

POEMS BY ADAM LINDSAY GORDON (1833-1870)

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Podas Okus

Am I waking? Was I sleeping?
Dearest, are you watching yet?
Traces on your cheeks of weeping
 Glitter, 'tis in vain you fret;
 Drifting ever! drifting onward!
In the glass the bright sand runs
Steadily and slowly downward;
Hushed are all the Myrmidons.

Has Automedon been banish'd
From his post beside my bed?
Where has Agamemnon vanished?
 Where is warlike Diomed?

Where is Nestor? where Ulysses?
Menelaus, where is he?
Call them not, more dear your kisses
Than their prosings are to me.

Daylight fades and night must follow,
Low, where sea and sky combine,
Droops the orb of great Apollo,
Hostile god to me and mine.
Through the tent's wide entrance streaming,
In a flood of glory rare,
Glides the golden sunset, gleaming
On your golden, gleaming hair.

Chide him not, the leech who tarries,
Surest aid were all too late;
Surer far the shaft of Paris,
Winged by Phoebus and by fate;

When he crouch'd behind the gable,
Had I once his features scann'd,
Phoebus' self had scarce been able
To have nerved his trembling hand.

Blue-eyed maiden! dear Athena!
Goddess chaste, and wise and brave,
From the snares of Polyxena
Thou would'st fain thy favourite save.
Tell me, is it not far better
That it should be as it is?
Jove's behest we cannot fetter,
Fate's decrees are always his.

Many seek for peace and riches,
Length of days and life of ease;
I have sought for one thing, which is
Fairer unto me than these.

Often, too, I've heard the story,
In my boyhood, of the doom
Which the fates assigned me — Glory,
Coupled with an early tomb.

Swift assault and sudden sally
Underneath the Trojan wall;
Charge, and countercharge, and rally,
War-cry loud, and trumpet call;
Doubtful strain of desp'rate battle,
Cut and thrust and grapple fierce,
Swords that ring on shields that rattle,
Blades that gash and darts that pierce; —

I have done with these for ever;
By the loud resounding sea,
Where the reedy jav'lins quiver,
There is now no place for me.

Day by day our ranks diminish,
We are falling day by day;
But our sons the strife will finish,
Where man carries man must slay.

Life, 'tis said, to all men sweet is,
Death to all must bitter be;
Wherefore thus, oh, mother Thetis!
None can baffle Jove's decree?
I am ready, I am willing,
To resign my stormy life;
Weary of this long blood-spilling,
Sated with this ceaseless strife.

Shorter doom I've pictured dimly,
On a bed of crimson sand;
Fighting hard and dying grimly,
Silent lips, and striking hand.

But the toughest lives are brittle,
And the bravest and the best
Lightly fall — it matters little;
Now I only long for rest.

I have seen enough of slaughter,
Seen Scamander's torrent red,
Seen hot blood poured out like water,
Seen the champaign heaped with dead.
Men will call me unrelenting,
Pitiless, vindictive, stern;
Few will raise a voice dissenting,
Few will better things discern.

Speak! the fires of life are reeling,
Like the wildfires on the marsh,
Was I to a friend unfeeling?
Was I to a mistress harsh?

Was there nought save bloodshed throbbing
In this heart and on this brow?
Whisper! girl, in silence sobbing!
Dead Patroclus! answer thou!

Dry those violet orbs that glisten,
Darling, I have had my day;
Place your hand in mine and listen,
Ere the strong soul cleaves its way
Through the death mist hovering o'er me,
As the stout ship cleaves the wave,
To my fathers gone before me,
To the gods who love the brave!

Courage, we must part for certain;
Shades that sink and shades that rise,
Blending in a shroud-like curtain,
Gather o'er these weary eyes.

O'er the fields we used to roam, in
Brighter days and lighter cheer,
Gathers thus the quiet gloaming —
Now, I ween, the end is near.

For the hand that clasps your fingers,
Closing in the death-grip tight,
Scarcely feels the warmth that lingers,
Scarcely heeds the pressure light;
While the failing pulse that alters,
Changing 'neath a death chill damp,
Flickers, flutters, flags, and falters,
Feebly like a waning lamp.

Think'st thou, love, 'twill chafe my ghost in
Hades' realm, where heroes shine,
Should I hear the shepherd boasting
To his Argive concubine?

Let him boast, the girlish victor,
Let him brag; not thus, I trow,
Were the laurels torn from Hector,
Not so very long ago.

Does my voice sound thick and husky?
Is my hand no longer warm?
Round that neck where pearls look dusky
Let me once more wind my arm;
Rest my head upon that shoulder,
Where it rested oft of yore;
Warm and white, yet seeming colder
Now than e'er it seem'd before.

'Twas the fraud of Priam's daughter,
Not the force of Priam's son,
Slew me — ask not why I sought her,
'Twas my doom — her work is done!

Fairer far than she, and dearer,
By a thousandfold thou art;
Come, my own one, nestle nearer,
Cheating death of half his smart.

Slowly, while your amber tresses
Shower down their golden rain,
Let me drink those last caresses,
Never to be felt again;
Yet th' Elysian halls are spacious,
Somewhere near me I may keep
Room — who knows? — The gods are gracious;
Lay me lower — let me sleep!

Lower yet, my senses wander,
And my spirit seems to roll
With the tide of swift Scamander
Rushing to a viewless goal.

In my ears, like distant washing
Of the surf upon the shore,
Drones a murmur, faintly splashing,
'Tis the splash of Charon's oar.

Lower yet, my own Briseis,
Denser shadows veil the light;
Hush, what is to be, to be is,
Close my eyes, and say good-night.
Lightly lay your red lips, kissing,
On this cold mouth, while your thumbs
Lie on these cold eyelids pressing —
Pallas! thus thy soldier comes!

Gone

In Collins-street standeth a statue tall —
A statue tall on a pillar of stone,
Telling its story, to great and small,
Of the dust reclaimed from the sand waste lone.
Weary and wasted, and worn and wan,
Feeble and faint, and languid and low,
He lay on the desert a dying man,
Who has gone, my friends, where we all must go.

There are perils by land, and perils by water,
Short, I ween, are the obsequies
Of the landsman lost, but they may be shorter
With the mariner lost in the trackless seas;

And well for him when the timbers start,
And the stout ship reels and settles below,
Who goes to his doom with as bold a heart
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Man is stubborn his rights to yield,
And redder than dews at eventide
Are the dews of battle, shed on the field,
By a nation's wrath or a despot's pride;
But few who have heard their death-knell roll,
From the cannon's lips where they faced the foe,
Have fallen as stout and steady of soul
As that dead man gone where we all must go.

Traverse yon spacious burial-ground,
Many are sleeping soundly there,
Who pass'd with mourners standing around,
Kindred and friends, and children fair;

Did he envy such ending? 'twere hard to say;
Had he cause to envy such ending? no;
Can the spirit feel for the senseless clay
When it once has gone where we all must go?

What matters the sand or the whitening chalk,
The blighted herbage, the black'ning log,
The crooked beak of the eagle-hawk,
Or the hot red tongue of the native dog?
That couch was rugged, those sextons rude,
Yet, in spite of a leaden shroud, we know
That the bravest and fairest are earth-worms' food,
When once they've gone where we all must go.

With the pistol clenched in his failing hand,
With the death mist spread o'er his fading eyes,
He saw the sun go down on the sand,
And he slept, and never saw it rise;

'Twas well; he toil'd till his task was done,
Constant and calm in his latest throe;
The storm was weathered, the battle was won,
When he went, my friends, where we all must go.

God grant that whenever, soon or late,
Our course is run and our goal is reach'd,
We may meet our fate as steady and straight
As he whose bones in yon desert bleach'd;
No tears are needed — our cheeks are dry,
We have none to waste upon living woe;
Shall we sigh for one who has ceased to sigh,
Having gone, my friends, where we all must go?

We tarry yet, we are toiling still,
He is gone and he fares the best,
He fought against odds, he struggled up hill,
He has fairly earned his season of rest;

No tears are needed — fill out the wine,
Let the goblets clash, and the grape juice flow;
Ho! pledge me a death-drink, comrade mine,
To a brave man gone where we all must go.

Unshriven

Oh! the sun rose on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
And the steed stood ready harness'd in the hall,
And he left his lady's bower, and he sought the eastern tower,
And he lifted cloak and weapon from the wall.

“We were wed but yester-noon, must we separate so soon?
Must you travel unassoiled and, aye, unshriven,
With the blood stain on your hand, and the red streak on your brand,
And your guilt all unconfessed and unforgiven?”

“Tho' it were but yester-even we were wedded, still unshriven,
Across the moor this morning I must ride;
I must gallop fast and straight, for my errand will not wait;

Fear naught, I shall return at eventide.”

“If I fear, it is for thee, thy weal is dear to me,
Yon moor with retribution seemeth rife;
As we’ve sown so must we reap, and I’ve started in my sleep
At the voice of the avenger, ‘Life for life’.”

“My arm is strong, I ween, and my trusty blade is keen,
And the courser that I ride is swift and sure,
And I cannot break my oath, though to leave thee I am loth,
There is one that I must meet upon the moor.”

* * * * *

Oh! the sun shone on the lea, and the bird sang merrilie,
Down the avenue and through the iron gate,
Spurr’d and belted, so he rode, steel to draw and steel to goad,
And across the moor he galloped fast and straight.

* * * * *

Oh! the sun shone on the lea, and the bird sang full of glee,
Ere the mists of evening gather'd chill and grey;
But the wild bird's merry note on the deaf ear never smote,
And the sunshine never warmed the lifeless clay.

Ere the sun began to droop, or the mist began to stoop,
The youthful bride lay swooning in the hall;
Empty saddle on his back, broken bridle hanging slack,
The steed returned full gallop to the stall.

Oh! the sun sank in the sea, and the wind wailed drearily;
Let the bells in yonder monastery toll,
For the night rack nestles dark round the body stiff and stark,
And unshriven to its Maker flies the soul.

**Ye Wearie Wayfarer, hys Ballad
In Eight Fyttes.**

Fytte I

By Wood and Wold

[A Preamble]

“Beneath the greenwood bough.” — W. Scott.

Lightly the breath of the spring wind blows,
 Though laden with faint perfume,
'Tis the fragrance rare that the bushman knows,
 The scent of the wattle bloom.
Two-thirds of our journey at least are done,

Old horse! let us take a spell
In the shade from the glare of the noonday sun,
Thus far we have travell'd well;
Your bridle I'll slip, your saddle ungirth,
And lay them beside this log,
For you'll roll in that track of reddish earth,
And shake like a water-dog.

Upon yonder rise there's a clump of trees —
Their shadows look cool and broad —
You can crop the grass as fast as you please,
While I stretch my limbs on the sward;
'Tis pleasant, I ween, with a leafy screen
O'er the weary head, to lie
On the mossy carpet of emerald green,
'Neath the vault of the azure sky;
Thus all alone by the wood and wold,
I yield myself once again

To the memories old that, like tales fresh told,
Come flitting across the brain.

Fytte II

By Flood and Field

[A Legend of the Cottiswold]

“They have saddled a hundred milk-white steeds,
They have bridled a hundred black.” — Old Ballad.

“He turned in his saddle, now follow who dare.
I ride for my country, quoth * *.” — Lawrence.

I remember the lowering wintry morn,
And the mist on the Cotswold hills,

Where I once heard the blast of the huntsman's horn,
Not far from the seven rills.

Jack Esdale was there, and Hugh St. Clair,
Bob Chapman and Andrew Kerr,
And big George Griffiths on Devil-May-Care,
And — black Tom Oliver.

And one who rode on a dark-brown steed,
Clean jointed, sinewy, spare,
With the lean game head of the Blacklock breed,
And the resolute eye that loves the lead,
And the quarters massive and square —
A tower of strength, with a promise of speed
(There was Celtic blood in the pair).

I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse,
In a country so deep, with a scent so hot,
That the hound could outpace the horse;

I remember how few in the front rank shew'd,
How endless appeared the tail,
On the brown hill-side, where we cross'd the road,
And headed towards the vale.

The dark-brown steed on the left was there,
On the right was a dappled grey,
And between the pair, on a chestnut mare,
The duffer who writes this lay.

What business had "this child" there to ride?

But little or none at all;

Yet I held my own for a while in "the pride
That goeth before a fall."

Though rashness can hope for but one result,
We are heedless when fate draws nigh us,
And the maxim holds good, "Quem perdere vult
Deus, dementat prius."

The right hand man to the left hand said,
As down in the vale we went,
“Harden your heart like a millstone, Ned,
And set your face as flint;
Solid and tall is the rasping wall
That stretches before us yonder;
You must have it at speed or not at all,
‘Twere better to halt than to ponder,
For the stream runs wide on the take-off side,
And washes the clay bank under;
Here goes for a pull, ’tis a madman’s ride,
And a broken neck if you blunder.”

No word in reply his comrade spoke,
Nor waver’d nor once look’d round,
But I saw him shorten his horse’s stroke
As we splash’d through the marshy ground;
I remember the laugh that all the while

On his quiet features play'd: —
So he rode to his death, with that careless smile,
In the van of the "Light Brigade";
So stricken by Russian grape, the cheer
Rang out, while he toppled back,
From the shattered lungs as merry and clear
As it did when it roused the pack.
Let never a tear his memory stain,
Give his ashes never a sigh,
One of many who perished, NOT IN VAIN,
AS A TYPE OF OUR CHIVALRY —

I remember one thrust he gave to his hat,
And two to the flanks of the brown,
And still as a statue of old he sat,
And he shot to the front, hands down;
I remember the snort and the stag-like bound
Of the steed six lengths to the fore,

And the laugh of the rider while, landing sound,
He turned in his saddle and glanced around;
I remember — but little more,
Save a bird's-eye gleam of the dashing stream,
A jarring thud on the wall,
A shock and the blank of a nightmare's dream —
I was down with a stunning fall.

Fytte III

Zu der edlen Yagd

[A Treatise on Trees — Vine-tree v. Saddle-tree]

“Now, welcome, welcome, masters mine,
Thrice welcome to the noble chase,
Nor earthly sport, nor sport divine,
Can take such honourable place.” — Ballad of the Wild Huntsman.
(Free Translation.)

I remember some words my father said,
When I was an urchin vain; —
God rest his soul, in his narrow bed
These ten long years he hath lain.
When I think one drop of the blood he bore
This faint heart surely must hold,
It may be my fancy and nothing more,
But the faint heart seemeth bold.

He said that as from the blood of grape,
Or from juice distilled from the grain,
False vigour, soon to evaporate,
Is lent to nerve and brain,
So the coward will dare on the gallant horse
What he never would dare alone,
Because he exults in a borrowed force,
And a hardihood not his own.

And it may be so, yet this difference lies
 'Twixt the vine and the saddle-tree,
The spurious courage that drink supplies
 Sets our baser passions free;
But the stimulant which the horseman feels
 When he gallops fast and straight,
 To his better nature most appeals,
 And charity conquers hate.

As the kindly sunshine thaws the snow,
 E'en malice and spite will yield,
We could almost welcome our mortal foe
 In the saddle by flood and field;
And chivalry dawns in the merry tale
 That "Market Harborough" writes,
And the yarns of "Nimrod" and "Martingale"
 Seem legends of loyal knights.

