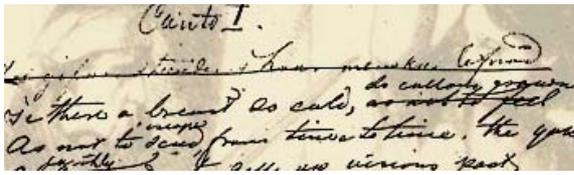


## Canto I



Is there a breast so cold, so callous grown,  
As not to escape from time to time, the yoke  
Of earthly Cares, to call up visions past  
Or visions future, with the aid of hope?  
Is there an eye can turn it to the skies,  
That peopled infinite of worlds like ours  
Nor feel bewildered with the awful scene?  
Is there a mind so base, so canker-worn,  
As to reject the wreaths that Fancy weaves,  
A slave of sordid wants; unmoved by aught  
That stirs the springs of the aspiring soul?  
Unmoved when Nature smiles on Nature's works,  
When the bright Sun bids welcome or farewell,  
Where the soft landscapes oft the sunny South  
Show man's domain in its most lovely light;  
Or where the Alpine heights are reared on high;  
Gigantic fosters of a ruder age  
Sprung from the womb of Chaos, ere the world  
Was yet adorned by the Creator's hand;  
Unmoved when parting with the long tried friend  
Unmoved when Beauty tries her sweetest smile  
To thaw the ice from off his frozen heart;  
When Love, that Almoner of Heaven, exerts  
His Charity; and heaves the youthful breast  
And yearns for love responsive to its throb;  
Unmoved beside a deathbed when the soul  
Of wife or parent takes eternal flight;  
When hand in hand, the living and the dying

The grasp relaxes, the breast pours forth  
In rattling sound to wring from Death,  
Its last poor breath upon this side the grave.  
[...]

Is there a man can stand such sights, nor feel  
His heart o'erflowing with religious awe?  
If such there be, his is the only breast,  
Where Poesy is extinct – Let him hence!  
He has no business on this blessed earth  
Where all are lurked, on mutual help depending:  
A living chaos, let him hide his woes  
If woes can dwell in such a shrivelled heart:  
Or if a tear, though but for selfish sorrow  
Can wet his eyelid, it will do him good,  
But no, it cannot be – none are so cold.  
The wintry frost, although it spares no flower,  
Yet spares their seed to grace a future spring;  
Though Vice may harden into Callousness  
It cannot drain all feeling from the breast.  
It lays there dormant, but with proper culture,  
Methinks the seed may bloom a second time.

That seed is Poesy. Our sceptic age  
Calls it a doll for elder babies' use:  
A foolish notion! Nature needs no toy  
Yet is a pact too. Look at her works,  
Look at the green which beautifies the ground,  
Or smell the fragrance which her rose exhales;  
Those are her humbler works, but lift your eye  
To higher wonders to your noble self:  
Look at your eye, while genius lights its fire  
Or on that brow, sublime with towering thought:  
Or into Beauty's face: what in it makes

The form so fair, the smile so sweet? it is  
The harmony, the poesy infused  
In Nature's masterpiece. Why do those locks  
Adorn the head – they have no business there  
Save as an ornament: – the bald do live  
As well. Why is her eye so bright?  
Is nothing to its sight. Why lend those lips  
Such deep enchantment to the lover's kiss?  
Why, sneers the Cynic, they are nature's bawds  
To light a flame, and set young people breeding:  
It is a lie: the heart that deepest feels  
Has least of Passion, and the sweetest kiss  
Is from affianced lips, when but the souls  
Are wed as yet. Why is her bosom turned  
With such perfection? Does the milk not flow  
In still more plenty from the cows teat?  
And, above all, why is the such Love implanted  
In higher beings? Why can they not live,  
Content to crawl with meaner things, and leave  
No trace behind save where their stinking clay  
Attracts the worm. Why feels the high-born soul  
Such deep dejection when it stays alone,  
Without a friend to counsel or condole,  
Without a leman to kiss up the tear,  
Or mixed with her transfuse it into love.  
Why, when two hearts are blended, do they throb  
Half maddening with their bliss? or when the lips  
Of lovers meet, why flows the blood so fast?

Is that prose? Shelley says the greatest poet  
Is yet to come – he's wrong – the greatest lives  
From all eternity: his works fill up  
The infinite of space, and from his eyes  
Flashes the light which illumines the world.

T'is Poesy, t'is the extracted essence  
Of Life and beauty which o'erfill the Soul  
With rapture. [...]  
To find an endless, incoherent mass,  
And mould it into worlds – that is his work.  
But that were little: atoms follow laws  
Perhaps not made by him; orbs might combine  
For aught I know, without a ruling hand.  
But to breathe life into that heaped up rubbish,  
To make the matter see, and feel, and think  
Oh that is wonderful: there is his seal  
Of Godhead set, a seal no man of sense  
Mistakes for chance: it is the fruit of thought  
So deep, so wondrous that it smites the mind  
With dizzy faintness like a lightning's flash.  
T'is not in crowded churches, while a priest  
Draws out his nonsense to a foolish flock  
Who yawn or sleep, that the reflecting mind  
Feels most inclined to worship; nor where scenes  
Of more imposing aspects, charm the sight.  
The Ocean, though our eye can see no end  
To its immensity, appears a drop  
To the mind's eye which fathoms space and time  
In search of God. The skies themselves do seem[as seen?]  
Resplendent with their multitude of stars  
Are but a grain composed to what discloses  
The magnifying glass: that also dwindles  
Into a grain reflected through the glass  
Of thought and truth, whose focus is the Soul.

