

### THE VESTAL VIRGIN

The fetish Fate to screen their cowardice  
From men and from themselves, when Con-  
science calls on will,

And Hercules resumes his human labours.  
Mighty debate stirred in me. I seemed to  
stand

With all respect, before a holier judgment  
The tribunal where but to stand condemned,  
Gnaws the soul's vitals with a direr torment  
Than scorch of fagot, or the hideous jaws  
Of famished leopards, rushing on their victims.  
Self was the judge, and Self the questioner,  
The issue—lawful Love 'gainst antique ordin-  
ance,

Love planted first, nor spited in its growth  
From root to blossom, till a dastard's envy  
Snapt its sweet flower asunder from the stem,  
And set the bleeding root in unkind soil  
By barriers of custom, cloistered rule,  
Locked as in prison, with the dead hand to tend  
it.

One verdict—one—resounded through my being;  
"If thou abandonest her, never again  
Call thyself man, nor speak of Roman faith:  
He is a man who for his heart's desire,  
With conscience smiling, so whips into order  
Fortune and accident, or e'en a prosperous evil,  
That like performing dogs they sit around him  
Watching their master's eye. Approve thy  
act

The equal of thy thought; thou hast abjured  
Gods, who are no gods."—

*Commotion and Cries.*