

## XXV.

This appeal, both by looks and by language, increased  
The trouble Matilda felt grown in her breast.

Still she spoke with what calmness she could :—

“Sir, the while I thank you,” she said, with a faint scornful smile,  
“For your fervor in painting my fancied distress :

Allow me the right some surprise to express

At the zeal you betray in disclosing to me

The possible depth of my own misery.”

“That zeal would not startle you, madam,” he said,

“Could you read in my heart, as myself I have read,

The peculiar interest which causes that zeal—”

Matilda her terror no more could conceal.

“Duke,” she answered in accents short, cold, and severe,

As she rose from her seat, “I continue to hear ;

But permit me to say, I no more understand.”

“Forgive !” with a nervous appeal of the hand,

And a well-feigned confusion of voice and of look,

“Forgive, O, forgive me !” at once cried the Duke,

“I forgot that you know me so slightly. Your leave

I entreat (from your anger those words to retrieve)

For one moment to speak of myself, —for I think

That you wrong me—”

His voice as in pain seemed to sink ;

And tears in his eyes, as he lifted them, glistened.

## XXVI.

Matilda, despite of herself, sat and listened.

## XXVII.

“Beneath an exterior which seems, and may be,

Worldly, frivolous, careless, my heart hides in me,”

He continued, “a sorrow which draws me to side

With all things that suffer. Nay, laugh not,” he cried,

“At so strange an avowal.

“I seek at a ball, for instance,—the beauty admired by all ?

No ! some plain, insignificant creature, who sits

Scorned of course by the beauties, and shunned by the wits.

All the world is accustomed to wound, or neglect,

Or oppress, claims my heart and commands my respect.

No Quixote, I do not affect to be long,

I admit, to those chartered redressers of wrong ;

But I seek to console, where I can. ’Tis a part

Not brilliant, I own, yet its joys bring no smart.”

These trite words, from the tone which he gave them, received

An appearance of truth, which might well be believed

By a heart shrewder yet than Matilda’s.

And so He continued . . . “O lady ! alas, could you know

What injustice and wrong in this world I have seen !

How many a woman, believed to have been [aside

Without a regret, I have known turn To burst into heart-broken tears undescried !

(On how many a lip have I witnessed the smile

Which but hid what was breaking the poor heart the while !”)

Said Matilda, “Your life, it would seem, then, must be

One long act of devotion.”

“Perhaps so,” said he ; “But at least that devotion small merit can boast,

For one day may yet come,—if one day at the most,—

When, perceiving at last all the difference—how great !—

’Twixt the heart that neglects and the heart that can wait.

’Twixt the natures that pity, the natures that pain,

Some woman, that else might have passed in disdain

Or indifference by me,—in passing that day

Might pause with a word or a smile to repay

This devotion,—and then” . . .

## XXVIII.

To Matilda’s relief At that moment her husband approached.

With some grief I must own that her welcome, perchance, was expressed

The more eagerly just for one twinge in her breast

Of a conscience disturbed, and her smile not less warm,

Though she saw the Countesse de Nevers on his arm.

The Duke turned and adjusted his collar.

Thought he, “Good ! the gods fight my battle tonight. I foresee

That the family doctor’s the part I must play.

Very well ! but the patients my visits shall pay.”

Lord Alfred presented Lucile to his wife ;

And Matilda, repressing with effort the strife

Of emotions which made her voice shake, murmured low

Some faint, troubled greeting. The Duke, with a bow

Which betokened a distant defiance, replied

To Lucile’s startled cry, as surprised she descried

Her former gay wooer. Anon, with the grace

Of that kindness which seeks to win kindness, her place

She assumed by Matilda, unconscious, perchance,

Or resolved not to notice, the half-frightened glance

That followed that movement. The Duke to his feet

Arose ; and, in silence, relinquished his seat.

One must own that the moment was awkward for all ;

But nevertheless, before long, the strange thrall

Of Lucile’s gracious tact was by every one felt,

And from each the reserve seemed, reluctant, to melt ;

Thus, conversing together, the whole of the four

Through the crowd sauntered, smiling.

## XXIX.

Approaching the door, Eugène de Luvoif, who had fallen behind,

By Lucile, after some hesitation, was joined

With a gesture of gentle and kindly appeal

Which appeared to imply, without words, “Let us feel

That the friendship between us in years that are fled,

Has survived one mad moment forgotten,” she said,

“You remain, Duke, at Ems ?”

He turned on her a look Of frigid, resentful, and sullen rebuke ;



And then, with a more than significant glance  
At Matilda, maliciously answered,  
"Perchance  
I have here an attraction. And  
you?" he returned.  
Lucile's eyes had followed his own,  
and discerned  
The boast they implied.  
He repeated, "And you?"  
And, still watching Matilda, she answered, "I too."  
And he thought, as with that word she left him, she sighed.  
The next moment her place she resumed by the side  
Of Matilda; and soon they shook  
Of the self-same hotel.

