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A book of poems

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[i]

**CAPTAIN CRAIG**

A Book of Poems

BY

Edwin Arlington Robinson

SECOND EDITION.

Boston and New York

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY

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[1]

**CAPTAIN CRAIG**

I

I doubt if ten men in all Tilbury Town  
Had ever shaken hands with Captain Craig,  
Or called him by his name, or looked at him  
So curiously, or so concernedly,  
As they had looked at ashes; but a few—  
Say five or six of us—had found somehow  
The spark in him, and we had fanned it there,  
Choked under, like a jest in Holy Writ,  
By Tilbury prudence. He had lived his life,  
And he had shared, with all of humankind,  
Inveterate leave to fashion of himself,  
By some resplendent metamorphosis,  
Whatever he was not. And after time,  
When it had come sufficiently to pass  
That he was going patch-clad through the streets,  
Weak, dizzy, chilled, and half starved, he had laid  
Some nerveless fingers on a prudent sleeve  
And told the sleeve, in furtive confidence,

[2]

Just how it was: "My name is Captain Craig,"  
He said, "and I must eat." The sleeve moved on,  
And after it moved others—one or two;  
For Captain Craig, before the day was done,

Got back to the scant refuge of his bed  
And shivered into it without a curse—  
Without a murmur even. He was cold,  
And old, and hungry; but the worst of it  
Was a forlorn familiar consciousness  
That he had failed again. There was a time  
When he had fancied, if worst came to worst,  
And he could work no more, that he might beg  
Nor be the less for it; but when it came  
To practice he found out that he had not  
The genius. It was that, and that was all:  
Experience had made him to detect  
The blunder for his own, like all the rest  
Of him. There were no other men to blame.  
He was himself, and he had lost the speed  
He started with, and he was left behind.  
There was no mystery, no tragedy;  
And if they found him lying on his back  
Stone dead there some sharp morning, as they might,—  
Well, once upon a time there was a man—  
*Es war einmal ein König*, if it pleased him.

[3]

And he was right: there were no men to blame:  
There was just a false note in the Tilbury tune—  
A note that able-bodied men might sound  
Hosannas on while Captain Craig lay quiet.

They might have made him sing by feeding him  
Till he should work again, but probably  
Such yielding would have jeopardized the rhythm;  
They found it more melodious to shout  
Right on, with unmolested adoration,  
To keep the tune as it had always been,  
To trust in God, and let the Captain starve.  
  
He must have understood that afterwards—  
When we had laid some fuel to the spark  
Of him, and oxidized it—for he laughed  
Out loud and long at us to feel it burn,  
And then, for gratitude, made game of us:  
“You are the resurrection and the life,”  
He said, “and I the hymn the Brahmin sings;  
O Fuscus! and we’ll go no more a-roving.”  
  
We were not quite accoutred for a blast  
Of any lettered nonchalance like that,  
And some of us—the five or six of us  
Who found him out—were singularly struck.

[4]

But soon there came assurance of his lips,  
Like phrases out of some sweet instrument  
Man’s hand had never fitted, that he felt  
“No penitential shame for what had come,  
No virtuous regret for what had been,—  
But rather a joy to find it in his life

To be an outcast usher of the soul  
For such as had good courage of the Sun  
To pattern Love." The Captain had one chair;  
And on the bottom of it, like a king,  
For longer time than I dare chronicle,  
Sat with an ancient ease and eulogized  
His opportunity. My friends got out,  
Like brokers out of Arcady; but I—  
May be for fascination of the thing,  
Or may be for the larger humor of it—  
Stayed listening, unwearied and unstung.  
When they were gone the Captain's tuneful ooze  
Of rhetoric took on a change; he smiled  
At me and then continued, earnestly:  
"Your friends have had enough of it; but you,  
For a motive hardly vindicated yet  
By prudence or by conscience, have remained;  
And that is very good, for I have things  
To tell you: things that are not words alone  
Which are the ghosts of things—but something firmer.

[5]

"First, would I have you know, for every gift  
Or sacrifice, there are—or there may be—  
Two kinds of gratitude: the sudden kind  
We feel for what we take, the slower kind  
We feel for what we give. Once we have learned

As much as this, we know the truth has been  
Told over to the world a thousand times;—  
But we have had no ears to listen yet  
For more than fragments of it: we have heard  
A murmur now and then, an echo here  
And there, and we have made great music of it;  
And we have made innumerable books  
To please the Unknown God. Time throws away  
Dead thousands of them, but the God that knows  
No death denies not one: the books all count,  
The songs all count; and yet God's music has  
No modes, his language has no adjectives.”  
“You may be right, you may be wrong,” said I;  
“But what has all of this that you say now—  
This nineteenth-century Nirvana-talk—  
To do with you and me?” The Captain raised  
His hand and held it westward, where a patched  
And unwashed attic-window filtered in

[6]

What barren light could reach us, and then said,  
With a suave, complacent resonance: “There shines  
The sun. Behold it. We go round and round,  
And wisdom comes to us with every whirl  
We count throughout the circuit. We may say  
The child is born, the boy becomes a man,  
The man does this and that, and the man goes,—

But having said it we have not said much,  
Not very much. Do I fancy, or you think,  
That it will be the end of anything  
When I am gone? There was a soldier once  
Who fought one fight and in that fight fell dead.  
Sad friends went after, and they brought him home  
And had a brass band at his funeral,  
As you should have at mine; and after that  
A few remembered him. But he was dead,  
They said, and they should have their friend no more.—  
However, there was once a starveling child—  
A ragged-vested little incubus,  
Born to be cuffed and frightened out of all  
Capacity for childhood's happiness—  
Who started out one day, quite suddenly,  
To drown himself. He ran away from home,  
Across the clover-fields and through the woods,  
[7]  
And waited on the rock above the stream,  
Just like a kingfisher. He might have dived,  
Or jumped, or he might not; but anyhow,  
There came along a man who looked at him  
With such an unexpected friendliness,  
And talked with him in such a common way,  
That life grew marvelously different:  
What he had lately known for sullen trunks

And branches, and a world of tedious leaves,  
Was all transmuted; a faint forest wind  
That once had made the loneliest of all  
Sad sounds on earth, made now the rarest music;  
And the water that had called him once to death  
Now seemed a flowing glory. And that man,  
Born to go down a soldier, did this thing.—  
Not much to do? Not very much, I grant you:  
Good occupation for a sonneteer,  
Or for a clown, or for a clergyman,  
But small work for a soldier. By the way,  
When you are weary sometimes of your own  
Utility, I wonder if you find  
Occasional great comfort pondering  
What power a man has in him to put forth?  
'Of all the many marvelous things that are,  
Nothing is there more marvelous than man,'  
Said Sophocles; and he lived long ago;  
'And earth, unending ancient of the gods

[8]

He furrows; and the ploughs go back and forth,  
Turning the broken mould, year after year'...  
"I turned a little furrow of my own  
Once on a time, and everybody laughed—  
As I laughed afterwards; and I doubt not  
The First Intelligence, which we have drawn

In our competitive humility  
As if it went forever on two legs,  
Had some diversion of it: I believe  
God's humor is the music of the spheres—  
But even as we draft omnipotence  
Itself to our own image, we pervert  
The courage of an infinite ideal  
To finite resignation. You have made  
The cement of your churches out of tears  
And ashes, and the fabric will not stand:  
The shifted walls that you have coaxed and shored  
So long with unavailing compromise  
Will crumble down to dust and blow away,  
And younger dust will follow after them;  
Though not the faintest or the farthest whirled  
First atom of the least that ever flew  
Shall be by man defrauded of the touch  
God thrilled it with to make a dream for man  
When Science was unborn. And after time,  
[9]  
When we have earned our spiritual ears,  
And art's commiseration of the truth  
No longer glorifies the singing beast,  
Or venerates the clinquant charlatan,—  
Then shall at last come ringing through the sun,  
Through time, through flesh, God's music of the soul.

For wisdom is that music, and all joy  
That wisdom:—you may counterfeit, you think,  
The burden of it in a thousand ways;  
But as the bitterness that loads your tears  
Makes Dead Sea swimming easy, so the gloom,  
The penance, and the woeful pride you keep,  
Make bitterness your buoyance of the world.  
  
And at the fairest and the frenziedest  
Alike of your God-fearing festivals,  
You so compound the truth to pamper fear  
That in the doubtful surfeit of your faith  
You clamor for the food that shadows eat.  
  
You call it rapture or deliverance,—  
Passion or exaltation, or what most  
The moment needs, but your faint-heartedness  
Lives in it yet: you quiver and you clutch  
For something larger, something unfulfilled,  
Some wiser kind of joy that you shall have  
Never, until you learn to laugh with God."

[10]

And with a calm Socratic patronage,  
At once half sombre and half humorous,  
The Captain reverently twirled his thumbs  
And fixed his eyes on something far away;  
Then, with a gradual gaze, conclusive, shrewd,  
And at the moment unendurable

For sheer beneficence, he looked at me.—  
“But the brass band?” I said, not quite at ease  
With altruism yet.—He made a kind  
Of reminiscent little inward noise,  
Midway between a chuckle and a laugh,  
And that was all his answer: not a word  
Of explanation or suggestion came  
From those tight-smiling lips. And when I left,  
I wondered, as I trod the creaking snow  
And had the world-wide air to breathe again,—  
Though I had seen the tremor of his mouth  
And honored the endurance of his hand—  
Whether or not, securely closeted  
Up there in the stived haven of his den,  
The man sat laughing at me; and I felt  
My teeth grind hard together with a quaint  
Revulsion—as I think back on it now—  
Not only for my Captain, but as well  
For every smug-faced failure on God’s earth—  
Albeit I could swear, at the same time,  
That there were tears in the old fellow’s eyes.

[11]

I question if in tremors or in tears  
There be more guidance to man’s worthiness  
Than—well, say in his prayers. But oftentimes  
It humors us to think that we possess

By some divine adjustment of our own  
Particular shrewd cells, or something else,  
What others, for untutored sympathy,  
Go spirit-fishing more than half their lives  
To catch—like cheerful sinners to catch faith;  
And I have not a doubt but I assumed  
Some egotistic attribute like this  
When, cautiously, next morning I reduced  
The fretful qualms of my novitiate,  
For most part, to an undigested pride.  
Only, I live convinced that I regret  
This enterprise no more than I regret  
My life; and I am glad that I was born.  
That evening, at "The Chrysalis," I found  
The faces of my comrades all suffused  
With what I chose then to denominate  
Superfluous good feeling. In return,  
They loaded me with titles of odd form  
And unexemplified significance,  
Like "Bellows-mender to Prince Æolus,"  
"Pipe-filler to the Hoboscholiast,"  
"Bread-fruit for the Non-Doing," with one more

[12]

That I remember, and a dozen more  
That I forgot. I may have been disturbed,  
I do not say that I was not annoyed,

But something of the same serenity  
That fortified me later made me feel  
For their skin-pricking arrows not so much  
Of pain as of a vigorous defect  
In this world's archery. I might have tried,  
With a flat facetiousness, to demonstrate  
What they had only snapped at and thereby  
Made out of my best evidence no more  
Than comfortable food for their conceit;  
But patient wisdom frowned on argument,  
With a side nod for silence, and I smoked  
A series of incurable dry pipes  
While Morgan fiddled, with obnoxious care,  
Some things that I detested.—Killigrew,  
Drowsed with a fond abstraction, like an ass,  
Lay blinking at me while he grinned and made  
Remarks. The learned Plunket made remarks.  
It may have been for smoke that I cursed cats  
That night, but I have rather to believe  
As I lay turning, twisting, listening,  
And wondering, between great sleepless yawns,  
What possible satisfaction those dead leaves  
Could find in sending shadows to my room

[13]

And swinging them like black rags on a line,  
That I, with a forlorn clear-headedness

Was ekeing out probation. I had sinned  
In fearing to believe what I believed,  
And I was paying for it.—Whimsical,  
You think,—factitious; but “there is no luck,  
No fate, no fortune for us, but the old  
Unswerving and inviolable price  
Gets paid: God sells himself eternally,  
But never gives a crust,” my friend had said;  
And while I watched those leaves, and heard those cats,  
And with half mad minuteness analyzed  
The Captain’s attitude and then my own,  
I felt at length as one who throws himself  
Down restless on a couch when clouds are dark,  
And shuts his eyes to find, when he wakes up  
And opens them again, what seems at first  
An unfamiliar sunlight in his room  
And in his life—as if the child in him  
Had laughed and let him see; and then I knew  
Some prowling superfluity of child  
In me had found the child in Captain Craig  
And had the sunlight reach him. While I slept,  
That thought reshaped itself to friendly dreams,  
And in the morning it was with me still.

[14]

Through March and shifting April to the time  
When winter first becomes a memory

My friend the Captain—to my other friend's  
Incredulous regret that such as he  
Should ever get the talons of his talk  
So fixed in my unfledged credulity—  
Kept up the peroration of his life,  
Not yielding at a threshold, nor, I think,  
Too often on the stairs. He made me laugh  
Sometimes, and then again he made me weep  
Almost; for I had insufficiency  
Enough in me to make me know the truth  
Within the jest, and I could feel it there  
As well as if it were the folded note  
I felt between my fingers. I had said  
Before that I should have to go away  
And leave him for the season; and his eyes  
Had shone with well-becoming interest  
At that intelligence. There was no mist  
In them that I remember; but I marked  
An unmistakable self-questioning  
And a reticence of unassumed regret.  
The two together made anxiety—  
Not selfishness, I ventured. I should see  
No more of him for six or seven months,  
And I was there to tell him as I might  
What humorous provision we had made

For keeping him locked up in Tilbury Town.  
That finished—with a few more commonplace  
Prosaics on the certified event  
Of my return to find him young again—  
I left him neither vexed, I thought, with us,  
Nor very much at odds with destiny.  
At any rate, save always for a look  
That I had seen too often to mistake  
Or to forget, he gave no other sign.  
When I was in the street I heard him shout  
Some anxious Latin down; but a slow load  
Of trailing rails absorbed it, and I lost  
Whatever of good counsel or farewell  
It may have had for me. I turned about  
And having waved a somewhat indistinct  
Acknowledgment, I walked along. The train  
Was late and I was early, but the gap  
Was filled and even crowded. Killigrew  
Had left his pigeonholes to say good-by,  
And he stood waiting by the ticket window  
Like one grin-cursed of Orcus.—“You have heard?”  
Said he.—“Heard what?” said I.—“He! he!” said he;  
“Then your gray-headed beneficiary—  
Your paragon of abstract usefulness—  
[16]  
Your philhellenic proletariat—

He! he!"—"But what the devil is it all  
About?" said I. "What has he done? What ails him?"—  
"What has he done? Ye gods! What has he done?  
Man, he's a tramp—a Waggles—a dead beat!  
I have a friend who knew him fifteen years  
Ago, and I have his assurance now  
That your sequestered parasite achieved  
The same discreet collapse, at intervals,  
Then as when first you found him. And you ask  
What he has done! Go find a looking-glass  
And you may see some recent work of his—  
The most remunerative, and I think  
The most unconscious."  
With another man  
I might have made of that last adjective  
A stimulating text; but Killigrew  
Was not the one for me to stimulate  
In five defective minutes, and I knew it.  
So I offer no defense for keeping still  
While he gave birth to phrases for my sake,  
Nor more for staring at the changeless curve  
Where river and railroad vanished, half a mile  
Beyond us to the north. I gave him leave  
To talk as long as he had words in him,  
[17]  
And watched the track and waited for the train;

And I remember, when the brakes had ceased  
Their welcome wheezing and the place was filled  
With yells and shadows and official smash,  
How he ground my patient fingers and said, "Well,  
Good-by, old man!—good-by! And don't forget:  
Patrician, but all Waggles to the grave."  
The grin became a smile soon after that,  
And I knew that he had let the Captain go;  
And I could read, where once the jest had been,  
The spirit of the friend who cared the most.  
The train began to move; and as it moved,  
I felt a comfortable sudden change  
All over and inside. Partly it seemed  
As if the strings of me had all at once  
Gone down a tone or two; and even though  
It made me scowl to think so trivial  
A touch had owned the strength to tighten them,  
It made me laugh to think that I was free.  
But free from what—when I began to turn  
The question round—was more than I could say:  
I was no longer vexed with Killigrew,  
Nor more was I possessed with Captain Craig;

[18]

But I was eased of some restraint, I thought,  
Not qualified by those amenities,  
And I should have to search the matter down;

For I was young, and I was very keen.  
So I began to smoke a bad cigar  
That Plunket, in his love, had given me  
The night before; and as I smoked I watched  
The flying mirrors for a mile or so,  
Till to the changing glimpse, now sharp, now faint,  
They gave me of the woodland over west,  
A gleam of long-forgotten strenuous years  
Came back, when we were Red Men on the trail,  
With Morgan for the big chief Wocky-Bocky;  
But I soon yawned out of that and set myself  
To face again the loud monotonous ride  
That lay before me like a vista drawn  
Of bag-racks to the fabled end of things.

II

Yet that ride had an end, as all rides have;  
And the days that followed after took the road  
That all days take,—though never one of them  
Went by but I got some good thought of it  
For Captain Craig. Not that I pitied him,  
Or nursed a mordant hunger for his presence;

[19]

But what I thought (what Killigrew still thinks)  
An irremediable cheerfulness  
Was in him and about the name of him,  
And I fancy that it may be most of all

For the jokes he made that I have saved his letters.

I like to think of him, and how he looked—

Or should have looked—in his renewed estate,

Composing them. They may be dreariness

Unspeakable to you that never saw

The Captain; but to five or six of us

Who knew him they are not so bad as that.

It may be we have smiled not always where

The text itself would seem to indicate

Responsive titillation on our part,—

Yet having smiled at all we have done well,

For we know that we have touched the ghost of him.

He tells me that he thinks of nothing now

That he would rather do than be himself,

Wisely alive. So let us heed this man:—

“The world that has been old is young again,

The touch that faltered clings; and this is May.

