

The Princess

by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

1847

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PROLOGUE

Sir Walter Vivian all a summer's day

Gave his broad lawns until the set of sun

Up to the people: thither flocked at noon

His tenants, wife and child, and thither
half

The neighbouring borough with their
Institute

Of which he was the patron. I was there

From college, visiting the son,--the son

A Walter too,--with others of our set,

Five others: we were seven at Vivian-
place.

And me that morning Walter showed the
house,

Greek, set with busts: from vases in the
hall

Flowers of all heavens, and lovelier than
their names,

Grew side by side; and on the pavement
lay

Carved stones of the Abbey-ruin in the
park,

Huge Ammonites, and the first bones of
Time;

And on the tables every clime and age
Jumbled together; celts and calumets,

Claymore and snowshoe, toys in lava,
fans

Of sandal, amber, ancient rosaries,

Laborious orient ivory sphere in sphere,

The cursed Malayan crease, and battle-
clubs

From the isles of palm: and higher on the
walls,

Betwixt the monstrous horns of elk and
deer,

His own forefathers' arms and armour
hung.

And 'this' he said 'was Hugh's at
Agincourt;

And that was old Sir Ralph's at Ascalon:

A good knight he! we keep a chronicle

With all about him'--which he brought,
and I

Dived in a hoard of tales that dealt with
knights,

Half-legend, half-historic, counts and
kings

Who laid about them at their wills and
died;

And mixt with these, a lady, one that
armed

Her own fair head, and sallying through
the gate,

Had beat her foes with slaughter from her
walls.

'O miracle of women,' said the book,

'O noble heart who, being strait-besieged

By this wild king to force her to his wish,

Nor bent, nor broke, nor shunned a
soldier's death,

But now when all was lost or seemed as
lost--

Her stature more than mortal in the burst

Of sunrise, her arm lifted, eyes on fire--

Brake with a blast of trumpets from the
gate,

And, falling on them like a thunderbolt,

She trampled some beneath her horses'
heels,

And some were whelmed with missiles of
the wall,

And some were pushed with lances from
the rock,

And part were drowned within the
whirling brook:

O miracle of noble womanhood!

So sang the gallant glorious chronicle;

And, I all rapt in this, 'Come out,' he said,

'To the Abbey: there is Aunt Elizabeth

And sister Lilia with the rest.' We went

(I kept the book and had my finger in it)

Down through the park: strange was the
sight to me;

For all the sloping pasture murmured,
sown

With happy faces and with holiday.

There moved the multitude, a thousand
heads:

The patient leaders of their Institute

Taught them with facts. One reared a font
of stone

And drew, from butts of water on the
slope,

The fountain of the moment, playing, now

A twisted snake, and now a rain of pearls,

Or steep-up spout whereon the gilded ball

Danced like a wisp: and somewhat lower
down

A man with knobs and wires and vials
fired

A cannon: Echo answered in her sleep

From hollow fields: and here were
telescopes

For azure views; and there a group of
girls

In circle waited, whom the electric shock

Dislinked with shrieks and laughter:
round the lake

A little clock-work steamer paddling plied

And shook the lilies: perched about the
knolls

A dozen angry models jetted steam:

A petty railway ran: a fire-balloon

Rose gem-like up before the dusky
groves

And dropt a fairy parachute and past:

And there through twenty posts of
telegraph

They flashed a saucy message to and fro

Between the mimic stations; so that sport

Went hand in hand with Science;
otherwhere

Pure sport; a herd of boys with clamour
bowled

And stumped the wicket; babies rolled
about

Like tumbled fruit in grass; and men and
maids

Arranged a country dance, and flew
through light

And shadow, while the twangling violin

Struck up with Soldier-laddie, and
overhead

The broad ambrosial aisles of lofty lime

Made noise with bees and breeze from
end to end.

Strange was the sight and smacking of
the time;

And long we gazed, but satiated at length

Came to the ruins. High-arched and ivy-
claspt,

Of finest Gothic lighter than a fire,

Through one wide chasm of time and
frost they gave

The park, the crowd, the house; but all
within

The sward was trim as any garden lawn:

And here we lit on Aunt Elizabeth,

And Lilia with the rest, and lady friends

From neighbour seats: and there was
Ralph himself,

A broken statue propt against the wall,

As gay as any. Lilia, wild with sport,

Half child half woman as she was, had
wound

A scarf of orange round the stony helm,

And robed the shoulders in a rosy silk,

That made the old warrior from his ivied
nook

Glow like a sunbeam: near his tomb a
feast

Shone, silver-set; about it lay the guests,

And there we joined them: then the
maiden Aunt

Took this fair day for text, and from it
preached

An universal culture for the crowd,

And all things great; but we, unworthier,
told

Of college: he had climbed across the
spikes,

And he had squeezed himself betwixt the
bars,

And he had breathed the Proctor's dogs;
and one

Discussed his tutor, rough to common
men,

But honeying at the whisper of a lord;

And one the Master, as a rogue in grain

Veneered with sanctimonious theory.

But while they talked, above their heads I
saw

The feudal warrior lady-clad; which
brought

My book to mind: and opening this I read

Of old Sir Ralph a page or two that rang

With tilt and tourney; then the tale of her

That drove her foes with slaughter from
her walls,

And much I praised her nobleness, and
'Where,'

Asked Walter, patting Lilia's head (she lay
Beside him) 'lives there such a woman
now?'

Quick answered Lilia 'There are thousands
now

Such women, but convention beats them
down:

It is but bringing up; no more than that:

You men have done it: how I hate you all!

Ah, were I something great! I wish I were

Some might poetess, I would shame you
then,

That love to keep us children! O I wish

That I were some great princess, I would
build

Far off from men a college like a man's,

And I would teach them all that men are
taught;

We are twice as quick!' And here she
shook aside

The hand that played the patron with her
curls.

And one said smiling 'Pretty were the
sight

If our old halls could change their sex,
and flaunt

With prudes for proctors, dowagers for
deans,

And sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair.

I think they should not wear our rusty gowns,

But move as rich as Emperor-moths, or Ralph

Who shines so in the corner; yet I fear,

If there were many Lilies in the brood,

However deep you might embower the nest,

Some boy would spy it.'

At this upon the sward

She tapt her tiny silken-sandaled foot:

'That's your light way; but I would make
it death

For any male thing but to peep at us.'

Petulant she spoke, and at herself she
laughed;

A rosebud set with little wilful thorns,

And sweet as English air could make her,
she:

But Walter hailed a score of names upon
her,

And 'petty Ogress', and 'ungrateful Puss',

And swore he longed at college, only
longed,

All else was well, for she-society.

They boated and they cricketed; they
talked

At wine, in clubs, of art, of politics;

They lost their weeks; they vexed the souls
of deans;

They rode; they betted; made a hundred
friends,

And caught the blossom of the flying
terms,

But missed the mignonette of Vivian-
place,

The little hearth-flower Lilia. Thus he
spoke,

Part banter, part affection.

'True,' she said,

'We doubt not that. O yes, you missed us much.

I'll stake my ruby ring upon it you did.'

She held it out; and as a parrot turns

Up through gilt wires a crafty loving eye,

And takes a lady's finger with all care,

And bites it for true heart and not for harm,

So he with Lilia's. Daintily she shrieked

And wrung it. 'Doubt my word again!' he said.

'Come, listen! here is proof that you were missed:

We seven stayed at Christmas up to read;
And there we took one tutor as to read:
The hard-grained Muses of the cube and
square
Were out of season: never man, I think,
So mouldered in a sinecure as he:
For while our cloisters echoed frosty feet,
And our long walks were stript as bare as
brooms,
We did but talk you over, pledge you all
In wassail; often, like as many girls--
Sick for the hollies and the yews of home-

-

As many little trifling Lilies--played

Charades and riddles as at Christmas
here,

And ~what's my thought~ and ~when~
and ~where~ and ~how~,

As here at Christmas.'

She remembered that:

A pleasant game, she thought: she liked
it more

Than magic music, forfeits, all the rest.

But these--what kind of tales did men tell
men,

She wondered, by themselves?

A half-disdain

Perched on the pouted blossom of her
lips:

And Walter nodded at me; '~He~ began,

The rest would follow, each in turn; and
so

We forged a sevenfold story. Kind? what
kind?

Chimeras, crotchets, Christmas
solecisms,

Seven-headed monsters only made to kill

Time by the fire in winter.'

'Kill him now,

The tyrant! kill him in the summer too,'

Said Lilia; 'Why not now?' the maiden
Aunt.

'Why not a summer's as a winter's tale?

A tale for summer as befits the time,

And something it should be to suit the
place,

Heroic, for a hero lies beneath,

Grave, solemn!

Walter warped his mouth at this

To something so mock-solemn, that I
laughed

And Lilia woke with sudden-thrilling mirth

An echo like a ghostly woodpecker,

Hid in the ruins; till the maiden Aunt

(A little sense of wrong had touched her
face

With colour) turned to me with 'As you
will;

Heroic if you will, or what you will,

Or be yourself you hero if you will.'

'Take Lilia, then, for heroine' clamoured
he,

'And make her some great Princess, six
feet high,

Grand, epic, homicidal; and be you

The Prince to win her!'

'Then follow me, the Prince,'

I answered, 'each be hero in his turn!

Seven and yet one, like shadows in a dream.--

Heroic seems our Princess as required--

But something made to suit with Time and place,

A Gothic ruin and a Grecian house,

A talk of college and of ladies' rights,

A feudal knight in silken masquerade,

And, yonder, shrieks and strange experiments

For which the good Sir Ralph had burnt them all--

This ~were~ a medley! we should have him back

Who told the "Winter's tale" to do it for us.

No matter: we will say whatever comes.

And let the ladies sing us, if they will,

From time to time, some ballad or a song

To give us breathing-space.'

So I began,

And the rest followed: and the women sang

Between the rougher voices of the men,

Like linnets in the pauses of the wind:

And here I give the story and the songs.

I

A prince I was, blue-eyed, and fair in
face,

Of temper amorous, as the first of May,

With lengths of yellow ringlet, like a girl,

For on my cradle shone the Northern star.

There lived an ancient legend in our
house.

Some sorcerer, whom a far-off grandsire
burnt

Because he cast no shadow, had foretold,

Dying, that none of all our blood should
know

The shadow from the substance, and that
one

Should come to fight with shadows and to
fall.

For so, my mother said, the story ran.

And, truly, waking dreams were, more or
less,

An old and strange affection of the house.

Myself too had weird seizures, Heaven
knows what:

On a sudden in the midst of men and
day,

And while I walked and talked as
heretofore,

I seemed to move among a world of
ghosts,

And feel myself the shadow of a dream.

Our great court-Galen poised his gilt-
head cane,

And pawed his beard, and muttered
'catalepsy'.

My mother pitying made a thousand
prayers;

My mother was as mild as any saint,

Half-canonized by all that looked on her,

So gracious was her tact and tenderness:

But my good father thought a king a
king;

He cared not for the affection of the
house;

He held his sceptre like a pedant's wand
To lash offence, and with long arms and
hands

Reached out, and picked offenders from
the mass

For judgment.

Now it chanced that I had been,

While life was yet in bud and blade,
bethrothed

To one, a neighbouring Princess: she to
me

Was proxy-wedded with a bootless calf

At eight years old; and still from time to
time

Came murmurs of her beauty from the
South,

And of her brethren, youths of puissance;

And still I wore her picture by my heart,

And one dark tress; and all around them
both

Sweet thoughts would swarm as bees
about their queen.

But when the days drew nigh that I
should wed,

My father sent ambassadors with furs

And jewels, gifts, to fetch her: these
brought back

A present, a great labour of the loom;

And therewithal an answer vague as
wind:

Besides, they saw the king; he took the
gifts;

He said there was a compact; that was
true:

But then she had a will; was he to blame?

And maiden fancies; loved to live alone

Among her women; certain, would not
wed.

That morning in the presence room I
stood

With Cyril and with Florian, my two
friends:

The first, a gentleman of broken means
(His father's fault) but given to starts and
bursts

Of revel; and the last, my other heart,
And almost my half-self, for still we
moved

Together, twinned as horse's ear and eye.
Now, while they spake, I saw my father's
face

Grow long and troubled like a rising
moon,

Inflamed with wrath: he started on his
feet,

Tore the king's letter, snowed it down,
and rent

The wonder of the loom through warp
and woof

From skirt to skirt; and at the last he
sware

That he would send a hundred thousand
men,

And bring her in a whirlwind: then he
chewed

The thrice-turned cud of wrath, and
cooked his spleen,

Communing with his captains of the war.

At last I spoke. 'My father, let me go.

It cannot be but some gross error lies

In this report, this answer of a king,

Whom all men rate as kind and
hospitable:

Or, maybe, I myself, my bride once seen,

Whate'er my grief to find her less than
fame,

May rue the bargain made.' And Florian
said:

'I have a sister at the foreign court,

Who moves about the Princess; she, you
know,

Who wedded with a nobleman from
thence:

He, dying lately, left her, as I hear,

The lady of three castles in that land:

Through her this matter might be sifted
clean.'

And Cyril whispered: 'Take me with you
too.'

Then laughing 'what, if these weird
seizures come

Upon you in those lands, and no one near

To point you out the shadow from the
truth!

Take me: I'll serve you better in a strait;

I grate on rusty hinges here:' but 'No!'

Roared the rough king, 'you shall not; we
ourselves

Will crush her pretty maiden fancies dead

In iron gauntlets: break the council up.'

But when the council broke, I rose and
past

Through the wild woods that hung about
the town;

Found a still place, and plucked her
likeness out;

Laid it on flowers, and watched it lying
bathed

In the green gleam of dewy-tasselled
trees:

What were those fancies? wherefore
break her troth?

Proud looked the lips: but while I
meditated

A wind arose and rushed upon the South,

And shook the songs, the whispers, and
the shrieks

Of the wild woods together; and a Voice

Went with it, 'Follow, follow, thou shalt
win.'

Then, ere the silver sickle of that month

Became her golden shield, I stole from
court

With Cyril and with Florian, unperceived,

Cat-footed through the town and half in
dread

To hear my father's clamour at our backs

With Ho! from some bay-window shake
the night;

But all was quiet: from the bastioned
walls

Like threaded spiders, one by one, we
dropt,

And flying reached the frontier: then we
crost

To a livelier land; and so by tilth and
grange,

And vines, and blowing bosks of
wilderness,

We gained the mother city thick with
towers,

And in the imperial palace found the king.

His name was Gama; cracked and small
his voice,

But bland the smile that like a wrinkling
wind

On glassy water drove his cheek in lines;

A little dry old man, without a star,

Not like a king: three days he feasted us,

And on the fourth I spake of why we
came,

And my bethrothed. 'You do us, Prince,'
he said,

Airing a snowy hand and signet gem,

'All honour. We remember love ourselves

In our sweet youth: there did a compact
pass

Long summers back, a kind of ceremony-
-

I think the year in which our olives failed.

I would you had her, Prince, with all my
heart,

With my full heart: but there were
widows here,

Two widows, Lady Psyche, Lady Blanche;

They fed her theories, in and out of place

Maintaining that with equal husbandry

The woman were an equal to the man.

They harped on this; with this our
banquets rang;

Our dances broke and buzzed in knots of
talk;

Nothing but this; my very ears were hot

To hear them: knowledge, so my
daughter held,

Was all in all: they had but been, she
thought,

As children; they must lose the child,
assume

The woman: then, Sir, awful odes she
wrote,

Too awful, sure, for what they treated of,
But all she is and does is awful; odes
About this losing of the child; and rhymes
And dismal lyrics, prophesying change
Beyond all reason: these the women
sang;

And they that know such things--I sought
but peace;

No critic I--would call them masterpieces:
They mastered ~me~. At last she begged
a boon,

A certain summer-palace which I have
Hard by your father's frontier: I said no,

Yet being an easy man, gave it: and
there,

All wild to found an University

For maidens, on the spur she fled; and
more

We know not,--only this: they see no
men,

Not even her brother Arac, nor the twins

Her brethren, though they love her, look
upon her

As on a kind of paragon; and I

(Pardon me saying it) were much loth to
breed

Dispute betwixt myself and mine: but
since

(And I confess with right) you think me
bound

In some sort, I can give you letters to
her;

And yet, to speak the truth, I rate your
chance

Almost at naked nothing.'

Thus the king;

And I, though nettled that he seemed to
slur

With garrulous ease and oily courtesies

Our formal compact, yet, not less (all
frets

But chafing me on fire to find my bride)

Went forth again with both my friends.
We rode

Many a long league back to the North. At
last

From hills, that looked across a land of
hope,

We dropt with evening on a rustic town
Set in a gleaming river's crescent-curve,
Close at the boundary of the liberties;

There, entered an old hostel, called mine
host

To council, plied him with his richest
wines,

And showed the late-writ letters of the king.

