

In love with nature and in sympathy
 With pastoral life, and thought myself a man
 But tiring of the scene, I sought again
 The life of town, and Brussels for a while
 Enrapt my fancy, and I loved my art,
 Whereby I strove, yet strove in vain to place
 On canvas that which haunted me as type
 Of Gretchen, but no model pleased the eye
 Or fixt its image here within the mind.
 And as one day I watched the busy throng
 Of toilers hast'ning from their hard day's wage
 One face I saw among the mass, which seem'd
 A type of human beauty and of love,
 United in a girl of lowly birth
 Who paused, and all unconscious of her grace
 And perfect pose, stood motionless, and gazed
 To where the maiden-mother sat enthroned
 Above the Gothic arch.

Then all in haste
 And fearing I should miss her in the throng,
 I left the balcony and followed her
 Thro' winding streets, until at length she reached
 The Church of Mary, with its storied glass;
 So rich in precious relic of the day,
 When art and zeal and worship sprang from love
 The love of an immortal, deathless fame;
 And entering, knelt before an altar-shrine
 In prayer as to the Virgin in the skies,
 And in her upturned face I saw, the one
 True face, that might have been the Virgin's own,
 Which spoke of simple untaught faith, and of
 That freedom touching holy things, which has
 Half reverence and irreverence side by side;
 Which makes the worship of the peasant seem
 Too much a form, altho' to him 'tis life,
 Then as she rose and met my gaze, I spoke,
 And in these words, "Have you a rosebud left,
 For by the basket at your feet, I deem,
 You bring the blossoms from your home to sell,"
 On which the girl, half frightened, made reply:
 "The flowers I sell not here, but take this one;"
 And stretched her hand, and smiling, gave a rose;
 Then, nodding, quickly turned to leave the place
 As half ashamed within the sacred walls
 To dream or breathe of aught, save of the saints.

Yet ere she left I called her to my side
 And said, "Come tell me, pretty one, thy name?"
 "My name? Why, all the people know my name;
 In Brabant, I am Bébée, where I dwell,
 And thither must I haste, for on this day
 I am sixteen, and children wait for me
 To share the good things which the day hath brought.
 Look here! beneath these vine-leaves at the gifts,
 Red shoes, to wear on Sunday at the mass,
 Sent by old Gingoire. Oh! how good it is
 To be sixteen and have so many friends!"
 Then, wondering at her child-like spirit, I,

Saw in our parting in one long embrace
 I kissed her, and in that one kiss her soul
 Went forth, her own no more, save linked
 And thus we parted, seeing that no more
 The future as the past could ever be,
 And lived but for my art, and soon the tale
 The world so covets hovered o'er my name
 Fame that was hers, for she it was who gave
 In her true face, the type I long had sought
 To place on canvas, and thus honor gain,
 Yet shared not with her; and I soon forgot
 The simple girl, till sickness came, and the
 Once more within my ears her voice I heard
 Which rent the air as if in anguish sore,
 And when I fain had called her to my side
 I found her not, but learned that she was dead.

But since more of her life you long to know
 I tell it as it came to me, tho' in
 A rougher shape, by an old man who lived
 Beside her from her earliest years, and loved
 In his quaint fashion evermore to dwell
 Upon the story of her life and death.

In Brabant stands a lonely little hut,
 Where once old Antoine tended to his flock
 In summer-time, by which a streamlet runs
 In winding course between the grazing field
 And in the early summer, years gone by,
 As Antoine passed along its banks, he saw
 A tiny bundle floating with the stream,
 Caught by the lilies, and by lilies saved;
 And rescued it, and brought it to the shore
 When out there peeped two laughing eyes,
 A babe of scarcely more than twelve months
 And being childless, he in pity took
 The child to his good dame, who nurtured it
 As 'twere her own, a gracious gift of God,
 To cheer the closing hours of fading life,
 And so the seasons passed, and came again
 And 'neath such kindly care the child soon
 To wander mid the flowers and tend the flowers
 So like a flower she seemed herself that one
 Might well believe that she was one of the
 And by and by, when eve was come, and
 Was laid aside, old Antoine on his knee
 Would take the child, and all in his rough
 Tell her of God so good and Virgin maid,
 Who loved in some mysterious way the poor
 And blessed their flowers, and sent the saints
 Their lives from harm, if only they would
 And place the flowers before the altar shrine
 And Bébée,—for 'twas thus they named her
 Her earliest lessons in this way, until
 The church, and Father Francis, her good
 Tried to impress her childish mind with a
 And more of reverence, touching holy things
 But Father Francis, being himself untaught
 Whose wisdom in the world of letters ran