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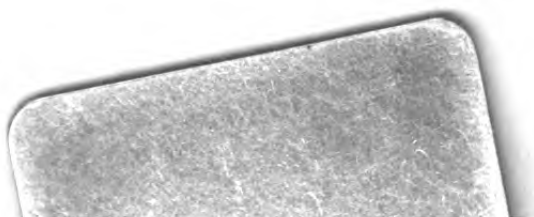


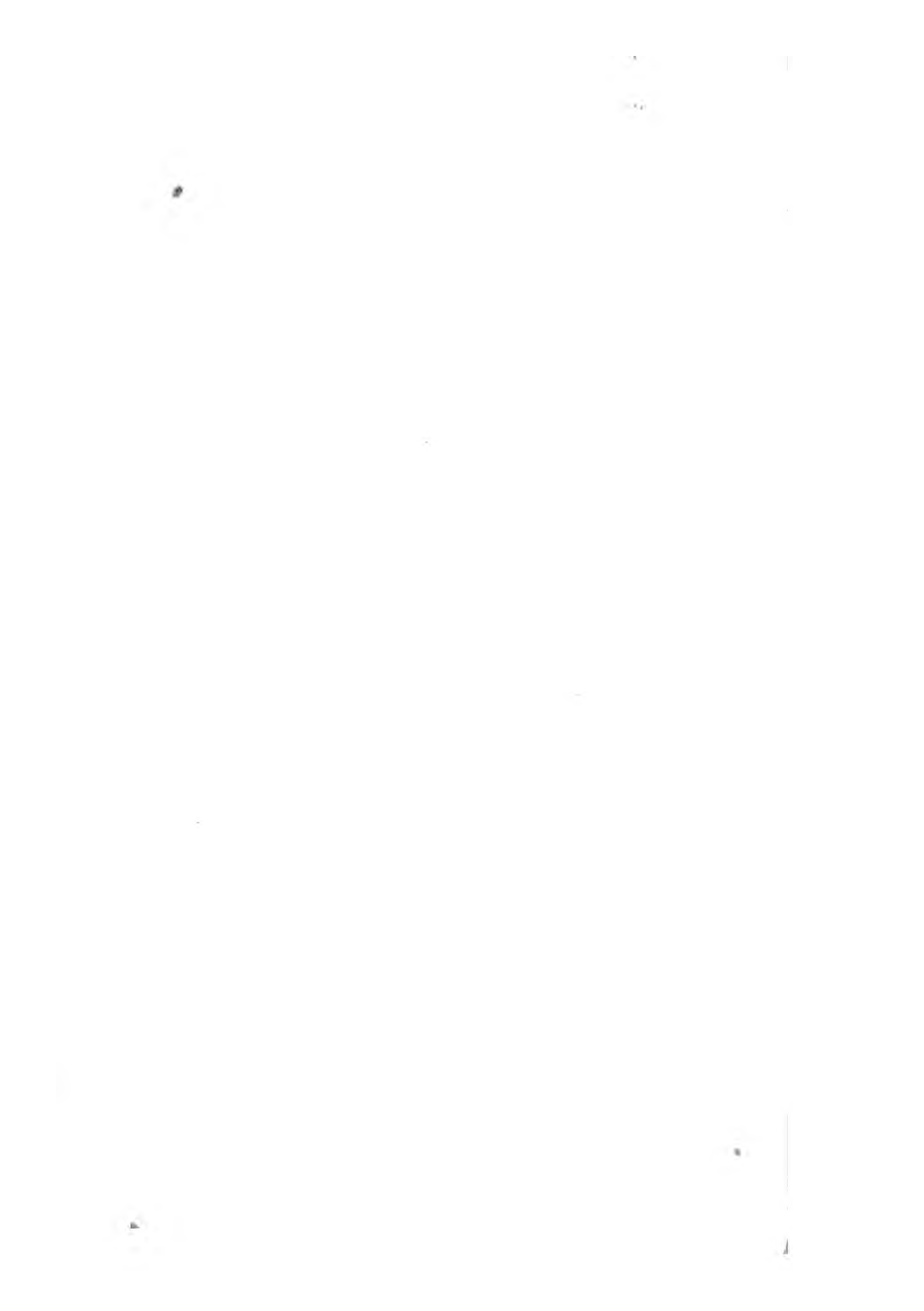
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POEMS.

POEMS

BY

THOMAS WILSON.



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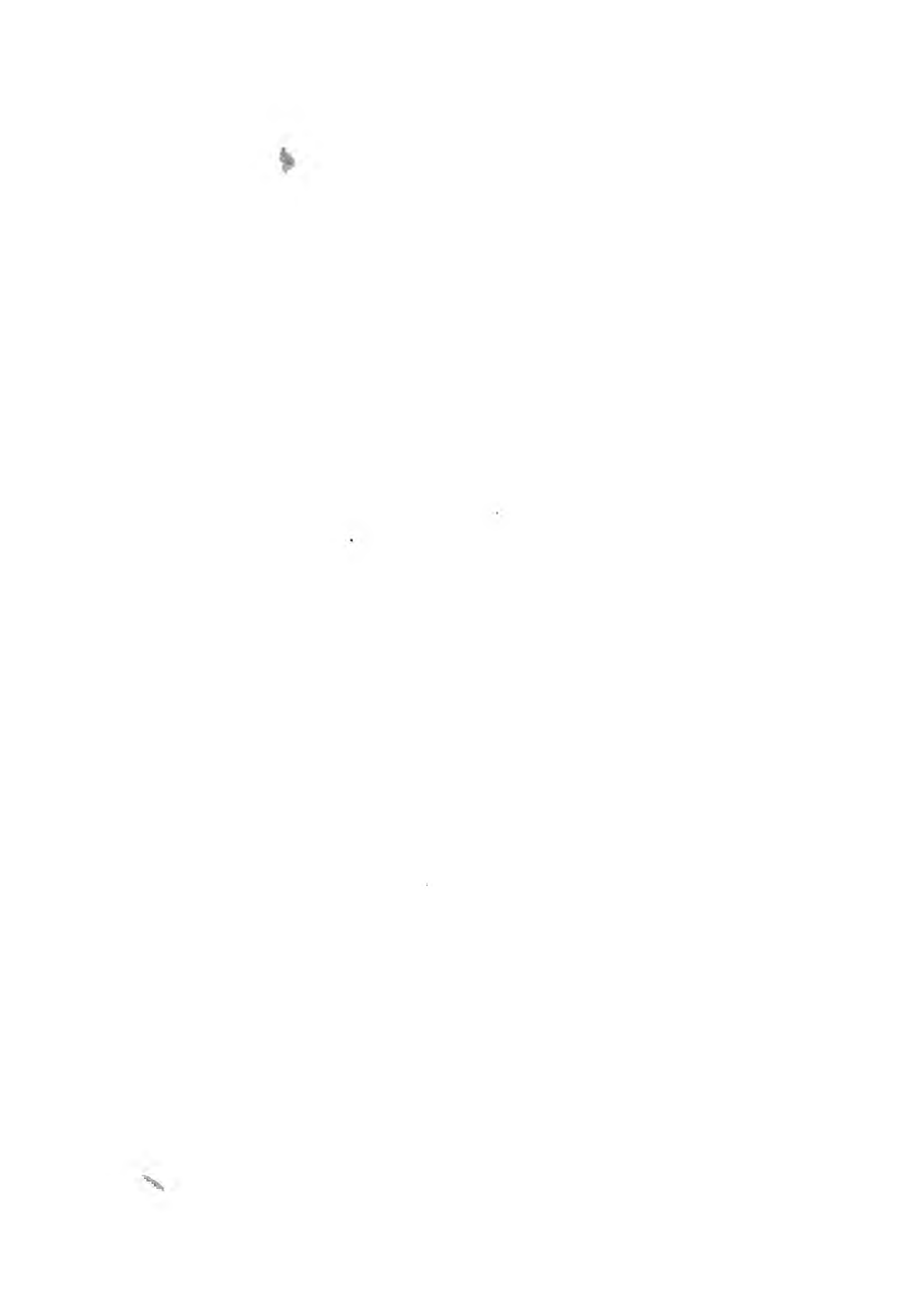


SIR RALPH MEREDITH.

A Dramatic Poem.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

- SIR RALPH MEREDITH, An English Baronet.
GILES BERNARD,A Lawyer, Suitor to Adeline.
EDWARD LESBURN,Also Suitor to Adeline.
ARSLAND,An Outlaw.
Servant, etc., etc.
- ADELINE,Daughter of Sir Ralph Meredith.



SIR RALPH MEREDITH.

SCENE FIRST.

BARONIAL HALL—SIR RALPH MEREDITH, ALONE, GAZING
ON THE PORTRAITS OF HIS ANCESTORS.

SIR RALPH.

