





THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

52

200

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
ADAM LINDSAY GORDON



ADAM LINDSAY GORDON

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
ADAM LINDSAY
GORDON

WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON AND MELBOURNE
PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

By MARCUS CLARKE, Author of "For the Term of His Natural Life."

(This was originally published in an early edition of the poems, and is reprinted by kind permission of Mrs. Marcus Clarke.)

THE poems of Gordon have an interest beyond the mere personal one which his friends attach to his name. Written, as they were, at odd times and leisure moments of a stirring and adventurous life, it is not to be wondered at if they are unequal or unfinished. The astonishment of those who knew the man, and can gauge the capacity of this city to foster poetic instinct, is, that such work was ever produced here at all. Intensely nervous, and feeling much of that shame at the exercise of the higher intelligence which besets those who are known to be renowned in field sports, Gordon produced his poems shyly, scribbled them on scraps of paper, and sent them anonymously to magazines. It was not until he discovered one morning that everybody knew a couplet or two of "How we Beat the Favourite" that he consented to forgo his anonymity and appear in the unsuspected character of a verse maker. The success of his republished "collected" poems gave him courage, and the unreserved praise which greeted "Bush Ballads" should have urged him to forget or to conquer those evil promptings which, unhappily, brought about his untimely death.

Adam Lindsay Gordon was the son of an officer in the English army, and was educated at Woolwich, in order that he might follow the profession of his family. At the time when he was a cadet there was no sign of either of the two great wars which were about to call forth the strength of English arms, and, like many other men of

his day, he quitted his prospects of service and emigrated. He went to South Australia and started as a sheep farmer. His efforts were attended with failure. He lost his capital, and, owning nothing but a love for horsemanship and a head full of Browning and Shelley, plunged into the varied life which gold-mining, "over-landing" and cattle-driving affords. From this experience he emerged to light in Melbourne as the best amateur steeplechase rider in the colonies. The victory he won for Major Baker in 1868, when he rode Babbler for the Cup Steeplechase, made him popular, and the almost simultaneous publication of his last volume of poems gave him welcome entrance to the houses of all who had pretensions to literary taste. The reputation of the book spread to England, and Major Whyte Melville did not disdain to place the lines of the dashing Australian author at the head of his own dashing descriptions of sporting scenery. Unhappily, the melancholy which Gordon's friends had with pain observed increased daily, and in the full flood of his success, with congratulations pouring upon him from every side, he was found dead in the heather near his home with a bullet from his own rifle in his brain.

I do not purpose to criticise the volumes which these few lines of preface introduce to the reader. The influence of Browning and of Swinburne upon the writer's taste is plain. There is plainly visible also, however, a keen sense for natural beauty and a manly admiration for healthy living. If in "Ashtaroth" and "Bellona" we recognize the swing of a familiar metre, in such poems as the "Sick Stockrider" we perceive the genuine poetic instinct united to a very clear perception of the loveliness of duty and of labour.

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass
 To wander as we've wandered many a mile,
 And blow the cool tobacco cloud, and watch the white wreaths
 pass,
 Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while;

'Twas merry 'mid the backwoods, when we spied the station roofs,
To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard,
With a running fire of stockwhips, and a fiery run of hoofs,
Oh ! the hardest day was never then too hard !

Aye ! we had a glorious gallop after " Starlight " and his gang,
When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat ;
How the sun-dried reed-beds crackled, how the flint-strewn
 ranges rang
To the strokes of " Mountaineer " and " Acrobat " ;

Hard behind them in the timber, harder still across the heath,
Close behind them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd ;
And the golden-tinted fern leaves, how they rustled underneath !
And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd !

This is genuine. There is no " poetic evolution from the depths of internal consciousness " here. The writer has ridden his ride as well as it is written.

The student of these unpretending volumes will be repaid for his labour. He will find in them something very like the beginnings of a national school of Australian poetry. In historic Europe where every rood of ground is hallowed in legend and in song, the least imaginative can find food for sad and sweet reflection. When strolling at noon down an English country lane, lounging at sunset by some ruined chapel on the margin of an Irish lake, or watching the mist of morning unveil Ben Lomond, we feel all the charm which springs from association with the past. Soothed, saddened and cheered by turns, we partake of the varied moods which belong, not so much to ourselves, as to the dead men who, in old days, sung, suffered, or conquered in the scenes which we survey. But this our native or adopted land has no past, no story. No poet speaks to us. Do we need a poet to interpret Nature's teachings, we must look into our own hearts, if perchance we may find a poet there.

What is the dominant note of Australian scenery ? That which is the dominant note of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry—Weird Melancholy. A poem like " L'Allegro " could never be written by an Australian. It is too airy,

too sweet, too freshly happy. The Australian mountain forests are funereal, secret, stern. Their solitude is desolation. They seem to stifle, in their black gorges, a story of sullen despair. No tender sentiment is nourished in their shade. In other lands the dying year is mourned, the falling leaves drop lightly on his bier. In the Australian forest no leaves fall. The savage winds shout among the rock clefts. From the melancholy gum strips of white bark hang and rustle. The very animal life of these frowning hills is either grotesque or ghostly. Great grey kangaroos hop noiselessly over the coarse grass. Flights of white cockatoos stream out, shrieking like evil souls. The sun suddenly sinks, and the mopokes burst out into horrible peals of semi-human laughter. The natives aver that, when night comes, from out the bottomless depth of some lagoon the Bunyip rises, and, in form like monstrous sea calf, drags his loathsome length from out the ooze. From a corner of the silent forest rises a dismal chant, and around a fire dance natives painted like skeletons. All is fear-inspiring and gloomy. No bright fancies are linked with the memories of the mountains. Hopeless explorers have named them out of their sufferings—Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful, Mount Despair. As when among sylvan scenes in places

Made green with the running of rivers,
And gracious with temperate air,

the soul is soothed and satisfied, so, placed before the frightful grandeur of these barren hills, it drinks in their sentiment of defiant ferocity, and is steeped in bitterness.

Australia has rightly been named the Land of the Dawning. Wrapped in the midst of early morning, her history looms vague and gigantic. The lonely horseman riding between the moonlight and the day sees vast shadows creeping across the shelterless and silent plains, hears strange noises in the primeval forest where flourishes a vegetation long dead in other lands, and feels, despite his fortune, that the trim utilitarian

civilization which bred him shrinks into insignificance beside the contemptuous grandeur of forest and ranges coeval with an age in which European scientists have cradled his own race.

There is a poem in every form of tree or flower, but the poetry which lives in the trees and flowers of Australia differs from those of other countries. Europe is the home of knightly song, of bright deeds and clear morning thought. Asia sinks beneath the weighty recollections of her past magnificence, as the Suttee sinks, jewel-burdened, upon the corpse of dead grandeur, destructive even in its death. America swiftly hurries on her way, rapid, glittering, insatiable even as one of her own giant waterfalls. From the jungles of Africa, and the creeper-tangled groves of the islands of the South, arise, from the glowing hearts of a thousand flowers, heavy and intoxicating odours—the Upas-poison which dwells in barbaric sensuality. In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness. Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphs of haggard gum-trees, blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds, or cramped with cold nights, when the Southern Cross freezes in a cloudless sky of icy blue. The phantasmagoria of that wild dreamland termed the Bush interprets itself, and the Poet of our desolation begins to comprehend why free Esau loved his heritage of desert sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE BY MARCUS CLARKE	v
INTRODUCTION	xii
SEA SPRAY AND SMOKE DRIFT:—	
ACHILLES' FAREWELL	9
GONE	14
UNSHRIVEN	17
YE WEARIE WAYFARER: HYS BALLAD IN EIGHT FYTTES:—	
FYTTE I BY WOOD AND WOLD	19
,, II BY FLOOD AND FIELD	20
,, III VINE-TREE <i>versus</i> SADDLE-TREE	23
,, IV A LOGICAL DISCUSSION	25
,, V A MORAL DISCOURSE	29
,, VI POTTER'S CLAY	32
,, VII A PHILOSOPHICAL DISSERTATION	33
,, VIII A METAPHYSICAL SONG	37
BORROWED PLUMES	43
TRANSLATION FROM HORACE	44
A LEGEND OF MADRID	46
FAUCONSHAWE	51
RIPPLING WATER	58
WHOM DOES IT PROFIT?	61
BELLONA	63
THE SONG OF THE SURF	66
WHISPERINGS IN WATTLE-BOUGHS	68
CONFESSION	70
SUNLIGHT ON THE SEA	74
DELILAH	77
FROM LIGHTNING AND TEMPEST	80
WORMWOOD AND NIGHTSHADE	82
ART IS LONG	87
THE LAST LEAP	90

CONTENTS

xi

SEA SPRAY AND SMOKE DRIFT, *continued*—

PAGE

TWO YEARS AGO I WAS THINKING	92
HIPPODROMANIA : OR WHIFFS FROM THE PIPE :—	
VISIONS IN THE SMOKE	95
THE FIELDS OF COLERAINE	100
A SHORT RHYME AT RANDOM	102
BANKER'S DREAM	105
'TWIXT THE CUP AND THE LIP	109
THE ROLL OF THE KETTLEDRUM ; OR, THE LAY OF THE LAST CHARGER	117

BUSH BALLADS AND GALLOPING RHYMES :—

A DEDICATION	127
THE SICK STOCKRIDER	131
THE SWIMMER	135
FROM THE WRECK	139
NO NAME	144
WOLF AND HOUND	146
DE TE	149
HOW WE BEAT THE FAVOURITE	152
FRAGMENTARY SCENES FROM THE ROAD TO AVERNUS	156
DOUBTFUL DREAMS	167
THE RHYME OF JOYOUS GARDE	172
THORA'S SONG	181
THE THREE FRIENDS	183
A SONG OF AUTUMN	187
THE ROMANCE OF BRITOMARTE	188
LAUDAMUS	197
A BASKET OF FLOWERS.	199

ASHTAROTH : A DRAMATIC LYRIC 205

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS :—

A HUNTING SONG	303
AN EXILE'S FAREWELL	304
EARLY ADIEUX	306
TO MY SISTER	308
THE OLD LEAVEN	311
A FRAGMENT	317

INDEX TO FIRST LINES 319

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON*

This was a poet that loved God's breath,
His life was a passionate quest;
He looked down deep in the wells of death,
And now he is taking his rest.

FORTY-TWO years have passed since, on a grey winter's morning, Adam Lindsay Gordon was found lying dead in the scrub near Brighton, Victoria. Forty-two years ago the first of Australian poets took the short cut into the Great Beyond, just when the light of literary fame had begun to shine through the dark clouds of poverty and neglect. That fame has extended with each passing year, until Gordon is now the best known, if not always acknowledged as the greatest, poet Australia has produced. His verse contains an indefinable charm that appeals strongly to the hearts of all English speaking people. It is read alike by the scholar and the stockman. The critic may condemn some of it; yet he loves it. Gordon did not write for a particular class; he wrote as the mood seized him. He could strike original notes in a classical theme like the death of Achilles, or could mingle the hoof-beats of horses with dashing verses as in "How We Beat the Favourite." Careless sometimes, despondent often, yet musical always, his verses have truly "touched most deeply of all singers the chords of the Australian heart." And through them all there runs that "mournful undersong," that note

**(Reprinted by permission of Messrs. W. K. Thomas & Co., proprietors of "The Register, Adelaide.")*

of sadness, which occasional stronger chords of cheerfulness fail to silence.

The weary longings and yearnings
For the mystical better things

ever arose in the poet amid distasteful occupations. The tragedy of so fine a spirit, so noble a nature, tainted with inherited melancholia, and overweighted by sordid cares, comes home to one as the story of Gordon's life is read. Abhorrence for the deed which ended his existence is lost in pity for and sympathy with the man. To one so constituted there are things far worse than death. Obsessed by cares which to a more robust mentality might have appeared slight, the poet's mind in his last years turned constantly to the contemplation of death. He had grown

So weary, with long sandsifting ;
T'wards the mist where the breakers moan
The rudderless barque is drifting,
Through the shoals and the quicksands shifting—
In the end shall the night rack lifting
Discover the shores unknown ?

Adam Lindsay Gordon first set foot on Australian soil at Port Adelaide, and the beautiful south-eastern district inspired his finest verse. There he passed probably the happiest years of his manhood, and in the joys of healthy living in the open learned to forget the unhappy days of his youth and the pangs of the exile. The poet's old home, Dingley Dell, still stands.

The son of a captain of the Indian army, Gordon was born in the Azores Islands in 1833. The high-spirited boy's educational career at Cheltenham College was the reverse of successful. He was by no means backwards, but preferred a bout with the gloves or a mad gallop to scholastic attainments. Passionately fond of riding, he was reckless with horses, and few of the neighbouring owners cared to lend him a mount. "He was held to be a wild, reckless youth, eccentric, unsteady, yet eminently generous and high spirited,

and with a lofty ideal of his own." Eventually Lindsay's escapades appear to have exhausted the patience of his affectionate though reserved father—his mother had come almost to dislike him; and it was thought better that he should emigrate. So, having been refused by a girl to whom he had become deeply attached, the youth bade farewell to "friends, parents, kinsmen, native shore," recording his feelings in those touching verses to his sister Inez:—

Across the trackless seas I go,
No matter when and where;
And few my future lot will know,
And fewer still will care.

Surely a hard fate this banishment, however foolish the young fellow had been; but Gordon was not to pass his days in useless repining. Arriving at Port Adelaide in the *Julia* on November 14, 1853, he was immediately admitted to the mounted police force, and sent to Mount Gambier. Those were stirring times, and the life suited Gordon for about two years. The story runs that at the end of that period a sergeant requested him to brush a pair of boots, and the young trooper indignantly flung the boots at his superior officer and left the service. He then set up in business as a professional horsebreaker. Gordon had retained the delight in reckless riding that had landed him in more than one scrape during his stormy youth, and on one occasion, after impatiently watching a man making elaborate preparations to mount a notorious buck-jumper, he stepped up, threw the saddle off, jumped on the barebacked animal, and darted away like a whirlwind. His perilous leap over a fence abutting on a precipitous declivity near Mount Gambier was the sensation of the district, and was talked of for many a day. He was with a party of huntsmen, and dared any of them to follow him over the fence. Needless to say, none accepted. Gordon's utter disregard of life and limb resulted in a severe fall at Robe, and here, seven

years after he had left the police force, he met and married Miss Maggie Park, and they lived for two happy years in the pretty cottage near to the sea. "He never repented of his choice," says his biographer, "and his subsequent letters breathe a mingled admiration and attachment for his wife." Then came the news that Gordon had inherited £7,000 from his mother, and with this alteration in his financial affairs his position in the district rapidly advanced, until he finally stood for Parliament, and narrowly defeated a formidable opponent in the then Attorney-General, Randolph Stow. The contest is referred to in *Hippodromania* :—

Like Stow at our hustings, confronting the hisses
Of roughs with his queer Mephistopheles smile.

On the rare occasions when he addressed the House the member for Victoria treated his colleagues to numerous classical quotations and references unintelligible to most of them; and it could seldom be definitely ascertained just what he was driving at. Becoming tired of Parliamentary routine, Gordon resigned after two sessions. Unwise investments and heavy expenditure had almost swallowed up his modest fortune, and he decided to buy a livery stable business in Ballarat and make a fresh start. For business, however, the poet was not fitted, and troubles soon arose. At this time he was described as "a lanky figure, looking a little scraggy with his flowing yellowish beard, over which he peered with shortsighted eyes. He wore tight corduroy trousers, and high boots. Sometimes a cap, more often his trusty cabbage-tree hat, surmounted his lean figure." Gordon was badly injured in Ballarat by being smashed against a gatepost while riding—his defective eyesight caused many a mishap—and the shock affected him for the remainder of his life. About the same time his little son died. This was a black period in the poet's history, but it also witnessed many turf triumphs, for he had won the reputation of being the most brilliant steeple-

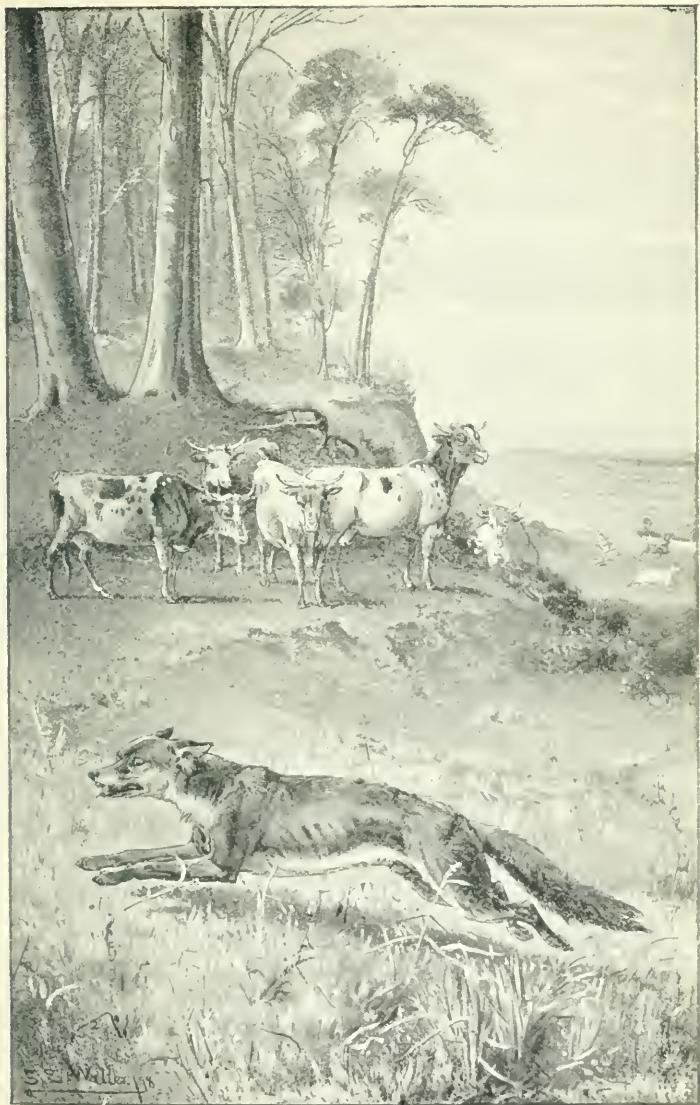
chase rider in the country. From Ballarat Gordon went to Melbourne, and there followed a remarkable series of racing successes. "How We Beat the Favourite," with its forceful rush—

On still past the gateway she strains in the straightway;
Still struggles, "The Clown by a short neck at most;"
He swerves, the green scourges, the stand rocks, and surges,
And flashes, and verges, and flits the white post—

was published anonymously about this period, and aroused widespread attention. But his heart was no longer in racing—or much in anything else. "I am heartily sick of the life I have been leading, and I do not now care even for riding. If I could find any sort of work in which I could earn enough money to live by, and keep my wife in bread and clothes, I shall swear against ever going near a racecourse again." Early in 1869 Gordon accepted an invitation to visit his dear friends, the Riddochs, at Yallum, and he rode his old mare Fairy across the border. This is recorded as the most productive poetic time of his life, and it was also the last peacefully pleasant month he was to know:—

"On his previous visit he had taken a whimsical fancy to a gnarled old gumtree that stood in a sunny paddock a few hundred yards from the house. After breakfast he used to climb it, and sit in a natural armchair upon a crooked limb. There he would fill and smoke successive bowls of his old clay pipe, and those who were curious might see him from time to time jot down lines in pencil on a paper spread upon the branch, or sometimes on his hat. He never had any thought upon the time, and when meals came round he generally had to be specially summoned, whereupon he would slide down the trunk and apologize for causing delay."

"The Sick Stockrider" was composed at this time, and probably "From the Wreck" and "Wolf and Hound." To Miss Mary Riddoch he is said to have written those sweet verses "A Basket of Flowers":—



"I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse."

Songs empty, yet airy,
I've striven to write,
For failure, dear Mary,
Forgive me. Good night.

Far more than to success on the turf Gordon aspired to win poetic fame, and upon his return to Melbourne this began to come to him. "The Feud" had been published at Mount Gambier in 1864, and his second book "Sea Spray and Smoke Drift," issued in the Victorian capital three years later, had won for him some little renown. Despite plenty of vigorous exercise, however, his inherited melancholia, combined probably with the effects of his injuries at Ballarat and another severe fall in Melbourne, grew upon him, and was mainly responsible for the rash act by which he ended his life on June 24, 1870.

The bard, the scholar, and the man who lived
That frank, that open-hearted life which keeps
The splendid fire of English chivalry
From dying out; the one who never wronged
A fellow man; . . . the brave great soul
That never told a lie, or turned aside
To fly from danger.

Such is Kendall's tribute to his friend. And, with no wish to exaggerate his good qualities or hide his blemishes, that is the impression—a nobleness of character and straightforwardness of living—received from the plain record of Gordon's life, and supported by the testimony of those who knew him. Beneath the proud, reserved, and usually unattractive exterior was hidden a courageous and clean nature. Even in the scapegrace days of his youth he was "generous and honourable, but reckless and misguided." His English military instructor found him "idle and reckless, but I never heard of him doing a dishonourable action." A close friend, Mr. W. Trainor, exclaimed of him enthusiastically:—"Oh, Gordon was, I think, the noblest fellow who ever lived! Very queer in his ways, though. I have ridden ten miles with him at a walking pace, and

he didn't say a word the whole time, but went on mumbling to himself, making up rhymes in his head." There was also something "so generous and noble about him, he was so upright and conscientious amid all the whims of his peculiar nature, that I felt him to be of a stamp quite superior to the men around him, and the closer our acquaintance grew, the deeper became my feelings of respect and admiration." A fine character, this for a man who had to earn his bread as Gordon did! In his South Australian days the poet made the acquaintance of the Rev. Julian Tenison Woods, who records that even then Gordon was subject to a restless sort of discontent, which at times almost impelled him to the idea of putting an end to the weariness of life. "This, Gordon explained, was a sort of melancholy to which much of the finest poetry owed its existence." "This conversation," continues the priest, "made a deep impression on me, for I connected it with those sad and moody fits which grew upon him more and more. He was very silent and thoughtful in these times, and often failed to hear half of what was said to him." The late Mr. John Riddoch described the poet as "a moody, unsociable man when his poetic fit was on—a great smoker. Often on arriving at the house he would go away into the bush and fend for himself rather than face company inside." From Ballarat Gordon wrote to Mr. Riddoch in 1868:—

"Since that heavy fall of mine I have taken to drink. I don't get drunk, but I drink a good deal more than I ought to, for I have a constant pain in my head and back. I get so awfully low-spirited and miserable that if I had a strong sleeping draught near me I am afraid I might take it. I have carried one that I should never awake from. You will, perhaps, be awfully shocked, old fellow, to see me write in this strain; but I am not exaggerating, at least. If I could only persuade myself that I am a little mad, I might do something of that sort. I really do feel a little mad at times, and I begin to think I have had more trouble than I can put up

with—I could almost say more than I deserve, though this would probably be untrue.”

Such glimpses of Gordon's temperament serve to show that his inherited tendency to melancholy—his mother had suffered from religious mania years before his birth, and it was in the hope of restoring her to sanity that the family had gone to the Azores—gradually increased. Bruised and battered by frequent falls, dispirited, worried by debts, the poet was being driven steadily to the tragic, inevitable end. His pecuniary liabilities amount to only about £400, and it seems hard that the man who had dispensed favours with a generous—too generous—hand in his days of affluence should lack for such a sum. Shortly before his death Gordon formed a strong friendship with Kendall, and the two poets found mutual pleasure in each other's work. Gordon had built his hopes upon obtaining the estate of Esslemont, in Scotland, to which he had laid claim, and the news of his failure, received in June, 1870, was a bitter blow. The end was now in sight. On June 23—the very day *Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes* was published—he was wandering miserably about the streets of Melbourne when he met Kendall, and spent the afternoon with him. “They sat for a couple of hours, each glad to suppress the gnawing cares which sat like spectres in the murky background behind the little circle of present warmth and light. For both were miserably poor, and unable to combat the practical difficulties of life.” Excited by the spirits he had taken, Gordon returned home with a furious headache, and that evening determined to terminate his troublous existence. The rest is best told in the words of his able and sympathetic biographer, the late Alexander Sutherland, M.A. :—

“Next morning the winter daybreak was scarcely perceptible when he rose and dressed himself quietly ; he stooped to kiss his slumbering wife, who afterwards

remembered only the consciousness of having felt her face swept by his long beard. Then he passed out into the grey street and down to the beach. The fishermen, who saw him striding along the sands, with his rifle balanced in his hand, saluted him as he passed, but heard no cheery response such as was customary. He was never afterwards seen alive. But about 9 o'clock in the forenoon a man named Allen, while hunting up a cow that had gone astray, was riding along the scrub at Picnic Point, when he saw a long form, clad in a velvet jacket, lying in a little open glade."

For Gordon there was no other way. He had almost prophesied his own end in "De Te":—

And crime has cause. Nay, never pause
 Idly to feel a pulseless wrist;
 Brace up the massive, square-shaped jaws,
 Unclench the stubborn, stiff'ning fist,
 And close those eyes through film and mist
 That kept the old defiant glare;
 And answer, wise psychologist,
 Whose science claims some little share
 Of truth, what better things lay there?

And "Say only, 'God, who has judged him thus, be merciful to him and us.'"

It is not likely that the poetry of Adam Lindsay Gordon will ever take a place in the front rank. His finest poems are fine indeed; but carelessness in rhythm and rhyme detracts frequently from the merit of some of his best verses. Much of what he wrote is not poetry at all in the strictest sense of the word. But it is poetry in that it is the revelation of a spirit—a gloomy spirit, perhaps, but that of a man incapable of a mean action. Had his later years been mere free from uncongenial toil and worry several of Gordon's perfectly finished pieces indicate that he might have produced work powerful enough to place him among the foremost of the world's great poets.

Yet rhyme had not failed me for reason,
 Nor reason for rhyme,
 Sweet song ! had I sought you in season,
 And found you in time.

But many of Gordon's readers would not have had him win such laurels if it had meant a sacrifice of his unsurpassed powers as a maker of stirring, swinging verses. Australians love and honour him because his best poems breathe the virile spirit of a new land ; and because he could reflect in melodious lines the beauties of seashore and woodland—could find expression for “the song that in all hearts hath existence”—

In the Spring, when the wattle gold trembles
 'Twixt shadow and shine,
 When each dewladen air draught resembles
 A long draught of wine.

Gordon had the rare ability to compress a wealth of description into a single sentence. Despite the faulty rhyme, who would wish to alter—

Hark ! the bells on distant cattle
 Waft across the range,
 Through the golden-tufted wattle,
 Music low and strange.

Or could a sunrise be more suggestively sketched in a verse than in this :—

On skies still and starlit
 White lustres take hold,
 And grey flushes scarlet,
 And red flashes gold.

There is a pathetic beauty, a deep remorse, in “Whisperings in Wattle Boughs” :—

Oh, gaily sings the bird, and the wattle boughs are stirred
 And rustled by the scented breath of Spring :
 Oh, the dreary, wistful longing ! Oh the faces that are throng-
 ing !
 Oh, the voices that are vaguely whispering !

“Ashtaroth” is seldom quoted from, yet it contains

passages of unusual power. The yearning "Thora's Song" must be placed among the poet's sweetest lyrics; and Sir Hugo's melancholy musings, although dreary, are never unmusical or uninteresting:—

And coldly and calmly and purely
 Grey rock and green hillock lie white
 In starshine dreamladen—so surely
 Night cometh—so cometh the night
 When we, too, at peace with our neighbour,
 May sleep where God's hillocks are piled,
 Thanking Him for a rest from day's labour,
 And a sleep like the sleep of a child.

The poet's joy in the lovely wattle groves surrounding his southern home when "lightly the breath of the spring wind blows, though laden with faint perfume," was not deeper than his love for the tumultuous ocean which raged against the rugged coast around Cape Northumberland. He loved to wander alone down to the "grim, grey coast," and sit "on the verge of the cliff—'twixt the earth and the ocean—with feet overhanging the surge." Gazing along the line of headlands and across the wide expanse of sea, he temporarily existed in a world other than this, where one looks for the reading of those "hidden truths that are taught in no college, hidden songs that no parchments express." The thoughts that then arose he has recorded in lines of passionate longing:—

I would that with sleepy, soft embraces
 The sea would fold me—would find me rest
 In luminous shades of her secret places,
 In depths where her marvels are manifest.

The wild restlessness of the sea struck a responsive chord in the breast of the moody, dispirited man. Truly, the sounds of the sea "are mingled with his noble verse."

You come, and your crests are hoary with the foam of your
 countless years,
 You break, with a rainbow of glory, through the spray of your
 glittering tears.

That is one mood. From impressionist sketches of Nature he could turn to the composition of this thrilling passage from a poem which is not estimated at its proper worth :—

Then a steel-shod rush and a steel-clad ring,
And a crash of the spear staves splintering,
And the billowy battle blended !
Riot of chargers, revel of blows,
And fierce, flush'd faces of fighting foes,
From croup to bridle that reel'd and rose
In a sparkle of sword-play splendid !

Most bushmen know "The Sick Stockrider," with its ring of genuine, restrained pathos ; and who has not gloried in the splendid swing of that headlong galop "From the Wreck ?" Therein Gordon is seen at his best ; those poems are purely Australian—and are all the better for being so. The pity is that his pen did not always run to such pleasant measure, instead of having to record the poet's baffled broodings over the mysteries of life and death. He could not contemplate eternal problems and realize their inexplicableness without bitterness.

Idle dreamer—earthborn elf !
Vainly grasping heavenly things,
Wherefore weariest thou thyself
With thy vain imaginings ?

he asks Hugo, but wearied himself nevertheless. Life sometimes seemed to Gordon only—

A little season of love and laughter,
Of light and life, and pleasure and pain,
And a horror of outer darkness after,
And dust returneth to dust again.
Then the lesser life shall be as the greater,
And the lover of life shall join the hater,
And the one thing cometh, sooner or later,
And no one knoweth the loss or gain.

Those lines are from "The Swimmer," perhaps Gordon's most powerful poem. In that as in many others his despairing philosophy reveals itself. It is not, however,

to such passages that we turn for the keynote to the poet's work and character. Rather is that to be found in the manly, hopeful sentiments at the conclusion of "Ye Wearie Wayfarer," without the quotation of which an essay on Adam Lindsay Gordon would be incomplete :—

Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won :
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none.

Life is mostly froth and bubble
Two things stand like stone—
Kindness in another's trouble,
Courage in your own.

Courage, comrades, this is certain
All is for the best—
There are lights behind the curtain—
Gentles, let us rest.

It is a good note to conclude upon, and one likes to think that in it is revealed the poet's true spirit.

SEA SPRAY AND SMOKE DRIFT

ACHILLES' FAREWELL

PODAS OKUS

AM I waking ? Was I sleeping ?
Dearest, are you watching yet ?
Traces on your cheeks of weeping
Glitter, 'tis in vain you fret ;
Drifting ever ! drifting onward !
In the glass the bright sand runs
Steadily and slowly downward ;
Hush'd are all the Myrmidons.

Has Automedon been banish'd
From his post beside my bed ?
Where has Agamemnon vanish'd ?
Where is warlike Diomed ?
Where is Nestor ? where Ulysses ?
Menelaus, where is he ?
Call them not, more dear your kisses
Than their prosings are to me.

Daylight fades and night must follow,
Low, where sea and sky combine
Droops the orb of great Apollo,
Hostile god to me and mine.
Through the tent's wide entrance streaming,
In a flood of glory rare,
Glides the golden sunset, gleaming
On your golden gleaming hair.

Chide him not, the leech who tarries,
Surest aid were all too late ;

Surer far the shaft of Paris,
Winged by Phoebus and by fate ;
When he crouch'd behind the gable,
Had I once his features scann'd,
Phoebus' self had scarce been able
To have nerved his trembling hand.

Blue-eyed maiden ! dear Athena !
Goddess chaste, and wise, and brave,
From the snares of Polyxena
Thou would'st fain thy favourite save.
Tell me, is it not far better
That it should be as it is ?
Jove's behests we cannot fetter,
Fate's decrees are always his.

Many seek for peace and riches,
Length of days and life of ease ;
I have sought for one thing, which is
Fairer unto me than these.
Often, too, I've heard the story ;
In my boyhood, of the doom
Which the fates assign'd me—Glory,
Coupled with an early tomb.

Swift assault and sudden sally
Underneath the Trojan wall ;
Charge, and countercharge, and rally,
War-cry loud, and trumpet call ;
Doubtful strain of desp'rate battle,
Cut and thrust and grapple fierce,
Swords that ring on shields that rattle,
Blades that gash and darts that pierce ;—

I have done with these for ever ;
By the loud resounding sea,
Where the reedy jav'lins quiver,
There is now no place for me.

Day by day our ranks diminish,
We are falling day by day ;
But our sons the strife will finish,
Where man tarries, man must slay.

Life, 'tis said, to all men sweet is,
Death to all must bitter be ;
Wherefore thus, O mother Thetis ?
None can baffle Jove's decree ;
I am ready, I am willing,
To resign my stormy life ;
Weary of this long blood-spilling,
Sated with this ceaseless strife.

Shorter doom I've pictured dimly,
On a bed of crimson sand ;
Fighting hard and dying grimly,
Silent lips, and striking hand ;
But the toughest lives are brittle,
And the bravest and the best
Lightly fall—it matters little ;
Now, I only long for rest.

I have seen enough of slaughter,
Seen Scamander's torrent red,
Seen hot blood poured out like water,
Seen the champaign heap'd with dead.
Men will call me unrelenting,
Pitiless, vindictive, stern ;
Few will raise a voice dissenting,
Few will better things discern.

Speak ! the fires of life are reeling,
Like the wildfires on the marsh.
Was I to a friend unfeeling ?
Was I to a mistress harsh ?
Was there nought save bloodshed throbbing
In this heart and on this brow ?
Whisper ! girl, in silence sobbing !
Dead Patroclus ! answer thou !

Dry those violet orbs that glisten,
Darling, I have had my day ;
Place your hand in mine and listen,
Ere the strong soul cleaves its way
Through the death-mist hovering o'er me,
As the stout ship cleaves the wave,
To my fathers, gone before me,
To the gods who love the brave !

Courage ! we must part for certain ;
Shades that sink and shades that rise,
Blending in a shroud-like curtain,
Gather o'er these weary eyes.
O'er the fields we used to roam, in
Brighter days and lighter cheer,
Gathers thus the quiet gloaming,—
Now, I ween the end is near.

For the hand that clasps your fingers,
Closing in the death-grip tight,
Scarcely feels the warmth that lingers,
Scarcely heeds the pressure light ;
While the failing pulse that alters,
Changing 'neath a death chill damp,
Flickers, flutters, flags, and falters,
Feebly, like a waning lamp.

Thinkst thou, love, 'twill chafe my ghost, in
Hades' realm where heroes shine,
Should I hear the shepherd boasting
To his Argive concubine ?
Let him boast, the girlish victor,
Let him brag ; not thus, I trow,
Were the laurels torn from Hector,
Not so very long ago.

Does my voice sound thick and husky ?
Is my hand no longer warm ?
Round that neck where pearls look dusky
Let me once more wind my arm ;

Rest my head upon that shoulder,
Where it rested oft of yore ;
Warm and white, yet seeming colder
Now than e'er it seem'd before.

'Twas the fraud of Priam's daughter,
Not the force of Priam's son,
Slew me—ask not why I sought her,
'Twas my doom—her work is done !
Fairer far than she, and dearer
By a thousand-fold thou art ;
Come, my own one, nestle nearer,
Cheating death of half his smart.

Slowly, while your amber tresses
Shower down their golden rain,
Let me drink those last caresses,
Never to be felt again ;
Yet th' Elysian halls are spacious,
Somewhere near me, I may keep
Room—who knows ?—The gods are gracious :
Lay me lower—let me sleep !

Lower yet, my senses wander,
And my spirit seems to roll
With the tide of swift Scamander,
Rushing to a viewless goal.
In my ears, like distant washing
Of the surf upon the shore,
Drones a murmur, faintly splashing,
'Tis the splash of Charon's oar.

Lower yet, my own Briseïs,
Denser shadows veil the light ;
Hush, what is to be, to be is,
Close my eyes and say, good night,
Lightly lay your red lips, kissing,
On this cold mouth, while your thumbs
Lie on these cold eyelids pressing—
Pallas ! thus thy soldier comes !

GONE

IN Collins Street standeth a statue tall,
A statue tall, on a pillar of stone,
Telling its story, to great and small,
Of the dust reclaimed from the sand waste lone ;
Weary and wasted, and worn and wan,
Feeble and faint, and languid and low,
He lay on the desert a dying man ;
Who has gone, my friends, where we all must go.

There are perils by land, and perils by water,
Short, I ween, are the obsequies
Of the landsman lost, but they may be shorter,
With the mariner lost in the trackless seas ;
And well for him, when the timbers start,
And the stout ship reels and settles below,
Who goes to his doom with as bold a heart,
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Man is stubborn his rights to yield,
And redder than dews at eventide
Are the dews of battle, shed on the field,
By a nation's wrath or a despot's pride ;
But few who have heard their death knell roll,
From the cannon's lips where they faced the foe,
Have fallen as stout and steady of soul,
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Traverse yon spacious burial ground,
Many are sleeping soundly there,
Who pass'd with mourners standing around,
Kindred, and friends, and children fair ;
Did he envy such ending ? 'twere hard to say ;
Had he cause to envy such ending ? no ;
Can the spirit feel for the senseless clay,
When it once has gone where we all must go ?

What matters the sand or the whitening chalk,
The blighted herbage, the black'ning log,
The crooked beak of the eagle-hawk,
Or the hot red tongue of the native dog ?
That couch was rugged, those sextons rude,
Yet, in spite of a leaden shroud, we know
That the bravest and fairest are earthworms' food,
When once they've gone where we all must go.

With the pistol clenched in his failing hand,
With the death-mist spread o'er his fading eyes,
He saw the sun go down on the sand,
And he slept, and never saw it rise ;
'Twas well ; he toil'd till his task was done,
Constant and calm in his latest throe,
The storm was weathered, the battle was won,
When he went, my friends, where we all must go.

God grant that whenever, soon or late,
Our course is run and our goal is reach'd,
We may meet our fate as steady and straight,
As he whose bones in yon desert bleach'd ;
No tears are needed—our cheeks are dry,
We have none to waste upon living woe ;
Shall we sigh for one who has ceased to sigh,
Having gone, my friends, where we all must go ?

We tarry yet, we are toiling still,

He is gone and he fares the best,

He fought against odds, he struggled up hill,

He has fairly earned his season of rest ;

No tears are needed—fill out the wine,

Let the goblets clash, and the grape juice flow,

Ho ! pledge me a death-drink, comrade mine,

To a brave man gone where we all must go.



"In a country so deep, with a scent so hot
That the hound could outpace the horse."

UNSHRIVEN

OH ! the sun rose on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
And the steed stood ready harness'd in the hall,
And he left his lady's bower, and he sought the eastern
tower,
And he lifted cloak and weapon from the wall.

“ We were wed but yester-noon, must we separate so
soon,
Must you travel unassoiled and, ay, unshriven,
With the blood stain on your hand, and the red streak
on your brand,
And your guilt all unconfess't and unforgiven ? ”

“ Tho' it were but yester-even we were wedded, still
unshriven,
Across the moor this morning I must ride ;
I must gallop fast and straight, for my errand will not
wait ;
Fear nought, I shall return at eventide.”

“ If I fear, it is for thee, thy weal is dear to me,
Yon moor with retribution seemeth rife ;
As we've sown so must we reap, and I've started in my
sleep
At the voice of the avenger, ' life for life.' ”

“ My arm is strong, I ween, and my trusty blade is keen,
 And the courser that I ride is swift and sure,
 And I cannot break my oath, though to leave thee I am
 loth,

There is one that I must meet upon the moor.”

* * * * *

Oh! the sun shone on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
 Down the avenue and through the iron gate,
 Spurr'd and belted, so he rode, steel to draw and steel
 to goad,

And across the moor he gallop'd fast and straight.

* * * * *

* * * * *

Oh! the sun shone on the lea, and the bird sang full of
 glee,

Ere the mists of evening gather'd chill and grey;
 But the wild bird's merry note on the deaf ear never
 smote,

And the sunshine never warm'd the lifeless clay.

Ere the sun began to droop, or the mist began to stoop,
 The youthful bride lay swooning in the hall;
 Empty saddle on his back, broken bridle hanging slack,
 The steed returned full gallop to the stall.

Oh! the sun sank in the sea, and the wind wail'd drearilie;
 Let the bells in yonder monastery toll,
 For the night rack nestles dark round the body stiff and
 stark,

And unshriven to its Maker flies the soul.

YE WEARIE WAYFARER

HYS BALLAD

IN EIGHT FYTTES

FYTTE I

BY WOOD AND WOLD

[*A Preamble*]

“Beneath the green wood bough.”—*W. Scott.*

LIGHTLY the breath of the spring wind blows,
Though laden with faint perfume,
'Tis the fragrance rare that the bushman knows,
The scent of the wattle bloom.
Two-thirds of our journey at least are done,
Old horse ! let us take a spell
In the shade from the glare of the noon-day sun,
Thus far we have travell'd well ;
Your bridle I'll slip, your saddle ungirth,
And lay them beside this log,
For you'll roll in that track of reddish earth,
And shake like a water dog.

Upon yonder rise there's a clump of trees—
Their shadows look cool and broad—
You can crop the grass as fast as you please
While I stretch my limbs on the sward ;
'Tis pleasant, I ween, with a leafy screen
O'er the weary head, to lie
On the mossy carpet of emerald green,
'Neath the vault of the azure sky ;
Thus all alone by the wood and wold,
I yield myself once again
To the memories old, that like tales fresh told
Come flitting across the brain.

FYTTE II

BY FLOOD AND FIELD

[*A Legend of the Cottiswold*]

“They have saddled a hundred milk-white steeds,
They have bridled a hundred black.”

Old Ballad.

“He turned in his saddle, ‘Now follow who dare,
I ride for my country’ quoth . . .”

Laurence.

I REMEMBER the lowering wintry morn,
And the mist on the Cotswold hills,
Where I once heard the blast of the huntsman’s horn,
Not far from the seven rills.
Jack Esdale was there, and Hugh St. Clair,
Bob Chapman, and Andrew Kerr,
And big George Griffiths on Devil-May-Care,
And—black Tom Oliver.
And one who rode on a dark brown steed,
Clean-jointed, sinewy, spare,
With the lean game head of the Blacklock breed,
And the resolute eye that loves the lead,
And the quarters massive and square—
A tower of strength, with a promise of speed
(There was Celtic blood in the pair).

