

Classic Poetry Series

Robert Browning
- poems -

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Robert Browning(1812-1889)

The son of Robert Browning, a Bank of England clerk, and Sarah Anna Wiedemann, of Scottish-German descent, Browning received little formal education. His learning was gleaned mainly from his Father's library at home in Camberwell, South London, where he learnt something, with his Father's help, of Latin and Greek and also read Shelly, Byron and Keats. Though he attended lectures at the University of London in 1828, Browning left after only one session.

Apart from a visit to St Petersburg in 1834 and two visits to Italy in 1838 and 1844, Browning lived with his parents in London until his marriage of 1846. It was during this period that most of the plays and the earlier poems were written and, excepting *Strafford*, published at his family's expense.

After the secretly held marriage to Elizabeth Barrett in 1846, Browning and wife travelled to Italy where they were, apart from brief holidays in France and England, to spend most of their married life together. In 1849 the couple had a son, Robert 'Pen' Browning, and it was Elizabeth who, during this time, was most productive. After her death in 1861, Browning returned to England with his son, where he achieved popular acclaim for his *Dramatis Personae* and *The Ring and the Book*.

He spent the remainder of his life, excepting holidays in France, Scotland, Italy and Switzerland, in London where he wrote a number of dramatic poems, the two series of *Dramatic Idylls* (1879,1880) and poems on primarily classical subjects: *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophone's Apology* (1875).

He died in Venice whilst holidaying in 1889 and was buried at Westminster Abbey.

"Heap Cassia, Sandal-Buds And Stripes"

Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smear'd with dull nard an Indian wipes
From out her hair: such balsam falls
Down sea-side mountain pedestals,
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island-gain.

And strew faint sweetness from some old
Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
From closet long to quiet vowed,
With moth'd and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.

Robert Browning

A Cavalier Song

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.
God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're-

(Chorus)

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell.
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

(Chorus)

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

(Chorus)

March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

Robert Browning

A Face

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pure gold,
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile; not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all: but rather as if aloft
Yon hyacinth, she loves so, leaned its staff's
Burden of honey-colored buds to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her little neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver on the pale gold ground
Up to the fruit-shaped, perfect chin it lifts!
I know, Correggio loves to mass, in rifts
Of heaven, his angel faces, orb on orb
Breaking its outline, burning shades absorb:
But these are only massed there, I should think,
Waiting to see some wonder momentarily
Grow out, stand full, fade slow against the sky
(That's the pale ground you'd see this sweet face by),
All heaven, meanwhile, condensed into one eye
Which fears to lose the wonder, should it wink.

Robert Browning

A Grammarian's Funeral Shortly After The Revival Of Learnin

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
Cared-for till cock-crow:
Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row!
That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citted to the top,
Crowded with culture!
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it;
No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
Safe from the weather!
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo!
Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
Winter would follow?

Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
 Cramped and diminished,
 Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
 My dance is finished"?
 No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
 Make for the city!)
 He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity;
 Left play for work, and grappled with the world
 Bent on escaping:
 "What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled
 Show me their shaping,
 Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,--
 Give!"--So, he gowned him,
 Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
 Learned, we found him.
 Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
 Accents uncertain:
 "Time to taste life," another would have said,
 "Up with the curtain!"
 This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
 Patience a moment!
 Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
 Still there's the comment.
 Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
 Painful or easy!
 Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
 Ay, nor feel queasy."
 Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
 When he had learned it,
 When he had gathered all books had to give!
 Sooner, he spurned it.
 Image the whole, then execute the parts--
 Fancy the fabric
 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
 Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
 Gaping before us.)
 Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
 (Hearten our chorus!)
 That before living he'd learn how to live--

No end to learning:
Earn the means first--God surely will contrive
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes:
Live now or never!"
He said, "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever."
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
Calculus racked him:
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
Tussis attacked him.
"Now, master, take a little rest!"--not he!
(Caution redoubled
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
Not a whit troubled,
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon
He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain!
Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen)--
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.
He ventured neck or nothing--heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure:
"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes:
Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,

Misses an unit.
That, has the world here--should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled Hoti's business--let it be!--
Properly based Oun--
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic De,
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:
This man decided not to Live but Know--
Bury this man there?
Here--here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him--still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

Robert Browning

A Light Woman

I.

So far as our story approaches the end,
Which do you pity the most of us three?---
My friend, or the mistress of my friend
With her wanton eyes, or me?

II.

My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet,
When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose
And over him drew her net.

III.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth for a whim!

IV.

And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at a wren instead!

V.

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
The wren is he, with his maiden face.

---You look away and your lip is curled?
Patience, a moment's space!

VII.

For see, my friend goes shaling and white;
He eyes me as the basilisk:
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
`` Though I love her---that, he comprehends---
`` One should master one's passions, (love, in chief)
`` And be loyal to one's friends!"

IX.

And she,---she lies in my hand as tame
As a pear late basking over a wall;
Just a touch to try and off it came;
'Tis mine,---can I let it fall?

X

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst!
Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?
'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
When I gave its stalk a twist.

XI.

And I,---what I seem to my friend, you see:
What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess:
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?
No hero, I confess.

XII.

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own:

Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone!

XIII.

One likes to show the truth for the truth;
That the woman was light is very true:
But suppose she says,---Never mind that youth!
What wrong have I done to you?

XIV.

Well, any how, here the story stays,
So far at least as I understand;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here's a subject made to your hand!

Robert Browning

A Lovers' Quarrel

I.

Oh, what a dawn of day!
How the March sun feels like May!
 All is blue again
 After last night's rain,
And the South dries the hawthorn-spray.
 Only, my Love's away!
I'd as lief that the blue were grey,

II.

Runnels, which rillets swell,
Must be dancing down the dell,
 With a foaming head
 On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit's cell;
 Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.

III.

Dearest, three months ago!
When we lived blocked-up with snow,---
 When the wind would edge
 In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go---
 Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so!

IV.

Laughs with so little cause!
We devised games out of straws.
 We would try and trace
 One another's face
In the ash, as an artist draws;
 Free on each other's flaws,
How we chattered like two church daws!

V.

What's in the `Times'?---a scold
At the Emperor deep and cold;
 He has taken a bride
 To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself is bold:
 There they sit ermine-stoled,
And she powders her hair with gold.

VI.

Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
Miles and miles of gold and green
 Where the sunflowers blow
 In a solid glow,
And---to break now and then the screen---
 Black neck and eyeballs keen,
Up a wild horse leaps between!

VII.

Try, will our table turn?
Lay your hands there light, and yearn
 Till the yearning slips
 Thro' the finger-tips
In a fire which a few discern,
 And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn!

VIII.

Then we would up and pace,
For a change, about the place,
 Each with arm o'er neck:
 'Tis our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
 Help in the ocean-space!
Or, if no help, we'll embrace.

IX.

See, how she looks now, dressed
In a sledging-cap and vest!
 'Tis a huge fur cloak---
 Like a reindeer's yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast:
 Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.

XI

Teach me to flirt a fan
As the Spanish ladies can,
 Or I tint your lip
 With a burnt stick's tip
And you turn into such a man!
 Just the two spots that span
Half the bill of the young male swan.

XI.

Dearest, three months ago
When the mesmerizer Snow
 With his hand's first sweep
 Put the earth to sleep:
'Twas a time when the heart could show
All---how was earth to know,
 'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro?

XII.

Dearest, three months ago
When we loved each other so,
 Lived and loved the same
 Till an evening came
When a shaft from the devil's bow
 Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe!

XIII.

Not from the heart beneath---

'Twas a bubble born of breath,
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth!
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

XIV.

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last
Me, your own, your You,---
Since, as truth is true,
I was You all the happy past---
Me do you leave aghast
With the memories We amassed?

XV.

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
How I look to you
For the pure and true
And the beauteous and the right,---
Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threatens the white!

XVI.

What of a hasty word?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick?
See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred---
Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

XVII.

Foul be the world or fair
More or less, how can I care?
'Tis the world the same

For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare---
Oh, it is hard to bear!

XVIII.

Here's the spring back or close,
When the almond-blossom blows:
We shall have the word
In a minor third
There is none but the cuckoo knows:
Heaps of the guelder-rose!
I must bear with it, I suppose.

XIX.

Could but November come,
Were the noisy birds struck dumb
At the warning slash
Of his driver's-lash---
I would laugh like the valiant Thumb
Facing the castle glum
And the giant's fee-faw-fum!

XX.

Then, were the world well stripped
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,---
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,
We were both in a bare-walled crypt!

XXI.

Each in the crypt would cry
` ` But one freezes here! and why?
` ` When a heart, as chill,
` ` At my own would thrill
` ` Back to life, and its fires out-fly?

`` Heart, shall we live or die?
`` The rest. . . . settle by-and-by!"

XXII.

So, she'd efface the score,
And forgive me as before.

It is twelve o'clock:

I shall hear her knock

In the worst of a storm's uproar,

I shall pull her through the door,
I shall have her for evermore!

Robert Browning

A Pretty Woman

I.

That fawn-skin-dappled hair of hers,
And the blue eye
Dear and dewy,
And that infantine fresh air of hers!

II.

To think men cannot take you, Sweet,
And enfold you,
Ay, and hold you,
And so keep you what they make you, Sweet!

III

You like us for a glance, you know- -
For a word's sake
Or a sword's sake,
All's the same, whate'er the chance, you know.

IV.

And in turn we make you ours, we say- -
You and youth too,
Eyes and mouth too,
All the face composed of flowers, we say.

V

All's our own, to make the most of, Sweet- -
Sing and say for,
Watch and pray for,
Keep a secret or go boast of, Sweet!

VI.

But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,
Though we prayed you,

Paid you, brayed you
in a mortar- -for you could not, Sweet!

VII.

So, we leave the sweet face fondly there:
Be its beauty
Its sole duty!
Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there!

VIII.

And while the face lies quiet there,
Who shall wonder
That I ponder
A conclusion? I will try it there.

IX.

As,- -why must one, for the love foregone,
Scout mere liking?
Thunder-striking
Earth,- -the heaven, we looked above for, gone!

X

Why, with beauty, needs there money be,
Love with liking?
Crush the fly-king
In his gauze, because no honey-bee?

XI.

May not liking be so simple-sweet,
If love grew there
'Twould undo there
All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet?

XII.

Is the creature too imperfect,
Would you mend it

And so end it?
Since not all addition perfects aye!

XIII.

Or is it of its kind, perhaps,
Just perfection- -
Whence, rejection
Of a grace not to its mind, perhaps?

XIV.

Shall we burn up, tread that face at once
Into tinder,
And so hinder
Sparks from kindling all the place at once?

XV.

Or else kiss away one's soul on her?
Your love-fancies!
- -A sick man sees
Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her!

XVI.

Thus the craftsman thinks to grace the rose,- -
Plucks a mould-flower
For his gold flower,
Uses fine things that efface the rose:

XVII.

Rosy rubies make its cup more rose,
Precious metals
Ape the petals,- -
Last, some old king locks it up, morose!

XVIII.

Then how grace a rose? I know a way!
Leave it, rather.

Must you gather?
Smell, kiss, wear it- -at last, throw away!

Robert Browning

A Serenade At The Villa

I.

That was I, you heard last night,
When there rose no moon at all,
Nor, to pierce the strained and tight
Tent of heaven, a planet small:
Life was dead and so was light.

II.

Not a twinkle from the fly,
Not a glimmer from the worm;
When the crickets stopped their cry,
When the owls forbore a term,
You heard music; that was I.

III.

Earth turned in her sleep with pain,
Sultrily suspired for proof:
In at heaven and out again,
Lightning!---where it broke the roof,
Bloodlike, some few drops of rain.

IV.

What they could my words expressed,
O my love, my all, my one!
Singing helped the verses best,
And when singing's best was done,
To my lute I left the rest.

V.

So wore night; the East was gray,
White the broad-faced hemlock-flowers:
There would be another day;
Ere its first of heavy hours
Found me, I had passed away.

VI.

What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well?
Say, this struck you---` ` When life gropes
` ` Feebly for the path where fell
` ` Light last on the evening slopes,

VII.

` ` One friend in that path shall be,
` ` To secure my step from wrong;
` ` One to count night day for me,
` ` Patient through the watches long,
` ` Serving most with none to see."

VIII.

Never say---as something bodes---
` ` So, the worst has yet a worse!
` ` When life halts 'neath double loads,
` ` Better the taskmaster's curse
` ` Than such music on the roads!

IX.

` ` When no moon succeeds the sun,
` ` Nor can pierce the midnight's tent
` ` Any star, the smallest one,
` ` While some drops, where lightning rent,
` ` Show the final storm begun---

X

` ` When the fire-fly hides its spot,
` ` When the garden-voices fail
` ` In the darkness thick and hot,---
` ` Shall another voice avail,
` ` That shape be where these are not?

XI.

` ` Has some plague a longer lease,
` ` Proffering its help uncouth?
` ` Can't one even die in peace?
` ` As one shuts one's eyes on youth,
` ` Is that face the last one sees?"

XII.

Oh how dark your villa was,
Windows fast and obdurate!
How the garden grudged me grass
Where I stood---the iron gate
Ground its teeth to let me pass!

Robert Browning

A Tale

(_Epilogue to 'The Two Poets of Croisic.'_)

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
--Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

Anyhow there's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting!)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing: I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that's behind.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
--Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss: such ears
Had old judges, it appears!

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile 'In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!'

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?

Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,--who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?--it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What 'cicada'? Pooh!)
--Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music--flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

So that when (Ah joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,--indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
'Take the prize--a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!'

Did the conqueror spurn the creature
Once its service done?
That's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul development.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,

Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
--Said 'Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!'

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you,
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

That's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Thro' his poetry that's--Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

If he gains one, will some ticket
When his statue's built,
Tell the gazer 'Twas a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose lilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

'For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,--
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,--one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain
Never to be heard again,--

'Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone.'

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls

To a--poet? All I care for
Is--to tell him that a girl's
'Love' comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing, (There, enough!)

Robert Browning

A Toccata Of Galuppi's

I.

Oh Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

II.

Here you come with all your music, and here's all the good it brings.
What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings,
Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

III.

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched by ... what you call
... Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival:
I was never out of England---it's as if I saw it all.

IV.

Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?
Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

V.

Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,---
On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?

VI.

Well, and it was graceful of them---they'd break talk off and afford
---She, to bite her mask's black velvet---he, to finger on his sword,
While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

VII.

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions--- ``Must we die?"
Those commiserating sevenths--- ``Life might last! we can but try!"

VIII.

``Were you happy?"--- ``Yes."--- ``And are you still as happy?"--- ``Yes. And
you?"
--- ``Then, more kisses!"--- ``Did I stop them, when a million seemed so
few?"
Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

IX.

So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say!
``Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!
``I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

XI.

Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun.

XI.

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor swerve,
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every nerve.

XII.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:
``Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.
``The soul, doubtless, is immortal---where a soul can be discerned.

XIII.

``Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
``Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
``Butterflies may dread extinction,---you'll not die, it cannot be!

XIV.

` ` As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop,
` ` Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
` ` What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

XV.

` ` Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
Dear dead women, with such hair, too---what's become of all the gold
Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

* 1. An overture---a touch piece.

Robert Browning

A Wall

O the old wall here! How I could pass
Life in a long midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
My eyes from a wall not once away!

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loath,
In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body,--the house no eye can probe,--
Divined, as beneath a robe, the limbs?

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang, perhaps:
So the old wall throbbled, and its life's excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart!
I--prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start--

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That's spirit: tho' cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and--forth to thee!

Robert Browning

A Woman's Last Word

I.

Let's contend no more, Love,
Strive nor weep:
All be as before, Love,
---Only sleep!

II.

What so wild as words are?
I and thou
In debate, as birds are,
Hawk on bough!

III.

See the creature stalking
While we speak!
Hush and hide the talking,
Cheek on cheek!

IV.

What so false as truth is,
False to thee?
Where the serpent's tooth is
Shun the tree---

V.

Where the apple reddens
Never pry---
Lest we lose our Edens,
Eve and I.

VI.

Be a god and hold me
With a charm!

Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!

VII.

Teach me, only teach, Love
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought---

VIII.

Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands.

IX.

That shall be to-morrow
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight:

X

---Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee.

Robert Browning

Abt Volger

<i>(after he has been extemporizing upon the musical instrument of his invention)</i>

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,
Man, brute, reptile, fly,---alien of end and of aim,
Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed,---
Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name
And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved!

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a wild plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowded but with many a crest,
Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest:
For higher still and higher (as a runner tips with fire,
When a great illumination surprises a festal night ---
Outlined round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.

In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:
Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
Not a point but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.

Nay more; for there wanted not who walked in the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow,
Lured now to begin and live, in a house to their liking at last;
Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new:
What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon;
And what is,--- shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too.

All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,
All through music and me! For think, had I painted the whole,
Why, there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth:
Had I written the same, made verse---still, effect proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told;
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,
Painter and poet are proud in the artist-list enrolled:---

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
It is everywhere in the world---loud, soft, and all is said:
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

Well, it is gone at last, the palace of music I reared;
Gone! and the good tears start, the praises that come too slow;
For one is assured at first, one scarce can say that he feared,
That he even gave it a thought, the gone thing was to go.
Never to be again! But many more of the kind
As good, nay, better perchance: is this your comfort to me?
To me, who must be saved because I cling with my mind
To the same, same self, same God; ay, what was, shall be.

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that He heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should be prized?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom He whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome, 'tis we musicians know.

Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,---yes,
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
Surveying a while the heights I rolled from into the deep;
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
The C major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.

Robert Browning

After

Take the cloak from his face, and at first
Let the corpse do its worst!

How he lies in his rights of a man!
Death has done all death can.
And, absorbed in the new life he leads,
He recks not, he heeds
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance; both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.
Ha, what avails death to erase
His offence, my disgrace?
I would we were boys as of old
In the field, by the fold:
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn
Were so easily borne!

I stand here now, he lies in his place:
Cover the face!

Robert Browning

Aix In Provence

Christ God who savest man, save most
Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honour, 'twas with all his strength.

II.

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

III.

I thought they loved me, did me grace
To please themselves; 'twas all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV.

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

V.

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling

A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs---

VI.

And come out on the morning-troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy---(a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,
Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun)---

VII.

And they could let me take my state
And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
My queen's-day---Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII.

However that be, all eyes were bent
Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 'twas time I should present
The victor's crown, but ... there, 'twill last
No long time ... the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

IX,

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
With his two boys: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
Forth boldly---to my face, indeed---
But Gauthier, and he thundered ``Stay!"
And all stayed. ``Bring no crowns, I say!

X

`` Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
`` About her! Let her shun the chaste,
`` Or lay herself before their feet!
`` Shall she whose body I embraced
`` A night long, queen it in the day?
`` For honour's sake no crowns, I say!"

XI.

I? What I answered? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
As answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

XII.

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan; who would spend
A minute's mistrust on the end?

XIII.

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

XIV.

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart of the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him---I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV.

Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot ... my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

XVI.

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
O' the sword, but open-breasted drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

XVII.

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said `` Here die, but end thy breath
`` In full confession, lest thou fleet
`` From my first, to God's second death!
`` Say, hast thou lied?" And, `` I have lied
`` To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII.

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
---What safe my heart holds, though no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers forever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX.

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world; and scarce I felt
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)

A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX.

So 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace!

XXI.

Our elder boy has got the clear
Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
Full eye slows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
And have you brought my tercel*1 back?
I just was telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

*1 A male of the peregrine falcon.

Robert Browning

Among The Rocks

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.
That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

Robert Browning

An Epistle Containing The Strange Medical Experience Of Karshish, The Arab Physician

Karshish, the picker-up of learning's crumbs,
The not-incurious in God's handiwork
(This man's-flesh he hath admirably made,
Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,
To coop up and keep down on earth a space
That puff of vapour from his mouth, man's soul)
- To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the term,-
And aptest in contrivance (under God)
To baffle it by deftly stopping such:-
The vagrant Scholar to his Sage at home
Sends greeting (health and knowledge, fame with peace)
Three samples of true snakestone- rarer still,
One of the other sort, the melon-shaped,
(But fitter, pounded fine, for charms than drugs)
And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho;
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward:
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
Lust of my blood inflamed his yellow balls:
I cried and threw my staff and he was gone.
Twice have the robbers stripped and beaten me,
And once a town declared me for a spy;
But at the end, I reach Jerusalem,
Since this poor covert where I pass the night,
This Bethany, lies scarce the distance thence

A man with plague-sores at the third degree
Runs till he drops down dead. Thou laughest here!
'Sooth, it elates me, thus reposed and safe,
To void the stuffing of my travel-scrip
And share with thee whatever Jewry yields
A viscid choler is observable
In tertians, I was nearly bold to say;
And falling-sickness hath a happier cure
Than our school wots of: there's a spider here
Weaves no web, watches on the ledge of tombs,
Sprinkled with mottles on an ash-grey back;
Take five and drop them... but who knows his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to?
His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves, and give thee all-
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Cracks 'twixt the pestle and the porphyry,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy-
Thou hadst admired one sort I gained at Zoar-
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefully,
Protesteth his devotion is my price-
Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all.
An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
For, be it this town's barrenness- or else
The Man had something in the look of him-
His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.
So, pardon if- (lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight- for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.

Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'Tis but a case of mania- subinduced
By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:
When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking all at once
Left the man whole and sound of body indeed,-
But, flinging (so to speak) life's gates too wide,
Making a clear house of it too suddenly,
The first conceit that entered might inscribe
Whatever it was minded on the wall
So plainly at that vantage, as it were,
(First come, first served) that nothing subsequent
Attaineth to erase those fancy-scrawls
The just-returned and new-established soul
Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart
That henceforth she will read or these or none.
And first- the man's own firm conviction rests
That he was dead (in fact they buried him)
- That he was dead and then restored to life
By a Nazarene physician of his tribe:
- 'Sayeth, the same bade 'Rise,' and he did rise.
'Such cases are diurnal,' thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment! - not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man- it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,
The body's habit wholly laudable,
As much, indeed, beyond the common health
As he were made and put aside to show.
Think, could we penetrate by any drug
And bathe the wearied soul and worried flesh,
And bring it clear and fair, by three days' sleep!
Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?
This grown man eyes the world now like a child.
Some elders of his tribe, I should premise,

Led in their friend, obedient as a sheep,
To bear my inquisition. While they spoke,
Now sharply, now with sorrow,- told the case,-
He listened not except I spoke to him,
But folded his two hands and let them talk,
Watching the flies that buzzed: and yet no fool.
And that's a sample how his years must go.
Look, if a beggar, in fixed middle-life,
Should find a treasure,- can he use the same
With straitened habits and with tastes starved small,
And take at once to his impoverished brain
The sudden element that changes things,
That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand
And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust?
Is he not such an one as moves to mirth-
Warily parsimonious, when no need,
Wasteful as drunkenness at undue times?
All prudent counsel as to what befits
The golden mean, is lost on such an one
The man's fantastic will is the man's law.
So here- we call the treasure knowledge, say,
Increased beyond the fleshly faculty-
Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven:
The man is witless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds-
'Tis one! Then take it on the other side,
Speak of some trifling fact- he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness,
(Far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the bystanders
In ever the same stupor (note this point)
That we too see not with his opened eyes.
Wonder and doubt come wrongly into play,
Preposterously, at cross purposes.
Should his child sicken unto death,- why, look
For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,

Or pretermission of the daily craft!
While a word, gesture, glance, from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand
The reason why- ' `tis but a word,' object-
'A gesture'- he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,
We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm's beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life-
(It is the life to lead perforce)
Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet-
The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not along, this black thread through the blaze-
'It should be' balked by 'here it cannot be.'
And oft the man's soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him 'Rise' and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick of the blood within
Admonishes: then back he sinks at once
To ashes, who was very fire before,
In sedulous recurrence to his trade
Whereby he earneth him the daily bread;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,
Professedly the faultier that he knows
God's secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man

Is prone submission to the heavenly will-
 Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
 'Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
 For that same death which must restore his being
 To equilibrium, body loosening soul
 Divorced even now by premature full growth:
 He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live
 So long as God please, and just how God please.
 He even seeketh not to please God more
 (Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
 Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach
 The doctrine of his sect whate'er it be,
 Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:
 How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
 His own conviction? Ardent as he is-
 Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
 'Be it as God please' reassureth him.
 I probed the sore as thy disciple should:
 'How, beast,' said I, 'this stolid carelessness
 Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
 To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
 Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once? '
 He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
 The man is apathetic, you deduce?
 Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
 Able and weak, affects the very brutes
 And birds- how say I? flowers of the field-
 As a wise workman recognizes tools
 In a master's workshop, loving what they make.
 Thus is the man as harmless as a lamb:
 Only impatient, let him do his best,
 At ignorance and carelessness and sin-
 An indignation which is promptly curbed:
 As when in certain travels I have feigned
 To be an ignoramus in our art
 According to some preconceived design,
 And happed to hear the land's practitioners,
 Steeped in conceit sublimed by ignorance,
 Prattle fantastically on disease,
 Its cause and cure- and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object- why have I not ere this

Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused,- our learning's fate,- of wizardry,
Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone)
Was wrought by the mad people- that's their wont!
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help-
How could he stop the earthquake? That's their way!
The other imputations must be lies:
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect for any good man's fame.
(And after all, our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?
Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech
'Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer, then
As- God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on 't awhile!
- 'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own house,
Then died, with Lazarus by, for aught I know,
And yet was... what I said nor choose repeat,
And must have so avouched himself, in fact,
In hearing of this very Lazarus
Who saith- but why all this of what he saith?
Why write of trivial matters, things of price
Calling at every moment for remark?
I noticed on the margin of a pool
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem

Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth!
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey's end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus:
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion's cheek teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing:
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian- he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem's repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too-
So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee! '
The madman saith He said so: it is strange.

Robert Browning

Andrea Del Sarto

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
Oh, I'll content him,--but to-morrow, Love!
I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if--forgive now--should you let me sit
Here by the window with your hand in mine
And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
Both of one mind, as married people use,
Quietly, quietly the evening through,
I might get up to-morrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so--
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!
--How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet--
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks--no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common greyness silvers everything,--
All in a twilight, you and I alike
--You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know),--but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down

To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example--turn your head--
All that's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
--It is the thing, Love! so such things should be--
Behold Madonna!--I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep--
Do easily, too--when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
--Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive--you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,--
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter)--so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt

This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word--
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
"Had I been two, another and myself,
"Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art--for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put--and there again--
A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right--that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch--
(Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think--
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you--oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,

And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare --
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
"God and the glory! never care for gain.
"The present by the future, what is that?
"Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
"Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
I might have done it for you. So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will's somewhat--somewhat, too, the power--
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
In that humane great monarch's golden look,--
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,--
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?

And had you not grown restless... but I know--
 'Tis done and past: 'twas right, my instinct said:
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end in any other way?
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.
 The triumph was--to reach and stay there; since
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
 "Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
 "The Roman's is the better when you pray,
 "But still the other's Virgin was his wife--"
 Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
 Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)
 "Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
 "Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
 "Who, were he set to plan and execute
 "As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 "Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
 To Rafael's!--And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
 Give the chalk here--quick, thus, the line should go!
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 (What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
 Do you forget already words like those?)
 If really there was such a chance, so lost,--
 Is, whether you're--not grateful--but more pleased.
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
 If you would sit thus by me every night
 I should work better, do you comprehend?
 I mean that I should earn more, give you more.

See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.
Come from the window, love,--come in, at last,
Inside the melancholy little house
We built to be so gay with. God is just.
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with!
Let us but love each other. Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you--you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more--the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them--that is, Michel Agnolo--
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
I take the subjects for his corridor,
Finish the portrait out of hand--there, there,
And throw him in another thing or two
If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
What's better and what's all I care about,
Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
I regret little, I would change still less.
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
The very wrong to Francis!--it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,

And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and my mother died of want.
Well, had I riches of my own? you see
How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
And I have laboured somewhat in my time
And not been paid profusely. Some good son
Paint my two hundred pictures--let him try!
No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
You loved me quite enough. it seems to-night.
This must suffice me here. What would one have?
In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance--
Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
To cover--the three first without a wife,
While I have mine! So--still they overcome
Because there's still Lucrezia,--as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

Robert Browning

Another Way Of Love

I.

June was not over
Though past the fall,
And the best of her roses
Had yet to blow,
When a man I know
(But shall not discover,
Since ears are dull,
And time discloses)

Turned him and said with a man's true air,
Half sighing a smile in a yawn, as 'twere,---
` ` If I tire of your June, will she greatly care?"

II.

Well, dear, in-doors with you!
True! serene deadness
Tries a man's temper.
What's in the blossom
June wears on her bosom?
Can it clear scores with you?
Sweetness and redness.
Eadem semper!

Go, let me care for it greatly or slightly!
If June mend her bower now, your hand left unsightly
By plucking the roses,---my June will do rightly.

III.

And after, for pastime,
If June be refulgent
With flowers in completeness,
All petals, no prickles,
Delicious as trickles
Of wine poured at mass-time,---
And choose One indulgent
To redness and sweetness:
Or if, with experience of man and of spider,

June use my June-lightning, the strong insect-ridder,
And stop the fresh film-work,---why, June will consider.

Robert Browning

Any Wife To Any Husband

My love, this is the bitterest, that thou---
Who art all truth, and who dost love me now
As thine eyes say, as thy voice breaks to say---
Shouldst love so truly, and couldst love me still
A whole long life through, had but love its will,
Would death that leads me from thee brook delay.

II.

I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
Will never let mine go, nor heart withstand
The beating of my heart to reach its place.
When shall I look for thee and feel thee gone?
When cry for the old comfort and find none?
Never, I know! Thy soul is in thy face.

III.

Oh, I should fade---'tis willed so! Might I save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul
Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole;
Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new.

IV.

It would not be because my eye grew dim
Thou couldst not find the love there, thanks to Him
Who never is dishonoured in the spark
He gave us from his fire of fires, and bade
Remember whence it sprang, nor be afraid
While that burns on, though all the rest grow dark.

V.

So, how thou wouldst be perfect, white and clean
Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
Alike, this body given to show it by!

Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,
What plaudits from the next world after this,
Couldst thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky!

VI.

And is it not the bitterer to think
That, disengage our hands and thou wilt sink
Although thy love was love in very deed?
I know that nature! Pass a festive day,
Thou dost not throw its relic-flower away
Nor bid its music's loitering echo speed.

VII.

Thou let'st the stranger's glove lie where it fell;
If old things remain old things all is well,
For thou art grateful as becomes man best
And hadst thou only heard me play one tune,
Or viewed me from a window, not so soon
With thee would such things fade as with the rest.

VIII.

I seem to see! We meet and part; 'tis brief;
The book I opened keeps a folded leaf,
The very chair I sat on, breaks the rank
That is a portrait of me on the wall---
Three lines, my face comes at so slight a call:
And for all this, one little hour to thank!

IX.

But now, because the hour through years was fixed,
Because our inmost beings met and mixed,
Because thou once hast loved me---wilt thou dare
Say to thy soul and Who may list beside,
`` Therefore she is immortally my bride;
`` Chance cannot change my love, nor time impair.

X

` ` So, what if in the dusk of life that's left,
` ` I, a tired traveller of my sun bereft,
Look from my path when, mimicking the same,
` ` The fire-fly glimpses past me, come and gone?
` ` ---Where was it till the sunset? where anon
` ` It will be at the sunrise! What's to blame?"

XI.

Is it so helpful to thee? Canst thou take
The mimic up, nor, for the true thing's sake,
Put gently by such efforts at a beam?
Is the remainder of the way so long,
Thou need'st the little solace, thou the strong
Watch out thy watch, let weak ones doze and dream!

XII.

---Ah, but the fresher faces! ` ` Is it true,"
Thou'lt ask, ` ` some eyes are beautiful and new?
` ` Some hair,---how can one choose but grasp such wealth?
` ` And if a man would press his lips to lips
` ` Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
` ` The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?

XIII.

` ` It cannot change the love still kept for Her,
` ` More than if such a picture I prefer
` ` Passing a day with, to a room's bare side:
The painted form takes nothing she possessed,
Yet, while the Titian's Venus lies at rest,
A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?"

XIV.

So must I see, from where I sit and watch,
My own self sell myself, my hand attach
Its warrant to the very thefts from me---
Thy singleness of soul that made me proud,
Thy purity of heart I loved aloud,
Thy man's-truth I was bold to bid God see!

XV.

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
Away to the new faces---disentranced,
(Say it and think it) obdurate no more:
Re-issue looks and words from the old mint,
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print
Image and superscription once they bore

XVI.

Re-coin thyself and give it them to spend,---
It all comes to the same thing at the end,
Since mine thou wast, mine art and mine shalt be,
Faithful or faithless, scaling up the sum
Or lavish of my treasure, thou must come
Back to the heart's place here I keep for thee!

XVII.

Only, why should it be with stain at all?
Why must I, 'twixt the leaves of coronal,
Put any kiss of pardon on thy brow?
Why need the other women know so much,
And talk together, ``Such the look and such
``The smile he used to love with, then as now!"

XVIII.

Might I die last and show thee! Should I find
Such hardship in the few years left behind,
If free to take and light my lamp, and go
Into thy tomb, and shut the door and sit,
Seeing thy face on those four sides of it
The better that they are so blank, I know!

XIX.

Why, time was what I wanted, to turn o'er
Within my mind each look, get more and more
By heart each word, too much to learn at first;

And join thee all the fitter for the pause
'Neath the low doorway's lintel. That were cause
For lingering, though thou calledst, if I durst!

XX.

And yet thou art the nobler of us two
What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,
Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride?
I'll say then, here's a trial and a task---
Is it to bear?---if easy, I'll not ask:
Though love fail, I can trust on in thy pride.

XXI.

Pride?---when those eyes forestall the life behind
The death I have to go through!---when I find,
Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!
What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
Until the little minute's sleep is past
And I wake saved.---And yet it will not be!

Robert Browning

Apparent Failure

'We shall soon lose a celebrated building.'
--_Paris Newspaper_.

No, for I'll save it! Seven years since
I passed through Paris, stopped a day
To see the baptism of your Prince,
Saw, made my bow, and went my way:
Walking the heat and headache off,
I took the Seine-side, you surmise,
Thought of the Congress, Gortschakoff,
Cavour's appeal and Buol's replies,
So sauntered till--what met my eyes?

Only the Doric little Morgue!
The dead-house where you show your drowned:
Petrarch's Vaucluse makes proud the Sorgue,
Your Morgue has made the Seine renowned.
One pays one's debt in such a case;
I plucked up heart and entered,--stalked,
Keeping a tolerable face
Compared with some whose cheeks were chalked:
Let them! No Briton's to be balked!

First came the silent gazers; next,
A screen of glass, we're thankful for;
Last, the sight's self, the sermon's text,
The three men who did most abhor
Their life in Paris yesterday,
So killed themselves: and now, enthroned
Each on his copper couch, they lay
Fronting me, waiting to be owned.
I thought, and think, their sin's atoned.

Poor men, God made, and all for that!
The reverence struck me; o'er each head
Religiously was hung its hat,
Each coat dripped by the owner's bed,
Sacred from touch: each had his berth,

His bounds, his proper place of rest,
Who last night tenanted on earth
Some arch, where twelve such slept abreast,--
Unless the plain asphalt seemed best.

How did it happen, my poor boy?
You wanted to be Buonaparte
And have the Tuileries for toy,
And could not, so it broke your heart?
You, old one by his side, I judge,
Were, red as blood, a socialist,
A leveller! Does the Empire grudge
You've gained what no Republic missed?
Be quiet, and unclench your fist!

And this--why, he was red in vain,
Or black,--poor fellow that is blue !
What fancy was it, turned your brain?
Oh, women were the prize for you!
Money gets women, cards and dice
Get money, and ill-luck gets just
The copper couch and one clear nice
Cool squirt of water o'er your bust,
The right thing to extinguish lust!

It's wiser being good than bad;
It's safer being meek than fierce:
It's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
That, after Last, returns the First,
Tho' a wide compass round be fetched;
That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.

Robert Browning

Apparitions

(_Prologue to 'The Two Poets of Croisic.'_)

Such a starved bank of moss
Till, that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

Sky--what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud:
Splendid, a star!

World--how it walled about
Life with disgrace,
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

Robert Browning

Bad Dreams: I

LAST night I saw you in my sleep:
And how your charm of face was changed!
I asked 'Some love, some faith you keep?'
You answered 'Faith gone, love estranged.'

Whereat I woke- a twofold bliss:
Waking was one, but next there came
This other: 'Though I felt, for this,
My heart break, I loved on the same.'

Robert Browning

Bad Dreams: III

THIS was my dream: I saw a Forest
Old as the earth, no track nor trace
Of unmade man. Thou, Soul, explorest-
Though in a trembling rapture- space
Immeasurable! Shrubs, turned trees,
Trees that touch heaven, support its frieze
Studded with sun and moon and star:
While- oh, the enormous growths that bar
Mine eye from penetrating past
Their tangled twine where lurks- nay, lives
Royally lone, some brute-type cast
I' the rough, time cancels, man forgives.

On, Soul! I saw a lucid City
Of architectural device
Every way perfect. Pause for pity,
Lightning! nor leave a cicatrice
On those bright marbles, dome and spire,
Structures palatial,- streets which mire
Dares not defile, paved all too fine
For human footstep's smirch, not thine-
Proud solitary traverser,
My Soul, of silent lengths of way-
With what ecstatic dread, aver,
Lest life start sanctioned by the stay!

Ah, but the last sight was the hideous!
A City, yes,- a Forest, true,-
But each devouring each. Perfidious
Snake-plants had strangled what I knew
Was a pavilion once: each oak
Held on his horns some spoil he broke
By surreptitiously beneath
Upthrusting: pavements, as with teeth,
Griped huge weed widening crack and split
In squares and circles stone-work erst.
Oh, Nature- good! Oh, Art- no whit
Less worthy! Both in one- accurst!

Before

I.

Let them fight it out, friend! things have gone too far.
God must judge the couple: leave them as they are
---Whichever one's the guiltless, to his glory,
And whichever one the guilt's with, to my story!

II.

Why, you would not bid men, sunk in such a slough,
Strike no arm out further, stick and stink as now,
Leaving right and wrong to settle the embroilment,
Heaven with snaky hell, in torture and entoilment?

III.

Who's the culprit of them? How must he conceive
God---the queen he caps to, laughing in his sleeve,
'Tis but decent to profess oneself beneath her:
Still, one must not be too much in earnest, either!"

IV.

Better sin the whole sin, sure that God observes;
Then go live his life out! Life will try his nerves,
When the sky, which noticed all, makes no disclosure,
And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.

V.

Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls of rose,
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze him as he goes!
For he 'gins to guess the purpose of the garden,
With the sly mute thing, beside there, for a warden.

VI.

What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant at his side,
A leer and lie in every eye of its obsequious hide?

When will come an end to all the mock obeisance,
And the price appear that pays for the misfeasance?

VII.

So much for the culprit. Who's the martyred man?
Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure he can!
He that strove thus evil's lump with good to leaven,
Let him give his blood at last and get his heaven!

VIII.

All or nothing, stake it! Trust she God or no?
Thus far and no farther? farther? be it so!
Now, enough of your chicane of prudent pauses,
Sage provisos, sub-intents and saving-clauses!

IX.

Ah, ``forgive" you bid him? While God's champion lives,
Wrong shall be resisted: dead, why, he forgives.
But you must not end my friend ere you begin him;
Evil stands not crowned on earth, while breath is in him.

X

Once more---Will the wronger, at this last of all,
Dare to say, ``I did wrong," rising in his fall?
No?---Let go then! Both the fighters to their places!
While I count three, step you back as many paces!

Robert Browning

Bishop Blougram's Apology

NO more wine? then we'll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, though: cool, i' faith!
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.
It's different, preaching in basilicas,
And doing duty in some masterpiece
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!
I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;
It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little--oh, they pay the price,
You take me--amply pay it! Now, we'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,--nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 't is our engagement: don't you know,
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
We'd see truth dawn together?--truth that peeps
Over the glasses' edge when dinner's done,

And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time:
'T is break of day! You do despise me then.
And if I say, "despise me,"--never fear!
I know you do not in a certain sense--
Not in my arm-chair, for example: here,
I well imagine you respect my place
(Status, entourage , worldly circumstance)
Quite to its value--very much indeed:
--Are up to the protesting eyes of you
In pride at being seated here for once--
You'll turn it to such capital account!
When somebody, through years and years to come,
Hints of the bishop,--names me--that's enough:
"Blougram? I knew him"--(into it you slide)
"Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,
"All alone, we two; he's a clever man:
"And after dinner,--why, the wine you know,--

"Oh, there was wine, and good!--what with the wine . .
"Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!
"He's no bad fellow, Blougram; he had seen
"Something of mine he relished, some review:
"He's quite above their humbug in his heart,
"Half-said as much, indeed--the thing's his trade.
"I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times:
"How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"

Che che , my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays--
You do despise me; your ideal of life
Is not the bishop's: you would not be I.
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,
Count D'Orsay,--so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.
--That, my ideal never can include,
Upon that element of truth and worth
Never be based! for say they make me Pope--
(They can't--suppose it for our argument!)
Why, there I'm at my tether's end, I've reached
My height, and not a height which pleases you:
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.
It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,
Of how some actor on a stage played Death,
With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinsel'd dart,
And called himself the monarch of the world;

Then, going in the tire-room afterward,
Because the play was done, to shift himself,
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,

The moment he had shut the closet door,
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,
And whose part he presumed to play just now?
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,
You weigh and find, whatever more or less
I boast of my ideal realized,
Is nothing in the balance when opposed
To your ideal, your grand simple life,
Of which you will not realize one jot.
I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,
I would be merely much: you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me: hearken why!
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,
Is--not to fancy what were fair in life
Provided it could be,--but, finding first
What may be, then find how to make it fair
Up to our means: a very different thing!
No abstract intellectual plan of life
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,

But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,
May lead within a world which (by your leave)
Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.
Embellish Rome, idealize away,
Make paradise of London if you can,
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile!
We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life;
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage--how prepare?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient: so they are!
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,

The new edition fifty volumes long;
And little Greek books, with the funny type
They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next:
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!
'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,--the marvellous Modenese!--

Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.
--Alas, friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name?
The captain, or whoever's master here--
You see him screw his face up; what's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard? "Six feet square!"
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly--
And if, in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board
Bare--why, you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off;
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug--
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)
And mortified you mutter "Well and good;
"He sits enjoying his sea-furniture;
"'T is stout and proper, and there's store of it:
"Though I've the better notion, all agree,
"Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,
"Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances--
"I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind--
You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.
See my way: we're two college friends, suppose.

Prepare together for our voyage, then;
Each note and check the other in his work,--
Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticize!
What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
(Not statedly, that is, and fixedly
And absolutely and exclusively)
In any revelation called divine.
No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains
But say so, like the honest man you are?
First, therefore, overhaul theology!
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,
Must find believing every whit as hard:
And if I do not frankly say as much,
The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now wait, my friend: well, I do not believe--
If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.
You're wrong--I mean to prove it in due time.
Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,
So give up hope accordingly to solve--

(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then
With both of us, though in unlike degree,
Missing full credence--overboard with them!
I mean to meet you on your own premise:
Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,
Calm and complete, determinately fixed
To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?
You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!
In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,
Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's
The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,
Make it bear fruit to us?--the problem here.
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,

A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,--
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,--
The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are--
This good God,--what he could do, if he would,

Would, if he could--then must have done long since:
If so, when, where and how? some way must be,--
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

--That way
Over the mountain, which who stands upon
Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road;
While, if he views it from the waste itself,
Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,
Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two
Seen from the unbroken desert either side?
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
The most consummate of contrivances
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith?
And so we stumble at truth's very test!
All we have gained then by our unbelief
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,
For one of faith diversified by doubt:
We called the chess-board white,--we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end's no worse, at least;
"We've reason for both colours on the board:
"Why not confess then, where I drop the faith
"And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?"

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,
And both things even,--faith and unbelief
Left to a man's choice,--we'll proceed a step,
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes--but a cabin-passenger's--
The man made for the special life o' the world--
Do you forget him? I remember though!
Consult our ship's conditions and you find
One and but one choice suitable to all;
The choice, that you unluckily prefer,
Turning things topsy-turvy--they or it
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,
Begins at its beginning. See the world
Such as it is,--you made it not, nor I;
I mean to take it as it is,--and you,
Not so you'll take it,--though you get nought else.
I know the special kind of life I like,
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit
In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.
I find that positive belief does this
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.
--For you, it does, however?--that, we'll try!
'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,

Induce the world to let me peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,
"I absolutely and peremptorily
"Believe!"--I say, faith is my waking life:
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,
We know, but waking's the main point with us
And my provision's for life's waking part.
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hand
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends;
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.
What's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith?
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,

That recognize the night, give dreams their weight--
To be consistent you should keep your bed,
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!
And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream,
Live through the day and bustle as you please.
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,
To unbelieve as I to still believe?
Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you
Bed-ridden,--and its good things come to me.
Its estimation, which is half the fight,
That's the first-cabin comfort I secure:

The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!
Come, come, it's best believing, if we may;
You can't but own that!

Next, concede again,
If once we choose belief, on all accounts
We can't be too decisive in our faith,
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,
To suit the world which gives us the good things.
In every man's career are certain points
Whereon he dares not be indifferent;
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,
As baffled at the game, and losing life.
He may care little or he may care much
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,
Since various theories of life and life's
Success are extant which might easily
Comport with either estimate of these;
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool
Because his fellow would choose otherwise:
We let him choose upon his own account
So long as he's consistent with his choice.
But certain points, left wholly to himself,
When once a man has arbitrated on,
We say he must succeed there or go hang.

Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need--
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,
Whate'er the process of conviction was:
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge:
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now, there's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in--which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world--
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend!
Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself--by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, but the tact
To let external forces work for me,
--Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;

Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride;
It does so,--which for me's a great point gained,
Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that's born of fear:
While at the same time, there's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon:
I must take what men offer, with a grace

As though I would not, could I help it, take!
An uniform I wear though over-rich--
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake
And despicable therefore! now folk kneel
And kiss my hand--of course the Church's hand.
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,
And thus that it should be I have procured;
And thus it could not be another way,
I venture to imagine.