So think of your decrepit pensioner

As one who cherishes the living light,

Forgetful of dead shadows. He may gloat,

And he may not have power in his arms

[20]

To make the young world move; but he has eyes

And ears, and he can read the sun. Therefore

Think first of him as one who vegetates

In tune with all the children who laugh best

And longest through the sunshine, though far off  
Their laughter, and unheard; for 'tis the child,  
O friend, that with his laugh redeems the man.  
  
Time steals the infant, but the child he leaves;  
  
And we, we fighters over of old wars—  
  
We men, we shearers of the Golden Fleece—  
  
Were brutes without him,—brutes to tear the scars  
Of one another's wounds and weep in them,  
And then cry out on God that he should flaunt  
For life such anguish and flesh-wretchedness.  
  
But let the brute go roaring his own way:  
  
We do not need him, and he loves us not.  
  
Let music be for us the forward song,  
  
And let us give the good world one more chance.  
  
"I cannot think of anything to-day  
That I would rather do than be myself,  
Primevally alive, and have the sun  
Shine into me; for on a day like this,  
When the chaff-parts of a man's adversities  
Are blown by quick spring breezes out of him—  
When even a flicker of wind that wakes no more  
[21]  
Than a tuft of grass, or a few young yellow leaves,  
Comes like the falling of a prophet's breath  
On altar-flames rekindled of crushed embers,—  
Then do I feel, now do I feel, within me

No dreariness, no grief, no discontent,  
No twinge of human envy. But I beg  
That you forego credentials of the past  
For these illuminations of the present,  
Or better still, to give the shadow justice,  
You let me tell you something: I have yearned  
In many another season for these days,  
And having them with God's own pageantry  
To make me glad for them,—yes, I have cursed  
The sunlight and the breezes and the leaves  
To think of men on stretchers and on beds,  
Or on foul floors, like starved outrageous lizards,  
Made human with paralysis and rags;  
Or of some poor devil on a battle-field,  
Left undiscovered and without the strength  
To drag a maggot from his clotted mouth;  
Or of women working where a man would fall—  
Flat-breasted miracles of cheerfulness  
Made neuter by the work that no man counts  
Until it waits undone; children thrown out  
To feed their veins and souls with offal.... Yes,

[22]

I have had half a mind to blow my brains out  
Sometimes; and I have gone from door to door,  
Ragged myself, trying to do something—  
Crazy, I hope.—But what has this to do

With Spring? Because one half of humankind  
Lives here in hell, shall not the other half  
Do any more than just for conscience' sake  
Be miserable? Is this the way for us  
To lead these creatures up to find the light,  
Or the way to be drawn down to find the dark  
Again? What is it? What does the child say?  
"But let us not make riot for the child  
Untaught, nor let us hold that we may read  
The sun but through the shadows; nor, again,  
Be we forgetful ever that we keep  
The shadows on their side. For evidence,  
I might go back a little to the days  
When I had hounds and credit, and grave friends  
To borrow my books and set wet glasses on them,  
And other friends of all sorts, grave and gay,  
Of whom one woman and one man stand out  
From all the rest, this morning. The man said  
One day, as we were riding, 'Now, you see,  
There goes a woman cursed with happiness:  
Beauty and wealth, health, horses,—everything  
[23]  
That she could ask, or we could ask, is hers,  
Except an inward eye for the plain fact  
Of what this damned world is. The cleverness  
God gave her—or the devil—cautions her

That she must keep the china cup of life  
Filled somehow, and she fills it—runs it over—  
Claps her white hands while some one does the sopping  
With fingers made, she thinks, for just that purpose,  
Giggles and eats and reads and goes to church,  
Makes pretty little penitential prayers,  
And has an eighteen-carat crucifix  
Wrapped up in chamois-skin. She gives enough,  
You say; but what is giving like hers worth?  
What is a gift without the soul to guide it?  
“Poor dears, and they have cancers?—Oh!” she says;  
And away she works at that new altar-cloth  
For the Reverend Hieronymus Mackintosh—  
Third person, Jerry. “Jerry,” she says, “can say  
Such lovely things, and make life seem so sweet!”  
Jerry can drink, also.—And there she goes,  
Like a whirlwind through an orchard in the springtime—  
Throwing herself away as if she thought

[24]

The world and the whole planetary circus  
Were a flourish of apple-blossoms. Look at her!  
Lilies and roses! Butterflies! Great Scott!  
And here is this infernal world of ours—  
And hers, if only she might find it out—  
Starving and shrieking, sickening, suppurating,  
Whirling to God knows where.... But look at her!

Confucius, how she rides! And by Saint Satan,  
She's galloping over to talk with us, woman and horse  
All ours! But look—just look at her!—By Jove!"...  
"And after that it came about somehow,  
Almost as if the Fates were killing time,  
That she, the spendthrift of a thousand joys,  
Rode in her turn with me, and in her turn  
Made observations: 'Now there goes a man,'  
She said, 'who feeds his very soul on poison:  
No matter what he does, or where he looks,  
He finds unhappiness; or, if he fails  
To find it, he creates it, and then hugs it:  
Pygmalion again for all the world—  
Pygmalion gone wrong. You know I think  
If when that precious animal was young,  
His mother, or some watchful aunt of his,  
[25]  
Had spanked him with *Pendennis* and *Don Juan*,  
And given him the *Lady of the Lake*,  
Or *Cord and Creese*, or almost anything,  
There might have been a tonic for him? Listen:  
When he was possibly nineteen years old  
He came to me and said, "I understand  
You are in love"—yes, that is what he said,—  
"But never mind, it won't last very long;  
It never does; we all get over it.

We have this clinging nature, for you see  
The Great Bear shook himself once on a time  
And the world is one of many that let go."  
But I let the creature live, and there you see him;  
And he would have this life no fairer thing  
Than a certain time for numerous marionettes  
To do the Dance of Death. Give him a rose,  
And he will tell you it is very sweet,  
But only for a day. Most wonderful!  
Show him a child, or anything that laughs,  
And he begins at once to crunch his wormwood  
And then runs on with his "realities."  
What does he know about realities,  
Who sees the truth of things almost as well  
As Nero saw the Northern Lights? Good gracious!

[26]

Can't you do something with him? Call him something—  
Call him a type, and that will make him cry:  
One of those not at all unusual,  
Prophetic, would-be-Delphic manger-snappers  
That always get replaced when they are gone;  
Or one of those impenetrable men,  
Who seem to carry branded on their foreheads,  
"We are abstruse, but not quite so abstruse  
As we think the Lord intended we should be;"  
One of those men who never quite confess

That Washington was great;—the kind of man  
That everybody knows and always will,—  
Shrewd, critical, facetious, insincere,  
And for the most part harmless, I'm afraid.

But even then, I truly think you ought  
To tell him something.'—And I said I would.

"So in one afternoon you see we have  
The child in absence—or, to say the least,  
In ominous defect,—and in excess  
Commensurate, likewise. Now the question is,

Not which was right and which was wrong, for each,  
By virtue of one-sidedness, was both;

But rather—to my mind, as heretofore—

[27]

Is it better to be blinded by the lights,  
Or by the shadows? By the lights, you say?  
The shadows are all devils, and the lights  
Gleam guiding and eternal? Very good;  
But while you say so do not quite forget  
That sunshine has a devil of its own,  
And one that we, for the great craft of him,  
But vaguely recognize. The marvel is  
That this persuasive and especial devil,  
By grace of his extreme transparency,  
Precludes all common vision of him; yet  
There is one way to glimpse him and a way,

As I believe, to test him,—granted once  
That we have ousted prejudice, which means  
That we have made magnanimous advance  
Through self-acquaintance. Not an easy thing  
For some of us; impossible, may be,  
For all of us: the woman and the man  
I cited, for example, would have wrought  
The most intractable conglomerate  
Of everything, if they had set themselves  
To analyze themselves and not each other;  
If only for the sake of self-respect,  
They would have come to no place but the same  
Wherfrom they started; one would have lived awhile  
In paradise without defending it,  
[28]  
And one in hell without enjoying it;  
And each had been dissuaded neither more  
Nor less thereafter. There are such on earth  
As might have been composed primarily  
For object-lessons: he was one of them,  
And she—the devil makes us hesitate:  
'Tis easy to read words writ well with ink  
That makes a good black mark on smooth white paper;  
But words are done sometimes with other ink  
Whereof the smooth white paper gives no sign  
Till science brings it out; and here we come

To knowledge, and the way to test a devil.  
"To the greater number of us, you contend,  
This demon of the sunlight is a stranger;  
But if you break the sunlight of yourself,  
Project it, and observe the quaint shades of it,  
I have a shrewd suspicion you may find  
That even as a name lives unrevealed  
In ink that waits an agent, so it is  
The devil—or this devil—hides himself  
To all the diagnoses we have made  
Save one,—sincerity. The quest is hard—  
As hard as truth; but once we seem to know  
That his compound obsequiousness prevails  
Unferreted within us, we may find  
[29]  
That sympathy, which aureoles itself  
To superfluity from you and me,  
May stand against the soul for five or six  
Persistent and indubitable streaks  
Of irritating brilliance, out of which  
A man may read, if he have knowledge in him,  
Proportionate attest of ignorance,  
Hypocrisy, good-heartedness, conceit,  
Indifference,—with all of these out-hued  
By the spiritual inactivity  
Which more than often is identified

With individual intensity,  
And is the parent of that selfishness  
Whereof no end of lesser *tions* and *isms*  
Are querulously born. But there are things  
To be considered here, or your machine  
May never justify the purchase of it;  
For if you fail to gauge the difference  
Between self-sacrifice and self-contempt,  
Your light will be all devil and your faith  
Diseased,—whatever courage you have left:  
Courage is not enough to make men glad  
For laughter when that laughter is itself  
The tribute of recriminating groans;  
Nor are the shapes of obsolescent creeds  
Much longer to flit near enough to make  
Men glad for living in a world like this;  
[30]  
But wisdom, courage, knowledge, and the faith  
Which has the soul and is the soul of reason—  
These are the world's achievers. And the child—  
The child that is the saviour of all ages,  
The prophet and the poet, the crown-bearer,  
Must yet with Love's unhonored fortitude,  
Survive to cherish and attain for us  
The candor and the generosity,  
By leave of which we smile if we bring back

Some first ideal flash that wakened us  
When wisdom like a shaft of dungeon-light  
Came searching down to find us.

"Halfway back  
I made a mild allusion to the Fates,  
Not knowing then that ever I should have  
Dream-visions of them, painted on the air,—  
Clotho, Lachesis, Atropos. Faint-hued  
They seem, but with a faintness never fading,  
Unblurred by gloom, unshattered by the sun,  
Still with eternal color, colorless,  
They move and they remain. The while I write  
These very words I see them,—Atropos,  
Lachesis, Clotho; and the last is laughing:  
When Clotho laughs, Atropos rattles her shears;  
But Clotho keeps on laughing just the same.

Some time when I have dreamed that Atropos

[31]

Has laughed, I'll tell you how the colors change—  
The colors that are changeless, colorless."

---

I fear I may have answered Captain Craig's  
Epistle Number One with what he chose,  
Good-humoredly but anxiously, to take  
For something that was not all reverence;  
From the tone of Number Two it seemed almost

As if the flanges of the old man's faith  
Had slipped the treacherous rails of my allegiance  
And left him by the roadside, humorously  
Upset, with nothing more convivial  
To do than be facetious and austere:—  
“If you did not like *Don César de Bazan*  
There must be some imperfection in your vitals.  
Flamboyant and old-fashioned? Overdone?  
Romantico-robustious?—Dear young man,  
There are fifteen thousand ways to be one-sided,  
And I have indicated two of them  
Already. Now you bait me with a third—  
As if it were a spider with nine legs;  
But what it is that you would have me do,  
What fatherly wrath you most anticipate,  
I lack the needed impulse to discern.

[32]

If you did not like *Don César de Bazan*,  
However, there are comedies in reach  
That have the fashion always. For example:—  
“At the time when there was not enough of laurel  
On Parnassus to feed quite the Boston market,  
An admirable poet undertook  
With earnest fingers to graft asphodels  
And old world cypress-plumes on apple-boughs;  
And at the end of his experiments,

Like Johann Kepler, he brought forth a book.  
The book was not sublime, but from its hard  
And uncommutative perversity  
Of words there came, like jewels out of sand,  
Six measured songs too beautiful to die.  
So I take that self-repudiating name  
'Perversity' and throw it like a spleen  
To the last and farthest of Thalia's kennels—  
Though I who shape no songs of any sort,  
I who have made no music, thrilled no canvas,—  
I who have added nothing to the world  
The world would reckon save long-squandered wit—  
Might with half-pardonable reverence  
Beguile my faith, maybe, to the forlorn  
Extent of some sequestered murmuring

[33]

Anent the vanities. No doubt I should,  
If mine were the one life that I have lived;  
But with a few good glimpses I have had  
Of heaven through the little holes in hell,  
I do not any longer feel myself  
To be ordained or even qualified  
For criticising God to my advantage.  
If you doubt the true humility of this,  
You doubt the spectrum; and if you doubt that,  
You cannot understand what price it was

The poet paid, at one time and another,  
For those indemnifying sonnet-songs  
That are to be the kernel in what lives  
To shrine him when the new-born men come singing.

“Nor can you understand what I have read  
From even the squeezed items of account  
Which I have to my credit in that book  
Whereof the leaves are ages and the text  
Eternity. What do I care to-day  
For the pages that have nothing? I have lived,  
And I have died, and I have lived again;  
And I am very comfortable. Yes,  
Though I look back through barren years enough  
To make me seem—as I transmute myself  
In a downward retrospect from what I am—

[34]

As unproductive and as unconvinced  
Of the living bread and the soul’s eternal draught  
As a frog on a Passover-cake in a streamless desert,—  
Still do I trust the light that I have earned,  
And having earned, received. You shake your head,  
But I do not know that you will shake it off.

“Meanwhile I have the flowers and the grass,  
My brothers here the trees, and all July  
To make me joyous. Why do you shake your head?  
Why do you laugh?—because you are so young?

Do you think if you laugh hard enough the truth  
Will go to sleep? Do you think of any couch  
Made soft enough to put the truth to sleep?  
Do you think there are no proper comedies  
But yours that have the fashion? For example,  
Do you think that I forget, or shall forget,  
One friendless, fat, fantastic nondescript  
Who knew the ways of laughter on low roads,—  
A vagabond, a drunkard, and a sponge,  
But always a free creature with a soul?  
For a compliment to your intelligence  
I bring him back, though not without misgivings,  
And I caution you to damn him sparingly.

[35]

“Count Pretzel von Würzburger, the Obscene  
(The beggar may have had another name,  
But no man to my knowledge ever knew it)  
Was a poet and a skeptic and a critic,  
And in his own mad manner a musician:  
He had found an old piano in a bar-room,  
And it was his career—three nights a week,  
From ten o’clock till twelve—to make it rattle;  
And then, when I was just far down enough  
To sit and watch him with his long straight hair,  
And pity him, and think he looked like Liszt,  
I might have glorified a musical

Steam-engine, or a xylophone. The Count  
Played half of everything and 'improvised'  
The rest: he told me once that he was born  
With a genius in him that 'prohibited  
Complete fidelity,' and that his art  
'Confessed vagaries,' therefore. But I made  
Kind reckoning of his vagaries then:  
I had the whole great pathos of the man  
To purify me, and all sorts of music  
To give me spiritual nourishment  
And cerebral athletics; for the Count  
Played indiscriminately—with an *s*,  
And with incurable presto—cradle-songs  
And carnivals, spring-songs and funeral marches,  
[36]  
The Marseillaise and Schubert's Serenade—  
And always in a way to make me think  
Procrustes had the germ of music in him.  
And when this interesting reprobate  
Began to talk—then there were more vagaries:  
He made a reeking fetich of all filth,  
Apparently; but there was yet revealed  
About him, through his words and on his flesh,  
That ostracizing nimbus of a soul's  
Abject, apologetic purity—

That phosphorescence of sincerity—  
Which indicates the curse and the salvation  
Of a life wherein starved art may never perish.

“One evening I remember clearliest  
Of all that I passed with him. Having wrought,  
With his nerve-ploughing ingenuity,  
The *Träumerei* into a Titan’s nightmare,  
The man sat down across the table from me  
And all at once was ominously decent.

““The more we measure what is ours to use,””  
He said then, wiping his froth-plastered mouth  
With the inside of his hand, ““the less we groan  
For what the gods refuse.” I’ve had that sleeved  
A decade for you. Now but one more stein,  
And I shall be prevailed upon to read

The only sonnet I have ever made;

[37]

And after that, if you propitiate  
Gambrinus, I shall play you that Andante  
As the world has never heard it played before.’  
So saying, he produced a piece of paper,  
Unfolded it, and read, ‘Sonnet Unique

De Pretzel von Würzburger, dit L’Obscéne:—

““Carmichael had a kind of joke-disease,  
And he had queer things fastened on his wall.  
*There are three green china frogs that I recall*

*More potently than anything, for these  
Three frogs have demonstrated, by degrees,  
What curse was on the man to make him fall:  
“They are not ordinary frogs at all,  
They are the Frogs of Aristophanes.”  
“God! how he laughed whenever he said that;  
And how we caught from one another’s eyes  
The flash of what a tongue could never tell!  
We always laughed at him, no matter what  
The joke was worth. But when a man’s brain dies,  
We are not always glad.... Poor Carmichael!”  
“I am a sowbug and a necrophile,’  
Said Pretzel, ‘and the gods are growing old;  
The stars are singing *Golden hair to gray*,  
[38]  
*Green leaf to yellow leaf,—or chlorophyll*  
To xanthophyll, to be more scientific,—  
So speed me one more stein. You may believe  
That I’m a mendicant, but I am not:  
For though it look to you that I go begging,  
The truth is I go giving—giving all  
My strength and all my personality,  
My wisdom and experience—myself,  
To make it final—for your preservation;  
Though I be not the one thing or the other,  
Though I strike between the sunset and the dawn,*

Though I be cliff-rubbed wreckage on the shoals  
Of Circumstance,—doubt not that I comprise,  
With all of my disintegrated zeal,  
Far more than my appearance. Here he comes;  
Now drink to good old Pretzel! Drink down Pretzel!  
*Quousque tandem*, Pretzel, and O Lord,  
How long! But let regret go hang: the good  
Die first, and of the poor did many cease  
To be. Beethoven after Wordsworth. *Prosit!*  
There were geniuses among the trilobites,  
And I suspect that I was one of them.'  
"How much of him was earnest and how much  
Fantastic, I know not; nor do I need  
Profounder knowledge to exonerate

[39]

The squalor or the folly of a man  
Than a consciousness—though even the crude laugh  
Of indigent Priapus follow it—  
That I get good of him. The poet made  
Six golden sonnets. Well, Count Pretzel made  
No golden sort of product I remember  
Except a shield of wisdom for the mind  
Of Captain Craig—whatever you may think  
Of him or of his armor. If you like him,  
Then some time in the future, past a doubt,  
You will have him in a book, make metres of him,—

To the great delight of Mr. Killigrew,  
And the grief of all your kinsmen. Christian shame  
And self-confuted Orientalism  
For the more sagacious of them; vulture-tracks  
Of my Promethean bile for the rest of them;  
And that will be a joke. There's nothing quite  
So funny as a joke that's lost on earth  
And laughed at by the gods. Your devil knows it.

