Lucile's a coquette to the end of her fingers,
I will stake my last farthing. Perhaps the wish lingers
To recall the once reckless, indifferent lover
To the feet he has left; let intrigue now recover
What truth could not keep. 'T were a vengeance, no doubt —
A triumph; — but why must *you* bring it about?
You are risking the substance of all that you schemed
To obtain; and for what? some mad dream you have dreamed!

ALFRED.

But there's nothing to risk. You exaggerate, Jack.
You mistake. In three days, at the most, I am back.

JOHN.

Ay, but how? . . . discontented, unsettled, upset,
Bearing with you a comfortless twinge of regret;
Preoccupied, sulky, and likely enough
To make your betrothed break off all in a huff.
Three days, do you say? But in three days who knows
What may happen? I don't, nor do you, I suppose.

V.

Of all the good things in this good world around us,
The one most abundantly furnished and found us,
And which, for that reason, we least care about,
And can best spare our friends, is good counsel, no doubt.
But advice, when 't is sought from a friend (though civility
May forbid to avow it), means mere liability
In the bill we already have drawn on Remorse,
Which we deem that a true friend is bound to indorse.
A mere lecture on debt from that friend is a bore.
Thus, the better his cousin's advice was, the more
Alfred Vargrave with angry resentment opposed it.
And, having the worst of the contest, he closed it
With so firm a resolve his bad ground to maintain,
That, sadly perceiving resistance was vain,
And argument fruitless, the amiable Jack
Came to terms, and assisted his cousin to pack
A slender valise (the one small condescension
Which his final remonstrance obtained), whose dimension
Excluded large outfits; and, cursing his stars, he
Shook hands with his friend and returned to Miss Darcy.

VI.

Lord Alfred, when last to the window he turned,
Ere he locked up and quitted his chamber, discerned
Matilda ride by, with her cheek beaming bright
In what Virgil has called "Youth's purpureal light"
(I like the expression, and can't find a better).
He sighed as he looked at her. Did he regret her?
In her habit and hat, with her glad golden hair,
As airy and blithe as a blithe bird in air,
And her arch rosy lips, and her eager blue eyes,
With their little impertinent look of surprise,
And her round youthful figure, and fair neck, below
The dark drooping feather, as radiant as snow, —
I can only declare, that if *I* had the chance
Of passing three days in the exquisite glance
Of those eyes, or caressing the hand that now petted
That fine English mare, I should much have regretted
Whatever might lose me one little half-hour
Of a pastime so pleasant, when once in my power.
For, if one drop of milk from the bright Milky-Way
Could turn into a woman, 't would look, I dare say,
Not more fresh than Matilda was looking that day.

VII.

But, whatever the feeling that prompted the sigh
With which Alfred Vargrave now watched her ride by,
I can only affirm that, in watching her ride,
As he turned from the window, he certainly sighed.

CANTO II.

I.

Letter from LORD ALFRED VARGRAVE *to the* COMTESSE DE NEVERS.

"BIGORRE, Tuesday.
"Your note, Madam, reached me to-day, at Bigorre,
And commands (need I add?) my obedience. Before
The night I shall be at Serchon, — where a line,
If sent to Duval's, the hotel where I dine,
Will find me, awaiting your orders. Receive
My respects.
"Yours sincerely,
"A. VARGRAVE.
"I leave
In an hour."

II.

In an hour from the time he wrote this,
Alfred Vargrave, in tracking a mountain abyss,
Gave the rein to his steed and his thoughts, and pursued,
In pursuing his course through the blue solitude,
The reflections that journey gave rise to. And here
(Because, without some such precaution, I fear
You might fail to distinguish them each from the rest
Of the world they belong to; whose captives are drest,
As our convicts, precisely the same one and all,
While the coat cut for Peter is passed on to Paul)
I resolve, one by one, when I pick from the mass
The persons I want, as before you they pass,
To label them broadly in plain black and white
On the backs of them. Therefore whilst yet he's in sight,
I first label my hero.

III.

