

IX.

From afar
That kiss was, alas! by Matilda beheld
With far other emotions: her young
bosom swelled,
And her young cheek with anger was
crimsoned.

The Duke
Adroitly attracted towards it her look
By a faint but significant smile.

X.

Much ill-contrued,
Renowned Bishop Berkeley has fully, for
one, strewed
With arguments page upon page to teach
folks
That the world they inhabit is only a
hoax.
But it surely is hard, since we can't do
without them,
That our senses should make us so oft
wish to doubt them!

CANTO III.

I.

WHEN first the red savage called Man
strode, a king,
Through the wilds of creation, — the
very first thing
That his naked intelligence taught him
to feel
Was the shame of himself; and the
wish to conceal
Was the first step in art. From the
apron which Eve
In Eden sat down out of fig-leaves to
weave,
To the furbelowed flounce and the broad
crinoline
Of my lady . . . you all know of course
whom I mean . . .
This art of concealment has greatly in-
creased.
A whole world lies cryptic in each
human breast;
And that drama of passions as old as the
hills,
Which the moral of all men in each man
fulfils,
Is only revealed now and then to our
eyes
In the newspaper-files and the courts of
assize.

II.

In the group seen so lately in sunlight
assembled,
Mid those walks over which the labour-
num-bough trembled,
And the deep-bosomed lilac, empara-
dising
The haunts where the blackbird and
thrush flit and sing,
The keenest eye could but have seen,
and seen only,
A circle of friends, minded not to leave
lonely
The bird on the bough, or the bee on
the blossom;
Conversing at ease in the garden's green
bosom,
Like those who, when Florence was yet
in her glories,
Cheated death and killed time with
Boccaccian stories.
But at length the long twilight more
deeply grew shaded,
And the fair night the rosy horizon
invaded.
And the bee in the blossom, the bird on
the bough,
Through the shadowy garden were slum-
bering now.
The trees only, o'er every unvisited walk,
Began on a sudden to whisper and talk.
And, as each little sprightly and garru-
lous leaf
Woke up with an evident sense of relief,
They all seemed to be saying . . . "Once
more we're alone,
And, thank Heaven, those tiresome peo-
ple are gone!"

III.

Through the deep blue concave of the
luminous air,
Large, loving, and languid, the stars
here and there,
Like the eyes of shy passionate women,
looked down
O'er the dim world whose sole tender
light was their own,
When Matilda, alone, from her chamber
descended,
And entered the garden, unseen, unat-
tended.
Her forehead was aching and parched,
and her breast
By a vague inexpressible sadness op-
pressed;

A sadness which led her, she scarcely
knew how,
And she scarcely knew why . . . (save,
indeed, that just now
The house, out of which with a gasp she
had fled
Half-stifled, seemed ready to sink on
her head) . . .
Out into the night air, the silence, the
bright
Boundless starlight, the cool isolation
of night!
Her husband that day had looked once
in her face,
And pressed both her hands in a silent
embrace,
And reproachfully noticed her recent
dejection
With a smile of kind wonder and tacit
affection.
He, of late so indifferent and listless!
. . . at last
Was he startled and awed by the change
which had passed
O'er the once radiant face of his young
wife? Whence came
That long look of solicitous fondness?
. . . the same
Look and language of quiet affection, —
the look
And the language, alas! which so often
she took
For pure love in the simple repose of its
purity, —
Her own heart thus lulled to a fatal
security!
Ha! would he deceive her again by this
kindness?
Had she been, then, O fool! in her in-
nocent blindness
The sport of transparent illusion? ah,
folly!
And that feeling, so tranquil, so happy,
so holy,
She had taken, till then, in the heart,
not alone
Of her husband, but also, indeed, in
her own,
For true love, nothing else, after all,
did it prove
But a friendship profanely familiar?
"And love? . . .
What was love, then? . . . not calm,
not secure, — scarcely kind!
But in one, all intensest emotions com-
bined:
Life and death: pain and rapture."

Thus wandering astray,
Led by doubt, through the darkness she
wandered away.
All silently crossing, recrossing the night,
With faint, meteoric, miraculous light,
The swift-shooting stars through the
infinite burned,
And into the infinite ever returned.
And silently o'er the obscure and un-
known
In the heart of Matilda there darted and
shone
Thoughts, enkindling like meteors the
deeps, to expire,
Leaving traces behind them of tremulous
fire.

