III

FROM JANE TO MRS. GRAHAM.

Mother, I told you how, at first,
I fear'd this visit to the Hurst.
Fred must, I felt, be so distress'd
By aught in me unlike the rest
Who come here. But I find the place
Delightful; there's such ease, and grace,
And kindness, and all seem to be
On such a high equality.
They have not got to think, you know,
How far to make the money go.
But Frederick says it's less the expense
Of money, than of sound good-sense,
Quickness to care what others feel,
And thoughts with nothing to conceal;
Which I'll teach Johnny. Mrs. Vaughan
Was waiting for us on the Lawn,
And kiss'd and call'd me 'Cousin.' Fred
Neglected his old friends, she said.
He laugh'd, and colour'd up at this.
She was, you know, a flame of his;
But I'm not jealous! Luncheon done,
I left him, who had just begun
To talk about the Russian War
With an old Lady, Lady Carr,—
A Countess, but I'm more afraid,
A great deal, of the Lady's Maid,—
And went with Mrs. Vaughan to see
The pictures, which appear'd to be
Of sorts of horses, clowns, and cows
Call'd Wouvermans and Cuyp and Dows.
And then she took me up, to show
Her bedroom, where, long years ago,
A Queen slept. 'Tis all tapestries
Of Cupids, Gods, and Goddesses,
And black, carved oak. A curtain'd door
Leads thence into her soft Boudoir,
Where even her husband may but come
By favour. He, too, has his room,
Kept sacred to his solitude.
Did I not think the plan was good?
She ask'd me; but I said how small
Our house was, and that, after all,
Though Frederick would not say his prayers
At night till I was safe upstairs,
I thought it wrong to be so shy
Of being good when I was by.
'Oh, you should humour him!' she said,
With her sweet voice and smile; and led
The way to where the children ate
Their dinner, and Miss Williams sate.
She's only Nursery-Governess,
Yet they consider her no less
Than Lord or Lady Carr, or me.
Just think how happy she must be!
The Ball-Room, with its painted sky
Where heavy angels seem to fly,
Is a dull place; its size and gloom
Make them prefer, for drawing-room,
The Library, all done up new
And comfortable, with a view
Of Salisbury Spire between the boughs.
When she had shown me through the house,
(I wish I could have let her know
That she herself was half the show;
She is so handsome, and so kind!)
She fetch'd the children, who had dined;
And, taking one in either hand,
Show'd me how all the grounds were plann'd.
The lovely garden gently slopes
To where a curious bridge of ropes
Crosses the Avon to the Park.
We rested by the stream, to mark
The brown backs of the hovering trout.
Frank tickled one, and took it out
From under a stone. We saw his owls,
And awkward Cochin-China fowls,
And shaggy pony in the croft;
And then he dragg'd us to a loft,
Where pigeons, as he push'd the door,
Fann'd clear a breadth of dusty floor.
And set us coughing. I confess
I trembled for my nice silk dress.
I cannot think how Mrs. Vaughan
Ventured with that which she had on,—
A mere white wrapper, with a few
Plain trimmings of a quiet blue,
But, oh, so pretty! Then the bell
For dinner rang. I look'd quite well
('Quite charming,' were the words Fred said,)
With the new gown that I've had made.

I am so proud of Frederick.
He's so high-bred and lordly-like -
With Mrs. Vaughan! He's not quite so
At home with me; but that, you know,
I can't expect, or wish. 'Twould hurt,
And seem to mock at my desert.
Not but that. I'm a duteous wife
To Fred; but, in another life,
FROM JANE TO MRS. GRAHAM.  235

Where all are fair that have been true,
I hope I shall be graceful too,
Like Mrs. Vaughan.  And, now, good-bye!
That happy thought has made me cry,
And feel half sorry that my cough,
In this fine air, is leaving off.
IV

FROM FREDERICK TO MRS. GRAHAM.

Honoria, trebly fair and mild
With added loves of lord and child,
Is else unalter'd. Years, which wrong
The rest, touch not her beauty, young
With youth which rather seems her clime,
Than aught that's relative to time.
How beyond hope was heard the prayer
I offer'd in my love's despair!
Could any, whilst there's any woe,
Be wholly blest, then she were so.
She is, and is aware of it,
Her husband's endless benefit;
But, though their daily ways reveal
The depth of private joy they feel,
'Tis not their bearing each to each
That does abroad their secret preach,
But such a lovely good-intent
To all within their government
And friendship as, 'tis well discern'd,
Each of the other must have learn'd;
For no mere dues of neighbourhood
Ever begot so blest a mood.
And fair, indeed, should be the few
God dowers with nothing else to do,
And liberal of their light, and free
To show themselves, that all may see!
For alms let poor men poorly give
The meat whereby men’s bodies live;
But they of wealth are stewards wise
Whose graces are their charities.