Now tell me for once, old horse of mine,
Grazing round me loose and free,
Does your ancient equine heart repine
For a burst in such companie,
Where “the POWERS that be” in the front rank ride,
To hold your own with the throng,
Or to plunge at “Faugh-a-Ballagh’s” side
In the rapids of Dandenong.

Don't tread on my toes, you're no foolish weight,
So I found to my cost, as under
Your carcass I lay, when you rose too late,
Yet I blame you not for the blunder.
What! sulky old man, your under-lip falls!
You think I, too, ready to rail am
At your kinship remote to that duffer at walls,
The talkative roadster of Balaam.

Fytte IV

In Utrumque Paratus

[A Logical Discussion]

“Then hey for boot and horse, lad!

And round the world away!

Young blood will have its course, lad!

And every dog his day!” — C. Kingsley.

There's a formula which the west country clowns

Once used, ere their blows fell thick,

At the fairs on the Devon and Cornwall downs,

In their bouts with the single-stick.

You may read a moral, not far amiss,

If you care to moralise,

In the crossing-guard, where the ash-plants kiss,
To the words "God spare our eyes".
No game was ever yet worth a rap
For a rational man to play,
Into which no accident, no mishap,
Could possibly find its way.

If you hold the willow, a shooter from Wills
May transform you into a hopper,
And the football meadow is rife with spills,
If you feel disposed for a cropper;
In a rattling gallop with hound and horse
You may chance to reverse the medal
On the sward, with the saddle your loins across,
And your hunter's loins on the saddle;
In the stubbles you'll find it hard to frame
A remonstrance firm, yet civil,

When oft as “our mutual friend” takes aim,
Long odds may be laid on the rising game,
And against your gaiters level;
There’s danger even where fish are caught,
To those who a wetting fear;
For what’s worth having must aye be bought,
And sport’s like life and life’s like sport,
“It ain’t all skittles and beer.”

The honey bag lies close to the sting,
The rose is fenced by the thorn,
Shall we leave to others their gathering,
And turn from clustering fruits that cling
To the garden wall in scorn?
Albeit those purple grapes hang high,
Like the fox in the ancient tale,
Let us pause and try, ere we pass them by,
Though we, like the fox, may fail.

All hurry is worse than useless; think
On the adage, “’Tis pace that kills”;
Shun bad tobacco, avoid strong drink,
Abstain from Holloway’s pills,
Wear woollen socks, they’re the best you’ll find,
Beware how you leave off flannel;
And whatever you do, don’t change your mind
When once you have picked your panel;
With a bank of cloud in the south south-east,
Stand ready to shorten sail;
Fight shy of a corporation feast;
Don’t trust to a martingale;
Keep your powder dry, and shut one eye,
Not both, when you touch your trigger;
Don’t stop with your head too frequently
(This advice ain’t meant for a nigger);
Look before you leap, if you like, but if

You mean leaping, don't look long,
Or the weakest place will soon grow stiff,
And the strongest doubly strong;
As far as you can, to every man,
Let your aid be freely given,
And hit out straight, 'tis your shortest plan,
When against the ropes you're driven.

Mere pluck, though not in the least sublime,
Is wiser than blank dismay,
Since "No sparrow can fall before its time",
And we're valued higher than they;
So hope for the best and leave the rest
In charge of a stronger hand,
Like the honest boors in the far-off west,
With the formula terse and grand.

They were men for the most part rough and rude,
Dull and illiterate,
But they nursed no quarrel, they cherished no feud,
They were strangers to spite and hate;
In a kindly spirit they took their stand,
That brothers and sons might learn
How a man should uphold the sports of his land,
And strike his best with a strong right hand,
And take his strokes in return.
“’Twas a barbarous practice,” the Quaker cries,
“’Tis a thing of the past, thank heaven” —
Keep your thanks till the combative instinct dies
With the taint of the olden leaven;
Yes, the times are changed, for better or worse,
The prayer that no harm befall
Has given its place to a drunken curse,
And the manly game to a brawl.

Our burdens are heavy, our natures weak,
Some pastime devoid of harm
May we look for? "Puritan elder, speak!"
"Yea, friend, peradventure thou mayest seek
Recreation singing a psalm."
If I did, your visage so grim and stern
Would relax in a ghastly smile,
For of music I never one note could learn,
And my feeble minstrelsy would turn
Your chant to discord vile.

Tho' the Philistine's mail could not avail,
Nor the spear like a weaver's beam,
There are episodes yet in the Psalmist's tale,
To obliterate which his poems fail,
Which his exploits fail to redeem.
Can the Hittite's wrongs forgotten be?

Does HE warble “Non nobis Domine”,
With his monarch in blissful concert, free
From all malice to flesh inherent;
Zeruiah’s offspring, who served so well,
Yet between the horns of the altar fell —
Does HIS voice the “Quid gloriaris” swell,
Or the “Quare fremuerunt”?
It may well be thus where DAVID sings,
And Uriah joins in the chorus,
But while earth to earthy matter clings,
Neither you nor the bravest of Judah’s kings
As a pattern can stand before us.

Fytte V

Lex Talionis

[A Moral Discourse]

**“And if there’s blood upon his hand,
'Tis but the blood of deer.” — W. Scott.**

To beasts of the field, and fowls of the air,
And fish of the sea alike,
Man’s hand is ever slow to spare,
And ever ready to strike;
With a license to kill, and to work our will,
In season by land or by water,
To our heart’s content we may take our fill
Of the joys we derive from slaughter.

And few, I reckon, our rights gainsay
In this world of rapine and wrong,

Where the weak and the timid seem lawful prey
For the resolute and the strong;
Fins, furs, and feathers, they are and were
For our use and pleasure created,
We can shoot, and hunt, and angle, and snare,
Unquestioned, if not unsated.

I have neither the will nor the right to blame,
Yet to many (though not to all)
The sweets of destruction are somewhat tame
When no personal risks befall;
Our victims suffer but little, we trust
(Mere guess-work and blank enigma),
If they suffer at all, our field sports must
Of cruelty bear the stigma.

Shall we, hard-hearted to their fates, thus
Soft-hearted shrink from our own,

When the measure we mete is meted to us,
When we reap as we've always sown?
Shall we who for pastime have squander'd life,
Who are styled "the Lords of Creation",
Recoil from our chance of more equal strife,
And our risk of retaliation?

Though short is the dying pheasant's pain,
Scant pity you well may spare,
And the partridge slain is a triumph vain,
And a risk that a child may dare;
You feel, when you lower the smoking gun,
Some ruth for yon slaughtered hare,
And hit or miss, in your selfish fun
The widgeon has little share.

But you've no remorseful qualms or pangs
When you kneel by the grizzly's lair,

On that conical bullet your sole chance hangs,
 'Tis the weak one's advantage fair,
 And the shaggy giant's terrific fangs
 Are ready to crush and tear;
Should you miss, one vision of home and friends,
 Five words of unfinished prayer,
 Three savage knife stabs, so your sport ends
In the worrying grapple that chokes and rends; —
 Rare sport, at least, for the bear.

Short shrift! sharp fate! dark doom to dree!
 Hard struggle, though quickly ending!
 At home or abroad, by land or sea,
 In peace or war, sore trials must be,
And worse may happen to you or to me,
For none are secure, and none can flee
 From a destiny impending.

Ah! friend, did you think when the LONDON sank,
 Timber by timber, plank by plank,
 In a cauldron of boiling surf,
How alone at least, with never a flinch,
 In a rally contested inch by inch,
You could fall on the trampled turf?
When a livid wall of the sea leaps high,
 In the lurid light of a leaden sky,
 And bursts on the quarter railing;
While the howling storm-gust seems to vie
With the crash of splintered beams that fly,
 Yet fails too oft to smother the cry
 Of women and children wailing?

 Then those who listen in sinking ships
To despairing sobs from their lov'd one's lips,
Where the green wave thus slowly shatters,
 May long for the crescent-claw that rips

The bison into ribbons and strips,
And tears the strong elk to tatters.

Oh! sunderings short of body and breath!
Oh! "battle and murder and sudden death!"
Against which the Liturgy preaches;
By the will of a just, yet a merciful Power,
Less bitter, perchance, in the mystic hour,
When the wings of the shadowy angel lower,
Than man in his blindness teaches!

Fytte VI

Potters' Clay

[An Allegorical Interlude]

"Nec propter vitam vivendi perdere causas."

Though the pitcher that goes to the sparkling rill
Too oft gets broken at last,
There are scores of others its place to fill
When its earth to the earth is cast;
Keep that pitcher at home, let it never roam,
But lie like a useless clod,
Yet sooner or later the hour will come
When its chips are thrown to the sod.

Is it wise, then, say, in the waning day,
When the vessel is crack'd and old,
To cherish the battered potters' clay,
As though it were virgin gold?
Take care of yourself, dull, boorish elf,
Though prudent and safe you seem,
Your pitcher will break on the musty shelf,
And mine by the dazzling stream.

Fytte VII

Cito Pede Preterit Aetas

[A Philosophical Dissertation]

“Gillian’s dead, God rest her bier —

How I loved her many years syne;

Marion’s married, but I sit here,

Alive and merry at three-score year,

Dipping my nose in Gascoigne wine.” — Wamba’s Song — Thackeray.

A mellow light doth Sol afford,

His meridian glare has pass’d,

And the trees on the broad and sloping sward

Their length’ning shadows cast.

“Time flies.” The current will be no joke,

If swollen by recent rain,
To cross in the dark, so I'll have a smoke,
And then I'll be off again.

What's up, old horse? Your ears you prick,
And your eager eyeballs glisten;
'Tis the wild dog's note in the tea-tree thick,
By the river, to which you listen.
With head erect and tail flung out,
For a gallop you seem to beg,
But I feel the qualm of a chilling doubt,
As I glance at your fav'rite leg.

Let the dingo rest, 'tis all for the best;
In this world there's room enough
For him and you and me and the rest,
And the country is awful rough.
We've had our gallop in days of yore,

Now down the hill we must run;
Yet at times we long for one gallop more,
Although it were only one.

Did our spirits quail at a new four-rail,
Could a “double” double-bank us,
Ere nerve and sinew began to fail
In the consulship of Plancus?
When our blood ran rapidly, and when
Our bones were pliant and limber,
Could we stand a merry cross-counter then,
A slogging fall over timber?

Arcades ambo! Duffers both,
In our best of days, alas!
(I tell the truth, though to tell it loth)
'Tis time we were gone to grass;
The young leaves shoot, the sere leaves fall,

And the old gives way to the new,
While the preacher cries, "Tis vanity all,
And vexation of spirit, too."

Now over my head the vapours curl
From the bowl of the soothing clay,
In the misty forms that eddy and whirl
My thoughts are flitting away;
Yes, the preacher's right, 'tis vanity all,
But the sweeping rebuke he showers
On vanities all may heaviest fall
On vanities worse than ours.

We have no wish to exaggerate
The worth of the sports we prize,
Some toil for their Church, and some for their State,
And some for their merchandise;
Some traffic and trade in the city's mart,

Some travel by land and sea,
Some follow science, some cleave to art,
And some to scandal and tea;

And some for their country and their queen
Would fight, if the chance they had,
Good sooth, 'twere a sorry world, I ween,
If we all went galloping mad;

Yet if once we efface the joys of the chase
From the land, and outroot the Stud,
GOOD-BYE TO THE ANGLO-SAXON RACE!
FAREWELL TO THE NORMAN BLOOD!

Where the burn runs down to the uplands brown,
From the heights of the snow-clad range,
What anodyne drawn from the stifling town
Can be reckon'd a fair exchange
For the stalker's stride, on the mountain side,

In the bracing northern weather,
To the slopes where couch, in their antler'd pride,
The deer on the perfum'd heather?

Oh! the vigour with which the air is rife!
The spirit of joyous motion;
The fever, the fulness of animal life,
Can be drain'd from no earthly potion!
The lungs with the living gas grow light,
And the limbs feel the strength of ten,
While the chest expands with its madd'ning might,
GOD'S GLORIOUS OXYGEN.

Thus the measur'd stroke, on elastic sward,
Of the steed three parts extended,
Hard held, the breath of his nostrils broad,
With the golden ether blended;
Then the leap, the rise from the springy turf,

The rush through the buoyant air,
And the light shock landing — the veriest serf
Is an emperor then and there!

Such scenes! sensation and sound and sight!
To some undiscover'd shore
On the current of Time's remorseless flight
Have they swept to return no more?
While, like phantoms bright of the fever'd night,
That have vex'd our slumbers of yore,
You follow us still in your ghostly might,
Dead days that have gone before.

Vain dreams, again and again re-told,
Must you crowd on the weary brain,
Till the fingers are cold that entwin'd of old
Round foil and trigger and rein,
Till stay'd for aye are the roving feet,

Till the restless hands are quiet,
Till the stubborn heart has forgotten to beat,
Till the hot blood has ceas'd to riot?

In Exeter Hall the saint may chide,
The sinner may scoff outright,
The Bacchanal steep'd in the flagon's tide,
Or the sensual Sybarite;
But NOLAN'S name will flourish in fame,
When our galloping days are past,
When we go to the place from whence we came,
Perchance to find rest at last.

Thy riddles grow dark, oh! drifting cloud,
And thy misty shapes grow drear,
Thou hang'st in the air like a shadowy shroud,
But I am of lighter cheer;
Though our future lot is a sable blot,

Though the wise ones of earth will blame us,
Though our saddles will rot, and our rides be forgot,
“DUM VIVIMUS, VIVAMUS!”

Fytte VIII

Finis Exoptatus

[A Metaphysical Song]

**“There’s something in this world amiss
Shall be unriddled by-and-bye.” — Tennyson.**

Boot and saddle, see, the slanting
Rays begin to fall,
Flinging lights and colours flaunting

Through the shadows tall.
Onward! onward! must we travel?
When will come the goal?
Riddle I may not unravel,
Cease to vex my soul.

Harshly break those peals of laughter
From the jays aloft,
Can we guess what they cry after?
We have heard them oft;
Perhaps some strain of rude thanksgiving
Mingles in their song,
Are they glad that they are living?
Are they right or wrong?
Right, 'tis joy that makes them call so,
Why should they be sad?
Certes! we are living also,
Shall not we be glad?

Onward! onward! must we travel?

Is the goal more near?

Riddle we may not unravel,

Why so dark and drear?

Yon small bird his hymn outpouring,

On the branch close by,

Recks not for the kestrel soaring

In the nether sky,

Though the hawk with wings extended

Poises over head,

Motionless as though suspended

By a viewless thread.

See, he stoops, nay, shooting forward

With the arrow's flight,

Swift and straight away to nor'ward

Sails he out of sight.

Onward! onward! thus we travel,

Comes the goal more nigh?
Riddle we may not unravel,
Who shall make reply?

Ha! Friend Ephraim, saint or sinner,
Tell me if you can —
Tho' we may not judge the inner,
By the outer man,
Yet by girth of broadcloth ample,
And by cheeks that shine,
Surely you set no example
In the fasting line —

Could you, like yon bird, discov'ring,
Fate as close at hand,
As the kestrel o'er him hov'ring,
Still, as he did, stand?
Trusting grandly, singing gaily,

Confident and calm,
Not one false note in your daily
Hymn or weekly psalm?