But not in vast dimensions lays confined  
Deepest conception. What were boundless space  
Without almighty thought? What were those spheres  
But useless deserts if deprived of life?

The sage search not the skies for proofs of God,  
But turn to man – that infinitely little  
Contains the infinitely grand of Thought;  
So grand that he, whose mind can comprehend  
The structure of a universe, and trace  
The course of comets, cannot trace the thread  
Of his own knowledge. Time has taught us much  
And will teach more, yet never solve the riddles  
Of God and Thought – they are the mind's barriers.  
There, as the human understanding feels  
Its impotence, the human heart o'erflows  
With hallowed worship. It o'ercomes me now,  
Even while I write, a tremor in the breast,  
A glistening in the eye, and I do bend  
An humbled knee and send my prayer on high.  
A prayer not for forgiveness of my sins –  
I claim no favour and I fear no Hell –  
But the pure homage which his wonders draw.  
He needs no praise, but man's Imagination  
Must needs uplift him to the heavenly spheres  
To face his God – and prostrate at His throne  
The soaring Soul expands with higher views,  
The offering heart is softened into love;  
Such is the only use of prayers: they do  
Ennoble us, or else we well might sneer  
At such an offering upon such a shrine.

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This is no idle talk. If I can prove  
That we have higher duties to fulfil  
Besides the drudgeries of our daily task,  
That poesy is not a madman's ravings,  
But the bright polish of enlightened Souls,  
That man grows wealthy as his mind grows rich  
Or as his heart grows good; if I can free

You for a moment my time is not misspent.  
A single being' from the fangs  
Of sordid selfishness; if I can draw  
A single tear into a single eye,  
My time is not misspent; and let me hope  
That this contempt of all that's pure in life,  
This lack of feeling, has not reached your heart  
But is the foolish fashion of a day.  
Ye parents, while your child is in his spring  
Mar not the seeds of Nature; let them Love  
Their full development, or else the mind  
Will be a store of learning not of thought.  
Fear not his frolicks: if they are forbid  
They will return in later years as Vice;  
And then to root them out requires the power  
Of giant minds – the rest are sunk in dirt.  
Chain not his youthful Fancy, lest it take  
A wilder flight when Reason ought to curb  
Its sway. The man whose childhood knew no joy  
Must either sink into a callous wretch,  
His temper soured, and his hopes foregone,  
Or else disbanded Passions cast him loose  
Upon the world, to founder in its storms.  
Not so the youth whose feelings softened down  
By poesy, Fancy's aid have taught him to enjoy  
The measured lines where Poets pour their heart.  
He never feels that emptiness of thought  
Which calls on Passion to fill up its void  
And then enslaves us in the arms of Vice.  
His heart reserves its freshness for a Love  
Which chains no feet, and calls not up remorse.  
His use is better of the gold he gains.  
  
Then let us hail thee Poesy! thou art

The inward star which lights our inward world.  
To thee we owe the sweetest joys of Life;  
It is thy light which colours Beauty's cheek,  
And sparkles in her eye; it is thy glow  
Which softens Passion into hallowed love,  
And sanctifies the bliss of nuptial rites.  
Thou Beautified of all things below,  
The day itself takes brightness through thy glass.

The Poesy of Day! The Sun ascends  
The Heaven, and casts a chequered light and shade  
O'er scenes as lovely as Calame can paint  
[deleted: ... or Byron trace  
With beauty-teeming pen ...];  
And grander far. The Ocean at my feet  
Has spent its fury, and is slumbering now  
A harmless child on Nature's ample lap.  
And in its mirror on the skies reflected,  
And in its deep another world resides,  
And on its surface I discern the dots  
Of winged barks, the sailors' floating isles.  
The morning breeze which gently fans my face  
Rippling the waters, wakes a gushing sound  
Whose mystic music seems to Fancy's ear  
A hallelujah from the angels' choir.  
The skies are clear, save that the morning rays  
With purple tints entwine their azure hue,  
Save where some cloud fantastically shaped  
Looks an abandoned foundling of the Skies  
Resembling down, perhaps for angels' sleep,  
Perhaps the down fallen of some angel's bed  
Save where some bird betwixt me and the sun  
Rests on his wings, and intercepts its rays.

