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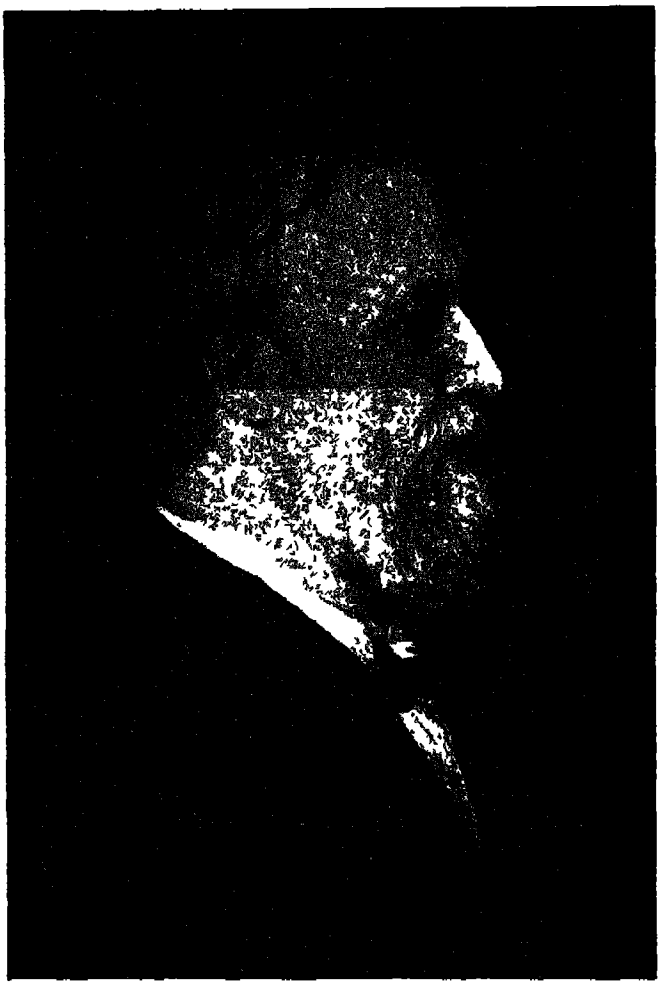
ROBERT BROWNING
PIPPA PASSES, AND SHORTER POEMS



ROBERT BROWNING, 1865

From the portrait by G. F. Watts
(The National Portrait Gallery, London)

BROWNING

PIPPA PASSES
AND
SHORTER POEMS

Edited by JOSEPH E. BAKER

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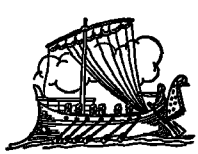

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PREFACE

No poet profits so much from selection as Browning, not even Wordsworth. For in Wordsworth's poetry the good and bad are inextricably mixed; Browning's best and worst are pretty well separated, so that his finest poetry can be read without the bad taste left in the mouth by blunders. He has written whole poems without a flaw. And even in the longer works (which can fall so low that in one of them he himself writes, "You see how poetry turns prose") the valuable passages may stand alone. Examples of this are the description of the Fall of Athens that begins *Aristophanes' Apology*, or the much-loved prologues and epilogues to books that deservedly remain unread.

And Browning's poems require a great deal of annotation. Ruskin pointed out, "The worst of it is that this kind of concentrated writing needs so much solution before the reader can fairly get the good of it, that people's patience fails them, and they give the thing up as insoluble." Elizabeth Barrett in the course of their love letters called Browning's attention to the need of explanation for his poetry. His poems make less demand on the understanding than those of most great poets, as far as profundity of thought is concerned; but they have a special difficulty of their own: they are full of recondite bits of erudition and references to obscure historical figures that few educated people know, allusions essential to the meaning of the poems. He had educated himself in his father's library of some 6000 volumes; among other things Browning found here was the *Biographie Universelle* (1822) whose entire fifty volumes he read through. There are also in his poetry many complicated statements that can be cleared up quickly by a brief explanation, though it has not seemed to me desirable in this edition to discuss various interpretations for their own

sake. Our purpose is to be as useful as possible in bringing Browning's poetry home to the college student and the general reader, quickly and efficiently.

I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Curt Zimansky and to Mr. Robert Shafer for their detailed advice concerning the preparation of this book, and to the National Portrait Gallery, London, for permission to use the G. F. Watts portrait of Browning. Anyone who edits Browning owes much to the edition of his works in a dozen volumes, with elaborate notes at the back of each volume by Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke. More recently, William C. DeVane has performed for us a great service in sifting the vast quantities of information that have been piled up concerning Browning, and I wish here to acknowledge my own debt to his synthesis of specific information and biographical detail. It seems to me that it is now possible to combine the best of Browning's poetry with this scholarly material and the critical evaluations, of which Browning's admirers have taken too little account. And this should be applied to individual poems or specific passages in the poetry that are most illustrative, in running commentary where its contribution can be made with the least possible interruption of the reading.

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NOTE ON THE TEXT

Except for the two sonnets which the poet never collected ("The Names," and "Why I am a Liberal"), the text of the poems in this book, and of those quoted in the Introduction, is that of Browning's own final, revised edition of 1888–1889, published in seventeen volumes by Smith, Elder, and Company. For each of the sonnets mentioned above, the source of the text is given in its first footnote.

I have departed from the text by placing quotation marks only at the beginning and end of a quotation, not repeating them at the beginning of every line.

INTRODUCTION

I. THE READING OF BROWNING

Browning is probably the most immediately popular of all our poets except Shakespeare. He is one of the first poets to delight children: When the actor Macready's son was confined to his room with a cough, their friend Browning wrote "The Pied Piper" to provide the boy—addressed as "Willie" at the close of the poem—with a subject for illustration, a purpose it still serves in the nursery. For many a schoolboy, "You Know, We French Stormed Ratisbon" has been a first introduction to French history. A few years later the pupil reading Browning in an "English" course is likely to find his style difficult, but soon discovers that this was a mere external obstacle; and the college sophomore decides that it is easy to pluck out the heart of his mystery. Among undergraduates, Browning enjoys a wide popularity, a popularity that he retains; he is one of the few poets not lost after graduation. The young scholar, just entering upon his profession, is likely again to magnify the difficulties of Browning, as the Browning Societies did a generation ago. As one pursues the study seriously, Browning's philosophy begins to seem so irrational, his learning so pedantic, as to be hardly worth the devotion of scholarship. But the more one reads as a critic, not only as a scholar, the more one is struck by the impossibility of dismissing Browning the poet merely because of his philosophy. The illusion that he is too trivial disappears, like the earlier illusion that he is too hard. One regains respect for the judgment of the college student, that here is something real—though it may be hard to say what.

Many readers have experienced something like the curious variation in their attitude towards the poet that I have just sketched. Furthermore, none of these attitudes is ever completely lost. They all have some validity. This variation explains much of the extreme disagreement found in evalua-

tions of Browning's achievement. Hence, this Introduction will focus attention progressively on various aspects of his work.

II. MASTER OF MODERN VERSE

One pours your cup—stark strength,
  Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp
Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood
Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!
For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;
  Dispatch it, then, in a single gulp!"
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
  The liquor: stuff for strength.

Epilogue to *Pacchiarotto*, 9–16

In "The Statue and the Bust" there are eight lines (121–128) containing a total of 65 words, of which 60 are monosyllables; and for one stretch of more than three lines there occur nothing but monosyllables. Browning is capable of writing lines of the utmost simplicity:

The grey sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon large and low.

Boot, saddle, to horse and away!

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there.

Never the time and the place
  And the loved one all together![1]

Yet there is no denying that at times Browning is obscure; and sometimes even careful study does not clarify his meaning. His friend Miss Martineau, one of the intellectual women of the Victorian Age, said concerning his *Sordello*, "I was so wholly unable to understand it that I supposed myself ill."[2] It is said

[1] "Meeting at Night," 1–2; "Cavalier Tunes," III, 1; "Home-Thoughts, From Abroad," 1–2; "Never the Time and the Place," 1–2.

[2] Martineau, Harriet, *Autobiography*, 4th ed., Boston, 1879, 1, 315.

that the journalist Douglas Jerrold was recovering from a severe illness and was finally permitted to read. A friend had sent him some new books and among them was *Sordello*, which happened to be the one that Jerrold decided to begin. As he read he turned pale. He could not understand two consecutive lines of an English poem! "My God! I'm an idiot!" he exclaimed, thinking that, though his health was restored, his mind was gone. Another member of his family began to read the book while he watched her intently, and as he saw signs of growing perplexity Jerrold uttered a sigh of relief, fell back in his bed, and was soon in a deep sleep. Of course the chief trouble was that Browning's *Sordello* appeared in print a century too early. Anyone who has dipped into the books of James Joyce or T. S. Eliot should feel at home with Browning's hardest poetry. These moderns demand the same kind of erudition that it takes to appreciate such phrases of Browning as the title, "Dîs Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours." Perhaps the best proof that Browning can be really difficult is the fact that even his prose is sometimes very obscure. Professor DeVane, who has studied Browning more thoroughly than anyone else, after quoting the poet's prose explanation of the meaning of his very difficult "Numpholeptos" adds dryly, "Browning's explanation is perhaps not so clear as the poem itself." Some passages in Browning's letters to Elizabeth Barrett are so unintelligible that even she mistook their meaning, and had to be informed that he did not mean what she thought. But usually—in the poems in this volume, for example—the obscurity is merely apparent. One may illustrate this by reading the first long speech in prose by Bluphocks in *Pippa Passes*, and then rereading it. The second reading is immensely lighted up because the significance of some of the first remarks becomes clear in the light of later sentences. As G. K. Chesterton very delightfully says, Browning tells things "tail foremost," but the tail is "often the most animated and fantastic" part of the animal.[3]

[3] *Robert Browning*, ed. 1925, p. 67.

This is not merely a stylistic peculiarity; it is of the very essence of Browning's poetry, his psychological method. Some passages are obscure on first reading because he has not arranged the thoughts logically, or even chronologically, each step ascending from the level reached by the previous step, each advance prepared for by what goes before. Instead, the phrases are spoken naturally, as they come to mind—as they come to *conscious mind*, for sometimes the phrase betrays an impulse from the stream of subconsciousness where the order of events is very different from what is going on in the clear light of reason. Browning's expression grows out of the same psychological interest with which Freud and other psychoanalysts have since made us familiar. Art has usually imposed on its materials a rational order; Browning came nearer to giving them a natural order than any other poet in a century marked by naturalism. The confusion on first reading springs from the order in which the ideas are expressed, but all are brought in, sooner or later. Consequently a second reading makes a speech surprisingly clear, in a different way from the second reading of poetry by other authors. It is somewhat like the light that suddenly dawns upon us as to the significance of a list of words jotted down in a psychological experiment. In order to achieve compression, Browning throws still another difficulty in the way of the reader: he often omits such words as articles, relative pronouns, and conjunctions. But this, too, is a trick with which one becomes familiar, after noticing a few times exactly what he has done.

To say that obscurity is a defect would be to condemn wholesale most of the leading poets of the twentieth century. And at least this can be said in their defense: that if a poem is worth reading once, it is worth reading twice. Perhaps the very fact that Browning *forces* a second reading accounts for the observable fact that with students beginning the study of literature in college, he is usually more popular than any other poet of the last three hundred years.

The occasional difficulty of Browning's style is only one aspect of its modernity. Arthur Compton-Rickett has pointed out that

Browning informalized poetry as Steele had informalized the prose essay more than a century earlier.[4] The poet, as Browning describes him, might be a periodical essayist or a newspaper columnist:

> 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-edge bold-print posters by the wall.
> He took such cognizance of men and things. . . .
>
> "How it Strikes a Contemporary," 23–30

This is the accent of the twentieth century. Indeed, Brockington, in the Preface to his *Browning and the Twentieth Century* says, "to some readers my book may serve as an introduction to modern poetry." Browning is, as another writer says, "the father of modern experimental verse,"[5] and one might add that none of his successors has yet equalled his achievement. Though his contemporaries were Tennyson, Rossetti, Arnold, and Swinburne, he belongs as a poet rather with Masefield, Kipling, Hardy, T. S. Eliot, Frost, and Sandburg.

One of the qualities that make Browning so modern is his realism. He speaks of himself as

> I who myself contentedly abide
> Awake, nor want the wings of dream,—who tramp
> Earth's common surface, rough, smooth, dry or damp.
>
> "Gerard de Lairesse," 111–113.

It is startling to find a religious poem published in 1850 describing in this manner the sect with which Browning felt deepest sympathy:

---

[4] *Robert Browning: Humanist*, New York, 1925, p. 57.
[5] Compton-Rickett, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

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. . . .

"Christmas Eve," 48–53.

This passage also illustrates another very modern characteristic of Browning, his interest in common humanity. He is the first democrat of poetry as Dickens is the first democrat of the novel, but he seems more modern than Dickens just as the psychology laboratory is more modern than the fairy tale.

It would not be correct to conclude from this that Browning's verse is prosaic. He is a great master of versification on the purely technical side, and his poetry makes a sensuous appeal through rhythm, rhyme, and imagery. The melody of his verse is not always heard immediately, but after a certain degree of familiarity one realizes that he is not only an experimenter but a master. The gallop of "As I ride, as I ride"—every line in the poem rhyming with *ride;* the silver-grey tone of "Andrea del Sarto"; the rush and gusto of "Saul"; the effect of classical hexameters in "Artemis Prologizes"; the imitation of the "Toccata" by Galuppi, or of a confident funeral march in "A Grammarian's Funeral"; the insane rhythms of the *Madhouse Cells* ("Johannes Agricola" and "Porphyria's Lover"); the dilettante repose and futility of "Cleon"; the grandeur of the description of the Fall of Athens—these are merely a few of his metrical triumphs, some of them masterpieces whose pure metrical beauty one would not trade for anything by Tennyson.

Browning's style is informal because it is conversational—again the parallel with "Dick Steele" is close. And it is conversational because it is usually spoken as one side of a conversation. It is the style necessary for the special kind of poem that Browning perfected, the dramatic monologue.

III. THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

> Partake my confidence! No creature's made so mean
> But that, some way, it boasts, could we investigate,
> Its supreme worth.
>
> *Fifine at the Fair*, 339–41

On May 26, 1836, Sergeant Talfourd gave a supper for various literary men, among them young Robert Browning, whose *Paracelsus*, the first book to be published under his name, had just won him acclaim as a poet. Walter Savage Landor was present, and William Wordsworth. When Talfourd proposed a toast to the "Poets of England" and named among them the author of *Paracelsus*, Wordsworth leaned across the table and said, "I am proud to drink to your health, Mr. Browning!"[6] *Paracelsus* was dramatic in form, though not a play, and as the party was breaking up the great actor W. C. Macready said to the young poet, "Will you not write me a tragedy, and save me from going to America?" John Forster, the dramatic critic, whom Browning met at Macready's home, had praised the dramatic element in *Paracelsus*. Such praise misled the poet, and for ten years thereafter he was trying, off and on, to write for the stage, a kind of writing for which he had no real genius. This was the very lowest period in the history of English dramatic literature—the mid-point of that hundred years between Sheridan and Shaw, which gave us no stage plays that rose to the rank of literary importance. Of no other period could it be said that its greatest dramatic poetry was not found in drama. As Browning *abandoned* the stage, he became the greatest dramatic poet in nineteenth-century English literature.

His first play, *Strafford*, was presented at the Covent Garden Theatre in 1837, with Macready playing the title rôle. His first work of distinctive importance in literature was *Pippa Passes* (1841), a play in form, but not for acting. And in *Dramatic Lyrics*, published the next year, he gave the world a volume of

[6] Griffin and Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning*, London, 1910, p. 77.

poems written in the form of which he is the great master. On February 13, 1846, he writes to Elizabeth Barrett, "I have lost, of late, interest in dramatic writing, as you know, and, perhaps, occasion." After that he never wrote for the stage, though his closet-drama "In a Balcony" (written 1853) has been acted several times. Browning drew no sharp line of distinction between "Dramatic Lyrics," "Dramatic Romances," "Dramatis Personae," and his psychological portraits of "Men and Women." These are the titles he gave to four different books, but he freely shifted individual poems about from one group to another in different editions of his works. Late in his life he published two books of "Dramatic Idyls." They may be called, generally, dramatic monologues.

Monologues of various kinds had been written before in English; for example, Cowper's "Verses Supposed to be Written by Alexander Selkirk" (beginning "I am monarch of all I survey"), or such epistles as Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard" or Drayton's *Heroical Epistles*. (Browning's "Cleon" is such an epistle.) Some of Tennyson's best poems are monologues, but even his "St. Simeon Stylites" or his "Northern Farmer" is less dramatic than Browning's masterpieces. The genuine dramatic monologue is addressed to a listener whose presence is indicated in the poem; and it discloses the character of the speaker rather than merely narrating what is spoken about. It is not a soliloquy, since other characters are supposed to be present. It is not a lyric like those sung in Shakespeare's plays because it is not just a song that might be sung by someone else. It is like one speech taken out of a play, but a speech in which the allusions and explanations are so complete as to convey the whole story. Thus Browning's experience as a playwright bore fruit. It was the salvation of his poetry. As he said, his sympathies were very wide; the problem was to concentrate them.[7] He suc-

[7] *The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, 1845–1846*, I, 449; *cf.* 282. Unless otherwise indicated, the letters of Robert or Elizabeth that I have referred to are in this work, which will be designated hereafter as *Letters*. I wish to thank the publishers, Harper and Brothers, for permission to quote.

ceeded in solving this problem by means of the dramatic monologue. Thus he could get brevity without losing range and opportunity to make the most of his dramatic adaptability. It is for this reason that it is possible to have in one volume of Browning's poetry such a combination of breadth and concentration.

Dr. Benjamin Fuson has shown[8] that Browning's contribution lay not in creating the dramatic monologue—since "occasional poems conforming to the *genre* appear throughout English literary history"—but in that he "shifted its focus to . . . psychological self-characterization." In his advertisement published on the second page of *Dramatic Lyrics,* Browning described these as "for the most part Lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle," and he indicated that by the latter phrase he meant they were "so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." Some of his later monologues might be described in the words of his "Mr. Sludge 'The Medium' " (425–9):

> The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes,
> The spinning out and drawing fine, you know,—
> Really mere novel-writing of a sort,
> Acting, or improvising, make-believe,
> Surely not downright cheatery, . . .

Lascelles Abercrombie has described Browning's method: "it is to make life argumentatively expound itself and, above all, justify itself to its own satisfaction."[9] These poems are apologies. This is the method of Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864–5) and the similarity of Newman's method to Browning's seems all the more striking when one contrasts Newman's autobiography with those of Franklin, Rousseau, Cellini, or St. Augustine. It is possible to suggest the important position of Browning in the development of modern literature if we turn

[8] In *The Dramatic Monolog in English Poetry Before Browning,* doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1942. Quotation is from printed final examination summary, July 24.

[9] *The Great Victorians,* ed. Massingham, New York, 1932, p. 84.

to "poetry" in the sense that some critics have used the word, to include any creative literature.[10] Browning is not only the father of modern verse but the godfather of the modern novel. Henry James prophesied that Browning would be remembered as a writer of fiction. Oscar Wilde said, "Meredith is a prose Browning," and added, "so is Browning." In *George Meredith* J. B. Priestley has indicated the "new method" Meredith brought to the novel, whereby the action, at all heightened moments, is described "not from the normal detached point of view of a disinterested spectator," but rather, from inside the mind of one of the participants, "as it appears in the consciousness of a character taking part in it. He gives us not the fact but the fact coloured by emotion and distorted by thought." Every phrase of this is true also of Browning. And Brockington says of Meredith's *Richard Feverel* (1859) that it "was the beginning of a new era in novel-writing, and the method of it was Browning's method applied to prose fiction."[11] Joseph Warren Beach points out that Browning surpassed Meredith in this matter.[12] One might say that the method of Joseph Conrad has come even closer to that of Browning, in not only refracting the story through a character, but in sometimes presenting the events out of their chronological order. It should be noticed that there are several layers to a complex situation, and that Browning is interested in the problems raised by at least three of them: (1) how it looked to other people; (2) how it looked to the person himself; and (3) what really happened, psychologically. These might be called the dramatic, the lyrical, and the psychological aspects of a poem by Browning, and there are even more fundamental problems that he is interested in probing. Good examples of such complication are "A Light Woman" and the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister."

If Browning's "dramatic lyrics" are not like lyrics from dramas by Elizabethan playwrights, since they carry too many

[10] Mortimer J. Adler, an Aristotelian, uses the word *poetry* as a loose synonym for *fiction* and even includes motion pictures in his discussion of the term. (*Art and Prudence*, New York, 1937, p. 23.)

[11] *Browning and the Twentieth Century*, p. 135.

[12] *The Twentieth-Century Novel*, New York, 1932, p. 46.

implications of plot and characterization, they also fail to be dramatic in the most rigid sense that meets the acid test of stage presentation. He does not write realistic dramatic dialogue. And sometimes it is difficult to know whether or not a character is speaking for himself or for Browning. In *Fifine at the Fair* the views expressed by the "Don Juan" who speaks are certainly, for the most part, Browning's own, for they repeat what he says elsewhere. This is one of those long poems which are elaborate failures, and have not been included in these selections. But the same ambiguity can be seen in some of his more successful poems, for example "Bishop Blougram's Apology." Often the ideas expressed by this dishonest casuist are undeniably Browning's, and parallel what he preaches elsewhere in his own person.[13] Sometimes the poet himself seems to get mixed up, and at one point in "Easter-Day" he says, "Do you say this, or I?—Oh, you!" (227). There is no author so hard to pin down, none who puts so many unorthodox ideas into circulation without clearly endorsing them, unless perhaps Browning is equalled by Euripides. This is the real puzzle in Browning, and its difficulty increases rather than diminishes as one reads. The best solution is to realize that it is fruitless to try to draw a sharp distinction between Browning's thought and that of his characters. Scholars who have written books trying to isolate his philosophy have found him using villains and sophists to express his deepest beliefs. We should assume that Browning has thrown himself into the characters portrayed and has done it sincerely, even for evil men. He has not asked "How would *they* think?" which is an external and condescending question. He has rather asked, "How would *I* think, if I were this evil man?" Perhaps he has even succeeded in asking, "How *do* I think, insofar as I have it in me to be this murderer, this madman, this rake?" The natural Aristotelian objection that a man with Browning's respectable habits would not have done some of these things remains unsolved. With this loss

[13] Or puts into the mouth of a character serving as his own mouthpiece, like St. John in "A Death in the Desert." For some of these parallels see the notes to "Bishop Blougram's Apology."

in probability there is, however, a gain in vividness and in psychological penetration. Few critics have yet recognized how much insight we owe to Browning's willingness to be irrational.

IV. PSYCHOLOGIST OF CONSCIOUS AND SUBCONSCIOUS

I am made up of an intensest life,
Of a most clear idea of consciousness
Of self, distinct from all its qualities, . . .

I cannot chain my soul: it will not rest
In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere:
It has strange impulse, tendency, desire,
Which nowise I account for nor explain,
But cannot stifle, being bound to trust
All feelings equally, to hear all sides.

Pauline, 268–70; 593–8.

Louis Cazamian in his *History of English Literature* studies his subject psychologically, or in the words of his introduction, "as a succession of moments in the history of the English mind." His tribute to Browning's similar achievement is therefore of special value: "The work of Browning is without doubt one of the richest and most deep-reaching treatises in practical psychology that English literature has to offer."[14] The poet well deserves to be called what his friend Alfred Domett ("Waring") called him, a "subtle-souled psychologist"[15]—some might even say super-subtle. In his dramatic monologues a character is shown at a moment when his whole past, his whole personality, and perhaps his whole future, come to light in a flash of self-revelation. Like the realism, the informal style, and the brief monologue form, employed by Browning, his psychological observations would seem to place him in the twentieth century. The instructive contrast that can be made between

[14] Trans. by MacInnes, New York, 1927, II, 391.
[15] Dedication, *Flotsam and Jetsam*, 1877.

him and Tennyson was made by Browning himself, writing about one of the *Idylls of the King* in which a knight is untrue to a friend; Browning feels that the conflict in the man's soul is the proper subject to describe, but "Tennyson thinks he should describe the castle, and effect of the moon on its towers, and anything but the soul."[16] There can be no doubt that Tennyson best suited Victorian taste, Browning a more modern one.

He even went so far as to give us case studies in abnormal psychology. Two of his earliest dramatic monologues, "Johannes Agricola" and "Porphyria's Lover," he originally classified under the general heading, *Madhouse Cells*, and many of his other "subjects" are under such emotional disturbance as to betray the irrational forces that usually lie below the threshold of the waking mind. Browning's designation of these forces by the word "soul" has, because of theological associations, disguised his meaning. Even Duckworth, who brings his study of Browning very close to psychoanalysis, says, "Browning's 'soul' eternal and free is a very different notion from the modern 'libido.' "[17] But often something very similar does seem to be meant. Browning's "In a Balcony" shows a queen whose feminine instincts have been repressed:

> . . . in that thin frame
> Pain-twisted, punctured through and through with cares,
> There lived a lavish soul until it starved,
> Debarred of healthy food. Look to the soul—
> Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin
> (The true man's-way) on justice and your rights.
>
> (271–6)

and notice the Queen's psychological description of herself:

> Do not I stand and see men come and go?
> I turned a half-look from my pedestal
> Where I grow marble—"one young man the more!
> He will love some one; that is naught to me:
> What would he with my marble stateliness?"

[16] *Letters*, ed. by Hood, New Haven, 1933, p. 134.
[17] *Browning: Background and Conflict*, London, 1931, p. 209.

Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore;
The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,
And I still older, with less flesh to change . . .
There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.
(393–400, 421–4)

The word "soul" is certainly not used here in the Christian sense. In "Parleying with Charles Avison" Browning tries to define what he means by "soul," and it is curious how the religious discussions of Browning have ignored this meaning: After using the word "Soul" he stops to explain it, and in a parenthesis asks us to

. . . accept
A word which vaguely names what no adept
In word-use fits and fixes. . .

This is not "Mind" but "the absolute Fact underlying" Mind. Rational activity is consciously constructive:

So works Mind—by stress
Of faculty, with loose facts, more or less,
Builds up our solid knowledge: all the same,
Underneath rolls what Mind may hide not tame,
An element which works beyond our guess,
Soul, the unsounded sea—whose life of surge,
Spite of all superstructure, lets emerge,
In flower and foam, Feeling from out the deeps
Mind arrogates no mastery upon . . .

Soul's sea,—drawn whence,
Fed how, forced whither,—by what evidence
Of ebb and flow, that's felt beneath the tread,
Soul has its course 'neath Mind's work overhead,—
Who tells of, tracks to source the founts of Soul?

He is saying that Music essays to make manifest this "turbulence":

> Hates, loves, joys, woes, hopes, fears, that rise and sink
> Ceaselessly, passion's transient flit and wink.[18]

For Browning as for William James[19] this "subconscious self," rather than stern Duty, is the voice of God; in this as in attitudes that resemble pragmatism, Browning is a forerunner of the American psychologist. Insofar as psychology makes ethical recommendations or attempts religious definitions, it should be discussed as philosophy. But here I am concerned simply with psychological studies transmuted into literature. Freudian psychology today has found expression in Surrealist art. Can it be said that Browning anticipated this movement? The answer is affirmative. His "Childe Roland" has been claimed as the first Surrealist poem, and, as yet, it is unsurpassed by any contemporary effort. (Charlot says the Surrealist gathers together fragments "of what repels and of what stinks." Clearly there are such materials in Browning's poetry, caught up often into a grotesque harmony.) Or one may cite "Bad Dreams"—a significant title. Elizabeth Barrett objected that in *Sordello* the associations were as loose as those in a dream. But Browning should not be assigned entirely to the Freudian school, the psychoanalysts and the Surrealists; his poetry, for example, could be studied fruitfully from the point of view of *Gestalt* psychology.[20]

In a short poem which stands at the head of the second series of *Dramatic Idyls* (1880) he contrasts the attitude of medical men, who know that there is much to be learned about the bodily organs, with the bland general assumption of sure knowledge in matters of psychology, especially psychiatry, in which ignorance is really profound. In a letter prefixed to *Sordello* he says, "my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study." That is a modern version of the classical view that "the proper study of mankind is man," but unfortunately Browning misused terms popular in the

[18] "Parleying with Charles Avison," 139–41; 144–5; 156–64; 178–82; 188–9.

[19] See his *Varieties of Religious Experience*.

[20] Charlot, Jean, "Surrealism—Or the Reason for Unreason," *American Scholar*, VII (Spring, 1938); *Letters*, I, 193; see "Abt Vogler," 52 and note.

Victorian Age to express his twentieth-century purpose. As G. R. Elliott has so well said, Browning portrays "not spiritual development but emotional revolution. Each 'soul' revolves, in a continually widening or narrowing orbit, around a certain centre, which is always close to the poet's own creed if not identical with it."[21] And Browning himself illustrates this too: At the beginning of his career he had already adopted the "philosophy" found in all his later work. This has been "wonderingly pointed out" by Browningites; but now for us, Elliott thinks, "the wonder must be, not that Browning adopted it so early, but that a man of his intelligence could cling to it so long."[22] Even in Browning's deepest psychological experience, his love affair, there is something of the same lack of development. As Elizabeth Barrett says, after their letters have gone on for a year, "How one writes and writes over and over the same thing!"[23]

The kind of change that does occur in Browning's life and in his characters is the catastrophic appearance of something already potentially there. He has too often been compared with Shakespeare. Except that both were dramatic poets it would be hard to find two authors more different—and even in the category of dramatic poetry they stand at opposite poles. Especially does their psychology differ, at least insofar as the majority of their characters are concerned. In *Pippa Passes* the hard-boiled Monsignor is listening sympathetically to a plan to get rid of his own niece by having her kidnapped for a "white slave" ring, since it is hoped that such a life will kill her in three years. Just then he hears a snatch of song, his conscience is awakened, and suddenly he turns against his sinful intentions. Would such a vicious racketeer be converted by a lyric? It is possible. Such things can happen; they have the scientific validity of an abnormal event, reported by current psychology or current history—which insist that the universe and man do not fit the neat

[21] *The Cycle of Modern Poetry*, Princeton, 1929, p. 87.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 86. Berdoe, in his *Browning Cyclopaedia*, praises the poet because, "From *Pauline* to this epilogue [to *Asolando*] the message was ever the same" (p. 153).

[23] *Letters*, II, 15.

patterns of rationalism. Such events are possible, but they lack the normal probability so often observed in Shakespeare's portrayal of human character. Browning did not agree with Aristotle's statement that this is just the difference between History and Poetry: that History "relates what has happened," Poetry, "what may happen. . . . Poetry tends to express the universal . . . how a person of a certain type will on occasion speak or act, according to the law of probability or necessity."[24] An Aristotelian might say that Browning wrote versified history. But when Carlyle asked why Browning in one work "did not tell it all in plain, straightforward statement?" Browning exclaimed, "As if this did not make all the difference between a poet's treatment of a subject and a historian's or a rhetorician's.[25] We see here Browning's very modern emphasis on complexity and indirectness, rather than typical probability as the distinguishing characteristic of poetry.

V. LOVE POETRY AND THE LOVE AFFAIR

> How I envy him whose soul
> Turns its whole energies to some one end,
> To elevate an aim, pursue success
> However mean! So, my still baffled hope
> Seeks out abstractions; I would have one joy,
> But one in life, so it were wholly mine,
> One rapture all my soul could fill.
>
> *Pauline*, 604–610

Browning is one of the greatest love poets in English, and his own love affair is one of the most famous romances that ever took place. Moreover, his conception of love was for him the key to philosophy and theology.

Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, six years older than Robert Browning, had won a reputation as an important poet while he was still almost unknown. Seven years before the time she first met Browning, a broken blood-vessel in her lungs had

[24] *Poetics*, IX, 1451 a and b, tr. by Butcher.
[25] *Life*, 256.

begun for her a long imprisonment in the sick-room. Two years later, while at Torquay for her health, she lost a favorite brother, for whose death by drowning she blamed herself because he had stayed with her at her request. Her nerves were shattered. And her condition was kept from improving by the strict régime her father imposed upon her. Mr. Barrett was a morbid tyrant: besides keeping his daughter confined to the sick-room, he absolutely prohibited his children from thinking of matrimony. Even his sons, approaching middle age, were being forced, by financial pressure, to submit to his will. When Elizabeth, Henrietta, and Alfred eloped, they were duly disowned.

A friend of Browning, John Kenyon, Elizabeth's second cousin, was the means of their introduction, but they had already long admired each other's poetry. Returning in December, 1844, from Italy, Browning saw her *Poems* (1844) in which she mentions him with Tennyson and Wordsworth:

> Or from Browning some pomegranate which, if cut deep down the middle,
> Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.

He wrote to express his admiration for her poetry, beginning his first letter (January 10, 1845), "I love your verses with all my heart," and continuing, "I love you too. Do you know that I was once not very far from seeing—really seeing you?" This impulsiveness and lack of restraint is characteristic of Browning. Her reactions are not surprising: she writes to a friend, "I had a letter from Browning the poet last night which threw me into ecstasies." In her second letter to him she is praising him, "You are 'masculine' to the height." And so the most remarkable series of love-letters ever written is well launched—to end in an elopement.

It was less a case of love at first sight than of love before first sight. They did not reach the point of "really seeing" each other until May 20, and immediately after seeing her, Browning wrote her a passionate declaration of love, which she made him destroy. In the following May, less than a year after their first

meeting, she writes, "I have been drawn back into life by your means and for you."[26] But much earlier, on September eighteenth, she wrote that she "had done *living*" until "you came and sought me out!" His contagious exuberance and irrepressible lovemaking—conducted in secrecy—swept her onto her feet, back to health. She wrote:

> The face of all the world is changed, I think,
> Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
> Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
> Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
> Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
> Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
> Of life in a new rhythm.
>
> *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, VII.

An invalid of forty, Elizabeth Barrett found herself fulsomely and exuberantly worshipped by a lively young poet much admired by women. She says rather frankly that she does not care why she is loved: "I am not over-particular, I fancy, about what I may be loved for. . . . But if there is to be any sort of reason, why one is as welcome as another . . . you may love me for my shoes, if you like it . . . except that they wear out."[27] In her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, XIV, this has been transmuted into:

> If thou must love me, let it be for nought
> Except for love's sake only. Do not say
> "I love her for her smile—her look—her way
> Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought
> That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
> A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"—
> For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
> Be changed.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are not translations from the Portuguese. They are her own account of their love, composed in secret during the courtship—an invaluable addition to what Browning tells us.

[26] *Letters*, II, 129, 130.
[27] *Letters*, II, 145.

Browning, living his own romance, rescued his lady from her dungeon (as she described it in her third letter) and stole her out from under the nose of the dragon, her father, who thought he was guarding her so carefully. Luckily she had an independent fortune, and since she was forty years old and her invalidism was largely psychological, once the morbid barriers were broken down nothing stood in the way. They were secretly married, September 12, 1846. In a few days she stole out of her father's house, and they fled to Italy.

In the midst of the courtship Elizabeth confessed to Browning that she long had a curious double feeling about him: that as a writer of letters he was nearer to her than as "the personal visitor who confounded me, and left me constantly under such an impression of its being all dream-work on his side." (Notice that it is *he* who she thought was dreaming.) She said to herself that since "women *always* know, and certainly I do not know, and therefore . . . therefore." But it was different with the letters; they "took me on the side of my own ideal life where I was able to stand a little upright and look round." She suspected that Browning was fooling himself, for in nothing are men "so apt to mistake their feelings as in this one thing." She did not doubt "that you had mistaken your own mind . . . that you had come here with the intention of trying to love whomever you should find," and she tells him that he has admitted as much, which he denies. He asks her if she really thinks that before he met her he "was going about the world seeking whom I might devour, that is, be devoured by, in the shape of a wife?"[28] Perhaps the woman's suspicions cannot be entirely dismissed. In "By the Fire-Side," one of Browning's most autobiographical poems, writing of their happiness together, he says in stanza 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?

[28] *Letters*, I, 372, 351, 502, 504, 254.

Perhaps there is reason to suspect that Browning was "in love with love" like Romeo before he meets Juliet. Was it the object of the emotion that he wanted first, or the emotion itself? Browning, "being no longer in the first freshness of life" as he put it, had for many years made up his mind "to the impossibility of loving any woman," though he had at first wondered at this "and fought not a little against it." About 1843 or 1844 he had told a friend that he "could not believe in 'love' nor understand it."[29] Yet it was in July, 1844, that he first published "The Flower's Name" ("Garden Fancies, I") in which occurs one of the most perfect expressions of love in all poetry:

> Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
> June's twice June since she breathed it with me?

He wrote this before he met his only lady-love, after he had given up hope of ever falling in love, and at the time when he was even expressing doubt as to the existence of the emotion. But it looks as if he was "ready and willing" to fall in love.

He writes to Elizabeth Barrett, May 30, 1846, that he will "never quite lie quiet and happy" when he takes her in his arms, for he will always be wishing her to be "angry and cruel and unjust, for a moment,—for my love overflows the bounds, needs to prove itself—" a passage suggestive of his statements in "Christmas Eve" that he "Will feast my love," and "Too much love there can never be."[30] This is from a religious poem; but Browning draws no sharp distinction between romantic love and divine love, and there is a temperamental identity between Browning the lover and Browning the religious thinker. In his religion he is not the humble seeker after truth, constrained in spite of himself to yield his assent. He rather reaches his convictions by letting himself go; he finds gushing up within him such faith that he looks for things that seem incredible to him so that he can pour his belief on them; and he feels such love gushing forth from his heart that he is sure

[29] *Letters*, I, 205; II, 159.
[30] *Letters*, II, 191; "Christmas Eve," 737, 732.

God must create a love to reward it. If this conception seems willful, it must be remembered that Browning's mind was not disciplined by the Classical tradition nor in the universities, but that he fed his soul in his youth on the Romantic poets, especially the later Romantics, Shelley, Keats, and Byron.

There was probably considerable insight in Elizabeth's feeling that "you loved out into the air, I thought—a love *a priori*, as the philosophers might say, and not *by induction*."[31] There is thus an egocentric quality in Browning's conception of love, even expressed in his religious "Easter-Day" (934–6):

> I let the world go, and take love!
> Love survives in me, albeit those
> I love be henceforth masks and shows,

and in "Cristina" the speaker, her lover, does not want her, but love. Love's tragedy for Browning is always the loss of love, not the coming of a fatal passion. That is probably the reason that he did not go on with the Hippolytus story beyond his prologue by Artemis. For Browning it is the goddess of chastity who is cruel, not Aphrodite. And it is the loss of love that is sad—not the mere loss of the loved one, which in Browning's poetry is not so deeply serious. Consequently much of his love poetry that might seem to us love's tragedy is often intended as love's triumph, over death or failure.

> Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed
> By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed?
>
> *La Saisiaz*, 365–6

Browning lived in perfect happiness with his wife until her death in 1861. He could never again endure the sight of Florence, their home for fourteen years. He determined to hold himself forever true to her memory, and deeply regretted his proposal of marriage to Lady Ashburton ten years later. Indeed, in making the unsuccessful attempt to win her hand he had told Lady Ashburton that she might have his fame, but

[31] *Letters*, II, 145.

his "heart was buried in Florence." Yet in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," written within two or three years after his wife's death and published in his next volume, the poet is cheerily singing,

> Grow old along with me!
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made.

It has been generally recognized that in this poem Browning is using the medieval rabbi as a mouthpiece for his own ideas. He still retains his optimism. And there still come from his pen, in the last years of his life, love poems very similar to those he had written before he met Elizabeth Barrett. It is hard to see that his great romance essentially changed his attitude, whatever it may have precipitated. His "development of soul" did not lead him to the kind of experience that provides the subject of *Anna Karenina*, *Othello*, or *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Lafcadio Hearn cites as "the very best we have in . . . 'the literature of kissing'" lines 49 to 62 from Browning's "In a Gondola."[32] And Browning wrote this poem three years before he ever fell in love. It will be noticed in this volume of selections that whatever else the poet is speaking of, he is very often dealing with some aspect of love, while many of his poems are love-lyrics, pure and simple—or unconventional and complex. There is, of course, a whole level of literature above Browning's reach, treating of love more manly, more tragic, more philosophical than his. But so far as it goes, Browning's love poetry is perhaps the best in English.

VI. HIS "MESSAGE"

> I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated, learnt and taught
> This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
> Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,

[32] "Studies in Browning," *Appreciations of Poetry*, New York, 1916, p. 201.

If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probation-space,
Mine, for me. But those apparent other mortals—theirs, for them?
La Saisiaz, 265–71

Browning's love poetry is largely concerned with the failures and disappointments of love—whatever hopes he may add, to extenuate the unpleasant facts. The speakers in his dramatic monologues are often evil men and women, or ordinary men and women who have been overcome by evil passions. His picture of the human past is not unduly idealized. For example, he thought that Matthew Arnold had overpraised the Greeks. And his "Heretic's Tragedy" might be an answer to the sentimental glorification of the Middle Ages indulged in by Romantics and Pre-Raphaelites. In the Prologue to his *Parleyings* he has Apollo say, "Man desponds and despairs" when "debarred of illusion," and the god of poetry "needs must acknowledge the plea" of the Fates, that from Apollo

comes a glimmer
Transforming to beauty life blank at the best.
(105–7; 66–67)

Edgar Lee Masters once said, "All of Browning's characters shout victory, though all are defeated, so far as human eyes can follow them."[33] Yet Browning is generally known as the most optimistic of poets. How can this be? We must examine his philosophy, not confining ourselves to those poems worthy of inclusion in a selection of his best. For Browning did his most self-conscious preaching in his poorest poetry, studied now only by Browning scholars—those long poems which his own phrase so well describes, "my mere grey argument."[34] It is possible to extract his "message" from the total body of his writings, not

[33] "Browning as a Philosopher," Paper read before the Chicago Literary Club, November 18, 1912.
[34] "Parleying with Christopher Smart," 232.

as if this were superior in value to the other aspects of his poetry (artistic, psychological, humorous, dramatic, historical, etc.) but to illuminate what he means in famous passages in his best poems that may be misinterpreted standing alone.

In November, 1882, the Reverend Professor B. F. Westcott, D.D. read, before the Cambridge Browning Society, a paper in which he said of the poet,

> He has dared to look on the darkest and meanest forms of action and passion, from which we commonly and rightly turn our eyes, and has brought back for us from this universal survey a conviction of hope. He has laid bare what there is in man of sordid, selfish, impure, corrupt, brutish, and he proclaims in spite of every disappointment and every wound, that he still finds a spiritual power in him, answering to a spiritual power without him, which restores assurance as to the destiny of creation.[35]

What Browning *sees*, and photographs for us, might make him a pessimist, but what he *feels* makes him an optimist. And more than any other moralist he preaches utter reliance on feeling. In his first poem, the autobiographical *Pauline* (1833) he wrote that he was "bound to trust all feelings equally," (597–8) and this same attitude was expressed at the end of his life in "A Pillar at Sebzevar" (in *Ferishtah's Fancies*, 1884) where he preaches distrust of the head and trust in the heart. He believed that "Man's soul" receives divine guidance through —not the mind, "Not concept," but through "instinct and impulse"[36]—often through what orthodox Christians have called Original Sin. By using a theological vocabulary, Browning obscured, even to himself, the revolutionary import of his views, which are often in direct opposition to those of the majority of Christian philosophers. Poets under the influence of Freud in the 1930's might have written some of the passages that appeared in Browning's personal confession a century earlier. Browning, like the literary Freudians of the twentieth century, is suspicious of the restraints imposed by reason, by tradition, or by institutions:

[35] *Browning Society's Papers*, I, 397–8.
[36] "Apollo and the Fates," 186–7.

> the past is in its grave
> Tho' its ghost haunts me; still this much is ours
> To cast away restraint, lest a worse thing
> Wait for us in the dark.
>
> *Pauline*, 39–42

Browning's feeling convinces him that evils are put on earth with a purpose. They are to train us, since Progress is "man's distinctive mark alone."

> Such progress could no more attend his soul
> Were all it struggles after found at first.
>
> "A Death in the Desert," 86, 89–90

He is speaking here of the soul's progress towards salvation; but the statement summarizes his total estimate of the lot of man. He expresses the hope that this world will not last

> One moment longer when Man finds its Past
> Exceed its Present—

He speaks of

> Heart's satisfaction that the Past indeed
> Is past, gives way before Life's best and last,
> The all-including Future! What were life
> Did soul stand still therein, forego her strife
> Through the ambiguous Present to the goal
> Of some all-reconciling Future? Soul,
> Nothing has been which shall not bettered be
> Hereafter,—
>
> "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse,"
> 168–170; 365–372

And a few lines later he summarizes it all—"Cheer up,—" (1. 408). Yet, curiously enough, this is not joyous; it is not merry, as Chaucer is merry. Browning can be happy while contemplating miseries, for he takes them as a positive sign of coming betterment. In this he is like many revolutionists, whether they are followers of Rousseau or of Marx; though for Browning the hopes are individual, not social. Or we may make another comparison: Where many of the most enjoyable

writers of the eighteenth century showed a tendency to accept life on the assumption that "Whatever is, is right," nineteenth-century writers like Shelley and Browning, recognizing more that was hideous and indefensible, pinned more faith on hope, and said, in effect, "Whatever will be, will be right."

Browning believed that the reality of life is so full of evil and disappointment that it would be unbearable except for aspirations which this life, here and now, can not be expected to satisfy. Speaking for himself he says

> we bear, own life a burthen more or less,
> Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happiness
> Possible and probable in life to come? or must we count
> Life a curse and not a blessing, . . .
> . . . just that hope, however scant,
> Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope therein away,
> All we have to do is surely not endure another day.
>
> *La Saisiaz*, 203–6; 242–4.

Moreover, the poet was convinced that his philosophy could not withstand a rational analysis. His recourse was bold: he denied the reason any right to judge. Indeed, he makes this his cardinal doctrine. In the mouth of his Pope, "the Christian act" is not something ethical, but mental, a determined belief in what Browning feels to be true.[37] This most optimistic of poets had his own pessimistic suspicions that he was determined to resist. If one looks at the picture he drew of life, without adopting his emotions, one finds it as black and discouraging as the most despairing pessimist could ask for. But Browning succeeded in keeping closed that "only veil betwixt joy and despair."[38] Only once does he lift "the painted veil" and think that perhaps "there was no light behind the curtain."[39] Only

[37] *The Ring and the Book*, "The Pope," 1826 ff.

[38] *Pauline*, 495–6.

[39] Shelley's sonnet, "Lift not the painted veil" should be read in connection with Browning. The second phrase in the sentence above is from the bleakly pessimistic poem, "The City of Dreadful Night," by a follower of Shelley, James Thomson. It may serve to suggest the kind of Late-Victorian pessimism into which many of Browning's contemporaries were falling. We can see what he was fighting against.

once does he express serious doubt, and that is in the Epilogue to his most optimistic volume, *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), when he suddenly grows cold with terror at the thought that perhaps all his optimistic constructions are an illusion produced by human love:

> a chill wind disencharms
> All the late enchantment! What if all be error—
> If the halo irised round my head were, love, thine arms?

With that utterance, for once the poet shows us how deeply he has been appalled by what he sees. Ordinarily he gives us only his answer: that human love, of which we are certain, must be an earnest of Divine Love.

Thus, writing love poetry was for Browning a form of religious propaganda more immediate than his arguments addressed to the mere intellect. And his theology supplies a sort of cosmic frame to his lyrics of amorous passion. The frame is quite detachable, and readers who do not like the theology find that it can be separated from what delights them in Browning's poetry. In any case, we should understand it as a consistent, integrated, conception of life and destiny.

VII. SOURCES OF HIS FAITH

> —What was all this except the lesson of a life?
> And—consequent upon the learning how from strife
> Grew peace—from evil, good—came knowledge that, to get
> Acquaintance with the way o' the world, we must not fret
> Nor fume, on altitudes of self-sufficiency,
> But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be,
> And, with as good a grace, welcome what is—we find.
> *Is*—for the hour, observe!
>
> *Fifine at the Fair*, 1878–85

Browning's theological terminology is sometimes confusing, sometimes revealing. He and his wife were both of Calvinistic origin, brought up in the Dissenting (Non-Conformist) sect of Independents. There are many traces of his Dissenting background in his books. But he is not a Calvinist; in "Caliban upon Setebos" he parodies the doctrines of Election and Repro-

bation as implying a cruel and savage god—better called a devil.[40] Browning's God is "All-Loving," and damns no one. Browning did not believe in Hell, and while he believed ardently in Heaven, he did not consider it a part of a system of rewards and punishments.[41] Like his own Johannes Agricola, Browning believed that nothing could ever avail to keep him from getting to Heaven, in time. He adopted certain fundamental doctrines, such as that of the Incarnation, but he was not a Fundamentalist. On the other hand he was not a "Liberal" or a "Modernist," since he held firmly to any Fundamentalist doctrine that would justify his cosmic optimism. He chose for himself, but when he accepted a doctrine he took it in a literal sense. He objected vigorously to the Liberal theological thinkers of the nineteenth century.[42] But he is even farther from Catholicism, in spite of his interest in everything else he met in Italy. His sympathetic use of Catholic characters in his fictions simply follows the romantic fashion of Protestants from Scott to the present day. Even the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* is not a Catholic in his beliefs, and the theology he sets forth is Browning's own. The poet's extreme individualism, his scorn for the past, for restraint, for authority, are remote from Catholicism. Moreover, Browning rejects all rationalistic treatment of religion, whether Catholic (Thomist), Calvinist, Modernist, Materialist, Platonic, or Aristotelian. For he relies on emotion—not on a mystical emotion which turns away from human instincts, but on those very natural instincts themselves. He puts trust in something that

> dwells in all,
> From life's minute beginnings, up at last
> To man—
>
> *Paracelsus*, V, 680–82

[40] See the notes to that poem, and to "Johannes Agricola" and "Which." Browning's religious position is well presented in his "Christmas Eve," "Easter-Day," and "A Death in the Desert."

[41] This is made clear in "Ixion" and "A Camel-Driver."

[42] See notes to "Christmas Eve," "Epilogue to *Dramatis Personae*," etc. An excellent treatment of the subject will be found in Raymond's "Browning and the Higher Criticism," P.M.L.A., XLIV, June, 1929.

or, as he says through his Pope (speaking of the instinct to preserve life found in "even tree, shrub, plant,")

> what I call God
> And fools call Nature.[43]

One of Browning's defenders, Margaret Sherwood, has pointed out that his originality in religious thinking consists in making human instincts share the life of God. "It appears as instinct . . . it is God within."[44] The relation of Browning's thought to romantic naturalism is somewhat concealed by the fact that he has only slight interest in external Nature—scenery, rural life, and physical science. Nature in this sense is probably less important to him than to any other important poet of the nineteenth century. But Nature as it manifests itself in Man—instinct, passion, feeling—this is his guide.

> So glorious is our nature, so august
> Man's inborn uninstructed impulses,
> His naked spirit so majestical.
>
> *Paracelsus*, V, 618–20

Browning recognizes in Man the traditional division between natural impulses and the instructed mind, but he relies on instinct, not reason.

Browning did not originate his philosophy. While he is in method, style, and psychology, like a twentieth-century poet, he is in philosophy a belated Romantic. This is because, as Abercrombie points out, his "intellectual life was spent in a backwater."[45] Browning was doubly provincial: As a Dissenter, he could not be admitted to the established universities. And he was the first literary suburban. When he turned from the petty circles of Camberwell and the Non-Conformist chapel,

[43] "The Pope" 1073–4. *Cf.* 1735–6 and 1766:
"The hidden forces, blind necessities,
Named Nature" (and)
"The forces and necessities grow God—"

[44] "Browning and Mr. Santayana," in *Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry*, Cambridge, 1934, p. 335.

[45] In *The Great Victorians*, 83.

both of them out of touch with the great world of thought and action, to find a more stimulating mental life in books, it is not surprising that he would adopt the dominant ideas of the preceding generation. His philosophy could almost be summarized in the remark of Keats, "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination."[46] Of all the Romantics, he felt greatest admiration for Shelley, to whom he doubtless owes his conviction that one can trust in the feeling within oneself and the Love which must sweep through the universe in answer to it. Shelley's radical deduction from this, his trust in Liberty as a panacea, was still Browning's political faith a generation later, when it had become the accepted creed of the middle class.

Browning's political and social views seem to have changed very little. He said in *Pauline*, "I was vowed to liberty."[47] Fifty-two years later he wrote a sonnet "Why I am a Liberal." He was not a Liberal in the present American sense, as the word has come to mean expanding the functions of government. Thus, in his "Apparent Failure" he classifies the socialist with the insane and lustful. As he contemplates three corpses in a "Doric little Morgue" in Paris, he speculates that one of them may have committed suicide because he was

> red as blood, a socialist,
> A leveller! Does the Empire grudge
> You've gained what no Republic missed?
> Be quiet, and unclench your fist!
>
> (42–45)

When Browning called himself a "Liberal" he meant that he was a "rugged individualist"; he was using the term in the early Victorian sense to mean belief in an extreme degree of freedom from institutional control. Politically, it meant support of *laissez-faire* economics. For example, "The Englishman in Italy" (1845) concludes with a bitter attack on the Corn Laws, a tariff on agricultural products against which the merchants and manufacturers had been waging a skillful campaign.

[46] Letter to Benjamin Bailey, Nov. 22, 1817.
[47] Line 425.

Browning's sympathies were with his own class, the well-to-do *bourgeoisie* which had taken control of England politically with the Reform Bill of 1832 and was to dominate English life and culture all through his own lifetime.

Browning also carried on into the Victorian age a romantic faith in the future. Long after Matthew Arnold's poetry had given voice to the disillusionment which was to become the dominant mood of English literature, Browning was still finding a bright promise in evil itself. "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Shelley asks, in his "Ode to the West Wind," as Browning's *Paracelsus* sees "a good in evil, and hope in ill-success."[48] Swinburne, expressing the reaction of the late nineteenth century, parodied Browning's philosophy thus:

> most things are so wrong
> That all things must be right.[49]

But in Browning the faith of Shelley is strangely transformed. Just as Browning—moving with his class—turned the wild romantic love of liberty into a firm insistence on the freedom of business from governmental control, so he takes Shelley's revolutionary optimism and turns it into a conservative optimism. He adheres to the view that we must not "fret nor fume"—"But bid a frank farewell to what—we think—should be."[50] Unlike Shelley, Browning rejoices that, in the words of *Adonais,* "hopes swarm like worms within our living clay." And no poet was ever so enamoured of "that unrest which men miscall delight"; far from wishing to "outsoar" it, to go where that unrest "can touch him not" again, Browning will give everything for the hope of keeping up this unrest throughout eternity; his last words in print were, "fight on, fare ever There as here!" Shelley, expressing an almost Manichaean contempt for ordinary existence, says

> Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

[48] *Paracelsus,* V, 875–6.
[49] Lafourcade, George, *La Jeunesse de Swinburne,* Paris, 1928, II, 163.
[50] *Fifine at the Fair,* 81–83.

while Browning in his second letter to Elizabeth declared, "I only make men and women speak—give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me." Perhaps the most significant word here is "fear," and it suggests an element in Browning's thought that has been almost ignored by scholars and critics. Browning and Shelley may be similar in metaphysics, but they are utterly different in personality and in tastes.

In addition to his Non-Conformist background, his Romantic literary education, and the views current in the Mid-Victorian middle class, another important factor in the formation of his philosophy was his individual personal experience. Well could he say, towards the end of his life,

> Have you found your life distasteful?
> My life did, and does, smack sweet.
> Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
> Mine I saved and hold complete.
> Do your joys with age diminish?
> When mine fail me, I'll complain.
>
> "At the 'Mermaid,'" 73–8

For in the mere conditions of his life, Browning was probably the luckiest poet that ever lived. He was born into a prosperous home, surrounded with music and books (his father's library had 6000 volumes), within walking distance of England's chief public art gallery. His health was remarkably good.[51] He was an only son—and in Victorian England, this meant privileges indeed. He told Elizabeth Barrett that he "never looked for the least or greatest thing" that his parents could give, "but given it was—nor for liberty but it was conceded."[52] His parents did not even insist that he attend college; and though they had paid for him to attend London University, then just being organized,

[51] This caused him to be too optimistic about his wife's health. According to Griffin and Minchin (*Life*, 223), he took "throughout" her illness "a sanguine view of his wife's physical powers; the shock which their failure caused him was consequently overwhelming." No other rebuff to his optimism came home to him so close.

[52] *Letters*, II, 226.

he dropped out after a few weeks. His biographers, speaking of the fact that there was never an important change or development in his attitudes, say, "For this the manner of his education . . . is largely accountable. He was allowed to grow; no effort was put forth to make of him something other than he was by nature."[53]

Nor was he disciplined by experience. His family was so prosperous that he never in his life had to do a day's work for pay. Even when he wished to marry he was not forced to take on greater financial responsibilities, since Elizabeth Barrett had an independent income. He did make one tentative offer to support her, so that she could transfer her "advantages" to her brothers and sisters—whose lives were being ruined by their dependence. He says he had thought of taking steps toward applying to someone like Lord Monteagle for a political appointment, but reconsidered and accepted Elizabeth's view that he ought not put away God's gifts.[54]

Besides ease, health, security, art, books, and popularity, Browning was able to indulge in travel, even to take up residence in Italy or France whenever he wanted to. However, at the end of his life he preferred to be in London for the social season, and became a well-known figure in society. He was awarded honorary degrees by Oxford and Cambridge. Browning's one love affair had ended in complete success—after a year of obstacles enough to please his chivalric or even melodramatic taste. He won his lady, and lived a perfectly happy married life. They had a son who attended the Oxford that had been closed to the poet, and who then became a young man of expensive sporting tastes. Browning lived to see him a successful painter. The poet died in his son's house, the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, soon after reading a telegram announcing the favorable reception that had just been accorded his last volume of poetry, published the day of his death. He was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Even during his life he had become the demi-god of a cult devoted

[53] Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, 284.
[54] *Letters*, II, 227–8, 230.

to studying him as a prophet and philosopher, organized by Dr. Furnivall, who had also organized the Chaucer Society and the Shakespeare Society. A poet could not but be gay in such a company!

It must be admitted that few readers of poetry today feel much sympathy with either Browning's complacency or his own kind of religious worry. The well-to-do *bourgeoisie* which found its voice in Macaulay and Browning has ceased to dominate the literary public. The twentieth century has hit this class very hard and shattered its optimism. Meanwhile both Romanticism and Calvinism have declined rapidly in English and American culture. We might have expected Browning to lose his standing among poets. But the contrary has happened. His best poetry is more admired than ever. At the end of the nineteenth century Santayana wrote, "There is serious danger" that we "may take him for a philosopher."[55] We do not fear that danger now. But we still gather "from his pages the unthreshed harvest of reality," as even Santayana, his most deadly critic, had to admit. And perhaps the literary taste of our generation places a higher value on the unthreshed harvest of reality than did the turn of the century. His poetry gives a vivid sense of life, "the mere living." Music, history, love, nationality in drinks, artists known and unknown—such realities are the matter of his poetic vision. We go to him for immediacy rather than profundity. In his one critical essay, on Shelley, he distinguishes between the objective (dramatic) and the subjective poet. The message he preaches as a subjective poet has lost its popularity. What he says of the objective poet remains an excellent reason for reading Browning:

> For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilized, but the raw material it operates upon must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality: what it was before they saw it, in refer-

[55] *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, New York, 1900, p. 194.

ence to the aggregate human mind, will be as desirable to know as ever.

VIII. POETIC ARTIST AND HUMORIST

> I must not think, lest this new impulse die
> In which I trust; I have no confidence:
> So, I will sing on fast as fancies come;
> Rudely, the verse being as the mood it paints.
>
> *Pauline*, 256–9

Browning's great achievements are not those which relate him to Romantic philosophy or to that Victorian complacency against which the great Victorian thinkers were waging war. His special merits are those which anticipate the twentieth-century verse. Hence I have included in this volume a number of poems that express his theory of art and poetry.[56] They are given complete, and do not need to be discussed here. Elsewhere he has a definition of "Art,—which I may style the love of loving"—that is characteristic of Browning. He explains that "Art" is the "rage of . . . feeling the absolute truth of things" and furthermore declares that this view "corroborates the sage," Plato.[57] From the actual writings of Plato one might rather fear that Browning would be the first poet banned from the sage's ideal Republic! If there is any doubt of it, consider the following statement by Ogniben in the second act of *A Soul's Tragedy* which voices an important purpose in Browning and his successors: "I desire to be able, with a quickened eye-sight, to descry beauty in corruption where others see foulness only."

In attempting to evaluate the art of Robert Browning, one begins to suspect that he is a greater poet than any who has written English since his time. As he says in his first poem, he "must not think," but he can sing. He gives us not wise reflection about life, but the direct sensation of life. He can create a vivid sense of many experiences: music, Renaissance

[56] E.g. "Shop," "House," "Memorabilia," "Popularity," "How it Strikes a Contemporary," "Transcendentalism: a Poem in Twelve Books," "Touch him ne'er so lightly," "Prologue" to *Asolando*, "Poetics."

[57] *Fifine at the Fair*, 684–6.

art, the gallop of a horse across the desert, a night-ride, the inner feeling of hatred, of love in a variety of moods, the very world-view of men who lived in antiquity; the color, the oddity, the adventure and splendor of life. In his poetry, as Dixon Scott has said, "All the treasures, fruits, and gems of the world are fingered with a satisfying voluptuousness," and to waste time on his theories is "to spend your time painfully struggling up a maypole instead of catching its ribands and joining the dance."[58] He owed his special merits to his worship of experience.

> —Experience, I am glad to master soon or late,
> Here, there and everywhere i' the world, without debate!
> Only, in Venice why? What reason for Mark's Square
> Rather than Timbuctoo?
>
> *Fifine at the Fair*, 1819–22

He confesses in *Pauline* that he finds in himself "a principle of restlessness which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all—" (277–8). Hence he is for us preëminently the poet of youth. Young readers get much from Shakespeare, but there is more that they do not get; the young reader can probably get from Browning almost everything of value he has to offer.

And he can make us live these many experiences because he is a master of the technique of his art. He followed Keats in making his appeal to all the five senses—to taste, smell, and touch, as well as to ear and to the mind's eye. No poet has more wealth of concrete detail, and certainly none ever had such a thoroughly physical imagination. He is a poet of muscle rather than vision. "The distinction between the eye-and-ear type of imagination and the muscle-and-nerve (motor-tactual) type becomes clear if one compares Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar* with Browning's *Prospice*," says Bonnell, discussing "Touch Images in the Poetry of Robert Browning,"[59] and it has also been pointed out that "He sees with pre-Raphaelite distinctness the particular objects which make up what we call nature."[60]

[58] *Men of Letters*, pp. 253 and 255.
[59] *P.M.L.A.*, XXXVII (September, 1922), 597.
[60] Stephen, Leslie, "Browning's Casuistry," in *Living Age*, CCXXXVI (January, 1903), 262.

