

47

A moment after, and hands unseen
 Were hanging the night around us fast.
 But we knew that a bar was broken between
 Life and life ; we were mixed at last
 In spite of the mortal screen.

48

The forests had done it ; there they stood—
 We caught for a second the powers at play :
 They had mingled us so, for once and for good,
 Their work was done—we might go or stay,
 They relapsed to their ancient mood.

49

How the world is made for each of us !
 How all we perceive and know in it
 Tends to some moment's product thus,
 When a soul declares itself—to wit,
 By its fruit—the thing it does !

50

Be Hate that fruit or Love that fruit,
 It forwards the General Deed of Man,
 And each of the Many helps to recruit
 The life of the race by a general plan,
 Each living his own, to boot.

51

I am named and known by that hour's feat,
 There took my station and degree.
 So grew my own small life complete
 As nature obtained her best of me—
 One born to love you, sweet !

52

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now
 Back again, as you mutely sit
 Musing by fire-light, that great brow
 And the spirit-small hand propping it
 Yonder, my heart knows how !

53

So the earth has gained by one man more,
 And the gain of earth must be Heaven's gain too,
 And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
 When the autumn comes : which I mean to do
 One day, as I said before.

L

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND

1

My love, this is the bitterest, that thou
 Who art all truth and who dost love me now
 As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to say—
 Should'st love so truly and could'st love me still
 A whole long life through, had but love its will,
 Would death that leads me from thee brook delay !

2

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
 Would never let mine go, thy heart withstand
 The beating of my heart to reach its place.
 When should I look for thee and feel thee gone ?
 When cry for the old comfort and find none ?
 Never, I know ! Thy soul is in thy face.

3

Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so ! might I save,
 Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
 Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
 It is not to be granted. But the soul
 Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole ;
 Vainly the flesh fades—soul makes all things new.

4

And 'twould not be because my eye grew dim
 Thou could'st not find the love there, thanks to Him
 Who never is dishonoured in the spark
 He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade
 Remember whence it sprang nor be afraid
 While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.

5

So, how thou would'st be perfect, white and clean
 Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
 Alike, this body given to show it by !
 Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,
 What plaudits from the next world after this,
 Could'st thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky !

6

And is it not the bitterer to think
 That, disengage our hands and thou wilt sink
 Although thy love was love in very deed?
 I know that nature! Pass a festive day
 Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
 Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

7

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it fell;
 If old things remain old things all is well,
 For thou art grateful as becomes man best:
 And hadst thou only heard me play one tune,
 Or viewed me from a window, not so soon
 With thee would such things fade as with the rest.

8

I seem to see! we meet and part: 'tis brief:
 The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,
 The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank;
 That is a portrait of me on the wall—
 Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call;
 And for all this, one little hour's to thank.

9

But now, because the hour through years was fixed,
 Because our inmost beings met and mixed,
 Because thou once hast loved me—wilt thou dare
 Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,
 "Therefore she is immortally my bride,
 Chance cannot change that love, nor time impair.

10

"So, what if in the dusk of life that's left,
 I, a tired traveller, of my sun bereft,
 Look from my path when, mimicking the same,
 The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and gone?
 —Where was it till the sunset? where anon
 It will be at the sunrise! what's to blame?"

11

Is it so helpful to thee? canst thou take
 The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,
 Put gently by such efforts at a beam?
 Is the remainder of the way so long
 Thou need'st the little solace, thou the strong?
 Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze and dream!

12

“—Ah, but the fresher faces! Is it true,
 Thou’lt ask, “some eyes are beautiful and new?
 Some hair,—how can one choose but grasp such wealth?
 And if a man would press his lips to lips
 Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
 The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?”

13

“It cannot change the love kept still for Her,
 Much more than, such a picture to prefer
 Passing a day with, to a room’s bare side.
 The painted form takes nothing she possessed,
 Yet while the Titian’s Venus lies at rest
 A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?”

14

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,
 My own self sell myself, my hand attach
 Its warrant to the very thefts from me—
 Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,
 Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,
 Thy man’s truth I was bold to bid God see!

15

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
 Away to the new faces—disentranced—
 (Say it and think it) obdurate no more,
 Re-issue looks and words from the old mint—
 Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
 Image and superscription once they bore!

16

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,—
 It all comes to the same thing at the end,
 Since mine thou wast, mine art, and mine shalt be,
 Faithful or faithless, sealing up the sum
 Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
 Back to the heart’s place here I keep for thee!

17

Only, why should it be with stain at all?
 Why must I, ’twixt the leaves of coronal,
 Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow?
 Why need the other women know so much
 And talk together, “Such the look and such
 The smile he used to love with, then as now!”

18

Might I die last and shew thee! Should I find
 Such hardship in the few years left behind,
 If free to take and light my lamp, and go
 Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit
 Seeing thy face on those four sides of it
 The better that they are so blank, I know!

19

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er
 Within my mind each look, get more and more
 My heart each word, too much to learn at first,
 And join thee all the fitter for the pause
 'Neath the low door-way's lintel. That were cause
 For lingering, though thou calledst, if I durst!

20

And yet thou art the nobler of us two.
 What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,
 Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?
 I'll say then, here's a trial and a task—
 Is it to bear?—if easy, I'll not ask—
 Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.

21

Pride?—when those eyes forestal the life behind
 The death I have to go through!—when I find,
 Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!
 What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
 Until the little minute's sleep is past
 And I wake saved.—And yet, it will not be!

LI

AN EPISTLE

CONTAINING THE STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE
 OF KARSHISH, THE ARAB PHYSICIAN

KARSHISH, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
 The not-incurious in God's handiwork
 (This man's-flesh He hath admirably made,
 Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
 To coop up and keep down on earth a space
 That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)

—To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
 Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
 Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
 Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
 Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
 Back and rejoin its source before the term,—
 And aptest in contrivance, under God,
 To baffle it by deftly stopping such :—
 The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
 Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace),
 Three samples of true snake-stone—rarer still,
 One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
 (But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
 And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho,
 Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
 Shall count a little labour unrepaired ?
 I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
 On many a flinty furlong of this land.
 Also the country-side is all on fire
 With rumours of a marching hitherward—
 Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
 A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear ;
 Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls :
 I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
 Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
 And once a town declared me for a spy,
 But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
 Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
 This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence
 A man with plague-sores at the third degree
 Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here !
 'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
 To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
 And share with thee whatever Jewry yields.
 A viscid choler is observable
 In tertians, I was nearly bold to say,
 And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
 Than our school wots of : there's a spider here
 Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
 Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back ;
 Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
 The Syrian run-a-gate I trust this to ?
 His service payeth me a sublimate
 Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
 Best wait : I reach Jerusalem at morn,
 There set in order my experiences,
 Gather what most deserves and give thee all—

Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
 Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
 Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
 In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
 Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
 Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar—
 But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
 Protesteth his devotion is my price—
 Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
 I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
 What set me off a-writing first of all.
 An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
 For, be it this town's barrenness—or else
 The Man had something in the look of him—
 His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.
 So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
 In the great press of novelty at hand
 The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
 I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
 Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth?
 The very man is gone from me but now,
 Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
 Thus then, and let thy better wit help all.

