The spring that yet oozed through the moss-paven floor
Had suggested, no doubt, to the monks there, of yore,
The site of that refuge where, back to its God
How many a heart, now at rest 'neath the sod,
Had borne from the world all the same wild unrest
That now preyed on his own!

XXVII.

By the thoughts in his breast
With varying impulse divided and torn,
He traversed the scant heath, and reached the forlorn
Autumn woodland, in which but a short while ago
He had seen the Duke rapidly enter; and so
He too entered. The light waned around him, and passed
Into darkness. The wrathful, red Occident cast
One glare of vindictive inquiry behind,
As the last light of day from the high wood declined,
And the great forest sighed its farewell to the beam,
And far off on the stillness the voice of the stream
Fell faintly.

XXVIII.

O Nature, how fair is thy face,
And how light is thy heart, and how friendless thy grace!
Thou false mistress of man! thou dost sport with him lightly
In his hours of ease and enjoyment; and brightly
Dost thou smile to his smile; to his joys thou inclinest,
But his sorrows, thou knowest them not, nor divinest.
While he woos, thou art wanton; thou lettest him love thee;
But thou art not his friend, for his grief cannot move thee;
And at last, when he sickens and dies, what dost thou?
All as gay are thy garments, as careless thy brow,
And thou laughest and toyest with any new comer,
Not a tear more for winter, a smile less for summer!
Hast thou never an anguish to heave the heart under
That fair breast of thine, O thou feminine wonder!
For all those — the young, and the fair, and the strong,
Who have loved thee, and lived with thee gayly and long,
And who now on thy bosom lie dead? and their deeds
And their days are forgotten! O, hast thou no weeds
And not one year of mourning, — one out of the many
That deck thy new bridals forever, — nor any
Regrets for thy lost loves, concealed from the new,
O thou widow of earth's generations? Go to!
If the sea and the night wind know aught of these things,
They do not reveal it. We are not thy kings.

CANTO VI.

I.

"The huntsman has ridden too far on the chase,
And eldrich, and eerie, and strange is the place!
The castle betokens a date long gone by.
He crosses the court-yard with curious eye:
He wanders from chamber to chamber, and yet
From strangeness to strangeness his footsteps are set;
And the whole place grows wilder and wilder, and less
Like aught seen before. Each in obsolete dress,
Strange portraits regard him with looks of surprise,
Strange forms from the arras start forth to his eyes;
Strange epigraphs, blazoned, burn out of the wall:
The spell of a wizard is over it all.
In her chamber, enchanted, the Princess is sleeping

The sleep which for centuries she has been keeping.
If she smile in her sleep, it must be to some lover
Whose lost golden locks the long grasses now cover:
If she moan in her dream, it must be to deplore
Some grief which the world cares to hear of no more.
But how fair is her forehead, how calm seems her cheek!
And how sweet must that voice be, if once she would speak!
He looks and he loves her; but knows he (not he!)
The clew to unravel this old mystery?
And he stoops to those shut lips. The shapes on the wall,
The mute men in armor around him, and all
The weird figures frown, as though striving to say,
'Halt! invade not the Past, reckless child of To-day!
And give not, O madman! the heart in thy breast
To a phantom, the soul of whose sense is possessed
By an Age not thine own!'
"But unconscious is he,
And he heeds not the warning, he cares not to see
Aught but *one* form before him!
"Rash, wild words are o'er;
And the vision is vanished from sight evermore!
And the gray morning sees, as it drearily moves
O'er a land long deserted, a madman that roves
Through a ruin, and seeks to recapture a dream.
Lost to life and its uses, withdrawn from the scheme
Of man's waking existence, he wanders apart."
And this is an old fairy-tale of the heart.
It is told in all lands, in a different tongue;
Told with tears by the old, heard with smiles by the young.
And the tale to each heart unto which it is known
Has a different sense. It has puzzled my own.

II.

Eugène de Luvois was a man who, in part
From strong physical health, and that vigor of heart
Which physical health gives, and partly, perchance,
From a generous vanity native to France,
With the heart of a hunter, whatever the quarry,
Pursued it, too hotly impatient to tarry
Or turn, till he took it. His trophies were trifles:
But trifler he was not. When rose-leaves it rifles,
No less than when oak-trees it ruins, the wind
Its pleasure pursues with impetuous mind.
Both Eugène de Luvois and Lord Alfred had been
Men of pleasure: but men's pleasant vices, which, seen
Floating faint, in the sunshine of Alfred's soft mood,
Seemed amiable foibles, by Luvois pursued
With impetuous passion, seemed semi-Satanic.
Half pleased you see brooks play with pebbles; in panic
You watch them whirled down by the torrent.
In truth,
To the sacred political creed of his youth
The century which he was born to denied
All realization. Its generous pride
To degenerate protest on all things was sunk;
Its principles each to a prejudice shrunk.
Down the path of a life that led nowhere he trod,
Where his whims were his guides, and his will was his god,
And his pastime his purpose.
From boyhood possessed
Of inherited wealth, he had learned to invest
Both his wealth and those passions wealth frees from the cage
Which penury locks, in each vice of an age
All the virtues of which, by the creed he revered,
Were to him illegitimate.
Thus, he appeared

To the world what the world chose to have him appear, —
The frivolous tyrant of Fashion, a mere
Reformer in coats, cards, and carriages! Still
'T was this vigor of nature, and tension of will,
That found for the first time — perchance for the last —
In Lucile what they lacked yet to free from the Past,
Force, and faith, in the Future.
And so, in his mind,
To the anguish of losing the woman was joined
The terror of missing his life's destination,
Which in her had its mystical representation.