I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse,
In a country so deep, with a scent so hot
That the hound could outpace the horse ;

I remember how few in the front rank show'd,
How endless appeared the tail,
On the brown hill side, where we cross'd the road,
And headed towards the vale.
The dark brown steed on the left was there,
On the right was a dappled grey,
And between the pair on a chestnut mare
The duffer who writes this lay.
What business had "this child" there to ride?
But little or none at all;
Yet I held my own for a while, in "the pride
That goeth before a fall."
Though rashness can hope for but one result,
We are heedless when fate draws nigh us,
And the maxim holds good, "*Quem perdere vult
Deus, dementat prius.*"

The right hand man to the left hand said,
As down in the vale we went,
"Harden your heart like a millstone, Ned,
And set your face as flint;
Solid and tall is the rasping wall
That stretches before us yonder;
You must have it at speed or not at all,
'Twere better to halt than to ponder,
For the stream runs wide on the take-off side,
And washes the clay bank under;
Here goes for a pull, 'tis a madman's ride,
And a broken neck if you blunder."

No word in reply his comrade spoke,
Nor waver'd, nor once look'd round,
But I saw him shorten his horse's stroke
As we splash'd through the marshy ground;
I remember the laugh that all the while
On his quiet features play'd:—
So he rode to his death, with that careless smile,
In the van of "the Light Brigade;"

So stricken by Russian grape, the cheer
Rang out, while he toppled back,
From the shattered lungs as merry and clear
As it did when it roused the pack.
Let never a tear his memory stain,
Give his ashes never a sigh,
One of many who perished, NOT IN VAIN,
AS A TYPE OF OUR CHIVALRY—

I remember one thrust he gave to his hat,
And two to the flanks of the brown,
And still as a statue of old he sat,
And he shot to the front, hands down ;
I remember the snort and the stag-like bound
Of the steed six lengths to the fore,
And the laugh of the rider while, landing sound,
He turned in his saddle and glanced around ;
I remember—but little more,
Save a bird's-eye gleam of the dashing stream,
A jarring thud on the wall,
A shock and the blank of a nightmare's dream—
I was down with a stunning fall.

FYTTE III

VINE-TREE VERSUS SADDLE-TREE

ZU DER EDLEN JAGD

“ Now, welcome, welcome, masters mine,
Thrice welcome to the noble chase,
Nor earthly sport, nor sport divine,
Can take such honourable place.”

*Ballad of the Wild Huntsman.
(Free translation.)*

I REMEMBER some words my father said,
When I was an urchin vain ;—
God rest his soul, in his narrow bed
These ten long years he hath lain !
When I think one drop of the blood he bore
This faint heart surely must hold,
It may be my fancy and nothing more,
But the faint heart seemeth bold.

He said, that as from the blood of grape,
Or from juice distilled from the grain,
False vigour, soon to evaporate,
Is lent to nerve and brain ;
So the coward will dare on the gallant horse
What he never would dare alone,
Because he exults in a borrowed force,
And a hardihood not his own.

And it may be so, yet this difference lies
 'Twixt the vine and the saddle-tree,
The spurious courage that drink supplies
 Sets our baser passions free ;
But the stimulant which the horseman feels
 When he gallops fast and straight,
To his better nature most appeals,
 And charity conquers hate.

As the kindly sunshine thaws the snow,
 E'en malice and spite will yield,
We could almost welcome our mortal foe
 In the saddle by flood and field ;
And chivalry dawns in the merry tale
 That " Market Harborough " writes,
And the yarns of " Nimrod " and " Martingale "
 Seem legends of loyal knights.

Now tell me for once, old horse of mine,
 Grazing round me loose and free,
Does your ancient equine heart repine
 For a burst in such companie,
Where " the *Powers* that be " in the front rank ride,
 To hold your own with the throng,
Or to plunge at " Faugh-a-Ballagh's " side
 In the rapids of Dandenong ?

Don't tread on my toes, you're no foolish weight,
 So I found to my cost, as under
Your carcass I lay, when you rose too late,
 Yet I blame you not for the blunder ;
What ! sulky, old man, your under lip falls !
 You think I too ready to rail am
At your kinship remote to that duffer at walls,
 The talkative roadster of Balaam.

FYTTE IV
A LOGICAL DISCUSSION
IN UTRUMQUE PARATUS

“Then hey for boot and horse, lad !
And round the world away !
Young blood will have its course, lad !
And every dog his day !”

C. Kingsley.

THERE'S a formula which the west country clowns
Once used, ere their blows fell thick,
At the fairs on the Devon and Cornwall downs
In their bouts with the single-stick.
You may read a moral, not far amiss,
If you care to moralize,
In the crossing guard, where the ash plants kiss,
To the words “God spare our eyes!”

No game was ever yet worth a rap
For a rational man to play,
Into which no accident, no mishap,
Could possibly find its way.
If you hold the willow, a shooter from Wills
May transform you into a hopper,
And the football meadow is rife with spills,
If you feel disposed for a cropper ;
In a rattling gallop with hound and horse
You may chance to reverse the medal
On the sward with the saddle your loins across,
And your hunter's loins on the saddle ;

In the stubbles you'll find it hard to frame
A remonstrance firm, yet civil,
When oft as "our mutual friend" takes aim,
Long odds may be laid on the rising game,
And against your gaiters level;
There's danger even where fish are caught
To those who a wetting fear;
For what's worth having must aye be bought,
And sport's like life, and life's like sport,
"It ain't all skittles and beer."

The honey bag lies close to the sting,
The rose is fenced by the thorn,
Shall we leave to others their gathering,
And turn from clustering fruits that cling
To the garden wall in scorn?
Albeit those purple grapes hang high,
Like the fox in the ancient tale,
Let us pause and try, ere we pass them by,
Though we, like the fox, may fail.

All hurry is worse than useless; think
On the adage, "'Tis pace that kills";
Shun bad tobacco, avoid strong drink,
Abstain from ———'s pills,
Wear woollen socks, they're the best you'll find,
Beware how you leave off flannel;
And whatever you do, don't change your mind
When once you have pick'd your panel;
With a bank of cloud in the south south-east,
Stand ready to shorten sail;
Fight shy of a corporation feast;
Don't trust to a martingale;
Keep your powder dry, and shut one eye,
Not both, when you touch your trigger;
Don't stop with your head too frequently
(This advice ain't meant for a nigger);

Look before you leap if you like, but if
You mean leaping, don't look long,
Or the weakest place will soon grow stiff,
And the strongest doubly strong ;
As far as you can, to every man
Let your aid be freely given,
And hit out straight, 'tis your shortest plan,
When against the ropes you're driven.

Mere pluck, though not in the least sublime,
Is wiser than blank dismay,
Since " No sparrow can fall before its time,"
And we're valued higher than they ;
So hope for the best, and leave the rest
In charge of a stronger hand,
Like the honest boors in the far-off west,
With the formula terse and grand.

They were men for the most part, rough and rude,
Dull and illiterate,
But they nurs'd no quarrel, they cherish'd no feud,
They were strangers to spite and hate ;
In a kindly spirit they took their stand,
That brothers and sons might learn
How a man should uphold the sports of his land,
And strike his best with a strong right hand,
And take his strokes in return.
" 'Twas a barbarous practice," the quaker cries,
" 'Tis a thing of the past, thank heaven !"—
Keep your thanks till the combative instinct dies
With the taint of the olden leaven ;
Yes, the times are changed, for better or worse,
The prayer that no harm befall
Has given its place to a drunken curse,
And the manly game to a brawl.

Our burdens are heavy, our natures weak,
Some pastime devoid of harm
May we look for? "Puritan elder, speak!"
"Yea, friend, peradventure thou mayst seek
Recreation singing a psalm."
If I did, your visage so grim and stern
Would relax in a ghastly smile,
For of music I never one note could learn,
And my feeble minstrelsy would turn
Your chant to discord vile.
Tho' the Philistine's mail could nought avail,
Nor the spear like a weaver's beam,
There are episodes yet in the Psalmist's tale
To obliterate which his poems fail,
Which his exploits fail to redeem.

Can the Hittite's wrongs forgotten be?
Does he warble "*Non nobis, Domine,*"
With his monarch in blissful concert, free
From all malice to flesh inherent;
Zeruiah's offspring, who served so well,
Yet between the horns of the altar fell—
Does HIS voice the "*Quid gloriaris*" swell,
Or the "*Quare fremuerunt?*"
It may well be thus, where DAVID sings,
And Uriah joins in the chorus,
But while earth to earthy matter clings,
Neither you nor the bravest of Judah's kings
As a pattern can stand before us.

FYTTE V
A MORAL DISCOURSE
LEX TALIONIS

“And if there's blood upon his hand,
'Tis but the blood of deer.”

W. Scott.

To beasts of the field, and fowls of the air,
And fish of the sea alike,
Man's hand is ever slow to spare,
And ever ready to strike ;
With a license to kill, and to work our will,
In season by land or by water,
To our heart's content we may take our fill
Of the joys we derive from slaughter.

And few, I reckon, our rights gainsay
In this world of rapine and wrong,
Where the weak and the timid seem lawful prey
For the resolute and the strong ;
Fins, furs, and feathers, they are and were
For our use and pleasure created,
We can shoot, and hunt, and angle, and snare,
Unquestioned, if not unsated.

I have neither the will nor the right to blame,
Yet to many (though not to all)
The sweets of destruction are somewhat tame,
When no personal risks befall ;

Our victims suffer but little we trust
 (Mere guesswork and blank enigma),
If they suffer at all, our field sports musi
 Of cruelty bear the stigma.

Shall we, hard-hearted to their fates, thus
 Soft-hearted shrink from our own
When the measure we mete is meted to us,
 When we reap as we've always sown?
Shall we who for pastime have squander'd life,
 Who are styled "the Lords of Creation,"
Recoil from our chance of more equal strife,
 And our risk of retaliation?

Though short is the dying pheasant's pain,
 Scant pity you well may spare,
And the partridge slain is a triumph vain,
 And a risk that a child may dare;
You feel when you lower the smoking gun
 Some ruth for yon slaughtered hare,
And hit or miss, in your selfish fun
 The widgeon has little share.

But you've no remorseful qualms or pangs
 When you kneel by the grizzly's lair,
On that conical bullet your sole chance hangs,
 'Tis the weak one's advantage fair,
And the shaggy giant's terrific fangs
 Are ready to crush and tear;—
Should you miss, one vision of home and friends,
 Five words of unfinish'd prayer,
Three savage knife stabs, so your sport ends
In the worrying grapple that chokes and rends;—
 Rare sport, at least, for the bear.
Short shrift! sharp fate! dark doom to dree!
 Hard struggle, tho' quickly ending!

At home or abroad, by land or sea,
In peace or war, sore trials must be,
And worse may happen to you or to me,
For none are secure, and none can flee
From a destiny impending.

Ah ! friend, did you think when the *London* sank,
Timber by timber, plank by plank,
In a cauldron of boiling surf,
How alone at least, with never a flinch,
In a rally contested inch by inch,
You could fall on the trampled turf ?
When a livid wall of the sea leaps high,
In the lurid light of a leaden sky,
And bursts on the quarter railing ;
While the howling storm-gust seems to vie
With the crash of splinter'd beams that fly,
Yet fails too oft to smother the cry
Of women and children wailing ?

Then those who listen in sinking ships,
To despairing sobs from their loved one's lips,
Where the green wave thus slowly shatters,
May long for the crescent-claw that rips
The bison into ribbons and strips,
And tears the strong elk to tatters.
Oh ! sunderings short of body and breath !
Oh ! " battle and murder and sudden death ! "
Against which the Liturgy preaches ;
By the will of a just, yet a merciful Power,
Less bitter, perchance, in the mystic hour,
When the wings of the shadowy angel lower
Than man in his blindness teaches !

FYTTE VI
POTTER'S CLAY

[*An Allegorical Interlude*]

“Nec propter vitam vivendi perdere causas.”

THOUGH the pitcher that goes to the sparkling rill
Too oft gets broken at last,
There are scores of others its place to fill
When its earth to the earth is cast ;
Keep that pitcher at home, let it never roam,
But lie like a useless clod,
Yet sooner or later the hour will come
When its chips are thrown to the sod.

Is it wise, then, say, in the waning day,
When the vessel is crackt and old,
To cherish the battered potter's clay,
As though it were virgin gold ?
Take care of yourself, dull boorish elf,
Though prudent and safe you seem,
Your pitcher will break on the musty shelf,
And mine by the dazzling stream.



“ Our victims suffer but little we trust.”

Lindsay Gordon]

[Page 30

FYTTE VII

A PHILOSOPHICAL DISSERTATION

CITO PEDE PRETERIT AETAS

“ Gillian’s dead, God rest her bier—
How I loved her many years syne ;
Marion’s married, but I sit here
Alive and merry at threescore year,
Dipping my nose in Gascoigne wine.”
Wamba’s song.—Thackeray.

A MELLOWER light doth Sol afford,
His meridian glare has pass’d,
And the trees on the broad and sloping sward
Their length’ning shadows cast,
“ Time flies.” The current will be no joke,
If swollen by recent rain,
To cross in the dark, so I’ll have a smoke,
And then I’ll be off again.

What’s up, old horse ? Your ears you prick,
And your eager eyeballs glisten ;
’Tis the wild-dog’s note in the tea-tree thick,
By the river to which you listen.
With head erect, and tail flung out,
For a gallop you seem to beg,
But I feel the qualm of a chilling doubt
As I glance at your fav’rite leg.

Let the dingo rest, ’tis all for the best,
In this world there’s room enough

For him and you and me and the rest,
And the country is awful rough.
We've had our gallop in days of yore,
Now down the hill we must run,
Yet at times we long for one gallop more,
Although it were only one.

Did our spirits quail at a new four-rail,
Could a "double" double-bank us,
Ere nerve and sinew began to fail
In the consulship of Plancus ?
When our blood ran rapidly, and when
Our bones were pliant and limber,
Could we stand a merry cross-counter then,
A slogging fall over timber ?

Arcades ambo ! Duffers both,
In our best of days, alas !
(I tell the truth, though to tell it loth)
'Tis time we were gone to grass ;
The young leaves shoot, the sere leaves fall,
And the old gives way to the new,
While the Preacher cries, " 'Tis vanity all
And vexation of spirit, too."

Now over my head the vapours curl
From the bowl of the soothing clay,
In the misty forms that eddy and whirl
My thoughts are flitting away ;
Yes, the Preacher's right, 'tis vanity all,
But the sweeping rebuke he showers
On vanities all may heaviest fall
On vanities worse than ours.

We have no wish to exaggerate
The worth of the sports we prize,
Some toil for their church, and some for their state,
And some for their merchandise ;

Some traffic and trade in the city's mart,
Some travel by land and sea,
Some follow science, some cleave to art,
And some to scandal and tea ;
And some for their country and their Queen
Would fight, if the chance they had,
Good ! sooth ! 'twere a sorry world, I ween,
If we all went galloping mad ;
Yet if once we efface the joys of the chase
From the land, and out-root the Stud,
GOOD-BYE TO THE ANGLO-SAXON RACE !
FAREWELL TO THE NORMAN BLOOD !

Where the burn runs down to the uplands brown
From the heights of the snow-clad range,
What anodyne drawn from the stifling town
Can be reckon'd a fair exchange
For the stalker's stride, on the mountain side,
In the bracing northern weather,
To the slopes where couch in their antler'd pride
The deer on the perfum'd heather ?

Oh ! the vigour with which the air is rife !
The spirit of joyous motion ;
The fever, the fulness of animal life,
Can be drain'd from no earthly potion !
The lungs with the living gas grow light,
And the limbs feel the strength of ten,
While the chest expands with its madd'ning might,
GOD'S GLORIOUS OXYGEN.

Thus the measur'd stroke on elastic sward,
Of the steed three parts extended,
Hard held, the breath of his nostrils broad,
With the golden ether blended ;
Then the leap, the rise from the springy turf,
The rush through the buoyant air,
And the light shock landing—the veriest serf
Is an emperor then and there !

Such scenes ! sensation and sound and sight !
To some undiscover'd shore
On the current of Time's remorseless flight
Have they swept to return no more ?
While like phantoms bright of the fever'd night,
That have vex'd our slumbers of yore,
You follow us still in your ghostly might,
Dead days that have gone before.

Vain dreams ! again and again re-told,
Must you crowd on the weary brain
Till the fingers are cold, that entwin'd of old,
Round foil and trigger and rein,
Till stay'd for aye are the roving feet,
Till the restless hands are quiet,
Till the stubborn heart has forgotten to beat,
Till the hot blood has ceas'd to riot ?

In Exeter-hall the saint may chide,
The sinner may scoff outright,
The Bacchanal steep'd in the flagon's tide,
Or the sensual Sybarite ;
But NOLAN'S name will flourish in fame,
When our galloping days are past,
When we go to the place from whence we came,
Perchance to find rest at last.

Thy riddles grow dark, O drifting cloud,
And thy misty shapes grow drear,
Thou hang'st in the air like a shadowy shroud,
But I am of lighter cheer ;
Though our future lot is a sable blot,
Though the wise ones of earth will blame us,
Though our saddles will rot, and our rides be forgot,
" DUM VIVIMUS, VIVAMUS ! "

FYTTE VIII

A METAPHYSICAL SONG

FINIS EXOPTATUS

“There’s something in this world amiss
Shall be unriddled by-and-bye.”

Tennyson.

BOOT and saddle! See the slanting
Rays begin to fall,
Flinging lights and colours flaunting
Through the shadows tall.
Onward! onward! must we travel?
When will come the goal?
Riddle I may not unravel,
Cease to vex my soul.

Harshly break those peals of laughter
From the jays aloft.
Can we guess what they cry after,
We have heard them oft;
Perhaps some strain of rude thanksgiving
Mingles in their song,
Are they glad that they are living?
Are they right or wrong?
Right, ’tis joy that makes them call so,
Why should they be sad?
Certes! we are living also,
Shall not we be glad?

Onward ! onward ! must we travel ?
Is the goal more near ?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Why so dark and drear ?

Yon small bird his hymn outpouring
On the branch close by
Recks not for the kestrel soaring
In the nether sky,
Though the hawk with wings extended
Poises overhead,
Motionless as though suspended
By a viewless thread.
See ! he stoops, nay, shooting forward
With the arrow's flight,
Swift and straight away to nor'ward
Sails he out of sight.
Onward ! onward ! thus we travel,
Comes the goal more nigh ?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Who shall make reply ?

Ha ! Friend Ephraim, saint or sinner,
Tell me if you can—
Tho' we may not judge the inner
By the outer man,
Yet by girth of broadcloth ample,
And by cheeks that shine,
Surely you set no example
In the fasting line—
Could you, like yon bird, discov'ring
Fate, as close at hand
As the kestrel o'er him hov'ring
Still, as he did, stand ?
Trusting grandly, singing gaily,
Confident and calm,
Not one false note in your daily
Hymn or weekly psalm ?

Oft your oily tones are heard in
Chapel, where you preach,
This the everlasting burden
Of the tale you teach :
“ We are damn’d, our sins are deadly,
You alone are heal’d ”—
’Twas not thus their gospel redly
Saints and martyrs seal’d—
You had seem’d more like a martyr
Than you seem to us
To the beasts that caught a Tartar
Once at Ephesus ;
Rather than the stout apostle
Of the Gentiles, who,
Pagan-like, could cuff and wrestle
They’d have chosen you.

Yet, I ween, on such occasion
Your dissenting voice
Would have been, in mild persuasion,
Raised against their choice ;
Man of peace, and man of merit,
Pompous, wise, and grave,
Ephraim ! Is it flesh or spirit
You strive most to save ?
Vain is half this care and caution
O’er the earthly shell,
We can neither baffle nor shun
Dark plumed Azrael.
Onward ! onward ! still we wander,
Nearer draws the goal ;
Half the riddle’s read, we ponder
Vainly on the whole.

Eastward ! in the pink horizon,
Fleecy hillocks shame
This dim range dull earth that lies on
Tinged with rosy flame.

Westward ! as a stricken giant
Stoops his bloody crest,
And tho' vanquish'd frowns defiant,
Sinks the sun to rest,
Distant yet, approaching quickly,
From the shades that lurk,
Like a black pall gathers thickly
Night, when none may work,
Soon our restless occupation
Shall have ceas'd to be ;
Units in God's vast creation,
Ciphers ! What are we ?
Onward ! onward ! oh ! faint-hearted ;
Nearer and more near
Has the goal drawn since we started,
Be of better cheer.

Preacher ! all forbearance ask, for
All are worthless found,
Man must aye take man to task for
Faults while earth goes round.
On this dank soil thistles muster,
Thorns are broadcast sown,
Seek not figs where thistles cluster,
Grapes where thorns have grown.
Sun and rain and dew from heaven,
Light and shade and air,
Heat and moisture freely given
Thorns and thistles share.
Vegetation rank and rotten
Feels the cheering ray ;
Not uncared for, unforgotten,
We too have our day.
Unforgotten ! though we cumber
Earth, we work His will.
Shall we sleep through night's long slumber
Unforgotten still ?

Onward ! onward ! toiling ever,
Weary steps and slow,
Doubting oft, despairing never,
To the goal we go !

Hark ! the bells on distant cattle
Waft across the range,
Through the golden-tufted wattle,
Music low and strange ;
Like the marriage peal of fairies
Comes the tinkling sound,
Or like chimes of sweet St. Mary's
On far English ground.
How my courser champs the snaffle,
And with nostril spread,
Snorts and scarcely seems to ruffle
Fern leaves with his tread ;
Cool and pleasant on his haunches
Blows the evening breeze,
Through the overhanging branches
Of the wattle trees :
Onward ! to the Southern Ocean,
Glides the breath of Spring,
Onward, with a dreamy motion,
I, too, glide and sing—
Forward ! forward ! still we wander—
Tinted hills that lie
In the red horizon yonder—
Is the goal so nigh ?

Whisper, spring wind, softly singing,
Whisper in my ear ;
Respite and nepenthe bringing,
Can the goal be near ?
Laden with the dew of vespers,
From the fragrant sky,
In my ear the wind that whispers
Seems to make reply—

“ Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none ;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,
KINDNESS in another's trouble,
COURAGE in your own.”

Courage ! comrades, this is certain,
All is for the best—
There are lights behind the curtain—
Gentles, let us rest.
As the smoke-rack veers to seaward,
From “ the ancient clay,”
With its moral drifting leeward,
Ends the wanderer's lay.

BORROWED PLUMES

[*A Preface and a Piracy*]

PROLOGUE

OF borrow'd plumes I take the sin,
My extracts will apply
To some few silly songs, which in
These pages scatter'd lie.
The words are Edgar Allan Poe's,
As any man may see,
But what a *Poe-t* wrote in prose,
Shall make blank verse for me.

"These trifles are collected and republished, chiefly with a view to their redemption from the many improvements to which they have been subjected while going at random the rounds of the press. I am naturally anxious, that what I have written should circulate as I wrote it, if it circulate at all. . . . In defence of my own taste, nevertheless, it is incumbent upon me to say that I think nothing in this volume of much value to the public, or very creditable to myself.

"E. A. P."

(*See Preface to Poe's Poetical Works.*)

EPILOGUE

And now that my theft stands detected,
The first of my extracts may call
To some of the rhymes here collected
Your notice, the second to all.

Ah! friends, you may shake your head sadly,
Yet this much you'll say for my verse,
I've written of old something badly,
But written anew something worse.

TRANSLATION FROM HORACE

PASTOR CUM

WHEN he, that shepherd false, 'neath Phrygian sails,
Carried his hostess Helen o'er the seas,
In fitful slumber Nereus hush'd the gales,
That he might sing their future destinies.
A curse to your ancestral home you take
With her, whom Greece, with many a soldier bold,
Shall seek again, in concert sworn to break
Your nuptial ties and Priam's kingdom old.
Alas! what sweat from man and horse must flow,
What devastation to the Trojan realm
You carry, even now doth Pallas show
Her wrath—preparing buckler, car, and helm.
In vain, secure in Aphrodite's care,
You comb your locks, and on the girlish lyre
Select the strains most pleasant to the fair;
In vain, on couch reclining, you desire
To shun the darts that threaten, and the thrust
Of Cretan lance, the battle's wild turmoil,
And Ajax swift to follow—in the dust
Condemned, though late, your wanton curls to soil.
Ah! see you not where (fatal to your race)
Laertes' son comes with the Pylean sage;
Fearless alike, with Teucer joins the chase
Stenelaüs skill'd the fistic strife to wage,
Nor less expert the fiery steeds to quell;
And Meriones, you must know. Behold
A warrior, than his sire more fierce and fell,

To find you rages,—Diomed the bold,
Whom, like the stag that, far across the vale
The wolf being seen, no herbage can allure,
So fly you, panting sorely, dastard pale ;—
Not thus you boasted to your paramour.
Achilles' anger for a space defers
The day of wrath to Troy and Trojan dame ;
Inevitable glide the allotted years,
And Dardan roofs must waste in Argive flame.

LEGEND OF MADRID

[*From the Spanish*]

Francesca :

CRUSH'D and throng'd are all the places
In our amphitheatre,
'Midst a sea of swarming faces
I can yet distinguish her ;
Dost thou triumph, dark-brow'd Nina ?
Is my secret known to thee ?
On the sands of yon arena
I shall yet my vengeance see.
Now through portals fast careering
Picadors are disappearing ;
Now the barriers nimbly clearing
Has the hindmost chulo flown.
Clots of dusky crimson streaking
Brindled flanks and haunches reeking,
Wheels the wild bull, vengeance seeking,
On the matador alone.
Features by sombrero shaded,
Pale and passionless and cold ;
Doublet richly laced and braided,
Trunks of velvet slash'd with gold,
Blood-red scarf, and bare Toledo,—
Mask more subtle, and disguise
Far less shallow, thou dost need, O
Traitor, to deceive my eyes.
Shouts of noisy acclamation,
Breathing savage expectation,

Greet him while he takes his station

Leisurely, disdaining haste ;
Now he doffs his tall sombrero,
Fools ! applaud your butcher hero,
Ye would idolize a Nero
Pandering to public taste.

From the restless Guadalquivir

To my sire's estates he came,
Woo'd and won me,—how I shiver !
Though my temples burn with shame.
I, a proud and high-born lady,
Daughter of an ancient race,
'Neath the vine and olive shade I
Yielded to a churl's embrace,
To a churl my vows were plighted.
Well my madness he requited,
Since, by priestly ties, united
To the muleteer's child ;
And my prayers are wafted o'er him,
That the bull may crush and gore him,
Since the love that once I bore him
Has been changed to hatred wild.

Nina :

Save him ! aid him ! O Madonna !

Two are slain if he is slain ;
Shield his life, and guard his honour,
Let me not entreat in vain.
Sullenly the brindled savage
Tears and tosses up the sand ;
Horns that rend and hoofs that ravage,
How shall man your shock withstand
On the shaggy neck and head lie
Frothy flakes, the eyeballs redly
Flash, the horns so sharp and deadly
Lower, short, and strong, and straight ;

Fast, and furious, and fearless,
 Now he charges ;—virgin peerless,
 Lifting lids, all dry and tearless,
 At thy throne I supplicate.

Francesca :

Cool and calm, the perjured varlet
 Stands on strongly planted heel,
 In his left a strip of scarlet,
 In his right a streak of steel ;
 Ah ! the monster topples over,
 Till his haunches strike the plain !—
 Low-born clown and lying lover,
 Thou hast conquer'd once again.

Nina :

Sweet Madonna, maiden mother,
 Thou hast saved him, and no other ;
 Now the tears I cannot smother,
 Tears of joy my vision blind ;
 Where thou sittest I am gazing,
 These glad misty eyes upraising,
 I have pray'd, and I am praising,
 Bless thee ! bless thee ! Virgin kind.

Francesca :

While the crowd still sways and surges,
 Ere the applauding shouts have ceas'd,
 See, the second bull emerges—
 'Tis the famed Cordovan beast,—
 By the picador ungoaded,
 Scathless of the chulo's dart.
 Slay him and with guerdon loaded,
 And with honours crown'd depart.
 No vain brutish strife he wages,
 Never uselessly he rages,

And his cunning, as he ages,
With his hatred seems to grow ;
Though he stands amid the cheering,
Sluggish to the eye appearing,
Few will venture on the spearing
Of so resolute a foe.

Nina :

Courage ! there is little danger,
Yonder dull-eyed craven seems
Fitter far for stall and manger
Than for scarf and blade that gleams,—
Shorter, and of frame less massive,
Than his comrade lying low,
Tame, and cowardly, and passive,—
He will prove a feebler foe.
I have done with doubt and anguish,
Fears like dews in sunshine languish,
Courage ! husband, we shall vanquish,
Thou art calm and so am I.
For the rush he has not waited,
On he strides with step elated,
And the steel with blood unsated,
Leaps to end the butchery.

Francesca :

Tyro ! mark the brands of battle
On those shoulders dusk and dun,
Such as he is, are the cattle
Skill'd tauridors gladly shun ;
Warier than the Andalusian,
Swifter far, though not so large,
Think'st thou, to his own confusion,
He, like him, will blindly charge ?
Inch by inch the brute advances,
Stealthy yet vindictive glances,

Horns as straight as levell'd lances,
Crouching withers, stooping haunches ;
Closer yet, until the tightening
Strain of 'rapt excitement height'ning
Grows oppressive. Ha ! like lightning
On his enemy he launches.

Nina :

O'er the horn'd front drops the streamer,
In the nape the sharp steel hisses,
Glances, grazes,—Christ ! Redeemer !
By a hair the spine he misses.

Francesca :

Hark ! that shock like muffled thunder,
Booming from the Pyrenees !
Both are down—the man is under—
Now he struggles to his knees,
Now he sinks, his features leaden
Sharpen rigidly and deaden,
Sands beneath him soak and redden,
Skies above him spin and veer ;
Through the doublet, torn and riven,
Where the stunted horn was driven,
Wells the life blood—We are even,
Daughter of the muleteer !

FAUCONSHAWE

[*A Ballad*]

To fetch clear water out of the spring
The little maid Margaret ran
From the stream to the castle's western wing
It was but a bowshot span ;
On the sedgy brink where the osiers cling
Lay a dead man, pallid and wan.

The lady Mabel rose from her bed,
And walked in the castle hall,
Where the porch through the western turret led,
She met with her handmaid small !
“ What aileth thee, Margaret ? ” the lady said,
“ Hast let thy pitcher fall ? ”

“ Say, what hast thou seen by the streamlet side,
A nymph or a water sprite ?
That thou comest with eyes so wild and wide,
And with cheeks so ghostly white ? ”
“ Nor nymph nor sprite,” the maiden cried,
“ But the corpse of a slaughtered knight.”

The lady Mabel summon'd straight
To her presence Sir Hugh de Vere,
Of the guests who tarried within the gate
Of Fauconshawe, most dear
Was he to that lady ; betrothed in state
They had been since many a year.

“ Little Margaret sayeth a dead man lies
By the western spring, Sir Hugh ;
I can scarce believe that the maiden lies—
Yet scarce can believe her true.”
And the knight replies, “ Till we test her eyes
Let her words gain credence due.”

Down the rocky path knight and lady led,
While guests and retainers bold
Followed in haste, for like wildfire spread
The news by the maiden told.
They found 'twas even as she had said,—
The corpse had some while been cold.

How the spirit had pass'd in the moments last
There was little trace to reveal ;
On the still calm face lay no imprint ghast,
Save the angel's solemn seal,
Yet the hands were clench'd in a death grip fast,
And the sods stamp'd down by the heel.

Sir Hugh by the side of the dead man knelt,
Said, “ Full well these features I know,
We have faced each other where blows were dealt,
And he was a stalwart foe ;
I had rather have met him hilt to hilt
Than have found him lying low.”

He turn'd the body up on its face,
And never a word was spoken,
While he ripp'd the doublet, and tore the lace,
And tugg'd—by the self-same token—
And strain'd, till he wrench'd it out of its place,
The dagger-blade that was broken.

Then he turn'd the body over again
And said, while he rose upright,
"May the brand of Cain, with its withering stain,
On the murderer's forehead light,
For he never was slain on the open plain,
Nor yet in the open fight!"

Solemn and stern were the words he spoke,
And he look'd at his lady's men,
But his speech no answering echoes woke,
All were silent there and then,
Till a clear cold voice the silence broke:—
Lady Mabel cried, "Amen!"

His glance met hers, the twain stood hush'd,
With the dead between them there;
But the blood to her snowy temples rush'd
Till it tinged the roots of her hair,
Then paled, but a thin red streak still flush'd
In the midst of her forehead fair.

Four yeomen raised the corpse from the ground,
At a sign from Sir Hugh de Vere,
It was borne to the western turret round
And laid on a knightly bier,
With never a sob nor a mourning sound,—
No friend to the dead was near.

Yet that night was neither revel nor dance
In the halls of Fauconshawe;
Men look'd askance with a doubtful glance
At Sir Hugh, for they stood in awe
Of his prowess, but he like one in a trance
Regarded naught that he saw.

* * * * *

Night black and chill, wind gathering still,
With its wail in the turret tall,
And its headlong blast like a catapult cast
On the crest of the outer wall,
And its hail and rain on the crashing pane,
Till the glassy splinters fall ;

A moody knight by the fitful light
Of the great hall fire below ;
A corpse upstairs, and a woman at prayers,
Will they profit her, ay or no ?
By'r lady fain ! an she comfort gain,
There is comfort for us also.

The guests were gone, save Sir Hugh alone,
And he watched the gleams that broke
On the pale hearth-stone, and flickered and shone
On the panels of polish'd oak ;
He was 'ware of no presence except his own,
Till the voice of young Margaret spoke :

“ I've risen, Sir Hugh, at the mirk midnight,
I cannot sleep in my bed,
Now, unless my tale can be told aright,
I wot it were best unsaid ;
It lies, the blood of yon northern knight,
On my lady's hand and head.”

“ Oh ! the wild wind raves and rushes along,
But thy ravings seem more wild—
She never could do so foul a wrong—
Yet, I blame thee not, my child,
For the fever'd dreams on thy rest that throng ! ”—
He frown'd though his speech was mild.

“ Let storm-winds eddy, and scream, and hurl
Their wrath, they disturb me naught ;
The daughter she of a highborn Earl
No secret of hers I’ve sought ;
I am but the child of a peasant churl,
Yet look to the proofs I’ve brought ;

“ This dagger snapp’d so close to the hilt—
Dost remember thy token well ?
Will it match with the broken blade that spilt
His life in the western dell ?
Nay ! read her handwriting, an thou wilt,
From her paramour’s breast it fell.”

The knight in silence the letter read,
Oh ! the characters well he knew !
And his face might have match’d the face of the dead,
So ashen white was its hue !
Then he tore the parchment, shred by shred,
And the strips in the flames he threw,

And he muttered, “ Densely those shadows fall
In the copse where the alders thicken ;
There she bade him come to her, once for all—
Now, I well may shudder and sicken ;—
Gramercy ! that hand so white and small,
How strongly it must have stricken.”

* * * * *

At midnight hour, in the western tower,
Alone with the dead man there,
Lady Mabel kneels, nor heeds nor feels
The shock of the rushing air,
Though the gusts that pass through the riven glass
Have scattered her raven hair.

Across the floor, through the opening door,
Where standeth a stately knight,
The lamplight streams, and flickers, and gleams,
On his features stern and white—
'Tis Sir Hugh de Vere, and he cometh more near,
And the lady standeth upright.

“ 'Tis little,” he said, “ that I know or care
Of the guilt (if guilt there be)
That lies 'twixt thee and yon dead man there,
Nor matters it now to me ;
I thought thee pure, thou art only fair,
And to-morrow I cross the sea.

“ He perish'd ! I ask not why or how ?
I come to recall my troth ;
Take back, my lady, thy broken vow,
Give back my allegiance oath ;
Let the past be buried between us now
For ever—'tis best for both.

“ Yet, Mabel, I could ask, dost thou dare
Lay hand on that corpse's heart,
And call on thy Maker, and boldly swear
That thou hadst in his death no part ?
I ask not, while threescore proofs I share
With one doubt—uncondemn'd thou art.”

Oh ! cold and bleak upon Mabel's cheek
Came the blast of the storm-wind keen,
And her tresses black, as the glossy back
Of the raven, glanced between
Her fingers slight, like the ivory white,
As she parted their sable sheen.

Yet with steady lip, and with fearless eye
And with cheek like the flush of dawn,
Unflinchingly she spoke in reply—

“Go hence with the break of morn,
I will neither confess, nor yet deny,
I return thee scorn for scorn.”

The knight bow'd low as he turn'd to go ;
He travell'd by land and sea,
But naught of his future fate I know,
And naught of his fair ladye ;—
My story is told, as, long ago,
The story was told to me.

RIPPLING WATER

THE maiden sat by the river side,
 (The rippling water murmurs by)
And sadly into the clear blue tide
 The salt tear fell from her clear blue eye.
“ ’Tis fixed for better, for worse,” she cried,
“ And to-morrow the bridegroom claims the bride.
Oh, ! wealth and power and rank and pride
 Can surely peace and happiness buy.
I was merry, nathless, in my girlhood’s hours,
 Mid the waving grass, when the bright sun shone.
Shall I be as merry in Marmaduke’s towers ? ”
 (The rippling water murmurs on).

Stephen works for his daily bread,
 (The rippling water murmurs low)
Through the crazy thatch that covers his head
 The rain-drops fall and the wind-gusts blow.
“ I’ll mend the old roof-tree,” so he said,
“ And repair the cottage when we are wed.”
And my pulses throbbed, and my cheek grew red,
 When he kiss’d me—that was long ago.
Stephen and I, should we meet again,
 Not as we’ve met in days that are gone,
Will my pulses throb with pleasure or pain ?
 (The rippling water murmurs on).

Old Giles, the gardener, strok'd my curls,
(The rippling water murmurs past)
Quoth he, "In laces and silks and pearls,
My child will see her reflections cast ;
Now I trust in my heart that your lord will be
Kinder to you than he was to me,
When I lay in the jail, and my children three
With their sickly mother kept bitter fast."
With Marmaduke now my will is law,
Marmaduke's will may be law anon ;
Does the sheath of velvet cover the claw ?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Dame Martha patted me on the cheek,
(The rippling water murmurs low)
Saying, "There are words that I fain would speak—
Perhaps they were best unspoken though ;
I can't persuade you to change your mind,
And useless warnings are scarcely kind,
And I may be foolish as well as blind,
But take my blessing whether or no."
Dame Martha's wise, though her hair is white,
Her sense is good, though her sight is gone—
Can she really be gifted with second sight ?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Brian of Hawksmede came to our cot,
(The rippling water murmurs by)
Scatter'd the sods of our garden plot,
Riding his roan horse recklessly ;
Trinket and token and tress of hair,
He flung them down at the door-step there,
Said, "Elsie ! ask your lord, if you dare,
Who gave him the blow as well as the lie."
That evening I mentioned Brian's name,
And Marmaduke's face grew white and wan,
Am I pledged to one of a spirit so tame ?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Brian is headstrong, rash, and vain,
 (The rippling water murmurs still)
Stephen is somewhat duller of brain,
 Slower of speech, and milder of will;
Stephen must toil a living to gain,
Plough and harrow, and gather the grain;
Brian has little enough to maintain
 The station in life which he needs must fill;
Both are fearless and kind and frank,
 But we can't win all gifts under the sun—
What have I won save riches and rank?
 (The rippling water murmurs on).

Riches and rank, and what beside,
 (The rippling water murmurs yet)
The mansion is stately, the manor is wide,
 Their lord for a while may pamper and pet;
Liveried lackeys may jeer aside,
Though the peasant girl is their master's bride,
At her shyness mingled with awkward pride—
 'Twere folly for trifles like these to fret;
But the love of one that I cannot love,
 Will it last when the gloss of his toy is gone?
Is there naught beyond, below or above?
 (The rippling water murmurs on).

WHOM DOES IT PROFIT ?

CUI BONO

OH ! wind that whistles o'er thorns and thistles,
Of this fruitful earth like a goblin elf ;
Why should he labour to help his neighbour
Who feels too reckless to help himself ?
The wail of the breeze in the bending trees
Is something between a laugh and a groan ;
And the hollow roar of the surf on the shore
Is a dull discordant monotone ;
I wish I could guess what sense they express,
There's a meaning, doubtless, in every sound,
Yet no one can tell, and it may be as well,—
Whom would it profit ? the world goes round !

On this earth so rough, we know quite enough,
And, I sometimes fancy, a little too much ;
The sage may be wiser than clown or than kaiser,
Is he more to be envied for being such ?
Neither more nor less, in his idleness,
The sage is doom'd to vexation sure ;
The kaiser may rule, but the slippery stool
That he calls his throne, is no sinecure ;
And as for the clown, you may give him a crown,
May be he'll thank you, and may be not,
And before you can wink, he may spend it in drink,—
To whom does it profit ?—We ripe and rot !

Yet under the sun much work is done
By clown and kaiser, by serf and sage ;
All sow and some reap, and few gather the heap
Of the garner'd grain of a by-gone age.
By sea or by soil man is bound to toil,
And the dreamer, waiting for time and tide,
For awhile may shirk his share of the work,
But he grows with his dream dissatisfied ;
He may climb to the edge of the beetling ledge,
Where the loose crag topples and well-nigh reels
'Neath the lashing gale, but the tonic will fail,—
What does it profit ?—Wheels within wheels !

Ay ! work we must, or with idlers rust,
And eat we must our bodies to nurse ;
Some folk grow fatter—what does it matter ?
I'm blest if I do—quite the reverse ;
'Tis a weary round to which we are bound,
The same thing over and over again ;
Much toil and trouble, and a glittering bubble
That rises and bursts is the best we gain ;
And we murmur, and yet, 'tis certain, we get
What good we deserve—can we hope for more ?—
They are roaring, those waves in their echoing caves,—
To whom do they profit ?—Let them roar !

BELLONA

THOU art moulded in marble impassive,
False goddess, fair statue of strife,
Yet standest on pedestal massive,
A symbol and token of life.
Thou art still, not with stillness of languor,
And calm, not with calm boding rest ;
For thine is all wrath and all anger
That throbs far and near in the breast
Of man, by thy presence possess'd.

With the brow of a fallen archangel,
The lips of a beautiful fiend,
And locks that are snake-like to strangle,
And eyes from whose depths may be glean'd
The presence of passions, that tremble
Unbidden, yet shine as they may
Through features too proud to dissemble,
Too cold and too calm to betray
Their secrets to creatures of clay.