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced
 By epilepsy, at the turning-point
 Of trance prolonged unduly some three days,
 When by the exhibition of some drug
 Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
 Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
 The evil thing out-breaking all at once
 Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,—
 But, flinging, so to speak, life's gates too wide,
 Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
 The first conceit that entered pleased to write
 Whatever it was minded on the wall
 So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
 (First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
 Attaineth to erase the fancy-scrawls
 Which the returned and new-established soul
 Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
 That henceforth she will read or these or none.
 And first—the man's own firm conviction rests
 That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
 That he was dead and then restored to life
 By a Nazarene physician of his tribe:
 —'Sayeth, the same bade "Rise," and he did rise.

"Such cases are diurnal," thou wilt cry.
 Not so this figment!—not, that such a fume,
 Instead of giving way to time and health,
 Should eat itself into the life of life,
 As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
 For see, how he takes up the after-life.
 The man—it is one Lazarus a Jew,
 Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
 The body's habit wholly laudable,
 As much, indeed, beyond the common health
 As he were made and put aside to show.
 Think, could we penetrate by any drug
 And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
 And bring it clear and fair, by three days sleep!
 Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
 This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
 Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,
 Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
 To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
 Now sharply, now with sorrow,—told the case,—
 He listened not except I spoke to him,
 But folded his two hands and let them talk,
 Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.
 And that's a sample how his years must go.
 Look if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
 Should find a treasure, can he use the same
 With straightened habits and with tastes starved small,
 And take at once to his impoverished brain
 The sudden element that changes things,
 —That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand,
 And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
 Is he not such an one as moves to mirth—
 Warily parsimonious, when's no need,
 Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
 All prudent counsel as to what befits
 The golden mean, is lost on such an one.
 The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
 So here—we'll call the treasure knowledge, say—
 Increased beyond the fleshy faculty—
 Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
 Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing Heaven.
 The man is witless of the size, the sum,
 The value in proportion of all things,
 Or whether it be little or be much.
 Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
 Assembled to besiege his city now,
 And of the passing of a mule with gourds—
 'Tis one! Then take it on the other side,
 Speak of some trifling fact—he will gaze rapt

With stupor at its very littleness—
 (Far as I see) as if in that indeed
 He caught prodigious import, whole results ;
 And so will turn to us the bystanders
 In ever the same stupor (note this point)
 That we too see not with his opened eyes !
 Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
 Preposterously, at cross purposes.
 Should his child sicken unto death,—why, look
 For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
 Or pretermission of his daily craft—
 While a word, gesture, glance, from that same child
 At play or in the school or laid asleep,
 Will start him to an agony of fear,
 Exasperation, just as like ! demand
 The reason why—“ ’tis but a word,” object—
 “ A gesture ”—he regards thee as our lord
 Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
 Looked at us, dost thou mind, when being young
 We both would unadvisedly recite
 Some charm’s beginning, from that book of his,
 Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
 All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
 Thou and the child have each a veil alike
 Thrown o’er your heads from under which ye both
 Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
 Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know !
 He holds on firmly to some thread of life—
 (It is the life to lead perforce)
 Which runs across some vast distracting orb
 Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
 Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet—
 The spiritual life around the earthly life !
 The law of that is known to him as this—
 His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
 So is the man perplexed with impulses
 Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
 Proclaiming what is right and wrong across—
 And not along—this black thread through the blaze—
 “ It should be ” balked by “ here it cannot be.”
 And oft the man’s soul springs into his face
 As if he saw again and heard again
 His sage that bade him “ Rise ” and he did rise.
 Something—a word, a tick of the blood within
 Admonishes—then back he sinks at once
 To ashes, that was very fire before,
 In sedulous recurrence to his trade
 Whereby he earneth him the daily bread—
 And studiously the humbler for that pride,

Professedly the faultier that he knows
 God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
 Indeed the especial marking of the man
 Is prone submission to the Heavenly will—
 Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
 'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
 For that same death which will restore his being
 To equilibrium, body loosening soul
 Divorced even now by premature full growth :
 He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
 So long as God please, and just how God please.
 He even seeketh not to please God more
 (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
 Hence I perceive not he affects to preach
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be—
 Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do.
 How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
 His own conviction ? ardent as he is—
 Call his great truth a lie, why still the old
 " Be it as God please " reassureth him.
 I probed the sore as thy disciple should—
 " How, beast," said I, " this stolid carelessness
 Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
 To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
 Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once ? "
 He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
 The man is apathetic, you deduce ?
 Contrariwise he loves both old and young,
 Able and weak—affects the very brutes
 And birds—how say I ? flowers of the field—
 As a wise workman recognises tools
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb :
 Only impatient, let him do his best,
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
 An indignation which is promptly curbed.
 As when in certain travels I have feigned
 To be an ignoramus in our art
 According to some preconceived design,
 And happed to hear the land's practitioners
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
 Prattle fantastically on disease,
 Its cause and cure—and I must hold my peace !

Thou wilt object—why have I not ere this
 Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
 Who wrought this cure, enquiring at the source,
 Conferring with the frankness that befits ?
 Alas ! it grieveth me, the learned leech

Perished in a tumult many years ago,
 Accused,—our learning's fate,—of wizardry,
 Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
 And creed prodigious as described to me.
 His death which happened when the earthquake fell
 (Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
 To occult learning in our lord the sage
 That lived there in the pyramid alone)
 Was wrought by the mad people—that's their wont—
 On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
 To his tried virtue, for miraculous help—
 How could he stop the earthquake? That's their way!
 The other imputations must be lies:
 But take one—though I loathe to give it thee,
 In mere respect to any good man's fame!
 (And after all our patient Lazarus
 Is stark mad—should we count on what he says?
 Perhaps not—though in writing to a leech
 'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)
 This man so cured regards the curer then,
 As—God forgive me—who but God himself,
 Creator and Sustainer of the world,
 That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
 —'Sayeth that such an One was born and lived,
 Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
 Then died, with Lazarus by, for ought I know,
 And yet was . . . what I said nor choose repeat,
 And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
 In hearing of this very Lazarus
 Who saith—but why all this of what he saith?
 Why write of trivial matters, things of price
 Calling at every moment for remark?
 I noticed on the margin of a pool
 Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
 Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
 Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
 Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth.
 Nor I myself discern in what is writ
 Good cause for the peculiar interest
 And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
 Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
 Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus—
 I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
 Like an old lion's cheek-teeth. Out there came
 A moon made like a face with certain spots
 Multiform, manifold, and menacing:
 Then a wind rose behind me. So we met

In this old sleepy town at unaware,
 The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
 Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
 To this ambiguous Syrian—he may lose,
 Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
 Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
 For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine,
 Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too—
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice
 Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
 Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself.
 Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
 But love I gave thee, with Myself to love,
 And thou must love me who have died for thee!"
 The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

LII

MESMERISM

1

ALL I believed is true!
 I am able yet
 All I want to get
 By a method as strange as new:
 Dare I trust the same to you?

