

John Sterling (1806-44)

3 *The Sexton's Daughter*

PART I.

I.

Beside the church upon the hill
A cottage stood of aspect grey,
Whose owner's task it was to till
The three fair fields that near him lay.

II.

An orchard small, a garden-plot, 5
By closest hedge-rows fenced around,
With leafy tufts adorned the spot,
And marked the churchyard's ancient bound.

III.

The church and tall church-spire at hand, 10
Around the cottage spread repose,
And gravely watch the teeming land,
Where slow a stream through meadows flows.

IV.

Below, upon the prosperous plain,
From that high church the gazer sees 15
A village small, with fields of grain,
And pastures bright, and shading trees.

V.

To him who owned the church-side farm,
The churchyard yielded gain as well;
The Sexton he, whose strenuous arm
Dug all the graves, and tolled the bell. 20

VI.

Sad seemed the strong grey-headed man,
Of lagging thought and careful heed;

He shaped his life by rule and plan,
And hoarded all beyond his need.

VII.

One daughter, little Jane, had he, 25
The silent Sexton's only child;
And when she laughed aloud and free,
The grave old Sexton smiled.

VIII.

For she within his heart had crept, 30
Himself he could not tell you why,
But often he has almost wept
Because he heard her cry.

IX.

All else to him appeared as dead,
Awaiting but the shroud and pall;
It seemed that to himself he said, 35
"I soon shall dig the graves of all."

X.

And beast, and man, and home, and wife,
He saw with cold, accustomed eye;
Jane only looked so full of life
As if that she could never die. 40

XI.

And when she still could hardly walk
By holding fast his wrinkled finger,
So well he loved her prattling talk,
He often from his work would linger.

XII.

Around her waist in sport he tied 45
The coffin-ropes for leading-strings,
And on his spade she learnt to ride,
And handled all his churchyard things.

XIII.

Henceforth on many a summer day,

While hollowing deep the sunlit grave, 50
Beside him he would have her stay,
And bones to be her playthings gave.

XIV.

At whiles the busied man would raise
Above the brink his bare grey head,
With quiet smile a moment gaze, 55
And turn to labor for the dead.

XV.

And when, slow-winding up the hill,
Between the elms, the funeral came,
Her voice would sound so cheerly shrill
As if 'twere all an infant's game. 60

XVI.

But when the burial rite was there,
The drooping forms, the weeping eyes,
The throb of awe, the hallowing prayer,
The sudden whisper lost in sighs, —

XVII.

The child then sought her father's side, 65
And spoke in wondering accents low,
And he with settled tone replied,
“Hush, hush, my dear! 'tis always so.”

XVIII.

One day upon a baby's grave
His morning's work must Simon spend, 70
And Jane her seat by him must have,
And all his well-known task attend.

XIX.

Soon 'mid the herbage soft and green
The little place of rest was made,
Whence daisy-covered meads were seen, 75
And where the hawthorn cast a shade.

XX.

Old Simon, almost resting now,
With slackened stroke his labor plied,
And raising oft his moistened brow,
With longer looks his darling eyed. 80

XXI.

Then Jane cried out in sudden glee,
“Oh, what a pretty grave is there!
It would be just a bed for me,
With room enough, and none to spare.”

XXII.

The father’s hand let fall the spade, 85
His cheek grew pale, he heaved a groan;
And when the children’s graves he made,
Thenceforth he always worked alone.

XXIII.

These hours, and others more, when he
In fields was laboring far away, 90
Dear Jane beside her mother’s knee
Would oftener pass than she would play.

XXIV.

The child and woman thus akin,
Two shapes of earth’s obscurest throng,
Had love as true, both hearts within, 95
As e’er was told in lofty song.

XXV.

I know not — ’twas not said of yore —
But still to me, a man, it seems
That motherhood is something more
Than e’en a father’s fondness deems. 100

XXVI.

The teeming breast has thrills, ’tis plain,
More deep than e’er its partner knew,
A mystery of hopeful pain,
That makes a greater blessing due.

XXVII.

And thus, though far in years apart, 105
To them belonged one will alone;
The youthful and the elder heart
To one true heart had grown.

XXVIII.

The mother bore an humble mind,
Unskilled in aught that's known to few, 110
Save this, which not in all we find,
A zeal to practise all she knew.

XXIX.

And Mary from her bosom's core
Of many things could speak to Jane,
That, never finding voice before, 115
Had mutely dwelt, but not in vain.

XXX.

Of change and trial here on earth,
Of hopes by which we conquer sins,
And of the spirit's better birth
Than that which first our life begins. 120

XXXI.

And sometimes, when the closing day
Shot through the cottage window-pane,
And o'er the mother cast a ray
That kindled all the heart of Jane, —

XXXII.

Then starting she would turn and look, 125
As if it were the cloven sky
That o'er the quiet face and book
Shot out its glory suddenly.

XXXIII.

And oft while Mary mildly spake
In words now flowing smooth and free, 130
From Simon's eyes a gleam would break;
So both were taught, his child and he.

XXXIV.

Thus from within and from without,
She grew, a flower for mind and eye;
'Twas love that circled her about, 135
And love in her made quick reply.

XXXV.

Church, too, and churchyard were to Jane
A realm of dream, and sight, and lore;
And, but for one green field or twain,
All else a sea without a shore. 140

XXXVI.

Of this her isle the central rock
Stood up in that old tower sublime,
Which uttered from its wondrous clock
The only thought she had of Time.

XXXVII.

For her at Sunday service-hours 145
The world she knew expanded wide;
The chiming bell had wizard powers
To bid new visions round her glide.

XXXVIII.

For now come trooping up the hill
The young and old, the faint and strong; 150
The white-frocked men the sunshine fill,
And girls, a many-colored throng.

XXXIX.

The sires of all from age to age
Were laid below the grassy mould,
Whose hillocks were to Jane a page 155
Inscribed with lessons manifold.

XL.

And in the porch or on the green,
And in the pause between the prayers,
She marked each various face and mien,

With eyes that softened theirs. 160

XLII.

She marked the hoary head serene,
Or happy look of youthful glow,
As if a sunbeam played between
Those hearts and hers to warm her so.

XLIII.

And brows where darker passions wrought, 165
And strength with more of ill than good,
Would stamp upon her infant thought
A fear not understood.

XLIV.

She turned from these and blushed, and heard
With deeper sense the prayer and praise, 170
And oft her soul was vaguely stirred
By Israel's old prophetic lays.

XLV.

The child between her parents knelt,
Who prayed the more to God above,
Because so close to them they felt 175
The dearest gift of heavenly love.

XLVI.

And well that heart the mother knew
Which he but as from far could prize;
For scarce an impulse in it grew
But Mary first had seen it rise. 180

PART II.

I.

Years flowed away and never brought
The weary weight of care to Jane;
They prompted pity, wonder, thought,
The strength of life without the pain.

II.

To her new beauty largely given 5
From deeper fountains looked and smiled;
And, like a morning dream from heaven,
The woman gleamed within the child.

III.

Her looks were oftener turned to earth,
But every glance was lovelier now; 10
'Twas plain that light of inward birth
Now kissed the sunshine round her brow.

IV.

Withdrawn was she from passing eyes
By more than Fortune's outward law,
By bashful thoughts like silent sighs, 15
By Feeling's lone, retiring awe.

V.

So fair the veil that twilight weaves
Around its golden shows,
Or shadow of its own green leaves
Upon the crimson rose. 20

VI.

And she had reached a higher state,
Though infant joys about her clung;
With gaze more fixed a graver fate
Above her beauty hung.

VII.

So fares it still with human life, 25
Which, ever journeying on,
Unconscious climbs from peace to strife,
Till new ascents be won.