He with a long low sibilation, stared

As blank as death in marble; then exclaimed

Averring it was clear against all rules

For any man to go: but as his brain

Began to mellow, 'If the king,' he said,

'Had given us letters, was he bound to speak?

The king would bear him out;' and at the last--

The summer of the vine in all his veins--

'No doubt that we might make it worth
his while.

She once had past that way; he heard
her speak;

She scared him; life! he never saw the
like;

She looked as grand as doomsday and as
grave:

And he, he revered his liege-lady
there;

He always made a point to post with
mares;

His daughter and his housemaid were the
boys:

The land, he understood, for miles about

Was tilled by women; all the swine were
SOWS,

And all the dogs'--

But while he jested thus,

A thought flashed through me which I
clothed in act,

Remembering how we three presented
Maid

Or Nymph, or Goddess, at high tide of
feast,

In masque or pageant at my father's
court.

We sent mine host to purchase female
gear;

He brought it, and himself, a sight to
shake

The midriff of despair with laughter, help
To lace us up, till, each, in maiden
plumes

We rustled: him we gave a costly bribe
To guerdon silence, mounted our good
steeds,

And boldly ventured on the liberties.

We followed up the river as we rode,

And rode till midnight when the college
lights

Began to glitter firefly-like in copse

And linden alley: then we past an arch,

Whereon a woman-statue rose with wings
From four winged horses dark against the
stars;

And some inscription ran along the front,
But deep in shadow: further on we gained
A little street half garden and half house;

But scarce could hear each other speak
for noise

Of clocks and chimes, like silver hammers
falling

On silver anvils, and the splash and stir
Of fountains spouted up and showering
down

In meshes of the jasmine and the rose:
And all about us pealed the nightingale,
Rapt in her song, and careless of the
snare.

There stood a bust of Pallas for a sign,
By two sphere lamps blazoned like
Heaven and Earth

With constellation and with continent,
Above an entry: riding in, we called;

A plump-armed Ostleress and a stable
wench

Came running at the call, and helped us
down.

Then stept a buxom hostess forth, and
sailed,

Full-blown, before us into rooms which
gave

Upon a pillared porch, the bases lost

In laurel: her we asked of that and this,

And who were tutors. 'Lady Blanche' she
said,

'And Lady Psyche.' 'Which was prettiest,

Best-natured?' 'Lady Psyche.' 'Hers are
we,'

One voice, we cried; and I sat down and
wrote,

In such a hand as when a field of corn

Bows all its ears before the roaring East;

'Three ladies of the Northern empire pray

Your Highness would enroll them with
your own,

As Lady Psyche's pupils.'

This I sealed:

The seal was Cupid bent above a scroll,

And o'er his head Uranian Venus hung,

And raised the blinding bandage from his
eyes:

I gave the letter to be sent with dawn;

And then to bed, where half in doze I
seemed

To float about a glimmering night, and
watch

A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight,
swell

On some dark shore just seen that it was
rich.

As through the land at eve we went,

And plucked the ripened ears,

We fell out, my wife and I,

O we fell out I know not why,

And kissed again with tears.

And blessings on the falling out

That all the more endears,

When we fall out with those we love

And kiss again with tears!

For when we came where lies the child

We lost in other years,

There above the little grave,

O there above the little grave,

We kissed again with tears.

II

At break of day the College Portress
came:

She brought us Academic silks, in hue

The lilac, with a silken hood to each,

And zoned with gold; and now when
these were on,

And we as rich as moths from dusk
cocoon,

She, curtseying her obeisance, let us
know

The Princess Ida waited: out we paced,

I first, and following through the porch
that sang

All round with laurel, issued in a court

Compact of lucid marbles, bossed with
lengths

Of classic frieze, with ample awnings gay

Betwixt the pillars, and with great urns of
flowers.

The Muses and the Graces, grouped in
threes,

Enringed a billowing fountain in the
midst;

And here and there on lattice edges lay

Or book or lute; but hastily we past,

And up a flight of stairs into the hall.

There at a board by tome and paper sat,

With two tame leopards couched beside
her throne,

All beauty compassed in a female form,

The Princess; liker to the inhabitant

Of some clear planet close upon the Sun,

Than our man's earth; such eyes were in
her head,

And so much grace and power, breathing
down

From over her arched brows, with every
turn

Lived through her to the tips of her long
hands,

And to her feet. She rose her height, and
said:

'We give you welcome: not without
redound

Of use and glory to yourselves ye come,

The first-fruits of the stranger: aftertime,

And that full voice which circles round the
grave,

Will rank you nobly, mingled up with me.

What! are the ladies of your land so tall?

'We of the court' said Cyril. 'From the
court'

She answered, 'then ye know the Prince?'
and he:

'The climax of his age! as though there
were

One rose in all the world, your Highness
that,

He worships your ideal:' she replied:

'We scarcely thought in our own hall to
hear

This barren verbiage, current among
men,

Light coin, the tinsel clink of compliment.

Your flight from out your bookless wilds
would seem

As arguing love of knowledge and of
power;

Your language proves you still the child.
Indeed,

We dream not of him: when we set our
hand

To this great work, we purposed with
ourselves

Never to wed. You likewise will do well,

Ladies, in entering here, to cast and fling

The tricks, which make us toys of men,
that so,

Some future time, if so indeed you will,

You may with those self-styled our lords
ally

Your fortunes, justlier balanced, scale
with scale.'

At those high words, we conscious of
ourselves,

Perused the matting: then an officer

Rose up, and read the statutes, such as
these:

Not for three years to correspond with
home;

Not for three years to cross the liberties;

Not for three years to speak with any
men;

And many more, which hastily
subscribed,

We entered on the boards: and 'Now,'
she cried,

'Ye are green wood, see ye warp not.
Look, our hall!

Our statues!--not of those that men
desire,

Sleek Odalisques, or oracles of mode,

Nor stunted squaws of West or East; but
she

That taught the Sabine how to rule, and
she

The foundress of the Babylonian wall,

The Carian Artemisia strong in war,

The Rhodope, that built the pyramid,

Clelia, Cornelia, with the Palmyrene

That fought Aurelian, and the Roman
brows

Of Agrippina. Dwell with these, and lose

Convention, since to look on noble forms

Makes noble through the sensuous
organism

That which is higher. O lift your natures
up:

Embrace our aims: work out your
freedom. Girls,

Knowledge is now no more a fountain
sealed:

Drink deep, until the habits of the slave,
The sins of emptiness, gossip and spite
And slander, die. Better not be at all
Than not be noble. Leave us: you may
go:

Today the Lady Psyche will harangue
The fresh arrivals of the week before;
For they press in from all the provinces,
And fill the hive.'

She spoke, and bowing waved

Dismissal: back again we crost the court

To Lady Psyche's: as we entered in,

There sat along the forms, like morning
doves

That sun their milky bosoms on the
thatch,

A patient range of pupils; she herself

Erect behind a desk of satin-wood,

A quick brunette, well-moulded, falcon-
eyed,

And on the hither side, or so she looked,

Of twenty summers. At her left, a child,

In shining draperies, headed like a star,

Her maiden babe, a double April old,

Aglaïa slept. We sat: the Lady glanced:

Then Florian, but not livelier than the
dame

That whispered 'Asses' ears', among the
sedge,

'My sister.' 'Comely, too, by all that's
fair,'

Said Cyril. 'Oh hush, hush!' and she
began.

'This world was once a fluid haze of light,

Till toward the centre set the starry tides,

And eddied into suns, that wheeling cast
The planets: then the monster, then the
man;

Tattooed or woaded, winter-clad in skins,
Raw from the prime, and crushing down
his mate;

As yet we find in barbarous isles, and
here

Among the lowest.'

Thereupon she took

A bird's-eye-view of all the ungracious
past;

Glanced at the legendary Amazon

As emblematic of a nobler age;

Appraised the Lycian custom, spoke of
those

That lay at wine with Lar and Lucumo;

Ran down the Persian, Grecian, Roman
lines

Of empire, and the woman's state in
each,

How far from just; till warming with her
theme

She fulminated out her scorn of laws
Salique

And little-footed China, touched on
Mahomet

With much contempt, and came to
chivalry:

When some respect, however slight, was
paid

To woman, superstition all awry:

However then commenced the dawn: a
beam

Had slanted forward, falling in a land

Of promise; fruit would follow. Deep,
indeed,

Their debt of thanks to her who first had
dared

To leap the rotten pales of prejudice,

Disyoke their necks from custom, and
assert

None lordlier than themselves but that
which made

Woman and man. She had founded; they
must build.

Here might they learn whatever men
were taught:

Let them not fear: some said their heads
were less:

Some men's were small; not they the
least of men;

For often fineness compensated size:

Besides the brain was like the hand, and
grew

With using; thence the man's, if more
was more;

He took advantage of his strength to be

First in the field: some ages had been
lost;

But woman ripened earlier, and her life

Was longer; and albeit their glorious
names

Were fewer, scattered stars, yet since in
truth

The highest is the measure of the man,

And not the Kaffir, Hottentot, Malay,

Nor those horn-handed breakers of the
glebe,

But Homer, Plato, Verulam; even so

With woman: and in arts of government

Elizabeth and others; arts of war

The peasant Joan and others; arts of
grace

Sappho and others vied with any man:

And, last not least, she who had left her
place,

And bowed her state to them, that they
might grow

To use and power on this Oasis, lapt

In the arms of leisure, sacred from the
blight

Of ancient influence and scorn.

At last

She rose upon a wind of prophecy

Dilating on the future; 'everywhere

Who heads in council, two beside the
hearth,

Two in the tangled business of the world,

Two in the liberal offices of life,

Two plummet dropt for one to sound the
abyss

Of science, and the secrets of the mind:

Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more:

And everywhere the broad and bounteous
Earth

Should bear a double growth of those
rare souls,

Poets, whose thoughts enrich the blood of the world.'

She ended here, and beckoned us: the rest

Parted; and, glowing full-faced welcome, she

Began to address us, and was moving on

In gratulation, till as when a boat

Tacks, and the slackened sail flaps, all her voice

Faltering and fluttering in her throat, she cried

'My brother!' 'Well, my sister.' 'O,' she said,

'What do you here? and in this dress? and these?

Why who are these? a wolf within the fold!

A pack of wolves! the Lord be gracious to me!

A plot, a plot, a plot to ruin all!'

'No plot, no plot,' he answered. 'Wretched boy,

How saw you not the inscription on the gate,

LET NO MAN ENTER IN ON PAIN OF DEATH?'

'And if I had,' he answered, 'who could think

The softer Adams of your Academe,

O sister, Sirens though they be, were
such

As chanted on the blanching bones of
men?'

'But you will find it otherwise' she said.

'You jest: ill jesting with edge-tools! my
vow

Binds me to speak, and O that iron will,

That axelike edge unturnable, our Head,

The Princess.' 'Well then, Psyche, take my
life,

And nail me like a weasel on a grange

For warning: bury me beside the gate,

And cut this epitaph above my bones;

~Here lies a brother by a sister slain,

All for the common good of womankind.~'

'Let me die too,' said Cyril, 'having seen

And heard the Lady Psyche.'

I struck in:

'Albeit so masked, Madam, I love the truth;

Receive it; and in me behold the Prince

Your countryman, affianced years ago

To the Lady Ida: here, for here she was,

And thus (what other way was left) I
came.'

'O Sir, O Prince, I have no country; none;

If any, this; but none. Whate'er I was

Disrooted, what I am is grafted here.

Affianced, Sir? love-whispers may not
breathe

Within this vestal limit, and how should I,

Who am not mine, say, live: the
thunderbolt

Hangs silent; but prepare: I speak; it
falls.'

'Yet pause,' I said: 'for that inscription
there,

I think no more of deadly lurks therein,
Than in a clapper clapping in a garth,
To scare the fowl from fruit: if more there
be,
If more and acted on, what follows? war;
Your own work marred: for this your
Academe,
Whichever side be Victor, in the halloo
Will topple to the trumpet down, and pass
With all fair theories only made to gild
A stormless summer.' 'Let the Princess
judge
Of that' she said: 'farewell, Sir--and to
you.

I shudder at the sequel, but I go.'

'Are you that Lady Psyche,' I rejoined,

'The fifth in line from that old Florian,

Yet hangs his portrait in my father's hall

(The gaunt old Baron with his beetle brow

Sun-shaded in the heat of dusty fights)

As he bestrode my Grandsire, when he
fell,

And all else fled? we point to it, and we
say,

The loyal warmth of Florian is not cold,

But branches current yet in kindred
veins.'

'Are you that Psyche,' Florian added; 'she

With whom I sang about the morning
hills,

Flung ball, flew kite, and raced the purple
fly,

And snared the squirrel of the glen? are
you

That Psyche, wont to bind my throbbing
brow,

To smoothe my pillow, mix the foaming
draught

Of fever, tell me pleasant tales, and read

My sickness down to happy dreams? are
you

That brother-sister Psyche, both in one?

You were that Psyche, but what are you now?'

'You are that Psyche,' said Cyril, 'for whom

I would be that for ever which I seem,

Woman, if I might sit beside your feet,

And glean your scattered sapience.'

Then once more,

'Are you that Lady Psyche,' I began,

'That on her bridal morn before she past

From all her old companions, when the kind

Kissed her pale cheek, declared that
ancient ties

Would still be dear beyond the southern
hills;

That were there any of our people there

In want or peril, there was one to hear

And help them? look! for such are these
and I.'

'Are you that Psyche,' Florian asked, 'to
whom,

In gentler days, your arrow-wounded
fawn

Came flying while you sat beside the
well?

The creature laid his muzzle on your lap,

And sobbed, and you sobbed with it, and
the blood

Was sprinkled on your kirtle, and you
wept.

That was fawn's blood, not brother's, yet
you wept.

O by the bright head of my little niece,
You were that Psyche, and what are you
now?'

'You are that Psyche,' Cyril said again,
'The mother of the sweetest little maid,
That ever crowed for kisses.'

'Out upon it!'

She answered, 'peace! and why should I
not play

The Spartan Mother with emotion, be

The Lucius Junius Brutus of my kind?

Him you call great: he for the common
weal,

The fading politics of mortal Rome,

As I might slay this child, if good need
were,

Slew both his sons: and I, shall I, on
whom

The secular emancipation turns

Of half this world, be swerved from right
to save

A prince, a brother? a little will I yield.

Best so, perchance, for us, and well for you.

O hard, when love and duty clash! I fear

My conscience will not count me fleckless;
yet--

Hear my conditions: promise (otherwise

You perish) as you came, to slip away

Today, tomorrow, soon: it shall be said,

These women were too barbarous, would
not learn;

They fled, who might have shamed us:
promise, all.'

What could we else, we promised each;
and she,

Like some wild creature newly-caged,
commenced

A to-and-fro, so pacing till she paused

By Florian; holding out her lily arms

Took both his hands, and smiling faintly
said:

'I knew you at the first: though you have
grown

You scarce have altered: I am sad and
glad

To see you, Florian. ~I~ give thee to
death

My brother! it was duty spoke, not I.

My needful seeming harshness, pardon it.

Our mother, is she well?'

With that she kissed

His forehead, then, a moment after, clung

About him, and betwixt them blossomed
up

From out a common vein of memory

Sweet household talk, and phrases of the
hearth,

And far allusion, till the gracious dews

Began to glisten and to fall: and while

They stood, so rapt, we gazing, came a
voice,

'I brought a message here from Lady
Blanche.'

Back started she, and turning round we
saw

The Lady Blanche's daughter where she
stood,

Melissa, with her hand upon the lock,

A rosy blonde, and in a college gown,

That clad her like an April daffodilly

(Her mother's colour) with her lips apart,

And all her thoughts as fair within her
eyes,

As bottom agates seen to wave and float

In crystal currents of clear morning seas.

So stood that same fair creature at the door.

Then Lady Psyche, 'Ah--Melissa--you!

You heard us?' and Melissa, 'O pardon me

I heard, I could not help it, did not wish:

But, dearest Lady, pray you fear me not,

Nor think I bear that heart within my breast,

To give three gallant gentlemen to death.'

'I trust you,' said the other, 'for we two

Were always friends, none closer, elm and vine:

But yet your mother's jealous
temperament--

Let not your prudence, dearest, drowse,
or prove

The Danaïd of a leaky vase, for fear

This whole foundation ruin, and I lose

My honour, these their lives.' 'Ah, fear me
not'

Replied Melissa; 'no--I would not tell,

No, not for all Aspasia's cleverness,

No, not to answer, Madam, all those hard
things

That Sheba came to ask of Solomon.'

'Be it so' the other, 'that we still may lead

The new light up, and culminate in peace,
For Solomon may come to Sheba yet.'