IV.

She entered that arbor of lilacs, in
which
The dark air with odors hung heavy and
rich,
Like a soul that grows faint with desire.
'T was the place
In which she so lately had sat, face to
face
With her husband, — and her, the pale
stranger detested,
Whose presence her heart like a plague
had infested.
The whole spot with evil remembrance
was haunted.
Through the darkness there rose on the
heart which it daunted
Each dreary detail of that desolate day,
So full, and yet so incomplete. Far
away
The acacias were muttering, like mis-
chievous elves,
The whole story over again to them-
selves,
Each word, — and each word was a
wound! By degrees
Her memory mingled its voice with the
trees.

V.

Like the whisper Eve heard, when she
paused by the root
Of the sad tree of knowledge, and gazed
on its fruit,
To the heart of Matilda the trees seemed
to hiss
Wild instructions, revealing man's last
right, which is
The right of reprisals.
An image uncertain,

And vague, dimly shaped itself forth on the curtain
Of the darkness around her. It came, and it went;
Through her senses a faint sense of peril it sent:

It passed and repassed her; it went and it came

Forever returning; forever the same;
And forever more clearly defined; till her eyes

In that outline obscure could at last recognize

The man to whose image, the more and the more

That her heart, now aroused from its calm sleep of yore,

From her husband detached itself slowly, with pain,

Her thoughts had returned, and returned to, again,

As though by some secret indefinite law, —

The vigilant Frenchman, — Eugène de Luvois!

VI.

A light sound behind her. She trembled. By some

Night-witchcraft her vision a fact had become.

On a sudden she felt, without turning to view,

That a man was approaching behind her. She knew

By the fluttering pulse which she could not restrain,

And the quick-beating heart, that this man was Eugène.

Her first instinct was flight; but she felt her slight foot

As heavy as though to the soil it had root.

And the Duke's voice retained her, like fear in a dream.

VII.

"Ah, lady! in life there are meetings which seem
Like a fate. Dare I think like a sympathy too?

Yet what else can I bless for this vision of you?

Alone with my thoughts, on this star-lighted lawn,

By an instinct resistless, I felt myself drawn

To revisit the memories left in the place
Where so lately this evening I looked in your face.

And I find, — you, yourself, — my own dream!

"Can there be
In this world one thought common to you and to me?

If so, . . . I, who deemed but a moment ago

My heart uncompanioned, save only by woe,

Should indeed be more blessed than I dare to believe —

Ah, but *one* word, but one from your lips to receive" . . .

Interrupting him quickly, she murmured, "I sought,

Here, a moment of solitude, silence, and thought,

Which I needed." . . .

"Lives solitude only for one? Must its charm by my presence so soon be undone?

Ah, cannot two share it? What needs it for this? —

The same thought in both hearts, — be it sorrow or bliss;

If my heart be the reflex of yours, lady, — you,

Are you not yet alone, — even though we be two?"

"For that," . . . said Matilda, . . . "needs were, you should read

What I have in my heart." . . .

"Think you, lady, indeed, You are yet of that age when a woman conceals

In her heart so completely whatever she feels

From the heart of the man whom it interests to know

And find out what that feeling may be? Ah, not so,

Lady Alfred! Forgive me that in it I look,

But I read in your heart as I read in a book."

"Well, Duke! and what read you within it? unless

It be, of a truth, a profound weariness, And some sadness?"

"No doubt. To all facts there are laws.

The effect has its cause, and I mount to the cause."

VIII.

Matilda shrank back; for she suddenly found

That a finger was pressed on the yet bleeding wound

She herself had but that day perceived in her breast.

"You are sad," . . . said the Duke (and that finger yet pressed

With a cruel persistence the wound it made bleed) —

"You are sad, Lady Alfred, because the first need

Of a young and a beautiful woman is to be

Beloved, and to love. You are sad: for you see

That you are not beloved, as you deemed that you were:

You are sad: for that knowledge hath left you aware

That you have not yet loved, though you thought that you had.

Yes, yes! . . . you are sad — because knowledge is sad!"

He could not have read more profoundly her heart.

"What gave you," she cried, with a terrified start,

"Such strange power?" . . .

