

THE BURGHERS

(17-)

The sun had wheeled from Grey's to Dammer's Crest,  
And still I mused on that Thing imminent:  
At length I sought the High-street to the West.

The level flare raked pane and pediment  
And my wrecked face, and shaped my nearing friend  
Like one of those the Furnace held unshent.

"I've news concerning her," he said. "Attend.  
They fly to-night at the late moon's first gleam:  
Watch with thy steel: two righteous thrusts will end

Her shameless visions and his passion'd dream.  
I'll watch with thee, to testify thy wrong -  
To aid, maybe.--Law consecrates the scheme."

I started, and we paced the flags along  
Till I replied: "Since it has come to this  
I'll do it! But alone. I can be strong."

Three hours past Curfew, when the Froom's mild hiss  
Reigned sole, undulled by whirr of merchandize,  
From Pummery-Tout to where the Gibbet is,

I crossed my pleasaunce hard by Glyd'path Rise,  
And stood beneath the wall. Eleven strokes went,  
And to the door they came, contrariwise,

And met in clasp so close I had but bent  
My lifted blade upon them to have let  
Their two souls loose upon the firmament.

But something held my arm. "A moment yet  
As pray-time ere you wantons die!" I said;  
And then they saw me. Swift her gaze was set

With eye and cry of love illimited  
Upon her Heart-king. Never upon me  
Had she thrown look of love so thorough-sped! . . .

At once she flung her faint form shieldingly  
On his, against the vengeance of my vows;  
The which o'erruling, her shape shielded he.

Blanked by such love, I stood as in a drowse,

And the slow moon edged from the upland nigh,  
My sad thoughts moving thuswise: "I may house

And I may husband her, yet what am I  
But licensed tyrant to this bonded pair?  
Says Charity, Do as ye would be done by." . . .

Hurling my iron to the bushes there,  
I bade them stay. And, as if brain and breast  
Were passive, they walked with me to the stair.

Inside the house none watched; and on we prest  
Before a mirror, in whose gleam I read  
Her beauty, his,--and mine own mien unblest;

Till at her room I turned. "Madam," I said,  
"Have you the wherewithal for this? Pray speak.  
Love fills no cupboard. You'll need daily bread."

"We've nothing, sire," said she; "and nothing seek.  
'Twere base in me to rob my lord unaware;  
Our hands will earn a pittance week by week."

And next I saw she'd piled her raiment rare  
Within the garde-ropes, and her household purse,  
Her jewels, and least lace of personal wear;

And stood in homespun. Now grown wholly hers,  
I handed her the gold, her jewels all,  
And him the choicest of her robes diverse.

"I'll take you to the doorway in the wall,  
And then adieu," I to them. "Friends, withdraw."  
They did so; and she went--beyond recall.

And as I paused beneath the arch I saw  
Their moonlit figures--slow, as in surprise -  
Descend the slope, and vanish on the haw.

"'Fool,' some will say," I thought. "But who is wise,  
Save God alone, to weigh my reasons why?"  
- "Hast thou struck home?" came with the boughs' night-sighs.

It was my friend. "I have struck well. They fly,  
But carry wounds that none can cicatrize."  
- "Not mortal?" said he. "Lingering--worse," said I.