Oft your oily tones are heard in
Chapel, where you preach,
This the everlasting burden
Of the tale you teach:
“We are d——d, our sins are deadly,
You alone are heal’d” —
'Twas not thus their gospel redly
Saints and martyrs seal’d.
You had seem’d more like a martyr,
Than you seem to us,
To the beasts that caught a Tartar
Once at Ephesus;
Rather than the stout apostle
Of the Gentiles, who,

Pagan-like, could cuff and wrestle,
They'd have chosen you.

Yet, I ween, on such occasion,
Your dissenting voice
Would have been, in mild persuasion,
Raised against their choice;
Man of peace, and man of merit,
Pompous, wise, and grave,
Ephraim! is it flesh or spirit
You strive most to save?
Vain is half this care and caution
O'er the earthly shell,
We can neither baffle nor shun
Dark plumed Azrael.
Onward! onward! still we wander,
Nearer draws the goal;
Half the riddle's read, we ponder

Vainly on the whole.

Eastward! in the pink horizon,
Fleecy hillocks shame
This dim range dull earth that lies on,
Tinged with rosy flame.
Westward! as a stricken giant
Stoops his bloody crest,
And tho' vanquished, frowns defiant,
Sinks the sun to rest.
Distant, yet approaching quickly,
From the shades that lurk,
Like a black pall gathers thickly,
Night, when none may work.
Soon our restless occupation
Shall have ceas'd to be;
Units! in God's vast creation,
Ciphers! what are we?

Onward! onward! oh! faint-hearted;
Nearer and more near
Has the goal drawn since we started,
Be of better cheer.

Preacher! all forbearance ask, for
All are worthless found,
Man must aye take man to task for
Faults while earth goes round.
On this dank soil thistles muster,
Thorns are broadcast sown;
Seek not figs where thistles cluster,
Grapes where thorns have grown.

Sun and rain and dew from heaven,
Light and shade and air,
Heat and moisture freely given,
Thorns and thistles share.

Vegetation rank and rotten
Feels the cheering ray;
Not uncared for, unforgotten,
We, too, have our day.

Unforgotten! though we cumber
Earth we work His will.
Shall we sleep through night's long slumber
Unforgotten still?
Onward! onward! toiling ever,
Weary steps and slow,
Doubting oft, despairing never,
To the goal we go!

Hark! the bells on distant cattle
Waft across the range;
Through the golden-tufted wattle,
Music low and strange;

Like the marriage peal of fairies
Comes the tinkling sound,
Or like chimes of sweet St. Mary's
On far English ground.
How my courser champs the snaffle,
And with nostril spread,
Snorts and scarcely seems to ruffle
Fern leaves with his tread;
Cool and pleasant on his haunches
Blows the evening breeze,
Through the overhanging branches
Of the wattle trees:
Onward! to the Southern Ocean,
Glides the breath of Spring.
Onward! with a dreary motion,
I, too, glide and sing —
Forward! forward! still we wander —
Tinted hills that lie

In the red horizon yonder —
Is the goal so nigh?

Whisper, spring-wind, softly singing,
Whisper in my ear;
Respite and nepenthe bringing,
Can the goal be near?
Laden with the dew of vespers,
From the fragrant sky,
In my ear the wind that whispers
Seems to make reply —

“Question not, but live and labour
Till yon goal be won,
Helping every feeble neighbour,
Seeking help from none;
Life is mostly froth and bubble,
Two things stand like stone,

KINDNESS in another's trouble,
COURAGE in your own."

Courage, comrades, this is certain,
All is for the best —
There are lights behind the curtain —
Gentiles, let us rest.
As the smoke-rack veers to seaward,
From "the ancient clay",
With its moral drifting leeward,
Ends the wanderer's lay.

Borrow'd Plumes

[A Preface and a Piracy]

Prologue

Of borrow'd plumes I take the sin,
My extracts will apply
To some few silly songs which in
These pages scatter'd lie.

The words are Edgar Allan Poe's,
As any man may see,
But what a POE-t wrote in prose,
Shall make blank verse for me.

Epilogue

And now that my theft stands detected,
The first of my extracts may call
To some of the rhymes here collected
Your notice, the second to all.

Ah! friend, you may shake your head sadly,
Yet this much you'll say for my verse,
I've written of old something badly,
But written anew something worse.

Pastor Cum

[Translation from Horace]

When he, that shepherd false, 'neath Phrygian sails,
Carried his hostess Helen o'er the seas,
In fitful slumber Nereus hush'd the gales,
That he might sing their future destinies.
A curse to your ancestral home you take
With her, whom Greece, with many a soldier bold
Shall seek again, in concert sworn to break
Your nuptial ties and Priam's kingdom old.
Alas! what sweat from man and horse must flow,
What devastation to the Trojan realm
You carry, even now doth Pallas show
Her wrath, preparing buckler, car, and helm.

In vain, secure in Aphrodite's care,
You comb your locks, and on the girlish lyre
Select the strains most pleasant to the fair;
In vain, on couch reclining, you desire
To shun the darts that threaten, and the thrust
Of Cretan lance, the battle's wild turmoil,
And Ajax swift to follow — in the dust
Condemned, though late, your wanton curls to soil.
Ah! see you not where (fatal to your race)
Laertes' son comes with the Pylean sage;
Fearless alike, with Teucer joins the chase
Stenelaus, skill'd the fistic strife to wage,
Nor less expert the fiery steeds to quell;
And Meriones, you must know. Behold
A warrior, than his sire more fierce and fell,
To find you rages, — Diomed the bold,
Whom like the stag that, far across the vale,
The wolf being seen, no herbage can allure,

So fly you, panting sorely, dastard pale! —
Not thus you boasted to your paramour.
Achilles' anger for a space defers
The day of wrath to Troy and Trojan dame;
Inevitable glide the allotted years,
And Dardan roofs must waste in Argive flame.

A Legend of Madrid

[Translated from the Spanish]

Francesca.

Crush'd and throng'd are all the places

In our amphitheatre,

'Midst a sea of swarming faces

I can yet distinguish her;

Dost thou triumph, dark-brow'd Nina?

Is my secret known to thee?

On the sands of yon arena

I shall yet my vengeance see.

Now through portals fast careering

Picadors are disappearing;

Now the barriers nimbly clearing

Has the hindmost chulo flown.
Clots of dusky crimson streaking,
Brindled flanks and haunches reeking,
Wheels the wild bull, vengeance seeking,

On the matador alone.

Features by sombrero shaded,
Pale and passionless and cold;
Doublet richly laced and braided,
Trunks of velvet slash'd with gold,
Blood-red scarf, and bare Toledo, —
Mask more subtle, and disguise
Far less shallow, thou dost need, oh,
Traitor, to deceive my eyes.

Shouts of noisy acclamation,
Breathing savage expectation,
Greet him while he takes his station

Leisurely, disdainingly haste;
Now he doffs his tall sombrero,

Fools! applaud your butcher hero,
Ye would idolise a Nero,
Pandering to public taste.

From the restless Guadalquivir
To my sire's estates he came,
Woo'd and won me, how I shiver!
Though my temples burn with shame.
I, a proud and high-born lady,
Daughter of an ancient race,
'Neath the vine and olive shade I
Yielded to a churl's embrace.
To a churl my vows were plighted,
Well my madness he requited,
Since, by priestly ties, united
To the muleteer's child;
And my prayers are wafted o'er him,
That the bull may crush and gore him,

Since the love that once I bore him
Has been changed to hatred wild.

Nina.

Save him! aid him! oh, Madonna!
Two are slain if he is slain;
Shield his life, and guard his honour,
Let me not entreat in vain.
Sullenly the brindled savage
Tears and tosses up the sand;
Horns that rend and hoofs that ravage,
How shall man your shock withstand?
On the shaggy neck and head lie
Frothy flakes, the eyeballs redly
Flash, the horns so sharp and deadly

Lower, short, and strong, and straight;
Fast, and furious, and fearless,
Now he charges; — virgin peerless,
Lifting lids, all dry and tearless,
At thy throne I supplicate.

Francesca.

Cool and calm, the perjured varlet
Stands on strongly-planted heel,
In his left a strip of scarlet,
In his right a streak of steel;
Ah! the monster topples over,
Till his haunches strike the plain! —
Low-born clown and lying lover,
Thou hast conquer'd once again.

Nina.

Sweet Madonna, maiden mother,
Thou hast saved him, and no other;
Now the tears I cannot smother,
Tears of joy my vision blind;
Where thou sittest I am gazing,
These glad, misty eyes upraising,
I have pray'd, and I am praising,
Bless thee! bless thee! virgin kind.

Francesca.

While the crowd still sways and surges,

Ere the applauding shouts have ceas'd,
See, the second bull emerges —
'Tis the famed Cordovan beast, —
By the picador ungoaded,
Scathless of the chulo's dart.
Slay him, and with guerdon loaded,
And with honours crown'd depart.
No vain brutish strife he wages,
Never uselessly he rages,
And his cunning, as he ages,
With his hatred seems to grow;
Though he stands amid the cheering,
Sluggish to the eye appearing,
Few will venture on the spearing
Of so resolute a foe.

Nina.

Courage, there is little danger,
Yonder dull-eyed craven seems
Fitter far for stall and manger
Than for scarf and blade that gleams;
Shorter, and of frame less massive,
Than his comrade lying low,
Tame, and cowardly, and passive, —
He will prove a feebler foe.
I have done with doubt and anguish,
Fears like dews in sunshine languish,
Courage, husband, we shall vanquish,
Thou art calm and so am I.
For the rush he has not waited,
On he strides with step elated,
And the steel with blood unsated,
Leaps to end the butchery.

Francesca.

Tyro! mark the brands of battle
On those shoulders dusk and dun,
Such as he is are the cattle
Skill'd tauridors gladly shun;
Warier than the Andalusian,
Swifter far, though not so large,
Think'st thou, to his own confusion,
He, like him, will blindly charge?
Inch by inch the brute advances,
Stealthy yet vindictive glances,
Horns as straight as levell'd lances,
Crouching withers, stooping haunches; —
Closer yet, until the tightening
Strains of rapt excitement height'ning
Grows oppressive. Ha! like lightning
On his enemy he launches.

Nina.

O'er the horn'd front drops the streamer,
In the nape the sharp steel hisses,
Glances, grazes, — Christ! Redeemer!
By a hair the spine he misses.

Francesca.

Hark! that shock like muffled thunder,
Booming from the Pyrenees!
Both are down — the man is under —
Now he struggles to his knees,
Now he sinks, his features leaden
Sharpen rigidly and deaden,
Sands beneath him soak and redden,
Skies above him spin and veer;

Through the doublet torn and riven,
Where the stunted horn was driven,
Wells the life-blood — We are even,
 Daughter of the muleteer!

Fauconshawe

[A Ballad]

To fetch clear water out of the spring
The little maid Margaret ran;
From the stream to the castle's western wing
It was but a bowshot span;
On the sedgy brink where the osiers cling
Lay a dead man, pallid and wan.

The lady Mabel rose from her bed,
And walked in the castle hall,
Where the porch through the western turret led
She met with her handmaid small.
"What aileth thee, Margaret?" the lady said,
"Hast let thy pitcher fall?"

“Say, what hast thou seen by the streamlet side —

A nymph or a water sprite —

That thou comest with eyes so wild and wide,

And with cheeks so ghostly white?”

“Nor nymph nor sprite,” the maiden cried,

“But the corpse of a slaughtered knight.”

The lady Mabel summon'd straight

To her presence Sir Hugh de Vere,

Of the guests who tarried within the gate

Of Fauconshawe most dear

Was he to that lady; betrothed in state

They had been since many a year.

“Little Margaret sayeth a dead man lies

By the western spring, Sir Hugh;

I can scarce believe that the maiden lies —

Yet scarce can believe her true.”

And the knight replies, "Till we test her eyes
Let her words gain credence due."

Down the rocky path knight and lady led,
While guests and retainers bold
Followed in haste, for like wildfire spread
The news by the maiden told.
They found 'twas even as she had said —
The corpse had some while been cold.

How the spirit had pass'd in the moments last
There was little trace to reveal:
On the still calm face lay no imprint ghast,
Save the angel's solemn seal,
Yet the hands were clench'd in a death-grip fast,
And the sods stamp'd down by the heel.

Sir Hugh by the side of the dead man knelt,

Said, "Full well these features I know,
We have faced each other where blows were dealt,
And he was a stalwart foe;
I had rather have met him hilt to hilt
Than have found him lying low."

He turn'd the body up on its face,
And never a word was spoken,
While he ripp'd the doublet, and tore the lace,
And tugg'd — by the self-same token, —
And strain'd, till he wrench'd it out of its place,
The dagger-blade that was broken.

Then he turned the body over again,
And said, while he rose upright,
"May the brand of Cain, with its withering stain,
On the murderer's forehead light,
For he never was slain on the open plain,

Nor yet in the open fight.”

Solemn and stern were the words he spoke,
And he look'd at his lady's men,
But his speech no answering echoes woke,
All were silent there and then,
Till a clear, cold voice the silence broke: —
Lady Mabel cried, “Amen.”

His glance met hers, the twain stood hush'd,
With the dead between them there;
But the blood to her snowy temples rush'd
Till it tinged the roots of her hair,
Then paled, but a thin red streak still flush'd
In the midst of her forehead fair.

Four yeomen raised the corpse from the ground,
At a sign from Sir Hugh de Vere;

It was borne to the western turret round,
And laid on a knightly bier,
With never a sob nor a mourning sound, —
No friend to the dead was near.

Yet that night was neither revel nor dance
In the halls of Fauconshawe;
Men looked askance with a doubtful glance
At Sir Hugh, for they stood in awe
Of his prowess, but he, like one in a trance,
Regarded naught that he saw.

* * * * *

Night black and chill, wind gathering still,
With its wail in the turret tall,
And its headlong blast like a catapult cast
On the crest of the outer wall,

And its hail and rain on the crashing pane,
Till the glassy splinters fall.

A moody knight by the fitful light
Of the great hall fire below;
A corpse upstairs, and a woman at prayers,
Will they profit her, aye or no?
By'r lady fain, an' she comfort gain,
There is comfort for us also.

The guests were gone, save Sir Hugh alone,
And he watched the gleams that broke
On the pale hearth-stone, and flickered and shone
On the panels of polish'd oak;
He was 'ware of no presence except his own
Till the voice of young Margaret spoke:

"I've risen, Sir Hugh, at the mirk midnight,

I cannot sleep in my bed,
Now, unless my tale can be told aright,
I wot it were best unsaid;
It lies, the blood of yon northern knight,
On my lady's hand and head."

"Oh! the wild wind raves and rushes along,
But thy ravings seem more wild —
She never could do so foul a wrong —
Yet I blame thee not, my child,
For the fever'd dreams on thy rest that throng!"
He frown'd though his speech was mild.