Said Cyril, 'Madam, he the wisest man

Feasted the woman wisest then, in halls

Of Lebanonian cedar: nor should you

(Though, Madam, ~you~ should answer,
~we~ would ask)

Less welcome find among us, if you came

Among us, debtors for our lives to you,

Myself for something more.' He said not
what,

But 'Thanks,' she answered 'Go: we have
been too long

Together: keep your hoods about the
face;

They do so that affect abstraction here.

Speak little; mix not with the rest; and
hold

Your promise: all, I trust, may yet be
well.'

We turned to go, but Cyril took the child,

And held her round the knees against his
waist,

And blew the swollen cheek of a
trumpeter,

While Psyche watched them, smiling, and
the child

Pushed her flat hand against his face and
laughed;

And thus our conference closed.

And then we strolled

For half the day through stately theatres

Benched crescent-wise. In each we sat,
we heard

The grave Professor. On the lecture slate

The circle rounded under female hands

With flawless demonstration: followed
then

A classic lecture, rich in sentiment,

With scraps of thunderous Epic lilted out

By violet-hooded Doctors, elegies

And quoted odes, and jewels five-words-
long

That on the stretched forefinger of all
Time

Sparkle for ever: then we dipt in all

That treats of whatsoever is, the state,

The total chronicles of man, the mind,

The morals, something of the frame, the
rock,

The star, the bird, the fish, the shell, the
flower,

Electric, chemic laws, and all the rest,

And whatsoever can be taught and
known;

Till like three horses that have broken
fence,

And glutted all night long breast-deep in
corn,

We issued gorged with knowledge, and I
spoke:

'Why, Sirs, they do all this as well as we.'

'They hunt old trails' said Cyril 'very well;

But when did woman ever yet invent?'

'Ungracious!' answered Florian; 'have you
learnt

No more from Psyche's lecture, you that
talked

The trash that made me sick, and almost
sad?'

'O trash' he said, 'but with a kernel in it.

Should I not call her wise, who made me
wise?

And learnt? I learnt more from her in a
flash,

Than in my brainpan were an empty hull,

And every Muse tumbled a science in.

A thousand hearts lie fallow in these
halls,

And round these halls a thousand baby
loves

Fly twanging headless arrows at the
hearts,

Whence follows many a vacant pang; but
O

With me, Sir, entered in the bigger boy,

The Head of all the golden-shafted firm,

The long-limbed lad that had a Psyche
too;

He cleft me through the stomacher; and
now

What think you of it, Florian? do I chase

The substance or the shadow? will it
hold?

I have no sorcerer's malison on me,

No ghostly hauntings like his Highness. I

Flatter myself that always everywhere

I know the substance when I see it. Well,

Are castles shadows? Three of them? Is she

The sweet proprietress a shadow? If not,

Shall those three castles patch my tattered coat?

For dear are those three castles to my wants,

And dear is sister Psyche to my heart,

And two dear things are one of double worth,

And much I might have said, but that my
zone

Unmanned me: then the Doctors! O to
hear

The Doctors! O to watch the thirsty plants

Imbibing! once or twice I thought to roar,

To break my chain, to shake my mane:
but thou,

Modulate me, Soul of mincing mimicry!

Make liquid treble of that bassoon, my
throat;

Abase those eyes that ever loved to meet

Star-sisters answering under crescent
brows;

Abate the stride, which speaks of man,
and loose

A flying charm of blushes o'er this cheek,

Where they like swallows coming out of
time

Will wonder why they came: but hark the
bell

For dinner, let us go!'

And in we streamed

Among the columns, pacing staid and still

By twos and threes, till all from end to
end

With beauties every shade of brown and
fair

In colours gayer than the morning mist,
The long hall glittered like a bed of
flowers.

How might a man not wander from his
wits

Pierced through with eyes, but that I kept
mine own

Intent on her, who rapt in glorious
dreams,

The second-sight of some Astræan age,

Sat compassed with professors: they, the
while,

Discussed a doubt and tost it to and fro:

A clamour thickened, mixt with inmost
terms

Of art and science: Lady Blanche alone
Of faded form and haughtiest lineaments,
With all her autumn tresses falsely
brown,
Shot sidelong daggers at us, a tiger-cat
In act to spring.

At last a solemn grace

Concluded, and we sought the gardens:
there

One walked reciting by herself, and one
In this hand held a volume as to read,
And smoothed a petted peacock down
with that:

Some to a low song oared a shallop by,

Or under arches of the marble bridge

Hung, shadowed from the heat: some hid
and sought

In the orange thickets: others tost a ball

Above the fountain-jets, and back again

With laughter: others lay about the
lawns,

Of the older sort, and murmured that
their May

Was passing: what was learning unto
them?

They wished to marry; they could rule a
house;

Men hated learned women: but we three

Sat muffled like the Fates; and often
came

Melissa hitting all we saw with shafts

Of gentle satire, kin to charity,

That harmed not: then day droopt; the
chapel bells

Called us: we left the walks; we mixt with
those

Six hundred maidens clad in purest white,

Before two streams of light from wall to
wall,

While the great organ almost burst his
pipes,

Groaning for power, and rolling through
the court

A long melodious thunder to the sound
Of solemn psalms, and silver litanies,
The work of Ida, to call down from
Heaven

A blessing on her labours for the world.

Sweet and low, sweet and low,

Wind of the western sea,

Low, low, breathe and blow,

Wind of the western sea!

Over the rolling waters go,

Come from the dying moon, and blow,

Blow him again to me;

While my little one, while my pretty one,
sleeps.

Sleep and rest, sleep and rest,

Father will come to thee soon;

Rest, rest, on mother's breast,

Father will come to thee soon;

Father will come to his babe in the nest,

Silver sails all out of the west

Under the silver moon:

Sleep, my little one, sleep, my pretty
one, sleep.

III

Morn in the wake of the morning star

Came furrowing all the orient into gold.

We rose, and each by other drest with
care

Descended to the court that lay three
parts

In shadow, but the Muses' heads were
touched

Above the darkness from their native
East.

There while we stood beside the fount,
and watched

Or seemed to watch the dancing bubble,
approached

Melissa, tinged with wan from lack of
sleep,

Or grief, and glowing round her dewy
eyes

The circled Iris of a night of tears;

'And fly,' she cried, 'O fly, while yet you
may!

My mother knows:' and when I asked her
'how,'

'My fault' she wept 'my fault! and yet not
mine;

Yet mine in part. O hear me, pardon me.

My mother, 'tis her wont from night to
night

To rail at Lady Psyche and her side.

She says the Princess should have been
the Head,

Herself and Lady Psyche the two arms;

And so it was agreed when first they
came;

But Lady Psyche was the right hand now,

And the left, or not, or seldom used;

Hers more than half the students, all the
love.

And so last night she fell to canvass you:

~Her~ countrywomen! she did not envy her.

"Who ever saw such wild barbarians?

Girls?--more like men!" and at these words the snake,

My secret, seemed to stir within my breast;

And oh, Sirs, could I help it, but my cheek

Began to burn and burn, and her lynx eye

To fix and make me hotter, till she laughed:

"O marvellously modest maiden, you!

Men! girls, like men! why, if they had been men

You need not set your thoughts in rubric
thus

For wholesale comment." Pardon, I am
shamed

That I must needs repeat for my excuse

What looks so little graceful: "men" (for
still

My mother went revolving on the word)

"And so they are,--very like men indeed--

And with that woman closeted for hours!"

Then came these dreadful words out one
by one,

"Why--these--~are~--men:" I
shuddered: "and you know it." "O ask me
nothing," I said: "And she knows too,

And she conceals it." So my mother
clutched

The truth at once, but with no word from
me;

And now thus early risen she goes to
inform

The Princess: Lady Psyche will be
crushed;

But you may yet be saved, and therefore
fly;

But heal me with your pardon ere you
go.'

'What pardon, sweet Melissa, for a blush?'

Said Cyril: 'Pale one, blush again: than
wear

Those lilies, better blush our lives away.

Yet let us breathe for one hour more in
Heaven'

He added, 'lest some classic Angel speak

In scorn of us, "They mounted,
Ganymedes,

To tumble, Vulcans, on the second morn."

But I will melt this marble into wax

To yield us farther furlough:' and he
went.

Melissa shook her doubtful curls, and
thought

He scarce would prosper. 'Tell us,' Florian asked,

'How grew this feud betwixt the right and left.'

'O long ago,' she said, 'betwixt these two
Division smoulders hidden; 'tis my
mother,

Too jealous, often fretful as the wind
Pent in a crevice: much I bear with her:
I never knew my father, but she says
(God help her) she was wedded to a fool;
And still she railed against the state of
things.

She had the care of Lady Ida's youth,

And from the Queen's decease she
brought her up.

But when your sister came she won the
heart

Of Ida: they were still together, grew

(For so they said themselves)
inoculated;

Consonant chords that shiver to one
note;

One mind in all things: yet my mother
still

Affirms your Psyche thieved her theories,

And angled with them for her pupil's love:

She calls her plagiarist; I know not what:

But I must go: I dare not tarry,' and light,

As flies the shadow of a bird, she fled.

Then murmured Florian gazing after her,

'An open-hearted maiden, true and pure.

If I could love, why this were she: how
pretty

Her blushing was, and how she blushed
again,

As if to close with Cyril's random wish:

Not like your Princess crammed with
erring pride,

Nor like poor Psyche whom she drags in
tow.'

'The crane,' I said, 'may chatter of the crane,

The dove may murmur of the dove, but I

An eagle clang an eagle to the sphere.

My princess, O my princess! true she errs,

But in her own grand way: being herself

Three times more noble than three score of men,

She sees herself in every woman else,

And so she wears her error like a crown

To blind the truth and me: for her, and her,

Hebes are they to hand ambrosia, mix

The nectar; but--ah she--whene'er she
moves

The Samian Herè rises and she speaks

A Memnon smitten with the morning
Sun.'

So saying from the court we paced, and
gained

The terrace ranged along the Northern
front,

And leaning there on those balusters,
high

Above the empurpled champaign, drank
the gale

That blown about the foliage underneath,

And sated with the innumerable rose,
Beat balm upon our eyelids. Hither came
Cyril, and yawning 'O hard task,' he
cried;

'No fighting shadows here! I forced a way
Through opposition crabbed and gnarled.

Better to clear prime forests, heave and
thump

A league of street in summer solstice
down,

Than hammer at this reverend
gentlewoman.

I knocked and, bidden, entered; found
her there

At point to move, and settled in her eyes

The green malignant light of coming
storm.

Sir, I was courteous, every phrase well-
oiled,

As man's could be; yet maiden-meeek I
prayed

Concealment: she demanded who we
were,

And why we came? I fabled nothing fair,

But, your example pilot, told her all.

Up went the hushed amaze of hand and
eye.

But when I dwelt upon your old affiance,

She answered sharply that I talked
astray.

I urged the fierce inscription on the gate,

And our three lives. True--we had limed
ourselves

With open eyes, and we must take the
chance.

But such extremes, I told her, well might
harm

The woman's cause. "Not more than
now," she said,

"So puddled as it is with favouritism."

I tried the mother's heart. Shame might
befall

Melissa, knowing, saying not she knew:

Her answer was "Leave me to deal with that."

I spoke of war to come and many deaths,

And she replied, her duty was to speak,

And duty duty, clear of consequences.

I grew discouraged, Sir; but since I knew

No rock so hard but that a little wave

May beat admission in a thousand years,

I recommenced; "Decide not ere you
pause.

I find you here but in the second place,

Some say the third--the authentic
foundress you.

I offer boldly: we will seat you highest:

Wink at our advent: help my prince to
gain

His rightful bride, and here I promise you

Some palace in our land, where you shall
reign

The head and heart of all our fair she-
world,

And your great name flow on with
broadening time

For ever." Well, she balanced this a little,

And told me she would answer us today,

meantime be mute: thus much, nor more
I gained.'

He ceasing, came a message from the
Head.

'That afternoon the Princess rode to take

The dip of certain strata to the North.

Would we go with her? we should find the
land

Worth seeing; and the river made a fall

Out yonder:' then she pointed on to
where

A double hill ran up his furrowy forks

Beyond the thick-leaved platans of the
vale.

Agreed to, this, the day fled on through
all

Its range of duties to the appointed hour.

Then summoned to the porch we went.
She stood

Among her maidens, higher by the head,

Her back against a pillar, her foot on one

Of those tame leopards. Kittenlike he
rolled

And pawed about her sandal. I drew
near;

I gazed. On a sudden my strange seizure
came

Upon me, the weird vision of our house:

The Princess Ida seemed a hollow show,
Her gay-furred cats a painted fantasy,
Her college and her maidens, empty
masks,

And I myself the shadow of a dream,
For all things were and were not. Yet I
felt

My heart beat thick with passion and with
awe;

Then from my breast the involuntary sigh
Broke, as she smote me with the light of
eyes

That lent my knee desire to kneel, and
shook

My pulses, till to horse we got, and so
Went forth in long retinue following up
The river as it narrowed to the hills.

I rode beside her and to me she said:

'O friend, we trust that you esteemed us
not

Too harsh to your companion
yestermorn;

Unwillingly we spake.' 'No--not to her,'

I answered, 'but to one of whom we
spake

Your Highness might have seemed the
thing you say.'

'Again?' she cried, 'are you
ambassadors

From him to me? we give you, being
strange,

A license: speak, and let the topic die.'

I stammered that I knew him--could have
wished--

'Our king expects--was there no
precontract?

There is no truer-hearted--ah, you seem

All he prefigured, and he could not see

The bird of passage flying south but
longed

To follow: surely, if your Highness keep

Your purport, you will shock him even to death,

Or baser courses, children of despair.'

'Poor boy,' she said, 'can he not read--no books?

Quoit, tennis, ball--no games? nor deals in that

Which men delight in, martial exercise?

To nurse a blind ideal like a girl,

Methinks he seems no better than a girl;

As girls were once, as we ourself have been:

We had our dreams; perhaps he mixt with them:

We touch on our dead self, nor shun to
do it,

Being other--since we learnt our meaning
here,

To lift the woman's fallen divinity

Upon an even pedestal with man.'

She paused, and added with a haughtier
smile

'And as to precontracts, we move, my
friend,

At no man's beck, but know ourself and
thee,

O Vashti, noble Vashti! Summoned out

She kept her state, and left the drunken
king

To brawl at Shushan underneath the
palms.'

'Alas your Highness breathes full East,' I
said,

'On that which leans to you. I know the
Prince,

I prize his truth: and then how vast a
work

To assail this gray preëminence of man!

You grant me license; might I use it?
think;

Ere half be done perchance your life may
fail;

Then comes the feebler heiress of your
plan,

And takes and ruins all; and thus your
pains

May only make that footprint upon sand

Which old-recurring waves of prejudice

Resmooth to nothing: might I dread that
you,

With only Fame for spouse and your great
deeds

For issue, yet may live in vain, and miss,

Meanwhile, what every woman counts her
due,

Love, children, happiness?'

And she exclaimed,

'Peace, you young savage of the Northern wild!

What! though your Prince's love were like a God's,

Have we not made ourself the sacrifice?

You are bold indeed: we are not talked to thus:

Yet will we say for children, would they grew

Like field-flowers everywhere! we like them well:

But children die; and let me tell you, girl,

Howe'er you babble, great deeds cannot die;

They with the sun and moon renew their
light

For ever, blessing those that look on
them.

Children--that men may pluck them from
our hearts,

Kill us with pity, break us with ourselves--

O--children--there is nothing upon earth

More miserable than she that has a son

And sees him err: nor would we work for
fame;

Though she perhaps might reap the
applause of Great,

Who earns the one POU STO whence
after-hands

May move the world, though she herself
effect

But little: wherefore up and act, nor
shrink

For fear our solid aim be dissipated

By frail successors. Would, indeed, we
had been,

In lieu of many mortal flies, a race

Of giants living, each, a thousand years,

That we might see our own work out, and
watch

The sandy footprint harden into stone.'

I answered nothing, doubtful in myself

If that strange Poet-princess with her
grand

Imaginations might at all be won.

And she broke out interpreting my
thoughts:

'No doubt we seem a kind of monster to
you;

We are used to that: for women, up till
this

Cramped under worse than South-sea-
isle taboo,

Dwarfs of the gynæceum, fail so far

In high desire, they know not, cannot
guess

How much their welfare is a passion to
us.

If we could give them surer, quicker
proof--

Oh if our end were less achievable

By slow approaches, than by single act

Of immolation, any phase of death,

We were as prompt to spring against the
pikes,

Or down the fiery gulf as talk of it,

To compass our dear sisters' liberties.'