"To read in your thoughts?" he exclaimed,

"O lady, — a love, deep, profound, — be it blamed

Or rejected, — a love, true, intense, — such, at least,

As you, and you only, could wake in my breast!"

"Hush, hush! . . . I beseech you . . . for pity!" she gasped,

Snatching hurriedly from him the hand he had clasped

In her effort instinctive to fly from the spot.

"For pity?" . . . he echoed, "for pity! and what

Is the pity you owe him? his pity for you!

He, the lord of a life, fresh as new-fallen dew!

The guardian and guide of a woman, young, fair,

And matchless! (whose happiness did he not swear

To cherish through life?) he neglects her — for whom?

For a fairer than she? No! the rose in the bloom

Of that beauty which, even when hidden, can prevail

To keep sleepless with song the aroused nightingale,

Is not fairer; for even in the pure world of flowers

Her symbol is not, and this poor world of ours

Has no second Matilda! For whom? Let that pass!

'T is not I, 't is not you, that can name her, alas!

And I dare not question or judge her. But why,

Why cherish the cause of your own misery?

Why think of one, lady, who thinks not of you?

Why be bound by a chain which himself he breaks through?

And why, since you have but to stretch forth your hand,

The love which you need and deserve to command,

Why shrink? Why repel it?"

"O hush, sir! O hush!" Cried Matilda, as though her whole heart were one blush.

"Cease, cease, I conjure you, to trouble my life!

Is not Alfred your friend? and am I not his wife?"

IX.

"And have I not, lady," he answered, . . . "respected

His rights as a friend, till himself he neglected

Your rights as a wife? Do you think 't is alone

For three days I have loved you? My love may have grown

I admit, day by day, since I first felt your eyes,

In watching their tears, and in sounding your sighs.

But, O lady! I loved you before I believed

That your eyes ever wept, or your heart ever grieved.

Then I deemed you were happy—I
deemed you possessed
All the love you deserved,—and I hid
in my breast
My own love, till this hour—when I
could not but feel
Your grief gave me the right my own
grief to reveal!
I knew, years ago, of the singular power
Which Lucile o'er your husband pos-
sessed. Till the hour
In which he revealed it himself, did I,
—say!—
By a word, or a look, such a secret be-
tray?
No! no! do me justice. I never have
spoken
Of this poor heart of mine, till all ties
he had broken
Which bound *your* heart to him. And
now—now, that his love
For another hath left your own heart
free to rove,
What is it,—even now,—that I kneel
to implore you?
Only this, Lady Alfred! . . . to let me
adore you
Unblamed: to have confidence in me:
to spend
On me not one thought, save to think
me your friend.
Let me speak to you,—ah, let me speak
to you still!
Hush to silence my words in your heart,
if you will.
I ask no response: I ask only your leave
To live yet in your life, and to grieve
when you grieve!"

X.

"Leave me, leave me!" . . . she gasped,
with a voice thick and low
From emotion. "For pity's sake, Duke,
let me go!
I feel that to blame we should both of
us be,
Did I linger."
"To blame? yes, no doubt!" . . .
answered he,
"If the love of your husband, in bring-
ing you peace,
Had forbidden you hope. But he signs
your release
By the hand of another. One moment!
but one!
Who knows when, alas! I may see you
alone

As to-night I have seen you? or when
we may meet
As to-night we have met? when, en-
tranced at your feet,
As in this blessed hour, I may ever avow
The thoughts which are pining for utter-
ance now?"
"Duke! Duke!" . . . she exclaimed . . .
"for heaven's sake let me go!
It is late. In the house they will miss
me, I know.
We must not be seen here together. The
night
Is advancing. I feel overwhelmed with
affright!
It is time to return to my lord."
"To your lord?"
He repeated, with lingering reproach on
the word,
"To your lord? do you think he awaits
you, in truth?
Is he anxiously missing your presence,
forsooth?
Return to your lord! . . . his restraint
to renew?
And hinder the glances which are not for
you?
No, no! . . . at this moment his looks
seek the face
Of another! another is there in your
place!
Another consoles him! another receives
The soft speech which from silence your
absence relieves!"

XI.

"You mistake, sir!" . . . responded a
voice, calm, severe,
And sad, . . . "You mistake, sir! that
other is here."

