The Prelude of 1805, 
in Thirteen Books

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

1805
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Book First  
*Introduction:*  
*Childhood and School-time*

Oh, there is blessing in this gentle breeze,  
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds  
And from the sky; it beats against my cheek,  
And seems half conscious of the joy it gives.  
O welcome messenger! O welcome friend!  
A captive greets thee, coming from a house  
Of bondage, from yon city's walls set free,  
A prison where he hath been long immured.  
Now I am free, enfranchised and at large,  
May fix my habitation where I will.  
What dwelling shall receive me, in what vale  
Shall be my harbour, underneath what grove  
Shall I take up my home, and what sweet stream  
Shall with its murmurs lull me to my rest?  
The earth is all before me—with a heart  
Joyous, nor scared at its own liberty,  
I look about, and should the guide I chuse  
Be nothing better than a wandering cloud  
I cannot miss my way. I breathe again—  
Trances of thought and mountings of the mind  
Come fast upon me. It is shaken off,  
As by miraculous gift 'tis shaken off,  
That burthen of my own unnatural self,  
The heavy weight of many a weary day  
Not mine, and such as were not made for me.  
Long months of peace—if such bold word accord
With any promises of human life—
Long months of ease and undisturbed delight
Are mine in prospect. Whither shall I turn,
By road or pathway, or through open field,
Or shall a twig or any floating thing
Upon the river point me out my course?

Enough that I am free, for months to come
May dedicate myself to chosen tasks,
May quit the tiresome sea and dwell on shore—
If not a settler on the soil, at least
To drink wild water, and to pluck green herbs,
And gather fruits fresh from their native bough.
Nay more, if I may trust myself, this hour
Hath brought a gift that consecrates my joy;
For I, methought, while the sweet breath of heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,
A vital breeze which travelled gently on
O’er things which it had made, and is become
A tempest, a redundant energy,
Vexing its own creation. ’Tis a power
That does not come unrecognised, a storm
Which, breaking up a long-continued frost,
Brings with it vernal promises, the hope
Of active days, of dignity and thought,
Of prowess in an honorable field,
Pure passions, virtue, knowledge, and delight,
The holy life of music and of verse.

Thus far, O friend, did I, not used to make
A present joy the matter of my song,
Pour out that day my soul in measured strains,
Even in the very words which I have here
Recorded. To the open fields I told
A prophesy; poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and clothed in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services. Great hopes were mine:
My own voice cheered me, and, far more, the mind’s
Internal echo of the imperfect sound—
To both I listened, drawing from them both
A cheerful confidence in things to come.

Whereat, being not unwilling now to give
A respite to this passion, I paced on
Gently, with careless steps, and came ere long
To a green shady place where down I sate
Beneath a tree, slackening my thoughts by choice
And settling into gentler happiness.
'Twas autumn, and a calm and placid day
With warmth as much as needed from a sun
Two hours declined towards the west, a day
With silver clouds and sunshine on the grass,
And, in the sheltered grove where I was couched,
A perfect stillness. On the ground I lay
Passing through many thoughts, yet mainly such
As to myself pertained. I made a choice
Of one sweet vale whither my steps should turn,
And saw, methought, the very house and fields
Present before my eyes; nor did I fail
To add meanwhile assurance of some work
Of glory there forthwith to be begun—
Perhaps too there performed. Thus long I lay
Cheered by the genial pillow of the earth
Beneath my head, soothed by a sense of touch
From the warm ground, that balanced me, else lost
Entirely, seeing nought, nought hearing, save
When here and there about the grove of oaks
Where was my bed, an acorn from the trees
Fell audibly, and with a startling sound.

Thus occupied in mind I lingered here
Contented, nor rose up until the sun
Had almost touched the horizon; bidding then
A farewell to the city left behind,
Even with the chance equipment of that hour
I journeyed towards the vale which I had chosen.  

It was a splendid evening, and my soul
Did once again make trial of the strength
Restored to her afresh; nor did she want
Eolian visitations—but the harp
Was soon defrauded, and the banded host
Of harmony dispersed in straggling sounds,
And lastly utter silence. ‘Be it so,
It is an injury’, said I, ‘to this day
To think of any thing but present joy.’
So, like a peasant, I pursued my road
Beneath the evening sun, nor had one wish
Again to bend the sabbath of that time
To a servile yoke. What need of many words?—
A pleasant loitering journey, through two days
Continued, brought me to my hermitage.

I spare to speak, my friend, of what ensued—
The admiration and the love, the life
In common things, the endless store of things
Rare, or at least so seeming, every day
Found all about me in one neighbourhood,
The self-congratulations, the complete
Composure, and the happiness entire.
But speedily a longing in me rose
To brace myself to some determined aim,
Reading or thinking, either to lay up
New stores, or rescue from decay the old
By timely interference. I had hopes
Still higher, that with a frame of outward life
I might endue, might fix in a visible home,
Some portion of those phantoms of conceit,
That had been floating loose about so long,
And to such beings temperately deal forth
The many feelings that oppressed my heart.
But I have been discouraged: gleams of light
Flash often from the east, then disappear,
And mock me with a sky that ripens not
Into a steady morning. If my mind,
Remembering the sweet promise of the past,
Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,
Vain is her wish—where’er she turns she finds
Impediments from day to day renewed.

And now it would content me to yield up
Those lofty hopes awhile for present gifts
Of humbler industry. But, O dear friend,
The poet, gentle creature as he is,
Hath like the lover his unruly times—
His fits when he is neither sick nor well,
Though no distress be near him but his own
Unmanageable thoughts. The mind itself,
The meditative mind, best pleased perhaps
While she as duteous as the mother dove
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,
But hath less quiet instincts—goadings on
That drive her as in trouble through the groves.
With me is now such passion, which I blame
No otherwise than as it lasts too long.

When, as becomes a man who would prepare
For such a glorious work, I through myself
Make rigorous inquisition, the report
Is often chearing; for I neither seem
To lack that first great gift, the vital soul,
Nor general truths which are themselves a sort
Of elements and agents, under-powers,
Subordinate helpers of the living mind.
Nor am I naked in external things,
Forms, images, nor numerous other aids
Of less regard, though won perhaps with toil,
And needful to build up a poet’s praise.
Time, place, and manners, these I seek, and these
I find in plenteous store, but nowhere such
As may be singled out with steady choice—
No little band of yet remembered names
Whom I, in perfect confidence, might hope
To summon back from lonesome banishment
And make them inmates in the hearts of men
Now living, or to live in times to come.
Sometimes, mistaking vainly, as I fear,
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,
I set on some British theme, some old
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung;
More often resting at some gentle place
Within the groves of chivalry I pipe
Among the shepherds, with reposing knights
Sit by a fountain-side and hear their tales.
Sometimes, more sternly move, I would relate
How vanquished Mithridates northward passed
And, hidden in the cloud of years, became
That Odin, father of a race by whom
Perished the Roman Empire; how the friends
And followers of Sertorius, out of Spain
Flying, found shelter in the Fortunate Isles,
And left their usages, their arts and laws,
To disappear by a slow gradual death,
To dwindle and to perish one by one,
Starved in those narrow bounds—but not the soul
Of liberty, which fifteen hundred years
Survived, and, when the European came
With skill and power that could not be withstood,
Did like a pestilence maintain its hold,
And wasted down by glorious death that race
Of natural heroes. Or I would record
How in tyrannic times, some unknown man,
Unheard of in the chronicles of kings,
Suffered in silence for the love of truth;
How that one Frenchman, through continued force
Of meditation on the inhuman deeds
Of the first conquerors of the Indian Isles,
Went single in his ministry across
The ocean, not to comfort the oppressed,
But like a thirsty wind to roam about
Withering the oppressor; how Gustavus found
Help at his need in Dalecarlia’s mines;
How Wallace fought for Scotland, left the name
Of Wallace to be found like a wild flower
All over his dear county, left the deeds
Of Wallace like a family of ghosts
To people the steep rocks and river-banks,
Her natural sanctuaries, with a local soul
Of independence and stern liberty.
Sometimes it suits me better to shape out
Some tale from my own heart, more near akin
To my own passions and habitual thoughts,
Some variegated story, in the main
Lofty, with interchange of gentler things.
But deadening admonitions will succeed,
And the whole beauteous fabric seems to lack
Foundation, and withal appears throughout
Shadowy and unsubstantial.

Then, last wish—
My last and favorite aspiration—then
I yearn towards some philosophic song
Of truth that cherishes our daily life,
With meditations passionate from deep
Recesses in man’s heart, immortal verse
Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre;
But from this awful burthen I full soon
Take refuge, and beguile myself with trust
That mellower years will bring a riper mind
And clearer insight. Thus from day to day
I live a mockery of the brotherhood
Of vice and virtue, with no skill to part
Vague longing that is bred by want of power,
From paramount impulse not to be withstood;
A timorous capacity, from prudence;
From circumspection, infinite delay.
Humility and modest awe themselves
Betray me, serving often for a cloak
To a more subtle selfishness, that now
Doth lock my functions up in blank reserve,
Now dupes me by an over-anxious eye
That with a false activity beats off
Simplicity and self-presented truth.
Ah, better far than this to stray about
Voluptuously through fields and rural walks
And ask no record of the hours given up
To vacant musing, unreprieved neglect
Of all things, and deliberate holiday.
Far better never to have heard the name
Of zeal and just ambition than to live
Thus baffled by a mind that every hour
Turns recreant to her task, takes heart again,
Then feels immediately some hollow thought
Hang like an interdict upon her hopes.
This is my lot; for either still I find
Some imperfection in the chosen theme,
Or see of absolute accomplishment
Much wanting—so much wanting—in myself
That I recoil and droop, and seek repose
In indolence from vain perplexity,
Unprofitably travelling toward the grave,
Like a false steward who hath much received
And renders nothing back.

—Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all Rivers, lov’d
To blend his murmurs with my Nurse’s song,
And from his alder shades and rocky falls,
And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
That flow’d along my dreams? For this, didst Thou,
O Derwent! travelling over the green Plains
Near my ’sweet Birthplace’, didst thou, beauteous Stream
Make ceaseless music through the night and day
Which with its steady cadence, tempering
Our human waywardness, compos’d my thoughts
To more than infant softness, giving me,
Among the fretful dwellings of mankind,
A knowledge, a dim earnest, of the calm
That Nature breathes among the hills and groves.
When, having left his Mountains, to the Towers
Of Cockermouth that beauteous River came,
Behind my Father’s House he pass’d, close by,
Along the margin of our Terrace Walk.
He was a Playmate whom we dearly lov’d.
Oh! many a time have I, a five years’ Child,
A naked Boy, in one delightful Rill,
A little Mill-race sever’d from his stream,
Made one long bathing of a summer’s day,
Bask’d in the sun, and plunged, and bask’d again
Alternate all a summer’s day, or cours’d
Over the sandy fields, leaping through groves
Of yellow grunsel, or when crag and hill,
The woods, and distant Skiddaw’s lofty height,
Were bronz’d with a deep radiance, stood alone
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born
On Indian Plains, and from my Mother’s hut
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport,
A naked Savage, in the thunder shower.

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster’d alike by beauty and by fear;
Much favour’d in my birthplace, and no less
In that beloved Vale to which, ere long,
I was transplanted. Well I call to mind
(’Twas at an early age, ere I had seen
Nine summers) when upon the mountain slope
The frost and breath of frosty wind had snapp’d
The last autumnal crocus, ’twas my joy
To wander half the night among the Cliffs
And the smooth Hollows, where the woodcocks ran
Along the open turf. In thought and wish
That time, my shoulder all with springes hung,
I was a fell destroyer. On the heights
Scudding away from snare to snare, I plied
My anxious visitation, hurrying on,
Still hurrying, hurrying onward; moon and stars
Were shining o’er my head; I was alone,
And seem’d to be a trouble to the peace
That was among them. Sometimes it befel
In these night-wanderings, that a strong desire
O’erpowers’d my better reason, and the bird
Which was the captive of another’s toils
Became my prey; and, when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.
Nor less in springtime when on southern banks
The shining sun had from his knot of leaves
Decoy’d the primrose flower, and when the Vales
And woods were warm, was I a plunderer then
In the high places, on the lonesome peaks
Where’er, among the mountains and the winds,
The Mother Bird had built her lodge. Though mean
My object, and inglorious, yet the end
Was not ignoble. Oh! when I have hung
Above the raven’s nest, by knots of grass
And half-inch fissures in the slippery rock
But ill sustain’d, and almost, as it seem’d,
Suspended by the blast which blew amain,
Shouldering the naked crag; Oh! at that time,
While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
Blow through my ears! the sky seem’d not a sky
Of earth, and with what motion mov’d the clouds!

The mind of Man is fram’d even like the breath
And harmony of music. There is a dark
Invisible workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements, and makes them move
In one society. Ah me! that all
The terrors, all the early miseries
Regrets, vexations, lassitudes, that all
The thoughts and feelings which have been infus’d
Into my mind, should ever have made up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself! Praise to the end!
Thanks likewise for the means! But I believe
That Nature, oftentimes, when she would frame
A favor’d Being, from his earliest dawn
Of infancy doth open out the clouds,
As at the touch of lightning, seeking him
With gentlest visitation; not the less,
Though haply aiming at the self-same end,
Does it delight her sometimes to employ
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable, and so she dealt with me.

One evening (surely I was led by her)
I went alone into a Shepherd’s Boat,
A Skiff that to a Willow tree was tied
Within a rocky Cave, its usual home.
'Twas by the shores of Patterdale, a Vale
Wherein I was a Stranger, thither come
A School-boy Traveller, at the Holidays.
Forth rambled from the Village Inn alone
No sooner had I sight of this small Skiff,
Discover’d thus by unexpected chance,
Than I unloos’d her tether and embark’d.
The moon was up, the Lake was shining clear
Among the hoary mountains; from the Shore
I push’d, and struck the oars and struck again
In cadence, and my little Boat mov’d on
Even like a Man who walks with stately step
Though bent on speed. It was an act of stealth
And troubled pleasure; not without the voice
Of mountain-echoes did my Boat move on,
Leaving behind her still on either side
Small circles glittering idly in the moon,
Until they melted all into one track
Of sparkling light. A rocky Steep uprose
Above the Cavern of the Willow tree
And now, as suited one who proudly row’d
With his best skill, I fix’d a steady view
Upon the top of that same craggy ridge,
The bound of the horizon, for behind
Was nothing but the stars and the grey sky.
She was an elfin Pinnace; lustily
I dipp’d my oars into the silent Lake,
And, as I rose upon the stroke, my Boat
Went heaving through the water, like a Swan;
When from behind that craggy Steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Uprear’d its head. I struck, and struck again
And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measur’d motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling hands I turn’d,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the Cavern of the Willow tree.
There, in her mooring-place, I left my Bark,
And, through the meadows homeward went, with grave
And serious thoughts; and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Work’d with a dim and undetermin’d sense
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men mov’d slowly through the mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams.

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe!
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought!
That giv’st to forms and images a breath
   And everlasting motion! not in vain,
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of Childhood didst Thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human Soul,
Not with the mean and vulgar works of Man,
But with high objects, with enduring things,
With life and nature, purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.

Nor was this fellowship vouchsaf’d to me
With stinted kindness. In November days,
When vapours, rolling down the valleys, made
A lonely scene more lonesome; among woods
At noon, and ’mid the calm of summer nights,
When, by the margin of the trembling Lake,
Beneath the gloomy hills I homeward went
In solitude, such intercourse was mine;
’Twas mine among the fields both day and night,
And by the waters all the summer long.

And in the frosty season, when the sun
Was set, and visible for many a mile
The cottage windows through the twilight blaz’d,
I heeded not the summons:—happy time
It was, indeed, for all of us; to me
It was a time of rapture: clear and loud
The village clock toll’d six; I wheel’d about,
Proud and exulting, like an untired horse,
That cares not for its home.—All shod with steel,
We hiss’d along the polish’d ice, in games
Confederate, imitative of the chace
And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,
The Pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.
So through the darkness and the cold we flew,
And not a voice was idle; with the din,
Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,
The leafless trees, and every icy crag
Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills
Into the tumult sent an alien sound
Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,
Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west
The orange sky of evening died away.

Not seldom from the uproar I retired
Into a silent bay, or sportively
Glanced sideway, leaving the tumultuous throng,
To cut across the image of a star
That gleam’d upon the ice: and oftentimes
When we had given our bodies to the wind,
And all the shadowy banks, on either side,
Came sweeping through the darkness, spinning still
The rapid line of motion; then at once
Have I, reclining back upon my heels,
Stopp’d short, yet still the solitary Cliffs
Wheeled by me, even as if the earth had roll’d
With visible motion her diurnal round;
Behind me did they stretch in solemn train
Feebler and feeble, and I stood and watch’d
Till all was tranquil as a dreamless sleep.

Ye Presences of Nature, in the sky
And on the earth! Ye Visions of the hills!
And Souls of lonely places! can I think
A vulgar hope was yours when Ye employ’d
Such ministry, when Ye through many a year
Haunting me thus among my boyish sports,
On caves and trees, upon the woods and hills,
Impress’d upon all forms the characters
Of danger or desire, and thus did make
The surface of the universal earth
With triumph, and delight, and hope, and fear;
Work like a sea?
Not uselessly employ’d,
I might pursue this theme through every change
Of exercise and play, to which the year
Did summon us in its delightful round.

We were a noisy crew, the sun in heaven
Beheld not vales more beautiful than ours,
Nor saw a race in happiness and joy
More worthy of the ground where they were sown.
I would record with no reluctant voice
The woods of autumn and their hazel bowers
With milk-white clusters hung; the rod and line,
True symbol of the foolishness of hope,
Which with its strong enchantment led us on
By rocks and pools, shut out from every star
All the green summer, to forlorn cascades
Among the windings of the mountain brooks.
—Unfading recollections! at this hour
The heart is almost mine with which I felt
From some hill-top, on sunny afternoons
The Kite high up among the fleecy clouds
Pull at its rein, like an impatient Courser,
Or, from the meadows sent on gusty days,
Beheld her breast the wind, then suddenly
Dash’d headlong; and rejected by the storm.

Ye lowly Cottages in which we dwelt,
A ministration of your own was yours,
A sanctity, a safeguard, and a love!
Can I forget you, being as ye were
So beautiful among the pleasant fields
In which ye stood? Or can I here forget
The plain and seemly countenance with which
Ye dealt out your plain comforts? Yet had ye
Delights and exultations of your own.
Eager and never weary we pursued
Our home amusements by the warm peat-fire
At evening; when with pencil and with slate,
In square divisions parcell’d out, and all
With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o’er,
We schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head
In strife too humble to be named in Verse.
Or round the naked table, snow-white deal,
Cherry or maple, sate in close array,
And to the combat, Lu or Whist, led on
thick-ribbed Army; not as in the world
Neglected and ungratefully thrown by
Even for the very service they had wrought,
But husbanded through many a long campaign.
Uncouth assemblage was it, where no few
Had changed their functions, some, plebeian cards,
Which Fate beyond the promise of their birth
Had glorified, and call’d to represent
The persons of departed Potentates.
Oh! with what echoes on the Board they fell!
Ironic Diamonds, Clubs, Hearts, Diamonds, Spades,
A congregation piteously akin.
Cheap matter did they give to boyish wit,
Those sooty knaves, precipitated down
With scoffs and taunts, like Vulcan out of Heaven,
The paramount Ace, a moon in her eclipse,
Queens, gleaming through their splendour’s last decay,
And Monarchs, surly at the wrongs sustain’d
By royal visages. Meanwhile, abroad
The heavy rain was falling, or the frost
Raged bitterly, with keen and silent tooth,
And, interrupting oft the impassion’d game,
From Esthwaite’s neighbouring Lake the splitting ice,
While it sank down towards the water, sent,
Among the meadows and the hills, its long
And dismal yellings, like the noise of wolves
When they are howling round the Bothnic Main.

Nor, sedulous as I have been to trace
How Nature by extrinsic passion first
Peopled my mind with beauteous forms or grand,
And made me love them, may I well forget
How other pleasures have been mine, and joys
Of subtler origin; how I have felt,
Not seldom, even in that tempestuous time,
Those hallow’d and pure motions of the sense
Which seem, in their simplicity, to own
An intellectual charm, that calm delight
Which, if I err not, surely must belong
To those first-born affinities that fit
Our new existence to existing things,
And, in our dawn of being, constitute
The bond of union betwixt life and joy.

Yes, I remember, when the changeful earth,
And twice five seasons on my mind had stamp’d
The faces of the moving year, even then,
A Child, I held unconscious intercourse
With the eternal Beauty, drinking in
A pure organic pleasure from the lines
Of curling mist, or from the level plain
Of waters colour’d by the steady clouds.

The Sands of Westmoreland, the Creeks and Bays
Of Cumbria’s rocky limits, they can tell
How when the Sea threw off his evening shade
And to the Shepherd’s huts beneath the crags
Did send sweet notice of the rising moon,
How I have stood, to fancies such as these,
Engrafted in the tenderness of thought,
A stranger, linking with the spectacle
No conscious memory of a kindred sight,
And bringing with me no peculiar sense
Of quietness or peace, yet I have stood,
Even while mine eye has mov’d o’er three long leagues
Of shining water, gathering, as it seem’d,
Through every hair-breadth of that field of light,
New pleasure, like a bee among the flowers.

Thus, often in those fits of vulgar joy
Which, through all seasons, on a child’s pursuits
Are prompt attendants, ’mid that giddy bliss
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood
And is forgotten; even then I felt
Gleams like the flashing of a shield; the earth
And common face of Nature spake to me
Rememberable things; sometimes, ’tis true,
By chance collisions and quaint accidents
Like those ill-sorted unions, work suppos’d
Of evil-minded fairies, yet not vain
Nor profitless, if haply they impress’d
Collateral objects and appearances,
Albeit lifeless then, and doom’d to sleep
Until maturer seasons call’d them forth
To impregnate and to elevate the mind.
—And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
Wearied itself out of the memory,
The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained, in their substantial lineaments
Depicted on the brain, and to the eye
Were visible, a daily sight; and thus
By the impressive discipline of fear,
By pleasure and repeated happiness,
So frequently repeated, and by force
Of obscure feelings representative
Of joys that were forgotten, these same scenes,
So beauteous and majestic in themselves,
Though yet the day was distant, did at length
Become habitually dear, and all
Their hues and forms were by invisible links
Allied to the affections.

I began
My story early, feeling as I fear,
The weakness of a human love, for days
Disown’d by memory, ere the birth of spring
Planting my snowdrops among winter snows.
Nor will it seem to thee, my Friend! so prompt
In sympathy, that I have lengthen’d out,
With fond and feeble tongue, a tedious tale.
Meanwhile, my hope has been that I might fetch
Invigorating thoughts from former years,
Might fix the wavering balance of my wind, 655
And haply meet reproaches, too, whose power
May spur me on, in manhood now mature,
To honorable toil. Yet should these hopes
Be vain, and thus should neither I be taught
To understand myself, nor thou to know 660
With better knowledge how the heart was fram’d
Of him thou lovest, need I dread from thee
Harsh judgments, if I am so loth to quit
Those recollected hours that have the charm
Of visionary things, and lovely forms 665
And sweet sensations that throw back our life
And almost make our Infancy itself
A visible scene, on which the sun is shining?

One end hereby at least hath been attain’d,
My mind hath been revived, and if this mood 670
Desert me not, I will forthwith bring down,
Through later years, the story of my life.
The road lies plain before me; ’tis a theme
Single and of determined bounds; and hence
I chuse it rather at this time, than work 675
Of ampler or more varied argument.
Thus far, O Friend! have we, though leaving much
Unvisited, endeavour’d to retrace
My life through its first years, and measured back
The way I travell’d when I first began
To love the woods and fields; the passion yet
Was in its birth, sustain’d, as might befal,
By nourishment that came unsought, for still,
From week to week, from month to month, we liv’d
A round of tumult: duly were our games
Prolong’d in summer till the day-light fail’d;
No chair remain’d before the doors, the bench
And threshold steps were empty; fast asleep
The Labourer, and the old Man who had sate,
A later lingerer, yet the revelry
Continued, and the loud uproar: at last,
When all the ground was dark, and the huge clouds
Were edged with twinkling stars, to bed we went,
With weary joints, and with a beating mind.
Ah! is there one who ever has been young,
Nor needs a monitory voice to tame
The pride of virtue, and of intellect?
And is there one, the wisest and the best
Of all mankind, who does not sometimes wish
For things which cannot be, who would not give,
If so he might, to duty and to truth
The eagerness of infantine desire?
A tranquillizing spirit presses now
On my corporeal frame: so wide appears
The vacancy between me and those days,
Which yet have such self-presence in my mind
That, sometimes, when I think of them, I seem
Two consciousnesses, conscious of myself
And of some other Being. A grey Stone
Of native rock, left midway in the Square
Of our small market Village, was the home
And centre of these joys, and when, return’d
After long absence, thither I repair’d,
I found that it was split, and gone to build
A smart Assembly-room that perk’d and flar’d
With wash and rough-cast elbowing the ground
Which had been ours. But let the fiddle scream,
And be ye happy! yet, my Friends! I know
That more than one of you will think with me
Of those soft starry nights, and that old Dame
From whom the stone was nam’d who there had sate
And watch’d her Table with its huckster’s wares
Assiduous, thro’ the length of sixty years.

We ran a boisterous race; the year span round
With giddy motion. But the time approach’d
That brought with it a regular desire
For calmer pleasures, when the beauteous forms
Of Nature were collaterally attach’d
To every scheme of holiday delight,
And every boyish sport, less grateful else,
And languidly pursued.

When summer came
It was the pastime of our afternoons
To beat along the plain of Windermere
With rival oars, and the selected bourne
Was now an Island musical with birds
That sang for ever; now a Sister Isle
Beneath the oaks’ umbrageous covert, sown
With lilies of the valley, like a field;
And now a third small Island where remain’d
An old stone Table, and a moulder’d Cave,
A Hermit’s history. In such a race,
So ended, disappointment could be none,
Uneasiness, or pain, or jealousy:
We rested in the shade, all pleas’d alike,
Conquer’d and Conqueror. Thus the pride of strength,
And the vain-glory of superior skill
Were interfus’d with objects which subdu’d
And temper’d them, and gradually produc’d
A quiet independence of the heart.
And to my Friend, who knows me, I may add,
Unapprehensive of reproof, that hence
Ensu’d a diffidence and modesty,
And I was taught to feel, perhaps too much,
The self-sufficing power of solitude.

No delicate viands sapp’d our bodily strength;
More than we wish’d we knew the blessing then
Of vigorous hunger, for our daily meals
Were frugal, Sabine fare! and then, exclude
A little weekly stipend, and we lived
Through three divisions of the quarter’d year
In pennyless poverty. But now, to School
Return’d, from the half-yearly holidays,
We came with purses more profusely fill’d,
Allowance which abundantly suffic’d
To gratify the palate with repasts
More costly than the Dame of whom I spake,
That ancient Woman, and her board supplied.
Hence inroads into distant Vales, and long
Excursions far away among the hills,
Hence rustic dinners on the cool green ground,
Or in the woods, or near a river side,
Or by some shady fountain, while soft airs
Among the leaves were stirring, and the sun
Unfelt, shone sweetly round us in our joy.
Nor is my aim neglected, if I tell
How twice in the long length of those half-years
We from our funds, perhaps, with bolder hand
Drew largely, anxious for one day, at least,
To feel the motion of the galloping Steed;
And with the good old Inn-keeper, in truth,
On such occasion sometimes we employ’d
Sly subterfuge; for the intended bound
Of the day’s journey was too distant far
For any cautious man, a Structure famed
Beyond its neighbourhood, the antique Walls
Of that large Abbey which within the vale
Of Nightshade, to St. Mary’s honour built,
Stands yet, a mouldering Pile, with fractured Arch,
Belfry, and Images, and living Trees,
A holy Scene! along the smooth green turf
Our Horses grazed: to more than inland peace
Left by the sea wind passing overhead
(Though wind of roughest temper) trees and towers
May in that Valley oftentimes be seen,
Both silent and both motionless alike;
Such is the shelter that is there, and such
The safeguard for repose and quietness.

Our steeds remounted, and the summons given,
With whip and spur we by the Chauntry flew
In uncouth race, and left the cross-legg’d Knight,
And the stone-Abbot, and that single Wren
Which one day sang so sweetly in the Nave
Of the old Church, that, though from recent showers
The earth was comfortless, and, touch’d by faint
Internal breezes, sobbings of the place,
And respirations, from the roofless walls
The shuddering ivy dripp’d large drops, yet still,
So sweetly ’mid the gloom the invisible Bird
Sang to itself, that there I could have made
My dwelling-place, and liv’d for ever there
To hear such music. Through the Walls we flew
And down the valley, and a circuit made
In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth
We scamper’d homeward. Oh! ye Rocks and Streams,
And that still Spirit of the evening air!
Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
Your presence, when with slacken’d step we breath’d
Along the sides of the steep hills, or when,
Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea,
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

Upon the Eastern Shore of Windermere,
Above the crescent of a pleasant Bay,
There stood an Inn, no homely-featured Shed,
Brother of the surrounding Cottages,
But ’twas a splendid place, the door beset
With Chaises, Grooms, and Liveries, and within
Decanters, Glasses, and the blood-red Wine.
In ancient times, or ere the Hall was built
On the large Island, had this Dwelling been
More worthy of a Poet’s love, a Hut,
Proud of its one bright fire, and sycamore shade.
But though the rhymes were gone which once inscribed
The threshold, and large golden characters
On the blue-frosted Signboard had usurp’d
The place of the old Lion, in contempt
And mockery of the rustic painter’s hand,
Yet to this hour the spot to me is dear
With all its foolish pomp. The garden lay
Upon a slope surmounted by the plain
Of a small Bowling-green; beneath us stood
A grove; with gleams of water through the trees
And over the tree-tops; nor did we want
Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.
And there, through half an afternoon, we play’d
On the smooth platform, and the shouts we sent
Made all the mountains ring. But ere the fall
Of night, when in our pinnace we return’d
Over the dusky Lake, and to the beach
Of some small Island steer’d our course with one,
The Minstrel of our troop, and left him there,
And row’d off gently, while he blew his flute
Alone upon the rock; Oh! then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.

Thus daily were my sympathies enlarged,
And thus the common range of visible things
Grew dear to me: already I began
To love the sun, a Boy I lov’d the sun,
Not as I since have lov’d him, as a pledge
And surety of our earthly life, a light
Which while we view we feel we are alive;
But, for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountain touch his setting orb,
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, my blood appear’d to flow
With its own pleasure, and I breath’d with joy.
And from like feelings, humble though intense,
To patriotic and domestic love
Analogous, the moon to me was dear;
For I would dream away my purposes,
Standing to look upon her while she hung
Midway between the hills, as if she knew
No other region; but belong’d to thee,
Yea, appertain’d by a peculiar right
To thee and thy grey huts, my darling Vale!

Those incidental charms which first attach’d
My heart to rural objects, day by day
Grew weaker, and I hasten on to tell
How Nature, intervenient till this time,
And secondary, now at length was sought
For her own sake. But who shall parcel out
His intellect, by geometric rules,
Split, like a province, into round and square?
Who knows the individual hour in which
His habits were first sown, even as a seed,
Who that shall point, as with a wand, and say,
'This portion of the river of my mind
Came from yon fountain?' Thou, my Friend! art one
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee
Science appears but, what in truth she is,
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,
But as a succedaneum, and a prop
To our infirmity. Thou art no slave
Of that false secondary power, by which,
In weakness, we create distinctions, then
Deem that our puny boundaries are things
Which we perceive, and not which we have made.
To thee, unblinded by these outward shows,
The unity of all has been reveal'd
And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skill'd
Than many are to class the cabinet
Of their sensations, and, in voluble phrase,
Run through the history and birth of each,
As of a single independent thing.
Hard task to analyse a soul, in which,
Not only general habits and desires,
But each most obvious and particular thought,
Not in a mystical and idle sense,
But in the words of reason deeply weigh'd,
Hath no beginning.

Bless'd the infant Babe,
(For with my best conjectures I would trace
The progress of our Being) blest the Babe,
Nurs'd in his Mother's arms, the Babe who sleeps
Upon his Mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his Mother's eye!
Such feelings pass into his torpid life
Like an awakening breeze, and hence his mind
Even [in the first trial of its powers]
Is prompt and watchful, eager to combine
In one appearance, all the elements
And parts of the same object, else detach’d
And loth to coalesce. Thus, day by day,
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quicken’d, are more vigorous, his mind spreads,
Tenacious of the forms which it receives.
In one beloved presence, nay and more,
In that most apprehensive habitude
And those sensations which have been deriv’d
From this beloved Presence, there exists
A virtue which irradiates and exalts
All objects through all intercourse of sense.
No outcast he, bewilder’d and depress’d;
Along his infant veins are interfus’d
The gravitation and the filial bond
Of nature, that connect him with the world.
Emphatically such a Being lives,
An inmate of this active universe;
From nature largely he receives; nor so
Is satisfied, but largely gives again,
For feeling has to him imparted strength,
And powerful in all sentiments of grief,
Of exultation, fear, and joy, his mind,
Even as an agent of the one great mind,
Creates, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.—Such, verily, is the first
Poetic spirit of our human life;
By uniform control of after years
In most abated or suppress’d, in some,
Through every change of growth or of decay,
Pre-eminent till death.

From early days,
Beginning not long after that first time
In which, a Babe, by intercourse of touch,
I held mute dialogues with my Mother’s heart
I have endeavour’d to display the means
Whereby this infant sensibility,
Great birthright of our Being, was in me
Augmented and sustain’d. Yet is a path
More difficult before me, and I fear
That in its broken windings we shall need
The chamois’ sinews, and the eagle’s wing:
For now a trouble came into my mind
From unknown causes. I was left alone,
Seeking the visible world, nor knowing why.
The props of my affections were remov’d,
And yet the building stood, as if sustain’d
By its own spirit! All that I beheld
Was dear to me, and from this cause it came,
That now to Nature’s finer influxes
My mind lay open, to that more exact
And intimate communion which our hearts
Maintain with the minuter properties
Of objects which already are belov’d,
And of those only. Many are the joys
Of youth; but oh! what happiness to live
When every hour brings palpable access
Of knowledge, when all knowledge is delight,
And sorrow is not there. The seasons came,
And every season to my notice brought
A store of transitory qualities
Which, but for this most watchful power of love
Had been neglected, left a register
Of permanent relations, else unknown,
Hence life, and change, and beauty, solitude
More active, even, than ’best society’,
Society made sweet as solitude
By silent inobtrusive sympathies,
And gentle agitations of the mind
From manifold distinctions, difference
Perceived in things, where to the common eye,
No difference is; and hence, from the same source
Sublimer joy; for I would walk alone,
In storm and tempest, or in starlight nights
Beneath the quiet Heavens; and, at that time,
Have felt whate’er there is of power in sound
To breathe an elevated mood, by form
Or image unprofaned; and I would stand,
Beneath some rock, listening to sounds that are
The ghostly language of the ancient earth,
Or make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power.
I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which,
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they still
Have something to pursue.

And not alone,
In grandeur and in tumult, but no less
In tranquil scenes, that universal power
And fitness in the latent qualities
And essences of things, by which the mind
Is mov’d by feelings of delight, to me
Came strengthen’d with a superadded soul,
A virtue not its own. My morning walks
Were early; oft, before the hours of School
I travell’d round our little Lake, five miles
Of pleasant wandering, happy time! more dear
For this, that one was by my side, a Friend
Then passionately lov’d; with heart how full
Will he peruse these lines, this page, perhaps
A blank to other men! for many years
Have since flow’d in between us; and our minds,
Both silent to each other, at this time
We live as if those hours had never been.
Nor seldom did I lift our cottage latch
Far earlier, and before the vernal thrush
Was audible, among the hills I sate
Alone, upon some jutting eminence
At the first hour of morning, when the Vale
Lay quiet in an utter solitude.
How shall I trace the history, where seek
The origin of what I then have felt?
Oft in these moments such a holy calm
Did overspread my soul, that I forgot
That I had bodily eyes, and what I saw
Appear’d like something in myself, a dream,
A prospect in my mind.

’Twere long to tell
What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
And what the summer shade, what day and night,
The evening and the morning, what my dreams
And what my waking thoughts supplied, to nurse
That spirit of religious love in which
I walked with Nature. But let this, at least
Be not forgotten, that I still retain’d
My first creative sensibility,
That by the regular action of the world
My soul was unsubdu’d. A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
A local spirit of its own, at war
With general tendency, but for the most
Subservient strictly to the external things
With which it commun’d. An auxiliar light
Came from my mind which on the setting sun
Bestow’d new splendor, the melodious birds,
The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on,
Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obey’d
A like dominion; and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
Hence by obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport. 400

Nor should this, perchance,
Pass unrecorded, that I still have lov’d
The exercise and produce of a toil
Than analytic industry to me
More pleasing, and whose character I deem 405
Is more poetic as resembling more
Creative agency. I mean to speak
Of that interminable building rear’d
By observation of affinities
In objects where no brotherhood exists
To common minds. My seventeenth year was come
And, whether from this habit, rooted now
So deeply in my mind, or from excess
Of the great social principle of life,
Coercing all things into sympathy,
To unorganic natures I transferr’d 410
My own enjoyments, or, the power of truth
Coming in revelation, I convers’d
With things that really are, I, at this time
Saw blessings spread around me like a sea. 420
Thus did my days pass on, and now at length
From Nature and her overflowing soul
I had receiv’d so much that all my thoughts
Were steep’d in feeling; I was only then
Contented when with bliss ineffable 425
I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O’er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O’er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
O’er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, o’er all that glides 430
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not
If such my transports were; for in all things
I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
One song they sang, and it was audible,
Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
Forgot its functions, and slept undisturb'd.

