

IV.—ALONG THE BEACH

1

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,
 And reason why you are wrong,
 You wanted my love—is that much true?
 And so I did love, so I do;
 What has come of it all along?

2

I took you—how could I otherwise?
 For a world to me, and more;
 For all, love greatens and glorifies
 Till God's a-glow, to the loving eyes,
 In what was mere earth before.

3

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth!
 Now do I mis-state, mistake?
 Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth?
 Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,
 Seal my sense up for your sake?

4

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love! not so, indeed!
 You were just weak earth I knew:
 With much in you waste, with many a weed,
 And plenty of passions run to seed,
 But a little good grain too.

5

And such as you were, I took you for mine:
 Did not you find me yours,
 To watch the olive and wait the vine,
 And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
 Would flow, as the Book assures?

6

Well, and if none of these good things came,
 What did the failure prove?
 The man was my whole world, all the same,
 With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame,
 And, either or both, to love.

7

Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!
 That I do love, watch too long,
 And wait too well, and weary and wear;
 And 't is all an old story, and my despair
 Fit subject for some new song:

8

How the light, light love, he has wings to fly
 At suspicion of a bond:
 My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,
 Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,
 And why should you look beyond?

V.—ON THE CLIFF

1

I LEANED on the turf,
 I looked at a rock
 Left dry by the surf;
 For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
 Dead to the roots, so deep was done
 The work of the summer sun.

2

And the rock lay flat
 As an anvil's face:
 No iron like that!
 Baked dry; of a weed, of a shell, no trace;
 Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
 Death's altar by the lone shore.

3

On the turf, sprang gay
 With his films of blue,
 No cricket, I'll say,
 But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,
 The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
 Real fairy, with wings all right.

4

On the rock, they scorch
 Like a drop of fire
 From a brandished torch,

Fell two red fans of a butterfly:
 No turf, no rock, in their ugly stead,
 See, wonderful blue and red!

5

It is not so
 With the minds of men?
 The level and low,
 The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
 With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,
 Love settling unawares!

VI.—UNDER THE CLIFF

1

“STILL ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?
 “Which needs the other’s office, thou or I?
 “Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,
 “And can, in truth, my voice untie
 “Its links, and let it go?”

2

“Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would be righted,
 “Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!
 “No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith, requitted
 “With falsehood,—love, at last aware
 “Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

3

“We have them; but I know not any tone
 “So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:
 “Dost think men would go mad without a moan,
 “If they knew any way to borrow
 “A pathos like thy own?”

4

“Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs? The one
 “So long escaping from lips starved and blue,
 “That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
 “Stretches her length; her foot comes through
 “The straw she shivers on;

5

“You had not thought she was so tall: and spent,
 “Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut
 “Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent
 “The clammy palm; then all is mute:
 “That way, the spirit went.

6

“Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
 “Thy will to help me?—like the dog I found
 “Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
 “Who would not take my food, poor hound,
 “But whined and licked my hand.”

7

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride
 Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,
 Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—
 Merely examples for his sake,
 Helps to his path untried:

8

Instances he must—simply recognize?
 Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's zeal,
 Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
 By added touches that reveal
 The god in babe's disguise.

9

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!
 Himself the undefeated that shall be:
 Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—
 His triumph, in eternity
 Too plainly manifest!

10

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind
 Means in its moaning—by the happy prompt,
 Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind
 Calm years, exacting their accompt
 Of pain, mature the mind:

11

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
 Just about daybreak, as he looks across
 A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
 To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
 Next minute must annul.—

12

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
 So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
 "Here is the change beginning, here the lines
 "Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
 "The limit time assigns."

13

Nothing can be as it has been before;
 Better, so call it, only not the same,
 To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,
 And keep it changeless! such our claim;
 So answered,—Never more!

14

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
 Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
 Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
 From change to change unceasingly,
 His soul's wings never furled!

15

That's a new question; still replies the fact,
 Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;
 We moan in acquiescence: there's life's pact.
 Perhaps probation—do I know?
 God does: endure His act!

16

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
 On his soul's hands' palms one fair, good, wise thing
 Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;
 While time first washes—ah, the sting!—
 O'er all he'd sink to save.

VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS

1

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
 This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
 To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
 For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
 Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
 The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

2

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
 Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
 If you loved only what were worth your love,
 Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
 Make the low nature better by your throes!
 Give earth yourself, go up for gain above.

VIII.—BESIDE THE DRAWING BOARD

1

“As like as a Hand to another Hand!”

Whoever said that foolish thing,
 Could not have studied to understand
 The counsels of God in fashioning,
 Out of the infinite love of His heart,
 This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart
 From the world of wonder left to praise,
 If I tried to learn the other ways
 Of love in its skill, or love in its power.

“As like as a Hand to another Hand:”

Who said that, never took his stand,
 Found and followed, like me, an hour,
 The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
 To fear, almost,—of the limit-line!
 As I looked at this, and learned and drew,
 Drew and learned, and looked again,
 While fast the happy minutes flew,
 Its beauty mounted into my brain,
 And a fancy seized me; I was fain
 To efface my work, begin anew,
 Kiss what before I only drew;

Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips,
 With soul to help if the mere lips failed,
 I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,
 Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips
 Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

2

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand!
 I have my lesson, shall understand.

IX.—ON DECK

1

THERE is nothing to remember in me,
 Nothing I ever said with a grace,
 Nothing I did that you cared to see,
 Nothing I was that deserves a place
 In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

2

Conceded! In turn, concede to me,
 Such things have been as a mutual flame.
 Your soul's locked fast; but, love for a key,
 You might let it loose, till I grew the same
 In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange plea!

3

For then, then, what would it matter to me
 That I was the harsh ill-favoured one?
 We both should be like as pea and pea;
 It was ever so since the world began:
 So, let me proceed with my reverie.

4

How strange it were if you had all me,
 As I have all you in my heart and brain,
 You, whose least word brought gloom or glee,
 Who never lifted the hand in vain
 Will hold mine yet, from over the sea!

5

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
 Rose like your own face present now,
 With eyes as dear in their due degree,
 Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,
 Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'Tis She!"

6

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
 Love that was life, life that was love;
 A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
 A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,
 A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

7

But did one touch of such love for me
 Come in a word or a look of yours,
 Whose words and looks will, circling, flee
 Round me and round while life endures,—
 Could I fancy "As I feel, thus feels he;"

8

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
 And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,
 Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—
 You might turn myself!—should I know or care
 When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

XCIV

GOLD HAIR:

A LEGEND OF PORNIC

1

OH, the beautiful girl, too white,
 Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,
 Just where the sea and the Loire unite!
 And a boasted name in Brittany
 She bore, which I will not write.

2

Too white, for the flower of life is red;
 Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen
 Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)
 To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
 And blossom in Heaven instead.

3

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair!
 One grace that grew to its full on earth:
 Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,
 And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
 But she had her great gold hair.

4

Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,
 Freshness and fragrance—floods of it, too!
 Gold, did I say? Nay, gold's mere dross:
 Here, Life smiled, "Think what I meant to do!"
 And Love sighed, "Fancy my loss!"

5

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange
 Than that, when delicate evening dies,
 And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,
 There's a shoot of colour startles the skies
 With sudden, violent change,—

6

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,
 As they put the little cross to her lips,
 She changed; a spot came out on her cheek,
 A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,
 And she broke forth, "I must speak!"

7

"Not my hair!" made the girl her moan—
 "All the rest is gone or to go;
 "But the last, last grace, my all, my own,
 "Let it stay in the grave, that the ghosts may know!
 "Leave my poor gold hair alone!"

