

FICTION

Robert Browning

**The Pied Piper
of Hamelin
and Other
Poems**



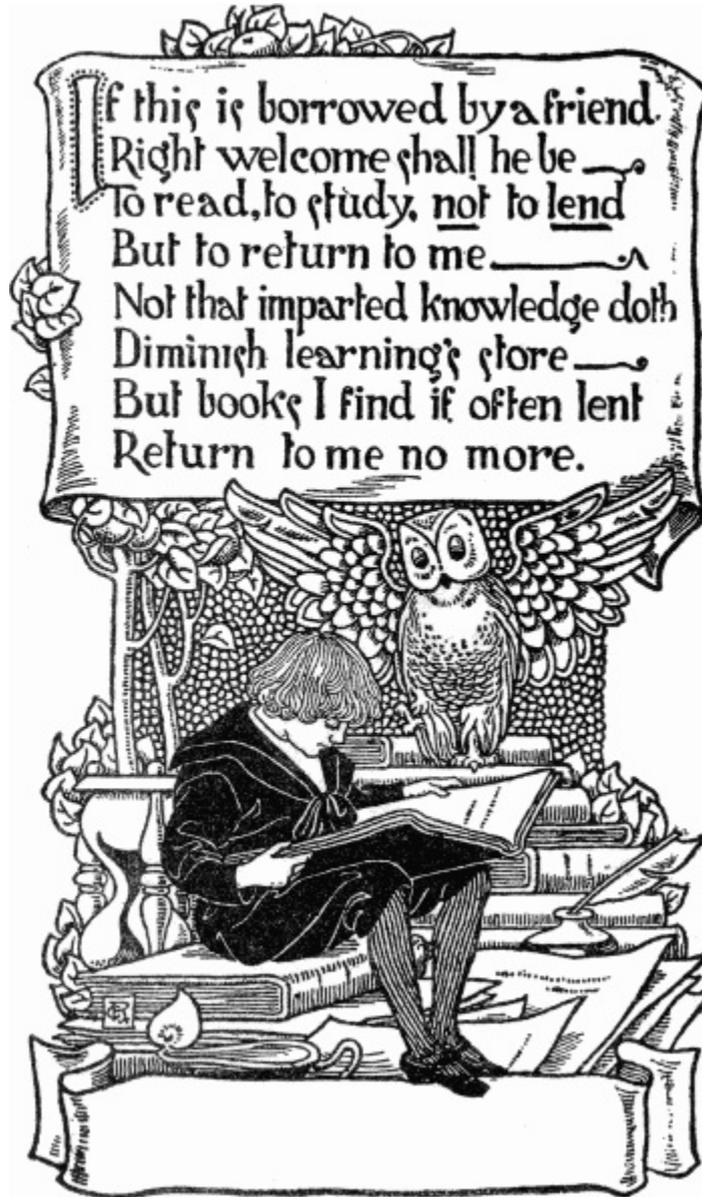
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FICTION

The Pied Piper of Hamelin and Other Poems



[Pg 1]

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For Little Boys

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THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

EVERY BOY'S LIBRARY



THE PIED
PIPER of
HAMELIN
and Other Poems

By
ROBERT BROWNING



ILLUSTRATED

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN	11
HERVE RIEL	24
CAVALIER TUNES	31
"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"	34
THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR	37
INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP	39
CLIVE	41

MULEYKEH	59
TRAY	68
A TALE	70
GOLD HAIR	75
DONALD	82
THE GLOVE	90

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN	Frontispiece
"LEAVE TO GO AND SEE MY WIFE, WHOM I CALL THE BELLE AURORE"	30
"I GALLOPED, DIRCK GALLOPED, WE GALLOPED ALL THREE"	34
"A RIDER BOUND ON BOUND FULL GALLOPING, NOR BRIDLE DREW UNTIL HE REACHED THE MOUND"	39
"HAIR, SUCH A WONDER OF FLIX AND FLOSS"	75
"AND FULL IN THE FACE OF ITS OWNER FLUNG THE GLOVE"	95

THE BOYS' BROWNING.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN. A CHILD'S STORY.

I

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
 By famous Hanover city;
 The river Weser, deep and wide,
 Washes its wall on the southern side;
 A pleasanter spot you never spied;
 But, when begins my ditty,
 Almost five hundred years ago,
 To see the townsfolk suffer so
 From vermin, was a pity.

II

Rats!
 They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
 And bit the babies in the cradles,
 And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
 And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
 Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
 Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
 And even spoiled the women's chats
 By drowning their speaking
 With shrieking and squeaking
 In fifty different sharps and flats.

III

At last the people in a body

To the Town Hall came flocking:
"Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation--shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV

An hour they sat in council;
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain--
I'm sure my poor head aches again,
I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
Oh, for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber-door but a gentle tap?
"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

V

"Come in!"--the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: "It's as my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI

He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,

By means of a secret charm, to draw
 All creatures living beneath the sun,
 That creep or swim or fly or run,
 After me so as you never saw!
 And I chiefly use my charm
 On creatures that do people harm,
 The mole and toad and newt and viper;
 And people call me the Pied Piper."
 (And here they noticed round his neck
 A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
 To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
 And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
 And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
 As if impatient to be playing
 Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
 Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
 "Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
 In Tartary I freed the Cham,
 Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
 I eased in Asia the Nizam
 Of a monstrous brood of vampire-bats:
 And as for what your brain bewilders,
 If I can rid your town of rats
 Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
 "One? fifty thousand!"--was the exclamation
 Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII

Into the street the Piper stept,
 Smiling first a little smile,
 As if he knew what magic slept
 In his quiet pipe the while;
 Then, like a musical adept,
 To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
 And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
 You heard as if an army muttered;
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats
 Brown rats, black rats, gray rats, tawny rats
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
 Families by tens and dozens,
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives--
 Followed the Piper for their lives.
 From street to street he piped advancing,
 And step for step they followed dancing,
 Until they came to the river Weser,
 Wherein all plunged and perished!
 --Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
 Swam across and lived to carry
 (As he, the manuscript he cherished)
 To Rat-land home his commentary:
 Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
 I heard a sound as of scraping trine

I heard a sound as of scraping pipes,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press's gripe:
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, 'Oh, rats, rejoice!
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!'
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me,
Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!'
--I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
"Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders,
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!"--when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation, too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gypsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
"Our business was done at the river's brink;
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke;
But as for the guilders, what we spoke
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried,
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
I've promised to visit by dinner-time
Bagdat, and accept the prime
Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,

For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor:
With him I proved no bargain-driver,
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I brook
Being worse treated than a Cook?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII

Once more he stept into the street,
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling;
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farmyard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,
--Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However, he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!
He's forced to let the piping drop,
And we shall see our children stop!"
When, lo, as they reached the mountainside,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced, and the children followed

And the piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountainside shut fast.
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,--
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
I can't forget that I'm bereft
Of all the pleasant sights they see,
Which the Piper also promised me.
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey-bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings:
And just as I became assured
My lame foot would be speedily cured,
The music stopped and I stood still,
And found myself outside the hill,
Left alone against my will,
To go now limping as before,
And never hear of that country more!"

XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin!
There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
The Mayor sent East, West, North, and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
"And so long after what happened here
On the Twenty-second of July,
Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street--
Where any one playing on pipe or tabour
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted

The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men--especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free from rats or from mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

HERVE RIEL.

I

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,--woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick--or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,
Shall the *Formidable* here with her twelve and eighty guns
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,

While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech.)
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
--A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate--first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Herve Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Herve Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Greve where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this *Formidable* clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Greve,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
--Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life,--here's my head!" cries Herve Riel.

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.

Still the north wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
 See, safe through shoal and rock,
 How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
 Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past,
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Herve Riel hollas "Anchor!"--sure as fate,
Up the English come--too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
 They see the green trees wave
 On the heights o'erlooking Greve.
Hearts that bled are stanch'd with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
 Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
 As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
 "This is Paradise for Hell!
 Let France, let France's King
 Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
 "Herve Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
 Not a symptom of surprise
 In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
 Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
 You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
 Since on board the duty's done,
 And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?--
Since 'tis ask and have. I mav--

Since the others go ashore--
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,--nothing more.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Herve Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Herve Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Herve Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!



"LEAVE TO GO AND SEE MY WIFE, WHOM I CALL THE BELLE AURORE."

CAVALIER TUNES.

I. MARCHING ALONG.

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're--

CHORUS.--Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell.
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,

CHO.--Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

CHO.--March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II. GIVE A ROUSE.

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

CHO.--King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

CHO.--King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III. BOOT AND SADDLE.

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray.

CHO.--"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay--

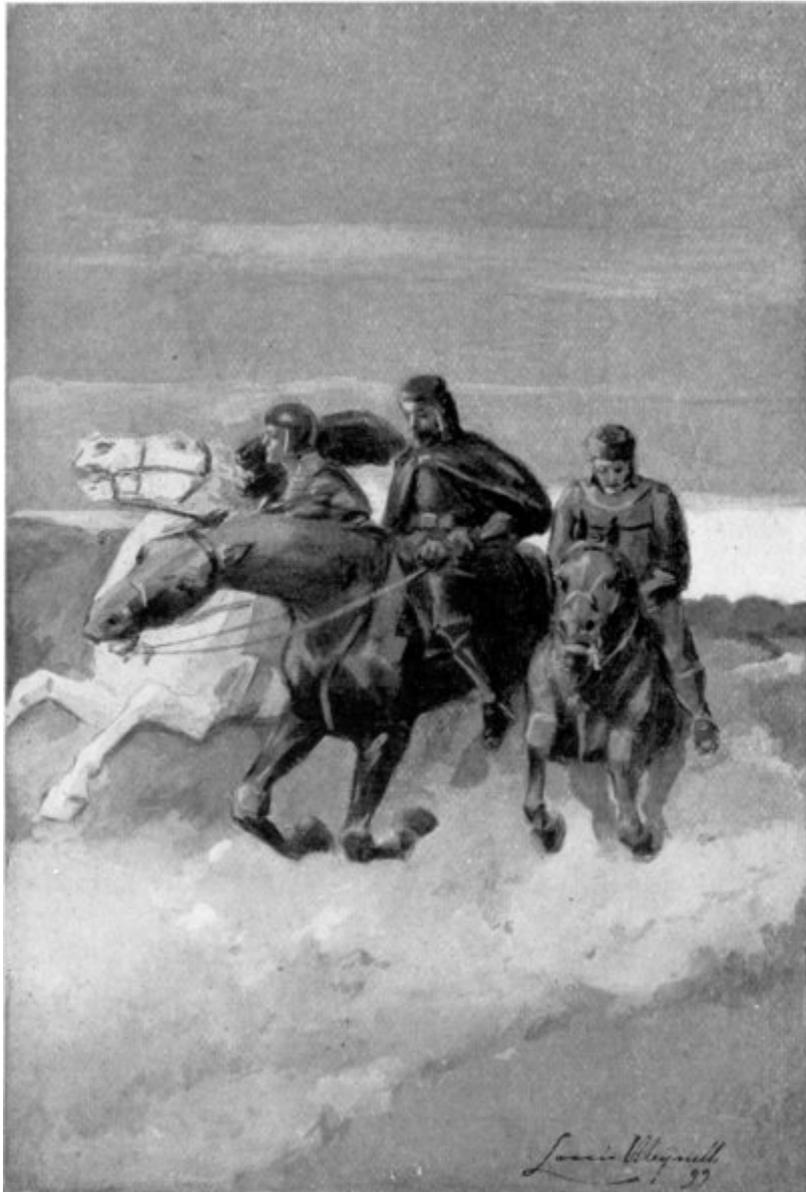
CHO.--"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

CHO.--"Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I've better counsellors; what counsel they?

