DELPHI CLASSICS

Rhoda Broughton

Complete Works

Series Fifteen

The Complete Works of

RHODA BROUGHTON

(1840-1920)

Contents

Rhoda Broughton (1927) by Myra Curtis

The Delphi Classics Catalogue

Version 1

The Complete Works of

RHODA BROUGHTON

With introductory material by Gill Rossini, MA

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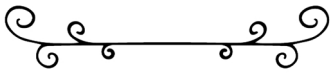

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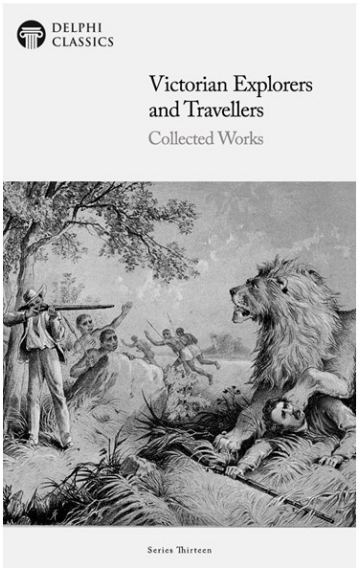
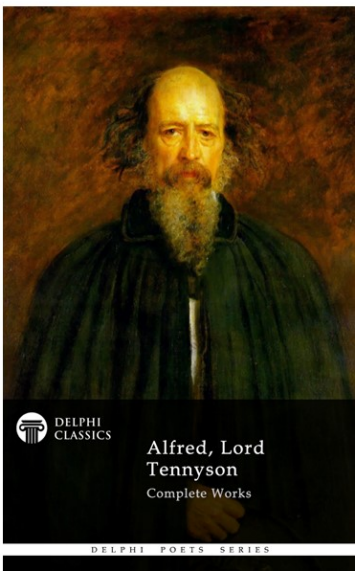
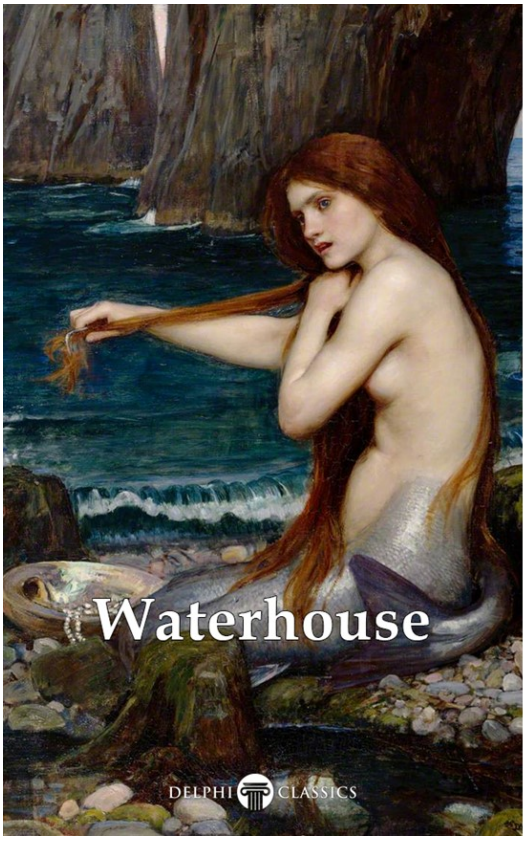
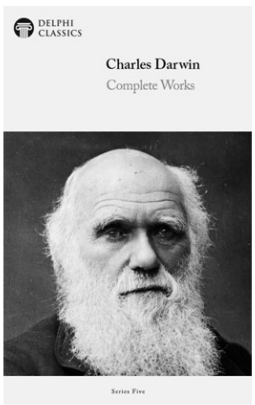
THE VICTORIANS

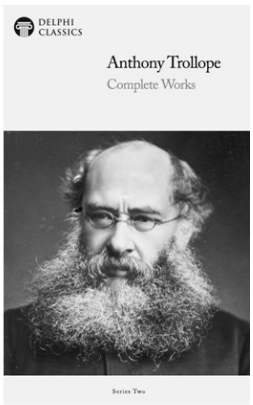


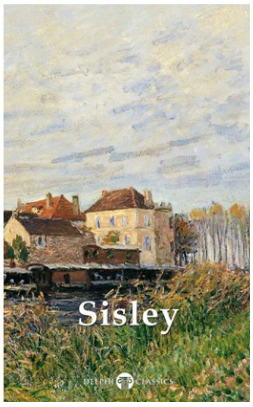


Explore the world of the Victorians…









The Novels

Denbigh, North Wales, c.1895 — Rhoda Broughton was born in Denbigh on 29 November 1840. She was the daughter of the Rev. Delves Broughton, youngest son of the Rev. Sir Henry Delves-Broughton, 8th baronet, and Jane Bennett, daughter of a leading Irish barrister, George Bennett. Her aunt, Susanna Bennett, married the well-known author Sheridan le Fanu.