2

If at night, when the doors are shut,
 And the wood-worm picks,
 And the death-watch ticks,
 And the bar has a flag of smut,
 And a cat's in the water-butt—

3

And the socket floats and flares,
 And the house-beams groan,
 And a foot unknown
 Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
 And the locks slip unawares—

4

And the spider, to serve his ends,
 By a sudden thread,
 Arms and legs outspread,
 On the table's midst descends,
 Comes to find, God knows what friends!—

5

If since eve drew in, I say,
 I have sate and brought
 — (So to speak) my thought
 To bear on the woman away,
 Till I felt my hair turn grey—

6

Till I seemed to have and hold
 In the vacancy
 'Twixt the wall and me,
 From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
 To the foot in its muslin fold—

7

Have and hold, then and there,
 Her, from head to foot,
 Breathing and mute,
 Passive and yet aware,
 In the grasp of my steady stare—

8

Hold and have, there and then,
 All her body and soul
 That completes my Whole,
 All that women add to men,
 In the clutch of my steady ken—

9

Having and holding, till
 I imprint her fast
 On the void at last
 As the sun does whom he will
 By the calotypist's skill—

10

Then,—if my heart's strength serve,
 And through all and each
 Of the veils I reach
 To her soul and never swerve,
 Knitting an iron nerve—

11

Commanding that to advance
 And inform the shape
 Which has made escape
 And before my countenance
 Answers me glance for glance—

12

I, still with a gesture fit
 Of my hands that best
 Do my soul's behest,
 Pointing the power from it,
 While myself do steadfast sit—

13

Steadfast and still the same
 On my object bent
 While the hands give vent
 To my ardour and my aim
 And break into very flame—

14

Then, I reach, I must believe,
 Not her soul in vain,
 For to me again
 It reaches, and past retrieve
 Is wound in the toils I weave—

15

And must follow as I require
 As befits a thrall,
 Bringing flesh and all,
 Essence and earth-attire,
 To the source of the tractile fire—

16

Till the house called hers, not mine,
 With a growing weight
 Seems to suffocate
 If she break not its leaden line
 And escape from its close confine—

17

Out of doors into the night!
 On to the maze
 Of the wild wood-ways,
 Not turning to left or right
 From the pathway, blind with sight—

18

Making thro' rain and wind
 O'er the broken shrubs,
 'Twixt the stems and stubs,
 With a still composed strong mind,
 Not a care for the world behind—

19

Swifter and still more swift,
 As the crowding peace
 Doth to joy increase
 In the wide blind eyes uplift,
 Thro' the darkness and the drift!

20

While I—to the shape, I too
 Feel my soul dilate
 Nor a whit abate
 And relax not a gesture due
 As I see my belief come true—

21

For there! have I drawn or no
 Life to that lip?
 Do my fingers dip
 In a flame which again they throw
 On the cheek that breaks a-glow?

22

Ha! was the hair so first?
 What, unfileted,
 Made alive, and spread
 Through the void with a rich outburst,
 Chestnut gold-interspersed!

23

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
 See, on either side,
 Her two arms divide
 Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
 Take me, for I am thine!

24

“Now—now”—the door is heard
 Hark! the stairs and near—
 Nearer—and here—
 “Now!” and at call the third
 She enters without a word.

25

On doth she march and on
 To the fancied shape—
 It is past escape
 Herself, now—the dream is done
 And the shadow and she are one.

26

First I will pray. Do Thou
 That ownest the soul,
 Yet wilt grant control
 To another nor disallow
 For a time, restrain me now!

27

I admonish me while I may,
 Not to squander guilt,
 Since require Thou wilt
 At my hand its price one day!
 What the price is, who can say?

LIII

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA

1

THAT was I, you heard last night
 When there rose no moon at all,
 Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
 Tent of heaven, a planet small:
 Life was dead, and so was light.

2

Not a twinkle from the fly,
 Not a glimmer from the worm.
 When the crickets stopped their cry,
 When the owls forbore a term,
 You heard music; that was I.

3

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
 Sultrily suspired for proof:
 In at heaven and out again,
 Lightning!—where it broke the roof,
 Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

4

What they could my words expressed,
 O my love, my all, my one !
 Singing helped the verses best,
 And when singing's best was done,
 To my lute I left the rest.

5

So wore night ; the east was grey,
 White the broad-faced hemlock flowers ;
 Soon would come another day ;
 Ere its first of heavy hours
 Found me, I had past away.

6

What became of all the hopes,
 Words and song and lute as well ?
 Say, this struck you—" When life gropes
 Feebly for the path where fell
 Light last on the evening slopes,

7

" One friend in that path shall be
 To secure my steps from wrong ;
 One to count night day for me,
 Patient through the watches long,
 Serving most with none to see."

8

Never say—as something bodes—
 " So the worst has yet a worse !
 When life halts 'neath double loads,
 Better the task-master's curse
 Than such music on the roads !

9

" When no moon succeeds the sun,
 Nor can pierce the midnight's tent
 Any star, the smallest one,
 While some drops, where lightning went,
 Show the final storm begun—

10

" When the fire-fly hides its spot,
 When the garden-voices fail
 In the darkness thick and hot,—
 Shall another voice avail,
 That shape be where those are not ?

11

“ Has some plague a longer lease
 Proffering its help uncouth ?
 Can't one even die in peace ?
 As one shuts one's eyes on youth,
 Is that face the last one sees ? ”

12

Oh, how dark your villa was,
 Windows fast and obdurate !
 How the garden grudged me grass
 Where I stood—the iron gate
 Ground its teeth to let me pass !

LIV

MY STAR

ALL that I know
 Of a certain star,
 Is, it can throw
 (Like the angled spar)
 Now a dart of red,
 Now a dart of blue,
 Till my friends have said
 They would fain see, too,

My star that dartles the red and the blue !
 Then it stops like a bird,—like a flower, hangs furl'd ;
 They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
 What matter to me if their star is a world ?
 Mine has opened its soul to me ; therefore I love it.

LV

INSTANS TYRANNUS

1

OF the million or two, more or less,
 I rule and possess,
 One man, for some cause undefined,
 Was least to my mind.

2

I struck him, he grovelled of course—
 For, what was his force ?
 I pinned him to earth with my weight
 And persistence of hate—
 And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
 As if lots might be worse.

3

“ Were the object less mean, would he stand
 At the swing of my hand !
 For obscurity helps him and blots
 The hole where he squats.”
 So I set my five wits on the stretch
 To inveigle the wretch.
 All in vain ! gold and jewels I threw,
 Still he couched there perdue.
 I tempted his blood and his flesh,
 Hid in roses my mesh,
 Choicest cates and the flagon’s best spilth—
 Still he kept to his filth !

4

Had he kith now or kin, were access
 To his heart, if I press—
 Just a son or a mother to seize—
 No such booty as these !
 Were it simply a friend to pursue
 ’Mid my million or two,
 Who could pay me in person or pelf
 What he owes me himself.
 No ! I could not but smile through my chafe—
 For the fellow lay safe
 As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
 —Through minuteness, to wit.

5

Then a humour more great took its place
 At the thought of his face,
 The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
 The trouble uncouth
 ’Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
 To put out of its pain—
 And, “ No ! ” I admonished myself,
 “ Is one mocked by an elf,
 Is one baffled by toad or by rat ?
 The gravamen’s in that !

How the lion, who crouches to suit
 His back to my foot,
 Would admire that I stand in debate!
 But the small is the great
 If it vexes you,—that is the thing!
 Toad or rat vex the king?
 Though I waste half my realm to unearth
 Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!"