If this be error, and another faith
Find easier access to the pious mind,
Yet were I grossly destitute of all
Those human sentiments which make this earth
So dear, if I should fail, with grateful voice
To speak of you, Ye Mountains and Ye Lakes,
And sounding Cataracts! Ye Mists and Winds
That dwell among the hills where I was born.
If, in my youth, I have been pure in heart,
If, mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have liv'd,
With God and Nature communing, remov'd
From little enmities and low desires,
The gift is yours; if in these times of fear,
This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
If, ’mid indifference and apathy
And wicked exultation, when good men,
On every side fall off we know not how,
To selfishness, disguis’d in gentle names
Of peace, and quiet, and domestic love,
Yet mingled, not unwillingly, with sneers
On visionary minds; if in this time
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
Despair not of our nature; but retain
A more than Roman confidence, a faith
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
The blessing of my life, the gift is yours,
Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours I find
A never-failing principle of joy,
And purest passion.

Thou, my Friend! wert rear’d
In the great City, ’mid far other scenes;
But we, by different roads at length have gain’d
The self-same bourne. And for this cause to Thee
I speak, unapprehensive of contempt,
The insinuated scoff of coward tongues,
And all that silent language which so oft
In conversation betwixt man and man
Blots from the human countenance all trace
Of beauty and of love. For Thou hast sought
The truth in solitude, and Thou art one,
The most intense of Nature’s worshippers
In many things my Brother, chiefly here
In this my deep devotion.

Fare Thee well!
Health, and the quiet of a healthful mind
Attend thee! seeking oft the haunts of men,
And yet more often living with Thyself,
And for Thyself, so haply shall thy days
Be many, and a blessing to mankind.
Book Third *Residence at Cambridge*

It was a dreary morning when the chaise
Rolled over the flat plains of Huntingdon
And through the open windows first I saw
The long-backed chapel of King’s College rear
His pinnacles above the dusky groves.

Soon afterwards we espied upon the road
A student clothed in gown and tasselled cap;
He passed—nor was I master of my eyes
Till he was left a hundred yards behind.

The place as we approached seemed more and more
To have an eddy’s force, and sucked us in
More eagerly at every step we took.
Onward we drove beneath the castle, down
By Magdalene Bridge we went and crossed the Cam,
And at the Hoop we landed, famous inn.

My spirit was up, my thoughts were full of hope;
Some friends I had—acquaintances who there
Seemed friends—poor simple schoolboys now hung round
With honour and importance. In a world
Of welcome faces up and down I roved—
Questions, directions, counsel and advice
Flowed in upon me from all sides. Fresh day
Of pride and pleasure: to myself I seemed
A man of business and expense, and went
From shop to shop about my own affairs,
To tutors or to tailors as befel,
From street to street with loose and careless heart.
I was the dreamer, they the dream; I roamed
Delighted through the motley spectacle:
Gowns grave or gaudy, doctors, students, streets,
Lamps, gateways, flocks of churches, courts and towers—
Strange transformation for a mountain youth,
A northern villager. As if by word
Of magic or some fairy’s power, at once
Behold me rich in monies and attired
In splendid clothes, with hose of silk, and hair
Glittering like rimy trees when frost is keen—
My lordly dressing-gown, I pass it by,
With other signs of manhood which supplied
The lack of beard. The weeks went roundly on,
With invitations, suppers, wine, and fruit,
Smooth housekeeping within, and all without
Liberal and suiting gentleman’s array.

The Evangelist St. John my patron was;
Three gloomy courts are his, and in the first
Was my abiding-place, a nook obscure.
Right underneath, the college kitchens made
A humming sound, less tuneable than bees
But hardly less industrious; with shrill notes
Of sharp command and scolding intermixed.
Near me was Trinity’s loquacious clock
Who never let the quarters, night or day,
Slip by him unproclaimed, and told the hours
Twice over with a male and female voice.
Her pealing organ was my neighbour too;
And from my bedroom I in moonlight nights
Could see right opposite, a few yards off,
The antechapel, where the statue stood
Of Newton with his prism and silent face.

Of college labours, of the lecturer’s room
All studded round, as thick as chairs could stand,
With loyal students faithful to their books,
Half-and-half idlers, hardy recusants,
And honest dunces; of important days,
Examinations, when the man was weighed
   As in the balance of excessive hopes,
Tremblings withal and commendable fears,
   Small jealousies and triumphs good or bad—
I make short mention. Things they were which then
I did not love, nor do I love them now:
   Such glory was but little sought by me,
And little won. But it is right to say
That even so early, from the first crude days
Of settling-time in this my new abode,
Not seldom I had melancholy thoughts
From personal and family regards,
   Wishing to hope without a hope—some fears
About my future worldly maintenance,
And, more than all, a strangeness in my mind,
   A feeling that I was not for that hour
Nor for that place. But wherefore be cast down,
Why should I grieve?—I was a chosen son.
For hither I had come with holy powers
And faculties, whether to work or feel:
   To apprehend all passions and all moods
Which time, and place, and season do impress
Upon the visible universe, and work
Like changes there by force of my own mind.
I was a freeman, in the purest sense
   Was free, and to majestic ends was strong—
I do not speak of learning, moral truth,
Or understanding—’twas enough for me
To know that I was otherwise endowed.
When the first glitter of the show was passed,
And the first dazzle of the taper-light,
As if with a rebound my mind returned
Into its former self. Oft did I leave
My comrades, and the crowd, buildings and groves,
And walked along the fields, the level fields,
With heaven’s blue concave reared above my head.
And now it was that through such change entire,
And this first absence from those shapes sublime
Wherewith I had been conversant, my mind
Seemed busier in itself than heretofore—
At least I more directly recognised
My powers and habits. Let me dare to speak
A higher language, say that now I felt
The strength and consolation which were mine.
As if awakened, summoned, rouzed, constrained,
I looked for universal things, perused
The common countenance of earth and heaven,
And, turning the mind in upon itself,
Pored, watched, expected, listened, spread my thoughts,
And spread them with a wider creeping, felt
Incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the upholder, of the tranquil soul,
Which underneath all passion lives secure
A steadfast life. But peace, it is enough
To notice that I was ascending now
To such community with highest truth.

A track pursuing not untrod before,
From deep analogies by thought supplied,
Or consciousnesses not to be subdued,
To every natural form, rock, fruit or flower,
Even the loose stones that cover the highway,
I gave a moral life—I saw them feel,
Or linked them to some feeling. The great mass
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all
That I beheld respired with inward meaning.
Thus much for the one presence, and the life
Of the great whole; suffice it here to add
That whatsoever of terror, or of love,
Or beauty, Nature’s daily face put on
From transitory passion, unto this
I was as wakeful even as waters are
To the sky’s motion, in a kindred sense
Of passion was obedient as a lute
That waits upon the touches of the wind.
So it was with me in my solitude:
So often among multitudes of men.
Unknown, unthought of, yet I was most rich,
I had a world about me—'twas my own,
I made it; for it only lived to me,
And to the God who looked into my mind.
Such sympathies would sometimes shew themselves
By outward gestures and by visible looks—
Some called it madness; such indeed it was,
If childlike fruitfulness in passing joy,
If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured
To inspiration, sort with such a name;
If prophesy be madness, if things viewed
By poets of old time, and higher up
By the first men, earth's first inhabitants,
May in these tutored days no more be seen
With undisordered sight. But leaving this,
It was no madness, for I had an eye
Which in my strongest workings evermore
Was looking for the shades of difference
As they lie hid in all exterior forms,
Near or remote, minute or vast—an eye
Which from a stone, a tree, a withered leaf,
To the broad ocean and the azure heavens
Spangled with kindred multitudes of stars,
Could find no surface where its power might sleep,
Which spake perpetual logic to my soul,
And by an unrelenting agency
Did bind my feelings even as in a chain.

And here, O friend, have I retraced my life
Up to an eminence, and told a tale
Of matters which not falsely I may call
The glory of my youth. Of genius, power,
Creation, and divinity itself,
I have been speaking, for my theme has been
What passed within me. Not of outward things
Done visibly for other minds—words, signs,
Symbols or actions—but of my own heart
Have I been speaking, and my youthful mind.
O heavens, how awful is the might of souls,
And what they do within themselves while yet
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world
Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.
This is in truth heroic argument,
And genuine prowess—which I wished to touch,
With hand however weak—but in the main
It lies far hidden from the reach of words.
Points have we all of us within our souls
Where all stand single; this I feel, and make
Breathings for incommunicable powers.
Yet each man is a memory to himself.
And, therefore, now that I must quit this theme,
I am not heartless; for there’s not a man
That lives who hath not had his god-like hours,
And knows not what majestic sway we have
As natural beings in the strength of Nature.

Enough, for now into a populous plain
We must descend. A traveller I am,
And all my tale is of myself—even so—
So be it, if the pure in heart delight
To follow me, and thou, O honoured friend,
Who in my thoughts art ever at my side,
Uphold as heretofore my fainting steps.
It hath been told already how my sight
Was dazzled by the novel show, and how
Erelong I did into myself return.
So did it seem, and so in truth it was—
Yet this was but short-lived. Thereafter came
Observance less devout: I had made a change
In climate, and my nature’s outward coat
Changed also, slowly and insensibly.
To the deep quiet and majestic thoughts
Of loneliness succeeded empty noise
And superficial pastimes, now and then
Forced labour, and more frequently forced hopes,
And, worse than all, a treasonable growth
Of indecisive judgements that impaired
And shook the mind's simplicity. And yet
This was a gladsome time. Could I behold—
Who less insensible than sodden clay
On a sea-river's bed at ebb of tide
Could have beheld—with undelighted heart
so many happy youths, so wide and fair
A congregation in its budding-time
Of health, and hope, and beauty, all at once
So many divers samples of the growth
Of life's sweet season, could have seen unmoved
That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers
Upon the matron temples of a place
So famous through the world? To me at least
It was a goodly prospect; for, through youth,
Though I had been trained up to stand unpropped,
And independent musings pleased me so
That spells seemed on me when I was alone,
Yet could I only cleave to solitude
In lonesome places—if a throng was near
That way I leaned by nature, for my heart
Was social and loved idleness and joy.

Not seeking those who might participate
My deeper pleasures—nay, I had not once,
Though not unused to mutter lonesome songs,
Even with myself divided such delight,
Or looked that way for aught that might be clothed
In human language—easily I passed
From the remembrances of better things,
And slipped into the weekday works of youth,
Unburthened, unalarmed, and unprofaned.
Caverns there were within my mind which sun
Could never penetrate, yet did there not
Want store of leafy arbours where the light
Might enter in at will. Companionships,
Friendships, acquaintances, were welcome all;
We sauntered, played, we rioted, we talked
Unprofitable talk at morning hours,
Drifted about along the streets and walks,
Read lazily in lazy books, went forth
To gallop through the country in blind zeal
Of senseless horsemanship, or on the breast
Of Cam sailed boisterously, and let the stars
Come out, perhaps without one quiet thought.

Such was the tenor of the opening act
In this new life. Imagination slept,
And yet not utterly: I could not print
Ground where the grass had yielded to the steps
Of generations of illustrious men,
Unmoved; I could not always lightly pass
Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept,
Wake where they waked, range that enclosure old,
That garden of great intellects, undisturbed.
Place also by the side of this dark sense
Of nobler feeling, that those spiritual men,
Even the great Newton’s own ethereal self,
Seemed humbled in these precincts, thence to be
The more beloved, invested here with tasks
Of life’s plain business, as a daily garb—
Dictators at the plough—a change that left
All genuine admiration unimpaired.

Beside the pleasant mills of Tromprington
I laughed with Chaucer; in the hawthorn shade
Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales
Of amorous passion. And that gentle bard
Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State,
Sweet Spencer, moving through his clouded heaven
With the moon’s beauty and the moon’s soft pace—
I called him brother, Englishman, and friend.
Yea, our blind poet, who, in his later day
Stood almost single, uttering odious truth,
Darkness before, and danger’s voice behind—
Soul awful, if the earth hath ever lodged
An awful soul— I seemed to see him here
Familiarly, and in his scholar’s dress
Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth,
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
And conscious step of purity and pride.

Among the band of my compeers was one,
My class-fellow at school, whose chance it was
To lodge in the apartments which had been
Time out of mind honored by Milton’s name—
The very shell reputed of the abode
Which he had tenanted. O Temperate bard!
One afternoon, the first time I set foot
In this they innocent nest and oratory,
Seated with others in a festive ring
Of commonplace convention, I to thee
Poured out libations, to thy memory drank
Within my private thoughts, till my brain reeled,
Never so clouded by the fumes of wine
Before that hour, or since. Thence, forth I ran
From that assembly, through a length of streets
Ran ostrich-like to reach our chapel door
In not a desperate or opprobrious time,
Albeit long after the importunate bell
Had stopped, with wearisome Cassandra voice
No longer haunting the dark winter night.
Call back, O friend, a moment to thy mind
The place itself and fashion of the rites.
Upshouldering in a dislocated lump
With shallow ostentatious carelessness
My surplice, gloried in and yet despised,
I clove in pride through the inferior throng
Of the plain burghers, who in audience stood
On the last skirts of their permitted ground,
Beneath the pealing organ. Empty thoughts,
I am ashamed of them; and that great bard,
And thou, O friend, who in thy ample mind
Hast stationed me for reverence and love,
Ye will forgive the weakness of that hour,
In some of its unworthy vanities
Brother of many more.

In this mixed sort
The months passed on, remissly, not giving up
To wilful alienation from the right,
Or walks of open scandal, but in vague
And loose indifference, easy likings, aims
Of a low pitch—duty and zeal dismissed,
Yet Nature, or a happy course of things,
Not doing in their stead the needful work.
The memory languidly revolved, the heart
Reposed in noontide rest, the inner pulse
Of contemplation almost failed to beat.
Rotted as by a charm, my life became
A floating island, an amphibious thing,
Unsound, of spungy texture, yet withal
Not wanting a fair face of water-weeds
And pleasant flowers. The thirst of living praise,
A reverence for the glorious dead, the sight
Of those long vistos, catacombs in which
Perennial minds lie visibly entombed,
Have often stirred the heart of youth, and bred
A fervent love of rigorous discipline.
Alas, such high commotion touched not me;
No look was in these walls to put to shame
My easy spirits, and discountenance
Their light composure—far less to instil
A calm resolve of mind, firmly addressed
To pleasant efforts. Nor was this the blame
Of others, but my own; I should in truth,
As far as doth concern my single self,
Misdemean most widely, lodging it elsewhere.
For I, bred in Nature’s lap, was even
As a spoiled child; and, rambling like the wind
As I had done in daily intercourse
With those delicious rivers, solemn heights,
And mountains, ranging like a fowl of the air,
I was ill-tutored for captivity—
To quit my pleasure, and from month to month
Take up a station calmly on the perch
Of sedentary peace. Those lovely forms
Had also left less space within my mind,
Which, wrought upon instinctively, had found
A freshness in those objects of its love,
A winning power beyond all other power.
Not that I slighted books—that were to lack
All sense—but other passions had been mine,
More fervent, making me less prompt perhaps
To indoor study than was wise or well,
Or suited to my years. Yet I could shape
The image of a place which—soothed and lulled
As I had been, trained up in paradise
Among sweet garlands and delightful sounds,
Accustomed in my loneliness to walk
With Nature magisterially—yet I
Methinks could shape the image of a place
Which with its aspect should have bent me down
To instantaneous service, should at once
Have made me pay to science and to arts
And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord,
A homage frankly offered up like that
Which I had paid to Nature. Toil and pains
In this recess which I have bodied forth
Should spread from heart to heart; and stately groves,
Majestic edifices, should not want
A corresponding dignity within.
The congregating temper which pervades
Our unripe years, not wasted, should be made
To minister to works of high attempt,
Which the enthusiast would perform with love.
Youth should be awed, possessed, as with a sense
Religious, of what holy joy there is
In knowledge if it be sincerely sought
For its own sake—in glory, and in praise,
If but by labour won, and to endure.
The passing day should learn to put aside
Her trappings here, should strip them off abashed
Before antiquity and stedfast truth,
And strong book-mindedness; and over all
Should be a healthy sound simplicity,
A seemly plainness—name it as you will,
Republican or pious.

If these thoughts
Be a gratuitous emblazonry
That does but mock this recreant age, at least
Let Folly and False-seeming (we might say)
Be free to affect whatever formal gait
Of moral or scholastic discipline
Shall raise them highest in their own esteem;
Let them parade among the schools at will,
But spare the house of God. Was ever known
The witless shepherd who would drive his flock
With serious repetition to a pool
Of which ’tis plain to sight they never taste?
A weight must surely hang on days begun
And ended with worst mockery. Be wise,
Ye Presidents and Deans, and to your bells
Give seasonable rest, for ’tis a sound
Hollow as ever vexed the tranquil air,
And your officious doings bring disgrace
On the plain steeples of our English Church,
Whose worship, ’mid remotest village trees,
Suffers for this. Even science too, at hand
In daily sight of such irreverence,
Is smitten thence with an unnatural taint,
Loses her just authority, falls beneath
Collateral suspicion, else unknown.
This obvious truth did not escape me then,
Unthinking as I was, and I confess
That—having in my native hills given loose
To a schoolboy’s dreaming—I had raised a pile
Upon the basis of the coming time
Which now before me melted fast away,
Which could not live, scarcely had life enough
To mock the builder. Oh, what joy it were
To see a sanctuary for our country’s youth
With such a spirit in it as might be
Protection for itself, a virgin grove,
Primaeval in its purity and depth—
Where, though the shades were filled with cheerfulness,
Nor indigent of songs warbled from crowds
In under-coverts, yet the countenance
Of the whole place should wear a stamp of awe—
A habitation sober and demure
For ruminating creatures, a domain
For quiet things to wander in, a haunt
In which the heron might delight to feed
By the shy rivers, and the pelican
Upon the cypress-spire in lonely thought
Might sit and sun himself. Alas, alas,
In vain for such solemnity we look;
Our eyes are crossed by butterflies, our ears
Hear chattering popinjays—the inner heart
Is trivial, and the impresses without
Are of a gaudy region.

Different sight
Those venerable doctors saw of old
When all who dwelt within these famous walls
Led in abstemiousness a studious life,
When, in forlorn and naked chambers cooped
And crowded, o’er their ponderous books they sate
Like caterpillars eating out their way
In silence, or with keen devouring noise
Not to be tracked or fathered. Princes then
At matins froze, and couched at curfew-time,
Trained up through piety and zeal to prize
Spare diet, patient labour, and plain weeds.
O seat of Arts, renowned throughout the world,
Far different service in those homely days
The nurslings of the Muses underwent
From their first childhood. In that glorious time
When Learning, like a stranger come from far,
Sounding through Christian lands her trumpet, rouzed
The peasant and the king; when boys and youths,
The growth of ragged villages and huts,
Forsook their homes and—errant in the quest
Of patron, famous school or friendly nook,
Where, pensioned, they in shelter might sit down—
From town to town and through wide scattered realms
Journed with their huge folios in their hands,
And often, starting from some covert place,
Saluted the chance comor on the road,
Crying, ‘An obolus, a penny give
To a poor scholar’; when illustrious men,
Lovers of truth, by penury constrained,
Bucer, Erasmus, or Melancthon, read
Before the doors or windows of their cells
By moonshine through mere lack of taper light.

But peace to vain regrets. We see but darkly
Even when we look behind us; and best things
Are not so pure by nature that they needs
Must keep to all—as fondly all believe—
Their highest promise. If the mariner,
When at reluctant distance he hath passed
Some fair enticing island, did but know
What fate might have been his, could he have brought
His bark to land upon the wished-for spot,
Good cause full often would he have to bless
The belt of churlish surf that scared him thence,
Or haste of the inexorable wind.
For me, I grieve not; happy is the man
Who only misses what I missed, who falls
No lower than I fell. I did not love,
As hath been notice heretofore, the guise
Of our scholastic studies—could have wished
The river to have had an ampler range
And freer pace. But this I tax not; far,
Far more I grieved to see among the band
Of those who in the field of contest stood
As combatants, passions that did to me
Seem low and mean—from ignorance of mine,
In part, and want of just forbearance; yet
My wiser mind grieves now for what I saw.
Willingly did I part from these, and turn
Out of their track to travel with the shoal
Of more unthinking natures, easy minds
And pillowy, and not wanting love that makes
The day pass lightly on, when foresight sleeps,
And wisdom and the pledges interchanged
With our own inner being, are forgot.

    To books, our daily fare prescribed, I turned
    With sickly appetite; and when I went,
    At other times, in quest of my own food,
    I chaced not steadily the manly deer,
    But laid me down to any casual feast
    Of wild wood-honey; or with truant eyes
    Unruly, peeped about for vagrant fruit.
    And as for what pertains to human life,
    The deeper passions working round me here—
    Whether of envy, jealousy, pride, shame,
    Ambition, emulation, fear, or hope,
    Or those of dissolute pleasure—were by me
    Unshared, and only now and then observed,
    So little was their hold upon my being,
    As outward things that might administer
    To knowledge or instruction. Hushed meanwhile
    Was the under-soul, locked up in such a calm,
    That not a leaf of the great nature stirred.
    Yet was this deep vacation not given up
    To utter waste. Hitherto I had stood
In my own mind remote from human life,
At least from what we commonly so name,
Even as a shepherd on a promontory,
Who, lacking occupation, looks far forth
Into the endless sea, and rather makes
Than finds what he beholds. And sure it is,
That this first transit from the smooth delights
And wild outlandish walks of simple youth
To something that resembled an approach
Towards mortal business, to a privileged world
Within a world, a midway residence
With all its intervenient imagery,
Did better suit my visionary mind—
Far better, than to have been bolted forth,
Thrust out abruptly into fortune’s way
Among the conflicts of substantial life—
By a more just gradation did lead on
To higher things, more naturally matured
For permanent possession, better fruits,
Whether of truth or virtue, to ensue.

In playful zest of fancy did we note—
How could we less?—the manners and the ways
Of those who in the livery were arrayed
Of good or evil fame, of those with whom
By frame of academic discipline
Perforce we were connected, men whose sway,
And whose authority of office, served
To set our minds on edge, and did no more.
Nor wanted we rich pastime of this kind—
Found everywhere, but chiefly in the ring
Of the grave elders, men unscoured, grotesque
In character, tricked out like aged trees
Which through the lapse of their infirmity
Give ready place to any random seed
That chuses to be reared upon their trunks.
Here on my view, confronting as it were
Those shepherd swains whom I had lately left,
Did flash a different image of old age—
How different—yet both withal alike
A book of rudiments for the unpractised sight,
Objects embossed, and which with sedulous care
Nature holds up before the eye of youth
In her great school—with further view, perhaps,
To enter early on her tender scheme
Of teaching comprehension with delight
And mingling playful with pathetic thoughts.

The surfaces of artificial life
And manners finely spun, the delicate race
Of colours, lurking, gleaming up and down
Through that state arras woven with silk and gold:
This wily interchange of snaky hues,
Willingly and unwillingly revealed,
I had not learned to watch, and at this time
Perhaps, had such been in my daily sight,
I might have been indifferent thereto
As hermits are to tales of distant things.
Hence, for these rarities elaborate
Having no relish yet, I was content
With the more homely produce rudely piled
In this our coarser warehouse. At this day
I smile in many a mountain solitude
At passages and fragments that remain
Of that inferior exhibition, played
By wooden images, a theatre
For wake or fair. And oftentimes do flit
Remembrances before me of old men,
Old humourists, who have been long in their graves,
And, having almost in my mind put off
Their human names, have into phantoms passed
Of texture midway betwixt life and books.

I play the loiterer. 'tis enough to note
That here in dwarf proportions were expressed
The limbs of the great world—its goings-on
Collaterally pourtrayed as in mock fight,
A tournament of blows, some hardly dealt 625
Though short of mortal combat—and whate’er
Might of this pageant be supposed to hit
A simple rustic’s notice, this way less,
More that way, was not wasted upon me.
And yet this spectacle may well demand
A more substantial name, no mimic show,
ItsSelf a living part of a live whole, 630
A creek of the vast sea. For, all degrees
And shapes of spurious fame and short-lived praise
Here sate in state, and, fed with daily alms,
Retainers won away from solid good.
And here was Labour, his own Bond-slave; Hope
That never set the pains against the prize;
Idleness, halting with his weary clog;
And poor misguided Shame, and witless Fear,
And simple Pleasure, foraging for Death;
Honour misplaced, and Dignity astray; 640
Feuds, factions, flatteries, Enmity and Guile,
Murmuring Submission and bald Government
(The idol weak as the idolator)
And Decency and Custom starving Truth,
And blind Authority beating with his staff 645
The child that might have led him; Emptiness
Followed as of good omen, and meek Worth
Left to itself unheard of and unknown.

Of these and other kindred notices
I cannot say what portion is in truth 650
The naked recollection of that time,
And what may rather have been called to life
By after-meditation. But delight,
That, in an easy temper lulled asleep,
Is still with innocence its own reward, 655
This surely was not wanting. Carelessly
I gazed, roving as through a cabinet
Or wide museum, thronged with fishes, gems,
Birds, crocodiles, shells, where little can be seen,
Well understood, or naturally endeared,
Yet still does every step bring something forth
That quickens, pleases, stings—and here and there
A casual rarity is singled out
And has its brief perusal, then gives way
To others, all supplanted in their turn.
Meanwhile, amid this gaudy congress framed
Of things by nature most unneighbourly,
The head turns round, and cannot right itself;
And, though an aching and a barren sense
Of gay confusion still be uppermost,
With few wise longings and but little love,
Yet something to the memory sticks at last
Whence profit may be drawn in times to come.

Thus in submissive idleness, my friend,
The labouring time of autumn, winter, spring—
Nine months—rolled pleasingly away, the tenth
Returned me to my native hills again.
A PLEASANT sight it was when, having clomb
The Heights of Kendal, and that dreary moor
Was crossed, at length as from a rampart’s edge
I overlooked the bed of Windermere.
I bounded down the hill, shouting amain
A lusty summons to the farther shore
For the old ferryman; and when he came
I did not step into the well-known boat
Without a cordial welcome. Thence right forth
I took my way, now drawing towards home,
To that sweet valley where I had been reared;
'Twas but a short hour’s walk ere, veering round,
I saw the snow-white church upon its hill
Sit like a thronèd lady, sending out
A gracious look all over its domain.
Glad greetings had I, and some tears perhaps,
From my old dame, so motherly and good,
While she perused me with a parent’s pride.
The thoughts of gratitude shall fall like dew
Upon thy grave, good creature: while my heart
Can beat I never will forget thy name.
Heaven’s blessing be upon thee where thou liest
After thy innocent and busy stir
In narrow cares, thy little daily growth
Of calm enjoyments, after eighty years,
And more than eighty, of untroubled life—
Childless, yet by the strangers to they blood
Honoured with little less than filial love.
Great joy was mine to see thee once again,
Thee and thy dwelling, and a throng of things
About its narrow precincts, all beloved
And many of them seeming yet my own.

Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts
Have felt, and every man alive can guess?
The rooms, the court, the garden were not left
Long unsaluted, and the spreading pine
And broad stone table underneath its boughs—
Our summer seat in many a festive hour—
And that unruly child of mountain birth,
The froward brook, which, soon as he was boxed
Within our garden, found himself at once
As if by trick insidious and unkind,
Stripped of his voice, and left to dimple down
Without an effort and without a will
A channel paved by the hand of man.
I looked at him and smiled, and smiled again,
And in the press of twenty thousand thoughts,
’Ha’, quoth I, ’pretty prisoner, are you there!’
—And now, reviewing soberly that hour,
I marvel that a fancy did not flash
Upon me, and a strong desire, straitway,
At sight of such an emblem that shewed forth
So aptly my late course of even days
And all their smooth enthralment, to pen down
A satire on myself. My aged dame
Was with me, at my side; she guided me,
I willing, nay—nay, wishing to be led.
The face of every neighbour whom I met
Was as a volume to me; some I hailed
Far off, upon the road, or at their work—
Unceremonious greetings, interchanged
With half the length of a long field between.
Among my schoolfellows I scattered round
A salutation that was more constrained
Though earnest—doubtless with a little pride,
But with more shame, for my habiliments,  
The transformation and the gay attire.

Delighted did I take my place again  
At our domestic table; and, dear friend,  
Relating simply as my wish hath been  
A poet’s history, can I leave untold
The joy with which I laid me down at night  
In my accustomed bed, more welcome now
Perhaps than if it had been more desired,  
Or been more often thought of with regret—
That bed whence I had heard the roaring wind  
And clamorous rain, that bed where I so oft
Had lain awake on breezy nights to watch
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves  
Of a tall ash that near our cottage stood,
Had watched her with fixed eyes, while to and fro
In the dark summit of the moving tree
She rocked with every impulse of the wind.

Among the faces which it pleased me well  
To see again was one by ancient right
Our inmate, a rough terrier of the hills,  
By birth and call of nature preordained
To hunt the badger and unearth the fox
Among the impervious crags. But having been  
From youth our own adopted, he had passed
Into a gentler service; and when first
The boyish spirit flagged, and day by day  
Along my veins I kindled with the stir,
The fermentation and the vernal heat  
Of poesy, affecting private shades
Like a sick lover, then this dog was used  
To watch me, an attendant and a friend,
Obsequious to my steps early and late,  
Though often of such dilatory walk
Tired, and uneasy at the halts I made,
A hundred times when in these wanderings
I have been busy with the toil of verse—
Great pains and little progress—and at once
Some fair enchanting image in my mind
Rose up, full-formed like Venus from the sea,
Have I sprung forth towards him and let loose
My hand upon his back with stormy joy,
Caressing him again and yet again.
And when in the public roads at eventide
I sauntered, like a river murmuring
And talking to itself, at such a season
It was his custom to jog on before;
But, duly whenever he had met
A passenger approaching, would he turn
To give me timely notice, and straitway,
Punctual to such admonishment, I hushed
My voice, composed my gait, and shaped myself
To give and take a greeting that might save
My name from piteous rumours, such as wait
On men suspected to be crazed in brain.

Those walks, well worthy to be prized and loved—
Regretted, that word too was on my tongue,
But they were richly laden with all good,
And cannot be remembered but with thanks
And gratitude and perfect joy of heart—
Those walks did now like a returning spring
Come back on me again. When first I made
Once more the circuit of our little lake
If ever happiness hath lodged with man
That day consummate happiness was mine—
Wide-spreading, steady, calm, contemplative.
The sun was set, or setting, when I left
Our cottage door, and evening soon brought on
A sober hour, not winning or serene,
For cold and raw the air was, and untuned;
But as a face we love is sweetest then
When sorrow damps it, or, whatever look
It chance to wear, is sweetest if the heart
Have fulness in itself, even so with me
It fared that evening. Gently did my soul
Put off her veil, and, self-transmuted, stood
Naked as in the presence of her God.
As on I walked, a comfort seemed to touch
A heart that had not been disconsolate,
Strength came where weakness was not known to be,
At least not felt; and restoration came
Like an intruder knocking at the door
Of unacknowledged weariness. I took
The balance in my hand and weighed myself:
I saw but little, and thereat was pleased;
Little did I remember, and even this
Still pleased me more—but I had hopes and peace
And swellings of the spirits, was rapt and soothed,
Conversed with promises, had glimmering views
How life pervades the undecaying mind,
How the immortal soul with godlike power
Informs, creates, and thaws the deepest sleep
That time can lay upon her, how on earth
Man if he do but live within the light
Of high endeavours, daily spreads abroad
His being with a strength that cannot fail.
Nor was there want of milder thoughts, of love,
Of innocence, and holiday repose,
And more than pastoral quiet in the heart
Of ampler projects, and a peaceful end
At last, or glorious, by endurance won.
Thus musing, in a wood I sate me down
Alone, continuing there to muse. Meanwhile
The mountain heights were slowly overspread
With darkness, and before a rippling breeze
The long lake lengthened out its hoary line,
And in the sheltered coppice where I sate,
Around me, from among the hazel leaves—
Now here, now there, stirred by the straggling wind—
Came intermittingly a breath-like sound,
A respiration short and quick, which oft,
Yea, might I say, again and yet again,  
Mistaking for the panting of my dog,  
The off-and-on companion of my walk,  
I turned my head to look if he were there.  

A freshness also found I at this time  
In human life, the life I mean of those  
Whose occupations really I loved.  
The prospect often touched me with surprize:  
Crowded and full, and changed, as seemed to me,  
Even as a garden in the heat of spring  
After an eight-days’ absence. For—to omit  
The things which were the same and yet appeared  
So different—amid this solitude,  
The little vale where was my chief abode,  
'Twas not indifferent to a youthful mind  
To note, perhaps some sheltered seat in which  
An old man had been used to sun himself,  
Now empty; pale-faced babes whom I had left  
In arms, known children of the neighbourhood,  
Now rosy prattlers, tottering up and down;  
And growing girls whose beauty, filched away  
With all its pleasant promises, was gone  
To deck some slighted playmate’s homely cheek.

Yes, I had something of another eye,  
And often looking round was moved to smiles  
Such as a delicate work of humour breeds.  
I read, without design, the opinions, thoughts,  
Of those plain-living people, in a sense  
Of love and knowledge: with another eye  
I saw the quiet woodman in the woods,  
The shepherd on the hills. With new delight,  
This chiefly, did I view my grey-haired dame,  
Saw her go forth to church, or other work  
Of state, equipped in monumental trim—  
Short velvet cloak, her bonnet of the like,  
A mantle such as Spanish cavaliers
Wore in old time. Her smooth domestic life—
Affectionate without uneasiness—
Her talk, her business, pleased me; and no less
Her clear though shallow stream of piety,
That ran on sabbath days a fresher course.
With thoughts unfelt till now I saw her read
Her bible on the Sunday afternoons,
And loved the book when she had dropped asleep
And made of it a pillow for her head.

Nor less do I remember to have felt
Distinctly manifested at this time,
A dawning, even as of another sense,
A human-heartedness about my love
For objects hitherto the gladsome air
Of my own private being, and no more—
Which I had loved, even as a blessèd spirit
Or angel, if he were to dwell on earth,
Might love in individual happiness.
But now there opened on me other thoughts,
Of change, congratulation and regret,
A new-born feeling. It spread far and wide:
The trees, the mountains shared it, and the brooks,
The stars of heaven, now seen in their old haunts—
White Sirius glittering o’er the southern crags,
Orion with his belt, and those fair Seven,
Acquaintances of every little child,
And Jupiter, my own beloved star.
Whatever shadings of mortality
Had fallen upon these objects heretofore
Were different in kind: not tender—strong,
Deep, gloomy were they, and severe, the scatterings
Of childhood, and moreover, had given way
In later youth to beauty and to love
Enthusiastic, to delight and joy.

As one who hangs down-bending from the side
Of a slow-moving boat upon the breast
Of a still water, solacing himself
With such discoveries as his eye can make
Beneath him in the bottom of the deeps,
Sees many beauteous sights—weeds, fishes, flowers,
Grotts, pebbles, roots of trees—and fancies more,
Yet often is perplexed, and cannot part
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
Mountains and clouds, from that which is indeed
The region, and the things which there abide
In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
And motions that are sent he knows not whence,
Impediments that make his task more sweet;
Such pleasant office have we long pursued
Incumbent o’er the surface of past time—
With like success. Nor have we often looked
On more alluring shows—to me at least—
More soft, or less ambiguously descried,
Than those which now we have been passing by,
And where we still are lingering. Yet in spite
Of all these new employments of the mind
There was an inner falling off. I loved,
Loved deeply, all that I had loved before,
More deeply even than ever; but a swarm
Of heady thoughts jostling each other, gawds
And feast and dance and public revelry
And sports and games—less pleasing in themselves
Than as they were a badge, glossy and fresh,
Of manliness and freedom—these did now
Seduce me from the firm habitual quest
Of feeding pleasures, from that eager zeal,
Those yearnings which had every day been mine,
A wild, unworldly-minded youth, given up
To Nature and to books, or, at the most,
From time to time by inclination shipped
One among many, in societies
That were, or seemed, as simple as myself.
But now was come a change—it would demand
Some skill, and longer time than may be spared,
To paint even to myself these vanities,
And how they wrought—but sure it is that now
Contagious air did oft environ me,
Unknown among these haunts in former days.
The very garments that I wore appeared
To prey upon my strength, and stopped the course
And quiet stream of self-forgetfulness.
Something there was about me that perplexed
Th’ authentic sight of reason, pressed too closely
On that religious dignity of mind
That is the very faculty of truth,
Which wanting—either, from the very first
A function never lighted up, or else
Extinguished—man, a creature great and good,
Seems but a pageant plaything with vile claws,
And this great frame of breathing elements
A senseless idol.