Thy breath stirreth faction and party,
Men rise, and no voice can avail
To stay them—rose-tinted Astarte,
Herself at thy presence turns pale.
For deeper and richer the crimson
That gathers behind thee throws forth
A halo thy raiment and limbs on,
And leaves a red track in the path
That flows from thy wine-press of wrath.

For behind thee red rivulets trickle,
Men fall by thy hands, swift and lithe,
As corn falleth down to the sickle,
As grass falleth down to the scythe.
Thine arm strong, and cruel, and shapely,
Lifts high the sharp pitiless lance,
And rapine and ruin and rape lie
Around thee. The Furies advance,
And Ares awakes from his trance.

We, too, with our bodies thus weakly,
With hearts hard and dangerous, thus
We own thee—the saints suffered meekly
Their wrongs—it is not so with us.
Some share of thy strength thou hast given
To mortals refusing in vain
Thine aid. We have suffered and striven
Till we have grown reckless of pain,
Though feeble of heart and of brain.

Fair spirit, alluring if wicked,
False deity, terribly real,
Our senses are trapp'd, our souls trickèd
By thee and thy hollow ideal.
The soldier who falls in his harness,
And strikes his last stroke with slack hand,
On his dead face thy wrath and thy scorn is
Imprinted. Oh! seeks he a land
Where he shall escape thy command.

When the blood of thy victims lies red on
That stricken field, fiercest and last,
In the sunset that gilds Armageddon
With battle-drift still overcast ;
When the smoke of thy hot conflagrations
O'ershadows the earth as with wings,
Where nations have fought against nations,
And kings have encounter'd with kings,
When cometh the end of all things ;

Then those who have patiently waited,
And borne unresisting the pain
Of thy vengeance unglutted, unsated,
Shall they be rewarded again ?
Then those who, enticed by thy laurels,
Or urged by thy promptings unblest,
Have striven, and stricken in quarrels,
Shall they too find pardon and rest ?
We know not, yet hope for the best.

THE SONG OF THE SURF

WHITE steeds of ocean, that leap with a hollow and
wearisome roar
On the bar of ironstone steep, not a fathom's length
from the shore,
Is there never a seer nor sophist can interpret your wild
refrain,
When speech, the harshest and roughest, is seldom
studied in vain ;
My ears are constantly smitten by that dreary mono-
tone,
In a hieroglyphic 'tis written—'tis spoken in a tongue
unknown ;
Gathering, growing, and swelling, and surging, and
shivering, say !
What is the tale you are telling ? what is the drift of
your lay ?

You come, and your crests are hoary with the foam of
your countless years ;
You break, with a rainbow of glory, through the spray
of your glittering tears,
Is your song a song of gladness ? a paean of joyous
might ?
Or a wail of discordant sadness for the wrongs you
never can right ?
For the empty seat by the ingle ? for the children reft
of their sire ?
For the bride, sitting sad, and single, and pale, by the
flickering fire ?

For your ravenous pools of suction ? for your shattering
billow swell ?

For your ceaseless work of destruction ? for your hunger
insatiable ?

Not far from this very place, on the sand and the shingle
dry,

He lay, with his batter'd face upturn'd to the frowning
sky.

When your waters wash'd and swill'd high over his
drowning head,

When his nostrils and lungs were fill'd, when his feet
and hands were as lead,

When against the rock he was hurl'd, and suck'd again
to the sea,

On the shores of another world, on the brink of eternity,
On the verge of annihilation, did it come to that swimmer
strong

The sudden interpretation of your mystical weird-like
song.

“ Mortal ! that which thou asketh, ask not thou of the
waves ;

Fool ! thou foolishly taskest us—we are only slaves ;

Might, more mighty, impels us—we must our lot fulfil,

He who gathers and swells us curbs us too at His will,

Think'st thou the wave that shatters questioneth His
decree ?

Little to us it matters, and nought it matters to thee.

Not, thus murmuring idly, we from our duty would
swerve,

Over the world spread widely, ever we labour and
serve.”

WHISPERINGS IN WATTLE-BOUGHS

Oh! gaily sings the bird, and the wattle-boughs are
stirr'd

And rustled by the scented breath of spring ;
Oh, the dreary wistful longing ! Oh, the faces that are
thronging !

Oh, the voices that are vaguely whispering !

Oh! tell me, father mine, ere the good ship cross'd the
brine,

On the gangway one mute hand-grip we exchanged,
Do you, past the grave, employ, for your stubborn
reckless boy,

Those petitions that in life were ne'er estranged ?

Oh! tell me, sister dear, parting word and parting tear

Never pass'd between us ;—let me bear the blame.
Are you living, girl, or dead ? bitter tears since then
I've shed

For the lips that lisp'd with mine a mother's name.

Oh! tell me, ancient friend, ever ready to defend

In our boyhood, at the base of life's long hill,
Are you waking yet, or sleeping ? have you left this vale
of weeping ?

Or do you, like your comrade, linger still ?

Oh! whisper, buried love, is there rest and peace
above?—

There is little hope or comfort here below;—
On your sweet face lies the mould, and your bed is
strait and cold—

Near the harbour where the sea-tides ebb and flow.

* * * * *

All silent—they are dumb—and the breezes go and
come

With an apathy that mocks at man's distress;
Laugh, scoffer, while you may! I could bow me down
and pray

For an answer that might stay my bitterness.

Oh, harshly screams the bird! and the wattle-bloom
is stirr'd!

There's a sullen weird-like whisper in the bough:
“Ay, kneel, and pray, and weep, but HIS BELOVED
SLEEP

CAN NEVER BE DISTURB'D BY SUCH AS THOU!!”

CONFESSION

THE shore-boat lies in the morning light,
By the good ship ready for sailing ;
The skies are clear, and the dawn is bright,
Tho' the bar of the bay is fleck'd with white,
And the wind is fitfully wailing ;
Near the tiller stands the priest, and the knight
Leans over the quarter-railing.

“ There is time while the vessel tarries still,
There is time while her shrouds are slack,
There is time ere her sails to the west wind fill,
Ere her tall masts vanish from town and from hill,
Ere cleaves to her keel the track ;
There is time for confession to those who will,
To those who may never come back.”

“ Sir priest, you can shrive these men of mine,
And, I pray you, shrive them fast,
And shrive those hardy sons of the brine,
Captain and mates of the *Eglantine*,
And sailors before the mast ;
Then pledge me a cup of the Cyprus wine,
For I fain would bury the past.”

“ And hast thou naught to repent, my son ?
Dost thou scorn confession and shrift ?
Ere thy sands from the glass of time shall run,

Is there naught undone that thou shouldst have done,
Naught done that thou shouldst have left ?
The guiltiest soul may from guilt be won,
And the stoniest heart may be cleft."

" Have my ears been closed to the prayer of the poor,
Or deaf to the cry of distress ?
Have I given little, and taken more ?
Have I brought a curse to the widow's door ?
Have I wrong'd the fatherless ?
Have I steep'd my fingers in guiltless gore,
That I must perforce confess ? "

" Have thy steps been guided by purity
Through the paths with wickedness rife ?
Hast thou never smitten thine enemy ?
Hast thou yielded naught to the lust of the eye,
And naught to the pride of life ?
Hast thou pass'd all snares of pleasure by ?
Hast thou shunn'd all wrath and all strife ? "

" Nay, certes ! a sinful life I've led,
Yet I've suffer'd, and lived in hope ;
I may suffer still, but my hope has fled,—
I've nothing now to hope or to dread,
And with fate I can fairly cope ;
Were the waters closing over my head,
I should scarcely catch at a rope."

" Dost suffer ? thy pain may be fraught with grace,
Since never by works alone
We are saved ;—the penitent thief may trace
That wealth of love in the Saviour's face
To the Pharisee rarely shown ;
And the Magdalene's arms may yet embrace
The foot of the jasper throne."

“ Sir priest, a heavier doom I dree,
For I feel no quickening pain,
But a dull dumb weight, when I bow my knee,
And (not with the words of the Pharisee)
My hard eyes heavenward strain,
Where my dead darling prayeth for me !
Now, I wot, she prayeth in vain !

“ Still I hear it over the battle’s din,
And over the festive cheer,—
So she pray’d with clasp’d hands, white and thin,—
The prayer of a soul absolved from sin,
For a soul that is dark and drear,
For the light of repentance bursting in
And the flood of the blinding tear.

“ Say, priest ! when the saint must vainly plead,
Oh ! how shall the sinner fare ?
I hold your comfort a broken reed ;
Let the wither’d branch for itself take heed,
While the green shoots wait your care ;
I’ve striven, though feebly, to grasp your creed,
And I’ve grappled my own despair.”

“ By the little within thee, good and brave,
Not wholly shattered, though shaken ;
By the soul that crieth beyond the grave,
The love that He once in His mercy gave,
In His mercy since retaken,
I conjure thee, O sinner ! pardon crave !
I implore thee, O sleeper, waken !”

“ Go to ! shall I lay my black soul bare
To a vain self-righteous man ?
In my sin, in my sorrow, you may not share,

And yet, could I meet with one* who must bear
The load of an equal ban,
With him I might strive to blend one prayer,
The wail of the Publican."

"My son, I too am a wither'd bough,
My place is to others given ;
Thou hast sinn'd, thou sayest ; I ask not how,
For I, too, have sinn'd, even as thou,
And I, too, have feebly striven,
And with thee I must bow, crying, ' Shrive us now
Our Father Which art in heaven ! ' "

SUNLIGHT ON THE SEA

[The Philosophy of a Feast]

MAKE merry, comrades, eat and drink,
 (The sunlight flickers on the sea)
The garlands gleam, the glasses clink,
 The grape juice mantles fair and free,
The lamps are trimm'd, although the light
 Of day still lingers on the sky ;
We sit between the day and night,
 And push the wine-flask merrily.
I see you feasting round me still,
 All gay of heart and strong of limb ;
Make merry, friends, your glasses fill,
 The lights are growing dim.

I miss the voice of one I've heard,
 (The sunlight sinks upon the sea)
He sang as blythe as any bird,
 And shook the rafters with his glee ;
But times have changed with him, I wot,
 By fickle fortune cross'd and flung ;
Far stouter heart than mine he's got
 If now he sings as then he sung.
Yet some must swim when others sink,
 And some must sink when others swim ;
Make merry, comrades, eat and drink,
 The lights are growing dim.

I miss the face of one I've loved—
 (The sunlight settles on the sea)
Long since to distant climes he roved ;
 He had his faults, and so have we ;
His name was mentioned here this day,
 And it was coupled with a sneer ;
I heard, nor had I aught to say,
 Though once I held his memory dear :
Who cares, 'mid wines and fruits and flowers,
 Though death or danger compass him,
He had his faults, and we have ours,
 The lights are growing dim.

I miss the form of one I know—
 (The sunlight wanes upon the sea)
'Tis not so very long ago ;
 We drank his health with three-times-three,
And we were gay when he was here ;
 And he is gone, and we are gay.
Where has he gone ? or far or near ?
 Good sooth ! 'twere somewhat hard to say.
You glance aside, you doubtless think
 My homily a foolish whim,
'Twill soon be ended, eat and drink,
 The lights are growing dim.

The fruit is ripe, the wine is red,
 (The sunlight fades upon the sea)
To us the absent are the dead,
 The dead to us must absent be.
We, too, the absent ranks must join ;
 And friends will censure and forget :
There's metal base in every coin ;
 Men vanish, leaving traces yet
Of evil, and of good behind,
 Since false notes taint the skylark's hymn
And dross still lurks in gold refined—
 The lights are growing dim.

We eat or drink or e'er we die.
 (The sunlight flushes on the sea)
 Three hundred soldiers feasted high
 An hour before Thermopylae ;
 Leonidas pour'd out the wine
 And shouted ere he drain'd the cup,
 " Ho ! comrades, let us gaily dine—
 This night with Pluto we shall sup " ;
 And if they lean'd upon a reed,
 And if their reed was slight and slim,
 There's something good in Spartan creed,
 The lights are growing dim.

Make merry, comrades, eat and drink,
 (The sunlight flashes on the sea)
 My spirit is rejoiced to think
 That even as they were so are we ;
 For they, like us, were mortals vain,
 The slaves to earthly passions wild,
 Who slept with heaps of Persians slain
 For winding-sheets around them piled.
 The dead men's deeds are living still—
 My festive speech is somewhat grim—
 Their good obliterates their ill,
 The lights are growing dim.

We eat and drink, we come and go.
 (The sunlight dies upon the sea)
 I speak in riddles. Is it so ?
 My riddles need not mar your glee ;
 For I will neither bid you share
 My thoughts, nor will I bid you shun,
 Though I should see in yonder chair,
 Th' Egyptian's muffled skeleton.
 One toast with me, your glasses fill,
 Ay, fill them level with the brim,
De mortuis, nisi bonum, nil
 The lights are growing dim.

DELILAH

[From a Picture]

THE sun has gone down, spreading wide on
The sky-line one ray of red fire :
Prepare the soft cushions of Sidon,
Make ready the rich loom of Tyre.
The day, with its toil and its sorrow,
Its shade, and its sunshine, at length
Has ended : dost fear for the morrow,
Strong man, in the pride of thy strength ?

Like fireflies, heavenward clinging,
They multiply, star upon star ;
And the breeze a low murmur is bringing
From the tents of my people afar,
Nay, frown not, I am but a Pagan,
Yet little for these things I care ;
'Tis the hymn to our deity Dagon,
That comes with the pleasant night air.

It shall not disturb thee, nor can it ;
See ! closed are the curtains, the lights
Gleam down on the cloven pomegranate,
Whose thirst-slaking nectar invites ;
The red wine of Hebron glows brightly
In yon goblet—the draught of a king ;
And through the silk awning steals lightly,
The sweet song my handmaidens sing.

Dost think that thy God, in His anger,
Will trifle with nature's great laws,
And slacken those sinews in languor
That battled so well in His cause?
Will He take back that strength He has given,
Because to the pleasures of youth
Thou yielddest? Nay, God-like, in heaven,
He laughs at such follies, forsooth!

Oh! were I, for good or for evil,
As great and as gifted as thou,
Neither God should restrain me, nor devil,
To none like a slave would I bow.
If fate must indeed overtake thee,
And feebleness come to thy clay,
Pause not till thy strength shall forsake thee,
Enjoy it the more in thy day.

Oh! fork'd-tongue of adder, by her pent
In smooth lips!—oh! Sybarite blind!
Oh! woman allied to the serpent!
Oh! beauty with venom combined!
Oh! might overcoming the mighty!
Oh! glory departing! oh! shame!
Oh! altar of false Aphrodite,
What strength is consumed in thy flame!

Strong chest, where her drapery rustles,
Strong limbs by her black tresses hid;
Not alone by the might of your muscles,
Yon lion was rent like a kid!
The valour from virtue that sunders
Is reft of its nobler part;
And Lancelot's arm may work wonders,
But braver is Galahad's heart.

Sleep sound on that breast fair and ample ;
Dull brain, and dim eyes, and deaf ears,
Feel not the cold touch on your temple,
Heed not the faint clash of the shears.
It comes !—with the gleam of the lamps on
The curtains—that voice—does it jar
On thy soul in the night-watch ? Ho ! Samson,
Upon thee the Philistines are.

FROM LIGHTNING AND TEMPEST

THE spring wind pass'd through the forest, and whis-
pered low in the leaves,
And the cedar toss'd her head, and the oak stood firm
in his pride ;
The spring wind pass'd through the town, through
the housetops, casements, and eaves,
And whisper'd low in the hearts of the men, and the
men replied,
Singing—" Let us rejoice in the light
Of our glory, and beauty, and might ;
Let us follow our own devices, and foster our own
desires.
As firm as our oaks in our pride, as our cedars fair in our
sight,
We stand like the trees of the forest that brave the
frosts and the fires."

The storm went forth to the forest, the plague went
forth to the town,
And the men fell down to the plague, as the trees fell
down to the gale ;
And their bloom was a ghastly pallor, and their smile was
a ghastly frown,
And the song of their hearts was changed to a wild
disconsolate wail,
Crying—" God ! we have sinn'd, we have sinn'd,

We are bruised, we are shorn, we are thinn'd,
Our strength is turn'd to derision, our pride laid low
in the dust,
Our cedars are cleft by Thy lightnings, our oaks are
strew'd by Thy wind,
And we fall on our faces seeking Thine aid though
Thy wrath is just."

WORMWOOD AND NIGHTSHADE

THE troubles of life are many,
The pleasures of life are few :
When we sat in the sunlight, Annie,
I dreamt that the skies were blue—
When we sat in the sunlight, Annie,
I dreamt that the earth was green ;
There is little colour, if any,
'Neath the sunlight now to be seen.

Then the rays of the sunset glinted
Through the blackwood's emerald bough
On an emerald sward, rose-tinted,
And spangled, and gemm'd ;—and now
The rays of the sunset redden
With a sullen and lurid frown,
From skies that are dusk and leaden
To earth that is dusk and brown.

To right and to left extended
The uplands are blank and drear,
And their neutral tints are blended
With the dead leaves sombre and sere ;
The cold grey mist from the still side
Of the lake creeps sluggish and sure,
Bare and bleak is the hill side,
Barren and bleak the moor.

Bright hues and shapes intertwined,
Fair forms and rich colours ;—now
They have flown—if e'er they existed—
It matters not why or how,
It matters not where or when, dear,
They have flown, the blue and the green.
I thought on what might be then, dear,
Now I think on what might have been.

What might have been !—words of folly,
What might be !—speech for a fool ;
With mistletoe round me, and holly,
Scarlet and green, at Yule,
With the elm in place of the wattle,
And in lieu of the gum, the oak,
Years back I believed a little,
And as I believed I spoke.

Have I done with those childish fancies ?
They suited the days gone by,
When I pulled the poppies and pansies,
When I hunted the butterfly,
With one who had long been sleeping,
A stranger to doubts and cares,
And to sowing that ends in reaping
Thistles and thorns and tares.

What might be !—the dreams were scatter'd,
As chaff is toss'd by the wind,
The faith has been rudely shattered,
That listen'd with credence blind ;
Things were to have been, and therefore
They were, and they are to be,
And will be :—we must prepare for
The doom we are bound to dree.

Ah me ! we believe in evil,
Where once we believed in good,
The world, the flesh, and the devil
Are easily understood ;
The world, the flesh, and the devil,
Their traces on earth are plain :
Must they always riot and revel
While footprints of man remain ?

Talk about better and wiser,
Wiser and worse are one,
The sophist is the despiser
Of all things under the sun ;
Is nothing real but confusion ?
Is nothing certain but death ?
Is nothing fair save illusion ?
Is nothing good that has breath

Some sprite, malignant and elfish,
Seems present, whispering close,
“ All motives of life are selfish,
All instincts of life are gross,
And the song that the poet fashions,
And the love-bird's musical strain,
Are jumbles of animal passions,
Refined by animal pain.”

The restless throbbings and burnings
That hope unsatisfied brings,
The weary longings and yearnings
For the mystical better things,
Are the sands on which is reflected
The pitiless moving lake,
Where the wanderer falls dejected,
By the thirst he never can slake.

A child blows bubbles that glitter,
He snatches them, they disperse ;
Yet childhood's folly is better,
And manhood's folly is worse :
Gilt baubles we grasp at blindly
Would turn in our hands to dross ;
'Tis a fate less cruel than kindly
Denies the gain and the loss.

And as one who pursues a shadow,
As one who hunts in a dream,
As the child who crosses the meadow,
Enticed by the rainbow's gleam,
I—knowing the course was foolish
And guessing the goal was pain,
Stupid, and stubborn, and mulish—
Followed and follow again.

The sun over Gibeon halted,
Holding aloof the night,
When Joshua's arm was exalted,
Yet never retraced his flight ;
Nor will he turn back, nor can he,
He chases the future fast ;
The future is blank—Oh, Annie !
I fain would recall the past.

There are others toiling and straining
'Neath burdens graver than mine—
They are weary yet uncomplaining—
I know it, yet I repine ;
I know it, how time will ravage,
How time will level, and yet
I long with a longing savage,
I regret with a fierce regret.

You are no false ideal,
Something is left of you,
Present, perceptible, real,
Palpable, tangible, true ;
One shred of your broken necklace.
One tress of your pale gold hair,
And a heart so utterly reckless,
That the worst it would gladly dare.

There is little pleasure, if any,
In waking the past anew ;
My days and nights have been many ;
Lost chances many I rue ;
My days and nights have been many ;
Now I pray that they be few,
When I think on the hillside, Annie,
Where I dreamt that the skies were blue.

ART IS LONG

ARS LONGA

[*A Song of Pilgrimage*]

OUR hopes are wild imaginings,
Our schemes are airy castles,
Yet these, on earth, are lords and kings,
And we their slaves and vassals ;
Yon dream, forsooth, of buoyant youth
Most ready to deceive is,
But age will own the bitter truth,
“ *Ars longa, vita brevis.*”

The hill of life with eager feet
We climb'd in merry morning,
But on the downward track we meet
The shades of twilight, warning ;
The shadows gaunt they fall aslant ;
And those who scaled Ben Nevis,
Against the mole-hills toil and pant,
“ *Ars longa, vita brevis.*”

The obstacles that barr'd our path
We seldom quail'd to dash on
In youth, for youth one motto hath,
“ The will, the way must fashion.”
Those words, I wot, blood thick and hot
Too ready to believe is,
But thin and cold our blood hath got,
“ *Ars longa, vita brevis.*”

And "art is long," and "life is short,"
And man is slow at learning ;
And yet, by divers dealings taught,
For divers follies yearning,
He owns at last, with grief downcast
(For man disposed to grieve is)—
One adage old, stands true and fast,
" *Ars longa, vita brevis.*"

We journey ! manhood, youth, and age,
The matron, and the maiden,
Like pilgrims on a pilgrimage,
Loins girded, heavy laden :—
Each pilgrim strong, who joins our throng,
Most eager to achieve is,
Foredoom'd ere long to swell the song,
" *Ars longa, vita brevis.*"

At morn, with staff and sandal-shoon,
We travel brisk and cheery.
But some have laid them down ere noon,
And all at eve are weary ;
The noon-tide glows with no repose,
And bitter chill the eve is,
The grasshopper a burden grows,
" *Ars longa, vita brevis.*"

The staff is snapt, the sandal fray'd,
The flint-stone galls and blisters,
Our brother's steps we cannot aid,
Ah me ! nor aid our sister's ;
The pit prepares its hidden snares,
The rock prepared to cleave is,
We cry, in falling unawares,
" *Ars longa, vita brevis.*"

Oh ! Wisdom, which we sought to win !
Oh ! Strength, in which we trusted !
Oh ! Glory, which we gloried in !
Oh ! puppets we adjusted !
On barren land our seed is sand,
And torn the web we weave is,
The bruised reed hath pierced the hand,
“ *Ars longa, vita brevis.*”

We, too, “ Job’s comforters ” have met,
With steps, like ours, unsteady,
They could not help themselves, and yet
To judge us they were ready ;
Life’s path is trod at last, and God
More ready to reprieve is,
They know, who rest beneath the sod,
“ *Mors grata, vita brevis.*”

THE LAST LEAP

ALL is over ! fleet career,
Dash of greyhound slipping thongs,
Flight of falcon, bound of deer,
Mad hoof-thunder in our rear,
Cold air rushing up our lungs,
Din of many tongues.

Once again, one struggle good,
One vain effort ;—he must dwell
Near the shifted post, that stood
Where the splinters of the wood,
Lying in the torn tracks, tell
How he struck and fell.

Crest where cold drops beaded cling,
Small ear drooping, nostril full
Glazing to a scarlet ring,
Flanks and haunches quivering,
Sinews stiff'ning void and null,
Dumb eyes sorrowful.

Satin coat that seems to shine
Duller now, black braided tress
That a softer hand than mine
Far away was wont to twine,
That in meadows far from this
Softer lips might kiss.

All is over ! this is death,
And I stand to watch thee die,
Brave old horse ; with 'bated breath
Hardly drawn through tight-clench'd teeth
Lip indented deep, but eye
Only dull and dry.

Musing on the husk and chaff
Gather'd where life's tares are sown,
Thus I speak, and force a laugh
That is half a sneer and half
An involuntary groan,
In a stifled tone—

“ Rest, old friend ! thy day, though rife
With its toil, hath ended soon ;
We have had our share of strife,
Tumblers in the mask of life,
In the pantomime of noon
Clown and pantaloon.

“ With the flash that ends thy pain
Respite and oblivion blest
Come to greet thee. I in vain
Fall : I rise to fall again :
Thou has fallen to thy rest—
And thy fall is best ! ”

TWO YEARS AGO I WAS THINKING

QUARE FATIGASTI

Two years ago I was thinking
On the changes that years bring forth ;
Now I stand where I then stood, drinking
The gust and the salt sea-froth ;
And the shuddering wave strikes, linking
With the wave subsiding and sinking,
And clots the coast-herbage, shrinking
With the hue of the white cere-cloth.

Is there aught worth losing or keeping ?
The bitters or sweets men quaff ?
The sowing or the doubtful reaping ?
The harvest of grain or chaff ?
Or squandering days or heaping,
Or waking seasons or sleeping,
The laughter that dries the weeping,
Or the weeping that drowns the laugh ?

For joys wax dim and woes deaden,
We forget the sorrowful biers
And the garlands glad that have fled in
The merciful march of years ;
And the sunny skies, and the leaden,
And the faces that pale or redden,
And the smiles that lovers are wed in
Who are born and buried in tears.

And the myrtle bloom turns hoary,
And the blush of the rose decays,
And sodden with sweat and gory
Are the hard-won laurels and bays ;
We are neither joyous nor sorry
When time has ended our story,
And blotted out grief, and glory,
And pain, and pleasure, and praise.

Weigh justly, throw good and bad in
The scales, will the balance veer
With the joys or the sorrows had in
The sum of a life's career ?
In the end, spite of dreams that sadden
The sad, or the sanguine madden,
There is nothing to grieve or gladden,
There is nothing to hope or fear.

“Thou hast gone astray,” quoth the preacher,
“In the gall of thy bitterness,”
Thou hast taught me in vain, O teacher !
I neither blame thee nor bless ;
If bitter is sure and sweet sure,
These vanish with form and feature,—
Can the creature fathom the creature
Whose Creator is fathomless ?

Is the dry land sure ? is the sea sure ?
Is there ought that shall long remain,
Pain, or peril, or pleasure,
Pleasure, or peril, or pain ?
Shall we labour or take our leisure,
And who shall inherit treasure,
If the measure with which we measure
Is meted to us again ?

I am slow in learning, and swift in

Forgetting, and I have grown

So weary with long sand sifting.

Towards the mist where the breakers moan

The rudderless bark is drifting

Through the shoals and the quicksands shifting—

In the end shall the night-rack lifting,

Discover the shores unknown ? .

HIPPODROMANIA
OR WHIFFS FROM THE PIPE
VISIONS IN THE SMOKE

REST, and be thankful! On the verge
Of the tall cliff rugged and grey,
But whose granite base the breakers surge,
And shiver their frothy spray,
Outstretched, I gaze on the eddying wreath
That gathers and flits away,
With the surf beneath, and between my teeth
The stem of the "ancient clay."

With the anodyne cloud on my listless eyes,
With its spell on my dreamy brain,
As I watch the circling vapours rise
From the brown bowl up to the sullen skies,
My vision becomes more plain,
Till a dim kaleidoscope succeeds
Through the smoke rack drifting and veering,
Like ghostly riders on phantom steeds
To a shadowy goal careering.

In their own generation the wise may sneer,
They hold our sports in derision;
Perchance to sophist, or sage, or seer
Were allotted a graver vision.
Yet if man, of all the Creator plann'd,
His noblest work is reckoned,
Of the work of His hand, by sea or by land,
The horse may at least rank second.

Like a ribbon of green, stretching out between
The ranks of the multitude.

The flag is lowered. "They're off!" "They come!"
The squadron is sweeping on;
A sway in the crowd—a murmuring hum!
"They're here!" "They're past!" "They're gone!"
They came with the rush of the southern surf,
On the bar of the storm-girt bay;
And like muffled drums on the sounding turf
Their hoof-strokes echo away.

The rose and black draws clear of the ruck,
And the murmur swells to a roar,
As the brave old colours that never were struck,
Are seen with the lead once more.
Though the feathery ferns and grasses wave
O'er the sods where Lantern sleeps,
Though the turf is green on Fisherman's grave,
The stable its prestige keeps.

Six lengths in front she scours along,
She's bringing the field to trouble,
She's taking them off, she's running strong,
She shakes her head and pulls double.
Now Minstrel falters, and Exile flags,
The Barb finds the pace too hot,
And Toryboy loiters, and Playboy lags,
And the *bolt* of Ben Bolt is shot.

That she never may be caught this day
Is the worst that the public wish her.
She won't be caught; she comes right away;
Hurrah for Seagull and Fisher!
See! Strop falls back, though his reins are slack,
Sultana begins to tire;
And the top-weight tells on the Sydney crack,
And the pace on "the Gipps Land flyer."

The rowels, as round the turn they sweep,
Just graze Tim Whiffler's flanks,
Like the hunted deer that flies through the sheep,
He strides through the beaten ranks.
Daughter of Omen! prove your birth,
The colt will take lots of choking ;
The hot breath steams at your saddle girth,
From his scarlet nostril smoking.

The shouts of the ring for a space subside,
And slackens the bookmakers' roar ;
Now, Davis, rally ; now, Carter, ride,
As man never rode before.
When Sparrowhawk's backers cease to cheer,
When Yattendon's friends are dumb,
When hushed is the clamour for Volunteer—
Alone in the race they come !

They're neck and neck ; they're head and head ;
They're stroke for stroke in the running ;
The whalebone whistles, the steel is red,
No shirking as yet nor shunning.
One effort, Seagull! the blood you boast
Should struggle when nerves are strained ;—
With a rush on the post by a neck at the most,
The verdict for Tim is gained.

Tim Whiffler wins. Is blood alone
The *sine qua non* for a flyer ?
The breed of his dam is a myth unknown,
And we've doubts respecting his sire.
Yet few (if any) those proud names are
On the pages of peerage or stud,
In whose scutcheon lurks no sinister bar,
No taint of the base black blood.

Ay, Shorthouse laugh—laugh loud and long,
For pedigree you're a sticker ;

You may be right, I may be wrong,
Wiseacres both ! Let's liquor.
Our common descent we may each recall
To a lady of old caught tripping,
The fair one in fig leaves, who damned us all
For a bite at a golden pippin.

When first on this rocky ledge I lay,
There was scarce a ripple in yonder bay,
The air was serenely still ;
Each column that sailed from my swarthy clay
Hung loitering long ere it passed away,
Though the skies wore a tinge of leaden grey,
And the atmosphere was chill.
But the red sun sank to his evening shroud,
Where the western billows are roll'd
Behind a curtain of sable cloud,
With a fringe of scarlet and gold ;
There's a misty glare in the yellow moon
And the drift is scudding fast,
There'll be storm and rattle and tempest soon,
When the heavens are overcast.
The neutral tint of the sullen sea
Is fleck'd with the snowy foam,
And the distant gale sighs drearily,
As the wanderer sighs for his home.
The white sea-horses toss their manes
On the bar of the southern reef,
And the breakers moan, and—by Jove, it rains
(I thought I should come to grief) ;
Though it can't well damage my shabby hat,
Though my coat looks best when it's damp,
Since the shaking I got (no matter where at)
I've a mortal dread of the cramp.
My matches are wet, and my pipe's put out,
And the wind blows colder and stronger ;
I'll be stiff, and sore, and sorry, no doubt,
If I lie here any longer.

THE FIELDS OF COLERAINE

ON the fields of Col'raine there'll be labour in vain
Before the Great Western is ended,
The nags will have toil'd, and the silks will be soil'd,
And the rails will require to be mended.

For the gullies are deep, and the uplands are steep,
And mud will of purls be the token,
And the tough stringy-bark, that invites us to lark,
With impunity may not be broken.

Though Ballarat's fast, and they say he can last,
And that may be granted hereafter,
Yet the judge's decision to the Border division
Will bring neither shouting nor laughter.

And Blueskin I've heard that he goes like a bird,
And I'm told that to back him would pay me,
He's a good bit of stuff, but not quite good enough,
“*Non licuit credere famac.*”

Alfred ought to be there, we all of us swear
By the blood of King Alfred, his sire,
He's not the real jam, by the blood of his dam,
So I shan't put him down as a flyer.

Now Hynam, my boy, I wish you great joy,
I know that when fresh you can jump, sir;
But you'll scarce be in clover when you're ridden all
over,
And punish'd from shoulder to rump, sir.

Archer goes like a shot, they can put on their pot,
 And boil it to cover expenses ;
 Their pot will boil over, the run of his Dover
 He'll never earn over big fences.

There's a horse in the race, with a blaze on his face,
 And we know he can gallop a docker,
 He's proved himself stout, of his speed there's no doubt,
 And his jumping's according to Cocker.

When Hynam's outstript, and when Alfred is whipt
 To keep him in sight of the leaders,
 While Blueskin runs true, but his backers look blue,
 For his rider's at work with the bleeders ;

When his carcass of beef brings " the bullock " to grief,
 And the rush of the tartan is ended ;
 When Archer's in trouble—who's that pulling double,
 And taking his leaps unextended ?

He wins all the way, and the rest—sweet, they say,
 Is the smell of the newly turn'd plough, friend,
 But you smell it too close, when it stops eyes and nose,
 And you can't tell your horse from your cow, friend.

A SHORT RHYME AT RANDOM

“*CREDAT JUDAEUS APELLA*”

DEAR BELL,—I enclose what you ask in a letter,
A short rhyme at random, no more and no less,
And you may insert it for want of a better,
Or leave it, it doesn't much matter, I guess;
And as for a tip, why there isn't much in it,
I may hit the right nail, but first, I declare,
I haven't a notion what's going to win it
(The Champion I mean), and what's more I don't care.
Imprimis, there's Cowra—few nags can go quicker
Than she can—and Smith takes his oath she can fly,
While Brown, Jones, and Robinson swear she's a sticker,
But “*credat Judacus Apella*,” say I.

There's old Volunteer, I'd be sorry to sneer
At his chance; he'll be there, if he goes at the rate
He went at last year, when a customer queer
Johnny Higgerson fancied him lock'd in the straight;
I've heard that the old horse has never been fitter,
I've heard all performances past he'll outvie;
He may gallop a docker, and finish a splitter,
But “*credat Judacus Apella*,” say I.

I know what they say, sir, “The Hook” he can stay, sir,
And stick to his work like a sleuth-hound or beagle;
He stays “with a *hook*,” and he sticks in the clay, sir,
I'd rather, for choice, pop my money on Seagull;

I'm told that the Sydney division will rue, sir,
 Their rashness in front of the stand when they spy
 With a clear lead the white jacket spotted with blue, sir,
 But "*credat Judæus Apella*," say I.

There's The Barb—you may talk of your flyers and stayers,

All bosh—when he strips you can see his eye range
 Round his rivals with much the same look as Tom Sayers

Once wore, when he faced the big novice, Bill Bainge.
 Like Stow, at our hustings, confronting the hisses

Of roughs, with his queer Mephistopheles smile ;
 Like Baker or Baker's more wonderful *Mrs.*

The terror of blacks at the source of the Nile ;
 Like Triton mid minnows ; like hawk among chickens ;

Like—anything better than everything else ;
 He stands at the post. Now they're off ! the plot
 thickens !

Quoth Stanley to Davis, " How is your pulse ? "
 He skins o'er the smooth turf, he scuds through the mire,

He waits with them, passes them, bids them good-bye !
 Two miles and three-quarters, cries Filgate, " He'll tire."

Oh ! "*credat Judæus Apella*," say I.

Lest my tale should come true, let me give you fair
 warning,

You may " shout " some cheroots, if you like, no
 champagne

For this child. —" Oh ! think of my head in the morning,"
 Old chap, you don't get me on that lay again.

The last time those games I look'd likely to try on,
 Says Bradshawe, " You'll feel very sheepish and shy

When you are haul'd up and caution'd by D—g—y and
 L—n."

Oh ! "*credat Judæus Apella*," say I.

This writing bad verses is very fatiguing,
The brain and the liver against it combine,
And nerves with digestion in concert are leaguering,
To punish excess in the pen and ink line ;
Already I feel as if I'd been rowing
Hard all—on a supper of onions and tripe
(A thing I abhor), but my steam I've done blowing,
I am, my dear *Bell*, yours truly, "The Pipe."
P.S.—Tell J. P., if he fancies a good 'un,
That old chestnut pony of mine is for sale.
N.B.—His fore legs are uncommonly wooden,
I fancy the near one's beginning to fail,
And why shouldn't I do as W—n does oft,
And swear that a cripple is sound—on the Bible—
Hold hard ! though the man I allude to is soft,
He's game to go in for an action for libel.

BANKER'S DREAM

Of chases and courses dogs dream, so do horses—
Last night I was dozing and dreaming,
The crowd and the bustle were there, and the rustle
Of the silk in the autumn sky gleaming.

The stand throng'd with faces, the broadcloth and laces,
The booths, and the tents, and the cars,
The bookmakers' jargon, for odds making bargain,
The nasty stale smell of cigars.

We form'd into line, 'neath the merry sunshine,
Near the logs at the end of the railing;
"Are you ready, boys? Go!" cried the starter, and
low
Sank the flag, and away we went sailing.

In the van of the battle we heard the stones rattle,
Some slogging was done, but no slaughter,
A shout from the stand, and the whole of our band
Skimm'd merrily over the water.

Two fences we clear'd, and the roadway we near'd
When three of our troop came to trouble;
Like a bird on the wing, or a stone from a sling,
Flew Cadger, first over the double.

And Western was there, head and tail in the air,
 And Pondon was there, too—what noodle
 Could so name a horse? I should feel some remorse
 If I gave such a name to a poodle.

In and out of the lane, to the racecourse again,
 Craig's pony was first, I was third,
 And Ingleside lit in my tracks, with the bit
 In his teeth, and came up "like a bird."

In the van of the battle we heard the rails rattle,
 Says he, "Though I don't care for shunning
 My share of the raps, I shall look out for gaps
 When the light weight's away with the running."

At the fence just ahead, the outsider still led,
 The chestnut play'd follow my leader,
 Oh! the devil a gap, he went into it slap,
 And he and his jock took a header.

Says Ingleside, "Mate, should the pony go straight,
 You've no time to stop or turn restive";
 Says I, "Who means to stop? I shall go till I drop";
 Says he, "Go it, old cuss, gay and festive."

The fence stiff and tall, just beyond the log wall,
 We cross'd, and the walls, and the water,—
 I took off too near, a small made fence to clear,
 And I just touch'd the grass with my snorter.

At the next post and rail up went Western's bang tail,
 And down (by the very same token)
 To earth went his nose, for the panel he chose
 Stood firm and refused to be broken.

I dreamt some one said that the bay would have made
The race safe, if he'd *stood* a while longer ;
If he had,—but, like if, there the panel stands stiff—
He stood, but the panel stood stronger.

In and out of the road, with a clear lead still show'd
The violet fluted with amber :
Says Johnson, " Old man, catch him now if you can,
'Tis the second time round, you'll remember."

At the road once again, pulling hard on the rein,
Craig's pony popt in and popt out ;
I follow'd like smoke, and the pace was no joke,
For his friends were beginning to shout.

And Ingleside came to my side strong and game,
And once he appear'd to outstrip me,
But I felt the steel gore, and I shot to the fore,
Only Cadger seem'd likely to whip me.

In the van of the battle I heard the logs rattle,
His stroke never seem'd to diminish,
And thrice I drew near him, and thrice he drew clear,
For the weight served him well at the finish.

Ha ! Cadger goes down : see ! he stands on his crown—
Those rails take a power of clouting—
A long sliding blunder—he's up—well, I wonder
If now it's all over but shouting.

All loosely he's striding, the amateur's riding
All loosely, some reverie lock'd in
Of a " vision in smoke," or a " wayfaring bloke,"
His poetical rubbish concocting.

Now comes from afar the faint cry, "Here they are,"
"The violet winning with ease," [not? "
"Fred goes up like a shot," "Does he catch him or
Level money, I'll take the cerise.

To his haunches I spring, and my muzzle I bring
To his flank, to his girth, to his shoulder;
Through the shouting and yelling I hear my name
swelling,
The hearts of my backers grow bolder.

Neck and neck! head and head! staring eye! nostril
spread!
Girth and stifle laid close to the ground!
Stride for stride! stroke for stroke! through one hurdle
we've broke!
On the splinters we've hit with one bound.

And "Banker for choice" is the cry, and one voice
Screams "Six to four once upon Banker";
"Banker wins," "Banker's beat," "Cadger wins," "A
dead heat"—
"Ha! there goes Fred's whalebone a flanker."

Springs the whip with a crack! nine stone ten on his back,
Fit and light he can race like the devil;
I draw past him—'tis vain; he draws past me again,
Springs the whip! and again we are level.

Steel and cord do their worst, now my head struggles
first!
That tug my last spurt has expended—
Nose to nose! lip to lip! from the sound of the whip
He strains to the utmost extended.

How they swim through the air, as we roll to the chair,
Stand, faces, and railings flit past;
Now I spring—from my lair, with a snort and a stare,
Rous'd by Fred with my supper at last.

'TWINX THE CUP AND THE LIP

EX FUMO DARE LUCEM

PROLOGUE

CALM and clear ! the bright day is declining,
The crystal expanse of the bay,
Like a shield of pure metal, lies shining
'Twixt headlands of purple and grey,
While the little waves leap in the sunset,
And strike with a miniature shock,
In sportive and infantine onset,
The base of the ironstone rock.

Calm and clear ! the sea-breezes are laden
With a fragrance, a freshness, a power,
With a song like the song of a maiden,
With a scent like the scent of a flower ;
And a whisper half weird, half prophetic,
Comes home with the sigh of the surf ;—
But I pause, for your fancies poetic
Never rise from the level of " Turf."

Fellow bungler of mine, fellow sinner,
In public performances past,
In trials whence touts take their winner,
In rumours that circulate fast,
In strains from Prunella or Priam,
Staying stayers, or goers that go,
You're much better posted than I am,
'Tis little I care, less I know.

Alas ! neither poet nor prophet
Am I, though a jingler of rhymes—
'Tis a hobby of mine, and I'm off it
At times, and I'm on it at times,
And whether I'm off it or on it,
Your readers my counsels will shun
Since I scarce know Van Tromp from Blue Bonnet,
Though I might know Cigar from The Nun.