She bowed as if to veil a noble tear;

And up we came to where the river
sloped

To plunge in cataract, shattering on black
blocks

A breadth of thunder. O'er it shook the
woods,

And danced the colour, and, below, stuck
out

The bones of some vast bulk that lived
and roared

Before man was. She gazed awhile and
said,

'As these rude bones to us, are we to her

That will be.' 'Dare we dream of that,' I
asked,

'Which wrought us, as the workman and
his work,

That practice betters?' 'How,' she cried,
'you love

The metaphysics! read and earn our
prize,

A golden brooch: beneath an emerald
plane

Sits Diotima, teaching him that died

Of hemlock; our device; wrought to the
life;

She rapt upon her subject, he on her:

For there are schools for all.' 'And yet' I
said

'Methinks I have not found among them
all

One anatomic.' 'Nay, we thought of that,'

She answered, 'but it pleased us not: in truth

We shudder but to dream our maids should ape

Those monstrous males that carve the living hound,

And cram him with the fragments of the grave,

Or in the dark dissolving human heart,

And holy secrets of this microcosm,

Dabbling a shameless hand with shameful jest,

Encarnalize their spirits: yet we know

Knowledge is knowledge, and this matter hangs:

Howbeit ourself, foreseeing casualty,

Nor willing men should come among us, learnt,

For many weary moons before we came,

This craft of healing. Were you sick, ourself

Would tend upon you. To your question now,

Which touches on the workman and his work.

Let there be light and there was light: 'tis so:

For was, and is, and will be, are but is;

And all creation is one act at once,
The birth of light: but we that are not all,
As parts, can see but parts, now this, now
that,

And live, perforce, from thought to
thought, and make

One act a phantom of succession: thus

Our weakness somehow shapes the
shadow, Time;

But in the shadow will we work, and
mould

The woman to the fuller day.'

She spake

With kindled eyes; we rode a league
beyond,

And, o'er a bridge of pinewood crossing,
came

On flowery levels underneath the crag,

Full of all beauty. 'O how sweet' I said

(For I was half-oblivious of my mask)

'To linger here with one that loved us.'
'Yea,'

She answered, 'or with fair philosophies

That lift the fancy; for indeed these fields

Are lovely, lovelier not the Elysian lawns,

Where paced the Demigods of old, and
saw

The soft white vapour streak the crownèd
towers

Built to the Sun:' then, turning to her
maids,

'Pitch our pavilion here upon the sward;

Lay out the viands.' At the word, they
raised

A tent of satin, elaborately wrought

With fair Corinna's triumph; here she
stood,

Engirt with many a florid maiden-cheek,

The woman-conqueror; woman-
conquered there

The bearded Victor of ten-thousand
hymns,

And all the men mourned at his side: but
we

Set forth to climb; then, climbing, Cyril
kept

With Psyche, with Melissa Florian, I

With mine affianced. Many a little hand

Glanced like a touch of sunshine on the
rocks,

Many a light foot shone like a jewel set

In the dark crag: and then we turned, we
wound

About the cliffs, the copses, out and in,

Hammering and clinking, chattering stony
names

Of shales and hornblende, rag and trap
and tuff,

Amygdaloid and trachyte, till the Sun

Grew broader toward his death and fell,
and all

The rosy heights came out above the
lawns.

The splendour falls on castle walls

And snowy summits old in story:

The long light shakes across the lakes,

And the wild cataract leaps in glory.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes
flying,

Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying,
dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,

And thinner, clearer, farther going!

O sweet and far from cliff and scar

The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!

Blow, let us hear the purple glens
replying:

Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying,
dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,

They faint on hill or field or river:

Our echoes roll from soul to soul,

And grow for ever and for ever.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes
flying,

And answer, echoes, answer, dying,
dying, dying.

IV

'There sinks the nebulous star we call the
Sun,

If that hypothesis of theirs be sound'

Said Ida; 'let us down and rest;' and we

Down from the lean and wrinkled
precipices,

By every coppice-feathered chasm and
cleft,

Dropt through the ambrosial gloom to
where below

No bigger than a glow-worm shone the
tent

Lamp-lit from the inner. Once she leaned
on me,

Descending; once or twice she lent her
hand,

And blissful palpitations in the blood,

Stirring a sudden transport rose and fell.

But when we planted level feet, and dipt

Beneath the satin dome and entered in,

There leaning deep in broidered down we
sank

Our elbows: on a tripod in the midst

A fragrant flame rose, and before us
glowed

Fruit, blossom, viand, amber wine, and
gold.

Then she, 'Let some one sing to us:
lightlier move The minutes fledged with
music:' and a maid,

Of those beside her, smote her harp, and
sang.

'Tears, idle tears, I know not what they
mean,

Tears from the depth of some divine
despair

Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no
more.

'Fresh as the first beam glittering on a
sail,

That brings our friends up from the
underworld,

Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the
verge;

So sad, so fresh, the days that are no
more.

'Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer
dawns

The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds

To dying ears, when unto dying eyes

The casement slowly grows a glimmering
square;

So sad, so strange, the days that are no
more.

'Dear as remembered kisses after death,

And sweet as those by hopeless fancy
feigned

On lips that are for others; deep as love,

Deep as first love, and wild with all
regret;

O Death in Life, the days that are no more.'

She ended with such passion that the tear,

She sang of, shook and fell, an erring pearl

Lost in her bosom: but with some disdain

Answered the Princess, 'If indeed there haunt

About the mouldered lodges of the Past

So sweet a voice and vague, fatal to men,

Well needs it we should cram our ears with wool

And so pace by: but thine are fancies hatched

In silken-folded idleness; nor is it

Wiser to weep a true occasion lost,

But trim our sails, and let old bygones be,

While down the streams that float us
each and all

To the issue, goes, like glittering bergs of
ice,

Throne after throne, and molten on the
waste

Becomes a cloud: for all things serve
their time

Toward that great year of equal might
and rights,

Nor would I fight with iron laws, in the
end

Found golden: let the past be past; let be

Their cancelled Babels: though the rough
kex break

The starred mosaic, and the beard-blown
goat

Hang on the shaft, and the wild figtree
split

Their monstrous idols, care not while we
hear

A trumpet in the distance pealing news

Of better, and Hope, a poisoning eagle,
burns

Above the unrisen morrow:' then to me;

'Know you no song of your own land,' she
said,

'Not such as moans about the retrospect,
But deals with the other distance and the
hues

Of promise; not a death's-head at the
wine.'

Then I remembered one myself had
made,

What time I watched the swallow winging
south

From mine own land, part made long
since, and part

Now while I sang, and maidenlike as far

As I could ape their treble, did I sing.

'O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South,

Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,

And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.

'O tell her, Swallow, thou that knowest
each,

That bright and fierce and fickle is the
South,

And dark and true and tender is the
North.

'O Swallow, Swallow, if I could follow, and
light

Upon her lattice, I would pipe and trill,

And cheep and twitter twenty million
loves.

'O were I thou that she might take me in,
And lay me on her bosom, and her heart
Would rock the snowy cradle till I died.

'Why lingereth she to clothe her heart
with love,

Delaying as the tender ash delays

To clothe herself, when all the woods are
green?

'O tell her, Swallow, that thy brood is
flown:

Say to her, I do but wanton in the South,

But in the North long since my nest is made.

'O tell her, brief is life but love is long,

And brief the sun of summer in the North,

And brief the moon of beauty in the South.

'O Swallow, flying from the golden woods,

Fly to her, and pipe and woo her, and make her mine,

And tell her, tell her, that I follow thee.'

I ceased, and all the ladies, each at each,

Like the Ithacensian suitors in old time,

Stared with great eyes, and laughed with alien lips,

And knew not what they meant; for still
my voice

Rang false: but smiling 'Not for thee,' she
said,

O Bulbul, any rose of Gulistan

Shall burst her veil: marsh-divers, rather,
maid,

Shall croak thee sister, or the meadow-
crake

Grate her harsh kindred in the grass: and
this

A mere love-poem! O for such, my friend,

We hold them slight: they mind us of the
time

When we made bricks in Egypt. Knaves
are men,

That lute and flute fantastic tenderness,

And dress the victim to the offering up,

And paint the gates of Hell with Paradise,

And play the slave to gain the tyranny.

Poor soul! I had a maid of honour once;

She wept her true eyes blind for such a
one,

A rogue of canzonets and serenades.

I loved her. Peace be with her. She is
dead.

So they blaspheme the muse! But great is
song

Used to great ends: ourself have often
tried

Valkyrian hymns, or into rhythm have
dashed

The passion of the prophetess; for song
Is due unto freedom, force and growth
Of spirit than to junketing and love.

Love is it? Would this same mock-love,
and this

Mock-Hymen were laid up like winter
bats,

Till all men grew to rate us at our worth,
Not vassals to be beat, nor pretty babes

To be dandled, no, but living wills, and
sphered

Whole in ourselves and owed to none.
Enough!

But now to leaven play with profit, you,

Know you no song, the true growth of
your soil,

That gives the manners of your country-
women?'

She spoke and turned her sumptuous
head with eyes

Of shining expectation fixt on mine.

Then while I dragged my brains for such
a song,

Cyril, with whom the bell-mouthed glass
had wrought,

Or mastered by the sense of sport, began
To troll a careless, careless tavern-catch
Of Moll and Meg, and strange experiences
Unmeet for ladies. Florian nodded at him,
I frowning; Psyche flushed and wanned
and shook;

The lilylike Melissa drooped her brows;

'Forbear,' the Princess cried; 'Forbear, Sir'
I;

And heated through and through with
wrath and love,

I smote him on the breast; he started up;

There rose a shriek as of a city sacked;

Melissa clamoured 'Flee the death;' 'To horse'

Said Ida; 'home! to horse!' and fled, as flies

A troop of snowy doves athwart the dusk,

When some one batters at the dovecote-doors,

Disorderly the women. Alone I stood

With Florian, cursing Cyril, vext at heart,

In the pavilion: there like parting hopes

I heard them passing from me: hoof by hoof,

And every hoof a knell to my desires,
Clanged on the bridge; and then another
shriek,
'The Head, the Head, the Princess, O the
Head!'

For blind with rage she missed the plank,
and rolled

In the river. Out I sprang from glow to
gloom:

There whirled her white robe like a
blossomed branch

Rapt to the horrible fall: a glance I gave,
No more; but woman-vested as I was

Plunged; and the flood drew; yet I caught
her; then

Oaring one arm, and bearing in my left
The weight of all the hopes of half the
world,
Strove to buffet to land in vain. A tree
Was half-disrooted from his place and
stooped
To wrench his dark locks in the gurgling
wave
Mid-channel. Right on this we drove and
caught,
And grasping down the boughs I gained
the shore.
There stood her maidens glimmeringly
grouped

In the hollow bank. One reaching forward
drew

My burthen from mine arms; they cried
'she lives:'

They bore her back into the tent: but I,

So much a kind of shame within me
wrought,

Not yet endured to meet her opening
eyes,

Nor found my friends; but pushed alone
on foot

(For since her horse was lost I left her
mine)

Across the woods, and less from Indian
craft

Than beelike instinct hiveward, found at
length

The garden portals. Two great statues,
Art

And Science, Caryatids, lifted up

A weight of emblem, and betwixt were
valves

Of open-work in which the hunter rued

His rash intrusion, manlike, but his brows

Had sprouted, and the branches
thereupon

Spread out at top, and grimly spiked the
gates.

A little space was left between the horns,

Through which I clambered o'er at top
with pain,

Dropt on the sward, and up the linden
walks,

And, tost on thoughts that changed from
hue to hue,

Now poring on the glowworm, now the
star,

I paced the terrace, till the Bear had
wheeled

Through a great arc his seven slow suns.

A step

Of lightest echo, then a loftier form

Than female, moving through the
uncertain gloom,

Disturbed me with the doubt 'if this were she,'

But it was Florian. 'Hist O Hist,' he said,

'They seek us: out so late is out of rules.

Moreover "seize the strangers" is the cry.

How came you here?' I told him: 'I' said he,

'Last of the train, a moral leper, I,

To whom none spake, half-sick at heart, returned.

Arriving all confused among the rest

With hooded brows I crept into the hall,

And, couched behind a Judith,
underneath

The head of Holofernes peeped and saw.

Girl after girl was called to trial: each

Disclaimed all knowledge of us: last of all,

Melissa: trust me, Sir, I pitied her.

She, questioned if she knew us men, at
first

Was silent; closer prest, denied it not:

And then, demanded if her mother knew,

Or Psyche, she affirmed not, or denied:

From whence the Royal mind, familiar
with her,

Easily gathered either guilt. She sent

For Psyche, but she was not there; she called

For Psyche's child to cast it from the doors;

She sent for Blanche to accuse her face to face;

And I slipt out: but whither will you now?

And where are Psyche, Cyril? both are fled:

What, if together? that were not so well.

Would rather we had never come! I dread

His wildness, and the chances of the dark.'

'And yet,' I said, 'you wrong him more
than I

That struck him: this is proper to the
clown,

Though smocked, or furred and purpled,
still the clown,

To harm the thing that trusts him, and to
shame

That which he says he loves: for Cyril,
howe'er

He deal in frolic, as tonight--the song

Might have been worse and sinned in
grosser lips

Beyond all pardon--as it is, I hold

These flashes on the surface are not he.

He has a solid base of temperament:

But as the waterlily starts and slides

Upon the level in little puffs of wind,

Though anchored to the bottom, such is
he.'

Scarce had I ceased when from a
tamarisk near

Two Proctors leapt upon us, crying,
'Names:'

He, standing still, was clutched; but I
began

To thrid the musky-circled mazes, wind

And double in and out the boles, and race

By all the fountains: fleet I was of foot:

Before me showered the rose in flakes;
behind

I heard the puffed pursuer; at mine ear

Bubbled the nightingale and heeded not,

And secret laughter tickled all my soul.

At last I hooked my ankle in a vine,

That claspt the feet of a Mnemosyne,

And falling on my face was caught and
known.

They haled us to the Princess where she
sat

High in the hall: above her drooped a
lamp,

And made the single jewel on her brow

Burn like the mystic fire on a mast-head,

Prophet of storm: a handmaid on each
side

Bowed toward her, combing out her long
black hair

Damp from the river; and close behind
her stood

Eight daughters of the plough, stronger
than men,

Huge women blowzed with health, and
wind, and rain,

And labour. Each was like a Druid rock;

Or like a spire of land that stands apart

Cleft from the main, and wailed about
with mews.

Then, as we came, the crowd dividing
clove

An advent to the throne: and
therebeside,

Half-naked as if caught at once from bed

And tumbled on the purple footcloth, lay

The lily-shining child; and on the left,

Bowed on her palms and folded up from
wrong,

Her round white shoulder shaken with her
sobs,

Melissa knelt; but Lady Blanche erect

Stood up and spake, an affluent orator.

'It was not thus, O Princess, in old days:

You prized my counsel, lived upon my
lips:

I led you then to all the Castalies;

I fed you with the milk of every Muse;

I loved you like this kneeler, and you me

Your second mother: those were gracious
times.

Then came your new friend: you began to
change--

I saw it and grieved--to slacken and to
cool;

Till taken with her seeming openness

You turned your warmer currents all to
her,

To me you froze: this was my meed for
all.

Yet I bore up in part from ancient love,

And partly that I hoped to win you back,

And partly conscious of my own deserts,

And partly that you were my civil head,

And chiefly you were born for something
great,

In which I might your fellow-worker be,

When time should serve; and thus a
noble scheme

Grew up from seed we two long since had
sown;

In us true growth, in her a Jonah's gourd,

Up in one night and due to sudden sun:

We took this palace; but even from the
first

You stood in your own light and darkened
mine.

What student came but that you planed
her path

To Lady Psyche, younger, not so wise,

A foreigner, and I your countrywoman,

I your old friend and tried, she new in all?

But still her lists were swelled and mine
were lean;

Yet I bore up in hope she would be
known:

Then came these wolves: ~they~ knew
her: ~they~ endured,

Long-closeted with her the yestermorn,

To tell her what they were, and she to
hear:

And me none told: not less to an eye like
mine

A lidless watcher of the public weal,

Last night, their mask was patent, and
my foot

Was to you: but I thought again: I feared

To meet a cold "We thank you, we shall
hear of it

From Lady Psyche:" you had gone to her,

She told, perforce; and winning easy
grace

No doubt, for slight delay, remained
among us

In our young nursery still unknown, the
stem

Less grain than touchwood, while my
honest heat

Were all miscounted as malignant haste

To push my rival out of place and power.

But public use required she should be
known;

And since my oath was ta'en for public
use,

I broke the letter of it to keep the sense.