This vague heartless chace
Of trivial pleasures was a poor exchange
For books and Nature at that early age.
’Tis true, some casual knowledge might be gained
Of character or life; but at that time,
Of manners put to school I took small note,
And all my deeper passions lay elsewhere—
Far better had it been to exalt the mind
By solitary study, to uphold
Intense desire by thought and quietness.
And yet, in chastisement of these regrets,
The memory of one particular hour
Doth here rise up against me. In a throng,
A festal company of maids and youths,
Old men and matrons, staid, promiscuous rout,
A medley of all tempers, I had passed
The night in dancing, gaiety and mirth—
With din of instruments, and shuffling feet,
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,
And unaimed prattle flying up and down,
Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there
Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed
That mounted up like joy into the head,
And tingled through the veins. Ere we retired
The cock had crowed, the sky was bright with day;
Two miles I had to walk along the fields
Before I reached my home. Magnificent
The morning was, a memorable pomp,
More glorious than I ever had beheld.
The sea was laughing at a distance; all
The solid mountains were as bright as clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth into the fields.
Ah, need I say, dear friend, that to the brim
My heart was full? I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be—else sinning greatly—
A dedicated spirit. On I walked
In blessedness, which even yet remains.

Strange rendezvous my mind was at that time,
A party-coloured shew of grave and gay,
Solid and light, short-sighted and profound,
Of considerate habits and sedate,
Consorting in one mansion unreproved.
I knew the worth of that which I possessed,
Though slighted and misused. Besides in truth
That summer, swarming as it did with thoughts
Transient and loose, yet wanted not a store
Of primitive hours, when—by these hindrances
Unthwarted—I experienced in myself
Conformity as just as that of old
To the end and written spirit of God’s works,
Whether held forth in Nature or in man.
From many wanderings that have left behind
Remembrances not lifeless, I will here
Single out one, then pass to other themes.
A favorite pleasure hath it been with me
From time of earliest youth to walk alone
Along the public way, when, for the night
Deserted, in its silence it assumes
A character of deeper quietness
Than pathless solitudes. At such an hour
Once, ere these summer months were passed away,
I slowly mounted up a steep ascent
Where the road’s wat’ry surface, to the ridge
Of that sharp rising, glittered in the moon
And seemed before my eyes another stream
Creeping with silent lapse to join the brook
That murmured in the valley. On I went
Tranquil, receiving in my own despite
Amusement, as I slowly passed along,
From such near objects as from time to time
Perforce intruded on the listless sense,
Quiescent and disposed to sympathy,
With an exhausted mind worn out by toil
And all unworthy of the deeper joy
Which waits on distant prospect—cliff or sea,
The dark blue vault and universe of stars.
Thus did I steal along that silent road,
My body from the stillness drinking in
A restoration like the calm of sleep,
But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,
Around me, all was peace and solitude;
I looked not round, nor did the solitude
Speak to my eye, but it was heard and felt,
O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
Rose in harmonious imagery; they rose
As from some distant region of my soul
And came along like dreams—yet such as left
Obscurely mingled with their passing forms
A consciousness of animal delight,
A self-possession felt in every pause
And every gentle movement of my frame.

While thus I wandered, step by step led on,
It chanced a sudden turning of the road
Presented to my view an uncouth shape,
So near that, slipping back into the shade
Of a thick hawthorn, I could mark him well,
Myself unseen. He was of stature tall,
A foot above man’s common measure tall,
Stiff in his form, and upright, lank and lean—
A man more meagre, as it seemed to me,
Was never seen abroad by night or day.
His arms were long, and bare his hands; his mouth
Shewed ghastly in the moonlight; from behind,
A milestone propped him, and his figure seemed
Half sitting, and half standing. I could mark
That he was clad in military garb,
Though faded yet entire. He was alone,
Had no attendant, neither dog, nor staff,
Nor knapsack; in his very dress appeared
A desolation, a simplicity
That seemed akin to solitude. Long time
Did I peruse him with a mingled sense
Of fear and sorrow. From his lips meanwhile
There issued murmuring sounds, as if of pain
Or of uneasy thought; yet still his form
Kept the same steadiness, and at his feet
His shadow lay, and moved not. In a glen
Hard by, a village stood, whose roofs and doors
Were visible among the scattered trees,
Scarce distant from the spot an arrow’s flight.
I wished to see him move, but he remained
Fixed to his place, and still from time to time
Sent forth a murmuring voice of dead complaint,
Groans scarcely audible. Without self-blame
I had not thus prolonged my watch; and now,
Subduing my heart’s specious cowardise,
I left the shady nook where I had stood
And hailed him. Slowly from his resting-place
He rose, and with a lean and wasted arm
In measured gesture lifted to his head
Returned my salutation, then resumed
His station as before. And when erelong
I asked his history, he in reply
Was neither slow nor eager, but, unmoved,
And with a quiet uncomplaining voice,
A stately air of mild indifference,
He told in simple words a soldier’s tale:
That in the tropic islands he had served,
Whence he had landed scarcely ten days past—
That on his landing he had been dismissed,
And now was travelling to his native home.
At this I turned and looked towards the village,
But all were gone to rest, the fires all out,
And every silent window to the moon
Shone with a yellow glitter. ‘No one there’,
Said I, ‘is waking; we must measure back
The way which we have come. Behind yon wood
A labourer dwells, and, take it on my word,
He will not murmur should we break his rest,
And with a ready heart will give you food
And lodging for the night.’ At this he stooped,
And from the ground took up an oaken staff
By me yet unobserved, a traveller’s staff
Which I suppose from his slack hand had dropped,
And lain till now neglected in the grass.

Towards the cottage without more delay
We shaped our course. As it appeared to me
He travelled without pain, and I beheld
With ill-suppressed astonishment his tall
And ghastly figure moving at my side;
Nor while we journeyed thus could I forbear
To question him of what he had endured
From hardship, battle, or the pestilence.
He all the while was in demeanor calm,  
Concise in answer. Solemn and sublime
He might have seemed, but that in all he said  
There was a strange half-absence, and a tone
Of weakness and indifference, as of one
Remembering the importance of his theme
But feeling it no longer. We advanced
Slowly, and ere we to the wood were come
Discourse had ceased. Together on we passed
In silence through the shades, gloomy and dark;
Then, turning up along an open field,
We gained the cottage. At the door I knocked,
Calling aloud, ‘My friend, here is a man
By sickness overcome. Beneath your roof
This night let him find rest, and give him food
If food he need, for he is faint and tired.’
Assured that now my comrade would repose
In comfort, I entreated that henceforth
He would not linger in the public ways,
But ask for timely furtherance, and help
Such as his state required. At this reproof,
With the same ghastly mildness in his look,
He said, ‘My trust is in the God of Heaven,
And in the eye of him that passes me.’
The cottage door was speedily unlocked,
And now the soldier touched his hat again
With his lean hand, and in a voice that seemed
To speak with a reviving interest,
‘Till then unfelt, he thanked me; I returned
The blessing of the poor unhappy man,
And so we parted. Back I cast a look,
And lingered near the door a little space,
Then sought with quiet heart my distant home.
Even in the steadiest mood of reason, when
All sorrow for thy transitory pains
Goes out, it grieves me for thy state, O man,
Thou paramount creature, and thy race, while ye
Shall sojourn on this planet, not for woes
Which thou endur’st—that weight, albeit huge,
I charm away—but for those palms atchieved
Through length of time, by study and hard thought,
The honours of thy high endowments; there
My sadness finds its fuel. Hitherto
In progress through this verse my mind hath looked
Upon the speaking face of earth and heaven
As her prime teacher, intercourse with man
Established by the Sovereign Intellect,
Who through that bodily image hath diffused
A soul divine which we participate,
A deathless spirit. Thou also, man, hast wrought,
For commerce of thy nature with itself,
Things worthy of unconquerable life;
And yet we feel—we cannot chuse but feel—
That these must perish. Tremblings of the heart
It gives, to think that the immortal being
No more shall need such garments; and yet man,
As long as he shall be the child of earth,
Might almost ‘weep to have’ what he may lose—
Nor be himself extinguished, but survive
Abject, depressed, forlorn, disconsolate.
A thought is with me sometimes, and I say,
'Should earth by inward throes be wrenched throughout,  
Or fire be sent from far to wither all  
Her pleasant habitations, and dry up  
Old Ocean in his bed, left singed and bare,  
Yet would the living presence still subsist  
Victorious; and composure would ensue,  
And kindlings like the morning—presage sure,  
Though slow perhaps, of a returning day.'  
But all the meditations of mankind,  
Yea, all the adamantine holds of truth  
By reason built, or passion (which itself  
Is highest reason in a soul sublime),  
The consecrated works of bard and sage,  
Sensuous or intellectual, wrought by men,  
Twin labourers and heirs of the same hopes—  
Where would they be? Oh, why hath not the mind  
Some element to stamp her image on  
In nature somewhat nearer to her own?  
Why, gifted with such powers to send abroad  
Her spirit, must it lodge in shrines so frail?  

One day, when in the hearing of a friend  
I had given utterance to thoughts like these,  
He answered with a smile that in plain truth  
'Twas going far to seek disquietude—  
But on the front of his reproof confessed  
That he at sundry seasons had himself  
Yielded to kindred hauntings, and, forthwith,  
Added that once upon a summer’s noon  
While he was sitting in a rocky cave  
By the seaside, perusing as it chanced,  
The famous history of the errant knight  
Recorded by Cervantes, these same thoughts  
Came to him, and to height unusual rose  
While listlessly he sate, and, having closed  
The book, had turned his eyes towards the sea.  
On poetry and geometric truth  
(The knowledge that endures) upon these two,
And their high privilege of lasting life
Exempt from all internal injury,
He mused—upon these chiefly—and at length,
His senses yielding to the sultry air,
Sleep seized him and he passed into a dream. 70
He saw before him an Arabian waste,
A desert, and he fancied that himself
Was sitting there in the wide wilderness
Alone upon the sands. Distress of mind
Was growing in him when, behold, at once
To his great joy a man was at his side,
Upon a dromedary mounted high.
He seemed an arab of the Bedouin tribes;
A lance he bore, and underneath one arm
A stone, and in the opposite hand a shell 80
Of a surpassing brightness. Much rejoiced
The dreaming man that he should have a guide
To lead him through the desert; and he thought,
While questioning himself what this strange freight
Which the newcomer carried through the waste
Could mean, the arab told him that the stone—
To give it in the language of the dream—
Was Euclid’s Elements. ‘And this’, said he,
‘This other’, pointing to the shell, ‘this book
Is something of more worth.’ ‘And, at the word, 90
The stranger’, said my friend continuing,
‘Stretched forth the shell towards me, with command
That I should hold it to my ear. I did so
And heard that instant in an unknown tongue,
Which yet I understood, articulate sounds,
A loud prophetic blast of harmony,
And ode in passion uttered, which foretold
Destruction to the children of the earth
By deluge now at hand. No sooner ceased
The song, but with calm look the arab said 100
That all was true, that it was even so
As had been spoken, and that he himself
Was going then to bury those two books—
The one that held acquaintance with the stars,
And wedded man to man by purest bond
Of nature, undisturbed by space or time;
Th’ other that was a god, yea many gods,
Had voices more than all the winds, and was
A joy, a consolation, and a hope.’

My friend continued, ‘Strange as it may seem
I wondered not, although I plainly saw
The one to be a stone, th’ other a shell,
Nor doubted once but that they both were books,
Having a perfect faith in all that passed.

A wish was now engendered in my fear
To cleave unto this man, and I begged leave
To share his errand with him. On he passed
Not heeding me; I followed, and took note
That he looked often backward with wild look,
Grasping his twofold treasure to his side.

Upon a dromedary, lance in rest,
He rode, I keeping pace with him; and now
I fancied that he was the very knight
Whose tale Cervantes tells, yet not the knight,
But was an arab of the desert too,

Of these was neither, and was both at once.
His countenance meanwhile grew more disturbed,
And looking backwards when he looked I saw
A glittering light, and asked him whence it came.
”It is”, said he, ”The waters of the deep
Gathering upon us.” Quickening then his pace
He left me; I called after him aloud;
He heeded not, but with his twofold charge
Beneath his arm—before me full in view—
I saw him riding o’er the desert sands
With the fleet waters of the drowning world
In chace of him; whereat I waked in terror,
And saw the sea before me, and the book
In which I had been reading at my side.’

Full often, taking from the world of sleep
This arab phantom which my friend beheld,  
This semi-Quixote, I to him have given  
A substance, fancied him a living man—  
A gentle dweller in the desart, crazed  
By love, and feeling, and internal thought  
Protracted among endless solitudes—  
Have shaped him, in the oppression of his brain,  
Wandering upon this quest and thus equipped.  
And I have scarcely pitied him, have felt  
A reverence for a being thus employed.  
And thought that in the blind and awful lair  
Of such a madness reason did lie couched.  
Enow there are on earth to take in charge  
Their wives, their children, and their virgin loves,  
Or whatsoever else the heart holds dear—  
Enow to think of these—yea, will I say,  
In sober contemplation of the approach  
Of such great overthrow, made manifest  
By certain evidence, that I methinks  
Could share that maniac’s anxiousness, could go  
Upon like errand. Oftentimes at least  
Me hath such deep entrancement half-possessed  
When I have held a volume in my hand—  
Poor earthly casket of immortal verse—  
Shakespeare or Milton, labourers divine.  

Mighty, indeed supreme, must be the power  
Of living Nature which could thus so long  
Detain me from the best of other thoughts.  
Even in the lisping time of infancy  
And, later down, in prattling childhood—even  
While I was travelling back among those days—  
How could I ever play an ingrate’s part?  
Once more should I have made those bowers resound,  
And intermingled strains of thankfulness  
With their own thoughtless melodies. At least  
It might have well beseemed me to repeat  
Some simply fashioned tale, to tell again
In slender accents of sweet verse some tale
That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now.
O friend, O poet, brother of my soul,
Think not that I could ever pass along
Untouched by these remembrances; no, no,
But I was hurried forward by a stream
And could not stop. Yet wherefore should I speak,
Why call upon a few weak words to say
What is already written in the hearts
Of all that breathe—what in the path of all
Drops daily from the tongue of every child
Wherever man is found? The trickling tear
Upon the cheek of listening infancy
Tells it, and the insuperable look
That drinks as if it never could be full.

That portion of my story I shall leave
There registered. Whatever else there be
Of power or pleasure, sown or fostered thus—
Peculiar to myself—let that remain
Where it lies hidden in its endless home
Among the depths of time. And yet it seems
That here, in memory of all books which lay
Their sure foundations in the heart of man,
Whether by native prose, or numerous verse,
That in the name of all inspirèd souls—
From Homer the great thunderer, from the voice
Which roars along the bed of Jewish song,
And that, more varied and elaborate,
Those trumpet-tones of harmony that shake
Our shores in England, from those loftiest notes
Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made
For cottagers and spinners at the wheel
And weary travellers when they rest themselves
By the highways and hedges: ballad-tunes,
Food for the hungry ears of little ones,
And of old men who have survived their joy—
It seemeth in behalf of these, the works,
And of the men who framed them, whether known, 215
Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves,
That I should here assert their rights, attest
Their honours, and should once for all pronounce
Their benediction, speak of them as powers
For ever to be hallowed—only less
For what we may become, and what we need,
Than Nature’s self which is the breath of God.

Rarely and with reluctance would I stoop
To transitory themes, yet I rejoice,
And, by these thoughts admonished, must speak out
Thanksgivings from my heart that I was reared
Safe from an evil which these days have laid
Upon the children of the land—a pest
That might have dried me up body and soul.
This verse is dedicate to Nature’s self
And things that teach as Nature teaches: then,
Oh, where had been the man, the poet where—
Where had we been we two, belovèd friend,
If we, in lieu of wandering as we did
Through heights and hollows and bye-spots of tales
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground
Of fancy, happy pastures ranged at will,
Had been attended, followed, watched, and noosed,
Each in his several melancholy walk,
Stringed like a poor man’s heifer at its feed,
Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;
Or rather like a stallèd ox shut out
From touch of growing grass, that may not taste
A flower till it have yielded up its sweets
A prelibation to the mower’s scythe.

Behold the parent hen amid her brood,
Though fledged and feathered, and well pleased to part
And straggle from her presence, still a brood,
And she herself from the maternal bond
Still undischarged. Yet doth she little more
Than move with them in tenderness and love,
A centre of the circle which they make;
And now and then—alike from need of theirs
And call of her own natural appetites—
She scratches, ransacks up the earth for food
Which they partake at pleasure. Early died
My honoured mother, she who was the heart
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves;
She left us destitute, and as we might
Trooping together. Little suits it me
To break upon the sabbath of her rest
With any thought that looks at others’ blame,
Nor would I praise her but in perfect love;
Hence am I checked, but I will boldly say
In gratitude, and for the sake of truth,
Unheard by her, that she, not falsely taught,
Fetching her goodness rather from times past
Than shaping novelties from those to come,
Had no presumption, no such jealousy—
Nor did by habit of her thoughts mistrust
Our nature, but had virtual faith that He
Who fills the mother’s breasts with innocent milk
Doth also for our nobler part provide,
Under His great correction and controul,
As innocent instincts, and as innocent food.
This was her creed, and therefore she was pure
From feverish dread of error and mishap
And evil, overweeningly so called,
Was not puffed up by false unnatural hopes,
Nor selfish with unnecessary cares,
Nor with impatience from the season asked
More than its timely produce—rather loved
The hours for what they are, than from regards
Glanced on their promises in restless pride.
Such was she: not from faculties more strong
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace
Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
A heart that found benignity and hope,
Being itself benign.

My drift hath scarcely
I fear been obvious, for I have recoiled
From showing as it is the monster birth
Engendered by these too industrious times.
Let few words paint it: ’tis a child, no child,
But a dwarf man; in knowledge, virtue, skill,
In what he is not, and in what he is,
The noontide shadow of a man complete;
A worshipper of worldly seemliness—
Not quarrelsome, for that were far beneath
His dignity; with gifts he bubbles o’er
As generous as a fountain; selfishness
May not come near him, gluttony or pride;
The wandering beggars propagate his name,
Dumb creatures find him tender as a nun.
Yet deem him not for this a naked dish
Of goodness merely—he is garnished out.
Arch are his notices, and nice his sense
Of the ridiculous; deceit and guile,
Meanness and falsehood, he detects, can treat
With apt and graceful laughter; nor is blind
To the broad follies of the licensed world;
Though shrewd, yet innocent himself withal,
And can read lectures upon innocence.
He is fenced round, nay armed, for ought we know,
In panoply complete; and fear itself,
Natural or supernatural alike,
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,
Touched him not. Briefly, the moral part
Is perfect, and in learning and in books
He is a prodigy. His discourse moves slow,
Massy and ponderous as a prison door,
Tremendously embossed with terms of art.
Rank growth of propositions overruns
The stripling’s brain; the path in which he treads
Is choked with grammars. Cushion of divine
Was never such a type of thought profound
As is the pillow where he rests his head.
The ensigns of the empire which he holds—
The globe and sceptre of his royalties—
Are telescopes, and crucibles, and maps.
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,
And tell you all their cunning; he can read
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;
He knows the policies of foreign lands,
Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,
The whole world over, tight as beads of dew
Upon a gossamer thread. He sifts, he weighs,
Takes nothing upon trust. His teachers stare,
The country people pray for God’s good grace,
And tremble at his deep experiments.
All things are put to question: he must live
Knowing that he grows wiser every day,
Or else not live at all, and seeing too
Each little drop of wisdom as it falls
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart.
Meanwhile old Grandame Earth is grieved to find
The playthings which her love designed for him
Unthought of—in their woodland beds the flowers
Weep, and the river-sides are all forlorn.

    Now this is hollow, ’tis a life of lies
From the beginning, and in lies must end.
Forth bring him to the air of common sense
And, fresh and shewy as it is, the corps
Slips from us into powder. Vanity,
That is his soul: there lives he, and there moves—
It is the soul of every thing he seeks—
That gone, nothing is left which he can love.
Nay, if a thought of purer birth should rise
To carry him towards a better clime,
Some busy helper still is on the watch
To drive him back, and pound him like a stray
With the pinfold of his own conceit,
Which is his home, his natural dwelling-place.
Oh, give us once again the wishing-cap
Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat
Of Jack the Giant-killer, Robin Hood,
And Sabra in the forest with St. George!
The child whose love is here, at least doth reap
One precious gain—that he forgets himself.

These mighty workmen of our later age
Who with a broad highway have overbridged
The froward chaos of futurity,
Tamed to their bidding—they who have the art
To manage books, and things, and make them work
Gently on infant minds as does the sun
Upon a flower—the tutors of our youth,
The guides, the wardens of our faculties
And stewards of our labour, watchful men
And skilful in the usufruct of time,
Sages, who in their prescience would controul
All accidents, and to the very road
Which they have fashioned would confine us down
Like engines—when will they be taught
That in the unreasoning progress of the world
A wiser spirit is at work for us,
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,
Even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?

There was a boy—ye knew him well, ye cliffs
And islands of Winander—many a time
At evening, when the stars had just begun
To move along the edges of the hills,
Rising or setting, would he stand alone
Beneath the trees or by the glimmering lake,
And there, with fingers interwoven, both hands
Pressed closely palm to palm, and to his mouth
Uplifted, he as through an instrument
Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls
That they might answer him. And they would shout
Across the wat’ry vale, and shout again,
Responsive to his call, with quivering peals
And long halloos, and screams, and echoes loud,
Redoubled and redoubled—concourse wild
Of mirth and jocund din. And when it chanced
That pauses of deep silence mocked his skill,
Then sometimes in that silence, while he hung
Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprize
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
Would enter unawares into his mind
With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This boy was taken from his mates, and died
In childhood ere he was full ten years old.
Fair are the woods, and beauteous is the spot,
The vale where he was born; the churchyard hangs
Upon a slope above the village school,
And there, along that bank, when I have passed
At evening, I believe that oftentimes
A full half-hour together I have stood
Mute, looking at the grave in which he lies.
Even now methinks I have before my sight
That self-same village church: I see her sit—
The throned lady spoken of erewhile—
On her green hill, forgetful of this boy
Who slumbers at her feet, forgetful too
Of all her silent neighbourhood of graves,
And listening only to the gladsome sounds
That, from the rural school ascending, play
Beneath her and about her. May she long
Behold a race of young ones like to those
With whom I herded—easily, indeed,
We might have fed upon a fatter soil
Of Arts and Letters, but be that forgiven—
A race of real children, not too wise,
Too learned, or too good, but wanton, fresh,
And bandied up and down by love and hate;
Fierce, moody, patient, venturous, modest, shy,
Mad at their sports like withered leaves in winds;
Though doing wrong and suffering, and full oft
Bending beneath our life’s mysterious weight
Of pain and fear, yet still in happiness
Not yielding to the happiest upon earth.
Simplicity in habit, truth in speech,
Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds!
May books and Nature be their early joy,
And knowledge, rightly honored with that name—
Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power!

Well do I call to mind the very week
When I was first entrusted to the care
Of that sweet valley—when its paths, its shores
And brooks, were like a dream of novelty
To my half-infant thoughts—that very week,
While I was roving up and down alone
Seeking I knew not what, I chanced to cross
One of those open fields, which, shaped like ears,
Make green peninsulas on Esthwaite’s Lake.
Twilight was coming on, yet through the gloom
I saw distinctly on the opposite shore
A heap of garments, left as I supposed
By one who there was bathing. Long I watched,
But no one owned them; meanwhile the calm lake
Grew dark, with all the shadows on its breast,
And now and then a fish up-leaping snapped
The breathless stillness. The succeeding day—
Those unclaimed garments telling a plain tale—
Went there a company, and in their boat
Sounded with grappling-irons and long poles:
At length, the dead man, ’mid that beauteous scene
Of trees and hills and water, bolt upright
Rose with his ghastly face, a spectre shape—
Of terror even. And yet no vulgar fear,
Young as I was, a child not nine years old,
Possessed me, for my inner eye had seen
Such sights before among the shining streams
Of fairyland, the forests of romance—
Thence came a spirit hallowing what I saw
With decoration and ideal grace,
A dignity, a smoothness, like the words
Of Grecian art and purest Poesy.

I had a precious treasure at that time,
A little yellow canvass-covered book,
A slender abstract of the *Arabian Tales*;
And when I learned, as now I first did learn
From my companions in this new abode,
That this dear prize of mine was but a block
Hewn from a mighty quarry—in a word,
That there were four large volumes, laden all
With kindred matter—’twas in truth to me
A promise scarcely earthly. Instantly
I made a league, a covenant with a friend
Of my own age, that we should lay aside
The monies we possessed, and hoard up more,
Till our joint savings had amassed enough
To make this book our own. Through several months
Religiously did we preserve that vow,
And spite of all temptation hoarded up,
And hoarded up; but firmness failed at length,
Nor were we ever masters of our wish.

And afterwards, when, to my father’s house
Returning at the holidays, I found
That golden store of books which I had left
Open to my enjoyment once again,
What heart was mine! Full often through the course
Of those glad respites in the summertime
When armed with rod and line we went abroad
For a whole day together, I have lain
Down by thy side, O Derwent, murmuring stream,
On the hot stones and in the glaring sun,
And there have read, devouring as I read,
Defrauding the day’s glory—desperate—
Till with a sudden bound of smart reproach
Such as an idler deals with in his shame,
I to my sport betook myself again.

A gracious spirit o’er this earth presides,
And o’er the heart of man: invisibly
It comes, directing those to works of love
Who care not, know not, think not, what they do.
The tales that charm away the wakeful night
In Araby—romances, legends penned
For solace by the light of monkish lamps;
Fictions, for ladies of their love, devised
By youthful squires; adventures endless, spun
By the dismantled warrior in old age
Out of the bowels of those very thoughts
In which his youth did first extravagate—
These spread like day, and something in the shape
Of these will live till man shall be no more.
Dumb yearnings, hidden appetites, are ours,
And they must have their foot. Our childhood sits,
Our simple childhood, sits upon a throne
That hath more power than all the elements.
I guess not what this tells of being past,
Nor what it augurs of the life to come,
But so it is, and in that dubious hour,
That twilight when we first begin to see
This dawning earth, to recognise, expect—
And in the long probation that ensues,
The time of trial ere we learn to live
In reconcilement with our stinted powers,
To endure this state of meagre vassalage,
Unwilling to forego, confess, submit,
Uneasy and unsettled, yoke-fellows
To custom, mettlesome and not yet tamed
And humbled down—oh, then we feel, we feel,
We know, when we have friends. Ye dreamers, then,
Forgers of lawless tales, we bless you then—
Impostors, drivellers, dotards, as the ape
Philosophy will call you—then we feel
With what, and how great might ye are in league,
Who make our wish our power, our thought a deed,
An empire, a possession. Ye whom time
And seasons serve—all faculties—to whom
Earth crouches, th’ elements are potter’s clay,
Space like a heaven filled up with northern lights,
Here, nowhere, there, and everywhere at once.

It might demand a more impassioned strain
To tell of later pleasures linked to these,
A tract of the same isthmus which we cross
In progress from our native continent
To earth and human life—I mean to speak
Of that delightful time of growing youth
When cravings for the marvellous relent,
And we begin to love what we have seen;
And sober truth, experience, sympathy,
Take stronger hold of us; and words themselves
Move us with conscious pleasure.

I am sad
At thought of raptures now for ever flown,
Even unto tears I sometimes could be sad
To think of, to read over, many a page—
Poems withal of name—which at that time
Did never fail to entrance me, and are now
Dead in my eyes as is a theatre
Fresh emptied of spectators. Thirteen years,
Or haply less, I might have seen when first
My ears began to open to the charm
Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
For their own sakes—a passion and a power—
And phrases pleased me, chosen for delight,
For pomp, or love. Oft in the public roads,
Yet unfrequented, while the morning light
Was yellowing the hilltops, with that dear friend
(The same whom I have mentioned heretofore)
I went abroad, and for the better part
Of two delightful hours we strolled along
By the still borders of the misty lake
Repeating favorite verses with one voice,
Or conning more, as happy as the birds
That round us chaunted. Well might we be glad,
Lifted above the ground by airy fancies
More bright than madness or the dreams of wine.
And though full oft the objects of our love
Were false and in their splendour overwrought,
Yet surely at such time no vulgar power
Was working in us, nothing less in truth
Than that most noble attribute of man—
Though yet untutored, and inordinate—
That wish for something loftier, more adorned,
Than is the common aspect, daily garb,
Of human life. What wonder then if sounds
Of exultation echoed through the groves—
For images, and sentiments, and words,
And every thing with which we had to do
In that delicious world of poesy,
Kept holiday, a never-ending show,
With music, incense, festival, and flowers!

Here must I pause: This only will I add
From heart-experience, and in humblest sense
Of modesty, that he who in his youth
A wanderer among the woods and fields
With living Nature hath been intimate,
Not only in that raw unpractised time
Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,
By glittering verse, but he doth furthermore,
In measure only dealt out to himself,
Receive enduring touches of deep joy
From the great Nature that exists in works
Of mighty poets. Visionary power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words;
There darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things do work their changes there
As in a mansion like their proper home.
Even forms and substances are circumfused
By that transparent veil with light divine,
And through the turnings intricate of verse
Present themselves as objects recognised
In flashes, and with a glory scare their own.

Thus far a scanty record is deduced
Of what I owed to books in early life;
Their later influence yet remains untold,
But as this work was taking in my thoughts
Proportions that seemed larger than had first
Been meditated, I was indisposed
To any further progress at a time
When these acknowledgements were left unpaid.
The leaves were yellow when to Furness Fells,
The haunt of shepherds, and to cottage life
I bade adieu, and, one among the flock
Who by that season are convened, like birds
Trooping together at the fowler’s lure,
Went back to Granta’s cloisters—not so fond
Or eager, though as gay and undepressed
In spirit, as when I thence had taken flight
A few short months before. I turned my face
Without repining from the mountain pomp
Of autumn and its beauty (entered in
With calmer lakes and louder streams); and you,
Frank-hearted maids of rocky Cumberland,
You and your not unwelcome days of mirth
I quitted, and your nights of revelry,
And in my own unlovely cell sate down
In lightsome mood—such privilege has youth,
That cannot take long leave of pleasant thoughts.

We need not linger o’er the ensuing time,
But let me add at once that now, the bonds
Of indolent and vague society
Relaxing in their hold, I lived henceforth
More to myself, read more, reflected more,
Felt more, and settled daily into habits
More promising. Two winters may be passed
Without a separate notice; many books
Were read in process of this time—devoured,
Tasted or skimmed, or studiously perused—
Yet with no settled plan. I was detached
Internally from academic cares,
From every hope of prowess and reward,
And wished to be a lodger in that house
Of letters, and no more—and should have been
Even such, but for some personal concerns
That hung about me in my own despite
Perpetually, no heavy weight, but still
A baffling and a hindrance, a controul
Which made the thought of planning for myself
A course of independent study seem
An act of disobedience towards them
Who loved me, proud rebellion and unkind.
This bastard virtue—rather let it have
A name it more deserves, this cowardise—
Gave treacherous sanction to that over-love
Of freedom planted in me from the very first,
And indolence, by force of which I turned
From regulations even of my own
As from restraints and bonds. And who can tell,
Who knows what thus may have been gained, both then
And at a later season, or preserved—
What love of Nature, what original strength
Of contemplation, what intuitive truths,
The deepest and the best, and what research
Unbiassed, unbewildered, and unawed?

The poet’s soul was with me at that time,
Sweet meditations, the still overflow
Of happiness and truth. A thousand hopes
Were mine, a thousand tender dreams, of which
No few have since been realized, and some
Do yet remain, hopes for my future life.
Four years and thirty, told this very week,
Have I been now a sojourner on earth,
And yet the morning gladness is not gone
Which then was in my mind. Those were the days
Which also first encouraged me to trust
With firmness, hitherto but lightly touched
With such a daring thought, that I might leave
Some monument behind me which pure hearts
Should reverence. The instinctive humbleness,
Uphelp even by the very name and thought
Of printed books and authorship, began
To melt away; and further, the dread awe
Of mighty names was softened down, and seemed
Approachable, admitting fellowship
Of modest sympathy. Such aspect now,
Though not familiarly, my mind put on;
I loved and I enjoyed—that was my chief
And ruling business, happy in the strength
And loveliness of imagery and thought.

All winter long, whenever free to take
My choice, did I at nights frequent our groves
And tributary walks—the last, and oft
The only one, who had been lingering there
Through hours of silence till the porter’s bell,
A punctual follower on the stroke of nine,
Rang with its blunt unceremonious voice,
Inexorable summons. Lofty elms,
Inviting shades of opportune recess,
Did give composure to a neighbourhood
Unpeaceful in itself. A single tree
There was, no doubt yet standing there, an ash,
With sinuous trunk, boughs exquisitely wreathed:
Up from the ground and almost to the top
The trunk and master branches everywhere
Were green with ivy, and the lightsome twigs
And outer spray profusely tipped with seeds
That hung in yellow tassels and festoons,
Moving or still—a favorite trimmed out
By Winter for himself, as if in pride,
And with outlandish grace. Oft have I stood
Foot-bound uplooking at this lovely tree
Beneath a frosty moon. The hemisphere
Of magic fiction, verse of mine perhaps
May never tread, but scarcely Spenser’s self
Could have more tranquil visions in his youth,
More bright appearances could scarcely see
Of human forms and superhuman powers,
Than I beheld standing on winter nights
Alone beneath this fairy work of earth.

’Twould be a waste of labour to detail
The rambling studies of a truant youth—
Which further may be easily divined,
What, and what kind they were. My inner knowledge
(This barely will I note) was oft in depth
And delicacy like another mind,
Sequestered from my outward taste in books—
And yet the books which then I loved the most
Are dearest to me now; for, being versed
In living Nature, I had there a guide
Which opened frequently my eyes, else shut,
A standard which was usefully applied,
Even when unconsciously, to other things
Which less I understood. In general terms,
I was a better judge of thoughts than words,
Misled as to these latter not alone
By common inexperience of youth,
But by the trade in classic niceties,
Delusion to young scholars incident—
And old ones also—by that overprized
And dangerous craft of picking phrases out
From languages that want the living voice
To make of them a nature to the heart,
To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
What reason, what simplicity and sense.

Yet must I not entirely overlook
The pleasure gathered from the elements
Of geometric science. I had stepped
In these inquiries but a little way,
No farther than the threshold—with regret
Sincere I mention this—but there I found
Enough to exalt, to cheer me and compose.
With Indian awe and wonder, ignorance
Which even was cherished, did I meditate
Upon the alliance of those simple, pure
Proportions and relations, with the frame
And laws of Nature—how they could become
Herein a leader to the human mind—
And made endeavours frequent to detect
The process by dark guesses of my own.
Yet from this source more frequently I drew
A pleasure calm and deeper, a still sense
Of permanent and universal sway
And paramount endowment in the mind,
An image not unworthy of the one
Surpassing life, which—out of space and time,
Nor touched by welterings of passion—is,
And hath the name of, God. Transcendent peace
And silence did await upon these thoughts
That were a frequent comfort to my youth.

And as I have read of one by shipwreck thrown
With fellow sufferers whom the waves had spared
Upon a region uninhabited,
An island of the deep, who having brought
To land a single volume and no more—
A treatise of geometry—was used,
Although of food and clothing destitute,
And beyond common wretchedness depressed,
To part from company and take this book,
Then first a self-taught pupil in those truths,
To spots remote and corners of the isle
By the seaside, and draw his diagrams
With a long stick upon the sand, and thus
Did oft beguile his sorrow, and almost
Forget his feeling: even so—if things
Producing like effect from outward cause
So different may rightly be compared—
So was it with me then, and so will be
With poets ever. Mighty is the charm
Of those abstractions to a mind beset
With images, and haunted by itself,
And specially delightful unto me
Was that clear synthesis built up aloft
So gracefully, even then when it appeared
No more than as a plaything, or a toy
Embodied to the sense—not what it is
In verity, an independent world
Created out of pure intelligence.

Such dispositions then were mine, almost
Through grace of heaven and inborn tenderness.
And not to leave the picture of that time
Imperfect, with these habits I must rank
A melancholy, from humours of the blood
In part, and partly taken up, that loved
A pensive sky, sad days, and piping winds,
The twilight more than dawn, autumn than spring—
A treasured and luxurious gloom of choice
And inclination mainly, and the mere
Redundancy of youth’s contentedness.
Add unto this a multitude of hours
Pilfered away by what the bard who sang
Of the enchanter Indolence hath called
‘Good-natured lounging’, and behold a map
Of my collegiate life: far less intense
Than duty called for, or, without regard
To duty, might have sprung up of itself
By change of accidents; or even—to speak
Without unkindness—in another place.