The spot I stand on is a highland coast  
With verdant hills and interspersed woods.  
And further off are snow-clad tops; their ice  
Is glittering gem-like in the morning sun  
And seems so near, I fancy I can trace  
The very crystals. Glancing to my right  
I can discern a tiny creek, o'erhung  
With trees projecting from the beach above,  
And its unruffled surface shows the form  
Of leafs and boughs as if they grew therein.  
T'is is but a mirror, yet my mind is struck,  
With that resemblance between things and dreams,  
And draws conclusions: if the mirrored form  
Affects the soul like a reality,  
Where is the boundary between truth and show?  
T'is better not to tell lest we should tear  
Its veil of splendour from the empty pomp  
Of power and wealth: Let those enjoy who can  
The baubles suited to the shallow soul,  
The rouged-up charm of prostituted Beauty.  
The showy dress which fools delight to wear,  
The tawdry ribands, and the nicknames given  
to clowns, and bawds, and spies,  
In guise of rank, to paint out guilt and shame.  
I turn again to Nature, to the scenes  
Of the fair landscape which attracts my eye.  
But it is changed; the sun is setting now  
Its farewell beams fall on the mountain-tops  
Gilding their snowy crests, and then it sinks  
Leaving the world to Darkness and to sleep.  
A little while its slanting rays yet linger  
As if unwilling to let in the shade  
A little while its twilight charms the eye  
With colours varied as their field is vast,

But they must fade, and Night must reign o'er Earth.

The Poesy of night! I love its calm;  
Which harmonizes with my wounded soul  
I use to gaze from some retired spot  
On Hymen's watch-lamp floating on the skies,  
Silvering the surface of the rippled stream  
Or peeping through the panes – what see she there?  
Is it some wedded pair, whose feast now joined  
As did their hands, but a few hours ago,  
Who lip on lip, and heart on heart, are draining  
The cup of Pleasure – may it fill as fast.  
Ne'er may Suspicion with its poisoned arrows  
Destroy the sweetness of Domestic joy,  
Ne'er may the lure of vanities or lust  
Decoy the bride from Duty's wholesome task  
And ne'er may Death find entrance by their door  
To steal a child, and break a mother's heart.  
Brave be their sons and blooming be their daughters,  
And let their plenty be content and worth.  
Is it a pair who taste unlawful love?  
The frenzied rapture of a stolen kiss,  
Stolen not from her who trembles with desire,  
But from her welfare, from her eternal peace.  
Oh, could we heal the wounds which thus are given,  
Could we dry up that source of bitter tears  
How different were the world; but sin must reap  
A fearful harvest ere its stains are washed,  
To feel a glow which she has squandered long  
Is it the orgies of a midnight revel  
Where sense and shame are drowned in wine and lust?  
And Prostitution with her haggard looks,  
And withered heart, feigns for a dirty fee  
To share the glow which her caresses raise.

Alas! full often must the Night look down  
On scenes of misery. Let us draw a veil  
Of decency o'er those unholy things,  
The muses dare not scrutinize too closely  
Such moral filth, lest they should soil their hands  
But if they would, what Hells, what gulphs of vice  
Could they not bring to light. Sealed be their lips,  
And closed the scene. A fairer prospect woos  
The heart and pen. Here let me steep my fill  
On the soft Beauty which pervades the night,  
While Fancy dreams she sees a "Hand divine"  
Trimming the lamp on high. Lulled are the storms,  
Of lately raging Passions, and subdued  
Our brutish instincts – Adoration leaves  
No nerve unstrung – a basic use to fit.  
Perhaps it is the faintness of the light,  
The indistinctness of the scene around  
Which charms us most: the mind goes wandering on  
Filling those shadows with its own creation  
Of fancy-land, to fade with coming day  
When Truth and Misery cannot bear the light.

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There is a bridge at Petersburg where oft  
I muse away my time – the waters flowing  
Beneath my feet – how long may they have flowed?  
How long are they to run? such questions force  
Them on the mind, and draw me from the theme  
I have in hand. Perhaps as many years  
As there are drops in that majestic river  
Or in the sea to which its water tend.  
Yet o'er their surface flows an elder stream,  
The airy Ocean in whose deep we live,  
Peopling its bottom. – Peter's Citadel

Looks grim and threatening; and the silvery light  
Lends to its granite walls a ghostly hue  
Which calls up terrors in the firmest breast  
As if those stones were not of human laying;  
As if those gates led in Pluto's realms.  
The measured footsteps of the sentinel,  
The dying echo of a distant voice,  
The moaning sound of the sweeping wind  
Alone are heard; but to the dreamer's absent mind  
They seem not what they are, but plaintive notes,  
The cries of tortured victims from within.  
Such there have been. What care the demi-gods,  
Or demi-devils of the Palace yonder  
For human wail, it cannot reach their ear.  
Nor, if it did, their heart, grown Pity-proof  
From long abuse of power, and wealth and lust.  
Let History speak! it does mankind some good  
To tear the mask from sceptred criminals,  
Although their curses cannot reach the dead  
And show what sordid wretches men obey.  
The best of them a murderer and a harlot,  
Fit inmate of a madman's prison and brothel,  
A princely train – let knaves and whores applaud.  
A nation's hope! Can ye not see?  
Out with the truth! Off with the veil!