"I come to like your Mr. Killigrew,  
And I rejoice that you speak well of him.  
The sprouts of human blossoming are in him,  
And useful eyes—if he will open them;

[40]

But one thing ails the man. He smiles too much.  
He comes to see me once or twice a week,  
And I must tell him that he smiles too much.  
If I were Socrates, how I should do it!"

---

Epistle Number Three was longer coming.  
I waited for it, even worried for it—  
Though Killigrew, and of his own free will,  
Had written reassuring little scraps  
From time to time, and I had valued them  
The more for being his. "The Sage," he said,  
"From all that I can see, is doing well—  
I should say very well. Three meals a day,

Siestas, and innumerable pipes—  
Not to the tune of water on the stones,  
But rather to the tune of his own Ego,  
Which seems to be about the same as God.  
  
But I was always weak in metaphysics,  
And I pray therefore that you be lenient.  
  
I'm going to be married in December,  
And I have made a poem that will scan—  
  
So Plunket says. You said the other wouldn't:  
  
“*Augustus Plunket, Ph. D.,*  
*And oh, the Bishop's daughter;*  
*A very learned man was he*  
*And in twelve weeks he got her;*  
[41]  
*And oh, she was as fair to see*  
*As pippins on the pippin tree ...*  
*Tu, tui, tibi, te,—chubs in the mill water.*  
“Connotative, succinct, and erudite;  
Three dots to boot. Now goodman Killigrew  
May wind an epic one of these glad years,  
And after that who knoweth but the Lord—  
The Lord of Hosts who is the King of Glory?”  
Still, when the Captain's own words were before me,  
I seemed to read from them, or into them,  
The protest of a mortuary joy  
Not all substantiating Killigrew's

Off-hand assurance. The man's face came back  
The while I read them, and that look again,  
Which I had seen so often, came back with it.  
I do not know that I can say just why,  
But I felt the feathery touch of something wrong:—  
"Since last I wrote—and I fear the weeks have gone  
Too long for me to leave my gratitude  
Unuttered for its own acknowledgment—  
I have won, without the magic of Amphion

[42]

Without the songs of Orpheus or Apollo,  
The frank regard—and with it, if you like,  
The fledged respect—of three quick-footed friends.  
('Nothing is there more marvelous than man,'  
Said Sophocles; and I say after him:  
'He traps and captures, all-inventive one,  
The light birds and the creatures of the wold,  
And in his nets the fishes of the sea.')  
Once they were pictures, painted on the air,  
Faint with eternal color, colorless,—  
But now they are not pictures, they are fowls.  
"At first they stood aloof and cocked their small,  
Smooth, prudent heads at me and made as if,  
With a cryptic idiotic melancholy,  
To look authoritative and sagacious;  
But when I tossed a piece of apple to them,

They scattered back with a discord of short squawks  
And then came forward with a craftiness  
That made me think of Eden. Atropos  
Came first, and having grabbed the morsel up,  
Ran flapping far away and out of sight,  
With Clotho and Lachesis hard after her;  
But finally the three fared all alike,  
And the next day I persuaded them with corn.

[43]

In a week they came and had it from my fingers  
And looked up at me while I pinched their bills  
And made them sneeze. Count Pretzel's Carmichael  
Had said they were not ordinary Birds  
At all,—and they are not: they are the Fates,  
Foredoomed of their own insufficiency  
To be assimilated.—Do not think,  
Because in my contented isolation  
It suits me at this time to be jocose,  
That I am nailing reason to the cross,  
Or that I set the bauble and the bells  
Above the crucible; for I do nought,  
Say nought, but with an ancient levity  
That is the forbear of all earnestness.  
“The cross, I said.—I had a dream last night:  
A dream not like to any other dream  
That I remember. I was all alone,

Sitting as I do now beneath a tree,  
But looking not, as I am looking now,  
Against the sunlight. There was neither sun  
Nor moon, nor do I think of any stars;  
Yet there was light, and there were cedar trees,  
And there were sycamores. I lay at rest,  
Or should have seemed at rest, within a trough  
Between two giant roots. A weariness

[44]

Was on me, and I would have gone to sleep,—  
But I had not the courage. If I slept,  
I feared that I should never wake again;  
And if I did not sleep I should go mad,  
And with my own dull tools, which I had used  
With wretched skill so long, hack out my life.  
And while I lay there, tortured out of death,  
Great waves of cold, as if the dead were breathing,  
Came over me and through me; and I felt  
Quick fearful tears of anguish on my face  
And in my throat. But soon, and in the distance,  
Concealed, importunate, there was a sound  
Of coming steps,—and I was not afraid;  
No, I was not afraid then, I was glad;  
For I could feel, with every thought, the Man,  
The Mystery, the Child, a footfall nearer.  
Then, when he stood before me, there was no

Surprise, there was no questioning: I knew him,  
As I had known him always; and he smiled.  
  
'Why are you here?' he asked; and reaching down,  
He took up my dull blades and rubbed his thumb  
Across the edges of them and then smiled  
  
Once more.—'I was a carpenter,' I said,  
  
'But there was nothing in the world to do.'

'Nothing?' said he.—'No, nothing,' I replied.—  
  
'But are you sure,' he asked, 'that you have skill?

[45]

And are you sure that you have learned your trade?  
  
No, you are not.'—He looked at me and laughed  
As he said that; but I did not laugh then,  
  
Although I might have laughed.—'They are dull,' said he;  
  
'They were not very sharp if they were ground;  
  
But they are what you have, and they will earn  
  
What you have not. So take them as they are,  
  
Grind them and clean them, put new handles to them,  
  
And then go learn your trade in Nazareth.

Only be sure that you find Nazareth.'—  
  
'But if I starve—what then?' said I.—He smiled.

"Now I call that as curious a dream  
  
As ever Meleager's mother had,—  
  
Æneas, Alcibiades, or Jacob.  
  
I'll not except the scientist who dreamed  
  
That he was Adam and that he was Eve

At the same time; or yet that other man  
Who dreamed that he was Æschylus, reborn  
To clutch, combine, compensate, and adjust  
The plunging and unfathomable chorus  
Wherein we catch, like a bacchanale through thunder,  
The chanting of the new Eumenides,  
[46]  
Implacable, renascent, farcical,  
Triumphant, and American. He did it,  
But he did it in a dream. When he awoke  
One phrase of it remained; one verse of it  
Went singing through the remnant of his life  
Like a bag-pipe through a mad-house.—He died young,  
And the more I ponder the small history  
That I have gleaned of him by scattered roads,  
The more do I rejoice that he died young.  
That measure would have chased him all his days,  
Defeated him, deposed him, wasted him,  
And shrewdly ruined him—though in that ruin  
There would have lived, as always it has lived,  
In ruin as in failure, the supreme  
Fulfillment unexpressed, the rhythm of God  
That beats unheard through songs of shattered men  
Who dream but cannot sound it.—He declined,  
From all that I have ever learned of him,  
With absolute good-humor. No complaint,

No groaning at the burden which is light,  
No brain-waste of impatience—‘Never mind,’  
He whispered, ‘for I might have written Odes.’  
“Speaking of odes now makes me think of ballads.

Your admirable Mr. Killigrew

[47]

Has latterly committed what he calls  
*A Ballad of London*—London ‘Town,’ of course—  
And he has wished that I pass judgment on it.  
He says there is a ‘generosity’  
About it, and a ‘sympathetic insight;’  
And there are strong lines in it, so he says.  
But who am I that he should make of me  
A judge? You are his friend, and you know best  
The measure of his jingle. I am old,  
And you are young. Be sure, I may go back  
To squeak for you the tunes of yesterday  
On my old fiddle—or what’s left of it—  
And give you as I’m able a young sound;  
But all the while I do it I remain  
One of Apollo’s pensioners (and yours),  
An usher in the Palace of the Sun,  
A candidate for mattocks and trombones  
(The brass-band will be indispensable),  
A patron of high science, but no critic.  
So I shall have to tell him, I suppose,

That I read nothing now but Wordsworth, Pope,  
Lucretius, Robert Burns, and William Shakespeare.

Now this is Mr. Killigrew's performance:

[48]

*"Say, do you go to London Town,  
You with the golden feather?"—  
'And if I go to London Town  
With my golden feather?'—  
'These autumn roads are bright and brown,  
The season wears a russet crown;  
And if you go to London Town,  
We'll go down together.'*

"I cannot say for certain, but I think  
The brown bright nightingale was half assuaged  
Before your Mr. Killigrew was born.

If I have erred in my chronology,  
No matter,—for the feathered man sings now:

*"Yes, I go to London Town'  
(Merrily waved the feather),  
'And if you go to London Town,  
Yes, we'll go together.'  
So in the autumn bright and brown,  
Just as the year began to frown,  
All the way to London Town  
Rode the two together.  
"I go to marry a fair maid'*

*(Lightly swung the feather)—*

*'Pardie, a true and loyal maid'*

*(Oh, the swinging feather!)—*

[49]

*'For us the wedding gold is weighed,*

*For us the feast will soon be laid;*

*We'll make a gallant show,' he said,—*

*'She and I together.'*

"The feathered man will do a thousand things

And the world go smiling; but the feathered man

May do too much. Now mark how he continues:

*"And you—you go to London Town?"*

*(Breezes waved the feather)—*

*'Yes, I go to London Town.'*

*(Ah, the stinging feather!)—*

*'Why do you go, my merry blade?*

*Like me, to marry a fair maid?'—*

*'Why do I go?... God knows,' he said;*

*And on they rode together.*

"Now you have read it through, and you know best

What worth it has. We fellows with gray hair

Who march with sticks to music that is gray

Judge not your vanguard fifing. You are one

To judge; and you will tell me what you think:—

Barring the Town, the Fair Maid, and the Feather,

The dialogue and those parentheses,

[50]

You cherish it, undoubtedly. Pardee!  
You call it, with a few conservative  
Allowances, an excellent small thing  
For patient inexperience to do:  
Derivative, you say,—still rather pretty.  
But what is wrong with Mr. Killigrew?  
Is he in love, or has he read Rossetti?—  
Forgive me! I am old and doddering....  
When are you coming back to Tilbury Town?”  
I could forgive the Captain soon enough,  
But Killigrew—there was a question there;  
Nor was it answered when the next week brought  
A letter from him. After rocketing  
For six or seven pages about love,  
Truth, purity, the passion of the soul,  
And other salutary attributes,  
Discovered or miraculously born  
Within six months, he said: “The Patriarch  
Is not quite as he should be. There’s a clutch  
Of something on him that will not let go;  
And there are days together when his eyes  
Are like two lamps in ashes. The gray look,  
Which we thought once the glory and the crown  
Of your too flexible determinist,  
Has gone all over him. And when he laughs,

He waits as if to hear the angels weep:

[51]

It seems to make him sorry when he laughs,

And I know what it does to me. But here

As at the station—I remember that—

The quantitative bias of the boy

May slant me too much to the other side

And make me blind again. By Jove! old man,

If you could really know her as I do

'Twould be the revelation of your life:

You would see that there are women in the world

Who are altogether different," etc.

There was more generosity in "women"

I thought than in the man without the feather.—

Meanwhile I saw that Captain Craig was dying.

III

I found the old man sitting in his bed,

Propped up and uncomplaining. On a chair

Beside him was a dreary bowl of broth,

A magazine, some glasses, and a pipe.

"I do not light it nowadays," he said,

"But keep it for an antique influence

That it exerts, an aura that it sheds—

Like hautboys, or Provence. You understand:

[52]

The charred memorial defeats us yet,

But think you not for always. We are young,  
And we are friends of time. Time that made smoke  
Will drive away the smoke, and we shall know  
The work that we are doing. We shall build  
With embers of all shrines one pyramid,  
And we shall have the most resplendent flame  
From earth to heaven, as the old words go,  
And we shall need no smoke.... Why don't you laugh?"

I gazed into those calm, half-lighted eyes  
And smiled at them with grim obedience.

He told me that I did it very well,  
But added that I should undoubtedly  
Do better in the future: "There is nothing,"

He said, "so beneficial in a sick-room  
As a well-bred spontaneity of manner.

Your sympathetic scowl obtrudes itself,  
And is indeed surprising. After death,  
Were you to take it with you to your coffin  
An unimaginative man might think  
That you had lost your life in worrying  
To find out what it was that worried you.

The ways of unimaginative men  
Are singularly fierce.... Why do you stand?

[53]

Sit here and watch me while I take this soup.  
The doctor likes it, therefore it is good.

"The man who wrote the decalogue," pursued  
The Captain, having swallowed four or five  
Heroic spoonfuls of his lukewarm broth,  
"Forgot the doctors. And I think sometimes  
The man of Galilee (or, if you choose,  
The men who made the sayings of the man)  
Like Buddha, and the others who have seen,  
Was to men's loss the Poet—though it be  
The Poet only of him we revere,  
The Poet we remember. We have put  
The prose of him so far away from us,  
The fear of him so crudely over us,  
That I have wondered—wondered."—Cautiously,  
But yet as one were cautious in a dream,  
He set the bowl down on the chair again,  
Crossed his thin fingers, looked me in the face,  
And looking smiled a little. "Go away,"  
He said at last, "and let me go to sleep.  
I told you I should eat, but I shall not.  
To-morrow I shall eat; and I shall read  
Some clauses of a jocund instrument  
That I have been preparing here of late  
For you and for the rest, assuredly.

[54]

'Attend the testament of Captain Craig:  
Good citizens, good fathers and your sons,

Good mothers and your daughters.' I should say so.

Now go away and let me go to sleep."

I stood before him and held out my hand,

He took it, pressed it; and I felt again

The sick soft closing on it. He would not

Let go, but lay there, looking up to me

With eyes that had a sheen of water on them

And a faint wet spark within them. So he clung,

Tenaciously, with fingers icy warm,

And eyes too full to keep the sheen unbroken.

I looked at him. The fingers closed hard once,

And then fell down.—I should have left him then.

But when we found him the next afternoon,

My first thought was that he had made his eyes

Miraculously smaller. They were sharp

And hard and dry, and the spark in them was dry.

For a glance it all but seemed as if the man

Had artfully forsworn the brimming gaze

Of yesterday, and with a wizard strength

Inveigled in, reduced, and vitalized

[55]

The straw-shine of October; and had that

Been truth, we should have humored him not less,

Albeit he had fooled us,—for he said

That we had made him glad by coming to him.

And he was glad: the manner of his words

Revealed the source of them; and the gray smile  
Which lingered like a twilight on his face  
Told of its own slow fading that it held  
The promise of the sun. Cadaverous,  
God knows it was; and we knew it was honest.

"So you have come to have the old man read  
To you from his last will and testament:  
Well, it will not be long—not very long—  
So listen." He brought out from underneath  
His pillow a new manuscript, and said,

"You are doing well to come and have me read  
My testament. There are men in the world  
Who say of me, if they remember me,  
That I am poor;—and I believe the ways  
Of certain men who never find things out

Are stranger than the way Lord Bacon wrote  
*Leviticus*, and *Faust*." He fixed his eyes

Abstractedly on something far from us,  
And with a look that I remembered well  
Gazed hard the while we waited. But at length

[56]

He found himself and soon began to chant,  
With a fitful shift at thin sonorousness  
The jocund instrument; and had he been  
Definitively parcelling to us  
All Kimberly and half of Ballarat,

The lordly quaver of his poor old words  
Could not have been the more magniloquent.  
  
No promise of dead carbon or of gold,  
However, flashed in ambush to corrupt us:  
  
“I, Captain Craig, abhorred iconoclast,  
Sage-errant, favored of the Cosmic Joke,  
And self-reputed humorist at large,  
Do now, confessed of my world-worshiping,  
Time-questioning, sun-fearing, and heart-yielding,  
Approve and unreservedly devise  
To you and your assigns for evermore,  
God’s universe and yours. If I had won  
What first I sought, I might have made you beam  
By giving less; but now I make you laugh  
By giving more than what had made you beam,  
And it is well. No man has ever done  
The deed of humor that God promises,  
But now and then we know tragedians  
Reform, and in denial too divine  
For sacrifice, too firm for ecstasy,  
Record in jolly letters or in books

[57]

What fragment of God’s laughter they have caught,  
What earnest of its rhythm; and I believe  
That I, in having somewhat recognized  
The formal measure of it, have endured

The discord of infirmity not less  
Through fortune than by failure. What men lose,  
Man gains; and what man gains reports itself  
In losses we but vaguely deprecate,  
So they be not for us;—and this is right,  
Except that when the devil in the sun  
Misguides us we go darkly where the shine  
Misleads us, and we know not what we see:  
We know not if we climb or if we fall;  
And if we fly, we know not where we fly.

