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MEPHISTOPHELES  
IN  
BROADCLOTH:

A SATIRE.

BY  
GEORGE FRANCIS ARMSTRONG,  
M.A., D.LIT.

"Il y a dans les discours de Méphistophélès une ironie infernale qui porte sur la création tout entière, et juge l'univers comme un mauvais livre dont le diable se fait le censeur." — DE STAËL.

"The Enemy, like a modern gentleman,  
Still walks the earth with hungry ears. Beware!"

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MEPHISTOPHELES IN  
BROADCLOTH.

I'M somewhat weary, and a little sick,  
Of wandering through this wilderness of brick;  
But here is Rotten Row, a famous place  
Where worn-out London flaunts its *blasé* face;  
And here the meanest man that wears a coat  
May see the world go by him for a groat ...  
Dear blooming beauties! ... Let me take a chair,  
And sit with idle gentlemen, and stare ...

It is not oft allowed me for a spell  
To quit the lower for the upper hell,  
Yet Evil's ends are satisfied as well —

The world, I find, on looking round about me,  
Goes to the Devil very well without me.

But, recently, by some mysterious shove,  
The trap-door opened, and I came above;  
And, though by gouty conscience still annoyed,  
My little holiday I've much enjoyed.  
"Dear are the pleasures that are dearly earned;"  
And many things I've noted, many learned.  
So fast in Error's way these mortals go  
By their example we'll progress below.

So much I've seen that, as 'tis fashionable  
For every babbler now to print his babble,  
If I remain but three weeks more from home,  
I also will produce a parchment tome.  
I'll print my observations line for line  
So that the "reading public" here may see 'em,  
And get 'em lauded in the A — m  
By asking in the Editor to dine.

'Tis said to be outlandish now's the way  
To make your literary offspring pay.  
But there are other crutches quite as mean  
Whereon your lame and limping authors lean, —  
As, joining some close clique or corporation  
Banded to palm its produce on the Nation  
And from Fame's temple carefully exclude  
All writers of an independent mood —  
Some mutually-congratulating club  
Of poetasters, let us say, who snub,  
Or patronize with condescending sneer,  
At social gatherings where they most appear,  
Or in the pages of their pet Reviews,  
All bards that homage to the ring refuse ...  
By Heaven! I'll join a clique, the strongest faction  
That draws the pressmen close with prime attraction,  
Belaud the "great" among them, soothe the small.  
Adore, delight, uphold, oblige them all,  
Then launch my book, and in a trice arise  
A leading author borne aloft on lies.

No better road to fame could I propose.  
Whether I clothe my thoughts in verse or prose  
Is doubtful. Every man's now called a poet  
Who has a trumpet and a clique to blow it.  
The name of poet's hardly worth the seeking  
Where every room with poetlings is reeking,  
And every table with their volumes creaking.  
*True* poets are a most unhappy race,  
And oft their loftiest finds the lowest place.  
I pity them — the proud and tender creatures —  
Because they must with hard-grained tradesmen deal,  
With publishers of stern and icy features,  
With butchers, chandlers, readers cold as steel,  
The wretch that spoils their houses he upholsters,  
Tailors whose bills are needles in their bolsters,  
And — sharper to the touch than lancewood splinters —  
The printer's devils and the devil's printers.  
A cheese breeds maggots and a poet critics;

They stick as close as words and their enclitics.  
Critics, those knaves of most obnoxious noses  
That seem for ever conscious of queer smells  
Where healthier people sniff the breath of roses,  
Against their ban in vain the bard rebels.

Yet, were a choice of crowns before me laid,  
I'd choose the true bard's bays — they never fade.  
I have a kindly leaning toward the tribe;  
They have a kindly leaning, too, toward me;  
And I am mindful of the smallest bribe  
And faintest tribute to my vanity.  
My name for ever ornaments their page,  
I've been their brightest hero many an age,  
And still I linger on the lyric stage.  
I'm very grateful to divinest Dante,  
And Virgil who with most benign intent  
Led him enraptured through my many ante-  
Chambers, and taught him tortures to invent,  
Which since I've taken under my protection,

And find they suit my system to perfection.  
To that grey edifice the Church of Grace  
I also owe a thousand thousand thanks  
For giving me so prominent a place  
Among the sacred histrionic ranks  
Of priests, disciples, dogs like Pontius Pilate,  
Gay publicans no pharisee will smile at,  
Barabbases, weak Peters, Caiaphases,  
Judases, Josephs, cocks, and colts, and asses,  
That throng the scenes of mediæval plays,  
And in the midst of whom, in holier days,  
To coax the erring in her fold to dwell,  
She deemed my presence indispensable,  
So taught the bards my features to descry  
And keep me alway in the public eye.  
To whomso first devised the goodly tale  
Of Faustus too my hymns will never fail.  
Then that sublime boy-poet, Shakespeare's master,  
Whose life was dashed with premature disaster,  
Poor Kit, the victim of a Deptford knife

Raised to avenge a sweetheart or a wife,  
Slain in the morn of glory, youth, and pleasure,  
Immortal Marlowe, whose heroic measure  
Rolls like the voice of waters on the ear —  
He to my heart of heart as light is dear.  
To him his land owes much, and I no less;  
He clothed me in the neatest-fitting dress.  
But daily do I homage to thy name,  
O serene Milton, who, in spite of shame,  
Exaltest me for ever! When I read  
Thy page my heart doth inly pine and bleed,  
My spirit writhes in that fell agony  
That heaved it in proud warfare to defy  
The Eternal and disturb His tranquil reign,  
And back returns the old remorseful pain.  
Immortal Goethe in immortal song  
Makes me immortal, but he makes me wrong;  
I am not half the mean thing that he paints,  
Nor half so clumsy when I tempt the saints;  
Indeed I seldom wander from my lair

To goad a rascal or a saint to snare;  
I set the ball a-rolling long ago,  
And Evil reigns though I remain below.  
Yet to the Doctor I am much indebted;  
The appetite for sin he somewhat whetted;  
Some morals that he taught us I approve —  
Men should be cruel to the things they love, —  
That is, they should do with them what they please,  
And study nothing but their own vile ease.  
It well avails me, works an equal evil,  
That men should worship Self as serve the Devil.  
So, though he made me half contemptible,  
I like Herr Doctor Goethe passing well;  
I profit by the prominence he gave me,  
And thank him for much trouble he will save me.  
But most of all love I your music, Burns,  
Sad, gay and fierce and delicate by turns.  
"Auld Nick" himself wept o'er your dying head  
And sighed to soothe the roughness of your bed.  
Ah Burns, poor thrall of love and joyous revel,

Whate'er the Kirk may swear to be your due,  
The Devil never can be hard on you  
Who could not ev'n be hard upon the Devil!  
Others have worshipped me, but none like these  
Whose homage was the heart's and not the knee's;  
For Coleridge, while he loved not Evil, drew  
With Southey's help my face of such a hue  
That none who know me by the picture crude  
Will shrink from meeting me in solitude;  
And Byron, while he served me faithfully  
Through six-and-thirty years of ribaldry,  
Did little to advance my tarnished fame,  
And trifled with my venerable name;  
And Shelley, that frail soul so weak and winning,  
Too guileless to perceive when he was sinning,  
Blaspheming God for making me and Hell,  
Deemed each a myth, though writing *Peter Bell...*  
I had forgot a book that once oppressed us, —  
That endless Festus Bailey's "Bailey's *Festus*"

And *Golden Legends*, and a score of other  
Books that much sense in needless metre smother ...

Enough! The bards have honoured me, and given  
The critics thoughts whereby their pens have thriven.  
At Edinburgh I said, "Before I pass on,  
I'll call upon the Scottish critic Masson,  
And ask him, in a deferential tone,  
Which of the devils now I most resemble, —  
Luther's, or Milton's, Goethe's, or his own."  
Even the Devil at critics well may tremble.  
I called. His face was frigid as a stone.  
Reception could not ever colder be.  
His would be warmer should he visit me.

If by a preëstablished harmony  
I and the poets ever thus agree,  
Should I attempt a book, I'd best begin it  
In verse. No matter then if nothing's in it;

It will the more resemble Swinburne's art —  
 "Form for form's sake," — no jam inside the tart, —  
 To pass away like fashionable slang  
 Or bubbles blown by Mallock or by Lang,  
 Or rondeaux, sonnets, Provençal confetti  
 Still served up by the rump of the Rossetti;  
 Ay, though I fail to join a clique, or scorn  
 Some influential pressmen to suborn,  
 To cite reviews yet know the man who wrote 'em  
 Is just my own paid agent and *factotum*,  
 And though I ogle every Muse in vain,  
 I yet might touch the skirts of Gosse or Payne ...

This gentleman hard by is such a prater  
 He must be some distinguished legislator.  
 Ah! yes, I've grown familiar with the species,  
 And know an eagle when among the geese he is.  
 I said, "In London I shall not omit  
 To see the Commons when the Commons sit."  
 I wished to watch them, with no purpose sinister,

So dropt a postcard to far-famed Minister,  
Requesting of that pillar of the State  
Simply an Order for the next Debate.  
He sent an answer, but so strangely penned it  
The more I read the less I comprehend it.  
I cannot say that it is not effusive;  
'Tis only somewhat nebulous and elusive: —  
"Dear Sir, — I have received your note with pleasure  
And read enough to see that at more leisure  
The rest of it I shall not read in vain.  
'Tis clear the Tory moon is on the wane.  
I think our common cause is wholly just.  
In Providence I trust you put your trust.  
Thanks for your interest in this Great Nation.  
You have my prayers and best consideration."  
I waited for the Order, but it came not.  
And yet his ways ambiguous I blame not.  
I am not of his party. Still he knows me  
Too well to know not that he something owes me.  
I taught him much, while yet he needed teaching;

Taught him to preach, not follow his own preaching;  
Taught him that use of words he knows so well,  
Nothing to leave unsaid, yet nothing tell;  
Taught him to wear his conscience on his sleeve,  
Deceive the Nation and himself deceive;  
To read the Book in Church on Holy Days,  
And when a Hero dies go see the plays;  
Before the sacred Table bend the knee,  
And never to forgive an enemy;  
To flirt with faction, cut the State adrift,  
Protest, explain, dodge, dive, elude and shift,  
Eat his own words, and palter every hour,  
On his own broken pledges climb to power,  
Ignore his Queen, and, clad in saint's attire,  
Drag his vexed country daily through the mire.  
And so I don't think he should play the actor  
With his best friend and oldest benefactor.