The sunny charm about this home
Makes all to shine who thither come.
My own dear Jane has caught its grace,
And, honour’d, honours too the place.
Across the lawn I lately walk’d
Alone, and watch’d where mov’d and talk’d,
Gentle and goddess-like of air,
Honoria and some Stranger fair.
I chose a path unblest by these;
When one of the two Goddesses,
With my Wife’s voice, but softer, said,
‘Will you not walk with us, dear Fred?’

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

With reckless loyalty, dear Wife,
She lays herself about my life!
The joy I might have had of yore
I have not; for ‘tis now no more,
With me, the lyric time of youth,
And sweet sensation of the truth.
Yet, past my hope or purpose bless'd,
In my chance choice let be confess'd
The tenderer Providence that rules
The fates of children and of fools!
    I kiss'd the kind, warm neck that slept,
And from her side this morning stepp'd,
To bathe my brain from drowsy night
In the sharp air and golden light.
The dew, like frost, was on the pane.
The year begins, though fair, to wane.
There is a fragrance in its breath
Which is not of the flowers, but death;
And green above the ground appear
The lilies of another year.
I wander'd forth, and took my path
Among the bloomless aftermath;
And heard the steadfast robin sing
As if his own warm heart were Spring,
And watch'd him feed where, on the yew,
Hung honey'd drops of crimson dew;
And th'n return'd, by walls of peach,
And pear-trees bending to my reach,
And rose-beds with the roses gone.
To bright-laid breakfast. Mrs. Vaughan
Was there, none with her. I confess
I love her than of yore no less!
But she alone was loved of old;
Now love is twain, nay, manifold;
For, somehow, he whose daily life
Adjusts itself to one true wife,
Grows to a nuptial, near degree
With all that's fair and womanly.
Therefore, as more than friends, we met,
Without constraint, without regret;
The wedded' yoke that each had donn'd
Seem'd a sanction, not a bond.
V

FROM MRS. GRAHAM.

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

She's gone: shut close the coffin-lid:
What distance for another did
That death has done for her! The good,
Once gazed upon with heedless mood,
Now fills with tears the famish'd eye,
And turns all else to vanity.
'Tis sad to see, with death between,
The good we have pass'd and have not seen!
How strange appear the words of all!
The looks of those that live appal.
They are the ghosts, and check the breath:
There's no reality but death,
And hunger for some signal given
That we shall have our own in heaven.
But this the God of love lets be
A horrible uncertainty.
   How great her smallest virtue seems,
   How small her greatest fault! Ill dreams
Were those that foil’d with loftier grace
The homely kindness of her face.
’Twas here she sat and work’d, and there
She comb’d and kiss’d the children’s hair;
Or, with one baby at her breast,
Another taught, or hush’d to rest.
Praise does the heart no more refuse
To the chief loveliness of use.
Her humblest good is hence most high
In the heavens of fond memory;
And Love says Amen to the word,
A prudent wife is from the Lord.
Her worst gown’s kept, (’tis now the best,
As that in which she oftenest dress’d,)
For memory’s sake more precious grown
Than she herself was for her own.
Poor child! foolish it seem’d to fly
To sobs instead of dignity,
When she was hurt. Now, more than all,
Heart-rending and angelical
That ignorance of what to do,
Bewilder’d still by wrong from you:
For what man ever yet had grace
Ne’er to abuse his power and place?
   No magic of her voice or smile
   Suddenly raised a fairy isle,
But fondness for her underwent
An unregarded increment,
Like that which lifts, through centuries,
The coral-reef within the seas;
’Til, lo! the land where was the wave.
Alas! ’tis everywhere her grave.
VI