You'll reply,
So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;
But were I made of better elements,
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,
I hardly would account the thing success
Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend,
We speak of what is; not of what might be,
And how't were better if't were otherwise.
I am the man you see here plain enough:
Grant I'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives!
Suppose I own at once to tail and claws;
The tailless man exceeds me: but being tailed
I'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.
My business is not to remake myself,
But make the absolute best of what God made.
Or--our first simile--though you prove me doomed
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,
The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible;
And as this cabin gets upholstery,
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes

Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than should judge?
And that's no way of holding up the soul,
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'--
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.
I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave,--approve in neither case,
Withhold their voices though I look their way:
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence,--what's its name?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here--
That even your prime men who appraise their kind

Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch--he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books--
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line
Before your sages,--just the men to shrink

From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels broad
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave
When there's a thousand diamond weights between?
So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you'll find,
Profess themselves indignant, scandalized
At thus being held unable to explain
How a superior man who disbelieves
May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!
It's through my coming in the tail of time,
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.
Had I been born three hundred years ago

They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course believes;"
And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."
But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet
"How can he?" All eyes turn with interest.
Whereas, step off the line on either side--
You, for example, clever to a fault,
The rough and ready man who write apace,
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less--
You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?
Lord So-and-so--his coat bedropped with wax,
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom--
Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?
But I, the man of sense and learning too,
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,
I, to believe at this late time of day!
Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

--Except it's yours! Admire me as these may,
You don't. But whom at least do you admire?
Present your own perfection, your ideal,
Your pattern man for a minute--oh, make haste
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?
Concede the means; allow his head and hand,
(A large concession, clever as you are)

Good! In our common primal element

Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know--
We're still at that admission, recollect!)
Where do you find--apart from, towering o'er
The secondary temporary aims
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise--
Where do you find his star?--his crazy trust
God knows through what or in what? it's alive
And shines and leads him, and that's all we want.
Have we aught in our sober night shall point
Such ends as his were, and direct the means
Of working out our purpose straight as his,
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success
With after-care to justify the same?
--Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve--
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!
What's the vague good o' the world, for which you dare
With comfort to yourself blow millions up?
We neither of us see it! we do see
The blown-up millions--spatter of their brains
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,
In that bewildering entanglement
Of horrible eventualities
Past calculation to the end of time!
Can I mistake for some clear word of God
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)

His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk,
"The State, that's I," quack-nonsense about crowns,
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)
A vague idea of setting things to rights,
Policing people efficaciously,
More to their profit, most of all to his own;
The whole to end that dimmest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,
And resurrection of the old régime ?
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such?
No: for, concede me but the merest chance
Doubt may be wrong--there's judgment, life to come!
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right?
This present life is all?--you offer me

Its dozen noisy years, without a chance
That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,
And getting called by divers new-coined names,
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like!
Therefore I will not.

Take another case;
Fit up the cabin yet another way.
What say you to the poets? shall we write
Hamlet, Othello--make the world our own,

Without a risk to run of either sort?
I can't--to put the strongest reason first.
"But try," you urge, "the trying shall suffice;
"The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life:
"Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!"
Spare my self-knowledge--there's no fooling me!
If I prefer remaining my poor self,
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.
If I'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone;
Why should I try to be what now I am?
If I'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,--
His power and consciousness and self-delight
And all we want in common, shall I find--
Trying for ever? while on points of taste
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I
Are dowered alike--I'll ask you, I or he,
Which in our two lives realizes most?
Much, he imagined--somewhat, I possess.
He had the imagination; stick to that!
Let him say, "In the face of my soul's works
"Your world is worthless and I touch it not
"Lest I should wrong them"--I'll withdraw my plea.
But does he say so? look upon his life!
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;

Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,

Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,
And none more, had he seen its entry once,
Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."
Why then should I who play that personage,
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,
Be told that had the poet chanced to start
From where I stand now (some degree like mine
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!
Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,
And English books, none equal to his own,
Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).
--Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top--
Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these;
But, as I pour this claret, there they are:
I've gained them--crossed St. Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?
We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,

Could fancy he too had them when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,
He would not have them also in my sense.
We play one game; I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit--his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,--
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game?

Believe--and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat;
Only, we can't command it; fire and life
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact's the same,--belief's fire, once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself:
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron--this turns steel,
That burns to ash--all's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare success.

But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.
Light one in me, I'll find it food enough!
Why, to be Luther--that's a life to lead,
Incomparably better than my own.
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind;
Such Luther's luck was: how shall such be mine?
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do:
And if he did not altogether--well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result?
He looks upon no future: Luther did.
What can I gain on the denying side?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world--
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,--not to him
More than Saint Paul! 't would press its pay, you think?
Then add there's still that plaguy hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run--
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things.

"Ay, but since really you lack faith," you cry,
"You run the same risk really on all sides,
"In cool indifference as bold unbelief.
"As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.
"It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,
"No more available to do faith's work
"Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none!"

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point
Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.
We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that!
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:
That's our one act, the previous work's his own.
You criticize the soul? it reared this tree--
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!
What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself--
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence

Against the thing done to me underground
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?
All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,
God means mankind should strive for and show forth
Whatever be the process to that end,--
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
And metaphysical acumen, sure!
"What think ye of Christ," friend? when all's done and said,
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?
Trust you an instinct silenced long ago

That will break silence and enjoin you love
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,
And all in vain, with bidding you despise?
If you desire faith--then you've faith enough:
What else seeks God--nay, what else seek ourselves?
You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,
On hearsay; it's a favourable one:
"But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,
"Because of contradiction in the facts.
"One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,
"This Blougram; yet throughout the tales of him

"I see he figures as an Englishman."
Well, the two things are reconcilable.
But would I rather you discovered that,
Subjoining--"Still, what matter though they be?
"Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there."

Pure faith indeed--you know not what you ask!
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare
Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:
I say it's meant to hide him all it can,
And that's what all the blessed evil's for.
Its use in Time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live;
The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.

With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot

Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that's too ambitious,--here's my box--
I need the excitation of a pinch
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
"Leave it in peace" advise the simple folk:
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I--let doubt occasion still more faith!

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you'd exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith's about to die),
And set you square with Genesis again,--
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,
How act? As other people felt and did;
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,

Believe--and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet--both tug--
He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave growing till the life to come!
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely:
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them?--brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then--
On to the rack with faith!--is my advice.

Will not that hurry us upon our knees,
Knocking our breasts, "It can't be--yet it shall!
"Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?
"Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.
That's better than acquitting God with grace
As some folk do. He's tried--no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient--he may go!

You'll say, the old system's not so obsolete
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?

King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles;
"Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is--yes, my doubt is great,
My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, degrassify my faith
Since I adopt it; keeping what I must
And leaving what I can--such points as this.
I won't--that is, I can't throw one away.
Supposing there's no truth in what I hold
About the need of trial to man's faith,
Still, when you bid me purify the same,
To such a process I discern no end.

Clearing off one excrescence to see two,
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,

That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?
Experimentalize on sacred things!
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain
To stop betimes: they all get drunk alike.
The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,
Nor see more danger in it,--you retort.
Your taste's worth mine; but my taste proves more wise
When we consider that the steadfast hold
On the extreme end of the chain of faith
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule:
We are their lords, or they are free of us,
Just as we tighten or relax our hold.
So, others matters equal, we'll revert
To the first problem--which, if solved my way
And thrown into the balance, turns the scale--
How we may lead a comfortable life,
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time
How narrowly and grossly I view life,
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule
The masses, and regard complacently
"The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
As this world prizes action, life and talk:
No prejudice to what next world may prove,
Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge
To observe then, is that I observe these now,
Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.
Let us concede (gratuitously though)
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
Pure spiritual enjoyment: well, my friend,
Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream
(Work it up in your next month's article)
Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still
Losing true life for ever and a day
Through ever trying to be and ever being--
In the evolution of successive spheres--
Before its actual sphere and place of life,
Halfway into the next, which having reached,
It shoots with corresponding foolery

Halfway into the next still, on and off!
As when a traveller, bound from North to South,
Scouts fur in Russia: what's its use in France?
In France spurns flannel: where's its need in Spain?
In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers!
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
A superfluity at Timbuctoo.
When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?
I'm at ease now, friend; worldly in this world,
I take and like its way of life; I think
My brothers, who administer the means,
Live better for my comfort--that's good too;
And God, if he pronounce upon such life,
Approves my service, which is better still.
If he keep silence,--why, for you or me
Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"
What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue: you declare,--
All special-pleading done with--truth is truth,
And justifies itself by undreamed ways.
You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,
To say so, act up to our truth perceived
However feebly. Do then,--act away!
'T is there I'm on the watch for you. How one acts
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:

And how you'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,

You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You've just demolished the revealed with--quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill and thief,
Or even to be an atheistic priest!
Suppose a pricking to incontinence--
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand;
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:
I read this in a French book t' other day.
Does law so analysed coerce you much?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You'll soon cut that!--which means you can, but won't,
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,

You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
In case he has a master after all!
You own your instincts? why, what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught?--no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot--which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours!
I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

--Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,

While, to your mind, remains another way
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.
There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about:
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.

Men are not angels, neither are they brutes:
Something we may see, all we cannot see.
What need of lying? I say, I see all,
And swear to each detail the most minute
In what I think a Pan's face--you, mere cloud:
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,
Mankind may doubt there's any cloud at all.
You take the simple life--ready to see,
Willing to see (for no cloud's worth a face)--
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?
I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine:
" Pastor est tui Dominus ." You find
In this the pleasant pasture of our life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself, offending them;
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears
Restrain you, real checks since you find them so;
Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks:

And thus you graze through life with not one lie,
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?
If so, you beat--which means you are not I--
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,
But motioned to the velvet of the sward
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.
Look at me, sir; my age is double yours:
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,
What now I should be--as, permit the word,
I pretty well imagine your whole range
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.
We both have minds and bodies much alike:
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,
My daily bread, my influence and my state?
You're young. I'm old; you must be old one day;
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,
Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls
From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch--
Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring--
With much beside you know or may conceive?
Suppose we die to-night: well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles

On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek.
But you--the highest honour in your life,
The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is--dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what's my estimation by the fact,
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words!
You're shrewd and know that should you publish one
The world would brand the lie--my enemies first,
Who'd sneer--"the bishop's an arch-hypocrite
"And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,

Before the chaplain who reflects myself--
My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.
What's your reward, self-abnegating friend?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine--
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art--

I should have nothing to object: such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.
But you,--you're just as little those as I--
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,
Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul
Unseized by the Germans yet--which view you'll print--
Meantime the best you have to show being still
That lively lightsome article we took
Almost for the true Dickens,--what's its name?
"The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life
"Limned after dark!" it made me laugh, I know,
And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.
--Success I recognize and compliment,
And therefore give you, if you choose, three words
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)
Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,
Such terms as never you aspired to get
In all our own reviews and some not ours.
Go write your lively sketches! be the first
"Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence"--
Or better simply say, "The Outward-bound."
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad
About me on the church-door opposite.

You will not wait for that experience though,
I fancy, howsoever you decide,

To discontinue--not detesting, not
Defaming, but at least--despising me!

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram, styled in partibus
Episcopus, nec non --(the deuce knows what
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)
With Gigadibs the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind
Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
The other portion, as he shaped it thus
For argumentary purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,
He chose to represent as fixtures there,
Invariable convictions (such they seemed
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)

While certain hell deep instincts, man's weak tongue
Is never bold to utter in their truth
Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)
He ignored these,--not having in readiness
Their nomenclature and philosophy:
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.
"On the whole," he thought, "I justify myself
"On every point where cavillers like this
"Oppugn my life: he tries one kind of fence,
"I close, he's worsted, that's enough for him.
"He's on the ground: if ground should break away
"I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet
"Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.
"His ground was over mine and broke the first:
"So, let him sit with me this many a year!"

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week

Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.
Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"
Another way than Blougram's purpose was:
And having bought, not cabin-furniture
But settler's-implements (enough for three)
And started for Australia--there, I hope,
By this time he has tested his first plough,
And studied his last chapter of St. John.

Robert Browning

Bishop Orders His Tomb At Saint Praxed's Church, Rome, The

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!

Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
Nephews--sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well--
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
--Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
--Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
Draw close: that conflagration of my church
--What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,

Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! ...
Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah God, of lapis lazuli,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast ...
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both His hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me--all of jasper, then!
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--
And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
--That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line--
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie through centuries,

And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
 And see God made and eaten all day long,
 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
 And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
 About the life before I lived this life,
 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
 --Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
 All lapis, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
 My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
 Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
 And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
 To comfort me on my entablature
 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
 "Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
 To death--ye wish it--God, ye wish it! Stone--
 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through--
 And no more lapis to delight the world!
 Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
 --Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,

That I may watch at leisure if he leers--
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!

Robert Browning

Boot And Saddle

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my Castle, before the hot day
Brightens the blue from its silvery grey,

(Chorus) "Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay,

(Chorus) "Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads array:
Who laughs, Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

(Chorus) "Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I've better counsellors; what counsel they?"

(Chorus) "Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Robert Browning

Boy And The Angel, The

Morning, evening, noon and night,
` ` Praise God!; sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, ` ` Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, ` ` Well done;
` ` I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

` ` As well as if thy voice to-day
` ` Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

` ` This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
` ` Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, ` ` Would God that I
` ` Might praise him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, ` ` Nor day nor night
` ` Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew:
The man put off the stripling's hue:

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay:

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, ``A praise is in mine ear;
``There is no doubt in it, no fear:

``So sing old worlds, and so
``New worlds that from my footstool go.

``Clearer loves sound other ways:
``I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

‘ ‘ I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell
‘ ‘ And set thee here; I did not well.

‘ ‘ Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
‘ ‘ Vain was thy dream of many a year.

‘ ‘ Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped---
‘ ‘ Creation's chorus stopped!

‘ ‘ Go back and praise again
‘ ‘ The early way, while I remain.

‘ ‘ With that weak voice of our disdain,
‘ ‘ Take up creation's pausing strain.

‘ ‘ Back to the cell and poor employ:
‘ ‘ Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

Robert Browning

By The Fire-Side

I.

How well I know what I mean to do
When the long dark autumn-evenings come:
And where, my soul, is thy pleasant hue?
With the music of all thy voices, dumb
In life's November too!

II.

I shall be found by the fire, suppose,
O'er a great wise book as beseemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

III.

Till the young ones whisper, finger on lip,
` ` There he is at it, deep in Greek:
` ` Now then, or never, out we slip
` ` To cut from the hazels by the creek
` ` A mainmast for our ship!"

IV.

I shall be at it indeed, my friends:
Greek puts already on either side
Such a branch-work forth as soon extends
To a vista opening far and wide,
And I pass out where it ends.

V.

The outside-frame, like your hazel-trees:
But the inside-archway widens fast,
And a rarer sort succeeds to these,
And we slope to Italy at last
And youth, by green degrees.

VI.

I follow wherever I am led,
Knowing so well the leader's hand:
Oh woman-country, wooed not wed,
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead!

VII.

Look at the ruined chapel again
Half-way up in the Alpine gorge!
Is that a tower, I point you plain,
Or is it a mill, or an iron-forge
Breaks solitude in vain?

VIII.

A turn, and we stand in the heart of things:
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings!

IX.

Does it feed the little lake below?
That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella; see, in the evening-glow,
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets heaven in snow!

X

On our other side is the straight-up rock;
And a path is kept 'twixt the gorge and it
By boulder-stones where lichens mock
The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
Their teeth to the polished block.

XI.

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!
For the drop of the woodland fruit's begun,
These early November hours,

XII.

That crimson the creeper's leaf across
Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needed mat of moss,

XIII.

By the rose-flesh mushrooms, undivulged
Last evening---nay, in to-day's first dew
Yon sudden coral nipple bulged,
Where a freaked fawn-coloured flaky crew
Of toadstools peep indulged.

XIV.

And yonder, at foot of the fronting ridge
That takes the turn to a range beyond,
Is the chapel reached by the one-arched bridge
Where the water is stopped in a stagnant pond
Danced over by the midge.

XV.

The chapel and bridge are of stone alike,
Blackish-grey and mostly wet;
Cut hemp-stalks steep in the narrow dyke.
See here again, how the lichens fret
And the roots of the ivy strike!

XVI.

Poor little place, where its one priest comes

On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams---

XVII.

To drop from the charcoal-burners' huts,
Or climb from the hemp-dressers' low shed,
Leave the grange where the woodman stores his nuts,
Or the wattled cote where the fowlers spread
Their gear on the rock's bare juts.

XVIII.

It has some pretension too, this front,
With its bit of fresco half-moon-wise
Set over the porch, Art's early wont:
'Tis John in the Desert, I surmise,
But has borne the weather's brunt---

XIX.

Not from the fault of the builder, though,
For a pent-house properly projects
Where three carved beams make a certain show,
Dating---good thought of our architect's---
'Five, six, nine, he lets you know.

XX.

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.

XXI.

My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,

With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path grey heads abhor?

XXII.

For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops---
Not they; age threatens and they contemn,
Till they reach the gulf wherein youth drops,
One inch from life's safe hem!

XXIII.

With me, youth led ... I will speak now,
No longer watch you as you sit
Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Mutely, my heart knows how---

XXIV.

When, if I think but deep enough,
You are wont to answer, prompt as rhyme;
And you, too, find without rebuff
Response your soul seeks many a time
Piercing its fine flesh-stuff.

XXV.

My own, confirm me! If I tread
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead?

XXVI.

My own, see where the years conduct!
At first, 'twas something our two souls
Should mix as mists do; each is sucked
In each now: on, the new stream rolls,
Whatever rocks obstruct.

XXVII.

Think, when our one soul understands
The great Word which makes all things new,
When earth breaks up and heaven expands,
How will the change strike me and you
In the house not made with hands?

XXVIII.

Oh I must feel your brain prompt mine,
Your heart anticipate my heart,
You must be just before, in fine,
See and make me see, for your part,
New depths of the divine!

XXIX.

But who could have expected this
When we two drew together first
Just for the obvious human bliss,
To satisfy life's daily thirst
With a thing men seldom miss?

XXX.

Come back with me to the first of all,
Let us lean and love it over again,
Let us now forget and now recall,
Break the rosary in a pearly rain,
And gather what we let fall!

XXXI.

What did I say?---that a small bird sings
All day long, save when a brown pair
Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
Strained to a bell: 'gainst noon-day glare
You count the streaks and rings.

XXXII.

But at afternoon or almost eve
'Tis better; then the silence grows
To that degree, you half believe
It must get rid of what it knows,
Its bosom does so heave.

XXXIII.

Hither we walked then, side by side,
Arm in arm and cheek to cheek,
And still I questioned or replied,
While my heart, convulsed to really speak,
Lay choking in its pride.

XXXIV.

Silent the crumbling bridge we cross,
And pity and praise the chapel sweet,
And care about the fresco's loss,
And wish for our souls a like retreat,
And wonder at the moss.

XXXV.

Stoop and kneel on the settle under,
Look through the window's grated square:
Nothing to see! For fear of plunder,
The cross is down and the altar bare,
As if thieves don't fear thunder.

XXXVI.

We stoop and look in through the grate,
See the little porch and rustic door,
Read duly the dead builder's date;
Then cross the bridge that we crossed before,
Take the path again---but wait!

XXXVII.

Oh moment, one and infinite!

The water slips o'er stock and stone;
The West is tender, hardly bright:
How grey at once is the evening grown---
One star, its chrysolite!

XXXVIII.

We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well:
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.

XXXIX.

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

XL.

Had she willed it, still had stood the screen
So slight, so sure, 'twixt my love and her:
I could fix her face with a guard between,
And find her soul as when friends confer,
Friends---lovers that might have been.

XLI.

For my heart had a touch of the woodland-time,
Wanting to sleep now over its best.
Shake the whole tree in the summer-prime,
But bring to the Iast leaf no such test!
'` Hold the last fast!" runs the rhyme.

XLII.

For a chance to make your little much,
To gain a lover and lose a friend,
Venture the tree and a myriad such,

When nothing you mar but the year can mend:
But a last leaf---fear to touch!

XLIII.

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddying down till it find your face
At some slight wind---best chance of all!
Be your heart henceforth its dwelling-place
You trembled to forestall!

XLIV.

Worth how well, those dark grey eyes,
That hair so dark and dear, how worth
That a man should strive and agonize,
And taste a veriest hell on earth
For the hope of such a prize!

XIV.

You might have turned and tried a man,
Set him a space to weary and wear,
And prove which suited more your plan,
His best of hope or his worst despair,
Yet end as he began.

XLVI.

But you spared me this, like the heart you are,
And filled my empty heart at a word.
If two lives join, there is oft a scar,
They are one and one, with a shadowy third;
One near one is too far.

XLVII.

A moment after, and hands unseen
Were hanging the night around us fast
But we knew that a bar was broken between
Life and life: we were mixed at last
In spite of the mortal screen.

XLVIII.

The forests had done it; there they stood;
We caught for a moment the powers at play:
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done---we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood.

XLIX.

How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself---to wit,
By its fruit, the thing it does

□

Be hate that fruit or love that fruit,
It forwards the general deed of man,
And each of the Many helps to recruit
The life of the race by a general plan;
Each living his own, to boot.

□.

I am named and known by that moment's feat;
There took my station and degree;
So grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me---
One born to love you, sweet!

□I.

And to watch you sink by the fire-side now
Back again, as you mutely sit
Musing by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit-small hand propping it,
Yonder, my heart knows how!

□II.

So, earth has gained by one man the more,
And the gain of earth must be heaven's gain too;
And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
When autumn comes: which I mean to do
One day, as I said before.

Robert Browning

Caliban Upon Setebos Or, Natural Theology In The Island

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."

(David, Psalms 50.21)

['Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
Run in and out each arm, and make him laugh:
And while above his head a pompion-plant,
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch,--
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
And recross till they weave a spider-web
(Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
Because to talk about Him, vexes--ha,
Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
When talk is safer than in winter-time.
Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
In confidence he drudges at their task,
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.]

Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!

'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease:
He hated that He cannot change His cold,

Nor cure its ache. 'Hath spied an icy fish
That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
At the other kind of water, not her life,
(Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)
Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
And in her old bounds buried her despair,
Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.

'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun, this isle,
Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing.
Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech;
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye
By moonlight; and the pie with the long tongue
That pricks deep into oak warts for a worm,
And says a plain word when she finds her prize,
But will not eat the ants; the ants themselves
That build a wall of seeds and settled stalks
About their hole--He made all these and more,
Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?
He could not, Himself, make a second self
To be His mate; as well have made Himself:
He would not make what He dislikes or slights,
An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains:
But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be--
Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
Things He admires and mocks too,--that is it.
Because, so brave, so better though they be,
It nothing skills if He begin to plague.
Look, now, I melt a gourd-fruit into mash,
Add honeycomb and pods, I have perceived,
Which bite like finches when they bill and kiss,--
Then, when froth rises bladdery, drink up all,
Quick, quick, till maggots scamper through my brain;
Last, throw me on my back i' the seeded thyme,

And wanton, wishing I were born a bird.
Put case, unable to be what I wish,
I yet could make a live bird out of clay:
Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
Able to fly?--for, there, see, he hath wings,
And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
And there, a sting to do his foes offence,
There, and I will that he begin to live,
Fly to yon rock-top, nip me off the horns
Of grigs high up that make the merry din,
Saucy through their veined wings, and mind me not.
In which feat, if his leg snapped, brittle clay,
And he lay stupid-like,--why, I should laugh;
And if he, spying me, should fall to weep,
Beseech me to be good, repair his wrong,
Bid his poor leg smart less or grow again,--
Well, as the chance were, this might take or else
Not take my fancy: I might hear his cry,
And give the mankin three sound legs for one,
Or pluck the other off, leave him like an egg
And lessoned he was mine and merely clay.
Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,
Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,
Making and marring clay at will? So He.

'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,
Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.
'Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs
That march now from the mountain to the sea;
'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,
Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.
'Say, the first straggler that boasts purple spots
Shall join the file, one pincer twisted off;
'Say, this bruised fellow shall receive a worm,
And two worms he whose nippers end in red;
As it likes me each time, I do: so He.

Well then, 'supposeth He is good i' the main,
Placable if His mind and ways were guessed,
But rougher than His handiwork, be sure!
Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,

And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
That they, unless through Him, do nought at all,
And must submit: what other use in things?
'Hath cut a pipe of pithless elder-joint
That, blown through, gives exact the scream o' the jay
When from her wing you twitch the feathers blue:
Sound this, and little birds that hate the jay
Flock within stone's throw, glad their foe is hurt:
Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth
'I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
I make the cry my maker cannot make
With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine!
Would not I smash it with my foot? So He.

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?
Aha, that is a question! Ask, for that,
What knows,--the something over Setebos
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
There may be something quiet o'er His head,
Out of His reach, that feels nor joy nor grief,
Since both derive from weakness in some way.
I joy because the quails come; would not joy
Could I bring quails here when I have a mind:
This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth.
'Esteemeth stars the outposts of its couch,
But never spends much thought nor care that way.
It may look up, work up,--the worse for those
It works on! 'Careth but for Setebos
The many-handed as a cuttle-fish,
Who, making Himself feared through what He does,
Looks up, first, and perceives he cannot soar
To what is quiet and hath happy life;
Next looks down here, and out of very spite
Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real,
These good things to match those as hips do grapes.
'Tis solace making baubles, ay, and sport.
Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books
Careless and lofty, lord now of the isle:
Vexed, 'stitched a book of broad leaves, arrow-shaped,

Wrote thereon, he knows what, prodigious words;
Has peeled a wand and called it by a name;
Weareth at whiles for an enchanter's robe
The eyed skin of a supple oncelot;
And hath an ounce sleeker than youngling mole,
A four-legged serpent he makes cower and couch,
Now snarl, now hold its breath and mind his eye,
And saith she is Miranda and my wife:
'Keeps for his Ariel a tall pouch-bill crane
He bids go wade for fish and straight disgorge;
Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
A bitter heart that bides its time and bites.
'Plays thus at being Prosper in a way,
Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.
His dam held that the Quiet made all things
Which Setebos vexed only: 'holds not so.
Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex.
Had He meant other, while His hand was in,
Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,
Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint
Like an orc's armour? Ay,--so spoil His sport!
He is the One now: only He doth all.

'Saith, He may like, perchance, what profits Him.
Ay, himself loves what does him good; but why?
'Gets good no otherwise. This blinded beast
Loves whoso places flesh-meat on his nose,
But, had he eyes, would want no help, but hate
Or love, just as it liked him: He hath eyes.
Also it pleaseth Setebos to work,
Use all His hands, and exercise much craft,
By no means for the love of what is worked.
'Tasteth, himself, no finer good i' the world
When all goes right, in this safe summer-time,
And he wants little, hungers, aches not much,
Than trying what to do with wit and strength.
'Falls to make something: 'piled yon pile of turfs,

And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk,
And, with a fish-tooth, scratched a moon on each,
And set up endwise certain spikes of tree,
And crowned the whole with a sloth's skull a-top,
Found dead i' the woods, too hard for one to kill.
No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;
'Shall some day knock it down again: so He.

'Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof!
One hurricane will spoil six good months' hope.
He hath a spite against me, that I know,
Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why?
So it is, all the same, as well I find.
'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
And licked the whole labour flat: so much for spite.
'Saw a ball flame down late (yonder it lies)
Where, half an hour before, I slept i' the shade:
Often they scatter sparkles: there is force!
'Dug up a newt He may have envied once
And turned to stone, shut up Inside a stone.
Please Him and hinder this?--What Prosper does?
Aha, if He would tell me how! Not He!
There is the sport: discover how or die!
All need not die, for of the things o' the isle
Some flee afar, some dive, some run up trees;
Those at His mercy,--why, they please Him most
When . . . when . . . well, never try the same way twice!
Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
Sure of the issue. 'Doth the like himself:
'Spareth a squirrel that it nothing fears
But steals the nut from underneath my thumb,
And when I threat, bites stoutly in defence:
'Spareth an urchin that contrariwise,
Curls up into a ball, pretending death
For fright at my approach: the two ways please.
But what would move my choler more than this,

That either creature counted on its life
To-morrow and next day and all days to come,
Saying, forsooth, in the inmost of its heart,
"Because he did so yesterday with me,
And otherwise with such another brute,
So must he do henceforth and always."--Ay?
Would teach the reasoning couple what "must" means!
'Doth as he likes, or wherefore Lord? So He.

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
And we shall have to live in fear of Him
So long as He lives, keeps His strength: no change,
If He have done His best, make no new world
To please Him more, so leave off watching this,--
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
Some strange day,--or, suppose, grow into it
As grubs grow butterflies: else, here are we,
And there is He, and nowhere help at all.

'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.
His dam held different, that after death
He both plagued enemies and feasted friends:
Idly! He doth His worst in this our life,
Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
Saving last pain for worst,--with which, an end.
Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,
Bask on the pompion-bell above: kills both.
'Sees two black painful beetles roll their ball
On head and tail as if to save their lives:
Moves them the stick away they strive to clear.

Even so, 'would have Him misconceive, suppose
This Caliban strives hard and ails no less,
And always, above all else, envies Him;
Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,
Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
And never speaks his mind save housed as now:

Outside, 'groans, curses. If He caught me here,
O'erheard this speech, and asked "What chucklest at?"
'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,
Or of my three kid yearlings burn the best,
Or let the toothsome apples rot on tree,
Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste:
While myself lit a fire, and made a song
And sung it, "What I hate, be consecrate
To celebrate Thee and Thy state, no mate
For Thee; what see for envy in poor me?"
Hoping the while, since evils sometimes mend,
Warts rub away and sores are cured with slime,
That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

Robert Browning

Cavalier Tunes

. MARCHING ALONG.

I.

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're---

CHORUS.---Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

CHORUS.---Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

IV.

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

CHORUS.---March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II. GIVE A ROUSE.

□

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

□.

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

CHORUS.---King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

□□.

□

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

CHORUS.---King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III. BOOT AND SADDLE.

□

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery grey,

CHORUS.---Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!

□□.

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
` ` God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay---

CHORUS.---` ` Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

□□□.

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, ` ` Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

CHORUS.---` ` Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

□□□.

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, ` ` Nay!
` ` I've better counsellors; what counsel they?

CHORUS.---` ` Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Robert Browning

Cavalier Tunes: Boot And Saddle

Boot, saddle, to horse and away!
Rescue my Castle, before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery gray,
(Chorus)

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
"God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay--
(Chorus)

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"
Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,
(Chorus)

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
I've better counsellors; what counsel they?
(Chorus)

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!"

Robert Browning

Cavalier Tunes: Give A Rouse

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

(Chorus)

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

(Chorus)

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in Hell's despite now,
King Charles!

Robert Browning

Cavalier Tunes: Marching Along

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.
God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're--

(Chorus)

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell.
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

(Chorus)

Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

(Chorus)

March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

Robert Browning

Childe Roland To The Dark Tower Came

I.

My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

II.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III.

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV.

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V.

As when a sick man very near to death

Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside, (``since all is o'er," he saith,
``And the blow fallen no grieving can amend;"

VI.

While some discuss if near the other graves
Be room enough for this, and when a day
Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
And still the man hears all, and only craves
He may not shame such tender love and stay.

VII.

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among ``The Band"---to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps---that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now---should I be fit?

VIII.

So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its stray.

IX.

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

XI

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:
For flowers---as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

XI.

No! penury, inertness and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. `` See
`` Or shut your eyes," said nature peevishly,
`` It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
`` 'Tis the Last judgment's fire must cure this place,
`` Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

XII.

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
All hope of greenness?'tis a brute must walk
Pushing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII.

As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
Stood stupefied, however he came there:
Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

XIV.

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain,
And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;

I never saw a brute I hated so;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV.

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards---the soldier's art:
One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

XVI.

Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place,
That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

XVII.

Giles then, the soul of honour---there he stands
Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
Good---but the scene shifts---faugh! what hangman hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands
Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII.

Better this present than a past like that;
Back therefore to my darkening path again!
No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX.

A sudden little river crossed my path

As unexpected as a serpent comes.
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof---to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX.

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of route despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

XXI.

Which, while I forded,---good saints, how I feared
To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
---It may have been a water-rat I speared,
But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XXII.

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage---

XXIII.

The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?
No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

XXIV.

And more than that---a furlong on---why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
Or brake, not wheel---that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV.

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood---
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

XXVI.

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII.

And just as far as ever from the end!
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further! At the thought,
great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap---perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII.

For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains---with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.

How thus they had surprised me,---solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

XXIX.

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when---
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts---you're inside the den!

XXX.

Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain ... Duncce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!

XXXI.

What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counter-part
In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

XXXII.

Not see? because of night perhaps?---why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,---
` ` Now stab and end the creature---to the heft!"

XXXIII.

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled

Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
Of all the lost adventurers my peers,---
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet, each of old
Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV.

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. ``_Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came._''

Robert Browning

Christmas-Eve

I.

OUT of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night air again.
I had waited a good five minutes first
In the doorway, to escape the rain
That drove in gusts down the common's centre,
At the edge of which the chapel stands,
Before I plucked up heart to enter:
Heaven knows how many sorts of hands
Reached past me, groping for the latch
Of the inner door that hung on catch,
More obstinate the more they fumbled,
Till, giving way at last with a scold
Of the crazy hinge, in squeezed or tumbled
One sheep more to the rest in fold,
And left me irresolute, standing sentry
In the sheepfold's lath-and-plaster entry,
Four feet long by two feet wide,
Partitioned off from the vast inside—
I blocked up half of it at least.
No remedy; the rain kept driving:
They eyed me much as some wild beast,
The congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the mainroad, white
A long way past me into the night,
Skirting the common, then diverging;
Not a few suddenly emerging
From the common's self thro' the paling-gaps,—
—They house in the gravel-pits perhaps,
Where the road stops short with its safeguard border
Of lamps, as tired of such disorder;—
But the most turned in yet more abruptly
From a certain squalid knot of alleys,
Where the town's bad blood once slept corruptly,
Which now the little chapel rallies
And leads into day again,—its priestliness
Lending itself to hide their beastliness
So cleverly (thanks in part to the mason),
And putting so cheery a whitewashed face on

Those neophytes too much in lack of it,
That, where you cross the common as I did,
And meet the party thus presided,
"Mount Zion," with Love-lane at the back of it,
They front you as little disconcerted,
As, bound for the hills, her fate averted
And her wicked people made to mind him,
Lot might have marched with Gomorrah behind him.

II.

Well, from the road, the lanes or the common,
In came the flock: the fat weary woman,
Panting and bewildered, down-clapping
Her umbrella with a mighty report,
Grounded it by me, wry and flapping,
A wreck of whalebones; then, with a snort,
Like a startled horse, at the interloper
Who humbly knew himself improper,
But could not shrink up small enough,
Round to the door, and in,—the gruff
Hinge's invariable scold
Making your very blood run cold.
Prompt in the wake of her, up-pattered
On broken clogs, the many-tattered
Little old-faced, peaking sister-turned-mother
Of the sickly babe she tried to smother
Somehow up, with its spotted face,
From the cold, on her breast, the one warm place;
She too must stop, wring the poor suds dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby
Her tribute to the door-mat, sopping
Already from my own clothes' dropping,
Which yet she seemed to grudge I should stand on;
Then stooping down to take off her pattens,
She bore them defiantly, in each hand one,
Planted together before her breast
And its babe, as good as a lance in rest.
Close on her heels, the dingy satins
Of a female something, past me flitted,
With lips as much too white, as a streak
Lay far too red on each hollow cheek;
And it seemed the very door-hinge pitied

All that was left of a woman once,
 Holding at least its tongue for the nonce.
 Then a tall yellow man, like the Penitent Thief,
 With his jaw bound up in a handkerchief,
 And eyelids screwed together tight,
 Led himself in by some inner light.
 And, except from him, from each that entered,
 I had the same interrogation—
 "What, you, the alien, you have ventured
 "To take with us, elect, your station?
 "A carer for none of it, a Gallio?"—
 Thus, plain as print, I read the glance
 At a common prey, in each countenance,
 As of huntsman giving his hounds the tallyho:
 And, when the door's cry drowned their wonder,
 The draught, it always sent in shutting,
 Made the flame of the single tallow candle
 In the cracked square lanthorn I stood under,
 Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting,
 As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:
 I verily thought the zealous light
 (In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite,
 Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
 With the airs of a St. John's Candlestick.
 There was no standing it much longer.
 "Good folks," said I, as resolve grew stronger,
 "This way you perform the Grand-Inquisitor,
 "When the weather sends you a chance visitor?
 "You are the men, and wisdom shall die with you,
 "And none of the old Seven Churches vie with you!
 "But still, despite the pretty perfection
 "To which you carry your trick of exclusiveness,
 "And, taking God's word under wise protection,
 "Correct its tendency to diffusiveness,
 "Bidding one reach it over hot ploughshares,—
 "Still, as I say, though you've found salvation,
 "If I should choose to cry—as now—'Shares!'—
 "See if the best of you bars me my ration!
 "Because I prefer for my expounder
 "Of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder:
 "Mine's the same right with your poorest and sickliest,
 "Supposing I don the marriage-vestment;

“So, shut your mouth, and open your Testament,
“And carve me my portion at your quickliest!”
Accordingly, as a shoemaker’s lad
With wizened face in want of soap,
And wet apron wound round his waist like a rope,
After stopping outside, for his cough was bad,
To get the fit over, poor gentle creature,
And so avoid disturbing the preacher,
Passed in, I sent my elbow spikewise
At the shutting door, and entered likewise,—
Received the hinge’s accustomed greeting,
Crossed the threshold’s magic pentacle,
And found myself in full conventicle,
—To wit, in Zion Chapel Meeting,
On the Christmas-Eve of ‘Forty-nine,
Which, calling its flock to their special clover,
Found them assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

III.

I very soon had enough of it.
The hot smell and the human noises,
And my neighbour’s coat, the greasy cuff of it,
Were a pebble-stone that a child’s hand poises,
Compared with the pig-of-lead-like pressure
Of the preaching-man’s immense stupidity,
As he poured his doctrine forth, full measure,
To meet his audience’s avidity.
You needed not the wit of the Sybil
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling—
No sooner had our friend an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whenever it was the thought first struck him
How Death, at unawares, might duck him
Deeper than the grave, and quench
The gin-shop’s light in Hell’s grim drench)
Than he handled it so, in fine irreverence,
As to hug the Book of books to pieces:
And, a patchwork of chapters and texts in severance,
Not improved by the private dog’s-ears and creases,
Having clothed his own soul with, he’d fain see equipt yours,—
So tossed you again your Holy Scriptures.

And you picked them up, in a sense, no doubt:
Nay, had but a single face of my neighbours
Appeared to suspect that the preacher's labours
Were help which the world could be saved without,
'Tis odds but I had borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet;
Or, who can tell? had even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:
But the flock sate on, divinely flustered,
Sniffing, methought, its dew of Hermon
With such content in every snuffle,
As the devil inside us loves to ruffle.
My old fat woman purred with pleasure,
And thumb round thumb went twirling faster
While she, to his periods keeping measure,
Maternally devoured the pastor.
The man with the handkerchief, untied it.
Showed us a horrible wen inside it,
Gave his eyelids yet another screwing.
And rocked himself as the woman was doing.
The shoemaker's lad, discreetly choking,
Kept down his cough. 'Twas too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it,
And saying, like Eve when she plucked the apple,
"I wanted a taste, and now there's enough of it,"
I flung out of the little chapel.

IV.

There was a lull in the rain, a lull
In the wind too; the moon was risen,
And would have shone out pure and full,
But for the ramparted cloud-prison,
Block on block built up in the west,
For what purpose the wind knows best,
Who changes his mind continually.
And the empty other half of the sky
Seemed in its silence as if it knew
What, any moment, might look through
A chance-gap in that fortress massy:—
Through its fissures you got hints
Of the flying moon, by the shifting tints,
Now, a dull lion-colour, now, brassy

Burning to yellow, and whitest yellow,
Like furnace-smoke just ere the flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.
Just by the chapel, a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across;
'Tis ever dry walking there, on the moss—
Besides, you go gently all the way uphill:
I stooped under and soon felt better:
My head grew light, my limbs more supple,
As I walked on, glad to have slipt the fetter;
My mind was full of the scene I had left,
That placid flock, that pastor vociferant,
—How this outside was pure and different!
The sermon, now—what a mingled weft
Of good and ill! were either less,
Its fellow had coloured the whole distinctly;
But alas for the excellent earnestness,
And the truths, quite true if stated succinctly,
But as surely false, in their quaint presentment,
However to pastor and flock's contentment!
Say rather, such truths looked false to your eyes,
With his provings and parallels twisted and twined,
Till how could you know them, grown double their size,
In the natural fog of the good man's mind?
Like yonder spots of our roadside lamps,
Haloed about with the common's damp.
Truth remains true, the fault's in the prover;
The zeal was good, and the aspiration;
And yet, and yet, yet, fifty times over,
Pharaoh received no demonstration
By his Baker's dream of Baskets Three,
Of the doctrine of the Trinity,—
Although, as our preacher thus embellished it,
Apparently his hearers relished it
With so unfeigned a gust—who knows if
They did not prefer our friend to Joseph?
But so it is everywhere, one way with all of them!
These people have really felt, no doubt,
A something, the motion they style the Call of them;
And this is their method of bringing about,

By a mechanism of words and tones,
(So many texts in so many groans)
A sort of reviving or reproducing,
More or less perfectly, (who can tell?—)
Of the mood itself, that strengthens by using;
And how it happens, I understand well.
A tune was born in my head last week,
Out of the thump-thump and shriek-shriek
Of the train, as I came by it, up from Manchester;
And when, next week, I take it back again,
My head will sing to the engine's clack again,
While it only makes my neighbour's haunches stir,
—Finding no dormant musical sprout
In him, as in me, to be jolted out.
'Tis the taught already that profit by teaching;
He gets no more from the railway's preaching,
Than, from this preacher who does the rail's office, I,
Whom therefore the flock casts a jealous eye on.
Still, why paint over their door "Mount Zion,"
To which all flesh shall come, saith the prophecy?

V.

But wherefore be harsh on a single case?
After how many modes, this Christmas-Eve,
Does the selfsame weary thing take place?
The same endeavour to make you believe,
And much with the same effect, no more:
Each method abundantly convincing,
As I say, to those convinced before,
But scarce to be swallowed without wincing,
By the not-as-yet-convinced. For me,
I have my own church equally.
And in this church my faith sprang first!
(I said, as I reached the rising ground,
And the wind began again, with a burst
Of rain in my face, and a glad rebound
From the heart beneath, as if, God speeding me,
I entered His church-door, Nature leading me)
—In youth I looked to these very skies,
And probing their immensities,
I found God there, His visible power;
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense

Of that power, an equal evidence
That His love, there too, was the nobler dower.
For the loving worm within its clod,
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.
You know what I mean: God's all, man's nought:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were, an handbreadth off, to give
Room for the newly-made to live,
And look at Him from a place apart,
And use his gifts of brain and heart,
Given, indeed, but to keep for ever.
Who speaks of man, then, must not sever
Man's very elements from man,
Saying, "But all is God's"—whose plan
Was to create man and then leave him
Able, His own word saith, to grieve Him,
But able to glorify Him too,
As a mere machine could never do,
That prayed or praised, all unaware
Of its fitness for aught but praise and prayer,
Made perfect as a thing of course.
Man, therefore, stands on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And, looking to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent,
Sees in His Power made evident,
Only excess by a million fold
O'er the power God gave man in the mould.
For, see: Man's hand, first formed to carry
A few pounds' weight, when taught to marry
Its strength with an engine's, lifts a mountain,
—Advancing in power by one degree;
And why count steps through eternity?
But Love is the ever springing fountain:
Man may enlarge or narrow his bed
For the water's play, but the water head—
How can he multiply or reduce it?
As easy create it, as cause it to cease:
He may profit by it, or abuse it;
But 'tis not a thing to bear increase

As power will: be love less or more
In the heart of man, he keeps it shut
Or opes it wide as he pleases, but
Love's sum remains what it was before.
So, gazing up, in my youth, at love
As seen through power, ever above
All modes which make it manifest,
My soul brought all to a single test—
That He, the Eternal First and Last,
Who, in His power, had so surpassed
All man conceives of what is might,—
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,
—Would prove as infinitely good;
Would never, my soul understood,
With power to work all love desires,
Bestow e'en less than man requires:
That He who endlessly was teaching,
Above my spirit's utmost reaching,
What love can do in the leaf or stone,
(So that to master this alone,
This done in the stone or leaf for me,
I must go on learning endlessly)
Would never need that I, in turn,
Should point him out a defect unheeded,
And show that God had yet to learn
What the meanest human creature needed,—
—Not life, to wit, for a few short years,
Tracking His way through doubts and fears,
While the stupid earth on which I stay
Suffers no change, but passive adds
Its myriad years to myriads,
Though I, He gave it to, decay,
Seeing death come and choose about me,
And my dearest ones depart without me.
No! love which, on earth, amid all the shows of it,
Has ever been seen the sole good of life in it,
The love, ever growing there, spite of the strife in it,
Shall arise, made perfect, from death's repose of it!
And I shall behold Thee, face to face,
O God, and in Thy light retrace
How in all I loved here, still wast Thou!
Whom pressing to, then, as I fain would now,

I shall find as able to satiate
The love, Thy gift, as my spirit's wonder
Thou art able to quicken and sublimate,
Was this sky of Thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in Thee as thus I gaze,
—Thus, thus! oh, let men keep their ways
Of seeking Thee in a narrow shrine—
Be this my way! And this is mine!

VI.

For lo, what think you? suddenly
The rain and the wind ceased, and the sky
Received at once the full fruition
Of the moon's consummate apparition.
The black cloud-barricade was riven,
Ruined beneath her feet, and driven
Deep in the west; while, bare and breathless,
North and south and east lay ready
For a glorious Thing, that, dauntless, deathless,
Sprang across them, and stood steady.
'Twas a moon-rainbow, vast and perfect,
From heaven to heaven extending, perfect
As the mother-moon's self, full in face.
It rose, distinctly at the base
With its seven proper colours chorded,
Which still, in the rising, were compressed,
Until at last they coalesced,
And supreme the spectral creature lorded
In a triumph of whitest white,—
Above which intervened the night.
But above night too, like the next,
The second of a wondrous sequence,
Reaching in rare and rarer frequency,
Till the heaven of heavens be circumflect,
Another rainbow rose, a mightier,
Fainter, flushier, and flightier,—
Rapture dying along its verge!
Oh, whose foot shall I see emerge,
WHOSE, from the straining topmost dark,
On to the keystone of that arc?

VII.