"Let storm winds eddy, and scream, and hurl
Their wrath, they disturb me naught;
The daughter she of a high-born earl,
No secret of hers I've sought;
I am but the child of a peasant churl,

Yet look to the proofs I've brought;

“This dagger snapp'd so close to the hilt —

Dost remember thy token well?

Will it match with the broken blade that spilt

His life in the western dell?

Nay! read her handwriting an' thou wilt,

From her paramour's breast it fell.”

The knight in silence the letter read,

Oh! the characters well he knew!

And his face might have match'd the face of the dead,

So ashen white was its hue!

Then he tore the parchment shred by shred,

And the strips in the flames he threw.

And he muttered, “Densely those shadows fall

In the copse where the alders thicken;

There she bade him come to her, once for all —
Now, I well may shudder and sicken; —
Gramercy! that hand so white and small,
How strongly it must have stricken.”

* * * * *

At midnight hour, in the western tower,
Alone with the dead man there,
Lady Mabel kneels, nor heeds nor feels
The shock of the rushing air,
Though the gusts that pass through the riven glass
Have scattered her raven hair.

Across the floor, through the opening door,
Where standeth a stately knight,
The lamplight streams, and flickers, and gleams,
On his features stern and white —

'Tis Sir Hugh de Vere, and he cometh more near,
And the lady standeth upright.

“’Tis little,” he said, “that I know or care
Of the guilt (if guilt there be)
That lies ‘twixt thee and yon dead man there,
Nor matters it now to me;
I thought thee pure, thou art only fair,
And to-morrow I cross the sea.

“He perish’d! I ask not why or how?
I come to recall my troth;
Take back, my lady, thy broken vow,
Give back my allegiance oath;
Let the past be buried between us now
For ever — ’tis best for both.

“Yet, Mabel, I could ask, dost thou dare

Lay hand on that corpse's heart,
And call on thy Maker, and boldly swear,
That thou hadst in his death no part?
I ask not, while threescore proofs I share
With one doubt — uncondemn'd thou art."

Oh! cold and bleak upon Mabel's cheek
Came the blast of the storm-wind keen,
And her tresses black, as the glossy back
Of the raven, glanced between
Her fingers slight, like the ivory white,
As she parted their sable sheen.

Yet with steady lip, and with fearless eye,
And with cheek like the flush of dawn,
Unflinchingly she spoke in reply —
"Go hence with the break of morn,
I will neither confess, nor yet deny,

I will return thee scorn for scorn.”

The knight bow'd low as he turn'd to go;

He travell'd by land and sea,

But naught of his future fate I know,

And naught of his fair ladye;

My story is told as, long ago,

My story was told to me.

Rippling Water

The maiden sat by the river side
(The rippling water murmurs by),
And sadly into the clear blue tide
The salt tear fell from her clear blue eye.
“’Tis fixed for better, for worse,” she cried,
“And to-morrow the bridegroom claims the bride.
Oh! wealth and power and rank and pride
Can surely peace and happiness buy.
I was merry, nathless, in my girlhood’s hours,
‘Mid the waving grass when the bright sun shone,
Shall I be as merry in Marmaduke’s towers?”
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Stephen works for his daily bread
(The rippling water murmurs low).
Through the crazy thatch that covers his head
The rain-drops fall and the wind-gusts blow.
“I’ll mend the old roof-tree,” so he said,
“And repair the cottage when we are wed.”
And my pulses throbb’d, and my cheek grew red,
When he kiss’d me — that was long ago.
Stephen and I, should we meet again,
Not as we’ve met in days that are gone,
Will my pulses throb with pleasure or pain?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Old Giles, the gardener, strok’d my curls
(The rippling water murmurs past),
Quoth he, “In laces and silks and pearls
My child will see her reflection cast;
Now I trust in my heart that your lord will be

Kinder to you than he was to me,
When I lay in the gaol, and my children three,
With their sickly mother, kept bitter fast.”
With Marmaduke now my will is law,
Marmaduke’s will may be law anon;
Does the sheath of velvet cover the claw?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Dame Martha patted me on the cheek
(The rippling water murmurs low),
Saying, “There are words that I fain would speak —
Perhaps they were best unspoken though;
I can’t persuade you to change your mind,
And useless warnings are scarcely kind,
And I may be foolish as well as blind,
But take my blessing whether or no.”
Dame Martha’s wise, though her hair is white,
Her sense is good, though her sight is gone —

Can she really be gifted with second sight?

(The rippling water murmurs on).

Brian of Hawksmede came to our cot

(The rippling water murmurs by),

Scatter'd the sods of our garden plot,

Riding his roan horse recklessly;

Trinket and token and tress of hair,

He flung them down at the door-step there,

Said, "Elsie! ask your lord, if you dare,

Who gave him the blow as well as the lie."

That evening I mentioned Brian's name,

And Marmaduke's face grew white and wan,

Am I pledged to one of a spirit so tame?

(The rippling water murmurs on).

Brian is headstrong, rash, and vain

(The rippling water murmurs still),

Stephen is somewhat duller of brain,
Slower of speech, and milder of will;
Stephen must toil a living to gain,
Plough and harrow and gather the grain;
Brian has little enough to maintain
The station in life which he needs must fill;
Both are fearless and kind and frank,
But we can't win all gifts under the sun —
What have I won save riches and rank?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Riches and rank, and what beside?
(The rippling water murmurs yet),
The mansion is stately, the manor is wide,
Their lord for a while may pamper and pet;
Liveried lackeys may jeer aside,
Though the peasant girl is their master's bride,
At her shyness, mingled with awkward pride, —

'Twere folly for trifles like these to fret;
But the love of one that I cannot love,
Will it last when the gloss of his toy is gone?
Is there naught beyond, below, or above?
(The rippling water murmurs on).

Cui Bono

Oh! wind that whistles o'er thorns and thistles,

Of this fruitful earth like a goblin elf;

Why should he labour to help his neighbour

Who feels too reckless to help himself?

The wail of the breeze in the bending trees

Is something between a laugh and a groan;

And the hollow roar of the surf on the shore

Is a dull, discordant monotone;

I wish I could guess what sense they express,

There's a meaning, doubtless, in every sound,

Yet no one can tell, and it may be as well —

Whom would it profit? — The world goes round!

On this earth so rough we know quite enough,
And, I sometimes fancy, a little too much;
The sage may be wiser than clown or than kaiser,
Is he more to be envied for being such?
Neither more nor less, in his idleness
The sage is doom'd to vexation sure;
The kaiser may rule, but the slippery stool,
That he calls his throne, is no sinecure;
And as for the clown, you may give him a crown,
Maybe he'll thank you, and maybe not,
And before you can wink he may spend it in drink —
To whom does it profit? — We ripe and rot!

Yet under the sun much work is done
By clown and kaiser, by serf and sage;
All sow and some reap, and few gather the heap
Of the garner'd grain of a by-gone age.
By sea or by soil man is bound to toil,

And the dreamer, waiting for time and tide,
For awhile may shirk his share of the work,
But he grows with his dream dissatisfied;
He may climb to the edge of the beetling ledge,
Where the loose crag topples and well-nigh reels
'Neath the lashing gale, but the tonic will fail —
What does it profit? — Wheels within wheels!

Aye! work we must, or with idlers rust,
And eat we must our bodies to nurse;
Some folk grow fatter — what does it matter?
I'm blest if I do — quite the reverse;
'Tis a weary round to which we are bound,
The same thing over and over again;
Much toil and trouble, and a glittering bubble,
That rises and bursts, is the best we gain;
And we murmur, and yet 'tis certain we get
What good we deserve — can we hope for more? —

They are roaring, those waves, in their echoing caves —

To whom do they profit? — Let them roar!

Bellona

Thou art moulded in marble impassive,
False goddess, fair statue of strife,
Yet standest on pedestal massive,
A symbol and token of life.

Thou art still, not with stillness of languor,
And calm, not with calm boding rest;
For thine is all wrath and all anger
That throbs far and near in the breast
Of man, by thy presence possess'd.

With the brow of a fallen archangel,
The lips of a beautiful fiend,
And locks that are snake-like to strangle,
And eyes from whose depths may be glean'd

The presence of passions, that tremble
Unbidden, yet shine as they may
Through features too proud to dissemble,
Too cold and too calm to betray
Their secrets to creatures of clay.

Thy breath stirreth faction and party,
Men rise, and no voice can avail
To stay them — rose-tinted Astarte
Herself at thy presence turns pale.
For deeper and richer the crimson
That gathers behind thee throws forth
A halo thy raiment and limbs on,
And leaves a red track in the path
That flows from thy wine-press of wrath.

For behind thee red rivulets trickle,
Men fall by thy hands swift and lithe,

As corn falleth down to the sickle,
As grass falleth down to the scythe,
Thine arm, strong and cruel, and shapely,
Lifts high the sharp, pitiless lance,
And rapine and ruin and rape lie
Around thee. The Furies advance,
And Ares awakes from his trance.

We, too, with our bodies thus weakly,
With hearts hard and dangerous, thus
We owe thee — the saints suffered meekly
Their wrongs — it is not so with us.
Some share of thy strength thou hast given
To mortals refusing in vain
Thine aid. We have suffered and striven
Till we have grown reckless of pain,
Though feeble of heart and of brain.

Fair spirit, alluring if wicked,
False deity, terribly real,
Our senses are trapp'd, our souls tricked
By thee and thy hollow ideal.

The soldier who falls in his harness,
And strikes his last stroke with slack hand,
On his dead face thy wrath and thy scorn is
Imprinted. Oh! seeks he a land
Where he shall escape thy command?

When the blood of thy victims lies red on
That stricken field, fiercest and last,
In the sunset that gilds Armageddon
With battle-drift still overcast —
When the smoke of thy hot conflagrations
O'ershadows the earth as with wings,
Where nations have fought against nations,
And kings have encounter'd with kings,

When cometh the end of all things —

Then those who have patiently waited,
And borne, unresisting, the pain
Of thy vengeance unglutted, unsated,
Shall they be rewarded again?

Then those who, enticed by thy laurels,
Or urged by thy promptings unblest,
Have striven and stricken in quarrels,
Shall they, too, find pardon and rest?
We know not, yet hope for the best.

The Song of the Surf

White steeds of ocean, that leap with a hollow and wearisome roar
On the bar of ironstone steep, not a fathom's length from the shore,
Is there never a seer nor sophist can interpret your wild refrain,
When speech the harshest and roughest is seldom studied in vain?

My ears are constantly smitten by that dreary monotone,
In a hieroglyphic 'tis written — 'tis spoken in a tongue unknown;
Gathering, growing, and swelling, and surging, and shivering, say!
What is the tale you are telling? What is the drift of your lay?

You come, and your crests are hoary with the foam of your countless years;
You break, with a rainbow of glory,
through the spray of your glittering tears.
Is your song a song of gladness? a paean of joyous might?

Or a wail of discordant sadness for the wrongs you never can right?

For the empty seat by the ingle? for children 'reft of their sire?

For the bride sitting sad, and single, and pale, by the flickering fire?

For your ravenous pools of suction? for your shattering billow swell?

For your ceaseless work of destruction? for your hunger insatiable?

Not far from this very place, on the sand and the shingle dry,

He lay, with his batter'd face upturned to the frowning sky.

When your waters wash'd and swill'd high over his drowning head,

When his nostrils and lungs were filled,

when his feet and hands were as lead,

When against the rock he was hurl'd, and suck'd again to the sea,

On the shores of another world, on the brink of eternity,

On the verge of annihilation, did it come to that swimmer strong,

The sudden interpretation of your mystical, weird-like song?

“Mortal! that which thou askest, ask not thou of the waves;

Fool! thou foolishly taskest us — we are only slaves;

Might, more mighty, impels us — we must our lot fulfil,
He who gathers and swells us curbs us, too, at His will.
Think'st thou the wave that shatters questioneth His decree?
Little to us it matters, and naught it matters to thee.
Not thus, murmuring idly, we from our duty would swerve,
Over the world spread widely ever we labour and serve.”

Whisperings in Wattle-Boughs

Oh, gaily sings the bird! and the wattle-boughs are stirr'd
And rustled by the scented breath of spring;
Oh, the dreary wistful longing! Oh, the faces that are thronging!
Oh, the voices that are vaguely whispering!

Oh, tell me, father mine, ere the good ship cross'd the brine,
On the gangway one mute hand-grip we exchange'd;
Do you, past the grave, employ, for your stubborn, reckless boy,
Those petitions that in life were ne'er estranged?

Oh, tell me, sister dear, parting word and parting tear
Never pass'd between us; — let me bear the blame,
Are you living, girl, or dead? bitter tears since then I've shed

For the lips that lisp'd with mine a mother's name.

Oh, tell me, ancient friend, ever ready to defend,
In our boyhood, at the base of life's long hill,
Are you waking yet or sleeping? have you left this vale of weeping?
Or do you, like your comrade, linger still?

Oh, whisper, buried love, is there rest and peace above? —
There is little hope or comfort here below;
On your sweet face lies the mould, and your bed is straight and cold —
Near the harbour where the sea-tides ebb and flow.

* * * * *

All silent — they are dumb — and the breezes go and come
With an apathy that mocks at man's distress;
Laugh, scoffer, while you may! I could bow me down and pray
For an answer that might stay my bitterness.

Oh, harshly screams the bird! and the wattle-bloom is stirr'd;

There's a sullen, weird-like whisper in the bough:

“Aye, kneel, and pray, and weep, but HIS BELOVED SLEEP

CAN NEVER BE DISTURB'D BY SUCH AS THOU!!”

Confiteor

The shore-boat lies in the morning light,
By the good ship ready for sailing;
The skies are clear, and the dawn is bright,
Tho' the bar of the bay is fleck'd with white,
And the wind is fitfully wailing;
Near the tiller stands the priest, and the knight
Leans over the quarter-railing.

“There is time while the vessel tarries still,
There is time while her shrouds are slack,
There is time ere her sails to the west wind fill,
Ere her tall masts vanish from town and from hill,
Ere cleaves to her keel the track:

There is time for confession to those who will,
To those who may never come back.”

“Sir priest, you can shrive these men of mine,
And, I pray you, shrive them fast,
And shrive those hardy sons of the brine,
Captain and mates of the EGLANTINE,
And sailors before the mast;
Then pledge me a cup of the Cyprus wine,
For I fain would bury the past.”

“And hast thou naught to repent, my son?
Dost thou scorn confession and shrift?
Ere thy sands from the glass of time shall run
Is there naught undone that thou should’st have done,
Naught done that thou should’st have left?
The guiltiest soul may from guilt be won,
And the stoniest heart may be cleft.”

“Have my ears been closed to the prayer of the poor,
Or deaf to the cry of distress?
Have I given little, and taken more?
Have I brought a curse to the widow’s door?
Have I wrong’d the fatherless?
Have I steep’d my fingers in guiltless gore,
That I must perforce confess?”

“Have thy steps been guided by purity
Through the paths with wickedness rife?
Hast thou never smitten thine enemy?
Hast thou yielded naught to the lust of the eye,
And naught to the pride of life?
Hast thou pass’d all snares of pleasure by?
Hast thou shunn’d all wrath and strife?”