III.

And truly, the thought of it, scaring him, passed
O'er his heart, while he now through the twilight rode fast.
As a shade from the wing of some great bird obscene
In a wide silent land may be suddenly seen,
Darkening over the sands, where it startles and scares
Some traveller strayed in the waste unawares,
So that thought more than once darkened over his heart
For a moment, and rapidly seemed to depart.
Fast and furious he rode through the thickets which rose
Up the shaggy hillside: and the quarrelling crows
Clanged above him, and clustering down the dim air
Dropped into the dark woods. By fits here and there
Shepherd fires faintly gleamed from the valleys. O, how
He envied the wings of each wild bird, as now
He urged the steed over the dizzy ascent
Of the mountain! Behind him a murmur was sent
From the torrent, — before him a sound from the tracts
Of the woodlands that waved o'er the wild cataracts,
And the loose earth and loose stones rolled momently down
From the hoofs of his steed to abysses unknown.
The red day had fallen beneath the black woods,
And the Powers of the night through the vast solitudes
Walked abroad and conversed with each other. The trees
Were in sound and in motion, and muttered like seas
In Elfland. The road through the forest was hollowed.
On he sped through the darkness, as though he were followed
Fast, fast by the Erl King!
The wild wizard-work
Of the forest at last opened sharp, o'er the fork
Of a savage ravine, and behind the black stems
Of the last trees, whose leaves in the light gleamed like gems,
Broke the broad moon above the voluminous
Rock-chaos, — the Hecate of that Tartarus!
With his horse reeking white, he at last reached the door
Of a small mountain inn, on the brow of a hoar
Craggy promontory, o'er a fissure as grim,
Through which, ever roaring, there leaped o'er the limb
Of the rent rock a torrent of water, from sight,
Into pools that were feeding the roots of the night.
A balcony hung o'er the water. Above
In a glimmering casement a shade seemed to move.
At the door the old negress was nodding her head
As he reached it. "My mistress awaits you," she said.
And up the rude stairway of creaking pine rafter
He followed her silent. A few moments after,
His heart almost stunned him, his head seemed to reel,
For a door closed — Luvois was alone with Lucile.

IV.

In a gray travelling dress, her dark hair unconfined
Streaming o'er it, and tossed now and then by the wind
From the lattice, that waved the dull flame in a spire
From a brass lamp before her, — a faint hectic fire
On her cheek, to her eyes lent the lustre of fever.
They seemed to have wept themselves wider than ever,
Those dark eyes, — so dark and so deep!
"You relent?
And your plans have been changed by the letter I sent?"
There his voice sank, borne down by a strong inward strife.

LUCILE.

Your letter! yes, Duke. For it threatens man's life, —
Woman's honor.

LUVOIS.

The last, madam, *not!*

LUCILE.

Both. I glance
At your own words; blush, son of the knighthood of France,
As I read them! You say in this letter . . .
"*I know*
Why now you refuse me; 't is (*is it not so?*)
For the man who has trifled before, wantonly,
And now trifles again with the heart you deny
To myself. But he shall not! By man's last wild law,
I will seize on the right (the *right*, Duc de Luvois!)
To avenge for you, woman, the past, and to give
To the future its freedom. That man shall not live
To make you as wretched as you have made me!"

LUVOIS.

Well, madam, in those words what word do you see
That threatens the honor of woman?

LUCILE.

See! . . . what,
What word, do you ask? Every word! would you not,
Had I taken your hand thus, have felt that your name
Was soiled and dishonored by more than mere shame
If the woman that bore it had first been the cause
Of the crime which in these words is menaced? You pause!
Woman's honor, you ask? Is there, sir, no dishonor
In the smile of a woman, when men, gazing on her,
Can shudder, and say, "In that smile is a grave"?
No! you can have no cause, Duke, for no right you have
In the contest you menace. That contest but draws
Every right into ruin. By all human laws
Of man's heart I forbid it, by all sanctities
Of man's social honor!
The Duke drooped his eyes.
"I obey you," he said, "but let woman beware
How she plays fast and loose thus with human despair,
And the storm in man's heart. Madam, yours was the right,
When you saw that I hoped, to extinguish hope quite,
But you should from the first have done this, for I feel
That you knew from the first that I loved you."
Lucile
This sudden reproach seemed to startle.
She raised
A slow, wistful regard to his features, and gazed
On them silent awhile. His own looks were downcast.
Through her heart, whence its first wild alarm was now passed,
Pity crept, and perchance o'er her conscience a tear,
Falling softly, awoke it.
However severe,
Were they unjust, these sudden upbraidings, to her?
Had she lightly misconstrued this man's character,