This sight was shown me, there and then,—
Me, one out of a world of men,
Singled forth, as the chance might hap
To another, if in a thunderclap
Where I heard noise, and you saw flame,
Some one man knew God called his name.
For me, I think I said, "Appear!
"Good were it to be ever here.
"If Thou wilt, let me build to Thee
"Service-tabernacles Three,
"Where, for ever in Thy presence,
"In extatic acquiescence,
"Far alike from thriftless learning
"And ignorance's undiscerning,
" I may worship and remain!"
Thus, at the show above me, gazing
With upturned eyes, I felt my brain
Glutted with the glory, blazing
Throughout its whole mass, over and under,
Until at length it burst asunder,
And out of it bodily there streamed
The too-much glory, as it seemed,
Passing from out me to the ground,
Then palely serpentine round
Into the dark with mazy error.

VIII.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He Himself with His human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before:
I saw the back of Him, no more—
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face: only the sight
Of a sweepy Garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognise.
I felt terror, no surprise:
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound, of the mighty fact.
I remembered, He did say
Doubtless, that, to this world's end,

Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their Friend:
Certainly He was there with them.
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw His very Vesture's hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear
With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear,
And I hastened, cried out while I pressed
To the salvation of the Vest,
"But not so, Lord! It cannot be
"That Thou, indeed, art leaving me—
"Me, that have despised Thy friends.
"Did my heart make no amends?
"Thou art the Love of God—above
"His Power, didst hear me place His Love,
"And that was leaving the world for Thee!
"Therefore Thou must not turn from me
"As if I had chosen the other part.
"Folly and pride o'ercame my heart.
"Our best is bad, nor bears Thy test
"Still it should be our very best.
"I thought it best that Thou, the Spirit,
"Be worshipped in spirit and in truth,
"And in beauty, as even we require it—
"Not in the forms burlesque, uncouth,
"I left but now, as scarcely fitted
"For Thee: I knew not what I pitied:
"But, all I felt there, right or wrong,
"What is it to Thee, who curest sinning?
"Am I not weak as Thou art strong?
"I have looked to Thee from the beginning,
"Straight up to Thee through all the world
"Which, like an idle scroll, lay furled
"To nothingness on either side:
"And since the time Thou wast descried,
"Spite of the weak heart, so have I
"Lived ever, and so fain would die,
"Living and dying, Thee before!
"But if Thou leavest me—"

IX.

Less or more,
I suppose that I spoke thus.
When,—have mercy, Lord, on us!
The whole Face turned upon me full.
And I spread myself beneath it,
As when the bleacher spreads, to seethe it
In the cleansing sun, his wool,—
Steeps in the flood of noontide whiteness
Some defiled, discoloured web—
So lay I, saturate with brightness.
And when the flood appeared to ebb,
Lo, I was walking, light and swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On, just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion:
What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed
And a man went weltering through the ocean,
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.
Darkness and cold were cloven, as through
I passed, upborne yet walking too.
And I turned to myself at intervals,—
"So He said, and so it befalls.
"God who registers the cup
"Of mere cold water, for His sake
"To a disciple rendered up,
"Disdains not His own thirst to slake
"At the poorest love was ever offered:
"And because it was my heart I proffered,
"With true love trembling at the brim,
"He suffers me to follow Him
"For ever, my own way,—dispensed
"From seeking to be influenced
"By all the less immediate ways
"That earth, in worships manifold,
"Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
'The Garment's hem, which, lo, I hold!"

X.

And so we crossed the world and stopped.

For where am I, in city or plain,
Since I am 'ware of the world again?
And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
'Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out,—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?
—Binding, ever as he bade,
Columns in this colonnade
With arms wide open to embrace
The entry of the human race
To the breast of . . . what is it, yon building,
Ablaze in front, all paint and gilding,
With marble for brick, and stones of price
For garniture of the edifice?
Now I see: it is no dream:
It stands there and it does not seem;
For ever, in pictures, thus it looks,
And thus I have read of it in books,
Often in England, leagues away,
And wondered how those fountains play,
Growing up eternally
Each to a musical water-tree,
Whose blossoms drop, a glittering boon,
Before my eyes, in the light of the moon,
To the granite lavers underneath.
Liar and dreamer in your teeth!
I, the sinner that speak to you,
Was in Rome this night, and stood, and knew
Both this and more! For see, for see,
The dark is rent, mine eye is free
To pierce the crust of the outer wall,
And I view inside, and all there, all,
As the swarming hollow of a hive,
The whole Basilica alive!
Men in the chancel, body, and nave,
Men on the pillars' architrave,
Men on the statues, men on the tombs

With popes and kings in their porphyry wombs,
All famishing in expectation
Of the main-altar's consummation.
For see, for see, the rapturous moment
Approaches, and earth's best endowment
Blends with heaven's: the taper-fires
Pant up, the winding brazen spires
Heave loftier yet the baldachin:
The incense-gaspings, long kept in,
Suspire in clouds; the organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed him,
(Like Behemoth when He praised him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprinkling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when He who trod,
Very Man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree,—
Shall come again, no more to be
Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, all in all,
King of kings, and Lord of lords,
As His servant John received the words,
"I died, and live for evermore!"

XI.

Yet I was left outside the door.
Why sate I there on the threshold-stone,
Left till He returns, alone
Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold?—
My reason, to my doubt, replied,
As if a book were opened wide,
And at a certain page I traced
Every record undefaced,
Added by successive years,—

The harvestings of truth's stray ears
Singly gleaned, and in one sheaf
Bound together for belief.
Yes, I said—that He will go
And sit with these in turn, I know.
Their faith's heart beats, though her head swims
Too giddily to guide her limbs,
Disabled by their palsy-stroke
From propping me. Though Rome's gross yoke
Drops off, no more to be endured,
Her teaching is not so obscured
By errors and perversities,
That no truth shines athwart the lies:
And He, whose eye detects a spark
Even where, to man's, the whole seems dark,
May well see flame where each beholder
Acknowledges the embers smoulder.
But I, a mere man, fear to quit
The clue God gave me as most fit
To guide my footsteps through life's maze,
Because Himself discerns all ways
Open to reach Him: I, a man
He gave to mark where faith began
To swerve aside, till from its summit
Judgment drops her damning plummet,
Pronouncing such a fatal space
Departed from the Founder's base:
He will not bid me enter too,
But rather sit, as now I do,
Awaiting His return outside.
—'Twas thus my reason straight replied,
And joyously I turned, and pressed
The Garment's skirt upon my breast,
Until, afresh its light suffusing me,
My heart cried,—what has been abusing me
That I should wait here lonely and coldly,
Instead of rising, entering boldly,
Baring truth's face, and letting drift
Her veils of lies as they choose to shift?
Do these men praise Him? I will raise
My voice up to their point of praise!
I see the error; but above

The scope of error, see the love.—
Oh, love of those first Christian days!
—Fanned so soon into a blaze,
From the spark preserved by the trampled sect,
That the antique sovereign Intellect
Which then sate ruling in the world,
Like a change in dreams, was hurled
From the throne he reigned upon:
—You looked up, and he was gone!
Gone, his glory of the pen!
—Love, with Greece and Rome in ken,
Bade her scribes abhor the trick
Of poetry and rhetoric,
And exult, with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet,
Leaving Livy incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
—Love, while able to acquaint her
With the thousand statues yet
Fresh from chisel, pictures wet
From brush, she saw on every side,
Chose rather with an infant's pride
To frame those portents which impart
Such unction to true Christian Art.
Gone, Music too! The air was stirred
By happy wings: Terpander's bird
(That, when the cold came, fled away)
Would tarry not the wintry day,—
As more-enduring sculpture must,
Till a filthy saint rebuked the gust
With which he chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
He glanced a thought above the toes of,
By breaking zealously her nose off.
Love, surely, from that music's lingering,
Might have filched her organ-fingering,
Nor chose rather to set prayings
To hog-grunts, praises to horse-neighings.
Love was the startling thing, the new;
Love was the all-sufficient too;
And seeing that, you see the rest.

As a babe can find its mother's breast
As well in darkness as in light,
Love shut our eyes, and all seemed right.
True, the world's eyes are open now:
—Less need for me to disallow
Some few that keep Love's zone unbuckled,
Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby-prattle
With intermixture of the rattle,
When she would have them creep, stand steady
Upon their feet, or walk already,
Not to speak of trying to climb.
I will be wise another time,
And not desire a wall between us,
When next I see a church-roof cover
So many species of one genus,
All with foreheads bearing Lover
Written above the earnest eyes of them;
All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed, to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroic in passion, or in action,—
Or, lowered for the senses' satisfaction,
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features.
What! with all Rome here, whence to levy
Such contributions to their appetite,
With women and men in a gorgeous bevy,
They take, as it were, a padlock, and clap it tight
On their southern eyes, restrained from feeding
On the glories of their ancient reading,
On the beauties of their modern singing,
On the wonders of the builder's bringing,
On the majesties of Art around them,—
And, all these loves, late struggling incessant,
When faith has at last united and bound them,
They offer up to God for a present!
Why, I will, on the whole, be rather proud of it,—
And, only taking the act in reference
To the other recipients who might have allowed of it
I will rejoice that God had the preference!

XII.

So I summed up my new resolves:
Too much love there can never be.
And where the intellect devolves
Its function on love exclusively,
I, as one who possesses both,
Will accept the provision, nothing loth,
—Will feast my love, then depart elsewhere,
That my intellect may find its share.
And ponder, O soul, the while thou departest,
And see thou applaud the great heart of the artist,
Who, examining the capabilities
Of the block of marble he has to fashion
Into a type of thought or passion,—
Not always, using obvious facilities,
Shapes it, as any artist can,
Into a perfect symmetrical man,
Complete from head to foot of the life-size,
Such as old Adam stood in his wife's eyes,—
But, now and then, bravely aspires to consummate
A Colossus by no means so easy to come at,
And uses the whole of his block for the bust,
Leaving the minds of the public to finish it,
Since cut it ruefully short he must:
On the face alone he expends his devotion;
He rather would mar than resolve to diminish it,
—Saying, "Applaud me for this grand notion
"Of what a face may be! As for completing it
"In breast and body and limbs, do that, you!"
All hail! I fancy how, happily meeting it,
A trunk and legs would perfect the statue,
Could man carve so as to answer volition.
And how much nobler than petty cavils,
A hope to find, in my spirit-travels,
Some artist of another ambition,
Who having a block to carve, no bigger,
Has spent his power on the opposite quest,
And believed to begin at the feet was best—
For so may I see, ere I die, the whole figure!

XIII.

No sooner said than out in the night!

And still as we swept through storm and night,
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And lo, as before, I was walking swift,
With my senses settling fast and steadying,
But my body caught up in the whirl and drift
Of the Vesture's amplitude, still eddying
On just before me, still to be followed,
As it carried me after with its motion,
—What shall I say?—as a path were hollowed,
And a man went weltering through the ocean
Sucked along in the flying wake
Of the luminous water-snake.

XIV.

Alone! I am left alone once more—
(Save for the Garment's extreme fold
Abandoned still to bless my hold)
Alone, beside the entrance-door
Of a sort of temple,—perhaps a college,
—Like nothing I ever saw before
At home in England, to my knowledge.
The tall, old, quaint, irregular town!
It may be . . . though which, I can't affirm . . . any
Of the famous middle-age towns of Germany;
And this flight of stairs where I sit down,
Is it Halle, Weimar, Cassel, or Frankfort,
Or Göttingen, that I have to thank for't?
It may be Göttingen,—most likely.
Through the open door I catch obliquely
Glimpses of a lecture-hall;
And not a bad assembly neither—
Ranged decent and symmetrical
On benches, waiting what's to see there;
Which, holding still by the Vesture's hem,
I also resolve to see with them,
Cautious this time how I suffer to slip
The chance of joining in fellowship
With any that call themselves His friends,
As these folks do, I have a notion.
But hist—a buzzing and emotion!
All settle themselves, the while ascends
By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk,

Step by step, deliberate
Because of his cranium's over-freight,
Three parts sublime to one grotesque,
If I have proved an accurate guesser,
The hawk-nosed, high-cheek-boned Professor.
I felt at once as if there ran
A shoot of love from my heart to the man—
That sallow, virgin-minded, studious
Martyr to mild enthusiasm,
As he uttered a kind of cough-preludious
That woke my sympathetic spasm,
(Beside some spitting that made me sorry)
And stood, surveying his auditory
With a wan pure look, well nigh celestial,—
—Those blue eyes had survived so much!
While, under the foot they could not smutch,
Lay all the fleshly and the bestial.
Over he bowed, and arranged his notes,
Till the auditory's clearing of throats
Was done with, died into silence;
And, when each glance was upward sent,
Each bearded mouth composed intent,
And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence,—
He pushed back higher his spectacles,
Let the eyes stream out like lamps from cells,
And giving his head of hair—a hake
Of undressed tow, for colour and quantity—
One rapid and impatient shake,
(As our own young England adjusts a jaunty tie
When about to impart, on mature digestion,
Some thrilling view of the surplice-question)
—The Professor's grave voice, sweet though hoarse,
Broke into his Christmas-Eve's discourse.

XV.

And he began it by observing
How reason dictated that men
Should rectify the natural swerving,
By a reversion, now and then,
To the well-heads of knowledge, few
And far away, whence rolling grew
The life-stream wide whereat we drink,

Commingled, as we needs must think,
With waters alien to the source:
To do which, aimed this Eve's discourse.
Since, where could be a fitter time
For tracing backward to its prime,
This Christianity, this lake,
This reservoir, whereat we slake,
From one or other bank, our thirst?
So he proposed inquiring first
Into the various sources whence
This Myth of Christ is derivable;
Demanding from the evidence,
(Since plainly no such life was liveable)
How these phenomena should class?
Whether 'twere best opine Christ was,
Or never was at all, or whether
He was and was not, both together—
It matters little for the name,
So the Idea be left the same:
Only, for practical purpose' sake,
'Twas obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,
And the penman's prejudice, expanding
Fact into fable fit for the clime,
Had, by slow and sure degrees, translated it
Into this myth, this Individuum,—
Which, when reason had strained and abated it
Of foreign matter, gave, for residuum,
A Man!—a right true man, however,
Whose work was worthy a man's endeavour!
Work, that gave warrant almost sufficient
To his disciples, for rather believing
He was just omnipotent and omniscient,
As it gives to us, for as frankly receiving
His word, their tradition,—which, though it meant
Something entirely different
From all that those who only heard it,
In their simplicity thought and averred it,
Had yet a meaning quite as respectable:
For, among other doctrines delectable,
Was he not surely the first to insist on,

The natural sovereignty of our race?—
Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him,
The Vesture still within my hand.

XVI.

I could interpret its command.
This time He would not bid me enter
The exhausted air-bell of the Critic.
Truth's atmosphere may grow mephitic
When Papist struggles with Dissenter,
Impregnating its pristine clarity,
—One, by his daily fare's vulgarity,
Its gust of broken meat and garlic;
—One, by his soul's too-much presuming,
To turn the frankincense's fuming
And vapours of the candle starlike
Into the cloud her wings she buoys on:
And each, that sets the pure air seething,
Poisoning it for healthy breathing—
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;
Pumps out by a ruthless ingenuity
Atom by atom, and leaves you—vacuity.
Thus much of Christ, does he reject?
And what retain? His intellect?
What is it I must reverence duly?
Poor intellect for worship, truly,
Which tells me simply what was told
(If mere morality, bereft
Of the God in Christ, be all that's left)
Elsewhere by voices manifold;
With this advantage, that the stater
Made nowise the important stumble
Of adding, he, the sage and humble,
Was also one with the Creator.
You urge Christ's followers' simplicity:
But how does shifting blame, evade it?
Have wisdom's words no more felicity?
The stumbling-block, His speech—who laid it?
How comes it that for one found able,

To sift the truth of it from fable,
Millions believe it to the letter?
Christ's goodness, then—does that fare better?
Strange goodness, which upon the score
Of being goodness, the mere due
Of man to fellow-man, much more
To God,—should take another view
Of its possessor's privilege,
And bid him rule his race! You pledge
Your fealty to such rule? What, all—
From Heavenly John and Attic Paul,
And that brave weather-battered Peter
Whose stout faith only stood completer
For buffets, sinning to be pardoned,
As the more his hands hauled nets, they hardened,—
All, down to you, the man of men,
Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! So, you and I
Are sheep of a good man! and why?
The goodness,—how did he acquire it?
Was it self-gained, did God inspire it?
Choose which; then tell me, on what ground
Should its possessor dare propound
His claim to rise o'er us an inch?
Were goodness all some man's invention,
Who arbitrarily made mention
What we should follow, and where flinch,—
What qualities might take the style
Of right and wrong,—and had such guessing
Met with as general acquiescing
As graced the Alphabet erewhile,
When A got leave an Ox to be,
No Camel (quoth the Jews) like G,—
For thus inventing thing and title
Worship were that man's fit requital.
But if the common conscience must
Be ultimately judge, adjust
Its apt name to each quality
Already known,—I would decree
Worship for such mere demonstration
And simple work of nomenclature,
Only the day I praised, not Nature,

But Harvey, for the circulation.
I would praise such a Christ, with pride
And joy, that he, as none beside,
Had taught us how to keep the mind
God gave him, as God gave his kind,
Freer than they from fleshly taint!
I would call such a Christ our Saint,
As I declare our Poet, him
Whose insight makes all others dim:
A thousand poets pried at life,
And only one amid the strife
Rose to be Shakespeare! Each shall take
His crown, I'd say, for the world's sake—
Though some objected—"Had we seen
"The heart and head of each, what screen
"Was broken there to give them light,
"While in ourselves it shuts the sight,
"We should no more admire, perchance,
"That these found truth out at a glance,
"Than marvel how the bat discerns
"Some pitch-dark cavern's fifty turns,
"Led by a finer tact, a gift
"He boasts, which other birds must shift
"Without, and grope as best they can."
No, freely I would praise the man.—
Nor one whit more, if he contended
That gift of his, from God, descended.
Ah, friend, what gift of man's does not?
No nearer Something, by a jot,
Rise an infinity of Nothings
Than one: take Euclid for your teacher:
Distinguish kinds: do crownings, clothings,
Make that Creator which was creature?
Multiply gifts upon his head,
And what, when all's done, shall be said
But . . . the more gifted he, I ween!
That one's made Christ, another, Pilate,
And This might be all That has been,—
So what is there to frown or smile at?
What is left for us, save, in growth,
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,
From the gift looking to the Giver,

And from the cistern to the River,
And from the finite to Infinity,
And from man's dust to God's divinity?

XVII.

Take all in a word: the Truth in God's breast
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed:
Though He is so bright and we so dim,
We are made in His image to witness Him;
And were no eye in us to tell,
Instructed by no inner sense.
The light of Heaven from the dark of Hell,
That light would want its evidence,—
Though Justice, Good and Truth were still
Divine, if by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and Right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, therefore:
And, if no better proof you will care for,
—Whom do you count the worst man upon earth?
Be sure, he knows, in his conscience, more
Of what Right is, than arrives at birth
In the best man's acts that we bow before:
This last knows better—true; but my fact is,
'Tis one thing to know, and another to practise;
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practising what we know already.
And such an injunction and such a motive
As the God in Christ, do you waive, and "heady
High minded," hang your tablet-votive
Outside the fane on a finger-post?
Morality to the uttermost,
Supreme in Christ as we all confess,
Why need we prove would avail no jot
To make Him God, if God He were not?
What is the point where Himself lays stress
Does the precept run "Believe in Good,
"In Justice, Truth, now understood
"For the first time?"—or, "Believe in ME,

“Who lived and died, yet essentially
“Am Lord of Life?” Whoever can take
The same to his heart and for mere love’s sake
Conceive of the love,—that man obtains
A new truth; no conviction gains
Of an old one only, made intense
By a fresh appeal to his faded sense.

XVIII.

Can it be that He stays inside?
Is the Vesture left me to commune with?
Could my soul find aught to sing in tune with
Even at this lecture, if she tried?
Oh, let me at lowest sympathise
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain’s white roots
Without a throb for Christ’s attributes,
As the Lecturer makes his special boast!
If love’s dead there, it has left a ghost.
Admire we, how from heart to brain
(Though to say so strike the doctors dum
One instinct rises and falls again,
Restoring the equilibrium.
And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the Pearl of Price, at reason’s test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor’s lecture-table;
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such a condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it,
Which fact pays the damage done rewardingly,
So, prize we our dust and ashes accordingly!
“Go home and venerate the Myth
“I thus have experimented with—
“This Man, continue to adore him
“Rather than all who went before him,
“And all who ever followed after!”—
Surely for this I may praise you, my brother!
Will you take the praise in tears or laughter?

That's one point gained: can I compass another?
Unlearned love was safe from spurning—
Can't we respect your loveless learning?
Let us at least give Learning honour!
What laurels had we showered upon her,
Girding her loins up to perturb
Our theory of the Middle Verb;
Or Turklike brandishing a scimeter
O'er anapests in comic-trimeter;
Or curing the halt and maimed Iketides,
While we lounged on at our indebted ease:
Instead of which, a tricky demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon!
When Ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 'tis altogether;
Nor leaves he his congenial thistles
To go and browse on Paul's Epistles.
—And you, the audience, who might ravage
The world wide, enviably savage
Nor heed the cry of the retriever,
More than Herr Heine (before his fever),—
I do not tell a lie so arrant
As say my passion's wings are furled up,
And, without the plainest Heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give this world up—
But still, when you rub the brow meticulous,
And ponder the profit of turning holy
If not for God's, for your own sake solely,
—God forbid I should find you ridiculous!
Deduce from this lecture all that eases you,
Nay, call yourselves, if the calling pleases you,
"Christians,"—abhor the Deist's pravity,—
Go on, you shall no more move my gravity,
Than, when I see boys ride a-cockhorse
I find it in my heart to embarrass them
By hinting that their stick's a mock horse,
And they really carry what they say carries them.

XIX.

So sate I talking with my mind.
I did not long to leave the door
And find a new church, as before,

But rather was quiet and inclined
To prolong and enjoy the gentle resting
From further tracking and trying and testing.
This tolerance is a genial mood!
(Said I, and a little pause ensued).
One trims the bark 'twixt shoal and shelf,
And sees, each side, the good effects of it,
A value for religion's self,
A carelessness about the sects of it.
Let me enjoy my own conviction,
Not watch my neighbour's faith with fretfulness,
Still spying there some dereliction
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!
Better a mild indifferentism,
To teach that all our faiths (though duller
His shines through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one colour—
Sending me on a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,
Where I may see Saint, Savage, Sage
Fuse their respective creeds in one
Before the general Father's throne!

XX.

. . . 'T was the horrible storm began afresh!
The black night caught me in his mesh
Whirled me up, and flung me prone.
I was left on the college-step alone.
I looked, and far there, ever fleeting
Far, far away, the receding gesture,
And looming of the lessening Vesture,
Swept forward from my stupid hand,
While I watched my foolish heart expand
In the lazy glow of benevolence,
O'er the various modes of man's belief.
I sprang up with fear's vehemence.
—Needs must there be one way, our chief
Best way of worship: let me strive
To find it, and when found, contrive
My fellows also take their share.
This constitutes my earthly care:

God's is above it and distinct!
For I, a man, with men am linked,
And not a brute with brutes; no gain
That I experience, must remain
Unshared: but should my best endeavour
To share it, fail—subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May—doth, I will believe—bring back
All wanderers to a single track!
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me—no more, can I—
It is but for myself I know.
The world rolls witnessing around me
Only to leave me as it found me;
Men cry there, but my ear is slow.
Their races flourish or decay
—What boots it, while yon lucid way
Loaded with stars, divides the vault?
How soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening senses' hebetude,
She turns on my own life! So viewed,
No mere mote's-breadth but teems immense
With witnessings of providence:
And woe to me if when I look
Upon that record, the sole book
Unsealed to me, I take no heed
Of any warning that I read!
Have I been sure, this Christmas-Eve;
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,
Whereby the truth from heaven slid
Into my soul?—I cannot bid
The world admit He stooped to heal
My soul, as if in a thunder-peal
Where one heard noise, and one saw flame,
I only knew He named my name.
And what is the world to me, for sorrow
Or joy in its censures, when to-morrow
It drops the remark, with just-turned head
Then, on again—That man is dead?
Yes,—but for me—my name called,—drawn
As a conscript's lot from the lap's black yawn,

He has dipt into on a battle-dawn:
Bid out of life by a nod, a glance,—
Stumbling, mute-mazed, at nature's chance,—
With a rapid finger circled round,
Fixed to the first poor inch of ground,
To light from, where his foot was found;
Whose ear but a minute since lay free
To the wide camp's buzz and gossipry—
Summoned, a solitary man,
To end his life where his life began,
From the safe glad rear, to the dreadful van!
Soul of mine, hadst thou caught and held
By the hem of the Vesture . . .

XXI.

And I caught
At the flying Robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight,
God's mercy being infinite.
And scarce had the words escaped my tongue,
When, at a passionate bound, I sprung
Out of the wandering world of rain,
Into the little chapel again.

XXII.

How else was I found there, bolt upright
On my bench, as if I had never left it?
—Never flung out on the common at night
Nor met the storm and wedge-like cleft it,
Seen the raree-show of Peter's successor,
Or the laboratory of the Professor!
For the Vision, that was true, I wist,
True as that heaven and earth exist.
There sate my friend, the yellow and tall,
With his neck and its wen in the selfsame place;
Yet my nearest neighbour's cheek showed gall,
She had slid away a contemptuous space:
And the old fat woman, late so placable,
Eyed me with symptoms, hardly mistakeable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid:
In short a spectator might have fancied

That I had nodded betrayed by a slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
To wake up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such a disgrace have happened?
Each friend at my elbow had surely nudged it;
And, as for the sermon, where did my nap end?
Unless I heard it, could I have judged it?
Could I report as I do at the close,
First, the preacher speaks through his nose:
Second, his gesture is too emphatic:
Thirdly, to waive what's pedagogic,
The subject-matter itself lacks logic:
Fourthly, the English is ungrammatical.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,
Whom, if I pleased, I might to the task call
Of making square to a finite eye
The circle of infinity,
And find so all-but-just-succeeding!
Great news! the sermon proves no reading
Where bee-like in the flowers I may bury me,
Like Taylor's, the immortal Jeremy!
And now that I know the very worst of him,
What was it I thought to obtain at first of him?
Ha! Is God mocked, as He asks?
Shall I take on me to change His tasks,
And dare, despatched to a river-head
For a simple draught of the element,
Neglect the thing for which He sent,
And return with another thing instead?—
Saying . . . "Because the water found
"Welling up from underground,
"Is mingled with the taints of earth,
"While Thou, I know, dost laugh at dearth,
"And couldest, at a word, convulse
"The world with the leap of its river-pulse,—
"Therefore I turned from the oozeings muddy,
"And bring thee a chalice I found, instead:
"See the brave veins in the breccia ruddy!
"One would suppose that the marble bled.
"What matters the water? A hope I have nursed,
"That the waterless cup will quench my thirst."

—Better have knelt at the poorest stream
That trickles in pain from the straitest rift!
For the less or the more is all God's gift,
Who blocks up or breaks wide the granite-seam.
And here, is there water or not, to drink?
I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
This mode of worship, as most to His mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,
His All in All appears serene,
With the thinnest human veil between,
Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
The many motions of His spirit,
Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
For the preacher's merit or demerit,
It were to be wished the flaws were fewer
In the earthen vessel, holding treasure,
Which lies as safe in a golden ewer;
But the main thing is, does it hold good measure?
Heaven soon sets right all other matters!—
Ask, else, these ruins of humanity,
This flesh worn out to rags and tatters,
This soul at struggle with insanity,
Who thence take comfort, can I doubt,
Which an empire gained, were a loss without.
May it be mine! And let us hope
That no worse blessing befall the Pope,
Turn'd sick at last of the day's buffoonery,
Of his posturings and his petticoatings,
Beside the Bourbon bully's gloatings
In the bloody orgies of drunk poltroonery!
Nor may the Professor forego its peace
At Göttingen, presently, when, in the dusk
Of his life, if his cough, as I fear, should increase,
Prophesied of by that horrible husk;
And when, thicker and thicker, the darkness fills
The world through his misty spectacles,
And he gropes for something more substantial
Than a fable, myth, or personification,
May Christ do for him, what no mere man shall,
And stand confessed as the God of salvation!

Meantime, in the still recurring fear
Lest myself, at unawares, be found,
While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
Without my own made—I choose here!
The giving out of the hymn reclaims me;
I have done!—And if any blames me,
Thinking that merely to touch in brevity
The topics I dwell on, were unlawful,—
Or, worse, that I trench, with undue levity,
On the bounds of the Holy and the awful,
I praise the heart, and pity the head of him,
And refer myself to THEE, instead of him;
Who head and heart alike discernest,
Looking below light speech we utter,
When the frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May the truth shine out, stand ever before us!
I put up pencil and join chorus
To Hepzibah Tune, without further apology,
The last five verses of the third section
Of the seventeenth hymn in Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

Robert Browning

Cleon

"As certain also of your own poets have said"--

(Acts 17.28)

Cleon the poet (from the sprinkled isles,
Lily on lily, that o'erlace the sea
And laugh their pride when the light wave lisps "Greece")--
To Protus in his Tyranny: much health!

They give thy letter to me, even now:
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico
Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,--
Thy recognition of the use of life;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower,--
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect,--
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake--
Hadst ever in thy heart the luring hope
Of some eventual rest a-top of it,
Whence, all the tumult of the building hushed,
Thou first of men might'st look out to the East:

The vulgar saw thy tower, thou sawest the sun.
For this, I promise on thy festival
To pour libation, looking o'er the sea,
Making this slave narrate thy fortunes, speak
Thy great words, and describe thy royal face--
Wishing thee wholly where Zeus lives the most,
Within the eventual element of calm.

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
It is as thou hast heard: in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate.
That epos on thy hundred plates of gold
Is mine,--and also mine the little chant,
So sure to rise from every fishing-bark
When, lights at prow, the seamen haul their net.
The image of the sun-god on the phare,
Men turn from the sun's self to see, is mine;
The Pæo'er-storied its whole length,
As thou didst hear, with painting, is mine too.
I know the true proportions of a man
And woman also, not observed before;
And I have written three books on the soul,
Proving absurd all written hitherto,
And putting us to ignorance again.

For music,--why, I have combined the moods,
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;
Thus much the people know and recognize,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,
Look not so great, beside their simple way,
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point and no other at a time,--
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way--not ours, nor meant for ours.
And ours is greater, had we skill to know:
For, what we call this life of men on earth,
This sequence of the soul's achievements here
Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually

As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
But each part having reference to all,--
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,
Endure effacement by another part?
Was the thing done?--then, what's to do again?
See, in the chequered pavement opposite,
Suppose the artist made a perfect rhomb,
And next a lozenge, then a trapezoid--
He did not overlay them, superimpose
The new upon the old and blot it out,
But laid them on a level in his work,
Making at last a picture; there it lies.
So, first the perfect separate forms were made,
The portions of mankind; and after, so,
Occurred the combination of the same.
For where had been a progress, otherwise?
Mankind, made up of all the single men,--
In such a synthesis the labour ends.
Now mark me! those divine men of old time
Have reached, thou sayest well, each at one point
The outside verge that rounds our faculty;
And where they reached, who can do more than reach?
It takes but little water just to touch
At some one point the inside of a sphere,
And, as we turn the sphere, touch all the rest
In due succession: but the finer air
Which not so palpably nor obviously,
Though no less universally, can touch
The whole circumference of that emptied sphere,
Fills it more fully than the water did;
Holds thrice the weight of water in itself
Resolved into a subtler element.
And yet the vulgar call the sphere first full
Up to the visible height--and after, void;
Not knowing air's more hidden properties.
And thus our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus
To vindicate his purpose in our life:
Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?
Long since, I imaged, wrote the fiction out,
That he or other god descended here
And, once for all, showed simultaneously
What, in its nature, never can be shown,

Piecemeal or in succession;--showed, I say,
The worth both absolute and relative
Of all his children from the birth of time,
His instruments for all appointed work.
I now go on to image,--might we hear
The judgment which should give the due to each,
Show where the labour lay and where the ease,
And prove Zeus' self, the latent everywhere!
This is a dream:--but no dream, let us hope,
That years and days, the summers and the springs,
Follow each other with unwaning powers.
The grapes which dye thy wine are richer far,
Through culture, than the wild wealth of the rock;
The suave plum than the savage-tasted drupe;
The pastured honey-bee drops choicer sweet;
The flowers turn double, and the leaves turn flowers;
That young and tender crescent-moon, thy slave,
Sleeping above her robe as buoyed by clouds,
Refines upon the women of my youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer, no--
Nor swept string like Terpander, no--nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend:
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each other's art.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup's
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,
And show a better flower if not so large:
I stand myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand: what then?
I pass too surely: let at least truth stay!

And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,

My works, in all these varicoloured kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men--
Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life?
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,
I face death with success in my right hand:
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men? "For" (writest thou)
"Thou leavest much behind, while I leave nought.
Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?
The brazen statue to o'erlook my grave,
Set on the promontory which I named.
And that--some supple courtier of my heir
Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
I go then: triumph thou, who dost not go!"

Nay, thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind.
Is this apparent, when thou turn'st to muse
Upon the scheme of earth and man in chief,
That admiration grows as knowledge grows?
That imperfection means perfection hid,
Reserved in part, to grace the after-time?
If, in the morning of philosophy,
Ere aught had been recorded, nay perceived,
Thou, with the light now in thee, couldst have looked
On all earth's tenantry, from worm to bird,
Ere man, her last, appeared upon the stage--
Thou wouldst have seen them perfect, and deduced
The perfectness of others yet unseen.
Conceding which,--had Zeus then questioned thee,
"Shall I go on a step, improve on this,
Do more for visible creatures than is done?"
Thou wouldst have answered, "Ay, by making each
Grow conscious in himself--by that alone.
All's perfect else: the shell sucks fast the rock,
The fish strikes through the sea, the snake both swims

And slides, forth range the beasts, the birds take flight,
Till life's mechanics can no further go--
And all this joy in natural life is put
Like fire from off thy finger into each,
So exquisitely perfect is the same.
But 'tis pure fire, and they mere matter are;
It has them, not they it: and so I choose
For man, thy last premeditated work
(If I might add a glory to the scheme),
That a third thing should stand apart from both,
A quality arise within his soul,
Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself,
And so be happy." Man might live at first
The animal life: but is there nothing more?
In due time, let him critically learn
How he lives; and, the more he gets to know
Of his own life's adaptabilities,
The more joy-giving will his life become.
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best.

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said:
Let progress end at once,--man make no step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense."
In man there's failure, only since he left
The lower and unconscious forms of life.
We called it an advance, the rendering plain
Man's spirit might grow conscious of man's life,
And, by new lore so added to the old,
Take each step higher over the brute's head.
This grew the only life, the pleasure-house,
Watch-tower and treasure-fortress of the soul,
Which whole surrounding flats of natural life
Seemed only fit to yield subsistence to;
A tower that crowns a country. But alas,
The soul now climbs it just to perish there!
For thence we have discovered ('tis no dream--
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting us; and still the soul craves all,

And still the flesh replies, "Take no jot more
Than ere thou clombst the tower to look abroad!
Nay, so much less as that fatigue has brought
Deduction to it." We struggle, fain to enlarge
Our bounded physical recipiency,
Increase our power, supply fresh oil to life,
Repair the waste of age and sickness: no,
It skills not! life's inadequate to joy,
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take.
They praise a fountain in my garden here
Wherein a Naiad sends the water-bow
Thin from her tube; she smiles to see it rise.
What if I told her, it is just a thread
From that great river which the hills shut up,
And mock her with my leave to take the same?
The artificer has given her one small tube
Past power to widen or exchange--what boots
To know she might spout oceans if she could?
She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread:
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,
"See, man, how happy I live, and despair--
That I may be still happier--for thy use!"
If this were so, we could not thank our lord,
As hearts beat on to doing; 'tis not so--
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?
Still, no. If care--where is the sign? I ask,
And get no answer, and agree in sum,
O king, with thy profound discouragement,
Who seest the wider but to sigh the more.
Most progress is most failure: thou sayest well.

The last point now:--thou dost except a case--
Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts--to such a man as I
Who leave behind me living works indeed;
For, such a poem, such a painting lives.
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)
With feeling joy? confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)

With actually living?--Otherwise
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the king?
Because in my great epos I display
How divers men young, strong, fair, wise, can act--
Is this as though I acted? if I paint,
Carve the young Ph{oe}bus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself
The many years of pain that taught me art!
Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too.
Yon rower, with the moulded muscles there,
Lowering the sail, is nearer it than I.
I can write love-odes: thy fair slave's an ode.
I get to sing of love, when grown too grey
For being beloved: she turns to that young man,
The muscles all a-ripple on his back.
I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king!

"But," sayest thou--(and I marvel, I repeat,
To find thee trip on such a mere word) "what
Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
And Aeschylus, because we read his plays!"
Why, if they live still, let them come and take
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,
In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase--
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape,
When I shall know most, and yet least enjoy--
When all my works wherein I prove my worth,
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
I, I the feeling, thinking, acting man,
The man who loved his life so over-much,
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible,

I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
--To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us:
That, stung by straitness of our life, made strait
On purpose to make prized the life at large--
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!
Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
He must have done so, were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought die:
Glad for what was! Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him--
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all!
He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.
Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

Robert Browning

Confessional, The

[SPAIN.]

I.

It is a lie---their Priests, their Pope,
Their Saints, their ... all they fear or hope
Are lies, and lies---there! through my door
And ceiling, there! and walls and floor,
There, lies, they lie---shall still be hurled
Till spite of them I reach the world!

II.

You think Priests just and holy men!
Before they put me in this den
I was a human creature too,
With flesh and blood like one of you,
A girl that laughed in beauty's pride
Like lilies in your world outside.

III.

I had a lover---shame avaunt!
This poor wrenched body, grim and gaunt,
Was kissed all over till it burned,
By lips the truest, love e'er turned
His heart's own tint: one night they kissed
My soul out in a burning mist.

IV.

So, next day when the accustomed train
Of things grew round my sense again,
` `That is a sin," I said: and slow
With downcast eyes to church I go,
And pass to the confession-chair,
And tell the old mild father there.

V.

But when I falter Beltran's name,
` `Ha?" quoth the father; ` `much I blame
` `The sin; yet wherefore idly grieve?
` `Despair not---strenuously retrieve!
` `Nay, I will turn this love of thine
` `To lawful love, almost divine;

VI.

` `For he is young, and led astray,
` `This Beltran, and he schemes, men say,
` `To change the laws of church and state
` `So, thine shall be an angel's fate,
` `Who, ere the thunder breaks, should roll
` `Its cloud away and save his soul.

VII.

` `For, when he lies upon thy breast,
` `Thou mayst demand and be possessed
` `Of all his plans, and next day steal
` `To me, and all those plans reveal,
` `That I and every priest, to purge
` `His soul, may fast and use the scourge."

VIII.

That father's beard was long and white,
With love and truth his brow seemed bright;
I went back, all on fire with joy,
And, that same evening, bade the boy
Tell me, as lovers should, heart-free,
Something to prove his love of me.

IX.

He told me what he would not tell
For hope of heaven or fear of hell;
And I lay listening in such pride!
And, soon as he had left my side,
Tripped to the church by morning-light

To save his soul in his despite.

XI

I told the father all his schemes,
Who were his comrades, what their dreams;
` ` And now make haste," I said, ` ` to pray
` ` The one spot from his soul away;
` ` To-night he comes, but not the same
` ` Will look!" At night he never came.

XI.

Nor next night: on the after-morn,
I went forth with a strength new-born.
The church was empty; something drew
My steps into the street; I knew
It led me to the market-place:
Where, lo, on high, the father's face!

XII.

That horrible black scaffold dressed,
That stapled block ... God sink the rest!
That head strapped back, that blinding vest,
Those knotted hands and naked breast,
Till near one busy hangman pressed,
And, on the neck these arms caressed ...

XIII.

No part in aught they hope or fear!
No heaven with them, no hell!---and here,
No earth, not so much space as pens
My body in their worst of dens
But shall bear God and man my cry,
Lies---lies, again---and still, they lie!

Robert Browning

Confessions

What is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge, -is a suburb lane,
With a wall to my bedside hand.

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall;
And that farthest bottle labelled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl; I know, sir, it's improper,
My poor mind's out of tune.

Only, there was a way... you crept
Close by the side, to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge".

What right had a lounge up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,
With the good wall's help, -their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether",
And stole from stair to stair,

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir -used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was -
But then, how it was sweet!

Robert Browning

Count Gismond--Aix In Provence

Christ God who savest man, save most
Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
Chose time and place and company
To suit it; when he struck at length
My honour, 't was with all his strength.
And doubtlessly, ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed,
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

I thought they loved me, did me grace
To please themselves; 't was all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed
My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
A word, and straight the play had stopped.

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast;
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs-

And come out on the morning troop
Of merry friends who kissed my cheek,
And called me queen, and made me stoop
Under the canopy-(a streak
That pierced it, of the outside sun,

Powdered with gold its gloom's soft dun)-

And they could let me take my state
And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
My queen's-day-Oh I think the cause
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

However that be, all eyes were bent
Upon me, when my cousins cast
Theirs down; 't was time I should present
The victor's crown, but ... there, 't will last
No long time ... the old mist again
Blinds me as then it did. How vain!

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
With his two boys: I can proceed.
Well, at that moment, who should stalk
Forth boldly-to my face, indeed-
But Gauthier? and he thundered "Stay!"
And all stayed. "Bring no crowns, I say!

"Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
"About her! Let her shun the chaste,
"Or lay herself before their feet!
"Shall she, whose body I embraced
"A night long, queen it in the day?
"For honour's sake no crowns, I say!"

I? What I answered? As I live,
I never fancied such a thing
As answer possible to give.
What says the body when they spring
Some monstrous torture-engine's whole
Strength on it? No more says the soul.

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set
Himself to Satan; would who spend

A minute's mistrust on the end?

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
With one back-handed blow that wrote
In blood men's verdict there. North, South,
East, West, I looked. The lie was dead,
And damned, and truth stood up instead.

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart o' the joy, with my content
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him-I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot ... my memory leaves
No least stamp out nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on.

And e'en before the trumpet's sound
Was finished, prone lay the false knight,
Prone as his lie, upon the ground:
Gismond flew at him, used no sleight
O' the sword, but open-breasted drove,
Cleaving till out the truth he clove.

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said, "Here die, but end thy breath
"In full confession, lest thou fleet
"From my first, to God's second death!
"Say, hast thou lied? "And, "I have lied
"To God and her,"he said, and died.

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
-What safe my heart holds, though no word
Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers for ever, to a third

Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world; and scarce I felt
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

So, 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace!

Our elder boy has got the clear
Great brow, tho' when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it ... Gismond here?
And have you brought my tercel back?
I was just telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

Robert Browning

Cristina

I.

She should never have looked at me
If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty ... men, you call such,
I suppose ... she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
And yet leave much as she found them:
But I'm not so, and she knew it
When she fixed me, glancing round them,

II.

What? To fix me thus meant nothing?
But I can't tell (there's my weakness)
What her look said!---no vile cant, sure,
About ``need to strew the bleakness
``Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed.
``That the sea feels"---no strange yearning
``That such souls have, most to lavish
``Where there's chance of least returning."

III.

Oh, we're sunk enough here, God knows!
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure tho' seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out plainly from its false ones,
And apprise it if pursuing
Or the right way or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing.

IV.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honours perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,

While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
That away the rest have trifled.

V.

Doubt you if, in some such moment,
As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages,
While the true end, sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love-way,
With some other soul to mingle?

VI.

Else it loses what it lived for,
And eternally must lose it;
Better ends may be in prospect,
Deeper blisses (if you choose it),
But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together?

VII.

Oh, observe! Of course, next moment,
The world's honours, in derision,
Trampled out the light for ever:
Never fear but there's provision
Of the devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture!
---Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture!

VIII.

Such am I: the secret's mine now!
She has lost me, I have gained her;

Her soul's mine: and thus, grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder.
Life will just hold out the proving
Both our powers, alone and blended:
And then, come next life quickly!
This world's use will have been ended.

Robert Browning

De Gustibus---

I.

Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
 (If our loves remain)
 In an English lane,
By a cornfield-side a-flutter with poppies.
Hark, those two in the hazel coppice---
A boy and a girl, if the good fates please,
 Making love, say,---
 The happier they!
Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
 With the bean-flowers' boon,
 And the blackbird's tune,
 And May, and June!

III.

What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,
(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands)---
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
And one sharp tree---'tis a cypress---stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Before the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea without a break?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,

And says there's news to-day---the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling:
---She hopes they have not caught the felons.
Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me---
 (When fortune's malice
 Lost her---Calais)---
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, ``Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!

Robert Browning

Earth's Immortalities

FAME.

See, as the prettiest graves will do in time,
Our poet's wants the freshness of its prime;
Spite of the sexton's browsing horse, the sods
Have struggled through its binding osier rods;
Headstone and half-sunk footstone lean awry,
Wanting the brick-work promised by-and-by;
How the minute grey lichens, plate o'er plate,
Have softened down the crisp-cut name and date!

LOVE.

So, the year's done with
(_Love me for ever!_)
All March begun with,
April's endeavour;
May-wreaths that bound me
June needs must sever;
Now snows fall round me,
Quenching June's fever---
(_Love me for ever!_)

Robert Browning

Easter-Day

HOW very hard it is to be
A Christian! Hard for you and me,
—Not the mere task of making real
That duty up to its ideal,
Effecting thus complete and whole,
A purpose or the human soul—
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realise it, more or less,
With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
“This aim is greater,” you may say,
“And so more arduous every way.”
—But the importance of the fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
“Then, what if it be God’s intent
“That labour to this one result
“Shall seem unduly difficult?”
—Ah, that’s a question in the dark—
And the sole thing that I remark
Upon the difficulty, this;
We do not see it where it is,
At the beginning of the race:
As we proceed, it shifts its place,
And where we looked for palms to fall,
We find the tug’s to come,—that’s all.

II.

