The Angel in the House

by Coventry Patmore

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THE Angel in the House.

BY COVENTRY PATMORE.

“Par la grace infinie, Dieu les mist au monde ensemble.”

Rousier des Dames.

Decorative graphic

CASSELL & COMPANY, Limited: LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE. 1891.

THIS POEM IS INSCRIBED TO THE MEMORY OF HER BY WHOM AND FOR WHOM I BECAME A POET.

INTRODUCTION.

There could be but one answer to the suggestion of Mr. Coventry Patmore that his “Angel in the House” might usefully have a place in this “National Library.” The suggestion was made with the belief that wide and cheap diffusion would not take from the value of a copyright library edition, while the best use of writing is fulfilled by the spreading of verse dedicated to the sacred love of home. The two parts of the Poem appeared in 1854 and 1856, were afterwards elaborately revised, and have since obtained a permanent place among the Home Books of the English People. Our readers will join, surely, in thanks to the author for the present he has made us.

H. M.

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Book I.

THE PROLOGUE.

1

‘Mine is no horse with wings, to gain The region of the spheral chime; He does but drag a rumbling wain, Cheer’d by the coupled bells of rhyme; And if at Fame’s bewitching note My homely Pegasus pricks an ear, The world’s cart-collar hugs his throat, And he’s too wise to prance or rear.’

2

Thus ever answer’d Vaughan his Wife, Who, more than he, desired his fame; But, in his heart, his thoughts were rife How for her sake to earn a name. With bays poetic

three times crown’d, And other college honours won, He, if he chose, might be renown’d, He had but little doubt, she none; And in a loftier phrase he talk’d With her, upon their Wedding-Day, (The eighth), while through the fields they walk’d, Their children shouting by the way.

3

‘Not careless of the gift of song, Nor out of love with noble fame, I, meditating much and long What I should sing, how win a name, Considering well what theme unsung, What reason worth the cost of rhyme, Remains to loose the poet’s tongue In these last days, the dregs of time, Learn that to me, though born so late, There does, beyond desert, befall (May my great fortune make me great!) The first of themes, sung last of all. In green and undiscover’d ground, Yet near where many others sing, I have the very well-head found Whence gushes the Pierian Spring.’

4

Then she: ‘What is it, Dear? The Life Of Arthur, or Jerusalem’s Fall?’ ‘Neither: your gentle self, my Wife, And love, that grows from one to all. And if I faithfully proclaim Of these the exceeding worthiness, Surely the sweetest wreath of Fame Shall, to your hope, my brows caress; And if, by virtue of my choice Of this, the most heart-touching theme That ever tuned a poet’s voice, I live, as I am bold to dream, To be delight to many days, And into silence only cease When those are still, who shared their bays With Laura and with Beatrice, Imagine, Love, how learned men Will deep-conceiv’d devices find, Beyond my purpose and my ken, An ancient bard of simple mind. You, Sweet, his Mistress, Wife, and Muse, Were you for mortal woman meant? Your praises give a hundred clues To mythological intent! And, severing thus the truth from trope, In you the Commentators see Outlines occult of abstract scope, A future for philosophy! Your arm’s on mine! these are the meads In which we pass our living days; There Avon runs, now hid with reeds, Now brightly brimming pebbly bays; Those are our children’s songs that come With bells

and bleatings of the sheep; And there, in yonder English home, We thrive on mortal food and sleep!' She laugh'd. How proud she always was To feel how proud he was of her! But he had grown distraught, because The Muse's mood began to stir.

5

His purpose with performance crown'd, He to his well-pleased Wife rehears'd, When next their Wedding-Day came round, His leisure's labour, 'Book the First.'

CANTO I The Cathedral Close.

PRELUDES.

I. The Impossibility.

Lo, love's obey'd by all. 'Tis right That all should know what they obey, Lest erring conscience damp delight, And folly laugh our joys away. Thou Primal Love, who grantest wings And voices to the woodland birds, Grant me the power of saying things Too simple and too sweet for words!

II. Love's Really.

I walk, I trust, with open eyes; I've travell'd half my worldly course; And in the way behind me lies Much vanity and some remorse; I've lived to feel how pride may part Spirits, tho' match'd like hand and glove; I've blush'd for love's abode, the heart; But have not disbelieved in love; Nor unto love, sole mortal thing Of worth immortal, done the wrong To count it, with the rest that sing, Unworthy of a serious song; And love is my reward; for now, When most of dead'ning time complain, The myrtle blooms upon my brow, Its odour quickens all my brain.

III. The Poet's Confidence.

The richest realm of all the earth Is counted still a heathen land: Lo, I, like Joshua, now go forth To give it into Israel's hand. I will not hearken blame or praise; For so should I dishonour do To that sweet Power by which these Lays Alone are lovely, good, and true; Nor credence to the world's cries give, Which ever preach and still

prevent Pure passion’s high prerogative To make, not follow, precedent. From love’s abysmal ether rare If I to men have here made known New truths, they, like new stars, were there Before, though not yet written down. Moving but as the feelings move, I run, or loiter with delight, Or pause to mark where gentle Love Persuades the soul from height to height. Yet, know ye, though my words are gay As David’s dance, which Michal scorn’d. If kindly you receive the Lay, You shall be sweetly help’d and warn’d.

THE CATHEDRAL CLOSE.

1

Once more I came to Sarum Close, With joy half memory, half desire, And breathed the sunny wind that rose And blew the shadows o’er the Spire, And toss’d the lilac’s scented plumes, And sway’d the chestnut’s thousand cones, And fill’d my nostrils with perfumes, And shaped the clouds in waifs and zones, And wafted down the serious strain Of Sarum bells, when, true to time, I reach’d the Dean’s, with heart and brain That trembled to the trembling chime.

2

’Twas half my home, six years ago. The six years had not alter’d it: Red-brick and ashlar, long and low, With dormers and with oriels lit. Geranium, lychnis, rose array’d The windows, all wide open thrown; And some one in the Study play’d The Wedding-March of Mendelssohn. And there it was I last took leave: ’Twas Christmas: I remember’d now The cruel girls, who feign’d to grieve, Took down the evergreens; and how The holly into blazes woke The fire, lighting the large, low room, A dim, rich lustre of old oak And crimson velvet’s glowing gloom. No change had touch’d Dean Churchill: kind, By widowhood more than winters bent, And settled in a cheerful mind, As still forecasting heaven’s content. Well might his thoughts be fix’d on high, Now she was there! Within her face Humility and dignity Were met in a most sweet embrace. She seem’d expressly sent below To teach our

erring minds to see The rhythmic change of time's swift flow As part of still eternity. Her life, all honour, observed, with awe Which cross experience could not mar, The fiction of the Christian law That all men honourable are; And so her smile at once conferr'd High flattery and benign reproof; And I, a rude boy, strangely stirr'd, Grew courtly in my own behoof. The years, so far from doing her wrong, Anointed her with gracious balm, And made her brows more and more young With wreaths of amaranth and palm.

4

Was this her eldest, Honor; prude, Who would not let me pull the swing; Who, kiss'd at Christmas, call'd me rude, And, sobbing low, refused to sing? How changed! In shape no slender Grace, But Venus; milder than the dove; Her mother's air; her Norman face; Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love. Mary I knew. In former time Ailing and pale, she thought that bliss Was only for a better clime, And, heavenly overmuch, scorn'd this. I, rash with theories of the right, Which stretch'd the tether of my Creed, But did not break it, held delight Half discipline. We disagreed. She told the Dean I wanted grace. Now she was kindest of the three, And soft wild roses deck'd her face. And, what, was this my Mildred, she To herself and all a sweet surprise? My Pet, who romp'd and roll'd a hoop? I wonder'd where those daisy eyes Had found their touching curve and droop.

5

Unmannerly times! But now we sat Stranger than strangers; till I caught And answer'd Mildred's smile; and that Spread to the rest, and freedom brought. The Dean talk'd little, looking on, Of three such daughters justly vain. What letters they had had from Bonn, Said Mildred, and what plums from Spain! By Honor I was kindly task'd To excuse my never coming down From Cambridge; Mary smiled and ask'd Were Kant and Goethe yet outgrown? And, pleased, we talk'd the old days o'er; And, parting, I for pleasure sigh'd. To be there as a friend, (since more),

Seem’d then, seems still, excuse for pride; For something that abode endued With temple-like repose, an air Of life’s kind purposes pursued With order’d freedom sweet and fair. A tent pitch’d in a world not right It seem’d, whose inmates, every one, On tranquil faces bore the light Of duties beautifully done, And humbly, though they had few peers, Kept their own laws, which seem’d to be The fair sum of six thousand years’ Traditions of civility.

CANTO II. Mary And Mildred.

PRELUDES.

I. The Paragon.

When I behold the skies aloft Passing the pageantry of dreams, The cloud whose bosom, cygnet-soft, A couch for nuptial Juno seems, The ocean broad, the mountains bright, The shadowy vales with feeding herds, I from my lyre the music smite, Nor want for justly matching words. All forces of the sea and air, All interests of hill and plain, I so can sing, in seasons fair, That who hath felt may feel again. Elated oft by such free songs, I think with utterance free to raise That hymn for which the whole world longs, A worthy hymn in woman’s praise; A hymn bright-noted like a bird’s, Arousing these song-sleepy times With rhapsodies of perfect words, Ruled by returning kiss of rhymes. But when I look on her and hope To tell with joy what I admire, My thoughts lie cramp’d in narrow scope, Or in the feeble birth expire; No mystery of well-woven speech, No simplest phrase of tenderest fall, No liken’d excellence can reach Her, thee most excellent of all, The best half of creation’s best, Its heart to feel, its eye to see, The crown and complex of the rest, Its aim and its epitome. Nay, might I utter my conceit, ’Twere after all a vulgar song, For she’s so simply, subtly sweet, My deepest rapture does her wrong. Yet is it now my chosen task To sing her worth as Maid and Wife; Nor happier post than this I ask, To live her laureate all my life. On wings of love uplifted free, And by her gentleness made great, I’ll teach how noble man should be To match with

such a lovely mate; And then in her may move the more The woman’s wish to be desired, (By praise increased), till both shall soar, With blissful emulations fired. And, as geranium, pink, or rose Is thrice itself through power of art, So may my happy skill disclose New fairness even in her fair heart; Until that churl shall nowhere be Who bends not, awed, before the throne Of her affecting majesty, So meek, so far unlike our own; Until (for who may hope too much From her who wields the powers of love?) Our lifted lives at last shall touch That happy goal to which they move; Until we find, as darkness rolls Away, and evil mists dissolve, That nuptial contrasts are the poles On which the heavenly spheres revolve.

II. Love at Large.

Whene’er I come where ladies are, How sad soever I was before, Though like a ship frost-bound and far Withheld in ice from the ocean’s roar, Third-winter’d in that dreadful dock, With stiffen’d cordage, sails decay’d, And crew that care for calm and shock Alike, too dull to be dismay’d, Yet, if I come where ladies are, How sad soever I was before, Then is my sadness banish’d far, And I am like that ship no more; Or like that ship if the ice-field splits, Burst by the sudden polar Spring, And all thank God with their warming wits, And kiss each other and dance and sing, And hoist fresh sails, that make the breeze Blow them along the liquid sea, Out of the North, where life did freeze, Into the haven where they would be.

III. Love and Duty.

Anne lived so truly from above, She was so gentle and so good, That duty bade me fall in love, And ‘but for that,’ thought I, ‘I should!’ I worshipp’d Kate with all my will, In idle moods you seem to see A noble spirit in a hill, A human touch about a tree.

IV. A Distinction.

The lack of lovely pride, in her Who strives to please, my pleasure numbs, And still the maid I most prefer Whose care to please with pleasing comes.

MARY AND MILDRED.

1

One morning, after Church, I walk’d Alone with Mary on the lawn, And felt myself, howe’er we talk’d, To grave themes delicately drawn. When she, delighted, found I knew More of her peace than she supposed, Our confidences heavenwards grew, Like fox-glove buds, in pairs disclosed. Our former faults did we confess, Our ancient feud was more than heal’d, And, with the woman’s eagerness For amity full-sign’d and seal’d, She, offering up for sacrifice Her heart’s reserve, brought out to show Some verses, made when she was ice To all but Heaven, six years ago; Since happier grown! I took and read The neat-writ lines. She, void of guile, Too late repenting, blush’d, and said, I must not think about the style.

2

‘Day after day, until to-day, Imaged the others gone before, The same dull task, the weary way, The weakness pardon’d o’er and o’er,

‘The thwarted thirst, too faintly felt, For joy’s well-nigh forgotten life, The restless heart, which, when I knelt, Made of my worship barren strife.

‘Ah, whence to-day’s so sweet release, This clearance light of all my care, This conscience free, this fertile peace, These softly folded wings of prayer,

‘This calm and more than conquering love, With which nought evil dares to cope, This joy that lifts no glance above, For faith too sure, too sweet for hope?

‘O, happy time, too happy change, It will not live, though fondly nurst! Full soon the sun will seem as strange As now the cloud which seems dispersed.’

3

She from a rose-tree shook the blight; And well she knew that I knew well Her grace with silence to requite; And, answering now the luncheon bell, I laugh’d at Mildred’s laugh, which made All melancholy wrong, its mood Such sweet

self-confidence display’d, So glad a sense of present good.

4

I laugh’d and sigh’d: for I confess I never went to Ball, or Fête, Or Show, but in pursuit express Of my predestinated mate; And thus to me, who had in sight The happy chance upon the cards, Each beauty blossom’d in the light Of tender personal regards; And, in the records of my breast, Red-letter’d, eminently fair, Stood sixteen, who, beyond the rest, By turns till then had been my care: At Berlin three, one at St. Cloud, At Chatteris, near Cambridge, one, At Ely four, in London two, Two at Bowness, in Paris none, And, last and best, in Sarum three; But dearest of the whole fair troop, In judgment of the moment, she Whose daisy eyes had learn’d to droop. Her very faults my fancy fired; My loving will, so thwarted, grew; And, bent on worship, I admired Whate’er she was, with partial view. And yet when, as to-day, her smile Was prettiest, I could not but note Honoria, less admired the while, Was lovelier, though from love remote.

CANTO III. Honoria

PRELUDES.

I. The Lover.

He meets, by heavenly chance express, The destined maid; some hidden hand Unveils to him that loveliness Which others cannot understand. His merits in her presence grow, To match the promise in her eyes, And round her happy footsteps blow The authentic airs of Paradise. For joy of her he cannot sleep; Her beauty haunts him all the night; It melts his heart, it makes him weep For wonder, worship, and delight. O, paradox of love, he longs, Most humble when he most aspires, To suffer scorn and cruel wrongs From her he honours and desires. Her graces make him rich, and ask No guerdon; this imperial style Affronts him; he disdains to bask, The pensioner of her priceless smile. He prays for some hard thing to do, Some

work of fame and labour immense, To stretch the languid bulk and thew Of love's fresh-born magnipotence. No smallest boon were bought too dear, Though barter'd for his love-sick life; Yet trusts he, with undaunted cheer, To vanquish heaven, and call her Wife He notes how queens of sweetness still Neglect their crowns, and stoop to mate; How, self-consign'd with lavish will, They ask but love proportionate; How swift pursuit by small degrees, Love's tactic, works like miracle; How valour, clothed in courtesies, Brings down the haughtiest citadel; And therefore, though he merits not To kiss the braid upon her skirt, His hope, discouraged ne'er a jot, Out-soars all possible desert.