FROM JANE TO MRS. GRAHAM

Dear Mother, I can surely tell,
Now, that I never shall get well.
Besides the warning in my mind,
All suddenly are grown so kind.
Fred stopp’d the Doctor, yesterd’ay,
Downstairs, and, when he went away,
Came smiling back, and sat with me,
P’ale, and conversing cheerfully
About the Spring, and how my cough,
In finer weather, would leave off.
I saw it all, and told him plain
I felt no hope of Spring again.
Then he, after a word of jest,
Burst into tears upon my breast,
And own’d, when he could speak, he knew
There was a little danger, too.
This made me very weak and ill,
And while, last night, I lay quite still,
And, as he fancied, in the deep,
Exhausted rest of my short sleep,
I heard, or dream’d I heard him pray:
‘Oh, Father, take her not away!
‘Let not life’s dear assurance lapse
‘Into death’s agonised “Perhaps,”
‘A hope without Thy promise, where
‘Less than assurance is despair!
'Give me some sign, if go she must,
'That death's not worse than dust to dust,
'Not heaven, on whose oblivious shore
'Joy I may have, but her no more!
'The bitterest cross, it seems to me,
'Of all is infidelity;
'And so, if I may choose, I'll miss
'The kind of heaven which comes to this.
'If doom'd, indeed, this fever ceased,
'To die out wholly, like a beast,
'Forgetting all life's ill success
'In dark and peaceful nothingness,
'I could but say, Thy will be done;
'For, dying thus, I were but one
'Of seed innumerable which ne'er
'In all the worlds shall bloom or bear.
'I've put life past to so poor use
'Well may'st Thou life to come refuse;
'And justice, which the spirit contents,
'Shall still in me all vain laments;
'Nay, pleased, I will, while yet I live,
'Think Thou my forfeit joy may'st give
'To some fresh life, else unelect,
'And heaven not feel my poor defect!
'Only let not Thy method be
'To make that life, and call it me;
'Still less to sever mine in twain,
'And tell each half to live again,
'And count itself the whole! To die,
'Is it love's disintegrity?
'Answer me, "No," and I, with grace,
'Will life's brief desolation face,
'My ways, as native to the clime,
'Adjusting to the wintry time,
'Even with a patient cheer thereof—'

He started up, hearing me cough,
FROM JANE TO MRS GRAHAM. 243

Oh, Mother, now my last doubt's gone!
He likes me more than Mrs. Vaughan;
And death, which takes me from his side,
Shows me, in very deed, his bride!
VII

FROM JANE TO FREDERICK.

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

But being about to die makes clear
Many dark things. I have no fear,
Now, that my love, my grief, my joy
Is but a passion for a toy.
I cannot speak at all, I find,
The shining something in my mind
That shows so much that, if I took
My thoughts all down, 'twould make a book.
God's Word, which lately seem'd above
The simpleness of human love,
To my death-sharpen'd hearing tells
Of little or of nothing else;
And many things I hopcd were true,
When first they came, like songs, from you,
Now rise with witness past the reach
Of doubt, and I to you can teach,
As if with felt authority
And as things seen, what you taught me.
   Yet how? I have no words but those
Which every one already knows:
As, 'No man hath at any time
'Seen God, but 'tis the love of Him
'Made perfect, and He dwells in us,
'If we each other love.' Or thus,
'My goodness misseth in extent
'Of Thee, Lord! In the excellent
'I know Thee; and the Saints on Earth
'Make all my love and holy mirth.'
And further, 'Inasmuch as ye
'Did it to one of these, to Me
'Ye did it, though ye nothing thought
'Nor knew of Me, in that ye wrought.'

What shall I dread? Will God undo
Our bond, which is all others too?
And when I meet you will you say
To my reclaiming looks, 'Away!'
'A dearer love my bosom warms
'With higher rights and holier charms.
'The children, whom thou here may'st see,
'Neighbours that mingle thee and me,
'And gaily on impartial lyres
'Renounce the foolish filial fires
'They felt, with "Praise to God on high,
"'Goodwill to all else equally;"
'The trials, duties, service, tears;
'The many fond, confiding years
'Of nearness sweet with thee apart;
'The joy of body, mind, and heart;
'The love that grew a reckless growth,
'Unmindful that the marriage-oath
'To love in an eternal style
'Meant—only for a little while:
'Sever'd are now those bonds earth-wrought;
'All love, not new, stands here for nought!'

Why, it seems almost wicked, Dear,
Even to utter such a fear!
Are we not 'heirs,' as man and wife,
'Together of eternal life?'
Was Paradise e'er meant to fade,
To make which marriage first was made?
Neither beneath him nor above
Could man in Eden find his Love;
Yet with him in the garden walk'd
His God, and with Him mildly talk'd!
Shall the humble preference offend
In heaven, which God did there commend?
Are 'honourable and undefiled'
The names of aught from heaven exiled?
And are we not forbid to grieve
As without hope? Does God deceive,
And call that hope which is despair,
Namely, the heaven we should not share!
Image and glory of the man,
As he of God, is woman. Can
This holy, sweet proportion die
Into a dull equality?
Are we not one flesh, yea, so far
More than the babe and mother are,
That sons are bid mothers to leave
And to their wives alone to cleave,
'For they two are one flesh?' But 'tis
In the flesh we rise. Our union is,
You know 'tis said, 'great mystery.'
Great mockery, it appears to me;
FROM JANE TO FREDERICK.

