Classic Poetry Series

Coventry Patmore

- poems -

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Coventry Patmore (23 July 1823 - 26 November 1896)

Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore was an English poet and critic best known for The Angel in the House, his narrative poem about an ideal happy marriage.

Life

Youth

The eldest son of author Peter George Patmore, Coventry Patmore was born at Woodford in Essex and was privately educated. He was his father's intimate and constant companion and inherited from him his early literary enthusiasm. It was Coventry's ambition to become an artist. He showed much promise, earning the silver palette of the Society of Arts in 1838. In 1839 he was sent to school in France for six months, where he began to write poetry. On his return, his father planned to publish some of these youthful poems; Coventry, however, had become interested in science and poetry was set aside.

He later returned to writing however, enthused by the success of Alfred Lord Tennyson; and in 1844 he published a small volume of Poems, which was original but uneven. Patmore, distressed at its reception, bought up the remainder of the edition and destroyed it. What upset him most was a cruel review in Blackwood's Magazine; but the enthusiasm of his friends, together with their more constructive criticism, helped foster his talent. The publication of this volume bore immediate fruit in introducing its author to various men of letters, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, through whom Patmore became known to William Holman Hunt, and was thus drawn into the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, contributing his poem "The Seasons" to The Germ.

Major work

At this time Patmore's father was financially embarrassed; and in 1846 Richard Monckton Milnes, 1st Baron Houghton obtained for Coventry the post of printed book supernumary assistant at the British Museum, a post he occupied for nineteen years, devoting his spare time to poetry. In 1847 he married Emily Andrews, daughter of Dr. Andrews of Camberwell and by 1851 they had had two sons, Coventry (born 1848) and Tennyson (born 1850). Three daughters followed - Emily (born 1853), Bertha (born 1855) and Gertrude (born 1857), before their last child, a son (Henry John), was born in 1860.

At the British Museum Patmore was instrumental in starting the Volunteer Movement in 1852. He wrote an important letter to The Times on the subject, and stirred up much martial enthusiasm among his colleagues.

In 1853 he republished Tamerton Church Tower, the more successful of his pieces from Poems of 1844, adding several new poems which showed distinct advance, both in conception and treatment; and in the following year (1854) the first part of his best known poem, The Angel in the House appeared. The Angel in the House is a long narrative and lyric poem, with four sections composed over a period of years: The Betrothed and The Espousals (1854) which eulogize his first wife; followed by Faithful For Ever (1860); and The Victories of Love (1862). The four works were published together in 1863 and have come to symbolise the Victorian feminine ideal - which was not necessarily the ideal amongst feminists of the period.

By 1861 the family were living in Elm Cottage, North End, Hampstead. In 1862 Emily died after a lengthy and lingering illness, and shortly afterwards Coventry joined the Roman Catholic church.

In 1865 he re-married, his second wife being Marianne Byles, daughter of James Byles of Bowden Hall, Gloucester; a year later he purchased Buxted Hall in Surrey, the history of which he wrote in How I managed my Estate (1886). In 1877 he published The Unknown Eros, which contains his finest poetic work, and in the following year Amelia, his own favourite among his poems, together with an interesting essay on English Metrical Law, appeared. This departure into criticism continued in 1879 with a volume of papers entitled Principle in Art, and again in 1893 with Religio poetae.

His second wife Marianne died in 1880, and in 1881 he married Harriet Robson from Bletchingley in Surrey (born 1840). Their son Francis was born in 1882. In later years he lived at Lymington, where he died in 1896. He was buried in Lymington churchyard.

Evaluation

A collected edition of Patmore's poems appeared in two volumes in 1886, with a characteristic preface which might serve as the author's epitaph. "I have written little," it runs; "but it is all my best; I have never spoken when I had nothing to say, nor spared time or labour to make my words true. I have respected posterity; and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me." The sincerity which underlies this statement, combined with a certain lack of humour which peers through its naïveté, points to two of the principal characteristics of Patmore's earlier poetry; characteristics which came to be almost unconsciously merged and harmonized as his style and his intention drew together into unity.

His best work is found in the volume of odes called The Unknown Eros, which is full not only of passages but entire poems in which exalted thought is expressed in poetry of the richest and most dignified melody. Spirituality informs his inspiration; the poetry is glowing and alive. The magnificent piece in praise of winter, the solemn and beautiful cadences of "Departure," and the homely but elevated pathos of "The Toys," are in their manner unsurpassed in English poetry. His somewhat reactionary political opinions, which also find expression in his odes, are perhaps a little less inspired, although they can certainly be said to reflect, as do his essays, a serious and very active mind. Patmore is today one of the least known but best-regarded Victorian poets.

His son Henry John Patmore (1860–1883) also became a poet.

Trivia

Coventry Patmore was caricatured as the unpleasant poet Carleon Anthony in Joseph Conrad's novel Chance (1913).

In X-Men: Season 1 Episode 1 Patmore's poem "Farewell", from the

collection "The Unknown Eros", is paraphrased by the character Beast, "The faint heart averted many feet and many a tear, in our opposed path to perservere." The character also follows the quote with, "A minor poet for a minor obstacle."

Eserleri:

Angel in the House
The Children's Garland from the Best Poets
The Unknown Eros
Victories of Love

A Dream

Amid the mystic fields of Love
I wander'd, and beheld a grove.
Breathlessly still was part, and part
Was breathing with an easy heart;
And there below, in lamblike game,
Were virgins, all so much the same,
That each was all. A youth drew nigh,
And on them gazed with wandering eye,
And would have pass'd, but that a maid,
Clapping her hands above her, said,
'My time is now!' and laughing ran
After the dull and strange young man,
And bade him stop and look at her.
And so he call'd her lovelier
Than any else, only because
She only then before him was.
And, while they stood and gazed, a change
Was seen in both, diversely strange:
The youth was ever more and more
That good which he had been before;
But the glad maiden grew and grew
Such that the rest no longer knew
Their sister, who was now to sight
The young man's self, yet opposite,
As the outer rainbow is the first,
But weaker, and the hues reversed.
And whereas, in the abandon'd grove,
The virgin round the Central Love
Had blindly circled in her play,
Now danced she round her partner's way;
And, as the earth the moon's, so he
Had the responsibility
Of her diviner motion. 'Lo,'
He sang, and the heavens began to glow,
'The pride of personality,
Seeking its highest, aspires to die,
And in unspeakably profound
Humiliation Love is crown'd!
And from his exaltation still
Into his ocean of good-will
He curiously casts the lead
To find strange depths of lowlihead.'

To one same tune, but higher, 'Bold,'
The maiden sang, 'is Love! For cold
On Earth are blushes, and for shame
Of such an ineffectual flame
As ill consumes the sacrifice!'

Coventry Patmore

A Farewell

With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now part.
My Very Dear,
Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear.
It needs no art,
With faint, averted feet
And many a tear,
In our opposèd paths to persevere.
Go thou to East, I West.
We will not say
There 's any hope, it is so far away.
But, O, my Best,
When the one darling of our widowhead,
The nursling Grief,
Is dead,
And no dews blur our eyes
To see the peach-bloom come in evening skies,
Perchance we may,
Where now this night is day,
And even through faith of still averted feet,
Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazèd meet;
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet
Seasoning the termless feast of our content
With tears of recognition never dry.

Coventry Patmore

A London Fête

All night fell hammers, shock on shock;
With echoes Newgate's granite clang'd:
The scaffold built, at eight o'clock
They brought the man out to be hang'd.
Then came from all the people there
A single cry, that shook the air;
Mothers held up their babes to see,
Who spread their hands, and crow'd for glee;
Here a girl from her vesture tore
A rag to wave with, and join'd the roar;
There a man, with yelling tired,
Stopp'd, and the culprit's crime inquired;
A sot, below the doom'd man dumb,
Bawl'd his health in the world to come;
These blasphemed and fought for places;
Those, half-crush'd, cast frantic faces,
To windows, where, in freedom sweet,
Others enjoy'd the wicked treat.
At last, the show's black crisis pended;
Struggles for better standings ended;
The rabble's lips no longer curst,
But stood agape with horrid thirst;
Thousands of breasts beat horrid hope;
Thousands of eyeballs, lit with hell,
Burnt one way all, to see the rope
Unslacken as the platform fell.
The rope flew tight; and then the roar
Burst forth afresh; less loud, but more
Confused and affrighting than before.
A few harsh tongues for ever led
The common din, the chaos of noises,
But ear could not catch what they said.
As when the realm of the damn'd rejoices
At winning a soul to its will,
That clatter and clangour of hateful voices
Sicken'd and stunn'd the air, until
The dangling corpse hung straight and still.
The show complete, the pleasure past,
The solid masses loosen'd fast:
A thief slunk off, with ample spoil,
To ply elsewhere his daily toil;
A baby strung its doll to a stick;
A mother praised the pretty trick;
Two children caught and hang'd a cat;
Two friends walk'd on, in lively chat;
And two, who had disputed places,
Went forth to fight, with murderous faces.

Coventry Patmore

A Retrospect

I, trusting that the truly sweet
Would still be sweetly found the true,
Sang, darkling, taught by heavenly heat,
Songs which were wiser than I knew.
To the unintelligible dream
That melted like a gliding star,
I said: ‘We part to meet, fair Gleam!
You are eternal, for you are.’
To Love's strange riddle, fiery writ
In flesh and spirit of all create,
‘Mocker,’ I said, ‘of mortal wit,
Me you shall not mock. I can wait.’

Coventry Patmore

Alexander And Lycon

‘What, no crown won,
These two whole years,
By man of fortitude beyond his peers,
In Thrace or Macedon?’

‘No, none.
But what deep trouble does my Lycon feel,
And hide 'neath chat about the commonweal?’

‘Glaucé but now the third time did again
The thing which I forbade. I had to box her ears.
'Twas ill to see her both blue eyes
Settled in tears
Despairing on the skies,
And the poor lip all pucker'd into pain;
Yet, for her sake, from kisses to refrain!’

‘Ho, Timocles, take down
That crown.
No, not that common one for blood with extreme valour spilt,
But yonder, with the berries gilt.
'Tis, Lycon, thy just meed.
To inflict unmoved
And firm to bear the woes of the Beloved
Is fortitude indeed.’

Coventry Patmore

Amelia

Whene'er mine eyes do my Amelia greet
It is with such emotion
As when, in childhood, turning a dim street,
I first beheld the ocean.

There, where the little, bright, surf-breathing town,
That shew'd me first her beauty and the sea,
Gathers its skirts against the gorse-lit down
And scatters gardens o'er the southern lea,
Abides this Maid
Within a kind, yet sombre Mother's shade,
Who of her daughter's graces seems almost afraid,
Viewing them ofttimes with a scared forecast,
Caught, haply, from obscure love-peril past.
Howe'er that be,
She scants me of my right,
Is cunning careful evermore to balk
Sweet separate talk,
And fevers my delight
By frets, if, on Amelia's cheek of peach,
I touch the notes which music cannot reach,
Bidding 'Good-night!'
Wherefore it came that, till to-day's dear date,
I curs'd the weary months which yet I have to wait
Ere I find heaven, one-nested with my mate.

To-day, the Mother gave,
To urgent pleas and promise to behave
As she were there, her long-besought consent
To trust Amelia with me to the grave
Where lay my once-betrothed, Millicent:
'For,' said she, hiding ill a moistening eye,
'Though, Sir, the word sounds hard,
God makes as if He least knew how to guard
The treasure He loves best, simplicity.'

And there Amelia stood, for fairness shewn
Like a young apple-tree, in flush'd array
Of white and ruddy flow'r, auroral, gay,
With chilly blue the maiden branch between;
And yet to look on her moved less the mind
To say 'How beauteous!' than 'How good and kind!'

And so we went alone
By walls o'er which the lilac's numerous plume
Shook down perfume;
Trim plots close blown
With daisies, in conspicuous myriads seen,
Engross'd each one
With single ardour for her spouse, the sun;
Garths in their glad array
Of white and ruddy branch, auroral, gay,

With azure chill the maiden flow'r between;
Meadows of fervid green,
With sometime sudden prospect of untold
Cowslips, like chance-found gold;
And broadcast buttercups at joyful gaze,
Rending the air with praise,
Like the six-hundred-thousand-voiced shout
Of Jacob camp'd in Midian put to rout;
Then through the Park,
Where Spring to livelier gloom
Quicken'd the cedars dark,
And, 'gainst the clear sky cold,
Which shone afar
Crowded with sunny alps oracular,
Great chestnuts raised themselves abroad like cliffs of bloom;
And everywhere,
Amid the ceaseless rapture of the lark,
With wonder new
We caught the solemn voice of single air,
‘Cuckoo!’

And when Amelia, 'bolden'd, saw and heard
How bravely sang the bird,
And all things in God's bounty did rejoice,
She who, her Mother by, spake seldom word,
Did her charm'd silence doff,
And, to my happy marvel, her dear voice
Went as a clock does, when the pendulum's off.
Ill Monarch of man's heart the Maiden who
Does not aspire to be High-Pontiff too!
So she repeated soft her Poet's line,
‘By grace divine,
Not otherwise, O Nature, are we thine!’
And I, up the bright steep she led me, trod,
And the like thought pursued
With, ‘What is gladness without gratitude,
And where is gratitude without a God?’
And of delight, the guerdon of His laws,
She spake, in learned mood;
And I, of Him loved reverently, as Cause,
Her sweetly, as Occasion of all good.
Nor were we shy,
For souls in heaven that be
May talk of heaven without hypocrisy.

And now, when we drew near
The low, gray Church, in its sequester'd dell,
A shade upon me fell.
Dead Millicent indeed had been most sweet,
But I how little meet
To call such graces in a Maiden mine!
A boy's proud passion free affection blunts;

His well-meant flatteries oft are blind affronts;
And many a tear
Was Millicent's before I, manlier, knew
That maidens shine
As diamonds do,
Which, though most clear,
Are not to be seen through;
And, if she put her virgin self aside
And sate her, crownless, at my conquering feet,
It should have bred in me humility, not pride.
Amelia had more luck than Millicent:
Secure she smiled and warm from all mischance
Or from my knowledge or my ignorance,
And glow'd content
With my—some might have thought too much—superior age,
Which seem'd the gage
Of steady kindness all on her intent.
Thus nought forbade us to be fully blent.

While, therefore, now
Her pensive footstep stirr'd
The darnell'd garden of unheedful death,
She ask'd what Millicent was like, and heard
Of eyes like her's, and honeysuckle breath,
And of a wiser than a woman's brow,
Yet fill'd with only woman's love, and how
An incidental greatness character'd
Her unconsider'd ways.
But all my praise
Amelia thought too slight for Millicent,
And on my lovelier-freighted arm she leant,
For more attent;
And the tea-rose I gave,
To deck her breast, she dropp'd upon the grave.
‘And this was her's,’ said I, decoring with a band
Of mildest pearls Amelia's milder hand.
‘Nay, I will wear it for her sake,’ she said:
For dear to maidens are their rivals dead.

And so,
She seated on the black yew's tortured root,
I on the carpet of sere shreds below,
And nigh the little mound where lay that other,
I kiss'd her lips three times without dispute,
And, with bold worship suddenly aglow,
I lifted to my lips a sandall'd foot,
And kiss'd it three times thrice without dispute.
Upon my head her fingers fell like snow,
Her lamb-like hands about my neck she wreathed.
Her arms like slumber o'er my shoulders crept,
And with her bosom, whence the azalea breathed,
She did my face full favourably smother,

To hide the heaving secret that she wept!

Now would I keep my promise to her Mother;
Now I arose, and raised her to her feet,
My best Amelia, fresh-born from a kiss,
Moth-like, full-blown in birthdew shuddering sweet,
With great, kind eyes, in whose brown shade
Bright Venus and her Baby play'd!

At inmost heart well pleased with one another,
What time the slant sun low
Through the plough'd field does each clod sharply shew,
And softly fills
With shade the dimples of our homeward hills,
With little said,
We left the 'wilder'd garden of the dead,
And gain'd the gorse-lit shoulder of the down
That keeps the north-wind from the nestling town,
And caught, once more, the vision of the wave,
Where, on the horizon's dip,
A many-sailed ship
Pursued alone her distant purpose grave;
And, by steep steps rock-hewn, to the dim street
I led her sacred feet;
And so the Daughter gave,
Soft, moth-like, sweet,
Showy as damask-rose and shy as musk,
Back to her Mother, anxious in the dusk.
And now ‘Good-night!’
Me shall the phantom months no more affright
For heaven's gates to open well waits he
Who keeps himself the key.

Coventry Patmore

An Idyll

‘And even our women,’ lastly grumbles Ben,
‘Leaving their nature, dress and talk like men!’
A damsel, as our train stops at Five Ashes,
Down to the station in a dog-cart dashes.
A footman buys her ticket, ‘Third class, parly;’
And, in huge-button'd coat and ‘Champagne Charley’
And such scant manhood else as use allows her,
Her two shy knees bound in a single trouser,
With, 'twixt her shapely lips, a violet
Perch'd as a proxy for a cigarette,
She takes her window in our smoking carriage,
And scans us, calmly scorning men and marriage.
Ben frowns in silence; older, I know better
Than to read ladies 'haviour in the letter.
This aping man is crafty Love's devising
To make the woman's difference more surprising;
And, as for feeling wroth at such rebelling,
Who'd scold the child for now and then repelling
Lures with ‘I won't!’ or for a moment's straying
In its sure growth towards more full obeying?
‘Yes, she had read the 'Legend of the Ages,'
‘And George Sand too, skipping the wicked pages.’
And, whilst we talk'd, her protest firm and perky
Against mankind, I thought, grew lax and jerky;
And, at a compliment, her mouth's compressure
Nipt in its birth a little laugh of pleasure;
And smiles, forbidden her lips, as weakness horrid,
Broke, in grave lights, from eyes and chin and forehead;
And, as I push'd kind 'vantage 'gainst the scorner,
The two shy knees press'd shier to the corner;
And Ben began to talk with her, the rather
Because he found out that he knew her father,
Sir Francis Applegarth, of Fenny Compton,
And danced once with her sister Maude at Brompton;
And then he stared until he quite confused her,
More pleased with her than I, who but excused her;
And, when she got out, he, with sheepish glances,
Said he'd stop too, and call on old Sir Francis.

Coventry Patmore

Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore

Love, light for me
Thy ruddiest blazing torch,
That I, albeit a beggar by the Porch
Of the glad Palace of Virginity,
May gaze within,k and sing the pomp I see;
For, crown'd with roses all,
'Tis there, O Love, they keep thy festival!
But first warn off the beatific spot
Those wretched who have not
Even afar beheld the shining wall,
And those who, once beholding, have forgot,
And those, most vile, who dress
The charnel spectre drear
Of utterly dishallow'd nothingness
In that refulgent fame,
And cry, Lo, here!
And name
The Lady whose smiles inflame
The sphere.
Bring, Love, anear, And bid be not afraid
Young Lover true, and love-foreboding Maid,
And wedded Spouse, if virginal of thought;
for I will sing of nought
Less sweet to hear
Than seems
A music their half-remember'd dreams.
The magnet calls the steel:
Answers the iron to the magnet's breath;
What do they feel
But death!
The clouds of summer kiss in flame and rain,
And are not found again;
But the heavens themselves eternal are with fire
Of unapproach'd desire,
By the aching heart of Love, which cannot rest,
In blissfullest pathos so indeed possess'd.
O, spousals high;
O, doctrine blest,
Unutterable in even the happiest sigh;
This know ye all
Who can recall
With what a welling of indignant tears
LOve's simpleness first hears
The meaning of his mortal covenant,
And from what pride comes down
To wear the crown
Of which 'twas very heaven to feel the want.
How envies he the ways
Of yonder hopeless star,
And so would laugh and yearn
With trembling lids eterne,
Ineffably content from infinitely far

Only to gaze
On his bright Mistress's responding rays,
That never know eclipse;
And, once in his long year, With praeternuptial ecstasy and fear,
By the delicious law of that ellipse
Wherein all citizens of ether move,
With hastening pace to come
Nearer, though never near,
His Love
And always inaccessible sweet Home;
There on his path doubly to burn,
Kiss'd by her doubled light
That whispers of its source,
The ardent secret ever clothed with Night,
Then go forth in new force
Towards a new return,
Rejoicing as a Bridegroom on his course!
This know ye all;
Therefore gaze bold,
That so in you be joyful hope increas'd,
Thorough the Palace portals, and behold
The dainty and unsating Marriage-Feast.
O, hear
Them singing clear
'Cor meum et caro mea'round the 'I am',
The Husband of the Heavens, and the Lamb
Whom they for ever follow there that kept,
Or, losing, never slept
Till they reconquer'd had in mortal fight
The standard white.
O, hear
From the harps they bore from Earth, five-strung, what music springs,
While the glad Spirits chide
The wondering strings!
And how the shining sacrificial Choirs,
Offering for aye their dearest hearts' desires,
Which to their hearts come back beatified,
Hymn, the bright aisles along,
The nuptial song,
Song ever new to us and them, that saith,
'Hail Virgin in Virginity a Spouse!'
Heard first below
Within the little house
At Nazareth;
Heard yet in many a cell where brides of Christ
Lie hid, emparadised,
And where, although
By the hour 'tis night,
There's light,
The Day still lingering in the lap of snow.
Gaze and be not afraid
Ye wedded few that honour, in sweet thought

And glittering will,
So freshly from the garden gather still
The lily sacrificed;
For ye,though self-suspected here for nought,
Are highly styled
With the thousands twelve times twelve of undefiled.
Gaze and be not afraid
Young Lover true and love-foreboding Maid.
The full Moon of deific vision bright
Abashes nor abates
No spark minute of Nature's keen delight,
'Tis there your Hymen waits!
There wher in courts afar, all unconfused, they crowd,
As fumes the starlight soft
In gulfs of cloud,
And each to the other, well-content,
Sighs oft,
''Twas this we meant!'
Gaze without blame
Ye in whom living Love yet blushes for dead shame.
There of pure Virgins none
Is fairer seen,
Save One,
Than Mary Magdalene.
Gaze without doubt or fear
Ye to whom generous Love, by any name, is dear.
Love makes the life to be
A fount perpetual of virginity;
For, lo, the Elect
Of generous Love, how named soe'er, affect
Nothing but God,
Or mediate or direct,
Nothing but God,
The Husband of the Heavens:
And who Him love, in potence great or small
Are, one and all,
Heirs of the Palace glad,
And inly clad
With the bridal robes of ardour virginal.

Coventry Patmore

Departure

It was not like your great and gracious ways!
Do you, that have naught other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye?
I knew, indeed, that you were parting soon;
And so we sate, within the low sun's rays,
You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,
Your harrowing praise.
Well, it was well
To hear you such things speak,
And I could tell
What made your eyes a growing gloom of love,
As a warm South-wind sombres a March grove.
And it was like your great and gracious ways
To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,
Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash
To let the laughter flash,
Whilst I drew near,
Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.
But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd:
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

Coventry Patmore

Eros

Bright thro' the valley gallops the brooklet;
Over the welkin travels the cloud;
Touch'd by the zephyr, dances the harebell;
Cuckoo sits somewhere, singing so loud;
Two little children, seeing and hearing,
Hand in hand wander, shout, laugh, and sing:
Lo, in their bosoms, wild with the marvel,
Love, like the crocus, is come ere the Spring.
Young men and women, noble and tender,
Yearn for each other, faith truly plight,
Promise to cherish, comfort and honour;
Vow that makes duty one with delight.
Oh, but the glory, found in no story,
Radiance of Eden unquench'd by the Fall;
Few may remember, none may reveal it,
This the first first-love, the first love of all!

Coventry Patmore

Faint Yet Pursuing

Heroic Good, target for which the young
Dream in their dreams that every bow is strung,
And, missing, sigh
Unfruitful, or as disbelievers die,
Thee having miss'd, I will not so revolt,
But lowlier shoot my bolt,
And lowlier still, if still I may not reach,
And my proud stomach teach
That less than highest is good, and may be high.
And even walk in life's uneven way,
Though to have dreamt of flight and not to fly
Be strange and sad,
Is not a boon that's given to all who pray.
If this I had
I'd envy none!
Nay, trod I straight for one
Year, month or week,
Should Heaven withdraw, and Satan me amerce
Of power and joy, still would I seek
Another victory with a like reverse;
Because the good of victory does not die,
As dies the failure's curse,
And what we have to gain
Is, not one battle, but a weary life's campaign.
Yet meaner lot being sent
Should more than me content;
Yea, if I lie
Among vile shards, though born for silver wings,
In the strong flight and feathers gold
Of whatsoever heavenward mounts and sings
I must by admiration so comply
That there I should my own delight behold.
Yea, though I sin each day times seven,
And dare not lift the fearfullest eyes to Heaven,
Thanks must I give
Because that seven times are not eight or nine,
And that my darkness is all mine,
And that I live
Within this oak-shade one more minute even,
Hearing the winds their Maker magnify.

Coventry Patmore

'If I were dead'

'IF I were dead, you'd sometimes say, Poor Child!'
The dear lips quiver'd as they spake,
And the tears brake
From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smiled.
Poor Child, poor Child!
I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song.
It is not true that Love will do no wrong.
Poor Child!
And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,
And of those words your full avengers make?
Poor Child, poor Child!
And now, unless it be
That sweet amends thrice told are come to thee,
O God, have Thou no mercy upon me!
Poor Child!

Coventry Patmore

King Cophetua The First

Said Jove within himself one day,
'I'll make me a mistress out of clay!
These ninefold spheres of chiming quires,
Though little things and therefore sweet,
Too Godlike are for my desires:
My pleasure still is incomplete.
The gust of love is mystery,
Which poorly yet the heavens supply.
Now where may God for mystery seek
Save in the earthly, small, and weak?
My work, then, let me crown and end
With what I ne'er shall comprehend!'
And so the unfathomable Need,
Hell's mock, Heaven's pity, was decreed.
And, with perversity immense
As all his other affluence,
Jove left his wondering Court behind
And Juno's almost equal mind,
On low and little Earth to seek
That vessel infinitely weak,
(The abler for the infinite honour
He hugely long'd to put upon her,)
And, in a melancholy grove,
Found sighing his predestined Love,
A pretty, foolish, pensive maid,
The least of heaven-related things,
Of every boy and beast afraid,
But not of him, the King of Kings.
He look'd so measurelessly mild,
And so he flatter'd her, poor child,
By lifting with respect her hand
To his salute benign and grand,
That, when he spoke, and begged to be
Instructed in her wishes, she,
Having a modest minute tarried,
Lisp'd, 'I should like, Sire, to be married.'
But, when he smiling ask'd, 'Whom to?'
She blush'd and said, she scarcely knew.
Then Jove named Shepherds, Lords, and Kings
To her free choice; for all such things
Were his and his to give; but these
She shook her curls at. 'Hard to please
Is my small Cousin, but my nod
Shall call from heaven some splendid God—'

'Ah, Maker mine, no God will do
That's not as great a God as you!'
Thereat Jove laugh'd: 'As least of things
Alone can sate the King of Kings,
So the least thing, it seems, that I
Alone of Gods can satisfy!'
And, fading in her flushing arms,

He blazed for ever from her charms.
Thenceforth the maiden sang and shone,
Admired by all and woo'd by none,
For, though she said she was a sinner,
'Twas clear to all that Jove was in her,
And, but for that deep pagan night,
She would have been a Carmelite.

Coventry Patmore

L’allegro

Felicity!
Who ope'st to none that knocks, yet, laughing weak,
Yield'st all to Love that will not seek,
And who, though won, wilt droop and die,
Unless wide doors bespeak thee free,
How safe's the bond of thee and me,
Since thee I cherish and defy!
Is't Love or Friendship, Dearest, we obey?
Ah, thou art young, and I am gray;
But happy man is he who knows
How well time goes,
With no unkind intruder by,
Between such friends as thou and I!
'Twould wrong thy favour, Sweet, were I to say,
'Tis best by far,
When best things are not possible,
To make the best of those that are;
For, though it be not May,
Sure, few delights of Spring excel
The beauty of this mild September day!
So with me walk,
And view the dreaming field and bossy Autumn wood,
And how in humble russet goes
The Spouse of Honour, fair Repose,
Far from a world whence love is fled
And truth is dying because joy is dead;
And, if we hear the roaring wheel
Of God's remoter service, public zeal,
Let us to stiller place retire
And glad admire
How, near Him, sounds of working cease
In little fervour and much peace;
And let us talk
Of holy things in happy mood,
Learnt of thy blest twin-sister, Certitude;
Or let's about our neighbours chat,
Well praising this, less praising that,
And judging outer strangers by
Those gentle and unsanction'd lines
To which remorse of equity
Of old hath moved the School divines.
Or linger where this willow bends,
And let us, till the melody be caught,
Harken that sudden, singing thought,
On which unguess'd increase to life perchance depends.
He ne'er hears twice the same who hears
The songs of heaven's unanimous spheres,
And this may be the song to make, at last, amends
For many sighs and boons in vain long sought!
Now, careless, let us stray, or stop
To see the partridge from the covey drop,
Or, while the evening air's like yellow wine,

From the pure stream take out
The playful trout,
That jerks with rasping check the struggled line;
Or to the Farm, where, high on trampled stacks,
The labourers stir themselves amain
To feed with hasty sheaves of grain
The deaf'ning engine's boisterous maw,
And snatch again,
From to-and-fro tormenting racks,
The toss'd and hustled straw;
Whilst others tend the shedded wheat
That fills yon row of shuddering sacks,
Or shift them quick, and bind them neat,
And dogs and boys with sticks
Wait, murderous, for the rats that leave the ruin'd ricks;
And, all the bags being fill'd and rank'd fivefold, they pour
The treasure on the barn's clean floor,
And take them back for more,
Until the whole bared harvest beauteous lies
Under our pleased and prosperous eyes.
Then let us give our idlest hour
To the world's wisdom and its power;
Hear famous Golden-Tongue refuse
To gander sauce that's good for goose,
Or the great Clever Party con
How many grains of sifted sand,
Heap'd, make a likely house to stand,
How many fools one Solomon.
Science, beyond all other lust
Endow'd with appetite for dust,
We glance at where it grunts, well-sty'd,
And pass upon the other side.
Pass also by, in pensive mood,
Taught by thy kind twin-sister, Certitude,
Yon puzzled crowd, whose tired intent
Hunts like a pack without a scent.
And now come home,
Where none of our mild days
Can fail, though simple, to confess
The magic of mysteriousness;
For there 'bide charming Wonders three,
Besides, Sweet, thee,
To comprehend whose commonest ways,
Ev'n could that be,
Were coward's 'vantage and no true man's praise.

Coventry Patmore

Love's Reality

I walk, I trust, with open eyes;
I've travelled half my worldly course;
And in the way behind me lies
Much vanity and some remorse;
I've lived to feel how pride may part
Spirits, tho' matched like hand and glove;
I've blushed for love's abode, the heart;
But have not disbelieved in love;
Nor unto love, sole mortal thing
Or worth immortal, done the wrong
To count it, with the rest that sing,
Unworthy of a serious song;
And love is my reward: for now,
When most of dead'ning time complain,
The myrtle blooms upon my brow,
Its odour quickens all my brain.

Coventry Patmore

Ma Belle

Farewell, dear Heart! Since needs it must I go,
Dear Heart, farewell!
Fain would I stay, but that I love thee so.
One kiss, ma Belle!
What hope lies in the Land we do not know,
Who, Dear, can tell?
But thee I love, and let thy 'plaint be, ‘Lo,
He loved me well!’

Coventry Patmore

Magna Est Veritas

Here, in this little Bay,
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
Where, twice a day,
The purposeless, gay ocean comes and goes,
Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
I sit me down.
For want of me the world's course will not fail:
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not.

Coventry Patmore

Mignonne

Whate'er thou dost thou'rt dear.
Uncertain troubles sanctify
That magic well-spring of the willing tear,
Thine eye.
Thy jealous fear,
With not the rustle of a rival near;
Thy careless disregard of all
My tenderest care;
Thy dumb despair
When thy keen wit my worship may construe
Into contempt of thy divinity;
They please me too!
But should it once befall
These accidental charms to disappear,
Leaving withal
Thy sometime self the same throughout the year,
So glowing, grave and shy,
Kind, talkative and dear
As now thou sitt'st to ply
The fireside tune
Of that neat engine deft at which thou sew'st
With fingers mild and foot like the new moon,
O, then what cross of any further fate
Could my content abate?
Forget, then, (but I know
Thou canst not so,)
Thy customs of some prædiluvian state.
I am no Bullfinch, fair my Butterfly,
That thou should'st try
Those zigzag courses, in the welkin clear;
Nor cruel Boy that, fledd'st thou straight
Or paused, mayhap
Might catch thee, for thy colours, with his cap.

Coventry Patmore

Night And Sleep

How strange at night to wake
And watch, while others sleep,
Till sight and hearing ache
For objects that may keep
The awful inner sense
Unroused, lest it should mark
The life that haunts the emptiness
And horror of the dark!
How strange at night the bay
Of dogs, how wild the note
Of cocks that scream for day,
In homesteads far remote;
How strange and wild to hear
The old and crumbling tower,
Amid the darkness, suddenly
Take tongue and speak the hour!
Albeit the love-sick brain
Affects the dreary moon,
Ill things alone refrain
From life's nocturnal swoon:
Men melancholy mad,
Beasts ravenous and sly,
The robber, and the murderer,
Remorse, with lidless eye.
The nightingale is gay,
For she can vanquish night;
Dreaming, she sings of day
Notes that make darkness bright;
But when the refluent gloom
Saddens the gaps of song,
Men charge on her the dolefulness,
And call her crazed with wrong.

Coventry Patmore

Olympus

Through female subtlety intense,
Or the good luck of innocence,
Or both, my Wife, with whom I plan
To pass calm evenings when I can,
After the chattering girls and boys
Are gone, or the less grateful noise
Is over, of grown tongues that chime
Untruly, once upon a time
Prevail'd with me to change my mind
Of reading out how Rosalind
In Arden jested, and to go
Where people whom I ought to know,
She said, would meet that night. And I,
Who inly murmur'd, ‘I will try
Some dish more sharply spiced than this
Milk-soup men call domestic bliss,’
Took, as she, laughing, bade me take,
Our eldest boy's brown wide-awake
And straw box of cigars, and went
Where, like a careless parliament
Of gods olympic, six or eight
Authors and else, reputed great,
Were met in council jocular
On many things, pursuing far
Truth, only for the chase's glow,
Quick as they caught her letting go,
Or, when at fault the view-halloo,
Playing about the missing clue.
And coarse jests came; ‘But gods are coarse,’
Thought I, yet not without remorse,
While memory of the gentle words,
Wife, Mother, Sister, flash'd like swords.
And so, after two hours of wit,
That burnt a hole where'er it hit,
I said I would not stay to sup,
Because my Wife was sitting up;
And walk'd home with a sense that I
Was no match for that company.
Smelling of smoke, which, always kind,
Amelia said she did not mind,
I sipp'd her tea, saw Baby scold
And finger at the muslin fold,
Through which he push'd his nose at last,
And choked and chuckled, feeding fast;
And, he asleep and sent upstairs,
She rang the servants in to prayers;
And after heard what men of fame
Had urged 'gainst this and that. ‘For shame!’
She said, but argument show'd not.
‘If I had answer'd thus,’ I thought,
‘'Twould not have pass'd for very wise.
But I have not her voice and eyes!

Howe'er it be, I'm glad of home,
Yea, very glad at heart to come
And lay a happy head to rest
On her unreasonable breast.’

Coventry Patmore

Regina Cœle

Say, did his sisters wonder what could Joseph see
In a mild, silent little Maid like thee?
And was it awful, in that narrow house,
With God for Babe and Spouse?
Nay, like thy simple, female sort, each one
Apt to find Him in Husband and in Son,
Nothing to thee came strange in this.
Thy wonder was but wondrous bliss:
Wondrous, for, though
True Virgin lives not but does know,
(Howbeit none ever yet confess'd,)
That God lies really in her breast,
Of thine He made His special nest!
And so
All mothers worship little feet,
And kiss the very ground they've trod;
But, ah, thy little Baby sweet
Who was indeed thy God!

Coventry Patmore

Semele

No praise to me!
My joy 'twas to be nothing but the glass
Thro' which the general boon of Heaven should pass,
To focus upon thee.
Nor is't thy blame
Thou first should'st glow, and, after, fade i' the flame.
It takes more might
Than God has given thee, Dear, so long to feel delight.
Shall I, alas,
Reproach thee with thy change and my regret?
Blind fumblers that we be
About the portals of felicity!
The wind of words would scatter, tears would wash
Quite out the little heat
Beneath the silent and chill-seeming ash,
Perchance, still slumbering sweet.

Coventry Patmore

Stars and Moon

Beneath the stars and summer moon
A pair of wedded lovers walk,
Upon the stars and summer moon
They turn their happy eyes, and talk.

Edith.

“Those stars, that moon, for me they shine
With lovely, but no startling light;
My joy is much, but not as thine,
A joy that fills the pulse, like fright.”

Alfred.

“My love, a darken'd conscience clothes
The world in sackcloth; and, I fear,
The stain of life this new heart loathes,
Still clouds my sight; but thine is clear.

“True vision is no startling boon
To one in whom it always lies;
But if true sight of stars and moon
Were strange to thee, it would surprise.

“Disease it is and dearth in me
Which thou believest genius, wealth;
And that imagined want in thee
Is riches and abundant health.

“O, little merit I my bride!
And therefore will I love her more;
Renewing, by her gentle side,
Lost worth: let this thy smile restore !”

Edith.

“Ah, love! we both, with longing deep,
Love words and actions kind, which are
More good for life than bread or sleep,
More beautiful than Moon or Star.”

Coventry Patmore

Tamerton Church-Tower, Or, First Love

I.
We left the Church at Tamerton
In gloomy western air;
To greet the day we gallop'd on,
A merry-minded pair.
The hazy East hot noon did bode;
Our horses sniff'd the dawn;
We made ten Cornish miles of road
Before the dew was gone.
We clomb the hill where Lanson's Keep
Fronts Dartmoor's distant ridge;
Thence trotted South; walk'd down the steep
That slants to Gresson Bridge;
And paused awhile, where Tamar waits,
In many a shining coil,
And teeming Devon separates
From Cornwall's sorry soil.

II.
Our English skies contain'd, that Spring,
A Caribbean sun;
The singing birds forgot to sing,
The rivulets to run.
For three noons past, the skies had frown'd,
Obscured with blighting shades
That only mock'd the thirsty ground
And unrejoicing glades.
To-day, before the noon was nigh,
Bright-skirted vapours grew,
And on the sky hung languidly;
The sky was languid too.
Our horses dropp'd their necks, and nosed
The dusty wayside grass,
Whilst we beneath still boughs reposed
And watch'd the water pass.
We spoke of plighted Bertha: Frank
Shot pebbles in the stream;
And I lay by him on the bank,
But dreamt no lover's dream.
She was a blythe and bashful maid,
Much blushing in her glee;
Yet gracing all she did and said
With sweet sufficiency.
'Is Blanche as fair?' ask'd I, who yearn'd
To feel my life complete;
To taste unselfish pleasures earn'd
By service strict and sweet.
'Well, some say fairer: she'll surprise
Your heart with crimson lips;
Fat underlids, that hold bright eyes
In laughing half-eclipse;

Alluring locks, done up with taste
Behind her dainty ears;
And manners full of wayward haste,
Tho' facile as the deer's.’

III.
‘You paint a leaflet, here and there;
And not the blossom: tell
What mysteries of good and fair
These blazon'd letters spell.’

IV.
‘Her mouth and teeth, by Cupid's bow!
Are letters spelling 'kiss;'
And, witchingly withdrawn below
Twin worlds of baby-bliss,
Her waist, so soft and small, may mean,
'O, when will some one come
To make me catch my breath between
His finger and his thumb!''

V.
My life, 'twas like a land of dreams,
Where nothing noble throve:
Dull seem'd it as to maiden seems
The verse that's not of love.
‘See where,’ sigh'd I, ‘the water dim
Repeats, with leaden hue,
The fervid sun, the cloud's hot rim,
The gap of dazzling blue!’
Quoth Frank, ‘I do, and hence foresee
And all too plainly scan
Some sentimental homily
On Duty, Death, or Man.’
‘'Tis this;’ said I, ‘our senses mar,
Ev'n so, sweet Nature's face,
Unless by love revived they are,
Or lit by heavenly grace.
Below the hazel talks the rill;
My heart speaks not again;
The solemn cloud, the stately hill,
I look on each in vain.
Sure he for whom no Power shall strike
This darkness into day—’

‘Is damn'd,’ said Frank, who morall'd like
The Fool in an old Play.
‘That's true!’ cried I, ‘yet, as the worm
That sickens ere it change—’

‘Or as the pup that nears the term
At which pups have the mange—
Pooh! Come, Man, let us on,’ he said,
‘For now the storm is nigh!’
And whilst we rode quaint sense we read
Within the changing sky.
Above us bent a prophet wild,
Pointing to hidden harm;
Beyond, a magic woman smiled,
And wove some wondrous charm;
Past that, a censer jetted smoke:
Black convolutions roll'd
Sunwards, and caught the light, and broke
In crowns of shining gold.

VI.
The gaps of blue shrank fast in span;
The long-forgotten breeze,
By lazy starts and fits, began
To stir the higher trees.
At noon, we came to Tavistock;
And sunshine still was there,
But gloomy Dartmoor seem'd to mock
Its weak and yellow glare.
The swallows, in the wrathful light,
Were pitching up and down;
A string of rooks made rapid flight,
Due southward, o'er the town,
Where, baiting at the Tiger-Inn,
We talk'd by windows wide,
Of Blanche and all my unseen kin,
Who did our coming bide.

VII.

The heavy sign-board swung and shriek'd,
In dark air whirl'd the vane,
Blinds flapp'd, dust rose, and, straining, creak'd
The shaken window-pane;
And, just o'erhead, a huge cloud flung,
For earnest of its stores,
A few calm drops, that struck among
The light-leaved sycamores.
Hot to be gone, Frank rose and eyed
Dark cloud and swinging branch;
But less long'd he to greet his Bride
Than I to look on Blanche.
Her name, pair'd still with praise at home,
Would make my pulses start;
The hills between us were become

A weight upon my heart.
‘Behold,’ I cried, ‘the storm comes not;
The northern heavens grow fair.’
‘Look South,’ said Frank, ‘'tis one wide blot
Of thunder-threatening air.’
The string of rooks had travell'd on,
Against the southern shroud,
And, like some snaky skeleton,
Lay twisted in the cloud.
‘No storm to-day!’ said I, ‘for, see,
Yon black thing travels south.’
We follow'd soon; our spirits free,
Our bodies slaked from drouth.
I rode in silence; Frank, with tongue
Made lax by too much port,
Soliloquising, said or sung
After this tipsy sort:

‘Yea, nerves they are the Devil's mesh,
And pups begin quite blind,
And health is ofttimes in the flesh,
And measles in the mind!
‘Foolish and fair was Joan without;
Foolish and foul within;
High as a hunted pig his snout,
She carried a foolish chin.
‘The Boy beheld, and brisk rose he
At this badly painted fly:
That boys less wise than fish will be
Makes many a man to sigh.’

VIII.
On, on we toil'd, amidst the blaze
From Dartmoor's ridges bare;
Beneath the hush'd and scorching haze,
And through the twinkling air;
Along the endless mountain-side,
That seem'd with us to move;
Past dreary mine-mouths, far and wide;
Huge dross-heap, wheel, and groove;
Dark towns by disembowell'd hills,
Where swarthy tribes abode,
Who, in hard rocks with harder wills,
Pursued the crooked lode;
Up heights, that seem'd against us match'd;
Until, from table-land,
Before the teasing midge was hatch'd,
We hail'd the southern strand.
Then pleasantly, on level ground
And through the lighter air,
We paced along and breathed around,

A merry-minded pair.
A western night of even cloud
Suck'd in the sultry disk;
Bright racks look'd on, a fiery crowd,
To seamen boding risk;
The late crow wing'd his silent way
Across the shadowy East;
The gnat danced out his little day,
His ceaseless singing ceased;
Along the dim horizon round
Fled faint electric fires;
Blue glow-worms lit the fresher ground
By moisture-harbouring briers;
Far northward twinkled lonely lights,
The peopled vales among;
In front, between the gaping heights,
The mystic ocean hung.

IX.
Our weary spirits flagg'd beneath
The still and loaded air;
We left behind the freër heath,
A moody-minded pair.
With senses slack and sick of mirth,
Tho' near the happy goal,
I murmur'd, fearing nought on earth
Could quite content the soul:
'Suppose your love prove such a light
As yonder glow-worm's lamp,
That gleams, at distance, strong and bright,
Approach'd, burns weak and damp.
Perchance, by much of bliss aroused,
Your heart will pant for more;
And then the worm of want lies housed
Within the sweet fruit's core!
Far worse, if, led by fancy blind,
But undeceiv'd by use—'
'I dream,' yawn'd Frank, 'and wake to find
My Goddess a green goose!'

'Vain, vain,' said I, 'is worldly weal:
We faint, within the heart,
For good which all we see and feel
Foreshadows but in part.'
Frank answer'd, 'What you faint for, win!
Faint not, but forward press.
Heav'n proffers all: 'twere grievous sin
To live content in less.
The Sun rolls by us every day;
And it and all things speak
To the sinking heart of man, and say,

'Tis wicked to be weak.
We would not hear the hated sound;
But, by the Lord, we must:
If not, the heavy world goes round,
And grinds us into dust.'
With each a moral in his mouth,
We rein'd our sweating nags,
Where quiet Ocean, on the South,
Kiss'd Edgecumb's ruddy crags.

II
I.
So subtly love within me wrought,
So excellent she seem'd,
Daily of Blanche was all my thought,
Nightly of Blanche I dream'd;
And this was all my wish, and all
The work now left for life,
To make this Wonder mine, to call
This laughing Blanche my Wife.

II.
I courted her till hope grew bold;
Then sought her in her place,
And all my passion freely told,
Before her blushing face.
I kiss'd her twice, I kiss'd her thrice,
Thro' tresses and thro' tears;
I kiss'd her lips, I kiss'd her eyes,
And calm'd her joys and fears.
So woo'd I Blanche, and so I sped,
And so, with small delay,
I and the patient Frank were wed
Upon the self-same day.
And friends all round kiss'd either Bride,
I Frank's, Frank mine; and he
Laugh'd as for once we thus defied
Love's sweet monopoly.
And then we drove by garth and grove;
And soon forgot the place
Where all the world had look'd shy Love
So rudely in the face.

III
I.
The noon was hot and close and still,
When, steadying Blanche's hand,
I led her down the southern hill,
And row'd with her from land.

Ere summer's prime that year the wasp
Lay gorged within the peach;
The tide, as though the sea did gasp,
Fell lax upon the beach.
Quietly dipp'd the dripping scull,
And all beside was calm;
But o'er the strange and weary lull
No angel waved his palm.
The sun was rayless, pale the sky,
The distance thick with light:
We glided past the fort and by
The war-ship's sleeping might.
Her paddle stirr'd: without a breeze,
A mimic tempest boil'd:
The sailors on the silent seas
With storm-tuned voices toil'd.
I could not toil; I seldom pray'd:
What was to do or ask?
Love's purple glory round me play'd,
Unfed by prayer or task.
All perfect my contentment was,
For Blanche was all my care;
And heaven seem'd only heaven because
My goddess would be there.
No wafted breeze the ships did strike,
No wish unwon moved me;
The peace within my soul was like
The peace upon the sea.
At times, when action sleeps, unstirr'd
By any motive gale,
A mystic wind, with warning heard,
Ruffles life's idle sail.
The fancy, then, a fear divines,
And, borne on gloomy wings,
Sees threats and formidable signs
In simply natural things.
It smote my heart, how, yesternight,
The moon rose in eclipse,
And how her maim'd and shapeless light
O'erhung the senseless ships.
The passion pass'd, as, lightning-lit,
Red cloud-scenes shew and close;
And soon came wonder at the fit,
And smiles and full repose.
Again I turn'd me, all devote,
To my sweet Idol's shrine;
Again I gazed where, on the boat,
Her shadow mix'd with mine.

II.
Cried Frank, who, with his Wife, was there,

‘We dream! sing each a song.’
And he sang first an old, brave air,
And pull'd the boat along:
‘Sir Pelles woo'd, in scorn's despite;
He cherish'd love's sweet smart;
Ettarde proved light; then, like a Knight,
He turn'd her from his heart.
‘O, the remorse with which we pay
For duties done too well!
But conscience gay does grief allay;
As all true knights can tell.’

