

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, Neëra, 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

Save the unquiet heart in his own troubled breast.
He endeavored to think, — an unwonted employment,
Which appeared to afford him no sort of enjoyment.

III.

"Withdraw into yourself. But, if peace you seek there for,
Your reception, beforehand, be sure to prepare for,"
Wrote the tutor of Nero; who wrote, be it said,
Better far than he acted, — but peace to the dead!
He bled for his pupil: what more could he do?
But Lord Alfred, when into himself he withdrew,
Found all there in disorder. For more than an hour
He sat with his head drooped like some stubborn flower
Beaten down by the rush of the rain, — with such force
Did the thick, gushing thoughts hold upon him the course
Of their sudden descent, rapid, rushing, and dim,
From the cloud that had darkened the evening for him.
At one moment he rose, — rose and opened the door,
And wistfully looked down the dark corridor
Toward the room of Matilda. Anon, with a sigh
Of an incomplete purpose, he crept quietly
Back again to his place in a sort of submission
To doubt, and returned to his former position, —
That loose fall of the arms, that dull droop of the face,
And the eye vaguely fixed on impalpable space.
The dream, which till then had been lulling his life,
As once Circe the winds, had sealed thought; and his wife
And his home for a time he had quite, like Ulysses,
Forgotten; but now o'er the troubled abysses

Of the spirit within him, æolian, forth leapt
To their freedom new-found, and resistlessly swept
All his heart into tumult, the thoughts which had been
Long pent up in their mystic recesses unseen.

IV.

How long he thus sat there, himself he knew not,
Till he started, as though he were suddenly shot,
To the sound of a voice too familiar to doubt,
Which was making some noise in the passage without.
A sound English voice, with a round English accent,
Which the scared German echoes resentfully back sent;
The complaint of a much disappointed cab-driver
Mingled with it, demanding some ultimate stiver:
Then, the heavy and hurried approach of a boot
Which revealed by its sound no diminutive foot:
And the door was flung suddenly open, and on
The threshold Lord Alfred by bachelor John
Was seized in that sort of affectionate rage or
Frenzy of hugs which some stout Ursa Major
On some lean Ursa Minor would doubtless bestow
With a warmth for which only starvation and snow
Could render one grateful. As soon as he could,
Lord Alfred contrived to escape, nor be food
Any more for those somewhat voracious embraces.
Then the two men sat down and scanned each other's faces;
And Alfred could see that his cousin was taken
With unwonted emotion. The hand that had shaken
His own trembled somewhat. In truth he desried,
At a glance, something wrong.

V.
"What's the matter?" he cried.
"What have you to tell me?"

JOHN.
What! have you not heard?
ALFRED.
Heard what?

JOHN.
This sad business —
ALFRED.
I? no, not a word.
JOHN.
You received my last letter?
ALFRED.
I think so. If not,
What then?

JOHN.
You have acted upon it?
ALFRED.
On what?
JOHN.
The advice that I gave you —
ALFRED.
Advice? — let me see!
You *always* are giving advice, Jack, to me.
About Parliament was it?

JOHN.
Hang Parliament! no,
The Bank, the Bank, Alfred!

ALFRED.
What Bank?
JOHN.
Heavens! I know
You are careless; — but surely you have not forgotten, —
Or neglected . . . I warned you the whole thing was rotten.
You have drawn those deposits at least?

ALFRED.
No, I meant
To have written to-day; but the note shall be sent
To-morrow, however.

JOHN.
To-morrow? too late!
Too late! O, what devil bewitched you to wait?

ALFRED.
Mercy save us! you don't mean to say . . .

JOHN.
Yes, I do.
ALFRED.
What! Sir Ridley? . . .

JOHN.
Smashed, broken, blown up, bolted too!
ALFRED.
But his own niece? . . . In heaven's name, Jack . . .

JOHN.
O, I told you
The old hypocritical scoundrel would . . .

ALFRED.
Hold! you
Surely can't mean we are ruined?