Most astonishing is Browning's range of metrical invention, including certain bold effects that may be considered more or less appropriate: For example, dactylic tetrameter is better suited to a Cavalier Tune than to a meditation on death; though "Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead" sounds too gay, nevertheless Browning wished it to sound gay, whether we think he should or not. We may disagree with the thought, but we cannot deny the effectiveness with which the poet conveys the mood. "Rabbi Ben Ezra's" meter is not meditative; it is doggerel; but doggerel is appropriate dress for such an outburst. If we ask only how well Browning has succeeded in what he wished to do, we would have to say that these two are great poems. And, indeed, they have ranked among his most popular pieces, for many admirers. It would be a psychological problem worthy of the poet's own genius, to study how often Browning's technical skill has charmed readers into accepting his ideas. Browning's success as an artist was mentioned in discussing his mastery of modern verse, but this whole volume of selections would be needed to give a just illustration of his skill.

We have Saintsbury's judgment that "Browning, though an audacious, is almost invariably a correct prosodist."[61] He achieves a subtle music that one may not perceive until after many readings, when at last the almost conversational tones seem to take on form, and a very beautiful, very quiet melody emerges and becomes audible. The only adequate way to appreciate many of the poems is to memorize them. We may still echo Elizabeth Barrett's congratulations. " 'Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?' You have right of trove to these novel effects of rhythm."[62] His wife deserves some credit for the final beauty of the poetry of his best period when she could suggest revisions. Professor Hatcher, in *The Versification of Robert Browning*, a very thorough survey, says, "It is not without significance that the great lyrics and dramatic monologues were composed or refined under her influence; and that in these

[61] *A History of English Prosody*, III, 216.

[62] *Letters*, I, 253, after mentioning "The Flight of the Duchess." (The first phrase in the quotation is from "The Flower's Name.")

poems, in contrast to those of both his early and later periods, there is dominant a melody and perfectness of poetic diction which Tennyson himself seldom surpasses."[63] Early in their acquaintance Elizabeth Barrett accused him of a habit of being difficult, and even earlier he confessed that he had sought deliberately to write "ugly things."[64] He swore off. But after her death he again slipped into carelessness about form. Indeed, his biographers say that he always shrank from the labor of revision,[65] which is what one would expect in such a rugged individualist and enemy of discipline.

In the diction of poetry he was a pioneer. According to Herbert Read, who mentions him as beginning the modern phase of poetry, his originality in that respect has probably not yet been fully recognized, though "it has been studied to some effect by modern poets"; he made progress in "the direction of flexibility, of making diction follow the subtleties of an unusual imaginative vision."[66] At a period when the fashions of poetry had carried elegance and smoothness as far as they could well go, Browning threw poetry open to harsh and ugly words. This, and his love of monosyllables, gave an Anglo-Saxon flavor to his work, which may be related to the contemporary revival of interest in the Anglo-Saxon element in English, but is certainly due more to his own rugged taste as a sturdy middle-class Briton of the Britons. As Oliver Elton puts it, "Browning seemed to rejoice in the inherent defects of our language; he liked it to be English to a fault."[67] It would be hard to overestimate the value of this for modern poetry.

There is another way in which he broke away from Victorian methods. F. W. Bateson has pointed out[68] that for the most part his contemporaries "sugared the common reader's pill." Usually a Victorian poem has a narrative frame which eliminates "disconcerting plunges into *medias res* which are of the

[63] P. 20.
[64] *Letters*, I, 134 and 98.
[65] *Life*, p. 300.
[66] *Phases of English Poetry*, London, 1928, pp. 136 ff. and 142–3.
[67] *Survey of English Literature*, 1780–1880, III, 391.
[68] *English Poetry and the English Language*, Oxford, 1934, p. 126.

essence of poetry," a frame which brings it "down to the level of prose. The reader knows where he is; it serves the purpose of an introduction and notes." To this charge Browning's best poems can plead not guilty. They certainly plunge into *medias res*, and leave the introductions and notes to the commentator.

To see how important—and successful—Browning is from the point of view of modern poetry, compare his best poems with an equivalent number of the best poems of all the twentieth-century English and American poets put together. Or test him by the manifesto of the Imagists, prefixed in 1915 to *Some Imagist Poems:*

1. To use the language of common speech. . . .
2. To create new rhythms—as the expressions of new moods. . . .
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. . . .
4. To present an image. . . . We . . . believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. . . .
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred or indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.

In every one of these six "rules" Browning can beat most twentieth-century poets at their own game.

Imagery,[69] meter, diction, dramatic concentration—by his mastery of these technical means he achieves his vivid effects. The result is a peculiar poetry at once realistic and romantic.

> Ramp, tramp, stamp and compound
> Fancy with fact—the lost secret is found!
>
> "Apollo and the Fates," 214–5

Romantic realism is a common characteristic in Mid-Century English and American literature; but this takes different forms in different authors, ranging from the gargoyle grotesquerie of

[69] Elizabeth writes to him (*Letters*, I, 414) that he is never misty or vague; rather there is an extra-distinctness in his images and thoughts; but since these sharp lines cross each other infinitely, they sometimes obscure his meaning.

Dickens to the Hellenic moderation of Arnold. It appears in authors as different as Carlyle and Trollope, and extends from Macaulay to Meredith. Browning's romantic realism is not a half-and-half addition, nor a mean between the two, nor an idealist's escape from both. It is rather a complete fusion of both in extreme form. A single poem, a single line, may be at once romantic and realistic. Any character may be studied by Browning in a spirit that might be described as very romantic or very realistic. It could never be called classical. It does not assume a conflict between "flesh" and "soul."

Another characteristic of Mid-Century English literature which Browning shares with all the authors I have just mentioned is humor. His humorous poetry is the most successful that we have had in our language for a hundred years. Indeed, we must go back to Byron to find any comic poet to equal him, and even Byron is more of a wit than a sympathetic humorist. Browning recognized his kinship with Byron: he said he would go a long way "to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves," though "Heaven knows that I could not get up enthusiasm enough to cross the room if at the other end of it all Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey were condensed into the little China bottle yonder."[70] He is most like Byron in his use of odd rhymes, like *fabric, dab brick*, or *Pascal, task call*,[71] though he got this taste directly from his own father, who also composed humorous verse. His father was very fond of Hogarth and of the Dutch artists, painters much closer to his son's poetry than the Italian artists who so often supplied the subject-matter for that poetry. "Fra Lippo Lippi," for example, is not an Italian primitive but a Rembrandt in verse, with its rich tones, its realism, its humor, its light and shade. Robert Browning Senior liked to draw hasty sketches, and these were almost always grotesques; he "could not draw a pretty face."[72] His son inherited this taste, and extended it to include what he calls his "odd liking for 'vermin' "—snails, efts, lizards, newts,[73]—a

[70] *Letters*, II, 453.
[71] "Grammarian's Funeral," 70–74; "Christmas Eve," 1268–9.
[72] *Life*, p. 13.
[73] *Letters*, I, 368.

love that shows itself in such poems as "Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis." He saw a connection between the grotesque and his interest in passionate, energetic souls, and he speaks of

> the face, an evidence
> O' the soul at word inside; and, all the more intense,
> So much the more grotesque.[74]

Browning never recognized the intensity that grows out of "the depth, and not the tumult of the soul"—to use a most classical expression by Wordsworth—the kind of intensity that gives a grandeur to beauty; in the words of Coleridge, "an emotion tranquil from its very intensity."[75]

But Browning's humor is not always grotesque. It can be quiet and delicate and no less delightful. After he first met Miss Barrett and forthwith wrote her a passionate love letter, she replied that if he attempted any other reference to the subject she would not see him again. A few months later he let her see in manuscript a poem, "The Lost Mistress," in which a rejected lover much in the position of Browning utters the following stanza. No poetic style could be more simple than this:

> 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!

By the time she read this, his expressions had indeed become a thought stronger—he had written on October thirteenth, "My life is bound up with yours—my own, first and last love."

As an artist Browning is receiving today the recognition that he has waited for a hundred years; but even yet he has not been sufficiently recognized as a humorist. While we no longer value his "message," there has been a tendency to continue the habit of reading him too solemnly; and some of the sentimen-

[74] *Fifine at the Fair*, 1719–21.
[75] *The Friend*, sec. II, essay ii.

tality that has been spent on his love affair has been almost as bad as anything of which the worst Victorians were guilty. Browning's humor, like the music of his verse, is often subtle, and may be missed until one is thoroughly familiar with the poem. But when it is perceived, it is, like the music, quite pervasive, and changes the whole aspect of the poem, which becomes at once not only a thing of beauty but also a thing of comic delight. Browning must be read with somewhat more attention to his humor, even when it is complex. One may go through pages of comment on the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" without finding the least hint that the poet or the reader could find anything to smile at in the poem. After all, it was Browning's delight to *toy* with various problems, and his philosophy was partly just the formulation of an excuse for his pleasure in "making a case" for a sinner. The results are none too consistent; and like most sophistry constructed somewhat in the spirit of play, it was taken seriously in time by the world and by its author. We are wise to get back to the spirit of the game. His humor is many times more effective than his optimism as an antidote to the evils he sees in the world.

IX. BROWNING THE POET OF HISTORY

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.

"Evelyn Hope," 41–4

John Addington Symonds, criticizing Browning's presentation of Aristophanes and Euripides, wrote what we may apply to all of Browning's argumentation: "As a sophist and a rhetorician of poetry, Mr. Browning proves himself unrivalled, and takes rank with the best writers of historical romances."[76] Intended as censure, this includes great praise. The Browningites treated the poet as if he were a moralist and belonged with

[76] *Academy*, VII (April 17, 1875), 389.

Arnold and Newman; whereas he really belongs with Scott and Macaulay. As Scott's novels stand first in historical fiction, Browning's dramatic monologues are the most successful concentrations in all poetry of characteristic moments of the past.[77] No one can be compared with him in power to give us the quintessence of history in brief. As a poetic humorist he towers over two hundred years, with perhaps one rival; but as a poet of history he has no peer in any language or in any age.

His first volume of dramatic monologues, *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), attempted "to distil the atmosphere of a time and a place into a few lines of verse,"[78] and this purpose so dominated the book that the poems were grouped into *Cavalier Tunes; Italy and France* ("My Last Duchess" and "Count Gismond"); *Camp and Cloister*, i.e., *I. Camp* (*French*) ("Incident of the French Camp") and *II. Cloister* (*Spanish*) ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"); *Queen-Worship* ("Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli" and "Cristina"); and *Madhouse Cells* ("Johannes Agricola" and "Porphyria's Lover"). Besides these, the volume included other historical pictures: "The Pied Piper," "Through the Metidja," "In a Gondola," and "Artemis Prologizes," one of the most successful archaeological reproductions of a Greek divinity as the Greeks conceived their gods to be, not Anglicized. Or turn to the two volumes of *Dramatic Idyls* published towards the end of his life (1879–80), "stories illustrative of the atmosphere of a country and a time."[79] And one of his best historic monologues, "Imperante Augusto Natus Est," was published in his last volume, *Asolando*. Indeed, his long earlier poems showed the same interest without the concentration: *Pippa Passes, Sordello, Paracelsus;* and in *Pauline* he speaks of

> my first dawn of life
> Which passed alone with wisest ancient books
> All halo-girt with fancies of my own;
> And I myself went with the tale—a god

[77] Abercrombie speaks of the *characteristic thinking* in Browning's poems (*The Great Victorians*, p. 82).
[78] DeVane, *Handbook*, p. 97.
[79] *Ibid.*, p. 385.

Wandering after beauty, or a giant
Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.
I tell you, naught has ever been so clear
As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives:
I had not seen a work of lofty art,
Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face,
Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those
On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,
The deep groves and white temples and wet caves:
And nothing ever will surprise me now—
Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair.
(318–335)

It is a merit of Browning's survey of history that it begins, as our race did begin, not with anthropology but with myth. But when we reach the historic period, "the extraordinary thing" about Browning's poetry is his "use of the ancient world—not romantic after the manner of Milton, or Keats, or any other English poet, but calling that world back to life with the reality and detailed readiness of an archaeologist, or better, of one who had lived in it."[80] We may add that his biographers justly say that Browning "always wrote admirably when he wrote of Jews," and we may turn to a great admirer of the Middle Ages, Ruskin, who declared him "unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages; always vital, right, and profound; so that in the matter of art there is hardly a principle connected with the Medieval temper, that he has not struck upon."[81] Moreover, Ruskin said of "The Bishop Orders his Tomb" that he knew of nothing else in our language which told so much about the Renaissance, "its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin."[82]

[80] Osgood, Charles G., *The Voice of England*, New York, 1935, p. 501; Professor Osgood is referring to *Balaustion's Adventure* and *Aristophanes' Apology*, but the same praise is applicable to other poems.

[81] *Modern Painters, Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburne, VI, 446 (pt. V, ch. XX, Section 32).

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 449, sec. 34.

Though he was an Independent, Browning gave us the "Cavalier Tunes," including one of the best drinking songs in English. And for all his bouncing British modernity, there is in his "Ivàn Ivànovitch" as much of the atmosphere of old Russian villages as one gets in three volumes of Russian fiction—and it is the same atmosphere, though the novels, in English translation, were published later. A similar comparison could be made between his poems on the *Ancien Régime* and much more extensive memoirs.

Even his "philosophy" becomes illuminating when it is approached historically rather than logically, for Browning as a thinker is representative of the specific prejudices of his own age—a greater thinker would rise so far above his age as to be of less "documentary value." Browning, for example, illustrates what Arnold was calling the Dissenters' vulgarity and narrowness; he illustrates the weakness of that bourgeois "Liberalism" which Karl Marx was attacking; he illustrates the shoddy anti-Christian religiosity that so many in the Oxford Movement were reacting against. Perhaps we fail to judge such men as Arnold, Marx, Newman, Carlyle, Swinburne, and Hardy accurately unless we realize what they were incited to oppose. We can sympathize with these critics of Victorianism when we read some of Browning's preachings, for Browning was typically "Victorian" in a way that the others were not.

Looked at with historical interest, his very defects become merits. And all his merits and abilities are enhanced in value: his realism, his semi-scientific approach (history cannot be fully scientific), his psychology, his breadth of information (which is worth more in the historian than originality in philosophy), his willingness to speak for unorthodox or even perverse points of view, his love of energy, experience, life in all its forms. What other "Liberal" historian could throw himself so completely into the spirit of the Cavaliers? What other historian could claim to have "Given up myself so many times" as he "Ransacked the ages"; "I myself went with the tale." And the concentration that puts so much into so few pages could be achieved only by a poet, since poetry is more concentrated and

vivid than prose. Especially this type of poet is best adapted to give us history, for while we do not want too much originality of theory in a historian, we do want great originality of style and phrase, so that the very music of his line will help create the appropriate mood: the gravity of a Roman senator, the primitive horror of Russian forests, the classical dignity of Greek tragedy, tight-lipped Renaissance cruelty, or soft Florentine twilight. We need, in short, that combination of romance and realism which was achieved by the Victorians, and by certain Romantics, notably Scott.

And that suggests one reason why Browning is the great poet of history—namely, the century in which he lived. The nineteenth century studied its predecessors more thoroughly than any century ever did, perhaps more than any century ever will. Renan wrote, "L'histoire est la vraie philosophie du XIX^e^ siècle." The Victorians were especially historical-minded. Not only did they bring the study of history to heights it had never before reached, but they gave us such literary masterpieces in that genre as the productions of Macaulay, Carlyle, Greene, Froude. It should be noticed how many of the other writers dealt with historical material: Thackeray, Pater, Morris, George Eliot—but it would require almost a roll-call of Victorian authors. The concept of historical development conquered science, as the theory of evolution became dominant. It even entered Catholic theology in Newman's crucial *Development of Christian Doctrine*, and it revolutionized Protestant thought. Moreover, the Victorians wrote for a reading public much better grounded in knowledge of the past than the twentieth-century public; the spread of literacy and of the reading-habit has altered the standards of publishers and reviewers. Of this wide and rich Victorian interest, then, Browning was preëminently the poet. Browning owes this in great measure to his father, whose historical interests and excellent library really constituted Browning's university and gave him a remarkably extensive, though eccentric, education. Another important influence has been less often mentioned. His biographers point out that he had shown strong historical leanings but had made no attempt

to create a genuine historical background in *Paracelsus;* but in 1837 appeared Carlyle's *French Revolution* which revealed "the value of elaborate detail and of acquaintance with locality."[83]

Browning and Carlyle have one virtue that is attained only by the greatest historians: they treat the problems of the past as real problems. They do this by focussing attention on problems that still seem to them vital, still worth discussing. Consequently they give us flashes of *Geistesgeschichte,* history of thought, even of the typical psychology of the past. For example, in "Cleon" Browning shows us how the advent of Christianity would be looked upon by a highly cultivated Greek—and how he would *feel* about it; in "Karshish" he has shown the same thing from the point of view of an Arabian physician; in "Imperante Augusto Natus Est" the same event as seen by Roman senators. These leaders in the wisdom of this world, in Art, Science, Statesmanship—the great achievements of ancient Classical civilization—look at this new spiritual force with curiosity but without real comprehension. Their very culture has shut their minds from it. And Browning has caught their state of mind and their state of feeling, their whole psychological reaction, with marvelous insight; and then he has had the artistic ability to awaken this insight in his readers. His method, which involves seeing the past *from within,* saves him from a trap his progressive theories might have led him into, the error, into which even some of the greatest historians have fallen, of thinking that there is a verdict of history—that because something was defeated it was not valid—the subtlest and most refined form of the belief that might makes right. It is true that so far as Browning's *philosophy* of history is concerned (as distinguished from his historical pictures), he is in essential agreement with most historians from Macaulay and Carlyle to Charles Beard and the Marxists: like them he gives a realistic, almost pessimistic picture of what has happened in the past, what man has done and how he has acted, and then adds to that a hope in a divine far-off event, a faith in Progress that makes even the evil which

[83] *Life,* p. 94.

history uncovers seem tolerable. Browning is perhaps the only one of them who frankly calls this hope an illusion that makes life worth living,[84] or who admits that it is not acceptable to the critical reason; that to accept it one must hold the reason in check and stir up the emotions. This, however, is a matter of interpretation. Every historian has a philosophy, conscious or unconscious, and those who preach their interpretation openly are the least insidious. Browning's philosophy is presented directly as theory; it does less to color his picture than that of any historian I know. In fact, it would often be difficult to know from reading one poem just what Browning thought about the speaker. For example, it is only after a thorough study of Browning's thought that one suddenly realizes with a shock that Browning agrees with some of the queer ideas in the two poems he labelled *Madhouse Cells*.

Browning, like all historians, of course, makes mistakes that must be corrected by others. But it is only the greatest re-creators of history, like Gibbon and Shakespeare, Browning and Carlyle, who win the distinction of having the corrections put into footnotes in new editions of their own works. The text itself is never superseded. Browning does not give us military or constitutional history, nor the achievements of eminent men, nor does he swing to the opposite extreme and pretend that history consists in impersonal mass movements. He makes us aware of the reactions of typical men, awake to what is going on. He gives us not dates and statistics but changes of mind, of psychological atmosphere—the real stuff of history, to which public events are mere surface phenomena. He shows "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure."

Anyone who wishes to see Browning under this aspect, may read the following poems in some such order as that indicated here—beginning with Browning's Greek myth, then his treatment of Classical civilization, its decline, and the rise of Christianity, touching upon Arabians, Jews, Catholics—rising to a climax in his imaginative re-creations of the Renaissance

[84] In "Apollo and the Fates."

—and continuing through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to his own day. It is a rare person indeed who does not rise from Browning's musical adventures in psychological history with a broader understanding of the range of experience, the intensity and variety of life.

POEMS ARRANGED HISTORICALLY BY SUBJECT

Apollo and the Fates. A Prologue.
Pan and Luna
Artemis Prologizes
Pheidippides
Echetlos
[The Fall of Athens] The beginning of *Aristophanes' Apology*
"Imperante Augusto Natus Est—"
Cleon
Protus
Love Among the Ruins
Saul
An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician
Muléykeh
Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr
Rabbi Ben Ezra
Holy-Cross Day
"Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"
Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli
Count Gismond
The Heretic's Tragedy
The Pied Piper of Hamelin
Old Pictures in Florence
Pictor Ignotus
Fra Lippo Lippi
Andrea del Sarto
My Last Duchess
The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church
A Grammarian's Funeral
The Statue and the Bust
The Glove

The Laboratory
Johannes Agricola in Meditation
Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island
Which?
Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha
"How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix"
Cavalier Tunes
I. Marching Along
II. Give a Rouse
III. Boot and Saddle
Cristina and Monaldeschi
Hervé Riel
A Forgiveness
The Confessional
Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister
Ivàn Ivànovitch
A Toccata of Galuppi's
Abt Vogler
Clive
Incident of the French Camp
The Flight of the Duchess
Nationality in Drinks
"My heart sank with our Claret-flask"
"Up jumped Tokay on our table"
"Here's to Nelson's memory!"
The Italian in England
The Englishman in Italy
The Patriot
The Lost Leader
Why I am a Liberal
Christmas Eve
"On the first of the Feast of Feasts": Epilogue to *Dramatis Personae*
Bishop Blougram's Apology

CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE

THE CHIEF EVENTS IN BROWNING'S LIFE

1811. (February 19) At Camberwell, upper-middle-class suburb of London, marriage of Robert Browning, Senior, and Sarah Anna Wiedemann.

1812. (May 7) Birth of Robert Browning, at Camberwell.

1826. End of Browning's five or six years as an "unluckily precocious" pupil at the Rev. Thomas Ready's school at Peckham. (He got most of his education at home, in his father's library of 6000 volumes, learning music from his mother and from John Relfe, or visiting the Dulwich Gallery a half-hour's walk away.)

1828. (October) Classes begun at London University; Robert Browning one of the first students.

1829. (Spring) Left London University, terminating his formal education. Chose poetry as a vocation.

1833. (March) Anonymous publication of *Pauline* (Browning's first published poem) at his own expense. It fell dead from the press—not a copy was sold.

1834. (March, April) Accompanied the Russian consul general on a mission to St. Petersburg.

1835. (August) Publication of *Paracelsus.*

1836. (January) Publication of "Porphyria" and "Johannes Agricola" in the *Monthly Repository.*

(May 26) Supper at Sergeant Talfourd's home at which Wordsworth said, "I am proud to drink to your health, Mr. Browning," and the actor Macready asked Browning to write him a play.

1837. (May 1) Browning's first play, *Strafford,* presented at Covent Garden Theatre.

1838. (April-July) First visit to Italy (Venice, Asolo, Treviso, Padua, Verona), returning by the Tyrol and the Rhine.

1840. (March) Publication of *Sordello*, so obscure that it ruined his reputation as a writer.

1841. (April) Publication of *Pippa Passes* (as *Bells and Pomegranates*. No. I), his first really distinctive contribution to literature.

1842–6. Dramas in the series *Bells and Pomegranates*, concluding with No. VIII, *Luria; and A Soul's Tragedy*, which were not acted. He then abandoned the stage.

1842. (November) Publication of *Dramatic Lyrics* (*Bells and Pomegranates*. No. III), his first volume of "dramatic monologues."

1844. (Summer to December) Second Italian journey.

[Elizabeth Barrett Barrett: born March 6, 1806; invalid from 1838; in her *Poems*, 1844, mentioned Browning alongside Wordsworth and Tennyson.]

1845. (January 10) Browning's first letter to Elizabeth Barrett.

(May 20) Robert Browning met Elizabeth Barrett and immediately wrote her a declaration of his love. By September she acknowledged him as a lover. The affair was kept secret throughout the courtship.

(November 6) Publication of *Dramatic Romances* (*Bells and Pomegranates*. No. VII).

1846. (September 12) Secret marriage of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett at Marylebone Church, London. Five days later she slipped out of her home and they left for Italy.

1847. (April) They made their home in Florence, until her death fourteen years later.

1849. (March 9) Birth of their son, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning.

1850. (April 1) Publication of *Christmas Eve and Easter-Day*.

1855. (November) Publication of *Men and Women*, in two volumes.

1856. (December) Death of John Kenyon, who had introduced Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett. He left them £11,000.

1861. (June 29) Death of Mrs. Browning.

(August 1) Browning leaves Florence forever.

1864. (May 28) Publication of *Dramatis Personae,* which won him popularity at last.

1868. (November 21–February 27, 1869) Publication of *The Ring and the Book.*

1871–8. Publication chiefly of long argumentative poems like *Fifine at the Fair* and *Aristophanes' Apology.*

1876. (July) Publication of *Pacchiarotto . . . With Other Poems.*

1879. (April) Publication of the first series of *Dramatic Idyls.*

1880. (June) Publication of *Dramatic Idyls Second Series.*

1881. (October) Founding of the Browning Society.

1883. (March) Publication of *Jocoseria.*

1883–5. Publication of sonnets.

1884. (November) Publication of *Ferishtah's Fancies.*

1887. (January) Publication of *Parleyings With Certain People.*

1889. (Autumn) Journey over the Alps to Italy (Asolo, etc.)
(December 12) Publication of *Asolando.*
(December 12) Death of Browning at his son's home, the Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice. He was buried in the Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

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"I believe that it is possible," says this Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow, "by the help of the intuitions of Browning's highest artistic period, to bring together again the elements of his broken faith, and to find in them suggestions of a truer philosophy of life than anything which the poet himself achieved . . . to make Browning correct his own errors, and to appeal from the metaphysician to the poet" (327–8).

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This is of interest in connection with almost all of Browning's poetry.

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Saintsbury, George, "Browning," in *Corrected Impressions*, New York, 1895.

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Contains many unusual, keen, sound observations, as of "that rather feverish and feminine . . . audacity which distinguished Browning, in contrast to the calm virility of Tennyson's accomplished art" (p. 237).

Santayana, George, "The Poetry of Barbarism," in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*, New York, 1900.

The classic criticism of Browning's spirit and temperament for considering "That life is an adventure, not a discipline; that the exercise of energy is the absolute good, irrespective of motives or of consequences. These are the maxims of a frank barbarism; nothing could express better the lust of life, the dogged unwillingness to learn from experience, the contempt for rationality, the carelessness about perfection, the admiration for mere force, in which barbarism always betrays itself" (p. 206).

Scott, Dixon, "The Homeliness of Browning," in *Men of Letters*, London, 1916.

Wisely presents Browning as "our chief poet of familiar life. He is the laureate of life in undress" (p. 253). His creed is not one of renunciation; "It is the conqueror's code, not the prophet's" (p. 252).

Sherwood, Margaret, "The Young Browning" and "Browning and Mr. Santayana," in *Undercurrents of Influence in English Romantic Poetry*, Cambridge, 1934.

She admires what Santayana attacks. "Browning's mind and imagination are obsessed by the idea of the hope lying in perpetual change and growth, which is the great contribution of the nineteenth century to thought. It was largely a Teutonic contribution" (p. 328).

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Finds satire where Browning may mean to agree. See also Tracy's "Caliban upon Setebos," *Studies in Philology*, XXXV (July, 1938), 487–99.

Watkins, Ralph G., *Robert Browning and the English Pre-Raphaelites*, Breslau, 1905.

Shows how close Browning was to the Pre-Raphaelites, especially in refusing to distinguish sharply between flesh and soul (p. 40).

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PIPPA PASSES

PIPPA PASSES*

A DRAMA

PERSONS

PIPPA.
OTTIMA.
SEBALD.
Foreign Students.
GOTTLIEB.
SCHRAMM.
JULES.
PHENE.
Austrian Police.
BLUPHOCKS.
LUIGI *and his* Mother.
Poor Girls.
MONSIGNOR *and his attendants.*

INTRODUCTION

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:

* The earliest of Browning's works that has won general admiration, this was published in 1841 as the first of a series of eight pamphlets called *Bells and Pomegranates.* As a foreword to the last of the series (1846) the poet wrote, "I only meant by that title to indicate an endeavour towards something like an alternation, or mixture, of music with discoursing, sound with sense, poetry with thought."

Pippa Passes is typical of Browning's poetry in its optimism, its romantic lyrics, its psychological interest in emotional crisis, and its unusual form: dramatic, but not well adapted to the stage. Moreover, it conveys a very vivid sense of life in an Italian town in the 1830's, with its churchmen, Austrian police, foreign students, mill-owners and laborers, and revolutionary conspirators. Browning's first visit to Italy (1838), in search of local color for *Sordello,* took him to Venice and to Asolo, about thirty miles away, a small town in the province of Treviso, famous for its silk mills. He was delighted with the place, visited it again in the last years of his life, and used its name in the title of his last volume of poetry, *Asolando.*

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 are 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 be 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 naught!
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,

71. *Browning's cheerful picture of Pippa, a girl employed at "wearisome" toil in the silk mills, should be contrasted with the humanitarian protest against child-labor, "The Cry of the Children," written by Elizabeth Barrett, who was to become his wife.*

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!

88. *Martagon:* kind of lily with light violet or flesh-colored flowers.
100. *Weevil and chafer:* small beetles.
108. Such references as this in Browning's poetry are not to be taken as protests or demands for reform. He did not believe that evils should be eliminated, but, rather, confronted with a rush of high spirits in the mood of the lyrics of this play. Is it dramatically appropriate to ascribe these feelings to one who leads the life of Pippa?

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.

110–113. Browning is like Pippa not only in his exuberance and optimism, but also, as his biographers Griffin and Minchin point out (*Life*, 35–6), in his own great joy in imagining himself to be other people. This taste led him to develop the "dramatic monologue," a form best adapted to his genius, by which he played out his "fancy's fullest games." Even this "play" is carried forward less by dialogue than by a series of monologues.

131. *Possagno church:* a church designed by Canova, who was born at Possagno.

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.

181. *Dome* (Duomo): cathedral.

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,

188. The four groups illustrate four kinds of love in an ascending scale: adulterous love involving murder, wedded love, parental love (and love of country), Christian love institutionalized; and Pippa realizes that she represents a fifth love—God's love for all mankind equally, even for a poor factory girl. Pippa does not realize the flaw in each of the other four examples of love, nor that her joyous, exuberant overflow of spirits is to save all these supposedly "Happiest Four" from impending disaster.

190 ff. Catholicism does not teach that "all service ranks the same with God," that "there is no last nor first," and that men are "God's puppets." This song is less that of a young Italian factory girl than an expression of Browning himself, strongly influenced by the nineteenth-century currents of Romanticism and the liberalism of his own middle class, and by his Evangelical (Dissenter) background. *Cf.* the Calvinistic belief that no good works can merit salvation, that God's grace is a free gift granted not for human virtue but according to unconditional election by God according to His eternal decrees, and that men's actions have been predestined by God throughout all eternity. Evangelical emphasis on sudden conversion may also be seen in the psychology of the situations in this play.

201. Notice Browning's interest in the Great Moment, the crisis, in which the soul either fails or rushes over to victory in an excess of power.

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.*

PART I

MORNING

SCENE.—*Up the Hill-side, inside the Shrub-house.* LUCA'S *wife,* OTTIMA, *and her paramour, the German* SEBALD.

Sebald [*sings*].

Let the watching lids wink!
Day's a-blaze with eyes, think!
Deep into the night, drink!

Ottima. Night? Such may be your Rhine-land nights perhaps;
But this blood-red beam through the shutter's chink
—We call such light, the morning: let us see!
Mind how you grope your way, though! How these tall
Naked geraniums straggle! Push the lattice
Behind that frame!—Nay, do I bid you?—Sebald,
It shakes the dust down on me! Why, of course
The slide-bolt catches. Well, are you content,
Or must I find you something else to spoil?
Kiss and be friends, my Sebald! Is 't full morning?
Oh, don't speak then!
Sebald. Ay, thus it used to be.
Ever your house was, I remember, shut
Till mid-day; I observed that, as I strolled
On mornings through the vale here; country girls
Were noisy, washing garments in the brook,
Hinds drove the slow white oxen up the hills:
But no, your house was mute, would ope no eye.
And wisely: you were plotting one thing there,
Nature, another outside. I looked up—
Rough white wood shutters, rusty iron bars,

Silent as death, blind in a flood of light.
Oh, I remember!—and the peasants laughed
And said, "The old man sleeps with the young wife."
This house was his, this chair, this window—his.
Ottima. Ah, the clear morning! I can see Saint Mark's;
That black streak is the belfry. Stop: Vicenza
Should lie . . . there's Padua, plain enough, that blue!
Look o'er my shoulder, follow my finger!
Sebald. Morning?
It seems to me a night with a sun added.
Where's dew, where's freshness? That bruised plant, I bruised
In getting through the lattice yestereve,
Droops as it did. See, here's my elbow's mark
I' the dust o' the sill.
Ottima. Oh, shut the lattice, pray!
Sebald. Let me lean out. I cannot scent blood here,
Foul as the morn may be.
There, shut the world out!
How do you feel now, Ottima? There, curse
The world and all outside! Let us throw off
This mask: how do you bear yourself? Let's out
With all of it.
Ottima. Best never speak of it.
Sebald. Best speak again and yet again of it,
Till words cease to be more than words. "His blood,"
For instance—let those two words mean "His blood"
And nothing more. Notice, I'll say them now,
"His blood."
Ottima. Assuredly if I repented
The deed—
Sebald. Repent? Who should repent, or why?
What puts that in your head? Did I once say
That I repented?
Ottima. No, I said the deed . . .
Sebald. "The deed" and "the event"—just now it was
"Our passion's fruit"—the devil take such cant!
Say, once and always, Luca was a wittol,
I am his cut-throat, you are . . .

28. *Saint Mark's:* the cathedral at Venice, which is visible from Asolo.
29. *Vicenza:* a town southwest of Asolo.
30. *Padua:* famous Italian city, about twenty-five miles south of Asolo.

Ottima. Here's the wine;
I brought it when we left the house above,
And glasses too—wine of both sorts. Black? White then?
Sebald. But am not I his cut-throat? What are you?
Ottima. There trudges on his business from the Duomo
Benet the Capuchin, with his brown hood
And bare feet; always in one place at church,
Close under the stone wall by the south entry.
I used to take him for a brown cold piece
Of the wall's self, as out of it he rose
To let me pass—at first, I say, I used:
Now, so has that dumb figure fastened on me,
I rather should account the plastered wall
A piece of him, so chilly does it strike.
This, Sebald?
Sebald. No, the white wine—the white wine!
Well, Ottima, I promised no new year
Should rise on us the ancient shameful way;
Nor does it rise. Pour on! To your black eyes!
Do you remember last damned New Year's day?
Ottima. You brought those foreign prints. We looked at them
Over the wine and fruit. I had to scheme
To get him from the fire. Nothing but saying
His own set wants the proof-mark, roused him up
To hunt them out.
Sebald. 'Faith, he is not alive
To fondle you before my face.
Ottima. Do you
Fondle me then! Who means to take your life
For that, my Sebald?
Sebald. Hark you, Ottima!
One thing to guard against. We'll not make much
One of the other—that is, not make more
Parade of warmth, childish officious coil,

58. *Duomo:* Italian for "Cathedral."
59. *Capuchin:* member of an order of friars, an offshoot of the Franciscans. The Capuchins wear a brown habit.
76. *Proof-mark:* the sign on a print showing that it is one of the first from the plate. This charge was therefore a challenge to Luca as to the value of his collection.
83. *Coil:* tumult, bustle.

Than yesterday: as if, sweet, I supposed
Proof upon proof were needed now, now first,
To show I love you—yes, still love you—love you
In spite of Luca and what's come to him
—Sure sign we had him ever in our thoughts,
White sneering old reproachful face and all!
We'll even quarrel, love, at times, as if
We still could lose each other, were not tied
By this: conceive you?
Ottima. Love!
Sebald. Not tied so sure.
Because though I was wrought upon, have struck
His insolence back into him—am I
So surely yours?—therefore forever yours?
Ottima. Love, to be wise, (one counsel pays another)
Should we have—months ago, when first we loved,
For instance that May morning we two stole
Under the green ascent of sycamores—
If we had come upon a thing like that
Suddenly . . .
Sebald. "A thing"—there again—"a thing!"
Ottima. Then, Venus' body, had we come upon
My husband Luca Gaddi's murdered corpse
Within there, at his couch-foot, covered close—
Would you have pored upon it? Why persist
In poring now upon it? For 't is here
As much as there in the deserted house:
You cannot rid your eyes of it. For me,
Now he is dead I hate him worse: I hate . . .
Dare you stay here? I would go back and hold
His two dead hands, and say, "I hate you worse,
Luca, than . . ."
Sebald. Off, off—take your hands off mine,
'T is the hot evening—off! oh, morning is it?
Ottima. There's one thing must be done; you know
what thing.
Come in and help to carry. We may sleep
Anywhere in the whole wide house to-night.
Sebald. What would come, think you, if we let
him lie
Just as he is? Let him lie there until

The angels take him! He is turned by this
Off from his face beside, as you will see.
Ottima. This dusty pane might serve for looking glass.
Three, four—four gray hairs! Is it so you said
A plait of hair should wave across my neck?
No—this way.
Sebald. Ottima, I would give your neck,
Each splendid shoulder, both those breasts of yours,
That this were undone! Killing! Kill the world
So Luca lives again!—ay, lives to sputter
His fulsome dotage on you—yes, and feign
Surprise that I return at eve to sup,
When all the morning I was loitering here—
Bid me despatch my business and begone.
I would . . .
Ottima. See!
Sebald. No, I'll finish. Do you think
I fear to speak the bare truth once for all?
All we have talked of, is, at bottom, fine
To suffer; there's a recompense in guilt;
One must be venturous and fortunate:
What is one young for, else? In age we'll sigh
O'er the wild reckless wicked days flown over;
Still, we have lived: the vice was in its place.
But to have eaten Luca's bread, have worn
His clothes, have felt his money swell my purse—
Do lovers in romances sin that way?
Why, I was starving when I used to call
And teach you music, starving while you plucked me
These flowers to smell!
Ottima. My poor lost friend!
Sebald. He gave me
Life, nothing less: what if he did reproach
My perfidy, and threaten, and do more—
Had he no right? What was to wonder at?
He sat by us at table quietly:
Why must you lean across till our cheeks touched?
Could he do less than make pretence to strike?
'T is not the crime's sake—I'd commit ten crimes

119–20. It is a superstition that the face of a murdered man looks skyward for vengeance.

Greater, to have this crime wiped out, undone!
And you—O how feel you? Feel you for me?
Ottima. Well then, I love you better now than ever,
And best (look at me while I speak to you)—
Best for the crime; nor do I grieve, in truth,
This mask, this simulated ignorance,
This affectation of simplicity,
Falls off our crime; this naked crime of ours
May not now be looked over: look it down!
Great? let it be great; but the joys it brought,
Pay they or no its price? Come: they or it!
Speak not! The past, would you give up the past
Such as it is, pleasure and crime together?
Give up that noon I owned my love for you?
The garden's silence: even the single bee
Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopped,
And where he hid you only could surmise
By some campanula chalice set a-swing.
Who stammered—"Yes, I love you?"
Sebald. And I drew
Back; put far back your face with both my hands
Lest you should grow too full of me—your face
So seemed athirst for my whole soul and body!
Ottima. And when I ventured to receive you here,
Made you steal hither in the mornings—
Sebald. When
I used to look up 'neath the shrub-house here,
Till the red fire on its glazed windows spread
To a yellow haze?
Ottima. Ah—my sign was, the sun
Inflamed the sere side of yon chestnut-tree
Nipped by the first frost.
Sebald. You would always laugh
At my wet boots: I had to stride thro' grass
Over my ankles.
Ottima. Then our crowning night!
Sebald. The July night?
Ottima. The day of it too, Sebald!
When heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat,

170. *Campanula:* "little bell," the Latin name of the bell-flower (harebell).

Its black-blue canopy suffered descend
Close on us both, to weigh down each to each,
And smother up all life except our life.
So lay we till the storm came.
Sebald. How it came!
Ottima. Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;
And ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burned thro' the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,
As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke
The thunder like a whole sea overhead—
Sebald. Yes!
Ottima. While I stretched myself upon you, hands
To hands, my mouth to your hot mouth, and shook
All my locks loose, and covered you with them—
You, Sebald, the same you!
Sebald. Slower, Ottima!
Ottima. And as we lay—
Sebald. Less vehemently! Love me!
Forgive me! Take not words, mere words, to heart!
Your breath is worse than wine. Breathe slow, speak slow!
Do not lean on me!
Ottima. Sebald, as we lay,
Rising and falling only with our pants,
Who said, "Let death come now! 'T is right to die!
Right to be punished! Naught completes such bliss
But woe!" Who said that?
Sebald. How did we ever rise?
Was't that we slept? Why did it end?
Ottima. I felt you
Taper into a point the ruffled ends
Of my loose locks 'twixt both your humid lips.
My hair is fallen now: knot it again!

200. *Cf.* the opening lines of Browning's first published work, *Pauline; a Fragment of a Confession* (1833):

> Pauline, mine own, bend o'er me—thy soft breast
> Shall pant to mine—bend o'er me—thy sweet eyes,
> And loosened hair and breathing lips, and arms
> Drawing me to thee—these build up a screen
> To shut me in with thee, and from all fear.

Sebald. I kiss you now, dear Ottima, now and now!
This way? Will you forgive me—be once more
My great queen?
Ottima. Bind it thrice about my brow;
Crown me your queen, your spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent in sin. Say that!
Sebald. I crown you
My great white queen, my spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent . . .

[*From without is heard the voice of* PIPPA *singing—*

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!

[PIPPA *passes.*

Sebald. God's in his heaven! Do you hear that? Who spoke?
You, you spoke!

227–8. It has been argued that Pippa's songs can not be taken to express Browning's own sentiment; *e.g.*, Abercrombie in *The Great Victorians* (pp. 76 ff.) says these two lines are "the one distinct piece of evidence" that Browning was really an optimist, but that this lyric is purely dramatic, "the right sort of song for such a person as she is." Now one may doubt that a person with the background of Pippa, in such a situation, would be so utterly pleased with the happiness of others. And it should be noticed that the very plot of the play—entirely Browning's invention—is strikingly optimistic: Browning gives us realistic pictures of four groups of people in the midst of sin, disaster, and tragedy. Then, suddenly, in each case they are saved as by a *deus ex machina* through overhearing Pippa's songs. This is presented as not a mere accident, but a result of the very nature of the universe, where men are "God's puppets" and His "presence fills our earth." "God's in his heaven." And to Browning, who did not care for logic or for the Christian contempt for the world, this led to the conclusion that basically "All's right with the world." Human nature is shown to be full of virtue; and even after a long entanglement in sin and error, it takes only Pippa's snatches of song to awaken the better self in each of these people and loose a flood of good emotions, remorse, pity, forgiveness, courage. The philosophy implied by this plot was preached by Browning repeatedly until the very end of his life.

Ottima. Oh—that little ragged girl!
She must have rested on the step: we give them
But this one holiday the whole year round.
Did you ever see our silk-mills—their inside?
There are ten silk-mills now belong to you.
She stoops to pick my double heartsease . . . Sh!
She does not hear: call you out louder!
Sebald. Leave me!
Go, get your clothes on—dress those shoulders!
Ottima. Sebald?
Sebald. Wipe off that paint! I hate you.
Ottima. Miserable!
Sebald. My God, and she is emptied of it now!
Outright now!—how miraculously gone
All of the grace—had she not strange grace once?
Why, the blank cheek hangs listless as it likes
No purpose holds the features up together,
Only the cloven brow and puckered chin
Stay in their places: and the very hair,
That seemed to have a sort of life in it,
Drops, a dead web!
Ottima. Speak to me—not of me!
Sebald. That round great full-orbed face, where not an angle
Broke the delicious indolence—all broken!
Ottima. To me—not of me! Ungrateful, perjured cheat!
A coward too: but ingrate's worse than all.
Beggar—my slave—a fawning, cringing lie!
Leave me! Betray me! I can see your drift!
A lie that walks and eats and drinks!
Sebald. My God!
Those morbid olive faultless shoulder-blades—
I should have known there was no blood beneath!
Ottima. You hate me then? You hate me then?
Sebald. To think
She would succeed in her absurd attempt,
And fascinate by sinning, show herself
Superior—guilt from its excess superior
To innocence! That little peasant's voice

235. *Heartsease:* species of violet, or pansy.

Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
I know which is the better, never fear,
Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
Nature or trick! I see what I have done,
Entirely now! Oh I am proud to feel
Such torments—let the world take credit thence—
I, having done my deed, pay too its price!
I hate, hate—curse you! God's in his heaven!
Ottima. —Me!
Me! no, no, Sebald, not yourself—kill me!
Mine is the whole crime. Do but kill me—then
Yourself—then—presently—first hear me speak!
I always meant to kill myself—wait, you!
Lean on my breast—not as a breast; don't love me
The more because you lean on me, my own
Heart's Sebald! There, there, both deaths presently!
Sebald. My brain is drowned now—quite drowned: all I feel
Is . . . is, at swift-recurring intervals,
A hurry-down within me, as of waters
Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit:
There they go—whirls from a black fiery sea!
Ottima. Not me—to him, O God, be merciful!

Talk by the way, while PIPPA *is passing from the hill-side to Orcana. Foreign* Students *of painting and sculpture, from Venice, assembled opposite the house of* JULES, *a young French statuary, at Possagno.*

1st Student. Attention! My own post is beneath this window, but the pomegranate clump yonder will hide three or four of you with a little squeezing, and Schramm and his pipe must lie flat in the balcony. Four, five—who's a defaulter? We want everybody, for Jules must not be suffered to hurt his bride when the jest's found out.

2nd Student. All here! Only our poet's away—never having much meant to be present, moonstrike him! The airs of that fellow, that Giovacchino! He was in violent love with himself, and had a fair prospect of thriving in his suit, so unmolested was it,—when suddenly a woman falls in love with him, too;

and out of pure jealousy he takes himself off to Trieste,[1] immortal poem and all: whereto is this prophetical epitaph appended already, as Bluphocks assures me,—"*Here a mammoth-poem lies, Fouled to death by butterflies.*" His own fault, the simpleton! Instead of cramp couplets, each like a knife in your entrails, he should write, says Bluphocks, both classically and intelligibly.—*Æsculapius,*[2] *an Epic. Catalogue of the drugs: Hebe's*[3] *plaister—One strip Cools your lip. Phœbus'*[4] *emulsion—One bottle Clears your throttle. Mercury's*[5] *bolus—One box Cures . . .*

3rd Student. Subside, my fine fellow! If the marriage was over by ten o'clock, Jules will certainly be here in a minute with his bride.

2nd Student. Good!—only, so should the poet's muse have been universally acceptable, says Bluphocks, *et canibus nostris*[6] . . . and Delia not better known to our literary dogs than the boy Giovacchino!

1st Student. To the point, now. Where's Gottlieb, the newcomer? Oh,—listen, Gottlieb, to what has called down this piece of friendly vengeance on Jules, of which we now assemble to witness the winding-up. We are all agreed, all in a tale,[7] observe, when Jules shall burst out on us in a fury by and by: I am spokesman—the verses that are to undeceive Jules bear my name of Lutwyche—but each professes himself alike insulted by this strutting stone-squarer, who came alone from Paris to Munich, and thence with a crowd of us to Venice and Possagno here, but proceeds in a day or two alone again—oh, alone indubitably!—to Rome and Florence. He, forsooth, take up his portion with these dissolute, brutalized, heartless bunglers!—so he was heard to call us all. Now, is Schramm brutalized, I should like to know? Am I heartless?

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[1] *Trieste:* Italian city on the Adriatic, across from Venice.
[2] *Æsculapius:* god of medicine.
[3] *Hebe:* goddess of youth, and cup-bearer to the gods.
[4] *Phœbus:* Apollo, god of healing, father of Æsculapius.
[5] *Mercury:* messenger of the gods, god of travel and commerce.
[6] *Et canibus nostris:* "and to our dogs" (Virgil, *Eclogues,* III, 67).
[7] *In a tale:* ready to tell the same tale.

Gottlieb. Why, somewhat heartless; for, suppose Jules a coxcomb as much as you choose, still, for this mere coxcombry, you will have brushed off—what do folks style it?—the bloom of his life. Is it too late to alter? These love-letters now, you call his—I can't laugh at them.

4th Student. Because you never read the sham letters of our inditing which drew forth these.

Gottlieb. His discovery of the truth will be frightful.

4th Student. That's the joke. But you should have joined us at the beginning: there's no doubt he loves the girl—loves a model he might hire by the hour!

Gottlieb. See here! "He has been accustomed," he writes, "to have Canova's[8] women about him, in stone, and the world's women beside him, in flesh; these being as much below, as those above, his soul's aspiration: but now he is to have the reality." There you laugh again! I say, you wipe off the very dew of his youth.

1st Student. Schramm! (Take the pipe out of his mouth, somebody!) Will Jules lose the bloom of his youth?

Schramm. Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world: look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time; but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue? As well affirm that your eye is no longer in your body, because its earliest favourite, whatever it may have first loved to look on, is dead and done with—as that any affection is lost to the soul when its first object, whatever happened first to satisfy it, is superseded in due course. Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on! Has a man done wondering at women?—there follow men, dead and alive, to wonder at. Has he done wondering at men?—there's God to wonder at: and the faculty of wonder may be, at the same time, old and tired enough with respect to its first object, and yet young and fresh sufficiently, so far as concerns its novel one. Thus . . .

1st Student. Put Schramm's pipe into his mouth again!

[8] *Canova:* Italian sculptor (1757–1822).

There, you see! Well, this Jules . . . a wretched fribble—oh, I watched his disportings at Possagno, the other day! Canova's gallery—you know: there he marches first resolvedly past great works by the dozen without vouchsafing an eye: all at once he stops full at the *Psiche-fanciulla*[9]—cannot pass that old acquaintance without a nod of encouragement—"In your new place, beauty? Then behave yourself as well here as at Munich—I see you!" Next he posts himself deliberately before the unfinished *Pietà*[10] for half an hour without moving, till up he starts of a sudden, and thrusts his very nose into—I say, into—the group; by which gesture you are informed that precisely the sole point he had not fully mastered in Canova's practice was a certain method of using the drill in the articulation of the knee-joint—and that, likewise, has he mastered at length! Good-bye, therefore, to poor Canova—whose gallery no longer needs detain his successor Jules, the predestinated novel thinker in marble!

5th Student. Tell him about the women: go on to the women!

1st Student. Why, on that matter he could never be supercilious enough. How should we be other (he said) than the poor devils you see, with those debasing habits we cherish? He was not to wallow in that mire, at least: he would wait, and love only at the proper time, and meanwhile put up with the *Psiche-fanciulla.* Now, I happened to hear of a young Greek —real Greek girl at Malamocco;[11] a true Islander, do you see, with Alciphron's[12] "hair like sea-moss"—Schramm knows!—white and quiet as an apparition, and fourteen years old at farthest,—a daughter of Natalia, so she swears—that hag Natalia, who helps us to models at three *lire*[13] an hour. We selected this girl for the heroine of our jest. So first, Jules received a scented letter—somebody had seen his Tydeus[14] at the Acad-

[9] *Psiche-fanciulla:* Canova's statue of Psyche as a young girl with a butterfly (in the gallery at Possagno).

[10] *Pietà:* a statue of Mary with the dead Christ in her arms.

[11] *Malamocco:* a small town and island near Venice.

[12] *Alciphron:* Greek writer of the second century A.D.

[13] *Lire:* plural of *lira,* Italian coin formerly worth about twenty cents.

[14] *Tydeus:* one of the heroes of the Theban War.

emy,[15] and my picture was nothing to it: a profound admirer bade him persevere—would make herself known to him ere long. (Paolina, my little friend of the *Fenice*,[16] transcribes divinely.) And in due time, the mysterious correspondent gave certain hints of her peculiar charms—the pale cheeks, the black hair—whatever, in short, had struck us in our Malamocco model: we retained her name, too—Phene, which is, by interpretation, sea-eagle. Now, think of Jules finding himself distinguished from the herd of us by such a creature! In his very first answer he proposed marrying his monitress: and fancy us over these letters, two, three times a day, to receive and despatch! I concocted the main of it: relations were in the way—secrecy must be observed—in fine, would he wed her on trust, and only speak to her when they were indissolubly united? St—st—Here they come!

6th Student. Both of them! Heaven's love, speak softly, speak within yourselves!

5th Student. Look at the bridegroom! Half his hair in storm and half in calm,—patted down over the left temple,—like a frothy cup one blows on to cool it: and the same old blouse that he murders the marble in.

2nd Student. Not a rich vest like yours, Hannibal Scratchy![17] —rich, that your face may the better set it off.

6th Student. And the bride! Yes, sure enough, our Phene! Should you have known her in her clothes? How magnificently pale!

Gottlieb. She does not also take it for earnest, I hope?

1st Student. Oh, Natalia's concern, that is! We settle with Natalia.

6th Student. She does not speak—has evidently let out no word. The only thing is, will she equally remember the rest of her lesson, and repeat correctly all those verses which are to break the secret to Jules?

Gottlieb. How he gazes on her! Pity—pity!

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[15] *Academy:* of Fine Arts in Venice.
[16] *The Fenice:* the Phoenix, a theatre in Venice.
[17] *Hannibal Scratchy:* burlesque for Annibale Caracci (Italian painter).

1st Student. They go in: now, silence! You three,—not nearer the window, mind, than that pomegranate: just where the little girl, who a few minutes ago passed us singing, is seated!

PART II

NOON

SCENE.—*Over Orcana. The house of* JULES, *who crosses its threshold with* PHENE: *she is silent, on which* JULES *begins—*

Do not die, Phene! I am yours now, you
Are mine now; let fate reach me how she likes,
If you'll not die: so, never die! Sit here—
My work-room's single seat. I over-lean
This length of hair and lustrous front; they turn
Like an entire flower upward: eyes, lips, last
Your chin—no, last your throat turns: 't is their scent
Pulls down my face upon you. Nay, look ever
This one way till I change, grow you—I could
Change into you, beloved!
You by me,
And I by you; this is your hand in mine,
And side by side we sit: all's true. Thank God!
I have spoken: speak you!
O my life to come!
My Tydeus must be carved that's there in clay;
Yet how be carved, with you about the room?
Where must I place you? When I think that once
This room-full of rough block-work seemed my heaven
Without you! Shall I ever work again,
Get fairly into my old ways again,
Bid each conception stand while, trait by trait,
My hand transfers its lineaments to stone?
Will my mere fancies live near you, their truth—
The live truth, passing and repassing me,
Sitting beside me?
Now speak!
Only first,
See, all your letters! Was 't not well contrived?

Their hiding-place is Psyche's robe; she keeps
Your letters next her skin: which drops out foremost?
Ah,—this that swam down like a first moonbeam
Into my world!
Again those eyes complete
Their melancholy survey, sweet and slow,
Of all my room holds; to return and rest
On me, with pity, yet some wonder too:
As if God bade some spirit plague a world,
And this were the one moment of surprise
And sorrow while she took her station, pausing
O'er what she sees, finds good, and must destroy!
What gaze you at? Those? Books, I told you of;
Let your first word to me rejoice them, too:
This minion, a Coluthus, writ in red
Bistre and azure by Bessarion's scribe—
Read this line . . . no, shame—Homer's be the Greek
First breathed me from the lips of my Greek girl!
This Odyssey in coarse black vivid type
With faded yellow blossoms 'twixt page and page,
To mark great places with due gratitude;
"*He said, and on Antinous directed*
A bitter shaft" . . . a flower blots out the rest!
Again upon your search? My statues, then!
—Ah, do not mind that—better that will look
When cast in bronze—an Almaign Kaiser, that,
Swart-green and gold, with truncheon based on hip.
This, rather, turn to! What, unrecognized?
I thought you would have seen that here you sit
As I imagined you,—Hippolyta,
Naked upon her bright Numidian horse.
Recall you this then? "Carve in bold relief"—
So you commanded—"carve, against I come,

39–40. Coluthus was a Greek poet of the sixth century; Cardinal Bessarion in the fifteenth century discovered one of his poems. *Bistre:* a dark brown paint made from the soot of wood.

46–7. Antinous was one of the suitors of Penelope. He was killed by Odysseus. Notice the appropriateness of this reference to vengeance, in the light of what Jules says later.

50. *Almaign:* German.

54. *Hippolyta:* Queen of the Amazons, conquered and forced to marry Theseus.

A Greek, in Athens, as our fashion was,
Feasting, bay-filleted and thunder-free,
Who rises 'neath the lifted myrtle-branch.
'Praise those who slew Hipparchus!' cry the guests,
'While o'er thy head the singer's myrtle waves
As erst above our champion: stand up, all!' "
See, I have laboured to express your thought.
Quite round, a cluster of mere hands and arms,
(Thrust in all senses, all ways, from all sides,
Only consenting at the branch's end
They strain toward) serves for frame to a sole face,
The Praiser's, in the centre: who with eyes
Sightless, so bend they back to light inside
His brain where visionary forms throng up,
Sings, minding not that palpitating arch
Of hands and arms, nor the quick drip of wine
From the drenched leaves o'erhead, nor crowns cast off,
Violet and parsley crowns to trample on—
Sings, pausing as the patron-ghosts approve,
Devoutly their unconquerable hymn.
But you must say a "well" to that—say "well!"
Because you gaze—am I fantastic, sweet?
Gaze like my very life's-stuff, marble—marbly
Even to the silence! Why, before I found
The real flesh Phene, I inured myself
To see, throughout all nature, varied stuff
For better nature's birth by means of art:
With me, each substance tended to one form
Of beauty—to the human archetype.
On every side occurred suggestive germs
Of that—the tree, the flower—or take the fruit,—
Some rosy shape, continuing the peach,
Curved beewise o'er its bough; as rosy limbs,
Depending, nestled in the leaves; and just
From a cleft rose-peach the whole Dryad sprang.

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59. *Bay-filleted:* crowned by bay (laurel) leaves, supposed to be a protection against lightning.

60–61. Hipparchus, Athenian tyrant, was killed by conspirators who concealed their daggers in myrtle-branches carried at a festival.

75. *Crowns:* of garlands (worn especially at drinking bouts).

92. *Dryad:* a nymph that lives in a tree.

But of the stuffs one can be master of,
How I divined their capabilities!
From the soft-rinded smoothening facile chalk
That yields your outline to the air's embrace,
Half-softened by a halo's pearly gloom;
Down to the crisp imperious steel, so sure
To cut its one confided thought clean out
Of all the world. But marble!—'neath my tools
More pliable than jelly—as it were
Some clear primordial creature dug from depths
In the earth's heart, where itself breeds itself,
And whence all baser substance may be worked;
Refine it off to air, you may,—condense it
Down to the diamond;—is not metal there,
When o'er the sudden speck my chisel trips?
—Not flesh, as flake off flake I scale, approach,
Lay bare those bluish veins of blood asleep?
Lurks flame in no strange windings where, surprised
By the swift implement sent home at once,
Flushes and glowings radiate and hover
About its track?
Phene? what—why is this?
That whitening cheek, those still dilating eyes!
Ah, you will die—I knew that you would die!

PHENE *begins, on his having long remained silent.*

Now the end's coming; to be sure, it must
Have ended sometime! Tush, why need I speak
Their foolish speech? I cannot bring to mind
One half of it, beside; and do not care
For old Natalia now, nor any of them.
Oh, you—what are you?—if I do not try
To say the words Natalia made me learn,
To please your friends,—it is to keep myself
Where your voice lifted me, by letting that
Proceed: but can it? Even you, perhaps,

113 ff. Even in this "drama" notice how undramatic are Jules' and Phene's speeches considered as dialogue. Each speech is really a *dramatic monologue*. Browning is turning instinctively to the form that he was later to develop and make his own.

Cannot take up, now you have once let fall,
The music's life, and me along with that—
No, or you would! We'll stay, then, as we are:
Above the world.
You creature with the eyes!
If I could look for ever up to them,
As now you let me,—I believe, all sin,
All memory of wrong done, suffering borne,
Would drop down, low and lower, to the earth
Whence all that's low comes, and there touch and stay
—Never to overtake the rest of me,
All that, unspotted, reaches up to you,
Drawn by those eyes! What rises is myself,
Not me the shame and suffering; but they sink,
Are left, I rise above them. Keep me so,
Above the world!
But you sink, for your eyes
Are altering—altered! Stay—"I love you, love" . . .
I could prevent it if I understood:
More of your words to me: was 't in the tone
Or the words, your power?
Or stay—I will repeat
Their speech, if that contents you! Only change
No more, and I shall find it presently
Far back here, in the brain yourself filled up.
Natalia threatened me that harm should follow
Unless I spoke their lesson to the end,
But harm to me, I thought she meant, not you.
Your friends,—Natalia said they were your friends
And meant you well,—because, I doubted it,
Observing (what was very strange to see)
On every face, so different in all else,
The same smile girls like me are used to bear,
But never men, men cannot stoop so low;
Yet your friends, speaking of you, used that smile,
That hateful smirk of boundless self-conceit
Which seems to take possession of the world
And make of God a tame confederate,
Purveyor to their appetites . . . you know!
But still Natalia said they were your friends,
And they assented though they smiled the more,

And all came round me,—that thin Englishman
With light lank hair seemed leader of the rest;
He held a paper—"What we want," said he,
Ending some explanation to his friends—
"Is something slow, involved and mystical,
To hold Jules long in doubt, yet take his taste
And lure him on until, at innermost
Where he seeks sweetness' soul, he may find—this!
—As in the apple's core, the noisome fly:
For insects on the rind are seen at once,
And brushed aside as soon, but this is found
Only when on the lips or loathing tongue."
And so he read what I have got by heart:
I'll speak it,—"Do not die, love! I am yours."
No—is not that, or like that, part of words
Yourself began by speaking? Strange to lose
What cost such pains to learn! Is this more right?

I am a painter who cannot paint;
In my life, a devil rather than saint;
In my brain, as poor a creature too:
No end to all I cannot do!
Yet do one thing at least I can—
Love a man or hate a man
Supremely: thus my lore began.
Through the Valley of Love I went,
In the lovingest spot to abide,
And just on the verge where I pitched my tent,
I found Hate dwelling beside.
(Let the Bridegroom ask what the painter meant,
Of his Bride, of the peerless Bride!)
And further, I traversed Hate's grove,
In the hatefullest nook to dwell;
But lo, where I flung myself prone, couched Love
Where the shadow threefold fell.
(The meaning—those black bride's-eyes above,
Not a painter's lip should tell!)