Poor image of the spousal bond
Of Christ and Church, if loosed beyond
This life!—'Gainst which, and much more yet,
There's not a single word to set.
The speech to the scoffing Sadducee
Is not in point to you and me;
For how could Christ have taught such clods
That Caesar's things are also God's?
The sort of Wife the Law could make
Might well be 'hated' for Love's sake,
And left, like money, land, or house;
For out of Christ is no true spouse.
    I used to think it strange of Him
To make love's after-life so dim,
Or only clear by inference:
But God trusts much to common sense,
And only tells us what, without
His Word, we could not have found out.
On fleshly tables of the heart
He penn'd truth's feeling counterpart
In hopes that come to all: so, Dear,
Trust these, and be of happy cheer,
Nor think that he who has loved well
Is of all men most miserable.
    There's much more yet I want to say,
But cannot now. You know my way
Of feeling strong from Twelve till Two
After my wine. I'll write to you
Daily some words, which you shall have
To break the silence of the grave.
VIII

FROM JANE TO FREDERICK.

You think, perhaps, ‘Ah, could she know
How much I loved her!’ Dear, I do!
And you may say, ‘Of this new awe
‘Of heart which makes her fancies law,
‘These watchful duties of despair,
‘She does not dream, she cannot care!’
Frederick, you see how false that is,
Or how could I have written this?
And, should it ever cross your mind
That, now and then, you were unkind,
You never, never were at all!
Remember that! It’s natural
For one like Mr. Vaughan to come,
From a morning’s useful pastime, home,
And greet, with such a courteous zest,
His handsome wife, still newly dress’d,
As if the Bird of Paradise
Should daily change her plumage thrice.
He’s always well, she’s always gay.
Of course! But he who toils all day,
And comes home hungry, tired, or cold,
And feels ’twould do him good to scold
His wife a little, let him trust
Her love, and say the things he must,
Till soothe’d in mind by meat and rest.
If, after that, she’s well caress’d,
FROM JANE TO FREDERICK.

And told how good she is, to bear
His humour, fortune makes it fair.
Women like men to be like men;
That is, at least, just now and then.
Thus, I have nothing to forgive,
But those first years, (how could I live')
When, though I really did behave
So stupidly, you never gave
One unkind word or look at all:
As if I was some animal
You pitied! Now, in later life,
You used me like a proper Wife.

You feel, Dear, in your present mood,
Your Jane, since she was kind and good,
A child of God, a living soul,
Was not so different, on the whole,
From Her who had a little more
Of God's best gifts: but, oh, be sure,
My dear, dear Love, to take no blame
Because you could not feel the same
Towards me, living, as when dead.
A hungry man must needs think bread
So sweet! and, only at their rise
And setting, blessings, to the eyes,
Like the sun's course, grow visible.
If you are sad, remember well,
Against delusions of despair,
That memory sees things as they were,
And not as they were misenjoy'd,
And would be still, if ought destroy'd
The glory of their hopelessness:
So that, in truth, you had me less
In days when necessary zeal
For my perfection made you feel
My faults the most, than now your love
Forgets but where it can approve.
You gain by loss, if that seem'd small
Possess'd, which, being gone, turns all
Surviving good to vanity.
Oh, Fred, this makes it sweet to die!
Say to yourself: 'Tis comfort yet
'I made her that which I regret;
'And parting might have come to pass
'In a worse season; as it was,
'Love an eternal temper took,
'Dipp'd, glowing, in Death's icy brook!'
Or say, 'On her poor feeble head
'This might have fallen: 'tis mine instead!
'And so great evil sets me free
'Henceforward from calamity.
'And, in her little children, too,
'How much for her I yet can do!'
And grieve not for these orphans even;
For central to the love of Heaven
Is each child as each star to space
This truth my dying love has grace
To trust with a so sure content,
I fear I seem indifferent.
You must not think a child's small heart
Cold, because it and grief soon part.
Fanny will keep them all away,
Lest you should hear them laugh and play,
Before the funeral's over. Then
I hope you'll be yourself again,
And glad, with all your soul, to find
How God thus to the sharpest wind
Suits the shorn lambs. Instruct them, Dear,
For my sake, in His love and fear.
And show how, till their journey's done,
Not to be weary they must run.
Strive not to dissipate your grief
By any lightness. True relief
Of sorrow is by sorrow brought,
And yet for sorrow's sake, you ought
To grieve with measure. Do not spend
So good a power to no good end!
Would you, indeed, have memory stay
In the heart, lock up and put away
Relics and likenesses and all
Musings, which waste what they recall.
True comfort, and the only thing
To soothe without diminishing
A prized regret, is to match here,
By a strict life, God's love severe.
Yet, after all, by nature's course,
Feeling must lose its edge and force.
Again you'll reach the desert tracts
Where only sin or duty acts.
But, if love always lit our path,
Where were the trial of our faith?

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

The only bond I hold you to
Is that which nothing can undo.
A man is not a young man twice;
And if, of his young years, he lies
FROM JANE TO FREDERICK.