Which had seemed, even when most impassioned it seemed,
Too self-conscious to lose all in love? Had she deemed
That this airy, gay, insolent man of the world,
So proud of the place the world gave him, held furled
In his bosom no passion which once shaken wide
Might tug, till it snapped, that erect lofty pride?
Were those elements in him, which once roused to strife
Overthrow a whole nature, and change a whole life?
There are two kinds of strength. One, the strength of the river
Which through continents pushes its pathway forever
To fling its fond heart in the sea; if it lose
This, the aim of its life, it is lost to its use,
It goes mad, is diffused into deluge, and dies.
The other, the strength of the sea; which supplies
Its deep life from mysterious sources, and draws
The river's life into its own life, by laws
Which it heeds not. The difference in each case is this:
The river is lost, if the ocean it miss;
If the sea miss the river, what matter? The sea
Is the sea still, forever. Its deep heart will be
Self-sufficing, unconscious of loss as of yore;
Its sources are infinite; still to the shore,
With no diminution of pride, it will say,
"I am here; I, the sea! stand aside, and make way!"
Was his love, then, the love of the river? and she,
Had she taken that love for the love of the sea?

V.

At that thought, from her aspect whatever had been
Stern or haughty departed; and, humbled in mien,
She approached him, and brokenly murmured, as though
To herself more than him, "Was I wrong? is it so?
Hear me, Duke! you must feel that, whatever you deem
Your right to reproach me in this, your esteem
I may claim on *one* ground, — I at least am sincere.
You say that to me from the first it was clear
That you loved me. But what if this knowledge were known
At a moment in life when I felt most alone,
And least able to be so? A moment, in fact,
When I strove from one haunting regret to retract
And emancipate life, and once more to fulfil
Woman's destinies, duties, and hopes? would you still
So bitterly blame me, Eugène de Luvois,
If I hoped to see all this, or deemed that I saw
For a moment the promise of this, in the plighted
Affection of one who, in nature, united
So much that from others affection might claim,
If only affection were free? Do you blame
The hope of that moment? I deemed my heart free
From all, saving sorrow. I deemed that in me
There was yet strength to mould it once more to my will,
To uplift it once more to my hope. Do you still
Blame me, Duke, that I did not then bid you refrain
From hope? alas! I too then hoped!"

LUVOIS.

O, again,
Yet again, say that thrice-blessèd word! say, Lucile,
That you then deigned to hope —

LUCILE.

Yes! to hope I could feel,
And could give to you, that without which, all else given
Were but to deceive, and to injure you even: —

A heart free from thoughts of another.
Say, then,
Do you blame that one hope?

LUVOIS.

O Lucile!

"Say again,"
She resumed, gazing down, and with faltering tone,
"Do you blame me that, when I at last had to own
To my heart that the hope it had cherished was o'er,
And forever, I said to you then, 'Hope no more'?
I myself hoped no more!"
With but ill-suppressed wrath
The Duke answered . . . "What, then! he recrosses your path
This man, and you have but to see him, despite
Of his troth to another, to take back that light
Worthless heart to your own, which he wronged years ago!"
Lucile faintly, brokenly murmured, . . .
"No! no!
'T is not that — but alas! — but I cannot conceal
That I have not forgotten the past — but I feel
That I cannot accept all these gifts on your part, —
In return for what . . . ah, Duke, what is it? . . . a heart
Which is only a ruin!"
With words warm and wild,
"Though a ruin it be, trust me yet to rebuild
And restore it," Luvois cried; "though ruined it be,
Since so dear is that ruin, ah, yield it to me!"
He approached her. She shrank back. The grief in her eyes
Answered, "No!"
An emotion more fierce seemed to rise
And to break into flame, as though fired by the light
Of that look, in his heart. He exclaimed,
"Am I right?
You reject *me!* accept *him?*"
"I have not done so,"
She said firmly. He hoarsely resumed,
"Not yet, — no!
But can you with accents as firm promise me
That you will not accept him?"
"Accept? Is he free?
Free to offer?" she said.
"You evade me, Lucile,"
He replied; "ah, you will not avow what you feel!
He might make himself free? O, you blush, — turn away!
Dare you openly look in my face, lady, say!
While you deign to reply to one question from me?
I may hope not, you tell me: but tell me, may he?
What! silent? I alter my question. If quite
Freed in faith from this troth, might he hope then?"
"He might,"
She said softly.

VI.

Those two whispered words, in his breast,
As he heard them, in one maddening moment release
All that 's evil and fierce in man's nature, to crush
And extinguish in man all that 's good. In the rush
Of wild jealousy, all the fierce passions that waste
And darken and devastate intellect, chased
From its realm human reason. The wild animal
In the bosom of man was set free. And of all
Human passions the fiercest, fierce jealousy, fierce
As the fire, and more wild than the whirlwind, to pierce
And to rend, rushed upon him; fierce jealousy, swelled
By all passions bred from it, and ever impelled
To involve all things else in the anguish within it,
And on others inflict its own pangs!
At that minute
What passed through his mind, who shall say? who may tell
The dark thoughts of man's heart, which the red glare of hell
Can illumine alone?