VIII.

And thus about her youth was spread
The shadow thrown by coming Time, 30
The expectance deepening o'er her head
Of passion's sad Sublime;

IX.

While all that on the dreadless flower
The war of Will and Doom may bring,
Unseen, though near, awaits the hour
When that loud bell shall ring. 35

X.

Heavy and sharp came down the blow
On her who had no shield of pride;
Who never felt the grasp of woe
Until her mother died. 40

XI.

The gold-haired maid and hoary man
Together knelt beside the bed,
And saw with helpless gaze the span
That parts the living from the dead.

XII.

Slow dragged the following day: the dear
Familiar life for him was gone; 45
The Past was something dark and drear
That he must look at now alone.

XIII.

But all his fondest heart awoke,
And opened toward his orphan child; 50
To her with cheerful ease he spoke,
And wondering marked she never smiled.

XIV.

She knew not what the mind will bear,
Yet only learn the more to brave;
It seemed the world so large and fair 55
Must sink within her mother's grave.

XV.

That grave himself would Simon make,
And she could only turn and groan,
When first the spade she saw him take,

As if the grief were not his own. 60

XVI.

Then soon the burial pang was o'er,
And calmer flowed the stream again;
But Jane would never witness more
An open grave, or funeral train.

XVII.

The maiden now was left to be 65
Her father's only prop and stay,
And in her looks was plain to see
A heart resolved, but never gay;

XVIII.

A loveliness that made men sad,
Like some delightful, mournful ditty, 70
Too fair for any but the bad
To think of without love and pity.

XIX.

Each household task she duly wrought,
No change but one the house could know,
And peace for her was in the thought, 75
Her mother would have wished it so.

XX.

But often in the silent hours
Of summer dawn, while all were sleeping,
She rose to gather fragrant flowers,
And wet their leaves with weeping. 80

XXI.

She strewed them o'er her mother's grave,
To wither where her joys had faded;
No growth she deemed could either have,
Though shower and sunshine aided.

XXII.

And oft she read her Bible there, 85
Her mother's book that well she knew;

And felt that in the hallowed air
Its meanings brighter grew.

XXIII.

One morning, while she sat intent
Beside the grassy mound, 90
Her brow upon the headstone leant,
Her book upon the ground, –

XXIV.

The sunshine sparkled through the sky,
The breeze and lark sang on together,
And yet there seemed, afar and nigh, 95
One silent world of azure weather.

XXV.

But from beyond the old yew-tree
A voice disturbed the maiden's ear,
And in the lone tranquillity
It sounded strangely near. 100

XXVI.

'Twas now a broken word of prayer,
'Twas now a sob of "Mother! Mother!"
And all the anguish bursting there
The heart, she felt, had sought to smother.

XXVII.

No woman's voice so deeply rings, 105
Though men by graves but seldom pray;
And, ah! how true the grief that brings
A man to weep by light of day!

XXVIII.

With wonder awed, with pity stirred,
From off the book she turned away; 110
And still the same low sob she heard,
And still he seemed to pray.

XXIX.

With sorrow moved for others' woes,

The maiden rose upon her knee;
Upon her feet the maiden rose, 115
And stood beside the old yew-tree.

XXX.

And doubting, trembling, there she stood,
Nor dared the mourning man to see;
And, though her thoughts were all of good,
She feared to stay, she feared to flee. 120

XXXI.

Against the broad yew-trunk she leant,
The black bough's vault of shade adorning, —
A fixed, fair, living monument,
Amid the light of morning:

XXXII.

Till silently stood up the man, 125
And from the grave he stepped aside,
And some faint speech in vain began
When there the maid he spied.

XXXIII.

He too was young, and sad, and pale,
Two mourning youthful hearts were they; 130
They had the same familiar tale,
Man's tale of every day.

XXXIV.

And each upon the other gazed,
With eyes from sorrow cold and slow;
They knew not why, but felt amazed 135
That each was not alone in woe.

XXXV.

Few moments they together staid,
And few the broken words they spake,
And parted so, the man and maid,
Their separate paths alone to take. 140

PART III.

I.

The pair who thus that morning met
Ne'er mingled mutual speech before,
And now could neither heart forget
What then it seemed so soon was o'er.

II.

In secret thought each breast could say 5
That one it knew of kindred mould,
And through the long, long summer day
That tale in fancy oft was told.

III.

For far unlike was Henry's mind
To aught that Jane had seen before; 10
Though poor and lowly, yet refined
With much of noblest lore.

IV.

A gentle window's only child
He grew beneath a loving rule;
A man with spirit undefiled, 15
He taught the village school.

V.

And many books had Henry read,
And other tongues than ours he knew,
His heart with many fancies fed,
Which oft from hidden wells he drew. 20

VI.

What souls heroic dared and bore
In ancient days for love and duty,
What sages could by thought explore,
What poets sang of beauty:

VII.

With these he dwelt, because within 25
His breast was full of silent fire.

No praise of men he cared to win,
More high was his desire;

VIII.

To be, to know whate'er of Good
To man below is given; 30
And, asking Truth as daily food,
Seek little more from Heaven.

IX.

To him the friend of all his days
Had been his fervid mother,
And ev'n the playmate of his plays — 35
He never wished another.

X.

For he was weak and oft in pain;
From noisy sports he shrank away;
But songs to sing, or tales to feign,
For him made holiday. 40

XI.

And she had lived in cities wide,
Had sailed across the fearful ocean,
Could tell of wealth, and camps, and pride,
And peopled earth's commotion.

XII.

And books had she a precious store, 45
With words whose light was never dim;
Five crowded shelves, like mines of ore,
Like undiscovered realms for him.

XIII.

Pure-souled and thoughtful he had been
Who left this young and widowed bride; 50
He left her while her leaves were green,
But ah! they withered when he died.

XIV.

So here she lived unmarked, alone,

Through quiet years remote from blame,
With little that she called her own 55
But him who bore his father's name.

XV.

Two hearts had she, the one so sad
It often ached within her breast;
But in her boy a heart she had
Now thrilled with hope, now lulled to rest. 60

XVI.

And tall he grew, though never strong,
And beautiful at least to her;
A soul he seemed attuned to song,
With thoughts of endless inward stir.

XVII.

By love she taught him best to love, 65
She gave him hope by trust in God;
When pained below he looked above,
Yet scorned no flower of nature's sod.

XVIII.

And when to fill the ripening man
In deeper flow Reflection came, 70
When Dread and Wish their strife began,
Awe, Passion, Doubt no longer tame;

XIX.

Though small the help 'twas hers to give, —
For deep not wide her best of lore, —
“Still, still,” she said, “by Conscience live, 75
And Peace and Truth from Heaven implore.

XX.

“My son, for these to toil is good,
For these to none who seek denied;
Alone thy soul must seek its food,
No teacher at thy side.” 80

XXI.

No teacher had he; but a friend,
The only friend in Henry's reach,
The kindly Vicar, books would lend,
And counsel, though unskilled to teach.

XXII.

And by his word was Henry made 85
The master o'er the village boys;
A guide who still, by smiles and aid
Allured them on to nobler joys.

XXIII.

Thus Henry lived in meek repose, 90
Though suffering oft the body's pain,
Though sometimes aimless Thoughts and Woes
Like wrestling giants racked the brain.

XXIV.

But now an outward sorrow fell 95
Down on his heart with heavier sway;
Through months of sickness long to tell
His mother passed from earth away.

XXV.

His books, his thoughts, his boys were now 100
A swarm of insects murmuring round.
Afresh they stung his aching brow,
And fevered him with weary sound.

XXVI.

And when the toilsome day was past,
And darkness veiled his burning eyes,
Upon the bed his limbs he cast,
And wished he ne'er again might rise.