JOHN.
Sit down!
A fortnight ago a report about town
Made me most apprehensive. Alas, and alas!
I at once wrote and warned you. Well, now let that pass.
A run on the Bank about five days ago
Confirmed my forebodings too terribly, though.
I drove down to the city at once: found the door
Of the Bank close: the Bank had stopped payment at four.
Next morning the failure was known to be fraud:
Warrant out for MacNab; but MacNab was abroad:
Gone — we cannot tell where. I endeavored to get
Information: have learned nothing certain as yet, —
Not even the way that old Ridley was gone:
Or with those securities what he had done:
Or whether they had been already called out:

If they are not, their fate is, I fear, past
a doubt.
Twenty families ruined, they say : what
was left, —
Unable to find any clew to the cleft
The old fox ran to earth in, — but join
you as fast
As I could, my dear Alfred ? *

VI.

He stopped here, aghast
At the change in his cousin, the hue of
whose face
Had grown livid ; and glassy his eyes
fixed on space.
"Courage, courage !" . . . said John,
"bear the blow like a man !" —
And he caught the cold hand of Lord
Alfred. There ran
Through that hand a quick tremor. "I
bear it," he said,
"But Matilda? the blow is to her!"
And his head
Seemed forced down, as he said it.

JOHN.

Matilda? Pooh, pooh!
I half think I know the girl better than
you.
She has courage enough — and to spare.
She cares less
Than most women for luxury, nonsense,
and dress.

ALFRED.

The fault has been mine.

JOHN.

Be it yours to repair it :
If you did not avert, you may help her
to bear it.

ALFRED.

I might have averted.

JOHN.

Perhaps so. But now
There is clearly no use in considering
how,

* These events, it is needless to say, Mr. Morse,
Took place when Bad News as yet travelled
by horse.
Ere the world, like a cockchafer, buzzed on a
wire,
Or Time was calmed by electrical fire ;
Ere a cable went under the hoary Atlantic,
Or the word Telegram drove grammarians
frantic.

Or whence, came the mischief. The
mischief is here.
Broken shins are not mended by crying,
— that's clear !
One has but to rub them, and get up
again,
And push on, — and not think too much
of the pain.
And at least it is much that you see
that to her
You owe too much to think of yourself.
You must stir
And arouse yourself, Alfred, for her
sake. Who knows?
Something yet may be saved from this
wreck. I suppose
We shall make him disgorge all he can,
at the least.

"O Jack, I have been a brute idiot ! a
beast !
A fool ! I have sinned, and to her I
have sinned !
I have been heedless, blind, inexcusably
blind !
And now, in a flash, I see all things !" —
As though
To shut out the vision, he bowed his
head low
On his hands ; and the great tears in
silence rolled on,
And fell momentarily, heavily, one after
one.
John felt no desire to find instant
relief
For the trouble he witnessed.

He guessed, in the grief
Of his cousin, the broken and heartfelt
admission
Of some error demanding a heartfelt
contrition :
Some oblivion perchance which could
plead less excuse
To the heart of a man re-aroused to the
use
Of the conscience God gave him, than
simply and merely
The neglect for which now he was pay-
ing so dearly.
So he rose without speaking, and paced
up and down
The long room, much afflicted, indeed,
in his own
Cordial heart for Matilda.

Thus, silently lost
In his anxious reflections, he crossed
and recrossed

The place where his cousin yet hope-
lessly hung
O'er the table ; his fingers entwisted
among
The rich curls they were knotting and
dragging : and there,
That sound of all sounds the most pain-
ful to hear,
The sobs of a man ! Yet so far in his own
Kindly thoughts was he plunged, he al-
ready had grown
Unconscious of Alfred.
And so for a space
There was silence between them.

VII.

At last, with sad face
He stopped short, and bent on his cousin
awhile
A pained sort of wistful, compassionate
smile,
Approached him, — stood o'er him, —
and suddenly laid
One hand on his shoulder —
"Where is she?" he said.
Alfred lifted his face all disfigured with
tears
And gazed vacantly at him, like one
that appears
In some foreign language to hear himself
greeted,
Unable to answer.
"Where is she?" repeated
His cousin.
He motioned his hand to the door ;
"There, I think," he replied. Cousin
John said no more,
And appeared to relapse to his own cog-
itations,
Of which not a gesture vouchsafed indi-
cations.

So again there was silence.
A timepiece at last
Struck the twelve strokes of midnight.
Roused by them, he cast
A half-look to the dial ; then quietly
threw
His arm round the neck of his cousin,
and drew
The hands down from his face.
"It is time she should know
What has happened," he said, . . . "let
us go to her now."
Alfred started at once to his feet.
Drawn and wan
Though his face, he looked more than
his wont was — a man.