"And here," said he, "Jules probably will ask,
'You have black eyes, Love,—you are, sure enough,
My peerless bride,—then do you tell indeed

What needs some explanation! What means this?' "
—And I am to go on, without a word—

So, I grew wise in Love and Hate,
From simple that I was of late.
Once, when I loved, I would enlace
Breast, eyelids, hands, feet, form and face
Of her I loved, in one embrace—
As if by mere love I could love immensely!
Once, when I hated, I would plunge
My sword, and wipe with the first lunge
My foe's whole life out like a sponge—
As if by mere hate I could hate intensely!
But now I am wiser, know better the fashion
How passion seeks aid from its opposite passion:
And if I see cause to love more, hate more
Than ever man loved, ever hated before—
And seek in the Valley of Love
The nest, or the nook in Hate's Grove
Where my soul may surely reach
The essence, naught less, of each,
The Hate of all Hates, the Love
Of all Loves, in the Valley or Grove,—
I find them the very warders
Each of the other's borders.
When I love most, Love is disguised
In Hate; and when Hate is surprised
In Love, then I hate most: ask
How Love smiles through Hate's iron casque,
Hate grins through Love's rose-braided mask,—
And how, having hated thee,
I sought long and painfully
To reach thy heart, nor prick
The skin but pierce to the quick—
Ask this, my Jules, and be answered straight
By thy bride—how the painter Lutwyche can hate!

JULES *interposes.*

Lutwyche! Who else? But all of them, no doubt,
Hated me: they at Venice—presently

Their turn, however! You I shall not meet:
If I dreamed, saying this would wake me.
Keep
What's here, the gold—we cannot meet again,
Consider! and the money was but meant
For two years' travel, which is over now,
All chance or hope or care or need of it.
This—and what comes from selling these, my casts
And books and medals, except . . . let them go
Together, so the produce keeps you safe
Out of Natalia's clutches! If by chance
(For all's chance here) I should survive the gang
At Venice, root out all fifteen of them,
We might meet somewhere, since the world is wide.
[*From without is heard the voice of* PIPPA, *singing—*

Give her but a least excuse to love me!
When—where—
How—can this arm establish her above me,
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
("Hist!"—said Kate the Queen;
But "Oh!"—cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'T is only a page that carols unseen,
Crumbling your hounds their messes!")

Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What costs it to be styled a donor?
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
("Nay, list!"—bade Kate the Queen;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
"'T is only a page that carols unseen,
Fitting your hawks their jesses!")

[PIPPA *passes.*

258. *Kate the Queen:* Caterina Cornaro (c. 1454–1510), Venetian, Queen of Cyprus. Venice forced her to abdicate and assigned her as a dwelling the castle at Asolo. The most celebrated member of her court was Pietro Bembo, whose dialogue on Platonic love, the *Asolani*, derives its name from that region. The dedication of Browning's own *Asolando* refers to the Queen and her secretary Bembo.

JULES *resumes.*

What name was that the little girl sang forth?
Kate? The Cornaro, doubtless, who renounced
The crown of Cyprus to be lady here
At Asolo, where still her memory stays,
And peasants sing how once a certain page
Pined for the grace of her so far above
His power of doing good to, "Kate the Queen—
She never could be wronged, be poor," he sighed,
"Need him to help her!"
Yes, a bitter thing
To see our lady above all need of us;
Yet so we look ere we will love; not I,
But the world looks so. If whoever loves
Must be, in some sort, god or worshipper,
The blessing or the blest one, queen or page,
Why should we always choose the page's part?
Here is a woman with utter need of me,—
I find myself queen here, it seems!
How strange!
Look at the woman here with the new soul,
Like my own Psyche,—fresh upon her lips
Alit, the visionary butterfly,
Waiting my word to enter and make bright,
Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.
This body had no soul before, but slept
Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free
From taint or foul with stain, as outward things
Fastened their image on its passiveness:
Now, it will wake, feel, live—or die again!
Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
Be Art—and further, to evoke a soul
From form be nothing? This new soul is mine!
Now, to kill Lutwyche, what would that do?—save
A wretched dauber, men will hoot to death
Without me, from their hooting. Oh, to hear
God's voice plain as I heard it first, before
They broke in with their laughter! I heard them
Henceforth, not God.

272. *Cf. note to l. 258.*

To Ancona—Greece—some isle!
I wanted silence only; there is clay
Everywhere. One may do whate'er one likes
In Art: the only thing is, to make sure
That one does like it—which takes pains to know.
Scatter all this, my Phene—this mad dream!
Who, what is Lutwyche, what Natalia's friends,
What the whole world except our love—my own,
Own Phene? But I told you, did I not,
Ere night we travel for your land—some isle
With the sea's silence on it? Stand aside—
I do but break these paltry models up
To begin Art afresh. Meet Lutwyche, I—
And save him from my statue meeting him?
Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
Like a god going through his world, there stands
One mountain for a moment in the dusk,
Whole brotherhoods of cedars on its brow:
And you are ever by me while I gaze
—Are in my arms as now—as now—as now!
Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
Some unsuspected isle in far-off seas!

Talk by the way, while PIPPA *is passing from Orcana to the Turret. Two or three of the Austrian Police loitering with* BLUPHOCKS,[1] *an English vagabond, just in view of the Turret.*

*Bluphocks.** So, that is your Pippa, the little girl who passed us singing? Well, your Bishop's Intendant's[2] money shall be honestly earned:—now, don't make me that sour face because I bring the Bishop's name into the business; we know he can have nothing to do with such horrors: we know that he is a saint and all that a bishop should be, who is a great man beside.

306. *Ancona:* town on the east coast of Italy.

[1] *Bluphocks:* "Blue Fox," perhaps in reference to the *Edinburgh Review*, bound in a cover of blue and fox.

* "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" [Browning].

[2] *Intendant:* superintendent (of the Bishop's estates).

Oh were every worm a maggot, Every fly a grig,[3] *Every bough a Christmas faggot, Every tune a jig!* In fact, I have abjured all religions; but the last I inclined to, was the Armenian: for I have travelled, do you see, and at Koenigsberg, Prussia Improper[4] (so styled because there's a sort of bleak hungry sun there), you might remark over a venerable house-porch, a certain Chaldee[5] inscription; and brief as it is, a mere glance at is used absolutely to change the mood of every bearded passenger. In they turned, one and all; the young and lightsome, with no irreverent pause, the aged and decrepit, with a sensible alacrity: 't was the Grand Rabbi's abode, in short. Struck with curiosity, I lost no time in learning Syriac—(these are vowels, you dogs,—follow my stick's end in the mud—*Celarent, Darii, Ferio!*)[6] and one morning presented myself, spelling-book in hand, a, b, c,—I picked it out letter by letter, and what was the purport of this miraculous posy?[7] Some cherished legend of the past, you'll say—*"How Moses hocus-pocussed Egypt's land with fly and locust,"*—or, *"How to Jonah sounded harshish, Get thee up and go to Tarshish,"*—or *"How the angel meeting Balaam, Straight his ass returned a salaam."* In no wise! *"Shackabrack—Boach—somebody or other—Isaach, Re-cei-ver, Pur-cha-ser and Ex-chan-ger of—Stolen Goods!"* So, talk to me of the religion of a bishop! I have renounced all bishops save Bishop Beveridge[8]—mean to live so—and die—*As some Greek dog-sage, dead and merry, Hell-ward bound in Charon's wherry,*[9] *With food for both worlds, under and upper, Lupine-seed*[10] *and Hecate's supper,*[11] *And never an obolus* . . . (Though thanks to you, or this Intendant

[3] *Grig:* grasshopper or cricket.

[4] *Prussia Improper:* as distinguished from Prussia proper.

[5] *Chaldee:* a Semitic language.

[6] *Celarent, Darii, Ferio:* words coined to aid the memory in the study of Logic.

[7] *Posy:* "poesy," *i.e.*, a rhyme or motto.

[8] *Beveridge:* pun on beverage.

[9] *Wherry:* light boat. The dead were ferried across the Styx by Charon for a fee of an *obolus*, a small Athenian coin.

[10] *Lupine-seed:* an edible seed.

[11] *Hecate's supper:* the food to propitiate the goddess of the underworld.

through you, or this Bishop through his Intendant—I possess a burning pocketfull of *zwanzigers*)[12] . . . *To pay the Stygian Ferry!*

1st Policeman. There is the girl, then; go and deserve them the moment you have pointed out to us Signor Luigi and his mother. [*To the rest.*] I have been noticing a house yonder, this long while: not a shutter unclosed since morning!

2nd Policeman. Old Luca Gaddi's, that owns the silk-mills here: he dozes by the hour, wakes up, sighs deeply, says he should like to be Prince Metternich, and then dozes again, after having bidden young Sebald, the foreigner, set his wife to playing draughts. Never molest such a household, they mean well.

Bluphocks. Only, cannot you tell me something of this little Pippa, I must have to do with? One could make something of that name. Pippa—that is, short for Felippa—rhyming to *Panurge*[13] *consults Hertrippa—Believest thou, King Agrippa?*[14] Something might be done with that name.

2nd Policeman. Put into rhyme that your head and a ripe musk-melon would not be dear at half a *zwanziger!* Leave this fooling, and look out; the afternoon's over or nearly so.

3rd Policeman. Where in this passport of Signor Luigi does our Principal instruct you to watch him so narrowly? There? What's there beside a simple signature? (That English fool's busy watching.)

2nd Policeman. Flourish all round—"Put all possible obstacles in his way;" oblong dot at the end—"Detain him till further advices reach you;" scratch at bottom—"Send him back on pretence of some informality in the above;" ink-spirt on right-

[12] *Zwanziger: twenty*-kreuzer coin (Austrian).

Notice that Browning's prose, like some of his poetry, may be obscure on first reading because the thoughts are not arranged logically or chronologically with every step based on what has already been made clear, but instead are spoken naturally as they come to mind. All the necessary links in the chain are there, but in confused order. A second reading usually makes a speech such as this one much clearer.

[13] *Panurge consults Hertrippa:* concerning his marriage, in Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel.*

[14] A question put by Paul (Acts, xxvi, 27). Bluphock's references to Rabelais and to prophecy hint at his plan to entrap Pippa into a vicious life.

hand side (which is the case here)—"Arrest him at once." Why and wherefore, I don't concern myself, but my instructions amount to this: if Signor Luigi leaves home to-night for Vienna —well and good, the passport deposed with us for our *visa* is really for his own use, they have misinformed the Office, and he means well; but let him stay over to-night—there has been the pretence we suspect, the accounts of his corresponding and holding intelligence with the Carbonari[15] are correct, we arrest him at once, to-morrow comes Venice, and presently Spielberg.[16] Bluphocks makes the signal, sure enough! That is he, entering the turret with his mother, no doubt.

PART III

EVENING

SCENE.—*Inside the Turret on the Hill above Asolo.* LUIGI *and his* Mother *entering.*

Mother. If there blew wind, you'd hear a long sigh, easing
The utmost heaviness of music's heart.
Luigi. Here in the archway?
Mother. Oh no, no—in farther,
Where the echo is made, on the ridge.
Luigi. Here surely, then.
How plain the tap of my heel as I leaped up!
Hark—"Lucius Junius!" The very ghost of a voice
Whose body is caught and kept by . . . what are those?
Mere withered wallflowers, waving overhead?
They seem an elvish group with thin bleached hair
That lean out of their topmost fortress—look
And listen, mountain men, to what we say,
Hand under chin of each grave earthy face.
Up and show faces all of you!—"All of you!"
That's the king dwarf with the scarlet comb; old Franz,

[15] *Carbonari:* secret patriotic society conspiring to liberate Italy from Austria.
[16] *Spielberg:* an Austrian prison.

6. Lucius Junius Brutus led the revolt against the Tarquins which established the Roman republic.

Come down and meet your fate? Hark—"Meet your fate!"
Mother. Let him not meet it, my Luigi—do not
Go to his City! Putting crime aside,
Half of these ills of Italy are feigned:
Your Pellicos and writers for effect,
Write for effect.
Luigi. Hush! Say A. writes, and B.
Mother. These A.s and B.s write for effect, I say.
Then, evil is in its nature loud, while good
Is silent; you hear each petty injury,
None of his virtues; he is old beside,
Quiet and kind, and densely stupid. Why
Do A. and B. not kill him themselves?
Luigi. They teach
Others to kill him—me—and, if I fail,
Others to succeed; now, if A. tried and failed,
I could not teach that: mine's the lesser task.
Mother, they visit night by night . . .
Mother. You, Luigi?
Ah, will you let me tell you what you are?
Luigi. Why not? Oh, the one thing you fear to hint,
You may assure yourself I say and say
Ever to myself! At times—nay, even as now
We sit—I think my mind is touched, suspect
All is not sound: but is not knowing that,
What constitutes one sane or otherwise?
I know I am thus—so, all is right again.
I laugh at myself as through the town I walk,
And see men merry as if no Italy
Were suffering; then I ponder—"I am rich,
Young, healthy; why should this fact trouble me,
More than it troubles these?" But it does trouble.
No, trouble's a bad word: for as I walk
There's springing and melody and giddiness,
And old quaint turns and passages of my youth,
Dreams long forgotten, little in themselves,
Return to me—whatever may amuse me:
And earth seems in a truce with me, and heaven

14. *Old Franz:* Francis I, Emperor of Austria.
19. Silvio Pellico, Italian patriot and member of the Carbonari, was imprisoned in Spielberg Castle.

Accords with me, all things suspend their strife,
The very cicala laughs "There goes he, and there!
Feast him, the time is short; he is on his way
For the world's sake: feast him this once, our friend!"
And in return for all this, I can trip
Cheerfully up the scaffold-steps. I go
This evening, mother!
Mother. But mistrust yourself—
Mistrust the judgment you pronounce on him!
Luigi. Oh, there I feel—am sure that I am right!
Mother. Mistrust your judgment then, of the mere means
To this wild enterprise. Say, you are right,—
How should one in your state e'er bring to pass
What would require a cool head, a cold heart,
And a calm hand? You never will escape.
Luigi. Escape? To even wish that, would spoil all.
The dying is best part of it. Too much
Have I enjoyed these fifteen years of mine,
To leave myself excuse for longer life:
Was not life pressed down, running o'er with joy,
That I might finish with it ere my fellows
Who, sparelier feasted, make a longer stay?
I was put at the board-head, helped to all
At first; I rise up happy and content.
God must be glad one loves his world so much.
I can give news of earth to all the dead
Who ask me:—last year's sunsets, and great stars
Which had a right to come first and see ebb
The crimson wave that drifts the sun away—
Those crescent moons with notched and burning rims
That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
Impatient of the azure—and that day
In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm—
May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights—
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!
Mother. (He will not go!)
Luigi. You smile at me? 'T is true,—
Voluptuousness, grotesqueness, ghastliness,
Environ my devotedness as quaintly
As round about some antique altar wreathe
The rose festoons, goats' horns, and oxen's skulls.

Mother. See now: you reach the city, you must cross
His threshold—how?
Luigi. Oh, that's if we conspired! 90
Then would come pains in plenty, as you guess—
But guess not how the qualities most fit
For such an office, qualities I have,
Would little stead me, otherwise employed,
Yet prove of rarest merit only here. 95
Every one knows for what his excellence
Will serve, but no one ever will consider
For what his worst defect might serve: and yet
Have you not seen me range our coppice yonder
In search of a distorted ash?—I find 100
The wry spoilt branch a natural perfect bow.
Fancy the thrice-sage, thrice-precautioned man
Arriving at the palace on my errand!
No, no! I have a handsome dress packed up—
White satin here, to set off my black hair; 105
In I shall march—for you may watch your life out
Behind thick walls, make friends there to betray you;
More than one man spoils everything. March straight—
Only, no clumsy knife to fumble for,
Take the great gate, and walk (not saunter) on 110
Thro' guards and guards——I have rehearsed it all
Inside the turret here a hundred times.
Don't ask the way of whom you meet, observe!
But where they cluster thickliest is the door
Of doors; they'll let you pass—they'll never blab 115
Each to the other, he knows not the favourite,
Whence he is bound and what's his business now.
Walk in—straight up to him; you have no knife:
Be prompt, how should he scream? Then, out with you!
Italy, Italy, my Italy! 120
You're free, you're free! Oh mother, I could dream
They got about me—Andrea from his exile,
Pier from his dungeon, Gualtier from his grave!
Mother. Well, you shall go. Yet seems this patriotism
The easiest virtue for a selfish man 125
To acquire: he loves himself—and next, the world—
If he must love beyond,—but naught between:

122–3. *Andrea, Pier, Gualtier:* other conspirators.

As a short-sighted man sees naught midway
His body and the sun above. But you
Are my adored Luigi, ever obedient
To my least wish, and running o'er with love:
I could not call you cruel or unkind.
Once more, your ground for killing him!—then go!
Luigi. Now do you try me, or make sport of me?
How first the Austrians got these provinces . . .
(If that is all, I'll satisfy you soon)
—Never by conquest but by cunning, for
That treaty whereby . . .
Mother. Well?
Luigi. (Sure, he's arrived,
The tell-tale cuckoo: spring's his confidant,
And he lets out her April purposes!)
Or . . . better go at once to modern time,
He has . . . they have . . . in fact, I understand
But can't restate the matter; that's my boast:
Others could reason it out to you, and prove
Things they have made me feel.
Mother. Why go to-night?
Morn's for adventure. Jupiter is now
A morning-star. I cannot hear you, Luigi!
Luigi. "I am the bright and morning-star," saith God—
And, "to such an one I give the morning-star."
The gift of the morning-star! Have I God's gift
Of the morning-star?
Mother. Chiara will love to see
That Jupiter an evening-star next June.
Luigi. True, mother. Well for those who live through June!
Great noontides, thunder-storms, all glaring pomps
That triumph at the heels of June the god
Leading his revel through our leafy world.
Yes, Chiara will be here.
Mother. In June: remember,
Yourself appointed that month for her coming.
Luigi. Was that low noise the echo?
Mother. The night-wind.
She must be grown—with her blue eyes upturned

135. *These provinces:* of Northern Italy, given to Austria by the Congress of Vienna, 1815.

As if life were one long and sweet surprise:
In June she comes.
Luigi. We were to see together
The Titian at Treviso. There, again!

[*From without is heard the voice of* PIPPA, *singing—*

A king lived long ago,
In the morning of the world,
When earth was nigher heaven than now:
And the king's locks curled,
Disparting o'er a forehead full
As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
Of some sacrificial bull—
Only calm as a babe new-born:
For he was got to a sleepy mood,
So safe from all decrepitude,
Age with its bane, so sure gone by,
(The gods so loved him while he dreamed)
That, having lived thus long, there seemed
No need the king should ever die.

Luigi. No need that sort of king should ever die!

Among the rocks his city was:
Before his palace, in the sun,
He sat to see his people pass,
And judge them every one
From its threshold of smooth stone.
They haled him many a valley-thief
Caught in the sheep-pens, robber-chief
Swarthy and shameless, beggar-cheat,
Spy-prowler, or rough pirate found
On the sea-sand left aground;
And sometimes clung about his feet,
With bleeding lip and burning cheek,

163. An altar-piece by Titian is in the Annunziata chapel of the cathedral at Treviso.

164–222. This song in a different form had been printed in the *Monthly Repository* for November, 1835. Therefore it was doubtless not written to characterize Pippa, who now sings it. It is impossible to draw a sharp distinction between the voice of Browning and the voices of his characters.

A woman, bitterest wrong to speak
Of one with sullen thickset brows:
And sometimes from the prison-house
The angry priests a pale wretch brought,
Who through some chink had pushed and pressed
On knees and elbows, belly and breast,
Worm-like into the temple,—caught
He was by the very god,
Who ever in the darkness strode
Backward and forward, keeping watch
O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch!
These, all and every one,
The king judged, sitting in the sun.

Luigi. That king should still judge sitting in the sun!

His counsillors, on left and right,
Looked anxious up,—but no surprise
Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes
Where the very blue had turned to white.
'T is said, a Python scared one day
The breathless city, till he came,
With forky tongue and eyes on flame,
Where the old king sat to judge alway;
But when he saw the sweepy hair
Girt with a crown of berries rare
Which the god will hardly give to wear
To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare
In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,
At his wondrous forest rites,—
Seeing this, he did not dare
Approach that threshold in the sun,
Assault the old king smiling there.
Such grace had kings when the world begun!

[PIPPA *passes.*

Luigi. And such grace have they, now that the world ends!
The Python at the city, on the throne,
And brave men, God would crown for slaying him,
Lurk in bye-corners lest they fall his prey.
Are crowns yet to be won in this late time,

Which weakness makes me hesitate to reach?
'T is God's voice calls: how could I stay? Farewell!

Talk by the way, while PIPPA *is passing from the Turret to the Bishop's Brother's House, close to the Duomo S. Maria. Poor* Girls *sitting on the steps.*

1st Girl. There goes a swallow to Venice—the stout seafarer!
Seeing those birds fly, makes one wish for wings.
Let us all wish; you wish first!
2nd Girl. I? This sunset
To finish.
3rd Girl. That old—somebody I know,
Greyer and older than my grandfather,
To give me the same treat he gave last week—
Feeding me on his knee with fig-peckers,
Lampreys and red Breganze-wine, and mumbling
The while some folly about how well I fare,
Let sit and eat my supper quietly:
Since had he not himself been late this morning
Detained at—never mind where,—had he not . . .
"Eh, baggage, had I not!"—
2nd Girl. How she can lie!
3rd Girl. Look there—by the nails!
2nd Girl. What makes your fingers red?
3rd Girl. Dipping them into wine to write bad words with
On the bright table: how he laughed!
1st Girl. My turn.
Spring's come and summer's coming. I would wear
A long loose gown, down to the feet and hands,
With plaits here, close about the throat, all day;
And all night lie, the cool long nights, in bed;
And have new milk to drink, apples to eat,
Deuzans and junetings, leather-coats . . . ah, I should say,
This is away in the fields—miles!
3rd Girl. Say at once
You'd be at home: she'd always be at home!

236. *Fig-peckers:* small birds.
237. *Lampreys:* eel-like fish.
251. *Deuzans, junetings, leather-coats:* varieties of apples.

Now comes the story of the farm among
The cherry orchards, and how April snowed
White blossoms on her as she ran. Why, fool,
They've rubbed the chalk-mark out, how tall you were
Twisted your starling's neck, broken his cage,
Made a dung-hill of your garden!
1st Girl. They, destroy
My garden since I left them? well—perhaps
I would have done so: so I hope they have!
A fig-tree curled out of our cottage wall;
They called it mine, I have forgotten why,
It must have been there long ere I was born:
Cric—cric—I think I hear the wasps o'erhead
Pricking the papers strung to flutter there
And keep off birds in fruit-time—coarse long papers,
And the wasps eat them, prick them through and through.
3rd Girl. How her mouth twitches! Where was I?—before
She broke in with her wishes and long gowns
And wasps—would I be such a fool!—Oh, here!
This is my way: I answer every one
Who asks me why I make so much of him—
(If you say, "you love him"—straight "he'll not be gulled!")
"He that seduced me when I was a girl
Thus high—had eyes like yours, or hair like yours,
Brown, red, white,"—as the case may be: that pleases!
See how that beetle burnishes in the path!
There sparkles he along the dust: and, there—
Your journey to that maize-tuft spoiled at least!
1st Girl. When I was young, they said if you killed one
Of those sunshiny beetles, that his friend
Up there, would shine no more that day nor next.
2nd Girl. When you were young? Nor are you young, that's true.
How your plump arms, that were, have dropped away!
Why, I can span them. Cecco beats you still?
No matter, so you keep your curious hair.
I wish they'd find a way to dye our hair
Your colour—any lighter tint, indeed,
Than black: the men say they are sick of black,
Black eyes, black hair!

4th Girl. Sick of yours, like enough.
Do you pretend you ever tasted lampreys
And ortolans? Giovita, of the palace,
Engaged (but there's no trusting him) to slice me
Polenta with a knife that had cut up
An ortolan.
2nd Girl. Why, there! Is not that Pippa
We are to talk to, under the window,—quick,—
Where the lights are?
1st Girl. That she? No, or she would sing,
For the Intendant said . . .
3rd Girl. Oh, you sing first!
Then, if she listens and comes close . . . I'll tell you,—
Sing that song the young English noble made,
Who took you for the purest of the pure,
And meant to leave the world for you—what fun!
2nd Girl [*sings*].

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 heartful 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!

3rd Girl [*to* PIPPA *who approaches*]. Oh, you may come closer—we shall not eat you! Why, you seem the very person that the great rich handsome Englishman has fallen so violently in love with. I'll tell you all about it.

293. *Ortolans:* birds, considered a great delicacy.
295. *Polenta:* pudding made of corn meal.

PART IV

NIGHT

SCENE.—*Inside the Palace by the Duomo.* MONSIGNOR, *dismissing his* Attendants.

Monsignor. Thanks, friends, many thanks! I chiefly desire life now, that I may recompense every one of you. Most I know something of already. What, a repast prepared? *Benedicto benedicatur*[1] . . . ugh, ugh! Where was I? Oh, as you were remarking, Ugo, the weather is mild, very unlike winter-weather: but I am a Sicilian, you know, and shiver in your Julys here. To be sure, when 't was full summer at Messina,[2] as we priests used to cross in procession the great square on Assumption Day, you might see our thickest yellow tapers twist suddenly in two, each like a falling star, or sink down on themselves in a gore of wax. But go, my friends, but go! [*To the* Intendant.] Not you, Ugo! [*The others leave the apartment.*] I have long wanted to converse with you, Ugo.

Intendant. Uguccio—

Monsignor. . . . 'guccio Stefani, man! of Ascoli, Fermo and Fossombruno;—what I do need instructing about, are these accounts of your administration of my poor brother's affairs. Ugh! I shall never get through a third part of your accounts: take some of these dainties before we attempt it, however. Are you bashful to that degree? For me, a crust and water suffice.

Intendant. Do you choose this especial night to question me?

Monsignor. This night, Ugo. You have managed my late brother's affairs since the death of our elder brother: fourteen years and a month, all but three days. On the Third of December, I find him . . .

Intendant. If you have so intimate an acquaintance with

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[1] *Benedicto benedicatur:* a blessing.
[2] *Messina:* seaport in Sicily.

your brother's affairs, you will be tender of turning so far back: they will hardly bear looking into, so far back.

Monsignor. Ay, ay, ugh, ugh,—nothing but disappointments here below! I remark a considerable payment made to yourself on this Third of December. Talk of disappointments! There was a young fellow here, Jules, a foreign sculptor I did my utmost to advance, that the Church might be a gainer by us both: he was going on hopefully enough, and of a sudden he notifies to me some marvellous change that has happened in his notions of Art. Here's his letter,—"He never had a clearly conceived Ideal within his brain till to-day. Yet since his hand could manage a chisel, he has practised expressing other men's Ideals; and, in the very perfection he has attained to, he foresees an ultimate failure: his unconscious hand will pursue its prescribed course of old years, and will reproduce with a fatal expertness the ancient types, let the novel one appear never so palpably to his spirit. There is but one method of escape: confiding the virgin type to as chaste a hand, he will turn painter instead of sculptor, and paint, not carve, its characteristics,"—strike out, I dare say, a school like Correggio: how think you, Ugo?

Intendant. Is Correggio a painter?

Monsignor. Foolish Jules! and yet, after all, why foolish? He may—probably will—fail egregiously; but if there should arise a new painter, will it not be in some such way, by a poet now, or a musician (spirits who have conceived and perfected an Ideal through some other channel), transferring it to this, and escaping our conventional roads by pure ignorance of them; eh, Ugo? If you have no appetite, talk at least, Ugo!

Intendant. Sir, I can submit no longer to this course of yours. First, you select the group of which I formed one,—next you thin it gradually,—always retaining me with your smile,—and so do you proceed till you have fairly got me alone with you between four stone walls. And now then? Let this farce, this chatter end now: what is it you want with me?

Monsignor. Ugo!

Intendant. From the instant you arrived, I felt your smile

on me as you questioned me about this and the other article in those papers—why your brother should have given me this villa, that *podere,*[3]—and your nod at the end meant,—what?

Monsignor. Possibly that I wished for no loud talk here. If once you set me coughing, Ugo!—

Intendant. I have your brother's hand and seal to all I possess: now ask me what for! what service I did him—ask me!

Monsignor. I would better not: I should rip up old disgraces, let out my poor brother's weaknesses. By the way, Maffeo of Forli (which, I forgot to observe, is your true name), was the interdict ever taken off you, for robbing that church at Cesena?

Intendant. No, nor needs be: for when I murdered your brother's friend, Pasquale, for him . . .

Monsignor. Ah, he employed you in that business, did he? Well, I must let you keep, as you say, this villa and that *podere,* for fear the world should find out my relations were of so indifferent a stamp? Maffeo, my family is the oldest in Messina, and century after century have my progenitors gone on polluting themselves with every wickedness under heaven: my own father . . . rest his soul!—I have, I know, a chapel to support that it may rest: my dear two dead brothers were,—what you know tolerably well; I, the youngest, might have rivalled them in vice, if not in wealth: but from my boyhood I came out from among them, and so am not partaker of their plagues. My glory springs from another source; or if from this, by contrast only,—for I, the bishop, am the brother of your employers, Ugo. I hope to repair some of their wrong, however; so far as my brother's ill-gotten treasure reverts to me, I can stop the consequences of his crime: and not one *soldo*[4] shall escape me. Maffeo, the sword we quiet men spurn away, you shrewd knaves pick up and commit murders with; what opportunities the virtuous forego, the villanous seize. Because, to pleasure myself apart from other considerations, my food would be millet-cake, my dress sackcloth, and my couch straw,—am I therefore to let you, the offscouring

[3] *Podere:* farm.
[4] *Soldo:* Italian penny.

of the earth, seduce the poor and ignorant by appropriating a pomp these will be sure to think lessens the abominations so unaccountably and exclusively associated with it? Must I let villas and *poderi* go to you, a murderer and thief, that you may beget by means of them other murderers and thieves? No—*if* my cough would but allow me to speak!

Intendant. What am I to expect? You are going to punish me?

Monsignor. Must punish you, Maffeo. I cannot afford to cast away a chance. I have whole centuries of sin to redeem, and only a month or two of life to do it in. How should I dare to say . . .

Intendant. "Forgive us our trespasses"?

Monsignor. My friend, it is because I avow myself a very worm, sinful beyond measure, that I reject a line of conduct you would applaud perhaps. Shall I proceed, as it were, a-pardoning?—I?—who have no symptom of reason to assume that aught less than my strenuousest efforts will keep myself out of mortal sin, much less keep others out. No: I do trespass, but will not double that by allowing you to trespass.

Intendant. And suppose the villas are not your brother's to give, nor yours to take? Oh, you are hasty enough just now!

Monsignor. 1, 2—No. 3!—ay, can you read the substance of a letter, No. 3, I have received from Rome? It is precisely on the ground there mentioned, of the suspicion I have that a certain child of my late elder brother, who would have succeeded to his estates, was murdered in infancy by you, Maffeo, at the instigation of my late younger brother—that the Pontiff enjoins on me not merely the bringing that Maffeo to condign punishment, but the taking all pains, as guardian of the infant's heritage for the Church, to recover it parcel by parcel, howsoever, whensoever, and wheresoever. While you are now gnawing those fingers, the police are engaged in sealing up your papers, Maffeo, and the mere raising my voice brings my people from the next room to dispose of yourself. But I want you to confess quietly, and save me raising my voice. Why, man, do I not know the old story? The heir between the

succeeding heir, and this heir's ruffianly instrument, and their complot's effect, and the life of fear and bribes and ominous smiling silence? Did you throttle or stab my brother's infant? Come now!

Intendant. So old a story, and tell it no better? When did such an instrument ever produce such an effect? Either the child smiles in his face; or, most likely, he is not fool enough to put himself in the employer's power so thoroughly: the child is always ready to produce—as you say—howsoever, wheresoever, and whensoever.

Monsignor. Liar!

Intendant. Strike me? Ah, so might a father chastise! I shall sleep soundly to-night at least, though the gallows await me to-morrow; for what a life did I lead! Carlo of Cesena reminds me of his connivance, every time I pay his annuity; which happens commonly thrice a year. If I remonstrate, he will confess all to the good bishop—you!

Monsignor. I see through the trick, caitiff! I would you spoke truth for once. All shall be sifted, however—seven times sifted.

Intendant. And how my absurd riches encumbered me! I dared not lay claim to above half my possessions. Let me but once unbosom myself, glorify Heaven, and die!

Sir, you are no brutal dastardly idiot like your brother I frightened to death: let us understand one another. Sir, I will make away with her for you—the girl—here close at hand; not the stupid obvious kind of killing; do not speak—know nothing of her nor of me! I see her every day—saw her this morning: of course there is to be no killing; but at Rome the courtesans perish off every three years, and I can entice her thither—have indeed begun operations already. There's a certain lusty blue-eyed florid-complexioned English knave, I and the Police employ occasionally. You assent, I perceive—no, that's not it—assent I do not say—but you will let me convert my present havings and holdings into cash, and give me time to cross the Alps? 'T is but a little black-eyed pretty singing Felippa, gay silk-winding girl. I have kept her out

of harm's way up to this present; for I always intended to make your life a plague to you with her. 'T is as well settled once and for ever. Some women I have procured will pass Bluphocks, my handsome scoundrel, off for somebody; and once Pippa entangled!—you conceive? Through her singing? Is it a bargain?

[*From without is heard the voice of* PIPPA, *singing*—

Overhead the tree-tops meet,
Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;
There was naught above me, naught 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.

[PIPPA *passes.*

Monsignor [*springing up*]. My people—one and all—all—within there! Gag this villain—tie him hand and foot! He dares . . . I know not half he dares—but remove him—quick! *Miserere mei, Domine!* Quick, I say!

SCENE.—PIPPA's *chamber again. She enters it.*

The bee with his comb,
The mouse at her dray,
The grub in his tomb,

10. *Seven and one:* the seven Pleiades and one other star, probably Aldebaran, "the follower" of one of the Pleiades.
20. *Miserere mei, Domine:* "Be merciful to me, O Lord!"
22. *Dray:* nest.

Wile winter away;
But the fire-fly and hedge-shrew and lob-worm, I pray,
How fare they?
Ha, ha, thanks for your counsel, my Zanze!
"Feast upon lampreys, quaff Breganze"—
The summer of life so easy to spend,
And care for to-morrow so soon put away!
But winter hastens at summer's end,
And fire-fly, hedge-shrew, lob-worm, pray,
How fare they?
No bidding me then to . . . what did Zanze say?
"Pare your nails pearlwise, get your small feet shoes
More like" . . . (what said she?)—"and less like canoes!"
How pert that girl was!—would I be those pert
Impudent staring women! It had done me,
However, surely no such mighty hurt
To learn his name who passed that jest upon me:
No foreigner, that I can recollect,
Came, as she says, a month since, to inspect
Our silk-mills—none with blue eyes and thick rings
Of raw-silk-coloured hair, at all events.
Well, if old Luca keep his good intents,
We shall do better, see what next year brings.
I may buy shoes, my Zanze, not appear
More destitute than you perhaps next year!
Bluph . . . something! I had caught the uncouth name
But for Monsignor's people's sudden clatter
Above us—bound to spoil such idle chatter
As ours: it were indeed a serious matter
If silly talk like ours should put to shame
The pious man, the man devoid of blame,
The . . . ah but—ah but, all the same,
No mere mortal has a right
To carry that exalted air;
Best people are not angels quite:
While—not the worst of people's doings scare
The devil; so there's that proud look to spare!
Which is mere counsel to myself, mind! for
I have just been the holy Monsignor:

25. *Hedge-shrew:* field-mouse; *lob-worm:* a marine worm.

And I was you too, Luigi's gentle mother,
And you too, Luigi!—how that Luigi started
Out of the turret—doubtlessly departed
On some good errand or another,
For he passed just now in a traveller's trim,
And the sullen company that prowled
About his path, I noticed, scowled
As if they had lost a prey in him.
And I was Jules the sculptor's bride,
And I was Ottima beside,
And now what am I?—tired of fooling.
Day for folly, night for schooling!
New year's day is over and spent,
Ill or well, I must be content.
  Even my lily's asleep, I vow:
Wake up—here's a friend I've plucked you:
Call this flower a heart's-ease now!
Something rare, let me instruct you,
Is this, with petals triply swollen,
Three times spotted, thrice the pollen;
While the leaves and parts that witness
Old proportions and their fitness,
Here remain unchanged, unmoved now;
Call this pampered thing improved now!
Suppose there's a king of the flowers
And a girl-show held in his bowers—
"Look ye, buds, this growth of ours,"
Says he, "Zanze from the Brenta,
I have made her gorge polenta
Till both cheeks are near as bouncing
As her . . . name there's no pronouncing!
See this heightened colour too,
For she swilled Breganze wine
Till her nose turned deep carmine;
'T was but white when wild she grew.
And only by this Zanze's eyes
Of which we could not change the size,
The magnitude of all achieved
Otherwise, may be perceived."

67. *Trim:* dress.
90. *Brenta:* river in Italy.

Oh what a drear dark close to my poor day!
How could that red sun drop in that black cloud?
Ah Pippa, morning's rule is moved away,
Dispensed with, never more to be allowed!
Day's turn is over, now arrives the night's.
Oh lark, be day's apostle
To mavis, merle and throstle,
Bid them their betters jostle
From day and its delights!
But at night, brother howlet, over the woods,
Toll the world to thy chantry;
Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods
Full complines with gallantry:
Then, owls and bats,
Cowls and twats,
Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods,
Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry!
[*After she has begun to undress herself.*
Now, one thing I should like to really know:
How near I ever might approach all these
I only fancied being, this long day:
—Approach, I mean, so as to touch them, so
As to . . . in some way . . . move them—if you please,
Do good or evil to them some slight way.
For instance, if I wind
Silk to-morrow, my silk may bind
[*Sitting on the bedside.*
And border Ottima's cloak's hem.
Ah me, and my important part with them,
This morning's hymn half promised when I rose!
True in some sense or other, I suppose.
[*As she lies down.*
God bless me! I can pray no more to-night.
No doubt, some way or other, hymns say right.

All service ranks the same with God—
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last nor first.
[*She sleeps.*

108. *Mavis, throstle:* thrushes; *merle:* blackbird.
111. *Howlet:* owlet.
114. *Complines:* last ecclesiastical office of the day.

SHORTER POEMS

CAVALIER TUNES*

I. 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.

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* For his play *Strafford* (1837) Browning had recently been studying the period of the Civil Wars (1642–1651) in which the Royalists or Cavaliers were defeated by the Parliamentarians. "Cavalier Tunes," intended to mark the second centenary of the outbreak, were published in 1842 as the first of the *Dramatic Lyrics*. These lyrics are dramatic, and do not express Browning's own political position, since *Strafford* and the *Parleying with Charles Avison* show that he was on the side of liberalism in the seventeenth century as well as in the nineteenth. But Browning's love of color and dashing action was so much deeper than his political sympathies that these Cavalier lyrics have more vitality than his poems of liberal politics. Notice that one is a military march, the second a drinking song, the third an expression of confidence in his wife by the one who is riding away.

2. The Parliamentarians or Puritans were called Roundheads because they cropped their hair short, while the Cavaliers wore long flowing locks. This middle-class fashion of the rebels has since triumphed, like the sans-culotte (trousers, as opposed to knee breeches) of the French Revolutionaries.

3. *Pressing:* conscripting for military service.

7. John Pym (1584–1643), leader of the Parliamentary party, who helped impeach Strafford. *Carles:* churls.

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

I

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!

II

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?

13. John Hampden (1594–1643) opposed the King's right to exact ship-money, and died fighting against Prince Rupert.

14. Sir Arthur Hazelrig, one of the five Parliamentarians who moved the Bill of Attainder against Strafford. Nathaniel Fiennes, a Presbyterian, friend of Cromwell. Sir Henry Vane, the younger, leader of the Parliamentary Party.

15. Prince Rupert of Bavaria, nephew of King Charles, became a Cavalier leader.

16. *Keep we not here:* do we not keep marching along?

22. *Nottingham:* where the Cavaliers made a stand against the Parliamentarians in August, 1842.

II. *Rouse:* cheer while drinking.

8. *Found:* provided.

CHORUS.—*King Charles, and you'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

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

I

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!*

II

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!*"

III

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:

16. *Noll's damned troopers:* Oliver Cromwell's Ironsides. Lafcadio Hearn says, "the measure in the third stanza does not run smoothly like the measure of the other stanzas; it hesitates a little. But it is a great stroke of art, for it indicates the suppressed emotion of the father speaking of his dead son" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, 212).

III. "Boot and Saddle." This lyric was first published under the title "My Wife Gertrude." The Cavalier leaves his castle in the hands of his wife as he goes to Nottingham. Compare Hotspur and his wife Lady Percy in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, especially II, iii, and III, i.

10. *Castle Brancepeth:* in North England, near Durham.

Who laughs, "Good fellows ere this, by my fay,
CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

IV

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!*"

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: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà 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, 't was not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint

* Entitled "Italy" when it first appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), this and the poem later called "Count Gismond" were grouped together under the general heading "Italy and France." Browning has given concentrated expression to the Italian Renaissance—morally and esthetically—in these fifty-six lines. He was also contrasting Italy and France in their attitude towards marriage: The Italian duke looks upon his wife as his property, over whom he exercises the power of life and death. Compare the Duchess and her husband in "The Flight of the Duchess."

Ferrara: town in northern Italy, ruled in the Renaissance by dukes of the Este family, who were noted for their accomplishments and their cruelty.

3. *Frà Pandolf:* a painter who was a *frà* or brother in a monastic order (fictitious character).

16–17. Her wrist is so beautiful that it should not be concealed.

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, 't was 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

45–6. Browning, questioned as to the meaning of these lines, said, "the commands were that she should be put to death . . . or he might have had her shut up in a convent" (Corson, *Introduction to . . . Browning*, note to third ed. p. viii). The "as if" of the following line shows that she has met death, even if her husband's method of accomplishing it was indirect.

53–4. Compare the last line of Act I in *Hamlet*, "Nay, come, let's go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

COUNT GISMOND*

AIX IN PROVENCE

I

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.

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; 't was all their deed;
God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
If showing mine so caused to bleed

together," expressing a similar graciousness on the part of a Renaissance prince. But what the Duke takes for recognition of difference in rank is doubtless a feeling of aversion.

56. *Claus of Innsbruck:* like Frà Pandolf, an imaginary character. The studied indifference of the conclusion brings out how sensitive is the Duke's esthetic taste, and how callous his conscience.

* Published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) as "II. France" under the general title "Italy and France," this poem attempts to catch the spirit of Medieval France as the companion poem ("My Last Duchess") caught the spirit of Renaissance Italy (especially with reference to typical attitudes towards women). The incident is imaginary, but Arthur Symons says, "the mediaeval temper of entire confidence in the ordeal by duel has never been better rendered." The poem was very popular among the Pre-Raphaelite poets.

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 it's 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

Howe'er 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!

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 for ever, 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 shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
  And have you brought my tercel back?
I just was telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May.

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.

124. *Tercel:* a falcon.

* This appeared originally (in *Dramatic Lyrics,* 1842) as "Camp (French)" along with "Cloister (Spanish)" ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister") under the general title "Camp and Cloister." The poems are thus supposed to be doubly typical. They seem to say that aggressive war brings out the best in men, monastic life the worst.

1. *Ratisbon:* Bavarian city of Regensburg on the Danube, stormed by Napoleon in April, 1809.

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.

V

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.

11. *Lannes:* Duke of Montebello, Napoleon's general in charge of the assault.

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER*

I

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorence!
  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,

* This expression of hatred was first called "Cloister (Spanish)" and grouped with the "Incident of the French Camp" as the second of "Camp and Cloister" in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). The monk who speaks is the sort of man described in Erasmus' *Colloquies* ("Ichthyophagia"): "Nay, I myself have known a great many, that would sooner die than be persuaded to take the Sacrament after they had chanced to taste a bit of food, or let a drop of water go down their throat while they were washing their mouths; and yet the same persons will own, that they have so much malice against some, that, if they had an opportunity they would kill them; nor are they afraid with this temper of mind to approach the Lord's Table." See Matthew, xxiii, 23 ff. and Isaiah, i, 1–17 for Biblical condemnation of those who place external observances before mercy and justice. (Perhaps Brother Lawrence *is* something of a vapid bore.) In Browning's psychology the repression of natural instincts might be expected to lead to such manifestations—compare Freud's theories.

10. *Salve tibi:* hail to thee.

Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 't is 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 't were 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!

31. *Barbary corsair:* pirate from northern Africa.
35. To make a cross.
39. *Arian:* follower of Arius, heretic of the fourth century, who rejected orthodox Trinitarianism and held that the Son was created by but inferior to the Father.

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 as 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

---

49. Probably Galatians, iii, 10; or v, 19–21. These very passages, on which he hopes to trip his associate into erroneous doctrine, condemn the speaker's own hatred, envying, lasciviousness, *etc.*, and his reliance on legalities. Notice the irony of the poem.

56. *Manichee:* follower of the Manichaean heresy which asserted the eternal opposition of good (Light) and evil (Darkness) instead of the orthodox Christian doctrine that God (the Light) was "in the beginning" and created everything else. The Manichaeans held that man and certainly women were created by Satan. Somewhat like the Antinomians who followed Johannes Agricola (see Browning's poem on him), they believed that only through the activity of "the elect" can the Light be separated from Darkness. Like Marcion, their founder Mani rejected Judaism completely. One might "trip" into some of their views from reading Galatians.

We 're so proud of! *Hy Zy, Hine . . .*
'St, there 's Vespers! *Plena gratiâ*
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r—you swine!

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!

70. These meaningless words represent a growl of hatred, or perhaps echo the ringing of the vesper bell.

71–2. Latin for "Hail Virgin, full of grace." The irony of the whole poem reaches a climax at this utterly uncomprehending mention of the grace of God, which does not seem to have filled the speaker to the transformation of his baser nature.

* The first stanza was written to illustrate a picture, *The Serenade*, by Maclise; "a divine Venetian work," Browning called it. He had not seen it, "but, from Forster's description, gave it to him, in his room, *impromptu*." When he did see it, he thought the Serenade "too jolly somewhat for the notion I got from Forster—and I took up the subject in my own way" (*Letters*, ed. Hood, p. 196). He went on with the poem to tell a story entirely his own. It was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), and revised before the edition of 1849.

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! 'T is 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.

I

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!

II

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!

---

22. *Three:* Paul, Gian, and "Himself," the lady's husband.
33. *Cruce:* crucible.
37 ff. Compare these stanzas with the plan of having Pippa "pass."
47. *Wried:* wrung.

She sings.

I

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.

II

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.

I

What are we too?
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!

II

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

49–62. Lafcadio Hearn calls this "the very best we have in what might be called the 'literature of kissing,'" and explains the meaning of these two stanzas for his Japanese audience in *Appreciation of Poetry* (ed. Erskine, p. 201).

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.

I

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 passed
His stylet thro' my back; I reel;
And . . . is it thou I feel?

II

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,
'T is 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?

113. Ancient Jewish tombs are on the Lido, an island at Venice.
120. "Go find the bottom" is spoken to the jewel.
127. *Giudecca:* a canal in Venice.

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, 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

141. *Lory:* parrot.

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.

180. The limpet comes from his shell for the limpid water (lymph) when he can hear it.

186. *Schidone:* Bartolemeo Schedone (1560–1616). The four paintings mentioned here are probably imaginary.

188. *Haste-thee-Luke:* Luca-fa-presto, nickname of Luca Giordana (1632–1705), Neapolitan painter.

190. *Castelfranco:* the painter Giorgione, who came from Castelfranco (1478–1511).

192. *Ser:* Sir.

193. *Tizian:* Titian, the painter (1477–1576).

She speaks.

I

To-morrow, if a harp-string, say,
Is used to tie the jasmine back
That overfloods my room with sweets,
Contrive your Zorzi somehow meets
My Zanze! If the ribbon 's black,
The Three are watching: keep away!

II

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreathe
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!

206–7. Zorzi is the lover's servant; Zanze, the lady's.
222. *Siora:* Venetian equivalent of "Signora."
231. The sensational ending is in accord with the theatrical fashions of Browning's day; it was the great age of melodrama.

ARTEMIS PROLOGIZES*

I AM a goddess of the ambrosial courts,
And save by Here, Queen of Pride, surpassed
By none whose temples whiten this the world.
Through heaven I roll my lucid moon along;
I shed in hell o'er my pale people peace;
On earth I, caring for the creatures, guard
Each pregnant yellow wolf and fox-bitch sleek,
And every feathered mother's callow brood,
And all that love green haunts and loneliness.
Of men, the chaste adore me, hanging crowns
Of poppies red to blackness, bell and stem,

* This is spoken by the goddess Artemis as prologue to a tragedy that Browning planned to write as a sequel to the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, Browning's favorite Greek dramatist. The poem was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). The Classical style of dignity, simplicity, and restraint has been caught very well by Browning; Matthew Arnold, one of the most thoroughly Classical writers in English, wrote, "one of the very best antique fragments I know is a fragment of a Hippolytus by him!" But Browning with his scientific attitude and his historical approach has given us a goddess more like those worshipped by the ancients than is common among English poets, who usually ignore the elements of primitive, bloody superstition. It was Artemis who demanded the human sacrifice of Iphigenia, subject of two other tragedies by Euripides. Sturge Moore calls this "perhaps the most splendid 120 lines of blank verse in English" (*Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, Second Series, XXXI, 1912, 42)—and indeed one must agree with Carlyle who said to Browning, "ye ought to translate the whole of the Greek tragedians—that's your vocation" (Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 257).

In Euripides' play, Hippolytus, a young man, son of Theseus, is a chaste worshipper of Artemis (Diana) and scornful of Aphrodite (Venus). To punish him, Aphrodite inspires a passion for him in his step-mother Phaedra. When he repells Phaedra's advances, she hangs herself, leaving a note falsely accusing her step-son of improper conduct towards her. Theseus in his grief and anger prays Poseidon, god of the sea, to destroy his son, and after Hippolytus has been mortally wounded Artemis makes an appearance to reveal the truth. Browning intended to follow Virgil and Ovid, who tell that Hippolytus, after being healed by Aesculapius, was carried to Italy by Artemis and there fell in love with Aricia, one of her nymphs. Browning spells the names *Hippolutos, Phaidra, etc.*, simply transliterating the Greek names directly, a practice he defended in the preface to his *Agamemnon*. This, too, shows a characteristic historical and scientific approach; a genuinely Classical taste would prefer the traditional English equivalents.

2. *Here:* Hera (Juno), queen of the gods.

Upon my image at Athenai here;
And this dead Youth, Asclepios bends above,
Was dearest to me. He, my buskined step
To follow through the wild-wood leafy ways,
And chase the panting stag, or swift with darts
Stop the swift ounce, or lay the leopard low,
Neglected homage to another god:
Whence Aphrodite, by no midnight smoke
Of tapers lulled, in jealousy despatched
A noisome lust that, as the gadbee stings,
Possessed his stepdame Phaidra for himself
The son of Theseus her great absent spouse.
Hippolutos exclaiming in his rage
Against the fury of the Queen, she judged
Life insupportable; and, pricked at heart
An Amazonian stranger's race should dare
To scorn her, perished by the murderous cord:
Yet, ere she perished, blasted in a scroll
The fame of him her swerving made not swerve.
And Theseus, read, returning, and believed,
And exiled, in the blindness of his wrath,
The man without a crime who, last as first,
Loyal, divulged not to his sire the truth.
Now Theseus from Poseidon had obtained
That of his wishes should be granted three,
And one he imprecated straight—"Alive
May ne'er Hippolutos reach other lands!"
Poseidon heard, ai ai! And scarce the prince
Had stepped into the fixed boots of the car
That give the feet a stay against the strength
Of the Henetian horses, and around
His body flung the rein, and urged their speed
Along the rocks and shingles of the shore,
When from the gaping wave a monster flung
His obscene body in the coursers' path.

12. *Athenai:* Athens.
13. *Asclepios:* Aesculapius, son of Phoebus (Phoibos) Apollo.
27. *Amazonian stranger:* Hippolyta, mother of Hippolytus and former wife of Theseus. Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* tells of their marriage.
42. *Henetian:* of a district near Paphlagonia.

These, mad with terror, as the sea-bull sprawled
Wallowing about their feet, lost care of him
That reared them; and the master-chariot-pole
Snapping beneath their plunges like a reed,
Hippolutos, whose feet were trammelled fast,
Was yet dragged forward by the circling rein
Which either hand directed; nor they quenched
The frenzy of their flight before each trace,
Wheel-spoke and splinter of the woeful car,
Each boulder-stone, sharp stub and spiny shell,
Huge fish-bone wrecked and wreathed amid the sands
On that detested beach, was bright with blood
And morsels of his flesh: then fell the steeds
Head-foremost, crashing in their mooned fronts,
Shivering with sweat, each white eye horror-fixed.
His people, who had witnessed all afar,
Bore back the ruins of Hippolutos.
But when his sire, too swoln with pride, rejoiced
(Indomitable as a man foredoomed)
That vast Poseidon had fulfilled his prayer,
I, in a flood of glory visible,
Stood o'er my dying votary and, deed
By deed, revealed, as all took place, the truth.
Then Theseus lay the woefullest of men,
And worthily; but ere the death-veils hid
His face, the murdered prince full pardon breathed
To his rash sire. Whereat Athenai wails.

So I, who ne'er forsake my votaries,
Lest in the cross-way none the honey-cake
Should tender, nor pour out the dog's hot life;
Lest at my fane the priests disconsolate
Should dress my image with some faded poor
Few crowns, made favours of, nor dare object
Such slackness to my worshippers who turn
Elsewhere the trusting heart and loaded hand,
As they had climbed Olumpos to report
Of Artemis and nowhere found her throne—
I interposed: and, this eventful night,—
(While round the funeral pyre the populace
Stood with fierce light on their black robes which bound

Each sobbing head, while yet their hair they clipped
O'er the dead body of their withered prince,
And, in his palace, Theseus prostrated
On the cold hearth, his brow cold as the slab
'T was bruised on, groaned away the heavy grief—
As the pyre fell, and down the cross logs crashed
Sending a crowd of sparkles through the night,
And the gay fire, elate with mastery,
Towered like a serpent o'er the clotted jars
Of wine, dissolving oils and frankincense,
And splendid gums like gold),—my potency
Conveyed the perished man to my retreat
In the thrice-venerable forest here.
And this white-bearded sage who squeezes now
The berried plant, is Phoibos' son of fame,
Asclepios, whom my radiant brother taught
The doctrine of each herb and flower and root,
To know their secret's virtue and express
The saving soul of all: who so has soothed
With lavers the torn brow and murdered cheeks,
Composed the hair and brought its gloss again,
And called the red bloom to the pale skin back,
And laid the strips and jagged ends of flesh
Even once more, and slacked the sinew's knot
Of every tortured limb—that now he lies
As if mere sleep possessed him underneath
These interwoven oaks and pines. Oh cheer,
Divine presenter of the healing rod,
Thy snake, with ardent throat and lulling eye,
Twines his lithe spires around! I say, much cheer!
Proceed thou with thy wisest pharmacies!
And ye, white crowd of woodland sister-nymphs,
Ply, as the sage directs, these buds and leaves
That strew the turf around the twain! While I
Await, in fitting silence, the event.

102. *My radiant brother:* Phoibos (Apollo, god of the sun, medicine, and the arts).

RUDEL TO THE LADY OF TRIPOLI*

I

I KNOW a Mount, the gracious Sun perceives
First, when he visits, last, too, when he leaves
The world; and, vainly favoured, it repays
The day-long glory of his steadfast gaze
By no change of its large calm front of snow.
And underneath the Mount, a Flower I know,
He cannot have perceived, that changes ever
At his approach; and, in the lost endeavour
To live his life, has parted, one by one,
With all a flower's true graces, for the grace
Of being but a foolish mimic sun,
With ray-like florets round a disk-like face.

* This first appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), where it was included with "Cristina" under the general title of "Queen-Worship." Geoffrey Rudel, a Provençal troubadour of the twelfth century (who had as patron the brother of Richard the Lion-Hearted), heard of the beauty of the Countess of Tripoli (a small duchy north of Palestine, ruled by Crusaders); and without seeing the lady, Rudel fell in love with her. (A few years after writing this poem Browning himself seems to have fallen in love with Elizabeth Barrett before seeing her; note his sympathy with the chivalric temperament.) Rudel wrote songs in her praise; and later, it is said, set out for the East to see her, only to die in her arms immediately of a fatal malady incurred on the journey. He had written in her praise:

It is resolved; I cross the tide,
I leave my native place;
O God, transport me to her side,
And let me see her face!
Grant me but life that I may tell
My tale to her I love so well.

(Translation from John Rutherford, *The Troubadours*, London, 1873, p. 119.) Browning's poem is true to the sentiments, and even the manner, of Rudel's poetry before he had seen his distant love. The situation, attitudes, emotions, and poetic devices, especially the symbolism, are in accord with the Medieval conventions of Courtly Love at the time of the Crusades.

1. The Sun of Love shines on the Mount (symbolizing the Lady), but she remains cold.

6. *Flower:* the sunflower, symbol of Rudel. Compare the following stanza from an actual poem by Rudel. Browning has caught the tone:

No other love shall shed its ray
On me, if not this love afar,
A brighter one, where'er I stray
I shall not see, or near, or far.
(Translation by Thomas Roscoe.)

Men nobly call by many a name the Mount
As over many a land of theirs its large
Calm front of snow like a triumphal targe
Is reared, and still with old names, fresh names vie,
Each to its proper praise and own account:
Men call the Flower the Sunflower, sportively.

II

Oh, Angel of the East, one, one gold look
Across the waters to this twilight nook,
—The far sad waters, Angel, to this nook!

III

Dear Pilgrim, art thou for the East indeed?
Go!—saying ever as thou dost proceed,
That I, French Rudel, choose for my device
A sunflower outspread like a sacrifice
Before its idol. See! These inexpert
And hurried fingers could not fail to hurt
The woven picture; 't is a woman's skill
Indeed; but nothing baffled me, so, ill
Or well, the work is finished. Say, men feed
On songs I sing, and therefore bask the bees
On my flower's breast as on a platform broad:
But, as the flower's concern is not for these
But solely for the sun, so men applaud
In vain this Rudel, he not looking here
But to the East—the East! Go, say this, Pilgrim dear!

CRISTINA*

I

She should never have looked at me
If she meant I should not love her!

* This was published first in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) as Part II of "Queen-Worship," Part I being "Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli." It is addressed to Maria Cristina, Queen of Spain between 1829 and 1841, a dissolute coquette, hated and despised by her subjects. In 1841 the discovery of her secret marriage to an officer forced her to abdicate her regency. In this poem one man whom her glance has entranced feels that he still has her because he loves her, though she has turned aside from him. He looks forward to Heaven and the fruition of his Queen-worship.

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 't is 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 the next life quickly!
This world's use will have been ended.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION*

THERE 's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;

* In *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) this appeared with "Porphyria's Lover" under the general title, "Madhouse Cells." But it had been printed, January, 1836, in the *Monthly Repository*, edited by W. J. Fox, a popular

No suns and moons though e'er so bright
  Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
  I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
  For 't is to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
  Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
  I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
  God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
  Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
  The heavens, God thought on me his child;

---

preacher, and friend of Browning's family circle, who was moving from Calvinism to Unitarianism. Johannes Agricola, Martin Luther's assistant and opponent, was the founder of Antinomianism, a heresy espoused by some Calvinists and Wesleyans, which in its extreme form (here ascribed to Agricola himself) declared that the elect, predestined to eternal salvation, can not sin, even though they commit evil acts. (More orthodox Calvinism considers an evil act evidence that the sinner is one of those predestined to be damned.) In the *Monthly Repository* the following note is prefaced to the poem: "Antinomians, so denominated for rejecting the Law as a thing of no use under the Gospel dispensation: they say, that good works do not further, nor evil works hinder salvation; that the child of God can not sin, that God never chastiseth him, that murder, drunkenness, etc. are sins in the wicked but not in him, that the child of grace being once assured of salvation, afterwards never doubteth . . . that God doth not love any man for his holiness, that sanctification is no evidence of justification, etc. Potanus, in his Catalogue of Heresies, says John Agricola was the author of this sect, A.D. 1535.—*Dictionary of all Religions,* 1704."

The very rhythm of the poem betrays the elation of a "madhouse cell." Yet even here the speaker cannot be entirely separated from Browning whose teaching, as Dean Inge points out, "is in danger of antinomianism, as . . . 'The Flight of the Duchess' and 'The Statue and the Bust,' for example—prove." (*Studies of English Mystics,* p. 232.) Browning did not believe in Hell, and was certain that he would get to Heaven sooner or later. Thus he would disagree with what Agricola says at the end, but would agree with what he says at the beginning. It is interesting to try to determine how far in the poem Agricola may be taken as the spokesman of some of Browning's beliefs, and at what point Browning parts company with him. Browning's background was Calvinistic; notice this statement in the Westminster Confession (XVII, 1): "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved." In his "Epilogue" to *Asolando* Browning expresses his "assurance" that he will be eternally saved in the end.

Ordained a life for me, arrayed
  Its circumstances every one
To the minutest; ay, God said
  This head this hand should rest upon
  Thus, ere he fashioned star or sun.
And having thus created me,
  Thus rooted me, he bade me grow,
Guiltless for ever, like a tree
  That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
  The law by which it prospers so:
But sure that thought and word and deed
  All go to swell his love for me,
Me, made because that love had need
  Of something irreversibly
  Pledged solely its content to be.
Yes, yes, a tree which must ascend,
  No poison-gourd foredoomed to stoop!
I have God's warrant, could I blend
  All hideous sins, as in a cup,
  To drink the mingled venoms up;
Secure my nature will convert
  The draught to blossoming gladness fast:
While sweet dews turn to the gourd's hurt,
  And bloat, and while they bloat it, blast,
  As from the first its lot was cast.
For as I lie, smiled on, full-fed
  By unexhausted power to bless,
I gaze below on hell's fierce bed,
  And those its waves of flame oppress,
  Swarming in ghastly wretchedness;
Whose life on earth aspired to be
  One altar-smoke, so pure!—to win
If not love like God's love for me,
  At least to keep his anger in;
  And all their striving turned to sin.
Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
  With prayer, the broken-hearted nun,
The martyr, the wan acolyte,
  The incense-swinging child,—undone
  Before God fashioned star or sun!

43. That Browning did not believe in Hell is shown in his "Ixion," "A Camel-Driver," and "The Inn Album" (1732–91).

God, whom I praise; how could I praise,
If such as I might understand,
Make out and reckon on his ways,
And bargain for his love, and stand,
Paying a price, at his right hand?

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.

58–60. *Cf.* "All service ranks the same with God" (*Pippa Passes,* 190), generally supposed to express Browning's own belief.