XXVII.

A flitting wish and soon recalled; 105
But still there lived within his mind
A shame for courage thus appalled,
For faith so weak, and reason blind.

XXVIII.

He knew not if he slept or woke,
'Twas all exhaustion's clouded gloom, 110
When light like moonshine round him broke,
And showed his mother's grassy tomb.

XXIX.

And o'er it floated, borne in air,
Her form serene in brightness clad,
With glistening stars around the hair, 115
And eyes of love no longer sad.

XXX.

Her looks like summer lightning spread,
And filled the boundless heavenly deep;
Devoutest peace around she shed,
The calm without the trance of sleep. 120

XXXI.

He knew not how, but soon was gone
The phantom shape that blessed his eyes;
The churchyard yew-tree, black and lone,
Stood up against the starry skies.

XXXII.

Bewildered, yet consoled, he rose, 125
And looked abroad; the east was breaking,
It was the night's grey chilly close,
The day's fresh golden waking.

XXXIII.

He left the village, crossed the rill,
While dawn's pale gleams had scarce begun; 130
He climbed the elm-bedarkened hill,
And in the churchyard faced the sun.

XXXIV.

Beneath a clear unruffled morn,
Beside the grave he knelt in prayer;
There breathed a voice to soothe and warn, 135
And still Repose was whispering there.

XXXV.

And there he saw the gentle maid
Whose earliest grief was like his own;
To him it seemed his mother bade
Their hearts should each to each be known. 140

XXXVI.

Yet passed a week as if no more
They could recall their mournful meeting;
And then, when seven long days were o'er,
Again they spoke with timid greeting.

XXXVII.

Amid the noiseless crystal morn 145
They stood below the nightly yew;
They dared not feel new hopes were born
For both, and trembling pleasures new.

XXXVIII.

Now neither sat beside the grave,
They stood below the old yew-tree, 150
That with its sable shadows gave
A home where grief might love to be.

XXXIX.

They speak of these so lately gone,
And words of sorrow dry their tears;
And even when the tear flows on 155
It each to each the more endears.

XL.

For grief like theirs, without remorse,
Is yet a gentle hallowed feeling,
And darkens not the limpid source
Of joy, from love's deep fountain stealing. 160

XLI.

Thou Breeze of dawn, a music blent
With hues that are a song of light!
Thou Sky, whose dome, above them bent,

Expands the cloudless God to sight!

XLII.

Thou greenest World, through countless ages 165
Adorned our bounteous home to be!
So fair beyond the dreams of sages,
Which are but glimmerings caught from thee!

XLIII.

And Thou pervading Soul of All, 170
In man's large mind most clearly shown,
Receiving at devotion's call
Whate'er of best thy Sire makes known!

XLIV.

Bear witness! ye consenting saw, 175
And shed from all your seats above,
A strength all evil fears to awe,
In those two hearts kept pure by love.

XLV.

At morning oft, and oft at eve, 180
They met below the old yew-tree,
For they would not forget to grieve,
Though blest as mortal souls may be.

XLVI.

'Twere worth a thoughtful wish to see
A loving pair so calm, so young,
'Mid graves, beside the churchyard tree,
While summer's light around them clung.

XLVII.

He seemed a more than common man, 185
Whom children passed not heedless by,
With graven brow of shapely span,
And sudden-moving, pensive eye.

XLVIII.

Retired and staid was Henry's look, 190
And shrank from men's tumultuous ways;

And on the earth, as on a book,
He oft would bend his gaze.

XLIX.

But then at sight of bird or flower,
Or beam that set the clouds in flame,
Or aught that told of joy or power, 195
Upon the man his genius came.

L.

Most flashed his light when near him shone
That face of youth, those eyes of blue,
Whose looks re-echoing every tone
Paid heartfelt words with smiles as true. 200

LI.

His Jane was fair to any eye;
How more than earthly fair to him!
Her very beauty made you sigh
To think that it should e'er be dim.

LII.

So childlike young, so gravely sweet, 205
In maidenhood so meekly proud,
With faith sincere and fancies fleet
Still murmuring soft, ne'er clashing loud.

LIII.

It was, in truth, a simple soul
That filled with day her great blue eyes, 210
That made her all one gracious whole,
Needing no charm of gaudy lies.

LIV.

She had no art, and little skill
In aught save Right, and maiden Feeling;
On Henry's wisdom leant her will, 215
No ignorance from him concealing.

LV.

And so she freshened all his life,

As does a sparkling mountain rill,
That plays with scarce a show of strife
Around its green aspiring hill. 220

PART IV.

I.

With bold affection, pure and true,
The lovers rose all fears above,
And Faith and Conscience fed with dew
The strong and flame-like flower of love.

II.

Sometimes amid the glimmering meads 5
They walked in August's genial eve,
And marked above the mill-stream reeds
The myriad flies their mazes weave;

III.

While under heaven's warm lucent hues
They felt their eyes and bosoms glow, 10
And learnt how fondly Fancy views
Fair sights the moment ere they go;

IV.

And then, while earth was darkening o'er,
While stars began their tranquil day,
Rejoiced that Nature gives us more 15
Than all it ever takes away.

V.

In earliest autumn's fading woods
Remote from eyes they roamed at morn,
And saw how Time transmuting broods
O'er all that into Time is born. 20

VI.

That power which men would fain forget,
The law of change and slow decay,
Came to them with a mild regret,

A brightness veiled in softening gray.

VII.

While in this mood one day they sat 25
Beside a lonely woodland spring,
On moss that spread a living mat,
The fountain's verdant fairy-ring —

VIII.

To Jane her lover slowly said,
"The time, the scene, recall to me 30
A story of a youth and maid
In famous lands beyond the sea.

IX.

"In land of Greece in ancient days,
A man, by many dreams possessed,
Would wander oft from trodden ways, 35
And rudest wilds he loved the best.

X.

"He strewed his thoughts along the gale,
He gave his heart to earth and sky,
To trees his life's fantastic tale
Was known, but not to mortal eye. 40

XI.

"His soul devout, his shaping mind,
Had power at last o'er mystic things,
And could the silent charms unbind
That chain the fountain's icy springs.

XII.

"There shone a breezeless autumn morn 45
When o'er the crystal cell arose
A woman from the waters born,
And fair as aught our fancy knows.

XIII.

"He sought to make the maid his own,
For earthly love a human bride; 50

Her voice had love's consenting tone,
But still her words the suit denied.

XIV.

"One day of free delight was given
In every month of changing skies,
And 'twas once more the autumnal heaven 55
That saw the Fountain Spirit rise.

XV.

"Again the youth his fay besought
A mortal's lot with him to share,
For converse all of airy thought
Contents but souls ensphered in air; 60

XVI.

"And man will ask below the skies
That breast may lean to beating breast,
That mingling hands and answering eyes
May halve the toil and glad the rest.

XVII.

"I too,' she said, and saying darkened, 65
'Must speak to thee of certain doom,
To thee for whom my deeps have hearkened,
And oft have felt unwonted gloom.

XVIII.

"For thee my heart, so calmly blest,
Has throbb'd with keener hopes and joys; 70
My waves have sparkled unrepressed,
And breathed for thee more vocal noise.

XIX.

"Too fond has been our mutual love
To last beneath yon clouded sun;
And fate, that sternly sits above, 75
Decrees our bliss already done.

XX.

"At morn or eve thou must no more

Return for commune sweet with me;
My gaze on mortal eyes is o'er,
Because it may not feed on thee. 80

XXI.

“Thou must in other pathways roam,
But sometimes think that once we met;
I seek my lonely cavern home,
There still to live, but not forget.’

XXII.

