

Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave  
 When there's a thousand diamond weights between?  
 So I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you'll find,  
 Profess themselves indignant, scandalised  
 At thus being held unable to explain  
 Now a superior man who disbelieves  
 May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!  
 It's through my coming in the tail of time,  
 Nicking the minute with a happy tact.  
 Had I been born three hundred years ago  
 They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course  
 believes;"

And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."  
 But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet  
 How can he?"—All eyes turn with interest.  
 Whereas, step off the line on either side—  
 You, for example, clever to a fault,  
 The rough and ready man that write apace,  
 Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less—  
 You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?  
 Lord So-and-So—his coat bedropt with wax,  
 All Peter's chains about his waist, his back  
 Brave with the needlework of Noodledom,  
 Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?  
 But I, the man of sense and learning too,  
 The able to think yet act, the this, the that,  
 I, to believe at this late time of day!  
 Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

—Except it's yours! admire me as these may,  
 You don't. But what at least do you admire?  
 Present your own perfections, your ideal,  
 Your pattern man for a minute—oh, make haste!  
 Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?  
 Concede the means; allow his head and hand,  
 (A large concession, clever as you are)  
 Good!—In our common primal element  
 Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know—  
 We're still at that admission, recollect)  
 Where do you find—apart from, towering-o'er  
 The secondary temporary aims  
 Which satisfy the gross tastes you despise—  
 Where do you find his star?—his crazy trust  
 God knows through what or in what? it's alive  
 And shines and leads him and that's all we want.  
 Have we ought in our sober night shall point  
 Such ends as his were, and direct the means  
 Of working out our purpose straight as his,  
 Nor bring a moment's trouble on success

With after-care to justify the same ?  
 —Be a Napoleon and yet disbelieve !  
 Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away.  
 What's the vague good of the world for which you'd dare  
 With comfort to yourself blow millions up ?  
 We neither of us see it ! we do see  
 The blown-up millions—spatter of their brains  
 And writhing of their bowels and so forth,  
 In that bewildering entanglement  
 Of horrible eventualities  
 Past calculation to the end of time !  
 Can I mistake for some clear word of God  
 (Which were my ample warrant for it all)  
 His puff of hazy instincts, idle talk,  
 "The state, that's I," quack-nonsense about kings,  
 And (when one beats the man to his last hold)  
 The vague idea of setting things to rights,  
 Policing people efficaciously,  
 More to their profit, most of all to his own ;  
 The whole to end that dimmest of ends  
 By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the church,  
 And resurrection of the old *régime*.  
 Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,  
 Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such ?  
 No : for, concede me but the merest chance  
 Doubt may be wrong—there's judgment, life to come !  
 With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right ?  
 This present life is all ? you offer me  
 Its dozen noisy years with not a chance  
 That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,  
 And getting called by divers new-coined names,  
 Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,  
 Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like !  
 Therefore, I will not.

Take another case ;

Fit up the cabin yet another way.  
 What say you to the poet's ? shall we write  
 Hamlets, Othellos—make the world our own,  
 Without a risk to run of either sort ?  
 I can't !—to put the strongest reason first.  
 "But try," you urge, "the trying shall suffice :  
 The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life.  
 Try to be Shakspeare, leave the rest to fate !"  
 Spare my self-knowledge—there's no fooling me !  
 If I prefer remaining my poor self,  
 I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.  
 If I'm a Shakspeare, let the well alone—  
 Why should I try to be what now I am ?  
 If I'm no Shakspeare, as too probable,—

His power and consciousness and self-delight  
And all we want in common, shall I find—  
Trying for ever? while on points of taste  
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I  
Are dowered alike—I'll ask you, I or he,  
Which in our two lives realises most?  
Much, he imagined—somewhat, I possess.  
He had the imagination; stick to that!  
Let him say "In the face of my soul's works  
Your world is worthless and I touch it not  
Lest I should wrong them"—I withdraw my plea.  
But does he say so? look upon his life!  
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.  
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces  
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;  
Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,  
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;  
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,  
And none more, had he seen its entry once,  
Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."  
Why then should I who play that personage,  
The very Pandulph Shakspeare's fancy made,  
Be told that had the poet chanced to start  
From where I stand now (some degree like mine  
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)  
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,  
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?  
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!  
Did Shakspeare live, he could but sit at home  
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,  
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,  
And English books, none equal to his own,  
Which I read, bound in gold, (he never did).  
—Terni and Naples' bay and Gothard's top—  
Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these—  
But, as I pour this claret, there they are—  
I've gained them—crossed St. Gothard last July  
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed  
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?  
We want the same things, Shakspeare and myself,  
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,  
Could fancy he too had it when he liked,  
But not so thoroughly that if fate allowed  
He would not have it also in my sense.  
We play one game. I send the ball aloft  
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes  
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high  
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get.  
He struck balls higher and with better skill,

But at a poor fence level with his head,  
 And hit—his Stratford house, a coat of arms,  
 Successful dealings in his grain and wool,—  
 While I receive heaven's incense in my nose  
 And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.  
 Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game ?

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.  
 Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat ;  
 Only, we can't command it ; fire and life  
 Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree :  
 And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,  
 The fact's the same,—belief's fire once in us,  
 Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself.  
 We penetrate our life with such a glow  
 As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,  
 That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power  
 For good or ill, since men call flare success.  
 But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.  
 Light one in me, I'll find it food enough !  
 Why, to be Luther—that's a life to lead,  
 Incomparably better than my own.  
 He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,  
 Sets up God's rule again by simple means,  
 Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.  
 He flared out in the flaring of mankind ;  
 Such Luther's luck was—how shall such be mine ?  
 If he succeeded, nothing's left to do :  
 And if he did not altogether—well,  
 Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be  
 I might be also. But to what result ?  
 He looks upon no future : Luther did.  
 What can I gain on the denying side ?  
 Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,  
 Read the text right, emancipate the world—  
 The emancipated world enjoys itself  
 With scarce a thank-you—Blougram told it first  
 It could not owe a farthing,—not to him  
 More than St. Paul ! 'twould press its pay, you think ?  
 Then add there's still that plaguey hundredth chance  
 Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—  
 For what gain ? not for Luther's, who secured  
 A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,  
 Supposing death a little altered things !

“ Ay, but since really I lack faith,” you cry,  
 “ I run the same risk really on all sides,  
 In cool indifference as bold unbelief.  
 As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.

It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,  
 Nor more available to do faith's work  
 Than unbelief like yours. Whole faith, or none!"

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.  
 Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.  
 We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith;  
 I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.  
 The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,  
 If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?  
 By life and man's free will, God gave for that!  
 To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:  
 That's our one act, the previous work's His own.  
 You criticise the soil? it reared this tree—  
 This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!  
 What matter though I doubt at every pore,  
 Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,  
 Doubts in the trivial work of every day,  
 Doubts at the very bases of my soul  
 In the grand moments when she probes herself—  
 If finally I have a life to show,  
 The thing I did, brought out in evidence  
 Against the thing done to me underground  
 By Hell and all its brood, for ought I know?  
 I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?  
 All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?  
 It is the idea, the feeling and the love  
 God means mankind should strive for and show forth,  
 Whatever be the process to that end,—  
 And not historic knowledge, logic sound,  
 And metaphysical acumen, sure!  
 "What think ye of Christ," friend? when all's done and  
 said,  
 You like this Christianity or not?  
 It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
 Has it your vote to be so if it can?  
 Trust you an instinct silenced long ago  
 That will break silence and enjoin you love  
 What mortified philosophy is hoarse,  
 And all in vain, with bidding you despise?  
 If you desire faith—then you've faith enough.  
 What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves?  
 You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,  
 On hearsay; it's a favourable one:  
 "But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,  
 Because of contradictions in the facts.  
 One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,  
 This Blougram—yet throughout the tales of him  
 I see he figures as an Englishman."

Well, the two things are reconcilable.  
 But would I rather you discovered that  
 Subjoining—"Still, what matter though they be?  
 Blougram—concerns me nought, born here or there."

Pure faith indeed—you know not what you ask!  
 Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,  
 Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much  
 The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.  
 It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare.  
 Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:  
 I say, it's meant to hide him all it can,  
 And that's what all the blessed evil's for.  
 Its use in time is to environ us,  
 Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough  
 Against that sight till we can bear its stress.  
 Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain  
 And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart  
 Less certainly would wither up at once  
 Than mind, confronted with the truth of Him.  
 But time and earth case-harden us to live;  
 The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child  
 Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,  
 Plays on and grows to be a man like us.  
 With me, faith means perpetual unbelief  
 Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot  
 Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.  
 Or, if that's too ambitious,—here's my box—  
 I need the excitation of a pinch  
 Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose  
 Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.  
 "Leave it in peace" advise the simple folk—  
 Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,  
 Say I—let doubt occasion still more faith!

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,  
 In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.  
 How you'd exult if I could put you back  
 Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,  
 Geology, ethnology, what not,  
 (Greek endings with the little passing-bell  
 That signifies some faith's about to die)  
 And set you square with Genesis again,—  
 When such a traveller told you his last news,  
 He saw the ark a-top of Ararat  
 But did not climb there since 'twas getting dusk  
 And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!  
 How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,  
 How act? As other people felt and did;

With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,  
Believe—and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate  
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,  
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,  
Satan looks up between his feet—both tug—  
He's left, himself, in the middle: the soul wakes  
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!  
Never leave growing till the life to come!  
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks  
That used to puzzle people wholesomely—  
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.  
What are the laws of Nature, not to bend  
If the Church bid them, brother Newman asks.  
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then—  
On to the rack with faith—is my advice!  
Will not that hurry us upon our knees  
Knocking our breasts, "It can't be—yet it shall!  
Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?  
Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.  
That's better than acquitting God with grace  
As some folks do. He's tried—no case is proved,  
Philosophy is lenient—He may go!