A faithful score in one wife's breast,
She need not mind who has the rest.
In this do what you will, dear Love,
And feel quite sure that I approve.
And, should it chance as it may be,
Give her my wedding-ring from me,
And never dream that you can err
T'wards me by being good to her;
Nor let remorseful thoughts destroy
In you the kindly flowering joy
And pleasure of the natural life.

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

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

FROM LADY CLITHEROE TO MRS. GRAHAM.

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

Your Great-Niece and your Grandson were
Perfection of a pretty pair.
How well Honoria's girls turn out,
Although they never go about!
Dear me, what trouble and expense
It took to teach mine confidence!

_Hers_ greet mankind as I've heard say
That wild things do, where beasts of prey
Were never known, nor any men
Have met their fearless eyes till then.
Their grave, inquiring trust to find
All creatures of their simple kind
Quite disconcerts bold coxcombry,
And makes less perfect candour shy.
FROM LADY CLITHEROE.

Ah, Mrs. Graham! people may scoff,
But how your home-kept girls go off!
How Hymen hastens to unband
The waist that n'er felt waltzer's hand!
At last I see my Sister's right,
And I've told Maud this very night,
(But, oh, my daughters have such wills!) To knit, and only dance quadrilles.

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

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

Do, dear Aunt, use your influence,
And try to teach some plain good sense
To Mary. 'Tis not yet too late
To make her change her chosen state
Of single silliness. In truth,
I fancy that, with fading youth,
Her will now wavers. Yesterday,
Though, till the Bride was gone away,
Joy shone from Mary's loving heart,
I found her afterwards apart,
Hysterically sobbing. I
Knew much too well to ask her why.
This marrying of Nieces daunts
The bravest souls of maiden Aunts.
Though Sisters' children often blend
Sweetly the bonds of child and friend,
They are but reeds to rest upon.
When Emily comes back with John,
Her right to go downstairs before
Aunt Mary will but be the more
Observed if kindly waived, and how
Shall these be as they were, when now
Niece has her John, and Aunt the sense
Of her superior innocence?
Somehow, all loves, however fond,
Prove lieges of the nuptial bond;
And she who dares at this to scoff,
Finds all the rest in time drop off;
While marriage, like a mushroom-ring,
Spreads its sure circle every Spring.
TO MRS. GRAHAM.

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

FROM FREDERICK TO HONORIA.

Cousin, my thoughts no longer try
To cast the fashion of the sky.
Imagination can extend
Scarcely in part to comprehend
The sweetness of our common food
Ambrosial, which ingratitude
And impious inadvertence waste,
Studious to eat but not to taste.
And who can tell what’s yet in store
There, but that earthly things have more
Of all that makes their inmost bliss,
And life’s an image still of this,
But haply such a glorious one
As is the rainbow of the sun?
Sweet are your words, but, after all
Their mere reversal may befall
The partners of His glories who
Daily is crucified anew:
Splendid privations, martyrdoms
To which no weak remission comes,
Perpetual passion for the good
Of them that feel no gratitude,
Far cirlings, as of planets’ fires,
Round never-to-be-reach’d desires,
Whateuer rapturously sighs
That life is love, love sacrifice.
All I am sure of heaven is this:
Howe'er the mode, I shall not miss
One true delight which I have known.
Not on the changeful earth alone
Shall loyalty remain unmoved
T'wards everything I ever loved.
So Heaven's voice calls, like Rachel's voice
To Jacob in the field, 'Rejoice!
'T Serve on some seven more sordid years,
'T Too short for weariness or tears;
'T Serve on; then, oh, Beloved, well-tried,
'T Take me for ever as thy Bride!'
XI

FROM MARY CHURCHILL TO THE DEAN

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

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

But strait's the gate of life! O'er late,
Besides, 'twere now to change my fate:
For flowers and fruit of love to form,
It must be Spring as well as warm.
The world's delight my soul dejects,
Revengeing all my disrespects
Of old, with incapacity
To chime with even its harmless glee,
Which sounds, from fields beyond my range,
Like fairies' music, thin and strange.
With something like remorse, I grant
The world has beauty which I want;
And if, instead of judging it,
I at its Council chance to sit,
Or at its gay and order'd Feast,
My place seems lower than the least.
The conscience of the life to be
Smites me with inefficiency,
And makes me all unfit to bless
With comfortable earthliness
The rest-desiring brain of man.
Finally, then, I fix my plan
To dwell with Him that dwells apart
In the highest heaven and lowliest heart;
Nor will I, to my utter loss,
Look to pluck roses from the Cross.
As for the good of human love,
'Twere countercheck almost enough
To think that one must die before
The other; and perhaps 'tis more
In love's last interest to do
Nought the least contrary thereto,
Than to be blest, and be unjust,
Or suffer injustice; as they must,
Without a miracle, whose pact
Compels to mutual life and act,
Whether love shines, or darkness sleeps
Cold on the spirit's changeful deeps.

