The hope which you speak of. That work I shall still
(If I live) watch and welcome, and bless far away.
Doubt not this. But mistake not the thought, if I say,
That the great moral combat between human life
And each human soul must be single. The strife
None can share, though by all its results may be known.
When the soul arms for battle, she goes forth alone.
I say not, indeed, we shall meet nevermore,
For I know not. But meet, as we have met of yore,
I know that we cannot. Perchance we may meet
By the death-bed, the tomb, in the crowd, in the street,
Or in solitude even, but never again
Shall we meet from henceforth as we have met, Eugène.
For we know not the way we are going, nor yet
Where our two ways may meet, or may cross. Life hath set
No landmarks before us. But this, this alone,
I will promise : whatever your path, or my own,
If, for once in the conflict before you, it chance
That the Dragon prevail, and with cleft shield, and lance
Lost or shattered, borne down by the stress of the war,
You falter and hesitate, if from afar
I, still watching (unknown to yourself, it may be)
O'er the conflict to which I conjure you, should see
That my presence could rescue, support you, or guide,
In the hour of that need I shall be at your side,
To warn, if you will, or incite, or control ;
And again, once again, we shall meet, soul to soul ! "

XIV.

The voice ceased.
He uplifted his eyes.
All alone
He stood on the bare edge of dawn.
She was gone,
Like a star, when up bay after bay of the night,
Ripples in, wave on wave, the broad ocean of light.
And at once, in her place, was the Sunrise ! It rose
In its sumptuous splendor and solemn repose,
The supreme revelation of light. Domes of gold,
Realms of rose, in the Orient ! And breathless, and bold,
While the great gates of heaven rolled back one by one,
The bright herald angel stood stern in the sun !
Thrice holy Eospheros ! Light's reign began
In the heaven, on the earth, in the heart of the man.
The dawn on the mountains ! the dawn everywhere !
Light ! silence ! the fresh innovations of air !
O earth, and O ether ! A butterfly breeze
Floated up, fluttered down, and poised blithe on the trees.
Through the revelling woods, o'er the sharp-rippled stream,
Up the vale slow uncoiling itself out of dream,
Around the brown meadows, adown the hill-slope,
The spirits of morning were whispering, "*Hope !*"

XV.

He uplifted his eyes. In the place where she stood
But a moment before, and where now rolled the flood
Of the sunrise all golden, he seemed to behold,
In the young light of sunrise, an image unfold
Of his own youth, — its ardors, — its promise of fame, —
Its ancestral ambition ; and France by the name
Of his sires seemed to call him. There, hovered in light,
That image aloft, o'er the shapeless and bright
And Aurorean clouds, which themselves seemed to be

Brilliant fragments of that golden world, wherein he
Had once dwelt, a native !
There, rooted and bound
To the earth, stood the man, gazing at it ! Around
The rims of the sunrise it hovered and shone
Transcendent, that type of a youth that was gone ;
And he, — as the body may yearn for the soul,
So he yearned to embody that image. His whole
Heart arose to regain it.
"And is it too late ?"
No ! For time is a fiction, and limits not fate.
Thought alone is eternal. Time thralls it in vain.
For the thought that springs upward and yearns to regain
The pure source of spirit, there *is* no
Too late.
As the stream to its first mountain levels, elate
In the fountain arises, the spirit in him
Arose to that image. The image waned dim
Into heaven ; and heavenward with it, to melt
As it melted, in day's broad expansion, he felt
With a thrill, sweet and strange, and intense, — awed, amazed, —
Something soar and ascend in his soul, as he gazed.

CANTO VI.

I.

Man is born on a battle-field. Round him, to rend
Or resist, the dread Powers he displaces attend,
By the cradle which Nature, amidst the stern shocks
That have shattered creation, and shapen it, rocks.
He leaps with a wail into being ; and lo !
His own mother, fierce Nature herself, is his foe.
Her whirlwinds are roused into wrath o'er his head :
'Neath his feet roll her earthquakes : her solitudes spread
To daunt him : her forces dispute his command :
Her snows fall to freeze him : her suns burn to brand :
Her seas yawn to engulf him : her rocks rise to crush :
And the lion and leopard, allied, lurk to rush
On their startled invader.
In lone Malabar,
Where the infinite forest spreads breathless and far,
'Mid the cruel of eye and the stealthy of claw
(Striped and spotted destroyers !) he sees, pale with awe,
On the menacing edge of a fiery sky
Grim Doorga, blue-limbed and red-handed, go by,
And the first thing he worships is Terror.
Anon,
Still impelled by necessity hungrily on,
He conquers the realms of his own self-reliance,
And the last cry of fear wakes the first of defiance.
From the serpent he crushes its poisonous soul :
Smitten down in his path see the dead lion roll !
On toward Heaven the son of Alcmena strides high on
The heads of the Hydra, the spoils of the lion :
And man, conquering Terror, is worshipped by man.

