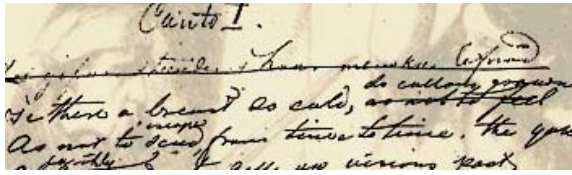


Canto I



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.

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.

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.