III.
‘Alas, poor Knight!’ cried Blanche, ‘Nay, hear,’
Said Frank, ‘the saddest half!’
And drearily he troll'd, while clear
Rose Blanche's puzzled laugh.
‘Sir Lob was drunk; the stars were bright.
Within an empty ditch,
Sir Lob all night lay right and tight
As a Saint within his niche.
‘Now, well, quoth he, goes life with me;
I've liquor and to spare;
I hate the herd that vulgar be;
And, O, the stars are fair!
‘The mill-dam burst: Sir Lob lay sunk
In that celestial swound:
The mill-stream found the knight dead drunk,
And the Jury found him drown'd.’

IV.
‘The tunes are good; the words,’ said I,
‘Are hard to understand.’
And soon I prefaced with a sigh
This pagan love-song grand:
‘When Love's bright Ichor fills the veins,
Love's Amaranth lights the brow,
The Past grows dark, the Future wanes,
Before the golden Now.
‘Marc Antony the war-flags furl'd,
For Egypt's Queen said, 'Stay:
He reck'd not of the worthless world,
Well lost by that delay.
‘Quoth Antony, Here set I up
My everlasting rest:
Leave me to drain Joy's magic cup,
To dream on Egypt's breast.’

V.

Frank smiled, and said my note was wrong;
'Twas neither Man's nor Boy's;
And Blanche sang next, some modern song,
Of ‘Flowers’ and ‘Fairy Joys.’
As bright disparted skies that break
To let a cherub through,
So seem'd her mouth: my sight did ache,
Glitt'ring with fiery dew;
And, in the laugh of her brown eye,
My heart, contented so,
Lay like the honey-thirsty fly
Drows'd in the cactus' glow.
Nor heeded I what sang my Saint,
Such magic had the sound.
The myrtle in her breath made faint
The air that hearken'd round.

VI.
‘Now, Wife,’ said Frank, ‘to shame our lays,
Try you in turn your power;
And sing your little song in praise
Of Love's selectest flower.’
Her hand felt his: thus sang she then,
Submitted to his rule,
Tho' shyer than the water-hen
On Tamar's shadiest pool.
‘The Myrtle sates with scent the air
That flows by Grecian hills;
Its fervid leaflets glisten fair
By warm Italian rills.
The North too has its Lover's-Flower,
The glad Forget-me-not;
Too bold thro' sunshine, wind, and shower,
Too blue to be forgot.’

VII.
Pointing far East, Frank said, ‘Do you see
Yon porpoise-droves at play?’
We gazed, and saw, with failing glee,
Bright lines of spotted spray.
Once more the boded terror shook
My heart, and made me dumb.
‘To land! to land!’ cried Frank, ‘for, look,
The storm, at last, is come!’
Above us, heated fields of mist
Precipitated cloud;
For shore we pull'd; the swift keel hiss'd;
Above us grew the shroud.
The pale gull flapp'd the stagnant air;
The thunder-drop fell straight;

The first wind lifted Blanche's hair;
Looking to me she sate.
Across the boundless mirror crept,
In dark'ning blasts, the squall;
And round our terror lightly leapt
Mad wavelets, many and small.
The oars cast by, convuls'd outflew
Our perilous hope the sail.
None spoke; all watch'd the waves, that grew
Under the splashing hail.
With urgent hearts and useless hands,
We sate and saw them rise,
Coursing to shore in gloomy bands,
Below the appalling skies.
The wrathful thunder scared the deeps,
And where, upon our wake,
The sea got up in ghastly heaps,
White lines of lightning strake.
On, on, with fainting hope we fled,
Hard-hunted by the grave;
Slow seem'd it, though like wind we sped
Over the shouldering wave;
In front swift rose the crags, where still
A storm of sunshine pour'd;
At last, beneath the southern hill,
The pitiless breakers roar'd.
O, bolt foreseen before it burst!
O, chastening hard to bear!
O, cup of sweetness quite revers'd,
And turn'd to void despair!
Blanche in fear swooning, I let go
The helm; we struck the ground;
The sea fell in from stern to prow,
And Blanche, my Bride, was drown'd.
What guilt was hers? But God is great,
And all that may be known
To each of any other's fate
Is, that it helps his own.

IV
I.
In a swift vortex go the years,
Each swifter than the last,
And seasons four their set careers
Pursued, and somehow pass'd.
The spirit of Spring, this year, was quench'd
With clouds and wind and rain;
All night the gust-blown torrent drench'd
The gloomy window-pane;
Against the pane the flapping blind
Flapp'd ever, dismally;

And ever, above the rain and wind,
Sounded the dismal sea.
The billows, like some guilty crew
Devour'd by vain remorse,
Dash'd up the beach, sighing withdrew,
And mix'd, with murmurs hoarse.
The morning was a cheerless sight,
Amongst the turbid skies;
But sweet was the relief of light
Within my restless eyes;
For then I rose to prayer and toil,
Forgat the ocean's moan,
Or faced the dizzy crash and coil
That drown'd its mournfuller tone.
But never, when the tide drew back,
Trod I the weltering strand;
For horribly my single track
Pursued me in the sand.

II.
One morn I watch'd the rain subside;
And then fared singly forth,
Below the clouds, till eve to ride
From Edgecumb to the North.
Once, only once, I paused upon
The sea-transcending height,
And turn'd to gaze: far breakers shone,
Slow gleams of silent light.
Into my horse I struck the spur;
Sad was the soul in me;
Sore were my lids with tears for her
Who slept beneath the sea.
But soon I sooth'd my startled horse,
And check'd that sudden grief,
And look'd abroad on crag and gorse
And Dartmoor's cloudy reef.
Far forth the air was dark and clear,
The crags acute and large,
The clouds uneven, black, and near,
And ragged at the marge.
The spider, in his rainy mesh,
Shook not, but, as I rode,
The opposing air, sweet, sharp, and fresh,
Against my hot lids flow'd.
Peat-cutters pass'd me, carrying tools;
Hawks glimmer'd on the wing;
The ground was glad with grassy pools,
And brooklets galloping;
And sparrows chirp'd, with feathers spread,
And dipp'd and drank their fill,
Where, down its sandy channel, fled

The lessening road-side rill.

III.
I cross'd the furze-grown table-land,
And near'd the northern vales,
That lay perspicuously plann'd
In lesser hills and dales.
Then rearward, in a slow review,
Fell Dartmoor's jagged lines;
Around were dross-heaps, red and blue,
Old shafts of gutted mines,
Impetuous currents copper-stain'd,
Wheels stream-urged with a roar,
Sluice-guiding grooves, strong works that strain'd
With freight of upheaved ore.
And then, the train, with shock on shock,
Swift rush and birth-scream dire,
Grew from the bosom of the rock,
And pass'd in noise and fire.
With brazen throb, with vital stroke,
It went, far heard, far seen,
Setting a track of shining smoke
Against the pastoral green.
Then, bright drops, lodged in budding trees,
Were loos'd in sudden showers,
Touch'd by the novel western breeze,
Friend of the backward flowers.
Then rose the Church at Tavistock,
The rain still falling there;
But sunny Dartmoor seem'd to mock
The gloom with cheerful glare.
About the West the gilt vane reel'd
And pois'd; and, with sweet art,
The sudden, jangling changes peal'd
Until, around my heart,
Conceits of brighter times, of times
The brighter for past storms,
Clung thick as bees, when brazen chimes
Call down the hiveless swarms.

IV.
I rested at the Tiger Inn,
There half-way on my ride,
And mused with joy of friends and kin
Who did my coming bide.
The Vicar, in his sombre wear
That shone about the knees,
Before me stood, his aspect fair
With godly memories.
I heard again his kind ‘Good-bye:

Christ speed and keep thee still
From frantic passions, for they die
And leave a frantic will.’
My fond, old Tutor, learn'd and meek!
A soul, in strangest truth,
As wide as Asia and as weak;
Not like his daughter Ruth.
A Girl of fullest heart she was;
Her spirit's lovely flame
Nor dazzled nor surprised, because
It always burn'd the same;
And in the maiden path she trod
Fair was the wife foreshown,
A Mary in the house of God,
A Martha in her own.
Charms for the sight she had; but these
Were tranquil, grave, and chaste,
And all too beautiful to please
A rash, untutor'd taste.

V.
In love with home, I rose and eyed
The rainy North; but there
The distant hill-top, in its pride,
Adorn'd the brilliant air:
And, as I pass'd from Tavistock,
The scatter'd dwellings white,
The Church, the golden weather-cock,
Were whelm'd in happy light;
The children 'gan the sun to greet,
With song and senseless shout;
The lambs to skip, their dams to bleat;
In Tavy leapt the trout;
Across a fleeting eastern cloud,
The splendid rainbow sprang,
And larks, invisible and loud,
Within its zenith sang.

VI.
So lay the Earth that saw the skies
Grow clear and bright above,
As the repentant spirit lies
In God's forgiving love.
The lark forsook the waning day,
And all loud songs did cease;
The Robin, from a wither'd spray,
Sang like a soul at peace.
Far to the South, in sunset glow'd
The peaks of Dartmoor ridge,
And Tamar, full and tranquil, flow'd

Beneath the Gresson Bridge.
There, conscious of the numerous noise
Of rain-awaken'd rills,
And gathering deep and sober joys
From the heart-enlarging hills,
I sat, until the first white star
Appear'd, with dewy rays,
And the fair moon began to bar
With shadows all the ways.
O, well is thee, whate'er thou art,
And happy shalt thou be,
If thou hast known, within thy heart,
The peace that came to me.
O, well is thee, if aught shall win
Thy spirit to confess,
God proffers all, 'twere grievous sin
To live content in less!

VII.
I mounted, now, my patient nag;
And scaled the easy steep;
And soon beheld the quiet flag
On Lanson's solemn Keep.
And now, whenas the waking lights
Bespake the valley'd Town,
A child o'ertook me, on the heights,
In cap and russet gown.
It was an alms-taught scholar trim,
Who, on her happy way,
Sang to herself the morrow's hymn;
For this was Saturday.

‘Saint Stephen, stoned, nor grieved nor groan'd:
'Twas all for his good gain;
For Christ him blest, till he confess'd
A sweet content in pain.
‘Then Christ His cross is no way loss,
But even a present boon:
Of His dear blood fair shines a flood
On heaven's eternal noon.’

VIII.
My sight, once more, was dim for her
Who slept beneath the sea,
As on I sped, without the spur,
By homestead, heath, and lea.
Beside my path the moon kept pace,
In meek and brilliant power,
And lit, ere long, the eastern face
Of Tamerton Church-tower.

Coventry Patmore

The After-Glow

Suspicion's playful counterfeit
Begot your question strange:
The only thing that I forget
Is that there's any change.
Did that long blight which fell on you
My zeal of heart assuage?
Less willing shall I watch you through
The milder illness, age?
To my monopoly first blind
When risks no longer live,
And careless of the hand so kind
That has no more to give,
Shall I forget Spring like a tree,
Nor boast, ‘Her honied cup
Of beauty to his lips save me
No man has lifted up!’
Mine are not memories that come
Of joys that could not last:
They are; and you, Dear, are the sum
Of all your lovely past.
Yet if, with all this conscious weal,
I still should covet more,
The joy behind me shall reveal
The joy that waits before:
I'll mind from sickness how to life
You came, by tardy stealth,
Till, one spring day, I clasp'd my wife
Abloom with blandest health.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto I.

Preludes.

I The Impossibility
Lo, Love's obey'd by all. 'Tis right
That all should know what they obey,
Lest erring conscience damp delight,
And folly laugh our joys away.
Thou Primal Love, who grantest wings
And voices to the woodland birds,
Grant me the power of saying things
Too simple and too sweet for words!

II Love's Reality
I walk, I trust, with open eyes;
I've travell'd half my worldly course;
And in the way behind me lies
Much vanity and some remorse;
I've lived to feel how pride may part
Spirits, tho' match'd like hand and glove;
I've blush'd for love's abode, the heart;
But have not disbelieved in love;
Nor unto love, sole mortal thing
Of worth immortal, done the wrong
To count it, with the rest that sing,
Unworthy of a serious song;
And love is my reward; for now,
When most of dead'ning time complain,
The myrtle blooms upon my brow,
Its odour quickens all my brain.

III The Poet's Confidence
The richest realm of all the earth
Is counted still a heathen land:
Lo, I, like Joshua, now go forth
To give it into Israel's hand.
I will not hearken blame or praise;
For so should I dishonour do
To that sweet Power by which these Lays
Alone are lovely, good, and true;
Nor credence to the world's cries give,
Which ever preach and still prevent
Pure passion's high prerogative
To make, not follow, precedent.
From love's abysmal ether rare
If I to men have here made known
New truths, they, like new stars, were there
Before, though not yet written down.
Moving but as the feelings move,
I run, or loiter with delight,
Or pause to mark where gentle Love
Persuades the soul from height to height,
Yet, know ye, though my words are gay

As David's dance, which Michal scorn'd,
If kindly you receive the Lay,
You shall be sweetly help'd and warn'd.

The Cathedral Close.

I
Once more I came to Sarum Close,
With joy half memory, half desire,
And breathed the sunny wind that rose
And blew the shadows o'er the Spire,
And toss'd the lilac's scented plumes,
And sway'd the chestnut's thousand cones,
And fill'd my nostrils with perfumes,
And shaped the clouds in waifs and zones,
And wafted down the serious strain
Of Sarum bells, when, true to time,
I reach'd the Dean's, with heart and brain
That trembled to the trembling chime.

II
'Twas half my home, six years ago.
The six years had not alter'd it:
Red-brick and ashlar, long and low,
With dormers and with oriels lit.
Geranium, lychnis, rose array'd
The windows, all wide open thrown;
And some one in the Study play'd
The Wedding-March of Mendelssohn.
And there it was I last took leave:
'Twas Christmas: I remember'd now
The cruel girls, who feign'd to grieve,
Took down the evergreens; and how
The holly into blazes woke
The fire, lighting the large, low room
A dim, rich lustre of old oak
And crimson velvet's glowing gloom.

III
No change had touch'd Dean Churchill: kind,
By widowhood more than winters bent,
And settled in a cheerful mind,
As still forecasting heaven's content.
Well might his thoughts be fix'd on high,
Now she was there! Within her face
Humility and dignity
Were met in a most sweet embrace.
She seem'd expressly sent below
To teach our erring minds to see
The rhythmic change of time's swift flow

As part of still eternity.
Her life, all honour, observed, with awe
Which cross experience could not mar,
The fiction of the Christian law
That all men honourable are;
And so her smile at once conferr'd
High flattery and benign reproof;
And I, a rude boy, strangely stirr'd,
Grew courtly in my own behoof.
The years, so far from doing her wrong,
Anointed her with gracious balm,
And made her brows more and more young
With wreaths of amaranth and palm.

IV
Was this her eldest, Honor; prude,
Who would not let me pull the swing;
Who, kiss'd at Christmas, call'd me rude,
And, sobbing low, refused to sing?
How changed! In shape no slender Grace,
But Venus; milder than the dove;
Her mother's air; her Norman face;
Her large sweet eyes, clear lakes of love.
Mary I knew. In former time
Ailing and pale, she thought that bliss
Was only for a better clime,
And, heavenly overmuch, scorn'd this.
I, rash with theories of the right,
Which stretch'd the tether of my Creed,
But did not break it, held delight
Half discipline. We disagreed.
She told the Dean I wanted grace.
Now she was kindest of the three,
And soft wild roses deck'd her face.
And, what, was this my Mildred, she
To herself and all a sweet surprise?
My Pet, who romp'd and roll'd a hoop?
I wonder'd where those daisy eyes
Had found their touching curve and droop.

V
Unmannerly times! But now we sat
Stranger than strangers; till I caught
And answer'd Mildred's smile; and that
Spread to the rest, and freedom brought.
The Dean talk'd little, looking on,
Of three such daughters justly vain.
What letters they had had from Bonn,
Said Mildred, and what plums from Spain!
By Honor I was kindly task'd
To excuse my never coming down
From Cambridge; Mary smiled and ask'd

Were Kant and Goethe yet outgrown?
And, pleased, we talk'd the old days o'er;
And, parting, I for pleasure sigh'd.
To be there as a friend, (since more),
Seem'd then, seems still, excuse for pride;
For something that abode endued
With temple-like repose, an air
Of life's kind purposes pursued
With order'd freedom sweet and fair.
A tent pitch'd in a world not right
It seem'd, whose inmates, every one,
On tranquil faces bore the light
Of duties beautifully done,
And humbly, though they had few peers,
Kept their own laws, which seem'd to be
The fair sum of six thousand years'
Traditions of civility.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto II.

Preludes.

I The Paragon
When I behold the skies aloft
Passing the pageantry of dreams,
The cloud whose bosom, cygnet-soft,
A couch for nuptial Juno seems,
The ocean broad, the mountains bright,
The shadowy vales with feeding herds,
I from my lyre the music smite,
Nor want for justly matching words.
All forces of the sea and air,
All interests of hill and plain,
I so can sing, in seasons fair,
That who hath felt may feel again.
Elated oft by such free songs,
I think with utterance free to raise
That hymn for which the whole world longs,
A worthy hymn in woman's praise;
A hymn bright-noted like a bird's,
Arousing these song-sleepy times
With rhapsodies of perfect words,
Ruled by returning kiss of rhymes.
But when I look on her and hope
To tell with joy what I admire,
My thoughts lie cramp'd in narrow scope,
Or in the feeble birth expire;
No mystery of well-woven speech,
No simplest phrase of tenderest fall,
No liken'd excellence can reach
Her, the most excellent of all,
The best half of creation's best,
Its heart to feel, its eye to see,
The crown and complex of the rest,
Its aim and its epitome.
Nay, might I utter my conceit,
'Twere after all a vulgar song,
For she's so simply, subtly sweet,
My deepest rapture does her wrong.
Yet is it now my chosen task
To sing her worth as Maid and Wife;
Nor happier post than this I ask,
To live her laureate all my life.
On wings of love uplifted free,
And by her gentleness made great,
I'll teach how noble man should be
To match with such a lovely mate;
And then in her may move the more
The woman's wish to be desired,
(By praise increased), till both shall soar,
With blissful emulations fired.
And, as geranium, pink, or rose

Is thrice itself through power of art,
So may my happy skill disclose
New fairness even in her fair heart;
Until that churl shall nowhere be
Who bends not, awed, before the throne
Of her affecting majesty,
So meek, so far unlike our own;
Until (for who may hope too much
From her who wields the powers of love?)
Our lifted lives at last shall touch
That happy goal to which they move;
Until we find, as darkness rolls
Away, and evil mists dissolve,
The nuptial contrasts are the poles
On which the heavenly spheres revolve.

II Love at Large
Whene'er I come where ladies are,
How sad soever I was before,
Though like a ship frost-bound and far
Withheld in ice from the ocean's roar,
Third-winter'd in that dreadful dock,
With stiffen'd cordage, sails decay'd,
And crew that care for calm and shock
Alike, too dull to be dismay'd,
Yet, if I come where ladies are,
How sad soever I was before,
Then is my sadness banish'd far,
And I am like that ship no more;
Or like that ship if the ice-field splits,
Burst by the sudden polar Spring,
And all thank God with their warming wits,
And kiss each other and dance and sing,
And hoist fresh sails, that make the breeze
Blow them along the liquid sea,
Out of the North, where life did freeze,
Into the haven where they would be.

III Love and Duty
Anne lived so truly from above,
She was so gentle and so good,
That duty bade me fall in love,
And ‘but for that,’ thought I, ‘I should!’
I worshipp'd Kate with all my will.
In idle moods you seem to see
A noble spirit in a hill,
A human touch about a tree.

IV A Distinction
The lack of lovely pride, in her
Who strives to please, my pleasure numbs,
And still the maid I most prefer

Whose care to please with pleasing comes.

Mary And Mildred.

I
One morning, after Church, I walk'd
Alone with Mary on the lawn,
And felt myself, howe'er we talk'd,
To grave themes delicately drawn.
When she delighted, found I knew
More of her peace than she supposed,
Our confidences heavenwards grew,
Like fox-glove buds, in pairs disclosed.
Our former faults did we confess,
Our ancient feud was more than heal'd.
And, with the woman's eagerness
For amity full-sign'd and seal'd,
She, offering up for sacrifice
Her heart's reserve, brought out to show
Some verses, made when she was ice
To all but Heaven, six years ago;
Since happier grown! I took and read
The neat-writ lines. She, void of guile,
Too late repenting, blush'd, and said,
I must not think about the style.

II
'Day after day, until to-day,
'Imaged the others gone before,
'The same dull task, the weary way,
'The weakness pardon'd o'er and o'er,
'The thwarted thirst, too faintly felt,
'For joy's well-nigh forgotten life,
'The restless heart, which, when I knelt,
'Made of my worship barren strife.
'Ah, whence to-day's so sweet release,
'This clearance light of all my care,
'This conscience free, this fertile peace,
'These softly folded wings of prayer,
'This calm and more than conquering love,
'With which nought evil dares to cope,
'This joy that lifts no glance above,
'For faith too sure, too sweet for hope?
'O, happy time, too happy change,
'It will not live, though fondly nurst!
'Full soon the sun will seem as strange
'As now the cloud which seems dispersed.'

III
She from a rose-tree shook the blight;

And well she knew that I knew well
Her grace with silence to requite;
And, answering now the luncheon-bell,
I laugh'd at Mildred's laugh, which made
All melancholy wrong, its mood
Such sweet self-confidence display'd,
So glad a sense of present good.

IV
I laugh'd and sigh'd; for I confess
I never went to Ball, or Fête,
Or Show, but in pursuit express
Of my predestinated mate;
And thus to me, who had in sight
The happy chance upon the cards,
Each beauty blossom'd in the light
Of tender personal regards;
And, in the records of my breast,
Red-letter'd, eminently fair,
Stood sixteen, who, beyond the rest,
By turns till then had been my care:
At Berlin three, one at St. Cloud,
At Chatteris, near Cambridge, one,
At Ely four, in London two,
Two at Bowness, in Paris none,
And, last and best, in Sarum three;
But dearest of the whole fair troop,
In judgment of the moment, she
Whose daisy eyes had learn'd to droop
Her very faults my fancy fired;
My loving will, so thwarted, grew;
And, bent on worship, I admired
Whate'er she was, with partial view.
And yet when, as to-day, her smile
Was prettiest, I could not but note
Honoria, less admired the while,
Was lovelier, though from love remote.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto III.

Preludes

I The Lover
He meets, by heavenly chance express,
The destined maid; some hidden hand
Unveils to him that loveliness
Which others cannot understand.
His merits in her presence grow,
To match the promise in her eyes,
And round her happy footsteps blow
The authentic airs of Paradise.
For joy of her he cannot sleep;
Her beauty haunts him all the night;
It melts his heart, it makes him weep
For wonder, worship, and delight.
O, paradox of love, he longs,
Most humble when he most aspires,
To suffer scorn and cruel wrongs
From her he honours and desires.
Her graces make him rich, and ask
No guerdon; this imperial style
Affronts him; he disdains to bask,
The pensioner of her priceless smile.
He prays for some hard thing to do,
Some work of fame and labour immense,
To stretch the languid bulk and thew
Of love's fresh-born magnipotence.
No smallest boon were bought too dear,
Though barter'd for his love-sick life;
Yet trusts he, with undaunted cheer,
To vanquish heaven, and call her Wife.
He notes how queens of sweetness still
Neglect their crowns, and stoop to mate;
How, self-consign'd with lavish will,
They ask but love proportionate;
How swift pursuit by small degrees,
Love's tactic, works like miracle;
How valour, clothed in courtesies,
Brings down the haughtiest citadel;
And therefore, though he merits not
To kiss the braid upon her skirt,
His hope, discouraged ne'er a jot,
Out-soars all possible desert.

II Love a Virtue
Strong passions mean weak will, and he
Who truly knows the strength and bliss
Which are in love, will own with me
No passion but a virtue 'tis.
Few hear my word; it soars above
The subtlest senses of the swarm
Of wretched things which know not love,

Their Psyche still a wingless worm.
Ice-cold seems heaven's noble glow
To spirits whose vital heat is hell;
And to corrupt hearts even so
The songs I sing, the tale I tell.
These cannot see the robes of white
In which I sing of love. Alack,
But darkness shows in heavenly light,
Though whiteness, in the dark, is black!

III Unthrift
Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
On her sweet self set her own price,
Knowing man cannot choose but pay,
How has she cheapen'd paradise;
How given for nought her priceless gift,
How spoil'd the bread and spill'd the wine,
Which, spent with due, respective thrift,
Had made brutes men, and men divine.

IV The Attainment
You love? That's high as you shall go;
For 'tis as true as Gospel text,
Not noble then is never so,
Either in this world or the next.

Honoria.

I
Grown weary with a week's exile
From those fair friends, I rode to see
The church-restorings; lounged awhile,
And met the Dean; was ask'd to tea,
And found their cousin, Frederick Graham,
At Honor's side. Was I concern'd,
If, when she sang, his colour came,
That mine, as with a buffet, burn'd?
A man to please a girl! thought I,
Retorting his forced smiles, the shrouds
Of wrath, so hid as she was by,
Sweet moon between her lighted clouds!

II
Whether this Cousin was the cause
I know not, but I seem'd to see,
The first time then, how fair she was,
How much the fairest of the three.
Each stopp'd to let the other go;
But, time-bound, he arose the first.
Stay'd he in Sarum long? If so
I hoped to see him at the Hurst.

No: he had call'd here, on his way
To Portsmouth, where the ‘Arrogant,’
His ship, was; he should leave next day,
For two years' cruise in the Levant.

II
Had love in her yet struck its germs?
I watch'd. Her farewell show'd me plain
She loved, on the majestic terms
That she should not be loved again.
And so her cousin, parting, felt.
Hope in his voice and eye was dead.
Compassion did my malice melt;
Then went I home to a restless bed.
I, who admired her too, could see
His infinite remorse at this
Great mystery, that she should be
So beautiful, yet not be his,
And, pitying, long'd to plead his part;
But scarce could tell, so strange my whim,
Whether the weight upon my heart
Was sorrow for myself or him.

IV
She was all mildness; yet 'twas writ
In all her grace, most legibly,
‘He that's for heaven itself unfit,
‘Let him not hope to merit me.’
And such a challenge, quite apart
From thoughts of love, humbled, and thus
To sweet repentance moved my heart,
And made me more magnanimous,
And led me to review my life,
Inquiring where in aught the least,
If question were of her for wife,
Ill might be mended, hope increas'd.
Not that I soar'd so far above
Myself, as this great hope to dare;
And yet I well foresaw that love
Might hope where reason must despair;
And, half-resenting the sweet pride
Which would not ask me to admire,
‘Oh,’ to my secret heart I sigh'd,
‘That I were worthy to desire!’

V
As drowsiness my brain reliev'd,
A shrill defiance of all to arms,
Shriek'd by the stable-cock, receiv'd
An angry answer from three farms.
And, then, I dream'd that I, her knight,

A clarion's haughty pathos heard,
And rode securely to the fight,
Cased in the scarf she had conferr'd;
And there, the bristling lists behind,
Saw many, and vanquish'd all I saw
Of her unnumber'd cousin-kind,
In Navy, Army, Church, and Law;
Smitten, the warriors somehow turn'd
To Sarum choristers, whose song,
Mix'd with celestial sorrow, yearn'd
With joy no memory can prolong;
And phantasms as absurd and sweet
Merged each in each in endless chace,
And everywhere I seem'd to meet
The haunting fairness of her face.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto IV.

Preludes

I The Rose of the World
Lo, when the Lord made North and South
And sun and moon ordained, He,
Forthbringing each by word of mouth
In order of its dignity,
Did man from the crude clay express
By sequence, and, all else decreed,
He form'd the woman; nor might less
Than Sabbath such a work succeed.
And still with favour singled out,
Marr'd less than man by mortal fall,
Her disposition is devout,
Her countenance angelical;
The best things that the best believe
Are in her face so kindly writ
The faithless, seeing her, conceive
Not only heaven, but hope of it;
No idle thought her instinct shrouds,
But fancy chequers settled sense,
Like alteration of the clouds
On noonday's azure permanence;
Pure dignity, composure, ease
Declare affections nobly fix'd,
And impulse sprung from due degrees
Of sense and spirit sweetly mix'd.
Her modesty, her chiefest grace,
The cestus clasping Venus' side,
How potent to deject the face
Of him who would affront its pride!
Wrong dares not in her presence speak,
Nor spotted thought its taint disclose
Under the protest of a cheek
Outbragging Nature's boast the rose.
In mind and manners how discreet;
How artless in her very art;
How candid in discourse; how sweet
The concord of her lips and heart;
How simple and how circumspect;
How subtle and how fancy-free;
Though sacred to her love, how deck'd
With unexclusive courtesy;
How quick in talk to see from far
The way to vanquish or evade;
How able her persuasions are
To prove, her reasons to persuade;
How (not to call true instinct's bent
And woman's very nature, harm),
How amiable and innocent
Her pleasure in her power to charm;
How humbly careful to attract,

Though crown'd with all the soul desires,
Connubial aptitude exact,
Diversity that never tires.

II The Tribute
Boon Nature to the woman bows;
She walks in earth's whole glory clad,
And, chiefest far herself of shows,
All others help her, and are glad:
No splendour 'neath the sky's proud dome
But serves for her familiar wear;
The far-fetch'd diamond finds its home
Flashing and smouldering in her hair;
For her the seas their pearls reveal;
Art and strange lands her pomp supply
With purple, chrome, and cochineal,
Ochre, and lapis lazuli;
The worm its golden woof presents;
Whatever runs, flies, dives, or delves,
All doff for her their ornaments,
Which suit her better than themselves;
And all, by this their power to give,
Proving her right to take, proclaim
Her beauty's clear prerogative
To profit so by Eden's blame.

III Compensation
That nothing here may want its praise,
Know, she who in her dress reveals
A fine and modest taste, displays
More loveliness than she conceals.

The Morning Call.

I
‘By meekness charm'd, or proud to allow
‘A queenly claim to live admired,
‘Full many a lady has ere now
‘My apprehensive fancy fired,
‘And woven many a transient chain;
‘But never lady like to this,
‘Who holds me as the weather-vane
‘Is held by yonder clematis.
‘She seems the life of nature's powers;
‘Her beauty is the genial thought
‘Which makes the sunshine bright; the flowers,
‘But for their hint of her, were nought.’

II
A voice, the sweeter for the grace

Of suddenness, while thus I dream'd,
‘Good morning!’ said or sang. Her face
The mirror of the morning seem'd.
Her sisters in the garden walk'd,
And would I come? Across the Hall
She led me; and we laugh'd and talk'd,
And praised the Flower-show and the Ball;
And Mildred's pinks had gain'd the Prize;
And, stepping like the light-foot fawn,
She brought me ‘Wiltshire Butterflies,’
The Prize-book; then we paced the lawn,
Close-cut, and with geranium-plots,
A rival glow of green and red;
Then counted sixty apricots
On one small tree; the gold-fish fed;
And watch'd where, black with scarlet tans,
Proud Psyche stood and flash'd like flame,
Showing and shutting splendid fans;
And in the prize we found its name.

III
The sweet hour lapsed, and left my breast
A load of joy and tender care;
And this delight, which life oppress'd,
To fix'd aims grew, that ask'd for pray'r.
I rode home slowly; whip-in-hand
And soil'd bank-notes all ready, stood
The Farmer who farm'd all my land,
Except the little Park and Wood;
And, with the accustom'd compliment
Of talk, and beef, and frothing beer,
I, my own steward, took my rent,
Three hundred pounds for half the year;
Our witnesses the Cook and Groom,
We sign'd the lease for seven years more,
And bade Good-day; then to my room
I went, and closed and lock'd the door,
And cast myself down on my bed,
And there, with many a blissful tear,
I vow'd to love and pray'd to wed
The maiden who had grown so dear;
Thank'd God who had set her in my path;
And promised, as I hoped to win,
That I would never dim my faith
By the least selfishness or sin;
Whatever in her sight I'd seem
I'd truly be; I'd never blend
With my delight in her a dream
'Twould change her cheek to comprehend;
And, if she wish'd it, I'd prefer
Another's to my own success;
And always seek the best for her,

With unofficious tenderness.

IV
Rising, I breathed a brighter clime,
And found myself all self above,
And, with a charity sublime,
Contemn'd not those who did not love;
And I could not but feel that then
I shone with something of her grace,
And went forth to my fellow men
My commendation in my face.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto IX.

Preludes.

I The Wife's Tragedy
Man must be pleased; but him to please
Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf
Of his condoled necessities
She casts her best, she flings herself.
How often flings for nought, and yokes
Her heart to an icicle or whim,
Whose each impatient word provokes
Another, not from her, but him;
While she, too gentle even to force
His penitence by kind replies,
Waits by, expecting his remorse,
With pardon in her pitying eyes;
And if he once, by shame oppress'd,
A comfortable word confers,
She leans and weeps against his breast,
And seems to think the sin was hers;
And whilst his love has any life,
Or any eye to see her charms,
At any time, she's still his wife,
Dearly devoted to his arms;
She loves with love that cannot tire;
And when, ah woe, she loves alone,
Through passionate duty love springs higher,
As grass grows taller round a stone.

II Common Graces
Is nature in thee too spiritless,
Ignoble, impotent, and dead,
To prize her love and loveliness
The more for being thy daily bread?
And art thou one of that vile crew
Which see no splendour in the sun,
Praising alone the good that's new,
Or over, or not yet begun?
And has it dawn'd on thy dull wits
That love warms many as soft a nest,
That, though swathed round with benefits,
Thou art not singularly blest?
And fail thy thanks for gifts divine,
The common food of many a heart,
Because they are not only thine?
Beware lest in the end thou art
Cast for thy pride forth from the fold,
Too good to feel the common grace
Of blissful myriads who behold
For evermore the Father's face.

III The Zest of Life
Give thanks. It is not time misspent;

Worst fare this betters, and the best,
Wanting this natural condiment,
Breeds crudeness, and will not digest.
The grateful love the Giver's law;
But those who eat, and look no higher,
From sin or doubtful sanction draw
The biting sauce their feasts require.
Give thanks for nought, if you've no more,
And, having all things, do not doubt
That nought, with thanks, is blest before
Whate'er the world can give, without.

IV Fool and Wise
Endow the fool with sun and moon,
Being his, he holds them mean and low;
But to the wise a little boon
Is great, because the giver's so.

Sahara.

I
I stood by Honor and the Dean,
They seated in the London train.
A month from her! yet this had been,
Ere now, without such bitter pain.
But neighbourhood makes parting light,
And distance remedy has none;
Alone, she near, I felt as might
A blind man sitting in the sun;
She near, all for the time was well;
Hope's self, when we were far apart,
With lonely feeling, like the smell
Of heath on mountains, fill'd my heart.
To see her seem'd delight's full scope,
And her kind smile, so clear of care,
Ev'n then, though darkening all my hope,
Gilded the cloud of my despair.

II
She had forgot to bring a book.
I lent one; blamed the print for old;
And did not tell her that she took
A Petrarch worth its weight in gold.
I hoped she'd lose it; for my love
Was grown so dainty, high, and nice,
It prized no luxury above
The sense of fruitless sacrifice.

III
The bell rang, and, with shrieks like death,
Link catching link, the long array,

With ponderous pulse and fiery breath,
Proud of its burthen, swept away;
And through the lingering crowd I broke,
Sought the hill-side, and thence, heart-sick,
Beheld, far off, the little smoke
Along the landscape kindling quick.

IV
What should I do, where should I go,
Now she was gone, my love! for mine
She was, whatever here below
Cross'd or usurp'd my right divine.
Life, without her, was vain and gross,
The glory from the world was gone,
And on the gardens of the Close
As on Sahara shone the sun.
Oppress'd with her departed grace,
My thoughts on ill surmises fed;
The harmful influence of the place
She went to fill'd my soul with dread.
She, mixing with the people there,
Might come back alter'd, having caught
The foolish, fashionable air
Of knowing all, and feeling nought.
Or, giddy with her beauty's praise,
She'd scorn our simple country life,
Its wholesome nights and tranquil days,
And would not deign to be my Wife.
'My Wife,' 'my Wife,' ah, tenderest word!
How oft, as fearful she might hear,
Whispering that name of 'Wife,' I heard
The chiming of the inmost sphere.

V
I pass'd the home of my regret.
The clock was striking in the hall,
And one sad window open yet,
Although the dews began to fall.
Ah, distance show'd her beauty's scope!
How light of heart and innocent
That loveliness which sicken'd hope
And wore the world for ornament!
How perfectly her life was framed;
And, thought of in that passionate mood,
How her affecting graces shamed
The vulgar life that was but good!

VI
I wonder'd, would her bird be fed,
Her rose-plots water'd, she not by;
Loading my breast with angry dread
Of light, unlikely injury.

So, fill'd with love and fond remorse,
I paced the Close, its every part
Endow'd with reliquary force
To heal and raise from death my heart.
How tranquil and unsecular
The precinct! Once, through yonder gate,
I saw her go, and knew from far
Her love-lit form and gentle state.
Her dress had brush'd this wicket; here
She turn'd her face, and laugh'd, with light
Like moonbeams on a wavering mere.
Weary beforehand of the night,
I went; the blackbird, in the wood,
Talk'd by himself, and eastward grew
In heaven the symbol of my mood,
Where one bright star engross'd the blue.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto V.

Preludes.

I The Comparison
Where she succeeds with cloudless brow,
In common and in holy course,
He fails, in spite of prayer and vow
And agonies of faith and force;
Or, if his suit with Heaven prevails
To righteous life, his virtuous deeds
Lack beauty, virtue's badge; she fails
More graciously than he succeeds.
Her spirit, compact of gentleness,
If Heaven postpones or grants her pray'r,
Conceives no pride in its success,
And in its failure no despair;
But his, enamour'd of its hurt,
Baffled, blasphemes, or, not denied,
Crows from the dunghill of desert,
And wags its ugly wings for pride.
He's never young nor ripe; she grows
More infantine, auroral, mild,
And still the more she lives and knows
The lovelier she's express'd a child.
Say that she wants the will of man
To conquer fame, not check'd by cross,
Nor moved when others bless or ban;
She wants but what to have were loss.
Or say she wants the patient brain
To track shy truth; her facile wit
At that which he hunts down with pain
Flies straight, and does exactly hit.
Were she but half of what she is,
He twice himself, mere love alone,
Her special crown, as truth is his,
Gives title to the worthier throne;
For love is substance, truth the form;
Truth without love were less than nought;
But blindest love is sweet and warm,
And full of truth not shaped by thought;
And therefore in herself she stands
Adorn'd with undeficient grace,
Her happy virtues taking hands,
Each smiling in another's face.
So, dancing round the Tree of Life,
They make an Eden in her breast,
While his, disjointed and at strife,
Proud-thoughted, do not bring him rest.

II Love in Tears
If fate Love's dear ambition mar,
And load his breast with hopeless pain,
And seem to blot out sun and star,

Love, won or lost, is countless gain;
His sorrow boasts a secret bliss
Which sorrow of itself beguiles,
And Love in tears too noble is
For pity, save of Love in smiles.
But, looking backward through his tears,
With vision of maturer scope,
How often one dead joy appears
The platform of some better hope!
And, let us own, the sharpest smart
Which human patience may endure
Pays light for that which leaves the heart
More generous, dignified, and pure.

III Prospective Faith
They safely walk in darkest ways
Whose youth is lighted from above,
Where, through the senses' silvery haze,
Dawns the veil'd moon of nuptial love.
Who is the happy husband? He
Who, scanning his unwedded life,
Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free,
'Twas faithful to his future wife.

IV Venus Victrix
Fatal in force, yet gentle in will,
Defeats, from her, are tender pacts,
For, like the kindly lodestone, still
She's drawn herself by what she attracts.

The Violets.

I
I went not to the Dean's unbid:
I would not have my mystery,
From her so delicately hid,
The guess of gossips at their tea.
A long, long week, and not once there,
Had made my spirit sick and faint,
And lack-love, foul as love is fair,
Perverted all things to complaint.
How vain the world had grown to be!
How mean all people and their ways,
How ignorant their sympathy,
And how impertinent their praise;
What they for virtuousness esteem'd,
How far removed from heavenly right;
What pettiness their trouble seem'd,
How undelightful their delight;
To my necessity how strange
The sunshine and the song of birds;

How dull the clouds' continual change,
How foolishly content the herds;
How unaccountable the law
Which bade me sit in blindness here,
While she, the sun by which I saw,
Shed splendour in an idle sphere!
And then I kiss'd her stolen glove,
And sigh'd to reckon and define
The modes of martyrdom in love,
And how far each one might be mine.
I thought how love, whose vast estate
Is earth and air and sun and sea,
Encounters oft the beggar's fate,
Despised on score of poverty;
How Heaven, inscrutable in this,
Lets the gross general make or mar
The destiny of love, which is
So tender and particular;
How nature, as unnatural
And contradicting nature's source,
Which is but love, seems most of all
Well-pleased to harry true love's course;
How, many times, it comes to pass
That trifling shades of temperament,
Affecting only one, alas,
Not love, but love's success prevent;
How manners often falsely paint
The man; how passionate respect,
Hid by itself, may bear the taint
Of coldness and a dull neglect;
And how a little outward dust
Can a clear merit quite o'ercloud,
And make her fatally unjust,
And him desire a darker shroud;
How senseless opportunity
Gives baser men the better chance;
How powers, adverse else, agree
To cheat her in her ignorance;
How Heaven its very self conspires
With man and nature against love,
As pleased to couple cross desires,
And cross where they themselves approve.
Wretched were life, if the end were now!
But this gives tears to dry despair,
Faith shall be blest, we know not how,
And love fulfilled, we know not where.

II
While thus I grieved, and kiss'd her glove,
My man brought in her note to say,
Papa had bid her send his love,

And would I dine with them next day?
They had learn'd and practised Purcell's glee,
To sing it by to-morrow night.
The Postscript was: Her sisters and she
Inclosed some violets, blue and white;
She and her sisters found them where
I wager'd once no violets grew;
So they had won the gloves. And there
The violets lay, two white, one blue.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto VI.

Preludes.

I Perfect Love rare
Most rare is still most noble found,
Most noble still most incomplete;
Sad law, which leaves King Love uncrown'd
In this obscure, terrestrial seat!
With bale more sweet than others' bliss,
And bliss more wise than others' bale,
The secrets of the world are his.
And freedom without let or pale.
O, zealous good, O, virtuous glee,
Religious, and without alloy,
O, privilege high, which none but he
Who highly merits can enjoy;
O, Love, who art that fabled sun
Which all the world with bounty loads,
Without respect of realms, save one,
And gilds with double lustre Rhodes;
A day of whose delicious life,
Though full of terrors, full of tears,
Is better than of other life
A hundred thousand million years;
Thy heavenly splendour magnifies
The least commixture of earth's mould,
Cheapens thyself in thine own eyes,
And makes the foolish mocker bold.

II Love Justified
What if my pole-star of respect
Be dim to others? Shall their 'Nay,'
Presumably their own defect,
Invalidate my heart's strong 'Yea'?
And can they rightly me condemn,
If I, with partial love, prefer?
I am not more unjust to them,
But only not unjust to her.
Leave us alone! After awhile,
This pool of private charity
Shall make its continent an isle,
And roll, a world-embracing sea;
This foolish zeal of lip for lip,
This fond, self-sanction'd, wilful zest,
Is that elect relationship
Which forms and sanctions all the rest;
This little germ of nuptial love,
Which springs so simply from the sod,
The root is, as my song shall prove,
Of all our love to man and God.

III Love Serviceable
What measure Fate to him shall mete

Is not the noble Lover's care;
He's heart-sick with a longing sweet
To make her happy as she's fair.
Oh, misery, should she him refuse,
And so her dearest good mistake!
His own success he thus pursues
With frantic zeal for her sole sake.
To lose her were his life to blight,
Being loss to hers; to make her his,
Except as helping her delight,
He calls but accidental bliss;
And, holding life as so much pelf
To buy her posies, learns this lore:
He does not rightly love himself
Who does not love another more.

IV A Riddle Solved
Kind souls, you wonder why, love you,
When you, you wonder why, love none.
We love, Fool, for the good we do,
Not that which unto us is done!

The Dean.

I
The Ladies rose. I held the door,
And sigh'd, as her departing grace
Assured me that she always wore
A heart as happy as her face;
And, jealous of the winds that blew,
I dreaded, o'er the tasteless wine,
What fortune momently might do
To hurt the hope that she'd be mine.

II
Towards my mark the Dean's talk set:
He praised my 'Notes on Abury,'
Read when the Association met
At Sarum; he was pleased to see
I had not stopp'd, as some men had,
At Wrangler and Prize Poet; last,
He hoped the business was not bad
I came about: then the wine pass'd.

III
A full glass prefaced my reply:
I loved his daughter, Honor; I told
My estate and prospects; might I try
To win her? At my words so bold
My sick heart sank. Then he: He gave

His glad consent, if I could get
Her love. A dear, good Girl! she'd have
Only three thousand pounds as yet;
More bye and bye. Yes, his good will
Should go with me; he would not stir;
He and my father in old time still
Wish'd I should one day marry her;
But God so seldom lets us take
Our chosen pathway, when it lies
In steps that either mar or make
Or alter others' destinies,
That, though his blessing and his pray'r
Had help'd, should help, my suit, yet he
Left all to me, his passive share
Consent and opportunity.
My chance, he hoped, was good: I'd won
Some name already; friends and place
Appear'd within my reach, but none
Her mind and manners would not grace.
Girls love to see the men in whom
They invest their vanities admired;
Besides, where goodness is, there room
For good to work will be desired.
'Twas so with one now pass'd away;
And what she was at twenty-two,
Honor was now; and he might say
Mine was a choice I could not rue.

IV
He ceased, and gave his hand. He had won
(And all my heart was in my word),
From me the affection of a son,
Whichever fortune Heaven conferr'd!
Well, well, would I take more wine? Then go
To her; she makes tea on the lawn
These fine warm afternoons. And so
We went whither my soul was drawn;
And her light-hearted ignorance
Of interest in our discourse
Fill'd me with love, and seem'd to enhance
Her beauty with pathetic force,
As, through the flowery mazes sweet,
Fronting the wind that flutter'd blythe,
And loved her shape, and kiss'd her feet,
Shown to their insteps proud and lithe,
She approach'd, all mildness and young trust,
And ever her chaste and noble air
Gave to love's feast its choicest gust,
A vague, faint augury of despair.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto VII.

Preludes.

I Love's Immortality
How vilely 'twere to misdeserve
The poet's gift of perfect speech,
In song to try, with trembling nerve,
The limit of its utmost reach,
Only to sound the wretched praise
Of what to-morrow shall not be;
So mocking with immortal bays
The cross-bones of mortality!
I do not thus. My faith is fast
That all the loveliness I sing
Is made to bear the mortal blast,
And blossom in a better Spring.
Doubts of eternity ne'er cross
The Lover's mind, divinely clear:
For ever is the gain or loss
Which maddens him with hope or fear:
So trifles serve for his relief,
And trifles make him sick and pale;
And yet his pleasure and his grief
Are both on a majestic scale.
The chance, indefinitely small,
Of issue infinitely great,
Eclipses finite interests all,
And has the dignity of fate.

II Heaven and Earth
How long shall men deny the flower
Because its roots are in the earth,
And crave with tears from God the dower
They have, and have despised as dearth,
And scorn as low their human lot,
With frantic pride, too blind to see
That standing on the head makes not
Either for ease or dignity!
But fools shall feel like fools to find
(Too late inform'd) that angels' mirth
Is one in cause, and mode, and kind
With that which they profaned on earth.

Aetna And The Moon.

I
To soothe my heart I, feigning, seized
A pen, and, showering tears, declared
My unfeign'd passion; sadly pleased
Only to dream that so I dared.
Thus was the fervid truth confess'd,
But wild with paradox ran the plea,

As wilfully in hope depress'd,
Yet bold beyond hope's warranty:

II
'O, more than dear, be more than just,
'And do not deafly shut the door!
'I claim no right to speak; I trust
'Mercy, not right; yet who has more?
'For, if more love makes not more fit,
'Of claimants here none's more nor less,
'Since your great worth does not permit
'Degrees in our unworthiness.
'Yet, if there's aught that can be done
'With arduous labour of long years,
'By which you'll say that you'll be won,
'O tell me, and I'll dry my tears.
'Ah, no; if loving cannot move,
'How foolishly must labour fail!
'The use of deeds is to show love;
'If signs suffice let these avail:
'Your name pronounced brings to my heart
'A feeling like the violet's breath,
'Which does so much of heaven impart
'It makes me amorous of death;
'The winds that in the garden toss
'The Guelder-roses give me pain,
'Alarm me with the dread of loss,
'Exhaust me with the dream of gain;
'I'm troubled by the clouds that move;
'Tired by the breath which I respire;
'And ever, like a torch, my love,
'Thus agitated, flames the higher;
'All's hard that has not you for goal;
'I scarce can move my hand to write,
'For love engages all my soul,
'And leaves the body void of might;
'The wings of will spread idly, as do
'The bird's that in a vacuum lies;
'My breast, asleep with dreams of you,
'Forgets to breathe, and bursts in sighs;
'I see no rest this side the grave,
'No rest nor hope, from you apart;
'Your life is in the rose you gave,
'Its perfume suffocates my heart;
'There's no refreshment in the breeze;
'The heaven o'erwhelms me with its blue;
'I faint beside the dancing seas;
'Winds, skies, and waves are only you;
'The thought or act which not intends
'You service, seems a sin and shame;
'In that one only object ends

‘Conscience, religion, honour, fame.
‘Ah, could I put off love! Could we
‘Never have met! What calm, what ease!
‘Nay, but, alas, this remedy
‘Were ten times worse than the disease!
‘For when, indifferent, I pursue
‘The world's best pleasures for relief,
‘My heart, still sickening back to you,
‘Finds none like memory of its grief;
‘And, though 'twere very hell to hear
‘You felt such misery as I,
‘All good, save you, were far less dear
‘Than is that ill with which I die!
‘Where'er I go, wandering forlorn,
‘You are the world's love, life, and glee:
‘Oh, wretchedness not to be borne
‘If she that's Love should not love me!’