“Nay, certes! a sinful life I’ve led,
Yet I’ve suffered, and lived in hope;
I may suffer still, but my hope has fled, —
I’ve nothing now to hope or to dread,
And with fate I can fairly cope;
Were the waters closing over my head,
I should scarcely catch at a rope.”

“Dost suffer? thy pain may be fraught with grace,
Since never by works alone
We are saved; — the penitent thief may trace
The wealth of love in the Saviour’s face
To the Pharisee rarely shown;
And the Magdalene’s arms may yet embrace
The foot of the jasper throne.”

“Sir priest, a heavier doom I dree,
For I feel no quickening pain,

But a dull, dumb weight when I bow my knee,
And (not with the words of the Pharisee)
My hard eyes heavenward strain,
Where my dead darling prayeth for me!
Now, I wot, she prayeth in vain!

“Still I hear it over the battle’s din,
And over the festive cheer, —
So she pray’d with clasp’d hands, white and thin, —
The prayer of a soul absolved from sin,
For a soul that is dark and drear,
For the light of repentance bursting in,
And the flood of the blinding tear.

“Say, priest! when the saint must vainly plead,
Oh! how shall the sinner fare?
I hold your comfort a broken reed;
Let the wither’d branch for itself take heed,

While the green shoots wait your care;
I've striven, though feebly, to grasp your creed,
And I've grappled my own despair."

"By the little within thee, good and brave,
Not wholly shattered, though shaken;
By the soul that crieth beyond the grave,
The love that He once in His mercy gave,
In His mercy since retaken,
I conjure thee, oh! sinner, pardon crave,
I implore thee, oh! sleeper, waken!"

"Go to! shall I lay my black soul bare
To a vain, self-righteous man?
In my sin, in my sorrow, you may not share,
And yet could I meet with one who must bear
The load of an equal ban,
With him I might strive to blend one prayer,

The wail of the Publican.”

“My son, I, too, am a withered bough,
My place is to others given;
Thou hast sinn’d, thou sayest; I ask not how,
For I, too, have sinn’d, even as thou,
And I, too, have feebly striven,
And with thee I must bow, crying, ‘Shrive us now!
Our Father which art in heaven!’”

Sunlight on the Sea

[The Philosophy of a Feast]

Make merry, comrades, eat and drink
 (The sunlight flickers on the sea),
The garlands gleam, the glasses clink,
 The grape juice mantles fair and free,
The lamps are trimm'd, although the light
 Of day still lingers on the sky;
We sit between the day and night,
 And push the wine flask merrily.
I see you feasting round me still,
 All gay of heart and strong of limb;
Make merry, friends, your glasses fill,
 The lights are growing dim.

I miss the voice of one I've heard
(The sunlight sinks upon the sea),
He sang as blythe as any bird,
And shook the rafters with his glee;
But times have changed with him, I wot,
By fickle fortune cross'd and flung;
Far stouter heart than mine he's got
If now he sings as then he sung.
Yet some must swim when others sink,
And some must sink when others swim;
Make merry, comrades, eat and drink,
The lights are growing dim.

I miss the face of one I've loved
(The sunlight settles on the sea) —
Long since to distant climes he roved,
He had his faults, and so have we;
His name was mentioned here this day,

And it was coupled with a sneer;
I heard, nor had I aught to say,
Though once I held his memory dear.
Who cares, 'mid wines and fruits and flowers,
Though death or danger compass him;
He had his faults, and we have ours,
The lights are growing dim.

I miss the form of one I know
(The sunlight wanes upon the sea) —
'Tis not so very long ago,
We drank his health with three-times-three,
And we were gay when he was here;
And he is gone, and we are gay.
Where has he gone? or far or near?
Good sooth, 'twere somewhat hard to say.
You glance aside, you doubtless think
My homily a foolish whim,

'Twill soon be ended, eat and drink,
The lights are growing dim.

The fruit is ripe, the wine is red
(The sunlight fades upon the sea);
To us the absent are the dead,
The dead to us must absent be.
We, too, the absent ranks must join;
And friends will censure and forget:
There's metal base in every coin;
Men vanish, leaving traces yet
Of evil and of good behind,
Since false notes taint the skylark's hymn,
And dross still lurks in gold refined —
The lights are growing dim.

We eat and drink or e'er we die
(The sunlight flushes on the sea).

Three hundred soldiers feasted high
An hour before Thermopylae;
Leonidas pour'd out the wine,
And shouted ere he drain'd the cup,
"Ho! comrades, let us gaily dine —
This night with Pluto we shall sup";
And if they leant upon a reed,
And if their reed was slight and slim,
There's something good in Spartan creed —
The lights are growing dim.

Make merry, comrades, eat and drink
(The sunlight flashes on the sea);
My spirit is rejoiced to think
That even as they were so are we;
For they, like us, were mortals vain,
The slaves to earthly passions wild,
Who slept with heaps of Persians slain

For winding-sheets around them piled.
The dead man's deeds are living still —
My Festive speech is somewhat grim —
 Their good obliterates their ill —
 The lights are growing dim.

We eat and drink, we come and go
(The sunlight dies upon the open sea).

 I speak in riddles. Is it so?
 My riddles need not mar your glee;
 For I will neither bid you share
My thoughts, nor will I bid you shun,
Though I should see in yonder chair
 Th' Egyptian's muffled skeleton.
One toast with me your glasses fill,
 Aye, fill them level with the brim,
 De mortuis, nisi bonum, nil!
 The lights are growing dim.

Delilah

[From a Picture]

The sun has gone down, spreading wide on
The sky-line one ray of red fire;
Prepare the soft cushions of Sidon,
Make ready the rich loom of Tyre.
The day, with its toil and its sorrow,
Its shade, and its sunshine, at length
Has ended; dost fear for the morrow,
Strong man, in the pride of thy strength?

Like fire-flies, heavenward clinging,
They multiply, star upon star;
And the breeze a low murmur is bringing

From the tents of my people afar.
Nay, frown not, I am but a Pagan,
Yet little for these things I care;
'Tis the hymn to our deity Dagon
That comes with the pleasant night air.

It shall not disturb thee, nor can it;
See, closed are the curtains, the lights
Gleam down on the cloven pomegranate,
Whose thirst-slaking nectar invites;
The red wine of Hebron glows brightly
In yon goblet — the draught of a king;
And through the silk awning steals lightly
The sweet song my handmaidens sing.

Dost think that thy God, in His anger,
Will trifle with nature's great laws,
And slacken those sinews in languor

That battled so well in His cause?
Will He take back that strength He has given,
Because to the pleasures of youth
Thou yieldest? Nay, Godlike, in heaven,
He laughs at such follies, forsooth.

Oh! were I, for good or for evil,
As great and as gifted as thou,
Neither God should restrain me, nor devil,
To none like a slave would I bow.
If fate must indeed overtake thee,
And feebleness come to thy clay,
Pause not till thy strength shall forsake thee,
Enjoy it the more in thy day.

Oh, fork'd-tongue of adder, by her pent
In smooth lips! — oh, Sybarite blind!
Oh, woman allied to the serpent!

Oh, beauty with venom combined!

Oh, might overcoming the mighty!

Oh, glory departing! oh, shame!

Oh, altar of false Aphrodite,

What strength is consumed in thy flame!

Strong chest, where her drapery rustles,

Strong limbs by her black tresses hid!

Not alone by the might of your muscles

Yon lion was rent like a kid!

The valour from virtue that sunders,

Is 'reft of its nobler part;

And Lancelot's arm may work wonders,

But braver is Galahad's heart.

Sleep sound on that breast fair and ample;

Dull brain, and dim eyes, and deaf ears,

Feel not the cold touch on your temple,

Heed not the faint clash of the shears.
It comes! — with the gleam of the lamps on
The curtains — that voice — does it jar
On thy soul in the night-watch? Ho! Samson,
Upon thee the Philistines are.

From Lightning and Tempest

The spring-wind pass'd through the forest, and whispered low in the leaves,
And the cedar toss'd her head, and the oak stood firm in his pride;
 The spring-wind pass'd through the town,
 through the housetops, casements, and eaves,
And whisper'd low in the hearts of the men, and the men replied,
 Singing — "Let us rejoice in the light
 Of our glory, and beauty, and might;
 Let us follow our own devices, and foster our own desires.
As firm as our oaks in our pride, as our cedars fair in our sight,
 We stand like the trees of the forest
 that brave the frosts and the fires."

The storm went forth to the forest, the plague went forth to the town,

And the men fell down to the plague, as the trees fell down to the gale;
And their bloom was a ghastly pallor, and their smile was a ghastly frown,
And the song of their hearts was changed to a wild, disconsolate wail,
Crying — “God! we have sinn’d, we have sinn’d,
We are bruis’d, we are shorn, we are thinn’d,
Our strength is turn’d to derision, our pride laid low in the dust,
Our cedars are cleft by Thy lightnings, our oaks are strew’d by Thy wind,
And we fall on our faces seeking Thine aid, though Thy wrath is just.”

Wormwood and Nightshade

The troubles of life are many,
The pleasures of life are few;
When we sat in the sunlight, Annie,
I dreamt that the skies were blue —
When we sat in the sunlight, Annie,
I dreamt that the earth was green;
There is little colour, if any,
'Neath the sunlight now to be seen.

Then the rays of the sunset glinted
Through the blackwoods' emerald bough
On an emerald sward, rose-tinted,
And spangled, and gemm'd; — and now

The rays of the sunset redden
With a sullen and lurid frown,
From the skies that are dark and leaden,
To earth that is dusk and brown.

To right and to left extended
The uplands are blank and drear,
And their neutral tints are blended
With the dead leaves sombre and sere;
The cold grey mist from the still side
Of the lake creeps sluggish and sure,
Bare and bleak is the hill-side,
Barren and bleak the moor.

Bright hues and shapes intertwined,
Fair forms and rich colours; — now
They have flown — if e'er they existed —
It matters not why or how.

It matters not where or when, dear,
They have flown, the blue and the green,
I thought on what might be then, dear,
Now I think on what might have been.

What might have been! — words of folly;
What might be! — speech for a fool;
With mistletoe round me, and holly,
Scarlet and green, at Yule.
With the elm in the place of the wattle,
And in lieu of the gum, the oak,
Years back I believed a little,
And as I believed I spoke.

Have I done with those childish fancies?
They suited the days gone by,
When I pulled the poppies and pansies,
When I hunted the butterfly,

With one who has long been sleeping,
A stranger to doubts and cares,
And to sowing that ends in reaping
Thistles, and thorns, and tares.

What might be! — the dreams were scatter'd,
As chaff is toss'd by the wind,
The faith has been rudely shattered
That listen'd with credence blind;
Things were to have been, and therefore
They were, and they are to be,
And will be; — we must prepare for
The doom we are bound to dree.

Ah, me! we believe in evil,
Where once we believed in good,
The world, the flesh, and the devil
Are easily understood;

The world, the flesh, and the devil
Their traces on earth are plain;
Must they always riot and revel
While footprints of man remain?

Talk about better and wiser,
Wiser and worse are one,
The sophist is the despiser
Of all things under the sun;
Is nothing real but confusion?
Is nothing certain but death?
Is nothing fair save illusion?
Is nothing good that has breath?

Some sprite, malignant and elfish,
Seems present whispering close,
“All motives of life are selfish,
All instincts of life are gross;

And the song that the poet fashions,
And the love-bird's musical strain,
Are jumbles of animal passions,
Refined by animal pain."

The restless throbbings and burnings
That hope unsatisfied brings,
The weary longings and yearnings
For the mystical better things,
Are the sands on which is reflected
The pitiless moving lake,
Where the wanderer falls dejected,
By a thirst he never can slake.

A child blows bubbles that glitter,
He snatches them, they disperse;
Yet childhood's folly is better,
And manhood's folly is worse;

Gilt baubles we grasp at blindly
Would turn in our hands to dross;
'Tis a fate less cruel than kindly
Denies the gain and the loss.

And as one who pursues a shadow,
As one who hunts in a dream,
As the child who crosses the meadow,
Enticed by the rainbow's gleam,
I — knowing the course was foolish,
And guessing the goal was pain,
Stupid, and stubborn, and mulish —
Followed and follow again.

The sun over Gideon halted,
Holding aloof the night,
When Joshua's arm was exalted,
Yet never retraced his flight;

Nor will he turn back, nor can he,
He chases the future fast;
The future is blank — oh, Annie!
I fain would recall the past.

There are others toiling and straining
'Neath burdens graver than mine —
They are weary, yet uncomplaining —
I know it, yet I repine;
I know it, how time will ravage,
How time will level, and yet
I long with a longing savage,
I regret with a fierce regret.

You are no false ideal,
Something is left of you,
Present, perceptible, real,
Palpable, tangible, true;

One shred of your broken necklace,
One tress of your pale, gold hair,
And a heart so utterly reckless,
That the worst it would gladly dare.

There is little pleasure, if any,
In waking the past anew;
My days and nights have been many;
Lost chances many I rue —
My days and nights have been many;
Now I pray that they be few,
When I think on the hill-side, Annie,
Where I dreamt that the skies were blue.

Ars Longa

[A Song of Pilgrimage]

Our hopes are wild imaginings,
Our schemes are airy castles,
Yet these, on earth, are lords and kings,
And we their slaves and vassals;
Your dream, forsooth, of buoyant youth,
Most ready to deceive is;
But age will own the bitter truth,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

The hill of life with eager feet
We climbed in merry morning,
But on the downward track we meet

The shades of twilight warning;
The shadows gaunt they fall aslant,
And those who scaled Ben Nevis,
Against the mole-hills toil and pant,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

The obstacles that barr'd our path
We seldom quail'd to dash on
In youth, for youth one motto hath,
“The will, the way must fashion.”
Those words, I wot, blood thick and hot,
Too ready to believe is,
But thin and cold our blood hath got,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

And “art is long”, and “life is short”,
And man is slow at learning;
And yet by divers dealings taught,

For divers follies yearning,
He owns at last, with grief downcast
(For man disposed to grieve is) —
One adage old stands true and fast,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

We journey, manhood, youth, and age,
The matron, and the maiden,
Like pilgrims on a pilgrimage,
Loins girded, heavy laden: —
Each pilgrim strong, who joins our throng,
Most eager to achieve is,
Foredoom'd ere long to swell the song,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

At morn, with staff and sandal-shoon,
We travel brisk and cheery,
But some have laid them down ere noon,

And all at eve are weary;
The noontide glows with no repose,
And bitter chill the eve is,
The grasshopper a burden grows,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

The staff is snapp'd, the sandal fray'd,
The flint-stone galls and blisters,
Our brother's steps we cannot aid,
Ah me! nor aid our sister's:
The pit prepares its hidden snares,
The rock prepared to cleave is,
We cry, in falling unawares,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

Oh! Wisdom, which we sought to win!
Oh! Strength, in which we trusted!
Oh! Glory, which we gloried in!

Oh! puppets we adjusted!
On barren land our seed is sand,
And torn the web we weave is,
The bruised reed hath pierced the hand,
“Ars longa, vita brevis.”