Denbigh, today

Not Wisely, but Too Well (1867)

Broughton's first novel landed perfectly in the middle of the decade known in literary terms as the start of 'sensation novel mania', which persisted until the 1890s. A sensation novel drew on existing literary genres such as melodrama, Gothic (in particular, ghost stories) and (in Broughton's case) romance, adding other themes to the mix, such as social anxiety. Sensation novels surged in popularity at a time when great changes were happening in British society. Although *compulsory* education for all children was not imposed until 1880 onwards in England and Wales, literacy levels were slowly rising before that, aided no doubt by Sunday Schools, the availability of cheaply printed reading matter — provincial newspapers, more circulating libraries, a plethora of magazines both 'tabloid' in editorial style and those more conventional and many cheap novels that could be bought for pence and passed around friends and family. High profile trials fuelled the demand for salacious stories, as did the beginnings of the reform of divorce legislation.

Broughton was one writer that had a gift for taking this genre, playing with it and producing entertaining stories for a readership looking for light reading with some thrills, a little sensuality and perhaps one or two minor shocks. Her unique blend of sensationalist tropes has led her style to be labelled 'erotic sensationalism' in the 2004 series *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction*. To Broughton's more moral-minded contemporaries, it was vulgar stuff, unfitting of both the author and her female characters, an insult to genteel female readers and nothing short of an 'abomination' as novelist Margaret Oliphant declared it in *Blackwood's Magazine*. Oliphant also wrote that Broughton's descriptions of her characters and their emotions were 'disgusting in the fullest sense of the word' whilst conceding that they were essentially characters of 'intense goodness'. It is the very lack of coyness in Broughton's depictions of relationships and females in particular that has been picked up as a modernist view of the same and in hindsight she is now regarded as a revisionist writer. Within her lifetime and lengthy career, Broughton could see changes in society that better accommodated her stories; she commented that early in her career, she was seen as the outrageous equivalent of Émile Zola, but 'I finish it as Miss Yonge (a conventional writer who wrote from her devout religious standpoint); it's not that I have changed, it's my fellow countrymen'.

This novel and the following novel *Cometh Up as A Flower* were compared at the time to Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

Broughton herself described the writing of *Not Wisely, but Too Well* — and the beginnings of her long career — as starting on 'a certain wet Sunday afternoon' when she was about twenty-two years old. She was reading a mediocre novel and not enjoying it; as she recalled the story, she was suddenly moved by 'the spirit' to write something herself. At first she told nobody she was writing, but did so steadily for weeks until she had completed the first draft of her novel. Unlike most other aspiring female writers of her generation, she was in a privileged position as the niece by marriage of the celebrated Irish author Sheridan le Fanu, who on looking at her first effort in January 1865, thought it had potential and published the story as a serial in the *Dublin University Magazine* (August 1865-July 1866). Le Fanu even went so far as to suggest book publication to George Bentley, the London based publisher that 'discovered' Wilkie Collins, but Bentley rejected it. After revisions by Broughton, which she was still completing when her second novel *Cometh Up As a Flower* was

being serialised in the same Dublin magazine, *Not Wisely, but Too Well* was eventually published in book form by the Tinsley brothers, a relatively new business, which was also to publish the early works of Thomas Hardy and G. A. Henty. Broughton's first two books came out very close together, giving the author a double 'hit' on the book market and a double treat for her early fans. The twenty-six year old new author was embarking on a career in writing that would last until her death in 1920. Publisher George Bentley, despite the faltering start to his connection with Broughton, was to become her main publisher until his death in 1898, when the copyright of her work was acquired by Macmillan, who also published her later works from 1899 to 1910.

Often Broughton's novels (as was common practice at the time) were serialised too, in the journal *Temple Bar: a London Magazine for Town and Country Readers*, a magazine aimed at comfortably off middle class readers. Stanley, Paul & Co published three novels for Broughton after 1912, but her last novel, *A Fool in Her Folly*, was published posthumously by Odhams. (This timeline of Broughton's publishing is taken from the excellent *Popular Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Kate Boardman and Shirley Jones, MUP, 2004).