A camp has this world been since first it began !
From his tents sweeps the roving Arabian ; at peace,
A mere wandering shepherd that follows the fleece ;
But, warring his way through a world's destinies,
Lo, from Delhi, from Bagdadt, from Cordova, rise
Domes of empiry, dowered with science and art,
Schools, libraries, forums, the palace, the mart !

New realms to man's soul have been conquered. But those,

Forthwith they are peopled for man by new foes!
The stars keep their secrets, the earth hides her own,
And bold must the man be that braves the Unknown!
Not a truth has to art or to science been given,
But brows have ached for it, and souls toiled and striven;
And many have striven, and many have failed,
And many died, slain by the truth they assailed.
But when Man hath tamed Nature, asserted his place
And dominion, behold! he is brought face to face
With a new foe, — himself!
Nor may man on his shield
Ever rest, for his foe is forever afield,
Danger ever at hand, till the armèd Archangel
Sound o'er him the trump of earth's final evangel.

II.

Silence straightway, stern Muse, the soft cymbals of pleasure,
Be all bronzen these numbers, and martial the measure!
Breathe, sonorously breathe, o'er the spirit in me
One strain, sad and stern, of that deep Epopee
Which thou, from the fashionless cloud of far time,
Chantest lonely, when Victory, pale, and sublime
In the light of the aureole over her head,
Hears, and heeds not the wound in her heart fresh and red.
Blown wide by the blare of the clarion, unfold
The shrill clanging curtains of war!
And behold
A vision!
The antique Heraclean seats;
And the long Black Sea billow that once bore those fleets,
Which said to the winds, "Be ye, too, Genoese!"
And the red angry sands of the chafed Chersonese;
And the two foes of man, War and Winter, allied
Round the Armies of England and France, side by side
Enduring and dying (Gaul and Briton abreast!)
Where the towers of the North fret the skies of the East.

III.

Since that sunrise, which rose through the calm linden stems
O'er Lucile and Eugène, in the garden at Ems,
Through twenty-five seasons encircling the sun,
This planet of ours on its pathway hath gone,
And the fates that I sing of have flowed with the fates
Of a world, in the red wake of war, round the gates
Of that doomed and heroical city, in which
(Fire crowning the rampart, blood bathing the ditch!)
At bay, fights the Russian as some hunted bear,
Whom the huntsmen have hemmed round at last in his lair.

IV.

A fanged, arid plain, sapped with underground fire,
Soaked with snow, torn with shot, mashed to one gory mire!
There Fate's iron scale hangs in horrid suspense,
While those two famished ogres, — the Siege, the Defence,
Face to face, through a vapor frore, dismal, and dun,
Glare, scenting the breath of each other.
The one
Double-bodied, two-headed, — by separate ways
Winding, serpent-wise, nearer; the other, each day's
Sullen toil adding size to, — concentrated, solid,
Indefatigable, — the brass-fronted, embodied,
And audible αυτος gone sombrely forth
To the world from that Autocrat Will of the north!

V.

In the dawn of a moody October, a pale
Ghostly motionless vapor began to prevail
Over city and camp; like the garment of death
Which (is formed by) the face it conceals.
'T was the breath
War, yet drowsily yawning, began to suspire;
Wherethrough, here and there, flashed an eye of red fire,
And closed, from some rampart beginning to bellow
Hoarse challenge; replied to anon, through the yellow
And sulphurous twilight: till day reeled and rocked,
And roared into dark. Then the midnight was mocked
With fierce apparitions. Ringed round by a rain
Of red fire, and of iron, the murtherous plain
Flared with fitful combustion; where fitfully fell
Afar off the fatal, disgorged *scharpenelle*,
And fired the horizon, and singed the coiled gloom
With wings of swift flame round that City of Doom.