Those times are gone. The nation for some years  
Has felt blessings of a milder sway.  
[deleted: And prospers now.] Long live the present Czar!  
Some men abuse him, trusting to his kindness,  
Some point at failings in his private life!  
But this I know: he is an honest man  
And that is much even in an humbler station,  
Still more upon a throne. And lest this praise

Be deemed flattery let me mention here  
That he and his have done a fearful wrong  
To me and mine – have brought my aged father  
To work for bread – it was a shameful deed,  
Still worse because an honest name was branded.  
But time shall wash the stains from off that name,  
And clear the just to make the guilty blush.  
A ducal title is no screen from shame  
Even where it is from law; Opinion's brand  
Sits doubly glaring on the justice-proof.

Before me stands the Palace of the Czars  
Before me lay the quays: the Winterpalace,  
That school for sycophants and prostitutes,  
Named courtiers, maids of honour, and so forth.  
A motley train! viewed through the glass of truth  
There's scarce a virgin though so many maids  
But all get married so it matters not;  
There's scarce an honest man though all are such  
In words – the virtue's on their tongues,  
The falsehood in their heart; but then they wear  
Such glittering stars –the ladies sure prefer  
The latter ornament: it shines so bright,  
T'is like their beauty when their honour's gone  
Or polished paste beside unpolished gems.

[deleted:

The Hermitage – what mockery in that name!  
The marble palace – t'is to match the heart  
Of him who built it, but it is empty now.  
And that long row of private palaces  
Wrung from serfs wherewith an Empress paid  
Her two-legged studs, besides she made them lords,  
All for a merit which we leave to guess!]

That Winterpalace is the pole whereon  
The whole of Russia turns; and in that palace  
Dwells a young prince born to the greatest power  
Which ever yet fell to the lot of man. –

Not he who wept for further worlds to conquer,  
Nor even the masters of Imperial Rome  
Nor Bonaparte ere set his bloody star,  
Had such a sway – a word of his may crush  
Or raise a world – he has to make his choice.  
Young god of earth! how must thy bosom swell  
With conscious pride when thou surveyest the map  
Of thy domain to be. Even as it is,  
Let but the reins fall to ambitious hands  
And it will stand against all nations leagued.  
Have we not seen in the Crimean war  
How impotent the greatest nations are  
Gainst such a foe. If Alexander yielded  
T’was not from want of means, but love of peace.  
He has a Conscience which forbids to shed  
For selfish ends the blood of fellow-men.  
But his successor will he yield as well?  
That curling lip of his, met blinks, says no.  
If he’s ambitious – let the world beware  
And England too, “despite its watery wall”.  
Enough of him – my mind is ever wandering,  
An ignis fatuus deludes my pen. –  
So let it wander to the purer regions  
Of Amor’s realm, in quest of love and bliss.

The Poesy of Love! It gives to life  
A heavenly flavour which conceals its dregs;  
Much like the gilding of a worser metal  
To keep from rust, and make its surface shine  
Both last some years, and both when worn away  
Expose the dross; but one may be regilt,  
The other rusts so fast with gall and tears  
There’s no regilding till it gets refined  
By Death; and who can tell what waits us there.

But while it lasts, how sweet is the delusion,  
How bright the polish of that finer gold  
We coin to bliss; but it consumes itself  
And few can hoard it for maturer days.  
Then let us use it wisely. Some betimes  
Waste upon Vice the treasures of their breast  
Till, soiled by its contagion, they are grown  
Themselves as low, their heart a skeleton,  
Shorn of its warmth to kindle sympathy,  
Shorn of its bliss to feel even for themselves.  
Do we not see men hardly turned of twenty  
Cloyed to disgust – theirs' is the worst castration  
Which sets the mind brooding o'er pleasures past  
And leaves a void nor wealth nor fame can fill;  
And racks the fame with weakness and disease  
Those heavy taxes Nature lays on sin;  
And racks the mind with terrors and remorse  
Those bitter fruits of moral impotence,  
The sunken eye, the pale and heat-worn cheek  
Are outward signs: men turn then with a sneer  
From the sad rags which Degradation leaves;  
And thus confined to solitude and shame  
They drag awhile the heavy chains of sin  
Or end in suicide. – Peace with their dust.  
For they have paid a fearful retribution,  
And if a Hell must needs reclaim the soul  
As priests will tell and fools believe, they've passed  
That worst of Purgatories – Hell on earth.

Such men of late love have met with less contempt  
Since Byron's genius stooped to hallow Vice.  
But let us not mistake – his lofty soul  
Was drained of Pleasure not by lust but thought;  
His shapes ideal had such heavenly forms,

The love he offered was so pure, so deep,  
He could not find the like; entering on life  
He felt its pleasures mingled with the pain  
Of disappointed hopes. Thus while the child  
Is happy with its doll, untaught to long  
For more, the youth must have a living doll,  
To suit his higher feelings; but a youth  
Whose mind is able to conceive perfection  
Will vainly seek for dolls to cheer his heart.  
T'was Byron's lot – not such the lot of those  
Who cling to Vice, unable to perceive  
The charms of Virtue. But enough of them.