6

So I soberly laid my last plan
 To extinguish the man.
 Round his creep-hole,—with never a break
 Ran my fires for his sake;
 Over-head, did my thunders combine
 With my under-ground mine:
 Till I looked from my labour content
 To enjoy the event.

7

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
 Did I say "without friend?"
 Say rather, from marge to blue marge
 The whole sky grew his targe
 With the sun's self for visible boss,
 While an Arm ran across
 Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
 Where the wretch was safe prest!
 Do you see? just my vengeance complete,
 The man sprang to his feet,
 Stood erect, caught at God's skirts and prayed!
 —So, I was afraid!

LVI

A PRETTY WOMAN

1

THAT fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,
 And the blue eye
 Dear and dewy,
 And that infantine fresh air of hers!

2

To think men cannot take you, Sweet,
 And enfold you,
 Ay, and hold you,
 And so keep you what they make you, Sweet!

3

You like us for a glance, you know—
 For a word's sake,
 Or a sword's sake,
 All's the same, whate'er the chance, you know.

4

And in turn we make you ours, we say—
 You and youth too,
 Eyes and mouth too,
 All the face composed of flowers, we say.

5

All's our own, to make the most of, Sweet—
 Sing and say for,
 Watch and pray for,
 Keep a secret or go boast of, Sweet.

6

But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,
 Though we prayed you,
 Paid you, brayed you
 In a mortar—for you could not, Sweet.

7

So, we leave the sweet face fondly there—
 Be its beauty
 Its sole duty!
 Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there!

8

And while the face lies quiet there,
 Who shall wonder
 That I ponder
 A conclusion? I will try it there.

9

As,—why must one, for the love forgone,
 Scout mere liking?
 Thunder-striking
 Earth,—the heaven, we looked above for, gone!

10

Why with beauty, needs there money be—
 Love with liking?
 Crush the fly-king
 In his gauze, because no honey bee?

11

May not liking be so simple-sweet,
 If love grew there
 'Twould undo there
 All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet ?

12

Is the creature too imperfect, say ?
 Would you mend it
 And so end it ?
 Since not all addition perfects aye !

13

Or is it of its kind, perhaps,
 Just perfection—
 Whence, rejection
 Of a grace not to its mind, perhaps ?

14

Shall we burn up, tread that face at once
 Into tinder,
 And so hinder
 Sparks from kindling all the place at once ?

15

Or else kiss away one's soul on her ?
 Your love-fancies !—
 A sick man sees
 Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her !

16

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose,—
 Plucks a mould-flower
 For his gold flower,
 Uses fine things that efface the rose.

17

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,
 Precious metals
 Ape the petals,—
 Last, some old king locks it up, morose !

18

Then, how grace a rose ? I know a way !
 Leave it rather.
 Must you gather ?
 Smell, kiss, wear it—at last, throw away !

LVII

“CHILDE ROLAND
TO THE DARK TOWER CAME”

(See *Edgar's Song in "LEAR"*)

1

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge at one more victim gained thereby.

2

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers that might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

3

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed; neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end should be.

4

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,—
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

5

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, (“since all is o'er,” he saith,
“And the blow fall'n no grieving can amend”)

6

While some discuss if near the other graves
 Be room enough for this, and when a day
 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
 With care about the banners, scarves and staves,—
 And still the man hears all, and only craves
 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

7

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
 So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
 The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
 Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
 And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

8

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
 That hateful cripple, out of his highway
 Into the path he pointed. All the day
 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

9

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
 Than pausing to throw backward a last view
 To the safe road, 'twas gone! grey plain all round!
 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
 I might go on; nought else remained to do.

10

So on I went. I think I never saw
 Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
 For flowers—as well expect a cedar grove!
 But cockle, spurge, according to their law
 Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
 You'd think: a burr had been a treasure-trove.

11

No! penury, inertness, and grimace,
 In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
 Or shut your eyes"—said Nature peevishly—
 "It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
 The Judgment's fire alone can cure this place,
 Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

12

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
 Above its mates, the head was chopped—the bents
 Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves—bruised as to baulk
 All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
 Pushing their life out, with a brute's intents.

13

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
 In leprosy—thin dry blades pricked the mud
 Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
 One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
 Stood stupefied, however he came there—
 Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

14

Alive? he might be dead for all I know,
 With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane.
 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe:
 I never saw a brute I hated so—
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

15

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights
 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
 Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:
 One taste of the old times sets all to rights!

16

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
 An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
 That way he used. Alas! one night's disgrace!
 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

17

Giles, then, the soul of honour—there he stands
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
 What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.
 Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman's hands
 Pin to his breast a parchment? his own bands
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

18

Better this present than a past like that—
 Back therefore to my darkening path again.
 No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
 Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
 I asked: when something on the dismal flat
 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

19

A sudden little river crossed my path
 As unexpected as a serpent comes.
 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms—
 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
 For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

20

So petty yet so spiteful! all along,
 Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
 The river which had done them all the wrong,
 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

21

Which, while I forded,—good saints, how I feared
 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
 —It may have been a water-rat I speared,
 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

22

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
 Now for a better country. Vain presage!
 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage
 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
 Soil to a splash? toads in a poisoned tank,
 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

23

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
 What kept them there, with all the plain to choose?
 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
 None out of it: mad brewage set to work
 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

24

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there !
 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
 Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
 Men's bodies out like silk ? with all the air
 Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

25

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
 Desperate and done with ; (so a fool finds mirth,
 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
 Changes and off he goes !) within a rood
 Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

26

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
 Broke into moss or substances like boils ;
 Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
 Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

27

And just as far as ever from the end !
 Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
 To point my footstep further ! At the thought,
 A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
 That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

28

For looking up, aware I somehow grew,
 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
 All round to mountains—with such name to grace
 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stol'n in view.
 How thus they had surprised me,—solve it, you !
 How to get from them was no plainer case.

29

Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when—
 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
 As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den !

30

Burningly it came on me all at once,
 This was the place! those two hills on the right
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight—
 While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
 Fool, to be dozing at the very nonce,
 After a life spent training for the sight!

31

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

32

Not see? because of night perhaps?—Why, day
 Came back again for that! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay—
 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
 “Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!”

33

Not hear? when noise was everywhere? it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

34

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides—met
 To view the last of me, a living frame
 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set
 And blew. “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.”

LVIII

RESPECTABILITY

1

DEAR, had the world in its caprice
 Deigned to proclaim " I know you both,
 Have recognised your plighted troth,
 Am sponsor for you—live in peace !"—
 How many precious months and years
 Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
 Before we found it out at last,
 The world, and what it fears ?

2

How much of priceless life were spent
 With men that every virtue decks,
 And women models of their sex,
 Society's true ornament,—
 Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
 Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
 And feel the Boulevart break again
 To warmth and light and bliss ?

3

I know ! the world proscribes not love ;
 Allows my finger to caress
 Your lip's contour and downiness,
 Provided it supply a glove.
 The world's good word !—the Institute !
 Guizot receives Montalembert !
 Eh ? down the court three lampions flare—
 Put forward your best foot !

LIX

A LIGHT WOMAN

1

So far as our story approaches the end,
 Which do you pity the most of us three ?—
 My friend, or the mistress of my friend
 With her wanton eyes, or me ?