You'll say—the old system's not so obsolete  
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?  
King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet  
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;  
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint  
Believes God watches him continually,  
As he believes in fire that it will burn,  
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,  
Sin against rain, although the penalty  
Be just singe or soaking? No, he smiles;  
Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves.

The sum of all is—yes, my doubt is great,  
My faith's the greater—then my faith's enough.  
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,  
Yet would die rather than avow my fear  
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,  
When set to happen by the palace-clock  
According to the clouds or dinner-time.  
I hear you recommend, I might at least  
Eliminate, decrassify my faith  
Since I adopt it; keeping what I must  
And leaving what I can—such points as this!  
I won't—that is, I can't throw one away.

Supposing there's no truth in what I said  
 About the need of trials to man's faith,  
 Still, when you bid me purify the same,  
 To such a process I discern no end,  
 Clearing off one excrescence to see two ;  
 There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,  
 That meets the knife—I cut and cut again !  
 First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last  
 But Fichte's clever cut at God himself ?  
 Experimentalize on sacred things ?  
 I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain  
 To stop betimes : they all get drunk alike.  
 The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste  
 As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,  
 Nor see more danger in it, you retort.  
 Your taste's worth mine ; but my taste proves more wise  
 When we consider that the steadfast hold  
 On the extreme end of the chain of faith  
 Gives all the advantage, makes the difference,  
 With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule.  
 We are their lords, or they are free of us  
 Just as we tighten or relax that hold.  
 So, other matters equal, we'll revert  
 To the first problem—which if solved my way  
 And thrown into the balance turns the scale—  
 How we may lead a comfortable life,  
 How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time  
 How narrowly and grossly I view life,  
 Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule  
 The masses, and regard complacently  
 "The cabin," in our old phrase ! Well, I do.  
 I act for, talk for, live for this world now,  
 As this world calls for action, life and talk—  
 No prejudice to what next world may prove,  
 Whose new laws and requirements my best pledge  
 To observe then, is that I observe these now,  
 Doing hereafter what I do meanwhile.  
 Let us concede (gratuitously though)  
 Next life relieves the soul of body, yields  
 Pure spiritual enjoyments : well, my friend,  
 Why lose this life in the meantime, since its use  
 May be to make the next life more intense ?

Do you know, I have often had a dream  
 (Work it up in your next month's article)



Of man's poor spirit in its progress still  
 Losing true life for ever and a day  
 Through ever trying to be and ever being  
 In the evolution of successive spheres,  
 Before its actual sphere and place of life,  
 Halfway into the next, which having reached,  
 It shoots with corresponding foolery  
 Halfway into the next still, on and off!  
 As when a traveller, bound from north to south,  
 Scouts fur in Russia—what's its use in France?  
 In France spurns flannel—where's its need in Spain?  
 In Spain drops cloth—too cumbrous for Algiers!  
 Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,  
 A superfluity at Timbuctoo.  
 When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?  
 I'm at ease now, friend—worldly in this world  
 I take and like its way of life; I think  
 My brothers who administer the means  
 Live better for my comfort—that's good too;  
 And God, if he pronounce upon it all,  
 Approves my service, which is better still.  
 If He keeps silence,—why for you or me  
 Or that brute-beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"  
 What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue—you declare,  
 All special pleading done with, truth is truth,  
 And justifies itself by undreamed ways.  
 You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,  
 To say so, acting up to our truth perceived  
 However feebly. Do then,—act away!  
 'Tis there I'm on the watch for you! How one acts  
 Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:  
 And how you'll act is what I fain would see  
 If, like the candid person you appear,  
 You dare to make the most of your life's scheme  
 As I of mine, live up to its full law  
 Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.  
 Put natural religion to the test  
 You've just demolished the revealed with—quick,  
 Down to the root of all that checks your will,  
 All prohibition to lie, kill, and thief  
 Or even to be an atheistic priest!  
 Suppose a pricking to incontinence—  
 Philosophers deduce you chastity  
 Or shame, from just the fact that at the first  
 Whoso embraced a woman in the plain,  
 Threw club down, and forewent his brains beside,  
 So stood a ready victim in the reach

Of any brother-savage club in hand—  
 Hence saw the use of going out of sight  
 In wood or cave to prosecute his loves—  
 I read this in a French book t'other day.  
 Does law so analyzed coerce you much?  
 Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,  
 But you who reach where the first thread begins,  
 You'll soon cut that!—which means you can, but  
 won't

Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,  
 You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,  
 But there they are, and so you let them rule.  
 Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,  
 A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,  
 Without the good the slave expects to get,  
 Suppose he has a master after all!  
 You own your instincts—why what else do I,  
 Who want, am made for, and must have a God  
 Ere I can be ought, do ought?—no mere name  
 Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,  
 To wit, a relation from that thing to me,  
 Touching from head to foot—which touch I feel,  
 And with it take the rest, this life of ours!  
 I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)  
 Disfigure such a life and call it names,  
 While, in your mind, remains another way  
 For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,  
 But ignorance and weakness have rights too.  
 There needs no crucial effort to find truth  
 If here or there or anywhere about—  
 We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,  
 And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least  
 The right, by one laborious proof the more,  
 To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.  
 Men are not gods, but, properly, are brutes.  
 Something we may see, all we cannot see—  
 What need of lying? I say, I see all,  
 And swear to each detail the most minute  
 In what I think a man's face—you, mere cloud:  
 I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,  
 For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,  
 Mankind may doubt if there's a cloud at all.  
 You take the simpler life—ready to see,  
 Willing to see—for no cloud's worth a face—  
 And leaving quiet what no strength can move,  
 And which, who bids you move? who has the  
 right?

"I bid you ; but you are God's sheep, not mine—  
 "*Pastor est tui Dominus.*" You find  
 In these the pleasant pastures of this life  
 Much you may eat without the least offence,  
 Much you don't eat because your maw objects,  
 Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock  
 Open great eyes at you and even butt,  
 And thereupon you like your friends so much  
 You cannot please yourself, offending them—  
 Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,  
 You weigh your pleasure with their butts and kicks  
 And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears  
 Restrain you—real checks since you find them so—  
 Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks ;  
 And thus you graze through life with not one lie,  
 And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name ?  
 If so, you beat—which means—you are not I—  
 Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill  
 Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,  
 But motioned to the velvet of the sward  
 By those obsequious wethers' very selves.  
 Look at me, sir ; my age is double yours.  
 At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,  
 What now I should be—as, permit the word,  
 I pretty well imagine your whole range  
 And stretch of tether twenty years to come.  
 We both have minds and bodies much alike.  
 In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,  
 My daily bread, my influence and my state ?  
 You're young, I'm old, you must be old one day ;  
 Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,  
 Women their lovers kneel to, that cut curls  
 From your fat lap-dog's ears to grace a brooch—  
 Dukes, that petition just to kiss your ring—  
 With much beside you know or may conceive ?  
 Suppose we die to-night : well, here am I,  
 Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,  
 While writing all the same my articles  
 On music, poetry, the fictile vase  
 Found at Albano, or Anacreon's Greek,  
 But you—the highest honour in your life,  
 The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,  
 Is—dining here and drinking this last glass  
 I pour you out in sign of amity  
 Before we part for ever. Of your power  
 And social influence, worldly worth in short,  
 Judge what's my estimation by the fact—

I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,  
 Hint secrecy on one of all these words !  
 You're shrewd and know that should you publish it  
 The world would brand the lie—my enemies first,  
 " Who'd sneer—the bishop's an arch-hypocrite,  
 And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."

Whereas I should not dare for both my ears  
 Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,  
 Before my chaplain who reflects myself—  
 My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.  
 What's your reward, self-abnegating friend ?  
 Stood you confessed of those exceptional  
 And privileged great natures that dwarf mine—  
 A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,  
 A poet just about to print his ode,  
 A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,  
 An artist whose religion in his art,  
 I should have nothing to object ! such men  
 Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,  
 Their druggot's worth my purple, they beat me.  
 But you,—you're just as little those as I—  
 You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,  
 Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,  
 Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul  
 Unseized by the Germans yet—which view you'll  
 print—

Meantime the best you have to show being still  
 That lively lightsome article we took  
 Almost for the true Dickens,—what's the name ?  
 " The Slum and Cellar—or Whitechapel life  
 Limned after dark ! " it made me laugh, I know,  
 And pleased a month and brought you in ten pounds.  
 —Success I recognise and compliment,  
 And therefore give you, if you please, three words  
 (The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)  
 Which whether here, in Dublin, or New York,  
 Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,  
 Such terms as never you aspired to get  
 In all our own reviews and some not ours.  
 Go write your lively sketches—be the first  
 " Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence "—  
 Or better simply say, " The Outward-bound."

Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth  
 As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad  
 About me on the church-door opposite.  
 You will not wait for that experience though,  
 I fancy, howsoever you decide,  
 To discontinue—not detesting, not  
 Defaming, but at least—despising me !

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour  
 Sylvester Blougram, styled *in partibus*  
*Episcopus, nec non*—(the deuce knows what  
 It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)  
 With Gigadibs the literary man,  
 Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,  
 And ranged the olive stones about its edge,  
 While the great bishop rolled him out his mind.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.  
 The other portion, as he shaped it thus  
 For argumentatory purposes,  
 He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.  
 Some arbitrary accidental thoughts  
 That crossed his mind, amusing because new,  
 He chose to represent as fixtures there,  
 Invariable convictions (such they seemed  
 Beside his interlocutor's loose cards  
 Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)  
 While certain hell-deep instincts, man's weak tongue  
 Is never bold to utter in their truth  
 Because styled hell-deep ('tis an old mistake  
 To place hell at the bottom of the earth)  
 He ignored these,—not having in readiness  
 Their nomenclature and philosophy :  
 He said true things, but called them by wrong names.  
 "On the whole," he thought, "I justify myself  
 On every point where cavillers like this  
 Oppugn my life : he tries one kind of fence—  
 I close—he's worsted, that's enough for him ;  
 He's on the ground ! if the ground should break away  
 I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet  
 Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.  
 His ground was over mine and broke the first.  
 So let him sit with me this many a year !"