CHO.--"Boot, saddle, to horse and away!"



"I GALLOPED, DIRCK GALLOPED, WE GALLOPED ALL THREE."

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX."

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear:
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;

At Duffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half chime,
So Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare through the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,--ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
We'll remember at Aix"--for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.
So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

"How they'll greet us!" and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to hear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

And all I remember is--friends flocking round
As I sat with his head, 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR.

As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried,
As I ride, as I ride.

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride?
Or are witnesses denied--
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride?

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied?)
To reside--where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
--Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed--
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride!

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that's meant me--satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!



"A RIDER BOUND ON BOUND FULL GALLOPING, NOR BRIDLE DREW UNTIL HE REACHED THE MOUND."

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP.

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow,
Oppressive with its mind.

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall,
Let once my army-leader, Lannes,
Waver at yonder wall,--"
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect--
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
We've got you Ratisbon!
The Marshal's in the market-place,
And you'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
Where I, to heart's desire,
Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
"I'm killed, Sire!" and his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

CLIVE.

I and Clive were friends--and why not? Friends! I think you laugh, my lad.
Clive it was gave England India, while your father gives--egad,
England nothing but the graceless boy who lures him on to speak--
"Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades--" with a tongue thrust in your cheek!
Very true: in my eyes, your eyes, all the world's eyes, Clive was man,
I was, am, and ever shall be--mouse, nay, mouse of all its clan
Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen's estimate for fame;
While the man Clive--he fought Plassy, spoiled the clever foreign game,

Conquered and annexed and Englished!

Never mind! As o'er my punch
(You away) I sit of evenings,--silence, save for biscuit crunch,
Black, unbroken,--thought grows busy, thrids each pathway of old years,
Notes this forthright, that meander, till the long past life appears
Like an outspread map of country plodded through, each mile and rood,
Once, and well remembered still,--I'm startled in my solitude
Ever and anon by--what's the sudden mocking light that breaks
On me as I slap the table till no rummer-glass but shakes
While I ask--aloud, I do believe, God help me!--"Was it thus?
Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when just one step for us--"
(Us,--you were not born, I grant, but surely some day born would be)
"--One bold step had gained a province" (figurative talk, you see)
"Got no end of wealth and honour,--yet I stood stock-still no less?"
--"For I was not Clive," you comment: but it needs no Clive to guess
Wealth were handy, honour ticklish, did no writing on the wall
Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!" Him who braves that notice--call
Hero! None of such heroics suit myself who read plain words,
Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture says, the land's the Lord's:
Louts then--what avail the thousand, noisy in a smock-frocked ring,
All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence, be Clive their king?
Higher warrant must you show me ere I set one foot before
T'other in that dark direction, though I stand for evermore
Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore? No! By and by
Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns out less wise than I.
Don't object "Why call him friend, then?" Power is power, my boy, and still
Marks a man,--God's gift magnific, exercised for good or ill.
You've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was a tiger's skin;
Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in!
True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came to pass;
Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage--ah, the brute he was!
Why, that Clive,--that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-driving clerk, in fine,--
He sustained a siege in Arcot ... But the world knows! Pass the wine.

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh, you mentioned "fear!"
Just so: and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I: so, when the clouds, about the orb
Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely threaten to absorb
Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,--friendship might, with steadier eye
Drawing near, hear what had burned else, now no blaze--all majesty.
Too much bee's-wing floats my figure? Well, suppose a castle's new:
None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold sure for shoe
'TwiXt those squares and squares of granite plating the impervious pile
As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile.
Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled? From without
Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates about
Towers--the heap he kicks now! Turrets--just the measure of his cane!
Will that do? Observe moreover--(same similitude again)--
Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of cannonade:
'Tis when foes are foiled, and fighting's finished that vile rains invade,
Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating find no holes
Fit to build like the topmost sockets made for banner-poles.
So Clive crumbled slow in London, crashed at last.

A week before,
Dining with him,--after trying churchyard chat of days of yore,--
Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece, foot-piece, when they lean
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a coffined Past between.

As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extinguishment
By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers went
Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,--"One more throw
Try for Clive!" thought I: "Let's venture some good rattling question!" So--
"Come Clive, tell us"--out I blurted--"what to tell in turn, years hence,
When my boy--suppose I have one--asks me on what evidence
I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit
Worth your Alexanders, Caesars, Marlboroughs, and--what said Pitt?--
Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once"--I want to say--
"Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell away
--In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob's rough guess--
Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called courageousness!
Come! What moment of the minute, what speck-centre in the wide
Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified?
(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this wholesome Port!)
If a friend has leave to question,--when were you most brave, in short?"

Up he arched his brows o' the instant--formidably Clive again.
"When was I most brave? I'd answer, were the instance half as plain
As another instance that's a brain-lodged crystal--curse it!--here
Freezing when my memory touches--ugh!--the time I felt most fear.
Ugh! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear--anyhow,
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver now."