Strong for once, in his weakness. Up-
lifted, filled through
With a manly resolve.

If that axiom be true
Of the "*Sum quia cogito*," I must opine
That "*id sum quod cogito*" : — that
which, in fine,
A man thinks and feels, with his whole
force of thought
And feeling, the man is himself.

He had fought
With himself, and rose up from his self-
overthrow
The survivor of much which that strife
had laid low.

At his feet, as he rose at the name of
his wife,
Lay in ruins the brilliant unrealized
life
Which, though yet unfulfilled, seemed
till then, in that name,
To be his, had he claimed it. The
man's dream of fame
And of power fell shattered before him ;
and only
There rested the heart of the woman. so
lonely

In all save the love he could give her.
The lord
Of that heart he arose. Blush not,
Muse, to record
That his first thought, and last, at that
moment was not
Of the power and fame that seemed lost
to his lot,
But the love that was left to it ; not of
the self
He had cared for, yet squandered ; and
not of himself,
But of her ; as he murmured,

"One moment, dear Jack !
We have grown up from boyhood to-
gether. Our track
Has been through the same meadows in
childhood : in youth
Through the same silent gateways, to
manhood. In truth,
There is none that can know me as you
do ; and none
To whom I more wish to believe myself
known.
Speak the truth ; you are not wont to
mince it, I know.
Nor I, shall I shirk it, or shrink from it
now.
In despite of a wanton behavior, in
spite

Of vanity, folly, and pride, Jack, which might
Have turned from me many a heart strong and true
As your own, I have never turned round and missed YOU
From my side in one hour of affliction or doubt
By my own blind and heedless self-will brought about.
Tell me truth. Do I owe this alone to the sake
Of those old recollections of boyhood that make
In your heart yet some clinging and crying appeal
From a judgment more harsh, which I cannot but feel
Might have sentenced our friendship to death long ago?
Or is it . . . (I would I could deem it were so!)
That, not all overlaid by a listless exterior,
Your heart has divined in me something superior
To that which I seem; from my innermost nature
Not wholly expelled by the world's usurpature?
Some instinct of earnestness, truth, or desire
For truth? Some one spark of the soul's native fire
Moving under the ashes, and cinders, and dust
Which life hath heaped o'er it? Some one fact to trust
And to hope in? Or by you alone am I deemed
The mere frivolous fool I so often have seemed
To my own self?"

JOHN.

No, Alfred! you will, I believe, Be true, at the last, to what now makes you grieve
For having belied your true nature so long.
Necessity is a stern teacher. Be strong!
"Do you think," he resumed . . . "what I feel while I speak
Is no more than a transient emotion, as weak
As these weak tears would seem to be-taken it?"

JOHN.

No!

ALFRED.

Thank you, cousin! your hand then.
And now I will go
Alone, Jack. Trust to me.

VIII.

JOHN.

I do. But 't is late.
If she sleeps, you 'll not wake her.

ALFRED.

No, no! it will wait
(Poor infant!) too surely, this mission of sorrow;
If she sleeps, I will not mar her dreams of to-morrow.
He opened the door, and passed out.
Cousin John
Watched him wistful, and left him to seek her alone.

IX.

His heart beat so loud when he knocked at her door,
He could hear no reply from within.
Yet once more
He knocked lightly. No answer. The handle he tried:
The door opened: he entered the room undescried.

X.

No brighter than is that dim circle of light
Which enhaloes the moon when rains form on the night,
The pale lamp and indistinct radiance shed
Round the chamber, in which at her pure snowy bed
Matilda was kneeling; so wrapt in deep prayer
That she knew not her husband stood watching her there.
With the lamplight the moonlight had mingled a faint
And unearthly effulgence which seemed to acquaint
The whole place with a sense of deep peace made secure
By the presence of something angelic and pure.
And not purer some angel Grief carves o'er the tomb

Where Love lies, than the lady that kneeled in that gloom.
She had put off her dress; and she looked to his eyes
Like a young soul escaped from its earthly disguise;
Her fair neck and innocent shoulders were bare,
And over them rippled her soft golden hair;
Her simple and slender white bodice unlaced
Confined not one curve of her delicate waist.
As the light that, from water reflected, forever
Trembles up through the tremulous reeds of a river,
So the beam of her beauty went trembling in him,
Through the thoughts it suffused with a sense soft and dim,
Reproducing itself in the broken and bright
Lapse and pulse of a million emotions.
That sight
Bowed his heart, bowed his knee. Knowing scarce what he did,
To her side through the chamber he silently slid,
And knelt down beside her,—and prayed at her side.