In summer among distant nooks I roved—
Dovedale, or Yorkshire dales, or through bye-tracts
Of my own native region—and was blest
Between those sundry wanderings with a joy
Above all joys, that seemed another morn
Risen on mid-noon: the presence, friend, I mean
Of that sole sister, she who hath been long
Thy treasure also, thy true friend and mine,
Now after separation desolate
Restored to me—such absence that she seemed
A gift then first bestowed. The gentle banks
Of Emont, hitherto unnamed in song,
And that monastic castle, on a flat,
Low-standing by the margin of the stream,
A mansion not unvisited of old
By Sidney, where, in sight of our Helvellyn,
Some snatches he might pen for aught we know
Of his Arcadia, by fraternal love
Inspired—that river and that mouldering dome
Have seen us sit in many a summer hour,
My sister and myself, when, having climbed
In danger through some window’s open space,
We looked abroad, or on the turret’s head
Lay listening to the wild-flowers and the grass
As they gave out their whispers to the wind.
Another maid there was, who also breathed
A gladness o’er that season, then to me
By her exulting outside look of youth
And placid under-countenance first endeared—
That other spirit, Coleridge, who is now
So near to us, that meek confiding heart,
So reverenced by us both. O’er paths and fields
In all that neighbourhood, through narrow lanes
Of eglantine, and through the shady woods,
And o’er the Border Beacon and the waste
Of naked pools and common crags that lay
Exposed on the bare fell, was scattered love—
A spirit of pleasure, and youth’s golden gleam.
O friend, we had not seen thee at that time,
And yet a power is on me and a strong
Confusion, and I seem to plant thee there.
Far art thou wandered now in search of health,
And milder breezes—melancholy lot—
But thou art with us, with us in the past,
The present, with us in the times to come.
There is no grief, no sorrow, no despair,
No languor, no dejection, no dismay,
No absence scarcely can there be, for those
Who love as we do. Speed thee well! divide
Thy pleasure with us; thy returning strength,
Receive it daily as a joy of ours;
Share with us thy fresh spirits, whether gift
Of gales Etesian or of loving thoughts.

I too have been a wanderer, but, alas,
How different is the fate of different men,
Though twins almost in genius and in mind.
Unknown unto each other, yea, and breathing
As if in different elements, we were framed
To bend at last to the same discipline,
Predestined, if two beings ever were,
To seek the same delights, and have one health,
One happiness. Throughout this narrative,
Else sooner ended, I have known full well
For whom I thus record the birth and growth
Of gentleness, simplicity, and truth,
And joyous loves that hallow innocent days
Of peace and self-command. Of rivers, fields,
And groves, I speak to thee, my friend—to thee
Who, yet a liveried schoolboy in the depths
Of the huge city, on the leaded roof
Of that wide edifice, thy home and school,
Wast used to lie and gaze upon the clouds
Moving in heaven, or haply, tired of this,
To shut thine eyes and by internal light
See trees, and meadows, and thy native stream
Far distant—thus beheld from year to year
Of thy long exile. Nor could I forget
In this late portion of my argument
That scarcely had I finally resigned
My rights among those academic bowers
When thou wert thither guided. From the heart
Of London, and from cloisters there, thou cam’st
And didst sit down in temperance and peace,
A rigorous student. What a stormy course
Then followed—oh, it is a pang that calls
For utterance, to think how small a change
Of circumstances might to thee have spared
A world of pain, ripened ten thousand hopes
For ever withered. Through this retrospect
Of my own college life I still have had
Thy after-sojourn in the self-same place
Present before my eyes, have played with times
(I speak of private business of the thought)
And accidents as children do with cards,
Or as a man, who, when his house is built,
A frame locked up in wood and stone, doth still
In impotence of mind by his fireside
Rebuild it to his liking. I have thought
Of thee, thy learning, gorgeous eloquence,
And all the strength and plumage of thy youth,
Thy subtle speculations, toils abstruse
Among the schoolmen, and Platonic forms
Of wild ideal pageantry, shaped out
From things well-matched, or ill, and words for things—
The self-created sustenance of a mind
Debarred from Nature’s living images,
Compelled to be a life unto itself,
And unrelentingly possessed by thirst
Of greatness, love, and beauty. Not alone,
Ah, surely not in singleness of heart
Should I have seen the light of evening fade
Upon the silent Cam, if we had met,
Even at that early time: I needs must hope,
Must feel, must trust, that my maturer age
And temperature less willing to be moved,
My calmer habits, and more steady voice,
Would with an influence benign have soothed
Or chased away the airy wretchedness
That batten’d on thy youth. But thou hast trod,
In watchful meditation thou hast trod,
A march of glory, which doth put to shame
These vain regrets; health suffers in thee, else
Such grief for thee would be the weakest thought
That ever harboured in the breast of man.

A passing word erewhile did lightly touch
On wanderings of my own, and now to these
My poem leads me with an easier mind.
The employments of three winters when I wore
A student’s gown have been already told,
Or shadowed forth as far as there is need—
When the third summer brought its liberty
A fellow student and myself, he too
A mountaineer, together sallied forth,
And, staff in hand on foot pursued our way
Towards the distant Alps. An open slight
Of college cares and study was the scheme,
Nor entertained without concern for those
To whom my worldly interests were dear,
But Nature then was sovereign in my heart,
And mighty forms seizing a youthful fancy
Had given a charter to irregular hopes.
In any age, without an impulse sent
From work of nations and their goings-on,
I should have been possessed by like desire;
But ’twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.
Bound, as I said, to the Alps, it was our lot
To land at Calais on the very eve
Of that great federal day; and there we saw,
In a mean city and among a few,
How bright a face is worn when joy of one
Is joy of tens of millions. Southward thence
We took our way, direct through hamlets, towns,
Gaudy with relics of that festival,
Flowers left to wither on triumphal arcs
And window-garlands. On the public roads—
And once three days successively through paths
By which our toilsome journey was abridged—
Among sequestered villages we walked
And found benevolence and blessedness
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, like spring
That leaves no corner of the land untouched.
Where elms for many and many a league in files,
With their thin umbrage, on the stately roads
Of that great kingdom rustled o’er our heads,
For ever near us as we paced along.
’Twas sweet at such a time—with such delights
On every side, in prime of youthful strength—
To feed a poet’s tender melancholy
And fond conceit of sadness, to the noise
And gentle undulation which they made.
Unhoused beneath the evening star we saw
Dances of liberty, and, in late hours
Of darkness, dances in the open air.
Among the vine-clad hills of Burgundy,
Upon the bosom of the gentle Soane
We glided forward with the flowing stream:
Swift Rhone, thou wert the wings on which we cut
Between they lofty rocks. Enchanting show
Those woods and farms and orchards did present,
And single cottages and lurking towns—
Reach after reach, procession without end,
Of deep and stately vales. A lonely pair
Of Englishmen we were, and sailed along
Clustered together with a merry crowd
Of those emancipated, with a host
Of travellers, chiefly delegates returning
From the great spousals newly solemnized
At their chief city, in the sight of Heaven.
Like bees they swarmed, gaudy and gay as bees;
Some vapoured in the unruliness of joy,
And flourished with their swords as if to fight
The saucy air. In this blithe company
We landed, took with them our evening meal,
Guests welcome almost as the angels were
To Abraham of old. The supper done,
With flowing cups elate and happy thoughts
We rose at signal given, and formed a ring,
And hand in hand danced round and round the board;
All hearts were open, every tongue was loud
With amity and glee. We bore a name
Honoured in France, the name of Englishmen,
And hospitably did they give us hail
As their forerunners in a glorious course;
And round and round the board they danced again.
With this same throng our voyage we pursued
At early dawn; the monastery bells
Made a sweet jingling in our youthful ears—
The rapid river flowing without noise—
And every spire we saw among the rocks
Spake with a sense of peace, at intervals
Touching the heart amid the boisterous crew
With which we were environed. Having parted
From this glad rout, the convent of Chartreuse
Received us two days afterwards, and there
We rested in an awful solitude—
Thence onward to the country of the Swiss.

'Tis not my present purpose to retrace
That variegated journey step by step;
A march it was of military speed,
And earth did change her images and forms
Before us fast as clouds are changed in heaven.
Day after day, up early and down late,
From vale to vale, from hill to hill we went,
From province on to province did we pass,
Keen hunters in a chace of fourteen weeks—
Eager as birds of prey, or as a ship
Upon the stretch when winds are blowing fair.
Sweet coverts did we cross of pastoral life,
Enticing vallies—greeted them, and left
Too soon, while yet the very flash and gleam
Of salutation were not passed away.
Oh, sorrow for the youth who could have seen
Unchastened, un subdued, un awed, un raised
To patriarchal dignity of mind
And pure simplicity of wish and will,
Those sanctified abodes of peaceful man.
My heart leaped up when first I did look down
On that which was first seen of those deep haunts,
A green recess, an aboriginal vale,
Quiet, and lorded over and possessed
By naked huts, wood-built, and sown like tents
Or Indian cabins over the fresh lawns
And by the river-side.

That day we first
Beheld the summit of Mount Blanc, and grieved
To have a soulless image on the eye
Which had usurped upon a living thought
That never more could be. The wondrous Vale
Of Chamouny did, on the following dawn,
With its dumb cataracts and streams of ice—
A motionless array of mighty waves,
Five rivers broad and vast—make rich amends,
And reconciled us to realities.
There small birds warble from the leafy trees,
The eagle soareth in the element,
There doth the reaper bind the yellow sheaf,
The maiden spread the haycock in the sun,
While Winter like a tamèd lion walks,
Descending from the mountain to make sport
Among the cottages by beds of flowers.

Whate’er in this wide circuit we beheld
Or heard was fitted to our unripe state
Of intellect and heart. By simple strains
Of feeling, the pure breath of real life,
We were not left untouched. With such a book
Before our eyes we could not chuse but read
A frequent lesson of sound tenderness,
The universal reason of mankind,
The truth of young and old. Nor, side by side
Pacing, two brother pilgrims, or alone
Each with his humour, could we fail to abound—
Craft this which hath been hinted at before—
In dreams and fictions pensively composed:
Dejection taken up for pleasure’s sake,
And gilded sympathies, the willow wreath,
Even among those solitudes sublime,
And sober posies of funereal flowers,
Culled from the gardens of the Lady Sorrow,
Did sweeten many a meditative hour.

Yet still in me, mingling with these delights,
Was something of stern mood, an under-thirst
Of vigor, never utterly asleep.
Far different dejection once was mine—
A deep and genuine sadness then I felt—
The circumstances I will here relate
Even as they were. Upturning with a band
Of travellers, from the Valais we had clomb
Along the road that leads to Italy;
A length of hours, making of these our guides,
Did we advance, and, having reached an inn
Among the mountains, we together ate
Our noon’s repast, from which the travellers rose
Leaving us at the board. Erelong we followed,
Descending by the beaten road that led
Right to a rivulet’s edge, and there broke off;
The only track now visible was one
Upon the further side, right opposite,
And up a lofty mountain. This we took,
After a little scruple and short pause,
And climbed with eagerness—though not, at length,
Without surprize and some anxiety
On finding that we did not overtake
Our comrades gone before. By fortunate chance,
While every moment now encreased our doubts,
A peasant met us, and from him we learned
That to the place which had perplexed us first
We must descend, and there should find the road
Which in the stony channel of the stream
Lay a few steps, and then along its banks—
And further, that thenceforward all our course
Was downwards with the current of that stream.
Hard of belief, we questioned him again,
And all the answers which the man returned
To our inquiries, in their sense and substance
Translated by the feelings which we had,
Ended in this—that we had crossed the Alps.

Imagination!—lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my song
Like an unfathered vapour, here that power,
In all the might of its endowments, came
Athwart me. I was lost as in a cloud,
Halted without a struggle to break through,
And now, recovering, to my soul I say
‘I recognise thy glory’. In such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home,
Is with infinitude—and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.
The mind beneath such banners militant
Thinks not of spoils or trophies, nor of aught
That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward—
Strong in itself, and in the access of joy
Which hides in like the overflowing Nile.

The dull and heavy slackening which ensued
Upon those tidings by the peasant given
Was soon dislodged; downwards we hurried fast,
And entered with the road which we had missed
Into a narrow chasm. The brook and road
Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy pass,
And with them did we journey several hours
At a slow step. The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And everywhere along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears—
Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
As if a voice were in them—the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,
Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great apocalypse,
The types and symbols of eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

That night our lodging was an alpine house,
An inn, or hospital (as they are named),
Standing in that same valley by itself,
And close upon the confluence of two streams—
A dreary mansion, large beyond all need,
With high and spacious rooms, deafened and stunned
By noise of waters, making innocent sleep
Lie melancholy among weary bones.
Uprisen betimes, our journey we renewed,
Led by the stream, ere noon-day magnified
Into a lordly river, broad and deep,
Dimpling along in silent majesty
With mountains for its neighbours, and in view
Of distant mountains and their snowy tops,
And thus proceeding to Locarno’s lake,
Fit resting-place for such a visitant.
Locarno, spreading out in width like heaven,
And Como thou—a treasure by the earth
Kept to itself, a darling bosomed up
In Abyssinian privacy—I spake
Of thee, thy chestnut woods and garden plots
Of Indian corn tended by dark-eyed maids,
Thy lofty steeps, and pathways roofed with vines
Winding from house to house, from town to town
(Sole link that binds them to each other), walks
League after league, and cloistral avenues
Where silence is if music be not there:
While yet a youth undisciplined in verse,
Through fond ambition of my heart I told
Your praises, nor can I approach you now
Ungreeted by a more melodious song,
Where tones of learned art and Nature mixed
May frame enduring language. Like a breeze
Or sunbeam over your domain I passed
In motion without pause; but ye have left
Your beauty with me, an impassioned sight
Of colours and of forms, whose power is sweet
And gracious, almost, might I dare to say,
As virtue is, or goodness—sweet as love,
Or the remembrance of a noble deed,
Or gentlest visitations of pure thought
When God, the giver of all joy, is thanked
Religiously in silent blessedness—
Sweet as this last itself, for such it is.

Through those delightful pathways we advanced
Two days, and still in presence of the lake,
Which winding up among the Alps now changed
Slowly its lovely countenance and put on
A sterner character. The second night,
In eagerness, and by report misled
Of those Italian clocks that speak the time
In fashion different from ours, we rose
By moonshine, doubting not that day was near,
And that, meanwhile, coasting the water’s edge
As hitherto, and with as plain a track
To be our guide, we might behold the scene
In its most deep repose. We left the town
Of Gravedona with this hope, but soon
Were lost, bewildered among woods immense,
Where, having wandered for a while, we stopped
And on a rock sate down to wait for day.
An open place it was and overlooked
From high the sullen water underneath,
On which a dull red image of the moon
Lay bedded, changing oftentimes its form
Like an uneasy snake. Long time we sate,
For scarcely more than one hour of the night—
Such was our error—had been gone when we
Renewed our journey. On the rock we lay
And wished to sleep, but could not for the stings
Of insects, which with noise like that of noon
Filled all the woods. The cry of unknown birds,
the mountains—more by darkness visible
And their own size, than any outward light—
The breathless wilderness of clouds, the clock
That told with unintelligible voice
The widely parted hours, the noise of streams,
And sometimes rustling motions nigh at hand
Which did not leave us free from personal fear,
And lastly, the withdrawing moon that set
Before us while she still was high in heaven—
These were our food, and such a summer night
Did to that pair of golden days succeed,
With now and then a doze and snatch of sleep,
On Como’s banks, the same delicious lake.

But here I must break off, and quit at once,  
Though loth, the record of these wanderings, 
A theme which may seduce me else beyond  
All reasonable bounds. Let this alone 
Be mentioned as a parting word, that not 
In hollow exultation, dealing forth 
Hyperboles of praise comparative; 
Not rich one moment to be poor for ever; 
Not prostrate, overborne—as if the mind 
Itself were nothing, a mean pensioner 
On outward forms—did we in presence stand 
Of that magnificent region. On the front 
Of this whole song is written that my heart 
Must, in such temple, needs have offered up 
A different worship. Finally, whate’er 
I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream 
That flowed into a kindred stream, a gale 
That helped me forwards, did administer 
To grandeur and to tenderness—to the one 
Directly, but to tender thoughts by means 
Less often instantaneous in effect— 
Conducted me to these along a path 
Which, in the main, was more circuitous.

Oh most beloved friend, a glorious time, 
A happy time that was. Triumphant looks 
Were then the common language of all eyes: 
As if awakened from sleep, the nations hailed 
Their great expectancy; the fife of war 
Was then a spirit-stirring sound indeed, 
A blackbird’s whistle in a vernal grove. 
We left the Swiss exulting in the fate 
Of their neighbours, and, when shortening fast 
Our pilgrimage—nor distant far from home— 
We crossed the Brabant armies on the fret 
For battle in the cause of Liberty.
A stripling, scarcely of the household then
Of social life, I looked upon these things
As from a distance—heard, and saw, and felt,
Was touched but with no intimate concern—
I seemed to move among them as a bird
Moves through the air, or as a fish pursues
Its business in its proper element.
I needed not that joy, I did not need
Such help: the ever-living universe
And independent spirit of pure youth
Were with me at that season, and delight
Was in all places spread around my steps
As constant as the grass upon the fields.
Five years are vanished since I first poured out,
Saluted by that animating breeze
Which met me issuing from the city’s walls,
A glad preamble to this verse. I sang
Aloud in dithyrambic fervour, deep
But short-lived uproar, like a torrent sent
Out of the bowels of a bursting cloud
Down Scawfell or Blencathara’s rugged sides,
A waterspout from heaven. But ’twas not long
Ere the interrupted strain broke forth once more,
And flowed awhile in strength; then stopped for years—
Not heard again until a little space
Before last primrose-time. Belovèd friend,
The assurances then given unto myself,
Which did beguile me of some heavy thoughts
At thy departure to a foreign land,
Have failed; for slowly doth this work advance.
Through the whole summer I have been at rest,
Partly from voluntary holiday
And part through outward hindrance. But I heard
After the hour of sunset yester-even,
Sitting within doors betwixt light and dark,
A voice that stirred me. ’Twas a little band,
A quire of redbreasts gathered somewhere near
My threshold, minstrels from the distant woods
And dells, sent in by Winter to bespeak
For the old man a welcome, to announce
With preparation artful and benign—
Yea, the most gentle music of the year—
That their rough lord had left the surly north,
And hath begun his journey. A delight
At this unthought-of-greeting unawares
Smote me, a sweetness of the coming time,
And, listening, I half whispered, ‘We will be,
Ye heartsome choristers, ye and I will be
Brethren, and in the hearing of bleak winds
Will chaunt together.’ And, thereafter, walking
By later twilight on the hills I saw
A glow-worm, from beneath a dusky shade
Or canopy of the yet unwithered fern
Clear shining, like a hermit’s taper seen
Through a thick forest. Silence touched me here
No less than sound had done before; the child
Of summer, lingering, shining by itself,
The voiceless worm on the unfrequented hills,
Seemed sent on the same errand with the quire
Of winter that had warbled at my door,
And the whole year seemed tenderness and love.
The last night’s genial feeling overflowed
Upon this morning, and my favorite grove—
Now tossing its dark boughs in sun and wind—
Spreads through me a commotion like its own,
Something that fits me for the poet’s task,
Which we will now resume with chearful hope,
Nor checked by aught of tamer argument
That lies before us, needful to be told.

Returned from that excursion, soon I bade
Farewell for ever to the private bowers
Of gowned students—quitted these, no more
To enter them, and pitched my vagrant tent,
A casual dweller and at large, among
The unfenced regions of society.
Yet undetermined to what plan of life
I should adhere, and seeming thence to have
A little space of intermediate time
Loose and at full command, to London first
I turned, if not in calmness, nevertheless
In no disturbance of excessive hope—
At ease from all ambition personal,
Frugal as there was need, and though self-willed,
Yet temperate and reserved, and wholly free
From dangerous passions. ’Twas at least two years
Before this season when I first beheld
That mighty place, a transient visitant;
And now it pleased me my abode to fix
Single in the wide waste. To have a house,
It was enough—what matter for a home?—
That owned me, living cheerfully abroad
With fancy on the stir from day to day,
And all my young affections out of doors.

There was a time when whatso’er is feigned
Of airy palaces and gardens built
By genii of romance, or hath in grave
Authentic history been set forth of Rome,
Alcairo, Babylon, or Persepolis,
Or given upon report by pilgrim friars
Of golden cities ten months’ journey deep
Among Tartarean wilds, fell short, far short,
Of that which I in simpleness believed
And thought of London—held me by a chain
Less strong of wonder and obscure delight.
I know not that herein I shot beyond
The common mark of childhood, but I well
Remember that among our flock of boys
Was one, a cripple from the birth, whom chance
Summoned from school to London—fortunate
And envied traveller—and when he returned,
After short absence, and I first set eyes
Upon his person, verily, though strange
The thing may seem, I was not wholly free
From disappointment to behold the same
Appearance, the same body, not to find
Some change, some beams of glory brought away
From that new region, Much I questioned him,
And every word he uttered, on my ears
Fell flatter than a caged parrot’s note,
That answers unexpectedly awry,
And mocks the prompter’s listening. Marvellous things
My fancy had shaped forth of sights and shows,
Processions, equipages, lords and dukes,
The King and the King’s palace, and not last
Or least, heaven bless him! the renowned Lord Mayor—
Dreams hardly less intense than those which wrought
A change of purpose in young Whittington
When he in fiendlessness, a drooping boy,
Sate on a stone and heard the bells speak out
Articulate music. Above all, one thought
Baffled my understanding, how men lived
Even next-door neighbours, as we say, yet still
Strangers, and knowing not each other’s names.

Oh wondrous power of words, how sweet they are
According to the meaning which they bring—
Vauxhall and Ranelagh, I then had heard
Of your green groves and wilderness of lamps,
Your gorgeous ladies, fairy cataracts,
And pageant fireworks. Nor must we forget
Those other wonders, different in kind
Though scarcely less illustrious in degree,
The river proudly bridged, the giddy top
And Whispering Gallery of St. Paul’s, the tombs
Of Westminster, the Giants of Guildhall,
Bedlam and the two figures at its gates,
Streets without end and churches numberless,
Statues with flowery gardens in vast squares,
The Monument, and Armoury of the Tower.
These fond imaginations, of themselves,
Had long before given way in season due,
Leaving a throng of others in their stead;
And now I looked upon the real scene,
Familiarly perused it day by day,
With keen and lively pleasure even there
Where disappointment was the strongest, pleased
Through courteous self-submission, as a tax
Paid to the object by prescriptive right,
A thing that ought to be. Shall I give way,
Copying the impression of the memory—
Though things remembered idly do half seem
The work of fancy—shall I, as the mood
Inclines me, here describe for pastime’s sake,
Some portion of that motley imagery,
A vivid pleasure of my youth, and now,
Among the lonely places that I love,
A frequent daydream for my riper mind?
And first, the look and aspect of the place—
The broad highway appearance, as it strikes
On strangers of all ages, the quick dance
Of colours, lights and forms, the Babel din,
The endless stream of men and moving things,
From hour to hour the illimitable walk
Still among streets, with clouds and sky above,
The wealth, the bustle and the eagerness,
The glittering chariots with their pampered steeds,
Stalls, barrows, porters, midway in the street
The scavenger that begs with hat in hand,
The labouring hackney-coaches, the rash speed
Of coaches travelling far, whirled on with horn
Loud blowing, and the sturdy drayman’s team
Ascending from some alley of the Thames
And striking right across the crowded Strand
Till the fore-horse veer round with punctual skill;
Here, there, and everywhere, a weary throng,
That comers and the goers face to face—
Face after face—the string of dazzling wares,
Shop after shop, with symbols, blazoned names,
And all the tradesman’s honours overhead:
Here, fronts of houses, like a title-page
With letters huge inscribed from top to toe;
Stationed above the door like guardian saints,  
There, allegoric shapes, female or male,  
Or physiognomies of real men,  
Land-warriors, kings, or admirals of the sea,  
Boyle, Shakespear, Newton, or the attractive head  
of some quack-doctor, famous in his day.

Meanwhile the roar continues, till at length,  
Escaped as from an enemy, we turn  
Abruptly into some sequestered nook,  
Still as a sheltered place when winds blow loud.  
At leisure thence, through tracts of thin resort,  
And sights and sounds that come at intervals,  
We take our way—a raree-show is here  
With children gathered round, another street  
Presents a company of dancing dogs,  
Or dromedary with an antic pair  
Of monkies on his back, a minstrel-band  
Of Savoyards, single and alone,  
An English ballad-singer. Private courts,  
Gloomy as coffins, and unsightly lanes  
Thrilled by some female vendor's scream—belike  
The very shrillest of all London cries—  
May then entangle us awhile,  
Conducted through those labyrinths unawares  
To privileged regions and inviolate,  
Where from their aery lodges studious lawyers  
Look out on waters, walks, and gardens green.

Thence back into the throng, until we reach—  
Following the tide that slackens by degrees—  
Some half-frequented scene where wider streets  
Bring straggling breezes of suburban air.  
Here files of ballads dangle from dead walls,  
Advertisements of giant size, from high  
Press forward in all colours on the sight—  
These, bold in conscious merit—lower down,  
That, fronted with a most imposing word,
Is peradventure one in masquerade. 215
As on the broadening causeway we advance,
Behold a face turned up towards us, strong
In lineaments, and red with over-toil:
'Tis one perhaps already met elsewhere,
A travelling cripple, by the trunk cut short, 220
And stumping with his arms. In sailor’s garb
Another lies at length beside a range
Of written characters, with chalk inscribed
Upon the smooth flat stones. The nurse is here,
The bachelor that loves to sun himself, 225
The military idler, and the dame
That field-ward takes her walk in decency.

Now homeward through the thickening hubbub, where
See—among less distinguishable shapes—
The Italian, with his frame of images 230
Upon his head; with basket at his waist,
The Jew; the stately and slow-moving Turk,
With freight of slippers piled beneath his arm.
Briefly, we find (if tired of random sights,
And haply to that search our thoughts should turn) 235
Among the crowd, conspicuous less or more
As we proceed, all specimens of man
Through all the colours which the sun bestows,
And every character of form and face:
The Swede, the Russian; from the genial south,
The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote
America, the hunter Indian; Moors,
Malays, Lascars, the Tartar and Chinese,
And Negro ladies in white muslin gowns.

At leisure let us view from day to day, 245
As they present themselves, the spectacles
Within doors: troops of wild beasts, birds and beasts
Of every nature from all climes convened,
And, next to these, those mimic sights that ape
The absolute presence of reality,
Expressing as in mirror sea and land,
And what earth is, and what she hath to shew—
I do not here allude to subtlest craft,
By means refined attaining purest ends,
But imitations fondly made in plain
Confession of man’s weakness and his loves.
Whether the painter—fashioning a work
To Nature’s circumambient scenery,
And with his greedy pencil taking in
A whole horizon on all sides—with power
Like that of angels or commissioned spirits,
Plant us upon some lofty pinnacle
Or in a ship on waters, with a world
Of life and lifelike mockery to east,
To west, beneath, behind us, and before,
Or more mechanic artist represent
By scale exact, in model, wood or clay,
From shading colours also borrowing help,
Some miniature of famous spots and things,
Domestic, or the boast of foreign realms:
The Firth of Forth, and Edinburgh, throned
On crags, fit empress of that mountain land;
St Peter’s Church; or, more aspiring aim,
In microscopic vision, Rome itself;
Or else, perhaps, some rural haunt, the Falls
Of Tivoli, and dim Frescati’s bowers,
And high upon the steep that mouldering fane,
The Temple of the Sibyl—every tree
Through all the landscape, tuft, stone, scratch minute,
And every cottage, lurking in the rocks—
All that the traveller sees when he is there.

And to these exhibitions mute and still
Others of wider scope, where living men,
Music, and shifting pantomimic scenes,
Together joined their multifarious aid
To heighten the allurement. Need I fear
To mention by its name, as in degree
Lowest of these, and humblest in attempt—
Yet richly graced with honours of its own—
Half-rural Sadler’s Wells? Though at that time
Intolerant, as is the way of youth
Unless itself be pleased, I more than once
Here took my seat, and, maugre frequent fits
Of irksomeness, with ample recompense
Saw singes, rope-dancers, giants and dwarfs,
Clowns, conjurors, posture-masters, harlequins,
Amid the uproar of the rabblemment,
Perform their feats. Nor was it mean delight
To watch crude Nature work in untaught minds,
To note the laws and progress of belief—
Though obstinate on this way, yet on that
How willingly we travel, and how far!—
To have, for instance, brought upon the scene
The champion, Jack the Giant-killer; lo,
He dons his coat of darkness, on the stage
Walks, and atchieves his wonders, from the eye
Of living mortal safe as is the moon
‘Hid in her vacant interlunar cave’.
Delusion bold (and faith must needs be coy)
How is it wrought?—his garb is black, the word
INVISIBLE flames forth upon his chest.

Nor was it unamusing here to view
Those samples, as of the ancient comedy
And Thespian times, dramas of living men
And recent things yet warm with life: a sea-fight,
Shipwreck, or some domestic incident
The fame of which is scattered through the land,
Such as this daring brotherhood of late
Set forth—too holy theme for such a place,
And doubtless treated with irreverence,
Albeit with their very best of skill—
I mean, O distant friend, a story drawn
From our own ground, the Maid of Buttermere,
And how the spoiler came, ‘a bold bad man’
To God unfaithful, children, wife, and home,
And wooed the artless daughter of the hills,
And wedded her, in cruel mockery
Of love and marriage bonds. O friend, I speak
With tender recollection of that time
When first we saw the maiden, then a name
By us unheard of—in her cottage-inn
Were welcomed, and attended on by her,
Both stricken with one feeling of delight,
An admiration of her modest mien
And carriage, marked by unexampled grace.
Not unfamiliarly we since that time
Have seen her, her discretion have observed,
Her just opinions, female modesty,
Her patience, and retiredness of mind
Unspoiled by commendation and excess
Of public notice. This memorial verse
Comes from the poet's heart, and is her due;
For we were nursed—as almost might be said—
On the same mountains, children at one time,
Must haply often on the self-same day
Have from our several dwellings gone abroad
To gather daffodils on Coker’s stream.

These last words uttered, to my argument
I was returning, when—with sundry forms
Mingled, that in the way which I must tread
Before me stand—thy image rose again,
Mary of Buttermere! She lives in peace
Upon the spot where she as born and reared;
Without contamination does she live
In quietness, without anxiety.
Beside the mountain chapel sleeps in earth
Her new-born infant, fearless as a lamb
That thither comes from some unsheltered place
To rest beneath the little rock-like pile
When storms are blowing. Happy are they both,
Mother and child! These feelings, in themselves
Trite, do yet scarcely seem so when I think
Of those ingenuous moments of our youth
Ere yet by use we have learnt to slight the crimes
And sorrows of the world. Those days are now
My theme, and, ’mid the numerous scenes which they
Have left behind them, foremost I am crossed
Here by remembrance of two figures: one
A rosy babe, who for a twelvemonth’s space
Perhaps had been of age to deal about
Articulate prattle, child as beautiful
As ever sate upon a mother’s knee;
The other was the parent of that babe—
But on the mother’s cheek the tints were false,
A painted bloom. ’Twas at a theatre
That I beheld this pair; the boy had been
The pride and pleasure of all lookers-on
In whatsoever place, but seemed in this
A sort of alien scattered from the clouds.
Of lusty vigour, more than infantine,
He was in limbs, in face a cottage rose
Just three part blown—a cottage-child, but ne’er
Saw I by cottage or elsewhere a babe
By Nature’s gifts so honored. Upon a board,
Whence an attendant of the theatre
Served out refreshments, had this child been placed,
And there he sate environed with a ring
Of chance spectators, chiefly dissolute men
And shameless women—treated and caressed—
Ate, drank, and with the fruit and glasses played,
While oaths, indecent speech, and ribaldry
Were rife about him as are songs of birds
In springtime after showers. The mother, too,
Was present, but of her I know no more
Than hath been said, and scarcely at this time
Do I remember her; but I behold
The lovely boy as I beheld him then,
Among the wretched and the falsely gay,
Like one of those who walked with hair unsinged
Amid the fiery furnace. He hath since
Appeared to me ofttimes as if embalmed
By Nature—through some special privilege
Stopped at the growth he had—destined to live,
To be, to have been, come, and go, a child
And nothing more, no partner in the years
That bear us forward to distress and guilt,
Pain and abasement; beauty in such excess
Adorned him in that miserable place.
So have I thought of him a thousand times—
And seldom otherwise—but he perhaps,
Mary, may now have lived till he could look
With envy on thy nameless babe that sleeps
Beside the mountain chapel undisturbed.

It was but little more than three short years
Before the season which I speak of now
When first, a traveller from our pastoral hills,
Southward two hundred miles I had advanced,
And for the first time in my life did hear
The voice of woman utter blasphemy—
Saw woman as she is to open shame
Abandoned, and the pride of public vice.
Full surely from the bottom of my heart
I shuddered; but the pain was almost lost,
Absorbed and buried in the immensity
Of the effect: a barrier seemed at once
Thrown in, that from humanity divorced
The human form, splitting the race of man
In twain, yet leaving the same outward shape.
Distress of mind ensued upon this sight,
And ardent meditation—afterwards
A milder sadness on such spectacles
Attended: thought, commiseration, grief,
For the individual and the overthrow
Of her soul’s beauty—farther at that time
Than this I was but seldom led; in truth
The sorrow of the passion stopped me here.
I quit this painful theme, enough is said
To shew what thoughts must often have been mine
At theatres, which then were my delight—
A yearning made more strong by obstacles
Which slender funds imposed. Life then was new,
The senses easily pleased; the lustres, lights,
The carving and the gilding, paint and glare,
And all the mean upholstery of the place,
Wanted not animation in my sight,
Far less the living figures on the stage,
Solemn or gay—whether some beauteous dame
Advanced in radiance through a deep recess
Of thick-entangled forest, like the moon
Opening the clouds; or sovereign king, announced
With flourishing trumpets, came in full-blown state
Of the world’s greatness, winding round with train
Of courtiers, banners, and a length of guards;
Or captive led in abject weeds, and jingling
His slender manacles; or romping girl
Bounced, leapt, and pawed the air; or mumbling sire,
A scarecrow pattern of old age, patched up
Of all the tatters of infirmity,
All loosely put together, hobbled in
Stumping upon a cane, with which he smites
From time to time the solid boards and makes them
Prat somewhat loudly of the whereabout
Of one so overloaded with his years.
But what of this?—the laugh, the grin, grimace,
And all the antics and buffoonery,
The least of them not lost, were all received
With charitable pleasure. Through the night,
Between the show, and many-headed mass
Of the spectators, and each little nook
That had its fray or brawl, how eagerly
And with what flashes, as it were, the mind
Turned this way, that way—sportive and alert
And watchful, as a kitten when at play,
While winds are blowing round her, among grass
And rustling leaves. Enchanting age and sweet—
Romantic almost, looked at through a space,
How small, of intervening years! For then,
Though surely no mean progress had been made
In meditations holy and sublime,
Yet something of a girlish childlike gloss
Of novelty survived for scenes like these—
Pleasure that had been handed down from times
When at a country playhouse, having caught
In summer through the fractured wall a glimpse
Of daylight, at the thought of where I was
I gladdened more than if I had beheld
Before me some bright cavern of romance,
Or than we do when on our beds we lie
At night, in warmth, when rains are beating hard.

The matter which detains me now will seem
To many neither dignified enough
Nor arduous, and is doubtless in itself
Humble and low—yet not to be despised
By those who have observed the curious props
By which the perishable hours of life
Rest on each other, and the world of thought
Exists and is sustained. More lofty themes,
Such as at least do wear a prouder face,
Might here be spoken of; but when I think
Of these I feel the imaginative power
Languish within me. Even then it slept,
When, wrought upon by tragic sufferings,
The heart was full—amid my sobs and tears
It slept, even in the season of my youth.
For though I was most passionately moved,
And yielded to the changes of the scene
With most obsequious feeling, yet all this
Passed not beyond the suburbs of the mind.
If aught there were of real grandeur here
'Twas only then when gross realities,
The incarnation of the spirits that moved
Amid the poet’s beauteous world—called forth
With that distinctness which a contrast gives,
Or opposition—made me recognise
As by a glimpse, the things which I had shaped
And yet not shaped, had seen and scarcely seen,
Had felt, and thought of in my solitude.

Pass we from entertainments that are such
Professedly, to others titled higher,
Yet, in the estimate of youth at least,
More near akin to these than names imply—
I mean the brawls of lawyers in their courts
Before the ermined judge, or that great stage
Where senators, tongue-favored men, perform,
Admired and envied. Oh, the beating heart,
When one among the prime of these rose up,
One of whose name from childhood we had heard
Familiarly, a household term, like those—
The Bedfords, Glocesters, Salisburys of old—
Which the fifth Harry talks of. Silence, hush,
This is no trifler, no short-flighted wit,
No stammerer of a minute, painfully
Delivered. No, the orator hath yoked
The hours, like young Aurora, to his car—
O presence of delight, can patience e’er
Grow weary of attending on a track
That kindles with such glory? Marvellous,
The enchantment spreads and rises—all are rapt
Astonished—like a hero in romance
He winds away his never-ending horn:
Words follow words, sense seems to follow sense—
What memory and what logic!—till the strain
Transcendent, superhuman as it is,
Grows tedious even in a young man’s ear.

These are grave follies; other public shows
The capital city teems with of a kind
More light—and where but in the holy church?
There have I seen a comely bachelor,
fresh from a toilette of two hours, ascend 550
The pulpit, with seraphic glance look up,
and in a tone elaborately low
Beginning, lead his voice through many a maze
A minuet course, and, winding up his mouth
From time to time into an orifice
Most delicate, a lurking eyelet, small
And only not invisible, again
Open it out, diffusing thence a smile
Of rapt irradiation exquisite.
Meanwhile the Evangelists, Isaiah, Job,
Moses, and he who penned the other day
*The Death of Abel*, Shakespear, Doctor Young,
And Ossian—doubt not, ’tis the naked truth—
Summoned from streamy Morven, each and all
Must in their turn lend ornament and flowers 565
To entwine the crook of eloquence with which
This pretty shepherd, pride of all the plains,
Leads up and down his captivated flock.