III
I could not write another word,
Through pity for my own distress;
And forth I went, untimely stirr'd
To make my misery more or less.
I went, beneath the heated noon,
To where, in her simplicity,
She sate at work; and, as the Moon
On Ætna smiles, she smiled on me.
But, now and then, in cheek and eyes,
I saw, or fancied, such a glow
As when, in summer-evening skies,
Some say, ‘It lightens,’ some say, ‘No.’
‘Honoria,’ I began—No more.
The Dean, by ill or happy hap,
Came home; and Wolf burst in before,
And put his nose upon her lap.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto VIII.

Preludes.

I Life of Life
What's that, which, ere I spake, was gone:
So joyful and intense a spark
That, whilst o'erhead the wonder shone,
The day, before but dull, grew dark?
I do not know; but this I know,
That, had the splendour lived a year,
The truth that I some heavenly show
Did see, could not be now more clear.
This know I too: might mortal breath
Express the passion then inspired,
Evil would die a natural death,
And nothing transient be desired;
And error from the soul would pass,
And leave the senses pure and strong
As sunbeams. But the best, alas,
Has neither memory nor tongue.

II The Revelation
An idle poet, here and there,
Looks round him; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling's jest.
Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
They lift their heavy lids, and look;
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
They read with joy, then shut the book.
And some give thanks, and some blaspheme
And most forget; but, either way,
That and the Child's unheeded dream
Is all the light of all their day.

III The Spirit's Epochs
Not in the crises of events,
Of compass'd hopes, or fears fulfill'd,
Or acts of gravest consequence,
Are life's delight and depth reveal'd.
The day of days was not the day;
That went before, or was postponed;
The night Death took our lamp away
Was not the night on which we groan'd.
I drew my bride, beneath the moon,
Across my threshold; happy hour!
But, ah, the walk that afternoon
We saw the water-flags in flower!

IV The Prototype
Lo, there, whence love, life, light are pour'd,

Veil'd with impenetrable rays,
Amidst the presence of the Lord
Co-equal Wisdom laughs and plays.
Female and male God made the man;
His image is the whole, not half;
And in our love we dimly scan
The love which is between Himself.

V The Praise of Love
Spirit of Knowledge, grant me this:
A simple heart and subtle wit
To praise the thing whose praise it is
That all which can be praised is it.

Sarum Plain.

I
Breakfast enjoy'd, 'mid hush of boughs
And perfumes thro' the windows blown;
Brief worship done, which still endows
The day with beauty not its own;
With intervening pause, that paints
Each act with honour, life with calm
(As old processions of the Saints
At every step have wands of palm),
We rose; the ladies went to dress,
And soon return'd with smiles; and then,
Plans fix'd, to which the Dean said 'Yes,'
Once more we drove to Salisbury Plain.
We past my house (observed with praise
By Mildred, Mary acquiesced),
And left the old and lazy grays
Below the hill, and walk'd the rest.

II
The moods of love are like the wind,
And none knows whence or why they rise:
I ne'er before felt heart and mind
So much affected through mine eyes.
How cognate with the flatter'd air,
How form'd for earth's familiar zone,
She moved; how feeling and how fair
For others' pleasure and her own!
And, ah, the heaven of her face!
How, when she laugh'd, I seem'd to see
The gladness of the primal grace,
And how, when grave, its dignity!
Of all she was, the least not less
Delighted the devoted eye;
No fold or fashion of her dress
Her fairness did not sanctify.

I could not else than grieve. What cause?
Was I not blest? Was she not there?
Likely my own? Ah, that it was:
How like seem'd ‘likely’ to despair!

III
And yet to see her so benign,
So honourable and womanly,
In every maiden kindness mine,
And full of gayest courtesy,
Was pleasure so without alloy,
Such unreproved, sufficient bliss,
I almost wish'd, the while, that joy
Might never further go than this.
So much it was as now to walk,
And humbly by her gentle side
Observe her smile and hear her talk,
Could it be more to call her Bride?
I feign'd her won; the mind finite,
Puzzled and fagg'd by stress and strain
To comprehend the whole delight,
Made bliss more hard to bear than pain.
All good, save heart to hold, so summ'd
And grasp'd, the thought smote, like a knife,
How laps'd mortality had numb'd
The feelings to the feast of life;
How passing good breathes sweetest breath;
And love itself at highest reveals
More black than bright, commending death
By teaching how much life conceals.

IV
But happier passions these subdued,
When from the close and sultry lane,
With eyes made bright by what they view'd,
We emerged upon the mounded Plain.
As to the breeze a flag unfurls,
My spirit expanded, sweetly embraced
By those same gusts that shook her curls
And vex'd the ribbon at her waist.
To the future cast I future cares;
Breathed with a heart unfreighted, free,
And laugh'd at the presumptuous airs
That with her muslins folded me;
Till, one vague rack along my sky,
The thought that she might ne'er be mine
Lay half forgotten by the eye
So feasted with the sun's warm shine.

V
By the great stones we chose our ground
For shade; and there, in converse sweet,

Took luncheon. On a little mound
Sat the three ladies; at their feet
I sat; and smelt the heathy smell,
Pluck'd harebells, turn'd the telescope
To the country round. My life went well,
For once, without the wheels of hope;
And I despised the Druid rocks
That scowl'd their chill gloom from above,
Like churls whose stolid wisdom mocks
The lightness of immortal love.
And, as we talk'd, my spirit quaff'd
The sparkling winds; the candid skies
At our untruthful strangeness laugh'd;
I kiss'd with mine her smiling eyes;
And sweet familiarness and awe
Prevail'd that hour on either part,
And in the eternal light I saw
That she was mine; though yet my heart
Could not conceive, nor would confess
Such contentation; and there grew
More form and more fair stateliness
Than heretofore between us two.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto X.

Preludes.

I The Joyful Wisdom
Would Wisdom for herself be woo'd,
And wake the foolish from his dream,
She must be glad as well as good,
And must not only be, but seem.
Beauty and joy are hers by right;
And, knowing this, I wonder less
That she's so scorn'd, when falsely dight
In misery and ugliness.
What's that which Heaven to man endears,
And that which eyes no sooner see
Than the heart says, with floods of tears,
'Ah, that's the thing which I would be!'
Not childhood, full of frown and fret;
Not youth, impatient to disown
Those visions high, which to forget
Were worse than never to have known;
Not worldlings, in whose fair outside
Nor courtesy nor justice fails,
Thanks to cross-pulling vices tied,
Like Samson's foxes, by the tails;
Not poets; real things are dreams,
When dreams are as realities,
And boasters of celestial gleams
Go stumbling aye for want of eyes;
Not patriots nor people's men,
In whom two worse-match'd evils meet
Than ever sought Adullam's den,
Base conscience and a high conceit;
Not new-made saints, their feelings iced,
Their joy in man and nature gone,
Who sing 'O easy yoke of Christ!'
But find 'tis hard to get it on;
Not great men, even when they're good;
The good man whom the time makes great,
By some disgrace of chance or blood,
God fails not to humiliate;
Not these: but souls, found here and there,
Oases in our waste of sin,
Where everything is well and fair,
And Heav'n remits its discipline;
Whose sweet subdual of the world
The worldling scarce can recognise,
And ridicule, against it hurl'd,
Drops with a broken sting and dies;
Who nobly, if they cannot know
Whether a 'scutcheon's dubious field
Carries a falcon or a crow,
Fancy a falcon on the shield;
Yet, ever careful not to hurt

God's honour, who creates success,
Their praise of even the best desert
Is but to have presumed no less;
Who, should their own life plaudits bring,
Are simply vex'd at heart that such
An easy, yea, delightful thing
Should move the minds of men so much.
They live by law, not like the fool,
But like the bard, who freely sings
In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,
And finds in them, not bonds, but wings.
Postponing still their private ease
To courtly custom, appetite,
Subjected to observances,
To banquet goes with full delight;
Nay, continence and gratitude
So cleanse their lives from earth's alloy,
They taste, in Nature's common food,
Nothing but spiritual joy.
They shine like Moses in the face,
And teach our hearts, without the rod,
That God's grace is the only grace,
And all grace is the grace of God.

II The Devices
Love, kiss'd by Wisdom, wakes twice Love,
And Wisdom is, thro' loving, wise.
Let Dove and Snake, and Snake and Dove,
This Wisdom's be, that Love's device.

Going To Church.

I
I woke at three; for I was bid
To breakfast with the Dean at nine,
And thence to Church. My curtain slid,
I found the dawning Sunday fine;
And could not rest, so rose. The air
Was dark and sharp; the roosted birds
Cheep'd, ‘Here am I, Sweet; are you there?’
On Avon's misty flats the herds
Expected, comfortless, the day,
Which slowly fired the clouds above;
The cock scream'd, somewhere far away;
In sleep the matrimonial dove
Was crooning; no wind waked the wood,
Nor moved the midnight river-damps,
Nor thrill'd the poplar; quiet stood
The chestnut with its thousand lamps;
The moon shone yet, but weak and drear,
And seem'd to watch, with bated breath,

The landscape, all made sharp and clear
By stillness, as a face by death.

II
My pray'rs for her being done, I took
Occasion by the quiet hour
To find and know, by Rule and Book,
The rights of love's beloved power.

III
Fronting the question without ruth,
Nor ignorant that, evermore,
If men will stoop to kiss the Truth,
She lifts them higher than before,
I, from above, such light required
As now should once for all destroy
The folly which at times desired
A sanction for so great a joy.

IV
Thenceforth, and through that pray'r, I trod
A path with no suspicions dim.
I loved her in the name of God,
And for the ray she was of Him;
I ought to admire much more, not less;
Her beauty was a godly grace;
The mystery of loveliness,
Which made an altar of her face,
Was not of the flesh, though that was fair,
But a most pure and living light
Without a name, by which the rare
And virtuous spirit flamed to sight.
If oft, in love, effect lack'd cause
And cause effect, 'twere vain to soar
Reasons to seek for that which was
Reason itself, or something more.
My joy was no idolatry
Upon the ends of the vile earth bent,
For when I loved her most then I
Most yearn'd for more divine content.
That other doubt, which, like a ghost,
In the brain's darkness haunted me,
Was thus resolved: Him loved I most,
But her I loved most sensibly.
Lastly, my giddiest hope allow'd
No selfish thought, or earthly smirch;
And forth I went, in peace, and proud
To take my passion into Church;
Grateful and glad to think that all
Such doubts would seem entirely vain
To her whose nature's lighter fall
Made no divorce of heart from brain.

V
I found them, with exactest grace
And fresh as Spring, for Spring attired;
And by the radiance in her face
I saw she felt she was admired;
And, through the common luck of love,
A moment's fortunate delay,
To fit the little lilac glove,
Gave me her arm; and I and they
(They true to this and every hour,
As if attended on by Time),
Enter'd the Church while yet the tower
Was noisy with the finish'd chime.

VI
Her soft voice, singularly heard
Beside me, in her chant, withstood
The roar of voices, like a bird
Sole warbling in a windy wood;
And, when we knelt, she seem'd to be
An angel teaching me to pray;
And all through the high Liturgy
My spirit rejoiced without allay,
Being, for once, borne clearly above
All banks and bars of ignorance,
By this bright spring-tide of pure love
And floated in a free expanse,
Whence it could see from side to side,
The obscurity from every part
Winnow'd away and purified
By the vibrations of my heart.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto XI.

Preludes.

I The Daughter of Eve
The woman's gentle mood o'erstept
Withers my love, that lightly scans
The rest, and does in her accept
All her own faults, but none of man's.
As man I cannot judge her ill,
Or honour her fair station less,
Who, with a woman's errors, still
Preserves a woman's gentleness;
For thus I think, if one I see
Who disappoints my high desire,
'How admirable would she be,
'Could she but know how I admire!'
Or fail she, though from blemish clear,
To charm, I call it my defect;
And so my thought, with reverent fear
To err by doltish disrespect,
Imputes love's great regard, and says,
'Though unapparent 'tis to me,
'Be sure this Queen some other sways
'With well-perceiv'd supremacy.'
Behold the worst! Light from above
On the blank ruin writes 'Forbear!
'Her first crime was unguarded love,
'And all the rest, perhaps, despair.'
Discrown'd, dejected, but not lost,
O, sad one, with no more a name
Or place in all the honour'd host
Of maiden and of matron fame,
Grieve on; but, if thou grievest right,
'Tis not that these abhor thy state,
Nor would'st thou lower the least the height
Which makes thy casting down so great.
Good is thy lot in its degree;
For hearts that verily repent
Are burden'd with impunity
And comforted by chastisement.
Sweet patience sanctify thy woes!
And doubt not but our God is just,
Albeit unscathed thy traitor goes,
And thou art stricken to the dust.
That penalty's the best to bear
Which follows soonest on the sin;
And guilt's a game where losers fare
Better than those who seem to win.

II Aurea Dicta
'Tis truth (although this truth's a star
Too deep-enskied for all to see),
As poets of grammar, lovers are

The fountains of morality.
Child, would you shun the vulgar doom,
In love disgust, in death despair?
Know, death must come and love must come,
And so for each your soul prepare.
Who pleasure follows pleasure slays;
God's wrath upon himself he wreaks;
But all delights rejoice his days
Who takes with thanks, and never seeks.
The wrong is made and measured by
The right's inverted dignity.
Change love to shame, as love is high
So low in hell your bed shall be.
How easy to keep free from sin!
How hard that freedom to recall!
For dreadful truth it is that men
Forget the heavens from which they fall.
Lest sacred love your soul ensnare,
With pious fancy still infer
'How loving and how lovely fair
'Must He be who has fashion'd her!'
Become whatever good you see,
Nor sigh if, forthwith, fades from view
The grace of which you may not be
The subject and spectator too.
Love's perfect blossom only blows
Where noble manners veil defect.
Angels may be familiar; those
Who err each other must respect.
Love blabb'd of is a great decline;
A careless word unsanctions sense;
But he who casts Heaven's truth to swine
Consummates all incontinence.
Not to unveil before the gaze
Of an imperfect sympathy
In aught we are, is the sweet praise
And the main sum of modesty.

The Dance.

I
'My memory of Heaven awakes!
'She's not of the earth, although her light,
'As lantern'd by her body, makes
'A piece of it past bearing bright.
'So innocently proud and fair
'She is, that Wisdom sings for glee
'And Folly dies, breathing one air
'With such a bright-cheek'd chastity;
'And though her charms are a strong law
'Compelling all men to admire,

‘They go so clad with lovely awe
‘None but the noble dares desire.
‘He who would seek to make her his
‘Will comprehend that souls of grace
‘Own sweet repulsion, and that 'tis
‘The quality of their embrace
‘To be like the majestic reach
‘Of coupled suns, that, from afar,
‘Mingle their mutual spheres, while each
‘Circles the twin obsequious star;
‘And, in the warmth of hand to hand,
‘Of heart to heart, he'll vow to note
‘And reverently understand
‘How the two spirits shine remote;
‘And ne'er to numb fine honour's nerve,
‘Nor let sweet awe in passion melt,
‘Nor fail by courtesies to observe
‘The space which makes attraction felt;
‘Nor cease to guard like life the sense
‘Which tells him that the embrace of love
‘Is o'er a gulf of difference
‘Love cannot sound, nor death remove.’

II
This learn'd I, watching where she danced,
Native to melody and light,
And now and then toward me glanced,
Pleased, as I hoped, to please my sight.

III
Ah, love to speak was impotent,
Till music did a tongue confer,
And I ne'er knew what music meant,
Until I danced to it with her.
Too proud of the sustaining power
Of my, till then, unblemish'd joy,
My passion, for reproof, that hour
Tasted mortality's alloy,
And bore me down an eddying gulf;
I wish'd the world might run to wreck,
So I but once might fling myself
Obliviously about her neck.
I press'd her hand, by will or chance
I know not, but I saw the rays
Withdrawn, which did till then enhance
Her fairness with its thanks for praise.
I knew my spirit's vague offence
Was patent to the dreaming eye
And heavenly tact of innocence,
And did for fear my fear defy,
And ask'd her for the next dance. ‘Yes.’

‘No,’ had not fall'n with half the force.
She was fulfill'd with gentleness,
And I with measureless remorse;
And, ere I slept, on bended knee
I own'd myself, with many a tear,
Unseasonable, disorderly,
And a deranger of love's sphere;
Gave thanks that, when we stumble and fall,
We hurt ourselves, and not the truth;
And, rising, found its brightness all
The brighter through the tears of ruth.

IV
Nor was my hope that night made less,
Though order'd, humbled, and reproved;
Her farewell did her heart express
As much, but not with anger, moved.
My trouble had my soul betray'd;
And, in the night of my despair,
My love, a flower of noon afraid,
Divulged its fulness unaware.
I saw she saw; and, O sweet Heaven,
Could my glad mind have credited
That influence had to me been given
To affect her so, I should have said
That, though she from herself conceal'd
Love's felt delight and fancied harm,
They made her face the jousting field
Of joy and beautiful alarm.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. Canto XII.

Preludes.

I The Chace
She wearies with an ill unknown;
In sleep she sobs and seems to float,
A water-lily, all alone
Within a lonely castle-moat;
And as the full-moon, spectral, lies
Within the crescent's gleaming arms,
The present shows her heedless eyes
A future dim with vague alarms.
She sees, and yet she scarcely sees,
For, life-in-life not yet begun,
Too many are its mysteries
For thought to fix on any one.
She's told that maidens are by youths
Extremely honour'd and desired;
And sighs, ‘If those sweet tales be truths,
‘What bliss to be so much admired!’
The suitors come; she sees them grieve;
Her coldness fills them with despair;
She'd pity if she could believe;
She's sorry that she cannot care.
But who now meets her on her way?
Comes he as enemy or friend,
Or both? Her bosom seems to say,
He cannot pass, and there an end.
Whom does he love? Does he confer
His heart on worth that answers his?
Or is he come to worship her?
She fears, she hopes, she thinks he is!
Advancing stepless, quick, and still,
As in the grass a serpent glides,
He fascinates her fluttering will,
Then terrifies with dreadful strides.
At first, there's nothing to resist;
He fights with all the forms of peace;
He comes about her like a mist,
With subtle, swift, unseen increase;
And then, unlook'd for, strikes amain
Some stroke that frightens her to death,
And grows all harmlessness again,
Ere she can cry, or get her breath.
At times she stops, and stands at bay;
But he, in all more strong than she,
Subdues her with his pale dismay,
Or more admired audacity.
She plans some final, fatal blow,
But when she means with frowns to kill
He looks as if he loved her so,
She smiles to him against her will.
How sweetly he implies her praise!

His tender talk, his gentle tone,
The manly worship in his gaze,
They nearly made her heart his own.
With what an air he speaks her name;
His manner always recollects
Her sex, and still the woman's claim
Is taught its scope by his respects.
Her charms, perceived to prosper first
In his beloved advertencies,
When in her glass they are rehearsed,
Prove his most powerful allies.
Ah, whither shall a maiden flee,
When a bold youth so swift pursues,
And siege of tenderest courtesy,
With hope perseverant, still renews!
Why fly so fast? Her flatter'd breast
Thanks him who finds her fair and good;
She loves her fears; veil'd joys arrest
The foolish terrors of her blood.
By secret, sweet degrees, her heart,
Vanquish'd, takes warmth from his desire;
She makes it more, with hidden art,
And fuels love's late dreaded fire.
The generous credit he accords
To all the signs of good in her
Redeems itself; his praiseful words
The virtues they impute confer.
Her heart is thrice as rich in bliss,
She's three times gentler than before;
He gains a right to call her his
Now she through him is so much more;
'Tis heaven where'er she turns her head;
Tis music when she talks; 'tis air
On which, elate, she seems to tread,
The convert of a gladder sphere!
Ah, might he, when by doubts aggrieved,
Behold his tokens next her breast,
At all his words and sighs perceived
Against its blythe upheaval press'd!
But still she flies. Should she be won,
It must not be believed or thought
She yields; she's chased to death, undone,
Surprised, and violently caught.

II Denied
The storm-cloud, whose portentous shade
Fumes from a core of smother'd fire,
His livery is whose worshipp'd maid
Denies herself to his desire.
Ah, grief that almost crushes life,
To lie upon his lonely bed,

And fancy her another's wife!
His brain is flame, his heart is lead.
Sinking at last, by nature's course,
Cloak'd round with sleep from his despair,
He does but sleep to gather force
That goes to his exhausted care.
He wakes renew'd for all the smart.
His only Love, and she is wed!
His fondness comes about his heart,
As milk comes, when the babe is dead.
The wretch, whom she found fit for scorn,
His own allegiant thoughts despise;
And far into the shining morn
Lazy with misery he lies.

III The Churl
This marks the Churl: when spousals crown
His selfish hope, he finds the grace,
Which sweet love has for even the clown,
Was not in the woman, but the chace.

The Abdication.

I
From little signs, like little stars,
Whose faint impression on the sense
The very looking straight at mars,
Or only seen by confluence;
From instinct of a mutual thought,
Whence sanctity of manners flow'd;
From chance unconscious, and from what
Concealment, overconscious, show'd;
Her hand's less weight upon my arm,
Her lowlier mien; that match'd with this;
I found, and felt with strange alarm,
I stood committed to my bliss.

II
I grew assured, before I ask'd,
That she'd be mine without reserve,
And in her unclaim'd graces bask'd,
At leisure, till the time should serve,
With just enough of dread to thrill
The hope, and make it trebly dear;
Thus loth to speak the word to kill
Either the hope or happy fear.

III
Till once, through lanes returning late,
Her laughing sisters lagg'd behind;
And, ere we reach'd her father's gate,

We paused with one presentient mind;
And, in the dim and perfumed mist,
Their coming stay'd, who, friends to me,
And very women, loved to assist
Love's timid opportunity.

IV
Twice rose, twice died my trembling word;
The faint and frail Cathedral chimes
Spake time in music, and we heard
The chafers rustling in the limes.
Her dress, that touch'd me where I stood,
The warmth of her confided arm,
Her bosom's gentle neighbourhood,
Her pleasure in her power to charm;
Her look, her love, her form, her touch,
The least seem'd most by blissful turn,
Blissful but that it pleased too much,
And taught the wayward soul to yearn.
It was as if a harp with wires
Was traversed by the breath I drew;
And, oh, sweet meeting of desires,
She, answering, own'd that she loved too.

V
Honoria was to be my bride!
The hopeless heights of hope were scaled;
The summit won, I paused and sigh'd,
As if success itself had fail'd.
It seem'd as if my lips approach'd
To touch at Tantalus' reward,
And rashly on Eden life encroach'd,
Half-blinded by the flaming sword.
The whole world's wealthiest and its best,
So fiercely sought, appear'd, when found,
Poor in its need to be possess'd,
Poor from its very want of bound.
My queen was crouching at my side,
By love unsceptred and brought low,
Her awful garb of maiden pride
All melted into tears like snow;
The mistress of my reverent thought,
Whose praise was all I ask'd of fame,
In my close-watch'd approval sought
Protection as from danger and blame;
Her soul, which late I loved to invest
With pity for my poor desert,
Buried its face within my breast,
Like a pet fawn by hunters hurt.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book I. The Prologue.

I.
Mine is no horse with wings, to gain
'The region of the spheral chime;
'He does but drag a rumbling wain,
'Cheer'd by the coupled bells of rhyme;
'And if at Fame's bewitching note
'My homely Pegasus pricks an ear,
'The world's cart-collar hugs his throat,
'And he's too sage to kick or rear.'

II.
Thus ever answer'd Vaughan his Wife,
Who, more than he, desired his fame;
But, in his heart, his thoughts were rife
How for her sake to earn a name.
With bays poetic three times crown'd,
And other college honours won,
He, if he chose, might be renown'd,
He had but little doubt, she none;
And in a loftier phrase he talk'd
With her, upon their Wedding-Day,
(The eighth), while through the fields they walk'd,
Their children shouting by the way.

III.
'Not careless of the gift of song,
'Nor out of love with noble fame,
'I, meditating much and long
'What I should sing, how win a name,
'Considering well what theme unsung,
'What reason worth the cost of rhyme,
'Remains to loose the poet's tongue
'In these last days, the dregs of time,
'Learn that to me, though born so late,
'There does, beyond desert, befall
'(May my great fortune make me great!)
'The first of themes, sung last of all.
'In green and undiscover'd ground,
'Yet near where many others sing,
'I have the very well-head found
'Whence gushes the Pierian Spring.'

IV.
Then she: 'What is it, Dear? The Life
'Of Arthur, or Jerusalem's Fall?'
'Neither: your gentle self, my Wife,
'And love, that grows from one to all.
'And if I faithfully proclaim
'Of these the exceeding worthiness,

‘Surely the sweetest wreath of Fame
‘Shall, to your hope, my brows caress;
‘And if, by virtue of my choice
‘Of this, the most heart-touching theme
‘That ever tuned a poet's voice,
‘I live, as I am bold to dream,
‘To be delight to many days,
‘And into silence only cease
‘When those are still, who shared their bays
‘With Laura and with Beatrice,
‘Imagine, Love, how learned men
‘Will deep-conceiv'd devices find,
‘Beyond my purpose and my ken,
‘An ancient bard of simple mind.
‘You, Sweet, his Mistress, Wife, and Muse,
‘Were you for mortal woman meant?
Your praises give a hundred clues
‘To mythological intent!
And, severing thus the truth from trope,
‘In you the Commentators see
‘Outlines occult of abstract scope,
‘A future for philosophy!
‘Your arm's on mine! these are the meads
‘In which we pass our living days;
‘There Avon runs, now hid with reeds,
‘Now brightly brimming pebbly bays;
‘Those are our children's songs that come
‘With bells and bleatings of the sheep;
‘And there, in yonder English home,
‘We thrive on mortal food and sleep!’
She laugh'd. How proud she always was
To feel how proud he was of her!
But he had grown distraught, because
The Muse's mood began to stir.

V.
His purpose with performance crown'd,
He to his well-pleased Wife rehears'd,
When next their Wedding-Day came round,
His leisure's labour, ‘Book the First.’

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto I.

Preludes.

I The Song of Songs
The pulse of War, whose bloody heats
Sane purposes insanely work,
Now with fraternal frenzy beats,
And binds the Christian to the Turk,
And shrieking fifes and braggart flags,
Through quiet England, teach our breath
The courage corporate that drags
The coward to heroic death.
Too late for song! Who henceforth sings,
Must fledge his heavenly flight with more
Song-worthy and heroic things
Than hasty, home-destroying war.
While might and right are not agreed,
And battle thus is yet to wage,
So long let laurels be the meed
Of soldier as of poet sage;
But men expect the Tale of Love,
And weary of the Tale of Hate;
Lift me, O Muse, myself above,
And let the world no longer wait!

II The Kites
I saw three Cupids (so I dream'd),
Who made three kites, on which were drawn,
In letters that like roses gleam'd,
'Plato,' 'Anacreon,' and 'Vaughan.'
The boy who held by Plato tried
His airy venture first; all sail,
It heav'nward rush'd till scarce descried,
Then pitch'd and dropp'd, for want of tail.
Anacreon's Love, with shouts of mirth
That pride of spirit thus should fall,
To his kite link'd a lump of earth,
And, lo, it would not soar at all.
Last, my disciple freighted his
With a long streamer made of flowers,
The children of the sod, and this
Rose in the sun, and flew for hours.

III Orpheus
The music of the Sirens found
Ulysses weak, though cords were strong;
But happier Orpheus stood unbound,
And shamed it with a sweeter song.
His mode be mine. Of Heav'n I ask,
May I, with heart-persuading might,
Pursue the Poet's sacred task
Of superseding faith by sight,

Till ev'n the witless Gadarene,
Preferring Christ to swine, shall know
That life is sweetest when it's clean.
To prouder folly let me show
Earth by divine light made divine;
And let the saints, who hear my word,
Say, ‘Lo, the clouds begin to shine
‘About the coming of the Lord!’

IV Nearest the Dearest
Till Eve was brought to Adam, he
A solitary desert trod,
Though in the great society
Of nature, angels, and of God.
If one slight column counterweighs
The ocean, 'tis the Maker's law,
Who deems obedience better praise
Than sacrifice of erring awe.

V Perspective
What seems to us for us is true.
The planet has no proper light,
And yet, when Venus is in view,
No primal star is half so bright.

Accepted.

I
What fortune did my heart foretell?
What shook my spirit, as I woke,
Like the vibration of a bell
Of which I had not heard the stroke?
Was it some happy vision shut
From memory by the sun's fresh ray?
Was it that linnet's song; or but
A natural gratitude for day?
Or the mere joy the senses weave,
A wayward ecstasy of life?
Then I remember'd, yester-eve
I won Honoria for my Wife.

II
Forth riding, while as yet the day
Was dewy, watching Sarum Spire,
Still beckoning me along my way,
And growing every minute higher,
I reach'd the Dean's. One blind was down,
Though nine then struck. My bride to be!
And had she rested ill, my own,
With thinking (oh, my heart!) of me?

I paced the streets; a pistol chose,
To guard my now important life
When riding late from Sarum Close;
At noon return'd. Good Mrs. Fife,
To my, 'The Dean, is he at home?'
Said, 'No, Sir; but Miss Honor is;'
And straight, not asking if I'd come,
Announced me, 'Mr. Felix, Miss,'
To Mildred, in the Study. There
We talk'd, she working. We agreed
The day was fine; the Fancy-Fair
Successful; 'Did I ever read
'De Genlis?' 'Never.' 'Do! She heard
'I was engaged.' 'To whom?' 'Miss Fry.'
'Was it the fact?' 'No!' 'On my word?'
'What scandal people talk'd!' 'Would I
'Hold out this skein of silk.' So pass'd
I knew not how much time away.
'How were her sisters?' 'Well.' At last
I summon'd heart enough to say,
'I hoped to see Miss Churchill too.'
'Miss Churchill, Felix! What is this?
'I said, and now I find 'tis true,
'Last night you quarrell'd! Here she is.'

III
She came, and seem'd a morning rose
When ruffling rain has paled its blush;
Her crown once more was on her brows;
And, with a faint, indignant flush,
And fainter smile, she gave her hand,
But not her eyes, then sate apart,
As if to make me understand
The honour of her vanquish'd heart.
But I drew humbly to her side;
And she, well pleased, perceiving me
Liege ever to the noble pride
Of her unconquer'd majesty,
Once and for all put it away;
The faint flush pass'd; and, thereupon,
Her loveliness, which rather lay
In light than colour, smiled and shone,
Till sick was all my soul with bliss;
Or was it with remorse and ire
Of such a sanctity as this
Subdued by love to my desire?

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto II.

Preludes.

I The Changed Allegiance
Watch how a bird, that captived sings,
The cage set open, first looks out,
Yet fears the freedom of his wings,
And now withdraws, and flits about,
And now looks forth again; until,
Grown bold, he hops on stool and chair,
And now attains the window-sill,
And now confides himself to air.
The maiden so, from love's free sky
In chaste and prudent counsels caged,
But longing to be loosen'd by
Her suitor's faith declared and gaged,
When blest with that release desired,
First doubts if truly she is free,
Then pauses, restlessly retired,
Alarm'd at too much liberty;
But soon, remembering all her debt
To plighted passion, gets by rote
Her duty; says, 'I love him!' yet
The thought half chokes her in her throat;
And, like that fatal 'I am thine,'
Comes with alternate gush and check
And joltings of the heart, as wine
Pour'd from a flask of narrow neck.
Is he indeed her choice? She fears
Her Yes was rashly said, and shame,
Remorse, and ineffectual tears
Revolt from his conceded claim.
Oh, treason! So, with desperate nerve,
She cries, 'I am in love, am his;'
Lets run the cables of reserve,
And floats into a sea of bliss,
And laughs to think of her alarm,
Avows she was in love before,
Though his avowal was the charm
Which open'd to her own the door.
She loves him for his mastering air,
Whence, Parthian-like, she slaying flies;
His flattering look, which seems to wear
Her loveliness in manly eyes;
His smile, which, by reverse, portends
An awful wrath, should reason stir;
(How fortunate it is they're friends,
And he will ne'er be wroth with her!)
His power to do or guard from harm;
If he but chose to use it half,
And catch her up in one strong arm,
What could she do but weep, or laugh!
His words, which still instruct, but so

That this applause seems still implied,
‘How wise in all she ought to know,
‘How ignorant of all beside!’
His skilful suit, which leaves her free,
Gives nothing for the world to name,
And keeps her conscience safe, while he,
With half the bliss, takes all the blame;
His clear repute with great and small;
The jealousy his choice will stir;
But, ten times more than ten times all,
She loves him for his love of her.
How happy 'tis he seems to see
In her that utter loveliness
Which she, for his sake, longs to be!
At times, she cannot but confess
Her other friends are somewhat blind;
Her parents' years excuse neglect,
But all the rest are scarcely kind,
And brothers grossly want respect;
And oft she views what he admires
Within her glass, and sight of this
Makes all the sum of her desires
To be devotion unto his.
But still, at first, whatever's done,
A touch, her hand press'd lightly, she
Stands dizzied, shock'd, and flush'd, like one
Set sudden neck-deep in the sea;
And, though her bond for endless time
To his good pleasure gives her o'er,
The slightest favour seems a crime,
Because it makes her love him more.
But that she ne'er will let him know;
For what were love should reverence cease!
A thought which makes her reason so
Inscrutable, it seems caprice.
With her, as with a desperate town,
Too weak to stand, too proud to treat,
The conqueror, though the walls are down,
Has still to capture street by street;
But, after that, habitual faith,
Divorced from self, where late 'twas due,
Walks nobly in its novel path,
And she's to changed allegiance true;
And prizing what she can't prevent,
(Right wisdom, often misdeem'd whim),
Her will's indomitably bent
On mere submissiveness to him;
To him she'll cleave, for him forsake
Father's and mother's fond command!
He is her lord, for he can take
Hold of her faint heart with his hand.

II Beauty
‘Beauty deludes.’ O shaft well shot,
To strike the mark's true opposite!
That ugly good is scorn'd proves not
Tis beauty lies, but lack of it.
By Heaven's law the Jew might take
A slave to wife, if she was fair;
So strong a plea does beauty make
That, where 'tis seen, discretion's there.
If, by a monstrous chance, we learn
That this illustrious vaunt's a lie,
Our minds, by which the eyes discern,
See hideous contrariety,
And laugh at Nature's wanton mood,
Which, thus a swinish thing to flout,
Though haply in its gross way good,
Hangs such a jewel in its snout.

III Lais and Lucretia
Did first his beauty wake her sighs?
That's Lais! Thus Lucretia's known:
The beauty in her Lover's eyes
Was admiration of her own.

The Course Of True Love.

I
Oh, beating heart of sweet alarm,
Which stays the lover's step, when near
His mistress and her awful charm
Of grace and innocence sincere!
I held the half-shut door, and heard
The voice of my betrothed wife,
Who sang my verses, every word
By music taught its latent life;
With interludes of well-touch'd notes,
That flash'd, surprising and serene,
As meteor after meteor floats
The soft, autumnal stars between.
There was a passion in her tone,
A tremor when she touch'd the keys,
Which told me she was there alone,
And uttering all her soul at ease.
I enter'd; for I did not choose
To learn how in her heart I throve,
By chance or stealth; beyond her use,
Her greeting flatter'd me with love.

II
With true love's treacherous confidence,
And ire, at last to laughter won,

She spoke this speech, and mark'd its sense,
By action, as her Aunt had done.

III
''You, with your looks and catching air,
''To think of Vaughan! You fool! You know,
''You might, with ordinary care,
''Ev'n yet be Lady Clitheroe.
''You're sure he'll do great things some day!
''Nonsense, he won't; he's dress'd too well.
''Dines with the Sterling Club, they say;
''Not commonly respectable!
''Half Puritan, half Cavalier!
''His curly hair I think's a wig;
''And, for his fortune, why, my Dear,
'''Tis not enough to keep a gig.
''Rich Aunts and Uncles never die;
''And what you bring won't do for dress;
''And so you'll live on Bye-and-bye,
''With oaten-cake and water-cress!'

IV
'I cried, but did not let her see.
'At last she soften'd her dispraise,
'On learning you had bought for me
'A carriage and a pair of bays.
'But here she comes! You take her in
'To dinner. I impose this task:
'Make her approve my love; and win
'What thanks from me you choose to ask!'

V
'My niece has told you every word
'I said of you! What may I mean?
'Of course she has; but you've not heard
'How I abused you to the Dean;—
'Yes, I'll take wine; he's mad, like her;
'And she will have you: there it ends!
'And, now I've done my duty, Sir,
'And you've shown common-sense, we're friends!'

VI
'Go, Child, and see him out yourself,'
Aunt Maude said, after tea, 'and show
'The place, upon that upper shelf,
'Where Petrarch stands, lent long ago.'

VII

‘These rose-leaves to my heart be press'd,
‘Honoria, while it aches for you!’
(The rose in ruin, from her breast,
Fell, as I took a fond adieu.)
‘You must go now, Love!’ ‘See, the air
‘Is thick with starlight!’ ‘Let me tie
‘This scarf on. Oh, your Petrarch! There!
‘I'm coming, Aunt!’ ‘Sweet, Sweet!’ ‘Good-bye!’
‘Ah, Love, to me 'tis death to part,
‘Yet you, my sever'd life, smile on!’
‘These 'Good-nights,' Felix, break my heart;
‘I'm only gay till you are gone!’
With love's bright arrows from her eyes,
And balm on her permissive lips,
She pass'd, and night was a surprise,
As when the sun at Quito dips.
Her beauties were like sunlit snows,
Flush'd but not warm'd with my desire.
Oh, how I loved her! Fiercely glows
In the pure air of frost the fire
Who for a year is sure of fate!
I thought, dishearten'd, as I went,
Wroth with the Dean, who bade me wait,
And vex'd with her, who seem'd content.
Nay, could eternal life afford
That tyranny should thus deduct
From this fair land, which call'd me lord,
A year of the sweet usufruct?
It might not and it should not be!
I'd go back now, and he must own,
At once, my love's compulsive plea.
I turn'd, I found the Dean alone.
‘Nonsense, my friend; go back to bed!
‘It's half-past twelve!’ ‘July, then, Sir?’
‘Well, come to-morrow,’ at last he said,
‘And you may talk of it with her.’
A light gleam'd as I pass'd the stair.
A pausing foot, a flash of dress,
And a sweet voice. ‘Is Felix there?’
‘July, Love!’ ‘Says Papa so?’ ‘Yes!’

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto III.

Preludes

I Love Ceremonious
Keep your undrest, familiar style
For strangers, but respect your friend,
Her most, whose matrimonial smile
Is and asks honour without end.
'Tis found, and needs it must so be,
That life from love's allegiance flags,
When love forgets his majesty
In sloth's unceremonious rags.
Let love make home a gracious Court;
There let the world's rude, hasty ways
Be fashion'd to a loftier port,
And learn to bow and stand at gaze;
And let the sweet respective sphere
Of personal worship there obtain
Circumference for moving clear,
None treading on another's train.
This makes that pleasures do not cloy,
And dignifies our mortal strife
With calmness and considerate joy,
Befitting our immortal life.

II The Rainbow
A stately rainbow came and stood,
When I was young, in High-Hurst Park;
Its bright feet lit the hill and wood
Beyond, and cloud and sward were dark;
And I, who thought the splendour ours
Because the place was, t'wards it flew,
And there, amidst the glittering showers,
Gazed vainly for the glorious view.
With whatsoever's lovely, know
It is not ours; stand off to see,
Or beauty's apparition so
Puts on invisibility.

III A Paradox
To tryst Love blindfold goes, for fear
He should not see, and eyeless night
He chooses still for breathing near
Beauty, that lives but in the sight.

The County Ball.

I
Well, Heaven be thank'd my first-love fail'd,
As, Heaven be thank'd, our first-loves do!
Thought I, when Fanny past me sail'd,

Loved once, for what I never knew,
Unless for colouring in her talk,
When cheeks and merry mouth would show
Three roses on a single stalk,
The middle wanting room to blow,
And forward ways, that charm'd the boy
Whose love-sick mind, misreading fate,
Scarce hoped that any Queen of Joy
Could ever stoop to be his mate.

II
But there danced she, who from the leaven
Of ill preserv'd my heart and wit
All unawares, for she was heaven,
Others at best but fit for it.
One of those lovely things she was
In whose least action there can be
Nothing so transient but it has
An air of immortality.
I mark'd her step, with peace elate,
Her brow more beautiful than morn,
Her sometime look of girlish state
Which sweetly waived its right to scorn;
The giddy crowd, she grave the while,
Although, as 'twere beyond her will,
Around her mouth the baby smile,
That she was born with, linger'd still.
Her ball-dress seem'd a breathing mist,
From the fair form exhaled and shed,
Raised in the dance with arm and wrist
All warmth and light, unbraceleted.
Her motion, feeling 'twas beloved,
The pensive soul of tune express'd,
And, oh, what perfume, as she moved,
Came from the flowers in her breast!
How sweet a tongue the music had!
‘Beautiful Girl,’ it seem'd to say,
‘Though all the world were vile and sad,
‘Dance on; let innocence be gay.’
Ah, none but I discern'd her looks,
When in the throng she pass'd me by,
For love is like a ghost, and brooks
Only the chosen seer's eye;
And who but she could e'er divine
The halo and the happy trance,
When her bright arm reposed on mine,
In all the pauses of the dance!

III
Whilst so her beauty fed my sight,
And whilst I lived in what she said,
Accordant airs, like all delight

Most sweet when noted least, were play'd;
And was it like the Pharisee
If I in secret bow'd my face
With joyful thanks that I should be,
Not as were many, but with grace,
And fortune of well-nurtured youth,
And days no sordid pains defile,
And thoughts accustom'd to the truth,
Made capable of her fair smile?

IV
Charles Barton follow'd down the stair,
To talk with me about the Ball,
And carp at all the people there.
The Churchills chiefly stirr'd his gall:
'Such were the Kriemhilds and Isondes
'You storm'd about at Trinity!
'Nothing at heart but handsome Blondes!
'Folk say that you and Fanny Fry—'
'They err! Good-night! Here lies my course,
'Through Wilton.' Silence blest my ears,
And, weak at heart with vague remorse,
A passing poignancy of tears
Attack'd mine eyes. By pale and park
I rode, and ever seem'd to see,
In the transparent starry dark,
That splendid brow of chastity,
That soft and yet subduing light,
At which, as at the sudden moon,
I held my breath, and thought 'how bright!'
That guileless beauty in its noon,
Compelling tribute of desires
Ardent as day when Sirius reigns,
Pure as the permeating fires
That smoulder in the opal's veins.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto IV.

Preludes.

I Honour and Desert
O queen, awake to thy renown,
Require what 'tis our wealth to give,
And comprehend and wear the crown
Of thy despised prerogative!
I, who in manhood's name at length
With glad songs come to abdicate
The gross regality of strength,
Must yet in this thy praise abate,
That, through thine erring humbleness
And disregard of thy degree,
Mainly, has man been so much less
Than fits his fellowship with thee.
High thoughts had shaped the foolish brow,
The coward had grasp'd the hero's sword,
The vilest had been great, hadst thou,
Just to thyself, been worth's reward.
But lofty honours undersold
Seller and buyer both disgrace;
And favours that make folly bold
Banish the light from virtue's face.

II Love and Honour
What man with baseness so content,
Or sick with false conceit of right,
As not to know that the element
And inmost warmth of love's delight
Is honour? Who'd not rather kiss
A duchess than a milkmaid, prank
The two in equal grace, which is
Precedent Nature's obvious rank?
Much rather, then, a woman deck'd
With saintly honours, chaste and good,
Whose thoughts celestial things affect,
Whose eyes express her heavenly mood!
Those lesser vaunts are dimm'd or lost
Which plume her name or paint her lip,
Extinct in the deep-glowing boast
Of her angelic fellowship.

III Valour misdirected
‘I'll hunt for dangers North and South,
‘To prove my love, which sloth maligns!’
What seems to say her rosy mouth?
‘I'm not convinced by proofs but signs.’

Love In Idleness.

I
What should I do? In such a wife
Fortune had lavish'd all her store,
And nothing now seem'd left for life
But to deserve her more and more.
To this I vow'd my life's whole scope;
And Love said, ‘I forewarn you now,
‘The Maiden will fulfil your hope
‘Only as you fulfil your vow.’

II
A promised service, (task for days),
Was done this morning while she slept,
With that full heart which thinks no praise
Of vows which are not more than kept;
But loftier work did love impose,
And studious hours. Alas, for these,
While she from all my thoughts arose
Like Venus from the restless seas!

III
I conn'd a scheme, with mind elate:
My Uncle's land would fall to me,
My skill was much in school debate,
My friends were strong in Salisbury;
A place in Parliament once gain'd,
Thro' saps first labour'd out of sight,
Far loftier peaks were then attain'd
With easy leaps from height to height;
And that o'erwhelming honour paid,
Or recognised, at least, in life,
Which this most sweet and noble Maid
Should yield to him who call'd her Wife.

IV
I fix'd this rule: in Sarum Close
To make two visits every week,
The first to-day; and, save on those,
I nought would do, think, read, or speak,
Which did not help my settled will
To earn the Statesman's proud applause.
And now, forthwith, to mend my skill
In ethics, politics, and laws,
The Statesman's learning! Flush'd with power
And pride of freshly-form'd resolve,
I read Helvetius half-an-hour;
But, halting in attempts to solve
Why, more than all things else that be,
A lady's grace hath force to move
That sensitive appetency
Of intellectual good, call'd love,

Took Blackstone down, only to draw
My swift-deriving thoughts ere long
To love, which is the source of law,
And, like a king, can do no wrong;
Then open'd Hyde, where loyal hearts,
With faith unpropp'd by precedent,
Began to play rebellious parts.
O, mighty stir that little meant!
How dull the crude, plough'd fields of fact
To me who trod the Elysian grove!
How idle all heroic act
By the least suffering of love!
I could not read; so took my pen,
And thus commenced, in form of notes,
A Lecture for the Salisbury men,
With due regard to Tory votes:
'A road's a road, though worn to ruts;
'They speed who travel straight therein;
'But he who tacks and tries short cuts
'Gets fools' praise and a broken shin—'
And here I stopp'd in sheer despair;
But, what to-day was thus begun,
I vow'd, up starting from my chair,
To-morrow should indeed be done;
So loosed my chafing thoughts from school,
To play with fancy as they chose,
And then, according to my rule,
I dress'd, and came to Sarum Close.

V
Ah, that sweet laugh! Diviner sense
Did Nature, forming her, inspire
To omit the grosser elements,
And make her all of air and fire!

VII
To-morrow, Cowes Regatta fell:
The Dean would like his girls to go,
If I went too. 'Most gladly.' Well,
I did but break a foolish vow!
Unless Love's toil has love for prize,
(And then he's Hercules), above
All other contrarieties
Is labour contrary to love.
No fault of Love's, but nature's laws!
And Love, in idleness, lies quick;
For as the worm whose powers make pause,
And swoon, through alteration sick,
The soul, its wingless state dissolved,
Awaits its nuptial life complete,
All indolently self-convolved,
Cocoon'd in silken fancies sweet.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto IX.

Preludes.

I The Nursling of Civility
Lo, how the woman once was woo'd:
Forth leapt the savage from his lair,
And fell'd her, and to nuptials rude
He dragg'd her, bleeding, by the hair.
From that to Chloe's dainty wiles
And Portia's dignified consent,
What distance! But these Pagan styles
How far below Time's fair intent!
Siegfried sued Kriemhild. Sweeter life
Could Love's self covet? Yet 'tis sung
In what rough sort he chid his wife
For want of curb upon her tongue!
Shall Love, where last I leave him, halt?
Nay; none can fancy or foresee
To how strange bliss may time exalt
This nursling of civility.