But access to the Commons may be gained

By many ways that need not be explained.  
Few know me when not clothed in black and red,  
And fewer when the horns are off my head;  
Ev'n preachers threatening Satan with most fell bow  
Don't see him when he's standing at their elbow;  
So, passing for some Judge with state-paid salary,  
I entered the Distinguished Strangers' Gallery,  
And, sitting by a Rajah in that place,  
I looked quite white beside his heathen face.

Who flouts the name of England, who ignores  
Her banners waving o'er a thousand shores?  
What foe that ever with her prowess fought  
The tempests of her onsets has forgot,  
Or doubts the courage of her stubborn sons,  
And cowers not at the thunder of her guns?  
Who fails the might of intellect to trace  
In Shakespeare's, Milton's, Newton's, Darwin's race?

Who deems her noblest energies are dead,  
And every virtue from her heart hath fled?  
Not I; and yet that senatorial show  
Might lay the pride of all her children low.  
There Britain's third-rate minds at dead of night  
Or on, half-dozing, through the dawning light,  
Exhausted, maddened with the unearthly noises  
And howling hurricane of Irish voices  
(Mid which I heard the Speaker called a rogue  
By someone shrieking in a Galway brogue),  
Confused and addled, careless what they said  
If only they could get at last to bed,  
Were forging, in rage, hate and panic blended,  
The laws whereon the Empire's fate depended! ...  
But this was some time since. Now all is changed.  
The Commons' House in order is arranged! ...  
Fall of the Mighty! — O, that ye should need your  
Successive stringent New Rules of Procedure!  
The Public Houses close here at eleven —  
The Commons' one hour later! ... O great Heaven!

Where is the Saxon's boasted self-restraint,  
The temperate calm his poets loved to paint?  
What fate degrades him or what cruel chance,  
That he must go for curbs and gags to France? ...

I gazed upon six hundred languid faces  
Of legislators lolling in their places,  
And sought in vain amid their ranks unblest  
For England's wisest and for England's best.  
Some honest folk among them I could note,  
Just men who might as conscience bade them vote;  
Some stately souls that could not stoop to brawl;  
Some nobles that could more than yawn and drawl;  
Some hats that rested not on empty heads;  
Some reputations not yet torn to shreds;  
Some graceful Plunkets 'mid the wild O'Triggers;  
Some Brights amid the Bradlaughs and the Biggars.  
But where were England's thinkers? Where the men

That wield in pure devotion sword or pen?  
Where were the patriot souls that seek alone  
Their country's weal and care not for their own?  
Far from the Senate's purlieus seemed to stand  
The noblest and the ablest of the land;  
The strong, the God-made rulers of the realm  
Renounced, and let the unworthier seize, the helm,  
Cast statecraft and ambition to the winds,  
And left the loathsome game to lower minds.

/murmured not at this. It gladdened *me*...  
Speed, speed the ruin, O Democracy!  
Yes, round about the Witches' Cauldron go;  
Pour in the ingredients; let them ranker grow.  
Pour in the place-hunter whose wrongs are righted  
If even he can boast that he's been knighted;  
The craftier knave of more ambitious aim,  
Content to crawl through sewers and sinks of shame,  
In hope to gain a seat among the Peers

By eating mud through half-a-score of years,  
Then stalk in robes and mimic dignity,  
A full-fledged peer with purchased pedigree;  
Pour in the Jew that covets an alliance  
With noble lords who greedily affianced  
(For gold dishonouring an ancient stem)  
Their daughters to the sallow sons of Shem;  
The lawyer next on selfish ends intent,  
Who holds the House a ladder of ascent,  
A rung, to clasp with momentary clench  
Of hasty hands up-clambering to the Bench,  
Who at the hustings vows his one desire  
Is just to serve the State through flood and fire,  
But ere his hustings speech has left the press  
Issues his "valedictory address;"  
Pour in the pimp, the publican, the sinner,  
The grimy tramp that begs or steals his dinner,  
The law-defier using as a hedge  
His lofty legislator's "privilege,"  
The houseless lodger lately made a voter,  
Content till now to breakfast on a bloater,

The burglar fattening on his neighbour's ale,  
The shaven convict just emerged from jail;  
Pour in the whole bad brood become notorious  
By doing things outrageous and uproarious,  
Till old King Mob his final feat achieves,  
The House of Commons is a den of thieves.  
Then let the once proud Empire, weak and blind,  
Ruled by brute motives and a drunkard's mind,  
Lame, staggering, mocked by every whiffler's breath.  
Reel down through degradation to its death ...

Sweet consummation! ... Nay, shall Good prevail,  
And I once more in schemes of ruin fail? ...

But see, a stir is yonder! It might seem  
Just a mere ripple on a tranquil stream.  
The quiet people softly move aside  
And leave the carriage-ways a moment wide,  
And many turn a little round to see  
Who's coming through this concourse of the free.  
It is the Prince. They like him. That is clear.

The languid faces lighten far and near.  
An English Prince, an English gentleman,  
Kind, genial, brave. I heard the cheer that ran  
Gathering from hill and vale and field and street,  
When England's loyal hosts arose to greet  
Their Sovereign's firstborn son, from tightening hand  
Of Death snatched back to grace his native land,  
As to the temple of the Living God  
Beside his Royal Mother good he rode,  
To thank the Power that stayed him from the grave;  
A shout that like the thunders of the wave  
Rolling upon the stormy Labrador  
Echoed around her Empire's leagues of shore.  
I heard it in my murky halls, and knew  
Death's aims were baffled, and my longings too.  
I yearned to see destruction in the Isle,  
The triumph of my most insidious guile,  
A race of children nursed on Besant's milk,  
The Church of Bradlaugh and the State of Dilke.  
My hopes were dashed, as oft before they'd been;

England, still loyal to her peerless Queen,  
Would guard the sacred treasure of her throne,  
And yearn for law-fenced liberty alone.  
Pass, Albert Edward, welcomed as you go  
By every wholesome heart of high and low,  
Prince, nursing no ambition in your breast  
Except to see your Isle content and blest,  
Foremost in every gentle deed of grace,  
Gladdening the crowd with ever kindly face! ...  
On all sides round my traps are laid to lame him,  
And if his foot should stumble, who shall blame him? ...

Ah year propitious! Happy celebration  
Of that which, 'mid Earth's boons that flame and fleet,  
Looks fairest in my heart's great desolation, —  
Marriage, — of human lives the union sweet,  
Love's perfect, tenderest, holiest harmony! ...  
Again the land rejoices. Many a knee

Is bent in prayer before that loftiest Throne  
To which all bow whose hearts are not as stone,  
To beg that endless blessings still may shower, —  
Albert and Alexandra, — grace and power,  
Glory and peace, upon your wedded lives! ...  
O gentlest, fairest of all England's wives,  
If it were mine to bless, could I to-day  
Remember thy bright marriage-morn, nor pray,  
As England prays, that every wind that blows  
May bear thee life and strength, sweet Danish rose ...

Think they I never know remorse or sorrow  
For griefs of men from which my strength I borrow —  
Ay, pain on pain to feel that out of Pain  
Alone my fruitless triumphs I must gain?  
It is my doom to mock — no curse were fitter;  
But evermore the mocker's joys are bitter ...

Certes, this is a pleasant place to sit,

And watch the human frailties round me flit.  
Lo, now, among the umbrellas and the sticks,  
There struts the Bantam-Cock of Politics —  
Spurs sharp as steel and beak made keen for fight  
And blood-red comb and plumage fiery-bright!  
Too weak too lead, too fractious to be led,  
Already half his flickering glory's fled —  
The press-proclaimed ambassador to Russia,  
Boxed on the ears, in passing home, by Prussia;  
Yearning to leave on history's page just *his* mark,  
He gains for guerdon a rebuff from Bismarck.  
Foiled in his hope his Leader still to lead,  
He stabbed his party in its hour of need,  
And earned the cold curt comment of his Chief, —  
"Goodbye, dear Schoolboy — (Thanks for this relief.)" —  
I almost chuckled when I read that Letter;  
Disraeli, or myself, could frame no better —  
A huge sledge-hammer driving home a nail;  
A grain of barley flattened by a flail.

Yes, with the tyro chief compare the Master,  
The true-born Premier with the premier-aster —  
The One prepared to risk the Vessel's weal  
In his hot haste to meddle with the wheel;  
Prepared to see the Ship to ruin go  
Rather than serve in peace and keep below;  
Or see her flung from billowy ridge to ridge  
If he himself could stand not on the bridge;  
The Other willing, would it help the State,  
To toil, a rival chief's subordinate —  
A ruler planning only what might prove  
Best for his country, not his own self-love;  
A ponderous mind, not made for show or speed —  
Not a lithe horse, like Dizzy (wingèd steed!),  
Or young rogue Randolph few but fools will trust,  
Or Gladstone backing in a cloud of dust;  
Rather a traction-engine, huge and broad,  
Clattering with rough hard wheels along its road,  
Good to crush stones with, not to leap or race,  
Do useful work, but do it without grace ...

Hold, hold! — I cry with Goldsmith's Marlowe here,  
"No, hang it! no, I won't be too severe!"  
When up in London for a holiday  
Asperity will never be my way.  
I grant the little Ishmaelite is clever,  
Most capable of strenuous endeavour,  
Courageous, quick of stroke, and keen of wit,  
For dashing charges eminently fit,  
Industrious, oftener rich than poor in tact,  
A colt that never bucks if never backed.  
With more of conscience and with less of vanity  
His future may not prove a sad insanity ...

I envy these great English, I confess,  
Their fire-concealing vast impassiveness.  
Last night upon a platform, mute and meek,  
I sat to hear the Coming Premier speak.  
The people rose and cheered the Cavendish.  
Callous he stood, and gelid as a fish.