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

FROM FELIX TO HONORIA.

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

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

Dearest, as each returning May
I see the season new and gay
With new joy and astonishment,
And Nature's infinite ostent
Of lovely flowers in wood and mead,
That weet not whether any heed,
So see I, daily wondering, you,
And worship with a passion new
The Heaven that visibly allows
Its grace to go about my house,
FROM FELIX TO HONORIA.

The partial Heaven, that, though I err
And mortal am, gave all to her
Who gave herself to me. Yet I
Boldly thank Heaven, (and so defy
The beggarly soul'd humbleness
Which fears God's bounty to confess,)
That I was fashion'd with a mind
Seeming for this great gift design'd,
So naturally it moved above
All sordid contraries of love,
Strengthen'd in youth with discipline
Of light, to follow the divine
Vision, (which ever to the dark
Is such a plague as was the ark
In Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron,) still
Discerning with the docile will
Which comes of full persuaded thought,
That intimacy in love is nought
Without pure reverence, whereas this,
In tearfullest banishment, is bliss.

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

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

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

One morning, contrary to law,
Which, for the most, we held in awe,
Commanding either not to intrude
On the other's place of solitude
Or solitary mind, for fear
Of coming there when God was near,
And finding so what should be known
To Him who is merciful alone,
FROM FELIX TO HONORIA.

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

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

How sing of such things, save to her,
Love's self, so love's interpreter?
How read from such a homely page
In the ear of this unhomely age?
'Tis now as when the Prophet cried:
'The nation hast Thou multiplied,
'But Thou hast not increased the joy!'
And yet, ere wrath or rot destroy
Of England's state the ruin fair,
Oh, might I so its charm declare,
That, in new Lands, in far-off years,
Delighted he should cry that hears:
'Great is the Land that somewhat best
'Works, to the wonder of the rest!
'We, in our day, have better done
FROM FELIX TO HONORIA.

'This thing or that than any one;
'And who but, still admiring, sees
'How excellent for images
'Was Greece, for laws how wise was Rome
'But read this Poet, and say if home
'And private love did e'er so smile
'As in that ancient English isle!"
XIII
FROM LADY CLITHEROE TO EMILY GRAHAM.

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

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

My Dear, I know that dreadful thought
That you've been kinder than you ought.
It almost makes you hate him! Yet
'Tis wonderful how men forget,
And how a merciful Providence
Deprives our husbands of all sense
Of kindness past, and makes them deem
We always were what now we seem.
For their own good we must, you know,
However plain the way we go,
Still make it strange with stratagem;
And instinct tells us that, to them,
'Tis always right to bate their price.
Yet I must say they're rather nice,
And, oh, so easily taken in
To cheat them almost seems a sin!
And, Dearest, 'twould be most unfair
To John your feelings to compare
With his, or any man's; for she
Who loves at all loves always; he,
Who loves far more, loves yet by fits,
And, when the wayward wind remits
To blow, his feelings faint and drop
Like forge-flames when the bellows stop.
Such things don't trouble you at all
When once you know they're natural.

My love to John; and, pray, my Dear,
Don't let me see you for a year;
Unless, indeed, ere then you've learn'd
That Beauties wed are blossoms turn'd
To unripe codlings, meant to dwell
In modest shadow hidden well,
Till this green stage again permute
To glow of flowers with good of fruit.
I will not have my patience tried
By your absurd new-married pride,
That scorns the world's slow-gather'd sense,
Ties up the hands of Providence,
Rules babes, before there's hope of one,
Better than mothers e'er have done,
And, for your poor particular,
Neglects delights and graces far
Beyond your crude and thin conceit.
Age has romance almost as sweet
And much more generous than this
Of yours and John's. With all the bliss
Of the evenings when you coo'd with him,
And upset home for your sole whim,
You might have envied, were you wise,
The tears within your Mother’s eyes,
Which, I dare say, you did not see.
But let that pass! Yours yet will be,
I hope, as happy, kind, and true
As lives which now seem void to you.
Have you not seen shop-painters paste
Their gold in sheets, then rub to waste
Full half, and, lo, you read the name?
Well, Time, my Dear, does much the same
With this unmeaning glare of love.
But, though you yet may much improve,
In marriage, be it still confess’d,
There’s little merit at the best.
Some half-a-dozen lives, indeed,
Which else would not have had the need,
Get food and nurture, as the price
Of antedated Paradise;
But what’s that to the varied want
Succour’d by Mary, your dear Aunt,
Who put the bridal crown thrice by,
For that of which virginity,
So used, has hope? She sends her love,
As usual with a proof thereof—
Papa’s discourse, which you, no doubt,
Heard none of, neatly copied out
Whilst we were dancing. All are well,
Adieu, for there’s the Luncheon Bell.
THE WEDDING SERMON.