II The Foreign Land
A woman is a foreign land,
Of which, though there he settle young,
A man will ne'er quite understand
The customs, politics, and tongue.
The foolish hie them post-haste through,
See fashions odd, and prospects fair,
Learn of the language, 'How d'ye do,'
And go and brag they have been there.
The most for leave to trade apply,
For once, at Empire's seat, her heart,
Then get what knowledge ear and eye
Glean chancewise in the life-long mart.
And certain others, few and fit,
Attach them to the Court, and see
The Country's best, its accent hit,
And partly sound its polity.

III Disappointment
'The bliss which woman's charms bespeak,
'I've sought in many, found in none!'
'In many 'tis in vain you seek
'What can be found in only one.'

The Friends.

I
Frank's long, dull letter, lying by
The gay sash from Honoria's waist,
Reproach'd me; passion spared a sigh

For friendship without fault disgraced.
How should I greet him? how pretend
I felt the love he once inspired?
Time was when either, in his friend,
His own deserts with joy admired;
We took one side in school-debate,
Like hopes pursued with equal thirst,
Were even-bracketed by Fate,
Twin-Wranglers, seventh from the First;
And either loved a lady's laugh
More than all music; he and I
Were perfect in the pleasant half
Of universal charity.

II
From pride of likeness thus I loved
Him, and he me, till love begot
The lowliness which now approved
Nothing but that which I was not.
Blest was the pride of feeling so
Subjected to a girl's soft reign.
She was my vanity, and, oh,
All other vanities how vain!

III
Frank follow'd in his letter's track,
And set my guilty heart at ease
By echoing my excuses back
With just the same apologies.
So he had slighted me as well!
Nor was my mind disburthen'd less
When what I sought excuse to tell
He of himself did first confess.

IV
Each, rapturous, praised his lady's worth;
He eloquently thus: ‘Her face
‘Is the summ'd sweetness of the earth,
‘Her soul the glass of heaven's grace,
‘To which she leads me by the hand;
‘Or, briefly all the truth to say
‘To you, who briefly understand,
‘She is both heaven and the way.
‘Displeasures and resentments pass
‘Athwart her charitable eyes
‘More fleetingly than breath from glass,
‘Or truth from foolish memories;
‘Her heart's so touch'd with others' woes
‘She has no need of chastisement;
‘Her gentle life's conditions close,
‘Like God's commandments, with content,
‘And make an aspect calm and gay,

‘Where sweet affections come and go,
‘Till all who see her, smile and say,
‘How fair, and happy that she's so!
‘She is so lovely, true, and pure,
‘Her virtue virtue so endears,
‘That often, when I think of her,
‘Life's meanness fills mine eyes with tears—’
‘You paint Miss Churchill! Pray go on—’
‘She's perfect, and, if joy was much
‘To think her nature's paragon,
‘'Tis more that there's another such!’

V
Praising and paying back their praise
With rapturous hearts, t'ward Sarum Spire
We walk'd, in evening's golden haze,
Friendship from passion stealing fire.
In joy's crown danced the feather jest,
And, parting by the Deanery door,
Clasp'd hands, less shy than words, confess'd
We had not been true friends before.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto V.

Preludes.

I Rejected
‘Perhaps she's dancing somewhere now!’
The thoughts of light and music wake
Sharp jealousies, that grow and grow
Till silence and the darkness ache.
He sees her step, so proud and gay,
Which, ere he spake, foretold despair;
Thus did she look, on such a day,
And such the fashion of her hair;
And thus she stood, when, kneeling low,
He took the bramble from her dress,
And thus she laugh'd and talk'd, whose ‘No’
Was sweeter than another's ‘Yes.’
He feeds on thoughts that most deject;
He impudently feigns her charms,
So reverenced in his own respect,
Dreadfully clasp'd by other arms;
And turns, and puts his brows, that ache,
Against the pillow where 'tis cold.
If only now his heart would break!
But, oh, how much a heart can hold.

II Rachel
You loved her, and would lie all night
Thinking how beautiful she was,
And what to do for her delight.
Now both are bound with alien laws!
Be patient; put your heart to school;
Weep if you will, but not despair;
The trust that nought goes wrong by rule
Should ease this load the many bear.
Love, if there's heav'n, shall meet his dues,
Though here unmatch'd, or match'd amiss
Meanwhile, the gentle cannot choose
But learn to love the lips they kiss.
Ne'er hurt the homely sister's ears
With Rachel's beauties; secret be
The lofty mind whose lonely tears
Protest against mortality.

III The Heart's Prophecies
Be not amazed at life; 'tis still
The mode of God with His elect
Their hopes exactly to fulfil,
In times and ways they least expect.

The Queen’s Room.

I
There's nothing happier than the days
In which young Love makes every thought
Pure as a bride's blush, when she says
‘I will’ unto she knows not what;
And lovers, on the love-lit globe,
For love's sweet sake, walk yet aloof,
And hear Time weave the marriage-robe,
Attraction warp and reverence woof!

II
My Housekeeper, my Nurse of yore,
Cried, as the latest carriage went,
‘Well, Mr. Felix, Sir, I'm sure
‘The morning's gone off excellent!
‘I never saw the show to pass
‘The ladies, in their fine fresh gowns,
‘So sweetly dancing on the grass,
‘To music with its ups and downs.
‘We'd such work, Sir, to clean the plate;
‘'Twas just the busy times of old.
‘The Queen's room, Sir, look'd quite like state.
‘Miss Smythe, when she went up, made bold
‘To peep into the Rose Boudoir,
‘And cried, 'How charming! all quite new!'
‘And wonder'd who it could be for.
‘All but Miss Honor look'd in too.
‘But she's too proud to peep and pry.
‘None's like that sweet Miss Honor, Sir!
‘Excuse my humbleness, but I
‘Pray Heav'n you'll get a wife like her!
‘The Poor love dear Miss Honor's ways
‘Better than money. Mrs. Rouse,
‘Who ought to know a lady, says
‘No finer goes to Wilton House.
‘Miss Bagshaw thought that dreary room
‘Had kill'd old Mrs. Vaughan with fright;
‘She would not sleep in such a tomb
‘For all her host was worth a night!
‘Miss Fry, Sir, laugh'd; they talk'd the rest
‘In French; and French Sir's Greek to me.
‘But, though they smiled, and seem'd to jest,
‘No love was lost, for I could see
‘How serious-like Miss Honor was—’
‘Well, Nurse, this is not my affair.
‘The ladies talk'd in French with cause.
‘Good-day; and thank you for your prayer.’

III
I loiter'd through the vacant house,
Soon to be hers; in one room stay'd,

Of old my mother's. Here my vows
Of endless thanks were oftenest paid.
This room its first condition kept;
For, on her road to Sarum Town,
Therein an English Queen had slept,
Before the Hurst was half-pull'd down.
The pictured walls the place became:
Here ran the Brook Anaurus, where
Stout Jason bore the wrinkled dame
Whom serving changed to Juno; there,
Ixion's selfish hope, instead
Of the nuptial goddess, clasp'd a cloud;
And, here, translated Psyche fed
Her gaze on Love, not disallow'd.

IV
And in this chamber had she been,
And into that she would not look,
My Joy, my Vanity, my Queen,
At whose dear name my pulses shook!
To others how express at all
My worship in that joyful shrine?
I scarcely can myself recall
What peace and ardour then were mine!
And how more sweet than aught below,
The daylight and its duties done,
It felt to fold the hands, and so
Relinquish all regards but one;
To see her features in the dark;
To lie and meditate once more
The grace I did not fully mark,
The tone I had not heard before;
And from my pillow then to take
Her notes, her picture, and her glove,
Put there for joy when I should wake,
And press them to the heart of love;
And then to whisper ‘Wife!’ and pray
To live so long as not to miss
That unimaginable day
Which farther seems the nearer 'tis;
And still from joy's unfathom'd well
To drink, in dreams, while on her brows
Of innocence ineffable
Blossom'd the laughing bridal rose.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto VI.

Preludes.

I Love's Perversity
How strange a thing a lover seems
To animals that do not love!
Lo, where he walks and talks in dreams,
And flouts us with his Lady's glove;
How foreign is the garb he wears;
And how his great devotion mocks
Our poor propriety, and scares
The undevout with paradox!
His soul, through scorn of worldly care,
And great extremes of sweet and gall,
And musing much on all that's fair,
Grows witty and fantastical;
He sobs his joy and sings his grief,
And evermore finds such delight
In simply picturing his relief,
That 'plaining seems to cure his plight;
He makes his sorrow, when there's none;
His fancy blows both cold and hot;
Next to the wish that she'll be won,
His first hope is that she may not;
He sues, yet deprecates consent;
Would she be captured she must fly;
She looks too happy and content,
For whose least pleasure he would die.
Oh, cruelty, she cannot care
For one to whom she's always kind!
He says he's nought, but, oh, despair,
If he's not Jove to her fond mind!
He's jealous if she pets a dove,
She must be his with all her soul;
Yet 'tis a postulate in love
That part is greater than the whole;
And all his apprehension's stress,
When he's with her, regards her hair,
Her hand, a ribbon of her dress,
As if his life were only there;
Because she's constant, he will change,
And kindest glances coldly meet,
And, all the time he seems so strange,
His soul is fawning at her feet;
Of smiles and simple heaven grown tired,
He wickedly provokes her tears,
And when she weeps, as he desired,
Falls slain with ecstasies of fears;
He blames her, though she has no fault,
Except the folly to be his;
He worships her, the more to exalt
The profanation of a kiss;
Health's his disease; he's never well

But when his paleness shames her rose;
His faith's a rock-built citadel,
Its sign a flag that each way blows;
His o'erfed fancy frets and fumes;
And Love, in him, is fierce, like Hate,
And ruffles his ambrosial plumes
Against the bars of time and fate.

II The Power of Love
Samson the Mighty, Solomon
The Wise, and Holy David all
Must doff their crowns to Love, for none
But fell as Love would scorn to fall!
And what may fallen spirits win,
When stripes and precepts cannot move?
Only the sadness of all sin,
When look'd at in the light of Love.

The Love-Letters.

I
'You ask, Will admiration halt,
'Should spots appear within my Sun?
'Oh, how I wish I knew your fault,
'For Love's tired gaze to rest upon!
'Your graces, which have made me great,
'Will I so loftily admire,
'Yourself yourself shall emulate,
'And be yourself your own desire.
'I'll nobly mirror you too fair,
'And, when you're false to me your glass,
'What's wanting you'll by that repair,
'So bring yourself through me to pass.
'O Dearest, tell me how to prove
'Goodwill which cannot be express'd;
'The beneficial heart of love
'Is labour in an idle breast.
'Name in the world your chosen part,
'And here I vow, with all the bent
'And application of my heart
'To give myself to your content.
'Would you live on, home-worshipp'd, thus,
'Not proudly high nor poorly low?
'Indeed the lines are fall'n to us
'In pleasant places! Be it so.
'But would you others heav'nward move,
'By sight not faith, while you they admire?
'I'll help with zeal as I approve
'That just and merciful desire.
'High as the lonely moon to view

‘I'll lift your light; do you decree
‘Your place, I'll win it; for from you
‘Command inspires capacity.
‘Or, unseen, would you sway the world
‘More surely? Then in gracious rhyme
‘I'll raise your emblem, fair unfurl'd
‘With blessing in the breeze of time.
‘Faith removes mountains, much more love;
‘Let your contempt abolish me
‘If ought of your devisal prove
‘Too hard or high to do or be.’

II
I ended. ‘From your Sweet-Heart, Sir,’
Said Nurse, ‘The Dean's man brings it down.’
I could have kiss'd both him and her!
‘Nurse, give him that, with half-a-crown.’
How beat my heart, how paused my breath.
When with perversely fond delay,
I broke the seal, that bore a wreath
Of roses link'd with one of bay.

III
‘I found your note. How very kind
‘To leave it there! I cannot tell
‘How pleased I was, or how you find
‘Words to express your thoughts so well.
‘The Girls are going to the Ball
‘At Wilton. If you can, do come;
‘And any day this week you call
‘Papa and I shall be at home.
‘You said to Mary once—I hope
‘In jest—that women should be vain:
‘On Saturday your friend (her Pope),
‘The Bishop dined with us again.
‘She put the question, if they ought?
‘He turn'd it cleverly away
‘(For giddy Mildred cried, she thought
‘We must), with 'What we must we may.'
‘Dear papa laugh'd, and said 'twas sad
‘To think how vain his girls would be,
‘Above all Mary, now she had
‘Episcopal authority.
‘But I was very dull, dear friend,
‘And went upstairs at last, and cried.
‘Be sure to come to-day, or send
‘A rose-leaf kiss'd on either side.
‘Adieu! I am not well. Last night
‘My dreams were wild: I often woke,
‘The summer-lightning was so bright;

‘And when it flash'd I thought you spoke.’

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto VII.

Preludes.

I Joy and Use
Can ought compared with wedlock be
For use? But He who made the heart
To use proportions joy. What He
Has join'd let no man put apart.
Sweet Order has its draught of bliss
Graced with the pearl of God's consent,
Ten times delightful in that 'tis
Considerate and innocent.
In vain Disorder grasps the cup;
The pleasure's not enjoy'd but spilt,
And, if he stoops to lick it up,
It only tastes of earth and guilt.
His sorry raptures rest destroys;
To live, like comets, they must roam;
On settled poles turn solid joys,
And sunlike pleasures shine at home.

II 'She was Mine'
'Thy tears o'erprize thy loss! Thy wife,
'In what was she particular?
'Others of comely face and life,
'Others as chaste and warm there are,
'And when they speak they seem to sing;
'Beyond her sex she was not wise;
'And there is no more common thing
'Than kindness in a woman's eyes.
'Then wherefore weep so long and fast,
'Why so exceedingly repine!
'Say, how has thy Beloved surpass'd
'So much all others?' 'She was mine.'

The Revulsion.

I
'Twas when the spousal time of May
Hangs all the hedge with bridal wreaths,
And air's so sweet the bosom gay
Gives thanks for every breath it breathes;
When like to like is gladly moved,
And each thing joins in Spring's refrain,
'Let those love now who never loved;
'Let those who have loved love again;'
That I, in whom the sweet time wrought,
Lay stretch'd within a lonely glade,
Abandon'd to delicious thought,
Beneath the softly twinkling shade.
The leaves, all stirring, mimick'd well

A neighbouring rush of rivers cold,
And, as the sun or shadow fell,
So these were green and those were gold;
In dim recesses hyacinths droop'd,
And breadths of primrose lit the air,
Which, wandering through the woodland, stoop'd
And gather'd perfumes here and there;
Upon the spray the squirrel swung,
And careless songsters, six or seven,
Sang lofty songs the leaves among,
Fit for their only listener, Heaven.
I sigh'd, 'Immeasurable bliss
'Gains nothing by becoming more!
'Millions have meaning; after this
'Cyphers forget the integer.'

II
And so I mused, till musing brought
A dream that shook my house of clay,
And, in my humbled heart, I thought,
To me there yet may come a day
With this the single vestige seen
Of comfort, earthly or divine,
My sorrow some time must have been
Her portion, had it not been mine.
Then I, who knew, from watching life,
That blows foreseen are slow to fall,
Rehearsed the losing of a wife,
And faced its terrors each and all.
The self-chastising fancy show'd
The coffin with its ghastly breath;
The innocent sweet face that owed
None of its innocence to death;
The lips that used to laugh; the knell
That bade the world beware of mirth;
The heartless and intolerable
Indignity of 'earth to earth;'
At morn remembering by degrees
That she I dream'd about was dead;
Love's still recurrent jubilees,
The days that she was born, won, wed;
The duties of my life the same,
Their meaning for the feelings gone;
Friendship impertinent, and fame
Disgusting; and, more harrowing none,
Small household troubles fall'n to me,
As, 'What time would I dine to-day?'
And, oh, how could I bear to see
The noisy children at their play.
Besides, where all things limp and halt,
Could I go straight, should I alone

Have kept my love without default
Pitch'd at the true and heavenly tone?
The festal-day might come to mind
That miss'd the gift which more endears;
The hour which might have been more kind,
And now less fertile in vain tears;
The good of common intercourse,
For daintier pleasures, then despised,
Now with what passionate remorse,
What poignancy of hunger prized!
The little wrong, now greatly rued,
Which no repentance now could right;
And love, in disbelieving mood,
Deserting his celestial height.
Withal to know, God's love sent grief
To make me less the world's, and more
Meek-hearted: ah, the sick relief!
Why bow'd I not my heart before?

III
'What,' I exclaimed, with chill alarm,
'If this fantastic horror shows
'The feature of an actual harm!'
And, coming straight to Sarum Close,
As one who dreams his wife is dead,
And cannot in his slumber weep,
And moans upon his wretched bed,
And wakes, and finds her there asleep,
And laughs and sighs, so I, not less
Relieved, beheld, with blissful start,
The light and happy loveliness
Which lay so heavy on my heart.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto VIII.

Preludes.

I In Love
If he's capricious she'll be so,
But, if his duties constant are,
She lets her loving favour glow
As steady as a tropic star;
Appears there nought for which to weep,
She'll weep for nought, for his dear sake;
She clasps her sister in her sleep;
Her love in dreams is most awake.
Her soul, that once with pleasure shook,
Did any eyes her beauty own,
Now wonders how they dare to look
On what belongs to him alone;
The indignity of taking gifts
Exhilarates her loving breast;
A rapture of submission lifts
Her life into celestial rest;
There's nothing left of what she was;
Back to the babe the woman dies,
And all the wisdom that she has
Is to love him for being wise.
She's confident because she fears,
And, though discreet when he's away,
If none but her dear despot hears,
She prattles like a child at play.
Perchance, when all her praise is said,
He tells the news, a battle won,
On either side ten thousand dead.
‘Alas!’ she says; but, if 'twere known,
She thinks, ‘He's looking on my face!
‘I am his joy; whate'er I do,
‘He sees such time-contenting grace
‘In that, he'd have me always so!’
And, evermore, for either's sake,
To the sweet folly of the dove,
She joins the cunning of the snake,
To rivet and exalt his love;
Her mode of candour is deceit;
And what she thinks from what she'll say,
(Although I'll never call her cheat),
Lies far as Scotland from Cathay.
Without his knowledge he was won;
Against his nature kept devout;
She'll never tell him how 'twas done,
And he will never find it out.
If, sudden, he suspects her wiles,
And hears her forging chain and trap,
And looks, she sits in simple smiles,
Her two hands lying in her lap.
Her secret (privilege of the Bard,

Whose fancy is of either sex),
Is mine; but let the darkness guard
Myst'ries that light would more perplex!

II Love Thinking
What lifts her in my thought so far
Beyond all else? Let Love not err!
'Tis that which all right women are,
But which I'll know in none but her.
She is to me the only Ark
Of that high mystery which locks
The lips of joy, or speaks in dark
Enigmas and in paradox;
That potent charm, which none can fly,
Nor would, which makes me bond and free,
Nor can I tell if first 'twas I
Chose it, or it elected me;
Which, when I look intentest, lo,
Cheats most mine eyes, albeit my heart,
Content to feel and not to know,
Perceives it all in every part;
I kiss its cheek; its life divine
Exhales from its resplendent shroud;
Ixion's fate reversed is mine,
Authentic Juno seems a cloud;
I feel a blessed warmth, I see
A bright circumference of rays,
But darkness, where the sun should be,
Fills admiration with amaze;
And when, for joy's relief, I think
To fathom with the line of thought
The well from which I, blissful, drink,
The spring's so deep I come to nought.

III The Kiss
‘I saw you take his kiss!’ ‘'Tis true.’
‘O, modesty!’ ‘'Twas strictly kept:
‘He thought me asleep; at least, I knew
‘He thought I thought he thought I slept.’

The Koh-I-Noor.

I
‘Be man's hard virtues highly wrought,
‘But let my gentle Mistress be,
‘In every look, word, deed, and thought,
‘Nothing but sweet and womanly!
‘Her virtues please my virtuous mood,
‘But what at all times I admire

‘Is, not that she is wise or good,
‘But just the thing which I desire.
‘With versatility to sing
‘The theme of love to any strain,
‘If oft'nest she is anything,
‘Be it careless, talkative, and vain.
‘That seems in her supremest grace
‘Which, virtue or not, apprises me
‘That my familiar thoughts embrace
‘Unfathomable mystery.’

II
I answer'd thus; for she desired
To know what mind I most approved;
Partly to learn what she inquired,
Partly to get the praise she loved.

III
I praised her, but no praise could fill
The depths of her desire to please,
Though dull to others as a Will
To them that have no legacies.
The more I praised the more she shone,
Her eyes incredulously bright,
And all her happy beauty blown
Beneath the beams of my delight.
Sweet rivalry was thus begot;
By turns, my speech, in passion's style,
With flatteries the truth o'ershot,
And she surpass'd them with her smile.

IV
‘You have my heart so sweetly seized,
‘And I confess, nay, 'tis my pride
‘That I'm with you so solely pleased,
‘That, if I'm pleased with aught beside,
‘As music, or the month of June,
‘My friend's devotion, or his wit,
‘A rose, a rainbow, or the moon,
‘It is that you illustrate it.
‘All these are parts, you are the whole;
‘You fit the taste for Paradise,
‘To which your charms draw up the soul
‘As turning spirals draw the eyes.
‘Nature to you was more than kind;
‘'Twas fond perversity to dress
‘So much simplicity of mind
‘In such a pomp of loveliness!
‘But, praising you, the fancy deft
‘Flies wide, and lets the quarry stray,

‘And, when all's said, there's something left,
‘And that's the thing I meant to say.’
‘Dear Felix!’ ‘Sweet, my Love!’ But there
Was Aunt Maude's noisy ring and knock!
‘Stay, Felix; you have caught my hair.
‘Stoop! Thank you!’ ‘May I have that lock?’
‘Not now. Good morning, Aunt!’ ‘Why, Puss,
‘You look magnificent to-day.’
‘Here's Felix, Aunt.’ ‘Fox and green goose!
‘Who handsome gets should handsome pay!’
‘Aunt, you are friends!’ ‘Ah, to be sure!
‘Good morning! Go on flattering, Sir;
‘A woman, like the Koh-i-noor,
‘Mounts to the price that's put on her.’

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto X.

Preludes.

I Frost in Harvest
The lover who, across a gulf
Of ceremony, views his Love,
And dares not yet address herself,
Pays worship to her stolen glove.
The gulf o'erleapt, the lover wed,
It happens oft, (let truth be told),
The halo leaves the sacred head,
Respect grows lax, and worship cold,
And all love's May-day promising,
Like song of birds before they pair,
Or flush of flowers in boastful Spring,
Dies out, and leaves the Summer bare
Yet should a man, it seems to me,
Honour what honourable is,
For some more honourable plea
Than only that it is not his.
The gentle wife, who decks his board
And makes his day to have no night,
Whose wishes wait upon her lord,
Who finds her own in his delight,
Is she another now than she
Who, mistress of her maiden charms,
At his wild prayer, incredibly
Committed them to his proud arms?
Unless her choice of him's a slur
Which makes her proper credit dim,
He never enough can honour her
Who past all speech has honour'd him.

II Felicity
To marry her and take her home!
The poet, painting pureness, tells
Of lilies; figures power by Rome;
And each thing shows by something else!
But through the songs of poets look,
And who so lucky to have found
In universal nature's book
A likeness for a life so crown'd!
Here they speak best who best express
Their inability to speak,
And none are strong, but who confess
With happy skill that they are weak.

III Marriage Indissoluble
'In heaven none marry.' Grant the most
Which may by this dark word be meant,
Who shall forbid the eternal boast
'I kiss'd, and kiss'd with her consent!'
If here, to Love, past favour is

A present boast, delight, and chain,
What lacks of honour, bond, and bliss,
Where Now and Then are no more twain!

The Epitaph.

I
'At Church, in twelve hours more, we meet!
'This, Dearest, is our last farewell.'
'Oh, Felix, do you love me?' 'Sweet,
'Why do you ask?' 'I cannot tell.'

II
And was it no vain fantasy
That raised me from the earth with pride?
Should I to-morrow verily
Be Bridegroom, and Honoria Bride?
Should I, in simple fact, henceforth
Live unconditionally lord
Of her whose smile for brightest worth
Seem'd all too bountiful reward?
Incredible life's promise seem'd,
Or, credible, for life too great;
Love his own deity blasphemed,
And doff'd at last his heavenly state.
What law, if man could mount so high,
To further insolence set bars,
And kept the chaste moon in the sky,
And bade him not tread out the stars!

III
Patience and hope had parted truce,
And, sun-like, Love obscured his ray
With dazzling mists, driven up profuse
Before his own triumphant way.
I thought with prayer how Jacob paid
The patient price of Rachel; then,
Of that calm grace Tobias said,
And Sarah's innocent 'Amen.'
Without avail! O'erwhelming wealth,
The wondrous gift of God so near,
Which should have been delight and health
Made heart and spirit sick and sere.
Until at last the soul of love,
That recks not of its own delight,
Awoke and bade the mists remove,
And then once more I breathed aright;
And I rehears'd my marriage vow,
And swore her welfare to prefer
To all things, and for aye as now

To live, not for myself, but her.
Forth, from the glittering spirit's peace
And gaiety ineffable,
Stream'd to the heart delight and ease,
As from an overflowing well;
And, orderly deriving thence
Its pleasure perfect and allow'd,
Bright with the spirit shone the sense,
As with the sun a fleecy cloud.
If now to part with her could make,
Her pleasure greater, sorrow less,
I for my epitaph would take
'To serve seem'd more than to possess.'
And I perceiv'd, (the vision sweet
Dimming with happy dew mine eyes),
That love and joy are torches lit
From altar-fires of sacrifice.

IV
Across the sky the daylight crept,
And birds grew garrulous in the grove,
And on my marriage-morn I slept
A soft sleep, undisturb'd by love.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto XI.

Preludes.

I Platonic Love
Right art thou who wouldst rather be
A doorkeeper in Love's fair house,
Than lead the wretched revelry
Where fools at swinish troughs carouse.
But do not boast of being least;
And if to kiss thy Mistress' skirt
Amaze thy brain, scorn not the Priest
Whom greater honours do not hurt.
Stand off and gaze, if more than this
Be more than thou canst understand,
Revering him whose power of bliss,
Angelic, dares to seize her hand,
Or whose seraphic love makes flight
To the apprehension of her lips;
And think, the sun of such delight
From thine own darkness takes eclipse.
And, wouldst thou to the same aspire,
This is the art thou must employ,
Live greatly; so shalt thou acquire
Unknown capacities of joy.

II A Demonstration
Nature, with endless being rife,
Parts each thing into 'him' and 'her,'
And, in the arithmetic of life,
The smallest unit is a pair;
And thus, oh, strange, sweet half of me,
If I confess a loftier flame,
If more I love high Heaven than thee,
I more than love thee, thee I am;
And, if the world's not built of lies,
Nor all a cheat the Gospel tells,
If that which from the dead shall rise
Be I indeed, not something else,
There's no position more secure
In reason or in faith than this,
That those conditions must endure,
Which, wanting, I myself should miss.

III The Symbol
As if I chafed the sparks from glass,
And said, 'It lightens,' hitherto
The songs I've made of love may pass
For all but for proportion true;
But likeness and proportion both
Now fail, as if a child in glee,
Catching the flakes of the salt froth,
Cried, 'Look, my mother, here's the sea.'

Yet, by the help of what's so weak,
But not diverse, to those who know,
And only unto those I speak,
May far-inferring fancy show
Love's living sea by coasts uncurb'd,
Its depth, its mystery, and its might,
Its indignation if disturb'd,
The glittering peace of its delight.

IV Constancy rewarded
I vow'd unvarying faith, and she,
To whom in full I pay that vow,
Rewards me with variety
Which men who change can never know.

The Wedding.

I
Life smitten with a feverish chill,
The brain too tired to understand,
In apathy of heart and will,
I took the woman from the hand
Of him who stood for God, and heard
Of Christ, and of the Church his Bride;
The Feast, by presence of the Lord
And his first Wonder, beautified;
The mystic sense to Christian men;
The bonds in innocency made,
And gravely to be enter'd then
For children, godliness, and aid,
And honour'd, and kept free from smirch;
And how a man must love his wife
No less than Christ did love His Church,
If need be, giving her his life;
And, vowing then the mutual vow,
The tongue spoke, but intention slept.
'Tis well for us Heaven asks not how
We take this oath, but how 'tis kept.

II
O, bold seal of a bashful bond,
Which makes the marriage-day to be,
To those before it and beyond,
An iceberg in an Indian sea!

III
‘Now, while she's changing,’ said the Dean,
‘Her bridal for her travelling dress,
‘I'll preach allegiance to your queen!
‘Preaching's the thing which I profess;
‘And one more minute's mine! You know

‘I've paid my girl a father's debt,
‘And this last charge is all I owe.
‘She's your's; but I love more than yet
‘You can; such fondness only wakes
‘When time has raised the heart above
‘The prejudice of youth, which makes
‘Beauty conditional to love.
‘Prepare to meet the weak alarms
‘Of novel nearness: recollect
‘The eye which magnifies her charms
‘Is microscopic for defect.
‘Fear comes at first; but soon, rejoiced,
‘You'll find your strong and tender loves,
‘Like holy rocks by Druids poised,
‘The least force shakes, but none removes.
‘Her strength is your esteem; beware
‘Of finding fault; her will's unnerv'd
‘By blame; from you 'twould be despair;
‘But praise that is not quite deserv'd

‘Will all her noble nature move
‘To make your utmost wishes true.
‘Yet think, while mending thus your Love,
‘Of matching her ideal too!
‘The death of nuptial joy is sloth:
‘To keep your mistress in your wife,
‘Keep to the very height your oath,
‘And honour her with arduous life.
‘Lastly, no personal reverence doff.
‘Life's all externals unto those
‘Who pluck the blushing petals off,
‘To find the secret of the rose.—
‘How long she's tarrying! Green's Hotel
‘I'm sure you'll like. The charge is fair,
‘The wines good. I remember well
‘I stay'd once, with her Mother, there.
‘A tender conscience of her vow
‘That Mother had! She's so like her!’
But Mrs. Fife, much flurried, now
Whisper'd, ‘Miss Honor's ready, Sir.’

IV
Whirl'd off at last, for speech I sought,
To keep shy Love in countenance;
But, whilst I vainly tax'd my thought,
Her voice deliver'd mine from trance:
‘Look, is not this a pretty shawl,
‘Aunt's parting gift.’ ‘She's always kind,’
‘The new wing spoils Sir John's old Hall:
‘You'll see it, if you pull the blind.’

V
I drew the silk: in heaven the night
Was dawning; lovely Venus shone,
In languishment of tearful light,
Swathed by the red breath of the sun.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. Canto XII.

Preludes

I The Married Lover
Why, having won her, do I woo?
Because her spirit's vestal grace
Provokes me always to pursue,
But, spirit-like, eludes embrace;
Because her womanhood is such
That, as on court-days subjects kiss
The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch
Affirms no mean familiarness,
Nay, rather marks more fair the height
Which can with safety so neglect
To dread, as lower ladies might,
That grace could meet with disrespect,
Thus she with happy favour feeds
Allegiance from a love so high
That thence no false conceit proceeds
Of difference bridged, or state put by;
Because, although in act and word
As lowly as a wife can be,
Her manners, when they call me lord,
Remind me 'tis by courtesy;
Not with her least consent of will,
Which would my proud affection hurt,
But by the noble style that still
Imputes an unattain'd desert;
Because her gay and lofty brows,
When all is won which hope can ask,
Reflect a light of hopeless snows
That bright in virgin ether bask;
Because, though free of the outer court
I am, this Temple keeps its shrine
Sacred to Heaven; because, in short,
She's not and never can be mine.

II The Amaranth
Feasts satiate; stars distress with height;
Friendship means well, but misses reach,
And wearies in its best delight
Vex'd with the vanities of speech;
Too long regarded, roses even
Afflict the mind with fond unrest;
And to converse direct with Heaven
Is oft a labour in the breast;
Whate'er the up-looking soul admires,
Whate'er the senses' banquet be,
Fatigues at last with vain desires,
Or sickens by satiety;
But truly my delight was more
In her to whom I'm bound for aye
Yesterday than the day before,

And more to-day than yesterday.

Husband And Wife

I
I, while the shop-girl fitted on
The sand-shoes, look'd where, down the bay,
The sea glow'd with a shrouded sun.
'I'm ready, Felix; will you pay?'
That was my first expense for this
Sweet Stranger, now my three days' Wife.
How light the touches are that kiss
The music from the chords of life!

II
Her feet, by half-a-mile of sea,
In spotless sand left shapely prints;
With agates, then, she loaded me;
(The lapidary call'd them flints);
Then, at her wish, I hail'd a boat,
To take her to the ships-of-war,
At anchor, each a lazy mote
Black in the brilliance, miles from shore.

III
The morning breeze the canvas fill'd,
Lifting us o'er the bright-ridged gulf,
And every lurch my darling thrill'd
With light fear smiling at itself;
And, dashing past the 'Arrogant,'
Asleep upon the restless wave,
After its cruise in the Levant,
We reach'd the 'Wolf,' and signal gave
For help to board: with caution meet,
My bride was placed within the chair,
The red flag wrapp'd about her feet,
And so swung laughing through the air.

IV
'Look, Love,' she said, 'there's Frederick Graham,
'My cousin, whom you met, you know.'
And seeing us, the brave man came,
And made his frank and courteous bow,
And gave my hand a sailor's shake,
And said, 'You ask'd me to the Hurst:
'I never thought my luck would make
'Your wife and you my guests the first.'
And Honor, cruel, 'Nor did we:
'Have you not lately changed your ship?'
'Yes: I'm Commander, now,' said he,
With a slight quiver of the lip.

We saw the vessel, shown with pride;
Took luncheon; I must eat his salt!
Parting he said, (I fear my bride
Found him unselfish to a fault),
His wish, he saw, had come to pass,
(And so, indeed, her face express'd),
That that should be, whatever 'twas,
Which made his Cousin happiest.
We left him looking from above;
Rich bankrupt! for he could afford
To say most proudly that his love
Was virtue and its own reward.
But others loved as well as he,
(Thought I, half-anger'd), and if fate,
Unfair, had only fashion'd me
As hapless, I had been as great.

V
As souls, ambitious, but low-born,
If raised past hope by luck or wit,
All pride of place will proudly scorn,
And live as they'd been used to it,
So we two wore our strange estate:
Familiar, unaffected, free,
We talk'd, until the dusk grew late,
Of this and that; but, after tea,
As doubtful if a lot so sweet
As ours was ours in very sooth,
Like children, to promote conceit,
We feign'd that it was not the truth;
And she assumed the maiden coy,
And I adored remorseless charms,
And then we clapp'd our hands for joy,
And ran into each other's arms.

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. The Epilogue

I
‘Ah, dearest Wife, a fresh-lit fire
‘Sends forth to heaven great shows of fume,
‘And watchers, far away, admire;
‘But when the flames their power assume,
‘The more they burn the less they show,
‘The clouds no longer smirch the sky,
‘And then the flames intensest glow
‘When far-off watchers think they die.
‘The fumes of early love my verse
‘Has figured—’ ‘You must paint the flame!’
‘'Twould merit the Promethean curse!
‘But now, Sweet, for your praise and blame.’
‘You speak too boldly; veils are due
‘To women's feelings.’ ‘Fear not this!
‘Women will vow I say not true,
‘And men believe the lips they kiss.’
‘I did not call you 'Dear' or 'Love,'
‘I think, till after Frank was born.’
‘That fault I cannot well remove;
‘The rhymes’—but Frank now blew his horn,
And Walter bark'd, on hands and knees,
At Baby in the mignonette,
And all made, full-cry, for the trees
Where Felix and his Wife were set.
Again disturb'd, (crickets have cares!)
True to their annual use they rose,
To offer thanks at Evening Prayers
In three times sacred Sarum Close.

II
Passing, they left a gift of wine
At Widow Neale's. Her daughter said:
‘O, Ma'am, she's sinking! For a sign,
‘She cried just now, of him that's dead,
‘'Mary, he's somewhere close above,
‘'Weeping and wailing his dead wife,
‘'With forceful prayers and fatal love
‘'Conjuring me to come to life.
‘'A spirit is terrible though dear!
‘'It comes by night, and sucks my breath,
‘'And draws me with desire and fear.'
‘Ah, Ma'am, she'll soon be his in death!’

III
Vaughan, when his kind Wife's eyes were dry,
Said, ‘This thought crosses me, my Dove;
‘If Heaven should proffer, when we die,
‘Some unconceiv'd, superior love,
‘How take the exchange without despair,
‘Without worse folly how refuse?’

But she, who, wise as she was fair,
For subtle doubts had simple clues,
Said, ‘Custom sanctifies, and faith
‘Is more than joy: ah, how desire
‘In any heaven a different path,
‘Though, found at first, it had been higher?
‘Yet love makes death a dreadful thought!
‘Felix, at what a price we live!’
But present pleasures soon forgot
The future's dread alternative;
For, as became the festal time,
He cheer'd her heart with tender praise,
And speeches wanting only rhyme
To make them like his winged lays.
He discommended girlhood. ‘What
‘For sweetness like the ten-years' wife,
‘Whose customary love is not
‘Her passion, or her play, but life?
‘With beauties so maturely fair,
‘Affecting, mild, and manifold,
‘May girlish charms no more compare
‘Than apples green with apples gold.
‘Ah, still unpraised Honoria, Heaven,
‘When you into my arms it gave,
‘Left nought hereafter to be given
‘But grace to feel the good I have.’

IV
Her own and manhood's modesty
Made dumb her love, but, on their road,
His hand in hers felt soft reply,
And like rejoinder fond bestow'd;
And, when the carriage set them down,
‘How strange,’ said he, ‘'twould seem to meet,
‘When pacing, as we now this town,
‘A Florence or a Lisbon Street,
‘That Laura or that Catherine, who,
‘In the remote, romantic years,
‘From Petrarch or Camoens drew
‘Their songs and their immortal tears!’
But here their converse had its end;
For, crossing the Cathedral Lawn,
There came an ancient college-friend,
Who, introduced to Mrs. Vaughan,
Lifted his hat, and bow'd and smiled,
And fill'd her kind large eyes with joy,
By patting on the cheek her child,
With, ‘Is he yours, this handsome boy?’

Coventry Patmore

The Angel In The House. Book II. The Prologue.

I Her sons pursue the butterflies,
Her baby daughter mocks the doves
With throbbing coo; in his fond eyes
She's Venus with her little Loves;
Her footfall dignifies the earth,
Her form's the native-land of grace,
And, lo, his coming lights with mirth
Its court and capital her face!
Full proud her favour makes her lord,
And that her flatter'd bosom knows.
She takes his arm without a word,
In lanes of laurel and of rose.
Ten years to-day has she been his.
He but begins to understand,
He says, the dignity and bliss
She gave him when she gave her hand.
She, answering, says, he disenchants
The past, though that was perfect; he
Rejoins, the present nothing wants
But briefness to be ecstasy.
He lauds her charms; her beauty's glow
Wins from the spoiler Time new rays;
Bright looks reply, approving so
Beauty's elixir vitæ, praise.
Upon a beech he bids her mark
Where, ten years since, he carved her name;
It grows there with the growing bark,
And in his heart it grows the same.
For that her soft arm presses his
Close to her fond, maternal breast;
He tells her, each new kindness is
The effectual sum of all the rest!
And, whilst the cushat, mocking, coo'd,
They blest the days they had been wed,
At cost of those in which he woo'd,
Till everything was three times said;
And words were growing vain, when Briggs,
Factotum, Footman, Butler, Groom,
Who press'd the cyder, fed the pigs,
Preserv'd the rabbits, drove the brougham,
And help'd, at need, to mow the lawns,
And sweep the paths and thatch the hay,
Here brought the Post down, Mrs. Vaughan's
Sole rival, but, for once, to-day,
Scarce look'd at; for the 'Second Book,'
Till this tenth festival kept close,
Was thus commenced, while o'er them shook
The laurel married with the rose.

II
'The pulse of War, whose bloody heats
'Sane purposes insanely work,

‘Now with fraternal frenzy beats,
‘And binds the Christian to the Turk,
‘And shrieking fifes’—

III
But, with a roar,
In rush'd the Loves; the tallest roll'd
A hedgehog from his pinafore,
Which saved his fingers; Baby, bold,
Touch'd it, and stared, and scream'd for life,
And stretch'd her hand for Vaughan to kiss,
Who hugg'd his Pet, and ask'd his wife,
‘Is this for love, or love for this?’
But she turn'd pale, for, lo, the beast,
Found stock-still in the rabbit-trap,
And feigning so to be deceased,
And laid by Frank upon her lap,
Unglobed himself, and show'd his snout,
And fell, scatt'ring the Loves amain,
With shriek, with laughter, and with shout;
And, peace at last restored again,
The Bard, who this untimely hitch
Bore with a calm magnanimous,
(The hedgehog roll'd into a ditch,
And Venus sooth'd), proceeded thus:

Coventry Patmore

The Azalea

There, where the sun shines first
Against our room,
She train'd the gold Azalea, whose perfume
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.
Last night the delicate crests of saffron bloom,
For this their dainty likeness watch'd and nurst,
Were just at point to burst.
At dawn I dream'd, O God, that she was dead,
And groan'd aloud upon my wretched bed,
And waked, ah, God, and did not waken her,
But lay, with eyes still closed,
Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere
By which I knew so well that she was near,
My heart to speechless thankfulness composed.
Till 'gan to stir
A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head--
It was the azalea's breath, and she was dead!
The warm night had the lingering buds disclosed,
And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast
A chance-found letter press'd
In which she said,
'So, till to-morrow eve, my Own, adieu!
Parting's well-paid with soon again to meet,
Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,
Sweet to myself that am so sweet to you!'

Coventry Patmore

The Barren Shore

Full many sing to me and thee
Their riches gather'd by the sea;
But I will sing, for I'm footsore,
The burthen of the barren shore.
The hue of love how lively shown
In this sole found cerulean stone
By twenty leagues of ocean roar.
O, burthen of the barren shore!
And these few crystal fragments bright,
As clear as truth, as strong as right,
I found in footing twenty more.
O, burthen of the barren shore!
And how far did I go for this
Small, precious piece of ambergris?
Of weary leagues I went threescore.
O, burthen of the barren shore!
The sand is poor, the sea is rich,
And I, I am I know not which;
And well it were to know no more
The burthen of the barren shore!

Coventry Patmore

The Circles

‘Within yon world-wide cirque of war
What's hidden which they fight so for?’
My guide made answer, ‘Rich increase
Of virtue and use, which are by peace,
And peace by war. That inner ring
Are craftsmen, working many a thing
For use, and, these within, the wise
Explore the grass and read the skies.’
‘Can the stars’ motions give me peace,
Or the herbs' virtues mine increase?
Of all this triple shell,’ said I,
‘Would that I might the kernel spy!’
A narrower circle then I reach'd,
Where sang a few and many preach'd
Of life immortal. ‘But,’ I said,
‘The riddle yet I have not read.
Life I must know, that care I may
For life in me to last for aye.’
Then he, ‘Those voices are a charm
To keep yon dove-cot out of harm.’
In the centre, then, he show'd a tent
Where, laughing safe, a woman bent
Over her babe, and, her above,
Lean'd in his turn a graver love.
‘Behold the two idolatries
By which,’ cried he, ‘the world defies
Chaos and death, and for whose sake
All else must war and work and wake.’

Coventry Patmore

The Falcon

Who would not be Sir Hubert, for his birth and bearing fine,
His rich sky-skirted woodlands, valleys flowing oil and wine;
Sir Hubert, to whose sunning all the rays of fortune shine?
So most men praised Sir Hubert, and some others warm'd with praise
Of Hubert noble-hearted, than whom none went on his ways
Less spoilt by splendid fortune, whom no peril could amaze.
To Ladies all, save one, he was the rule by which the worth
Of other men was reckon'd; so that many a maid, for dearth
Of such a knight to woo her, love forswore, and with it mirth.
No prince could match his banquets, when proud Mabel was his guest;
And shows and sumptuous triumphs day by day his hope express'd
That love e'en yet might burgeon in her young unburgeon'd breast.
Time pass'd, and use for riches pass'd with hope, which slowly fled;
And want came on unheeded; and report in one day spread
Of good Sir Hubert houseless, and of Mabel richly wed.
Forth went he from the city where she dwelt, to one poor farm,
All left of all his valleys: there Sir Hubert's single arm
Served Hubert's wants; and labour soon relieved love's rankling harm.
Much hardship brought much easement of the melancholy freight
He bore within his bosom; and his fancy was elate
And proud of Love's rash sacrifice which led to this estate.
One friend was left, a falcon, famed for beauty, skill, and size,
Kept from his fortune's ruin, for the sake of its great eyes,
That seem'd to him like Mabel's. Of an evening he would rise,
And wake its royal glances and reluctantly flapp'd wings,
And looks of grave communion with his lightsome questionings,
That broke the drowsy sameness, and the sense like fear that springs
At night, when we are conscious of our distance from the strife
Of cities, and the memory of the spirit in all things rife
Endows the silence round us with a grim and ghastly life.
His active resignation wrought, in time, a heartfelt peace,
And though, in noble bosoms, love once lit can never cease,
He could walk and think of Mabel, and his pace would not increase.
Who say, when somewhat distanced from the heat and fiercer might,
'Love's brand burns us no longer; it is out,' use not their sight
For ever and for ever we are lighted by the light:
And ere there be extinguish'd one minutest flame, love-fann'd,
The Pyramids of Egypt shall have no place in the land,
But as a nameless portion of its ever-shifting sand.
News came at last that Mabel was a widow; but, with this,
That all her dead Lord's wealth went first to her one child and his;
So she was not for Hubert, had she beckon'd him to bliss;
For Hubert felt, tho' Mabel might, like him, become resign'd
To poverty for Love's sake, she might never, like him, find
That poverty is plenty, peace, and freedom of the mind.
One morning, while he rested from his delving, spade in hand,
He thought of her and blest her, and he look'd about the land,
And he, and all he look'd at, seem'd to brighten and expand.
The wind was newly risen; and the airy skies were rife
With fleets of sailing cloudlets, and the trees were all in strife,
Extravagantly triumphant at their newly gotten life.
Birds wrangled in the branches, with a trouble of sweet noise;

Even the conscious cuckoo, judging wisest to rejoice,
Shook round his ‘cuckoo, cuckoo,’ as if careless of his voice.
But Hubert mused and marvell'd at the glory in his breast;
The first glow turn'd to passion, and he nursed it unexpress'd;
And glory gilding glory turn'd, at last, to sunny rest.
Then again he look'd around him, like an angel, and, behold,
The scene was changed; no cloudlets cross'd the serious blue, but, roll'd
Behind the distant hill-tops, gleam'd aërial hills of gold.
The wind too was abated, and the trees and birds were grown
As quiet as the cloud-banks; right above, the bright sun shone,
Down looking from the forehead of the giant sky alone.
Then the nightingale, awaken'd by the silence, shot a throng
Of notes into the sunshine: cautious first, then swift and strong;
Then he madly smote them round him, till the bright air throbb'd with song,
And suddenly stopp'd singing, all amid his ecstasies:—
Myrtles rustle; what sees Hubert? sight is sceptic, but his knees
Bend to the Lady Mabel, as she blossoms from the trees.
She spoke, her eyes cast downwards, while upon them, dropp'd half way,
Lids fairer than the bosom of an unblown lily lay:
‘In faith of ancient amity, Sir Hubert, I this day
‘Would beg a boon, and bind me your great debtor.’ O, her mouth
Was sweet beyond new honey, or the bean-perfumed South,
And better than pomegranates to a pilgrim dumb for drouth!
She look'd at his poor homestead; at the spade beside his hand;
And then her heart reproach'd her, What inordinate demand
Was she come there for making! Then she says, in accents bland,
Her Page and she are weary, and her wish can wait; she'll share
His noontide meal, by his favour. This he hastens to prepare;
But, lo! the roost is empty, and his humble larder bare.
No friend has he to help him; no one near of whom to claim
The tax, and force its payment in his passion's sovereign name;
No time to set the pitfalls for the swift and fearful game;
Too late to fly his falcon, which, as if it would assist
Its master's trouble, perches on his idly proffer'd fist,
With busy, dumb caresses, treading up and down his wrist.
But now a gleam of comfort and a shadow of dismay
Pass o'er the good knight's features; now it seems he would essay
The fatness of his falcon, while it flaps both wings for play;
Now, lo, the ruthless lover takes it off its trusted stand;
Grasps all its frighten'd body with his hard remorseless hand;
Puts out its faithful life, and plucks and broils it on the brand.
In midst of this her dinner, Mabel gave her wish its word:
‘My wilful child, Sir Hubert, pines from fancy long deferr'd;
And now he raves in fever to possess your famous bird.’
‘Alas!’ he said, ‘behold it there.’ Then nobly did she say:
‘It grieves my heart, Sir Hubert, that I'm much too poor to pay
For this o'er-queenly banquet I am honour'd with to-day;
‘But if, Sir, we two, henceforth, can converse as friends, my board
To you shall be as open as it would were you its Lord.’
And so she bow'd and left him, from his vex'd mind unrestored.
Months pass'd, and Hubert went not, but lived on in his old way;
Until to him, one morning, Mabel sent her Page to say,

That, should it suit his pleasure, she would speak with him that day.
‘Ah, welcome Sir!’ said Mabel, rising courteous, kind and free
‘I hoped, ere this, to have had you for my guest, but now I see
That you are even prouder than they whisper you to be.’
Made grave by her great beauty, but not dazzled, he replied,
With every noble courtesy, to her words; and spoke beside
Such things as are permitted to bare friendship; not in pride,
Or wilful overacting of the right, which often blends
Its sacrificial pathos, bitter-sweet, with lover's ends,
Or that he now remember'd her command to meet ‘as friends;’
But having not had knowledge that the infant heir was dead,
Whose life made it more loving to preserve his love unsaid,
He waited, calmly wondering to what mark this summons led.
She, puzzled with a strangeness by his actions disavow'd,
Spoke further: ‘Once, Sir Hubert, I was thoughtless, therefore proud;
Your love on me shone sunlike. I, alas, have been your cloud,
‘And, graceless, quench'd the light that made me splendid. I would fain
Pay part of what I owe you, that is, if,—alas, but then
I know not! Things are changed, and you are not as other men.’
She strove to give her meaning, yet blush'd deeply with dismay
Lest he should find it. Hubert fear'd she purpos'd to repay
His love with less than love. Thought he, ‘Sin 'twas my hawk to slay!’
His eyes are dropp'd in sorrow from their worshipping: but, lo!
Upon her sable vesture they are fall'n; with progress slow,
Through dawning apprehension to sweet hope, his features glow;
And all at once are lighted with a light, as when the moon,
Long labouring to the margin of a cloud, still seeming soon
About to swim beyond it, bursts at last as bare as noon.
‘O, Lady, I have loved, and long kept silence; but I see
The time is come for speaking, O, sweet Lady, I should be
The blessedest knight in Christendom, were I beloved by thee!’
One small hand's weight of whiteness on her bosom did she press;
The other, woo'd with kisses bold, refused not his caress;
Feasting the hungry silence came, sob-clad, her silver ‘Yes.’