8

The passion thus vented, dead lay she;
 Her parents sobbed their worst on that;
 All friends joined in, nor observed degree:
 For indeed the hair was to wonder at,
 As it spread—not flowing free,

9

But curled around her brow, like a crown,
 And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,
 And calmed about her neck—ay, down
 To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap
 I' the gold, it reached her gown.

10

All kissed that face, like a silver wedge
 Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair:
 E'en the priest allowed death's privilege,
 As he planted the crucifix with care
 On her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

11

And thus was she buried, inviolate
 Of body and soul, in the very space
 By the altar; keeping saintly state
 In Pornic church, for her pride of race,
 Pure life and piteous fate.

12

And in after-time would your fresh tear fall,
 Though your mouth might twitch with a dubious smile,
 As they told you of gold, both robe and pall,
 How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,
 So it never was touched at all.

13

Years flew; this legend grew at last
 The life of the lady; all she had done,
 All been, in the memories fading fast
 Of lover and friend, was summed in one
 Sentence survivors passed:

14

To wit, she was meant for Heaven, not earth;
 Had turned an angel before the time:
 Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth
 Of frailty, all you could count a crime
 Was—she knew her gold hair's worth.

15

At little pleasant Pornic church,
 It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,
 Was taken to pieces: left in the lurch,
 A certain sacred space lay bare,
 And the boys began research.

16

'T was the space where our sires would lay a saint,
 A benefactor,—a bishop, suppose,
 A baron with armour-adornments quaint,
 Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,
 Things sanctity saves from taint;

17

So we come to find them in after-days
 When the corpse is presumed to have done with gauds
 Of use to the living, in many ways:
 For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,
 And the church deserves the praise.

18

They grubbed with a will: and at length—*O cor*
Humanum, pectora cæca, and the rest!—
 They found—no gaud they were prying for,
 No ring, no rose, but—who would have guessed?—
 A double Louis-d'or!

19

Here was a case for the priest: he heard,
 Marked, inwardly digested, laid
 Finger on nose, smiled, "There's a bird
 "Chirps in my ear:" then, "Bring a spade,
 Dig deeper!"—he gave the word.

20

And lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,
 Or rotten planks which composed it once,
 Why, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid
 A mint of money, it served for the nonce
 To hold in its hair-heaps hid!

21

Louis-d'or, some six times five,
 And duly double, every piece.
 Now do you see? With the priest to shrive,
 With parents preventing her soul's release
 By kisses that kept alive,—

22

With heaven's gold gates about to ope,
 With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
 An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
 For gold, the true sort—"Gold in heaven, I hope;
 "But I keep earth's if God will!"

23

Enough! The priest took the grave's grim yield:
 The parents, they eyed that price of sin
 As if *thirty pieces* lay revealed
 On the place to bury strangers in,
 The hideous Potter's Field.

24

But the priest bethought him: "Milk that's spilt"
 "—You know the adage! Watch and pray!
 "Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!
 "It would build a new altar; that, we may!"
 And the altar therewith was built.

25

Why I deliver this horrible verse?
 As the text of a sermon, which now I preach:
 Evil or good may be better or worse
 In the human heart, but the mixture of each
 Is a marvel and a curse.

26

The candid incline to surmise of late
 That the Christian faith may be false, I find:
 For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate
 Begins to tell on the public mind,
 And Colenso's words have weight:

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
 See reasons and reasons; this, to begin:
 'T is the faith that launched point-blank her dart
 At the head of a lie—taught Original Sin.
 The Corruption of Man's Heart.

xcv

THE WORST OF IT

1

Would it were I had been false, not you!
 I that am nothing, not you that are all:
 I, never the worse for a touch or two
 On my speckled hide; not you, the pride
 Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall
 On her wonder of white must unswan, undo!

2

I had dipped in life's struggle and, out again,
 Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,
 When I found my swan and the cure was plain;
 The dull turned bright as I caught your white
 On my bosom: you saved me—saved in vain
 If you ruined yourself, and all through me!

3

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,
 Who taught you to stoop; you gave me yourself,
 And bound your soul by the vows that damn:
 Since on better thought you break, as you ought,
 Vows—words, no angel set down, some elf
 Mistook,—for an oath, an epigram!

4

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,
 And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased!
 I choose to be yours, for my proper part,
 Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make;
 If I acquiesce, why should you be teased
 With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart?

5

But what will God say? Oh, my sweet,
 Think, and be sorry you did this thing!
 Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,
 There's a Heaven above may deserve your love:
 Should you forfeit Heaven for a snapt gold ring
 And a promise broke, were it just or meet?

6

And I to have tempted you! I, who tried
 Your soul, no doubt, till it sank! Unwise,
 I loved and was lowly, loved and aspired,
 Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,
 And you meant to have hated and despised—
 Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired!

7

She, ruined? How? No Heaven for her?
 Crowns to give, and none for the brow
 That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh?
 Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne,
 And she go graceless, she graced now
 Beyond all saints, as themselves aver?

8

Hardly! That must be understood!
 The earth is your place of penance, then;
 And what will it prove? I desire your good,
 But, plot as I may, I can find no way
 How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,
 Nor prove too much for your womanhood.

9

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,
 When you walk alone, and review the past;
 And I, who so long shall have done with strife,
 And journeyed my stage and earned my wage
 And retired as was right,—I am called at last,
 When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

10

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong,
 Nor the other hours are able to save,
 The happy, that lasted my whole life long:
 For a promise broke, not for first words spoke,
 The true, the only, that turn my grave
 To a blaze of joy and a crash of song.

11

Witness beforehand! Off I trip
 On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung:
 My very name made great by your lip,
 And my heart a-glow with the good I know
 Of a perfect year when we both were young,
 And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

12

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait!
 I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots!
 It may be for yourself, when you meditate,
 That you grieve—for slain ruth, murdered truth.
 "Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots?
 "How truth would have triumphed!"—you sigh too
 late.

13

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say!
 Well, it is lost now; well, you must bear,
 Abide and grow fit for a better day:
 You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge!
 But hush! For you, can be no despair:
 There's amends: 't is a secret: hope and pray!

14

For I was true at least—oh, true enough!
 And, Dear, truth is not as good as it seems!
 Commend me to conscience! Idle stuff!
 Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,
 And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams
 At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

15

Men tell me of truth now—"False!" I cry:
 Of beauty—"A mask, friend! Look beneath!"
 We take our own method, the devil and I,
 With pleasant and fair and wise and rare:
 And the best we wish to what lives, is—death;
 Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie!

16

Far better commit a fault and have done—
 As you, Dear!—for ever; and choose the pure,
 And look where the healing waters run,
 And strive and strain to be good again,
 And a place in the other world ensure,
 All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

17

Misery! What shall I say or do?
 I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade:
 Most like, you are glad you deceived me—rue
 No whit of the wrong: you endured too long,
 Have done no evil and want no aid,
 Will live the old life out and chance the new.

18

And your sentence is written all the same,
 And I can do nothing,—pray, perhaps:
 But somehow the world pursues its game,—
 If I pray, if I curse,—for better or worse:
 And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,
 And my heart feels ice while my words breathe flame.