The age is gone o'er
When a man may in all things be all. We have more
Painters, poets, musicians, and artists, no doubt,
Than the great Cinquecento gave birth to; but out
Of a million of mere dilettanti, when, when
Will a new LEONARDO arise on our ken?
He is gone with the age which begat him. Our own
Is too vast, and too complex, for one man alone
To embody its purpose, and hold it shut close
In the palm of his hand. There were giants in those
Irreclaimable days; but in these days of ours,
In dividing the work, we distribute the powers.
Yet a dwarf on a dead giant's shoulders sees more
Than the 'live giant's eyesight availed to explore;
And in life's lengthened alphabet what used to be
To our sires X Y Z is to us A B C.
A Vanini is roasted alive for his pains,
But a Bacon comes after and picks up his brains.
A Bruno is angrily seized by the throttle
And hunted about by thy ghost, Aristotle,
Till a More or Lavater step into his place:
Then the world turns and makes an admiring grimace.
Once the men were so great and so few, they appear,

Through a distant Olympian atmosphere,
Like vast Caryatids upholding the age.
Now the men are so many and small, disengage
One man from the million to mark him, next moment
The crowd sweeps him hurriedly out of your comment;
And since we seek vainly (to praise in our songs)
'Mid our fellows the size which to heroes belongs,
We take the whole age for a hero, in want
Of a better; and still, in its favor, descant
On the strength and the beauty which, failing to find
In any one man, we ascribe to mankind.

IV.

Alfred Vargrave was one of those men who achieve
So little, because of the much they conceive.
With irresolute finger he knocked at each one
Of the doorways of life, and abided in none.
His course, by each star that would cross it, was set,
And whatever he did he was sure to regret.
That target, discussed by the travellers of old,
Which to one appeared argent, to one appeared gold,
To him, ever lingering on Doubt's dizzy margent,
Appeared in one moment both golden and argent.
The man who seeks one thing in life, and but one,
May hope to achieve it before life be done:
But he who seeks all things, wherever he goes,
Only reaps from the hopes which around him he sows
A harvest of barren regrets. And the worm
That crawls on in the dust to the definite term
Of its creeping existence, and sees nothing more
Than the path it pursues till its creeping be o'er,
In its limited vision, is happier far
Than the Half-Sage, whose course, fixed by no friendly star,
Is by each star distracted in turn, and who knows
Each will still be as distant wherever he goes.

V.

Both brilliant and brittle, both bold and unstable,
Indecisive yet keen, Alfred Vargrave seemed able
To dazzle, but not to illumine mankind.
A vigorous, various, versatile mind;
A character wavering, fitful, uncertain,
As the shadow that shakes o'er a luminous curtain,
Vague, flitting, but on it forever impressing
The shape of some substance at which you stand guessing:
When you said; "All is worthless and weak here," behold!
Into sight on a sudden there seemed to unfold
Great outlines of strenuous truth in the man:
When you said, "This is genius," the outlines grew wan.
And his life, though in all things so gifted and skilled,
Was, at best, but a promise which nothing fulfilled.

VI.

In the budding of youth, ere wild winds can deflower
The shut leaves of man's life, round the germ of his power
Yet folded, his life had been earnest. Alas!
In that life one occasion, one moment, there was
When this earnestness might, with the life-sap of youth,
Lusty fruitage have borne in his manhood's full growth;
But it found him too soon, when his nature was still
The delicate toy of too pliant a will,
The boisterous wind of the world to resist,
Or the frost of the world's wintry wisdom.

He missed
That occasion, too rathe in its advent.
Since then,
He had made it a law, in his commerce with men,
That intensity in him, which only left sore
The heart it disturbed, to repel and ignore.