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week  
 Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.  
 (Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"  
 Another way than Blougram's purpose was)  
 And having bought, not cabin-furniture  
 But settler's-implements (enough for three)  
 And started for Australia—there, I hope,  
 By this time he has tested his first plough,  
 And studied his last chapter of St. John.

## LXVIII

## MEMORABILIA

1

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,  
 And did he stop and speak to you ?  
 And did you speak to him again ?  
 How strange it seems, and new !

2

But you were living before that,  
 And you are living after,  
 And the memory I started at—  
 My starting moves your laughter !

3

I crossed a moor with a name of its own  
 And a use in the world no doubt,  
 Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone  
 'Mid the blank miles round about—

4

For there I picked up on the heather  
 And there I put inside my breast  
 A moulted feather, an eagle-feather—  
 Well, I forget the rest.

## LXIX

## ANDREA DEL SARTO

(CALLED THE "FAULTLESS PAINTER")

BUT do not let us quarrel any more,  
 No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me for once :  
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.  
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart ?  
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,  
 Treat his own subject after his own way,  
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,  
 And shut the money into this small hand  
 When next it takes mine. Will it ? tenderly ?

Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!  
I often am much wearier than you think,  
This evening more than usual, and it seems  
As if—forgive now—should you let me sit  
Here by the window with your hand in mine  
And look a half hour forth on Fiesole,  
Both of one mind, as married people use,  
Quietly, quietly, the evening through,  
I might get up to-morrow to my work  
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.  
To-morrow how you shall be glad for this!  
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,  
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.  
Don't count the time lost, either; you must serve  
For each of the five pictures we require—  
It saves a model. So! keep looking so—  
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!  
—How could you ever prick those perfect ears,  
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet—  
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,  
Which everybody looks on and calls his,  
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,  
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less!  
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made.  
There's what we painters call our harmony!  
A common greyness silvers everything,—  
All in a twilight, you and I alike  
—You, at the point of your first pride in me  
(That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;  
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down  
To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.  
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;  
That length of convent-wall across the way  
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;  
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease  
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.  
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape  
As if I saw alike my work and self  
And all that I was born to be and do,  
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.  
How strange now, looks the life He makes us lead!  
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are:  
I feel he laid the fether: let it lie!  
This chamber for example—turn your head—  
All that's behind us! you don't understand  
Nor care to understand about my art,  
But you can hear at least when people speak;  
And that cartoon, the second from the door  
—It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—

Behold Madonna, I am bold to say.  
 I can do with my pencil what I know,  
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—  
 Do easily, too—when I say perfectly  
 I do not boast, perhaps : yourself are judge  
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,  
 And just as much they used to say in France.  
 At any rate 'tis easy, all of it,  
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long past—  
 I do what many dream of all their lives  
 —Dream ? strive to do, and agonise to do,  
 And fail in doing. I could count twenty such  
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,  
 Who strive—you don't know how the others strive  
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared  
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,  
 Yet do much less, so much less, some one says,  
 (I know his name, no matter) so much less !  
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia ! I am judged.  
 There burns a truer light of God in them,  
 In their vexed, beating, stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt  
 This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.  
 Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
 Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
 Enter and take their place there sure enough,  
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.  
 The sudden blood of these men ! at a word—  
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.  
 I, painting from myself and to myself,  
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame  
 Or their praise either. Somebody remarks  
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,  
 His hue mistaken—what of that ? or else,  
 Rightly traced and well ordered—what of that ?  
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
 Or what's a Heaven for ? all is silver-grey  
 Placid and perfect with my art—the worse !  
 I know both what I want and what might gain—  
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh  
 “ Had I been two, another and myself,  
 Our head would have o'erlooked the world ! ” No doubt.  
 Yonder's a work, now, of that famous youth  
 The Urbinate who died five years ago.  
 ('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)  
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,  
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,



Reaching, that Heaven might so replenish him,  
 Above and through his art—for it gives way ;  
 That arm is wrongly put—and there again—  
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,  
 Its body, so to speak ! its soul is right,  
 He means right—that, a child may understand.  
 Still, what an arm ! and I could alter it.  
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch—  
 Out of me ! out of me ! And wherefore out ?  
 Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,  
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you.  
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—  
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.  
 But had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,  
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,  
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird  
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—  
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind !  
 Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged  
 " God and the glory ! never care for gain.  
 The present by the future, what is that ?  
 Live for fame, side by side with Angelo—  
 Rafael is waiting. Up to God all three !"  
 I might have done it for you. So it seems—  
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.  
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self ;  
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you ?  
 What wife had Rafael, or has Angelo ?  
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not—  
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive :  
 Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,  
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.  
 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,  
 That I am something underrated here,  
 Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.  
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,  
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.  
 The best is when they pass and look aside ;  
 But they speak sometimes ; I must bear it all.  
 Well may they speak ! That Francis, that first time,  
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau !  
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,  
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,  
 In that humane great monarch's golden look,—  
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl  
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,  
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,  
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,

[I] painting proudly with his breath on me,  
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,  
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls  
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—  
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,  
 This in the back-ground, waiting on my work,  
 To crown the issue with a last reward!  
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days?  
 And had you not grown restless—but I know—  
 'Tis done and past; 'twas right, my instinct said;  
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey—  
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt  
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.  
 How could it end in any other way?  
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.  
 The triumph was to have ended there—then if  
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?  
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,  
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!  
 "Rafael did this, Andrea painted that—  
 The Roman's is the better when you pray,  
 But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"  
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge  
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows  
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.  
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,  
 Said one day Angelo, his very self,  
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .  
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts  
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,  
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)  
 "Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub  
 Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,  
 Who, were he set to plan and execute  
 As you are pricked on by your popes and kings,  
 Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"  
 To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.  
 I hardly dare—yet, only you to see,  
 Give the chalk here—quick, thus the line should go!  
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!  
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,  
 (What he? why, who but Michael Angelo?  
 Do you forget already words like those?)  
 If really there was such a chance, so lost,  
 Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.  
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!  
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?  
 If you would sit thus by me every night  
 I should work better, do you comprehend?

I mean that I should earn more, give you more.  
 See, it is settled dusk now ; there's a star ;  
 Morello's gone, the watch-lights shew the wall,  
 The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.  
 Come from the window, Love,—come in, at last,  
 Inside the melancholy little house  
 We built to be so gay with. God is just.  
 King Francis may forgive me. Oft at nights  
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,  
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick  
 Distinct, instead of mortar fierce bright gold,  
 That gold of his I did cement them with !  
 Let us but love each other. Must you go ?  
 That Cousin here again ? he waits outside ?  
 Must see you—you, and not with me ? Those loans !  
 More gaming debts to pay ? you smiled for that ?  
 Well, let smiles buy me ! have you more to spend ?  
 While hand and eye and something of a heart  
 Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth ?  
 I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit  
 The grey remainder of the evening out,  
 Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly  
 How I could paint were I but back in France,  
 One picture, just one more—the Virgin's face,  
 Not yours this time ! I want you at my side  
 To hear them—that is, Michael Angelo—  
 Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.  
 Will you ? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.  
 I take the subjects for his corridor,  
 Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,  
 And throw him in another thing or two  
 If he demurs ; the whole should prove enough  
 To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,  
 What's better and what's all I care about,  
 Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff.  
 Love, does that please you ? Ah, but what does he,  
 The Cousin ! what does he to please you more ?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.  
 I regret little, I would change still less.  
 Since there my past life lies, why alter it ?  
 The very wrong to Francis ! it is true  
 I took his coin, was tempted and complied,  
 And built this house and sinned, and all is said.  
 My father and my mother died of want.  
 Well, had I riches of my own ? you see  
 How one gets rich ! Let each one bear his lot.  
 They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died :  
 And I have laboured somewhat in my time

And not been paid profusely. Some good son  
 Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try !  
 No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,  
 You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.  
 This must suffice me here. What would one have ?  
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—  
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem  
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,  
 For Leonard, Rafael, Angelo and me  
 To cover—the three first without a wife,  
 While I have mine ! So—still they overcome  
 Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle ! Go, my Love.

LXX

BEFORE

1

LET them fight it out, friend ! things have gone too far.  
 God must judge the couple ! leave them as they are  
 —Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory,  
 And whichever one the guilt's with, to my story.

2

Why, you would not bid men, sunk in such a slough,  
 Strike no arm out further, stick and stink as now,  
 Leaving right and wrong to settle the embroilment,  
 Heaven with snaky Hell, in torture and entoilment ?

3

Which of them's the culprit, how must he conceive  
 God's the queen he caps to, laughing in his sleeve !  
 'Tis but decent to profess oneself beneath her.  
 Still, one must not be too much in earnest either.

4

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes,  
 Then go live his life out ! life will try his nerves,  
 When the sky which noticed all, makes no disclosure,  
 And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.

5

Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls of rose,  
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze him as he goes.  
For he 'gins to guess the purpose of the garden,  
With the sly mute thing beside there for a warden.

6

What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant to his side,  
A leer and lie in every eye on its obsequious hide?  
When will come an end of all the mock obeisance,  
And the price appear that pays for the misfeasance?

7

So much for the culprit. Who's the martyred man?  
Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure he can.  
He that strove thus evil's lump with good to leaven,  
Let him give his blood at last and get his heaven.

