

NEAR HASTINGS¹

Near Hastings, on the shingle-beach,^o *gravel beach*
We loitered at the time
When ripens on the wall the peach,
The autumn's lovely prime.
5 Far off,—the sea and sky seemed blent,
The day was wholly done,
The distant town its murmurs sent,
Strangers,—we were alone.

We wandered slow; sick, weary, faint,
10 Then one of us sat down,
No nature hers, to make complaint;—
The shadows deepened brown.
A lady past,—she was not young,
But oh! her gentle face
15 No painter-poet ever sung,
Or saw such saintlike grace.

She past us,—then she came again,
Observing at a glance
That we were strangers; one, in pain,—
20 Then asked,—Were we from France?
We talked awhile,—some roses red
That seemed as wet with tears,
She gave my sister, and she said,
“God bless you both, my dears!”

25 Sweet were the roses,—sweet and full,
And large as lotus flowers²
That in our own wide tanks we cull
To deck our Indian bowers.
But sweeter was the love that gave
30 Those flowers to one unknown,
I think that He who came to save
The gift a debt will own.

The lady's name I do not know,
Her face no more may see,
35 But yet, oh yet I love her so!
Blest, happy, may she be!
Her memory will not depart,
Though grief my years should shade,

¹ Hastings is a town on the southeastern coast of England between Beachy Head and Dover.

² The lotus is a large water-lily that is sacred to Hindus.

40 Still bloom her roses in my heart!
 And they shall never fade!