* This was first printed as "Porphyria" in the *Monthly Repository,* January, 1836, accompanied by "Johannes Agricola." The two poems appeared under the general title "Madhouse Cells" in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). This is the first of Browning's short dramatic monologues and the first of his studies in abnormal psychology. Artistically it is one of his most successful poems. The speaker is the lover, who has strangled Porphyria with her own hair. See C. R. Tracy, "Porphyria's Lover," *Mod. Lang. Notes,* LII (1937), 579–80.

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!

60. In *Browning, How to Know Him* (1915, p. 106) William Lyon Phelps mentions three possible meanings for this last line: that God has not struck him with a thunderbolt and hence approves the murder; that God has disappointed him by not saying, as he expected, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased"; or that God is indifferent. Browning himself did not believe that God has an eternal system of rewards

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR*

I

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.

II

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?

III

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.

---

and punishment, but that every afterlife leads to Heaven sooner or later. Browning often intends to put the truth in the mouths of madmen and sinners.

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* This represents an Arab dashing through the desert of Metidja (in Algeria) to join his chieftain, Abd-el-Kadr (1807–1883), an Arabian leader who united the tribes to resist French invasion. Algeria, whose coast Browning had seen in 1838, was in revolt against the French when this poem was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). Notice the great metrical skill with which the poet has succeeded in making us feel the strong rhythm of the horse's gallop. Compare "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix."

IV

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!

V

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!

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN*
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,

38. Mohammed ("The Prophet") said his wife Ayesha would be his wife in Paradise.

* Written to amuse a friend's sick child, this poem evidently seemed to Browning hardly worth publishing; he sent it to the printer late as additional "copy" to fill out the last pages of *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842). It is his best known poem, and has been translated into many languages. For the sources of the story see Cooke, *Guide-Book to Browning*, pp. 291–4; DeVane, *Browning Handbook*, pp. 115–9, and Dickson, "Browning's Source for the 'Pied Piper of Hamelin'" *Studies in Philology*, XXIII (1926), pp. 327–32. Robert Browning's father, who probably introduced his son to the story, also began a poem on the subject in 1842, "not knowing that Robert had written on this subject," but did not complete it until after this poem had been published.

W. M.—William Macready, son of the great actor of the same name. Browning wrote this poem to provide him something to illustrate.

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 keys 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:
" 'T is 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.

89. *Cham:* ruler of Tartary.
91. *Nizam:* ruler of Hyderabad in India.

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, gray 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 Cæsar,
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 by harp or by 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."

123. When Cæsar's ship was captured at the siege of Alexandria (48 B.C.), it is said that Cæsar swam to safety carrying the manuscript of his *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars.*

133. *Train-oil-flasks:* flasks of whale oil.

138. *Drysaltery:* place for the sale of pickles and dried meats.

139. *Nuncheon:* light luncheon.

141. *Puncheon:* cask.

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 gypsy 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,

158. Names of famous wines from various regions.
160. *Rhenish:* wine from the Rhine district.

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.

182. *Stiver:* Dutch coin worth about two cents.

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, he 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:

220–231. There are more imposing "mountains" around Hamelin than Koppelberg Hill, which is hardly more than a slight elevation of ground, just high enough to swallow children up out of sight as they might walk out of town. This has been taken as evidence that some real event lies behind the story, like the Children's Crusade of 1211, or one of the dancing manias that sometimes spread through Medieval towns.

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 't was 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;

258–60. Matthew, xix, 24.

270–75. For some time the town of Hamelin dated its public records from this event, usually dated 1284. The date 1376 used by Browning agrees with that in the account in Verstegen's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities.*

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 fróm rats or fróm mice,
If we've promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

"HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX"*

[16—.]

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.

290 ff. Transylvania is a district in Central Europe, formerly part of Hungary. The Saxon people are widely scattered over Europe.

* Like a historical novelist, Browning is more interested in the typical atmosphere of an age or nation than in specific, verifiable events. He wrote, "there is no historical incident whatever commemorated by [this] poem . . . which I wrote at sea, off the African Coast, with a merely general

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

'T was 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 Düffeld, 't was 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 butting 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;

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impression of the characteristic warfare and besieging which abound in the annals of Flanders." He deals specially, of course, with the struggle of the Netherlands for freedom from Spain in the sixteenth century. His biographers also suggest that Browning may have been thinking of his trip to Russia in 1834 when even Belgium had no railways and he covered 1500 miles, travelling day and night as fast as the horses could go (Griffin and Minchin, *Life*, p. 61). Ghent is a city in Flanders, Belgium; Aix is Aix-la-Chapelle, in West Prussia, about 100 miles from Ghent. The other towns mentioned lie between these two, but Looz and Tongres lie out of the direct route and add about 20 miles to the ride. The poem was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). It should be compared to the prose "Night of Spurs" in Carlyle's *French Revolution*, a book from which Browning probably learned some of his historical art. The rhythm is one of breathless but tireless gallop, and suggests the modern love of speed, of which Browning is preëminently the poet.

10. *Pique:* pommel of the saddle.

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.

X

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.

PICTOR IGNOTUS*

FLORENCE, 15—.

I COULD have painted pictures like that youth's
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar
Stayed me—ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!
—Never did fate forbid me, star by star,
To outburst on your night with all my gift
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
And wide to heaven, or, straight like thunder, sunk
To the centre, of an instant; or around
Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
The license and the limit, space and bound,
Allowed to truth made visible in man.
And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
Each face obedient to its passion's law,
Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
A-tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place;
Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,—
O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup?
What did ye give me that I have not saved?
Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!)
Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth,

* The speaker is some early "unknown painter" (Latin, *pictor ignotus*), one of those who produced the monotonous series of Virgins and Saints on the monastery walls, in the period of transition in painting from Medieval religious devotion and anonymity to Renaissance individualism and love of fame and wealth. Berdoe thinks the poem might be "considered as uttered by a Fra Angelico with reference to Raffaele. The great monastic painters, like Angelico, painted under the eye of God . . . for God and through God,

As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,
Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
Through old streets named afresh from the event,
Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!—
Oh, thus to live, I and my picture, linked
With love about, and praise, till life should end,
And then not go to heaven, but linger here,
Here on my earth, earth's every man my friend,—
The thought grew frightful, 't was so wildly dear!
But a voice changed it. Glimpses of such sights
Have scared me, like the revels through a door
Of some strange house of idols at its rites!
This world seemed not the world it was before:
Mixed with my loving trusting ones, there trooped
. . . Who summoned those cold faces that begun
To press on me and judge me? Though I stooped
Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
They drew me forth, and spite of me . . . enough!
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
And where they live needs must our pictures live
And see their faces, listen to their prate,
Partakers of their daily pettiness,
Discussed of,—"This I love, or this I hate,
This likes me more, and this affects me less!"
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint,
With the same cold calm beautiful regard,—
At least no merchant traffics in my heart;

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not through men and for men" (*Browning Cyclopaedia*, pp. 338–9). Pictor Ignotus could not bear to submit pictures of real worth to the praise of the vulgar world. Contrast Fra Lippo Lippi, who represents the *rising* Renaissance, as this painter represents the dying Middle Ages. The poem was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845).

The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
  Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine
  While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
  'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
  O youth, men praise so,—holds their praise its worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
  Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?

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!

67. *Travertine:* white limestone.

* This appeared originally in *Dramatic Romances* (1845) under the title "Italy in England" as companion piece to "England in Italy" ("The Englishman in Italy"). In 1844 the Bandiera brothers led an uprising of young Italians against the Austrians in Naples. With seven of their followers they were captured and executed. This revolt aroused much interest in England, and was probably in Browning's mind when he wrote this poem, though the scene is that of the uprising of 1823 in Northern Italy. The great Italian leader Mazzini, who was living as an exile in England when the poem was published, told Browning that he had read it to fellow-refugees to show how an Englishman could sympathize with them. Sympathy with the Italian struggle for liberty is shown also in *Pippa Passes* and in Mrs. Browning's *Casa Guidi Windows.* In her letter to Browning, November 15, 1845, she praises this poem.

5. *Instant:* pressing.

8. *Charles:* Carlo Alberto, King of Sardinia. As a youth he had joined the liberal Carbonari, but later took severe measures against the "Young Italy" movement of Mazzini. In the revolt of 1848 (after this poem had been published) he led the Italians against Austria, but was defeated.

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

19. *Metternich:* reactionary Austrian statesman who organized the opposition to the revolutionary movement for liberating subject nationalities.

Rested the hopes of Italy.
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 't was 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 Tenebræ 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!"

75. *Duomo:* the cathedral.
76. *Tenebrae:* church service commemorating the Crucifixion, during the last three days of Holy Week.

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sun-rise
Than 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 employers. 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.

THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY*

PIANO DI SORRENTO

Fortù, Fortù, 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 flintstone,
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,

* First published under the title "England in Italy" in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). In early October, 1844, Browning had wandered over this Plain of Sorrento ("Piano di Sorrento") near Naples, and he mentions it in his letter to Miss Barrett, May 3, 1845.

5. *Scirocco:* the dry, hot, autumn wind from Africa—the oppressive "South Wind" of Norman Douglas' novel by that name.

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 boat reached Salerno,
So back, to a man,

47. *Frails:* baskets of rushes, containing figs.

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,

87. *Love-apple:* tomato.
97. *Lasagne:* kind of macaroni.

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

138. *Sorbs:* fruit of the service-tree.

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 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

162. *Lentisks:* mastic trees.

171. *Calvano:* mountain near Naples. See Browning's letter to Miss Barrett, May 3, 1845.

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:
'T is 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.
Fortù, 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?

199. *Isles of the Siren:* supposed to be those described in the *Odyssey.*

—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 dizened
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

250–251. *The Feast of the Rosary's Virgin:* celebrating the anniversary of the Christian victory over the Turks at the Battle of Lepanto, 1571.

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?
Fortù, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Be righteous and wise
—If 't were proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies!

265. Vincenzi Bellini (1802–35), operatic composer; Daniel François Esprit Auber (1782–1871), French composer.

269. *Image:* of the Rosary's Virgin.

289. *Corn-laws:* the tariff on grain that kept up the price of foodstuffs for the benefit of the agricultural interests. After a year of ruined crops, great suffering, and bitter agitation for free-trade, backed especially by the rising industrialists, the Corn Laws were repealed in June, 1846. The agitation was at its height when Browning finished this poem by adding the last section. When Miss Barrett criticized it on August thirteenth, it still lacked this section. In her letter of October twenty-second, 1845, she writes that the end he has added gives unity to the whole. This is one of the few direct references to contemporary politics in Browning's poetry.

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!

*In 1875, thirty years after this poem was published in *Dramatic Romances,* Browning acknowledged "with shame and contrition" that when he wrote it he had Wordsworth in mind as a "model." Wordsworth in his youth had been an ardent believer in the French Revolution, but, shocked by the course of events in France, had grown more and more conservative—though certainly not "for a handful of silver" as Browning implies here. This ascription of sordid motives to a political opponent shows a characteristic narrowness and intolerance in Browning's own "liberalism" and illustrates what Edith Batho finds too common in criticism dealing with Wordsworth, "the illiberalism of the liberal" (*The Later Wordsworth,* Cambridge, 1933). More unpleasant is the tone of moral superiority adopted by the young Victorian towards a great poet who had shown a far more profound interest in political liberalism than Browning ever felt. (Wordsworth said that for every hour spent in the composition of poetry, he had devoted twelve to the study of politics.)

1. Perhaps a reference to Wordsworth's acceptance of the Civil List Pension of £300 on October 15, 1842. Browning later admitted that such rewards did not influence Wordsworth. But for cases where a leader has actually "sold out," these lines have often been quoted as a classic condemnation.

2. "Riband" may refer to the appointment of Wordsworth as Poet Laureate, April 4, 1843.

8. He would be proud to wear royal purple even as rags.

13. Browning is mistaken; so far as we can see, Shakespeare at his most liberal was never so liberal as Wordsworth at his most conservative. On the other hand, in "House," Browning claims that Shakespeare kept his own opinions hidden completely. In both of these contradictory assumptions Browning is, in general, unsupported by the conclusions of Shakespearean

He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
  —He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II

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 footpath 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, 't is the sparrows' good-night twitter
  About your cottage eaves!

scholarship. Almost all schools of thought in the nineteenth century wished to claim Shakespeare as their own. Liberalism in English literature really begins with Milton.

32. Mrs. Orr says admiringly of the poem, "It breathes a tender regret for the moral injury he [the Leader] has inflicted on himself." But others might consider Browning's conclusion self-righteous.

* The rejected lover is in the position of Browning himself a few months before the poem appeared. After first meeting Miss Barrett on May 20, 1845, he went home and wrote her a passionate declaration of love. She replied that if he attempted any more reference to the subject, *"I will not see you again."* Browning resigned himself to saying "what mere friends say." But before the publication of the poem in *Dramatic Romances* on November sixth of that year, even his letters had become more than "a thought stronger." On October twenty-third he had written, "I love you

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!

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD*

I

Oh, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England

because I *love* you; I see you 'once a week' because I cannot see you all day long; I think of you all day long, because I most certainly could not think of you once an hour less . . ." (*Letters* I, 254). She had just seen "The Lost Mistress" in manuscript and criticized it, in her letter of October twenty-second, for being obscure in the fourth stanza. Contrast the humble but genial attitude towards "The Lost Mistress" with the pitying condescension towards "The Lost Leader"—the poem which immediately preceded this in *Dramatic Romances.*

* This title originally (in *Dramatic Romances,* 1845) covered three poems, of which this was the first; "Nobly, nobly, Cape St. Vincent" ("Home-Thoughts, from the Sea") the third; and the second "Here's to Nelson's Memory" (later the last poem under "Nationality in Drinks"). Contrast "De Gustibus."

Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brush-wood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

II

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!

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 gray;
"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.

*In *Dramatic Romances* (1845) this appeared originally as the third poem under "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad." In 1849, when the first poem assumed the general title and the second poem was dropped, this was given its present title.

1. *Cape Saint Vincent:* the scene of Nelson's victory over the Spanish, February 14, 1797.

3. *Trafalgar:* a cape east of Cadiz Bay, on the southern coast of Spain, where Nelson won his great naval victory over the French and Spanish (October 21, 1805) and lost his life. *Cf.* "Here's to Nelson's Memory" under "Nationality in Drinks."

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB AT SAINT PRAXED'S CHURCH*

ROME, 15—

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

* This appeared first, under the title "The Tomb at St. Praxed's," in *Hood's Magazine*, March, 1845, and then in *Dramatic Romances*, in November. In October, 1844, Browning visited, in Rome, the ornate Church of Saint Praxed with its tomb of Cardinal Cetive. Ruskin writes, "I know of no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin" (*Modern Painters*, pt. V, sec. 34, *Works*, ed. Cook and Wedderburne, VI, 449). Browning's success in depicting the worldly churchmen of the Renaissance has often been pointed out, but the chief Browning commentators have given less attention to the relation between this poem and the pseudo-religious estheticism that was to be an important current in the decadence of the *fin de siècle*, best represented by Walter Pater. Elizabeth Barrett in her letter to Browning, July 21, 1845, says of this grotesque-tragic poem that it is "indeed full of the power of life . . . and of death" (*Letters*, I, 134).

1. *Cf.* Ecclesiastes, i, 2.

14. A church in Rome named in honour of St. Praxed (S. Prassede), virgin daughter of a Roman senator of the first century.

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?

---

21. *Epistle-side:* the right side (as one faces the altar) where the epistle is read at the Mass.
26. *Tabernacle:* the canopy.
31. *Onion-stone:* inferior grade of marble (onion-colored) that peels off in layers.
41. *Olive-frail:* olive basket.
42. *Lapis lazuli:* a semi-precious blue stone.
46. *Frascati:* beautiful suburb of Rome.
49. Jesu Church (Il Jesu) is the Jesuit church in Rome.
51. *Cf.* Job, vii, 6.

Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black—
'T was ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
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!
'T is 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—

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58. *Thyrsus:* staff carried in Bacchanalian festivals in honor of the God of Wine. Browning is laughing at the unconscious irony in this mixture of utterly incompatible pagan and Christian elements, so common in the Renaissance.

62. *Cf.* Exodus, xxiv-xxxvi.

68. *Jasper:* a green stone with red spots. Ruskin says that this poem illustrates "one of those phases of local human character which, though belonging to Shakespere's own age, he never noticed, because it was specially Italian and un-English. . . . I mean the kind of admiration with which a southern artist regarded the *stone* he worked in; and the pride which populace or priest took in the possession of precious mountain substance, worked into the pavements of their cathedrals, and the shafts of their tombs" (*Modern Painters,* pt. V, sec. 32, vi, 447).

77. *Tully:* Marcus Tullius Cicero. As the Renaissance degenerated (first in Italy), men of superficial culture were more interested in imitating Cicero's pure Latin style than in reviving Classical wisdom.

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,

79. Domitius Ulpian (170–228 A.D.) was a Roman jurist of the period when Latin no longer had the Classical purity of Cicero's age.

82. A reference to the Sacrament of the Mass.

84. The thoroughgoing materialism of the Bishop's conception of Eternal Life shows the depth of his worldliness.

89. *Mortcloth:* funeral pall.

95. Compare line 59. The dying man is confusing Christ and St. Praxed (a woman).

99. *Elucescebat:* "he was illustrious" (in decadent Latin—Classical Latin would say "elucebat").

101. *Cf.* Job, xiv, 1

108. *Term:* a bust on a pedestal such as the Romans erected for their god Terminus.

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!

GARDEN FANCIES*

I. THE FLOWER'S NAME

I

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 robe's edge brushed the box:

116. *Gritstone:* a coarse sandstone.

* These two poems appeared in *Hood's Magazine,* July, 1844, and in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). (In 1863 the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" was put with them as "Garden Fancies No. III," but it was separated again in 1868.) Probably in both poems the garden is that of Browning's mother at Hatcham, New Cross, Surrey—the garden that was to supply roses for Miss Barrett when the poet fell in love with her a few months after the publication of these "Garden Fancies."

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 beloved for ever!
Bud, if I kiss you 't is 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?

16. This line was at first (in *Hood's Magazine*):
But this—so surely this met her eye!
20. It is not known to what flower Browning refers.

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*

I

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.

II

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.

43–44. When Browning wrote these lines he had never been in love, according to his letters to Miss Barrett (*Letters,* I, 205, and II, 159); but he was at least in love with the idea of falling in love.

* See note to general title at head of preceding poem. Browning takes Sibrandus of Aschafenburg as a typical pedant. This incident happened in the garden of Browning's mother. In a letter to Miss Barrett, January 5, 1846, Browning confesses to his "odd liking for 'vermin.'" He had a pet spider that lived "in the jaws of a great scull, whence he watched me as I wrote" (*Letters,* I, 28).

7. *Matin-prime:* early morning hour.

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 lætis,*
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,

19. *Pont-levis:* drawbridge.
30. *Chablis:* a white wine from the region of Chablis in France.
32. Browning contrasts with this pedant the great Renaissance French author of *Gargantua and Pantagruel,* Rabelais, one of Browning's favorites. Humorous, learned, grotesque, realistic, Rabelais probably exercised an influence on Browning's style.
38–39. Latin for "from the depths, with joyous accents, sing."

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!

52. *Right of trover:* the discoverer's right to a treasure.
61. John Knox (1505–72), Scotch Calvinist leader of the Reformation in Scotland. Both Browning and Miss Barrett were of Calvinistic origin. She reproached him for holding up John Knox to derision here.
67. *Sufficit:* "it is sufficient."

THE LABORATORY*

ANCIEN RÉGIME

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!

* This appeared first in *Hood's Magazine*, June, 1844, and then with "The Confessional" under the general title "France and Spain" in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Dante Gabriel Rossetti's first water-color was an illustration of this poem.

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—it is 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!

THE CONFESSIONAL*

[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

* In *Dramatic Romances* (1845) this was published with "The Laboratory" under the general title "France and Spain." The poem may have reference to the period of the Spanish Inquisition. Whatever the date of the action, Browning probably had in mind the Spain and Italy of his own day.

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 mayest 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.

X

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!

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!

* The first nine sections appeared in *Hood's Magazine*, April, 1845. Then the magazine was discontinued. The whole was published in *Dramatic Romances*, November 6, 1845. Browning wrote to Dr. Furnivall (April 15, 1883) that the idea of this poem grew out of a line in a song he heard a woman singing when he was a boy, *Following the Queen of the Gypsies, O* (*Letters*, ed. Hood, p. 217). Dulwich Wood, near Browning's

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,

home, was a favorite haunt of gypsies. The situation and character of the Duchess are much the same as in "My Last Duchess," and perhaps Browning was also thinking of the tyranny Miss Barrett was being subjected to in her home. He wrote her (July 25, 1845) that he first intended the poem to consist entirely of the gypsy's description of the life the lady was to lead with her gypsy lover, "a *real* life, not an unreal one like that with the Duke." The poem would have told of "all their wild adventures," while the "insignificance" of her former life would have been merely inferred. But Browning was less interested in telling a romantic story than in making a psychological study, and this became the main subject of the poem. Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* also uses a flight to the gypsies as an escape from "unreal" conventional life; a comparison as to what the flight is *toward* brings out the difference between the two poets. Browning's is at once a romantic tale and a realistic dramatic monologue, giving the psychology not only of the Duchess but also of the huntsman who is speaking. Notice his contempt for the fake antique of romantic fashions with their idealization of the Middle Ages. To him feudalism is a practical way of life, and he takes for granted the feudal virtues of loyalty and hardiness. He expresses himself naturally in the language of hunting, the chief feudal sport. We see the difference between a living tradition and an antiquarian imitation of the forms of the past. The scene is Central Europe, where feudalism was more vital than elsewhere in the middle of the nineteenth century. Browning passed through southwest Germany in 1834 and in 1838.

On November 15, 1845, Elizabeth Barrett says the rhythm of this poem strikes her as something new, something "between metre and prose." Earlier, Browning had submitted the poem to her for criticism and accepted her suggestions for improvement, saying (July 25), "wherever was a bud, even, in that strip of May-bloom, a live musical bee hangs now." (*Letters* I, 277, 138.)

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 chamber 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 heat 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,

78. *Merlin:* species of hawk used in hunting.
80. *Falcon-lanner:* a long-tailed hawk.

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;
'T was 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

104. Most of Germany, Bohemia, and Poland lies north of Paris. Compare also Walter Scott's romantic treatment of North Britain (Scotland, *etc.*) in prose fiction and in poems like *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. For all of this the huntsman has contempt, since to him, as to Shakespeare's Hotspur, or to many Southern planters before the Civil War, the feudal way of life was simply reality, not romance.

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 pulleys
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.

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130. *Urochs:* wild bulls; *buffle:* buffalo.

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, " 'T is 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.

X

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 household took thought and debated.
Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin

238. *St. Hubert:* patron saint of hunting.

His sire was wont to do forest-work in;
Blesseder he who nobly sunk "ohs"
And "ahs" while he tugged on his grandsire'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 Verderers,
  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 towelling,
Let her preside at the disembowelling."
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

246. *Shallop:* kind of boat.
249. With our huntsmen, light-horsemen, and guardians of the venison.
263. *Wind a mort:* sound at the death of the deer.
273. *Sealed her eyes:* closed them (term in falconry).

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,

293. *Sewer:* household officer in charge of serving.

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.

322. *Fifty-part canon:* "A canon, in music, is a piece wherein the subject is repeated in various keys: and being strictly in the repetition becomes the 'canon'—the imperative law—to what follows. Fifty of such parts would be indeed a notable peal: to manage three is enough of an achievement for a good musician" (note by Browning).

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, a 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

371. *Winkle:* periwinkle, a spiral mollusk.

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 put 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 to-morrow;
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, 't was 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 goodwill
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.

439. *Helicat:* hell-cat or witch.
454–5. *Imps the wing:* inserts new feathers in the place of broken ones in the wing.
455. *Hernshaw:* heron.
458. *Fernshaw:* fern thicket.

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

480. *Band-roll:* small ornamental streamer; *tomans:* Persian gold coins.

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 my 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?"

533. *Gor-crow:* carrion crow.
535. *Banning:* cursing.

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 furled
  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,

602. *Assay:* examination to determine quality.

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 gleam
  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 centered
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
One's self 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 owning 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 grudgment),
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.

XVI

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 fucus 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 supples a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,
Give 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.

830. *Fucus:* olive-green algae.

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-adapter,
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 staff, 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 Æthiop.
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,

864. *Morion:* a helmet.
865. *Hauberk:* coat of mail.

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, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
He also must be such a lady's scorner!
  Smooth Jacob still robs 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 further throwing
  Pearls before swine that can't value them. Amen!

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!

910. *Orson the wood-knight:* "the wild man of the forest," the terror of France, twin-brother to Valentine, born in the woods and raised by a bear. (French *ourson* means *bear's cub.*)

* The title is ironic. Contrast Browning's humorous mood with the spirit in which Hardy would treat the same theme. When this was first published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845) the two parts were without the explanatory subtitles "Fame" and "Love," which were added in 1849.

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!*)

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?

II

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!

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

* This was published in *Dramatic Romances* on November 6, 1845. On December first, Miss Barrett sent Browning a lock of her hair. In her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, concerning their love affair, sonnet XVIII begins

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee.

** This poem and the following were first published (in *Dramatic Romances*, 1845), under the general title "Night and Morning," as "I.

In fiery ringlets from their sleep,
As I gain the cove with pushing prow,
And quench its speed i' the slushy sand.

II

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!

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.

NATIONALITY IN DRINKS**

I

My heart sank with our Claret-flask,
Just now, beneath the heavy sedges
That serves 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.

Night" and "II. Morning." Browning said that in both poems the man is speaking, and that the first part implies "that such raptures are self-sufficient and enduring," while the second part is a confession of "how fleeting" is that belief.

* See explanation under preceding poem.

3. *Him* refers to the sun.

** These three poems were first brought together in 1863 with the subtitles "I. Claret," "II. Tokay," "III. Beer." All three appeared in *Dramatic Romances* in 1845, but the third was classified as Number II of "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad." (In the collected edition of 1849 all three were omitted, probably because of the disapproval of Browning's wife.) "Claret and Tokay" had appeared in *Hood's Magazine*, June, 1844. This is another study in the nationally typical: Claret, the French wine, suggests a gay French lady (modern, in contrast to "The Laboratory" of the

II

Our laughing little flash, 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!

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 naught 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!

Here's to Nelson's memory!
'T is 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!

Ancien Régime); Tokay, the Hungarian wine, is "a pygmy castle-warder"; British beer is drunk to the memory of England's naval hero who won the Battle of Trafalgar against Napoleon's fleet in 1805.

10. *Buda:* ancient capital of Hungary.
16. *Sir Ausbruch* originally read "from Ausbruch."

1–3. Browning passed Trafalgar the second time in late August, 1844. See "Home-Thoughts from the Sea," a companion poem.

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!"

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,

11. Nelson's coat was to be seen in the museum at Greenwich, near Browning's home. Nelson had lost an arm at Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

* The title is from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, V, i, 384: "And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges." The situation is imaginary, but DeVane thinks Browning is doing a "fancy portrait" of his friend Domett. (*Browning Handbook*, p. 162.) "Time's Revenges" was published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Compare Hardy's poems on ironic situations.

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 quain
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,

46. *The Florentine:* Dante.
54–5. The lines read, originally,
As all my genius, all my learning
Leave me, where there's no returning.

The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her mouth; 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!

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

* Based on Leigh Hunt's poem, "The Glove and the Lions," which condemns the lady, Browning's poem of course makes out a case for her. His own experience as a lover lies behind his chivalric interpretation of her motive, an interpretation, as Elizabeth Barrett told him, so plainly Browning's that women should all be grateful. (*Letters,* I, 261). It appeared in *Dramatic Romances* (1845). Peter Ronsard, French poet of the sixteenth century, is speaking (*loquitur*).

1. Francis I, King of France at the beginning of the sixteenth century, patron of poets and artists.

12. *Naso:* Ovid, the Roman poet (43 B.C.–18 A.D.), author of the *Metamorphoses.*

14. Ixion was bound to a constantly turning wheel in Hades for presuming to love Hera, queen of the gods.

—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 he 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 hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
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
Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu.
One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy

34. *Scarab:* a large beetle.
45. Clement Marot (1496–1544), French poet who wrote paraphrases of the Psalms.
50. "That lion of the tribe of Judah."

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 fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame 't was, 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.

82. *Marignan:* Marignano, a town in northern Italy, where Francis had won a great victory in 1515.

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
Ne'er 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—" 't was 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,—behooves 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!

96. The Kaffirs of South Africa hunted lions.

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)

162. The slaying of the Nemean lion was one of the twelve labors of Hercules.

—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 't was 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.

CHRISTMAS EVE*

I

Out of the little chapel I burst
Into the fresh night-air again.
Five minutes full, I waited first
In the doorway, to escape the rain

189. "Go to meet the coming ills."
190. *Theorbo:* a stringed instrument, to which Ronsard has been singing this poem.

* This poem, appearing in *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day,* 1850, portrays graphically, in extreme form, the three kinds of Christianity that were most

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,
Six feet long by three 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,
That congregation, still arriving,
Some of them by the main road, 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

---

prominent during the last two centuries: the Evangelical Protestant (now often called Fundamentalist); the Catholic; and the Rationalistic (or ultra-Modernist). Here, moreover, Browning first formulated his own religious views, and in all his later elaborations of his ideas he did not alter his main conclusions. This was the first of Browning's books, except *Strafford,* to be printed at the publisher's expense, and it is the only poetry he published during the first nine years of his married life. Tennyson's chief religious poem, *In Memoriam,* was also published in 1850.

The extreme Protestants are represented in "Christmas Eve" by the Dissenters or Non-Conformists whose meeting the poet paints in the most unattractive colors (portraying the traits Arnold ascribes to them) in order to say that even at its worst Browning prefers Dissent. He was not only brought up in a Non-Conformist family, but lived in the middle class suburb Camberwell, the very center of Non-Conformity. The influence of Elizabeth Barrett was all in the same direction, for she too attended an Independent (Congregational) Chapel. But in spite of his Protestant prejudices, Browning has drawn with great power the rapture of the Catholic worshipper at the miracle of the Mass of Christmas.

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 my 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 ends dry
Of a draggled shawl, and add thereby

46. See Genesis, xix, 17 and 30.

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 got the same interrogation—
"What, you the alien, you have ventured
  To take with us, the 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 lantern I stood under,
  Shoot its blue lip at me, rebutting
As it were, the luckless cause of scandal:
I verily fancied the zealous light
(In the chapel's secret, too!) for spite
Would shudder itself clean off the wick,
With the airs of a Saint John's Candlestick.

---

81. *Penitent Thief: cf.* Luke, xxiii, 40.
89. "And Gallio cared for none of those things" (Acts, xviii, 17)
92. *Tallyho:* cry to urge on the hounds.
102. *Saint John's Candlestick:* see Revelation, i, 12 and 20.

There was no standing it much longer.
"Good folks," thought 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,
And bid 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!
I prefer, if you please, 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 vestiment:
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,
And 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 all assembled and one sheep over,
Whose lot, as the weather pleased, was mine.

---

107. Spoken in irony; *cf.* Job, xii, 2.
108. *Seven Churches: cf.* Revelation, i, 20.
120. *Vestiment:* vestment. (See Matthew, xxii, 11ff.)
132. *Pentacle:* figure supposed to have magical significance.

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 Sibyl
To guess the cause of it all, in a twinkling:
No sooner our friend had got an inkling
Of treasure hid in the Holy Bible,
(Whene'er 't 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,
'T is odds but I might have borne in quiet
A qualm or two at my spiritual diet,
Or (who can tell?) perchance even mustered
Somewhat to urge in behalf of the sermon:

139–186. Compare this section (III) with Elizabeth Barrett's remark in her letter to Browning, August 15, 1846, concerning the Dissenters, "the Formula is rampant among them as among others . . . you feel moreover bigotry and ignorance pressing on you on all sides, till you gasp for breath like one strangled. But better this, even, than what is elsewhere" (*Letters*, II, 427).

143. Like a heavy mass of crude metal.

147. *Sibyl:* ancient prophetess.

157. *In severance:* severed from the context that would show the meaning.

But the flock sat 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. 'T was too provoking!
My gorge rose at the nonsense and stuff of it;
  So, 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 shown 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 flames bellow,
All a-simmer with intense strain
To let her through,—then blank again,
At the hope of her appearance failing.

170. *Dew of Hermon:* see Psalms, cxxxiii, 3.

Just by the chapel a break in the railing
Shows a narrow path directly across;
'T is 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 lighter, 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 damps?
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)

232–8. See Genesis, xl.

A sort of reviving and reproducing,
  More or less perfectly, (who can tell?)
The mood itself, which strengthens by using;
  And how that 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.
'T is the taught already that profits 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 cast 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 self-same weary thing take place?
  The same endeavour to make you believe,
And with much 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;

262. See Hebrews, xii, 22–24.

Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense
Of the 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 naught:
But also, God, whose pleasure brought
Man into being, stands away
As it were a 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, note: 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 't is not a thing to bear increase
As power does: 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 is 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 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,
  With this sky of thine, that I now walk under,
And glory in thee for, as 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.
'T was 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 only the next,
  The second of a wondrous sequence,
  Reaching in rare and rarer frequence,
Till the heaven of heavens were circumflexed,

385. Browning said that all the incidents of this poem are imaginary, "save the lunar rainbow: I saw that" (Nicoll and Wise, *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, I, 456).

389. *Chorded:* in harmony.

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, forever in thy presence,
In ecstatic 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 serpentining 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 recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise;
My mind filled with the cataract
At one bound of the mighty fact.
"I remember, 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 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?

467–8. *Cf.* John, iv, 24.

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, 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 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 the 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 these fountains play,
Growing up eternally

529. The dome of St. Peter's Cathedral, Rome.

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 pavements 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,

562. *Basilica:* the Cathedral.
573. *Baldachin:* the canopy over the altar, 95 feet high, supported by magnificent twisted brazen columns designed by Bernini.
578. *Behemoth:* see Job, xl, 15 ff.
579. At the elevation of the Host or Sacrament.

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, 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 sit I here on the threshold-stone
Left till He return, 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 mine. 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.

595. See Revelation, i, 18.

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
Able 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.
—'T was 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 sat 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,

652. Browning agrees with Evangelical Christianity in rejecting rationalism as a guide to life.

And exult with hearts set free,
In blessed imbecility
Scrawled, perchance, on some torn sheet
Leaving Sallust incomplete.
Gone, his pride of sculptor, painter!
—Love, while able to acquaint her
While 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 filthy saints rebuked the gust
With which they chanced to get a sight
Of some dear naked Aphrodite
They 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 chosen 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,

663–4. Contemptuous of pagan culture, some of the early Christians wrote on sheets torn from ancient manuscripts. The lost portions of the writings of Sallust, Roman historian, may have been destroyed in this way.

674. Terpander was the father of Greek music; his bird was the nightingale.

680. *Aphrodite:* Greek goddess of Love and Beauty.

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 sense's 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, 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 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, a man 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 mind 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,
  Were 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!
My heart beat lighter and more light:
And still, 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, Frankfort
Or Göttingen, 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

793. *Göttingen:* German university noted for its contribution to Biblical scholarship (the "Higher Criticism").

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 a 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

810. Browning considers Biblical scholarship ridiculously "highbrow." This is aimed especially at David Friedrich Strauss whose book, *The Life of Jesus,* which attacked the Gospels as "myths," had appeared in the English translation of Marian Evans (George Eliot) in 1846. In sections XV–XVII of this poem, "starting with the premises of Strauss, the Göttingen professor draws conclusions which resemble those of Comte and Matthew Arnold rather than those set forth in the *Leben Jesu* and the *Vergängliches und Bleibendes in Christentum*" (Raymond, W. O., "Browning and the Higher Criticism," PMLA, XLIV, 1929, p. 600).

834. *Hake:* bunch.

837. *Young England:* the political counterpart (here, the equivalent) of the Oxford Movement which considered the Church of England to be Catholic rather than Protestant, and hence came to emphasize ritual, vest-

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 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 't were 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,
'T was obviously as well to take
The popular story,—understanding
How the ineptitude of the time,

ments, *etc.* Its leader, John Henry Newman, had just recently shocked Protestant England by going on beyond this "Anglo-Catholicism" and joining the Roman Catholic Church. *Cf.* Thackeray's clergyman Charles Honeyman in *The Newcomes* (1853–5).

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, left, 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

875. *Individuum:* Latin for an indivisible unit.
900. *Mephitic:* foul or poisonous.

Into the cloud her wings she buoys on.
  Each, that thus sets the pure air seething,
  May poison it for healthy breathing—
But the Critic leaves no air to poison;
Pumps out with 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, more his hands hauled nets, they hardened—
All, down to you, the man of men,

941. St. John and St. Paul were men of Greek culture which was largely Attic (Athenian) in origin.

Professing here at Göttingen,
Compose Christ's flock! They, 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 whence 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,

962–3. The letter *Aleph* (A) in Hebrew was suggested by an ox head, and *Gimel* (G) means camel.

966–7. Browning here refers to the theory which gives morality a humanistic basis by establishing *criteria of right* and *wrong* upon the verdict of universal human judgment.

973. William Harvey (1578–1657) discovered the circulation of the blood.

979 ff. Compare Browning's "The Names" concerning these different degrees of respect.

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 man's head,
And what, when all's done, shall be said
But—the more gifted he, I ween!
  That one's made Christ, this other, 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?

1003. *Euclid:* the great Greek mathematician of the third century B.C. whose *Elements* served as an introduction to geometry for twenty centuries.

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,
'T is one thing to know, and another to practice.
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?

1041–2. Compare "A Defence of Poetry" by Shelley, whom Browning admired most of all nineteenth-century poets: "We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice . . . we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine . . . and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave." But the conclusions drawn by Browning are very different from Shelley's.

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 sympathize
With the lurking drop of blood that lies
In the desiccated brain's white roots
Without 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 dumb)
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 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 damage done rewardingly,

1051–6. Many Christian thinkers would disagree with Browning as to which of these Christ emphasized. *Cf.* John xviii, 36–38.

1078. *Levigable:* capable of being reduced to powder.

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 Turk-like brandishing a scimitar
O'er anapæsts in comic-trimeter;
Or curing the halt and maimed 'Iketides,'
While we lounged on at our indebted ease:
Instead of which, a tricksy demon
Sets her at Titus or Philemon!
When ignorance wags his ears of leather
And hates God's word, 't is 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,

1101. *Middle Verb:* a reflexive form.

1103. The three-syllable foot with accent on the last syllable is unusual in trimeter (three-foot) verse.

1104. *'Iketides':* "The Suppliants," a tragedy by Aeschylus that exists only in fragmentary form.

1107. The question is whether books of the Bible, like *Titus* and *Philemon*, should be studied by the scholarly methods that may be tolerated when applied to Aeschylus. At the end of his life (in "Development") Browning even objects to such research applied to the *Iliad*.

1115. The German poet Heine, converted by illness to a more spiritual life.

And, without plainest heavenly warrant,
I were ready and glad to give the world up—
But still, when you rub 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 sat 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,
Teaching that both our faiths (though duller
His shine through a dull spirit's prism)
Originally had one colour!
Better pursue a pilgrimage
Through ancient and through modern times
To many peoples, various climes,

1126. *Pravity:* depravity. Matthew Arnold in his religious position was close to the school attacked here, yet called himself a Christian and rejected Deism.

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?

But soon my soul repairs its fault
When, sharpening sense's 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:
But what *is* the world to me, *for sorrow*
Or joy in its censure, 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 fight 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.
For 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 sat 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 mistakable,
Of her milk of kindness turning rancid.
In short, a spectator might have fancied
That I had nodded, betrayed by slumber,
Yet kept my seat, a warning ghastly,
Through the heads of the sermon, nine in number,
And woke up now at the tenth and lastly.
But again, could such 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 ungrammatic.
Great news! the preacher is found no Pascal,

1242. *Raree-show:* peep-show.
1268. *Pascal:* great French religious thinker (1623–1662).

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 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, dispatched 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 couldst, at wink or word, convulse
The world with the leap of a river-pulse,—
Therefore I turned from the oozings 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:
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
That mode of worship, as most to his mind,
Where earthly aids being cast behind,

1275. *Jeremy Taylor:* one of the greatest English writers of sermons (1613–1667).

1292. *Breccia:* stone of variegated colors, composed of different minerals.

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 a 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,
Turned sick at last of to-day's buffoonery,
  Of posturings and petticoatings,
  Beside his 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—
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,

1305–7. *Cf.* another statement of Protestant preferences in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853): "I told him how we kept fewer forms between us and God; retaining, indeed, no more than, perhaps, the nature of mankind in the mass rendered necessary for due observance" (ch. XXXVI).

1326. Ferdinand II of Naples and Sicily was a reactionary Bourbon despot. The Brownings were disappointed at the failure of the new and liberal Pope, Pius IX, to defend liberalism as they had hoped he would.

While attacking the choice of my neighbours round,
With none of 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 frothy spume and frequent sputter
Prove that the soul's depths boil in earnest!
May 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 of Whitfield's Collection,
To conclude with the doxology.

EASTER-DAY*

I

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 of the human soul—
For that is always hard to do;
But hard, I mean, for me and you
To realize it, more or less

1358. *Whitfield's Collection:* a hymnal used especially by Calvinistic Methodists.

* See note to "Christmas Eve," with which this was published in 1850. While neither of the two men who are speaking in the poem completely expresses Browning's usual attitude, between them they set forth his first full "confession of faith." Browning holds that the one sufficient basis for Christian Hope and Faith is Love—not Nature, Art, or Intellect. *Cf.* "Epistle of Karshish," footnote to 305 ff.

With even the moderate success
Which commonly repays our strife
To carry out the aims of life.
"This aim is greater," you will say,
"And so more arduous every way."
—But the importance of their fruits
Still proves to man, in all pursuits,
Proportional encouragement.
"Then, what if it be God's intent
That labour to this one result
Should 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 crowns 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 make acquist,

46. *Acquist:* acquisition.

Through the brief minute's 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 when 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 its 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,

59–61. Extreme Protestants have emphasized salvation through faith rather than through meritorious works.

71–2. *Cf.* "*Bishop Blougram's Apology*," 634 and note.

I found belief in it too hard;
And she and I have our reward.
—Yet here a doubt peeps: well for us
Weak beings, to go using thus
A touchstone for our little ends,
Trying 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 as a natural tree,
Stand as a rock, soar up like fire.
The world 's so perfect and entire,
Quite above faith, so right and fit!
Go there, walk up and down in it!
No. The 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 stand carping at)
This time flung back unanswered flat,—

91–2. *Cf.* Jeans, Sir James, *The Mysterious Universe* (New Rev. Ed. New York and London, 1932, p. 160), "Plutarch records that Plato used to say that God for ever geometrises." Jeans endorses this view (p. 165); "from the intrinsic evidence of his creature, the Great Architect of the Universe now begins to appear as a pure mathematician." *Cf.* Plato's *Timaeus* and Plutarch's *Symposiacs,* VIII, 2.

96–100. Browning did not place a high value on perfection. In Browning's view, life is a struggle towards perfection, and, in striving, man grows in moral stature. He concludes that the world, with all its imperfections, is a fit scene for man's development, which it would not be if it were perfect, because then it would be so out of tune with man as to offer him no challenge. *Cf.* "Reverie," 203–5.

Beside, perhaps, as many more
As those that drove you out before,
Now added, where was little need.
Questions impossible, indeed,
To us who sat 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 freed 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, " 'T is well averred,
A scientific faith 's absurd,
—Frustrates the very end 't was 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 be 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 if some interval
Of life less plainly may 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

123. *Cf.* E. J. Watkin, *Catholic Art and Culture* (New York, 1944), p. 190, "Romanticism denies reason, the foundation upon which religious faith must build." In this sense even the Pope in *The Ring and the Book* is a romantic, expressing Browning's views.

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 say,
'My list of *coleopteral*'
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! 'T is 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

154. *Coleoptera:* an order of insects including the beetles.
160. *Grignon with the Regent's crest:* snuff-box made by Pierre Grignon (1723–1784) with the crest of the Duke of Orleans when he was acting as Regent.
169. *Semitic guess:* a guess concerning the meaning of a text written in a language like Hebrew.
170. *Blindfold chess:* chess in which the players cannot see the board.

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 flap 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,
And puzzle out who 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,

180. *Jonah's whale translatable:* by interpreters refusing to accept literally the story of Jonah.

193. *Orpheus:* son of Apollo and mythological personification of music. The Orphic mysteries have been compared with Christianity.

194. *Dionysius Zagrias:* Bacchus the Sufferer, whose story is in some ways parallel to that of Christ. Browning is sarcastic at the theory that the Bible, like Greek religion, embodies mythological expression of the interests of the human heart.

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
A dispensation 's merciful,
More pettishly we try and cull
Briers, 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?—(thus 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,—all 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

227. Browning may well ask this question, for he does seem to assume a similar attitude in the rest of his poetry, where he is less Puritanical. The austere mood of this one poem may be accounted for by the recent death of his mother. Even his wife, who had influenced him to express these views, complained of what she called the *asceticism* of "Easter-Day." (*Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. Kenyon, 1897, I, 449.)

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, 't were 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,
Give licence formal 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 or 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

245–9. *Cf.* the doctrine of Original Sin stressed by the sect to which Browning's family belonged, with its assumption that all men were implicated in the sin of Adam, and, so far as their own merits are concerned, already deserve damnation as soon as they are born.

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 't is 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
Each friend 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 't were 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

303–7. Browning answers his opponents by plucking up heart to jeer at them as idiots, blind as moles groping in manure.

And match the noble hearts of them!
Thus the contemner we contemn,—
And, when doubt strikes us, thus 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 here you drive
At causing me to lose what most
Yourself would mourn for had you lost!"

XII

But, do you see, my friend, that thus
You leave Saint 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 I allege,
Quite other than a condiment
To heighten flavour 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 . . .

320–21. Browning makes clearer his view that faith, not works, is the essential problem for the Christian.

322. *Wis; wot:* think.

330. Leave the faith of St. Paul for the "blind hopes" given to Man, according to Aeschylus, by the Titan Prometheus.

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 if I carry through
My purpose, if my words in you
Find a live actual listener,
My story, reason must aver
False after all—the happy chance!
While, if each human countenance
I meet in London day by 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,
Upon 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.

360. According to the extreme Protestant tradition, most men do not have enough faith or grace to be saved.

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 my faith there, or none at all.
"How were my case, now, did I fall
Dead here, this minute—should I lie
Faithful or faithless?" Note that I
Inclined thus ever!—little prone
For instance, when I lay 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

393. *Lucumons:* Etruscan patriarchs, whose "kingcraft" may have influenced the Roman rulers.

394. *Fourier's scheme:* the socialism of François Fourier (1772–1837). Browning felt that the weighing of evidence appropriate to other subjects concerned with history and human conduct should not be tolerated in dealing with "That History" in the Bible, which must be accepted literally, "all or none."

Beside, that, should the dreadful scout
Really lie hid there, and leap out
At first turn of the rusty key,
Mine were small gain that she could see,
Killed not in bed but on 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 progress and not flight.
Through baffling senses passionate,
Fancies as restless,—with a freight
Of knowledge cumbersome enough
To sink your ship when waves grow rough,
Though meant for 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, nor 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

447. *'Tice:* entice.

By storms, a mere wreck, waterlogged,
Masts by the board, her 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 reach 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 skylark, taken by surprise
As we ourselves, shall recognize
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 laugh, 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!'

476. See 2 Peter iii, 10.
488. *Queen Mab:* a fairy mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 54 ff.

So shall we marvel why we grudged
Our labour here, and idly judged
Of heaven, we might have gained, but lose!
Lose? Talk of loss, and I refuse
To plead at all! You speak no worse
Nor better than my ancient nurse
When she would tell me in my youth
I well deserved that shapes uncouth
Frighted and teased me in my sleep:
Why could 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,—
Just so great conflagrations kill
Night overhead, and rise and sink,
Reflected. Now the fire would shrink
And wither off the blasted face
Of heaven, and I distinct might 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,
And unevadable, the fact.
My brain held all the same 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: since my life had end
And my choice with it—best defend,
Applaud both! I resolved to say,
"So was I framed by thee, such way

I put to use thy senses here!
It was so beautiful, so near,
Thy world,—what could I then but choose
My part there? Nor did I refuse
To look above the transient boon
Of time; but it was hard so soon
As in a short life, to give up
Such beauty: I could put the cup,
Undrained of half its fulness, 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,
Hast made its complement a hell?"

XVII

A final belch of fire like blood,
Overbroke all heaven in one flood
Of doom. Then fire was sky, and sky
Fire, and both, one brief ecstasy,
Then ashes. But I heard no noise
(Whatever was) because a voice
Beside me spoke thus, "Life is done,
Time ends, Eternity 's begun,
And thou art judged for evermore."

XVIII

I looked up; all seemed as before;
Of that cloud-Tophet overhead

566–78. Browning usually does not recommend a complete renunciation of the world. *Cf.* "The Guardian Angel," 33–5.
598. *Tophet:* place of burning.

No trace was left: I saw instead
The common round me, and the sky
Above, stretched drear and emptily
Of life. 'T was 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 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,
Leans o'er it, while the years pursue
Their course, unable to abate
Its paradisal laugh at fate!
One morn,—the Arab staggers blind
O'er a new tract of death, calcined
To ashes, silence, nothingness,—
And strives, with dizzy wits, to guess
Whence fell the blow. What if, 'twixt skies
And prostrate earth, he should surprise

615. See Revelation xx, 11.

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 magnific pall
Mantled in massive fold and fall
His head, 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 hadst to do
With absolute omnipotence,
Able its judgments to dispense
To the whole race, as every one
Were its sole object. Judgment 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 plain word,
To heaven and to infinity.
Here the probation was for thee,

641. See Genesis xix, 28.

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
'T was 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 yearned, 'This were to live
Indeed, if rays, completely pure
From flesh that dulls them, could endure,—
Not shoot in meteor-light athwart
Our earth, to show how cold and swart
It lies beneath their fire, but stand
As stars do, destined to expand,
Prove veritable worlds, our home!'
Thou saidst,—'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: 't is 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?"

671–3. *Cf. The Ring and the Book*, "The Pope," 1436–7.
Life is probation and the earth no goal
But starting-point of man.

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 sat 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,

708 ff. This conception of Hell is developed by Bernard Shaw in *Man and Superman*, III.

And recollected I might learn
From books, how many myriad sorts
Of fern exist, to 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

Then 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 scarce one
Was able, in a million,
To feel that any marvel lay
In objects round his feet all day;
Scarce 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 refledge!
All partial beauty was a pledge
Of beauty in its plenitude:
But since the pledge sufficed thy mood,
Retain it! plentitude be theirs
Who looked above!"

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749. *Bee-bird:* tropical humming-bird.
769–770. This is one of the central doctrines in Browning's thought.

XXV

Though sharp despairs
Shot through me, I held up, bore on.
"What matter though my trust were gone
From natural things? Henceforth my part
Be less with nature than with art!
For art supplants, gives mainly worth
To nature; 't is 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 mere tentatives which 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 Buonarroti'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 forms, as still they burst
Upon him? How will he quench thirst,

777–782. In general, Browning treats "Italy's paintings" and other products of human art as of higher interest than "natural things."
799. *Buonarroti:* Michelangelo, Italian artist (1475–1564).

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 pages 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. But through
Life pierce,—and what has earth to do,
Its utmost beauty's appanage,
With the requirement of next stage?
Did God pronounce earth 'very good'?
Needs must it be, while understood
For man's preparatory state;
Naught here to heighten nor abate;
Transfer the same completeness here,
To swerve 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 light would chafe
The creature's new world-widened sense,
Dazzled to death at evidence
Of all the sounds and sights that broke
Innumerous at the chisel's stroke,—
So, in God's eye, the earth's first stuff
Was, neither more nor less, enough

834. *Cf.* Browning's belief in Progress.

To house man's soul, man's need fulfil.
Man 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 stinted soul, I nipped
Of budding wings, else now equipped
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,
Which 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 on the earth its gleams were meant
To sting with hunger for full light,—
Made visible in verse, despite

The veiling weakness,—truth by means
Of fable, showing while its screens,—
Since highest truth, man e'er supplied,
Was ever fable on outside.
Such gleams made bright the earth an age;
Now the whole sun '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 love be henceforth masks and shows,
Not living 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 look on me; and I will match
Departed love with love, attach
Old memories to new dreams, nor scorn
The 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,—
Leave to love, 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? 'T is 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,
Beside 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,—
Man thought man, for his kind's behoof,
Both could and did invent that scheme
Of perfect love: 't would 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 gray 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

1021 ff. This is what Browning's optimism really means.

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?

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

* Possibly the scene is the Roman Campagna (*cf.* "Two in the Campagna"); but Rome never had a hundred gates. This ancient city seems more like Babylon, as described by Herodotus, with details drawn from the Apocalypse of St. John, and perhaps 1 Chronicles, xviii and xxi. The poem is a good example of very romantic Victorian poetry.

On New Year's, 1852, in Paris, Browning resolved to write a poem a day. On that day he wrote "Women and Roses," on the next, "Childe Roland," and on January 3 "Love Among the Ruins." Browning is the inventor of the beautiful meter used with success in the poem. It was published as the first poem in *Men and Women* (1855), the first volume of poetry (except *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day*, a theological discussion) published by Browning after his romantic marriage and removal to Italy.

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.

---

39. *Caper:* a low prickly shrub.

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.

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.

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

* It seems to the speaker that such a perfect union can not be destroyed by the sharp word that has divided them. This was published in *Men and Women* (1855), after the Brownings had been happily married for nine years. So far as we know, they never had a quarrel; but here Browning touches upon the two subjects in which he and his wife were in disagreement.

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:
'T is our quarter-deck,
We are seamen in woeful case.
Help in the ocean-space!
Or, if no help, we 'll embrace.

31. The Emperor Napoleon III was married on January 30, 1853. Browning did not share his wife's admiration for the Emperor.

IX

See, how she looks now, dressed
In a sledging-cap and vest!
'T is 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.

X

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:
'T was 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!

---

72. Mrs. Browning believed in mesmerism and spiritualism; Browning became more and more sceptical of all such manifestations.

XIII

Not from the heart beneath—
'T was 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 threats 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?
    'T is 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!

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.

* Basing his hope on the belief that after death we pass through a series of lives and worlds "not a few," the middle-aged lover says his time will "come for taking" the sixteen-year-old Evelyn; though he is sitting by her dead body now, and she never did love him, "perhaps she had scarcely heard my name." God will see to it that each passion is requited, even if it takes several afterlives to reach that consummation. This is a remarkable example of optimism. In "One Word More," speaking not dramatically, but for himself, Browning refers to other *lives* (l. 115), and the same idea is mentioned in "Old Pictures in Florence." All three of these poems appeared in *Men and Women* (1855).

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.

UP AT A VILLA—DOWN IN THE CITY*

(AS DISTINGUISHED BY AN ITALIAN PERSON OF QUALITY)

I

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!

II

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.

III

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.

IV

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!

* This contrast of Italian life in town and country was published in *Men and Women* (1855), after the Brownings had lived in Italy for nine years. The poet shares the speaker's delight in town life, but not his contempt for the countryside, whose beauty the "person of quality" indicates unconsciously. In 1850 Mrs. Browning's description of their villa in the hills two miles above Siena mentions the beautiful view of the country "under the sun, alive with verdure and vineyards" (*Letters to her Sister*, p. 128).

10. *Own:* own skull.

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.

V

What of a villa? Though winter be over in March by rights,
'T is 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 grey olive-trees.

VI

Is it better in May, I ask yo ' 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 the end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

VII

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 foam-bows 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.

VIII

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 i' the corn and mingle,
Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.

34. *Thrid:* thread.

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.

IX

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.

---

39. *Diligence:* stage-coach.

42. *Pulcinello-trumpet:* trumpet announcing the puppet-show.

44. The word "thieves" indicates the aristocrat's contempt for the patriots who sought the liberation of Italy.

48–9. Praised as if equal to the greatest poets, humanists, saints, and scholars of Italy and ancient Rome, and almost equal to the most successful preacher Italy ever heard, St. Paul.

51–2. The Virgin as Our Lady of Sorrows (seven in number). The speaker is thinking only of the delightful spangles and pink gauze.

X

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!

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD*

I

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

56. The salt tax was still an important source of revenue in Italy, and the cost of provisions was further increased by the *octroi,* a local tariff levied on all produce that entered the city gates.

* The speaker is a woman expressing her own intellectual and moral self-surrender. To her, it is better to keep her love, even though that means shutting her eyes to the truth, than to kill love by dwelling on imperfections in her lover. The imagery is from *Paradise Lost,* in which attention should be called to the line "He for God only, she for God in him" (IV, 299). Milton was the first great poet of the "Liberal," Non-Conformist tradition to which Browning belonged—less liberal in its conception of woman than the Renaissance or Chaucer. In a letter to Browning, February 16, 1846, Elizabeth Barrett expresses her contempt for those who sacrifice love to duty; to her, as to Keats, the "heart's affections" are "holy things." This poem was published after Browning had known Elizabeth for ten years (in *Men and Women,* 1855).

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.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI*

I AM poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what 's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
The Carmine 's my cloister: hunt it up,
Do,—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that 's crept to keep him company!
Aha, you know your betters! Then, you 'll take
Your hand away that 's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?

* The speaker is "Brother" Filippo Lippi (*c.* 1406–1469), a Carmelite friar and painter, of the early Florentine Renaissance. Vasari's *Lives of the Painters,* which Browning followed very closely, says Fra Filippo liked cheerful people "and lived for his own part in a very joyous fashion." Browning's love of life, his sympathy with Italy, and his lifelong interest in art, make this poem at once a delightful expression of his own exuberant vitality and a dramatic re-creation of the spirit of the Renaissance. On February 23, 1853, Browning mentioned that he was writing "lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see. . . ." The poem itself is conceived as a painting—a night piece with lights, shadows, and groups, as painted by Rembrandt. It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Fra Lippo Lippi had already figured in the *Imaginary Conversations* by Browning's friend Landor.

3. *Zooks:* "gadzooks" (an oath).
7. *Carmine:* monastery of the friars Del Carmine.

Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he 's a certain . . . how d' ye call?
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
Remember and tell me, the day you 're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He 's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I 'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all 's come square again. I 'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It 's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I 'm the painter, since you style me so.
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
Let 's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
Here 's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
To roam the town and sing out carnival,
And I 've been three weeks shut within my mew,

17. *Cosimo of the Medici:* great Florentine banker and patron of art, the real ruler of Florence. Notice the effect on the guard.

18. *Boh! you were best: i.e.,* "to have taken your hand off my throat"—as the next line shows. Browning gives us the information tail-first.

23. *Pilchards:* a kind of fish.

25. Browning is indicating the psychology of the artist who sees the pictorial possibilities even in this situation, and at the same time we are made aware of the group present in the background. (This is a typical dramatic monologue, not spoken alone like a soliloquy.)

A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whifts of song,—
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That 's all I 'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
Flower o' the rose,
If I 've been merry, what matter who knows?
And so as I was stealing back again
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
Mine 's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum 's the word naturally; but a monk!

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53 ff. This is a *stornello,* a kind of Florentine folk-song.

61 ff. According to Vasari, it was said that Fra Lippo Lippi was "much addicted to the pleasures of sense," and to keep him from "running about" and neglecting his work, Cosimo shut him up in his palace. But after enduring this for two days, Lippi "made ropes with the sheets of his bed, which he cut to pieces for that purpose," and escaped through the window.

67. *Saint Laurence:* the Church of San Lorenzo.

73. St. Jerome was a Church Father (340–420 A.D.) who prepared the Vulgate translation of the Bible. This subject is humorously inappropriate for Lippi.

Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
"So, boy, you 're minded," quoth the good fat father
Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time,—
"To quit this very miserable world?
Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'T was not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
"Let 's see what the urchin 's fit for"—that came next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
Lord, they 'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—

88 ff. Vasari tells of this aunt who placed him in the Carmelite convent when she was unable to support him. There he proved to be "ingenious in all works performed by hand" and manifested "the utmost dullness and incapacity in letters."

Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
"Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d' ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row

121. *The Eight:* the magistrates who governed Florence.
130. *Antiphonary:* choir-book. *Cf.* Vasari: "he never did anything but daub his own books . . . with caricatures, whereupon the prior determined to give him all means and every opportunity for learning to draw."
140. *Preaching Friars:* Dominicans.
148. *Cribs:* small thefts.
150. *Safe:* having fled to the church for sanctuary.

Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
I painted all, then cried "'T is ask and have;
Choose, for more 's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies,—"That 's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman 's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma: it 's the life!"
But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funked;
Their betters took their turn to see and say:
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. "How? what 's here?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it 's devil's-game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there 's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men—
Man's soul, and it 's a fire, smoke . . . no, it 's not . . .
It 's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It 's . . . well, what matters talking, it 's the soul!
Give us no more of body than shows soul!
Here 's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
That sets us praising,—why not stop with him?
Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?

Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She 's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow 's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks nought.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I 've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
Or say there 's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That 's somewhat: and you 'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
"Rub all out!" Well, well, there 's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I 'm grown a man no doubt, I 've broken bounds:
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.

207. In this plea for realism in art, portraying both body and soul, Browning not only catches the spirit of the Renaissance revolt against Medieval asceticism, but also defends his own poetic practice. Neither Browning nor the Renaissance swings to the extreme of eliminating "soul" entirely, though they conceived of the soul differently. Lippi is very close in spirit to the Florentine artist Benvenuto Cellini, whose *Autobiography* (begun in 1558) should be compared with this dramatic monologue (autobiographic in method), published while Browning was living in Florence three centuries later.

I 'm my own master, paint now as I please—
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, it 's fast holding by the rings in front—
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still—"It 's art's decline, my son!
You 're not of the true painters, great and old;
Brother Angelico 's the man, you 'll find;
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
Fag on at flesh, you 'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr . . . manners, and I 'll stick to mine!
I 'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
Don't you think they 're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't;
For, doing most, there 's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
(*Flower o' the peach,*
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life 's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they? all I want 's the thing
Settled for ever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:

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235. The Florentine painter Fra Angelico (1387–1455) represents the Medieval religious art that is so foreign to Lippi.

