

JOAN OF ARC.

—49—

Before me stands the pyre built high of wood,
By men well-trained in their hard hellish trade;
And damnable dread fate, of mercy nude,
Awaits brave Joan—Orlean's immortal Maid.
Fra Ladvenu and Isambard give aid;
Of happiness they plead in paradise.
Yet now alone through fierce fire she must wade
To heaven's shore. Isambard early flies
But Ladvenu dares death, till livid corpse she lies.

—50—

The bourreau, poor Joan chained, reels slowly down.
Her slender body writhes within its bonds;
For none at length can bide death's awful frown
Were he a breathing bust of beaten bronze.
Then drop their eyes strong men; like wizard-wands
They bend in circles as they moan and weep,
Behold they blench like wild ferns' frozen fronds,
While briny streamlets through their kerchiefs seep,
And they sink senseless down, like shipwrecks in the deep!

—51—

As lightnings pierce the storm's dark boiling clouds,
The flames shoot through the grimy rolling smoke;
At first odd beams, then masts in winding shrouds.
Ah! now her prayers the sleeping echoes woke,
And shrieks as frequent the dread silence broke;
The pyramid a rosy furnace turned
As in some forest fire a mighty oak.
The flames are famished, Joan a crisp is burned.
To heaven her soul is fled, her ashes Loire burned.

—52—

The pedestal was plaster whence the stake
Upright arose. The tense career of crowd
Can see the victim as men her noose make;
And wind the rope around the snow-white shroud
Grown to the gibbet. Standing strong and proud,
She seemed a statue motionless and fair;
Her head with wealth of tresses rich, unbowed.
The throng below now weep and weeping stare
Through tears that start and stand, like diamonds in a lair.