WHY look ye down upon me from the past,
Stern warrior spirits, so reproachfully?
Why on the mouldering canvas do those eyes
Seem once again to darken in proud wrath?
Momentous issues summoned into life
Momentous deeds, and ye were in the van,
In life and death, gathering a great renown.
Thou whose bold front dismayed a tyrant's heart,—
Thou whose white plume lay dabbled all in gore
On Cressy's plain,—thou, the sea-king of old,

Who tracked the craven Spaniard to his doom,
And gave the Armada to the winds and waves,—
Ye were my ancestors; of mighty thoughts,
And mightier deeds that gave a path to thought.
Oh, if those many silent lips had voice
To breathe awhile their ghostly utterance,
What loathing scorn, what curlings of contempt
Would sink into my heart; for I have brought
An ancient glory unto utter ruin,
And girt a name, that men had learned to worship,
With evil import! True, I may have earned
Some honour in the world; but what avails?—
My brain is reeling in a drunken riot,
Mine eyes are blinded by a feverish glare,
I see before me, as in a half-dream,
The forms, and deeds, and pangs of yesternight—
Nay, was it altogether not a dream?
Have I foresworn my goodly heritage,
And given my portion like a gift away?
Bernard—Oh! black and foul ingratitude!
Thy cunning hand hath played my ruin there,
And in that hell of dissipated folly

Flung down the dice, while I, with burning grasp,
Seized, trembled, swooned—my all, my all was lost !

[Enter Adeline.]

ADELINE.

Father, what troubles you ?

SIR RALPH.

Nought that I know.

Why do you ask ?

ADELINE.

Seek not with gentle words
To hide the secret sting that now embitters
Your whole existence. Since my mother died,
Who is there, if you will not even trust
A daughter with the secret of your grief ?

SIR RALPH.

Why speak of it? 'Tis not for you to know.
The stars are shining brightly, and I hear
The gentle murmur of the ocean wave.

Retire, for it is late—the night is cold,
And you are shivering in this lonely chamber.
Be not disturbed by that which I have said,
Bear a light heart, and all will yet be well.

ADELINE.

Heaven grant it may be so; but you have spoken
Words that are as a riddle, which to solve,
Or in a vain endeavour, will become
The source of many sad and anxious fears.

SIR RALPH.

Why do you thus beseechingly inquire
Of things which have not an existence, save
In your own fancy?

ADELINE.

Mock me not thus
With idle words, and yet forgive me, father.
It is the kindly weakness of my love
That prompts me to such eager questionings.
Have I not made your comfort all my care?

Could I not share the weight of this affliction?
If so, it might be lightened unto thee.
Why do you hesitate? Oh! father speak,
And trust me with the secret of thy wrong;
For in this bosom it shall lie secure
As death itself had sealed it on my lips.
I can bear aught; but oh! the agony
Of this suspense will kill me. I have heard
Vague rumours, and uncertain prophecies,
That pass like shadows, take no certain shape,
Yet whisper strange forebodings.

SIR RALPH.

Adeline,
I fain would have you leave me.

ADELINE.

Be it so,
Perhaps 'tis better that I should not know. [*Exit.*

SIR RALPH.

This is too much. God strengthen me to bear

My fate with fortitude; 'tis pity, too,
For I had thought to end my days in peace ;
But now, though on the threshold of old age,
My troubles seem but in their infancy.

SCENE SECOND.

SEA-SHORE—MOONLIGHT—EDWARD LESBURN, ALONE.

LESBURN.

WITH what a calm and quiet earnestness
Yon stars are shining in their nightly spheres,
Bright essences of immortality,
Yet looking down upon this mortal world,
The guardian spirits of our destinies!

[Hears Adeline singing along the shore.]

'Tis here we were to meet—I hear her voice.
Is it a mortal strain, and doomed to die,
With nought on earth to tell that it hath been?
Oh! ye unseen abodes of love and joy,
Ye golden spheres, why are ye silent now?
Can such sweet rapture as that now I hear
Be lost, for ever lost, nor find a home

Amid the eternal anthems that ascend
Through the still night to God—no warbling life
In that vast universe—no spiritual haunt,
Where music roams like an embodied thought,
And heavenly harmonies together dwell?
Visions that haunt me like prophetic gleams
Of an immortal glory—lovely forms,
Divine, yet shadowy, as if to gaze
So long upon your beauty, were too much
For mortal bliss. Where are your mystic homes?
Do ye exist in form, or space, or time?
Are ye those heavenly visitants that cheer
This sadly chequered earth—or are the thoughts
That link us so to you fantastic gleams,
That have no home but in the vain illusion
Of human hopes, and fond imaginings?
Adeline! *[Goes forward to her.]*

ADELINE.

Ah! Edward, it is you, but why
So long and lingering?

LESBURN.

Fain would I have made
More haste, but that I stood awhile as one
Whose soul is spell-bound by a lovely dream,
Gazing upon thy form.

ADELINE.

List that there be
None other, for methought I heard a breath—
A stifled breath. I would not for the world
That this our meeting here to-night should come
Unto my father's knowledge.

LESBURN.

Never fear,
'Twas but the low wind in some aged ruin;
There are no listeners but the nightingale,
Or the dim owl that in the ivy tower
Sits brooding o'er the night. But why so sad,—
What ails you?

ADELINE.

Well, I hardly know myself,
And yet I am not happy as I should be.

LESBURN.

Is it that strange misgiving which will rise
In the most constant bosoms?

ADELINE.

'Tis in thine
It seems to have its source; but have you seen
M father lately?

LESBURN.

No;—but what of it?—
Has he at length found out our intercourse?

ADELINE.

Nay, but some sorrow seems to press upon him,
Some heavy pressure of calamity;—
Broken in spirit, worn and wasted sore
With anxious thought;—he is not now to me
What once he was.

LESBURN.

Do not let that affect you,
'Tis but the weight of many public cares,
The lot of all great minds who rule the world,
And in such dark and perilous times as these
There is no wonder that he should be so.

ADELINE.

If that were all, I would be light of heart;
But I have more to fear. For many months
He has gone on each alternate day
Unto the city. In his earlier years
He was a gambler; but the thirst of fame
Drew him from such a course: now, when his soul
Hath tasted all the fame which earth bestows,
The old passion has returned, and once again
Threatens, if it hath not already proved,
His ruin.

LESBURN.

These are sad and ominous tidings,
Yet be of happier cheer. When I came nigh

B

I heard the rich sweet music of your voice,
And little thought its fountain could have been
A heart so full of sorrow. Why should we
Be so distracted?—have we not a solace
In our own love, and wherefore should we live,
If it be not to love?

ADELINE.

I cannot see
What course we may pursue. Could we make bold
To ask my father's countenance—but no,
The time hath not arrived—we must await
His better mood.

LESBURN.

Wherefore should he deny
My suit? 'Tis true, I am not nobly born—
I have not wealth, yet own a competence.
Oh! Pride, thou art the barrier to all
The better promptings of the human heart.
And oh! my Adeline, though all the world
Frown coldly on us, shall the love we bear

Be sacrificed on such a niggard shrine?
Why should we then despair?—there is a power
In fond affection that will baffle Fate;
And come what may, no power on earth can break
The bonds which Nature hath so firmly sealed.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE THIRD.

HALL—SIR RALPH MEREDITH—GILES BERNARD.

SIR RALPH.

UNGENEROUS and ungrateful! had I known
Thy nature then as circumstance has forced
My present knowledge, menial and obscure
Your lot had been in life. Have I not raised
Your fortune from a miserable state?
A poor thin ragged child, one winter night
You came a-begging to my father's hall;—
I too was young, and with youth's gentle heart
Took pity—gave you shelter and a home—
In after years afforded you the best
Of human knowledge—lent my influence
To set you forth in life. Do you not hold
Your present privilege in Parliament
Through me and in my interest?—honour, wealth,
Position, I have heaped without regard
Upon you; yet is this my recompense?

BERNARD.

Sir Ralph, 'twas but a chance—my stake was there,
And yours—'twas Fortune judged between us,
And still, the more she proved your enemy,
The more you tempted her, until at length
You threw your whole estate into the scale.
The die was cast—the mighty sweep was mine—
You were a ruined man! Your future weal
Was therefore in my power. I could have ta'en
All at the moment, but I then conceived
Another purpose; so last night I came,
And proffered you indemnity of all;
Nay, more, that you were free from all the debts
You owed before; and what was the return
I humbly craved?—your daughter Adeline,
Whom, if this hardened bosom could not love,
'Twould cherish with respect.

SIR RALPH.

Stay, vilest wretch!
Let not that pure name pass between your lips,
Or I will crush thee like a worm I loathe!

BERNARD.

Last evening when I left, you would not deign
To listen—flung a high and haughty curse
Into my teeth. By Heaven! such paltry pride
But ill befits your present circumstance!

SIR RALPH.

Have you got more to say? I cannot put
Myself much longer at your service now.

BERNARD.

Sir Ralph, I would be just and reasonable,
'Twere better for yourself that you should hear me.
I must have yea or nay—grant my request—
Honour and peace will crown a good old age;
Refuse—'twere better that a veil should fall,
Lest the foreboding be more terrible
Than the stern doom itself.

SIR RALPH.

You threaten me.

BERNARD.

I can make good my threats.

SIR RALPH.

You dare not.

Leave me! too long I have already borne
Your dogged insolence; within these walls
Shall I submit to this, and from the lips
Of a low-born audacious notary?

BERNARD.

I would advise you to be calm, Sir Ralph,
And curb the fiery impotence of rage
That breaks through your proud nature. Lay aside
Those furious airs, or store them in your blood
For such as pay them somewhat more regard.
But I have seen too much of this strange world—
Fathomed earth's good and ill—and learned to count
Such outbursts but as wasteful excrement.
Think you to me pale lips and flashing eyes
Are fraught with terror?—let them idly pass;
The boiling surge will calm, and passion bite
The lips of its own weakness.