VI.

So the day — so the night! So by night, so by day,
With stern patient pathos, while time wears away,
In the trench flooded through, in the wind where it wails,
In the snow where it falls, in the fire where it hails
Shot and shell — link by link, out of hardship and pain,
Toil, sickness, endurance, is forged the bronze chain
Of those terrible siege-lines!
No change to that toil
Save the mine's sudden leap from the treacherous soil,
Save the midnight attack, save the groans of the maimed,
And Death's daily obolus due, whether claimed
By man or by nature.

VII.

Time passes. The dumb,
Bitter, snow-bound, and sullen November is come.

And its snows have been bathed in the blood of the brave:
And many a young heart has glutted the grave:
And on Inkerman yet the wild bramble is gory,
And those bleak heights henceforth shall be famous in story.

VIII.

The moon, swathed in storm, has long set: through the camp
No sound save the sentinel's slow sullen tramp,
The distant explosion, the wild sleety wind,
That seems searching for something it never can find.
The midnight is turning: the lamp is nigh spent:
And, wounded and lone, in a desolate tent
Lies a young British soldier whose sword . . .
In this place,
However, my Muse is compelled to retrace
Her precipitous steps and revert to the past.
The shock which had suddenly shattered at last
Alfred Vargrave's fantastical holiday nature,
Had sharply drawn forth to his full size and stature
The real man, concealed till that moment beneath
All he yet had appeared. From the gay broidered sheath
Which a man in his wrath flings aside, even so
Leaps the keen trenchant steel summoned forth by a blow.
And thus loss of fortune gave value to life.
The wife gained a husband, the husband a wife,
In that home which, though humbled and narrowed by fate,
Was enlarged and ennobled by love. Low their state,
But large their possessions.
Sir Ridley, forgiven
By those he unwittingly brought nearer heaven
By one fraudulent act, than through all his sleek speech

The hypocrite brought his own soul, safe from reach
Of the law, died abroad.
Cousin John, heart and hand,
Purse and person, henceforth (honest man!) took his stand
By Matilda and Alfred; guest, guardian, and friend
Of the home he both shared and assured, to the end,
With his large lively love. Alfred Vargrave meanwhile
Faced the world's frown, consoled by his wife's faithful smile.
Late in life he began life in earnest; and still,
With the tranquil exertion of resolute will,
Through long, and laborious, and difficult days,
Out of manifold failure, by wearisome ways,
Worked his way through the world; till at last he began
(Reconciled to the work which mankind claims from man),
After years of unwitnessed, unwearied endeavor,
Years impassioned yet patient, to realize ever
More clear on the broad stream of current opinion
The reflex of powers in himself, — that dominion
Which the life of one man, if his life be a truth,
May assert o'er the life of mankind. Thus, his youth
In his manhood renewed, fame and fortune he won
Working only for home, love, and duty.
One son
Matilda had borne him; but scarce had the boy,
With all Eton yet fresh in his full heart's frank joy,
The darling of young soldier comrades, just glanced
Down the glad dawn of manhood at life, when it chanced
That a blight sharp and sudden was breathed o'er the bloom
Of his joyous and generous years, and the gloom
Of a grief premature on their fair promise fell:
No light cloud like those which, for June to dispel,
Captious April engenders; but deep as his own
Deep nature. Meanwhile, ere I fully make known
The cause of this sorrow, I track the event.
When first a wild war-note through England was sent,
He, transferring without either token or word,
To friend, parent, or comrade, a yet virgin sword,
From a holiday troop, to one bound for the war,
Had marched forth, with eyes that saw death in the star
Whence others sought glory. Thus, fighting, he fell
On the red field of Inkerman; found, who can tell
By what miracle, breathing, though shattered, and borne
To the rear by his comrades, pierced, bleeding, and torn.
Where for long days and nights, with the wound in his side,
He lay, dark.

IX.

But a wound deeper far, undescried,
In the young heart was rankling; for there, of a truth,
In the first earnest faith of a pure pensive youth,
A love large as life, deep and changeless as death,
Lay ensheathed: and that love, ever fretting its sheath,
The frail scabbard of life pierced and wore through and through.
There are loves in man's life for which time can renew
All that time may destroy. Lives there are, though, in love,
Which cling to one faith, and die with it; nor move,
Though earthquakes may shatter the shrine.
Whence or how
Love laid claim to this young life, it matters not now.