19

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.
 Are you still so fair? Have you still the eyes?
 Be happy! Add but the other grace,
 Be good! Why want what the angels vaunt?
 I knew you once: but in Paradise,
 If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

xcvi

DÛS ALITER VISUM; OR, LE BYRON
 DE NOS JOURS

1

Stop, let me have the truth of that!
 Is that all true? I say, the day
 Ten years ago when both of us
 Met on a morning, friends—as thus
 We meet this evening, friends or what?—

2

Did you—because I took your arm
 And sillily smiled, “A mass of brass
 “That sea looks, blazing underneath!”
 While up the cliff-road edged with heath,
 We took the turns nor came to harm—

3

Did you consider "Now makes twice
 "That I have seen her, walked and talked
 "With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,
 "Whose worth I weigh: she tries to sing;
 "Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice;

4

"Reads verse and thinks she understands;
 "Loves all, at any rate, that's great,
 "Good, beautiful; but much as we
 "Down at the bath-house love the sea,
 "Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands:

5

While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull
 "That flaps and floats from wave to cave!
 "There's the sea-lover, fair my friend!
 "What then? Be patient, mark and mend!
 "Had you the making of your scull?"

6

And did you, when we faced the church
 With spire and sad slate roof, aloof
 From human fellowship so far,
 Where a few graveyard crosses are,
 And garlands for the swallows' perch,—

7

Did you determine, as we stepped
 O'er the lone stone fence, "Let me get
 "Her for myself, and what's the earth
 "With all its art, verse, music, worth—
 "Compared with love, found, gained, and kept?

8

"Schumann's our music-maker now;
 "Has his march-movement youth and mouth?
 "Ingres's the modern man that paints;
 "Which will lean on me, of his saints?
 "Heine for songs; for kisses, how?"

9

And did you, when we entered, reached
 The votive frigate, soft aloft
 Riding on air this hundred years,
 Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—
 Did you draw profit while she preached?

10

Resolving, "Fools we wise men grow!
 "Yes, I could easily blurt out curt
 "Some question that might find reply
 "As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,
 "And rush of red to cheek and brow:

11

"Thus were a match made, sure and fast,
 "'Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound
 "Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay
 "For one more look at baths and bay,
 "Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last—

12

"A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lame,
 "Famous, however, for verse and worse,
 "Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair
 "When gout and glory seat me there,
 "So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,—

13

"And this young beauty, round and sound
 "As a mountain-apple, youth and truth
 "With loves and doves, at all events
 "With money in the Three per Cents;
 "Whose choice of me would seem profound:—

14

"She might take me as I take her.
 "Perfect the hour would pass, alas!
 "Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,
 "Feet, feelings, must descend the hill:
 "An hour's perfection can't recur.

15

“Then follows Paris and full time
 “For both to reason: ‘Thus with us!’
 “She ’ll sigh, ‘Thus girls give body and soul
 “‘At first word, think they gain the goal,
 “‘When ’t is the starting-place they climb!

16

“‘My friend makes verse and gets renown;
 “‘Have they all fifty years, his peers?
 “‘He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay;
 “‘Boys will become as much one day:
 “‘They ’re fools; he cheats, with beard less brown.

17

“‘For boys say, *Love me or I die!*
 “‘He did not say, *The truth is, youth*
 “‘*I want, who am old and know too much;*
 “‘*I ’d catch youth: lend me sight and touch!*
 “‘*Drop heart’s blood where life’s wheels grate dry!*’

18

“While I should make rejoinder”—(then
 It was, no doubt, you ceased that least
 Light pressure of my arm in yours)
 “‘I can conceive of cheaper cures
 “For a yawning-fit o’er books and men.

19

“‘What? All I am, was, and might be,
 “‘All, books taught, art brought, life’s whole strife,
 “‘Painful results since precious, just
 “‘Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,
 “‘For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea?

20

“‘All for a nosegay!—what came first;
 “‘With fields on flower, untried each side;
 “‘I rally, need my books and men,
 “‘And find a nosegay:’ drop it, then,
 “No match yet made for best or worst!”

21

That ended me. You judged the porch
 We left by, Norman; took our look
 At sea and sky; wondered so few
 Find out the place for air and view;
 Remarked the sun began to scorch;

22

Descended, soon regained the baths,
 And then, good-bye! Years ten since then:
 Ten years! We meet: you tell me, now,
 By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,
 On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

23

Now I may speak: you fool, for all
 Your lore! Who made things plain in vain?
 What was the sea for? What, the grey
 Sad church, that solitary day,
 Crosses and graves and swallows' call?

24

Was there nought better than to enjoy?
 No feat which, done, would make time break
 And let us pent-up creatures through
 Into eternity, our due?
 No forcing earth teach Heaven's employ?

25

No wise beginning, here and now,
 What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)
 And Heaven must finish, there and then?
 No tasting earth's true food for men,
 Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet?

26

No grasping at love, gaining a share
 O' the sole spark from God's life at strife
 With death, so, sure of range above
 The limits here? For us and love,
 Failure; but, when God fails, despair.

27

This you call wisdom? Thus you add
 Good unto good again, in vain?
 You loved, with body worn and weak;
 I loved, with faculties to seek:
 Were both loves worthless since ill-clad?

28

Yet the mere star-fish in his vault
 Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
 Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:
 He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
 Man, found with either in default.

29

But what's whole, can increase no more,
 Is dwarfed and dies, since here's its sphere.
 The devil laughed at you in his sleeve!
 You knew not? That I well believe;
 Or you had saved two souls: nay, four.

30

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
 Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?
 At any rate she danced, all say,
 Vilely; her vogue has had its day.
 Here comes my husband from his whist.

XCVII

TOO LATE

1

HERE was I with my arm and heart
 And brain, all yours for a word, a want
 Put into a look—just a look, your part,—
 While mine, to repay it . . . vainest vaunt,
 Were the woman, that's dead, alive to hear,
 Had her lover, that's lost, love's proof to show!
 But I cannot show it; you cannot speak
 From the churchyard neither, miles removed,
 Though I feel by a pulse within my cheek,
 Which stabs and stops, that the woman I loved
 Needs help in her grave, and finds none near,
 Wants warmth from the heart which sends it—so!

2

Did I speak once angrily, all the drear days
 You lived, you woman I loved so well,
 Who married the other? Blame or praise,
 Where was the use then? Time would tell,
 And the end declare what man for you,
 What woman for me, was the choice of God.
 But, Edith dead! no doubting more!
 I used to sit and look at my life
 As it rippled and ran till, right before,
 A great stone stopped it: oh, the strife
 Of waves at the stone some devil threw
 In my life's midcurrent, thwarting God!

3

But either I thought, "They may churn and chide
 "Awhile, my waves which came for their joy
 "And found this horrible stone full-tide:
 "Yet I see just a thread escape, deploy
 "Through the evening-country, silent and safe,
 "And it suffers no more till it finds the sea."
 Or else I would think, "Perhaps some night
 "When new things happen, a meteor-ball
 "May slip through the sky in a line of light,
 "And earth breathe hard, and landmarks fall,
 "And my waves no longer champ nor chafe,
 "Since a stone will have rolled from its place: let
 be!"

4

But, dead! All's done with: wait who may,
 Watch and wear and wonder who will.
 Oh, my whole life that ends to-day!
 Oh, my soul's sentence, sounding still,
 "The woman is dead that was none of his;
 "And the man that was none of hers may go!"
 There's only the past left: worry that!
 Wreak, like a bull, on the empty coat,
 Rage, its late wearer is laughing at!
 Tear the collar to rags, having missed his throat;
 Strike stupidly on—"This, this and this,
 "Where I would that a bosom received the blow!"

5

I ought to have done more: once my speech,
 And once your answer, and there, the end,
 And Edith was henceforth out of reach!
 Why, men do more to deserve a friend,

Be rid of a foe, get rich, grow wise,
 Nor, folding their arms, stare fate in the face.
 Why, better even have burst like a thief
 And borne you away to a rock for us two,
 In a moment's horror, bright, bloody and brief:
 Then changed to myself again—"I slew
 "Myself in that moment; a ruffian lies
 "Somewhere: your slave, see, born in his place!"