He stared wildly around
That lone place, so lonely! That silence! no sound
Reached that room, through the dark evening air, save the drear
Drip and roar of the cataract ceaseless and near!
It was midnight all round on the weird silent weather;
Deep midnight in him! They two, — lone and together,
Himself, and that woman defenceless before him!
The triumph and bliss of his rival flashed o'er him.
The abyss of his own black despair seemed to ope
At his feet, with that awful exclusion of hope
Which Dante read over the city of doom.
All the Tarquin passed into his soul in the gloom,
And, uttering words he dared never recall,
Words of insult and menace, he thundered down all
The brewed storm-cloud within him: its flashes scorched blind
His own senses. His spirit was driven on the wind
Of a reckless emotion beyond his control;
A torrent seemed loosened within him. His soul
Surged up from that caldron of passion that hissed
And seethed in his heart.

VII.

He had thrown, and had missed
His last stake.

VIII.

For, transfigured, she rose from the place
Where he rested o'erawed: a saint's scorn on her face;
Such a dread *vade retro* was written in light
On her forehead, the fiend would himself, at that sight,
Have sunk back abashed to perdition. I know
If Lucretia at Tarquin but once had looked so,
She had needed no dagger next morning. She rose
And swept to the door, like that phantom the snows
Feel at nightfall sweep o'er them, when daylight is gone,
And Caucasus is with the moon all alone.
There she paused; and, as though from immeasurable,
Insurpassable distance, she murmured — "Farewell!
We, alas! have mistaken each other. Once more
Illusion, to-night, in my lifetime is o'er.
Duc de Luvois, adieu!"
From the heart-breaking gloom
Of that vacant, reproachful, and desolate room,
He felt she was gone, — gone forever!

IX.

No word,
The sharpest that ever was edged like a sword,
Could have pierced to his heart with such keen accusation
As the silence, the sudden profound isolation,
In which he remained.
"O, return; I repent!"
He exclaimed; but no sound through the stillness was sent,
Save the roar of the water, in answer to him,
And the beetle that, sleeping, yet hummed her night-hymn:
An indistinct anthem, that troubled the air
With a searching, and wistful, and questioning prayer.
"Return," sung the wandering insect. The roar
Of the waters replied, "Nevermore! nevermore!"
He walked to the window. The spray on his brow
Was flung cold from the whirlpools of water below;
The frail wooden balcony shook in the sound
Of the torrent. The mountains gloomed sullenly round.
A candle one ray from a closed casement flung.
O'er the dim balustrade all bewildered he hung,
Vaguely watching the broken and shimmering blink

Of the stars on the veering and vitreous brink
Of that snake-like prone column of water; and listing
Aloof o'er the languors of air the persisting
Sharp horn of the gray gnat. Before he relinquished
His unconscious employment, that light was extinguished.
Wheels, at last, from the inn door aroused him. He ran
Down the stairs; reached the door — just to see her depart.
Down the mountain the carriage was speeding.

X.

His heart
Pealed the knell of its last hope. He rushed on; but whither
He knew not — on, into the dark cloudy weather —
The midnight — the mountains — on, over the shelf
Of the precipice — on, still — away from himself!
Till, exhausted, he sank 'mid the dead leaves and moss
At the mouth of the forest. A glimmering cross
Of gray stone stood for prayer by the woodside. He sank
Prayerless, powerless, down at its base, 'mid the dank
Weeds and grasses; his face hid amongst them. He knew
That the night had divided his whole life in two.
Behind him a Past that was over forever;
Before him a Future devoid of endeavor
And purpose. He felt a remorse for the one,
Of the other a fear. What remained to be done?
Whither now should he turn? Turn again, as before,
To his old easy, careless existence of yore
He could not. He felt that for better or worse
A change had passed o'er him; an angry remorse
Of his own frantic failure and error had marred
Such a refuge forever. The future seemed barred
By the corpse of a dead hope o'er which he must tread
To attain it. Life's wilderness round him was spread.
What clew there to cling by?
He clung by a name
To a dynasty fallen forever. He came
Of an old princely house, true through change to the race
And the sword of Saint Louis, — a faith 't were disgrace
To relinquish, and folly to live for! Nor less
Was his ancient religion (once potent to bless
Or to ban; and the crozier his ancestors kneeled
To adore, when they fought for the Cross, in hard field,
With the Crescent) become, ere it reached him, tradition;
A mere faded badge of a social position;
A thing to retain and say nothing about,
Lest, if used, it should draw degradation from doubt.
Thus, the first time he sought them, the creeds of his youth
Wholly failed the strong needs of his manhood, in truth!
And beyond them, what region of refuge? what field
For employment, this civilized age, did it yield,
In that civilized land? or to thought? or to action?
Blind deliriums, bewildered and endless distraction!
Not even a desert, not even the cell
Of a hermit to flee to, wherein he might quell
The wild devil-instincts which now, unreprest,
Ran riot through that ruined world in his breast.

XI.