X.

O, is it a phantom? a dream of the night?
A vision which fever hath fashioned to sight?

The wind wailing ever, with motion uncertain,
Sways sighingly there the drenched tent's tattered curtain,
To and fro, up and down.
But it is not the wind
That is lifting it now: and it is not the mind
That hath moulded that vision.
A pale woman enters,
As wan as the lamp's waning light, which concentres
Its dull glare upon her. With eyes dim and dimmer
There, all in a slumberous and shadowy glimmer,
The sufferer sees that still form floating on,
And feels faintly aware that he is not alone.
She is flitting before him. She pauses. She stands
By his bedside, all silent. She lays her white hands
On the brow of the boy. A light finger is pressing
Softly, softly the sore wounds: the hot blood-stained dressing
Slips from them. A comforting quietude steals
Through the racked weary frame: and, throughout it, he feels
The slow sense of a merciful, mild neighborhood.
Something smooths the tossed pillow. Beneath a gray hood
Of rough serge, two intense tender eyes are bent o'er him,
And thrill through and through him. The sweet form before him,
It is surely Death's angel Life's last vigil keeping!
A soft voice says . . . "Sleep!"
And he sleeps: he is sleeping.

XI.

He waked before dawn. Still the vision is there:
Still that pale woman moves not. A ministering care
Meanwhile has been silently changing and cheering
The aspect of all things around him.
Revering
Some power unknown and benignant, he blessed
In silence the sense of salvation. And rest
Having loosened the mind's tangled meshes, he faintly
Sighed . . . "Say what thou art, blesséd dream of a saintly
And ministering spirit!"
A whisper serene
Slid, softer than silence . . . "The Sœur Seraphine,
A poor Sister of Charity. Shun to inquire
Aught further, young soldier. The son of thy sire,
For the sake of that sire, I reclaim from the grave.
Thou didst not shun death: shun not life. 'T is more brave
To live, than to die. Sleep!"
He sleeps: he is sleeping.

XII.

He wakened again, when the dawn was just steeping
The skies with chill splendor. And there, never flitting,
Never flitting, that vision of mercy was sitting.
As the dawn to the darkness, so life seemed returning
Slowly, feebly within him. The night-lamp, yet burning,
Made ghastly the glimmering daybreak.
He said,
"If thou be of the living, and not of the dead,
Sweet minister, pour out yet further the healing
Of that balmy voice; if it may be, revealing
Thy mission of mercy! whence art thou?"
"O son
Of Matilda and Alfred, it matters not! One
Who is not of the living nor yet of the dead:
To thee, and to others, alive yet" . . . she said . . .
"So long as there liveth the poor gift in me
Of this ministration; to them, and to thee,
Dead in all things beside. A French Nun, whose vocation
Is now by this bedside. A nun hath no nation.
Wherever man suffers, or woman may soothe,
There her land! there her kindred!"

She bent down to smooth
The hot pillow; and added . . . "Yet more than another
Is thy life dear to me. For thy father, thy mother,
I knew them, — I know them."
"O can it be? you!
My dearest dear father! my mother! you knew,
You know them?"
She bowed, half averting, her head
In silence.
He brokenly, timidly said,
"Do they know I am thus?"
"Hush!" . . . she smiled, as she drew
From her bosom two letters: and — can it be true?
That beloved and familiar writing!
He burst
Into tears . . . "My poor mother — my father! the worst
Will have reached them!"
"No, no!" she exclaimed with a smile,
"They know you are living; they know that meanwhile
I am watching beside you. Young soldier, weep not!"
But still on the nun's nursing bosom, the hot
Fevered brow of the boy weeping wildly is pressed.
There, at last, the young heart sobs itself into rest:
And he hears, as it were between smiling and weeping,
The calm voice say . . . "Sleep!"
And he sleeps, he is sleeping.

XIII.

And day followed day. And, as wave follows wave,
With the tide, day by day, life, reissuing, drave
Through that young hardy frame novel currents of health.
Yet some strange obstruction, which life's self by stealth
Seemed to cherish, impeded life's progress. And still
A feebleness, less of the frame than the will,
Clung about the sick man: hid and harbored within
The sad hollow eyes: pinched the cheek pale and thin:
And clothed the wan fingers with languor.
And there,
Day by day, night by night, unremitting in care,
Unwearied in watching, so cheerful of mien,
And so gentle of hand, sat the Sœur Seraphine!