6

What did the other do? You be judge!
 Look at us, Edith! Here are we both!
 Give him his six whole years: I grudge
 None of the life with you, nay, loathe
 Myself that I grudged his start in advance
 Of me who could overtake and pass.
 But, as if he loved you! No, not he,
 Nor anyone else in the world, 't is plain:
 Who ever heard that another, free
 As I, young, prosperous, sound and sane,
 Poured life out, proffered it—"Half a glance
 "Of those eyes of yours and I drop the glass!"

7

Handsome, were you? 'T is more than they held,
 More than they said; I was 'ware and watched:
 I was the 'scapegrace, this rat belled
 The cat, this fool got his whiskers scratched:
 The others? No head that was turned, no heart
 Broken, my lady, assure yourself!
 Each soon made his mind up; so and so
 Married a dancer, such and such
 Stole his friend's wife, stagnated slow,
 Or maundered, unable to do as much,
 And muttered of peace where he had no part:
 While, hid in the closet, laid on the shelf,—

8

On the whole, you were let alone, I think!
 So, you looked to the other, who acquiesced;
 My rival, the proud man,—prize your pink
 Of poets! A poet he was! I've guessed:
 He rhymed you his rubbish nobody read,
 Loved you and doved you—did not I laugh!
 There was a prize! But we both were tried.
 Oh, heart of mine, marked broad with her mark,

Tekel, found wanting, set aside,
 Scorned! See, I bleed these tears in the dark
 Till comfort come and the last be bled:
 He? He is tagging your epitaph.

9

If it would only come over again!
 —Time to be patient with me, and probe
 This heart till you punctured the proper vein,
 Just to learn what blood is: twitch the robe
 From that blank lay-figure your fancy draped,
 Prick the leathern heart till the—verses spirt!
 And late it was easy; late, you walked
 Where a friend might meet you; Edith's name
 Arose to one's lip if one laughed or talked;
 If I heard good news, you heard the same;
 When I woke, I knew that your breath escaped;
 I could bide my time, keep alive, alert.

10

And alive I shall keep and long, you will see!
 I knew a man, was kicked like a dog
 From gutter to cesspool; what cared he
 So long as he picked from the filth his prog?
 He saw youth, beauty and genius die,
 And jollily lived to his hundredth year.
 But I will live otherwise: none of such life!
 At once I begin as I mean to end.
 Go on with the world, get gold in its strife,
 Give your spouse the slip and betray your friend!
 There are two who decline, a woman and I,
 And enjoy our death in the darkness here.

11

I liked that way you had with your curls
 Wound to a ball in a net behind:
 Your cheek was chaste as a quaker-girl's,
 And your mouth—there was never, to my mind,
 Such a funny mouth, for it would not shut;
 And the dented chin too—what a chin!
 There were certain ways when you spoke, some words
 That you know you never could pronounce:
 You were thin, however; like a bird's
 Your hand seemed—some would say, the pounce
 Of a scaly-footed hawk—all but!
 The world was right when it called you thin.

12

But I turn my back on the world: I take
 Your hand, and kneel, and lay to my lips.
 Bid me live, Edith! Let me slake
 Thirst at your presence! Fear no slips:
 'T is your slave shall pay, while his soul endures,
 Full due, love's whole debt, *summum jus*.
 My queen shall have high observance, planned
 Courtship made perfect, no least line
 Crossed without warrant. There you stand,
 Warm too, and white too: would this wine
 Had washed all over that body of yours,
 Ere I drank it, and you down with it, thus!

XCVIII

ABT VOGLER

(AFTER HE HAS BEEN EXTEMPORIZING UPON THE MUSICAL
 INSTRUMENT OF HIS INVENTION)

1

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I
 build,
 Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
 Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when
 Solomon willed
 Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,
 Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,
 Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep
 removed,—
 Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable
 Name,
 And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess
 he loved!

2

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of
 mine,
 This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned
 to raise!
 Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and
 now combine,
 Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his
 praise!

And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to
 hell,
 Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
 Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace
 well,
 Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

3

And another would mount and march, like the excellent
 minion he was,
 Ay, another and yet another, one crowd but with many
 a crest,
 Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,
 Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
 For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
 When a great illumination surprises a festal night—
 Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to
 spire)
 Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my
 soul was in sight.

4

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match
 man's birth,
 Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
 And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to
 reach the earth,
 As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale
 the sky:
 Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with
 mine,
 Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering
 star;
 Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor
 pine,
 For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more
 near nor far.

5

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare
 and glow,
 Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the
 Protoplast,
 Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should
 blow,
 Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at
 last;

Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the
 body and gone,
 But were back once more to breathe in an old world
 worth their new;
 What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be
 anon;
 And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was
 made perfect too.

6

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of
 my soul,
 All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed
 visibly forth,
 All through music and me! For think, had I painted the
 whole,
 Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so
 wonder-worth;
 Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds
 from cause,
 Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is
 told;
 It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
 Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled:—

7

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
 Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they
 are!
 And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to
 man,
 That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound,
 but a star,
 Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
 It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:
 Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
 And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and
 bow the head!

8

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
 Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come
 too slow;
 For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he
 feared,
 That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was
 to go.

Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort
to me?

To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same love, same God; ay, what
was, shall be.

9

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable
Name?

Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with
hands!

What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the
same?

Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power
expands?

There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live
as before;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;

What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much
good more;

On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect
round.

10

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall
exist;

Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor
power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the
melodist

When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too
hard,

The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the
sky,

Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;

Enough that He heard it once: we shall hear it
by-and-by.

11

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence

For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or
agonized?

Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might
issue thence?

Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be
prized?

Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
 Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and
 woe:

But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
 The rest may reason and welcome: 't is we musicians
 know.

12

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
 I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
 Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
 Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,—yes,
 And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
 Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the
 deep;
 Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place
 is found,
 The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

XCIX

RABBI BEN EZRA

1

GROW old along with me!
 The best is yet to be,
 The last of life, for which the first was made:
 Our times are in His hand
 Who saith "A whole I planned,
 "Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be
 afraid!"

2

Not that, amassing flowers,
 Youth sighed "Which rose make ours,
 "Which lily leave and then as best recall?"
 Not that, admiring stars,
 It yearned "Nor Jove, nor Mars;
 "Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends
 them all!"

3

Not for such hopes and fears
 Annulling youth's brief years,
 Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
 Rather I prize the doubt
 Low kinds exist without,
 Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

4

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
 Were man but formed to feed
 On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
 Such feasting ended, then
 As sure an end to men;
 Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-
 crammed beast?

5

Rejoice we are allied
 To That which doth provide
 And not partake, effect and not receive!
 A spark disturbs our clod;
 Nearer we hold of God
 Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

6

Then, welcome each rebuff
 That turns earth's smoothness rough,
 Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
 Be our joys three-parts pain!
 Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
 Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the
 throe!

7

For thence,—a paradox
 Which comforts while it mocks,—
 Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
 What I aspired to be,
 And was not, comforts me:
 A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the
 scale.

8

What is he but a brute
 Whose flesh has soul to suit,
 Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
 To man, propose this test—
 Thy body at its best,
 How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

9

Yet gifts should prove their use:
 I own the Past profuse
 Of power each side, perfection every turn:

Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and
learn?"

10

Not once beat "Praise be Thine!
"I see the whole design,
"I, who saw Power, see now Love perfect too:
"Perfect I call Thy plan:
"Thanks that I was a man!
"Maker, remake, complete—I trust what Thou shalt
do!"