SIR RALPH, *ironically*.

Well, proceed;

I am amused; you state your case right well.

BERNARD.

Sir Ralph, the world applauds your many gifts,
And when your name is mentioned, some such words
As these are heard to pass from lip to lip:—
“He is a great man!” “He hath well sustained
The honour of his house!” “What grievous loss
His death were to his country!” It is right
That this should be, but fame is dearly bought.
Did not your rising mark another’s fall?
Did not the power which you so fondly grasped
Pass from another? You have enemies—
Many and bitter—even of those around you
Your foes are the most honest. Think of it,
And should you fall, and if you still deny
My suit, that ruin is inevitable,
Scandal will whisper, scorn and envy sneer;
The victims of your sarcasm, in their turn,
Will then be merry. Men forgive not wit

For its own sake that's pointed with a sting;
The poorest menial you have trampled on
Will be well pleased, and if 'tis in his power
Repay the haughty insult.

SIR RALPH.

I shall hear

No more of this.

BERNARD.

What, do you then refuse?

Let us but understand each other well:

You are the helpless creature of my will.

SIR RALPH.

Words are but lost on such a fellow—go!—

I stoop not to defiance!

BERNARD.

Very good,

Your words will yet assume an humbler tone. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE FOURTH.

SEA-SHORE—NIGHT—SIR RALPH MEREDITH, ALONE.

SIR RALPH.

It is a terrible alternative,
And yet it must be done. I will procure
The outlaw Arslan. There will be no peace
For me while Bernard is alive. This man—
Whom money will persuade to any deed—
Will see unto his death. I've thought on it
Until my mind recoiled. I could endure
A harsh and cruel fate myself alone,
But Oh! to think how the great world will point
Its fingers at my lineage and my name;
How sneering Envy will congratulate
Her little soul; and every parchment mouth
Favour my downfall with a homily!
Bernard must die!—my fate hangs on his death!
If that could be accomplished, all is well.
Oh! dark and cloudy night, it is most meet

That I should harbour purposes like these
Beneath your shadowy wings. Oh! mournful waves,
And ye wild winds, like the far rolling echoes
Of some strange spirit-world, your voices fall
In sadness on my ear; but I must haste,
Ere morrow dawns, lest its broad light unveil
My grief, my shame, my crime! Yonder dim light,
Methinks, is Arsland's hut.

[He arrives—knocks—Arsland calls from within.]

ARSLAND.

What, ho! who is there?

SIR RALPH.

Arsland.

ARSLAND.

What honour 'tis, Sir Ralph, that thus
You deign a visit to your humble servant?

SIR RALPH.

Are you alone?

ARSLAND.

Not quite, though a few steps
Along will make us so.

SIR RALPH.

Let us move hence.

[They proceed together along the shore.]

It is a pressing matter. I require
Your services. Know you the lawyer Bernard?

ARSLAND.

Too well, Sir Ralph, as I have had good cause,
And hope to pay the wretch a reckoning.

SIR RALPH.

Then yours and mine may both be summed in one.
Have you a conscience?

ARSLAND.

Once I had one, Sir Ralph,
But have lost sight of it these many years.
Conscience, like new-delved earth, grows the more dead
The more 'tis trampled on.

SIR RALPH, *giving him a purse.*

Are you afraid
Of danger? There! When that I'd have of you
Is done, as much again will be thine own.

ARSLAND,

His eyes kindling at the sight of the gold.

Ha! is it so? Said and already done,
If but the will be voucher for the deed!
By Heaven! Sir Ralph, I will stake life and all
In your good service. Oh! 'tis wondrous luck!
You tempt me thus, and yet you speak of danger
To one whose life has been an endless peril
To gain the meanest subsistence. Ah! Sir Ralph,
Danger and I have long been kindred friends.
Have I not in my little bark been borne
O'er the wild billows, and, half bending o'er,
Gazed far into that fearful chasm of waves
Like a poor craven, shuddering on the brink
Of some unfathomed hell? Oh! many times
Have I looked bold on death, yet am I still
Alive, though somewhat worn. 'Tis destiny.

And with that thought I care not where I go,
When death is fated, death will doubtless come,
And it may be to-morrow.

SIR RALPH.

Well, Arsland,
You seem to be the very man I want,
What I would have of you is Bernard's death.
Why do you start? 'Twill do the world a service
To rid it of so foul and base a wretch!

ARSLAND.

Not yet, but soon to be a murderer!
Thank God, 'tis not the blood of innocence
Or childhood! Crime is sweet unto the soul
That long hath dallied with its infamy.
From step to step, and ever gaining more,
In fearful fascination o'er my will,
I am sunk deep, and feel a demon power
Stirring the darker passions of my nature
Like madness, till they glut themselves with blood,
And then will come the end.

SIR RALPH.

So I may trust
Your making away with Bernard?

* ARSLAND.

Ay, you may,
Gold is a powerful pledge;—but how, or when?

SIR RALPH.

Know you the haunted cavern in the wood?

ARSLAND.

Well thought of. How can I decoy him there?

SIR RALPH.

He passes homewards by the forest path,
But stay!—if human shrieks were heard, or blood?

ARSLAND.

Alack! no human eye can see us there—
One rapid whirl over the gaping chasm,
And he is gone into eternity!
No human ear will listen to his cry,

Or heard, 'twould be unheeded, for the winds
Moaning and howling, in the hollow echoes,
Pierce through the gloom, like the heart-rending shrieks
Of some long-suffering anguish;—overhead
The juttings of the rock will hide our steps.
So all things favour us.

SIR RALPH.

'Tis very well.

Remember your reward! The time draws nigh,
And when it comes, I will advise thee more. [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE FIFTH.

A ROAD IN A FOREST—NIGHT—ARSLAND THE OUTLAW
SUDDENLY ACCOSTS BERNARD.

ARSLAND.

'Tis a cold cloudy night.

BERNARD.

What man art thou?

ARSLAND.

Do not pretend, friend Bernard, not to know:

My name is Arsland.

BERNARD.

Villain, hold aback!

Or I will—

ARSLAND.

Nay, not so strong, good sir,

As, after all, what art thou but a rogue

Upon a larger scale?

BERNARD.

Hold a good distance there;

Let me pass on!

ARSLAND.

I have some pressing business with you, sir,
Of such a nature that we cannot well
Be seen about it on the public road.

BERNARD.

What is its import?

ARSLAND.

It concerns you much,
And that is all that I will say of it
Till we can find a shelter.

BERNARD, *aside*.

There must be
Something in this. I'll follow, come what may,
This matter to the end; and should it prove
That Meredith hath hired this man to take

My life,—on that score I am well prepared;
But more anon. Know you where we may go?

ARSLAND.

There is a cave, haunted, good people say,
By many horrors of the invisible world;—
Ghosts and dire phantoms, shrieks, and sounds of woe;
But I have never seen or heard what might
Have told me of their presence, though I've sat
Whole nights amid its gloom. Through yonder glen
The road leads to it. What say you, then,
Shall we go thither?

BERNARD.

Well, I care not much.

Go on before, as I know not the way. [Aside.
Sir Ralph, I could not credit you before,
With such a subtle brain;—'tis nobly planned—
But I will thwart, and thwarting may preserve
That which will make thy haughty stubbornness
More pliant to my will. Where are we now?

ARSLAND.

This tufted copsewood hides the cavern's mouth.
We must descend.

BERNARD.

Why, to what underground
Or lower world does this strange pathway lead?

ARSLAND.

Take heed and guard your steps aright. The way
Is steep and perilous.

BERNARD, *aside*.

Impudent knave!

Were but my foot to slip o'er yonder crag,
He would be merry that myself had done
What might have cost him trouble; yet in truth
This is an awful spot! Still we descend,
And still yon chasm opens a wider gulf,
And looks more horrible.

ARSLAND.

Turn to your left—

Catch hold!—all right!—beneath yon hanging cliff
We will sit down.

BERNARD, *aside*.

What does the fellow mean?
Sit on yon narrow ledge, that, swift as thought,
I may be jostled over! I will watch
The cunning dog. He fancies all secure,
And counts upon his victim, reckoning not
He may be undeceived.

ARSLAND.

Now, Bernard, if you will,
I can reveal my object here to-night.
Put off restraint;—in such a spot as this
All men are equals. Should I lay hands on you,
You have not a resource. You may cry help!
And thieves! and murder! till your throat is cracked,
And echo will but laugh in mockery.

BERNARD.

I can defend myself—so have a care!

ARSLAND.

It matters not, as I do not intend
To harm you. Have you seen my face before?

BERNARD.

No.

ARSLAND.

You lie! and more, you did me grievous wrong.
Can you remember, when in Court of Justice,
I swore a false and cruel oath that gave
The gain to you and yours; and when I asked
The promised gold, was laughed at for my pains;
And, with a virtuous sneer, by you advised
Unto repentance of my perjury?

BERNARD.

'Twas surely a mistake. I'll think of it.
Is that what you desire?

ARSLAND.

You must fulfil
Your promise.

BERNARD.

Call on me, say to-morrow,
And I will then consider your demand.

ARSLAND.