Broughton made a comfortable living from her writing; as a single woman with no pressing family responsibilities, she could spend her money on her social life or anything else she chose, although there is no suggestion that she was as flamboyantly spendthrift as her contemporary, Ouida, with whom she was (erroneously) compared. Even so, her earnings did diminish over time, as her popularity also declined. As to Broughton's thoughts on her own writing, information is rather scarce. She destroyed nearly all of her personal papers, which could well have included correspondence of a literary nature, before she died.

Not Wisely, but Too Well had a turbulent road to publication. 'The most thoroughly sensual tale I have read in English for a long time' wrote novelist and critic Geraldine Jewsbury in her reader's report, adding that it was not suitable for 'decent people' and referred to its 'highly coloured and hot blooded passion', exactly the sort of verdict designed to titillate readers of sensation novels. Jewsbury tried to prevent its publication, but while Broughton ultimately triumphed, she was obliged to make extensive revisions, promising to 'expunge it of coarseness and slanginess, & to rewrite those passages which cannot be toned down'. Naturally, Broughton's new readers had no such qualms; whilst they did not get to see the unexpurgated version (and no doubt would have relished it!) they were delighted by the novel. Today, the book is seen as a pioneering portrayal of female sexuality.

The title of the novel comes from Shakespeare's *Othello*, in which the titular character in Act V says: 'Then you must speak of one that loved not wisely, but too well.'

After a wandering preamble in the form of a sermon that takes up the whole of Chapter One, the story begins in earnest. The seaside resorts of North Wales are introduced to us, from a small sleepy village to the bright lights and bustle of Ryvel ('all lodging houses and dust and glare'), which sounds very like the down-to-earth ambience of Rhyl. Pen Dyl, the sleepy village destination, has a railway, wind blown sand flats, a few modest shops and even more modest, but respectable accommodation. As the plot opens, we see it at its best, bathed in bright sunshine and all those in this place appear to be headed for the beach, to play, meditate on nature, or just take in the sun.

Most of the visitors are average types that one would find at a seaside resort catering for families, except for one — a young woman, alone except for her

Pomeranian dog. Twenty-year-old Kate Chester, the dog's owner, is 'not a beauty', but has an appearance and demeanour that draws attention. She has dark auburn hair, green eyes, a pale skin and a mouth that looks ready to smile or laugh at any time. Her plump figure is criticised by other females for its comfortable appearance, but it is in pleasing contrast to fashion conscious women of her day, with their waists abnormally constricted by cruelly tight corsets (her sister Margaret is one such, with her constricted seventeen-inch waist) — Kate, at least, has an earthy appeal that is positively sensual. She has just finished reading an emotional and romantic novel and seems contented with her life, in sharp contrast to how she felt two years before when she declared she 'never, *never* could feel happy again in this world' following the death of her beloved mother. Looking at the holidaymakers and day trippers around her, she observes a young couple, possibly newlyweds. Kate firmly decides that there is much more to life than love affairs and that in fact, the everyday pleasures and beauties around her are of much more interest: 'I have done very well without love… for twenty years…and I do not see why I should not do it for twenty years more'; and yet, for all her protestations, she is intensely curious about passion and love. After all, if Romeo and Juliet and many great writers have felt it, perhaps she is wrong after all!

In her guest accommodation, Breadalbane House, there resides a small, motley selection of family members. Her sister Margaret is one and then there is Kate's uncle, the Rev. Josiah Piggott and his wife, both Welsh and Blount Chester, a 'long-legged, loose-limbed, thoroughbred-looking hobbledehoy' who seems to approach life with a light touch and a smile. Kate returns for the unappetising lunch of mutton and potatoes and there is a discussion as to whom of the two sisters will accompany the Reverend and his wife to dinner at the home of Sir Guy and Lady Stamer. In the end both sisters are able to go and after Kate has spent the whole afternoon choosing what to wear, the party set off for Llyn castle, an ugly edifice with ivy scrambling over it, but a comfortable interior with ancestral portraits, pleasant fellow guests and a beautifully laid out dining table. The servants are immaculate and attentive, 'so different from Jane of the dirty fingers', the maid at the modest terraced house he is staying in! The company, too, is more illustrious — Sir Guy Stamer and his wife and daughters; and, to Kate's dismay, opposite her at the table is Colonel Dare Stamer, the son of the knight and a young man who has a less than respectable reputation. Her dismay is prompted by the fact that he has been seated next to her sister Margaret, with whom he is having an animated conversation as if she is the only person in the world he cares for. What Kate would really like is for all his attention to be directed at her, as recently she has felt herself undeniably attracted to him. He is not a conventionally good-looking man, but he is tall, dark haired and muscular in a rather primitive way. What really 'spoils' him, however, is the lifestyle he shares with his male friends — he is 'a dissipated, self-indulgent man.' He had already flirted a little with Kate and originally thought to just toy with her, but to his surprise finds himself rather attracted to her and what he thought would be her 'wells of undeveloped passion'. He decided, in the end, to take pity on her and not pursue her and contented himself with flirting with Margaret, but ended the evening thinking about Kate and her earthy charms again.