We, too, “Job’s comforters” have met,
With steps, like ours, unsteady,
They could not help themselves, and yet
To judge us they were ready;
Life’s path is trod at last, and God
More ready to reprieve is,
They know who rest beneath the sod,
“Mors gratum, vita brevis.”

The Last Leap

All is over! fleet career,
Dash of greyhound slipping thongs,
Flight of falcon, bound of deer,
Mad hoof-thunder in our rear,
Cold air rushing up our lungs,
Din of many tongues.

Once again, one struggle good,
One vain effort; — he must dwell
Near the shifted post, that stood
Where the splinters of the wood,
Lying in the torn tracks, tell
How he struck and fell.

Crest where cold drops beaded cling,
Small ear drooping, nostril full,
Glazing to a scarlet ring,
Flanks and haunches quivering,
Sinews stiff'ning, void and null,
Dumb eyes sorrowful.

Satin coat that seems to shine
Duller now, black braided tress,
That a softer hand than mine
Far away was wont to twine,
That in meadows far from this
Softer lips might kiss.

All is over! this is death,
And I stand to watch thee die,
Brave old horse! with 'bated breath

Hardly drawn through tight-clenched teeth,
Lip indented deep, but eye
Only dull and dry.

Musing on the husk and chaff
Gather'd where life's tares are sown,
Thus I speak, and force a laugh
That is half a sneer and half
An involuntary groan,
In a stifled tone —

“Rest, old friend! thy day, though rife
With its toil, hath ended soon;
We have had our share of strife,
Tumblers in the mask of life,
In the pantomime of noon
Clown and pantaloon.

“With the flash that ends thy pain
 Respite and oblivion blest
Come to greet thee. I in vain
 Fall: I rise to fall again:
Thou hast fallen to thy rest —
 And thy fall is best!”

Quare Fatigasti

Two years ago I was thinking
On the changes that years bring forth;
Now I stand where I then stood drinking
The gust and the salt sea froth;
And the shuddering wave strikes, linking
With the waves subsiding and sinking,
And clots the coast herbage, shrinking,
With the hue of the white cere-cloth.

Is there aught worth losing or keeping?
The bitters or sweets men quaff?
The sowing or the doubtful reaping?
The harvest of grain or chaff?

Or squandering days or heaping,
Or waking seasons or sleeping,
The laughter that dries the weeping,
Or the weeping that drowns the laugh?

For joys wax dim and woes deaden,
We forget the sorrowful biers,
And the garlands glad that have fled in
The merciful march of years;
And the sunny skies, and the leaden,
And the faces that pale or redden,
And the smiles that lovers are wed in
Who are born and buried in tears.

And the myrtle bloom turns hoary,
And the blush of the rose decays,
And sodden with sweat and gory
Are the hard won laurels and bays;

We are neither joyous nor sorry
When time has ended our story,
And blotted out grief and glory,
And pain, and pleasure, and praise.

Weigh justly, throw good and bad in
The scales, will the balance veer
With the joys or the sorrows had in
The sum of a life's career?
In the end, spite of dreams that sadden
The sad or the sanguine madden,
There is nothing to grieve or gladden,
There is nothing to hope or fear.

“Thou hast gone astray,” quoth the preacher,
“In the gall of thy bitterness,”
Thou hast taught me in vain, oh, teacher!
I neither blame thee nor bless;

If bitter is sure and sweet sure,
These vanish with form and feature —
Can the creature fathom the creature,
Whose Creator is fathomless?

Is this dry land sure? Is the sea sure?
Is there aught that shall long remain,
Pain, or peril, or pleasure,
Pleasure, or peril, or pain?
Shall we labour or take our leisure,
And who shall inherit treasure,
If the measure with which we measure
Is meted to us again?

I am slow in learning and swift in
Forgetting, and I have grown
So weary with long sand sifting;
T'wards the mist where the breakers moan

The rudderless bark is drifting,
Through the shoals and the quicksands shifting —
In the end shall the night-rack lifting,
Discover the shores unknown?

Hippodromania; or, Whiffs from the Pipe

In Five Parts

Part I

Visions in the Smoke

Rest, and be thankful! On the verge
Of the tall cliff rugged and grey,
But whose granite base the breakers surge,
And shiver their frothy spray,
Outstretched, I gaze on the eddying wreath
That gathers and flits away,
With the surf beneath, and between my teeth
The stem of the "ancient clay".

With the anodyne cloud on my listless eyes,
 With its spell on my dreamy brain,
 As I watch the circling vapours rise
From the brown bowl up to the sullen skies,
 My vision becomes more plain,
 Till a dim kaleidoscope succeeds
Through the smoke-rack drifting and veering,
 Like ghostly riders on phantom steeds
 To a shadowy goal careering.

In their own generation the wise may sneer,
 They hold our sports in derision;
Perchance to sophist, or sage, or seer,
 Were allotted a graver vision.
 Yet if man, of all the Creator plann'd,
 His noblest work is reckoned,
Of the works of His hand, by sea or by land,

The horse may at least rank second.

Did they quail, those steeds of the squadrons light,

Did they flinch from the battle's roar,

When they burst on the guns of the Muscovite,

By the echoing Black Sea shore?

On! on! to the cannon's mouth they stride,

With never a swerve nor a shy,

Oh! the minutes of yonder maddening ride,

Long years of pleasure outvie!

No slave, but a comrade staunch, in this,

Is the horse, for he takes his share,

Not in peril alone, but in feverish bliss,

And in longing to do and dare.

Where bullets whistle, and round shot whiz,

Hoofs trample, and blades flash bare,

God send me an ending as fair as his

Who died in his stirrups there!

The wind has slumbered throughout the day,
Now a fitful gust springs over the bay,
My wandering thoughts no longer stray,
I'll fix my overcoat buttons;
Secure my old hat as best I may
(And a shocking bad one it is, by the way),
Blow a denser cloud from my stunted clay,
And then, friend BELL, as the Frenchmen say,
We'll "go back again to our muttons".

There's a lull in the tumult on yonder hill,
And the clamour has grown less loud,
Though the Babel of tongues is never still,
With the presence of such a crowd.
The bell has rung. With their riders up
At the starting post they muster,

The racers stripp'd for the "Melbourne Cup",
All gloss and polish and lustre;
And the course is seen, with its emerald sheen,
By the bright spring-tide renew'd,
Like a ribbon of green stretched out between
The ranks of the multitude.

The flag is lowered. "They're off!" "They come!"
The squadron is sweeping on;
A sway in the crowd — a murmuring hum:
"They're here!" "They're past!" "They're gone!"
They came with the rush of the southern surf,
On the bar of the storm-girt bay;
And like muffled drums on the sounding turf
Their hoof-strokes echo away.

The rose and black draws clear of the ruck,
And the murmur swells to a roar,

As the brave old colours that never were struck,
Are seen with the lead once more.
Though the feathery ferns and grasses wave
O'er the sod where Lantern sleeps,
Though the turf is green on Fisherman's grave,
The stable its prestige keeps.

Six lengths in front she scours along,
She's bringing the field to trouble;
She's tailing them off, she's running strong,
She shakes her head and pulls double.
Now Minstrel falters and Exile flags,
The Barb finds the pace too hot,
And Toryboy loiters, and Playboy lags,
And the BOLT of Ben Bolt is shot.

That she never may be caught this day,
Is the worst that the public wish her.

She won't be caught: she comes right away;
Hurrah for Seagull and Fisher!
See, Strop falls back, though his reins are slack,
Sultana begins to tire,
And the top-weight tells on the Sydney crack,
And the pace on "the Gippsland flyer".

The rowels, as round the turn they sweep,
Just graze Tim Whiffler's flanks;
Like the hunted deer that flies through the sheep,
He strides through the beaten ranks.
Daughter of Omen, prove your birth,
The colt will take lots of choking;
The hot breath steams at your saddle girth,
From his scarlet nostril smoking.

The shouts of the Ring for a space subside,
And slackens the bookmaker's roar;

Now, Davis, rally; now, Carter, ride,
As man never rode before.

When Sparrowhawk's backers cease to cheer,
When Yattendon's friends are dumb,
When hushed is the clamour for Volunteer —
Alone in the race they come!

They're neck and neck; they're head and head;
They're stroke for stroke in the running;
The whalebone whistles, the steel is red,
No shirking as yet nor shunning.
One effort, Seagull, the blood you boast
Should struggle when nerves are strained; —
With a rush on the post, by a neck at the most,
The verdict for Tim is gained.

Tim Whiffler wins. Is blood alone
The sine qua non for a flyer?

The breed of his dam is a myth unknown,
And we've doubts respecting his sire.
Yet few (if any) those proud names are,
On the pages of peerage or stud,
In whose 'scutcheon lurks no sinister bar,
No taint of the base black blood.

Aye, Shorthouse, laugh — laugh loud and long,
For pedigree you're a sticker;
You may be right, I may be wrong,
Wiseacres both! Let's liquor.
Our common descent we may each recall
To a lady of old caught tripping,
The fair one in fig leaves, who d——d us all
For a bite at a golden pippin.

When first on this rocky ledge I lay,
There was scarce a ripple in yonder bay,

The air was serenely still;
Each column that sailed from my swarthy clay
Hung loitering long ere it passed away,
Though the skies wore a tinge of leaden grey,
And the atmosphere was chill.
But the red sun sank to his evening shroud,
Where the western billows are roll'd,
Behind a curtain of sable cloud,
With a fringe of scarlet and gold;
There's a misty glare in the yellow moon,
And the drift is scudding fast,
There'll be storm, and rattle, and tempest soon,
When the heavens are overcast.
The neutral tint of the sullen sea
Is fleck'd with the snowy foam,
And the distant gale sighs drearily,
As the wanderer sighs for his home.
The white sea-horses toss their manes

On the bar of the southern reef,
And the breakers moan, and — by Jove, it rains
(I thought I should come to grief);
Though it can't well damage my shabby hat,
Though my coat looks best when it's damp;
Since the shaking I got (no matter where at),
I've a mortal dread of the cramp.
My matches are wet, my pipe's put out,
And the wind blows colder and stronger;
I'll be stiff, and sore, and sorry, no doubt,
If I lie here any longer.

Part II

The Fields of Coleraine

On the fields of Col'raine there'll be labour in vain

Before the Great Western is ended,
The nags will have toil'd, and the silks will be soil'd,
And the rails will require to be mended.

For the gullies are deep, and the uplands are steep,
And mud will of purls be the token,
And the tough stringy-bark, that invites us to lark,
With impunity may not be broken.

Though Ballarat's fast, and they say he can last,
And that may be granted hereafter,
Yet the judge's decision to the Border division
Will bring neither shouting nor laughter.

And Blueskin, I've heard that he goes like a bird,
And I'm told that to back him would pay me;
He's a good bit of stuff, but not quite good enough,
"Non licuit credere fama."

Alfred ought to be there, we all of us swear
By the blood of King Alfred, his sire;
He's not the real jam, by the blood of his dam,
So I sha'n't put him down as a flyer.

Now, Hynam, my boy, I wish you great joy,
I know that when fresh you can jump, sir;
But you'll scarce be in clover, when you're ridden all over,
And punished from shoulder to rump, sir.

Archer goes like a shot, they can put on their pot,
And boil it to cover expenses;
Their pot will boil over, the run of his dover
He'll never earn over big fences.

There's a horse in the race, with a blaze on his face,
And we know he can gallop a docker!

He's proved himself stout, of his speed there's no doubt,
And his jumping's according to Cocker.

When Hynam's outstripp'd, and when Alfred is whipp'd,
To keep him in sight of the leaders,
While Blueskin runs true, but his backers look blue,
For his rider's at work with the bleeders;

When his carcase of beef brings "the bullock" to grief,
And the rush of the tartan is ended;
When Archer's in trouble — who's that pulling double,
And taking his leaps unextended?

He wins all the way, and the rest — sweet, they say,
Is the smell of the newly-turned plough, friend,
But you smell it too close when it stops eyes and nose,
And you can't tell your horse from your cow, friend.

Part III

Credat Judaeus Apella

Dear Bell, — I enclose what you ask in a letter,
A short rhyme at random, no more and no less,
And you may insert it, for want of a better,
Or leave it, it doesn't much matter, I guess;
And as for a tip, why, there isn't much in it,
I may hit the right nail, but first, I declare,
I haven't a notion what's going to win it
(The Champion, I mean), and what's more, I don't care.
Imprimis, there's Cowra — few nags can go quicker
Than she can — and Smith takes his oath she can fly;
While Brown, Jones, and Robinson swear she's a sticker,
But "credat Judaeus Apella", say I.

There's old Volunteer, I'd be sorry to sneer
At his chance; he'll be there, if he goes at the rate
He went at last year, when a customer queer,
Johnny Higgeson, fancied him lock'd in the straight;
I've heard that the old horse has never been fitter,
I've heard all performances past he'll outvie;
He may gallop a docker, and finish a splitter,
But "credat Judaeus Apella", say I.

I know what they say, sir, "The Hook" he can stay, sir,
And stick to his work like a sleuth-hound or beagle;
He stays "with a HOOK", and he sticks in the clay, sir;
I'd rather, for choice, pop my money on Seagull;
I'm told that the Sydney division will rue, sir,
Their rashness in front of the stand when they spy,
With a clear lead, the white jacket spotted with blue, sir,
But "credat Judaeus Apella", say I.

There's The Barb — you may talk of your flyers and stayers,
All bosh — when he strips you can see his eye range
Round his rivals, with much the same look as Tom Sayers
Once wore when he faced the big novice, Bill Bainge.
Like Stow, at our hustings, confronting the hisses
Of roughs, with his queer Mephistopheles' smile;
Like Baker, or Baker's more wonderful MRS.,
The terror of blacks at the source of the Nile;
Like Triton 'mid minnows; like hawk among chickens;
Like — anything better than everything else:
He stands at the post. Now they're off! the plot thickens!
Quoth Stanley to Davis, "How is your pulse?"
He skims o'er the smooth turf, he scuds through the mire,
He waits with them, passes them, bids them good-bye!
Two miles and three-quarters, cries Filgate, "He'll tire."
Oh! "credat Judaeus Apella", say I.

Lest my tale should come true, let me give you fair warning,
You may “shout” some cheroots, if you like, no champagne
For this child — “Oh! think of my head in the morning,”
Old chap, you don’t get me on that lay again.
The last time those games I look’d likely to try on,
Says Bradshawe, “You’ll feel very sheepish and shy
When you are haul’d up and caution’d by D——g——y and L——n,”
Oh! “credat Judaeus Apella”, say I.

This writing bad verses is very fatiguing,
The brain and the liver against it combine,
And nerves with digestion in concert are leaguering,
To punish excess in the pen and ink line;
Already I feel just as if I’d been rowing
Hard all — on a supper of onions and tripe
(A thing I abhor), but my steam I’ve done blowing,
I am, my dear BELL, yours truly, “The Pipe”.

P.S. — Tell J. P., if he fancies a good ‘un,
That old chestnut pony of mine is for sale.
N.B. — His forelegs are uncommonly wooden,
I fancy the near one’s beginning to fail,
And why shouldn’t I do as W——n does oft,
And swear that a cripple is sound — on the Bible —
Hold hard! though the man I allude to is soft,
He’s game to go in for an action of libel.