“And here do I insert an urging clause  
For climbers and up-fliers of all sorts,  
Cliff-climbers and high-fliers: Phaethon,  
Bellerophon, and Icarus did each  
Go gloriously up, and each in turn  
Did famously come down—as you have read  
In poems and elsewhere; but other men  
Have mounted where no fame has followed them,  
And we have had no sight, no news of them,  
And we have heard no crash. The crash may count,

[58]

Undoubtedly, and earth be fairer for it;  
Yet none save creatures out of harmony  
Have ever, in their fealty to the flesh,  
Made crashing an ideal. It is the flesh  
That ails us, for the spirit knows no qualm,

No failure, no down-falling: so climb high,  
And having set your steps regard not much  
The downward laughter clinging at your feet,  
Nor overmuch the warning; only know,  
As well as you know dawn from lantern-light,  
That far above you, for you, and within you,  
There burns and shines and lives, unwavering  
And always yours, the truth. Take on yourself  
But your sincerity, and you take on  
Good promise for all climbing: fly for truth,  
And hell shall have no storm to crush your flight,  
No laughter to vex down your loyalty.

"I think you may be smiling at me now—  
And if I make you smile, so much the better;  
For I would have you know that I rejoice  
Always to see the thing that I would see—  
The righteous thing, the wise thing. I rejoice  
Always to think that any thought of mine,  
Or any word or any deed of mine,  
May grant sufficient of what fortifies  
Good feeling and the courage of calm joy

[59]

To make the joke worth while. Contrariwise,  
When I review some faces I have known—  
Sad faces, hungry faces—and reflect  
On thoughts I might have moulded, human words

I might have said, straightway it saddens me  
To feel perforce that had I not been mute  
And actionless, I might have made them bright  
Somehow, though only for the moment. Yes,  
Howbeit I confess the vanities,  
It saddens me;—and sadness, of all things  
Miscounted wisdom, and the most of all  
When warmed with old illusions and regrets,  
I mark the selfishest, and on like lines  
The shrewdest. For your sadness makes you climb  
With dragging footsteps, and it makes you groan;  
It hinders you when most you would be free,  
And there are many days it wearies you  
Beyond the toil itself. And if the load  
It lays on you may not be shaken off  
Till you have known what now you do not know—  
Meanwhile you climb; and he climbs best who sees  
Above him truth burn faithfulest, and feels  
Within him truth burn purest. Climb or fall,  
[60]  
One road remains and one firm guidance always;  
One way that shall be taken, climb or fall.  
“But ‘falling, falling, falling.’ There’s your song,  
The cradle-song that sings you to the grave.  
What is it your bewildered poet says?—  
“*The toiling ocean thunders of unrest*

*And aching desolation; the still sea  
Paints but an outward calm that mocks itself  
To the final and irrefragable sleep  
That owns no shifting fury; and the shoals  
Of ages are but records of regret  
Where Time, the sun's arch-phantom, writes on sand  
The prelude of his ancient nothingness.'*

"Tis easy to compound a dirge like that,

And it is easy too to be deceived

And alienated by the fleshless note

Of half-world yearning in it; but the truth

To which we all are tending,—charlatans

And architects alike, artificers

In tinsel as in gold, evangelists

Of ruin and redemption, all alike,—

The truth we seek and equally the truth

We do not seek, but yet may not escape,

[61]

Was never found alone through flesh contempt

Or through flesh reverence. Look east and west

And we may read the story: where the light

Shone first the shade now darkens; where the shade

Clung first, the light fights westward—though the shade

Still feeds, and there is yet the Orient.

"But there is this to be remembered always:

Whatever be the altitude you reach,

You do not rise alone; nor do you fall  
But you drag others down to more or less  
Than your preferred abasement. God forbid  
That ever I should preach, and in my zeal  
Forget that I was born an humorist;  
But now, for once, before I go away,  
I beg of you to be magnanimous  
A moment, while I speak to please myself—  
The moment now for flowers; and your patience:  
“Though I have heard it variously sung  
That even in the fury and the clash  
Of battles, and the closer fights of men  
When silence gives the knowing world no sign,

[62]

One flower there is, though crushed and cursed it be,  
Keeps rooted through all tumult and all scorn,—  
Still do I find, when I look sharply down,  
There's yet another flower that grows well  
And has the most unconscionable roots  
Of any weed on earth. Perennial  
It grows, and has the name of Selfishness;  
No doubt you call it Love. In either case,  
You propagate it with a diligence  
That hardly were outmeasured had its leaf  
The very juice in it of that famed herb  
Which gave back breath to Glaucus; and I know

That in the twilight, after the day's work,  
You take your little children in your arms,  
Or lead them by their credulous frail hands  
Benignly out and through the garden-gate  
And show them there the things that you have raised;  
Not everything, perchance, but always one  
Miraculously rooted flower plot  
Which is your pride, their pattern. Socrates,  
Could he be with you there at such a time,  
Would have some unsolicited shrewd words  
To say that you might hearken to; but I  
Say nothing, for I am not Socrates.—  
So much, good friends, for flowers; and I thank you.

[63]

"There was a poet once who would have roared  
Away the world and had an end of stars.  
Where was he when I quoted him?—oh, yes:  
'Tis easy for a man to link loud words  
With woeful pomp and unschooled emphasis  
And add one thundered contribution more  
To the dirges of all-hollowness, I said;  
But here again I find the question set  
Before me, after turning books on books  
And looking soulward through man after man,  
If there indeed be more determining  
Play-service in remotely sounding down

The world's one-sidedness. If I judge right,  
Your pounding protestations, echoing  
Their burden of unfraught futility,  
Surge back to mute forgetfulness at last  
And have a kind of sunny, sullen end,  
Like any cold north storm.—But there are few  
Still seas that have no life to profit them,  
And even in such currents of the mind  
As have no tide-rush to them, but are drowsed,  
Crude thoughts may dart in armor and upspring  
With a waking sound, when all is dim with peace,  
Like sturgeons in the twilight out of Lethe;  
And though they be discordant, hard, grotesque,  
And all unwelcome to the lethargy  
That you think means repose, you know as well

[64]

As if your names were shouted when they leap,

And when they leap you listen.—Ah! friends, friends,

There are these things we do not like to know:

They trouble us, they make us hesitate,

They touch us, and we try to put them off.

We banish one another and then say

That we are left alone: the midnight leaf

That rattles when it hangs above the snow—

Gaunt, fluttering, forlorn—scarcely may seem

So cold in all its palsied loneliness

As we, we frozen brothers, who have yet  
Profoundly and severely to find out  
That there is more of unpermitted love  
In most men's reticence than most men think.

"Once, when I made it out fond-headedness  
To say that we should ever be apprised;  
Of our deserts and their emolument  
At all but in the specious way of words,  
The wisdom of a warm thought woke within me  
And I could read the sun. Then did I turn  
My long-defeated face full to the world,  
And through the clouded warfare of it all  
Discern the light. Through dusk that hindered it,  
I found the truth, and for the first whole time

[65]

Knew then that we were climbing. Not as one  
Who mounts along with his experience  
Bound on him like an Old Man of the Sea—  
Not as a moral pedant who drags chains  
Of his unearned ideals after him  
And always to the lead-like thud they make  
Attunes a cold inhospitable chant  
Of All Things Easy to the Non-Attached,—  
But as a man, a scarred man among men,  
I knew it, and I felt the strings of thought  
Between us to pull tight the while I strove;

And if a curse came ringing now and then  
To my defended ears, how could I know  
The light that burned above me and within me,  
And at the same time put on cap-and-bells  
For such as yet were groping?"

Killigrew  
Made there as if to stifle a small cough.

I might have kicked him, but regret forbade  
The subtle admonition; and indeed  
When afterwards I reprimanded him,  
The fellow never knew quite what I meant.

I may have been unjust.—The Captain read  
Right on, without a chuckle or a pause,  
As if he had heard nothing:

[66]

"How, forsooth,  
Shall any man, by curses or by groans,  
Or by the laugh-jarred stillness of all hell,  
Be so drawn down to servitude again  
That on some backward level of lost laws  
And undivined relations, he may know  
No longer Love's imperative resource,  
Firm once and his, well treasured then, but now  
Too fondly thrown away? And if there come  
But once on all his journey, singing down  
To find him, the gold-throated forward call,

What way but one, what but the forward way,  
Shall after that call guide him? When his ears  
Have earned an inward skill to methodize  
The clash of all crossed voices and all noises,  
How shall he grope to be confused again,  
As he has been, by discord? When his eyes  
Have read the book of wisdom in the sun,  
And after dark deciphered it on earth,  
How shall he turn them back to scan some huge  
Blood-lettered protest of bewildered men  
That hunger while he feeds where they should starve  
And all absurdly perish?"

Killigrew

Looked hard for a subtle object on the wall,

[67]

And, having found it, sighed. The Captain paused:

If he grew tedious, most assuredly

Did he crave pardon of us; he had feared

Beforehand that he might be wearisome,

But there was not much more of it, he said,—

No more than just enough. And we rejoiced

That he should look so kindly on us then.

("Commend me to a dying man's grimace

For absolute humor, always," Killigrew

Maintains; but I know better.)

"Work for them,

You tell me? Work the folly out of them?  
Go back to them and teach them how to climb,  
While you teach caterpillars how to fly?  
You tell me that Alnaschar is a fool  
Because he dreams? And what is this you ask?  
I make him wise? I teach him to be still?  
While you go polishing the Pyramids,  
I hold Alnaschar's feet? And while you have  
The ghost of Memnon's image all day singing,  
I sit with aching arms and hardly catch  
A few spilled echoes of the song of songs—  
The song that I should have as utterly  
For mine as any other man should have,  
The sweetest a glad shepherd ever trilled

[68]

In Sharon, long ago? Is this the way  
For me to do good climbing any more  
Than Phaethon's? Do you think the golden tone  
Of that far-singing call you all have heard  
Means any more for you than you should be  
Wise-heartedly, glad-heartedly yourselves?  
Do this, there is no more for you to do;  
And you have no dread left, no shame, no scorn.  
And while you have your wisdom and your gold,  
Songs calling, and the Princess in your arms,  
Remember, if you like, from time to time,

Down yonder where the clouded millions go,  
Your bloody-knuckled scullions are not slaves,  
Your children of Alnaschar are not fools.

“Nor are they quite so foreign or far down  
As you may think to see them. What you take  
To be the cursedest mean thing that crawls  
On earth is nearer to you than you know:  
You may not ever crush him but you lose,  
You may not ever shield him but you gain—  
As he, with all his crookedness, gains with you.

Your preaching and your teaching, your achieving,  
Your lifting up and your discovering,  
Are more than often—more than you have dreamed—

[69]

The world-refracted evidence of what  
Your dream denies. You cannot hide yourselves  
In any multitude or solitude,  
Or mask yourselves in any studied guise  
Of hardness or of old humility,  
But soon by some discriminating man—  
Some humorist at large, like Socrates—  
You get yourselves found out.—Now I should be  
Found out without an effort. For example:  
When I go riding, trimmed and shaved again,  
Consistent, adequate, respectable,—  
Some citizen, for curiosity,

Will ask of a good neighbor, ‘What is this?’—  
‘It is the funeral of Captain Craig,’  
Will be the neighbor’s word.—‘And who, good man,  
Was Captain Craig?’—‘He was an humorist;  
And we are told that there is nothing more  
For any man alive to say of him.’—  
‘There is nothing very strange in that,’ says A;  
‘But the brass band? What has he done to be  
Blown through like this by cornets and trombones?  
And here you have this incompatible dirge—  
Where are the jokes in that?’—Then B should say:  
‘Maintained his humor: nothing more or less.

[70]

The story goes that on the day before  
He died—some say a week, but that’s a trifle—  
He said, with a subdued facetiousness,  
“Play Handel, not Chopin; assuredly not  
Chopin.”—He was indeed an humorist.”  
He made the paper fall down at arm’s length;  
And with a tension of half-quizzical  
Benignity that made it hard for us,  
He looked up—first at Morgan, then at me—  
Almost, I thought, as if his eyes would ask  
If we were satisfied; and as he looked,  
The tremor of an old heart’s weariness  
Was on his mouth. He gazed at each of us,

But spoke no further word that afternoon.

He put away the paper, closed his eyes,

And went to sleep with his lips flickering;

And after that we left him.—At midnight

Plunket and I looked in; but he still slept,

And everything was going as it should.

The watchman yawned, rattled his newspaper,

And wondered what it was that ailed his lamp.

He said it wheezed. He feared it might explode.

Next day we found the Captain wide awake,

Propped up, and searching dimly with a spoon

Through another dreary dish of chicken-broth,

[71]

Which he raised up to me, at my approach,

So fervently and so unconsciously,

That one could only laugh. He looked again

At each of us, and as he looked he frowned;

And there was something in that frown of his

That none of us had ever seen before.

“Kind friends,” he said, “be sure that I rejoice

To know that you have come to visit me;

Be sure I speak with undisguised words

And earnest, when I say that I rejoice.”—

“But what the devil!” whispered Killigrew.

I kicked him, for I thought I understood.

The old man’s eyes had glimmered wearily

At first, but now they glittered like to those  
Of a glad fish. "Beyond a doubt," said he,  
"My dream this morning was more singular  
Than any other I have ever known.  
  
Give me that I might live ten thousand years,  
And all those years do nothing but have dreams,  
I doubt me much if any one of them  
Could be so quaint or so fantastical,  
So pregnant, as a dream of mine this morning.  
  
You may not think it any more than odd;  
You may not feel—you cannot wholly feel—  
How droll it was:—I dreamed that I found Hamlet—  
[72]  
  
Found him at work, drenched with an angry sweat,  
Predestined, he declared with emphasis,  
To root out a large weed on Lethe wharf;  
And after I had watched him for some time,  
I laughed at him and told him that no root  
Would ever come the while he talked like that:  
The power was not in him, I explained,  
For such compound accomplishment. He glared  
At me, of course,—next moment laughed at me,  
And finally laughed with me. I was right,  
And we had eisel on the strength of it:—  
'They tell me that this water is not good,'  
Said Hamlet, and you should have seen him smile.

Conceited? Pelion on Ossa?—pah!...

“But anon comes in a crocodile. We stepped  
Adroitly down upon the back of him,  
And away we went to an undiscovered country—  
A fertile place, but in more ways than one  
So like the region we had started from,  
That Hamlet straightway found another weed  
And there began to tug. I laughed again,  
Till he cried out on me and on my mirth,  
Protesting all he knew: ‘The Fates,’ he said,  
‘Have ordered it that I shall have these roots.’

[73]

But all at once a dreadful hunger seized him,  
And it was then we killed the crocodile—  
Killed him and ate him. Washed with eisel down  
That luckless reptile was, to the last morsel;  
And there we were with flag-fens all around us,—  
And there was Hamlet, at his task again,  
Ridiculous. And while I watched him work,  
The drollest of all changes came to pass:—  
The weed had snapped off just above the root,  
Not warning him, and I was left alone.  
The bubbles rose, and I laughed heartily  
To think of him; I laughed when I woke up;  
And when my soup came in I laughed again;  
I think I may have laughed a little—no?—

Not when you came?... Why do you look like that?

You don't believe me? Crocodiles—why not?

Who knows what he has eaten in his life?

Who knows but I have eaten Atropos?...

'Briar and oak for a soldier's crown,' you say?

Provence? Oh, no.... Had I been Socrates,

Count Pretzel would have been the King of Spain."

Now of all casual things we might have said

To make the matter smooth at such a time,

[74]

There may have been a few that we had found

Sufficient. Recollection fails, however,

To say that we said anything. We looked.

Had he been Carmichael, we might have stood

Like faithful hypocrites and laughed at him;

But the Captain was not Carmichael at all,

For the Captain had no frogs: he had the sun.

So there we waited, hungry for the word,—

Tormented, unsophisticated, stretched—

Till, with a drawl, to save us, Killigrew

Good-humoredly spoke out. The Captain fixed

His eyes on him with some severity.

"That was a funny dream, beyond a doubt,"

Said Killigrew;—"too funny to be laughed at;

Too humorous, we mean."—"Too humorous?"

The Captain answered; "I approve of that.

Proceed.”—We were not glad for Killigrew.

“Well,” he went on, “twas only this. You see

My dream this morning was a droll one too:

I dreamed that a sad man was in my room,

Sitting, as I do now, beside the bed.

I questioned him, but he made no reply,—

Said not a word, but sang.”—“Said not a word,

But sang,” the Captain echoed. “Very good.

Now tell me what it was the sad man sang.”

[75]

“Now that,” said Killigrew, constrainedly,

And with a laugh that might have been left out,

“Is why I know it must have been a dream.

But there he was, and I lay in the bed

Like you; and I could see him just as well

As you see my right hand. And for the songs

He sang to me—there’s where the dream part comes.”

“You don’t remember them?” the Captain said,

With a weary little chuckle; “very well,

I might have guessed it. Never mind your dream,

But let me go to sleep.”—For a moment then

There was half a frown on Killigrew’s good face,

But he turned it to a smile.—“Not quite,” said he;

“The songs that he sang first were sorrowful,

And they were stranger than the man himself—

And he was very strange; but I found out,

Through all the gloom of him and of his music,  
That a kind of—well, say mystic cheerfulness,  
Or give it almost any trumped-up name,  
Pervaded him; for slowly, as he sang,  
There came a change, and I began to know  
The method of it all. Song after song  
Was ended; and when I had listened there  
For hours—I mean for dream-hours—hearing him,

[76]

And always glad that I was hearing him,  
There came another change—a great one. Tears  
Rolled out at last like bullets from his eyes,  
And I could hear them fall down on the floor  
Like shoes; and they were always marking time  
For the song that he was singing. I have lost  
The greater number of his verses now,

But there are some, like these, that I remember:

*“Ten men from Zanzibar,*

*Black as iron hammers are,*

*Riding on a cable-car*

*Down to Crowley’s theatre.’...”*

“Ten men?” the Captain interrupted there—

“Ten men, my Euthyphron? That is beautiful.

But never mind, I wish to go to sleep:

Tell Cebes that I wish to go to sleep....