I spoke not then at first, but watched
them well,

Saw that they kept apart, no mischief
done;

And yet this day (though you should hate
me for it)

I came to tell you; found that you had
gone,

Ridden to the hills, she likewise: now, I
thought,

That surely she will speak; if not, then I:

Did she? These monsters blazoned what they were,

According to the coarseness of their kind,

For thus I hear; and known at last (my work)

And full of cowardice and guilty shame,

I grant in her some sense of shame, she flies;

And I remain on whom to wreak your rage,

I, that have lent my life to build up yours,

I that have wasted here health, wealth, and time,

And talent, I--you know it--I will not
boast:

Dismiss me, and I prophesy your plan,

Divorced from my experience, will be
chaff

For every gust of chance, and men will
say

We did not know the real light, but
chased

The wisp that flickers where no foot can
tread.'

She ceased: the Princess answered
coldly, 'Good:

Your oath is broken: we dismiss you: go.

For this lost lamb (she pointed to the child)

Our mind is changed: we take it to ourself.'

Thereat the Lady stretched a vulture throat,

And shot from crooked lips a haggard smile.

'The plan was mine. I built the nest' she said

'To hatch the cuckoo. Rise!' and stooped to updrag

Melissa: she, half on her mother propt,

Half-drooping from her, turned her face, and cast

A liquid look on Ida, full of prayer,
Which melted Florian's fancy as she hung,
A Niobëan daughter, one arm out,
Appealing to the bolts of Heaven; and
while
We gazed upon her came a little stir
About the doors, and on a sudden rushed
Among us, out of breath as one pursued,
A woman-post in flying raiment. Fear
Stared in her eyes, and chalked her face,
and winged
Her transit to the throne, whereby she fell

Delivering sealed dispatches which the
Head

Took half-amazed, and in her lion's mood

Tore open, silent we with blind surmise

Regarding, while she read, till over brow

And cheek and bosom brake the wrathful
bloom

As of some fire against a stormy cloud,

When the wild peasant rights himself, the
rick

Flames, and his anger reddens in the
heavens;

For anger most it seemed, while now her
breast,

Beaten with some great passion at her
heart,

Palpitated, her hand shook, and we heard

In the dead hush the papers that she held

Rustle: at once the lost lamb at her feet

Sent out a bitter bleating for its dam;

The plaintive cry jarred on her ire; she
crushed

The scrolls together, made a sudden turn

As if to speak, but, utterance failing her,

She whirled them on to me, as who
should say

'Read,' and I read--two letters--one her
sire's.

'Fair daughter, when we sent the Prince
your way,

We knew not your ungracious laws, which
learnt,

We, conscious of what temper you are
built,

Came all in haste to hinder wrong, but fell

Into his father's hands, who has this
night,

You lying close upon his territory,

Slipt round and in the dark invested you,

And here he keeps me hostage for his
son.'

The second was my father's running thus:

'You have our son: touch not a hair of his head:

Render him up unscathed: give him your hand:

Cleave to your contract: though indeed we hear

You hold the woman is the better man;

A rampant heresy, such as if it spread

Would make all women kick against their Lords

Through all the world, and which might well deserve

That we this night should pluck your palace down;

And we will do it, unless you send us back

Our son, on the instant, whole.'

So far I read;

And then stood up and spoke
impetuously.

'O not to pry and peer on your reserve,

But led by golden wishes, and a hope

The child of regal compact, did I break

Your precinct; not a scorner of your sex

But venerator, zealous it should be

All that it might be: hear me, for I bear,

Though man, yet human, whatsoe'er your
wrongs,

From the flaxen curl to the gray lock a life

Less mine than yours: my nurse would
tell me of you;

I babbled for you, as babies for the
moon,

Vague brightness; when a boy, you
stooped to me

From all high places, lived in all fair
lights,

Came in long breezes rapt from inmost
south

And blown to inmost north; at eve and
dawn

With Ida, Ida, Ida, rang the woods;

The leader wildswan in among the stars
Would clang it, and lapt in wreaths of
glowworm light

The mellow breaker murmured Ida. Now,
Because I would have reached you, had
you been

Sphered up with Cassiopëia, or the
enthroned

Persephonè in Hades, now at length,
Those winters of abeyance all worn out,
A man I came to see you: but indeed,
Not in this frequency can I lend full
tongue,

O noble Ida, to those thoughts that wait

On you, their centre: let me say but this,

That many a famous man and woman,
town

And landskip, have I heard of, after seen

The dwarfs of presage: though when
known, there grew

Another kind of beauty in detail

Made them worth knowing; but in your I
found

My boyish dream involved and dazzled
down

And mastered, while that after-beauty
makes

Such head from act to act, from hour to
hour,

Within me, that except you slay me here,

According to your bitter statute-book,

I cannot cease to follow you, as they say

The seal does music; who desire you
more

Than growing boys their manhood; dying
lips,

With many thousand matters left to do,

The breath of life; O more than poor men
wealth,

Than sick men health--yours, yours, not
mine--but half

Without you; with you, whole; and of
those halves

You worthiest; and howe'er you block and
bar

Your heart with system out from mine, I
hold

That it becomes no man to nurse despair,

But in the teeth of clenched antagonisms

To follow up the worthiest till he die:

Yet that I came not all unauthorized

Behold your father's letter.'

On one knee

Kneeling, I gave it, which she caught, and
dashed

Unopened at her feet: a tide of fierce

Invective seemed to wait behind her lips,

As waits a river level with the dam

Ready to burst and flood the world with
foam:

And so she would have spoken, but there
rose

A hubbub in the court of half the maids

Gathered together: from the illumined
hall

Long lanes of splendour slanted o'er a
press

Of snowy shoulders, thick as herded
ewes,

And rainbow robes, and gems and
gemlike eyes,

And gold and golden heads; they to and
fro

Fluctuated, as flowers in storm, some
red, some pale,

All open-mouthed, all gazing to the light,

Some crying there was an army in the
land,

And some that men were in the very
walls,

And some they cared not; till a clamour
grew

As of a new-world Babel, woman-built,

And worse-confounded: high above them
stood

The placid marble Muses, looking peace.

Not peace she looked, the Head: but
rising up

Robed in the long night of her deep hair,
so

To the open window moved, remaining
there

Fixt like a beacon-tower above the waves

Of tempest, when the crimson-rolling eye

Glares ruin, and the wild birds on the
light

Dash themselves dead. She stretched her
arms and called

Across the tumult and the tumult fell.

'What fear ye, brawlers? am not I your
Head?

On me, me, me, the storm first breaks:
~I~ dare

All these male thunderbolts: what is it ye
fear?

Peace! there are those to avenge us and
they come:

If not,--myself were like enough, O girls,

To unfurl the maiden banner of our
rights,

And clad in iron burst the ranks of war,

Or, falling, promartyr of our cause,

Die: yet I blame you not so much for
fear:

Six thousand years of fear have made
you that

From which I would redeem you: but for
those

That stir this hubbub--you and you--I
know

Your faces there in the crowd--tomorrow
morn

We hold a great convention: then shall
they

That love their voices more than duty,
learn

With whom they deal, dismissed in shame
to live

No wiser than their mothers, household
stuff,

Live chattels, mincers of each other's
fame,

Full of weak poison, turnspits for the
clown,

The drunkard's football, laughing-stocks
of Time,

Whose brains are in their hands and in
their heels

But fit to flaunt, to dress, to dance, to
thrum,

To tramp, to scream, to burnish, and to
scour,

For ever slaves at home and fools
abroad.'

She, ending, waved her hands: thereat
the crowd

Muttering, dissolved: then with a smile,
that looked

A stroke of cruel sunshine on the cliff,

When all the glens are drowned in azure
gloom

Of thunder-shower, she floated to us and
said:

'You have done well and like a
gentleman,

And like a prince: you have our thanks for
all:

And you look well too in your woman's dress:

Well have you done and like a gentleman.

You saved our life: we owe you bitter thanks:

Better have died and spilt our bones in the flood--

Then men had said--but now--What hinders me

To take such bloody vengeance on you both?--

Yet since our father--Wasps in our good hive,

You would-be quenchers of the light to be,

Barbarians, grosser than your native
bears--

O would I had his sceptre for one hour!

You that have dared to break our bound,
and gulled

Our servants, wronged and lied and
thwarted us--

~I~ wed with thee! ~I~ bound by
precontract

Your bride, our bondslave! not though all
the gold

That veins the world were packed to
make your crown,

And every spoken tongue should lord
you. Sir,

Your falsehood and yourself are hateful to us:

I trample on your offers and on you:

Begone: we will not look upon you more.

Here, push them out at gates.'

In wrath she spake.

Then those eight mighty daughters of the plough

Bent their broad faces toward us and addressed

Their motion: twice I sought to plead my cause,

But on my shoulder hung their heavy hands,

The weight of destiny: so from her face

They pushed us, down the steps, and
through the court,

And with grim laughter thrust us out at
gates.

We crossed the street and gained a petty
mound

Beyond it, whence we saw the lights and
heard the voices murmuring. While I
listened, came On a sudden the weird
seizure and the doubt:

I seemed to move among a world of
ghosts;

The Princess with her monstrous woman-
guard,

The jest and earnest working side by
side,

The cataract and the tumult and the kings
Were shadows; and the long fantastic
night

With all its doings had and had not been,
And all things were and were not.

This went by

As strangely as it came, and on my spirits
Settled a gentle cloud of melancholy;

Not long; I shook it off; for spite of
doubts

And sudden ghostly shadowings I was
one

To whom the touch of all mischance but
came

As night to him that sitting on a hill

Sees the midsummer, midnight, Norway
sun

Set into sunrise; then we moved away.

Thy voice is heard through rolling drums,

That beat to battle where he stands;

Thy face across his fancy comes,

And gives the battle to his hands:

A moment, while the trumpets blow,

He sees his brood about thy knee;

The next, like fire he meets the foe,
And strikes him dead for thine and thee.

So Lilia sang: we thought her half-
possessed,

She struck such warbling fury through the
words;

And, after, feigning pique at what she
called

The raillery, or grotesque, or false
sublime--

Like one that wishes at a dance to change

The music--clapt her hands and cried for
war,

Or some grand fight to kill and make an
end:

And he that next inherited the tale

Half turning to the broken statue, said,

'Sir Ralph has got your colours: if I prove

Your knight, and fight your battle, what
for me?'

It chanced, her empty glove upon the
tomb

Lay by her like a model of her hand.

She took it and she flung it. 'Fight' she
said,

'And make us all we would be, great and
good.'

He knightlike in his cap instead of casque,

A cap of Tyrol borrowed from the hall,
Arranged the favour, and assumed the
Prince.

V

Now, scarce three paces measured from
the mound,

We stumbled on a stationary voice,

And 'Stand, who goes?' 'Two from the
palace' I.

'The second two: they wait,' he said,
'pass on;

His Highness wakes:' and one, that
clashed in arms,

By glimmering lanes and walls of canvas
led

Threading the soldier-city, till we heard
The drowsy folds of our great ensign
shake
From blazoned lions o'er the imperial tent
Whispers of war.
Entering, the sudden light
Dazed me half-blind: I stood and seemed
to hear,
As in a poplar grove when a light wind
wakes
A lispings of the innumerable leaf and dies,
Each hissing in his neighbour's ear; and
then

A strangled titter, out of which there
brake

On all sides, clamouring etiquette to
death,

Unmeasured mirth; while now the two old
kings

Began to wag their baldness up and
down,

The fresh young captains flashed their
glittering teeth,

The huge bush-bearded Barons heaved
and blew,

And slain with laughter rolled the gilded
Squire.

At length my Sire, his rough cheek wet
with tears,

Panted from weary sides 'King, you are
free!

We did but keep you surety for our son,

If this be he,--or a dragged mawkin,
thou,

That tends to her bristled gruntes in the
sludge:'

For I was drenched with ooze, and torn
with briars,

More crumpled than a poppy from the
sheath,

And all one rag, dispriced from head to
heel.

Then some one sent beneath his vaulted
palm

A whispered jest to some one near him,
'Look,

He has been among his shadows.' 'Satan
take

The old women and their shadows! (thus
the King

Roared) make yourself a man to fight
with men.

Go: Cyril told us all.'

As boys that slink

From ferule and the trespass-chiding eye,

Away we stole, and transient in a trice

From what was left of faded woman-
slough

To sheathing splendours and the golden
scale

Of harness, issued in the sun, that now

Leapt from the dewy shoulders of the
Earth,

And hit the Northern hills. Here Cyril met
us.

A little shy at first, but by and by

We twain, with mutual pardon asked and
given

For stroke and song, resoldered peace,
whereon

Followed his tale. Amazed he fled away

Through the dark land, and later in the
night

Had come on Psyche weeping: 'then we
fell

Into your father's hand, and there she
lies,

But will not speak, or stir.'

He showed a tent

A stone-shot off: we entered in, and
there

Among piled arms and rough
accoutrements,

Pitiful sight, wrapped in a soldier's cloak,

Like some sweet sculpture draped from
head to foot,

And pushed by rude hands from its
pedestal,

All her fair length upon the ground she
lay:

And at her head a follower of the camp,

A charred and wrinkled piece of
womanhood,

Sat watching like the watcher by the
dead.

Then Florian knelt, and 'Come' he
whispered to her, 'Lift up your head,
sweet sister: lie not thus.

What have you done but right? you could
not slay

Me, nor your prince: look up: be
comforted:

Sweet is it to have done the thing one
ought,

When fallen in darker ways.' And likewise
I:

'Be comforted: have I not lost her too,

In whose least act abides the nameless
charm

That none has else for me?' She heard,
she moved,

She moaned, a folded voice; and up she
sat,

And raised the cloak from brows as pale
and smooth

As those that mourn half-shrouded over
death

In deathless marble. 'Her,' she said, 'my
friend--

Parted from her--betrayed her cause and
mine--

Where shall I breathe? why kept ye not
your faith?

O base and bad! what comfort? none for
me!

To whom remorseful Cyril, 'Yet I pray

Take comfort: live, dear lady, for your
child!'

At which she lifted up her voice and cried.

'Ah me, my babe, my blossom, ah, my
child,

My one sweet child, whom I shall see no
more!

For now will cruel Ida keep her back;

And either she will die from want of care,

Or sicken with ill-usage, when they say

The child is hers--for every little fault,

The child is hers; and they will beat my
girl

Remembering her mother: O my flower!

Or they will take her, they will make her
hard,

And she will pass me by in after-life

With some cold reverence worse than
were she dead.

Ill mother that I was to leave her there,
To lag behind, scared by the cry they
made,

The horror of the shame among them all:
But I will go and sit beside the doors,
And make a wild petition night and day,
Until they hate to hear me like a wind
Wailing for ever, till they open to me,
And lay my little blossom at my feet,
My babe, my sweet Aglaïa, my one child:

And I will take her up and go my way,

And satisfy my soul with kissing her:

Ah! what might that man not deserve of
me

Who gave me back my child?' 'Be
comforted,'

Said Cyril, 'you shall have it:' but again

She veiled her brows, and prone she
sank, and so

Like tender things that being caught feign
death,

Spoke not, nor stirred.

By this a murmur ran

Through all the camp and inward raced
the scouts

With rumour of Prince Arab hard at hand.

We left her by the woman, and without

Found the gray kings at parle: and 'Look
you' cried

My father 'that our compact be fulfilled:

You have spoilt this child; she laughs at
you and man:

She wrongs herself, her sex, and me, and
him:

But red-faced war has rods of steel and
fire;

She yields, or war.'

Then Gama turned to me:

'We fear, indeed, you spent a stormy
time

With our strange girl: and yet they say
that still

You love her. Give us, then, your mind at
large:

How say you, war or not?'

'Not war, if possible,

O king,' I said, 'lest from the abuse of
war,

The desecrated shrine, the trampled year,

The smouldering homestead, and the
household flower

Torn from the lintel--all the common
wrong--

A smoke go up through which I loom to
her

Three times a monster: now she lightens
scorn

At him that mars her plan, but then
would hate

(And every voice she talked with ratify it,

And every face she looked on justify it)

The general foe. More soluble is this knot,

By gentleness than war. I want her love.

What were I nigher this although we
dashed

Your cities into shards with catapults,

She would not love;--or brought her
chained, a slave,

The lifting of whose eyelash is my lord,

Not ever would she love; but brooding
turn

The book of scorn, till all my flitting
chance

Were caught within the record of her
wrongs,

And crushed to death: and rather, Sire,
than this

I would the old God of war himself were
dead,

Forgotten, rusting on his iron hills,

Rotting on some wild shore with ribs of
wreck,

Or like an old-world mammoth bulked in
ice,

Not to be molten out.'

And roughly spake

My father, 'Tut, you know them not, the
girls.

Boy, when I hear you prate I almost think

That idiot legend credible. Look you, Sir!

Man is the hunter; woman is his game:

The sleek and shining creatures of the
chase,

We hunt them for the beauty of their
skins;

They love us for it, and we ride them
down.

Wheedling and siding with them! Out! for
shame!