Part IV

Banker’s Dream

Of chases and courses dogs dream, so do horses —
Last night I was dozing and dreaming,

The crowd and the bustle were there, and the rustle
Of the silk in the autumn sky gleaming.

The stand throng'd with faces, the broadcloth and laces,
The booths, and the tents, and the cars,
The bookmakers' jargon, for odds making bargain,
The nasty stale smell of cigars.

We formed into line, 'neath the merry sunshine,
Near the logs at the end of the railing;
"Are you ready, boys? Go!" cried the starter, and low
Sank the flag, and away we went sailing.

In the van of the battle we heard the stones rattle,
Some slogging was done, but no slaughter,
A shout from the stand, and the whole of our band
Skimm'd merrily over the water.

Two fences we clear'd, and the roadway we near'd,
When three of our troop came to trouble;
Like a bird on the wing, or a stone from a sling,
Flew Cadger, first over the double.

And Western was there, head and tail in the air,
And Pondon was there, too — what noodle
Could so name a horse? I should feel some remorse
If I gave such a name to a poodle.

In and out of the lane, to the racecourse again,
Craig's pony was first, I was third,
And Ingleside lit in my tracks, with the bit
In his teeth, and came up "like a bird".

In the van of the battle we heard the rails rattle,
Says he, "Though I don't care for shunning
My share of the raps, I shall look out for gaps,

When the light weight's away with the running."

At the fence just ahead the outsider still led,
The chestnut play'd follow my leader;
Oh! the devil a gap, he went into it slap,
And he and his jock took a header.

Says Ingleside, "Mate, should the pony go straight,
You've no time to stop or turn restive;"
Says I, "Who means to stop? I shall go till I drop;"
Says he, "Go it, old cuss, gay and festive."

The fence stiff and tall, just beyond the log wall,
We cross'd, and the walls, and the water, —
I took off too near, a small made fence to clear,
And just touch'd the grass with my snorter.

At the next post and rail up went Western's bang tail,
And down (by the very same token)
To earth went his nose, for the panel he chose
Stood firm and refused to be broken.

I dreamt someone said that the bay would have made
The race safe if he'd STOOD a while longer;
IF he had, — but, like if, there the panel stands stiff —
He stood, but the panel stood stronger.

In and out of the road, with a clear lead still show'd
The violet fluted with amber;
Says Johnson, "Old man, catch him now if you can,
'Tis the second time round you'll remember."

At the road once again, pulling hard on the rein,
Craig's pony popp'd in and popp'd out;
I followed like smoke and the pace was no joke,

For his friends were beginning to shout.

And Ingleside came to my side, strong and game,
And once he appear'd to outstrip me,
But I felt the steel gore, and I shot to the fore,
Only Cadger seem'd likely to whip me.

In the van of the battle I heard the logs rattle,
His stroke never seem'd to diminish,
And thrice I drew near him, and thrice he drew clear,
For the weight served him well at the finish.

Ha! Cadger goes down, see, he stands on his crown —
Those rails take a power of clouting —
A long sliding blunder — he's up — well, I wonder
If now it's all over but shouting.

All loosely he's striding, the amateur's riding
All loosely, some reverie locked in
Of a "vision in smoke", or a "wayfaring bloke",
His poetical rubbish concocting.

Now comes from afar the faint cry, "Here they are,"
"The violet winning with ease,"
"Fred goes up like a shot," "Does he catch him or not?"
Level money, I'll take the cerise.

To his haunches I spring, and my muzzle I bring
To his flank, to his girth, to his shoulder;
Through the shouting and yelling I hear my name swelling,
The hearts of my backers grow bolder.

Neck and neck! head and head! staring eye! nostril spread!
Girth and stifle laid close to the ground!
Stride for stride! stroke for stroke! through one hurdle we've broke!

On the splinters we've lit with one bound.

And "Banker for choice" is the cry, and one voice
Screams "Six to four once upon Banker;"
"Banker wins," "Banker's beat," "Cadger wins," "A dead heat" —
Ah! there goes Fred's whalebone a flanker.

Springs the whip with a crack! nine stone ten on his back,
Fit and light he can race like the devil;
I draw past him — 'tis vain; he draws past me again,
Springs the whip! and again we are level.

Steel and cord do their worst, now my head struggles first!
That tug my last spurt has expended —
Nose to nose! lip to lip! from the sound of the whip
He strains to the utmost extended.

How they swim through the air, as we roll to the chair,
Stand, faces, and railings flit past;
Now I spring * * *
from my lair with a snort and a stare,
Rous'd by Fred with my supper at last.

Part V

Ex Fumo Dare Lucem

['Twixt the Cup and the Lip]

Prologue

Calm and clear! the bright day is declining,
The crystal expanse of the bay,
Like a shield of pure metal, lies shining

'Twixt headlands of purple and grey,
While the little waves leap in the sunset,
And strike with a miniature shock,
In sportive and infantine onset,
The base of the iron-stone rock.

Calm and clear! the sea-breezes are laden
With a fragrance, a freshness, a power,
With a song like the song of a maiden,
With a scent like the scent of a flower;
And a whisper, half-weird, half-prophetic,
Comes home with the sigh of the surf; —
But I pause, for your fancies poetic
Never rise from the level of "Turf".

Fellow-bungler of mine, fellow-sinner,
In public performances past,
In trials whence touts take their winner,

In rumours that circulate fast,
In strains from Prunella or Priam,
Staying stayers, or goers that go,
You're much better posted than I am,
'Tis little I care, less I know.

Alas! neither poet nor prophet
Am I, though a jingler of rhymes —
'Tis a hobby of mine, and I'm off it
At times, and I'm on it at times;
And whether I'm off it or on it,
Your readers my counsels will shun,
Since I scarce know Van Tromp from Blue Bonnet,
Though I might know Cigar from the Nun.

With "visions" you ought to be sated
And sicken'd by this time, I swear
That mine are all myths self-created,

Air visions that vanish in air;
If I had some loose coins I might chuck one,
To settle this question and say,
“Here goes! this is tails for the black one,
And heads for my fav’rite the bay.”

And must I rob Paul to pay Peter,
Or Peter defraud to pay Paul?
My rhymes, are they stale? if my metre
Is varied, one chime rings through all:
One chime — though I sing more or sing less,
I have but one string to my lute,
And it might have been better if, stringless
And songless, the same had been mute.

Yet not as a seer of visions,
Nor yet as a dreamer of dreams,
I send you these partial decisions

On hackney'd, impoverish'd themes;
But with song out of tune, sung to pass time,
Flung heedless to friends or to foes,
Where the false notes that ring for the last time,
May blend with some real ones, who knows?

The Race

On the hill they are crowding together,
In the stand they are crushing for room,
Like midge-flies they swarm on the heather,
They gather like bees on the broom;
They flutter like moths round a candle —
Stale similes, granted, what then?
I've got a stale subject to handle,
A very stale stump of a pen.

Hark! the shuffle of feet that are many,
Of voices the many-tongued clang —
“Has he had a bad night?” “Has he any
Friends left?” — How I hate your turf slang;
'Tis stale to begin with, not witty,

But dull, and inclined to be coarse,
But bad men can't use (more's the pity)
Good words when they slate a good horse.

Heu! heu! quantus equis (that's Latin
For "bellows to mend" with the weeds),
They're off! lights and shades! silk and satin!
A rainbow of riders and steeds!
And one shows in front, and another
Goes up and is seen in his place,
Sic transit (more Latin) — Oh! bother,
Let's get to the end of the race.

* * * * *

See, they come round the last turn careering,
Already Tait's colours are struck,
And the green in the vanguard is steering,

And the red's in the rear of the ruck!
Are the stripes in the shade doom'd to lie long?
Do the blue stars on white skies wax dim?
Is it Tamworth or Smuggler? 'Tis Bylong
That wins — either Bylong or Tim.

As the shell through the breach that is riven
And sapp'd by the springing of mines,
As the bolt from the thunder-cloud driven,
That levels the larches and pines,
Through yon mass parti-colour'd that dashes
Goal-turn'd, clad in many-hued garb,
From rear to van, surges and flashes
The yellow and black of The Barb.

Past The Fly, falling back on the right, and
The Gull, giving way on the left,
Past Tamworth, who feels the whip smite, and

Whose sides by the rowels are cleft;
Where Tim and the chestnut together
Still bear of the battle the brunt,
As if eight stone twelve were a feather,
He comes with a rush to the front.

Tim Whiffler may yet prove a Tartar,
And Bylong's the horse that can stay,
But Kean is in trouble — and Carter
Is hard on the satin-skinn'd bay;
And The Barb comes away unextended,
Hard held, like a second Eclipse,
While behind the hoof-thunder is blended
With the whistling and crackling of whips.

Epilogue

He wins; yes, he wins upon paper,

He hasn't yet won upon turf,
And these rhymes are but moonshine and vapour,
Air-bubbles and spume from the surf.

So be it, at least they are given
Free, gratis, for just what they're worth,
And (whatever there may be in heaven)
There's little worth much upon earth.

When, with satellites round them the centre,
Of all eyes, hard press'd by the crowd,
The pair, horse and rider, re-enter
The gate, 'mid a shout long and loud,
You may feel, as you might feel, just landed
Full length on the grass from the clip
Of a vicious cross-counter, right-handed,
Or upper-cut whizzing from hip.

And that's not so bad if you're pick'd up

Discreetly, and carefully nursed;
Loose teeth by the sponge are soon lick'd up,
And next time you MAY get home first.
Still I'm not sure you'd like it exactly
(Such tastes as a rule are acquired),
And you'll find in a nutshell this fact lie,
Bruised optics are not much admired.

Do I bore you with vulgar allusions?
Forgive me, I speak as I feel,
I've pondered and made my conclusions —
As the mill grinds the corn to the meal;
So man striving boldly but blindly,
Ground piecemeal in Destiny's mill,
At his best, taking punishment kindly,
Is only a chopping-block still.

Are we wise? Our abstruse calculations

Are based on experience long;
Are we sanguine? Our high expectations
Are founded on hope that is strong;
Thus we build an air-castle that crumbles
And drifts till no traces remain,
And the fool builds again while he grumbles,
And the wise one laughs, building again.

“How came they to pass, these rash blunders,
These false steps so hard to defend?”
Our friend puts the question and wonders,
We laugh and reply, “Ah! my friend,
Could you trace the first stride falsely taken,
The distance misjudged, where or how,
When you pick’d yourself up, stunn’d and shaken,
At the fence ‘twixt the turf and the plough?”

In the jar of the panel rebounding!

In the crash of the splintering wood!
In the ears to the earth shock resounding!
In the eyes flashing fire and blood!
In the quarters above you revolving!
In the sods underneath heaving high!
There was little to aid you in solving
Such questions — the how or the why.

And destiny, steadfast in trifles,
Is steadfast for better or worse
In great things, it crushes and stifles,
And swallows the hopes that we nurse.
Men wiser than we are may wonder,
When the future they cling to so fast,
To the roll of that destiny's thunder,
Goes down with the wrecks of the past.

* * * * *

The past! the dead past! that has swallow'd
All the honey of life and the milk,
Brighter dreams than mere pastimes we've follow'd,
Better things than our scarlet or silk;
Aye, and worse things — that past is it really
Dead to us who again and again
Feel sharply, hear plainly, see clearly,
Past days with their joy and their pain?

Like corpses embalm'd and unburied
They lie, and in spite of our will,
Our souls on the wings of thought carried,
Revisit their sepulchres still;
Down the channels of mystery gliding,
They conjure strange tales, rarely read,
Of the priests of dead Pharaohs presiding
At mystical feasts of the dead.

Weird pictures arise, quaint devices,
Rude emblems, baked funeral meats,
Strong incense, rare wines, and rich spices,
The ashes, the shrouds, and the sheets;
Does our thraldom fall short of completeness
For the magic of a charnel-house charm,
And the flavour of a poisonous sweetness,
And the odour of a poisonous balm?

And the links of the past — but, no matter,
For I'm getting beyond you, I guess,
And you'll call me "as mad as a hatter"
If my thoughts I too freely express;
I subjoin a quotation, pray learn it,
And with the aid of your lexicon tell us
The meaning thereof — "Res discernit
Sapiens, quas confundit asellus."

Already green hillocks are swelling,
And combing white locks on the bar,
Where a dull, droning murmur is telling
Of winds that have gather'd afar;
Thus we know not the day, nor the morrow,
Nor yet what the night may bring forth,
Nor the storm, nor the sleep, nor the sorrow,
Nor the strife, nor the rest, nor the wrath.

Yet the skies are still tranquil and starlit,
The sun 'twixt the wave and the west
Dies in purple, and crimson, and scarlet,
And gold; let us hope for the best,
Since again from the earth his effulgence
The darkness and damp-dews shall wipe.

Kind reader, extend your indulgence
To this the last lay of "The Pipe".

The Roll of the Kettledrum; or, The Lay of the Last Charger

“You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet,
Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?
Of two such lessons, why forget
The nobler and the manlier one?” — Byron.

One line of swart profiles and bearded lips dressing,
One ridge of bright helmets, one crest of fair plumes,
One streak of blue sword-blades all bared for the fleshing,
One row of red nostrils that scent battle-fumes.

Forward! the trumpets were sounding the charge,
The roll of the kettledrum rapidly ran,
That music, like wild-fire spreading at large,

Madden'd the war-horse as well as the man.

Forward! still forward! we thunder'd along,
Steadily yet, for our strength we were nursing;
Tall Ewart, our sergeant, was humming a song,
Lance-corporal Black Will was blaspheming and cursing.

Open'd their volley of guns on our right,
Puffs of grey smoke, veiling gleams of red flame,
Curling to leeward, were seen on the height,
Where the batteries were posted, as onward we came.

Spreading before us their cavalry lay,
Squadron on squadron, troop upon troop;
We were so few, and so many were they —
Eagles wait calmly the sparrow-hawk's stoop.

Forward! still forward! steed answering steed

Cheerily neigh'd, while the foam flakes were toss'd
From bridle to bridle — the top of our speed
Was gain'd, but the pride of our order was lost.

One was there leading by nearly a rood,
Though we were racing he kept to the fore,
Still as a rock in his stirrups he stood,
High in the sunlight his sabre he bore.

Suddenly tottering, backwards he crash'd,
Loudly his helm right in front of us rung;
Iron hoofs thunder'd, and naked steel flash'd
Over him — youngest, where many were young.

Now we were close to them, every horse striding
Madly; — St. Luce pass'd with never a groan; —
Sadly my master look'd round — he was riding
On the boy's right, with a line of his own.

Thrusting his hand in his breast or breast-pocket,
While from his wrist the sword swung by a chain,
Swiftly he drew out some trinket or locket,
Kiss'd it (I think) and replaced it again.

Burst, while his fingers reclosed on the haft,
Jarring concussion and earth shaking din,
Horse 'counter'd horse, and I reel'd, but he laugh'd,
Down went his man, cloven clean to the chin!

Wedged in the midst of that struggling mass,
After the first shock, where each his foe singled,
Little was seen, save a dazzle, like glass
In the sun, with grey smoke and black dust intermingled.