In the aftermath of the dinner party, Kate is steeped in melancholy. She knows she is falling deeply for a man too elevated in station for her, 'violently' so and of course that man is Dare Stanton. The hopelessness of her feelings makes her irritable and uncooperative, until she has driven herself into such a state that she has to go off alone and weep, oblivious to the calming aspects of nature around her that usually give such delight. Eventually, her tears spent and late for supper, she takes the path

for home and encounters Colonel Dare Stamer, in his carriage, travelling back to the castle after a fishing expedition. Kate is elated to see him! He, in turn, is gratified to find her alone, with no tiresome chaperone to spoil his entertainment and he offers to take her home himself. After a show of reluctance (which in her heart is genuine, as she knows that Dare is one she 'felt instinctively not to be a good man' and a man who put his own passions and will before everything else), she climbs onto the carriage, sitting close to him as she must. By the end of the short journey she is completely in his thrall and has arranged a secret meeting with him.

The next day, Kate is in a fever of excitement. She relishes her morning walk with Tip, running and playing with him on the beach, laughing with sheer joy and anticipation; back at the house, she is restless and only the passionate writing of Byron — about an illicit love affair — can interest her. She nearly finds herself forced into a carriage drive with her family, which would have thwarted her plans to meet Dare (and she clearly fears his disapproval) and is ready to make her escape when she is confronted by her sister who warns her that Dare is making a fool of her and is considered the 'fastest' (the most sexually forward) guard in the Coldstreams. Kate is unmoved: 'I should not love him a bit the less if I were to know that he was as wicked as sin itself.'

Kate does meet Dare and apart from many exchanges of passionate glances and the gifting of a flower to Dare, little progress is made. In fact, the assignation is interrupted when Dare sees his sisters heading their way and he tells Kate he must join them and she is to leave alone. Soon after, Dare leaves for London on business, to return in a few days; but worse news is to come. The long awaited house that the three Williams siblings had been planning to occupy is ready early and Margaret announces they will move away from the area soon. Kate is horrified. How can she move away from Dare? Her sister is sympathetic, but warns her that any affair with him is doomed to fail, but her brother Blount is more brutal and incredulous. 'Do you mean to say…that the reason why she wants to stay so much is to try and get that big, conceited, black [haired] fellow to smile upon her again?' All Kate can do is wait for Dare's return and hope she can attend the tea party his sisters have arranged, in order to see again the man she considers to be her lover. Can anything come of this naïve passion?

In this curious book, the narrator dips in and out of the story in a distracting way, commenting in the first person on characters and other aspects of the story. Perhaps the result of the author's inexperience, or her determination to be a 'storyteller', it is incongruous to say the least. What is also evident is Broughton's famous caustic wit, given a public outing in this novel for the first time. She describes Lady Stamer after the dinner party: 'Self-indulgent, as worldly old women so often are, she cast her fat old person into an arm-chair and straightway fell asleep, like a rude old porpoise as she was.' That can either be taken as wit, or an unsubtle and offensive remark made by a juvenile and socially inexperienced mind. We are also expected to believe a woman's soul 'is such a small room that it has only space for one idea at a time'; consequently, when she falls in love, that is all she can think of, whereas a man in love has ample room left over for his horses, career, male friends and his food. Whilst such opinions may have been commonplace at the time, they will most likely grate on the modern reader, until one re-reads it with the cultural mindset of the 1860s and forgetting that the first wave of the feminist movement was close on the horizon.

Broughton's uncle and first publisher, Sheridan le Fanu, 1870

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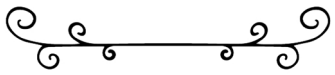
Broughton's early critic, Margaret Oliphant, in an 1881 sketch

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.