XIV.

A strange woman truly! not young; yet her face,
Wan and worn as it was, bore about it the trace
Of a beauty which time could not ruin. For the whole
Quiet cheek, youth's lost bloom left transparent, the soul
Seemed to fill with its own light, like some sunny fountain
Everlastingly fed from far off in the mountain
That pours, in a garden deserted, its streams,
And all the more lovely for loneliness seems.
So that, watching that face, you would scarce pause to guess
The years which its calm careworn lines might express,
Feeling only what suffering with these must have past
To have perfected there so much sweetness at last.

XV.

Thus, one bronzen evening, when day had put out
His brief thrifty fires, and the wind was about,
The nun, watchful still by the boy, on his own
Laid a firm quiet hand, and the deep tender tone
Of her voice moved the silence.
She said . . . "I have healed
These wounds of the body. Why hast thou concealed,
Young soldier, that yet open wound in the heart?
Wilt thou trust *no* hand near it?"
He winced, with a start,
As of one that is suddenly touched on the spot
From which every nerve derives suffering.
"What!
Lies my heart, then, so bare?" he moaned bitterly.

"Nay,"
With compassionate accents she hastened to say,
"Do you think that these eyes are with sorrow, young man,
So all unfamiliar, indeed, as to scan
Her features, yet know them not?
"O, was it spoken,
'*Go ye forth, heal the sick, lift the low, bind the broken!*'
Of the body alone? Is our mission, then, done,
When we leave the bruised hearts, if we bind the bruised bone?
Nay, is not the mission of mercy twofold?
Whence twofold, perchance, are the powers, that we hold
To fulfil it, of Heaven! For Heaven doth still
To us, Sisters, it may be, who seek it, send skill
Won from long intercourse with affliction, and art
Helped of Heaven, to bind up the broken of heart.
Trust to me!" (His two feeble hands in her own
She drew gently.) "Trust to me!" (she said, with soft tone):
"I am not so dead in remembrance to all
I have died to in this world, but what I recall
Enough of its sorrow, enough of its trial,
To grieve for both, — save from both haply! The dial
Receives many shades, and each points to the sun.
The shadows are many, the sunlight is one.
Life's sorrows still fluctuate: God's love does not.
And His love is unchanged, when it changes our lot.
Looking up to this light, which is common to all,
And down to these shadows, on each side, that fall
In time's silent circle, so various for each,
Is it nothing to know that they never can reach
So far, but what light lies beyond them forever?
Trust to me! O, if in this hour I endeavor
To trace the shade creeping across the young life
Which, in prayer till this hour, I have watched through its strife
With the shadow of death, 't is with this faith alone,
That, in tracing the shade, I shall find out the sun.
Trust to me!"
She paused: he was weeping. Small need
Of added appeal, or entreaty, indeed,
Had those gentle accents to win from his pale
And parched, trembling lips, as it rose, the brief tale
Of a life's early sorrow. The story is old,
And in words few as may be shall straightway be told.

XVI.

A few years ago, ere the fair form of Peace
Was driven from Europe, a young girl — the niece
Of a French noble, leaving an old Norman pile
By the wild northern seas, came to dwell for a while
With a lady allied to her race, — an old dame
Of a threefold legitimate virtue, and name,
In the Faubourg Saint Germain.
Upon that fair child,
From childhood, nor father nor mother had smiled.
One uncle their place in her life had supplied,
And their place in her heart: she had grown at his side,
And under his roof-tree, and in his regard,
From childhood to girlhood.
This fair orphan ward
Seemed the sole human creature that lived in the heart
Of that stern rigid man, or whose smile could impart
One ray of response to the eyes which, above
Her fair infant forehead, looked down with a love
That seemed almost stern, so intense was its chill

Lofty stillness, like sunlight on some lonely hill
Which is colder and stiller than sunlight elsewhere.