O ye of little faith, your golden plumes

Are like to drag ... par-dee!"—We may have smiled  
In after days to think how Killigrew  
Had sacrificed himself to fight that silence,  
But we were grateful to him, none the less;  
And if we smiled, that may have been the reason.

[77]

But the good Captain for a long time then  
Said nothing: he lay quiet—fast asleep,  
For all that we could see. We waited there  
Till each of us, I fancy, must have made  
The paper on the wall begin to squirm,  
And then got up to leave. My friends went out,  
And I was going, when the old man cried:  
"You leave me now—now it has come to this?  
What have I done to make you go? Come back!  
Come back!"  
There was a quaver in his cry  
That we shall not forget—reproachful, kind,  
Indignant, piteous. It seemed as one  
Marooned on treacherous tide-feeding sand  
Were darkly calling over the still straits  
Between him and irrevocable shores  
Where now there was no lamp to fade for him,  
No call to give him answer. We were there  
Before him, but his eyes were not much turned  
On us; nor was it very much to us

That he began to speak the broken words,  
The scattered words, that he had left in him.

"So it has come to this? And what is this?  
Death, do you call it? Death? And what is death?

[78]

Why do you look like that at me again?  
Why do you shrink your brows and shut your lips?

If it be fear, then I can do no more  
Than hope for all of you that you may find  
Your promise of the sun; if it be grief  
You feel, to think that this old face of mine  
May never look at you and laugh again,

Then tell me why it is that you have gone  
So long with me, and followed me so far,  
And had me to believe you took my words  
For more than ever misers did their gold?"

He listened, but his eyes were far from us—  
Too far to make us turn to Killigrew,  
Or search the futile shelves of our own thoughts  
For golden-labeled insincerities  
To make placebos of. The marrowy sense  
Of a slow November storm that splashed against  
The shingles and the glass reminded us  
That we had brought umbrellas. He continued:  
"Oh, can it be that I, too credulous,  
Have made myself believe that you believe

Youselves to be the men that you are not?

I prove and I prize well your friendliness,

But I would have that your last look at me

[79]

Be not like this; for I would scan to-day

Strong thoughts on all your faces—no regret,

No fine commiseration—oh, not that,

Not that! Nor say of me, when I am gone,

That I was cold and harsh, for I was warm

To strangeness, and for you.... Say not like that

Of me—nor think of me that I reproached

The friends of my tight battles and hard years,

But say that I did love them to the last

And in my love reproved them for the grief

They did not—for they dared not—throw away.

Courage, my boys,—courage, is what you need:

Courage that is not all flesh-recklessness,

But earnest of the world and of the soul—

First of the soul; for a man may be as brave

As Ajax in the fury of his arms,

And in the midmost warfare of his thoughts

Be frail as Paris.... For the love, therefore,

That brothered us when we stood back that day

From Delium—the love that holds us now

More than it held us at Amphipolis—

Forget you not that he who in his work

Would mount from these low roads of measured shame  
To tread the leagueless highway must fling first  
And fling forevermore beyond his reach

[80]

The shackles of a slave who doubts the sun.

There is no servitude so fraudulent

As of a sun-shut mind; for 'tis the mind

That makes you craven or invincible,

Diseased or puissant. The mind will pay

Ten thousand fold and be the richer then

To grant new service; but the world pays hard

And accurately sickens till in years

The dole has eked its end and there is left

What all of you are noting on all days

In these Athenian streets, where squandered men

Drag ruins of half-warriors to the grave—

Or to Hippocrates."

His head fell back,

And he lay still with wearied eyes half-closed.

We waited, but a few faint words yet stayed:

"Kind friends," he said, "friends I have known so long,

Though I have jested with you in time past,

Though I have stung your pride with epithets

Not all forbearing,—still, when I am gone,

Say Socrates wrought always for the best

And for the wisest end.... Give me the cup!

The truth is yours, God's universe is yours....

Good-by ... good citizens ... give me the cup"....

[81]

Again we waited; and this time we knew

Those lips of his that would not flicker down

Had yet some fettered message for us there.

We waited, and we watched him. All at once,

With a faint flash, the clouded eyes grew clear;

And then we knew the man was coming back,

And we knew that he would speak in the old way.

We watched him, and I listened. The man smiled

And looked about him—not regretfully,

Not anxiously; and when at last he spoke,

Before the long drowse came to give him peace,

One word was all he said. "Trombones," he said.

---

That evening, at "The Chrysalis" again,

We smoked and looked at one another's eyes,

And we were glad. The world had scattered ways

For us to take, we knew; but for the time

That one snug room where the big beech logs roared smooth

Defiance to the cold rough rain outside

Sufficed. There were no scattered ways for us

That we could see just then, and we were glad:

[82]

We were glad to be on earth, and we rejoiced

No less for Captain Craig that he was gone.  
We might, for his dead benefit, have run  
The gamut of all human weaknesses  
And uttered after-platitudes enough—  
Wrecked on his own abstractions, and all such—  
To drive away Gambrinus and the bead  
From Bernard's ale; and I suppose we might  
Have praised, accordingly, the Lord of Hosts  
For making us to see that we were not  
(Like certain unapproved inferiors  
Whom we had known, and having known might name)  
Abominable flotsam. But the best  
And wisest occupation, we had learned,—  
At work, at home, or at "The Chrysalis,"  
Companioned or unfriended, winged or chained,—  
Was always to perpetuate the bead.  
So Plunket, who had knowledge of all sorts,  
Yet hardly ever spoke, began to plink  
*O tu, Palermo!*—quaintly, with his nails,—  
On Morgan's fiddle, and at once got seized,  
As if he were some small thing, by the neck.  
Then the consummate Morgan, having told  
Explicitly what hardship might accrue  
To Plunket if he did that any more,  
[83]  
Made roaring chords and acrobatic runs—

To charge his fingers and the strings, he said,—  
And then, with his kind eyes on Killigrew,  
Struck up the schoolgirls' march in *Lohengrin*,  
So Killigrew might smile and stretch himself  
And have to light his pipe. When that was done  
We knew that Morgan, by the looks of him,  
Was in the mood for almost anything  
From Bach to Offenbach;—and of all times  
That he has ever played, that one somehow—  
That evening of the day the Captain died—  
Stands out like one great verse of a good song,  
One strain that sings itself beyond the rest  
For the magic and a glamour that it has.  
The ways have scattered for us, and all things  
Have changed; and we have wisdom, I doubt not,  
More fit for the world's work than we had then;  
But neither parted roads nor cent per cent  
May starve quite out the child that lives in us—  
The Child that is the Man, the Mystery,  
The Phoenix of the World. So, now and then,  
That evening of the day the Captain died  
Returns to us; and there comes always with it  
The storm, the warm restraint, the fellowship,  
[84]  
The friendship and the firelight, and the fiddle.  
So too there comes a day that followed it—

A windy, dreary day with a cold white shine  
That only gummed the tumbled frozen ruts  
We tramped upon. The road was hard and long,  
But we had what we knew to comfort us,  
And we had the large humor of the thing  
To make it advantageous; for men stopped  
And eyed us on that road from time to time,  
And on that road the children followed us;  
And all along that road the Tilbury Band  
Blared indiscreetly the Dead March in Saul.

---

[85]

#### **ISAAC AND ARCHIBALD**

Isaac and Archibald were two old men.  
I knew them, and I may have laughed at them  
A little; but I must have honored them  
For they were old, and they were geniuses.  
I do not think of either of them now  
Without remembering, infallibly,  
A journey that I made one afternoon  
With Isaac to find out what Archibald  
Was doing with his oats. It was high time  
Those oats were cut, said Isaac; and he feared  
That Archibald—well, he could never feel  
Quite sure of Archibald. Accordingly  
The good old man invited me—that is,

Permitted me—to go along with him;  
And I, with a small boy's adhesiveness  
To competent old age, got up and went.  
I do not know that I cared overmuch  
For Archibald's or anybody's oats,  
But Archibald was quite another thing,  
And Isaac yet another; and the world  
Was wide, and there was gladness everywhere.

[86]

We walked together down the River Road  
With all the warmth and wonder of the land  
Around us, and the wayside flash of leaves,—  
And Isaac said the day was glorious;  
But somewhere at the end of the first mile  
I found that I was figuring to find  
How long those ancient legs of his would keep  
The pace that he had set for them. The sun  
Was hot, and I was ready to sweat blood;  
But Isaac, for aught I could make of him,  
Was cool to his hat-band. So I said then  
With a dry gasp of affable despair,  
Something about the scorching days we have  
In August without knowing it sometimes;  
But Isaac said the day was like a dream,  
And praised the Lord, and talked about the breeze.  
I made a fair confession of the breeze,

And crowded casually on his thought  
The nearness of a profitable nook  
That I could see. First I was half inclined  
To caution him that he was growing old,  
But something that was not compassion soon  
Made plain the folly of all subterfuge.

Isaac was old, but not so old as that.

So I proposed, without an overture,  
That we be seated in the shade a while,

[87]

And Isaac made no murmur. Soon the talk

Was turned on Archibald, and I began  
To feel some premonitions of a kind  
That only childhood knows; for the old man  
Had looked at me and clutched me with his eye,  
And asked if I had ever noticed things.

I told him that I could not think of them,  
And I knew then, by the frown that left his face  
Unsatisfied, that I had injured him.

“My good young friend,” he said, “you cannot feel  
What I have seen so long. You have the eyes—  
Oh, yes—but you have not the other things:  
The sight within that never will deceive,  
You do not know—you have no right to know;  
The twilight warning of experience,  
The singular idea of loneliness,—

These are not yours. But they have long been mine,  
And they have shown me now for seven years  
That Archibald is changing. It is not  
So much that he should come to his last hand,  
And leave the game, and go the old way down;  
But I have known him in and out so long,  
And I have seen so much of good in him  
That other men have shared and have not seen,

And I have gone so far through thick and thin,

[88]

Through cold and fire with him, that it brings

To this old heart of mine an ache that you

Have not yet lived enough to know about.

But even unto you, with your boy's faith,

Your freedom, and your untried confidence,

A time will come to find out what it means

To know that you are losing what was yours,

To know that you are being left behind;

And then the long contempt of innocence—

God bless you, boy!—don't think the worse of it

Because an old man chatters in the shade—

Will all be like a story you have read

In childhood and remembered for the pictures.

And when the best friend of your life goes down,

When first you know in him the slackening

That comes, and coming always tells the end,—

Now in a common word that would have passed  
Uncaught from any other lips than his,  
Now in some trivial act of every day,  
Done as he might have done it all along  
But for a twinging little difference  
That bites you like a squirrel's teeth—oh, yes,  
Then you will understand it well enough.

But oftener it comes in other ways;  
It comes without your knowing when it comes;  
You know that he is changing, and you know

[89]

That he is going—just as I know now  
That Archibald is going and that I  
Am staying.... Look at me, my boy,  
And when the time shall come for you to see  
That I must follow after him, try then  
To think of me, to bring me back again,  
Just as I was to-day. Think of the place  
Where we are sitting now, and think of me—  
Think of old Isaac as you knew him then,  
When you set out with him in August once  
To see old Archibald.”—The words come back  
Almost as Isaac must have uttered them,  
And there comes with them a dry memory  
Of something in my throat that would not move.  
If you had asked me then to tell just why

I made so much of Isaac and the things  
He said, I should have reached far for an answer;  
For I knew it was not sorrow that I felt,  
Whatever I may have wished it, or tried then  
To make myself believe. My mouth was full  
Of words, and they would have been comforting  
To Isaac, spite of my twelve years, I think;  
But there was not in me the willingness  
To speak them out. Therefore I watched the ground;  
And I was wondering what made the Lord

[90]

Create a thing so nervous as an ant,  
When Isaac, with commendable unrest,  
Ordained that we should take the road again—  
For it was yet three miles to Archibald's,  
And one to the first pump. I felt relieved  
All over when the old man told me that;  
I felt that he had stilled a fear of mine  
That those extremities of heat and cold  
Which he had long gone through with Archibald  
Had made the man impervious to both;  
But Isaac had a desert somewhere in him,  
And at the pump he thanked God for all things  
That he had put on earth for men to drink,  
And he drank well,—so well that I proposed  
That we go slowly lest I learn too soon

The bitterness of being left behind,  
And all those other things. That was a joke  
To Isaac, and it pleased him very much;  
And that pleased me—for I was twelve years old.  
  
At the end of an hour's walking after that  
The cottage of old Archibald appeared.  
Little and white and high on a smooth round hill  
It stood, with hackmatacks and apple-trees  
Before it, and a big barn-roof beyond;  
And over the place—trees, houses, fields and all—  
  
[91]  
  
Hovered an air of still simplicity  
And a fragrance of old summers—the old style  
That lives the while it passes. I dare say  
That I was lightly conscious of all this  
  
When Isaac, of a sudden, stopped himself,  
And for the long first quarter of a minute  
Gazed with incredulous eyes, forgetful quite  
Of breezes and of me and of all else  
  
Under the scorching sun but a smooth-cut field,  
Faint yellow in the distance. I was young,  
But there were a few things that I could see,  
And this was one of them.—“Well, well!” said he;  
And “Archibald will be surprised, I think,”  
Said I. But all my childhood subtlety  
Was lost on Isaac, for he strode along

Like something out of Homer—powerful  
And awful on the wayside, so I thought.  
Also I thought how good it was to be  
So near the end of my short-legged endeavor  
To keep the pace with Isaac for five miles.

Hardly had we turned in from the main road  
When Archibald, with one hand on his back  
And the other clutching his huge-headed cane,  
Came limping down to meet us.—“Well! well! well!”

[92]

Said he; and then he looked at my red face,  
All streaked with dust and sweat, and shook my hand,  
And said it must have been a right smart walk  
That we had had that day from Tilbury Town.—

“Magnificent,” said Isaac; and he told  
About the beautiful west wind there was  
Which cooled and clarified the atmosphere.

“You must have made it with your legs, I guess,”  
Said Archibald; and Isaac humored him  
With one of those infrequent smiles of his  
Which he kept in reserve, apparently,  
For Archibald alone. “But why,” said he,  
“Should Providence have cider in the world  
If not for such an afternoon as this?”  
And Archibald, with a soft light in his eyes,  
Replied that if he chose to go down cellar,

There he would find eight barrels—one of which  
Was newly tapped, he said, and to his taste  
An honor to the fruit. Isaac approved  
Most heartily of that, and guided us  
Forthwith, as if his venerable feet  
Were measuring the turf in his own door-yard,  
Straight to the open rollway. Down we went,  
Out of the fiery sunshine to the gloom,  
Grateful and half sepulchral, where we found  
The barrels, like eight potent sentinels,

[93]

Close ranged along the wall. From one of them  
A bright pine spile stuck out convincingly,  
And on the black flat stone, just under it,  
Glimmered a late-spilled proof that Archibald  
Had spoken from unfeigned experience.  
There was a fluted antique water-glass  
Close by, and in it, prisoned, or at rest,  
There was a cricket, of the brown soft sort  
That feeds on darkness. Isaac turned him out,  
And touched him with his thumb to make him jump,  
And then composedly pulled out the plug

With such a practiced hand that scarce a drop  
Did even touch his fingers. Then he drank  
And smacked his lips with a slow patronage  
And looked along the line of barrels there

With a pride that may have been forgetfulness:  
“I never twist a spigot nowadays,”  
He said, and raised the glass up to the light,  
“But I thank God for orchards.” And that glass  
Was filled repeatedly for the same hand  
Before I thought it worth while to discern  
Again that I was young, and that old age,  
With all his woes, had some advantages.

“Now, Archibald,” said Isaac, when we stood  
Outside again, “I have it in my mind

[94]

That I shall take a sort of little walk—  
To stretch my legs and see what you are doing.  
You stay and rest your back and tell the boy  
A story: Tell him all about the time  
In Stafford’s cabin forty years ago,  
When four of us were snowed up for ten days  
With only one dried haddock. Tell him all  
About it, and be wary of your back.

Now I will go along.”—I looked up then  
At Archibald, and as I looked I saw  
The way his nostrils widened once or twice  
And then grew narrow. I can hear to-day  
The way the old man chuckled to himself—  
Not wholesomely, not wholly to convince  
Another of his mirth,—as I can hear

The lonely sigh that followed.—But at length  
He said: "The orchard now's the place for us;  
We may find something like an apple there,  
And we shall have the shade, at any rate."  
So there we went and there we laid ourselves  
Where the sunlight could not reach us; and I champed  
A dozen of worm-blighted astrakhans  
While Archibald said nothing—merely told  
The tale of Stafford's cabin, which was good,  
Though "master chilly"—after his own phrase—

[95]

Even for a day like that. But other thoughts  
Were moving in his mind, imperative,  
And writhing to be spoken: I could see  
The glimmer of them in a glance or two,  
Cautious, or else unconscious, that he gave  
Over his shoulder: ... "Stafford and the rest  
Would have had no story of their own to tell;  
They would have left it all for others—yes—  
But that's an old song now, and Archibald  
And Isaac are old men. Remember, boy,  
That we are old. Whatever we have gained,  
Or lost, or thrown away, we are old men.  
You look before you and we look behind,  
And we are playing life out in the shadow—  
But that's not all of it. The sunshine lights

A good road yet before us if we look,  
And we are doing that when least we know it;  
For both of us are children of the sun,  
Like you, and like the weed there at your feet.  
  
The shadow calls us, and it frightens us—  
We think; but there's a light behind the stars  
And we old fellows who have dared to live,  
We see it—and we see the other things,  
The other things.... Yes, I have seen it come  
These eight years, and these ten years, and I know  
Now that it cannot be for very long  
  
[96]  
  
That Isaac will be Isaac. You have seen—  
Young as you are, you must have seen the strange  
Uncomfortable habit of the man?  
He'll take my nerves and tie them in a knot  
Sometimes, and that's not Isaac. I know that—  
And I know what it is: I get it here  
A little, in my knees, and Isaac—here.”  
The old man shook his head regretfully  
And laid his knuckles three times on his forehead.  
“That's what it is: Isaac is not quite right.  
You see it, but you don't know what it means:  
The thousand little differences—no,  
You do not know them, and it's well you don't;  
You'll know them soon enough—God bless you, boy!—

You'll know them, but not all of them—not all.