8

All or nothing, stake it! trusts he God or no?  
Thus far and no farther? farther? be it so.  
Now, enough of your chicane of prudent pauses,  
Sage provisos, sub-intents, and saving-clauses.

9

Ah, "forgive" you bid him? While God's champion lives,  
Wrong shall be resisted: dead, why he forgives.  
But you must not end my friend ere you begin him;  
Evil stands not crowned on earth, while breath is in him.

10

Once more—Will the wronger, at this last of all,  
Dare to say "I did wrong," rising in his fall?  
No?—Let go, then—both the fighters to their places—  
While I count three, step you back as many paces.

LXXI

AFTER

TAKE the cloak from his face, and at first  
Let the corpse do its worst.  
How he lies in his rights of a man!  
Death has done all death can.

And absorbed in the new life he leads,  
 He recks not, he heeds  
 Nor his wrong nor my vengeance—both strike  
 On his senses alike,  
 And are lost in the solemn and strange  
 Surprise of the change.  
 Ha, what avails death to erase  
 His offence, my disgrace?  
 I would we were boys as of old  
 In the field, by the fold—  
 His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn  
 Were so easily borne.

I stand here now, he lies in his place—  
 Cover the face.

## LXXII

## IN THREE DAYS

## 1

So, I shall see her in three days  
 And just one night, but nights are short,  
 Then two long hours, and that is morn.  
 See how I come, unchanged, unworn—  
 Feel, where my life broke off from thine,  
 How fresh the splinters keep and fine,—  
 Only a touch and we combine!

## 2

Too long, this time of year, the days!  
 But nights—at least the nights are short.  
 As night shows where her one moon is,  
 A hand's-breadth of pure light and bliss,  
 So, life's night gives my lady birth  
 And my eyes hold her! what is worth  
 The rest of heaven, the rest of earth?

## 3

O loaded curls, release your store  
 Of warmth and scent as once before  
 The tingling hair did, lights and darks  
 Out-breaking into fairy sparks  
 When under curl and curl I pried  
 After the warmth and scent inside  
 Thro' lights and darks how manifold—  
 The dark inspired, the light controlled:  
 As early Art embrowned the gold.

4

What great fear—should one say, “ Three days  
 That change the world, might change as well  
 Your fortune ; and if joy delays,  
 Be happy that no worse befell.”  
 What small fear—if another says,  
 “ Three days and one short night beside  
 May throw no shadow on your ways ;  
 But years must teem with change untried,  
 With chance not easily defied,  
 With an end somewhere undescried.”  
 No fear !—or if a fear be born  
 This minute, it dies out in scorn.  
 Fear ? I shall see her in three days  
 And one night, now the nights are short,  
 Then just two hours, and that is morn.

LXXIII

## IN A YEAR

1

NEVER any more  
 While I live,  
 Need I hope to see his face  
 As before.  
 Once his love grown chill,  
 Mine may strive—  
 Bitterly we re-embrace,  
 Single still.

2

Was it something said,  
 Something done,  
 Vexed him ? was it touch of hand,  
 Turn of head ?  
 Strange ! that very way  
 Love begun.  
 I as little understand  
 Love's decay.

3

When I sewed or drew,  
 I recall  
 How he looked as if I sang,  
 —Sweetly too.

If I spoke a word,  
 First of all  
 Up his cheek the colour sprang,  
 Then he heard.

## 4

Sitting by my side,  
 At my feet,  
 So he breathed the air I breathed,  
 Satisfied !  
 I, too, at love's brim  
 Touched the sweet :  
 I would die if death bequeathed  
 Sweet to him.

## 5

“ Speak, I love thee best ! ”  
 He exclaimed,  
 “ Let my love thy own foretell,—”  
 I confessed :  
 “ Clasp my heart on thine  
 Now unblamed,  
 Since upon thy soul as well  
 Hangeth mine ! ”

## 6

Was it wrong to own,  
 Being truth ?  
 Why should all the giving prove  
 His alone ?  
 I had wealth and ease,  
 Beauty, youth—  
 Since my lover gave me love,  
 I gave these.

## 7

That was all I meant,  
 —To be just,  
 And the passion I had raised  
 To content.  
 Since he chose to change  
 Gold for dust,  
 If I gave him what he praised  
 Was it strange ?



## 8

Would he loved me yet,  
 On and on,  
 While I found some way undreamed  
 —Paid my debt!  
 Gave more life and more,  
 Till, all gone,  
 He should smile "She never seemed  
 Mine before.

## 9

"What—she felt the while,  
 Must I think?  
 Love's so different with us men,"  
 He should smile.  
 "Dying for my sake—  
 White and pink!  
 Can't we touch these bubbles then  
 But they break?"

## 10

Dear, the pang is brief.  
 Do thy part,  
 Have thy pleasure. How perplex  
 Grows belief!  
 Well, this cold clay clod  
 Was man's heart.  
 Crumble it—and what comes next?  
 Is it God?

## LXXIV

## OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE

## 1

THE morn when first it thunders in March,  
 The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say.  
 As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch  
 Of the villa-gate, this warm March day,  
 No flash snapt, no dumb thunder rolled  
 In the valley beneath, where, white and wide,  
 Washed by the morning's water-gold,  
 Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

## 2

River and bridge and street and square  
 Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,  
 Through the live translucent bath of air,  
 As the sights in a magic crystal ball.  
 And of all I saw and of all I praised,  
 The most to praise and the best to see,  
 Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised :  
 But why did it more than startle me ?

## 3

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,  
 Could you play me false who loved you so ?  
 Some slights if a certain heart endures  
 It feels, I would have your fellows know !  
 Faith—I perceive not why I should care  
 To break a silence that suits them best,  
 But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear  
 When I find a Giotto join the rest.

## 4

On the arch where olives overhead  
 Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,  
 (That sharp-curved leaf they never shed)  
 'Twixt the aloes I used to lean in chief,  
 And mark through the winter afternoons,  
 By a gift God grants me now and then,  
 In the mild decline of those suns like moons,  
 Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

## 5

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go  
 For pleasure or profit, her men alive—  
 My business was hardly with them, I trow,  
 But with empty cells of the human hive ;  
 —With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,  
 The church's apsis, aisle or nave,  
 Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch—  
 Its face, set full for the sun to shave.

## 6

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,  
 Wherever an outline weakens and wanes  
 Till the latest life in the painting stops,  
 Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains !

One, wishful each scrap should clutch its brick,  
 Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,  
 —A lion who dies of an ass's kick,  
 The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

7

For oh, this world and the wrong it does !  
 They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,  
 The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz  
 Round the works of, you of the little wit !  
 Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,  
 Now that they see God face to face,  
 And have all attained to be poets, I hope ?  
 'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

8

Much they reckon of your praise and you !  
 But the wronged great souls—can they be quit  
 Of a world where all their work is to do,  
 Where you style them, you of the little wit,  
 Old Master this and Early the other,  
 Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows,  
 That a younger succeeds to an elder brother,  
 Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

9

And here where your praise would yield returns  
 And a handsome word or two give help,  
 Here, after your kind, the mastiff girns  
 And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.  
 What, not a word for Stefano there  
 —Of brow once prominent and starry,  
 Called Nature's ape and the world's despair  
 For his peerless painting? (See Vasari)

10

There he stands now. Study, my friends,  
 What a man's work comes to ! so he plans it,  
 Performs it, perfects it, makes amends  
 For the toiling and moiling, and there's its transit !  
 Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,  
 With upturned eye while the hand is busy,  
 Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour !  
 'Tis looking downward makes one dizzy.

## 11

If you knew their work you would deal your dole.  
 May I take upon me to instruct you ?  
 When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,  
 Thus much had the world to boast *in fructu*—  
 The truth of Man, as by God first spoken,  
 Which the actual generations garble,  
 Was re-uttered,—and Soul (which Limbs betoken)  
 And Limbs (Soul informs) were made new in marble.

## 12

So you saw yourself as you wished you were,  
 As you might have been, as you cannot be ;  
 And bringing your own shortcomings there,  
 You grew content in your poor degree  
 With your little power, by those statues' godhead,  
 And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,  
 And your little grace, by their grace embodied,  
 And your little date, by their forms that stay.

## 13

You would fain be kinglier, say than I am ?  
 Even so, you would not sit like Theseus.  
 You'd fain be a model ? the Son of Priam  
 Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.  
 You're wroth—can you slay your snake like Apollo ?  
 You're grieved—still Niobe's the grander !  
 You live—there's the Racers' frieze to follow—  
 You die—there's the dying Alexander.

## 14

So, testing your weakness by their strength,  
 Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,  
 Measured by Art in your breadth and length,  
 You learn—to submit is the worsted's duty.  
 —When I say “ you ” 'tis the common soul,  
 The collective, I mean—the race of Man  
 That receives life in parts to live in a whole,  
 And grow here according to God's own plan.

## 15

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,  
 You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day  
 And cried with a start—What if we so small  
 Are greater, ay, greater the while than they !

Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature ?

In both, of such lower types are we  
Precisely because of our wider nature ;  
For time, theirs—ours, for eternity.

16

To-day's brief passion limits their range,

It seethes with the morrow for us and more.

They are perfect—how else ? they shall never change :

We are faulty—why not ? we have time in store.

The Artificer's hand is not arrested

With us—we are rough-hewn, no-wise polished :

They stand for our copy, and, once invested

With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

17

'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven—

The better ! what's come to perfection perishes.

Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven.

Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.

Thyself shall afford the example, Giotto !

Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,

Done at a stroke, was just (was it not ?) " O ! "

Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

18

Is it true, we are now, and shall be hereafter,

And what—is depending on life's one minute ?

Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter

Our first step out of the gulf or in it ?