236. Lorenzo Monaco, a painter who had been Lippi's teacher, was a monk of the order of the Camaldolese.

249. Individualism is typical both of the Renaissance and of Browning.

You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly detestable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards,

You understand me: I 'm a beast, I know.
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning-star 's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We 've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
His name is Guidi—he 'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he 'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what 's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
However, you 're my man, you 've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
—For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,

262. Compare this psychology with the Freudian analysis of repressions and inhibitions.

268. Browning's belief in Progress makes it possible for him, without inconsistency, to say what he is saying through Fra Lippo here, and what he says in "Old Pictures in Florence." He considered Medieval art an advance over Greek art because of its greater concern with the "soul" (especially with the *irrational* elements in the "soul"). But modern art seemed to him another step in the same direction, since he believed that "flesh helps soul" ("Rabbi Ben Ezra," 72). Notice that he has in mind here a scene that suggests Milton, who had made the introduction of Eve an occasion for a moralistic attack on asceticism, and "Whatever hypocrites austerely talk" (*Paradise Lost*, IV, 744). But Browning carries his objection to restraint much farther than Milton.

276–7. *Hulking Tom:* Tommaso Guidi, also called Masaccio (1401–1428). Browning seems to have been misled by Baldinucci's *Delle Notizie de' Professori del Disegno da Cimabue* into thinking that Masaccio was Lippi's pupil, when he was probably his teacher.

The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What 's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
But why not do as well as say,—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint anyone, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There 's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we 're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world 's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
"Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning 's plain
It does not say to folk—remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what 's best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:

307. *Cullion:* base fellow.

323–4. *A Saint Laurence . . . At Prato:* near Florence. St. Laurence, a martyr, being broiled to death on a gridiron, told his torturers to turn him over as he was "done on one side."

"How looks my painting, now the scaffold 's down?"
I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns—
"Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But 's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

—That is—you 'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
It 's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
. . . There 's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris-root
When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,

346. *Sant' Ambrogio's:* a convent in Florence where Lippi painted *The Coronation of the Virgin* described in the remainder of this poem. Browning saw this painting in Florence.

As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
Mazed, motionless and moonstruck—I 'm the man!
Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where 's a hole, where 's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
—Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he 's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—
His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!" So, all smile—
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you 're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
And so all 's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
The street 's hushed, and I know my own way back,
Don't fear me! there 's the grey beginning. Zooks!

374–5. *Cf.* Mark i, 6: "And John was clothed with camel's hair."

377. *Iste perfecit opus:* "This man executed the work." These words appear in the painting near Lippi, who is in the lower right hand corner of his own painting.

381. *Hot cockles:* a game.

A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI'S*

I

Oh Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 't is with such a heavy mind!

II

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

III

Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 't is 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.

* Arthur Symons says, "In this poem Browning has called up before us the whole aspect of Venetian life in the eighteenth century" (*Introduction to the Study of Browning*, p. 115). It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Baldassare Galuppi (1706–85) was a Venetian composer, said to have written 54 light operas as well as church music and sonatas. The music Browning rented for his piano in Italy (and probably the things he played on the convent organ that Milton had played in Vallambrosa) included music by Galuppi. In this poem the music evokes the frivolous, gay Venice of the period of Italian decadence, when the impulse of the Renaissance had spent itself and the national awakening of the *Risorgimento* had not yet begun. The verse itself charms the ear with music of subtle beauty, creating just the appropriate mood of delicate, sensuous pleasure under which is a strong, persistent sadness. Contrast Byron's treatment of the same Venice in *Beppo*. See A. J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (London, 1939), IV, 280 ff.

Toccata: a "touch-piece," an overture illustrating technique, light and free in movement.

6. *St. Mark's:* the cathedral at Venice. The Doge was the chief magistrate of Venice; every year he threw a ring into the sea to symbolize the union of Venice and the Adriatic.

8. *Shylock's bridge:* the Rialto, over the Grand Canal. (Shylock of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*.)

9. Browning had been out of England several times, and by the time the poem was published had lived in Italy nine years. The speaker is an imaginary person.

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!

18. *Clavichord:* ancestor of the piano.

19. The "lesser thirds" show the key to be minor; the "diminished sixth" used as a "suspension" (see next line) gives a dismal effect.

20. *Suspension:* note held over from one chord to another; *solution:* concord following a dissonance such as those produced by a "suspension" or the "commiserating sevenths."

21. *Seventh:* probably a minor seventh—not so mournful as the "lesser thirds" and "diminished sixths"; of all dissonances none is so pleasing to the ear.

24. The dominant chord is the chord written on the dominant, the fifth tone of the scale.

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!"

X

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!

25. The dominant is answered in the tonic, an octave above the first presentation of the theme. Although with the "commiserating sevenths" life seemed possible, in a kind of pleasing melancholy, the inevitable solution, resistless fate, must come at last.

32. The speaker is evidently a scientist. Browning may be taking a sly dig at the high spiritual evaluation his own contemporaries placed on scientific knowledge.

36–38. The existence of a soul might depend on geological information and a dilettante pleasure in mathematics. Browning did not believe that a sinner had a soul destined for damnation. That the soul exists only insofar as it is moving towards God is a conception very close to Neo-Platonism.

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.

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!"

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855), this poem reflects Browning's own experience and his anticipation of having his wife by his side throughout the autumn of life. The scene is laid in a mountain gorge near the Baths of Lucca, where they had spent the summer in 1849 and 1853. Browning was to outlive his wife by twenty-five years.

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!

19. Notice Browning's great interest in Greek; he translated from Euripides in *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871) and *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), partly in memory of his wife's fondness for "Euripides, the Human, with his droppings of warm tears," as she had called him.

24–25. In old age he expects to look back down the past towards their youth in Italy. Actually, Mrs. Browning was forty years old before their life in Italy began.

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-needled 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.

43. *Pella:* a village.

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:
  'T is 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, 't was something our two souls

101. *Leonor:* the devoted wife in Beethoven's opera of married love, *Fidelio.*

113–114. This is a description of his wife.

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.

135. In Heaven.

XXXII

But at afternoon or almost eve
'T is 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!

185. *Chrysolite:* a precious stone, usually olive-green.

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 last 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!

XLV

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!

L

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.

LI

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!

LII

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!

LIII

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.

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND*

I

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—

* The speaker is a dying woman telling her husband that he will become interested in other women after she is gone. She hates to think how it will lower his dignity to fall so; she herself would be quite capable of remaining faithful. This poem proved to be prophetic of Browning's own conduct. Six years after its publication (in *Men and Women*, 1855) Browning's wife died, and ten years later he proposed marriage to Lady Louisa Ashburton, telling her, however, that his "heart was buried in Florence." Browning was rejected, and never forgave himself his faithlessness.

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—'t is 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; 't is 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, sealing 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!

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

* This poem, which appeared in *Men and Women* (1855), deals with the raising of Lazarus from the dead (see John xi, 1–46) and his subsequent attitude, as told by Karshish, a physician. Browning indicates the speaker's profession by his medical interests, technical language, the terms and figures of speech with which he thinks, and his open-minded approach to the problem.

7. *Abib:* the master of Karshish (and, like him, fictitious).

17. *Snakestone:* stone used to cure snake-bite.

21. *Jericho:* the last letter of Karshish was from this city, northeast of Jerusalem.

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, Judæa'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.

28. *Vespasian:* Roman emperor who invaded Palestine in 66 A.D. His son Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.
43. *Tertians:* fevers returning every third day.
44. *Falling-sickness:* epilepsy.
45–8. He starts to give a recipe for the use of these spiders as medicine.
55. *Gum-tragacanth:* a medicinal gum.
60. *Zoar:* city near the Dead Sea.

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 't is 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!

'T is 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 which 't were 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:

69. *The Man:* Lazarus, in whose "case" the physician is interested.

—'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—
'T is 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—" 't is 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

145 ff. In "Browning's Idealism" (*Transactions, Wisconsin Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters,* XVII, I), J. W. Cunliffe explains that in Browning's thought good and evil, space and time, are human conceptions, having no place in the Eternal Mind. "But this absolute truth must not be used by man as a basis of action in this life, in which he lives not by the absolute but by the relative . . . to realize this in human life is fatal to the soul—it reduces man to a state of apathy, like that of Lazarus after his resurrection (*Karshish*), or it ruins him by obliterating the distinction between right and wrong . . . a necessary means to human progress" (pp. 677–8). This conception, so very close to the relativity of certain twentieth-century philosophies, should be contrasted with Christian and Classical ethics, both of which insist that men should bend every effort to make absolute truth the basis of action in this life, and that from any genuine mystic experience comes not apathy but greater energy. The difference is partly that this conception of God is more Oriental than Christian.

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 perforcedly)
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 perplext 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" baulked 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 o' 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.

202–4 and 211–12. Contrast this fatalism and lack of morality with the Platonic interpretation of the results of escaping from the ordinary world of relative values, e.g., in Plato's "Myth of the Cave" (*Republic,* bk. VII) and in the whole Gospel of John, from which the story of Lazarus is drawn.

204. Lazarus, having experienced eternal life, is not subject to doubt and hence he can not think or talk on the plane of earthly humanity. Browning considers doubt a spiritual advantage, and any mystical contact of a man with Absolute Reality a disaster.

'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 workship, 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 travel 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
'T is 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 it 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

252–5. The earthquake, recorded by Matthew (xxvii, 51) as happening when Christ died, was taken by Karshish and Abib as a sign of the impending death of some "lord and sage" whom they follow. Notice Browning's skill in creating the psychological atmosphere of the civilizations near the Arabian Desert in the first century A.D.

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!

305 ff. Karshish is struck by the Christian emphasis on Love as characteristic of God. If the revelation that Lazarus believes in is really true, then God is All-Loving as well as All-Powerful. According to Browning, man has little power but much love, and this could give humanity a direct contact with a God of Love. This is the quintessence of Browning's interpretation of religion, and it should be contrasted with those religions which turn to God from a strong sense of the wickedness of men. He said, "The evidence of divine power is everywhere about us; not so the evidence of divine love. That love could only reveal itself to the human heart by some supreme act of *human* tenderness and devotion; the fact, or fancy, of Christ's cross and passion could alone supply such a revelation" (quoted by Mrs. Orr, *Contemporary Review*, December, 1891). He parodies the opposite conception of God in "Caliban upon Setebos."

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.

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.

*Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The unlucky lover has just spent a sultry night serenading his lady, but her windows stayed dark and fast. Something makes him suspect that his music has merely made the oppressive night more oppressive to her. *Cf.* "The Last Ride Together" and "One Way of Love."

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!

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.

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!

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). When asked for his autograph, it was Browning's custom to write out this poem. It is usually considered to be written to his wife.

4. *Angled spar:* Iceland spar, a prism which breaks the light into its colors.

** Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The model for this poem may have been Gerardine Bate, niece of Mrs. Jameson. The two ladies vis-

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!

---

ited the Brownings in Florence soon after their marriage. Mrs. Browning wrote to her sister that "Gerardine is just pretty and no more at most," and relates that Mrs. Jameson, defending "her charming qualities," told them that "three men out of every five would be in love with her forthwith," adding, "Oh, not *you*, Browning, of course! I am aware that under no possible circumstances, she could have been calculated to please *you*—I only speak of ordinary men." Browning presents such a woman as his wife saw in Gerardine, but concludes that perhaps she is at her best as she is. Oliver Elton says that in this poem "half the bitterness against the soulless beauty of the lady would be missed, without the touch of oddness and the slippery dexterous dactyls" (*Survey of English Literature*, 1780–1880, III, 375).

23. *Brayed:* ground.

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 forgone,
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
'T would undo there
All that breaks the cheek to dimples sweet?

XII

Is the creature too imperfect, say?
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!

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME"*

(See Edgar's song in "LEAR")

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.

* On January 1, 1852, Browning made a New Year's resolution to write a poem every day. That day he wrote "Women and Roses" and on January

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,

3, "Love Among the Ruins" (note the diversity); between these, on January 2, "Childe Roland." It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Like Edgar's song in *King Lear* (III, iv) which suggested this train of images, the poem grows out of the Medieval literature of ballads and fairy tales, knights, quests, castles, miracles, and Arthurian romance. (*Childe* means "Lord," and *Roland* is the same as "Orlando.") But this poem lacks the Medieval simplicity and clarity. Its indefinite suggestiveness is utterly different from allegory with clear-cut representation of definite abstractions. The attempts to work it out as an allegory have only served to show the hopelessness of such "interpretation" and the essential futility of that kind of Browning study. (Those who like to work puzzles should compare the interpretations in Phelps, *Browning;* Nettleship, *Essays and Thoughts;* Berdoe, *Browning Cyclopaedia;* Cooke, *Guide-Book.*) Browning himself when asked if he agreed with an allegorical analysis of *Childe Roland,* said, "Oh, no, not at all. Understand, I don't repudiate it, either; I only mean I was conscious of no allegorical intention" (Whiting, *The Brownings,* Boston, 1911, p. 261). When the Reverend J. W. Chadwick asked Browning if the central purpose of the poem could be expressed as "He that endureth to the end shall be saved," the poet said, "Yes, just about that."

This poem, partly because of its obscurity, is very modern. (Compare T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land* and Wilder's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" in *The Angel that Troubled the Waters.*) Perhaps it should be called the first surrealist masterpiece in literature. Browning said it came upon him "as a kind of dream. I had to write it. . . . I did not know then what I meant beyond that, and I'm sure I don't know now" (Whiting, *loc. cit.*). But its irrationality is more than a surface creation; it springs from Browning's deepest feelings, for he anticipates the twentieth century in a certain anti-intellectualism. Now though today anti-intellectualism usually takes the form of attack on Christianity, in the nineteenth century it usually posed as a defense of Christianity; hence it is not surprising that often interpreters took this poem as an attack on "Atheistic Science" (*e.g.,* Berdoe). Browning's later poetry on metaphysical and theological problems might indicate that these interpreters were in accord with him, even if he was not consciously expressing the idea in this poem. DeVane astutely points out that "The Lost Leader," "Prospice," "How they Brought the Good News," and many other poems by Browning resemble "Childe Roland pushing resolutely and courageously toward an unknown goal."

Edgar's song in *Lear,* III, iv. Edgar, disguised as a madman, speaks wildly, letting his fancy call up images and moods that have influenced Browning in this poem. (See Elliot, "Shakespeare's Significance for Browning," *Anglia,* Jan.–April, 1909, pp. 90–162.) Then he says:

"Childe Rowland to the dark tower came,
His word was still,—Fie, foh, and fum
I smell the blood of a British man."

Browning had just been reading Shakespeare for his essay on Shelley.

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,

12. Mrs. Orr, pointing out the "discrepancies" under the surface of the poem, calls attention to the fact that this "sinister-looking man" did "really put him on the right track." Phelps makes, but does not endorse, the suggestion that the Tower might be not the quest at all, but "damnation" and that the knight may be turning aside from the true road.

14 ff. Browning seems to have drawn many of his ideas to to what is horrible in landscape, and some other details (such as the old cripple), from his childhood reading of Lairesse, *The Art of Painting in All its Branches.* See DeVane, "The Landscape of Browning's Childe Roland," *PMLA*, XL (1925), 426–32.

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 estray.

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, 't was gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
  I might go on; naught else remained to do.

X

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,

48. *Estray:* the victim that has strayed.

"It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
'T is 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? 't is a brute must walk
Pashing 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.

66. *Calcine:* turn to powder by heat.
68. *Bents:* coarse grasses.
76 ff. The horse was suggested to Browning by a figure of a red horse in a tapestry in his own drawing-room.
80. *Colloped:* ridged.

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 mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
  Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

114. *Bespate:* bespattered.

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 plash? 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.

135. *Mews:* stable.

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,
A 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

Ye 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;

160. *Apollyon:* the Devil. *Cf.* Revelation, ix, 11.
161. *Penned:* pinioned.

While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
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 counterpart
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."*

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181. Browning said that a tower he had seen in the Carrara mountains was in his mind when he wrote the poem.

203. *Slug-horn:* trumpet (Browning's meaning is erroneous; *slughorn* is really the same word as *slogan*). Commentators do not even agree as to whether he blew his horn in triumph or as a warning to others that he had failed in the quest.

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 Boulevart 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!

* The scene is Paris, 1852, at night. It is possible that as examples of unconventional lovers who had defied respectability, Browning had in mind George Sand (Madame Dudevant) and Jules Sandeau, since the Brownings had called on George Sand several times in Paris in 1852. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

15. *Boulevart:* Boulevard. The peculiarly French spelling emphasizes what the word suggests of Paris at night.

22. The allusions in this line carry the whole force of the contrast in the poem. Guizot, a constitutional royalist, and Montalembert, a Catholic Liberal, were bitter political enemies; but when Montalembert was elected to the Académie Français, a branch of the Institut de France, February 5, 1852, Guizot had to welcome him—to preserve appearances of respectability.

23. *Lampions:* lamps (in the lighted court of the Institute). The next line is ironic.

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.

* The man says that to save an infatuated friend he won the heart of the "light woman" (Victorian euphemism for "courtesan"), and now that he has her in the palm of his hand he does not know what to do with her. His friend considers him a thief, and how does he look to himself? It is awkward to meddle, and hard enough to save one's own soul. Beneath the drama others see, lies the man's own reason for what he has done. But what, psychologically, lies beneath his reasoning? Lafcadio Hearn's interpretation is that "When he says that he did not care for the woman, he only means that he is now tired of her. He has indulged his lust and his vanity by the most treacherous and brutal conduct; yet he tries to tell the world that he is a moral man, a martyr, a calumniated person. Such is the real meaning of his apology" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, p. 180). This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

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 shaking 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;
  'T is 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?
'T was 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

'T is 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!

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."

55–6. Browning presents in a dramatic monologue a situation which he says is worthy of treatment in a play. This is significant of his abandonment of playwriting; he stopped writing for the stage before his marriage. In regular dramatic form he could not have revealed the streams of consciousness—or subconsciousness—he was interested in.

* This is a story full of the color, cruelty, and beauty of the Renaissance in Florence. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). The rhyme-scheme (not the meter) is that of *terza rima*.

1. *Palace:* of the Riccardi, originally built by the Medici (later the Palazzo Antinori).

2. *Statue:* of Ferdinand di Medici (1549–1608), Grand Duke. The statue faces the eastern window of the Riccardi palace. There is an empty shrine under the window, but the bust of the lady is fictitious. The square is the Annunziata Piazza.

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 to-day."

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 her 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 cursed son.)

22. *Encolure:* mane.
33. *Pile:* Ferdinand's palace, scene of the feast.
34. *Via Larga:* a street, now the Via Cavour.
39. Cosimo di Medici destroyed the republican liberty of Florence in the early fifteenth century; hence the palace he built is spoken of symbolically as overshadowing the city. Lorenzo di Medici, "the Magnificent," was Cosimo's grandson.

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 catafalk 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!

57. *Catafalk:* carriage for a coffin.

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

" 'T is 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 to-morrow"—

(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 " 'T was 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!

94. *Arno:* river that flows through Florence.
95. *Petraja:* suburb of Florence.

"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 to-night 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 to-night the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with thyself, my tool.

"I need thee still and might miss perchance.
To-day 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.

---

100. *Leaves:* comes from.

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 a 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 enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

---

169. The Della Robbia family gave its name to Della Robbia ware.
184. The necessary quotation mark before "Unless" is omitted in the 1889 edition.
185. *Cf.* "Rabbi Ben Ezra" (72), "flesh helps soul"; but contrast the more orthodox Christian fight *against* "the World, the Flesh, and the Devil."

(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?

202. *John of Douay:* Giovanni da Bologna (1524–1608), sculptor who made the equestrian statue that suggested the poem.

213. His own idleness, in its fruitless aspiration, he will laugh at.

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 thro' 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, 't were an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

---

218. Contrast 1 John, ii, 15–16, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"; and John xii, 25, "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

220–23. Infinite aspiration has been called the characteristic Western attitude that unites the Medieval saint and the modernist like Browning. Contrast the Classical desire for balance and restraint, an ideal for which Browning often showed his dislike, especially in poems dealing with the Renaissance.

227. Contrast the *critical* ethics advocated by Socrates in Plato's *Crito:* "your zeal is invaluable, if a right one; but if wrong, the greater the zeal the greater the danger." Medieval saints and the Renaissance itself were much closer to Socrates than to Browning in their faith and philosophy, whatever may be said of their spirit and practice.

234. *Stamp of the . . . Guelph:* genuine coin with the stamp of the ruler.

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*

---

235. *Cf. Pippa Passes,* 190: "All service ranks the same with God." In Browning's philosophy, Porphyria's lover was better than this lady's lover.

237. *Dram:* drink.

247. This interpretation of the parable of the virgins who were not ready for the Bridegroom's coming (Matthew, xxv, 1–13) would have been considered blasphemous by any generation before Browning. Christ did not mean that it is "the sin" to be unready to commit even adultery. Berdoe, an admirer of Browning's thought, parts company with him here: "if every governor of a city felt himself at liberty to steal another man's wife merely to complete and perfect the circle of his own delights, society would soon be thrown back into barbarism" (*Browning Cyclopaedia,* p. 519). But Professor William Lyon Phelps defends Browning's position, saying that from the point of view of a Christian, a man who holds up a train and kills two men is better than a man who intends to rob a train but backs out: "Who is the most virtuous. . . . Which has the best chance to be with God? Manifestly the brave one, although he is a robber and a murderer . . . for that criminal's individual soul, he was better . . . because the crime tested his character and found him sound." (*Browning,* 1915, pp. 275–7). For Lafcadio Hearn's defence, see Bibliography.

250. *De te, fabula:* "Concerning you [is told] the fable," *i.e.,* this moral should be taken to heart by each reader.

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 gleamed at the wave of her feather.

II

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 't is twilight, you see,—with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to importune!

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.
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,

* This is a companion piece to "Life in a Love." They were published in *Men and Women* (1855).

** The title refers to a life spent pursuing an elusive love. This poem and its companion, "Love in a Life," were published in *Men and Women* (1855).

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!

HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY*

I ONLY knew one poet in my life:
And this, or something like it, was his way.

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.

* The poet, a mysterious personage observing everything, is mistaken for a spy of the government, making reports to his king. Poets are rather "God's spies"—to use a phrase from *Lear*, Browning's favorite play, which he was reading about this time in preparing his essay on Shelley. The poem appeared in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning wrote to Ruskin, December 10, 1855, that Poetry "is all teaching . . . and people hate to be taught. . . . A poet's affair is with God,—to whom he is accountable, and of whom is his reward"; and in his essay on Shelley (1852) he speaks of "the whole poet's function of beholding with an understanding keenness the universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection" and of "the subjective poet of modern classification" who "is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth. . . . Not what man sees, but what God sees,—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand,—it is toward these that he struggles." This autocratic conception of the Poet's relation to his fellow men Browning expresses appropriately by a scene laid in Spain.

3. *Valladolid:* Spanish town.

They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads nowhither; 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-edge 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,—you stared at him,
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know you and expect as much.
So, next time that a neighbour'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.
Oh, you might smile! there wanted not a touch,
A tang of . . . well, it was not wholly ease

28. *Fly-leaf:* printed on single sheets of paper.

40. This might be the Spanish equivalent of the more English, parliamentarian figure of speech that concludes "A Defence of Poetry" by Shelley, whom Browning so much admired: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Browning's conceptions should be compared and contrasted with those of Shelley's essay.

As back into your mind the man's look came.
Stricken in years a little,—such a brow
His eyes had to live under!—clear as flint
On either side the formidable nose
Curved, cut and coloured like an eagle's claw.
Had he to do with A.'s surprising fate?
When altogether old B. disappeared
And young C. got his mistress,—was't our friend,
His letter to the King, that did it all?
What paid the bloodless man for so much pains?
Our Lord the King has favourites manifold,
And shifts his ministry some once a month;
Our city gets new governors at whiles,—
But never word or sign, that I could hear,
Notified to this man about the streets
The King's approval of those letters conned
The last thing duly at the dead of night.
Did the man love his office? Frowned our Lord,
Exhorting when none heard—"Beseech me not!
Too far above my people,—beneath me!
I set the watch,—how should the people know?
Forget them, keep me all the more in mind!"
Was sone such understanding 'twixt the two?

I found no truth in one report at least—
That if you tracked him to his home, down lanes
Beyond the Jewry, and as clean to pace,
You found he ate his supper in a room
Blazing with lights, four Titians on the wall,
And twenty naked girls to change his plate!
Poor man, he lived another kind of life
In that new stuccoed third house by the bridge
Fresh-painted, rather smart than otherwise!
The whole street might o'erlook him as he sat
Leg crossing leg, one foot on the dog's back,
Playing a decent cribbage with his maid
(Jacynth, you're sure her name was) o'er the cheese
And fruit, three red halves of starved winter-pears,
Or treat of radishes in April. Nine,
Ten, struck the church clock, straight to bed went he.
My father, like the man of sense he was,

Would point him out to me a dozen times;
"'St—'St," he'd whisper, "the Corregidor!"
I had been used to think that personage
Was one with lacquered breeches, lustrous belt,
And feathers like a forest in his hat,
Who blew a trumpet and proclaimed the news,
Announced the bull-fights, gave each church its turn,
And memorized the miracle in vogue!
He had a great observance from us boys;
We were in error; that was not the man.

I'd like now, yet had haply been afraid,
To have just looked, when this man came to die,
And seen who lined the clean gay garret-sides
And stood about the neat low truckle-bed,
With the heavenly manner of relieving guard.
Here had been, mark, the general-in-chief,
Thro' a whole campaign of the world's life and death,
Doing the King's work all the dim day long,
In his old coat and up to knees in mud,
Smoked like a herring, dining on a crust,—
And, now the day was won, relieved at once!
No further show or need for that old coat,
You are sure, for one thing! Bless us, all the while
How sprucely we are dressed out, you and I!
A second, and the angels alter that.
Well, I could never write a verse,—could you?
Let's to the Prado and make the most of time.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER*

I

I SAID—Then, dearest, since 't is so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,

90. *Corregidor:* the chief magistrate of the city.
115. *The Prado:* the promenade of the city.

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The rejected lover is taking one last ride with his beloved, and thinks that heaven might be just like this. Berdoe in *The Browning Cyclopaedia* gives an enthusiastic analysis of the ideas in this poem. *Cf.* Duckworth, *Browning*, ch. VII, "Time and Eternity."

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 to-night?

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.
'T is something, nay 't is much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—

65. Honored by being buried in Westminster Abbey.

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,
But 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.

X

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?

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.

* This reflects the Brownings' interest in the attempt of Italy to free herself from Austria, though Browning denied that he had specifically in mind Arnold of Brescia, and dropped from stanza VI the name of Brescie (a Lombard town). Browning had witnessed the celebrations of Florence in March, 1849, when the Grand Duke was driven out; a few months later, Florence celebrated the return of the Grand Duke. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). It "is a more subtle delineation of the eve-of-execution subtheme than the several laments by Mary Queen of Scots indulged in by poets from Southwell to Wordsworth: the reader is enabled to delve deeper into the unnamed patriot's personality than the known Queen's." (B. W. Fuson, *The Dramatic Monolog in English Poetry Before Browning*, dissertation, Univ. of Iowa, 1942, 198.)

19. *Shambles' Gate:* the gate where animals are slaughtered.

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,
'T is God shall repay: I am safer so.

MASTER HUGUES OF SAXE-GOTHA*

I

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?
See, we 're alone in the loft,—

II

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!

30. Notice the optimistic discovery of good (for the individual) in this social evil, based upon a rather legalistic conception of God's justice.

* An imaginary organist is speaking to Master Hugues, an imaginary composer. (Saxe-Gotha was the birthplace of Bach in 1685, but this fugue is of the preceding century.) The poem is to represent the temper of a fugue: The organist regards the "mountainous fugue" as a scholastic quarrel over a simple proposition or as an elaboration of religious ornament, casuistry, and traditionalism, obscuring God's truth and nature. The ideas of this poem (published in *Men and Women*, 1855) should be compared with the views on religion and nature expressed elsewhere by Browning, or by the clergyman-novelist Charles Kingsley, who treated Protestantism as something very close to naturalism.

III

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.

IV

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!

V

(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:
Help 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, yon forest of pipes
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

26. *Aloys, Jurien, Just:* either patron saints of the church or sacristan's assistants.

39. *Clavier:* keyboard of the organ.

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, 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.

44. *Breves:* the longest notes, formerly square in shape.
67. *Discept:* dispute.

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, O Sieve!

XVII

Now, they ply axes and crowbars;
Now, they prick pins at a tissue
Fine as a skein of the casuist Escovar's
Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?
Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

XXVIII

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, 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!

77. *Crepitant:* crackling.
79. *Strepitant:* noisy.
80. *Danaides:* daughters of Danaus, condemned to pour water through a sieve forever.
83. Escobar y Mendoza of Valladolid (1589–1669) was a Jesuit casuist who found excuses for human faults, and was criticized by Pascal.
86. Latin for "It is a flight, the wheel revolves." *Fugue* is from *fuga.*
92. *Risposting:* in fencing, making a counter-stroke.

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?"

XXI

I for man's effort am zealous:
  Prove me such censure unfounded!
Seems it surprising a lover grows jealous—
  Hopes 't was 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.

100. *Ticken:* ticking, a fabric.

106 ff. Compare Shelley's *Adonais*, 462–3;

Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity.

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, 't is 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 *meâ pœnâ*
(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.*

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?

136. *Meâ poenâ:* at my risk of punishment.

140. *Mode Palestrina:* in the style of Palestrina (1524–94) who emancipated music from pedantries and subtleties, bringing it back to simplicity and melody. Browning would consider him parallel in music with Pascal in theology.

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.

* Browning admitted that his model for Bishop Blougram was Cardinal Wiseman (1802–1865), a leader of the Catholic revival in Victorian England. Upon the publication of the poem in *Men and Women* (1855), Cardinal Wiseman himself reviewed it in a Roman Catholic periodical, *The Rambler* (January, 1856), declaring that this apology is "utterly mistaken in the very groundwork of religion"; and concluding: "Though much of the matter is extremely offensive to Catholics, yet beneath the surface there is an undercurrent of thought that is by no means inconsistent with our religion; and if Mr. Browning is a man of will and action, and not a mere dreamer and talker, we should never feel surprise at his conversion." Wiseman certainly ascribed to Browning views that the poet did not endorse. Yet it is very difficult to say just when the argument is intended as that of an evil casuist, and when it has Browning's approval. Some of these arguments he has set forth elsewhere; and Blougram's philosophy is closer to that of Browning than to that of a genuine Catholic. As an example of a real Victorian Catholic's "apology" for his beliefs, compare Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864–5), noting especially the argument, method, and psychological self-revelation.

Lafcadio Hearn says of the poem, "We know that the bishop is morally wrong the whole way through, that every statement which he makes is wrong; yet it would take a clever man to prove him wrong. The logic is too well managed. Few psychological studies are comparable to this" (*Appreciations of Poetry*, p. 232).

3. *Abbey:* Westminster. See note to 54.

6. A. W. N. Pugin (1812–1852), architect, was a Catholic who considered Gothic architecture suitable for churches, and was one of the first Victorians to emphasize the esthetic element in religion. The Neo-Gothic style of many modern ecclesiastical and academic buildings may be traced back to his influence.

13. *Gigadibs:* the journalist whose superficial attacks have stirred the Bishop to defend himself in terms that even Gigadibs can appreciate. DeVane (*Browning Handbook*, pp. 214–5) suspects that the model for this figure was "Father Prout" (F. S. Mahony) of the staff of *Fraser's Magazine*,

"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:
Truth's 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;

---

who had many conversations with the Brownings in Florence, and who may even have presented Blougram's argument to them. But since Mahony was an ex-Jesuit, his apologies would surely have been more Catholic than this.

34. *Corpus Christi:* literally "Body of Christ," the Feast of the Sacrament of the Altar, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

45. *Che:* Italian for "what."

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 tinselled 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!

---

54. *Count D'Orsay:* famous dandy. Since he (and "brother Pugin") died in 1852, this poem was probably written soon after the appearance of *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* in 1850. It was in 1850 that Protestant England was stirred to great suspicion and anger by the reëstablishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, with Wiseman as Archbishop of Westminster. Line 3, suggesting that Englishmen with Browning's background were still afraid that this "Papal Aggression" would prove a serious menace to national institutions, is most likely to have been written at this early date. See note to 704.

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!

80–85. It is clear from "Rabbi Ben Erza," "Andrea del Sarto," "Old Pictures in Florence," "A Grammarian's Funeral," *etc.*, that Browning himself prefers the unattainable ideal to perfection on a lower level.

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?

113. *Parma's Pride, the Jerome:* picture of St. Jerome in the Ducal Academy at Parma, by the Italian painter Correggio (1494–1534).

117. *Modenese:* Correggio was born in Modena.

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,—

161–2. Blougram's kind of "faith" without certainty is that of Browning himself—as he expresses it in "Easter-Day," 71–72, etc. It is *not* like the Catholic faith which St. Thomas Aquinas defines as voluntary assent accompanied by certainty.

184. *Euripides:* Browning's favorite Greek dramatist, whose choruses

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?"

---

sometimes end with a declaration of the necessity of submitting to life as it is.

207. On this point Browning certainly agrees with Blougram. This theory is elaborated in "A Death in the Desert," where he puts it into the mouth of St. John himself: "Therefore, I say, to test men, the proofs shift" (295; *cf.* 589–93).

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 naught 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,

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232. *To take it as it is:* Browning's own attitude towards the world. Contrast, in the same cause, Newman's argument from the evil (not the good things) of the world, in the last chapter of his *Apologia*. *Cf.* Romans, xii, 2, "And be not conformed to this world. . . ."

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,

301 ff. *Cf.* "Christmas Eve," 271–3.

316. The Popes trace their authority back to that of St. Peter. Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII, 1073–85) claimed temporal power and supremacy.

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.

349. *Cf.* "Fra Lippo Lippi," 270, and the argument at that point.
354–5. Browning's own attitude is well summarized in these lines.

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,

381. *Verdi:* Italian composer of operas who turned from the applause of the multitude to learn the verdict of another musician, Rossini; the opera referred to here is "Macbeth."

395–401. An excellent statement of Browning's own interests, as his poetry demonstrates.

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,

411. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling was a German philosopher (1775–1854).

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 dismallest of ends
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,

472. *Austrian marriage:* of Marie Louise, Hapsburg princess, to Napoleon Bonaparte, who had begun as a revolutionary leader and came to seek an alliance with ultra-reactionary rulers.

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

475. *Austerlitz:* Battle won by Napoleon in 1805.
492. *Cf.* "Andrea del Sarto," 97–98; "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 40–41 and 142–150.

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,

513. *Towers and gorgeous palaces:* this phrase is from Prospero's famous speech, "We are such stuff as dreams are made of," in Shakespeare's *Tempest* (IV, i, 152).

514. When Shakespeare had made his fortune in the city he retired to live in the best house in his home town.

516. *Giulio Romano:* Italian painter (1492–1546), mentioned in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale,* V, ii, 105. *Dowland:* English musician praised in *The Passionate Pilgrim* (ascribed to Shakespeare).

519. Quoted from *King John,* III, i, 138.

533. *Terni's fall:* beautiful cataract north of Rome.

536. *St. Gothard:* the principal pass from Italy to Switzerland.

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,

556 ff. Blougram is now expressing Browning's own romantic, evangelical views.

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 criticise the soul? it reared this tree—

577. *Strauss:* David Friedrich Strauss (1808–74) whose *Life of Jesus* (translated by "George Eliot") made him, in Browning's eyes, the leading rationalist of the Tübingen school of Biblical criticism, which Browning in "Christmas Eve" attacks as inferior to Catholicism or the vulgarest Dissenter "Fundamentalism."

603–4. *Cf.* this characteristic idea of Browning's with the *Credo quia absurdum* ("I believe it because it is absurd") of Tertullian, one of the earliest Church Fathers.

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,

626. The quotation is from Matthew, xxii, 42.

634. Contrast the Catholic philosopher St. Thomas Aquinas, who, far from calling it "faith," would not even call it "opinion": "the intellect assents to something, not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt and fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there be certainty, and no fear of the opposite side, there will be faith." *Summa Theologica*, II–II, Q. i, A. 4 (tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London, 1917, pp. 9–10). Compare "Easter-Day," 124–6.

640. Wiseman was born of Anglo-Irish parents in Seville, Spain.

This Blougram; yet throughout the tales of him
I see he figures as an Englishman."
Well, the two things are reconcileable.
But would I rather you discovered that,
Subjoining—"Still, what matter though they be?
Blougram concerns me naught, 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:

652–3. The view rejected by the "Bishop" is that of Catholicism. The view expressed is one developed by the Victorians.

654. The poet's direct expressions of optimism endorse this view of evil (*e.g.*, in *Parleyings with Certain People*). Notice what a direct vision of spiritual truths did to Karshish.

657–661. *Cf.* "A Death in the Desert," 198–205.

667. In Raphael's paintings of St. Michael slaying the dragon.

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.

702–3. John Henry Newman had been a leader of the (Anglo-Catholic) Oxford Movement in the English Church until he became a Roman Catholic in 1845. He wrote in defense of belief in miracles. *E.g.* "I think it impossible to withstand the evidence which is brought for the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius at Naples, and for the motion of the eyes of the pictures of the Madonna in the Roman States. . . . Many men, when they hear an educated man so speak, will at once impute the avowal to insanity, or to an idiosyncrasy, or to imbecility of mind, or to decrepitude of powers, or to fanaticism, or to hypocrisy. They have a right to say so if they will . . ." (*Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics,* Longmans ed.

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

London 1918, 312–313). This and other passages from Newman are quoted by C. R. Tracy as parallel to lines 374–9, 726–744, etc., in "Bishop Blougram," *Mod. Lang. Rev.* XXXIV (July, 1939) 422–425.

704. *Immaculate Conception:* a dogma defined as "of the faith" in December, 1854, by Pope Pius IX, who in 1851 had appointed a commission to investigate the subject.

715. *King Bomba:* nickname (meaning "Liar") of Ferdinand II of the Two Sicilies; *lazzaroni:* beggars.

716. *Antonelli:* Cardinal, secretary of Pope Pius IX.

728. A small solid drop of the blood of Naples' patron saint, Januarius, is believed to become liquid on the public occasion of the Feast of St. Januarius, each year, September nineteenth. Browning, however, is in error in thinking that belief in this kind of miracle is *required* of Catholics.

Eliminate, decrassify 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, other 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,

732. *Decrassify*: make less crass.

744. Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1765–1814), German philosopher, defined God as "the moral order of the universe." Compare Matthew Arnold's later definition of God as a natural law, "the not-ourselves that makes for righteousness."

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.

769 ff. *Cf.* Browning's own attitude, in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 67–72, and his interests, tastes, and emphasis shown in the rest of the poetry in this volume.

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 thieve,
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 analyzed 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,

864–5. *Cf.* the description of Man, put into the mouth of St. John in "A Death in the Desert" (576–80 and 586–88).

877. *Pastor est tui Dominus:* The Lord is your shepherd.

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,

915. *Anacreon:* Greek lyric poet (*c.* 550–*c.* 465 B.C.).

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 statedly 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)

945. *Blackwood's Magazine:* one of the leading literary periodicals in Victorian England.

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 argumentatory purposes,
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,

972–4. When the Roman Catholic Church was not regularly established in England it had no bishops of English sees; bishops serving "in partibus infidelium"—in London, for example—bore titles from foreign lands. But in 1850, to the great horror of the English Protestants, of Parliament, Oxford, and Cambridge, the Pope reëstablished the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, Wiseman's title being changed to "Archbishop of Westminster."

980–87. Browning too believed, say, half of what is spoken here; he has added perhaps arbitrary 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.

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!

* Browning in his youth was a great admirer of Shelley, whom he addressed as "Sun-treader" in *Pauline* (1833), written under Shelley's influence. He also wrote a critical essay on Shelley in 1852 (introductory to a

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.

ANDREA DEL SARTO*

(CALLED "THE FAULTLESS PAINTER")

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,

volume of letters later found to be spurious). He told W. G. Kingsland that one day in a bookseller's shop he met a stranger who happened to mention talking with Shelley. "Suddenly the stranger paused, and burst into laughter as he observed me staring at him with blanched face. . . . I still vividly remember how strangely the presence of a man who had seen and spoken with Shelley affected me" (*Contemporary Review*, CII, 206–7). *Memorabilia* means "things worth remembering." This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

9. *Moor:* symbol of a commonplace life.

* John Kenyon, the friend who introduced Browning to Elizabeth Barrett, wanted a photograph of Andrea's portrait of himself and his wife, in the Pitti Palace at Florence. Not being able to procure a photograph, Browning wrote this poem and sent it to him instead. It is perhaps Browning's greatest poem, as the poet himself realized by the time he wrote "One Word More," the epilogue that concluded, as this poem began, the second volume of *Men and Women* (1855). Evening in Florence, the autumn of life, regret without contrition, technical perfection without grandeur, failure,

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 serpentining 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,

---

even the silver-grey music of the verse, all these are fused into a perfectly harmonious symphony in a minor key.

Andrea (called *del Sarto* because his father was a tailor) was a Florentine painter (1486–1531). The title he won, "Il Pittore senza Errori," "The Faultless Painter," evidently incited Browning to bring out his own belief that only men of low ambition can achieve perfection. (*Cf.* "Old Pictures in Florence.")

2. *Lucrezia:* his wife, Lucrezi di Baccio del Fede, a cap-maker's widow. Vasari, who would have first hand information since he had been Andrea's pupil, describes her (in the first edition of his *Lives of the Painters*) as a haughty siren who ensnared Andrea before her husband's death. He degraded himself by marrying her, and thus lost the respect of his friends. He soon became jealous of her, probably with good reason, for she deserted him during his last illness. Her expression in the picture that Andrea is painting as he speaks betrays a woman without depth of feeling.

15. *Fiesole:* a town on the hills near Florence. The Brownings had resided in Florence since April, 1847.

26. *Serpentining:* sinuous, undulant.

And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks—no one's: very dear, no less.
Your 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 't is easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that 's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,

57. *Cartoon:* drawing for a painting.
65. *Legate:* Pope's envoy.

—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,

---

76. *Someone:* Michelangelo. See lines 189–193.

82. Elie Faure (*Renaissance Art,* tr. Pach, New York, 1937, p. 78) with reference to Andrea del Sarto, speaks of such "an intelligence that has mistaken its rôle through allowing sentiment to be effaced; it is an intelligence that takes means for the end and exhausts itself in seeking the form outside of the inner drama that determines its function." *Cf.* Vasari, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters,* ed. and tr. by Blashfield and Hopkins, New York, 1896, III, 234 ff., especially, "there was a certain timidity of mind, a sort of diffidence and want of force in his nature, which rendered it impossible that those evidences of ardour and animation, which are proper to the more exalted character, should ever appear in him," so that he lacked the grandeur and force of other great masters and never became a "truly divine painter."

93. *Morello:* a mountain north of Florence.

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.
('T is 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.

97–8. Even Andrea, the complete opposite of Browning and the kind of man he considers most contemptible (worse than an energetic criminal) is forced to become the spokesman of Browning's own peculiar doctrine, expressed also in "Old Pictures in Florence," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Saul," *etc.* This "philosophy of the imperfect" is also defended in Ruskin's "On the Nature of Gothic," in *Stones of Venice*, II, vi. Elizabeth Barrett wrote to Browning on February 24, 1846, "One's ideal must be above one. . . . It is as far as one can reach with one's eyes (soul-eyes), not reach to touch" (*Letters*, I, 501). Browning has rephrased her statement, but it is still recognizable. He has made it peculiarly his own by what he adds about Heaven. (*Cf* "Evelyn Hope," "Epilogue to *Asolando*," etc.) Contrast the Christian-Platonic conception of the eternal life as not merely an extension in time "for" the continuation of impossible worldly pursuits, but a rebirth into a new spiritual attitude different in kind, and free from the urges of ambition.

105. *Urbinate:* Raphael (1483–1520), born at Urbino, one of the greatest Italian painters.

106. *Vasari:* pupil of Andrea and author of *The Lives of the Painters* from which Browning got the material for this poem and for "Fra Lippo Lippi."

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.
'T is 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

126. Just before their marriage, Browning mentioned to Elizabeth Barrett that his happiness would be disturbed if he were to ally himself with a woman whose mind he could not look up to (*Letters*, II, 425).

130. *Agnolo:* Michelangelo (1475–1564).

146–150. King Francis I (1494–1547), patron of Italian artists who could bring Renaissance culture to France, had given Andrea encouragement at his royal palace in Fontainebleau. Returning to Florence to buy paintings for the King, Andrea used the money to settle down there with Lucrezia.

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—
'T is done and past; 't was 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

178. *The Roman:* Raphael.

189 ff. Vasari reports that Michelangelo said to Raphael, "There is a little man in Florence, who if he were employed upon such great works as have been given to you, would make you sweat" (III, 196).

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,

216–8. Andrea built himself a house with the gold King Francis had entrusted to him.

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,

241. *Scudi:* coins approximately equal to dollars.
250. Vasari says Andrea abandoned his father and mother and took care of his wife's relatives instead.
261. *New Jerusalem:* Heaven. See Revelation, xxi, 10–21.
263. *Leonard:* Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), one of the three greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance.

While I have mine! So—still they overcome
Because there 's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

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

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,
" 'T is 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.

* "Before" and "After" are companion pieces, published in *Men and Women* (1855). In "Before" the speaker is a second for one of the duelists. In a letter to Elizabeth Barrett, April 8, 1846, Browning defended dueling as something any man must do who, unlike himself, cared to have a position in society. She attacked his argument in her next letter.

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! Trusts he 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!

AFTER*

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

29. Notice how close this view is to other expressions of optimism in Browning's poetry. The poet here suggests that the duel is a continuation of the Medieval trial by combat, such as he portrays it in "Count Gismond."

* The speaker is the victor. (See note to the companion piece, "Before.")

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!

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 her 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?

*This and "In a Year" are companion pieces, published together in *Men and Women* (1855). In the first a man is speaking; in the second, a woman. As in "A Woman's Last Word" and "Any Wife to Any Husband," Browning is differentiating between love in men and women.

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.

IN A YEAR*

I

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.

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). See note under the companion piece, "In Three Days."

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 sprung,
  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?"

X

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?

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.

* This expresses a love for the early Florentine art from which Fra Lippo Lippi broke away. The views of art expressed in the two poems may be contrasted. But Browning, opponent of Classicism, is especially contrasting the perfection of Greek art with the imperfection of Medieval art which leaves room for aspiration, and tries to paint the soul. He agreed with Ruskin's statement in "The Nature of Gothic" (*Stones of Venice*, II, vi, II, Cooke and Wedderburn, ed., vol. X, 191) that while "we are to desire perfection, and strive for it, we are nevertheless not to set the meaner thing, in its narrow accomplishment, above the nobler thing, in its mighty progress . . . not to lower the level of our aim, that we may the more surely enjoy the complacency of success." Browning's belief in Progress, even in Art, is stated very explicitly in his "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse."

Browning and his wife had lived in Florence since their marriage, had visited the galleries, read Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, and picked up pictures in obscure corners of the city. Mrs. Browning wrote to Mrs. Jameson, May 4, 1850, that Robert had just acquired five pictures and that one of the

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-curled 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.

best judges in Florence "throws out such names for them as Cimabue, Ghirlandajo, Giottino, a crucifixion painted on a banner, Giottesque, if not Giotto. . . ." The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855).

15. *Bell-tower:* the campanile of the Cathedral Santa Maria in Florence, designed by Giotto (1276–1337), greatest artist and architect of Medieval Florence. He died before the campanile was completed.

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?
  'T is their holiday now, in any case.

VIII

Much they reck 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.

44. *One:* the spirit of the painter whose picture is neglected.

51. Michelangelo (1475–1564) and Raphael (1483–1520), two of the greatest artists of the Renaissance. See "Andrea del Sarto."

64. Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) represents Renaissance genius at its height. Dello di Niccolo Delli, a fifteenth-century painter, is obscure and relatively unimportant. Notice how Browning is carrying democratic attitudes into the discussion of art.

67. *Girns:* snarls.

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.)

X

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!
'T is 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.

69. *Stefano:* a pupil of Giotto's, called "The Ape of Nature" for his ability to imitate nature.

72. *Vasari:* author of *The Lives of the Painters.* He says "It is obvious Stefano approached closely to the manner of the moderns, surpassing his master Giotto considerably, whether in design or other artistic qualities."

76. *Sic transit:* add *gloria mundi* ("thus passes the glory of the world").

84. *In fructu:* "as fruit."

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" 't is 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.

98. A reference to the statue of Theseus from the frieze of the Parthenon.

99. *Son of Priam:* Paris, of the Aegina sculptures, kneeling and drawing a bow.

102. The statue of Niobe mourning for her children was in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence, as was also a statue of the dying Alexander.

103. *Racers' frieze:* on the Parthenon.

120. *Cf.* "A Grammarian's Funeral," 83–4.

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

'T is 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 shall 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 petrifaction?

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?"

131. A neat formulation of one of Browning's ideas concerning Heaven, which he expresses in such poems as "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Evelyn Hope," "Speculative,"—that after death, life is changed not in kind but in degree. *Cf.* the American Indian conception of a "happy hunting-ground" or the Teutonic warrior's Valhalla.

135. As an example of his skill, for Pope Benedict IX to examine, Giotto drew a perfect circle at one stroke.

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; 't is 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.

156. *Quiddit:* quibble. *Cf.* Browning's statement in "Parleying with Gerard de Lairesse," addressed to the Classic poets:

> we poets go not back at all:
> What you did we could do—from great to small
> Sinking assuredly: if this world last
> One moment longer when Man finds its Past
> Exceed its Present—blame the Protoplast!
> If we no longer see as you of old,
> 'T is we see deeper. Progress for the bold!
> You saw the body, 't is the soul we see.

160. Browning was one of the earliest group of students to attend London University, but he stayed only a few months.

167. Notice the use of this interpretation of Heaven to solve the problem of unrequitted love, in "Evelyn Hope," also in *Men and Women.*

XXIII

But at any rate I have loved the season
Or Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy;
My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan,
My painter—who but Cimabue?
Nor ever was man of them all indeed,
From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,
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;

In the epilogue, "One Word More" (115), Browning endorses this as his own view.

179. *Nicolo the Pisan:* architect and sculptor from Pisa (1207–1278).

180. Giovanni Cimabue (1240–1302) was one of Giotto's teachers.

182. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381–1455), Florentine sculptor, executed the eastern doors of the Baptistry at Florence. Domenico Bigordi, or Ghirlandajo (1449–94), was a Florentine fresco painter.

198. *Dree:* endure.

201. *Bigordi:* Ghirlandajo.

202. Sandro Filipepi is usually called Botticelli (1444–1510).

Nor the wrong Lippino; and not a word I
Say of a scrap of Frà Angelico's:
But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,
To grant me a taste of your intonaco,
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, 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 crumbly—
Could not Alesso Baldovinetti
Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?

XXVIII

Margheritone of Arezzo,
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.

203. *Lippino:* Filippino Lippi (1460–1505), son of Fra Lippo Lippi. (He was "wronged" by having his work ascribed to others.)

204. *Fra Angelico:* greatest of monastic painters (1387–1455).

205. Taddeo Gaddi (1300–1366), Giotto's godson and pupil, continued the building of the Campanile after Giotto's death.

206. *Intonaco:* rough plaster background for frescoes.

207. St. Jerome (340–420) was the Church Father who prepared the Vulgate translation of the Bible.

208. Lorenzo Monaco, a monastic painter who executed many works in the Calmaldoline monastery, followed the manner of Gaddi. See the comment on him and on Fra Angelico in "Fra Lippo Lippi," 233–236.

209 ff. Browning owned the pictures described in stanzas XXVII, XXVIII.

210. Antonio Pollaiuolo (1429–98), painter, sculptor, goldsmith, was one of the first artists to study anatomy.

214. *Tempera:* mixture of paint and a gummy substance.

215. *Alesso Baldovinetti:* Florentine painter (1422–99).

217. *Margheritone:* painter and sculptor (1236–1313) whose chief subject was the Crucifixion.

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-clod 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?)
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?

---

230. *Zeno:* the first Stoic philosopher.

232. *Carlino:* Carlo Dolci (1616–86), Florentine known for his smooth, lifeless paintings.

236–7. Michelangelo Buonarroti admired the little tablet which, Browning wrote, "was a famous *Last Supper*, mentioned by Vasari, and gone astray long ago from the Church of S. Spirito: it turned up, according to report, in some obscure corner, while I was in Florence."

241. *San Spirito:* the Church of the Holy Spirit. (See note to 236.)

242. *Ognissanti:* the Church of All Saints.

244. *Detur amanti:* Let it be given to its lover.

245. *Koh-i-noor:* one of the largest of existing diamonds, given to Queen Victoria in 1850.

246. *Jewel of Giamschid:* a great ruby.

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 Loraine's,
  And bring us the days of Orgagna 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

251. *Worse side:* over the Alps, out of Italy.

255. *Radetzky:* Austrian field marshal who held Italy in subjection; born in 1766, he is the "dotard" (old fool) of line 249.

256. *Morello:* mountain peak near Florence.

Italian patriots.

258. A stone on which Dante often sat was used as a rallying point for

259. *Witanagemot:* Anglo-Saxon predecessor of Parliament.

260. *Casa Guidi Windows* was the name of a poem by Mrs. Browning devoted to the cause of Italian liberty. *Ex:* "out of" . . . *quod videas ante:* "which you may have seen before."

263. The family of Duke Francis of Lorraine had controlled Florence since 1737.

264. *Orgagna:* Andrea di Cione (1315–76), Florentine painter of original genius, of the school of Giotto, the kind that flourished when Florence was free.

Out of the bear's shape into Chimæra'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,
And turn the bell-tower's *alt* to *altissimo:*
And fine as the beak of a young beccaccia
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!

272. Though Browning has expressed here a view very popular among English-speaking peoples, the "truth" is not that monarchy always marks a "sterile" era. The Roman Empire under Augustus, the Tudor absolutism of Queen Elizabeth, the despotic reign of Louis XIV, saw the greatest literary art produced in their respective languages, Latin, English, and French; and one may add to these the great art of all kinds produced under the dictatorship of the Medici in later Florence. But as the Romantics like Byron and Shelley had faith that Greece upon being liberated would show again the creative genius of ancient Athens, so many Victorians hoped that the liberation and national unification of Italy would lead to a new birth of Art.

273. Dante made the Florentine speech ("curt Tuscan") the literary language of Italy.

274. *Issimo:* termination of the superlative in Italian.

275. *Half-told tale of Cambuscan:* Chaucer's uncompleted *Squire's Tale.* In *Il Penseroso,* Milton wishes to

Call up him who left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold.

276. *Alt to altissimo:* high to highest.

277. *Beccaccia:* woodcock.

279. According to Giotto's plans, a spire fifty braccia (cubits) high was to be added to the bell-tower.

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 heat
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;

* The first nine sections were published in *Dramatic Romances* (1845); the entire poem appeared first in *Men and Women* ten years later. The source is 1 Samuel, xvi, 14–23. The speaker is David, and it is his psychological experience that constitutes the subject of the poem, Saul serving merely as the object of David's love. The idea was suggested by Christopher Smart's preface to his "Ode to Music on Saint Cecilia's Day," "that is, David's playing to King Saul when he was troubled with the evil spirit." Browning also drew upon Smart's "Song to David," which he had known since boyhood. On Miss Barrett's advice the first part of the poem was printed in 1845, though incomplete; so far David had merely praised God for earthly joys. This is close enough to the character of the young David as it is presented in Samuel. In 1846 Browning married and in the next ten years, under his wife's influence, he formulated his religious philosophy, so that in the continuation David sings as a prophet of Christianity, the religion of Love. Compare the Psalms.

1. *Abner:* captain of Saul's army (1 Samuel, xxvi, 5).

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 naught 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 noontide—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!

31. *King-serpent:* the boa constrictor, waiting the change of his skin.

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 a-musing 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
Naught 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;

45. *Jerboa:* the jumping hare, swift as a bird.

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 forever 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 hear 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

78–9. A famous expression of gusto for life, especially for physical sensation. But the idea that this is fit to employ the soul forever is not Biblical. For Browning's conception of "the soul" see Section IV of the Introduction.

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!"

X

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 upsoareth 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

96. At first the poem ended here, the last four lines reading:
On the one head the joy and the pride, even rage like the throe
That opes the rock, helps its glad labor, and lets the gold go—
And ambition that sees a man lead it—oh, all of these—all
Combine to unite in one creature—Saul!
Notice, in what follows, the shift in emphasis from human to divine, from earthly pleasures to immortal hopes.

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: 't was 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.

XI

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 inconscious, 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 't is 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!"

XIV

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 upheaves
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron 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

203. *Hebron:* mountain in Judea and the city that is on it.
204. *Kidron:* brook near Jerusalem.
213. *Error:* see 1 Samuel, xv. Saul had disobeyed Jehovah's command to kill all the Amalekites.

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 head, 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 handwork—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 appall?
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 dayspring, 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

257–262. It is doubtful that David, or any Biblical character, could be conceived of as making such a statement, expressing fear that if he does not hold himself in, he will be more loving than God. It is rather Browning who speaks here; elsewhere he shows a similar feeling.

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 itensified bliss,
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

XVIII

"I believe it! 'T is thou, God, that givest 't is 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;—'t is 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!

288. Contrast Dante's "In His will is our peace" (*Paradise,* III, 85)—an expression of obedience of heart and conduct.

291. *Sabaoth:* armies.

295–9. This is said in a spirit very different from that of the Psalmist's "contrite heart." (Contrast especially Psalm li.)

300. Here, and in lines 266–7, faith has been expressed that God will in time suffer as the speaker is now willing to suffer, and will show as much loving-kindness. Browning saw in the universe proof of the Power of God, but not of His Love, which he deduced from the love he felt within his own breast. *Cf.* "A Death in the Desert," lines 551–62.

He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the most weak.
'T is 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.

331 ff. Not only animals, reptiles, and plants, but even inanimate brooklets understand "the new law" that God is Love. This is far from orthodox, belonging rather between Romantic Naturalism and the vitalism of Bergson and Shaw. But compare Psalms xcvi and cxlviii, or St. Francis' conception of Nature.

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!"

"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!

II

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—'t is a cypress—stands
By the many hundred years red-rusted,

* *De gustibus non est disputandum,* "there is no disputing about tastes." The poet's friend prefers English scenery; but Browning prefers Italy. This poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Contrast "Home Thoughts, from Abroad," which was published ten years before.

4. *Cornfield:* field of grain, not Indian corn.
22. *Cicala:* cicada.

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!

PROTUS*

Among these latter busts we count by scores,
Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,

35 ff. The Bourbon, Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies, was a hated tyrant.

36. *Liver-wing:* right wing (arm).

40–2. Queen Mary of England lost Calais, England's last French possession, in 1558, and she said that after her death the name of Calais would be found written on her heart.

43–4. These two lines were inscribed on a tablet and attached to the wall of the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice, where Browning died.

46. In 1855 this ended "so it still shall be!" But after the death of his wife he left Italy and in 1863 appeared the present reading.

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). Any reader of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* will recognize this as a typical situation, but the quoted chronicle and both of these Emperors are fictitious. Even Gibbon could not surpass the irony with which Browning in a few lines lights up an epoch.

2. Diocletian, Roman Emperor 284–305 A.D., reorganized the Empire so that its administration would be divided between two *Augusti* ("half-emperors") and—subordinate to them—two Caesars ("quarter-emperors").

Each with his bay-leaf fillet, loose-thonged vest,
Loric and low-browed Gorgon on the breast,—
One loves a baby face, with violets there,
Violets instead of laurel in the hair,
As those were all the little locks could bear.

Now read here. "Protus ends a period
Of empery beginning with a god;
Born in the porphyry chamber at Byzant,
Queens by his cradle, proud and ministrant:
And if he quickened breath there, 't would like fire
Pantingly through the dim vast realm transpire.
A fame that he was missing spread afar:
The world, from its four corners, rose in war,
Till he was borne out on a balcony
To pacify the world when it should see.
The captains ranged before him, one, his hand
Made baby points at, gained the chief command.
And day by day more beautiful he grew
In shape, all said, in feature and in hue,
While young Greek sculptors, gazing on the child,
Became with old Greek sculpture reconciled.
Already sages laboured to condense
In easy tomes a life's experience:
And artists took grave counsel to impart
In one breath and one hand-sweep, all their art—
To make his graces prompt as blossoming
Of plentifully-watered palms in spring:
Since well beseems it, whoso mounts the throne,
For beauty, knowledge, strength, should stand alone,
And mortals love the letters of his name."

—Stop! Have you turned two pages? Still the same.
New reign, same date. The scribe goes on to say
How that same year, on such a month and day,
"John the Pannonian, groundedly believed

4. *Loric:* leather cuirass. *Gorgon:* Gorgon's head on an amulet worn as protection against the evil eye.

10. *Byzant:* Byzantium, later called Constantinople, capital of the Roman Empire in its period of effete decadence.

36. *Pannonian:* from Pannonia (on the Danube, in Central Europe).

A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved
The Empire from its fate the year before,—
Came, had a mind to take the crown, and wore
The same for six years (during which the Huns
Kept off their fingers from us), till his sons
Put something in his liquor"—and so forth.
Then a new reign. Stay—"Take at its just worth"
(Subjoins an annotator) "what I give
As hearsay. Some think, John let Protus live
And slip away. 'T is said, he reached man's age
At some blind northern court; made, first a page,
Then tutor to the children; last, of use
About the hunting-stables. I deduce
He wrote the little tract 'On worming dogs,'
Whereof the name in sundry catalogues
Is extant yet. A Protus of the race
Is rumoured to have died a monk in Thrace,—
And if the same, He reached senility."

Here's John the Smith's rough-hammered head. Great eye,
Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can
To give you the crown-grasper. What a man!

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 the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome should

50. Pannonia was famous for its hunting dogs. The production of such a treatise under such circumstances would be characteristic of the later Empire.

53. *Thrace:* a region north of Greece.

55–7. The hard sounds here (especially "gr-") may be contrasted with the liquid softness of some of the lines (*e.g.*, 10–13) in which the poet is not only referring to over-refined, decadent Byzantium, but is accompanying his meaning with the appropriate esthetic effects.

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning had probably read in *Six Months in Italy*, by his friend G. S. Hillard, that a bull of Pope Gregory XIII issued in 1584 compelled all Jews above the age of twelve to listen

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:—

I

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday 's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons—'t is sermon-time!

II

Boh, here 's Barnabas! Job, that 's you?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years

every week to a Christian sermon, and "to this day" (1853) several times in the course of a year a Jewish congregation gathered in the Church of S. Angelo in the Fish-Market (Pescheris) near the Ghetto to listen to a sermon by a Dominican friar. The humor of the situation appealed to Browning, and he imagines what "really" happened, psychologically. In the old conflict between Catholic and Jew, Browning's sympathies were clearly with the latter: his attacks on Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic are numerous (*e.g.,* "The Heretic's Tragedy") and in many poems he is very favorable to the Jews. This led to the belief that he had Jewish blood, but there seems to be no foundation for that belief. Browning had a temperamental sympathy with many attitudes which have been considered "Jewish." His biographers say he "always wrote admirably when he wrote of Jews."