With "visions" you ought to be sated
And sicken'd by this time, I swear
That mine are all myths self-created,
Air visions that vanish in air ;
If I had some loose coins I might chuck one,
To settle this question and say,
"Here goes ! this is tails for the black one,
And heads for my fav'rite, the bay."

And must I rob Paul to pay Peter,
Or Peter defraud to pay Paul ?
My rhymes, are they stale ? if my metre
Is varied, one chime rings through all ;
One chime—though I sing more or sing less,
I have but one string to my lute,
And it might have been better if, stringless
And songless, the same had been mute.

Yet not as a seer of visions,
Nor yet as a dreamer of dreams,
I send you these partial decisions
On hackney'd impoverish'd themes ;
But with song out of tune, sung to pass time,
Flung heedless to friends or to foes,
Where the false notes that ring for the last time
May blend with some real ones, who knows ?

THE RACE

On the hill they are crowding together,
In the stand they are crushing for room,
Like midge-flies they swarm on the heather,
They gather like bees on the broom;
They flutter like moths round a candle—
Stale similes, granted, what then?
I've got a stale subject to handle
A very stale stump of a pen.

Hark! the shuffle of feet that are many,
Of voices the many-tongued clang—
“Has he had a bad night?” “Has he any
Friends left?”—How I hate your turf slang;
'Tis stale to begin with, not witty,
But dull and inclined to be coarse,
But bad men can't use (more's the pity)
Good words when they slate a good horse.

Heu! heu! quantus equis (that's Latin
For “bellows to mend” with the weeds),
They're off! lights and shades! silks and satin!
A rainbow of riders and steeds!
And one shows in front, and another
Goes up and is seen in his place,
Sic transit (more Latin)—Oh! bother,
Let's get to the end of the race.

* * * * *

See! they come round the last turn careering,
Already Tait's colours are struck,
And the green in the vanguard is steering,
And the red's in the rear of the ruck!
Are the stripes in the shade doom'd to lie long?
Do the blue stars on white skies wax dim?
Is it Tamworth or Smuggler? 'Tis Bylong
That wins—either Bylong or Tim.

As the shell through the breach that is riven
And sapp'd by the springing of mines,
As the bolt from the thunder-cloud driven,
That levels the larches and pines,
Through yon mass parti-colour'd that dashes
Goal-turn'd, clad in many-hued garb,
From rear to van, surges and flashes
The yellow and black of The Barb.

Past The Fly, falling back on the right, and
The Gull, giving way on the left,
Past Tamworth, who feels the whip smite, and
Whose sides by the rowels are cleft;
Where Tim and the chestnut together
Still bear of the battle the brunt,
As if eight stone twelve were a feather,
He comes with a rush to the front.

Tim Whiffler may yet prove a Tartar,
And Bylong's the horse that can stay,
But Kean is in trouble—and Carter
Is hard on the satin-skin'd bay,
And The Barb comes away unextended,
Hard held, like a second Eclipse,
While behind, the hoof-thunder is blended
With the whistling and crackling of whips.

EPILOGUE

He wins; yes, he wins upon paper,
He hasn't yet won upon turf,
And these rhymes are but moonshine and vapour,
Air-bubbles and spume from the surf.
So be it, at least they are given
Free, gratis, for just what they're worth,
And (whatever there may be in heaven)
There's little worth much upon earth.



"Horse 'countered horse, and I reel'd but he laugh'd,
Down went his man, cloven clean to the chin!"

When, with satellites round them, the centre
Of all eyes, hard press'd by the crowd,
The pair, horse, and rider, re-enter
The gate, 'mid a shout long and loud,
You may feel as you might feel, just landed
Full length on the grass from the clip
Of a vicious cross-counter, right-handed,
Or upper-cut, whizzing from hip.

And that's not so bad if you're pick'd up
Discreetly, and carefully nursed ;
Loose teeth by the sponge are soon lick'd up,
And next time you *may* get home first.
Still I'm not sure you'd like it exactly
(Such tastes as a rule are acquired),
And you'll find in a nutshell this fact lie,
Bruised optics are not much admired.

Do I bore you with vulgar allusions ?
Forgive me, I speak as I feel,
I've ponder'd and made my conclusions—
As the mill grinds the corn to the meal ;
So man striving boldly but blindly,
Ground piecemeal in Destiny's mill,
At his best, taking punishment kindly,
Is only a chopping-block still.

Are we wise ? our abstruse calculations
Are based on experience long ;
Are we sanguine ? our high expectations
Are founded on hope that is strong ;
Thus we build an air-castle that crumbles
And drifts, till no traces remain,
And the fool builds again while he grumbles,
And the wise one laughs, building again.

"How came they to pass, these rash blunders,
 These false steps so hard to defend?"
 Our friend puts the question and wonders,
 We laugh and reply, "Ah! my friend,
 Could you trace the first stride falsely taken,
 The distance misjudged, where or how,
 When you pick'd yourself up, stunn'd and shaken,
 At the fence 'twixt the turf and the plough?"

In the jar of the panel rebounding!
 In the crash of the splintering wood!
 In the ears to the earth shock resounding!
 In the eyes flashing fire and blood!
 In the quarters above you revolving!
 In the sods underneath heaving high!
 There was little to aid you in solving
 Such questions—the how or the why.

And destiny, steadfast in trifles,
 Is steadfast for better or worse
 In great things, it crushes and stifles,
 And swallows the hopes that we nurse.
 Men wiser than we are may wonder,
 When the future they cling to so fast,
 To the roll of that destiny's thunder
 Goes down with the wrecks of the past.

* * * * *

The past! the dead past! that has swallow'd
 All the honey of life and the milk,
 Brighter dreams than mere pastimes we've follow'd,
 Better things than our scarlet or silk,
 Ay, and worse things—that past is it really
 Dead to us who again and again
 Feel sharply, hear plainly, see clearly
 Past days with their joy and their pain?

Like corpses embalm'd and unburied
They lie, and in spite of our will,
Our souls on the wings of thought carried
Revisit their sepulchres still ;
Down the channels of mystery gliding
They conjure strange tales, rarely read,
Of the priests of dead Pharaohs presiding
At mystical feasts of the dead.

Weird pictures arise, quaint devices,
Rude emblems, baked funeral meats,
Strong incense, rare wines, and rich spices,
The ashes, the shrouds, and the sheets ;
Does our thralldom fall short of completeness
For the magic of a charnel-house charm,
And the flavour of a poisonous sweetness,
And the odour of a poisonous balm ?

And the links of the past—but, no matter,
For I'm getting beyond you, I guess,
And you'll call me "as mad as a hatter"
If my thoughts I too freely express ;
I subjoin a quotation, pray learn it,
And with aid of your lexicon tell us
The meaning thereof, "*Res discernit
Sapiens, quas confundit asellus.*"

Already green hillocks are swelling,
And combing white locks on the bar,
Where a dull droning murmur is telling
Of winds that have gather'd afar ;
Thus we know not the day, nor the morrow,
Nor yet what the night may bring forth,
Nor the storm, nor the sleep, nor the sorrow,
Nor the strife, nor the rest, nor the wrath.

Yet the skies are still tranquil and starlit,
The sun 'twixt the wave and the west
Dies in purple and crimson and scarlet
And gold ; let us hope for the best,
Since again from the earth his effulgence
The darkness and damp-dews shall wipe.—
Kind reader, extend your indulgence
To this the last lay of “ The Pipe.”

THE ROLL OF THE KETTLEDRUM

OR

THE LAY OF THE LAST CHARGER

“ You have the Pyrrhic dance, as yet,
Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone ?
Of two such lessons, why forget
The nobler and the manlier one ? ”

Byron.

ONE line of swart profiles, and bearded lips dressing,
One ridge of bright helmets, one crest of fair plumes,
One streak of blue sword-blades all bared for the fleshing,
One row of red nostrils that scent battle-fumes.

Forward ! the trumpets were sounding the charge,
The roll of the kettledrum rapidly ran,
That music, like wild-fire spreading at large,
Madden'd the war-horse as well as the man.

Forward ! still, forward ! we thunder'd along,
Steadily, yet, for our strength we were nursing ;
Tall Ewart, our sergeant, was humming a song,
Lance-corporal Black Will was blaspheming and cursing.

Open'd their volley of guns on our right,
Puffs of grey smoke, veiling gleams of red flame,
Curling to leeward, were seen on the height
Where their batteries were posted, as onward we came.

Spreading before us their cavalry lay,
Squadron on squadron, troop upon troop;
We were so few, and so many were they—
Eagles wait calmly the sparrowhawk's stoop.

Forward ! still, forward ! steed answering steed
Cheerily neigh'd, while the foam flakes were toss'd
From bridle to bridle—the top of our speed
Was gain'd, but the pride of our order was lost.

One was there, leading by nearly a rood,
Though we were racing he kept to the fore,
Still as a rock in his stirrups he stood,
High in the sunlight his sabre he bore.

Suddenly tottering, backward he crash'd,
Loudly his helm right in front of us rung;
Iron hoofs thunder'd, and naked steel flash'd
Over him—youngest, where many were young.

Now we were close to them, every horse striding
Madly ; St. Luce pass'd with never a groan ;—
Sadly my master look'd round—he was riding
On the boy's right, with a line of his own.

Thrusting his hand in his breast or breast-pocket,
While from his wrist the sword swung by a chain,
Swiftly he drew out some trinket or locket,
Kiss'd it (I think) and replaced it again.

Burst, while his fingers reclosed on the haft,
Jarring concussion and earth-shaking din,
Horse 'counter'd horse, and I reel'd but he laugh'd,
Down went his man, cloven clean to the chin !

Wedged in the midst of that struggling mass,
 After the first shock, where each his foe singled,
 Little was seen save a dazzle, like glass
 In the sun, with grey smoke and black dust inter-
 mingled.

Here and there redden'd a pistol shot, flashing
 Through the red sparkle of steel upon steel!
 Redder the spark seem'd, and louder the clashing,
 Struck from the helm by the iron-shod heel!

Over fallen riders, like wither'd leaves strewing
 Uplands in autumn, we sunder'd their ranks;
 Steeds rearing and plunging, men hacking and hewing,
 Fierce grinding of sword-blades, sharp goading of
 flanks.

Short was the crisis of conflict soon over,
 Being too good (I suppose) to last long;
 Through them we cut, as the scythe cuts the clover,
 Batter'd and stain'd we emerged from their throng.

Some of our saddles were emptied, of course;
 To heaven (or elsewhere) Black Will had been carried!
 Ned Sullivan mounted Will's riderless horse,
 His mare being hurt, while ten seconds we tarried.

And then we re-formed, and went at them once more
 And ere they had rightly closed up the old track,
 We broke through the lane we had open'd before,
 And as we went forward e'en so we came back.

Our numbers were few, and our loss far from small,
 They could fight, and besides, they were twenty to
 one;
 We were clear of them all when we heard the recall,
 And thus we returned, but my tale is not done.

For the hand of my rider felt strange on my bit,
 He breathed once or twice like one partially choked,
 And sway'd in his seat, then I knew he was hit ;—
 He must have bled fast for my withers were soak'd,

And scarcely an inch of my housing was dry.
 I slacken'd my speed, yet, I never quite stopp'd,
 Ere he patted my neck, said, " Old fellow, good-bye ! "
 And dropp'd off me gently, and lay where he dropp'd !

Ah me ! after all, they may call us dumb creatures,—
 I tried hard to neigh but the sobs took my breath,
 Yet I guess'd, gazing down at those still quiet features,
 He was never more happy in life than in death.

* * * * *

Two years back, at Aldershot, Elrington mentioned
 My name to our colonel one field-day. He said,
 " Count," " Steeltrap " and " Challenger " ought to be
 pension'd :—
 " Count " died the same week, and now " Steeltrap "
 is dead.

That morning our colonel was riding " Theresa,"
 The filly by " Teddington," out of " Mistake " ;
 His girls, pretty Alice and fair-hair'd Louisa,
 Were there on the ponies he purchased from Blake.

I remember he pointed me out to his daughters,
 Said he, " In this troop I may fairly take pride,
 But I've none left like him in my officers' quarters,
 Whose life-blood the mane of old ' Challenger ' dyed."

Where are they ? the war-steeds who shared in our glory,
 The " Lanercost " colt, and the " Acrobat " mare,
 And the Irish division, " Kate Kearney " and " Rory,"
 And rushing " Roscommon," and eager " Kildare,"

And "Freeny," a favourite once with my master,
 And "Warlock," a sluggard, but honest and true,
 And "Tancred," as honest as "Warlock," but faster,
 And "Blacklock," and "Birdlime," and "Molly
 Carew?"—

All vanish'd! What wonder? Twelve summers have pass'd
 Since then, and my comrade lies buried this day,—
 Old "Steeltrap," the kicker,—and now I'm the last
 Of the chargers who shared in that glorious fray.

* * * * *

Come, "Harlequin," keep your nose out of my manger,
 You'll get your allowance, my boy, and no more;
 Snort! "Silver-tail," snort! when you've seen as much
 danger
 As I have, you won't mind the rats in the straw.

* * * * *

Our gallant old colonel came limping and halting,
 The day before yesterday, into my stall,
 Oh! light to the saddle I've once seen him vaulting,
 In full marching order, steel broadsword, and all.

And now, his left leg than his right is made shorter
 Three inches, he stoops, and his chest is unsound;
 He spoke to me gently, and patted my quarter,
 I laid my ears back and look'd playfully round.

For that word kindly meant, that caress kindly given,
 I thank'd him though dumb, but my cheerfulness fled;
 More sadness I drew from the face of the living
 Than years back I did from the face of the dead.

For the dead face, upturn'd, tranquil, joyous, and fear-
 less,
 Look'd straight from green sod to blue fathomless sky
 With a smile; but the living face, gloomy and tearless,
 And haggard and harass'd, look'd down with a sigh.

Did he think on the first time he kiss'd Lady Mary ?
 On the morning he wing'd Horace Greville the beau ?
 On the winner he steer'd in the Grand Militáry ?
 On the charge that he headed twelve long years ago ?

Did he think on each fresh year, of fresh grief the herald ?
 On lids that are sunken, and locks that are grey ?
 On Alice, who bolted with Brian Fitzgerald ?
 On Rupert, his first-born, dishonour'd by " play ? "

On Louey, his darling, who sleeps 'neath the cypress
 That shades her and one whose last breath gave her
 life ?—

I saw those strong fingers hard over each eye press—
 Oh ! the dead rest in peace when the quick toil in
 strife !

* * * *

Scoff, man ! egotistical, proud, unobservant,
 Since I with man's grief dare to sympathize thus ;
 Why scoff ?—fellow-creature I am, fellow-servant
 Of God, can man fathom God's dealings with us ?

The wide gulf that parts us may yet be no wider
 Than that which parts you from some being more blest,
 And there may be more links 'twixt the horse and his
 rider
 Than ever your shallow philosophy guess'd.

You are proud of your power, and vain of your courage,
 And your blood, Anglo-Saxon, or Norman, or Celt,
 Though your gifts you extol, and our gifts you disparage,
 Your perils, your pleasures, your sorrows we've felt.

We, too, sprung from mares of the prophet of Mecca,
 And nursed on the pride that was born with the milk,
 And filtered through " Crucifix," " Beeswing," " Re-
 becca,"

We love sheen of scarlet and shimmer of silk.

We, too, sprung from loins of the Ishmaelite stallions,
 We glory in daring that dies or prevails ;
 From counter of squadrons, and crash of battalions,
 To rending of blackthorns, and rattle of rails.

In all strife where courage is tested, and power,
 From the meet on the hill-side, the horn-blast, the find,
 The burst, the long gallop that seems to devour
 The champaign, all obstacles flinging behind.

To the cheer and the clarion, the war-music blended
 With war-cry, the furious dash at the foe,
 The terrible shock, the recoil, and the splendid
 Bare sword, flashing blue, rising red from the blow.

I've borne *one* through perils where many have seen us,
 No tyrant, a kind friend, a patient instructor,
 And I've felt some strange element flashing between us,
 Till the saddle seem'd turn'd to a lightning conductor.

Did he see ? could he feel through the faintness, the
 numbness,
 While linger'd the spirit half-loosed from the clay,
 Dumb eyes seeking his in their piteous dumbness,
 Dumb quivering nostrils, too stricken to neigh ?

And what then ? the colours reversed, the drums muffled,
 The black nodding plumes, the Dead March and the
 pall,
 The stern faces, soldier-like, silent, unruffled,
 The slow sacred music that floats over all !

'Cross carbine and boarspear, hang bugle and banner,
 Spur, sabre, and snaffle, and helm—Is it well ?
 Vain scutcheon, false trophies of Mars and Diana,—
 Can the dead laurel sprout with the live *immortelle* ?

It may be,—we follow, and though we inherit
 Our strength for a season, our pride for a span,
 Say ! vanity are they ? vexation of spirit ?
 Not so, since they serve for a time horse and man.

They serve for a time, and they make life worth living
 In spite of life's troubles—'tis vain to despond ;
 Oh man ! *we* at least, *we* enjoy, with thanksgiving,
 God's gifts on this earth, though we look not beyond.

You sin, and *you* suffer, and we, too, find sorrow,
 Perchance through *your* sin—yet it soon will be o'er ;
 We labour to-day, and we slumber to-morrow,
 Strong horse and bold rider !—and *who knoweth more ?*

* * * * *

In our barrack-square shouted drill-sergeant McCluskie,
 The roll of the kettledrum rapidly ran,
 The colonel wheel'd short, speaking once, dry and husky,
 " Would to God I had died with your master, old
 man ! "

BUSH BALLADS AND GALLOPING
RHYMES

A DEDICATION

TO G. J. WHYTE-MELVILLE, AUTHOR OF "HOLMBY HOUSE"

THEY are rhymes rudely strung with intent less
Of sound than of words,
In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,
And songless bright birds ;
Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,
Insatiable Summer oppresses
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,
And faint flocks and herds.

Where in dreariest days, when all dews end,
And all winds are warm,
Wild Winter's large floodgates are loosen'd,
And floods, freed by storm ;
From broken-up fountain heads, dash on
Dry deserts with long pent up passion—
Here rhyme was first framed without fashion,
Song shaped without form.

Whence gather'd ?—The locust's glad chirrup
May furnish a stave ;
The ring of a rowel and stirrup,
The wash of a wave.
The chaunt of the marsh frog in rushes
That chimes through the pauses and hushes
Of nightfall, the torrent that gushes,
The tempests that rave.

In the deep'ning of dawn, when it dapples
 The dusk of the sky,
With streaks like the redd'ning of apples,
 The ripening of rye.
To eastward, when cluster by cluster,
Dim stars and dull planets, that muster,
Wax wan in a world of white lustre
 That spreads far and high.

In the gathering of night gloom o'er head, in
 The still silent change,
All fire-flush'd when forest trees redden
 On slopes of the range.
When the gnarl'd, knotted trunks Eucalyptian
Seemed carved like weird columns Egyptian
With curious device—quaint inscription,
 And hieroglyph strange.

In the Spring, when the wattle gold trembles
 'Twixt shadow and shine,
When each dew-laden air draught resembles
 A long draught of wine ;
When the skyline's blue burnish'd resistance
Makes deeper the dreamiest distance,
Some song in all hearts hath existence,—
 Such songs have been mine.

They came in all guises, some vivid
 To clasp and to keep ;
Some sudden and swift as the livid
 Blue thunder-flame's leap.
This swept through the first breath of clover
With memories renew'd to the rover—
That flash'd while the black horse turn'd over
 Before the long sleep.



"The wide gulf that parts us may yet be no wider
Than that which parts you from some being more blest,
And there may be more links 'twixt the horse and his rider
Than ever your shallow philosophy guess'd."

To you (having cunning to colour
 A page with your pen,
 That through dull days, and nights even duller,
 Long years ago ten ;
 Fair pictures in fever afforded)—
 I send these rude staves, roughly worded
 By one in whose brain stands recorded
 As clear now as then,

“ The great rush of grey ‘ Northern water,’
 The green ridge of bank,
 The ‘ sorrel ’ with curved sweep of quarter
 Curl’d close to clean flank,
 The Royalist saddlefast squarely,
 And, where the bright uplands stretch fairly,
 Behind, beyond pistol-shot barely,
 The Roundheaded rank.

“ A long launch, with clinging of muscles,
 And clenching of teeth !
 The loose doublet ripples and rustles !
 The swirl shoots beneath ! ”
 Enough. In return for your garland—
 In lieu of the flowers from your far land—
 Take wild growth of dreamland or starland,
 Take weeds for your wreath.

Yet rhyme had not fail’d me for reason,
 Nor reason for rhyme ;
 Sweet Song ! had I sought you in season,
 And found you in time.
 You beckon in your bright beauty yonder,
 And I, waxing fainter yet fonder,
 Now weary too soon when I wander—
 Now fall when I climb.

It matters but little in the long run,
 The weak have some right—
Some share in the race that the strong run,
 The fight the strong fight.
If words that are worthless go westward,
Yet the worst word shall be as the best word,
In the day when all riot sweeps restward,
 In darkness or light.

THE SICK STOCKRIDER

HOLD hard, Ned ! Lift me down once more, and lay me
in the shade.

Old man, you've had your work cut out to guide
Both horses, and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd
All through the hot, slow, sleepy, silent ride.
The dawn at " Moorabinda " was a mist rack dull and
dense,

The sunrise was a sullen, sluggish lamp ;
I was dozing in the gateway at Arbuthnot's bound'ry
fence,

I was dreaming on the Limestone cattle camp.
We crossed the creek at Carricksford, and sharply
through the haze,

And suddenly the sun shot flaming forth ;
To southward lay " Katâwa " with the sandpeaks all
ablaze

And the flush'd fields of Glen Lomond lay to north.
Now westward winds the bridle path that leads to
Lindisfarm,

And yonder looms the double-headed Bluff ;
From the far side of the first hill, when the skies are
clear and calm,

You can see Sylvester's woolshed fair enough.
Five miles we used to call it from our homestead to the
place

Where the big tree spans the roadway like an arch ;
'Twas here we ran the dingo down that gave us such a
chase

Eight years ago—or was it nine ?—last March.

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming
grass

To wander as we've wander'd many a mile,
And blow the cool tobacco cloud, and watch the white
wreaths pass,

Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.

'Twas merry mid the blackwoods when we spied the
station roofs,

To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard,
With a running fire of stockwhips and a fiery run of
hoofs ;

Oh ! the hardest day was never then too hard !

Ay ! we had a glorious gallop after " Starlight " and
his gang,

When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat ;
How the sun-dried reed-beds crackled, how the flint-
strewn ranges rang

To the strokes of " Mountaineer " and " Acrobat ! "
Hard behind them in the timber, harder still across the
heath,

Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we
dash'd ;

And the golden-tinted fern leaves, how they rustled
underneath !

And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd !

We led the hunt throughout, Ned, on the chestnut and
the grey,

And the troopers were three hundred yards behind,
While we emptied our six-shooters on the bushrangers
at bay,

In the creek with stunted box-tree for a blind !
There you grappled with the leader, man to man and
horse to horse,

And you roll'd together when the chestnut rear'd ;
He blazed away and missed you in that shallow water
course—

A narrow shave—his powder singed your beard !



"With a running fire of stock-whips and a fiery run of hoofs."

Lindsay Gordon]

Page 132

In these hours when life is ebbing, how those days
 when life was young
 Come back to us ; how clearly I recall
 Even the yarns Jack Hall invented, and the songs Jem
 Roper sung ;
 And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall ?

Ay ! nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school,
 Our ancient boon companions, Ned, are gone ;
 Hard livers for the most part, somewhat reckless as a
 rule,
 It seems that you and I are left alone.

There was Hughes, who got in trouble through that
 business with the cards,
 It matters little what became of him ;
 But a steer ripp'd up Macpherson in the Cooraminta
 yards,
 And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink-or-Swim ;
 And Mostyn—poor Frank Mostyn—died at last a fearful
 wreck,
 In “ the horrors,” at the Upper Wandinong,
 And Carisbrooke, the rider, at the Horsefall broke his
 neck,
 Faith ! the wonder was he saved his neck so long !

Ah ! those days and nights we squandered at the Logans '
 in the glen—
 The Logans, man and wife, have long been dead.
 Elsie's tallest girl seems taller than your little Elsie then ;
 And Ethel is a woman grown and wed.

I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share
 of toil,
 And life is short—the longest life a span ;
 I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,
 Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.

For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain,
 'Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know—
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again ;
 And the chances are I go where most men go.

The deep blue skies wax dusky and the tall green trees
 grow dim,
 The sward beneath me seems to heave and fall ;
And sickly, smoky shadows through the sleepy sunlight
 swim,
 And on the very sun's face weave their pall.
Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms
 wave,
 With never stone or rail to fence my bed ;
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers
 on my grave,
 I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

THE SWIMMER

WITH short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,
To southward far as the sight can roam ;
Only the swirl of the surges livid,
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,
And waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim grey coast and a seaboard ghastly,
And shores trod seldom by feet of men—
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie
They have lain embedded these long years ten.
Love ! when we wander'd here together,
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer and shores were firmer—
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd ;
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold—
And the sunset bath'd in the gulf to lend her
A garland of pinks and of purples tender,
A tinge of the sun-god's rosy splendour,
A tithe of his glories manifold.

Man's works are graven, cunning, and skilful
On earth where his tabernacles are ;
But the sea is wanton, the sea is wilful,
And who shall mend her and who shall mar ?
Shall we carve success or record disaster
On the bosom of her heaving alabaster ?
Will her purple pulse beat fainter or faster
For fallen sparrow or fallen star ?

I would that with sleepy soft embraces
The sea would fold me—would find me rest
In luminous shades of her secret places,
In depths where her marvels are manifest,
So the earth beneath her should not discover
My hidden couch—nor the heaven above her—
As a strong love shielding a weary lover,
I would have her shield me with shining breast.

When light in the realms of space lay hidden,
When life was yet in the womb of time,
Ere flesh was fettered to fruits forbidden,
And souls were wedded to care and crime,
Was the course foreshaped for the future spirit—
A burden of folly, a void of merit—
That would fain the wisdom of stars inherit,
And cannot fathom the seas sublime ?

Under the sea or the soil (what matter ?
The sea and the soil are under the sun),
As in the former days in the latter
The sleeping or waking is known of none,
Surely the sleeper shall not awaken
To griefs forgotten or joys forsaken,
For the price of all things given and taken,
The sum of all things done and undone.

Shall we count offences or coin excuses,
 Or weigh with scales the soul of a man,
 Whom a strong hand binds and a sure hand looses,
 Whose light is a spark and his life a span?
 The seed he sow'd or the soil he cumber'd,
 The time he served or the space he slumber'd;
 Will it profit a man when his days are number'd,
 Or his deeds since the days of his life began?

One, glad because of the light, saith, " Shall not
 The righteous Judge of all the earth do right,
 For behold the sparrows on the house-tops fall not
 Save as seemeth to Him good in His sight?"
 And this man's joy shall have no abiding
 Through lights departing and lives dividing,
 He is soon as one in the darkness hiding,
 One loving darkness rather than light.

A little season of love and laughter,
 Of light and life, and pleasure and pain,
 And a horror of outer darkness after,
 And dust returneth to dust again.
 Then the lesser life shall be as the greater,
 And the lover of life shall join the hater,
 And the one thing cometh sooner or later,
 And no one knoweth the loss or gain.

Love of my life! we had lights in season—
 Hard to part from, harder to keep—
 We had strength to labour and souls to reason,
 And seed to scatter and fruits to reap.
 Though time estranges and fate disperses,
 We have *had* our loves and our loving-mercies;
 Though the gifts of the light in the end are curses,
 Yet bides the gift of the darkness—sleep!

See ! girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder,
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,
The strong winds treading the swift waves sunder
The flying rollers with frothy feet.

One gleam like a bloodshot swordblade swims on
The skyline, staining the green gulf crimson,
A death stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun
That strikes through his stormy winding sheet.

Oh, brave white horses ! you gather and gallop,
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins ;
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop
In your hollow backs, or your high arch'd manes.
I would ride as never a man has ridden
In your sleepy swirling surges hidden,
To gulfs foreshadow'd through straits forbidden,
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

FROM THE WRECK

“TURN out, boys”—“What’s up with our super to-night?”

The man’s mad—Two hours to daybreak I’d swear—
Stark mad—why, there isn’t a glimmer of light.”

“Take Bolingbroke, Alec, give Jack the young mare;
Look sharp. A large vessel lies jamm’d on the reef,
And many on board still, and some wash’d on shore.

Ride straight with the news—they may send some relief

From the township; and we—we can do little more.

You, Alec, you know the near cuts; you can cross

‘The Sugarloaf’ ford with a scramble, I think;

Don’t spare the blood filly, nor yet the black horse;

Should the wind rise, God help them! the ship will
soon sink.

Old Peter’s away down the paddock, to drive

The nags to the stockyard as fast as he can—

A life and death matter; so, lads, look alive.”

Half-dress’d, in the dark to the stockyard we ran.

There was bridling with hurry, and saddling with haste,

Confusion and cursing for lack of a moon,

“Be quick with these buckles, we’ve no time to waste;”

“Mind the mare, she can use her hind legs to some
tune.”

“Make sure of the crossing-place; strike the old track,

They’ve fenced off the new one; look out for the holes

On the wombat hills.” “Down with the slip rails;
stand back.”

“And ride, boys, the pair of you, ride for your souls.”

In the low branches heavily laden with dew,

In the long grasses spoiling with deadwood that day,
Where the blackwood, the box, and the bastard oak
grew,

Between the tall gum trees we gallop'd away—
We crash'd through a brush fence, we splash'd through
a swamp—

We steered for the north near "The Eaglehawk's
Nest"—

We bore to the left, just beyond "The Red Camp."

And round the black tea-tree belt wheel'd to the
west—

We cross'd a low range sickly scented with musk

From wattle-tree blossom—we skirted a marsh—

Then the dawn faintly dappled with orange the dusk,

And peal'd overhead the jay's laughter note harsh,
And shot the first sunstreak behind us, and soon

The dim dewy uplands were dreamy with light,
And full on our left flash'd "The Reedy Lagoon,"

And sharply "The Sugarloaf" rear'd on our right.
A smother'd curse broke through the bushman's brown
beard,

He turn'd in his saddle, his brick-colour'd cheek
Flush'd feebly with sundawn, said, "Just what I fear'd;

Last fortnight's late rainfall has flooded the creek."

Black Bolingbroke snorted, and stood on the brink

One instant, then deep in the dark, sluggish swirl
Plunged headlong. I saw the horse suddenly sink,

Till round the man's armpits the waves seem'd to curl.
We follow'd,—one cold shock, and deeper we sank

Than they did, and twice tried the landing in vain.
The third struggle won it, straight up the steep bank

We stagger'd, then out on the skirts of the plain.

The stockrider, Alec, at starting had got

The lead, and had kept it throughout ; 'twas his boast,

That through thickest of scrub he could steer like a shot,
 And the black horse was counted the best on the coast.
 The mare had been awkward enough in the dark,
 She was eager and headstrong, and barely half broke ;
 She had had me too close to a big stringy-bark,
 And had made a near thing of a crooked sheoak ;

But now on the open, lit up by the morn,
 She flung the white foam-flakes from nostril to neck,
 And chased him—I hatless, with shirtsleeves all torn
 (For he may ride ragged who rides from a wreck)—
 And faster and faster across the wide heath
 We rode till we raced. Then I gave her her head,
 And she—stretching out with the bit in her teeth—
 She caught him, outpaced him, and passed him, and
 led.

We neared the new fence ; we were wide of the track ;
 I look'd right and left—she had never been tried
 At a stiff leap. 'Twas little he cared on the black.
 “ You're more than a mile from the gateway,” he cried.
 I hung to her head, touched her flank with the spurs
 (In the red streak of rail not the ghost of a gap) ;
 She shortened her long stroke, she pricked her sharp
 ears,
 She flung it behind her with hardly a rap—
 I saw the post quiver where Bolingbroke struck,
 And guessed that the pace we had come the last mile
 Had blown him a bit (he could jump like a buck).
 We galloped more steadily then for a while.

The heath was soon pass'd, in the dim distance lay
 The mountain. The sun was just clearing the tips
 Of the ranges to eastward. The mare—could she stay ?
 She was bred very nearly as clean as Eclipse ;
 She led, and as oft as he came to her side,
 She took the bit free and untiring as yet,
 Her neck was arched double, her nostrils were wide,
 And the tips of her tapering ears nearly met—

“ You’re lighter than I am,” said Alec at last,
“ The horse is dead beat and the mare isn’t blown.
She must be a good one—ride on and ride fast,
You know your way now.” So I rode on alone.

Still galoping forward we pass’d the two flocks
At Macintyre’s hut and Macallister’s hill—
She was galloping strong at the Warrigal Rocks—
On the Wallaby Range she was galloping still—
And over the wasteland and under the wood,
By down and by dale, and by fell and by flat,
She gallop’d, and here in the stirrups I stood
To ease her, and there in the saddle I sat
To steer her. We suddenly struck the red loam
Of the track near the troughs—then she reeled on the
rise—
From her crest to her croup covered over with foam,
And blood-red her nostrils and bloodshot her eyes,
A dip in the dell where the wattle fire bloomed—
A bend round a bank that had shut out the view—
Large framed in the mild light the mountain had loom’d
With a tall, purple peak bursting out from the blue.

I pull’d her together, I press’d her, and she
Shot down the decline to the Company’s yard,
And on by the paddocks, yet under my knee
I could feel her heart thumping the saddle-flaps hard.
Yet a mile and another, and now we were near
The goal, and the fields and the farms flitted past,
And ’twixt the two fences I turned with a cheer,
For a green grass-fed mare ’twas a far thing and fast ;
And labourers, roused by her galloping hoofs,
Saw bare-headed rider and foam-sheeted steed ;
And shone the white walls and the slate-covered roofs
Of the township. I steadied her then—I had need—
Where stood the old chapel (where stands the new
church—
Since chapels to churches have changed in that town).

A short, sidelong stagger, a long, forward lurch,
A slight choking sob, and the mare had gone down.
I slipp'd off the bridle, I slackened the girth,
I ran on and left her and told them my news ;
I saw her soon afterwards. What was she worth ?
How much for her hide ? She had never worn shoes.

NO NAME

"A stone upon her heart and head,
But no name written on that stone;
Sweet neighbours whisper low instead,
This sinner was a loving one."

Mrs. Browning.

'Tis a nameless stone that stands at your head—
The gusts in the gloomy gorges whirl
Brown leaves and red till they cover your bed—
Now I trust that your sleep is a sound one, girl!

I said in my wrath, when his shadow cross'd
From your garden gate to your cottage door,
"What does it matter for one soul lost,
Millions of souls have been lost before."

Yet I warn'd you—ah! but my words came true—
"Perhaps some day you will find him out."
He who was not worthy to loosen your shoe,
Does his conscience therefore prick him? I doubt.

You laugh'd and were deaf to my warning voice—
Blush'd and were blind to his cloven hoof—
You have had your chance, you have taken your choice—
How could I help you, standing aloof?

He has prosper'd well with the world—he says
I am mad—if so, and if he be sane,
I, at least, give God thanksgiving and praise
That there lies between us one difference plain.

* * * * *

You in your beauty above me bent
 In the pause of a wild west country ball—
 Spoke to me—touched me without intent—
 Made me your servant for once and all.

Light laughter rippled your rose-red lip,
 And you swept my cheek with a shining curl
 That stray'd from your shoulder's snowy tip—
 Now I pray that your sleep is a sound one, girl!

From a long way off to look at your charms
 Made my blood run redder in every vein,
 And he—he has held you long in his arms,
 And has kiss'd you over and over again.

Is it well that he keeps well out of my way?
 If we met, he and I—we alone—we two—
 Would I give him one moment's grace to pray?
 Not I, for the sake of the soul he slew.

A life like a shuttlecock may be tost
 With the hand of fate for a battledore;
 But it matters much, for your sweet soul lost,
 As much as a million souls and more.

And I know that if, here or there, alone,
 I found him, fairly and face to face,
 Having slain his body, I would slay my own,
 That my soul to Satan his soul might chase.

He hardens his heart in the public way—
 Who am I? I am but a nameless churl;
 But God will put all things straight some day—
 Till then may your sleep be a sound one, girl!

WOLF AND HOUND

“The hills like giants at a hunting lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay.”

Browning.

YOU'LL take my tale with a little salt,
But it needs none, nevertheless,
I was foil'd completely, fairly at fault,
Disheartened too, I confess.
At the splitters' tent I had seen the track
Of horse-hoofs fresh on the sward,
And though Darby Lynch and Donovan Jack
(Who could swear through a ten-inch board)
Solemnly swore he had not been there,
I was just as sure that they lied,
For to Darby all that is foul was fair,
And Jack for his life was tried.

We had run him for seven miles and more
As hard as our nags could split,
At the start they were all too weary and sore
And his was quite fresh and fit.
Young Marsden's pony had had enough
On the plain, where the chase was hot ;
We breasted the swell of the Bittern's Bluff,
And Mark couldn't raise a trot.
When the sea, like a splendid silver shield,
To the south-west suddenly lay,
On the brow of the Beetle the chestnut reel'd
And I bid good-bye to M'Crea—
And I was alone when the mare fell lame
With a pointed flint in her shoe

On the Stony Flats : I had lost the game,
And what was a man to do ?

I turned away with no fixed intent
And headed for Hawthorndell ;
I could neither eat in the splitters' tent
Nor drink at the splitters' well ;
I knew that they gloried in my mishap,
And I cursed them between my teeth—
A blood-red sunset through Brayton's Gap
Flung a lurid fire on the heath.

Could I reach the Dell ? I had little reck,
And with scarce a choice of my own
I threw the reins on Miladi's neck—
I had freed her foot from the stone.
That season most of the swamps were dry,
And after so hard a burst
In the sultry noon of so hot a sky
She was keen to appease her thirst—
Or by instinct urged or impelled by fate—
I care not to solve these things—
Certain it is that she took me straight
To the Warrigal water springs.

I can shut my eyes and recall the ground
As though it were yesterday—
With a shelf of the low grey rocks girt round
The springs in their basin lay ;
Woods to the east and wolds to the north
In the sundown sullenly bloomed ;
Dead black on a curtain of crimson cloth
Large peaks to the westward loomed.
I led Miladi through weed and sedge,
She leisurely drank her fill ;
There was something close to the water's edge,
And my heart with one leap stood still,
For a horse's shoe and a rider's boot
Had left clean prints on the clay ;

Some one had watered his beast on foot,
'Twas he—he had gone. Which way?
Then the mouth of the cavern faced me fair,
As I turned and fronted the rocks;
So, at last, I had press'd the wolf to his lair,
I had run to his earth the fox.

I thought so. Perhaps he was resting. Perhaps
He was waiting, watching, for me.
I examined all my revolver caps,
I hitched my mare to a tree—
I had sworn to have him, alive or dead,
And to give him a chance was loth.
He knew his life had been forfeited—
He had even heard of my oath.
In my stocking'd soles to the shelf I crept,
I crawl'd safe into the cave—
All silent—if he was there he slept
Not there. All dark as the grave.

Through the crack I could hear the leaden hiss!
See the livid face through the flame!
How strange it seems that a man should miss
When his life depends on his aim!
There couldn't have been a better light
For him, nor a worse for me.
We were coop'd up, caged, like beasts for a fight
And dumb as dumb beasts were we.

Flash! flash! bang! bang! and we blazed away,
And the grey roof reddened and rang;
Flash! flash! and I felt his bullet flay
The tip of my ear. Flash! bang!
Bang! flash! and my pistol arm fell broke;
I struck with my left hand then—
Struck at a corpse through a cloud of smoke—
I had shot him dead in his den!

DE TE

A BURNING glass of burnish'd brass,
The calm sea caught the noontide rays,
And sunny slopes of golden grass
And wastes of weed-flower seem to blaze.
Beyond the shining silver-greys,
Beyond the shades of denser bloom,
The skyline girt with glowing haze
The farthest faintest forest gloom,
And the everlasting hills that loom.

We heard the hound beneath the mound,
We scared the swamp hawk hovering nigh—
We had not sought for that we found—
He lay as dead men only lie,
With wan cheek whitening in the sky
Through the wild heath flowers, white and red.
The dumb brute that had seen him die,
Close crouching, how'd beside the head,
Brute burial service o'er the dead.

The brow was rife with seams of strife—
A lawless death made doubly plain
The ravage of a reckless life ;
The havoc of a hurricane
Of passions through that breadth of brain,
Like headlong horses that had run
Riot, regardless of the rein—
“ Madman! he might have lived and done
Better than most men,” whisper'd one.

The beams and blots that Heaven allots,
To every life with life begin.
Fool! would you change the leopard's spots,
Or blanch the Ethiopian's skin?
What more could he have hoped to win,
What better things have thought to gain,
So shapen—so conceived in sin?
No life is wholly void and vain,
Just and unjust share sun and rain.

Were new life sent and life misspent
Wiped out (if such to God seem'd good),
Would he (being as he was) repent,
Or could he, even if he would,
Who heeded not things understood
(Though dimly) even in savage lands
By some who worship stone or wood,
Or bird or beast, or who stretch hands
Sunward on shining Eastern sands?

And crime has cause. Nay, never pause
Idly to feel a pulseless wrist,
Brace up the massive square-shaped jaws,
Unclench the stubborn stiff'ning fist,
And close those eyes through film and mist,
That kept the old defiant glare;
And answer, wise Psychologist,
Whose science claims some little share
Of truth, what better things lay there?

Ay! thought and mind were there,—some kind
Of faculty that men mistake
For talent when their wits are blind,—
An aptitude to mar and break
What others diligently make.
This was the worst and best of him—
Wise with the cunning of the snake,

Brave with the she-wolf's courage grim,
Dying hard and dumb, torn limb from limb.

And you, Brown, you're a doctor ; cure
You can't, but you can kill, and he
" *Witness, his mark,*" he signed last year,
And now he signs John Smith, J.P.
We'll hold our inquest *now*, we three ;
I'll be your coroner for once ;
I think old Oswald ought to be
Our foreman—Jones is such a dunce,—
There's more brain in the bloodhound's scone.

No man may shirk the allotted work,
The deed to do, the death to die ;
At least I think so,—neither Turk,
Nor Jew, nor infidel am I,—
And yet I wonder when I try
To solve one question, may or must,
And shall I solve it by and bye,
Beyond the dark, beneath the dust ?
I trust so, and I only trust.