II. Love a Virtue.

Strong passions mean weak will, and he Who truly knows the strength and bliss Which are in love, will own with me No passion but a virtue 'tis. Few hear my word; it soars above The subtlest senses of the swarm Of wretched things which know not love, Their Psyche still a wingless worm. Ice-cold seems heaven's noble glow To spirits whose vital heat is hell; And to corrupt hearts even so The songs I sing, the tale I tell. These cannot see the robes of white In which I sing of love. Alack, But darkness shows in heavenly light, Though whiteness, in the dark, is black!

III. The Attainment.

You love? That's high as you shall go; For 'tis as true as Gospel text, Not noble then is never so, Either in this world or the next.

HONORIA.

1

Grown weary with a week's exile From those fair friends, I rode to see The church-restorings; lounged awhile, And met the Dean; was ask'd to tea, And found their cousin, Frederick Graham At Honor's side. Was I concern'd, If, when she sang, his colour came, That mine, as with a buffet, burn'd? A man to please a girl! thought

I, Retorting his forced smiles, the shrouds Of wrath, so hid as she was by, Sweet moon between her lighted clouds!

2

Whether this Cousin was the cause I know not, but I seem'd to see, The first time then, how fair she was, How much the fairest of the three. Each stopp'd to let the other go; But, time-bound, he arose the first. Stay'd he in Sarum long? If so I hoped to see him at the Hurst. No: he had call'd here, on his way To Portsmouth, where the Arrogant, His ship, was; he should leave next day, For two years' cruise in the Levant.

3

Had love in her yet struck its germs? I watch'd. Her farewell show'd me plain She loved, on the majestic terms That she should not be loved again; And so her cousin, parting, felt. Hope in his voice and eye was dead. Compassion did my malice melt; Then went I home to a restless bed. I, who admired her too, could see His infinite remorse at this Great mystery, that she should be So beautiful, yet not be his, And, pitying, long'd to plead his part; But scarce could tell, so strange my whim, Whether the weight upon my heart Was sorrow for myself or him.

4

She was all mildness; yet 'twas writ In all her grace, most legibly, 'He that's for heaven itself unfit, Let him not hope to merit me.' And such a challenge, quite apart From thoughts of love, humbled, and thus To sweet repentance moved my heart, And made me more magnanimous, And led me to review my life, Inquiring where in aught the least, If question were of her for wife, Ill might be mended, hope increas'd. Not that I soar'd so far above Myself, as this great hope to dare; And yet I well foresaw that love Might hope where reason must despair; And, half-resenting the sweet pride Which would not ask me to admire, 'Oh,' to my secret heart I sigh'd, 'That I were worthy to desire!'

5

As drowsiness my brain reliev'd, A shrill defiance of all to arms, Shriek'd by the stable-cock, receiv'd An angry answer from three farms. And, then, I dream'd that I, her knight, A clarion's haughty pathos heard, And rode securely to the fight, Cased in the scarf she had conferr'd; And there, the bristling lists behind, Saw many, and vanquish'd all I saw Of her unnumber'd cousin-kind, In Navy, Army, Church, and Law; Smitten, the warriors somehow turn'd To Sarum choristers, whose song, Mix'd with celestial sorrow, yearn'd With joy no memory can prolong; And phantasms as absurd and sweet Merged each in each in endless chace, And everywhere I seem'd to meet The haunting fairness of her face.

CANTO IV. The Morning Call.

PRELUDES.

I. The Rose of the World.

Lo, when the Lord made North and South And sun and moon ordained, He, Forthbringing each by word of mouth In order of its dignity, Did man from the crude clay express By sequence, and, all else decreed, He form'd the woman; nor might less Than Sabbath such a work succeed. And still with favour singled out, Marr'd less than man by mortal fall, Her disposition is devout, Her countenance angelical; The best things that the best believe Are in her face so kindly writ The faithless, seeing her, conceive Not only heaven, but hope of it; No idle thought her instinct shrouds, But fancy chequers settled sense, Like alteration of the clouds On noonday's azure permanence; Pure dignity, composure, ease Declare affections nobly fix'd, And impulse sprung from due degrees Of sense and spirit sweetly mix'd. Her modesty, her chiefest grace, The cestus clasping Venus' side, How potent to deject the face Of him who would affront its pride! Wrong dares not in her presence speak, Nor spotted thought its taint disclose Under the protest of a cheek Outbragging Nature's boast the rose. In mind and manners how discreet; How

artless in her very art; How candid in discourse; how sweet The concord of her lips and heart; How simple and how circumspect; How subtle and how fancy-free; Though sacred to her love, how deck'd With unexclusive courtesy; How quick in talk to see from far The way to vanquish or evade; How able her persuasions are To prove, her reasons to persuade; How (not to call true instinct's bent And woman's very nature, harm), How amiable and innocent Her pleasure in her power to charm; How humbly careful to attract, Though crown'd with all the soul desires, Connubial aptitude exact, Diversity that never tires.

II. The Tribute.

Boon Nature to the woman bows; She walks in earth's whole glory clad, And, chiefest far herself of shows, All others help her, and are glad: No splendour 'neath the sky's proud dome But serves for her familiar wear; The far-fetch'd diamond finds its home Flashing and smouldering in her hair; For her the seas their pearls reveal; Art and strange lands her pomp supply With purple, chrome, and cochineal, Ochre, and lapis lazuli; The worm its golden woof presents; Whatever runs, flies, dives, or delves, All doff for her their ornaments, Which suit her better than themselves; And all, by this their power to give, Proving her right to take, proclaim Her beauty's clear prerogative To profit so by Eden's blame.

III. Compensation.

That nothing here may want its praise, Know, she who in her dress reveals A fine and modest taste, displays More loveliness than she conceals.

THE MORNING CALL.

1

'By meekness charm'd, or proud to allow A queenly claim to live admired, Full many a lady has ere now My apprehensive fancy fired, And woven many a transient chain; But never lady like to this, Who holds me as the weather-vane Is held by yonder clematis. She seems the life of nature's powers; Her beauty is the genial

thought Which makes the sunshine bright; the flowers, But for their hint of her, were nought.’

2

A voice, the sweeter for the grace Of suddenness, while thus I dream’d, ‘Good morning!’ said or sang. Her face The mirror of the morning seem’d. Her sisters in the garden walk’d, And would I come? Across the Hall She led me; and we laugh’d and talk’d, And praised the Flower-show and the Ball; And Mildred’s pinks had gain’d the Prize; And, stepping like the light-foot fawn, She brought me ‘Wiltshire Butterflies,’ The Prize-book; then we paced the lawn, Close-cut, and with geranium-plots, A rival glow of green and red; Than counted sixty apricots On one small tree; the gold-fish fed; And watch’d where, black with scarlet tans, Proud Psyche stood and flash’d like flame, Showing and shutting splendid fans; And in the prize we found its name.

3

The sweet hour lapsed, and left my breast A load of joy and tender care; And this delight, which life oppress’d, To fix’d aims grew, that ask’d for pray’r. I rode home slowly; whip-in-hand And soil’d bank-notes all ready, stood The Farmer who farm’d all my land, Except the little Park and Wood; And with the accustom’d compliment Of talk, and beef, and frothing beer, I, my own steward, took my rent, Three hundred pounds for half the year; Our witnesses the Cook and Groom, We sign’d the lease for seven years more, And bade Good-day; then to my room I went, and closed and lock’d the door, And cast myself down on my bed, And there, with many a blissful tear, I vow’d to love and pray’d to wed The maiden who had grown so dear; Thank’d God who had set her in my path; And promised, as I hoped to win, That I would never dim my faith By the least selfishness or sin; Whatever in her sight I’d seem I’d truly be; I’d never blend With my delight in her a dream ’Twould change her cheek to comprehend; And, if she wish’d it, I’d prefer Another’s to my

own success; And always seek the best for her With unofficious tenderness.

4

Rising, I breathed a brighter clime, And found myself all self above, And, with a charity sublime, Contemn'd not those who did not love: And I could not but feel that then I shone with something of her grace, And went forth to my fellow men My commendation in my face.

CANTO V. The Violets.

PRELUDES.

I. The Comparison.

Where she succeeds with cloudless brow, In common and in holy course, He fails, in spite of prayer and vow And agonies of faith and force; Or, if his suit with Heaven prevails To righteous life, his virtuous deeds Lack beauty, virtue's badge; she fails More graciously than he succeeds. Her spirit, compact of gentleness, If Heaven postpones or grants her pray'r, Conceives no pride in its success, And in its failure no despair; But his, enamour'd of its hurt, Baffled, blasphemes, or, not denied, Crows from the dunghill of desert, And wags its ugly wings for pride. He's never young nor ripe; she grows More infantine, auroral, mild, And still the more she lives and knows The lovelier she's express'd a child. Say that she wants the will of man To conquer fame, not check'd by cross, Nor moved when others bless or ban; She wants but what to have were loss. Or say she wants the patient brain To track shy truth; her facile wit At that which he hunts down with pain Flies straight, and does exactly hit. Were she but half of what she is, He twice himself, mere love alone, Her special crown, as truth is his, Gives title to the worthier throne; For love is substance, truth the form; Truth without love were less than nought; But blindest love is sweet and warm, And full of truth not shaped by thought, And therefore in herself she stands Adorn'd with undeficient grace, Her happy virtues taking hands,

Each smiling in another's face. So, dancing round the Tree of Life, They make an Eden in her breast, While his, disjointed and at strife, Proud-thoughted, do not bring him rest.

II. Love in Tears.

If fate Love's dear ambition mar, And load his breast with hopeless pain, And seem to blot out sun and star, Love, won or lost, is countless gain; His sorrow boasts a secret bliss Which sorrow of itself beguiles, And Love in tears too noble is For pity, save of Love in smiles. But, looking backward through his tears, With vision of maturer scope, How often one dead joy appears The platform of some better hope! And, let us own, the sharpest smart Which human patience may endure Pays light for that which leaves the heart More generous, dignified, and pure.

III. Prospective Faith.

They safely walk in darkest ways Whose youth is lighted from above, Where, through the senses' silvery haze, Dawns the veil'd moon of nuptial love. Who is the happy husband? He Who, scanning his unwedded life, Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free, 'Twas faithful to his future wife.

IV. Venus Victrix.

Fatal in force, yet gentle in will, Defeats, from her, are tender pacts, For, like the kindly lodestone, still She's drawn herself by what she attracts.

THE VIOLETS.

1

I went not to the Dean's unbid: I would not have my mystery, From her so delicately hid, The guess of gossips at their tea. A long, long week, and not once there, Had made my spirit sick and faint, And lack-love, foul as love is fair, Perverted all things to complaint. How vain the world had grown to be! How mean all people and their ways, How ignorant their sympathy, And how impertinent their praise; What they

for virtuousness esteem'd, How far removed from heavenly right; What pettiness their trouble seem'd, How undelightful their delight; To my necessity how strange The sunshine and the song of birds; How dull the clouds' continual change, How foolishly content the herds; How unaccountable the law Which bade me sit in blindness here, While she, the sun by which I saw, Shed splendour in an idle sphere! And then I kiss'd her stolen glove, And sigh'd to reckon and define The modes of martyrdom in love, And how far each one might be mine. I thought how love, whose vast estate Is earth and air and sun and sea, Encounters oft the beggar's fate, Despised on score of poverty; How Heaven, inscrutable in this, Lets the gross general make or mar The destiny of love, which is So tender and particular; How nature, as unnatural And contradicting nature's source, Which is but love, seems most of all Well-pleased to harry true love's course; How, many times, it comes to pass That trifling shades of temperament, Affecting only one, alas, Not love, but love's success prevent; How manners often falsely paint The man; how passionate respect, Hid by itself, may bear the taint Of coldness and a dull neglect; And how a little outward dust Can a clear merit quite o'ercloud, And make her fatally unjust, And him desire a darker shroud; How senseless opportunity Gives baser men the better chance; How powers, adverse else, agree To cheat her in her ignorance; How Heaven its very self conspires With man and nature against love, As pleased to couple cross desires, And cross where they themselves approve. Wretched were life, if the end were now! But this gives tears to dry despair, Faith shall be blest, we know not how, And love fulfill'd, we know not where.

2

While thus I grieved, and kiss'd her glove, My man brought in her note to say, Papa had hid her send his love, And would I dine with them next day? They had learn'd and practised Purcell's glee, To sing it by to-morrow night. The Postscript was: Her sisters and she Inclosed some violets, blue and white; She and her sisters found them where I wager'd once no violets grew; So they had won the gloves. And there The

violets lay, two white, one blue.

CANTO VI. The Dean.

PRELUDES.

I. Perfect Love rare.

Most rare is still most noble found, Most noble still most incomplete; Sad law, which leaves King Love uncrown'd In this obscure, terrestrial seat! With bale more sweet than others' bliss, And bliss more wise than others' bale, The secrets of the world are his. And freedom without let or pale. O, zealous good, O, virtuous glee, Religious, and without alloy, O, privilege high, which none but he Who highly merits can enjoy; O, Love, who art that fabled sun Which all the world with bounty loads, Without respect of realms, save one, And gilds with double lustre Rhodes; A day of whose delicious life, Though full of terrors, full of tears, Is better than of other life A hundred thousand million years; Thy heavenly splendour magnifies The least commixture of earth's mould, Cheapens thyself in thine own eyes, And makes the foolish mocker bold.

II. Love Justified.

What if my pole-star of respect Be dim to others? Shall their 'Nay,' Presumably their own defect, Invalidate my heart's strong 'Yea'? And can they rightly me condemn, If I, with partial love, prefer? I am not more unjust to them, But only not unjust to her. Leave us alone! After awhile, This pool of private charity Shall make its continent an isle, And roll, a world-embracing sea; This foolish zeal of lip for lip, This fond, self-sanction'd, wilful zest, Is that elect relationship Which forms and sanctions all the rest; This little germ of nuptial love, Which springs so simply from the sod, The root is, as my song shall prove, Of all our love to man and God.

III. Love Serviceable.

What measure Fate to him shall mete Is not the noble Lover's care; He's heart-sick

with a longing sweet To make her happy as she's fair. Oh, misery, should she him refuse, And so her dearest good mistake! His own success he thus pursues With frantic zeal for her sole sake. To lose her were his life to blight, Being loss to hers; to make her his, Except as helping her delight, He calls but incidental bliss; And holding life as so much pelf To buy her posies, learns this lore: He does not rightly love himself Who does not love another more.

IV. A Riddle Solved.

Kind souls, you wonder why, love you, When you, you wonder why, love none. We love, Fool, for the good we do, Not that which unto us is done!

THE DEAN.

1

The Ladies rose. I held the door, And sigh'd, as her departing grace Assured me that she always wore A heart as happy as her face; And, jealous of the winds that blew, I dreaded, o'er the tasteless wine, What fortune momently might do To hurt the hope that she'd be mine.