“The tinkling words were hardly said, 85
When sank the fountain’s mournful daughter;
The youth, to grasp the form that fled,
Sprang shrieking down the fatal water.

XXIII.

“— Dear Jane, ’tis but a graceful tale,
To soothe and not oppress the mind; 90
But now that autumn shakes the dale,
I hear it moaned by every wind.

XXIV.

“And in the autumn’s look I trace,
I know not why, a threatening stare,
Nor e’en thy dear and rosy face 95
Can disenchant the spell-bound air.

XXV.

“Yet well I know ’tis empty dream,
And vainer still the legend’s voice,
For if too fond man’s love may seem,
’Tis but by erring in the choice. 100

XXVI.

“Begone, ye fears that round us wait,
The soul’s dim twilight hour possessing!
A Will beyond the Grecian Fate
Has given us love’s unstinted blessing.”

XXVII.

Jane listened first with pensive gaze, 105
Then dread disturbed her seeking glance,
Though she but half could read the phrase
That told the heathen land's romance.

XXVIII.

But clear she saw, and truly felt, 110
That Henry was not well at ease;
'Twas not a grief obscurely spelt,
But plain as aught the spirit sees.

XXIX.

Her arms around his neck she threw,
Against his cheek her head she laid,
And he could feel the sigh she drew, 115
Could feel the passion of the maid.

XXX.

Then first upon her soul it broke
That Time their lives might sever;
From joy's illusive trance she woke,
And it was gone for ever: 120

XXXI.

As when a child first snaps the band
That close to home has bound him;
Or as the sailor dreams of land,
And wakes with waves around him.

XXXII.

Long time she paused, and hid her face, 125
Then raised her head in piteous sorrow,
As doubting in his look to trace
A hope for e'en to-morrow.

XXXIII.

She saw his cheek so worn and pale,
She saw the dark expanded eye, 130
And read the unimagined tale
Of sure and near mortality.

XXXIV.

Her shuddering face she stooped in dread,
And then once more was fain to look;
Slow tears her eyes o'erladen shed 135
On his thin hand, that feebly shook.

XXXV.

They spoke not, ere they rose to go,
And walked towards the far church-tower;
Side pressed to side, they journeyed slow,
While passed one voiceless, throbbing hour. 140

XXXVI.

But when they reached the burial-ground,
They turned and looked o'er hill and plain;
And starting up from misery's swoond,
He faintly said to Jane —

XXXVII.

“The autumn woods are fair to see, 145
Its clouds with stragglingsunshine burn;
But lovelier will the springtime be,
When warmth, and hope, and life return.”

XXXVIII.

With long, sad smiles, of sorrow bred,
The fate-struck lovers left each other, 150
While both at heart more deeply bled
Than even for a buried mother.

PART V.

I.

Slow dragged along the unsmiling year,
With winds, and mist, and foliage torn;
And, though their green love grew not sere,
They could not cease to mourn.

II.

But still they strove to feed their hope, 5

Though faint and worn away with fears,
Though in their passion's ample scope
Was room for many tears.

III.

To see the Sexton Henry came,
And told how great a thing he sought; 10
The father did not loudly blame,
But sat in unrejoicing thought.

IV.

At last he spoke with lingering tongue:
"My friend, I will not say you no,
Though Jane is still but weak and young 15
From her old father's side to go.

V.

"Indeed, 'twould be a wiser plan,
If you could come and live with me;
Though I am not a book-learned man,
With her to help we might agree. 20

VI.

"The house and fields are all my own,
And will be his who weds with her,
And I grow old to work alone,
And oft would rather rest than stir.

VII.

"And after me, 'tis plain to think, 25
My son may be the sexton too;
But for your books, and pen, and ink,
I know not what 's the good they do.

VIII.

"Ah! well, I see you hang your head;
And where, my friend, 's the need of shame? 30
'Tis not too late to change your trade,
And then — why, Jane may change her name.

IX.

“To-morrow evening come again;
Till then, at least, I'll not refuse;
I would not cross the wish of Jane, 35
Though she, I fear, is young to choose.”

X.

Before that eve, it so befell
The lovers met beside the tree,
And Henry said — “’Twere vain to tell
That I would give all else for thee. 40

XI.

“But, Jane, although I should desire
My thoughts and aims in sleep were laid,
My limbs the needful strength require
To ply a laborer's busy spade.[”]

XII.

“Oh! well” she said, “I know it all! 45
My father's wish can never be.
Oh! could we but the past recall,
So you again were calm and free!

XIII.

“Yet, Henry, still our love is sweet,
The best of life I e'er have known, 50
And if again we never meet,
I oft shall think it o'er alone.

XIV.

“These leaves now fallen were bright and green
The day that first I heard you speak;
How many hours have passed between, 55
Strengthening my heart, though still 'tis weak!

XV.

“I seem to look with larger eyes,
What once I dreamt not now is true,
More lovely sights around me rise,
And all seem gifts bestowed by you. 60

XVI.

“But yet it must not be, I know;
Whate’er the unpausing moment’s choice,
Great hopes within your bosom grow
That never yet have found a voice.

XVII.

“And in the body’s daily task, 65
While cares on cares for ever crowd,
Regrets will wake, and move, and ask,
And speak the more, not speaking loud.

XVIII.

“And you will muse, from day to day, 70
Of all you might have been and done;
Of wisdom widening men’s highway,
Of goodness warming like the sun.

XIX.

“And you for want of those will pine, 75
Who might reflect your fancy’s hues;
Perhaps will think the fault is mine
Of all the nobler life you lose.”

XX.

Half-turned the maid, as if to part, 80
Affrighted by the imagined pain,
But Henry pressed her on his heart,
And kissed her eyes, and spoke again:

XXI.

“Though this were sure that sounds so strange,
Yet need we not at once decide;
Perhaps your father’s mind may change,
And hopes be ours now undescried.

XXII.

“Your love is not forbidden yet; 85
It shames not you, it blesses me.
The past we never can forget,
And happier may the future be.”

XXIII.

The evening came, and trembling stood
The lover at the father's door, 90
And found within the maid he wooed,
And that old man so bent and hoar.

XXIV.

Their trimmest garb had each put on,
Around was neatness, comfort, cheer;
The clouds appeared to distance gone, 95
And Jane's bright face bespoke not fear.

XXV.

She sat upon her mother's chair,
And poured the drink that Henry loved;
Her tea with him 'twas joy to share,
And sit beside him unproved. 100

XXVI.

And close beside the blazing fire
Was placed the old man's easy seat;
The flames, now low, then shooting higher,
Cast o'er him glimpses bright and fleet.

XXVII.

They showed a face more soft than bold, 105
Though keen the look of settled will;
With lines that many winters told,
But little change of good and ill.

XXVIII.

And thus the untroubled, aged man,
His long-experienced lesson spake, 110
In words that painfully began,
While slow his pondering seemed to wake: —

XXIX.

“Perhaps you think, dear daughter Jane,
My wishes neither kind nor wise,
Because I keep a sober brain, 115

And look about with wistful eyes.

XXX.

“Yet surely I have lived and wrought
More years than you, or he you love;
And it must be a foolish thought
Of yours that I cannot approve. 120

XXXI.

“I know not who can better learn
Than one who lives so long as I,
Who all life long have tried to earn,
And still have set my earnings by.

XXXII.

“And I have seen a many score 125
Of men and women laid in earth;
I mostly, too, can tell them o’er,
And all their prosperings, up from birth.

XXXIII.

“And always I have seen with all 130
That thriftiest heads are honored most;
And those who into misery fall,
By them respect is quickly lost.

XXXIV.

“A man who gains and keeps together,
Is like the tree that yearly grows,
That, stout and strong in wintry weather, 135
A goodly crop in summer shows:

XXXV.