So think of them as little as you can:

There's nothing in them for you, or for me—

But I am old and I must think of them;

I'm in the shadow, but I don't forget

The light, my boy,—the light behind the stars.

Remember that: remember that I said it;

And when the time that you think far away

Shall come for you to say it—say it, boy;

Let there be no confusion or distrust

[97]

In you, no snarling of a life half lived,

Nor any cursing over broken things

That your complaint has been the ruin of.

Live to see clearly and the light will come

To you, and as you need it.—But there, there,

I'm going it again, as Isaac says,

And I'll stop now before you go to sleep.—

Only be sure that you growl cautiously,

And always where the shadow may not reach you."

Never shall I forget, long as I live,

The quaint thin crack in Archibald's old voice,

The lonely twinkle in his little eyes,

Or the way it made me feel to be with him.

I know I lay and looked for a long time

Down through the orchard and across the road,

Across the river and the sun-scorched hills  
That ceased in a blue forest, where the world  
Ceased with it. Now and then my fancy caught  
A flying glimpse of a good life beyond—  
Something of ships and sunlight, streets and singing,  
Troy falling, and the ages coming back,  
And ages coming forward: Archibald  
And Isaac were good fellows in old clothes  
And Agamemnon was a friend of mine;

[98]

Ulysses coming home again to shoot  
With bows and feathered arrows made another,  
And all was as it should be. I was young.  
So I lay dreaming of what things I would,  
Calm and incorrigibly satisfied  
With apples and romance and ignorance,  
And the floating smoke from Archibald's clay pipe.  
There was a stillness over everything,  
As if the spirit of heat had laid its hand  
Upon the world and hushed it; and I felt  
Within the mightiness of the white sun  
That smote the land around us and wrought out  
A fragrance from the trees, a vital warmth  
And fullness for the time that was to come,  
And a glory for the world beyond the forest.  
The present and the future and the past,

Isaac and Archibald, the burning bush,  
The Trojans and the walls of Jericho,  
Were beautifully fused; and all went well  
Till Archibald began to fret for Isaac  
And said it was a master day for sunstroke.

That was enough to make a mummy smile,  
I thought; and I remained hilarious,  
In face of all precedence and respect,  
Till Isaac (who had come to us unheard)

[99]

Found he had no tobacco, looked at me  
Peculiarly, and asked of Archibald  
What ailed the boy to make him chirrup so.  
From that he told us what a blessed world  
The Lord had given us.—“But, Archibald,”  
He added, with a sweet severity  
That made me think of peach-skins and goose-flesh,  
“I’m half afraid you cut those oats of yours  
A day or two before they were well set.”  
“They were set well enough,” said Archibald,—  
And I remarked the process of his nose  
Before the words came out; “but never mind  
Your neighbor’s oats: you stay here in the shade  
And rest yourself while I go find the cards.  
We’ll have a little game of seven-up  
And let the boy keep count.”—“We’ll have the game,

Assuredly," said Isaac; "and I think  
That I will have a draught of cider, also."—  
They marched away together towards the house  
And left me to my childish ruminations  
Upon the ways of men. I followed them  
Down cellar with my fancy, and then left them  
For a fairer vision of all things at once  
That was anon to be destroyed again

[100]

By the sound of voices and of heavy feet—  
One of the sounds of life that I remember,  
Though I forget so many that rang first  
As if they were thrown down to me from Sinai.  
So I remember, even to this day,  
Just how they sounded, how they placed themselves,  
And how the game went on while I made marks  
And crossed them out, and meanwhile made some Trojans.  
Likewise I made Ulysses, after Isaac,  
And a little after Flaxman. Archibald  
Was wounded when he found himself left out,  
But he had no heroics, and I said so:  
I told him that his white beard was too long  
And too straight down to be like things in Homer.  
"Quite so," said Isaac.—"Low," said Archibald;  
And he threw down a deuce with a deep grin  
That showed his yellow teeth and made me happy.

So they played on till a bell rang from the door,

And Archibald said, "Supper."—After that

The old men smoked while I sat watching them

[101]

And wondered with all comfort what might come

To me, and what might never come to me;

And when the time came for the long walk home

With Isaac in the twilight, I could see

The forest and the sunset and the sky-line,

No matter where it was that I was looking:

The flame beyond the boundary, the music,

The foam and the white ships, and two old men

Were things that would not leave me.—And that night

There came to me a dream—a shining one,

With two old angels in it. They had wings,

And they were sitting where a silver light

Suffused them, face to face. The wings of one

Began to palpitate as I approached,

But I was yet unseen when a dry voice

Cried thinly, with unpatronizing triumph,

"I've got you, Isaac; high, low, jack, and the game."

Isaac and Archibald have gone their way

To the silence of the loved and well-forgotten.

I knew them, and I may have laughed at them;

But there's a laughing that has honor in it,

And I have no regret for light words now.

Rather I think sometimes they may have made

[102]

Their sport of me;—but they would not do that,

They were too old for that. They were old men,

And I may laugh at them because I knew them.

---

[103]

### **THE RETURN OF MORGAN AND FINGAL**

And there we were together again—

Together again, we three:

Morgan, Fingal, fiddle, and all,

They had come for the night with me.

The spirit of joy was in Morgan's wrist,

There were songs in Fingal's throat;

And secure outside, for the spray to drench,

Was a tossed and empty boat.

And there were the pipes, and there was the punch,

And somewhere were twelve years;

So it came, in the manner of things unsought,

That a quick knock vexed our ears.

The night wind hovered and shrieked and snarled,

And I heard Fingal swear;

Then I opened the door—but I found no more

Than a chalk-skinned woman there.

[104]

I looked, and at last, “What is it?” I said—

"What is it that we can do?"

But never a word could I get from her

But "You—you three—it is you!"

Now the sense of a crazy speech like that

Was more than a man could make;

So I said, "But we—we are what, we three?"

And I saw the creature shake.

"Be quick!" she cried, "for I left her dead—

And I was afraid to come;

But you, you three—God made it be—

Will ferry the dead girl home.

"Be quick! be quick!—but listen to that

Who is it that makes it?—hark!"

But I heard no more than a knocking splash

And a wind that shook the dark.

"It is only the wind that blows," I said,

"And the boat that rocks outside."

And I watched her there, and I pitied her there—

"Be quick! be quick!" she cried.

She cried it so loud that her voice went in

To find where my two friends were;

[105]

So Morgan came, and Fingal came,

And out we went with her.

'Twas a lonely way for a man to take

And a tedious way for three;

And over the water, and all day long,  
They had come for the night with me.  
  
But the girl was dead, as the woman had said,  
And the best we could see to do  
  
Was to lay her aboard. The north wind roared,  
And into the night we flew.  
  
Four of us living and one for a ghost,  
Furrowing crest and swell,  
  
Through the surge and the dark, for that faint far spark,  
We ploughed with Azrael.  
  
Three of us ruffled and one gone mad,  
Crashing to south we went;  
  
And three of us there were too spattered to care  
What this late sailing meant.  
  
So down we steered and along we tore  
Through the flash of the midnight foam:  
  
[106]  
  
Silent enough to be ghosts on guard,  
We ferried the dead girl home.  
  
We ferried her down to the voiceless wharf,  
And we carried her up to the light;  
  
And we left the two to the father there,  
Who counted the coals that night.  
  
Then back we steered through the foam again,  
But our thoughts were fast and few;  
  
And all we did was to crowd the surge

And to measure the life we knew;—  
Till at last we came where a dancing gleam  
Skipped out to us, we three,—  
And the dark wet mooring pointed home  
Like a finger from the sea.

Then out we pushed the teetering skiff

And in we drew to the stairs;  
And up we went, each man content

With a life that fed no cares.

Fingers were cold and feet were cold,

And the tide was cold and rough;  
But the light was warm, and the room was warm,  
And the world was good enough.

[107]

And there were the pipes, and there was the punch,

More shrewd than Satan's tears:

Fingal had fashioned it, all by himself,  
With a craft that comes of years.

And there we were together again—

Together again, we three:

Morgan, Fingal, fiddle, and all,  
They were there for the night with me.

---

[108]

#### AUNT IMOGEN

Aunt Imogen was coming, and therefore

The children—Jane, Sylvester, and Young George—  
Were eyes and ears; for there was only one  
Aunt Imogen to them in the whole world,  
And she was in it only for four weeks  
In fifty-two. But those great bites of time  
Made all September a Queen's Festival;  
And they would strive, informally, to make  
The most of them.—The mother understood,  
And wisely stepped away. Aunt Imogen  
Was there for only one month in the year,  
While she, the mother,—she was always there;  
And that was what made all the difference.  
She knew it must be so, for Jane had once  
Expounded it to her so learnedly  
That she had looked away from the child's eyes  
And thought; and she had thought of many things.  
There was a demonstration every time  
Aunt Imogen appeared, and there was more  
[109]  
Than one this time. And she was at a loss  
Just how to name the meaning of it all:  
It puzzled her to think that she could be  
So much to any crazy things alive—  
Even to her sister's little savages  
Who knew no better than to be themselves;  
But in the midst of her glad wonderment

She found herself besieged and overcome  
By two tight arms and one tumultuous head,  
And therewith half bewildered and half pained  
By the joy she felt and by the sudden love  
That proved itself in childhood's honest noise.  
Jane, by the wings of sex, had reached her first;  
And while she strangled her, approvingly,  
Sylvester thumped his drum and Young George howled.—  
But finally, when all was rectified,  
And she had stilled the clamor of Young George  
By letting him go "pig-back" through the hall,  
They went together into the old room  
That looked across the fields; and Imogen  
Gazed out with a girl's gladness in her eyes,  
Happy to know that she was back once more  
Where there were those who knew her, and at last  
Had gloriously got away again  
From cabs and clattered asphalt for a while;

[110]

And there she sat and talked and looked and laughed  
And made the mother and the children laugh.  
Aunt Imogen made everybody laugh.  
There was the feminine paradox—that she  
Who had so little sunshine for herself  
Should have so much for others. How it was  
That she could make, and feel for making it,

So much of joy for them, and all along  
Be covering, like a scar, the while she smiled,  
That hungering incompleteness and regret—  
That passionate ache for something of her own,  
For something of herself—she never knew.  
  
She knew that she could seem to make them all  
Believe there was no other part of her  
Than her persistent happiness; but the why  
And how she did not know. Still none of them  
Could have a thought that she was living down—  
Almost as if regret were criminal,  
So proud it was and yet so profitless—  
The penance of a dream, and that was good:  
Even her big bewhiskered brother Giles  
Had called her in his letter, not long since,  
A superannuated pretty girl;  
And she, to do the thing most adequate,  
Had posted back sarcastic sheets enough  
  
[111]  
To keep the beast in humor for a month.  
  
But her sister Jane—the mother of little Jane,  
Sylvester, and Young George—may, after all,  
Have known; for she was—well, she was a woman.  
Young George, however, did not yield himself  
To nourish the false hunger of a ghost  
That made no good return. He saw too much:

The accumulated wisdom of his years  
Had so conclusively made plain to him  
The permanent profusion of a world  
Where everybody might have everything  
To do, and almost everything to eat,  
That he was jubilantly satisfied  
And all unthwarted by adversity.

Young George knew things. The world, he had found out,  
Was a good place, and life was a good game—  
Particularly when Aunt Imogen  
Was in it. And one day it came to pass—  
One rainy day when she was holding him  
And rocking him—that he, in his own right,  
Took it upon himself to tell her so;  
And something in his way of telling it—  
The language, or the tone, or something else—  
Gripped like a baby's fingers on her throat,

[112]

And then went feeling through as if to make  
A plaything of her heart. Such undeserved  
And unsophisticated confidence  
Went mercilessly home; and had she sat  
Before a looking glass, the deeps of it  
Could not have shown more clearly to her then  
Than one thought-mirrored little glimpse had shown,  
The pang that wrenched her face and filled her eyes

With anguish and intolerable mist.  
The blow that she had vaguely thrust aside  
Like fright so many times had found her now:  
Clean-thrust and final it had come to her  
From a child's lips at last, as it had come  
Never before, and as it might be felt  
Never again. Some grief, like some delight,  
Stings hard but once: to custom after that  
The rapture or the pain submits itself,  
And we are wiser than we were before.  
And Imogen was wiser; though at first  
Her dream-defeating wisdom was indeed  
A thankless heritage: there was no sweet,  
No bitter now; nor was there anything  
To make a daily meaning for her life—  
Till truth, like Harlequin, leapt out somehow  
From ambush and threw sudden savor to it—

[113]

But the blank taste of time. There were no dreams,  
No phantoms in her future any more:  
One clinching revelation of what was,  
One by-flash of irrevocable chance,  
Had acridly but honestly foretold  
The mystical fulfillment of a life  
That might have once.... But that was all gone by:  
There was no need of reaching back for that:

The triumph was not hers: there was no love  
Save borrowed love: there was no might have been.  
  
But there was yet Young George—and he had gone  
Conveniently to sleep, like a good boy;  
  
And there was yet Sylvester with his drum,  
And there was frowzle-headed little Jane;  
  
And there was Jane the sister, and the mother,—  
Her sister, and the mother of them all.  
  
They were not hers, not even one of them:  
She was not born to be so much as that,  
For she was born to be Aunt Imogen.  
  
Now she could see the truth and look at it;  
Now she could make stars out where once had palled

[114]

A future's emptiness; now she could share  
With others—ah, the others!—to the end  
The largess of a woman who could smile;  
  
Now it was hers to dance the folly down,  
And all the murmuring; now it was hers  
To be Aunt Imogen.—So, when Young George  
Woke up and blinked at her with his big eyes,  
And smiled to see the way she blinked at him,  
'Twas only in old concord with the stars  
That she took hold of him and held him close,  
Close to herself, and crushed him till he laughed.

### THE KLONDIKE

Never mind the day we left, or the way the women clung to us;

All we need now is the last way they looked at us.

Never mind the twelve men there amid the cheering—

Twelve men or one man, 'twill soon be all the same;

For this is what we know: we are five men together,

Five left o' twelve men to find the golden river.

Far we came to find it out, but the place was here for all of us;

Far, far we came, and here we have the last of us.

We that were the front men, we that would be early,

We that had the faith, and the triumph in our eyes:

We that had the wrong road, twelve men together,—

Singing when the devil sang to find the golden river.

Say the gleam was not for us, but never say we doubted it;

Say the wrong road was right before we followed it.

We that were the front men, fit for all forage,—

Say that while we dwindle we are front men still;

For this is what we know to-night: we're starving here together—

Starving on the wrong road to find the golden river.

Wrong, we say, but wait a little: hear him in the corner there;

He knows more than we, and he'll tell us if we listen there—

He that fought the snow-sleep less than all the others

Stays awhile yet, and he knows where he stays:

Foot and hand a frozen clout, brain a freezing feather,

Still he's here to talk with us and to the golden river.

[117]

"Flow," he says, "and flow along, but you cannot flow away from us;

All the world's ice will never keep you far from us;

Every man that heeds your call takes the way that leads him—

The one way that's his way, and lives his own life:

Starve or laugh, the game goes on, and on goes the river;

Gold or no, they go their way—twelve men together.

"Twelve," he says, "who sold their shame for a lure you call too fair for them—

You that laugh and flow to the same word that urges them:

Twelve who left the old town shining in the sunset,

Left the weary street and the small safe days:

Twelve who knew but one way out, wide the way or narrow:

Twelve who took the frozen chance and laid their lives on yellow.

"Flow by night and flow by day, nor ever once be seen by them;

Flow, freeze, and flow, till time shall hide the bones of them;

[118]

Laugh and wash their names away, leave them all forgotten,

Leave the old town to crumble where it sleeps;

Leave it there as they have left it, shining in the valley,—

Leave the town to crumble down and let the women marry.

"Twelve of us or five," he says, "we know the night is on us now:

Five while we last, and we may as well be thinking now:

Thinking each his own thought, knowing, when the light comes,

Five left or none left, the game will not be lost.

Crouch or sleep, we go the way, the last way together:

Five or none, the game goes on, and on goes the river.  
"For after all that we have done and all that we have failed to do,  
Life will be life and the world will have its work to do:  
Every man who follows us will heed in his own fashion  
The calling and the warning and the friends who do not know:

[119]

Each will hold an icy knife to punish his heart's lover,  
And each will go the frozen way to find the golden river."  
There you hear him, all he says, and the last we'll ever get from him.  
Now he wants to sleep, and that will be the best for him.  
Let him have his own way—no, you needn't shake him—  
Your own turn will come, so let the man sleep.  
For this is what we know: we are stalled here together—  
Hands and feet and hearts of us, to find the golden river.  
And there's a quicker way than sleep?... Never mind the looks of him:  
All he needs now is a finger on the eyes of him.  
You there on the left hand, reach a little over—  
Shut the stars away, or he'll see them all night:  
He'll see them all night and he'll see them all to-morrow,  
Crawling down the frozen sky, cold and hard and yellow.

[120]

Won't you move an inch or two—to keep the stars away from him?  
—No, he won't move, and there's no need of asking him.  
Never mind the twelve men, never mind the women;  
Three while we last, we'll let them all go;  
And we'll hold our thoughts north while we starve here together,

Looking each his own way to find the golden river.

---

[121]

### THE GROWTH OF "LORRAINE"

I

While I stood listening, discreetly dumb,  
Lorraine was having the last word with me:  
"I know," she said, "I know it, but you see  
Some creatures are born fortunate, and some  
Are born to be found out and overcome,—  
Born to be slaves, to let the rest go free;  
And if I'm one of them (and I must be)  
You may as well forget me and go home.  
"You tell me not to say these things, I know,  
But I should never try to be content:  
I've gone too far; the life would be too slow.  
Some could have done it—some girls have the stuff;  
But I can't do it: I don't know enough.  
I'm going to the devil."—And she went.

II

I did not half believe her when she said  
That I should never hear from her again;

[122]

Nor when I found a letter from Lorraine,  
Was I surprised or grieved at what I read:  
"Dear friend, when you find this, I shall be dead.