11

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

12

Let us not always say
"Spite of this flesh to-day
"I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!"
As the bird wings and sings,
Let us cry "All good things
"Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh
helps soul!"

13

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.

14

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

15

Youth ended, I shall try
 My gain or loss thereby;
 Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
 And I shall weigh the same,
 Give life its praise or blame:
 Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

16

For note, when evening shuts,
 A certain moment cuts
 The deed off, calls the glory from the grey:
 A whisper from the west
 Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
 "Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

17

So, still within this life,
 Though lifted o'er its strife,
 Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
 "This rage was right i' the main,
 "That acquiescence vain:
 "The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

18

For more is not reserved
 To man, with soul just nerved
 To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
 Here, work enough to watch
 The Master work, and catch
 Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

19

As it was better, youth
 Should strive, through acts uncouth,
 Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
 So, better, age, exempt
 From strife, should know, than tempt
 Further. Thou waitedest age: wait death nor be
 afraid!

20

Enough now, if the Right
 And Good and Infinite
 Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own,

With knowledge absolute,
 Subject to no dispute
 From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

21

Be there, for once and all,
 Severed great minds from small,
 Announced to each his station in the Past!
 Was I, the world arraigned,
 Were they, my soul disdained,
 Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at
 last!

22

Now, who shall arbitrate?
 Ten men love what I hate,
 Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
 Ten, who in ears and eyes
 Match me: we all surmise,
 They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul
 believe?

23

Not on the vulgar mass
 Called "work," must sentence pass,
 Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
 O'er which, from level stand,
 The low world laid its hand,
 Found straightway to its mind, could value in a
 trice:

24

But all, the world's coarse thumb
 And finger failed to plumb,
 So passed in making up the main account;
 All instincts immature,
 All purposes unsure,
 That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's
 amount:

25

Thoughts hardly to be packed
 Into a narrow act,
 Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
 All I could never be,
 All, men ignored in me,
 This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher
 shaped.

26

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
 That metaphor! and feel
 Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,—
 Thou, to whom fools propound,
 When the wine makes its round,
 "Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize
 to-day!"

27

Fool! All that is, at all,
 Lasts ever, past recall;
 Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
 What entered into thee,
 That was, is, and shall be:
 Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay
 endure.

28

He fixed thee mid this dance
 Of plastic circumstance,
 This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
 Machinery just meant
 To give thy soul its bent,
 Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

29

What though the earlier grooves
 Which ran the laughing loves
 Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
 What though, about thy rim,
 Scull-things in order grim
 Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

30

Look not thou down but up!
 To uses of a cup,
 The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
 The new wine's foaming flow,
 The Master's lips a-glow!
 Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou
 with earth's wheel?

31

But I need, now as then,
 Thee, God, who moulded men;
 And since, not even while the whirl was worst,

Did I,—to the wheel of life
 With shapes and colours rife,
 Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

32

So, take and use Thy work:
 Amend what flaws may lurk,
 What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
 My times be in Thy hand!
 Perfect the cup as planned!
 Let age approve of youth, and death complete the
 same!

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

[SUPPOSED of Pamphylax the Antiochene:
 It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,
 Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek
 And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu*:
 Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest,
 Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,
 Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi*,
 From Xanthus, my wife's uncle, now at peace:
Mu and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.
 I may not write it, but I make a cross
 To show I wait His coming, with the rest,
 And leave off here: beginneth Pamphylax.]

I said, "If one should wet his lips with wine,
 "And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,
 "Or else the lappet of a linen robe,
 "Into the water-vessel, lay it right,
 "And cool his forehead just above the eyes,
 "The while a brother, kneeling either side,
 "Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—
 "He is not so far gone but he might speak."

This did not happen in the outer cave,
 Nor in the secret chamber of the rock
 Where, sixty days since the decree was out,
 We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,
 And waited for his dying all the while;
 But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light
 Reached there a little, and we would not lose
 The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,
 With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him,
 And brought him from the chamber in the depths,
 And laid him in the light where we might see:
 For certain smiles began about his mouth,
 And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave,
 The Bactrian convert, having his desire,
 Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat
 That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,
 Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive:
 So that if any thief or soldier passed,
 (Because the persecution was aware)
 Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,
 Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,
 Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.
 Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

"Here is wine," answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop;
 I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,
 Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:
 But Valens had bethought him, and produced
 And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume.
 Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn
 And smile a little, as a sleeper does
 If any dear one call him, touch his face—
 And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept:
 It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,
 Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,
 Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,
 And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead
 Out of the secret chamber, found a place,
 Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,
 And spoke, as 't were his mouth proclaiming first,
 "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once,
 And sat up of himself, and looked at us;
 And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word;
 Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry
 Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
 As signal we were safe, from time to time.

First he said, "If a friend declared to me,
 "This my son Valens, this my other son,
 "Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well
 "This lad was very John,—I could believe!
 "—Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe:
 "So is myself withdrawn into my depths,
 "The soul retreated from the perished brain
 "Whence it was wont to feel and use the world
 "Through these dull members, done with long ago.
 "Yet I myself remain; I feel myself:
 "And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile!"

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,
 How divers persons witness in each man,
 Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,
 A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
 Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
 And has the use of earth, and ends the man
 Downward: but, tending upward for advice,
 Grows into, and again is grown into
 By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,
 Useth the first with its collected use,
 And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows:
 Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
 Grows into, and again is grown into
 By the last soul, that uses both the first,
 Subsisting whether they assist or no,
 And, constituting man's self, is what Is—
 And leans upon the former, makes it play,
 As that played off the first: and, tending up,
 Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
 Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
 Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.
 What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man.
 I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end:
 "Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!
 "Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself
 "A little where the fire was: thus I urge
 "The soul that served me, till it task once more
 "What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,
 "And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,
 "Trying to taste again the truth of things—"
 (He smiled)—"their very superficial truth;
 "As that ye are my sons, that it is long
 "Since James and Peter had release by death,
 "And I am only he, your brother John,
 "Who saw and heard, and could remember all.

"Remember all! It is not much to say.
 "What if the truth broke on me from above
 "As once and oft-times? Such might hap again:
 "Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,
 "With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like brass,
 "The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—
 "I who now shudder only and surmise
 "'How did your brother bear that sight and live?'"

"If I live yet, it is for good, more love
 "Through me to men: be nought but ashes here
 "That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—
 "Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth
 "No one alive who knew (consider this!)
 "—Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
 "That which was from the first, the Word of Life.
 "How will it be when none more saith 'I saw'?

"Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.
 "Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,
 "I went, for many years, about the world,
 "Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw,'
 "Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.
 "Afterward came the message to myself
 "In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach,
 "But simply listen, take a book and write,
 "Nor set down other than the given word,
 "With nothing left to my arbitrament
 "To choose or change: I wrote, and men believed.
 "Then, for my time grew brief, no message more.
 "No call to write again, I found a way,
 "And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught
 "Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength believe;
 "Or I would pen a letter to a friend
 "And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more:
 "Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.
 "But at the last, why, I seemed left alive
 "Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,
 "To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared
 "When their was mid-sea, and the mighty things:
 "Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'
 "And go all over the old ground again,
 "With Antichrist already in the world,
 "And many Antichrists, who answered prompt
 "'Am I not Jasper as thyself art John?'"
 "'Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget:
 "'Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe?'"
 "I never thought to call down fire on such,

" Or, as in wonderful and early days,
 " Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb;
 " But patient stated much of the Lord's life
 " Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work:
 " Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
 " Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
 " Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
 " Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
 " Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
 " Of new significance and fresh result;
 " What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
 " And named them in the Gospel I have writ.
 " For men said, 'It is getting long ago:
 " 'Where is the promise of His coming?'—asked
 " These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,
 " Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.
 " I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,
 " Since I was there, and helpful in my age;
 " And, in the main, I think such men believed.
 " Finally, thus endeavouring, I fell sick,
 " Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,
 " And went to sleep with one thought that, at least,
 " Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,
 " We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.
 " Yet now I wake in such decrepitude
 " As I had slidden down and fallen afar,
 " Past even the presence of my former self,
 " Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,
 " Till I am found away from my own world,
 " Feeling for foot-hold through a blank profound,
 " Along with unborn people in strange lands,
 " Who say—I hear said or conceive they say—
 " 'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
 " 'Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

" And how shall I assure them? Can they share
 " —They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength
 " About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,
 " Living and learning still as years assist
 " Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—
 " With me who hardly am withheld at all,
 " But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,
 " Lie bare to the universal prick of light?
 " Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,
 " We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.
 " To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death
 " Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is;
 " —Is, here and now: I apprehend nought else.
 " Is not God now i' the world His power first made?