"A THING OF beauty is a joy for ever." That is my text for this chapter, and my service is going to be an amplification and enlarging upon that idea. Keats meant it in a purely material sense, for his intense perception of the beautiful was confined to material objects; but I, having adopted it for my motto, intend it to be taken in a nobler, wider, more spiritual sense. The subject I am going to write about is to my mind "a thing of beauty;" for what is more preëminently so than a tender, "loving, passionate, human soul, made more tender, more loving, by many a sore grief," by many a gnawing sorrow, till towards the hour of its setting, whether calm or whelmed to the last in storm-clouds, it shines with a chaste mellow radiance such as our earth lamps do not afford us here, borrowed (oh, priceless loan!) from the fountains of light above? Love in such a soul, growing purified from the drossy, worthless part of earthly passion which oftentimes forms the largest share of it, is raised higher and higher above this world's low level, above its dull swampy flats, till it merges in that better, boundless love which is the essence of the Deity, a love free from the sharp sting of disappointment, free from the mortal taint of satiety, and which decay is powerless to soil with its foul, polluting fingers.

Even taking it in its narrow material sense, I agree very fully and heartily with the sentiment of Keats' suggestive line, and thank him most humbly and sincerely for saying for me, so pithily and concisely, what I should never have been able to say so well for myself. Yes! I subscribe to the opinion of that born Greek, whom some anachronism isolated from his kin and his country, and set amongst uncongenial money-making Britons, full twenty centuries too late. I subscribe to it; but yet I know, on the other hand, that we all learned, on no less authority than the copy-books, which exercised our powers of handwriting in the days of our hard-worked, highly educated youth, that "Beauty is a fading flower;" and, applied particularly to woman's loveliness, there is none more favourite among that bundle of dull platitudes, of insipid, trite commonplaces which enrol themselves under the head of moral maxims. Of course it is true — tiresomely, provokingly, heart-breakingly true; so true as to be almost a self-evident proposition. Which of you, O daughters of Eve! has not made this interesting discovery in natural history for yourself, by one or other of the following pleasant processes? Either, standing after the manner of your kind, considering your *tout ensemble*, in that teller of such gall-bitter, such treacle-sweet truths, your looking-glass, you make the discovery, some fine day, that you have lost your most effective, aggressive weapon against mankind. Your little sword is dinted; your pretty arrows have lost their points; your power is gone from you. Disarmed you stand there; like "brave Kempenfelt," your "victories are o'er," and very ruefully you have to own to yourself that your soft, much prized fascinations, which, perchance, made your small world so cheery a place, have gone away from you, never to come back again any more. "Eheu fugaces!" They have slipped away, treacherous ones, out of your reluctant clasp, "most cunningly did steal away," as is the wont of the brief good things of this troublesome world of ours, leaving us very heart bare, and sore, and grumbling; none the worse, perhaps, for that at last. Or else you have this truth exemplified in a manner some degrees less painful to your own feelings; seeing old Time, that busy artificer, performing on the countenance of an intimate friend. Curiously you watch him, as, with his graver's tool, he draws horizontal, parallel lines

along the smooth brow; designs skilfully a simple yet ingenious pattern of crow's feet at the corner of each haggard eye, pares down the rounded contours, and cuts them into sharp points and angles, and paints out with his dull grays and drabs the rosy flush of colour from the once love-bright cheek. Ay, me! Ay, me! indeed. What so frail, so butterfly lived as beauty in the individual? Hardly are we consoled by the reflection that at least in the species it seems perennial. But though the visible presence of this fairest of earth's visitants — this living witness that Eden once existed — is so sadly short, yet in memory it out-lives all the other powers that sway our destinies. Great kingdoms grew into being in the old times, at least we suppose so, we having now nothing of them but their dark old tombs. Big men did big things, and might as well never have done them for all we know about them, seeing that they rot now in such unrescued, irrecoverable oblivion. Even the most learned of our pundits in the historical and antiquarian line have but the most shadowy impression of what brave deeds were done, of what wise thoughts were thought, of how men lived and loved, and believed and hoped in that dim far dawning. As for the bulk of us ignoramuses or *ignorami* (as I suppose would be the correct plural), it is a great chance if we know the names of the four great empires that people talk so much about nowadays.