Then, when he spoke, each sentence seemed to pass  
Like some huge serpent moving through thick grass,  
Still onward trailing in the same slow fashion  
Without one trace of art or touch of passion.  
Not dexterous at undoing party ties,  
Not easily swayed to break with old allies;  
No Derby, now a Whig and now a Tory;  
No fine Sir Robert ratting from vain-glory;  
No wavering child of fear, like good Trevelyan,  
Clinging behind his Nurse upon a pillion;  
No shrill Carnarvon, sure to bolt and start,  
Being all things "from the bottom of his heart;"  
No Granville smiling off his country's honour  
With every gem her bleeding heroes won her.  
Against the old smooth-tongued Flatterer triply mailed,  
Steadfast when many a trusted spirit failed,

Content to wait for power or to forego,  
He stands unmoved whatever whirlwinds blow.

The cheers for Hartington had scarce subsided  
When forward to the footlights Goschen glided.  
How oft in England men of alien race  
Seek more her honour, blush at her disgrace,  
Delight her splendours more to glorify  
Than the true children of her own grey sky!  
Lives there a stouter champion of her fame  
Than German Goschen with his Jewish name?  
Not England's Israelite Ben Disraeli  
Extolled her more than this Rhinelander's son.  
Why, Britons, must enthusiasms repel ye?  
Is not your coldness rather overdone?  
Most welcome after Hartington's chill platitudes  
Were Goschen's heat and even Goschen's attitudes;  
Yes, having fed on ices to satiety,  
Some cherry-brandy was a warm variety.  
"Great" is a word too often misapplied

And must by me to Goschen be denied;  
But many things not small are still not great,  
And Goschen is a bulwark of the State.  
A keen clear mind, a tongue epigrammatic,  
A man of fire amid a race phlegmatic;  
Strong in defence, determined in assault,  
On Error's trail not often found at fault;  
Half Liberal and half Conservative,  
Content alone in just the mean to live.  
To make a sort of semi-Coalition  
It seemed an unavoidable condition  
Some Whig must at the Tory Council sit.  
What statesman for the hybrid seat were fit?  
'Tis said that every bullet finds its billet;  
The seat is empty — Goschen, then, will fill it.

Uprose, when Goschen sat, that man of pith  
The right Right Honourable Mr. Smith,  
Whose fate it seems (however fair his dream is)  
A Commoner to linger *in extremis*,

And never be, it matters not who else is,  
Apotheosized quite and *in excelsis*,  
But who, whatever sphere his soul inherits,  
Will always be a man of many merits.  
Too full of homely useful common-sense  
To clothe a single thought in eloquence,  
Welcome relief from Gladstonism and Dizziness,  
Straightforward, truthful, honest man of business,  
Plain English of the plainest English order,  
Incapable of crossing Reason's border.  
(Seeing distinctly just their noses' length,  
They take weak sight for intellectual strength,  
And poetry is folly, they agree,  
Because it tells of things they cannot see.) —  
Successor to the Churchills and Hicks-Beaches,  
Better thy silence oft than half their speeches! ...

But there goes he whom certain seasons back  
The unworthier Irish nicknamed "Foxy Jack."  
Yes, they had learned to fear his resolute sway.

And cowering at his foot rebellion lay.  
I saw him oft in Dublin, riding by  
With anxious face, but ever-fearless eye,  
When on the unscathed assassin's weapon yet  
The blood of Burke and Cavendish was wet,  
When every hedgerow bore a crimson stain,  
And murder lurked in every street and lane.  
Erect he rode amid the sullen crowd,  
Sad, careworn, sick, yet self-possessed and proud,  
An English noble undismayed by death,  
fit to have served the Great Elizabeth.  
He grappled with a dark invisible foe,  
He dragged him from his lair, he laid him low;  
A true-born soldier trained in Nature's school,  
A true-born king, men said, foreframed for rule.  
But who could dream that he who ruled to-day  
To-morrow would his sceptre cast away,  
The pilot who had saved the ship from wreck  
Would cut its cables when he'd left its deck?  
What wrought the change in Spencer? Can it be,

Unnerved at last, he sought his brain to free  
From the dread vision of the murderer's knife,  
And sighed for pleasures of a peaceful life?  
Or deemed he that no arm except his own  
Could wield the sword that kept rebellion down, —  
That, he being gone, remained no better shift  
Than let the ungovernable country drift?  
Was it his own or other men's exertion  
That brought about that singular "conversion?"  
Nay, was it but the Old Magician's wiles,  
The tongue persuasive, the bewitching smiles,  
The wand of Hawarden that with one light wave  
Transformed him from a master to a slave? ...

To Erin's Isle I do not mean to roam,  
Because I seek a *thorough* change from home;  
But, though I've shirked that land of saints and caitiffs,  
I've not escaped its patriotic natives;  
And therefore with its grievances (as painted

By Irish brushes) I am well acquainted.  
I met what might have been an Irish Member  
Travelling by Kew to London in the train,  
In whom I recognized a burning ember  
Of fierce rebellion trampled on in vain.  
Assuming that I was his country's foe,  
And out my brains his blunderbuss must blow,  
He set himself before me and most shrilly  
Began to talk of Ireland willy-nilly.  
"Do you deny that we're a race opprest?" —  
"Believe me, nothing's farther from my breast!" —  
"Yes, sir, you do, and by the seat I sit on,  
I tell you, you're a base and bloody Briton." —  
"Excuse me, sir, your language grows so hot " —  
"Insult me, and I'll shoot you on the spot!" —  
"To insult you I respectfully decline, sir." —  
"Then you're a coward, and can only whine, sir." —  
"You're welcome, most pugnacious Irishman,"  
I said and smiled, "to kill me, *if you can.*"  
At this he cooled, and asked my frank opinion

Of Ireland under England's proud dominion.  
And thus I answered: — "Sir, I know your Island  
By many men is held a very vile land,  
Much over-peopled by a hybrid race  
That can't abide in peace in any place,  
Vindictive and irascible and shifty,  
Uncleanly and untruthful and unthrifty,  
That hug their hate as others hug their love,  
Or only nurse the loves their hates approve —  
Look in your glass and you will comprehend me —  
(From men with restless eyeballs Lord defend me!);  
And yet with glimmerings of attractive light,  
Like meteors breaking from the gloom of night, —  
An inconvenient show of virtuous phases  
That stupid English judgments much amazes,  
A jack-o'-lantern lustre that deceives them  
And lures them into quagmires, and there leaves them.  
Sir, that's too sweeping. 'Tis your noisy few  
That make your Island hateful to the view.

No kindlier race upon this planet dwells  
Than that which haunts the Wicklow hills and dells;  
No worthier folk inhabit field or town  
Than they who brighten happy, smiling Down;  
Ay, and kind Irish hearts there are, and merry,  
Even amid the blood-stained glens of Kerry.  
'Tis such as you, sir, work your Isle's disgrace,  
By deeds, by words, mean, dastardly, and base.  
You perpetrate your crimes and ne'er relent,  
And "persecution" call your punishment,  
Name equity "injustice" if it thwart  
The wishes of your harmless little heart,  
And when you've picked men's pockets, and they've smit  
you,  
Cry out that they are cruel to have hit you.  
O sir, if I were England, let me tell you,  
To Russia, Prussia, France, I'd gladly sell you,  
To rid my soul of all the botheration  
And endless talk about an Irish "nation."

But were I England, this could never be  
If I would still be Mistress of the Sea;  
For what must be your happy Home Rule's ending?  
More men and ships for England's coast-defending;  
New dangers in each European broil;  
A Russian fleet at Cork, a French in Foyle.  
Nay, were I England, I should have to clasp  
Your Island tight and tighter in my grasp;  
So, then, my furnace I should pile more fire on,  
And rule your country with a rod of iron.  
But England I am not, and I perceive  
The Siren doth her dainty nets enweave  
Most dexterously round the Saxons' hearts,  
And yet may gain her ends by woman's arts.  
Hath she not lulled old Merlin in her lap,  
And well at Scottish Rosebery set her cap,  
Led the strong Spencer by a silken thread,  
And found a champion in the stainless Stead,  
Among her lovers counted sainted Ripon,

And Morley forced his Christian garb to slip on,  
And captive Blunt led captive in her train,  
And Aberdeen entangled in her chain?  
Sweet Bully Bottom Harcourt now reposes  
Between her white arms, garlanded with roses.  
And hath not lately too the fair deceiver  
Put her *comether* quite on Shaw Lefevre?  
And Labouchere, whose name is one with Truth,  
And Graham, that inestimable youth,  
And Wilfred Lawson, with his wit and water,  
Have all the wealth of all their wisdom brought her.  
Then she can boast still eighty Members *free*,  
Her ever-faithful Parnell and O'Shea,  
Town-Councillors from Boyle to Ballyhooley,  
Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde, and Gillooley.  
Sir, aided thus, whatever England's need,  
The Home Rule brig will certainly succeed —  
Nay, every timid foot may now embark on it  
Since philanthropic Plimsoll's set his mark on it!"

At this with rage he foamed, and drew a knife,  
Intent on taking my immortal life.  
I parried the fell weapon with my stick,  
And out flew sparks electrical and thick.  
(He took me then for some distinguished player).  
He crossed himself and offered up a prayer,  
Turned blue, as if his blood began to freeze,  
And all but begged for pardon on his knees.  
Just then the engine neared another station  
And with a whistle drowned the conversation,  
And I, unwilling any more to rile him,  
Stopped at the Æsthetes' Lunatic Asylum —

I mean that curious place by Turnham Green,  
Where red-tiled houses from the train are seen,  
Mild eyes æsthetic to attract and please,  
Stuck here and there 'mid blooming apple-trees;  
Where, dressed in garments of a bygone age,  
The people act all day as on a stage;  
Where coldness and discomfort are a study,

And windows damned unless their light be muddy;  
Where every box must be unique and old,  
And every bedstead crumbling into mould —  
One spacious lumber-room wherein are tumbled  
The treasures often thousand Ghettos jumbled;  
Old kettles from the stores of East End brokers,  
Old clocks, old cupboards, shovels, fenders, pokers,  
Chippendale tables that have lost their legs,  
Old silver spoons too frail for breaking eggs,  
Worm-eaten chairs of long-forgotten families,  
Old pots coeval with the rout at Ramillies,  
Old stools perhaps Bubb Dodington has sat on  
Or Chesterfield or Lumpkin laid his hat on —  
Anything dingy ever used by man,  
Or woman, so it savours of Queen Anne.  
I walked about the stage with studied grace,  
Yet somehow felt most sadly out of place.  
The actors saw 'twas plainly not my line,  
And frowned upon me as a Philistine.  
I felt, I must allow, a day too old

To drop into the arch-æsthetic fold;  
Youth is the time for masquerades and folly,  
And age for broadcloth and for melancholy;  
So, when I had my little round for fun done,  
I left the sacred applegarth for London ...

