

ISRAFEL

And the angel Israfel who has the sweetest voice of all God's creatures.
—KORAN

I

In Heaven a spirit doth dwell
Whose heart-strings are a lute—
None sing so wild—so well
As the angel Israfel—
And the giddy stars are mute.

II

Tottering above
In her highest noon
The enamoured moon
Blushes with love—
While, to listen, the red levin
Pauses in Heaven.

III

And they say (the starry choir
And all the listening things)
That Israfeli's fire
Is owing to that lyre
With those unusual strings.

IV

But the Heavens that angel trod
Where deep thoughts are a duty—
Where Love is a grown god—
Where Houri glances are—
—Stay! turn thine eyes afar!—
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in yon star.

V

Thou art not, therefore, wrong
Israfeli, who despisest
An unimpassion'd song:
To thee the laurels belong
Best bard,—because the wisest.

VI

The extacies above
With thy burning measures suit—
Thy grief—if any—thy love
With the fervor of thy lute—
Well may the stars be mute!

VII

Yes, Heaven is thine: but this
Is a world of sweets and sour:
Our flowers are merely—flowers,
And the shadow of thy bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.

VIII

If I did dwell where Israfel
Hath dwelt, and he where I,
He would not sing one half as well—
One half as passionately,
And a stormier note than this would swell
From my lyre within the sky.

[1831]