You are too far away to make me stop.  
They say that one drop—think of it, one drop!—  
Will be enough,—but I'll take five instead.  
“You do not frown because I call you friend,  
For I would have you glad that I still keep  
Your memory, and even at the end—  
Impenitent, sick, shattered—cannot curse  
The love that flings, for better or for worse,  
This worn-out, cast-out flesh of mine to sleep.”

---

[123]

#### **THE SAGE**

Foreguarded and unfevered and serene,  
Back to the perilous gates of Truth he went—  
Back to fierce wisdom and the Orient,  
To the Dawn that is, that shall be, and has been:  
Previsioned of the madness and the mean  
He stood where Asia, crowned with ravishment,  
The curtain of Love’s inner shrine had rent,  
And after had gone scarred by the Unseen.  
There at his touch there was a treasure chest,  
And in it was a gleam, but not of gold;  
And on it, like a flame, these words were scrolled:  
“I keep the mintage of Eternity.  
Who comes to take one coin may take the rest,  
And all may come—but not without the key.”

---

[124]

## **ERASMUS**

When he protested, not too solemnly,  
That for a world's achieving maintenance  
The crust of overdone divinity  
Lacked aliment, they called it recreance;  
And when he chose through his own glass to scan  
Sick Europe, and reduced, unyieldingly,  
The monk within the cassock to the man  
Within the monk, they called it heresy.  
And when he made so perilously bold  
As to be scattered forth in black and white,  
Good fathers looked askance at him and rolled  
Their inward eyes in anguish and affright;  
There were some of them did shake at what was told,  
And they shook best who knew that he was right.

---

[125]

## **THE WOMAN AND THE WIFE**

### **I—THE EXPLANATION**

"You thought we knew," she said, "but we were wrong.  
This we can say, the rest we do not say;  
Nor do I let you throw yourself away  
Because you love me. Let us both be strong,  
And we shall find in sorrow, before long,

Only the price Love ruled that we should pay:  
The dark is at the end of every day,  
And silence is the end of every song.  
“You ask me for one proof that I speak right,  
But I can answer only what I know;  
You look for just one lie to make black white,  
But I can tell you only what is true—  
God never made me for the wife of you.  
This we can say,—believe me!... Tell me so!”

## II—THE ANNIVERSARY

“Give me the truth, whatever it may be.  
You thought we knew, now tell me what you miss:  
[126]  
You are the one to tell me what it is—  
You are a man, and you have married me.  
What is it worth to-night that you can see  
More marriage in the dream of one dead kiss  
Than in a thousand years of life like this?  
Passion has turned the lock, Pride keeps the key.  
“Whatever I have said or left unsaid,  
Whatever I have done or left undone,—  
Tell me. Tell me the truth.... Are you afraid?  
Do you think that Love was ever fed with lies  
But hunger lived thereafter in his eyes?  
Do you ask me to take moonlight for the sun?”

---

**THE BOOK OF ANNANDALE**

I

Partly to think, more to be left alone,  
George Annandale said something to his friends—  
A word or two, brusque, but yet smoothed enough  
To suit their funeral gaze—and went upstairs;  
And there, in the one room that he could call  
His own, he found a kind of meaningless  
Annoyance in the mute familiar things  
That filled it; for the grate's monotonous gleam  
Was not the gleam that he had known before,  
The books were not the books that used to be,  
The place was not the place. There was a lack  
Of something; and the certitude of death  
Itself, as with a furtive questioning,  
Hovered, and he could not yet understand.  
He knew that she was gone—there was no need  
Of any argued proof to tell him that,  
For they had buried her that afternoon,  
Under the leaves and snow; and still there was  
A doubt, a pitiless doubt, a plunging doubt,

That struck him, and upstartled when it struck,  
The vision, the old thought in him. There was  
A lack, and one that wrenched him; but it was

Not that—not that. There was a present sense  
Of something indeterminably near—  
The soul-clutch of a prescient emptiness  
That would not be foreboding. And if not,  
What then?—or was it anything at all?  
Yes, it was something—it was everything—  
But what was everything? or anything?  
Tired of time, bewildered, he sat down;  
But in his chair he kept on wondering  
That he should feel so desolately strange  
And yet—for all he knew that he had lost  
More of the world than most men ever win—  
So curiously calm. And he was left  
Unanswered and unsatisfied: there came  
No clearer meaning to him than had come  
Before; the old abstraction was the best  
That he could find, the farthest he could go;  
To that was no beginning and no end—  
No end that he could reach. So he must learn  
To live the surest and the largest life  
Attainable in him, would he divine  
The meaning of the dream and of the words  
That he had written, without knowing why,

[129]

On sheets that he had bound up like a book  
And covered with red leather. There it was—

There in his desk, the record he had made,  
The spiritual plaything of his life:  
There were the words no eyes had ever seen  
Save his; there were the words that were not made  
For glory or for gold. The pretty wife  
Whom he had loved and lost had not so much  
As heard of them. They were not made for her.  
His love had been so much the life of her,  
And hers had been so much the life of him,  
That any wayward phrasing on his part  
Would have had no moment. Neither had lived enough  
To know the book, albeit one of them  
Had grown enough to write it. There it was,  
However, though he knew not why it was:  
There was the book, but it was not for her,  
For she was dead. And yet, there was the book.  
Thus would his fancy circle out and out,  
And out and in again, till he would make  
As if with a large freedom to crush down  
Those under-thoughts. He covered with his hands  
His tired eyes, and waited: he could hear—  
[130]  
Or partly feel and hear, mechanically—  
The sound of talk, with now and then the steps  
And skirts of some one scudding on the stairs,  
Forgetful of the nerveless funeral feet

That she had brought with her; and more than once  
There came to him a call as of a voice—  
A voice of love returning—but not hers.  
Whose he knew not, nor dreamed; nor did he know,  
Nor did he dream, in his blurred loneliness  
Of thought, what all the rest might think of him.  
For it had come at last, and she was gone  
With all the vanished women of old time,—  
And she was never coming back again.  
Yes, they had buried her that afternoon,  
Under the frozen leaves and the cold earth,  
Under the leaves and snow. The flickering week,  
The sharp and certain day, and the long drowse  
Were over, and the man was left alone.  
He knew the loss—Therefore it puzzled him  
That he should sit so long there as he did,  
And bring the whole thing back—the love, the trust,  
The pallor, the poor face, and the faint way

[131]

She last had looked at him—and yet not weep,  
Or even choose to look about the room  
To see how sad it was; and once or twice  
He winked and pinched his eyes against the flame  
And hoped there might be tears. But hope was all,  
And all to him was nothing: he was lost.  
And yet he was not lost: he was astray—

Out of his life and in another life;  
And in the stillness of this other life  
He wondered and he drowsed. He wondered when  
It was, and wondered if it ever was  
On earth that he had known the other face—  
The searching face, the eloquent, strange face—  
That with a sightless beauty looked at him  
And with a speechless promise uttered words  
That were not the world's words, or any kind  
That he had known before. What was it, then?  
What was it held him—fascinated him?  
Why should he not be human? He could sigh,  
And he could even groan,—but what of that?  
There was no grief left in him. Was he glad?  
Yet how could he be glad, or reconciled,  
Or anything but wretched and undone?  
How could he be so frigid and inert—  
[132]  
So like a man with water in his veins  
Where blood had been a little while before?  
How could he sit shut in there like a snail?  
What ailed him? What was on him? Was he glad?  
Over and over again the question came,  
Unanswered and unchanged,—and there he was.  
But what in heaven's name did it all mean?  
If he had lived as other men had lived,

If home had ever shown itself to be  
The counterfeit that others had called home,  
Then to this undivined resource of his  
There were some key; but now ... Philosophy?  
Yes, he could reason in a kind of way  
That he was glad for Miriam's release—  
Much as he might be glad to see his friends  
Laid out around him with their grave-clothes on,  
And this life done for them; but something else  
There was that foundered reason, overwhelmed it,  
And with a chilled, intuitive rebuff  
Beat back the self-cajoling sophistries  
That his half-tutored thought would half-project.  
What was it, then? Had he become transformed  
And hardened through long watches and long grief  
[133]  
Into a loveless, feelingless dead thing  
That brooded like a man, breathed like a man,—  
Did everything but ache? And was a day  
To come some time when feeling should return  
Forever to drive off that other face—  
The lineless, indistinguishable face—  
That once had thrilled itself between his own  
And hers there on the pillow,—and again  
Between him and the coffin-lid had flashed  
Like fate before it closed,—and at the last

Had come, as it should seem, to stay with him,  
Bidden or not? He were a stranger then,  
Foredrowsed awhile by some deceiving draught  
Of poppied anguish, to the covert grief  
And the stark loneliness that waited him,  
And for the time were cursedly endowed  
With a dull trust that shammed indifference  
To knowing there would be no touch again  
Of her small hand on his, no silencing  
Of her quick lips on his, no feminine  
Completeness and love-fragrance in the house,  
No sound of some one singing any more,  
No smoothing of slow fingers on his hair,  
No shimmer of pink slippers on brown tiles.

But there was nothing, nothing, in all that:  
He had not fooled himself so much as that;

[134]

He might be dreaming or he might be sick,  
But not like that. There was no place for fear,  
No reason for remorse. There was the book  
That he had made, though.... It might be the book;  
Perhaps he might find something in the book;  
But no, there could be nothing there at all—  
He knew it word for word; but what it meant—  
He was not sure that he had written it  
For what it meant; and he was not quite sure

That he had written it;—more likely it  
Was all a paper ghost.... But the dead wife  
Was real: he knew that, for he had been  
To see them bury her; and he had seen  
The flowers and the snow and the stripped limbs  
Of trees; and he had heard the preacher pray;  
And he was back again, and he was glad.

Was he a brute? No, he was not a brute:  
He was a man—like any other man:  
He had loved and married his wife Miriam,  
They had lived a little while in paradise  
And she was gone; and that was all of it.

But no, not all of it—not all of it:  
There was the book again; something in that  
Pursued him, overpowered him, put out  
The futile strength of all his whys and wheres,

[135]  
And left him unintelligibly numb—

Too numb to care for anything but rest.  
It must have been a curious kind of book  
That he had made: it was a drowsy book  
At any rate. The very thought of it  
Was like the taste of some impossible drink—  
A taste that had no taste, but for all that  
Had mixed with it a strange thought-cordial,  
So potent that it somehow killed in him

The ultimate need of doubting any more—  
Of asking any more. Did he but live  
The life that he must live, there were no more  
To seek.—The rest of it was on the way.  
Still there was nothing, nothing, in all this—  
Nothing that he cared now to reconcile  
With reason or with sorrow. All he knew  
For certain was that he was tired out:  
His flesh was heavy and his blood beat small;  
Something supreme had been wrenched out of him  
As if to make vague room for something else.  
He had been through too much. Yes, he would stay  
There where he was and rest.—And there he stayed;  
The daylight became twilight, and he stayed;  
The flame and the face faded, and he slept.

[136]

And they had buried her that afternoon,  
Under the tight-screwed lid of a long box,  
Under the earth, under the leaves and snow.

## II—DAMARIS

Look where she would, feed conscience how she might,  
There was but one way now for Damaris—  
One straight way that was hers, hers to defend,  
At hand, imperious. But the nearness of it,  
The flesh-bewildering simplicity,  
And the plain strangeness of it, thrilled again

That wretched little quivering single string  
Which yielded not, but held her to the place  
Where now for five triumphant years had slept  
The flameless dust of Argan.—He was gone,  
The good man she had married long ago;  
And she had lived, and living she had learned,  
And surely there was nothing to regret:  
Much happiness had been for each of them,  
And they had been like lovers to the last:  
And after that, and long, long after that,  
Her tears had washed out more of widowed grief  
Than smiles had ever told of other joy.—

But could she, looking back, find anything  
That should return to her in the new time,  
And with relentless magic uncreate

[137]

This temple of new love where she had thrown  
Dead sorrow on the altar of new life?  
Only one thing, only one thread was left;  
When she broke that, when reason snapped it off,  
And once for all, baffled, the grave let go  
The trivial hideous hold it had on her,—  
Then she were free, free to be what she would,  
Free to be what she was.—And yet she stayed,  
Leashed, as it were, and with a cobweb strand,  
Close to a tombstone—maybe to starve there.

But why to starve? And why stay there at all?  
Why not make one good leap and then be done  
Forever and at once with Argan's ghost  
And all such outworn churchyard servitude?  
For it was Argan's ghost that held the string,  
And her sick fancy that held Argan's ghost—  
Held it and pitied it. She laughed, almost,  
There for the moment; but her strained eyes filled  
With tears, and she was angry for those tears—  
Angry at first, then proud, then sorry for them.  
So she grew calm; and after a vain chase  
For thoughts more vain, she questioned of herself  
What measure of primeval doubts and fears

[138]

Were still to be gone through that she might win  
Persuasion of her strength and of herself  
To be what she could see that she must be,  
No matter where the ghost was.—And the more  
She lived, the more she came to recognize  
That something out of her thrilled ignorance  
Was luminously, proudly being born,  
And thereby proving, thought by forward thought  
The prowess of its image; and she learned  
At length to look right on to the long days  
Before her without fearing. She could watch  
The coming course of them as if they were

No more than birds, that slowly, silently,  
And irretrievably should wing themselves  
Uncounted out of sight. And when he came  
Again she should be free—she would be free.  
  
Else, when he looked at her she must look down,  
Defeated, and malignly dispossessed  
Of what was hers to prove and in the proving  
Wisely to consecrate. And if the plague  
Of that perverse defeat should come to be—  
If at that sickening end she were to find  
Herself to be the same poor prisoner  
That he had found at first—then she must lose  
All sight and sound of him, she must abjure  
All possible thought of him; for he would go

[139]

So far and for so long from her that love—  
Even a love like his, exiled enough,  
Might for another's touch be born again—  
Born to be lost and starved for and not found;  
Or, at the next, the second wretchedest,  
It might go mutely flickering down and out,  
And on some incomplete and piteous day,  
Some perilous day to come, she might at last  
Learn, with a noxious freedom, what it is  
To be at peace with ghosts. Then were the blow  
Thrice deadlier than any kind of death

Could ever be: to know that she had won  
The truth too late—there were the dregs indeed  
Of wisdom, and of love the final thrust  
Unmerciful; and there where now did lie  
So plain before her the straight radiance  
Of what was her appointed way to take,  
Were only the bleak ruts of an old road  
That stretched ahead and faded and lay far  
Through deserts of unconscionable years.  
But vampire thoughts like these confessed the doubt  
That love denied; and once, if never again,  
They should be turned away. They might come back—  
[140]  
More craftily, perchance, they might come back—  
And with a spirit-thirst insatiable  
Finish the strength of her; but now, to-day  
She would have none of them. She knew that love  
Was true, that he was true, that she was true;  
And should a death-bed snare that she had made  
So long ago be stretched inexorably  
Through all her life, only to be unspun  
With her last breathing? And were bats and threads,  
Accursedly devised with watered gules,  
To be Love's heraldry? What were it worth  
To live and to find out that life were life  
But for an unrequited incubus

Of outlawed shame that would not be thrown down  
Till she had thrown down fear and overcome  
The woman that was yet so much of her  
That she might yet go mad? What were it worth  
To live, to linger, and to be condemned  
In her submission to a common thought  
That clogged itself and made of its first faith  
Its last impediment? What augured it,  
Now in this quick beginning of new life,

[141]

To clutch the sunlight and be feeling back,  
Back with a scared fantastic fearfulness,  
To touch, not knowing why, the vexed-up ghost  
Of what was gone?  
Yes, there was Argan's face,  
Pallid and pinched and ruinously marked  
With big pathetic bones; there were his eyes,  
Quiet and large, fixed wistfully on hers;  
And there, close-pressed again within her own,  
Quivered his cold thin fingers. And, ah! yes,  
There were the words, those dying words again,  
And hers that answered when she promised him.  
Promised him? ... yes. And had she known the truth  
Of what she felt that he should ask her that,  
And had she known the love that was to be,  
God knew that she could not have told him then.

But then she knew it not, nor thought of it;  
There was no need of it; nor was there need  
Of any problematical support  
Whereto to cling while she convinced herself  
That love's intuitive utility,  
Inexorably merciful, had proved  
That what was human was unpermanent  
And what was flesh was ashes. She had told

Him then that she would love no other man,

[142]

That there was not another man on earth  
Whom she could ever love, or who could make  
So much as a love thought go through her brain;  
And he had smiled. And just before he died  
His lips had made as if to say something—  
Something that passed unwhispered with his breath,  
Out of her reach, out of all quest of it.  
And then, could she have known enough to know  
The meaning of her grief, the folly of it,  
The faithlessness and the proud anguish of it,  
There might be now no threads to punish her,  
No vampire thoughts to suck the coward blood,  
The life, the very soul of her.

Yes, Yes,

They might come back.... But why should they come back?

Why was it she had suffered? Why had she

Struggled and grown these years to demonstrate  
That close without those hovering clouds of gloom  
And through them here and there forever gleamed  
The Light itself, the life, the love, the glory,  
Which was of its own radiance good proof  
That all the rest was darkness and blind sight?

And who was *she*? The woman she had known—

[143]

The woman she had petted and called “I”—  
The woman she had pitied, and at last  
Commiserated for the most abject  
And persecuted of all womankind,—  
Could it be she that had sought out the way  
To measure and thereby to quench in her  
The woman’s fear—the fear of her not fearing?

A nervous little laugh that lost itself,  
Like logic in a dream, fluttered her thoughts  
An instant there that ever she should ask  
What she might then have told so easily—  
So easily that Annandale had frowned,  
Had he been given wholly to be told  
The truth of what had never been before  
So passionately, so inevitably  
Confessed.

For she could see from where she sat  
The sheets that he had bound up like a book

And covered with red leather; and her eyes  
Could see between the pages of the book,  
Though her eyes, like them, were closed. And she could read  
As well as if she had them in her hand,  
What he had written on them long ago,—  
Six years ago, when he was waiting for her.