"Is not His love at issue still with sin
 "Closed with and cast and conquered, crucified
 "Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
 "Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?
 "Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise
 "To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,
 "When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,
 "And, as I saw the sin and death, even so
 "See I the need yet transiency of both,
 "The good and glory consummated thence?
 "I saw the power; I see the Love, once weak,
 "Resume the Power: and in this word 'I see,'
 "Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both
 "That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds
 "His eye and bids him look. These are, I see;
 "But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,
 "Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass
 "I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,
 "It had been given a crafty smith to make;
 "A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,
 "Lying confusedly insubordinate
 "For the unassisted eye to master once:
 "Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,
 "Becomes succinct, distinct, so small, so clear!
 "Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth
 "I see, reduced to plain historic fact,
 "Diminished into clearness, proved a point
 "And far away: ye would withdraw your sense
 "From out eternity, strain it upon time,
 "Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death
 "Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,
 "As though a star should open out, all sides,
 "Grow the world on you, as it is my world.
 "For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
 "And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—
 "Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
 "How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
 "And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
 "Such prize despite the envy of the world,
 "And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all.
 "But see the double way wherein we are led,
 "How the soul learns diversely from the flesh!
 "With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,
 "And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,
 "Except prompt teaching. Helpful was the light,
 "And warmth was cherishing and food was choice
 "To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
 "As now to yours and mine; the body sprang

" At once to the height, and stayed: but the soul,—no !
 " Since sages who, this noontide, meditate
 " In Rome or Athens, may descry some point
 " Of the eternal power, hid yestereve;
 " And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,
 " So much extends the æther floating o'er,
 " The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.
 " Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these
 " Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,
 " So duly, daily, needs provision be
 " For keeping the soul's prowess possible,
 " Building new barriers as the old decay,
 " Saving us from evasion of life's proof,
 " Putting the question ever, ' Does God love,
 " ' And will ye hold that truth against the world ?'
 " Ye know there needs no second proof with good
 " Gained for our flesh from any earthly source:
 " We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,
 " Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,
 " And guard it safe through every chance, ye know!
 " That fable of Prometheus and his theft,
 " How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old
 " (I have been used to hear the pagans own)
 " And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth,
 " Here is it, precious to the sophist now
 " Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,
 " As precious to those satyrs of his play,
 " Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.
 " While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth
 " Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure
 " To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—
 " Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth
 " Crumble; for he both reasons and decides,
 " Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire
 " For gold or purple once he knows its worth?
 " Could he give Christ up were his worth as plain?
 " Therefore, I say, to test man, shift the proofs,
 " Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,
 " And straightway in his life acknowledge it,
 " As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.
 " Sigh ye, ' It had been easier once than now ' ?
 " To give you answer I am left alive;
 " Look at me who was present from the first !
 " Ye know what things I saw; then came a test,
 " My first, befitting me who so had seen:
 " ' Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him
 " ' Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life?
 " ' What should wring this from thee ! '—ye laugh and ask.
 " What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,

" The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,
 " And fear of what the Jews might do ! Just that,
 " And it is written, ' I forsook and fled : '
 " There was my trial, and it ended thus.
 " Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow :
 " Another year or two,—what little child,
 " What tender woman that had seen no least
 " Of all my sights, but barely heard them told,
 " Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,
 " Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God ?
 " Well, was truth safe for ever, then ? Not so.
 " Already had begun the silent work
 " Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze,
 " Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt.
 " Teachers were busy, whispering ' All is true
 " ' As the aged ones report ; but youth can reach
 " ' Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,
 " ' And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.'
 " Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,
 " A bar to me who touched and handled truth,
 " Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,
 " This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,
 " Till imminent was the outcry ' Save our Christ ! '
 " Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life
 " Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.
 " Such work done, as it will be, what comes next ?
 " What do I hear say, or conceive men say,
 " ' Was John at all, and did he say he saw ?
 " ' Assure us, ere we ask what he might see ! '

" Is this indeed a burthen for late days,
 " And may I help to bear it with you all,
 " Using my weakness which becomes your strength ?
 " For if a babe were born inside this grot,
 " Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,
 " Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—
 " One loving him and wishful he should learn,
 " Would much rejoice himself was blinded first
 " Month by month here, so made to understand
 " How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss :
 " I think I could explain to such a child
 " There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,
 " Ay, nor need urge ' I saw it, so believe ! '
 " It is a heavy burthen you shall bear
 " In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,
 " Left without me, which must be very soon.
 " What is the doubt, my brothers ? Quick with it !
 " I see you stand conversing, each new face,
 " Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,

“ On islets yet unnamed amid the sea ;
 “ Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico
 “ Out of the crowd in some enormous town
 “ Where now the larks sing in a solitude ;
 “ Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand
 “ Idly conjectured to be Ephesus :
 “ And no one asks his fellow any more
 “ ‘ Where is the promise of His coming ? ’ but
 “ ‘ Was he revealed in any of His lives,
 “ ‘ As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul ? ’
 “ Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,
 “ And let us ask and answer and be saved !
 “ My book speaks on, because it cannot pass ;
 “ One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads
 “ ‘ Here is a tale of things done ages since ;
 “ ‘ What truth was ever told the second day ?
 “ ‘ Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for nought.
 “ ‘ Remains the doctrine, love ; well, we must love,
 “ ‘ And what we love most, power and love in one,
 “ ‘ Let us acknowledge on the record here,
 “ ‘ Accepting these in Christ : must Christ then be ?
 “ ‘ Has He been ? Did not we ourselves make Him ?
 “ ‘ Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.
 “ ‘ First of the love, then ; we acknowledge Christ—
 “ ‘ A proof we comprehend His love, a proof
 “ ‘ We had such love already in ourselves,
 “ ‘ Knew first what else we should not recognize.
 “ ‘ 'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,
 “ ‘ And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,
 “ ‘ Becomes accounted somewhat out of him ;
 “ ‘ He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,
 “ ‘ With shape name, story added, man's old way.
 “ ‘ How prove you Christ came otherwise at least ?
 “ ‘ Next try the power : He made and rules the world :
 “ ‘ Certes there is a world once made, now ruled,
 “ ‘ Unless things have been ever as we see.
 “ ‘ Our sires declared a charioteer's yoked steeds
 “ ‘ Brought the sun up the east and down the west,
 “ ‘ Which only of itself now rises, sets,
 “ ‘ As if a hand impelled it and a will,—
 “ ‘ Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands :
 “ ‘ But the new question's whisper is distinct,
 “ ‘ Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves ?
 “ ‘ We have the hands, the will ; what made and drives
 “ ‘ The sun is force, is law, is named, not known,
 “ ‘ While will and love we do know ; marks of these,
 “ ‘ Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—
 “ ‘ As that, to punish or reward our race,

““ The sun at undue times arose or set
 ““ Or else stood still: what do not men affirm?
 ““ But earth requires as urgently reward
 ““ Or punishment to-day as years ago,
 ““ And none expects the sun will interpose:
 ““ Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,
 ““ Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth.
 ““ Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things;
 ““ Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,
 ““ Man’s!—which he gives, supposing he but finds,
 ““ As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,
 ““ To help these in what forms he calls his gods.
 ““ First, Jove’s brow, Juno’s eyes were swept away,
 ““ But Jove’s wrath, Juno’s pride continued long;
 ““ As last, will, power, and love discarded these,
 ““ So law in turn discards power, love, and will.
 ““ What proveth God is otherwise at least?
 ““ All else, projection from the mind of man!’
 ““ Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,
 ““ But place my gospel where I put my hands.