Dear! what a crowd along the railings presses!  
I scarce can see the Ride for ladies' dresses.  
Alas, while I've been lost in recollection,  
What marvels may have passed without inspection!  
Now surely comes a personage amazing,  
Else why should all the world be one way gazing?  
Heavens! who rides by so broad of beam and back,  
An elephant upheaved upon a hack?  
What! is that mass amorphous, ponderous,  
That human heap, renowned Historicus?  
He whose prodigious jests by night resound  
From Stephen's chaos up to Heaven's profound,  
And, having vainly smitten earthly ears  
And moved Heaven's angels to unwonted tears,

Roll down, and reaching late our world of woe,  
Add one more torture to the damned below?  
Is this sublime Silenus of the Law,  
This Senatorial Samson and his jaw,  
Is this stupendous bulk so broad and bossy  
Great England's Lord High Chancellor *in posse?*  
O, take him hence! He shadows me with gloom.  
His every smile reminds me of the tomb.  
O, take him hence! I do not merit this  
Extinguishment of all my earthly bliss!  
O, take him hence, and let me see no more  
The blessed daylight darkened by a bore!  
Take back thy champion, Erin, to thy bosom,  
And, having found him, see that you don't lose him! ...

Of Radicals I wished to get some notion,  
But Chamberlain had gone across the Ocean,  
On a hard errand driven by the Fates, —  
To patch up treaties with the Yankee States;

And Bright was altogether out of town,  
And only sending letters up and down  
To various correspondents who might nobble 'im  
For counsel on the endless Irish problem;  
And Dilke, whose black eclipse was such a loss for us,  
Was sipping coffee somewhere on the Bosphorus;  
And Morley, with Lord Ripon, was appearing  
In Christian parts at theatres in Erin;  
Trevelyan to be caught was quite too slippery;  
And all the rest are but the merest frippery.

But heartily I wish that I had seen  
And heard John Bright while yet his age is green.  
An honest politician is so fair a thing  
'Tis pity, if there's one, to miss so rare a thing;  
And, judged, I hold, according to his light,  
No man more honest breathes than bluff John Bright.  
His old "peace policy" has proved, no doubt,

A little weak, as things are turning out.  
We must have order and we sigh for peace,  
But will the wicked from their troubling cease?  
If not, when Turmoil sweet Persuasion stifles,  
What's left to use but truncheons, swords, and rifles?  
But Christianity and Commerce call  
Alike for peace amid this mundane brawl;  
The shrewd commercial Christian shrewdly measures  
What swells his earthly and his heavenly treasures.  
Thus there is reason in that high appeal  
For peace amid the wide world's commonweal;  
And, sooth, if Earth had such a boon as this is,  
The Heavens themselves might envy her her blisses.  
Yet, were I mortal 'mid this world of care,  
However I might shrink from battle's din,  
I'd hold by old Polonius' words: — "Beware  
Of entrance to a quarrel, but, being in,  
Bear't that the opposed may beware of thee," —

And never underrate mine enemy, —  
A fault of Britons, which, the world well knows,  
Oft humbles England to her paltriest foes ...  
Leave baby soldiers to their babies'-rattles,  
And pay a corps of *mento* to fight your battles ...

On Chamberlain I've pondered with mixed pleasure;  
I think he too is honest — in all measure.  
A Radical who likewise is Imperial  
Is Radical of very best material.  
Somehow I think he wishes England well,  
And would not for mere place her honour sell, —  
At least not yet, while still he's no temptation  
To play the Gladstone with this patient nation;  
But truly to my inexperienced eye  
In him no serious danger seems to lie.  
Upon the Irish case he looks as sound  
As any man can look on Irish ground,  
Which always is so shifty and so boggy

And shrouded in an atmosphere so foggy  
That all who tread it seem in wild gyrations  
Revolving in a life of transformations;  
And I, until he's done some patent ill,  
Will hold that Chamberlain is honest still ...

I'm tired of musing on these politicians  
Who deem themselves so great and are so small —  
Why, Bismarck, in his mammoth deglutitions,  
In one light morsel might devour them all.  
A man of letters, were he small or great,  
Were now a pleasing thing to contemplate —  
And here comes Robert Browning! ... I regret  
To see the seal of age upon him set.  
I saw him last in Florence years ago,  
Long ere that massive head was touched with snow,  
When Landor's words were truer than to-day, —  
An eager watcher looking every way,  
A man of buoyant step and grasping eye  
That laid its grip on every passer-by,

And read him — not perhaps exactly right,  
But always in some interesting light,  
And nothing let escape in park or street  
Of all that he in rapid walk might meet,  
Glancing from Beauty in her chariot down  
To the bare foot of beggar or of clown,  
From the dull pavement upward to heaven's blue,  
And back from heaven again to me or you.  
Short, broad, erect, not lithely in his gait,  
Unweariable, self-confident, elate,  
With easy, drawing-room-educated shoulders —  
A presence always cheering to beholders.  
To-day, alas! the largeness of the eye  
Is gone, and tamed the fine vivacity,  
Less buoyant is the step, the keen-cut brow  
More toward its mother-earth begins to bow.  
Ay me! the poets at three-score-and-ten  
Cease to be poets and are only men,  
And Tennyson and Browning Delphi's god  
Hath stamped with mournful letters "Ichabod!"

Yet hath Sordello lived to hear his claims  
To deathless glory sung by girls and dames,  
To find that every critic now afraid is  
To chide the hoary lion of the ladies,  
To sit at ease while Furnivall's Society  
Spoon-feeds his large self-love to sick satiety.  
Lord! how this foolish and inconstant world  
From folly unto folly still is whirled!  
A score of years ago poor Browning's name  
Was only whispered with a blush of shame;  
Now I perceive the literary papers  
Are following Furnivall's fantastic capers,  
And *Athenæum*, *Saturday Review*,  
*Academy*, and eke *Spectator* too,  
The Editor most genial and loquacious,  
The Editor most graceful and most gracious,  
The Editor most liberal though not spacious,  
The Editor most kind and most capacious,  
All laud his feeblest fancies to the skies,  
Declare his darkest devils deities,

And carve upon his pedestal sublime,  
"Browning, the Greatest Poet of all Time!"  
Well, this is very well, but after all,  
All Editors, down even to — I  
Should, one would think, have sometimes still at heart  
The interests of literary art,  
And not exaggerate in blame or praise  
Though they may know exaggeration pays.  
And I, who am artistic to the core,  
Though liking Browning, cannot but deplore  
That the poor public should be led astray,  
And taught that Browning writes the proper way,  
That verse should be as harsh and rough as shingle,  
And Milton's English turned to hobbling jingle,  
And men from poesy should nothing gain  
But grains of pleasure got with spasms of pain.

To whatsoever madness critics run  
I hold the time's best bard is Tennyson.

Though poorer stuff ne'er dripped from worn-out pens  
Than *Carmen Seculare* and *The Wrens*,  
Though "Go not, happy day" is grievous folly,  
And *Harold's* as insipid as *Queen Molly*,  
Though he should ne'er have served us up that *Supper*,  
And half his *Idylls* are as dull as Tupper,  
Yet he that *In Memoriam* hath writ  
High o'er this age's bards enthroned shall sit,  
Still revered by his country and his Queen,  
A Laureate crowned with laurels ever green.  
He is no caterer for the sensual herd  
Whose pulses nothing noble ever stirred;  
No manufacturer of amorous ditties  
Inspired amid the smoke and gas of cities;  
No Cockney lyrist of the street and square  
Who hardly knows a harrier from a hare,  
And moulds and mixes mediæval ballads  
As cooks concoct their sauces and their salads;

No trickster toadying pressmen for critiques;  
 No hanger-on of literary cliques;  
 No charlatan with intellectual puzzles  
 Perplexing the dazed reader Fashion muzzles;  
 But one of Nature's poets, mingling heart  
 Still with the music of elaborate art,  
 From Nature drawing all the sweets he brings us,  
 And still exalting by the songs he sings us.

This is involuntary admiration;  
 He merits not my *moral*/approbation.  
 Far better to my liking are the inborn  
 Rare virtues of the smaller poet Swinburne.  
*He* was my willing servant for a time,  
 And somewhat prostituted English rhyme  
 To doubtful uses, and with sensual spice  
 Spoilt critic-palates, never over-nice,  
 So that the pure Castalian springs no more  
 They care to taste, nor heed though they should pour

In clear glad music and refreshful song  
Down from the Delphian hollows all day long.  
One says, "There was a little craft in this  
Betrayal of the Muses with a kiss, —  
A stroke of business in this best of ages  
When half each book is advertising pages.  
A bombshell of unseemly fancies hurled  
Into its midst might rouse the listless world,  
And make the hurler famous in a day,  
Where modest bards are left to fade away.  
This is an age when men attract attention  
By doing things that some would blush to mention,  
Then, having wallowed well in sloughs of shame,  
Walk evermore serene the halls of Fame,  
Become 'respectable,' — the people's leaders,  
Great in the Senate, loved of lady readers;  
Demoralize at first, and then instruct,  
And claim of Virtue's self the usufruct.  
So Bradlaugh, having horrified Society,  
Begins to pose, a preacher of propriety;

And Chastelard, self-cured of ribald rabies,  
Betakes himself to writing Odes to Babies." — ...  
But no! O'er all ambition's mean devices  
The soul of *Atalanta's* bard arises;  
And he is still a poet and a true one,  
Though milder now than when he was a new one;  
To whom, in scribbling (when I knew no better),  
Myself in some degree have been a debtor,  
Which freely I acknowledge, while repenting  
Things rhythmic done without my will's consenting.  
I saw poor Chastelard some time ago  
Down somewhere toward the Seven Dials go.  
He paused to peer into a printer's shop.  
He looked autumnal, rather, at the top.  
I touched him on the shoulder, and he started;  
He claspt my hand — then swift away he darted,  
And down a lane the little poet ran on,  
Followed at heel and pelted by Buchanan.

