

THE DUEL

"I am here to time, you see;
The glade is well-screened--eh?--against alarm;
Fit place to vindicate by my arm
The honour of my spotless wife,
Who scorns your libel upon her life
In boasting intimacy!

"All hush-offerings you'll spurn,
My husband. Two must come; one only go,'
She said. 'That he'll be you I know;
To faith like ours Heaven will be just,
And I shall abide in fullest trust
Your speedy glad return.'"

"Good. Here am also I;
And we'll proceed without more waste of words
To warm your cockpit. Of the swords
Take you your choice. I shall thereby
Feel that on me no blame can lie,
Whatever Fate accords."

So stripped they there, and fought,

And the swords clicked and scraped, and the onsets sped;
Till the husband fell; and his shirt was red
With streams from his heart's hot cistern. Nought
Could save him now; and the other, wrought
Maybe to pity, said:

"Why did you urge on this?
Your wife assured you; and 't had better been
That you had let things pass, serene
In confidence of long-tried bliss,
Holding there could be nought amiss
In what my words might mean."

Then, seeing nor ruth nor rage
Could move his foeman more--now Death's deaf thrall -
He wiped his steel, and, with a call
Like turtledove to dove, swift broke
Into the copse, where under an oak
His horse crompt, held by a page.

"All's over, Sweet," he cried
To the wife, thus guised; for the young page was she.
"'Tis as we hoped and said 't would be.
He never guessed . . . We mount and ride
To where our love can reign uneyed.
He's clay, and we are free."