She might as well have said that she could see  
The man himself, as once he would have looked

[144]

Had she been there to watch him while he wrote  
Those words, and all for her.... For her whose face  
Had flashed itself, prophetic and unseen,  
But not unspirited, between the life  
That would have been without her and the life  
That he had gathered up like frozen roots  
Out of a grave-clod lying at his feet,  
Unconsciously, and as unconsciously  
Transplanted and revived. He did not know  
The kind of life that he had found, nor did  
He doubt, not knowing it; but well he knew  
That it was life—new life, and that the old  
Might then with unimprisoned wings go free,  
Onward and all along to its own light,  
Through the appointed shadow.  
While she gazed  
Upon it there she felt within herself

The growing of a newer consciousness—  
The pride of something fairer than her first  
Outclamoring of interdicted thought  
Had ever quite foretold; and all at once  
There quivered and requivered through her flesh,  
Like music, like the sound of an old song,  
Triumphant, love-remembered murmurings  
Of what for passion's innocence had been  
Too mightily, too perilously hers,

[145]

Ever to be reclaimed and realized  
Until to-day. To-day she could throw off  
The burden that had held her down so long,  
And she could stand upright, and she could see  
The way to take, with eyes that had in them  
No gleam but of the spirit. Day or night,  
No matter; she could see what was to see—  
All that had been till now shut out from her,  
The service, the fulfillment, and the truth,  
And thus the cruel wiseness of it all.  
So Damaris, more like than anything  
To one long prisoned in a twilight cave  
With hovering bats for all companionship,  
And after time set free to fight the sun,  
Laughed out, so glad she was to recognize  
The test of what had been, through all her folly,

The courage of her conscience; for she knew,  
Now on a late-flushed autumn afternoon  
That else had been too bodeful of dead things  
To be endured with aught but the same old  
Inert, self-contradicted martyrdom  
Which she had known so long, that she could look  
Right forward through the years, nor any more  
Shrink with a cringing prescience to behold  
The glitter of dead summer on the grass,

[146]

Or the brown-glimmered crimson of still trees  
Across the interval where flashed along,  
Black-silvered, the cold river. She had found,  
As if by some transcendent freakishness  
Of reason, the glad life that she had sought  
Where naught but obvious clouds could ever be—  
Clouds to put out the sunlight from her eyes,  
And to put out the love-light from her soul.

But they were gone—now they were all gone;  
And with a whimsied pathos, like the mist  
Of grief that clings to new-found happiness  
Hard wrought, she might have pity for the small  
Defeated quest of them that brushed her sight  
Like flying lint—lint that had once been thread....  
Yes, like an anodyne, the voice of him,  
There were the words that he had made for her,

For her alone. The more she thought of them  
The more she lived them, and the more she knew  
The life-grip and the pulse of warm strength in them.

They were the first and last of words to her,  
And there was in them a far questioning  
That had for long been variously at work,  
[147]

Divinely and elusively at work,  
With her, and with the grave that had been hers;  
They were eternal words, and they diffused  
A flame of meaning that men's lexicons  
Had never kindled; they were choral words  
That harmonized with love's enduring chords  
Like wisdom with release; triumphant words  
That rang like elemental orisons  
Through ages out of ages; words that fed  
Love's hunger in the spirit; words that smote;  
Thrilled words that echoed, and barbed words that clung;—  
And every one of them was like a friend  
Whose obstinate fidelity, well tried,  
Had found at last and irresistibly  
The way to her close conscience, and thereby  
Revealed the unsubstantial Nemesis  
That she had clutched and shuddered at so long;  
And every one of them was like a real  
And ringing voice, clear toned and absolute,

But of a love-subdued authority  
That uttered thrice the plain significance  
Of what had else been generously vague  
And indolently true. It may have been  
The triumph and the magic of the soul,  
Unspeakably revealed, that finally

[148]

Had reconciled the grim probationing  
Of wisdom with unalterable faith,  
But she could feel—not knowing what it was,  
For the sheer freedom of it—a new joy  
That humanized the latent wizardry  
Of his prophetic voice and put for it  
The man within the music.

So it came  
To pass, like many a long-compelled emprise  
That with its first accomplishment almost  
Annihilates its own severity,  
That she could find, whenever she might look,  
The certified achievement of a love  
That had endured, self-guarded and supreme,  
To the glad end of all that wavering;  
And she could see that now the flickering world  
Of autumn was awake with sudden bloom,  
New-born, perforce, of a slow bourgeoning.  
And she had found what more than half had been

The grave-deluded, flesh-bewildered fear  
Which men and women struggle to call faith,  
To be the paid progression to an end  
Whereat she knew the foresight and the strength  
To glorify the gift of what was hers,  
To vindicate the truth of what she was.

[149]

And had it come to her so suddenly?  
There was a pity and a weariness  
In asking that, and a great needlessness;  
For now there were no wretched quivering strings  
That held her to the churchyard any more:  
There were no thoughts that flapped themselves like bats  
Around her any more. The shield of love  
Was clean, and she had paid enough to learn  
How it had always been so. And the truth,  
Like silence after some far victory,  
Had come to her, and she had found it out  
As if it were a vision, a thing born  
So suddenly!—just as a flower is born,  
Or as a world is born—so suddenly.

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[150]

#### **SAINTE-NITOUCHÉ**

Though not for common praise of him,  
Nor yet for pride or charity,

Still would I make to Vanderberg  
One tribute for his memory:  
One honest warrant of a friend  
Who found with him that flesh was grass—  
Who neither blamed him in defect  
Nor marveled how it came to pass;  
Or why it ever was that he—  
That Vanderberg, of all good men,  
Should lose himself to find himself,  
Straightway to lose himself again.  
For we had buried Sainte-Nitouche,  
And he had said to me that night:  
“Yes, we have laid her in the earth,  
But what of that?” And he was right.  
And he had said: “We have a wife,  
We have a child, we have a church;  
[151]  
'Twould be a scurrilous way out  
If we should leave them in the lurch.  
“That's why I have you here with me  
To-night: you know a talk may take  
The place of bromide, cyanide,  
*Et cetera.* For heaven's sake,  
“Why do you look at me like that?  
What have I done to freeze you so?  
Dear man, you see where friendship means

A few things yet that you don't know;  
"And you see partly why it is  
That I am glad for what is gone:  
For Sainte-Nitouche and for the world  
In me that followed. What lives on—  
"Well, here you have it: here at home—  
For even home will yet return.  
  
You know the truth is on my side,  
And that will make the embers burn.  
"I see them brighten while I speak,  
I see them flash,—and they are mine!  
You do not know them, but I do:  
I know the way they used to shine.

[152]

"And I know more than I have told  
Of other life that is to be:  
I shall have earned it when it comes,  
And when it comes I shall be free.  
"Not as I was before she came  
But farther on for having been  
The servitor, the slave of her—  
The fool, you think. But there's your sin—  
"Forgive me!—and your ignorance:  
Could you but have the vision here  
That I have, you would understand  
As I do that all ways are clear

“For those who dare to follow them  
With earnest eyes and honest feet.  
  
But Sainte-Nitouche has made the way  
For me, and I shall find it sweet.  
  
“Sweet with a bitter sting left?—Yes,  
Bitter enough, God knows, at first;  
But there are more steep ways than one  
To make the best look like the worst;  
“And here is mine—the dark and hard,  
For me to follow, trust, and hold:  
  
[153]  
And worship, so that I may leave  
No broken story to be told.  
  
“Therefore I welcome what may come,  
Glad for the days, the nights, the years.”—  
An upward flash of ember-flame  
Revealed the gladness in his tears.  
“You see them, but you know,” said he,  
“Too much to be incredulous:  
You know the day that makes us wise,  
The moment that makes fools of us.  
“So I shall follow from now on  
The road that she has found for me:  
The dark and starry way that leads  
Right upward, and eternally.  
“Stumble at first? I may do that;

And I may grope, and hate the night;

But there's a guidance for the man

Who stumbles upward for the light,

"And I shall have it all from her,

The foam-born child of innocence.

I feel you smiling while I speak,

But that's of little consequence;

[154]

"For when we learn that we may find

The truth where others miss the mark,

What is it worth for us to know

That friends are smiling in the dark?

"Could we but share the lonely pride

Of knowing, all would then be well;

But knowledge often writes itself

In flaming words we cannot spell.

"And I, who have my work to do,

Look forward; and I dare to see,

Far stretching and all mountainous,

God's pathway through the gloom for me."

I found so little to say then

That I said nothing.—"Say good-night,"

Said Vanderberg; "and when we meet

To-morrow, tell me I was right.

"Forget the dozen other things

That you have not the faith to say;

For now I know as well as you  
That you are glad to go away."  
I could have blessed the man for that,  
And he could read me with a smile:  
[155]

"You doubt," said he, "but if we live  
You'll know me in a little while."  
He lived; and all as he foretold,  
I knew him—better than he thought:  
My fancy did not wholly dig  
The pit where I believed him caught.  
But yet he lived and laughed, and preached,  
And worked—as only players can:  
He scoured the shrine that once was home  
And kept himself a clergyman.  
The clockwork of his cold routine  
Put friends far off that once were near;  
The five staccatos in his laugh  
Were too defensive and too clear;  
The glacial sermons that he preached  
Were longer than they should have been;  
And, like the man who fashioned them,  
The best were too divinely thin.  
But still he lived, and moved, and had  
The sort of being that was his,  
Till on a day the shrine of home

For him was in the Mysteries:—

[156]

"My friend, there's one thing yet," said he,

"And one that I have never shared

With any man that I have met;

But you—you know me." And he stared

For a slow moment at me then

With conscious eyes that had the gleam,

The shine, before the stroke:—"You know

The ways of us, the way we dream:

"You know the glory we have won,

You know the glamour we have lost;

You see me now, you look at me,—

And yes, you pity me, almost;

"But never mind the pity—no,

Confess the faith you can't conceal;

And if you frown, be not like one

Of those who frown before they feel.

"For there is truth, and half truth,—yes,

And there's a quarter truth, no doubt;

But mine was more than half.... You smile?

You understand? You bear me out?

"You always knew that I was right—

You are my friend—and I have tried

[157]

Your faith—your love."—The gleam grew small,

The stroke was easy, and he died.

I saw the dim look change itself

To one that never will be dim;

I saw the dead flesh to the grave,

But that was not the last of him.

For what was his to live lives yet:

Truth, quarter truth, death cannot reach;

Nor is it always what we know

That we are fittest here to teach.

The fight goes on when fields are still,

The triumph clings when arms are down;

The jewels of all coronets

Are pebbles of the unseen crown;

The specious weight of loud reproof

Sinks where a still conviction floats;

And on God's ocean after storm

Time's wreckage is half pilot-boats;

And what wet faces wash to sight

Thereafter feed the common moan;—

But Vanderberg no pilot had,

Nor could have: he was all alone.

[158]

Unchallenged by the larger light

The starry quest was his to make;

And of all ways that are for men,

The starry way was his to take.

We grant him idle names enough  
To-day, but even while we frown  
The fight goes on, the triumph clings,  
And there is yet the unseen crown.  
  
But was it his? Did Vanderberg  
Find half truth to be passion's thrall,  
Or as we met him day by day,  
Was love triumphant, after all?  
  
I do not know so much as that;  
I only know that he died right:  
Saint Anthony nor Sainte-Nitouche  
Had ever smiled as he did—quite.

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[159]

#### **AS A WORLD WOULD HAVE IT**

#### **ALCESTIS**

Shall I never make him look at me again?  
I look at him, I look my life at him,  
I tell him all I know the way to tell,  
But there he stays the same.  
  
Shall I never make him speak one word to me?  
  
Shall I never make him say enough to show  
My heart if he be glad? Be glad? ... ah! God,  
Why did they bring me back?  
I wonder, if I go to him again,  
If I take him by those two cold hands again,

Shall I get one look of him at last, or feel

One sign—or anything?

Or will he still sit there in the same way,

Without an answer for me from his lips,

Or from his eyes,—or even with a touch

Of his hand on my hand?...

[160]

“Will you look down this once—look down at me?

Speak once—and if you never speak again,

Tell me enough—tell me enough to make

Me know that you are glad!

“You are my King, and once my King would speak:

You were Admetus once, you loved me once:

Life was a dream of heaven for us once—

And has the dream gone by?

“Do I cling to shadows when I call you Life?

Do you love me still, or are the shadows all?

Or is it I that love you in the grave,

And you that mourn for me?

“If it be that, then do not mourn for me;

Be glad that I have loved you, and be King.

But if it be not that—if it be true....

Tell me if it be true!”

Then with a choking answer the King spoke;

But never touched his hand on hers, or fixed

His eyes on hers, or on the face of her:

"Yes, it is true," he said.

[161]

"You are alive, and you are with me now;

And you are reaching up to me that I—

That I may take you—I that am a King—

I that was once a man."

So then she knew. She might have known before;

Truly, she thought, she must have known it long

Before: she must have known it when she came

From that great sleep of hers.

She knew the truth, but not yet all of it:

He loved her, but he would not let his eyes

Prove that he loved her; and he would not hold

His wife there in his arms.

So, like a slave, she waited at his knees,

And waited. She was not unhappy now.

She quivered, but she knew that he would speak

Again—and he did speak.

And while she felt the tremor of his words,

He told her all there was for him to tell;

And then he turned his face to meet her face,

That she might look at him.

She looked; and all her trust was in that look,

And all her faith was in it, and her love;

[162]

And when his answer to that look came back,

It flashed back through his tears.  
So then she put her arms around his neck,  
And kissed him on his forehead and his lips;  
And there she clung, fast in his arms again,  
Triumphant, with closed eyes.  
  
At last, half whispering, she spoke once more:  
“Why was it that you suffered for so long?  
Why could you not believe me—trust in me?  
Was I so strange as that?  
“We suffer when we do not understand;  
And you have suffered—you that love me now—  
Because you are a man.... There is one thing  
No man can understand.  
“I would have given everything?—gone down  
To Tartarus—to silence? Was it that?  
I would have died? I would have let you live?—  
And was it very strange?”

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[163]

#### THE CORRIDOR

It may have been the pride in me for aught  
I know, or just a patronizing whim;  
But call it freak or fancy, or what not,  
I cannot hide that hungry face of him.  
I keep a scant half-dozen words he said,  
And every now and then I lose his name;

He may be living or he may be dead,  
But I must have him with me all the same.  
  
I knew it, and I knew it all along,—  
And felt it once or twice, or thought I did;  
But only as a glad man feels a song  
That sounds around a stranger's coffin lid.  
  
I knew it, and he knew it, I believe,  
But silence held us alien to the end;  
And I have now no magic to retrieve  
That year, to stop that hunger for a friend.

---

[164]

#### CORTÈGE

Four o'clock this afternoon,  
Fifteen hundred miles away:  
So it goes, the crazy tune,  
So it pounds and hums all day.  
  
Four o'clock this afternoon,  
Earth will hide them far away:  
Best they go to go so soon,  
Best for them the grave to-day.  
  
Had she gone but half so soon,  
Half the world had passed away.  
  
Four o'clock this afternoon,  
Best for them they go to-day.  
  
Four o'clock this afternoon

Love will hide them deep, they say;  
Love that made the grave so soon,  
Fifteen hundred miles away.

Four o'clock this afternoon—

Ah, but they go slow to-day:

[165]

Slow to suit my crazy tune,

Past the need of all we say.

Best it came to come so soon,

Best for them they go to-day:

Four o'clock this afternoon,

Fifteen hundred miles away.

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[166]

### THE WIFE OF PALISSY

Yes, you have it; I can see.

Beautiful?... Dear, look at me!

Look and let my shame confess

Triumph after weariness.

Beautiful? Ah, yes.

Lift it where the beams are bright;

Hold it where the western light,

Shining in above my bed,

Throws a glory on your head,

Now it is all said.

All there was for me to say

From the first until to-day.

Long denied and long deferred,

Now I say it in one word—

Now; and you have heard.

Life would have its way with us,

And I've called it glorious:

For I know the glory now

[167]

And I read it on your brow.

You have shown me how.

I can feel your cheeks all wet,

But your eyes will not forget:

In the frown you cannot hide

I can read where faith and pride

Are not satisfied.

But the word was, two should live:

Two should suffer—and forgive:

By the steep and weary way,

For the glory of the clay,

Two should have their day.

We have toiled and we have wept

For the gift the gods have kept:

Clashing and unreconciled

When we might as well have smiled,

We have played the child.

But the clashing is all past,

And the gift is yours at last.

Lift it—hold it high again!...

Did I doubt you now and then?

Well, we are not men.

[168]

Never mind; we know the way,—

And I do not need to stay.

Let us have it well confessed:

You to triumph, I to rest.

That will be the best.

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[169]

### **TWILIGHT SONG**

Through the shine, through the rain

We have shared the day's load;

To the old march again

We have tramped the long road;

We have laughed, we have cried,

And we've tossed the King's crown;

We have fought, we have died,

And we've trod the day down.

So it's lift the old song

Ere the night flies again,

Where the road leads along

Through the shine, through the rain.

Long ago, far away,

Came a sign from the skies;  
And we feared then to pray  
For the new sun to rise:  
With the King there at hand,  
Not a child stepped or stirred—  
Where the light filled the land

[170]

And the light brought the word;

For we knew then the gleam  
Though we feared then the day,  
And the dawn smote the dream  
Long ago, far away.

But the road leads us all,  
For the King now is dead;  
And we know, stand or fall,  
We have shared the day's bread.

We can laugh down the dream,

For the dream breaks and flies;  
And we trust now the gleam,  
For the gleam never dies;—  
So it's off now the load,  
For we know the night's call,  
And we know now the road  
And the road leads us all.

Through the shine, through the rain,  
We have wrought the day's quest;

To the old march again  
We have earned the day's rest;  
We have laughed, we have cried,  
And we've heard the King's groans;  
We have fought, we have died,  
And we've burned the King's bones,

[171]

And we lift the old song  
Ere the night flies again,  
Where the road leads along  
Through the shine, through the rain.