These Three the critics in the public sight

The foremost places yield. Perhaps they're right.  
Morris, the "Singer of an empty Day,"  
Has seldom soothed *me* with his jolting lay.  
He told a story well; could wield his pencil,  
And graphic pictures drew with that utensil;  
But something always seemed a little wrong  
About his paces as he jiggled along.  
(His Muse is dead. The socialist upholsterer  
Will hardly with anarchic ballads bolster her.)  
That nursery-Dante, Morris of the *Hades*,  
Is harmless reading for insipid ladies;  
The mild musician, with his silver medal,  
Still plays his harpsichord with broken pedal,  
And calls the toneless instrument his "harp;"  
And still he'll play for folk that are not sharp  
To notice that his melodies are tuneless,  
His day-songs sunless and his nocturnes moonless.  
Arnold — I mean Sir Edwin — must confess  
He owes much to his brethren of the Press;  
And Arnold — I mean Matthew Arnold — owes

No more to modest verse than polished prose.  
Amid the bowl of bards I might have tossed in  
An Austin Dobson or an Alfred Austin;  
Buchanan these might join, to sink or swim,  
And one or two whose lustre's not more dim;  
But this my cup of riches soon would drain,  
And if I pour the lees out, what remain?  
For who would noble Poesy degrade  
By calling poets those whose dismal trade  
Is forging verses void of thought and passion  
(I wish some Jeffrey these would lay his lash on),  
Those cliques of small persistent poetasters  
Who of the trick of rime are would-be masters,  
But never yet, for all their toil and dole,  
Have touched the springs of any human soul;  
Who, though their rhythmic "lilt" correct and terse is,  
Have never got past writing "nonsense-verses";  
Who love the poet's *name*, and purr, and paw it,  
But would not know a poem if they saw it?

What man who Milton, Shakespeare, Byron loves,  
Whom Dante, Goethe, Wordsworth, Shelley moves,  
Could read without a smile their dusty stuff  
That every petty critic's learnt to puff?  
Deluded by the weekly weak Reviews,  
Whose whims our wiser Britons but amuse,  
The honest Yankees now their praises shower  
On these presumptuous froth-flies of an hour.  
God help thee, Poesy, if men conceive thee  
As nothing better than these nothings leave thee ...  
Still harping on the poets? Well, I know it.  
The noblest work of Heaven's a true-born poet.  
They fascinate, but yet disturb my bliss,  
So once for all let me the tribe dismiss.  
Of all the bards I know my say is said.  
The works of Armstrong I have never read ...

What, my good fellow! Are you not aware  
That I have paid already for the chair? ...  
A penny? ... Though my fortunes are decaying,

Excellent sir, I yet will go on paying  
Penny on penny, so you'll keep away  
And let me feel heaven's breezes while I may.  
And yet I don't see why I *should* pay *twice* ...  
Don't beg my pardon. Sir, you're much too nice! ...  
Ha! ha! ... The righteous rascal! How respectable! ...  
These English really are a race delectable.  
They cheat and sin with such unruffled calm  
That every wolf among them looks a lamb —  
Ay, search the earth "from China to Peru,"  
No scoundrel, English scoundrel, equals you! ...

How strange that none of all these million eyes  
Has happened yet my form to recognize  
In this my nineteenth-century disguise!  
Some dimly note in passing, little caring,  
Something distinguished, doubtless, in my bearing;  
Some antiquated spinsters eye me queerly,  
But that, no doubt, is maiden coyness merely;

Some country parsons take me for His Grace  
Of York, or that Great Statesman out of place,  
Or Lincoln's Bishop (vinegar and nitre!)  
Compelled in Town to go without his mitre;  
Some tinted ladies smile at me so boldly  
I'm forced to recompense their glances coldly;  
They seem to take me for a titled rip,  
And go about to get me in their grip;  
Some giddy girls, whose morals and whose fancies  
Alike are nursed on yellow-backed romances,  
Perceive a something in me devilish,  
And flirting with the Devil is their wish;  
Some take me for an actor off the boards,  
And some a novice of the House of Lords;  
But, as I still am modest and discreet,  
I'm not much noticed yet in park or street.

I sat hobnobbing with invisible Sin  
One Sunday in a Cambridge country-inn  
While other (better) folk were on their knees,

When in a party trooped in twos and threes,  
A-dust with trudging many a country road,  
Led by a broad-built man who stoutly strode,  
Grey-eyed, grey-bearded, and with dusty curls.  
They looked Bohemians, and they spoke like churls,  
But learned terms were mingled with their talk,  
And learning seemed to dog them in their walk —  
Indeed they could not call for beer and cheese  
Except in symbols of the Sciences.  
I thought it sport to watch them from afar,  
So crossed my legs and lighted a cigar.  
Silent they ate — it seems a Cambridge way  
To be as gruff and graceless as you may —  
Till one who looked less English than the rest,  
A dark man in a velvet tunic dressed,  
Blithe, flexile, and with mirth in either eye,  
With some bright sally woke the company;  
And then there followed a disjointed chat  
On many topics, while I, listening, sat.

They rose to speculation's loftiest level,  
And settled down at last upon the Devil —  
I hid myself amid a cloud of smoke,  
And bent an ear to each one as he spoke.  
An orange-tawny-bearded man with glasses,  
Who spake unmoved as monumental brasses,  
With clenched teeth and face that looked one sneer  
Of discontent and inward suffering drear,  
A constant agonizing inanition  
Of ravenous and insatiable ambition  
(Or so to me appeared it — but I gauge  
All men perhaps by mine own inward rage),  
Gathered himself together, stern as Fate,  
And in harsh accents thus addressed his plate: —  
"The Devil served his purpose well enough  
When barbarous Ignorance battered on such stuff;  
But now he's left no place wherein to dwell  
Since Modern Science has abolished Hell."  
Whereat those laughed who were for laughter able,  
And I drew in my feet beneath the table.

The grey man, who his pipe had meanwhile lighted,  
Smiled not, but smoked as if the jest he slighted;  
Then muttered drily, "Modern Science boasts  
It has abolished too the Lord of Hosts."  
"The House of Lords, no doubt, will follow next,"  
Said one who straightway blushed and looked perplext.  
(What though the others failed its point to see,  
I liked this speaker's covert irony.)  
Then one, who was a politician clearly,  
And thought of governing (but not too dearly),  
Suggested, "For the ignorant and the fool,  
For women, and for children still at school,  
The Devil is a useful institution,  
Serving as a deterrent from pollution,  
Perhaps preventing even revolution,  
And for State purposes the worn-out foggy  
Might still be kept together as a boggy!" —  
Naught hurts my feelings like an idiot's sneers.  
I felt the blood rush tingling to my ears.

I flashed a look of anger at the creature —  
He only thought I must be some lay-preacher.  
(The self-sufficient man is always blind,  
And sees not what's before him or behind).  
The fool at his own fooling joined the laugh,  
And called, with pomp, for some more shandy-gaff.  
Then like a gust of wind they rose and passed  
Quickly, as if each moment were their last,  
Striding away in agonizing walk;  
And, left alone, I mused upon their talk.  
"The world," thought I, — "I say it not in grief —  
Is simply perishing of unbelief.  
Men that can't see their noses save with glasses  
Presume to solve what human sight surpasses;  
Even Science, that at best but dimly sees,  
Will dogmatize about the Mysteries.  
'Tis this that makes it easy, for my mirth,  
To move about unnoticed o'er the Earth,  
And, laughing at each Solomon I meet,  
To play the Devil with his self-conceit." ...

Nay, I am Evil, I am Anarchy,  
I am Confusion — have ye conquered *mæ*?...  
There goes a Bishop! ... Yes, that shovel-hat  
Would guide me, were he ne'er so sleek and fat.  
Stanley I've heard, and Jowett, in my time,  
Describe a Church ideal and sublime.  
Among the cleric ranks — I must allow it —  
There's not a broader mind than that of Jowett.  
Stanley's was wide, but Jowett's still is wider, —  
So wide that out of sight there Truth might hide her;  
I don't know what it holds, or what it does not,  
And of its secrets that I know, I'll buzz not.  
In the grey Abbey oft I've heard him preach,  
And much approved what he's assayed to teach —  
A Church with all the elements of schism  
Within it like the colours in a prism,  
Though breaking up what Light it doth enrol,  
Still, like the prism, one unbroken whole —

A Church, in fact, was to mine eye presented  
From all whose doctrines all her sons dissented,  
Just brooked because men's freaks it would not fetter,  
And subsidized by State for want of better;  
A Church that reckoned as her faithful sheep  
Whatever cared within her pale to creep, —  
Wolves, bears, or jackals, lions, tigers, hogs,  
Panthers, or hinds, or ladies' collie-dogs,  
Frequenters of conventicles suburban,  
Or any chutney-merchant in a turban,  
The British Buddhist or the true Chinese,  
The Zulus or the feathered Cherokees,  
The ritualistic curate slight and sleek,  
The Jew, the Turk, the Gallican, the Greek,  
The man whose god is Gothic Art or Norman,  
The wifeless priest or patriarchal Mormon; —  
A Church whose very basis of existence  
Were yielding to dissent without resistance,  
Where every wight should worship as it pleased him,