Diary: this entry is imaginary. Holy-Cross day commemorates the dedication in 335 A.D. of the churches built on the sites of the Crucifixion and the Holy Sepulchre, near Jerusalem.

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 stye,
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!

23. *Chine:* backbone.
29. *Quotha:* indeed!
31. *Doomed . . . dozen:* the ones who must pretend to be converted.
32. *Cog* and *cozen:* cheat.

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.

52. *Corso:* a street in Rome.

66 ff. Rabbi Ben Ezra (see Browning's poem by that name) was a Medieval Jewish philosopher whose "Song of Death" is used here. Browning wrote to Dr. Furnivall, February 17, 1888, that in this passage Ben Ezra

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

---

is not supposed to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah in his retort that the so-called Christians are, even by their own Lawgiver, condemned.

91–2. If He, Jesus, was really the Messiah.

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 march, thy band,
South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!"

[*Pope Gregory XVI abolished this bad business of the sermon.* —R. B.]

121. (*Note*) The papal bull to abolish this practice was issued officially in 1846.

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 head beneath thine, while thy healing hands
Close-covered both my eyes beside thy breast,
Pressing the brain, which too much thought expands,

* Written in July, 1848, and published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning himself is speaking of the picture called *L'Angelo Custode* that was in the Church of San Agostino (St. Augustine) in Fano, a small Italian city on the Adriatic.

6. *Another child:* Browning himself, yearning to be protected from "the world" and from "too much thought." This poem should be interpreted in the light of the fact that the poet lived under his mother's care until he was

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

---

34 (leaving college after a few months to cultivate his mind privately, in his mother's garden) and left home only when he married a woman of 40, here identified as "my angel."

25–28. Notice the indication here of a deep psychological basis for Browning's dislike of rationalism.

29–35. Compare this (and the preceding stanza) with the ideas of Keats (one of the most important influences in forming the mind of Browning), especially *Lamia*, 229–236; *Ode to a Nightingale*, 27; and *Ode on a Grecian Urn:*

> Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity: . . .
> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (44–5, 49–50.)

33–35. Notice that although Browning here expresses a characteristic extreme Romantic faith that the whole duty of man consists in a quiescent esthetic appreciation of scenery, he has also indicated that "brain" and "too much thought" interfere with the acceptance of this view. Intellectual interference can be "suppressed," however, by the motherly, "soothing" caresses of an angel-wife. He then identifies this "quiet, happy" resignation with doing one's duty, going far beyond Keats, who simply ignored the ethical in his esthetic thought. On this current of thought, see Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*.

36. *Guercino:* "the squinter," Giovanni Francesco Barberini (1590–1660), painter of the picture which Browning is here making use of for a philosophy utterly different from the Christianity which inspired the painting. Browning had admired Guercino's work in the Dulwich Gallery near his home.

37. *Alfred:* Domett, his friend.

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.

CLEON*

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

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!

46. *My Angel:* Browning's wife.
55. *Wairoa:* a river in New Zealand, where Alfred Domett had gone.
56. *Ancona:* a town in Italy near Fano.

*In a letter to his royal patron, Cleon, a cultivated Greek of the decadence (who argues sophistically that it is not decadence), complacent over his achievements but really filled with a sense of futility, makes us realize that the Classical world is ready for Christianity, the religious message that is being preached by St. Paul (Paulus) "Apostle to the Gentiles." Yet Cleon retains, throughout, the detached scepticism that one sees also in Pilate's "What is Truth?" The dilettante characteristics (*e.g.*, considering Homer and Terpander from the point of view of the artistic types they mastered rather than for their creative power) are presented graphically by Browning, who lived in an age that saw again the complacency, decadence,

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,—

and dilettantism represented here. Paul Elmer More, in "Why is Browning Popular?" (*Shelburne Essays, Third Series*) says, "in reality, through this monologue, suspended delicately between self-examination and dramatic confession, he is focussing in one individual heart the doom of the great civilization that is passing away and the splendid triumph of the new."

It was published in *Men and Women* (1855). A. W. Crawford (in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Oct. 1927, xxiv, 485 ff) suggests that the occasion of this poem was Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*, published in 1852 and omitted by Arnold from his edition of 1853 because in it "there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" (Preface of 1853). When Arnold reinstated *Empedocles* in his *New Poems* (1867), he wrote to his brother, "Browning's desire that I should reprint 'Empedocles' was really the cause of the volume appearing at all" (*Letters*, ed. Russell, 1895, I, 431). The quotation at the head of the poem is from Acts, xvii, 28, spoken at Athens by St. Paul, who is referred to at the end of the poem. Cleon and Protus are both fictitious, but typical of their age.

1. *Sprinkled isles:* the Sporades, east of Greece.

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 mightst 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 Pœcile, o'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,

47. An epic poem engraved on golden tablets.
51. The statue of Apollo on the lighthouse.
53. *Pœcile:* the Portico at Athens with its paintings.

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

140. *Terpander:* founder of Greek music, who lived in the seventh century B.C.

141. Polygnotus, the painter, was reputed to be the teacher of the great sculptor Phidias. They lived in the fifth century B.C., during the Periclean Age, the greatest period of Athenian art and statesmanship. Browning's own faith in Progress led him, like Cleon, to deny superior greatness to past achievement.

With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored eachother'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 't is 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 inconscious 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 ('t is 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: 't is 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 Phœbus, 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 Æschylus, 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

340. *Paulus:* St. Paul.

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 circumsized,
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.

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.

341. *Christus:* Christ.

* Browning contrasts the neglect that Keats suffered with the rewards won by those who later exploited the vein of poetry opened up by Keats. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Perhaps Browning drew the figure of speech that runs through the poem from Keats' sonnet beginning "Blue! 'T is the life of heaven."

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 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.

18–20. Reference to John, ii, 1–10.

24. *Tyre:* Phoenician city from which came the Tyrian purple (or blue) dye that was the sign of royalty. See note to line 64.

29. *Astarte:* Semitic goddess identified with Aphrodite or Artemis.

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 up?
What porridge had John Keats?

41 ff. See 1 Kings, vi–vii.
51. *Conchs:* shells.
58. Imaginary names for a company of merchants that bottle, sell, and take the pay for the product won at great labor by the ill-paid fisherman.
61. He eats turtle like a prosperous merchant.
64. *Murex:* the mollusk from which the dye is made.
65. *Porridge: i.e.,* reward.

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY*

A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE

ROSA MUNDI; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS. A CONCEIT OF MASTER GYSBRECHT, CANON-REGULAR OF SAINT JODOCUS-BY-THE-BAR, YPRES CITY. CANTUQUE, *VIRGILIUS*. AND HATH OFTEN BEEN SUNG AT HOCK-TIDE AND FESTIVALS. GAVISUS ERAM, *JESSIDES*.

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, at Paris, A.D. 1314; as distorted by the refraction from Flemish brain to brain, during the course of a couple of centuries.)

I

PREADMONISHETH 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,

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). An interlude is a light entertainment. *Rosa Mundi; seu, Fulcite Me Floribus* is Latin for "Rose of the World; or Sustain Me with Flowers." *Cantuque:* "And in song." *Virgilius* (Virgil) and *Jessides* are proper names, signed. *Gavisus Eram:* "I was delighted." Ypres is a city in Flanders. Jacques du Bourg-Molay (called John in the poem) was the last Grand Master of the great crusading order, the Knights Templars. He was imprisoned by King Philip IV of France and burnt as a heretic when the order was suppressed and its property confiscated. Abbot Deodaet and his monks are singing in the choir of their church.

8–9. *Plagal-cadence:* a closing progression of chords.

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 clavicithern,*
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 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.

12–14. Pope Clement V (1303–1314), who suppressed the Templars, made it a charge against de Molay that they had sold their gains to the enemy, Sultan Saladin.

17–18. *Clavicithern:* a cithern with keys like a clavichord.

28. *Bavins:* bundles of brushwood.

29. *Billets:* sticks of firewood.

35. *Laudes:* a service of the Church, including the Psalms of praise.

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.
  (*Salvâ reverentiâ.*)
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

'T is 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!

---

48. *Salvâ reverentiâ:* "greet with a reverence" (since the Flesh, or Host, of the Sacrament has just been mentioned).
60. *Sharon's rose:* in Song of Solomon, ii, 1.

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!

64. *Leman:* sweetheart.
69. *Felix:* Procurator of Judea; see Acts, xxiv.

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA*

I

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, run to seed
There, branching from the brickwork's cleft,
Some old tomb's ruin: yonder weed
Took up the floating weft,

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.

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855). The Campagna (ancient Latium) is the plain around Rome, providing, with its ruins and its rich pastures, a very appropriate setting for this mood of melancholy over the sense that love is as elusive as a spider web.

21. *Champaign:* the Campagna.

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.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN EUROPE.*

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.

* This is a realistic elegy on the death of a typical scholar ("grammarian") who has devoted his life to minute linguistic research and values learning for learning's own sake. The poet has laid it in the time of the Renaissance, when the recovery of knowledge of Greek and Latin literature was the necessary means of restoring contact with the classical view of life, human and rational in its emphasis. This "grammarian" however does not apply his learning to human purposes in the spirit of the Renaissance; in his devotion to facts for their own sake he is perhaps more like a type of scholar that flourished in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Browning himself admires the decision "not to Live"—this willingness to forego everything except study. In his glorification of specialization and his "philosophy of the imperfect," Browning was hostile to the classic demand for balanced and well-rounded perfection, and preferred an attitude that he was calling Medieval in other poems that appeared in 1855 in the same work, *Men and Women* (e. g. "Old Pictures in Florence"). John Ruskin also ascribed that philosophy to the Middle Ages in *The Stones of Venice* (1853), which Browning had been reading in 1854. The scholar is therefore not of one age but of any. As the master's disciples carry his body up the mountain, the rhythm of their step is very successfully reflected in the meter of the verse.

3 *Crofts:* enclosed fields; *thorpes:* villages.

Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied 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,

50. *Gowned him:* put on a gown, symbol of academic life.

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:

81–3. *Cf.* "Old Pictures in Florence," 120 and 152.

84. *Cf.* the conception of Heaven expressed in "Evelyn Hope," "Andrea del Sarto," "Rabbi Ben Ezra," *etc.* Browning wishes to encourage even ambitions that cannot be attained on earth.

86. *Calculus:* the stone.

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.

88. *Tussis:* a cough.
95. *Hydroptic:* over-thirsty.
97 ff. *Cf.* "Abt Vogler," line 72.

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.

---

127. *Rattle:* of death.

129–131. *Hoti, Oun, De:* Greek particles meaning "that," "therefore," "towards."

139. Contrast the characteristic attitude of the Renaissance, as expressed by Montaigne in *Of Pedantry* and *Of the Education of Children*, or in the words of Sir Philip Sidney on "The highest end of the mistress Knowledge . . . which stands . . . in the knowledge of a man's self, in the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only" (*Apology for Poetry*).

141–3. Browning did not really approve of dangerous scholarship as is shown in "Christmas Eve," XVIII, where he regrets that learning has left Grammar to study the Bible. He would not tolerate the kind of scholarship the Renaissance most admired, that of a man like Erasmus, whose learning had revolutionary consequences.

ONE WAY OF LOVE*

I

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? 'T is well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE**

I

June was not over,
Though past the full,
And the best of her roses
Had yet to blow,
When a man I know

* Published in *Men and Women* (1855), with "Another Way of Love" to which it is contrasted by exhibiting the attitude of patience. In the final edition of Browning's poetry this was printed immediately after "A Serenade at the Villa" to which it is very similar in mood and situation.

** Sequel to "One Way of Love" and published with it in *Men and Women* (1855). Both are poems of June roses. The woman compares her perfections to those of June, and speaks scornfully of the man who could tire of them merely because they are always the same. She threatens to give herself to one who will appreciate "redness and sweetness." Or she may strike with the June-lightning of her scorn such insects as men.

(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 't were,—
"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.

"TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS."*

Stop playing, poet! May a brother speak?
'T is you speak, that 's your error. Song 's our art:
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts

19. *Eadem semper:* "always the same."

* The title is in quotation marks, as if it were the title of some other poet's work on which Browning is commenting. Cooke's *Guide-Book* says

Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
—True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure up!
But why such long prolusion and display,
Such turning and adjustment of the harp,
And taking it upon your breast, at length,
Only to speak dry words across its strings?
Stark-naked thought is in request enough:
Speak prose and hollo it till Europe hears!
The six-foot Swiss tube, braced about with bark,
Which helps the hunter's voice from Alp to Alp—
Exchange our harp for that,—who hinders you?

But here 's your fault; grown men want thought, you think;
Thought 's what they mean by verse, and seek in verse.
Boys seek for images and melody,
Men must have reason—so, you aim at men.
Quite otherwise! Objects throng our youth, 't is true;
We see and hear and do not wonder much:
If you could tell us what they mean, indeed!
As German Boehme never cared for plants
Until it happed, a-walking in the fields,
He noticed all at once that plants could speak,
Nay, turned with loosened tongue to talk with him.
That day the daisy had an eye indeed—
Colloquized with the cowslip on such themes!

---

that here Browning "speaks to a young realistic poet, who is writing a poem in twelve books on transcendentalism, and advises him not to make his song too naked, in its attempt to describe life as it is." DeVane in his *Handbook* suggests that perhaps this is a reply to Carlyle's advice to poets to say in prose what they had to say. Carlyle was a transcendentalist. The poem was published in *Men and Women* (1855). Browning's later verse is often guilty of the faults here condemned.

22. Jacob Boehme was a German mystic (1575–1624). Two years before the publication of this poem, Mrs. Browning and some of their friends became interested in Swedenborg, a follower of Boehme, who was himself a follower of Paracelsus (the subject of Browning's second published poem). Boehme saw hidden meanings in all nature. One day the sunshine on a burnished pewter dish shone with such splendor that he fell into an ecstasy, and felt that he could look into the principles of things. Thinking this to be a mere fancy, "in order to banish it from his mind he went out upon the green. But here he remarked that he gazed into the very heart of things, the very herbs and grass" (Martensen, *Jacob Boehme*, tr. T. Rhys Evans, London, 1885, p. 7).

We find them extant yet in Jacob's prose.
But by the time youth slips a stage or two
While reading prose in that tough book he wrote
(Collating and emendating the same
And settling on the sense most to our mind),
We shut the clasps and find life's summer past.
Then, who helps more, pray, to repair our loss—
Another Boehme with a tougher book
And subtler meanings of what roses say,—
Or some stout Mage like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about?
He with a "look you!" vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
Over us, under, round us every side,
Nay, in and out the tables and the chairs
And musty volumes, Boehme's book and all,—
Buries us with a glory, young once more,
Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.

So come, the harp back to your heart again!
You are a poem, though your poem 's naught.
The best of all you showed before, believe,
Was your own boy-face o'er the finer chords
Bent, following the cherub at the top
That points to God with his paired half-moon wings.

ONE WORD MORE

TO E. B. B.*

1855

I

THERE they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!

37. Johannes Teutonicus, a canon of Halberstadt, was a magician said to be able to make flowers spring up in winter—as a poet creates beauty.

* Browning dedicates *Men and Women* (1855) to his wife, "E.B.B.," with this epilogue. It is the reply to her poetic expression of her love for him in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850).

1–2. *Men and Women* contained fifty poems besides this epilogue, and the rest of the book was "finished" and in the hands of the printer before this poem was added.

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 life-time?
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.

5. Vasari is responsible for the story that Raphael, the great Renaissance painter, wrote a hundred sonnets to a young girl he loved all his life. Only four sonnets are known to have been composed by him.

21–22. The Sistine Madonna and the Madonna of Foligno are two of the most famous of Raphael's fifty or more Madonnas.

23. Browning wrote to W. J. Rolfe, "The Madonna at Florence is that called *del Granduca*, which represents her 'as appearing to a votary in a vision.'" It is in the Pitti Palace.

24. Browning said, "I think I mean *La Belle Jardinière*—but am not sure—from the picture in the Louvre."

27. Guido Reni (1575–1642), an Italian painter, treasured a book of Raphael's original designs—not sonnets, as Browning implies.

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 brown 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.

32. Dante, the greatest poet of the Middle Ages, expresses his devotion to Beatrice Portinari in both *The Divine Comedy* and *The New Life*, where he writes (ch. XXXV) that on the first anniversary of her death, "having her in mind, I was drawing an angel upon my tablets, . . . I turned my eyes and saw at my side certain people of importance." Boccaccio says that Dante had studied drawing under Cimabue and was "very intimate with Giotto," and Aretino says, "Dante was an excellent draughtsman."

35–36. *Pen corroded:* by the writing of the first part of *The Divine Comedy*, "The Inferno," where he showed his Florentine enemies tortured in Hell.

44. So for Browning this poem differs from the rest of the portraits of *Men and Women* by being a study of "his angel."

48. There is no basis for this statement in Dante's *New Life*. The passage quoted above ends, "And when they had gone away, I returned to my work, that is, that of drawing figures of angels."

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 for ever.

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 savours of disrelish;
Thus achievement lacks a gracious somewhat;

57. *Bice:* Beatrice.
74. Moses. (See Exodus, xvi–xix; Numbers, xii and xx.)

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-forehead'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 Æthiopian 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!

95. See Exodus, xvi, 3.

97. *Sinai . . . brilliance:* God appearing amid lightning on Mt. Sinai. See Exodus, xix and xxxiv.

101. *Jethro's daughter:* Zipporah, wife of Moses. See Exodus, ii and xviii.

102. *Aethiopian bondslave:* See Numbers, xii.

115. Here Browning himself endorses the view expressed in "Evelyn Hope" that there may be several afterlives. As that hope was for the

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 thro' bronze, may breathe thro' 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,

---

fruition of earthly passion, here he hopes for an increasing number of worldly skills.

125. *Missal-marge:* margin of a mass-book.

126. *Breathe thro' silver:* While he cannot change his artistic medium, he can at least change his method. DeVane (*Handbook*, 244) interprets this to mean that for the first and last time he used trochaic pentameter. While it is true that no poem by Browning achieves such a silvery tone (appropriate to the moon-imagery), still line 137 makes it clear that the change in method was chiefly from dramatic to direct expression of his own feelings, these being in his view the two chief kinds of poetry. (See his "Essay on Shelley.") But it is not true that this is the first or last time he speaks out in his own person.

136. *Karshish, Cleon, etc.:* characters who speak in *Men and Women*.

137. In his "Essay on Shelley" Browning distinguishes two chief kinds of poetry, objective (dramatic) and subjective (direct lyrical expression). He claimed to be almost always portraying characters even when it seems clear to readers that he is setting forth his own views. This confessed exception is thus a special concession to "E.B.B.," who had urged him even before their marriage, in a letter of May 26, 1846, to speak out directly.

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 colour,
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 houseroofs,
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 ('t is 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,

146. *Thrice-transfigured*: in the three phases, new, full and old. The moon is to Browning a symbol of his wife in other poems.

148. *Fiesole:* town near Florence.

150. *Samminiato:* the Church of San Miniato, on the hills near Florence.

160. *Mythos:* the story of the love of the moon goddess for Endymion. Keats' poem *Endymion* is referred to in line 165.

161. One side of the moon is never seen from the earth.

163. Zoroaster was the founder of the ancient Persian religion whose god Ormazd was the principle of Light. Hence the interest in observation of the heavenly bodies.

164. *Galileo:* Italian astronomer (1564–1642), who first used a telescope and made some discoveries concerning the moon.

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 shall 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.

165. Shelley translated Homer's "Hymn to Artemis" from the *Iliad*, Bk. XXI.

174. See Exodus, xxiv, 9–10.

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!

R. B.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE*

I.—JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW

I

Ah, Love, but a day
  And the world has changed!
The sun 's away,
  And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
  And the sky 's deranged:
Summer has stopped.

II

Look in my eyes!
  Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
  Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
  In the good and true,
With the changing year?

III

Thou art a man,
  But I am thy love.

* This was first published with the title "James Lee," in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). In the collected edition of 1868 the present title was substituted, a significant indication that the center of interest in this (as in so many of Browning's poems) is not the narrative, but the psychology of the speaker. The story of an unfortunate marriage is told in a series of meditations by the wife, who remains constant. *Cf.* Meredith's *Modern Love*, which had just appeared when Browning began his poem in 1862.

I. While her husband has been away for a day, summer has departed. Will love depart too?

For the lake, its swan;
For the dell, its dove;
And for thee—(oh, haste!)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

II.—BY THE FIRESIDE

I

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,
Oak and pine?
Oh, for the ills half-understood,
The dim dead woe
Long ago
Befallen this bitter coast of France!
Well, poor sailors took their chance;
I take mine.

II

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot
O'er the sea:
Do sailors eye the casement—mute,
Drenched and stark,
From their bark—
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate
O' the warm safe house and happy freight
—Thee and me?

III

God help you, sailors, at your need!
Spare the curse!
For some ships, safe in port indeed,
Rot and rust,
Run to dust,
All through worms i' the wood, which crept,
Gnawed our hearts out while we slept:
That is worse.

II. The fire that warms them is of shipwreck wood. Will love be shipwrecked too?

IV

Who lived here before us two?
Old-world pairs.
Did a woman ever—would I knew!—
Watch the man
With whom began
Love's voyage full-sail,—(now, gnash your teeth!)
When planks start, open hell beneath
Unawares?

III.—IN THE DOORWAY

I

The swallow has set her six young on the rail,
And looks sea-ward:
The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-pale
To the leeward,—
On the weather-side, black, spotted white with the wind.
"Good fortune departs, and disaster 's behind,"—
Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite wail!

II

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has furled
Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world
Where there lingers
No glint of the gold, Summer sent for her sake:
How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled on its stake!
My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks curled.

III

Yet here are we two; we have love, house enough,
With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and rough,
Though it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a bent;
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;
And they both will be gone at November's rebuff.

III. The two have everything, including love, but the cold is spreading.

61–7. This stanza describes what Browning saw from his house at Ste. Marie on the coast of Brittany where he lived during the summer of 1862.

72. *Bent:* grass.

IV

But why must cold spread? but wherefore bring change
To the spirit,
God meant should mate his with an infinite range,
And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold!
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter estrange!

IV.—ALONG THE BEACH

I

I WILL be quiet and talk with you,
And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love—is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do:
What has come of it all along?

II

I took you—how could I otherwise?
For a world to me, and more;
For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God 's a-glow, to the loving eyes,
In what was mere earth before.

III

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth!
Now do I mis-state, mistake?
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth?
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,
Seal my sense up for your sake?

IV

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love! not so, indeed!
You were just weak earth, I knew:
With much in you waste, with many a weed,
And plenty of passions run to seed,
But a little good grain too.

IV. There is now no doubt about their estrangement. She reasons with him why he is wrong: She took him as he was—mere earth, full of weeds. She waited for a harvest, but it did not come. Yet he was still her whole world. And her very devotion became irksome to him.

V

And such as you were, I took you for mine:
Did not you find me yours,
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
Would flow, as the Book assures?

VI

Well, and if none of these good things came,
What did the failure prove?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to blame,
And, either or both, to love.

VII

Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!
That I do love, watch too long,
And wait too well, and weary and wear;
And 't is all an old story, and my despair
Fit subject for some new song:

VIII

"How the light, light love, he has wings to fly
At suspicion of a bond:
My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-bye,
Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,
And why should you look beyond?"

V.—ON THE CLIFF

I

I LEANED on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were to mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

V. Like a gay cricket or resplendent butterfly, love settles on barren, low minds, bringing them a grace that is not theirs. (*Cf.* the Christian doctrine of the Grace of God.)

II

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face:
No iron like that!
Baked dry; of a weed, of a shell, no trace:
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

III

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue,
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a warhorse, barded and chanfroned too,
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

IV

On the rock, they scorch
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly:
No turf, no rock: in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red!

V

Is it not so
With the minds of men?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,—
Love settling unawares!

VI.—READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF

I

"Still ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?
Which needs the other's office, thou or I?

137. *Barded and chanfroned:* armed and plumed.
138. *Quixote-mage:* quixotic magician.

VI. She is reading a book of poetry by some young man—Browning himself, who had published the quoted poem (here stanzas I–VI) in the *Monthly Repository*, May, 1836. She regards the poem as an expression of youthful inexperience. What the wind really announces is change.

Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,
And can, in truth, my voice untie
Its links, and let it go?

II

"Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would be righted,
Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!
No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith, requited
With falsehood,—love, at last aware
Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

III

"We have them; but I know not any tone
So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:
Dost think men would go mad without a moan,
If they knew any way to borrow
A pathos like thy own?

IV

"Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs? The one
So long escaping from lips starved and blue,
That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
Stretches her length; her foot comes through
The straw she shivers on;

V

"You had not thought she was so tall: and spent,
Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut
Close, close, their sharp and livid nails indent
The clammy palm; then all is mute:
That way, the spirit went.

VI

"Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
Thy will to help me?—like the dog I found
Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
Who would not take my food, poor hound,
But whined and licked my hand."

VII

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride
Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—

Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried:

VIII

Instances he must—simply recognize?
Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's zeal,
Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

IX

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!
Himself the undefeated that shall be:
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—
His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest!

X

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what the wind
Means in its moaning—by the happy prompt
Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind
Calm years, exacting their accompt
Of pain, mature the mind:

XI

And *some midsummer morning*, at the lull
Just about daybreak, as he looks across
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul,—

XII

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
"Here is the change beginning, here the lines
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns."

XIII

Nothing can be as it has been before;
Better, so call it, only not the same.
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,
And keep it changeless! such our claim;
So answered,—Never more!

XIV

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
  Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
  From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled!

XV

That 's a new question; still replies the fact,
  Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;
We moan in acquiescence: there 's life's pact,
  Perhaps probation—do *I* know?
God does: endure his act!

XVI

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
  On his soul's hands' palms one fair good wise thing
Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's wave;
  While time first washes—ah, the sting!—
O'er all he 'd sink to save.

VII.—AMONG THE ROCKS

I

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.

II

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!

VII. She decides that while he is not worth her love, she should not expect her love to be rewarded on earth. Her suffering may make his low nature better.

VIII.—BESIDE THE DRAWING BOARD

I

"As like as a Hand to another Hand!"
  Whoever said that foolish thing,
Could not have studied to understand
  The counsels of God in fashioning,
Out of the infinite love of his heart,
This Hand, whose beauty I praise, apart
From the world of wonder left to praise,
If I tried to learn the other ways
Of love in its skill, or love in its power.
  "As like as a Hand to another Hand":
  Who said that, never took his stand,
Found and followed, like me, an hour,
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear, almost,—of the limit-line!
As I looked at this, and learned and drew,
  Drew and learned, and looked again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
  Its beauty mounted into my brain,
  And a fancy seized me; I was fain
To efface my work, begin anew,
Kiss what before I only drew;
Ay, laying the red chalk 'twixt my lips,
  With soul to help if the mere lips failed,
  I kissed all right where the drawing ailed,
Kissed fast the grace that somehow slips
Still from one's soulless finger-tips.

II

'T is a clay cast, the perfect thing,
  From Hand live once, dead long ago:

VIII. A clay cast of a beautiful hand that she has been drawing lies before her; but she turns from this ideal perfection to the living rough hand of a peasant girl, recognizing Leonardo da Vinci's scientific interest in reality. (Browning, the realistic poet, is closer to science than to Platonism in his own esthetics.) Similarly, she has been a fool to look for the ideal in her love.

270–330. The second stanza and first section of the third stanza were added in the 1868 edition.

Princess-like it wears the ring
To fancy's eye, by which we know
That here at length a master found
His match, a proud lone soul its mate,
As soaring genius sank to ground,
And pencil could not emulate
The beauty in this,—how free, how fine
To fear almost!—of the limit-line.
Long ago the god, like me
The worm, learned, each in our degree:
Looked and loved, learned and drew,
Drew and learned and loved again,
While fast the happy minutes flew,
Till beauty mounted into his brain
And on the finger which outvied
His art he placed the ring that 's there,
Still by fancy's eye descried,
In token of a marriage rare:
For him on earth, his art's despair,
For him in heaven, his soul's fit bride.

III

Little girl with the poor coarse hand
I turned from to a cold clay cast—
I have my lesson, understand
The worth of flesh and blood at last.
Nothing but beauty in a Hand?
Because he could not change the hue,
Mend the lines and make them true
To this which met his soul's demand,—
Would Da Vinci turn from you?
I hear him laugh my woes to scorn—
"The fool forsooth is all forlorn
Because the beauty, she thinks best,
Lived long ago or was never born,—
Because no beauty bears the test
In this rough peasant Hand! Confessed!
'Art is null and study void!'
So sayest thou? So said not I,
Who threw the faulty pencil by,
And years instead of hours employed,

Learning the veritable use
  Of flesh and bone and nerve beneath
  Lines and hue of the outer sheath,
If haply I might reproduce
One motive of the powers profuse,
Flesh and bone and nerve that make
  The poorest coarsest human hand
  An object worthy to be scanned
A whole life long for their sole sake.
Shall earth and the cramped moment-space
Yield the heavenly crowning grace?
Now the parts and then the whole!
Who art thou, with stinted soul
  And stunted body, thus to cry
'I love,—shall that be life's strait dole?
  I must live beloved or die!'
This peasant hand that spins the wool
  And bakes the bread, why lives it on,
  Poor and coarse with beauty gone,—
What use survives the beauty?" Fool!

Go, little girl with the poor coarse hand!
I have my lesson, shall understand.

IX.—ON DECK

I

THERE is nothing to remember in me,
  Nothing I ever said with a grace,
Nothing I did that you care to see,
  Nothing I was that deserves a place
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.

II

Conceded! In turn, concede to me,
  Such things have been as a mutual flame.

IX. She is leaving him. She was harsh, ill-favored, without grace or beauty; but if he had loved her as she loved him, she might have been transformed in his eyes. (Browning himself, while he wishes to avoid classical idealism, believes in pushing on beyond the known truth and accepting romantic illusions.)

Your soul 's locked fast; but, love for a key,
You might let it loose, till I grew the same
In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange plea!

III

For then, then, what would it matter to me
That I was the harsh ill-favoured one?
We both should be like as pea and pea;
It was ever so since the world begun:
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

IV

How strange it were if you had all me,
As I have all you in my heart and brain,
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee,
Who never lifted the hand in vain—
Will hold mine yet, from over the sea!

V

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
Rose like your own face present now,
With eyes as dear in their due degree,
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,
Till you saw yourself, while you cried " 'T is She!"

VI

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love;
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
A passion to stand as your thoughts approve,
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.

VII

But did one touch of such love for me
Come in a word or a look of yours,
Whose words and looks will, circling, flee
Round me and round while life endures,—
Could I fancy "As I feel, thus feels he";

VIII

Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
And your hair grow these coarse hanks of hair,

Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—
  You might turn myself!—should I know or care
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

THE WORST OF IT*

I

Would it were I had been false, not you!
  I that am nothing, not you that are all:
I, never the worse for a touch or two
  On my speckled hide; not you, the pride
Of the day, my swan, that a first fleck's fall
  On her wonder of white must unswan, undo!

II

I had dipped in life's struggle and, out again,
  Bore specks of it here, there, easy to see,
When I found my swan and the cure was plain;
  The dull turned bright as I caught your white
On my bosom: you saved me—saved in vain
  If you ruined yourself, and all through me!

III

Yes, all through the speckled beast that I am,
  Who taught you to stoop; you gave me yourself,
And bound your soul by the vows that damn:
  Since on better thought you break, as you ought,
Vows—words, no angel set down, some elf
  Mistook,—for an oath, an epigram!

* This was published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864), and embodies both of the two main themes of the poems in that volume: disappointment in human love, and hope from Divine Love in spite of the problems involved. The speaker seems to be a man whose wife has been false to him, but who thinks only of the injury she has done herself, and blames himself for her sins. In stooping to save him, she ruined herself. "The worst of it" is that her purity, which was once his salvation, has been stained. Loving and forgiving her himself, he yet reminds her that she is a sinner in the eyes of God, in danger of not going to heaven, and fears that it will be his duty at the end of her life to join the devil in stabbing her. He hopes that she will work out her penance, and return to virtue, though not to him. Notice the man's conception of a "glass and gold" heaven, and his assumption that he himself is more forgiving than God.

IV

Yes, might I judge you, here were my heart,
And a hundred its like, to treat as you pleased!
I choose to be yours, for my proper part,
Yours, leave or take, or mar me or make;
If I acquiesce, why should you be teased
With the conscience-prick and the memory-smart?

V

But what will God say? Oh, my sweet,
Think, and be sorry you did this thing
Though earth were unworthy to feel your feet,
There's a heaven above may deserve your love:
Should you forfeit heaven for a snapt gold ring
And a promise broke, were it just or meet?

VI

And I to have tempted you! I, who tried
Your soul, no doubt, till it sank! Unwise,
I loved, and was lowly, loved and aspired,
Loved, grieving or glad, till I made you mad,
And you meant to have hated and despised—
Whereas, you deceived me nor inquired!

VII

She, ruined? How? No heaven for her?
Crowns to give, and none for the brow
That looked like marble and smelt like myrrh?
Shall the robe be worn, and the palm-branch borne,
And she go graceless, she graced now
Beyond all saints, as themselves aver?

VIII

Hardly! That must be understood!
The earth is your place of penance, then;
And what will it prove? I desire your good,
But, plot as I may, I can find no way
How a blow should fall, such as falls on men,
Nor prove too much for your womanhood.

IX

It will come, I suspect, at the end of life,
When you walk alone, and review the past;
And I, who so long shall have done with strife,
And journeyed my stage and earned my wage
And retired as was right,—I am called at last
When the devil stabs you, to lend the knife.

X

He stabs for the minute of trivial wrong,
Nor the other hours are able to save,
The happy, that lasted my whole life long:
For a promise broke, not for first words spoke,
The true, the only, that turn my grave
To a blaze of joy and a crash of song.

XI

Witness beforehand! Off I trip
On a safe path gay through the flowers you flung:
My very name made great by your lip,
And my heart a-glow with the good I know
Of a perfect year when we both were young,
And I tasted the angels' fellowship.

XII

And witness, moreover . . . Ah, but wait!
I spy the loop whence an arrow shoots!
It may be for yourself, when you meditate,
That you grieve—for slain ruth, murdered truth.
"Though falsehood escape in the end, what boots?
How truth would have triumphed!"—you sigh too late.

XIII

Ay, who would have triumphed like you, I say!
Well, it is lost now; well, you must bear,
Abide and grow fit for a better day:
You should hardly grudge, could I be your judge!
But hush! For you, can be no despair:
There's amends: 'tis a secret: hope and pray!

XIV

For I was true at least—oh, true enough!
And, Dear, truth is not as good as it seems!
Commend me to conscience! Idle stuff!
Much help is in mine, as I mope and pine,
And skulk through day, and scowl in my dreams
At my swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff.

XV

Men tell me of truth now—"False!" I cry:
Of beauty—"A mask, friend! Look beneath!"
We take our own method, the devil and I,
With pleasant and fair and wise and rare:
And the best we wish to what lives, is—death;
Which even in wishing, perhaps we lie!

XVI

Far better commit a fault and have done—
As you, Dear! for ever; and choose the pure,
And look where the healing waters run,
And strive and strain to be good again,
And a place in the other world ensure,
All glass and gold, with God for its sun.

XVII

Misery! What shall I say or do?
I cannot advise, or, at least, persuade:
Most like, you are glad you deceived me—rue
No whit of the wrong: you endured too long,
Have done no evil and want no aid,
Will live the old life out and chance the new.

XVIII

And your sentence is written all the same,
And I can do nothing,—pray, perhaps:
But somehow the world pursues its game,—
If I pray, if I curse,—for better or worse;
And my faith is torn to a thousand scraps,
And my heart feels ice while my words breathe flame.

XIX

Dear, I look from my hiding-place.
  Are you still so fair? Have you still the eyes?
Be happy! Add but the other grace,
  Be good! Why want what the angels vaunt?
I knew you once: but in Paradise,
  If we meet, I will pass nor turn my face.

DÎS ALITER VISUM; OR, LE BYRON DE NOS JOURS*

I

STOP, let me have the truth of that!
  Is that all true? I say, the day
Ten years ago when both of us
  Met on a morning, friends—as thus
We meet this evening, friends or what?—

II

Did you—because I took your arm
  And sillily smiled, "A mass of brass
That sea looks, blazing underneath!"
  While up the cliff-road edged with heath,
We took the turns nor came to harm—

III

Did you consider "Now makes twice
  That I have seen her, walked and talked
With this poor pretty thoughtful thing,
  Whose worth I weigh: she tries to sing;
Draws, hopes in time the eye grows nice;

* *Dîs aliter visum*, from Virgil's *Aeneid* (II, 428), "To the gods it seemed otherwise." The speaker in Browning's poem is a woman who rebukes a man for not yielding to his love for her ten years before; his failure to speak has ruined four souls. The scene is on the French coast; and the French subtitle, *Le Byron de nos jours*, means "The Byron of our days." Byron's "Dream" tells of a similar tragic quadrangle, but the relative positions of the man and woman are reversed. Notice the contrast between the Byronic lover of the Romantic period and the restrained "realist" typical of Mid-Victorian days. Browning's sympathy was for the romantic lover, and his own courtship of Elizabeth Barrett is one of the most impetuous in the annals of literature. In his letter to her on August

IV

"Reads verse and thinks she understands;
Loves all, at any rate, that 's great,
Good, beautiful; but much as we
Down at the bath-house love the sea,
Who breathe its salt and bruise its sands:

V

"While . . . do but follow the fishing-gull
That flaps and floats from wave to cave!
There 's the sea-lover, fair my friend!
What then? Be patient, mark and mend!
Had you the making of your scull?"

VI

And did you, when we faced the church
With spire and sad slate roof, aloof
From human fellowship so far,
Where a few graveyard crosses are,
And garlands for the swallows' perch,—

VII

Did you determine, as we stepped
O'er the lone stone fence, "Let me get
Her for myself, and what 's the earth
With all its art, verse, music, worth—
Compared with love, found, gained, and kept?

VIII

"Schumann 's our music-maker now;
Has his march-movement youth and mouth?
Ingres 's the modern man that paints;
Which will lean on me, of his saints?
Heine for songs; for kisses, how?"

22, 1846, he mentions how much more he cares for Byron than for Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey put together: "I would at any time have gone to Finchley to see a curl of his hair or one of his gloves." This poem was published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

36. Robert Schumann (1810–58), German composer.

38. Jean August Ingres (1780–1867), French painter.

IX

And did you, when we entered, reached
  The votive frigate, soft aloft
Riding on air this hundred years,
  Safe-smiling at old hopes and fears,—
Did you draw profit while she preached?

X

Resolving, "Fools we wise men grow!
  Yes, I could easily blurt out curt
Some question that might find reply
  As prompt in her stopped lips, dropped eye,
And rush of red to cheek and brow:

XI

"Thus were a match made, sure and fast,
  'Mid the blue weed-flowers round the mound
Where, issuing, we shall stand and stay
  For one more look at baths and bay,
Sands, sea-gulls, and the old church last—

XII

"A match 'twixt me, bent, wigged and lamed,
  Famous, however, for verse and worse,
Sure of the Fortieth spare Arm-chair
  When gout and glory seat me there,
So, one whose love-freaks pass unblamed,—

XIII

"And this young beauty, round and sound
  As a mountain-apple, youth and truth
With loves and doves, at all events
  With money in the Three per Cents;
Whose choice of me would seem profound:—

42. *The votive frigate:* a pious offering, a model of a vessel, hanging in the church.

58. A vacancy is created in the French Academy when one of its forty members dies.

64. British government bonds yielding 3%, an investment noted for safety.

XIV

"She might take me as I take her.
Perfect the hour would pass, alas!
Climb high, love high, what matter? Still,
Feet, feelings, must descend the hill:
An hour's perfection can't recur.

XV

"Then follows Paris and full time
For both to reason: 'Thus with us!'
She 'll sigh, 'Thus girls give body and soul
At first word, think they gain the goal,
When 't is the starting-place they climb!

XVI

" 'My friend makes verse and gets renown;
Have they all fifty years, his peers?
He knows the world, firm, quiet and gay;
Boys will become as much one day:
They're fools; he cheats, with beard less brown.

XVII

" 'For boys say, *Love me or I die!*
He did not say, *The truth is, youth*
I want, who am old and know too much;
I 'd catch youth: lend me sight and touch!
Drop heart's blood where life's wheels grate dry!'

XVIII

"While I should make rejoinder"—(then
It was, no doubt, you ceased that least
Light pressure of my arm in yours)
" 'I can conceive of cheaper cures
For a yawning-fit o'er books and men.

XIX

" 'What? All I am, was, and might be,
All, books taught, art brought, life's whole strife,

85. It has seemed advisable here to add a single quotation mark after *dry* though it is not in the text followed.

Painful results since precious, just
  Were fitly exchanged, in wise disgust,
For two cheeks freshened by youth and sea?

XX

" 'All for a nosegay!—what came first;
  With fields on flower, untried each side;
I rally, need my books and men,
  And find a nosegay': drop it, then,
No match yet made for best or worst!"

XXI

That ended me. You judged the porch
  We left by, Norman; took our look
At sea and sky; wondered so few
  Find out the place for air and view;
Remarked the sun began to scorch;

XXII

Descended, soon regained the baths,
  And then, good-bye! Years ten since then:
Ten years! We meet: you tell me, now,
  By a window-seat for that cliff-brow,
On carpet-stripes for those sand-paths.

XXIII

Now I may speak: you fool, for all
  Your lore! WHO made things plain in vain?
What was the sea for? What, the grey
  Sad church, that solitary day,
Crosses and graves and swallows' call?

XXIV

Was there nought better than to enjoy?
  No feat which, done, would make time break,
And let us pent-up creatures through
  Into eternity, our due?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ?

XXV

No wise beginning, here and now,
  What cannot grow complete (earth's feat)

And heaven must finish, there and then?
No tasting earth's true food for men,
Its sweet in sad, its sad in sweet?

XXVI

No grasping at love, gaining a share
O' the sole spark from God's life at strife
With death, so, sure of range above
The limits here? For us and love,
Failure; but, when God fails, despair.

XXVII

This you call wisdom? Thus you add
Good unto good again, in vain?
You loved, with body worn and weak;
I loved, with faculties to seek:
Were both loves worthless since ill-clad?

XXVIII

Let the mere star-fish in his vault
Crawl in a wash of weed, indeed,
Rose-jacynth to the finger-tips:
He, whole in body and soul, outstrips
Man, found with either in default.

XXIX

But what 's whole, can increase no more,
Is dwarfed and dies, since here 's its sphere.
The devil laughed at you in his sleeve!
You knew not? That I well believe;
Or you had saved two souls: nay, four.

XXX

For Stephanie sprained last night her wrist,
Ankle or something. "Pooh," cry you?
At any rate she danced, all say,
Vilely; her vogue has had its day.
Here comes my husband from his whist.

123. It is a favorite thought of Browning that Heaven completes things begun with intensity on earth, that such a beginning is better than completeness on a lower level. *Cf.* "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Evelyn Hope," and "Rabbi Ben Ezra."

ABT VOGLER*

(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!

---

* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864), this might be called Browning's most notable "metaphysical" poem. It illustrates how his poetry forms a link (in thought as well as in style) between the seventeenth-century metaphysical poetry and that of later followers like T. S. Eliot. Since the philosophy he presents here, and the figure through which it is symbolized, are both ancient and timeless, there is no anarchronism in ascribing his own views to an eighteenth-century Bavarian musician and priest (hence Abt or Abbé) George Joseph Vogler (1749–1814). Browning himself was trained in the musical system invented by Vogler, through his music teacher John Relfe, who, like Meyerbeer and Weber, studied under Vogler. Browning was fond of extemporizing music.

Subtitle: Vogler invented the "orchestrion," a small organ. He was a great extemporizer—hence much of the music he created would seem, at first thought, to be destined for a very transient existence. This raises the philosophical problem: Can anything be real that does not have material existence? Is a piece of music real if it will never be played again? In the words of Newman, "Is it possible that inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regulated, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes?" Newman says that under such a form "great wonders unknown seem to be typified." Abt Vogler in this poem gives approximately the same Christian-Platonist argument, but turns it in the direction of Browning's optimism. We have no evidence that Abbé Vogler actually engaged in these speculations.

3. According to Jewish and Mohammedan legends, Solomon had power to command demons because of a seal on which was engraved the "ineffable Name" of God.

II

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 blind 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.

III

And another would mount and march, like the excellent minion he was,
Ay, another and yet another, one crowd 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—
Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire)
Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.

IV

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,

9. Music has often been compared to architecture.

13–14. Does Browning consider "hell . . . the roots of things"? Browning's optimism may be strong enough to grant even this. *Cf.* "Apollo and the Fates." With this as a starting point, all movement would be good.

21–3. The dome of St. Peter's Cathedral is illuminated on important festival nights.

Not a point nor peak 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.

V

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.

VI

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:—

VII

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!

34. *Protoplast:* that which is modeled first, from which things are made.

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!

VIII

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 love, same God: ay, what was, shall be.

IX

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;

52. The musical reality is not the sum total of three material sounds but an ideal structure. H. J. Muller begins his summary of Gestalt psychology (in *Science and Criticism*, New Haven, 1943, p. 157) thus: "A melody is a related whole, something more than the notes that compose it; (played in another key, with utterly different notes, it is recognizable)." Von Ehrenfels observed that this simple fact of experience cannot be explained by a psychological theory of elements in mechanical association. This "was the origin of the theory of Gestalt." Thus Browning anticipated the twentieth century in phrasing an answer to the older psychology which founded all mental life on association of sensations.

64 ff. *Cf.* "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 157–8.

66. *Cf.* 2 Corinthians, v, 1.

70. *Cf.* the view expressed by various philosophers: Neo-Platonists, Spinoza, Hegel, and other idealistic monists. This is the basis of Brown-

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.

X

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.

XI

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: 't is we musicians know.

XII

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 awhile 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.

---

ing's optimism. In the century in which Abt Vogler lived, a similar view of evil had been set forth by Leibnitz and ridiculed in Voltaire's *Candide*.

72. *Cf.* "A Grammarian's Funeral," lines 97 ff.

91–6. Vogler comes down to the common level. C Major is the natural scale, having no sharps or flats.

RABBI BEN EZRA*

I

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!"

II

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!"

III

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.

IV

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;

* The monistic tendencies of Browning's romantic philosophy would naturally attract him to this Neo-Platonist of the twelfth century who here becomes spokesman for the poet. Abraham Ibn Ezra (Abenezra) fled from Spain and after much travel died at Rome; he seems to have had reason to consider the last of his life pleasanter than the first. But Browning, who had perhaps the luckiest youth and early manhood of any English poet, had little experience in welcoming "each rebuff." The jaunty rhythm is appropriate to the thought. The poem was published in *Dramatis Personae* in 1864, and was answered by Matthew Arnold's poem "Growing Old," in 1867. This Neo-Platonism and optimism should be compared with Emerson's thought.

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V

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.

VI

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!

VII

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.

VIII

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?

---

24 ff. A man would rather *not* have the contentment of an animal that is free of care because its stomach is crammed. Compare Ibn Ezra, *Comment, Job, xxxv, 11,* "Man has the sole privilege of becoming superior to the beast and the fowl."

48. *Cf.* Ibn Ezra, *Comment, Psalm, xxii, 22,* "The soul of man is called lonely because it is separated during its union with the body from the universal soul, into which it is again received when it departs from its earthly companion." (*Cf.* Emerson's doctrine of the "Over-Soul.")

IX

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?"

X

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!"

XI

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!

XII

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!"

57. Browning expresses this interpretation of God in other poems, such as "Cleon," "Saul," "Karshish."

68–9. Here Browning makes the speaker protest against one of Ibn Ezra's own doctrines, that "as long as the bodily desires are strong, the soul is weak and powerless against them" (*Comment, Ecclesiastes vii, 3*). But there are similarities between what follows in the poem and in Ibn Ezra: "therefore, after the victory gained with the support of the animal soul [the higher quality of the body] over the desires, it is necessary that the soul should devote itself to wisdom, and seek its support for the subjection of the passions, in order to remain under the sole control of knowledge."

72. This glorification of the flesh should be contrasted with the kind of idealism which issues in asceticism and Puritanism. Browning's position is

XIII

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.

XIV

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.

XV

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.

XVI

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."

---

a typical "Victorian compromise"—making the best of both material and spiritual, without admitting that anything of either need be sacrificed. Contrast the Gospel of John (Browning's favorite book of the Bible) which says, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing" (vi, 63).

81. *Adventure brave and new:* life after death. But if there is nothing to fear, can it be called an adventure? Perhaps the poet's ideas, and rhythms, imply more confidence than he actually feels.

84. *Indue:* put on.

XVII

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."

XVIII

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.

XIX

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 waitedest age: wait death nor be afraid!

XX

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.

XXI

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!

119–20. Not subject to dispute by fools such as those who destroyed the solitude of youth. Contrast this romantic conception, that truth is found in solitude, with the Socratic search for truth through discussion.

XXII

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?

XXIII

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:

XXIV

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:

XXV

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.

141. *So passed:* and so passed over.

142 ff. Contrast any form of belief in "salvation through works," such as the conception of ethics expressed in the saying, "Hell is paved with good intentions."

150–156. DeVane thinks this whole poem may be an answer to the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, published by FitzGerald in 1859. Certainly this passage attacks the sort of futiliarianism expressed in stanzas 82–90 of the *Rubáiyát*. See Isaiah, lxiv, 8; and Jeremiah, xviii, 2–6.

XXVI

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!"

XXVII

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.

XXVIII

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.

XXIX

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?

XXX

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?

160. *What entered into thee:* This Neo-Platonic doctrine that the soul existed before birth is found in Ibn Ezra.

XXXI

But I need, now as then,
Thee, God, who mouldest 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:

XXXII

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!

A DEATH IN THE DESERT*

[Supposed of Pamphylax the Antiochene:
It is a parchment, of my rolls the fifth,
Hath three skins glued together, is all Greek,
And goeth from *Epsilon* down to *Mu:*
Lies second in the surnamed Chosen Chest,
Stained and conserved with juice of terebinth,
Covered with cloth of hair, and lettered *Xi,*
From Xanthus, my wife's uncle now at peace:
Mu and *Epsilon* stand for my own name.
I may not write it, but I make a cross
To show I wait His coming, with the rest,
And leave off here: beginneth Pamphylax.]

* This poem is like several others that appeared with it in *Dramatis Personae* (1864) in giving Browning's views on current controversial topics, especially theological. Ostensibly the speaker is the aged St. John. But readers at the time would have recognized it as a reply to two lives of Jesus which had appeared within the past twelve months, Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* and Strauss's new *Leben Jesu.* See W. O. Raymond, "Browning and the Higher Criticism," *P.M.L.A.,* XLIV (1929), 590–621.

1–12. Pamphylax of Antioch is imaginary. (So are Xanthus, Valens, and Theotypas, mentioned later.)

4. *Epsilon; Mu:* letters E and M in the Greek alphabet.

6. *Terebinth:* turpentine.

I said, "If one should wet his lips with wine,
And slip the broadest plantain-leaf we find,
Or else the lappet of a linen robe,
Into the water-vessel, lay it right,
And cool his forehead just above the eyes,
The while a brother, kneeling either side,
Should chafe each hand and try to make it warm,—
He is not so far gone but he might speak."

This did not happen in the outer cave,
Nor in the secret chamber of the rock
Where, sixty days since the decree was out,
We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,
And waited for his dying all the while;
But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light
Reached there a little, and we would not lose
The last of what might happen on his face.

I at the head, and Xanthus at the feet,
With Valens and the Boy, had lifted him,
And brought him from the chamber in the depths,
And laid him in the light where we might see:
For certain smiles began about his mouth,
And his lids moved, presageful of the end.

Beyond, and half way up the mouth o' the cave,
The Bactrian convert, having his desire,
Kept watch, and made pretence to graze a goat
That gave us milk, on rags of various herb,
Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keeps alive:
So that if any thief or soldier passed,
(Because the persecution was aware)
Yielding the goat up promptly with his life,
Such man might pass on, joyful at a prize,
Nor care to pry into the cool o' the cave.
Outside was all noon and the burning blue.

23. By decree of some Roman emperor, the Christians are being persecuted.
36. *Bactrian:* from Bactria in ancient Persia.
39. *Quitch:* a tenacious grass.

"Here is wine," answered Xanthus,—dropped a drop;
I stooped and placed the lap of cloth aright,
Then chafed his right hand, and the Boy his left:
But Valens had bethought him, and produced
And broke a ball of nard, and made perfume.
Only, he did—not so much wake, as—turn
And smile a little, as a sleeper does
If any dear one call him, touch his face—
And smiles and loves, but will not be disturbed.

Then Xanthus said a prayer, but still he slept:
It is the Xanthus that escaped to Rome,
Was burned, and could not write the chronicle.

Then the Boy sprang up from his knees, and ran,
Stung by the splendour of a sudden thought,
And fetched the seventh plate of graven lead
Out of the secret chamber, found a place,
Pressing with finger on the deeper dints,
And spoke, as 't were his mouth proclaiming first,
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Whereat he opened his eyes wide at once,
And sat up of himself, and looked at us;
And thenceforth nobody pronounced a word:
Only, outside, the Bactrian cried his cry
Like the lone desert-bird that wears the ruff,
As signal we were safe, from time to time.

First he said, "If a friend declared to me,
This my son Valens, this my other son,
Were James and Peter,—nay, declared as well
This lad was very John,—I could believe!
—Could, for a moment, doubtlessly believe:
So is myself withdrawn into my depths,
The soul retreated from the perished brain
Whence it was wont to feel and use the world

50. *Nard:* spikenard, a fragrant ointment.

Through these dull members, done with long ago.
Yet I myself remain; I feel myself:
And there is nothing lost. Let be, awhile!"

[This is the doctrine he was wont to teach,
How divers persons witness in each man,
Three souls which make up one soul: first, to wit,
A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does,
And has the use of earth, and ends the man
Downward: but, tending upward for advice,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the next soul, which, seated in the brain,
Useth the first with its collected use,
And feeleth, thinketh, willeth,—is what Knows:
Which, duly tending upward in its turn,
Grows into, and again is grown into
By the last soul, that uses both the first,
Subsisting whether they assist or no,
And, constituting man's self, is what Is—
And leans upon the former, makes it play,
As that played off the first: and, tending up,
Holds, is upheld by, God, and ends the man
Upward in that dread point of intercourse,
Nor needs a place, for it returns to Him.
What Does, what Knows, what Is; three souls, one man.
I give the glossa of Theotypas.]

And then, "A stick, once fire from end to end:
Now, ashes save the tip that holds a spark!
Yet, blow the spark, it runs back, spreads itself
A little where the fire was: thus I urge
The soul that served me, till it task once more
What ashes of my brain have kept their shape,
And these make effort on the last o' the flesh,

76–79. This Platonic assumption, that the real self merely makes use of the brain, was also taught by such contemporaries of Browning as Emerson and Arnold—not to mention orthodox Christians. It is appropriate in the mouth of a Platonist like St. John. In the note, added in brackets, lines 82–104, this is elaborated into a doctrine of three souls more peculiarly characteristic of the age in which St. John lived.

104. *Glossa:* explanatory note.

Trying to taste again the truth of things—"
(He smiled)—"their very superficial truth;
As that ye are my sons, that it is long
Since James and Peter had release by death,
And I am only he, your brother John,
Who saw and heard, and could remember all.
Remember all! It is not much to say.
What if the truth broke on me from above
As once and oft-times? Such might hap again:
Doubtlessly He might stand in presence here,
With head wool-white, eyes flame, and feet like brass,
The sword and the seven stars, as I have seen—
I who now shudder only and surmise
'How did your brother bear that sight and live?'

"If I live yet, it is for good, more love
Through me to men: be naught but ashes here
That keep awhile my semblance, who was John,—
Still, when they scatter, there is left on earth
No one alive who knew (consider this!)
—Saw with his eyes and handled with his hands
That which was from the first, the Word of Life.
How will it be when none more saith 'I saw'?

"Such ever was love's way: to rise, it stoops.
Since I, whom Christ's mouth taught, was bidden teach,
I went, for many years, about the world,
Saying 'It was so; so I heard and saw,'
Speaking as the case asked: and men believed.
Afterward came the message to myself
In Patmos isle; I was not bidden teach,
But simply listen, take a book and write,

122–3. See Revelation i, 14, 15.

125. *Your brother:* John referring to himself in the third person.

131–2. *Handled with his hand . . . the Word of Life:* touched Christ. In the Gospel by St. John, "the Word" (King James translation for the Greek *Logos* in i, 1) means "the Reason," which is identified with Christ. Browning often obliterates the dualist's sharp distinction between spiritual and physical. *Cf.* "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 71–2.

140. *Patmos:* island in the Aegean Sea. (Revelation i, 9.) Against the theory of Biblical critics like Renan and Strauss, Browning maintained that the book of Revelation was written by Christ's "beloved disciple" John.

Nor set down other than the given word,
With nothing left to my arbitrament
To choose or change: I wrote, and men believed.
Then, for my time grew brief, no message more,
No call to write again, I found a way,
And, reasoning from my knowledge, merely taught
Men should, for love's sake, in love's strength believe;
Or I would pen a letter to a friend
And urge the same as friend, nor less nor more:
Friends said I reasoned rightly, and believed.
But at the last, why, I seemed left alive
Like a sea-jelly weak on Patmos strand,
To tell dry sea-beach gazers how I fared
When there was mid-sea, and the mighty things;
Left to repeat, 'I saw, I heard, I knew,'
And go all over the old ground again,
With Antichrist already in the world,
And many Antichrists, who answered prompt
'Am I not Jasper as thyself art John?
Nay, young, whereas through age thou mayest forget:
Wherefore, explain, or how shall we believe?'
I never thought to call down fire on such,
Or, as in wonderful and early days,
Pick up the scorpion, tread the serpent dumb;
But patient stated much of the Lord's life
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work:
Since much that at the first, in deed and word,
Lay simply and sufficiently exposed,
Had grown (or else my soul was grown to match,
Fed through such years, familiar with such light,
Guarded and guided still to see and speak)
Of new significance and fresh result;

142–4. Insisting that Revelation was dictated literally to the saint, whose human mind had nothing to do with deciding what to write, Browning is deliberately taking issue with the Biblical scholarship of his day, and with the liberal and modernist Christians.

149. The epistles of St. John.

156. "I saw"—and wrote the Fourth Gospel; "I heard"—and wrote Revelation; "I knew" ("reasoning from my knowledge" line 7)—and wrote the Epistles of John. In the next 20 lines Browning offers an explanation to meet the objection that the fourth was evidently written much later than the other three Gospels.

What first were guessed as points, I now knew stars,
And named them in the Gospel I have writ.
For men said, 'It is getting long ago:
Where is the promise of His coming?'—asked
These young ones in their strength, as loth to wait,
Of me who, when their sires were born, was old.
I, for I loved them, answered, joyfully,
Since I was there, and helpful in my age;
And, in the main, I think such men believed.
Finally, thus endeavouring I fell sick,
Ye brought me here, and I supposed the end,
And went to sleep with one thought that, at least,
Though the whole earth should lie in wickedness,
We had the truth, might leave the rest to God.
Yet now I wake in such decrepitude
As I had slidden down and fallen afar,
Past even the presence of my former self,
Grasping the while for stay at facts which snap,
Till I am found away from my own world,
Feeling for foothold through a blank profound,
Along with unborn people in strange lands,
Who say—I hear said or conceive they say—
'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

"And how shall I assure them? Can they share
—They, who have flesh, a veil of youth and strength
About each spirit, that needs must bide its time,
Living and learning still as years assist
Which wear the thickness thin, and let man see—
With me who hardly am withheld at all,
But shudderingly, scarce a shred between,
Lie bare to the universal prick of light?
Is it for nothing we grow old and weak,

194. He finds himself among the sceptics and Biblical scholars of France, Germany, and England in the nineteenth century, and proceeds to answer them.

199. See Plato's *Phaedo* for the theory that the body is a hindrance to knowledge of the truth; but contrast line 252. Reference to the truth, and to God, under the figure of *light* (line 205) is common in Plato and in the Johannine portions of the New Testament.

206. *Cf.* "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 2–3.

We whom God loves? When pain ends, gain ends too.
To me, that story—ay, that Life and Death
Of which I wrote 'it was'—to me, it is;
—Is, here and now: I apprehend naught else.
Is not God now i' the world His power first made?
Is not His love at issue still with sins
Visibly when a wrong is done on earth?
Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?
Yea, and the Resurrection and Uprise
To the right hand of the throne—what is it beside,
When such truth, breaking bounds, o'erfloods my soul,
And, as I saw the sin and death, even so
See I the need yet transiency of both,
The good and glory consummated thence?
I saw the power; I see the Love, once weak,
Resume the Power: and in this word 'I see,'
Lo, there is recognized the Spirit of both
That moving o'er the spirit of man, unblinds
His eye and bids him look. These are, I see;
But ye, the children, His beloved ones too,
Ye need,—as I should use an optic glass
I wondered at erewhile, somewhere i' the world,
It had been given a crafty smith to make;
A tube, he turned on objects brought too close,
Lying confusedly insubordinate
For the unassisted eye to master once:
Look through his tube, at distance now they lay,
Become succinct, distinct, so small, so clear!
Just thus, ye needs must apprehend what truth
I see, reduced to plain historic fact,
Diminished into clearness, proved a point
And far away: ye would withdraw your sense
From out eternity, strain it upon time,
Then stand before that fact, that Life and Death,
Stay there at gaze, till it dispart, dispread,

207. *Cf.* "Easter-Day," 99–100.

219. Brockington, in *Browning and the Twentieth Century*, points out (p. 193), "No New Testament writer sees the 'need' of sin and death." *Cf.* Browning's *Fifine at the Fair*, lines 1870–71:

"came discovery there was just
Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust."

241. *Dispart:* spread apart.

As though a star should open out, all sides,
Grow the world on you, as it is my world.

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,—believe the aged friend,—
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all.
But see the double way wherein we are led,
How the soul learns diversely from the flesh!
With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,
And yields mere basement for the soul's emprise,
Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the light,
And warmth was cherishing and food was choice
To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
As *now to yours and mine*; the body sprang
At once to the height, and stayed: but the soul,—no!
Since sages who, this noontide, meditate
In Rome or Athens, may descry some point
Of the eternal power, hid yestereve;
And, as thereby the power's whole mass extends,
So much extends the æther floating o'er,
The love that tops the might, the Christ in God.
Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these
Till earth's work stop and useless time run out,
So duly, daily, needs provision be
For keeping the soul's prowess possible,
Building new barriers as the old decay,
Saving us from evasion of life's proof,
Putting the question ever, 'Does God love,

244–6. Hence, to Browning his love lyrics are an important part of his "philosophical" work.