2

Towards my mark the Dean's talk set: He praised my 'Notes on Abury,' Read when the Association met At Sarum; he was pleased to see I had not stopp'd, as some men had, At Wrangler and Prize Poet; last, He hoped the business was not bad I came about: then the wine pass'd.

3

A full glass prefaced my reply: I loved his daughter, Honor; I told My estate and prospects; might I try To win her? At my words so bold My sick heart sank. Then he: He gave His glad consent, if I could get Her love. A dear, good Girl! she'd have Only three thousand pounds as yet; More bye and bye. Yes, his good will Should go with me; he would not stir; He and my father in old time still Wish'd I should one

day marry her; But God so seldom lets us take Our chosen pathway, when it lies In steps that either mar or make Or alter others' destinies, That, though his blessing and his pray'r Had help'd, should help, my suit, yet he Left all to me, his passive share Consent and opportunity. My chance, he hoped, was good: I'd won Some name already; friends and place Appear'd within my reach, but none Her mind and manners would not grace. Girls love to see the men in whom They invest their vanities admired; Besides, where goodness is, there room For good to work will be desired. 'Twas so with one now pass'd away; And what she was at twenty-two, Honor was now; and he might say Mine was a choice I could not rue.

4

He ceased, and gave his hand. He had won (And all my heart was in my word), From me the affection of a son, Whichever fortune Heaven conferr'd! Well, well, would I take more wine? Then go To her; she makes tea on the lawn These fine warm afternoons. And so We went whither my soul was drawn; And her light-hearted ignorance Of interest in our discourse Fill'd me with love, and seem'd to enhance Her beauty with pathetic force, As, through the flowery mazes sweet, Fronting the wind that flutter'd blythe, And loved her shape, and kiss'd her feet, Shown to their insteps proud and lithe, She approach'd, all mildness and young trust, And ever her chaste and noble air Gave to love's feast its choicest gust, A vague, faint augury of despair.

CANTO VII. *Ætna and the Moon.*

PRELUDES.

I. Love's Immortality.

How vilely 'twere to misdeserve The poet's gift of perfect speech, In song to try, with trembling nerve, The limit of its utmost reach, Only to sound the wretched praise Of what to-morrow shall not be; So mocking with immortal bays The

cross-bones of mortality! I do not thus. My faith is fast That all the loveliness I sing Is made to bear the mortal blast, And blossom in a better Spring. Doubts of eternity ne'er cross The Lover's mind, divinely clear; For ever is the gain or loss Which maddens him with hope or fear: So trifles serve for his relief, And trifles make him sick and pale; And yet his pleasure and his grief Are both on a majestic scale. The chance, indefinitely small, Of issue infinitely great, Eclipses finite interests all, And has the dignity of fate.

II. Heaven and Earth.

How long shall men deny the flower Because its roots are in the earth, And crave with tears from God the dower They have, and have despised as dearth, And scorn as low their human lot, With frantic pride, too blind to see That standing on the head makes not Either for ease or dignity! But fools shall feel like fools to find (Too late inform'd) that angels' mirth Is one in cause, and mode, and kind With that which they profaned on earth.

ÆTNA AND THE MOON.

1

To soothe my heart I, feigning, seized A pen, and, showering tears, declared My unfeign'd passion; sadly pleased Only to dream that so I dared. Thus was the fervid truth confess'd, But wild with paradox ran the plea. As wilfully in hope depress'd, Yet bold beyond hope's warranty:

2

'O, more than dear, be more than just, And do not deafly shut the door! I claim no right to speak; I trust Mercy, not right; yet who has more? For, if more love makes not more fit, Of claimants here none's more nor less, Since your great worth does not permit Degrees in our unworthiness. Yet, if there's aught that can be done With arduous labour of long years, By which you'll say that you'll be won, O tell me, and I'll dry my tears. Ah, no; if loving cannot move, How foolishly must labour fail! The

use of deeds is to show love; If signs suffice let these avail: Your name pronounced brings to my heart A feeling like the violet's breath, Which does so much of heaven impart It makes me amorous of death; The winds that in the garden toss The Guelder-roses give me pain, Alarm me with the dread of loss, Exhaust me with the dream of gain; I'm troubled by the clouds that move; Tired by the breath which I respire; And ever, like a torch, my love, Thus agitated, flames the higher; All's hard that has not you for goal; I scarce can move my hand to write, For love engages all my soul, And leaves the body void of might; The wings of will spread idly, as do The bird's that in a vacuum lies; My breast, asleep with dreams of you, Forgets to breathe, and bursts in sighs; I see no rest this side the grave, No rest nor hope, from you apart; Your life is in the rose you gave, Its perfume suffocates my heart; There's no refreshment in the breeze; The heaven o'erwhelms me with its blue; I faint beside the dancing seas; Winds, skies, and waves are only you; The thought or act which not intends You service seems a sin and shame; In that one only object ends Conscience, religion, honour, fame. Ah, could I put off love! Could we Never have met! What calm, what ease! Nay, but, alas, this remedy Were ten times worse than the disease! For when, indifferent, I pursue The world's best pleasures for relief, My heart, still sickening back to you, Finds none like memory of its grief; And, though 'twere very hell to hear You felt such misery as I, All good, save you, were far less dear! Than is that ill with which I die Where'er I go, wandering forlorn, You are the world's love, life, and glee: Oh, wretchedness not to be borne If she that's Love should not love me!'

3

I could not write another word, Through pity for my own distress; And forth I went, untimely stirr'd To make my misery more or less. I went, beneath the heated noon, To where, in her simplicity, She sate at work; and, as the Moon On Ætna smiles, she smiled on me. But, now and then, in cheek and eyes, I saw, or fancied, such a glow As when, in summer-evening skies, Some say, 'It lightens,' some say, 'No.'

‘Honoria,’ I began—No more. The Dean, by ill or happy hap, Came home; and Wolf burst in before, And put his nose upon her lap.

CANTO VIII. Sarum Plain.

PRELUDES.

I. Life of Life.

What’s that, which, ere I spake, was gone? So joyful and intense a spark That, whilst o’erhead the wonder shone, The day, before but dull, grew dark. I do not know; but this I know, That, had the splendour lived a year, The truth that I some heavenly show Did see, could not be now more clear. This know I too: might mortal breath Express the passion then inspired, Evil would die a natural death, And nothing transient be desired; And error from the soul would pass, And leave the senses pure and strong As sunbeams. But the best, alas, Has neither memory nor tongue!

II. The Revelation.

An idle poet, here and there, Looks round him; but, for all the rest, The world, unfathomably fair, Is duller than a witling’s jest. Love wakes men, once a lifetime each; They lift their heavy lids, and look; And, lo, what one sweet page can teach, They read with joy, then shut the book. And some give thanks, and some blaspheme, And most forget; but, either way, That and the Child’s unheeded dream Is all the light of all their day.

III. The Spirit’s Epochs.

Not in the crises of events, Of compass’d hopes, or fears fulfill’d, Or acts of gravest consequence, Are life’s delight and depth reveal’d. The day of days was not the day; That went before, or was postponed; The night Death took our lamp away Was not the night on which we groan’d. I drew my bride, beneath the moon, Across my threshold; happy hour! But, ah, the walk that afternoon We saw the water-flags in flower!

IV. The Prototype.

Lo, there, whence love, life, light are pour’d, Veil’d with impenetrable rays, Amidst the presence of the Lord Co-equal Wisdom laughs and plays. Female and male God made the man; His image is the whole, not half; And in our love we dimly scan The love which is between Himself.

V. The Praise of Love.

Spirit of Knowledge, grant me this: A simple heart and subtle wit To praise the thing whose praise it is That all which can be praised is it.

SARUM PLAIN.

1

Breakfast enjoy’d, ’mid hush of boughs And perfumes thro’ the windows blown; Brief worship done, which still endows The day with beauty not its own; With intervening pause, that paints Each act with honour, life with calm (As old processions of the Saints At every step have wands of palm), We rose; the ladies went to dress, And soon return’d with smiles; and then, Plans fix’d, to which the Dean said ‘Yes,’ Once more we drove to Salisbury Plain. We past my house (observed with praise By Mildred, Mary acquiesced), And left the old and lazy greys Below the hill, and walk’d the rest.

2

The moods of love are like the wind, And none knows whence or why they rise: I ne’er before felt heart and mind So much affected through mine eyes. How cognate with the flatter’d air, How form’d for earth’s familiar zone, She moved; how feeling and how fair For others’ pleasure and her own! And, ah, the heaven of her face! How, when she laugh’d, I seem’d to see The gladness of the primal grace, And how, when grave, its dignity! Of all she was, the least not less Delighted the devoted eye; No fold or fashion of her dress Her fairness did not sanctify. I could not else than grieve. What cause? Was I not blest? Was she not there? Likely my own? Ah, that it

was: How like seem’d ‘likely’ to despair!

3

And yet to see her so benign, So honourable and womanly, In every maiden kindness mine, And full of gayest courtesy, Was pleasure so without alloy, Such unreproved, sufficient bliss, I almost wish’d, the while, that joy Might never further go than this. So much it was as now to walk, And humbly by her gentle side Observe her smile and hear her talk, Could it be more to call her Bride? I feign’d her won: the mind finite, Puzzled and fagg’d by stress and strain To comprehend the whole delight, Made bliss more hard to bear than pain. All good, save heart to hold, so summ’d And grasp’d, the thought smote, like a knife, How laps’d mortality had numb’d The feelings to the feast of life; How passing good breathes sweetest breath; And love itself at highest reveals More black than bright, commending death By teaching how much life conceals.

4

But happier passions these subdued, When from the close and sultry lane, With eyes made bright by what they view’d, We emerged upon the mounded Plain. As to the breeze a flag unfurls, My spirit expanded, sweetly embraced By those same gusts that shook her curls And vex’d the ribbon at her waist. To the future cast I future cares; Breathed with a heart unfreighted, free, And laugh’d at the presumptuous airs That with her muslins folded me; Till, one vague rack along my sky, The thought that she might ne’er be mine Lay half forgotten by the eye So feasted with the sun’s warm shine.

5

By the great stones we chose our ground For shade; and there, in converse sweet, Took luncheon. On a little mound Sat the three ladies; at their feet I sat; and smelt the heathy smell, Pluck’d harebells, turn’d the telescope To the country round. My life went well, For once, without the wheels of hope; And I despised the Druid rocks

That scowl'd their chill gloom from above, Like churls whose stolid wisdom mocks The lightness of immortal love. And, as we talk'd, my spirit quaff'd The sparkling winds; the candid skies At our untruthful strangeness laugh'd; I kiss'd with mine her smiling eyes; And sweet familiarness and awe Prevail'd that hour on either part, And in the eternal light I saw That she was mine; though yet my heart Could not conceive, nor would confess Such contentation; and there grew More form and more fair stateliness Than heretofore between us two.

CANTO IX. Sahara.

PRELUDES.

I. The Wife's Tragedy.

Man must be pleased; but him to please Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf Of his condoled necessities She casts her best, she flings herself. How often flings for nought, and yokes Her heart to an icicle or whim, Whose each impatient word provokes Another, not from her, but him; While she, too gentle even to force His penitence by kind replies, Waits by, expecting his remorse, With pardon in her pitying eyes; And if he once, by shame oppress'd, A comfortable word confers, She leans and weeps against his breast, And seems to think the sin was hers; And whilst his love has any life, Or any eye to see her charms, At any time, she's still his wife, Dearly devoted to his arms; She loves with love that cannot tire; And when, ah woe, she loves alone, Through passionate duty love springs higher, As grass grows taller round a stone.

II. Common Graces.

Is nature in thee too spiritless, Ignoble, impotent, and dead, To prize her love and loveliness The more for being thy daily bread? And art thou one of that vile crew Which see no splendour in the sun, Praising alone the good that's new, Or over, or not yet begun? And has it dawn'd on thy dull wits That love warms many as soft a

nest, That, though swathed round with benefits, Thou art not singularly blest? And fail thy thanks for gifts divine, The common food of many a heart, Because they are not only thine? Beware lest in the end thou art Cast for thy pride forth from the fold, Too good to feel the common grace Of blissful myriads who behold For evermore the Father's face.

III. The Zest of Life.

Give thanks. It is not time misspent; Worst fare this betters, and the best, Wanting this natural condiment, Breeds crudeness, and will not digest. The grateful love the Giver's law; But those who eat, and look no higher, From sin or doubtful sanction draw The biting sauce their feasts require. Give thanks for nought, if you've no more, And, having all things, do not doubt That nought, with thanks, is blest before Whate'er the world can give, without.

IV. Fool and Wise.

Endow the fool with sun and moon, Being his, he holds them mean and low, But to the wise a little boon Is great, because the giver's so.

SAHARA.

1

I stood by Honor and the Dean, They seated in the London train. A month from her! yet this had been, Ere now, without such bitter pain. But neighbourhood makes parting light, And distance remedy has none; Alone, she near, I felt as might A blind man sitting in the sun; She near, all for the time was well; Hope's self, when we were far apart, With lonely feeling, like the smell Of heath on mountains, fill'd my heart. To see her seem'd delight's full scope, And her kind smile, so clear of care, Ev'n then, though darkening all my hope, Gilded the cloud of my despair.

2

She had forgot to bring a book. I lent one; blamed the print for old; And did not tell

her that she took A Petrarch worth its weight in gold. I hoped she'd lose it; for my love Was grown so dainty, high, and nice, It prized no luxury above The sense of fruitless sacrifice.

3

The bell rang, and, with shrieks like death, Link catching link, the long array, With ponderous pulse and fiery breath, Proud of its burthen, swept away; And through the lingering crowd I broke, Sought the hill-side, and thence, heart-sick, Beheld, far off, the little smoke Along the landscape kindling quick.

4

What should I do, where should I go, Now she was gone, my love! for mine She was, whatever here below Cross'd or usurp'd my right divine. Life, without her, was vain and gross, The glory from the world was gone, And on the gardens of the Close As on Sahara shone the sun. Oppress'd with her departed grace, My thoughts on ill surmises fed; The harmful influence of the place She went to fill'd my soul with dread. She, mixing with the people there, Might come back alter'd, having caught The foolish, fashionable air Of knowing all, and feeling nought. Or, giddy with her beauty's praise, She'd scorn our simple country life, Its wholesome nights and tranquil days. And would not deign to be my Wife. 'My Wife,' 'my Wife,' ah, tenderest word! How oft, as fearful she might hear, Whispering that name of 'Wife,' I heard The chiming of the inmost sphere.

5

I pass'd the home of my regret. The clock was striking in the hall, And one sad window open yet, Although the dews began to fall. Ah, distance show'd her beauty's scope! How light of heart and innocent That loveliness which sicken'd hope And wore the world for ornament! How perfectly her life was framed; And, thought of in that passionate mood, How her affecting graces shamed The vulgar life that was but good!