There is a class of wretches far more common,  
The female class; and far more wretched too,  
Though less to blame; they pay a moment's error  
With heavy years of abject misery.  
It must be so; if failings were not punished,  
Lewdness might triumph over Love, and make  
More havoc than it does on sacred ties.  
But it is hard on some: not all give up  
Their purity to satisfy their lust.  
Full many a victim of despairing Hunger  
Has wet the bed of nourishment with tears.  
Such tears, o God: she pays a heavy price  
For the sad privilege of shame and woe.  
And those who stoops to such infernal pacts,  
Is there no hand to punish crimes like theirs'?  
None ever blames the murderer of a soul,  
Such is the justice of all human laws.

There's one I know – her's is a lovely face  
Even now, though stained with the polluted touch  
Of strangers' kisses – t'was her mother sold her.

She prayed, she wept, she wrung her hands despairing  
But all in vain, for Nature's voice was deaf  
And she was beat into obedience; then  
She knelt before the wretch who was to buy  
Her maidenhood; she kissed his hand imploring  
His mercy for her soul – that he might give  
What gold he could without such sacrifice.  
What do you think he answered? Gold my girl  
Is never given for nothing, you must pay  
Your mother's debt – come let me kiss your breasts;  
T'will stir desire and dry up your tears.  
Now don't be foolish! t'is a moment's pain  
And you will know such sweet sensations after.  
She made no answer, but she doffed her clothes,  
All to the last, and stood a marble statue  
Before a gloating fiend, then laid her down,  
Nor wept, nor prayed – she acted nobly then!  
The gold was got, but with it came remorse  
Gnawing the mother's bosom, till it ended  
In suicide. Some years are past since then;  
And where's the daughter? needs her fate be told?

Where do they go all those unhappy victims  
Of want, of lust, of petty vanities?  
To swell the stream of Prostitution's sewer  
Where glide those forms along the dusky streets. Who  
Can know where blame is due – all are so like,  
Their price is plainly written on their garments  
As impudence is written in their look.  
Yet do we pity, for the gem when broken  
Is still the remnant of a precious thing  
And so the soul: although its light is out  
We should revere it for the light that was.  
But woman's soul – it is so frail a thing

One single kiss can rob it of its lustre,  
And woman's beauty too; a short-lived rose.  
You walk a garden and you cull its flowers  
They show as lovely though their stalks are torn  
But life is ebbing, and their leaves when withered  
Are only mockeries of their beauty past.

You walk a broader garden – that of life  
Its roses blooming in Affection's light.  
You cull those roses – who can stay his hand  
When such invite, when bliss is at your bidding,  
They show so fair, their fragrance is so pure,  
Where is the harm to place them on your bosom?  
Alas, there is! those roses too have stalks  
Which feed their blush, their purity, their life,  
And once cut off, though still the same to view,  
Their bloom is ebbing, and the hand of Death  
Already busy with the beauteous form.  
A year of freshness – few can claim even that –  
And what remains? Some withered leaves to tell –  
Those trophies of Decay – their tale of woe.

I show the blackness for the sake of contrast  
With the pure blessings of a wedded life.  
The greatest pain and greatest joy comes  
From the same source. Let's take a fairer view  
Of sunny life – a pair is at the altar  
Exchanging vows: the bride is young and timid,  
And her confusion shows how rich the blood,  
And her emotion, as she faintly whispers  
The fitting words, o'ermasters all her soul,  
The bosom heaves as bellows on the Ocean,  
Stirred by the breath of coyness and of Love.  
How deeply feels that undefiled breast

The maiden's fears contending with desire  
Less to be blessed than bless. Her thoughts are all  
For him, the happy man, whose lot it is  
To keep the key of such a heart – her love.  
The priest is gone, the guests are all retired,  
The bride is moved to the nuptial bed,  
The curtains drawn, thou happy pair Good night.  
There let them lay – it would not do to peep  
For stranger's eyes into the mystic rites  
Of wedded life. Let's hope those rites will lead  
To bless the wife into a mother; She  
Who has no child is only half a woman,  
Or less than so – she knows not half her joys.  
A year is past – their feelings are the same  
But not so stormy; love is friendship now.  
The husband has his business to attend,  
The wife a newborn feeling which divides  
Her heart: the infant at her breast tells why.  
It is her love, and let it be her pride,  
For there is woman's greatness. Man feels humbled  
When he reflects that all his knowledge heaped  
By generations, has not taught him yet  
To understand what woman's instinct breeds.  
She smiles so sweetly on the little thing  
Which lies unconscious there: her thoughts are fore  
Busy with coming years – she sees a boy  
Climbing his mother's knees to kiss her lips;  
Or tell his childish thoughts, or ask Mamma  
For sweets or playthings, as of course he will.

Not all is sunshine. Ever and anon  
Black clouds are gathering; storm and darkness reign  
As much o'er life as o'er the atmosphere.  
What ails the infant? it can't tell poor thing,

But its tears tell upon the mother's heart.  
Not without cause, for Death is near at hand,  
Though warded off. She sinks upon her knees  
And prays to God, her face all bathed in tears:  
Her prayer so pure, perhaps some angel near  
Hears it and guards the infant's life; for it  
Revives, and brings new sunshine to her face.  
Fain would I linger on that hallowed scene  
Which shows Affection in its purest light  
But what I feel, I lack the skill to tell:  
My pen has no such colours. Let us on.

