

*From Père Lachaise*  
*The Good Victorians*

1. *Perverted England*

My Dears, don't listen to that mush  
About the good Victorians.  
We did all that they do in France,  
But with a guilty cough, hush-hush.

Ah, sail the seas! You'll find, in all  
This wide world, no *Tartufferie*  
Quite like the English variety.  
I'll give you a little roll-call.

One Arthur Munby, mysophile,  
Was smitten by squat working girls  
With brawny arms. For him the pearls  
And the sophisticated smile

Of a young lady held no charms  
Compared with dirty fingernails  
And great red fists clutching slop-pails  
And ah, those hairy underarms!

The library of erotica  
Milnes kept would have made even Tiberius  
Blush. Wouldn't he have waxed delirious  
Over *that* pornocopia!

Pocket-books cried up 'Poses Plastiques'  
And 'Foreign Language Schools'. (Of aught  
Those cunning linguists might have taught  
A modest tongue declines to speak.)

Gladstone would walk the streets, to try  
And save his 'fallen angels'. They  
Had doubts about his motives: *Hey!*  
They'd shout, *Look, here comes old Glad-eye!*

How often with a flail he scored  
His naked back for thoughts of lust!  
But how could punishment be just  
That felt so much like a reward?

*I am asked about the Victorians'  
legendary (and alleged) prudery.*



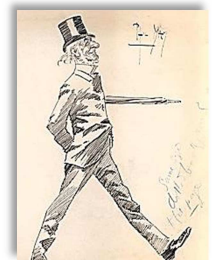
*Park and Boulton  
(Fanny and Stella).*

*Poet, journalist, photographer.*



*Richard Monckton Milnes, Baron  
Houghton, parliamentarian, patron  
of literature, friend of Swinburne.*

*Or 'Tableaux Vivants'.*



(My father-in-law, Horatio  
Lloyd... Well, there were Uranian rumours,  
Dears, and in one of his strange humours  
He once 'exposed' himself, you know...)

The Suffolk docks FitzGerald haunted  
Were full of strapping fellows he  
Dreamed would fill up the vacancy  
In him with all the love he wanted.

And Burton's *Kama Sutra*, and  
Young Swinburne's whips and chains, and staid  
Old Ruskin's girls: well, it all made  
For a most interesting land,

Despite the Evangelical,  
The Philistine, and our good Queen.  
(For what could the word 'lesbian' mean  
To one with thoughts so virginal,

Reared by a prude in isolation?)  
And what went on in public schools  
Was only a mystery to fools.  
Think of the history of our nation:

William the Second's gowns; Edward  
The Second and Piers Gaveston;  
King James the First. I could go on...  
More recently, perhaps you've heard

Of the scandal of Cleveland Street,  
Where in a shadowy house, boys would  
Eke out their incomes with a good  
Side-line as prostitutes? They'd meet

With gentlemen of a certain taste  
And retire upstairs to their bliss.  
The law knew something was amiss:  
Arrests were made. A problem faced

The Crown, but it had strings to pull:  
The poor boys received sentences,  
But their distinguished clients? These,  
Being rich, well-born and powerful,



*Richard Burton, scholar, adventurer,  
translator of The Arabian Nights  
and The Perfumed Garden, as well.*

*Delicacy prevented the Parliamentarians  
from even mentioning the subject to  
the Queen, and so lesbianism was not  
covered in the Act I mention below.*

*The dreadful 'Kensington System',  
instituted by her priggish mother.*



*1889, involving telegraph boys  
and some very high-born clients,  
including Lord Arthur Somerset  
and, possibly, royalty, in the person  
of Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence.*

Were handled with the softest gloves.  
Some went abroad temporarily,  
But all, Duke, Earl, and Royalty,  
Went on pursuing their strange loves.



2.  
An open secret, a dark fact  
Was that the rich thought it their right  
To exploit the poor. And still, despite  
The Criminal Law Amendment Act,

*'Droit de seigneur', in mediæval parlance.*

A wealthy man felt free to dandle  
A small white-slave girl on his knee,  
Most often with impunity.  
When I was 'caught', and caused a scandal,

1885. Under Section 11 (the Labouchère Amendment) I was tried and convicted for 'gross indecency with male persons'.

The system itself was compromised.  
The Marquis threatened to expose  
Uranians in high places; those  
Men made sure I was sacrificed—



*'The only Léon' as Sarah Bernhardt.*

A patriotic act, you see...  
*What, the Prime Minister in the dock?*  
*God save the Queen from such a shock!*  
I took a bullet for Rosebery.



(And so was Palinurus culled  
His comrades' safety to ensure:  
*Unum pro multis dabitur*  
*Caput.* This law can't be annulled.)

*Henry Labouchère, MP, author of the 'Blackmailer's Charter' (Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act) making acts of 'gross indecency' between male persons a crime punishable by imprisonment. A man, ironically, I much admired in my youth. He remarked, regarding the (maximum) two-year sentence I received, that he wished his legislation had provided for a longer one.*

3.  
There is, as far as I can tell, an  
Increasing tolerance for all sorts  
Of love these days. But in the courts  
Poor Uranus is still a felon.

We'll win the fight, if we but dare.  
Either the law, Dears, or the love:  
One of them must go. Time will prove  
The love's not going anywhere

*'Gross indecency' is technically a misdemeanour—small consolation to Oscar.*

—[Mr V]