6

I wonder'd, would her bird be fed, Her rose-plots water'd, she not by; Loading my breast with angry dread Of light, unlikely injury. So, fill'd with love and fond remorse, I paced the Close, its every part Endow'd with reliquary force To heal and raise from death my heart. How tranquil and unsecular The precinct! Once, through yonder gate, I saw her go, and knew from far Her love-lit form and gentle state. Her dress had brush'd this wicket; here She turn'd her face, and laugh'd, with light Like moonbeams on a wavering mere. Weary beforehand of the night, I went; the blackbird, in the wood Talk'd by himself, and eastward grew In heaven the symbol of my mood, Where one bright star engross'd the blue.

CANTO X. Church to Church.

PRELUDES.

I. The Joyful Wisdom.

Would Wisdom for herself be woo'd, And wake the foolish from his dream, She must be glad as well as good, And must not only be, but seem. Beauty and joy are hers by right; And, knowing this, I wonder less That she's so scorn'd, when falsely dight In misery and ugliness. What's that which Heaven to man endears, And that which eyes no sooner see Than the heart says, with floods of tears, 'Ah, that's the thing which I would be!' Not childhood, full of frown and fret; Not youth, impatient to disown Those visions high, which to forget Were worse than never to have known; Not worldlings, in whose fair outside Nor courtesy nor justice fails, Thanks to cross-pulling vices tied, Like Samson's foxes, by the tails; Not poets; real things are dreams, When dreams are as realities, And boasters of celestial gleams Go stumbling aye for want of eyes; Not patriots or people's men, In whom two worse-match'd evils meet Than ever sought Adullam's den, Base conscience and a high conceit; Not new-made saints, their feelings iced, Their joy in man and nature gone, Who sing 'O easy yoke of Christ!' But find 'tis hard to get it on; Not great

men, even when they're good; The good man whom the time makes great, By some disgrace of chance or blood, God fails not to humiliate; Not these: but souls, found here and there, Oases in our waste of sin, Where everything is well and fair, And Heav'n remits its discipline; Whose sweet subdual of the world The worldling scarce can recognise, And ridicule, against it hurl'd, Drops with a broken sting and dies; Who nobly, if they cannot know Whether a 'scutcheon's dubious field Carries a falcon or a crow, Fancy a falcon on the shield; Yet, ever careful not to hurt God's honour, who creates success, Their praise of even the best desert Is but to have presumed no less; Who, should their own life plaudits bring, Are simply vex'd at heart that such An easy, yea, delightful thing Should move the minds of men so much. They live by law, not like the fool, But like the bard, who freely sings In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule, And finds in them, not bonds, but wings. Postponing still their private ease To courtly custom, appetite, Subjected to observances, To banquet goes with full delight; Nay, continence and gratitude So cleanse their lives from earth's alloy, They taste, in Nature's common food, Nothing but spiritual joy. They shine like Moses in the face, And teach our hearts, without the rod, That God's grace is the only grace, And all grace is the grace of God.

II. The Devices.

Love, kiss'd by Wisdom, wakes twice Love, And Wisdom is, thro' loving, wise. Let Dove and Snake, and Snake and Dove, This Wisdom's be, that Love's device.

GOING TO CHURCH.

1

I woke at three; for I was bid To breakfast with the Dean at nine, And thence to Church. My curtain slid, I found the dawning Sunday fine, And could not rest, so rose. The air Was dark and sharp; the roosted birds Cheep'd, 'Here am I, Sweet; are you there?' On Avon's misty flats the herds Expected, comfortless, the day, Which slowly fired the clouds above; The cock scream'd, somewhere far away; In sleep the

matrimonial dove Was crooning; no wind waked the wood, Nor moved the midnight river-damps, Nor thrill'd the poplar; quiet stood The chestnut with its thousand lamps; The moon shone yet, but weak and drear, And seem'd to watch, with bated breath, The landscape, all made sharp and clear By stillness, as a face by death.

2

My pray'rs for her being done, I took Occasion by the quiet hour To find and know, by Rule and Book, The rights of love's beloved power.

3

Fronting the question without ruth, Nor ignorant that, evermore, If men will stoop to kiss the Truth, She lifts them higher than before, I, from above, such light required As now should once for all destroy The folly which at times desired A sanction for so great a joy.

4

Thenceforth, and through that pray'r, I trod A path with no suspicions dim. I loved her in the name of God, And for the ray she was of Him; I ought to admire much more, not less Her beauty was a godly grace; The mystery of loveliness, Which made an altar of her face, Was not of the flesh, though that was fair, But a most pure and living light Without a name, by which the rare And virtuous spirit flamed to sight. If oft, in love, effect lack'd cause And cause effect, 'twere vain to soar Reasons to seek for that which was Reason itself, or something more. My joy was no idolatry Upon the ends of the vile earth bent, For when I loved her most then I Most yearn'd for more divine content. That other doubt, which, like a ghost, In the brain's darkness haunted me, Was thus resolved: Him loved I most, But her I loved most sensibly. Lastly, my giddiest hope allow'd No selfish thought, or earthly smirch; And forth I went, in peace, and proud To take my passion into Church; Grateful and glad to think that all Such doubts would seem entirely vain To her whose nature's lighter fall Made no divorce of heart from brain.

5

I found them, with exactest grace And fresh as Spring, for Spring attired; And by the radiance in her face I saw she felt she was admired; And, through the common luck of love, A moment's fortunate delay, To fit the little lilac glove, Gave me her arm; and I and they (They true to this and every hour, As if attended on by Time), Enter'd the Church while yet the tower Was noisy with the finish'd chime.

6

Her soft voice, singularly heard Beside me, in her chant, withstood The roar of voices, like a bird Sole warbling in a windy wood; And, when we knelt, she seem'd to be An angel teaching me to pray; And all through the high Liturgy My spirit rejoiced without allay, Being, for once, borne clearly above All banks and bars of ignorance, By this bright spring-tide of pure love, And floated in a free expanse, Whence it could see from side to side, The obscurity from every part Winnow'd away and purified By the vibrations of my heart.

CANTO XI. The Dance.

PRELUDES.

I. The Daughter of Eve.

The woman's gentle mood o'erstept Withers my love, that lightly scans The rest, and does in her accept All her own faults, but none of man's. As man I cannot judge her ill, Or honour her fair station less, Who, with a woman's errors, still Preserves a woman's gentleness; For thus I think, if one I see Who disappoints my high desire, 'How admirable would she be, Could she but know how I admire!' Or fail she, though from blemish clear, To charm, I call it my defect; And so my thought, with reverent fear To err by doltish disrespect, Imputes love's great regard, and says, 'Though unapparent 'tis to me, Be sure this Queen some other sways With well-perceiv'd supremacy.' Behold the worst! Light from above On the blank ruin

writes ‘Forbear! Her first crime was unguarded love, And all the rest, perhaps, despair.’ Discrown’d, dejected, but not lost, O, sad one, with no more a name Or place in all the honour’d host Of maiden and of matron fame, Grieve on; but, if thou grievest right, ’Tis not that these abhor thy state, Nor would’st thou lower the least the height Which makes thy casting down so great. Good is thy lot in its degree; For hearts that verily repent Are burden’d with impunity And comforted by chastisement. Sweet patience sanctify thy woes! And doubt not but our God is just, Albeit unscathed thy traitor goes, And thou art stricken to the dust. That penalty’s the best to bear Which follows soonest on the sin; And guilt’s a game where losers fare Better than those who seem to win.

II. Aurea Dicta.

’Tis truth (although this truth’s a star Too deep-enskied for all to see), As poets of grammar, lovers are The fountains of morality.

Child, would you shun the vulgar doom, In love disgust, in death despair? Know, death must come and love must come, And so for each your soul prepare.

Who pleasure follows pleasure slays; God’s wrath upon himself he wreaks; But all delights rejoice his days Who takes with thanks, and never seeks.

The wrong is made and measured by The right’s inverted dignity. Change love to shame, as love is high So low in hell your bed shall be.

How easy to keep free from sin! How hard that freedom to recall! For dreadful truth it is that men Forget the heavens from which they fall.

Lest sacred love your soul ensnare, With pious fancy still infer ‘How loving and how lovely fair Must He be who has fashion’d her!’

Become whatever good you see, Nor sigh if, forthwith, fades from view The grace of which you may not be The subject and spectator too.

Love’s perfect blossom only blows Where noble manners veil defect Angels maybe

familiar; those Who err each other must respect.

Love blabb’d of is a great decline; A careless word unsanctions sense; But he who casts Heaven’s truth to swine Consummates all incontinence.

Not to unveil before the gaze Of an imperfect sympathy In aught we are, is the sweet praise And the main sum of modesty.

THE DANCE.

1

‘My memory of Heaven awakes! She’s not of the earth, although her light, As lantern’d by her body, makes A piece of it past bearing bright. So innocently proud and fair She is, that Wisdom sings for glee And Folly dies, breathing one air With such a bright-cheek’d chastity; And though her charms are a strong law Compelling all men to admire, They go so clad with lovely awe None but the noble dares desire. He who would seek to make her his Will comprehend that souls of grace Own sweet repulsion, and that ’tis The quality of their embrace To be like the majestic reach Of coupled suns, that, from afar, Mingle their mutual spheres, while each Circles the twin obsequious star; And, in the warmth of hand to hand, Of heart to heart, he’ll vow to note And reverently understand How the two spirits shine remote; And ne’er to numb fine honour’s nerve, Nor let sweet awe in passion melt, Nor fail by courtesies to observe The space which makes attraction felt; Nor cease to guard like life the sense Which tells him that the embrace of love Is o’er a gulf of difference Love cannot sound, nor death remove.’

2

This learn’d I, watching where she danced, Native to melody and light, And now and then toward me glanced, Pleased, as I hoped, to please my sight.

3

Ah, love to speak was impotent, Till music did a tongue confer, And I ne’er knew

what music meant, Until I danced to it with her. Too proud of the sustaining power Of my, till then, unblemish'd joy. My passion, for reproof, that hour Tasted mortality's alloy, And bore me down an eddying gulf; I wish'd the world might run to wreck, So I but once might fling myself Obliviously about her neck. I press'd her hand, by will or chance I know not, but I saw the rays Withdrawn, which did till then enhance Her fairness with its thanks for praise. I knew my spirit's vague offence Was patent to the dreaming eye And heavenly tact of innocence, And did for fear my fear defy, And ask'd her for the next dance. 'Yes.' 'No,' had not fall'n with half the force. She was fulfill'd with gentleness, And I with measureless remorse; And, ere I slept, on bended knee I own'd myself, with many a tear, Unseasonable, disorderly, And a deranger of love's sphere; Gave thanks that, when we stumble and fall, We hurt ourselves, and not the truth; And, rising, found its brightness all The brighter through the tears of ruth.

4

Nor was my hope that night made less, Though order'd, humbled, and reproved; Her farewell did her heart express As much, but not with anger, moved. My trouble had my soul betray'd; And, in the night of my despair, My love, a flower of noon afraid, Divulged its fulness unaware. I saw she saw; and, O sweet Heaven, Could my glad mind have credited That influence had to me been given To affect her so, I should have said That, though she from herself conceal'd Love's felt delight and fancied harm, They made her face the jousting field Of joy and beautiful alarm.

CANTO XII. The Abdication.

PRELUDES.

I. The Chace.

She wearies with an ill unknown; In sleep she sobs and seems to float, A water-lily, all alone Within a lonely castle-moat; And as the full-moon, spectral, lies Within the

crescent's gleaming arms, The present shows her heedless eyes A future dim with vague alarms. She sees, and yet she scarcely sees, For, life-in-life not yet begun, Too many are its mysteries For thought to fix on any one. She's told that maidens are by youths Extremely honour'd and desired; And sighs, 'If those sweet tales be truths, What bliss to be so much admired!' The suitors come; she sees them grieve; Her coldness fills them with despair; She'd pity if she could believe; She's sorry that she cannot care. But who now meets her on her way? Comes he as enemy or friend, Or both? Her bosom seems to say, He cannot pass, and there an end. Whom does he love? Does he confer His heart on worth that answers his? Or is he come to worship her? She fears, she hopes, she thinks he is! Advancing stepless, quick, and still, As in the grass a serpent glides, He fascinates her fluttering will, Then terrifies with dreadful strides. At first, there's nothing to resist; He fights with all the forms of peace; He comes about her like a mist, With subtle, swift, unseen increase; And then, unlook'd for, strikes amain Some stroke that frightens her to death, And grows all harmlessness again, Ere she can cry, or get her breath. At times she stops, and stands at bay; But he, in all more strong than she, Subdues her with his pale dismay, Or more admired audacity. She plans some final, fatal blow, But when she means with frowns to kill, He looks as if he loved her so, She smiles to him against her will. How sweetly he implies her praise! His tender talk, his gentle tone, The manly worship in his gaze, They nearly make her heart his own. With what an air he speaks her name; His manner always recollects Her sex, and still the woman's claim Is taught its scope by his respects. Her charms, perceived to prosper first In his beloved advertencies, When in her glass they are rehearsed, Prove his most powerful allies. Ah, whither shall a maiden flee, When a bold youth so swift pursues, And siege of tenderest courtesy, With hope perseverant, still renews! Why fly so fast? Her flatter'd breast Thanks him who finds her fair and good; She loves her fears; veil'd joys arrest The foolish terrors of her blood; By secret, sweet degrees, her heart, Vanquish'd, takes warmth from his desire; She makes it more, with hidden art, And

fuels love’s late dreaded fire. The generous credit he accords To all the signs of good in her Redeems itself; his praiseful words The virtues they impute confer. Her heart is thrice as rich in bliss, She’s three times gentler than before; He gains a right to call her his, Now she through him is so much more; ’Tis heaven where’er she turns her head; ’Tis music when she talks; ’tis air On which, elate, she seems to tread, The convert of a gladder sphere! Ah, might he, when by doubts aggrieved, Behold his tokens next her breast, At all his words and sighs perceived Against its blythe upheaval press’d! But still she flies. Should she be won, It must not be believed or thought She yields; she’s chased to death, undone, Surprised, and violently caught.

II. Denied.

The storm-cloud, whose portentous shade Fumes from a core of smother’d fire, His livery is whose worshipp’d maid Denies herself to his desire. Ah, grief that almost crushes life, To lie upon his lonely bed, And fancy her another’s wife! His brain is flame, his heart is lead. Sinking at last, by nature’s course, Cloak’d round with sleep from his despair, He does but sleep to gather force That goes to his exhausted care. He wakes renew’d for all the smart. His only Love, and she is wed! His fondness comes about his heart, As milk comes, when the babe is dead. The wretch, whom she found fit for scorn, His own allegiant thoughts despise; And far into the shining morn Lazy with misery he lies.

III. The Churl.

This marks the Churl: when spousals crown His selfish hope, he finds the grace, Which sweet love has for ev’n the clown, Was not in the woman, but the chace.

THE ABDICATION.

1

From little signs, like little stars, Whose faint impression on the sense The very looking straight at mars, Or only seen by confluence; From instinct of a mutual

thought, Whence sanctity of manners flow’d; From chance unconscious, and from what Concealment, overconscious, show’d; Her hand’s less weight upon my arm, Her lowlier mien; that match’d with this; I found, and felt with strange alarm I stood committed to my bliss.