Grass grew in the court-yard ; the chambers were bare
In that ancient mansion ; when first the stern tread
Of its owner awakened their echoes long dead :
Bringing with him this infant (the child of a brother),
Whom, dying, the hands of a desolate mother
Had placed on his bosom. 'T was said — right or wrong —
That, in the lone mansion, left tenantless long,
To which, as a stranger, its lord now returned,
In years yet recalled, through loud midnights had burned
The light of wild orgies. Be that false or true,
Slow and sad was the footstep which now wandered through
Those desolate chambers ; and calm and severe
Was the life of their inmate.
Men now saw appear
Every morn at the mass that firm sorrowful face,
Which seemed to lock up in a cold iron case
Tears hardened to crystal. Yet harsh if he were,
His severity seemed to be trebly severe
In the rule of his own rigid life, which, at least,
Was benignant to others. The poor parish priest,
Who lived on his largess, his piety praised.
The peasant was fed, and the chapel was raised,
And the cottage was built, by his liberal hand.
Yet he seemed in the midst of his good deeds to stand
A lone, and unloved, and unlovable man.
There appeared some inscrutable flaw in the plan
Of his life, that love failed to pass over.
That child
Alone did not fear him, nor shrink from him ; smiled
To his frown, and dispelled it.
The sweet sportive elf
Seemed the type of some joy lost, and missed, in himself.
Ever welcome he suffered her glad face to glide
In on hours when to others his door was denied :
And many a time with a mute moody look
He would watch her at prattle and play, like a brook
Whose babble disturbs not the quietest spot,
But soothes us because we need answer it not.

But few years had passed o'er that childhood before
A change came among them. A letter, which bore
Sudden consequence with it, one morning was placed
In the hands of the lord of the château. He paced
To and fro in his chamber a whole night alone
After reading that letter. At dawn he was gone.
Weeks passed. When he came back again he returned
With a tall ancient dame, from whose lips the child learned
That they were of the same race and name. With a face
Sad and anxious, to this withered stock of the race
He confided the orphan, and left them alone
In the old lonely house.
In a few days 't was known,
To the angry surprise of half Paris, that one
Of the chiefs of that party which, still clinging on
To the banner that bears the white lilies of France,
Will fight 'neath no other, nor yet for the chance
Of restoring their own, had renounced the watchword
And the creed of his youth in unsheathing his sword
For a Fatherland fathered no more (such is fate !)
By legitimate parents.
And meanwhile, elate
And in no wise disturbed by what Paris might say,
The new soldier thus wrote to a friend far away : —
"To the life of inaction farewell ! After all,
Creeds the oldest may crumble, and dynasties fall,
But the sole grand Legitimacy will endure,
In whatever makes death noble, life strong and pure.
Freedom ! action ! . . . the desert to breathe in, — the lance
Of the Arab to follow ! I go ! *Vive la France !*"

Few and rare were the meetings henceforth, as years fled,
'Twixt the child and the soldier. The two women led
Lone lives in the lone house. Meanwhile the child grew
Into girlhood ; and, like a sunbeam, sliding through
Her green quiet years, changed by gentle degrees
To the loveliest vision of youth a youth sees
In his loveliest fancies : as pure as a pearl,
And as perfect : a noble and innocent girl,
With eighteen sweet summers dissolved in the light
Of her lovely and lovable eyes, soft and bright !
Then her guardian wrote to the dame, . . . "Let Constance
Go with you to Paris. I trust that in France
I may be ere the close of the year. I confide
My life's treasure to you. Let her see, at your side,
The world which we live in."
To Paris then came
Constance to abide with that old stately dame
In that old stately Faubourg.
The young Englishman
Thus met her. 'T was there their acquaintance began,
There it closed. That old miracle — Love-at-first-sight —
Needs no explanations. The heart reads aright
Its destiny sometimes. His love neither chidden
Nor checked, the young soldier was graciously bidden
An habitual guest to that house by the dame.
His own candid graces, the world-honored name
Of his father (in him not dishonored) were both
Fair titles to favor. His love, nothing loath,
The old lady observed, was returned by Constance.
And as the child's uncle his absence from France
Yet prolonged, she (thus easing long self-gratulation)
Wrote to him a lengthened and moving narration
Of the graces and gifts of the young English wooer :
His father's fair fame ; the boy's deference to her ;
His love for Constance, — unaffected, sincere ;
And the girl's love for him, read by her in those clear
Limpid eyes ; then the pleasure with which she awaited
Her cousin's approval of all she had stated.

At length from that cousin an answer there came,
Brief, stern ; such as stunned and astonished the dame.

"Let Constance leave Paris with you on the day
You receive this. Until my return she may stay
At her convent awhile. If my niece wishes ever
To behold me again, understand, she will never
Wed that man.
"You have broken faith with me. Farewell !"