"Fear!" smiled I. "Well, that's the rarer: that's a specimen to seek,
Ticket up in one's museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive's Fear, Unique!*"

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he pored as though
Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts encrusted long ago.
When he spoke 'twas like a lawyer reading word by word some will,
Some blind jungle of a statement,--beating on and on until
Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

"This fell in my factor-days.
Desk-drudge, slaving at Saint David's, one must game, or drink, or craze.
I chose gaming: and,--because your high-flown gamblers hardly take
Umbrage at a factor's elbow, if the factor pays his stake,--
I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice,
Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud of voice,
Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile
Who not merely risked, but lost his hard-earned guineas with a smile.

"Down I sat to cards, one evening,--had for my antagonist
Homebody whose name's a secret--you'll know why--so, if you list,
Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from head to heel!
Play commenced: and, whether Cocky fancied that a clerk must feel
Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green baize,
I the scribe with him the warrior, guessed no penman dared to raise
Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing end
More or less abruptly,--whether disinclined he grew to spend
Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare
At--not ask of--lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide plays fair,--
Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me 'Cut!'

"I rose.
'Such the new manoeuvre, Captain? I'm a novice: knowledge grows.
What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir?'

"Never did a thunder-clap
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his lap,
As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join the pack)

~~... my heart was grieved (I'm counting my cards to join the party)~~
Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before, turned black.

"When he found his voice, he stammered 'That expression once again!"

"Well, you forced a card and cheated!"

"Possibly a factor's brain,
Busied with his all important balance of accounts, may deem
Weighing words superfluous trouble: cheat to clerkly ears may seem
Just the joke for friends to venture: but we are not friends, you see!
When a gentleman is joked with,--if he's good at repartee,
He rejoins, as do I--Sirrah, on your knees, withdraw in full!
Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet through your skull
Lets in light and teaches manner to what brain it finds! Choose quick--
Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray me trim yon candle-wick!"

"Well, you cheated!"

"Then outbroke a howl from all the friends around.
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were clenched and teeth were ground.
'End it! no time like the present! Captain, yours were our disgrace!
No delay, begin and finish! Stand back, leave the pair a space!
Let civilians be instructed: henceforth simply ply the pen,
Fly the sword! This clerk's no swordsman? Suit him with a pistol, then!
Even odds! A dozen paces 'twixt the most and least expert
Make a dwarf a giant's equal: nay, the dwarf, if he's alert,
Likelier hits the broader target!"

"Up we stood accordingly.
As they handed me the weapon, such was my soul's thirst to try
Then and there conclusions with this bully, tread on and stamp out
Every spark of his existence, that,--crept close to, curled about
By that toying, tempting, teasing, fool-forefinger's middle joint,--
Don't you guess?--the trigger yielded. Gone my chance! and at the point
Of such prime success moreover: scarce an inch above his head
Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was living, I was dead.

"Up he marched in flaming triumph--'twas his right, mind!--up, within
Just an arm's length. 'Now, my clerkling,' chuckled Cocky, with a grin
As the levelled piece quite touched me, 'Now, Sir Counting-House, repeat
That expression which I told you proved bad manners! Did I cheat?"

"Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and, this moment, know as well.
As for me, my homely breeding bids you--fire and go to Hell!"

"Twice the muzzle touched my forehead. Heavy barrel, flurried wrist.
Either spoils a steady lifting. Thrice: then, 'Laugh at Hell who list,
I can't! God's no fable either. Did this boy's eye wink once? No!
There's no standing him and Hell and God all three against me,--so,
I did cheat!"

"And down he threw the pistol, out rushed--by the door
Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney, roof or floor,
He effected disappearance--I'll engage no glance was sent
That way by a single starrer, such a blank astonishment
Swallowed up their senses: as for speaking--mute they stood as mice.

"Mute not long, though! Such reaction, such a hubbub in a trice!
'Rogue and rascal! Who'd have thought it? What's to be expected next,
When His Majesty's Commission serves a sharper as pretext
For ... But where's the need of wasting time now? Naught requires delay:

Punishment the Service cries for: let disgrace be wiped away
Publicly, in good broad daylight! Resignation? No, indeed!
Drum and fife must play the Rogue's-March, rank and file be free to speed
Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the rear
--Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,--never fear,
Mister Clive, for--though a clerk--you bore yourself--suppose we say--
Just as would beseem a soldier?

"Gentlemen, attention--pray!

First, one word!"

"I passed each speaker severally in review.
When I had precise their number, names, and styles, and fully knew
Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,--why, then--

"Some five minutes since, my life lay--as you all saw, gentlemen--
At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice was raised
In arrest of judgment, not one tongue--before my powder blazed--
Ventured "Can it be the youngster plundered, really seemed to mark
Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,
Guess at random,--still, for sake of fair play--what if for a freak,
In a fit of absence,--such things have been!--if our friend proved weak
--What's the phrase?--corrected fortune! Look into the case, at least!"
Who dared interpose between the altar's victim and the priest?
Yet he spared me! You eleven! Whosoever, all or each,
To the disadvantage of the man who spared me, utters speech
--To his face, behind his back,--that speaker has to do with me:
Me who promise, if positions change, and mine the chance should be,
Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage!"

"Twenty-five

Years ago this matter happened: and 'tis certain," added Clive,
"Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single breath
Breathed against him: lips were closed throughout his life, or since his death,
For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.
All I know is--Cocky had one chance more; how he used it,--grew
Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again
Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his train,--
That's for you to judge. Reprieve I procured, at any rate.
Ugh--the memory of that minute's fear makes gooseflesh rise! Why prate
Longer? You've my story, there's your instance: fear I did, you see!"