And thus, as some Prince by his subjects deposed,
Whose strength he, by seeking to crush it, disclosed,
In resigning the power he lacked power to support,
Turns his back upon courts, with a sneer at the court,
In his converse this man for self-comfort appealed
To a cynic denial of all he concealed
In the instincts and feelings belied by his words.
Words, however, are things: and the man who accords
To his language the license to outrage his soul
Is controlled by the words he disdains to control.
And, therefore, he seemed in the deeds of each day,
The light code proclaimed on his lips to obey;
And, the slave of each whim, followed wilfully aught
That perchance fooled the fancy, or flattered the thought.
Yet, indeed, deep within him, the spirits of truth,
Vast, vague aspirations, the powers of his youth,
Lived and breathed, and made moan — stirred themselves — strove to start
Into deeds — though deposed, in that Hades, his heart,
Like those antique Theogonies ruined and hurled
Under clefts of the hills, which, convulsing the world,
Heaved, in earthquake, their heads the rent caverns above,
To trouble at times in the light court of Jove
All its frivolous gods, with an undefined awe,
Of wronged rebel powers that owned not their law.
For his sake, I am fain to believe that, if born
To some lowlier rank (from the world's languid scorn
Secured by the world's stern resistance), where strife,
Strife and toil, and not pleasure, gave purpose to life,
He possibly might have contrived to attain
Not eminence only, but worth. So, again,
Had he been of his own house the first-born, each gift
Of a mind many-gifted had gone to uplift
A great name by a name's greatest uses.
But there
He stood isolated, opposed, as it were,
To life's great realities; part of no plan;
And if ever a nobler and happier man
He might hope to become, that alone could be when
With all that is real in life and in men
What was real in him should have been reconciled;
When each influence now from experience exiled
Should have seized on his being, combined with his nature,
And formed, as by fusion, a new human creature:
As when those airy elements viewless to sight
(The amalgam of which, if our science be right,
The germ of this populous planet doth fold)
Unite in the glass of the chemist, behold!
Where a void seemed before there a substance appears,
From the fusion of forces whence issued the spheres!

VII.

But the permanent cause why his life failed and missed
The full value of life was, — where man should resist
The world, which man's genius is called to command,
He gave way, less from lack of the power to withstand,
Than from lack of the resolute will to retain
Those strongholds of life which the world strives to gain.

Let this character go in the old-fashioned way,
With the moral thereof tightly tacked to it. Say —
"Let any man once show the world that he feels
Afraid of its bark, and 't will fly at his heels:
Let him fearlessly face it, 't will leave him alone:
But 't will fawn at his feet if he flings it a bone."

VIII.

The moon of September, now half at the full,
Was unfolding from darkness and dream-land the lull
Of the quiet blue air, where the many-faced hills
Watched, well-pleased, their fair slaves, the light, foam-footed rills,
Dance and sing down the steep marble stairs of their courts,
And gracefully fashion a thousand sweet sports.
Lord Alfred (by this on his journeying far)
Was pensively puffing his Lopez cigar,
And brokenly humming an old opera strain,
And thinking, perchance, of those castles in Spain
Which that long rocky barrier hid from his sight;
When suddenly, out of the neighboring night,
A horseman emerged from a fold of the hill,
And so startled his steed, that was winding at will
Up the thin dizzy strip of a pathway which led
O'er the mountain — the reins on its neck, and its head
Hanging lazily forward — that, but for a hand
Light and ready, yet firm, in familiar command,
Both rider and horse might have been in a trice
Hurled horribly over the grim precipice.

IX.

As soon as the moment's alarm had subsided,
And the oath, with which nothing can find unprovided
A thoroughbred Englishman, safely exploded,
Lord Alfred unbent (as Apollo his bow did
Now and then) his erectness; and looking, not ruder
Than such inroad would warrant, surveyed the intruder,
Whose arrival so nearly cut short in his glory
My hero, and finished abruptly this story.

X.

The stranger, a man of his own age or less,
Well mounted, and simple though rich in his dress,
Wore his beard and mustache in the fashion of France.
His face, which was pale, gathered force from the glance
Of a pair of dark, vivid, and eloquent eyes.
With a gest of apology, touched with surprise,
He lifted his hat, bowed and courteously made
Some excuse in such well-cadenced French as betrayed,
At the first word he spoke, the Parisian.

XI.

I swear
I have wandered about in the world everywhere;
From many strange mouths have heard many strange tongues;
Strained with many strange idioms my lips and my lungs;
Walked in many a far land, regretting my own;
In many a language groaned many a groan;
And have often had reason to curse those wild fellows
Who built the high house at which Heaven turned jealous,
Making human audacity stumble and stammer
When seized by the throat in the hard gripe of Grammar.
But the language of languages dearest to me
Is that in which once, *O ma toute chérie,*

When, together, we bent o'er your nosegay for hours,
You explained what was silently said by the flowers,
And, selecting the sweetest of all, sent a flame
Through my heart, as, in laughing, you murmured, *Je t'aime.*

XII.