Now who would not be Hubert, for his dark-eyed Bride divine,
Her rich, sky-skirted woodlands, valleys flowing oil and wine,
Sir Hubert to whose sunning all the rays of fortune shine!’

Coventry Patmore

The Foreign Land

A woman is a foreign land,
Of which, though there he settle young,
A man will ne'er quite understand
The customs, politics, and tongue.
The foolish hie them post-haste through,
See fashions odd, and prospects fair,
Learn of the language, "How d'ye do,"
And go and brag they have been there.
The most for leave to trade apply,
For once, at Empire's seat, her heart,
Then get what knowledge ear and eye
Glean chancewise in the life-long mart.
And certain others, few and fit,
Attach them to the Court, and see
The Country's best, its accent hit,
And partly sound its polity.

Coventry Patmore

The Kiss

'I saw you take his kiss!' ''Tis true.'
'O, modesty!' ' 'Twas strictly kept:
He thought me asleep; at least I knew
He thought I thought he thought I slept.'

Coventry Patmore

The Married Lover

Why, having won her, do I woo?
Because her spirit's vestal grace
Provokes me always to pursue,
But, spirit-like, eludes embrace;
Because her womanhood is such
That, as on court-days subjects kiss
The Queen's hand, yet so near a touch
Affirms no mean familiarness;
Nay, rather marks more fair the height
Which can with safety so neglect
To dread, as lower ladies might,
That grace could meet with disrespect;
Thus she with happy favour feeds
Allegiance from a love so high
That thence no false conceit proceeds
Of difference bridged, or state put by;
Because although in act and word
As lowly as a wife can be,
Her manners, when they call me lord,
Remind me 'tis by courtesy;
Not with her least consent of will,
Which would my proud affection hurt,
But by the noble style that still
Imputes an unattain'd desert;
Because her gay and lofty brows,
When all is won which hope can ask,
Reflect a light of hopeless snows
That bright in virgin ether bask;
Because, though free of the outer court
I am, this Temple keeps its shrine
Sacred to Heaven; because, in short,
She 's not and never can be mine.

Coventry Patmore

The Open Secret

The Heavens repeat no other Song,
And, plainly or in parable,
The Angels trust, in each man's to gue,
The Treasure's safety to its size.
In shameful Hell
The Lily in last corruption lies,
Where known 'tis, rotten-lily-wise,
By the strange foulness of the smell.
Earth, that, in this arcanum, spies
Proof of high kinship unconceiv'd,
By all desired and disbeliev'd,
Shews fancies, in each thing that is,
Which nothing mean, not meaning this,
Yea, does from her own law, to hint it, err,
As 'twere a trust too huge for her.
Maiden and Youth pipe wondrous clear
The tune they are the last to hear.
'Tis the strange gem in Pleasure's cup.
Physician and Philosopher,
In search of acorns, plough it up,
But count it nothing 'mong their gains,
Nay, call it pearl, they'd answer, ‘Lo,
Blest Land where pearls as large as pumpkins grow!’
And would not even rend you for your pains.
To tell men truth, yet keep them dark
And shooting still beside the mark,
God, as in jest, gave to their wish,
The Sign of Jonah and the Fish.
'Tis the name new, on the white stone,
To none but them that have it known;
And even these can scarce believe, but cry,
‘When turn'd was Sion's captivity,
Then were we, yea, and yet we seem
Like them that dream!’
In Spirit 'tis a punctual ray
Of peace that sheds more light than day;
In Will and Mind
'Tis the easy path so hard to find;
In Heart, a pain not to be told,
Were words mere honey, milk, and gold;
I' the Body 'tis the bag of the bee;
In all, the present, thousandfold amends
Made to the sad, astonish'd life
Of him that leaves house, child, and wife,
And on God's 'hest, almost despairing, wends,
As little guessing as the herd
What a strange Phœnix of a bird
Builds in this tree,
But only intending all that He intends.

To this, the Life of them that live,
If God would not, thus far, give tongue,

Ah, why did He his secret give
To one that has the gift of song?
But all He does He doubtless means,
And, if the Mystery that smites Prophets dumb
Here, to the grace-couch'd eyes of some,
Shapes to its living face the clinging shroud,
Perchance the Skies grow tired of screens,
And 'tis His Advent in the Cloud.

Coventry Patmore

The Revelation

An idle poet, here and there,
Looks around him; but, for all the rest,
The world, unfathomably fair,
Is duller than a witling's jest.
Love wakes men, once a lifetime each;
They lift their heavy lids, and look;
And, lo, what one sweet page can teach,
They read with joy, then shut the book.
And some give thanks, and some blaspheme
And most forget; but, either way,
That and the Child's unheeded dream
Is all the light of all their day.

Coventry Patmore

The River

It is a venerable place,
An old ancestral ground,
So broad, the rainbow wholly stands
Within its lordly bound;
And here the river waits and winds
By many a wooded mound.
Upon a rise, where single oaks
And clumps of beeches tall
Drop pleasantly their shade beneath,
Half-hid amidst them all,
Stands in its quiet dignity
An ancient manor-hall.
About its many gable-ends
The swallows wheel their flight;
The huge fantastic weather-vanes
Look happy in the light;
The warm front through the foliage gleams,
A comfortable sight.
The ivied turrets seem to love
The low, protected leas;
And, though this manor-hall hath seen
The snow of centuries,
How freshly still it stands amid
Its wealth of swelling trees!
The leafy summer-time is young;
The yearling lambs are strong;
The sunlight glances merrily;
The trees are full of song;
The valley-loving river flows
Contentedly along.
Look where the merry weather-vanes
Veer upon yonder tower:
There, amid starry jessamine
And clasping passion-flower,
The sweetest Maid of all the land
Is weeping in her bower.
Alas, the lowly Youth she loves
Loves her, but fears to sue:
He came this morning hurriedly;
Then forth her blushes flew!
But he talk'd of common things, and so
Her eyes are fill'd with dew.
Time passes on; the clouds are come;
The river, late so bright,
Rolls foul and black, and gloomily
Makes known across the night,
In far-heard plash and weary drench,
The passage of its might.
The noble Bridegroom counts the hours;
The guests are coming fast;
(The vanes are creaking drearily
Within the dying blast!)

The bashful Bride is at his side;
And night is here at last.
The guests are gay; the minstrels play;
'Tis liker noon than night;
From side to side, they toast the Bride,
Who blushes ruby light:
For one and all within that hall,
It is a cheerful sight.
But unto one, who stands alone,
Among the mists without,
Watching the windows, bright with shapes
Of king and saint devout,
Strangely across the muffled air
Pierces the laughter-shout.
No sound or sight this solemn night
But moves the soul to fear:
The faded saints stare through the gloom,
Askant, and wan, and blear;
And wither'd cheeks of watchful kings
Start from their purple gear.
The burthen of the wedding-song
Comes to him like a wail;
The stream, athwart the cedar-grove,
Is shining ghastly pale:
His cloudy brow clears suddenly!
Dark soul, what does thee ail?
He turns him from the lighted hall;
The pale stream curls and heaves
And moans beyond the gloomy wood,
Through which he breaks and cleaves;
And now his footfall dies away
Upon the wither'd leaves.
The restless moon, among the clouds,
Is loitering slowly by;
Now in a circle like the ring
About a weeping eye;
Now left quite bare and bright; and now
A pallor in the sky;
And now she's looking through the mist,
Cold, lustreless, and wan,
And wildly, past her dreary form,
The watery clouds rush on,
A moment white beneath her light,
And then, like spirits, gone.
Silent and fast they hurry past,
Their swiftness striketh dread,
For earth is hush'd, and no breath sweeps
The spider's rainy thread,
And everything, but those pale clouds,
Is dark, and still, and dead.
The lonely stars are here and there,
But weak and wasting all;

The winds are dead, the cedars spread
Their branches like a pall;
The guests, by laughing twos and threes,
Have left the bridal hall.
Beneath the mossy, ivied bridge,
The river slippeth past:
The current deep is still as sleep,
And yet so very fast!
There's something in its quietness
That makes the soul aghast.
No wind is in the willow-tree
That droops above the bank;
The water passes quietly
Beneath the sedges dank;
Yet the willow trembles in the stream,
And the dry reeds talk and clank.
The weak stars swoon; the jagged moon
Is lost in the cloudy air.
No thought of light! save where the wave
Sports with a fitful glare.
The dumb and dreadful world is full
Of darkness and night-mare.
The hall-clocks clang; the watch-dog barks.
What are his dreams about?
Marsh lights leap, and tho' fast asleep
The owlets shriek and shout;
The stars, thro' chasms in utter black,
Race like a drunken rout.
'Wake, wake, oh wake!' the Bridegroom now
Calls to his sleeping Bride:
'Alas, I saw thee, pale and dead,
Roll down a frightful tide!'
He takes her hand: 'How chill thou art!
What is it, sweet my Bride?'

The Bride bethinks her now of him
Who last night was no guest.
'Sweet Heaven! and for me? I dream!
Be calm, thou throbbing breast.'
She says, in thought, a solemn prayer
And sinks again to rest.
Along, along, swiftly and strong
The river slippeth past;
The current deep is still as sleep,
And yet so very fast!
There's something in its quietness
That makes the soul aghast.
The morn has risen: wildly by
The water glides to-day;
Outspread upon its eddying face,
Long weeds and rushes play;
And on the bank the fungus rots,

And the grass is foul'd with clay.
Time passes on: the park is bare;
The year is scant and lean;
The river's banks are desolate;
The air is chill and keen;
But, now and then, a sunny day
Comes with a thought of green.
Amid blear February's flaw,
Tremulous snowdrops peep;
The crocus, in the shrewd March morn,
Starts from its wintry sleep;
The daisies sun themselves in hosts,
Among the pasturing sheep.
The waters, in their old content,
Between fresh margins run;
The pike, as trackless as a sound,
Shoots thro' the current dun;
And languid new-born chestnut-leaves
Expand beneath the sun.
The summer's prime is come again;
The lilies bloom anew;
The current keeps the doubtful past
Deep in its bosom blue,
And babbles low thro' quiet fields
Gray with the falling dew.
The sheep-bell tolls the curfew-time;
The gnats, a busy rout,
Fleck the warm air; the distant owl
Shouteth a sleepy shout;
The voiceless bat, more felt than seen,
Is flitting round about;
The poplar's leaflet scarcely stirs;
The river seems to think;
Across the dusk, the lily broad
Looks coolly from the brink;
And knee-deep in the freshet's fall,
The meek-eyed cattle drink.
The chafers boom; the white moths rise
Like spirits from the ground;
The gray-flies sing their weary tune,
A distant, dream-like sound;
And far, far off, in the slumberous eve,
Bayeth a restless hound.
At this sweet time, the Lady walks
Beside the gentle stream;
She marks the waters curl along,
Beneath the sunset gleam,
And in her soul a sorrow moves,
Like memory of a dream.
She passes on. How still the earth,
And all the air above!
Here, where of late the scritch-owl shriek'd,

Whispers the happy dove;
And the river, through the ivied bridge,
Flows calm as household love.

Coventry Patmore

The Rosy Bosom’d Hours

A florin to the willing Guard
Secured, for half the way,
(He lock'd us in, ah, lucky-starr'd,)
À curtain'd, front coupé.
The sparkling sun of August shone;
The wind was in the West;
Your gown and all that you had on
Was what became you best;
And we were in that seldom mood
When soul with soul agrees,
Mingling, like flood with equal flood,
In agitated ease.
Far round, each blade of harvest bare
Its little load of bread;
Each furlong of that journey fair
With separate sweetness sped.
The calm of use was coming o'er
The wonder of our wealth,
And now, maybe, 'twas not much more
Than Eden's common health.
We paced the sunny platform, while
The train at Havant changed:
What made the people kindly smile,
Or stare with looks estranged?
Too radiant for a wife you seem'd,
Serener than a bride;
Me happiest born of men I deem'd,
And show'd perchance my pride.
I loved that girl, so gaunt and tall,
Who whispered loud, ‘Sweet Thing!’
Scanning your figure, slight yet all
Round as your own gold ring.
At Salisbury you stray'd alone
Within the shafted glooms,
Whilst I was by the Verger shown
The brasses and the tombs.
At tea we talk'd of matters deep,
Of joy that never dies;
We laugh'd, till love was mix'd with sleep
Within your great sweet eyes.
The next day, sweet with luck no less
And sense of sweetness past,
The full tide of our happiness
Rose higher than the last.
At Dawlish, 'mid the pools of brine,
You stept from rock to rock,
One hand quick tightening upon mine,
One holding up your frock.
On starfish and on weeds alone
You seem'd intent to be:
Flash'd those great gleams of hope unknown
From you, or from the sea?

Ne'er came before, ah, when again
Shall come two days like these:
Such quick delight within the brain,
Within the heart such peace?
I thought, indeed, by magic chance,
A third from Heaven to win,
But as, at dusk, we reach'd Penzance,
A drizzling rain set in.

Coventry Patmore

The Spirit's Depths

Not in the crisis of events
Of compass'd hopes, or fears fulfill'd,
Or acts of gravest consequence,
Are life's delight and depth reveal'd.
The day of days was not the day;
That went before, or was postponed;
The night Death took our lamp away
Was not the night on which we groan'd.
I drew my bride, beneath the moon,
Across my threshold; happy hour!
But, ah, the walk that afternoon
We saw the water-flags in flower!

Coventry Patmore

The Storm

Within the pale blue haze above,
Some pitchy shreds took size and form,
And, like a madman's wrath or love,
From nothing rose a sudden storm.
The blossom'd limes, which seem'd to exhale
Her breath, were swept with one strong sweep,
And up the dusty road the hail
Came like a flock of hasty sheep,
Driving me under a cottage-porch,
Whence I could see the distant Spire,
Which, in the darkness, seem'd a torch
Touch'd with the sun's retreating fire.
A voice, so sweet that even her voice,
I thought, could scarcely be more sweet,
As thus I stay'd against my choice,
Did mine attracted hearing greet;
And presently I turn'd my head
Where the kind music seem'd to be,
And where, to an old blind man, she read
The words that teach the blind to see.
She did not mark me; swift I went,
Thro' the fierce shower's whistle and smoke,
To her home, and thence her woman sent
Back with umbrella, shoes and cloak.
The storm soon pass'd; the sun's quick glare
Lay quench'd in vapour fleecy, fray'd;
And all the moist, delicious air
Was fill'd with shine that cast no shade;
And, when she came, forth the sun gleam'd,
And clash'd the trembling Minster chimes;
And the breath with which she thank'd me seem'd
Brought thither from the blossom'd limes.

Coventry Patmore

The Three Witnesses

Musing I met, in no strange land,
What meet thou must to understand:
An Angel. There was none but he,
Yet 'twas a glorious company.
God, Youth, and Goddess, one, twain, trine,
In altering wedlock flamed benign.
The Youth i' the midst did shadowy seem,
Till merged in either blest extreme,
But could, by choosing, each way turn,
And, with God, for the Goddess burn,
Or vanish in the Goddess quite,
To be, with her, the God's delight;
And, whether he chose Hers or His,
He glow'd at once with either's bliss.
The head was Godhead without guile,
A solar force, an infant's smile;
Breasted the Wonder was and loin'd
With Man and Woman's beauties join'd;
And thence, O, moonlike and most sweet,
The Goddess brighten'd to the feet,
Which, when they felt the one the other,
Felt each like Cupid and his Mother.
Unwearying, since I caught that sight,
Him have I praised by whose word's might
The Heavens and the Earth did breathe
And the gay Waters underneath.

Coventry Patmore

The Toys

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
—His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells,
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with trancèd breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

Coventry Patmore

The Unknown Eros

Proem

‘Many speak wisely, some inerrably:
Witness the beast who talk'd that should have bray'd,
And Caiaphas that said
Expedient 'twas for all that One should die;
But what avails
When Love's right accent from their wisdom fails,
And the Truth-criers know not what they cry!
Say, wherefore thou,
As under bondage of some bitter vow,
Warblest no word,
When all the rest are shouting to be heard?
Why leave the fervid running just when Fame
'Gan whispering of thy name
Amongst the hard-pleased Judges of the Course?
Parch'd is thy crystal-flowing source?
Pierce, then, with thought's steel probe, the trodden ground,
Till passion's buried floods be found;
Intend thine eye
Into the dim and undiscover'd sky
Whose lustres are the pulsings of the heart,
And promptly, as thy trade is, watch to chart
The lonely suns, the mystic hazes and throng'd sparkles bright
That, named and number'd right
In sweet, transpicuous words, shall glow alway
With Love's three-stranded ray,
Red wrath, compassion golden, lazuline delight.’

Thus in reproof of my despondency,
My Mentor; and thus I:

O, season strange for song!
And yet some timely power persuades my lips.
Is't England's parting soul that nerves my tongue,
As other Kingdoms, nearing their eclipse,
Have, in their latest bards, uplifted strong
The voice that was their voice in earlier days?
Is it her sudden, loud and piercing cry,
The note which those that seem too weak to sigh
Will sometimes utter just before they die?

Lo, weary of the greatness of her ways,
There lies my Land, with hasty pulse and hard,
Her ancient beauty marr'd,
And, in her cold and aimless roving sight,
Horror of light;
Sole vigour left in her last lethargy,
Save when, at bidding of some dreadful breath,
The rising death
Rolls up with force;
And then the furiously gibbering corse

Shakes, panglessly convuls'd, and sightless stares,
Whilst one Physician pours in rousing wines,
One anodynes,
And one declares
That nothing ails it but the pains of growth.

My last look loth
Is taken; and I turn, with the relief
Of knowing that my life-long hope and grief
Are surely vain,
To that unshapen time to come, when She,
A dim, heroic Nation long since dead,
The foulness of her agony forgot,
Shall all benignly shed
Through ages vast
The ghostly grace of her transfigured past
Over the present, harass'd and forlorn,
Of nations yet unborn;
And this shall be the lot
Of those who, in the bird-voice and the blast
Of her omniloquent tongue,
Have truly sung
Or greatly said,
To shew as one
With those who have best done,
And be as rays,
Thro' the still altering world, around her changeless head.

Therefore no 'plaint be mine
Of listeners none,
No hope of render'd use or proud reward,
In hasty times and hard;
But chants as of a lonely thrush's throat
At latest eve,
That does in each calm note
Both joy and grieve;
Notes few and strong and fine,
Gilt with sweet day's decline,
And sad with promise of a different sun.

'Mid the loud concert harsh
Of this fog-folded marsh,
To me, else dumb,
Uranian Clearness, come!
Give me to breathe in peace and in surprise
The light-thrill'd ether of your rarest skies,
Till inmost absolution start
The welling in the grateful eyes,
The heaving in the heart.
Winnow with sighs
And wash away
With tears the dust and stain of clay,

Till all the Song be Thine, as beautiful as Morn,
Bedeck'd with shining clouds of scorn;
And Thou, Inspirer, deign to brood
O'er the delighted words, and call them Very Good.
This grant, Clear Spirit; and grant that I remain
Content to ask unlikely gifts in vain.

Coventry Patmore

The Unknown Eros. Book I.

I
Saint Valentine’s Day

Well dost thou, Love, thy solemn Feast to hold
In vestal February;
Not rather choosing out some rosy day
From the rich coronet of the coming May,
When all things meet to marry!

O, quick, prævernal Power
That signall'st punctual through the sleepy mould
The Snowdrop's time to flower,
Fair as the rash oath of virginity
Which is first-love's first cry;
O, Baby Spring,
That flutter'st sudden 'neath the breast of Earth
A month before the birth;
Whence is the peaceful poignancy,
The joy contrite,
Sadder than sorrow, sweeter than delight,
That burthens now the breath of everything,
Though each one sighs as if to each alone
The cherish'd pang were known?
At dusk of dawn, on his dark spray apart,
With it the Blackbird breaks the young Day's heart;
In evening's hush
About it talks the heavenly-minded Thrush;
The hill with like remorse
Smiles to the Sun's smile in his westering course;
The fisher's drooping skiff
In yonder sheltering bay;
The choughs that call about the shining cliff;
The children, noisy in the setting ray;
Own the sweet season, each thing as it may;
Thoughts of strange kindness and forgotten peace
In me increase;
And tears arise
Within my happy, happy Mistress' eyes,
And, lo, her lips, averted from my kiss,
Ask from Love's bounty, ah, much more than bliss!

Is't the sequester'd and exceeding sweet
Of dear Desire electing his defeat?
Is't the waked Earth now to yon purpling cope
Uttering first-love's first cry,
Vainly renouncing, with a Seraph's sigh,
Love's natural hope?
Fair-meaning Earth, foredoom'd to perjury!
Behold, all amorous May,
With roses heap'd upon her laughing brows,
Avoids thee of thy vows!
Were it for thee, with her warm bosom near,

To abide the sharpness of the Seraph's sphere?
Forget thy foolish words;
Go to her summons gay,
Thy heart with dead, wing'd Innocencies fill'd,
Ev'n as a nest with birds
After the old ones by the hawk are kill'd.

Well dost thou, Love, to celebrate
The noon of thy soft ecstasy,
Or e'er it be too late,
Or e'er the Snowdrop die!

II
Wind And Wave

The wedded light and heat,
Winnowing the witless space,
Without a let,
What are they till they beat
Against the sleepy sod, and there beget
Perchance the violet!
Is the One found,
Amongst a wilderness of as happy grace,
To make Heaven's bound;
So that in Her
All which it hath of sensitively good
Is sought and understood
After the narrow mode the mighty Heavens prefer?
She, as a little breeze
Following still Night,
Ripples the spirit's cold, deep seas
Into delight;
But, in a while,
The immeasurable smile
Is broke by fresher airs to flashes blent
With darkling discontent;
And all the subtle zephyr hurries gay,
And all the heaving ocean heaves one way,
T'ward the void sky-line and an unguess'd weal;
Until the vanward billows feel
The agitating shallows, and divine the goal,
And to foam roll,
And spread and stray
And traverse wildly, like delighted hands,
The fair and fleckless sands;
And so the whole
Unfathomable and immense
Triumphing tide comes at the last to reach
And burst in wind-kiss'd splendours on the deaf'ning beach,
Where forms of children in first innocence
Laugh and fling pebbles on the rainbow'd crest

Of its untired unrest.

III
Winter

I, singularly moved
To love the lovely that are not beloved,
Of all the Seasons, most
Love Winter, and to trace
The sense of the Trophonian pallor on her face.
It is not death, but plenitude of peace;
And the dim cloud that does the world enfold
Hath less the characters of dark and cold
Than warmth and light asleep,
And correspondent breathing seems to keep
With the infant harvest, breathing soft below
Its eider coverlet of snow.
Nor is in field or garden anything
But, duly look'd into, contains serene
The substance of things hoped for, in the Spring,
And evidence of Summer not yet seen.
On every chance-mild day
That visits the moist shaw,
The honeysuckle, 'sdaining to be crost
In urgence of sweet life by sleet or frost,
'Voids the time's law
With still increase
Of leaflet new, and little, wandering spray;
Often, in sheltering brakes,
As one from rest disturb'd in the first hour,
Primrose or violet bewilder'd wakes,
And deems 'tis time to flower;
Though not a whisper of her voice he hear,
The buried bulb does know
The signals of the year,
And hails far Summer with his lifted spear.
The gorse-field dark, by sudden, gold caprice,
Turns, here and there, into a Jason's fleece;
Lilies, that soon in Autumn slipp'd their gowns of green,
And vanish'd into earth,
And came again, ere Autumn died, to birth,
Stand full-array'd, amidst the wavering shower,
And perfect for the Summer, less the flower;
In nook of pale or crevice of crude bark,
Thou canst not miss,
If close thou spy, to mark
The ghostly chrysalis,
That, if thou touch it, stirs in its dream dark;
And the flush'd Robin, in the evenings hoar,
Does of Love's Day, as if he saw it, sing;
But sweeter yet than dream or song of Summer or Spring

Are Winter's sometime smiles, that seem to well
From infancy ineffable;
Her wandering, languorous gaze,
So unfamiliar, so without amaze,
On the elemental, chill adversity,
The uncomprehended rudeness; and her sigh
And solemn, gathering tear,
And look of exile from some great repose, the sphere
Of ether, moved by ether only, or
By something still more tranquil.

IV
Beta

Of infinite Heaven the rays,
Piercing some eyelet in our cavern black,
Ended their viewless track
On thee to smite
Solely, as on a diamond stalactite,
And in mid-darkness lit a rainbow's blaze,
Wherein the absolute Reason, Power, and Love,
That erst could move
Mainly in me but toil and weariness,
Renounced their deadening might,
Renounced their undistinguishable stress
Of withering white,
And did with gladdest hues my spirit caress,
Nothing of Heaven in thee showing infinite,
Save the delight.

V
The Day After To-Morrow

Perchance she droops within the hollow gulf
Which the great wave of coming pleasure draws,
Not guessing the glad cause!
Ye Clouds that on your endless journey go,
Ye Winds that westward flow,
Thou heaving Sea
That heav'st 'twixt her and me,
Tell her I come;
Then only sigh your pleasure, and be dumb;
For the sweet secret of our either self
We know.
Tell her I come,
And let her heart be still'd.
One day's controlled hope, and then one more,
And on the third our lives shall be fulfill'd!
Yet all has been before:
Palm placed in palm, twin smiles, and words astray.

What other should we say?
But shall I not, with ne'er a sign, perceive,
Whilst her sweet hands I hold,
The myriad threads and meshes manifold
Which Love shall round her weave:
The pulse in that vein making alien pause
And varying beats from this;
Down each long finger felt, a differing strand
Of silvery welcome bland;
And in her breezy palm
And silken wrist,
Beneath the touch of my like numerous bliss
Complexly kiss'd,
A diverse and distinguishable calm?
What should we say!
It all has been before;
And yet our lives shall now be first fulfill'd,
And into their summ'd sweetness fall distill'd
One sweet drop more;
One sweet drop more, in absolute increase
Of unrelapsing peace.

O, heaving Sea,
That heav'st as if for bliss of her and me,
And separatest not dear heart from heart,
Though each 'gainst other beats too far apart,
For yet awhile
Let it not seem that I behold her smile.
O, weary Love, O, folded to her breast,
Love in each moment years and years of rest,
Be calm, as being not.
Ye oceans of intolerable delight,
The blazing photosphere of central Night,
Be ye forgot.
Terror, thou swarthy Groom of Bride-bliss coy,
Let me not see thee toy.
O, Death, too tardy with thy hope intense
Of kisses close beyond conceit of sense;
O, Life, too liberal, while to take her hand
Is more of hope than heart can understand;
Perturb my golden patience not with joy,
Nor, through a wish, profane
The peace that should pertain
To him who does by her attraction move.
Has all not been before?
One day's controlled hope, and one again,
And then the third, and ye shall have the rein,
O Life, Death, Terror, Love!
But soon let your unrestful rapture cease,
Ye flaming Ethers thin,
Condensing till the abiding sweetness win
One sweet drop more;

One sweet drop more in the measureless increase
Of honied peace.

VI
Tristitia

Darling, with hearts conjoin'd in such a peace
That Hope, so not to cease,
Must still gaze back,
And count, along our love's most happy track,
The landmarks of like inconceiv'd increase,
Promise me this:
If thou alone should'st win
God's perfect bliss,
And I, beguiled by gracious-seeming sin,
Say, loving too much thee,
Love's last goal miss,
And any vows may then have memory,
Never, by grief for what I bear or lack,
To mar thy joyance of heav'n's jubilee.
Promise me this;
For else I should be hurl'd,
Beyond just doom
And by thy deed, to Death's interior gloom,
From the mild borders of the banish'd world
Wherein they dwell
Who builded not unalterable fate
On pride, fraud, envy, cruel lust, or hate;
Yet loved too laxly sweetness and heart's ease,
And strove the creature more than God to please.

For such as these
Loss without measure, sadness without end!
Yet not for this do thou disheaven'd be
With thinking upon me.
Though black, when scann'd from heaven's surpassing bright,
This might mean light,
Foil'd with the dim days of mortality.
For God is everywhere.
Go down to deepest Hell, and He is there,
And, as a true but quite estranged Friend,
He works, 'gainst gnashing teeth of devilish ire,
With love deep hidden lest it be blasphemed,
If possible, to blend
Ease with the pangs of its inveterate fire;
Yea, in the worst
And from His Face most wilfully accurst
Of souls in vain redeem'd,
He does with potions of oblivion kill
Remorse of the lost Love that helps them still.

Apart from these,
Near the sky-borders of that banish'd world,
Wander pale spirits among willow'd leas,
Lost beyond measure, sadden'd without end,
But since, while erring most, retaining yet
Some ineffectual fervour of regret,
Retaining still such weal
As spurned Lovers feel,
Preferring far to all the world's delight
Their loss so infinite,
Or Poets, when they mark
In the clouds dun
A loitering flush of the long sunken sun,
And turn away with tears into the dark.

Know, Dear, these are not mine
But Wisdom's words, confirmed by divine
Doctors and Saints, though fitly seldom heard
Save in their own prepense-occulted word,
Lest fools be fool'd the further by false hope,
And wrest sweet knowledge to their own decline;
And (to approve I speak within my scope)
The Mistress of that dateless exile gray
Is named in surpliced Schools Tristitia.

But, O, my Darling, look in thy heart and see
How unto me,
Secured of my prime care, thy happy state,
In the most unclean cell
Of sordid Hell,
And worried by the most ingenious hate,
It never could be anything but well,
Nor from my soul, full of thy sanctity,
Such pleasure die
As the poor harlot's, in whose body stirs
The innocent life that is and is not hers:
Unless, alas, this fount of my relief
By thy unheavenly grief
Were closed.
So, with a consecrating kiss
And hearts made one in past all previous peace,
And on one hope reposed,
Promise me this!

VII
The Azalea

There, where the sun shines first
Against our room,
She train'd the gold Azalea, whose perfume
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.

Last night the delicate crests of saffron bloom,
For this their dainty likeness watch'd and nurst,
Were just at point to burst.
At dawn I dream'd, O God, that she was dead,
And groan'd aloud upon my wretched bed,
And waked, ah, God, and did not waken her,
But lay, with eyes still closed,
Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere
By which I knew so well that she was near,
My heart to speechless thankfulness composed.
Till 'gan to stir
A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head—
It was the azalea's breath, and she was dead!
The warm night had the lingering buds disclosed,
And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast
A chance-found letter press'd
In which she said,
'So, till to-morrow eve, my Own, adieu!
Parting's well-paid with soon again to meet,
Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,
Sweet to myself that am so sweet to you!'

VIII
Departure

It was not like your great and gracious ways!
Do you, that have nought other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days,
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye?
I knew, indeed, that you were parting soon;
And so we sate, within the low sun's rays,
You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,
Your harrowing praise.
Well, it was well,
To hear you such things speak,
And I could tell
What made your eyes a growing gloom of love,
As a warm South-wind sombres a March grove.
And it was like your great and gracious ways
To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,
Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash
To let the laughter flash,
Whilst I drew near,
Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.
But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,

With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd:
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

IX
Eurydice

Is this the portent of the day nigh past,
And of a restless grave
O'er which the eternal sadness gathers fast;
Or but the heaped wave
Of some chance, wandering tide,
Such as that world of awe
Whose circuit, listening to a foreign law,
Conjunctures ours at unguess'd dates and wide,
Does in the Spirit's tremulous ocean draw,
To pass unfateful on, and so subside?
Thee, whom ev'n more than Heaven loved I have,
And yet have not been true
Even to thee,
I, dreaming, night by night, seek now to see,
And, in a mortal sorrow, still pursue
Thro' sordid streets and lanes
And houses brown and bare
And many a haggard stair
Ochrous with ancient stains,
And infamous doors, opening on hapless rooms,
In whose unhaunted glooms
Dead pauper generations, witless of the sun,
Their course have run;
And ofttimes my pursuit
Is check'd of its dear fruit
By things brimful of hate, my kith and kin,
Furious that I should keep
Their forfeit power to weep,
And mock, with living fear, their mournful malice thin.
But ever, at the last, my way I win
To where, with perfectly sad patience, nurst
By sorry comfort of assured worst,
Ingrain'd in fretted cheek and lips that pine,
On pallet poor
Thou lyest, stricken sick,
Beyond love's cure,
By all the world's neglect, but chiefly mine.
Then sweetness, sweeter than my tongue can tell,
Does in my bosom well,
And tears come free and quick
And more and more abound

For piteous passion keen at having found,
After exceeding ill, a little good;
A little good
Which, for the while,
Fleets with the current sorrow of the blood,
Though no good here has heart enough to smile.

X
The Toys

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet.
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own;
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells
And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah, when at last we lie with tranced breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'lt leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

XI
Tired Memory

The stony rock of death's insensibility
Well'd yet awhile with honey of thy love
And then was dry;

Nor could thy picture, nor thine empty glove,
Nor all thy kind, long letters, nor the band
Which really spann'd
Thy body chaste and warm,
Thenceforward move
Upon the stony rock their wearied charm.
At last, then, thou wast dead.
Yet would I not despair,
But wrought my daily task, and daily said
Many and many a fond, unfeeling prayer,
To keep my vows of faith to thee from harm.
In vain.
‘For 'tis,’ I said, ‘all one,
The wilful faith, which has no joy or pain,
As if 'twere none.’
Then look'd I miserably round
If aught of duteous love were left undone,
And nothing found.
But, kneeling in a Church, one Easter-Day,
It came to me to say:
‘Though there is no intelligible rest,
In Earth or Heaven,
For me, but on her breast,
I yield her up, again to have her given,
Or not, as, Lord, Thou wilt, and that for aye.’
And the same night, in slumber lying,
I, who had dream'd of thee as sad and sick and dying,
And only so, nightly for all one year,
Did thee, my own most Dear,
Possess,
In gay, celestial beauty nothing coy,
And felt thy soft caress
With heretofore unknown reality of joy.
But, in our mortal air,
None thrives for long upon the happiest dream,
And fresh despair
Bade me seek round afresh for some extreme
Of unconceiv'd, interior sacrifice
Whereof the smoke might rise
To God, and 'mind Him that one pray'd below.
And so,
In agony, I cried:
‘My Lord, if Thy strange will be this,
That I should crucify my heart,
Because my love has also been my pride,
I do submit, if I saw how, to bliss
Wherein She has no part.’
And I was heard,
And taken at my own remorseless word.
O, my most Dear,
Was't treason, as I fear?
'Twere that, and worse, to plead thy veiled mind,

Kissing thy babes, and murmuring in mine ear,
'Thou canst not be
Faithful to God, and faithless unto me!'
Ah, prophet kind!
I heard, all dumb and blind
With tears of protest; and I cannot see
But faith was broken. Yet, as I have said,
My heart was dead,
Dead of devotion and tired memory,
When a strange grace of thee
In a fair stranger, as I take it, bred
To her some tender heed,
Most innocent
Of purpose therewith blent,
And pure of faith, I think, to thee; yet such
That the pale reflex of an alien love,
So vaguely, sadly shown,
Did her heart touch
Above
All that, till then, had woo'd her for its own.
And so the fear, which is love's chilly dawn,
Flush'd faintly upon lids that droop'd like thine,
And made me weak,
By thy delusive likeness doubly drawn,
And Nature's long suspended breath of flame
Persuading soft, and whispering Duty's name,
Awhile to smile and speak
With this thy Sister sweet, and therefore mine;
Thy Sister sweet,
Who bade the wheels to stir
Of sensitive delight in the poor brain,
Dead of devotion and tired memory,
So that I lived again,
And, strange to aver,
With no relapse into the void inane,
For thee;
But (treason was't?) for thee and also her.

XII
Magna Est Veritas

Here, in this little Bay,
Full of tumultuous life and great repose,
Where, twice a day,
The purposeless, glad ocean comes and goes,
Under high cliffs, and far from the huge town,
I sit me down.
For want of me the world's course will not fail:
When all its work is done, the lie shall rot;
The truth is great, and shall prevail,
When none cares whether it prevail or not.

XIII
1867

In the year of the great crime,
When the false English Nobles and their Jew,
By God demented, slew
The Trust they stood twice pledged to keep from wrong,
One said, Take up thy Song,
That breathes the mild and almost mythic time
Of England's prime!
But I, Ah, me,
The freedom of the few
That, in our free Land, were indeed the free,
Can song renew?
Ill singing 'tis with blotting prison-bars,
How high soe'er, betwixt us and the stars;
Ill singing 'tis when there are none to hear;
And days are near
When England shall forget
The fading glow which, for a little while,
Illumes her yet,
The lovely smile
That grows so faint and wan,
Her people shouting in her dying ear,
Are not two daws worth two of any swan!

Ye outlaw'd Best, who yet are bright
With the sunken light,
Whose common style
Is Virtue at her gracious ease,
The flower of olden sanctities,
Ye haply trust, by love's benignant guile,
To lure the dark and selfish brood
To their own hated good;
Ye haply dream
Your lives shall still their charmful sway sustain,
Unstifled by the fever'd steam
That rises from the plain.
Know, 'twas the force of function high,
In corporate exercise, and public awe
Of Nature's, Heaven's, and England's Law
That Best, though mix'd with Bad, should reign,
Which kept you in your sky!
But, when the sordid Trader caught
The loose-held sceptre from your hands distraught,
And soon, to the Mechanic vain,
Sold the proud toy for nought,
Your charm was broke, your task was sped,
Your beauty, with your honour, dead,
And though you still are dreaming sweet

Of being even now not less
Than Gods and Goddesses, ye shall not long so cheat
Your hearts of their due heaviness.
Go, get you for your evil watching shriven!
Leave to your lawful Master's itching hands
Your unking'd lands,
But keep, at least, the dignity
Of deigning not, for his smooth use, to be,
Voteless, the voted delegates
Of his strange interests, loves and hates.
In sackcloth, or in private strife
With private ill, ye may please Heaven,
And soothe the coming pangs of sinking life;
And prayer perchance may win
A term to God's indignant mood
And the orgies of the multitude,
Which now begin;
But do not hope to wave the silken rag
Of your unsanction'd flag,
And so to guide
The great ship, helmless on the swelling tide
Of that presumptuous Sea,
Unlit by sun or moon, yet inly bright
With lights innumerable that give no light,
Flames of corrupted will and scorn of right,
Rejoicing to be free.

And, now, because the dark comes on apace
When none can work for fear,
And Liberty in every Land lies slain,
And the two Tyrannies unchallenged reign,
And heavy prophecies, suspended long
At supplication of the righteous few,
And so discredited, to fulfilment throng,
Restrain'd no more by faithful prayer or tear,
And the dread baptism of blood seems near
That brings to the humbled Earth the Time of Grace,
Breathless be song,
And let Christ's own look through
The darkness, suddenly increased,
To the gray secret lingering in the East.

XIV
'If I Were Dead'

'If I were dead, you'd sometimes say, Poor Child!'
The dear lips quiver'd as they spake,
And the tears brake
From eyes which, not to grieve me, brightly smiled.
Poor Child, poor Child!
I seem to hear your laugh, your talk, your song.

It is not true that Love will do no wrong.
Poor Child!
And did you think, when you so cried and smiled,
How I, in lonely nights, should lie awake,
And of those words your full avengers make?
Poor Child, poor Child!
And now, unless it be
That sweet amends thrice told are come to thee,
O God, have Thou no mercy upon me!
Poor Child!

XV
Peace

O England, how hast thou forgot,
In dullard care for undisturb'd increase
Of gold, which profits not,
The gain which once thou knew'st was for thy peace!
Honour is peace, the peace which does accord
Alone with God's glad word:
‘My peace I send you, and I send a sword.’
O England, how hast thou forgot,
How fear'st the things which make for joy, not fear,
Confronted near.
Hard days? 'Tis what the pamper'd seek to buy
With their most willing gold in weary lands.
Loss and pain risk'd? What sport but understands
These for incitements! Suddenly to die,
With conscience a blurr'd scroll?
The sunshine dreaming upon Salmon's height
Is not so sweet and white
As the most heretofore sin-spotted soul
That darts to its delight
Straight from the absolution of a faithful fight.
Myriads of homes unloosen'd of home's bond,
And fill'd with helpless babes and harmless women fond?
Let those whose pleasant chance
Took them, like me, among the German towns,
After the war that pluck'd the fangs from France,
With me pronounce
Whether the frequent black, which then array'd
Child, wife, and maid,
Did most to magnify the sombreness of grief,
Or add the beauty of a staid relief
And freshening foil
To cheerful-hearted Honour's ready smile!

Beneath the heroic sun
Is there then none
Whose sinewy wings by choice do fly
In the fine mountain-air of public obloquy,

To tell the sleepy mongers of false ease
That war's the ordained way of all alive,
And therein with goodwill to dare and thrive
Is profit and heart's peace?

But in his heart the fool now saith:
‘The thoughts of Heaven were past all finding out,
Indeed, if it should rain
Intolerable woes upon our Land again,
After so long a drought!’

‘Will a kind Providence our vessel whelm,
With such a pious Pilot at the helm?’

‘Or let the throats be cut of pretty sheep
That care for nought but pasture rich and deep?’

‘Were 't Evangelical of God to deal so foul a blow
At people who hate Turks and Papists so?’

‘What, make or keep
A tax for ship and gun,
When 'tis full three to one
Yon bully but intends
To beat our friends?’

‘Let's put aside
Our costly pride.
Our appetite's not gone
Because we've learn'd to doff
Our caps, where we were used to keep them on.’

‘If times get worse,
We've money in our purse,
And Patriots that know how, let who will scoff,
To buy our perils off.
Yea, blessed in our midst
Art thou who lately didst,
So cheap,
The old bargain of the Saxon with the Dane.’
Thus in his heart the fool now saith;
And, lo, our trusted leaders trust fool's luck,
Which, like the whale's 'mazed chine,
When they thereon were mulling of their wine,
Will some day duck.

Remnant of Honour, brooding in the dark
Over your bitter cark,
Staring, as Rispah stared, astonied seven days,
Upon the corpses of so many sons,
Who loved her once,
Dead in the dim and lion-haunted ways,

Who could have dreamt
That times should come like these!
Prophets, indeed, taught lies when we were young,
And people loved to have it so;
For they teach well who teach their scholars' tongue!
But that the foolish both should gaze,
With feeble, fascinated face,
Upon the wan crest of the coming woe,
The billow of earthquake underneath the seas,
And sit at ease,
Or stand agape,
Without so much as stepping back to 'scape,
Mumbling, ‘Perchance we perish if we stay:
'Tis certain wear of shoes to stir away!’
Who could have dreamt
That times should come like these!
Remnant of Honour, tongue-tied with contempt,
Consider; you are strong yet, if you please.
A hundred just men up, and arm'd but with a frown,
May hoot a hundred thousand false loons down,
Or drive them any way like geese.
But to sit silent now is to suborn
The common villainy you scorn.
In the dark hour
When phrases are in power,
And nought's to choose between
The thing which is not and which is not seen,
One fool, with lusty lungs,
Does what a hundred wise, who hate and hold their tongues,
Shall ne'er undo.
In such an hour,
When eager hands are fetter'd and too few,
And hearts alone have leave to bleed,
Speak; for a good word then is a good deed.

XVI
A Farewell

With all my will, but much against my heart,
We two now part.
My Very Dear,
Our solace is, the sad road lies so clear.
It needs no art,
With faint, averted feet
And many a tear,
In our opposed paths to persevere.
Go thou to East, I West.
We will not say
There's any hope, it is so far away.
But, O, my Best,
When the one darling of our widowhead,

The nursling Grief,
Is dead,
And no dews blur our eyes
To see the peach-bloom come in evening skies,
Perchance we may,
Where now this night is day,
And even through faith of still averted feet,
Making full circle of our banishment,
Amazed meet;
The bitter journey to the bourne so sweet
Seasoning the termless feast of our content
With tears of recognition never dry.

XVII
1880-85

Stand by,
Ye Wise, by whom Heav'n rules!
Your kingly hands suit not the hangman's tools.
When God has doom'd a glorious Past to die,
Are there no knaves and fools?
For ages yet to come your kind shall count for nought.
Smoke of the strife of other Powers
Than ours,
And tongues inscrutable with fury fraught
'Wilder the sky,
Till the far good which none can guess be wrought.
Stand by!
Since tears are vain, here let us rest and laugh,
But not too loudly; for the brave time's come,
When Best may not blaspheme the Bigger Half,
And freedom for our sort means freedom to be dumb.

Lo, how the dross and draff
Jeer up at us, and shout,
‘The Day is ours, the Night is theirs!’
And urge their rout
Where the wild dawn of rising Tartarus flares.
Yon strives their Leader, lusting to be seen.
His leprosy's so perfect that men call him clean!
Listen the long, sincere, and liberal bray
Of the earnest Puller at another's hay
'Gainst aught that dares to tug the other way,
Quite void of fears
With all that noise of ruin round his ears!
Yonder the people cast their caps o'erhead,
And swear the threaten'd doom is ne'er to dread
That's come, though not yet past.
All front the horror and are none aghast;
Brag of their full-blown rights and liberties,
Nor once surmise

When each man gets his due the Nation dies;
Nay, still shout ‘Progress!’ as if seven plagues
Should take the laggard who would stretch his legs.
Forward! glad rush of Gergesenian swine;
You've gain'd the hill-top, but there's yet the brine.
Forward! to meet the welcome of the waves
That mount to 'whelm the freedom which enslaves.
Forward! bad corpses turn into good dung,
To feed strange futures beautiful and young.
Forward! God speed ye down the damn'd decline,
And grant ye the Fool's true good, in abject ruin's gulf
As the Wise see him so to see himself!

Ah, Land once mine,
That seem'd to me too sweetly wise,
Too sternly fair for aught that dies,
Past is thy proud and pleasant state,
That recent date
When, strong and single, in thy sovereign heart,
The thrones of thinking, hearing, sight,
The cunning hand, the knotted thew
Of lesser powers that heave and hew,
And each the smallest beneficial part,
And merest pore of breathing, beat,
Full and complete,
The great pulse of thy generous might,
Equal in inequality,
That soul of joy in low and high;
When not a churl but felt the Giant's heat,
Albeit he simply call'd it his,
Flush in his common labour with delight,
And not a village-Maiden's kiss
But was for this
More sweet,
And not a sorrow but did lightlier sigh,
And for its private self less greet,
The whilst that other so majestic self stood by!
Integrity so vast could well afford
To wear in working many a stain,
To pillory the cobbler vain
And license madness in a lord.
On that were all men well agreed;
And, if they did a thing,
Their strength was with them in their deed,
And from amongst them came the shout of a king!