No appeal from that sentence.
It needs not to tell
The tears of Constance, nor the grief of her lover :
The dream they had laid out their lives in was over.

Bravely strove the young soldier to look in the face
Of a life, where invisible hands seemed to trace
O'er the threshold, these words . . . "Hope no more!"
Unreturned
Had his love been, the strong manful heart would have spurned
That weakness which suffers a woman to lie
At the roots of man's life, like a canker, and dry
And wither the sap of life's purpose. But there
Lay the bitterer part of the pain! Could he dare
To forget he was loved? that he grieved not alone?
Recording a love that drew sorrow upon
The woman he loved, for himself dare he seek
Surcease to that sorrow, which thus held him weak,
Beat him down, and destroyed him?
News reached him indeed,
Through a comrade, who brought him a letter to read
From the dame who had care of Constance (it was one
To whom, when at Paris, the boy had been known,
A Frenchman, and friend of the Faubourg), which said
That Constance, although never a murmur betrayed
What she suffered, in silence grew paler each day,
And seemed visibly drooping and dying away.
It was then he sought death.

XVII.

Thus the tale ends. 'T was told
With such broken, passionate words, as unfold
In glimpses alone, a coiled grief. Through each pause
Of its fitful recital, in raw gusty flaws,
The rain shook the canvas, unheeded; aloof,
And unheeded, the night-wind around the tent-roof
At intervals wirbled. And when all was said,
The sick man, exhausted, drooped backward his head,
And fell into a feverish slumber.
Long while
Sat the Sœur Seraphine, in deep thought. The still smile
That was wont, angel-wise, to inhabit her face
And make it like heaven, was fled from its place
In her eyes, on her lips; and a deep sadness there
Seemed to darken the lines of long sorrow and care,
As low to herself she sighed . . .
"Hath it, Eugène,
Been so long, then, the struggle? . . . and yet, all in vain!
Nay, not all in vain! Shall the world gain a man,
And yet Heaven lose a soul? Have I done all I can?
Soul to soul, did he say? Soul to soul, be it so!
And then, — soul of mine, whither? whither?"

XVIII.

Large, slow,
Silent tears in those deep eyes ascended, and fell.
"*Here*, at least, I have failed not" . . . she mused . . . "this is well!"
She drew from her bosom two letters. In one,
A mother's heart, wild with alarm for her son,
Breathed bitterly forth its despairing appeal.
"The pledge of a love owed to thee, O Lucile!
The hope of a home saved by thee, — of a heart
Which hath never since then (thrice endeared as thou art!)
Ceased to bless thee, to pray for thee, save! . . . save my son!
And if not" . . . the letter went brokenly on,
"Heaven help us!"
Then followed, from Alfred, a few
Blotted heart-broken pages. He mournfully drew,
With pathos, the picture of that earnest youth,
So unlike his own: how in beauty and truth
He had nurtured that nature, so simple and brave!

And how he had striven his son's youth to save
From the errors so sadly redeemed in his own,
And so deeply repented: how thus, in that son,
In whose youth he had garnered his age, he had seemed
To be blessed by a pledge that the past was redeemed,
And forgiven. He bitterly went on to speak
Of the boy's baffled love; in which fate seemed to break
Unawares on his dreams with retributive pain,
And the ghosts of the past rose to scourge back again
The hopes of the future. To sue for consent
Pride forbade: and the hope his old foe might relent
Experience rejected . . . "My life for the boy's!"
(He exclaimed); "for I die with my son, if he dies!
Lucile! Heaven bless you for all you have done!
Save him, save him, Lucile! save my son! save my son!"

XIX.

"Ay!" murmured the Sœur Seraphine . . . "heart to heart!
There, at least, I have failed not! Fulfilled is my part?
Accomplished my mission? One act crowns the whole.
Do I linger? Nay, be it so, then! . . . Soul to soul!"
She knelt down, and prayed. Still the boy slumbered on.
Dawn broke. The pale nun from the bedside was gone.

XX.