And Man, this step within his endeavour,

His face, have no more play and action

Than joy which is crystallized for ever,

Or grief, an eternal petrification !

19

On which I conclude, that the early painters,

To cries of " Greek Art and what more wish you ? "—

Replied, " Become now self-acquainters,

And paint man, man,—whatever the issue !

Make the hopes shine through the flesh they fray,

New fears aggrandise the rags and tatters.

So bring the invisible full into play,

Let the visible go to the dogs—what matters ? "

## 20

Give these, I say, full honour and glory  
 For daring so much, before they well did it.  
 The first of the new, in our race's story,  
 Beats the last of the old, 'tis no idle quiddit.  
 The wor hies began a revolution  
 Which if on the earth we intend to acknowledge  
 Honour them now—(ends my allocution)  
 Nor confer our degree when the folks leave college.

## 21

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate—  
 That, when this life is ended, begins  
 New work for the soul in another state,  
 Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins—  
 Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,  
 Repeat in large what they practised in small,  
 Through life after life in unlimited series ;  
 Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

## 22

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen  
 By the means of Evil that Good is best,  
 And through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,—  
 When its faith in the same has stood the test—  
 Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,  
 The uses of labour are surely done.  
 There remaineth a rest for the people of God,  
 And I have had troubles enough for one.

## 23

But at any rate I have loved the season  
 Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy,  
 My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan ;  
 My painter—who but Cimabue ?  
 Nor ever was man of them all indeed,  
 From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,  
 Could say that he missed my critic-meed.  
 So now to my special grievance—heigh ho !

## 24

Their ghosts now stand, as I said before,  
 Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,  
 Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er  
 —No getting again what the church has grasped !

The works on the wall must take their chance,  
 "Works never conceded to England's thick clime!"  
 (I hope they prefer their inheritance  
 Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

25

When they go at length, with such a shaking  
 Of heads o'er the old delusions, sadly  
 Each master his way through the black streets taking,  
 Where many a lost work breathes though badly—  
 Why don't they bethink them of who has merited?  
 Why not reveal, while their pictures dree  
 Such doom, that a captive's to be out-ferreted?  
 Why do they never remember me?

26

Not that I expect the great Bigordi  
 Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose;  
 Nor wronged Lippino—and not a word I  
 Say of a scrap of Fra Angelico's.  
 But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,  
 To grant me a taste of your intonaco—  
 Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?  
 No churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?

27

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,  
 My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman,  
 Save me a sample, give me the hap  
 Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman?  
 No Virgin by him, the somewhat petty,  
 Of finical touch and tempera crumbly—  
 Could not Alesso Baldovinetti  
 Contribute so much, I ask humbly?

28

Margheritone of Arezzo,  
 With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret,  
 (Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,  
 You bald, saturnine, poll-clawed parrot?)  
 No poor glimmering Crucifixion,  
 Where in the foreground kneels the donor?  
 If such remain, as is my conviction,  
 The hoarding does you but little honour.

## 29

They pass : for them the panels may thrill,  
 The tempera grow alive and tinglish—  
 Rot or are left to the mercies still  
 Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English !  
 Seeing mere money's worth in their prize,  
 Who sell it to some one calm as Zeno  
 At naked Art, and in ecstasies  
 Before some clay-cold, vile Carlino !

## 30

No matter for these ! But Giotto, you,  
 Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it,  
 Never ! it shall not be counted true—  
 That a certain precious little tablet  
 Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover,—  
 Buried so long in oblivion's womb,  
 Was left for another than I to discover,—  
 Turns up at last, and to whom ?—to whom ?

## 31

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,  
 (Or was it rather the Ognissanti ?)  
 Stood on the altar-steps, patient and weary too !  
 Nay, I shall have it yet, *detur amanti* !  
 My Koh-i-noor—or (if that's a platitude)  
 Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye !  
 So, in anticipative gratitude,  
 What if I take up my hope and prophesy ?

## 32

When the hour is ripe, and a certain dotard  
 Pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing,  
 To the worse side of the Mont St. Gothard,  
 Have, to begin by way of rejoicing,  
 None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),  
 No civic guards, all plumes and lacquer,  
 Hunting Radetsky's soul like a partridge  
 Over Morello with squib and cracker.

## 33

We'll shoot this time better game and bag 'em hot—  
 No display at the stone of Dante,  
 But a kind of [sober] Witanagemot  
 (" Casa Guidi," *quod videas ante*)



To ponder Freedom restored to Florence,  
 How Art may return that departed with her.  
 Go, hated house, go each trace of the Lorraine's!  
 And bring us the days of Orgagna hither.

34

How we shall prologuise, how we shall perorate,  
 Say fit things upon art and history—  
 Set truth at blood-heat and the false at a zero rate,  
 Make of the want of the age no mystery!  
 Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,  
 Show, monarchy its uncouth cub licks  
 Out of the bear's shape to the chimæra's—  
 Pure Art's birth being still the republic's!

35

Then one shall propose (in a speech, curt Tuscan,  
 Sober, expurgate, spare of an "*issimo*,")  
 Ending our half-told tale of Cambuscan,  
 Turning the Bell-tower's *alt altissimo*.  
 And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia  
 The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,  
 Soars up in gold its full fifty braccia,  
 Completing Florence, as Florence, Italy.

36

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold  
 Is broken away, and the long-pent fire  
 Like the golden hope of the world unbaffled  
 Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire—  
 As, "God and the People" plain for its motto,  
 Thence the new tricolor flaps at the sky?  
 Foreseeing the day that vindicates Giotto  
 And Florence together, the first am I!

## LXXV

## IN A BALCONY

CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT

*Norbert.* Now.

*Constance.* Not now.

*Norbert.* Give me them again, those hands—  
Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs!  
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through.  
You cruellest, you dearest in the world,  
Let me! The Queen must grant whate'er I ask—  
How can I gain you and not ask the Queen?  
There she stays waiting for me, here stand you.  
Some time or other this was to be asked,  
Now is the one time—what I ask, I gain—  
Let me ask now, Love!

*Constance.* Do, and ruin us.

*Norbert.* Let it be now, Love! All my soul breaks forth.  
How I do love you! give my love its way!  
A man can have but one life and one death,  
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate—  
Grant me my heaven now. Let me know you mine,  
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,  
Hold you and have you, and then die away  
If God please, with completion in my soul.

*Constance.* I am not yours then? How content this man?

I am not his, who change into himself,  
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,  
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,  
Give all that was of me away to him  
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,  
Takes part with him against the woman here,  
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw  
As caring that the world be cognisant  
How he loves her and how she worships him.  
You have this woman, not as yet that world.  
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me  
By saving what I cease to care about,  
The courtly name and pride of circumstance—  
The name you'll pick up and be cumbered with  
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing more;  
Just that the world may slip from under you—  
Just that the world may cry "So much for him—"

The man predestined to the heap of crowns !  
There goes his chance of winning one, at least."

*Norbert.* The world !

*Constance.* You love it. Love me quite as well,  
And see if I shall pray for this in vain !  
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks ?

*Norbert.* You pray for—what, in vain ?

*Constance.* Oh my heart's heart,  
How I do love you, Norbert !—That is right !  
But listen, or I take my hands away.

You say, "let it be now"—you would go now  
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,  
You love me—so you do, thank God !

*Norbert.*

Thank God !

*Constance.* Yes, Norbert,—but you fain would tell your  
love,

And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her  
My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,  
Listening to me. You are the minister,  
The Queen's first favourite, nor without a cause.  
To-night completes your wonderful year's-work  
(This palace-feast is held to celebrate)  
Made memorable by her life's success,  
That junction of two crowns on her sole head  
Her house had only dreamed of anciently.  
That this mere dream is grown a stable truth  
To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose the praise ?  
Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved  
What turned the many heads and broke the hearts ?  
You are the fate—your minute's in the heaven.  
Next comes the Queen's turn. Name your own reward !  
With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,  
Put out an arm and touch and take the sun  
And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,  
Possess yourself supremely of her life,  
You choose the single thing she will not grant—  
The very declaration of which choice  
Will turn the scale and neutralise your work.  
At best she will forgive you, if she can.

You think I'll let you choose—her cousin's hand ?

*Norbert.* Wait. First, do you retain your old belief  
The Queen is generous,—nay, is just ?

*Constance.*

There, there !

So men make women love them, while they know  
No more of women's hearts than . . . look you here,  
You that are just and generous beside,  
Make it your own case. For example now,  
I'll say—I let you kiss me and hold my hands—  
Why ? do you know why ? I'll instruct you, then—

The kiss, because you have a name at court,  
 This hand and this, that you may shut in each.  
 A jewel, if you please to pick up such.  
 That's horrible! Apply it to the Queen—  
 Suppose, I am the Queen to whom you speak.  
 "I was a nameless man: you needed me:  
 Why did I proffer you my aid? there stood  
 A certain pretty Cousin by your side.  
 Why did I make such common cause with you?  
 Access to her had not been easy else.  
 You give my labours here abundant praise:  
 'Faith, labour, while she overlooked, grew play.  
 How shall your gratitude discharge itself?  
 Give me her hand!"

*Norbert.* And still I urge the same.

Is the Queen just? just—generous or no!