At first you say, “The whole, or chief
“Of difficulties, is Belief.
“Could I believe once thoroughly,
“The rest were simple. What? Am I
“An idiot, do you think? A beast?
“Prove to me only that the least
“Command of God is God’s indeed,
“And what injunction shall I need
“To pay obedience? Death so nigh

"When time must end, eternity
"Begin,—and cannot I compute?
"Weigh loss and gain together? suit
"My actions to the balance drawn,
"And give my body to be sawn
"Asunder, hacked in pieces, tied
"To horses, stoned, burned, crucified,
"Like any martyr of the list?
"How gladly,—if I made acquist,
"Through the brief minutes' fierce annoy,
"Of God's eternity of joy."

III.

—And certainly you name the point
Whereon all turns: for could you joint
This flexile finite life once tight
Into the fixed and infinite,
You, safe inside, would spurn what's out,
With carelessness enough, no doubt—
Would spurn mere life: but where time brings
To their next stage your reasonings,
Your eyes, late wide, begin to wink
Nor see the path so well, I think.

IV.

You say, "Faith may be, one agrees,
"A touchstone for God's purposes,
"Even as ourselves conceive of them.
"Could He acquit us or condemn
"For holding what no hand can loose,
"Rejecting when we can't but choose?
"As well award the victor's wreath
"To whosoever should take breath
"Duly each minute while he lived—
"Grant Heaven, because a man contrived
"To see the sunlight every day
"He walked forth on the public way.
"You must mix some uncertainty
"With faith, if you would have faith be.
"Why, what but faith, do we abhor
"And idolize each other for—
"—Faith in our evil, or our good,

"Which is or is not understood
"Aright by those we love or those
"We hate, thence called our friends or foes?
"Your mistress saw your spirit's grace,
"When, turning from the ugly face,
"I found belief in it too hard;
"And both of us have our reward.
"—Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
"Weak beings, to go using thus
"A touchstone for our little ends,
"And try with faith the foes and friends;
"—But God, bethink you! I would fain
"Conceive of the Creator's reign
"As based upon exacter laws
"Than creatures build by with applause.
"In all God's acts—(as Plato cries
"He doth)—He should geometrize.
"Whence, I desiderate . . .

V.

I see!

You would grow smoothly as a tree.
Soar heavenward, straightly up like fire—
God bless you—there's your world entire
Needing no faith, if you think fit;
Go there, walk up and down in it!
The whole creation travails, groans—
Contrive your music from its moans,
Without or let or hindrance, friend!
That's an old story, and its end
As old—you come back (be sincere)
With every question you put here
(Here where there once was, and is still,
We think, a living oracle,
Whose answers you stood carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat,—
Besides, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need!
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sate still, all and each
Persuaded that our earth had speech

Of God's, writ down, no matter if
In cursive type or hieroglyph,—
Which one fact frees us from the yoke
Of guessing why He never spoke.
You come back in no better plight
Than when you left us,—am I right?

VI.

So the old process, I conclude,
Goes on, the reasoning's pursued
Further. You own. "Tis well averred,
"A scientific faith's absurd,
"—Frustrates the very end 'twas meant
"To serve: so I would rest content
"With a mere probability,
"But, probable; the chance must lie
"Clear on one side,—lie all in rough,
"So long as there is just enough
"To pin my faith to, though it hap
"Only at points: from gap to gap
"One hangs up a huge curtain so,
"Grandly, nor seeks to have it go
"Foldless and flat along the wall:
"—What care I that some interval
"Of life less plainly might depend
"On God? I'd hang there to the end;
"And thus I should not find it hard
"To be a Christian and debarred
"From trailing on the earth, till furled
"Away by death!—Renounce the world?
"Were that a mighty hardship? Plan
"A pleasant life, and straight some man
"Beside you, with, if he thought fit,
"Abundant means to compass it,
"Shall turn deliberate aside
"To try and live as, if you tried
"You clearly might, yet most despise.
"One friend of mine wears out his eyes,
"Slighting the stupid joys of sense,
"In patient hope that, ten years hence,
"Somewhat completer he may see
"His list of lepidopteræ:

"While just the other who most laughs
"At him, above all epitaphs
"Aspires to have his tomb describe
"Himself as Sole among the tribe
"Of snuffbox-fanciers, who possessed
"A Grignon with the Regent's crest.
"So that, subduing as you want,
"Whatever stands predominant
"Among my earthly appetites
"For tastes, and smells, and sounds, and sights,
"I shall be doing that alone,
"To gain a palm-branch and a throne,
"Which fifty people undertake
"To do, and gladly, for the sake
"Of giving a Semitic guess,
"Or playing pawns at blindfold chess."

VII.

Good! and the next thing is,—look round
For evidence enough. 'Tis found,
No doubt: as is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search—you'll find
What you desire, and that's to be
A Christian: what says History?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah's whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That Faith might clap her wings and crow
From such an eminence! Or, no—
The Human Heart's best; you prefer
Making that prove the minister
To truth; you probe its wants and needs
And hopes and fears, then try what creeds
Meet these most aptly,—resolute
That Faith plucks such substantial fruit
Wherever these two correspond,
She little needs to look beyond,
To puzzle out what Orpheus was,
Or Dionysius Zagrias.

You'll find sufficient, as I say,
To satisfy you either way.
You wanted to believe; your pains
Are crowned—you do: and what remains?
Renounce the world!—Ah, were it done
By merely cutting one by one
Your limbs off, with your wise head last,
How easy were it!—how soon past,
If once in the believing mood!
Such is man's usual gratitude,
Such thanks to God do we return,
For not exacting that we spurn
A single gift of life, forego
One real gain,—only taste them so
With gravity and temperance,
That those mild virtues may enhance
Such pleasures, rather than abstract—
Last spice of which, will be the fact
Of love discerned in every gift;
While, when the scene of life shall shift,
And the gay heart be taught to ache,
As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy,—the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of Love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before.
So plain is it that all the more
God's dispensation's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briars, thistles, from our private plot,
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!

VIII.

Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!
Then, what, my friend,—(so I pursue
Our parley)—you indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth . . . Enough! you know
The all-stupendous tale,—that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all, the earth

Shuddered at,—all, the heavens grew black
Rather than see; all, Nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested,—it took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins,—concede
That if He blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere not
So very disproportionate!
Or there might be another fate—
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that Day's price,
The impure in their impurities,
Leave formal licence and complete
To choose the fair, and pick the sweet.
But there be certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake, to overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for loss,
And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they proclaim)
In wickedness,—come out of it!—
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every nerve
At thought of what deaf ears deserve,—
How do you counsel in the case?

IX.

"I'd take, by all means, in your place,
"The safe side, since it so appears:
"Deny myself, a few brief years,
"The natural pleasure, leave the fruit
"Or cut the plant up by the root.
"Remember what a martyr said
"On the rude tablet overhead—

“I was born sickly, poor and mean,
“A slave: no misery could screen
“The holders of the pearl of price
“From Cæsar’s envy; therefore twice
“I fought with beasts, and three times saw
“My children suffer by his law—
“At last my own release was earned:
“I was some time in being burned,
“But at the close a Hand came through
“The fire above my head, and drew
“My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
“Sergius, a brother, writes for me
“This testimony on the wall—
“For me, I have forgot it all.’
“You say right; this were not so hard!
“And since one nowise is debarred
“From this, why not escape some sins
“By such a method?”

X.

—Then begins
To the old point, revulsion new—
(For ’tis just this, I bring you to)
If after all we should mistake,
And so renounce life for the sake
Of death and nothing else? You hear
Our friends we jeered at, send the jeer
Back to ourselves with good effect—
‘There were my beetles to collect!’
‘My box—a trifle, I confess,
‘But here I hold it, ne’ertheless!’
Poor idiots, (let us pluck up heart
And answer) we, the better part
Have chosen, though ’twere only hope,—
Nor envy moles like you that grope
Amid your veritable muck,
More than the grasshoppers would truck,
For yours, their passionate life away,
That spends itself in leaps all day
To reach the sun, you want the eyes
To see, as they the wings to rise
And match the noble hearts of them!

So, the contemner we contemn,—
And, when doubt strikes us, so, we ward
Its stroke off, caught upon our guard,
—Not struck enough to overturn
Our faith, but shake it—make us learn
What I began with, and, I wis,
End, having proved,—how hard it is
To be a Christian!

XI.

“Proved, or not,
“Howe’er you wis, small thanks, I wot,
“You get of mine, for taking pains
“To make it hard to me. Who gains
“By that, I wonder? Here I live
“In trusting ease; and do you drive
“At causing me to lose what most
“Yourself would mourn for when ‘twas lost?”

XII.

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave St. Paul for Æschylus?—
—Who made his Titan’s arch-device
The giving men blind hopes to spice
The meal of life with, else devoured
In bitter haste, while lo! Death loured
Before them at the platter’s edge!
If faith should be, as we allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavors with, or meant
(Like that brave curry of his Grace)
To take at need the victuals’ place?
If having dined you would digest
Besides, and turning to your rest
Should find instead . . .

XIII.

Now, you shall see
And judge if a mere foppery
Pricks on my speaking! I resolve
To utter . . . yes, it shall devolve
On you to hear as solemn, strange

And dread a thing as in the range
Of facts,—or fancies, if God will—
E'er happened to our kind! I still
Stand in the cloud, and while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak, perhaps;
Seeing that as I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find veritable listeners,
My story, reason's self avers
Must needs be false—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London streets all day,
Be what I fear,—my warnings fray
No one, and no one they convert,
And no one helps me to assert
How hard it is to really be
A Christian, and in vacancy
I pour this story!

XIV.

I commence
By trying to inform you, whence
It comes that every Easter-night
As now, I sit up, watch, till light
Shall break, those chimney-stacks and roofs
Give, through my window-pane, grey proofs
That Easter-day is breaking slow.
On such a night, three years ago,
It chanced that I had cause to cross
The common, where the chapel was,
Our friend spoke of, the other day—
You've not forgotten, I dare say.
I fell to musing of the time
So close, the blessed matin-prime
All hearts leap up at, in some guise—
One could not well do otherwise.
Insensibly my thoughts were bent
Toward the main point; I overwent
Much the same ground of reasoning
As you and I just now: one thing
Remained, however—one that tasked
My soul to answer; and I asked,

Fairly and frankly, what might be
 That History, that Faith, to me—
 —Me there—not me, in some domain
 Built up and peopled by my brain,
 Weighing its merits as one weighs
 Mere theories for blame or praise,
 —The Kingcraft of the Lucumons,
 Or Fourier's scheme, its pros and cons,—
 But as my faith, or none at all.
 'How were my case, now, should I fall
 'Dead here, this minute—do I lie
 'Faithful or faithless?'—Note that I
 Inclined thus ever!—little prone
 For instance, when I slept alone
 In childhood, to go calm to sleep
 And leave a closet where might keep
 His watch perdue some murderer
 Waiting till twelve o'clock to stir,
 As good, authentic legends tell
 He might—'But how improbable!
 'How little likely to deserve
 'The pains and trial to the nerve
 'Of thrusting head into the dark,'—
 Urged my old nurse, and bade me mark
 Besides, that, should the dreadful scout
 Really lie hid there, to leap out
 At first turn of the rusty key,
 It were small gain that she could see
 In being killed upon the floor
 And losing one night's sleep the more.
 I tell you, I would always burst
 The door ope, know my fate at first.—
 This time, indeed, the closet penned
 No such assassin: but a friend
 Rather, peeped out to guard me, fit
 For counsel, Common Sense, to-wit,
 Who said a good deal that might pass,—
 Heartening, impartial too, it was,
 Judge else: 'For, soberly now,—who
 'Should be a Christian if not you?'
 (Hear how he smoothed me down). 'One takes
 'A whole life, sees what course it makes

'Mainly, and not by fits and starts—
'In spite of stoppage which imparts
'Fresh value to the general speed:
'A life, with none, would fly indeed:
'Your progressing is slower-right!
'We deal with progressing, not flight.
'Through baffling senses passionate,
'Fancies as restless,—with a freight
'Of knowledge cumbersome enough
'To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
'Not serve as ballast in the hold,
'I find, 'mid dangers manifold,
'The good bark answers to the helm
'Where Faith sits, easier to o'erwhelm
'Than some stout peasant's heavenly guide,
'Whose hard head could not, if it tried,
'Conceive a doubt, or understand
'How senses hornier than his hand
'Should 'tice the Christian off, his guard—
'More happy! But shall we award
'Less honour to the hull, which, dogged
'By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
'Masts by the board, and bulwarks gone,
'And stanchions going, yet bears on,—
'Than to mere life-boats, built to save,
'And triumph o'er the breaking wave?
'Make perfect your good ship as these,
'And what were her performances!
I added—'Would the ship reached home!
'I wish indeed "God's kingdom come—"
'The day when I shall see appear
'His bidding, as my duty, clear
'From doubt! And it shall dawn, that day,
'Some future season; Easter may
'Prove, not impossibly, the time—
'Yes, that were striking—fates would chime
'So aptly! Easter-morn, to bring
'The Judgment!—deeper in the Spring
'Than now, however, when there's snow
'Capping the hills; for earth must show
'All signs of meaning to pursue
'Her tasks as she was wont to do—

`—The lark, as taken by surprise
`As we ourselves, shall recognise
`Sudden the end: for suddenly
`It comes—the dreadfulness must be
`In that—all warrants the belief—
“At night it cometh like a thief.”
`I fancy why the trumpet blows;
`—Plainly, to wake one. From repose
`We shall start up, at last awake
`From life, that insane dream we take
`For waking now, because it seems.
`And as, when now we wake from dreams,
`We say, while we recall them, “Fool,
“To let the chance slip, linger cool
“When such adventure offered! Just
“A bridge to cross, a dwarf to thrust
“Aside, a wicked mage to stab—
“And, lo ye, I had kissed Queen Mab,”—
`So shall we marvel why we grudged
`Our labours here, and idly judged
`Of Heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
`Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
`To plead at all! I speak no worse
`Nor better than my ancient nurse
`When she would tell me in my youth
`I well deserved that shapes uncouth
`Should fright and tease me in my sleep—
`Why did I not in memory keep
`Her precept for the evil’s cure?
“Pinch your own arm, boy, and be sure
“You’ll wake forthwith!”

XV.

And as I said
This nonsense, throwing back my head
With light complacent laugh, I found
Suddenly all the midnight round
One fire. The dome of Heaven had stood
As made up of a multitude
Of handbreadth cloudlets, one vast rack
Of ripples infinite and black,
From sky to sky. Sudden there went,

Like horror and astonishment,
A fierce vindictive scribble of red
Quick flame across, as if one said
(The angry scribe of Judgment) 'There—
'Burn it!' And straight I was aware
That the whole ribwork round, minute
Cloud touching cloud beyond compute,
Was tinted each with its own spot
Of burning at the core, till clot
Jammed against clot, and spilt its fire
Over all heaven, which 'gan suspire
As fanned to measure equable,—
As when great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither oft the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct could trace
The sharp black ridgy outlines left
Unburned like network—then, each cleft
The fire had been sucked back into,
Regorged, and out it surging flew
Furiously, and night writhed inflamed,
Till, tolerating to be tamed
No longer, certain rays world-wide
Shot downwardly, on every side,
Caught past escape; the earth was lit;
As if a dragon's nostril split
And all his famished ire o'erflowed;
Then, as he winced at his Lord's goad,
Back he inhaled: whereat I found
The clouds into vast pillars bound,
Based on the corners of the earth,
Propping the skies at top: a dearth
Of fire i' the violet intervals,
Leaving exposed the utmost walls
Of time, about to tumble in
And end the world.

XVI.

I felt begin
The Judgment-Day: to retrocede
Was too late now.—'In very deed,

(I uttered to myself) 'that Day!'
The intuition burned away
All darkness from my spirit too—
There, stood I, found and fixed, I knew,
Choosing the world. The choice was made—
And naked and disguiseless stayed,
An unevadeable, the fact.
My brain held ne'ertheless compact
Its senses, nor my heart declined
Its office—rather, both combined
To help me in this juncture—I
Lost not a second,—agony
Gave boldness: there, my life had end
And my choice with it—best defend,
Applaud them! I resolved to say,
So was I framed by Thee, this way
'I put to use Thy senses here!
'It was so beautiful, so near,
'Thy world,—what could I do but choose
'My part there? Nor did I refuse
'To look above the transient boon
'In time—but it was hard so soon
'As in a short life, to give up
'Such beauty: I had put the cup
'Undrained of half its fullness, by;
'But, to renounce it utterly,
'—That was too hard! Nor did the Cry
'Which bade renounce it, touch my brain
'Authentically deep and plain
'Enough, to make my lips let go.
'But Thou, who knowest all, dost know
'Whether I was not, life's brief while,
'Endeavouring to reconcile
'Those lips—too tardily, alas!
'To letting the dear remnant pass,
'One day,—some drops of earthly good
'Untasted! Is it for this mood,
'That Thou, whose earth delights so well,
'Has made its complement a Hell?

XVII.

A final belch of fire like blood,

Overbroke all, next, in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Was fire, and both, one extasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a Voice
Beside me spoke thus, "All is done,
"Time end's, Eternity's begun,
"And thou art judged for evermore!"

XVIII.

I looked up; all was as before;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead,
No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life: 'twas the last watch of night,
Except what brings the morning quite,
When the armed angel, conscience-clear
His task nigh done, leans o'er his spear
And gazes on the earth he guards,
Safe one night more through all its wards,
Till God relieve him at his post.
'A dream—a waking dream at most!'
(I spoke out quick that I might shake
The horrid nightmare off, and wake.)
'The world's gone, yet the world is here?
'Are not all things as they appear?
'Is Judgment past for me alone?
'—And where had place the Great White Throne?
'The rising of the Quick and Dead?
'Where stood they, small and great? Who read
'The sentence from the Opened Book?'
So, by degrees, the blood forsook
My heart, and let it beat afresh:
I knew I should break through the mesh
Of horror, and breathe presently—
When, lo, again, the Voice by me!

XIX.

I saw . . . Oh, brother, 'mid far sands
The palm-tree-cinctured city stands,—
Bright-white beneath, as Heaven, bright-blue,

Above it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisaal laugh at fate:
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
Striving, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow: what if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise
The imaged Vapour, head to foot.
Surveying, motionless and mute,
Its work, ere, in a whirlwind rapt,
It vanish up again?—So hapt
My chance. HE stood there. Like the smoke
Pillared o'er Sodom, when day broke,—
I saw Him. One magnificent pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His Dread, and coiled in snaky swathes
About His feet: night's black, that bathes
All else, broke, grizzled with despair,
Against the soul of blackness there.
A gesture told the mood within—
That wrapped right hand which based the chin,—
That intense meditation fixed
On His procedure,—pity mixed
With the fulfilment of decree.
Motionless, thus, He spoke to me,
Who fell before His feet, a mass,
No man now.

XX.

"All is come to pass.
"Such shows are over for each soul
"They had respect to. In the roll
"Of Judgment which convinced mankind
"Of sin, stood many, bold and blind,
"Terror must burn the truth into:
"Their fate for them!—thou had'st to do
"With absolute omnipotence,
"Able its judgments to dispense
"To the whole race, as every one
"Were its sole object: that is done:

"God is, thou art,—the rest is hurled
 "To nothingness for thee. This world,
 "This finite life, thou hast preferred,
 "In disbelief of God's own word,
 "To Heaven and to Infinity.
 "Here, the probation was for thee,
 "To show thy soul the earthly mixed
 "With Heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
 "The earthly joys lay palpable,—
 "A taint, in each, distinct as well;
 "The Heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
 "Above them, but as truly were
 "Taintless, so in their nature, best.
 "Thy choice was earth: thou didst attest
 "Twas fitter spirit should subserve
 "The flesh, than flesh refine to nerve
 "Beneath the spirit's play. Advance
 "No claim to their inheritance
 "Who chose the spirit's fugitive
 "Brief gleams, and thought, 'This were to live
 "'Indeed, if rays, completely pure
 "'From flesh that dulls them, should endure,—
 "'Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
 "'Our earth, to show how cold and swart
 "'It lies beneath their fire, but stand
 "'As stars should, destined to expand,
 "'Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
 "Thou said'st,—'Let Spirit star the dome
 "'Of sky, that flesh may miss no peak,
 "'No nook of earth,—I shall not seek
 "'Its service further!' Thou art shut
 "Out of the Heaven of Spirit; glut
 "Thy sense upon the world: 'tis thine
 "For ever—take it!"

XXI.

'How? Is mine,
 'The world?' (I cried, while my soul broke
 Out in a transport) 'Hast thou spoke
 'Plainly in that? Earth's exquisite
 'Treasures of wonder and delight,
 'For me?'

XXII.

The austere Voice returned,—
"So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
"What God accounteth happiness,
"Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
"What Hell may be His punishment
"For those who doubt if God invent
"Better than they. Let such men rest
"Content with what they judged the best.
"Let the Unjust usurp at will:
"The Filthy shall be filthy still:
"Miser, there waits the gold for thee!
"Hater, indulge thine enmity!
"And thou, whose heaven, self-ordained,
"Was to enjoy earth unrestrained,
"Do it! Take all the ancient show!
"The woods shall wave, the rivers flow,
"And men apparently pursue
"Their works, as they were wont to do,
"While living in probation yet:
"I promise not thou shalt forget
"The past, now gone to its account,
"But leave thee with the old amount
"Of faculties, nor less nor more,
"Unvisited, as heretofore,
"By God's free spirit, that makes an end.
"So, once more, take thy world; expend
"Eternity upon its shows,—
"Flung thee as freely as one rose
"Out of a summer's opulence,
"Over the Eden-barrier whence
"Thou art excluded, Knock in vain!"

XXIII.

I sate up. All was still again.
I breathed free: to my heart, back fled
The warmth. 'But, all the world!' (I said)
I stooped and picked a leaf of fern,
And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Exist, if one may trust reports,

Each as distinct and beautiful
As this, the very first I cull.
Think, from the first leaf to the last!
Conceive, then, earth's resources! Vast
Exhaustless beauty, endless change
Of wonder! and this foot shall range
Alps, Andes,—and this eye devour
The bee-bird and the aloe-flower?

XXIV.

And the Voice, "Welcome so to rate
"The arras-folds that variegate
"The earth, God's antechamber, well!
"The wise, who waited there, could tell
"By these, what royalties in store
"Lay one step past the entrance-door.
"For whom, was reckoned, not too much,
"This life's munificence? For such
"As thou,—a race, whereof not one
"Was able, in a million,
"To feel that any marvel lay
"In objects round his feet all day;
"Nor one, in many millions more,
"Willing, if able, to explore
"The secreter, minuter charm!
"—Brave souls, a fern-leaf could disarm
"Of power to cope with God's intent,—
"Or scared if the South Firmament
"With North-fire did its wings reflodge!
"All partial beauty was a pledge
"Of beauty in its plenitude:
"But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
"Retain it—plenitude be theirs
"Who looked above!"

XXV.

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
'What is it though my trust is gone
'From natural things? Henceforth my part
'Be less with Nature than with Art!
'For Art supplants, gives mainly worth

'To Nature; 'tis Man stamps the earth—
'And I will seek his impress, seek
'The statuary of the Greek,
'Italy's painting—there my choice
'Shall fix!

XXVI.

"Obtain it," said the Voice.
"The one form with its single act,
"Which sculptors laboured to abstract,
"The one face, painters tried to draw,
"With its one look, from throngs they saw!
"And that perfection in their soul,
"These only hinted at? The whole,
"They were but parts of? What each laid
"His claim to glory on?—afraid
"His fellow-men should give him rank
"By the poor tentatives he shrank
"Smitten at heart from, all the more,
"That gazers pressed in to adore!
"Shall I be judged by only these?
"If such his soul's capacities,
"Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
"What pomp in Buonarotti's brow,
"With its new palace-brain where dwells
"Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
"That crumbled with the transient clay!
"What visions will his right hand's sway
"Still turn to form, as still they burst
"Upon him? How will he quench thirst,
"Titanically infantine,
"Laid at the breast of the Divine?
"Does it confound thee,—this first page
"Emblazoning man's heritage?—
"Can this alone absorb thy sight,
"As if they were not infinite,—
"Like the omnipotence which tasks
"Itself, to furnish all that asks
"The soul it means to satiate?
"What was the world, the starry state
"Of the broad skies,—what, all displays
"Of power and beauty intermixed,

"Which now thy soul is chained betwixt,—
"What, else, than needful furniture
"For life's first stage? God's work, be sure,
"No more spreads wasted, than falls scant:
"He filled, did not exceed, Man's want
"Of beauty in this life. And pass
"Life's line,—and what has earth to do,
"Its utmost beauty's appanage,
"With the requirements of next stage?
"Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?
"Needs must it be, while understood
"For man's preparatory state;
"Nothing to heighten nor abate:
"But transfer the completeness here,
"To serve a new state's use,—and drear
"Deficiency gapes every side!
"The good, tried once, were bad, retried.
"See the enwrapping rocky niche,
"Sufficient for the sleep, in which
"The lizard breathes for ages safe:
"Split the mould—and as this would chafe
"The creature's new world-widened sense,
"One minute after you dispense
"The thousand sounds and sights that broke
"In, on him, at the chisel's stroke,—
"So, in God's eyes, the earth's first stuff
"Was, neither more nor less, enough
"To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
"You reckoned it immeasurable:
"So thinks the lizard of his vault!
"Could God be taken in default,
"Short of contrivances, by you,—
"Or reached, ere ready to pursue
"His progress through eternity?
"That chambered rock, the lizard's world,
"Your easy mallet's blow has hurled
"To nothingness for ever; so,
"Has God abolished at a blow
"This world, wherein his saints were pent,—
"Who, though, found grateful and content,
"With the provision there, as thou,
"Yet knew He would not disallow

"Their spirit's hunger, felt as well,—
"Unsated,—not unsatable,
"As Paradise gives proof. Deride
"Their choice now, thou who sit'st outside!"

XXVII.

I cried in anguish, 'Mind, the mind,
'So miserably cast behind,
'To gain what had been wisely lost!
'Oh, let me strive to make the most
'Of the poor stunted soul, I nipped
'Of budding wings, else well equipt
'For voyage from summer isle to isle!
'And though she needs must reconcile
'Ambition to the life on ground,
'Still, I can profit by late found
'But precious knowledge. Mind is best—
'I will seize mind, forego the rest
'And try how far my tethered strength
'May crawl in this poor breadth and length.
'—Let me, since I can fly no more,
'At least spin dervish-like about
'(Till giddy rapture almost doubt
'I fly) through circling sciences,
'Philosophies and histories!
'Should the whirl slacken there, then Verse,
'Fining to music, shall asperse
'Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
'Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
'Not joyless, though more favoured feet
'Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
'The floor? At least earth's bond is broke!"

XXVIII.

Then, (sickening even while I spoke
'Let me alone! No answer, pray,
'To this! I know what Thou wilt say
'All still is earth's,—to Know, as much
'As Feel its truths, which if we touch
'With sense or apprehend in soul,
'What matter? I have reached the goal—
"Whereto does Knowledge serve!" will burn

'My eyes, too sure, at every turn!
'I cannot look back now, nor stake
'Bliss on the race, for running's sake.
'The goal's a ruin like the rest!'—
—“And so much worse thy latter quest,
(Added the Voice) “that even on earth
“Whenever, in man's soul, had birth
“Those intuitions, grasps of guess,
“That pull the more into the less,
“Making the finite comprehend
“Infinity, the bard would spend
“Such praise alone, upon his craft,
“As, when wind-lyres obey the waft,
“Goes to the craftsman who arranged
“The seven strings, changed them and rechanged—
“Knowing it was the South that harped.
“He felt his song, in singing, warped,
“Distinguished his and God's part: whence
“A world of spirit as of sense
“Was plain to him, yet not too plain,
“Which he could traverse, not remain
“A guest in:—else were permanent
“Heaven upon earth, its gleams were meant
“To sting with hunger for the light,—
“Made visible in Verse, despite
“The veiling weakness,-truth by means
“Of fable, showing while it screens,—
“Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
“Was ever fable on outside.
“Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
“Now, the whole sum's his heritage!
“Take up thy world, it is allowed,
“Thou who hast entered in the cloud!

XXIX.

Then I—'Behold, my spirit bleeds,
'Catches no more at broken reeds,—
'But lilies flower those reeds above—
'I let the world go, and take love!
'Love survives in me, albeit those
'I loved are henceforth masks and shows,
'Not loving men and women: still

'I mind how love repaired all ill,
'Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends
'With parents, brothers, children, friends!
'Some semblance of a woman yet
'With eyes to help me to forget,
'Shall live with me; and I will match
'Departed love with love, attach
'Its fragments to my whole, nor scorn
'Tho poorest of the grains of corn
'I save from shipwreck on this isle,
'Trusting its barrenness may smile
'With happy foodful green one day,
'More precious for the pains. I pray,
'For love, then, only!'

XXX.

At the word,
The Form, I looked to have been stirred
With pity and approval, rose
O'er me, as when the headsman throws
Axe over shoulder to make end—
I fell prone, letting Him expend
His wrath, while, thus, the inflicting Voice
Smote me. "Is this thy final choice?
Love is the best? 'Tis somewhat late!
"And all thou dost enumerate
"Of power and beauty in the world,
"The mightiness of love was curled
"Inextricably round about.
"Love lay within it and without,
"To clasp thee,—but in vain! Thy soul
"Still shrunk from Him who made the whole,
"Still set deliberate aside
"His love!—Now take love! Well betide
"Thy tardy conscience! Haste to take
"The show of love for the name's sake,
"Remembering every moment Who
"Reside creating thee unto
"These ends, and these for thee, was said
"To undergo death in thy stead
"In flesh like thine: so ran the tale.
"What doubt in thee could countervail

"Belief in it? Upon the ground
"That in the story had been found
"Too much love? How could God love so?
"He who in all his works below
"Adapted to the needs of man,
"Made love the basis of the plan,—
"Did love, as was demonstrated:
"While man, who was so fit instead,
"To hate, as every day gave proof,—
"You thought man, for his kind's behoof,
"Both could and would invent that scheme
"Of perfect love—'twould well beseem
"Cain's nature thou wast wont to praise,
"Not tally with God's usual ways!"

XXXI.

And I cowered deprecatingly—
'Thou Love of God! Or let me die,
'Or grant what shall seem Heaven almost!
'Let me not know that all is lost,
'Though lost it be—leave me not tied
'To this despair, this corpse-like bride!
'Let that old life seem mine—no more—
'With limitation as before,
'With darkness, hunger, toil, distress:
'Be all the earth a wilderness!
'Only let me go on, go on,
'Still hoping ever and anon
'To reach one eve the Better Land!'

XXXII.

Then did the Form expand, expand—
I knew Him through the dread disguise,
As the whole God within his eyes
Embraced me.

XXXIII.

When I lived again,
The day was breaking,—the grey plain
I rose from, silvered thick with dew.
Was this a vision? False or true?
Since then, three varied years are spent,

And commonly my mind is bent
To think it was a dream—be sure
A mere dream and distemperature—
The last day's watching: then the night,—
The shock of that strange Northern Light
Set my head swimming, bred in me
A dream. And so I live, you see,
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,
Prefer, still struggling to effect
My warfare; happy that I can
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
Not left in God's contempt apart,
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
Thank God she still each method tries
To catch me, who may yet escape,
She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
Thank God, no paradise stands barred
To entry, and I find it hard
To be a Christian, as I said!
Still every now and then my head
Raised glad, sinks mournful—all grows drear
Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
'No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
'Condemned to earth for ever, shut
'From Heaven' . . .
But Easter-Day breaks! But
Christ rises! Mercy every way
Is infinite,—and who can say?

Robert Browning

Englishman In Italy, The

PIANO DI SORRENTO

Fort` >, Fort` >, my beloved one,
Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet!
I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco.
Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
As you tell your beads;
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
---The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
Had net-worked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
Marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of,
Whose heads,---speckled white
Over brown like a great spider's back,
As I told you last night,---
Your mother bites off for her supper.
Red-ripe as could be,
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
In halves on the tree:
And betwixt the loose walls of great flint-stone,
Or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,
Wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup.
So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,
What change was in store,
By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
Which woke me before

I could open my shutter, made fast
With a bough and a stone,
And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
Sole lattice that's known.
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
The rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover:
Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
For, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
---Our fisher arrive
And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
And brown as his shrimps;
Himself too as bare to the middle
---You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a bout reached Salerno,
So back, to a man,
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
Grape-harvest began.
In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,
Like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
Till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten in effort on effort
To keep the grapes under,

Since still when he seems all but master,
In pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going
With basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving;
Your girls that are older,---
For under the hedges of aloe,
And where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
Lies pulpy and red,
All the young ones are kneeling and filling
Their laps with the snails
Tempted out by this first rainy weather,---
Your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
When, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
Three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow
In slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices,
That colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape bunch they've brought you:
The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence:
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;
Next, sip this weak wine
From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
A leaf of the vine;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
That leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
Scirocco is loose!
Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
Which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
Tho' not yet half black!

How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,
The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
Snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest!
No refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
And listen or sleep.
O how will your country show next week,
When all the vine-boughs
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
The mules and the cows?
Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
Your brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
That offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,---
Or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,
Those hairy gold orbs!
But my mule picked his sure sober path out,
Just stopping to neigh
When he recognized down in the valley
His mates on their way
With the faggots and barrels of water;
And soon we emerged
From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
And still as we urged
Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
As up still we trudged
Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath---
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
And lentisks*1 as staunch

To the stone where they root and bear berries,
And ... what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale seagreen leaves;
Over all trod my mule with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lady,
Till, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.
Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal!
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes.
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement!
Still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
If quickly you turn
And before they escape you surprise them.
They grudge you should learn
How the soft plains they look on, lean over
And love (they pretend)
---Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
The wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut:
All is silent and grave:
'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty,
How fair! but a slave.
So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered
As greenly as ever
Those isles of the siren, your Galli;
No ages can sever
The Three, nor enable their sister
To join them,---halfway
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses---
No farther to-day,

Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave,
Watches breast-high and steady
From under the rock, her bold sister
Swum halfway already.
Fort`>, shall we sail there together
And see from the sides
Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
Where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over
The rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the grey glassy water
To glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear?
---The secret they sang to Ulysses
When, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret
I hear and I know.

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;
He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume.
All is over. Look out, see the gipsy,
Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there;
One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting
His jews'-harps to proof,
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall
---Chew, abbot's own cheek!
All is over. Wake up and come out now,

And down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order
At church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening.
To-morrow's the Feast
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
Of Virgins the least,
As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse
Which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
Was getting by heart.
Not a pillar nor post but is dized
With red and blue papers;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
A-blaze with long tapers;
But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
Rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers
And trumpeters bold,
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
Who, when the priest's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that's brisk
For the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
Be carried in pomp
Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
The priests mean to stomp.
All round the glad church lie old bottles
With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
Religiously popped;
And at night from the crest of Calvano
Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,
And more poppers bang.
At all events, come---to the garden
As far as the wall;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers!

---` `Such trifles!" you say?

Fort`>, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Be righteous and wise
---If 'twere proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies!

*1 The mastic tree (resinous).

Robert Browning

Epilogue

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where--by death, fools think, imprisoned--
Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
--Pity me?

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!
What had I on earth to do
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the unmanly?
Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I drive
--Being--who?

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's work-time
Greet the unseen with a cheer!
Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed,--fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

Robert Browning

Epilogue To Asolando

At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
When you set your fancies free,
Will they pass to where--by death, fools think, imprisoned--
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There as here!"

Robert Browning

Evelyn Hope

I.

Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

II.

Sixteen years old, when she died!
Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name;
It was not her time to love; beside,
Her life had many a hope and aim,
Duties enough and little cares,
And now was quiet, now astir,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,---
And the sweet white brow is all of her.

III.

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew---
And, just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, nought beside?

IV.

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!

Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V

But the time will come,---at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's red---
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

VI.

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

VII.

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while.
My heart seemed full as it could hold?
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,---I will give you this leaf to keep:
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret: go to sleep!
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

Robert Browning

Fears And Scruples

Here's my case. Of old I used to love him.
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,--
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty,
Present, he would find me at his side.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

'Some day' proving--no day! Here's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

'Letters?' (hear them!) 'You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts!--How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing--
Call them forgery from A to Z !

'Actions? Where's your certain proof' (they bother)
'He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action--claimed by men, a multitude?'

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would,--by a word, a wink,--
Bid me stop that foolish mouth,--you brute you!
He keeps absent,--why, I cannot think.

Never mind! Tho' foolishness may flout me.
One thing's sure enough; 'tis neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth--tho' falsehood, gained--tho' lost.

All my days, I'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
Thro' and thro' me as I thought, 'The gladlier
Lives my friend because I love him still!'

Ah, but there's a menace some one utters!
'What and if your friend at home play tricks?
Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
Mean your eyes should pierce thro' solid bricks?

'What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?
Lay on you the blame that bricks--conceal?
Say '_At least I saw who did not see me,
Does see now, and presently shall feel_'?

'Why, that makes your friend a monster!' say you;
'Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?' Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be--God?

Robert Browning

Flight Of The Duchess, The

□

You're my friend:

I was the man the Duke spoke to;
I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too;
So here's the tale from beginning to end,
My friend!

□□.

Ours is a great wild country:

If you climb to our castle's top,
I don't see where your eye can stop;
For when you've passed the cornfield country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow,
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,
So, like black priests up, and so
Down the other side again
To another greater, wilder country,
That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
Branched through and through with many a vein
Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;
Look right, look left, look straight before,---
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,
And so on, more and ever more,
Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
---And the whole is our Duke's country.

□□□.

I was born the day this present Duke was---
 (And O, says the song, ere I was old!)
 In the castle where the other Duke was---
 (When I was happy and young, not old!)
 I in the kennel, he in the bower:
 We are of like age to an hour.
 My father was huntsman in that day;
 Who has not heard my father say
 That, when a boar was brought to bay,
 Three times, four times out of five,
 With his huntspear he'd contrive
 To get the killing-place transfixed,
 And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?
 And that's why the old Duke would rather
 He lost a salt-pit than my father,
 And loved to have him ever in call;
 That's why my father stood in the hall
 When the old Duke brought his infant out
 To show the people, and while they passed
 The wondrous bantling round about,
 Was first to start at the outside blast
 As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn
 Just a month after the babe was born.
 ``And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, ``since
 ``The Duke has got an heir, our Prince
 ``Needs the Duke's self at his side: "
 The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
 But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
 Castles a-fire, men on their march,
 The toppling tower, the crashing arch;
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
 The row of crests and shields and banners
 Of all achievements after all manners,
 And ``ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
 The more was his comfort when he died
 At next year's end, in a velvet suit,
 With a gilt glove on his hand, his foot
 In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
 Petticoated like a herald,
 In a chamher next to an ante-room,
 Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
 What he called stink, and they, perfume:

---They should have set him on red Berold
Mad with pride, like fire to manage!
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!
Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin!
(Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game!
Oh for a noble falcon-lanner
To flap each broad wing like a banner,
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)
Had they broached a white-beer cask from Berlin
---Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine
Put to his lips, when they saw him pine,
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,
Cotnar for instance, green as May sorrel
And ropy with sweet,---we shall not quarrel.

IV.

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches,
She being the daughter of God knows who:
And now was the time to revisit her tribe.
Abroad and afar they went, the two,
And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape;
Full of his travel, struck at himself.
You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?
---Not he! For in Paris they told the elf
Our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days;
Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,
And only in wild nooks like ours
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
And see true castles, with proper towers,

Young-hearted women, old-minded men,
And manners now as manners were then.
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out:
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength;
---They should have set him on red Berold
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey-spire!

VI.

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:
And out of a convent, at the word,
Came the lady, in time of spring.
---Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
Fit for the chase of urochs or buffle
In winter-time when you need to muffle.
But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,
And so we saw the lady arrive:
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees:
In truth, she was not hard to please!
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls:
As for us, styled the ``serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it;

And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired---
If that was an eagle she saw hover,
And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.
When suddenly appeared the Duke:
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,---as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,
And welcomed her with his grandest smile;
And, mind you, his mother all the while
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,
The lady's face stopped its play,
As if her first hair had grown grey;
For such things must begin some one day.

VII.

In a day or two she was well again;
As who should say, ``You labour in vain!
``This is all a jest against God, who meant
``I should ever be, as I am, content
`` And glad in his sight; therefore, glad I will be."
So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII.

She was active, stirring, all fire---
Could not rest, could not tire---
To a stone she might have given life!
(I myself loved once, in my day)
---For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
(I had a wife, I know what I say)
Never in all the world such an one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.
There was already this man in his post,

This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,
Now outside the hall, now in it,
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute,
And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
Of rule---(but for after-sadness that came)
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
With which the young Duke and the old dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As though an artificer, after contriving
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!
So found the Duke, and his mother like him:
The lady hardly got a rebuff---
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

□

IX.

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,
Paling and ever paling,
As the way is with a hid chagrin;
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, ``'Tis done to spite me,
`` But I shall find in my power to right me!"
Don't swear, friend! The old one, many a year,
Is in hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.

☒

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold,

And another and another, and faster and faster,
 Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:
 Then it so chanced that the Duke our master
 Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
 And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
 He should do the Middle Age no treason
 In resolving on a hunting-party.
 Always provided, old books showed the way of it!
 What meant old poets by their strictures?
 And when old poets had said their say of it,
 How taught old painters in their pictures?
 We must revert to the proper channels,
 Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,
 And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions:
 Here was food for our various ambitions,
 As on each case, exactly stated---
 To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,
 Or best prayer to Saint Hubert on mounting your stirrup---
 We of the house hold took thought and debated.
 Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin
 His sire was wont to do forest-work in;
 Blessedder he who nobly sunk ``ohs"
 And ``ahs" while he tugged on his grand-sire's trunk-hose;
 What signified hats if they had no rims on,
 Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,
 And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
 Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?
 So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on't,
 What with our Venerers, Prickers and Yerderers,
 Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
 And oh the Duke's tailor, he had a hot time on't!

XI.

Now you must know that when the first dizziness
 Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,
 The Duke put this question, ``The Duke's part provided,
 ``Had not the Duchess some share in the business?"
 For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses
 Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:
 And, after much laying of heads together,
 Somebody's cap got a notable feather

By the announcement with proper unction
 That he had discovered the lady's function;
 Since ancient authors gave this tenet,
 ``When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
 ``Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
 ``And, with water to wash the hands of her liege
 ``In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
 ``Let her preside at the disemboweling."

Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
 As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,
 And thrust her broad wings like a banner
 Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;
 And if day by day and week by week
 You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
 And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,
 Would it cause you any great surprise
 If, when you decided to give her an airing,
 You found she needed a little preparing?
 ---I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
 If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?
 Yet when the Duke to his lady signified,
 Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
 In what a pleasure she was to participate,---
 And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
 Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
 As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
 And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
 But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
 Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
 And much wrong now that used to be right,
 So, thanking him, declined the hunting,---
 Was conduct ever more affronting?
 With all the ceremony settled---
 With the towel ready, and the sewer
 Polishing up his oldest ewer,
 And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
 Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled,---
 No wonder if the Duke was nettled
 And when she persisted nevertheless,---
 Well, I suppose here's the time to confess
 That there ran half round our lady's chamber
 A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;

And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
How could I keep at any vast distance?
And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,
Stood for a while in a sultry smother,
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was held decorous and lawful;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct.
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once!
What meant she?--Who was she?---Her duty and station,
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation---
In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on!
Well, somehow or other it ended at last
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed;
And after her,----making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,
From door to staircase---oh such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column!

XII.

However, at sunrise our company mustered;
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;
For the court-yard walls were filled with fog
You might have cut as an axe chops a log---
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,

And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen.
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder
This way and that from the valley under;
And, looking through the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
But a troop of Gipsies on their march?
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII.

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only
After reaching all lands beside;
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,
And still, as they travel far and wide,
Catch they and keep now a trace here, trace there,
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there.
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,
And nowhere else, I take it, are found
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned:
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on
The very fruit they are meant to feed on.
For the earth---not a use to which they don't turn it,
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it---
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle
With side-bars never a brute can baffle;
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards;
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,
Horseshoes they hammer which turn on a swivel
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel.
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle;
But the sand---they pinch and pound it like otters;
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters!
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear,
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
As if in pure water you dropped and let die
A bruised black-blooded mulberry;
And that other sort, their crowning pride,

With long white threads distinct inside,
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle
Loose such a length and never tangle,
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters:
Such are the works they put their hand to,
The uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.
And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally
Toward his castle from out of the valley,
Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,
Come out with the morning to greet our riders.
And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch
That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
By her gait directly and her stoop,
I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
The oldest Gipsy then above ground;
And, sure as the autumn season came round,
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
And every time, as she swore, for the last time.
And presently she was seen to sidle
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
So that the horse of a sudden reared up
As under its nose the old witch peered up
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
Of no use now but to gather brine,
And began a kind of level whine
Such as they used to sing to their viols
When their ditties they go grinding
Up and down with nobody minding:
And then, as of old, at the end of the humming
Her usual presents were forthcoming
---A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,---
And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
A word in reply; and in vain she felt
With twitching fingers at her belt
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt,
Ready to pelt what he gave in her pouch safe,---

Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning---
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow,
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser tomorrow;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,
(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute
That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned
From out of the throng, and while I drew near
He told the crone---as I since have reckoned
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
With circumspection and mystery---
The main of the lady's history,
Her frowardness and ingratitude:
And for all the crone's submissive attitude
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,
And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening,
As though she engaged with hearty good-will
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
And promised the lady a thorough frightening.
And so, just giving her a glimpse
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw,
He bade me take the Gipsy mother
And set her telling some story or other
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
To wile away a weary hour
For the lady left alone in her bower,
Whose mind and body craved exertion
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV.

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
And what makes me confident what's to be told you
Had all along been of this crone's devising,
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising:
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,
As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,
Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges,
Like the band-roll strung with tomans
Which proves the veil a Persian woman's.
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly
Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakable eye-points duly
Live and aware looked out of their places.
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the lady's chamber standing sentry;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token,
Not a single word had the lady spoken:
They went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV.