Ay! what they will, such trifles kill.
Comrade, for one good deed of yours,
Your history shall not help to fill
The mouths of many brainless boors.
It may be death absolves or cures
The sin of life. 'Twere hazardous
To assert so. If the sin endures,
Say only, " God, Who has judged him thus,
Be merciful to him, and us! "

HOW WE BEAT THE FAVOURITE

[*A Lay of the Loamshire Hunt Cup*]

“ Ay, squire,” said Stevens, “ they back him at evens ;
The race is all over, bar shouting, they say ;
The Clown ought to beat her ; Dick Neville is sweeter
Than ever—he swears he can win all the way.

“ A gentleman rider—well, I’m an outsider,
But if he’s a gent who the mischief’s a jock ?
You swells mostly blunder, Dick rides for the plunder,
He rides, too, like thunder—he sits like a rock.

“ He calls ‘ hunted fairly ’ a horse that has barely
Been stripp’d for a trot within sight of the hounds,
A horse that at Warwick beat Birdlime and Yorick,
And gave Abd-el-Kader at Aintree nine pounds.

“ They say we have no test to warrant a protest ;
Dick rides for a lord and stands in with a steward ;
The light of their faces they show him—his case is
Prejudged and his verdict already secured.

“ But none can outlast her, and few travel faster,
She strides in her work clean away from The Drag,
You hold her and sit her she couldn’t be fitter,
Whenever you hit her she’ll spring like a stag.

“ And p'rhaps the green jacket, at odds though they
back it,

May fall, or there's no knowing what may turn up.
The mare is quite ready, sit still and ride steady,

Keep cool ; and I think you may just win the Cup.”

Dark-brown with tan muzzle, just stripped for the
tussle,

Stood Iseult, arching her neck to the curb,
A lean head and fiery, strong quarters and wiry,
A loin rather light, but a shoulder superb.

Some parting injunction, bestow'd with great unction,
I tried to recall, but forgot like a dunce,

When Reginald Murray, full tilt on White Surrey,
Came down in a hurry to start us at once.

“ Keep back in the yellow ! Come up on Othello !

Hold hard on the chestnut ! Turn round on The
Drag !

Keep back there on Spartan ! Back you, sir, in tartan !

So, steady there, easy,” and down went the flag.

We started, and Kerr made strong running on Mermaid,
Through furrows that led to the first stake-and-bound,
The crack half extended look'd bloodlike and splendid,
Held wide on the right where the headland was sound.

I pulled hard to baffle her rush with the snaffle,
Before her two-thirds of the field got away.

All through the wet pasture where floods of the last year
Still loitered, they clotted my crimson with clay.

The fourth fence, a wattle, floor'd Monk and Blue-
bottle ;

The Drag came to grief at the blackthorn and ditch,
The rails toppled over Redoubt and Red Rover,

The lane stopped Lycurgus and Leicestershire Witch.

She passed like an arrow Kildare and Cock Sparrow,
And Mantrap and Mermaid refused the stone wall;
And Giles on The Grayling came down at the paling.
And I was left sailing in front of them all.

I took them a burster, nor eased her nor nursed her
Until the black bullfinch led into the plough,
And through the strong bramble we bored with a
scramble—
My cap was knocked off by the hazel-tree bough.

Where furrows looked lighter I drew the rein tighter—
Her dark chest all dappled with flakes of white foam,
Her flanks mud-bespattered, a weak rail she shattered—
We landed on turf with our heads turn'd for home.

Then crash'd a low binder, and then close behind her
The sward to the strokes of the favourite shook,
His rush roused her mettle, yet ever so little
She shorten'd her stride as we raced at the brook.

She rose when I hit her. I saw the stream glitter,
A wide scarlet nostril flashed close to my knee,
Between sky and water The Clown came and caught her,
The space that he cleared was a caution to see.

And forcing the running, discarding all cunning,
A length to the front went the rider in green;
A long strip of stubble, and then the big double,
Two stiff flights of rails with a quickset between.

She raced at the rasper, I felt my knees grasp her,
I found my hands give to her strain on the bit,
She rose when The Clown did—our silks as we bounded
Brush'd lightly, our stirrups clash'd loud as we lit.

A rise steeply sloping, a fence with stone coping—
 The last—we diverged round the base of the hill,
 His path was the nearer, his leap was the clearer.
 I flogg'd up the straight, and he led sitting still.

She came to his quarter and on still I brought her,
 And, up to his girth, to his breast-plate she drew,
 A short prayer from Neville just reach'd me, "The
 Devil!"
 He mutter'd—lock'd level the hurdles we flew.

A hum of hoarse cheering, a dense crowd careering,
 All sights seen obscurely, all shouts vaguely heard,
 "The green wins!" "The crimson!" The multitude
 swims on,
 And figures are blended and features are blurr'd.

"The horse is her master!" "The green forges past
 her!"
 "The Clown will outlast her!" "The Clown wins!"
 "The Clown!"

The white railing races with all the white faces,
 The chestnut outpaces, outstretches the brown.

On still past the gateway she strains in the straightway,
 Still struggles, "The Clown by a short neck at most,"
 He swerves, the green scourges, the stand rocks and
 surges,
 And flashes, and verges, and flits the white post.

Ay! so ends the tussle,—I knew the tan muzzle
 Was first, though the ring-men were yelling "Dead
 heat!"
 A nose I could swear by, but Clarke said, "The mare by
 A short head." And that's how the favourite was
 beat.

FRAGMENTARY SCENES
FROM
THE ROAD TO AVERNUS

[*An Unpublished Dramatic Lyric*]

SCENE 1.—“DISCONTENT.”

LAURENCE RABY

Laurence :

I said to young Allan McIlveray,
Beside the swift swirls of the North,
When, in lilac shot through with a silver ray,
We haul'd the strong salmon fish forth,
Said only, “He gave us some trouble
To land him, and what does he weigh?
Our friend has caught one that weighs double,
The game for the candle won't pay
Us to-day,
We may tie up our rods and away.”

I said to old Norman Macgregor,
Three leagues to the west of Glen Dhu—
I had drawn, with a touch of the trigger,
The best *bead* that ever I drew—
Said merely, “For birds in the stubble
I once had an eye—I could swear
He's down—but he's not worth the trouble

Nay, our wisest have asserted that, as shade enhances
light,
Evil is but good perverted, wrong is but the foil of
right.
Banish sickness, then you banish joy for health to all
that live ;
Slay all sin, all good must vanish, good being but
comparative.
Sophistry you say—yet listen : look you skyward,
there 'tis known
Worlds on worlds in myriads glisten—larger, lovelier
than our own—
This has been, and this shall still be, here as there, in
sun or star ;
These things are to be and will be, those things were to
be and are.
Man in man's imperfect nature is by imperfection
taught :
Add one cubit to your stature if you can by taking
thought.

Laurence :

Thus you would not teach that peasant, though he
calls you "father."

Melchior :

True,

I should magnify this present, mystify that future,
too—

We adapt our conversation always to our hearer's
light.

Laurence :

I am not of your persuasion.

Melchior :

Yet the difference is but slight.

Laurence :

I, *even I*, say, " He who barter's worldly weal for
heavenly worth
He does well "—your saints and martyrs were ex-
amples, here on earth.

Melchior :

Ay, in earlier Christian ages, while the heathen empire
stood,
When the war 'twixt saints and sages cried aloud for
saintly blood,
Christ was then their model truly. Now, if all were
meek and pure
Save the ungodly and the unruly, would the
Christian church endure ?
Shall the toiler or the fighter dream by day and watch
by night,
Turn the left cheek to the smiter, smitten rudely on the
right ?
Strong men must encounter bad men—so-called saints
of latter days
Have been mostly pious madmen, lusting after righte-
ous praise—
Or the thralls of superstition, doubtless worthy some
reward,
Since they came by their condition hardly of their
free accord.
'Tis but madness, sad and solemn, that these fakir-
Christians feel—
Saint Stylites on his column gratified a morbid zeal.

Laurence :

By your showing, good is really on a par (of worth)
with ill.

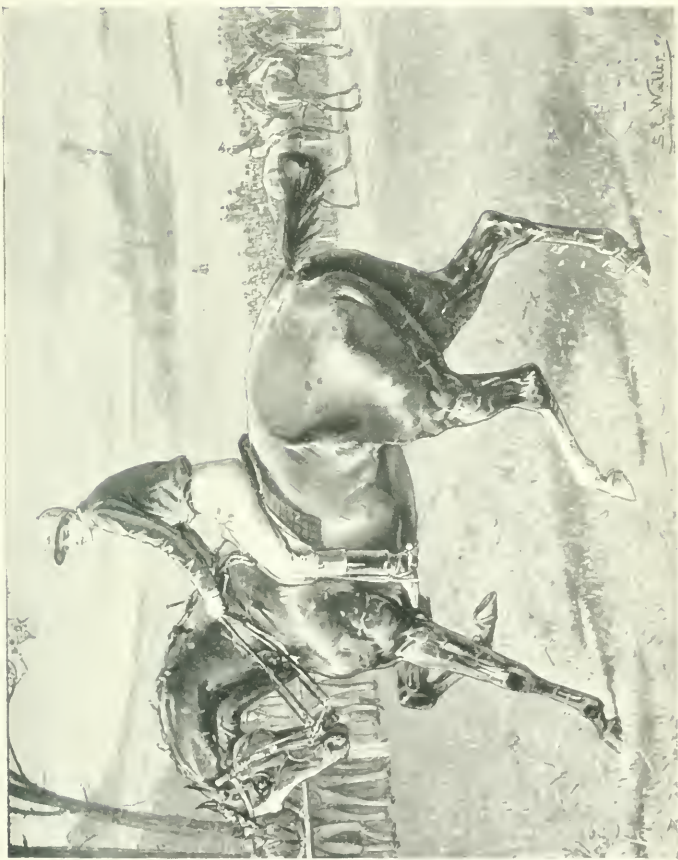
Melchior :

Nay, I said not so ; I merely tell you both some ends
fulfil—
Priestly vows were my vocation, fast and vigil wait
for me.

You must work and face temptation. Never should
 the strong man flee,
 Though God wills the inclination with the soul at war
 to be. (*Pauses.*)
 In the strife 'twixt flesh and spirit, while you can the
 spirit aid.
 Should you fall not less your merit, be not for a fall
 afraid.
 Whatsoe'er most right, most fit is, you shall do. When
 all is done
 Chant the noble *Nunc Dimittis*—*Benedicimur*, my son.
 [*Exit MELCHIOR.*]

Laurence (alone):

Why do I provoke these wrangles? Melchior talks
 (as well he may)
 With the tongues of men and angels.
 (*Takes up a pamphlet.*) What has this man got to
 say?
 (*Reads.*) *Sic sacerdos fatur (ejus nomen quondam erat*
Burgo).
Mala mens est, caro pejus, anima infirma ergo
I nunc, ora, sine mora—orat etiam Sancta Virgo.
 (*Thinks.*)
 (*Speaks.*) So it seems they mean to make her wed the
 usurer, Nathan Lee.
 Poor Estelle! her friends forsake her; what has this
 to do with me?
 Glad I am, at least, that Helen still refuses to dis-
 card
 Her, through tales false gossips tell in spite or heed-
 lessness.—'Tis hard!—
 Lee, the Levite!—some few years back Herbert horse-
 whipt him—the cur
 Show'd his teeth and laid his ears back. Now his
 wealth has purchased her.
 Must his baseness mar her brightness? Shall the
 callous cunning churl



"Dark-brown with tan muzzle, just stripped for the tussle."

Lindsay Gordon

Revel in the rosy whiteness of that golden-headed girl?

(*Thinks and smokes.*)

(*Reads.*) *Cito certe venit vitæ finis (sic sacerdos fatur).
Nunc audite omnes, ite, vobis, fabula narratur,
Nunc orate et laudate, laudat etiam Alma Mater.*

(*Muses.*) Such has been, and such shall still be, here
as there, in sun or star.

These things are to be and will be, those things were
to be and are.

If I thought that speech worth heeding I should—
Nay, it seems to me

More like Satan's special pleading than like *Gloria
Domine*.

(*Lies down on his couch.*)

(*Reads.*) *Et tu quoque, frater meus, facta mala quod
fecisti*

*Denique confundit Deus omnes res quas tetegisti.
Nunc si unquam, nunc aut nunquam, sanguine adjuro
Christi.*

SCENE IX.—“ IN THE GARDEN ”

Aylmer's Garden, near the Lake. LAURENCE RABY and
ESTELLE

He :

Come to the bank where the boat is moor'd to the
willow-tree low ;

Bertha, the baby, won't notice, Brian, the blockhead,
won't know.

She :

Bertha is not such a baby, sir, as you seem to sup-
pose.

Brian, a blockhead he may be, more than you think for
he knows.

He :

This much, at least, of your brother, from the beginning he knew
Somewhat concerning that other made such a fool of
by you.

She :

Firmer those bonds were and faster, Frank was my
spaniel, my slave,
You ! you would fain be my master ; mark you ! the
difference is grave.

He .

Call me your spaniel, your starling, take me and treat
me as these,
I would be anything, darling ! ay, whatsoever you
please.
Brian and Basil are "punting," leave them their
dice and their wine,
Bertha is butterfly-hunting, surely one hour shall be
mine.
See ! I have done with all duty ; see ! I can dare all
disgrace,
Only to look at your beauty, feasting my eyes on your
face.

She :

Look at me, ay, till your eyes ache ! How, let me
ask, will it end ;
Neither for your sake nor my sake, but for the sake of
my friend ?

He :

Is she your friend, then ? I own it, this is all wrong,
and the rest ;
Frustra sed anima monet, caro quod fortius est.

She :

Not quite so close, Laurence Raby, not with your arm
round my waist ;
Something to look at I may be, nothing to touch or to
taste.

He :

Wilful as ever and wayward ; why did you tempt me,
Estelle ?

She :

You misinterpret each stray word, you for each inch
take an ell.
Lightly all laws and ties trammel me, I am warn'd for
all that.

He (aside) :

Perhaps she will swallow her camel when she has
strain'd at her gnat.

She :

Therefore take thought and consider, weigh well, as I
do, the whole,
You for mere beauty a bidder, say, would you barter a
soul ?

He :

Girl ! *that may* happen, but *this is* ; after this welcome
the worst ;
Blest for one hour by your kisses, let me be evermore
curst.
Talk not of ties to me reckless, here every tie I discard—
Make me your girdle, your necklace—

She :

Laurence, you kiss me too hard.

He :

Ay, 'tis the road to Avernus, *n'est-ce pas vrais donc,*
ma belle ?
There let them bind us or burn us, *mais le jeu vaut la*
chandelle.

Am I your lord or your vassal ? Are you my sun or
my torch ?

You, when I look at you dazzle, yet when I touch you
you scorch.

She :

Yonder are Brian and Basil, watching us fools from the
porch.

SCENE X.—“ AFTER THE QUARREL ”

*Laurence Raby's Chamber. LAURENCE enters, a little the
worse for liquor*

Laurence :

He never gave me a chance to speak,
And he call'd her—worse than a dog—
The girl stood up with a crimson cheek,
And I fell'd him there like a log.

I can feel the blow on my knuckles yet—
He feels it more on his brow.
In a thousand years we shall all forget
The things that trouble us now.

SCENE XI.—“ TEN PACES OFF ”

*An Open Country. LAURENCE RABY and FORREST, BRIAN
AYLMER and PRESCOT*

Forrest :

I've won the two tosses from Prescott ;
Now hear me, and hearken and heed,
And pull that vile flower from your waistcoat,
And throw down that beast of a weed :

I'm going to give you the signal
 I gave Harry Hunt at Boulogne,
 The morning he met Major Bignell,
 And shot him as dead as a stone :
 For he must look round on his right hand
 To watch the white flutter—that stops
 His aim, for it takes off his sight, and
I cough while the handkerchief drops,
 And you keep both eyes on his figure,
 Old fellow, and don't take them off.
 You've got the sawhandled hair trigger—
 You sight him and shoot when I cough.

Laurence (aside) :

Though God will never forgive me,
 Though men make light of my name,
 Though my sin and my shame outlive me,
 I shall not outlast my shame.
 The coward, does he mean to miss me ?
 His right hand shakes like a leaf ;
 Shall I live for my friends to hiss me,
 Of fools and of knaves the chief ?
 Shall I live for my foes to twit me ?
 He has master'd his nerve again—
 He is firm, he will surely hit me—
 Will he reach the heart or the brain ?
 One long look eastward and northward—
 One prayer—" Our Father Which art "—
 And the cough chimes in with the fourth word.
 And I shoot skyward—the heart.

LAST SCENE.—" EXEUNT " .

HELEN RABY

Where the grave deeps rot, where the grave dewes rust
 They dug, crying, " Earth to earth "—
 Crying, " Ashes to ashes and dust to dust "—
 And what are my poor prayers worth ?

Upon whom shall I call, or in whom shall I trust,
Though death were indeed new birth ?

And they bid me be glad for my baby's sake,
That she suffer'd sinless and young—
Would they have me be glad when my breasts still ache
Where that small soft sweet mouth clung ?
I am glad that the heart will so surely break
That has been so bitterly wrung.

He was false, they tell me, and what if he were ?
I can only shudder and pray,
Pouring out my soul in a passionate prayer
For the soul that he cast away,
Was there nothing that once was created fair
In the potter's perishing clay ?

Is it well for the sinner that souls endure ?
For the sinless soul is it well ?
Does the pure child lisp to the angels pure ?
And where does the strong man dwell,
If the sad assurance of priests be sure,
Or the tale that our preachers tell ?

The unclean has follow'd the undefiled,
And the ill *may* regain the good,
And the man *may* be even as the little child !
We are children lost in the wood—
Lord ! lead us out of this tangled wild,
Where the wise and the prudent have been beguiled,
And only the babes have stood.

DOUBTFUL DREAMS

Ay ! snows are rife in December,
And sheaves are in August, yet,
And you would have me remember,
And I would rather forget ;
In the bloom of the May-day weather,
In the blight of October chill,
We were dreamers of old together,—
As of old, are you dreaming still ?

For nothing on earth is sadder
Than the dream that cheated the grasp,
The flower that turned to the adder,
The fruit that changed to the asp ;
When the dayspring in darkness closes,
As the sunset fades from the hills,
With the fragrance of perish'd roses,
With the music of parch'd up rills.

When the sands on the sea-shore nourish
Red clover and yellow corn ;
When figs on the thistle flourish,
And grapes grow thick on the thorn ;
When the dead branch, blighted and blasted,
Puts forth green leaves in the spring ;
Then the dream that life has outlasted
Dead comfort to life may bring.

I have changed the soil and the season,
But whether skies freeze or flame,
The soil they flame on or freeze on
Is changed in little save name ;
The loadstone points to the nor'ward,
The river runs to the sea ;
And you would have me look forward,
And backward I fain would flee.

I remember the bright spring garlands,
The gold that spangled the green,
And the purple on fairy far lands,
And the white and the red bloom, seen
From the spot where we last lay dreaming
Together—yourself and I—
The soft grass beneath us gleaming,
Above us the great grave sky.

And we spoke thus, " Though we have trodden
Rough paths in our boyish years ;
And some with our sweat are sodden,
And some are salt with our tears ;
Though we stumble still, walking blindly,
Our paths shall be made all straight ;
We are weak, but the heavens are kindly,
The skies are compassionate."

Is the clime of the old land younger,
Where the young dreams longer are nursed ?
With the old insatiable hunger,
With the old unquenchable thirst.
Are you longing, as in the old years
We have longed so often in vain ;
Fellow toilers still, fellow soldiers,
Though the seas have sunder'd us twain ?

But the young dreams surely have faded,
 Young dreams—old dreams of young days—
 Shall the new dream vex us as they did?
 Or as things worth censure or praise?
 Real toil is ours, real trouble,
 Dim dreams of pleasure and pride;
 Let the dreams disperse like a bubble,
 So the toil like a dream subside.

Vain toil! men better and braver,
 Rose early and rested late,
 Whose burdens than ours were graver,
 And sterner than ours their hate.
 What fair reward had Achilles?
 What rest could Alcides win?
 Vain toil! "Consider the lilies,
 They toil not, neither do spin."

Nor for mortal toiling nor spinning,
 Will the matters of mortals mend;
 As it was so in the beginning
 It shall be so in the end.
 The web that the weavers weave ill
 Shall not be woven aright,
 Till the good is brought forth from evil,
 As day is brought forth from night.

Vain dreams! for our fathers cherish'd
 High hopes in the days that were;
 And these men wonder'd and perish'd,
 Nor better than these we fare;
 And our due at least is their due,
 They fought against odds and fell;
 "*En avant, les enfants perdus!*"
 We fight against odds as well.

The skies! Will the great skies care for
Our footsteps, straighten our path,
Or strengthen our weakness? Wherefore?
We have rather incurr'd their wrath;
When against the Captain of Hazor
The stars in their courses fought,
Did the sky shed merciful rays, or
With love was the sunshine fraught?

Can they favour man, can they wrong man,
The unapproachable skies?
Though these gave strength to the strong man,
And wisdom gave to the wise?
When strength is turn'd to derision,
And wisdom brought to dismay,
Shall we wake from a troubled vision
Or rest from a toilsome day?

Nay! I cannot tell. Peradventure
Our very toil is a dream,
And the works that we praise or censure
It may be, they only seem.
If so, I would fain awaken
Or sleep more soundly than so,
Or by dreamless sleep overtaken
The dream I would fain forgo.

For the great things of earth are small things,
The longest life is a span,
And there is an end to all things,
A season to every man.
Whose glory is dust and ashes
Whose spirit is but a spark
That out from the darkness flashes
And flickers out in the dark.

We remember the pangs that wrung us
 When some went down to the pit,
 Who faded as leaves among us,
 Who flitted as shadows flit ;
 What visions under the stone lie ?
 What dreams in the shroud sleep dwell ?
 For we saw the earth pit only,
 And we heard only the knell.

We know not whether they slumber
 Who waken on earth no more,
 As the stars of the heights in number,
 As sands on the deep sea-shore.
 Shall stiffness bind them, and starkness
 Enthral them, by field and flood,
 Till " the sun shall be turn'd to darkness
 And the moon shall be turn'd to blood ? "

We know not !—worse may enthrall men—
 " The wages of sin is death,"
 And so death pass'd upon all men ;
 For sin was born with man's breath.
 Then the labourer, spent with sinning,
 His hire with his life shall spend,
 For it was so in the beginning,
 And shall be so in the end.

There is life in the blacken'd ember
 While a spark is smouldering yet
 In a dream, e'en now I remember
 That dream I had lief forget.
 I had lief forget, I had e'en lief
 That dream with *this* doubt should die
 " *If we did these things in the green leaf,*
What shall be done in the dry ? "

THE RHYME OF JOYOUS GARDE

THROUGH the lattice rushes the south wind, dense
With fumes of the flowery frankincense
 From hawthorn blossoming thickly ;
And gold is shower'd on grass unshorn,
And poppy-fire on shuddering corn,
With Maydew flooded and flush'd with morn,
 And scented with sweetness sickly.

The bloom and brilliance of summer days,
The buds that brighten, the fields that blaze,
 The fruits that ripen and redden,
And all the gifts of a God-sent light
Are sadder things in my shameful sight
Than the blackest gloom of the bitterest night,
 When the senses darken and deaden.

For the days recall what the nights efface,
Scenes of glory and seasons of grace,
 For which there is no returning—
Else the days were even as the nights to me,
Now the axe is laid to the root of the tree,
And to-morrow the barren trunk may be
 Cut down—cast forth for the burning.

Would God I had died the death that day
When the bishop blessed us before the fray
 At the shrine of the Saviour's Mother ;
We buckled the spur, we braced the belt,
Arthur and I—together we knelt,
And the grasp of his kingly hand I felt
 As the grasp of an only brother.

The body and the blood of Christ we shared,
 Knees bended and heads bow'd down and bared,
 We listened throughout the praying.
 Eftsoon the shock of the foe we bore
 Shoulder to shoulder on Severn's shore,
 Till our hilts were glued to our hands with gore
 And our sinews slacken'd with slaying.

Was I far from Thy Kingdom, gracious Lord,
 With a shattered casque and a shiver'd sword,
 On the threshold of Mary's chapel?
 Pardie! I had wellnigh won that crown
 Which endureth more than a knight's renown,
 When the pagan giant had got me down
 Sore spent in the deadly grapple.

May his craven spirit find little grace!
 He was seal'd to Satan in any case,
 Yet the loser had been the winner;
 Had I wax'd fainter or he less faint,
 Then my soul was free from this loathsome taint,
 I had died as a Christian knight—no saint
 Perchance, yet a pardon'd sinner.

But I strove full grimly beneath his weight,
 I clung to his poignard desperate,
 I baffled the thrust that followed,
 And writhing uppermost rose, to deal,
 With bare three inches of broken steel,
 One stroke—Ha! the headpiece crash'd piecemeal,
 And the knave in his black blood wallow'd.

So I lived for worse—in fulness of time,
 When peace for a season swayed the clime,
 And spears for a space were idle;

Trusted and chosen of all the court,
A favoured herald of fair report,
I travell'd eastward, and duly brought
A bride to a queenly bridal.

Pardie ! 'twas a morning even as this
(The skies were warmer if aught, I wis,
Albeit the fields were duller,
Or it may be that the envious spring
Abash'd at the sight of a fairer thing
Wax'd somewhat sadder of colouring
Because of her faultless colour).

With her through the Lyonesse I rode,
Till the woods with the noontide fervour glow'd,
And there for a space we halted,
Where the intertwining branches made
Cool carpets of olive-tinted shade,
And the floors with fretwork of flame inlaid
From leafy lattices vaulted.

And scarf and mantle for her I spread,
And strewed them over the grassiest bed
And under the greenest awning,
And loosen'd latch and buckle, and freed
From selle and housing the red roan steed
And the jennet of swift Iberian breed
That had carried us since the dawning.

The brown thrush sang through the briar and bower,
All flush'd or frosted with forest flower
In the warm sun's wanton glances ;
And I grew deaf to the song bird—blind
To blossom that sweeten'd the sweet spring wind—
I saw her only—a girl reclined
In her girlhood's indolent trances.

And the song and the scent and sense wax'd weak,
The wild rose withered beside the cheek

 She poised on her finger slender,
The soft spun gold of her glittering hair
Ran rippling into a wondrous snare,
That flooded the round arm bright and bare
 And the shoulder's silvery splendour.

The deep dusk fires in those dreamy eyes,
Like seas clear-coloured in summer skies,

 Were guiltless of future treason :
And I stood watching her, still and mute,
Yet the evil seed in my soul found root,
And the sad plant throve, and the sinful fruit
 Grew ripe in the shameful season.

Let the sin be mine as the shame was hers,
In desolate days of departed years

 She had leisure for shame and sorrow—
There was light repentance and brief remorse,
When I rode against Saxon foes or Norse
With clang of harness and clatter of horse,
 And little heed for the morrow.

And now she is dead, men tell me, and I,
In this living death must I linger and lie

 Till my cup to the dregs is drunken ?
I look through the lattice, worn and grim,
With eyelids darken'd and eyesight dim,
And weary body and wasted limb,
 And sinew slacken'd and shrunken.

She is dead ! Gone down to the burial place
Where the grave-dews cleave to her faultless face ;
 Where the grave-sods crumble around her ;

And that bright burden of burnish'd gold
That once on those waxen shoulders roll'd,
Will it spoil with the damps of the deadly mould?
Was it shorn when the church vows bound her?

Now I know full well that the fair spear shaft
Shall never gladden my hand, nor the haft
Of the good sword grow to my fingers;
Now the maddest fray, the merriest din
Would fail to quicken this life-stream thin,
Yet the sleepy poison of that sweet sin
In the sluggish current still lingers.

Would God I had slept with the slain men, long
Or ever the heart conceiv'd a wrong
That the innermost soul abhorred—
Or ever these lying lips were strained
To her lids, pearl-tinted and purple-vein'd,
Or ever those traitorous kisses stained
The snows of her spotless forehead.

Let me gather a little strength to think
As one who reels on the outermost brink,
To the innermost gulf descending.
In that truce the longest and last of all,
In the summer nights of that festival—
Soft vesture of samite and silken pall—
The beginning came of the ending.

And one trod softly with sandall'd feet—
Ah! why are the stolen waters sweet?—
And one crept stealthily after.
I would I had taken him there and wrung
His knavish neck when the dark door swung,
Or torn by the roots his treacherous tongue,
And stifled his hateful laughter.

So the smouldering scandal blazed—but he,
 My king, to the last put trust in me—
 Ay, well, was his trust requited?
 Now, priests may patter, and bells may toll,
 He will need no masses to aid his soul;
 When the angels open the judgment scroll,
 His wrong will be tenfold righted.

Then dawn'd the day when the mail was donn'd,
 And the steed for the strife caparison'd,
 But not 'gainst the Norse invader.
 Then was bloodshed—not by untoward chance,
 As the blood that is drawn by the jousting lance,
 The fray in the castle of Melegrance,
 The fight in the lists with Mador.

Then the guilt made manifest, then the siege
 When the true men rallying round the liege
 Beleaguer'd his base betrayer,
 Then the fruitless parleys, the pleadings vain,
 And the hard-fought battles with brave Gawaine,
 Twice worsted, and once so nearly slain
 I may well be counted his slayer.

Then the crime of Modred—a little sin
 At the side of mine, though the knave was kin
 To the king by the knave's hand stricken.
 And the once loved knight, was he there to save
 That knightly king who that knighthood gave?
 Ah, Christ! will he greet me as knight or knave
 In the day when the dust shall quicken?

Had he lightly loved, had he trusted less,
 I had sinn'd perchance with the sinfulness
 That through prayer and penance is pardon'd.

Oh, love most loyal! Oh, faith most sure!
In the purity of a soul so pure
I found my safeguard—I sinn'd secure,
Till my heart to the sin grew harden'd.

We were glad together in gladsome meads,
When they shook to the strokes of our snorting steeds.
We were joyful in joyous lustre
When it flush'd the coppice or fill'd the glade,
Where the horn of the Dane or the Saxon bray'd,
And we saw the heathen banner display'd,
And the heathen lances cluster.

Then a steel-shod rush and a steel-clad ring,
And a crash of the spear staves splintering,
And the billowy battle blended.
Riot of chargers, revel of blows,
And fierce flush'd faces of fighting foes,
From croup to bridle, that reel'd and rose,
In a sparkle of sword-play splendid.

And the long lithe sword in the hand became
As a leaping light, as a falling flame,
As a fire through the flax that hasted;
Slender, and shining, and beautiful,
How it shore through shivering casque and skull,
And never a stroke was void and null,
And never a thrust was wasted.

I have done for ever with all these things—
Deeds that were joyous to knights and kings,
In days that with songs were cherish'd.
The songs are ended, the deeds are done,
There shall none of them gladden me now, not one;
There is nothing good for me under the sun,
But to perish as these things perish'd.

Shall it profit me aught that the bishop seeks
My presence daily, and duly speaks

Soft words of comfort and kindness?
Shall it aught avail me? "Certes," he said,
"Though thy soul is darken'd, be not afraid—
God hateth nothing that He hath made—
His light shall disperse thy blindness."

I am not afraid for myself, although
I know I have had that light, and I know
The greater my condemnation.
When I well nigh swoon'd in the deep-drawn bliss
Of that first long, sweet, slow, stolen kiss,
I would gladly have given for less than this
Myself, with my soul's salvation.

I would languish thus in some loathsome den
As a thing of naught in the eyes of men,
In the mouths of men as a by-word.
Through years of pain, and when God saw fit,
Singing His praises my soul shall flit
To the darkest depth of the nethermost pit,
If *hers* could be wafted skyward.

Lord Christ! have patience a little while,
I have sinn'd because I am utterly vile,
Having light, loving darkness rather.
And I pray Thee deal with me as Thou wilt,
Yet the blood of Thy foes I have freely spilt,
And, moreover, mine is the greater guilt,
In the sight of Thee and Thy Father.

That saint, Thy servant, was counted dear
Whose sword in the garden grazed the ear
Of Thine enemy, Lord Redeemer!

Not thus on the shattering visor jarr'd
In this hand the iron of the hilt crossbarr'd,
When the blade was swallow'd up to the guard
Through the teeth of the strong blasphemer.

If ever I smote as a man should smite,
If I struck one stroke that seem'd good in Thy sight,
By Thy loving mercy prevailing.
Lord! let her stand in the light of Thy face
Cloth'd with Thy love and crown'd with Thy grace,
When I gnash my teeth in the terrible place
That is fill'd with weeping and wailing.

Shall I comfort my soul on account of this?
In the world to come, whatsoever it is,
There is no more earthly ill-doing—
For the dusty darkness shall slay desire,
And the chaff may burn with unquenchable fire,
But for green wild growth of thistle and briar,
At least there is no renewing.

And this grievous burden of life shall change
In the dim hereafter, dreamy and strange,
And sorrows and joys diurnal.
And partial blessings and perishing ills
Shall fade in the praise, or the pang that fills
The glory of God's eternal hills,
Or the gloom of His gulf eternal.

Yet if all things change to the glory of One
Who for all illdoers gave His Own sweet Son,
To His goodness so shall He change ill,
When the world as a wither'd leaf shall be,
And the sky like a shrivell'd scroll shall flee,
And souls shall be summon'd from land and sea,
At the blast of His bright archangel.

THORA'S SONG

[*From "Ashtaroith", see pp. 215-6*]

WE severed in Autumn early,
Ere the earth was torn by the plough ;
The wheat and the oats and the barley
Are ripe for the harvest now.
We sunder'd one misty morning,
Ere the hills were dimm'd by the rain,
Through the flowers those hills adorning
Thou comest not back again.

My heart is heavy and weary
With the weight of a weary soul ;
The mid-day glare groweth dreary,
And dreary the midnight scroll.
The corn-stalks sigh for the sickle
'Neath the load of the golden grain ;
I sigh for a mate more fickle—
Thou comest not back again.

The warm sun riseth and setteth,
The night bringeth moist'ning dew
But the soul that longeth forgetteth
The warmth and the moisture, too ;
In the hot sun rising and setting
There is naught save feverish pain ;
There are tears in the night-dews wetting—
Thou comest not back again.

Thy voice in mine ear still mingles
With the voices of whisp'ring trees,
Thy kiss on my cheek still tingles
At each kiss of the summer breeze :
While dreams of the past are thronging
For substance of shades in vain,
I am waiting, watching, and longing—
Thou comest not back again.

Waiting and watching ever,
Longing and lingering yet,
Leaves rustle and corn-stalks quiver,
Winds murmur and waters fret ;
No answer they bring, no greeting,
No speech, save that sad refrain,
No voice, save an echo repeating—
He cometh not back again.

THE THREE FRIENDS

[*From the French*]

THE sword slew one in deadly strife ;
One perished by the bowl ;
The third lies self-slain by the knife ;
For three the bells may toll —
I loved her better than my life,
And better than my soul.

Ay, father ! hast thou come at last ?
'Tis somewhat late to pray ;
Life's crimson tides are ebbing fast,
They drain my soul away ;
Mine eyes with film are overcast,
The lights are waning grey.

This curl from her bright head I shore,
And this her hands gave mine ;
See ! one is stained with purple gore,
And one with poison'd wine ;
Give these to her when all is o'er —
How serpent-like they twine !

We three were brethren in arms,
And sworn companions we ;
We held this motto, " Whoso harms
The one shall harm the three ! "
Till, matchless for her subtle charms,
Beloved of each was she.

(These two were slain that I might kiss
Her sweet mouth. I did well ;
I said, " There is no greater bliss
For those in Heaven that dwell ;"
I lost her ; then I said, " There is
No fiercer pang in hell !")

We have upheld each other's rights,
Shared purse, and borrow'd blade ;
Have stricken side by side in fights ;
And side by side have prayed
In churches. We were Christian knights,
And she a Christian maid.

We met at sunrise, he and I,
My comrade—'twas agreed
The steel our quarrel first should try,
The poison should succeed ;
For two of three were doomed to die,
And one was doomed to bleed.

We buckled to the doubtful fray,
At first, with some remorse ;
But he, who must be slain—or slay,
Soon strikes with vengeful force.
He fell ; I left him where he lay,
Among the trampled gorse.

Did passion warp my heart and head
To madness ? And, if so,
Can madness palliate bloodshed ?—
It may be—I shall know
When God shall gather up the dead
From where the four winds blow.

We met at sunset, he and I—
 My second comrade, true ;
 Two cups with wine were brimming high,
 And one was drugg'd—we knew
 Not which, nor sought we to descry ;
 Our choice by lot we drew.

And there I sat with him to sup :
 I heard him blithely speak
 Of bygone days—the fatal cup
 Forgotten seemed—his cheek
 Was ruddy : father, raise me up,
 My voice is waxing weak.

We drank ; his lips turned livid white,
 His cheeks grew leaden ash ;
 He reel'd—I heard his temples smite
 The threshold with a crash !
 And from his hand, in shivers bright,
 I saw the goblet flash.

The morrow dawned with fragrance rare,
 The May-breeze, from the west,
 Just fann'd the sleepy olives, where
 She heard and I confess'd ;
 My hair entangled with her hair,
 Her breast strained to my breast.

On the dread verge of endless gloom,
 My soul recalls that hour ;
 Skies languishing with balm of bloom,
 And fields aflame with flower ;
 And slow caresses that consume,
 And kisses that devour.

Ah ! now with storm the day seems rife,
My dull ears catch the roll
Of thunder, and the far sea strife,
On beach and bar and shoal—
I loved her better than my life ;
And better than my soul.

She fled ! I cannot prove her guilt,
Nor would I an I could,
See ! life for life is fairly spilt,
And blood is shed for blood ;
Her white hands neither touch'd the hilt,
Nor yet the potion brew'd.

Ay ! turn me from the sickly south,
Towards the gusty north ;
The fruits of sin are dust and drouth,
The end of crime is wrath—
The lips that press'd her rose-like mouth,
Are choked with blood-red froth.

Then dig the grave-pit deep and wide,
Three graves thrown into one,
And lay three corpses side by side ;
And tell their tale to none,
But bring her back in all her pride,
To see what she hath done.

A SONG OF AUTUMN

“WHERE shall we go for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year,
When the burnt-up banks are yellow and sad,
When the boughs are yellow and sere?
Where are the old ones that once we had,
And when are the new ones near?
What shall we do for our garlands glad
At the falling of the year?”

“Child! can I tell where the garlands go?
Can I say where the lost leaves veer
On the brown-burnt banks, when the wild winds blow,
When they drift through the dead-wood drear?
Girl! when the garlands of next year glow,
You may gather again, my dear —
But *I* go where the last year's lost leaves go
At the falling of the year.”

THE ROMANCE OF BRITOMARTE

AS RELATED BY SERGEANT LEIGH ON THE NIGHT HE GOT
HIS CAPTAINCY AT THE RESTORATION

I'LL tell you a story : but pass the "jack,"
And let us make merry to-night, my men.
Ay, those were the days when my beard was black—
I like to remember them now and then—
Then Miles was living, and Cuthbert there
On his lip was never a sign of down.
But I carry about some braided hair
That has not yet changed from the glossy brown
That it show'd the day when I broke the heart
Of the bravest of destriers, "Britomarte."

Sir Hugh was slain (may his soul find grace)
In the fray that was neither lost nor won
At Edgehill—then to St. Hubert's-chase
Lord Goring despatch'd a garrison—
But men and horses were ill to spare,
And ere long the soldiers were shifted fast.
As for me, I never was quarter'd there
Till Marston Moor had been lost ; at last,
As luck would have it, alone, and late
In the night, I rode to the northern gate.

I thought as I pass'd through the moonlit park,
On the boyish days I used to spend
In the halls of the knight lying stiff and stark—
Thought on his lady, my father's friend
(Mine, too, in spite of my sinister bar,
But with that my story has naught to do)—

She died the winter before the war,
 Died giving birth to the baby Hugh.
 He pass'd ere the green leaves clothed the bough,
 And the orphan girl was the heiress now.

When I was a rude and a reckless boy,
 And she a brave and a beautiful child,
 I was her page, her playmate, her toy—
 I have crown'd her hair with the field-flowers wild,
 Cowslip and crowfoot, and coltsfoot bright—
 I have carried her miles when the woods were wet,
 I have read her romances of dame and knight—
 She was my princess, my pride, my pet.
 There was then this proverb us twain between,
 For the glory of God and of Gwendoline.

She had grown to a maiden wonderful fair,
 But for years I had scarcely seen her face.
 Now, with troopers Holdsworth, Huntly and Clare,
 Old Miles kept guard at St. Hubert's-chase,
 And the chatelaine was a Mistress Ruth,
 Sir Hugh's half-sister, an ancient dame,
 But a mettlesome soul had she, forsooth,
 As she show'd when the time of her trial came.
 I bore despatches to Miles and to her
 To warn them against the bands of Kerr.

And mine would have been a perilous ride
 With the rebel horsemen—we knew not where
 They were scatter'd over that country side,—
 If it had not been for my brave brown mare—
 She was iron-sinew'd and satin-skin'd,
 Ribb'd like a drum and limb'd like a deer,
 Fierce as the fire and fleet as the wind—
 There was nothing she couldn't climb or clear—
 Rich lords had vex'd me, in vain, to part,
 For their gold and silver, with Britomarte,

Next morn we muster'd scarce half a score

With the serving men, who were poorly arm'd—
Five soldiers, counting myself, no more,

And a culverin, which might well have harm'd
Us, had we used it, but not our foes—

When, with horses and foot, to our doors they came.
And a psalm-singer summon'd us (through his nose),

And deliver'd—"This, in the people's name,
Unto whoso holdeth this fortress here,
Surrender! or bide the siege—John Kerr."

'Twas a mansion built in a style too new,

A castle by courtesy, he lied
Who called it a fortress—yet, 'tis true

It had been indifferently fortified—
We were well provided with bolt and bar,

And while I hurried to place our men,
Old Miles was call'd to a council of war,

With Mistress Ruth and with *her*, and when
They had argued loudly and long, those three,
They sent, as a last resource, for me.

In the chair of state sat erect Dame Ruth;

She had cast aside her embroidery:
She had been a beauty, they say, in her youth,
There was much fierce fire in her bold black eye.

"Am I deceiv'd in you both," quoth she,

"If one spark of her father's spirit lives
In this girl here—so, this Leigh, Ralph Leigh,

Let us hear what counsel the springald gives."
Then I stammer'd, somewhat taken aback—
(Simon, you ale-swiller, pass the "jack").

The dame wax'd hotter—"Speak out, lad, say

Must we fall in that canting caitiff's power?
Shall we yield to a knave and a turncoat? Nay,

I had liever leap from our topmost tower.
For a while we can surely await relief:

Our walls are high and our doors are strong."