Or worship nothing if the humour seized him,  
And all should by their deeds and words admit  
That Truth's attainment passes human wit.  
Now, still there may remain an English Church  
Till pious William grips it as a perch  
To flutter up to power and place once more,  
Striking it down in wild attempts to soar;  
And every year and month to me it seems  
Assuming more the shape of Jowett's dreams.  
Yes, Divine Service I have much attended  
As up and down through English land I've wended,  
And fifty petty churches seem to-day  
Sprung fungus-like from one in its decay, —  
Broad, High, Low, High-Broad, Low-Broad, High-and-Dry,  
Broad-Ritualistic, Ritualistic-High,  
Dry-Low, or Evangelical-Hysterical,  
Half-Plym., Whole-Slim, All-Square, and Semi-Spherical,

Church-scouting-Everlasting-Punishment,  
Church-holding-Hell-Heaven's-highest-ornament,  
Church-Calvinistic, Church-distinct-Arminian,  
Church-Arian, Church-Agnostic, Church-Socinian,  
Church-looking-on-Religion-as-a-slow-thing,  
Church-everything-you-like, or simply no thing;  
A chaos of all sorts of contradictories  
Unreconciled by logic's nicest victories.  
Now all these churchlets, from one faint Church sprouting,  
Each little shadowy cult the others flouting,  
What are they but a sickly suppuration  
Of Faith becoming morbid through prostration?  
Which things to me, an old observer, point  
To something in this kingdom out of joint.  
Can Morals flourish where Religion dies?  
What shall uplift the mortal to the skies?  
Religion grown a luxury or whim  
Which each man alters as it pleases *him*,  
A thing to number with the "fads" and follies

And puppets infants dandle with their dollies,  
Whatever compromising minds may plan,  
Can work no miracle in bestial man.  
And yet this Church a kind of sanction yields  
Still to the State that still its being shields;  
Still throws the mantle of respectability  
O'er morals, makes its service seem gentility;  
Encourages a social regularity;  
Teaches decorum; organizes charity;  
Ay, even in suspended animation,  
Is worth preserving by this mighty nation;  
For none can tell, when Faith is on the wane,  
What touch may wake her into life again.  
Meanwhile, I, Satan, drink to its confusion,  
To all its votaries daily new delusion,  
To Lincoln lasting strength, and health to Jowett,  
Power to each hand that earthward helps to bow it,  
And force to Gladstone's axe that never fails  
Uplifted now to strike its life from Wales! ...

My Lords and gentlemen, "The Church!" ... Ta-ta! ...  
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ...

I weigh with those who make this Church their home  
The men who from it headlong run to Rome.  
When to believe in nothing most are driven,  
These in believing all things find their heaven.  
Credulity and weakness both are human,  
Yet neither surely taints the breast of Newman.  
To rise to power most men are ever planning,  
But who can prove ambition governs Manning?  
What wild confusion of the wistful heart  
Made such from creed to creed impetuous dart,  
What panic of the Spirit o'er them came  
That, in sheer frenzy, plunged them into flame? ...

Close by the pulpit in a chapel small  
I sat to hear an English Cardinal.

Not like a foe I went, in rude invasion,  
But simple, childlike, open to persuasion.  
His eye, that seemed to look in all men's eyes,  
Caught mine amid the rest without surprise;  
But when he saw my eagerness for light,  
He gave me all his rede with all his might.  
An eager, keen, lean face, without one ray  
Of joy or rapture in its ashen grey;  
An eye that, half suspicious, half defiant,  
Seems loveless, lustreless, and uncompliant;  
A litheness of the body and the mind  
That makes the man within them hard to find;  
A voice incisive; an incisive finger  
That lights on sores, but nowhere loves to linger;  
Some temper 'mid a studious calm betraying;  
Some subtle shuffling of the cards in playing;  
Some yielding to unfairness toward a foe  
In resolute straining for his overthrow;  
In language careful, measured, mathematical;  
In faith adopted almost full fanatical;

Not swaying with the enthusiast's warmth and boldness,  
But penetrating with an east wind's coldness;  
Clear with the gleam and glassiness of ice,  
And liberal in logical device.  
If but his premises I could have granted,  
My creed I should most surely have recanted ...

I have not much affection for the Law,  
So of the Men of Wigs I little saw —  
At least in recent wanderings up and down  
Among the doubtful places of the town.  
The Church, although it fancies it eludes me,  
Oft folds me to its heart. The Law excludes me.  
Law, based on Faith, enforced where evil lurks,  
Is death upon the Devil and his works;  
And English law, though now and then it blunders,  
Sounds in mine ears like Heaven's eternal thunders.  
Of Barrister and Judge I've nought to say.  
I think they do their work from day to day,

Whatever motive actuates the breast,  
Respectably, while feathering each his nest;  
And, tolerant as I am of peccadillos,  
I think they may recline upon their pillows  
As peacefully as some of sacred station  
Or any statesman who has "found salvation."  
And, though there may be Judges too with flaws,  
How ably all expound their country's laws!  
I hardly can recount the brilliant names.  
There's Herschell, Bramwell, and there will be James;  
There's Selborne — or there *was*; there's High-Church  
Coleridge,  
Fit to plough up false logic by the whole ridge;  
There's Butt, who uses all a mortal's forces  
(And needs them) to decide the world's divorces;  
There's ... really I forbear to think them over.  
I envy all. Though none quite live in clover,  
They're happier here than in that Isle of Slaughters,  
Out, where the sun sets, there, across the Waters ...

What's he, now, with the eye-glass in his eye,  
Perched on the four-in-hand that's passing by?  
An actor? Can an actor sit so high?  
Yes, yes, I've seen the same that now I scan  
Act also on the boards the gentleman —  
Indeed he looked (I can't imagine how)  
A good deal less the actor then than now.  
I like the craft, have acted much myself,  
And have not yet been laid upon the shelf;  
And nothing would I think or say severe  
Of actors that might hurt them should they hear.  
But they themselves must think it rather curious,  
When acted plays are paltry things and spurious,  
When England's Drama stultifies the land,  
That actors on a pinnacle should stand.  
Yes, in the Drama's palmiest days, we know,  
Despised they lived, their art was rated "low;"  
Now, when the Drama is a thing so base,  
The world enfolds them in its fond embrace  
(At least the lady-players it caresses),

And Royalty itself the boxes blesses.  
You dine the players, ask them to your suppers,  
Lend them your hacks, your saddles, and your cruppers,  
Invite them to your country-seats for sport,  
Smile at their weddings, usher them to Court,  
Purchase their portraits, treasure up their busts,  
Make them dispensers of your children's trusts,  
Nay, envy them the very boards they walk on,  
And seek the Stage yourselves to rant and talk on,  
Rear mimic theatres in private houses,  
Or act your pastorals where the heifer browses,  
Ay, all but set the Stage o'er Mother Church,  
And meanwhile leave the Drama in the lurch.

The Drama is old England's brightest glory,  
Her loftiest feat in literary story.  
Each traveller a spectator's sure to be at her  
Finest performance in her foremost theatre —  
"That's the Lyceum," I was told, and so

To the Lyceum I was bound to go.  
I went, and saw Myself (with sundry thrills)  
Caricatured by Irving and by Wills.  
'Tis clear there is no reverence in this age  
Felt for the Devil on or off the Stage.  
Goethe, though treating me not wholly well,  
Remembered the Archangel ere he fell;  
But Wills and Irving vulgarize my part,  
And mere scene-shifting strangles Goethe's art.  
Outraged I sat. I could not choose but frown  
At that lean Devil skipping up and down,  
At travesties of Goethe's lordly rime  
Mixed with tomfooleries of the Pantomime.  
Think of the glories of Elizabeth!  
Say, is not ~~the~~ the Drama's lingering death?  
Garrick compare, his Shakespeare's tragic sock on,  
With Irving kissing monkeys on the Brocken!  
Yet Irving's scarce to blame. If all the Nation  
Delight to watch him in that situation,  
To see their ablest actor play the fool

And sink in Tragedy to rival Toole,  
Why should he starve his purse or waste his wit  
By playing *Hamlet* to an empty pit?  
Why not keep climbing still the Bracken's heights,  
And kissing apes, for ten more thousand nights?  
It is the world's fault if your art is bad;  
Art follows public taste or sane or mad.  
The English-speaking public vaster grows,  
And all must see the latest London shows;  
No spectacle must ever be withdrawn  
Till all the population's come and gone;  
Then, when the folk at home have ceased to laud it,  
Remains that all America applaud it;  
And so the same false art from shore to shore  
Moves round the earth until it pays no more.

I've gone about by gaslight to and fro  
To theatres from Kensington to Bow;  
The inside and the outside have inspected;  
A member of the \*\*\*\*\* been elected;

With Negroes danced (in dances quite informal)  
On frosty days to keep my blood-heat normal;  
And when, at night, the longest play was over,  
Supped at the \*\*\*\*\* like a midnight rover;  
With actors over wine have cracked a filbert,  
Talking of Hebrew Sullivan and Gilbert;  
Seen Ellen Terry in her Doctor's dress,  
And mourned with her in Gretchen's dire distress;  
Heard Beerbohm Tree to Bernard-Beere once sigh on  
knee,  
And worshipped Anderson in fair Hermionè;  
Laughed till my sides have ached at Thorne and Toole,  
And under Hermann Veizin gone to school;  
From melancholy musings grown too merry  
In looking at the face of Edward Terry;  
Felt passionate Eastlake all my senses daze,  
And wept with Barrett at his latest plays;  
And, after days of weariness, to end all,  
Sat happy, watching charming Mrs. Kendal;

And all I have to say of England's stage is,  
Its tale is writ in bygone history's pages.  
Brilliant and many talents on it shine;  
Of comic actors England is a mine;  
But poetry from Britain's stage has faded;  
For noble art men's minds are all too jaded;  
Shakespeare himself, if living in these days,  
"Would leave Augustus Harris to write plays,  
Would let the critics about roundels rave on,  
And fatten sheep at Stratford-upon-Avon ...

But pause, my brain! Might not this stage-distraction,  
Before there comes a still more mad reaction,  
Yet lead the public taste to fairer ways,  
And bring again the Drama's halcyon-days?  
Then, when the people yearned for loftier art,  
Some mightier poet from the gloom might start,  
Some Shakespeare dealing with the deeds sublime  
And vaster knowledge of the later time,

To rouse, to help, to chasten, to entrance,  
 With dreams divine and gorgeous circumstance! .  
 Pshaw! ... What Utopian vision blinds mine eye! .  
 Enough. The Drama's dying. Let it die ...