Boy, there's no rose that's half so dear to
them

As he that does the thing they dare not
do,

Breathing and sounding beauteous battle,
comes

With the air of the trumpet round him,
and leaps in

Among the women, snares them by the
score

Flattered and flustered, wins, though
dashed with death

He reddens what he kisses: thus I won

You mother, a good mother, a good wife,

Worth winning; but this firebrand--
gentleness

To such as her! if Cyril spake her true,

To catch a dragon in a cherry net,

To trip a tigress with a gossamer

Were wisdom to it.'

'Yea but Sire,' I cried,

'Wild natures need wise curbs. The
soldier? No:

What dares not Ida do that she should
prize

The soldier? I beheld her, when she rose

The yesternight, and storming in
extremes,

Stood for her cause, and flung defiance
down

Gagelike to man, and had not shunned
the death,

No, not the soldier's: yet I hold her, king,

True woman: you clash them all in one,

That have as many differences as we.

The violet varies from the lily as far

As oak from elm: one loves the soldier,
one

The silken priest of peace, one this, one
that,

And some unworthily; their sinless faith,

A maiden moon that sparkles on a sty,

Glorifying clown and satyr; whence they
need

More breadth of culture: is not Ida right?

They worth it? truer to the law within?

Severer in the logic of a life?

Twice as magnetic to sweet influences

Of earth and heaven? and she of whom
you speak,

My mother, looks as whole as some
serene

Creation minted in the golden moods

Of sovereign artists; not a thought, a
touch,

But pure as lines of green that streak the
white

Of the first snowdrop's inner leaves; I
say,

Not like the piebald miscellany, man,

Bursts of great heart and slips in sensual
mire,

But whole and one: and take them all-in-
all,

Were we ourselves but half as good, as
kind,

As truthful, much that Ida claims as right

Had ne'er been mooted, but as frankly
theirs

As dues of Nature. To our point: not war:

Lest I lose all.'

'Nay, nay, you spake but sense'

Said Gama. 'We remember love ourself

In our sweet youth; we did not rate him
then

This red-hot iron to be shaped with
blows.

You talk almost like Ida: ~she~ can talk;

And there is something in it as you say:

But you talk kindlier: we esteem you for it.--

He seems a gracious and a gallant Prince,

I would he had our daughter: for the rest,

Our own detention, why, the causes weighed,

Fatherly fears--you used us courteously--

We would do much to gratify your Prince--

We pardon it; and for your ingress here

Upon the skirt and fringe of our fair land,

you did but come as goblins in the night,

Nor in the furrow broke the ploughman's head,

Nor burnt the grange, nor bussted the milking-maid,

Nor robbed the farmer of his bowl of cream:

But let your Prince (our royal word upon it,

He comes back safe) ride with us to our lines,

And speak with Arac: Arac's word is thrice

As ours with Ida: something may be done--

I know not what--and ours shall see us friends.

You, likewise, our late guests, if so you will,

Follow us: who knows? we four may build some plan

Foursquare to opposition.'

Here he reached

White hands of farewell to my sire, who growled

An answer which, half-muffled in his beard,

Let so much out as gave us leave to go.

Then rode we with the old king across the lawns

Beneath huge trees, a thousand rings of
Spring

In every bole, a song on every spray

Of birds that piped their Valentines, and
woke

Desire in me to infuse my tale of love

In the old king's ears, who promised help,
and oozed

All o'er with honeyed answer as we rode

And blossom-fragrant slipt the heavy
dews

Gathered by night and peace, with each
light air

On our mailed heads: but other thoughts
than Peace

Burnt in us, when we saw the embattled
squares,

And squadrons of the Prince, trampling
the flowers

With clamour: for among them rose a cry

As if to greet the king; they made a halt;

The horses yelled; they clashed their
arms; the drum

Beat; merrily-blowing shrilled the martial
fife;

And in the blast and bray of the long horn

And serpent-throated bugle, undulated

The banner: anon to meet us lightly
pranced

Three captains out; nor ever had I seen
Such thews of men: the midmost and the
highest
Was Arac: all about his motion clung
The shadow of his sister, as the beam
Of the East, that played upon them,
made them glance
Like those three stars of the airy Giant's
zone,
That glitter burnished by the frosty dark;
And as the fiery Sirius alters hue,
And bickers into red and emerald, shone

Their morions, washed with morning, as
they came.

And I that prated peace, when first I
heard

War-music, felt the blind wildbeast of
force,

Whose home is in the sinews of a man,

Stir in me as to strike: then took the king

His three broad sons; with now a
wandering hand

And now a pointed finger, told them all:

A common light of smiles at our disguise

Broke from their lips, and, ere the windy
jest

Had laboured down within his ample
lungs,

The genial giant, Arac, rolled himself

Thrice in the saddle, then burst out in
words.

'Our land invaded, 'sdeath! and he
himself

Your captive, yet my father wills not war:

And, 'sdeath! myself, what care I, war or
no?

but then this question of your troth
remains:

And there's a downright honest meaning
in her;

She flies too high, she flies too high! and
yet

She asked but space and fairplay for her
scheme;

She prest and prest it on me--I myself,

What know I of these things? but, life and
soul!

I thought her half-right talking of her
wrongs;

I say she flies too high, 'sdeath! what of
that?

I take her for the flower of womankind,

And so I often told her, right or wrong,

And, Prince, she can be sweet to those
she loves,

And, right or wrong, I care not: this is all,
I stand upon her side: she made me
swear it--

'Sdeath--and with solemn rites by candle-
light--

Swear by St something--I forget her
name--

Her that talked down the fifty wisest
men;

~She~ was a princess too; and so I
swore.

Come, this is all; she will not: waive your
claim:

If not, the foughten field, what else, at
once

Decides it, 'sdeath! against my father's will.'

I lagged in answer loth to render up
My precontract, and loth by brainless war
To cleave the rift of difference deeper
yet;

Till one of those two brothers, half aside
And fingering at the hair about his lip,
To prick us on to combat 'Like to like!

The woman's garment hid the woman's
heart.'

A taunt that clenched his purpose like a
blow!

For fiery-short was Cyril's counter-scoff,

And sharp I answered, touched upon the
point

Where idle boys are cowards to their
shame,

'Decide it here: why not? we are three to
three.'

Then spake the third 'But three to three?
no more?

No more, and in our noble sister's cause?

More, more, for honour: every captain
waits

Hungry for honour, angry for his king.

More, more some fifty on a side, that
each

May breathe himself, and quick! by
overthrow

Of these or those, the question settled
die.'

'Yea,' answered I, 'for this wreath of air,
This flake of rainbow flying on the highest
Foam of men's deeds--this honour, if ye
will.

It needs must be for honour if at all:

Since, what decision? if we fail, we fail,

And if we win, we fail: she would not
keep

Her compact.' "Sdeath! but we will send
to her,'

Said Arac, 'worthy reasons why she should

Bide by this issue: let our missive through,

And you shall have her answer by the word.'

'Boys!' shrieked the old king, but vainlier than a hen To her false daughters in the pool; for none

Regarded; neither seemed there more to say:

Back rode we to my father's camp, and found

He thrice had sent a herald to the gates,
To learn if Ida yet would cede our claim,

Or by denial flush her babbling wells

With her own people's life: three times he went:

The first, he blew and blew, but none appeared:

He battered at the doors; none came: the next,

An awful voice within had warned him thence:

The third, and those eight daughters of the plough

Came sallying through the gates, and caught his hair,

And so belaboured him on rib and cheek

They made him wild: not less one glance
he caught

Through open doors of Ida stationed
there

Unshaken, clinging to her purpose, firm

Though compassed by two armies and
the noise

Of arms; and standing like a stately Pine

Set in a cataract on an island-crag,

When storm is on the heights, and right
and left

Sucked from the dark heart of the long
hills roll

The torrents, dashed to the vale: and yet
her will

Bred will in me to overcome it or fall.

But when I told the king that I was
pledged

To fight in tourney for my bride, he
clashed

His iron palms together with a cry;

Himself would tilt it out among the lads:

But overborne by all his bearded lords

With reasons drawn from age and state,
perforce

He yielded, wroth and red, with fierce
demur:

And many a bold knight started up in
heat,

And sware to combat for my claim till
death.

All on this side the palace ran the field

Flat to the garden-wall: and likewise
here,

Above the garden's glowing blossom-
belts,

A columned entry shone and marble
stairs,

And great bronze valves, embossed with
Tomyris

And what she did to Cyrus after fight,

But now fast barred: so here upon the
flat

All that long morn the lists were
hammered up,

And all that morn the heralds to and fro,

With message and defiance, went and
came;

Last, Ida's answer, in a royal hand,

But shaken here and there, and rolling
words

Oration-like. I kissed it and I read.

'O brother, you have known the pangs we
felt,

What heats of indignation when we heard

Of those that iron-cramped their women's
feet;

Of lands in which at the altar the poor
bride

Gives her harsh groom for bridal-gift a
scourge;

Of living hearts that crack within the fire

Where smoulder their dead despots; and
of those,--

Mothers,--that, with all prophetic pity,
fling

Their pretty maids in the running flood,
and swoops

The vulture, beak and talon, at the heart

Made for all noble motion: and I saw

That equal baseness lived in sleeker
times

With smoother men: the old leaven
leavened all:

Millions of throats would bawl for civil
rights,

No woman named: therefore I set my
face

Against all men, and lived but for mine
own.

Far off from men I built a fold for them:
I stored it full of rich memorial:

I fenced it round with gallant institutes,
And biting laws to scare the beasts of
prey

And prospered; till a rout of saucy boys

Brake on us at our books, and marred our
peace,

Masked like our maids, blustering I know
not what

Of insolence and love, some pretext held

Of baby troth, invalid, since my will

Sealed not the bond--the striplings! for
their sport!--

I tamed my leopards: shall I not tame
these?

Or you? or I? for since you think me
touched

In honour--what, I would not aught of
false--

Is not our case pure? and whereas I know

Your prowess, Arac, and what mother's
blood

You draw from, fight; you failing, I abide

What end soever: fail you will not. Still

Take not his life: he risked it for my own;

His mother lives: yet whatsoe'er you do,

Fight and fight well; strike and strike him.
O dear

Brothers, the woman's Angel guards you,
you

The sole men to be mingled with our
cause,

The sole men we shall prize in the after-
time,

Your very armour hallowed, and your
statues

Reared, sung to, when, this gad-fly
brushed aside,

We plant a solid foot into the Time,

And mould a generation strong to move

With claim on claim from right to right, till
she

Whose name is yoked with children's,
know herself;

And Knowledge in our own land make her
free,

And, ever following those two crownèd
twins,

Commerce and conquest, shower the
fiery grain

Of freedom broadcast over all the orbs

Between the Northern and the Southern
morn.'

Then came a postscript dashed across the
rest.

See that there be no traitors in your
camp:

We seem a nest of traitors--none to trust

Since our arms failed--this Egypt-plague
of men!

Almost our maids were better at their homes,

Than thus man-girdled here: indeed I think

Our chiefest comfort is the little child

Of one unworthy mother; which she left:

She shall not have it back: the child shall grow

To prize the authentic mother of her mind.

I took it for an hour in mine own bed

This morning: there the tender orphan hands

Felt at my heart, and seemed to charm from thence

The wrath I nursed against the world:
farewell.'

I ceased; he said, 'Stubborn, but she may
sit

Upon a king's right hand in thunder-
storms,

And breed up warriors! See now, though
yourself

Be dazzled by the wildfire Love to sloughs

That swallow common sense, the
spindling king,

This Gama swamped in lazy tolerance.

When the man wants weight, the woman
takes it up,

And topples down the scales; but this is
fixt

As are the roots of earth and base of all;

Man for the field and woman for the
hearth:

Man for the sword and for the needle she:

Man with the head and woman with the
heart:

Man to command and woman to obey;

All else confusion. Look you! the gray
mare

Is ill to live with, when her whinny shrills

From tile to scullery, and her small
goodman

Shrinks in his arm-chair while the fires of
Hell

Mix with his hearth: but you--she's yet a
colt--

Take, break her: strongly groomed and
straitly curbed

She might not rank with those detestable

That let the bantling scald at home, and
brawl

Their rights and wrongs like potherbs in
the street.

They say she's comely; there's the fairer
chance:

~I~ like her none the less for rating at
her!

Besides, the woman wed is not as we,
But suffers change of frame. A lusty
brace

Of twins may weed her of her folly. Boy,
The bearing and the training of a child
Is woman's wisdom.'

Thus the hard old king:

I took my leave, for it was nearly noon:

I pored upon her letter which I held,

And on the little clause 'take not his life:'

I mused on that wild morning in the
woods,

And on the 'Follow, follow, thou shalt
win:'

I thought on all the wrathful king had
said,

And how the strange betrothment was to
end:

Then I remembered that burnt sorcerer's
curse

That one should fight with shadows and
should fall;

And like a flash the weird affection came:

King, camp and college turned to hollow
shows;

I seemed to move in old memorial tilts,

And doing battle with forgotten ghosts,

To dream myself the shadow of a dream:
And ere I woke it was the point of noon,
The lists were ready. Empanoplied and
plumed
We entered in, and waited, fifty there
Opposed to fifty, till the trumpet blared
At the barrier like a wild horn in a land
Of echoes, and a moment, and once more
The trumpet, and again: at which the
storm
Of galloping hoofs bare on the ridge of
spears
And riders front to front, until they closed

In conflict with the crash of shivering
points,

And thunder. Yet it seemed a dream, I
dreamed

Of fighting. On his haunches rose the
steed,

And into fiery splinters leapt the lance,

And out of stricken helmets sprang the
fire.

Part sat like rocks: part reeled but kept
their seats:

Part rolled on the earth and rose again
and drew:

Part stumbled mixt with floundering
horses. Down

From those two bulks at Arac's side, and
down

From Arac's arm, as from a giant's flail,

The large blows rained, as here and
everywhere

He rode the mellay, lord of the ringing
lists,

And all the plain,--brand, mace, and
shaft, and shield--

Shocked, like an iron-clanging anvil
banged

With hammers; till I thought, can this be
he

From Gama's dwarfish loins? if this be so,

The mother makes us most--and in my
dream

I glanced aside, and saw the palace-front

Alive with fluttering scarfs and ladies'
eyes,

And highest, among the statues,
statuelike,

Between a cymballed Miriam and a Jael,

With Psyche's babe, was Ida watching us,

A single band of gold about her hair,

Like a Saint's glory up in heaven: but she

No saint--inexorable--no tenderness--

Too hard, too cruel: yet she sees me
fight,

Yea, let her see me fall! and with that I
drave

Among the thickest and bore down a
Prince,

And Cyril, one. Yea, let me make my
dream

All that I would. But that large-moulded
man,

His visage all agrin as at a wake,

Made at me through the press, and,
staggering back

With stroke on stroke the horse and
horseman, came

As comes a pillar of electric cloud,

Flaying the roofs and sucking up the
drains,

And shadowing down the champaign till it
strikes

On a wood, and takes, and breaks, and
cracks, and splits,

And twists the grain with such a roar that
Earth

Reels, and the herdsman cry; for
everything

Game way before him: only Florian, he

That loved me closer than his own right
eye,

Thrust in between; but Arac rode him
down:

And Cyril seeing it, pushed against the
Prince,

With Psyche's colour round his helmet,
tough,

Strong, supple, sinew-corded, apt at
arms;

But tougher, heavier, stronger, he that
smote

And threw him: last I spurred; I felt my
veins

Stretch with fierce heat; a moment hand
to hand,

And sword to sword, and horse to horse
we hung,

Till I struck out and shouted; the blade
glanced,

I did but shear a feather, and dream and
truth

Flowed from me; darkness closed me;
and I fell.

Home they brought her warrior dead:

She nor swooned, nor uttered cry:

All her maidens, watching, said,

'She must weep or she will die.'

Then they praised him, soft and low,

Called him worthy to be loved,

Truest friend and noblest foe;

Yet she neither spoke nor moved.

Stole a maiden from her place,
Lightly to the warrior stept,
Took the face-cloth from the face;
Yet she neither moved nor wept.
Rose a nurse of ninety years,
Set his child upon her knee--
Like summer tempest came her tears--
'Sweet my child, I live for thee.'

VI

My dream had never died or lived again.
As in some mystic middle state I lay;
Seeing I saw not, hearing not I heard:

Though, if I saw not, yet they told me all
So often that I speak as having seen.

For so it seemed, or so they said to me,

That all things grew more tragic and more
strange;

That when our side was vanquished and
my cause

For ever lost, there went up a great cry,

The Prince is slain. My father heard and
ran

In on the lists, and there unlaced my
casque

And grovelled on my body, and after him

Came Psyche, sorrowing for Aglaïa.

But high upon the palace Ida stood

With Psyche's babe in arm: there on the
roofs

Like that great dame of Lapidoth she
sang.