XXX.

One depressed, one elate,  
The Duke and Lord Alfred again,  
through the glooms  
Of the thick linden alley, returned  
to the Rooms.  
His cigar each had lighted, a moment  
before,  
At the inn, as they turned, arm-in-  
arm, from the door.  
Ems cigars do not cheer a man's  
spirits, *experto*  
(*Me miserum quoties!*) *crede Roberto.*  
In silence, awhile, they walked on-  
ward.

At last  
The Duke's thoughts to language  
half consciously passed.

LUVOIS.  
Once more! yet once more!

ALFRED.  
What?

LUVOIS.  
We meet her, once more,  
The woman for whom we two mad  
men of yore  
(Laugh, *mon cher Alfred*, laugh!)  
were about to destroy  
Each the other!

ALFRED.  
It is not with laughter that!  
Raise the ghost of that once troubled  
time. Say! can you  
Recall it with coolness and quietude  
now?

LUVOIS.  
Now? yes! I, *mon cher*, am a true  
*Parisien*:  
Now, the red revolution, the tocsin  
and then  
The dance and the play. I am now  
at the play.

ALFRED.  
At the play, are you now? Then  
perchance I now may  
Presume, Duke, to ask you what,  
ever until  
Such a moment, I waited...

LUVOIS.  
Oh! ask what you will.  
*Franc jeu!* on the table my cards I  
spread out.

ALFRED.  
Duke, you were called to a meeting  
(no doubt  
You remember it yet) with Lucile.  
It was night  
When you went; and before you re-  
turned it was light.  
We met: you accosted me then with  
a brow  
Bright with triumph: your words  
(you remember them now?)  
Were "Let us be friends!"

LUVOIS.  
Well?

ALFRED.  
How then, after that,  
Can you and she meet as acquaint-  
ances?

LUVOIS.  
What!  
Did she not then, herself, the Com-  
tesse de Nevers,  
Solve your riddle to-night with those  
soft lips of hers?

ALFRED.  
In our converse to-night we avoided  
the past.  
But the question I ask should be an-  
swered at last:  
By you, if you will; if you will not,  
by her.

LUVOIS.  
Indeed? but that question, milord,  
can it stir  
Such an interest in you, if your pas-  
sion be o'er?

ALFRED.  
Yes. Esteem may remain, although  
love be no more.  
Lucile asked me, this night, to my  
wife (understand  
To my wife!) to present her. I did  
so. Her hand  
Has clasped that of Matilda. We  
gentlemen owe  
Respect to the name that is ours:  
and, if so, [respect.  
To the woman that bears it a twofold  
Answer, Duc de Luvois! Did Lucile  
then reject

The proffer you made of your hand  
and your name?  
Or did you on her love then relin-  
quish a claim  
Urged before? I ask bluntly this  
question, because  
My title to do so is clear by the laws  
That all gentlemen honor. Make  
only one sign  
That you know of Lucile de Nevers  
aught, in fine,  
For which, if your own virgin sister  
were by,  
From Lucile you would shield her  
acquaintance, and I  
And Matilda leave Ems on the mor-  
row.

XXXI.

The Duke  
Hesitated and paused. He could  
tell, by the look  
Of the man at his side, that he  
meant what he said.

And there flashed in a moment these  
thoughts through his head:  
"Leave Ems! would that suit me?  
no! that were again  
To mar all. And besides, if I do not  
explain,  
She herself will... *et puis, il a  
raison; on est  
Gentilhomme avant tout!*" He re-  
plied therefore,

"Nay!  
Madame de Nevers had rejected me.  
I,  
In those days, I was mad; and in  
some mad reply  
I threatened the life of the rival to  
whom  
That rejection was due, I was led to  
presume.  
She feared for his life; and the letter  
which then  
She wrote me, I showed you; we  
met: and again  
My hand was refused, and my love  
was denied,  
And the glance you mistook was the  
vizard which Pride  
Lends to Humiliation.

"And so," half in jest,  
He went on, "in this best world, 'tis  
all for the best;  
You are wedded, (blessed English-  
man!) wedded to one  
Whose past can be called into ques-  
tion by none:  
And I (fickle Frenchman!) can still  
laugh to feel  
I am lord of myself, and the Mode:  
and Lucile  
Still shines from her pedestal, frigid  
and fair  
As yon German moon o'er the linden-  
tops there! [troth  
A Dian in marble that scorns any  
With the little love-gods, whom I  
thank for us both,  
While she smiles from her lonely  
Olympus apart,  
That her arrows are marble as well  
as her heart.  
Stay at Ems, Alfred Vargrave!"



## XXXII.

The Duke, with a smile,  
Turned and entered the Rooms  
which, thus talking, mean-  
while,  
They had reached.