2

I grew assured, before I ask’d, That she’d be mine without reserve, And in her unclaim’d graces bask’d, At leisure, till the time should serve, With just enough of dread to thrill The hope, and make it trebly dear; Thus loth to speak the word to kill Either the hope or happy fear.

3

Till once, through lanes returning late, Her laughing sisters lagg’d behind; And, ere we reach’d her father’s gate, We paused with one presentient mind; And, in the dim and perfumed mist, Their coming stay’d, who, friends to me, And very women, loved to assist Love’s timid opportunity.

4

Twice rose, twice died my trembling word; The faint and frail Cathedral chimes Spake time in music, and we heard The chafers rustling in the limes. Her dress, that touch’d me where I stood, The warmth of her confided arm, Her bosom’s gentle neighbourhood, Her pleasure in her power to charm; Her look, her love, her form, her touch, The least seem’d most by blissful turn, Blissful but that it pleased too much, And taught the wayward soul to yearn. It was as if a harp with wires Was traversed by the breath I drew; And, oh, sweet meeting of desires, She, answering, own’d that she loved too.

Honoria was to be my bride! The hopeless heights of hope were scaled The summit won, I paused and sigh’d, As if success itself had fail’d. It seem’d as if my lips approach’d To touch at Tantalus’ reward, And rashly on Eden life encroach’d, Half-blinded by the flaming sword. The whole world’s wealthiest and its best, So

fiercely sought, appear'd when found, Poor in its need to be possess'd, Poor from its very want of bound. My queen was crouching at my side, By love unsceptred and brought low, Her awful garb of maiden pride All melted into tears like snow; The mistress of my reverent thought, Whose praise was all I ask'd of fame, In my close-watch'd approval sought Protection as from danger and blame; Her soul, which late I loved to invest With pity for my poor desert, Buried its face within my breast, Like a pet fawn by hunters hurt.

Book II.

THE PROLOGUE.

1

Her sons pursue the butterflies, Her baby daughter mocks the doves With throbbing coo; in his fond eyes She's Venus with her little Loves; Her footfall dignifies the earth, Her form's the native-land of grace, And, lo, his coming lights with mirth Its court and capital her face! Full proud her favour makes her lord, And that her flatter'd bosom knows. She takes his arm without a word, In lanes of laurel and of rose. Ten years to-day has she been his. He but begins to understand, He says, the dignity and bliss She gave him when she gave her hand. She, answering, says, he disenchants The past, though that was perfect; he Rejoins, the present nothing wants But briefness to be ecstasy. He lands her charms; her beauty's glow Wins from the spoiler Time new rays; Bright looks reply, approving so Beauty's elixir vitæ, praise. Upon a beech he bids her mark Where, ten years since, he carved her name; It grows there with the growing bark, And in his heart it grows the same. For that her soft arm presses his Close to her fond, maternal breast; He tells her, each new kindness is The effectual sum of all the rest! And, whilst the cushat, mocking, coo'd, They blest the days they had been wed, At cost of those in which he woo'd, Till everything was three times said; And words were growing vain, when Briggs, Factotum, Footman,

Butler, Groom, Who press'd the cyder, fed the pigs, Preserv'd the rabbits, drove the brougham, And help'd, at need, to mow the lawns, And sweep the paths and thatch the hay, Here brought the Post down, Mrs. Vaughan's Sole rival, but, for once, to-day, Scarce look'd at; for the 'Second Book,' Till this tenth festival kept close, Was thus commenced, while o'er them shook The laurel married with the rose.

2

'The pulse of War, whose bloody heats Sane purposes insanely work, Now with fraternal frenzy beats, And binds the Christian to the Turk, And shrieking fifes'—

3

But, with a roar, In rush'd the Loves; the tallest roll'd A hedgehog from his pinafore, Which saved his fingers; Baby, bold, Touch'd it, and stared, and scream'd for life, And stretch'd her hand for Vaughan to kiss, Who hugg'd his Pet, and ask'd his wife, 'Is this for love, or love for this?' But she turn'd pale, for, lo, the beast, Found stock-still in the rabbit-trap, And feigning so to be deceased, And laid by Frank upon her lap, Unglobed himself, and show'd his snout, And fell, scatt'ring the Loves amain, With shriek, with laughter, and with shout; And, peace at last restored again, The bard, who this untimely hitch Bore with a calm magnanimous, (The hedgehog rolled into a ditch, And Venus sooth'd), proceeded thus:

CANTO I. Accepted.

PRELUDES.

I. The Song of Songs.

The pulse of War, whose bloody heats Sane purposes insanely work, Now with fraternal frenzy beats, And binds the Christian to the Turk, And shrieking fifes and braggart flags, Through quiet England, teach our breath The courage corporate that drags The coward to heroic death. Too late for song! Who henceforth sings, Must fledge his heavenly flight with more Song-worthy and heroic things Than hasty,

home-destroying war. While might and right are not agreed, And battle thus is yet to wage, So long let laurels be the meed Of soldier as of poet sage; But men expect the Tale of Love, And weary of the Tale of Hate; Lift me, O Muse, myself above, And let the world no longer wait!

II. The Kites.

I saw three Cupids (so I dream'd), Who made three kites, on which were drawn, In letters that like roses gleam'd, 'Plato,' 'Anacreon,' and 'Vaughan.' The boy who held by Plato tried His airy venture first; all sail, It heav'nward rush'd till scarce descried, Then pitch'd and dropp'd for want of tail. Anacreon's Love, with shouts of mirth That pride of spirit thus should fall, To his kite link'd a lump of earth, And, lo, it would not soar at all. Last, my disciple freighted his With a long streamer made of flowers, The children of the sod, and this Rose in the sun, and flew for hours.

III. Orpheus.

The music of the Sirens found Ulysses weak, though cords were strong; But happier Orpheus stood unbound, And shamed it with a sweeter song. His mode be mine. Of Heav'n I ask, May I, with heart-persuading might, Pursue the Poet's sacred task Of superseding faith by sight, Till ev'n the witless Gadarene, Preferring Christ to swine, shall know That life is sweetest when it's clean. To prouder folly let me show Earth by divine light made divine; And let the saints, who hear my word, Say, 'Lo, the clouds begin to shine About the coming of the Lord!'

IV. Nearest the Dearest.

Till Eve was brought to Adam, he A solitary desert trod, Though in the great society Of nature, angels, and of God. If one slight column counterweighs The ocean, 'tis the Maker's law, Who deems obedience better praise Than sacrifice of erring awe.

V. Perspective.

What seems to us for us is true. The planet has no proper light, And yet, when Venus is in view, No primal star is half so bright.

ACCEPTED.

1

What fortune did my heart foretell? What shook my spirit, as I woke, Like the vibration of a bell Of which I had not heard the stroke? Was it some happy vision shut From memory by the sun's fresh ray? Was it that linnet's song; or but A natural gratitude for day? Or the mere joy the senses weave, A wayward ecstasy of life? Then I remember'd, yester-eve I won Honoria for my Wife.

2

Forth riding, while as yet the day Was dewy, watching Sarum Spire, Still beckoning me along my way, And growing every minute higher, I reach'd the Dean's. One blind was down, Though nine then struck. My bride to be! And had she rested ill, my own, With thinking (oh, my heart!) of me? I paced the streets; a pistol chose, To guard my now important life When riding late from Sarum Close; At noon return'd. Good Mrs. Fife, To my, 'The Dean, is he at home?' Said, 'No, sir; but Miss Honor is;' And straight, not asking if I'd come, Announced me, 'Mr. Felix, Miss,' To Mildred, in the Study. There We talk'd, she working. We agreed The day was fine; the Fancy-Fair Successful; 'Did I ever read De Genlis?' 'Never.' 'Do! She heard I was engaged.' 'To whom?' 'Miss Fry Was it the fact?' 'No!' 'On my word?' 'What scandal people talk'd!' 'Would I Hold out this skein of silk.' So pass'd I knew not how much time away. 'How were her sisters?' 'Well.' At last I summon'd heart enough to say, 'I hoped to have seen Miss Churchill too.' 'Miss Churchill, Felix! What is this? I said, and now I find 'tis true, Last night you quarrell'd! Here she is.'

3

She came, and seem'd a morning rose When ruffling rain has paled its blush; Her crown once more was on her brows; And, with a faint, indignant flush, And fainter smile, she gave her hand, But not her eyes, then sate apart, As if to make me understand The honour of her vanquish'd heart. But I drew humbly to her side; And

she, well pleased, perceiving me Liege ever to the noble pride Of her unconquer'd majesty, Once and for all put it away; The faint flush pass'd; and, thereupon, Her loveliness, which rather lay In light than colour, smiled and shone, Till sick was all my soul with bliss; Or was it with remorse and ire Of such a sanctity as this Subdued by love to my desire?

CANTO II. The Course of True Love.

PRELUDES.

I. The Changed Allegiance.

Watch how a bird, that captived sings, The cage set open, first looks out, Yet fears the freedom of his wings, And now withdraws, and flits about, And now looks forth again; until, Grown bold, he hops on stool and chair, And now attains the window-sill, And now confides himself to air. The maiden so, from love's free sky In chaste and prudent counsels caged, But longing to be loosen'd by Her suitor's faith declared and gaged, When blest with that release desired, First doubts if truly she is free, Then pauses, restlessly retired, Alarm'd at too much liberty; But soon, remembering all her debt To plighted passion, gets by rote Her duty; says, 'I love him!' yet The thought half chokes her in her throat; And, like that fatal 'I am thine,' Comes with alternate gush and check And joltings of the heart, as wine Pour'd from a flask of narrow neck. Is he indeed her choice? She fears Her Yes was rashly said, and shame, Remorse and ineffectual tears Revolt from has conceded claim. Oh, treason! So, with desperate nerve, She cries, 'I am in love, am his;' Lets run the cables of reserve, And floats into a sea of bliss, And laughs to think of her alarm, Avows she was in love before, Though has avowal was the charm Which open'd to her own the door. She loves him for his mastering air, Whence, Parthian-like, she slaying flies; His flattering look, which seems to wear Her loveliness in manly eyes; His smile, which, by reverse, portends An awful wrath, should reason stir; (How fortunate it is they're friends, And he will ne'er be wroth with her!) His power to do

or guard from harm; If he but chose to use it half, And catch her up in one strong arm, What could she do but weep, or laugh! His words, which still instruct, but so That this applause seems still implied, ‘How wise in all she ought to know, How ignorant of all beside!’ His skilful suit, which leaves her free, Gives nothing for the world to name, And keeps her conscience safe, while he, With half the bliss, takes all the blame; His clear repute with great and small; The jealousy his choice will stir; But ten times more than ten times all, She loves him for his love of her. How happy ’tis he seems to see In her that utter loveliness Which she, for his sake, longs to be! At times, she cannot but confess Her other friends are somewhat blind; Her parents’ years excuse neglect, But all the rest are scarcely kind, And brothers grossly want respect; And oft she views what he admires Within her glass, and sight of this Makes all the sum of her desires To be devotion unto his. But still, at first, whatever’s done, A touch, her hand press’d lightly, she Stands dizzied, shock’d, and flush’d, like one Set sudden neck-deep in the sea; And, though her bond for endless time To his good pleasure gives her o’er, The slightest favour seems a crime, Because it makes her love him more. But that she ne’er will let him know; For what were love should reverence cease? A thought which makes her reason so Inscrutable, it seems caprice. With her, as with a desperate town, Too weak to stand, too proud to treat, The conqueror, though the walls are down, Has still to capture street by street; But, after that, habitual faith, Divorced from self, where late ’twas due, Walks nobly in its novel path, And she’s to changed allegiance true; And prizing what she can’t prevent, (Right wisdom, often misdeem’d whim), Her will’s indomitably bent On mere submissiveness to him; To him she’ll cleave, for him forsake Father’s and mother’s fond command! He is her lord, for he can take Hold of her faint heart with his hand.

II. Beauty.

‘Beauty deludes.’ O shaft well shot, To strike the mark’s true opposite! That ugly good is scorn’d proves not ’Tis beauty lies, but lack of it. By Heaven’s law the Jew

might take A slave to wife, if she was fair; So strong a plea does beauty make That, where ’tis seen, discretion’s there. If, by a monstrous chance, we learn That this illustrious vaunt’s a lie, Our minds, by which the eyes discern, See hideous contrariety. And laugh at Nature’s wanton mood, Which, thus a swinish thing to flout, Though haply in its gross way good, Hangs such a jewel in its snout.

III. Lais and Lucretia.

Did first his beauty wake her sighs? That’s Lais! Thus Lucretia’s known: The beauty in her Lover’s eyes Was admiration of her own.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

1

Oh, beating heart of sweet alarm, Which stays the lover’s step, when near His mistress and her awful charm Of grace and innocence sincere! I held the half-shut door, and heard The voice of my betrothed wife, Who sang my verses, every word By music taught its latent life; With interludes of well-touch’d notes, That flash’d, surprising and serene, As meteor after meteor floats The soft, autumnal stars between. There was a passion in her tone, A tremor when she touch’d the keys, Which told me she was there alone, And uttering all her soul at ease. I enter’d; for I did not choose To learn how in her heart I throve, By chance or stealth; beyond her use, Her greeting flatter’d me with love.

2

With true love’s treacherous confidence, And ire, at last to laughter won, She spoke this speech, and mark’d its sense, By action, as her Aunt had done.

3

‘“You, with your looks and catching air, To think of Vaughan! You fool! You know, You might, with ordinary care, Ev’n yet be Lady Clitheroe. You’re sure he’ll do great things some day! Nonsense, he won’t; he’s dress’d too well. Dines with the

Sterling Club, they say; Not commonly respectable! Half Puritan, half Cavalier! His curly hair I think's a wig; And, for his fortune, why my Dear, 'Tis not enough to keep a gig. Rich Aunts and Uncles never die; And what you bring won't do for dress: And so you'll live on By-and-by, Within oaten-cake and water-cress!"

4

'I cried, but did not let her see. At last she soften'd her dispraise, On learning you had bought for me A carriage and a pair of bays. But here she comes! You take her in To dinner. I impose this task Make her approve my love; and win What thanks from me you choose to ask!'

5

'My niece has told you every word I said of you! What may I mean? Of course she has; but you've not heard How I abused you to the Dean;— Yes, I'll take wine; he's mad, like her; And she will have you: there it ends! And, now I've done my duty, Sir, And you've shown common-sense, we're friends!'

6

'Go, child, and see him out yourself,' Aunt Maude said, after tea, 'and show The place, upon that upper shelf, Where Petrarch stands, lent long ago.'