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it:
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
On that little head of hers and burn it
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
Asleep of a sudden and there continue

The whole time sleeping as profoundly
 As one of the boars my father would pin you
 'Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,
 ---Jacynth forgive me the comparison!
 But where I begin asy own narration
 Is a little after I took my station
 To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
 And, having in those days a falcon eye,
 To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
 From where the bushes thinlier crested
 The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree.
 When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
 By---was it singing, or was it saying,
 Or a strange musical instrument playing
 In the chamber?---and to be certain
 I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
 And there lay Jacynth asleep,
 Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
 In a rosy sleep along the floor
 With her head against the door;
 While in the midst, on the seat of state,
 Was a queen---the Gipsy woman late,
 With head and face downbent
 On the lady's head and face intent:
 For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,
 The lady sat between her knees
 And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,
 And on those hands her chin was set,
 And her upturned face met the face of the crone
 Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
 As if she could double and quadruple
 At pleasure the play of either pupil
 ---Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,
 As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers
 They moved to measure, or bell-clappers.
 I said `` Is it blessing, is it banning,
 `` Do they applaud you or burlesque you---
 `` Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?"
 But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
 At once I was stopped by the lady's expression:
 For it was life her eyes were drinking
 From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,

---Life's pure fire received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving,
---Life, that filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
As she listened and she listened:
When all at once a hand detained me,
The selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
Making out words and prose and rhyme,
Till it seemed that the music furl'd
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped
From under the words it first had propped,
And left them midway in the world:
Word took word as hand takes hand,
I could hear at last, and understand,
And when I held the unbroken thread,
The Gipsy said:---

` ` And so at last we find my tribe.
` ` And so I set thee in the midst,
` ` And to one and all of them describe
` ` What thou saidst and what thou didst,
` ` Our long and terrible journey through,
` ` And all thou art ready to say and do
` ` In the trials that remain:
` ` I trace them the vein and the other vein
` ` That meet on thy brow and part again,
` ` Making our rapid mystic mark;
` ` And I bid my people prove and probe
` ` Each eye's profound and glorious globe
` ` Till they detect the kindred spark
` ` In those depths so dear and dark,
` ` Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,
` ` Circling over the midnight sea.

`` And on that round young cheek of thine
`` I make them recognize the tinge,
`` As when of the costly scarlet wine
`` They drip so much as will impinge
`` And spread in a thinnest scale afloat
`` One thick gold drop from the olive's coat
`` Over a silver plate whose sheen
`` Still thro' the mixture shall be seen.
`` For so I prove thee, to one and all,
`` Fit, when my people ope their breast,
`` To see the sign, and hear the call,
`` And take the vow, and stand the test
`` Which adds one more child to the rest---
`` When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
`` And the world is left outside.
`` For there is probation to decree,
`` And many and long must the trials be
`` Thou shalt victoriously endure,
`` If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;
`` Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay
`` Of the prize he dug from its mountain-tomb---
`` Let once the vindicating ray
`` Leap out amid the anxious gloom,
`` And steel and fire have done their part
`` And the prize falls on its finder's heart;
`` So, trial after trial past,
`` Wilt thou fall at the very last
`` Breathless, half in trance
`` With the thrill of the great deliverance,
`` Into our arms for evermore;
`` And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
`` About thee, what we knew before,
`` How love is the only good in the world.
`` Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
`` Or brain devise, or hand approve!
`` Stand up, look below,
`` It is our life at thy feet we throw
`` To step with into light and joy;
`` Not a power of life but we employ
`` To satisfy thy nature's want;
`` Art thou the tree that props the plant,
`` Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree---

‘ ‘ Canst thou help us, must we help thee?
‘ ‘ If any two creatures grew into one,
‘ ‘ They would do more than the world has done.
‘ ‘ Though each apart were never so weak,
‘ ‘ Ye vainly through the world should seek
‘ ‘ For the knowledge and the might
‘ ‘ Which in such union grew their right:
‘ ‘ So, to approach at least that end,
‘ ‘ And blend,---as much as may be, blend
‘ ‘ Thee with us or us with thee,---
‘ ‘ As climbing plant or propping tree,
‘ ‘ Shall some one deck thee, over and down,
‘ ‘ Up and about, with blossoms and leaves?
‘ ‘ Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland crown,
‘ ‘ Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,
‘ ‘ Die on thy boughs and disappear
‘ ‘ While not a leaf of thine is sere?
‘ ‘ Or is the other fate in store,
‘ ‘ And art thou fitted to adore,
‘ ‘ To give thy wondrous self away,
‘ ‘ And take a stronger nature's sway?
‘ ‘ I foresee and could foretell
‘ ‘ Thy future portion, sure and well:
‘ ‘ But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
‘ ‘ Let them say what thou shalt do!
‘ ‘ Only be sure thy daily life,
‘ ‘ In its peace or in its strife,
‘ ‘ Never shall be unobserved:
‘ ‘ We pursue thy whole career,
‘ ‘ And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,---
‘ ‘ Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved,
‘ ‘ We are beside thee in all thy ways,
‘ ‘ With our blame, with our praise,
‘ ‘ Our shame to feel, our pride to show,
‘ ‘ Glad, angry---but indifferent, no!
‘ ‘ Whether it be thy lot to go,
‘ ‘ For the good of us all, where the haters meet
‘ ‘ In the crowded city's horrible street;
‘ ‘ Or thou step alone through the morass
‘ ‘ Where never sound yet was
‘ ‘ Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill,
‘ ‘ For the air is still, and the water still,

` ` When the blue breast of the dipping coot
 ` ` Dives under, and all is mute.
 ` ` So, at the last shall come old age,
 ` ` Decrepit as befits that stage;
 ` ` How else wouldst thou retire apart
 ` ` With the hoarded memories of thy heart,
 ` ` And gather all to the very least
 ` ` Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
 ` ` Let fall through eagerness to find
 ` ` The crowning dainties yet behind?
 ` ` Ponder on the entire past
 ` ` Laid together thus at last,
 ` ` When the twilight helps to fuse
 ` ` The first fresh with the faded hues,
 ` ` And the outline of the whole,
 ` ` As round eve's shades their framework roll,
 ` ` Grandly fronts for once thy soul.
 ` ` And then as, 'mid the dark, a glean
 ` ` Of yet another morning breaks,
 ` ` And like the hand which ends a dream,
 ` ` Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
 ` ` Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
 ` ` Then-----"

Ay, then indeed something would happen!
 But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's;
 There grew more of the music and less of the words;
 Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen
 To paper and put you down every syllable
 With those clever clerkly fingers,
 All I've forgotten as well as what lingers
 In this old brain of mine that's but ill able
 To give you even this poor version
 Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering
 ---More fault of those who had the hammering
 Of prosody into me and syntax,
 And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!
 But to return from this excursion,---
 Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
 The peace most deep and the charm completest,
 There came, shall I say, a snap---
 And the charm vanished!
 And my sense returned, so strangely banished,

And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I
Down from the casement, round to the portal,
Another minute and I had entered,---
When the door opened, and more than mortal
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess: I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,
I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding;
I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.
As for finding what she wanted,
You know God Almighty granted
Such little signs should serve wild creatures
To tell one another all their desires,
So that each knows what his friend requires,
And does its bidding without teachers.
I preceded her; the crone
Followed silent and alone;
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk;
In short, the soul in its body sunk
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
We descended, I preceding;
Crossed the court with nobody heeding,
All the world was at the chase,
The courtyard like a desert-place,
The stable emptied of its small fry;
I saddled myself the very palfrey
I remember patting while it carried her,
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
The lady had not forgotten it either,
And knew the poor devil so much beneath her

Would have been only too glad for her service
 To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
 But, unable to pay proper duty where owing it,
 Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:
 For though the moment I began setting
 His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
 (Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
 She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,
 By a single rapid finger's lifting,
 And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
 And a little shake of the head, refused me,---
 I say, although she never used me,
 Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,
 And I ventured to remind her,
 I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
 Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,
 ---Something to the effect that I was in readiness
 Whenever God should please she needed me,---
 Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
 With a look that placed a crown on me,
 And she felt in her bosom,---mark, her bosom---
 And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
 Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse
 Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,
 Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
 So understood,---that a true heart so may gain
 Such a reward,---I should have gone home again,
 Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
 It was a little plait of hair
 Such as friends in a convent make
 To wear, each for the other's sake,---
 This, see, which at my breast I wear,
 Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudging),
 And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
 And then,---and then,---to cut short,---this is idle,
 These are feelings it is not good to foster,---
 I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
 And the palfrey bounded,---and so we lost her.

❧VI.

When the liquor's out why clink the cannikin?

I did think to describe you the panic in
The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,
How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib
Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,
When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness
---But it seems such child's play,
What they said and did with the lady away!
And to dance on, when we've lost the music,
Always made me---and no doubt makes you---sick.
Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
As that sweet form disappeared through the postern,
She that kept it in constant good humour,
It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do more.
But the world thought otherwise and went on,
And my head's one that its spite was spent on:
Thirty years are fled since that morning,
And with them all my head's adorning.
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
As you expect, of suppressed spite,
The natural end of every adder
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder:
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So, they made no search and small inquiry---
And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've
Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,
And the old one was in the young one's stead,
And took, in her place, the household's head,
And a blessed time the household had of it!
And were I not, as a man may say, cautious
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,
I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and focus from mere use of ceruse:

In short, she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder.

XVII.

You're my friend---
What a thing friendship is, world without end!
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up
As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,
And poured out, all lovelily, sparkingly, sunlit,
Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,
Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids---
Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids;
Each supple a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,
Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand doubts
Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.
I have seen my little lady once more,
Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;
I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:
And now it is made---why, my heart's blood, that went trickle,
Trickle, but anon, in such muddy driblets,
Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,
And genially floats me about the giblets.
I'll tell you what I intend to do:
I must see this fellow his sad life through---
He is our Duke, after all,
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.
My father was born here, and I inherit
His fame, a chain he bound his son with;
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
But there's no mine to blow up and get done with:
So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adaptor,
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
Some day or other, his head in a morion
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up,
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,
Then I shall scrape together my earnings;

For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,
 And our children all went the way of the roses:
 It's a long lane that knows no turnings.
 One needs but little tackle to travel in;
 So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:
 And for a stall, what beats the javelin
 With which his boars my father pinned you?
 And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
 Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,
 I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!
 Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.
 What's a man's age? He must hurry more, that's all;
 Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold.
 When we mind labour, then only, we're too old---
 What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?
 And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,
 (Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)
 I hope to get safely out of the turmoil
 And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,
 And find my lady, or hear the last news of her
 From some old thief and son of Lucifer,
 His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,
 Sunburned all over like an <AE>thiop.
 And when my Cotnar begins to operate
 And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
 And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,
 I shall drop in with---as if by accident---
 `` You never knew, then, how it all ended,
 `` What fortune good or bad attended
 `` The little lady your Queen befriended?"
 ---And when that's told me, what's remaining?
 This world's too hard for my explaining.
 The same wise judge of matters equine
 Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
 To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,
 And, fur strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
 He also umst be such a lady's scorne!
 Smooth Jacob still rubs homely Esau:
 Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.
 ---So, I shall find out some snug corner
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
 Turn myself round and bid the world good night;

And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing
Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
To a world where will be no furtiner throwing
Pearls before swine that Can't value them. Amen!

Robert Browning

From 'paracelsus'

I

TRUTH is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to KNOW,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.

II

I knew, I felt, (perception unexpressed,
Uncomprehended by our narrow thought,
But somehow felt and known in every shift
And change in the spirit,—nay, in every pore
Of the body, even,)—what God is, what we are
What life is—how God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,
From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds; in whom is life for evermore,
Yet whom existence in its lowest form
Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is he:
With still a flying point of bliss remote,
A happiness in store afar, a sphere
Of distant glory in full view; thus climbs
Pleasure its heights for ever and for ever.
The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,
And the earth changes like a human face;
The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,
Winds into the stone's heart, outbranches bright
In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,
Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask—
God joys therein! The wroth sea's waves are edged

With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate,
When, in the solitary waste, strange groups
Of young volcanos come up, cyclops-like,
Staring together with their eyes on flame—
God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride.
Then all is still; earth is a wintry clod:
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face;
The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms
Like chrysalids impatient for the air,
The shining dorrs are busy, beetles run
Along the furrows, ants make their ade;
Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;
Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing-gulls
Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
Their loves in wood and plain—and God renews
His ancient rapture. Thus He dwells in all,
From life's minute beginnings, up at last
To man—the consummation of this scheme
Of being, the completion of this sphere
Of life: whose attributes had here and there
Been scattered o'er the visible world before,
Asking to be combined, dim fragments meant
To be united in some wondrous whole,
Imperfect qualities throughout creation,
Suggesting some one creature yet to make,
Some point where all those scattered rays should meet
Convergent in the faculties of man.

Robert Browning

From 'Pauline'

O God, where does this tend—these struggling aims?
What would I have? What is this 'sleep', which seems
To bound all? can there be a 'waking' point
Of crowning life? The soul would never rule—
It would be first in all things—it would have
Its utmost pleasure filled,—but that complete
Commanding for commanding sickens it.
The last point I can trace is, rest beneath
Some better essence than itself—in weakness;
This is 'myself'—not what I think should be
And what is that I hunger for but God?
My God, my God! let me for once look on thee
As tho' nought else existed: we alone.
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands till I can say, 'Even from myself
I need thee, and I feel thee, and I love thee;
I do not plead my rapture in thy works
For love of thee—or that I feel as one
Who cannot die—but there is that in me
Which turns to thee, which loves, or which should love.'

Why have I girt myself with this hell-dress?
Why have I laboured to put out my life?
Is it not in my nature to adore,
And e'en for all my reason do I not
Feel him, and thank him, and pray to him—now?
Can I forgo the trust that he loves me?
Do I not feel a love which only ONE...
O thou pale form, so dimly seen, deep-eyed,
I have denied thee calmly—do I not
Pant when I read of thy consummate deeds,
And burn to see thy calm pure truths out-flash
The brightest gleams of earth's philosophy?
Do I not shake to hear aught question thee?
If I am erring save me, madden me,
Take from me powers and pleasures—let me die.
Ages, so I see thee: I am knit round
As with a charm, by sin and lust and pride,
Yet tho' my wandering dreams have seen all shapes

Of strange delight, oft have I stood by thee—
Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee
In the damp night by weeping Olivet,
Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less—
Or dying with thee on the lonely cross—
Or witnessing thy bursting from the tomb!

Robert Browning

Garden Francies

I. THE FLOWER'S NAME

Here's the garden she walked across,
Arm in my arm, such a short while since:
Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss
Hinders the hinges and makes them wince!
She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,
As back with that murmur the wicket swung;
For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,
To feed and forget it the leaves among.

II.

Down this side of the gravel-walk
She went while her rope's edge brushed the box:
And here she paused in her gracious talk
To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.
Roses, ranged in valiant row,
I will never think that she passed you by!
She loves you noble roses, I know;
But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie!

III.

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim;
Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,
Its soft meandering Spanish name:
What a name! Was it love or praise?
Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?
I must learn Spanish, one of these days,
Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

IV.

Roses, if I live and do well,
I may bring her, one of these days,
To fix you fast with as fine a spell,
Fit you each with his Spanish phrase;

But do not detain me now; for she lingers
There, like sunshine over the ground,
And ever I see her soft white fingers
Searching after the bud she found.

V

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
Stay as you are and be loved for ever!
Bud, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not:
Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never!
For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,
Twinkling the audacious leaves between,
Till round they turn and down they nestle---
Is not the dear mark still to be seen?

VI.

Where I find her not, beauties vanish;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee;
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June's twice June since she breathed it with me?
Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,
Treasure my lady's lightest footfall!
---Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces---
Roses, you are not so fair after all!

II. SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS.

Plague take all your pedants, say I!
He who wrote what I hold in my hand,
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together.

III.

Into the garden I brought it to read,

And under the arbute and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.
Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge;
Added up the mortal amount;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

III.

Yonder's a plum-tree with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the Middle Age,
Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber;
When he'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber:
Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

IV.

Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
---At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate:
Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

V.

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo:
So, I took pity, for learning's sake,
And, _de profundis, accentibus Itis,
Cantate!_ quoth I, as I got a rake;
And up I fished his delectable treatise.

VI.

Here you have it, dry in the sun,
With all the binding all of a blister,
And great blue spots where the ink has run,
And reddish streaks that wink and glister
O'er the page so beautifully yellow:
Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks!
Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow?
Here's one stuck in his chapter six!

VII.

How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover?
---When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face
Made of her eggs the stately deposit,
And the newt borrowed just so much of the preface
As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet?

VIII.

All that life and fun and romping,
All that frisking and twisting and coupling,
While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping
And clasps were cracking and covers suppling!
As if you had carried sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna or Munich,
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the ballet with trousers and tunic.

IX.

Come, old martyr! What, torment enough is it?
Back to my room shall you take your sweet self.
Good-bye, mother-beetle; husband-eft, _sufficit!_
See the snug niche I have made on my shelf!
A.'s book shall prop you up, B.'s shall cover you,
Here's C. to be grave with, or D. to be gay,
And with E. on each side, and F. right over you,
Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day!

Robert Browning

Glove, The

(PETER RONSARD _loquitur_.)

` ` Heigho!" yawned one day King Francis,
` ` Distance all value enhances!
` ` When a man's busy, why, leisure
` ` Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:
` ` 'Faith, and at leisure once is he?
` ` Straightway he wants to be busy.
` ` Here we've got peace; and aghast I'm
` ` Caught thinking war the true pastime.
` ` Is there a reason in metre?
` ` Give us your speech, master Peter!"

I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne'er am at loss with my Naso,
` ` Sire," I replied, ` ` joys prove cloudlets:
` ` Men are the merest Ixions"---
Here the King whistled aloud, ` ` Let's
` ` ---Heigho---go look at our lions!"
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading,
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before be arrived at the penfold;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most.
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The King bailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,*1
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.

They opened a hole in the wire-work
 Across it, and dropped there a firework,
 And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;
 A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
 The blackness and silence so utter,
 By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
 Then earth in a sudden contortion
 Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
 Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
 (Whose experience of nature's but narrow,
 And whose faculties move in no small mist
 When he versifies David the Psalmist)
 I should study that brute to describe you
 Illim Juda Leonem de Tribu.
 One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
 To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
 The tail in the air stiff and straining,
 The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
 As over the barrier which bounded
 His platform, and us who surrounded
 The barrier, they reached and they rested
 On space that might stand him in best stead:
 For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
 The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
 And if, in this minute of wonder,
 No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
 Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
 The lion at last was delivered?
 Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!
 And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
 By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
 He was leagues in the desert already,
 Driving the flocks up the mountain,
 Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
 To waylay the date-gathering negress:
 So guarded he entrance or egress.
 ``How he stands!" quoth the King: ``we may well swear,
 (``No novice, we've won our spurs elsewhere
 ``And so can afford the confession,)
 ``We exercise wholesome discretion
 ``In keeping aloof from his threshold;
 ``Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,

` ` Their first would too pleasantly purloin
` ` The visitor's brisket or surloin:
` ` But who's he would prove so fool-hardy?
` ` Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove flattered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 'twas, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight's a tARRIER!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,---while the lion
Neer moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,---
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

☐ Your heart's queen, you dethrone her?
` ` So should I!"---cried the King---` ` 'twas mere vanity,
` ` Not love, set that task to humanity!"
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,---
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful,---
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what ` ` speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had not to trust to,

Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?
If she wished not the rash deed's recalment?
` ` For I"---so I spoke---` ` am a poet:
` ` Human nature,---behoves that I know it!"

She told me, ` ` Too long had I heard
` ` Of the deed proved alone by the word:
` ` For my love---what De Lorge would not dare!
` ` With my scorn---what De Lorge could compare!
` ` And the endless descriptions of death
` ` He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
` ` I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
` ` Doubt his word---and moreover, perforce,
` ` For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
` ` Must offer my love in return.
` ` When I looked on your lion, it brought
` ` All the dangers at once to my thought,
` ` Encountered by all sorts of men,
` ` Before he was lodged in his den,---
` ` From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
` ` Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
` ` With no King and no Court to applaud,
` ` By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
` ` Yet to capture the creature made shift,
` ` That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
` ` ---To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
` ` Of the pit, on no greater pretence
` ` Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
` ` Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
` ` So, wiser I judged it to make
` ` One trial what ` death for my sake'
` ` Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
` ` Than to wait until time should define
` ` Such a phrase not so simply as I,
` ` Who took it to mean just ` to die.'
` ` The blow a glove gives is but weak:
` ` Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?
` ` But when the heart suffers a blow,
` ` Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean---
(I judge by a certain calm fervour
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
---He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
If you whispered ``Friend, what you'd get, first earn!"
And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,
To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,
Those in wonder and praise, these in envy;
And in short stood so plain a head taller
That he wooed and won ... how do you call her?
The beauty, that rose in the sequel
To the King's love, who loved her a week well.
And 'twas noticed he never would honour
De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)
With the easy commission of stretching
His legs in the service, and fetching
His wife, from her chamber, those straying
Sad gloves she was always mislaying,
While the King took the closet to chat in,---
But of course this adventure came pat in.
And never the King told the story,
How bringing a glove brought such glory,
But the wife smiled--- ``His nerves are grown firmer:
`` Mine he brings now and utters no murmur."

Venienti occurrite morbo!
With which moral I drop my theorbo.

*1 A beetle.

Robert Browning

Guardian-Angel, The

A PICTURE AT FANO.

I.

Dear and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry,
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still, to quiet and retrieve.

II.

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where I gaze,
---And suddenly my head is covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb---and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door.

III.

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV.

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My bead beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing

Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

VI.

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend!)---that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
Pressed gently,---with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, though heaven was opening o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII.

We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
---My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent)---

VIII.

And since he did not work thus earnestly
At all times, and has else endured some wrong---
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.
My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?
This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

Robert Browning

Heap Cassia, Sandal-Buds And Stripes

Heap Cassia, sandal-buds and stripes
Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smear'd with dull nard an Indian wipes
From out her hair: such balsam falls
Down sea-side mountain pedestals,
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain,
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island-gain.

And strew faint sweetness from some old
Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
From closet long to quiet vowed,
With moth'd and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among,
As when a queen, long dead, was young.

Robert Browning

Heretic's Tragedy, The

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE.

ROSA MUNDI; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS.
A CONCEIT OF MASTER GYSBRECHT,
CANON-REGULAR OF SAID JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR,
YPRES CITY. CANTUQUE, _Virgilius._
AND HATH OFTEN BEEN SUNG
AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTIVALES. GAVISUS
ERAM, _Jessides._

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the
burning of Jacques du Bourg-Mulay, at Paris,
A. D. 1314; as distorted by the refraction from
Flemish brain to brain, during the course of
a couple of centuries.)

[Molay was Grand Master of the Templars
when that order was suppressed in 1312.]

□

¶READMONISHETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

The Lord, we look to once for all,
Is the Lord we should look at, all at once:
He knows not to vary, saith Saint Paul,
Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.
See him no other than as he is!
Give both the infinitudes their due---
Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.
□Organ: plagal-cadence._
As infinite a justice too.

¶.

¶ONE SINGETH.

John, Master of the Temple of God,

Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin:
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.
☐ And wanteth there grace of lute or
☐ lavicithern, ye shall say to confirm
☐ him who singeth---_
We bring John now to be burned alive.

III.

In the midst is a goodly gallows built;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck;
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city muck;
Inside they pile log upon log, good store;
Faggots no few, blocks great and small,
Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,---
For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

CHORUS.

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

IV.

Good sappy bavins<*1> that kindle forthwith;
Billets that blaze substantial and slow;
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith;
Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow:
Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,
Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing ``Laudes" and bid clap-to the torch.

CHORUS.

Laus Deo---who bids clap-to the torch.

V

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
Is burning alive in Paris square!
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there?
Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound?
---Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.
□Here one crosseth himself_

VI.

Jesus Christ---John had bought and sold,
Jesus Christ---John had eaten and drunk;
To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.
(_Salv<a^> reverenti<a^>._)
Now it was, ``Saviour, bountiful lamb,
``I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me!
``See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!
``Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!"

CHORUS.

'Tis John the mocker cries, ``Save thou me!"

VII.

Who maketh God's menace an idle word?
---Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,
Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird?---
For she too prattles of ugly names.
---Saith, he knoweth but one thing,---what he knows?
That God is good and the rest is breath;
Why else is the same styled Sharon's rose?
Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS.

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

VIII.

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!
Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue:
Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!)
Their tree struck root in devil's-dung.
When Paul once reasoned of righteousness
And of temperance and of judgment to come,
Good Felix trembled, he could no less:
John, snickering, crook'd his wicked thumb.

CHORUS.

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?

IX.

Ha ha, John plucketh now at his rose
To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
Lo,---petal on petal, fierce rays unclose;
Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
Of a coal-black giant flower of hell!

CHORUS.

What maketh heaven, That maketh hell.

X

So, as John called now, through the fire amain.
On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life---
To the Person, he bought and sold again---

For the Face, with his daily buffets rife---
Feature by feature It took its place:
And his voice, like a mad dog's choking bark,
At the steady whole of the Judge's face---
Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

¶SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark!

*1: Fagots.

Robert Browning

Herve Riel

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety two,
Did the English fight the French,--woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter thro' the blue.
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place
'Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbor, take us quick--or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!'

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
'Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?' laughed they:
'Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and scored,
Shall the '_Formidable_' here, with her twelve and eighty guns
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
Trust to enter where 'tis ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!'

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
'Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!'
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
Not a minute more to wait!
'Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

'Give the word!' But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
--A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate--first, second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Herve Riel the Croisickese.

And, 'What mockery or malice have we here?' cries Herve Riel:
'Are you mad, you Malouins ? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Greve where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this '_Formidable_' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Greve,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,
--Keel so much as grate the ground.
Why, I've nothing but my life,--here's my head!' cries Herve Riel.

Not a minute more to wait.
'Steer us in then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!' cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.

Still the north-wind, by God's grace!
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,

Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past,
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Herve Kiel hollas 'Anchor!'--sure as fate
Up the English come, too late!

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Greve.
Hearts that bled are staunch'd with balm.
'Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
'This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!
What a shout, and all one word,
'Herve Riel!
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

Then said Damfreville, 'My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Tho' I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward,
'Faith our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville.'

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
'Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?--
Since 'tis ask and have, I may--
Since the others go ashore--
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!
That he asked and that he got,--nothing more.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank.
Search, the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Herve Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Herve Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Herve Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

Robert Browning

Holy-Cross Day

ON WHICH THE JEWS WERE FORCED TO
ATTEND AN ANNUAL CHRISTIAN SERMON
IN ROME.

[` ` Now was come about Holy-Cross Day,
and now must my lord preach his first sermon
to the Jews: as it was of old cared for in tine
merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to
speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous
table here in Rome should be, though but
once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled
and bespitten-upon beneath the feet
of the guests. And a moving sight in truth,
this, of so many of the besotted blind restif
and ready-to-perish Hebrews! now maternally
brought---nay (for He saith, ` Compel them
to come in') haled, as it were, by the head and
hair, and against their obstinate hearts, to partake
of the heavenly grace. What awakening,
what striving with tears, what working of a
yeasty conscience! Nor was my lord wanting
to himself on so apt an occasion; witness
the abundance of conversions which did incontinently
reward him: though not to my
lord be altogether the glory."---_Diary by the
Bishop's Secretary,_ 1600.]

What the Jews really said, on thus being
driven to church, was rather to this effect:---

□

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, simug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons---'tis sermon-time!

III.

Bob, here's Barnabas! Job, that's you?
Up stumps Solomon---bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears?
Fair play's a jewel! Leave friends in the lurch?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church!

III.

Higgledy piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop---here he comes.

IV.

Bow, wow, wow---a bone for the dog!
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog.
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

V

Aaron's asleep---shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!
Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob!
What's he at, quotha? reading his text!
Now you've his curtsey---and what comes next?

VI.

See to our converts---you doomed black dozen---
No stealing away---nor cog nor cozen!
You five, that were thieves, deserve it fairly;
You seven, that were beggars, will live less sparely;

You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune---and fortune gets you; mind that!

VII.

Give your first groan---compunction's at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah,---the selfsame beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!
Here's a knife, clip quick---it's a sign of grace---
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

VIII.

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now
Went to my heart and made me vow
I meddle no more with the worst of trades---
Let somebody else pay his serenades.

IX.

Groan all together now, whee-hee-hee!
It's a-work, it's a-work, ah, woe is me!
It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,
Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the waist;
Jew brutes, with sweat and blood well spent
To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

X

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds,
Yelled, pricked us out to his church like hounds:
It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed
Which gutted my purse would throttle my creed:
And it overflows when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins help me to their God.

XI.

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,

And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,---
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

XII.

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, `` This world has been harsh and strange;
`` Something is wrong: there needeth a change.
`` But what, or where? at the last or first?
`` In one point only we sinned, at worst.

XIII.

`` The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
`` And again in his border see Israel set.
`` When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
`` The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:
`` To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
`` So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV.

`` Ay, the children of the chosen race
`` Shall carry and bring them to their place:
`` In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
`` Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
`` When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o'er
`` The oppressor triumph for evermore?

XV.

`` God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,
`` Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
`` 'Mid a faithless world,---at watch and ward,
`` Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
`` By His servant Moses the watch was set:
`` Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

XVI.

` ` Thou! if thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,
` ` By the starlight, naming a dubious name!
` ` And if, too heavy with sleep---too rash
` ` With fear---O Thou, if that martyr-gash
` ` Fell on Thee coming to take thine own,
` ` And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne---

XVII.

` ` Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
` ` But, the Judgment over, join sides with us!
` ` Thine too is the cause! and not more thine
` ` Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine,
` ` Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed!
` ` Who maintain Thee in word, and defy Thee in deed!

XVIII.

` ` We withstood Christ then? Be mindful how
` ` At least we withstand Barabbas now!
` ` Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared,
` ` To have called these---Christians, had we dared!
` ` Let defiance to them pay mistrust of Thee,
` ` And Rome make amends for Calvary!

XIX.

` ` By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
` ` By the infamy, Israel's heritage,
` ` By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
` ` By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
` ` By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
` ` And the summons to Christian fellowship,---

XX.

` ` We boast our proof that at least the Jew
` ` Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.
` ` Thy face took never so deep a shade
` ` But we fought them in it, God our aid!

` ` A trophy to bear, as we marches, thy band,
` ` South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!"

☐Pope Gregory XVI. abolished this bad
☐business of the Sermon. _---R. B.]

Robert Browning

Home Thoughts, From Abroad

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—
That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

Robert Browning

Home Thoughts, From The Sea

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest North-east distance dawned Gibraltar grand and grey;
"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?" -say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

Robert Browning

How It Strikes a Contemporary

YOU saw go up and down Valladolid,□
A man of mark, to know next time you saw.□
His very serviceable suit of black□
Was courtly once and conscientious still,□
And many might have worn it, though none did:□
The cloak that somewhat shone and showed the threads□
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.□
He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,□
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,□
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.□
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,□
That leads no whither; now, they breathed themselves□
On the main promenade just at the wrong time.□
You 'd come upon his scrutinizing hat,□
Making a peaked shade blacker than itself□
Against the single window spared some house□
Intact yet with its mouldered Moorish work;□
Or else surprise the ferrel of his stick□
Trying the mortar's temper 'tween the chinks□
Of some new shop a-building, French and fine.□
He stood and watched the cobbler at his trade,□
The man who slices lemons into drink,□
The coffee-roaster's brazier, and the boys□
That volunteer to help him turn its winch.□
He glanced o'er books on stalls with half an eye,□
And fly-leaf ballads on the vender's string,□
And broad-edged bold-print posters by the wall.□
He took such cognizance of men and things,□
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;□
If any cursed a woman, he took note;□
Yet stared at nobody,—they stared at him,□
And found, less to their pleasure than surprise,□
He seemed to know them and expect as much.□
So, next time that a neighbor's tongue was loosed,□
It marked the shameful and notorious fact,□
We had among us, not so much a spy,□
As a recording chief-inquisitor,□
The town's true master if the town but knew!□
We merely kept a Governor for form,□

While this man walked about and took account□
Of all thought, said, and acted, then went home,□
And wrote it fully to our Lord the King,□
Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,□
And reads them in his bedroom of a night.

Robert Browning

How They Brought The Good News From Ghent To Aix

I.

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
` ` "Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
` ` "Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Dffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, ` ` "Yet there is time!"

IV.

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each hutting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back

For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,---ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, `` Stay spur!
`` Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
`` We'll remember at Aix"---for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII.

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And `` Gallop," gasped Joris, `` for Aix is in sight!"

VIII.

`` How they'll greet us!"---and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

☒

And all I remember is---friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

Robert Browning

In A Gondola

He sings_.

I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing.
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

☐She speaks_.

Say after me, and try to say
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord,
In your own voice, in your own way:
` ` This woman's heart and soul and brain
` ` Are mine as much as this gold chain
` ` She bids me wear; which" (say again)
` ` I choose to make by cherishing
` ` A precious thing, or choose to fling
` ` Over the boat-side, ring by ring."
And yet once more say ... no word more!
Since words are only words. Give o'er!

Unless you call me, all the same,
Familiarly by my pet name,
Which if the Three should hear you call,
And me reply to, would proclaim
At once our secret to them all.
Ask of me, too, command me, blame---
Do, break down the partition-wall
'Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
Curtained in dusk and splendid folds!
What's left but---all of me to take?
I am the Three's: prevent them, slake
Your thirst! 'Tis said, the Arab sage,
In practising with gems, can loose
Their subtle spirit in his cruce

And leave but ashes: so, sweet mage,
Leave them my ashes when thy use
Sucks out my soul, thy heritage!

□He sings_.

□

Past we glide, and past, and past!
What's that poor Agnese doing
Where they make the shutters fast?
Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing
To his couch the purchased bride:
Past we glide!

□.

Past we glide, and past, and past!
Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast?
Guests by hundreds, not one caring
If the dear host's neck were wried:
Past we glide!

□She sings_.

□

The moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide ope I burst.

□.

The bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow

The claim, so all is rendered up,
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

□He sings_.

□

What are we two?
I am a Jew,
And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue,
To a feast of our tribe;
Where they need thee to bribe
The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe
Thy ... Scatter the vision for ever! And now,
As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

□.

Say again, what we are?
The sprite of a star,
I lure thee above where the destinies bar
My plumes their full play
Till a ruddier ray
Than my pale one announce there is withering away
Some ... Scatter the vision for ever! And now,
As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

□He muses_.

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?
The land's lap or the water's breast?
To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
Or swim in lucid shallows just
Eluding water-lily leaves,
An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
To lock you, whom release he must;
Which life were best on Summer eves?

□He speaks, musing_.

Lie back; could thought of mine improve you?

From this shoulder let there spring
A wing; from this, another wing;
Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you!
Snow-white must they spring, to blend
With your flesh, but I intend
They shall deepen to the end,
Broader, into burning gold,
Till both wings crescent-wise enfold
Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
As if a million sword-blades hurled
Defiance from you to the world!

Rescue me thou, the only real!
And scare away this mad ideal
That came, nor motions to depart!
Thanks! Now, stay ever as thou art!

☐ Still he muses_.

☐

What if the Three should catch at last
Thy serenader? While there's cast
Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
Gian pinions me, himself has past
His stylet thro' my back; I reel;
And ... is it thou I feel?

☐.

They trail me, these three godless knaves,
Past every church that saints and saves,
Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
By Lido's wet accursed graves,
They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And ... on thy breast I sink

☐ She replies, musing_.

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do: thus: were death so unlike sleep,

Caught this way? Death's to fear from flame or steel,
Or poison doubtless; but from water---feel!

Go find the bottom! Would you stay me? There!
Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away: since you have praised my hair,
'Tis proper to be choice in what I wear.

□He speaks_.

Row home? must we row home? Too surely
Know I where its front's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled;
Window just with window mating,
Door on door exactly waiting,
All's the set face of a child:
But behind it, where's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead!
First, out a cloud of curtain blew,
Then a sweet cry, and last came you---
To catch your lory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.
I scarce could breathe to see you reach
So far back o'er the balcony
To catch him ere he climbed too high
Above you in the Smyrna peach
That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
This coiled hair on your head, unrolled,
Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
The Roman girls were wont, of old,
When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
Dear lory,*1 may his beak retain

Ever its delicate rose stain
As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
Had marked their thief to know again!

Stay longer yet, for others' sake
Than mine! What should your chamber do?
---With all its rarities that ache
In silence while day lasts, but wake
At night-time and their life renew,
Suspended just to pleasure you
Who brought against their will together
These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
Around them such a magic tether
That dumb they look: your harp, believe,
With all the sensitive tight strings
Which dare not speak, now to itself
Breathes slumberously, as if some elf
Went in and out the chords, his wings
Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
As an angel may, between the maze
Of midnight palace-pillars, on
And on, to sow God's plagues, have gone
Through guilty glorious Babylon.
And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell
As the dry limpet for the lymph
Come with a tune he knows so well.
And how your statues' hearts must swell!
And how your pictures must descend
To see each other, friend with friend!
Oh, could you take them by surprise,
You'd find Schidone's eager Duke
Doing the quaintest courtesies
To that prim saint by Haste-thee-Luke!
And, deeper into her rock den,
Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen
You'd find retreated from the ken
Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser---
As if the Tizian thinks of her,
And is not, rather, gravely bent
On seeing for himself what toys
Are these, his progeny invent,

What litter now the board employs
Whereon he signed a document
That got him murdered! Each enjoys
Its night so well, you cannot break
The sport up, so, indeed must make
More stay with me, for others' sake.

☐She speaks_.

☐

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
Is used to tie the jasmine back
That overflows my room with sweets,
Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets
My Zanze! If the ribbon's black,
The Three are watching: keep away!

☐.

Your gondola---let Zorzi wreath
A mesh of water-weeds about
its prow, as if he unaware
Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair!
That I may throw a paper out
As you and he go underneath.

There's Zanze's vigilant taper; safe are we.
Only one minute more to-night with me?
Resume your past self of a month ago!
Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
The lady with the colder breast than snow.
Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand
More than I touch yours when I step to land,
And say, ``All thanks, Siora!''---

☐Heart to heart

And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we part,
Clasp me and make me thine, as mine thou art!

☐He is surprised, and stabbed_.

It was ordained to be so, sweet!---and best
Comes now, beneath thine eyes, upon thy breast.
Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care

Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not scorn
To death, because they never lived: but I
Have lived indeed, and so---(yet one more kiss)---can die!

Robert Browning

In A Year

Never any more,
While I live,
Need I hope to see his face
As before.
Once his love grown chill,
Mine may strive:
Bitterly we re-embrace,
Single still.

II.

Was it something said,
Something done,
Vexed him? was it touch of hand,
Turn of head?
Strange! that very way
Love begun:
I as little understand
Love's decay.

III.

When I sewed or drew,
I recall
How he looked as if I sung,
---Sweetly too.
If I spoke a word,
First of all
Up his cheek the colour sprang,
Then he heard.

IV.

Sitting by my side,
At my feet,
So he breathed but air I breathed,
Satisfied!
I, too, at love's brim
Touched the sweet:

I would die if death bequeathed
Sweet to him.

V.

``Speak, I love thee best!"
He exclaimed:
``Let thy love my own foretell!"
I confessed:
``Clasp my heart on thine
``Now unblamed,
``Since upon thy soul as well
``Hangeth mine!"

VI.

Was it wrong to own,
Being truth?
Why should all the giving prove
His alone?
I had wealth and ease,
Beauty, youth:
Since my lover gave me love,
I gave these.

VII.

That was all I meant,
---To be just,
And the passion I had raised,
To content.
Since he chose to change
Gold for dust,
If I gave him what he praised
Was it strange?

VIII.

Would he loved me yet,
On and on,
While I found some way undreamed
---Paid my debt!

Gave more life and more,
Till, all gone,
He should smile `` She never seemed
`` Mine before.

IX.

`` What, she felt the while,
`` Must I think?
`` Love's so different with us men!"
He should smile:
`` Dying for my sake---
`` White and pink!
`` Can't we touch these bubbles then
`` But they break?"

XI

Dear, the pang is brief,
Do thy part,
Have thy pleasure! How perplexed
Grows belief!
Well, this cold clay clod
Was man's heart:
Crumble it, and what comes next?
Is it God?

Robert Browning

In Three Days

I.

So, I shall see her in three days
And just one night, but nights are short,
Then two long hours, and that is morn.
See how I come, unchanged, unworn!
Feel, where my life broke off from thine,
How fresh the splinters keep and fine,---
Only a touch and we combine!

II.

Too long, this time of year, the days!
But nights, at least the nights are short.
As night shows where ger one moon is,
A hand's-breadth of pure light and bliss,
So life's night gives my lady birth
And my eyes hold her! What is worth
The rest of heaven, the rest of earth?

III.

O loaded curls, release your store
Of warmth and scent, as once before
The tingling hair did, lights and darks
Outbreaking into fairy sparks,
When under curl and curl I pried
After the warmth and scent inside,
Thro' lights and darks how manifold---
The dark inspired, the light controlled
As early Art embrowns the gold.

IV.

What great fear, should one say, ``Three days
``That change the world might change as well
``Your fortune; and if joy delays,
``Be happy that no worse befell!"
What small fear, if another says,

` ` Three days and one short night beside
` ` May throw no shadow on your ways;
` ` But years must teem with change untried,
` ` With chance not easily defied,
` ` With an end somewhere undescried."

No fear!---or if a fear be born

This minute, it dies out in scorn.

Fear? I shall see her in three days

And one night, now the nights are short,

Then just two hours, and that is morn.

Robert Browning

Incident Of The French Camp

I.

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:

A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II.

Just as perhaps he mused ``My plans
``That soar, to earth may fall,
``Let once my army-leader Lannes
``Waver at yonder wall,"---
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect---
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV.

``Well," cried he, ``Emperor, by God's grace
``We've got you Ratisbon!
``The Marshal's in the market-place,
``And you'll be there anon

``To see your flag-bird flap his vans
``Where I, to heart's desire,
``Perched him!" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

¶

The chief's eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
``You're wounded!" ``Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
``I'm killed, Sire!" And his chief beside
Smiling the boy fell dead.

Robert Browning

Instans Tyrannus

I.

Of the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

II.

I struck him, he grovelled of course---
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate:
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
As his lot might be worse.

III.

` ` Were the object less mean, would he stand
` ` At the swing of my hand!
` ` For obscurity helps him and blots
` ` The hole where he squats."
So, I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain! Gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue;
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
Hid in roses my mesh,
Choicest cates and the flagon's best spilth:
Still he kept to his filth.

IV.

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press:
Just a son or a mother to seize!
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
'Mid my million or two,

Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself!
No: I could not but smile through my chafe:
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
---Through minuteness, to wit.

Ⅴ

Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
'Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain.
And, ``no!" I admonished myself,
``Is one mocked by an elf,
``Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
``The gravamen's in that!
``How the lion, who crouches to suit
``His back to my foot,
``Would admire that I stand in debate!
``But the small turns the great
``If it vexes you,---that is the thing!
``Toad or rat vex the king?
``Though I waste half my realm to unearth
``Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!"

Ⅵ.

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.

Ⅶ.

When sudden ... how think ye, the end?

Did I say ``without friend"?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!
Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
---So, I was afraid!

Robert Browning

Introduction: Pippa Passes

New Year's Day at Asolo in the Trevisan

Scene.-

A large mean airy chamber. A girl, Pippa, from the Silk-mills, springing out of bed

.

Day!

Faster and more fast,

O'er night's brim, day boils at last:

Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim

Where spurting and suppressed it lay,

For not a froth-flake touched the rim

Of yonder gap in the solid gray

Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;

But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,

Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,

Rose, reddened, and its seething breast

Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world.

Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,

A mite of my twelve hours' treasure,

The least of thy gazes or glances,

(Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above measure)

One of thy choices or one of thy chances,

(Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks at thy pleasure)

-My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,

Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me!

Thy long blue solemn hours serenely flowing,

Whence earth, we feel, gets steady help and good-

Thy fitful sunshine-minutes, coming, going,

As if earth turned from work in gamesome mood-

All shall be mine! But thou must treat me not

As prosperous ones are treated, those who live

At hand here, and enjoy the higher lot,

In readiness to take what thou wilt give,

And free to let alone what thou refusest;
For, Day, my holiday, if thou ill-usest
Me, who am only Pippa,-old-year's sorrow,
Cast off last night, will come again to-morrow:
Whereas, if thou prove gentle, I shall borrow
Sufficient strength of thee for new-year's sorrow.
All other men and women that this earth
Belongs to, who all days alike possess,
Make general plenty cure particular dearth,
Get more joy one way, if another, less:
Thou art my single day, God lends to leaven
What were all earth else, with a feel of heaven,-
Sole light that helps me through the year, thy sun's!
Try now! Take Asolo's Four Happiest Ones-
And let thy morning rain on that superb
Great haughty Ottima; can rain disturb
Her Sebald's homage? All the while thy rain
Beats fiercest on her shrub-house window-pane,
He will but press the closer, breathe more warm
Against her cheek; how should she mind the storm?
And, morning past, if mid-day shed a gloom
O'er Jules and Phene,-what care bride and groom
Save for their dear selves? 'T is their marriage-day;
And while they leave church and go home their way,
Hand clasping hand, within each breast would be
Sunbeams and pleasant weather spite of thee.
Then, for another trial, obscure thy eve
With mist,-will Luigi and his mother grieve-
The lady and her child, unmatched, forsooth,
She in her age, as Luigi in his youth,
For true content? The cheerful town, warm, close
And safe, the sooner that thou art morose,
Receives them. And yet once again, outbreak
In storm at night on Monsignor, they make
Such stir about,-whom they expect from Rome
To visit Asolo, his brothers' home,
And say here masses proper to release
A soul from pain,-what storm dares hurt his peace?
Calm would he pray, with his own thoughts to ward
Thy thunder off, nor want the angels' guard.
But Pippa-just one such mischance would spoil
Her day that lightens the next twelvemonth's toil

At wearisome silk-winding, coil on coil!

And here I let time slip for nought!
Aha, you foolhardy sunbeam, caught
With a single splash from my ewer!
You that would mock the best pursuer,
Was my basin over-deep?
One splash of water ruins you asleep,
And up, up, fleet your brilliant bits
Wheeling and counterwheeling,
Reeling, broken beyond healing:
Now grow together on the ceiling!
That will task your wits.
Whoever it was quenched fire first, hoped to see
Morsel after morsel flee
As merrily, as giddily . . .
Meantime, what lights my sunbeam on,
Where settles by degrees the radiant cripple?
Oh, is it surely blown, my martagon?
New-blown and ruddy as St. Agnes' nipple,
Plump as the flesh-bunch on some Turk bird's poll!
Be sure if corals, branching 'neath the ripple
Of ocean, bud there, -fairies watch unroll
Such turban-flowers; I say, such lamps disperse
Thick red flame through that dusk green universe!
I am queen of thee, floweret!
And each fleshy blossom
Preserve I not-(safer
Than leaves that embower it,
Or shells that embosom)
-From weevil and chafer?
Laugh through my pane then; solicit the bee;
Gibe him, be sure; and, in midst of thy glee,
Love thy queen, worship me!