“But he who spends and wastes away,
Is like a tree decayed within;
Though still the leaves and bloom be gay,
Its top will soon be shrunk and thin. 140

XXXVI.

“Or see the gleaner winnowing grain,
The empty chaff goes flying;

The plump, full, yellow seeds remain,
Like gold for profit lying.

XXXVII.

“The chaff may glitter in the sun, 145
And dance before the wind,
But I would rather look upon
The quiet heap behind.

XXXVIII.

“What some within an hour would spend, 150
The wise man takes a day to win;
But when the waste has reached an end
The gains of thrift are coming in.

XXXIX.

“And ever I have seen that they
Who least had cause to fear the morrow, 155
Have cheeriest walked the open way,
Nor hung their heads in sorrow.

XL.

“Who does not feel how hard the thought
For one whose life must soon be o’er,
That all his days have added nought,
But still made less men’s little store? 160

XLI.

“And therefore, Jane, I think it right
That you should choose a gainful man,
One working hard from morn till night,
Gathering and hoarding all he can.

XLII.

“Yet, mind you well, I do not say 165
But Henry may your husband be;
Though much I doubt if learning’s pay
Would keep such house as pleases me.

XLIII.

“His health, by study much abused,

Seems now, if well I mark, to pine; 170
And then he has been always used
To nurture delicate and fine.

XLIV.

“His mother’s stipend ceased with her,
And he, I know, must needs be poor;
And so methinks it better were 175
That you and he should love no more.

XLV.

“But stay till winter days be past,
And when the spring returns again,
If still I find your liking last,
Why then – nay, come and kiss me, Jane.” 180

XLVI.

Thus wandered round his maze of speech
The long-experienced man;
Determined both the twain to teach,
Through all his saws he ran.

XLVII.

With eyes upon the table bent, 185
The maiden stooped her glowing face;
But Henry gazed with look intent,
The father’s inmost thought to trace.

XLVIII.

And when of sinking health he spoke,
The lover’s brow was flushed with red, 190
While Jane turned white beneath the stroke,
With anguish more than dread.

XLIX.

But when the closing promise came,
They both were lifted up and cheered;
For, freed from strife, remorse, and blame, 195
The old man’s eye no more they feared.

PART VI.

I.

November days are dull and dark,
And well they teach the heart to ponder,
Which sometimes needs must pause to mark
How fades from earth its garb of wonder.

II.

We breathe at whiles so charmed an air, 5
By sound each leaf's light fall we learn,
No breeze disturbs the spider's snare,
That hangs with dew the stately fern.

III.

Soon heaves within the boundless frame
A strong and sullen gust of life, 10
And rolling waves and woods proclaim
The untuned world's increasing strife.

IV.

'Mid boom, and clang, and stormy swell,
And shadows dashed by blast and rain,
Leaves heaped, whirled, routed, sweep the dell 15
And glimpses course the leaden main.

V.

And yet, though inward drawn and still,
There beats a hidden heart of joy;
Beneath the old year's mantle chill
Sleeps, mute and numb, the unconscious boy. 20

VI.

And they who muse and hope may guess
With faith assured the future spring;
But him who loves all hours will bless,
All months to him of May-time sing.

VII.

"At least I've known," young Henry said, 25
"How dark so'er new days may prove,

Love's inspiration shared and fed
By her I love."

VIII.

With lifted brow, and buoyant heart,
He now fulfilled his daily toil, 30
And e'en 'mid weary tasks would start
Bright springs from desert soil.

IX.

He stood with zeal the untaught to teach,
'Mid fifty faces young and rude,
And turned a cheerful front to each, 35
That brightened them and yet subdued.

X.

He strove that clear they might discern,
What aims to man true value give,
And said — "You do not live to learn,
But learn that you may better live." 40

XI.

The boy who came with sun-bleached head,
And dress by many a patch repaired,
Still felt in all that Henry said
E'en more than strongest words declared.

XII.

Those truths, as more than lessons taught, 45
Were learnt as more than lessons too;
The teacher's precept, will, and thought,
E'en from his look fresh import drew.

XIII.

And well he knew how wilful sway
Disloyal service breeds at best, 50
And often makes the heart a prey
To hate, by fear alone repressed.

XIV.

Yet could he temper love and meekness

With all the sacred might of law,
Dissevering gentleness from weakness, 55
And hallowing tenderness by awe.

XV.

Nor e'er beneath his steadfast eye
Could ill escape its grave reproof;
Nor durst he set his conscience by,
That peace might reign by its removal. 60

XVI.

His love was no unblest device
To lengthen falsehood's coward mood,
Nor purchased liking at the price
Of calling evil — good.

XVII.

He woke the sense, he warmed the breast, 65
Affirming truths supreme,
And let the voice within attest
He told no misty dream.

XVIII.

Each feeling thus that moved the child,
As each in turn awoke, 70
To its fixed law was reconciled,
And owned the strengthening yoke.

XIX.

So still the God revealed below
As one great Will of Good to all,
He taught for Sire and Judge to know, 75
On whom for aid all groans may call.

XX.

Amid his poor, unknowing throng
Of little learners pleased he stood;
To him their murmur hummed a song,
And every face had sparks of good. 80

XXI.

And when the exhausted aching frame
Would fain have dropped in seas of sleep,
He thought how high the teacher's aim,
How dread the watch 'twas his to keep.

XXII.

So have I seen upon a hill 85
A fair green tree of milk-white flowers,
Where bees sucked out their honeyed fill
Through all the long day's basking hours:

XXIII.

To its green cells and vases white, 90
That yield an odorous air,
The swarm with musical delight
For their sweet gold repair.

XXIV.

But dark decay may mine the tree, 95
Or lightning-bolt may blast,
And not a flower for wind or bee
Delight the saddening waste.

XXV.

The winter pressed with gloom and chill
Round Henry's wavering thread of life,
And though the eye shone boldly still,
The cheek grew thin amid the strife. 100

XXVI.

And while at solitary night
His candle showed some ancient page,
And like a deft familiar sprite
Evoked for him the buried sage;

XXVII.

While from the distant snow-clad wold 105
The clown, belated, marked the beam,
Nor guessed of what the glimmering told,
What human task, or goblin dream, —

XXVIII.

The lonely student oft would shrink,
And startling, clasp his painful breast, 110
With long-drawn sigh of Jane would think,
And seek at last reluctant rest.

XXIX.

Yet once again did Jane and he
By Simon's hearth at evening meet,
And once beneath his bare ash-tree 115
They filled at dawn their grassy seat.

XXX.

'Twas then a cold and misty morn,
The churchyard seemed a cave of death;
They saw the yew, by cold unshorn,
Stand hearse-like black in winter's breath. 120

XXXI.

And e'en while now the lovers spoke
They felt the fog between them rise;
Round each it spread a dull grey cloak,
And masked them each in vague disguise.

XXXII.

At parting Henry said — "Farewell;
On Sunday morn we meet again; 125
When first rings out the old church-bell,
With merry chant, expect me then."

XXXIII.

At last, though slow, that Sunday came,
And Jane put on her best array, 130
And still her color fled and came
As if it were her wedding-day.

XXXIV.

Her father went to ring the bell,
And she to watch the doorway sprang,
And on the latch her finger fell, 135
And paused, and paused — the church-bell rang.

XXXV.

No step was there: it seemed a knell
Whose notes her father's hand was ringing;
She oped the door for breath, the bell
So heavily went swinging. 140

XXXVI.

She knew that Henry was not there,
And yet she looked below the tree;
There stood nor shape of misty air,
Nor sunbright face in sunshine free.

XXXVII.

She looked the winding road along, 145
Now hid no more with leafy green,
But 'mid its loitering speckled throng
For her no living shape was seen.