"Well"--I hardly kept from laughing--"if I see it, thanks must be
Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that--in a common case--
When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's face,
I should under-rate, believe me, such a trial to the nerve!
'Tis no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor swerve.
Fear I naturally look for--unless, of all men alive,
I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert Clive.
Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death--the whole world knows--
Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,
Clive and I, you had not wondered--up he sprang so, out he rapped
Such a round of oaths--no matter! I'll endeavour to adapt
To our modern usage words he--well, 'twas friendly license--flung
At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his tongue.

"You--a soldier? You--at Plassy? Yours the faculty to nick
Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-quick,
--At his mercy, at his malice--has you through some stupid inch

--At his mercy, at his dance,--has you, through some stupid men
 Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,--not to flinch
 --That needs courage, you'll concede me. Then, look here! Suppose the man,
 Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span
 Distant from my temple,--curse him!--quietly had bade me, 'There!
 Keep your life, calumniator!--worthless life I freely spare:
 Mine you freely would have taken--murdered me and my good fame
 Both at once--and all the better! Go, and thank your own bad aim
 Which permits me to forgive you!' What if, with such words as these,
 He had cast away his weapon? How should I have borne me, please?
 Nay, I'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only this, remained--
 Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. If so had gained
 Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still
 Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's will."

"Such the turn," said I, "the matter takes with you? Then I abate
 --No, by not one jot nor tittle,--of your act my estimate.
 Fear--I wish I could detect there: courage fronts me, plain enough--
 Call it desperation, madness--never mind! for here's in rough
 Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome disgrace.
 True, disgrace were hard to bear: but such a rush against God's face
 --None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church at times,
 Say the creed my mother taught me! Many years in foreign climes
 Rub some marks away--not all, though! We poor sinners reach life's brink,
 Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but think
 There's advantage in what's left us--ground to stand on, time to call
 'Lord, have mercy!' ere we topple over--do not leap, that's all!"

Oh, he made no answer, re-absorbed into his cloud. I caught
 Something like "Yes--courage; only fools will call it fear."

If aught

Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I heard,
 Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and uttered just the word
 "Fearfully courageous!"--this, be sure, and nothing else I groaned.
 I'm no Clive, nor parson either: Clive's worst deed--we'll hope condoned.

MULEYKEH.

If a stranger passed the tent of Hoseyn, he cried "A churl's!"
 Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"
 --"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn
 More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking pearls,
 --Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
 On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinan?
 They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the due,
 Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
 'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began,
 Muleykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,
 And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at men's land and gold!"

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hoseyn--and right, I say.
 Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Outstripping all,
 Ever Muleykeh stands first steed at the victor's staff.
 Who started the owner's horse gets shamed and named that day

Who started, the others hope, get blamed and named, that day.
'Silence,' or, last but not one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we used to call
Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hoseyn, I say, to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muleykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies: "Be sure
On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheyban, who withers away in heart
For envy of Hoseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no cure.
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an oath,
'For the vulgar--flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize apart.'"

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheyban comes riding to Hoseyn's tent,
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace!" bids he.
"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty shall mend the wrong.
'Tis said of your Pearl--the price of a hundred camels spent
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such prudence is far from me
Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley may last too long."

Said Hoseyn, "You feed young beasts a many, of famous breed,
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Muzennem:
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs the hill.
But I love Muleykeh's face: her forefront whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels--go gaze on them!
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.
"You are open-hearted, ay--moist-handed, a very prince.
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare your simple gift!
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my wife prompts 'Fool,
Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the rewarder, since
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders on Him shows thrift.'"

Said Hoseyn, "God gives each man one life, like a lamp, then gives
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted--hold high, wave wide
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what help is left?
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Muleykeh lives.
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muleykeh died?
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-bereft?"

Another year, and--hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?
He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,
But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench
Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night combines
With the robber--and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to crime,
Must wring from Hoseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my store,
And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?
Account the fault to me who chattered with such an one!
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay, more--
For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two:
I will beg! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and son.

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,
And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die:
Let him die, then,--let me live! Be bold--but not too rash!
I have found me a peeping-place: breast, bury your breathing while
I explore for myself! Now, breathe! He deceived me not, the spy!

"As he said--there lies in peace Hoseyn--how happy! Beside
Stands tethered the Pearl: thrice winds her headstall about his wrist:

stands tethered the Pearl, thrice winds her headstall about his wrist.
'Tis therefore he sleeps so sound--the moon through the roof reveals.
And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and wide,
Buheyseh, her sister born: fleet is she yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case some thief
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.
What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once mount her we both escape."
Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,--so a serpent disturbs no leaf
In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest: clean through,
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned, he performs the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth, has clipped
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound as before,
He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like bolt from bow.
Up starts our plundered man: from his breast though the heart be ripped,
Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a minute more,
He is out and off and away on Buheyseh, whose worth we know!

And Hoseyn--his blood turns flame, he has learned long since to ride,
And Buheyseh does her part,--they gain--they are gaining fast
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Darraj to cross and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Saban,--no safety till that he spied!
And Buheyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and queer:
Buheyseh is mad with hope--beat sister she shall and must,
Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail--they are neck by croup--joy! fear!
What folly makes Hoseyn shout "Dog Duhl, Damned son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's left flank!"

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muleykeh as prompt perceived
Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and vanished for evermore.
And Hoseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may:
Then he turned Buheyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hoseyn upon the ground
Weeping: and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Benu-Asad
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his grief;
And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound
His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad!
And how Buheyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: "Poor Hoseyn is crazed past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for boy or girl,
And here were Muleykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!"--
"And the beaten in speed!" wept Hoseyn. "You never have loved my Pearl."