So he lay there, like Lucifer, fresh from the sight
Of a heaven scaled and lost; in the wide arms of night
O'er the howling abysses of nothingness! There
As he lay, Nature's deep voice was teaching him prayer;
But what had he to pray to?
The winds in the woods

The voices abroad o'er those vast solitudes,
Were in commune all round with the invisible Power
That walked the dim world by Himself at that hour.
But their language he had not yet learned — in despite
Of the much he *had* learned — or forgotten it quite,
With its once native accents. Alas! what had he
To add to that deep-toned sublime symphony
Of thanksgiving? . . . A fiery finger was still
Scorching into his heart some dread sentence. His will,
Like a wind that is put to no purpose, was wild
At its work of destruction within him. The child
Of an infidel age, he had been his own god,
His own devil.
He sat on the damp mountain sod,
And stared sullenly up at the dark sky.
The clouds
Had heaped themselves over the bare west in crowds
Of misshapen, incongruous portents. A green
Streak of dreary, cold, luminous ether, between
The base of their black barricades, and the ridge
Of the grim world, gleamed ghastly, as under some bridge,
Cyclop-sized, in a city of ruins o'erthrown
By sieges forgotten, some river, unknown
And unnamed, widens on into desolate lands.
While he gazed, that cloud-city invisible hands
Dismantled and rent; and revealed, through a loop
In the breached dark, the blemished and half-broken hoop
Of the moon, which soon silently sank; and anon
The whole supernatural pageant was gone.
The wide night, discomforted, conscious of loss,
Darkened round him. One object alone
— that gray cross —
Glimmered faint on the dark. Gazing up, he descried
Through the void air, its desolate arms outstretched wide,
As though to embrace him.
He turned from the sight,
Set his face to the darkness, and fled.

XII.

When the light
Of the dawn grayly flickered and glared on the spent
Wearied ends of the night, like a hope that is sent
To the need of some grief when its need is the sorest,
He was sullenly riding across the dark forest
Toward Serchon.
Thus riding, with eyes of defiance
Set against the young day, as disclaiming alliance
With aught that the day brings to man, he perceived
Faintly, suddenly, fleetingly, through the damp-leaved
Autumn branches that put forth gaunt arms on his way,
The face of a man pale and wistful, and gray
With the gray glare of morning. Eugène de Luvois,
With the sense of a strange second-sight, when he saw
That phantom-like face, could at once recognize,
By the sole instinct now left to guide him, the eyes
Of his rival, though fleeting the vision and dim,
With a stern sad inquiry fixed keenly on him.
And, to meet it, a lie leaped at once to his own;
A lie born of that lying darkness now grown
Over all in his nature! He answered that gaze
With a look which, if ever a man's look conveys
More intensely than words what a man means, conveyed
Beyond doubt in its smile an announcement which said,
"*I have triumphed. The question your eyes would imply*
Comes too late, Alfred Vargrave!"

And so he rode by,
And rode on, and rode gayly, and rode out of sight,
Leaving that look behind him to rankle and bite.

XIII.

And it bit, and it rankled.

XIV.

Lord Alfred, scarce knowing,
Or choosing, or heeding the way he was going,
By one wild hope impelled, by one wild fear pursued,
And led by one instinct, which seemed to exclude
From his mind every human sensation, save one —
The torture of doubt — had strayed moodily on,
Down the highway deserted, that evening in which
With the Duke he had parted; strayed on, through the rich
Haze of sunset, or into the gradual night,
Which darkened, unnoticed, the land from his sight,
Toward Saint Saviour; nor did the changed aspect of all
The wild scenery round him avail to recall
To his senses their normal perceptions, until,
As he stood on the black shaggy brow of the hill
At the mouth of the forest, the moon, which had hung
Two dark hours in a cloud, slipped on fire from among
The rent vapors, and sunk o'er the ridge of the world.
Then he lifted his eyes, and saw round him unfurled,
In one moment of splendor, the leagues of dark trees,
And the long rocky line of the wild Pyrenees.
And he knew by the milestone scored rough on the face
Of the bare rock, he was but two hours from the place
Where Lucile and Luvois must have met. This same track
The Duke must have traversed, perforce, to get back
To Serchon; not yet then the Duke had returned!
He listened, he looked up the dark, but discerned
Not a trace, not a sound of a horse by the way.
He knew that the night was approaching to day.
He resolved to proceed to Saint Saviour. The morn
Which, at last, through the forest broke chill and forlorn,
Revealed to him, riding toward Serchon, the Duke.
'T was then that the two men exchanged look for look.

XV.

And the Duke's rankled in him.

XVI.

He rushed on. He tore
His path through the thicket. He reached the inn door,
Roused the yet drowsing porter, reluctant to rise,
And inquired for the Countess. The man rubbed his eyes.
The Countess was gone. And the Duke?
The man stared
A sleepy inquiry.
With accents that scared
The man's dull sense awake, "He, the stranger," he cried,
"Who had been there that night!"
The man grinned and replied,
With a vacant intelligence, "He, O ay, ay!
He went after the lady."
No further reply
Could he give. Alfred Vargrave demanded no more,
Flung a coin to the man, and so turned from the door.
"What! the Duke then the night in that lone inn had passed?
In that lone inn — with her!" Was that look he had cast
When they met in the forest, that look which remained
On his mind with its terrible smile, thus explained?

XVII.