-Worship whom else? For am I not, this day,
Whate'er I please? What shall I please to-day?
My morn, noon, eve and night-how spend my day?
To-morrow I must be Pippa who winds silk,
The whole year round, to earn just bread and milk:

But, this one day, I have leave to go,
And play out my fancy's fullest games;
I may fancy all day-and it shall be so-
That I taste of the pleasures, am called by the names
Of the Happiest Four in our Asolo!
See! Up the hill-side yonder, through the morning,
Some one shall love me, as the world calls love:
I am no less than Ottima, take warning!
The gardens, and the great stone house above,
And other house for shrubs, all glass in front,
Are mine; where Sebald steals, as he is wont,
To court me, while old Luca yet reposes:
And therefore, till the shrub-house door uncloses,
I . . . what now?-give abundant cause for prate
About me-Ottima, I mean-of late,
Too bold, too confident she'll still face down
The spitefullest of talkers in our town.
How we talk in the little town below!

But love, love, love-there's better love, I know!
This foolish love was only day's first offer;
I choose my next love to defy the scoffer:
For do not our Bride and Bridegroom sally
Out of Possagno church at noon?
Their house looks over Orcana valley:
Why should not I be the bride as soon
As Ottima? For I saw, beside,
Arrive last night that little bride-
Saw, if you call it seeing her, one flash
Of the pale snow-pure cheek and black bright tresses,
Blacker than all except the black eyelash;
I wonder she contrives those lids no dresses!
-So strict was she, the veil
Should cover close her pale
Pure cheeks-a bride to look at and scarce touch,
Scarce touch, remember, Jules! For are not such
Used to be tended, flower-like, every feature,
As if one's breath would fray the lily of a creature?
A soft and easy life these ladies lead:
Whiteness in us were wonderful indeed.
Oh, save that brow its virgin dimness,

Keep that foot its lady primness,
Let those ankles never swerve
From their exquisite reserve,
Yet have to trip along the streets like me,
All but naked to the knee!
How will she ever grant her Jules a bliss
So startling as her real first infant kiss?
Oh, no-not envy, this!

-Not envy, sure!-for if you gave me
Leave to take or to refuse,
In earnest, do you think I'd choose
That sort of new love to enslave me?
Mine should have lapped me round from the beginning;
As little fear of losing it as winning:
Lovers grow cold, men learn to hate their wives,
And only parents' love can last our lives.
At eve the Son and Mother, gentle pair,
Commune inside our turret: what prevents
My being Luigi? While that mossy lair
Of lizards through the winter-time is stirred
With each to each imparting sweet intents
For this new-year, as brooding bird to bird-
(For I observe of late, the evening walk
Of Luigi and his mother, always ends
Inside our ruined turret, where they talk,
Calmer than lovers, yet more kind than friends)
-Let me be cared about, kept out of harm,
And schemed for, safe in love as with a charm;
Let me be Luigi! If I only knew
What was my mother's face-my father, too!

Nay, if you come to that, best love of all
Is God's; then why not have God's love befall
Myself as, in the palace by the Dome,
Monsignor?-who to-night will bless the home
Of his dead brother; and God bless in turn
That heart which beats, those eyes which mildly burn
With love for all men! I, to-night at least,
Would be that holy and beloved priest.

Now wait!-even I already seem to share
In God's love: what does New-year's hymn declare?
What other meaning do these verses bear?

All service ranks the same with God:
If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work-God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we; there is no last nor first.

Say not 'a small event!' Why 'small'?
Costs it more pain that this, ye call
A 'great event,' should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed!

And more of it, and more of it!-oh yes-
I will pass each, and see their happiness,
And envy none-being just as great, no doubt,
Useful to men, and dear to God, as they!
A pretty thing to care about
So mightily, this single holiday!
But let the sun shine! Wherefore repine?
-With thee to lead me, O Day of mine,
Down the grass path grey with dew,
Under the pine-wood, blind with boughs,
Where the swallow never flew
Nor yet cicala dared carouse-
No, dared carouse!

[She enters the street]

Robert Browning

Italian In England, The

That second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,---
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping thro' the moss they love:
---How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line,
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,
One instant rapidly glanced round,

And saw me beckon from the ground.
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.
Then I drew breath; they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts: on me
Rested the hopes of Italy.
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 'twas told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm---
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
` ` I am that man upon whose head
` ` They fix the price, because I hate
` ` The Austrians over us: the State
` ` Will give you gold---oh, gold so much!---
` ` If you betray me to their clutch,
` ` And be your death, for aught I know,
` ` If once they find you saved their foe.
` ` Now, you must bring me food and drink,
` ` And also paper, pen and ink,
` ` And carry safe what I shall write
` ` To Padua, which you'll reach at night
` ` Before the duomo shuts; go in,
` ` And wait till Tenebr<ae> begin;
` ` Walk to the third confessional,
` ` Between the pillar and the wall,
` ` And kneeling whisper, _Whence comes peace?_
` ` Say it a second time, then cease;

` ` And if the voice inside returns,
` `_ From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
` ` The cause of Peace?_---for answer, slip
` ` My letter where you placed your lip;
` ` Then come back happy we have done
` ` Our mother service---I, the son,
` ` As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sun-rise
That of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover---stout and tall,
She said---then let her eyelids fall,
` ` He could do much"---as if some doubt
Entered her heart,---then, passing out,
` ` She could not speak for others, who
` ` Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head---` ` This faith was shown
` ` To Italy, our mother; she
` ` Uses my hand and blesses thee."
She followed down to the sea-shore;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning---much less wished for---aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince.
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself---say, three---
I know at least what one should be.

I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
---Nor much for that am I perplexed---
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employer. Last
---Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
---Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so---perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine---
Are turning wise: while some opine
` `Freedom grows license," some suspect
` `Haste breeds delay," and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen ` `All's for best,"
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes---just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing---how

It steals the time! To business now.

Robert Browning

Laboratory, The

ANCIEN R<E'>GIME.

□

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy---
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

□□.

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!---I am here.

□□□.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,---I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

□□□.

That in the mortar---you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,---is that poison too?

□□

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!

□□□.

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

VII.

Quick---is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII.

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me!
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,---Say, ``no!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace---
He is sure to remember her dying face!

XI.

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close;
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII.

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it---next moment I dance at the King's!

Robert Browning

Last Ride Together, The

I.

I said---Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be---
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,---I claim
---Only a memory of the same,
---And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II.

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me, a breathing-while or two,
 With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
 Who knows but the world may end tonight?

III.

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions---sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once---
 And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!---

Thus leant she and lingered---joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,---All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach,
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?

They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII.

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you---poor, sick, old ere your time---
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII.

And you, great sculptor---so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
' ` Greatly his opera's strains intend,
' ` Put in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being---had I signed the bond---
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

☒

And yet---she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,---
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

Robert Browning

Life In A Bottle

Escape me?

Never--

Beloved!

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both,

Me the loving and you the loth,

While the one eludes, must the other pursue.

My life is a fault at last, I fear:

It seems too much like a fate, indeed!

Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.

But what if I fail of my purpose here?

It is but to keep the nerves at strain,

To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,

And, baffled, get up and begin again,--

So the chace takes up one's life, that's all.

While, look but once from your farthest bound

At me so deep in the dust and dark,

No sooner the old hope goes to ground

Than a new one, straight to the self-same mark,

I shape me--

Ever

Removed!

Robert Browning

Life In A Love

Escape me?

Never---

Beloved!

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both,

Me the loving and you the loth

While the one eludes, must the other pursue.

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I shape me---

Ever

Removed!

Robert Browning

Lost Leader, The

□

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat---
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags---were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,---they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the free-men,
---He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

□□.

We shall march prospering,---not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,---not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,---while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more foot-path untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part---the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him---strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

Lost Mistress, The

I.

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

II.

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully
---You know the red turns grey.

III.

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we,---well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

IV.

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,---
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever!---

V.

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

Robert Browning

Love Among The Ruins

I.

Where the quiet-coloured end of evening smiles,
Miles and miles
On the solitary pastures where our sheep
Half-asleep
Tinkle homeward thro' the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop---
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country's very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

II.

Now,---the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O'er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
Twelve abreast.

III.

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone---
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe

Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

IV.

Now,---the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
Through the chinks---
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

V.

And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
Melt away---
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

VI.

But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,

All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,---and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
Of my face,
Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
Each on each.

VII.

In one year they sent a million fighters forth
South and North,
And they built their gods a brazen pillar high
As the sky,
Yet reserved a thousand chariots in full force---
Gold, of course.
Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

Robert Browning

Love Among The Ruins

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For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
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With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

Robert Browning

Love In A Life

I.

Room after room,
I hunt the house through
We inhabit together.
Heart, fear nothing, for, heart, thou shalt find her---
Next time, herself!---not the trouble behind her
Left in the curtain, the couch's perfume!
As she brushed it, the cornice-wreath blossomed anew:
Yon looking-glass gleaned at the wave of her feather.

III.

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune---
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! She goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest,---who cares?
But 'tis twilight, you see,---with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

Robert Browning

Man I Am And Man Would Be, Love

Man I am and man would be, Love--merest man and nothing more.
Bid me seem no other! Eagles boast of pinions--let them soar!
I may put forth angel's plumage, once unmanned, but not before.

Now on earth to stand suffices,--nay, if kneeling serves, to kneel:
Here you front me, here I find the all of heaven that earth can feel:
Sense looks straight,--not over,under,--perfect sees beyond appeal.

Good you are and wise, full circle: what to me were more outside?
Wiser wisdom, better goodness? Ah, such want the angel's wide
Sense to take and hold and keep them! Mine at least has never tried.

Robert Browning

Master Hugues Of Saxe-Gotha

An imaginary composer.]

□

Hist, but a word, fair and soft!
Forth and be judged, Master Hugues!
Answer the question I've put you so oft:
What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?<*1>
See, we're alone in the loft,---

□□.

I, the poor organist here,
Hugues, the composer of note,
Dead though, and done with, this many a year:
Let's have a colloquy, something to quote,
Make the world prick up its ear!

□□□.

See, the church empties apace:
Fast they extinguish the lights.
Hallo there, sacristan! Five minutes' grace!
Here's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,
Baulks one of holding the base.

□□□.

See, our huge house of the sounds,
Hushing its hundreds at once,
Bids the last loiterer back to his bounds!
O you may challenge them, not a response
Get the church-saints on their rounds!

□□□

(Saints go their rounds, who shall doubt?
---March, with the moon to admire,
Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about,

Supervise all betwixt pavement and spire,
Put rats and mice to the rout---

¶VI.

Aloys and Jurien and Just---

Order things back to their place,
Have a sharp eye lest the candlesticks rust,
Rub the church-plate, darn the sacrament-lace,
Clear the desk-velvet of dust.)

¶VII.

Here's your book, younger folks shelve!
Played I not off-hand and runningly,
Just now, your masterpiece, hard number twelve?
Here's what should strike, could one handle it cunningly:
HeIp the axe, give it a helve!

¶VIII.

Page after page as I played,
Every bar's rest, where one wipes
Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed,
O'er my three claviers<*2> yon forest of pipes
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

¶IX.

Sure you were wishful to speak?
You, with brow ruled like a score,
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
Like two great breves,<*3> as they wrote them of yore,
Each side that bar, your straight beak!

¶X

Sure you said---` ` Good, the mere notes!
` ` Still, couldst thou take my intent,
` ` Know what procured me our Company's votes---
` ` A master were lauded and sciolists shent,
` ` Parted the sheep from the goats!"

XI.

Well then, speak up, never flinch!
Quick, ere my candle's a snuff
---Burnt, do you see? to its uttermost inch---
I believe in you, but that's not enough:
Give my conviction a clinch!

XII.

First you deliver your phrase
---Nothing propound, that I see,
Fit in itself for much blame or much praise---
Answered no less, where no answer needs be:
Off start the Two on their ways.

XIII.

Straight must a Third interpose,
Volunteer needlessly help;
In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,
So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,
Argument's hot to the close.

□

XIV.

One dissertates, he is candid;
Two must discept,--has distinguished;
Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did;
Four protests; Five makes a dart at the thing wished:
Back to One, goes the case bandied.

XV.

One says his say with a difference
More of expounding, explaining!
All now is wrangle, abuse, and vociferance;
Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-restraining:
Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

XVI.

One is incisive, corrosive:

Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant;
Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive;
Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant,
Five ... O Danaides, <*4> O Sieve!

XVII.

Now, they ply axes and crowbars;
Now, they prick pins at a tissue
Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's <*5>
Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?
Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

XVIII.

Est fuga, volvitur rota.
On we drift: where looms the dim port?
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their quota;
Something is gained, if one caught but the import---
Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha!

XIX.

What with affirming, denying,
Holding, risposting, <*6> subjoining,
All's like ... it's like ... for an instance I'm trying ...
There! See our roof, its gilt moulding and groining
Under those spider-webs lying!

XX.

So your fugue broadens and thickens,
Greatens and deepens and lengthens,
Till we exclaim--- `` But where's music, the dickens?
`` Blot ye the gold, while your spider-web strengthens
`` ---Blacked to the stoutest of tickens?" <*7>

XXI.

I for man's effort am zealous:

Prove me such censure unfounded!
Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous---
Hopes 'twas for something, his organ-pipes sounded,
Tiring three boys at the bellows?

XXII.

Is it your moral of Life?
Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife?

XXIII.

Over our heads truth and nature---
Still our life's zigzags and dodges,
Ins and outs, weaving a new legislature---
God's gold just shining its last where that lodges,
Palled beneath man's usurpature.

XXIV.

So we o'ershroud stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland;
Nothings grow something which quietly closes
Heaven's earnest eye: not a glimpse of the far land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

XXV.

Ah but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)
So many men with such various intentions,
Down the past ages, must know more than this age!
Leave we the web its dimensions!

XXVI.

Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf,
Proved a mere mountain in labour?
Better submit; try again; what's the clef?

'Faith, 'tis no trifle for pipe and for tabor---
Four flats, the minor in F.

XXVII.

Friend, your fugue taxes the finger
Learning it once, who would lose it?
Yet all the while a misgiving will linger,
Truth's golden o'er us although we refuse it---
Nature, thro' cobwebs we string her.

XXVIII.

Hugues! I advise _Me Pn_
(Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)
Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena!
Say the word, straight I unstop the full-organ,
Blare out the _mode Palestrina._<*8>

XXIX.

While in the roof, if I'm right there,
... Lo you, the wick in the socket!
Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
Down it dips, gone like a rocket.
What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
And find a poor devil has ended his cares
At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket?

- * 1 A fugue is a short melody.
- * 2 Keyboard of organ.
- * 3 A note in music.
- * 4 The daughters of Danaus, condemned to pour water
* into a sieve.
- * 5 The Spanish casuist, so severely mauled by Pascal.
- * 6 A quick return in fencing.
- * 7 A closely woven fabric.
- * 8 _Giovanni P. da Palestrina_, celebrated musician (1524-1594).

Meeting At Night

I.

The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low;
And the startled little waves that leap
In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

III.

Then a mile of warm sea-scented beach;
Three fields to cross till a farm appears;
A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch
And blue spurt of a lighted match,
And a voice less loud, thro' its joys and fears,
Than the two hearts beating each to each!

Robert Browning

Memorabilia

I.

Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you
And did you speak to him again?
How strange it seems and new!

II.

But you were living before that,
And also you are living after;
And the memory I started at---
My starting moves your laughter.

III.

I crossed a moor, with a name of its own
And a certain use in the world no doubt,
Yet a hand's-breadth of it shines alone
'Mid the blank miles round about:

IV.

For there I picked up on the heather
And there I put inside my breast
A moulted feather, an eagle-feather!
Well, I forget the rest.

Robert Browning

Mesmerism

I.

All I believed is true!
I am able yet
All I want, to get
By a method as strange as new:
Dare I trust the same to you?

II.

If at night, when doors are shut,
And the wood-worm picks,
And the death-watch ticks,
And the bar has a flag of smut,
And a cat's in the water-butt---

III.

And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares---

IV.

And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
Comes to find, God knows what friends!---

V.

If since eve drew in, I say,
I have sat and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey---

VI.

Till I seemed to have and hold,
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
To the foot in its muslin fold---

VII.

Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare---

VIII.

Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken---

IX.

Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill---

X

Then,---if my heart's strength serve,
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
Knitting an iron nerve---

XI.

Command her soul to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance---

XII.

I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
While myself do steadfast sit---

XIII.

Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent,
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame---

XIV.

Then I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
Is wound in the toils I weave;

XV.

And must follow as I require,
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire:

XVI.

Till the house called hers, not mine,

With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine.

XVII.

Out of doors into the night!
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left nor right
From the pathway, blind with sight---

XVIII.

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind---

XIX.

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift
Thro' the darkness and the drift!

XX.

While I---to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true.

XXI.

For, there! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip

In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow?

XXII.

□

Ha! was the hair so first?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed?

XXTII.

Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine!

XXIV.

` ` Now---now"---the door is heard!
Hark, the stairs! and near---
Nearer---and here---
` ` Now!" and at call the third
She enters without a word.

XXV.

On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape;
It is, past escape,
Herself, now: the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one.

XXVI.

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant control
To another, nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now!

XXVII.

I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day
What the price is, who can say?

Robert Browning

Misconceptions

.
This is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high tree-top she sprang to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure.
Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to,---
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

III.

This is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.<*1>
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on---
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

* 1 A vestment used by ecclesiastics, and formerly
* by senators and persons of high rank.

Robert Browning

My Last Duchess

FERRARA.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fr Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
` ` Fr Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fr Pandolf chanced to say ` ` Her mantle laps
` ` Over my lady's wrist too much," or ` ` Paint
` ` Must never hope to reproduce the faint
` ` Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart---how shall I say?---too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace---all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,---good! but thanked
Somehow---I know not how---as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech---(which I have not)---to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, ` ` Just this

``Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
``Or there exceed the mark"---and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
---E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning

My Star

All, that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Robert Browning

Nationality In Drinks

I.

My heart sank with our Claret-flask,
Just now, beneath the heavy sedges
That serve this Pond's black face for mask
And still at yonder broken edges
O' the hole, where up the bubbles glisten,
After my heart I look and listen.

III.

Our laughing little flask, compelled
Thro' depth to depth more bleak and shady;
As when, both arms beside her held,
Feet straightened out, some gay French lady
Is caught up from life's light and motion,
And dropped into death's silent ocean!

IV-

Up jumped Tokay on our table,
Like a pygmy castle-warder,
Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,
Arms and accoutrements all in order;
And fierce he looked North, then, wheeling South,
Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth,
Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather,
Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,
Jingled his huge brass spurs together,
Tightened his waist with its Buda sash,
And then, with an impudence nought could abash,
Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder,
For twenty such knaves he should laugh but the bolder:
And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting,
And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting,
Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch, strutting!

IV-

Here's to Nelson's memory!
'Tis the second time that I, at sea,
Right off Cape Trafalgar here,
Have drunk it deep in British Beer.
Nelson for ever---any time
Am I his to command in prose or rhyme!
Give me of Nelson only a touch,
And I save it, be it little or much:
Here's one our Captain gives, and so
Down at the word, by George, shall it go!
He says that at Greenwich they point the beholder
To Nelson's coat, ` ` still with tar on the shoulder:
` ` For he used to lean with one shoulder digging,
` ` Jigging, as it were, and zig-zag-zigging
` ` Up against the mizen-rigging!"

Robert Browning

Natural Magic

All I can say is--I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,--I swear,
From the head to the foot of her--well, quite as bare!
'No Nautch shall cheat me,' said I, 'taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!' And this bolt--I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With--who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only--I saw it!

All I can sing is--I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling, and floor,--not a chance for a weed!
Wide opens the entrance: where's cold, now, where's gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing--nay, birds of your winging!
A fairy-tale! Only--I feel it!

Robert Browning

Never The Time And The Place

Never the time and the place
And the loved one all together!
This path--how soft to pace!
This May -- what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?
This path so soft to pace shall lead
Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed!
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers: we
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she, --
I and she!

Robert Browning

Now!

Out of your whole life give but a moment!
All of your life that has gone before,
All to come after it, -- so you ignore,
So you make perfect the present, condense,
In a rapture of rage, for perfection's endowment,
Thought and feeling and soul and sense,
Merged in a moment which gives me at last
You around me for once, you beneath me, above me --
Me, sure that, despite of time future, time past,
This tick of life-time's one moment you love me!
How long such suspension may linger? Ah, Sweet,
The moment eternal -- just that and no more --
When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core,
While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut, and lips meet!

Robert Browning

O' Lyric Love

O' Lyric Love, half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a wild desire,-
Boldest of hearts that ever braved the sun,
Took sanctuary within the holier blue,
And sang a kindred soul out to his face,-
Yet human at the red-ripe of the heart-
When the first summons from the darkling earth
Reached thee amid thy chambers, blanched their blue,
And bared them of the glory-to drop down,
To toil for man, to suffer or to die,-
This is the same voice: can thy soul know change?
Hail then, and hearken from the realms of help!
Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand-
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendor once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
-Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their upmost up and on,-so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,
Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall!

Robert Browning

Old Pictures In Florence

I.

The morn when first it thunders in March,
The eel in the pond gives a leap, they say:
As I leaned and looked over the aloed arch
Of the villa-gate this warm March day,
No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled
In the valley beneath where, white and wide
And washed by the morning water-gold,
Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

II.

River and bridge and street and square
Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
Through the live translucent bath of air,
As the sights in a magic crystal ball.
And of all I saw and of all I praised,
The most to praise and the best to see
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised:
But why did it more than startle me?

III.

Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
Could you play me false who loved you so?
Some slights if a certain heart endures
Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know!
I' faith, I perceive not why I should care
To break a silence that suits them best,
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV.

On the arch where olives overhead
Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,
(That sharp-curved leaf which they never shed)
'Twixt the aloes, I used to lean in chief,

And mark through the winter afternoons,
By a gift God grants me now and then,
In the mild decline of those suns like moons,
Who walked in Florence, besides her men.

V

They might chirp and chaffer, come and go
For pleasure or profit, her men alive---
My business was hardly with them, I trow,
But with empty cells of the human hive;
---With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
Its face set full for the sun to shave.

VI.

Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
Till the latest life in the painting stops,
Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains:
One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
---A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

VII.

For oh, this world and the wrong it does
They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
Round the works of, you of the little wit!
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope?
'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

VIII.

Much they reckon of your praise and you!
But the wronged great souls---can they be quit

Of a world where their work is all to do,
Where you style them, you of the little wit,
Old Master This and Early the Other,
Not dreaming that Old and New are fellows:
A younger succeeds to an elder brother,
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos.

IX.

And here where your praise might yield returns,
And a handsome word or two give help,
Here, after your kind, the mastiff girns
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.
What, not a word for Stefano there,
Of brow once prominent and starry,
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair
For his peerless painting? (See Vasari.)

XI

There stands the Master. Study, my friends,
What a man's work comes to! So he plans it,
Performs it, perfects it, makes amends
For the toiling and moiling, and then, _sic transit!_
Happier the thrifty blind-folk labour,
With upturned eye while the hand is busy,
Not sidling a glance at the coin of their neighbour!
'Tis looking downward that makes one dizzy.

XI.

` ` If you knew their work you would deal your dole."
May I take upon me to instruct you?
When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,
Thus much had the world to boast _in fructu_---
The Truth of Man, as by God first spoken,
Which the actual generations garble,
Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)
And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

XII.

So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,
As you might have been, as you cannot be;
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:
And grew content in your poor degree
With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

XIII.

You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?
Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.
You would prove a model? The Son of Priam
Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees' use.
You're wroth---can you slay your snake like Apollo?
You're grieved---still Niobe's the grander!
You live---there's the Racers' frieze to follow:
You die---there's the dying Alexander.

XIV.

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
You learned---to submit is a mortal's duty.
---When I say ``you" 'tis the common soul,
The collective, I mean: the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
And grow here according to God's clear plan.

XV.

Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start---What if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they?
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature;
For time, theirs---ours, for eternity.

XVI.

To-day's brief passion limits their range;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect---how else? they shall never change:
We are faulty---why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished:
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

XVII.

'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven---
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) ``O!"
Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

XVIII.

Is it true that we are now, and shall be hereafter,
But what and where depend on life's minute?
Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter
Our first step out of the gulf or in it?
Shall Man, such step within his endeavour,
Man's face, have no more play and action
Than joy which is crystallized for ever,
Or grief, an eternal petrification?

XIX.

On which I conclude, that the early painters,
To cries of ``Greek Art and what more wish you?"---
Replied, ``To become now self-acquainters,
``And paint man man, whatever the issue!
``Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
``New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
``To bring the invisible full into play!

`` Let the visible go to the dogs---what matters?"

XX.

Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory
For daring so much, before they well did it.
The first of the new, in our race's story,
Beats the last of the old; 'tis no idle quiddit.
The worthies began a revolution,
Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,
Why, honour them now! (ends my allocution)
Nor confer your degree when the folk leave college.

XXI.

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate---
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

XXII.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene,---
When our faith in the same has stood the test---
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one.

XXIII.

But at any rate I have loved the season
Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy;
My sculptor is Nicolo<*1> the Pisan,
My painter---who but Cimabue?
Nor ever was man of them all indeed,

From these to Ghiberti<*2> and Ghirlandaio,<*3>
Could say that he missed my critic-meed.
So, now to my special grievance---heigh ho!

XXIV.

Their ghosts still stand, as I said before,
Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,
Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er:
---No getting again what the church has grasped!
The works on the wall must take their chance;
``Works never conceded to England's thick clime!"
(I hope they prefer their inheritance
Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

XXV.

When they go at length, with such a shaking
Of heads o'er the old delusion, sadly
Each master his way through the black streets taking,
Where many a lost work breathes though badly---
Why don't they bethink them of who has merited?
Why not reveal, while their pictures dree
Such doom, how a captive might be out-ferreted?
Why is it they never remember me?

XXVI.

Not that I expect the great Bigordi,
Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose;
Nor the wronged Lippino;<*4> and not a word I
Say of a scrap of Fr Angelico's:
But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,<*5>
To grant me a taste of your intonaco,<*6>
Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?
Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?

XXVII.

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,
My Pollajolo,<*7> the twice a craftsman,
Save me a sample, give me the hap

Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman?
No Virgin by him the somewhat petty,
Of finical touch and tempera<*8> crumbly---
Could not Alesso Baldovinetti
Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?

XXVIII.

Margheritone of Arezzo,<*9>
With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret
(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,
You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot?)
Not a poor glimmering Crucifixion,
Where in the foreground kneels the donor?
If such remain, as is my conviction,
The hoarding it does you but little honour.

XXIX.

They pass; for them the panels may thrill,
The tempera grow alive and tinglish;
Their pictures are left to the mercies still
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,
Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,
Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno
At naked High Art, and in ecstasies
Before some clay-cold vile Carlino!

XXX.

No matter for these! But Giotto, you,
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it,---
Oh, never! it shall not be counted true---
That a certain precious little tablet
Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover,---
Was buried so long in oblivion's womb
And, left for another than I to discover,
Turns up at last! and to whom?---to whom?

XXXI.

I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,

(Or was it rather the Ognissanti<*10>?)
Patient on altar-step planting a weary toe!
Nay, I shall have it yet! _Detur amanti!_
My Koh-i-noor-or (if that's a platitude)
Jewel of Giamschid, the Persian Sofi's eye
So, in anticipative gratitude,
What if I take up my hope and prophesy?

XXXII.

When the hour grows ripe, and a certain dotard
Is pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing,
To the worse side of the Mont Saint Gothard,
We shall begin by way of rejoicing;
None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),
Nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer,
Hunting Radetzky's soul like a partridge
Over Morello with squib and cracker.

XXXIII.

This time we'll shoot better game and bag 'em hot---
No mere display at the stone of Dante,
But a kind of sober Witanagemot
(Ex: ``Casa Guidi," _quod videas ante_)
Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,
How Art may return that departed with her.
Go, hated house, go each trace of the Lorraine's,
And bring us the days of Orgagna<*11> hither!

XXXIV.

How we shall prologize, how we shall perorate,
Utter fit things upon art and history,
Feel truth at blood-heat and falsehood at zero rate,
Make of the want of the age no mystery;
Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,
Show---monarchy ever its uncouth cub licks
Out of the bear's shape into Chimra's,
While Pure Art's birth is still the republic's.

XXXV.

Then one shall propose in a speech (curt Tuscan,
Expurgate and sober, with scarcely an ``_issimo,_)")
To end now our half-told tale of Cambuscan,<*12>
And turn the bell-tower's _alt_ to _altissimo_:
And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia<*13>
The Campanile, the Duomo's fit ally,
Shall soar up in gold full fifty braccia,
Completing Florence, as Florence Italy.

XXXVI.

Shall I be alive that morning the scaffold
Is broken away, and the long-pent fire,
Like the golden hope of the world, unbaffled
Springs from its sleep, and up goes the spire
While ``God and the People" plain for its motto,
Thence the new tricolour flaps at the sky?
At least to foresee that glory of Giotto
And Florence together, the first am I!

* 1 A sculptor, died 1278.

* 2 Died 1455. Designed the bronze gates of the Baptistry at Florence.

* 3 A painter, died 1498.

* 4 The son of Fr Lippo Lippi. Wronged, because some of his
pictures have been attributed to others.

* 5 Died 1366. One of Giotto's pupils and assistants.

* 6 Rough cast.

* 7 Painter, sculptor, and goldsmith.

* 8 Distemper---mixture of water and egg yolk.

* 9 Sculptor and architect, died 1313-

*10 All Saints.

*11 A Florentine painter, died 1576.

*12 Tartar king.

*13 A woodcock

Robert Browning

One Way Of Love

.

All June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II.

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III.

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion---heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may---I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

Robert Browning

One Word More

TO E.B.B.

I

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together;
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Rafael made a century of sonnets,
Made and wrote them in a certain volume
Dinted with the silver-pointed pencil
Else he only used to draw Madonnas;
These, the world might view--but one, the volume.
Who that one, you ask? Your heart instructs you.
Did she live and love it all her lifetime?
Did she drop, his lady of the sonnets,
Die, and let it drop beside her pillow
Where it lay in place of Rafael's glory,
Rafael's cheek so duteous and so loving--
Cheek, the world was wont to hail a painter's,
Rafael's cheek, her love had turned a poet's?

III

You and I would rather read that volume
(Taken to his beating bosom by it),
Lean and list the bosom-beats of Rafael,
Would we not? than wonder at Madonnas--
Her, San Sisto names, and Her, Foligno,
Her, that visits Florence in a vision,
Her, that's left with lilies in the Louvre--
Seen by us and all the world in circle.

IV

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple,
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, 'Ours, the treasure!'
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

V

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper 'Beatrice.'
While he mused and traced it and retraced it
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)--
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante, standing, studying his angel,--
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he--'Certain people of importance'
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)
'Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet.'
Says the poet--'Then I stopped my painting.'

VI

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not?--than read a fresh Inferno.

VII

You and I will never see that picture.

While he mused on love and Beatrice,
While he softened o'er his outlined angel,
In they broke, those 'people of importance':
We and Bice bear the loss forever.

VIII

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only,
(Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient--
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
None but would forego his proper dowry,--
Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,
Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,--
Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
Once, and only once, and for one only,
So to be the man and leave the artist,
Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.

IX

Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement!
He who smites the rock and spreads the water,
Bidding drink and live a crowd beneath him,
Even he, the minute makes immortal,
Proves, perchance, but mortal in the minute,
Desecrates, belike, the deed in doing.
While he smites, how can he but remember,
So he smote before, in such a peril,
When they stood and mocked--'Shall smiting help us?'
When they drank and sneered--'A stroke is easy!'
When they wiped their mouths and went their journey,
Throwing him for thanks--'But drought was pleasant.'
Thus old memories mar the actual triumph;
Thus the doing savors of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;

O'er-importuned brows becloud the mandate,
Carelessness or consciousness--the gesture.
For he bears an ancient wrong about him,
Sees and knows again those phalanxed faces,
Hears, yet one time more, the 'customed prelude--
'How shouldst thou, of all men, smite, and save us?'
Guesses what is like to prove the sequel--
'Egypt's flesh-pots --nay, the drought was better.'

X

Oh, the crowd must have emphatic warrant!
Theirs, the Sinai-forhead's cloven brilliance,
Right-arm's rod-sweep, tongue's imperial fiat.
Never dares the man put off the prophet.

XI

Did he love one face from out the thousands,
(Were she Jethro's daughter, white and wifely,
Were she but the AETHiopian bondslave),
He would envy yon dumb, patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues.
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems; I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you;
Other heights in other lives, God willing;
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love.

XIII

Yet a semblance of resource avails us--
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.
He who works in fresco steals a hair-brush,
Curbs the liberal hand, subservient proudly,
Cramps his spirit, crowds its all in little,
Makes a strange art of an art familiar,
Fills his lady's missal-marge with flowerets,
He who blows through bronze may breathe through silver,
Fitly serenade a slumbrous princess.
He who writes, may write for once as I do.

XIV

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,--the speech, a poem.
Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours--the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert, and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:
Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV

Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbrued with color,

Drifted over Fiesole by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.
Full she flared it, lamping Samminiato,
Rounder 'twixt the cypresses and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house-roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI

What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),
All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos),
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman,--
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret.
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats --him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal--
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg
Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire,
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII

What were seen? None knows, none ever will know.
Only this is sure--the sight were other,

Not the moon's same side, born late in Florence,
Dying now impoverished here in London.
God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her.

XVIII

This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you--yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,
Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you--
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song--and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel--borne, see, on my bosom!

Robert Browning

Over The Sea Our Galleys Went

Over the sea our galleys went,
With cleaving prows in order brave,
To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,

A gallant armament:
Each bark built out of a forest-tree,

Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
And nailed all over the gaping sides,
Within and without, with black bull-hides,
Seethed in fat and suppled in flame,
To bear the playful billows' game:
So, each good ship was rude to see,
Rude and bare to the outward view,

But each upbore a stately tent
Where cedar-pales in scented row
Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine,
And an awning drooped the mast below,
In fold on fold of the purple fine,
That neither noontide nor star-shine
Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad,

Might pierce the regal tenement.
When the sun dawned, oh, gay and glad
We set the sail and plied the oar;
But when the night-wind blew like breath,
For joy of one day's voyage more,
We sang together on the wide sea,
Like men at peace on a peaceful shore;
Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,
Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
And in a sleep as calm as death,
We, the voyagers from afar,

Lay stretched along, each weary crew
In a circle round its wondrous tent
Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,

And with light and perfume, music too:
So the stars wheeled round, and the darkness past,
And at morn we started beside the mast,
And still each ship was sailing fast!

Now, one morn, land appeared! - a speck
Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky:
'Avoid it,' cried our pilot, 'check

The shout, restrain the eager eye! '
But the heaving sea was black behind
For many a night and many a day,
And land, though but a rock, drew nigh;
So, we broke the cedar pales away,
Let the purple awning flap in the wind,

And a statue bright was on every deck!
We shouted, every man of us,
And steered right into the harbour thus,
With pomp and paeon glorious.
A hundred shapes of lucid stone!

All day we built its shrine for each,
A shrine of rock for every one,
Nor paused we till in the westering sun

We sat together on the beach
To sing because our task was done.
When lo! what shouts and merry songs!
What laughter all the distance stirs!
A loaded raft with happy throngs
Of gentle islanders!
'Our isles are just at hand,' they cried,

'Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping;
Our temple-gates are opened wide,

Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping
For these majestic forms'- they cried.
Oh, then we awoke with sudden start
From our deep dream, and knew, too late,
How bare the rock, how desolate,

Which had received our precious freight:

Yet we called out- 'Depart!
Our gifts, once given, must here abide.

Our work is done; we have no heart
To mar our work,'- we cried.

Robert Browning

Overhead The Tree-Tops Meet

Overhead the tree-tops meet,
Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;
There was nought above me, and nought below,
My childhood had not learned to know:
For what are the voices of birds
—Ay, and of beasts,—but words—our words,
Only so much more sweet?
The knowledge of that with my life begun!
But I had so near made out the sun,
And counted your stars, the Seven and One,
Like the fingers of my hand:
Nay, I could all but understand
Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges,
And just when out of her soft fifty changes
No unfamiliar face might overlook me—
Suddenly God took me!

Robert Browning

Pan And Luna

Si credere dignum est.--Virgil, Georgics, III, 390

Oh, worthy of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!
No question, that adventure came to pass
One black night in Arcadia: yes, the pines,
Mountains and valleys mingling made one mass
Of black with void black heaven: the earth's confines,
The sky's embrace,--below, above, around,
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice:
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,
By turning round the bowl! So night can fuse
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less,
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when--diving into space,
Stript of all vapor, from each web of mist,
Utterly film-free--entered on her race
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist
Of night and dark, night's dowry: peak to base,
Upstarted mountains, and each valley, kissed
To sudden life, lay silver-bright: in air
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth,--where refuge seemed--
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct
Those limbs: mid still-retreating blue, she teemed
Herself with whiteness,--virginal, uncinct
By any halo save what finely gleamed
To outline not disguise her: heaven was linked
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,
A succorable cloud with sleep lay dense:
Some pinetree-top had caught it sailing slow,
And tethered for a prize: in evidence
Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow
Drowsily patient: flake-heaped how or whence,
The structure of that succorable cloud,
What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud.

Orbed--so the woman-figure poets call
Because of rounds on rounds--that apple-shaped
Head which its hair binds close into a ball
Each side the curving ears--that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps--that . . . once for all,
Say--her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerable circlets, sank absorbed,
Safe in the cloud--O naked Moon full-orbed!

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,
Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff
Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine
Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff
Fitting as close as fits the dented spine
Its flexible ivory outside-flesh: enough!
The plummy drifts contract, condense, constringe,
Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam
Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits
Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,--
If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets
What most she loathes and leaps from,--elf from gnome
No gladlier,--finds that safest of retreats
Bubble about a treacherous hand wide ope
To grasp her--(divers who pick pearls so grope)--

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught
By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract:
He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought
With simulated earth-breath,--wool-tufts packed
Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought
For spotless shearings yield such: take the fact

As learned Virgil gives it,--how the breed
Whitens itself forever: yes, indeed!

If one forefather ram, though pure as chalk
From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue
Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men balk
The propagating plague: he gets no young:
They rather slay him,--sell his hide to calk
Ships with, first steeped with pitch,--nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,
The purity we loved is gained for us. So did girl-Moon, by just her attribute
Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,
Bruised to the breast of Pan, half god half brute,
Raked by his bristly boar-sword while he lapped
--Never say, kissed her! that were to pollute
Love's language--which moreover proves unapt
To tell how she recoiled--as who finds thorns
Where she sought flowers--when, feeling, she touched--horns!

Then--does the legend say?--first moon-eclipse
Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore
The early sages? Is that why she dips
Into the dark, a minute and no more,
Only so long as serves her while she rips
The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,
Pursues her way? No lesson for a maid
Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed?

Ha, Virgil? Tell the rest, you! "To the deep
Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith
Called her, and so she followed"--in her sleep,
Surely?--"by no means spurning him." The myth
Explain who may! Let all else go, I keep
--As of a ruin just a monolith--
Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon:
Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.

Robert Browning

Parting At Morning

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun looked over the mountain's rim:
And straight was a path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

Robert Browning

Patriot, The

AN OLD STORY.

I.

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, ``Good folk, mere noise repels---
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, ``And afterward, what else?"

III.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Nought man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV.

There's nobody on the house-tops now---
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate---or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,

For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI.

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
``Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
``Me?''---God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.

Robert Browning

Pheidippides

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all!
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth, and forever,—O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 'tis myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
'Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?' Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for 'Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria.—but Athens? shall Athens, sink,
Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick,—what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there's lightning in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!'

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
'Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must!'

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
'Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!

Count we no time lost time which lags thro' respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend.'

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze thro' my blood; off, off and away was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false and the vile!
Yet 'O Gods of my land!' I cried, as each hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them again,
'Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

'Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to en-wreath
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!
Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure?—at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!'

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
'Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Athens to aid? Tho' the dive were thro' Erebos, thus I obey—
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!'—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof;
All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
'Halt, Pheidippides!'—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
'Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?!' he gracious began:
'How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

'Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—Is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

'Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
—Fennel,—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode),
'While, as for thee...' But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was my road;
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

* * * * *

Then spoke Miltiades.^o 'And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of her son!
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance—'Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

'I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away forever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!'

* * * * *

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried 'To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!' He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,

Till in he broke: 'Rejoice, we conquer!' Like wine thro' clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still 'Rejoice!'—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy forever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a god, bear the face of a god, whom a god loved so well,
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
'Athens is saved!'—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

Robert Browning

Pied Piper Of Hamelin, The

A CHILD'S STORY.

(_Written for, and inscribed to, W. M. the Younger._)

I.

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II.

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III.

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
`` 'Tis clear," cried they, `` our Mayor's a noddy;
`` And as for our Corporation---shocking.
`` To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
`` For dolts that can't or won't determine
`` What's best to rid us of our vermin!

`` You hope, because you're old and obese,
`` To find in the furry civic robe ease?
`` Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
`` To find the remedy we're lacking,
`` Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"

At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV.

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
`` For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
`` I wish I were a mile hence!
`` It's easy to bid one rack one's brain---
`` I'm sure my poor head aches again,
`` I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
`` Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"

Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
`` Bless us," cried the Mayor, `` what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
`` Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
`` Anything like the sound of a rat
`` Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

V

`` Come in!"---the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;

There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: ``It's as my great-grandsire,
`` Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
`` Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI.

He advanced to the council-table
And, ``Please your honours," said he, ``I'm able,
`` By means of a secret charm, to draw
`` All creatures living beneath the sun,
`` That creep or swim or fly or run,
`` After me so as you never saw!
`` And I chiefly use my charm
`` On creatures that do people harm,
`` The mole and toad and newt and viper;
`` And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
``Yet," said he, ``poor piper as I am,
`` In Tartary I freed the Cham,
`` Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
`` I eased in Asia the Nizam
`` Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
`` And as for what your brain bewilders,
`` If I can rid your town of rats
`` Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
``One? fifty thousand!"---was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII.

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,

As if he knew what magic slept
 In his quiet pipe the while;
 Then, like a musical adept,
 To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
 And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
 You heard as if an army muttered;
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
 Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
 Families by tens and dozens,
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives---
 Followed the Piper for their lives.
 From street to street he piped advancing,
 And step for step they followed dancing,
 Until they came to the river Weser,
 Wherein all plunged and perished!
 ---Save one who, stout as Julius C<ae>sar,
 Swam across and lived to carry
 (As he, the manuscript he cherished)
 To Rat-land home his commentary:
 Which was, `` At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
 `` I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
 `` And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
 `` Into a cider-press's gripe:
 `` And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
 `` And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
 `` And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
 `` And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
 `` And it seemed as if a voice
 `` (Sweeter far than b<y'> harp or b<y'> psaltery
 `` Is breathed) called out, ` Oh rats, rejoice!
 `` ` The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
 `` ` So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
 `` ` Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
 `` And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,

` ` All ready staved, like a great sun shone
` ` Glorious scarce an inch before me,
` ` Just as methought it said, `Come, bore me!
` ` ---I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII.

You should have heard the Hamelin people
ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
` `Go," cried the Mayor, ` `and get long poles,
` `Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
` `Consult with carpenters and builders,
` `And leave in our town not even a trace
` `Of the rats!"---when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, ` `First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX.

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
` `Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
` `Our business was done at the river's brink;
` `We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
` `And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
` `So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
` `From the duty of giving you something for drink,
` `And a matter of money to put in your poke;
` `But as for the guilders, what we spoke
` `Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
` `Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
` `A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried

` ` No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
` ` I've promised to visit by dinnertime
` ` Bagdat, and accept the prime
` ` Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
` ` For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
` ` Of a nest of scorpions no survivor:
` ` With him I proved no bargain-driver,
` ` With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
` ` And folks who put me in a passion
` ` May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI.

` ` How?" cried the Mayor, ` ` d'ye think I brook
` ` Being worse treated than a Cook?
` ` Insulted by a lazy ribald
` ` With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
` ` You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
` ` Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII.

Once more he stept into the street
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
 As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
 Unable to move a step, or cry
 To the children merrily skipping by,
 ---Could only follow with the eye
 That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
 But how the Mayor was on the rack,
 And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
 As the Piper turned from the High Street
 To where the Weser rolled its waters
 Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
 However be turned from South to West,
 And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
 And after him the children pressed;
 Great was the joy in every breast.
 ` ` He never can cross that mighty top!
 ` ` He's forced to let the piping drop,
 ` ` And we shall see our children stop!"
 When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
 A wondrous portal opened wide,
 As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
 And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
 And when all were in to the very last,
 The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
 Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
 And could not dance the whole of the way;
 And in after years, if you would blame
 His sadness, he was used to say,---
 ` ` It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
 ` ` I can't forget that I'm bereft
 ` ` Of all the pleasant sights they see,
 ` ` Which the Piper also promised me.
 ` ` For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
 ` ` Joining the town and just at hand,
 ` ` Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
 ` ` And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
 ` ` And everything was strange and new;
 ` ` The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
 ` ` And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
 ` ` And honey-bees had lost their stings,
 ` ` And horses were born with eagles' wings:
 ` ` And just as I became assured

` ` My lame foot would be speedily cured,
` ` The music stopped and I stood still,
` ` And found myself outside the hill,
` ` Left alone against my will,
` ` To go now limping as before,
` ` And never hear of that country more!"

ÆIV.

Alas, alas for Hamelin!

There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
The mayor sent East, West, North and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
` ` And so long after what happened here
` ` On the Twenty-second of July,
` ` Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street---
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.

And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV.

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men---especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free fr<o'>m rats or fr<o'>m mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

Robert Browning

Pippa's Song

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearl'd;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in His heaven--
All's right with the world!

Robert Browning

Popularity

I.

Stand still, true poet that you are!
I know you; let me try and draw you.
Some night you'll fail us: when afar
You rise, remember one man saw you,
Knew you, and named a star!

II.

My star, God's glow-worm! Why extend
That loving hand of his which leads you
Yet locks you safe from end to end
Of this dark world, unless he needs you,
just saves your light to spend?

III.