XXXVIII.

She turned, and passed the dim church-door,
Beneath an ancient arch's frown, 150
And in the aisle upon the floor
She knelt not, but her knees fell down.

XXXIX.

Upon the seat she stooped her face,
But still she heard that doleful bell,
And though she prayed for Heaven's dear grace, 155
'Twas still the same pursuing knell.

XL.

And when the people stood to sing,
Though now the weary bell was o'er,
She heard it through her bosom ring,
As if 'twould ring for evermore. 160

XLI.

She could not rise upon her feet,
She could not stand when others stood,
And all the words she could repeat

Were still – “To me, O God! be good!”

XLII.

At last the service all was done, 165
And she might go from church away,
But still she could not be alone,
She must beside her father stay.

XLIII.

His mid-day meal she must prepare
Before the second service-bell; 170
And she must sit beside him there,
And by constraint be well.

XLIV.

Once more they reached their home again;
The winter day had changed to night;
He dozed beside the fire, and Jane 175
At last was free from busy light.

XLV.

She left his frugal supper laid,
She heard him breathe with slumbrous tone;
And then, released, the trembling maid
Dared slip away alone. 180

PART VII.

I.

Upon the maiden's weary soul
The silent darkness dawned like day,
While free amid the boundless Whole,
Alone with God, she took her way.

II.

And yet a thrill of shame and fear 5
In her with love and anguish met;
She longed that Earth would cease to hear,
And Heaven one hour its gaze forget.

III.

But Henry more than all was dear;
On her he seemed to call for aid, 10
And she through wave and gale would steer,
To track the wandering, mourning shade.

IV.

Along the churchyard path she went,
And saw above the yew,
The low discoloured firmament, 15
While cold winds round her blew.

V.

But swift along the road she sped
With still increasing pace,
And walked where blackest darkness led,
The more to hide her face. 20

VI.

And now to Henry's home she came,
Where never she had been before;
She could not now remember shame,
But knocked upon the door.

VII.

An aged woman, dull and slow, 25
Came creeping at the sound,
Nor asked the comer's name to know,
But straight the key turned round.

VIII.

Jane hurried in, and at the first,
These words unpausing said – 30
“O! tell me, tell me all the worst
Tell me, is Henry dead?”

IX.

She marked the woman's wrinkled cheek,
And saw 'twas swollen with weeping,
Before she heard her answering speak, 35
“He is alive, and sleeping.

X.

“Tis now the second day that he
Has been too weak to rise from bed,
And truly, as it seems to me,
He never more will lift his head. 40

XI.

“I’ve loved him ever since a child,
And tended him from day to day;
I sometimes think ’twould drive me wild
If I should see him pass away.”

XII.

Then Jane exclaimed, – “What noise is there? 45
I hear a tapping faint and low.”
The other hastened up the stair,
And Jane with her would go.

XIII.

And she was there when Henry said –
“I heard below a well-known voice; 50
Or was my heart by dreams betrayed,
That made me suddenly rejoice?”

XIV.

His words were weak, and drawn with pain,
His face looked flushed with burning red;
She would no more her love restrain, 55
But swiftly knelt beside the bed.

XV.

Her arms around his neck she threw,
She gave his lips a quivering kiss,
And heart to heart tumultuous flew,
For naught was left them now but this. 60

XVI.

Few moments passed in hurried grief,
And then her face away she drew,
And gazing, sought to find relief

In looks where misery met her view.

XVII.

He strove to smile with happier eyes, 65
But could not long the toil sustain;
From his deep glance the meaning flies,
The lids drop down – he longs in vain.

XVIII.

On her young heart his withered hand
She laid, and pressed it strongly there, 70
As if her life she could command,
And bid it pass to him from her.

XIX.

He slept. The maiden whispered low,
“I pray you try to find me, dame,
A friend who to the church would go, 75
And say why here to-night I came.”

XX.

The woman went, and Jane remained
With all she e'er had loved the best,
His hand upon her bosom strained,
Her face by his, but not in rest. 80

XXI.

In her large eyes the unthought-of tears
Gathered fully, gathered slowly,
And o'erflowed their azure spheres,
Drops of pain, but pure and holy.

XXII.

The lingering minutes, measured out 85
By that sad rain, drew on and on,
Till Henry feebly turned about,
And raised his eyes, and heaved a groan.

XXIII.

“Dear Jane,” he said, “my only love!
I feel I have not long to stay; 90

'Tis good, almost my hopes above,
That you are not away.

XXIV.

"Tis not that I have much to tell
Before my lips their breath resign;
But, oh! 'tis peace, 'tis more than well, 95
While thus my hand is clasped in thine.

XXV.

"For here upon my bed of death
Is with me all that earth can give;
Thus God supports the fearless faith
Which cannot cease to live. 100

XXVI.

"My mother, and that humble friend,
The boys that were my flock, and thou,
To none beside my thoughts extend,
Save Him whose heaven is near me now.

XXVII.

"My boys again I fain would see, 105
And speak what last inspires my soul;
– That men who would be truly free,
Must win their aim by self-control.

XXVIII.

"That Reverence is the bond for man
With all of Best his eyes discern; 110
Love teaches more than Doctrine can,
And no pure Hope will vainly yearn.

XXIX.

"That Conscience holds supernal power
To rend or heal the human breast;
And that in guilt's most dismal hour 115
God still may turn its war to rest.

XXX.

"Through all on earth that lives and dies

Still shines that sole eternal star,
And while to its great beams I rise,
They seem to make me all they are. 120

XXXI.

“But all from depths of mystery grows,
Which hide from us the root of things;
And good beyond what Science knows
To man his faith’s high Reason brings.

XXXII.

“To thee, to all, my sinking voice, 125
Beloved! would fain once more proclaim,
In Christ alone may those rejoice,
Deceived by every other name.

XXXIII.

“In all but Him our sins have been,
And wanderings dark of doubtful mind; 130
In Him alone on earth is seen
God’s perfect Will for all mankind.

XXXIV.

“The shadows round me close and press,
But still that radiant orb I see,
And more I seem its light to bless 135
Than aught near worlds could give to me.

XXXV.

“As light and warmth to noontide hours,
To sweetest voices tuneful songs,
And as to summer fields the flowers,
So heaven to heavenly souls belongs.” 140

XXXVI.

His upward look drew light and peace
From some unclouded source above;
The tears of Jane had learnt to cease,
And she was hushed in fearless love.

XXXVII.

But, sighing slow, he turned from heaven 145
To gaze at her, his lamp on earth,
With thoughts that need not be forgiven,
For they, too, claimed a sinless birth.

XXXVIII.

“My more than dear, my wife” — he said —
“I leave a toilsome lot to thee; 150
To bear, a widow, though unwed,
The lonely memory of me.

XXXIX.

“So young, so beautiful as thou,
To feel thou art on earth alone,
That none can be, as I am now, 155
Thy first whole hope, and all thy own;

XL.

“With few or none beside the heart
To cheer, uphold, and comprehend;
With thoughts at which the crowd would start,
And grief which they would vainly tend. 160

XLI.

“Still hope! still act! Be sure that life,
The source and strength of every good,
Wastes down in feeling’s empty strife,
And dies in dreaming’s sickly mood.

XLII.

“To toil in tasks, however mean, 165
For all we know of right and true –
In this alone our worth is seen;
’Tis this we were ordained to do.

XLIII.

“So shalt thou find in work and thought
The peace that sorrow cannot give; 170
Though grief’s worst pangs to thee be taught,
By thee let others noblier live.

XLIV.

“Oh! wail not in the darksome forest,
Where thou must needs be left alone,
But, e'en when memory is sorest, 175
Seek out a path, and journey on.