Years come, years go – the infant's grown a boy  
And has a sister; both are fair and chubby.  
Here is a group of four, if we except  
The fifth, their God, who smiles on them. The mother  
Is in her husband's arms: a fond embrace  
Shows that their love is still as fresh as ever.  
Why should it cool? The bloom gone from the cheek  
Is on the soul: it shines so much the brighter  
With the remembrance of endearments past  
With the pure gem of proved and trusted love.  
The children play; their shiny morning faces  
Reflect the happiness which is in them  
Upon their parents; well may they rejoice  
While they decline to see those buds expand.  
For what so miserable as the lot  
Of age, when its infirmities are left  
Unpitied by the soothing voice of youth,  
When all is blank except the racking pain  
And parting souls must set in vacancy,  
When not a hand, unless a fee be paid,  
Will bring the cup to parched lips; when Death  
Is the sole friend, courted like bliss of yore.

Not so with parents when their tender care  
Has laid up fondness for succeeding years  
In younger hearts. But more of that anon.  
Up comes the boy – his father’s blue-eyed darling  
Climbing his knee: “I want to kiss Mamma,  
She’s bought me such an handsome doll, so big,  
So nicely dressed, I’ll fetch it, my Papa,  
And show it you – it is little girl  
Just like my sister; though one arm’s got broken.  
T’was sister did it; but it lost no blood –  
Tell me Papa why have not dolls got blood.”  
And off he is, waiting for no reply.  
Gone was their child; and the parents follow  
With eager eyes their cherub on his errand  
Their hearts send up their gratitude  
And their lips meet – t’is long before they part.

Time’s hand – though bleeding bosoms find it slow  
And blessed bosoms fast – moves ever steady,  
Careless of our sensations, on the dial  
Of Nature’s clock, which leads us to our grave  
Stops not for Lovers, quickens not for grief, meets the hours of life.  
Its wheels the worlds, its spring attraction’s power  
Its key – eternity; its winder God.  
Thus seasons pass – the summer is gone,  
And Autumn sheds the leaves. To man that season  
Brings but one joy – the ripening fruit of life,  
Either the moral one his soul has bred,  
Or that more common sprung from woman’s seed.  
The fond pursuits of Youth have lost their charm,  
And fame seems trumpery as we near the grave;  
But children’s blessings have a lasting zest,  
Sweetening with age. Methinks I see them now  
The venerable pair we left in Youth,

Surrounded by a numerous family  
Who listen to their stories of old days, –  
Or tell their own – their cares, their hopes, their love  
Asking advice or blessing which is given  
Most lovingly. May God preserve their life  
Full many years to see their children prosper  
And may their soul pass, when their time is come,  
Without a throe, to th'other side the grave!

I draw this picture of a happy life  
Not from my own experience. Mine has been  
A miserable lot. At twenty-nine,  
When I retrace the current of my years,  
I scarce can find a day without sting,  
The joys of Childhood swallowed up by Illness,  
The joys of Fancy swallowed up by truth  
Which came to early, spreading out its pall  
Of real woe o'er visionary hopes.  
Take up a microscope, it shows the face  
Of Beauty's self o'erfilled with dirty wrinkles.  
Viewed through the microscope of truth, all things  
Show deviations from Perfection's form;  
One only not – th'Almighty power above,  
Brightning with truth; but as we turn to earth  
How mean, compared, seem the pursuits of life,  
How less those little things of greatness here.  
A Niagara grows a glassful water  
Poured o'er a broken pebble; a Mont-Blanc  
A dung-hill or a mole-hill; and the Ocean  
A pond or puddle, Earth a cage for man.  
Then what are we? what are our mighty kings  
But patched up puppets for a raree[?]-show,  
With souls to match, or else they well might see,  
That, though the lives they waste are soon filled up,

And are but atoms in the world at large,  
Their ends are meaner still, even if attained,  
Whereas we know most blood to have been spilt  
Where least was gained. – Do we not see to-day  
Our brethren on the other side th’Atlantic  
Butchered, for what? Can Lincoln tell the why?  
Wasting the blood and treasures of the realm  
And forging chains to fetter Freedom’s hand;  
For it will come to that, unless you rise,  
All to a man, to bid this madness cease.  
Build up a Bedlam – big enough to hold  
The fools or knaves who play their tricks on you.

Not now my theme; but as the vision flits  
Before my mind it makes my blood run cold  
With horror and disgust – t’is over now.  
I said that searching after Fancy’s roses  
I’d pricked me sorely on the thorns of Truth.  
Thus stung I’ve learned to look more close on life  
Nor be imposed on. I can tear the mask  
From Egotism though dressed in Friendship’s guise,  
From Rottenness though fineries and rouge,  
From Lewdness though affected purity,  
From Baseness in exalted life; I smell  
The stinking spirits through the sparkling rose.  
Then w[h]ere is sympathy for me? the many  
Are sympathising but with glare and lust.  
To steep my senses in degrading pleasures  
I cannot shut the chambers of my heart,  
I cannot veil the clearness of my sight  
To see a virgin in each would-be strumpet,  
Held back by fear from other strumpets’ fate  
Or stooping to those lower vices which  
Are left unbranded as they are unknown.