7

'These rose-leaves to my heart be press'd, Honoria, while it aches for you!' (The rose in ruin, from her breast, Fell, as I took a fond adieu.) 'You must go now, Love!' 'See, the air Is thick with starlight!' 'Let me tie This scarf on. Oh, your Petrarch! There! I'm coming, Aunt!' 'Sweet, Sweet!' 'Good-bye!' 'Ah, Love, to me 'tis death to part, Yet you, my sever'd life, smile on!' These "Good-nights," Felix, break my heart; I'm only gay till you are gone!' With love's bright arrows from her eyes, And balm on her permissive lips, She pass'd, and night was a surprise, As when the sun at Quito dips. Her beauties were like sunlit snows, Flush'd but not warm'd with my desire. Oh, how I loved her! Fiercely glows In the pure air of frost the fire. Who for

a year is sure of fate! I thought, dishearten'd as I went, Wroth with the Dean, who bade me wait, And vex'd with her, who seem'd content. Nay, could eternal life afford That tyranny should thus deduct From this fair land, which call'd me lord, A year of the sweet usufruct? It might not and it should not be! I'd go back now, and he must own, At once, my love's compulsive plea. I turn'd, I found the Dean alone. 'Nonsense, my friend; go back to bed! It's half-past twelve!' 'July, then, Sir!' 'Well, come to-morrow,' at last he said, 'And you may talk of it with her.' A light gleam'd as I pass'd the stair. A pausing foot, a flash of dress, And a sweet voice. 'Is Felix there?' 'July, Love!' 'Says Papa so?' 'Yes!'

CANTO III. The Country Ball.

PRELUDES.

I. Love Ceremonious.

Keep your undrest, familiar style For strangers, but respect your friend, Her most, whose matrimonial smile Is and asks honour without end. 'Tis found, and needs it must so be, That life from love's allegiance flags, When love forgets his majesty In sloth's unceremonious rags. Let love make home a gracious Court; There let the world's rude, hasty ways Be fashion'd to a loftier port, And learn to bow and stand at gaze; And let the sweet respective sphere Of personal worship there obtain Circumference for moving clear, None treading on another's train. This makes that pleasures do not cloy, And dignifies our mortal strife With calmness and considerate joy, Befitting our immortal life.

II. The Rainbow.

A stately rainbow came and stood, When I was young, in High-Hurst Park; Its bright feet lit the hill and wood Beyond, and cloud and sward were dark; And I, who thought the splendour ours Because the place was, t'wards it flew, And there, amidst the glittering showers, Gazed vainly for the glorious view. With whatsoever's

lovely, know It is not ours; stand off to see, Or beauty’s apparition so Puts on invisibility.

III. A Paradox.

To tryst Love blindfold goes, for fear He should not see, and eyeless night He chooses still for breathing near Beauty, that lives but in the sight.

THE COUNTY BALL.

1

Well, Heaven be thank’d my first-love fail’d, As, Heaven be thank’d, our first-loves do! Thought I, when Fanny past me sail’d, Loved once, for what I never knew, Unless for colouring in her talk, When cheeks and merry mouth would show Three roses on a single stalk, The middle wanting room to blow, And forward ways, that charm’d the boy Whose love-sick mind, misreading fate, Scarce hoped that any Queen of Joy Could ever stoop to be his mate.

2

But there danced she, who from the leaven Of ill preserv’d my heart and wit All unawares, for she was heaven, Others at best but fit for it. One of those lovely things she was In whose least action there can be Nothing so transient but it has An air of immortality. I mark’d her step, with peace elate, Her brow more beautiful than morn, Her sometime look of girlish state Which sweetly waived its right to scorn; The giddy crowd, she grave the while, Although, as ’twere beyond her will, Around her mouth the baby smile That she was born with linger’d still. Her ball-dress seem’d a breathing mist, From the fair form exhaled and shed, Raised in the dance with arm and wrist All warmth and light, unbraceleted. Her motion, feeling ’twas beloved, The pensive soul of tune express’d, And, oh, what perfume, as she moved, Came from the flowers in her breast! How sweet a tongue the music had! ‘Beautiful Girl,’ it seem’d to say, ‘Though all the world were vile and sad, Dance on; let innocence be gay.’ Ah, none but I discern’d her looks, When in the throng she

pass'd me by, For love is like a ghost, and brooks Only the chosen seer's eye; And who but she could e'er divine The halo and the happy trance, When her bright arm reposed on mine, In all the pauses of the dance!

3

Whilst so her beauty fed my sight, And whilst I lived in what she said, Accordant airs, like all delight Most sweet when noted least, were play'd; And was it like the Pharisee If I in secret bow'd my face With joyful thanks that I should be, Not as were many, but with grace And fortune of well-nurtured youth, And days no sordid pains defile, And thoughts accustom'd to the truth, Made capable of her fair smile?

4

Charles Barton follow'd down the stair, To talk with me about the Ball, And carp at all the people there. The Churchills chiefly stirr'd his gall: 'Such were the Kriemhilds and Isondes You storm'd about at Trinity! Nothing at heart but handsome Blondes! 'Folk say that you and Fanny Fry—' 'They err! Good-night! Here lies my course, Through Wilton.' Silence blest my ears, And, weak at heart with vague remorse, A passing poignancy of tears Attack'd mine eyes. By pale and park I rode, and ever seem'd to see, In the transparent starry dark, That splendid brow of chastity, That soft and yet subduing light, At which, as at the sudden moon, I held my breath, and thought 'how bright!' That guileless beauty in its noon, Compelling tribute of desires Ardent as day when Sirius reigns, Pure as the permeating fires That smoulder in the opal's veins.

CANTO IV. Love in Idleness.

PRELUDES.

I. Honour and Desert.

O queen, awake to thy renown, Require what 'tis our wealth to give, And comprehend and wear the crown Of thy despised prerogative! I, who in manhood's

name at length With glad songs come to abdicate The gross regality of strength, Must yet in this thy praise abate, That, through thine erring humbleness And disregard of thy degree, Mainly, has man been so much less Than fits his fellowship with thee. High thoughts had shaped the foolish brow, The coward had grasp'd the hero's sword, The vilest had been great, hadst thou, Just to thyself, been worth's reward. But lofty honours undersold Seller and buyer both disgrace; And favours that make folly bold Banish the light from virtue's face.

II. Love and Honour.

What man with baseness so content, Or sick with false conceit of right, As not to know that the element And inmost warmth of love's delight Is honour? Who'd not rather kiss A duchess than a milkmaid, prank The two in equal grace, which is Precedent Nature's obvious rank? Much rather, then, a woman deck'd With saintly honours, chaste and good, Whose thoughts celestial things affect, Whose eyes express her heavenly mood! Those lesser vaunts are dimm'd or lost Which plume her name or paint her lip, Extinct in the deep-glowing boast Of her angelic fellowship.

III. Valour Misdirected.

I'll hunt for dangers North and South, To prove my love, which sloth maligns!' What seems to say her rosy mouth? 'I'm not convinced by proofs but signs.'

LOVE IN IDLENESS.

1

What should I do? In such a wife Fortune had lavish'd all her store, And nothing now seem'd left for life But to deserve her more and more. To this I vow'd my life's whole scope; And Love said, 'I forewarn you now, The Maiden will fulfill your hope Only as you fulfil your vow.'

2

A promised service, (task for days), Was done this morning while she slept, With that full heart which thinks no praise Of vows which are not more than kept; But loftier work did love impose. And studious hours. Alas, for these, While she from all my thoughts arose Like Venus from the restless seas!

3

I conn'd a scheme, within mind elate: My Uncle's land would fall to me, My skill was much in school debate, My friends were strong in Salisbury; A place in Parliament once gain'd, Thro' saps first labour'd out of sight, Far loftier peaks were then attain'd With easy leaps from height to height; And that o'erwhelming honour paid, Or recognised, at least, in life, Which this most sweet and noble Maid Should yield to him who call'd her Wife.

4

I fix'd this rule: in Sarum Close To make two visits every week, The first, to-day; and, save on those, I nought would do, think, read, or speak, Which did not help my settled will To earn the Statesman's proud applause. And now, forthwith, to mend my skill In ethics, politics, and laws, The Statesman's learning! Flush'd with power And pride of freshly-form'd resolve, I read Helvetius half-an-hour; But, halting in attempts to solve Why, more than all things else that be, A lady's grace hath force to move That sensitive appetency Of intellectual good, call'd love, Took Blackstone down, only to draw My swift-deriving thoughts ere long To love, which is the source of law, And, like a king, can do no wrong; Then open'd Hyde, where loyal hearts, With faith unpropp'd by precedent, Began to play rebellious parts. O, mighty stir that little meant! How dull the crude, plough'd fields of fact To me who trod the Elysian grove! How idle all heroic act By the least suffering of love! I could not read; so took my pen, And thus commenced, in form of notes, A Lecture for the Salisbury men, With due regard to Tory votes: 'A road's a road, though worn to ruts; They speed who travel straight therein; But he who tacks and tries short cuts

Gets fools' praise and a broken shin—' And here I stopp'd in sheer despair; But, what to-day was thus begun, I vow'd, up starting from my chair, To-morrow should indeed be done; So loosed my chafing thoughts from school, To play with fancy as they chose, And then, according to my rule, I dress'd, and came to Sarum Close.

5

Ah, that sweet laugh! Diviner sense Did Nature, forming her, inspire To omit the grosser elements, And make her all of air and fire!

6

To-morrow, Cowes' Regatta fell: The Dean would like his girls to go, If I went too. 'Most gladly.' Well, I did but break a foolish vow! Unless Love's toil has love for prize, (And then he's Hercules), above All other contrarieties Is labour contrary to love. No fault of Love's, but nature's laws! And Love, in idleness, lies quick; For as the worm whose powers make pause, And swoon, through alteration sick, The soul, its wingless state dissolved, Awaits its nuptial life complete, All indolently self-convolved, Cocoon'd in silken fancies sweet.

CANTO V. The Queen's Room.

PRELUDES.

I. Rejected.

'Perhaps she's dancing somewhere now!' The thoughts of light and music wake Sharp jealousies, that grow and grow Till silence and the darkness ache. He sees her step, so proud and gay, Which, ere he spake, foretold despair: Thus did she look, on such a day, And such the fashion of her hair; And thus she stood, when, kneeling low, He took the bramble from her dress, And thus she laugh'd and talk'd, whose 'No' Was sweeter than another's 'Yes.' He feeds on thoughts that most deject; He impudently feigns her charms, So reverenced in his own respect, Dreadfully clasp'd by other arms; And turns, and puts his brows, that ache, Against the pillow where

’tis cold. If, only now his heart would break! But, oh, how much a heart can hold.

II. Rachel.

You loved her, and would lie all night Thinking how beautiful she was, And what to do for her delight. Now both are bound with alien laws! Be patient; put your heart to school; Weep if you will, but not despair; The trust that nought goes wrong by rule Should ease this load the many bear. Love, if there’s heav’n, shall meet his dues, Though here unmatch’d, or match’d amiss; Meanwhile, the gentle cannot choose But learn to love the lips they kiss. Ne’er hurt the homely sister’s ears With Rachel’s beauties; secret be The lofty mind whose lonely tears Protest against mortality.

III. The Heart’s Prophecies.

Be not amazed at life; ’tis still The mode of God with his elect Their hopes exactly to fulfil, In times and ways they least expect.

THE QUEEN’S ROOM.

1

There’s nothing happier than the days In which young Love makes every thought Pure as a bride’s blush, when she says ‘I will’ unto she knows not what; And lovers, on the love-lit globe, For love’s sweet sake, walk yet aloof, And hear Time weave the marriage-robe, Attraction warp and reverence woof.

2

My Housekeeper, my Nurse of yore, Cried, as the latest carriage went, ‘Well, Mr, Felix, Sir, I’m sure The morning’s gone off excellent! I never saw the show to pass The ladies, in their fine fresh gowns, So sweetly dancing on the grass, To music with its ups and downs. We’d such work, Sir, to clean the plate; ’Twas just the busy times of old. The Queen’s Room, Sir, look’d quite like state. Miss Smythe, when she went up, made bold To peep into the Rose Boudoir, And cried, “How charming! all quite new;” And wonder’d who it could be for. All but Miss Honor look’d in too. But

she's too proud to peep and pry. None's like that sweet Miss Honor, Sir! Excuse my humbleness, but I Pray Heav'n you'll get a wife like her! The Poor love dear Miss Honor's ways Better than money. Mrs. Rouse, Who ought to know a lady, says No finer goes to Wilton House. Miss Bagshaw thought that dreary room Had kill'd old Mrs. Vaughan with fright; She would not sleep in such a tomb For all her host was worth a night! Miss Fry, Sir, laugh'd; they talk'd the rest In French; and French Sir's Greek to me; But, though they smiled, and seem'd to jest, No love was lost, for I could see How serious-like Miss Honor was—' 'Well, Nurse, this is not my affair. The ladies talk'd in French with cause. Good-day; and thank you for your prayer.'

3

I loiter'd through the vacant house, Soon to be her's; in one room stay'd, Of old my mother's. Here my vows Of endless thanks were oftenest paid. This room its first condition kept; For, on her road to Sarum Town, Therein an English Queen had slept, Before the Hurst was half pull'd down. The pictured walls the place became: Here ran the Brook Anaurus, where Stout Jason bore the wrinkled dame Whom serving changed to Juno; there, Ixion's selfish hope, instead Of the nuptial goddess, clasp'd a cloud; And, here, translated Psyche fed Her gaze on Love, not disallow'd.

4

And in this chamber had she been, And into that she would not look, My Joy, my Vanity, my Queen, At whose dear name my pulses shook! To others how express at all My worship in that joyful shrine? I scarcely can myself recall What peace and ardour then were mine; And how more sweet than aught below, The daylight and its duties done, It felt to fold the hands, and so Relinquish all regards but one; To see her features in the dark, To lie and meditate once more The grace I did not fully mark, The tone I had not heard before; And from my pillow then to take Her notes, her picture, and her glove, Put there for joy when I should wake, And press them to the heart of love; And then to whisper 'Wife!' and pray To live so long as not to

miss That unimaginable day Which farther seems the nearer ’tis; And still from joy’s unfathom’d well To drink, in dreams, while on her brows Of innocence ineffable Blossom’d the laughing bridal rose.

CANTO VI. The Love-Letters.

PRELUDES.

I. Love’s Perversity.

How strange a thing a lover seems To animals that do not love! Lo, where he walks and talks in dreams, And flouts us with his Lady’s glove; How foreign is the garb he wears; And how his great devotion mocks Our poor propriety, and scares The undevout with paradox! His soul, through scorn of worldly care, And great extremes of sweet and gall, And musing much on all that’s fair, Grows witty and fantastical; He sobs his joy and sings his grief, And evermore finds such delight In simply picturing his relief, That ’plaining seems to cure his plight; He makes his sorrow, when there’s none; His fancy blows both cold and hot; Next to the wish that she’ll be won, His first hope is that she may not; He sues, yet deprecates consent; Would she be captured she must fly; She looks too happy and content, For whose least pleasure he would die; Oh, cruelty, she cannot care For one to whom she’s always kind! He says he’s nought, but, oh, despair, If he’s not Jove to her fond mind! He’s jealous if she pets a dove, She must be his with all her soul; Yet ’tis a postulate in love That part is greater than the whole; And all his apprehension’s stress, When he’s with her, regards her hair, Her hand, a ribbon of her dress, As if his life were only there; Because she’s constant, he will change, And kindest glances coldly meet, And, all the time he seems so strange, His soul is fawning at her feet; Of smiles and simple heaven grown tired, He wickedly provokes her tears, And when she weeps, as he desired, Falls slain with ecstasies of fears; He blames her, though she has no fault, Except the folly to be his; He worships her, the more to exalt The profanation of a kiss; Health’s his disease, he’s never well But when his paleness shames her

rose; His faith’s a rock-built citadel, Its sign a flag that each way blows; His o’erfed fancy frets and fumes; And Love, in him, is fierce, like Hate, And ruffles his ambrosial plumes Against the bars of time and fate.