I glance but at a few conspicuous marks,
Leaving ten thousand others that do each— 570
In hall or court, conventicle, or shop,
In public room or private, park or street—
With fondness reared on his own pedestal,
Look out for admiration. Folly, vice,
Extravagance in gesture, mien and dress,
And all the strife of singularity—
Lies to the ear, and lies to every sense—
Of these and of the living shapes they wear
There is no end. Such candidates for regard,
Although well pleased to be where they were found,
I did not hunt after or greatly prize,
Nor made unto myself a secret boast
Of reading them with quick and curious eye,
But as a common produce—things that are
Today, tomorrow will be—took of them 585
Such willing note as, on some errand bound
Of pleasure or of love, some traveller might,
Among a thousand other images,
Of sea-shells that bestud the sandy beach,
Or daisies swarming through the fields in June.

But foolishness, and madness in parade,
Though most at home in this their dear domain,
Are scattered everywhere, no rarities,
Even to the rudest novice of the schools.
O friend, one feeling was there which belonged
To this great city by exclusive right:
How often in the overflowing streets
Have I gone forwards with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, ‘The face of every one
That passes by me is a mystery.’
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still montains, or appears in dreams,
And all the ballast of familiar life—
The present, and the past, hope, fear, all stays,
All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man—
Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known.
And once, far travelled in such mood, beyond
The reach of common indications, lost
Amid the moving pageant, ’twas my chance
Abruptly to be smitten with the view
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
The story of the man, and who he was.
My mind did at this spectacle turn round
As with the might of waters, and it seemed
To me that in this label was a type
Or emblem of the utmost that we know
Both of ourselves and of the universe,
And on the shape of this unmoving man,
His fixed face and sightless eyes, I looked,
As if admonished from another world.

Though reared upon the base of outward things,
These chiefly are such structures as the mind
Builds for itself. Scenes different there are—
Full-formed—which take, with small internal help,
Possession of the faculties: the peace
Of night, for instance, the solemnity
Of Nature’s intermediate hours of rest
When the great tide of human life stands still,
The business of the day to come unborn,
Of that gone by locked up as in the grave;
The calmness, beauty, of the spectacle,
Sky, stillness, moonshine, empty streets, and sounds
Unfrequent as in desarts; at late hours
Of winter evenings when unwholesome rains
Are falling hard, with people yet astir,
The feeble salutation from the voice
Of some unhappy woman now and then
Heard as we pass, when no one looks about,
Nothing is listened to. But these I fear
Are falsely catalogued things that are, are not,
Even as we give them welcome, or assist—
Are prompt, or are remiss. What say you then
To times when half the city shall break out
Full of one passion—vengeance, rage, or fear—
To executions, to a street on fire,
Mobs, riots, or rejoicings? From those sights
Take one, an annual festival, the fair
Holden where martyrs suffered in past time,
And named of St. Bartholomew, there see
A work that’s finished to our hands, that lays,
If any spectacle on earth can do,
The whole creative powers of man asleep.
For once the Muse’s help will we implore,
And she shall lodge us—wafted on her wings
Above the press and danger of the crowd—
Upon some showman's platform. What a hell
For eyes and ears, what anarchy and din
Barbarian and infernal—'tis a dream
Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound.
Below, the open space, through every nook
Of the wide area, twinkles, is alive
With heads; the midway region and above
Is thronged with staring pictures and huge scrolls,
Dumb proclamations of the prodigies;
And chattering monkeys dangling from their poles,
And children whirling in their roundabouts;
With those that stretch the neck, and strain the eyes,
And crack the voice in rivalship, the crowd
Inviting; with buffoons against buffoons
Grimacing, writhing, screaming; him who grinds
The hurdy-gurdy, at the fiddle weaves,
Rattles the salt-box, thumps the kettle-drum,
And him who at the trumpet puffs his cheeks,
The silver-collared negro with his timbrel,
Equestrians, tumblers, women, girls, and boys,
Blue-breeched, pink-vested, and with towering plumes.
All moveables of wonder from all parts
Are here, albinos, painted Indians, dwarfs,
The horse of knowledge, and the learned pig,
The stone-eater, the man that swallows fire,
Giants, ventriloquists, the invisible girl,
The bust that speaks and moves its goggling eyes,
The waxwork, clockwork, all the marvellous craft
Of modern Merlins, wild beasts, puppet-shows,
All out-o'-th'-way, far-fetched, perverted things,
All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts
Of man—his dulness, madness, and other feats,
All jumbled up together to make up
This parliament of monsters. Tents and booths
Meanwhile—as if the whole were one vast mill—
Are vomiting, receiving, on all sides,
Men, women, three-years’ children, babes in arms.
O, blank confusion, and a type not false
Of what the mighty city is itself
To all, except a straggler here and there—
To the whole swarm of its inhabitants—
An undistinguishable world to men,
The slaves unresptied of low pursuits,
Living amid the same perpetual flow
Of trivial objects, melted and reduced
To one identity by differences
That have no law, no meaning, and no end—
Oppression under which even highest minds
Must labour, whence the strongest are not free.
But though the picture weary out the eye,
By nature an unmanageable sight,
It is not wholly so to him who looks
In steadiness, who hath among least things
An under-sense of greatest, sees the parts
As parts, but with a feeling of the whole.
This, of all acquisitions first, awaits
On sundry and most widely different modes
Of education—nor with least delight
On that through which I passed. Attention comes,
And comprehensiveness and memory,
From early converse with the works of God
Among all regions, chiefly where appear
Most obviously simplicity and power.
By influence habitual to the mind
The mountain’s outline and its steady form
Gives a pure grandeur, and its presence shapes
The measure and the prospect of the soul
To majesty; such virtue have the forms
Perennial of the ancient hills—nor less
The changeful language of their countenances
Gives movement of the thoughts, and multitude,
With order and relation. This (if still,
As hitherto, with freedom I may speak,
And the same perfect openness of mind,
Not violating any just restraint,
As I would hope, of real modesty),
This did I feel in that vast receptacle.
The spirit of Nature was upon me here,
The soul of beauty and enduring life
Was present as a habit, and diffused— 740
Through meagre lines and colours, and the press
Of self-destroying, transitory things—
Composure and ennobling harmony.
Book Eighth Retrospect: Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind

WHAT sounds are those, Helvellyn, which are heard
Up to thy summit, through the depth of air
Ascending as if distance had the power
To make the sounds more audible? What crowd
Is yon, assembled in the gay green field?
Crowd seems it, solitary hill, to thee,
Though but a little family of men—
Twice twenty—with their children and their wives,
And here and there a stranger interspersed.
It is a summer festival, a fair,
Such as—on this side now, and now on that,
Repeated through his tributary vales—
Helvellyn, in the silence of his rest
Sees annually, if storms be not abroad
And mists have left him an unshrouded head.
Delightful day it is for all who dwell
In this secluded glen, and eagerly
They give it welcome. Long ere heat of noon,
Behold the cattle are driven down; the sheep
That have for traffic been culled out are penned
In cotes that stand together on the plain
Ranged side by side; the chaffering is begun;
The heifer lows uneasy at the voice
Of a new master; bleat the flocks aloud.
Booths are there none: a stall or two is here,
A lame man, or a blind (the one to beg,
The other to make music; hither too
From far, with basket slung upon her arm
Of hawker's wares—books, pictures, combs, and pins—
Some aged woman finds her way again,
Year after year a punctual visitant;
The showman with his freight upon his back,
And once perchance in lapse of many years,
Prouder itinerant—mountebank, or he
Whose wonders in a covered wain lie hid.
But one is here, the loveliest of them all,
Some sweet lass of the valley, looking out
For gains—and who that sees her would not buy?
Fruits of her father's orchard, apples, pears
(On that day only to such office stooping),
She carries in her basket, and walks round
Among the crowd, half pleased with, half ashamed
Of her new calling, blushing restlessly.
The children now are rich, the old man now
Is generous, so gaiety prevails
Which all partake of, young and old.

Immense
Is the recess, the circumambient world
Magnificent, by which they are embraced.
They move about upon the soft green field;
How little they, they and their doings, seem,
Their herds and flocks about them, they themselves,
And all which they can further or obstruct—
Through utter weakness pitifully dear,
As tender infants are—and yet how great,
For all things serve them: them the morning light
Loves as it glistens on the silent rocks,
And them the silent rocks, which now from high
Look down upon them, the reposing clouds,
The lurking brooks from their invisible haunts,
And old Helvellyn, conscious of the stir,
And the blue sky that roofs their calm abode.

With deep devotion, Nature, did I feel
In that great city what I owed to thee:
High thoughts of God and man, and love of man, 65
Triumphant over all those loathsome sights
Of wretchedness and vice, a watchful eye,
Which, with the outside of our human life
Not satisfied, must read the inner mind.
For I already had been taught to love 70
My fellow-beings, to such habits trained
Among the woods and mountains, where I found
In thee a gracious guide to lead me forth
Beyond the bosom of my family,
My friends and youthful playmates. 'Twas thy power 75
That raised the first complacency in me,
And noticeable kindliness of heart,
Love human to the creature in himself
As he appeared, a stranger in my path,
Before my eyes a brother of this world— 80
Thou first didst with those motions of delight
Inspire me. I remember, far from home
Once having strayed while yet a very child,
I saw a sight—and with what joy and love!
It was a day of exhalations spread 85
Upon the mountains, mists and steam-like fogs
Redounding everywhere, not vehement,
But calm and mild, gentle and beautiful,
With gleams of sunshine on the eyelet spots
And loopholes of the hills, wherever seen, 90
Hidden by quiet process, and as soon
Unfolded, to be huddled up again—
Along a narrow valley and profound
I journeyed, when aloft above my head,
Emerging from the silvery vapours, lo, 95
A shepherd and his dog, in open day.
Girt round with mists they stood, and looked about
From that enclosure small, inhabitants
Of an aerial island floating on,
As seemed, with that abode in which they were, 100
A little pendant area of grey rocks,
By the soft wind breathed forward. With delight
As bland almost, one evening I beheld—
And at as early age (the spectacle
Is common, but by me was then first seen)—
A shepherd in the bottom of a vale,
Towards the centre standing, who with voice,
And hand waved to and fro as need required,
Gave signal to his dog, thus teaching him
To chace along the mazes of steep crags
The flock he could not see. And so the brute—
Dear creature—with a man’s intelligence,
Advancing, or retreating on his steps,
Through every pervious strait, to right or left,
Thridded a way unbaffled, while the flock
Fled upwards from the terror of his bark
Through rocks and seams of turf with liquid gold
Irradiate—that deep farewell light by which
The setting sun proclaims the love he bears
To mountain regions.

Beauteous the domain
Where to the sense of beauty first my heart
Was opened—tract more exquisitely fair
Than in that paradise of ten thousand trees,
Or Gehol’s famous gardens, in a clime

    from widest empire, for delight
Of the Tartarian dynasty composed
Beyond that mighty wall, not fabulous
(China’s stupendous mound!) by patient skill
Of myriads, and boon Nature’s lavish help:
Scene linked to scene, and ever-growing change,
Soft, grand, or gay, with palaces and domes
Of pleasure spangled over, shady dells
For eastern monasteries, sunny mounds
With temples crested, bridges, gondolas,
Rocks, dens and groves of foliage, taught to melt
Into each other their obsequious hues—
Going and gone again, in subtile chace,
Too fine to be pursued—or standing forth
In no discordant opposition, strong
And gorgeous as the colours side by side
Bedded among the plumes of tropic birds;
And mountains over all, embracing all,
And all the landscape endlessly enriched
With waters running, falling, or asleep.
But lovelier far than this the paradise
Where I was reared, in Nature’s primitive gifts
Favored no less, and more to every sense
Delicious, seeing that the sun and sky,
The elements, and seasons in their change,
Do find their dearest fellow-labourer there
The heart of man—a district on all sides
The fragrance breathing of humanity,
Man free, man working for himself, with choice
Of time, and place, and object; by his wants,
His comforts, native occupations, cares,
Conducted on to individual ends
Or social, and still followed by a train,
Unwooed, unthought-of even: simplicity,
And beauty, and inevitable grace.

Yea, doubtless, at any age when but a glimpse
Of those resplendent gardens, with their frame
Imperial, and elaborate ornaments,
Would to a child be transport over-great,
When but a half-hour’s roam through such a place
Would leave behind a dance of images
That shall break in upon his sleep for weeks,
Even then the common haunts of the green earth
With the ordinary human interests
Which they embosom—all without regard
As both may seem—are fastening on the heart
Insensibly, each with the other’s help,
So that we love, not knowing that we love,
And feel, not knowing whence our feeling comes.
Such league have these two principles of joy
In our affections. I have singled out
Some moments, the earliest that I could, in which
Their several currents, blended into one—
Weak yet, and gathering imperceptibly—
Flowed in by gushes. My first human love,
As hath been mentioned, did incline to those
Whose occupations and concerns were most
Illustrated by Nature, and adorned,
And shepherds were the men who pleased me first:
Not such as, in Arcadian fastnesses
Sequestered, handed down among themselves,
So ancient poets sing, the golden age;
Nor such—a second race, allied to these—
As Shakespeare in the wood of Arden placed,
Where Phoebe sighed for the false Ganymede,
Or there where Florizel and Perdita
Together dance, Queen of the feast and King;
Nor such as Spenser fabled. True it is
That I had heard, what he perhaps had seen,
Of maids at sunrise bringing in from far
Their May-bush, and along the streets in flocks
Parading, with a song of taunting rhymes
Aimed at the laggards slumbering within doors—
Had also heard, from those who yet remembered,
Tales of the maypole dance, and flowers that decked
The posts and the kirk-pillars, and of youths,
That each one with his maid at break of day,
By annual custom, issued forth in troops
To drink the waters of some favorite well,
And hang it round with garlands. This, alas,
Was but a dream: the times had scattered all
These lighter graces, and the rural ways
And manners which it was my chance to see
In childhood were severe and unadorned,
The unluxuriant produce of a life
Intent on little but substantial needs,
Yet beautiful—and beauty that was felt.
But images of danger and distress  
And suffering, these took deepest hold of me,  
Man suffering among awful powers and forms:  
Of this I heard and saw enough to make  
The imagination restless—nor was free  
Myself from frequent perils. Nor were tales  
Wanting, the tragedies of former times,  
Or hazards and escapes, which in my walks  
I carried with me among crags and woods  
And mountains; and of these may here be told  
One as recorded by my household dame.

‘At the first falling of autumnal snows  
A shepherd and his son one day went forth’,  
Thus did the matron’s tale begin, ‘to seek  
A straggler of their flock. They both had ranged  
Upon this service the preceding day  
All over their own pastures and beyond,  
And now, at sunrise sallying out again,  
Renewed their search, begun where from Dove Crag—  
Ill home for bird so gentle—they looked down  
On Deepdale Head, and Brothers Water (named  
From those two brothers that were drowned therein)  
Thence, northward, having passed by Arthur’s Seat,  
To Fairfield’s highest summit. On the right  
Leaving St Sunday’s Pike, to Grisedale Tarn  
They shot, and over that cloud-loving hill,  
Seat Sandal—a fond lover of the clouds—  
Thence up Helvellyn, a superior mount  
With prospect underneath of Striding Edge  
And Grisedale’s houseless vale, along the brink  
Of Russet Cove, and those two other coves,  
Huge skeletons of crags, which from the trunk  
Of old Helvellyn spread their arms abroad  
And make a stormy harbour for the winds.  
Far went those shepherds in their devious quest,  
From mountain ridges peeping as they passed  
Down into every glen; at length the boy
Said, “Father, with your leave I will go back, And range the ground which we have searched before.”

So speaking, southward down the hill the lad

Sprang like a gust of wind, crying aloud,

“I know where I shall find him.” ‘For take note’,

Said here my grey-haired dame, ‘that though the storm

Drive one of these poor creatures miles and miles,

If he can crawl he will return again

To his own hills, the spots where when a lamb

He learnt to pasture at his mother’s side.

After so long a labour suddenly

Bethinking him of this, the boy

Pursued his way towards a brook whose course

Was through that unfenced tract of mountain ground

Which to his father’s little farm belonged,

The home and ancient birthright of their flock.

Down the deep channel of the stream he went,

Prying through every nook. Meanwhile the rain

Began to fall upon the mountain tops,

Thick storm and heavy which for three hours’ space

Abated not, and all that time the boy

Was busy in his search, until at length

He spied the sheep upon a plot of grass,

An island in the brook. It was a place

Remote and deep, piled round with rocks, where foot

Of man or beast was seldom used to tread;

But now, when everywhere the summer grass

Had failed, this one adventurer, hunger-pressed,

Had left his fellows, and made his way alone

To the green plot of pasture in the brook.

Before the boy knew well what he had seen,

He leapt upon the island with proud heart

And with a prophet’s joy. Immediately

The sheep sprang forward to the further shore

And was borne headlong by the roaring flood—

At this the boy looked round him, and his heart

Fainted with fear. Thrice did he turn his face

To either brink, nor could he summon up
The courage that was needful to leap back
Cross the tempestuous torrent: so he stood,
A prisoner on the island, not without
More than one thought of death and his last hour.
Meanwhile the father had returned alone
To his own house; and now at the approach
Of evening he went forth to meet his son,
Conjecturing vainly for what cause the boy
Had stayed so long. The shepherd took his way
Up his own mountain grounds, where, as he walked
Along the steep that overhung the brook
He seemed to hear a voice, which was again
Repeated, like the whistling of a kite.
At this, now knowing why, as oftentimes
Long afterwards he has been heard to say,
Down to the brook he went, and tracked its course
Upwards among the o’erhanging rocks—nor thus
Had he gone far, ere he espied the boy,
Where on that little plot of ground he stood
Right in the middle of the roaring stream,
Now stronger every moment and more fierce.
The sight was such as no one could have seen
Without distress and fear. The shepherd heard
The outcry of his son, he stretched his staff
Towards him, bade him leap—which word scarce said,
The boy was safe within his father’s arms.’

Smooth life had flock and shepherd in old time,
Long springs and tepid winters on the banks
Of delicate Galesus—and no less
Those scattered along Adria’s myrtle shores—
Smooth life the herdman and his snow-white herd,
To triumphs and to sacrificial rites
Devoted, on the inviolable stream
Of rich Clitumnus; and the goatherd lived
As sweetly underneath the pleasant brows
Of cool Lucretilis, where the pipe was heard
Of Pan, the invisible God, thrilling the rocks
With tutelary music, from all harm 325
The fold protecting. I myself, mature
In manhood then, have seen a pastoral tract
Like one of these, where fancy might run wild,
Though under skies less generous and serene;
Yet there, as for herself, had Nature framed 330
A pleasure-ground, diffused a fair expanse
Of level pasture, islanded with groves
And banked with woody risings—but the plain
Endless, here opening widely out, and there
Shut up in lesser lakes or beds of lawn 335
And intricate recesses, creek or bay
Sheltered within a shelter, where at large
The shepherd strays, a rolling hut his home:
Thither he comes with springtime, there abides
All summer, and at sunrise ye may hear 340
His flute or flagelet resounding far.
There’s not a nook or hold of that vast space,
Nor strait where passage is, but it shall have
In turn its visitant, telling there his hours
In unlaborious pleasure, with no task 345
More toilsome than to carve a beechen bowl
For spring or fountain, which the traveller finds
When through the region he pursues at will
His devious course.

A glimpse of such sweet life 350
I saw when, from the melancholy walls
Of Goslar, once imperial, I renewed
My daily walk along that cheerful plain,
Which, reaching to her gates, spreads east and west
And northwards, from beneath the mountainous verge 355
Of the Hercynian forest. Yet hail to you,
Your rocks and precipices, ye that seize
The heart with firmer grasp, your snows and streams
Ungovernable, and your terrifying winds,
That howled so dismally when I have been 360
Companionless among your solitudes!
There, 'tis the shepherd's task the winter long
To wait upon the storms: of their approach
Sagacious, from the height he drives his flock
Down into sheltering coves, and feeds them there
Through the hard time, long as the storm is 'locked'
(So do they phrase it), bearing from the stalls
A toilsome burthen up the craggy ways
To strew it on the snow. And when the spring
Looks out, and all the mountains dance with lambs,
He through the enclosures won from the steep waste,
And through the lower heights hath gone his rounds;
And when the flock with warmer weather climbs
Higher and higher, him his office leads
To range among them through the hills dispersed,
And watch their goings, whatsoever track
Each wanderer chuses for itself—a work
That lasts the summer through. He quits his home
At dayspring, and no sooner doth the sun
Begin to strike him with a fire-like heat,
Than he lies down upon some shining place,
And breakfasts with his dog. When he hath stayed—
As for the most he doth—beyond this time,
He springs up with a bound, and then away!
Ascending fast with his long pole in hand,
Or winding in and out among the crags.
What need to follow him through what he does
Or sees in his day's march? He feels himself
In those vast regions where his service is
A freeman, wedded to his life of hope
And hazard, and hard labour interchanged
With that majestic indolence so dear
To native man.

A rambling schoolboy, thus
Have I beheld him; without knowing why,
Have felt his presence in his own domain
As of a lord and master, or a power,
Or genius, under Nature, under God,
Presiding—and severest solitude
Seemed more commanding oft when he was there. 400
Seeking the raven’s nest and suddenly
Surprized with vapours, or on rainy days
When I have angled up the lonely brooks,
Mine eyes have glanced upon him, few steps off,
In size a giant, stalking through the fog,
His sheep like Greenland bears. At other times,
When round some shady promontory turning,
His form hath flashed upon me glorified
By the deep radiance of the setting sun;
Or him have I descried in distant sky,
A solitary object and sublime,
Above all height, like an aërial cross,
As it is stationed on some spiry rock
Of the Chartreuse, for worship. Thus was man
Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes, 415
And thus my heart at first was introduced
To an unconscious love and reverence
Of human nature; hence the human form
To me was like an index of delight,
Of grace and honour, power and worthiness.
Meanwhile, this creature—spiritual almost
As those of books, but more exalted far,
Far more of an imaginative form—
Was not a Corin of the groves, who lives
For his own fancies, or to dance by the hour 425
In coronal, with Phyllis in the midst,
But, for the purpose of kind, a man
With the most common—husband, father—learned,
Could teach, admonish, suffered with the rest
From vice and folly, wretchedness and fear.
Of this I little saw, cared less for it,
But something must have felt.

Call ye these appearances
Which I beheld of shepherds in my youth,
This sanctity of Nature given to man, 435
A shadow, a delusion?—ye who are fed
By the dead letter, not the spirit of things,
Whose truth is not a motion or a shape
Instinct with vital functions, but a block
Or waxen image which yourselves have made,
And ye adore. But blessèd be the God
Of Nature and of man that this was so,
That men did at the first present themselves
Before my untaught eyes thus purified,
Removed, and at a distance that was fit.
And so we all of us in some degree
Are led to knowledge, whencesoever led,
And howsoever—were it otherwise,
And we found evil fast as we find good
In our first years, or think that it is found,
How could the innocent heart bear up and live?
But doubly fortunate my lot: not here
 Alone, that something of a better life
Perhaps was round me than it is the privilege
Of most to move in, but that first I looked
 At man through objects that were great and fair,
First communed with him by their help. And thus
Was founded a sure safeguard and defence
Against the weight of meanness, selfish cares,
Coarse manners, vulgar passions, that beat in
On all sides from the ordinary world
In which we traffic. Starting from this point,
I had my face towards the truth, began
With an advantage, furnished with that kind
Of prepossession without which the soul
Receives no knowledge that can bring forth good—
No genuine insight ever comes to her—
Happy in this, that I with Nature walked,
Not having a too early intercourse
With the deformities of crowded life,
And those ensuing laughters and contempts
Self-pleasing, which if we would wish to think
With admiration and respect of man
Will not permit us, but pursue the mind
That to devotion willingly would be raised,
Into the temple of the temple’s heart.

Yet do not deem, my friend, though thus I speak
Of man as having taken in my mind
A place thus early which might almost seem
Preeminent, that this was really so.
Nature herself was at this unripe time
But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures. And long afterwards
When those had died away, and Nature did
For her own sake become my joy, even then,
And upwards through late youth until not less
Than three-and-twenty summers had been told,
Was man in my affections and regards
Subordinate to her, her awful forms
And viewless agencies—a passion, she,
A rapture often, and immediate joy
Ever at hand; he distant, but a grace
Occasional, and accidental thought,
His hour being not yet come. Far less had then
The inferior creatures, beast or bird, attuned
My spirit to that gentleness of love,
Won from me those minute obeisances
Of tenderness which I may number now
With my first blessings. Nevertheless, on these
The light of beauty did not fall in vain,
Or grandeur circumfuse them to no end.

Why should I speak of tillers of the soil?—
The ploughman and his team; or men and boys
In festive summer busy with the rake,
Old men and ruddy maids, and little ones
All out together, and in sun and shade
Dispersed among the hay-grounds alder-fringed;
The quarryman, far heard, that blasts the rock;
The fishermen in pairs, the one to row,
And one to drop the net, plying their trade
‘Mid tossing lakes and tumbling boats’ and winds
Whistling; the miner, melancholy man,
That works by taper-light, while all the hills
Are shining with the glory of the day.

But when that first poetic faculty
Of plain imagination and severe—
No longer a mute influence of the soul,
An element of the nature’s inner self—
Began to have some promptings to put on
A visible shape, and to the works of art,
The notions and the images of books,
Did knowingly conform itself (by these
Enflamed, and proud of that her new delight),
There came among these shapes of human life
A wilfulness of fancy and conceit
Which gave them new importance to the mind—
And Nature and her objects beautified
These fictions, as, in some sort, in their turn
They banished her. From touch of this new power
Nothing was safe: the elder-tree that grew
Beside the well-known charnel-house had then
A dismal look, the yew-tree had its ghost
That took its station there for ornament.
Then common death was none, common mishap,
But matter for this humour everywhere,
The tragic super-tragic, else left short.
Then, if a widow staggering with the blow
Of her distress was known to have made her way
To the cold grave in which her husband slept,
One night, or haply more than one—through pain
Or half-insensate impotence of mind—
The fact was caught at greedily, and there
She was a visitant the whole year through,
Wetting the turf with never-ending tears,
And all the storms of heaven must beat on her.
Through wild obliquities could I pursue
Among all objects of the fields and groves
These cravings: when the foxglove, one by one,
Upwards through every stage of its tall stem
Had shed its bells, and stood by the wayside
Dismantled, with a single one perhaps
Left at the ladder's top, with which the plant
Appeared to stoop, as slender blades of grass
Tipped with a bead of rain or dew, behold,
If such a sight were seen, would fancy bring
Some vagrant thither with her babes and seat her
Upon the turf beneath the stately flower,
Drooping in sympathy and making so
A melancholy crest above the head
Of the lorn creature, while her little ones,
All unconcerned with her unhappy plight,
Were sporting with the purple cups that lay
Scattered upon the ground. There was a copse,
An upright bank of wood and woody rock
That opposite our rural dwelling stood,
In which a sparkling patch of diamond light
Was in bright weather duly to be seen
On summer afternoons, within the wood
At the same place. 'Twas doubtless nothing more
Than a black rock, which, wet with constant springs,
Glistened far seen from out its lurking-place
As soon as ever the declining sun
Had smitten it. Beside our cottage hearth
Sitting with open door, a hundred times
Upon this lustre have I gazed, that seemed
To have some meaning which I could not find—
And now it was a burnished shield, I fancied,
Suspended over a knight's tomb, who lay
Inglorious, buried in the dusky wood;
An entrance now into some magic cave,
Or palace for a fairy of the rock.
Nor would I, though not certain whence the cause
Of the effulgence, thither have repaired
Without a precious bribe, and day by day
And month by month I saw the spectacle,
Nor ever once have visited the spot
Unto this hour. Thus sometimes were the shapes
Of wilful fancy grafted upon feelings
Of the imagination, and they rose
In worth accordingly.

My present theme
Is to retrace the way that led me on
Through Nature to the love of human-kind;
Nor could I with such object overlook
The influence of this power which turned itself
Instinctively to human passions, things
Least understood—, of this adulterate power,
For so it may be called, and without wrong,
When with that first compared. Yet in the midst
Of these vagaries, with an eye so rich
As mine was— through the chance, on me not wasted,
Of having been brought up in such a grand
And lovely region—I had forms distinct
To steady me. These thoughts did oft revolve
About some centre palpable, which at once
Incited them to motion, and controlled,
And whatsoever shape the fit might take,
And whencesoever it might come, I still
At all times had a real solid world
Of images about me, did not pine
As one in cities bred might do—as thou,
Beloved friend, hast told me that thou didst,
Great spirit as thou art—in endless dreams
Of sickness, disjoining, joining things,
Without the light of knowledge. Where the harm
If when the woodman languished with disease
From sleeping night by night among the woods
Within his sod-built cabin, Indian-wise,
I called the pangs of disappointed love
And all the long etcetera of such thought
To help him to his grave?—meanwhile the man,
If not already from the woods retired
To die at home, was haply, as I knew,
Pining alone among the gentle airs,
Birds, running streams, and hills so beautiful
On golden evenings, while the charcoal-pile
Breathed up its smoke, an image of his ghost
Or spirit that was soon to take its flight.

There came a time of greater dignity,
Which had been gradually prepared, and now
Rushed in as if on wings—the time in which
The pulse of being everywhere was felt,
When all the several frames of things, like stars
Through every magnitude distinguishable,
Were half confounded in each other’s blaze,
One galaxy of life and joy. Then rose
Man, inwardly contemplated, and present
In my own being, to a loftier height—
As of all visible natures crown, and first
In capability of feeling what
Was to be felt, in being rapt away
By the divine effect of power and love—
As, more than any thing we know, instinct
With godhead, and by reason and by will
Acknowledging dependency sublime.

Erelong, transported hence as in a dream,
I found myself begirt with temporal shapes
Of vice and folly thrust upon my view,
Objects of sport and ridicule and scorn,
Manners and characters discriminate,
And little busy passions that eclipsed,
As well they might, the impersonated thought,
The idea or abstraction of the kind.
An idler among academic bowers,
Such was my new condition—as at large
Hath been set forth—yet here the vulgar light
Of present, actual, superficial life,
Gleaming through colouring of other times,
Old usages and local privilege,
Thereby was softened, almost solemnized,
And rendered apt and pleasing to the view.
This notwithstanding, being brought more near
As I was now to guilt and wretchedness,
I trembled, thought of human life at times 665
With an indefinite terror and dismay,
Such as the storms and angry elements
Had bred in me; but gloomier far, a dim
Analogy to uproar and misrule,
Disquiet, danger, and obscurity.

It might be told (but wherefore speak of things
Common to all?) that, seeing, I essayed
To give relief, began to deem myself
A moral agent, judging between good
And evil not as for the mind’s delight
But for her safety, one who was to act— 675
As sometimes to the best of my weak means
I did, by human sympathy impelled,
And through dislike and most offensive pain
Was to the truth conducted—of this faith
Never forsaken, that by acting well,
And understanding, I should learn to love
The end of life and every thing we know.

Preceptress stern, that didst instruct me next,
London, to thee I willingly return.
Erewhile my verse played only with the flowers
Enwrought upon the mantle, satisfied
With this amusement, and a simple look
Of childish inquisition now and then
Cast upwards on thine eye to puzzle out
Some inner meanings which might harbour there.
Yet did I not give way to this light mood
Wholly beguiled, as one incapable
Of higher things, and ignorant that high things
Were round me. Never shall I forget the hour,
The moment rather say, when, having thridded
The labyrinth of suburban villages,
At length I did unto myself first seem
To enter the great city. On the roof
Of an itinerant vehicle I sate,
With vulgar men about me, vulgar forms
Of houses, pavement, streets, of men and things,
Mean shapes on every side; but, at the time,
When to myself it fairly might be said
(The very moment that I seemed to know)
‘The threshold now is \textit{overpast’}, great God!
That aught \textit{external} to the living mind
Should have such mighty sway, yet so it was:
A weight of ages did at once descend
Upon my heart—no thought embodied, no
Distinct remembrances, but weight and power,
Power growing with the weight. Alas, I feel
That I am trifling. 'Twas a moment’s pause:
All that took place within me came and went
As in a moment, and I only now
Remember that it was a thing divine.

As when a traveller hath from open day
With torches passed into some vault of earth,
The grotto of Antiparos, or the den
Of Yordas among Craven’s mountain tracts,
He looks and sees the cavern spread and grow,
Widening itself on all sides, sees, or thinks
He sees, ere long, the roof above his head,
Which instantly unsettles and recedes—
Substance and shadow, light and darkness, all
Commingled, making up a canopy
Of shapes, and forms, and tendencies to shape,
That shift and vanish, change and interchange
Like spectres—ferment quiet and sublime,
Which, after a short space, works less and less
Till, every effort, every motion gone,
The scene before him lies in perfect view
Exposed, and lifeless as a written book.
But let him pause awhile and look again,
And a new quickening shall succeed, at first
Beginning timidly, then creeping fast
Through all which he beholds: the senseless mass,
In its projections, wrinkles, cavities,
Through all its surface, with all colours streaming,
Like a magician’s airy pageant, parts,
Unites, embodying everywhere some pressure
Or image, recognised or new, some type
Or picture of the world—forests and lakes,
Ships, rivers, towers, the warrior clad in mail,
The prancing steed, the pilgrim with his staff,
A mitred bishop and the throne’d king—
A spectacle to which there is no end.

No otherwise had I at first been moved—
With such a swell of feeling, followed soon
By a blank sense of greatness passed away—
And afterwards continued to be moved,
In presence of that vast metropolis,
The fountain of my country’s destiny
And of the destiny of earth itself,
That great emporium, chronicle at once
And burial-place of passions, and their home
Imperial, and chief living residence.
With strong sensations teeming as it did
Of past and present, such a place must needs
Have pleased me in those times. I sought not then
Knowledge, but craved for power—and power I found
In all things. Nothing had a circumscribed
And narrow influence; but all objects, being
Themselves capacious, also found in me
Capaciousness and amplitude of mind—
Such is the strength and glory of our youth.
The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged, and which I loved and reverenced,  
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit  
Living in time and space, and far diffused.  
In this my joy, in this my dignity  
Consisted: the external universe,  
By striking upon what is found within,  
Had given me this conception, with the help  
Of books and what they picture and record.  

’Tis true the history of my native land,  
With those of Greece compared and popular Rome—  
Events not lovely nor magnanimous,  
But harsh and unaffecting in themselves;  
And in our high-wrought modern narratives  
Stript of their humanizing soul, the life  
Of manners and familiar incidents—  
Had never much delighted me. And less  
Than other minds I had been used to owe  
The pleasure which I found in place or thing  
To extrinsic transitory accidents,  
To records or traditions; but a sense  
Of what had been here done, and suffered here  
Through ages, and was doing, suffering, still,  
Weighed with me, could support the test of thought—  
Was like the enduring majesty and power  
Of independent nature. And not seldom  
Even individual remembrances,  
By working on the shapes before my eyes,  
Became like vital functions of the soul;  
And out of what had been, what was, the place  
Was thronged with impregnations, like those wilds  
In which my early feelings had been nursed,  
And naked valleys full of caverns, rocks,  
And audible seclusions, dashing lakes,  
Echoes and waterfalls, and pointed crags  
That into music touch the passing wind.

Thus here imagination also found
An element that pleased her, tried her strength
Among new objects, simplified, arranged,
Impregnated my knowledge, made it live—
And the result was elevating thoughts
Of human nature. Neither guilt nor vice,
Debasement of the body or the mind,
Nor all the misery forced upon my sight,
Which was not lightly passed, but often scanned
Most feelingly, could overthrow my trust
In what we may become, induce belief
that I was ignorant, had been falsely taught,
A solitary, who with vain conceits
Had been inspired, and walked about in dreams.
When from that rueful prospect, overcast
And in eclipse, my meditations turned,
Lo, every thing that was indeed divine
Retained its purity inviolate
And unencroached upon, nay, seemed brighter far
For this deep shade in counterview, the gloom
Of opposition, such as shewed itself
To the eyes of Adam, yet in Paradise
Though fallen from bliss, when in the East he saw
Darkness ere day’s mid course, and morning light
More orient in the western cloud, that drew
‘O’er the blue firmament a radiant white,
Descending slow with something heavenly fraught.’

Add also, that among the multitudes
Of that great city oftentimes was seen
Affectingly set forth, more than elsewhere
Is possible, the unity of man,
One spirit over ignorance and vice
Predominant, in good and evil hearts
One sense for moral judgments, as one eye
For the sun’s light. When strongly breathed upon
By this sensation—whencesoe’er it comes,
Of union or communion—doth the soul
Rejoice as in her highest joy; for there,
There chiefly, hath she feeling whence she is,
And passing through all Nature rests with God.

And is not, too, that vast abiding-place
Of human creatures, turn where’er we may,
Profusely sown with individual sights
Of courage, and integrity, and truth,
And tenderness, which, here set off by foil,
Appears more touching? In the tender scenes
Chiefly was my delight, and one of these
Never will be forgotten. ’Twas a man,
Whom I saw sitting in an open square
Close to the iron paling that fenced in
The spacious grass-plot: on the corner-stone
Of the low wall in which the pales were fixed
Sate this one man, and with a sickly babe
Upon his knee, whom he had thither brought
For sunshine, and to breathe the fresher air.
Of those who passed, and me who looked at him,
He took no note; but in his brawny arms
(The artificer was to the elbow bare,
And from his work this moment had been stolen)
He held the child, and, bending over it
As if he were afraid both of the sun
And of the air which he had come to seek,
He eyed it with unutterable love.