The day was half turned to the evening, before

He re-entered Serchon, with a heart sick and sore.
In the midst of a light crowd of babblers, his look,
By their voices attracted, distinguished the Duke,
Gay, insolent, noisy, with eyes sparkling bright,
With laughter, shrill, airy, continuous.
Right
Through the throng Alfred Vargrave, with swift sombre stride,
Glided on. The Duke noticed him, turned, stepped aside,
And, cordially grasping his hand, whispered low,
"O, how right have you been! There can never be — no,
Never — any more contest between us! Milord,
Let us henceforth be friends!"
Having uttered that word,
He turned lightly round on his heel, and again
His gay laughter was heard, echoed loud by that train
Of his young imitators.
Lord Alfred stood still,
Rooted, stunned to the spot. He felt weary and ill,
Out of heart with his own heart, and sick to the soul,
With a dull, stifling anguish he could not control.
Does he hear in a dream, through the buzz of the crowd,
The Duke's blithe associates, babbling aloud
Some comment upon his gay humor that day?
He never was gayer: what makes him so gay?
'T is, no doubt, say the flatterers, flattering in tune,
Some vestal whose virtue no tongue dare impugn
Has at last found a Mars, — who, of course, shall be nameless,
The vestal that yields to Mars *only* is blameless!
Hark! hears he a name which, thus syllabled, stirs
All his heart into tumult? . . . Lucile de Nevers
With the Duke's coupled gayly, in some laughing, light,
Free allusion? Not so as might give him the right
To turn fiercely round on the speaker, but yet
To a trite and irreverent compliment set!

XVIII.

Slowly, slowly, usurping that place in his soul
Where the thought of Lucile was enshrined, did there roll
Back again, back again, on its smooth downward course
O'er his nature, with gathered momentum and force,
THE WORLD.

XIX.

"No!" he muttered, "she cannot have sinned!
True! women there are (self-named women of mind!)
Who love rather liberty — liberty, yes!
To choose and to leave — than the legalized stress
Of the lovingest marriage. But she — is she so?
I will not believe it. Lucile? O no, no!
Not Lucile!
"But the world? and, ah, what would it say?
O the look of that man, and his laughter, to-day!
The gossip's light question! the slanderous jest!
She is right! no, we could not be happy. 'T is best
As it is. I will write to her, — write, O my heart!
And accept her farewell. *Our* farewell! must we part, —
Part thus, then, — forever, Lucile? Is it so?
Yes! I feel it. We could not be happy, I know.
'T was a dream! we must waken!"

XX.

With head bowed, as though
By the weight of the heart's resignation, and slow
Moody footsteps, he turned to his inn.
Drawn apart
From the gate, in the court-yard, and ready to start,

Postboys mounted, portmanteaus packed up and made fast,
A travelling-carriage, unnoticed, he passed.
He ordered his horse to be ready anon:
Sent, and paid, for the reckoning, and slowly passed on,
And ascended the staircase, and entered his room.
It was twilight. The chamber was dark in the gloom
Of the evening. He listlessly kindled a light,
On the mantel-piece; there a large card caught his sight, —
A large card, a stout card, well printed and plain,
Nothing flourishing, flimsy, affected, or vain.
It gave a respectable look to the slab
That it lay on. The name was —

SIR RIDLEY MACNAB.

Full familiar to him was the name that he saw,
For 't was that of his own future uncle-in-law,
Mrs. Darcy's rich brother, the banker, well known
As wearing the longest-phylacteried gown
Of all the rich Pharisees England can boast of;
A shrewd Puritan Scot, whose sharp wits made the most of
This world and the next; having largely invested
Not only where treasure is never molested
By thieves, moth, or rust; but on this earthly ball
Where interest was high, and security small,
Of mankind there was never a theory yet
Not by some individual instance upset:
And so to that sorrowful verse of the Psalm
Which declares that the wicked expand like the palm
In a world where the righteous are stunted and pent,
A cheering exception did Ridley present.
Like the worthy of Uz, Heaven prospered his piety.
The leader of every religious society,
Christian knowledge he labored through life to promote
With personal profit, and knew how to quote
Both the Stocks and the Scripture, with equal advantage
To himself and admiring friends, in this Cant-Age.

XXI.

Whilst over this card Alfred vacantly brooded,
A waiter his head through the doorway protruded;
"Sir Ridley MacNab with Milord wished to speak."
Alfred Vargrave could feel there were tears on his cheek;
He brushed them away with a gesture of pride.
He glanced at the glass; when his own face he eyed,
He was scared by its pallor. Inclining his head,
He with tones calm, unshaken, and silvery, said,
"Sir Ridley may enter."
In three minutes more
That benign apparition appeared at the door.
Sir Ridley, released for a while from the cares
Of business, and minded to breathe the pure airs
Of the blue Pyrenees, and enjoy his release,
In company there with his sister and niece,
Found himself now at Serchon, — distributing tracts,
Sowing seed by the way, and collecting new facts
For Exeter Hall; he was starting that night
For Bigorre: he had heard, to his cordial delight,
That Lord Alfred was there, and, himself, setting out

For the same destination: impatient, no doubt!
Here some commonplace compliments as to "the marriage"
Through his speech trickled softly, like honey: his carriage
Was ready. A storm seemed to threaten the weather:
If his young friend agreed, why not travel together?