1

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

2

In Godhead rise, thither flow back
All loves, which, as they keep or lack,
In their return, the course assign'd,
Are virtue or sin. Love's every kind,
Lofty or low, of spirit or sense,
Desire is, or benevolence.
He who is fairer, better, higher
Than all His works, claims all desire,
And in His Poor, His Proxies, asks
Our whole benevolence: He tasks,
Howbeit, His People by their powers;
And if, my Children, you, for hours,
Daily, untortur'd in the heart,
Can worship, and time's other part
Give, without rough recoils of sense,
To the claims ingrate of indigence,
Happy are you, and fit to be
Wrought to rare heights of sanctity,
For the humble to grow humbler at.
But if the flying spirit falls flat,
After the modest spell of prayer
That saves the day from sin and care,
And the upward eye a void descres,
And praises are hypocrisies,
And, in the soul, o'erstrain'd for grace,
A godless anguish grows apace;
Or, if impartial charity
Seems, in the act, a sordid lie,
Do not infer you cannot please
God, or that He his promises
Postpones, but be content to love
No more than He accounts enough.
Account them poor enough who want
Any good thing which you can grant;
And fathom well the depths of life
In loves of Husband and of Wife,
Child, Mother, Father; simple keys
To what cold faith calls mysteries.

3

The love of marriage claims, above
All other kinds, the name of love,
As perfectest, though not so high
As love which Heaven with single eye
THE WEDDING SERMON.

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

4

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

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

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

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

Lovers, once married, deem their bond
Then perfect, scanning nought beyond
For love to do but to sustain
The spousal hour's delighted gain.
But time and a right life alone
Fulfil the promise then foreshown.
THE WEDDING SERMON.

The Bridegroom and the Bride withal
Are but unwrought material
Of marriage; nay, so far is love,
Thus crown'd, from being thereto enough,
Without the long, compulsive awe
Of duty; that the bond of law
Does oftener marriage-love evoke,
Than love, which does not wear the yoke
Of legal vows, submits to be
Self-rein'd from ruinous liberty.
Lovely is love; but age well knows
'Twas law which kept the lover's vows
Inviolate through the year or years
Of worship pieced with panic fears,
When she who lay within his breast
Seem'd of all women perhaps the best,
But not the whole, of womankind,
Or love, in his yet wayward mind,
Had ghastly doubts its precious life
Was pledged for aye to the wrong wife.
Could it be else? A youth pursues
A maid, whom chance, not he, did choose,
Till to his strange arms hurries she
In a despair of modesty.
Then, simply and without pretence
Of insight or experience,
They plight their vows. The parents say
'We cannot speak them yea or nay;
'The thing proceedeth from the Lord!'
And wisdom still approves their word;
For God created so these two
They match as well as others do
That take more pains, and trust Him less
Who never fails, if ask'd, to bless
His children's helpless ignorance
And blind election of life's chance.
Verily, choice not matters much,
If but the woman's truly such,
And the young man has led the life
Without which how shall e'er the wife
Be the one woman in the world?
Love's sensitive tendrils sicken, curl'd
Round folly's former stay; for 'tis
The doom of all unsanction'd bliss
To mock some good that, gain'd, keeps still
The taint of the rejected ill.

Howbeit, though both were perfect, she
Of whom the maid was prophecy
As yet lives not, and Love rebels
Against the law of any else;
And, as a steed takes blind alarm,
Disowns the rein, and hunts his harm,
So, misdespairing word and act
May now perturb the happiest pact.
The more, indeed, is love, the more
Peril to love is now in store.
Against it nothing can be done
But only this: leave ill alone!
Who tries to mend his wife succeeds
As he who knows not what he needs.
He much affronts a worth as high
As his, and that equality
Of spirits in which abide the grace
And joy of her subjected place;
And does the still growth check and blurr
Of contraries, confusing her
Who better knows what he desires
Than he, and to that mark aspires
With perfect zeal, and a deep wit
Which nothing helps but trusting it.
THE WEDDING SERMON.