Sing me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of soul, ye bards!

Quoth Bard the first:

"Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm and eke his habergeon"...
Sir Olaf and his bard--!

"That sin-scathed brow" (quoth Bard the second),
"That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting death"...
You too without your host have reckoned!

"A beggar-child" (let's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

"Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet--twelve, I bet!
Good dog! What, off again? There's yet
Another child to save? All right!

"How strange we saw no other fall!
It's instinct in the animal.
Good dog! But he's a long while under:
If he got drowned I should not wonder--
Strong current, that against the wall!

"Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
--What may the thing be? Well, that's prime!
Now, did you ever? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished--the child's doll from the slime!"

"And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,--old Tray,--
Till somebody, prerogated
With reason, reasoned: 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

"John, go and catch--or, if needs be,
Purchase--that animal for me!
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteenpence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see!"

A TALE.

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
--Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

Anyhow there's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting!)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing: I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that's behind.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
--Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss: such ears
Had old judges, it appears!

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile "In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!"

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,--who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?--it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What "cicada?" Pooh!)
--Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music--flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

So that when (Ah, joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

Ay, and ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,

Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,--indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
"Take the prize--a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!"

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
--Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you,
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

That's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that's--Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue's built,
Tell the gazer "'Twas a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose lilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?"

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,--
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,--one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,--

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a--poet? All I care for
Is--to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)



"HAIR, SUCH A WONDER OF FLIX AND FLOSS."

GOLD HAIR.

Oh, the beautiful girl, too white,
Who lived at Pornic, down by the sea,
Just where the sea and the Loire unite!
And a boasted name in Brittany
She bore, which I will not write.

Too white, for the flower of life is red:
Her flesh was the soft seraphic screen
Of a soul that is meant (her parents said)
To just see earth, and hardly be seen,
And blossom in heaven instead.

Yet earth saw one thing, one how fair!
One grace that grew to its full on earth:
Smiles might be sparse on her cheek so spare,
And her waist want half a girdle's girth,
But she had her great gold hair.

Hair, such a wonder of flix and floss,
Freshness and fragrance--floods of it, too!
Gold, did I say? Nay, gold's mere dross:
Here, Life smiled, "Think what I meant to do!"
And Love sighed, "Fancy my loss!"

So, when she died, it was scarce more strange
Than that, when delicate evening dies,
And you follow its spent sun's pallid range,
There's a shoot of colour startles the skies
With sudden, violent change,--

That, while the breath was nearly to seek,
As they put the little cross to her lips,
She changed; a spot came out on her cheek,
A spark from her eye in mid-eclipse,
And she broke forth, "I must speak!"

"Not my hair!" made the girl her moan--
"All the rest is gone or to go;
But the last, last grace, my all, my own,
Let it stay in the grave, that the ghosts may know!
Leave my poor gold hair alone!"

The passion thus vented, dead lay she;
Her parents sobbed their worst on that;
All friends joined in, nor observed degree:
For indeed the hair was to wonder at,
As it spread--not flowing free,

But curled around her brow, like a crown,
And coiled beside her cheeks, like a cap,
And calmed about her neck--ay, down
To her breast, pressed flat, without a gap
I' the gold, it reached her gown.

All kissed that face, like a silver wedge
'Mid the yellow wealth, nor disturbed its hair:
E'en the priest allowed death's privilege,
As he planted the crucifix with care
On her breast, 'twixt edge and edge.

And thus was she buried, inviolate
Of body and soul, in the very space
By the altar, keeping saintly state
In Pomic church, for her pride of race,
Pure life and piteous fate.

And in after-time would your fresh tear fall,

Though your mouth might twitch with a dubious smile,
As they told you of gold, both robe and pall,
How she prayed them leave it alone awhile,
So it never was touched at all.

Years flew; this legend grew at last
The life of the lady; all she had done,
All been, in the memories fading fast
Of lover and friend, was summed in one
Sentence survivors passed:

To wit, she was meant for heaven, not earth;
Had turned an angel before the time:
Yet, since she was mortal, in such dearth
Of frailty, all you could count a crime
Was--she knew her gold hair's worth.



At little pleasant Pornic church,
It chanced, the pavement wanted repair,
Was taken to pieces: left in the lurch,
A certain sacred space lay bare,
And the boys began research.

'Twas the space where our sires would lay a saint,
A benefactor,--a bishop, suppose,
A baron with armour-adornments quaint,
Dame with chased ring and jewelled rose,
Things sanctity saves from taint;

So we come to find them in after-days
When the corpse is presumed to have done with gauds
Of use to the living, in many ways:
For the boys get pelf, and the town applauds,
And the church deserves the praise.

They grubbed with a will: and at length--*O cor*
Humanum, pectora caeca, and the rest!--
They found--no gaud they were prying for,
No ring, no rose, but--who would have guessed?--
A double Louis-d'or!

Here was a case for the priest: he heard,
Marked, inwardly digested, laid
Finger on nose, smiled, "There's a bird
Chirps in my ear:" then, "Bring a spade,
Dig deeper!"--he gave the word.

And lo, when they came to the coffin-lid,
Or rotten planks which composed it once,
Why, there lay the girl's skull wedged amid
A mint of money, it served for the nonce
To hold in its hair-heaps hid!

Hid there? Why? Could the girl be wont
(She the stainless soul) to treasure up
Money, earth's trash and heaven's affront?
Had a spider found out the communion-cup,
Was a toad in the christening-font?

Truth is truth: too true it was.