Thus from a very early age, O friend,
My thoughts had been attracted more and more
By slow gradations towards human-kind,
And to the good and ill of human life.
Nature had led me on, and now I seemed
To travel independent of her help,
As if I had forgotten her—but no,
My fellow-beings still were unto me
Far less than she was: though the scale of love
Were filling fast, ’twas light as yet compared
With that in which her mighty objects lay.
Book Ninth *Residence in France*

AS oftentimes a river, it might seem,
Yielding in part to old remembrances,
Part swayed by fear to tread an onward road
That leads direct to the devouring sea,
Turns and will measure back his course—far back,
Towards the very regions which he crossed
In his first outset—so have we long time
Made motions retrograde, in like pursuit
Detained. But now we start afresh: I feel
An impulse to precipitate my verse.
Fair greetings to this shapeless eagerness,
Whene’er it comes, needful in work so long,
Trice needful to the argument which now
Awaits us—oh, how much unlike the past—
One which though bright the promise, will be found
Ere far we shall advance, ungenial, hard
To treat of, and forbidding in itself.

Free as a colt at pasture on the hills
I ranged at large through the metropolis
Month after month. Obscurely did I live,
Not courting the society of men,
By literature, or elegance, or rank,
Distinguished—in the midst of things, it seemed,
Looking as from a distance on the world
That moved about me. Yet insensibly
False preconceptions were corrected thus,
And errors of the fancy rectified
(Alike with reference to men and things),
And sometimes from each quarter were poured in Novel imaginations and profound.
A year thus spent, this field, with small regret— Save only for the bookstalls in the streets (Wild produce, hedgerow fruit, on all sides hung To lure the sauntering traveller from his track)— I quitted, and betook myself to France, Let thither chiefly by a personal wish To speak the language more familiarly, With which intent I chose for my abode A city on the borders of the Loire.

Through Paris lay my readiest path, and there I sojourned a few days, and visited In haste each spot of old and recent fame— The latter chiefly—from the field of Mars Down to the suburbs of St. Anthony, And from Mont Martyr southward to the Dome Of Geneviève. In both her clamorous halls, The National Synod and the Jacobins, I saw the revolutionary power Toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms, The Arcades I traversed in the Palace huge Of Orleans, coasted round and round the line Of tavern, brothel, gaming-house, and shop, Great rendezvous of worst and best, the walk Of all who had a purpose, or had not; I stared and listened with a stranger’s ears, To hawkers and haranguers, hubbub wild, And hissing factionists with ardent eyes, In knots, or pairs, or single, ant-like swarms Of builders and subverters, every face That hope or apprehension could put on— Joy, anger, and vexation, in the midst Of gaiety and dissolute idleness.

Where silent zephyrs sported with the dust Of the Bastile I sate in the open sun
And from the rubbish gathered up a stone,
And pocketed the relick in the guise
Of an enthusiast; yet, in honest truth,
Though not without some strong incumbencies,
And glad—could living man be otherwise?—
I looked for something which I could not find,
Affecting more emotion than I felt.
For 'tis most certain that the utmost force
Of all these various objects which may shew
The temper of my mind as then it was
Seemed less to recompense the traveller’s pains,
Less moved me, gave me less delight, than did
A single picture merely, hunted out
Among other sights, the Magdalene of le Brun,
A beauty exquisitely wrought—fair face
And rueful, with its ever-flowing tears.

But hence to my more permanent residence
I hasten: there, by novelties in speech,
Domestic manners, customs, gestures, looks,
And all the attire of ordinary life,
Attention was at first engrossed; and thus
Amused and satisfied, I scarcely felt
The shock of these concussions, unconcerned,
Tranquil almost, and careless as a flower
Glassed in a greenhouse, or a parlour-shrub,
When every bush and tree the country through,
Is shaking to the roots—indifference this
Which may seem strange, but I was unprepared
With needful knowledge, had abruptly passed
Into a theatre of which the stage
Was busy with an action far advanced.
Like others I had read, and eagerly
Sometimes, the master pamphlets of the day,
Nor wanted such half-insight as grew wild
Upon that meagre soil, helped out by talk
And public news; but having never chanced
To see a regular chronicle which might shew—
If any such indeed existed then—
Whence the main organs of the public power
Had sprung, their transmigrations, when and how
Accomplished (giving thus unto events
A form and body), all things were to me
Loose and disjointed, and the affections left
Without a vital interest. At that time,
Moreover, the first storm was overblown,
And the strong hand of outward violence
Locked up in quiet. For myself—I fear
Now in connection with so great a theme
To speak, as I must be compelled to do,
Of one so unimportant—a short time
I loitered, and frequented night by night
Routs, card-tables, the formal haunts of men
Whom in the city privilege of birth
Sequestered from the rest, societies
Where, through punctilios of elegance
And deeper causes, all discourse, alike
Of good and evil, in the time, was shunned
With studious care. But ’twas not long ere this
Proved tedious, and I gradually withdrew
Into a noisier world, and thus did soon
Become a patriot—and my heart was all
Given to the people, and my love was theirs.

A knot of military officers
That to a regiment appertained which then
Was stationed in the city were the chief
Of my associates; some of these wore swords
Which had been seasoned in the wars, and all
Were men well-born, at least laid claim to such
Distinction, as the chivalry of France.
In age and temper differing, they had yet
One spirit ruling in them all—alike
(Save only one, hereafter to be named)
Were bent upon undoing what was done.
This was their rest, and only hope; therewith
No fear had they of bad becoming worse,
For worst to them was come—nor would have stirred,
Or deemed it worth a moment’s while to stir,
In any thing, save only as the act
Looked thitherward. One, reckoning by years,
Was in the prime of manhood, and erewhile
He had sate lord in many tender hearts,
Though heedless of such honours now, and changed:
His temper was quite mastered by the times,
And they had blighted him, had eat away
The beauty of his person, doing wrong
Alike to body and to mind. His port,
Which once had been erect and open, now
Was stooping and contracted, and a face
By nature lovely in itself, expressed,
As much as any that was ever seen,
A ravage out of season, made by thoughts
Unhealthy and vexatious. At the hour,
The most important of each day, in which
The public news was read, the fever came,
A punctual visitant, to shake this man,
Disarmed his voice and fanned his yellow cheek
Into a thousand colours. While he read,
Or mused, his sword was haunted by his touch
Continually, like an uneasy place
In his own body. 'Twas in truth an hour
Of universal ferment—mildest men
Were agitated, and commotions, strife
Of passion and opinion, filled the walls
Of peaceful houses with unquiet sounds.
The soil of common life was at that time
Too hot to tread upon. Oft said I then,
And not then only, 'What a mockery this
Of history, the past and that to come!
Now do I feel how I have been deceived,
Reading of nations and their works in faith—
Faith given to vanity and emptiness—
Oh, laughter for the page that would reflect
To future times the face of what now is!’
The land all swarmed with passion, like a plain
Devoured by locusts—Carra, Gorsas—add
A hundred other names, forgotten now,
Nor to be heard of more; yet were they powers,
Like earthquakes, shocks repeated day by day,
And felt through every nook of town and field.

The men already spoken of as chief
Of my associates were prepared for flight
To augment the band of emigrants in arms
Upon the borders of the Rhine, and leagued
With foreign foes mustered for instant war.
This was their undisguised intent, and they
Were waiting with the whole of their desires
The moment to depart. An Englishman,
Born in a land the name of which appeared
To licence some unruliness of mind,
A stranger, with youth’s further privilege,
And that indulgence which a half-learned speech
Wins from the courteous, I—who had been else
Shunned and not tolerated—freely lived
With these defenders of the crown, and talked,
And heard their notions; nor did they disdain
The wish to bring me over to their cause.

But though untaught by thinking or by books
To reason well of polity or law,
And nice distinctions—then on every tongue—
Of natural rights and civil, and to acts
Of nations, and their passing interests
(I speak comparing these with other things)
Almost indifferent, even the historian’s tale
Prizing but little otherwise than I prized
Tales of poets—as it made my heart
Beat high and filled my fancy with fair forms,
Old heroes and their sufferings and their deeds—
Yet in the regal sceptre, and the pomp
Of orders and degrees, I nothing found
Then, or had ever even in crudest youth,  
That dazzled me, but rather what my soul  215
Mourned for, or loathed, beholding that the best  
Ruled not, and feeling that they ought to rule.

For, born in a poor district, and which yet  
Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,  220
Manners erect, and frank simplicity,  
Than any other nook of English land,  
It was my fortune scarcely to have seen  
Through the whole tenor of my schoolday time  
The face of one, who, whether boy or man,  
Was vested with attention or respect  225
Through claims of wealth or blood. Nor was it least  
Of many debts which afterwards I owed  
To Cambridge and an academic life,  
That something there was holden up to view  
Of a republic, where all stood thus far  230
Upon equal ground, that they were brothers all  
In honour, as of one community—  
Scholars and gentlemen—where, furthermore,  
Distinction lay open to all that came,  
And wealth and titles were in less esteem  235
Than talents and successful industry.  
Add unto this, subservience from the first  
To God and Nature’s single sovereignty  
(Familiar presences of awful power),  
And fellowship with venerable books  240
To sanction the proud workings of the soul,  
And mountain liberty. It could not be  
But that one tutored thus, who had been formed  
To thought and moral feeling in the way  
This story hath described, should look with awe  245
Upon the faculties of man, receive  
Gladly the highest promises, and hail  
As best the government of equal rights  
And individual worth. And hence, O friend,  
If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced  250
Less than might well befit my youth, the cause
In part lay here, that unto me the events
seemed nothing out of nature’s certain course—
A gift that rather was come late than soon.
No wonder then if advocates like these
Whom I have mentioned, at this riper day
Were impotent to make my hopes put on
The shape of theirs, my understanding bend
In honour to their honour. Zeal which yet
Had slumbered, now in opposition burst
Forth like a Polar summer. Every word
They uttered was a dart by counter-winds
Blown back upon themselves; their reason seemed
Confusion-stricken by a higher power
Than human understanding, their discourse
Maimed, spiritless—and, in their weakness strong,
I triumphed.

Meantime day by day the roads,
While I consorted with these royalists,
Were crowded with the bravest youth of France
And all the promptest of her spirits, linked
In gallant soldiership, and posting on
To meet the war upon her frontier-bounds.
Yet at this very moment do tears start
Into mine eyes—I do not say I weep,
I wept not then, but tears have dimmed my sight—
In memory of the farewells of that time,
Domestic severings, female fortitude
At dearest separation, patriot love
And self-devotion, and terrestrial hope
Encouraged with a martyr’s confidence.
Even files of strangers merely, seen but once
And for a moment, men from far, with sound
Of music, martial tunes, and banners spread,
Entering the city, here and there a face
Or person singled out among the rest
Yet still a stranger, and beloved as such—
Even by these passing spectacles my heart
Was oftentimes uplifted, and they seemed
Like arguments from Heaven that 'twas a cause
Good, and which no one could stand up against
Who was not lost, abandoned, selfish, proud,
Mean, miserable, wilfully depraved,
Hater perverse of equity and truth.

Among that band of officers was one,
Already hinted at, of other mold—
A patriot, thence rejected by the rest,
And with an oriental loathing spurned
As of a different cast. A meeker man
Than this lived never, or a more benign—
Meek, though enthusiastic to the height
Of highest expectation. Injuries
Made him more gracious, and his nature then
Did breathe its sweetness out most sensibly,
As aromatic flowers on Alpine turf
When foot hath crushed them. He through the events
Of that great change wandered in perfect faith,
As through a book, an old romance, or tale
Of Fairy, or some dream of actions wrought
Behind the summer clouds. By birth he ranked
With the most noble, but unto the poor
Among mankind he was in service bound
As by some tie invisible, oaths professed
To a religious order. Man he loved
As man, and to the mean and the obscure,
And all the homely in their homely works,
Transferred a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension, but did rather seem
A passion and a gallantry, like that
Which he, a soldier, in his idler day
Had payed to woman. Somewhat vain he was,
Or seemed so—yet it was not vanity,
But fondness, and a kind of radiant joy
That covered him about when he was bent
On works of love or freedom, or revolved
Complacently the progress of a cause
Whereof he was a part—yet this was meek
And placid, and took nothing from the man
That was delightful. Oft in solitude
With him did I discourse about the end
Of civil government, and its wisest forms,
Of ancient prejudice and chartered rights,
Allegiance, faith, and laws by time matured,
Custom and habit, novelty and change,
Of self-respect, and virtue in the few
For patrimonial honour set apart,
And ignorance in the labouring multitude.
For he, an upright man and tolerant,
Balanced these contemplations in his mind,
And I, who at that time was scarcely dipped
Into the turmoil, had a sounder judgement
Than afterwards, carried about me yet
With less alloy to its integrity
The experience of past ages, as through help
Of books and common life it finds its way
To youthful minds, by objects over near
Not pressed upon, nor dazzled or misled
By struggling with the crowd for present ends.

But though not deaf and obstinate to find
Error without apology on the side
Of those who were against us, more delight
We took, and let this freely be confessed,
In painting to ourselves the miseries
Of royal courts, and that voluptuous life
Unfeeling where the man who is of soul
The meanest thrives the most, where dignity,
True personal dignity, abideth not—
A light and cruel world, cut off from all
The natural inlets of just sentiment,
From lowly sympathy, and chastening truth,
When good and evil never have the name,
That which they ought to have, but wrong prevails,
And vice at home. We added dearest themes,
Man and his noble nature, as it is
The gift of God and lies in his own power,
His blind desires and steady faculties
Capable of clear truth, the one to break
Bondage, the other to build liberty
On firm foundations, making social life,
Through knowledge spreading and imperishable,
As just in regulation, and as pure,
As individual in the wise and good.

We summoned up the honorable deeds
Of ancient story, thought of each bright spot
That could be found in all recorded time,
Of truth preserved and error passed away,
Of single spirits that catch the flame from heaven,
And how the multitude of men will feed
And fan each other—thought of sects, how keen
They are to put the appropriate nature on,
Triumphant over every obstacle
Of custom, language, country, love and hate,
And what they do and suffer for their creed,
How far they travel, and how long endure—
How quickly mighty nations have been formed
From least beginnings, how, together locked
By new opinions, scattered tribes have made
One body, spreading wide as clouds in heaven.
To aspirations then of our own minds
Did we appeal; and, finally, beheld
A living confirmation of the whole
Before us in a people risen up
Fresh as the morning star. Elate we looked
Upon their virtues, saw in rudest men
Self-sacrifice the firmest, generous love
And continence of mind, and sense of right
Uppermost in the midst of fiercest strife.
Oh, sweet it is in academic groves—
Or such retirement, friend, as we have known
Among the mountains by our Rotha’s stream,
Greta, or Derwent, or some nameless rill—
To ruminate, with interchange of talk,
On rational liberty and hope in man,
Justice and peace. But far more sweet such toil
(Toil, say I, for it leads to thoughts abstruse)
If Nature then be standing on the brink
Of some great trial, and we hear the voice
Of one devoted, one whom circumstance
Hath called upon to embody his deep sense
In action, give it outwardly a shape,
And that of benediction to the world.
Then doubt is not, and truth is more than truth—
A hope it is and a desire, a creed
Of zeal by an authority divine
Sanctioned, of danger, difficulty, or death.
Such conversation under Attic shades
Did Dion hold with Plato, ripened thus
For a deliverer’s glorious task, and such
He, on that ministry already bound,
Held with Eudemus and Timonides,
Surrounded by adventurers in arms,
When those two vessels with their daring freight
For the Sicilian tyrant’s overthrow
Sailed from Zacynthus—philosophic war
Led by philosophers. With harder fate,
Though like ambition, such was he, O friend,
Of whom I speak. So Beauquis—let the name
Stand near the worthiest of antiquity—
Fashioned his life, and many a long discourse
With like persuasion honored we maintained,
He on his part accoutred for the worst.
He perished fighting, in supreme command,
Upon the borders of the unhappy Loire,
For liberty, against deluded men,
His fellow countrymen; and yet most blessed
In this, that he the fate of later times
Lived not to see, nor what we now behold
Who have as ardent hearts as he had then.

Along that very Loire, with festivals
Resounding at all hours, and innocent yet
Of civil slaughter, was our frequent walk,
Or in wide forests of the neighbourhood,
High woods and over-arched, with open space
On every side, and footing many a mile,
Inwoven roots, and moss smooth as the sea—
A solemn region. Often in such place
From earnest dialogues I slipped in thought,
And let remembrance steal to other times
When hermits, from their sheds and caves forth strayed,
Walked by themselves, so met in shades like these,
And if a devious traveller was heard
Approaching from a distance, as might chance,
With speed and echoes loud of trampling hoofs
From the hard floor reverberated, then
It was Angelica thundering through the woods
Upon her palfrey, or that gentler maid
Erminia, fugitive as fair as she.
Sometimes I saw methought a pair of knights
Joust underneath the trees, that as in storm
Did rock above their heads, anon the din
Of boisterous merriment and music’s roar,
With sudden proclamation, burst from haunt
Of satyrs in some viewless glade, with dance
Rejoicing o’er a female in the midst,
A mortal beauty, their unhappy thrall.
The width of those huge forests, unto me
A novel scene, did often in this way
Master my fancy while I wandered on
With that revered companion. And sometimes
When to a convent in a meadow green
By a brook-side we came—a roofless pile,
And not by reverential touch of time.
Dismantled, but by violence abrupt—
In spite of those heart-bracing colloquies,
In spite of real fervour, and of that
Less genuine and wrought up within myself,
I could not but bewail a wrong so harsh,
And for the matin-bell—to sound no more—
Grieved, and the evening taper, and the cross
High on the topmost pinnacle, a sign
Admonitory to the traveller,
First seen above the woods.

And when my friend
Pointed upon occasion to the site
Of Romarentin, home of ancient kings,
To the imperial edifice of Blois,
Or to that rural castle, name now slipped
From my remembrance, where a lady lodged
By the first Francis wooed, and bound to him
In chains of mutual passion—from the tower,
As a tradition of the country tells,
Practised to commune with her royal knight
By cressets and love-beacons, intercourse
'Twixt her high-seated residence and his
Far off at Chambord on the plain beneath—
Even here, though less than with the peaceful house
Religious, 'mid these frequent monuments
Of kings, their vices and their better deeds,
Imagination, potent to enflame
At times with virtuous wrath and noble scorn,
Did also often mitigate the force
Of civic prejudice, the bigotry,
So call it, of a youthful patriot’s mind,
And on these spots with many gleams I looked
Of chivalrous delight. Yet not the less,
Hatred of absolute rule, where will of one
Is law for all, and of that barren pride
In those who by immunities unjust
Betwixt the sovereign and the people stand,
His helpers and not theirs, laid stronger hold
Daily upon me—mixed with pity too,
And love, for where hope is, there love will be
For the abject multitude. And when we chanced
One day to meet a hunger-bitten girl
Who crept along fitting her languid self
Unto a heifer’s motion—by a cord
Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane
Its sustenance, while the girl with her two hands
Was busy knitting in a heartless mood
Of solitude—and at the sight my friend
In agitation said, ‘‘Tis against that
Which we are fighting’’. I with him believed
Devoutly that a spirit was abroad
Which could not be withstood, that poverty,
At least like this, would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The industrious, and the lowly child of toil,
All institutes for ever blotted out
That legalized exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power,
Whether by edict of the one or few—
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand
In making their own laws, whence better days
To all mankind. But, these things set apart,
Was not the single confidence enough
To animate the mind that ever turned
A thought to human welfare?—that henceforth
Captivity by mandate without law
Should cease, and open accusation lead
To sentence in the hearing of the world,
And open punishment, if not the air
Be free to breathe in, and the heart of man
Dread nothing. Having touched this argument
I shall not, as my purpose was, take note
Of other matters which detained us oft
In thought or conversation—public acts, 550
And public persons, and the emotions wrought
Within our minds by the ever-varying wind
Of record and report which day by day
Swept over us—but I will here instead
Draw from obscurity a tragic tale, 555
Not in its spirit singular, indeed,
But haply worth memorial, as I heard
The events related by my patriot friend
And others who had borne a part therein.

Oh, happy time of youthful lovers—thus 560
My story may begin—oh, balmy time
In which a love-knot on a lady’s brow
Is fairer than the fairest star in heaven!
To such inheritance of blessedness
Young Vaudracour was brought by years that had
A little overstepped his stripling prime.
A town of small repute in the heart of France
Was the youth’s birthplace; there he vowed his love
To Julia, a bright maid from parents sprung
Not mean in their condition, but with rights 570
Unhonoured of nobility—and hence
The father of the young man, who had place
Among that order, spurned the very thought
Of such alliance. From their cradles up,
With but a step between their several homes,
Th’ pair had thriven together year by year,
Friends, playmates, twins in pleasure, after strife
And petty quarrels had grown fond again,
Each other’s advocate, each other’s help,
Nor ever happy if they were apart. 580
A basis this for deep and solid love,
And endless constancy, and placid truth—
But whatsoever of such treasures might,
Beneath the outside of their youth, have lain
Reserved for mellower years, his present mind
Was under fascination—he beheld
A vision, and he loved the thing he saw.
Arabian fiction never filled the world
With half the wonders that were wrought for him:
Earth lived in one great presence of the spring,
Life turned the meanest of her implements
Before his eyes to price above all gold,
The house she dwelt in was a sainted shrine,
Her chamber-window did surpass in glory
The portals of the east, all paradise
Could by the simple opening of a door
Let itself in upon him—pathways, walks,
Swarmed with enchantment, till his spirits sunk
Beneath the burden, overblessed for life.
This state was theirs, till—whether through effect
Of some delirious hour, or that the youth,
Seeing so many bars betwixt himself
And the dear haven where he wished to be
In honorable wedlock with his love,
Without a certain knowledge of his own
Was inwardly prepared to turn aside
From law and custom and entrust himself
To Nature for a happy end of all,
And thus abated of that pure reserve
Congenial to his loyal heart, with which
It would have pleased him to attend the steps
Of maiden so divinely beautiful,
I know not—but reluctantly must add
That Julia, yet without the name of wife,
Carried about her for a secret grief
The promise of a mother.

To conceal
The threatened shame the parents of the maid
Found means to hurry her away, by night
And unforewarned, that in a distant town
She might remain shrouded in privacy
Until the babe was born. When morning came
The lover, thus bereft, stung with his loss
And all uncertain whither he should turn,
Chafed like a wild beast in the toils. At length,
Following as his suspicions led, he found—
O joy!—sure traces of the fugitives,
Pursued them to the town where they had stopped,
And lastly to the very house itself
Which had been chosen for the maid’s retreat.
The sequel may be easily divined:
Walks backwards, forwards, morning, noon, and night
(When decency and caution would allow),
And Julia, who, whenever to herself
She happened to be left a moment’s space,
Was busy at her casement as a swallow
About its nest, ere long did thus espy
Her lover; thence a stolen interview
By night accomplished, with a ladder’s help.

I pass the raptures of the pair, such theme
Hath by a hundred poets been set forth
In more delightful verse than skill of mine
Could fashion—chiefly by that darling bard
Who told of Juliet and her Romeo,
And of the lark’s note heard before its time,
And of the streaks that laced the evening clouds
In the unrelenting east. ’Tis mine to tread
The humbler province of plain history,
And, without choice of circumstance, submissively
Relate what I have heard. The lovers came
To this resolve—with which they parted, pleased
And confident—that Vaudracour should hie
Back to his father’s house, and there employ
Means aptest to obtain a sum of gold,
A final portion even, if that might be;
Which done, together they could then take flight
To some remote and solitary place
Where they might live with no one to behold
Their happiness, or to disturb their love.
Immediately, and with this mission charged,
Home to his father’s house did he return,
And there remained a time without hint given
Of his design. But if a word were dropped
Touching the matter of his passion, still,
In hearing of his father, Vaudracour
Persisted openly that nothing less
Than death should make him yield up hope to be
A blessèd husband of the maid he loved.

Incensed at such obduracy, and slight
Of exhortations and remonstrances,
The father threw out threats that by a mandate
Bearing the private signet of the state
He should be baffled of his mad intent—
And that should cure him. From this time the youth
Conceived a terror, and by night or day
Stirred nowhere without arms. Soon afterwards
His parents to their country seat withdrew
Upon some feigned occasion, and the son
Was left with one attendant in the house.
Retiring to his chamber for the night,
While he was entering at the door, attempts
Were made to seize him by three armèd men,
The instruments of ruffian power. The youth
In the first impulse of his rage laid one
Dead at his feet, and to the second gave
A perilous wound—which done, at sight
Of the dead man, he peacefully resigned
His person to the law, was lodged in prison,
And wore the fetters of a criminal.

Through three weeks’ space, by means which love devised,
The maid in her seclusion had received
Tidings of Vaudracour, and how he sped
Upon his enterprize. Thereafter came
A silence; half a circle did the moon
Complete, and then a whole, and still the same
Silence; a thousand thousand fears and hopes
Stirred in her mind—thoughts waking, thoughts of sleep,
Entangled in each other—and at last
Self-slaughter seemed her only resting-place: So did she fare in her uncertainty.

At length, by interference of a friend,
One who had sway at court, the youth regained
His liberty, on promise to sit down
Quietly in his father’s house, nor take
One step to reunite himself with her
Of whom his parents disapproved—hard law,
To which he gave consent only because
His freedom else could nowise by procured.
Back to his father’s house he went, remained
Eight days, and then his resolution failed—
He fled to Julia, and the words with which
He greeted her were these: ‘All right is gone,
Gone from me. Thou no longer now art mine,
I thine. A murderer, Julia, cannot love
An innocent woman. I behold thy face,
I see thee, and my misery is complete.’
She could not give him answer; afterwards
She coupled with his father’s name some words
Of vehement indignation, but the youth
Checked her, nor would he hear of this, for thought
Unfilial, or unkind, had never once
Found harbour in his breast. The lovers, thus
United once again, together lived
For a few days, which were to Vaudracour
Days of dejection, sorrow and remorse
For that ill deed of violence which his hand
Had hastily committed—for the youth
Was of a loyal spirit, a conscience nice,
And over tender for the trial which
His fate had called him to. The father’s mind
Meanwhile remained unchanged, and Vaudracour
Learned that a mandate had been newly issued
To arrest him on the spot. Oh pain it was
To part!—he could not, and he lingered still
To the last moment of his time, and then,
At dead of night, with snow upon the ground,
He left the city, and in villages,
The most sequestered of the neighbourhood,
Lay hidden for the space of several days,
Until, the horseman bringing back report
That he was nowhere to be found, the search
Was ended. Back returned the ill-fated youth,
And from the house where Julia lodged—to which
He now found open ingress, having gained
The affection of the family, who loved him
Both for his own, and for the maiden’s sake—
One night retiring, he was seized.

But here
A portion of the tale may well be left
In silence, though my memory could add
Much how the youth, and in short space of time,
Was traversed from without—much, too, of thoughts
By which he was employed in solitude
Under privation and restraint, and what
Through dark and shapeless fear of things to come,
And what through strong compunction for the past,
He suffered, breaking down in heart and mind.
Such grace, if grace it were, had been vouchsafed—
Or such effect had through the father’s want
Of power, or through his negligence, ensued—
That Vaudracour was suffered to remain,
Though under guard and without liberty,
In the same city with the unhappy maid
From whom he was divided. So they fared,
Objects of general concern, till, moved
With pity for their wrongs, the magistrate
(The same who had placed the youth in custody)
By application to the minister
Obtained his liberty upon condition
That to his father’s house he should return.
He left his prison almost on the eve
Of Julia’s travail. She had likewise been,
As from the time, indeed, when she had first
Been brought for secrecy to this abode,
Though treated with consoling tenderness,
Herself a prisoner—a dejected one,
Filled with a lover’s and a woman’s fears—
And whoso’er the mistress of the house
Entered the room for the last time at night,
And Julia with a low and plaintive voice
Said, ‘You are coming then to lock me up’,
The housewife when these words—always the same—
Were by her captive languidly pronounced,
Could never hear them uttered without tears.
A day or two before her childbed time
Was Vaudracour restored to her, and, soon
As he might be permitted to return
Into her chamber after the child’s birth,
The master of the family begged that all
The household might be summoned, doubting not
But that they might receive impressions then
Friendly to human kindness. Vaudracour
(This heard I from one present at the time)
Held up the new-born infant in his arms
And kissed, and blessed, and covered it with tears,
Uttering a prayer that he might never be
As wretched as his father. Then he gave
The child to her who bare it, and she too
Repeated the same prayer—took it again,
And, muttering something faintly afterwards,
He gave the infant to the standers-by,
And wept in silence upon Julia’s neck.

Two months did he continue in the house,
And often yielded up himself to plans
Of future happiness. ‘You shall return,
Julia’, said he, ‘and to your father’s house
Go with your child; you have been wretched, yet
It is a town where both of us were born—
None will reproach you, for our loves are known.
With ornaments the prettiest you shall dress
Your boy, as soon as he can run about,
And when he thus is at his play my father
Will see him from the window, and the child
Will by his beauty move his grandsire’s heart,
So that it shall be softened, and our loves
End happily, as they began.’ These gleams
Appeared but seldom; oftener he was seen
Propping a pale and melancholy face
Upon the mother’s bosom, resting thus
His head upon one breast, while from the other
The babe was drawing in its quiet food.
At other times, when he in silence long
And fixedly had looked upon her face,
He would exclaim, ‘Julia, how much thine eyes
Have cost me! During daytime, when the child
Lay in its cradle, by its side he sate,
Not quitting it an instant. The whole town
In his unmerited misfortunes now
Took part, and if he either at the door
Or window for a moment with his child
Appeared, immediately the street was thronged;
While others, frequently, without reserve,
Passed and repassed before the house to steal
A look at him. Oft at this time he wrote
Requesting, since he knew that the consent
Of Julia’s parents never could be gained
To a clandestine marriage, that his father
Would from the birthright of an eldest son
Exclude him, giving but, when this was done,
A sanction to his nuptials. Vain request,
To which no answer was returned.

And now
From her own home the mother of his love
Arrived to apprise the daughter of her fixed
and last resolve, that, since all hope to move
The old man’s heart proved vain, she must retire
Into a convent and be there immured.
Julia was thunderstricken by these words,
And she insisted on a mother’s rights
To take her child along with her—a grant
Impossible, as she at last perceived.
The persons of the house no sooner heard
Of this decision upon Julia’s fate
Than everyone was overwhelmed with grief,
Nor could they frame a manner soft enough
To impart the tidings to the youth. But great
Was their astonishment when they beheld him
Receive the news in calm despondency,
Composed and silent, without outward sign
Of even the least emotion. Seeing this,
When Julia scattered some upbraiding words
Upon his slackness, he thereto returned
No answer, only took the mother’s hand
(Who loved him scarcely less than her own child)
And kissed it, without seeming to be pressed
By any pain that ’twas the hand of one
Whose errand was to part him from his love
For ever. In the city he remained
A season after Julia had retired
And in the convent taken up her home,
To the end that he might place his infant babe
With a fit nurse; which done, beneath the roof
Where now his little one was lodged he passed
The day entire, and scarcely could at length
Tear himself from the cradle to return
Home to his father’s house—in which he dwelt
Awhile, and then came back that he might see
Whether the babe had gained sufficient strength
To bear removal. He quitted this same town
For the last time, attendant by the side
Of a close chair, a litter or sedan,
In which the child was carried. To a hill
Which rose at a league’s distance from the town
The family of the house where he had lodged
Attended him, and parted from him there,
Watching below until he disappeared
On the hill-top. His eyes he scarcely took
Through all that journey from the chair in which
The babe was carried, and at every inn
Or place at which they halted or reposed
Laid him upon his knees, nor would permit
The hands of any but himself to dress
The infant, or undress. By one of those
Who bore the chair these facts, at his return,
Were told, and in relating them he wept.

This was the manner in which Vaudracour
Departed with his infant, and thus reached
His father’s house, where to the innocent child
Admittance was denied. The young man spake
No words of indignation or reproof,
But of his father begged, a last request,
That a retreat might be assigned to him—
A house where in the country he might dwell
With such allowance as his wants required—
And the more lonely that the mansion was
’Twould be more welcome. To a lodge that stood
Deep in a forest, with leave given, at the age
Of four and twenty summers he retired,
And thither took with him his infant babe
And one domestic for their common needs,
An aged woman. It consoled him here
To attend upon the orphan and perform
The office of a nurse to his young child,
Which, after a short time, by some mistake
Or indiscretion of the father, died.
The tale I follow to its recess
Of suffering or of peace, I know not which—
Theirs be the blame who caused the woe, not mine.

From that time forth he never uttered word
To any living. An inhabitant
Of that same town in which the pair had left
So lively a remembrance of their griefs,
By chance of business coming within reach
Of his retirement, to the spot repaired
With the intent to visit him; he reached
The house and only found the matron there,
Who told him that his pains were thrown away,
For that her master never uttered word
To living soul—not even to her. Behold,
While they were speaking Vaudracour approached,
But, seeing some one there, just as his hand
Was stretched towards the garden-gate, he shrunk
And like a shadow glided out of view.
Shocked at his savage outside, from the place
The visitor retired.

Thus lived the youth,
Cut off from all intelligence with man,
And shunning even the light of common day.
Nor could the voice of freedom, which through France
Soon afterwards resounded, public hope,
Or personal memory of his own deep wrongs,
Rouze him, but in those solitary shades
His days he wasted, an imbecile mind.
Book Tenth Residence in France and French Revolution

It was a beautiful and silent day
That overspread the countenance of earth,
Then fading, with unusual quietness,
When from the Loire I parted, and through scenes
Of vineyard, orchard, meadow-ground and tilth,
Calm waters, gleams of sun, and breathless trees,
Towards the fierce metropolis turned my steps
Their homeward way to England. From his throne
The King had fallen; the congregated host—
Dire cloud, upon the front of which was written
The tender mercies of the dismal wind
That bore it—on the plains of Liberty
Had burst innocuously. Say more, the swarm
That came elate and jocund, like a band
Of eastern hunters, to enfold in ring
Narrowing itself by moments, and reduce
To the last punctual spot of their despair,
A race of victims—so they seemed—their selves
Had shrunk from sight of their own task, and fled
In terror. Desolation and dismay
Remained for them whose fancies had grown rank
With evil expectations: confidence
And perfect triumph to the better cause.
The state, as if to stamp the final seal
On her security, and to the world
Shew what she was, a high and fearless soul—
Or rather in a spirit of thanks to those
Who had stirred up her slackening faculties
To a new transition—had assumed with joy
The body and the venerable name
Of a republic. Lamentable crimes,
'Tis true, had gone before this hour—the work
Of massacre, in which the senseless sword
Was prayed to as a judge—but these were past,
Earth free from them for ever (as was thought),
Ephemeral monsters, to be seen but once,
Things that could only shew themselves and die.

This was the time in which, enflamed with hope,
To Paris I returned. Again I ranged,
More eagerly than I had done before,
Through the wide city, and in progress passed
The prison where the unhappy monarch lay,
Associate with his children and his wife
In bondage, and the palace, lately stormed
With roar of cannon and a numerous host.
I crossed—a black and empty area then—
The square of the Carousel, a few weeks back
Heaped up with dead and dying, upon these
And other sights looking as doth a man
Upon a volume whose contents he knows
Are memorable but from him locked up,
Being written in a tongue he cannot read,
So that he questions the mute leaves with pain,
And half upbraids their silence. But that night
When on my bed I lay, I was most moved
And felt most deeply in what world I was;
My room was high and lonely, near the roof
Of a large mansion or hotel, a spot
That would have pleased me in more quiet times—
Nor was it wholly without pleasure then.
With unextinguished taper I kept watch,
Reading at intervals. The fear gone by
Pressed on me almost like a fear to come.
I thought of those September massacres,
Divided from me by a little month,
And felt and touched them, a substantial dread
(The rest was conjured up from tragic fictions,
And mournful calendars of true history,
Remembrances and dim admonishments):
‘The horse is taught his manage, and the wind
Of heaven wheels round and treads in his own steps;
Year follows year, the tide returns again,
Day follows day, all things have second birth;
The earthquake is not satisfied at once’—
And in such way I wrought upon myself,
Until I seemed to hear a voice that cried
To the whole city, ‘Sleep no more!’ To this
Add comments of a calmer mind—from which
I could not gather full security—
But at the best it seemed a place of fear,
Unfit for the repose of night,
Defenceless as a wood where tigers roam.