2

My friend was already too good to lose,
 And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
 When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
 And over him drew her net.

3

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
 A shame, said I, if she adds just him
 To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
 The hundredth, for a whim!

4

And before my friend be wholly hers,
 How easy to prove to him, I said,
 An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
 Though she snaps at the wren instead!

5

So I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
 My hand sought her as in earnest need,
 And round she turned for my noble sake,
 And gave me herself indeed.

6

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
 The wren is he, with his maiden face.
 —You look away and your lip is curled?
 Patience, a moment's space!

7

For see—my friend goes shaking and white;
 He eyes me as the basilisk:
 I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
 Eclipsing his sun's disc.

8

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
 “Though I love her—that he comprehends—
 One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
 And be loyal to one's friends!”

9

And she,—she lies in my hand as tame
 As a pear hung basking over a wall;
 Just a touch to try and off it came;
 'Tis mine,—can I let it fall?

10

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst !
 Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist ?
 'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst.
 When I gave its stalk a twist.

11

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see—
 What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess.
 What I seem to myself, do you ask of me ?
 No hero, I confess.

12

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
 And matter enough to save one's own.
 Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
 He played with for bits of stone !

13

One likes to show the truth for the truth ;
 That the woman was light is very true :
 But suppose she says,—never mind that youth—
 What wrong have I done to you ?

14

Well, any how, here the story stays,
 So far at least as I understand ;
 And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
 Here's a subject made to your hand !

LX

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

THERE'S a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
 And a statue watches it from the square,
 And this story of both do the townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
 At the farthest window facing the east
 Asked, " Who rides by with the royal air ? "

The brides-maids' prattle around her ceased ;
 She leaned forth, one on either hand ;
 They saw how the blush of the bride increased—

They felt by its beats her heart expand—
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That selfsame instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—"Who is she?"
—"A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day."

Hair in heaps laid heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure—
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure—
Which vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man,—
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes,—
The past was a sleep, and her life began.

As love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite!

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bed-chamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalk repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the east
She might watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

"Freely I choose too," said the bride—
"Your window and its world suffice."
So replied the tongue, while the heart replied—

"If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on Paradise!

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

"'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow"—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)—
"My father tarries to bless my state:
I must keep it one day more for him.

"Is one day more so long to wait?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know—
We shall see each other, sure as fate."

She turned on her side and slept. Just so !
So we resolve on a thing and sleep.
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, " Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep."

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled " 'Twas a very funeral
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
A shame to efface, whate'er befall !

" What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And let Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers ? "

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, " Too much favour for me so mean !

" Alas ! my lady leaves the south.
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth.

" No way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life's decline."

Quoth the Duke, " A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring—
Be our feast to-night as usual here ! "

And then to himself—" Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
Or I am the fool, and thou art his king !

" Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France,
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

" I need thee still and might miss perchance.
To-day is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady's countenance—

“ For I ride—what should I do but ride ?
 And passing her palace, if I list,
 May glance at its window—well betide ! ”

So said, so done : nor the lady missed
 One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
 Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
 No morrow's sun should arise and set
 And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
 With still fresh cause to wait one more
 Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
 With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
 They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
 But not in despite of heaven and earth—
 The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
 By winter's fruits that supplant the rose :
 The world and its ways have a certain worth !

And to press a point while these oppose
 Were a simple policy—best wait,
 And lose no friends and gain no foes.

Meanwhile, worse fates than a lover's fate,
 Who daily may ride and lean and look
 Where his lady watches behind the grate !

And she—she watched the square like a book
 Holding one picture and only one,
 Which daily to find she undertook.

When the picture was reached the book was done,
 And she turned from it all night to scheme
 Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

Weeks grew months, years—gleam by gleam
 The glory dropped from youth and love,
 And both perceived they had dreamed a dream,

Which hovered as dreams do, still above,—
But who can take a dream for truth?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove!

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
So hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
“Summon here,” she suddenly said,
“Before the rest of my old self pass,

“Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who moulds the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

“Make me a face on the window there
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

“And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle—

“To say,—‘What matters at the end?
I did no more while my heart was warm,
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.’

“Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

“Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow.”

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(With, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever passes by—)

The Duke sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, "So, my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch

Some subtle fashioner of shapes—
"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?"

"John of Douay shall work my plan,
Mould me on horseback here aloft,
Alive—(the subtle artisan!)

"In the very square I cross so oft!
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

"While the mouth and the brow are brave in bronze—
Admire and say, 'When he was alive,
How he would take his pleasure once!'

"And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen meanwhile and laugh in my tomb
At indolence which aspires to strive."

So! while these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Surely they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of His,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had cut his way thro' the world to this.

I hear your reproach—"But delay was best,
For their end was a crime!"—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view.

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham.
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize, a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as truly, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play—is my principle!
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Was, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a crime, I say.
You of the virtue, (we issue join)
How strive you? *De te, fabula!*

LXI

LOVE IN A LIFE

1

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her,
Next time, herself!—not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew,—
Yon looking-glass gleamed at the wave of her feather.

2

Yet the day wears,
 And door succeeds door ;
 I try the fresh fortune—
 Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
 Still the same chance ! she goes out as I enter.
 Spend my whole day in the quest,—who cares ?
 But 'tis twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,
 Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune !

LXII

LIFE IN A LOVE

ESCAPE me ?
 Never—
 Beloved !
 While I am I, and you are you,
 So long as the world contains us both,
 Me the loving and you the loth,
 While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
 My life is a fault at last, I fear—
 It seems too much like a fate, indeed !
 Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed—
 But what if I fail of my purpose here ?
 It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
 To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
 And baffled, get up to begin again,—
 So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.
 While, look but once from your farthest bound,
 At me so deep in the dust and dark,
 No sooner the old hope drops to ground
 Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,
 I shape me—
 Ever
 Removed !

LXIII

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

I ONLY knew one poet in my life :
 And this, or something like it, was his way.

You saw go up and down Valladolid,
 A man of mark, to know next time you saw.

His very serviceable suit of black
 Was courtly once and conscientious still,
 And many might have worn it, though none did :
 The cloak that somewhat shone and shewed the threads
 Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.
 He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
 Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
 An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
 They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
 That leads no whither ; now, they breathed themselves
 On the main promenade just at the wrong time.
 You'd come upon his scrutinising hat,
 Making a peaked shade blacker than itself
 Against the single window spared some house
 Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work,—
 Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick
 Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks
 Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.
 He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,
 The man who slices lemons into drink,
 The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys
 That volunteer to help him turn its winch.
 He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,
 And fly-leaf ballads on the vendor's string,
 And broad-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
 He took such cognisance of men and things,
 If any beat a horse, you felt he saw ;
 If any cursed a woman, he took note ;
 Yet stared at nobody,—they stared at him,
 And found, less to their pleasure than surprise,
 He seemed to know them and expect as much.
 So, next time that a neighbour's tongue was loosed,
 It marked the shameful and notorious fact,
 We had among us, not so much a spy,
 As a recording chief-inquisitor,
 The town's true master if the town but knew !
 We merely kept a governor for form,
 While this man walked about and took account
 Of all thought, said, and acted, then went home,
 And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
 Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,
 And reads them in his bed-room of a night.
 Oh, you might smile ! there wanted not a touch,
 A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease
 As back into your mind the man's look came—
 Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
 His eyes had to live under !—clear as flint
 On either side the formidable nose
 Curved, cut, and coloured, like an eagle's claw.

Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate ?
 When altogether old B. disappeared
 And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,
 His letter to the King, that did it all ?
 What paid the bloodless man for so much pains ?
 Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
 And shifts his ministry some once a month ;
 Our city gets new governors at whiles,—
 But never word or sign, that I could hear,
 Notified to this man about the streets
 The King's approval of those letters conned
 The last thing duly at the dead of night.
 Did the man love his office ? frowned our Lord,
 Exhorting when none heard—" Beseech me not !
 Too far above my people,—beneath me !
 I set the watch,—how should the people know ?
 Forget them, keep me all the more in mind !"
 Was some such understanding 'twixt the Two ?

I found no truth in one report at least—
 That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
 Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
 You found he ate his supper in a room
 Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
 And twenty naked girls to change his plate !
 Poor man, he lived another kind of life
 In that new, stuccoed, third house by the bridge,
 Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise !
 The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat,
 Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
 Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
 (Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
 And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
 Or treat of radishes in April ! nine—
 Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.

My father, like the man of sense he was,
 Would point him out to me a dozen times ;
 "'St—'St," he'd whisper, " the Corregidor !"
 I had been used to think that personage
 Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
 And feathers like a forest in his hat,
 Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
 Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
 And memorized the miracle in vogue !
 He had a great observance from us boys—
 I was in error ; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
 To have just looked, when this man came to die,
 And seen who lined the clean gay garret's sides
 And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
 With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
 Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
 Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
 Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
 In his old coat, and up to his knees in mud,
 Smoked like a herring, dining on a crus,—
 And now the day was won, relieved at once!
 No further show or need for that old coat,
 You are sure, for one thing! Bless u, all the while
 How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!
 A second, and the angels alter that.
 Well, I could never write a verse,—could you?
 Let's to the Prado and make the most of time.

LXIV

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

1

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
 Since now at length my fate I know,
 Since nothing all my love avails,
 Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be—
 My whole heart rises up to bless
 Your name in pride and thankfulness!
 Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
 Only a memory of the same,
 —And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

2

My mistress bent that brow of hers,
 Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
 When pity would be softening through,
 Fixed me a breathing-while or two
 With life or death in the balance—Right!
 The blood replenished me again:
 My last thought was at least not vain.
 I and my mistress, side by side
 Shall be together, breathe and ride,
 So one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end to-night?

3

Hush ! if you saw some western cloud
 All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
 By many benedictions—sun's
 And moon's and evening star's at once—

And so, you, looking and loving best,
 Conscious grew, your passion drew
 Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too
 Down on you, near and yet more near,
 Till flesh must fade for heaven was here !—
 Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear !
 Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

4

Then we began to ride. My soul
 Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
 Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
 Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry ?
 Had I said that, had I done this,
 So might I gain, so might I miss.
 Might she have loved me ? just as well
 She might have hated,—who can tell ?
 Where had I been now if the worst befell ?
 And here we are riding, she and I.

5

Fail I alone, in words and deeds ?
 Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
 We rode ; it seemed my spirit flew,
 Saw other regions, cities new,

As the world rushed by on either side.
 I thought,—All labour, yet no less
 Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
 Look at the end of work, contrast
 The petty done the undone vast,
 This present of theirs with the hopeful past !
 I hoped she would love me. Here we ride.

6

What hand and brain went ever paired ?
 What heart alike conceived and dared ?
 What act proved all its thought had been ?
 What will but felt the fleshly screen ?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.
 There's many a crown for who can reach.
 Ten lines, a statesman's life in each !

The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
 A soldier's doing! what atones?
 They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
 My riding is better, by their leave.

7

What does it all mean, poet? well,
 Your brain's beat into rhythm—you tell
 What we felt only; you expressed
 You hold things beautiful the best,
 And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
 'Tis something, nay 'tis much—but then,
 Have you yourself what's best for men?
 Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
 Nearer one whit your own sublime
 Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
 Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

8

And you, great sculptor—so you gave
 A score of years to art, her slave,
 And that's your Venus—whence we turn
 To yonder girl that fords the burn!
 You acquiesce and shall I repine?
 What, man of music, you, grown grey
 With notes and nothing else to say,
 Is this your sole praise from a friend,
 "Greatly his opera's strains intend,
 But in music we know how fashions end!"
 I gave my youth—but we ride, in fine.

9

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
 Proposed bliss here should sublimate
 My being; had I signed the bond—
 Still one must lead some life beyond,
 —Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
 This foot once planted on the goal,
 This glory-garland round my soul,
 Could I descry such? Try and test!
 I sink back shuddering from the quest—
 Earth being so good, would Heaven seem best?
 Now, Heaven and she are beyond this ride.

10

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
 What if Heaven be, that, fair and strong

At life's best, with our eyes upturned
 Whither life's flower is first discerned,
 We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
 What if we still ride on, we two,
 With life for ever old yet new,
 Changed not in kind but in degree,
 The instant made eternity,—
 And Heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

LXV

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

1

It was roses, roses, all the way,
 With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
 The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
 The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
 A year ago on this very day!

2

The air broke into a mist with bells,
 The old walls rocked with the crowds and cries.
 Had I said, "Good folks, mere noise repels—
 But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
 They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

3

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun,
 To give it my loving friends to keep.
 Nought man could do, have I left undone
 And you see my harvest, what I reap
 This very day, now a year is run.

4

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
 Just a palsied few at the windows set—
 For the best of the sight is, all allow,
 At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
 By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

5

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
 A rope cuts both my wrists behind,
 And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
 For they fling, whoever has a mind,
 Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

6

Thus I entered Brescia, and thus I go !
 In such triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
 "Thou, paid by the World,—what dost thou owe
 Me ?" God might have questioned : but now instead
 'Tis God shall requite ! I am safer so.

LXVI

MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-GOTHA

1

HIST, but a word, fair and soft !
 Forth and be judged, Master Hugues !
 Answer the question I've put you so oft—
 What do you mean by your mountainous fugues ?
 See, we're alone in the loft,

2

I, the poor organist here,
 Hugues, the composer of note—
 Dead, though, and done with, this many a year—
 Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,
 Make the world prick up its ear !

3

See, the church empties a-pace.
 Fast they extinguish the lights—
 Hallo, there, sacristan ! five minutes' grace !
 Here's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,
 Baulks one of holding the base.

4

See, our huge house of the sounds
 Hushing its hundreds at once,
 Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds
 —Oh, you may challenge them, not a response
 Get the church saints on their rounds !

5

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt ?
 —March, with the moon to admire,
 Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,
 Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,
 Put rats and mice to the rout—

6

Aloys and Jurien and Just—
 Order things back to their place,
 Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,
 Rub the church plate, darn the sacrament lace,
 Clear the desk velvet of dust.)

7

Here's your book, younger folks shelve !
 Played I not off-hand and runningly,
 Just now, your masterpiece, hard number twelve ?
 Here's what should strike,—could one handle it
 cunningly.
 Help the axe, give it a helve !