The Italians have voices like peacocks; the Spanish
Smell, I fancy, of garlic; the Swedish and Danish
Have something too Runic, too rough and unshod, in
Their accent for mouths not descended from Odin;
German gives me a cold in the head, sets me wheezing
And coughing; and Russian is nothing but sneezing;
But, by Belus and Babel! I never have heard,
And I never shall hear (I well know it), one word
Of that delicate idiom of Paris without
Feeling morally sure, beyond question or doubt,
By the wild way in which my heart inwardly fluttered
That my heart's native tongue to my heart had been uttered.
And whene'er I hear French spoken as I approve,
I feel myself quietly falling in love.

XIII.

Lord Alfred, on hearing the stranger, appeased
By a something, an accent, a cadence, which pleased
His ear with that pledge of good breeding which tells
At once of the world in whose fellowship dwells
The speaker that owns it, was glad to remark
In the horseman a man one might meet after dark
Without fear.
And thus, not disagreeably impressed,
As it seemed, with each other, the two men abreast
Rode on slowly a moment.

XIV.

STRANGER.

I see, Sir, you are
A smoker. Allow me!

ALFRED.

Pray take a cigar.

STRANGER.

Many thanks! . . . Such cigars are a luxury here.
Do you go to Serchon?

ALFRED.

Yes; and you?

STRANGER.

Yes. I fear,
Since our road is the same, that our journey must be
Somewhat closer than is our acquaintance. You see
How narrow the path is. I 'm tempted to ask
Your permission to finish (no difficult task!)
The cigar you have given me (really a prize!)
In your company.

ALFRED.

Charmed, Sir, to find your road lies
In the way of my own inclinations! Indeed
The dream of your nation I find in this weed.
In the distant savannas a talisman grows
That makes all men brothers that use it . . . who knows?
That blaze which erewhile from the *Boulevart* outbroke,
It has ended where wisdom begins, Sir, — in smoke.
Messieurs Lopez (whatever your publicists write)
Have done more in their way human kind to unite,
Perchance, than ten Proudhons.

STRANGER.

Yes. Ah, what a scene!

ALFRED.

Humph ! Nature is here too pretentious. Her mien
Is too haughty. One likes to be coaxed, not compelled,
To the notice such beauty resents if withheld.
She seems to be saying too plainly, "Admire me !"
And I answer, "Yes, madam, I do : but you tire me."

STRANGER.

That sunset, just now though . . .

ALFRED.

A very old trick !
One would think that the sun by this time must be sick
Of blushing at what, by this time, he must know
Too well to be shocked by — this world.

STRANGER.

Ah, 't is so
With us all. 'T is the sinner that best knew the world
At twenty, whose lip is, at sixty, most curled
With disdain of its follies. You stay at Serchon ?

ALFRED.

A day or two only.

STRANGER.

The season is done.

ALFRED.

Already ?

STRANGER.

'T was shorter this year than the last.
Folly soon wears her shoes out. She dances so fast,
We are all of us tired.

ALFRED.

You know the place well ?

STRANGER.

I have been there two seasons.

ALFRED.

Pray who is the Belle
Of the Baths at this moment ?

STRANGER.

The same who has been
The belle of all places in which she is seen ;
The belle of all Paris last winter ; last spring
The belle of all Baden.

ALFRED.

An uncommon thing !

STRANGER.

Sir, an uncommon beauty ! . . . I rather should say,
An uncommon character. Truly, each day
One meets women whose beauty is equal to hers,
But none with the charm of Lucile de Nevers.

ALFRED.

Madame de Nevers ?

STRANGER.

Do you know her ?

ALFRED.

I know,
Or, rather, I knew her — a long time ago.
I almost forget . . .

STRANGER.

What a wit ! what a grace
In her language ! her movements ! what play in her face !
And yet what a sadness she seems to conceal !

ALFRED.

You speak like a lover.

STRANGER.

I speak as I feel,
But not like a lover. What interests me so
In Lucile, at the same time forbids me, I know,
To give to that interest, whate'er the sensation,
The name we men give to an hour's admiration,
A night's passing passion, an actress's eyes,
A dancing girl's ankles, a fine lady's sighs.

ALFRED.

Yes, I quite comprehend. But this sadness — this shade
Which you speak of ? . . . it almost would make me afraid
Your gay countrymen, Sir, less adroit must have grown,
Since when, as a stripling, at Paris, I own
I found in them terrible rivals, — if yet
They have all lacked the skill to console this regret
(If regret be the word I should use), or fulfil
This desire (if desire be the word), which seems still
To endure unappeased. For I take it for granted,
From all that you say, that the will was not wanted.