Betimes next morning to the Palace-walk
Of Orleans I repaired, and entering there
Was greeted, among divers other notes,
By voices of the hawkers in the crowd
Brawling, Denunciation of the crimes
Of Maximilian Robespierre. The speech
Which in their hands they carried was the same
Which had been recently pronounced—the day
When Robespierre, well known for what mark
Some words of indirect reproof had been
Intended, rose in hardihood, and dared
The man who had ill surmise of him
To bring his charge in openness. Whereat,
When a dead pause ensued and no one stirred,
In silence of all present, from his seat
Louvet walked singly through the avenue
And took his station in the Tribune, saying,
‘I, Robespierre, accuse thee!’ ’Tis well known
What was the issue of that charge, and how Louvet was left alone without support
Of his irresolute friends, but these are things
Of which I speak only as they were storm
Or sunshine to my individual mind,
No further. Let me than relate that now—
In some sort seeing with my proper eyes
That liberty, and life, and death, would soon
To the remotest corners of the land
Lie in the arbitrement of those who ruled
The capital city; what was struggled for,
And by what combatants victory must be won;
The indecision on their part whose aim
Seemed best, and the straightforward path of those
Who in attack or in defence alike
Were strong through their impiety—greatly I
Was agitated. Yea, I could almost
Have prayed that throughout earth upon all souls
Worthy of liberty, upon every soul
Matured to live in plainness and in truth,
The gift of tongues might fall, and men arrive
From the four quarters of the winds to do
For France what without help she could not do,
A work of honour—think not that to this
I added, work of safety: from such thought,
And the least fear about the end of things,
I was as far as angels are from guilt.

Yet did I grieve, nor only grieved, but thought
Of opposition and of remedies:
An insignificant stranger and obscure,
Mean as I was, and little graced with powers
Of eloquence even in my native speech,
And all unfit for tumult and intrigue,
Yet would I willingly have taken up
A service at this time for cause so great,
However dangerous. Inly I revolved
How much the destiny of man had still
Hung upon single persons; that there was,
Transcendent to all local patrimony,
One nature as there is one sun in heaven;
That objects, even as they are great, thereby
Do come within the reach of humblest eyes;
That man was only weak through his mistrust
And want of hope, where evidence divine
Proclaimed to him that hope should be most sure;
That, with desires heroic and firm sense,
A spirit thoroughly faithful to itself,
Unquenchable, unsleeping, undismayed,
Was as an instinct among men, a stream
That gathered up each petty straggling rill
And vein of water, glad to be rolled on
In safe obedience; that a mind whose rest
Was where it ought to be, in self-restraint,
In circumspection and simplicity,
Fell rarely in entire discomfiture
Below its aim, or met with from without
A treachery that defeated it or foiled.

On the other side, I called to mind those truths
Which are the commonplaces of the schools,
A theme for boys, too trite even to be felt,
Yet with revelation’s liveliness
In all their comprehensive bearings known
And visible to philosophers of old,
Men who, to business of the world untrained,
Lived in the shade; and to Harmodius known,
And his compeer Aristogiton; known
To Brutus—that tyrannic power is weak,
Hath neither gratitude, nor faith nor love,
Nor the support of good or evil men,
To trust in; that the godhead which is ours
Can never utterly be charmed or stilled;
That nothing hath a natural right to last
But equity and reason; that all else
Meets foes irreconcilable, and at best
Doth live but by variety of disease. 175

Well might my wishes be intense, my thoughts
Strong and perturbed, not doubting at that time—
Creed which ten shameful years have not annulled—
But that the virtue of one paramount mind 180
Would have abashed those impious crests, have quelled
Outrage and bloody power, and in despite
Of what the people were through ignorance
And immaturity, and in the teeth
Of desperate opposition from without,
Have cleared a passage for just government,
And left a solid birthright to the state,
Redeemed according to example given
By ancient lawgivers. In this frame of mind
Reluctantly to England I returned, 190
Compelled by nothing less than absolute want
Of funds for my support; else, well assured
That I both was and must be of small worth,
No better than an alien in the land,
I doubtless should have made a common cause 195
With some who perished, haply perished too—
A poor mistaken and bewildered offering,
Should to the breast of Nature have gone back,
With all my resolutions, all my hopes,
A poet only to myself, to men
Useless, and even, belovèd friend, a soul
To thee unknown.

When to my native land,
After a whole year’s absence, I returned,
I found the air yet busy with the stir 200
Of a contention which had been raised up
Against the traffickers in Negro blood,
An effort which, though baffled, nevertheless
Had called back old forgotten principles
Dismissed from service, had diffused some truths,
And more of virtuous feeling, through the heart
Of the English people. And no few of those,
So numerous—little less in verity
Than a whole nation crying with one voice—
Who had been crossed in this their just intent
And righteous hope, thereby were well prepared
To let that journey sleep awhile, and join
Whatever other caravan appeared
To travel forward towards Liberty
With more success. For me that strife had ne’er
Fastened on my affections, nor did now
Its unsuccessful issue much excite
My sorrow, having laid this faith to heart,
That if France prospered good men would not long
Pay fruitless worship to humanity,
And this most rotten branch of human shame
(Object, as seemed, of superfluous pains)
Would fall together with its parent tree.

Such was my then belief—that there was one,
And only one, solicitude for all.
And now the strength of Britain was put forth
In league with the confederated host;
Not in my single self alone I found,
But in the minds of all ingenuous youth,
Change and subversion from this hour. No shock
Given to my moral nature had I known
Down to that very moment—neither lapse
Nor turn of sentiment—that might be named
A revolution, save at this one time:
All else was progress on the self-same path
On which with a diversity of pace
I had been travelling; this, a stride at once
Into another region. True it is,
’Twas not concealed with what ungracious eyes
Our native rulers from the very first
Had looked upon regenerated France;
Nor had I doubted that this day would come—
But in such contemplation I had thought
Of general interests only, beyond this Had never once foretasted the event. 250
Now had I other business, for I felt The ravage of this most unnatural strife In my own heart; there lay it like a weight, At enmity with all the tenderest springs Of my enjoyments. I, who with the breeze 255
Had played, a green leaf on the blessed tree Of my beloved country—nor had wished For happier fortune than to wither there— Now from my pleasant station was cut off, And tossed about in whirlwinds. I rejoiced, 260
Yes, afterwards, truth painful to record, Exulted in the triumph of my soul When Englishmen by thousands were o’erthrown, Left without glory on the field, or driven, Brave hearts, to shameful flight. It was a grief— 265
Grief call it not, ’twas any thing but that— A conflict of sensations without name, Of which he only who may love the sight Of a village steeple as I do can judge, When in the congregation, bending all 270
To their great Father, prayers were offered up Or praises for our country’s victories, And, ’mid the simple worshippers perchance I only, like an uninvited guest Whom no one owned, sate silent—shall I add, 275
Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come!

Oh, much have they to account for, who could tear By violence at one decisive rent
From the best youth in England their dear pride, Their joy, in England. This, too, at a time 280
In which worst losses easily might wear The best of names; when patriotic love Did of itself in modesty give way Like the precursor when the deity Is come, whose harbinger he is—a time 285
In which apostacy from ancient faith
Seemed but conversion to a higher creed;
Withal a season dangerous and wild—
A time in which Experience would have plucked
Flowers out of any hedge to make thereof
A chaplet, in contempt of his grey locks.

Ere yet the fleet of Britain had gone forth
On this unworthy service, whereunto
The unhappy counsel of a few weak men
Had doomed it, I beheld the vessels lie—
A brood of gallant creatures—on the deep
I saw them in their rest, a sojourner
Through a whole month of calm and glassy days
In that delightful island which protects
Their place of convocation. There I heard
Each evening, walking by the still sea-shore,
A monitory sound which never failed—
The sunset cannon. When the orb went down
In the tranquillity of Nature, came
That voice—ill requiem—seldom heard by me
Without a spirit overcast, a deep
Imagination, thought of woes to come,
And sorrow for mankind, and pain of heart.

In France, the men who for their desperate ends
Had plucked up mercy by the roots were glad
Of this new enemy. Tyrants, strong before
In devilish pleas, were ten times stronger now,
And thus beset with foes on every side,
The goaded land waxed mad; the crimes of few
Spread into madness of the many; blasts
From hell came sanctified like airs from heaven.
The sternness of the just, the faith of those
Who doubted not that Providence had times
Of anger and of vengeance, theirs who throned
The human understanding paramount
And made of that their god, the hopes of those
Who were content to barter short-lived pangs
For a paradise of ages, the blind rage
Of insolent tempers, the light vanity
Of intermeddlers, steady purposes
Of the suspicious, slips of the indiscreet,
And all the accidents of life, were pressed
Into one service, busy with one work.
The Senate was heart-stricken, not a voice
Uplifted, none to oppose or mitigate.
Domestic carnage now filled all the year
With feast-days: the old man from the chimney-nook,
The maiden from the bosom of her love,
The mother from the cradle of her babe,
The warrior from the field—all perished, all—
Friends, enemies, of all parties, ages, ranks,
Head after head, and never heads enough
For those who bade them fall. They found their joy,
They made it, ever thirsty, as a child—
If light desires of innocent little ones
May with such heinous appetites be matched—
Having a toy, a windmill, though the air
Do of itself blow fresh and makes the vane
Spin in his eyesight, he is not content,
But with the plaything at arm’s length he sets
His front against the blast, and runs amain
To make it whirl the faster.

In the depth
Of these enormities, even thinking minds
Forgot at seasons whence they had their being—
Forgot that such a sound was ever heard
As Liberty upon earth—yet all beneath
Her innocent authority was wrought,
Nor could have been, without her blessèd name.
The illustrious wife of Roland, in the hour
Of her composure, felt that agony
And gave it vent in her last words. O friend,
It was a lamentable time for man,
Whether a hope had e’er been his or not;
A woeful time for them whose hopes did still
Outlast the shock; most woeful for those few—
They had the deepest feeling of the grief—
Who still were flattered, and had trust in man.
Meanwhile the invaders fared as they deserved:
The herculean Commonwealth had put forth her arms,
And throttled with an infant godhead’s might
The snakes about her cradle—that was well,
And as it should be, yet no cure for those
Whose souls were sick with pain of what would be
Hereafter brought in charge against mankind.
Most melancholy at that time, O friend,
Were my day-thoughts, my dreams were miserable;
Through months, through years, long after the last beat
Of those atrocities (I speak bare truth,
As if to thee alone in private talk)
I scarcely had one night of quiet sleep,
Such ghastly visions had I of despair,
And tyranny, and implements of death,
And long orations which in dreams I pleaded
Before unjust tribunals, with a voice
Labouring, a brain confounded, and a sense
Of treachery and desertion in the place
The holiest that I knew of—my own soul.

When I began at first, in early youth,
To yield myself to Nature—when that strong
And holy passion overcame me first—
Neither day nor night, evening or morn,
Were free from the oppression, but, great God,
Who send’st thyself into this breathing world
Through Nature and through every kind of life,
And mak’st man what he is, creature divine,
In single or in social eminence,
Above all these raised infinite ascents
When reason, which enables him to be,
Is not sequestered—what a change is here!
How different ritual for this after-worship,
What countenance to promote this second love!
That first was service but to things which lie
At rest, within the bosom of thy will:
Therefore to serve was high beatitude;
The tumult was a gladness, and the fear
Ennobling, venerable; sleep secure,
And waking thoughts more rich than happiest dreams.
But as the ancient prophets were enflamed,
Nor wanted consolations of their own
And majesty of mind, when they denounced
On towns and cities, wallowing in the abyss
Of their offences, punishment to come;
Or saw like other men with bodily eyes
Before them in some desolated place
The consummation of the wrath of Heaven;
So did some portion of that spirit fall
On me to uphold me through those evil times,
And in their rage and dog-day heat I found
Something to glory in, as just and fit,
And in the order of sublimest laws.
And even if that were not, amid the awe
Of unintelligible chastisement
I felt a kind of sympathy with power—
Motions raised up within me, nevertheless,
Which had relationship to highest things.
Wild blasts of music thus did find their way
Into the midst of terrible events,
So that worst tempests might be listened to:
Then was the truth received into my heart
That under heaviest sorrow earth can bring,
Grievs bitterness of ourselves or of our kind,
If from the affliction somewhere do not grow
Honour which could not else have been—a faith,
An elevation, and a sanctity—
If new strength be not given, or old restored,
The blame is ours, not Nature’s. When a taunt
Was taken up by scoffers in their pride,
Saying, ‘Behold the harvest which we reap
From popular government and equality’,
I saw that it was neither these nor aught
Of wild belief engrafted on their names
By false philosophy, that caused the woe,
But that it was a reservoir of guilt
And ignorance, filled up from age to age,
That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,
But burst and spread in deluge through the land.

And as the desert hath green spots, the sea
Small islands in the midst of stormy waves,
So that disastrous period did not want
Such sprinklings of all human excellence
As were a joy to hear of. Yet—nor less
For those bright spots, those fair examples given
Of fortitude, and energy, and love,
And human nature faithful to itself
Under worst trials—was I impelled to think
Of the glad time when first I traversed France,
A youthful pilgrim; above all remembered
That day when through an arch that spanned the street,
A rainbow made of garish ornaments
(Triumphant pomp for Liberty confirmed)
We walked, a pair of weary travellers,
Along the town of Arras—place from which
Issued that Robespierre, who afterwards
Wielded the sceptre of the atheist crew.
When the calamity spread far and wide,
And this same city, which had even appeared
To outrun the rest in exultation, groaned
Under the vengeance of her cruel son,
As Lear reproached the winds, I could almost
Have quarrelled with that blameless spectacle
For being yet an image in my mind
To mock me under such a strange reverse.

O friend, few happier moments have been mine
Through my whole life than that when first I heard
That this foul tribe of Moloch was o’erthrown,
And their chief regent levelled with the dust.
The day was one which haply may deserve
A separate chronicle. Having gone abroad
From a small village where I tarried then,
To the same far-secluded privacy
I was returning. Over the smooth sands
Of Leven’s ample aestuary lay
My journey, and beneath a genial sun,
With distant prospect among gleams of sky
And clouds, and intermingled mountain-tops,
In one inseparable glory clad—
Creatures of one ethereal substance, met
In consistory, like a diadem
Or crown of burning seraphs, as they sit
In the empyrean. Underneath this show
Lay, as I knew, the nest of pastoral vales
Among whose happy fields I had grown up
From childhood. On the fulgent spectacle,
Which neither changed, nor stirred, nor passed away,
I gazed, and with a fancy more alive
On this account—that I had chanced to find
That morning, ranging through the churchyard graves
Of Cartmell’s rural town, the place in which
An honored teacher of my youth was laid.
While we were schoolboys he had died among us,
And was born hither, as I knew, to rest
With his own family. A plain stone, inscribed
With name, date, office, pointed out the spot,
To which a slip of verses was subjoined—
By his desire, as afterwards I learned—
A fragment from the *Elegy* of Gray.
A week, or little less, before his death
He had said to me, ‘My head will soon lie low’;
And when I saw the turf that covered him,
After the lapse of full eight years, those words,
With sound of voice, and countenance of the man,
Came back upon me, so that some few tears
Fell from me in my own despite. And now,
Thus travelling smoothly o’er the level sands,
I thought with pleasure of the verses graven
Upon his tombstone, saying to myself,
‘He loved the poets, and if now alive
Would have loved me, as one not destitute
Of promise, nor belying the kind hope
Which he had formed when I at his command
Began to spin, at first, my toilsome songs.’

Without me and within as I advanced
All that I saw, or felt, or communed with,
Was gentleness and peace. Upon a small
And rocky island near, a fragment stood—
Itself like a sea rock—of what had been
A Romish chapel, where in ancient times
Masses were said at the hour which suited those
Who crossed the sands with ebb of morning tide.
Not far from this still ruin all the plain
Was spotted with a variegated crowd
Of coaches, wains, and travellers, horse and foot,
Wading, beneath the conduct of their guide,
In loose procession through the shallow stream
Of inland water; the great sea meanwhile
Was at safe distance, far retired. I paused,
Unwilling to proceed, the scene appeared
So gay and cheerful—when a traveller
Chancing to pass, I carelessly inquired
If any news were stirring, he replied
In the familiar language of the day
That, Robespierre was dead. Nor was a doubt,
On further question, left within my mind
But that the tidings were substantial truth—
That he and his supporters all were fallen.

Great was my glee of spirit, great my joy
In vengeance, and eternal justice, thus
Made manifest. ‘Come now, ye golden times’,
Said I, forth-breathing on those open sands
A hymn of triumph, ‘as the morning comes
Out of the bosom of the night, come ye.
Thus far our trust is verified: behold,
They who with clumsy desperation brought
Rivers of blood, and preached that nothing else
Could cleanse the Augean stable, by the might
Of their own helper have been swept away.
Their madness is declared and visible;
Elsewhere will safety now be sought, and earth
March firmly towards righteousness and peace.’
Then schemes I framed more calmly, when and how
The madding factions might be tranquillized,
And—though through hardships manifold and long—
The mighty renovation would proceed.
Thus, interrupted by uneasy bursts
Of exultation, I pursued my way
Along that very shore which I had skimmed
In former times, when, spurring from the Vale
Of Nightshade, and St. Mary’s mouldering fane,
And the stone abbot, after circuit made
In wantonness of heart, a joyous crew
Of schoolboys, hastening to their distant home,
Along the margin of the moonlight sea,
We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

From this time forth in France, as is well known,\[1\]
Authority put on a milder face,
Yet every thing was wanting that might give
Courage to those who looked for good by light
Of rational experience—good I mean
At hand, and in the spirit of past aims.
The same belief I nevertheless retained:
The language of the Senate, and the acts
And public measures of the Government,
Though both of heartless omen, had not power

\[1\]Chapter Eleventh begins here in 1850 Version.
To daunt me. In the people was my trust,
And in the virtues which mine eyes had seen,
And to the ultimate repose of things
I looked with unabated confidence.
I knew that wound external could not take
Life from the young Republic, that new foes
Would only follow in the path of shame
Their brethren, and her triumphs be in the end
Great, universal, irresistible.
This faith, which was an object in my mind
Of passionate intuition, had effect
Not small in dazzling me; for thus, through zeal,
Such victory I confounded in my thoughts
With one far higher and more difficult:
Triumphs of unambitious peace at home,
And noiseless fortitude. Beholding still
Resistance strong as heretofore, I thought
That what was in degree the same was likewise
The same in quality, that as the worse
Of the two spirits then at strife remained
Untired, the better surely would preserve
The heart that first had rouzed him—never dreamt
That transmigration could be undergone,
A fall of being suffered, and of hope,
By creature that appeared to have received
Entire conviction what a great ascent
Had been accomplished, what high faculties
It had been called to. Youth maintains, I knew,
In all conditions of society
Communion more direct and intimate
With Nature, and the inner strength she has—
And hence, oftimes, no less with reason too—
Than age, or manhood even. To Nature then,
Power had reverted: habit, custom, law,
Had left an interregnum’s open space
For her to stir about in, uncontrolled.
The warmest judgments, and the most untaught,
Found in events which every day brought forth
Enough to sanction them—and far, far more
To shake the authority of canons drawn
From ordinary practice. I could see
How Babel-like the employment was of those
Who, by the recent deluge stupefied,
With their whole souls went culling from the day
Its petty promises to build a tower
For their own safety—laughed at gravest heads,
Who, watching in their hate of France for signs
Of her disasters, if the stream of rumour
Brought with it one green branch, conceited thence
That not a single tree was left alive
In all her forests. How could I believe
That wisdom could in any shape come near
Men clinging to delusions so insane?
And thus, experience proving that no few
Of my opinions had been just, I took
Like credit to myself where less was due,
And thought that other notions were as sound—
Yea, could not but be right—because I saw
That foolish men opposed them.

To a strain
More animated I might here give way,
And tell, since juvenile errors are my theme,
What in those days through Britain was performed
To turn all judgements out of their right course;
But this is passion over near ourselves,
Reality too close and too intense,
And mingled up with something, in my mind,
Of scorn and condemnation personal
That would profane the sanctity of verse.
Our shepherds (this say merely) at that time
Thirsted to make the guardian crook of law
A tool of murder. They who ruled the state,
Though with such awful proof before their eyes
That he who would sow death, reaps death, or worse,
And can reap nothing better, childlike longed
To imitate—not wise enough to avoid.  
Giants in their impiety alone,  
But in their weapons and their warfare base  
As vermin working out of reach, they leagued  
Their strength perfidiously to undermine  
Justice, and make an end of liberty.  

But from these bitter truths I must return  
To my own history. It hath been told  
That I was led to take an eager part  
In arguments of civil polity  
Abruptly, and indeed before my time:  
I had approached, like other youth, the shield  
Of human nature from the golden side,  
And would have fought even to the death to attest  
The quality of the metal which I saw.  
What there is best in individual man,  
Of wise in passion and sublime in power,  
What there is strong and pure in household love,  
Benevolent in small societies,  
And great in large ones also, when called forth  
By great occasions—these were things of which  
I something knew; yet even these themselves,  
Felt deeply, were not thoroughly understood  
By reason. Nay, far from it; they were yet,  
As cause was given me afterwards to learn,  
Not proof against the injuries of the day—  
Lodged only at the sanctuary’s door,  
Not safe within its bosom. Thus prepared,  
And with such general insight into evil,  
And of the bounds which sever it from good,  
As books and common intercourse with life  
Must needs have given (to the noviciate mind,  
When the world travels in a beaten road,  
Guide faithful as is needed), I began  
To think with fervour upon management  
Of nations—what it is and ought to be,  
And how their worth depended on their laws,
And on the constitution of the state.

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy,
For great were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, we who were strong in love.
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute took at once
The attraction of a country in romance—
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
When most intent on making of herself
A prime enchanter to assist the work
Which then was going forwards in her name.
Not favored spots alone, but the whole earth,
The beauty wore of promise, that which sets
(To take an image which was felt, no doubt,
Among the bowers of Paradise itself)
The budding rose above the rose full-blown.
What temper at the prospect did not wake
To happiness unthought of? The inert
Were rouzed, and lively natures rapt away.
They who had fed their childhood upon dreams—
The playfellows of fancy, who had made
All powers of swiftness, subtlety, and strength
Their ministers, used to stir in lordly wise
Among the grandest objects of the sense,
And deal with whatsoever they found there
As if they had within some lurking right
To wield it—they too, who, of gentle mood,
Had watched all gentle motions, and to these
Had fitted their own thoughts (schemers more mild,
And in the region of their peaceful selves),
Did now find helpers to their hearts’ desire
And stuff at hand plastic as they could wish,
Were called upon to exercise their skill
Not in Utopia—subterraneous fields,
Or some secreted island, heaven knows where—
But in the very world which is the world
Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all. 730

Why should I not confess that earth was then
To me what an inheritance new-fallen
Seems, when the first time visited, to one
Who thither comes to find in it his home?
He walks about and looks upon the place
With cordial transport—moulds it and remoulds—
And is half pleased with things that are amiss,
’Twill be such joy to see them disappear. 740

An active partisan, I thus convoked
From every object pleasant circumstance
To suit my ends. I moved among mankind
With genial feelings still predominant,
When erring, erring on the better side,
And in the kinder spirit—placable,
Indulgent ofttimes to the worst desires,
As, on one side, not uninformed that men
See as it hath been taught them, and that time
Gives rights to error; on the other hand
That throwing off oppression must be work
As well of licence as of liberty;
And above all (for this was more than all),
Not caring if the wind did now and then
Blow keen upon an eminence that gave
Prospect so large into futurity—
In brief, a child of Nature, as at first,
Diffusing only those affections wider
That from the cradle had grown up with me,
And losing, in no other way than light
Is lost in light, the weak in the more strong. 750

In the main outline, such it might be said,
Was my condition, till with open war
Britain opposed the liberties of France.
This threw me first out of the pale of love, 765
Soured and corrupted upwards to the source,
My sentiments; was not, as hitherto,
A swallowing up of lesser things in great,
But change of them into their opposites,
And thus a way was opened for mistakes 770
And false conclusions of the intellect,
As gross in their degree, and in their kind
Far, far more dangerous. What had been a pride
Was now a shame, my likings and my loves
Ran in new channels, leaving old ones dry; 775
And thus a blow, which in maturer age
Would but have touched the judgement, struck more deep
Into sensations near the heart. Meantime,
As from the first, wild theories were afloat,
Unto the subtleties of which at least, 780
I had but lent a careless ear—assured
Of this, that time would soon set all things right,
Prove that the multitude had been oppressed,
And would be so no more. But when events
Brought less encouragement, and unto these 785
The immediate proof of principles no more
Could be entrusted—while the events themselves,
Worn out in greatness, and in novelty,
Less occupied the mind, and sentiments
Could through my understanding’s natural growth 790
No longer justify themselves through faith
Of inward consciousness, and hope that laid
Its hand upon its object—evidence
Safer, of universal application, such
As could not be impeached, was sought elsewhere. 795

And now, become oppressors in their turn,
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence
For one of conquest, losing sight of all
Which they had struggled for, and mounted up,
Openly in the view of earth and heaven, 800
The scale of Liberty. I read her doom,
Vexed inly somewhat, it is true, and sore,
But not dismayed, nor taking to the shame
Of a false prophet. But, roused up, I stuck
More firmly to old tenets, and, to prove
Their temper, strained them more; and thus, in heat
Of contest, did opinions every day
Grow into consequence, till round my mind
They clung as if they were the life of it.

This was the time when, all things tending fast
To depravation, the philosophy
That promised to abstract the hopes of man
Out of his feelings, to be fixed thenceforth
For ever in a purer element,
Found ready welcome. Tempting region that
For zeal to enter and refresh herself,
Where passions had the privilege to work,
And never hear the sound of their own names—
But, speaking more in charity, the dream
Was flattering to the young ingenuous mind
Pleased with extremes, and not the least with that
Which makes the human reason’s naked self
The object of its fervour. What delight!—
How glorious!—in self-knowledge and self-rule
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off
The accidents of nature, time, and place,
That make up the weak being of the past,
Build social freedom on its only basis:
The freedom of the individual mind,
Which, to the blind restraint of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide—the light of circumstances, flashed
Upon an independent intellect.

For howso’er unsettled, never once
Had I thought ill of human-kind, or been
Indifferent to its welfare, but, enflamed
With thirst of a secure intelligence,
And sick of other passion, I pursued
A higher nature—wished that man should start
Out of the worm-like state in which he is,
And spread abroad the wings of Liberty,
Lord of himself, in undisturbed delight.
A noble aspiration!—yet I feel
The aspiration—but with other thoughts
And happier: for I was perplexed and sought
To accomplish the transition by such means
As did not lie in nature, sacrificed
The exactness of a comprehensive mind
To scrupulous and microscopic views
That furnished out materials for a work
Of false imagination, placed beyond
The limits of experience and of truth.

Enough, no doubt, the advocates themselves
Of ancient institutions had performed
To bring disgrace upon their very names;
Disgrace of which custom, and written law,
And sundry moral sentiments, as props
And emanations of these institutes,
Too justly bore a part. A veil had been
Uplifted. Why deceive ourselves?—’twas so,
’Twas even so—and sorrow for the man
Who either had no eyes wherewith to see,
Or seeing hath forgotten. Let this pass,
Suffice it that a shock had then been given
To old opinions, and the minds of all men
Had felt it—that my mind was both let loose,
Let loose and goaded. After what hath been
Already said of patriotic love,
And hinted at in other sentiments,
We need not linger long upon this theme,
This only may be said, that from the first
Having two natures in me (joy the one,
The other melancholy), and withal
A happy man, and therefore bold to look
On painful things—slow, somewhat, too, and stern
In temperament—I took the knife in hand,
And, stopping not at parts less sensitive,
Endeavoured with my best of skill to probe
The living body of society
Even to the heart. I pushed without remorse
My speculations forward, yea, set foot
On Nature’s holiest places.

Time may come
When some dramatic story may afford
Shapes livelier to convey to thee, my friend,
What then I learned—or think I learned—of truth,
And the errors into which I was betrayed
By present objects, and by reasonings false
From the beginning, inasmuch as drawn
Out of a heart which had been turned aside
From Nature by external accidents,
And which was thus confounded more and more,
Misguiding and misguided. Thus I fared,
Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,
Like culprits of the bar, suspiciously
Calling the mind to establish in plain day
Her titles and her honours, now believing,
Now disbelieving, endlessly perplexed
With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground
Of moral obligation—what the rule,
And what the sanction—till, demanding proof,
And seeking it in every thing, I lost
All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
Yielded up moral questions in despair,
And for my future studies, as the sole
Employment of the inquiring faculty,
Turned towards mathematics, and their clear
And solid evidence.

Ah, then it was
That thou, most precious friend, about this time
First known to me, didst lend a living help
To regulate my soul. And then it was
That the belovèd woman in whose sight
Those days were passed—now speaking in a voice
Of sudden admonition like a brook
That does but cross a lonely road; and now
Seen, heard and felt, and caught at every turn,
Companion never lost through many a league—
Maintained for me a saving intercourse
With my true self (for, though impaired, and changed
Much, as it seemed, I was no further changed
Than as a clouded, not a waning moon);
She, in the midst of all, preserved me still
A poet, made me seek beneath that name
My office upon earth, and nowhere else.
And lastly, Nature’s self, by human love
Assisted, through the weary labyrinth
Conducted me again to open day,
Revived the feelings of my earlier life,
Gave me that strength and knowledge full of peace,
Enlarged, and never more to be disturbed,
Which through the steps of our degeneracy,
All degradation of this age, hath still
Upheld me, and upholds me at this day
In the catastrophe (for so they dream,
And nothing less), when, finally to close
And rivet up the gains of France, a Pope
Is summoned in to crown an Emperor—
This last opprobrium, when we see the dog
Returning to his vomit, when the sun
That rose in splendour, was alive, and moved
In exultation among living clouds,
Hath put his function and his glory off,
And, turned into a gewgaw, a machine,
sets like an opera phantom.

Thus, O friend,
Through times of honour, and through times of shame,
Have I descended, tracing faithfully
The workings of a youthful mind, beneath
The breath of great events—its hopes no less
Than universal, and its boundless love—
A story destined for thy ear, who now,
Among the basest and the lowest fallen
Of all the race of men, dost make abode
Where Etna looketh down on Syracuse,
The city of Timoleon. Living God,
How are the mighty prostrated!—they first,
They first of all that breathe, should have awaked
When the great voice was heard out of the tombs
Of ancient heroes. If for France I have grieved,
Who in the judgement of no few hath been
A trifler only, in her proudest day—
Have been distressed to think of what she once
Promised, now is—a far more sober cause
Thine eyes must see of sorrow in a land
Strewed with the wreck of loftiest years, a land
Glorious indeed, substantially renowned
Of simple virtue once, and manly praise,
Now without one memorial hope, not even
A hope to be deferred—for that would serve
To cheer the heart in such entire decay.

But indignation works where hope is not,
And thou, O friend, wilt be refreshed. There is
One great society alone on earth:
The noble living and the noble dead.
Thy consolation shall be there, and time
And Nature shall before thee spread in store
Imperishable thoughts, the place itself
Be conscious of their presence, and the dull
Sirocco air of its degeneracy
Turn as thou mov’st into a healthful breeze
To cherish and invigorate thy frame.

    Thine be those motions strong and sanative,
A ladder for thy spirit to reascend
To health and joy and pure contentedness:
To me the grief confined that thou art gone
From this last spot of earth where Freedom now
Stands single in her only sanctuary—
A lonely wanderer art gone, by pain
Compelled and sickness, at this latter day,
This heavy time of change for all mankind.
I feel for thee, must utter what I feel;
The sympathies, erewhile in part discharged,
Gather afresh, and will have vent again.
My own delights do scarcely seem to me
My own delights: the lordly Alps themselves,
Those rosy peaks from which the morning looks
Abroad on many nations, are not now
Since thy migration and departure, friend,
The gladsome image in my memory
Which they were used to be. To kindred scenes,
On errand—at a time how different—
Thou tak’st thy way, carrying a heart more ripe
For all divine enjoyment, with the soul
Which Nature gives to poets, now by thought
Matured, and in the summer of its strength.
Oh, wrap him in your shades, ye giant woods,
On Etna’s side, and thou, O flowery vale
Of Enna, is there not some nook of thine
From the first playtime of the infant earth
Kept sacred to restorative delight?

Child of the mountains, among shepherds reared,
Even from my earliest schoolday time, I loved
To dream of Sicily; and now a sweet
And gladsome promise wafted from that land
Comes o’er my heart. There’s not a single name
Of note belonging to that honored isle,
Philosopher or bard, Empedocles,
Or Archimedes—deep and tranquil soul—
That is not like a comfort to my grief.
And, O Theocritus, so far have some
Prevailed among the powers of heaven and earth
By force of graces which were theirs, that they
Have had, as thou reportest, miracles
Wrought for them in old time: yea, not unmoved,
When thinking on my own belovèd friend,
I hear thee tell how bees with honey fed
Divine Comates, by his tyrant lord
Within a chest imprisoned impiously—
How with their honey from the fields they came
And fed him there, alive, from month to month,
Because the goatherd, blessèd man, had lips
Wet with the Muse’s nectar.

Thus I soothe
The pensive moments by this calm fireside,
And find a thousand fancied images
That chear the thoughts of those I love, and mine.
Our prayers have been accepted: thou wilt stand
Not as an exile but a visitant
On Etna’s top; by pastoral Arethuse—
Or if that fountain be indeed no more,
Then near some other spring which by the name
Thou gratulatest, willingly deceived—
Shalt linger as a gladsome votary,
And not a captive pining for his home.
LONG time hath man’s unhappiness and guilt detain us: with what dismal sights beset For the outward view, and inwardly oppressed With sorrow, disappointment, vexing thoughts, Confusion of the judgement, zeal decayed— And lastly, utter loss of hope itself And things to hope for. Not with these began Our song, and not with these our song must end. Ye motions of delight, that through the fields Stir gently, breezes and soft airs that breathe The breath of paradise, and find your way To the recesses of the soul; ye brooks Muttering along the stones, a busy noise By day, a quiet one in silent night; And you, ye groves, whose ministry it is To interpose the covert of your shades, Even as a sleep, betwixt the heart of man And the uneasy world—’twixt man himself, Not seldom, and his own unquiet heart— Oh, that I had a music and a voice Harmonious as your own, that I might tell What ye have done for me. The morning shines, Nor heedeth man’s perverseness; spring returns— I saw the spring return, when I was dead To deeper hope, yet had I joy for her

2Book Twelfth begins here in 1850 version.
And welcomed her benevolence, rejoiced  
In common with the children of her love,  
Plants, insects, beasts in field, and birds in bower.  
So neither were complacency, nor peace,  
Nor tender yearnings, wanting for my good  
Through those distracted times: in Nature still  
Glorying, I found a counterpoise to her,  
Which, when the spirit of evil was at height,  
Maintained for me a secret happiness.  
Her I resorted to, and loved so much  
I seemed to love as much as heretofore—  
And yet this passion, fervent as it was,  
Had suffered change; how could there fail to be  
Some change, if merely hence, that years of life  
Were going on, and with them loss or gain  
Inevitable, sure alternative?

This history, my friend, hath chiefly told  
Of intellectual power from stage to stage  
Advancing hand in hand with love and joy,  
And of imagination teaching truth  
Until that natural graciousness of mind  
Gave way to over-pressure of the times  
And their disastrous issues. What availed,  
When spells forbade the voyager to land,  
The fragrance which did ever and anon  
Give notice of the shore, from arbours breathed  
Of blessèd sentiment and fearless love?  
What did such sweet remembrances avail—  
Perfidious then, as seemed—what served they then?  
My business was upon the barren seas,  
My errand was to sail to other coasts.  
Shall I avow that I had hope to see  
(I mean that future times would surely see)  
The man to come parted as by a gulph  
From him who had been?—that I could no more  
Trust the elevation which had made me one  
With the great family that here and there
Is scattered through the abyss of ages past,
Sage, patriot, lover, hero; for it seemed
That their best virtues were not free from taint
Of something false and weak, which could not stand
The open eye of reason. Then I said,
‘Go to the poets, they will speak to thee
More perfectly of purer creatures—yet
If reason be nobility in man,
Can aught be more ignoble than the man
Whom they describe, would fasten if they may
Upon our love by sympathies of truth?’

Thus strangely did I war against myself;
A bigot to a new idolatry,
Did like a monk who hath forsworn the world
Zealously labour to cut off my heart
From all the sources of her former strength;
And, as by simple waving of a wand,
The wizard instantaneously dissolves
Palace or grove, even so did I unsoul
As readily by syllogistic words
(Some charm of logic, ever within reach)
Those mysteries of passion which have made,
And shall continue evermore to make—
In spite of all that reason hath performed,
And shall perform, to exalt and to refine—
One brotherhood of all the human race,
Through all the habitations of past years,
And those to come: and hence an emptiness
Fell on the historian’s page, and even on that
Of poets, pregnant with more absolute truth.
The works of both withered in my esteem,
Their sentence was, I thought, pronounced—their rights
Seemed mortal, and their empire passed away.

What then remained in such eclipse, what light
To guide or cheer? The laws of things which lie
Beyond the reach of human will or power,
The life of Nature, by the God of love
Inspired—celestial presence ever pure—
These left, the soul of youth must needs be rich
Whatever else be lost; and these were mine,
Not a deaf echo merely of the thought
(Bewildered recollections, solitary),
But living sounds. Yet in despite of this—
This feeling, which howe’er impaired or damped,
Yet having been once born can never die—
'Tis true that earth with all her appanage
Of elements and organs, storm and sunshine,
With its pure forms and colours, pomp of clouds,
Rivers, and mountains, objects among which
It might be thought that no dislike or blame,
No sense of weakness or infirmity
Or aught amiss, could possibly have come,
Yea, even the visible universe was scanned
With something of a kindred spirit, fell
Beneath the domination of a taste
Less elevated, which did in my mind
With its more noble influence interfere,
Its animation and its deeper sway.