The English Novel too, it seems agreed,  
 Like many English things, has run to seed.  
 Who wears the mantle now of Dickens, pray?  
 Where is the genius of a Thackeray?  
 Where the fine power of Lytton when he drew  
 Rienzi underneath the Italian blue?  
 In worthy Wilkie Collins must we seek  
 A Trollope, though poor Trollope was but weak?  
 Is Black or Blackmore worthy to unloose  
 The latchet of immortal Eliot's shoes?  
 Who hears an echo now of all the cant  
 About John Shorthouse and *John Inglesant*?  
 Behind the times I'm far too great a laggard  
 To kneel to Payn, Besant, or Rider Haggard;  
 The innumerable horrors of Miss Braddon

Might suit the taste of Moloch or Abaddon,  
But, for myself, however dark my *mind*,  
I hope my *palate* still may be refined.  
As to the rest, in truth I have not read them.  
I really cannot open them. I dread them ...

But peace! What "noticeable man" comes by,  
Who sees nor dog nor horse nor earth nor sky,  
Wandering amid the concourse unaware,  
With drooping lips that seem to move in prayer;  
Tall; pale; his face in sad appeal upraised;  
Intent on nothing outward; calm, yet dazed;  
With arm uplifted and its hand suspended,  
As if to drop an alms it were extended?  
Quaint picture for the Devil's contemplation —  
Historic Lecky lost in meditation!  
I read his gentle histories now and then  
When I am weary in my fiery den;  
He cools my lips and tenderly bedews 'em  
Like Lazarus come from Father Abraham's bosom;

He soothes my troubled mind with tranquil story  
Told softly with no straining after glory;  
Sweet, temperate, impartial, conscientious,  
Not pompous, or disjointed, or sententious;  
Not eager, like the late-lost gifted Green,  
Who paints as one red sunset every scene;  
Not saying things aggressive and unpleasant,  
Like Freeman, with the brusqueness of a peasant —  
Freeman the foe of Kingsley, now a tool  
Of hot-brained faction clamouring for Home Rule;  
Not dealing in the startling and surprising,  
Like Seeley, brass in beater's-leaf disguising;  
Not bungling in his very happiest mood,  
And doomed to bungle still, like luckless Froude —  
Poor Froude who made the Irish hate him so  
By telling what they did not wish to know,  
And telling it without the tact that kills  
Ill-flavoured truth's harsh taste as jam the pill's;  
No quack historian with his syllabubs;

Surpassed in breadth and strength by only Stubbs ...  
 I heard an Irish critic named O'Brawley  
 Declare he was the "Irish Lord Macaulay."  
 If "Irish" means serene and equable,  
 That epithet might fit him passing well.  
 But what poor praise Irish from Irish meet!  
 Can nothing Irish stand on its own feet?  
*Must* Connemara be "the Irish *Highlands*"  
 Wild Arran only "Irish *Western Islands*"  
 Killarney just "the Irish *Taylor Lever*"  
 And loveliest Wicklow but "the Irish *Devon?*"  
 Say Goldsmith, then, but flaunts in *Johnson's* socks,  
 And Edmund Burke declare "the Irish Fox."  
 Nay, Irish things in Irish raiment deck ye.  
 Let Irish Lecky be "the Irish Lecky ..."  
 I say, this mild historian soothes my soul,  
 And yet he's done me damage on the whole.  
 His *European Morals* and his *Rationalism*

Disturb me like his Anti-Irish-Nationalism —  
Yes, 'mid the turmoil of our stormy weather  
They fret me like the tickling of a feather.  
He certainly has dealt a hurtful blow  
At that fast-melting Home Rule Man-of-Snow,  
And, after Stephen's giant club's assay,  
Has helped, with Froude, to shovel him away.  
But yet this overthrow I scarce lament —  
There always must be Irish discontent;  
And if through Lecky poor Religion gains  
One convert, she may take him for her pains ...

What! Millais? Leighton? ... 'Tis a sight to charm —  
Apollo and Adonis arm-in-arm! ...  
The wordless arts, that don't assail the ear,  
Amid this world of noise to me are dear,  
And very pleasant to my weary sight  
A passing vision of their men of might ...  
But hang it! Wherefore should they look at *me*

With such a close and puzzled scrutiny? ...  
 Yes, gentlemen, I much admire you both,  
 But to be stared at I am something loath.  
 I thought I looked quite sleek and commonplace.  
 What, pray, can ye decipher in my face? ...  
 'Tis but their painters' study — so, no matter.  
 They care but for the outside of the platter.  
 They paint the lights and tints of hair and skin,  
 But seldom show without the man within.  
 To paint the Soul's beyond your art's ambitions,  
 Ye two most famous Royal Academicians!  
 But then we've learnt that men have now no souls  
 (*Vide the Nineteenth Century of Knowles*),  
 And so ye can't be blamed if ye omit it,  
 And paint the Body that was made to fit it ...

To Piccadilly's Gallery I turned in —  
 The rooms great England's artist-genius burned in.  
 A chaos of wild paint on endless walls,  
 Saints, poultry, portraits, sea-views, waterfalls,

A blinding blaze of wood, street, sky, storms, lake —  
One gazes at it till the eyeballs ache,  
Squeezed by stout ladies, elbowed by stout men,  
Pressed, packed, and poked, like cattle in a pen,  
Tangled in flounces, trodden on with boots  
By boors that beg your pardon when it suits,  
Driven sideways from the point at which you aim,  
And *out*, in sick confusion, blind and lame —  
Unless you go there when the world's in bed,  
And then it's empty as an æsthete's head.  
Then to that sanctuary of Art's high priests,  
The Grosvenor, to taste ambrosial feasts,  
I hurried, eager to behold the pictures  
Proved great by earning Academic strictures,  
Or paintings which their painters deemed too fine  
To set before Earth's ordinary swine.  
And there I found no crowd, but ample space —  
The world forgot that there was such a place.  
And from the Grosvenor up and down I went  
From gallery to gallery, intent

On satisfying my religious feeling  
By means of Art, without the pain of kneeling —  
On feeding the deep spiritual emotions  
With *paint*, according to the newest notions;  
Till, having stood and gazed in almost all  
(A shower of rain had now begun to fall),  
My soul found peace where these sweet words were  
seen: —  
"Arrangement by one Whistler, here, in Green."

It was in Bond Street, and the rain was spitting.  
To enter in and rest was most befitting —  
And pity 'twas no chair was there for sitting.  
A servitor in green my shilling took,  
And in my hand he placed a greenish book,  
And through a curtain green I passed, and found  
Myself within a room, green, green all round,  
Hung with green pictures all in frames of green,  
Pale green, grass-green, pea-green, and green of bean.

Green were the pictures in their greeny frames,  
Green skies, green seas, green coals, and greener flames,  
Green moons, and sunsets green, and green sea-fishes,  
And medleys of green plates and cakes and dishes,  
Green men with legs of superhuman thickness,  
And green girls dead, or dying, of green-sickness —  
Or what seemed girls and men and cups and cakes  
And moons and suns, but might be ducks and drakes,  
Or anything you please; for, as for drawing,  
That was beneath the godlike painter's pawing —  
Just as it is beneath your bards of light  
To put one word of sense in what they write.  
"O Art, Art, Art," I cried, "I feel indeed  
Thou satisfiest my spiritual need!  
Farewell all dreams of Heaven, all childish cults!  
This is the true Religion — for adults!" ...

Fools! ... Art, to gratify the Spirit's yearning,  
Itself must from the Spirit's yearning spring.  
With all their marvellous skill, *technique*, and learning,  
Your modern artists paint no noble thing.  
*Your* fault again, O misbelieving World,  
Not theirs, whose finer energies are furled,  
Or hang as dead, amid the lifeless air,  
But might like crowded sails o'er gorgeous seas  
Waft them sublime, if ye but gave the breeze.  
What might not Millais, Leighton, Poynter paint  
If not quite crippled by your base constraint?  
Splendid the genius and the skill to-day  
That England owns, but England's sons betray.  
Painters, like actors, bend to social need —  
They follow downward as the vulgar lead.  
Delicate Leighton, fine and finer grown,  
Paints merely flesh, omitting brawn and bone;  
And Stone and Millais (doubtless unawares)  
Turn advertisers of the soaps of Pears!

Most lovely are the visions of their minds,  
And richer gifts my searching nowhere finds;  
But public whims from loftiest flights deter —  
They bow to Liverpool and Manchester,  
And bloated cotton-lords and city zeros  
Usurp the canvas meant for gods and heroes ...

If I were man, I can't believe but I  
Should greatly mourn o'er man's mortality.  
Decay and Death, how dismal and how drear!  
How horrible man's losses year by year!  
How horrible to see each living face  
Lose all its beauty, every form its grace!  
To see the mind that swayed you with its might  
Grow feebler, languishing with mortal blight,  
Till all that you have striven with tears to save  
Drops down at last into a loathsome grave! ...  
These melancholy thoughts arise, no doubt,  
From seeing intellectual lights go out  
So often lately when I least expected

And where mine eyes for guidance were directed.  
There was dear Ruskin. Where could any find  
Upon the crust of Earth a fairer mind?  
His was a force that stirred the dullest heart  
With love of Nature, and, through Nature, Art;  
A lovely mind with shapes of beauty haunted,  
Through which Thought moved as through a realm  
enchanted.

I saw him first beneath those snowy heights  
He hath illumined with such magic lights,  
I thought to find their beauty in his face  
Reflected with an archangelic grace.  
Not so. On Lemman's Lake of skyey blue  
He came aboard a steamboat off Montreux.  
He gazed upon the waters, and a sneer  
Spread o'er his face, methought, from ear to ear;  
He gazed upon the mountains, and it seemed  
As if of Whistler's pots of paint he dreamed;  
He gazed upon the blue unclouded skies,  
And seemed to groan within, and shut his eyes.