No; though my heart is of a tender texture  
And yearns for love as Hunger does for food  
I cannot stoop to idolize such things.  
I'll rather worship knowledge that the worms,  
Which are to eat me as physicians tell  
Within some years – may feast on learned brains.

Yet once I loved and was beloved. The world  
Wore then a different aspect in my eyes.  
No wonder, since this lustre of all things  
Is in the mind, not in the objects seen,  
And from the happiness we feel within  
Their colours. Thence are Love and hope  
A panacea for all human ills,  
They'd have been so to me, had Death not broke the glass.  
The vital lamp before its light goes out  
Must burn the fibres of some kindred heart,  
And, ere they heal, an Angel scarce could kindle  
Fresh love in such a breast. I've gazed unmoved  
On one whose face, if not of perfect mould,  
Beams with a soul such as but few can boast.

Dear Alexandra! though I never told it  
I feel thy beauties, and I know thy worth.  
With all the fondness of a woman's nature  
Though latent yet – perhaps unknown to thee –  
With modesty to temper sensual feelings  
And keep thy soul as virgin as the rest;  
With bright enthusiasm for the high and noble  
Without the emptiness of staring fools,  
With feeling such as we may trust in woe  
Too true to change, too noble to deceive;  
With all the attractions which should grace a wife  
And all the solid merit of a friend;

With all those gems to deck thy youthful charms  
Thine is a judgement might adorn a man.  
I love to watch thy brightening, serious eyes  
Expressive of thy eagerness for truth;  
I love to hear thy talk – it is so different  
From hackneyed nonsense or defaming slander;  
Thy thoughts thy own, unborrowed, undefiled  
Even when they err, they have a charm to me;  
For thy conviction whence those errors rise  
Is still the produce of a noble spirit.  
I love to hear thee sing – how sweet they fall,  
Those deep-toned accents, on the raptured ear!  
Thy very soul seems pouring from thy throat  
Transformed to music: I am not a judge  
But I have feeling, and it speaks for thee.  
I do recall sometimes the happy hours  
I spent with thee and thine, ere Death came down  
To tear a link of your sweet sisterhood.  
I loved her too: that black dilating eye,  
With less of Sense, had full as much of feeling;  
Tamed to her cage, yet wandering in her thoughts,  
And full of sorrow, melting oft to tears;  
I pitied her – but that wore useless now.  
I went of late to kneel before her dust:  
The sun had set, and all around was dark,  
So none could see me; none could hear a sigh  
Breaking the stillness of the night, while I  
Recalled the past, pondering o'er life and Death.

Hadst thou been there we might have met together  
And pledged our friendship over hallowed dust;  
For there is freedom yet, and woman's honour  
Left to her proper care. Dost thou remember  
That night – it was as dark as pitch – when we

Went home alone – it was an awkward drive,  
I had been maddened with thy first refusal,  
And wild emotions had cut short my voice,  
But as I was thou must have understood  
What depth of feeling shook the Poet's bosom  
Even as the storm around us shook the trees.  
Thou must have felt – if not, thou'lt feel it now  
Reading these lines, for there is truth in them  
And feeling too, my heart is in my pen.

The petty fineries which please thy sex  
Amuse not thee: thou wouldst adorn thy mind  
Rather than person: thou wouldst choose a man,  
Not for nobility of name or fortune  
But for nobility of heart and soul.  
Such are but few – thou wilt have long to search  
As there's much digging after gold and gems.  
Here let me thank thee and thy sister  
For many a kindness thou shown to me  
And if my friendship may be worth accepting  
I give it full – as full as heart can feel.  
It is not love, but it is very near it  
For while I write an unbid tear is gathering  
And trickles down my cheek: such tears with me  
Are very rare: I have dried up my feelings  
To match the egotist with whom I live.  
But there are moments still of solitude,  
When tenderness o'ermasters self-control,  
When all the wildness of suppressed emotions,  
And all the latent riches of the heart  
Find vent, and form themselves into a tear.  
That offered drop it may be worth accepting  
Its spirit worth inhaling in thy soul.