You have deceived me once. I cannot trust you.
Nay, nay, my cunning sir,—I must have gold!
Out with your purse!—I'll ease you of its weight!

BERNARD.

Sir Ralph hath promised—

ARSLAND.

Ha! you fain would probe
A secret. Come!—your money!

BERNARD, *pulling out a pistol.*

This may please
Your fancy quite as well.

*[Arsland rushes on him—Bernard fires—Arsland falls
at his side mortally wounded.]*

Take that to boot,
And let thy damned soul go where it may!

Oh, horrible! how long the loud report
Is lingering in reverberated echoes—
And will it never die? Hath murder power
To rouse all Nature through her dread abodes
To shuddering and alarm?

ARSLAND.

Done for at last!
Have mercy on me!

BERNARD.

Ah! he is not dead!
Then I will wring the mystery from his lips—
Prepare thee for a leap into the abyss!

ARSLAND.

I'm dying! Let me yield my breath, and then
Do with me what you will.

BERNARD.

Tell me, then,
What tempted you to this?

ARSLAND.

A weight of gold,
Which I could not resist.

BERNARD.

Let me know all,
Or I will hurl you still in your warm blood
Over the precipice!

ARSLAND.

Wait, Oh, Heaven! my life
Is ebbing fast—'twas Sir Ralph Meredith
That bribed me to it. I can speak no more,
But this will tell you all.

[Points to a letter in his breast, and dies.]

BERNARD, *reading.*

Ah yes, Sir Ralph,
We will have more together. He is dead!
[Turns to Arsland's body, and rolls it over the precipice.]
Poor fellow! I must now away with him!
Down with a heavy fall on each sharp cliff,

That juts from out the rock,—I hear a splash,
And all is still. 'Tis done and over now!
It is near midnight,—in this awful cave
'Tis little else in daytime—on a ledge
Of rock I stand ;—beneath me like a dream
'Tis darkness deep and dread. Hear I not
The sound as of the rush of many waters?
Far as the eye can pierce the dizzy depth
A shining river flows. Oh! silent stream—
For thou art silent—Lethé-like thy bed
May lead to unknown horrors. All around
Bare rocks lean over from their beds of earth,
And look for ever downwards. Withered trunks
Of up-torn pines are lingering like the shreds
Of a past age, and with a glimmering light,
Like the wan shadow of a better world,
One solitary moonbeam falleth there.
But I have stayed too long. I must away—
But where?—at once to Sir Ralph Meredith.
I will confront him. If he dare deny
This letter—why—I'll suborn witnesses
To prove it. If I cannot otherwise

Make good my case, I'll threaten him
With terrors that ne'er entered in his dreams—
The law's dire punishment which justly waits
On such a crime. I know his nature well;
He will not at this time deny my suit;
And the fair one herself will doubtless yield,
To save her father from so sad a fate,
And her own life from misery and shame.

[Bernard proceeds to Sir Ralph's residence.]

SCENE SIXTH.

HALL—SIR RALPH MEREDITH, ALONE.

SIR RALPH.

THE serpent's head is crushed, if Arslan proves
Faithful unto his trust. Bernard is dead!
And I have now no longer cause to fear.
Would that I heard the tidings go abroad
Of his mysterious death! Yet if there be
A link—a trace;—but why should I create
From my own fears such dire contingencies—
There's every chance 'tis over, and the spot
Hath fearful secrecy? *[Enter Servant.*

SERVANT.

There is a man,
Sir Ralph, now waiting at the outer gate,
Who fain would have an interview upon
A matter of most pressing interest.

SIR RALPH.

His name ?

SERVANT.

He will not give it, sir,
But stands aside with his face closely wrapped
In a dark mantle.

SIR RALPH.

Show him in to me.

[Exit Servant.]

'Tis Arsland!—this is well—he comes to claim
His gold, and he shall have it, with a hand
More liberal even than he anticipates.

*[Enter Giles Bernard—Sir Ralph turns deadly pale on
seeing his supposed victim.]*

What—Bernard!

BERNARD.

An unwelcome guest, Sir Ralph.

SIR RALPH, *aside.*

Great God! how hath this come? I am betrayed!

In counting Arsland worthy of my trust,
He hath been either false, or over-matched—
This last were better; he would tell no tales.
What would you have with me?

BERNARD.

To me you owe
To-night a lightened conscience. Ay, you start!
And strive, like every craven criminal,
To wear an aspect of complacency.

SIR RALPH.

What do you mean? Why do you thus intrude?

BERNARD.

You will perceive, anon. There is a man
Noted for sundry questionable deeds—
His name is Arsland—know ye aught of him?
Quiver and wince, Sir Ralph, as well you may.
Now, baffled murderer! for I name thee such,
As such was thine intent, we will proceed
To business.

SIR RALPH.

Sir, I do not understand
One word—the man is mad!

BERNARD.

I can reveal

That which might drive thee into madness, were
Thy nature fashioned in a gentler mould.
Know you this letter?

*[Produces the note found on Arsland's body—Sir Ralph
extends his hand to receive it.]*

Nay, it is too precious
To trust thy keeping;—I will read it you. *[Reads.]*

“ARSLAND,—He will pass through the
wood between nine and eleven o'clock to-
night. Leave not a shadow of what might
be hereafter a dangerous tracing-point. It
were better not done than half-done. Let
him be heard of no more! Remember your
reward, which I will take occasion to double
if the matter be managed well.”

On *your* part it was managed well, Sir Ralph,
'Tis not to *you* that I owe gratitude

For being here to-night! Had circumstance
Favoured YOUR kind intentions, I had found
A fearful grave! But I must go, Sir Ralph,—
The world shall hear of this. Prepare to meet
Stern Justice in her place!

SIR RALPH.


Oh, Heaven, 'tis true!
Stay, stay, and think on what I've done for you!
You will not thus expose me to a doom
I dread to look upon!

BERNARD.

A criminal
Thou art, and shalt be!

SIR RALPH.

On my bended knees
I do implore you—a poor weak old man—
Broken in sorrow, prostrate in my pride—
Have you no pity?



BERNARD.

You will ne'er again
Have such means in your power. I am not safe
One single hour! But stay!—are you prepared
To make a sacrifice that this affair
May be hushed up?

SIR RALPH.

Oh, anything on earth
That I have in my power!

BERNARD.

Then, yet once more
I would become a suitor for the hand
Of your fair daughter Adeline!

SIR RALPH.

No other boon
Than this? Oh, Bernard, you have torn my heart!
Is there none other?

BERNARD.

I am inexorable!

D

SIR RALPH.

Then I must yield; my daughter shall be yours!

BERNARD.

Perhaps our new relationship may prove
A mutual bond of safety;—that which brings
Disgrace on one, is ruin unto both.
Sir Ralph, you have done wisely, let us now
Forget our little differences.

SIR RALPH.

Leave me,
For I would be alone,—my aching mind
Hath need of rest, though it should only come
In nightmare terrors and unsightly fears.
But it is long past midnight; 'twere as well
You should remain till morning. I will go
Into my chamber;—yours is opposite.

[Exit Sir Ralph, Bernard alone in his room.]

BERNARD.

Thread loosening thread. This closely ravelled plot

Day after day unwinds its tangled coil,
And shapes itself to the accomplishment
Of all my heart's desire. This night hath brought
The matter to an issue, which hath proved
Beyond my utmost hope. A baronet's son-in-law!
Bernard, your lines have fallen pleasantly.
Now the barred doors of high society
Will ope their ponderous hinges to my call.
The great will be my peers; my lord will court
My friendship; and my lady make request
Of influence and counsel;—things assume
A brilliant aspect. I had set a goal
To my ambition!—'tis within my grasp:
Would that I clutched it! but have patience, Bernard,
A few short weeks will bring it all to pass.

[*Exit.*

SCENE SEVENTH.

SEA-SHORE—A CLOUDY NIGHT—EDWARD LESBURN
MEETS ADELINE.

LESBURN.

'Tis a dark night, my love!

ADELINE.

So well it may,

It is the last that we shall be together—
Indeed, I knew not that I could be here,
So many cunning eyes keep constant watch
Upon my movements. Edward, we must meet
On earth no more!

LESBURN.

Fool that I was to trust
A woman's nature! Would I could have known
That this would be the issue! Adeline,
I had fair hopes, and they were all of thee,

Thy name was the most hallowed utterance
That ever passion breathed from fervent lips;
And is it come to this?

ADELINE.

'Tis most unkind
To chide me thus. Have I not borne enough
From other lips, that yours should also wrong me?
Judge not so harshly;—let me tell you all,
And then you will forgive. For many years
We have been true unto our plighted troth;
But Fate is jealous of all mortal joy,
And will not brook too much of happiness.
My father hath forbade our intercourse,
And Oh! I know not how to think of it,
Or front a dreaded future;—he has forced
My unwilling lips to give a cold assent
Unto this Bernard's suit. I did refuse,
And told him of the love I bore another;
He muttered threatenings with an angry brow,
Called me undutiful,—yet I still refused;
And then he told me of his ruined state,

And I was forced to yield that I might save
Our family from bankruptcy and shame!

LESBURN.