XV.

The stranger replied, not without irritation :
"I have heard that an Englishman — one of your nation,
I presume — and if so, I must beg you, indeed,
To excuse the contempt which I . . ."

ALFRED.

Pray, Sir, proceed
With your tale. My compatriot, what was his crime ?

STRANGER.

O, nothing ! His folly was not so sublime
As to merit that term. If I blamed him just now,
It was not for the sin, but the silliness.

ALFRED.

How ?

STRANGER.

I own I hate Botany. Still, . . . I admit,
Although I myself have no passion for it,
And do not understand, yet I cannot despise
The cold man of science, who walks with his eyes
All alert through a garden of flowers, and strips
The lilies' gold tongues, and the roses' red lips,
With a ruthless dissection ; since he, I suppose,
Has some purpose beyond the mere mischief he does.
But the stupid and mischievous boy, that uproots
The exotics, and tramples the tender young shoots,
For a boy's brutal pastime, and only because
He knows no distinction 'twixt heartsease and haws, —
One would wish, for the sake of each nursling so nipped
To catch the young rascal and have him well whipped !

ALFRED.

Some compatriot of mine, do I then understand,
With a cold Northern heart, and a rude English hand,
Has injured your Rosebud of France ?

STRANGER.

Sir, I know,
But little, or nothing. Yet some faces show
The last act of a tragedy in their regard :
Though the first scenes be wanting, it yet is not hard
To divine, more or less, what the plot may have been,
And what sort of actors have passed o'er the scene.
And whenever I gaze on the face of Lucile,
With its pensive and passionless languor, I feel
That some feeling hath burnt there . . . burnt out, and burnt up
Health and hope. So you feel when you gaze down the cup
Of extinguished volcanoes : you judge of the fire
Once there, by the ravage you see ; — the desire,
By the apathy left in its wake, and that sense
Of a moral, immovable, mute impotence.

ALFRED.

Humph ! . . . I see you have finished, at last, your cigar.
Can I offer another ?

STRANGER.

No, thank you. We are
Not two miles from Serchon.

ALFRED.

You know the road well?

STRANGER.

I have often been over it.

XVI.

Here a pause fell
On their converse. Still musingly on, side by side,
In the moonlight, the two men continued to ride
Down the dim mountain pathway. But each, for the rest
Of their journey, although they still rode on abreast,
Continued to follow in silence the train
Of the different feelings that haunted his brain;
And each, as though roused from a deep revery,
Almost shouted, descending the mountain, to see
Burst at once on the moonlight the silvery Baths,
The long lime-tree alley, the dark gleaming paths,
With the lamps twinkling through them — the quaint wooden roofs —
The little white houses.
The clatter of hoofs,
And the music of wandering bands, up the walls
Of the steep hanging hill, at remote intervals
Reached them, crossed by the sound of the clacking of whips,
And here and there, faintly, through serpentine slips
Of verdant rose-gardens, deep-sheltered with screens
Of airy acacias and dark evergreens,
They could mark the white dresses, and catch the light songs,
Of the lovely Parisians that wandered in throngs,
Led by Laughter and Love through the cold eventide
Down the dream-haunted valley, or up the hillside.

XVII.

At length, at the door of the inn l'Hérisson,
(Pray go there, if ever you go to Serchon!)
The two horsemen, well pleased to have reached it, alighted
And exchanged their last greetings.
The Frenchman invited
Lord Alfred to dinner. Lord Alfred declined.
He had letters to write, and felt tired. So he dined
In his own rooms that night.
With an unquiet eye
He watched his companion depart; nor knew why,
Beyond all accountable reason or measure,
He felt in his breast such a sovran displeasure.
"The fellow's good-looking," he murmured at last,
"And yet not a coxcomb." Some ghost of the past
Vexed him still.
"If he love her," he thought, "let him win her."
Then he turned to the future — and ordered his dinner.

XVIII.

O hour of all hours, the most blessed upon earth,
Blessèd hour of our dinners!
The land of his birth;
The face of his first love; the bills that he owes;
The twaddle of friends and the venom of foes;
The sermon he heard when to church he last went;
The money he borrowed, the money he spent; —
All of these things a man, I believe, may forget,
And not be the worse for forgetting; but yet
Never, never, O never! earth's luckiest sinner
Hath unpunished forgotten the hour of his dinner!
Indigestion, that conscience of every bad stomach,
Shall relentlessly gnaw and pursue him with some ache

Or some pain; and trouble, remorseless, his best ease,
As the Furies once troubled the sleep of Orestes.