XLV.

“Thou wilt have angels near above,
By whom invisible aid is given;
They journey still on tasks of love,
And never rest except in heaven. 180

XLVI.

“The God who gave in me a friend,
Is more than any friend to all;
Upon my grave before him bend,
And He will hear thy lonely call.

XLVII.

“One kiss, my Jane — I now must rest.” 185
His eyes grew faint, his eyelids closed,
And when her lips to his were pressed,
His lips in death reposed.

PART VIII.

I.

“Oh! father, father, list to me;
The tale that I shall tell,
It must no more my burthen be,
And, father, heed me well.

II.

“Last night upon my bed I lay, 5
And prayed that I might sleep,
But still my wakeful thoughts would stay,
And still I could not weep.

III.

“The moonshine filled my room with light,

A stream of silver air, 10
And all the window-panes were bright,
And showed the stars so fair.

IV.

"I lay and looked, when lo! a hand,
A giant hand outspread;
Methought the moonlight skies it spanned, 15
And darkened o'er my bed.

V.

"This hand of giant size, I say,
It beckoned me to rise,
I saw its shadow where I lay,
I felt it o'er my eyes. 20

VI.

"I rose and went, I passed the door,
And, father! I beheld,
Where stood the old yew-tree before,
A form that heavenward swelled.

VII.

"It seemed a dark gigantic man, 25
Who sat upon a mound;
His face not well my eye could scan,
For darkness wrapped it round.

VIII.

"Oh! taller far than spire or trees,
That form above me bowed; 30
A mantle falling o'er his knees
Concealed him all in cloud.

IX.

"I knew 'twas not an earthly thing
That there before me rose;
Some nameless ghost-land's ghostly king, 35
Whose look my life-blood froze.

X.

“And when he fixed his gaze on me
I turned my eyes away,
And there before his foot could see
A grave that open lay. 40

XI.

“I could not choose but enter there;
And passing down the new-made cell,
I left the clear and moonlight air,
Where dark his shadow fell.

XII.

“With easy slope the passage dived, 45
And on I travelled far and slow,
Till through the vault my steps arrived
Where light from heaven appear'd to flow.

XIII.

“I saw a valley broad and green,
Where trees and rocks were scattered round, 50
And hills of ancient wood were seen
Encircling all the quiet ground.

XIV.

“Old trees and vast, with caves of shade,
Bright waters foaming down the steep,
Green hues that dappled all the glade, 55
Grey rocks that lay in awful sleep.

XV.

“And over all a sky was spread
Of woodland violet's deepest glow,
While amber pale and ruby red
Hung o'er the winding hills below. 60

XVI.

“And 'mid this sky without a moon
Great beaming stars of golden blaze,
Like flaming garlands thickly strewn,
Filled all the world with whispering rays.

XVII.

“Then o’er my head a sound I knew 65
Of many swift and gentle wings;
Sweet airy music o’er me flew,
And seemed to wheel in blended rings.

XVIII.

“And sooner than than eye could see 70
With life the earth and skies o’erflowed,
And grass and rock, and hill and tree,
Ten thousand radiant beings showed.

XIX.

“’Twas Angels all, a dazzling throng, 75
With wings of rose and golden down,
With hair of sunbeams pale and long,
To each bright face a streaming crown.

XX.

“They floated o’er the trees and rocks, 80
They sat o’er all the grassy dell,
They hid the hills in glancing flocks,
And seemed amid the stars to dwell.

XXI.

“And One to me, the nearest there,
Upon a brown and craggy steep,
Raised up toward heaven a face so fair,
With inmost joy I longed to weep.

XXII.

“He held a branch of darkest yew 85
That dropped with glittering tears of rain,
And loud he sang a song that drew
All things around beneath the strain.

XXIII.

“He sang of love, and death, and life, 90
And worlds and hearts, the homes of these;
Of peace attuning every strife,
Of grief whose pang the spirit frees;

XXIV.

“Of all that is, and journeys on
From worst of ill to best of good;
For not a moment e’er is gone
But in the next survives renewed. 95

XXV.

“And while he sang, the earth and skies,
And all those countless forms around,
More softly gleamed with shifting dyes,
And flushing drank the blissful sound. 100

XXVI.

“The trees were piles of trembling flame,
The rocks like diamonds heaped the sod,
Each star a living eye became,
And all, methought, were eyes of God.

XXVII.

“The stream that shimmered down the hill 105
In waves of clearest crimson ran;
And that sweet singer, brightening still,
Grew lovelier far than man.

XXVIII.

“His words upon the glowing stream
Sank melting down, and borne along 110
Upon the mingled floods of dream
All floated in accord to song.

XXIX.

“The world was changed around me all,
To arches rock and tree were grown;
I stood amid a pillared hall, 115
Beneath a roof of carven stone.

XXX.

“The windows beamed with many a hue
Of living forms in smooth array;
Again those Angel hosts I knew,

And through them shot the light of day. 120

XXXI.

“They twinkling shone with radiance keen,
With eyes whose brightness dazzled mine;
And thousands round the walls were seen,
With hands upraised in prayer divine.

XXXII.

“Before me, ’mid a depth of gloom, 125
I marked one high enormous shade,
And him I knew, compelled by whom
His giant hand I first obeyed.

XXXIII.

“Like some great dusky crag he towered,
In cloudy folds involved and dim; 130
As midnight’s darkest heaven he lowered,
The world’s whole strength reposed in him.

XXXIV.

“But, oh! a form before him lay,
And watch o’er this he seemed to keep;
’Twas Henry’s form in twilight grey, 135
That corpse-like slept an icy sleep.

XXXV.

“And when that frozen face I saw,
So calm, so chill, without a breath,
I knew the Giant Shadow’s Law,
And owned the king was Death. 140

XXXVI.

“The dread lips moved; a voice there came,
Like midnight wind in trees;
All shook around, as waves a flame
Beneath a gusty breeze.

XXXVII.

“I claim my own,’ the shadow said; 145
‘If any answers, No!

His life must ransom this, my dead,
Who thus shall 'scape from woe.'

XXXVIII.

"O'er all those Angel faces fell
A sad and helpless gloom; 150
The building seemed a mouldering cell,
A dark eternal tomb.

XXXIX.

"Then loud I spake, with swelling voice, —
'To him thy respite give, 155
And hear, O! Spirit, hear my choice
To die that he may live.'

XL.

"Before the lowly bier I knelt,
And kissed the lips and eyes,
And o'er the face a warmth I felt,
And saw new life arise. 160

XLI.

"There dawned again my Henry's look,
And feebly met my view;
With sighs and throbs my bosom shook,
His eyes my presence knew.

XLII.

"Above him poured a blaze of light, 165
And, looking whence it flowed,
The boundless form was dazzling bright,
The darkness round him glowed.

XLIII.

"Like God he sat, serene and mild,
In snowy whiteness clad: 170
His face with sunlike glory smiled,
And made all beings glad.

XLIV.

"No roof was there; the stars of heaven

Were shining round his head,
And o'er his brow a Crown of Seven
Their wondrous lustre shed. 175

XLV.

“In circling lines the Angel race,
A world of lights, rose high;
And joy shone bright in every face,
And love in every eye. 180

XLVI.

“But Angels' looks were nought to me,
Who saw beside me clear
My Henry's eyes, that now could see,
Nor taught me more to fear.

XLVII.

“No voice of God or Angel spoke, 185
And I was Henry's own;
But when upon my bed I woke,
I found myself alone.

XLVIII.

“But still I saw his fondest gaze,
Who bade affright be dumb; 190
And, filled with peaceullest amaze,
I knew my end was come.”

PART IX.

I.