Was it a sense of duty that constrained
Your motives to this terrible expedient?
Oh! Adeline, there are times and influences
When Duty hath no longer such a name!
Can Duty boast such high prerogative—
And in a wrongful cause—as thus to make
The weal and woe of all your after life
Subservient to its purpose?—shall the false
And cold conventionalisms of this hollow world
Blight all our fond affection? When I gaze
Upon thy features, so familiar grown,
That, like another and a purer self,
They will for ever haunt me,—it seems strange
That we should part. Nay, nay, my beautiful!
Were we not made and fashioned for each other?

ADELINE.

Such things have been—such things will be again—

So long as there are hopes to realise,
Or hearts to break. Edward, when you are gone,
With you my fairest portion in the world
Will take its flight! Oh! is not that enough
For you to know, that this, our taking leave,
Is with a mutual sorrow;—that our love
Is still the same, though we may no more dare
To give it breath?—and what more can I say?

LESBURN.

It is a blessed assurance,—one that robs
The anguish of a ruined expectation
Of half its harrowing power. Your father's threats
Fill you with dread. His will inexorable—
Ay, and if so, as mercenary too—
Would have you play the lover to this man.
'Tis fine to speak of partings and farewells,
As if the human heart were but a toy,
And love and sorrow but the airy bubbles
That float upon the surface of existence,
Dissolved and blown by every passing wind
That meets them in its course. If this be true,

How can I satisfy this endless longing—
How can I quench this passion-fire within me?
Here do we stand, like two worn travellers,
Who, sad at heart, are wandering opposite ways,
And both lead onward to eternity.
When will they meet again in that great void?
The answer is, Despair—this world denied—
Alas! we have no surety of another.
I'll think you have been fooling me, my love:
This will not, cannot be!

ADELINE.

Ah, me! it must.

Oh! Edward, I am struggling with myself—
You know not what I suffer!

LESBURN.

Can we not

Devise some secret method of escape?
We are both young, and this right arm is strong.
The wide world is before us. Far away,
Beyond the utmost verge of that great sea,

The blue heaven circles many a sunny land,
Where we may find a home. To-night, in wrath
The billows toss their white foam to the sky,
But on the morrow a sweet slumb'rous calm
Will soothe the angry ocean into rest,
With such a fragrant breathing of the wind
As will but waft my fair one o'er its bosom,
And then what need we fear?

ADELINE.

It is in vain!

Had I been born and nursed in poverty,
We might have shared an evil lot together;
But we are drifted through this world of woe
By forces not our own. There is no part
Left for us now to play, save the farewell!
And then the curtain falls.

LESBURN.

Oh! Adeline,

How will I bear it? Is it not too much
For a weak human heart?

ADELINE.

Edward, farewell!

LESBURN.

Farewell!—Heaven bless you!—deign a passing thought,
And pause in memory o'er our early years,
I will not soon forget,—a long farewell!

[Exit Adeline.]

Yes, Adeline, in all this great vast world
There was not room enough for us to love.
Bernard will be your husband! No, by Heaven!
If life be spared me, he will bite the dust,
Though it be at the altar with his bride! *[Exit.]*

SCENE EIGHTH.

CHAPEL—LESBURN ALONE IN THE AISLE.

LESBURN.

THERE is a deep oppressive solitude
When man holds commune darkly with himself
On holy ground—such do I stand on here—
And such a silence round me that my heart
Trembles at its own beating. I must nerve
My sinking spirit, and take steady aim ;

[Produces and loads a Pistol.

And if this go not unto Bernard's heart,
The next will reach mine own. Oh! Adeline!
If circumstance hath sternly parted us,
I will at least have saved you from a fate
More horrible than death. Bernard will die,
And I have all things ready for escape
Unto a foreign land. Ha! do I hear them?

* *[The Marriage Party enter the other end of the Chapel.*

She comes!—how thin and pale!—her very step
Is feeble and uncertain; those sad eyes
That hang so heavy in their drooping lids
Seem as if grief had dried up all their tears.
Yes, yes, proceed with your fine ceremony!
Oh! is it not a mockery of God
To invoke His blessing on a deed which breaks
Fond hearts, and renders love henceforth a crime?
Yes, yes, he answers that he loves her truly,
Foul hypocrite! but I will stop his mouth!

[Bernard and Adeline are before the Altar—the ceremony is proceeding—Lesburn fires at Bernard; but, missing aim, strikes Adeline at his side, who falls mortally wounded.]

LESBURN.

[Rushing to the spot, where all around are convulsed with sorrow and alarm.]

Great God! what have I done?

BERNARD.

Seize the man!

LESBURN.

Stand back!

Thou damned villain! it was meant for thee!
What have I done? Oh! my dear Adeline!
Open thine eye, and give my heart relief—
Look on me yet once more!

ADELINE, *raising her head.*

Ha! is it you,
Dear Edward? Let me die while you are near,
For I am weak and faint!

LESBURN.

Oh! I have killed
My own true love;—forgive me, Adeline!
I sought to save you from an evil doom,
And levelled my false aim at Bernard's breast—
Forgive me! Oh, forgive me! or a curse
Will bear me down for ever!

ADELINE.

I forgive!
Nay, thank and bless you, Edward. This hath proved

Your constant love, and I am happy now—
 Happy in death, for death hath brought me peace.
 Where is my father?—hears he not my voice?

LESBURN.

He hearkens not, but stands immovable—
 His sorrow hath o'erborne him.

SIR RALPH.

Can it be
 Her voice? methought I heard it whispering
 In feeble accents, Father! Do I see
 Her form before me, dabbled all in blood!

ADELINE.

Father, farewell! I have been dutiful!

SIR RALPH.

Too dutiful. Oh! are my wandering senses
 Not fashioning a dream?

LESBURN.

Is there no hope?
 Her eye is beaming brightly.

ADELINE.

'Tis the flash
That kindles in the socket ere the light
Is quenched for ever! Edward, I am dying!
But you must fly abroad, the hounds of law
Will soon be on your track!

LESBURN.

The world hath lost
To me its fairest hope—its brightest hue,
Ah! whither shall I roam? In lonely lands
A lonely wanderer, with a murderer's brand
Imprinted on my brow? No, Adeline,
Ere long I'll follow thee!

ADELINE.

Farewell! farewell!
Dear Edward, we may meet again in heaven!
Oh, God! is this the icy chill of death? [Dies.

LESBURN, *bending over her body.*

Heavens! have I killed her? Oh! she is not dead!

Her own love waiteth for her waking eye.
But no!—the warm and fervid life which gave
Soul unto beauty—light to loveliness—
Is now, alas! no more! Sorrow had chased
Thy ruddy bloom,—death gives it back again.
I never saw her look so fair as now;
Could I but catch a breath, I would believe

[*To Sir Ralph.*]

She sleeps;—look on her form, old man!
Is not the cold clay coldly beautiful?
All this and more of grief she hath endured
For my sake. How could I have borne
To see her cast away into the lot
Of a cold villain! Go, Sir Ralph, and drag
In bitterness thy few remaining years!
Blame not her memory, for love is strong,
And the heart-yearnings of affection brook

[*To Bernard.*]

No mercenary thought; and thou, vile wretch!
Gaze on the being you have thus laid low;
Think of the gentle heart that you have broken!
If e'er a curse that fell from human lips

Had power to cloud a mortal destiny,
By all the anguish of a blighted hope—
By all the wrongs of injured innocence—
I curse you in your life and death, and then
I leave you to the vengeance of your God!

BERNARD, *to those around him.*

Seize him! Why stand ye gaping in amaze?
Have ye not yet recovered from the shock
Of sudden terror? Seize the murderer!
That this dark deed escape not its reward!

A VOICE.

Leave him alone, for he is desperate,
And seems to sorrow for her death far more
Than him who was her bridegroom. Look at him,
His frame is heaving in convulsive throes,
And the strong agony of despair doth shake
The roots of all his being.

BERNARD.

Let us make
A circle round him, and prevent his flight.

LESBURN.

Why come ye here in the white robes of joy?
Were not the sackcloth and the shroud more meet
For such a scene? Go, hang yon marble fane
In sable weeds, and spread the black pall over—
A purer soul ne'er winged its flight to heaven—
A warmer heart ne'er beat in woman's breast.

[They press around him.]

Back, back! come not upon me! 'Tis in vain!
For I will baffle you! Oh! best beloved!
I will not stay behind!—we were as one
In life, and let us be in death the same!

[Stabs himself and dies, falling upon Adeline's body.]

VANDERDECKEN;
OR, THE PHANTOM SHIP.

A Fragment.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

VANDERDECKEN.

FREDERICK.

SPIRITS, ETC.

NOTE—The Author originally designed to make the following poem much longer and more complete than it now appears,—to embody in the character of Vanderdecken those doubts and perplexities which in the present age are shaking the traditions of the past to their foundations; but as he intends, in a future work, to develop more fully his own speculations on these subjects, he has here refrained, comparatively speaking, from touching upon them, and leaves the poem simply in the condition of a Fragment.

VANDERDECKEN.

SCENE FIRST.

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE—VANDERDECKEN—FREDERICK.

FREDERICK.

'Tis a dead calm, the waters seem asleep,
If this be all the speed that we can make,
Our journey will not soon come to an end.

VANDERDECKEN.