*Constance.* Yes, just. You love a rose—no harm in that—

But was it for the rose's sake or mine  
 You put it in your bosom? mine, you said—  
 Then mine you still must say or else be false.  
 You told the Queen you served her for herself:  
 If so, to serve her was to serve yourself  
 She thinks, for all your unbelieving face!  
 I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,  
 One sees the twenty pictures—there's a life  
 Better than life—and yet no life at all;  
 Conceive her born in such a magic dome,  
 Pictures all round her! why, she sees the world  
 Can recognise its given things and facts,  
 The fight of giants or the feast of gods,  
 Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,  
 Chaces and battles, the whole earth's display,  
 Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit—  
 And who shall question that she knows them all  
 In better semblance than the things outside?  
 Yet bring into the silent gallery  
 Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,  
 Some lion, with the painted lion there—  
 You think she'll understand composedly?  
 —Say, "that's his fellow in the hunting-piece  
 Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred times?"  
 Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,  
 Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,  
 Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.  
 The real exists for us outside, not her—  
 How should it, with that life in these four walls,  
 That father and that mother, first to last  
 No father and no mother—friends, a heap,

Lovers, no lack—a husband in due time,  
 And everyone of them alike a lie!  
 Things painted by a Rubens out of nought  
 Into what kindness, friendship, love should be;  
 All better, all more grandiose than life,  
 Only no life; mere cloth and surface-paint  
 You feel while you admire. How should she feel?  
 And now that she has stood thus fifty years  
 The sole spectator in that gallery,  
 You think to bring this warm real struggling love  
 In to her of a sudden, and suppose  
 She'll keep her state untroubled? Here's the truth—  
 She'll apprehend its value at a glance,  
 Prefer it to the pictured loyalty!  
 You only have to say "so men are made,  
 For this they act, the thing has many names  
 But this the right one—and now, Queen, be just!"  
 And life slips back—you lose her at the word—  
 You do not even for amends gain me.  
 He will not understand! oh, Norbert, Norbert,  
 Do you not understand?

*Norbert.* The Queen's the Queen,

I am myself—no picture, but alive  
 In every nerve and every muscle, here  
 At the palace-window or in the people's street,  
 As she in the gallery where the pictures glow.  
 The good of life is precious to us both.  
 She cannot love—what do I want with rule?  
 When first I saw your face a year ago  
 I knew my life's good—my soul heard one voice  
 "The woman yonder, there's no use of life  
 But just to obtain her! heap earth's woes in one  
 And bear them—make a pile of all earth's joys  
 And spurn them, as they help or help not here;  
 Only, obtain her!"—How was it to be?  
 I found she was the cousin of the Queen;  
 I must then serve the Queen to get to her—  
 No other way. Suppose there had been one,  
 And I by saying prayers to some white star  
 With promise of my body and my soul  
 Might gain you,—should I pray the star or no?  
 Instead, there was the Queen to serve! I served,  
 And did what other servants failed to do.  
 Neither she sought nor I declared my end.  
 Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,  
 And let me name you as that recompense.  
 She dreamed that such a thing could never be?  
 Let her wake now. She thinks there was some  
 cause—

The love of power, of fame, pure loyalty?  
 —Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives  
 Chasing such shades. Then I've a fancy too.  
 I worked because I want you with my soul—  
 I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now.

*Constance.* Had I not loved you from the very first,  
 Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus  
 So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,  
 You might be thus impatient. What's conceived  
 Of us without here, by the folks within?  
 Where are you now? immersed in cares of state—  
 Where am I now?—intent on festal robes—  
 We two, embracing under death's spread hand!  
 What was this thought for, what this scruple of yours  
 Which broke the council up, to bring about  
 One minute's meeting in the corridor?  
 And then the sudden sleights, long secresies,  
 The plots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,  
 Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,  
 "Does she know? does she not know? saved or lost?"  
 A year of this compression's ecstasy  
 All goes for nothing? you would give this up  
 For the old way, the open way, the world's,  
 His way who beats, and his who sells his wife?  
 What tempts you? their notorious happiness,  
 That you're ashamed of ours? The best you'll get  
 Will be, the Queen grants all that you require,  
 Concedes the ousin, and gets rid of you  
 And her at once, and gives us ample leave  
 To live as our five hundred happy friends.  
 The world will show us with officious hand  
 Our chamber-entry and stand sentinel,  
 When we so oft have stolen across her traps!  
 Get the world's warrant, ring the falcon's foot,  
 And make it duty to be bold and swift,  
 When long ago 'twas nature. Have it so!  
 He never hawked by rights till flung from fist?  
 Oh, the man's thought!—no woman's such a fool.

*Norbert.* Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which  
 is more—  
 One made to love you, let the world take note.  
 Have I done worthy work? be love's the praise,  
 Though hampered by restrictions, barred against  
 By set forms, blinded by forced secresies.  
 Set free my love, and see what love will do  
 Shown in my life—what work will spring from that!  
 The world is used to have its business done  
 On other grounds, find great effects produced  
 For power's sake, fame's sake, motives you have named.

So good. But let my low ground shame their high.  
 Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true!  
 And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!  
 I choose to have you stamped all over me,  
 Your name upon my forehead and my breast,  
 You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,  
 That men may see, all over, you in me—  
 That pale loves may die out of their pretence  
 In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off—  
 Permit this, Constance! Love has been so long  
 Subdued in me, eating me through and through,  
 That now it's all of me and must have way.  
 Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,  
 Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,  
 That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,  
 Trembling at last to its assured result—  
 Then think of this revulsion. I resume  
 Life, after death, (it is no less than life  
 After such long unlovely labouring days)  
 And liberate to beauty life's great need  
 Of the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,  
 Suppress itself erewhile. This eve's the time—  
 This eve intense with yon first trembling star  
 We seem to pant and reach; scarce ought between  
 The earth that rises and the heaven that bends—  
 All nature self-abandoned—every tree  
 Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts  
 And fixed so, every flower and every weed,  
 No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat:  
 All under God, each measured by itself!  
 These statues round us, each abrupt, distinct,  
 The strong in strength, the weak in weakness fixed,  
 The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre,  
 The Nymph to her fawn, the Silence to her rose,  
 And God's approval on His universe!  
 Let us do so—aspire to live as these  
 In harmony with truth, ourselves being true.  
 Take the first way, and let the second come,  
 My first is to possess myself of you;  
 The music sets the march-step—forward then!  
 And there's the Queen, I go to claim you of,  
 The world to witness, wonder and applaud.  
 Our flower of life breaks open. No delay!

*Constance.* And so shall we be ruined, both of us.  
 Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone—  
 You do not know her, were not born to it,  
 To feel what she can see or cannot see.  
 Love, she is generous,—ay, despite your smile,  
 Generous as you are. For, in that thin frame

Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with  
 cares,  
 There lived a lavish soul until it starved  
 Debarred all healthy food. Look to the soul—  
 Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin  
 (The true man's way) on justice and your rights,  
 Exactions and acquittance of the past.  
 Begin so—see what justice she will deal !  
 We women hate a debt as men a gift.  
 Suppose her some poor keeper of a school  
 Whose business is to sit thro' summer-months  
 And dole out children's leave to go and play,  
 Herself superior to such lightness—she  
 In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic pomp,  
 To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside—  
 We wonder such an one looks black on us ?  
 I do not bid you wake her tenderness,  
 —That were vain truly—none is left to wake—  
 But, let her think her justice is engaged  
 To take the shape of tenderness, and mark  
 If she'll not coldly do its warmest deed !  
 Does she love me, I ask you ? not a whit.  
 Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged  
 To help a kinswoman, she took me up—  
 Did more on that bare ground than other loves  
 Would do on greater argument. For me,  
 I have no equivalent of that cold kind  
 To pay her with ; my love alone to give  
 If I give anything. I give her love.  
 I feel I ough to help her, and I will.  
 So for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice  
 That women hate a debt as men a gift.  
 If I were you, I could obtain this grace—  
 Would lay the whole I did to love's account,  
 Nor yet be very false as courtiers go—  
 Declare that my success was recompense ;  
 It would be so, in fact : what were it else ?  
 And then, once loosed her generosity  
 As you will mark it—then,—were I but you  
 To turn it, let it seem to move itself,  
 And make it give the thing I really take,  
 Accepting so, in the poor cousin's hand,  
 All value as the next thing to the queen—  
 Since none loves her directly, none dares that !  
 A shadow of a thing, a name's mere echo  
 Suffices those who miss the name and thing ;  
 You pick up just a ribbon she has worn  
 To keep in proof how near her breath you came.  
 Say I'm so near I seem a piece of her—



Ask for me that way—(oh, you understand)  
 And find the same gift yielded with a grace,  
 Which if you make the least show to extort  
 —You'll see! and when you have ruined both of us,  
 Dissertate on the Queen's ingratitude!

*Norbert.* Then, if I turn it that way, you consent?  
 'Tis not my way; I have more hope in truth.  
 Still if you won't have truth—why, this indeed,  
 Is scarcely false, I'll so express the sense.  
 Will you remain here?

*Constance.* O best heart of mine,  
 How I have loved you! then, you take my way?  
 Are mine as you have been her minister,  
 Work out my thought, give it effect for me,  
 Paint plain my poor conceit and make it serve?  
 I owe that withered woman everything—  
 Life, fortune, you, remember! Take my part—  
 Help me to pay her! Stand upon your rights?  
 You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on you?  
 Your rights are mine—you have no rights but mine.

*Norbert.* Remain here. How you know me!

*Constance.* Ah, but still——

*[He breaks from her: she remains.]*

*[Dance-music from within.]*

*Enter the QUEEN*

*Queen.* Constance!—She is here as he said. Speak!  
 quick!

Is it so? is it true—or false? One word!

*Constance.* True.

*Queen.* Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee!

*Constance.* Madam!

*Queen.* I love you, Constance, from my soul,

Now say once more, with any words you will,

'Tis true—all true—as true as that I speak.

*Constance.* Why should you doubt it?

*Queen.* Ah, why doubt? why doubt?

Dear, make me see it. Do you see it so?

None see themselves—another sees them best.

You say “why doubt it?”—you see him and me.