'Our enemies have fallen, have fallen: the
seed,

The little seed they laughed at in the
dark,

Has risen and cleft the soil, and grown a
bulk

Of spanless girth, that lays on every side

A thousand arms and rushes to the Sun.

'Our enemies have fallen, have fallen:
they came;

The leaves were wet with women's tears:
they heard

A noise of songs they would not
understand:

They marked it with the red cross to the
fall,

And would have strown it, and are fallen
themselves.

'Our enemies have fallen, have fallen:
they came,

The woodmen with their axes: lo the tree!

But we will make it faggots for the
hearth,

And shape it plank and beam for roof and floor,

And boats and bridges for the use of men.

'Our enemies have fallen, have fallen: they struck;

With their own blows they hurt themselves, nor knew

There dwelt an iron nature in the grain:

The glittering axe was broken in their arms,

Their arms were shattered to the shoulder blade.

'Our enemies have fallen, but this shall grow

A night of Summer from the heat, a
breadth

Of Autumn, dropping fruits of power: and
rolled

With music in the growing breeze of
Time,

The tops shall strike from star to star, the
fangs

Shall move the stony bases of the world.

'And now, O maids, behold our sanctuary

Is violate, our laws broken: fear we not

To break them more in their behoof,
whose arms

Championed our cause and won it with a
day

Blanched in our annals, and perpetual
feast,

When dames and heroines of the golden
year

Shall strip a hundred hollows bare of
Spring,

To rain an April of ovation round

Their statues, borne aloft, the three: but
come,

We will be liberal, since our rights are
won.

Let them not lie in the tents with coarse
mankind,

Ill nurses; but descend, and proffer these

The brethren of our blood and cause, that
there

Lie bruised and maimed, the tender
ministries

Of female hands and hospitality.'

She spoke, and with the babe yet in her
arms,

Descending, burst the great bronze
valves, and led

A hundred maids in train across the Park.

Some cowled, and some bare-headed, on
they came,

Their feet in flowers, her loveliest: by
them went

The enamoured air sighing, and on their
curls

From the high tree the blossom wavering
fell,

And over them the tremulous isles of light
Slided, they moving under shade: but
Blanche

At distance followed: so they came: anon
Through open field into the lists they
wound

Timorously; and as the leader of the herd
That holds a stately fretwork to the Sun,
And followed up by a hundred airy does,
Steps with a tender foot, light as on air,

The lovely, lordly creature floated on
To where her wounded brethren lay;
there stayed;

Knelt on one knee,--the child on one,--
and prest

Their hands, and called them dear
deliverers,

And happy warriors, and immortal names,

And said 'You shall not lie in the tents but
here,

And nursed by those for whom you
fought, and served

With female hands and hospitality.'

Then, whether moved by this, or was it
chance,

She past my way. Up started from my
side

The old lion, glaring with his whelpless
eye,

Silent; but when she saw me lying stark,

Dishelmed and mute, and motionlessly
pale,

Cold even to her, she sighed; and when
she saw

The haggard father's face and reverend
beard

Of grisly twine, all dabbled with the blood

Of his own son, shuddered, a twitch of
pain

Tortured her mouth, and o'er her
forehead past

A shadow, and her hue changed, and she
said:

'He saved my life: my brother slew him
for it.'

No more: at which the king in bitter scorn

Drew from my neck the painting and the
tress,

And held them up: she saw them, and a
day

Rose from the distance on her memory,

When the good Queen, her mother, shore
the tress

With kisses, ere the days of Lady
Blanche:

And then once more she looked at my
pale face:

Till understanding all the foolish work

Of Fancy, and the bitter close of all,

Her iron will was broken in her mind;

Her noble heart was molten in her breast;

She bowed, she set the child on the
earth; she laid

A feeling finger on my brows, and
presently

'O Sire,' she said, 'he lives: he is not
dead:

O let me have him with my brethren here

In our own palace: we will tend on him

Like one of these; if so, by any means,

To lighten this great clog of thanks, that
make

Our progress falter to the woman's goal.'

She said: but at the happy word 'he lives'

My father stooped, re-fathered o'er my
wounds.

So those two foes above my fallen life,

With brow to brow like night and evening
mixt

Their dark and gray, while Psyche ever
stole

A little nearer, till the babe that by us,

Half-lapt in glowing gauze and golden
brede,

Lay like a new-fallen meteor on the grass,

Uncared for, spied its mother and began

A blind and babbling laughter, and to
dance

Its body, and reach its fatling innocent
arms

And lazy lingering fingers. She the appeal

Brooked not, but clamouring out 'Mine--
mine--not yours,

It is not yours, but mine: give me the
child'

Ceased all on tremble: piteous was the
cry:

So stood the unhappy mother open-
mouthed,

And turned each face her way: wan was
her cheek

With hollow watch, her blooming mantle
torn,

Red grief and mother's hunger in her eye,

And down dead-heavy sank her curls, and
half

The sacred mother's bosom, panting,
burst

The laces toward her babe; but she nor
cared

Nor knew it, clamouring on, till Ida heard,

Looked up, and rising slowly from me,
stood

Erect and silent, striking with her glance

The mother, me, the child; but he that
lay

Beside us, Cyril, battered as he was,

Trailed himself up on one knee: then he
drew

Her robe to meet his lips, and down she
looked

At the armed man sideways, pitying as it
seemed,

Or self-involved; but when she learnt his
face,

Remembering his ill-omened song, arose

Once more through all her height, and
o'er him grew

Tall as a figure lengthened on the sand

When the tide ebbs in sunshine, and he
said:

'O fair and strong and terrible! Lioness

That with your long locks play the Lion's
mane!

But Love and Nature, these are two more
terrible

And stronger. See, your foot is on our
necks,

We vanquished, you the Victor of your
will.

What would you more? Give her the child!
remain

Orbed in your isolation: he is dead,

Or all as dead: henceforth we let you be:

Win you the hearts of women; and
beware

Lest, where you seek the common love of
these,

The common hate with the revolving
wheel

Should drag you down, and some great
Nemesis

Break from a darkened future, crowned
with fire,

And tread you out for ever: but howso'er

Fixed in yourself, never in your own arms

To hold your own, deny not hers to her,

Give her the child! O if, I say, you keep

One pulse that beats true woman, if you
loved

The breast that fed or arm that dandled
you,

Or own one part of sense not flint to
prayer,

Give her the child! or if you scorn to lay
it,

Yourself, in hands so lately claspt with
yours,

Or speak to her, your dearest, her one
fault,

The tenderness, not yours, that could not
kill,

Give ~me~ it: ~I~ will give it her.

He said:

At first her eye with slow dilation rolled

Dry flame, she listening; after sank and
sank

And, into mournful twilight mellowing,
dwelt

Full on the child; she took it: 'Pretty bud!

Lily of the vale! half opened bell of the
woods!

Sole comfort of my dark hour, when a
world

Of traitorous friend and broken system
made

No purple in the distance, mystery,

Pledge of a love not to be mine, farewell;

These men are hard upon us as of old,

We two must part: and yet how fain was
I

To dream thy cause embraced in mine, to
think

I might be something to thee, when I felt

Thy helpless warmth about my barren
breast

In the dead prime: but may thy mother
prove

As true to thee as false, false, false to
me!

And, if thou needs must needs bear the
yoke, I wish it

Gentle as freedom'--here she kissed it:
then--

'All good go with thee! take it Sir,' and so

Laid the soft babe in his hard-mailed
hands,

Who turned half-round to Psyche as she
sprang

To meet it, with an eye that swum in
thanks;

Then felt it sound and whole from head to
foot,

And hugged and never hugged it close
enough,

And in her hunger mouthed and mumbled
it,

And hid her bosom with it; after that

Put on more calm and added suppliantly:

'We two were friends: I go to mine own
land

For ever: find some other: as for me

I scarce am fit for your great plans: yet
speak to me,

Say one soft word and let me part
forgiven.'

But Ida spoke not, rapt upon the child.

Then Arac. 'Ida--'sdeath! you blame the
man;

You wrong yourselves--the woman is so
hard

Upon the woman. Come, a grace to me!

I am your warrior: I and mine have
fought

Your battle: kiss her; take her hand, she
weeps:

'Sdeath! I would sooner fight thrice o'er
than see it.'

But Ida spoke not, gazing on the ground,
And reddening in the furrows of his chin,
And moved beyond his custom, Gama
said:

'I've heard that there is iron in the blood,
And I believe it. Not one word? not one?

Whence drew you this steel temper? not
from me,

Not from your mother, now a saint with
saints.

She said you had a heart--I heard her say
it--

"Our Ida has a heart"--just ere she died--

"But see that some on with authority

Be near her still" and I--I sought for one-

All people said she had authority--

The Lady Blanche: much profit! Not one
word;

No! though your father sues: see how
you stand

Stiff as Lot's wife, and all the good
knights maimed,

I trust that there is no one hurt to death,

For our wild whim: and was it then for
this,

Was it for this we gave our palace up,

Where we withdrew from summer heats
and state,

And had our wine and chess beneath the
planes,

And many a pleasant hour with her that's
gone,

Ere you were born to vex us? Is it kind?

Speak to her I say: is this not she of
whom,

When first she came, all flushed you said
to me

Now had you got a friend of your own
age,

Now could you share your thought; now
should men see

Two women faster welded in one love
Than pairs of wedlock; she you walked
with, she

You talked with, whole nights long, up in
the tower,

Of sine and arc, spheroid and azimuth,

And right ascension, Heaven knows what;
and now

A word, but one, one little kindly word,

Not one to spare her: out upon you, flint!

You love nor her, nor me, nor any; nay,

You shame your mother's judgment too.
Not one?

You will not? well--no heart have you, or
such

As fancies like the vermin in a nut

Have fretted all to dust and bitterness.'

So said the small king moved beyond his
wont.

But Ida stood nor spoke, drained of her
force

By many a varying influence and so long.

Down through her limbs a drooping
languor wept:

Her head a little bent; and on her mouth

A doubtful smile dwelt like a clouded
moon

In a still water: then brake out my sire,

Lifted his grim head from my wounds. 'O
you,

Woman, whom we thought woman even
now,

And were half fooled to let you tend our
son,

Because he might have wished it--but we
see,

The accomplice of your madness
unforgiven,

And think that you might mix his draught
with death,

When your skies change again: the
rougher hand

Is safer: on to the tents: take up the
Prince.'

He rose, and while each ear was pricked
to attend

A tempest, through the cloud that
dimmed her broke

A genial warmth and light once more, and
shone

Through glittering drops on her sad
friend.

'Come hither.

O Psyche,' she cried out, 'embrace me,
come,

Quick while I melt; make reconciliation
sure

With one that cannot keep her mind an
hour:

Come to the hollow hear they slander so!

Kiss and be friends, like children being
chid!

~I~ seem no more: ~I~ want
forgiveness too:

I should have had to do with none but
maids,

That have no links with men. Ah false but
dear,

Dear traitor, too much loved, why?--
why?--Yet see,

Before these kings we embrace you yet
once more

With all forgiveness, all oblivion,

And trust, not love, you less.

And now, O sire,

Grant me your son, to nurse, to wait
upon him,

Like mine own brother. For my debt to
him,

This nightmare weight of gratitude, I
know it;

Taunt me no more: yourself and yours
shall have

Free adit; we will scatter all our maids

Till happier times each to her proper
hearth:

What use to keep them here--now? grant
my prayer.

Help, father, brother, help; speak to the
king:

Thaw this male nature to some touch of
that

Which kills me with myself, and drags me
down

From my fixt height to mob me up with
all

The soft and milky rabble of womankind,
Poor weakling even as they are.'

Passionate tears

Followed: the king replied not: Cyril said:

'Your brother, Lady,--Florian,--ask for him

Of your great head--for he is wounded too--

That you may tend upon him with the prince.'

'Ay so,' said Ida with a bitter smile,

'Our laws are broken: let him enter too.'

Then Violet, she that sang the mournful song,

And had a cousin tumbled on the plain,

Petitioned too for him. 'Ay so,' she said,

'I stagger in the stream: I cannot keep

My heart an eddy from the brawling hour:

We break our laws with ease, but let it
be.'

'Ay so?' said Blanche: 'Amazed am I to
her

Your Highness: but your Highness breaks
with ease

The law your Highness did not make:
'twas I.

I had been wedded wife, I knew mankind,

And blocked them out; but these men
came to woo

Your Highness--verily I think to win.'

So she, and turned askance a wintry eye:

But Ida with a voice, that like a bell

Tolled by an earthquake in a trembling
tower,

Rang ruin, answered full of grief and
scorn.

'Fling our doors wide! all, all, not one, but
all,

Not only he, but by my mother's soul,

Whatever man lies wounded, friend or
foe,

Shall enter, if he will. Let our girls flit,

Till the storm die! but had you stood by
us,

The roar that breaks the Pharos from his
base

Had left us rock. She fain would sting us
too,

But shall not. Pass, and mingle with your
likes.

We brook no further insult but are gone.'

She turned; the very nape of her white
neck

Was rosed with indignation: but the
Prince

Her brother came; the king her father
charmed

Her wounded soul with words: nor did
mine own

Refuse her proffer, lastly gave his hand.

Then us they lifted up, dead weights, and
bare

Straight to the doors: to them the doors
gave way

Groaning, and in the Vestal entry
shrieked

The virgin marble under iron heels:

And on they moved and gained the hall,
and there

Rested: but great the crush was, and
each base,

To left and right, of those tall columns
drowned

In silken fluctuation and the swarm

Of female whisperers: at the further end
Was Ida by the throne, the two great cats
Close by her, like supporters on a shield,
Bow-backed with fear: but in the centre
stood

The common men with rolling eyes;
amazed

They glared upon the women, and aghast

The women stared at these, all silent,
save

When armour clashed or jingled, while
the day,

Descending, struck athwart the hall, and
shot

A flying splendour out of brass and steel,
That o'er the statues leapt from head to
head,
Now fired an angry Pallas on the helm,
Now set a wrathful Dian's moon on flame,
And now and then an echo started up,
And shuddering fled from room to room,
and died
Of fright in far apartments.
Then the voice
Of Ida sounded, issuing ordinance:
And me they bore up the broad stairs,
and through

The long-laid galleries past a hundred
doors

To one deep chamber shut from sound,
and due

To languid limbs and sickness; left me in
it;

And others elsewhere they laid; and all

That afternoon a sound arose of hoof

And chariot, many a maiden passing
home

Till happier times; but some were left of
those

Held sagest, and the great lords out and
in,

From those two hosts that lay beside the
walls,

Walked at their will, and everything was
changed.

Ask me no more: the moon may draw the
sea;

The cloud may stoop from heaven and
take the shape

With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape;

But O too fond, when have I answered
thee?

Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: what answer should I
give?

I love not hollow cheek or faded eye:

Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!

Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee
live;

Ask me no more.

Ask me no more: thy fate and mine are
sealed:

I strove against the stream and all in
vain:

Let the great river take me to the main:

No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield;

Ask me no more.

VII

So was their sanctuary violated,

So their fair college turned to hospital;

At first with all confusion: by and by

Sweet order lived again with other laws:

A kindlier influence reigned; and
everywhere

Low voices with the ministering hand

Hung round the sick: the maidens came,
they talked,

They sang, they read: till she not fair
began

To gather light, and she that was,
became

Her former beauty treble; and to and fro

With books, with flowers, with Angel
offices,

Like creatures native unto gracious act,

And in their own clear element, they
moved.

But sadness on the soul of Ida fell,

And hatred of her weakness, blent with
shame.

Old studies failed; seldom she spoke: but
oft

Clomb to the roofs, and gazed alone for
hours

On that disastrous leaguer, swarms of
men

Darkening her female field: void was her
use,

And she as one that climbs a peak to
gaze

O'er land and main, and sees a great
black cloud

Drag inward from the deeps, a wall of
night,

Blot out the slope of sea from verge to
shore,

And suck the blinding splendour from the
sand,

And quenching lake by lake and tarn by
tarn

Expunge the world: so fared she gazing
there;

So blackened all her world in secret,
blank

And waste it seemed and vain; till down
she came,

And found fair peace once more among
the sick.

And twilight dawned; and morn by morn
the lark

Shot up and shrilled in flickering gyres,
but I

Lay silent in the muffled cage of life:

And twilight gloomed; and broader-grown
the bowers

Drew the great night into themselves,
and Heaven,

Star after Star, arose and fell; but I,

Deeper than those weird doubts could
reach me, lay

Quite sundered from the moving
Universe,

Nor knew what eye was on me, nor the
hand

That nursed me, more than infants in
their sleep.