His clenched hand shall unclose at last,
I know, and let out all the beauty:
My poet holds the future fast,
Accepts the coming ages' duty,
Their present for this past.

IV.

That day, the earth's feast-master's brow
Shall clear, to God the chalice raising;
`` Others give best at first, but thou
`` Forever set'st our table praising,
`` Keep'st the good wine till now!"

V.

Meantime, I'll draw you as you stand,
With few or none to watch and wonder:
I'll say---a fisher, on the sand
By Tyre the old, with ocean-plunder,
A netful, brought to land.

VI.

Who has not heard how Tyrian shells
Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes
Whereof one drop worked miracles,
And coloured like Astarte's<*1> eyes
Raw silk the merchant sells?

VII.

And each bystander of them all
Could criticize, and quote tradition
How depths of blue sublimed some pall
---To get which, pricked a king's ambition
Worth sceptre, crown and ball.

VIII.

Yet there's the dye, in that rough mesh,
The sea has only just o'erwhispered!
Live whelks, each lip's beard dripping fresh,
As if they still the water's lisp heard
Through foam the rock-weeds thresh.

IX.

Enough to furnish Solomon
Such hangings for his cedar-house,
That, when gold-robed he took the throne
In that abyss of blue, the Spouse
Might swear his presence shone

X

Most like the centre-spike of gold
Which burns deep in the blue-bell's womb,
What time, with ardours manifold,
The bee goes singing to her groom,
Drunken and overbold.

XI.

Mere conchs! not fit for warp or woof!
Till cunning come to pound and squeeze
And clarify,---refine to proof
The liquor filtered by degrees,
While the world stands aloof.

XII.

And there's the extract, flasked and fine,
And priced and saleable at last!
And Hobbs, Nobbs, Stokes and Nokes combine
To paint the future from the past,
Put blue into their line.

XIII.

□

Hobbs hints blue,---Straight he turtle eats:
Nobbs prints blue,---claret crowns his cup:
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,---
Both gorge. Who fished the murex<*2> up?
What porridge had John Keats?

* 1 The Syrian Venus.

* 2 Molluscs from which the famous Tyrian

* purple dye was obtained.

Robert Browning

Porphyria's Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me---she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound

Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

Robert Browning

Prospice

Fear death?---to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form;
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so---one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that Death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And made me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers,
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave.
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain.
Then a light, then thy breath,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

Robert Browning

Rabbi Ben Ezra

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!'

Not that, amassing flowers,
Youth sighed 'Which rose make ours,
Which lily leave and then as best recall?'
Not that, admiring stars,
It yearned 'Nor Jove, nor Mars;
Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!'

Not for such hopes and fears
Annulling youth's brief years,
Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark!
Rather I prize the doubt
Low kinds exist without,
Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

Poor vaunt of life indeed,
Were man but formed to feed
On joy, to solely seek and find and feast:
Such feasting ended, then
As sure an end to men;
Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive!
A spark disturbs our clod;
Nearer we hold of God
Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe.

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!

Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

For thence,--a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks,--
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:
What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me:
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

What is he but a brute
Whose flesh has soul to suit,
Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play?
To man, propose this test--
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

Yet gifts should prove their use:
I own the Past profuse
Of power each side, perfection every turn:
Eyes, ears took in their dole,
Brain treasured up the whole;
Should not the heart beat once 'How good to live and learn?'

Not once beat 'Praise be Thine!
I see the whole design,
I, who saw power, see now love perfect too:
Perfect I call Thy plan:
Thanks that I was a man!
Maker, remake, complete,--I trust what Thou shalt do!'

For pleasant is this flesh;
Our soul, in its rose-mesh
Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest;
Would we some prize might hold
To match those manifold
Possessions of the brute,--gain most, as we did best!

Let us not always say,
'Spite of this flesh to-day
I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!'
As the bird wings and sings,

Let us cry 'All good things
Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!'

Therefore I summon age
To grant youth's heritage,
Life's struggle having so far reached its term:
Thence shall I pass, approved
A man, for aye removed
From the developed brute; a god though in the germ.

And I shall thereupon
Take rest, ere I be gone
Once more on my adventure brave and new:
Fearless and unperplexed,
When I wage battle next,
What weapons to select, what armour to indue.

Youth ended, I shall try
My gain or loss thereby;
Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold:
And I shall weigh the same,
Give life its praise or blame:
Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

For note, when evening shuts,
A certain moment cuts
The deed off, calls the glory from the grey:
A whisper from the west
Shoots--'Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: here dies another day.'

So, still within this life,
Though lifted o'er its strife,
Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last,
This rage was right i' the main,
That acquiescence vain:
The Future I may face now I have proved the Past.'

For more is not reserved
To man, with soul just nerved
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch

The Master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

As it was better, youth
Should strive, through acts uncouth,
Toward making, than repose on aught found made:
So, better, age, exempt
From strife, should know, than tempt
Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid!
Enough now, if the Right
And Good and Infinite
Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own
With knowledge absolute,
Subject to no dispute
From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

Be there, for once and all,
Severed great minds from small,
Announced to each his station in the Past!
Was I, the world arraigned,
Were they, my soul disdained,
Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise,
They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

Not on the vulgar mass
Called 'work,' must sentence pass,
Things done, that took the eye and had the price;
O'er which, from level stand,
The low world laid its hand,
Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

But all, the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account;
All instincts immature,
All purposes unsure,

That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped;
All I could never be,
All, men ignored in me,
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,--
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
'Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!'

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops: Potter and clay endure.

He fixed thee mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

What though the earlier grooves,
Which ran the laughing loves
Around thy base, no longer pause and press?
What though, about thy rim,
Skull-things in order grim
Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

Look not thou down but up!
To uses of a cup,
The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal,
The new wine's foaming flow,
The Master's lips a-glow!

Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's wheel?

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who moulded men;
And since, not even while the whirl was worst,
Did I,--to the wheel of life
With shapes and colours rife,
Bound dizzily,--mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

So, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!

Robert Browning

Respectability

I.

Dear, had the world in its caprice
Deigned to proclaim ``I know you both,
``Have recognized your plighted troth,
Am sponsor for you: live in peace!"---
How many precious months and years
Of youth had passed, that speed so fast,
Before we found it out at last,
The world, and what it fears?

II.

How much of priceless life were spent
With men that every virtue decks,
And women models of their sex,
Society's true ornament,---
Ere we dared wander, nights like this,
Thro' wind and rain, and watch the Seine,
And feel the Boulevard break again
To warmth and light and bliss?

III.

I know! the world proscribes not love;
Allows my finger to caress
Your lips' contour and downiness,
Provided it supply a glove.
The world's good word!---the Institute!
Guizot receives Montalembert!
Eh? Down the court three lampions flare:
Put forward your best foot!

Robert Browning

Saul

I.

Said Abner, ``At last thou art come! Ere I tell, ere thou speak,
``Kiss my cheek, wish me well!" Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.
And he, ``Since the King, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,
``Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent
``Thou return with the joyful assurance the King liveth yet,
``Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet.
``For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,
``Not a sound hath escaped to thy servants, of prayer nor of praise,
``To betoken that Saul and the Spirit have ended their strife,
``And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

II.

``Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew
``On thy gracious gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue
``Just broken to twine round thy harp-strings, as if no wild beat
``Were now raging to torture the desert!"

III.

Then I, as was meet,
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose on my feet,
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder. The tent was unlooped;
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under I stooped
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch, all withered and gone,
That extends to the second enclosure, I groped my way on
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open. Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid
But spoke, ``Here is David, thy servant!" And no voice replied.
At the first I saw nought but the blackness but soon I descried
A something more black than the blackness---the vast, the upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof, showed Saul.

IV.

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched out wide
On the great cross-support in the centre, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,---so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

V

Then I tuned my harp,---took off the lilies we twine round its chords
Lest they snap 'neath the stress of the noon-tide---those sunbeams like swords!
And I first played the tune all our sheep know, as, one after one,
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding be done.
They are white and untorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us,---so blue and so far!

VI.

---Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each leave his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has weight
To set the quick jerboa<*1> amusing outside his sand house---
There are none such as he for a wonder, half bird and half mouse!
God made all the creatures and gave them our love and our fear,
To give sign, we and they are his children, one family here.

VII.

Then I played the help-tune of our reapers, their wine-song, when hand
Grasps at hand, eye lights eye in good friendship, and great hearts expand
And grow one in the sense of this world's life.---And then, the last song
When the dead man is praised on his journey---` ` Bear, bear him along
` ` With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm-seeds not here
` ` To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.
` ` Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!"---And then, the glad chaunt
Of the marriage,---first go the young maidens, next, she whom we vaunt
As the beauty, the pride of our dwelling.---And then, the great march
Wherein man runs to man to assist him and buttress an arch
Nought can break; who shall harm them, our friends?---Then, the chorus intoned

As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII.

And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang,---

IX.

 ` ` Oh, our manhood's prime vigour! No spirit feels waste,
` ` Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
` ` Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
` ` The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
` ` Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
` ` And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
` ` And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
` ` And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,
` ` And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
` ` That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
` ` How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
` ` All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!
` ` Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou didst guard
` ` When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious reward?
` ` Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men sung
` ` The low song of the nearly-departed, and bear her faint tongue
` ` Joining in while it could to the witness, ` Let one more attest,
` ` ` I have lived, seen God's hand thro'a lifetime, and all was for best'?
` ` Then they sung thro' their tears in strong triumph, not much, but the rest.
` ` And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
` ` Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained true:
` ` And the friends of thy boyhood---that boyhood of wonder and hope,
` ` Present promise and wealth of the future beyond the eye's scope,---
` ` Till lo, thou art grown to a monarch; a people is thine;
` ` And all gifts, which the world offers singly, on one head combine!
` ` On one head, all the beauty and strength, love and rage (like the throe
` ` That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the gold go)

` ` High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them,---all
` ` Brought to blaze on the head of one creature---King Saul!"

ⓧ

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,---heart, hand, harp and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for---as when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its array,
And up soareth the cherubim-chariot---` ` Saul!" cried I, and stopped,
And waited the thing that should follow. Then Saul, who hung propped
By the tent's cross-support in the centre, was struck by his name.
Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breastplate,---leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his feet,
And there fronts you, stark, black, but alive yet, your mountain of old,
With his rents, the successive bequeathings of ages untold---
Yea, each harm got in fighting your battles, each furrow and scar
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the tempest---all hail, there they are!
---Now again to be softened with verdure, again hold the nest
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to the green on his crest
For their food in the ardours of summer. One long shudder thrilled
All the tent till the very air tingled, then sank and was stilled
At the King's self left standing before me, released and aware.
What was gone, what remained? All to traverse, 'twixt hope and despair;
Death was past, life not come: so he waited. Awhile his right hand
Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forthwith to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean---a sun's slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so, arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

ⓧI.

What spell or what charm,
(For, awhile there was trouble within me) what next should I urge
To sustain him where song had restored him?---Song filled to the verge

His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields
Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty: beyond, on what fields,
Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye
And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?
He saith, ``It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise life,
Gives assent, yet would die for his own part.

XII.

Then fancies grew rife
Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep
Fed in silence---above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the sky:
And I laughed---``Since my days are ordained to be passed with my flocks,
``Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks,
``Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show
``Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!
``Schemes of life, its best rules and right uses, the courage that gains,
``And the prudence that keeps what men strive for." And now these old trains
Of vague thought came again; I grew surer; so, once more the string
Of my harp made response to my spirit, as thus---

XIII.

``Yea, my King,"
I began---``thou dost well in rejecting mere comforts that spring
``From the mere mortal life held in common by man and by brute:
``In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.
``Thou hast marked the slow rise of the tree,---how its stem trembled first
``Till it passed the kid's lip, the stag's antler then safely outburst
``The fan-branches all round; and thou mindest when these too, in turn
``Broke a-bloom and the palm-tree seemed perfect: yet more was to learn,
``E'en the good that comes in with the palm-fruit. Our dates shall we slight,
``When their juice brings a cure for all sorrow? or care for the plight
``Of the palm's self whose slow growth produced them? Not so! stem and
branch
``Shall decay, nor be known in their place, while the palm-wine shall staunch
``Every wound of man's spirit in winter. I pour thee such wine.
``Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
``By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou still shalt enjoy
``More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life of a boy.

` ` Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done
 ` ` Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
 ` ` Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,
 ` ` Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace
 ` ` The results of his past summer-prime'---so, each ray of thy will,
 ` ` Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill
 ` ` Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour, till they too give forth
 ` ` A like cheer to their sons, who in turn, fill the South and the North
 ` ` With the radiance thy deed was the germ of. Carouse in the past!
 ` ` But the license of age has its limit; thou diest at last:
 ` ` As the lion when age dims his eyeball, the rose at her height
 ` ` So with man---so his power and his beauty for ever take flight.
 ` ` No! Again a long draught of my soul-wine! Look forth o'er the years!
 ` ` Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seer's!
 ` ` Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb---bid arise
 ` ` A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to the skies,
 ` ` Let it mark where the great First King slumbers: whose fame would ye know?
 ` ` Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go
 ` ` In great characters cut by the scribe,---Such was Saul, so he did;
 ` ` With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,---
 ` ` For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend,
 ` ` In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend
 ` ` (See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record
 ` ` With the gold of the graver, Saul's story,---the statesman's great word
 ` ` Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave
 ` ` With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-winds rave:
 ` ` So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
 ` ` In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art!"

ⓧIV.

And behold while I sang ... but O Thou who didst grant me that day,
 And before it not seldom hast granted thy help to essay,
 Carry on and complete an adventure,---my shield and my sword
 In that act where my soul was thy servant, thy word was my word,---
 Still be with me, who then at the summit of human endeavour
 And scaling the highest, man's thought could, gazed hopeless as ever
 On the new stretch of heaven above me---till, mighty to save,
 Just one lift of thy hand cleared that distance---God's throne from man's grave!
 Let me tell out my tale to its ending---my voice to my heart
 Which can scarce dare believe in what marvels last night I took part,
 As this morning I gather the fragments, alone with my sheep,

And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep!
For I wake in the grey dewy covert, while Hebron<*2> upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron<*3> retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

XV.

I say then,---my song

While I sang thus, assuring the monarch, and ever more strong
Made a proffer of good to console him---he slowly resumed
His old motions and habitudes kingly. The right-hand replumed
His black locks to their wonted composure, adjusted the swathes
Of his turban, and see---the huge sweat that his countenance bathes,
He wipes off with the robe; and he girds now his loins as of yore,
And feels slow for the armlets of price, with the clasp set before.
He is Saul, ye remember in glory,---ere error had bent
The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though much spent
Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did choose,
To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose.
So sank he along by the tent-prop till, stayed by the pile
Of his armour and war-cloak and garments, he leaned there awhile,
And sat out my singing,---one arm round the tent-prop, to raise
His bent head, and the other hung slack---till I touched on the praise
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: thro' my hair
The large fingers were pushed, and he bent back my bead, with kind power---
All my face back, intent to peruse it, as men do a flower.
Thus held he me there with his great eyes that scrutinized mine---
And oh, all my heart how it loved him! but where was the sign?
I yearned---` ` Could I help thee, my father, inventing a bliss,
` ` I would add, to that life of the past, both the future and this;
` ` I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,
` ` As this moment,---had love but the warrant, love's heart to dispense!"

XVI.

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more---no song more! outbroke---

XVII.

` ` I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke:
` ` I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
` ` And pronounced on the rest of his hand-work---returned him again
` ` His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw:
` ` I report, as a man may of God's work---all's love, yet all's law.
` ` Now I lay down the judgeship he lent me. Each faculty tasked
` ` To perceive him, has gained an abyss, where a dewdrop was asked.
` ` Have I knowledge? confounded it shrivels at Wisdom laid bare.
` ` Have I forethought? how purblind, how blank, to the Infinite Care!
` ` Do I task any faculty highest, to image success?
` ` I but open my eyes,---and perfection, no more and no less,
` ` In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen God
` ` In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the clod.
` ` And thus looking within and around me, I ever renew
` ` (With that stoop of the soul which in bending upraises it too)
` ` The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete,
` ` As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to his feet.
` ` Yet with all this abounding experience, this deity known,
` ` I shall dare to discover some province, some gift of my own.
` ` There's a faculty pleasant to exercise, hard to hoodwink,
` ` I am fain to keep still in abeyance, (I laugh as I think)
` ` Lest, insisting to claim and parade in it, wot ye, I worst
` ` E'en the Giver in one gift.---Behold, I could love if I durst!
` ` But I sink the pretension as fearing a man may o'ertake
` ` God's own speed in the one way of love: I abstain for love's sake.
` ` ---What, my soul? see thus far and no farther? when doors great and small,
` ` Nine-and-ninety flew ope at our touch, should the hundredth appal?
` ` In the least things have faith, yet distrust in the greatest of all?
` ` Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
` ` That I doubt his own love can compete with it? Here, the parts shift?
` ` Here, the creature surpass the Creator,---the end, what Began?
` ` Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,
` ` And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?
` ` Would it ever have entered my mind, the bare will, much less power,
` ` To bestow on this Saul what I sang of, the marvellous dower
` ` Of the life he was gifted and filled with? to make such a soul,
` ` Such a body, and then such an earth for insphering the whole?
` ` And doth it not enter my mind (as my warm tears attest)

` ` These good things being given, to go on, and give one more, the best?
 ` ` Ay, to save and redeem and restore him, maintain at the height
 ` ` This perfection,---succeed with life's day-spring, death's minute of night?
 ` ` Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul the mistake,
 ` ` Saul the failure, the ruin he seems now,---and bid him awake
 ` ` From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
 ` ` Clear and safe in new light and new life,---a new harmony yet
 ` ` To be run, and continued, and ended---who knows?---or endure!
 ` ` The man taught enough, by life's dream, of the rest to make sure;
 ` ` By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
 ` ` And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

XVIII.

` ` I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:
 ` ` In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
 ` ` All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my prayer
 ` ` As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
 ` ` From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread Sabaoth:
 ` ` I will?---the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
 ` ` To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
 ` ` Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?
 ` ` This;---'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!
 ` ` See the King---I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall through.
 ` ` Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
 ` ` To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would---knowing which,
 ` ` I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!
 ` ` Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou---so wilt thou!
 ` ` So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown---
 ` ` And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
 ` ` One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
 ` ` Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!
 ` ` As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
 ` ` Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
 ` ` He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
 ` ` 'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
 ` ` In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
 ` ` A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
 ` ` Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: a Hand like this hand
 ` ` Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

XIX.

I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news---
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge: but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth---
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling still
Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent,---he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices---` `E'en so, it is so!"

- * 1 The jumping hare.
- * 2 One of the three cities of Refuge.
- * 3 A brook in Jerusalem.

Robert Browning

Soliloquy Of The Spanish Cloister

I.

Gr-r-r---there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flower-pots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims---
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames!

II.

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
_Not a plenteous cork-crop: scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:
What's the Latin name for ` `parsley"?_
What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

III.

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps---
Marked with L. for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV.

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,

Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
---Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

V

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange-pulp---
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
While he drains his at one gulp.

VI.

Oh, those melons? If he's able
We're to have a feast! so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!---And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

VII.

There's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
One sure, if another fails:
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?

VIII.

Or, my scrofulous French novel
On grey paper with blunt type!

Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe:
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

IX.

Or, there's Satan!---one might venture
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,
Blasted lay that rose-acacia
We're so proud of! _Hy, Zy, Hine ..._
'St, there's Vespers! _Plena grati
Ave, Virgo!_ Gr-r-r---you swine!

Robert Browning

Song

I.

Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught---speak truth---above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

III.

Because, you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world over:
Then why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught---speak truth---above her?
Above this tress, and this, I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

Robert Browning

Summum Bonum

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, wonder, wealth, and--how far above them--
Truth, that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl,--
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe--all were for me
In the kiss of one girl

Robert Browning

The Boy And The Angel

Morning, evening, noon and night,
` ` Praise God!; sang Theocrite.

Then to his poor trade he turned,
Whereby the daily meal was earned.

Hard he laboured, long and well;
O'er his work the boy's curls fell.

But ever, at each period,
He stopped and sang, ` ` Praise God!"

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew.

Said Blaise, the listening monk, ` ` Well done;
` ` I doubt not thou art heard, my son:

` ` As well as if thy voice to-day
` ` Were praising God, the Pope's great way.

` ` This Easter Day, the Pope at Rome
` ` Praises God from Peter's dome."

Said Theocrite, ` ` Would God that I
` ` Might praise him, that great way, and die!"

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

With God a day endures alway,
A thousand years are but a day.

God said in heaven, ` ` Nor day nor night
` ` Now brings the voice of my delight."

Then Gabriel, like a rainbow's birth,
Spread his wings and sank to earth;

Entered, in flesh, the empty cell,
Lived there, and played the craftsman well;

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite.

And from a boy, to youth he grew:
The man put off the stripling's hue:

The man matured and fell away
Into the season of decay:

And ever o'er the trade he bent,
And ever lived on earth content.

(He did God's will; to him, all one
If on the earth or in the sun.)

God said, ``A praise is in mine ear;
``There is no doubt in it, no fear:

``So sing old worlds, and so
``New worlds that from my footstool go.

``Clearer loves sound other ways:
``I miss my little human praise."

Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.

'Twas Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,

With his holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

Since when, a boy, he plied his trade,
Till on his life the sickness weighed;

And in his cell, when death drew near,
An angel in a dream brought cheer:

And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here.

To the East with praise he turned,
And on his sight the angel burned.

` ` I bore thee from thy craftsman's cell
` ` And set thee here; I did not well.

` ` Vainly I left my angel-sphere,
` ` Vain was thy dream of many a year.

` ` Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped---
` ` Creation's chorus stopped!

` ` Go back and praise again
` ` The early way, while I remain.

` ` With that weak voice of our disdain,
` ` Take up creation's pausing strain.

` ` Back to the cell and poor employ:
` ` Resume the craftsman and the boy!"

Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.

One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side.

Robert Browning

The Confessional

I.

It is a lie---their Priests, their Pope,
Their Saints, their ... all they fear or hope
Are lies, and lies---there! through my door
And ceiling, there! and walls and floor,
There, lies, they lie---shall still be hurled
Till spite of them I reach the world!

II.

You think Priests just and holy men!
Before they put me in this den
I was a human creature too,
With flesh and blood like one of you,
A girl that laughed in beauty's pride
Like lilies in your world outside.

III.

I had a lover---shame avaunt!
This poor wrenched body, grim and gaunt,
Was kissed all over till it burned,
By lips the truest, love e'er turned
His heart's own tint: one night they kissed
My soul out in a burning mist.

IV.

So, next day when the accustomed train
Of things grew round my sense again,
` ` That is a sin," I said: and slow
With downcast eyes to church I go,
And pass to the confession-chair,
And tell the old mild father there.

V

But when I falter Beltran's name,

` ` Ha?" quoth the father; ` ` much I blame
` ` The sin; yet wherefore idly grieve?
` ` Despair not---strenuously retrieve!
` ` Nay, I will turn this love of thine
` ` To lawful love, almost divine;

VI.

` ` For he is young, and led astray,
` ` This Beltran, and he schemes, men say,
` ` To change the laws of church and state
` ` So, thine shall be an angel's fate,
` ` Who, ere the thunder breaks, should roll
` ` Its cloud away and save his soul.

VII.

` ` For, when he lies upon thy breast,
` ` Thou mayst demand and be possessed
` ` Of all his plans, and next day steal
` ` To me, and all those plans reveal,
` ` That I and every priest, to purge
` ` His soul, may fast and use the scourge."

VIII.

That father's beard was long and white,
With love and truth his brow seemed bright;
I went back, all on fire with joy,
And, that same evening, bade the boy
Tell me, as lovers should, heart-free,
Something to prove his love of me.

IX.

He told me what he would not tell
For hope of heaven or fear of hell;
And I lay listening in such pride!
And, soon as he had left my side,
Tripped to the church by morning-light
To save his soul in his despite.

XI

I told the father all his schemes,
Who were his comrades, what their dreams;
` ` And now make haste," I said, ` ` to pray
` ` The one spot from his soul away;
` ` To-night he comes, but not the same
` ` Will look!" At night he never came.

XI.

Nor next night: on the after-morn,
I went forth with a strength new-born.
The church was empty; something drew
My steps into the street; I knew
It led me to the market-place:
Where, lo, on high, the father's face!

XII.

That horrible black scaffold dressed,
That stapled block ... God sink the rest!
That head strapped back, that blinding vest,
Those knotted hands and naked breast,
Till near one busy hangman pressed,
And, on the neck these arms caressed ...

XIII.

No part in aught they hope or fear!
No heaven with them, no hell!---and here,
No earth, not so much space as pens
My body in their worst of dens
But shall bear God and man my cry,
Lies---lies, again---and still, they lie!

Robert Browning

The Englishman In Italy

PIANO DI SORRENTO

Fort, Fort, my beloved one,
Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet!
I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco.
Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
As you tell your beads;
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
---The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
Had net-worked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
Marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of,
Whose heads,---speckled white
Over brown like a great spider's back,
As I told you last night,---
Your mother bites off for her supper.
Red-ripe as could be,
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
In halves on the tree:
And betwixt the loose walls of great flint-stone,
Or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rock-side,
Wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up,
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup.
So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,
What change was in store,
By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
Which woke me before

I could open my shutter, made fast
With a bough and a stone,
And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
Sole lattice that's known.
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
The rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover:
Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
For, under the cliff,
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
---Our fisher arrive
And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
And brown as his shrimps;
Himself too as bare to the middle
---You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a bout reached Salerno,
So back, to a man,
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
Grape-harvest began.
In the vat, halfway up in our house-side,
Like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
Till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten in effort on effort
To keep the grapes under,

Since still when he seems all but master,
In pours the fresh plunder
From girls who keep coming and going
With basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving;
Your girls that are older,---
For under the hedges of aloe,
And where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
Lies pulpy and red,
All the young ones are kneeling and filling
Their laps with the snails
Tempted out by this first rainy weather,---
Your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
When, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
Three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow
In slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices,
That colour of popes.
Meantime, see the grape bunch they've brought you:
The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence:
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;
Next, sip this weak wine
From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
A leaf of the vine;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
That leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
Scirocco is loose!
Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
Which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
Tho' not yet half black!

How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,
The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
Snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest!
No refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
And listen or sleep.
O how will your country show next week,
When all the vine-boughs
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
The mules and the cows?
Last eve, I rode over the mountains;
Your brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
That offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,---
Or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,
Those hairy gold orbs!
But my mule picked his sure sober path out,
Just stopping to neigh
When he recognized down in the valley
His mates on their way
With the faggots and barrels of water;
And soon we emerged
From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
And still as we urged
Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
As up still we trudged
Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath---
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath,
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
And lentisks*1 as staunch

To the stone where they root and bear berries,
And ... what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale seagreen leaves;
Over all trod my mule with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lady,
Till, round after round,
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.
Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal!
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes.
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement!
Still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
If quickly you turn
And before they escape you surprise them.
They grudge you should learn
How the soft plains they look on, lean over
And love (they pretend)
---Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
The wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut:
All is silent and grave:
'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty,
How fair! but a slave.
So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered
As greenly as ever
Those isles of the siren, your Galli;
No ages can sever
The Three, nor enable their sister
To join them,---halfway
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses---
No farther to-day,

Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave,
Watches breast-high and steady
From under the rock, her bold sister
Swum halfway already.
Fort, shall we sail there together
And see from the sides
Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
Where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over
The rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the grey glassy water
To glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door,
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear?
---The secret they sang to Ulysses
When, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret
I hear and I know.

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;
He strikes the great gloom
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume.
All is over. Look out, see the gipsy,
Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there;
One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting
His jews'-harps to proof,
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall
---Chew, abbot's own cheek!
All is over. Wake up and come out now,

And down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order
At church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening.
To-morrow's the Feast
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
Of Virgins the least,
As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse
Which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
Was getting by heart.
Not a pillar nor post but is dized
With red and blue papers;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
A-blaze with long tapers;
But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
Rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers
And trumpeters bold,
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
Who, when the priest's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that's brisk
For the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
Be carried in pomp
Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
The priests mean to stomp.
All round the glad church lie old bottles
With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
Religiously popped;
And at night from the crest of Calvano
Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,
And more poppers bang.
At all events, come---to the garden
As far as the wall;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers!

---` `Such trifles!" you say?

Fort, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Be righteous and wise
---If 'twere proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies!

*1 The mastic tree (resinous).

Robert Browning

The Flight Of The Duchess

I.

You're my friend:

I was the man the Duke spoke to;
I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too;
So here's the tale from beginning to end,
My friend!

II.

Ours is a great wild country:

If you climb to our castle's top,
I don't see where your eye can stop;
For when you've passed the cornfield country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed,
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow,
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,
So, like black priests up, and so
Down the other side again
To another greater, wilder country,
That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
Branched through and through with many a vein
Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;
Look right, look left, look straight before,---
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,
And so on, more and ever more,
Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea-shore,
---And the whole is our Duke's country.

III.

I was born the day this present Duke was---
 (And O, says the song, ere I was old!)
 In the castle where the other Duke was---
 (When I was happy and young, not old!)
 I in the kennel, he in the bower:
 We are of like age to an hour.
 My father was huntsman in that day;
 Who has not heard my father say
 That, when a boar was brought to bay,
 Three times, four times out of five,
 With his huntspear he'd contrive
 To get the killing-place transfixed,
 And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?
 And that's why the old Duke would rather
 He lost a salt-pit than my father,
 And loved to have him ever in call;
 That's why my father stood in the hall
 When the old Duke brought his infant out
 To show the people, and while they passed
 The wondrous bantling round about,
 Was first to start at the outside blast
 As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn
 Just a month after the babe was born.
 ``And," quoth the Kaiser's courier, ``since
 ``The Duke has got an heir, our Prince
 ``Needs the Duke's self at his side: "
 The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
 But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
 Castles a-fire, men on their march,
 The toppling tower, the crashing arch;
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
 The row of crests and shields and banners
 Of all achievements after all manners,
 And ``ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
 The more was his comfort when he died
 At next year's end, in a velvet suit,
 With a gilt glove on his hand, his foot
 In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
 Petticoated like a herald,
 In a chamher next to an ante-room,
 Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
 What he called stink, and they, perfume:

---They should have set him on red Berold
Mad with pride, like fire to manage!
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!
Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin!
(Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game!
Oh for a noble falcon-lanner
To flap each broad wing like a banner,
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)
Had they broached a white-beer cask from Berlin
---Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine
Put to his lips, when they saw him pine,
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,
Cotnar for instance, green as May sorrel
And ropy with sweet,---we shall not quarrel.

IV.

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches,
She being the daughter of God knows who:
And now was the time to revisit her tribe.
Abroad and afar they went, the two,
And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape;
Full of his travel, struck at himself.
You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?
---Not he! For in Paris they told the elf
Our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days;
Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,
And only in wild nooks like ours
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
And see true castles, with proper towers,

Young-hearted women, old-minded men,
And manners now as manners were then.
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out:
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength;
---They should have set him on red Berold
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey-spire!

VI.

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:
And out of a convent, at the word,
Came the lady, in time of spring.
---Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
Fit for the chase of urochs or buffle
In winter-time when you need to muffle.
But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,
And so we saw the lady arrive:
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees:
In truth, she was not hard to please!
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls:
As for us, styled the ``serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it;

And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired---
If that was an eagle she saw hover,
And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.
When suddenly appeared the Duke:
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,---as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward,
And welcomed her with his grandest smile;
And, mind you, his mother all the while
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,
The lady's face stopped its play,
As if her first hair had grown grey;
For such things must begin some one day.

VII.

In a day or two she was well again;
As who should say, ``You labour in vain!
``This is all a jest against God, who meant
``I should ever be, as I am, content
`` And glad in his sight; therefore, glad I will be."
So, smiling as at first went she.

VIII.

She was active, stirring, all fire---
Could not rest, could not tire---
To a stone she might have given life!
(I myself loved once, in my day)
---For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
(I had a wife, I know what I say)
Never in all the world such an one!
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.
There was already this man in his post,

This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
To meet his eye, with the other trophies,
Now outside the hall, now in it,
To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute,
And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
Of rule---(but for after-sadness that came)
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
With which the young Duke and the old dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As though an artificer, after contriving
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!
So found the Duke, and his mother like him:
The lady hardly got a rebuff---
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

□

IX.

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,
Paling and ever paling,
As the way is with a hid chagrin;
And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, ``'Tis done to spite me,
`` But I shall find in my power to right me!"
Don't swear, friend! The old one, many a year,
Is in hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.

⊠

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold,

And another and another, and faster and faster,
 Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:
 Then it so chanced that the Duke our master
 Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
 And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
 He should do the Middle Age no treason
 In resolving on a hunting-party.
 Always provided, old books showed the way of it!
 What meant old poets by their strictures?
 And when old poets had said their say of it,
 How taught old painters in their pictures?
 We must revert to the proper channels,
 Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,
 And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions:
 Here was food for our various ambitions,
 As on each case, exactly stated---
 To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup,
 Or best prayer to Saint Hubert on mounting your stirrup---
 We of the house hold took thought and debated.
 Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin
 His sire was wont to do forest-work in;
 Blessedder he who nobly sunk ``ohs"
 And ``ahs" while he tugged on his grand-sire's trunk-hose;
 What signified hats if they had no rims on,
 Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,
 And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
 Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?
 So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on't,
 What with our Venerers, Prickers and Yerderers,
 Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
 And oh the Duke's tailor, he had a hot time on't!

XI.

Now you must know that when the first dizziness
 Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,
 The Duke put this question, ``The Duke's part provided,
 ``Had not the Duchess some share in the business?"
 For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses
 Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:
 And, after much laying of heads together,
 Somebody's cap got a notable feather

By the announcement with proper unction
 That he had discovered the lady's function;
 Since ancient authors gave this tenet,
 ``When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
 ``Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
 ``And, with water to wash the hands of her liege
 ``In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
 ``Let her preside at the disemboweling."

Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
 As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,
 And thrust her broad wings like a banner
 Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;
 And if day by day and week by week
 You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
 And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,
 Would it cause you any great surprise
 If, when you decided to give her an airing,
 You found she needed a little preparing?
 ---I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
 If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?
 Yet when the Duke to his lady signified,
 Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
 In what a pleasure she was to participate,---
 And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
 Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
 As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
 And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
 But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
 Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
 And much wrong now that used to be right,
 So, thanking him, declined the hunting,---
 Was conduct ever more affronting?
 With all the ceremony settled---
 With the towel ready, and the sewer
 Polishing up his oldest ewer,
 And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
 Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled,---
 No wonder if the Duke was nettled
 And when she persisted nevertheless,---
 Well, I suppose here's the time to confess
 That there ran half round our lady's chamber
 A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;

And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,
Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
How could I keep at any vast distance?
And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,
Stood for a while in a sultry smother,
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was held decorous and lawful;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct.
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once!
What meant she?--Who was she?---Her duty and station,
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation---
In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on!
Well, somehow or other it ended at last
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed;
And after her,---making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,
From door to staircase---oh such a solemn
Unbending of the vertebral column!

XII.

However, at sunrise our company mustered;
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;
For the court-yard walls were filled with fog
You might have cut as an axe chops a log---
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily,

And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen.
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder
This way and that from the valley under;
And, looking through the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
But a troop of Gipsies on their march?
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII.

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only
After reaching all lands beside;
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely,
And still, as they travel far and wide,
Catch they and keep now a trace here, trace there,
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there.
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,
And nowhere else, I take it, are found
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned:
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on
The very fruit they are meant to feed on.
For the earth---not a use to which they don't turn it,
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it---
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle
With side-bars never a brute can baffle;
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards;
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,
Horseshoes they hammer which turn on a swivel
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel.
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle;
But the sand---they pinch and pound it like otters;
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters!
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear,
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
As if in pure water you dropped and let die
A bruised black-blooded mulberry;
And that other sort, their crowning pride,

With long white threads distinct inside,
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle
Loose such a length and never tangle,
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters:
Such are the works they put their hand to,
The uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.
And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally
Toward his castle from out of the valley,
Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,
Come out with the morning to greet our riders.
And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch
That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
By her gait directly and her stoop,
I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
The oldest Gipsy then above ground;
And, sure as the autumn season came round,
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
And every time, as she swore, for the last time.
And presently she was seen to sidle
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
So that the horse of a sudden reared up
As under its nose the old witch peered up
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
Of no use now but to gather brine,
And began a kind of level whine
Such as they used to sing to their viols
When their ditties they go grinding
Up and down with nobody minding:
And then, as of old, at the end of the humming
Her usual presents were forthcoming
---A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles,)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end,---
And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
A word in reply; and in vain she felt
With twitching fingers at her belt
For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt,
Ready to pelt what he gave in her pouch safe,---

Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning---
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow,
She, foolish to-day, would be wiser tomorrow;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,
(If such it was, for they grow so hirsute
That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned
From out of the throng, and while I drew near
He told the crone---as I since have reckoned
By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
With circumspection and mystery---
The main of the lady's history,
Her frowardness and ingratitude:
And for all the crone's submissive attitude
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,
And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening,
As though she engaged with hearty good-will
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
And promised the lady a thorough frightening.
And so, just giving her a glimpse
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imp
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw,
He bade me take the Gipsy mother
And set her telling some story or other
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
To wile away a weary hour
For the lady left alone in her bower,
Whose mind and body craved exertion
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV.

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
And what makes me confident what's to be told you
Had all along been of this crone's devising,
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising:
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,
As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,
Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges,
Like the band-roll strung with tomans
Which proves the veil a Persian woman's.
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly
Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakable eye-points duly
Live and aware looked out of their places.
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the lady's chamber standing sentry;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token,
Not a single word had the lady spoken:
They went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV.

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it:
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
On that little head of hers and burn it
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
Asleep of a sudden and there continue

The whole time sleeping as profoundly
 As one of the boars my father would pin you
 'Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,
 ---Jacynth forgive me the comparison!
 But where I begin asy own narration
 Is a little after I took my station
 To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
 And, having in those days a falcon eye,
 To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
 From where the bushes thinlier crested
 The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree.
 When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
 By---was it singing, or was it saying,
 Or a strange musical instrument playing
 In the chamber?---and to be certain
 I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
 And there lay Jacynth asleep,
 Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
 In a rosy sleep along the floor
 With her head against the door;
 While in the midst, on the seat of state,
 Was a queen---the Gipsy woman late,
 With head and face downbent
 On the lady's head and face intent:
 For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,
 The lady sat between her knees
 And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,
 And on those hands her chin was set,
 And her upturned face met the face of the crone
 Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
 As if she could double and quadruple
 At pleasure the play of either pupil
 ---Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,
 As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers
 They moved to measure, or bell-clappers.
 I said `` Is it blessing, is it banning,
 `` Do they applaud you or burlesque you---
 `` Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?"
 But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
 At once I was stopped by the lady's expression:
 For it was life her eyes were drinking
 From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,

---Life's pure fire received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving,
---Life, that filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure,
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
As she listened and she listened:
When all at once a hand detained me,
The selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
Making out words and prose and rhyme,
Till it seemed that the music furl'd
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped
From under the words it first had propped,
And left them midway in the world:
Word took word as hand takes hand,
I could hear at last, and understand,
And when I held the unbroken thread,
The Gipsy said:---

` ` And so at last we find my tribe.
` ` And so I set thee in the midst,
` ` And to one and all of them describe
` ` What thou saidst and what thou didst,
` ` Our long and terrible journey through,
` ` And all thou art ready to say and do
` ` In the trials that remain:
` ` I trace them the vein and the other vein
` ` That meet on thy brow and part again,
` ` Making our rapid mystic mark;
` ` And I bid my people prove and probe
` ` Each eye's profound and glorious globe
` ` Till they detect the kindred spark
` ` In those depths so dear and dark,
` ` Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,
` ` Circling over the midnight sea.

And on that round young cheek of thine
I make them recognize the tinge,
As when of the costly scarlet wine
They drip so much as will impinge
And spread in a thinnest scale afloat
One thick gold drop from the olive's coat
Over a silver plate whose sheen
Still thro' the mixture shall be seen.
For so I prove thee, to one and all,
Fit, when my people ope their breast,
To see the sign, and hear the call,
And take the vow, and stand the test
Which adds one more child to the rest---
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
And the world is left outside.
For there is probation to decree,
And many and long must the trials be
Thou shalt victoriously endure,
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;
Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay
Of the prize he dug from its mountain-tomb---
Let once the vindicating ray
Leap out amid the anxious gloom,
And steel and fire have done their part
And the prize falls on its finder's heart;
So, trial after trial past,
Wilt thou fall at the very last
Breathless, half in trance
With the thrill of the great deliverance,
Into our arms for evermore;
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
About thee, what we knew before,
How love is the only good in the world.
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
Or brain devise, or hand approve!
Stand up, look below,
It is our life at thy feet we throw
To step with into light and joy;
Not a power of life but we employ
To satisfy thy nature's want;
Art thou the tree that props the plant,
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree---

‘ ‘ Canst thou help us, must we help thee?
‘ ‘ If any two creatures grew into one,
‘ ‘ They would do more than the world has done.
‘ ‘ Though each apart were never so weak,
‘ ‘ Ye vainly through the world should seek
‘ ‘ For the knowledge and the might
‘ ‘ Which in such union grew their right:
‘ ‘ So, to approach at least that end,
‘ ‘ And blend,---as much as may be, blend
‘ ‘ Thee with us or us with thee,---
‘ ‘ As climbing plant or propping tree,
‘ ‘ Shall some one deck thee, over and down,
‘ ‘ Up and about, with blossoms and leaves?
‘ ‘ Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland crown,
‘ ‘ Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,
‘ ‘ Die on thy boughs and disappear
‘ ‘ While not a leaf of thine is sere?
‘ ‘ Or is the other fate in store,
‘ ‘ And art thou fitted to adore,
‘ ‘ To give thy wondrous self away,
‘ ‘ And take a stronger nature's sway?
‘ ‘ I foresee and could foretell
‘ ‘ Thy future portion, sure and well:
‘ ‘ But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
‘ ‘ Let them say what thou shalt do!
‘ ‘ Only be sure thy daily life,
‘ ‘ In its peace or in its strife,
‘ ‘ Never shall be unobserved:
‘ ‘ We pursue thy whole career,
‘ ‘ And hope for it, or doubt, or fear,---
‘ ‘ Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved,
‘ ‘ We are beside thee in all thy ways,
‘ ‘ With our blame, with our praise,
‘ ‘ Our shame to feel, our pride to show,
‘ ‘ Glad, angry---but indifferent, no!
‘ ‘ Whether it be thy lot to go,
‘ ‘ For the good of us all, where the haters meet
‘ ‘ In the crowded city's horrible street;
‘ ‘ Or thou step alone through the morass
‘ ‘ Where never sound yet was
‘ ‘ Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill,
‘ ‘ For the air is still, and the water still,

` ` When the blue breast of the dipping coot
 ` ` Dives under, and all is mute.
 ` ` So, at the last shall come old age,
 ` ` Decrepit as befits that stage;
 ` ` How else wouldst thou retire apart
 ` ` With the hoarded memories of thy heart,
 ` ` And gather all to the very least
 ` ` Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
 ` ` Let fall through eagerness to find
 ` ` The crowning dainties yet behind?
 ` ` Ponder on the entire past
 ` ` Laid together thus at last,
 ` ` When the twilight helps to fuse
 ` ` The first fresh with the faded hues,
 ` ` And the outline of the whole,
 ` ` As round eve's shades their framework roll,
 ` ` Grandly fronts for once thy soul.
 ` ` And then as, 'mid the dark, a glean
 ` ` Of yet another morning breaks,
 ` ` And like the hand which ends a dream,
 ` ` Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
 ` ` Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
 ` ` Then-----"

Ay, then indeed something would happen!
 But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's;
 There grew more of the music and less of the words;
 Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen
 To paper and put you down every syllable
 With those clever clerkly fingers,
 All I've forgotten as well as what lingers
 In this old brain of mine that's but ill able
 To give you even this poor version
 Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering
 ---More fault of those who had the hammering
 Of prosody into me and syntax,
 And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!
 But to return from this excursion,---
 Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
 The peace most deep and the charm completest,
 There came, shall I say, a snap---
 And the charm vanished!
 And my sense returned, so strangely banished,

And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I
Down from the casement, round to the portal,
Another minute and I had entered,---
When the door opened, and more than mortal
Stood, with a face where to my mind centred
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess: I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,
I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest,
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful.
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding;
I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.
As for finding what she wanted,
You know God Almighty granted
Such little signs should serve wild creatures
To tell one another all their desires,
So that each knows what his friend requires,
And does its bidding without teachers.
I preceded her; the crone
Followed silent and alone;
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk;
In short, the soul in its body sunk
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
We descended, I preceding;
Crossed the court with nobody heeding,
All the world was at the chase,
The courtyard like a desert-place,
The stable emptied of its small fry;
I saddled myself the very palfrey
I remember patting while it carried her,
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
The lady had not forgotten it either,
And knew the poor devil so much beneath her

Would have been only too glad for her service
 To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
 But, unable to pay proper duty where owing it,
 Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:
 For though the moment I began setting
 His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
 (Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
 She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,
 By a single rapid finger's lifting,
 And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
 And a little shake of the head, refused me,---
 I say, although she never used me,
 Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,
 And I ventured to remind her,
 I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
 Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,
 ---Something to the effect that I was in readiness
 Whenever God should please she needed me,---
 Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
 With a look that placed a crown on me,
 And she felt in her bosom,---mark, her bosom---
 And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
 Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse
 Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,
 Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
 So understood,---that a true heart so may gain
 Such a reward,---I should have gone home again,
 Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
 It was a little plait of hair
 Such as friends in a convent make
 To wear, each for the other's sake,---
 This, see, which at my breast I wear,
 Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudging),
 And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
 And then,---and then,---to cut short,---this is idle,
 These are feelings it is not good to foster,---
 I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
 And the palfrey bounded,---and so we lost her.

❧VI.

When the liquor's out why clink the cannikin?

I did think to describe you the panic in
The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin,
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,
How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib
Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,
When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness
---But it seems such child's play,
What they said and did with the lady away!
And to dance on, when we've lost the music,
Always made me---and no doubt makes you---sick.
Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
As that sweet form disappeared through the postern,
She that kept it in constant good humour,
It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do more.
But the world thought otherwise and went on,
And my head's one that its spite was spent on:
Thirty years are fled since that morning,
And with them all my head's adorning.
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
As you expect, of suppressed spite,
The natural end of every adder
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder:
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So, they made no search and small inquiry---
And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've
Noticed the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,
And the old one was in the young one's stead,
And took, in her place, the household's head,
And a blessed time the household had of it!
And were I not, as a man may say, cautious
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,
I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and focus from mere use of ceruse:

In short, she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder.