With a footstep uncertain and restless, a frown
Of perplexity, during this speech, up and down
Alfred Vargrave was striding; but, after a pause
And a slight hesitation, the which seemed to cause
Some surprise to Sir Ridley, he answered, — "My dear
Sir Ridley, allow me a few moments here —
Half an hour at the most — to conclude an affair
Of a nature so urgent as hardly to spare
My presence (which brought me, indeed, to this spot),
Before I accept your kind offer."
"Why not?"
Said Sir Ridley, and smiled. Alfred Vargrave, before
Sir Ridley observed it, had passed through the door.
A few moments later, with footsteps revealing
Intense agitation of uncontrolled feeling,
He was rapidly pacing the garden below.
What passed through his mind then is more than I know.
But before one half-hour into darkness had fled,
In the courtyard he stood with Sir Ridley. His tread
Was firm and composed. Not a sign on his face
Betrayed there the least agitation. "The place
You so kindly have offered," he said, "I accept."
And he stretched out his hand. The two travellers stepped
Smiling into the carriage.
And thus, out of sight,
They drove down the dark road, and into the night.

XXII.

Sir Ridley was one of those wise men who, so far
As their power of saying it goes, say with Zophar,
"We, no doubt, are the people, and wisdom shall die with us!"
Though of wisdom like theirs there is no small supply with us.
Side by side in the carriage ensconced, the two men
Began to converse, somewhat drowsily, when
Alfred suddenly thought, — "Here's a man of ripe age,
At my side, by his fellows reputed as sage,
Who looks happy, and therefore who must have been wise:
Suppose I with caution reveal to his eyes
Some few of the reasons which make me believe
That I neither am happy nor wise? 't would relieve
And enlighten, perchance, my own darkness and doubt."
For which purpose a feeler he softly put out.
It was snapped up at once.
"What is truth?" jesting Pilate
Asked, and passed from the question at once with a smile at
Its utter futility. Had he addressed it
To Ridley MacNab, he at least had confessed it
Admitted discussion! and certainly no man
Could more promptly have answered the sceptical Roman
Than Ridley. Hear some street astronomer talk!
Grant him two or three hearers, a morsel of chalk,
And forthwith on the pavement he 'll sketch you the scheme
Of the heavens. Then hear him enlarge on his theme!
Not afraid of La Place, nor of Arago, he!
He 'll prove you the whole plan in plain A B C.
Here 's your sun, — call him A; B 's the moon; it is clear
How the rest of the alphabet brings up the rear
Of the planets. Now ask Arago, ask La Place,

(Your sages, who speak with the heavens face to face!)
Their science in plain A B C to accord
To your point-blank inquiry, my friends! not a word
Will you get for your pains from their sad lips. Alas!
Not a drop from the bottle that 's quite full will pass.
'T is the half-empty vessel that freest emits
The water that 's in it. 'T is thus with men's wits;
Or at least with their knowledge. A man's capability
Of imparting to others a truth with facility
Is proportioned forever with painful exactness
To the portable nature, the vulgar compactness,
The minuteness in size, or the lightness in weight
Of the truth he imparts. So small coins circulate
More freely than large ones. A beggar asks alms,
And we fling him a sixpence, nor feel any qualms;
But if every street charity shook an investment,
Or each beggar to clothe we must strip off a vestment,
The length of the process would limit the act;
And therefore the truth that 's summed up in a tract
Is most lightly dispensed.
As for Alfred, indeed,
On what spoonfuls of truth he was suffered to feed
By Sir Ridley, I know not. This only I know,
That the two men thus talking continued to go
Onward somehow, together, — on into the night, —
The midnight, — in which they escape from our sight.

XXIII.

And meanwhile a world had been changed in its place,
And those glittering chains that o'er blue balmy space
Hang the blessing of darkness, had drawn out of sight,
To solace unseen hemispheres, the soft night;
And the dew of the dayspring benignly descended,
And the fair morn to all things new sanction extended,
In the smile of the East. And the lark soaring on,
Lost in light, shook the dawn with a song from the sun.
And the world laughed.
It wanted but two rosy hours
From the noon, when they passed through the thick passion-flowers
Of the little wild garden that dimpled before
The small house where their carriage now stopped, at Bigorre.
And more fair than the flowers, more fresh than the dew,
With her white morning robe flitting joyously through
The dark shrubs with which the soft hillside was clothed,
Alfred Vargrave perceived, where he paused, his betrothed.
Matilda sprang to him, at once, with a face
Of such sunny sweetness, such gladness, such grace,
And radiant confidence, childlike delight,
That his whole heart upbraided itself at that sight.
And he murmured, or sighed, "O, how could I have strayed
From this sweet child, or suffered in aught to invade
Her young claim on my life, though it were for an hour,
The thought of another?"
"Look up, my sweet flower!"
He whispered her softly, "my heart unto thee
Is returned, as returns to the rose the wild bee!"
"And will wander no more?" laughed Matilda.
"No more,"
He repeated. And, low to himself,
"Yes, 't is o'er!
My course, too, is decided, Lucile! Was I blind
To have dreamed that these clever French-women of mind
Could satisfy simply a plain English heart,
Or sympathize with it?"

XXIV.