Yes, but 'tis like that ominous silentness,
That fearful calm which dwells within the eye
Before the flash of passion. Ere the night
Hath closed upon us the wild elements
Will play with our poor vessel like a toy.
Far to the west, on the horizon's brink,
See yonder little speck of gathering cloud.
What wrath, what blighting energy, what power

Of desolation, what contending fires
It bears within its bosom, and, ere long,
'Twill ope' its sulphurous throat, and loosen bolts
Of thunder on the world !

FREDERICK.

Thou sayest true,
And we are close upon a dangerous shore;
'Twere well we should commend ourselves to God.

VANDERDECKEN.

Ay, Frederick, say your prayers in humble trust;
'Tis well you never questioned that belief
Which guides your daily life.

FREDERICK.

That may be,
Master; 'tis known you are a learned man,
That you can speak and question of such things
As unto my poor mind are mysteries.
Nought know I, save that in the Christian faith
My fathers lived and died. I have grown old,

And found some comfort in that heavenly hope.
What though 'tis false? there is no mockery
Within the silent grave!

VANDERDECKEN.

For ten long years,
In studious solitude, I gave my mind
To art and science. With enthusiast zeal
I probed each secret mystery of thought,
Pondered with anxious care o'er all beliefs,
Ended with having none. I saw around me
A craven superstitious multitude,
Who shuffled through the patchwork of their lives
With a few prayers, a few formalities,
A closing benedict, a mummary;
And then the farce was over. From that hour
I doubted all things, and with doubt there came
Unhappiness and unrest. I saw the sun
Enter in glory through the gates of morn,
I stood in presence of majestic hills,
I heard the eternal music of the sea,
I sought to read my fate upon the stars.

Is all this universe of love and beauty,
This ever-beating pulse of infinite life,
This intermingling of wild elements,
This whirling of innumerable worlds,
This warring of great passions—are not these
The garments of the god whom we adore?
You speak of faith, free-will, and moral purpose,
But look around ;—a stern relentless fate
Bears all before it,—and we, puny mortals,
Struggling and pulling at the tail of Fortune,
Dream not we are the tools of Destiny.

FREDERICK.

Master, I know not ; but with all thy lore
I would not share thy dark and troubled mind.

[Looking upward.]

The sky is lowering. We will hear anon
The first far-thundering premonitor
Of a most dreadful night. What think you, master,
Had we not better beat out straight to sea,
Nor dare the perilous passage of the Cape
In such a storm ?

VANDERDECKEN.

I have made up my mind,
Be there a God in heaven, or devil in hell,
I'll pass the Cape ere yet the night is o'er!

[A voice is heard in the air above.]

Curse the genial light of morn!
Curse the day that thou wert born!
'Twere better the one thou hadst never seen,
'Twere better the other had never been,
For thee the bell of Fate hath tolled—
Happy, happy are the dead
Who sleep beneath the mould;
And the living many a tear may shed
For him they will ne'er behold!
Her eye will be red with tears,
Her cheek will be pale with sorrow,
Her love will be constant for years,
Yet still it will wait for the morrow.
Many long and weary years,
Many sad and anxious fears;
But days and nights will come and go,
And passion's tears will idly flow,

And the grief of a broken heart deplore
The best beloved, who will return no more!

FREDERICK.

Hark! heard ye not a voice, that seemed to come
From a far land?

VANDERDECKEN.

Was it a waking dream—
A subtle soul-beguiling fantasy?
I heard a voice—a melancholy voice!
And there was something in the words it uttered
That makes me tremble. What is it I have done?
Where am I? My bewildered senses whirl
As in a chaos;—it is wondrous strange.
Hark! how the storm is roaring through the night!
Above us all is darkness, and around
All darkness, and beneath, a chasm of waves
That rise and fall, and open in huge gulfs,
And yet we move not;—every sail is spread,
And the loud winds are flapping in the folds,
Yet, like a shadow or a heavy cloud,
Our vessel makes no motion on the deep.

SCENE SECOND.

THE SAME.

VANDERDECKEN.

THERE was a time when I had laughed to scorn
The thought of shapes and powers invisible
Acting on human fate; but I have seen
Or heard to-night such marvellous accidents,
That I am spell-bound by a craven terror—
The power of reason overwhelmed by fear—
I am not what I was.

[*Vanderdecken feels slowly lifted upward through the air
as in a cloud, till he finds himself resting in a spacious
hall, surrounded on all sides by clouds and vapours,
and overhead the clear bright stars — he sees at the
further end a number of spectres moving to and fro.*

What place is this?

Who and what are ye, dim and shadowy forms?

What is your nature? Are ye existences

Of palpable shape and power, or but the coinage

Of this too subtle and fantastic brain,
That bodies forth such strange and foul distortions
To torture me with horror? Where am I?
I ask myself is it not but a dream?—
A dream within a dream—that baffles all
My questionings? I'd have you speak to me—
Spirits or wandering shapes, whate'er you be,
If ye have being—speak, Oh! speak to me!

A VOICE.

Thou art where man hath never been before,
Thou shalt behold what man hath never seen,
Thou shalt endure what man hath never suffered,
And thou shalt know what man hath never known.

VANDERDECKEN.

Are ye the Fates that rule man's destinies,
That thus ye can foretell so dread a doom?

A VOICE.

Thy path is on the rugged thunder-cloud,
And from thy feet the fiery lightnings quiver—

Look downward from thine airy pinnacle,
What dost thou hear? what do thine eyes behold?

VANDERDECKEN.

I hear the roaring of the ocean waves,
And on the deep I see a ship reposing.

A VOICE.

Where now it is there shall it ever be,
A wreck, a phantom, and a mystery!
[Enter Spirits, with a sound of thunder in the airy hall.]

FIRST SPIRIT, *in the midst, from beneath a cloud.*

By the God thou hast denied,
By the heaven thou hast defied,
By the thunder long and loud,
By the lightning in the cloud,
By the tempest in the shroud,
By the foam upon the wave,
And its echo in the cave,
By the stars, whose silent light
Gem the forehead of the night,
By all powers of earth and air,
Do I now thy doom declare—

Life will be unto thee a living death,
Yet will thy recreant being never die;
The tortured clay will long to yield its breath,
Yet will thy life be through eternity!

The foam will gather on the rolling wave,
The clouds hang heavy in the midnight air;
And they shall be around thee like a grave,
And press upon thine heart the darkness of despair!

VANDERDECKEN.

I have been dealt with most mysteriously!
Spirit—if such thou art, whose solemn voice
Dost thus pronounce my fate—what have I done,
That I must bear so dire a punishment?
Ye tell me I will never die; but who
Or what are ye, that ye have power to curse
A mortal with such immortality?
Say are ye not but airy charlatans,
Peopling the morbid vision of my soul!
Or if it be that I must drag on earth
An endless life of solitude and pain,

How will I think of her, whose longing heart
Waits my return? Oh! my dear Ellenore!
Shall we ne'er look into each other's eyes—
Eyes that could never beam enough of love
To tell the soul's fond rapture—never more
Will I return to my dear native land?
Ye Spirits, if the influence of love
Pervade your subtle natures, if your breasts
May fire with passion, or with pity soften,—
Have mercy! Oh, have mercy on my lot!
Let me return again unto my home—
I have a mother and a sister there!

SECOND SPIRIT.

Mortal!—'tis vain to plead—the stern decree
Is like the past of time, irrevocable.
Thy mother shall no more behold her son,
Thy sister ne'er shall look upon her brother,
Thy Love will yield her heart unto despair.
If there be any other boon that thou
Wouldst covet and desire, it shall be given.

VANDERDECKEN.

Since that my heart's affections thus are blighted,
One refuge have I from the harrowing thought,—
Tell me, can ye bestow upon my mind
All knowledge,—to divine that mystery
Of life which weighs so heavy on my heart?

THIRD SPIRIT.

That which we know not, how can we reveal?
Alike from mortal and immortal minds
The great *First Cause* is hidden. 'Tis the folly
Of thine own pride that hath betrayed thy soul.
What is—I can lay open thine eye—
But how or whence, is far above my power,
All things that are, are known alone to me,
And they shall likewise be made known to thee.

With me upon the viewless winds
Thou shalt wander to and fro,
From the sultry desert waste,
To the region of the snow,
From the siroc's fiery blast,
To where the northern tempests blow.

O'er wind and wave, o'er earth and sea,
 On some lone mountain height,
Where the wolf's long howl comes sad and slow
 Up through the silent night;
And the eagle starts from his eyrie,
 To hail the morning light.

With me in the dewy midnight,
 Through yonder starry sky,
Where the planets roll, and the suns look down
 From their burning thrones on high,
And the comets, with wild and loosened hair,
 Sweep through immensity.

SCENE THIRD.

THE SAME.

VANDERDECKEN.

NIGHT, night! dark night, and longing for the dawn,
Oh! lonely heart! so doomed to long in vain!
Above, the warring of the bolts of heaven,
Around, the mingled tumults of the winds,
And multitudinous waves, whose yawning gulfs
Grow darker than the midnight when I gaze
Into their cold and shuddering depths of gloom.
Like a deep soul's impenetrable calm
Amid the din of wrangling multitudes,
So in this whirling of the elements
Our ship is shrouded in a silent spell,
And moves not on the sea. [*Enter Frederick.*

FREDERICK.

Good morrow, master!
How pale you look and troubled! Some mishap
Hath caused such quick and melancholy change.

VANDERDECKEN.