XI.

Upstarting, she then for the first time descried
That her husband was near her; suffused with the blush
Which came o'er her soft pallid cheek with a gush
Where the tears sparkled yet.
As a young fawn uncouches,
Shy with fear, from the fern where some hunter approaches,
She shrank back; he caught her, and circling his arm
Round her waist, on her brow pressed one kiss long and warm.
Then her fear changed in impulse; and hiding her face
On his breast, she hung locked in a clinging embrace
With her soft arms wound heavily round him, as though
She feared, if their clasp were relaxed, he would go:

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Her smooth naked shoulders, uncared for, convulsed
By sob after sob, while her bosom yet pulsed
In its pressure on his, as the effort within it
Lived and died with each tender tumultuous minute.
"O Alfred, O Alfred! forgive me," she cried,—
"Forgive me!"
"Forgive you, my poor child!" he sighed;
"But I never have blamed you for aught that I know,
And I have not one thought that reproaches you now."
From her arms he unwound himself gently. And so
He forced her down softly beside him. Below
The canopy shading their couch, they sat down.
And he said, clasping firmly her hand in his own,
"When a proud man, Matilda, has found out at length,
That he is but a child in the midst of his strength,
But a fool in his wisdom, to whom can he own
The weakness which thus to himself hath been shown?
From whom seek the strength which his need of is sore,
Although in his pride he might perish, before
He could plead for the one, or the other avow
'Mid his intimate friends? Wife of mine, tell me now,
Do you join me in feeling, in that darkened hour,
The sole friend that *can* have the right or the power
To be at his side, is the woman that shares
His fate, if he falter; the woman that bears
The name dear for *her* sake, and hallows the life
She has mingled her own with,—in short, that man's wife?"
"Yes," murmured Matilda, "O yes!"
"Then," he cried,
"This chamber in which we two sit, side by side

(And his arm, as he spoke, seemed more softly to press her),
Is now a confessional,—you, my confessor!"

"I?" she faltered, and timidly lifted her head.

"Yes! but first answer one other question," he said:

"When a woman once feels that she is not alone;
That the heart of another is warmed by her own;
That another feels with her whatever she feel,
And halves her existence in woe or in weal;
That a man for her sake will, so long as he lives,
Live to put forth his strength which the thought of her gives;
Live to shield her from want, and to share with her sorrow;
Live to solace the day, and provide for the morrow:
Will that woman feel less than another, O say,
The loss of what life, sparing this, takes away?
Will she feel (feeling this), when calamities come,
That they brighten the heart, though they darken the home?"

She turned, like a soft rainy heaven, on him

Eyes that smiled through fresh tears, trustful, tender, and dim.

"That woman," she murmured, "indeed were thrice blest!"

"Then courage, true wife of my heart!" to his breast

As he folded and gathered her closely, he cried.

"For the refuge, to-night in these arms opened wide
To your heart, can be never closed to it again,
And this room is for both an asylum!
For when
I passed through that door, at the door I left there
A calamity, sudden, and heavy to bear.
One step from that threshold, and daily, I fear,
We must face it henceforth: but it enters not here,
For that door shuts it out, and admits here alone

A heart which calamity leaves all your own!"

She started... "Calamity, Alfred! to you?"

"To both, my poor child, but 't will bring with it too
The courage, I trust, to subdue it."

"O speak!" she faltered in tones timid, anxious, and weak.

"O yet for a moment," he said, "hear me on!"

Matilda, this morn we went forth in the sun,
Like those children of sunshine, the bright summer flies,
That sport in the sunbeam, and play through the skies
While the skies smile, and heed not each other: at last,
When their sunbeam is gone, and their sky overcast,
Who recks in what ruin they fold their wet wings?
So indeed the morn found us,—poor frivolous things!
Now our sky is o'ercast, and our sunbeam is set,
And the night brings its darkness around us. O, yet,
Have we weathered no storm through those twelve cloudless hours?
Yes; you, too, have wept!