But Psyche tended Florian: with her oft,

Melissa came; for Blanche had gone, but
left

Her child among us, willing she should
keep

Court-favour: here and there the small
bright head,

A light of healing, glanced about the
couch,

Or through the parted silks the tender
face

Peeped, shining in upon the wounded
man

With blush and smile, a medicine in
themselves

To wile the length from languorous hours,
and draw

The sting from pain; nor seemed it
strange that soon

He rose up whole, and those fair charities

Joined at her side; nor stranger seemed
that hears

So gentle, so employed, should close in
love,

Than when two dewdrops on the petals
shake

To the same sweet air, and tremble
deeper down,

And slip at once all-fragrant into one.

Less prosperously the second suit
obtained

At first with Psyche. Not though Blanche
had sworn

That after that dark night among the
fields

She needs must wed him for her own
good name;

Not though he built upon the babe
restored;

Nor though she liked him, yielded she,
but feared

To incense the Head once more; till on a
day

When Cyril pleaded, Ida came behind

Seen but of Psyche: on her foot she hung

A moment, and she heard, at which her
face

A little flushed, and she past on; but each

Assumed from thence a half-consent
involved

In stillness, plighted troth, and were at peace.

Nor only these: Love in the sacred halls
Held carnival at will, and flying struck
With showers of random sweet on maid
and man.

Nor did her father cease to press my
claim,

Nor did mine own, now reconciled; nor
yet

Did those twin-brothers, risen again and
whole;

Nor Arac, satiate with his victory.

But I lay still, and with me oft she sat:

Then came a change; for sometimes I
would catch

Her hand in wild delirium, gripe it hard,

And fling it like a viper off, and shriek

'You are not Ida;' clasp it once again,

And call her Ida, though I knew her not,

And call her sweet, as if in irony,

And call her hard and cold which seemed
a truth:

And still she feared that I should lose my
mind,

And often she believed that I should die:

Till out of long frustration of her care,

And pensive tendance in the all-weary
noons,

And watches in the dead, the dark, when
clocks

Throbbbed thunder through the palace
floors, or called

On flying Time from all their silver
tongues--

And out of memories of her kindlier days,

And sidelong glances at my father's grief,

And at the happy lovers heart in heart--

And out of hauntings of my spoken love,

And lonely listenings to my muttered
dream,

And often feeling of the helpless hands,
And wordless broodings on the wasted
cheek--

From all a closer interest flourished up,
Tenderness touch by touch, and last, to
these,

Love, like an Alpine harebell hung with
tears

By some cold morning glacier; frail at first
And feeble, all unconscious of itself,
But such as gathered colour day by day.

Last I woke sane, but well-nigh close to
death

For weakness: it was evening: silent light

Slept on the painted walls, wherein were wrought

Two grand designs; for on one side arose

The women up in wild revolt, and stormed

At the Oppian Law. Titanic shapes, they crammed

The forum, and half-crushed among the rest

A dwarf-like Cato cowered. On the other side

Hortensia spoke against the tax; behind,

A train of dames: by axe and eagle sat,

With all their foreheads drawn in Roman
scowls,

And half the wolf's-milk curdled in their
veins,

The fierce triumvirs; and before them
paused

Hortensia pleading: angry was her face.

I saw the forms: I knew not where I was:

They did but look like hollow shows; nor
more

Sweet Ida: palm to palm she sat: the
dew

Dwelt in her eyes, and softer all her
shape

And rounder seemed: I moved: I sighed:
a touch

Came round my wrist, and tears upon my
hand:

Then all for languor and self-pity ran

Mine down my face, and with what life I
had,

And like a flower that cannot all unfold,

So drenched it is with tempest, to the
sun,

Yet, as it may, turns toward him, I on her

Fixt my faint eyes, and uttered
whisperingly:

'If you be, what I think you, some sweet
dream,

I would but ask you to fulfil yourself:

But if you be that Ida whom I knew,

I ask you nothing: only, if a dream,

Sweet dream, be perfect. I shall die
tonight.

Stoop down and seem to kiss me ere I
die.'

I could no more, but lay like one in
trance,

That hears his burial talked of by his
friends,

And cannot speak, nor move, nor make
one sign,

But lies and dreads his doom. She
turned; she paused;

She stooped; and out of languor leapt a
cry;

Leapt fiery Passion from the brinks of
death;

And I believed that in the living world

My spirit closed with Ida's at the lips;

Till back I fell, and from mine arms she
rose

Glowing all over noble shame; and all

Her falser self slipt from her like a robe,

And left her woman, lovelier in her mood

Than in her mould that other, when she
came

From barren deeps to conquer all with
love;

And down the streaming crystal dropt;
and she

Far-fleeted by the purple island-sides,
Naked, a double light in air and wave,

To meet her Graces, where they decked
her out

For worship without end; nor end of
mine,

Stateliest, for thee! but mute she glided
forth,

Nor glanced behind her, and I sank and
slept,

Filled through and through with Love, a
happy sleep.

Deep in the night I woke: she, near me,
held

A volume of the Poets of her land:

There to herself, all in low tones, she
read.

'Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the
white;

Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;

Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry
font:

The fire-fly wakens: wake thou with me.

Now droops the milkwhite peacock like a ghost,

And like a ghost she glimmers on to me.

Now lies the Earth all Danaë to the stars,

And all thy heart lies open unto me.

Now lies the silent meteor on, and leaves

A shining furrow, as thy thoughts in me.

Now folds the lily all her sweetness up,

And slips into the bosom of the lake:

So fold thyself, my dearest, thou, and slip

Into my bosom and be lost in me.'

I heard her turn the page; she found a
small

Sweet Idyl, and once more, as low, she
read:

'Come down, O maid, from yonder
mountain height:

What pleasure lives in height (the
shepherd sang)

In height and cold, the splendour of the
hills?

But cease to move so near the Heavens,
and cease

To glide a sunbeam by the blasted Pine,

To sit a star upon the sparkling spire;

And come, for love is of the valley, come,

For love is of the valley, come thou down
And find him; by the happy threshold, he,
Or hand in hand with Plenty in the maize,
Or red with spirted purple of the vats,
Or foxlike in the vine; nor cares to walk
With Death and Morning on the silver
horns,
Nor wilt thou snare him in the white
ravine,
Nor find him dropt upon the firths of ice,
That huddling slant in furrow-cloven falls
To roll the torrent out of dusky doors:

But follow; let the torrent dance thee
down

To find him in the valley; let the wild

Lean-headed Eagles yelp alone, and leave

The monstrous ledges there to slope, and
spill

Their thousand wreaths of dangling
water-smoke,

That like a broken purpose waste in air:

So waste not thou; but come; for all the
vales

Await thee; azure pillars of the hearth

Arise to thee; the children call, and I

Thy shepherd pipe, and sweet is every
sound,

Sweeter thy voice, but every sound is
sweet;

Myriads of rivulets hurrying through the
lawn,

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.'

So she low-toned; while with shut eyes I
lay

Listening; then looked. Pale was the
perfect face;

The bosom with long sighs laboured; and
meek

Seemed the full lips, and mild the
luminous eyes,

And the voice trembled and the hand.
She said

Brokenly, that she knew it, she had failed

In sweet humility; had failed in all;

That all her labour was but as a block

Left in the quarry; but she still were loth,

She still were loth to yield herself to one

That wholly scorned to help their equal
rights

Against the sons of men, and barbarous
laws.

She prayed me not to judge their cause
from her

That wronged it, sought far less for truth
than power

In knowledge: something wild within her
breast,

A greater than all knowledge, beat her
down.

And she had nursed me there from week
to week:

Much had she learnt in little time. In part

It was ill counsel had misled the girl

To vex true hearts: yet was she but a
girl--

'Ah fool, and made myself a Queen of farce!

When comes another such? never, I think,

Till the Sun drop, dead, from the signs.'

Her voice

choked, and her forehead sank upon her hands,

And her great heart through all the faultful Past

Went sorrowing in a pause I dared not break;

Till notice of a change in the dark world

Was lispt about the acacias, and a bird,

That early woke to feed her little ones,
Sent from a dewy breast a cry for light:

She moved, and at her feet the volume
fell.

'Blame not thyself too much,' I said, 'nor
blame

Too much the sons of men and barbarous
laws;

These were the rough ways of the world
till now.

Henceforth thou hast a helper, me, that
know

The woman's cause is man's: they rise or
sink

Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or
free:

For she that out of Lethe scales with man

The shining steps of Nature, shares with
man

His nights, his days, moves with him to
one goal,

Stays all the fair young planet in her
hands--

If she be small, slight-natured, miserable,

How shall men grow? but work no more
alone!

Our place is much: as far as in us lies

We two will serve them both in aiding
her--

Will clear away the parasitic forms

That seem to keep her up but drag her
down--

Will leave her space to burgeon out of all

Within her--let her make herself her own

To give or keep, to live and learn and be

All that not harms distinctive
womanhood.

For woman is not undeveloped man,

But diverse: could we make her as the
man,

Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond
is this,

Not like to like, but like in difference.

Yet in the long years liker must they
grow;

The man be more of woman, she of man;

He gain in sweetness and in moral height,

Nor lose the wrestling thews that throw
the world;

She mental breadth, nor fail in childward
care,

Nor lose the childlike in the larger mind;

Till at the last she set herself to man,

Like perfect music unto noble words;

And so these twain, upon the skirts of
Time,

Sit side by side, full-summed in all their powers,

Dispensing harvest, sowing the To-be,

Self-reverent each and reverencing each,

Distinct in individualities,

But like each other even as those who love.

Then comes the statelier Eden back to men:

Then reign the world's great bridals, chaste and calm:

Then springs the crowning race of humankind.

May these things be!'

Sighing she spoke 'I fear

They will not.'

'Dear, but let us type them now

In our own lives, and this proud
watchword rest

Of equal; seeing either sex alone

Is half itself, and in true marriage lies

Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils

Defect in each, and always thought in
thought,

Purpose in purpose, will in will, they
grow,

The single pure and perfect animal,

The two-celled heart beating, with one
full stroke,

Life.'

And again sighing she spoke: 'A dream

That once was mind! what woman taught
you this?'

'Alone,' I said, 'from earlier than I know,

Immersed in rich foreshadowings of the
world,

I loved the woman: he, that doth not,
lives

A drowning life, besotted in sweet self,

Or pines in sad experience worse than
death,

Or keeps his winged affections clipt with
crime:

Yet was there one through whom I loved
her, one

Not learnèd, save in gracious household
ways,

Not perfect, nay, but full of tender wants,

No Angel, but a dearer being, all dipt

In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,

Interpreter between the Gods and men,

Who looked all native to her place, and
yet

On tiptoe seemed to touch upon a sphere

Too gross to tread, and all male minds
perforce

Swayed to her from their orbits as they
moved,

And girdled her with music. Happy he

With such a mother! faith in womankind

Beats with his blood, and trust in all
things high

Comes easy to him, and though he trip
and fall

He shall not blind his soul with clay.'

'But I,'

Said Ida, tremulously, 'so all unlike--

It seems you love to cheat yourself with words:

This mother is your model. I have heard
of your strange doubts: they well might
be: I seem

A mockery to my own self. Never, Prince;
You cannot love me.'

'Nay but thee' I said

'From yearlong poring on thy pictured
eyes,

Ere seen I loved, and loved thee seen,
and saw

Thee woman through the crust of iron
moods

That masked thee from men's reverence
up, and forced

Sweet love on pranks of saucy boyhood:
now,

Given back to life, to life indeed, through
thee,

Indeed I love: the new day comes, the
light

Dearer for night, as dearer thou for faults

Lived over: lift thine eyes; my doubts are
dead,

My haunting sense of hollow shows: the
change,

This truthful change in thee has killed it.
Dear,

Look up, and let thy nature strike on
mine,

Like yonder morning on the blind half-
world;

Approach and fear not; breathe upon my
brows;

In that fine air I tremble, all the past

Melts mist-like into this bright hour, and
this

Is morn to more, and all the rich to-come

Reels, as the golden Autumn woodland
reels

Athwart the smoke of burning weeds.
Forgive me,

I waste my heart in signs: let be. My
bride,

My wife, my life. O we will walk this
world,

Yoked in all exercise of noble end,

And so through those dark gates across
the wild

That no man knows. Indeed I love thee:
come,

Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are
one:

Accomplish thou my manhood and
thyself;

Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to
me.'

CONCLUSION

So closed our tale, of which I give you all

The random scheme as wildly as it rose:

The words are mostly mine; for when we
ceased

There came a minute's pause, and Walter
said,

'I wish she had not yielded!' then to me,

'What, if you drest it up poetically?'

So prayed the men, the women: I gave
assent:

Yet how to bind the scattered scheme of
seven

Together in one sheaf? What style could
suit?

The men required that I should give
throughout

The sort of mock-heroic gigantesque,

With which we bantered little Lilia first:

The women--and perhaps they felt their
power,

For something in the ballads which they
sang,

Or in their silent influence as they sat,

Had ever seemed to wrestle with
burlesque,

And drove us, last, to quite a solemn
close--

They hated banter, wished for something
real,

A gallant fight, a noble princess--why

Not make her true-heroic--true-sublime?

Or all, they said, as earnest as the close?

Which yet with such a framework scarce
could be.

Then rose a little feud betwixt the two,

Betwixt the mockers and the realists:

And I, betwixt them both, to please them
both,

And yet to give the story as it rose,

I moved as in a strange diagonal,

And maybe neither pleased myself nor them.

But Lilia pleased me, for she took no part
In our dispute: the sequel of the tale
Had touched her; and she sat, she
plucked the grass,

She flung it from her, thinking: last, she
fixt

A showery glance upon her aunt, and
said,

'You--tell us what we are' who might
have told,

For she was crammed with theories out of
books,

But that there rose a shout: the gates
were closed

At sunset, and the crowd were swarming
now,

To take their leave, about the garden
rails.

So I and some went out to these: we
climbed

The slope to Vivian-place, and turning
saw

The happy valleys, half in light, and half

Far-shadowing from the west, a land of
peace;

Gray halls alone among their massive
groves;

Trim hamlets; here and there a rustic
tower

Half-lost in belts of hop and breadths of
wheat;

The shimmering glimpses of a stream;
the seas;

A red sail, or a white; and far beyond,

Imagined more than seen, the skirts of
France.

'Look there, a garden!' said my college
friend,

The Tory member's elder son, 'and there!

God bless the narrow sea which keeps
her off,

And keeps our Britain, whole within
herself,

A nation yet, the rulers and the ruled--

Some sense of duty, something of a faith,

Some reverence for the laws ourselves
have made,

Some patient force to change them when
we will,

Some civic manhood firm against the
crowd--

But yonder, whiff! there comes a sudden
heat,

The gravest citizen seems to lose his
head,

The king is scared, the soldier will not
fight,

The little boys begin to shoot and stab,

A kingdom topples over with a shriek

Like an old woman, and down rolls the
world

In mock heroics stranger than our own;

Revolts, republics, revolutions, most

No graver than a schoolboys' barring out;

Too comic for the serious things they are,

Too solemn for the comic touches in
them,

Like our wild Princess with as wise a
dream

As some of theirs--God bless the narrow seas!

I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad.'

'Have patience,' I replied, 'ourselves are full

Of social wrong; and maybe wildest dreams

Are but the needful preludes of the truth:

For me, the genial day, the happy crowd,

The sport half-science, fill me with a faith.

This fine old world of ours is but a child

Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time

To learn its limbs: there is a hand that
guides.'

In such discourse we gained the garden
rails,

And there we saw Sir Walter where he
stood,

Before a tower of crimson holly-hoaks,

Among six boys, head under head, and
looked

No little lily-handed Baronet he,

A great broad-shouldered genial
Englishman,

A lord of fat prize-oxen and of sheep,

A raiser of huge melons and of pine,

A patron of some thirty charities,

A pamphleteer on guano and on grain,

A quarter-sessions chairman, abler none;

Fair-haired and redder than a windy
morn;

Now shaking hands with him, now him, of
those

That stood the nearest--now addressed to
speech--

Who spoke few words and pithy, such as
closed

Welcome, farewell, and welcome for the
year

To follow: a shout rose again, and made

The long line of the approaching rookery
swerve

From the elms, and shook the branches
of the deer

From slope to slope through distant ferns,
and rang

Beyond the bourn of sunset; O, a shout

More joyful than the city-roar that hails

Premier or king! Why should not these
great Sirs

Give up their parks some dozen times a
year

To let the people breathe? So thrice they
cried,

I likewise, and in groups they streamed
away.

But we went back to the Abbey, and sat
on,

So much the gathering darkness
charmed: we sat

But spoke not, rapt in nameless reverie,

Perchance upon the future man: the walls

Blackened about us, bats wheeled, and
owls whooped,

And gradually the powers of the night,

That range above the region of the wind,

Deepening the courts of twilight broke
them up

Through all the silent spaces of the
worlds,

Beyond all thought into the Heaven of
Heavens.

Last little Lilia, rising quietly,

Disrobed the glimmering statue of Sir
Ralph

From those rich silks, and home well-
pleased we went.

THE END

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