XIX.

We may live without poetry, music, and art;
We may live without conscience, and live without heart;
We may live without friends; we may live without books;
But civilized man cannot live without cooks.
He may live without books, — what is knowledge but grieving?
He may live without hope, — what is hope but deceiving?
He may live without love, — what is passion but pining?
But where is the man that can live without dining?

XX.

Lord Alfred found, waiting his coming, a note
From Lucile.
"Your last letter has reached me," she wrote.
"This evening, alas! I must go to the ball,
And shall not be at home till too late for your call;
But to-morrow, at any rate, *sans faute*, at One
You will find me at home, and will find me alone.
Meanwhile, let me thank you sincerely, milord,
For the honor with which you adhere to your word.
Yes, I thank you, Lord Alfred! To-morrow, then.
"L."

XXI.

I find myself terribly puzzled to tell
The feelings with which Alfred Vargrave flung down
This note, as he poured out his wine. I must own
That I think he himself could have hardly explained
Those feelings exactly.
"Yes, yes," as he drained
The glass down, he muttered, "Jack's right, after all.
The coquette!"
"Does milord mean to go to the ball?"
Asked the waiter, who lingered.
"Perhaps. I don't know.
You may keep me a ticket, in case I should go."

XXII.

O, better, no doubt, is a dinner of herbs,
When seasoned by love, which no rancor disturbs,
And sweetened by all that is sweetest in life,
Than turbot, bisque, ortolans, eaten in strife!
But if, out of humor, and hungry, alone,
A man should sit down to a dinner, each one
Of the dishes of which the cook chooses to spoil
With a horrible mixture of garlic and oil,
The chances are ten against one, I must own,
He gets up as ill-tempered as when he sat down.
And if any reader this fact to dispute is
Disposed, I say . . . "*Allium edat cicutis Nocentius!*"
Over the fruit and the wine
Undisturbed the wasp settled. The evening was fine.
Lord Alfred his chair by the window had set,
And languidly lighted his small cigarette.
The window was open. The warm air without
Waved the flame of the candles. The moths were about.
In the gloom he sat gloomy.

XXIII.

Gay sounds from below
Floated up like faint echoes of joys long ago,
And night deepened apace; through the dark avenues
The lamps twinkled bright; and by threes, and by twos,
The idlers of Serchon were strolling at will,
As Lord Alfred could see from the cool window-sill,
Where his gaze, as he languidly turned it, fell o'er

His late travelling companion, now passing before
The inn, at the window of which he still sat,
In full toilet, — boots varnished, and snowy cravat,
Gayly smoothing and buttoning a yellow kid glove,
As he turned down the avenue. Watching above,
From his window, the stranger, who stopped as he walked
To mix with those groups, and now nodded, now talked,
To the young Paris dandies, Lord Alfred discerned,
By the way hats were lifted, and glances were turned,
That this unknown acquaintance, now bound for the ball,
Was a person of rank or of fashion; for all
Whom he bowed to in passing, or stopped with and chattered,
Walked on with a look which implied . . . "I feel flattered!"

XXIV.

His form was soon lost in the distance and gloom.

XXV.

Lord Alfred still sat by himself in his room.
He had finished, one after the other, a dozen
Or more cigarettes. He had thought of his cousin:
He had thought of Matilda, and thought of Lucile:
He had thought about many things: thought a great deal
Of himself: of his past life, his future, his present:
He had thought of the moon, neither full moon nor crescent:
Of the gay world, so sad! life, so sweet and so sour!
He had thought, too, of glory, and fortune, and power:
Thought of love, and the country, and sympathy, and
A poet's asylum in some distant land:
Thought of man in the abstract, and woman, no doubt,
In particular; also he had thought much about
His digestion, his debts, and his dinner; and last,
He thought that the night would be stupidly passed,
If he thought any more of such matters at all:
So he rose, and resolved to set out for the ball.

XXVI.