"While the world was yet ours,
While its sun was upon us, its incense streamed to us,
And its myriad voices of joy seemed to woo us,
We strayed from each other, too far, it may be,
Nor, wantonly wandering, then did I see
How deep was my need of thee, dearest, how great
Was thy claim on my heart and thy share in my fate!
But, Matilda, an angel was near us, meanwhile,
Watching o'er us, to warn, and to rescue!
That smile
Which you saw with suspicion, that presence you eyed
With resentment, an angel's they were at your side
And at mine; nor perchance is the day all so far,
When we both in our prayers, when most heartfelt they are,

May murmur the name of that woman now gone
From our sight evermore.

"Here, this evening, alone,
I seek your forgiveness, in opening my heart
Unto yours,—from this clasp be it never to part!
Matilda, the fortune you brought me is gone,
But a prize richer far than that fortune has won
It is yours to confer, and I kneel for that prize,
"T is the heart of my wife!" With suffused happy eyes
She sprang from her seat, flung her arms wide apart,
And tenderly closing them round him, his heart
Clasped in one close embrace to her bosom; and there
Drooped her head on his shoulder; and sobbed.

Not despair,
Not sorrow, not even the sense of her loss,
Flowed in those happy tears, so oblivious she was
Of all save the sense of her own love!
Anon,
However, his words rushed back to her.

"All gone,
The fortune you brought me!"

And eyes that were dim
With soft tears she upraised: but those tears were for him.

"Gone! my husband?" she said, "tell me all! see! I need,
To sober this rapture, so selfish indeed,
Fuller sense of affliction."

"Poor innocent child!"

He kissed her fair forehead, and mournfully smiled,
As he told her the tale he had heard,—something more
The gain found in loss of what gain lost of yore.

"Rest, my heart, and my brain, and my right hand for you;
And with these, my Matilda, what may I not do?
You know not, I knew not myself till this hour,
Which so sternly revealed it, my nature's full power."

"And I too," she murmured, "I too am no more
The mere infant at heart you have known me before.
I have suffered since then. I have learned much in life.
O take, with the faith I have pledged as a wife,
The heart I have learned as a woman to feel!
For I—love you, my husband!"

As though to conceal
Less from him, than herself, what that motion expressed,
She dropped her bright head, and hid all on his breast.

"O lovely as woman, beloved as wife!
Evening star of my heart, light forever my life!
If from eyes fixed too long on this base earth thus far
You have missed your due homage, dear guardian star,
Believe that, uplifting those eyes unto heaven,
There I see you, and know you, and bless the light given
To lead me to life's late achievement; my own,
My blessing, my treasure, my all things in one!"

XII.

How lovely she looked in the lovely moonlight,
That streamed through the pane from the blue balmy night!
How lovely she looked in her own lovely youth,
As she clung to his side full of trust, and of truth!
How lovely to him as he tenderly pressed
Her young head on his bosom, and sadly caressed
The glittering tresses which now shaken loose
Showered gold in his hand, as he smoothed them!

XIII.

O Muse,
Interpose not one pulse of thine own beating heart
"Twixt these two silent souls! There's a joy beyond art,
And beyond sound the music it makes in the breast.

XIV.

Here were lovers twice wed, that were
happy at least !
No music, save such as the nightingales
sung,
Breathed their bridals abroad ; and no
cresset, uphung,
Lit that festival hour, save what soft
light was given
From the pure stars that peopled the
deep-purple heaven.
He opened the casement : he led her
with him,
Hushed in heart, to the terrace, dipped
cool in the dim
Lustrous gloom of the shadowy laurels.
They heard
Aloof the invisible, rapturous bird,
With her wild note bewildering the
woodlands : they saw
Not unheard, afar off, the hill-rivulet
draw
His long ripple of moon-kindled wavelets
with cheer
From the throat of the vale ; o'er the
dark-sapphire sphere
The mild, multitudinous lights lay asleep,
Pastured free on the midnight, and bright
as the sheep
Of Apollo in pastoral Thrace ; from
unknown
Hollow glooms freshened odors around
them were blown
Intermittently ; then the moon dropped
from their sight,
Immersed in the mountains, and put out
the light
Which no longer they needed to read on
the face
Of each other's life's last revelation.
The place
Slept sumptuous round them ; and Nature,
that never
Sleeps, but waking repose, with patient
endeavor
Continued about them, unheeded, unseen,
Her old, quiet toil in the heart of the
green
Summer silence, preparing new buds for
new blossoms,
And stealing a finger of change o'er the
bosoms
Of the unconscious woodlands ; and
Time, that halts not
His forces, how lovely soever the spot
Where their march lies, — the wary, gray
strategist, Time,

With the armies of Life, lay encamped,
— Grief and Crime,
Love and Faith, in the darkness un-
heeded ; maturing,
For his great war with man, new sur-
prises ; securing
All outlets, pursuing and pushing his
foe
To his last narrow refuge, — the grave.