But, once let traitor coward meet,
Not Heaven itself can keep its feet.
Come knave who said to dastard, ‘Lo,
‘The Deluge!’ which but needed ‘No!’
For all the Atlantic's threatening roar,
If men would bravely understand,

Is softly check'd for evermore
By a firm bar of sand.
But, dastard listening knave, who said,
‘'Twere juster were the Giant dead,
That so yon bawlers may not miss
To vote their own pot-belly'd bliss,’
All that is past!
We saw the slaying, and were not aghast.
But ne'er a sun, on village Groom and Bride,
Albeit they guess not how it is,
At Easter or at Whitsuntide,
But shines less gay for this!

XVIII
The Two Deserts

Not greatly moved with awe am I
To learn that we may spy
Five thousand firmaments beyond our own.
The best that's known
Of the heavenly bodies does them credit small.
View'd close, the Moon's fair ball
Is of ill objects worst,
A corpse in Night's highway, naked, fire-scarr'd, accurst;
And now they tell
That the Sun is plainly seen to boil and burst
Too horribly for hell.
So, judging from these two,
As we must do,
The Universe, outside our living Earth,
Was all conceiv'd in the Creator's mirth,
Forecasting at the time Man's spirit deep,
To make dirt cheap.
Put by the Telescope!
Better without it man may see,
Stretch'd awful in the hush'd midnight,
The ghost of his eternity.
Give me the nobler glass that swells to the eye
The things which near us lie,
Till Science rapturously hails,
In the minutest water-drop,
A torment of innumerable tails.
These at the least do live.
But rather give
A mind not much to pry
Beyond our royal-fair estate
Betwixt these deserts blank of small and great.
Wonder and beauty our own courtiers are,
Pressing to catch our gaze,
And out of obvious ways
Ne'er wandering far.

XIX
Crest And Gulf

Much woe that man befalls
Who does not run when sent, nor come when Heaven calls;
But whether he serve God, or his own whim,
Not matters, in the end, to any one but him;
And he as soon
Shall map the other side of the Moon,
As trace what his own deed,
In the next chop of the chance gale, shall breed.
This he may know:
His good or evil seed
Is like to grow,
For its first harvest, quite to contraries:
The father wise
Has still the hare-brain'd brood;
'Gainst evil, ill example better works than good;
The poet, fanning his mild flight
At a most keen and arduous height,
Unveils the tender heavens to horny human eyes
Amidst ingenious blasphemies.
Wouldst raise the poor, in Capuan luxury sunk?
The Nation lives but whilst its Lords are drunk!
Or spread Heav'n's partial gifts o'er all, like dew?
The Many's weedy growth withers the gracious Few!
Strange opposites, from those, again, shall rise.
Join, then, if thee it please, the bitter jest
Of mankind's progress; all its spectral race
Mere impotence of rest,
The heaving vain of life which cannot cease from self,
Crest altering still to gulf
And gulf to crest
In endless chace,
That leaves the tossing water anchor'd in its place!
Ah, well does he who does but stand aside,
Sans hope or fear,
And marks the crest and gulf in station sink and rear,
And prophesies 'gainst trust in such a tide:
For he sometimes is prophet, heavenly taught,
Whose message is that he sees only nought.

Nathless, discern'd may be,
By listeners at the doors of destiny,
The fly-wheel swift and still
Of God's incessant will,
Mighty to keep in bound, tho' powerless to quell,
The amorous and vehement drift of man's herd to hell.

XX
‘Let Be!’

Ah, yes; we tell the good and evil trees
By fruits: But how tell these?
Who does not know
That good and ill
Are done in secret still,
And that which shews is verily but show!
How high of heart is one, and one how sweet of mood:
But not all height is holiness,
Nor every sweetness good;
And grace will sometimes lurk where who could guess?
The Critic of his kind,
Dealing to each his share,
With easy humour, hard to bear,
May not impossibly have in him shrined,
As in a gossamer globe or thickly padded pod,
Some small seed dear to God.
Haply yon wretch, so famous for his falls,
Got them beneath the Devil-defended walls
Of some high Virtue he had vow'd to win;
And that which you and I
Call his besetting sin
Is but the fume of his peculiar fire
Of inmost contrary desire,
And means wild willingness for her to die,
Dash'd with despondence of her favour sweet;
He fiercer fighting, in his worst defeat,
Than I or you,
That only courteous greet
Where he does hotly woo,
Did ever fight, in our best victory.
Another is mistook
Through his deceitful likeness to his look!
Let be, let be:
Why should I clear myself, why answer thou for me?
That shaft of slander shot
Miss'd only the right blot.
I see the shame
They cannot see:
'Tis very just they blame
The thing that's not.

XXI
‘Faint Yet Pursuing’

Heroic Good, target for which the young
Dream in their dreams that every bow is strung,
And, missing, sigh

Unfruitful, or as disbelievers die,
Thee having miss'd, I will not so revolt,
But lowlier shoot my bolt,
And lowlier still, if still I may not reach,
And my proud stomach teach
That less than highest is good, and may be high.
An even walk in life's uneven way,
Though to have dreamt of flight and not to fly
Be strange and sad,
Is not a boon that's given to all who pray.
If this I had
I'd envy none!
Nay, trod I straight for one
Year, month or week,
Should Heaven withdraw, and Satan me amerce
Of power and joy, still would I seek
Another victory with a like reverse;
Because the good of victory does not die,
As dies the failure's curse,
And what we have to gain
Is, not one battle, but a weary life's campaign.
Yet meaner lot being sent
Should more than me content;
Yea, if I lie
Among vile shards, though born for silver wings,
In the strong flight and feathers gold
Of whatsoever heavenward mounts and sings
I must by admiration so comply
That there I should my own delight behold.
Yea, though I sin each day times seven,
And dare not lift the fearfullest eyes to Heaven,
Thanks must I give
Because that seven times are not eight or nine,
And that my darkness is all mine,
And that I live
Within this oak-shade one more minute even,
Hearing the winds their Maker magnify.

XXII
Victory In Defeat

Ah, God, alas,
How soon it came to pass
The sweetness melted from thy barbed hook
Which I so simply took;
And I lay bleeding on the bitter land,
Afraid to stir against thy least command,
But losing all my pleasant life-blood, whence
Force should have been heart's frailty to withstand.
Life is not life at all without delight,
Nor has it any might;

And better than the insentient heart and brain
Is sharpest pain;
And better for the moment seems it to rebel,
If the great Master, from his lifted seat,
Ne'er whispers to the wearied servant ‘Well!’
Yet what returns of love did I endure,
When to be pardon'd seem'd almost more sweet
Than aye to have been pure!
But day still faded to disastrous night,
And thicker darkness changed to feebler light,
Until forgiveness, without stint renew'd,
Was now no more with loving tears imbued,
Vowing no more offence.
Not less to thine Unfaithful didst thou cry,
‘Come back, poor Child; be all as 'twas before.
But I,
‘No, no; I will not promise any more!
Yet, when I feel my hour is come to die,
And so I am secured of continence,
Then may I say, though haply then in vain,
'My only, only Love, O, take me back again!''

Thereafter didst thou smite
So hard that, for a space,
Uplifted seem'd Heav'n's everlasting door,
And I indeed the darling of thy grace.
But, in some dozen changes of the moon,
A bitter mockery seem'd thy bitter boon.
The broken pinion was no longer sore.
Again, indeed, I woke
Under so dread a stroke
That all the strength it left within my heart
Was just to ache and turn, and then to turn and ache,
And some weak sign of war unceasingly to make.
And here I lie,
With no one near to mark,
Thrusting Hell's phantoms feebly in the dark,
And still at point more utterly to die.
O God, how long!
Put forth indeed thy powerful right hand,
While time is yet,
Or never shall I see the blissful land!

Thus I: then God, in pleasant speech and strong,
(Which soon I shall forget):
‘The man who, though his fights be all defeats,
Still fights,
Enters at last
The heavenly Jerusalem's rejoicing streets
With glory more, and more triumphant rites
Than always-conquering Joshua's, when his blast
The frighted walls of Jericho down cast;

And, lo, the glad surprise
Of peace beyond surmise,
More than in common Saints, for ever in his eyes.

XXIII
Remembered Grace

Since succour to the feeblest of the wise
Is charge of nobler weight
Than the security
Of many and many a foolish soul's estate,
This I affirm,
Though fools will fools more confidently be:
Whom God does once with heart to heart befriend,
He does so till the end:
And having planted life's miraculous germ,
One sweet pulsation of responsive love,
He sets him sheer above,
Not sin and bitter shame
And wreck of fame,
But Hell's insidious and more black attempt,
The envy, malice, and pride,
Which men who share so easily condone
That few ev'n list such ills as these to hide.
From these unalterably exempt,
Through the remember'd grace
Of that divine embrace,
Of his sad errors none,
Though gross to blame,
Shall cast him lower than the cleansing flame,
Nor make him quite depart
From the small flock named ‘after God's own heart,’
And to themselves unknown.
Nor can he quail
In faith, nor flush nor pale
When all the other idiot people spell
How this or that new Prophet's word belies
Their last high oracle;
But constantly his soul
Points to its pole
Ev'n as the needle points, and knows not why;
And, under the ever-changing clouds of doubt,
When others cry,
‘The stars, if stars there were,
Are quench'd and out!’
To him, uplooking t'ward the hills for aid,
Appear, at need display'd,
Gaps in the low-hung gloom, and, bright in air,
Orion or the Bear.

XXIV
Vesica Piscis
In strenuous hope I wrought,
And hope seem'd still betray'd;
Lastly I said,
‘I have labour'd through the Night, nor yet
Have taken aught;
But at Thy word I will again cast forth the net!’
And, lo, I caught
(Oh, quite unlike and quite beyond my thought,)
Not the quick, shining harvest of the Sea,
For food, my wish,
But Thee!
Then, hiding even in me,
As hid was Simon's coin within the fish,
Thou sigh'd'st, with joy, ‘Be dumb,
Or speak but of forgotten things to far-off times to come.’

Coventry Patmore

The Victories Of Love. Book I

I
From Frederick Graham

Mother, I smile at your alarms!
I own, indeed, my Cousin's charms,
But, like all nursery maladies,
Love is not badly taken twice.
Have you forgotten Charlotte Hayes,
My playmate in the pleasant days
At Knatchley, and her sister, Anne,
The twins, so made on the same plan,
That one wore blue, the other white,
To mark them to their father's sight;
And how, at Knatchley harvesting,
You bade me kiss her in the ring,
Like Anne and all the others? You,
That never of my sickness knew,
Will laugh, yet had I the disease,
And gravely, if the signs are these:

As, ere the Spring has any power,
The almond branch all turns to flower,
Though not a leaf is out, so she
The bloom of life provoked in me;
And, hard till then and selfish, I
Was thenceforth nought but sanctity
And service: life was mere delight
In being wholly good and right,
As she was; just, without a slur;
Honouring myself no less than her;
Obeying, in the loneliest place,
Ev'n to the slightest gesture, grace
Assured that one so fair, so true,
He only served that was so too.
For me, hence weak towards the weak,
No more the unnested blackbird's shriek
Startled the light-leaved wood; on high
Wander'd the gadding butterfly,
Unscared by my flung cap; the bee,
Rifling the hollyhock in glee,
Was no more trapp'd with his own flower,
And for his honey slain. Her power,
From great things even to the grass
Through which the unfenced footways pass,
Was law, and that which keeps the law,
Cherubic gaiety and awe;
Day was her doing, and the lark
Had reason for his song; the dark
In anagram innumerous spelt
Her name with stars that throbb'd and felt;
'Twas the sad summit of delight
To wake and weep for her at night;

She turn'd to triumph or to shame
The strife of every childish game;
The heart would come into my throat
At rosebuds; howsoe'er remote,
In opposition or consent,
Each thing, or person, or event,
Or seeming neutral howsoe'er,
All, in the live, electric air,
Awoke, took aspect, and confess'd
In her a centre of unrest,
Yea, stocks and stones within me bred
Anxieties of joy and dread.

O, bright apocalyptic sky
O'erarching childhood! Far and nigh
Mystery and obscuration none,
Yet nowhere any moon or sun!
What reason for these sighs? What hope,
Daunting with its audacious scope
The disconcerted heart, affects
These ceremonies and respects?
Why stratagems in everything?
Why, why not kiss her in the ring?
'Tis nothing strange that warriors bold,
Whose fierce, forecasting eyes behold
The city they desire to sack,
Humbly begin their proud attack
By delving ditches two miles off,
Aware how the fair place would scoff
At hasty wooing; but, O child,
Why thus approach thy playmate mild?

One morning, when it flush'd my thought
That, what in me such wonder wrought
Was call'd, in men and women, love,
And, sick with vanity thereof,
I, saying loud, ‘I love her,’ told
My secret to myself, behold
A crisis in my mystery!
For, suddenly, I seem'd to be
Whirl'd round, and bound with showers of threads
As when the furious spider sheds
Captivity upon the fly
To still his buzzing till he die;
Only, with me, the bonds that flew,
Enfolding, thrill'd me through and through
With bliss beyond aught heaven can have
And pride to dream myself her slave.

A long, green slip of wilder'd land,
With Knatchley Wood on either hand,
Sunder'd our home from hers. This day

Glad was I as I went her way.
I stretch'd my arms to the sky, and sprang
O'er the elastic sod, and sang
'I love her, love her!' to an air
Which with the words came then and there;
And even now, when I would know
All was not always dull and low,
I mind me awhile of the sweet strain
Love taught me in that lonely lane.

Such glories fade, with no more mark
Than when the sunset dies to dark.
They pass, the rapture and the grace
Ineffable, their only trace
A heart which, having felt no less
Than pure and perfect happiness,
Is duly dainty of delight;
A patient, poignant appetite
For pleasures that exceed so much
The poor things which the world calls such,
That, when these lure it, then you may
The lion with a wisp of hay.

That Charlotte, whom we scarcely knew
From Anne but by her ribbons blue,
Was loved, Anne less than look'd at, shows
That liking still by favour goes!
This Love is a Divinity,
And holds his high election free
Of human merit; or let's say,
A child by ladies call'd to play,
But careless of their becks and wiles,
Till, seeing one who sits and smiles
Like any else, yet only charms,
He cries to come into her arms.
Then, for my Cousins, fear me not!
None ever loved because he ought.
Fatal were else this graceful house,
So full of light from ladies' brows.
There's Mary; Heaven in her appears
Like sunshine through the shower's bright tears;
Mildred's of Earth, yet happier far
Than most men's thoughts of Heaven are;
But, for Honoria, Heaven and Earth
Seal'd amity in her sweet birth.
The noble Girl! With whom she talks
She knights first with her smile; she walks,
Stands, dances, to such sweet effect,
Alone she seems to move erect.
The brightest and the chastest brow
Rules o'er a cheek which seems to show
That love, as a mere vague suspense

Of apprehensive innocence,
Perturbs her heart; love without aim
Or object, like the sunlit flame
That in the Vestals' Temple glow'd,
Without the image of a god.
And this simplicity most pure
She sets off with no less allure
Of culture, subtly skill'd to raise
The power, the pride, and mutual praise
Of human personality
Above the common sort so high,
It makes such homely souls as mine
Marvel how brightly life may shine.
How you would love her! Even in dress
She makes the common mode express
New knowledge of what's fit so well
'Tis virtue gaily visible!
Nay, but her silken sash to me
Were more than all morality,
Had not the old, sweet, feverous ill
Left me the master of my will!

So, Mother, feel at rest, and please
To send my books on board. With these,
When I go hence, all idle hours
Shall help my pleasures and my powers.
I've time, you know, to fill my post,
And yet make up for schooling lost
Through young sea-service. They all speak
German with ease; and this, with Greek,
(Which Dr. Churchill thought I knew,)
And history, which I fail'd in too,
Will stop a gap I somewhat dread,
After the happy life I've led
With these my friends; and sweet 'twill be
To abridge the space from them to me.

II
From Mrs. Graham

My Child, Honoria Churchill sways
A double power through Charlotte Hayes.
In minds to first-love's memory pledged
The second Cupid's born full-fledged.
I saw, and trembled for the day
When you should see her beauty, gay
And pure as apple-blooms, that show
Outside a blush and inside snow,
Her high and touching elegance
Of order'd life as free as chance.
Ah, haste from her bewitching side,

No friend for you, far less a bride!
But, warning from a hope so wild,
I wrong you. Yet this know, my Child:
He that but once too nearly hears
The music of forefended spheres,
Is thenceforth lonely, and for all
His days like one who treads the Wall
Of China, and, on this hand, sees
Cities and their civilities,
And, on the other, lions. Well,
(Your rash reply I thus foretell,)
Good is the knowledge of what's fair,
Though bought with temporal despair!
Yes, good for one, but not for two.
Will it content a wife that you
Should pine for love, in love's embrace,
Through having known a happier grace;
And break with inward sighs your rest,
Because, though good, she's not the best?
You would, you think, be just and kind,
And keep your counsel! You will find
You cannot such a secret keep;
'Twill out, like murder, in your sleep;
A touch will tell it, though, for pride,
She may her bitter knowledge hide;
And, while she accepts love's make-believe,
You'll twice despise what you'd deceive.

I send the books. Dear Child, adieu!
Tell me of all you are and do.
I know, thank God, whate'er it be,
'Twill need no veil 'twixt you and me.

III
From Frederick

The multitude of voices blythe
Of early day, the hissing scythe
Across the dew drawn and withdrawn,
The noisy peacock on the lawn,
These, and the sun's eye-gladding gleam,
This morning, chased the sweetest dream
That e'er shed penitential grace
On life's forgetful commonplace;
Yet 'twas no sweeter than the spell
To which I woke to say farewell.

Noon finds me many a mile removed
From her who must not be beloved;
And us the waste sea soon shall part,
Heaving for aye, without a heart!

Mother, what need to warn me so?
I love Miss Churchill? Ah, no, no.
I view, enchanted, from afar,
And love her as I love a star,
For, not to speak of colder fear,
Which keeps my fancy calm, I hear,
Under her life's gay progress hurl'd,
The wheels of the preponderant world,
Set sharp with swords that fool to slay
Who blunders from a poor byway,
To covet beauty with a crown
Of earthly blessing added on;
And she's so much, it seems to me,
Beyond all women womanly,
I dread to think how he should fare
Who came so near as to despair.

IV
From Frederick

Yonder the sombre vessel rides
Where my obscure condition hides.
Waves scud to shore against the wind
That flings the sprinkling surf behind;
In port the bickering pennons show
Which way the ships would gladly go;
Through Edgecumb Park the rooted trees
Are tossing, reckless, in the breeze;
On top of Edgecumb's firm-set tower,
As foils, not foibles, of its power,
The light vanes do themselves adjust
To every veering of the gust:
By me alone may nought be given
To guidance of the airs of heaven?
In battle or peace, in calm or storm,
Should I my daily task perform,
Better a thousand times for love,
Who should my secret soul reprove?

Beholding one like her, a man
Longs to lay down his life! How can
Aught to itself seem thus enough,
When I have so much need thereof?
Blest in her place, blissful is she;
And I, departing, seem to be
Like the strange waif that comes to run
A few days flaming near the sun,
And carries back, through boundless night,
Its lessening memory of light.

Oh, my dear Mother, I confess

To a deep grief of homelessness,
Unfelt, save once, before. 'Tis years
Since such a shower of girlish tears
Disgraced me? But this wretched Inn,
At Plymouth, is so full of din,
Talkings and trampings to and fro.
And then my ship, to which I go
To-night, is no more home. I dread,
As strange, the life I long have led;
And as, when first I went to school,
And found the horror of a rule
Which only ask'd to be obey'd,
I lay and wept, of dawn afraid,
And thought, with bursting heart, of one
Who, from her little, wayward son,
Required obedience, but above
Obedience still regarded love,
So change I that enchanting place,
The abode of innocence and grace
And gaiety without reproof,
For the black gun-deck's louring roof,
Blind and inevitable law
Which makes light duties burdens, awe
Which is not reverence, laughters gain'd
At cost of purities profaned,
And whatsoever most may stir
Remorseful passion towards her,
Whom to behold is to depart
From all defect of life and heart.

But, Mother, I shall go on shore,
And see my Cousin yet once more!
'Twere wild to hope for her, you say.
I've torn and cast those words away.
Surely there's hope! For life 'tis well
Love without hope's impossible;
So, if I love, it is that hope
Is not outside the outer scope
Of fancy. You speak truth: this hour
I must resist, or lose the power.
What! and, when some short months are o'er,
Be not much other than before?
Drop from the bright and virtuous sphere
In which I'm held but while she's dear?
For daily life's dull, senseless mood,
Slay the fine nerves of gratitude
And sweet allegiance, which I owe
Whether the debt be weal or woe?
Nay, Mother, I, forewarn'd, prefer
To want for all in wanting her.

For all? Love's best is not bereft

Ever from him to whom is left
The trust that God will not deceive
His creature, fashion'd to believe
The prophecies of pure desire.
Not loss, not death, my love shall tire.
A mystery does my heart foretell;
Nor do I press the oracle
For explanations. Leave me alone,
And let in me love's will be done.

V
From Frederick

Fashion'd by Heaven and by art
So is she, that she makes the heart
Ache and o'erflow with tears, that grace
So lovely fair should have for place,
(Deeming itself at home the while,)
The unworthy earth! To see her smile
Amid this waste of pain and sin,
As only knowing the heaven within,
Is sweet, and does for pity stir
Passion to be her minister:
Wherefore last night I lay awake,
And said, 'Ah, Lord, for Thy love's sake,
Give not this darling child of Thine
To care less reverent than mine!'
And, as true faith was in my word,
I trust, I trust that I was heard.

The waves, this morning, sped to land,
And shouted hoarse to touch the strand,
Where Spring, that goes not out to sea,
Lay laughing in her lovely glee;
And, so, my life was sunlit spray
And tumult, as, once more to-day,
For long farewell did I draw near
My Cousin, desperately dear.
Faint, fierce, the truth that hope was none
Gleam'd like the lightning in the sun;
Yet hope I had, and joy thereof.
The father of love is hope, (though love
Lives orphan'd on, when hope is dead,)
And, out of my immediate dread
And crisis of the coming hour,
Did hope itself draw sudden power.
So the still brooding storm, in Spring,
Makes all the birds begin to sing.

Mother, your foresight did not err:
I've lost the world, and not won her.

And yet, ah, laugh not, when you think
What cup of life I sought to drink!
The bold, said I, have climb'd to bliss
Absurd, impossible, as this,
With nought to help them but so great
A heart it fascinates their fate.
If ever Heaven heard man's desire,
Mine, being made of altar-fire,
Must come to pass, and it will be
That she will wait, when she shall see,
This evening, how I go to get,
By means unknown, I know not yet
Quite what, but ground whereon to stand,
And plead more plainly for her hand!

And so I raved, and cast in hope
A superstitious horoscope!
And still, though something in her face
Portended 'No!' with such a grace
It burthen'd me with thankfulness,
Nothing was credible but 'Yes.'
Therefore, through time's close pressure bold,
I praised myself, and boastful told
My deeds at Acre; strain'd the chance
I had of honour and advance
In war to come; and would not see
Sad silence meant, 'What's this to me.'

When half my precious hour was gone,
She rose to greet a Mr. Vaughan;
And, as the image of the moon
Breaks up, within some still lagoon
That feels the soft wind suddenly,
Or tide fresh flowing from the sea,
And turns to giddy flames that go
Over the water to and fro,
Thus, when he took her hand to-night,
Her lovely gravity of light
Was scatter'd into many smiles
And flattering weakness. Hope beguiles
No more my heart, dear Mother. He,
By jealous looks, o'erhonour'd me.

With nought to do, and fondly fain
To hear her singing once again,
I stay'd, and turn'd her music o'er;
Then came she with me to the door.
'Dearest Honoria,' I said,
(By my despair familiar made,)
'Heaven bless you!' Oh, to have back then stepp'd
And fallen upon her neck, and wept,
And said, 'My friend, I owe you all

‘I am, and have, and hope for. Call
‘For some poor service; let me prove
‘To you, or him here whom you love,
‘My duty. Any solemn task,
‘For life's whole course, is all I ask!’
Then she must surely have wept too,
And said, ‘My friend, what can you do!’
And I should have replied, ‘I'll pray
‘For you and him three times a-day,
‘And, all day, morning, noon, and night,
‘My life shall be so high and right
‘That never Saint yet scaled the stairs
‘Of heaven with more availing prayers!’
But this (and, as good God shall bless
Somehow my end, I'll do no less,)
I had no right to speak. Oh, shame,
So rich a love, so poor a claim!

My Mother, now my only friend,
Farewell. The school-books which you send
I shall not want, and so return.
Give them away, or sell, or burn.
I'll write from Malta. Would I might
But be your little Child to-night,
And feel your arms about me fold,
Against this loneliness and cold!

VI
From Mrs. Graham

The folly of young girls! They doff
Their pride to smooth success, and scoff
At far more noble fire and might
That woo them from the dust of fight!

But, Frederick, now the storm is past,
Your sky should not remain o'ercast.
A sea-life's dull, and, oh, beware
Of nourishing, for zest, despair.
My Child, remember, you have twice
Heartily loved; then why not thrice,
Or ten times? But a wise man shuns
To cry ‘All's over,’ more than once.
I'll not say that a young man's soul
Is scarcely measure of the whole
Earthly and heavenly universe,
To which he inveterately prefers
The one beloved woman. Best
Speak to the senses' interest,
Which brooks no mystery nor delay:
Frankly reflect, my Son, and say,

Was there no secret hour, of those
Pass'd at her side in Sarum Close,
When, to your spirit's sick alarm,
It seem'd that all her marvellous charm
Was marvellously fled? Her grace
Of voice, adornment, movement, face
Was what already heart and eye
Had ponder'd to satiety;
And so the good of life was o'er,
Until some laugh not heard before,
Some novel fashion in her hair,
Or style of putting back her chair,
Restored the heavens. Gather thence
The loss-consoling inference.

Yet blame not beauty, which beguiles,
With lovely motions and sweet smiles,
Which while they please us pass away,
The spirit to lofty thoughts that stay
And lift the whole of after-life,
Unless you take the vision to wife,
Which then seems lost, or serves to slake
Desire, as when a lovely lake
Far off scarce fills the exulting eye
Of one athirst, who comes thereby,
And inappreciably sips
The deep, with disappointed lips.
To fail is sorrow, yet confess
That love pays dearly for success!
No blame to beauty! Let's complain
Of the heart, which can so ill sustain
Delight. Our griefs declare our fall,
But how much more our joys! They pall
With plucking, and celestial mirth
Can find no footing on the earth,
More than the bird of paradise,
Which only lives the while it flies.

Think, also, how 'twould suit your pride
To have this woman for a bride.
Whate'er her faults, she's one of those
To whom the world's last polish owes
A novel grace, which all who aspire
To courtliest custom must acquire.
The world's the sphere she's made to charm,
Which you have shunn'd as if 'twere harm.
Oh, law perverse, that loneliness
Breeds love, society success!
Though young, 'twere now o'er late in life
To train yourself for such a wife;
So she would suit herself to you,
As women, when they marry, do.

For, since 'tis for our dignity
Our lords should sit like lords on high,
We willingly deteriorate
To a step below our rulers' state;
And 'tis the commonest of things
To see an angel, gay with wings,
Lean weakly on a mortal's arm!
Honoria would put off the charm
Of lofty grace that caught your love,
For fear you should not seem above
Herself in fashion and degree,
As in true merit. Thus, you see,
'Twere little kindness, wisdom none,
To light your cot with such a sun.

VII
From Frederick

Write not, my Mother, her dear name
With the least word or hint of blame.
Who else shall discommend her choice,
I giving it my hearty voice?
Wed me? Ah, never near her come
The knowledge of the narrow home!
Far fly from her dear face, that shows
The sunshine lovelier than the rose,
The sordid gravity they wear
Who poverty's base burthen bear!
(And all are poor who come to miss
Their custom, though a crown be this.)
My hope was, that the wheels of fate,
For my exceeding need, might wait,
And she, unseen amidst all eyes,
Move sightless, till I sought the prize,
With honour, in an equal field.
But then came Vaughan, to whom I yield
With grace as much as any man,
In such cause, to another can.
Had she been mine, it seems to me
That I had that integrity
And only joy in her delight—
But each is his own favourite
In love! The thought to bring me rest
Is that of us she takes the best.

'Twas but to see him to be sure
That choice for her remain'd no more!
His brow, so gaily clear of craft;
His wit, the timely truth that laugh'd
To find itself so well express'd;
His words, abundant yet the best;

His spirit, of such handsome show
You mark'd not that his looks were so;
His bearing, prospects, birth, all these
Might well, with small suit, greatly please;
How greatly, when she saw arise
The reflex sweetness of her eyes
In his, and every breath defer
Humbly its bated life to her;
Whilst power and kindness of command,
Which women can no more withstand
Than we their grace, were still unquell'd,
And force and flattery both compell'd
Her softness! Say I'm worthy. I
Grew, in her presence, cold and shy.
It awed me, as an angel's might
In raiment of reproachful light.
Her gay looks told my sombre mood
That what's not happy is not good;
And, just because 'twas life to please,
Death to repel her, truth and ease
Deserted me; I strove to talk,
And stammer'd foolishness; my walk
Was like a drunkard's; if she took
My arm, it stiffen'd, ached, and shook:
A likely wooer! Blame her not;
Nor ever say, dear Mother, aught
Against that perfectness which is
My strength, as once it was my bliss.

And do not chafe at social rules.
Leave that to charlatans and fools.
Clay graffs and clods conceive the rose,
So base still fathers best. Life owes
Itself to bread; enough thereof
And easy days condition love;
And, kindly train'd, love's roses thrive,
No more pale, scentless petals five,
Which moisten the considerate eye
To see what haste they make to die,
But heavens of colour and perfume,
Which, month by month, renew the bloom
Of art-born graces, when the year
In all the natural grove is sere.

Blame nought then! Bright let be the air
About my lonely cloud of care.

VIII
From Frederick

Religion, duty, books, work, friends,—

'Tis good advice, but there it ends.
I'm sick for what these have not got.
Send no more books: they help me not;
I do my work: the void's there still
Which carefullest duty cannot fill.
What though the inaugural hour of right
Comes ever with a keen delight?
Little relieves the labour's heat;
Disgust oft crowns it when complete;
And life, in fact, is not less dull
For being very dutiful.
'The stately homes of England,' lo,
'How beautiful they stand!' They owe
How much to nameless things like me
Their beauty of security!
But who can long a low toil mend
By looking to a lofty end?
And let me, since 'tis truth, confess
The void's not fill'd by godliness.
God is a tower without a stair,
And His perfection, love's despair.
'Tis He shall judge me when I die;
He suckles with the hissing fly
The spider; gazes calmly down,
Whilst rapine grips the helpless town.
His vast love holds all this and more.
In consternation I adore.
Nor can I ease this aching gulf
With friends, the pictures of myself.

Then marvel not that I recur
From each and all of these to her.
For more of heaven than her have I
No sensitive capacity.
Had I but her, ah, what the gain
Of owning aught but that domain!
Nay, heaven's extent, however much,
Cannot be more than many such;
And, she being mine, should God to me
Say 'Lo! my Child, I give to thee
All heaven besides,' what could I then,
But, as a child, to Him complain
That whereas my dear Father gave
A little space for me to have
In His great garden, now, o'erblest,
I've that, indeed, but all the rest,
Which, somehow, makes it seem I've got
All but my only cared-for plot.
Enough was that for my weak hand
To tend, my heart to understand.

Oh, the sick fact, 'twixt her and me

There's naught, and half a world of sea.

IX
From Frederick

In two, in less than two hours more
I set my foot on English shore,
Two years untrod, and, strange to tell,
Nigh miss'd through last night's storm! There fell
A man from the shrouds, that roar'd to quench
Even the billows' blast and drench.
Besides me none was near to mark
His loud cry in the louder dark,
Dark, save when lightning show'd the deeps
Standing about in stony heaps.
No time for choice! A rope; a flash
That flamed as he rose; a dizzy splash;
A strange, inopportune delight
Of mounting with the billowy might,
And falling, with a thrill again
Of pleasure shot from feet to brain;
And both paced deck, ere any knew
Our peril. Round us press'd the crew,
With wonder in the eyes of most.
As if the man who had loved and lost
Honoria dared no more than that!

My days have else been stale and flat.
This life's at best, if justly scann'd,
A tedious walk by the other's strand,
With, here and there cast up, a piece
Of coral or of ambergris,
Which, boasted of abroad, we ignore
The burden of the barren shore.
I seldom write, for 'twould be still
Of how the nerves refuse to thrill;
How, throughout doubly-darken'd days,
I cannot recollect her face;
How to my heart her name to tell
Is beating on a broken bell;
And, to fill up the abhorrent gulf,
Scarce loving her, I hate myself.

Yet, latterly, with strange delight,
Rich tides have risen in the night,
And sweet dreams chased the fancies dense
Of waking life's dull somnolence.
I see her as I knew her, grace
Already glory in her face;
I move about, I cannot rest,
For the proud brain and joyful breast

I have of her. Or else I float,
The pilot of an idle boat,
Alone, alone with sky and sea,
And her, the third simplicity.
Or Mildred, to some question, cries,
(Her merry meaning in her eyes,)
‘The Ball, oh, Frederick will go;
‘Honoria will be there!’ and, lo,
As moisture sweet my seeing blurs
To hear my name so link'd with hers,
A mirror joins, by guilty chance,
Either's averted, watchful glance!
Or with me, in the Ball-Room's blaze,
Her brilliant mildness thrids the maze;
Our thoughts are lovely, and each word
Is music in the music heard,
And all things seem but parts to be
Of one persistent harmony.
By which I'm made divinely bold;
The secret, which she knows, is told;
And, laughing with a lofty bliss
Of innocent accord, we kiss;
About her neck my pleasure weeps;
Against my lip the silk vein leaps;
Then says an Angel, ‘Day or night,
‘If yours you seek, not her delight,
‘Although by some strange witchery
‘It seems you kiss her, 'tis not she;
‘But, whilst you languish at the side
‘Of a fair-foul phantasmal bride,
‘Surely a dragon and strong tower
‘Guard the true lady in her bower.’
And I say, ‘Dear my Lord, Amen!’
And the true lady kiss again.
Or else some wasteful malady
Devours her shape and dims her eye;
No charms are left, where all were rife,
Except her voice, which is her life,
Wherewith she, for her foolish fear,
Says trembling, ‘Do you love me, Dear?’
And I reply, ‘Sweetest, I vow
‘I never loved but half till now.’
She turns her face to the wall at this,
And says, ‘Go, Love, 'tis too much bliss.’
And then a sudden pulse is sent
About the sounding firmament
In smitings as of silver bars;
The bright disorder of the stars
Is solved by music; far and near,
Through infinite distinctions clear,
Their twofold voices' deeper tone
Utters the Name which all things own,

And each ecstatic treble dwells
On one whereof none other tells;
And we, sublimed to song and fire,
Take order in the wheeling quire,
Till from the throbbing sphere I start,
Waked by the heaving of my heart.

Such dreams as these come night by night,
Disturbing day with their delight.
Portend they nothing? Who can tell!
God yet may do some miracle.
'Tis nigh two years, and she's not wed,
Or you would know! He may be dead,
Or mad, and loving some one else,
And she, much moved that nothing quells
My constancy, or, simply wroth
With such a wretch, accept my troth
To spite him; or her beauty's gone,
(And that's my dream!) and this man Vaughan
Takes her release: or tongues malign,
Confusing every ear but mine,
Have smirch'd her: ah, 'twould move her, sure,
To find I loved her all the more!
Nay, now I think, haply amiss
I read her words and looks, and his,
That night! Did not his jealousy
Show—Good my God, and can it be
That I, a modest fool, all blest,
Nothing of such a heaven guess'd?
Oh, chance too frail, yet frantic sweet,
To-morrow sees me at her feet!

Yonder, at last, the glad sea roars
Along the sacred English shores!
There lies the lovely land I know,
Where men and women lordliest grow;
There peep the roofs where more than kings
Postpone state cares to country things,
And many a gay queen simply tends
The babes on whom the world depends;
There curls the wanton cottage smoke
Of him that drives but bears no yoke;
There laughs the realm where low and high
Are lieges to society.
And life has all too wide a scope,
Too free a prospect for its hope,
For any private good or ill,
Except dishonour, quite to fill!
—Mother, since this was penn'd, I've read
That ‘Mr. Vaughan, on Tuesday, wed
‘The beautiful Miss Churchill.’ So
That's over; and to-morrow I go

To take up my new post on board
The ‘Wolf,’ my peace at last restored;
My lonely faith, like heart-of-oak,
Shock-season'd. Grief is now the cloak
I clasp about me to prevent
The deadly chill of a content
With any near or distant good,
Except the exact beatitude
Which love has shown to my desire.
Talk not of ‘other joys and higher,’
I hate and disavow all bliss
As none for me which is not this.
Think not I blasphemously cope
With God's decrees, and cast off hope.
How, when, and where can mine succeed?
I'll trust He knows who made my need.

Baseness of men! Pursuit being o'er,
Doubtless her Husband feels no more
The heaven of heavens of such a Bride,
But, lounging, lets her please his pride
With fondness, guerdons her caress
With little names, and turns a tress
Round idle fingers. If 'tis so,
Why then I'm happier of the two!
Better, for lofty loss, high pain,
Than low content with lofty gain.
Poor, foolish Dove, to trust from me
Her happiness and dignity!

X
From Frederick

I thought the worst had brought me balm:
'Twas but the tempest's central calm.
Vague sinkings of the heart aver
That dreadful wrong is come to her,
And o'er this dream I brood and dote,
And learn its agonies by rote.
As if I loved it, early and late
I make familiar with my fate,
And feed, with fascinated will,
On very dregs of finish'd ill.
I think, she's near him now, alone,
With wardship and protection none;
Alone, perhaps, in the hindering stress
Of airs that clasp him with her dress,
They wander whispering by the wave;
And haply now, in some sea-cave,
Where the ribb'd sand is rarely trod,
They laugh, they kiss. Oh, God! oh, God!

There comes a smile acutely sweet
Out of the picturing dark; I meet
The ancient frankness of her gaze,
That soft and heart-surprising blaze
Of great goodwill and innocence,
And perfect joy proceeding thence!
Ah! made for earth's delight, yet such
The mid-sea air's too gross to touch.
At thought of which, the soul in me
Is as the bird that bites a bee,
And darts abroad on frantic wing,
Tasting the honey and the sting;
And, moaning where all round me sleep
Amidst the moaning of the deep,
I start at midnight from my bed—
And have no right to strike him dead.

What world is this that I am in,
Where chance turns sanctity to sin!
'Tis crime henceforward to desire
The only good; the sacred fire
That sunn'd the universe is hell!
I hear a Voice which argues well:
‘The Heaven hard has scorn'd your cry;
‘Fall down and worship me, and I
‘Will give you peace; go and profane
‘This pangful love, so pure, so vain,
‘And thereby win forgetfulness
‘And pardon of the spirit's excess,
‘Which soar'd too nigh that jealous Heaven
‘Ever, save thus, to be forgiven.
‘No Gospel has come down that cures
‘With better gain a loss like yours.
‘Be pious! Give the beggar pelf,
‘And love your neighbour as yourself!
‘You, who yet love, though all is o'er,
‘And she'll ne'er be your neighbour more,
‘With soul which can in pity smile
‘That aught with such a measure vile
‘As self should be at all named 'love!'
‘Your sanctity the priests reprove;
‘Your case of grief they wholly miss;
‘The Man of Sorrows names not this.
‘The years, they say, graff love divine
‘On the lopp'd stock of love like thine;
‘The wild tree dies not, but converts.
‘So be it; but the lopping hurts,
‘The graff takes tardily! Men stanch
‘Meantime with earth the bleeding branch,
‘There's nothing heals one woman's loss,
‘And lighten's life's eternal cross
‘With intermission of sound rest,

‘Like lying in another's breast.
‘The cure is, to your thinking, low!
‘Is not life all, henceforward, so?’

Ill Voice, at least thou calm'st my mood.
I'll sleep! But, as I thus conclude,
The intrusions of her grace dispel
The comfortable glooms of hell.

A wonder! Ere these lines were dried,
Vaughan and my Love, his three-days' Bride,
Became my guests. I look'd, and, lo,
In beauty soft as is the snow
And powerful as the avalanche,
She lit the deck. The Heav'n-sent chance!
She smiled, surprised. They came to see
The ship, not thinking to meet me.

At infinite distance she's my day:
What then to him? Howbeit they say
'Tis not so sunny in the sun
But men might live cool lives thereon!

All's well; for I have seen arise
That reflex sweetness of her eyes
In his, and watch'd his breath defer
Humbly its bated life to her,
His wife. My Love, she's safe in his
Devotion! What ask'd I but this?

They bade adieu; I saw them go
Across the sea; and now I know
The ultimate hope I rested on,
The hope beyond the grave, is gone,
The hope that, in the heavens high,
At last it should appear that I
Loved most, and so, by claim divine,
Should have her, in the heavens, for mine,
According to such nuptial sort
As may subsist in the holy court,
Where, if there are all kinds of joys
To exhaust the multitude of choice
In many mansions, then there are
Loves personal and particular,
Conspicuous in the glorious sky
Of universal charity,
As Phosphor in the sunrise. Now
I've seen them, I believe their vow
Immortal; and the dreadful thought,
That he less honour'd than he ought
Her sanctity, is laid to rest,
And, blessing them, I too am blest.

My goodwill, as a springing air,
Unclouds a beauty in despair;
I stand beneath the sky's pure cope
Unburthen'd even by a hope;
And peace unspeakable, a joy
Which hope would deaden and destroy,
Like sunshine fills the airy gulf
Left by the vanishing of self.
That I have known her; that she moves
Somewhere all-graceful; that she loves,
And is belov'd, and that she's so
Most happy, and to heaven will go,
Where I may meet with her, (yet this
I count but accidental bliss,)
And that the full, celestial weal
Of all shall sensitively feel
The partnership and work of each,
And thus my love and labour reach
Her region, there the more to bless
Her last, consummate happiness,
Is guerdon up to the degree
Of that alone true loyalty
Which, sacrificing, is not nice
About the terms of sacrifice,
But offers all, with smiles that say,
'Tis little, but it is for aye!

XI
From Mrs. Graham

You wanted her, my Son, for wife,
With the fierce need of life in life.
That nobler passion of an hour
Was rather prophecy than power;
And nature, from such stress unbent,
Recurs to deep discouragement.
Trust not such peace yet; easy breath,
In hot diseases, argues death;
And tastelessness within the mouth
Worse fever shows than heat or drouth.
Wherefore take, Frederick, timely fear
Against a different danger near:
Wed not one woman, oh, my Child,
Because another has not smiled!
Oft, with a disappointed man,
The first who cares to win him can;
For, after love's heroic strain,
Which tired the heart and brought no gain,
He feels consoled, relieved, and eased
To meet with her who can be pleased
To proffer kindness, and compute

His acquiescence for pursuit;
Who troubles not his lonely mood;
And asks for love mere gratitude.
Ah, desperate folly! Yet, we know,
Who wed through love wed mostly so.

At least, my Son, when wed you do,
See that the woman equals you,
Nor rush, from having loved too high,
Into a worse humility.
A poor estate's a foolish plea
For marrying to a base degree.
A woman grown cannot be train'd,
Or, if she could, no love were gain'd;
For, never was a man's heart caught
By graces he himself had taught.
And fancy not 'tis in the might
Of man to do without delight;
For, should you in her nothing find
To exhilarate the higher mind,
Your soul would deaden useless wings
With wickedness of lawful things,
And vampire pleasure swift destroy
Even the memory of joy.
So let no man, in desperate mood,
Wed a dull girl because she's good.
All virtues in his wife soon dim,
Except the power of pleasing him,
Which may small virtue be, or none!

I know my just and tender Son,
To whom the dangerous grace is given
That scorns a good which is not heaven;
My Child, who used to sit and sigh
Under the bright, ideal sky,
And pass, to spare the farmer's wheat,
The poppy and the meadow-sweet!
He would not let his wife's heart ache
For what was mainly his mistake;
But, having err'd so, all his force
Would fix upon the hard, right course.

She's graceless, say, yet good and true,
And therefore inly fair, and, through
The veils which inward beauty fold,
Faith can her loveliness behold.
Ah, that's soon tired; faith falls away
Without the ceremonial stay
Of outward loveliness and awe.
The weightier matters of the law
She pays: mere mint and cumin not;
And, in the road that she was taught,

She treads, and takes for granted still
Nature's immedicable ill;
So never wears within her eyes
A false report of paradise,
Nor ever modulates her mirth
With vain compassion of the earth,
Which made a certain happier face
Affecting, and a gayer grace
With pathos delicately edged!
Yet, though she be not privileged
To unlock for you your heart's delight,
(Her keys being gold, but not the right,)
On lower levels she may do!
Her joy is more in loving you
Than being loved, and she commands
All tenderness she understands.
It is but when you proffer more
The yoke weighs heavy and chafes sore.
It's weary work enforcing love
On one who has enough thereof,
And honour on the lowlihead
Of ignorance! Besides, you dread,
In Leah's arms, to meet the eyes
Of Rachel, somewhere in the skies,
And both return, alike relieved,
To life less loftily conceived.
Alas, alas!

Then wait the mood
In which a woman may be woo'd
Whose thoughts and habits are too high
For honour to be flattery,
And who would surely not allow
The suit that you could proffer now.
Her equal yoke would sit with ease;
It might, with wearing, even please,
(Not with a better word to move
The loyal wrath of present love);
She would not mope when you were gay,
For want of knowing aught to say;
Nor vex you with unhandsome waste
Of thoughts ill-timed and words ill-placed;
Nor reckon small things duties small,
And your fine sense fantastical;
Nor would she bring you up a brood
Of strangers bound to you by blood,
Boys of a meaner moral race,
Girls with their mother's evil grace,
But not her chance to sometimes find
Her critic past his judgment kind;
Nor, unaccustom'd to respect,
Which men, where 'tis not claim'd, neglect,

Confirm you selfish and morose,
And slowly, by contagion, gross;
But, glad and able to receive
The honour you would long to give,
Would hasten on to justify
Expectancy, however high,
Whilst you would happily incur
Compulsion to keep up with her.

XII
From Frederick

Your letter, Mother, bears the date
Of six months back, and comes too late.
My Love, past all conceiving lost,
A change seem'd good, at any cost,
From lonely, stupid, silent grief,
Vain, objectless, beyond relief,
And, like a sea-fog, settled dense
On fancy, feeling, thought, and sense.
I grew so idle, so despised
Myself, my powers, by Her unprized,
Honouring my post, but nothing more,
And lying, when I lived on shore,
So late of mornings: weak tears stream'd
For such slight cause,—if only gleam'd,
Remotely, beautifully bright,
On clouded eves at sea, the light
Of English headlands in the sun,—
That soon I deem'd 'twere better done
To lay this poor, complaining wraith
Of unreciprocated faith:
And so, with heart still bleeding quick,
But strengthen'd by the comfort sick
Of knowing that She could not care,
I turn'd away from my despair,
And told our chaplain's daughter, Jane,—
A dear, good girl, who saw my pain,
And look'd as if she pitied me,—
How glad and thankful I should be
If some kind woman, not above
Myself in rank, would give her love
To one that knew not how to woo.
Whereat she, without more ado,
Blush'd, spoke of love return'd, and closed
With what she thought I had proposed.

And, trust me, Mother, I and Jane,
We suit each other well. My gain
Is very great in this good Wife,
To whom I'm bound, for natural life,

By hearty faith, yet crossing not
My faith towards—I know not what!
As to the ether is the air,
Is her good to Honoria's fair;
One place is full of both, yet each
Lies quite beyond the other's reach
And recognition.

If you say,
Am I contented? Yea and nay!
For what's base but content to grow
With less good than the best we know?
But think me not from life withdrawn,
By passion for a hope that's gone,
So far as to forget how much
A woman is, as merely such,
To man's affection. What is best,
In each, belongs to all the rest;
And though, in marriage, quite to kiss
And half to love the custom is,
'Tis such dishonour, ruin bare,
The soul's interior despair,
And life between two troubles toss'd,
To me, who think not with the most;
Whatever 'twould have been, before
My Cousin's time, 'tis now so sore
A treason to the abiding throne
Of that sweet love which I have known,
I cannot live so, and I bend
My mind perforce to comprehend
That He who gives command to love
Does not require a thing above
The strength He gives. The highest degree
Of the hardest grace, humility;
The step t'ward heaven the latest trod,
And that which makes us most like God,
And us much more than God behoves,
Is, to be humble in our loves.
Henceforth for ever therefore I
Renounce all partiality
Of passion. Subject to control
Of that perspective of the soul
Which God Himself pronounces good,
Confirming claims of neighbourhood,
And giving man, for earthly life,
The closest neighbour in a wife,
I'll serve all. Jane be much more dear
Than all as she is much more near!
I'll love her! Yea, and love's joy comes
Ever from self-love's martyrdoms!