I believe, ere he finished his tardy toilet,
That Lord Alfred had spoiled, and flung by in a pet,
Half a dozen white neckcloths, and looked for the nonce
Twenty times in the glass, if he looked in it once.
I believe that he split up, in drawing them on,
Three pair of pale lavender gloves, one by one.
And this is the reason, no doubt, that at last,
When he reached the Casino, although he walked fast,
He heard, as he hurriedly entered the door,
The church-clock strike Twelve.

XXVII.

The last waltz was just o'er.
The chaperons and dancers were all in a flutter.
A crowd blocked the door: and a buzz and a mutter
Went about in the room as a young man, whose face
Lord Alfred had seen ere he entered that place,
But a few hours ago, through the perfumed and warm
Flowery porch, with a lady that leaned on his arm
Like a queen in a fable of old fairy days,
Left the ballroom.

XXVIII.

The hubbub of comment and praise
Reached Lord Alfred as just then he entered.
"*Ma foi!*"
Said a Frenchman beside him, . . .
"That lucky Luvois
Has obtained all the gifts of the gods . . . rank and wealth,

And good looks, and then such inexhaustible health!
He that hath shall have more; and this truth, I surmise,
Is the cause why, to-night, by the beautiful eyes
Of *la charmante Lucile* more distinguished than all,
He so gayly goes off with the belle of the ball."
"Is it true," asked a lady, aggressively fat,
Who, fierce as a female Leviathan, sat
By another that looked like a needle, all steel
And tenuity, — "Luvois will marry Lucile?"
The needle seemed jerked by a virulent twitch,
As though it were bent upon driving a stitch
Through somebody's character. "Madam," replied,
Interposing, a young man who sat by their side,
And was languidly fanning his face with his hat,
"I am ready to bet my new Tilbury that,
If Luvois has proposed, the Comtesse has refused."
The fat and thin ladies were highly amused.
"Refused! . . . what! a young Duke, not thirty, my dear,
With at least half a million (what is it?) a year!"
"That may be," said the third; "yet I know some time since
Castelmar was refused, though as rich, and a Prince.
But Luvois, who was never before in his life
In love with a woman who was not a wife,
Is now certainly serious."

XXIX.

The music once more Recommenced.

XXX.

Said Lord Alfred, "This ball is a bore!"
And returned to the inn, somewhat worse than before.

XXXI.

There, whilst musing he leaned the dark valley above,
Through the warm land were wandering the spirits of love.
A soft breeze in the white window drapery stirred;
In the blossomed acacia the lone cricket chirred;
The scent of the roses fell faint o'er the night,
And the moon on the mountain was dreaming in light.
Repose, and yet rapture! that pensive wild nature
Impregnate with passion in each breathing feature!
A stone's-throw from thence, through the large lime-trees peeped,
In a garden of roses, a white châlet, steeped
In the moonbeams. The windows oped down to the lawn;
The casements were open; the curtains were drawn;
Lights streamed from the inside; and with them the sound
Of music and song. In the garden, around
A table with fruits, wine, tea, ices, there set,
Half a dozen young men and young women were met.
Light, laughter, and voices, and music, all streamed
Through the quiet-leaved limes. At the window there seemed
For one moment the outline, familiar and fair,
Of a white dress, a white neck, and soft dusky hair,
Which Lord Alfred remembered . . . a moment or so
It hovered, then passed into shadow; and slow
The soft notes, from a tender piano upflung,
Floated forth, and a voice unforgotten thus sung:

"Hear a song that was born in the land of my birth!
The anchors are lifted, the fair ship is free,
And the shout of the mariners floats in its mirth
'Twixt the light in the sky and the light on the sea.

"And this ship is a world. She is freighted with souls,

She is freighted with merchandise: proudly she sails
With the Labor that stores, and the Will that controls
The gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"From the gardens of Pleasure, where reddens the rose,
And the scent of the cedar is faint on the air,
Past the harbors of Traffic, sublimely she goes,
Man's hopes o'er the world of the waters to bear!

"Where the cheer from the harbors of Traffic is heard,
Where the gardens of Pleasure fade fast on the sight,
O'er the rose, o'er the cedar, there passes a bird;
'T is the Paradise Bird, never known to alight.

"And that bird, bright and bold as a Poet's desire,
Roams her own native heavens, the realms of her birth.
There she soars like a seraph, she shines like a fire,
And her plumage hath never been sullied by earth.