II. The Power of Love.

Samson the Mighty, Solomon The Wise, and Holy David all Must doff their crowns to Love, for none But fell as Love would scorn to fall! And what may fallen spirits win, When stripes and precepts cannot move? Only the sadness of all sin, When look’d at in the light of Love.

THE LOVE-LETTERS.

1

‘You ask, Will admiration halt, Should spots appear within my Sun? Oh, how I wish I knew your fault, For Love’s tired gaze to rest upon! Your graces, which have made me great, Will I so loftily admire, Yourself yourself shall emulate, And be yourself your own desire. I’ll nobly mirror you too fair, And, when you’re false to me your glass, What’s wanting you’ll by that repair, So bring yourself through me to pass. O dearest, tell me how to prove Goodwill which cannot be express’d; The beneficial heart of love Is labour in an idle breast. Name in the world your chosen part, And here I vow, with all the bent And application of my heart To give myself to your content. Would you live on, home-worshipp’d, thus, Not proudly high nor poorly low? Indeed the lines are fall’n to us In pleasant places! Be it so. But would you others heav’nward move, By sight not faith, while you they admire? I’ll help with zeal as I approve That just and merciful desire. High as the lonely moon to view I’ll lift your light; do you decree Your place, I’ll win it; for from you Command inspires capacity. Or, unseen, would you sway the world More surely? Then in gracious rhyme I’ll raise your emblem, fair unfurl’d With blessing in the breeze of time. Faith removes mountains, much more love; Let your contempt abolish me If ought of your devisal prove Too hard or high to do or be.’

2

I ended. ‘From your Sweet-Heart, Sir,’ Said Nurse, ‘The Dean’s man brings it down.’ I could have kiss’d both him and her! ‘Nurse, give him that, with half-a-crown.’ How beat my heart, how paused my breath, When, with perversely fond delay, I broke the seal, that bore a wreath Of roses link’d with one of bay.

3

‘I found your note. How very kind To leave it there! I cannot tell How pleased I was, or how you find Words to express your thoughts so well. The Girls are going to the Ball At Wilton. If you can, do come; And any day this week you call Papa and I shall be at home. You said to Mary once—I hope In jest—that women should be vain: On Saturday your friend (her Pope), The Bishop dined with us again. She put the question, if they ought? He turn’d it cleverly away (For giddy Mildred cried, she thought We must), with “What we must we may.” ‘Dear papa laugh’d, and said ’twas sad To think how vain his girls would be, Above all Mary, now she had Episcopal authority. But I was very dull, dear friend, And went upstairs at last, and cried. Be sure to come to-day, or send A rose-leaf kiss’d on either side. Adieu! I am not well. Last night My dreams were wild: I often woke, The summer-lightning was so bright; And when it flash’d I thought you spoke.’

CANTO VII. The Revulsion.

PRELUDES.

I. Joy and Use.

Can ought compared with wedlock be For use? But He who made the heart To use proportions joy. What He Has join’d let no man put apart. Sweet Order has its draught of bliss Graced with the pearl of God’s consent, Ten times delightful in that ’tis Considerate and innocent. In vain Disorder grasps the cup; The pleasure’s not enjoy’d but spilt, And, if he stoops to lick it up, It only tastes of earth and guilt. His

sorry raptures rest destroys; To live, like comets, they must roam; On settled poles turn solid joys, And sunlike pleasures shine at home.

II. ‘She was Mine.’

‘Thy tears o’erprize thy loss! Thy wife, In what was she particular? Others of comely face and life, Others as chaste and warm there are, And when they speak they seem to sing; Beyond her sex she was not wise; And there is no more common thing Than kindness in a woman’s eyes. Then wherefore weep so long and fast, Why so exceedingly repine! Say, how has thy Beloved surpass’d So much all others?’ ‘She was mine.’

THE REVULSION.

1

’Twas when the spousal time of May Hangs all the hedge with bridal wreaths, And air’s so sweet the bosom gay Give thanks for every breath it breathes, When like to like is gladly moved, And each thing joins in Spring’s refrain, ‘Let those love now who never loved; Let those who have loved love again;’ That I, in whom the sweet time wrought, Lay stretch’d within a lonely glade, Abandon’d to delicious thought Beneath the softly twinkling shade. The leaves, all stirring, mimick’d well A neighbouring rush of rivers cold, And, as the sun or shadow fell, So these were green and those were gold; In dim recesses hyacinths droop’d, And breadths of primrose lit the air, Which, wandering through the woodland, stoop’d And gather’d perfumes here and there; Upon the spray the squirrel swung, And careless songsters, six or seven. Sang lofty songs the leaves among, Fit for their only listener, Heaven. I sigh’d, ‘Immeasurable bliss Gains nothing by becoming more! Millions have meaning; after this Cyphers forget the integer.’

2

And so I mused, till musing brought A dream that shook my house of clay, And, in my humbled heart, I thought, To me there yet may come a day With this the single

vestige seen Of comfort, earthly or divine, My sorrow some time must have been Her portion, had it not been mine. Then I, who knew, from watching life, That blows foreseen are slow to fall, Rehearsed the losing of a wife, And faced its terrors each and all. The self-chastising fancy show'd The coffin with its ghastly breath; The innocent sweet face that owed None of its innocence to death; The lips that used to laugh; the knell That bade the world beware of mirth; The heartless and intolerable Indignity of 'earth to earth;' At morn remembering by degrees That she I dream'd about was dead; Love's still recurrent jubilees, The days that she was born, won, wed; The duties of my life the same, Their meaning for the feelings gone; Friendship impertinent, and fame Disgusting; and, more harrowing none, Small household troubles fall'n to me, As, 'What time would I dine to-day?' And, oh, how could I bear to see The noisy children at their play. Besides, where all things limp and halt, Could I go straight, should I alone Have kept my love without default, Pitch'd at the true and heavenly tone? The festal-day might come to mind That miss'd the gift which more endears; The hour which might have been more kind, And now less fertile in vain tears; The good of common intercourse, For daintier pleasures, then despised, Now with what passionate remorse, What poignancy of hunger prized! The little wrong, now greatly rued, Which no repentance now could right; And love, in disbelieving mood, Deserting his celestial height. Withal to know, God's love sent grief To make me less the world's, and more Meek-hearted: ah, the sick relief! Why bow'd I not my heart before?

3

'What,' I exclaimed, with chill alarm, 'If this fantastic horror shows The feature of an actual harm!' And, coming straight to Sarum Close, As one who dreams his wife is dead, And cannot in his slumber weep, And moans upon his wretched bed, And wakes, and finds her there asleep, And laughs and sighs, so I, not less Relieved, beheld, with blissful start, The light and happy loveliness Which lay so heavy on my heart.

CANTO VIII. The Koh-i-noor.

PRELUDES.

I. In Love.

If he’s capricious she’ll be so, But, if his duties constant are, She lets her loving favour glow As steady as a tropic star; Appears there nought for which to weep, She’ll weep for nought, for his dear sake; She clasps her sister in her sleep; Her love in dreams is most awake. Her soul, that once with pleasure shook, Did any eyes her beauty own, Now wonders how they dare to look On what belongs to him alone; The indignity of taking gifts Exhilarates her loving breast; A rapture of submission lifts Her life into celestial rest; There’s nothing left of what she was; Back to the babe the woman dies, And all the wisdom that she has Is to love him for being wise. She’s confident because she fears; And, though discreet when he’s away, If none but her dear despot hears, She prattles like a child at play. Perchance, when all her praise is said, He tells the news, a battle won, On either side ten thousand dead. ‘Alas!’ she says; but, if ’twere known, She thinks, ‘He’s looking on my face! I am his joy; whate’er I do, He sees such time-contenting grace In that, he’d have me always so!’ And, evermore, for either’s sake, To the sweet folly of the dove, She joins the cunning of the snake, To rivet and exalt his love; Her mode of candour is deceit; And what she thinks from what she’ll say (Although I’ll never call her cheat), Lies far as Scotland from Cathay. Without his knowledge he was won; Against his nature kept devout; She’ll never tell him how ’twas done, And he will never find it out. If, sudden, he suspects her wiles, And hears her forging chain and trap, And looks, she sits in simple smiles, Her two hands lying in her lap. Her secret (privilege of the Bard, Whose fancy is of either sex), Is mine; but let the darkness guard Myst’ries that light would more perplex!

II. Love Thinking.

What lifts her in my thought so far Beyond all else? Let Love not err! ’Tis that

which all right women are, But which I'll know in none but her. She is to me the only Ark Of that high mystery which locks The lips of joy, or speaks in dark Enigmas and in paradox; That potent charm, which none can fly, Nor would, which makes me bond and free, Nor can I tell if first 'twas I Chose it, or it elected me; Which, when I look intentest, lo, Cheats most mine eyes, albeit my heart, Content to feel and not to know, Perceives it all in every part; I kiss its cheek; its life divine Exhales from its resplendent shroud; Ixion's fate reversed is mine, Authentic Juno seems a cloud; I feel a blessed warmth, I see A bright circumference of rays, But darkness, where the sun should be, Fills admiration with amaze; And when, for joy's relief, I think To fathom with the line of thought The well from which I, blissful, drink, The spring's so deep I come to nought.

III. The Kiss.

'I saw you take his kiss!' ''Tis true.' 'O, modesty!' ''Twas strictly kept: He thought me asleep; at least, I knew He thought I thought he thought I slept.'

THE KOH-I-NOOR.

1

'Be man's hard virtues highly wrought, But let my gentle Mistress be, In every look, word, deed, and thought, Nothing but sweet and womanly! Her virtues please my virtuous mood, But what at all times I admire Is, not that she is wise or good, But just the thing which I desire. With versatility to sing The theme of love to any strain, If oft'nest she is anything, Be it careless, talkative, and vain. That seems in her supremest grace Which, virtue or not, apprises me That my familiar thoughts embrace Unfathomable mystery.'

2

I answer'd thus; for she desired To know what mind I most approved; Partly to learn what she inquired, Partly to get the praise she loved.

3

I praised her, but no praise could fill The depths of her desire to please, Though dull to others as a Will To them that have no legacies. The more I praised the more she shone, Her eyes incredulously bright, And all her happy beauty blown Beneath the beams of my delight. Sweet rivalry was thus begot; By turns, my speech, in passion's style, With flatteries the truth o'ershot, And she surpass'd them with her smile.

4

'You have my heart so sweetly seiz'd, And I confess, nay, 'tis my pride That I'm with you so solely pleased, That, if I'm pleased with aught beside, As music, or the month of June, My friend's devotion, or his wit, A rose, a rainbow, or the moon, It is that you illustrate it. All these are parts, you are the whole; You fit the taste for Paradise, To which your charms draw up the soul As turning spirals draw the eyes. Nature to you was more than kind; 'Twas fond perversity to dress So much simplicity of mind In such a pomp of loveliness! But, praising you, the fancy deft Flies wide, and lets the quarry stray, And, when all's said, there's something left, And that's the thing I meant to say.' 'Dear Felix!' 'Sweet, my Love!' But there Was Aunt Maude's noisy ring and knock! 'Stay, Felix; you have caught my hair. Stoop! Thank you!' 'May I have that lock?' 'Not now. Good morning, Aunt!' 'Why, Puss, You look magnificent to-day.' 'Here's Felix, Aunt.' 'Fox and green goose! Who handsome gets should handsome pay! Aunt, you are friends!' 'Ah, to be sure! Good morning! Go on flattering, sir; A woman, like the Koh-i-noor, Mounts to the price that's put on her.'

CANTO IX. The Friends.

PRELUDES.

I. The Nursling of Civility.

Lo, how the woman once was woo'd; Forth leapt the savage from his lair, And fell'd

her, and to nuptials rude He dragg'd her, bleeding, by the hair. From that to Chloe's dainty wiles And Portia's dignified consent, What distance! Bat these Pagan styles How far below Time's fair intent! Siegfried sued Kriemhild. Sweeter life Could Love's self covet? Yet 'tis snug In what rough sort he chid his wife For want of curb upon her tongue! Shall Love, where last I leave him, halt? Nay; none can fancy or forsee To how strange bliss may time exalt This nursling of civility.

II. The Foreign Land.

A woman is a foreign land, Of which, though there he settle young, A man will ne'er quite understand The customs, politics, and tongue. The foolish hie them post-haste through, See fashions odd, and prospects fair, Learn of the language, 'How d'ye do,' And go and brag they have been there. The most for leave to trade apply, For once, at Empire's seat, her heart, Then get what knowledge ear and eye Glean chancewise in the life-long mart. And certain others, few and fit, Attach them to the Court, and see The Country's best, its accent hit, And partly sound its polity.

III. Disappointment.

'The bliss which woman's charms bespeak, I've sought in many, found in none!' 'In many 'tis in vain you seek What only can be found in one.'

THE FRIENDS.

1

Frank's long, dull letter, lying by The gay sash from Honoria's waist, Reproach'd me; passion spared a sigh For friendship without fault disgraced. How should I greet him? how pretend I felt the love he once inspired? Time was when either, in his friend, His own deserts with joy admired; We took one side in school-debate, Like hopes pursued with equal thirst, Were even-bracketed by Fate, Twin-Wranglers, seventh from the First; And either loved a lady's laugh More than all music; he and I Were perfect in the pleasant half Of universal charity.

2

From pride of likeness thus I loved Him, and he me, till love begot The lowliness which now approved Nothing but that which I was not, Blest was the pride of feeling so Subjected to a girl's soft reign. She was my vanity, and, oh, All other vanities how vain!

3

Frank follow'd in his letter's track, And set my guilty heart at ease By echoing my excuses back With just the same apologies. So he had slighted me as well! Nor was my mind disburthen'd less When what I sought excuse to tell He of himself did first confess.

4

Each, rapturous, praised his lady's worth; He eloquently thus: 'Her face Is the summ'd sweetness of the earth, Her soul the glass of heaven's grace, To which she leads me by the hand; Or, briefly all the truth to say To you, who briefly understand, She is both heaven and the way. Displeasures and resentments pass Athwart her charitable eyes More fleetingly than breath from glass, Or truth from foolish memories; Her heart's so touch'd with others' woes She has no need of chastisement; Her gentle life's conditions close, Like God's commandments, with content, And make an aspect calm and gay, Where sweet affections come and go, Till all who see her, smile and say, How fair, and happy that she's so! She is so lovely, true, and pure, Her virtue virtue so endears, That often, when I think of her, Life's meanness fills mine eyes with tears—' 'You paint Miss Churchill! Pray go on—' 'She's perfect, and, if joy was much To think her nature's paragon, 'Tis more that there's another such!'

Praising and paying back their praise With rapturous hearts, t'ward Sarum Spire We walk'd, in evening's golden haze, Friendship from passion stealing fire. In joy's crown danced the feather jest, And, parting by the Deanery door, Clasp'd hands, less shy than words, confess'd We had not been true friends before.