249. Thus Browning would justify the apparent immoralism of "Respectability" and "The Statue and the Bust."

265. *Christ in God:* of the three Persons in the Trinity. For Browning, Christ represents the Divine in its aspect as Love. (*In its aspect as Reason—Logos*—might seem closer to the Biblical John, but Browning repudiated reliance on reason.)

270–71. Barriers to direct knowledge of God's truth are ***desirable***, to exercise the prowess of the soul.

And will ye hold that truth against the world?'
Ye know there needs no second proof with good
Gained for our flesh from any earthly source:
We might go freezing, ages,—give us fire,
Thereafter we judge fire at its full worth,
And guard it safe through every chance, ye know!
That fable of Prometheus and his theft,
How mortals gained Jove's fiery flower, grows old
(I have been used to hear the pagans own)
And out of mind; but fire, howe'er its birth,
Here is it, precious to the sophist now
Who laughs the myth of Æschylus to scorn,
As precious to those satyrs of his play,
Who touched it in gay wonder at the thing.
While were it so with the soul,—this gift of truth
Once grasped, were this our soul's gain safe, and sure
To prosper as the body's gain is wont,—
Why, man's probation would conclude, his earth
Crumble; for he both reasons and decides,
Weighs first, then chooses: will he give up fire
For gold or purple once he knows its worth?
Could he give Christ up were His worth as plain?
Therefore, I say, to test man, the proofs shift,
Nor may he grasp that fact like other fact,
And straightway in his life acknowledge it,
As, say, the indubitable bliss of fire.
Sigh ye, 'It had been easier once than now'?
To give you answer I am left alive;
Look at me who was present from the first!
Ye know what things I saw; then came a test,

279. *Prometheus:* Titan who stole fire from Zeus (Jove) for the benefit of mankind.

284. *Aeschylus:* Greek tragedian (525–456 B.C.) who wrote a trilogy on Prometheus.

290. To Browning the difficulty for the Christian lies not in living a good life but in *believing.* With the sceptics of the nineteenth century he agrees that the essentials of Christianity are "absurd" to the reason. But like Tertullian he would say, "I believe *because* it is absurd." This emphasis on the need for irrational belief has been, in the past, characteristic of extreme forms of Protestantism such as that of Browning's family background. It is not characteristic of Christian Platonists, who usually look to St. John for their very different philosophy.

My first, befitting me who so had seen:
'Forsake the Christ thou sawest transfigured, Him
Who trod the sea and brought the dead to life?
What should wring this from thee!'—ye laugh and ask.
What wrung it? Even a torchlight and a noise,
The sudden Roman faces, violent hands,
And fear of what the Jews might do! Just that,
And it is written, 'I forsook and fled:'
There was my trial, and it ended thus.
Ay, but my soul had gained its truth, could grow:
Another year or two,—what little child,
What tender woman that had seen no least
Of all my sights, but barely heard them told,
Who did not clasp the cross with a light laugh,
Or wrap the burning robe round, thanking God?
Well, was truth safe for ever, then? Not so.
Already had begun the silent work
Whereby truth, deadened of its absolute blaze,
Might need love's eye to pierce the o'erstretched doubt.
Teachers were busy, whispering 'All is true
As the aged ones report: but youth can reach
Where age gropes dimly, weak with stir and strain,
And the full doctrine slumbers till to-day.'
Thus, what the Roman's lowered spear was found,
A bar to me who touched and handled truth,
Now proved the glozing of some new shrewd tongue,
This Ebion, this Cerinthus or their mates,
Till imminent was the outcry 'Save our Christ!'
Whereon I stated much of the Lord's life
Forgotten or misdelivered, and let it work.
Such work done, as it will be, what comes next?
What do I hear say, or conceive men say,
'Was John at all, and did he say he saw?
Assure us, ere we ask what he might see!'

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328. *Glozing:* comment.

329. Cerinthus was associated with the Ebionites who, according to Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* "obstinately rejected the preceding existence and divine perfections of the Logos, or Son of God, which are so clearly defined in the Gospel of St. John." Browning has in mind modern parallels.

"Is this indeed a burthen for late days,
And may I help to bear it with you all,
Using my weakness which becomes your strength?
For if a babe were born inside this grot,
Grew to a boy here, heard us praise the sun,
Yet had but yon sole glimmer in light's place,—
One loving him and wishful he should learn,
Would much rejoice himself was blinded first
Month by month here, so made to understand
How eyes, born darkling, apprehend amiss:
I think I could explain to such a child
There was more glow outside than gleams he caught,
Ay, nor need urge 'I saw it, so believe!'
It is a heavy burthen you shall bear
In latter days, new lands, or old grown strange,
Left without me, which must be very soon.
What is the doubt, my brothers? Quick with it!
I see you stand conversing, each new face,
Either in fields, of yellow summer eves,
On islets yet unnamed amid the sea;
Or pace for shelter 'neath a portico
Out of the crowd in some enormous town
Where now the larks sing in a solitude;
Or muse upon blank heaps of stone and sand
Idly conjectured to be Ephesus:
And no one asks his fellow any more
'Where is the promise of His coming?' but
'Was he revealed in any of His lives,
As Power, as Love, as Influencing Soul?'

"Quick, for time presses, tell the whole mind out,
And let us ask and answer and be saved!
My book speaks on, because it cannot pass;
One listens quietly, nor scoffs but pleads
'Here is a tale of things done ages since;
What truth was ever told the second day?
Wonders, that would prove doctrine, go for naught.

361. *Ephesus:* ancient city of Asiatic Greece, now in ruins. Gibbon relates the story that "St. John and Cerinthus accidentally met in the public bath of Ephesus; but the apostle fled from the heretic lest the building should tumble on their heads."

Remains the doctrine, love; well, we must love,
And what we love most, power and love in one,
Let us acknowledge on the record here,
Accepting these in Christ: must Christ then be?
Has He been? Did not we ourselves make Him?
Our mind receives but what it holds, no more.
First of the love, then; we acknowledge Christ—
A proof we comprehend His love, a proof
We had such love already in ourselves,
Knew first what else we should not recognize.
'T is mere projection from man's inmost mind,
And, what he loves, thus falls reflected back,
Becomes accounted somewhat out of him;
He throws it up in air, it drops down earth's,
With shape, name, story added, man's old way.
How prove you Christ came otherwise at least?
Next try the power: He made and rules the world:
Certes there is a world once made, now ruled,
Unless things have been ever as we see.
Our sires declared a charioteer's yoked steeds
Brought the sun up the east and down the west,
Which only of itself now rises, sets,
As if a hand impelled it and a will,—
Thus they long thought, they who had will and hands:
But the new question's whisper is distinct,
Wherefore must all force needs be like ourselves?
We have the hands, the will; what made and drives
The sun is force, is law, is named, not known,
While will and love we do know; marks of these,
Eye-witnesses attest, so books declare—
As that, to punish or reward our race,
The sun at undue times arose or set
Or else stood still: what do not men affirm?
But earth requires as urgently reward

380–421. John is quoting someone who might object that it is merely anthropomorphic superstition to create a god by projecting outside ourselves an idealization of love or an assumption of a personal will, both of which are, so far as we know, merely human. In 494–513 the poet attacks this view, not so much by trying to reason against it as by asserting that anyone is spiritually dead who fails to admit that there is an analogy here requiring belief.

Or punishment to-day as years ago,
And none expects the sun will interpose:
Therefore it was mere passion and mistake,
Or erring zeal for right, which changed the truth.
Go back, far, farther, to the birth of things;
Ever the will, the intelligence, the love,
Man's!—which he gives, supposing he but finds,
As late he gave head, body, hands and feet,
To help these in what forms he called his gods.
First, Jove's brow, Juno's eyes were swept away,
But Jove's wrath, Juno's pride continued long;
As last, will, power, and love discarded these,
So law in turn discards power, love, and will.
What proveth God is otherwise at least?
All else, projection from the mind of man!'

"Nay, do not give me wine, for I am strong,
But place my gospel where I put my hands.

"I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
This imports solely, man should mount on each
New height in view; the help whereby he mounts,
The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,
Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.
Man apprehends Him newly at each stage
Whereat earth's ladder drops, its service done;
And nothing shall prove twice what once was proved.
You stick a garden-plot with ordered twigs
To show inside lie germs of herbs unborn,
And check the careless step would spoil their birth;
But when herbs wave, the guardian twigs may go,
Since should ye doubt of virtues, question kinds,
It is no longer for old twigs ye look,
Which proved once underneath lay store of seed,
But to the herb's self, by what light ye boast,

434–465. Browning uses the nineteenth-century faith in progress to justify the older Protestant belief that miracles no longer occur but did occur in Biblical times.

For what fruit's signs are. This book's fruit is plain,
Nor miracles need prove it any more.
Doth the fruit show? Then miracles bade 'ware
At first of root and stem, saved both till now
From trampling ox, rough boar and wanton goat.
What? Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,
And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?
No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets:
May learn a thousand things, not twice the same.

"This might be pagan teaching: now hear mine.

"I say, that as the babe, you feed awhile,
Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,
So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:
When they can eat, babe's-nurture is withdrawn.
I fed the babe whether it would or no:
I bid the boy or feed himself or starve.
I cried once, 'That ye may believe in Christ,
Behold this blind man shall receive his sight!'
I cry now, 'Urgest thou, *for I am shrewd*
And smile at stories how John's word could cure—
Repeat that miracle and take my faith?'
I say, that miracle was duly wrought
When, save for it, no faith was possible.
Whether a change were wrought i' the shows o' the world,
Whether the change came from our minds which see
Of shows o' the world so much as and no more
Than God wills for His purpose,—(what do I
See now, suppose you, there where you see rock
Round us?)—I know not; such was the effect,
So faith grew, making void more miracles
Because too much: they would compel, not help.
I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise.
Wouldst thou unprove this to re-prove the proved?

478. *Cf.* Newman, *Grammar of Assent* (Longmans ed. p. 229), "it is our duty, deliberately to take things for granted which our forefathers had a duty to doubt about: and unless we summarily put down disputation on

In life's mere minute, with power to use that proof,
Leave knowledge and revert to how it sprung?
Thou hast it; use it and forthwith, or die!

"For I say, this is death and the sole death,
When a man's loss comes to him from his gain,
Darkness from light, from knowledge ignorance,
And lack of love from love made manifest;
A lamp's death when, replete with oil, it chokes;
A stomach's when, surcharged with food, it starves.
With ignorance was surety of a cure.
When man, appalled at nature, questioned first,
'What if there lurk a might behind this might?'
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when he finds might still redouble might,
Yet asks, 'Since all is might, what use of will?'
—Will, the one source of might,—he being man
With a man's will and a man's might, to teach
In little how the two combine in large,—
That man has turned round on himself and stands,
Which in the course of nature is, to die.

"And when man questioned, 'What if there be love
Behind the will and might, as real as they?'—
He needed satisfaction God could give,
And did give, as ye have the written word:
But when, beholding that love everywhere,
He reasons, 'Since such love is everywhere,
And since ourselves can love and would be loved,
We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,'—
How shall ye help this man who knows himself,
That he must love and would be loved again,
Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,

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points which have been already proved and ruled, we should waste our time, and make no advances." In *The Arians of the Fourth Century* Newman applies this to science, arguing that in physics we must take Newton as an authority, and not doubt his conclusions.

482–485. Here Browning preaches in an abstract formula what he presents more artistically and humorously in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," where he shows this concretely embodied in character.

Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?
The lamp o'erswims with oil, the stomach flags
Loaded with nurture, and that man's soul dies.

"If he rejoin, 'But this was all the while
A trick; the fault was, first of all, in thee,
Thy story of the places, names and dates,
Where, when and how the ultimate truth had rise,
—Thy prior truth, at last discovered none,
Whence now the second suffers detriment.
What good of giving knowledge if, because
O' the manner of the gift, its profit fail?
And why refuse what modicum of help
Had stopped the after-doubt, impossible
I' the face of truth—truth absolute, uniform?
Why must I hit of this and miss of that,
Distinguish just as I be weak or strong,
And not ask of thee and have answer prompt,
Was this once, was it not once?—then and now
And evermore, plain truth from man to man.
Is John's procedure just the heathen bard's?
Put question of his famous play again
How for the ephemerals' sake, Jove's fire was filched,
And carried in a cane and brought to earth:
The fact is in the fable, cry the wise,
Mortals obtained the boon, so much is fact,
Though fire be spirit and produced on earth.
As with the Titan's, so now with thy tale:
Why breed in us perplexity, mistake,
Nor tell the whole truth in the proper words?'

"I answer, Have ye yet to argue out
The very primal thesis, plainest law,
—Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,
A master to obey, a course to take,

530–31. *Heathen bard's . . . famous play:* Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound.*

542–551. This is perhaps Browning's most direct repudiation of any view which makes man the measure of all things or sets up human ends as a guide to life.

Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become?
Grant this, then man must pass from old to new,
From vain to real, from mistake to fact,
From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.
How could man have progression otherwise?
Before the point was mooted 'What is God?'
No savage man inquired 'What am myself?'
Much less replied, 'First, last, and best of things.'
Man takes that title now if he believes
Might can exist with neither will nor love,
In God's case—what he names now Nature's Law—
While in himself he recognizes love
No less than might and will: and rightly takes.
Since if man prove the sole existent thing
Where these combine, whatever their degree,
However weak the might or will or love,
So they be found there, put in evidence,—
He is as surely higher in the scale
Than any might with neither love nor will,
As life, apparent in the poorest midge,
(When the faint dust-speck flits, ye guess its wing)
Is marvellous beyond dead Atlas' self—
Given to the nobler midge for resting-place!
Thus, man proves best and highest—God, in fine,
And thus the victory leads but to defeat,
The gain to loss, best rise to the worst fall,
His life becomes impossible, which is death.

"But if, appealing thence, he cower, avouch
He is mere man, and in humility
Neither may know God nor mistake himself;
I point to the immediate consequence
And say, by such confession straight he falls
Into man's place, a thing nor God nor beast,
Made to know that he can know and not more:

552–562. Compare "Saul," lines 300 ff., and "Epistle of Karshish," lines 305 ff. (and note). Browning makes St. John reverse the position of 1 John iv, 11 ("if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another").

565. *Atlas:* mountain range in northern Africa.

571. *Cower:* shrink quivering from fear (of God, a "master to obey," l. 543).

Lower than God who knows all and can all,
Higher than beasts which know and can so far
As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more;
While man knows partly but conceives beside,
Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
And in this striving, this converting air
Into a solid he may grasp and use,
Finds progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
Not God's, and not the beasts': God is, they are,
Man partly is and wholly hopes to be.
Such progress could no more attend his soul
Were all it struggles after found at first
And guesses changed to knowledge absolute,
Than motion wait his body, were all else
Than it the solid earth on every side,
Where now through space he moves from rest to rest.
Man, therefore, thus conditioned, must expect
He could not, what he knows now, know at first;
What he considers that he knows to-day,
Come but to-morrow, he will find misknown;
Getting increase of knowledge, since he learns
Because he lives, which is to be a man,
Set to instruct himself by his past self:
First, like the brute, obliged by facts to learn,
Next, as man may, obliged by his own mind,
Bent, habit, nature, knowledge turned to law.
God's gift was that man should conceive of truth
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.
The statuary ere he mould a shape
Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next
The aspiration to produce the same;
So, taking clay, he calls his shape thereout,
Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see':
Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought,
From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself.
How were it had he cried 'I see no face,
No breast, no feet i' the ineffectual clay'?
Rather commend him that he clapped his hands,
And laughed 'It is my shape and lives again!'

Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth,
Until yourselves applaud the flesh indeed
In what is still flesh-imitating clay.
Right in you, right in him, such way be man's!
God only makes the live shape at a jet.
Will ye renounce this pact of creatureship?
The pattern on the Mount subsists no more,
Seemed awhile, then returned to nothingness;
But copies, Moses strove to make thereby,
Serve still and are replaced as time requires:
By these, make newest vessels, reach the type!
If ye demur, this judgment on your head,
Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,
Indulging every instinct of the soul
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!

"Such is the burthen of the latest time.
I have survived to hear it with my ears,
Answer it with my lips: does this suffice?
For if there be a further woe than such,
Wherein my brothers struggling need a hand,
So long as any pulse is left in mine,
May I be absent even longer yet,
Plucking the blind ones back from the abyss,
Though I should tarry a new hundred years!"

But he was dead; 't was about noon, the day
Somewhat declining: we five buried him
That eve, and then, dividing, went five ways,
And I, disguised, returned to Ephesus.

By this, the cave's mouth must be filled with sand.
Valens is lost, I know not of his trace;
The Bactrian was but a wild childish man,
And could not write nor speak, but only loved:
So, lest the memory of this go quite,

619. *Cf. "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium,'"* 1323–5:
I'm ready to believe my very self—
That every cheat's inspired, and every lie
Quick with a germ of truth.

623. *Jet:* spurt.

Seeing that I to-morrow fight the beasts,
I tell the same to Phœbas, whom believe!
For many look again to find that face,
Beloved John's to whom I ministered,
Somewhere in life about the world; they err:
Either mistaking what was darkly spoke
At ending of his book, as he relates,
Or misconceiving somewhat of this speech
Scattered from mouth to mouth, as I suppose.
Believe ye will not see him any more
About the world with his divine regard!
For all was as I say, and now the man
Lies as he lay once, breast to breast with God.

[Cerinthus read and mused; one added this:

"If Christ, as thou affirmest, be of men
Mere man, the first and best but nothing more,—
Account Him, for reward of what He was,
Now and for ever, wretchedest of all.
For see; Himself conceived of life as love,
Conceived of love as what must enter in,
Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved
Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him.
Well, He is gone, thou sayest, to fit reward.
But by this time are many souls set free,
And very many still retained alive:
Nay, *should* His coming be delayed awhile,
Say, ten years longer (twelve years, some compute)
See if, for every finger of thy hands,
There be not found, that day the world shall end,
Hundreds of souls, each holding by Christ's word
That He will grow incorporate with all,
With me as Pamphylax, with him as John,
Groom for each bride! Can a mere man do this?
Yet Christ saith, this He lived and died to do.
Call Christ, then, the illimitable God,
Or lost!"

But 't was Cerinthus that is lost.]

CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS; OR, NATURAL THEOLOGY IN THE ISLAND*

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

[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,

* Caliban is a primitive man, or perhaps even the "missing link" between ape and *homo sapiens* which was being talked about after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). (This poem appeared in the *Dramatis Personae* of 1864, which was largely concerned with ideas of current interest.) Caliban's name, character, and situation are taken from Shakespeare's *Tempest*, where he represents the savage Carib ("Caribal," or "Canibal" in Spanish), inhabitant of the Caribbean Isles in the New World. (His very name is made up of the letters of "Can(n)ibal.") Shakespeare's presentation of this example of "Natural Man" is much closer to the scientific conclusions of modern investigations than to the sentimentalized Noble Savage of the Romantics. Browning gives us this creature's primitive speculations concerning the nature of his god, Setebos. Caliban, like David in "Saul," creates his god in his own image; but where David, a man of up-welling affection, has faith that God is Love, Caliban assumes a cruel, savage, arbitrary god. Thus Browning satirizes one of the anthropomorphic elements in religion, and perhaps implies that "natural theology"—the attempt to define the nature of God by purely rationalistic speculation from the evidence of Nature—is always likely to fall into the same pit.

The name also suggests the French pronunciation of Calvin, the French theologian and Reformer whose doctrines of predestination and election are close to those of Caliban. Browning himself was of Calvinistic origin and obviously has in mind such doctrines as the following from the Westminster Confession of Faith: "The rest of mankind [all but the elect] God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious grace" (III, 7). But Caliban also feels that his god is inferior to a higher power which he calls "Quiet."

Motto: From Psalms, 1, 21.

7. *Pompion-plant:* wild vine of the pumpkin family.

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

---

11. Notice Browning's realism, making Caliban seem animal-like.

20. Prosper and Miranda are the only human beings he knows.

23. After the introductory description in brackets—and perhaps even in that part too—Caliban is the speaker. He refers to himself in the third person, either omitting the pronoun or using "he" (not capitalized—to be distinguished from "He" used of the god Setebos). Browning implies by this that the primitive man, like the animal, has not yet developed a sense of his own individual personality.

24. Setebos is the god of Caliban's mother (Sycorax) in the *Tempest.* Shakespeare had probably read in Eden's *History of Travaile* (1577) that the Patagonian Indians worshipped "Settaboth," "that is to say, the great devil." The kind of god that Caliban assumes does act like a great devil. Compare Hardy's conception of God.

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 oakwarts 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 as have made Himself:
He would not make what He mislikes 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,

46. *Lithe as a leech:* Caliban's very figures of speech show that his mind is full of grotesque and loathsome objects—an illustration of Browning's psychological and artistic method in the dramatic monologue.
50. *Pie:* magpie.

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.

75. *Put case:* assume that.
83. *Grigs:* grasshoppers or crickets.

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 naught 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,

128–149. Setebos is something of a Platonic demiurge, creating the world in imitation of eternal and perfect ideas. Quiet, on the other hand, is more like Aristotle's God, an Unmoved Mover. To say that Caliban thinks like Plato, Aristotle, and Calvin does not mean that Browning committed gross anachronism. The poet means to say that the natural man's reasoning leads him to these beliefs and that (without revelation) there is

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.

---

less difference than we would like to think between highly civilized philosophy and primitive superstition. Browning finds much of Caliban in himself—for example, Browning loved "small eft-things" (*Cf. Letters,* I, 368).

142. Notice the casual reference to the physical appearance of Setebos, as hideous as an African or a Hindu god.

148. *Hips:* hard round fruit of wild brier. *Cf.* note to 128–49, and compare the very different expression of this Platonic conception in Spenser's *Hymne in Honour of Beautie* (29–35):

> What time this worlds great Work-maister did cast
> To make all things such as we now behold,
> It seems that he before his eyes had plast
> A goodly Paterne, to whose perfect mould
> He fashioned them as comely as he could,
> That now so faire and seemly they appeare,
> As nought may be amended any wheare.

150. *Himself:* that is, I, Caliban.

156. *Oncelot:* a little ounce, which is somewhat like a leopard.

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

177. *Orc:* carnivorous sea-beast.

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,

225. Caliban considers his god as arbitrary as himself; he does not necessarily reward obedience. Compare the Calvinistic belief that man cannot merit salvation by his own works. See the notes to "Johannes Agricola."

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,

256–7. Another reference to Puritanism (British form of Calvinism).
260. *Painful:* taking pains.

That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.

[What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!
Crickets stop hissing; not a bird—or, yes,
There scuds His raven that has told Him all!
It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze—
A tree's head snaps—and there, there, there, there, there,
His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!]

CONFESSIONS*

I

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!

II

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.

III

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?

* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). A dying man, supposed to be confessing, refuses to admit that the world is "a vale of tears" or to feel any regret for being "bad and mad." Instead, his imagination, still full of untamed energy, sees even the bottles of the sickroom as if they were the lane where he carried on a secret love affair.

IV

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

V

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.

VI

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."

VII

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

VIII

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,

IX

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!

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 bade 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 breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

* First published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for June, 1864, and, at about the same time, in *Dramatis Personae,* the poem was written soon after the death of Mrs. Browning in June, 1861. It asserts Browning's belief in immortality. *Prospice,* pronounced prōs' pī sē (Webster), is Latin for "look forward." Browning says he would hate to have an easy death, but demands a chance for a struggle "like the heroes of old" whose equal he claims to be (17). He represents himself as "ever a fighter." Yet he asserts that the terrors he wants to undergo will last but a minute. In "Apparent Failure," of the same volume, he asserted "That what began best, can't end worst, Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst." Compare the "Epilogue to Asolando." Browning believes that there is really nothing to fear; and he is determined to face it with great courage. This inconsistency has not kept the poem from being much admired.

27. Addressed to his wife, who died in June, 1861.

YOUTH AND ART*

I

It once might have been, once only:
We lodged in a street together,
You, a sparrow on the housetop lonely,
I, a lone she-bird of his feather.

II

Your trade was with sticks and clay,
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
Then laughed "They will see some day
Smith made, and Gibson demolished."

III

My business was song, song, song;
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
"Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,
And Grisi's existence embittered!"

IV

I earned no more by a warble
Than you by a sketch in plaster;
You wanted a piece of marble,
I needed a music-master.

V

We studied hard in our styles,
Chipped each at a crust like Hindoos,
For air looked out on the tiles,
For fun watched each other's windows.

* Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). A woman regrets that during their youth they put their artistic ambitions first and failed to make "rash" or more than rash advances to each other. Similar themes are found in "Dîs Aliter Visum," "The Statue and the Bust," *etc.* Saintsbury says, "The admirable lightness of 'Youth and Art,' half careless, half rueful, could not have been attained without audacious double rhymes" (*History of English Prosody,* London, 1910, III, 236).

8. John Gibson (1790–1866) was then considered one of England's greatest sculptors. Browning knew him well.

12. Giulia Grisi (1811–1869) was an Italian operatic soprano.

VI

You lounged, like a boy of the South,
  Cap and blouse—nay, a bit of beard too;
Or you got it, rubbing your mouth
  With fingers the clay adhered to.

VII

And I—soon managed to find
  Weak points in the flower-fence facing,
Was forced to put up a blind
  And be safe in my corset-lacing.

VIII

No harm! It was not my fault
  If you never turned your eye's tail up
As I shook upon E *in alt.*,
  Or ran the chromatic scale up:

IX

For spring bade the sparrows pair,
  And the boys and girls gave guesses,
And stalls in our street looked rare
  With bulrush and watercresses.

X

Why did not you pinch a flower
  In a pellet of clay and fling it?
Why did not I put a power
  Of thanks in a look, or sing it?

XI

I did look, sharp as a lynx,
  (And yet the memory rankles)
When models arrived, some minx
  Tripped up-stairs, she and her ankles.

XII

But I think I gave you as good!
  "That foreign fellow,—who can know
How she pays, in a playful mood,
  For his tuning her that piano?"

31. E *in alt.* is high E.

XIII

Could you say so, and never say
"Suppose we join hands and fortunes,
And I fetch her from over the way,
Her, piano, and long tunes and short tunes?"

XIV

No, no: you would not be rash,
Nor I rasher and something over:
You've to settle yet Gibson's hash,
And Grisi yet lives in clover.

XV

But you meet the Prince at the Board,
I'm queen myself at *bals-paré,*
I've married a rich old lord,
And you're dubbed knight and an R.A.

XVI

Each life unfulfilled, you see;
It hangs still, patchy and scrappy:
We have not sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.

XVII

And nobody calls you a dunce,
And people suppose me clever:
This could but have happened once,
And we missed it, lost it for ever.

53–4. A characteristic moral in Browning's poetry: that they should have been "rash." Notice how remote Browning is from the Classical admiration for prudence or the Christian belief in the need for constant struggle to keep passion under restraint.

57. Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, was interested in art.

58. *Bals-paré:* fancy-dress balls.

60. *R.A.:* Member of the Royal Academy.

A FACE*

If one could have that little head of hers
  Painted upon a background of pale 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
Burthen of honey-coloured buds to kiss
And capture 'twixt the lips apart for this.
Then her lithe 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 momently
  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.

A LIKENESS**

Some people hang portraits up
In a room where they dine or sup:
  And the wife clinks tea-things under

* On October 11, 1852, this poem was written in the album of the woman whose beauty it celebrates, the first wife of Coventry Patmore and the heroine of his *Angel in the House*, and other poems of wedded love. She was also much admired by the Pre-Raphaelite artists, by Tennyson, Ruskin, and Carlyle; but Mrs. Carlyle accused her of trying to look like Woolner's medallion of her. This poem was first printed in *Dramatis Personae* (1864).

3. *Tuscan's early art:* the painting of Medieval Florence, in Tuscany.
6. It was agreed that Mrs. Patmore lost her beauty when she laughed.
14. *Correggio:* Italian painter (1494–1534).

** Published in *Dramatis Personae* (1864). In the first two incidents others fail to appreciate the picture as much as the owner. But what if a

And her cousin, he stirs his cup,
  Asks, "Who was the lady, I wonder?"
" 'T is a daub John bought at a sale,"
  Quoth the wife,—looks black as thunder:
"What a shade beneath her nose!
Snuff-taking, I suppose,—"
Adds the cousin, while John's corns ail.

Or else, there 's no wife in the case,
But the portrait 's queen of the place,
Alone mid the other spoils
Of youth,—masks, gloves and foils,
And pipe-sticks, rose, cherry-tree, jasmine,
  And the long whip, the tandem-lasher,
And the cast from a fist ("not, alas! mine,
  But my master's, the Tipton Slasher"),
And the cards where pistol-balls mark ace,
And a satin shoe used for cigar-case,
And the chamois-horns ("shot in the Chablais")
  And prints—Rarey drumming on Cruiser,
  And Sayers, our champion, the bruiser,
And the little edition of Rabelais:
Where a friend, with both hands in his pockets,
  May saunter up close to examine it,
  And remark a good deal of Jane Lamb in it,
"But the eyes are half out of their sockets;
That hair 's not so bad, where the gloss is,
But they 've made the girl's nose a proboscis:
Jane Lamb, that we danced with at Vichy!
What, is not she Jane? Then, who is she?"

All that I own is a print,
An etching, a mezzotint;

---

friend *did* appreciate an etching as much as he should? Then the owner would give it away, pleased with the appreciation but half in rage at the loss of his own sense of peculiar possession.

18. *Tipton Slasher:* a boxer from Tipton.

21. *Chablais:* French alpine district, on the south side of Lake Geneva.

22. J. S. Rarey was a famous tamer of horses, one of which was named "Cruiser."

23. Tom Sayers was a prize fighter who won the championship in 1857 and retired in 1860. The poem was probably written before the latter date.

'T is a study, a fancy, a fiction,
Yet a fact (take my conviction)
Because it has more than a hint
  Of a certain face, I never
Saw elsewhere touch or trace of
In women I 've seen the face of:
  Just an etching, and, so far, clever.

I keep my prints, an imbroglio,
Fifty in one portfolio.
When somebody tries my claret,
We turn round chairs to the fire,
Chirp over days in a garret,
  Chuckle o'er increase of salary,
Taste the good fruits of our leisure,
Talk about pencil and lyre,
  And the National Portrait Gallery:
Then I exhibit my treasure.
After we 've turned over twenty,
  And the debt of wonder my crony owes
  Is paid to my Marc Antonios,
He stops me—*"Festina lentè!*
What 's that sweet thing there, the etching?"
How my waistcoat-strings want stretching,
  How my cheeks grow red as tomatos,
How my heart leaps! But hearts, after leaps, ache.

"By the by, you must take, for a keepsake,
  That other, you praised, of Volpato's."
The fool! would he try a flight further and say—
He never saw, never before to-day,
What was able to take his breath away,
A face to lose youth for, to occupy age
With the dream of, meet death with,—why, I 'll not engage
But that, half in a rapture and half in a rage,
I should toss him the thing's self—" 'T is only a duplicate,
A thing of no value! Take it, I supplicate!"

42. *Imbroglio:* a confused mass.
54. *Marc Antonios:* engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi (*c.* 1490–*c.* 1530).
55. *Festina lentè:* make haste slowly.
61. Giovanni Volpato (*c.* 1735–1803) was an Italian engraver.

EPILOGUE TO *DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

FIRST SPEAKER, *as David*

I

On the first of the Feast of Feasts,
The Dedication Day,
When the Levites joined the Priests
At the Altar in robed array,
Gave signal to sound and say,—

II

When the thousands, rear and van,
Swarming with one accord
Became as a single man
(Look, gesture, thought and word)
In praising and thanking the Lord,—

III

When the singers lift up their voice,
And the trumpets made endeavour,
Sounding, "In God rejoice!"
Saying, "In Him rejoice
Whose mercy endureth for ever!"—

IV

Then the Temple filled with a cloud,
Even the House of the Lord;
Porch bent and pillar bowed:
For the presence of the Lord,
In the glory of His cloud,
Had filled the House of the Lord.

* Browning had finished reading Renan's *La Vie de Jésus* in November, 1863, and this "Epilogue" to *Dramatis Personae* (1864) is an answer to such rationalism, a current of religious thought that was becoming more and more important. Meanwhile the Catholic Revival had also increased its influence, so that in the first section of this poem Browning has David give voice to a religion that is ritualistic, sacerdotal, emphasizing the Church as the special abode of God. In the third section the poet rejects both rationalism and Catholicism for his own religion of inner feeling. *Cf.* "Christmas Eve."

1. *Feast of Feasts:* Dedication of Solomon's Temple (1 Kings, viii, ix; 2 Chronicles, v, vi).

3. *Levites:* descendants of Levi, the sacred caste in Israel (most of them inferior to the Priests).

SECOND SPEAKER *as Renan*

Gone now! All gone across the dark so far,
  Sharpening fast, shuddering ever, shutting still,
Dwindling into the distance, dies that star
  Which came, stood, opened once! We gazed our fill
With upturned faces on as real a Face
  That, stooping from grave music and mild fire,
Took in our homage, made a visible place
  Through many a depth of glory, gyre on gyre,
For the dim human tribute. Was this true?
  Could man indeed avail, mere praise of his,
To help by rapture God's own rapture too,
  Thrill with a heart's red tinge that pure pale bliss?
Why did it end? Who failed to beat the breast,
  And shriek, and throw the arms protesting wide,
When a first shadow showed the star addressed
  Itself to motion, and on either side
The rims contracted as the rays retired;
  The music, like a fountain's sickening pulse,
Subsided on itself; awhile transpired
  Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,
No prayers retard; then even this was gone,
  Lost in the night at last. We, lone and left
Silent through centuries, ever and anon
  Venture to probe again the vault bereft
Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist
  Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say—
And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst,
  But where may hide what came and loved our clay?
How shall the sage detect in yon expanse
  The star which chose to stoop and stay for us?
Unroll the records! Hailed ye such advance
  Indeed, and did your hope evanish thus?

---

22 ff. Ernest Renan (1823–92), French scholar and writer, was a leader in the Higher Criticism of the Bible. His *Life of Jesus* is a human interpretation of the life of Christ. Like Matthew Arnold (whom he greatly influenced) Renan tried to dispense with the supernatural in Christianity. Browning represents the sceptic feeling a regret over the loss of faith. *Cf.* Arnold's *Dover Beach* (1867).

26. *Face:* of Christ.

29. *Gyre:* spiral.

Watchers of twilight, is the worst averred?
We shall not look up, know ourselves are seen,
Speak, and be sure that we again are heard,
Acting or suffering, have the disk's serene
Reflect our life, absorb an earthly flame,
Nor doubt that, were mankind inert and numb,
Its core had never crimsoned all the same,
Nor, missing ours, its music fallen dumb?
Oh, dread succession to a dizzy post,
Sad sway of sceptre whose mere touch appals,
Ghastly dethronement, cursed by those the most
On whose repugnant brow the crown next falls!

THIRD SPEAKER

I

Witness alike of will and way divine,
How heaven's high with earth's low should intertwine!
Friends, I have seen through your eyes: now use mine!

II

Take the least man of all mankind, as I;
Look at his head and heart, find how and why
He differs from his fellows utterly:

III

Then, like me, watch when nature by degrees
Grows alive round him, as in Arctic seas
(They said of old) the instinctive water flees

IV

Toward some elected point of central rock,
As though, for its sake only, roamed the flock
Of waves about the waste: awhile they mock

V

With radiance caught for the occasion,—hues
Of blackest hell now, now such reds and blues
As only heaven could fitly interfuse,—

66 ff. The Third Speaker is Browning himself.

VI

The mimic monarch of the whirlpool, king
O' the current for a minute: then they wring
Up by the roots and oversweep the thing,

VII

And hasten off, to play again elsewhere
The same part, choose another peak as bare,
They find and flatter, feast and finish there.

VIII

When you see what I tell you,—nature dance
About each man of us, retire, advance,
As though the pageant's end were to enhance

IX

His worth, and—once the life, his product, gained—
Roll away elsewhere, keep the strife sustained,
And show thus real, a thing the North but feigned—

X

When you acknowledge that one world could do
All the diverse work, old yet ever new,
Divide us, each from other, me from you,—

XI

Why, where 's the need of Temple, when the walls
O' the world are that? What use of swells and falls
From Levites' choir, Priests' cries, and trumpet-calls?

XII

That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels and knows.

THE FALL OF ATHENS

The beginning of

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY*

WIND, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage!
Doomed to die,—
Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,

* This account of the fall of Athens, the first 176 lines of *Aristophanes' Apology* (1875), forms a unit in itself, constituting one of the poet's most beautiful dramatic monologues. But it is perhaps the least known of all, since it begins the sequel of one of Browning's most forbidding long poems, *Balaustion's Adventure,* read through by only a few readers who usually do not care to go on to the even more forbidding sequel. The 8416 lines of the two works embody an elaborate praise of Euripides for "his droppings of warm tears" (a phrase quoted by Browning from his wife's "Wine of Cyprus") and a prudish attack on Aristophanes. This passage can stand alone without reference to either book.

The tragic decay of Athenian civilization was portrayed at the time it was happening by some of the greatest authors the world has yet seen: Thucydides, the first historian and one of the greatest; Aristophanes himself in his unsurpassed realistic comedies, full of remarks on local sophists and politicians; and, by implication, in Plato's *Republic,* Books VIII, IX, when he describes the stages of degeneration a nation may go through. The Peloponnesian War (431–404 B.C.) was at last won by Athens' enemy, Sparta.

1–2. *Euthukles:* husband of Balaustion. The two have left Athens and are sailing to Rhodes. Balaustion, the speaker, is a Greek girl from the island of Rhodes, who had taken the side of Athens as long as there was any hope for the city. Browning's *Balaustion's Adventure,* 1871, tells how she saved her companions in Syracuse by reciting the *Alcestis* of Euripides, the Athenian dramatist. The subtitle of *Aristophanes' Apology* is *The Last Adventure of Balaustion.*)

4. *Athenai:* Athens, which in *Balaustion's Adventure* she called

"the life and light
Of the whole world worth calling world at all."

9. *Haides:* Pluto, god of the underworld.

(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,
Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the gray,
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind

17. *Olumpos:* Olympus, a mountain in Thessaly, abode of the gods.
18. *Akropolis:* citadel of Athens.
19. *Koré:* a name under which Persephone, daughter of Demeter, was worshipped in Attica.
23. *Glaucous:* sea-green.
24. *Glassing:* reflecting.
29. *Attiké:* Attica, of which Athens was the capital.
34. *Pallas:* Athena, goddess of wisdom.
35. *Helios:* god of the Sun, especially worshipped at Rhodes. The Colossus of Rhodes was a gigantic statue of this god.
38. *Rhodes:* The easternmost island of the Aegean Sea.

And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude:—
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more—
O, nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be Rhodes!
Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name,
Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense
Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centred in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke

50. *Philemon:* a poet of the New Comedy, who had a very high opinion of Euripides. (This is an anachronism, since Philemon was not yet born.)

69. *Oppression:* The prosperity of Athens was based on imperialistic exploitation of her confederates.

70. *Sparté:* Sparta, the military power which had at last, in 404 B.C., won the Peloponnesian War, defeating Athens and destroying her defensive walls and her free government.

71. *Peiraios:* Piraeus, the harbor connected with Athens by the Long Walls.

Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance about the conquerer while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbour on to citadel! Each side
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,—
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)

---

74 ff. Browning's description of the destruction of the Long Walls is from Plutarch's *Life of Lysander:* "Lysander, as soon as he had taken from the Athenians all their ships except twelve, and their walls, on the sixteenth of the month Munychion, the very day that they had overthrown the Barbarians in the sea-fight at Salamis, took measures at once to change their form of government. And when the Athenians opposed this bitterly, he sent word to the people that they had violated the terms of their surrender, for the walls were still standing though the time fixed for demolishing them was past; and since they had broken their agreement, he would present their case anew for consideration by the authorities. Some say that a proposal was actually made in the council of allies to sell the Athenians into slavery, and that Erianthus the Theban made a motion that the city be levelled with the ground, and the spot on which it stood turned into sheep-pasture. Afterwards, however, when the captains were gathered at a banquet, a certain man from Phocis sang the first chorus from Euripides' *Elektra* which begins

O daughter of Agamemnon
I come, Elektra, to thy rustic home.

They were greatly moved, and felt it to be a cruel deed to destroy such a famous city which produced such poets. Lysander, accordingly, the Athenians having yielded up everything, sent for many flute-girls from the city, and collecting all those who were already in the camp, tore down the walls and burned the ships, to the sound of the flute; while the allies crowned themselves with garlands and made merry together, counting that day the beginning of their liberty. Then he proceeded at once to alter the form of government, establishing thirty rulers in the city and ten in Piraeus; he put a garrison into the Akropolis, and made Callibius, a Spartan, the governor of it."

79–80. Themistocles, Athenian general, fortified Athens.

Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout
O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—
Rivalities at truce now each with each,
Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!
While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure,—true to type,
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!

---

89. *Dikast:* judge; *heliast:* juryman.

101. *Kordax-step:* an indecent comic dance; to perform it sober and without a mask was regarded as a sign of shameless profligacy.

103. *Perikles:* ruler of Athens in her greatest period.

107–8. Compare Plato's *Republic* where the ideal city is said to exist "in idea only": "In heaven . . . there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order" (592 B, Jowett translation). But Browning, characteristically, reverses Platonism by using the actual city as the pattern on which to model the ideal type. Compare Shelley, *Hellas,* 1000 ff:

> And now, O Victory, blush! and Empire, tremble
> When ye desert the free—
> If Greece must be
> A wreck, yet shall its fragments reassemble,
> And build themselves again impregnably
> In a diviner clime,
> To Amphionic music on some Cape sublime,
> Which frowns above the idle foam of Time.

109. *Pheidias:* the greatest Athenian sculptor in the Age of Pericles.

'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,
Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through
That shall be better and more beautiful
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—
Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent, indecorous just enough:
Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh

---

112. *Propulaia:* Propylaea, gateway of the Acropolis.
114. *Pnux:* Pnyx, the place at Athens for popular assemblies. *Bema:* elevated place where speeches were made.
115. *Hellas:* all Greek lands.
119. *Staghunt-month:* March, with its festival of Artemis, goddess of the chase.
120. *Dionusia:* the festival of Bacchus or Dionysus, when dramas were presented.
121. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are the greatest tragic dramatists in Greek literature.
128. *Hermippos:* poet of the Old Comedy who accused Aspasia, Pericles' mistress, of impiety.
129. *Kratinos:* Athenian comic poet satirized in Aristophanes' *Knights.*
130. *Eruxis:* a satirist mentioned in Aristophanes' *Frogs.*
131. *Mop and mow:* grimaces.
132. *Dog-faced dwarf:* the Egyptian god Anubis.
137. *Momos:* god of pleasantry, who satirized the gods.

Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,—
Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot
Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—
Do I amiss, who wanting strength, use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—
Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine, likelier die than if left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,
Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!
What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medeia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,

138. *Makaria:* a self-sacrificing heroine of Euripides' *Heracleidae.*
141. This sentiment is less Hellenic than Victorian.
147. *Those Furies:* Alecto, Tisiphone, and Megara, who haunted Orestes after he murdered his mother Clytemnestra.
161. *Klutaemnestra:* Clytemnestra, who murdered her husband Agamemnon upon his return from Troy; the central figure in *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus.
162. *Iokasté (Iocasté):* Jocasta, mother and wife of Oedipus, in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King. Medeia:* Medea, heroine of Euripides' *Medea;* she murders her own children to take revenge on their father Jason.

Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

HOUSE*

I

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
"Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?"

II

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
"Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

III

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

166. Allusion to the theory of Aristotle's *Poetics* that tragic drama purifies the passions by *katharsis* or purgation.

171. *Peplosed:* robed; *kothorned:* buskined.

173. *Choros:* the chorus, the "ideal spectators" in a Greek tragedy.

* In this poem, as in others of the *Pacchiarotto* volume (1876), Browning argues that everyone, even an author, has a right to privacy, and that his poems need not be taken as direct expressions of his own views but as dramatic presentations of other characters. *Cf.* "One Word More," where he says he will speak only that "once" for himself. But he spoke for himself at other times, and many of the ideas expressed by his dramatic characters are presented elsewhere as his own.

IV

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
  In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced:
And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
  Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
  The inside gaped: exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
  Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!
  "Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!
What a parcel of musty old books about!
  He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health!

VII

"I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
  A brasier?—the pagan, he burned perfumes!
You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed:
  His wife and himself had separate rooms."

VIII

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
  Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'T is the fall of its frontage permits you feast
  On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

IX

Outside should suffice for evidence:
  And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense—
  No optics like yours, at any rate!

24. DeVane thinks that Browning had in mind Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and that the whole poem is a protest against Rossetti's self-revealing sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, published in 1870 ("The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man," *Studies in Philology*, XXIX, 463–84). Browning's wife's revelation of their love in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* might be open to the same objections.

X

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! *'With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!"
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP*

I

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

38–9. The quotation is from Wordsworth's "Scorn not the Sonnet."

40. In his "Essay on Shelley" Browning chooses Shakespeare as the example of the "objective poet" (dramatic) as opposed to the self-revealing "subjective poet" like Shelley. "Shakespeare" has now become for Browning, *by definition*, that which he has come to represent in Browning's mind; and if the actual Shakespeare is not completely summed up in Browning's conception, then Shakespeare is not what Browning means by Shakespeare! This is a remarkable example of the use of a man's name not to mean the man according to what we know to be true about him, but as a term for an ideal to which certain emotions have been attached; and it may be related to Browning's method of arguing about religion, as in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," especially stanzas XXIV and XXV. Modern scholars more often agree with Wordsworth, that Shakespeare's sonnets are likely to be autobiographical. *Cf. "The Lost Leader,"* 13.

* A man should not be completely absorbed in his pursuit of worldly success but should have a private spiritual life, the poet says. Browning vividly suggests the business life of London, at a time when England was already very much commercialized. This was published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876); and because of other poems in that volume, such as "House," this may be taken to imply that the modern divorce between one's work and one's real life should be carried over into the vocation of literature, in contrast to the older conception that such a vocation is a way of life in itself. Browning seemed to many who met him more like a businessman than a poet.

III

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,
—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he 's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that 's clear.

VII

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

23. *City chaps:* business men, with the connotations Sinclair Lewis has given to "Babbitt." The "City" is the business center of London, and the English did not consider business a pursuit fit for a gentleman.

30. *Takes the rail:* takes the best position.

35. *Rothschild:* Jewish banking family for whom Browning's uncles had worked.

VIII

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
  Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
  Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX

Nowise! At back of all that spread
  Of merchandize, woe 's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
  The owner couched, his ware behind,
  —In cupboard suited to his mind.

X

For why? He saw no use of life
  But, while he drove a roaring trade,
To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
  To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
  Yet zero in my profits made!

XI

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
  Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
  Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
  The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII

'T was lodging best to live most nigh
  (Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
  Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
  The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

XIII

My fancy of a merchant-prince
  Was different. Through his wares we groped

36. *Mayfair:* center of fashionable Society in the West End of London.
39. *Hampstead:* suburb of London.
40. *Country-box:* small country house.

Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped!

XIV

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare!
'Sell and scud home' be shop's affair!"

XV

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

XVI

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang
On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.

Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
  Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
  Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX

Because a man has shop to mind
  In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
  All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
  All loves except what trade can give?

XXI

I want to know a butcher paints,
  A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
  His soul with song, or, haply mute,
  Blows out his brains upon the flute!

XXII

But—shop each day and all day long!
  Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
  From where these sorts of treasures are,
  There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES*

I

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.

II

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.

109–10. Referring to Matthew, vi, 21, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

*Published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876). The application of the parable is revealed in the last line.

5. *Letters:* the Scriptures.

III

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.

IV

"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!

V

"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!

VI

"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?"

VII

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.

VIII

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
One thing 's sure enough: 't is neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

IX

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

18. *Experts:* Higher Critics of the Bible, such as those at whom Browning directed the argument of "A Death in the Desert." See note to that poem.

X

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 through solid bricks?

XI

"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'?"

XII

"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 happened to be—God?

HERVÉ RIEL*

I

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 through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

41–48. Browning explained to W. G. Kingsland that "it would be a wrong to the wisdom and goodness of the friend if he were supposed capable of overlooking the actual love and only considering the ignorance." ("Robert Browning . . Reminiscences," in *Baylor's Browning Interests* Second Series, ed. A. J. Armstrong, 1931, p. 33.)

* Printed in *Pacchiarotto* (1876), this poem had already been published, March, 1871, in the *Cornhill Magazine,* to which Browning sold the poem for a hundred guineas that he gave to the Paris Relief Fund. (Paris had just fallen to the Prussians at the end of the war of 1870.) The poem was dated "Croisic, Sept. 30, 1867." Browning had spent that summer, and the preceding, at the little Breton village of Croisic, and had probably read the story of the local hero in a guidebook.

1–2. Louis XIV had undertaken to restore James II to the English throne. His fleet was defeated off Cape La Hogue.

5. *Saint-Malo:* a Breton seaport at the mouth of the Rance river which flows into the English Channel.

II

'T was 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 harbour, take us quick—or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III

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 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV

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.

8. *Damfreville:* Commander of the largest ship.
30. *Plymouth Sound:* naval station on the south coast of England.

V

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, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé 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 Grève 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 Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,—
—Keel so much as grate the ground,

43. *Pressed:* conscripted for war. Tourville was Admiral of the French fleet.

46. *Malouins:* men from St. Malo.

49. *Grève:* the dangerous sands off the coast of Brittany from St. Malo to Mont St. Michel.

53. *Solidor:* fortified town at the mouth of the Rance.

Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII

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 Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched 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 shout, and all one word,
"Hervé 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.

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
  Though 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."

X

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 't is 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.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
  In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;

125. This is an error on Browning's part. According to reports in the files of the French Admiralty, Riel asked for complete discharge from the Navy. Browning later realized that he had mistaken the meaning of *congé absolu*, and admitted that "an absolute discharge seems to approach in importance a substantial reward" (*Letters* ed. Hood, p. 207).

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 Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

A FORGIVENESS*

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!"
The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains

132. *Bore the bell:* won first place.
135. *Louvre:* art museum in Paris.

* Published in *Pacchiarotto* (1876). A Spanish nobleman is in a confessional, telling of his jealousy, contempt, vindictiveness, hatred, and revenge (according to the fantastic pride that characterized the old Spanish nobility). He knows that the monk to whom he is confessing was the guilty man. As in "Clive," the dramatic narrative carries a weight of extremely complicated psychology. As long as he thought his wife guilty of unfaithfulness, the husband felt only contempt, and they continued to act the part of a loving couple before the world. But three years later she admitted that she had always loved him and had merely tried to awaken his jealousy because she thought statecraft was drawing his attention away from her. At this, his contempt changed to hatred, he murdered her with poison, and then, consequently. loved her again.

His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appal him: happy to excess,—
Work freely done should balance happiness
Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof
I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe
Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve,
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"
I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
—Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran:
"A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambuscade,—
A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate 's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,

And—back to that last fancy of the train—
"A danger risked for hope of just a word
With—which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?
Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana 's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgeling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be
Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June
Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose:
Or whether hungry for my hate—who knows?—
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment:—anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now
The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse
As well as love—you are to recollect!

"Stay!" she said. "Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that 's spotless hitherto—your own!
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last!
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower's bondage: tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite!
I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike
Out of existence—hate and love! Whence love?

That 's safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,
At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me!"

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—
Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient: I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—
Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such! As for my love-romance—
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup!
Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me—a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember,—staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost:
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all!
Now, work—no word before the curtain fall!"

97. *Hidalgo:* Don Quixote, hero of Cervantes' novel.

100. See *Don Quixote,* ch. XXI, where the deluded knight mistakes a barber's copper basin for the golden helmet of King Mambrino that he had read about in romance.

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant:
My "word," permissible in death's event,
Would be—truth, soul to soul; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game
If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince
No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride
Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture—every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
—Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord; where a speech was due
There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too
Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There 's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her—
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,
Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence,
Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace, where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door
As we two stood by the saloon—now blank
And disencumbered of its guests—there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

"I half forget
The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word—if you grant
That grace—within a certain room you called
Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break
The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentining ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are,—
Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—
Always in silence,—till I reached the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of entrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand—

The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height,—'t was here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung
That last toy on the table—gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience?—own that each
Equalled advantage—sportsman's—statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face.
She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain
Why that first struck me, know—not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public,—all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that face
I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize:
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill,—
Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not
An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,

201. *Arquebuss:* form of gun used as early as the fifteenth century.

And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that 's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished sight,
Reported daily she it was—not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed
May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract
And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp

242. *Serpent's tooth:* ingratitude.

250. *Yataghan, etc.:* daggers and swords "of Eastern workmanship." Browning owned such a collection of Oriental weapons.

While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
—These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open—what intend
They else but water-purlings—pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,
Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank,
But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank
From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game
Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know
This shame, my three years' torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most
In men is—action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls—whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—
Prompt follows placability, regret,
Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.

265. *Diapered:* covered with a diamond-shaped pattern

Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

"Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!"

"No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied."

"And yet you loved me?"

"Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"

"Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself *I* learn—who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle, survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt

Of your all-despicable life—perturb
The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough—
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life
Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
—Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown
Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would—how rewardingly!—
Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.
No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress
Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise—
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment
Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
'I loved my husband and I hated—who
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here
Lies paper!"

"Would my blood for ink suffice!"

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.
Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away
In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

PROLOGUE TO *THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC**

I

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

II

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

III

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

PHEIDIPPIDES**

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν

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!

* *The Two Poets of Croisic* was published with *La Saisiaz* in 1878. The Prologue has no special connection with the poem it precedes. If it is addressed to any one person this would be Browning's wife, who died in 1861. But before he met her there was no time in his poetic career when he seemed to feel that the World walled life about with disgrace.

11. It is characteristic of Browning to identify divine and human grace.

** The Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) has often been considered the most decisive battle ever fought. Persia, gigantic and despotic Oriental empire, had invaded Greece, the first land to develop European civilization, where the seeds of free political life, of science, of philosophy, of art and literature as such, were just beginning to sprout. Defeat for Greece would probably have killed at the beginning almost everything we now value in our culture, and the West would have been forced to develop on the same lines as the Orient. Before the poem opens, Athens, the city that was to become the fountainhead of Western Civilization, had sent Pheidippides to ask aid of

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, 't is 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!

Sparta against the foreign foe. He is telling what happened. The long line is designed to give an effect similar to that of the hexameter, the meter of the Greek idyl. Browning constructed his story by combining Herodotus' account of Pheidippides' run to Sparta and meeting with Pan, Plutarch's account of the bringing of the news from the Battle of Marathon (*not* by Pheidippides, according to Plutarch), and Lucian's identification of this runner with Pheidippides, and his statement that his dying words were, "Rejoice, we conquer" (quoted in Greek at the head of this poem). See Cunliffe, "Browning and the Marathon Race," in *P.M.L.A.*, XXIV (1909) 154–63, and DeVane, *Browning Handbook*, pp. 386–9. The poem was published in the first series of *Dramatic Idyls* (1879).

2. *Daemons:* guardian spirits.

4. *Her of the aegis and spear:* Athena (*aegis:* shield).

5. *Ye of the bow and the buskin:* Artemis, virgin goddess of the moon and of hunting. The buskin is a high-laced shoe.

8. *Pan:* god of nature, in form half goat, half man. He is said to have caused the defeat of the Persians at Marathon by inducing a *panic* in their ranks.

9. *Archons:* rulers; *tettix:* grasshopper (a golden image of which was worn by the Athenians to signify that they, like grasshoppers, sprang from Greek soil).

15. Browning has given more time than the ancient writers, who allowed Pheidippides only one day to cover the 130 miles from Athens to Sparta.

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 through 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!

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19. *Eretria:* important city on the island Euboea in the Aegean Sea.
20. *Hellas:* all Greek lands.
32. *Phoibos:* Phoebus Apollo. Browning transliterates the Greek names.
33. *Olumpos:* Olympus, a mountain in Greece, home of the gods.

That sent a blaze through 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 enwreathe
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? Though the dive were through 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?

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47. *Filleted victim:* animal adorned for sacrifice.

52. *Parnes:* a mountain *north* of Athens. This is 10 miles out of his way for the runner. Herodotus says he met Pan on Mt. Parthenium in Arcadia. Browning has perhaps deliberately changed the scene to a mountain in Attica, but compare a similar mistake in laying out the route for "How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix."

61. *Fosse:* ditch.

62. *Erebos:* the dark region under the earth, which the dead pass through on their way to Hades. Line 62 was not in the edition of 1888–89 but was inserted after Browning's death according to his instructions.

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. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thyself?

83. The fennel is prophetic, since "Marathon" means "fennel-field."
89. *Miltiades:* Greek general at the Battle of Marathon.

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 for ever; 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 through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

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101. This is Browning's own romantic addition to the classical story. *Cf.* "Hervé Riel."

106. *Akropolis:* the citadel of Athens.

109. *Fennel-field:* in Greek, "Marathon."

111. "Rejoice, we conquer!" is a translation of the Greek phrase used as a motto at the head of the poem. Compare the "moral" of "Childe Roland" and of "Prospice."

112. Browning has the hero die of joy; Plutarch says he had been wounded. The difference is characteristic.

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.

IVÀN IVÀNOVITCH*

"THEY tell me, your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,
"Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool-box serves with us.
Arm but each man with his axe, 't is a hammer and saw and plane
And chisel, and—what know I else? We should imitate in vain
The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze,
He cleaves, clamps, dovetails in,—no need of our nails and brads,—
The manageable pine: 't is said he could shave himself
With the axe,—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,
Does he work and play at once!"
Quoth my friend the Russ to me,
"Ay, that and more beside on occasion! It scarce may be
You never heard tell a tale told children, time out of mind,
By father and mother and nurse, for a moral that's behind,
Which children quickly seize. If the incident happened at all,

* Browning had travelled through Russia to St. Petersburg in the spring of 1834, and in this poem, which appeared in *Dramatic Idyls* forty-five years later, he has vividly reproduced the Russian atmosphere, concentrating into a few lines the impression that one ultimately gets from many pages of the great Russian novels. The poet's realism, his mastery of meter, his concern with moments of emotional intensity and morbid psychological states, even his love of melodrama, combine to produce a horror suitable to the story. It is especially horrible to let the woman tell the story herself. She betrays her willingness to let her children die to save her own life, a sin against maternal instinct so unnatural that the village priest justifies her summary execution.

We place it in Peter's time when hearts were great not small,
Germanized, Frenchified. I wager 't is old to you
As the story of Adam and Eve, and possibly quite as true."

In the deep of our land, 't is said, a village from out the woods
Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.
Through forestry right and left, black verst and verst of pine,
From village to village runs the road's long wide bare line.
Clearance and clearance break the else-unconquered growth
Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth
Man's inch of masterdom,—spot of life, spirt of fire,—
To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire
Throughout the monstrous wild, a-hungered to resume
Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb:
Defrauded by man's craft which clove from North to South
This highway broad and straight e'en from the Neva's mouth
To Moscow's gates of gold. So, spot of life and spirt
Of fire aforesaid, burn, each village death-begirt
By wall and wall of pine—unprobed undreamed abyss.

Early one winter morn, in such a village as this,
Snow-whitened everywhere except the middle road
Ice-roughed by track of sledge, there worked by his abode
Ivàn Ivànovitch, the carpenter, employed
On a huge shipmast trunk; his axe now trimmed and toyed
With branch and twig, and now some chop athwart the bole
Changed bole to billets, bared at once the sap and soul.
About him, watched the work his neighbours sheepskin-clad;
Each bearded mouth puffed steam, each grey eye twinkled glad
To see the sturdy arm which, never stopping play,
Proved strong man's blood still boils, freeze winter as he may.
Sudden, a burst of bells. Out of the road, on edge

15–16. Peter the Great (1672–1725) began the Europeanization of Russia. In Browning's romantic opinion, the best guide to ethical wisdom was a great "heart."

19. *Verst:* two thirds of a mile.

28. *Neva:* river that empties into the Gulf of Finland at St. Petersburg (Leningrad).

29. *Moscow:* the ancient capital of Russia.

35. *Ivànovitch:* Ivàn is Russian for John; Ivànovitch similar to Johnson.

Of the hamlet—horse's hoofs galloping. "How, a sledge?
What 's here?" cried all as—in, up to the open space,
Workyard and market-ground, folk's common meeting-place,—
Stumbled on, till he fell, in one last bound for life,
A horse: and, at his heels, a sledge held—"Dmìtri's wife!
Back without Dmìtri too! and children—where are they?
Only a frozen corpse!"

They drew it forth: then—"Nay,
Not dead, though like to die! Gone hence a month ago:
Home again, this rough jaunt—alone through night and snow—
What can the cause be? Hark—Droug, old horse, how he groans:
His day 's done! Chafe away, keep chafing, for she moans:
She 's coming to! Give here: see, motherkin, your friends!
Cheer up, all safe at home! Warm inside makes amends
For outside cold,—sup quick! Don't look as we were bears!
What is it startles you? What strange adventure stares
Up at us in your face? You know friends—which is which?
I 'm Vàssili, he 's Sergeì, Ivàn Ivànovitch . . ."

At the word, the woman's eyes, slow-wandering till they neared
The blue eyes o'er the bush of honey-coloured beard,
Took in full light and sense and—torn to rags, some dream
Which hid the naked truth—O loud and long the scream
She gave, as if all power of voice within her throat
Poured itself wild away to waste in one dread note!
Then followed gasps and sobs, and then the steady flow
Of kindly tears: the brain was saved, a man might know.
Down fell her face upon the good friend's propping knee;
His broad hands smoothed her head, as fain to brush it free
From fancies, swarms that stung like bees unhived. He soothed—
"Loukèria, Loùscha!"—still he, fondling, smoothed and smoothed.
At last her lips formed speech.

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53. *Droug:* Russian for "Friend."
55. *Motherkin:* English equivalent for the Russian diminutive "matushka."

"Ivàn, dear—you indeed!
You, just the same dear you! While I . . . O intercede,
Sweet Mother, with thy Son Almighty—let his might
Bring yesterday once more, undo all done last night!
But this time yesterday, Ivàn, I sat like you,
A child on either knee, and, dearer than the two,
A babe inside my arms, close to my heart—that 's lost
In morsels o'er the snow! Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
Cannot you bring again my blessed yesterday?"

When no more tears would flow, she told her tale: this way.

"Maybe, a month ago,—was it not?—news came here,
They wanted, deeper down, good workmen fit to rear
A church and roof it in. 'We 'll go,' my husband said:
'None understands like me to melt and mould their lead.'
So, friends here helped us off—Ivàn, dear, you the first!
How gay we jingled forth, all five—(my heart will burst)—
While Dmìtri shook the reins, urged Droug upon his track!