## XXXIII.

Alfred Vargrave strode on (over-  
thrown  
Heart and mind!) in the darkness  
bewildered, alone:  
"And so," to himself did he mutter,  
"and so  
'Twas to rescue my life, gentle  
spirit! and, oh,  
For this did I doubt her? . . . a light  
word—a look—  
The mistake of a moment! . . . for  
this I forsook—  
For this? Pardon, pardon, Lucile!  
O Lucile!"  
Thought and memory rang, like a  
funeral peal,  
Weary changes on one dirge-like note  
through his brain,  
As he strayed down the darkness.

## XXXIV.

Re-entering again  
The Casino, the Duke smiled. He  
turned to roulette,  
And sat down, and played fast, and  
lost largely, and yet  
He still smiled: night deepened: he  
played his last number:  
Went home: and soon slept: and  
still smiled in his slumber.

## XXXV.

In his desolate Maxims, La Roche-  
foucauld wrote,  
"In the grief or mischance of a  
friend you may note,  
There is something which always  
gives pleasure."  
Alas!  
That reflection fell short of the truth  
as it was.

La Rochefoucauld might have as  
truly set down,—  
"No misfortune, but what some one  
turns to his own  
Advantage its mischief: no sorrow,  
but of it [profit:  
There ever is somebody ready to  
No affliction without its stock-job-  
bers, who all  
Gamble, speculate, play on the rise  
and the fall  
Of another man's heart, and make  
traffic in it."  
Burn thy book, O La Rochefoucauld!  
Fool! one man's wit  
All men's selfishness how should it  
fathom?

O sage,  
Dost thou satirize Nature?  
She laughs at thy page.

## CANTO II.

## I.

COUSIN JOHN to COUSIN ALFRED.

"LONDON, 18—.

"MY DEAR ALFRED:  
Your last letters put me in pain.  
This contempt of existence, this list-  
less disdain  
Of your own life,—its joys and its  
duties,—the deuce  
Take my wits if they find for it half  
an excuse!  
I wish that some Frenchman would  
shoot off your leg,  
And compel you to stump through  
the world on a peg.  
I wish that you had, like myself,  
(more's the pity!)  
To sit seven hours on this cursed  
committee.  
I wish that you knew, sir, how salt  
is the bread  
Of another—(what is it that Dante  
has said?)  
And the trouble of other men's stairs.  
In a word,  
I wish fate had some real affliction  
conferred

On your whimsical self, that, at  
least, you had cause  
For neglecting life's duties, and  
damning its laws!  
This pressure against all the pur-  
pose of life,  
This self-ebullition, and ferment, and  
strife,  
Betokened, I grant that it may be in  
truth,  
The richness and strength of the  
new wine of youth.  
But if, when the wine should have  
mellowed with time,  
Being bottled and binned, to a flavor  
sublime  
It retains the same acrid, incongru-  
ous taste,  
Why, the sooner to throw it away  
that we haste  
The better, I take it. And this vice  
of snarling,  
Self-love's little lapdog, the overfed  
darling  
Of a hypochondriacal fancy appears,  
To my thinking, at least, in a man  
of your years,  
At the midnight of manhood with  
plenty to do,  
And every incentive for doing it  
too,—  
With the duties of life just suffi-  
ciently pressing  
For prayer, and of joys more than  
most men for blessing;  
With a pretty young wife, and a  
pretty full purse,—  
Like poltroonery, puerile truly, or  
worse!  
I wish I could get you at least to  
agree  
To take life as it is, and consider  
with me,  
If it be not all smiles, that it is not  
all sneers;  
It admits honest laughter, and needs  
honest tears.  
Do you think none have known but  
yourself all the pain  
Of hopes that retreat, and regrets  
that remain?

And all the wide distance fate fixes,  
no doubt,  
'Twixt the life that's within, and the  
life that's without?  
What one of us finds the world just  
as he likes?  
Or gets what he wants when he  
wants it? Or strikes  
Without missing the thing that he  
strikes at the first?  
Or walks without stumbling? Or  
quenches his thirst  
At one draught? Bah! I tell you!  
I, bachelor John,  
Have had griefs of my own. But  
what then? I push on  
All the faster perchance that I yet  
feel the pain  
Of my last fall, albeit I may stumble  
again.  
God means every man to be happy,  
be sure.  
He sends us no sorrows that have  
not some cure.  
Our duty down here is to do, not to  
know.  
Live as though life were earnest, and  
life will be so.  
Let each moment, like Time's last  
ambassador, come:  
It will wait to deliver its message;  
and some  
Sort of answer it merits. It is not  
the deed  
A man does, but the way that he  
does it, should plead  
For the man's compensation in do-  
ing it.  
"Here,  
My next neighbor's a man with  
twelve thousand a year,  
Who deems that life has not a pas-  
time more pleasant  
Than to follow a fox or to slaughter  
a pheasant.  
Yet this fellow goes through a con-  
tested election,  
Lives in London, and sits, like the  
soul of dejection,  
All the day through upon a commit-  
tee, and late