CANTO X. The Epitaph.

PRELUDES.

I. Frost in Harvest.

The lover who, across a gulf Of ceremony, views his Love, And dares not yet address herself, Pays worship to her stolen glove. The gulf o'erleapt, the lover wed, It happens oft, (let truth be told), The halo leaves the sacred head, Respect grows lax, and worship cold, And all love's May-day promising, Like song of birds before they pair, Or flush of flowers in boastful Spring, Dies out, and leaves the Summer bare. Yet should a man, it seems to me, Honour what honourable is, For some more honourable plea Than only that it is not his. The gentle wife, who decks his board And makes his day to have no night, Whose wishes wait upon her lord, Who finds her own in his delight, Is she another now than she Who, mistress of her maiden charms, At his wild prayer, incredibly Committed them to his proud arms? Unless her choice of him's a slur Which makes her proper credit dim, He never enough can honour her Who past all speech has honour'd him.

II. Felicity.

To marry her and take her home! The poet, painting pureness, tells Of lilies; figures power by Rome; And each thing shows by something else. But through the songs of poets look, And who so lucky to have found In universal nature's book A likeness for a life so crown'd! Here they speak best who best express Their inability to speak, And none are strong, but who confess With happy skill that they are weak.

III. Marriage Indissoluble.

'In heaven none marry.' Grant the most Which may by this dark word be meant, Who shall forbid the eternal boast 'I kiss'd, and kiss'd with her consent!' If here, to Love, past favour is A present boast, delight, and chain, What lacks of honour, bond, and bliss, Where Now and Then are no more twain!

THE EPITAPH.

1

‘At Church, in twelve hours more, we meet! This, Dearest, is our last farewell.’ ‘Oh, Felix, do you love me?’ ‘Sweet, Why do you ask?’ ‘I cannot tell.’

2

And was it no vain fantasy That raised me from the earth with pride? Should I to-morrow verily Be Bridegroom, and Honoria Bride? Should I, in simple fact, henceforth Live unconditionally lord Of her whose smile for brightest worth Seem’d all too bountiful reward? Incredible life’s promise seem’d, Or, credible, for life too great; Love his own deity blasphemed, And doff’d at last his heavenly state. What law, if man could mount so high, To further insolence set bars, And kept the chaste moon in the sky, And bade him not tread out the stars!

3

Patience and hope had parted truce, And, sun-like, Love obscured his ray With dazzling mists, driven up profuse Before his own triumphant way. I thought with prayer how Jacob paid The patient price of Rachel; them, Of that calm grace Tobias said, And Sarah’s innocent ‘Amen.’ Without avail! O’erwhelming wealth, The wondrous gift of God so near, Which should have been delight and health Made heart and spirit sick and sere. Until at last the soul of love, That recks not of its own delight, Awoke and bade the mists remove, And then once more I breathed aright; And I rehears’d my marriage vow, And swore her welfare to prefer To all things, and for aye as now To live, not for myself, but her. Forth, from the glittering spirit’s peace And gaiety ineffable, Stream’d to the heart delight and ease, As from an overflowing well; And, orderly deriving thence Its pleasure perfect and allow’d, Bright with the spirit shone the sense, As with the sun a fleecy cloud. If now to part with her could make Her pleasure greater, sorrow less, I for my epitaph would take ‘To serve seem’d more than to possess.’ And I perceiv’d, (the vision sweet Dimming with happy dew mine eyes), That love and joy are torches lit From

altar-fires of sacrifice.

4

Across the sky the daylight crept, And birds grew garrulous in the grove, And on my marriage-morn I slept A soft sleep, undisturb'd by love.

CANTO XI. The Wedding.

PRELUDES.

I. Platonic Love.

Right art thou who wouldst rather be A doorkeeper in Love's fair house, Than lead the wretched revelry Where fools at swinish troughs carouse. But do not boast of being least; And if to kiss thy Mistress' skirt Amaze thy brain, scorn not the Priest Whom greater honours do not hurt. Stand off and gaze, if more than this Be more than thou canst understand, Revering him whose power of bliss, Angelic, dares to seize her hand, Or whose seraphic love makes flight To the apprehension of her lips; And think, the sun of such delight From thine own darkness takes eclipse. And, wouldst thou to the same aspire, This is the art thou must employ, Live greatly; so shalt thou acquire Unknown capacities of joy.

II. A Demonstration.

Nature, with endless being rife, Parts each thing into 'him' and 'her,' And, in the arithmetic of life, The smallest unit is a pair; And thus, oh, strange, sweet half of me, If I confess a loftier flame, If more I love high Heaven than thee, I more than love thee, thine I am; And, if the world's not built of lies, Nor all a cheat the Gospel tells, If that which from the dead shall rise Be I indeed, not something else, There's no position more secure In reason or in faith than this, That those conditions must endure, Which, wanting, I myself should miss.

III. The Symbol.

As if I chafed the sparks from glass, And said, 'It lightens,' hitherto The songs I've

made of love may pass For all but for proportion true; But likeness and proportion both Now fail, as if a child in glee, Catching the flakes of the salt froth, Cried, ‘Look, my mother, here’s the sea. Yet, by the help of what’s so weak, But not diverse, to those who know, And only unto those I speak, May far-inferring fancy show Love’s living sea by coasts uncurb’d, Its depth, its mystery, and its might, Its indignation if disturb’d, The glittering peace of its delight.

IV. Constancy Rewarded.

I vow’d unvarying faith, and she, To whom in full I pay that vow, Rewards me with variety Which men who change can never know.

THE WEDDING.

1

Life smitten with a feverish chill, The brain too tired to understand, In apathy of heart and will, I took the woman from the hand Of him who stood for God, and heard Of Christ, and of the Church his Bride; The Feast, by presence of the Lord And his first Wonder, beautified; The mystic sense to Christian men; The bonds in innocency made, And gravely to be enter’d then, For children, godliness, and, aid, And honour’d, and kept free from smirch; And how a man must love his wife No less than Christ did love his Church, If need be, giving her his life; And, vowing then the mutual vow, The tongue spoke, but intention slept. ’Tis well for us Heaven asks not how We take this oath, but how ’tis kept.

2

O, bold seal of a bashful bound, Which makes the marriage-day to be, To those before it and beyond, An iceberg in an Indian sea!

3

‘Now, while she’s changing,’ said the Dean, ‘Her bridal for her travelling dress, I’ll preach allegiance to your queen! Preaching’s the thing which I profess; And one

more minute's mine! You know I've paid my girl a father's debt, And this last charge is all I owe. She's yours; but I love more than yet You can; such fondness only wakes When time has raised the heart above The prejudice of youth, which makes Beauty conditional to love. Prepare to meet the weak alarms Of novel nearness; recollect The eye which magnified her charms Is microscopic for defect. Fear comes at first; but soon, rejoiced, You'll find your strong and tender loves, Like holy rocks by Druids poised, The least force shakes, but none removes. Her strength is your esteem; beware Of finding fault; her will's unnerv'd By blame; from you 'twould be despair; But praise that is not quite deserv'd Will all her noble nature move To make your utmost wishes tree. Yet think, while mending thus your Love, Of snatching her ideal too. The death of nuptial joy is sloth: To keep your mistress in your wife, Keep to the very height your oath, And honour her with arduous life. Lastly, no personal reverence doff. Life's all externals unto those Who pluck the blushing petals off, To find the secret of the rose.— How long she's tarrying! Green's Hotel I'm sure you'll like. The charge is fair, The wines good. I remember well I stay'd once, with her Mother, there. A tender conscience of her vow That Mother had! She's so like her!' But Mrs. Fife, much flurried, now Whisper'd, 'Miss Honor's ready, Sir.'

4

Whirl'd off at last, for speech I sought, To keep shy Love in countenance, But, whilst I vainly tax'd my thought, Her voice deliver'd mime from trance: 'Look, is not this a pretty shawl, Aunt's parting gift.' 'She's always kind.' 'The new wing spoils Sir John's old Hall: You'll see it, if you pull the blind.'

5

I drew the silk: in heaven the night Was dawning; lovely Venus shone, In languishment of tearful light, Swathed by the red breath of the sun.

CANTO XII. Husband and Wife.

PRELUDES.

I. The Married Lover.

Why, having won her, do I woo? Because her spirit's vestal grace Provokes me always to pursue, But, spirit-like, eludes embrace; Because her womanhood is such That, as on court-days subjects kiss The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch Affirms no mean familiarness, Nay, rather marks more fair the height Which can with safety so neglect To dread, as lower ladies might, That grace could meet with disrespect, Thus she with happy favour feeds Allegiance from a love so high That thence no false conceit proceeds Of difference bridged, or state put by; Because, although in act and word As lowly as a wife can be, Her manners, when they call me lord, Remind me 'tis by courtesy; Not with her least consent of will, Which would my proud affection hurt, But by the noble style that still Imputes an unattain'd desert; Because her gay and lofty brows, When all is won which hope can ask, Reflect a light of hopeless snows That bright in virgin ether bask; Because, though free of the outer court I am, this Temple keeps its shrine Sacred to Heaven; because, in short, She's not and never can be mine.

II. The Amaranth.

Feasts satiate; stars distress with height; Friendship means well, but misses reach, And wearies in its best delight, Vex'd with the vanities of speech; Too long regarded, roses even Afflict the mind with fond unrest; And to converse direct within Heaven Is oft a labour in the breast; Whate'er the up-looking soul admires, Whate'er the senses' banquet be, Fatigues at last with vain desires, Or sickens by satiety; But truly my delight was more In her to whom I'm bound for aye Yesterday than the day before And more to-day than yesterday.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

1

I, while the shop-girl fitted on The sand-shoes, look'd where, down the bay, The sea glow'd with a shrouded sun. 'I'm ready, Felix; will you pay?' That was my first expense for this Sweet Stranger, now my three days' Wife. How light the touches are that kiss The music from the chords of life!

2

Her feet, by half-a-mile of sea, In spotless sand left shapely prints; With agates, then, she loaded me; (The lapidary call'd them flints); Then, at her wish, I hail'd a boat, To take her to the ships-of-war, At anchor, each a lazy mote Black in the brilliance, miles from shore.

3

The morning breeze the canvas fill'd, Lifting us o'er the bright-ridged gulf, And every lurch my darling thrill'd With light fear smiling at itself; And, dashing past the Arrogant, Asleep upon the restless wave After its cruise in the Levant, We reach'd the Wolf, and signal gave For help to board; within caution meet, My bride was placed within the chair, The red flag wrapp'd about her feet, And so swung laughing through the air.

4

'Look, Love,' she said, 'there's Frederick Graham, My cousin, whom you met, you know,' And seeing us, the brave man came, And made his frank and courteous bow, And gave my hand a sailor's shake, And said, 'You ask'd me to the Hurst: I never thought my luck would make Your wife and you my guests the first.' And Honor, cruel, 'Nor did we: Have you not lately changed your ship?' 'Yes: I'm Commander, now,' said he, With a slight quiver of the lip. We saw the vessel, shown with pride; Took luncheon; I must eat his salt! Parting he said, (I fear my bride Found him unselfish to a fault), His wish, he saw, had come to pass, (And so, indeed, her face express'd), That that should be, whatever 'twas, Which made his Cousin happiest. We left him looking from above; Rich bankrupt! for he could afford To say most

proudly that his love Was virtue and its own reward. But others loved as well as he, (Thought I, half-anger'd), and if fate, Unfair, had only fashion'd me As hapless, I had been as great.

5

As souls, ambitious, but low-born, If raised past hope by luck or wit, All pride of place will proudly scorn, And live as they'd been used to it, So we two wore our strange estate: Familiar, unaffected, free, We talk'd, until the dusk grew late, Of this and that; but, after tea, As doubtful if a lot so sweet As ours was ours in very sooth, Like children, to promote conceit, We feign'd that it was not the truth; And she assumed the maiden coy, And I adored remorseless charms, And then we clapp'd our hands for joy, And ran into each others arms.

THE EPILOGUE.

I

'Ah, dearest Wife, a fresh-lit fire Sends forth to heaven great shows of fume, And watchers, far away, admire; But when the flames their power assume, The more they burn the less they show, The clouds no longer smirch the sky, And then the flames intensest glow When far-off watchers think they die. The fumes of early love my verse Has figured—' 'You must paint the flame!' 'Twould merit the Promethean curse! But now, Sweet, for your praise and blame.' 'You speak too boldly; veils are due To women's feelings.' 'Fear not this! Women will vow I say not true, And men believe thine lips they kiss.' I did not call you "Dear" or "Love," 'I think, till after Frank was born.' 'That fault I cannot well remove; The rhymes'—but Frank now blew his horn, And Walter bark'd, on hands and knees, At Baby in the mignonette, And all made, full-cry, for the trees Where Felix and his Wife were set. Again disturb'd, (crickets have cares!) True to their annual use they rose, To offer thanks at Evening Prayers In three times sacred Sarum Close.

2

Passing, they left a gift of wine At Widow Neale's. Her daughter said: 'O, Ma'am, she's sinking! For a sign, She cried just now, of him that's dead, "Mary, he's somewhere close above, Weeping and wailing his dead wife, With forceful prayers and fatal love Conjuring me to come to life. A spirit is terrible though dear! It comes by night, and sucks my breath, And draws me with desire and fear." Ah, Ma'am, she'll soon be his in death!'

3

Vaughan, when his kind Wife's eyes were dry, Said, 'This thought crosses me, my Dove; If Heaven should proffer, when we die, Some unconceiv'd, superior love, How take the exchange without despair, Without worse folly how refuse?' But she, who, wise as she was fair, For subtle doubts had simple clues, Said, 'Custom sanctifies, and faith Is more than joy: ah, how desire In any heaven a different path, Though, found at first, it had been higher? Yet love makes death a dreadful thought! Felix, at what a price we live!' But present pleasures soon forgot The future's dread alternative; For, as became the festal time, He cheer'd her heart with tender praise, And speeches wanting only rhyme To make them like his winged lays. He discommended girlhood. 'What For sweetness like the ten-years' wife, Whose customary love is not Her passion, or her play, but life? With beauties so maturely fair, Affecting, mild, and manifold, May girlish charms mo more compare Than apples green with apples gold. Ah, still unpraised Honoria, Heaven, When you into my arms it gave, Left nought hereafter to be given But grace to feel the good I have.'

4

Her own and manhood's modesty Made dumb her love, but, on their road, His hand in hers felt soft reply, And like rejoinder found bestow'd; And, when the carriage set them down, 'How strange,' said he, ''twould seem to meet, When pacing, as we now this town, A Florence or a Lisbon Street, That Laura or that Catherine, who, In

the remote, romantic years, From Petrarch or Camoens drew Their songs and their immortal tears!' But here their converse had its end; For, crossing the Cathedral Lawn, There came an ancient college-friend, Who, introduced to Mrs. Vaughan, Lifted his hat, and bow'd and smiled. And fill'd her kind large eyes with joy, By patting on the cheek her child, With, 'Is he yours, this handsome boy?'

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