But when shall we cease to hear the trailing garments of Helen the well-robed, the goddess of women, sweeping down the shadowy echoing corridors of Priam's cool, wide palace? And when, oh when, save at the hour when recollection's self perishes, shall we forget "the serpent of old Nile;" made up of delicious contradictions, enchanting termagant! the tempest of whose anger blew sweeter than the breath of the west wind come straight from a garden of roses; whose scolding angry words seemed more caressing, more utterly bewitching than other women's love-whispers! Frail, vain, variable, heartless coquette! who could yet love so exceeding well "her curled Antony," her mailed Homan darling, as to choose the aspick's cold kisses on her soft flesh, rather than existence without him — who could lay aside life, with so queenly rare a grace, as to make us "half in love with dreamful death!" still, yes still, though dead, you snare us "in your strong toil of grace." That was a lovely conception of the mightiest and sweetest of all singers that have sung for many a day, embodied in the "Dream of Fair Women." Those "far renowned brides of ancient song" were worthy denizens for the fragrant chambers of a great poet's soul. He who has been able to set before us —

> "Idalian Aphrodite, beautiful,
> Fresh as the foam, new-bathed in Paphian wells,"

who has called her back from her old Cyprian home, with her own rosy cloud of love and maddening witchery round her, taking the senses by storm, who can, even now, make men's veins throb and their pulses beat with ecstasy, leading them into the presence of her divine ambrosial loveliness, he, I say, is one of the few great artists — the one great artist indeed, in these barren days, that is equal to the task of limning those "imperial moulded forms" that haunt his dim wood. How great a treat, how rich a banquet for the half-starved fancy to wander with the great enchanter among the shadowy aisles, the faintly-seen archets of those great dew-drenched ancient trees, to see him conquer the unconquerable one, foil the prime victor over human kind, touching the dry dust, and making it reassume the forms of those "Daughters of the Gods," making us reach across the centuries, and awaking them out of their nameless graves, with the sleep of many ages still heavy on their long-closed eyelids, making us behold them, shining in the noonday rays of his strong imagination, more perfectly,

flawlessly fair, more absolutely free from mortal stain or blemish, than when first they ravished the eyes of their demigod lovers! I could babble on, on this theme, for ever: it opens out such long lines of thought. I am not Tennyson, as I need hardly inform anyone who has got thus far. I am also pretty sure that I am not possessed of that greatest of gifts, a poetic soul, — in its creative power coming next (though at an immeasurable distance) to God Himself. But, for all that, I too have, this night, had a "Dream of Fair Women."

My fair women were not celebrated ones, though. The world never heard, never will hear of them. Indeed, there is nothing for it to hear. Their voices were too low and gentle to be audible above its dull roar. But none the less for that are they pleasant visitants. Nor are they only dream-faces bending over me, in their evanescent intangible bloom, as I lie on my bed, and, when morning dawns, leaving only a vague unreal impression of something far pleasanter than the work-a-day world of realities affords. No, they are real flesh-and-blood faces; the faces of the women who, at different times, in different relations of life, have influenced and moulded my destiny. Rather should I say that, in an inner chamber of my spirit, I have a secret picture-gallery. None enters there but myself; small beauty would a stranger see, perchance, in some of those woman portraits. Some of my pictures were painted many years ago; some have been slightly, poorly sketched, and their colours are getting wishy washy and blurred. Others glow with more vivid, liquid, melting hues, every time I look upon them. But the gem of the collection has been hung there but a short time. The paint is hardly dry yet. Often I stand before that girl image, and gaze and gaze till my eyes ache and burn, in the intensity of my longing that those lips should unclose but once again, for one little minute; should just say one word, whether cross or kind, or cruel or tender, would mate but small difference, so as it were conveyed by that obstinately silent voice. But they never do. They never will again, though I should gaze till my eyes shrank up in their sockets — till their light were quenched for aye. O dead woman! you have caught his speechlessness from your grim bridegroom, Death. My case is not an uncommon one, I think, if that could console me. She was everything to me, and I was less than nothing to her; and now she is dead, and I must talk about her to some one. I will tell the simple story of her short life. I do not want her to be forgotten, though now there has been for twelve months past a small white tablet, with a marble lily drooping broken upon it, among the knightly brasses, the cold "Hie jacets" of the gray old church where so many Chesters are sleeping. But let no one be afraid that I shall make an elegy of this life. Let no one dread a long threnody, breathing despair, with tears in every line. I do not despair. I know so *surely,* I am so utterly persuaded, that it is *well.*

End of Sample