There comes (if need be now to speak of this
After such long detail of our mistakes),
There comes a time when reason—not the grand
And simple reason, but that humbler power
Which carries on its no inglorious work
By logic and minute analysis—
Is of all idols that which pleases most
The growing mind. A trifler would he be
Who on the obvious benefits should dwell
That rise out of this process; but to speak
Of all the narrow estimates of things
Which hence originate were a worthy theme
For philosophic verse. Suffice it here
To hint that danger cannot but attend
Upon a function rather proud to be
The enemy of falsehood, than the friend
Of truth—to sit in judgement than to feel.

Oh soul of Nature, excellent and fair,
That didst rejoice with me, with whom I too
Rejoiced, through early youth, before the winds
And powerful waters, and in lights and shades
That marched and countermarched about the hills
In glorious apparition, now all eye
And now all ear, but ever with the heart
Employed, and the majestic intellect!
O soul of Nature, that dost overflow
With passion and with life, what feeble men
Walk on this earth, how feeble have I been
When thou wert in thy strength! Nor this through stroke
Of human suffering, such as justifies
Remissness and inaptitude of mind,
But through presumption, even in pleasure pleased
Unworthily, disliking here, and there
Liking, by rules of mimic art transferred
To things above all art. But more—for this,
Although a strong infection of the age,
Was never much my habit—giving way
To a comparison of scene with scene,
Bent overmuch on superficial things,
Pampering myself with meagre novelties
Of colour and proportion, to the moods
Of nature, and the spirit of the place,
Less sensible. Nor only did the love
Of sitting thus in judgment interrupt
My deeper feelings, but another cause,
More subtle and less easily explained,
That almost seems inherent in the creature,
Sensuous and intellectual as he is,
A twofold frame of body and of mind:
The state to which I now allude was one
In which the eye was master of the heart,
When that which is in every stage of life
The most despotic of our senses gained
Such strength in me as often held my mind
In absolute dominion. Gladly here,
Entering upon abstruser argument,
Would I endeavour to unfold the means
Which Nature studiously employs to thwart
This tyranny, summons all the senses each
To counteract the other and themselves,
And makes them all, and the objects with which all
Are conversant, subservient in their turn
To the great ends of liberty and power.
But this is matter for another song;
Here only let me add that my delights,
Such as they were, were sought insatiably.
Though 'twas a transport of the outward sense,
Not of the mind—vivid but not profound—
Yet was I often greedy in the chase,
And roamed from hill to hill, from rock to rock,
Still craving combinations of new forms,
New pleasure, wider empire for the sight,
Proud of its own endowments, and rejoiced
To lay the inner faculties asleep.

      Amid the turns and counter-turns, the strife
And various trials of our complex being
As we grow up, such thraldom of that sense
Seems hard to shun; and yet I knew a maid,
Who, young as I was then, conversed with things
In higher style. From appetites like these
She, gentle visitant, as well she might,
Was wholly free. Far less did critic rules
Or barren intermeddling subtleties
Perplex her mind, but, wise as women are
When genial circumstance hath favored them,
She welcomed what was given, and craved no more.
Whatever scene was present to her eyes,
That was the best, to that she was attuned
Through her humility and lowliness,
And through a perfect happiness of soul
Whose variegated feelings were in this
Sisters, that they were each some new delight.
For she was Nature's inmate: her the birds
And every flower she met with, could they but
Have known her, would have loved. Methought such charm
Of sweetness did her presence breathe around
That all the trees, and all the silent hills,
And every thing she looked on, should have had
An intimation how she bore herself
Towards them and to all creatures. God delights
In such a being, for her common thoughts
Are piety, her life is blessedness.

Even like this maid, before I was called forth
From the retirement of my native hills
I loved whate'er I saw, nor lightly loved,
But fervently—did never dream of aught
More grand, more fair, more exquisitely framed,
Than those few nooks to which my happy feet
Were limited. I had not at that time
Lived long enough, nor in the least survived
The first diviner influence of this world
As it appears to unaccustomed eyes.
I worshipped then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me; could I then take part
In aught but admiration, or be pleased
With any thing but humbleness and love?
I felt, and nothing else; I did not judge,
I never thought of judging, with the gift
Of all this glory filled and satisfied—
And afterwards, when through the gorgeous Alps
Roaming, I carried with me the same heart.
In truth, this degradation—howso'er
Induced, effect in whatso'er degree
Of custom that prepares such wantonness
As makes the greatest things give way to least,
Or any other cause that hath been named,
Or, lastly, aggravated by the times,
Which with their passionate sounds might often make
The milder minstrelsy of rural scenes
Inaudible—was transient. I had felt
Too forcibly, too early in my life,
Visitings of imaginative power
For this to last: I shook the habit off
Entirely and for ever, and again
In Nature’s presence stood, as I stand now,
A sensitive, and a creative soul.

There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct preeminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence, depressed
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repaired—
A virtue, by which pleasure is enhanced,
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments, worthy of all gratitude,
Are scattered everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood—in our childhood even
Perhaps are most conspicuous. Life with me,
As far as memory can look back, is full
Of this beneficent influence.

At a time
When scarcely (I was then not six years old)
My hand could hold a bridle, with proud hopes
I mounted, and we rode towards the hills:
We were a pair of horsemen—honest James
Was with me, my encourager and guide.

We had not travelled long ere some mischance
Disjointed me from my comrade, and, through fear
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor
I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length
Came to a bottom where in former times
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.

The gibbet-mast was mouldered down, the bones
And iron case was gone, but on the turf
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,
Some unknown hand had carved the murderer’s name.

The monumental writing was engraven
In times long past, and still from year to year
By superstition of the neighbourhood
The grass is cleared away; and to this hour
The letters are all fresh and visible.

Faltering, and ignorant where I was, at length
I chanced to espy those characters inscribed
On the green sod: forthwith I left the spot,
And, reascending the bare common, saw
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,
The beacon on the summit, and more near,
A girl who bore a pitcher on her head
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,
An ordinary sight, but I should need
Colours and words that are unknown to man
To paint the visionary dreariness
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,
Did at that time invest the naked pool,
The beacon on the lonely eminence,
The woman, and her garments vexed and tossed
By the strong wind. When, in blessèd season,
With those two dear ones—to my heart so dear—
When, in the blessed time of early love,
Long afterwards I roamed about
In daily presence of this very scene,
Upon the naked pool and dreary crags,
And on the melancholy beacon, fell
The spirit of pleasure and youth's golden gleam—
And think ye not with radiance more divine
From these remembrances, and from the power
They left behind? So feeling comes in aid
Of feeling, and diversity of strength
Attends us, if but once we have been strong.

Oh mystery of man, from what a depth
Proceed thy honours! I am lost, but see
In simple childhood something of the base
On which thy greatness stands—but this I feel,
That from thyself it is that thou must give,
Else never canst receive. The days gone by
Come back upon me from the dawn almost
Of life; the hiding-places of my power
Seem open, I approach, and then they close;
I see by glimpses now, when age comes on
May scarcely see at all; and I would give
While yet we may, as far as words can give,
A substance and a life to what I feel:
I would enshrine the spirit of the past
For future restoration. Yet another
Of these to me affecting incidents,
With which we will conclude.

One Christmas-time,
The day before the holidays began,
Feverish, and tired, and restless, I went forth
Into the fields, impatient for the sight
Of those two horses which should bear us home,
My brothers and myself. There was a crag,
An eminence, which from the meeting-point
Of two highways ascending overlooked
At least a long half-mile of those two roads,
By each of which the expected steeds might come—
The choice uncertain. Thither I repaired
Up to the highest summit. 'Twas a day
Stormy, and rough, and wild, and on the grass
I sate half sheltered by a naked wall.
Upon my right hand was a single sheep,
A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
With those companions at my side, I watched,
Straining my eyes intensely as the mist
Gave intermitting prospect of the wood
And plain beneath. Ere I to school returned
That dreary time, ere I had been ten days
A dweller in my father's house, he died,
And I and my two brothers, orphans then,
Followed his body to the grave. The event,
With all the sorrow which it brought, appeared
A chastisement; and when I called to mind
That day so lately past, when from the crag
I looked in such anxiety of hope,
With trite reflections of morality,
Yet in the deepest passion, I bowed low
To God who thus corrected my desires.
And afterwards the wind and sleety rain,
And all the business of the elements,
The single sheep, and the one blasted tree,
And the bleak music of that old stone wall,
The noise of wood and water, and the mist
Which on the line of each of those two roads
Advanced in such indisputable shapes—
All these were spectacles and sounds to which
I often would repair, and thence would drink
As at a fountain. And I do not doubt
That in this later time, when storm and rain
Beat on my roof at midnight, or by day
When I am in the woods, unknown to me
The workings of my spirit thence are brought.

Thou wilt not languish here, O friend, for whom
I travel in these dim uncertain ways—
Thou wilt assist me, as a pilgrim gone
In quest of highest truth. Behold me then
Once more in Nature’s presence, thus restored,
Or otherwise, and strengthened once again
(With memory left of what had been escaped)
To habits of devoutest sympathy.
FROM Nature doth emotion come, and moods\textsuperscript{3} Of calmness equally are Nature’s gift: This is her glory—these two attributes Are sister horns that constitute her strength; This twofold influence is the sun and shower Of all her bounties, both in origin And end alike benignant. Hence it is That genius, which exists by interchange Of peace and excitation, finds in her His best and purest friend—from her receives That energy by which he seeks the truth, Is roused, aspires, grasps, struggles, wishes, craves From her that happy stillness of the mind Which fits him to receive it when unsought.

Such benefit may souls of humblest frame Partake of, each in their degree; ’tis mine To speak of what myself have known and felt— Sweet task, for words find easy way, inspired By gratitude and confidence in truth. Long time in search of knowledge desperate, I was benighted heart and mind, but now On all sides day began to reappear, And it was proved indeed that not in vain I had been taught to reverence a power

\textsuperscript{3}Book Thirteenth begins here in 1850 version.
That is the very quality and shape
And image of right reason, that matures
Her processes by steady laws, gives birth
To no impatient or fallacious hopes,
No heat of passion or excessive zeal,
No vain conceits, provokes to no quick turns
Of self-applauding intellect, but lifts
The being into magnanimity,
Holds up before the mind, intoxicate
With present objects and the busy dance
Of things that pass away, a temperate shew
Of objects that endure—and by this course
Disposes her, when over-fondly set
On leaving her incumbrances behind,
To seek in man, and in the frame of life
Social and individual, what there is
Desirable, affecting, good or fair,
Of kindred permanence, the gifts divine
And universal, the pervading grace
That hath been, is, and shall be. Above all
Did Nature bring again this wiser mood,
More deeply reestablished in my soul,
Which, seeing little worthy or sublime
In what we blazon with the pompous names
Of power and action, early tutored me
To look with feelings of fraternal love
Upon those unassuming things that hold
A silent station in this beauteous world.

    Thus moderated, thus composed, I found
Once more in man an object of delight,
Of pure imagination, and of love;
And, as the horizon of my mind enlarged,
Again I took the intellectual eye
For my instructor, studious more to see
Great truths, than touch and handle little ones.
Knowledge was given accordingly: my trust
Was firmer in the feelings which had stood
The test of such a trial, clearer far
My sense of what was excellent and right,
The promise of the present time retired
Into its true proportion; sanguine schemes,
Ambitious virtues, pleased me less; I sought
For good in the familiar face of life,
And built thereon my hopes of good to come.

With settling judgements now of what would last,
And what would disappear; prepared to find
Ambition, folly, madness, in the men
Who thrust themselves upon this passive world
As rulers of the world—to see in these
Even when the public welfare is their aim
Plans without thought, or bottomed on false thought
And false philosophy; having brought to test
Of solid life and true result the books
Of modern statists, and thereby perceived
The utter hollowness of what we name
The wealth of nations, where alone that wealth
Is lodged, and how encreased; and having gained
A more judicious knowledge of what makes
The dignity of individual man—
Of man, no composition of the thought,
Abstraction, shadow, image, but the man
Of whom we read, the man whom we behold
With our own eyes—I could not but inquire,
Not with less interest than heretofore,
But greater, though in spirit more subdued,
Why is this glorious creature to be found
One only in ten thousand? What one is,
Why may not many be? What bars are thrown
By Nature in the way of such a hope?
Our animal wants and the necessities
Which they impose, are these the obstacles?—
If not, then others vanish into air.
Such meditations bred an anxious wish
To ascertain how much of real worth,
And genuine knowledge, and true power of mind,
Did at this day exist in those who lived
By bodily labour, labour far exceeding
Their due proportion, under all the weight
Of that injustice which upon ourselves
By composition of society
Ourselves entail. To frame such estimate
I chiefly looked (what need to look beyond?)
Among the natural abodes of men,
Fields with their rural works—recalled to mind
My earliest notices, with these compared
The observations of my later youth
Continued downwards to that very day.

For time had never been in which the throes
And mighty hopes of nations, and the stir
And tumult of the world, to me could yield—
How far soe’er transported and possessed—
Full measure of content, but still I craved
An intermixture of distinct regards
And truths of individual sympathy
Nearer ourselves. Such often might be gleaned
From that great city—else it must have been
A heart-depressing wilderness indeed,
Full soon to me a wearisome abode—
But much was wanting; therefore did I turn
To you, ye pathways and ye lonely roads,
Sought you enriched with every thing I prized,
With human kindness and with Nature’s joy.

Oh, next to one dear state of bliss, vouchsafed
Alas to few in this untoward world,
The bliss of walking daily in life’s prime
Through field or forest with the maid we love
While yet our hearts are young, while yet we breathe
Nothing but happiness, living in some place,
Deep vale, or anywhere the home of both,
From which it would be misery to stir—
Oh, next to such enjoyment of our youth,
In my esteem next to such dear delight,
Was that of wandering on from day to day
Where I could meditate in peace, and find
The knowledge which I love, and teach the sound
Of poet’s music to strange fields and groves,
Converse with men, where if we meet a face
We almost meet a friend, on naked moors
With long, long ways before, by cottage bench,
Or well-spring where the weary traveller rests.

I love a public road: few sights there are
That please me more—such object hath had power
O’er my imagination since the dawn
Of childhood, when its disappearing line
Seen daily afar off, on one bare steep
Beyond the limits which my feet had trod,
Was like a guide into eternity,
At least to things unknown and without bound.
Even something of the grandeur which invests
The mariner who sails the roaring sea
Through storm and darkness, early in my mind
Surrounded too the wanderers of the earth—
Grandeur as much, and loveliness far more.
Awed have I been by strolling bedlamites;
From many other uncouth vagrants, passed
In fear, have walked with quicker step—but why
Take note of this? When I began to inquire,
To watch and question those I met, and held
Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
Were schools to me in which I daily read
With most delight the passions of mankind,
There saw into the depth of human souls—
Souls that appear to have no depth at all
To vulgar eyes. And now, convinced at heart
How little that to which alone we give
The name of education hath to do
With real feeling and just sense, how vain
A correspondence with the talking world
Proves to the most—and called to make good search
If man’s estate, by doom of Nature yoked
With toil, is therefore yoked with ignorance,
If virtue be indeed so hard to rear,
And intellectual strength so rare a boon—
I prized such walks still more; for there I found
Hope to my hope, and to my pleasure peace
And steadiness, and healing and repose
To every angry passion. There I heard,
From mouths of lowly men and of obscure,
A tale of honour—sounds in unison
With loftiest promises of good and fair.

There are who think that strong affections, love
Known by whatever name, is falsely deemed
A gift (to use a term which they would use)
Of vulgar Nature—that its growth requires
Retirement, leisure, language purified
By manners thoughtful and elaborate—
That whoso feels such passion in excess
Must live within the very light and air
Of elegances that are made by man.
True it is, where oppression worse than death
Salutes the being at his birth, where grace
Of culture hath been utterly unknown,
And labour in excess and poverty
From day to day pre-occupy the ground
Of the affections, and to Nature’s self
Oppose a deeper nature—there indeed
Love cannot be; nor does it easily thrive
In cities, where the human heart is sick,
And the eye feeds it not, and cannot feed:
Thus far, no further, is that inference good.

Yes, in those wanderings deeply did I feel
How we mislead each other, above all
How books mislead us—looking for their fame
To judgements of the wealthy few, who see
By artificial lights—how they debase
The many for the pleasure of those few,
Effeminately level down the truth
To certain general notions for the sake
Of being understood at once, or else
Through want of better knowledge in the men
Who frame them, flattering thus our self-conceit
With pictures that ambitiously set forth
The differences, the outside marks by which
Society has parted man from man,
Neglectful of the universal heart.

Here calling up to mind what then I saw
A youthful traveller, and see daily now
Before me in my rural neighbourhood—
Here might I pause, and bend in reverence
To Nature, and the power of human minds,
To men as they are men within themselves.
How oft high service is performed within
When all the external man is rude in shew,
Not like a temple rich with pomp and gold,
But a mere mountain-chapel such as shields
Its simple worshippers from sun and shower.
‘Of these,’ said I, ‘shall be my song. Of these,
If future years mature me for the task,
Will I record the praises, making verse
Deal boldly with substantial things—in truth
And sanctity of passion speak of these,
That justice may be done, obeisance paid
Where it is due. Thus haply shall I teach,
Inspire, through unadulterated ears
Pour rapture, tenderness, and hope, my theme
No other than the very heart of man
As found among the best of those who live
Not unexalted by religious faith,
Not uninformed by books (good books, though few),
In Nature’s presence—thence may I select
Sorrow that is not sorrow but delight,
And miserable love that is not pain
To hear of, for the glory that redounds
Therefrom to human-kind and what we are.
Be mine to follow with no timid step
Where knowledge leads me: it shall be my pride
That I have dared to tread this holy ground,
Speaking no dream but things oracular,
Matter not lightly to be heard by those
Who to the letter of the outward promise
Do read the invisible soul, by men adroit
In speech and for communion with the world
Accomplished, minds whose faculties are then
Most active when they are most eloquent,
And elevated most when most admired.
Men may be found of other mold than these,
Who are their own upholders, to themselves
Encouragement, and energy, and will,
Expressing liveliest thoughts in lively words
As native passion dictates. Others, too,
There are among the walks of homely life
Still higher, men for contemplation framed,
Shy, and unpractised in the strife of phrase,
Meek men, whose very souls perhaps would sink
Beneath them, summoned to such intercourse:
Their is the language of the heavens, the power,
The thought, the image, and the silent joy;
Words are but under-agents in their souls—
When they are grasping with their greatest strength
They do not breathe among them. This I speak
In gratitude to God, who feeds our hearts
For his own service, knoweth, loveth us,
When we are unregarded by the world.'

Also about this time did I receive
Convictions still more strong than heretofore
Not only that the inner frame is good,
And graciously composed, but that, no less,
Nature through all conditions hath a power
To consecrate—if we have eyes to see—
The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
Grandeur upon the very humblest face 285
Of human life. I felt that the array
Of outward circumstance and visible form
Is to the pleasure of the human mind
What passion makes it; that meanwhile the forms
Of Nature have a passion in themselves 290
That intermingles with those works of man
To which she summons him, although the works
Be mean, having nothing lofty of their own;
And that the genius of the poet hence
May boldly take his way among mankind
Wherever Nature leads—that he hath stood 295
By Nature’s side among the men of old,
And so shall stand for ever. Dearest friend,
Forgive me if I say that I, who long
Had harboured reverentially a thought
That poets, even as prophets, each with each
Connected in a mighty scheme of truth,
Have each for his peculiar dower a sense
By which he is enabled to perceive
Something unseen before—forgive me, friend, 300
If I, the meanest of this band, had hope
That unto me had also been vouchsafed
An influx, that in some sort I possessed
A privilege, and that a work of mine,
Proceeding from the depth of untaught things, 310
Enduring and creative, might become
A power like one of Nature’s.

To such a mood,
Once above all—a traveller at that time
Upon the plain of Sarum—was I raised: 315
There on the pastoral downs without a track
To guide me, or along the bare white roads
Lengthening in solitude their dreary line,
While through those vestiges of ancient times
I ranged, and by the solitude o’ercome,
I had a reverie and saw the past,
Saw multitudes of men, and here and there
A single Briton in his wolf-skin vest,
With shield and stone-ax, stride across the wold;
The voice of spears was heard, the rattling spear
Shaken by arms of mighty bone, in strength
Long mouldered, of barbaric majesty.
I called upon the darkness, and it took—
A midnight darkness seemed to come and take—
All objects from my sight; and lo, again
The desart visible by dismal flames!
It is the sacrificial altar, fed
With living men—how deep the groans!—the voice
Of those in the gigantic wicker thrills
Throughout the region far and near, pervades
The monumental hillocks, and the pomp
Is for both worlds, the living and the dead.
At other moments, for through that wide waste
Three summer days I roamed, when ’twas my chance
To have before me on the downy plain
Lines, circles, mounts, a mystery of shapes
Such as in many quarters yet survive,
With intricate profusion figuring o’er
The untilled ground (the work, as some divine,
Of infant science, imitative forms
By which the Druids covertly expressed
Their knowledge of the heavens, and imaged forth
The constellations), I was gently charmed,
Albeit with an antiquarian’s dream,
And saw the bearded teachers, with white wands
Uplifted, pointing to the starry sky,
Alternately, and plain below, while breath
Of music seemed to guide them, and the waste
Was cleared with stillness and a pleasant sound.

This for the past, and things that may be viewed,
Or fancied, in the obscurities of time.
Nor is it, friend, unknown to thee; at least—
Thyself delighted—thou for my delight
Hast said, perusing some imperfect verse
Which in that lonesome journey was composed,
That also I must then have exercised
Upon the vulgar forms of present things
And actual world of our familiar days,
A higher power—have caught from them a tone,
An image, and a character, by books
Not hitherto reflected. Call we this
But a persuasion taken up by thee
In friendship, yet the mind is to herself
Witness and judge, and I remember well
That in life’s everyday appearances
I seemed about this period to have sight
Of a new world—a world, too, that was fit
To be transmitted and made visible
To other eyes, as having for its base
That whence our dignity originates,
That which both gives it being, and maintains
A balance, an ennobling interchange
Of action from within and from without:
The excellence, pure spirit, and best power,
Both of the object seen, and eye that sees.
In one of these excursions, travelling then[4] Through Wales on foot and with a youthful friend, I left Bethkelet’s huts at couching-time, And westward took my way to see the sun Rise from the top of Snowdon. Having reached The cottage at the mountain’s foot, we there Rouzed up the shepherd who by ancient right Of office is the stranger’s usual guide, And after short refreshment sallied forth.

It was a summer’s night, a close warm night, Wan, dull, and glaring, with a dripping mist Low-hung and thick that covered all the sky, Half threatening storm and rain; but on we went Unchecked, being full of heart and having faith In our tried pilot. Little could we see, Hemmed round on every side with fog and damp, And, after ordinary travellers’ chat With our conductor, silently we sunk Each into commerce with his private thoughts. Thus did we breast the ascent, and by myself Was nothing either seen or heard the while Which took me from my musings, save that once The shepherd’s cur did to his own great joy Unearth a hedgehog in the mountain-crags, Round which he made a barking turbulent. This small adventure—for even such it seemed

In that wild place and at the dead of night—
Being over and forgotten, on we wound
In silence as before. With forehead bent
Earthward, as if in opposition set
Against an enemy, I panted up
With eager pace, and no less eager thoughts,
Thus might we wear perhaps an hour away,
Ascending at loose distance each from each,
And I, as chanced, the foremost of the band—
When at my feet the ground appeared to brighten,
And with a step or two seemed brighter still;
Nor had I time to ask the cause of this,
For instantly a light upon the turf
Fell like a flash. I looked about, and lo,
The moon stood naked in the heavens at height
Immense above my head, and on the shore
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,
Which meek and silent rested at my feet.
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved
All over this still ocean, and beyond,
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes,
Into the sea, the real sea, that seemed
To dwindle and give up its majesty,
Usurped upon as far as sight could reach.
Meanwhile, the moon looked down upon this shew
In single glory, and we stood, the mist
Touching our very feet; and from the shore
At distance not the third part of a mile
Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour,
A deep and gloomy breathing-place, through which
Mounted the roar of waters, torrents, steams
Innumerable, roaring with one voice.
The universal spectacle throughout
Was shaped for admiration and delight,
Grand in itself alone, but in that breach
Through which the homeless voice of waters rose,
That dark deep thoroughfare, had Nature lodged
The soul, the imagination of the whole.

A meditation rose in me that night
Upon the lonely mountain when the scene
Had passed away, and it appeared to me
The perfect image of a mighty mind,
Of one that feeds upon infinity,
That is exalted by an under-presence,
The sense of God, or whatsoe’er is dim
Or vast in its own being—above all,
One function of such mind had Nature there
Exhibited by putting forth, and that
With circumstance most awful and sublime:
That domination which she oftentimes
Exerts upon the outward face of things,
So moulds them, and endues, abstracts, combines,
Or by abrupt and unhabitual influence
Doth make one object so impress itself
Upon all others, and pervades them so,
That even the grossest minds must see and hear,
And cannot chuse but feel. The power which these
Acknowledge when thus moved, which Nature thus
Thrusts forth upon the senses, is the express
Resemblance—in the fullness of its strength
Made visible—a genuine counterpart
And brother of the glorious faculty
Which higher minds bear with them as their own.
This is the very spirit in which they deal
With all the objects of the universe:
They from their native selves can send abroad
Like transformation, for themselves create
A like existence, and, when’er it is
Created for them, catch it by an instinct.
Them the enduring and the transient both
Serve to exalt. They build up greatest things
From least suggestions, ever on the watch,
Willing to work and to be wrought upon.
They need not extraordinary calls
To rouze them—in a world of life they live,
By sensible impressions not enthralled,
But quickened, rouzed, and made thereby more fit
To hold communion with the invisible world.
Such minds are truly from the Deity,
For they are powers; and hence the highest bliss
That can be known is theirs—the consciousness
Of whom they are, habitually infused
Through every image, and through every thought,
And all impressions; hence religion, faith,
And endless occupation for the soul,
Whether discursive or intuitive;
Hence sovereignty within and peace at will,
Emotion which best foresight need not fear,
Most worthy then of trust when most intense;
Hence cheerfulness in every act of life;
Hence truth in moral judgements; and delight
That fails not, in the external universe.

Oh, who is he that hath his whole life long
Preserved, enlarged, this freedom in himself?—
For this alone is genuine liberty,
Witness, ye solitudes, where I received
My earliest visitations (careless then
Of what was given me), and where now I roam,
A meditative, oft a suffering man,
And yet I trust with undiminished powers;
Witness—whatever falls my better mind,
Revolving with the accidents of life,
May have sustained—that, howso’er misled,
I never in the quest of right and wrong
Did tamper with myself from private aims;
Nor was in any of my hopes the dupe
Of selfish passions; nor did wilfully
Yield ever to mean cares and low pursuits;
But rather did with jealousy shrink back
From every combination that might aid
The tendency, too potent in itself,
Of habit to enslave the mind—I mean
Oppress it by the laws of vulgar sense,
And substitute a universe of death,
The falsest of all worlds, in place of that
Which is divine and true. To fear and love
(To love as first and chief, for there fear ends)
Be this ascribed, to early intercourse
In presence of sublime and lovely forms
With the adverse principles of pain and joy—
Evil as one is rashly named by those
Who know not what they say. From love, for here
Do we begin and end, all grandeur comes,
All truth and beauty—from pervading love—
That gone, we are as dust. Behold the fields
In balmy springtime, full of rising flowers
And happy creatures; see that pair, the lamb
And the lamb’s mother, and their tender ways
Shall touch thee to the heart; in some green bower
Rest, and be not alone, but have thou there
The one who is thy choice of all the world—
There linger, lulled, and lost, and rapt away—
Be happy to thy fill; thou cal’st this love,
And so it is, but there is higher love
Than this, a love that comes into the heart
With awe and a diffusive sentiment.
Thy love is human merely: this proceeds
More from the brooding soul, and is divine.

This love more intellectual cannot be
Without imagination, which in truth
Is but another name for absolute strength
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the moving soul
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream
From darkness, and the very place of birth
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard
The sound of waters; followed it to light
And open day, accompanied its course
Among the ways of Nature, afterwards
Lost sight of it bewildered and engulphed,
Then given it greeting as it rose once more
With strength, reflecting in its solemn breast
The works of man, and face of human life;
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
The feeling of life endless, the one thought
By which we live, infinity and God.

Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually. Here must thou be, O man,
Strength to thyself—no helper hast thou here—
Here keepest thou thy individual state:
No other can divide with thee this work,
No secondary hand can intervene
To fashion this ability. 'Tis thine,
The prime and vital principle is thine
In the recesses of thy nature, far
From any reach of outward fellowship,
Else 'tis not thine at all. But joy to him,
O, joy to him who here hath sown—hath laid
Here the foundations of his future years—
For all that friendship, all that love can do,
All that a darling countenance can look
Or dear voice utter, to complete the man,
Perfect him, made imperfect in himself,
All shall be his. And he whose soul hath risen
Up to the height of feeling intellect
Shall want no humbler tenderness, his heart
Be tender as a nursing mother’s heart;
Of female softness shall his life be full,
Of little loves and delicate desires,
Mild interests and gentlest sympathies.

Child of my parents, sister of my soul,
Elsewhere have strains of gratitude been breathed
To thee for all the early tenderness
Which I from thee imbibed. And true it is
That later seasons owned to thee no less;
For, spite of thy sweet influence and the touch
Of other kindred hands that opened out
The springs of tender thought in infancy,
And spite of all which singly I had watched
Of elegance, and each minuter charm
In Nature or in life, still to the last—
Even to the very going-out of youth,
The period which our story now hath reached—
I too exclusively esteemed that love,
And sought that beauty, which as Milton sings
Hath terror in it. Thou didst soften down
This over-sternness; but for thee, sweet friend,
My soul, too reckless of mild grace, had been
Far longer what by Nature it was framed—
Longer retained its countenance severe—
A rock with torrents roaring, with the clouds
Familiar, and a favorite of the stars;
But thou didst plant its crevices with flowers,
Hang it with shrubs that twinkle in the breeze,
And teach the little birds to build their nests
And warble in its chambers. At a time
When Nature, destined to remain so long
Foremost in my affections, had fallen back
Into a second place, well pleased to be
A handmaid to a nobler than herself—
When every day brought with it some new sense
Of exquisite regard for common things,
And all the earth was budding with these gifts
Of more refined humanity—thy breath,
Dear sister, was a kind of gentler spring
That went before my steps.

With such a theme
Coleridge—with this my argument—of thee
Shall I be silent? O most loving soul,
Placed on this earth to love and understand,
And from thy presence shed the light of love,
Shall I be mute ere thou be spoken of?
Thy gentle spirit to my heart of hearts
Did also find its way; and thus the life
Of all things and the mighty unity
In all which we behold, and feel, and are,
Admitted more habitually a mild
Interposition, closelier gathering thoughts
Of man and his concerns, such as become
A human creature, be he who he may,
Poet, or destined to an humbler name;
And so the deep enthusiastic joy,
The rapture of the hallelujah sent
From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed,
And balanced, by a reason which indeed
Is reason, duty, and pathetic truth—
And God and man divided, as they ought,
Between them the great system of the world,
Where man is sphered, and which God animates.

And now, O friend, this history is brought
To its appointed close: the discipline
And consummation of the poet’s mind
In every thing that stood most prominent
Have faithfully been pictured. We have reached
The time, which was our object from the first,
When we may (not presumptuously, I hope)
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such
My knowledge, as to make me capable
Of building up a work that should endure.
Yet much hath been omitted, as need was—
Of books how much! and even of the other wealth
Which is collected among woods and fields,
Far more. For Nature’s secondary grace,
That outward illustration which is hers,
Hath hitherto been barely touched upon:
The charm more superficial, and yet sweet,
Which from her works finds way, contemplated
As they hold forth a genuine counterpart
And softening mirror of the moral world.

Yes, having tracked the main essential power—
Imagination—up her way sublime,
In turn might fancy also be pursued
Through all her transmigrations, till she too
Was purified, had learned to ply her craft
By judgement steadied. Then might we return,
And in the rivers and the groves behold
Another face, might hear them from all sides
Calling upon the more instructed mind
To link their images—with subtle skill
Sometimes, and by elaborate research—
With forms and definite appearances
Of human life, presenting them sometimes
To the involuntary sympathy
Of our internal being, satisfied
And soothed with a conception of delight
Where meditation cannot come, which thought
Could never heighten. Above all, how much
Still nearer to ourselves is overlooked
In human nature and that marvellous world
As studied first in my own heart, and then
In life, among the passions of mankind
And qualities commixed and modified
By the infinite varieties and shades
Of individual character. Herein
It was for me (this justice bids me say)
No useless preparation to have been
The pupil of a public school, and forced
In hardy independence to stand up
Among conflicting passions and the shock
Of various tempers, to endure and note
What was not understood, though known to be—
Among the mysteries of love and hate,
Honour and shame, looking to right and left,
Unchecked by innocence too delicate,
And moral notions too intolerant,
Sympathies too contracted. Hence, when called
To take a station among men, the step
Was easier, the transition more secure,
More profitable also; for the mind
Learns from such timely exercise to keep
In wholesome separation the two natures—
The one that feels, the other that observes.

Let one word more of personal circumstance—
Not needless, as it seems—be added here.
Since I withdrew unwillingly from France,
The story hath demanded less regard
To time and place; and where I lived and how,
Hath been no longer scrupulously marked.
Three years, until a permanent abode
Received me with that sister of my heart
Who ought by rights the dearest to have been
Conspicuous through this biographic verse—
Star seldom utterly concealed from view—
I led an undomestic wanderer’s life.
In London chiefly was my home, and thence
Excursively, as personal friendships, chance
Or inclination led, or slender means
Gave leave, I roamed about from place to place,
Tarrying in pleasant nooks, wherever found,
Through England or through Wales. A youth—he bore
The name of Calvert; it shall live, if words
Of mine can give it life—without respect
To prejudice or custom, having hope
That I had some endowments by which good
Might be promoted, in his last decay
From his own family withdrawing part
Of no redundant patrimony, did
By a bequest sufficient for my needs
Enable me to pause for choice, and walk
At large and unrestrained, nor damped too soon 360
By mortal cares. Himself no poet, yet
Far less a common spirit of the world,
He deemed that my pursuits and labors lay
Apart from all that leads to wealth, or even
Perhaps to necessary maintenance,
Without some hazard to the finer sense,
He cleared a passage for me, and the stream
Flowed in the bent of Nature.

Having now
Told what best merits mention, further pains 370
Our present labour seems not to require,
And I have other tasks. Call back to mind
The mood in which this poem was begun,
O friend—the termination of my course
Is nearer now, much nearer, yet even then
In that distraction and intense desire
I said unto the life which I had lived,
‘Where art thou? Hear I not a voice from thee
Which ’tis reproach to hear?’ Anon I rose
As if on wings, and saw beneath me stretched
Vast prospect of the world which I had been,
And was; and hence this song, which like a lark
I have protracted, in the unwearied heavens
Singing, and often with more plaintive voice
Attempered to the sorrows of the earth—
Yet centring all in love, and in the end
All gratulant if rightly understood.

Whether to me shall be allotted life,
And with life power to accomplish aught of worth
Sufficient to excuse me in men’s sight 390
For having given this record of myself,
Is all uncertain, but, belovèd friend,
When looking back thou seest, in clearer view
Than any sweetest sight of yesterday,
That summer when on Quantock’s grassy hills
Far ranging, and among the sylvan coombs,
Thou in delicious words, with happy heart,
Didst speak the vision of that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes
Didst utter of the Lady Christabel;

And I, associate in such labour, walked
Murmuring of him, who—joyous hap—was found,
After the perils of his moonlight ride,
Near the loud waterfall, or her who sate
In misery near the miserable thorn;

When thou dost to that summer turn thy thoughts,
And hast before thee all which then we were,
To thee, in memory of that happiness,
It will be known—by thee at least, my friend,
Felt—that the history of a poet’s mind
Is labour not unworthy of regard:
To thee the work shall justify itself.

The last and later portions of this gift
Which I for thee design have been prepared
In times which have from those wherein we first
Together wandered in wild poesy
Differed thus far, that they have been, my friend,
Times of much sorrow, of a private grief
Keen and enduring, which the frame of mind
That in this meditative history
Hath been described, more deeply makes me feel,
Yet likewise hath enabled me to bear
More firmly; and a comfort now, a hope,
One of the dearest which this life can give,
Is mine: that thou art near, and wilt be soon
Restored to us in renovated health—
When, after the first mingling of our tears,
’Mong other consolations, we may find
Some pleasure from this offering of my love.

Oh, yet a few short years of useful life,
And all will be complete—thy race be run,
Thy monument of glory will be raised.
Then, though too weak to tread the ways of truth,
This age fall back to old idolatry,
Though men return to servitude as fast
As the tide ebbs, to ignominy and shame
By nations sink together, we shall still
Find solace in the knowledge which we have,
Blessed with true happiness if we may be
United helpers forward of a day
Of firmer trust, joint labourers in the work—
Should Providence such grace to us vouchsafe—
Of their redemption, surely yet to come.
Prophets of Nature, we to them will speak
A lasting inspiration, sanctified
By reason and by truth; what we have loved
Others will love, and we may teach them how:
Instruct them how the mind of man becomes
A thousand times more beautiful than the earth
On which he dwells, above this frame of things
(Which, 'mid all revolutions in the hopes
And fears of men, doth still remain unchanged)
In beauty exalted, as it is itself
Of substance and of fabric more divine.