

And 'gainst thy good uncle too! 180

“Until now my heart was cheerful;
Duty had been light till now.
— Oh that I were free to woo thee;
That my heart had known no vow!

“Yet, I would not shrink from duty; 185
Nor my vow leave unfulfilled!
— Still, still, had my mother known thee,
Would she thus have sternly willed?

“Wherefore did my angel-mother
Thus enforce her dying prayer? 190
— Yet what right had I to seek thee,
Thou, thy uncle’s wealthy heir!

“Thus my spirit cried within me;
And that inward strife began,
That wild warfare of the feelings 195
Which lays waste the life of man.

“In auch turmoil of the spirit,
Feeble is oar human strength;
Life seems stripped of all its glory:
—Yet was duty lord at length. 200

“So at least I deemed. But meeting
Toward the pleasant end of May
With thy uncle, here he brought me,
I who long had kept away.

“He was willful, thy good uncle; 205
I was such a stranger grown;
I must go to hear the reading
Of a ballad of his own.

“Willing to be won, I yielded.

Canst thou not that eve recal, 210
When the lilacs were in blossom
And the sunshine lay o'er all?

“On the bench beneath the lilacs,
Sate we; and thy uncle read
That sweet, simple, wondrous ballad, 215
Which my own heart's woe portrayed.

“Twas a simple tale of nature —
Of a lowly youth who gave
All his heart to one above him,
Loved, and filled an early grave. 220

“But the fine tact of the poet
Laid the wounded spirit bare,
Breathed forth all the silent anguish
Of the breaking heart's despair.

“Twas as if my soul had spoken, 225
And at once I seemed to know,
Through the poet's voice prophetic,
What the issue of my woe.

“Later, walking in the evening
Through the shrubbery, thou and I, 230
With the woodlarks singing round us,
And the full moon in the sky;

“Thou, my Ellen, didst reproach me,
For that I had coldly heard
That sweet ballad of thy uncle's, 235
Nor responded by a word.

“Said I, 'If that marvelous ballad
Did not seem my heart to touch;
It was not from want of feeling,
But because it felt too much.' 240

“And even as the rod of Moses
 Called forth water from the rock;
So did now thy sweet reproaches
 All my secret heart unlock.

“And my soul lay bare before thee; 245
 And I told thee all; how strove,
As in fierce and dreary conflict,
 My stern duty and my love.

“All I told thee — of my parents, 250
 Of my angel-mother’s fate;
Of the vow by which she bound me;
 Of my present low estate.

“All I told thee, while the woodlarks 255
 Filled with song the evening breeze,
And bright gushes of the moonlight
 Fell upon us through the trees.

“And thou murmured’st, oh! my Ellen,
 In a voice so sweet and low;
‘Would that I had known thy mother,
 Would that I might soothe thy woe!’ 260

“Ellen, my sweet, life’s companion!
 From my being’s inmost core
Then I blessed thee; but I bless thee,
 Bless thee, even now, still more!

“For, as in the days chivalric 265
 Ladies armed their knights for strife,
So didst thou, with thy true counsel,
 Arm me for the fight of life.

“Saidst thou, ‘No, thou must not waver;
 Ever upright must thou stand: 270

Even in duty's hardest peril,
All thy weapons in thy hand.

“Doing still thy utmost, utmost;
Never resting till thou’rt free! —
But, if e’er thy soul is weary, 275
Or discouraged — think of me!’

“And again thy sweet voice murmured,
In a low and thrilling tone;
‘I have loved thee, truly loved thee,
Though that love was all unknown! 280

“And the sorrows and the trials
Which thy youth in bondage hold,
Make thee to my heart yet dearer
Than if thou hadst mines of gold!

“Go forth — pay thy debt to duty; 285
And when thou art nobly free,
He shall know, my good old uncle,
Of the love ’twixt thee and me!’

“Ellen, thou wast my good angel!
Once again in life I strove — 290
But the hardest task was easy,
In the light and strength of love.

“And, when months had passed on swiftly,
Canst thou not that hour recall —
’Twas a Christmas Sabbath evening — 295
When we told thy uncle all?

“Good old uncle! I can see him,
With those calm and loving eyes,
Smiling on us as he listened,
Silent, yet with no surprise. 300