XV.

Sweetly though
Smiled the stars like new hopes out of
heaven, and sweetly
Their hearts beat thanksgiving for all
things, completely
Confiding in that yet untrodden exist-
ence
Over which they were pausing. To-
morrow, resistance
And struggle ; to-night, Love his hal-
lowed device
Hung forth, and proclaimed his serene
armistice.

CANTO V.

I.

WHEN Lucile left Matilda, she sat for
long hours
In her chamber, fatigued by long over-
wrought powers,
'Mid the signs of departure, about to
turn back
To her old vacant life, on her old home-
less track.
She felt her heart falter within her.
She sat
Like some poor player, gazing dejectedly
at
The insignia of royalty worn for a night ;
Exhausted, fatigued, with the dazzle
and light,
And the effort of passionate feigning ;
who thinks
Of her own meagre, rush-lighted garret,
and shrinks
From the chill of the change that awaits
her.

II.

From these
Oppressive, and comfortless, blank rev-
eries,
Unable to sleep, she descended the stair
That led from her room to the garden.

The air,
With the chill of the dawn, yet unrisen,
but at hand,
Strangely smote on her feverish forehead.
The land
Lay in darkness and change, like a world
in its grave :
No sound, save the voice of the long
river wave,
And the crickets that sing all the night !
She stood still,
Vaguely watching the thin cloud that
curled on the hill.
Emotions, long pent in her breast, were
at stir,
And the deeps of the spirit were troubled
in her.
Ah, pale woman ! what, with that heart-
broken look,
Didst thou read then in nature's weird
heart-breaking book ?
Have the wild rains of heaven a father ?
and who
Hath in pity begotten the drops of the
dew ?
Orion, Arcturus, who pilots them both ?
What leads forth in his season the bright
Mazarothe ?
Hath the darkness a dwelling, — save
there, in those eyes ?
And what name hath that half-revealed
hope in the skies ?
Ay, question, and listen ! What an-
swer ?

The sound
Of the long river wave through its stone-
troubled bound,
And the crickets that sing all the night.
There are hours
Which belong to unknown, supernatural
powers,
Whose sudden and solemn suggestions
are all
That to this race of worms — stinging
creatures, that crawl,
Lie, and fear, and die daily, beneath
their own stings —
Can excuse the blind boast of inherited
wings.
When the soul, on the impulse of an-
guish, hath passed
Beyond anguish, and risen into rapture
at last ;
When she traverses nature and space,
till she stands
In the Chamber of Fate ; where, through
tremulous hands,

Hum the threads from an old-fashioned
distaff uncurled,
And those three blind old women sit
spinning the world.

III.

The dark was blanched wan, overhead.
One green star
Was slipping from sight in the pale void
afar ;
The spirits of change, and of awe, with
faint breath
Were shifting the midnight, above and
beneath.
The spirits of awe and of change were
around,
And about, and upon her.
A dull muffled sound,
And a hand on her hand, like a ghostly
surprise,
And she felt herself fixed by the hot
hollow eyes
Of the Frenchman before her : those
eyes seemed to burn,
And scorch out the darkness between
them, and turn
Into fire as they fixed her. He looked
like the shade
Of a creature by fancy from solitude
made,
And sent forth by the darkness to scare
and oppress
Some soul of a monk in a waste wilder-
ness.

IV.

" At last, then, — at last, and alone, —
I and thou,
Lucile de Nevers, have we met ?
" Hush ! I know
Not for me was the tryst. Never mind !
it is mine ;
And whatever led hither those proud
steps of thine,
They remove not, until we have spoken.
My hour
Is come ; and it holds thee and me in its
power,
As the darkness holds both the horizons.
'T is well !
The timidiest maiden that e'er to the spell
Of her first lover's vows listened, hushed
with delight,
When soft stars were brightly uphanging
the night,
Never listened, I swear, more unques-
tioningly,