Gold! She hoarded and hugged it first,
Longed for it, leaned o'er it, loved it--alas--
Till the humour grew to a head and burst,
And she cried, at the final pass,--

"Talk not of God, my heart is stone!
Nor lover nor friend--be gold for both!
Gold I lack; and, my all, my own,
It shall hide in my hair. I scarce die loth
If they let my hair alone!"

Louis-d'or, some six times five,
And duly double, every piece.
Now, do you see? With the priest to shrive,
With parents preventing her soul's release
By kisses that kept alive,--

With heaven's gold gates about to ope,
With friends' praise, gold-like, lingering still,
An instinct had bidden the girl's hand grope
For gold, the true sort--"Gold in heaven, if you will;
But I keep earth's too, I hope."

Enough! The priest took the grave's grim yield:
The parents, they eyed that price of sin
As if *thirty pieces* lay revealed
On the place *to bury strangers in*,
The hideous Potter's Field.

But the priest bethought him: "Milk that's spilt'
--You know the adage! Watch and pray!
Saints tumble to earth with so slight a tilt!
It would build a new altar; that, we may!"
And the altar therewith was built.

Why I deliver this horrible verse?
As the text of a sermon, which now I preach:
Evil or good may be better or worse
In the human heart, but the mixture of each
Is a marvel and a curse.

The candid incline to surmise of late
That the Christian faith proves false, I find;
For our Essays-and-Reviews' debate
Begins to tell on the public mind,
And Colenso's words have weight:

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,
See reasons and reasons; this, to begin:
'Tis the faith that launched point-blank her dart
At the head of a lie--taught Original Sin,
The Corruption of Man's Heart.

DONALD.

Do you happen to know in Koss-shire
Mount Ben ... but the name scarce matters:
Of the naked fact I am sure enough,
Though I clothe it in rags and tatters.

You may recognise Ben by description;
Behind him--a moor's immenseness:
Up goes the middle mount of a range,
Fringed with its firs in denseness.

Rimming the edge, its fir-fringe, mind!
For an edge there is, though narrow;
From end to end of the range, a strip
Of path runs straight as an arrow.

And the mountaineer who takes that path
Saves himself miles of journey
He has to plod if he crosses the moor
Through heather, peat, and burnie.

But a mountaineer he needs must be,
For, look you, right in the middle
Projects bluff Ben--with an end in *ich*--
Why planted there, is a riddle:

Since all Ben's brothers little and big
Keep rank, set shoulder to shoulder,
And only this burliest out must bulge
Till it seems--to the beholder

From down in the gully,--as if Ben's breast,
To a sudden spike diminished,
Would signify to the boldest foot
"All further passage finished!"

Yet the mountaineer who sidles on
And on to the very bending,
Discovers, if heart and brain be proof,
No necessary ending.

Foot up, foot down, to the turn abrupt
Having trod, he, there arriving,
Finds--what he took for a point was breadth
A mercy of Nature's contriving.

So, he rounds what, when 'tis reached, proves straight,
From one side gains the other:
The wee path widens--resume the march,
And he foils you, Ben my brother!

But Donald--(that name, I hope, will do)--
I wrong him if I call "foiling"
The tramp of the callant, whistling the while
As blithe as our kettle's boiling.

He had dared the danger from boyhood up,
And now,--when perchance was waiting
A lass at the brig below,--'twixt mount
And moor would he standing debating?

Moreover this Donald was twenty-five,
A glory of bone and muscle:

Did a fiend dispute the right of way,
Donald would try a tussle.

Lightsomely marched he out of the broad
On to the narrow and narrow;
A step more, rounding the angular rock,
Reached the front straight as an arrow.

He stepped it, safe on the ledge he stood,
When--whom found he full-facing?
What fellow in courage and wariness too,
Had scouted ignoble pacing,

And left low safety to timid mates,
And made for the dread dear danger,
And gained the height where--who could guess
He would meet with a rival ranger?

'Twas a gold-red stag that stood and stared,
Gigantic and magnificent,
By the wonder--ay, and the peril--struck
Intelligent and pacific:

For a red deer is no fallow deer
Grown cowardly through park-feeding;
He batters you like a thunderbolt
If you brave his haunts unheeding.

I doubt he could hardly perform *volte-face*
Had valour advised discretion:
You may walk on a rope, but to turn on a rope
No Blondin makes profession.

Yet Donald must turn, would pride permit,
Though pride ill brooks retiring:
Each eyed each--mute man, motionless beast--
Less fearing than admiring.

These are the moments when quite new sense,
To meet some need as novel,
Springs up in the brain: it inspired resource:
--"Nor advance nor retreat but--grovel!"

And slowly, surely, never a whit
Relaxing the steady tension
Of eye-stare which binds man to beast,--
By an inch and inch declension,

Sank Donald sidewise down and down:
Till flat, breast upwards, lying
At his six-foot length, no corpse more still,
--"If he cross me! The trick's worth trying."

Minutes were an eternity;
But a new sense was created
In the stag's brain too; he resolves! Slow, sure,
With eye-stare unabated,

Feelingly he extends a foot
Which tastes the way ere it touches
Earth's solid and just escapes man's soft,

Nor hold of the same unclutches

Till its fellow foot, light as a feather whisk,
Lands itself no less finely:
So a mother removes a fly from the face
Of her babe asleep supinely.

And now 'tis the haunch and hind-foot's turn
--That's hard: can the beast quite raise it?
Yes, traversing half the prostrate length,
His hoof-tip does not graze it.

Just one more lift! But Donald, you see,
Was sportsman first, man after:
A fancy lightened his caution through,
--He wellnigh broke into laughter:

"It were nothing short of a miracle!
Unrivalled, unexampled--
All sporting feats with this feat matched
Were down and dead and trampled!"