Yet, not to lie for God, 'tis true

That 'twas another joy I knew
When freighted was my heart with fire
Of fond, irrational desire
For fascinating, female charms,
And hopeless heaven in Her mild arms.
Nor wrong I any, if I profess
That care for heaven with me were less
But that I'm utterly imbued
With faith of all Earth's hope renew'd
In realms where no short-coming pains
Expectance, and dear love disdains
Time's treason, and the gathering dross,
And lasts for ever in the gloss
Of newness.

All the bright past seems,
Now, but a splendour in my dreams,
Which shows, albeit the dreamer wakes,
The standard of right life. Life aches
To be therewith conform'd; but, oh,
The world's so stolid, dark, and low!
That and the mortal element
Forbid the beautiful intent,
And, like the unborn butterfly,
It feels the wings, and wants the sky.

But perilous is the lofty mood
Which cannot yoke with lowly good.
Right life, for me, is life that wends
By lowly ways to lofty ends.
I well perceive, at length, that haste
T'ward heaven itself is only waste;
And thus I dread the impatient spur
Of aught that speaks too plain of Her.
There's little here that story tells;
But music talks of nothing else.
Therefore, when music breathes, I say,
(And urge my task,) Away, away!
Thou art the voice of one I knew,
But what thou say'st is not yet true;
Thou art the voice of her I loved,
And I would not be vainly moved.

So that which did from death set free
All things, now dons death's mockery,
And takes its place with things that are
But little noted. Do not mar
For me your peace! My health is high.
The proud possession of mine eye
Departed, I am much like one
Who had by haughty custom grown
To think gilt rooms, and spacious grounds,

Horses, and carriages, and hounds,
Fine linen, and an eider bed
As much his need as daily bread,
And honour of men as much or more.
Till, strange misfortune smiting sore,
His pride all goes to pay his debts,
A lodging anywhere he gets,
And takes his family thereto
Weeping, and other relics few,
Allow'd, by them that seize his pelf,
As precious only to himself.
Yet the sun shines; the country green
Has many riches, poorly seen
From blazon'd coaches; grace at meat
Goes well with thrift in what they eat;
And there's amends for much bereft
In better thanks for much that's left!

Jane is not fair, yet pleases well
The eye in which no others dwell;
And features somewhat plainly set,
And homely manners leave her yet
The crowning boon and most express
Of Heaven's inventive tenderness,
A woman. But I do her wrong,
Letting the world's eyes guide my tongue!
She has a handsomeness that pays
No homage to the hourly gaze,
And dwells not on the arch'd brow's height
And lids which softly lodge the light,
Nor in the pure field of the cheek
Flow'rs, though the soul be still to seek;
But shows as fits that solemn place
Whereof the window is the face:
Blankness and leaden outlines mark
What time the Church within is dark;
Yet view it on a Festal night,
Or some occasion else for light,
And each ungainly line is seen
A special character to mean
Of Saint or Prophet, and the whole
Blank window is a living scroll.

For hours, the clock upon the shelf,
Has all the talking to itself;
But to and fro her needle runs
Twice, while the clock is ticking once;
And, when a wife is well in reach,
Not silence separates, but speech;
And I, contented, read, or smoke,
And idly think, or idly stroke
The winking cat, or watch the fire,

In social peace that does not tire;
Until, at easeful end of day,
She moves, and puts her work away,
And, saying ‘How cold 'tis,’ or ‘How warm,’
Or something else as little harm,
Comes, used to finding, kindly press'd,
A woman's welcome to my breast,
With all the great advantage clear
Of none else having been so near.

But sometimes, (how shall I deny!)
There falls, with her thus fondly by,
Dejection, and a chilling shade.
Remember'd pleasures, as they fade,
Salute me, and colossal grow,
Like foot-prints in the thawing snow.
I feel oppress'd beyond my force
With foolish envy and remorse.
I love this woman, but I might
Have loved some else with more delight;
And strange it seems of God that He
Should make a vain capacity.

Such times of ignorant relapse,
'Tis well she does not talk, perhaps.
The dream, the discontent, the doubt,
To some injustice flaming out,
Were't else, might leave us both to moan
A kind tradition overthrown,
And dawning promise once more dead
In the pernicious lowlihead
Of not aspiring to be fair.
And what am I, that I should dare
Dispute with God, who moulds one clay
To honour and shame, and wills to pay
With equal wages them that delve
About His vines one hour or twelve!

XIII
From Lady Clitheroe To Mary Churchill

I've dreadful news, my Sister dear!
Frederick has married, as we hear,
Oh, such a girl! This fact we get
From Mr. Barton, whom we met
At Abury once. He used to know,
At Race and Hunt, Lord Clitheroe,
And writes that he ‘has seen Fred Graham,
‘Commander of the 'Wolf,'—the same
‘The Mess call'd Joseph,—with his Wife
‘Under his arm.’ He ‘lays his life,

‘The fellow married her for love,
‘For there was nothing else to move.
‘H. is her Shibboleth. 'Tis said
‘Her Mother was a Kitchen-Maid.’

Poor Fred! What will Honoria say?
She thought so highly of him. Pray
Tell it her gently. I've no right,
I know you hold, to trust my sight;
But Frederick's state could not be hid!
And Felix, coming when he did,
Was lucky; for Honoria, too,
Was half in love. How warm she grew
On ‘worldliness,’ when once I said
I fancied that, in ladies, Fred
Had tastes much better than his means!
His hand was worthy of a Queen's,
Said she, and actually shed tears
The night he left us for two years,
And sobb'd, when ask'd the cause to tell,
That ‘Frederick look'd so miserable.’
He did look very dull, no doubt,
But such things girls don't cry about.

What weathercocks men always prove!
You're quite right not to fall in love.
I never did, and, truth to tell,
I don't think it respectable.
The man can't understand it, too.
He likes to be in love with you,
But scarce knows how, if you love him,
Poor fellow. When 'tis woman's whim
To serve her husband night and day,
The kind soul lets her have her way!
So, if you wed, as soon you should,
Be selfish for your husband's good.
Happy the men who relegate
Their pleasures, vanities, and state
To us. Their nature seems to be
To enjoy themselves by deputy,
For, seeking their own benefit,
Dear, what a mess they make of it!
A man will work his bones away,
If but his wife will only play;
He does not mind how much he's teased,
So that his plague looks always pleased;
And never thanks her, while he lives,
For anything, but what he gives!
'Tis hard to manage men, we hear!
Believe me, nothing's easier, Dear.
The most important step by far
Is finding what their colours are.

The next is, not to let them know
The reason why they love us so.
The indolent droop of a blue shawl,
Or gray silk's fluctuating fall,
Covers the multitude of sins
In me. Your husband, Love, might wince
At azure, and be wild at slate,
And yet do well with chocolate.
Of course you'd let him fancy he
Adored you for your piety.

XIV
From Jane To Her Mother

Dear Mother, as you write, I see
How glad and thankful I should be
For such a husband. Yet to tell
The truth, I am so miserable!
How could he—I remember, though,
He never said he loved me! No,
He is so right that all seems wrong
I've done and thought my whole life long!
I'm grown so dull and dead with fear
That Yes and No, when he is near,
Is all I have to say. He's quite
Unlike what most would call polite,
And yet, when first I saw him come
To tea in Aunt's fine drawing-room,
He made me feel so common! Oh,
How dreadful if he thinks me so!
It's no use trying to behave
To him. His eye, so kind and grave,
Sees through and through me! Could not you,
Without his knowing that I knew,
Ask him to scold me now and then?
Mother, it's such a weary strain
The way he has of treating me
As if 'twas something fine to be
A woman; and appearing not
To notice any faults I've got!
I know he knows I'm plain, and small,
Stupid, and ignorant, and all
Awkward and mean; and, by degrees,
I see a beauty which he sees,
When often he looks strange awhile,
Then recollects me with a smile.

I wish he had that fancied Wife,
With me for Maid, now! all my life
To dress her out for him, and make
Her looks the lovelier for his sake;

To have her rate me till I cried;
Then see her seated by his side,
And driven off proudly to the Ball;
Then to stay up for her, whilst all
The servants were asleep; and hear
At dawn the carriage rolling near,
And let them in; and hear her laugh,
And boast, he said that none was half
So beautiful, and that the Queen,
Who danced with him the first, had seen
And noticed her, and ask'd who was
That lady in the golden gauze?
And then to go to bed, and lie
In a sort of heavenly jealousy,
Until 'twas broad day, and I guess'd
She slept, nor knew how she was bless'd.

Pray burn this letter. I would not
Complain, but for the fear I've got
Of going wild, as we hear tell
Of people shut up in a cell,
With no one there to talk to. He
Must never know he is loved by me
The most; he'd think himself to blame;
And I should almost die for shame.

If being good would serve instead
Of being graceful, ah, then, Fred—
But I, myself, I never could
See what's in women's being good;
For all their goodness is to do
Just what their nature tells them to.
Now, when a man would do what's right,
He has to try with all his might.

Though true and kind in deed and word,
Fred's not a vessel of the Lord.
But I have hopes of him; for, oh,
How can we ever surely know
But that the very darkest place
May be the scene of saving grace!

XV
From Frederick

'How did I feel?' The little wight
Fill'd me, unfatherly, with fright!
So grim it gazed, and, out of the sky,
There came, minute, remote, the cry,
Piercing, of original pain.
I put the wonder back to Jane,

And her delight seem'd dash'd, that I,
Of strangers still by nature shy,
Was not familiar quite so soon
With her small friend of many a moon.
But, when the new-made Mother smiled,
She seem'd herself a little child,
Dwelling at large beyond the law
By which, till then, I judged and saw;
And that fond glow which she felt stir
For it, suffused my heart for her;
To whom, from the weak babe, and thence
To me, an influent innocence,
Happy, reparative of life,
Came, and she was indeed my wife,
As there, lovely with love she lay,
Brightly contented all the day
To hug her sleepy little boy,
In the reciprocated joy
Of touch, the childish sense of love,
Ever inquisitive to prove
Its strange possession, and to know
If the eye's report be really so.

XVI
From Jane To Mrs. Graham

Dear Mother,—such if you'll allow,
In love, not law, I'll call you now,—
I hope you're well. I write to say
Frederick has got, besides his pay,
A good appointment in the Docks;
Also to thank you for the frocks
And shoes for Baby. I, (D.V.,)
Shall soon be strong. Fred goes to sea
No more. I am so glad; because,
Though kinder husband never was,
He seems still kinder to become
The more he stays with me at home.
When we are parted, I see plain
He's dull till he gets used again
To marriage. Do not tell him, though;
I would not have him know I know,
For all the world.

I try to mind
All your advice; but sometimes find
I do not well see how. I thought
To take it about dress; so bought
A gay new bonnet, gown, and shawl;
But Frederick was not pleased at all;
For, though he smiled, and said, ‘How smart!’

I feel, you know, what's in his heart.
But I shall learn! I fancied long
That care in dress was very wrong,
Till Frederick, in his startling way,
When I began to blame, one day,
The Admiral's Wife, because we hear
She spends two hours, or something near,
In dressing, took her part, and said
How all things deck themselves that wed;
How birds and plants grow fine to please
Each other in their marriages;
And how (which certainly is true—
It never struck me—did it you?)
Dress was, at first, Heaven's ordinance,
And has much Scripture countenance.
For Eliezer, we are told,
Adorn'd with jewels and with gold
Rebecca. In the Psalms, again,
How the King's Daughter dress'd! And, then,
The Good Wife in the Proverbs, she
Made herself clothes of tapestry,
Purple and silk: and there's much more
I had not thought about before!
But Fred's so clever! Do you know,
Since Baby came, he loves me so!
I'm really useful, now, to Fred;
And none could do so well instead.
It's nice to fancy, if I died,
He'd miss me from the Darling's side!
Also, there's something now, you see,
On which we talk, and quite agree;
On which, without pride too, I can
Hope I'm as wise as any man.
I should be happy now, if quite
Sure that in one thing Fred was right.
But, though I trust his prayers are said,
Because he goes so late to bed,
I doubt his Calling. Glad to find
A text adapted to his mind,—
That where St. Paul, in Man and Wife,
Allows a little worldly life,—
He smiled, and said that he knew all
Such things as that without St. Paul!
And once he said, when I with pain
Had got him just to read Romaine,
'Men's creeds should not their hopes condemn.
'Who wait for heaven to come to them
'Are little like to go to heaven,
'If logic's not the devil's leaven!'
I cried at such a wicked joke,
And he, surprised, went out to smoke.

But to judge him is not for me,
Who myself sin so dreadfully
As half to doubt if I should care
To go to heaven, and he not there.
He must be right; and I dare say
I shall soon understand his way.
To other things, once strange, I've grown
Accustom'd, nay, to like. I own
'Twas long before I got well used
To sit, while Frederick read or mused
For hours, and scarcely spoke. When he
For all that, held the door to me,
Pick'd up my handkerchief, and rose
To set my chair, with other shows
Of honour, such as men, 'tis true,
To sweethearts and fine ladies do,
It almost seem'd an unkind jest;
But now I like these ways the best.
They somehow make me gentle and good;
And I don't mind his quiet mood.
If Frederick does seem dull awhile,
There's Baby. You should see him smile!
I'm pretty and nice to him, sweet Pet,
And he will learn no better yet:
Indeed, now little Johnny makes
A busier time of it, and takes
Our thoughts off one another more,
I'm happy as need be, I'm sure!

XVII
From Felix To Honoria

Let me, Beloved, while gratitude
Is garrulous with coming good,
Or ere the tongue of happiness
Be silenced by your soft caress,
Relate how, musing here of you,
The clouds, the intermediate blue,
The air that rings with larks, the grave
And distant rumour of the wave,
The solitary sailing skiff,
The gusty corn-field on the cliff,
The corn-flower by the crumbling ledge,
Or, far-down at the shingle's edge,
The sighing sea's recurrent crest
Breaking, resign'd to its unrest,
All whisper, to my home-sick thought,
Of charms in you till now uncaught,
Or only caught as dreams, to die
Ere they were own'd by memory.

High and ingenious Decree
Of joy-devising Deity!
You whose ambition only is
The assurance that you make my bliss,
(Hence my first debt of love to show,
That you, past showing, indeed do so!)
Trust me, the world, the firmament,
With diverse-natured worlds besprent,
Were rear'd in no mere undivine
Boast of omnipotent design,
The lion differing from the snake
But for the trick of difference sake,
And comets darting to and fro
Because in circles planets go;
But rather that sole love might be
Refresh'd throughout eternity
In one sweet faith, for ever strange,
Mirror'd by circumstantial change.
For, more and more, do I perceive
That everything is relative
To you, and that there's not a star,
Nor nothing in't, so strange or far,
But, if 'twere scanned, 'twould chiefly mean
Somewhat, till then, in you unseen,
Something to make the bondage strait
Of you and me more intimate,
Some unguess'd opportunity
Of nuptials in a new degree.

But, oh, with what a novel force
Your best-conn'd beauties, by remorse
Of absence, touch; and, in my heart,
How bleeds afresh the youthful smart
Of passion fond, despairing still
To utter infinite good-will
By worthy service! Yet I know
That love is all that love can owe,
And this to offer is no less
Of worth, in kind speech or caress,
Than if my life-blood I should give.
For good is God's prerogative,
And Love's deed is but to prepare
The flatter'd, dear Belov'd to dare
Acceptance of His gifts. When first
On me your happy beauty burst,
Honoria, verily it seem'd
That naught beyond you could be dream'd
Of beauty and of heaven's delight.
Zeal of an unknown infinite
Yet bade me ever wish you more
Beatified than e'er before.
Angelical were your replies

To my prophetic flatteries;
And sweet was the compulsion strong
That drew me in the course along
Of heaven's increasing bright allure,
With provocations fresh of your
Victorious capacity.
Whither may love, so fledged, not fly?

Did not mere Earth hold fast the string
Of this celestial soaring thing,
So measure and make sensitive,
And still, to the nerves, nice notice give
Of each minutest increment
Of such interminable ascent,
The heart would lose all count, and beat
Unconscious of a height so sweet,
And the spirit-pursuing senses strain
Their steps on the starry track in vain!
But, reading now the note just come,
With news of you, the babes, and home,
I think, and say, 'To-morrow eve
'With kisses me will she receive;'
And, thinking, for extreme delight
Of love's extremes, I laugh outright.

XVIII
From Frederick

Eight wedding-days gone by, and none
Yet kept, to keep them all in one,
Jane and myself, with John and Grace
On donkeys, visited the place
I first drew breath in, Knatchley Wood.
Bearing the basket, stuff'd with food,
Milk, loaves, hard eggs, and marmalade,
I halted where the wandering glade
Divides the thicket. There I knew,
It seem'd, the very drops of dew
Below the unalter'd eglantine.
Nothing had changed since I was nine!

In the green desert, down to eat
We sat, our rustic grace at meat
Good appetite, through that long climb
Hungry two hours before the time.
And there Jane took her stitching out,
And John for birds'-nests pry'd about,
And Grace and Baby, in between
The warm blades of the breathing green,
Dodged grasshoppers; and I no less,
In conscientious idleness,

Enjoy'd myself, under the noon
Stretch'd, and the sounds and sights of June
Receiving, with a drowsy charm,
Through muffled ear and folded arm.

And then, as if I sweetly dream'd,
I half-remember'd how it seem'd
When I, too, was a little child
About the wild wood roving wild.
Pure breezes from the far-off height
Melted the blindness from my sight,
Until, with rapture, grief, and awe,
I saw again as then I saw.
As then I saw, I saw again
The harvest-waggon in the lane,
With high-hung tokens of its pride
Left in the elms on either side;
The daisies coming out at dawn
In constellations on the lawn;
The glory of the daffodil;
The three black windmills on the hill,
Whose magic arms, flung wildly by,
Sent magic shadows o'er the rye.
Within the leafy coppice, lo,
More wealth than miser's dreams could show,
The blackbird's warm and woolly brood,
Five golden beaks agape for food;
The Gipsies, all the summer seen
Native as poppies to the Green;
The winter, with its frosts and thaws
And opulence of hips and haws;
The lovely marvel of the snow;
The Tamar, with its altering show
Of gay ships sailing up and down,
Among the fields and by the Town;
And, dearer far than anything,
Came back the songs you used to sing.
(Ah, might you sing such songs again,
And I, your Child, but hear as then,
With conscious profit of the gulf
Flown over from my present self!)
And, as to men's retreating eyes,
Beyond high mountains higher rise,
Still farther back there shone to me
The dazzling dusk of infancy.
Thither I look'd, as, sick of night,
The Alpine shepherd looks to the height,
And does not see the day, 'tis true,
But sees the rosy tops that do.

Meantime Jane stitch'd, and fann'd the flies
From my repose, with hush'd replies

To Grace, and smiles when Baby fell.
Her countenance love visible
Appear'd, love audible her voice.
Why in the past alone rejoice,
Whilst here was wealth before me cast
Which, I could feel, if 'twere but past
Were then most precious? Question vain,
When ask'd again and yet again,
Year after year; yet now, for no
Cause, but that heaven's bright winds will blow
Not at our pray'r but as they list,
It brought that distant, golden mist
To grace the hour, firing the deep
Of spirit and the drowsy keep
Of joy, till, spreading uncontain'd,
The holy power of seeing gain'd
The outward eye, this owning even
That where there's love and truth there's heaven.

Debtor to few, forgotten hours
Am I, that truths for me are powers.
Ah, happy hours, 'tis something yet
Not to forget that I forget!

And now a cloud, bright, huge and calm,
Rose, doubtful if for bale or balm;
O'ertoppling towers and bulwarks bright
Appear'd, at beck of viewless might,
Along a rifted mountain range.
Untraceable and swift in change,
Those glittering peaks, disrupted, spread
To solemn bulks, seen overhead;
The sunshine quench'd, from one dark form
Fumed the appalling light of storm.
Straight to the zenith, black with bale,
The Gipsies' smoke rose deadly pale;
And one wide night of hopeless hue
Hid from the heart the recent blue.
And soon, with thunder crackling loud,
A flash reveal'd the formless cloud:
Lone sailing rack, far wavering rim,
And billowy tracks of stormland dim.

We stood, safe group'd beneath a shed.
Grace hid behind Jane's gown for dread,
Who told her, fondling with her hair,
‘The naughty noise! but God took care
‘Of all good girls.’ John seem'd to me
Too much for Jane's theology,
Who bade him watch the tempest. Now
A blast made all the woodland bow;
Against the whirl of leaves and dust

Kine dropp'd their heads; the tortured gust
Jagg'd and convuls'd the ascending smoke
To mockery of the lightning's stroke.
The blood prick'd, and a blinding flash
And close coinstantaneous crash
Humbled the soul, and the rain all round
Resilient dimm'd the whistling ground,
Nor flagg'd in force from first to last,
Till, sudden as it came, 'twas past,
Leaving a trouble in the copse
Of brawling birds and tinkling drops.

Change beyond hope! Far thunder faint
Mutter'd its vast and vain complaint,
And gaps and fractures, fringed with light,
Show'd the sweet skies, with squadrons bright
Of cloudlets, glittering calm and fair
Through gulfs of calm and glittering air.

With this adventure, we return'd.
The roads the feet no longer burn'd.
A wholesome smell of rainy earth
Refresh'd our spirits, tired of mirth.
The donkey-boy drew friendly near
My Wife, and, touch'd by the kind cheer
Her countenance show'd, or sooth'd perchance
By the soft evening's sad advance,
As we were, stroked the flanks and head
Of the ass, and, somewhat thick-voiced, said,
‘To 'ave to wop the donkeys so
‘'Ardens the 'art, but they won't go
‘Without!’ My Wife, by this impress'd,
As men judge poets by their best,
When now we reach'd the welcome door,
Gave him his hire, and sixpence more.

XIX
From Jane

Dear Mrs. Graham, the fever's past,
And Fred is well. I, in my last,
Forgot to say that, while 'twas on,
A lady, call'd Honoria Vaughan,
One of his Salisbury Cousins, came.
Had I, she ask'd me, heard her name?
'Twas that Honoria, no doubt,
Whom he would sometimes talk about
And speak to, when his nights were bad,
And so I told her that I had.

She look'd so beautiful and kind!

And just the sort of wife my mind
Pictured for Fred, with many tears,
In those sad early married years.

Visiting, yesterday, she said,
The Admiral's Wife, she learn'd that Fred
Was very ill; she begg'd to be,
If possible, of use to me.
What could she do? Last year, his Aunt
Died, leaving her, who had no want,
Her fortune. Half was his, she thought;
But he, she knew, would not be brought
To take his rights at second hand.
Yet something might, she hoped, be plann'd.
What did I think of putting John
To school and college? Mr. Vaughan,
When John was old enough, could give
Preferment to her relative;
And she should be so pleased.—I said
I felt quite sure that dearest Fred
Would be most thankful. Would we come,
And make ourselves, she ask'd, at home,
Next month, at High-Hurst? Change of air
Both he and I should need, and there
At leisure we could talk, and then
Fix plans, as John was nearly ten.

It seemed so rude to think and doubt,
So I said, Yes. In going out,
She said, 'How strange of Frederick, Dear,'
(I wish he had been there to hear,)
'To send no cards, or tell me what
'A nice new Cousin I had got!'
Was not that kind?

When Fred grew strong,
I had, I found, done very wrong.
Anger was in his voice and eye.
With people born and bred so high
As Fred and Mrs. Vaughan and you,
It's hard to guess what's right to do;
And he won't teach me!

Dear Fred wrote,
Directly, such a lovely note,
Which, though it undid all I had done,
Was, both to me and Mrs. Vaughan,
So kind! His words, I can't say why,
Like soldiers' music, made me cry.

Coventry Patmore

The Victories Of Love. Book II

I
From Jane To Her Mother

Thank Heaven, the burthens on the heart
Are not half known till they depart!
Although I long'd, for many a year,
To love with love that casts out fear,
My Frederick's kindness frighten'd me,
And heaven seem'd less far off than he;
And in my fancy I would trace
A lady with an angel's face,
That made devotion simply debt,
Till sick with envy and regret,
And wicked grief that God should e'er
Make women, and not make them fair.
That he might love me more because
Another in his memory was,
And that my indigence might be
To him what Baby's was to me,
The chief of charms, who could have thought?
But God's wise way is to give nought
Till we with asking it are tired;
And when, indeed, the change desired
Comes, lest we give ourselves the praise,
It comes by Providence, not Grace;
And mostly our thanks for granted pray'rs
Are groans at unexpected cares.
First Baby went to heaven, you know,
And, five weeks after, Grace went, too.
Then he became more talkative,
And, stooping to my heart, would give
Signs of his love, which pleased me more
Than all the proofs he gave before;
And, in that time of our great grief,
We talk'd religion for relief;
For, though we very seldom name
Religion, we now think the same!
Oh, what a bar is thus removed
To loving and to being loved!
For no agreement really is
In anything when none's in this.
Why, Mother, once, if Frederick press'd
His wife against his hearty breast,
The interior difference seem'd to tear
My own, until I could not bear
The trouble. 'Twas a dreadful strife,
And show'd, indeed, that faith is life.
He never felt this. If he did,
I'm sure it could not have been hid;
For wives, I need not say to you,
Can feel just what their husbands do,
Without a word or look; but then

It is not so, you know, with men.

From that time many a Scripture text
Help'd me, which had, before, perplex'd.
Oh, what a wond'rous word seem'd this:
He is my head, as Christ is his!
None ever could have dared to see
In marriage such a dignity
For man, and for his wife, still less,
Such happy, happy lowliness,
Had God Himself not made it plain!
This revelation lays the rein—

If I may speak so—on the neck
Of a wife's love, takes thence the check
Of conscience, and forbids to doubt
Its measure is to be without
All measure, and a fond excess
Is here her rule of godliness.

I took him not for love but fright;
He did but ask a dreadful right.
In this was love, that he loved me
The first, who was mere poverty.
All that I know of love he taught;
And love is all I know of aught.
My merit is so small by his,
That my demerit is my bliss.
My life is hid with him in Christ,
Never thencefrom to be enticed;
And in his strength have I such rest
As when the baby on my breast
Finds what it knows not how to seek,
And, very happy, very weak,
Lies, only knowing all is well,
Pillow'd on kindness palpable.

II
From Lady Clitheroe To Mary Churchill

Dear Saint, I'm still at High-Hurst Park.
The house is fill'd with folks of mark.
Honoria suits a good estate
Much better than I hoped. How fate
Loads her with happiness and pride!
And such a loving lord, beside!
But between us, Sweet, everything
Has limits, and to build a wing
To this old house, when Courtholm stands
Empty upon his Berkshire lands,
And all that Honor might be near

Papa, was buying love too dear.

With twenty others, there are two
Guests here, whose names will startle you:
Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Graham!
I thought he stay'd away for shame.
He and his wife were ask'd, you know,
And would not come, four years ago.
You recollect Miss Smythe found out
Who she had been, and all about
Her people at the Powder-mill;
And how the fine Aunt tried to instil
Haut ton, and how, at last poor Jane
Had got so shy and gauche that, when
The Dockyard gentry came to sup,
She always had to be lock'd up;
And some one wrote to us and said
Her mother was a kitchen-maid.
Dear Mary, you'll be charm'd to know
It must be all a fib. But, oh,
She is the oddest little Pet
On which my eyes were ever set!
She's so outrée and natural
That, when she first arrived, we all
Wonder'd, as when a robin comes
In through the window to eat crumbs
At breakfast with us. She has sense,
Humility, and confidence;
And, save in dressing just a thought
Gayer in colours than she ought,
(To-day she looks a cross between
Gipsy and Fairy, red and green,)
She always happens to do well.
And yet one never quite can tell
What she might do or utter next.
Lord Clitheroe is much perplex'd.
Her husband, every now and then,
Looks nervous; all the other men
Are charm'd. Yet she has neither grace,
Nor one good feature in her face.
Her eyes, indeed, flame in her head,
Like very altar-fires to Fred,
Whose steps she follows everywhere
Like a tame duck, to the despair
Of Colonel Holmes, who does his part
To break her funny little heart.
Honor's enchanted. 'Tis her view
That people, if they're good and true,
And treated well, and let alone,
Will kindly take to what's their own,
And always be original,
Like children. Honor's just like all

The rest of us! But, thinking so,
'Tis well she miss'd Lord Clitheroe,
Who hates originality,
Though he puts up with it in me.

Poor Mrs. Graham has never been
To the Opera! You should have seen
The innocent way she told the Earl
She thought Plays sinful when a girl,
And now she never had a chance!
Frederick's complacent smile and glance
Towards her, show'd me, past a doubt,
Honoria had been quite cut out.
'Tis very strange; for Mrs. Graham,
Though Frederick's fancy none can blame,
Seems the last woman you'd have thought
Her lover would have ever sought.
She never reads, I find, nor goes
Anywhere; so that I suppose
She got at all she ever knew
By growing up, as kittens do.

Talking of kittens, by-the-bye,
You have more influence than I
With dear Honoria. Get her, Dear,
To be a little more severe
With those sweet Children. They've the run
Of all the place. When school was done,
Maud burst in, while the Earl was there,
With 'Oh, Mama, do be a bear!'

Do you know, Dear, this odd wife of Fred
Adores his old Love in his stead!
She is so nice, yet, I should say,
Not quite the thing for every day.
Wonders are wearying! Felix goes
Next Sunday with her to the Close,
And you will judge.

Honoria asks
All Wiltshire Belles here; Felix basks
Like Puss in fire-shine, when the room
Is thus aflame with female bloom.
But then she smiles when most would pout;
And so his lawless loves go out
With the last brocade. 'Tis not the same,
I fear, with Mrs. Frederick Graham.
Honoria should not have her here,—
And this you might just hint, my Dear,—
For Felix says he never saw
Such proof of what he holds for law,
That 'beauty is love which can be seen.'

Whatever he by this may mean,
Were it not dreadful if he fell
In love with her on principle!

III
From Jane To Mrs. Graham

Mother, I told you how, at first,
I fear'd this visit to the Hurst.
Fred must, I felt, be so distress'd
By aught in me unlike the rest
Who come here. But I find the place
Delightful; there's such ease, and grace,
And kindness, and all seem to be
On such a high equality.
They have not got to think, you know,
How far to make the money go.
But Frederick says it's less the expense
Of money, than of sound good-sense,
Quickness to care what others feel,
And thoughts with nothing to conceal;
Which I'll teach Johnny. Mrs. Vaughan
Was waiting for us on the Lawn,
And kiss'd and call'd me 'Cousin.' Fred
Neglected his old friends, she said.
He laugh'd, and colour'd up at this.
She was, you know, a flame of his;
But I'm not jealous! Luncheon done,
I left him, who had just begun
To talk about the Russian War
With an old Lady, Lady Carr,—
A Countess, but I'm more afraid,
A great deal, of the Lady's Maid,—
And went with Mrs. Vaughan to see
The pictures, which appear'd to be
Of sorts of horses, clowns, and cows
Call'd Wouvermans and Cuyps and Dows.
And then she took me up, to show
Her bedroom, where, long years ago,
A Queen slept. 'Tis all tapestries
Of Cupids, Gods, and Goddesses,
And black, carved oak. A curtain'd door
Leads thence into her soft Boudoir,
Where even her husband may but come
By favour. He, too, has his room,
Kept sacred to his solitude.
Did I not think the plan was good?
She ask'd me; but I said how small
Our house was, and that, after all,
Though Frederick would not say his prayers
At night till I was safe upstairs,

I thought it wrong to be so shy
Of being good when I was by.
‘Oh, you should humour him!’ she said,
With her sweet voice and smile; and led
The way to where the children ate
Their dinner, and Miss Williams sate.
She's only Nursery-Governess,
Yet they consider her no less
Than Lord or Lady Carr, or me.
Just think how happy she must be!
The Ball-Room, with its painted sky
Where heavy angels seem to fly,
Is a dull place; its size and gloom
Make them prefer, for drawing-room,
The Library, all done up new
And comfortable, with a view
Of Salisbury Spire between the boughs.

When she had shown me through the house,
(I wish I could have let her know
That she herself was half the show;
She is so handsome, and so kind!)
She fetch'd the children, who had dined;
And, taking one in either hand,
Show'd me how all the grounds were plann'd.
The lovely garden gently slopes
To where a curious bridge of ropes
Crosses the Avon to the Park.
We rested by the stream, to mark
The brown backs of the hovering trout.
Frank tickled one, and took it out
From under a stone. We saw his owls,
And awkward Cochin-China fowls,
And shaggy pony in the croft;
And then he dragg'd us to a loft,
Where pigeons, as he push'd the door,
Fann'd clear a breadth of dusty floor,
And set us coughing. I confess
I trembled for my nice silk dress.
I cannot think how Mrs. Vaughan
Ventured with that which she had on,—
A mere white wrapper, with a few
Plain trimmings of a quiet blue,
But, oh, so pretty! Then the bell
For dinner rang. I look'd quite well
(‘Quite charming,’ were the words Fred said,)
With the new gown that I've had made.

I am so proud of Frederick.
He's so high-bred and lordly-like
With Mrs. Vaughan! He's not quite so
At home with me; but that, you know,

I can't expect, or wish. 'Twould hurt,
And seem to mock at my desert.
Not but that I'm a duteous wife
To Fred; but, in another life,
Where all are fair that have been true
I hope I shall be graceful too,
Like Mrs. Vaughan. And, now, good-bye!
That happy thought has made me cry,
And feel half sorry that my cough,
In this fine air, is leaving off.

IV
From Frederick To Mrs. Graham

Honoria, trebly fair and mild
With added loves of lord and child,
Is else unalter'd. Years, which wrong
The rest, touch not her beauty, young
With youth which rather seems her clime,
Than aught that's relative to time.
How beyond hope was heard the prayer
I offer'd in my love's despair!
Could any, whilst there's any woe,
Be wholly blest, then she were so.
She is, and is aware of it,
Her husband's endless benefit;
But, though their daily ways reveal
The depth of private joy they feel,
'Tis not their bearing each to each
That does abroad their secret preach,
But such a lovely good-intent
To all within their government
And friendship as, 'tis well discern'd,
Each of the other must have learn'd;
For no mere dues of neighbourhood
Ever begot so blest a mood.

And fair, indeed, should be the few
God dowers with nothing else to do,
And liberal of their light, and free
To show themselves, that all may see!
For alms let poor men poorly give
The meat whereby men's bodies live;
But they of wealth are stewards wise
Whose graces are their charities.

The sunny charm about this home
Makes all to shine who thither come.
My own dear Jane has caught its grace,
And, honour'd, honours too the place.
Across the lawn I lately walk'd

Alone, and watch'd where mov'd and talk'd,
Gentle and goddess-like of air,
Honoria and some Stranger fair.
I chose a path unblest by these;
When one of the two Goddesses,
With my Wife's voice, but softer, said,
‘Will you not walk with us, dear Fred?’

She moves, indeed, the modest peer
Of all the proudest ladies here.
Unawed she talks with men who stand
Among the leaders of the land,
And women beautiful and wise,
With England's greatness in their eyes.
To high, traditional good-sense,
And knowledge ripe without pretence,
And human truth exactly hit
By quiet and conclusive wit,
Listens my little, homely Dove,
Mistakes the points and laughs for love;
And, after, stands and combs her hair,
And calls me much the wittiest there!

With reckless loyalty, dear Wife,
She lays herself about my life!
The joy I might have had of yore
I have not; for 'tis now no more,
With me, the lyric time of youth,
And sweet sensation of the truth.
Yet, past my hope or purpose bless'd,
In my chance choice let be confess'd
The tenderer Providence that rules
The fates of children and of fools!

I kiss'd the kind, warm neck that slept,
And from her side this morning stepp'd,
To bathe my brain from drowsy night
In the sharp air and golden light.
The dew, like frost, was on the pane.
The year begins, though fair, to wane.
There is a fragrance in its breath
Which is not of the flowers, but death;
And green above the ground appear
The lilies of another year.
I wander'd forth, and took my path
Among the bloomless aftermath;
And heard the steadfast robin sing
As if his own warm heart were Spring,
And watch'd him feed where, on the yew,
Hung honey'd drops of crimson dew;
And then return'd, by walls of peach,
And pear-trees bending to my reach,

And rose-beds with the roses gone,
To bright-laid breakfast. Mrs. Vaughan
Was there, none with her. I confess
I love her than of yore no less!
But she alone was loved of old;
Now love is twain, nay, manifold;
For, somehow, he whose daily life
Adjusts itself to one true wife,
Grows to a nuptial, near degree
With all that's fair and womanly.
Therefore, as more than friends, we met,
Without constraint, without regret;
The wedded yoke that each had donn'd
Seeming a sanction, not a bond.

V
From Mrs. Graham

Your love lacks joy, your letter says.
Yes; love requires the focal space
Of recollection or of hope,
Ere it can measure its own scope.
Too soon, too soon comes Death to show
We love more deeply than we know!
The rain, that fell upon the height
Too gently to be call'd delight,
Within the dark vale reappears
As a wild cataract of tears;
And love in life should strive to see
Sometimes what love in death would be!
Easier to love, we so should find,
It is than to be just and kind.

She's gone: shut close the coffin-lid:
What distance for another did
That death has done for her! The good,
Once gazed upon with heedless mood,
Now fills with tears the famish'd eye,
And turns all else to vanity.
'Tis sad to see, with death between,
The good we have pass'd and have not seen!
How strange appear the words of all!
The looks of those that live appal.
They are the ghosts, and check the breath:
There's no reality but death,
And hunger for some signal given
That we shall have our own in heaven.
But this the God of love lets be
A horrible uncertainty.

How great her smallest virtue seems,

How small her greatest fault! Ill dreams
Were those that foil'd with loftier grace
The homely kindness of her face.
'Twas here she sat and work'd, and there
She comb'd and kiss'd the children's hair;
Or, with one baby at her breast,
Another taught, or hush'd to rest.
Praise does the heart no more refuse
To the chief loveliness of use.
Her humblest good is hence most high
In the heavens of fond memory;
And Love says Amen to the word,
A prudent wife is from the Lord.
Her worst gown's kept, ('tis now the best,
As that in which she oftenest dress'd,)
For memory's sake more precious grown
Than she herself was for her own.
Poor child! foolish it seem'd to fly
To sobs instead of dignity,
When she was hurt. Now, more than all,
Heart-rending and angelical
That ignorance of what to do,
Bewilder'd still by wrong from you:
For what man ever yet had grace
Ne'er to abuse his power and place?

No magic of her voice or smile
Suddenly raised a fairy isle,
But fondness for her underwent
An unregarded increment,
Like that which lifts, through centuries,
The coral-reef within the seas,
Till, lo! the land where was the wave,
Alas! 'tis everywhere her grave.

VI
From Jane To Mrs. Graham

Dear Mother, I can surely tell,
Now, that I never shall get well.
Besides the warning in my mind,
All suddenly are grown so kind.
Fred stopp'd the Doctor, yesterday,
Downstairs, and, when he went away,
Came smiling back, and sat with me,
Pale, and conversing cheerfully
About the Spring, and how my cough,
In finer weather, would leave off.
I saw it all, and told him plain
I felt no hope of Spring again.
Then he, after a word of jest,

Burst into tears upon my breast,
And own'd, when he could speak, he knew
There was a little danger, too.
This made me very weak and ill,
And while, last night, I lay quite still,
And, as he fancied, in the deep,
Exhausted rest of my short sleep,
I heard, or dream'd I heard him pray:
‘Oh, Father, take her not away!
‘Let not life's dear assurance lapse
‘Into death's agonised 'Perhaps,'

‘A hope without Thy promise, where
‘Less than assurance is despair!
‘Give me some sign, if go she must,
‘That death's not worse than dust to dust,
‘Not heaven, on whose oblivious shore
‘Joy I may have, but her no more!
‘The bitterest cross, it seems to me,
‘Of all is infidelity;
‘And so, if I may choose, I'll miss
‘The kind of heaven which comes to this.
‘If doom'd, indeed, this fever ceased,
‘To die out wholly, like a beast,
‘Forgetting all life's ill success
‘In dark and peaceful nothingness,
‘I could but say, Thy will be done;
‘For, dying thus, I were but one
‘Of seed innumerable which ne'er
‘In all the worlds shall bloom or bear.
‘I've put life past to so poor use
‘Well may'st Thou life to come refuse;
‘And justice, which the spirit contents,
‘Shall still in me all vain laments;
‘Nay, pleased, I will, while yet I live,
‘Think Thou my forfeit joy may'st give
‘To some fresh life, else unelect,
‘And heaven not feel my poor defect!
‘Only let not Thy method be
‘To make that life, and call it me;
‘Still less to sever mine in twain,
‘And tell each half to live again,
‘And count itself the whole! To die,
‘Is it love's disintegrity?
‘Answer me, 'No,' and I, with grace,
‘Will life's brief desolation face,
‘My ways, as native to the clime,
‘Adjusting to the wintry time,
‘Ev'n with a patient cheer thereof—’

He started up, hearing me cough.
Oh, Mother, now my last doubt's gone!

He likes me more than Mrs. Vaughan;
And death, which takes me from his side,
Shows me, in very deed, his bride!

VII
From Jane To Frederick

I leave this, Dear, for you to read,
For strength and hope, when I am dead.
When Grace died, I was so perplex'd,
I could not find one helpful text;
And when, a little while before,
I saw her sobbing on the floor,
Because I told her that in heaven
She would be as the angels even,
And would not want her doll, 'tis true
A horrible fear within me grew,
That, since the preciousness of love
Went thus for nothing, mine might prove
To be no more, and heaven's bliss
Some dreadful good which is not this.

But being about to die makes clear
Many dark things. I have no fear,
Now, that my love, my grief, my joy
Is but a passion for a toy.
I cannot speak at all, I find,
The shining something in my mind,
That shows so much that, if I took
My thoughts all down, 'twould make a book.
God's Word, which lately seem'd above
The simpleness of human love,
To my death-sharpen'd hearing tells
Of little or of nothing else;
And many things I hoped were true,
When first they came, like songs, from you,
Now rise with witness past the reach
Of doubt, and I to you can teach,
As if with felt authority
And as things seen, what you taught me.

Yet how? I have no words but those
Which every one already knows:
As, ‘No man hath at any time
‘Seen God, but 'tis the love of Him
‘Made perfect, and He dwells in us,
‘If we each other love.’ Or thus,
‘My goodness misseth in extent
‘Of Thee, Lord! In the excellent
‘I know Thee; and the Saints on Earth
‘Make all my love and holy mirth.’

And further, ‘Inasmuch as ye
‘Did it to one of these, to Me
‘Ye did it, though ye nothing thought
‘Nor knew of Me, in that ye wrought.’

What shall I dread? Will God undo
Our bond, which is all others too?
And when I meet you will you say
To my reclaiming looks, ‘Away!
‘A dearer love my bosom warms
‘With higher rights and holier charms.
‘The children, whom thou here may'st see,
‘Neighbours that mingle thee and me,
‘And gaily on impartial lyres
‘Renounce the foolish filial fires
‘They felt, with 'Praise to God on high,
‘'Goodwill to all else equally;'

‘The trials, duties, service, tears;
‘The many fond, confiding years
‘Of nearness sweet with thee apart;
‘The joy of body, mind, and heart;
‘The love that grew a reckless growth,
‘Unmindful that the marriage-oath
‘To love in an eternal style
‘Meant—only for a little while:
‘Sever'd are now those bonds earth-wrought:
‘All love, not new, stands here for nought!’

Why, it seems almost wicked, Dear,
Even to utter such a fear!
Are we not ‘heirs,’ as man and wife,
‘Together of eternal life?’
Was Paradise e'er meant to fade,
To make which marriage first was made?
Neither beneath him nor above
Could man in Eden find his Love;
Yet with him in the garden walk'd
His God, and with Him mildly talk'd!
Shall the humble preference offend
In heaven, which God did there commend?
Are ‘honourable and undefiled’
The names of aught from heaven exiled?
And are we not forbid to grieve
As without hope? Does God deceive,
And call that hope which is despair,
Namely, the heaven we should not share?
Image and glory of the man,
As he of God, is woman. Can
This holy, sweet proportion die
Into a dull equality?
Are we not one flesh, yea, so far

More than the babe and mother are,
That sons are bid mothers to leave
And to their wives alone to cleave,
‘For they two are one flesh?’ But 'tis
In the flesh we rise. Our union is,
You know 'tis said, ‘great mystery.’
Great mockery, it appears to me;
Poor image of the spousal bond
Of Christ and Church, if loosed beyond
This life!—'Gainst which, and much more yet,
There's not a single word to set.
The speech to the scoffing Sadducee
Is not in point to you and me;
For how could Christ have taught such clods
That Cæsar's things are also God's?
The sort of Wife the Law could make
Might well be ‘hated’ for Love's sake,
And left, like money, land, or house;
For out of Christ is no true spouse.

I used to think it strange of Him
To make love's after-life so dim,
Or only clear by inference:
But God trusts much to common sense,
And only tells us what, without
His Word, we could not have found out.
On fleshly tables of the heart
He penn'd truth's feeling counterpart
In hopes that come to all: so, Dear,
Trust these, and be of happy cheer,
Nor think that he who has loved well
Is of all men most miserable.

There's much more yet I want to say,
But cannot now. You know my way
Of feeling strong from Twelve till Two
After my wine. I'll write to you
Daily some words, which you shall have
To break the silence of the grave.

VIII
From Jane To Frederick

You think, perhaps, ‘Ah, could she know
How much I loved her!’ Dear, I do!
And you may say, ‘Of this new awe
‘Of heart which makes her fancies law,
‘These watchful duties of despair,
‘She does not dream, she cannot care!’
Frederick, you see how false that is,
Or how could I have written this?

And, should it ever cross your mind
That, now and then, you were unkind,
You never, never were at all!
Remember that! It's natural
For one like Mr. Vaughan to come,
From a morning's useful pastime, home,
And greet, with such a courteous zest,
His handsome wife, still newly dress'd,
As if the Bird of Paradise
Should daily change her plumage thrice.
He's always well, she's always gay.
Of course! But he who toils all day,
And comes home hungry, tired, or cold,
And feels 'twould do him good to scold
His wife a little, let him trust
Her love, and say the things he must,
Till sooth'd in mind by meat and rest.
If, after that, she's well caress'd,
And told how good she is, to bear
His humour, fortune makes it fair.
Women like men to be like men;
That is, at least, just now and then.
Thus, I have nothing to forgive,
But those first years, (how could I live!)
When, though I really did behave
So stupidly, you never gave
One unkind word or look at all:
As if I was some animal
You pitied! Now, in later life,
You used me like a proper Wife.

You feel, Dear, in your present mood,
Your Jane, since she was kind and good,
A child of God, a living soul,
Was not so different, on the whole,
From Her who had a little more
Of God's best gifts: but, oh, be sure,
My dear, dear Love, to take no blame
Because you could not feel the same
Towards me, living, as when dead.
A hungry man must needs think bread
So sweet! and, only at their rise
And setting, blessings, to the eyes,
Like the sun's course, grow visible.
If you are sad, remember well,
Against delusions of despair,
That memory sees things as they were,
And not as they were misenjoy'd,
And would be still, if ought destroy'd
The glory of their hopelessness:
So that, in truth, you had me less
In days when necessary zeal

For my perfection made you feel
My faults the most, than now your love
Forgets but where it can approve.
You gain by loss, if that seem'd small
Possess'd, which, being gone, turns all
Surviving good to vanity.
Oh, Fred, this makes it sweet to die!

Say to yourself: ''Tis comfort yet
'I made her that which I regret;
'And parting might have come to pass
'In a worse season; as it was,
'Love an eternal temper took,
'Dipp'd, glowing, in Death's icy brook!'
Or say, 'On her poor feeble head
'This might have fallen: 'tis mine instead!
'And so great evil sets me free
'Henceforward from calamity.
'And, in her little children, too,
'How much for her I yet can do!'
And grieve not for these orphans even;
For central to the love of Heaven
Is each child as each star to space.
This truth my dying love has grace
To trust with a so sure content,
I fear I seem indifferent.

You must not think a child's small heart
Cold, because it and grief soon part.
Fanny will keep them all away,
Lest you should hear them laugh and play,
Before the funeral's over. Then
I hope you'll be yourself again,
And glad, with all your soul, to find
How God thus to the sharpest wind
Suits the shorn lambs. Instruct them, Dear,
For my sake, in His love and fear.
And show how, till their journey's done,
Not to be weary they must run.