 ““ I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
 ““ That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
 ““ Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
 ““ For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
 ““ This imports solely, man should mount on each
 ““ New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,
 ““ The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,
 ““ Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.
 ““ Man apprehends Him newly at each stage
 ““ Whereat earth’s ladder drops, its service done;
 ““ And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.
 ““ You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs
 ““ To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,
 ““ And check the careless step would spoil their birth,
 ““ But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,
 ““ Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,
 ““ It is no longer of old twigs ye look,
 ““ Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,
 ““ But to the herb’s self, by what light ye boast,
 ““ For what fruit’s signs are. This book’s fruit is plain,
 ““ Nor miracles need prove it any more.
 ““ Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade ’ware
 ““ At first of root and stem, saved both till now
 ““ From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.
 ““ What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,
 ““ And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?
 ““ No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne’er forgets:
 ““ May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

- " This might be pagan teaching: now hear mine.
 " I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,
 " Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,
 " So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:
 " When they can eat, babe's-nurture is withdrawn.
 " I fed the babe whether it would or no:
 " I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.
 " I cried once, 'That ye may believe in Christ,
 " 'Behold this blind man shall receive his sight!'
 " I cry now, 'Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*
 " '*And smile at stories how John's word could cure—*
 " '*Repeat that miracle and take my faith?*'
 " I say, that miracle was duly wrought
 " When, save for it, no faith was possible.
 " Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the
 world,
 " Whether the change came from our minds which see
 " Of shows o' the world so much as and no more
 " Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I
 " See now, suppose you, there where you see rock
 " Round us?)—I know not; such was the effect,
 " So faith grew, making void more miracles
 " Because too much: they would compel, not help.
 " I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
 " Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
 " All questions in the earth and out of it,
 " And has so far advanced thee to be wise.
 " Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?
 " In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,
 " Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?
 " Thou hast it: use it and forthwith, or die!
 " For I say, this is death and the sole death,
 " When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
 " Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
 " And lack of love from love made manifest;
 " A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;
 " A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves
 " With ignorance was surety of a cure.
 " When man, appalled at nature, questioned first
 " 'What if there lurk a might behind this might?'
 " He needed satisfaction God could give,
 " And did give, as ye have the written word:
 " But when he finds might still redouble might,
 " Yet asks, 'Since all is might, what use of will?'
 " —Will, the one source of might,—he being man
 " With a man's will and a man's might, to teach
 " In little how the two combine in large,—

“That man has turned round on himself and stands
 “Which in the course of nature is, to die.

“And when man questioned, ‘What if there be love
 “‘Behind the will and might, as real as they?’—
 “He needed satisfaction God could give,
 “And did give, as ye have the written word:
 “But when, beholding that love everywhere,
 “He reasons, ‘Since such love is everywhere,
 “‘And since ourselves can love and would be loved,
 “‘We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,’—
 “How shall ye help this man who knows himself,
 “That he must love and would be loved again,
 “Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,
 “Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?
 “The lamp o’erswims with oil, the stomach flags
 “Loaded with nurture, and that man’s soul dies.

“If he rejoin, ‘But this was all the while
 “‘A trick; the fault was, first of all, in thee,
 “‘Thy story of the places, names and dates,
 “‘Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,
 “‘—Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,
 “‘Whence now the second suffers detriment.
 “‘What good of giving knowledge if, because
 “‘O’ the manner of the gift, its profit fail?
 “‘And why refuse what modicum of help
 “‘Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible
 “‘I’ the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?
 “‘Why must I hit of this and miss of that,
 “‘Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,
 “‘And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,
 “‘Was this once, was it not once?—then and now
 “‘And evermore, plain truth from man to man.
 “‘Is John’s procedure just the heathen bard’s?
 “‘Put question of his famous play again
 “‘How for the ephemerals’ sake Jove’s fire was filched,
 “‘And carried in a cane and brought to earth;
 “‘*The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,*
 “‘*Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,*
 “‘*Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.*
 “‘As with the Titan’s, so now with thy tale:
 “‘Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,
 “‘Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?’

“I answer, Have ye yet to argue out
 “The very primal thesis, plainest law,
 “—Man is not God but hath God’s end to serve,
 “A master to obey, a course to take,

- "Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?
 "Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,
 "From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
 "From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.
 "How could man have progression otherwise?
 "Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'
 "No savage man inquired 'What am myself?'
 "Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'
 "Man takes that title now if he believes
 "Might can exist with neither will nor love,
 "In God's case—what he names now Nature's Law—
 "While in himself he recognizes love
 "No less than might and will: and rightly takes.
 "Since if man prove the sole existent thing
 "Where these combine, whatever their degree,
 "However weak the might or will or love,
 "So they be found there, put in evidence,—
 "He is as surely higher in the scale
 "Than any might with neither love nor will,
 "As life, apparent in the poorest midge,
 "When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing
 "Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self—
 "Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!
 "Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,
 "And thus the victory leads but to defeat,
 "The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,
 "His life becomes impossible, which is death.
- "But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch
 "He is mere man, and in humility
 "Neither may know God nor mistake himself;
 "I point to the immediate consequence
 "And say, by such confession straight he falls
 "Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,
 "Made to know that he can know and not more:
 "Lower than God who knows all and can all,
 "Higher than beasts which know and can so far
 "As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
 "Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more;
 "While man knows partly but conceives beside,
 "Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
 "And in this striving, this converting air
 "Into a solid he may grasp and use,
 "Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
 "Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
 "Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.
 "Such progress could no more attend his soul
 "Were all it struggles after found at first
 "And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,

"Than motion wait his body, were all else
 "Than it the solid earth on every side,
 "Where now through space he moves from rest to rest,
 "Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect
 "He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
 "What he considers that he knows to-day,
 "Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;
 "Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
 "Because he lives, which is to be a man,
 "Set to instruct himself by his past self:
 "First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
 "Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,
 "Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
 "God's gift was that man should conceive of truth
 "And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,
 "As midway help till he reach fact indeed.
 "The statuary ere he mould a shape
 "Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next
 "The aspiration to produce the same;
 "So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,
 "Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see:'
 "Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,
 "From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.
 "How were it had he cried 'I see no face,
 "'No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay?'
 "Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,
 "And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again!'
 "Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,
 "Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed
 "In what is still flesh-imitating clay.
 "Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!
 "God only makes the live shape at a jet.
 "Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship?
 "The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,
 "Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;
 "But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,
 "Serve still and are replaced as time requires:
 "By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!
 "If ye demur, this judgment on your head,
 "Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,
 "Indulging every instinct of the soul
 "There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!
 "Such is the burthen of the latest time.
 "I have survived to hear it with my ears,
 "Answer it with my lips: does this suffice?
 "For if there be a further woe than such,
 "Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,
 "So long as any pulse is left in mine,

“May I be absent even longer yet,
 “Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,
 “Though I should tarry a new hundred years!”