The last of the legs as tenderly
Follows the rest: or never
Or now is the time! His knife in reach,
And his right hand loose--how clever!

For this can stab up the stomach's soft,
While the left hand grasps the pastern.
A rise on the elbow, and--now's the time
Or never: this turn's the last turn!

I shall dare to place myself by God
Who scanned--for he does--each feature
Of the face thrown up in appeal to him
By the agonising creature.

Nay, I hear plain words: "Thy gift brings this!"
Up he sprang, back he staggered,
Over he fell, and with him our friend
--At following game no laggard.

Yet he was not dead when they picked next day
From the gully's depth the wreck of him;
His fall had been stayed by the stag beneath
Who cushioned and saved the neck of him.

But the rest of his body--why, doctors said,
Whatever could break was broken;
Legs, arms, ribs, all of him looked like a toast
In a tumbler of port wine soaken.

"That your life is left you, thank the stag!"
Said they when--the slow cure ended--
They opened the hospital door, and thence
--Strapped, spliced, main fractures mended,

And minor damage left wisely alone,--
Like an old shoe clouted and cobbled,
Out--what went in a Goliath wellnigh,--
Some half of a David hobbled.

"You must ask an alms from house to house:
Sell the stag's head for a bracket,
With its grand twelve tines--I'd buy it myself--
And use the skin for a jacket!"

He was wiser, made both head and hide
His win-penny: hands and knees on,
Would manage to crawl--poor crab--by the roads
In the misty stalking season.

And if he discovered a bothy like this,
Why, harvest was sure: folk listened.
He told his tale to the lovers of Sport:
Lips twitched, cheeks glowed, eyes glistened.

And when he had come to the close, and spread
His spoils for the gazers' wonder,
With "Gentlemen, here's the skull of the stag
I was over, thank God, not under!"--

The company broke out in applause;
"By Jingo, a lucky cripple!
Have a munch of grouse and a hunk of bread,
And a tug, besides, at our tippie!"

And "There's my pay for your pluck!" cried This,
"And mine for your jolly story!"
Cried That, while T'other--but he was drunk--
Hiccapped "A trump, a Tory!"

I hope I gave twice as much as the rest;
For, as Homer would say, "within grate
Though teeth kept tongue," my whole soul growled,
"Rightly rewarded,--Ingrate!"



"AND FULL IN THE FACE OF ITS OWNER FLUNG THE GLOVE."

THE GLOVE.
(PETER RONSARD *loipuitur.*)

"Heigho," yawned one day King Francis,
"Distance all value enhances!
When a man's busy, why, leisure
Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:
Faith, and at leisure once is he?
Straightway he wants to be busy.
Here we've got peace; and aghast I'm
Caught thinking war the true pastime.
Is there a reason in metre?
Give us your speech, master Peter!"
I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne'er am at a loss with my Naso,
"Sire," I replied, "joys prove cloudlets:
Men are the merest Ixions"--
Here the King whistled aloud, "Let's
--Heigho--go look at our lions!"

Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding
Our company, Francis was leading,
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before he arrived at the penfold;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most.
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The King hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.
They opened a hole in the wire-work
Across it, and dropped there a firework,
And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;
A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
The blackness and silence so utter,
By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
Then earth in a sudden contortion
Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
(Whose experience of nature's but narrow,
And whose faculties move in no small mist
When he versifies David the Psalmist)
I should study that brute to describe you
Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu.

One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
The tail in the air stiff and straining,
The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
As over the barrier which bounded
His platform, and us who surrounded
The barrier, they reached and they rested
On space that might stand him in best stead:
For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
And if, in this minute of wonder,
No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
The lion at last was delivered?
Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!
And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
By the hope in those eyes wide and steady.
He was leagues in the desert already,
Driving the flocks up the mountain,
Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
To waylay the date-gathering negress:
So guarded he entrance or egress.
"How he stands!" quoth the King: "we may well swear,
No novice, you've won our cure elsewhere"

(no novice, we've won our spoils elsewhere
And so can afford the confession,)
We exercise wholesome discretion
In keeping aloof from his threshold,
Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,
Their first would too pleasantly purloin
The visitor's brisket or sirloin:
But who's he would prove so foolhardy?
Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 'twas, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight's a tarrier!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,--while the lion
Ne'er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,--
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

"Your heart's queen, you dethrone her?
So should I!"--cried the King--"twas mere vanity,
Not love, set that task to humanity!"
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,--
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful,--
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had *not* to trust to,
Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?
If she wished not the rash deed's recallment?
"For I"--so I spoke--"am a poet:
Human nature,--behooves that I know it!"

She told me, "Too long had I heard
Of the deed proved alone by the word:
For my love--what De Lorge would not dare!
With my scorn--what De Lorge could compare!
And the endless descriptions of death
He would brave when my lin formed a breath.

... the more certain that my up-coming is certain,
I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
Doubt his word--and moreover, perforce,
For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
Must offer my love in return.
When I looked on your lion, it brought
All the dangers at once to my thought,
Encountered by all sorts of men,
Before he was lodged in his den,--
From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
With no King and no Court to applaud,
By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
Yet to capture the creature made shift,
That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
--To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
Of the pit, on no greater pretence
Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
So, wiser I judged it to make
One trial what 'death for my sake'
Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
Than to wait until time should define
Such a phrase not so simply as I,
Who took it to mean just 'to die.'
The blow a glove gives is but weak:
Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?
But when the heart suffers a blow,
Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean--
(I judge by a certain calm fervour
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
--He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
If you whispered, "Friend, what you'd get, first earn!"
And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,
To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

THE END.