Eugène and Matilda both started.
"Lucile!"
With a half-stifled scream, as she felt
herself reel
From the place where she stood, cried
Matilda.

"Ho, oh!
What! eaves-dropping, madam?" . . .
the Duke cried . . . "And so
you were listening?"
"Say, rather," she said, "that I
heard,
Without wishing to hear it, that in-
famous word,—
Heard—and therefore reply."
"Belle Comtesse," said the Duke,

With concentrated wrath in the savage
rebuke,
Which betrayed that he felt himself
baffled . . . "you know
That your place is not *here*."
"Duke," she answered him slow,
"My place is wherever my duty is clear;
And therefore my place, at this moment,
is here.
O lady, this morning my place was beside
Your husband, because (as she said this
she sighed)
I felt that from folly fast growing to
crime—
The crime of self-blindness—Heaven
yet spared me time
To save for the love of an innocent wife
All that such love deserved in the heart
and the life
Of the man to whose heart and whose
life you alone
Can with safety confide the pure trust
of your own."

She turned to Matilda, and lightly laid
on her
Her soft, quiet hand . . .
"Tis, O lady, the honor
Which that man has confided to you,
that, in spite
Of his friend, I now trust I may yet save
to-night—
Save for both of you, lady! for yours
I revere;
Duc de Luvois, what say you?—my
place is not here?"

XII.

And, so saying, the hand of Matilda she
caught,
Wound one arm round her waist unre-
sisted, and sought
Gently, softly, to draw her away from
the spot.
The Duke stood confounded, and followed
them not.
But not yet the house had they reached
when Lucile
Her tender and delicate burden could
feel
Sink and falter beside her. O, then she
knelt down,
Flung her arms round Matilda, and
pressed to her own
The poor bosom beating against her.

The moon,

Bright, breathless, and buoyant, and
brimful of June,
Floated up from the hillside, sloped over
the vale,
And poised herself loose in mid-heaven,
with one pale,
Minute, scintilless, and tremulous
star
Swinging under her globe like a wizard-
lit car,
Thus to each of those women revealing
the face
Of the other. Each bore on her features
the trace
Of a vivid emotion. A deep inward
shame
The cheek of Matilda had flooded with
flame.
With her enthusiastic emotion, Lucile
Trembled visibly yet; for she could not
but feel
That a heavenly hand was upon her that
night,
And it touched her pure brow to a
heavenly light.
"In the name of your husband, dear
lady," she said;
"In the name of your mother, take
heart! Lift your head,
For those blushes are noble. Alas! do
not trust
To that maxim of virtue made ashes and
dust,
That the fault of the husband can cancel
the wife's.
Take heart! and take refuge and strength
in your life's
Pure silence,—there, kneel, pray, and
hope, weep, and wait!"
"Saved, Lucile!" sobbed Matilda, "but
saved to what fate?
Tears, prayers, yes! not hopes."
"Hush!" the sweet voice replied.
"Fooled away by a fancy, again to your
side
Must your husband return. Doubt not
this. And return
For the love you can give, with the love
that you yearn
To receive, lady. What was it chilled
you both now?
Not the absence of love, but the igno-
rance how
Love is nourished by love. Well! hence-
forth you will prove
Your heart worthy of love,—since it
knows how to love."

XIII.

"What gives you such power over me,
that I feel
Thus drawn to obey you? What are
you, Lucile?"
Sighed Matilda, and lifted her eyes to
the face
Of Lucile.
There passed suddenly through it the
trace
Of deep sadness; and o'er that fair fore-
head came down
A shadow which yet was too sweet for a
frown.
"The pupil of sorrow, perchance" . . .
she replied.
"Of sorrow?" Matilda exclaimed . . .
"O confide
To my heart your affliction. In all you
made known
I should find some instruction, no doubt,
for my own!"
"And I some consolation, no doubt;
for the tears
Of another have not flowed for me many
years."
It was then that Matilda herself seized
the hand
Of Lucile in her own, and uplifted her;
and
Thus together they entered the house.

XIV.

'T was the room

Of Matilda.