It is because the Mother has such grace

That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—

Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us;

Howbeit we let our whims prescribe despair,

Our very fancies thwart and cramp our will,

And so accepting life, abjure ourselves !  
 Constance, I had abjured the hope of love  
 And of being loved, as truly as yon palm  
 The hope of seeing Egypt from that turf.

*Constance.* Heaven !

*Queen.* But it was so, Constance, it was so.  
 Men say—or do men say it ? fancies say—  
 “ Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.  
 Too late—no love for you, too late for love—  
 Leave love to girls. Be queen—let Constance love ! ”  
 One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,  
 Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.

“ Oh, love, true, never think of love again !  
 I am a queen—I rule, not love, indeed.”

So it goes on ; so a face grows like this,  
 Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,  
 Till,—nay, it does not end so, I thank God !

*Constance.* I cannot understand——

*Queen.* The happier you !

Constance, I know not how it is with men.  
 For women, (I am a woman now like you)  
 There is no good of life but love—but love !  
 What else looks good, is some shade flung from love—  
 Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,  
 Never you cheat yourself one instant. Love,  
 Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest !  
 O Constance, how I love you !

*Constance.* I love you.

*Queen.* I do believe that all is come through you.  
 I took you to my heart to keep it warm  
 When the last chance of love seemed dead in me ;  
 I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered heart.  
 Oh, I am very old now, am I not ?  
 Not so ! it is true, and it shall be true !

*Constance.* Tell it me ! let me judge if true or false.

*Queen.* Ah, but I fear you—you will look at me  
 And say “ she’s old, she’s grown unlovely quite  
 Who ne’er was beauteous ! men want beauty still.”  
 Well, so I feared—the curse ! so I felt sure.

*Constance.* Be calm. And now you feel not sure, you  
 say ?

*Queen.* Constance, he came, the coming was not  
 strange—

Do not I stand and see men come and go ?  
 I turned a half look from my pedestal  
 Where I grow marble—“ one young man the more !  
 He will love some one,—that is nought to me—  
 What would he with my marble stateliness ? ”  
 Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore ;

The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,  
 And I still older, with less flesh to change—  
 We two those dear extremes that long to touch.  
 It seemed still harder when he first began  
 Absorbed to labour at the state-affairs  
 The old way for the old end, interest.  
 Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts  
 Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,  
 Professing they've no care but for your cause,  
 Thought but to help you, love but for yourself,  
 And you the marble statue all the time  
 They praise and point at as preferred to life,  
 Yet leave for the first breathing woman's cheek,  
 First dancer's, gypsy's, or street baladine's !  
 Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men's speech  
 Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,  
 Their gait subdued lest step should startle me,  
 Their eyes declined, such queendom to respect,  
 Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,  
 While not a man of these broke rank and spoke,  
 Or wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,  
 Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand.  
 There have been moments, if the sentinel  
 Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,  
 Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,  
 I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

*Constance.* Who could have comprehended !

*Queen.*

Ay, who—who ?

Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.  
 Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps  
 It comes too late—would you but tell the truth.

*Constance.* I wait to tell it.

*Queen.*

Well, you see, he came,

Outfaced the others, did a work this year  
 Exceeds in value all was ever done  
 You know—it is not I who say it—all  
 Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)  
 I grew aware not only of what he did,  
 But why so wondrously. Oh, never work  
 Like his was done for work's ignoble sake—  
 It must have finer aims to spur it on !  
 I felt, I saw he loved—loved somebody.  
 And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,  
 I did believe this while 'twas you he loved.

*Constance.* Me, madam ?

*Queen.*

It did seem to me your face  
 Met him where'er he looked : and whom but you  
 Was such a man to love ? it seemed to me  
 You saw he loved you, and approved the love,

And that you both were in intelligence.  
 You could not loiter in the garden, step  
 Into this balcony, but I straight was stung  
 And forced to understand. It seemed so true,  
 So right, so beautiful, so like you both  
 That all this work should have been done by him  
 Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,  
 But that at last—suppose some night like this—  
 Borne on to claim his due reward of me  
 He might say, "Give her hand and pay me so."  
 And I (O Constance, you shall love me now)  
 I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,  
 —"And he shall have it. I will make her blest,  
 My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,  
 My happiest woman's self that might have been!  
 These two shall have their joy and leave me here."  
 Yes—yes—

*Constance.* Thanks!

*Queen.* And the word was on my lips  
 When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear  
 A mere calm statement of his just desire  
 In payment of his labour. When, O Heaven,  
 How can I tell you? cloud was on my eyes  
 And thunder in my ears at that first word  
 Which told 'twas love of me, of me, did all—  
 He loved me—from the first step to the last,  
 Loved me!

*Constance.* You did not hear . . . you thought he  
 spoke  
 Of Love? what if you should mistake?

*Queen.* No, no—  
 No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!  
 He had not dared to hint the love he felt—  
 You were my reflex—how I understood!  
 He said you were the ribbon I had worn,  
 He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,  
 And love, love was the end of every phrase.  
 Love is begun—this much is come to pass,  
 The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours—  
 I will learn, I will place my life on you,  
 But teach me how to keep what I have won.  
 Am I so old? this hair was early grey;  
 But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,  
 And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.  
 I could sing once too; that was in my youth.  
 Still, when men paint me, they declare me . . . yes,  
 Beautiful—for the last French painter did!  
 I know they flatter somewhat; you are frank—  
 I trust you. How I loved you from the first!

Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out  
 And set her by their side to take the eye :  
 I must have felt that good would come from you.  
 I am not generous—like him—like you !  
 But he is not your lover after all—  
 It was not you he looked at. Saw you him ?  
 You have not been mistaking words or looks ?  
 He said you were the reflex of myself—  
 And yet he is not such a paragon  
 To you, to younger women who may choose  
 Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth !  
 You know you never named his name to me—  
 You know, I cannot give him up—ah God,  
 Not up now, even to you !

*Constance.* Then calm yourself.

*Queen.* See, I am old—look here, you happy girl,  
 I will not play the fool, deceive myself ;  
 'Tis all gone—put your cheek beside my cheek—  
 Ah, what a contrast does the moon behold !  
 But then I set my life upon one chance,  
 The last chance and the best—am I not left,  
 My soul, myself ? All women love great men  
 If young or old—it is in all the tales—  
 Young beauties love old poets who can love—  
 Why should not he the poems in my soul,  
 The love, the passionate faith, the sacrifice,  
 The constancy ? I throw them at his feet.  
 Who cares to see the fountain's very shape  
 And whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's  
 That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around ?  
 You could not praise indeed the empty conch ;  
 But I'll pour floods of love and hide myself.  
 How I will love him ! cannot men love love ?  
 Who was a queen and loved a poet once  
 Humpbacked, a dwarf ? ah, women can do that !  
 Well, but men too ! at least, they tell you so.  
 They love so many women in their youth,  
 And even in age they all love whom they please ;  
 And yet the best of them confide to friends  
 That 'tis not beauty makes the lasting love—  
 They spend a day with such and tire the next ;  
 They like soul,—well then, they like phantasy,  
 Novelty even. Let us confess the truth  
 Horrible though it be—that prejudice,  
 Prescription . . . Curses ! they will love a queen.  
 They will—they do. And will not, does not—he ?

*Constance.* How can he ? You are wedded—'tis a name  
 We know, but still a bond. Your rank remains,  
 His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled

As you believe and I incline to think,  
Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all ?

*Queen.* Hear her ! there, there now—could she love  
like me ?

What did I say of smooth-cheeked youth and grace ?  
See all it does or could do ! so, youth loves !  
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do  
What I will—you, it was not born in ! I  
Will drive these difficulties far and fast  
As yonder mists curdling before the moon.  
I'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve  
My youth from its enforced calamity,  
Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,  
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

*Constance.* You will do—dare do—Pause on what you  
say !

*Queen.* Hear her ! I thank you, Sweet, for that surprise.  
You have the fair face : for the soul, see mine !  
I have the strong soul : let me teach you, here.  
I think I have borne enough and long enough,  
And patiently enough, the world remarks,  
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.  
It does so happen, I rejoice for it,  
This most un hoped-for issue cuts the knot.  
There's not a better way of settling claims  
Than this ; God sends the accident express ;  
And were it for my subjects' good, no more,  
'Twere best thus ordered. I am thankful now,  
Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,  
And bless God simply, or should almost fear  
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.  
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate !  
How strong I am ! could Norbert see me now !

*Constance.* Let me consider. It is all too strange.

*Queen.* You, Constance, learn of me ; do you, like me.  
You are young, beautiful : my own, best girl,  
You will have many lovers, and love one—  
Light hair, not hair like Norbert's, to suit yours,  
And taller than he is, for you are tall.  
Love him like me ! give all away to him ;  
Think never of yourself ; throw by your pride,  
Hope, fear,—your own good as you saw it once,  
And love him simply for his very self.  
Remember, I (and what am I to you ?)  
Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,  
Do all but just unlove him ! he loves me.

*Constance.* He shall.

*Queen.* You, step inside my inmost heart.  
Give me your own heart—let us have one heart—

I'll come to you for counsel ; " This he says,  
 This he does, what should this amount to, pray ?  
 Beseech you, change it into current coin.  
 Is that worth kisses ? shall I please him there ? "  
 And then we'll speak in turn of you—what else ?  
 Your love (according to your beauty's worth)  
 For you shall have some noble love, all gold—  
 Whom choose you ? we will get him at your choice.  
 —Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since  
 I felt as I must die or be alone  
 Breathing my soul into an ear like yours.  
 Now, I would face the world with my new life,  
 With my new crown. I'll walk around the rooms,  
 And then come back and tell you how it feels.  
 How soon a smile of God can change the world !  
 How we are all made for happiness—how work  
 Grows play, adversity a winning fight !  
 True, I have lost so many years. What then ?  
 Many remain—God has been very good.  
 You, stay here. 'Tis as different from dreams,—  
 From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,  
 As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.  
 The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's moon !