What is there you perceive? Do I not wear
My wonted aspect?

FREDERICK.

You seem not unto me
As the same being. Yesternight your hair
Was black as jet, now it is thin and grey—
Your brow is tracked with wrinkles, and the light
Of a strange frenzy starts within thine eye.

VANDERDECKEN.

Say you 'tis so? I scarcely could have thought
One day had made such havoc with my frame;
But I have been in a strange wonder-world,
Have heard the music of unearthly voices,
Have borne the anguish of unearthly sorrow.
Leave me, for I am stricken at the core!

FREDERICK, *aside*.

His mind hath gone astray; the man is mad.

VANDERDECKEN.

Spirits are all around me; I can brook
No earthly presence.

FREDERICK, *aside*.

May Heaven be with you!

There was aye something in your mind and life
I could not fathom, and 'tis better so. [Exit.

VANDERDECKEN.

Oh, Ellenore! these bitter, bitter tears
Are shed for thee, and they may prove the last!
For I must soon forget that thou hast been,
And in the glory of a loftier sphere
Find refuge from the memory of the past.
And Oh! ye unseen powers, with you my soul
Must henceforth hold communion, and endure
Immortal suffering, share immortal joy!
Thou Spirit, who didst make thyself my guide,
And tender such obedience to my will,
I now command your presence—rise! appear!

[A cloud appears before him.

SPIRIT.

I come, I come, from my far-off home,
O'er the wide world with thee to roam!

VANDERDECKEN.

Can ye withdraw the curtain of oblivion,
And from the womb of many ages call
To life before me the primeval world,
The form earth wore ere human footsteps trod
Its dim abodes?

SPIRIT.

As thou hast spoken, so
It shall appear before thee like a dream.
[A vision of the world in its primeval condition appears.]

VANDERDECKEN.


Beautiful chaos! Through the misty gloom
The sun arises like a low, red moon,
Cheerless and cold. Huge mountains tower on high,
And I can hear, amid their ghostly echoes,
The sound of many waters, and the shriek

Of desolate winds. Like a grand evermore,
The voice of ocean rises through the night,
Its white waves breaking blindly on the beach
Of unknown shores. To me it all beseems
As if 'twere yearning towards a larger life.
And there, beneath the shadow of the hills,
Impenetrable woods and pathless wilds,
Black forests, whose unfathomable depths
Are silent, silent as eternity,
Save when the mammoth's howl is heard afar
In the primeval gloom, or when uptearing
Huge pine trees by the root, the monster cracks
Their knotted boughs like twigs; and now anon
Is heard the sound of nether thunderings;
Vast continents are thrown from out the deep,
And others are laid waste beneath the rush
Of the o'erwhelming waters.

SPIRIT.

Such was the world

Till in the ripening processes of time,
From some dull chrysalis the man arose,
And earth grew likewise meet for his abode.



VANDERDECKEN.

And man, when first his heart became aware
Of its own evil, cast a withering blight
O'er all the shining Paradise.

SPIRIT.

Not so!

Evil and good are both eternities,
And, like the universe, have ever been.
Evil is but a mighty energy,
A purging of effete excrescences,
The wind that sweeps the stagnant formulas
Of cold and obsolete conventionalisms.
Evil is but the darker side of good,
And to the great First Cause all things are well.
By storm and earthquake, fire and thunderbolts,
Doth Nature purify her elements;
And so with man;—hunger, and cold, and rain,
Havoc, and war, and gory battlements,
Red Revolution's carnage, and the cries
Of maddened multitudes,—these are the crucibles
In which a worn-out world renews its youth.

VANDERDECKEN.

I would survey the power which man has wielded
In the world's history, as one who bore
A part, and breathed himself the heroic air,
And drank the inspiration of great thoughts
And deeds, which mankind cherish, like the past
Of their own memories.

SPIRIT.

There shall arise
Such scenes as in thine heart thou wouldst desire.

[A Vision of the ancient Memphis appears before him.]

VANDERDECKEN.

A great and populous city,—silent all,—
Massive and grand in aspect,—lofty towers
Rise o'er the battlements, whose rugged heights
Throw a dark shadow round,—gigantic men,
Gigantic souls must have abided there.
Pillars and temples, domes and pyramids,
Whose ruins, after many thousand years,
Would be earth's greatest trophies, where the souls

Of men would worship as upon the shrines
Of their own household gods. Out in the plain
The Sphinx uprears its bold colossal brow
Beneath the clear bright midnight, where the stars
Shine cold on its impassive countenance.
Seems it not like a great, dumb, earnest heart,
That grapples with some high prophetic thought
Of the far ages, when the things which are
Shall be no more?

*[The Vision fades away, and another appears before him
—it is one of Jerusalem, and Christ in the garden of
Gethsemane.]*

Now breaks the ruddy light
Of morn o'er Salem's towers and Judah's hills,
The busy hum begins to spread abroad
Within the city's courts,—a gentle murmur
Flows upward from the valley, and the winds
Breathe a sad music where the willows bend
O'er Kidron's rippling wave,—and underneath
A shady bough there stands a human form—
A stately form—such nobleness and grace
As I have seen in sculptured images

Of man's ideal beauty, yet methinks
 He hath not fared well with a sordid world—
 A world too narrow for the utterance
 Of that which earnest spirits have revealed.

SPIRIT.

It is the CHRIST,—there throbs the largest heart
 That ever beat within a human breast,—
 The kindest, gentlest of all human natures.
 Yet this majestic Spirit must succumb
 Beneath the clamorous howls of bigotry!
 They crucified Him! In return He gave
 Three burning words, writ in immortal fire—
 "Love one another!" blest His foes, and died!

*[Another scene now passes before them, representing Paris
 at the outbreak of the French Revolution.]*

VANDERDECKEN.

Hark! hear ye not the tumult and the cry
 Of angry human voices,—louder still,
 And louder, as the gathering multitudes,
 In mad convulsion, wander to and fro,

Mingling their horrid curses with the roar
Of war's impending thunders? Now anon
A mighty cry is heard—revenge and blood!
Blood! blood! pale frenzy on the battlements
Shrieks o'er the wide arena, and beyond
The skeleton forms of want and misery
Roll back with flashing eyes the cry of blood.
Men's hearts are wildly stirred—a thunder-peal
Has roused them from the sleep of centuries.

*[Another scene passes before them, representing Napoleon's
army at Moscow.]*

From earth to heaven, one wide, red sheet of flame,
Mingled with bursting bombs, and falling towers,
And human shrieks, and cannon heard afar,
Like long loud thunder in the northern night.
Red flash the fiery waves of burning steel,
Shining on many a dark and sullen brow.
Earth shakes with tumult; the wolf's ravenous howl
Comes from afar like an unearthly sound;
The pathless snow o'er the wide plain is bathed
In a red lurid glare; sounds like the roar

Of earthquakes, mingled with volcano fires,
And seething cauldrons, and tumultuous waves.

SPIRIT.

How silent are the mountain tops of snow,
And cold and clear above the starry sky!
Man's thunders are but whispers, after all,
In the eternal universe of God.

[*Exeunt.*

MEMORY.

ONCE, once I had a love, in the spring-dawn
Of life, when all things smiled upon my youth—
A boyish love, and yet it haunts me still,
As if the passion but of yesterday.
Comely and fair she was, and young desire
Circled her form with an ideal grace.
I blame her not, she has been happier far,
And Heaven has blessed her in another's home!
Little she knew that on that bridal day
This was a broken heart! Oh! whither gone?
Thou wert a vision,—art thou still a dream?
Even now methinks I see thee,—yet to feel
Thou knowest not, or knowing heedest not—
That love—Oh, God! I cannot think of it—
It rends my heart! her image is before me,
It will not speak—it is a mockery.
Oh, human fate! thou art not so unkind.

Speak, if this be not but a feverish dream,
Art thou not my beloved? Are not these
Her eyes, her lips, and the rich auburn hair
Like sunset on the waters? Phantasy,
And all her morbid brood, are torturing
My mind with horrid shapes,—away, away!
'Tis all delusion! Oh, thou loveliest one!
Could I but gaze upon thee yet once more,
Gaze on thine eye, though it were masked in scorn,
Then might the quenchless flame of life's great hope,
Callous and cold, be still within the quiet grave.

LINES WRITTEN ON READING THE LIFE AND
POEMS OF THE

LATE DAVID GRAY.

BLAME not, though from the Poet's breast
 One short sharp cry of pain arose,
How many hath that pride repressed,
 Which scorns to tell the world its woes!
He would not paint that inner life
 Of sorrow, trouble, doubt, and care,
But, looking outward on the strife,
 Found utterance for his music there.

Let all things that have been remain
 In his own bosom's sacred shrine,
He bore his fate with proud disdain,
 Nor would his lay with such entwine.
Fortune and Time have had their course,
 But little recks the mouldering clay;
And passion died within its source,
 Affection sleeps in cold decay!

Let blighted loves and hopes forlorn,
 That shook his soul in days gone by,
Lie prostrate, pallid, and outworn,
 In life unknown, so let them die.
Bright eyes are kindling in their mirth,
 And laughing lips make merry glee,
Sunshine is smiling o'er the earth,
 But this large heart has ceased to be.