This poem lengthens. Then is Charity,  
A kind of Love, perhaps the most poetic  
We have not touched on yet. – As I went home  
The other night, a sigh broke on my ear.  
I looked around, and saw a woman sitting,  
Half-naked, with an infant in her arms,  
Before the palace of a Count, I passed,  
And saw a sight to be remembered long.  
Within that palace all was still and dark:  
Its luxuries of ease, and pomp, and power  
Forgotten for the luxury of Sleep,  
Nor did the groan of Misery from without  
Disturb, I ween, the smoothness of their dreams.  
Yet well it might, could they have seen that picture,  
Not on a canvas, or the actors' stage,  
But on that real stage where Suffering acts;  
Could they have seen it as I saw. Her rags,  
Though insufficient to protect her bosom  
Which shivered with the cold, yet bore the mark  
Of former ease. Her face, though youthful still,  
Had a strange aspect bordering on the calm,  
Which is distinction of departed life.  
Her hollow checks, her lips so wan, and thinned  
Witnessed of hunger, but of hunger past  
For torture's self has something of reprieve,  
And Nature pities what it cannot cure.  
Her eye, it had that dim, unearthly look  
It wears when Health and Youth contend with Death,  
It is the same as in a fainting fit  
Before the mind is gone: you see it strive  
To fix your glance – then stop on vacancy.  
Her arm scarce able to sustain itself  
Sustained her infant though: for love lives on  
Till yawns the grave – we cling to something still.

I asked no questions, but I raised her up  
And bore her (walk she could not) to my home.  
(I see you sneer but I pass over that.)  
There, what with sparing food and lavish care  
She soon revived; then asked me who I was  
That then could pity what the world reviles.  
Who, but a wretch perhaps as much to pity  
If that big sufferings could be seen or told?  
Thirsting for love till it has parched my heart;  
Yet thirsting vainly with a Tantal's longing  
For Death has spilt the nectar meant for me,  
Thirsting for fame, but Time has taught me better;  
That sparkling bauble is a bauble still –  
For which I long no more. Then what remains?

Ungrateful that I am! is there not left  
Thy anodyne delicious Charity!  
Healing the healer, gladdening him who gladdens,  
The only incense God accepts from me  
I feel thy blessings now. Here comes the girl  
Kissing my hand and leaving there a tear,  
T'was eloquent in its unlettered speech  
That sparkling drop! I draw her to my heart  
And **kiss** her eyelids – mine are moistened too.  
Her bosom heaves, her colour comes and goes:  
Is it with gratitude? Yes, and with love.  
Poor girl! I'm sorry she should feel for me  
Who cannot feel for her. But such is life.  
She tells her simple tale. The Count or fiend  
Before whose palace she was lately sitting  
Who found her pretty, ordered that her father,  
Who was a serf, should pay a living tax  
Lending his daughter for a night or two  
Perhaps for three – his constancy was great.

Then left her, big with child, to a derision  
She could not bear, the best can stand it least.  
She left her home: at first t'was a relief  
To live with strangers, thus escaping shame,  
But want soon made it felt. Then she resolved  
To seek the Count – t'was many miles to go,  
And better natures are but middling beggars  
So she got starved – the rest is known to you.

This is one instance. Every city teems  
With all the rich variety of woes  
For Pity's hand to heal. We've heard of late  
Full many arguments gainst giving alms  
But there is one for giving them – the heart.  
While Charity relieves the sufferer's lot,  
It cultivates the nobleness of man,  
And Nature's patrols[?] of Nobility,  
I've seen a few, are signed by Pity's hand.

The Poesy of dreams! T'is sweet to build  
One's airy castles on a fairy ground.  
They wax so grand; you build as many stores[stories?]  
As e'er you please with furniture to match.  
And then you people them with lovely beings  
And kiss them too, for nothing, if you like;  
Or give them wings, or strip them of their garments,  
And maidenhood, it often comes to that.  
No potentate upon this real Earth  
Has such a power: t'is nothing to compose:  
You spin up worlds as spiders spin their webs.  
T'is pity though the goods should be so brittle  
And quite unstorable for elder years.  
T'is like that hardened glass, as seeming solid,  
As any samples of transparent ware,

Which falls to atoms on the slightest touch.  
The only difference is we cannot make  
Bohemian drops as big as air-creations.  
I had a knack when I was very young  
To blow amazing bubbles; few I think  
Can get balloons to carry them as far.  
But Reason came and made a fearful havoc  
On those same bubbles till they last had burst:  
Their only produce was in baffled hopes. –  
We'll chose, if but to show their size and colours  
With memory's aid, one bubble from the mass.

T'was in my early teens. Till real scene –  
A homely dwelling in a noisy city.  
The fancied scene – a homely dwelling too  
(I never loved your pampered luxury)  
But peopled with affections: I had friends  
A few but trusty – who would wish for more?  
I had a wife – she was my dearest friend  
And something more: she was an angel sent  
To guard my purity of soul an heart.  
I had a child – her mother's flattered likeness:  
With all the sweetness of a budding rose  
Beside another with expanded leaves.  
I had a name – not such as birthright gives –  
I wonder men disgrace them with such tinsel –  
But such as gratefulness for gifts bestowed  
Or admiration of a lofty soul  
[deleted: Writes on the heart of man  
To benefit mankind]  
Writes on the heart of men – I had all that  
Upon my bubble: then it burst, and left  
A drop of water – or a nameless blank,  
Unseen, unknown yet pregnant with despair.

Be this a warning! When your dreams are spent,  
When Hope no longer glimmers o'er your path,  
When Poesy is gone — your life is barren:  
The fire alone fears not the wintry cold  
All higher plants require warmth and light.  
The callous born alone can thrive without  
The softer influence of Love and Hope.