Meanwhile, 'mid his aides-de-camp, busily bent
O'er the daily reports, in his well-ordered tent
There sits a French General, — bronzed by the sun
And seared by the sands of Algeria. One
Who forth from the wars of the wild Kabylee
Had strangely and rapidly risen to be
The idol, the darling, the dream, and the star
Of the younger French chivalry: daring in war,
And wary in council. He entered, indeed,
Late in life (and discarding his Bourbonite creed)
The Army of France: and had risen, in part,
From a singular aptitude proved for the art
Of that wild desert warfare of ambush, surprise,
And stratagem, which to the French camp supplies
Its subtlest intelligence; partly from chance;
Partly, too, from a name and position which France
Was proud to put forward; but mainly, in fact,
From the prudence to plan, and the daring to act,
In frequent emergencies startlingly shown,
To the rank which he now held, — intrepidly won
With many a wound, trenched in many a scar,
From fierce Milianah and Sidi-Sakhdar.

XXI.

All within, and without, that warm tent seems to bear
Smiling token of provident order and care.
All about, a well-fed, well-clad soldiery stands
In groups round the music of mirth-breathing bands.
In and out of the tent, all day long, to and fro,
The messengers come, and the messengers go,
Upon missions of mercy, or errands of toil:
To report how the sapper contends with the soil
In the terrible trench, how the sick man is faring
In the hospital tent: and, combining, comparing,
Constructing, within moves the brain of one man,
Moving all.

He is bending his brow o'er some plan
For the hospital service, wise, skilful, humane.
The officer standing beside him is fain
To refer to the angel solicitous cares
Of the Sisters of Charity: one he declares
To be known through the camp as a seraph of grace:
He has seen, all have seen her indeed, in each place
Where suffering is seen, silent, active, — the Sœur . . .
Sœur . . . how do they call her?
"Ay, truly, of her
I have heard much," the General, musing, replies;
"And we owe her already (unless rumor lies)
The lives of not few of our bravest. You mean . . .
Ay, how do they call her? . . . the Sœur — Seraphine,
(Is it not so?) I rarely forget names once heard."

"Yes; the Sœur Seraphine. Her I meant."
"On my word,
I have much wished to see her. I fancy I trace,
In some facts traced to her, something more than the grace
Of an angel: I mean an acute human mind,
Ingenious, constructive, intelligent. Find
And, if possible, let her come to me. We shall,
I think, aid each other.
"*Oui, mon Général;*
I believe she has lately obtained the permission
To tend some sick man in the Second Division
Of our Ally: they say a relation.
"Ay, so?
A relation?"
"'T is said so."
"The name do you know?"
"*Non, mon Général.*"
While they spoke yet, there went
A murmur and stir round the door of the tent.
"A Sister of Charity craves, in a case
Of urgent and serious importance, the grace
Of brief private speech with the General there.
Will the General speak with her?"
"Bid her declare
Her mission."
"She will not. She craves to be seen
And be heard."
"Well, her name then?"
"The Sœur Seraphine."
"Clear the tent. She may enter."

XXII.

The tent has been cleared.
The chieftain stroked moodily somewhat his beard,
A sable long silvered: and pressed down his brow
On his hand, heavy veined. All his countenance, now
Unwitnessed, at once fell dejected, and dreary,
As a curtain let fall by a hand that 's grown weary,
Into puckers and folds. From his lips, unrepressed,
Steals th' impatient quick sigh, which reveals in man's breast
A conflict concealed, an experience at strife
With itself, — the vexed heart's passing protest on life.
He turned to his papers. He heard the light tread
Of a faint foot behind him: and, lifting his head,
Said, "Sit, Holy Sister! your worth is well known
To the hearts of our soldiers; nor less to my own.
I have much wished to see you. I owe you some thanks:
In the name of all those you have saved to our ranks
I record them. Sit! Now then, your mission?"
The nun
Paused silent. The General eyed her anon
More keenly. His aspect grew troubled. A change
Darkened over his features. He muttered . . . "Strange! strange!
Any face should so strongly remind me of *her!*
Fool! again the delirium, the dream! does it stir?

Does it move as of old? Psha!
"Sit, Sister! I wait
Your answer, my time halts but hurriedly. State
The cause why you seek me?"
"The cause? ay, the cause!"
She vaguely repeated. Then, after a pause, —
As one who, awaked unawares, would put back
The sleep that forever returns in the track
Of dreams which, though scared and dispersed, not the less
Settle back to faint eyelids that yield 'neath their stress,
Like doves to a penthouse, — a movement she made,
Less toward him than away from herself; drooped her head