His earnest thought was in his fame,
 He heard afar the wafted breath
That whispered of a Poet's name,
 And hung on high the laurel wreath.
Encircled with a glorious light,
 Oh! wherefore should he care to die?
His soul, though shrouded in the night,
 Hath earned its immortality!

LINES WRITTEN ON READING A WORK ENTITLED,

“THE AGE OF PROGRESS.”

YES, 'tis an Age of Progress; and if such
Were said alone of Virtue, it were well.
Evil, too, has its Progress, and if much
Of modern usage may have rung the knell
Of ancient wrong, so likewise hath the clutch
Of Mammon served diviner thoughts to quell,
Talk of the world's millennium! who'd begin it?
There never were so many rogues in it!

Inventions are careering at such speed,
Things getting, as the Yankees say, so tall;
And mechanics of late such power decreed,
That we begin to wonder, wherewithal
Matters are tending,—if there shall be need
Of mankind soon in the wide world at all,
And gravely argue whether it be
Not better managed by machinery.

Somehow the pulses of the human heart

No longer beat and tremble in the breast:

The pocket seems a more congenial part

For mankind's tender sympathies to rest,

And doubtless they have chosen to depart,

And there luxuriate in a golden nest—

Fate dwells in purses, and when they run over,

Poor human nature is indeed in clover.

Oh! are there not more things in heaven and earth

Than linen drabs, rag-stores, and cotton mills?

Mankind are not all hucksters from their birth,

Nor is their creed the faith of money-bills.

Gaze on the eye of childhood in its mirth,

Or dwell beneath the shadow of the hills,

List to the mighty waters as they flow,

Ask thine own heart—that hollow creed forego.

Men cherish hope no longer, and their souls,

Blighted and worn, succumb unto despair,

The lava tide of human anguish rolls—

We live, we move, we breathe—yet know not where

Our Fate will guide us, till the death-bell tolls,
And sweet peace slumbers on the brow of care—
In doubt and anguish, tossing to and fro,
We lapse into the everlasting—*No!*

Shall man for ever journey to the end,
A poor distracted child of doubt and woe,
Nor fathom aught of life, save he must wend
His weary way amid its feverish flow
Of joy, hope, sorrow, love—all things that blend
In his own soul—is this enough to know?
Cleave unto us, old forms and faiths will cry—
Tried, and found wanting, doth my heart reply.

Though human creeds be tottering to their fall,
Why should our souls pursue a doubtful way,
Shall we, like weeds around a ruined wall,
Moulder and share alike the same decay?
Let us have faith in God and disenthral
Our trammelled souls from such a craven sway.
True to thyself, let conscience hold thee clear,
A noble life need brook no bigot's fear!

God's grandest temple is the human soul,
There let us build an altar to His name,
Let Love, and Truth, and Virtue be the goal,
And end of every noble spirit's aim;
Let Time and Fortune through the long years roll
Their weary weight of suffering and shame—
The highest truth is Love: Oh why should we,
Alone on this fair earth, unhappy be?

TO A FRIEND

ON LEAVING HIS NATIVE COUNTRY.

SINCE our young lips could lisp each other's name
We have been friends;—the parting-hour is come.
Now we are on the threshold of the world,
Life is before us, and the drifting winds
Of circumstance may leave us far apart.
It may be we shall never meet again,
And yet how soon we will forget each other;
For, like the changeful seasons of the year,
Man's passions are but shifting moods of thought:
To-day we love, to-morrow we are cold!
New hopes, new friends—it may be other loves—
Will rise around us. Ere we bid farewell,
Should we not pledge at least a passing thought
In the far distant future's memory?

TO THE SKYLARK.

THOU first and sweetest harbinger of dawn,
Whose notes are trembling in the misty light
Of airy realms, I envy not thy home
Amid the sun-beams, not the ecstatic power
Which proudly bears thee on thy lofty path;
No, happy warbler! 'tis thy sinless soul,
Thy matchless melody, thy simple faith,
Thy little trembling, all-adoring heart,—
'Tis that I fain would covet, till like thine
My soul might overflow with music and with love.



ALFRED MAYNARD.

A PASSAGE FROM LIFE.

THE pleasant hours of social intercourse
He little knew, and little cared to know;
His own self-gathered spirit was the source
Of those wild thoughts of beauty which could throw
A fine ideal light around the course
Of his strange life;—he scorned to come and go
A unit in the multitude, but sought
The depths of his own soul; therefore men lov'd him not.

By the sea-shore he loved in solitude
To listen to the wild waves in their play;
To roam the secret caverns of the wood,
All voiceless save unto the roundelay
Of the sweet warbler; where the mountain flood
Awakes the deep-toned echoes,—and decay
Sits on some ancient ruin, where alone
The desolate winds of night make melancholy moan.

His Bible was the universe of love;

 His moral code was in the inward light
Of his own conscience;—thus he held aloof

 From creeds and formulas, and learned to slight
The patchings of coincidental proof.

 His faith was in the triumph of the right;
Deemed Nature's laws more steadfast than the Schools,
And shook his head at pious miracles.

Sage Orthodoxy from her sacred seat

 Beheld him with a dark and sullen eye,—
First counselled, then endeavoured with a threat

 To move the youthful sceptic; his reply
Was couched in pride and scorn; anon the heat
 Of passion rose, and words grew wild and high;

Not without deepest pain he bore it all,
When an untimely death brought peace unto his soul.

Upon a summer evening he set sail

 Alone, as was his wont, awhile to roam
O'er the broad ocean; but a surly gale
 Blew from the west; upon the rising foam

The little bark was tossed, until the frail
 And shattered bulk was hurled unto its doom.
The ship went down into the ocean wave,
And Alfred Maynard met a watery grave.

His corse was found upon the break of day
 All cold and still and lifeless on the shore;
Like one in a deep slumber there he lay,
 Who had not slept for many nights before.
Now unto him all things have passed away,
 And he is gone to the dark evermore.
He sleeps—and if a waking hour there be—
But we must hold,—the rest is mystery.

A CHARACTER.

LET us give Harry Buzzard here a place,
A fat, good-humoured kind of animal,
With features like a burly boniface,
And in his modes and manners somewhat dull.
Indulged by others in a kind of grace,
Grinned at bad jokes, and played the honest fool,
Was disinclined to work, though nowise lazy,
Lived, laughed, and dined—and took things wondrous
easy.

Harry took orders in his after-course,
And jumped into a lucky parsonage:
To all his arguments rhetoric force
Of lung gave fine effect—in pious rage
Denounced this evil world through his discourse,
Yet made the best of it; like an honest sage,
Thought it enough, through threescore years and ten,
To be an orthodox light unto his fellow-men.

TO THE REV. H. W. C. ·

ALONE, amid a multitude, thy voice
Is heard, and not unheeded,—as of old,
The truth hath gathered but a little band—
Yet will an unseen power be at their side,
An unseen hand sustain them in the battle,
An unseen light shine in upon their souls,—
For truth like music hath immortal tones
That roll and vibrate through the unknown for ever!

FRANK ERNEST;

OR, THE MAN UPON TOWN.

I HAD a friend,—Frank Ernest, was he hight,
Whose mind was fashioned in no common mould,—
A wild impulsive soul, whose fitful light
Flashed in a keen dark eye, that as it rolled
Glowed like a flame—yet in its happiest flight
Of mirthful wit and humours manifold,
Could but the laughter of an hour engage
Such wit as might have shone on an immortal page.

Fashion had whispered in that witching tone,
Which snares the young heart from its earnest
thought,
Ah! could his generous spirit but have known,
The tinsel triumph would be dearly bought;
But he was doomed to reap as he had sown,
And share, alas! the inevitable lot.
He cast away his hopes of fair renown
To be a famous wit upon the town.

Let us survey the last sad scene that brought
 Unto a close his earthly pilgrimage.
In a low lodging he had cast his lot,
 And there the curtain dropped upon the stage
Of all his lofty purpose,—now he sought,
 Beneath another name, the harbourage,
Far from all friends, of mean obscurity,
And nothing now was left him but to die.

What had been once a strong and powerful frame
 Was now laid prostrate by a slow disease;
Life's lamp was flickering with a feeble flame,
 The bitter cup was drunk unto the lees.
They spake to him of death, and he became
 Maddened with grief, then calmed by slow degrees;
Then in wild frenzy bursting forth again—
One would have longed for death to ease him of his pain.

“Death, death!” he cried; “I dare not, cannot die;
 My soul is darker than the midnight hour.”
(A pious minister of God stood by,
 And gently whispered of a higher Power.)

“Away, away, it is a mockery;

My heart is worn and withered at the core;
What are your schemes of penitence to me?—
As life hath been, eternity shall be!

“Oh God! before me, like a shadowy gloom,

Where spectre blasts make low and sullen moan,
Lies far away,—ay, would it were the tomb;

But, no,—the dread and fathomless unknown.

Oh! were I portioned to no blacker doom

Than my own memory, 'twould well atone;
Yet one thought brings sweet peace unto my soul—
The God who made me will be merciful.

“Within this bosom burns a fiercer hell

Than entered e'er into a bigot's dream—
A deeper anguish than my lips can tell.

Oh, for another life! I would redeem—
But it is all in vain; farewell, farewell!”

Then all was over, and the fiery gleam
That flashed in frenzy from that dark bright eye,
Was fixed in cold and callous vacancy.

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