

THE PEDESTRIAN

AN INCIDENT OF 1883

"Sir, will you let me give you a ride?

Nox Venit, and the heath is wide."

- My phaeton-lantern shone on one

Young, fair, even fresh,

But burdened with flesh:

A leathern satchel at his side,

His breathings short, his coat undone.

'Twas as if his corpulent figure slopped

With the shake of his walking when he stopped,

And, though the night's pinch grew acute,

He wore but a thin

Wind-thridded suit,

Yet well-shaped shoes for walking in,

Artistic beaver, cane gold-topped.

"Alas, my friend," he said with a smile,

"I am daily bound to foot ten mile -

Wet, dry, or dark--before I rest.

Six months to live

My doctors give

Me as my prospect here, at best,
Unless I vamp my sturdiest!"

His voice was that of a man refined,
A man, one well could feel, of mind,
Quite winning in its musical ease;
 But in mould maligned
 By some disease;
And I asked again. But he shook his head;
Then, as if more were due, he said:-

"A student was I--of Schopenhauer,
Kant, Hegel,--and the fountained bower
Of the Muses, too, knew my regard:
 But ah--I fear me
 The grave gapes near me! . . .
Would I could this gross sheath discard,
And rise an ethereal shape, unmarred!"

How I remember him!--his short breath,
His aspect, marked for early death,
As he dropped into the night for ever;
 One caught in his prime
 Of high endeavour;
From all philosophies soon to sever
Through an unconscienced trick of Time!