This Kerr was indeed a canting thief—

I know not rightly, some private wrong
He had done Sir Hugh, but I know this much,
Traitor or turncoat he suffer'd as such.

Quoth Miles—"Enough! your will shall be done ;

Relief may arrive by the merest chance,
But your house ere dusk will be lost and won ;

They have got three pieces of ordnance."
Then I cried, "Lord Guy, with four troops of horse,
Even now is biding at Westbrooke town ;
If a rider could break through the rebel force,
He would bring relief ere the sun goes down ;
Through the postern door could I make one dart,
I could baffle them all upon Britomarte."

Miles mutter'd "Madness!" Dame Ruth look'd grave,

Said, "True, though we cannot keep one hour
The courtyard, no, nor the stables save,

They will have to batter piecemeal the tower,
And thus——" But suddenly she halted there.

With a shining hand on my shoulder laid,
Stood Gwendoline. She had left her chair,

And, "Nay, if it needs must be done," she said,
"Ralph Leigh will gladly do it, I ween,
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline."

I had undertaken a heavier task

For a lighter word. I saddled with care,
Nor cumber'd myself with corselet nor casque
(Being loth to burden the brave brown mare).

Young Clare kept watch on the wall—he cried,
"Now, haste, Ralph! this is the time to seize,
The rebels are round us on every side,

But here they straggle by twos and threes."
Then out I led her, and up I sprung,
And the postern door on its hinges swung.

I had drawn this sword—you may draw it and feel,
For this is the blade that I bore that day—
There's a notch even now on the long grey steel,
A nick that has never been rasp'd away.
I bow'd my head and I buried my spurs,
One bound brought the gliding green beneath ;
I could tell by her back-flung flatten'd ears
She had fairly taken the bit in her teeth—
(What, Jack, have you drain'd your namesake dry,
Left nothing to quench the thirst of a fly ?)

These things are done, and are done with, lad,
In far less time than your talker tells.
The sword with their hoof strokes shook like mad,
And rang with their carbines and petronels,
And they shouted, " Cross him and cut him off ! "
" Surround him ! " " Seize him ! " " Capture the clown
Or kill him ! " " Shall he escape to scoff
In your faces ? " " Shoot him or cut him down ! "
And their bullets whistled on every side :
Many were near us and more were wide.

Not a bullet told upon Britomarte—
Suddenly snorting, she launched along—
So the osprey dives where the seagulls dart,
So the falcon swoops where the kestrels throng ;
And full in my front one pistol flash'd,
And right in my path their sergeant got.
How our jack-boots jarr'd, how our stirrups clash'd,
While the mare like a meteor past him shot ;
But I clove his skull with a backstroke clean,
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline.

And as one whom the fierce wind storms in the face
With spikes of hail and with splinters of rain,
I, while we fled through St. Hubert's-chase,
Bent till my cheek was amongst her mane.

To the north full a league of the deer-park lay,
 Smooth, springy turf, and she fairly flew,
 And the sound of their hoof strokes died away,
 And their far shots faint in the distance grew.
 Loudly I laugh'd, having won the start,
 At the folly of following Britomarte.

They had posted a guard at the northern gate—
 Some dozen of pikemen and musketeers.
 To the tall park palings I turn'd her straight,
 She veer'd in her flight as the swallow veers—
 And some blew matches and some drew swords,
 And one of them wildly hurl'd his pike,
 But she clear'd by inches the oaken boards,
 And she carried me yards beyond the dyke,
 Then gaily over the long green down
 We gallop'd, heading for Westbrooke town.

The green down slopes to the great grey moor,
 The grey moor sinks to the gleaming Skelt—
 Sudden and sullen, and swift and sure,
 The whirling water was round my belt—
 She breasted the bank with a savage snort
 And a backward glance of her bloodshot eye,
 And "Our Lady of Andover's" flash'd like thought,
 And flitted St. Agatha's nunnery,
 And the firs at The Ferngrove fled on the right,
 And "Falconer's Tower" on the left took flight.

And over "The Ravenswold" we raced—
 We rounded the hill by "The Hermit's Well"—
 We burst on the Westbrooke Bridge—"What haste?
 What errand?" shouted the sentinel.
 "To Beelzebub with the brewer's knave!"
 "*Carolus Rex* and he of the Rhine!"
 Galloping past him, I got and gave
 In the gallop password and countersign.
 All soak'd with water and soil'd with mud,
 With the sleeve of my jerkin half-drench'd in blood.

Now, Heaven be praised that I found him there,—
 Lord Guy. He said, having heard my tale,
 “Leigh, let my own man look to your mare,
 Rest and recruit with our wine and ale;
 But first must our surgeon attend to you;
 You are somewhat shrewdly stricken no doubt.”
 Then he snatch’d a horn from the wall and blew,
 Making “Boot and Saddle” ring sharply out.
 “Have I done good service this day?” quoth I.
 “Then I will ride back in your troop, Lord Guy.”

In the street I heard how the trumpets peal’d,
 And I caught the gleam of a morion
 From the window—then to the door I reel’d;
 I had lost more blood than I reckon’d upon;
 He eyed me calmly with keen grey eyes—
 Stern grey eyes of a steel-blue grey—
 Said, “The wilful man can never be wise,
 Nathless the wilful must have his way,”
 And he pour’d from a flagon some fiery wine,
 I drain’d it, and straightway strength was mine.

* * * * *

I was with them all the way on the brown—
 “Guy to the rescue!” “God and the King!”
 We were just in time, for the doors were down,
 And didn’t our sword blades rasp and ring?
 And didn’t we hew, and didn’t we hack?
 The sport scarce lasted minutes ten—
 (Ay, those were the days when my beard was black;
 I like to remember them now and then).
 Though they fought like fiends, we were four to one,
 And we captured those that refused to run.

We have not forgotten it, Cuthbert, boy!
 That supper scene when the lamps were lit,
 How the women (some of them) sobb’d for joy,
 How the soldiers drank the deeper for it;

How the Dame did honours, and Gwendoline
 How grandly she glided into the hall,
 How she stoop'd with the grace of a girlish queen,
 And kiss'd me gravely before them all,
 And the stern Lord Guy, how gaily he laugh'd,
 Till more of his cup was spilt than quaff.

Brown Britomarte lay dead in her straw
 Next morn—we buried her—brave old girl!
 John Kerr, we tried him by martial law,
 And we twisted some hemp for the traitors' churl;
 And she, I met her alone, said she,
 "You have risk'd your life, you have lost your mare,
 And what can I give in return, Ralph Leigh?"
 I replied, "One braid of that bright brown hair,"
 And with that she bow'd her beautiful head,
 "You can take as much as you choose," she said.

And I took it, it may be, more than enough—
 And I shore it rudely, close to the roots.
 The wine or wounds may have made me rough,
 And men at the bottom are merely brutes.
 Three weeks I slept at St. Hubert's-chase,
 When I woke from the fever of wounds and wine
 I could scarcely believe that the ghastly face
 That the glass reflected was really mine.
 I sought the hall—where a wedding *had been*—
 The wedding of Guy and of Gwendoline.

The romance of a grizzled old trooper's life
 May make you laugh in your sleeves: laugh out,
 Lads; we have most of us seen some strife;
 We have all of us had some sport, no doubt.
 I have won some honour and gain'd some gold,
 Now that our king returns to his own;

If the pulses beat slow, if the blood runs cold,
And if friends have faded and loves have flown,
Then the greater reason is ours to drink,
And the more we swallow the less we shall think.

At the battle of Naseby, Miles was slain,
And Huntly sank from his wounds that week ;
We left young Clare upon Worcester plain—
How the " Ironside " gash'd his girlish cheek.
Ay, strut, and swagger, and ruffle anew,
Gay gallants, now that the war is done !
They fought like fiends (give the fiend his due!)—
We fought like fops, it was thus they won.
Holdsworth is living for aught I know,
At least he was living two years ago.

And Guy—Lord Guy—so stately and stern,
He is changed, I met him at Winchester ;
He has grown quite gloomy and taciturn.
Gwendoline—why do you ask for her ?
Died ! as her mother had died before—
Died giving birth to the baby Guy !
Did my voice shake ? Then am I fool the more.
Sooner or later we all must die :
But, at least, let us live while we live to-night,
The *days* may be dark, but the *lamps* are bright.

For to me the sunlight seems worn and wan :
The sun, he is losing his splendour now—
He can never shine as of old he shone
On her glorious hair and glittering brow.
Ah ! those *days that were*, when my beard was black,
Now I have only the *nights that are*.
What, landlord, ho ! bring in haste, burnt sack
And a flask of your fiercest usquebaugh.
You, Cuthbert ! surely you know by heart
The story of *her* and of Britomarte.

LAUDAMUS

THE Lord shall slay or the Lord shall save !

He is righteous whether He save or slay—

Brother ! give thanks for the gifts He gave,

Though the gifts He gave He hath taken away—

Shall we strive for that which is nothing ? Nay.

Shall we hate each other for that which fled ?

She is but a marvel of modell'd clay,

And the smooth clear white and the soft pure red

That we coveted, shall endure no day.

Was it wise or well that I hated you

For the fruit that hung too high on the tree ?—

For the blossom out of our reach that grew

Was it well or wise that you hated me ?—

My hate has flown, and your hate shall flee.

Let us veil our faces like children chid—

Can that violet orb we swore by see

Through that violet-vein'd, transparent lid ?—

Now the Lord forbid that this strife should be.

Would you knit the forehead or clench the fist,

For the curls that never were well caress'd—

For the red that never was fairly kiss'd—

For the white that never was fondly press'd ?

Shall we nourish wrath while she lies at rest

Between us ? Surely our wrath shall cease—

We would fain know better—the Lord knows best—

Is there peace between us ? Yea, there is peace.

In the soul's release she at least is blest.

Let us thank the Lord for His bounties all,
For the brave old days of pleasure and pain,
When the world for both of us seem'd too small—
Though the love was void and the hate was vain—
Though the word was bitter between us twain,
And the bitter word was kin to the blow,
For her gloss and ripple of rich gold rain,
For her velvet crimson and satin snow—
Though we never shall know the old days again

The Lord !—His mercy is great, men say ;
His wrath, men say, is a burning brand—
Let us praise Him, whether He save or slay,
And above her body let hand join hand.
We shall meet, my friends, in the Spirit-land—
Will our strife renew ? Nay, I dare not trust,
For the grim great gulf that cannot be spann'd
Will divide us from her. The Lord is just,
She shall not be thrust where our spirits stand.

A BASKET OF FLOWERS

[*From Dawn to Dusk*]

DAWN

ON skies still and starlit
White lustres take hold,
And grey flushes scarlet,
And red flashes gold.
And sun-glories cover
The rose, shed above her,
Like lover and lover
They flame and unfold.

* * * * *

Still bloom in the garden
Green grassplot, fresh lawn,
Though pasture lands harden
And drought fissures yawn.
While leaves, not a few fall,
Let rose-leaves for you fall
Leaves pearl-strung with dew fall,
And gold shot with dawn.

Does the grass-plot remember
The fall of your feet
In Autumn's red ember
When drought leagues with heat,

When the last of the roses
Despairingly closes
In the lull that reposes
Ere storm winds wax fleet ?

Love's melodies languish
In Chastelard's strain,
And Abelard's anguish
Is love's pleasant pain ;
And Sappho rehearses
Love's blessings and curses
In passionate verses
Again and again.

And I !—I have heard of
All these long ago,
Yet never one word of
Their song-lore I know ;
Not under my finger
In songs of the singer
Love's litanies linger,
Love's rhapsodies flow.

Fresh flowers in a basket—
An offering to you—
Though you did not ask it,
Unbidden I strew ;
With heat and drought striving
Some blossoms still living
May render thanksgiving
For dawn and for dew.

The garlands I gather,
The rhymes I string fast,
Are hurriedly rather
Than heedlessly cast.

Yon tree's shady awning
 Is short'ning and warning,
 Far spent is the morning
 And I must ride fast.

Songs empty, yet airy,
 I've striven to write;
 For failure, dear Mary!
 Forgive me—Good-night!
 Songs and flowers may beset you,
 I can only regret you,
 While the soil where I met you
 Recedes from my sight.

For the sake of past hours,
 For the love of old times,
 Take "A Basket of Flowers,"
 And a bundle of rhymes,
 Though all the bloom perish
 E'er *your* hand can cherish,
 While churlish and bearish
 The verse-jingle chimes.

And Eastward by Nor'ward
 Looms sadly *my* track,
 And I must ride forward
 And still I look back,—
 Look back—Ah, how vainly!
 For while I see plainly
 My hands on the reins lie
 Uncertain and slack.

The warm wind breathes strong breath,
 The dust dims mine eye,
 And I draw one long breath
 And stifle one sigh.

Green slopes softly shaded,
Have flitted and faded—
My dreams flit as they did—
Good-night !—and—Good-bye !

* * * * *

DUSK

Last rose ! end my story !
Dead core and dry husk—
Departed thy glory
And tainted thy musk.
Night spreads her dark limbs on
The face of the dim sun,
So flame fades to crimson
And crimson to dusk.

ASHTAROTH :
A DRAMATIC LYRIC

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

HUGO, *a Norman Baron and a Scholar.*

ERIC, *A Friend of Hugo's.*

THURSTON,
EUSTACE, } *Followers of Hugo.*
RALPH,

HENRY, *a Page.*

LUKE,
HUBERT, } *Monks living in a Norman Chapel.*

BASIL, *Abbot of a Convent on the Rhine.*

CYRIL, *a Monk of the same Convent.*

OSRIC, *a Norwegian Adventurer, and formerly a Corsair.*

RUDOLPH, *an outlawed Count, and the Captain of a Band of Robbers.*

DAGOBERT, *the Captain of some predatory Soldiers called "Free Lances."*

HAROLD, *a Danish Knight.*

ORION.

THORA,
AGATHA,
ELSPETH, *a Nurse of Thora's,*
URSULA, *Abbess of the Convent on the Rhine,*
NUNS, ETC., } *WOMEN.*

Men-at-arms, Soldiers, and Robbers; Monks, Friars, and Churchmen; Spirits, etc.

ASHTAROTH

SCENE.—A CASTLE IN NORMANDY

A Study in a Tower ; HUGO seated at a table covered with maps and charts of the heavens, astronomical instruments, books, manuscripts, etc.

Enter Henry, a Page

Hugo :

Well, boy, what is it ?

Henry :

The feast is spread.

Hugo :

Why tarry the guests for me ?

Let Eric sit at the table's head ;

Alone I desire to be.

[Henry goes out.]

What share have I at their festive board,

Their mirth I can only mar ;

To me no pleasure their cups afford,

Their songs on my silence jar.

With an aching eye and a throbbing brain,

And yet with a hopeful heart,

I must toil and strain with the planets again

When the rays of the sun depart ;

He who must needs with the topers tope,

And the feasters feast in the hall,

How can he hope with a matter to cope

That is immaterial !

Orion :

He who his appetite stints and curbs
 • Shut up in the northern wing,
 With his rye-bread flavoured with bitter herbs,
 And his draught from the tasteless spring,
 Good sooth! he is but a sorry clown.

There are some good things upon earth—
 Pleasure and power and fair renown,

And wisdom of worldly worth ;

• There is wisdom in follies that charm the sense,
 In follies that light the eyes,
 But the folly to wisdom that makes pretence
 Is alone by the fool termed wise.

Hugo :

Thy speech, Orion, is somewhat rude ;
 Perchance, having jeer'd and scoff'd
 To thy fill, thou wilt curb thy jeering mood ;
 I wot thou hast served me oft.
 This plan of the skies seems fairly traced ;
 What errors canst thou detect ?

Orion :

Nay, the constellations are all misplaced
 And the satellites incorrect ;
 Leave the plan to me ; you have time to seek
 An hour of needful rest,
 The night is young, and the planets are weak :
 See! the sun still reddens the west.

Hugo :

I fear I shall sleep too long.

Orion :

If you do

It matters not much ; the sky
 Is cloudy, the stars will be faint and few ;
 Now, list to my lullaby.

[*Hugo reclines on a couch.*

(*Sings.*)

Still the darkling skies are red,
 Though the day-god's course is run ;
 Heavenly night lamps overhead
 Flash and twinkle one by one.
 Idle dreamer, earth-born elf !
 Vainly grasping heavenly things,
 Wherefore weariest thou thyself
 With thy vain imaginings ?

From the tree of knowledge first,
 Since his parents pluck'd the fruit,
 Man, with partial knowledge curs'd,
 Of the tree still seeks the root ;
 Musty volumes crowd thy shelf—
 Which of these true knowledge brings ?
 Wherefore weariest thou thyself
 With thy vain imaginings ?

Will the stars from heaven descend ?
 Can the earthworm soar and rise ?
 Can the mortal comprehend
 Heaven's own hallow'd mysteries ?
 Greed and glory, power and pelf—
 These are won by clowns and kings ;
 Wherefore weariest thou thyself
 With thy vain imaginings ?

Sow and reap, and toil and spin ;
 Eat and drink, and dream and die ;
 Man may strive, yet never win,
 And I laugh the while and cry—
 Idle dreamer—earth-born elf !
 Vainly grasping heavenly things,
 Wherefore weariest thou thyself
 With thy vain imaginings ?

Would master at once. In a pilgrimage,
 Forsooth, there is nothing new,
 Though virtue, I ween, in change of scene,
 And vigour in change of air,
 Will always be, and has always been,
 And travel is a tonic rare ;
 Still, the restless discontented mood
 For the time alone is eased,
 It will soon return with hunger renew'd
 And appetite unappeased,
 Nathless I could teach a shorter plan
 To win that wisdom you crave ;
 That lore that is seldom attain'd by man
 From the cradle down to the grave.

Hugo :

Sure lore I had rather do without,
 It hath nothing mystic nor awful
 In my eye. Nay, I despise and doubt
 The arts that are term'd unlawful ;
 'Twixt science and magic the line lies plain,
 I shall never wittingly pass it ;
 There is now no compact between us twain.

Orion :

But an understanding tacit.
 You have prosper'd much since the day we met ;
 You were then a landless knight,
 You now have honour and wealth, and yet
 I never can serve you right.

Hugo :

Enough ! We will start this very day,
 Thurston, Eric, and I,
 And the baffled visions will pass away,
 And the restless fires will die.

Orion :

Till the fuel expires that feeds those fires
 They smoulder and live unspent ;

Give a mortal all that his heart desires
He is less than ever content.

SCENE.—A CLIFF ON THE BRETON COAST, OVERHANGING
THE SEA

Hugo :

Down drops the red sun ; through the gloaming
They burst—raging waves of the sea
Foaming out their own shame—ever foaming
Their leprosy up with fierce glee ;
Flung back from the stone, snowy fountains
Of feathery flakes, scarcely flag
Where, shock after shock, the green mountains
Explode on the iron-grey crag.

The salt spray with ceaseless commotion
Leaps round me. I sit on the verge
Of the cliff—'twixt the earth and the ocean—
With feet overhanging the surge ;
In thy grandeur, O sea ! we acknowledge,
In thy fairness, O earth ! we confess,
Hidden truths that are taught in no college,
Hidden songs that no parchments express.

Were they wise in their own generations,
Those sages and sagas of old ?
They have pass'd ; o'er their names and their nations
Time's billows have silently roll'd ;
They have pass'd, leaving little to their children
Save histories of a truth far from strict ;
Or theories more vague and bewild'ring,
Since three out of four contradict.

Lost labour ! vain bookworms have sat in
The halls of dull pedants who teach
Strange tongues, the dead lore of the Latin,
The scroll that is god-like and Greek ;

Have wasted life's springtide in learning
 Things long ago learnt all in vain ;
 They are slow, very slow, in discerning
 That booklore and wisdom are twain.

Pale shades of a creed that was mythic,
 By time or by truth overcome,
 Your Delphian temples and Pythic
 Are ruins deserted and dumb ;
 Your Muses are hush'd, and your Graces
 Are bruised and defaced ; and your gods
 Enshrined and enthroned in high places
 No longer, are powerless as clods ;

By forest and streamlet, where glisten'd
 Fair feet of the Naiads that skimm'd
 The shallows ; where the Oreads listened
 Rose-lipp'd, amber-hair'd, marble-limb'd,
 No lithe forms disport in the river,
 No sweet faces peer through the boughs ;
 Elms and beeches wave silent for ever,
 Ever silent the bright water flows.

(Were they duller or wiser than we are,
 Those heathens of old ? Who shall say ?
 Worse or better ? Thy wisdom, O "Thea
 Glaucopis" was wise in thy day,
 And the false gods alluring to evil,
 That sway'd reckless votaries then,
 Were slain to no purpose ; they revel
 Recrowned in the hearts of us men.)

Dead priests of Osiris, and Isis,
 And Apis ! that mystical lore,
 Like a nightmare, conceived in a crisis
 Of fever, is studied no more ;

Dead Magian ! yon star-troop that spangles
The arch of yon firmament vast
Looks calm, like a host of white angels,
On dry dust of votaries past.

On seas unexplored can the ship shun
Sunk rocks ? Can man fathom life's links,
Past or future, unsolved by Egyptian
Or Theban, unspoken by Sphynx ?
The riddle remains, still unravell'd,
By student consuming night oil.
O earth ! we have toil'd, we have travail'd.
How long shall we travail and toil ?

How long ? The short life that fools reckon
So sweet, by how much is it higher
Than brute life ? the false gods still beckon,
And man, through the dust and the mire,
Toils onward, as toils the dull bullock,
Unreasoning, brutish, and blind,
With Ashtaroth, Mammon, and Moloch
In front, and Alecto behind.

The wise one of earth, the Chaldæan,
Serves folly in wisdom's disguise ;
And the sensual Epicurean
Though grosser, is hardly less wise,
'Twixt the former, half-pedant, half-pagan,
And the latter, half-sow and half-sloth,
We halt, choose Astarté or Dagon,
Or sacrifice freely to both.

With our reason that seeks to disparage
Brute instinct it fails to subdue ;
With our false illegitimate courage,
Our sophistry, vain and untrue ;

Our hopes, that ascend so and fall so,
 Our passions, fierce hates and hot loves,
 We are wise (ay, the snake is wise also)—
 Wise as serpents, *not* harmless as doves.

Some flashes, like faint sparks from heaven,
 Come rarely with rushing of wings;
 We are conscious at times, we have striven,
 Though seldom, to grasp better things;
 These pass, leaving hearts that have falter'd,
 Good angels with faces estranged,
 And the skin of the Ethiop unalter'd
 And the spots of the leopard unchanged.

O earth! pleasant earth! have we hanker'd
 To gather thy flowers and thy fruits?
 The roses are wither'd, and canker'd
 The lilies, and barren the roots
 Of the fig-tree, the vine, the wild olive,
 Sharp thorns and sad thistles that yield
 Fierce harvest—so *we* live and *so* live
 The perishing beasts of the field—

And withal we are conscious of evil
 And good—of the spirit and the clod,
 Of the power in our hearts of a devil,
 Of the power in our souls of a God,
 Whose commandments are graven in no cypher,
 But clear as His sun—from our youth
 One at least we have cherish'd—"An eye for
 An eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

O man! of thy Maker the image;
 To passion, to pride, or to wealth,
 Sworn bondsman, from dull youth to dim age,
 Thy portion, the fire or the filth,

Dross seeking ; dead pleasure's death-rattle
 Thy memories' happiest song
 And thy highest hope—scarce a drawn battle
 With dark desperation. How long ?

* * * * *

Roar louder ! leap higher ! ye surf-beds,
 And sprinkle your foam on the furze ;
 Bring the dreams that brought sleep to our turf-beds,
 To camps of our long ago years,
 With the flashing and sparkling of broadswords,
 With the tossing of banners and spears,
 With the trampling of hard hoofs on hard swards,
 With the mingling of trumpets and cheers.

* * * * *

The gale has gone down ; yet outlasting
 The gale, raging waves of the sea
 Casting up their own foam, ever casting
 Their leprosy up with wild glee,
 Still storm ; so in rashness and rudeness,
 Man storms through the days of his grace
 Yet man cannot fathom God's goodness,
 Exceeding God's infinite space ;

And coldly and calmly and purely
 Grey rock and green hillock lie white
 In a star-shine dream-laden—so surely
 Night cometh—so cometh the night
 When we, too, at peace with our neighbour,
 May sleep where God's hillocks are piled,
 Thanking HIM for a rest from day's labour,
 And a sleep like the sleep of a child !

SCENE.—THE CASTLE IN NORMANDY

*THORA working at embroidery, ELSPETH spinning**Thora (sings) :*

We severed in Autumn early,
 Ere the earth was torn by the plough;
 The wheat and the oats and the barley
 Are ripe for the harvest now.
 We sunder'd one misty morning,
 Ere the hills were dimn'd by the rain,
 Through the flowers those hills adorning
 Thou comest not back again.

My heart is heavy and weary
 With the weight of a weary soul;
 The mid-day glare groweth dreary,
 And dreary the midnight scroll,
 The corn-stalks sigh for the sickle
 'Neath the load of the golden grain;
 I sigh for a mate more fickle—
 Thou comest not back again.

The warm sun riseth and setteth,
 The night bringeth moist'ning dew,
 But the soul that longeth forgetteth
 The warmth and the moisture, too;
 In the hot sun rising and setting
 There is naught save feverish pain;
 There are tears in the night-dews wetting—
 Thou comest not back again.

Thy voice in mine ear still mingles
 With the voices of whisp'ring trees,
 Thy kiss on my cheek still tingles
 At each kiss of the summer breeze:
 While dreams of the past are thronging
 For substance of shades in vain,
 I am waiting, watching, and longing—
 Thou comest not back again.

Waiting and watching ever,
 Longing and lingering yet,
 Leaves rustle and corn-stalks quiver,
 Winds murmur and waters fret ;
 No answer they bring, no greeting,
 No speech, save that sad refrain,
 No voice, save an echo repeating—
 He cometh not back again.

Elspeth :

Thine elder sister is wedded to Max ;
 With Biorn, Hilda hath cast her lot.
 If the husbands vanish'd, and left no tracks,
 Would the wives have cause for sorrow, I wot ?

Thora :

How well I remember that dreary ride ;
 How I sigh'd for the lands of ice and snow,
 In the trackless wastes of the desert wide,
 With the sun o'erhead and the sand below ;
 'Neath the scanty shades of the feathery palms,
 How I sigh'd for the forest of sheltering firs,
 Whose shadows environ'd the Danish farms
 Where I sang and sported in childish years.
 On the fourteenth day of our pilgrimage
 We stay'd at the foot of a sandhill high ;
 Our fever'd thirst we could scarce assuage
 At the brackish well that was nearly dry ;
 And the hot sun rose, and the hot sun set,
 And we rode all the day through a desert land,
 And we camp'd where the lake and the river met,
 On sedge and shingle and shining sand ;
 Enfolded in Hugo's cloak I slept,
 Or watch'd the stars while I lay awake ;
 And close to our feet the staghound crept
 And the horses were grazing beside the lake ;
 Now we own castles and serving men,
 Lands and revenues. What of that ?
 Hugo the Norman was kinder then,
 And happier was Thora of Armorat.

Elsbeth :

Nay, I warn'd thee, with Norman sails unfurl'd
 Above our heads, when we wished thee joy,
 That men are the same all over the world ;
 They will worship only the newest toy ;
 Yet Hugo is kind and constant, too,
 Though somewhat given to studies of late ;
 Biorn is sottish, and Max untrue,
 And worse than thine is thy sister's fate.
 But a shadow darkens the chamber door.

Enter Thurston

Thurston :

'Tis I, Lady Thora ; our lord is near.
 My horse being fresher, I rode before ;
 Both he and Eric will soon be here.

Thora :

Good Thurston, give me your hand. You are
 Most welcome. What has delay'd you thus ?

Thurston :

Both by sea and land we have travell'd far,
 Yet little of note has happen'd to us—
 We were wreck'd on the shores of Brittany,
 Near the coast of Morbihan iron-bound ;
 The rocks were steep and the surf ran high,
 Thy kinsman, Eric, was well nigh drown'd.
 By a swarm of knaves we were next beset,
 Who took us for corsairs ; then released
 By a Breton count, whose name I forget.
 Now, I go, by your leave, to tend my beast.
[He goes out.]

Elsbeth :

That man is rude and froward of speech :
 My ears are good, though my sight grows dim.

Thora :

Thurston is faithful. Thou canst not teach
Courtly nor servile manners to him.

SCENE.—THE CASTLE HALL

THURSTON, RALPH, EUSTACE, *and other followers of* HUGO,
seated at a long table. HAROLD seated apart

Thurston :

Who is that stranger, dark and tall,
On the wooden settle next to the wall :
Mountebank, pilgrim, or wandering bard ?

Eustace :

To define his calling is somewhat hard ;
Lady Thora has taken him by the hand
Because he has come from the Holy Land.
Pilgrims and palmers are all the rage
With her, since she shared in that pilgrimage
With Hugo. The stranger came yesterday,
And would have gone on, but she bade him stay.
Besides, he sings in the Danish tongue
The songs she heard in her childhood sung.
That's all I know of him, good or bad,
In my own opinion, he's somewhat mad.
You must raise your voice if you speak with him,
And he answers as though his senses were dim.

Thurston (to Harold) :

Good morrow, sir stranger.

Harold :

Good morrow, friend.

Thurston :

Where do you come from ? and whither wend ?

Harold :

I have travelled, of late, with the setting sun
At my back ; and as soon as my task is done
I purpose to turn my face to the North.
Yet we know not what a day may bring forth.

Thurston :

Indeed we don't.

(*To Eustace, aside*) Nay, I know him now
By that ugly scar that crosses his brow,
And the less we say to him the better.
Your judgment is right to the very letter—
The man is mad—

Eustace : But harmless, I think ;
He eats but little, eschews strong drink,
And only speaks when spoken to first.

Thurston :

Harmless or not, he was once the worst
And bitterest foe Lord Hugo had ;
And yet his story is somewhat sad—

Eustace :

May I hear it ?

Thurston :

Nay, I never reveal
What concerns me not. Our lord may conceal
Or divulge at pleasure his own affairs,—
Not even his comrade Eric shares
His secrets ; though Eric thinks him wise,
Which is more than I do, for I despise
That foolish science he learnt at Rome.
He dreams and mopes when he sits at home,
And now he's not much better abroad ;
'Tis hard to follow so tame a lord.
'Twixt us two, he won't be worth a rush
If he will persist in his studies—

Eustace : Hush !
Ralph has persuaded our guest to sing.

Thurston :
I have known the day when his voice would ring
Till the rafters echoed.

Eustace : 'Tis pleasant still,
Though far too feeble this hall to fill.

Harold (sings) :
On the current, where the wide
Windings of the river
Eddy to the North Sea tide,
Shall I in my shallop glide,
As I have done at her side ?
Never ! never ! never !

In the forest, where the firs,
Pines and larches quiver
To the northern breeze that stirs,
Shall my lips be press'd to hers,
As they were in bygone years ?—
Never ! never ! never !

In the battle on the plain,
Where the lance-shafts shiver,
And the sword-strokes fall like rain,
Shall I bear her scarf again
As I have done ?—not in vain.
Never ! never ! never !

In a fairer, brighter land,
Where the saints rest ever,
Shall I once more see her stand,
White, amidst a white-robed band,
Harp and palm-branch in her hand ?
Never ! never ! never !

SCENE.—THE SAME

EUSTACE, THURSTON, and followers of HUGO. HAROLD

Enter by the hall door, Hugo, Eric, and Thora

Eustace (and others, standing up) :

Welcome, Lord Hugo !

Hugo :

Welcome or not,

Thanks for your greeting all.

Ha, Eustace ! what complaints hast thou got ?

What grievances to recall ?

Eustace :

Count William came with a numerous band,

Ere the snows began to fall,

And slew a buck on your lordship's land,

Within a league of the wall.

Hugo :

Count William has done to us no more

Than we to him. In his vineyard

Last summer, or later may be, a boar

Was slaughter'd by Thurston's whinyard.

Thurston :

Ay, Hugo ! But William kept the buck

I will wager marks a score,

Though the tale is new to me ; and, worse luck,

You made me give back the boar.

Harold (advancing) :

Lord Hugo !

Hugo :

What ! Art thou living yet ?

I scarcely knew thee, Sir Dane !

And 'tis not so very long since we met.

Harold :

'Twill be long ere we meet again, (*gives a letter*).
This letter was traced by one now dead
In the Holy Land ; and I
Must wait till his dying request is read,
And in his name ask the reply.

Thora (aside) :

Who is that stranger, Hugo ?

Hugo :

By birth

He is a countryman of thine,
Thora : What writing is this on earth ?
I can scarce decipher a line.

Harold :

The pen in the clutch of death works ill.

Hugo :

Nay, I read now ; the letters run
More clearly.

Harold :

Wilt grant the request ?

Hugo :

I will.

Harold :

Enough ! Then my task is done. (*He holds out his hand.*)

Hugo, I go to a far off land,
Wilt thou say, " God speed thee ! " now ?

Hugo :

Sir Harold, I cannot take thy hand,
Because of my ancient vow.

Harold :

Farewell, then.

Thora :

Friend, till the morning wait.

On so wild a night as this

Thou shalt not go from my husband's gate,

The path thou wilt surely miss.

Harold :

I go. Kind lady, some future day

Thy care will requited be.

Thora :

Speak, Hugo, speak.

Hugo :

He may go or stay,

It matters little to me.

[*Harold goes out.*]

Thora :

Husband, that man is ill and weak ;

On foot he goes and alone

Through a barren moor in a night-storm bleak.

Eric :

Now, I wonder where he has gone !

Hugo :

Indeed, I have not the least idea ;

The man is certainly mad.

He wedded my sister, Dorothea,

And used her cruelly bad.

He was once my firmest and surest friend,

And once my deadliest foe ;

But hate and friendship both find their end—

Now I heed not where he may go.

SCENE.—A CHAMBER IN THE CASTLE

HUGO, THORA, *and* ERIC*Hugo :*

That letter that came from Palestine
By the hands of yon wandering Dane,
Will cost me a pilgrimage to the Rhine.

Thora :

Wilt thou travel so soon again ?

Hugo :

I can scarce refuse the dying request
Of my comrade, Baldwin, now ;
His bones are dust. May his soul find rest !
He once made a foolish vow
That at Englemehr, 'neath the watchful care
Of the Abbess, his child should stay,
For a season at least. To escort her there
I must start at the break of day.

Thora :

Is it Agatha that goes or Clare ?

Hugo :

Nay, Clare is dwelling in Spain
With her spouse.

Thora :

'Tis Agatha. She is fair,
I am told ; but giddy and vain.

Eric :

Some musty tales on my memory grow
Concerning Count Baldwin's vow.
Thou knew'st his daughter ?

Falls the black frost, nipping and killing,
Where its petals the violet rears,
And the wind, though tempered, is chilling
To the lamb despoiled by the shears.

The strong in their strength are shaken,
The wise in their wisdom fall ;
And the bloom of beauty is taken—
Strength, wisdom, beauty, and all ;
They vanish, their lot fulfilling,
Their doom approaches and nears,
But the wind, though tempered, is chilling
To the lamb despoiled by the shears.

'Tis the will of a Great Creator,
He is wise, His will must be done,
And it cometh sooner or later ;
And one shall be taken, and one
Shall be left here, toiling and tilling,
In this vale of sorrows and tears,
Where the wind, though tempered, is chilling
To the lamb despoiled by the shears.

Tell me, mine own one, tell me.
The shadows of life and the fears
Shall neither daunt me nor quell me,
While I can avert thy tears :
Dost thou shrink, as I shrink, unwilling
To realize lonely years ?
Since the wind, though tempered, is chilling
To the lamb despoiled by the shears.

Enter Henry

Henry :

My lord, Father Luke craves audience straight,
He has come on foot from the chapel ;
Some stranger perished beside his gate,
When the dawn began to dapple.

SCENE.—A CHAPEL NOT VERY FAR FROM HUGO'S CASTLE

HUGO, ERIC, *and two monks* (LUKE *and* HUBERT). *The dead body of HAROLD*

Luke :

When the dawn was breaking,
Came a faint sound, waking
Hubert and myself ; we hurried to the door,
Found the stranger lying
At the threshold, dying.
Somewhere have I seen a face like his before.

Hugo :

Harold he is hight.
Only yesternight
From our gates he wandered, in the driving hail ;
Well his face I know,
Both as friend and foe ;
Of my followers only Thurston knows his tale.

Luke :

Few the words he said,
Faint the signs he made,
Twice or thrice he groaned, quoth Hubert, " Thou hast
sinn'd.
This is retribution,
Seek for absolution ;
Answer me—then cast thy sorrows to the wind.
Do their voices reach thee ?
Friends who failed to teach thee,
In thine earlier days, to sunder right from wrong,
Charges 'gainst thee cited,
Cares all unrequited,
Counsels spurned and slighted—do they press and
throng ? "
But he shook his head.
" 'Tis not so," he said ;

“ They will scarce reproach me who reproached of yore.
If their counsels good,
Rashly I withstood,
Having suffered longer, I have suffered more.”

“ Do their curses stun thee ?
Foes who failed to shun thee,
Stricken by rash vengeance, in some wild career,
As the barbed arrow
Cleaveth bone and marrow,
From those chambers narrow—do they pierce thine
ear ? ”

And he made reply,
Laughing bitterly,
“ Did I fear them living—shall I fear them dead ?
Blood that I have spilt
Leaveth little guilt ;
On the hand it resteth, scarcely on the head.”

“ Is there one whom thou
Mayst have wronged ere now,
Since remorse so sorely weigheth down thine heart ?
By some saint in heaven,
Sanctified and shriven,
Wouldst thou be forgiven ere thy soul depart ? ”
Not a word he said,
But he bowed his head
Till his temples rested on the chilly sods ;
And we heard him groan—
“ Ah ! mine own, mine own !
If I had thy pardon I might ask for God’s.”

Hubert raised him slowly.
Sunrise, faint and holy,
Lit the dead face, placid as a child’s might be.
May the troubled spirit,
Through Christ’s saving merit,
Peace and rest inherit! Thus we sent for thee.

Hugo :

God o'erruleth fate.
 I had cause for hate :
 In this very chapel, years back, proud and strong ;
 Joined by priestly vows,
 He became the spouse
 Of my youngest sister, to her bitter wrong.
 And he wrought her woe,
 Making me his foe ;
 Not alone unfaithful—brutal, too, was he.
 She had scarce been dead
 Three months ere he fled
 With Count Baldwin's daughter, then betrothed to me

Fortune straight forsook him,
 Vengeance overtook him ;
 Heavy crimes will bring down heavy punishment.
 All his strength was shatter'd,
 Even his wits were scatter'd,
 Half-deranged, half-crippled, wandering he went.
 We are unforgiving
 While our foes are living ;
 Yet his retribution weigh'd so heavily
 That I feel remorse
 Gazing on his corpse,
 For my rudeness when he left our gates to die.
 And his grave shall be
 'Neath the chestnut tree
 Where he met my sister many years ago ;
 Leave that tress of hair
 On his bosom there—
 Wrap the cerecloth round him ! Eric, let us go.

SCENE.—A ROOM IN THE CASTLE

HUGO and ERIC. *Early morning*

Hugo :

The morn is fair, the weary miles

Will shorten 'neath the summer's wiles,
Pomona in the orchard smiles,

And in the meadow, Flora ;
And I have roused a chosen band
For escort through the troubled land ;
And shaken Elspeth by the hand,
And said farewell to Thora.

Comrade and kinsman—for thou art
Comrade and kin to me—we part
Ere nightfall, if at once we start,

We gain the dead Count's castle.
The roads are fair, the days are fine,
Ere long I hope to reach the Rhine.
Forsooth, no friend to me or mine

Is that same Abbot Basil ;
I thought he wrong'd us by his greed.
My father sign'd a foolish deed
For lack of gold in time of need,

And thus our lands went by us ;
Yet wrong on our side may have been ;
As far as my will goes, I ween,
'Tis past, the grudge that lay between

Us twain. Men call him pious--
And I have prosper'd much since then,
And gain'd for one lost acre ten ;
And even the ancient house and glen

Rebought with purchase-money.
He, too, is wealthy ; he has got
By churchly rights a fertile spot,
A land of corn and wine, I wot,

A land of milk and honey.
Now, Eric, change thy plans and ride
With us, thou hast no ties, no bride.

Eric :

Nay, ties I have, and time and tide
Thou knowest wait for no man ;
And I go north ; God's blessing shuns
The dwellings of forgetful sons,

That proverb he may read who runs,
 In Christian lore or Roman
 My good old mother, she hath heard,
 For twelve long months, from me no word;
 At thought of her my heart is stirr'd,
 And even mine eyes grow moister.
 Greet Ursula from me; her fame
 Is known to all. A nobler dame,
 Since days of Clovis, ne'er became
 The inmate of a cloister.
 Our paths diverge, yet we may go
 Together for a league or so;
 I, too, will join thy band below
 When thou thy bugle windest.

[*Eric goes out.*]

Hugo:

From weaknesses we stand afar,
 On us unpleasantly they jar;
 And yet the stoutest-hearted are
 The gentlest and the kindest.
 My mother loved me tenderly;
 Alas! her only son was I.
 I shudder'd, but my lids were dry,
 By death made orphan newly.
 A braver man than me, I swear,
 Who never comprehended fear,
 Scarce names his mother, and the tear,
 Unbidden, springs unruly.

SCENE.—A ROAD ON THE NORMAN FRONTIERS

HUGO, AGATHA, ORION, THURSTON, and armed attendants,
riding slowly

Agatha:

Sir Knight, what makes you so grave and glum,
 At times, I fear you are deaf or dumb,
 Or both.

Hugo : And yet, should I speak the truth,
There is little in common 'twixt us, forsooth,
You would think me duller, and still more vain,
If I uttered the thoughts that fill my brain ;
Since the matters with which my mind is laden
Would scarcely serve to amuse a maiden.

Agatha :
I am so foolish, and you are so wise,
'Tis the meaning your words so ill disguise.
Alas ! my prospects are sad enough :
I had rather listen to speeches rough,
Than muse and meditate silently
On the coming loss of my liberty.
Sad hope to me can my future bring,
Yet, while I may, I would prattle and sing,
Though it only were to try and assuage
The dreariness of my pilgrimage.

Hugo :
Prattle and sing to your heart's content,
And none will offer impediment.

Agatha (sings) :
We were playmates in childhood, my sister and I,
Whose playtime with childhood is done ;
Through thickets where briar and bramble grew high,
Barefooted I've oft seen her run.