[*She goes out. Dance-music from within.*]

NORBERT *enters*

Norbert. Well! we have but one minute and one  
 word—

Constance. I am yours, Norbert !

Norbert. Yes, mine.

Constance. Not till now !

You were mine. Now I give myself to you.

Norbert. Constance !

Constance. Your own ! I know the thriftier way  
 Of giving—haply, 'tis the wiser way.

Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole

Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,

With a new largess still at each despair)

And force you keep in sight the deed, reserve

Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,

My giving and your taking, both our joys

Dying together. Is it the wiser way ?

I choose the simpler ; I give all at once.

Know what you have to trust to, trade upon.

Use it, abuse it,—anything but say

Hereafter, " Had I known she loved me so,

And what my means, I might have thriven with it.”  
This is your means. I give you all myself.

*Norbert.* I take you and thank God.

*Constance.* Look on through years!  
We cannot kiss a second day like this,  
Else were this earth, no earth.

*Norbert.* With this day's heat  
We shall go on through years of cold.

*Constance.* So best.  
I try to see those years—I think I see.  
You walk quick and new warmth comes; you look  
back

And lay all to the first glow—not sit down  
For ever brooding on a day like this  
While seeing the embers whiten and love die.  
Yes, love lives best in its effect; and mine,  
Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

*Norbert.* Just so. I take and know you all at once.  
Your soul is disengaged so easily,  
Your face is there, I know you; give me time,  
Let me be proud and think you shall know me.  
My soul is slower: in a life I roll  
The minute out in which you condense yours—  
The whole slow circle round you I must move,  
To be just you. I look to a long life  
To decompose this minute, prove its worth.  
'Tis the sparks' long succession one by one  
Shall show you in the end what fire was crammed  
In that mere stone you struck: you could not know,  
If it lay ever unproved in your sight,  
As now my heart lies? your own warmth would hide  
Its coldness, were it cold.

*Constance.* But how prove, how?

*Norbert.* Prove in my life, you ask?

*Constance.* Quick, Norbert—how?

*Norbert.* That's easy told. I count life just a stuff  
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.  
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.  
As with the body—he who hurls a lance  
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike,  
So I will seize and use all means to prove  
And show this soul of mine you crown as yours,  
And justify us both.

*Constance.* Could you write books,  
Paint pictures! one sits down in poverty  
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

*Norbert.* And loves one's painting and one's writing  
too,  
And not one's mistress! All is best, believe,



And we best as no other than we are.  
 We live, and they experiment on life  
 Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof  
 To overlook the farther. Let us be  
 The thing they look at! I might take that face  
 And write of it and paint it—to what end?  
 For whom? what pale dictatress in the air  
 Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form  
 With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous life  
 She makes despised for ever? You are mine,  
 Made for me, not for others in the world,  
 Nor yet for that which I should call my art,  
 That cold calm power to see how fair you look.  
 I come to you—I leave you not, to write  
 Or paint. You are, I am. Let Rubens there  
 Paint us.

*Constance.* So best!

*Norbert.* I understand your soul.  
 You live, and rightly sympathise with life,  
 With action, power, success: this way is straight.  
 And days were short beside, to let me change  
 The craft my childhood learnt; my craft shall serve.  
 Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,  
 Manure their barren lives and force the fruit  
 First for themselves, and afterward for me  
 In the due tithe; the task of some one man,  
 By ways of work appointed by themselves.  
 I am not bid create, they see no star  
 Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—  
 But bind in one and carry out their wills.  
 So I began: to-night sees how I end.  
 What if it see, too, my first outbrak here  
 Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,  
 The instincts of the heart that teach the head?  
 What if the people have discerned in me  
 The dawn of the next nature, the new man  
 Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,  
 And whom they trust to find them out new ways  
 To the new heights which yet he only sees?  
 I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen,  
 This people—in our phrase, this mass of men—  
 See how the mass lies passive to my hand  
 And how my hand is plastic, and you by  
 To make the muscles iron! Oh, an end  
 Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first.  
 My will be on this people! then, the strain,  
 The grappling of the potter with his clay,  
 The long uncertain struggle,—the success  
 In that uprising of the spirit-work,

The vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,  
 While rounded fair for lower men to see  
 The Graces in a dance they recognise  
 With turbulent applause and laughs of heart !  
 So triumph ever shall renew itself ;  
 Ever to end in efforts higher yet,  
 Ever begun——

*Constance.* I ever helping ?

*Norbert.*

Thus !

[*As he embraces her, enter the QUEEN.*]

*Constance.* Hist, madam—so I have performed my part.  
 You see your gratitude's true decency,  
 Norbert ? a little slow in seeing it !  
 Begun to end the sooner. What's a kiss ?

*Norbert.* Constance !

*Constance.* Why, must I teach it you again ?  
 You want a witness to your dullness, sir ?  
 What was I saying these ten minutes long ?  
 Then I repeat—when some young handsome man  
 Like you has acted out a part like yours,  
 Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,  
 So very far beyond him, as he says—  
 So hopelessly in love, that but to speak  
 Would prove him mad, he thinks judiciously,  
 And makes some insignificant good soul  
 Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant  
 And very stalking-horse to cover him  
 In following after what he dares not face—  
 When his end's gained—(sir, do you understand ?)  
 When she, he dares not face, has loved him first,  
 —May I not say so, madam ?—tops his hope,  
 And overpasses so his wildest dream,  
 With glad consent of all, and most of her  
 The confidant who brought the same about—  
 Why, in the moment when such joy explodes,  
 I do say that the merest gentleman  
 Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,  
 Dismiss it with a “ There, enough of you ! ”  
 Forget it, show his back unmannerly ;  
 But like a liberal heart will rather turn  
 And say, “ A tingling time of hope was ours—  
 Betwixt the fears and falterings—we two lived  
 A chanceful time in waiting for the prize.  
 The confidant, the Constance, served not ill ;  
 And though shall forget her in due time,  
 Her use being answered now, as reason bids,  
 Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts,  
 Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,

The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,  
And the first—which is the last—thankful kiss.”

*Norbert.* —Constance? it is a dream—ah see you smile!

*Constance.* So, now his part being properly performed,  
Madam, I turn to you and finish mine  
As duly—I do justice in my turn.  
Yes, madam, he has loved you—long and well—  
He could not hope to tell you so—’twas I  
Who served to prove your soul accessible.  
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place,  
When oft they had wandered out into despair,  
And kept love constant toward its natural aim.  
Enough—my part is played; you stoop half-way  
And meet us royally and spare our fears—  
’Tis like yourself—he thanks you, so do I.  
Take him—with my full heart! my work is praised  
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both!  
Yourself—the only one on earth who can—  
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart  
Which though warm is not useful in its warmth  
As the silk vesture of a queen! fold that  
Around him gently, tenderly. For him—  
For him,—he knows his own part.

*Norbert.* Have you done?

I take the jest at last. Should I speak now?  
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,  
Or did you but accept it? Well—at least,  
You lose by it.

*Constance.* Now madam, ’tis your turn.  
Restrain him still from speech a little more  
And make him happier and more confident!  
Pity him, madam, he is timid yet.  
Mark, Norbert! do not shrink now! Here I yield  
My whole right in you to the Queen, observe!  
With her go put in practice the great schemes  
You teem with, follow the career else closed—  
Be all you cannot be except by her!  
Behold her.—Madam, say for pity’s sake  
Anything—frankly say you love him. Else  
He’ll not believe it: there’s more earnest in  
His fear than you conceive—I know the man.

*Norbert.* I know the woman somewhat, and confess  
I thought she had jested better—she begins  
To overchange her part. I gravely wait  
Your pleasure, madam: where is my reward?

*Queen.* Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognise  
Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,  
Eccentric speech and variable mirth,  
Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold

Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)  
 —May still be right : I may do well to speak  
 And make authentic what appears a dream—  
 To even myself. For, what she says, is true—  
 Yes, Norbert—what you spoke but now of love,  
 Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,  
 But justified a warmth felt long before.  
 Yes, from the first—I loved you, I shall say,—  
 Strange ! but I do grow stronger, now 'tis said,  
 Your courage helps mine : you did well to speak  
 To-night, the night that crowns your twelvemonths' toil—  
 But still I had not waited to discern  
 Your heart so long, believe me ! From the first  
 The source of so much zeal was almost plain,  
 In absence even of your own words just now  
 Which opened out the truth. 'Tis very strange,  
 But takes a happy ending—in your love  
 Which mine meets : be it so—as you choose me,  
 So I choose you.

*Norbert.* And worthily you choose !  
 I will not be unworthy your esteem,  
 No, madam. I do love you ; I will meet  
 Your nature, now I know it ; this was well,  
 I see,—you dare and you are justified :  
 But none had ventured such experiment,  
 Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,  
 Less confident of finding it in me.  
 I like that thus you test me ere you grant  
 The dearest, richest, beauteousest and best  
 Of women to my arms ! 'tis like yourself !  
 So—back again into my part's set words—  
 Devotion to the uttermost is yours,  
 But no, you cannot, madam, even you,  
 Create in me the love our Constance does.  
 Or—something truer to the tragic phrase—  
 Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent  
 Invites a certain insect—that's myself—  
 But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground :  
 I take this lady !

*Constance.* Stay—not hers, the trap—  
 Stay, Norbert—that mistake were worst of all.  
 (He is too cunning, madam ! ) it was I,  
 I, Norbert, who . . .

*Norbert.* You, was it, Constance ? Then,  
 But for the grace of this divinest hour  
 Which gives me you, I should not pardon here.  
 I am the Queen's : she only knows my brain—  
 She may experiment therefore on my heart  
 And I instruct her too by the result ;