And here the first part
Of this drama is over. The curtain falls furled
On the actors within it, — the Heart and the World.
Wooed and wooer have played with the riddle of life, —
Have they solved it?
Appear! answer, Husband and Wife!

XXV.

Yet, ere bidding farewell to Lucile de Nevers,
Hear her own heart's farewell in this letter of hers.

The COMTESSE DE NEVERS *to a* FRIEND IN INDIA.

"Once more, O my friend, to your arms and your heart,
And the places of old . . . never, never to part!
Once more to the palm and the fountain! Once more
To the land of my birth, and the deep skies of yore!
From the cities of Europe, pursued by the fret
Of their turmoil wherever my footsteps are set;
From the children that cry for the birth, and behold,
There is no strength to bear them, — old Time is *so* old!
From the world's weary masters, that come upon earth
Sapped and mined by the fever they bear from their birth;
From the men of small stature, mere parts of a crowd,
Born too late, when the strength of the world hath been bowed;
Back, — back to the Orient, from whose sunbright womb
Sprang the giants which now are no more, in the bloom
And the beauty of times that are faded forever!
To the palms! to the tombs! to the still Sacred River!
Where I too, the child of a day that is done,
First leapt into life, and looked up at the sun.
Back again, back again, to the hill-tops of home
I come, O my friend, my consoler, I come!
Are the three intense stars, that we watched night by night
Burning broad on the band of Orion, as bright?
Are the large Indian moons as serene as of old,
When, as children, we gathered the moonbeams for gold?
Do you yet recollect me, my friend? Do you still
Remember the free games we played on the hill,
'Mid those huge stones upheaped, where we recklessly trod
O'er the old ruined fane of the old ruined god?
How he frowned, while around him we carelessly played!
That frown on my life ever after hath stayed,
Like the shade of a solemn experience upcast
From some vague supernatural grief in the past.
For the poor god, in pain, more than anger, he frowned,
To perceive that our youth, though so fleeting, had found,
In its transient and ignorant gladness, the bliss
Which his science divine seemed divinely to miss.
Alas! you may haply remember me yet
The free child, whose glad childhood myself I forget.
I come — a sad woman, defrauded of rest:
I bear to you only a laboring breast:
My heart is a storm-beaten ark, wildly hurled
O'er the whirlpools of time, with the wrecks of a world:
The dove from my bosom hath flown far away:
It is flown, and returns not, though many a day
Have I watched from the windows of life for its coming.
Friend, I sigh for repose, I am weary of roaming.
I know not what Ararat rises for me
Far away, o'er the waves of the wandering sea:

I know not what rainbow may yet, from far hills,
Lift the promise of hope, the cessation of ills:
But a voice, like the voice of my youth, in my breast
Wakes and whispers me on — to the East! to the East!
Shall I find the child's heart that I left there? or find
The lost youth I recall with its pure peace of mind?
Alas! who shall number the drops of the rain?
Or give to the dead leaves their greenness again?
Who shall seal up the caverns the earthquake hath rent?
Who shall bring forth the winds that within them are pent?
To a voice who shall render an image? or who
From the heats of the noontide shall gather the dew?
I have burned out within me the fuel of life
Wherefore lingers the flame? Rest is sweet after strife.
I would sleep for a while. I am weary.
"My friend,
I had meant in these lines to regather, and send
To our old home, my life's scattered links. But 't is vain!
Each attempt seems to shatter the chaplet again;
Only fit now for fingers like mine to run o'er,
Who return, a recluse, to those cloisters of yore
Whence too far I have wandered.
"How many long years
Does it seem to me now since the quick, scorching tears,
While I wrote to you, splashed out a girl's premature
Moans of pain at what women in silence endure!
To your eyes, friend of mine, and to your eyes alone,
That now long-faded page of my life hath been shown
Which recorded my heart's birth, and death, as you know,
Many years since, — how many!
"A few months ago
I seemed reading it backward, that page! Why explain
Whence or how? The old dream of my life rose again.
The old superstition! the idol of old!
It is over. The leaf trodden down in the mould
Is not to the forest more lost than to me
That emotion. I bury it here by the sea
Which will bear me anon far away from the shore
Of a land which my footsteps shall visit no more.
And a heart's *requiescat* I write on that grave.
Hark! the sigh of the wind, and the sound of the wave,
Seem like voices of spirits that whisper me home!
I come, O you whispering voices, I come!
My friend, ask me nothing.
"Receive me alone
As a Santon receives to his dwelling of stone
In silence some pilgrim the midnight may bring:
It may be an angel that, weary of wing,
Hath paused in his flight from some city of doom,
Or only a wayfarer strayed in the gloom.
This only I know: that in Europe at least
Lives the craft or the power that must master our East.
Wherefore strive where the gods must themselves yield at last?
Both they and their altars pass by with the Past.
The gods of the household Time thrusts from the shelf;
And I seem as unreal and weird to myself
As those idols of old.
"Other times, other men,
Other men, other passions!
"So be it! yet again
I turn to my birthplace, the birthplace of morn,
And the light of those lands where the great sun is born!
Spread your arms, O my friend! on your breast let me feel
The repose which hath fled from my own.
"Your LUCILE."