The languid and delicate gloom
Of a lamp of pure white alabaster, aloft
From the ceiling suspended, around it
slept soft.
The casement oped into the garden.
The pale
Cool moonlight streamed through it.
One lone nightingale
Sung aloof in the laurels.
And here, side by side,
Hand in hand, the two women sat down
undescried,
Save by guardian angels.
As, when, sparkling yet
From the rain, that, with drops that are
jewels, leaves wet
The bright head it humbles, a young
rose inclines
To some pale lily near it, the fair vision
shines

As one flower with two faces, in hushed,
tearful speech,
Like the showery whispers of flowers,
each to each
Linked, and leaning together, so loving,
so fair,
So united, yet diverse, the two women
there
Looked, indeed, like two flowers upon
one drooping stem,
In the soft light that tenderly rested on
them.
All that soul said to soul in that cham-
ber, who knows?
All that heart gained from heart?
Leave the lily, the rose,
Undisturbed with their secret within
them. For who
To the heart of the floweret can follow
the dew?
A night full of stars! O'er the silence,
unseen,
The footsteps of sentinel angels, between
The dark land and deep sky were mov-
ing. You heard
Passed from earth up to heaven the
happy watchword
Which brightened the stars as amongst
them it fell
From earth's heart, which it eased . . .
"All is well! all is well!"

CANTO IV.

I.

THE Poets pour wine; and, when 't is
new, all decry it,
But, once let it be old, every trifler
must try it.
And Polonius, who praises no wine
that's not Massie,
Complains of my verse, that my verse is
not classic.
And Miss Tilburina, who sings, and not
badly,
My earlier verses, sighs "Commonplace
sadly!"
As for you, O Polonius, you vex me but
slightly;
But you, Tilburina, your eyes beam so
brightly
In despite of their languishing looks, on
my word,

That to see you look cross I can scarcely
afford.
Yes! the silliest woman that smiles on
a bard
Better far than Longinus himself can
reward
The appeal to her feelings of which she
approves;
And the critics I most care to please are
the Loves.
Alas, friend! what boots it, a stone at
his head
And a brass on his breast, — when a
man is once dead?
Ay! were fame the sole guerdon, poor
guerdon were then
Theirs who, stripping life bare, stand
forth models for men.
The reformer's? — a creed by posterity
learnt
A century after its author is burnt!
The poet's? — a laurel that hides the
bald brow
It hath blighted! The painter's? — ask
Raphael now
Which Madonna's authentic! The
statesman's? — a name
For parties to blacken, or boys to de-
claim!
The soldier's? — three lines on the cold
Abbey pavement!
Were this all the life of the wise and the
brave meant,
All it ends in, thrice better, Neæra, it
were
Unregarded to sport with thine odorous
hair,
Untroubled to lie at thy feet in the
shade
And be loved, while the roses yet bloom
overhead,
Than to sit by the lone hearth, and think
the long thought,
A severe, sad, blind schoolmaster, envied
for naught
Save the name of John Milton! For all
men, indeed,
Who in some choice edition may gracious-
ly read,
With fair illustration, and erudite note,
The song which the poet in bitterness
wrote,
Beat the poet, and notably beat him, in
this —
The joy of the genius is theirs, whilst
they miss

The grief of the man: Tasso's song, —
not his madness!
Dante's dreams, — not his waking to
exile and sadness!
Milton's music, — but not Milton's blind-
ness! . . .
Yet rise,
My Milton, and answer, with those noble
eyes
Which the glory of heaven hath blinded
to earth!
Say — the life, in the living it, savors
of worth:
That the deed, in the doing it, reaches
its aim:
That the fact has a value apart from the
fame:
That a deeper delight, in the mere labor,
pays
Scorn of lesser delights, and laborious
days:
And Shakespeare, though all Shake-
spear's writings were lost,
And his genius, though never a trace of
it crossed
Posterity's path, not the less would have
dwelt
In the isle with Miranda, with Hamlet
have felt
All that Hamlet hath uttered, and haply
where, pure
On its death-bed, wronged Love lay,
have moaned with the Moor!

II.

When Lord Alfred that night to the salon
returned
He found it deserted. The lamp dimly
burned
As though half out of humor to find itself
there
Forced to light for no purpose a room
that was bare.
He sat down by the window alone.
Never yet
Did the heavens a lovelier evening beget
Since Latona's bright childbed that bore
the new moon!
The dark world lay still, in a sort of
sweet swoon,
Wide open to heaven; and the stars on
the stream
Were trembling like eyes that are loved
on the dream
Of a lover; and all things were glad and
at rest