"And the mariners greet her; there 's song on each lip,
For that bird of good omen, and joy in each eye.
And the ship and the bird, and the bird and the ship,
Together go forth over ocean and sky.

"Fast, fast fades the land! far the rose-gardens flee,
And far fleet the harbors. In regions unknown
The ship is alone on a desert of sea,
And the bird in a desert of sky is alone.

"In those regions unknown, o'er that desert of air,
Down that desert of waters — tremendous in wrath —
The storm-wind Euroclydon leaps from his lair,
And cleaves, through the waves of the ocean, his path.

"And the bird in the cloud, and the ship on the wave,
Overtaken, are beaten about by wild gales:
And the mariners all rush their cargo to save,
Of the gold in the ingots, the silk in the bales.

"Lo! a wonder, which never before hath been heard,
For it never before hath been given to sight;
On the ship hath descended the Paradise Bird,
The Paradise Bird, never known to alight!

"The bird which the mariners blessed, when each lip
Had a song for the omen that gladdened each eye;
The bright bird for shelter hath flown to the ship
From the wrath on the sea and the wrath in the sky.

"But the mariners heed not the bird any more.
They are felling the masts, — they are cutting the sails;
Some are working, some weeping, and some wrangling o'er
Their gold in the ingots, their silk in the bales.

"Souls of men are on board; wealth of man in the hold;
And the storm-wind Euroclydon sweeps to his prey;
And who heeds the bird? 'Save the silk and the gold!'
And the bird from her shelter the gust sweeps away!

"Poor Paradise Bird! on her lone flight once more
Back again in the wake of the wind she is driven, —
To be 'whelmed in the storm, or above it to soar,
And, if rescued from ocean, to vanish in heaven!

"And the ship rides the waters, and weathers the gales:
From the haven she nears the rejoicing is heard.
All hands are at work on the ingots, the bales,
Save a child, sitting lonely, who misses — the Bird!"

CANTO III.

I.

With stout iron shoes be my Pegasus shod!
For my road is a rough one: flint, stubble, and clod,
Blue clay, and black quagmire, brambles no few,
And I gallop up-hill, now.
There 's terror that 's true
In that tale of a youth who, one night at a revel,
Amidst music and mirth lured and wiled by some devil,
Followed ever one mask through the mad masquerade,
Till, pursued to some chamber deserted ('t is said),
He unmasked, with a kiss, the strange lady, and stood
Face to face with a Thing not of flesh nor of blood.
In this Masque of the Passions, called Life, there 's no human
Emotion, though masked, or in man or in woman,
But, when faced and unmasked, it will leave us at last
Struck by some supernatural aspect aghast.
For truth is appalling and eldrich, as seen
By this world's artificial lamplights, and we screen
From our sight the strange vision that troubles our life.
Alas! why is Genius forever at strife
With the world, which, despite the world's self, it ennobles?
Why is it that Genius perplexes and troubles
And offends the effete life it comes to renew?
'T is the terror of truth! 't is that Genius is true!

II.

Lucile de Nevers (if her riddle I read)
Was a woman of genius: whose genius, indeed,
With her life was at war. Once, but once, in that life
The chance had been hers to escape from this strife
In herself; finding peace in the life of another
From the passionate wants she, in hers, failed to smother.
But the chance fell too soon, when the crude restless power
Which had been to her nature so fatal a dower,
Only wearied the man it yet haunted and thralled;
And that moment, once lost, had been never recalled.
Yet it left her heart sore: and, to shelter her heart
From approach, she then sought, in that delicate art
Of concealment, those thousand adroit strategies
Of feminine wit, which repel while they please,
A weapon, at once, and a shield, to conceal
And defend all that women can earnestly feel.
Thus, striving her instincts to hide and repress,
She felt frightened at times by her very success:
She pined for the hill-tops, the clouds, and the stars:
Golden wires may annoy us as much as steel bars
If they keep us behind prison-windows: impassioned
Her heart rose and burst the light cage she had fashioned
Out of glittering trifles around it.
Unknown
To herself, all her instincts, without hesitation,
Embraced the idea of self-immolation.
The strong spirit in her, had her life but been blended
With some man's whose heart had her own comprehended,
All its wealth at his feet would have lavishly thrown.
For him she had struggled and striven alone;
For him had aspired; in him had transfused
All the gladness and grace of her nature — and used