Upon the spring-clad fields and woods,
The churchyard graves and tall church-tower,
The warm, pure daylight softly broods,
And fills with life the morning hour.

II.

The vast sepulchral yew-tree waves, 5
And feels the sunshine cheer the shade,
And e'en the low and grassy graves

Appear in living slumber laid.

III.

The only sad and helpless thing,
That May-day makes not less forlorn, 10
Is that old man, to whom the spring
Is dead, and dead the breezy morn.

IV.

These live not now, for all is dead
With her that lies below the sod;
His daughter from his life is fled, 15
And leaves but dust by spectres trod.

V.

The smooth, sweet air is blowing round,
It is a Spirit of hope to all;
It whispers o'er the wakening ground,
And countless daisies hear the call; 20

VI.

It mounts and sings away to heaven,
And 'mid each light and lovely cloud;
To it the lark's loud joys are given,
And young leaves answer it aloud.

VII.

It skims above the flat green meadow, 25
And darkening sweeps the shiny stream;
Along the hill it drives the shadow,
And sports and warms in the skiey beam.

VIII.

But round that hoar and haggard man
It cannot shed a glimpse of gladness; 30
He wastes beneath a separate ban,
An exile to a world of sadness.

IX.

Upon a bench before his door
He sits, with weak and staring eyes,

He sits and looks, for straight before
The grave that holds his daughter lies. 35

X.

If any come with him to speak,
In dull harsh words he bids them go;
For this strong earth he seems too weak,
For breathing life too cramped and slow. 40

XI.

A gnawing rage, an aimless heat,
Have scored and set his grating face;
His eyes like ghosts the gazer greet,
The guards of misery's dwelling-place;

XII.

A sun-dial pillar left alone, 45
On which no dial meets the eye;
A black mill-wheel with grass o'er-grown,
That hears no water trickle by;

XIII.

Dark palsied mass of severed rock,
Deaf, blind, and sere to sun and rain; 50
A shattered gravestone's time-worn block
That only shows the name of — Jane.

XIV.

'Tis thus he sits from hour to hour,
Amid the breeze beneath the sky;
And still, when beats the noisy shower, 55
The cottage doorway keeps him dry.

XV.

With open door he shelters there,
A pace behind his outward seat;
And, fixed upon his old arm-chair,
Looks through the rain from his retreat. 60

XVI.

Upon his daughter's grave he stares,

As if her form he thought would rise,
For all to him the semblance wears
Of mist that has his daughter's eyes.

XVII.

He heeds not passing beast nor men, 65
Nor wain at hand, nor distant plough;
Not e'en a burial draws his ken —
He is no longer Sexton now.

XVIII.

But while, like some grey stump, he sits, 70
Dried up at root, and shorn of all,
Still Nature round him works and flits,
And fills and lights her festival.

XIX.

And e'en around his daughter's grave,
Where Life for him in Death is cold,
Fair growth goes on, and grasses wave, 75
And shooting flies their revels hold.

XX.

And, lo! at last the old man's gaze
Is brightened with a gleam of sense,
A butterfly all yellow plays
Above the grave, nor wanders thence. 80

XXI.

And see, below the flutterer's dance,
From earth a streak of color springing;
It is the primrose leaves that glance,
To him his daughter's presence bringing.

XXII.

To her 'twas May's most precious flower, 85
That well she loved, and tended oft;
Its pale stars filled her hawthorn bower
With clustering fancies mild and soft.

XXIII.

She strewed it o'er her mother's grave,
Its grace with Henry loved to note; 90
To Simon oft the flower she gave,
And fixed it in his Sunday coat.

XXIV.

And now, with gradual change of heart,
He saw it peep above the sod
Where she was laid: it seemed to start 95
A special sign for him from God.

XXV.

An hour he sat, and marked it well,
Then rose and would behold it near;
His face no more was hard and fell, 100
No more the man was numbed and drear.

XXVI.

Another hour upon his staff
He leant, and pored above the grave;
He gave at length a silent laugh,
And seemed to grasp some purpose brave.

XXVII.

Then eager toward his house he went, 105
And took his old and idle spade,
And round his fields with fixed intent
He walked, and many pauses made:

XXVIII.

And where below the hedge-row shade,
A little tuft of primrose grew, 110
He dug it with his churchyard spade,
As if 'twere gold that thence he drew.

XXIX.

And so with sods of yellow flowers
He filled his basket full and gay,
And back in evening's quiet hours 115
Towards the church he took his way.

XXX.

Beside the grave of Jane he stood,
And round it smoothly dug the ground;
With clods as many as he could,
He made a primrose border round. 120

XXXI.

His work was done, and brightly sank
The day's last light upon his head;
The flowers that kindred beauty drank,
And all was peace around the dead.

XXXII.

And while by day the man had wrought, 125
And while by night awake he lay,
He felt within a flow of thought
Serene, that led him still to pray.

XXXIII.

Before him now his daughter came
In all her truth, as if alive; 130
Now child, now woman, still the same,
And made his purest heart revive.

XXXIV.

He thought how after Henry died
She strove and toiled with earnest will,
To each small task her heart applied, 135
Though Death within was strengthening still:

XXXV.

How week on week, 'mid humble calm,
And zealous heed that would not sleep,
She found her suffering's holiest balm
In suffering's lowest silent deep. 140

XXXVI.

And so she wore away. The night
In which she went to Henry's home
Had seized her all with chilly blight,
And warmth again would never come.

XXXVII.

She laid her down, but not to rest, 145
For feverish dreams besieged her bed;
And, with too many thoughts oppressed,
It seemed that thought itself was fled.

XXXVIII.

But now with steadfast voice and eye
She met her father's wandering gaze, 150
And told of visions bright and high —
Strange visions told in darkling phrase.

XXXIX.

Then swift she sank; she could not speak,
But lay a pale, unmoving clod,
At last she said, with utterance weak, 155
"Remembering me, remember God!"

XL.

The thought of this, of her, of all
That she to him had been before,
Began within his heart to call,
And open wide its inmost door. 160

XLI.

Though seventy winters gathering still
Had choked with ice some sacred cells,
He felt within him now a thrill
That thawed the solid icicles.

XLII.

From morning's burst to soothing eve 165
He loitered near the hallowed spot;
And though he never ceased to grieve,
The pangs of grief he now forgot.

XLIII.

He tended still the primrose flowers,
He decked with them his Mary's mound, 170
In what to him were Sabbath hours

On Henry's grave he set them round.

XLIV.

And sometimes when a funeral came,
With pensive eyes the train he saw;
Bareheaded stood, and so would claim 175
His share in others' grief and awe.

XLV.

But once 'twas more than this. There died
A hapless widow's only good,
A daughter, all her help and pride,
Who toiled to gain their daily food. 180

XLVI.

Who saw their state might well confess
Such boundless want was strange to see,
For little can the rich man guess
The poor man's utter poverty.

XLVII.

And when the burial all was o'er, 185
And there the mother staid alone,
With fingers clasped, and weeping sore,
She stood, for every hope was gone.

XLVIII.

But Simon crept in silence there,
And stretched his hand beneath her view, 190
That held five golden pieces fair,
More wealth than e'er before she knew.

XLIX.

"The aching heart it cannot heal,
I know, nor give you rest," he said —
"But thus you will not have to feel 195
The pangs that haunt the wretch's bed."

L.

Few words she spake, and turned away,
But lighter heart that eve he bore

Than he for many a weary day,
Perchance had ever felt before. 200

LI.

Next day began with sunbright dawn,
And soon to tend the grave he went;
From toil by sultry heat withdrawn,
He felt his strength was overspent:

LII.

He sank to earth in quiet sleep, 205
Beside the grave his head he laid,
And in that slumber soft and deep
He died below the yew-tree shade.

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