Here and there redden'd a pistol shot, flashing
Through the red sparkle of steel upon steel!

Redder the spark seem'd, and louder the clashing,
Struck from the helm by the iron-shod heel!

Over fallen riders, like wither'd leaves strewing
Uplands in autumn, we sunder'd their ranks;
Steeds rearing and plunging, men hacking and hewing,
Fierce grinding of sword-blades, sharp goading of flanks.

Short was the crisis of conflict soon over,
Being too good (I suppose) to last long;
Through them we cut, as the scythe cuts the clover,
Batter'd and stain'd we emerg'd from their throng.

Some of our saddles were emptied, of course;
To heaven (or elsewhere) Black Will had been carried!
Ned Sullivan mounted Will's riderless horse,
His mare being hurt, while ten seconds we tarried.

And then we re-formed, and went at them once more,
And ere they had rightly closed up the old track,
We broke through the lane we had open'd before,
And as we went forward e'en so we came back.

Our numbers were few, and our loss far from small,
They could fight, and, besides, they were twenty to one;
We were clear of them all when we heard the recall,
And thus we returned, but my tale is not done.

For the hand of my rider felt strange on my bit,
He breathed once or twice like one partially choked,
And sway'd in his seat, then I knew he was hit; —
He must have bled fast, for my withers were soak'd,

And scarcely an inch of my housing was dry;
I slacken'd my speed, yet I never quite stopp'd,
Ere he patted my neck, said, "Old fellow, good-bye!"

And dropp'd off me gently, and lay where he dropp'd!

Ah, me! after all, they may call us dumb creatures —
I tried hard to neigh, but the sobs took my breath,
Yet I guess'd gazing down at those still, quiet features,
He was never more happy in life than in death.

* * * * *

Two years back, at Aldershot, Elrington mentioned
My name to our colonel one field-day. He said,
“`Count', `Steeltrap', and `Challenger' ought to be pension'd;”
“Count” died the same week, and now “Steeltrap” is dead.

That morning our colonel was riding “Theresa”,
The filly by “Teddington” out of “Mistake”;
His girls, pretty Alice and fair-haired Louisa,
Were there on the ponies he purchased from Blake.

I remember he pointed me out to his daughters,
Said he, "In this troop I may fairly take pride,
But I've none left like him in my officers' quarters,
Whose life-blood the mane of old 'Challenger' dyed."

Where are they? the war-steeds who shared in our glory,
The "Lanercost" colt, and the "Acrobat" mare,
And the Irish division, "Kate Kearney" and "Rory",
And rushing "Roscommon", and eager "Kildare",

And "Freeny", a favourite once with my master,
And "Warlock", a sluggard, but honest and true,
And "Tancred", as honest as "Warlock", but faster,
And "Blacklock", and "Birdlime", and "Molly Carew"? —

All vanish'd, what wonder! twelve summers have pass'd

Since then, and my comrade lies buried this day, —

Old “Steeltrap”, the kicker, — and now I’m the last
Of the chargers who shared in that glorious fray.

* * * * *

Come, “Harlequin”, keep your nose out of my manger,
You’ll get your allowance, my boy, and no more;
Snort! “Silvertail”, snort! when you’ve seen as much danger
As I have, you won’t mind the rats in the straw.

* * * * *

Our gallant old colonel came limping and halting,
The day before yesterday, into my stall;
Oh! light to the saddle I’ve once seen him vaulting,
In full marching order, steel broadsword and all.

And now his left leg than his right is made shorter

Three inches, he stoops, and his chest is unsound;
He spoke to me gently, and patted my quarter,
I laid my ears back, and look'd playfully round.

For that word kindly meant, that caress kindly given,
I thank'd him, though dumb, but my cheerfulness fled;
More sadness I drew from the face of the living
Than years back I did from the face of the dead.

For the dead face, upturn'd, tranquil, joyous, and fearless,
Look'd straight from green sod to blue fathomless sky
With a smile; but the living face, gloomy and tearless,
And haggard and harass'd, look'd down with a sigh.

Did he think on the first time he kiss'd Lady Mary?
On the morning he wing'd Horace Greville the beau?
On the winner he steer'd in the grand military?
On the charge that he headed twelve long years ago?

Did he think on each fresh year, of fresh grief the herald?

On lids that are sunken, and locks that are grey?

On Alice, who bolted with Brian Fitzgerald?

On Rupert, his first-born, dishonour'd by "play"?

On Louey, his darling, who sleeps 'neath the cypress,
That shades her and one whose last breath gave her life?

I saw those strong fingers hard over each eye press —

Oh! the dead rest in peace when the quick toil in strife!

* * * * *

Scoff, man! egotistical, proud, unobservant,
Since I with man's grief dare to sympathise thus;
Why scoff? — fellow-creature I am, fellow-servant
Of God, can man fathom God's dealings with us?

The wide gulf that parts us may yet be no wider
Than that which parts you from some being more blest;
And there may be more links 'twixt the horse and his rider
Than ever your shallow philosophy guess'd.

You are proud of your power, and vain of your courage,
And your blood, Anglo-Saxon, or Norman, or Celt;
Though your gifts you extol, and our gifts you disparage,
Your perils, your pleasures, your sorrows we've felt.

We, too, sprung from mares of the prophet of Mecca,
And nursed on the pride that was born with the milk,
And filtered through "Crucifix", "Beeswing", "Rebecca",
We love sheen of scarlet and shimmer of silk.

We, too, sprung from loins of the Ishmaelite stallions,
We glory in daring that dies or prevails;
From 'counter of squadrons, and crash of battalions,

To rending of blackthorns, and rattle of rails.

In all strife where courage is tested, and power,
From the meet on the hill-side, the horn-blast, the find,
The burst, the long gallop that seems to devour
The champaign, all obstacles flinging behind,

To the cheer and the clarion, the war-music blended
With war-cry, the furious dash at the foe,
The terrible shock, the recoil, and the splendid
Bare sword, flashing blue, rising red from the blow.

I've borne ONE through perils where many have seen us,
No tyrant, a kind friend, a patient instructor,
And I've felt some strange element flashing between us,
Till the saddle seem'd turn'd to a lightning conductor.

Did he see? could he feel through the faintness, the numbness,

While linger'd the spirit half-loosed from the clay,
Dumb eyes seeking his in their piteous dumbness,
Dumb quivering nostrils, too stricken to neigh?

And what then? the colours reversed, the drums muffled,
The black nodding plumes, the dead march and the pall,
The stern faces, soldier-like, silent, unruffled,
The slow sacred music that floats over all!

Cross carbine and boar-spear, hang bugle and banner,
Spur, sabre, and snaffle, and helm — Is it well?
Vain 'scutcheon, false trophies of Mars and Diana, —
Can the dead laurel sprout with the live immortelle?

It may be, — we follow, and though we inherit
Our strength for a season, our pride for a span,
Say! vanity are they? vexation of spirit?
Not so, since they serve for a time horse and man.

They serve for a time, and they make life worth living,
In spite of life's troubles — 'tis vain to despond;
Oh, man! WE at least, WE enjoy, with thanksgiving,
God's gifts on this earth, though we look not beyond.

YOU sin, and YOU suffer, and we, too, find sorrow,
Perchance through YOUR sin — yet it soon will be o'er;
We labour to-day, and we slumber to-morrow,
Strong horse and bold rider! — and WHO KNOWETH MORE?

* * * * *

In our barrack-square shouted Drill-sergeant M'Cluskie,
The roll of the kettledrum rapidly ran,
The colonel wheel'd short, speaking once, dry and husky,
“Would to God I had died with your master, old man!”

And under the greenest awning,
And loosen'd latch and buckle, and freed
From selle and housing the red roan steed,
And the jennet of swift Iberian breed,
That had carried us since the dawning.

The brown thrush sang through the briar and bower,
All flush'd or frosted with forest flower
In the warm sun's wanton glances;
And I grew deaf to the song bird — blind
To blossom that sweeten'd the sweet spring wind —
I saw her only — a girl reclined
In her girlhood's indolent trances.

And the song and the scent and sense wax'd weak,
The wild rose withered beside the cheek
She poised on her fingers slender;
The soft spun gold of her glittering hair

Ran rippling into a wondrous snare,
That flooded the round arm bright and bare,
And the shoulder's silvery splendour.

The deep dusk fires in those dreamy eyes,
Like seas clear-coloured in summer skies,
Were guiltless of future treason;
And I stood watching her, still and mute,
Yet the evil seed in my soul found root,
And the sad plant throve, and the sinful fruit
Grew ripe in the shameful season.

Let the sin be mine as the shame was hers,
In desolate days of departed years
She had leisure for shame and sorrow —
There was light repentance and brief remorse,
When I rode against Saxon foes or Norse,
With clang of harness and clatter of horse,

And little heed for the morrow.

And now she is dead, men tell me, and I,

In this living death must I linger and lie

Till my cup to the dregs is drunken?

I looked through the lattice worn and grim,

With eyelids darken'd and eyesight dim,

And weary body and wasted limb,

And sinew slacken'd and shrunken.

She is dead! Gone down to the burial-place,

Where the grave-dews cleave to her faultless face;

Where the grave-sods crumble around her;

And that bright burden of burnish'd gold,

That once on those waxen shoulders roll'd,

Will it spoil with the damps of the deadly mould?

Was it shorn when the church vows bound her?

Now I know full well that the fair spear shaft
Shall never gladden my hand, nor the haft
Of the good sword grow to my fingers;
Now the maddest fray, the merriest din,
Would fail to quicken this life-stream thin,
Yet the sleepy poison of that sweet sin
In the sluggish current still lingers.

Would God I had slept with the slain men, long
Or ever the heart conceived a wrong
That the innermost soul abhorred —
Or ever these lying lips were strained
To her lids, pearl-tinted and purple-vein'd,
Or ever those traitorous kisses stained
The snows of her spotless forehead.

Let me gather a little strength to think,
As one who reels on the outermost brink,

To the innermost gulf descending.
In that truce the longest and last of all,
In the summer nights of that festival —
Soft vesture of samite and silken pall —
The beginning came of the ending.

And one trod softly with sandal'd feet —
Ah! why are the stolen waters sweet? —
And one crept stealthily after;
I would I had taken him there and wrung
His knavish neck when the dark door swung,
Or torn by the roots his treacherous tongue,
And stifled his hateful laughter.

So the smouldering scandal blazed — but he,
My king, to the last put trust in me —
Aye, well was his trust requited!
Now priests may patter, and bells may toll,

He will need no masses to aid his soul;
When the angels open the judgment scroll,
His wrong will be tenfold righted.

Then dawn'd the day when the mail was donn'd,
And the steed for the strife caparison'd,
But not 'gainst the Norse invader.
Then was bloodshed — not by untoward chance,
As the blood that is drawn by the jouster's lance,
The fray in the castle of Melegrance,
The fight in the lists with Mador.

Then the guilt made manifest, then the siege,
When the true men rallying round the liege
Beleaguer'd his base betrayer;
Then the fruitless parleys, the pleadings vain,
And the hard-fought battles with brave Gawaine,
Twice worsted, and once so nearly slain,

I may well be counted his slayer.

Then the crime of Modred — a little sin
At the side of mine, though the knave was kin
To the king by the knave's hand stricken.
And the once-loved knight, was he there to save
That knightly king who that knighthood gave?
Ah, Christ! will he greet me as knight or knave
In the day when the dust shall quicken.

Had he lightly loved, had he trusted less,
I had sinn'd perchance with the sinfulness
That through prayer and penance is pardoned.
Oh, love most loyal! Oh, faith most sure!
In the purity of a soul so pure
I found my safeguard — I sinn'd secure,
Till my heart to the sin grew harden'd.

We were glad together in gladsome meads,
When they shook to the strokes of our snorting steeds;

We were joyful in joyous lustre
When it flush'd the coppice or fill'd the glade,
Where the horn of the Dane or the Saxon bray'd,
And we saw the heathen banner display'd,
And the heathen lances cluster.

Then a steel-shod rush and a steel-clad ring,
And a crash of the spear staves splintering,
And the billowy battle blended.

Riot of chargers, revel of blows,
And fierce, flush'd faces of fighting foes,
From croup to bridle, that reel'd and rose,
In a sparkle of sword-play splendid.

And the long, lithe sword in the hand became
As a leaping light, as a falling flame,

As a fire through the flax that hasted;
Slender, and shining, and beautiful,
How it shone through shivering casque and skull,
And never a stroke was void and null,
And never a thrust was wasted.

I have done for ever with all these things —
Deeds that were joyous to knights and kings,
In days that with songs were cherish'd.
The songs are ended, the deeds are done,
There shall none of them gladden me now, not one;
There is nothing good for me under the sun,
But to perish as these things perish'd.

Shall it profit me aught that the bishop seeks
My presence daily, and duly speaks
Soft words of comfort and kindness?
Shall it aught avail me? "Certes," he said,

“Though thy soul is darken’d, be not afraid —
God hateth nothing that He hath made —
His light shall disperse thy blindness.”

I am not afraid for myself, although
I know I have had that light, and I know
The greater my condemnation.

When I well-nigh swoon’d in the deep-drawn bliss
Of that first long, sweet, slow, stolen kiss,
I would gladly have given, for less than this,
Myself, with my soul’s salvation.

I would languish thus in some loathsome den,
As a thing of naught in the eyes of men,
In the mouths of men as a by-word,
Through years of pain, and when God saw fit,
Singing his praises my soul should flit
To the darkest depth of the nethermost pit,

If HERS could be wafted skyward.

Lord Christ! have patience a little while,
I have sinn'd because I am utterly vile,
Having light, loving darkness rather.
And I pray Thee deal with me as Thou wilt,
Yet the blood of Thy foes I have freely spilt,
And, moreover, mine is the greater guilt
In the sight of Thee and Thy Father.

That saint, Thy servant, was counted dear
Whose sword in the garden grazed the ear
Of Thine enemy, Lord Redeemer!
Not thus on the shattering visor jarr'd
In this hand the iron of the hilt cross-barr'd,
When the blade was swallow'd up to the guard
Through the teeth of the strong blasphemer.

If ever I smote as a man should smite,
If I struck one stroke that seem'd good in Thy sight,
By Thy loving mercy prevailing,
Lord! let her stand in the light of Thy face,
Cloth'd with Thy love and crown'd with Thy grace,
When I gnash my teeth in the terrible place
That is fill'd with weeping and wailing.

Shall I comfort my soul on account of this?
In the world to come, whatsoever it is,
There is no more earthly ill-doing —
For the dusty darkness shall slay desire,
And the chaff may burn with unquenchable fire,
But for green wild growth of thistle and briar
At least there is no renewing.

And this grievous burden of life shall change
In the dim hereafter, dreamy and strange,

And sorrows and joys diurnal.
And partial blessings and perishing ills
Shall fade in the praise, or the pang that fills
The glory of God's eternal hills,
Or the gloom of His gulf eternal.

Yet if all things change to the glory of One
Who for all ill-doers gave His Own sweet Son,
To His goodness so shall He change ill,
When the world as a wither'd leaf shall be,
And the sky like a shrivell'd scroll shall flee,
And souls shall be summon'd from land and sea,
At the blast of His bright archangel.