I've known her when mists on the moorland hung
white,
Bareheaded past nightfall remain ;
She has followed a landless and penniless knight
Through battles and sieges in Spain.

But I pulled the flower, and shrank from the thorn,
Sought the sunshine, and fled from the mist ;

My sister was born to face hardship with scorn—
I was born to be fondled and kiss'd.

Hugo (aside) :
She has a sweet voice.

Orion : And a sweet face, too—
Be candid for once, and give her her due.

Agatha :
Your face grows longer, and still more long,
Sir Scholar! how did you like my song?

Hugo :
I thought it rather a silly one.

Agatha :
You are far from a pleasant companion.

SCENE.—AN APARTMENT IN A WAYSIDE INN

HUGO and AGATHA. *Evening*

Hugo :
I will leave you now—we have talked enough,
And for one so tenderly reared and nursed
This journey is wearisome, perhaps, and rough.

Agatha :
Will you not finish your story first?

Hugo :
I repent me that I began it now,
'Tis a dismal tale for a maiden's ears;
Your cheek is pale already, your brow
Is sad, and your eyes are moist with tears.

Agatha :

It may be thus, I am lightly vexed,
 But the tears will lightly come and go ;
 I can cry one moment and laugh the next,
 Yet I have seen terrors, as well you know.
 I remember that flight through moss and fern,
 The moonlit shadows, the hoofs that rolled
 In fierce pursuit, and the ending stern,
 And the hawk that left his prey on the wold.

Hugo :

I have sorrowed since that I left you there :
 Your friends were close behind on the heath,
 Though not so close as I thought they were.
 (*Aside*) Now I will not tell her of Harold's death.

Agatha :

'Tis true I was justly punished, and men,
 As a rule, of pity have little share :
 Had I died, you had cared but little then.

Hugo :

But little then, yet now I should care
 More than you think for. Now, good night.
 Tears still ? Ere I leave you, child, alone,
 Must I dry your cheeks ?

Agatha :

Nay, I am not quite
 Such a child, but what I can dry my own.

[*Hugo goes out. Agatha retires*]

Orion (singing outside the window of Agatha's chamber) :

'Neath the stems with blossoms laden,
 'Neath the tendrils curling,
 I, thy servant, sing, O maiden !
 I, thy slave, O darling !

Lo! the shaft that slew the red deer,
 At the elk may fly, too,
 Spare them not! The dead are dead, dear,
 Let the living die, too.

Where the wiles of serpent mingle,
 And the looks of dove lie,
 Where small hands in strong hands tingle,
 Loving eyes meet lovely;
 Where the harder natures soften,
 And the softer, harden—
 Certes! such things have been often
 Since we left Eve's garden.

Sweeter follies herald sadder
 Sins—look not too closely;
 Tongue of asp and tooth of adder
 Under leaf of rose lie.
 Warned, advised in vain, abandon
 Warning and advice, too
 Let the child lay wilful hand on
 Den of cockatrice too.

I, thy servant, or thy master,
 One or both—no matter;
 If the former—firmer, faster,
 Surer, still the latter.
 Lull thee, soothe thee, with my singing,
 Bid thee sleep, and ponder
 On my lullabies, still ringing
 Through thy dreamland yonder.

SCENE.—A WOODED RISING GROUND, NEAR THE
RHINE

HUGO and AGATHA resting under the trees. THURSTON,
EUSTACE, and followers a little apart. ORION. (*Noon-
day.*) *The Towers of the Convent in the distance*

Agatha :

I sit on the greensward, and hear the birds sing,
'Mid the thickets where scarlet and white blossoms
cling ;
And beyond the sweet uplands all golden with flower,
It looms in the distance, the grey convent tower
And the emerald earth and the sapphire-hued sky
Keep telling me ever my spring has gone by ;
Ah ! spring premature, they are tolling thy knell,
In the wind's soft adieu, in the bird's sweet farewell
Oh ! why is the greensward with garlands so gay,
That I quail at the sight of my prison-house grey ?
Oh ! why is the bird's note so joyous and clear ?
The caged bird must pine in a cage doubly drear.

Hugo :

May the lances of Dagobert narry their house,
If they coax or intimidate thee to take vows ;
May the freebooters pillage their shrines, should they
dare
To touch with their scissors thy glittering hair !
Our short and sweet journey now draws to an end,
And homeward my sorrowful way I must wend ;
O fair one ! O loved one ! I would I were free,
To squander my life in the greenwood with thee.

Orion (aside) :

Ho ! seeker of knowledge, so grave and so wise,
Touch her soft curl again—look again in her eyes,
Forget for the nonce musty parchments, and learn
How the slow pulse may quicken—the cold blood may
burn.

Ho ! fair fickle maiden, so blooming and shy,
The old love is dead, let the old promise die !
Thou dost well, thou dost wise, take the word of Orion,
“ A living dog always before a dead lion ! ”

.

Thurston :

Ye varlets, I would I knew which of ye burst
Our wineskin—what, ho ! must I perish with thirst ?
Go, Henry, thou hast a glib tongue, go and ask
Thy lord to send Ralph to yon inn for a flask.

Henry :

Nay, Thurston, not so ; I decline to disturb
Our lord for the present ; go thou, or else curb
Thy thirst, or drink water, as I do.

Thurston :

Thou knave

Of a page, dost thou wish me the colic to have ?

Orion (aside) :

That clown is a thoroughbred Saxon. He thinks
With pleasure on naught save hard blows and strong
drinks ;
In hell he will scarce go athirst if once given
An inkling of any good liquors in heaven.

.

Hugo :

Our Pontiff to manhood at Englemehr grew,
The priests there are many, the nuns are but few.
I love not the Abbot—’tis needless to tell
My reason ; but all of the Abbess speak well.

Agatha :

Through vineyards and cornfields beneath us, the
Rhine

Spreads and winds, silver-white, in the merry sun-
shine ;
And the air, overcharged with a subtle perfume,
Grows faint from the essence of manifold bloom.

Hugo :

And the tinkling of bells, and the bleating of sheep,
And the chaunt from the fields, where the labourers
reap
The earlier harvest, comes faint on the breeze
That whispers so faintly in hedgerows and trees.

Orion :

And a waggon wends slow to those turrets and spires,
To feed the fat monks and the corpulent friars ;
It carries the corn, and the oil, and the wine,
The honey and milk from the shores of the Rhine.
The oxen are weary and spent with their load ;
They pause, but the driver doth recklessly goad
Up yon steep, flinty rise ; they have staggered and
reeled.
Even devils may pity dumb beasts of the field.

Agatha (sings) :

Oh ! days and years departed,
Vain hopes, vain fears that smarted,
I turn to you, sad-hearted—
I turn to you in tears !
Your daily sun shone brightly,
Your happy dreams came nightly,
Flowers bloomed and birds sang lightly,
Through all your hopes and fears !

You halted not, nor tarried,
Your hopes have all miscarried,
And even your fears are buried,
Since fear with hope must die ;

You halted not, but hasted,
 And flew past, childhood wasted,
 And girlhood scarcely tasted,
 Now womanhood is nigh.

Yet I forgive your wronging,
 Dead seasons round me thronging,
 With yearning and with longing,
 I call your bitters sweet.
 Vain longing, and vain yearning,
 There now is no returning:
 Oh! beating heart and burning,
 Forget to burn and beat!

Oh! childish suns and showers,
 Oh! girlish thorns and flowers,
 Oh! fruitless days and hours,
 Oh! groundless hopes and fears:
 The birds still chirp and twitter,
 And still the sunbeams glitter:
 Oh! barren years and bitter,
 Oh! bitter barren years!

SCENE.—THE SUMMIT OF A BURNING MOUNTAIN

Night. A terrific storm. ORION (undisguised)

Orion (sings):

From fathomless depths of abysses
 Where fires unquenchable burst,
 From the blackness of darkness, where hisses
 The brood of the serpent accurs'd;
 From shrines, where the hymns are the weeping
 And wailing and gnashing of teeth,
 Where the palm is the pang never-sleeping,
 Where the worm never-dying is the wreath;
 Where all fruits save wickedness wither,
 Whence naught save despair can be gleaned—

Come hither ! come hither ! come hither !
Fall'n angel, fell sprite, and foul fiend,
Come hither ! the bands are all broken
And loosed in hell's innermost womb,
When the spell unpronounceable spoken
Divides the unspeakable gloom.

Evil spirits approach. The storm increases

Evil Spirits (singing) :

We hear thee, we seek thee, on pinions
That darken the shades of the shade ;
O Prince of the Air, with dominions
Encompass'd, with powers array'd,
With majesty cloth'd as a garment,
Begirt with a shadowy shine,
Whose feet scorch the hill-tops that are meant
As footstools for thee and for thine.

Orion (sings) :

How it swells through each pause of the thunder,
And mounts through each lull of the gust,
Through the crushing of crags torn asunder,
And the hurtling of trees in the dust ;
With its chorus of loud lamentations,
With its dreary and hopeless refrain !
'Tis the cry of all tongues and all nations,
That suffer and shudder in vain.

Evil Spirits (singing) :

'Tis the cry of all tongues and all nations ;
Our song shall chime in with their strain ;
Lost spirits blend their wild exultations
With the sighing of mortals in pain.

Orion (sings) :

With just light enough to see sorrows
In this world, and terrors beyond,

'Twixt the day's bitter pangs and the morrow's
 Dread doubts, to despair and despond,
 Man lingers through toils unavailing
 For blessings that baffle his grasp ;
 To his cradle he comes with a wailing,
 He goes to his grave with a gasp.

Evil Spirits (singing) :

His birth is a weeping and wailing,
 His death is a groan and a gasp ;
 O'er the seed of the woman prevailing,
 Thus triumphs the seed of the asp.

SCENE.—CHAMBER OF A WAYSIDE INN

HUGO, *sitting alone. Evening*

Hugo :

And now the parting is over,
 The parting should end the pain ;
 And the restless heart may recover,
 And so may the troubled brain.
 I am sitting within the chamber
 Whose windows look on the porch,
 Where the roses cluster and clamber ;
 We halted here on our march
 With her to the convent going,
 And now I go back alone ;
 Ye roses budding and blowing,
 Ye heed not though she is flown.
 I remember the girlish gesture,
 The sportive and childlike grace,
 With which she crumpled and pressed your
 Rose leaves to her rose-hued face.
 Shall I think on her ways hereafter—
 On those flashes of mirth and grief,
 On that April of tears and laughter,
 On our parting, bitterly brief ?

I remember the bell at sunrise
 That sounded so solemnly,

Bidding monk, and prelate, and nun rise ;
I rose ere the sun was high.
Down the long, dark, dismal passage,
To the door of her resting-place
I went, on a farewell message,
I trod with a stealthy pace.
There was no one there to see us
When she opened her chamber door.
“ *Miserere, mei Deus,*”
Rang faint from the convent choir.
I remember the dark and narrow
And scantily-furnished room ;
And the gleam, like a golden arrow,
The gleam that lighted the gloom.
One couch, one seat, and one table,
One window, and only one—
It stands in the eastern gable,
It faces the rising sun ;
One ray shot through it, and one light
On doorway and threshold played.
She stood within in the sunlight,
I stood without in the shade.

I remember that bright form under
The sheen of that slanting ray.
I spoke—“ For life we must sunder,
Let us sunder without delay.
Let us sever without preamble,
As brother and sister part,
For the sake of one pleasant ramble,
That will live in at least one heart.”
Still the choir in my ears rang faintly,
In the distance dying away,
Sweetly and sadly and saintly,
Through arch and corridor grey !
And thus we parted forever,
Between the shade and the shine ;
Not as brother and sister sever—
I fondled her hands in mine.

Still the choir in my ears rang deaden'd
 And dull'd, though audible yet ;
 And she redden'd, and paled, and redden'd—
 Her lashes and lids grew wet.
 Not as brothers severs from sister,
 My lips clung fast to her lips ;
 She shivered and shrank when I kissed her.
 On the sunbeam drooped the eclipse.

I remember little of the parting
 With the Abbot, down by the gate,
 My men were eager for starting ;
 I think he pressed me to wait.
 From the lands where convent and glebe lie,
 From manors, and Church's right,
 Where I fought temptation so feebly,
 I too felt eager for flight.

Alas ! the parting is over :
 The parting, but not the pain—
 Oh ! sweet was the purple clover
 And sweet was the yellow grain ;
 And sweet were the woody hollows
 On the summery Rhineward track ;
 But a winter untimely swallows
 All sweets as I travel back.

Yet, I feel assured, in some fashion
 Ere the hedges are crisp with rime
 I shall conquer this senseless passion,
 'Twill yield to toil and to time.
 I will fetter these fancies roaming ;
 Already the sun has dipt ;
 I will trim the lamps in the gloaming,
 I will finish my manuscript.
 Through the night-watch, unflagging study
 Shall banish regrets perforce ;
 As soon as the east is ruddy
 Our bugle shall sound " To Horse ! "

SCENE.—ANOTHER WAYSIDE HOUSE, NEAR THE
NORMAN FRONTIER*HUGO and ORION in a chamber. Evening**Orion :*

Your eyes are hollow, your step is slow,
And your cheek is pallid as though from toil,
Watching or fasting, by which I know
That you have been burning the midnight oil.

Hugo :

Ay, three nights running.

Orion :

'Twill never do
To travel all day and study all night ;
Will you join in a gallop through mist and dew,
In a flight that may vie with the eagle's flight ?

Hugo :

With all my heart. Shall we saddle " Rollo ? "

Orion :

Nay, leave him undisturb'd in his stall ;
I have steeds he would hardly care to follow.

Hugo :

Follow, forsooth ! he can lead them all.

Orion :

Touching his merits we will not quarrel ;
But let me mount you for once, enough
Of work may await your favourite sorrel,
And the paths we must traverse to-night are rough.
But first let me mix you a beverage,
To invigorate your enfeebled frame.
[*He mixes a draught and hands it to Hugo.*]
All human ills this draught can assuage.

Hugo :

It hisses and glows like liquid flame ;
Say, what quack nostrum is this thou'st brew'd ?
Speak out ; I am learn'd in the chemist's lore.

Orion :

There is nothing but what will do you good :
And the drugs are simples ; 'tis hellebore,
Nepenthe, upas, and dragon's blood,
Absinth, and mandrake, and mandragore.

Hugo :

I will drink it, although, by mass and rood,
I am just as wise as I was before.

SCENE.—A ROUGH, HILLY COUNTRY

HUGO and ORION *riding at speed on black horses. Mountains
in the distance. Night*

Hugo :

See! the sparks that fly from our hoof-strokes make
A fiery track that gleams in our wake ;
Like a dream the dim landscape past us shoots,
Our horses fly.

Orion :

They are useful brutes,
Though somewhat skittish ; the foam is whit'ning
The crest and rein of my courser " Lightning."
He pulls to-night, being short of work,
And takes his head with a sudden jerk ;
Still heel and steady hand on the bit,
For that is " Tempest " on which you sit.

Hugo :

'Tis the bravest steed that ever I back'd,
Did'st mark how he cross'd yon cataract ?
From hoof to hoof I should like to measure
The space he clear'd.

You have long'd to explore the scrolls of Fate.
Dismount as I do, and listen and wait.

[*They dismount!*]

Orion (chanting) :

Spirits of earth, and air and sea,
Spirits unclean, and spirits untrue,
By the symbols three, that shall nameless be,
One of your masters calls on you.

Spirits (chanting in the distance) :

From the bowels of earth, where gleams the gold ;
From the air, where the powers of darkness hold
Their court ; from the white sea-foam
Whence the white rose-tinted goddess sprung
Whom poets of every age have sung,
Ever we come ! we come !

Hugo :

How close to our ears the thunder peals !
How the earth beneath us sludders and reels !

A Voice (chanting) :

Woe to the earth ! Where men give death !
And women gave birth !
To the sons of Adam, by Cain or Seth !
Plenty and dearth !
To the daughters of Eve, who toil and spin,
Barren of worth !
Let them sigh and sicken and suffer sin !
Woe to the earth !

Hugo :

What is yon phantom large and dim
That over the mountain seems to swim ?

Orion :

'Tis the scarlet woman of Babylon !

Hugo :

Whence does she come ? Where has she gone ?
And who is she ?

Orion :

You would know too much ;
These are subjects on which I dare not touch,
And if I were to try and enlighten you
I should probably fail, and possibly frighten you ;
You had better ask some learned divine,
Whose opinion is p'rhaps worth as much as mine
In his own conceit ; and who besides
Could tell you the brand of the beast she rides ;
What can you see in the valley yonder ?
Speak out ; I can hear you, for all the thunder.

Hugo :

I see four shadowy altars rise,
They seem to swell and dilate in size,
Larger and clearer now they loom,
Now, fires are lighting them through the gloom.

A Voice (chanting) :

The first a golden-hued fire shows,
A blood-red flame on the second glows,
The blaze on the third is tinged like the rose,
From the fourth a column of black smoke goes.

Orion :

Can you see all this ?

Hugo :

I can see and hear ;
The lights and hues are vivid and clear.

Spirits (sing at the first altar) :

Hail, Mammon ! while man buys and barter
Thy kingdom in this world is sure,
Thy prophets thou hast and thy martyrs,
Great things in thy name they endure ;

Thy fetters of gold crush the miser,
 The usurer bends at thy shrine,
 And the wealthier nations and the wiser
 Bow with us at this altar of thine.

Spirits (sing at the second altar) :

Hail, Moloch ! whose banner floats blood-red
 From pole to equator unfurl'd,
 Whose laws redly written have stood red,
 And shall stand while standeth this world ;
 Clad in purple, with thy diadem gory,
 Thy sceptre the blood-dripping steel,
 Thy subjects with us give thee glory,
 With us at thine altar they kneel.

Spirits (sing at the third altar) :

Hail, Sovereign ! whose fires are kindled
 By sparks from the bottomless pit,
 Has thy worship diminish'd or dwindled ?
 Do the yokes of thy slaves lightly sit ?
 Nay, the men of all climes and all races
 Are stirr'd by the flames that now stir us ;
 Then (as we do) they fall on their faces,
 Crying, " Hear us ! Oh ! Ashtaroth, hear us ! "

Spirits (all in chorus) :

The vulture her carrion swallows
 Returns to his vomit the dog,
 In the slough of uncleanness wallows
 The he-goat and revels the hog.
 Men are wise with their schools and their teachers,
 Men are just with their creeds and their priests ;
 Yet in spite of their pedants and preachers
 They backslide in footprints of beasts !

Hugo :

From the smoky altar there seems to come
 A stifled murmur, a droning hum.

Orion :

With that we have nothing at all to do,
Or, at least, not now, neither I nor you ;
Though some day or other, possibly,
We may see it closer, both you and I ;
Let us visit the nearest altar first,
Whence the yellow fires flicker and burst,
Like the flames from molten ore that spring ;
We may stand in the pale of the outer ring,
But forbear to trespass within the inner
Lest the sins of the past should find out the sinner.

*[They approach the first altar, and stand within
the outer circle which surrounds it, and near
the inner.]*

Spirits (sing) :

Beneath us it flashes,
The glittering gold,
Though it turneth to ashes
And dross in the hold ;
Yet man will endeavour,
By fraud or by strife,
To grasp it and never
To yield it with life.

Orion :

What can you see ?

Hugo :

Some decrepit shapes
That are neither dwarfs, nor demons, nor apes ;
In the hollow earth they appear to store
And rake together great heaps of ore.

Orion :

These are the gnomes, coarse sprites and rough :
Come on, of these we have seen enough.

[They approach second altar, and stand as before.]

Spirits (singing) :

Above us it flashes,
The glittering steel,
Though the red blood splashes
Where its victims reel;
Yet man will endeavour
To grapple the hilt,
And to wield the blade ever,
Till his life be spilt.

Orion :

What see you now ?

Hugo :

A rocky glen,
A horrid jumble of fighting men,
And a face that somewhere I've seen before.

Orion :

Come on ; there is naught worth seeing more
Except the altar of Ashtaroth.

Hugo :

To visit that altar I am loth.

Orion :

Why so ?

Hugo :

Nay, I cannot fathom why ;
But I feel no curiosity.

Orion :

Come on. Stand close to the inner ring,
And hear how sweetly these spirits sing.

[*They approach third altar.*]

Spirits (sing) :

Around us it flashes,
The cestus of one
Born of white foam that dashes
Beneath the white sun ;
Let the mortal take heart, he
Has nothing to dare ;
She is fair, Queen Astarté,
Her subjects are fair !

Orion :

What see you now, friend ?

Hugo :

Wood and wold,
And forms that look like the nymphs of old.
There is nothing here worth looking at twice.
I have seen enough.

Orion :

You are far too nice
Nevertheless you must look again.
Those forms will fade.

Hugo :

They are growing less plain
They vanish. I see a door that seems
To open ; a ray of sunlight gleams
From a window behind, a vision as fair
As the flush of dawn is standing there.
[*He gazes earnestly.*]

Orion (sings) :

Higher and hotter the white flames glow,
And the adamant may be thaw'd like snow,
And the life for a single chance may go,
And the soul for a certainty.
O vain and shallow philosopher,
Dost feel them quicken, dost feel them stir,
The thoughts that have stray'd again to *her*,
From whom thou hast sought to fly ?

Lo! the furnace is heated till sevenfold;
Is thy brain still calm? Is thy blood still cold
To the curls that wander in ripples of gold

On the shoulders of ivory?

Do the large dark eyes and the small red mouth
Consume thine heart with a fiery drouth,
Like the fierce sirocco that sweeps from the south,
When the deserts are parch'd and dry?

Ay, start and shiver and catch thy breath,
The sting is certain, the venom is death,
And the scales are flashing the fruit beneath,
And the fang striketh suddenly.
At the core the ashes are bitter and dead,
But the rind is fair and the rind is red,
has ever been pluck'd since the serpent said,
"Thou shalt *not surely* die."

[*Hugo tries to enter the inner ring, Orion holds
him back; they struggle.*]

Hugo:

Unhand me, slave! or quail to the rod!

Agatha! Speak! in the name of God!

[*The vision disappears, the altars vanish.
Hugo falls insensible.*]

SCENE.—THE WAYSIDE HOUSE

HUGO *waking in his chamber. ORION unseen at first.*
Morning

Hugo:

Vanish fair and fatal vision!

Fleeting shade of fever'd sleep,

Chiding one whose indecision

Waking substance fail'd to keep;

Picture into life half starting,
As in life once seen before,
Parting somewhat sadly, parting
Slowly at the chamber door ;

Were my waking senses duller ?
Have I seen with mental eye
Light and shade and warmth and colour
Plainer than reality ?
Sunlight that on tangled tresses
Every ripple gilds and tips ;
Balm and bloom and breath of kisses,
Warm on dewy scarlet lips ;

Dark eyes veiling half their splendour
'Neath their lashes' darker fringe,
Dusky, dreamy, deep, and tender,
Passing smile and passing tinge;
Dimpling fast and flushing faster,
Ivory chin and coral cheek,
Pearly strings, by alabaster
Neck and arms made faint and weak ;

Drooping downcast lids enduring
Gaze of man unwillingly ;
Sudden sidelong gleams alluring,
Partly arch and partly shy.
Do I bless or curse that beauty ?
Am I longing, am I loth ?
Is it passion, is it duty
That I strive with, one or both ?

Round about one fiery centre
Wayward thoughts like moths revolve.
(*He sees Orion.*)
Ha ! Orion, thou did'st enter
Unperceived. I pray thee solve

These two questions : firstly, tell me
 Must I strive for wrong or right ?
 Secondly, what things befell me,
 Facts, or phantasies, last night ?

Orion :

First, your strife is all a sham, you
 Know as well as I which wins ;
 Second, waking sins will damn you,
 Never mind your sleeping sins ;
 Both your questions thus I answer,
 Listen, ere you seek or shun :
 I at least am no romancer,
 What you long for may be won.
 Turn again and travel Rhineward,
 Tread once more the flowery path.

Hugo :

Ay, the flowery path that, sinward
 Pointing, ends in sin and wrath.

Orion :

Songs by love-birds lightly caroll'd
 Even the just man may allure—

Hugo :

To his shame ; in this wise Harold
 Sinn'd, his punishment was sure.

Orion :

Nay, the Dane was worse than you are,
 Base and pitiless to boot,
 Doubtless all are bad, yet few are
 Cruel, false and dissolute.

Hugo :

Some sins foreign to our nature
 Seem ; we take no credit when
 We escape them,

On the neck of the Cæsar's offspring trod,
 Who was justly surnamed "The Scourge of God."
 Yet in flight lies safety. Skirmish and run
 To forest and fastness, Teuton and Hun,
 From the banks of the Rhine to the Danube's shore
 And back to the banks of the Rhine once more;
 Retreat from the face of an armed foe,
 Robbing garden and henroost where'er you go,
 Let the short alliance betwixt us cease,
 I and my Norsemen will go in peace!
 I wot it never will suit with us
 Such existence, tame and inglorious;
 I could live no worse, living single-handed,
 And better with half my men disbanded.

Rudolph:

Jarl Osric, what wouldst thou have me do?
 'Gainst Otto's army our men count few;
 With one chance of victory, fight, say I!
 But not when defeat is a certainty.
 If Rudiger joins us with his free-lances
 Our chance will be equal to many chances.
 For Rudiger is both prompt and wary,
 And his men are gallant though mercenary,
 But the knave refuses to send a lance
 Till half the money is paid in advance.

Dagobert:

May his avarice wither him like a curse!
 I guess he has heard of our late reverse;
 But, Rudolph, whether he goes or stays,
 There is reason in what Jarl Osric says;
 Of provisions we need a fresh supply,
 And our butts and flasks are shallow dry.
 My men are beginning to grumble sadly,
 'Tis no wonder, since they must fare so badly.

Rudolph:

We have plenty of foragers out, and still
 We have plenty of hungry mouths to fill;

And moreover by some means, foul or fair,
We must raise money ; 'tis little I care,
So long as we raise it, whence it comes.

Osric :

Shall we sit till nightfall biting our thumbs ?
The shortest plan is ever the best ;
Has any one here got aught to suggest ?

Orion :

The cornfields are golden that skirt the Rhine,
Fat are the oxen, strong is the wine,
In those pleasant pastures, those cellars deep,
That o'erflow with the tears that those vineyards
weep ;
Is it silver you stand in need of, or gold ?
Ingot or coin ? There is wealth untold
In the ancient convent of Englemchr ;
That is not so very far from here.
The Abbot, esteem'd a holy man,
Will hold what he has and grasp what he can ;
The cream of the soil he loves to skim,
Why not levy a contribution on him ?

Dagobert :

The stranger speaks well ; not far away
That convent lies ; and one summer's day
Will suffice for a horseman to reach the gate ;
The garrison soon would capitulate,
Since the arm'd retainers are next to none,
And the walls, I wot, may be quickly won.

Rudolph :

I kept those walls for two months and more
When they feared the riders of Melchior ;
That was little over three years ago.
Their Abbot is thrifty, as well I know
He haggled sorely about the price
Of our service.

Dagobert : Rudolph, he paid thee twice.

Rudolph :

Well, what of that ? Since then I've tried
To borrow from him ; now I know he lied
When he told me he could not spare the sum
I asked. If we to his gates should come
He could spare it though it were doubled ; and still
This war with the Church, I like it ill.

Osric :

The creed of our fathers is well nigh dead,
And the creed of the Christian reigns in its stead ;
But the creed of the Christian, too, may die,
For your creeds or your churches what care I !
If there be plunder at Englemehr,
Let us strike our tents and thitherward steer.

SCENE.—A FARM HOUSE ON THE RHINE

(*About a mile from the Convent*)

HUGO *in chamber alone.* Enter ERIC

Eric :

What, Hugo, still at the Rhine ! I thought
You were home. You have travell'd by stages short.

Hugo (with hesitation) :

Our homeward march was labour in vain,
We had to retrace our steps again ;
It was here or hereabouts that I lost
Some papers of value ; at any cost
I must find them : and which way lies your course ?

Eric :

I go to recruit Prince Otto's force.
I cannot study as you do ; I
Am wearied with inactivity,

So I carry a blade engrim'd with rust
(That a hand sloth-slacken'd has, I trust,
Not quite forgotten the way to wield)
To strike once more on the tented field.

Hugo :

Fighting is all a mistake, friend Eric,
And has been so since the age Homeric,
When Greece was shaken and Troy undone
Ten thousand lives for a worthless one.
Yet I blame you not ; you might well do worse
Better fight and perish than live to curse
The day you were born ; and such has been
The lot of many, and shall, I ween,
Be the lot of more. If Thurston chooses
He may go with you ; the blockhead abuses
Me and the life I lead.

Enter Orion

Orion :

Great news !

The Englemehr monks will shake in their shoes
In the soles of their callous feet will shake
The bare-footed friars. The nuns will quake.

Hugo :

Wherefore ?

Orion :

The outlaw of Rothenstein
Has come with his soldiers to the Rhine,
Back'd by those hardy adventurers
From the northern forests of pines and firs,
And Dagobert's horse. They march as straight
As the eagle swoops, to the convent gate.

Hugo :

We must do something to save the place.

Orion :

They are sure to take it in any case,
Unless the sum that they ask is paid.

Eric :

Some effort on our part must be made.

Hugo :

'Tis not so much for the monks I care.

Eric :

Nor I ; but the Abbess and nuns are there.

Orion :

'Tis not our business ; what can we do ?
They are too many, and we are too few :
And yet, I suppose, you will save if you can
That lady, your ward or your kinswoman.

Hugo :

She is no kinswoman of mine.
How far is Otto's camp from the Rhine ?

Orion :

Too far for help in such time of need
To be brought, though you used your utmost speed.

Eric :

Nay, that I doubt.

Hugo :

And how many men
Have they ?

Orion :

To your oae they could muster ten.

Eric :

I know Count Rudolph, and terms may be made
With him, I fancy ; for though his trade

Is a rough one now, gainsay it who can,
He was once a knight and a gentleman.
And Dagobert, the chief of the Huns,
Bad as he is, will spare the nuns ;
Though neither he nor the Count could check
Those lawless men, should they storm and sack
The convent. Jarl Osric, too, I know,
He is rather a formidable foe,
And will likely enough be troublesome ;
But the others, I trust, to terms will come.

Hugo :

Eric, how many men have you ?
I can count a score.

Eric :

I have only two.

Hugo :

At every hazard we must try to save
The nuns.

Eric :

Count Rudolph shall think we have
A force that almost equals his own,
If I can confer with him alone.

Orion :

He is close at hand ; by this time he waits
The Abbot's reply at the convent gates.

Hugo :

We had better send him a herald.

Eric :

Nay,
I will go myself.

[*Eric goes out.*]

Hugo :

Orion, stay !

So this is the reed on which I've leaned,
These are the hopes thou hast fostered, these
The flames thou hast fanned. O lying fiend !
Is it thus thou dost keep thy promises ?

Orion :

Strong language, Hugo, and most unjust ;
 You will cry out before you are hurt—
 You will live to recall your words, I trust.
 Fear nothing from Osric or Dagobert ;
 These are your friends, if you only knew it,
 And would take the advice of a friend sincere :
 Neglect his counsels and you must rue it,
 For I know by a sign the crisis is near.
 Accept the terms of these outlaws all,
 And be thankful that things have fallen out
 Exactly as you would have had them fall—
 You may save the one that you care about ;
 Otherwise, how did you hope to gain
 Access to her—on what pretence ?
 What were the schemes that worried your brain
 To tempt her there or to lure her thence ?
 You must have bungled, and raised a scandal
 About your ears, that might well have shamed
 The rudest Hun, the veriest Vandal,
 Long or ever the bird was famed.

Hugo :

The convent is scarce surrounded yet,
 We might reach and hold it against their force
 Till another sun has risen and set ;
 And should I despatch my fleetest horse
 To Otto——

Orion :

For Abbot, or Monk, or Friar,
 Between ourselves, 'tis little you care
 If their halls are harried by steel and fire ;
 Their avarice left your heritage bare.
 Forsake them ! Mitres, and cowls, and hoods,
 Will cover vices while earth endures ;
 Through the green and gold of the summer woods
 Ride out, with that pretty bird of yours.

SCENE.—A CHAMBER IN THE NUNS' APARTMENTS OF
THE CONVENT

AGATHA and URSULA

Agatha :

My sire in my childhood pledged my hand
 To Hugo—I know not why—
 They were comrades then 'neath the Duke's command,
 In the wars of Lombardy.
 I thought, ere my summers had turned sixteen,
 That mine was a grievous case ;
 Save once, for an hour, I had never seen
 My intended bridegroom's face ;
 And maidens vows of their own will plight.
 Unknown to my kinsfolk all
 My love was vowed to a Danish knight,
 A guest in my father's hall ;
 His foot fell lightest in merry dance,
 His shaft never missed the deer ;
 He could fly a hawk, he could wield a lance,
 Our wildest colt he could steer.
 His deep voice ringing through hall or glen
 Had never its match in song,
 And little was known of his past life then,
 Or of Dorothea's wrong.
 I loved him—Lady Abbess, I know
 That my love was foolish now ;
 I was but a child five years ago,
 And thoughtless as bird on bough.
 One evening Hugo the Norman came,
 And, to shorten a weary tale,
 I fled that night (let me bear the blame),
 With Harold, by down and dale.
 He had mounted me on a dappled steed,
 And another of coal-black hue
 He rode himself ; and away at speed
 We fled, through mist and dew.

Of miles we had ridden some half a score,
We had halted beside a spring,
When the breeze to our ears through the still night bore
A distant trample and ring ;
We listen'd one breathing-space, and caught
The clatter of mounted men.
With vigour renew'd by their respite short
Our horses dash'd through the glen.
Another league, and we listen'd in vain,
The breeze to our ears came mute ;
But we heard them again, on the spacious plain,
Faint tidings of hot pursuit.
In the misty light of a moon half hid
By the dark or fleecy rack,
Our shadows over the moorland slid,
Still listening and looking back.
So we fled (with a cheering word to say
At times as we hurried on),
From sounds that at intervals died away,
And at intervals came anon.
Another league, and my lips grew dumb,
And I felt my spirit quailing,
For closer those sounds began to come,
And the speed of my horse was failing.
"The grey is weary and lame to boot,"
Quoth Harold ; "the black is strong,
And their steeds are blown with their fierce pursuit,
What wonder ! our start was long.
Now, lady, behind me mount the black,
The double load he can bear ;
We are safe when we reach the forest track,
Fresh horses and friends wait there."
Then I sat behind him and held his waist,
And faster we seem'd to go
My moss and moor ; but for all our haste
Came the tramp of the nearing foe ;
A dyke through the mist before us hover'd,
And, quicken'd by voice and heel,

The black overleap'd it, stagger'd, recover'd :
 Still nearer that muffled peal,
 And louder on sward the hoof-strokes grew,
 And duller, though not less nigh,
 On deader sand ; and a dark speck drew
 On my vision suddenly,
 And a single horseman in fleet career,
 Like a shadow appear'd to glide
 To within six lances' lengths of our rear,
 And there for a space to bide.
 Quoth Harold, " Speak, has the moon reveal'd
 His face ? " I replied, " Not so ;
 Yet 'tis none of my kinsfolk," then he wheel'd
 In the saddle and scann'd the foe,
 And mutter'd, still gazing in our wake,
 " 'Tis he ; now I will not fight
 The brother again, for the sister's sake,
 While I can escape by flight."
 " Who, Harold ? " I ask'd ; but he never spoke.
 By the cry of the bittern harsh,
 And the bullfrog's dull discordant croak,
 I guess'd that we near'd the marsh,
 And the moonbeam flash'd on the watery sedge
 As it broke from a strip of cloud,
 Ragged and jagged about the edge
 And shaped like a dead man's shroud ;
 And flagg'd and falter'd our gallant steed
 'Neath the weight of his double burden,
 As we splash'd through water and crash'd through
 reed ;
 Then the soil began to harden,
 And again we gain'd, or we seemed to gain,
 With our foe in the deep morass,
 But those fleet hoofs thunder'd, and gain'd again,
 When they trampled the firmer grass.
 And I cried, and Harold again look'd back,
 And bade me fasten mine eyes on
 The forest that loom'd like a patch of black
 Standing out from the faint horizon.

“Courage, sweetheart! we are saved,” he said;
“With the moorland our danger ends,
And close to the borders of yonder glade
They tarry, our trusty friends.”
Where the mossy uplands rise and dip
On the edge of the leafy dell,
With a lurch, like the lurch of a sinking ship,
The black horse toppled and fell.
Unharm’d we lit on the velvet sward,
And even as I lit I lay,
But Harold uprose, unsheath’d his sword,
And toss’d the scabbard away,
And spake through his teeth, “Good brother-in-law,
Forbearance, at last, is spent;
The strife that thy soul hath lusted for,
Thou shalt have to thy soul’s content!”
While he spoke, our pursuer past us swept
Ere he rein’d his warhorse proud
To his haunches flung, then to earth he leapt,
And my lover’s voice rang loud,
“Thrice welcome! Hugo of Normandy,
Thou hast come at our time of need,
This lady will thank thee, and so will I,
For the loan of thy sorrel steed!”

And never a word Lord Hugo said,
They closed ’twixt the wood and wold,
And the white steel flicker’d over my head
In the moonlight calm and cold;
’Mid the feathery grasses crouching low,
With face bow’d down to the dust,
I heard the clash of each warded blow,
The click of each parried thrust,
And the shuffling feet that bruis’d the lawn
As they traversed here and there,
And the breath through the clench’d teeth heavily
drawn,
When breath there was none to spare;

Sharp ringing sword-play, dull trampling heel,
 Short pause, spent force to regain,
 Quick muffled footfall, harsh grating steel,
 Sharp ringing rally again ;
 They seem'd long hours those moments fleet
 As I counted them one by one,
 Till a dead weight toppled across my feet,
 And I knew that the strife was done.
 When I look'd up, after a little space,
 As though from a fearful dream,
 The moon was flinging on Harold's face
 A white and a weird-like gleam ;
 And I felt mine ankles moist and warm
 With the blood that trickled slow
 From a spot on the doublet beneath his arm,
 From a ghastly gash on his brow ;
 I heard the tread of the sorrel's hoof
 As he bore his lord away ;
 They pass'd me slowly, keeping aloof
 Like spectres misty and grey.
 I thought Lord Hugo had left me there
 To die, but it was not so ;
 Yet then for death I had little care,
 My soul seem'd numb'd by the blow ;
 A faintness follow'd, a sickly swoon,
 A long and a dreamless sleep,
 And I woke to the light of a sultry noon
 In my father's castled keep.

And thus, Lady Abbess, it came to pass
 That my father vow'd his vow ;
 Must his daughter espouse the Church ? Alas !
 Is she better or wiser now ?
 For some are feeble and others strong,
 And feeble am I and frail.
 Mother ! 'tis not that I love the wrong,
 'Tis not that I loathe the veil,
 But with heart still ready to go astray
 If assail'd by a fresh temptation,

I could sin again as I sinn'd that day
 For a girl's infatuation.
 See ! Harold the Dane thou say'st is dead,
 Yet I weep *not bitterly* ;
 As I fled with the Dane, so I might have fled
 With Hugo of Normandy.

Ursula :

My child, I advise no hasty vows,
 Yet I pray that in life's brief span
 Thou mayst learn that our Church is a fairer spouse
 Than fickle and erring man ;
 Though fenced for a time by the Church's pale,
 When that time expires thou'rt free,
 And we cannot force thee to take the veil,
 Nay, we scarce can counsel thee.

Enter the Abbot hastily

Basil (the Abbot) :

I am sorely stricken with shame and grief;
 It has come by the selfsame sign,
 A summons brief from the outlaw'd chief,
 Count Rudolph of Rothenstein.
 Lady Abbess, ere worse things come to pass
 I would speak with thee alone ;
 Alack and alas ! for by the rood and mass
 I fear we are all undone.

SCENE.—A FARM HOUSE NEAR THE CONVENT

A Chamber furnished with writing materials. HUGO, ERIC, and THURSTON on one side, on the other OSRIC, RUDOLPH, and DAGOBERT

Osric :

We have granted too much, ye ask for more ;
 I am not skilled in your clerkly lore,

I scorn your logic ; I had rather die
Than live like Hugo of Normandy ;
I am a Norseman, frank and plain ;
Ye must read the parchment over again.

Eric :

Jarl Osric, twice we have read this scroll.

Osric :

Thou hast read a part.

Eric :

I have read the whole.

Osric :

Ay, since I attached my signature !

Eric :

Before and since !

Rudolph :

Nay, of this be sure,

Thou hast signed ; in fairness now let it rest.

Osric :

I had rather have sign'd upon Hugo's crest ;
He has argued the question mouth to mouth
With the wordy lore of the subtle south ;
Let him or any one of his band
Come and argue the question hand to hand,
With the aid of my battleaxe I will show
That a score of words are not worth one blow.

Thurston :

To the devil with thee and thy battleaxe ;
I would send the pair of ye back in your tracks,
With an answer that even to thy boorish brain
Would scarce need repetition again.

Osric :

Thou Saxon slave to a milksop knight,
I will give thy body to raven and kite.

Thurston :

Thou liest ; I am a freeborn man,
And thy huge carcass—in cubit and span
Like the giant's of Gath—'neath Saxon steel,
Shall furnish the kites with a fatter meal.

Osric :

Now, by Odin !

Rudolph :

Jarl Osric, curb thy wrath ;
Our names are sign'd, our words have gone forth.

Hugo :

I blame thee, Thurston.

Thurston :

And I, too, blame
Myself, since I follow a knight so tame !
[*Thurston goes out.*]

Osric :

The Saxon hound, he said I lied !

Rudolph :

I pray thee, good Viking, be pacified.

Osric :

Why do we grant the terms they ask ?
To crush them all were an easy task.

Dagobert :

That know'st thou not ; if it come to war,
They are stronger, perhaps, than we bargain for.

Eric :

Jarl Osric, thou mayst recall thy words—
Should we meet again.

Hugo :

May He save you, too, from Norsemen and Huns;
Since the gates are beleaguer'd and walls begirt
By the forces of Osric and Dagobert ;
'Tis a heavy price that the knaves demand.

Abbot :

Were we to mortgage the Church's land
We never could raise what they would extort.

Orion (aside) :

The price is too long and the notice too short.

Eric :

And you know the stern alternative.

Abbot :

If we die we die, if we live we live ;
God's will be done ; and our trust is sure
In Him, though His chast'nings we endure
Two messengers rode from here last night
To Otto they carry news of our plight,
On my swiftest horses I saw them go.