This disappointed me; but even then  
He was a seraph in this world of men.  
But now, Art's hierarch, great Nature's priest,  
What is he but a piteous sight and *tristè*?  
Preacher of queer, fantastic, meaningless,  
Dull dogmas, softening to his own caress,  
God of a self-built temple, he is found,  
His worshippers extended on the ground,  
Fed with the fruits of vanity o'erblown,  
By no heart, so adored as by his own.

These are the follies that are bread and wine  
To Art's old foe, the wall-eyed Philistine,  
That fatten those brute monsters dull and dense,  
The Calibans of purblind Common-Sense,  
And help my harpies, hovering under heaven,  
To foul the fairest gifts that God has given ...

Enough, enough! I'm tired of all this musing;  
My thoughts are growing more and more confusing;

Yes, the old torture of the mind is coming,  
The old puzzles in mine ears again are drumming.  
I, who have lived so many million ages,  
Have found not out the riddles that these sages  
Think they may solve in half-a-score of years,  
In passing from their cradles to their biers;  
And still they come like fever-dreams and madness  
To crush me down in endless, hopeless sadness.

Some little satisfaction here I find  
In gazing at these blind that lead the blind,  
Some triumph — it is little, it is brief —  
In poring o'er this Chaos of Belief ...

I thank thee, Darwin! ... Those observant eyes  
Saw men in monkeys, elephants in flies,  
A crocodile in every cricket curled,  
In every grain of dust a dædal world.  
He saw, or thought he might with reason see;  
Too strong that mind for swift credulity.

What with suspended judgment he had hinted  
His weak disciples clutched with faith unstinted.  
So Spencer philosophic fabrics based  
On faint foundations trembling hands had traced;  
So Huxley to the rough mechanic tells  
The hopeless creed wherewith his bosom swells;  
So Alpine Tyndall, icier than the Alps,  
His scalpel lays upon the Bishops' scalps,  
Excites the public rage in furious blast  
By preaching down the preachers at Belfast,  
Till, having ended his atomic mission,  
He is evolved into a Politician;  
So every whipster now his morals shapes  
By the high cult of atoms and of apes;  
Sweet vicars-choral of the Godless Church  
Atomic anthems pipe at every porch,  
Aggressive spinsters ape the Ape opinion,  
And beardless freshmen boast themselves Darwinian.  
God, Herbert Spencer, immortality,  
All in one clearance overboard must fly ...

O soothing creed! ... But why does Spencer doubt?  
What! after all the riddle's *not* found out? ...  
Whence came the atom whence all atoms come?  
What force set force in motion? Nature's thumb!  
By rule of thumb mechanic man was moulded,  
By rule of thumb the worlds on worlds unfolded! ...

It is an age that suits my humour well —  
Jumble and tumble, everything pell-mell;  
An age *agnostic*, which with eager throat  
Swallows new lies as old ones' antidote;  
Believes in palmistry and table-rappings  
And demoniac wings of mystic flappings;  
Accepts the solar theory which unlocks  
History's whole secret, with the help of Cox,  
Who deems a revelation every yawn  
Of mythic Müller blinking at the Dawn;  
Gulps esoteric Buddhism, and the Light  
Of Asia in a European Night;  
Believes in that abstraction called "The People;"

In Gladstone sheltering 'neath the Church's steeple;  
In sonnets, roundels, and æstheticism;  
In Drummond's scientific symbolism;  
In Randolph Churchill; and in charlatanism;  
In anarchy, and George, and nihilism;  
In all the little lights and poetasters  
A fleeting Fashion with its praises plasters;  
In Whistler; and in Ruskin gone to seed;  
In voters who have never learnt to read;  
In women's right to look and live like men;  
In the inspiration of Walt Whitman's pen;  
In ruling rebel mobs without a rod;  
In anything in Earth and Heaven but God.  
An age of shams and mean mendacities  
Through which the very fool they wheedle sees;  
Of scandal-mongers prompting vice to scourge it,  
To fleece the wicked world, but never purge it;  
Of lies, invented just to float a journal,  
Adopted as a regimen diurnal;  
Of purity societies that hatch

The impurities they lie in wait to catch;  
Of clubs established "for the People's good,"  
That just supply their Secretaries' food;  
Of philanthropic movements with an art in them  
Of screening sins of ladies that take part in them;  
Of social vice that only shocks Society  
When brought to light and damned with notoriety;  
Of Belgian and Parisian bestialities,  
And viler sins of viler nationalities,  
And every kind of deed that should be un-done,  
Acclimatized in England's centre, London;  
Of endless cheating and adulteration;  
Of scoundrels drunk with public adulation;  
Of guileless critics, and unbiassed Press;  
Of honest merit crowned with sure success;  
Of genius banned that never droops or dwindles;  
Of gold-mines and innumerable swindles;  
Of legislators glorying in the breaking  
Of laws their very lives are spent in making;  
Of babes their mothers are too fine to nurse,

And wives that deem their marriage-vows a curse.  
An age when little boys of six are *blasé*  
From hearing things the maids of their mammas say;  
When parents put to grass each "little treasure"  
In order to be free to sin at leisure;  
When Youth believes it's sharper than a knife  
Because it knows the seamy side of life;  
When acts that merit our rebuking cloak we  
From dread of getting tript by a *tu quoque*,  
When Parliament tears contracts up like paper,  
And Justice nickers like a rushlight taper;  
When all who own must loss by Law endure,  
And all securities are insecure;  
When servants itch to seize their master's places,  
And all things governed kick against the traces ...

Where are the heirs of that immortal band  
Who strove to purer heights to lead their land,  
Who dedicated art and skill and life

To Virtue's service in one ceaseless strife  
With Evil, men who held a God of Light  
Reigns o'er the vague and awful Infinite?  
"Who wears the armour now of Wilberforce?  
Or who with Howard purges Misery's source?  
Who now would rather die than prove a liar?  
What martyr for his Christ would brave the fire?  
What mummer mumbling "Stories of the Cross"  
Would suffer for His sake a living's loss,  
What ranter of Christ's pangs on Sabbath-morns  
Bear one light skin-prick of His crown of thorns? ...

Ye sneer at honour, praise the schemer's sleekness,  
And hold straightforwardness a childish weakness;  
Contemn the hero though for you he dies,  
And laud a crafty rascal to the skies;  
Ay, kneel to every savage ye have warred on  
And to save Gladstone sacrifice a Gordon.  
Void of belief in either God or Devil,  
Each life's a sordid strife or filthy revel;

No hope of Heaven and no fear of Hell  
To prompt to good, from Evil's paths repel;  
No vision of Eternity to fire  
The spirit of man and lift him from the mire;  
No hope of vaster life in boundless spheres  
To consecrate the loves of mortal years.  
Let each man live his little life of sin  
Just far enough from Crime to save his skin,  
Gain place or power or gold or gluttonous ease,  
Crawl up to fame by any base degrees,  
Eat, drink, and sleep, till, choked with London's fogs,  
He dies unwept, to rot with apes and dogs! ...

Yet, were I dwelling in this world of mist,  
I scarce could be an ultra-pessimist.  
Hell's pessimism's mortals' optimism;  
If man, I'd lean to Sully's "meliorism."  
For, ever through the weary circling years  
I, struggling with the Power that sways the spheres,

I, the old Anarch, I that Chaos am,  
I, the grim Wolf in clothing of the lamb,  
I, subtil Serpent that through Eden crept,  
Man's Enemy, whose hate hath never slept,  
I, keen of eyes and base of heart, whose lot  
Is to know Good and yet to choose it not,  
I, Supreme Evil, who have warred on Good  
Through age on age of horror and of blood,  
I, who would mar the peace of Earth and Heaven,  
Loose through the worlds Hell's thunders and its levin,  
All order, beauty, joy in ruin lay,  
Roll darkness upon light and night on day —  
Ay me! I feel my weakness in His grasp,  
The knees that press my limbs, the palms that clasp,  
A moment risen, am backward flung as dead,  
And still the Victor's heel is on my head ...

I know not for what end the Universe  
Sustains me thus, who am its scourge and curse,

Why the Almighty with one final blow  
Hath struck not and for ever laid me low.  
Methinks it would be sweet to sleep. Ah me,  
Far sweeter than to strive perpetually  
In failures on through centuries of woe,  
Foreknowing nothing save mine overthrow,  
No higher joy than what a sneer may yield  
At human foibles every hour revealed,  
No hope of vaster triumph, richer gain,  
Than just some increment of mortals' pain! ...

So bestial Man appeareth from his birth,  
So base in grain, so cumbered with his earth,  
I marvel not that he so low can fall,  
But that he soars so high, or soars at all.  
But upward, onward still, in Hell's despite,  
He struggles, yearning toward his gleam of light;  
The Good prevails, the surging floods of Sin,  
Still threatening, still are held their bounds within;

Earth's charioteer still curbs Earth's wanton steeds,  
And guides them where the angel Virtue leads.  
Ay, though I die not, Victor never yet  
Have I my throne on Earth unshaken set,  
Nor shall I while this orb about the sun  
By the Invisible Hand in light is spun ...

Eh, my good fellow? Once again the chair?  
Have I not paid my penny? Pray, be fair! ...  
Well, I have lingered here perhaps too long.  
Methinks I've not escaped the prying throng.  
That shrewd observer, yonder, turns again;  
He is a poet yet unknown to men.  
The ladies, too, are gazing all together —  
They smell a little sulphur in the breeze;  
They seem to search about for foot and feather,  
And test me as they would a Stilton cheese.  
Were they but certain of the thing I am,  
I should not know on Earth one moment's calm.  
Good Lord! I should be plagued with invitations

To breakfasts, dances, cold and hot collations,  
To *tête-à-têtes* and private conversations,  
And amateur confessions, and ovations,  
Afternoon-teas, and plays, and recitations,  
And East End concerts, ritualist oblations,  
Salvation armies, temperance orations,  
Clerical meetings, ministerial dinners,  
And mild retreats of melancholy sinners,  
And crowded parties where you make your way  
Half up the staircase ere the dawn of day;  
And, by my faith, I'd rather lose my reason  
Than be the Lion of a London Season ...  
But hark! ... Time's up! ... Farewell, my children! ... Pah! ...  
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!

THE END.