Strive not to dissipate your grief
By any lightness. True relief
Of sorrow is by sorrow brought.
And yet for sorrow's sake, you ought
To grieve with measure. Do not spend
So good a power to no good end!
Would you, indeed, have memory stay
In the heart, lock up and put away
Relics and likenesses and all
Musings, which waste what they recall.
True comfort, and the only thing
To soothe without diminishing

A prized regret, is to match here,
By a strict life, God's love severe.
Yet, after all, by nature's course,
Feeling must lose its edge and force.
Again you'll reach the desert tracts
Where only sin or duty acts.
But, if love always lit our path,
Where were the trial of our faith?

Oh, should the mournful honeymoon
Of death be over strangely soon,
And life-long resolutions, made
In grievous haste, as quickly fade,
Seeming the truth of grief to mock,
Think, Dearest, 'tis not by the clock
That sorrow goes! A month of tears
Is more than many, many years
Of common time. Shun, if you can,
However, any passionate plan.
Grieve with the heart; let not the head
Grieve on, when grief of heart is dead;
For all the powers of life defy
A superstitious constancy.

The only bond I hold you to
Is that which nothing can undo.
A man is not a young man twice;
And if, of his young years, he lies
A faithful score in one wife's breast,
She need not mind who has the rest.
In this do what you will, dear Love,
And feel quite sure that I approve.
And, should it chance as it may be,
Give her my wedding-ring from me;
And never dream that you can err
T'wards me by being good to her;
Nor let remorseful thoughts destroy
In you the kindly flowering joy
And pleasure of the natural life.

But don't forget your fond, dead Wife.
And, Frederick, should you ever be
Tempted to think your love of me
All fancy, since it drew its breath
So much more sweetly after death,
Remember that I never did
A single thing you once forbid;
All poor folk liked me; and, at the end,
Your Cousin call'd me ‘Dearest Friend!’

And, now, 'twill calm your grief to know,—
You, who once loved Honoria so,—

There's kindness, that's look'd kindly on,
Between her Emily and John.
Thus, in your children, you will wed!
And John seems so much comforted,
(Like Isaac when his mother died
And fair Rebekah was his bride),
By his new hope, for losing me!
So all is happiness, you see.
And that reminds me how, last night,
I dreamt of heaven, with great delight.
A strange, kind Lady watch'd my face,
Kiss'd me, and cried, 'His hope found grace!'
She bade me then, in the crystal floor,
Look at myself, myself no more;
And bright within the mirror shone
Honoria's smile, and yet my own!
'And, when you talk, I hear,' she sigh'd,
'How much he loved her! Many a bride
'In heaven such countersemblance wears
'Through what Love deem'd rejected prayers.'
She would have spoken still; but, lo,
One of a glorious troop, aglow
From some great work, towards her came,
And she so laugh'd, 'twas such a flame,
Aaron's twelve jewels seem'd to mix
With the lights of the Seven Candlesticks.

IX
From Lady Clitheroe To Mrs. Graham

My dearest Aunt, the Wedding-day,
But for Jane's loss, and you away,
Was all a Bride from heaven could beg!
Skies bluer than the sparrow's egg,
And clearer than the cuckoo's call;
And such a sun! the flowers all
With double ardour seem'd to blow!
The very daisies were a show,
Expanded with uncommon pride,
Like little pictures of the Bride.

Your Great-Niece and your Grandson were
Perfection of a pretty pair.
How well Honoria's girls turn out,
Although they never go about!
Dear me, what trouble and expense
It took to teach mine confidence!
Hers greet mankind as I've heard say
That wild things do, where beasts of prey
Were never known, nor any men
Have met their fearless eyes till then.

Their grave, inquiring trust to find
All creatures of their simple kind
Quite disconcerts bold coxcombry,
And makes less perfect candour shy.
Ah, Mrs. Graham! people may scoff,
But how your home-kept girls go off!
How Hymen hastens to unband
The waist that ne'er felt waltzer's hand!
At last I see my Sister's right,
And I've told Maud this very night,
(But, oh, my daughters have such wills!)
To knit, and only dance quadrilles.

You say Fred never writes to you
Frankly, as once he used to do,
About himself; and you complain
He shared with none his grief for Jane.
It all comes of the foolish fright
Men feel at the word, hypocrite.
Although, when first in love, sometimes
They rave in letters, talk, and rhymes,
When once they find, as find they must.
How hard 'tis to be hourly just
To those they love, they are dumb for shame,
Where we, you see, talk on the same.

Honoria, to whose heart alone
He seems to open all his own,
At times has tears in her kind eyes,
After their private colloquies.
He's her most favour'd guest, and moves
My spleen by his impartial loves.
His pleasure has some inner spring
Depending not on anything.
Petting our Polly, none e'er smiled
More fondly on his favourite child;
Yet, playing with his own, it is
Somehow as if it were not his.
He means to go again to sea,
Now that the wedding's over. He
Will leave to Emily and John
The little ones to practise on;
And Major-domo, Mrs. Rouse,
A deal old soul from Wilton House,
Will scold the housemaids and the cook,
Till Emily has learn'd to look
A little braver than a lamb
Surprised by dogs without its dam!

Do, dear Aunt, use your influence,
And try to teach some plain good sense
To Mary. 'Tis not yet too late

To make her change her chosen state
Of single silliness. In truth,
I fancy that, with fading youth,
Her will now wavers. Yesterday,
Though, till the Bride was gone away,
Joy shone from Mary's loving heart,
I found her afterwards apart,
Hysterically sobbing. I
Knew much too well to ask her why.
This marrying of Nieces daunts
The bravest souls of maiden Aunts.
Though Sisters' children often blend
Sweetly the bonds of child and friend,
They are but reeds to rest upon.
When Emily comes back with John,
Her right to go downstairs before
Aunt Mary will but be the more
Observed if kindly waived, and how
Shall these be as they were, when now
Niece has her John, and Aunt the sense
Of her superior innocence?
Somehow, all loves, however fond,
Prove lieges of the nuptial bond;
And she who dares at this to scoff,
Finds all the rest in time drop off;
While marriage, like a mushroom-ring,
Spreads its sure circle every Spring.

She twice refused George Vane, you know;
Yet, when he died three years ago
In the Indian war, she put on gray,
And wears no colours to this day.
And she it is who charges me,
Dear Aunt, with ‘inconsistency!’

X
From Frederick To Honoria

Cousin, my thoughts no longer try
To cast the fashion of the sky.
Imagination can extend
Scarcely in part to comprehend
The sweetness of our common food
Ambrosial, which ingratitude
And impious inadvertence waste,
Studious to eat but not to taste.
And who can tell what's yet in store
There, but that earthly things have more
Of all that makes their inmost bliss,
And life's an image still of this,
But haply such a glorious one

As is the rainbow of the sun?
Sweet are your words, but, after all
Their mere reversal may befall
The partners of His glories who
Daily is crucified anew:
Splendid privations, martyrdoms
To which no weak remission comes,
Perpetual passion for the good
Of them that feel no gratitude,
Far circlings, as of planets' fires,
Round never-to-be-reach'd desires,
Whatever rapturously sighs
That life is love, love sacrifice.
All I am sure of heaven is this:
Howe'er the mode, I shall not miss
One true delight which I have known.
Not on the changeful earth alone
Shall loyalty remain unmoved
T'wards everything I ever loved.
So Heaven's voice calls, like Rachel's voice
To Jacob in the field, ‘Rejoice!
‘Serve on some seven more sordid years,
‘Too short for weariness or tears;
‘Serve on; then, oh, Beloved, well-tried,
‘Take me for ever as thy Bride!’

XI
From Mary Churchill To The Dean

Charles does me honour, but 'twere vain
To reconsider now again,
And so to doubt the clear-shown truth
I sought for, and received, when youth,
Being fair, and woo'd by one whose love
Was lovely, fail'd my mind to move.
God bids them by their own will go,
Who ask again the things they know!
I grieve for my infirmity,
And ignorance of how to be
Faithful, at once, to the heavenly life,
And the fond duties of a wife.
Narrow am I and want the art
To love two things with all my heart.
Occupied singly in His search,
Who, in the Mysteries of the Church,
Returns, and calls them Clouds of Heaven,
I tread a road, straight, hard, and even;
But fear to wander all confused,
By two-fold fealty abused.
Either should I the one forget,
Or scantly pay the other's debt.

You bid me, Father, count the cost.
I have; and all that must be lost
I feel as only woman can.
To make the heart's wealth of some man,
And through the untender world to move,
Wrapt safe in his superior love,
How sweet! How sweet the household round
Of duties, and their narrow bound,
So plain, that to transgress were hard,
Yet full of manifest reward!
The charities not marr'd, like mine,
With chance of thwarting laws divine;
The world's regards and just delight
In one that's clearly, kindly right,
How sweet! Dear Father, I endure,
Not without sharp regret, be sure,
To give up such glad certainty,
For what, perhaps, may never be.
For nothing of my state I know,
But that t'ward heaven I seem to go,
As one who fondly landward hies
Along a deck that seaward flies.
With every year, meantime, some grace
Of earthly happiness gives place
To humbling ills, the very charms
Of youth being counted, henceforth, harms:
To blush already seems absurd;
Nor know I whether I should herd
With girls or wives, or sadlier balk
Maids' merriment or matrons' talk.

But strait's the gate of life! O'er late,
Besides, 'twere now to change my fate:
For flowers and fruit of love to form,
It must be Spring as well as warm.
The world's delight my soul dejects,
Revenging all my disrespects
Of old, with incapacity
To chime with even its harmless glee,
Which sounds, from fields beyond my range,
Like fairies' music, thin and strange.
With something like remorse, I grant
The world has beauty which I want;
And if, instead of judging it,
I at its Council chance to sit,
Or at its gay and order'd Feast,
My place seems lower than the least.
The conscience of the life to be
Smites me with inefficiency,
And makes me all unfit to bless
With comfortable earthliness

The rest-desiring brain of man.
Finally, then, I fix my plan
To dwell with Him that dwells apart
In the highest heaven and lowliest heart;
Nor will I, to my utter loss,
Look to pluck roses from the Cross.
As for the good of human love,
'Twere countercheck almost enough
To think that one must die before
The other; and perhaps 'tis more
In love's last interest to do
Nought the least contrary thereto,
Than to be blest, and be unjust,
Or suffer injustice; as they must,
Without a miracle, whose pact
Compels to mutual life and act,
Whether love shines, or darkness sleeps
Cold on the spirit's changeful deeps.

Enough if, to my earthly share,
Fall gleams that keep me from despair.
Happy the things we here discern;
More happy those for which we yearn;
But measurelessly happy above
All else are those we guess not of!

XII
From Felix To Honoria

Dearest, my Love and Wife, 'tis long
Ago I closed the unfinish'd song
Which never could be finish'd; nor
Will ever Poet utter more
Of love than I did, watching well
To lure to speech the unspeakable!
‘Why, having won her, do I woo?’
That final strain to the last height flew
Of written joy, which wants the smile
And voice that are, indeed, the while
They last, the very things you speak,
Honoria, who mak'st music weak
With ways that say, ‘Shall I not be
‘As kind to all as Heaven to me?’
And yet, ah, twenty-fold my Bride!
Rising, this twentieth festal-tide,
You still soft sleeping, on this day
Of days, some words I long to say,
Some words superfluously sweet
Of fresh assurance, thus to greet
Your waking eyes, which never grow
Weary of telling what I know

So well, yet only well enough
To wish for further news thereof.

Here, in this early autumn dawn,
By windows opening on the lawn,
Where sunshine seems asleep, though bright,
And shadows yet are sharp with night,
And, further on, the wealthy wheat
Bends in a golden drowse, how sweet
To sit and cast my careless looks
Around my walls of well-read books,
Wherein is all that stands redeem'd
From time's huge wreck, all men have dream'd
Of truth, and all by poets known
Of feeling, and in weak sort shown,
And, turning to my heart again,
To find I have what makes them vain,
The thanksgiving mind, which wisdom sums,
And you, whereby it freshly comes
As on that morning, (can there be
Twenty-two years 'twixt it and me?)
When, thrill'd with hopeful love I rose
And came in haste to Sarum Close,
Past many a homestead slumbering white
In lonely and pathetic light,
Merely to fancy which drawn blind
Of thirteen had my Love behind,
And in her sacred neighbourhood
To feel that sweet scorn of all good
But her, which let the wise forfend
When wisdom learns to comprehend!

Dearest, as each returning May
I see the season new and gay
With new joy and astonishment,
And Nature's infinite ostent
Of lovely flowers in wood and mead,
That weet not whether any heed,
So see I, daily wondering, you,
And worship with a passion new
The Heaven that visibly allows
Its grace to go about my house,
The partial Heaven, that, though I err
And mortal am, gave all to her
Who gave herself to me. Yet I
Boldly thank Heaven, (and so defy
The beggarly soul'd humbleness
Which fears God's bounty to confess,)
That I was fashion'd with a mind
Seeming for this great gift design'd,
So naturally it moved above
All sordid contraries of love,

Strengthen'd in youth with discipline
Of light, to follow the divine
Vision, (which ever to the dark
Is such a plague as was the ark
In Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron,) still
Discerning with the docile will
Which comes of full persuaded thought,
That intimacy in love is nought
Without pure reverence, whereas this,
In tearfullest banishment, is bliss.

And so, dearest Honoria, I
Have never learn'd the weary sigh
Of those that to their love-feasts went,
Fed, and forgot the Sacrament;
And not a trifle now occurs
But sweet initiation stirs
Of new-discover'd joy, and lends
To feeling change that never ends;
And duties, which the many irk,
Are made all wages and no work.

How sing of such things save to her,
Love's self, so love's interpreter?
How the supreme rewards confess
Which crown the austere voluptuousness
Of heart, that earns, in midst of wealth,
The appetite of want and health,
Relinquishes the pomp of life
And beauty to the pleasant Wife
At home, and does all joy despise
As out of place but in her eyes?
How praise the years and gravity
That make each favour seem to be
A lovelier weakness for her lord?
And, ah, how find the tender word
To tell aright of love that glows
The fairer for the fading rose?
Of frailty which can weight the arm
To lean with thrice its girlish charm?
Of grace which, like this autumn day,
Is not the sad one of decay,
Yet one whose pale brow pondereth
The far-off majesty of death?
How tell the crowd, whom passion rends,
That love grows mild as it ascends?
That joy's most high and distant mood
Is lost, not found in dancing blood;
Albeit kind acts and smiling eyes,
And all those fond realities
Which are love's words, in us mean more
Delight than twenty years before?

How, Dearest, finish, without wrong
To the speechless heart, the unfinish'd song,
Its high, eventful passages
Consisting, say, of things like these:—

One morning, contrary to law,
Which, for the most, we held in awe,
Commanding either not to intrude
On the other's place of solitude
Or solitary mind, for fear
Of coming there when God was near,
And finding so what should be known
To Him who is merciful alone,
And views the working ferment base
Of waking flesh and sleeping grace,
Not as we view, our kindness check'd
By likeness of our own defect,
I, venturing to her room, because
(Mark the excuse!) my Birthday 'twas,
Saw, here across a careless chair,
A ball-dress flung, as light as air,
And, here, beside a silken couch,
Pillows which did the pressure vouch
Of pious knees, (sweet piety!
Of goodness made and charity,
If gay looks told the heart's glad sense,
Much rather than of penitence,)
And, on the couch, an open book,
And written list—I did not look,
Yet just in her clear writing caught:—
‘Habitual faults of life and thought
‘Which most I need deliverance from.’
I turn'd aside, and saw her come
Adown the filbert-shaded way,
Beautified with her usual gay
Hypocrisy of perfectness,
Which made her heart, and mine no less,
So happy! And she cried to me,
‘You lose by breaking rules, you see!
‘Your Birthday treat is now half-gone
‘Of seeing my new ball-dress on.’
And, meeting so my lovely Wife,
A passing pang, to think that life
Was mortal, when I saw her laugh,
Shaped in my mind this epitaph:
‘Faults had she, child of Adam's stem,
‘But only Heaven knew of them.’

Or thus:

For many a dreadful day,

In sea-side lodgings sick she lay,
Noteless of love, nor seem'd to hear
The sea, on one side, thundering near,
Nor, on the other, the loud Ball
Held nightly in the public hall;
Nor vex'd they my short slumbers, though
I woke up if she breathed too low.
Thus, for three months, with terrors rife,
The pending of her precious life
I watch'd o'er; and the danger, at last,
The kind Physician said, was past.
Howbeit, for seven harsh weeks the East
Breathed witheringly, and Spring's growth ceased,
And so she only did not die;
Until the bright and blighting sky
Changed into cloud, and the sick flowers
Remember'd their perfumes, and showers
Of warm, small rain refreshing flew
Before the South, and the Park grew,
In three nights, thick with green. Then she
Revived, no less than flower and tree,
In the mild air, and, the fourth day,
Look'd supernaturally gay
With large, thanksgiving eyes, that shone,
The while I tied her bonnet on,
So that I led her to the glass,
And bade her see how fair she was,
And how love visibly could shine.
Profuse of hers, desiring mine,
And mindful I had loved her most
When beauty seem'd a vanish'd boast,
She laugh'd. I press'd her then to me,
Nothing but soft humility;
Nor e'er enhanced she with such charms
Her acquiescence in my arms.
And, by her sweet love-weakness made
Courageous, powerful, and glad,
In a clear illustration high
Of heavenly affection, I
Perceived that utter love is all
The same as to be rational,
And that the mind and heart of love,
Which think they cannot do enough,
Are truly the everlasting doors
Wherethrough, all unpetition'd, pours
The eternal pleasance. Wherefore we
Had innermost tranquillity,
And breathed one life with such a sense
Of friendship and of confidence,
That, recollecting the sure word:
'If two of you are in accord,
'On earth, as touching any boon

‘Which ye shall ask, it shall be done
‘In heaven,’ we ask'd that heaven's bliss
Might ne'er be any less than this;
And, for that hour, we seem'd to have
The secret of the joy we gave.

How sing of such things, save to her,
Love's self, so love's interpreter?
How read from such a homely page
In the ear of this unhomely age?
'Tis now as when the Prophet cried:
‘The nation hast Thou multiplied,
‘But Thou hast not increased the joy!’
And yet, ere wrath or rot destroy
Of England's state the ruin fair,
Oh, might I so its charm declare,
That, in new Lands, in far-off years,
Delighted he should cry that hears:
‘Great is the Land that somewhat best
‘Works, to the wonder of the rest!
‘We, in our day, have better done
‘This thing or that than any one;
‘And who but, still admiring, sees
‘How excellent for images
‘Was Greece, for laws how wise was Rome;
‘But read this Poet, and say if home
‘And private love did e'er so smile
‘As in that ancient English isle!’

XIII
From Lady Clitheroe To Emily Graham

My dearest Niece, I'm charm'd to hear
The scenery's fine at Windermere,
And glad a six-weeks' wife defers
In the least to wisdom not yet hers.
But, Child, I've no advice to give!
Rules only make it hard to live.
And where's the good of having been
Well taught from seven to seventeen,
If, married, you may not leave off,
And say, at last, ‘I'm good enough!’
Weeding out folly, still leave some.
It gives both lightness and aplomb.
We know, however wise by rule,
Woman is still by nature fool;
And men have sense to like her all
The more when she is natural.
'Tis true that, if we choose, we can
Mock to a miracle the man;
But iron in the fire red hot,

Though 'tis the heat, the fire 'tis not:
And who, for such a feint, would pledge
The babe's and woman's privilege,
No duties and a thousand rights?
Besides, defect love's flow incites,
As water in a well will run
Only the while 'tis drawn upon.

‘Point de culte sans mystère,’ you say,
‘And what if that should die away?’
Child, never fear that either could
Pull from Saint Cupid's face the hood.
The follies natural to each
Surpass the other's moral reach.
Just think how men, with sword and gun,
Will really fight, and never run;
And all in sport: they would have died,
For sixpence more, on the other side!
A woman's heart must ever warm
At such odd ways: and so we charm
By strangeness which, the more they mark,
The more men get into the dark.
The marvel, by familiar life,
Grows, and attaches to the wife
By whom it grows. Thus, silly Girl,
To John you'll always be the pearl
In the oyster of the universe;
And, though in time he'll treat you worse,
He'll love you more, you need not doubt,
And never, never find you out!

My Dear, I know that dreadful thought
That you've been kinder than you ought.
It almost makes you hate him! Yet
'Tis wonderful how men forget,
And how a merciful Providence
Deprives our husbands of all sense
Of kindness past, and makes them deem
We always were what now we seem.
For their own good we must, you know,
However plain the way we go,
Still make it strange with stratagem;
And instinct tells us that, to them,
'Tis always right to bate their price.
Yet I must say they're rather nice,
And, oh, so easily taken in
To cheat them almost seems a sin!
And, Dearest, 'twould be most unfair
To John your feelings to compare
With his, or any man's; for she
Who loves at all loves always; he,
Who loves far more, loves yet by fits,

And when the wayward wind remits
To blow, his feelings faint and drop
Like forge-flames when the bellows stop.
Such things don't trouble you at all
When once you know they're natural.

My love to John; and, pray, my Dear,
Don't let me see you for a year;
Unless, indeed, ere then you've learn'd
That Beauties wed are blossoms turn'd
To unripe codlings, meant to dwell
In modest shadow hidden well,
Till this green stage again permute
To glow of flowers with good of fruit.
I will not have my patience tried
By your absurd new-married pride,
That scorns the world's slow-gather'd sense,
Ties up the hands of Providence,
Rules babes, before there's hope of one,
Better than mothers e'er have done,
And, for your poor particular,
Neglects delights and graces far
Beyond your crude and thin conceit.
Age has romance almost as sweet
And much more generous than this
Of yours and John's. With all the bliss
Of the evenings when you coo'd with him,
And upset home for your sole whim,
You might have envied, were you wise,
The tears within your Mother's eyes,
Which, I dare say, you did not see.
But let that pass! Yours yet will be,
I hope, as happy, kind, and true
As lives which now seem void to you.
Have you not seen shop-painters paste
Their gold in sheets, then rub to waste
Full half, and, lo, you read the name?
Well, Time, my Dear, does much the same
With this unmeaning glare of love.

But, though you yet may much improve,
In marriage, be it still confess'd,
There's little merit at the best.
Some half-a-dozen lives, indeed,
Which else would not have had the need,
Get food and nurture, as the price
Of antedated Paradise;
But what's that to the varied want
Succour'd by Mary, your dear Aunt,
Who put the bridal crown thrice by,
For that of which virginity,
So used, has hope? She sends her love,

As usual with a proof thereof—
Papa's discourse, which you, no doubt,
Heard none of, neatly copied out
Whilst we were dancing. All are well,
Adieu, for there's the Luncheon Bell.

The Wedding Sermon

I
The truths of Love are like the sea
For clearness and for mystery.
Of that sweet love which, startling, wakes
Maiden and Youth, and mostly breaks
The word of promise to the ear,
But keeps it, after many a year,
To the full spirit, how shall I speak?
My memory with age is weak,
And I for hopes do oft suspect
The things I seem to recollect.
Yet who but must remember well
'Twas this made heaven intelligible
As motive, though 'twas small the power
The heart might have, for even an hour,
To hold possession of the height
Of nameless pathos and delight!

II
In Godhead rise, thither flow back
All loves, which, as they keep or lack,
In their return, the course assign'd,
Are virtue or sin. Love's every kind,
Lofty or low, of spirit or sense,
Desire is, or benevolence.
He who is fairer, better, higher
Than all His works, claims all desire,
And in His Poor, His Proxies, asks
Our whole benevolence: He tasks,
Howbeit, His People by their powers;
And if, my Children, you, for hours,
Daily, untortur'd in the heart,
Can worship, and time's other part
Give, without rough recoils of sense,
To the claims ingrate of indigence,
Happy are you, and fit to be
Wrought to rare heights of sanctity,
For the humble to grow humbler at.
But if the flying spirit falls flat,
After the modest spell of prayer
That saves the day from sin and care,
And the upward eye a void descries,

And praises are hypocrisies,
And, in the soul, o'erstrain'd for grace,
A godless anguish grows apace;
Or, if impartial charity
Seems, in the act, a sordid lie,
Do not infer you cannot please
God, or that He His promises
Postpones, but be content to love
No more than He accounts enough.
Account them poor enough who want
Any good thing which you can grant;
And fathom well the depths of life
In loves of Husband and of Wife,
Child, Mother, Father; simple keys
To what cold faith calls mysteries.

III
The love of marriage claims, above
All other kinds, the name of love,
As perfectest, though not so high
As love which Heaven with single eye
Considers. Equal and entire,
Therein benevolence, desire,
Elsewhere ill-join'd or found apart,
Become the pulses of one heart,
Which now contracts, and now dilates,
And, both to the height exalting, mates
Self-seeking to self-sacrifice.
Nay, in its subtle paradise
(When purest) this one love unites
All modes of these two opposites,
All balanced in accord so rich
Who may determine which is which?
Chiefly God's Love does in it live,
And nowhere else so sensitive;
For each is all that the other's eye,
In the vague vast of Deity,
Can comprehend and so contain
As still to touch and ne'er to strain
The fragile nerves of joy. And then
'Tis such a wise goodwill to men
And politic economy
As in a prosperous State we see,
Where every plot of common land
Is yielded to some private hand
To fence about and cultivate.
Does narrowness its praise abate?
Nay, the infinite of man is found
But in the beating of its bound,
And, if a brook its banks o'erpass,
'Tis not a sea, but a morass.

IV
No giddiest hope, no wildest guess
Of Love's most innocent loftiness
Had dared to dream of its own worth,
Till Heaven's bold sun-gleam lit the earth.
Christ's marriage with the Church is more,
My Children, than a metaphor.
The heaven of heavens is symbol'd where
The torch of Psyche flash'd despair.

But here I speak of heights, and heights
Are hardly scaled. The best delights
Of even this homeliest passion, are
In the most perfect souls so rare,
That they who feel them are as men
Sailing the Southern ocean, when,
At midnight, they look up, and eye
The starry Cross, and a strange sky
Of brighter stars; and sad thoughts come
To each how far he is from home.

V
Love's inmost nuptial sweetness see
In the doctrine of virginity!
Could lovers, at their dear wish, blend,
'Twould kill the bliss which they intend;
For joy is love's obedience
Against the law of natural sense;
And those perpetual yearnings sweet
Of lives which dream that they can meet
Are given that lovers never may
Be without sacrifice to lay
On the high altar of true love,
With tears of vestal joy. To move
Frantic, like comets to our bliss,
Forgetting that we always miss,
And so to seek and fly the sun,
By turns, around which love should run,
Perverts the ineffable delight
Of service guerdon'd with full sight
And pathos of a hopeless want,
To an unreal victory's vaunt,
And plaint of an unreal defeat.
Yet no less dangerous misconceit
May also be of the virgin will,
Whose goal is nuptial blessing still,
And whose true being doth subsist,
There where the outward forms are miss'd,
In those who learn and keep the sense
Divine of ‘due benevolence,’
Seeking for aye, without alloy
Of selfish thought, another's joy,

And finding in degrees unknown
That which in act they shunn'd, their own.
For all delights of earthly love
Are shadows of the heavens, and move
As other shadows do; they flee
From him that follows them; and he
Who flies, for ever finds his feet
Embraced by their pursuings sweet.

VI
Then, even in love humane, do I
Not counsel aspirations high,
So much as sweet and regular
Use of the good in which we are.
As when a man along the ways
Walks, and a sudden music plays,
His step unchanged, he steps in time,
So let your Grace with Nature chime.
Her primal forces burst, like straws,
The bonds of uncongenial laws.
Right life is glad as well as just,
And, rooted strong in 'This I must,'
It bears aloft the blossom gay
And zephyr-toss'd, of 'This I may;'
Whereby the complex heavens rejoice
In fruits of uncommanded choice.
Be this your rule: seeking delight,
Esteem success the test of right;
For 'gainst God's will much may be done,
But nought enjoy'd, and pleasures none
Exist, but, like to springs of steel,
Active no longer than they feel
The checks that make them serve the soul,
They take their vigour from control.
A man need only keep but well
The Church's indispensable
First precepts, and she then allows,
Nay, more, she bids him, for his spouse,
Leave even his heavenly Father's awe,
At times, and His immaculate law,
Construed in its extremer sense.
Jehovah's mild magnipotence
Smiles to behold His children play
In their own free and childish way,
And can His fullest praise descry
In the exuberant liberty
Of those who, having understood
The glory of the Central Good,
And how souls ne'er may match or merge,
But as they thitherward converge,
Take in love's innocent gladness part
With infantine, untroubled heart,

And faith that, straight t'wards heaven's far Spring,
Sleeps, like the swallow, on the wing.

VII
Lovers, once married, deem their bond
Then perfect, scanning nought beyond
For love to do but to sustain
The spousal hour's delighted gain.
But time and a right life alone
Fulfil the promise then foreshown.
The Bridegroom and the Bride withal
Are but unwrought material
Of marriage; nay, so far is love,
Thus crown'd, from being thereto enough,
Without the long, compulsive awe
Of duty, that the bond of law
Does oftener marriage-love evoke,
Than love, which does not wear the yoke
Of legal vows, submits to be
Self-rein'd from ruinous liberty.
Lovely is love; but age well knows
'Twas law which kept the lover's vows
Inviolate through the year or years
Of worship pieced with panic fears,
When she who lay within his breast
Seem'd of all women perhaps the best,
But not the whole, of womankind,
Or love, in his yet wayward mind,
Had ghastly doubts its precious life
Was pledged for aye to the wrong wife.

Could it be else? A youth pursues
A maid, whom chance, not he, did choose,
Till to his strange arms hurries she
In a despair of modesty.
Then, simply and without pretence
Of insight or experience,
They plight their vows. The parents say
‘We cannot speak them yea or nay;
‘The thing proceedeth from the Lord!’
And wisdom still approves their word;
For God created so these two
They match as well as others do
That take more pains, and trust Him less
Who never fails, if ask'd, to bless
His children's helpless ignorance
And blind election of life's chance.
Verily, choice not matters much,
If but the woman's truly such,
And the young man has led the life
Without which how shall e'er the wife
Be the one woman in the world?

Love's sensitive tendrils sicken, curl'd
Round folly's former stay; for 'tis
The doom of all unsanction'd bliss
To mock some good that, gain'd, keeps still
The taint of the rejected ill.

VIII
Howbeit, though both were perfect, she
Of whom the maid was prophecy
As yet lives not, and Love rebels
Against the law of any else;
And, as a steed takes blind alarm,
Disowns the rein, and hunts his harm,
So, misdespairing word and act
May now perturb the happiest pact.

The more, indeed, is love, the more
Peril to love is now in store.
Against it nothing can be done
But only this: leave ill alone!
Who tries to mend his wife succeeds
As he who knows not what he needs.
He much affronts a worth as high
As his, and that equality
Of spirits in which abide the grace
And joy of her subjected place;
And does the still growth check and blurr
Of contraries, confusing her
Who better knows what he desires
Than he, and to that mark aspires
With perfect zeal, and a deep wit
Which nothing helps but trusting it.

So, loyally o'erlooking all
In which love's promise short may fall
Of full performance, honour that
As won, which aye love worketh at!
It is but as the pedigree
Of perfectness which is to be
That our best good can honour claim;
Yet honour to deny were shame
And robbery; for it is the mould
Wherein to beauty runs the gold
Of good intention, and the prop
That lifts to the sun the earth-drawn crop
Of human sensibilities.

Such honour, with a conduct wise
In common things, as, not to steep
The lofty mind of love in sleep
Of over much familiarness;
Not to degrade its kind caress,

As those do that can feel no more,
So give themselves to pleasures o'er;
Not to let morning-sloth destroy
The evening-flower, domestic joy;
Not by uxoriousness to chill
The warm devotion of her will
Who can but half her love confer
On him that cares for nought but her;—

These, and like obvious prudences
Observed, he's safest that relies,
For the hope she will not always seem,
Caught, but a laurel or a stream,
On time; on her unsearchable
Love-wisdom; on their work done well,
Discreet with mutual aid; on might
Of shared affliction and delight;
On pleasures that so childish be
They're 'shamed to let the children see,
By which life keeps the valleys low
Where love does naturally grow;
On much whereof hearts have account,
Though heads forget; on babes, chief fount
Of union, and for which babes are
No less than this for them, nay far
More, for the bond of man and wife
To the very verge of future life
Strengthens, and yearns for brighter day,
While others, with their use, decay;
And, though true marriage purpose keeps
Of offspring, as the centre sleeps
Within the wheel, transmitting thence
Fury to the circumference,
Love's self the noblest offspring is,
And sanction of the nuptial kiss;
Lastly, on either's primal curse,
Which help and sympathy reverse
To blessings.

IX
God, who may be well
Jealous of His chief miracle,
Bids sleep the meddling soul of man,
Through the long process of this plan,
Whereby, from his unweeting side,
The Wife's created, and the Bride,
That chance one of her strange, sweet sex
He to his glad life did annex,
Grows more and more, by day and night,
The one in the whole world opposite
Of him, and in her nature all
So suited and reciprocal

To his especial form of sense,
Affection, and intelligence,
That, whereas love at first had strange
Relapses into lust of change,
It now finds (wondrous this, but true!)
The long-accustom'd only new,
And the untried common; and, whereas
An equal seeming danger was
Of likeness lacking joy and force,
Or difference reaching to divorce,
Now can the finish'd lover see
Marvel of me most far from me,
Whom without pride he may admire,
Without Narcissus' doom desire,
Serve without selfishness, and love
'Even as himself,' in sense above
Niggard 'as much,' yea, as she is
The only part of him that's his.

X
I do not say love's youth returns;
That joy which so divinely yearns!
But just esteem of present good
Shows all regret such gratitude
As if the sparrow in her nest,
Her woolly young beneath her breast,
Should these despise, and sorrow for
Her five blue eggs that are no more.
Nor say I the fruit has quite the scope
Of the flower's spiritual hope.
Love's best is service, and of this,
Howe'er devout, use dulls the bliss.
Though love is all of earth that's dear,
Its home, my Children, is not here:
The pathos of eternity
Does in its fullest pleasure sigh.

Be grateful and most glad thereof.
Parting, as 'tis, is pain enough.
If love, by joy, has learn'd to give
Praise with the nature sensitive,
At last, to God, we then possess
The end of mortal happiness,
And henceforth very well may wait
The unbarring of the golden gate,
Wherethrough, already, faith can see
That apter to each wish than we
Is God, and curious to bless
Better than we devise or guess;
Not without condescending craft
To disappoint with bliss, and waft
Our vessels frail, when worst He mocks

The heart with breakers and with rocks,
To happiest havens. You have heard
Your bond death-sentenced by His Word.
What, if, in heaven, the name be o'er,
Because the thing is so much more?
All are, 'tis writ, as angels there,
Nor male nor female. Each a stair
In the hierarchical ascent
Of active and recipient
Affections, what if all are both
By turn, as they themselves betroth
To adoring what is next above,
Or serving what's below their love?

Of this we are certified, that we
Are shaped here for eternity,
So that a careless word will make
Its dint upon the form we take
For ever. If, then, years have wrought
Two strangers to become, in thought,
Will, and affection, but one man
For likeness, as none others can,
Without like process, shall this tree
The king of all the forest, be,
Alas, the only one of all
That shall not lie where it doth fall?
Shall this unflagging flame, here nurs'd
By everything, yea, when reversed,
Blazing, in fury, brighter, wink,
Flicker, and into darkness shrink,
When all else glows, baleful or brave,
In the keen air beyond the grave?

Beware; for fiends in triumph laugh
O'er him who learns the truth by half!
Beware; for God will not endure
For men to make their hope more pure
Than His good promise, or require
Another than the five-string'd lyre
Which He has vow'd again to the hands
Devout of him who understands
To tune it justly here! Beware
The Powers of Darkness and the Air,
Which lure to empty heights man's hope,
Bepraising heaven's ethereal cope,
But covering with their cloudy cant
Its ground of solid adamant,
That strengthens ether for the flight
Of angels, makes and measures height,
And in materiality
Exceeds our Earth's in such degree
As all else Earth exceeds! Do I

Here utter aught too dark or high?
Have you not seen a bird's beak slay
Proud Psyche, on a summer's day?
Down fluttering drop the frail wings four,
Missing the weight which made them soar.
Spirit is heavy nature's wing,
And is not rightly anything
Without its burthen, whereas this,
Wingless, at least a maggot is,
And, wing'd, is honour and delight
Increasing endlessly with height.

XI
If unto any here that chance
Fell not, which makes a month's romance,
Remember, few wed whom they would.
And this, like all God's laws, is good;
For nought's so sad, the whole world o'er,
As much love which has once been more.
Glorious for light is the earliest love;
But worldly things, in the rays thereof,
Extend their shadows, every one
False as the image which the sun
At noon or eve dwarfs or protracts.
A perilous lamp to light men's acts!
By Heaven's kind, impartial plan,
Well-wived is he that's truly man
If but the woman's womanly,
As such a man's is sure to be.
Joy of all eyes and pride of life
Perhaps she is not; the likelier wife!
If it be thus; if you have known,
(As who has not?) some heavenly one,
Whom the dull background of despair
Help'd to show forth supremely fair;
If memory, still remorseful, shapes
Young Passion bringing Eshcol grapes
To travellers in the Wilderness,
This truth will make regret the less:
Mighty in love as graces are,
God's ordinance is mightier far;
And he who is but just and kind
And patient, shall for guerdon find,
Before long, that the body's bond
Is all else utterly beyond
In power of love to actualise
The soul's bond which it signifies,
And even to deck a wife with grace
External in the form and face.
A five years' wife, and not yet fair?
Blame let the man, not Nature, bear!
For, as the sun, warming a bank

Where last year's grass droops gray and dank,
Evokes the violet, bids disclose
In yellow crowds the fresh primrose,
And foxglove hang her flushing head,
So vernal love, where all seems dead,
Makes beauty abound.

Then was that nought,
That trance of joy beyond all thought,
The vision, in one, of womanhood?
Nay, for all women holding good,
Should marriage such a prologue want,
'Twere sordid and most ignorant
Profanity; but, having this,
'Tis honour now, and future bliss;
For where is he that, knowing the height
And depth of ascertain'd delight,
Inhumanly henceforward lies
Content with mediocrities!

Coventry Patmore

The Wedding Sermon

'Now, while she's changing,' said the Dean,
'Her bridal for her traveling dress,
I'll preach allegiance to your queen!
Preaching's the thing which I profess;
And one more minute's mine! You know
I've paid my girl a father's debt,
And this last charge is all I owe.
She's yours; but I love more than yet
You can; such fondness only wakes
When time has raised the heart above
The prejudice of youth, which makes
Beauty conditional to love.
Prepare to meet the weak alarms
Of novel nearness; recollect
The eye which magnifies her charms
Is microscopic for defect.
Fear comes at first; but soon, rejoiced,
You'll find your strong and tender loves,
Like holy rocks by Druids poised,
The least force shakes, but none removes.
Her strength is your esteem; beware
Of finding fault; her will's unnerved
By blame; from you 'twould be despair;
But praise that is not quite deserved
Will all her noble nature move
To make your utmost wishes true.
Yet think, while mending thus your Love,
Of matching her ideal too!
The death of nuptial joy is sloth;
To keep your mistress in your wife,
Keep to the very height your oath,
And honor her with arduous life.
Lastly, no personal reverence doff.
Life's all externals unto those
Who pluck the blushing petals off,
To find the secret of the rose. -
How long she's tarrying! Green's Hotel
I'm sure you'll like. The charge is fair,
The wines good. I remember well
I stayed once, with her mother, there.
A tender conscience of her vow
That mother had! She's so like her!'
But Mrs. Fife, much flurried, now
Whispered, 'Miss Honor's ready, sir.'

Coventry Patmore

The Woodman’s Daughter

In Gerald's Cottage by the hill,
Old Gerald and his child,
Innocent Maud, dwelt happily;
He toil'd, and she beguiled
The long day at her spinning-wheel,
In the garden now grown wild.
At Gerald's stroke the jay awoke;
Till noon hack follow'd hack,
Before the nearest hill had time
To give its echo back;
And evening mists were in the lane
Ere Gerald's arm grew slack.
Meanwhile, below the scented heaps
Of honeysuckle flower,
That made their simple cottage-porch
A cool, luxurious bower,
Maud sat beside her spinning-wheel,
And spun from hour to hour.
The growing thread thro' her fingers sped;
Round flew the polish'd wheel;
Merrily rang the notes she sang
At every finish'd reel;
From the hill again, like a glad refrain,
Follow'd the rapid peal.
But all is changed. The rusting axe
Reddens a wither'd bough;
A spider spins in the spinning-wheel,
And Maud sings wildly now;
And village gossips say she knows
Grief she may not avow.
Her secret's this: In the sweet age
When heaven's our side the lark,
She follow'd her old father, where
He work'd from dawn to dark,
For months, to thin the crowded groves
Of the old manorial Park.
She fancied and he felt she help'd;
And, whilst he hack'd and saw'd,
The rich Squire's son, a young boy then,
Whole mornings, as if awed,
Stood silent by, and gazed in turn
At Gerald and on Maud.
And sometimes, in a sullen tone,
He offer'd fruits, and she
Received them always with an air
So unreserved and free,
That shame-faced distance soon became
Familiarity.
Therefore in time, when Gerald shook
The woods, no longer coy,
The young heir and the cottage-girl
Would steal out to enjoy

The sound of one another's talk,
A simple girl and boy.
Spring after Spring, they took their walks
Uncheck'd, unquestion'd; yet
They learn'd to hide their wanderings
By wood and rivulet,
Because they could not give themselves
A reason why they met.
Once Maud came weeping back. ‘Poor Child!’
Was all her father said:
And he would steady his old hand
Upon her hapless head,
And think of her as tranquilly
As if the child were dead.
But he is gone: and Maud steals out,
This gentle day of June;
And having sobb'd her pain to sleep,
Help'd by the stream's soft tune,
She rests along the willow-trunk,
Below the calm blue noon.
The shadow of her shame and her
Deep in the stream, behold!
Smiles quake over her parted lips:
Some thought has made her bold;
She stoops to dip her fingers in,
To feel if it be cold.
'Tis soft and warm, and runs as 'twere
Perpetually at play:
But then the stream, she recollects,
Bears everything away.
There is a dull pool hard at hand
That sleeps both night and day.
She marks the closing weeds that shut
The water from her sight;
They stir awhile, but now are still;
Her arms fall down; the light
Is horrible, and her countenance
Is pale as a cloud at night.
Merrily now from the small church-tower
Clashes a noisy chime;
The larks climb up thro' the heavenly blue,
Carolling as they climb:
Is it the twisting water-eft
That dimples the green slime?
The pool reflects the scarlet West
With a hot and guilty glow;
The East is changing ashy pale;
But Maud will never go
While those great bubbles struggle up
From the rotting weeds below.
The light has changed. A little since
You scarcely might descry

The moon, now gleaming sharp and bright,
From the small cloud slumbering nigh;
And, one by one, the timid stars
Step out into the sky.
The night blackens the pool; but Maud
Is constant at her post,
Sunk in a dread, unnatural sleep,
Beneath the skiey host
Of drifting mists, thro' which the moon
Is riding like a ghost.

Coventry Patmore

The Year

The crocus, while the days are dark,
Unfolds its saffron sheen;
At April's touch the crudest bark
Discovers gems of green.

Then sleep the seasons, full of might;
While slowly swells the pod
And rounds the peach, and in the night
The mushroom bursts the sod.

The winter falls; the frozen rut
Is bound with silver bars;
The snowdrift heaps against the hut,
And night is pierced with stars.

Coventry Patmore

The Yew-Berry

I
I call this idle history the ‘Berry of the Yew;
Because there's nothing sweeter than its husk of scarlet glue,
And nothing half so bitter as its black core bitten through.
I loved, saw hope, and said so; learn'd that Laura loved again:
Why speak of joy then suffer'd? My head throbs, and I would fain
Find words to lay the spectre starting now before my brain.
She loved me: all things told it; eye to eye, and palm to palm:
As the pause upon the ceasing of a thousand-voiced psalm
Was the mighty satisfaction and the full eternal calm.
On her face, when she was laughing, was the seriousness within;
Her sweetest smiles, (and sweeter did a lover never win,)
In passing, grew so absent that they made her fair cheek thin.
On her face, when she was speaking, thoughts unworded used to live;
So that when she whisper'd to me, ‘Better joy Earth cannot give,’
Her following silence added, ‘But Earth's joy is fugitive.’
For there a nameless something, though suppress'd, still spread around;
The same was on her eyelids, if she look'd towards the ground;
In her laughing, singing, talking, still the same was in the sound;—
A sweet dissatisfaction, which at no time went away,
But shadow'd on her spirit, even at its brightest play,
That her mirth was like the sunshine in the closing of the day.

II
Let none ask joy the highest, save those who would have it end
There's weight in earthly blessings; they are earthy, and they tend,
By predetermin'd impulse, at their highest, to descend.
I still for a happy season, in the present, saw the past,
Mistaking one for the other, feeling sure my hold was fast
On that of which the symbols vanish'd daily: but, at last,
As when we watch bright cloud-banks round about the low sun ranged,
We suddenly remember some rich glory gone or changed,
All at once I comprehended that her love was grown estranged.
From this time, spectral glimpses of a darker fear came on:
They came; but, since I scorn'd them, were no sooner come than gone.—
At times, some gap in sequence frees the spirit, and, anon,
We remember states of living ended ere we left the womb,
And see a vague aurora flashing to us from the tomb,
The dreamy light of new states, dash'd tremendously with gloom.
We tremble for an instant, and a single instant more
Brings absolute oblivion, and we pass on as before!
Ev'n so those dreadful glimpses came, and startled, and were o'er.

III
One morning, one bright morning, Wortley met me. He and I,
As we rode across the country, met a friend of his. His eye
Caught Wortley's, who rode past him. ‘What,’ said he, ‘pass old friends by?
So I've heard your game is grounded! Why your life's one long romance
After your last French fashion. But, ah! ha! should Herbert chance—’
‘Nay, Herbert's here,’ said he, and introduced me, with a glance

Of easy smiles, ignoring this embarrassment; and then
This pass'd off, and soon after I went home, and took a pen,
And wrote the signs here written, with much more, and where, and when;
And, having read them over once or twice, sat down to think,
From time to time beneath them writing more, till, link by link,
The evidence against her was fulfill'd: I did not shrink,
But I read them all together, and I found it was no dream.
What I felt I can't remember; an oblivion which the gleam
Of light which oft comes through it shews for blessedness extreme.
At last I moved, exclaiming, 'I will not believe, until
'I've spoken once with Laura.' Thereon all my heart grew still
For doubt and faith are active, and decisions of the will.

IV
I found my Love. She started: I suppose that I was pale.
We talk'd; but words on both sides, seem'd to sicken, flag, and fail.
Then I gave her what I'd written, watching whether she would quail.
In and out flew sultry blushes: so, when red reflections rise
From conflagrations, filling the alarm'd heart with surmise,
They lighten now, now darken, up and down the gloomy skies.
She finish'd once; but fearing to look from it, read it o'er
Ten times at least. Poor Laura, had those readings been ten score,
That refuge from confusion had confused thee more and more!
I said, 'You're ill, sit Laura,' and she sat down and was meek.
'Ah tears! not lost to God then. But pray Laura, do not speak
I understand you better by the moisture on your cheek.'
She shook with sobs, in silence. I yet checking passion's sway,
Said only, 'Farewell Laura!' then got up, and strode away;
For I felt that she would burst my heart asunder should I stay.
Oh, ghastly corpse of Love so slain! it makes the world its hearse;
Or, as the sun extinct and dead, after the doomsday curse,
It rolls, an unseen danger, through the darken'd universe.
I struggled to forget this; but, forgetfulness too sweet!
It startled with its sweetness, thus involv'd its own defeat;
And, every time this happen'd, aching memory would repeat
The shock of that discovery: so at length I learn'd by heart
And never, save when sleeping, suffer'd thenceforth to depart,
The feeling of my sorrow: and in time this sooth'd the smart.
Yet even now not seldom, in my leisure, in the thick
Of other thoughts, unchallenged, words and looks come crowding quick—
They do while I am writing, till the sunshine makes me sick.

Coventry Patmore

Unthrift

Ah, wasteful woman, she who may
On her sweet self set her own price,
Knowing men cannot choose but pay,
How she has cheapen'd paradise;
How given for nought her priceless gift,
How spoil'd the bread and spill'd the wine,
Which, spent with due, respective thrift,
Had made brutes men, and men divine.

Coventry Patmore

Venus And Death

With fetters gold her captivated feet
Lay, sunny sweet;
In that palm was the poppy, Sleep; in this
The apple, Bliss;
Against the mild side of his Spouse and Mother
One small God throve, and in't, meseem'd, another.
By these a Death-in-Life did foully breathe
Out of a face that was one grate of teeth.
Lift, O kind Angels, lift her eyelids loth,
Lest he devour her and her Godlets both!

Coventry Patmore