Orion (aside) :

Then his swiftest horses are wondrous slow.

Eric :

One of these is captive and badly hurt ;
By the reckless riders of Dagobert
He was overtaken and well nigh slain,
Not a league from here on the open plain.

Abbot :

But the other escap'd.

Strict stipulation was made, of course,
That except ourselves, neither man nor horse
Should enter your gates—they were keen to shun
The chance of increasing your garrison.

Eric :

I hold safe-conduct here in my hand,
Signed by the chiefs of that lawless band ;
See Rudolph's name, no disgrace to a clerk,
And Dagobert's scrawl, and Osric's mark ;
Iarl sign'd sorely against his will,
With a scratch like the print of a raven's bill ;
But the foe have muster'd in sight of the gate,
For another hour they will scarcely wait ;
Bid Abbess and dame prepare with haste,
We have neither moments nor words to waste.

Hugo :

Lord Abbot, I tell thee candidly
There is no great love between thou and I,
As well thou know'st ; but, nevertheless,
I would we were more, or thy foes were less.

Abbot :

I will summon the Lady Abbess straight.
[*The Abbot and Monks go out.*]

Eric :

'Tis hard to leave these men to their fate,
Norseman and Hun will never relent :
Their day of grace upon earth is spent.
[*Hugo goes out, followed by Orion.*]

SCENE.—THE CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE GUEST CHAMBER

HUGO *pacing up and down*, ORION *leaning against the wall*

Hugo :

My day of grace with theirs is past.
I might have saved them ; 'tis too late—
Too late for both. The die is cast,
And I resign me to my fate.
God's vengeance I await.

Orion :

The boundary 'twixt right and wrong
Is not so easy to discern,
And man is weak and fate is strong,
And destiny man's hopes will spurn,
Man's schemes will overturn.

Hugo :

Thou liest, thou fiend ! Not unawares
The sinner swallows Satan's bait,
Nor pits conceal'd nor hidden snares
Seeks blindly ; wherefore dost thou prate
Of destiny and fate ?

Orion :

Who first named fate ? But never mind,
Let that pass by—to Adam's fall
And Adam's curse look back, and find
Iniquity the lot of all
And sin original.

Hugo :

But I have sinn'd, repented, sinn'd
Till seven times that sin may be
By seventy multiplied ; the wind
Is constant when compared with me,
And stable is the sea !

My hopes are sacrificed, for what ?
For days of folly, less or more,
For years to see those dead hopes rot
Like dead weeds scatter'd on the shore
Beyond the surfs that roar !

Orion :

The wiles of Eve are swift to smite ;
Ay, swift to smite and not to spare—
Red lips and round limbs sweet and white,
Dark eyes and sunny silken hair,
Thy betters may ensnare.

Hugo :

Not so ; the strife 'twixt hell and heaven
I felt last night, and well I knew
The crisis ; but my aid was given
To hell. Thou'st known the crisis, too,
For once thou'st spoken true,

Having foretold it ; there remains
For grace no time, for hope no room ;
Even now I seem to feel the pains
Of hell, that wait beyond the gloom
Of my dishonour'd tomb.

Thou who hast lived and died to save
Us sinners, Christ of Galilee !
Thy great love pardon'd and forgave
The dying thief upon the tree,
Thou canst not pardon me !

Dear Lord ! hear Thou my latest prayer,
For prayer must die since hope is dead ;
Thy Father's vengeance let me bear,
Nor let my guilt be visited
Upon a guiltless head !

Ah! God is just! Full sure I am
 He never did predestinate
 Our souls to hell. Ourselves we damn—
 [To Orion, with sudden passion
 Serpent! I know thee now, too late;
 Curse thee! Work out thy hate!

Orion:

I hate thee not; thy grievous plight
 Would move my pity, but I bear
 A curse to which thy curse seems light;
 Thy wrong is better than my right,
 My day is darker than thy night;
 Beside the whitest hope I share
 How white is thy despair!

SCENE.—THE CHAPEL OF THE CONVENT

URSULA, AGATHA, *Nuns and Novices*

(Hymn of the Nuns):

Jehovah! we bless Thee,
 All works of Thine hand
 Extol Thee, confess Thee;
 By sea and by land,
 By mountain and river,
 By forest and glen,
 They praise Thee for ever!
 And ever! Amen!

The heathen are raging
 Against Thee, O Lord!
 The ungodly are waging
 Rash war against God!
 Arise, and deliver
 Us, sheep of Thy pen,
 Who praise Thee for ever!
 And ever! Amen!

Thou, Shepherd of Zion !
Thy firstlings didst tear
From jaws of the lion,
From teeth of the bear ;
Thy strength to deliver
Is strong now as then,
We praise Thee for ever !
And ever ! Amen !

Thine arm hath deliver'd
Thy servants of old,
Hath scatter'd and shiver'd
The spears of the bold,
Hath emptied the quiver
Of bloodthirsty men,
We praise Thee for ever !
And ever ! Amen !

Nathless shall Thy right hand
Those counsels fulfil,
Most wise in Thy sight, and
We bow to Thy will ;
Thy children quail never
For dungeon or den,
They praise Thee for ever !
And ever ! Amen !

Though fierce tribulation
Endure for a space,
Yet, God ! our salvation !
We gain by Thy grace
At end of life's fever,
Bliss passing man's ken ;
There to praise Thee for ever !
And ever ! Amen !

SCENE.—THE GUEST ROOM OF THE CONVENT

HUGO, ERIC, and ORION. *Enter* URSULA, AGATHA, and
Nuns

Ursula :

Hugo ! we reject thine offers,
Not that we can buy
Safety from the Church's coffers,
Neither can we fly.

Far too great the price they seek is;
Let their lawless throng
Come, we wait their coming ; weak is
Man, but God is strong.

Eric :

Think again on our proposals,
It will be too late
When the robbers hold carousals
On this side the gate.

Ursula :

For myself I speak and others
Weak and frail as I,
We will not desert our brothers
In adversity.

Hugo (to the Nuns) :

Does the Abbess thus advance her
Will before ye all ?

A Nun :

We will stay.

Hugo :

Is this thine answer,
Agatha ? The wall
Is a poor protection truly,
And the gates are weak,
And the Norsemen most unruly.
Come, then.

A Nun (to Agatha) : Sister, speak !

Orion (aside to Hugo) :

Press her ! She, her fears dissembling,
Stands irresolute ;
She will yield—her limbs are trembling,
Though her lips are mute.
[*A trumpet is heard without.*]

Eric :

Hark ! their savage war-horn blowing
Chafes at our delay.

Hugo :

Agatha, we must be going.
Come, girl !

Agatha (clinging to Ursula) : Must I stay ?

Ursula :

Nay, my child, thou shalt not make me
Judge : I cannot give
Orders to a novice.

Agatha :

Take me,
Hugo ! let me live !

Eric (to Nuns) :

Foolish women ! will ye tarry,
Spite of all we say ?

Hugo :

Must we use our strength and carry
You by force away ?

Ursula :

Bad enough thou art, Sir Norman,
Yet thou wilt not do
This thing. Shame !—on men make war, man,
Not on women few.

Eric :

Heed her not—her life she barter
Of her free accord,
For her faith ; and, doubtless, martyrs
Have their own reward.

Ursula :

In the Church's cause thy father
Never grudged his blade—
Hugo, did he rue it ?

Orion :

Rather !

He was poorly paid.

Hugo :

Abbess, this is not my doing,
I have said my say ;
How can I avert the ruin,
Even for a day,
Since they count two hundred fairly,
While we count a score ;
And thine own retainers barely
Count a dozen more ?

Agatha (kneeling to Ursula) :

Ah ! forgive me, Lady Abbess,
Bless me ere I go ;
She who under sod and slab is
Lying, cold and low,
Scarce would turn away in anger
From a child so frail ;
Not dear life, but deadly danger
Makes her daughter quail.

Hugo :

Eric, will those faces tearful
To God's judgment seat
Haunt us ?

Eric : Death is not so fearful.

Hugo :

No, but life is sweet,
Sweet, for once, to me, though sinful.

Orion (to Hugo) :

Earth is scant of bliss ;
Wiseest he who takes his skinful
When the chance is his.

(To Ursula) :

Lady Abbess ! stay and welcome
Osric's savage crew ;
Yet when pains of death and hell come,
Thou thy choice may'st rue.

Ursula (to Orion) :

What dost thou 'neath roof-trees sacred ?
Man or fiend, depart !

Orion :

Dame, thy tongue is sharp and acrid
Yet I bear the smart.

Ursula (advancing and raising up a crucifix) :

I conjure thee by this symbol

Leave us !

[Orion goes out hastily.]

Hugo :

Ha ! the knave,

He has made an exit nimble :

Abbess ! thou art brave.

Yet once gone, we're past recalling ;

Let no blame be mine.

See ! thy sisters' tears are falling

Fast, and so are thine.

Ursula :

Fare you well ! The teardrop splashes

Vainly on the ice.

Ye will sorrow o'er our ashes

And your cowardice.

Eric ;

Sorry am I, yet my sorrow

Cannot alter fate ;

Should Prince Otto come to-morrow,

He will come too late.

Hugo :

Nay, old comrade, she hath spoken

Words we must not hear,

Shall we pause for sign or token—

Taunted twice with fear ?

Yonder, hilt to hilt adjusted,

Stand the swords in which we trusted

Years ago. Their blades have rusted,

So, perchance, have we.

Ursula ! thy words may shame us,

Yet we once were counted famous,

Morituri, salutamur,

Aut victuri, te !

[They go out.]

SCENE.—THE OUTSKIRTS OF RUDOLPH'S CAMP.

RUDOLPH, OSRIC, *and* DAGOBERT. HUGO*Rudolph :*

Lord Hugo ! thy speech is madness ;
Thou hast tax'd our patience too far :
We offer'd thee peace—with gladness,
We gladly accept thy war.

Dagobert :

And the clemency we extended
To thee and thine, we recall ;
And the treaty 'twixt us is ended—
We are ready to storm the wall.

Osric :

Now tear yon parchment to tatters,
Thou shalt make no further use
Of our safeguard : the wind that scatters
The scroll shall scatter the truce.

Hugo :

Jarl Osric, to save the spilling
Of blood and the waste of life,
I am willing, if thou art willing,
With thee to decide this strife ;
Let thy comrades draw their force back :
I defy thee to single fight,
I will meet thee on foot or horseback,
And God shall defend the right.

Rudolph :

No single combat shall settle
This strife : thou art overbold—
Thou hast put us all on our mettle,
Now the game in our hands we hold.

Dagobert :

Our lances round thee have hover'd,
Have seen where thy fellows bide ;
Thy weakness we have discover'd,
Thy nakedness we have spied.

Osric :

And hearken, knight, to my story—
When sack'd are the convent shrines,
When the convent thresholds are gory,
And quaff'd are the convent wines ;
When our beasts with pillage are laden,
And the clouds of our black smoke rise
From yon tower : one fair-haired maiden
Is singled as Osric's prize.
I will fit her with chain and collar
Of red gold, studded with pearls,
With bracelet of gold, Sir Scholar :
The queen of my captive girls.

Hugo (savagely) :

May the Most High God of battles,
The Lord and Ruler of fights,
Who breaketh the shield that rattles,
Who snappeth the sword that smites,
In Whose hands are footman and horseman
At Whose breath they conquer or flee,
Never show me His mercy, Norseman !
If I show mercy to thee.

Osric :

What, ho ! art thou drunk, Sir Norman ?
Has the wine made thy pale cheek red ?
Now, I swear by Odin and Thor, man,
Already I count thee dead.

Rudolph :

I crave thy pardon for baulking
The flood of thine eloquence,
But thou canst not scare us with talking,
I therefore pray thee go hence.

Osric :

Though I may not take up thy gauntlet,
Should we meet where the steel strikes fire,
'Twixt thy casque and thy charger's frontlet
The choice will perplex thy squire.

Hugo :

When the Norman rowels are goading,
When glitters the Norman glaive,
Thou shalt call upon Thor and Odin :
They shall not hear thee nor save.
"Should we meet !" Ay, the chance may fall so.
In the furious battle drive,
So may God deal with me—more, also !
If we separate, both alive !

SCENE.—THE COURTYARD OF THE OLD FARM

EUSTACE and other followers of HUGO and ERIC lounging about. Enter THURSTON hastily, with swords under his arm

Thurston :

Now saddle your horses and girth them tight,
And see that your weapons are sharp and bright.
Come, lads, get ready as fast as you can.

Eustace :

Why, what's this bustle about, old man ?

Thurston :

Well, it seems Lord Hugo has changed his mind,
As the weathercock veers with the shifting wind ;
He has gone in person to Osric's camp,
To tell him to pack up his tents and tramp .
But I guess he won't.

Eustace :

Then I hope he will.

They are plenty to eat us, as well as to kill.

Ralph :

And I hope he won't—I begin to feel
A longing to moisten my thirsty steel.

*[They begin to saddle and make preparations
for a skirmish.]*

Thurston :

I've a couple of blades to look to here.
In their scabbards I scarcely could make them stir
At first, but I'll sharpen them both ere long.

A Man-at-Arms :

Hurrah for a skirmish ! Who'll give us a song ?

Thurston (sings, cleaning and sharpening) :

Hurrah for the sword ! I hold one here,
And I scour at the rust, and say
'Tis the umpire, this, and the arbiter
That settles in the fairest way ;
For it stays false tongues and it cools hot blood,
And it lowers the proud one's crest ;
And the law of the land is sometimes good,
But the law of the sword is best.
In all disputes 'tis the shortest plan,
The surest and best appeal ;—
What else can decide between man and man ?

(Chorus of all) :

Hurrah ! for the bright blue steel !

Thurston (sings) :

Hurrah ! for the sword of Hugo our lord !

'Tis a trusty friend and a true ;

It has held its own on a grassy sward,

When its blade shone bright and blue.

Though it never has stricken in anger hard,

And has scarcely been cleansed from rust,
Since the day when it broke through Harold's guard

With our favourite cut and thrust ;

Yet Osric's crown will look somewhat red,

And his brain will be apt to reel,

Should the trenchant blade come down on his head—

(Chorus of all) :

Hurrah ! for the bright blue steel !

Thurston (sings) :

Hurrah ! for the sword of our ally bold,

It has done good service to him ;

It has held its own on an open wold,

When its edge was in keener trim.

It may baffle the plots of the wisest skull,

It may slacken the strongest limb,

Make the brains full of forethought void and null,

And the eyes full of farsight, dim ;

And the hasty hands are content to wait,

And the knees are compell'd to kneel,

Where it falls with the weight of a downstroke straight,

(Chorus of all) :

Hurrah ! for the bright blue steel !

Thurston (sings) :

Hurrah ! for the sword—I've one of my own :

And I think I may safely say,

Give my enemy his, let us stand alone,

And our quarrel shall end one way ;

One way or the other—it matters not much,
 So the question be fairly tried.
 O peacemaker good, bringing peace with a touch,
 Thy clients will be satisfied.
 As a judge, thou dost judge—as a witness, attest,
 And thou settest thy hand and seal,
 And the winner is blest, and the loser at rest—

(*Chorus of all*) :

Hurrah! for the bright blue steel!

[*Hugo and Eric enter during the last verse of
 the song.*]

Hugo :

Boot and saddle, old friend,
 Their defiance they send;
 Time is short—make an end
 Of thy song.

Let the sword in this fight
 Strike as hard for the right
 As it once struck for might
 Leagued with wrong.

Ha! Rollo, thou champest
 Thy bridle and stampest,
 For the rush of the tempest
 Dost long?

Ho! the kites will grow fatter
 On the corpses we scatter,
 In the paths where we shatter
 Their throng:

Where Osric, the craven,
 Hath reared the black raven
 'Gainst monks that are shaven
 And cowl'd;

Where the Teuton and Hun sit
 In the track of our onset,
 Will the wolves, ere the sunset,
 Have howl'd.

Retribution is good,
 They have revell'd in blood,
 Like the wolves of the wood,
 They have prowld.
 Birds of prey they have been,
 And of carrion unclean,
 And their own nests (i ween,
 They have foul'd.

Eric :

Two messengers since
 Yesternorn have gone hence,
 And ere long will the Prince
 Bring relief.
 Shall we pause? —they are ten
 To our one, but their men
 Are ill-arm'd, and scarce ken
 Their own chief;
 And for this we give thanks:
 Their disorderly ranks,
 If assail'd in the flanks,
 Will as lief
 Run as fight—loons and lords.

Hugo :

Mount your steeds! draw your swords!
 Take your places! My words
 Shall be brief:
 Ride round by the valley,
 Through pass and gorge sally—
 The linden trees rally
 Beneath.
 Then, Eric and Thurston,
 Their ranks while we burst on,
 Try which will be first on
 The heath.

(Aside) :

Look again, mother mine,
Through the happy starshine,
For my sins dost thou pine ?

With my breath,
See ! thy pangs are all done,
For the life of thy son :
Thou shalt never feel one

For his death.

*[They all go out but Hugo, who lingers
to tighten his girths. Orion appears
suddenly in the gateway.]*

Orion :

Stay, friend ! I keep guard on
Thy soul's gates : hold hard on
Thy horse. Hope of pardon

Hath fled !

Bethink once, I crave thee,
Can recklessness save thee ?
Hell sooner will have thee

Instead.

Hugo :

Back ! My soul, tempest-toss'd,
Hath her Rubicon cross'd :
She shall fly—saved or lost !

Void of dread !

Sharper pang than the steel,
Thou, O serpent ! shalt feel,
Should I set the bruised heel

On thy head.

[He rides out.]

SCENE.—A ROOM IN THE CONVENT TOWER OVER-
LOOKING THE GATE

URSULA *at the window.* AGATHA and Nuns *crouching or
kneeling in a corner*

Ursula :

See, Ellinor ! Agatha ! Anna !

While yet for the ladders they wait,
Jarl Osric hath rear'd the black banner

Within a few yards of the gate ;

It faces our window, the raven,

The badge of the cruel sea-kings,

That has carried to harbour and haven

Destruction and death on its wings.

Beneath us they throng, the fierce Norsemen,

The pikemen of Rudolph behind

Are mustered, and Dagobert's horsemen

With faces to rearward inclined,

Come last, on their coursers, broad-chested,

Rough-coated, short-pastern'd, and strong,

Their casques with white plumes thickly crested,

Their lances barb-headed and long :

They come through the shades of the linden,

Fleet riders and war-horses hot ;

The Normans, our friends—we have sinn'd in

Our selfishness, sisters, I wot—

They come to add slaughter to slaughter,

Their handful can ne'er stem the tide

Of our foes, and our fate were but shorter

Without them. How fiercely they ride !

And "Hugo of Normandy!" "Hugo!"
 "A rescue! a rescue!" rings loud,
 And right on the many the few go!
 A sway and a swerve of the crowd!
 A springing and sparkling of sword-blades!
 A crashing and 'countering of steeds!
 And the white feathers fly 'neath their broad blades
 Like foam flakes! the spear-shafts like reeds!

A Nun (to Agatha) :
 Pray, sister!

Agatha : Alas! I have striven
 To pray, but the lips move in vain
 When the heart with such terror is riven.
 Look again, Lady Abbess! Look again!

Ursula :
 As leaves fall, by wintry gusts scatter'd,
 As fall by the sickle ripe ears,
 As the pines by the whirlwind fall shatter'd,
 As shatter'd by bolt fall the firs,
 To the right hand they fall! to the left hand
 They yield! They go down! they give back!
 And their ranks are divided and cleft, and
 Dispers'd and destroy'd in the track!
 Where, stirrup to stirrup, and bridle
 To bridle, down-trampling the slain!
 Our friends, wielding swords never idle,
 Hew bloody and desperate lane
 Through pikemen so crowded together
 They scarce for their pikes can find room,
 Led by Hugo's gilt crest, the tall feather
 Of Thurston, and Eric's black plume!

A Nun (to Agatha) :
 Pray, sister!

Agatha : First pray thou that heaven
Will lift this dull weight from my brain,
That crushes like crime unforgiven.
Look again, Lady Abbess ! Look again !

Ursula :
Close under the gates men are fighting
On foot where the raven is rear'd !
'Neath that sword-stroke, through helm and skull
smiting,
Jarl Osric falls, cloven to the beard !
And Hugo, the hilt firmly grasping,
His heel on the throat of his foe,
Wrenches back—I can hear the dull rasping—
The steel through the bone grating low !
And the raven rocks ! Thurston has landed
Two strokes well directed and hard
On the standard pole, wielding two-handed
A blade crimson'd up to the guard.
Like the mast cut in two by the lightning !
The black banner topples and falls !
Bewildering ! back-scattering ! affright'ning !
It clears a wide space next the walls.

A Nun (to Agatha) :
Pray, sister !

Agatha : Does the sinner unshriven
With naught beyond this life to gain,
Pray for mercy on earth or in heaven ?
Look again, Lady Abbess ! Look again !

Ursula :
The gates are flung open, and straightway,
By Ambrose and Cyril led on,
Our own men rush out through the gateway ;
One charge, and the entrance is won !

No! our foes block the gate and endeavour
 To force their way in! Oath and yell,
 Shout and war-cry wax wilder than ever!
 Those children of Odin fight well;
 And my ears are confused by the crashing,
 The jarring, the discord, the din;
 And mine eyes are perplex'd by the flashing
 Of fierce lights that ceaselessly spin;
 So when thunder to thunder is calling,
 Quick flash follows flash in the shade,
 So leaping and flashing and falling,
 Blade flashes and follows on blade!
 While the sward newly-plough'd, freshly painted,
 Grows purple with blood of the slain,
 And slippery! Has Agatha fainted?

Agatha:

Not so, Lady Abbess! Look again!

Ursula:

No more from the window; in the old years
 I have look'd upon strife. Now I go
 To the courtyard to rally our soldiers
 As I may—face to face with the foe.

[She goes out.]

SCENE.—A ROOM IN THE CONVENT

THURSTON *seated near a small fire*

Enter Eustace

Eustace:

We have come through this skirmish with hardly
 a scratch.

Thurston :

Nay, he spoke after that, for I heard him myself ;
But he won't speak again, he must lie on his shelf.

Ursula :

Alas ! he is dead, then ?

Thurston :

As dead as St. Paul.
And what then ? to-morrow we, too, one and all
Die, to fatten these ravenous carrion birds.
I knelt down by Hugo and heard his last words :
“ How heavy the night hangs—how wild the waves
dash !
Say a mass for my soul—and give Rollo a mash.”

Ursula :

Nay, Thurston, thou jestest.

Thurston :

Ask Eric. I swear
We listened, and caught every syllable clear.

Eustace :

Why, his horse was slain, too.

Thurston :

'Neath the linden trees grey,
Ere the onset, young Henry rode Rollo away ;
He will hasten the Prince, and they may reach your
gate
To-morrow—though to-morrow for us is too late.
Hugo rode the boy's mare, and she's dead, if you like—
Disembowell'd by the thrust of a freebooter's pike.

Eustace :

Neither Henry nor Rollo we ever shall see.

Ursula :

But we may hold the walls till to-morrow.

Thirston :

Not we.

In an hour or less, having rallied their force,
They'll storm your old building—and take it, of
course,
Since of us, who alone in war's science are skill'd,
One-third are disabled, and two-thirds are kill'd.

Ursula :

Art thou hurt ?

Thurston :

At present I feel well enough,
But your water is brackish, unwholesome, and rough
Bring a flask of your wine, dame, for Eustace and I
Let us gaily give battle, and merrily die!

[*Enter Eric, with arm in sling*]

Eric :

Thou art safe, Lady Abbess ! The convent is safe.
To be robbed of their prey, how the ravens will chafe ;
The vanguard of Otto is looming in sight :
At the sheen of their spears, see ! thy foemen take flight.
Their foremost are scarce half a mile from the wall.

Thurston :

Bring the wine, lest those Germans should swallow it
all.

SCENE.—THE CHAPEL OF THE CONVENT

(*Dirge of the Monks*):

Earth to earth, and dust to dust,
 Ashes unto ashes go.
 Judge not. He who judgeth just,
 Judgeth merciful also.
 Earthly penitence hath fled,
 Earthly sin hath ceased to be;
 Pile the sods on heart and head,
Miserere, Domine!

*Hominum et angelorum,
 Domine! precamur te
 Ut immemor sis malorum—
 Miserere, Domine!
 (Miserere!)*

Will the fruits of life brought forth,
 Pride and greed, and wrath and lust,
 Profit in the day of wrath,
 When the dust returns to dust?
 Evil flower and thorny fruit
 Load the wild and worthless tree,
 Lo! the axe is at the root,
Miserere, Domine!

*Spes, fidesque, caritasque,
 Frustra fatigant per se,
 Frustra virtus, forsque, fasque,
 Miserere, Domine!
 (Miserere!)*

Fair without and foul within,
 When the honey'd husks are reft
 From the bitter sweets of sin,
 Bitterness alone is left.
 Yet the wayward soul hath striven
 Mostly hell's ally to be,
 In the strife 'twixt hell and heaven,
Miserere, Domine !

*Heu ! heu ! herba latet anguis—
 Caro herba—carni væ—
 Solum purgat Christi sanguis,
 Miserere, Domine !
 (Miserere !)*

Pray that in the doubtful fight
 Man may win through sore distress,
 By His goodness infinite,
 And His mercy fathomless.
 Pray for one more of the weary,
 Head bowed down and bended knee,
 Swell the requiem, *Miserere !*
Miserere, Domine !

*Bonum, malum, qui fecisti
 Mali imploramus te,
 Salve fratrem, causa Christi,
 Miserere, Domine !
 (Miserere !)*

A HUNTING SONG *

HERE'S a health to every sportsman, be he stable-man
or lord,

If his heart be true, I care not what his pocket may
afford ;

And may he ever pleasantly each gallant sport pursue
If he takes his liquor fairly, and his fences fairly too

He cares not for the bubbles of fortune's fickle tide,
Who like Bendigo can battle, and like Olliver can ride.
He laughs at those who caution, at those who chide
he'll frown,

As he clears a five-foot paling, or he knocks a pecker
down.

The dull cold world may blame us, boys ! but what care
we the while,

If coral lips will cheer us, and bright eyes on us smile ?
For beauty's fond caresses can most tenderly repay

The weariness and trouble of many an anxious day.

Then fill your glass, and drain it, too, with all your heart
and soul,

To the best of sports—the Fox-Hunt, the Fair Ones,
and the Bowl ;

To a stout heart in adversity through every ill to steer,
And when fortune smiles a score of friends like those
around us here.

* Written when Gordon was living in Cheltenham.

AN EXILE'S FAREWELL *

THE ocean heaves around us still
With long and measured swell,
The autumn gales our canvas fill,
Our ship rides smooth and well ;
The broad Atlantic's bed of foam
Still breaks against our prow ;
I shed no tears at quitting home,
Nor will I shed them now.

Against the bulwarks on the poop
I lean, and watch the sun
Behind the red horizon stoop—
His race is nearly run.
Those waves will never quench his light,
O'er which they seem to close,
To-morrow he will rise as bright
As he this morning rose.

How brightly gleams the orb of day
Across the trackless sea !
How lightly dance the waves that play
Like dolphins on our lee !
The restless waters seem to say
In smothered tones to me,
How many thousand miles away
My native land must be !

* Written before leaving England in 1853.

Speak, Ocean, is my home the same,
Now all is new to me ?
The tropic skies' resplendent flame ?
The vast expanse of sea ?
Does all around her, yet unchanged,
The well-known aspect wear ?
Oh ! can the leagues that I have ranged
Have made no difference there ?

How vivid Recollection's hand
Recalls the scene once more ;
I see the same tall poplars stand
Beside the garden door ;
I see the bird-cage hanging still ;
And where my sister set
The flowers in the window-sill—
Can they be living yet ?

Let woman's nature cherish grief,
I rarely heave a sigh,
Before emotion takes relief
In listless apathy ;
While from my pipe the vapours curl
Towards the evening sky,
And 'neath my feet the billows whirl
In dull monotony.

The sky still wears the crimson streak
Of Sol's departing ray,
Some briny drops are on my cheek,
'Tis but the salt sea-spray.
Then let our barque the ocean roam,
Our keel the billows plough ;
I shed no tears at quitting home,
Nor will I shed them now.

EARLY ADIEUX *

ADIEU to kindred hearts and home,
To pleasure, joy, and mirth !
A fitter foot than mine to roam
Could scarcely tread the earth ;
For they are now so few indeed
(Not more than three in all)
Whoe'er will think of me, or heed
What fate may me befall.

For I through pleasure's paths have run
My headlong goal to win,
Now pleasure's snares have cared to shun
When pleasure sweetened sin.
Let those who will their failings mask,
To mine I frankly own ;
But for them pardon will I ask
Of none—save Heaven alone.

From carping friends I turn aside ;
At foes' defiance frown ;
Yet time may tame my stubborn pride,
And break my spirit down.
Still, if to error I incline,
Truth whispers comfort strong,
That never reckless act of mine
E'er worked a comrade wrong.

My mother is a stately dame,
Who oft would chide with me ;
She saith my riot bringeth shame,
And stains my pedigree.

* Written in England in 1850.

I'd reck not what my friends might know,
Or what the world might say,
Did I but think some tears would flow
When I am far away.

Perchance my mother will recall
My memory with a sigh ;
My gentle sister's tears may fall,
And dim her laughing eye ;
Perhaps a loving thought may gleam,
And fringe its saddened ray,
When, like a nightmare's troubled dream,
I, outcast, pass away.

Then once again farewell to those
Whoe'er for me have sighed ;
For pleasures melt away like snows,
And hopes like shadows glide.
Adieu, my mother ! if no more
Thy son's face thou mayst see,
At least those many cares are o'er,
So oft-times caused by me.

My lot is fixed ! The die is cast !
For me home hath no joy !
Oh ! pardon then all follies past,
And bless your wayward boy !
And thou, from whom for aye to part
Grieves more than tongue can tell,
May Heaven preserve thy guileless heart !
Sweet sister, fare thee well !

Thou too, whose loving-kindness makes
My resolution less,
While from the bitter past it takes
One-half its bitterness,
If e'er you held my memory dear,
Grant this request, I pray—
Give to that memory one bright tear,
And let it pass away.

TO MY SISTER *

ACROSS the trackless seas I go,
No matter when or where,
And few my future lot will know,
And fewer still will care.
My hopes are gone, my time is spent,
I little heed their loss,
And if I cannot feel content,
I cannot feel remorse.
My parents bid me cross the flood,
My kindred frowned at me ;
They say I have belied my blood,
And stained my pedigree.
But I must turn from those who chide,
And laugh at those who frown ;
I cannot quench my stubborn pride,
Nor keep my spirits down.
I once had talents fit to win
Success in life's career,
And if I chose a part of sin,
My choice has cost me dear.
But those who brand me with disgrace
Will scarcely dare to say
They spoke the taunt before my face,
And went unscathed away.
My friends will miss a comrade's face,
And pledge me on the seas,
Who shared the wine-cup or the chase,
Or follies worse than these.
A careless smile, a parting glass,
A hand that waves adieu,
And from my sight they soon will pass,
And from my memory too.

* Written August 4, 1853, being three days before he sailed for Australia.

I loved a girl not long ago,
And, till my suit was told,
I thought her breast as fair as snow,
'Twas very near as cold ;
And yet I spoke, with feelings more
Of recklessness than pain,
Those words I never spoke before,
Nor never shall again.

Her cheek grew pale, in her dark eye
I saw the tear-drop shine ;
Her red lips faltered in reply,
And then were pressed to mine.
A quick pulsation of the heart,
A flutter of the breath,
A smothered sob—and thus we part
To meet no more till death.

And yet I may at times recall
Her memory with a sigh ;
At times for me the tears may fall
And dim her sparkling eye.
But absent friends are soon forgot,
And in a year or less,
'Twill doubtless be another's lot
Those very lips to press.

With adverse fate we best can cope
When all we prize has fled ;
And where there's little left to hope,
There's little left to dread.
Oh, time glides ever quickly by,
Destroying all that's dear ;
On earth there's little worth a sigh,
And nothing worth a tear.

What fears have I ? What hopes in life ?
What joys can I command ?
A few short years of toil and strife
In a strange and distant land !

When green grass sprouts above this clay
(And that might be ere long),
Some friends may read these lines and say,
The world has judged him wrong.

There is a spot not far away
Where my young sister sleeps,
Who seems alive but yesterday,
So fresh her memory keeps ;
For we have played in childhood there
Beneath the hawthorn's bough,
And bent our knee in childish prayer
I cannot utter now.

Of late so reckless and so wild,
That spot recalls to me
That I was once a laughing child,
As innocent as she ;
And there, while August's wild flowers wave,
I wandered all alone,
Strewed blossoms on her little grave,
And knelt beside the stone.

I seem to have a load to bear,
A heavy choking grief ;
Could I have forced a single tear
I might have felt relief.
I think my hot and restless heart
Has scorched the channels dry,
From which those sighs of sorrow start
To moisten cheek and eye.

Sister, farewell ! farewell once more
To every youthful tie !
Friends ! parents ! kinsmen ! native shore !
To each and all good-bye !
And thoughts which for the moment seem
To bind me with a spell,
Ambitious hope, love's bovisish dream,
To you a last farewell !

THE OLD LEAVEN⁹

A DIALOGUE

Mark :

So, Maurice, you sail to-morrow, you say ?

And you may or may not return ?

Be sociable, man ! for once in a way,

Unless you're too old to learn.

The shadows are cool by the water side

Where the willows grow by the pond,

And the yellow laburnums' drooping pride

Sheds a golden gleam beyond.

For the blended tints of the summer flowers,

For the scents of the summer air,

For all nature's charms in this world of ours,

'Tis little or nought you care.

Yet I know for certain you haven't stirred

Since noon from your chosen spot ;

And you've hardly spoken a single word—

Are you tired, or cross, or what ?

You're fretting about those shares you bought,

They were to have gone up fast ;

But I heard how they fell to nothing—in short,

They were given away at last.

Maurice :

No, Mark, I'm not so easily crossed ;

'Tis true that I've had a run

Of bad luck lately ; indeed, I've lost ;

Well ! somebody else has won.

Mark :

The glass has fallen, perhaps you fear
A return of your ancient stitch—
That souvenir of the Lady's mere,
Park palings and double ditch.

Maurice :

You're wrong. I'm not in the least afraid
Of that. If the truth be told,
When the stiffness visits my shoulder-blade,
I think on the days of old ;
It recalls the rush of the freshening wind,
The strain of the chestnut springing,
And the rolling thunder of hoofs behind,
Like the Rataplan chorus ringing.

Mark :

Are you bound to borrow, or loth to lend ?
Have you purchased another screw ?
Or backed a bill for another friend ?
Or had a bad night at loo ?

Maurice :

Not one of those, you're all in the dark,
If you choose you can guess again ;
But you'd better give over guessing, Mark,
It's only labour in vain.

Mark :

I'll try once more ; does it plague you still,
That trifle of lead you carry ?
A guest that lingers against your will,
Unwelcome, yet bound to tarry.

Maurice :

Not so ! That burden I'm used to bear,
'Tis seldom it gives me trouble ;
And to earn it as I did then and there,
I'd carry a dead weight double.
A shock like that for a splintered rib
Can a thousandfold repay—

As the swallow skims through the spider's web,
We rode through their ranks that day!

Mark :

Come, Maurice, you shan't escape me so!
I'll hazard another guess;
That girl that jilted you long ago,
You're thinking of her, confess!

Maurice :

Though the blue lake flushed with a rosy light,
Reflected from yonder sky,
Might conjure a vision of Aphrodite
To a poet's or painter's eye;
Though the golden drop, with its drooping curl,
Between the water and wood,
Hangs down like the tress of a wayward girl
In her dreamy maidenhood:
Such boyish fancies seem out of date,
To one half inclined to censure
Their folly, and yet—your shaft flew straight,
Though you drew your bow at a venture.
I saw my lady the other night
In the crowded opera hall,
When the boxes sparkled with faces bright;
I knew her amongst them all.
Though little for these things now I reck,
I singled her from the throng
By the queenly curves of her head and neck,
By the droop of her eyelash long.
Oh! passionless, placid, and calm, and cold,
Does the fire still lurk within
That lit her magnificent eyes of old,
And coloured her marble skin?
For a weary look on the proud face hung,
While the music clashed and swelled,
And the restless child to the silk skirt clung
Unnoticed though unrepelled.

They've paled, those rosebud lips that I kissed,
That slim waist has thickened rather,
And the cub has the sprawling mutton fist,
And the great splay foot of the father.
May the blight— —

Mark :

Hold hard there, Maurice, my son,
Let her rest since her spell is broken ;
We can neither recall deeds rashly done,
Nor retract words hastily spoken.

Maurice :

Time was when to pleasure her girlish whim,
In my blind infatuation,
I've freely endangered life and limb ;
Aye, perilled my soul's salvation.

Mark :

With the best intentions we all must work,
But little good and much harm ;
Be a Christian for once, not a pagan Turk,
Nursing wrath and keeping it warm.

Maurice :

If our best intentions pave the way
To a place that is somewhat hot,
Can our worst intentions lead us, say,
To a still more sultry spot ?

Mark :

'Tis said that charity makes amends
For a multitude of transgressions.

Maurice :

But our perjured loves and our faithless friends
Are entitled to no concessions.

Mark :

Old man, these many years side by side
Our parallel paths have lain,
Now, in life's long journey, diverging wide,
They can scarcely unite again :

And though, from all that I've seen and heard,
You're prone to chafe and to fret
At the least restraint, not one angry word
Have we two exchanged as yet.
We've shared our peril, we've shared our sport,
Our sunshine and gloomy weather,
Feasted, and flirted, and fenced, and fought,
Struggled and toiled together ;
In happier moments lighter of heart,
Stouter of heart in sorrow ;
We've met and we've parted, and now we part
For ever, perchance, to-morrow.
She's a matron now ; when you knew her first
She was but a child, and your hate,
Fostered and cherished, and nourished and nursed,
Will it never evaporate ?
Your grievance is known to yourself alone,
But, Maurice, I say, for shame,
If in ten long years you haven't outgrown
Ill-will to an ancient flame.

Maurice :

Well, Mark, you're right ; if I spoke in spite,
Let the shame and the blame be mine ;
At the risk of a headache we'll drain this night
Her health in a flask of wine ;
For a castle in Spain, though it never was built ;
For a dream, though it never came true ;
For a cup, just tasted, though rudely spilt,
At least she can hold me due.
Those hours of pleasure she dealt of yore,
As well as those hours of pain,
I ween they would flit as they flitted before,
If I had them over again.
Against her no word from my lips shall pass,
Betraying the grudge I've cherished,
Till the sand runs down in my hour-glass,
And the gift of my speech has perished.

Say ! why is the spirit of peace so weak,
And the spirit of wrath so strong,
That the right we must steadily search and seek,
Though we readily find the wrong ?

Mark :

Our parents of old entailed the curse
Which must to our children cling ;
Let us hope, at least, that we're not much worse
Than the founder from whom we spring.
Fit sire was he of a selfish race,
Who first to temptation yielded,
Then to mend his case tried to heap disgrace
On the woman he should have shielded.
Say ! comrade mine, the forbidden fruit
We'd have plucked, that I well believe,
But I trust we'd rather have suffered mute
Than have laid the blame upon Eve.

Maurice (yawning) :

Who knows ? not I ; I can hardly vouch
For the truth of what little I see ;
And now, if you've any weed in your pouch,
Just hand it over to me.

A FRAGMENT

THEY say that poison-sprinkled flowers
Are sweeter in perfume
Than when, untouched by deadly dew,
They glowed in early bloom.

They say that men condemned to die
Have quaffed the sweetened wine,
With higher relish than the juice
Of the untampered vine.

They say that in the witches' song,
Though rude and harsh it be,
There blends a wild, mysterious strain
Of weirdest melody.

And I believe the devil's voice
Sinks deeper in our ear
Than any whisper sent from Heaven,
However sweet and clear.

INDEX TO FIRST LINES

	PAGE
A burning glass of burnish'd brass	149
A mellow light doth Sol afford	33
Across the trackless seas I go	308
Adieu to kindred hearts and home	306
All is over ! fleet career	90
Am I waking ? Was I sleeping ?	9
Ay ! snows are rife in December	167
"Ay, squire," said Stevens, "they back him at evens"	152
Boot and saddle ! See the slanting Rays begin to fall	37
Calm and clear ! the bright day is declining	109
Crush'd and throng'd are all the places	46
Dear Bell,—I enclose what you ask in a letter	102
Here's a health to every sportsman, be he stable man or lord	303
Hold hard, Ned ! Lift me down once more, and lay me in the shade	131
I remember some words my father said	23
I remember the lowering wintry morn	20
I said to young Allan Melveray	156
I'll tell you a story : but pass the "jack"	188
In Collins Street standeth a statue tall	14
Lightly the breath of the spring wind blows	19
Make merry, comrades, eat and drink	74
Of borrow'd plumes I take the sin	13
Of chases and courses dogs dream, so do horses . . .	105
Oh ! gaily sings the bird, and the wattle boughs are stirr'd	68
Oh ! the sun rose on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie	17
Oh ! wind that whistles o'er thorns and thistles . . .	61
On skies still and starlit	199
On the fields of Col'raine there'll be labour in vain . .	100

	PAGE
One line of swart profiles, and bearded lips dressing	117
Our hopes are wild imaginings	87
Rest, and be thankful ! On the verge	95
So, Maurice, you sail to-morrow, you say ?	311
The Lord shall slay or the Lord shall save !	197
The maiden sat by the river side	58
The ocean heaves around us still	304
The shore-boat lies in the morning light	70
The spring wind pass'd through the forest	80
The sun has gone down, spreading wide on	77
The sword slew one in deadly strife ;	183
The troubles of life are many	82
There's a formula which the west country clowns	25
They are rhymes rudely strung with intent less	127
They say that poison-sprinkled flowers	317
Thou art moulded in marble impassive	63
Though the pitcher that goes to the sparkling rill	32
Through the lattice rushes the south wind, dense	172
'Tis a nameless stone that stands at your head	144
To beasts of the field, and fowls of the air	29
To fetch clear water out of the spring	51
" Turn out, boys "—" What's up with our super. to-night ? "	139
Two years ago I was thinking	92
We severed in Autumn early	181
When he, that shepherd false, 'neath Phrygian sails	44
" Where shall we go for our garlands glad "	187
White steeds of ocean, that leap with a hollow and wearisome roar	66
With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid	135
You'll take my tale with a little salt	146

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

PR Gordon -
4725 The poetical
G3 works.
1800

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 378 141 6

PR
4725
G3
1800