XVII.

You're my friend---
What a thing friendship is, world without end!
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up
As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,
And poured out, all lovelily, sparkingly, sunlit,
Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,
Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids---
Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids;
Each supple a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,
Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand doubts
Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.
I have seen my little lady once more,
Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;
I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:
And now it is made---why, my heart's blood, that went trickle,
Trickle, but anon, in such muddy driblets,
Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,
And genially floats me about the giblets.
I'll tell you what I intend to do:
I must see this fellow his sad life through---
He is our Duke, after all,
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.
My father was born here, and I inherit
His fame, a chain he bound his son with;
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
But there's no mine to blow up and get done with:
So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adaptor,
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
Some day or other, his head in a morion
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up,
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,
Then I shall scrape together my earnings;

For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes,
 And our children all went the way of the roses:
 It's a long lane that knows no turnings.
 One needs but little tackle to travel in;
 So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:
 And for a stall, what beats the javelin
 With which his boars my father pinned you?
 And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
 Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,
 I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!
 Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful.
 What's a man's age? He must hurry more, that's all;
 Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold.
 When we mind labour, then only, we're too old---
 What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?
 And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,
 (Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)
 I hope to get safely out of the turmoil
 And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,
 And find my lady, or hear the last news of her
 From some old thief and son of Lucifer,
 His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,
 Sunburned all over like an thiop.
 And when my Cotnar begins to operate
 And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
 And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,
 I shall drop in with---as if by accident---
 ``You never knew, then, how it all ended,
 ``What fortune good or bad attended
 ``The little lady your Queen befriended?"
 ---And when that's told me, what's remaining?
 This world's too hard for my explaining.
 The same wise judge of matters equine
 Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
 To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold,
 And, fur strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
 He also umst be such a lady's scorne!
 Smooth Jacob still rubs homely Esau:
 Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.
 ---So, I shall find out some snug corner
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
 Turn myself round and bid the world good night;

And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing
Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
To a world where will be no furtiner throwing
Pearls before swine that Can't value them. Amen!

Robert Browning

The Glove

PETER RONSARD _loquitur_.)

` ` Heigho!" yawned one day King Francis,
` ` Distance all value enhances!
` ` When a man's busy, why, leisure
` ` Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:
` ` 'Faith, and at leisure once is he?
` ` Straightway he wants to be busy.
` ` Here we've got peace; and aghast I'm
` ` Caught thinking war the true pastime.
` ` Is there a reason in metre?
` ` Give us your speech, master Peter!"

I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne'er am at loss with my Naso,
` ` Sire," I replied, ` ` joys prove cloudlets:
` ` Men are the merest Ixions"---
Here the King whistled aloud, ` ` Let's
` ` ---Heigho---go look at our lions!"
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading,
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before be arrived at the penfold;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed 'mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most.
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow,
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.
The King bailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,*1
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.

They opened a hole in the wire-work
 Across it, and dropped there a firework,
 And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;
 A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled,
 The blackness and silence so utter,
 By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
 Then earth in a sudden contortion
 Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
 Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
 (Whose experience of nature's but narrow,
 And whose faculties move in no small mist
 When he versifies David the Psalmist)
 I should study that brute to describe you
 Illim Juda Leonem de Tribu.
 One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
 To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
 The tail in the air stiff and straining,
 The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
 As over the barrier which bounded
 His platform, and us who surrounded
 The barrier, they reached and they rested
 On space that might stand him in best stead:
 For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
 The eruption of clatter and blaze meant,
 And if, in this minute of wonder,
 No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
 Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
 The lion at last was delivered?
 Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!
 And you saw by the flash on his forehead,
 By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
 He was leagues in the desert already,
 Driving the flocks up the mountain,
 Or catlike couched hard by the fountain
 To waylay the date-gathering negress:
 So guarded he entrance or egress.
 ``How he stands!" quoth the King: ``we may well swear,
 (``No novice, we've won our spurs elsewhere
 ``And so can afford the confession,)
 ``We exercise wholesome discretion
 ``In keeping aloof from his threshold;
 ``Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,

` ` Their first would too pleasantly purloin
` ` The visitor's brisket or surloin:
` ` But who's he would prove so fool-hardy?
` ` Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!"

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove flattered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 'twas, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance.

Sound the trumpet, no true knight's a tARRIER!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove,---while the lion
Neer moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring's sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir,---
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

☐ Your heart's queen, you dethrone her?
` ` So should I!"---cried the King---` ` 'twas mere vanity,
` ` Not love, set that task to humanity!"
Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,---
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful,---
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what ` ` speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had not to trust to,

Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?
If she wished not the rash deed's recalment?
` ` For I"---so I spoke---` ` am a poet:
` ` Human nature,---behoves that I know it!"

She told me, ` ` Too long had I heard
` ` Of the deed proved alone by the word:
` ` For my love---what De Lorge would not dare!
` ` With my scorn---what De Lorge could compare!
` ` And the endless descriptions of death
` ` He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
` ` I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
` ` Doubt his word---and moreover, perforce,
` ` For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
` ` Must offer my love in return.
` ` When I looked on your lion, it brought
` ` All the dangers at once to my thought,
` ` Encountered by all sorts of men,
` ` Before he was lodged in his den,---
` ` From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
` ` Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
` ` With no King and no Court to applaud,
` ` By no shame, should he shrink, overawed,
` ` Yet to capture the creature made shift,
` ` That his rude boys might laugh at the gift,
` ` ---To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
` ` Of the pit, on no greater pretence
` ` Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
` ` Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
` ` So, wiser I judged it to make
` ` One trial what ` death for my sake'
` ` Really meant, while the power was yet mine,
` ` Than to wait until time should define
` ` Such a phrase not so simply as I,
` ` Who took it to mean just ` to die.'
` ` The blow a glove gives is but weak:
` ` Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?
` ` But when the heart suffers a blow,
` ` Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping,
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean---
(I judge by a certain calm fervour
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
---He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
If you whispered ``Friend, what you'd get, first earn!"
And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,
To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,
Those in wonder and praise, these in envy;
And in short stood so plain a head taller
That he wooed and won ... how do you call her?
The beauty, that rose in the sequel
To the King's love, who loved her a week well.
And 'twas noticed he never would honour
De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)
With the easy commission of stretching
His legs in the service, and fetching
His wife, from her chamber, those straying
Sad gloves she was always mislaying,
While the King took the closet to chat in,---
But of course this adventure came pat in.
And never the King told the story,
How bringing a glove brought such glory,
But the wife smiled--- ``His nerves are grown firmer:
`` Mine he brings now and utters no murmur."

Venienti occurrite morbo!
With which moral I drop my theorbo.

*1 A beetle.

Robert Browning

The Guardian-Angel

A PICTURE AT FANO.

I.

Dear and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave
That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
Let me sit all the day here, that when eve
Shall find performed thy special ministry,
And time come for departure, thou, suspending
Thy flight, mayst see another child for tending,
Another still, to quiet and retrieve.

II.

Then I shall feel thee step one step, no more,
From where thou standest now, to where I gaze,
---And suddenly my head is covered o'er
With those wings, white above the child who prays
Now on that tomb---and I shall feel thee guarding
Me, out of all the world; for me, discarding
Yon heaven thy home, that waits and opes its door.

III.

I would not look up thither past thy head
Because the door opes, like that child, I know,
For I should have thy gracious face instead,
Thou bird of God! And wilt thou bend me low
Like him, and lay, like his, my hands together,
And lift them up to pray, and gently tether
Me, as thy lamb there, with thy garment's spread?

IV.

If this was ever granted, I would rest
My bead beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing

Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V

How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

VI.

Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend!)---that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
Pressed gently,---with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, though heaven was opening o'er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII.

We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul's content
---My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino's fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent)---

VIII.

And since he did not work thus earnestly
At all times, and has else endured some wrong---
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.
My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world's far end?
This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.

Robert Browning

The Heretic's Tragedy

I.

¶READMONISHETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

The Lord, we look to once for all,
Is the Lord we should look at, all at once:
He knows not to vary, saith Saint Paul,
Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.
See him no other than as he is!
Give both the infinitudes their due---
Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.
□Organ: plagal-cadence._
As infinite a justice too.

II.

ONE SINGETH.

John, Master of the Temple of God,
Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin:
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.
□And wanteth there grace of lute or
□lavicithern, ye shall say to confirm
□him who singeth---_
We bring John now to be burned alive.

III.

In the midst is a goodly gallows built;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck;
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city muck;
Inside they pile log upon log, good store;

Faggots no few, blocks great and small,
Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,---
For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

☐CHORUS.

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

Ⅳ.

Good sappy bavins<*1> that kindle forthwith;
Billets that blaze substantial and slow;
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith;
Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow:
Then up they hoist me John in a chafe,
Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing ``Laudes" and bid clap-to the torch.

☐CHORUS.

Laus Deo---who bids clap-to the torch.

Ⅴ

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
Is burning alive in Paris square!
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there?
Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound?
---Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.
☐Here one crosseth himself_

Ⅵ.

Jesus Christ---John had bought and sold,
Jesus Christ---John had eaten and drunk;

To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.

(_Salv reverenti._)

Now it was, ``Saviour, bountiful lamb,

``I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me!

``See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!

``Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!"

CHORUS.

'Tis John the mocker cries, ``Save thou me!"

VII.

Who maketh God's menace an idle word?

---Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,

Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird?---

For she too prattles of ugly names.

---Saith, he knoweth but one thing,---what he knows?

That God is good and the rest is breath;

Why else is the same styled Sharon's rose?

Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS.

O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

VIII.

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!

Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue:

Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!)

Their tree struck root in devil's-dung.

When Paul once reasoned of righteousness

And of temperance and of judgment to come,

Good Felix trembled, he could no less:

John, snickering, crook'd his wicked thumb.

CHORUS.

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?

IX.

Ha ha, John plucketh now at his rose
To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
Lo,---petal on petal, fierce rays unclose;
Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
Of a coal-black giant flower of hell!

CHORUS.

What maketh heaven, That maketh hell.

XI

So, as John called now, through the fire amain.
On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life---
To the Person, he bought and sold again---
For the Face, with his daily buffets rife---
Feature by feature It took its place:
And his voice, like a mad dog's choking bark,
At the steady whole of the Judge's face---
Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

SUBJOINETH THE ABBOT DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark!

*1: Fagots.

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE.

ROSA MUNDI; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS.
A CONCEIT OF MASTER GYSBRECHT,
CANON-REGULAR OF SAID JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR,

YPRES CITY. CANTUQUE, _Virgilius._
AND HATH OFTEN BEEN SUNG
AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTIVALES. GAVISUS
ERAM, _Jessides._

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the
burning of Jacques du Bourg-Mulay, at Paris,
A. D. 1314; as distorted by the refraction from
Flemish brain to brain, during the course of
a couple of centuries.)

[Molay was Grand Master of the Templars
when that order was suppressed in 1312.]

Robert Browning

The Italian In England

That second time they hunted me
From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,---
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping thro' the moss they love:
---How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o'er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,
And Charles's miserable end,
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line,
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,
One instant rapidly glanced round,

And saw me beckon from the ground.
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.
Then I drew breath; they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts: on me
Rested the hopes of Italy.
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 'twas told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood,
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm---
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
` ` I am that man upon whose head
` ` They fix the price, because I hate
` ` The Austrians over us: the State
` ` Will give you gold---oh, gold so much!---
` ` If you betray me to their clutch,
` ` And be your death, for aught I know,
` ` If once they find you saved their foe.
` ` Now, you must bring me food and drink,
` ` And also paper, pen and ink,
` ` And carry safe what I shall write
` ` To Padua, which you'll reach at night
` ` Before the duomo shuts; go in,
` ` And wait till Tenebr begin;
` ` Walk to the third confessional,
` ` Between the pillar and the wall,
` ` And kneeling whisper, _Whence comes peace?_
` ` Say it a second time, then cease;

` ` And if the voice inside returns,
` `_ From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
` ` The cause of Peace?_---for answer, slip
` ` My letter where you placed your lip;
` ` Then come back happy we have done
` ` Our mother service---I, the son,
` ` As you the daughter of our land!"

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sun-rise
That of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover---stout and tall,
She said---then let her eyelids fall,
` ` He could do much"---as if some doubt
Entered her heart,---then, passing out,
` ` She could not speak for others, who
` ` Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head---` ` This faith was shown
` ` To Italy, our mother; she
` ` Uses my hand and blesses thee."
She followed down to the sea-shore;
I left and never saw her more.

How very long since I have thought
Concerning---much less wished for---aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince.
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself---say, three---
I know at least what one should be.

I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
---Nor much for that am I perplexed---
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employer. Last
---Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
---Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so---perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine---
Are turning wise: while some opine
` ` Freedom grows license," some suspect
` ` Haste breeds delay," and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen ` ` All's for best,"
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,
Inquired of all her fortunes---just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing---how

It steals the time! To business now.

Robert Browning

The Laboratory

ANCIEN RGIME.

I.

Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze thro' these faint smokes curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy---
Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?

II.

He is with her, and they know that I know
Where they are, what they do: they believe my tears flow
While they laugh, laugh at me, at me fled to the drear
Empty church, to pray God in, for them!---I am here.

III.

Grind away, moisten and mash up thy paste,
Pound at thy powder,---I am not in haste!
Better sit thus, and observe thy strange things,
Than go where men wait me and dance at the King's.

IV.

That in the mortar---you call it a gum?
Ah, the brave tree whence such gold oozings come!
And yonder soft phial, the exquisite blue,
Sure to taste sweetly,---is that poison too?

V.

Had I but all of them, thee and thy treasures,
What a wild crowd of invisible pleasures!
To carry pure death in an earring, a casket,
A signet, a fan-mount, a filigree basket!

VI.

Soon, at the King's, a mere lozenge to give,
And Pauline should have just thirty minutes to live!
But to light a pastile, and Elise, with her head
And her breast and her arms and her hands, should drop dead!

VII.

Quick---is it finished? The colour's too grim!
Why not soft like the phial's, enticing and dim?
Let it brighten her drink, let her turn it and stir,
And try it and taste, ere she fix and prefer!

VIII.

What a drop! She's not little, no minion like me!
That's why she ensnared him: this never will free
The soul from those masculine eyes,---Say, ``no!"
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go.

IX.

For only last night, as they whispered, I brought
My own eyes to bear on her so, that I thought
Could I keep them one half minute fixed, she would fall
Shrivelled; she fell not; yet this does it all!

X

Not that I bid you spare her the pain;
Let death be felt and the proof remain:
Brand, burn up, bite into its grace---
He is sure to remember her dying face!

XI.

Is it done? Take my mask off! Nay, be not morose;
It kills her, and this prevents seeing it close;
The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's fee!
If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?

XII.

Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it---next moment I dance at the King's!

Robert Browning

The Laboratory-Ancien Régime

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Robert Browning

The Lady and the Painter

SHE: Yet womanhood you reverence,
So you profess!

HE: With heart and soul.

SHE: Of which fact this is evidence!
To help Art-study,- for some dole
Of certain wretched shillings,- you
Induce a woman- virgin too-
To strip and stand stark naked?

HE: True.

SHE: Nor feel you so degrade her?

HE: What
- (Excuse the interruption)- clings
Half-savage-like around your hat?

SHE: Ah, do they please you? Wild-bird-wings
Next season,- Paris-prints assert,-
We must go feathered to the skirt:
My modiste keeps on the alert.
Owls, hawks, jays- swallows most approve ...

HE: Dare I speak plainly?

SHE: Oh, I trust!

HE: Then, Lady Blanche, it less would move
In heart and soul of me disgust
Did you strip off those spoils you wear,
And stand- for thanks, not shillings- bare,
To help Art like my Model there.
She well knew what absolved her- praise
In me for God's surpassing good,
Who granted to my reverent gaze
A type of purest womanhood.
You clothed with murder of His best

Of harmless beings- stand the test!
What is it you know?

SHE: That you jest!

Robert Browning

The Last Ride Together

I.

I said---Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be---
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,---I claim
---Only a memory of the same,
---And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II.

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me, a breathing-while or two,
 With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
 Who knows but the world may end tonight?

III.

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions---sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once---
 And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!---

Thus leant she and lingered---joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,---All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach,
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?

They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

VII.

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you---poor, sick, old ere your time---
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII.

And you, great sculptor---so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
' ` Greatly his opera's strains intend,
' ` Put in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being---had I signed the bond---
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.

Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

☒

And yet---she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,---
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

Robert Browning

The Lost Leader

I.

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat---
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags---were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,---they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the free-men,
---He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

III.

We shall march prospering,---not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,---not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,---while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more foot-path untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part---the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him---strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

The Lost Mistress

I.

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

II.

And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
I noticed that, to-day;
One day more bursts them open fully
---You know the red turns grey.

III.

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we,---well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

IV.

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Though I keep with heart's endeavour,---
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops back,
Though it stay in my soul for ever!---

V.

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

Robert Browning

The Patriot

AN OLD STORY.

I.

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, ``Good folk, mere noise repels---
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, ``And afterward, what else?"

III.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Nought man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV.

There's nobody on the house-tops now---
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate---or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,

For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI.

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
``Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
``Me?''---God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.

Robert Browning

The Pied Piper Of Hamelin

I.

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II.

Rats!
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

III.

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
`` 'Tis clear," cried they, `` our Mayor's a noddy;
`` And as for our Corporation---shocking.
`` To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
`` For dolts that can't or won't determine
`` What's best to rid us of our vermin!
`` You hope, because you're old and obese,
`` To find in the furry civic robe ease?
`` Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
`` To find the remedy we're lacking,

`` Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.

IV.

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
`` For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
`` I wish I were a mile hence!
`` It's easy to bid one rack one's brain---
`` I'm sure my poor head aches again,
`` I've scratched it so, and all in vain.
`` Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!"
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
`` Bless us," cried the Mayor, `` what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
`` Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
`` Anything like the sound of a rat
`` Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"

V

`` Come in!"---the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: `` It's as my great-grandsire,

`` Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
`` Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!"

VI.

He advanced to the council-table
And, `` Please your honours," said he, `` I'm able,
`` By means of a secret charm, to draw
`` All creatures living beneath the sun,
`` That creep or swim or fly or run,
`` After me so as you never saw!
`` And I chiefly use my charm
`` On creatures that do people harm,
`` The mole and toad and newt and viper;
`` And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;
And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
`` Yet," said he, `` poor piper as I am,
`` In Tartary I freed the Cham,
`` Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats;
`` I eased in Asia the Nizam
`` Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
`` And as for what your brain bewilders,
`` If I can rid your town of rats
`` Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
`` One? fifty thousand!"---was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.

VII.

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,

And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
 Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
 And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
 You heard as if an army muttered;
 And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
 And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
 And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
 Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
 Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
 Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
 Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
 Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
 Families by tens and dozens,
 Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives---
 Followed the Piper for their lives.
 From street to street he piped advancing,
 And step for step they followed dancing,
 Until they came to the river Weser,
 Wherein all plunged and perished!
 ---Save one who, stout as Julius Csar,
 Swam across and lived to carry
 (As he, the manuscript he cherished)
 To Rat-land home his commentary:
 Which was, `` At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
 `` I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
 `` And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
 `` Into a cider-press's gripe:
 `` And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
 `` And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
 `` And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
 `` And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
 `` And it seemed as if a voice
 `` (Sweeter far than b harp or b psaltery
 `` Is breathed) called out, ` Oh rats, rejoice!
 `` ` The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
 `` ` So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
 `` ` Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!
 `` And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
 `` All ready staved, like a great sun shone
 `` Glorious scarce an inch before me,
 `` Just as methought it said, ` Come, bore me!
 `` ---I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII.

You should have heard the Hamelin people
ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
` `Go," cried the Mayor, ` `and get long poles,
` `Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
` `Consult with carpenters and builders,
` `And leave in our town not even a trace
` `Of the rats!"---when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, ` `First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX.

A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.
To pay this sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
` `Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
` `Our business was done at the river's brink;
` `We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
` `And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
` `So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
` `From the duty of giving you something for drink,
` `And a matter of money to put in your poke;
` `But as for the guilders, what we spoke
` `Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
` `Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
` `A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried
` `No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
` `I've promised to visit by dinnertime
` `Bagdat, and accept the prime
` `Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,

` ` For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
` ` Of a nest of scorpions no survivor:
` ` With him I proved no bargain-driver,
` ` With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
` ` And folks who put me in a passion
` ` May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI.

` ` How?" cried the Mayor, ` ` d'ye think I brook
` ` Being worse treated than a Cook?
` ` Insulted by a lazy ribald
` ` With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
` ` You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
` ` Blow your pipe there till you burst!"

XII.

Once more he stept into the street
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering,
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,

---Could only follow with the eye
 That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
 But how the Mayor was on the rack,
 And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
 As the Piper turned from the High Street
 To where the Weser rolled its waters
 Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
 However be turned from South to West,
 And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
 And after him the children pressed;
 Great was the joy in every breast.
 ` ` He never can cross that mighty top!
 ` ` He's forced to let the piping drop,
 ` ` And we shall see our children stop!"
 When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
 A wondrous portal opened wide,
 As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
 And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
 And when all were in to the very last,
 The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
 Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
 And could not dance the whole of the way;
 And in after years, if you would blame
 His sadness, he was used to say,---
 ` ` It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
 ` ` I can't forget that I'm bereft
 ` ` Of all the pleasant sights they see,
 ` ` Which the Piper also promised me.
 ` ` For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
 ` ` Joining the town and just at hand,
 ` ` Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
 ` ` And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
 ` ` And everything was strange and new;
 ` ` The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
 ` ` And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
 ` ` And honey-bees had lost their stings,
 ` ` And horses were born with eagles' wings:
 ` ` And just as I became assured
 ` ` My lame foot would be speedily cured,
 ` ` The music stopped and I stood still,
 ` ` And found myself outside the hill,
 ` ` Left alone against my will,

``To go now limping as before,
``And never hear of that country more!"

XIV.

Alas, alas for Hamelin!

There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
The mayor sent East, West, North and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
``And so long after what happened here
``On the Twenty-second of July,
``Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street---
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress

On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

XV.

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men---especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free frm rats or frm mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

Robert Browning

The Statue And The Bust

There's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East,
Asked, "Who rides by with the royal air?"

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased;
She leaned forth, one on either hand;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased --

They felt by its beats her heart expand --
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, "The Great-Duke Ferdinand."

That self-same instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back -- "Who is she?"
-- "A bride the Riccardi brings home today."

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure --
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure --
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man, --
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes:
The past was a sleep, and their life began.

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite!

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursèd son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square)
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued --

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor --
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think,
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalque repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East,
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,

And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

"Freely I choose too," said the bride --
"Your window and its world suffice,"
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied --

"If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on paradise!

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

"'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul -- but not tomorrow" --

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)

"My father tarries to bless my state:
I must keep it one day more for him.

"Is one day more so long to wait?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know;
We shall see each other, sure as fate."

She turned on her side and slept. Just so!
So we resolve on a thing and sleep:
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, "Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep."

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled "'Twas a very funeral,
Your lady will think, this feast of ours, --
A shame to efface, whate'er befall!

"What if we break from the Arno bowers,
And try if Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?"

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, "Too much favour for me so mean!

"But, alas! my lady leaves the South;
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth:

"Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life's decline."

Quoth the Duke, "A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring:
Be our feast tonight as usual here!"

And then to himself -- "Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool --
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king!

"Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool --
For tonight the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with myself, my tool.

"I need thee still and might miss perchance.
Today is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady's countenance:

"For I ride -- what should I do but ride?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window -- well betide!"

So said, so done: nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,

No morrow's sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth:
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose:
The world and its ways have a certain worth:

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy; better wait:
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate!

And she -- she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook:

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above:
But who can take a dream for a truth?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove!

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked, --
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

Fronting her silent in the glass --
"Summon here," she suddenly said,
"Before the rest of my old self pass,

"Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who fashions the clay no love will change,
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

"Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair,
And rivet them while the seasons range.

"Make me a face on the window there,
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

"And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle,

"To say, 'What matters it at the end?
I did no more while my heart was warm
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.'

"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm --

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,

With flowers and fruits which leaves enlance,
Was set where now is the empty shrine --

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space,
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face --
Eyeing ever, with earnest eye

And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever is passing by --)
The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch

In Florence, "Youth -- my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch
Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes --

"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?

"John of Douay shall effect my plan,
Set me on horseback here aloft,
Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

"In the very square I have crossed so oft:
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

"While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze --
Admire and say, 'When he was alive
How he would take his pleasure once!'

"And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
At idleness which aspires to strive."

So! While these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,

Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss --
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way through the world to this.

I hear you reproach, "But delay was best,
For their end was a crime." -- Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham:
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play! -- is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is -- the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you? De te, fabula.

Robert Browning

The Twins

Give" and ``It-shall-be-given-unto-you."

□

Grand rough old Martin Luther
Bloomed fables---flowers on furze,
The better the uncouth:
Do roses stick like burrs?

□□.

A beggar asked an alms
One day at an abbey-door,
Said Luther; but, seized with qualms,
The abbot replied, ``We're poor!

□□□.

``Poor, who had plenty once,
``When gifts fell thick as rain:
``But they give us nought, for the nonce,
``And how should we give again?"

□□□.

Then the beggar, ``See your sins!
``Of old, unless I err,
``Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,
``Date and Dabitur.

□□□□.

``While Date was in good case
``Dabitur flourished too:
``For Dabitur's lenten face
``No wonder if Date rue.

□□□□.

`` Would ye retrieve the one?
`` Try and make plump the other!
`` When Date's penance is done,
`` Dabitur helps his brother.

Ⅶ.

`` Only, beware relapse!"
The Abbot hung his head.
This beggar might be perhaps
An angel, Luther said.

Robert Browning

The Year's At The Spring

The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;
God's in his Heaven—
All's right with the world!

Robert Browning

Through The Metidja To Abd-El-Kadr

Abd-el-Kadr was an Arab Chief of Algiers who resisted the French in 1833.]

□

As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,
As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried
As I ride, as I ride.

□□.

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride?
Or are witnesses denied---
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride?

□□□.

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied?)
To reside---where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

□□□.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,

Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
---Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed---
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride!

¶

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that's meant me---satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!

Robert Browning

Thus The Mayne Glideth

THUS the Mayne glideth
Where my Love abideth;
Sleep 's no softer: it proceeds
On through lawns, on through meads,
On and on, whate'er befall,
Meandering and musical,
Though the niggard pasturage
Bears not on its shaven ledge
Aught but weeds and waving grasses
To view the river as it passes,
Save here and there a scanty patch
Of primroses too faint to catch
A weary bee.... And scarce it pushes
Its gentle way through strangling rushes
Where the glossy kingfisher
Flutters when noon-heats are near,
Glad the shelving banks to shun,
Red and steaming in the sun,
Where the shrew-mouse with pale throat
Burrows, and the speckled stoat;
Where the quick sandpipers flit
In and out the marl and grit
That seems to breed them, brown as they:
Naught disturbs its quiet way,
Save some lazy stork that springs,
Trailing it with legs and wings,
Whom the shy fox from the hill
Rouses, creep he ne'er so still.

Robert Browning

Time's Revenges

I've a Friend, over the sea;
I like him, but he loves me.
It all grew out of the books I write;
They find such favour in his sight
That he slaughters you with savage looks
Because you don't admire my books.
He does himself though,---and if some vein
Were to snap to-night in this heavy brain,
To-morrow month, if I lived to try,
Round should I just turn quietly,
Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand
Till I found him, come from his foreign land
To be my nurse in this poor place,
And make my broth and wash my face
And light my fire and, all the while,
Bear with his old good-humoured smile
That I told him `` Better have kept away
`` Than come and kill me, night and day,
`` With, worse than fever throbs and shoots,
`` The creaking of his clumsy boots."

I am as sure that this he would do
As that Saint Paul's is striking two.
And I think I rather ... woe is me!
---Yes, rather would see him than not see,
If lifting a hand could seat him there
Before me in the empty chair
To-night, when my head aches indeed,
And I can neither think nor read
Nor make these purple fingers hold
The pen; this garret's freezing cold!

And I've a Lady---there he wakes,
The laughing fiend and prince of snakes
Within me, at her name, to pray
Fate send some creature in the way
Of my love for her, to be down-torn,
Upthrust and outward-borne,
So I might prove myself that sea
Of passion which I needs must be!

Call my thoughts false and my fancies quaint
And my style infirm and its figures faint,
All the critics say, and more blame yet,
And not one angry word you get.
But, please you, wonder I would put
My cheek beneath that lady's foot
Rather than trample under mine
The laurels of the Florentine,
And you shall see how the devil spends
A fire God gave for other ends!
I tell you, I stride up and down
This garret, crowned with love's best crown,
And feasted with love's perfect feast,
To think I kill for her, at least,
Body and soul and peace and fame,
Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
---So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
Filled full, eaten out and in
With the face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her month; and she
---I'll tell you,---calmly would decree
That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be heaven; there must be hell;
Meantime, there is our earth here---well!

Robert Browning

To Edward Fitzgerald

I chanced upon a new book yesterday;
I opened it, and, where my finger lay
'Twixt page and uncut page, these words I read -
Some six or seven at most - and learned thereby
That you, Fitzgerald, whom by ear and eye
She never knew, "thanked God my wife was dead."
Aye, dead! and were yourself alive, good Fitz,
How to return you thanks would task my wits.
Kicking you seems the common lot of curs -
While more appropriate greeting lends you grace,
Surely to spit there glorifies your face -
Spitting from lips once sanctified by hers.

Robert Browning

Tray

Sing me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of soul, ye bards!
Quoth Bard the first:
'Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm, and eke his habergeon ...'
Sir Olaf and his bard—!

'That sin-scathed brow' (quoth Bard the second),
'That eye wide ope as tho' Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting Death ...'
You too without your host have reckoned!

'A beggar-child' (let's hear this third!)
'Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

'Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

"Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet!
Good dog! What, off again? There's yet
Another child to save? All right!

"How strange we saw no other fall!
It's instinct in the animal.
Good dog! But he's a long while under:
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall!

"Here lie comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be? Well, that's prime!

Now, did you ever? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime!

'And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—
Till somebody, prerogated
With reason, reasoned: 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

"John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase that animal for me!
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteen pence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see!"

Robert Browning

Two In The Campagna

.

I wonder do you feel to-day
As I have felt since, hand in hand,
We sat down on the grass, to stray
In spirit better through the land,
This morn of Rome and May?

II.

For me, I touched a thought, I know,
Has tantalized me many times,
(Like turns of thread the spiders throw
Mocking across our path) for rhymes
To catch at and let go.

III.

Help me to hold it! First it left
The yellowing fennel, <*1> run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating wet,

IV.

Where one small orange cup amassed
Five beetles,---blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V

The champaign with its endless fleece
Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
An everlasting wash of air---
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI.

Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII.

How say you? Let us, O my dove,
Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

IX.

I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul's springs,---your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

X

No. I yearn upward, touch you close,
Then stand away. I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth,---I pluck the rose
And love it more than tongue can speak---
Then the good minute goes.

XI.

Already how am I so far
Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?

XII.

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern---
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn.

* 1 Herb with yellow flowers and seeds supposed
* to be medicinal.

Robert Browning

Up At A Villa--Down In The City

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city-square;
Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window there!

Something to see, by Bacchus, something to hear, at least!
There, the whole day long, one's life is a perfect feast;
While up at a villa one lives, I maintain it, no more than a beast.

Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!
--I scratch my own, sometimes, to see if the hair's turned wool.

But the city, oh the city--the square with the houses! Why?
They are stone-faced, white as a curd, there's something to take the eye!
Houses in four straight lines, not a single front awry;
You watch who crosses and gossips, who saunters, who hurries by;
Green blinds, as a matter of course, to draw when the sun gets high;
And the shops with fanciful signs which are painted properly.

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the heights:
You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray olive-trees.

Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

Is it ever hot in the square? There's a fountain to spout and splash!
In the shade it sings and springs: in the shine such foambows flash
On the horses with curling fish-tails, that prance and paddle and pash
Round the lady atop in her conch--fifty gazers do not abash,
Though all that she wears is some weeds round her waist in a sort of sash.

All the year long at the villa, nothing to see though you linger,
Except yon cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.

Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix in the corn and mingle,
Or thrud the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on the hill.
Enough of the seasons,--I spare you the months of the fever and chill.

Ere you open your eyes in the city, the blessed church-bells begin:
No sooner the bells leave off than the diligence rattles in:
You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a pin.
By and by there's the travelling doctor gives pills, lets blood, draws teeth;
Or the Pulcinello-trumpet breaks up the market beneath.
At the post-office such a scene-picture--the new play, piping hot!
And a notice how, only this morning, three liberal thieves were shot.

Above it, behold the Archbishop's most fatherly of rebukes,
And beneath, with his crown and his lion, some little new law of the Duke's!
Or a sonnet with flowery marge, to the Reverend Don So-and so,
Who is Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca, Saint Jerome and Cicero,
"And moreover," (the sonnet goes rhyming,) "the skirts of Saint Paul has
reached,

Having preached us those six Lent-lectures more unctuous than ever he
preached."

Noon strikes,--here sweeps the procession! our Lady borne smiling and smart
With a pink gauze gown all spangles, and seven swords stuck in her heart!
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife.
No keeping one's haunches still: it's the greatest pleasure in life.

But bless you, it's dear--it's dear! fowls, wine, at double the rate.
They have clapped a new tax upon salt, and what oil pays passing the gate
It's a horror to think of. And so, the villa for me, not the city!
Beggars can scarcely be choosers: but still--ah, the pity, the pity!
Look, two and two go the priests, then the monks with cowls and sandals,
And the penitents dressed in white shirts a-holding the yellow candles;
One, he carries a flag up straight, and another a cross with handles.
And the Duke's guard brings up the rear, for the better prevention of scandals:
Bang-whang-whang goes the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife;
Oh, a day in the city-square, there is no such pleasure in life!

Robert Browning

Verse-Making Was Least Of My Virtues

Verse-making was least of my virtues: I viewed with despair
Wealth that never yet was but might be--all that verse-making were
If the life would but lengthen to wish, let the mind be laid bare.
So I said, "To do little is bad, to do nothing is worse"--
And made verse.

Love-making,--how simple a matter! No depths to explore,
No heights in a life to ascend! No disheartening Before,
No affrighting Hereafter,--love now will be love ever more.
So I felt "To keep silence were folly:"--all language above,
I made love.

Robert Browning

Waring

Mr. Alfred Domett, C.M.G., author of
Ranolf and Amohia, `` full of descriptions of
New Zealand scenery.]

□

I.

What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London town?

II.

Who'd have guessed it from his lip
Or his brow's accustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship
Or started landward?---little caring
For us, it seems, who supped together
(Friends of his too, I remember)
And walked home thro' the merry weather,
The snowiest in all December.
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet
Who wrote the book there, on the shelf---
How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day?
Never looked he half so gay!

III.

He was prouder than the devil:
How he must have cursed our revel!
Ay and many other meetings,
Indoor visits, outdoor greetings,
As up and down he paced this London,

With no work done, but great works undone,
 Where scarce twenty knew his name.
 Why not, then, have earlier spoken,
 Written, bustled? Who's to blame
 If your silence kept unbroken?
 ` ` True, but there were sundry jottings,
 ` ` Stray-leaves, fragments, blurts and blottings,
 ` ` Certain first steps were achieved
 ` ` Already which"---(is that your meaning?)
 ` ` Had well borne out who'er believed
 ` ` In more to come!" But who goes gleaning
 Hedgeside chance-glades, while full-sheaved
 Stand cornfields by him? Pride, o'erweening
 Pride alone, puts forth such claims
 O'er the day's distinguished names.

IV.

Meantime, how much I loved him,
 I find out now I've lost him.
 I who cared not if I moved him,
 Who could so carelessly accost him,
 Henceforth never shall get free
 Of his ghostly company,
 His eyes that just a little wink
 As deep I go into the merit
 Of this and that distinguished spirit---
 His cheeks' raised colour, soon to sink,
 As long I dwell on some stupendous
 And tremendous (Heaven defend us!)
 Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous
 Demoniaco-seraphic
 Penman's latest piece of graphic.
 Nay, my very wrist grows warm
 With his dragging weight of arm.
 E'en so, swimmingly appears,
 Through one's after-supper musings,
 Some lost lady of old years
 With her beauteous vain endeavour
 And goodness unrepaid as ever;
 The face, accustomed to refusings,
 We, puppies that we were ... Oh never

Surely, nice of conscience, scrupled
Being aught like false, forsooth, to?
Telling aught but honest truth to?
What a sin, had we centupled
Its possessor's grace and sweetness
No! she heard in its completeness
Truth, for truth's a weighty matter,
And truth, at issue, we can't flatter!
Well, 'tis done with; she's exempt
From damning us thro' such a sally;
And so she glides, as down a valley,
Taking up with her contempt,
Past our reach; and in, the flowers
Shut her unregarded hours.

V.

Oh, could I have him back once more,
This Waring, but one half-day more!
Back, with the quiet face of yore,
So hungry for acknowledgment
Like mine! I'd fool him to his bent.
Feed, should not he, to heart's content?
I'd say, ``to only have conceived,
``Planned your great works, apart from progress,
``Surpasses little works achieved!"
I'd lie so, I should be believed.
I'd make such havoc of the claims
Of the day's distinguished names
To feast him with, as feasts an ogress
Her feverish sharp-toothed gold-crowned child!
Or as one feasts a creature rarely
Captured here, unreconciled
To capture; and completely gives
its pettish humours license, barely
Requiring that it lives.

VI.

Ichabod, Ichabod,
The glory is departed!
Travels Waring East away?

Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstarted
Somewhere as a god,
Hordes grown European-hearted,
Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?
Or who in Moscow, toward the Czar,
With the demurest of footfalls
Over the Kremlin's pavement bright
With serpentine and syenite,*1
Steps, with five other Generals
That simultaneously take snuff,
For each to have pretext enough
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,
And leave the grand white neck no gash?
Waring in Moscow, to those rough
Cold northern natures born perhaps,
Like the lambwhite maiden dear
From the circle of mute kings
Unable to repress the tear,
Each as his sceptre down he flings,
To Dian's fane at Taurica,
Where now a captive priestess, she alway
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten beach
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian strands
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry
Amid their barbarous twitter!
In Russia? Never! Spain were fitter!
Ay, most likely 'tis in Spain
That we and Waring meet again
Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid
All fire and shine, abrupt as when there's slid
Its stiff gold blazing pall
From some black coffin-lid.
Or, best of all,
I love to think

The leaving us was just a feint;
Back here to London did he slink,
And now works on without a wink
Of sleep, and we are on the brink
Of something great in fresco-pain:
Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
Up and down and o'er and o'er
He splashes, as none splashed before
Since great Caldera Polidore.*2
Or Music means this land of ours
Some favour yet, to pity won
By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers,---
` ` Give me my so-long promised son,
` ` Let Waring end what I begun!"
Then down he creeps and out he steals
Only when the night conceals
His face; in Kent 'tis cherry-time,
Or hops are picking: or at prime
Of March he wanders as, too happy,
Years ago when he was young,
Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
And the early moths had sprung
To life from many a trembling sheath
Woven the warm boughs beneath;
While small birds said to themselves
What should soon be actual song,
And young gnats, by tens and twelves,
Made as if they were the throng
That crowd around and carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,
Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July noon
When all God's creatures crave their boon,
All at once and all in tune,
And get it, happy as Waring then,
Having first within his ken
What a man might do with men:
And far too glad, in the even-glow,
To mix with the world he meant to take
Into his hand, he told you, so---
And out of it his world to make,

To contract and to expand
As he shut or oped his hand.
Oh Waring, what's to really be?
A clear stage and a crowd to see!
Some Garrick, say, out shall not he
The heart of Hamlet's mystery pluck?
Or, where most unclean beasts are rife,
Some Junius---am I right?---shall tuck
His sleeve, and forth with flaying-knife!
Some Chatterton shall have the luck
Of calling Rowley into life!
Some one shall somehow run a muck
With this old world for want of strife
Sound asleep. Contrive, contrive
To rouse us, Waring! Who's alive?
Our men scarce seem in earnest now.
Distinguished names!---but 'tis, somehow,
As if they played at being names
Still more distinguished, like the games
Of children. Turn our sport to earnest
With a visage of the sternest!
Bring the real times back, confessed
Still better than our very best!

III.

I.

`` When I last saw Waring ..."
(How all turned to him who spoke!
You saw Waring? Truth or joke?
In land-travel or sea-faring?)

II.

`` We were sailing by Triest
`` Where a day or two we harboured:
`` A sunset was in the West,
`` When, looking over the vessel's side,
`` One of our company espied
`` A sudden speck to larboard.

`` And as a sea-duck flies and swims
`` At once, so came the light craft up,
`` With its sole lateen sail that trims
`` And turns (the water round its rims
`` Dancing, as round a sinking cup)
`` And by us like a fish it curled,
`` And drew itself up close beside,
`` Its great sail on the instant furled,
`` And o'er its thwarts a shrill voice cried,
`` (A neck as bronzed as a Lascar's)
`` `Buy wine of us, you English Brig?
`` `Or fruit, tobacco and cigars?
`` `A pilot for you to Triest?
`` `Without one, look you ne'er so big,
`` `They'll never let you up the bay!
`` `We natives should know best.'
`` I turned, and `just those fellows' way,'
`` Our captain said, `The 'long-shore thieves
`` `Are laughing at us in their sleeves.'

III.

`` In truth, the boy leaned laughing back;
`` And one, half-hidden by his side
`` Under the furled sail, soon I spied,
`` With great grass hat and kerchief black,
`` Who looked up with his kingly throat,
`` Said somewhat, while the other shook
`` His hair back from his eyes to look
`` Their longest at us; then the boat,
`` I know not how, turned sharply round,
`` Laying her whole side on the sea
`` As a leaping fish does; from the lee
`` Into the weather, cut somehow
`` Her sparkling path beneath our bow
`` And so went off, as with a bound,
`` Into the rosy and golden half
`` O' the sky, to overtake the sun
`` And reach the shore, like the sea-calf
`` Its singing cave; yet I caught one
`` Glance ere away the boat quite passed,
`` And neither time nor toil could mar

` ` Those features: so I saw the last
` ` Of Waring!"---You? Oh, never star
Was lost here but it rose afar!
Look East, where whole new thousands are!
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?

*1 Egyptian granite.

*2 Surnamed da Caravaggio. A pupil of Raphael.

Robert Browning

Why I Am A Liberal

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all I hope to be,--
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men--each in his degree
Also God-guided--bear, and gayly, too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved through Liberty.
Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,
Who live, love, labour freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

Robert Browning

Women And Roses

I.

I dream of a red-rose tree.
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

II.

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day.
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens,
Beauties yet unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

III.

Dear rose, thy term is reached,
Thy leaf hangs loose and bleached:
Bees pass it unimpeached.

IV.

Stay then, stoop, since I cannot climb,
You, great shapes of the antique time!
How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,
Break my heart at your feet to please you?
Oh, to possess and be possessed!
Hearts that beat 'neath each pallid breast!
Once but of love, the poesy, the passion,
Drink but once and die!---In vain, the same fashion,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

V.

Dear rose, thy joy's undimmed,

Thy cup is ruby-rimmed,
Thy cup's heart nectar-brimmed.

VI.

Deep, as drops from a statue's plinth
The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
So will I bury me while burning,
Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
Eyes in your eyes, lips on your lips!
Fold me fast where the cincture slips,
Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure,
Girdle me for once! But no---the old measure,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

VII.

Dear rose without a thorn,
Thy bud's the babe unborn:
First streak of a new morn.

VIII.

Wings, lend wings for the cold, the clear!
What is far conquers what is near.
Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
Sprung from the dust where our flesh moulders.
What shall arrive with the cycle's change?
A novel grace and a beauty strange.
I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her,
Shaped her to his mind!---Alas! in like manner
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

Robert Browning

You'LI Love Me Yet

You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartfelt now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like!

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.
What's death?—You'll love me yet!

Robert Browning

Youth And Art

1 It once might have been, once only:
2 We lodged in a street together,
3 You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,
4 I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

5 Your trade was with sticks and clay,
6 You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
7 Then laughed 'They will see some day
8 Smith made, and Gibson demolished.'

9 My business was song, song, song;
10 I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
11 'Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,
12 And Grisi's existence embittered!'

13 I earned no more by a warble
14 Than you by a sketch in plaster;
15 You wanted a piece of marble,
16 I needed a music-master.

17 We studied hard in our styles,
18 Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,
19 For air looked out on the tiles,
20 For fun watched each other's windows.

21 You lounged, like a boy of the South,
22 Cap and blouse--nay, a bit of beard too;
23 Or you got it, rubbing your mouth
24 With fingers the clay adhered to.

25 And I--soon managed to find
26 Weak points in the flower-fence facing,
27 Was forced to put up a blind
28 And be safe in my corset-lacing.

29 No harm! It was not my fault
30 If you never turned your eye's tail up
31 As I shook upon E in alt,
32 Or ran the chromatic scale up:

33 For spring bade the sparrows pair,
34 And the boys and girls gave guesses,
35 And stalls in our street looked rare
36 With bulrush and watercresses.

37 Why did not you pinch a flower
38 In a pellet of clay and fling it?
39 Why did not I put a power
40 Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

41 I did look, sharp as a lynx,
42 (And yet the memory rankles,)
43 When models arrived, some minx
44 Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

45 But I think I gave you as good!
46 'That foreign fellow,--who can know
47 How she pays, in a playful mood,
48 For his tuning her that piano?'

49 Could you say so, and never say
50 'Suppose we join hands and fortunes,
51 And I fetch her from over the way,
52 Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?'

53 No, no: you would not be rash,
54 Nor I rasher and something over:
55 You've to settle yet Gibson's hash,
56 And Grisi yet lives in clover.

57 But you meet the Prince at the Board,
58 I'm queen myself at bals-paré,
59 I've married a rich old lord,
60 And you're dubbed knight and an R.A.

61 Each life unfulfilled, you see;
62 It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
63 We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
64 Starved, feasted, despaired,--been happy.

65 And nobody calls you a dunce,

66 And people suppose me clever:
67 This could but have happened once,
68 And we missed it, lost it for ever.

Robert Browning