8

Page after page as I played,
 Every bar's rest where one wipes
 Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed
 O'er my three claviers, yon forest of pipes
 Whence you still peeped in the shade.

9

Sure you were wishful to speak,
 You, with brow ruled like a score,
 Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
 Like two great breves as they wrote them of yore
 Each side that bar, your straight beak !

10

Sure you said—" Good, the mere notes !
 Still, couldst thou take my intent,
 Know what procured me our Company's votes—
 Masters being lauded and sciolists shent,
 Parted the sheep from the goats ! "

11

Well then, speak up, never flinch !
 Quick, ere my candle's a snuff
 —Burnt, do you see ? to its uttermost inch—
 I believe in you, but that's not enough.
 Give my conviction a clinch !

12

First you deliver your phrase
 —Nothing propound, that I see,
 Fit in itself for much blame or much praise—
 Answered no less, where no answer needs be :
 Off start the Two on their ways !

13

Straight must a Third interpose,
 Volunteer needlessly help—
 In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,
 So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,
 Argument's hot to the close !

14

One dissertates, he is candid—
 Two must discept,—has distinguished !
 Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did :
 Four protests, Five makes a dart at the thing
 wished—
 Back to One, goes the case bandied !

15

One says his say with a difference—
 More of expounding, explaining !
 All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance—
 Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-restraining—
 Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

16

One is incisive, corrosive—
 Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant—
 Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive—
 Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant—
 Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve !

17

Now, they ply axes and crowbars—
 Now, they prick pins at a tissue
 Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's
 Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?
 Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

18

Est fuga, volvitur rota!
 On we drift. Where looms the dim port?
 One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their
 quota—
 Something is gained, if one caught but the
 import—
 Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha!

19

What with affirming, denying,
 Holding, risposting, subjoining,
 All's like . . . it's like . . . for an instance I'm trying . . .
 There! See our roof, its gilt moulding and groining
 Under those spider-webs lying!

20

So your fugue broadens and thickens,
 Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
 Till one exclaims—"But where's music, the dickens?
 Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web strengthens,
 Blacked to the stoutest of tickens?"

21

I for man's effort am zealous.
 Prove me such censure's unfounded!
 Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—
 Hopes 'twas for something his organ-pipes sounded,
 Tiring three boys at the bellows?

22

Is it your moral of Life?
 Such a web, simple and subtle,
 Weave we on earth herein impotent strife,
 Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
 Death ending all with a knife?

23

Over our heads Truth and Nature—
 Still our life's zigzags and dodges,
 Ins and outs weaving a new legislature—
 God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,
 Palled beneath Man's usurpature !

24

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
 Cherub and trophy and garland.
 Nothings grow something which quietly closes
 Heaven's earnest eye,—not a glimpse of the far land
 Gets through our comments and glozes.

25

Ah, but traditions, inventions,
 (Say we and make up a visage)
 So many men with such various intentions
 Down the past ages must know more than this age !
 Leave the web all its dimensions !

26

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf ?
 Proved a mere mountain in labour ?
 Better submit—try again—what's the clef ?
 'Faith, it's no trifle for pipe and for tabor—
 Four flats—the minor in F.

27

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger.
 Learning it once, who would lose it ?
 Yet all the while a misgiving will linger—
 Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse it—
 Nature, thro' dust-clouds we fling her !

28

Hugues ! I advise *meâ pænâ*
 (Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)
 Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena !
 Say the word, straight I unstop the Full-Organ,
 Blare out the *mode Palestrina*.

29

While in the roof, if I'm right there—
 . . . Lo, you, the wick in the socket !
 Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there !
 Down it dips, gone like a rocket !

What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
 Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
 And find a poor devil at end of his cares
 At the foot of your rotten-planked rat-riddled stairs ?
 Do I carry the moon in my pocket ?

LXVII

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY

No more wine ? Then we'll push back chairs and talk.
 A final glass for me, tho' ; cool, i'faith !
 We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
 It's different, preaching in basilicas,
 And doing duty in some masterpiece
 Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart !
 I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
 Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere ;
 It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln : eh ?
 These hot long ceremonies of our church
 Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
 You take me—amply pay it ! Now, we'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
 No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir !
 Beside 'tis our engagement : don't you know,
 I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
 We'd see truth dawn together ?—truth that peeps
 Over the glass's edge when dinner's done,
 And body gets its sop and holds its noise
 And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time—
 'Tis break of day ! You do despise me then.
 And if I say, " despise me,"—never fear—
 I know you do not in a certain sense—
 Not in my arm-chair for example : here,
 I well imagine you respect my place
 (Status, *entourage*, worldly circumstance)
 Quite to its value—very much indeed
 —Are up to the protesting eyes of you
 In pride at being seated here for once—
 You'll turn it to such capital account !
 When somebody, through years and years to come,
 Hints of the bishop,—names me—that's enough—
 " Blougram ? I knew him "—(into it you slide)
 " Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
 All alone, we two—he's a clever man—
 And after dinner,—why, the wine you know,—

Oh, there was wine, and good!—what with the wine . . .
 'Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!
 He's no bad fellow, Blougram—he had seen
 Something of mine he relished—some review—
 He's quite above their humbug in his heart,
 Half-said as much, indeed—the thing's his trade—
 I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times—
 How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"
Che ché, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
 Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
 You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths—
 The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
 You do despise me; your ideal of life
 Is not the bishop's—you would not be I—
 You would like better to be Goethe, now,
 Or Buonaparte—or, bless me, lower still,
 Count D'Orsay,—so you did what you preferred,
 Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
 Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
 So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
 You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.
 —That, my ideal never can include,
 Upon that element of truth and worth
 Never be based! for say they make me Pope
 (They can't—suppose it for our argument)
 Why, there I'm at my tether's end—I've reached
 My height, and not a height which pleases you.
 An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
 It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
 Of how some actor played Death on a stage
 With pasteboard crown, sham orb, and tinsel'd dart,
 And called himself the monarch of the world,
 Then going in the tire-room afterward
 Because the play was done, to shift himself,
 Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly
 The moment he had shut the closet door
 By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
 At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
 And whose part he presumed to play just now?
 Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
 You weigh and find whatever more or less
 I boast of my ideal realised
 Is nothing in the balance when opposed
 To your ideal, your grand simple life,
 Of which you will not realise one jot.

I am much, you are nothing ; you would be all,
I would be merely much—you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me,—hearken why.
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,—but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means—a very different thing !
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,
But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London—not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealise away,
Make paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile !

We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life—
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare ?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient—so they are !
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long ;
And little Greek books with the funny type
They get up well at Leipsic fill the next—
Go on ! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes !
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add !
'Twere pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese !
Yet 'twas not on your list before, perhaps.
—Alas ! friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name ?
The captain, or whoever's master here—
You see him screw his face up ; what's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard ? “ Six feet square ! ”
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano and bath, you come on board
Bare—why you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off ;
Not afterwards, when, long ere half seas o'er,

You peep up from your utterly naked boards
 Into some snug and well-appointed berth
 Like mine, for instance (try the cooler jug—
 Put back the other, but don't jog the ice)
 And mortified you mutter "Well and good—
 He sits enjoying his sea-furniture—
 'Tis stout and proper, and there's store of it,
 Though I've the better notion, all agree,
 Of fitting rooms up! hang the carpenter,
 Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
 I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"
 And meantime you bring nothing: never mind—
 You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't,
 You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting place.
 See my way: we're two college friends, suppose—
 Prepare together for our voyage, then,
 Each note and check the other in his work,—
 Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticise!
 What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why, first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
 (Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
 And absolutely and exclusively)
 In any revelation called divine.
 No dogmas nail your faith—and what remains
 But say so, like the honest man you are?
 First, therefore, overhaul theology!
 Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
 Must find believing every whit as hard,
 And if I do not frankly say as much,
 The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now, wait, my friend: well, I do not believe—
 If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
 Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
 (You're wrong—I mean to prove it in due time)
 Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
 I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
 So give up hope accordingly to solve—
 (To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
 With both of us, tho' in unlike degree,
 Missing full credence—overboard with them!
 I mean to meet you on your own premise—
 Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
 Calm and complete, determinately fixed

To-day, to-morrow, and for ever, pray ?
 You'll guarantee me that ? Not so, I think.
 In no-wise ! all we've gained is, that belief,
 As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
 Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's
 The gain ? how can we guard our unbelief.
 Make it bear fruit to us ?—the problem here.
 Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
 A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
 A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
 And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
 As old and new at once as Nature's self,
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
 Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
 The grand Perhaps ! we look on helplessly,—
 There the old misgivings, crooked questions are—
 This good God,—what he could do, if he would,
 Would, if he could—then must have done long since :
 If so, when, where, and how ? some way must be,—
 Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
 Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
 Why not, " The Way, the Truth, the Life ? "

—That way

Over the mountain, which who stands upon
 Is apt to doubt if it's indeed a road ;
 While if he views it from the waste itself,
 Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
 Not vague, mistakeable ! what's a break or two
 Seen from the unbroken desert either side ?
 And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
 What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
 The most consummate of contrivances
 To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith,—
 And so we stumble at truth's very test ?
 What have we gained then by our unbelief
 But a life of doubt diversified by faith,
 For one of faith diversified by doubt ?
 We called the chess-board white,—we call it black.

" Well," you rejoin, " the end's no worse, at least,
 We've reason for both colours on the board.
 Why not confess, then, where I drop the faith
 And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you ? "

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
 And both things even,—faith and unbelief

Left to a man's choice,—we'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes—but a cabin-passenger's—
The man made for the special life of the world—
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all,
The choice that you unluckily prefer
Turning things topsy-turvy—they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is,—you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is,—and you
Not so you'll take it,—though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness, and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
—For you, it does, however—that we'll try!
'Tis clear, I cannot lead my life, at least
Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,
I absolutely and peremptorily
Believe!"—I say faith is my waking life.
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us,
And my provision's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hands
All day, I build, scheme, study and make friends;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What's midnight's doubt before the dayspring's faith?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,
That recognise the night, give dreams their weight—
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you a man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!
And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream,
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,
To unbelieve as I to still believe?
Well, and the common sense of the world calls you
Bed-ridden,—and its good things come to me.
Its estimation, which is half the fight,

That's the first cabin-comfort I secure—
 The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye !
 Come, come, it's best believing, if we can—
 You can't but own that.

Next, concede again—

If once we choose belief, on all accounts
 We can't be too decisive in our faith,
 Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
 To suit the world which gives us the good things.
 In every man's career are certain points
 Whereon he dares not be indifferent ;
 The world detects him clearly, if he is,
 As baffled at the game, and losing life.
 He may care little or he may care much
 For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,
 Since various theories of life and life's
 Success are extant which might easily
 Comport with either estimate of these,
 And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
 Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool
 Because his fellows would choose otherwise.
 We let him choose upon his own account
 So long as he's consistent with his choice.
 But certain points, left wholly to himself,
 When once a man has arbitrated on,
 We say he must succeed there or go hang.
 Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
 Or needs most, whatso'er the love or need—
 For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch
 Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
 The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
 Whate'er the process of conviction was.
 For nothing can compensate his mistake
 On such a point, the man himself being judge—
 He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now—there's one great form of Christian faith
 I happened to be born in—which to teach
 Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
 As best and readiest means of living by ;
 The same on examination being proved
 The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
 And absolute form of faith in the whole world—
 Accordingly, most potent of all forms
 For working on the world. Observe, my friend,
 Such as you know me, I am free to say,
 In these hard latter days which hamper one,
 Myself, by no immoderate exercise

Of intellect and learning, and the tact
 To let external forces work for me,
 Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread,
 Bid Peter's creed, or, rather Hildebrand's,
 Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
 And make my life an ease and joy and pride,
 It does so,—which for me's a great point gained,
 Who have a soul and body that exact
 A comfortable care in many ways.
 There's power in me and will to dominate
 Which I must exercise, they hurt me else :
 In many ways I need mankind's respect,
 Obedience, and the love that's born of fear :
 While at the same time, there's a taste I have,
 A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
 Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
 The naked life is gross till clothed upon :
 I must take what men offer, with a grace
 As though I would not, could I help it, take !
 A uniform to wear though over-rich—
 Something imposed on me, no choice of mine ;
 No fancy-dress worn for pure fashion's sake
 And despicable therefore ! now men kneel
 And kiss my hand—of course the Church's hand.
 Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
 And thus that it should be I have procured ;
 And thus it could not be another way,
 I venture to imagine.

You'll reply—

So far my choice, no doubt, is a success ;
 But were I made of better elements,
 With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
 I hardly would account the thing success
 Though it do all for me I say.

But, friend,

We speak of what is—not of what might be,
 And how 'twere better if 'twere otherwise.
 I am the man you see here plain enough—
 Grant I'm a beast, why beasts must lead beasts' lives !
 Suppose I own at once to tail and claws—
 The tailless man exceeds me ; but being tailed
 I'll lash out lion-fashion, and leave apes
 To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
 My business is not to remake myself,
 But make the absolute best of what God made.
 Or—our first simile—though you proved me doomed
 To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,

The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
 To make what use of each were possible ;
 And as this cabin gets upholstery,
 That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
 I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
 Enumerated so complacently,
 On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
 In this particular life I choose to lead
 No fit provision for them. Can you not ?
 Say you, my fault is I address myself
 To grosser estimators than I need,
 And that's no way of holding up the soul—
 Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
 One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools',—
 Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that ?
 I pine among my million imbeciles
 (You think) aware some dozen men of sense
 Eye me and know me, whether I believe
 In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
 And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
 And am a knave,—approve in neither case,
 Withhold their voices though I look their way :
 Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
 (The thing they gave at Florence,—what's its name ?)
 While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
 His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
 He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
 Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here—
 For even your prime men who appraise their kind
 Are men still, catch a thing within a thing,
 See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
 Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
 Sixty the minute ; what's to note in that ?
 You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack ;
 Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands !
 Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
 The honest thief, the tender murderer,
 The superstitious atheist, demireps
 That love and save their souls in new French books—
 We watch while these in equilibrium keep
 The giddy line midway : one step aside,
 They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
 Before your sages,—just the men to shrink
 From the gross weights, coarse scales, and labels broad
 You offer their refinement. Fool or knave ?