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

Such honour, with a conduct wise
In common things, as, not to steep
The lofty mind of love in sleep
Of over much familiarity;
Not to degrade its kind caress,
As those do that can feel no more,
So give themselves to pleasures o'er:
Not to let morning-sloth destroy
The evening-flower, domestic joy;
Not by uxoriousness to chill
The warm devotion of her will
Who can but half her love confer
On him that cares for nought but her;—
These, and like obvious prudencies
Observed, he's safest that relies,
For the hope she will not always seem,
Caught, but a laurel or a stream,
On time; on her unsearchable
Love-wisdom; on their work done well,
Discreet with mutual aid; on might
Of shared affliction and delight;
On pleasures that so childish be
They're 'shamed to let the children see,
By which life keeps the valleys low
Where love does naturally grow;
On much whereof hearts have account,
Though heads forget; on babes, chief fount
Of union, and for which babes are
No less than this for them, nay far
More, for the bond of man and wife
To the very verge of future life
Strengthens, and yearns for brighter day,
While others, with their use, decay;
And, though true marriage purpose keeps
Of offspring, as the centre sleeps
Within the wheel, transmitting thence
Fury to the circumference,
Love's self the noblest offspring is,
And sanction of the nuptial kiss;
Lastly, on either's primal curse,
Which help and sympathy reverse
To blessings.

God, who may be well
Jealous of His chief miracle,
Bids sleep the meddling soul of man,
Through the long process of this plan,
Whereby, from his unweeting side,
The Wife's created, and the Bride,
That chance one of her strange, sweet sex
He to his glad life did annex,
Grows more and more, by day and night,
The one in the whole world opposite
Of him, and in her nature all
So suited and reciprocal
To his especial form of sense,
Affection, and Intelligence,
That, whereas love at first had strange
THE WEDDING SERMON.

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

I do not say love's youth returns;
That joy which so divinely yearns!
But just esteem of present good
Shows all regret such gratitude
As if the sparrow in her nest,
Her woolly young beneath her breast,
Should these despise, and sorrow for
Her five blue eggs that are no more.
Nor say I the fruit has quite the scope
Of the flower's spiritual hope.
Love's best is service, and of this,
Howe'er devout, use dulls the bliss.
Though love is all of earth that's dear,
Its home, my Children, is not here:
The pathos of eternity
Does in its fullest pleasure sigh.
Be grateful and most glad thereof.
Parting, as 'tis, is pain enough.
If love, by joy, has learn'd to give
Praise with the nature sensitive,
At last, to God, we then possess
The end of mortal happiness,
And henceforth very well may wait
The unbarring of the golden gate,
Wherethrough, already, faith can see
That apter to each wish than we
Is God, and curious to bless
Better than we devise or guess;
Not without condescending craft
To disappoint with bliss, and waft
Our vessels frail, when worst He mocks
The heart with breakers and with rocks,
To happiest havens. You have heard
Your bond death-sentenced by His Word.
What, if, in heaven, the name be o'er,
Because the thing is so much more?
All are, 'tis writ, as angels there,
Nor male nor female. Each a stair
In the hierarchical ascent
Of active and recipient
Affections, what if all are both
By turn, as they themselves betroth
To adoring what is next above,
Or serving what's below their love?
Of this we are certified, that we
Are shaped here for eternity,
So that a careless word will make
Its dint upon the form we take
For ever. If, then, years have wrought
Two strangers to become, in thought,
Will, and affection, but one man
For likeness, as none others can,
Without like process, shall this tree
The king of all the forest, be,
THE WEDDING SERMON.

Alas, the only one of all
That shall not lie where it doth fall?
Shall this unflagging flame, here nurs'd
By everything, yea, when reversed,
Blazing, in fury, brighter, wink,
Flicker, and into darkness shrink,
When all else glows, baleful or brave,
In the keen air beyond the grave?

Beware; for fiends in triumph laugh
O'er him who learns the truth by half!
Beware; for God will not endure
For men to make their hope more pure
Than His good promise, or require
Another than the five-string'd lyre
Which he has vow'd again to the hands
Devout of him who understands
To tune it justly here! Beware
The Powers of Darkness and the Air,
Which lure to empty heights man's hope,
Bepraising heaven's ethereal cope,
But covering with their cloudy cant
Its ground of solid adamant,
That strengthens ether for the flight
Of angels, makes and measures height,
And in materiality
Exceeds our Earth's in such degree
As all else Earth exceeds! Do I
Here utter aught too dark or high?
Have you not seen a bird's beak slay
Proud Psyche, on a summer's day?
Down fluttering drop the frail wings four,
Missing the weight which made them soar.
Spirit is heavy nature's wing,
And is not rightly anything
Without its burthen, whereas this,
Wingless, at least a maggot 'is,
And, wing'd, is honour and delight
Increasing endlessly with height.

II

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

In power of love to actualise—
The soul's bond which it signifies,
And even to deck a wife with grace
External in the form and face.
A five years' wife, and not yet fair?
Blame let the man, not Nature, bear!
For, as the sun, warming a bank
Where last year's grass droops gray and dank,
Evokes the violet, bids disclose
In yellow crowds the fresh primrose,
And foxglove hang her flushing head,
So vernal love, where all seems dead,
Makes beauty abound.

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

END OF VOL. I.

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