But he was dead; 't was about noon, the day
 Somewhat declining: we five buried him
 That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways,
 And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.
 Valens is lost, I know not of his trace;
 The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
 And could not write nor speak, but only loved:
 So, lest the memory of this go quite,
 Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,
 I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe!
 For many look again to find that face,
 Beloved John's to whom I ministered,
 Somewhere in life about the world; they err:
 Either mistaking what was darkly spoke
 At ending of his book, as he relates,
 Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech
 Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose.
 Believe ye will not see him any more
 About the world with his divine regard!
 For all was as I say, and now the man
 Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

[Cerinthus read and mused; one added this:

“If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
 “Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—
 “Account Him, for reward of what He was,
 “Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.
 “For see; Himself conceived of life as love,
 “Conceived of love as what must enter in,
 “Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved
 “Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.
 “Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.
 “But by this time are many souls set free,
 “And very many still retained alive:
 “Nay, should His coming be delayed awhile,
 “Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)
 “See if, for every finger of thy hands,
 “There be not found, that day the world shall end,
 “Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word
 “That He will grow incorporate with all,
 “With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,

“Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?
 “Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.
 “Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
 “Or lost!”

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]

CI

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS; OR, NATURAL
 THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND

“Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.”

[WILL sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
 Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
 With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
 And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
 And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
 Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:
 And while above his head a pompion-plant,
 Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
 Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
 And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
 And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,—
 He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
 And recross till they weave a spider-web
 (Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
 And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
 Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
 Because to talk about Him, vexes—ha,
 Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
 When talk is safer than in winter-time.
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
 In confidence he drudges at their task,
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!

'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
 But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
 Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
 Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
 And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease :
 He hated that He cannot change His cold,
 Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
 That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
 And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
 O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
 A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave ;
 Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
 At the other kind of water, not her life,
 (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)
 Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
 And in her old bounds buried her despair,
 Hating and loving warmth alike : so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
 Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
 Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech ;
 Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
 That floats and feeds ; a certain badger brown
 He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
 By moonlight ; and the pie with the long tongue
 That pricks deep into oakwarts for a worm,
 And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
 But will not eat the ants ; the ants themselves
 That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
 About their hole—He made all these and more,
 Made all we see, and us, in spite : how else ?
 He could not, Himself, make a second self
 To be His mate : as well have made Himself :
 He would not make what he dislikes or slights,
 An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains :
 But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
 Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be—
 Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
 Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
 Things He admires and mocks too,—that is it.
 Because, so brave, so better though they be,
 It nothing skills if He begin to plague.
 Look now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,
 Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,
 Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,—
 Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,
 Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain ;
 Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,
 And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.
 Put case, unable to be what I wish,
 I yet could make a live bird out of clay :
 Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
 Able to fly ?—for, there, see, he hath wings,

And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
 And there, a sting to do his foes offence,
 There, and I will that he begin to live,
 Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns
 Of grigs high up that make the merry din,
 Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.
 In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay,
 And he lay stupid-like,—why, I should laugh ;
 And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,
 Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,
 Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,—
 Well, as the chance were, this might take or else
 Not take my fancy : I might hear his cry,
 And give the mankin three sound legs for one,
 Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg,
 And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.
 Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,
 Drinking the mash, with brain becomes alive,
 Making and marring clay at will ? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,
 Nor kind, nor cruel : He is strong and Lord.
 'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs
 That march now from the mountain to the sea ;
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
 'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
 Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off ;
 'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
 And two worms he whose nippers end in red ;
 As it likes me each time, I do : so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,
 Placable if His mind and ways were guessed,
 But rougher than His handiwork, be sure !
 Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
 And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
 Than He who made them ! What consoles but this ?
 That they, unless through Him, do nought at all,
 And must submit : what other use in things ?
 'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder joint
 That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay
 When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue :
 Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay
 Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt :
 Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth
 " I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
 " I make the cry my maker cannot make

“ With his great round mouth ; he must blow through mine ! ”

Would not I smash it with my foot ? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease ?

Aha, that is a question ! Ask, for that,

What knows,—the something over Setebos

That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,

Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.

There may be something quiet o’er His head,

Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,

Since both derive from weakness in some way.

I joy because the quails come ; would not joy

Could I bring quails here when I have a mind :

This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.

’Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,

But never spends much thought nor care that way.

It may look up, work up,—the worse for those

It works on ! ’Careth but for Setebos

The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,

Who, making Himself feared through what He does,

Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar

To what is quiet and hath happy life ;

Next looks down here, and out of very spite

Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,

These good things to match those as hips do grapes.

’T is solace making baubles, ay, and sport.

Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books

Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle :

Vexed, ’stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,

Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words ;

Has peeled a wand and called it by a name ;

Weareth at whiles for an enchanter’s robe

The eyed skin of a supple oncelot ;

And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,

A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,

Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,

And saith she is Miranda and my wife :

’Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane

He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge ;

Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,

Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,

And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge

In a hole o’ the rock and calls him Caliban ;

A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.

’Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,

Taketh his mirth with make-believes : so He.

His dam held that the Quiet made all things
 Which Setebos vexed only : 'holds not so.
 Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.
 Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
 Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
 Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,
 Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
 Like an orc's armour ? Ay,—so spoil His sport !
 He is the One now : only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.
 Ay, himself loves what does him good ; but why ?
 'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast
 Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,
 But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate
 Or love, just as it liked him : He hath eyes.
 Also it pleaseth Setebos to work,
 Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,
 By no means for the love of what is worked.
 'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world
 When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,
 And he wants little, hungers, aches not much,
 Than trying what to do with wit and strength.
 'Falls to make something : 'piled yon pile of turfs,
 And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,
 And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,
 And set up endwise certain spikes of tree,
 And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,
 Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.
 No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake ;
 'Shall some day knock it down again : so He.

'Saith He is terrible : watch His feats in proof !
 One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.
 He hath a spite against me, that I know,
 Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why ?
 So it is, all the same, as well I find.
 'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm
 With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
 Crawling to lay their eggs here : well, one wave,
 Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
 Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
 And licked the whole labour flat : so much for spite.
 'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)
 Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade :
 Often they scatter sparkles : there is force !
 'Dug up a newt He may have envied once
 And turned to stone, shut up inside a stone.
 Please Him and hinder this ?—What Prosper does ?

Aha, if He would tell me how ! Not he !
 There is the sport : discover how or die !
 All need not die, for of the things o' the isle
 Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees ;
 Those at His mercy,—why, they please Him most
 When . . . when . . . well, never try the same way twice !
 Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
 You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
 Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself :
 'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears
 But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,
 And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence :
 'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,
 Curles up into a ball, pretending death
 For fright at my approach : the two ways please.
 But what would move my choler more than this,
 That either creature counted on its life
 To-morrow and next day and all days to come,
 Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart,
 " Because he did so yesterday with me,
 " And otherwise with such another brute,
 " So must he do henceforth and always."—Ay ?
 Would teach the reasoning couple what " must " means !
 'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord ? So He.

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
 And we shall have to live in fear of Him
 So long as He lives, keeps His strength : no change,
 If He have done His best, make no new world
 To please Him more, so leave off watching this,—
 If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
 Some strange day,—or, suppose, grow into it
 As grubs grow butterflies : else, here are we,
 And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.
 His dam held different, that after death
 He both plagued enemies and feasted friends :
 Idly ! He doth His worst in this our life,
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
 Saving last pain for worst,—with which, an end.
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
 Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
 Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,
 Bask on the pompion-bell above ; kills both.
 'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball
 On head and tail as if to save their lives :
 Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.