"Well, soon the month ran out, we just were coming back,
When yesterday—behold, the village was on fire!
Fire ran from house to house. What help, as, nigh and nigher,
The flames came furious? 'Haste,' cried Dmìtri, 'men must do
The little good man may: to sledge and in with you,
You and our three! We check the fire by laying flat
Each building in its path,—I needs must stay for that,—
But you . . . no time for talk! Wrap round you every rug,
Cover the couple close,—you 'll have the babe to hug.
No care to guide old Droug, he knows his way, by guess,
Once start him on the road: but chirrup, none the less!
The snow lies glib as glass and hard as steel, and soon
You 'll have rise, fine and full, a marvel of a moon.
Hold straight up, all the same, this lighted twist of pitch!
Once home and with our friend Ivàn Ivànovitch,
All 's safe: I have my pay in pouch, all 's right with me,
So I but find as safe you and our precious three!
Off, Droug!'—because the flames had reached us, and the men
Shouted 'But lend a hand, Dmìtri—as good as ten!'

"So, in we bundled—I, and those God gave me once;

Old Droug, that 's stiff at first, seemed youthful for the nonce:
He understood the case, galloping straight ahead.
Out came the moon: my twist soon dwindled, feebly red
In that unnatural day—yes, daylight, bred between
Moon-light and snow-light, lamped those grotto-depths which screen
Such devils from God's eye. Ah, pines, how straight you grow
Nor bend one pitying branch, true breed of brutal snow!
Some undergrowth had served to keep the devils blind
While we escaped outside their border!

"Was that—wind?
Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his ears, he snuffs,
Snorts,—never such a snort! then plunges, knows the sough 's
Only the wind: yet, no—our breath goes up too straight!
Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder, at a rate
There 's no mistaking more! Shall I lean out—look—learn
The truth whatever it be? Pad, pad! At last, I turn—

" 'T is the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the life in the sledge!
An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a wedge:
They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks ranged each side,
Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide
The four-footed steady advance. The foremost—none may pass:
They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing brass!
But a long way distant still. Droug, save us! He does his best:
Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—one reaches . . . How utter the rest?
O that Satan-faced first of the band! How he lolls out the length of his tongue,

133. *Satan-faced:* refers to the Russian belief that wolves were reincarnations of witches of Satan.

How he laughs and lets gleam his white teeth! He is on me, his paws pry among
The wraps and the rugs! O my pair, my twin pigeons, lie still and seem dead!
Stepàn, he shall never have you for a meal,—here 's your mother instead!
No, he will not be counselled—must cry, poor Stiòpka, so foolish! though first
Of my boy-brood, he was not the best: nay, neighbours have called him the worst:
He was puny, an undersized slip,—a darling to me, all the same!
But little there was to be praised in the boy, and a plenty to blame.
I loved him with heart and soul, yes—but, deal him a blow for a fault,
He would sulk for whole days. 'Foolish boy! lie still or the villain will vault,
Will snatch you from over my head!' No use! he cries, screams, —who can hold
Fast a boy in a frenzy of fear! It follows—as I foretold!
The Satan-face snatched and snapped: I tugged, I tore—and then
His brother too needs must shriek! If one must go, 't is men
The Tsar needs, so we hear, not ailing boys! Perhaps
My hands relaxed their grasp, got tangled in the wraps:
God, he was gone! I looked: there tumbled the cursed crew,
Each fighting for a share: too busy to pursue!
That 's so far gain at least: Droug, gallop another verst
Or two, or three—God sends we beat them, arrive the first!
A mother who boasts two boys was ever accounted rich:
Some have not a boy: some have, but lose him,—God knows which
Is worse: how pitiful to see your weakling pine
And pale and pass away! Strong brats, this pair of mine!

"O misery! for while I settle to what near seems

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135. *Twin-pigeons:* "little pigeon" (*golubchik*) is a common pet name in Russian.

137. *Stiòpka:* diminutive of Stepàn (Stephan).

·Content, I am 'ware again of the tramp, and again there gleams—
Point and point—the line, eyes, levelled green brassy fire!
So soon is resumed your chase? Will nothing appease, nought tire
The furies? And yet I think—I am certain the race is slack,
And the numbers are nothing like. Not a quarter of the pack!
Feasters and those full-fed are staying behind . . . Ah why?
We 'll sorrow for that too soon! Now,—gallop, reach home, and die,
Nor ever again leave house, to trust our life in the trap
For life—we call a sledge! Teriòscha, in my lap!
Yes, I 'll lie down upon you, tight-tie you with the strings
Here—of my heart! No fear, this time, your mother flings . . .
Flings? I flung? Never! But think!—a woman, after all
·Contending with a wolf! Save you I must and shall,
Terentiì!
"How now? What, you still head the race,
Your eyes and tongue and teeth crave fresh food, Satan-face?
There and there! Plain I struck green fire out! Flash again?
All a poor fist can do to damage eyes proves vain!
My fist—why not crunch that? He is wanton for . . . O God,
Why give this wolf his taste? Common wolves scrape and prod
The earth till out they scratch some corpse—mere putrid flesh!
Why must this glutton leave the faded, choose the fresh?
Terentiì—God, feel!—his neck keeps fast thy bag
·Of holy things, saints' bones, this Satan-face will drag
Forth, and devour along with him, our Pope declared
The relics were to save from danger!

"Spurned, not spared!
'T was through my arms, crossed arms, he—nuzzling now with snout,
Now ripping, tooth and claw—plucked, pulled Terentiì out,
A prize indeed! I saw—how could I else but see?—
My precious one—I bit to hold back—pulled from me!
Up came the others, fell to dancing—did the imps!—

166. *Teriòscha:* diminutive of Terentiì (Terence) *cf.* line 171.
181. *Pope:* village priest.

Skipped as they scampered round. There 's one is grey, and limps:
Who knows but old bad Màrpha,—she always owed me spite
And envied me my births,—skulks out of doors at night
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood,
And laps the youthful life, then slinks from out the wood,
Squats down at door by dawn, spins there demure as erst
—No strength, old crone,—not she!—to crawl forth half a verst!'

"Well, I escaped with one: 'twixt one and none there lies
The space 'twixt heaven and hell. And see, a rose-light dyes
The endmost snow: 't is dawn, 't is day, 't is safe at home!
We have outwitted you! Ay, monsters, snarl and foam,
Fight each the other fiend, disputing for a share,—
Forgetful, in your greed, our finest off we bear,
Tough Droug and I,—my babe, my boy that shall be man,
My man that shall be more, do all a hunter can
To trace and follow and find and catch and crucify
Wolves, wolfkins, all your crew! A thousand deaths shall die
The whimperingest cub that ever squeezed the teat!
'Take that!' we 'll stab you with,—'the tenderness we met
When, wretches, you danced round—not this, thank God—not this!
Hellhounds, we baulk you!'

"But—Ah, God above!—Bliss, bliss—
Not the band, no! And yet—yes, for Droug knows him! One—
This only of them all has said 'She saves a son!'
His fellows disbelieve such luck: but he believes,
He lets them pick the bones, laugh at him in their sleeves:
He 's off and after us,—one speck, one spot, one ball
Grows bigger, bound on bound,—one wolf as good as all!
Oh but I know the trick! Have at the snaky tongue!
That 's the right way with wolves! Go, tell your mates I wrung
The panting morsel out, left you to howl your worst!
Now for it—now! Ah me! I know him—thrice-accurst
Satan-face,—him to the end my foe!

"All fight 's in vain:
This time the green brass points pierce to my very brain.
I fall—fall as I ought—quite on the babe I guard:

I overspread with flesh the whole of him. Too hard
To die this way, torn piecemeal? Move hence? Not I—one inch!
Gnaw through me, through and through: flat thus I lie nor flinch!
O God, the feel of the fang furrowing my shoulder!—see!
It grinds—it grates the bone. O Kìrill under me,
Could I do more? Beside he knew wolf's way to win:
I clung, closed round like wax: yet in he wedged and in,
Past my neck, past my breasts, my heart, until . . . how feels
The onion-bulb your knife parts, pushing through its peels,
Till out you scoop its clove wherein lie stalk and leaf
And bloom and seed unborn?

"That slew me: yes, in brief,
I died then, dead I lay doubtlessly till Droug stopped
Here, I suppose. I come to life, I find me propped
Thus—how or when or why,—I know not. Tell me, friends,
All was a dream: laugh quick and say the nightmare ends!
Soon I shall find my house: 't is over there: in proof,
Save for that chimney heaped with snow, you 'd see the roof
Which holds my three—my two—my one—not one?

"Life 's mixed
With misery, yet we live—must live. The Satan fixed
His face on mine so fast, I took its print as pitch
Takes what it cools beneath. Ivàn Ivànovitch,
'T is you unharden me, you thaw, disperse the thing!
Only keep looking kind, the horror will not cling.
Your face smooths fast away each print of Satan. Tears
—What good they do! Life 's sweet, and all its after-years,
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I owe you! Yours am I!
May God reward you, dear!"

Down she sank. Solemnly
Ivàn rose, raised his axe,—for fitly, as she knelt,
Her head lay: well-apart, each side, her arms hung,—dealt
Lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow—no need of more!
Headless she knelt on still: that pine was sound at core
(Neighbours were used to say)—cast-iron-kernelled—which
Taxed for a second stroke Ivàn Ivànovitch.

The man was scant of words as strokes. "It had to be:
I could no other: God it was bade 'Act for me!' "
Then stooping, peering round—what is it now he lacks?
A proper strip of bark wherewith to wipe his axe.
Which done, he turns, goes in, closes the door behind.
The others mute remain, watching the blood-snake wind
Into a hiding-place among the splinter-heaps.
At length, still mute, all move: one lifts,—from where it steeps
Redder each ruddy rag of pine,—the head: two more
Take up the dripping body: then, mute still as before,
Move in a sort of march, march on till marching ends
Opposite to the church; where halting,—who suspends,
By its long hair, the thing, deposits in its place
The piteous head: once more the body shows no trace
Of harm done: there lies whole the Loùscha, maid and wife
And mother, loved until this latest of her life.
Then all sit on the bank of snow which bounds a space
Kept free before the porch for judgment: just the place!

Presently all the souls, man, woman, child, which make
The village up, are found assembling for the sake
Of what is to be done. The very Jews are there:
A Gipsy troop, though bound with horses for the Fair,
Squats with the rest. Each heart with its conception seethes
And simmers, but no tongue speaks: one may say,—none breathes.

Anon from out the church totters the Pope—the priest—
Hardly alive, so old, a hundred years at least.
With him, the Commune's head, a hoary senior too,
Stàrosta, that 's his style,—like Equity Judge with you,—
Natural Jurisconsult: then, fenced about with furs,
Pomeschìk—Lord of the Land, who wields—and none demurs—
A power of life and death. They stoop, survey the corpse.

Then, straightened on his staff, the Stàrosta—the thorpe's
Sagaciousest old man—hears what you just have heard,

282. *Stàrosta:* the old man, head of the village holding land in common.
284. *Pomeschìk:* great landowner.
286. *Thorpe:* village.

From Droug's first inrush, all, up to Ivàn's last word
"God bade me act for him: I dared not disobey!"

Silence—the Pomeschìk broke with "A wild wrong way
Of righting wrong—if wrong there were, such wrath to rouse!
Why was not law observed? What article allows
Whoso may please to play the judge, and, judgment dealt,
Play executioner, as promptly as we pelt
To death, without appeal, the vermin whose sole fault
Has been—it dared to leave the darkness of its vault,
Intrude upon our day! Too sudden and too rash!
What was this woman's crime? Suppose the church should crash
Down where I stand, your lord: bound are my serfs to dare
Their utmost that I 'scape: yet, if the crashing scare
My children,—as you are,—if sons fly, one and all,
Leave father to his fate,—poor cowards though I call
The runaways, I pause before I claim their life
Because they prized it more than mine. I would each wife
Died for her husband's sake, each son to save his sire:
'T is glory, I applaud—scarce duty, I require.
Ivàn Ivànovitch has done a deed that 's named
Murder by law and me: who doubts, may speak unblamed!"

All turned to the old Pope. "Ay, children, I am old—
How old, myself have got to know no longer. Rolled
Quite round, my orb of life, from infancy to age,
Seems passing back again to youth. A certain stage
At least I reach, or dream I reach, where I discern
Truer truths, laws behold more lawlike than we learn
When first we set our foot to tread the course I trod
With man to guide my steps: who leads me now is God.
'Your young men shall see visions:' and in my youth I saw
And paid obedience to man's visionary law:
'Your old men shall dream dreams:' and, in my age, a hand
Conducts me through the cloud round law to where I stand
Firm on its base,—know cause, who, before, knew effect.

"The world lies under me: and nowhere I detect

317. *See* Joel, ii, 28.

So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life.
'Shall the dead praise thee?' No! 'The whole live world is rife,
God, with thy glory,' rather! Life then, God's best of gifts,
For what shall man exchange? For life—when so he shifts
The weight and turns the scale, lets life for life restore
God's balance, sacrifice the less to gain the more,
Substitute—for low life, another's or his own—
Life large and liker God's who gave it: thus alone
May life extinguish life that life may trulier be!
How low this law descends on earth, is not for me
To trace: complexed becomes the simple, intricate
The plain, when I pursue law's winding. 'T is the straight
Outflow of law I know and name: to law, the fount
Fresh from God's footstool, friends, follow while I remount.

"A mother bears a child: perfection is complete
So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat
The miracle of life,—herself was born so just
A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.
Crowned by this crowning pride,—how say you, should she spurn
Regality—discrowned, unchilded, by her choice
Of barrenness exchanged for fruit which made rejoice
Creation, though life's self were lost in giving birth
To life more fresh and fit to glorify God's earth?
How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's torch
Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,
Let fall the same? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings
The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things
Shall she be classed? Because of motherhood, each male
Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:
His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,
Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.
The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire
Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,
Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest
Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.
What 's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,
Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now!

Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge
On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost'
Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post
Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels:
That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—
Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.
Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less
To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold He saw
The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law,
Whereof first instrument was first intelligence
Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense,
The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface
Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.
Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found
A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,
Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I hold, has done, this day,
No otherwise than did, in ages long ago,
Moses when he made known the purport of that flow
Of fire athwart the law's twain-tables! *I* proclaim
Ivàn Ivànovitch God's servant!"

At which name
Uprose that creepy whisper from out the crowd, is wont
To swell and surge and sing when fellow-men confront
A punishment that falls on fellow flesh and blood,
Appallingly beheld—shudderingly understood,
No less, to be the right, the just, the merciful.
"God's servant!" hissed the crowd.

When that Amen grew dull
And died away and left acquittal plain adjudged,
"Amen!" last sighed the lord. "There 's none shall say I grudged
Escape from punishment in such a novel case.
Deferring to old age and holy life,—be grace
Granted! say I. No less, scruples might shake a sense
Firmer than I boast mine. Law 's law, and evidence

Of breach therein lies plain,—blood-red-bright,—all may see!
Yet all absolve the deed: absolved the deed must be!

"And next—as mercy rules the hour—methinks 't were well
You signify forthwith its sentence, and dispel
The doubts and fears, I judge, which busy now the head
Law puts a halter round—a halo—you, instead!
Iván Ivànovitch—what think you he expects
Will follow from his feat? Go, tell him—law protects
Murder, for once: no need he longer keep behind
The Sacred Pictures—where skulks Innocence enshrined,
Or I missay! Go, some! You others, haste and hide
The dismal object there: get done, whate'er betide!"

So, while the youngers raised the corpse, the elders trooped
Silently to the house: where halting, someone stooped,
Listened beside the door; all there was silent too.
Then they held counsel; then pushed door and, passing through,
Stood in the murderer's presence.
Iván Ivànovitch
Knelt, building on the floor that Kremlin rare and rich
He deftly cut and carved on lazy winter nights.
Some five young faces watched, breathlessly, as, to rights,
Piece upon piece, he reared the fabric nigh complete.
Stèscha, Iván's old mother, sat spinning by the heat
Of the oven where his wife Kàtia stood baking bread.
Iván's self, as he turned his honey-coloured head,
Was just in act to drop, 'twixt fir-cones,—each a dome,—
The scooped-out yellow gourd presumably the home
Of Kolokol the Big: the bell, therein to hitch,
—An acorn-cup—was ready: Iván Ivànovitch
Turned with it in his mouth.
They told him he was free
As air to walk abroad. "How otherwise?" asked he.

404. *Sacred Pictures:* the sacred icons, mosaics, or paintings.
412. *Kremlin:* the fortress and palace at Moscow.
421. *Kolokol the Big:* the great bell in the Kremlin.

ECHETLOS*

HERE is a story shall stir you! Stand up, Greeks dead and gone,
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on,
Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was Marathon!

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought away
In his tribe and file: up, back, out, down—was the spear-arm play:
Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing that day!

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,
As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the rear,
Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he! but, a goat-skin all his wear,
Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and bare,
Went he ploughing on and on: he pushed with a ploughman's share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the shark
Precipitates his bulk? Did the right-wing halt when, stark
On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch?

Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,
As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

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* Published in the *Second Series* of *Dramatic Idyls* (1880). Like Pheidippides, Echetlos is a modest hero of the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) —this time an unknown rustic who used a ploughshare as a sword. The oracles said to call the nameless hero "Ploughshare-wielder" (*Echetlos*). But the fame of this humble man's great deed remains untarnished, while eminent men with famous names came to a grievous end. The story is from Pausanias and Herodotus.

3. Marathon: See the first note to "Pheidippides."
11. *Clown:* rustic.
13. *Tunnies:* fish of the mackerel family.
15. Kallimachos held the office of *polemarch* (archon in charge of military affairs) at Marathon.
18. The Sakae were Scythian tribes fighting for Persia; the Medes were associated with the Persians in ruling their empire.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh,—look far and wide
From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-plashed seaside,—

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged and brown,
Shearing and clearing still with the share before which—down
To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for Greece, that clown!

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name at all!
Say but just this: 'We praise one helpful whom we call
The Holder of the Ploughshare.' The great deed ne'er grows small."

Not the great name! Sing—woe for the great name Miltiadés
And its end at Paros isle! Woe for Themistokles
—Satrap in Sardis court! Name not the clown like these!

CLIVE*

I AND Clive were friends—and why not? Friends! I think you laugh, my lad.

28–29. Miltiades, Athenian general at Marathon, was later thought to have made war on the island of Paros to satisfy a private grudge. He died miserably of a wound.

29–30. Themistokles was chief archon of Athens at this period. Accused of bribery, and ostracized, he fled to Persia and was made a provincial governor (Satrap) by the Persian king, Artaxerxes. Sardis was capital of Lydia, part of the Persian Empire.

* Published in *Dramatic Idyls, Second Series* (1880). Clive is popularly considered a brave hero, but the time that he seemed most courageous he says was the time he "felt most fear"—moral cowardice rather than physical courage. This is an old man's reminiscence of what Clive, a week before his suicide, had told him of an incident 25 years earlier. Like Browning's *Aristophanes' Apology* or some of Conrad's novels, one fictitious character tells what another character told, so that the narrative is doubly refracted through two minds. This, plus the fact of suicide, poses a very subtle and complicated problem: Was Clive a brave man or a coward? What does Browning think? What does the speaker think? What does Clive think at the conclusion? What did Clive think at the time? Yet in spite of the

Clive it was gave England India, while your father gives—egad,
England nothing but the graceless boy who lures him on to speak—
"Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades—" with a tongue thrust in your cheek!
Very true: in my eyes, your eyes, all the world's eyes, Clive was man,
I was, am and ever shall be—mouse, nay, mouse of all its clan
Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen's estimate for fame;
While the man Clive—he fought Plassy, spoiled the clever foreign game,
Conquered and annexed and Englished!

Never mind! As o'er my punch
(You away) I sit of evenings,—silence, save for biscuit-crunch,
Black, unbroken,—thought grows busy, thrids each pathway of old years,
Notes this forthright, that meander, till the long-past life appears
Like an outspread map of country plodded through, each mile and rood,
Once, and well remembered still: I 'm startled in my solitude
Ever and anon by—what 's the sudden mocking light that breaks
On me as I slap the table till no rummer-glass but shakes
While I ask—aloud, I do believe, God help me!—"Was it thus?
Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when just one step for us—"
(Us,—you were not born, I grant, but surely some day born would be)
"—One bold step had gained a province" (figurative talk, you see)
"Got no end of wealth and honour,—yet I stood stock still no less?"

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psychological complications and moral subtleties, this Idyl is a dramatic narrative and creates a vivid impression of the young Clive in India and the broken Clive in London, and the eighteenth-century setting.

2. Robert Clive (1725–1774), the general and statesman who consolidated British power in India, began his career as a clerk in the East India Company, and this incident belongs to that period of his life.

8. *Plassy:* or Plassey, battle in India (1757), at which Clive defeated the French.

11. *Thrids:* threads.

16. *Rummer-glass:* large glass for drinking wine.

—"For I was not Clive," you comment: but it needs no Clive to guess
Wealth were handy, honour ticklish, did no writing on the wall
Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!" Him who braves that notice—call
Hero! none of such heroics suit myself who read plain words,
Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture says the land 's the Lord's:
Louts then—what avail the thousand, noisy in a smock-frocked ring,
All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence, be Clive their king?
Higher warrant must you show me ere I set one foot before
T'other in that dark direction, though I stand for evermore
Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore? No! By-and-by
Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns out less wise than I.
Don't object "Why call him friend, then?" Power is power, my boy, and still
Marks a man,—God's gift magnific, exercised for good or ill.
You 've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was a tiger's skin:
Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in!
True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came to pass;
Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage—ah, the brute he was!
Why, that Clive,—that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-driving clerk, in fine,—
He sustained a siege in Arcot . . . But the world knows! Pass the wine.

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh, you mentioned "fear"!
Just so: and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I: so, when the clouds, about the orb
Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely, threatened to absorb
Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,—friendship might, with steadier eye

40. *Arcot:* capital of the province of the Carnatic in India, which Clive held against the French in 1751.

Drawing near, bear what had burned else, now no blaze—all majesty.
Too much bee's-wing floats my figure? Well, suppose a castle's new:
None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold sure for shoe
'Twixt those squares and squares of granite plating the impervious pile
As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile.
Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled? From without
Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates about
Towers—the heap he kicks now! turrets—just the measure of his cane!
Will that do? Observe moreover—(same similitude again)—
Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of cannonade:
'T is when foes are foiled and fighting 's finished that vile rains invade,
Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating find no holes
Fit to build in like the topmost sockets made for banner-poles.
So Clive crumbled slow in London—crashed at last.

A week before,
Dining with him,—after trying churchyard-chat of days of yore,—
Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece, foot-piece, when they lean
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a coffined Past between.
As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extinguishment
By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers went
Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,—"One more throw
Try for Clive!" thought I: "Let 's venture some good rattling question!" So—
"Come, Clive, tell us"—out I blurted—"what to tell in turn, years hence,

47. *Bee's-wing:* a film on port wine showing its age.
65. Macaulay writes, "To obtain ease he called in the help of opium; and he was gradually enslaved by this dangerous ally."

When my boy—suppose I have one—asks me on what evidence
I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit
Worth your Alexanders, Cæsars, Marlboroughs and—what said Pitt?—
Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once"—I want to say—
"Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell away
—In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob's rough guess—
Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called courageousness!
Come! what moment of the minute, what speck-centre in the wide
Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified?
(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this wholesome Port!)
If a friend has leave to question,—when were you most brave, in short?"

Up he arched his brows o' the instant—formidably Clive again.
"When was I most brave? I 'd answer, were the instance half as plain
As another instance that 's a brain-lodged crystal—curse it!—here
Freezing when my memory touches—ugh!—the time I felt most fear.
Ugh! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear—anyhow,
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver now."

"Fear!" smiled I. "Well, that 's the rarer: that 's a specimen to seek,
Ticket up in one's museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive's Fear, Unique!*"

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he pored as though

---

70. In a speech in the House of Commons, Pitt compared Clive to the greatest generals of history, saying that even Frederick (the Great) of Prussia might envy him.

Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts encrusted long ago.
When he spoke 't was like a lawyer reading word by word some will,
Some blind jungle of a statement,—beating on and on until
Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

"This fell in my factor-days.
Desk-drudge, slaving at St. David's, one must game, or drink, or craze.
I chose gaming: and,—because your high-flown gamesters hardly take
Umbrage at a factor's elbow if the factor pays his stake,—
I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice,
Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud of voice,
Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile
Who not merely risked but lost his hard-earned guineas with a smile.

"Down I sat to cards, one evening,—had for my antagonist
Somebody whose name 's a secret—you 'll know why—so, if you list,
Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from head to heel!
Play commenced: and, whether Cocky fancied that a clerk must feel
Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green baize,
I the scribe with him the warrior,—guessed no penman dared to raise
Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing end
More or less abruptly,—whether disinclined he grew to spend
Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare
At—not ask of—lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide plays fair,—
Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me 'Cut!'

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91. *Factor:* clerk or "writer" in the East India Company. He was then stationed at Fort St. David's. Being a civilian, he would be looked upon with scorn by the military men, since military careers were a special privilege of the aristocracy.

"I rose.
'Such the new manœuvre, Captain? I 'm a novice: knowledge
grows.
What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir?'

"Never did a thunder-clap
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his lap,
As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join the
pack)
Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before, turned
black.

When he found his voice, he stammered 'That expression once
again!'

" 'Well, you forced a card and cheated!'

" 'Possibly a factor's brain,
Busied with his all-important balance of accounts, may deem
Weighing words superfluous trouble: *cheat* to clerkly ears may
seem
Just the joke for friends to venture: but we are not friends, you
see!
When a gentleman is joked with,—if he 's good at repartee,
He repoins, as do I—Sirrah, on your knees, withdraw in full!
Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet through your skull
Lets in light and teaches manners to what brain it finds! Choose
quick—
Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray me trim yon
candle-wick!'

" 'Well, you cheated!'

"Then outbroke a howl from all the friends around.
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were clenched and teeth
were ground.
'End it! no time like the present! Captain, yours were our
disgrace!
No delay, begin and finish! Stand back, leave the pair a space!
Let civilians be instructed: henceforth simply ply the pen,

112. *Thyrsis, Chloe:* pastoral lovers.

Fly the sword! This clerk 's no swordsman? Suit him with a pistol, then!
Even odds! A dozen paces 'twixt the most and least expert
Make a dwarf a giant's equal: nay, the dwarf, if he 's alert,
Likelier hits the broader target!'

"Up we stood accordingly.
As they handed me the weapon, such was my soul's thirst to try
Then and there conclusions with this bully, tread on and stamp out
Every spark of his existence, that,—crept close to, curled about
By that toying tempting teasing fool-forefinger's middle joint,—
Don't you guess?—the trigger yielded. Gone my chance! and at the point
Of such prime success moreover: scarce an inch above his head
Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was living, I was dead.

"Up he marched in flaming triumph—'t was his right, mind!—up, within
Just an arm's length. 'Now, my clerkling,' chuckled Cocky with a grin
As the levelled piece quite touched me, 'Now, Sir Counting-House, repeat
That expression which I told you proved bad manners! Did I cheat?'

" 'Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and, this moment, know as well.
As for me, my homely breeding bids you—fire and go to Hell!'

"Twice the muzzle touched my forehead. Heavy barrel, flurried wrist,
Either spoils a steady lifting. Thrice: then, 'Laugh at Hell who list,
I can't! God 's no fable either. Did this boy's eye wink once? No!
There 's no standing him and Hell and God all three against me,—so,
I did cheat!'

"And down he threw the pistol, out rushed—by the door
Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney, roof or floor,

He effected disappearance—I 'll engage no glance was sent
That way by a single starer, such a blank astonishment
Swallowed up their senses: as for speaking—mute they stood as mice

"Mute not long, though! Such reaction, such a hubbub in a trice!
'Rogue and rascal! Who 'd have thought it? What 's to be expected next,
When His Majesty's Commission serves a sharper as pretext
For . . . But where 's the need of wasting time now? Nought requires delay:
Punishment the Service cries for: let disgrace be wiped away
Publicly, in good broad daylight! Resignation? No, indeed
Drum and fife must play the Rogue's March, rank and file be free to speed
Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the rear
—Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,—never fear,
Mister Clive, for—though a clerk—you bore yourself—suppose we say—
Just as would beseem a soldier!'

" 'Gentlemen, attention—pray!
First, one word!'

"I passed each speaker severally in review.
When I had precise their number, names and styles, and fully knew
Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,—why, then———

" 'Some five minutes since, my life lay—as you all saw, gentlemen—
At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice was raised
In arrest of judgment, not one tongue—before my powder blazed—
Ventured "Can it be the youngster blundered, really seemed to mark

162. *Rogue's March:* a march played upon dishonorable discharge from the British army.

Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,
Guess at random,—still, for sake of fair play—what if for a freak,
In a fit of absence,—such things have been!—if our friend proved weak
—What 's the phrase?—corrected fortune! Look into the case, at least!"
Who dared interpose between the altar's victim and the priest?
Yet he spared me! You eleven! Whosoever, all or each,
To the disadvantage of the man who spared me, utters speech
—To his face, behind his back,—that speaker has to do with me:
Me who promise, if positions change and mine the chance should be,
Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage!'

"Twenty-five
Years ago this matter happened: and 't is certain," added Clive,
"Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single breath
Breathed against him: lips were closed throughout his life, or since his death,
For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.
All I know is—Cocky had one chance more; how he used it,—grew
Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again
Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his train,—
That 's for you to judge. Reprieval I procured, at any rate.
Ugh—the memory of that minute's fear makes gooseflesh rise! Why prate
Longer? You 've my story, there 's your instance: fear I did, you see!"

"Well"—I hardly kept from laughing—"if I see it, thanks must be
Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that—in a common case—
When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's face,
I should underrate, believe me, such a trial to the nerve!

183–4. He would be 46, since line 198 says he was 21 when the incident occurred. But Clive was actually 49 years old at his death (which line 238 tells us was next week).

'T is no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor swerve.
Fear I naturally look for—unless, of all men alive,
I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert Clive.
Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death—the whole world knows—
Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,
Clive and I, you had not wondered—up he sprang so, out he rapped
Such a round of oaths—no matter! I 'll endeavour to adapt
To our modern usage words he—well, 't was friendly licence—flung
At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his tongue.

"You—a soldier? You—at Plassy? Yours the faculty to nick
Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-quick,
—At his mercy, at his malice,—has you, through some stupid inch
Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,—not to flinch
—That needs courage, you 'll concede me. Then, look here! Suppose the man,
Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span
Distant from my temple,—curse him!—quietly had bade me 'There!
Keep your life calumniator!—worthless life I freely spare:
Mine you freely would have taken—murdered me and my good fame
Both at once—and all the better! Go, and thank your own bad aim
Which permits me to forgive you!' What if, with such words as these,
He had cast away his weapon? How should I have borne me, please?

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211. Browning said this supposition was his own invention: What if the antagonist, instead of confessing, had reiterated his innocence and offered to spare his worthless life? Such a man as Clive, Browning felt, would have had to kill himself. But it is fictitious to make Clive consider such a possibility. The psychological point is that courage can be close to cowardice, mere luck making the difference. Contrast the Aristotelian conception of virtue as a habit, induced by long practice.

Nay, I 'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only this, remained—
Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. I so had gained
Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still
Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's will."

"Such the turn," said I, "the matter takes with you? Then I abate
—No, by not one jot nor tittle,—of your act my estimate.
Fear—I wish I could detect there: courage fronts me, plain enough—
Call it desperation, madness—never mind! for here 's in rough
Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome disgrace.
True, disgrace were hard to bear: but such a rush against God's face
—None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church at times,
Say the creed my mother taught me! Many years in foreign climes
Rub some marks away—not all, though! We poor sinners reach life's brink,
Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but think
There 's advantage in what 's left us—ground to stand on, time to call
'Lord, have mercy!' ere we topple over—do not leap, that 's all!"

Oh, he made no answer,—re-absorbed into his cloud. I caught
Something like "Yes—courage: only fools will call it fear." If aught
Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I heard,
Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and uttered just the word
"Fearfully courageous!"—this, be sure, and nothing else I groaned.
I 'm no Clive, nor parson either: Clive's worst deed—we 'll hope condoned.

220–21. Clive is already wishing for death.

229. *Lord Plassy:* Clive's title as a baron.

238. Clive, a broken man and a drug addict, committed suicide in 1774. Hence there is an element of cowardice in Clive in spite of his agreement with the speaker in line 236.

MULÉYKEH*

If a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A churl's!"
Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"
—"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn
More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking pearls,
—Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán?
They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the due,
Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began,
Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,
And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at men's land and gold!'

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—and right, I say.
Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Outstripping all,
Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor's staff.
Who started, the owner's hope, gets shamed and named, that day.
'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we use to call
Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hóseyn, I say, to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies: "Be sure
On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away in heart

* For this old Arabian tale of a horse-lover, Browning has created the appropriate atmosphere by various devices such as the lively racing movement in the verse, and the coining of appropriate names. It was published in the *Second Series* of *Dramatic Idyls* (1880).

1. *Hóseyn:* the name means "one who is constantly occupied with a horse."

11 ff. *Muléykeh:* Arabic diminutive for "Queen," but Browning takes it to mean "Pearl."

17. *Silence, Cuffed:* names given to horses that fail in the race.

21. *Duhl:* the name means "dwarfish."

For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no cure.
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an oath,
'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize apart.' "

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to Hóseyn's tent,
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace!" bids he.
"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty shall mend the wrong.
'T is said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred camels spent
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such prudence is far from me
Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley may last too long."

Said Hóseyn "You feed young beasts a many, of famous breed,
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Múzennem:
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs the hill.
But I love Muléykeh's face: her forefront whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels—go gaze on them!
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.
"You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a very prince.
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare your simple gift!
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my wife prompts 'Fool,
Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the rewarder, since
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders on Him shows thrift.' "

Said Hóseyn "God gives each man one life, like a lamp, then gives
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted—hold high, wave wide
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what help is left?
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Muléykeh lives.
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died?
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-bereft?"

Another year, and—hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?
He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,
But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench
Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night combines
With the robber—and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to crime,
Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my store,
And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?
Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one!
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay, more—
For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two:
I will beg! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and son.

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,
And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die:
Let him die, then,—let me live! Be bold—but not too rash!
I have found me a peeping-place: breast, bury your breathing while
I explore for myself! Now, breathe! He deceived me not, the spy!

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy! Beside
Stands tethered the Pearl: thrice winds her headstall about his wrist:
'T is therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the roof reveals.
And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and wide,
Buhéyseh, her sister born: fleet is she yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case some thief
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.

61. *Holy House:* the family of Mohammed.

What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once mount her we both escape."
Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a serpent disturbs no leaf
In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest: clean through,
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned, he performs the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth, has clipped
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound as before,
He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like bolt from bow.
Up starts our plundered man: from his breast though the heart be ripped,
Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a minute more,
He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose worth we know!

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long since to ride,
And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining fast
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be spied!
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and queer:
Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and must
Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—joy! fear!
What folly makes Hóseyn shout "Dog Duhl, Damned son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's left flank!"

96. Rollo Springfield's *The Horse and his Rider* (1847) says, in giving a version of this story, "Every Bedouin trains the animals he rides to obey some sign of this kind, to which he has recourse only on urgent occasions, and which he makes a close secret, not to be divulged even to his son." But Hóseyn would rather lose possession of Muléykeh than have her beaten in speed.

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt perceived
Who was urging, redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for evermore.
And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may:
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping: and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-Asád
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his grief;
And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound
His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad!
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: "Poor Hóseyn is crazed past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!"—
"And the beaten in speed!" wept Hóseyn: "You never have loved my Pearl."

PAN AND LUNA*

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic,* iii. 390

O WORTHY of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!
No question, that adventure came to pass

104. *Bénu-Asád:* sons of the lion.

* Published in *Dramatic Idyls, Second Series* (1880), this very un-Victorian poem tells a Classical myth with a sensuous realization that even Ovid and the Elizabethans hardly surpassed. Pan was the Greek god of Nature and of country people. He was half goat, rough, ruddy in complexion, fond of music, noise, and riot. Luna was the virgin moon-goddess Artemis (Cynthia or Diana). In "One Word More," the "Epilogue" to *Ferishtah's Fancies, etc.,* the moon is a symbol of Browning's wife. But it

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 vapour, 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.

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would be rash to identify Browning with Pan. The Latin quotation means, "If it is worthy of belief." The whole passage in Virgil's *Georgics* (III) which gave Browning the idea for this poem is: "Thus, if the tale is worthy of belief, Pan, Arcadia's god, beguiled you, O Moon, calling you to the depths of the woods, wooing you with a gift of snowy wool, and you did not disdain him." This constituted the first eclipse of the moon (*cf.* 89).

4. *Arcadia:* district in Greece which according to Virgil was the home of pastoral simplicity.

28. *Uncinct:* not girdled.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,
A succourable cloud with sleep lay dense:
Some pine-tree-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 succourable 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 of curving ears—that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps—that . . . Once for all,
Say—her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerous 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 flexile ivory outside-flesh: enough!
The plumy 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:

34. *Succourable:* admitting of relief.
54. *Flexile:* supple. 56. *Springe:* snare.
59. *Amphitrite's dome:* the sea, Amphitrite being wife of Poseidon (Neptune).

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 for ever: 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 baulk
The propagating plague: he gets no young:
They rather slay him,—sell his hide to caulk
Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,
The purity we love 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-sward 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

71–80. In the *Georgics*, immediately before the passage on Pan and Luna, Virgil had been explaining how to get white wool: "But cast out the ram, however white his fleece, if he has even a black tongue under his moist palate."

81–2. Browning has changed this from Virgil's account in which Luna appears a willing victim.

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.

"TOUCH HIM NE'ER SO LIGHTLY. . . ."*

"Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke:
Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul!"

Indeed?
Rock 's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:
Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age
Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.

WANTING IS—WHAT?**

Wanting is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
—Where is the blot?

* This attacks the popular notion (expressed in the first stanza) that the poet sings spontaneously and easily. Rather, he says, rock, and all the extremes of weather, are best for great poetry. I cannot see that DeVane is correct in saying that here Browning expresses a preference for conceiving of "the poet as 'prophet'" (*Browning Handbook*, p. 411, and *Shorter Poems*, p. 382). The *Second Series* of *Dramatic Idyls* (1880), to which this is attached as an epilogue, was much less "prophetic" or philosophical than most of Browning's other work of the seventies and eighties.

** This poem describes the emptiness of beauty without Love. It is typical of Browning that the "comer" might be a girl or Divine Love, "He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matthew, xxi, 9); "The Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Revelation, i, 8). This was printed as the prologue to *Jocoseria* (1883). In the same volume is "Cristina and Monaldeschi," in which the love was not perfect; forgiveness is wanting. Perhaps other poems in *Jocoseria* could be interpreted from this point of view (*e.g.*, "Adam, Lilith, and Eve").

Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
—Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Roses embowering with nought they embower!
Come then, complete incompletion, O comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
Breathe but one breath
Rose-beauty above,
And all that was death
Grows life, grows love,
Grows love!

CRISTINA AND MONALDESCHI*

Ah, but how each loved each, Marquis!
Here 's the gallery they trod
Both together, he her god,
She his idol,—lend your rod,
Chamberlain!—ay, there they are—"*Quis Separabit?*"—plain those two
Touching words come into view,
Apposite for me and you:

Since they witness to incessant
Love like ours: King Francis, he—

* Published in *Jocoseria* (1883). Queen Cristina of Sweden (1626–89), brilliant and unconventional, refused to bind herself in marriage, and abdicated her throne in 1654 to live a life of greater freedom, retaining, however, absolute and sovereign jurisdiction over all her servants. She went to Rome, joined the Catholic Church, and surrounded herself with Italian officers. The Marquis Monaldeschi, her "Master of Horse," she described in her memoirs as "a gentleman of most handsome person and fine manners, who from the first moment reigned exclusively over my heart." He is supposed to have taken advantage of his position, writing to a young Roman beauty letters ridiculing Christina's fondness for him. These letters came into her possession; and she summoned Monaldeschi to the Gallery of the Deer at Fontainebleau, confronted him with the letters, and had him murdered, November 10, 1657. (See C. N. Wenger, "Clio's Rights in Poetry," *P.M.L.A.*, LX [1945], 256–270.)

1. Marquis Gian Rinaldi Monaldeschi, her lover, has betrayed her confidences; she is ironically speaking of faithful lovers.

5–6. *Quis separabit?*: "Who will separate?"—a Latin motto inscribed on the frame of a picture in the gallery of Diana of Poitiers at the palace of Fontainebleau (near Paris).

Diane the adored one, she—
Prototypes of you and me.
Everywhere is carved her Crescent
With his Salamander-sign—
Flame-fed creature: flame benign
To itself or, if malign,

Only to the meddling curious,
—So, be warned, Sir! Where 's my head?
How it wanders! What I said
Merely meant—the creature, fed
Thus on flame, was scarce injurious
Save to fools who woke its ire,
Thinking fit to play with fire.
'Tis the Crescent you admire?

Then, be Diane! I 'll be Francis.
Crescents change,—true!—wax and wane,
Woman-like: male hearts retain
Heat nor, once warm, cool again.
So, we figure—such our chance is—
I as man and you as . . . What?
Take offence? My Love forgot
He plays woman, I do not?

I—the woman? See my habit,
Ask my people! Anyhow,
Be we what we may, one vow
Binds us, male or female. Now,—
Stand, Sir! Read! *"Quis separabit?"*
Half a mile of pictured way
Past these palace-walls to-day
Traversed, this I came to say.

---

10. Francis I ruled France from 1515 to 1547. Browning, however, makes a mistake—it was not Francis I but Henry II who kept Diana of Poitiers at Fontainebleau as his favorite mistress.

13–14. The crescent moon was the emblem of Diana; the salamander, emblem of the King. Both signs are repeated in the decorations of the gallery, and Browning has carried through a dramatic contrast between frigidity and fire.

You must needs begin to love me;
  First I hated, then, at best,
  —Have it so!—I acquiesced;
  Pure compassion did the rest.
From below thus raised above me,
  Would you, step by step, descend,
  Pity me, become my friend,
  Like me, like less, loathe at end?

That 's the ladder's round you rose by!
  That—my own foot kicked away,
  Having raised you: let it stay,
  Serve you for retreating? Nay.
Close to me you climbed: as close by,
  Keep your station, though the peak
  Reached proves somewhat bare and bleak
  Woman 's strong if man is weak.

Keep here, loving me forever!
  Love's look, gesture, speech, I claim;
  Act love, lie love, all the same—
  Play as earnest were our game!
Lonely I stood long: 't was clever
  When you climbed, before men's eyes,
  Spurned the earth and scaled the skies,
  Gained my peak and grasped your prize.

Here you stood, then, to men's wonder;
  Here you tire of standing? Kneel!
  Cure what giddiness you feel,
  This way! Do your senses reel?
Not unlikely! What rolls under?
  Yawning death in yon abyss
  Where the waters whirl and hiss
  Round more frightful peaks than this.

Should my buffet dash you thither . . .
  But be sage! No watery grave
  Needs await you: seeming brave
  Kneel on safe, dear timid slave!

You surmised, when you climbed hither,
Just as easy were retreat
Should you tire, conceive unmeet
Longer patience at my feet?

Me as standing, you as stooping,—
Who arranged for each the pose?
Lest men think us friends turned foes,
Keep the attitude you chose!
Men are used to this same grouping—
I and you like statues seen.
You and I, no third between,
Kneel and stand! That makes the scene.

Mar it—and one buffet . . . Pardon!
Needless warmth—wise words in waste!
'T was prostration that replaced
Kneeling, then? A proof of taste.
Crouch, not kneel, while I mount guard on
Prostrate love—become no waif,
No estray to waves that chafe
Disappointed—love 's so safe!

Waves that chafe? The idlest fancy!
Peaks that scare? I think we know
Walls enclose our sculpture: so
Grouped, we pose in Fontainebleau.
Up now! Wherefore hesitancy?
Arm in arm and cheek by cheek,
Laugh with me at waves and peak!
Silent still? Why, pictures speak.

See, where Juno strikes Ixion,
Primatice speaks plainly! Pooh—
Rather, Florentine Le Roux!
I 've lost head for who is who—

105. An ominous suggestion—Ixion attempted to seduce Juno, Queen of the Gods, and was cruelly punished.

106. Francesco Primaticcio (1504–70) designed some of the decorations in the Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau.

107. *Le Roux:* French way of saying Rossi (a Florentine painter).

So it swims and wanders! Fie on
What still proves me female! Here,
By the staircase!—for we near
That dark "Gallery of the Deer."

Look me in the eyes once! Steady!
Are you faithful now as erst
On that eve when we two first
Vowed at Avon, blessed and cursed
Faith and falsehood? Pale already?
Forward! Must my hand compel
Entrance—this way? Exit—well
Somehow, somewhere. Who can tell?

What if to the self-same place in
Rustic Avon, at the door
Of the village church once more,
Where a tombstone paves the floor
By that holy-water basin
You appealed to—"As, below,
This stone hides its corpse, e'en so
I your secrets hide"? What ho!

Friends, my four! You, Priest, confess him!
I have judged the culprit there:
Execute my sentence! Care
For no mail such cowards wear!
Done, Priest? Then, absolve and bless him!
Now—you three, stab thick and fast,
Deep and deeper! Dead at last?
Thanks, friends—Father, thanks! Aghast?

112. *Gallery of the Deer: Galerie des Cerfs* at Fontainbleau, where the murder took place. Browning seems to have shifted the scene of the murder to the *Galerie de Diane* just above it, as he has made the murder take place in Christina's presence and without delay, to heighten the sensational effect.

129. *Priest:* Father le Bel, Prior of the Maturins, who begged her to spare him.

130. She had a legal right to judge him, since he was her Master of Horse and by a clause in her Act of Abdication she had retained absolute and sovereign jurisdiction over all her servants. The only objection the French Court made was to having the murder committed at Fontainebleau. She retired to Rome and gave herself up to art and chemistry and idleness.

132. In reality he was wearing mail, and they had to decapitate him.

What one word of his confession
Would you tell me, though I lured
With that royal crown abjured
Just because its bars immured
Love too much? Love burst compression,
Fled free, finally confessed
All its secrets to that breast
Whence . . . let Avon tell the rest!

ADAM, LILITH, AND EVE*

One day it thundered and lightened.
Two women, fairly frightened,
Sank to their knees, transformed, transfixed,
At the feet of the man who sat betwixt;
And "Mercy!" cried each—"if I tell the truth
Of a passage in my youth!"

Said This: "Do you mind the morning
I met your love with scorning?
As the worst of the venom left my lips,
I thought, 'If, despite this lie, he strips
The mask from my soul with a kiss—I crawl
His slave,—soul, body and all!' "

Said That: "We stood to be married;
The priest, or someone, tarried;

144. *Avon:* village near Fontainebleau where Monaldeschi is buried.

* Under the influence of fear, two types of women tell a typical man the truth about their past emotions towards him; but when fear has passed all three pretend it was a jest. "Adam" in Hebrew means "man," and it has been traditional to consider Adam and Eve as typical man and wife. Browning's interest in ancient rabbinical lore is illustrated by other poems also of the *Jocoseria* volume in which this was published (1883).

7. *This:* Lilith. The Hebrew commentators in the *Talmud* said that Adam had Lilith as a mate before Eve (distinguishing between the woman mentioned in Genesis, i, 27, and Genesis, ii, 18). She is said to have been disobedient and sensual. Browning indicates that one of these traits could have been played off against the other.

13. *That:* Eve, his wife, who is supposed to have saved him from Lilith, but here confesses that she would have deserted him at the altar if the one she really loved had appeared.

'If Paradise-door proved locked?' smiled you.
I thought, as I nodded, smiling too,
'Did one, that 's away, arrive—nor late
Nor soon should unlock Hell's gate!' "

It ceased to lighten and thunder.
Up started both in wonder,
Looked round and saw that the sky was clear,
Then laughed "Confess you believed us, Dear!"
"I saw through the joke!" the man replied
They re-seated themselves beside.

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!

* A lyric referring to his love for his wife who died in 1861. This was published in *Jocoseria* (1883).

12. *Enemy:* perhaps time? or change? or forgetfulness? or doubt?

EPILOGUE TO *FERISHTAH'S FANCIES**

Oh, Love—no, Love! All the noise below, Love,
Groanings all and moanings—none of Life I lose!
All of Life 's a cry just of weariness and woe, Love—
"Hear at least, thou happy one!" How can I, Love, but choose?

Only, when I do hear, sudden circle round me
—Much as when the moon's might frees a space from cloud—
Iridescent splendours: gloom—would else confound me—
Barriered off and banished far—bright-edged the blackest shroud!

Thronging through the cloud-rift, whose are they, the faces
Faint revealed yet sure divined, the famous ones of old?
"What"—they smile—"our names, our deeds so soon erases
Time upon his tablet where Life's glory lies enrolled?

"Was it for mere fool's-play, make-believe and mumming,
So we battled it like men, not boylike sulked or whined?
Each of us heard clang God's 'Come!' and each was coming:
Soldiers all, to forward-face, not sneaks to lag behind!

"How of the field's fortune? That concerned our Leader!
Led, we struck our stroke nor cared for doings left and right:
Each as on his sole head, failer or succeeder,
Lay the blame or lit the praise: no care for cowards: fight!"

Then the cloud-rift broadens, spanning earth that 's under
Wide our world displays its worth, man's strife and strife's success:
All the good and beauty, wonder crowning wonder,
Till my heart and soul applaud perfection, nothing less.

---

* Of all Browning's expressions of facile optimism, the volume *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) was perhaps the most extreme. But at the very end he says that his blood turns to ice at the thought that his cheery philosophy may all be error, and all his hopes an illusion inspired by love.

6. Browning frequently uses the moon as the symbol for his wife, now dead 23 years. (*Cf.* "One Word More.") This poem is addressed to her.

Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror
  Sudden turns the blood to ice: a chill wind disencharms
All the late enchantment! What if all be error—
  If the halo irised round my head were, Love, thine arms?

THE NAMES*

SHAKESPEARE!—to such name's sounding, what succeeds
  Fitly as silence? Falter forth the spell,—
  Act follows word, the speaker knows full well,
Nor tampers with its magic more than needs.
Two names there are: That which the Hebrew reads
  With his soul only: if from lips it fell,
  Echo, back thundered by earth, heaven and hell,
Would own "Thou did'st create us!" Nought impedes
We voice the other name, man's most of might,
  Awesomely, lovingly: let awe and love
Mutely await their working, leave to sight
  All of the issue as—below—above—
  Shakespeare's creation rises: one remove,
Though dread—this finite from that infinite.

---

* This was published in 1884 on the first page of *The Shakespearean Show-Book* and in the *Browning Society's Papers* (I, 105*), but was not collected by Browning in any volume of his works. (The only difference between these two earliest texts of the sonnet is that the former uses a semicolon after the title, the latter a period.) The poem was contributed at the request of Dr. Furnivall, Shakespearean scholar and founder of the Browning Society. The Shakespearean Show was held to aid the Hospital for Women in Fulham Road.

This sonnet illustrates what might be called the Hebraism, as Arnold's sonnet "Shakespeare" the Hellenism, in Victorian Shakespeare-worship. Compare the story Browning liked to tell of Charles Lamb, who, when someone asked, "And if Christ entered this room?" answered, "You see, if Shakespeare entered we should all rise; if *He* appeared we must kneel" (*Letters of Robert Browning*, ed. Hood, 171–2).

6. The ancient Hebrews considered themselves forbidden to pronounce the sacred name of Yahweh or Jehovah (the sacred four letters, JHWH).

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 gaily 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."

---

* This was first printed in a book edited by Andrew Reid, *Why I am a Liberal, being Definitions and Personal Confessions of Faith by the Best Minds of the Liberal Party* (London, 1885), from which this text is taken, since Browning never published it in any collected edition. (It was reprinted in the *Browning Society's Papers*, 1889, II, 92*.)

Browning is using the term "Liberal" in the early Victorian sense, *i.e.*, one who believes in an extreme degree of liberty. It meant especially *laissez-faire* economics, that "rugged individualism" of which Browning is the poetic representative. Even when Browning wrote the sonnet this "Liberalism" was considered conservative, and the Liberal party was on the verge of disruption. Meredith's novel, *Beauchamp's Career*, shows how it was splitting into conservatives, sympathetic with vested interests, and the more radical wing. Browning's political opinions are the corollary of his religion, since the strength of Liberalism in England has been the Non-Conformist middle class.

APOLLO AND THE FATES*

A PROLOGUE

(Hymn, in Mercurium, v. 559. Eumenides, vv. 693–4, 697–8. Alcestis, vv. 12, 33.)

APOLLO [*From above.*

Flame at my footfall, Parnassus! Apollo,
  Breaking a-blaze on thy topmost peak,
Burns thence, down to the depths—dread hollow—
  Haunt of the Dire Ones. Haste! They wreak
Wrath on Admetus whose respite I seek.

* In this Prologue to *Parleyings with Certain People* (1887) Browning has followed the lead of the Greeks in expressing his ideas mythologically; it may be read as a prologue to all of his studies of the good and evil in human fate, since it is a mature and conclusive statement of his philosophy and his theory of the function of poetry. This is an optimistic answer, by a belated Romantic, to the pessimistic fatalism characteristic of late Victorian authors like Hardy, whose universe might be ruled by these underworld Fates without Apollonian relief. (Hardy's *Return of the Native* had appeared 9 years before.) A comparison of this, one of Browning's latest poems, with *Pippa Passes,* his earliest great success, proves how little change had taken place in Browning's ideas in the 46 years between 1841 (when Wordsworth had not yet succeeded Southey as Poet Laureate) and 1887 (when George Bernard Shaw was already writing).

Hymn, etc.: The three passages Browning has in mind are as follows:
Homer's *Hymn to Mercury* (in Shelley's translation):

> They [the Fates], having eaten the fresh honey, grow
> Drunk with divine enthusiasm, and utter
> With earnest willingness the truth they know.

Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (in Plumtre's translation, altering the second half of the second line):

> This didst thou also in the house of Pheres,
> Winning the Fates to free a man from death.
> Thou hast o'erthrown, yea, thou, laws hoar with age,
> And drugged with wine the ancient Goddesses.

Euripides' *Alcestis:* Apollo says, "The son of Pheres—him I saved from death, cheating the Fates;" and Orcus replies, "Did it not suffice to have snatched Admetus from his doom, beguiling the Fates with cunning?"

1. *Parnassus:* Mountain sacred to the Muses, to Apollo, and to Bacchus. In the underworld beneath the roots of this mountain dwelt the three Fates. Apollo was god of poetry and music, and god of the sun; two functions often associated so that he has been taken as a personification of the clear white light of Hellenic poetry and art, its balance, reason, and simple realism. "It may safely be asserted, that the Greeks would never have

THE FATES [*Below. Darkness.*

Dragonwise couched in the womb of our Mother,
Coiled at thy nourishing heart's core, Night!
Dominant Dreads, we, one by the other,
Deal to each mortal his dole of light
On earth—the upper, the glad, the bright.

CLOTHO

Even so: thus from my loaded spindle
Plucking a pinch of the fleece, lo, "Birth"
Brays from my bronze lip: life I kindle:
Look, 't is a man! go, measure on earth
The minute thy portion, whatever its worth!

LACHESIS

Woe-purfled, weal-prankt,—if it speed, if it linger,—
Life's substance and show are determined by me,
Who, meting out, mixing with sure thumb and finger,
Lead life the due length: is all smoothness and glee,
All tangle and grief? Take the lot, my decree!

ATROPOS

—Which I make an end of: the smooth as the tangled
My shears cut asunder: each snap shrieks "One more
Mortal makes sport for us Moirai who dangled

become what they were, without the worship of Apollo; in him the brightest side of the Grecian mind is reflected" (Blakeney, *Smaller Classical Dictionary*). Apollo, as god of rational beauty, has sometimes (as in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*) been opposed to Dionysus or Bacchus, patron of the irrational and mysterious—wine, music, and tragedy. Browning probably has better justification in having Apollo make use of the invention of Bacchus.

4. *Dire Ones:* The Three Fates or *Parcae,* who preside over Destiny. (Compare the Weird Sisters of *Macbeth,* "Weird" being an old word for Fate.)

5. *Admetus:* King of Pherae. Browning tells this story in *Balaustion's Adventure, Including a Transcript from Euripides.* The play *Alcestis* "transcribed" from Euripides begins with a decree from the Fates that it is time for Admetus to die.

11 ff. *Clotho:* the Fate who spins the thread of life.

16 ff. *Lachesis:* the Fate who determines the length of life, which is embroidered (purfled) with woe and decked out with prosperity (*weal-prankt*).

21 ff. *Atropos:* the Fate who cuts the thread of life.

23. *Moirai:* the Fates

The puppet grotesquely till earth's solid floor
Proved film he fell through, lost in Naught as before."

CLOTHO

I spin thee a thread. Live, Admetus! Produce him!

LACHESIS

Go,—brave, wise, good, happy! Now chequer the thread!
He is slaved for, yet loved by a god. I unloose him
A goddess-sent plague. He has conquered, is wed,
Men crown him, he stands at the height,—

ATROPOS

He is . . .

APOLLO [*Entering: Light.*

"Dead?"

Nay, swart spinsters! So I surprise you
Making and marring the fortunes of Man?
Huddling—no marvel, your enemy eyes you—
Head by head bat-like, blots under the ban
Of daylight earth's blessing since time began!

THE FATES

Back to thy blest earth, prying Apollo!
Shaft upon shaft transpierce with thy beams
Earth to the centre,—spare but this hollow
Hewn out of night's heart, where our mystery seems
Mewed from day's malice: wake earth from her dreams!

APOLLO

Crones, 't is your dusk selves I startle from slumber:
Day's god deposes you—queens Night-crowned!
—Plying your trade in a world ye encumber,
Fashioning Man's web of life—spun, wound,
Left the length ye allot till a clip strews the ground!

Behold I bid truce to your doleful amusement—
Annulled by a subeam!

31. *Spinster:* originally feminine form of *spinner.*
40. *Mewed:* concealed.

THE FATES

Boy, are not we peers?

APOLLO

You with the spindle grant birth: whose inducement
But yours—with the niggardly digits—endears
To mankind chance and change, good and evil? Your
shears . . .

ATROPOS

Ay, mine and the conflict: so much is no fable.
We spin, draw to length, cut asunder: what then?
So it was, and so is, and so shall be: art able
To alter life's law for ephemeral men?

APOLLO

Nor able nor willing. To threescore and ten

Extend but the years of Admetus! Disaster
O'ertook me, and, banished by Zeus, I became
A servant to one who forbore me though master:
True lovers were we. Discontinue your game,
Let him live whom I loved, then hate on, all the same!

THE FATES

And what if we granted—law-flouter, use-trampler—
His life at the suit of an upstart? Judge, thou—
Of joy were it fuller, of span because ampler?
For love's sake, not hate's, end Admetus—ay, now—
Not a gray hair on head, nor a wrinkle on brow!

For, boy, 't is illusion: from thee comes a glimmer
Transforming to beauty life blank at the best.
Withdraw—and how looks life at worst, when to shimmer
Succeeds the sure shade, and Man's lot frowns—confessed
Mere blackness chance-brightened? Whereof shall attest

56–9. Apollo, having offended Zeus, was banished from Olympus, and became a servant to Admetus. They became close friends. Now that Apollo is restored to favor he wishes to save his friend's life.

66–7. In the view of the Fates, the Sun of Poetry does not simply light up *reality*, but *transforms* life by "gilding evil" and dullness. Browning lets Apollo grant this theory of poetry, since it is ground upon which the extreme realist and the romantic can meet in agreement.

The truth this same mortal, the darling thou stylest,
  Whom love would advantage,—eke out, day by day,
A life which 't is solely thyself reconcilest
  Thy friend to endure,—life with hope: take away
Hope's gleam from Admetus, he spurns it. For, say—

What 's infancy? Ignorance, idleness, mischief:
  Youth ripens to arrogance, foolishness, greed:
Age—impotence, churlishness, rancour: call *this* chief
  Of boons for thy loved one? Much rather bid speed
Our function, let live whom thou hatest indeed!

Persuade thee, bright boy-thing! Our eld be instructive!

APOLLO

  And certes youth owns the experience of age.
Ye hold then, grave seniors, my beams are productive
  —They solely—of good that's mere semblance, engage
Man's eye—gilding evil, Man's true heritage?

THE FATES

So, even so! From without,—at due distance
  If viewed,—set a-sparkle, reflecting thy rays,—
Life mimics the sun: but withdraw such assistance,
  The counterfeit goes, the reality stays—
An ice-ball disguised as a fire-orb.

APOLLO

What craze

Possesses the fool then whose fancy conceits him
  As happy?

THE FATES

Man happy?

APOLLO

If otherwise—solve
This doubt which besets me! What friend ever greets him
  Except with "Live long as the seasons revolve,"
Not "Death to thee straightway"? Your doctrines absolve

89. *Ice-ball . . . fire-orb:* Earthly life gets all its warmth from the Sun (the Arts).

Such hailing from hatred: yet Man should know best.
He talks it, and glibly, as life were a load
Man fain would be rid of: when put to the test,
He whines "Let it lie, leave me trudging the road
That is rugged so far, but methinks . . ."

THE FATES

Ay, 't is owed

To that glamour of thine, he bethinks him "Once past
The stony, some patch, nay, a smoothness of sward
Awaits my tired foot: life turns easy at last"—
Thy largess so lures him, he looks for reward
Of the labour and sorrow.

APOLLO

It seems, then—debarred

Of illusion—(I needs must acknowledge the plea)
Man desponds and despairs. Yet,—still further to draw
Due profit from counsel,—suppose there should be
Some power in himself, some compensative law
By virtue of which, independently . . .

THE FATES

Faugh!

Strength hid in the weakling!
What bowl-shape hast there,
Thus laughingly proffered? A gift to our shrine?
Thanks—worsted in argument! Not so? Declare
Its purpose!

105–7. Illusion is necessary to have happiness at all—notice how close Browning's optimism is to pessimism, supported by perhaps insubstantial props. Knock out the props, and one has the mood of many late-Victorian authors. Browning's feverish enthusiasm for life should not be confused with hearty gusto like that of the Renaissance, or Chaucer's cheerful humanity.

APOLLO

I proffer earth's product, not mine.
Taste, try, and approve Man's invention of—WINE!

THE FATES

We feeding suck honeycombs.

APOLLO

Sustenance meagre!
Such fare breeds the fumes that show all things amiss.
Quaff wine,—how the spirits rise nimble and eager,
Unscale the dim eyes! To Man's cup grant one kiss
Of your lip, then allow—no enchantment like this!

CLOTHO

Unhook wings, unhood brows! Dost hearken?

LACHESIS

I listen:
I see—smell the food these fond mortals prefer
To our feast, the bee's bounty!

ATROPOS

The thing leaps! But—glisten
Its best, I withstand it—unless all concur
In adventure so novel.

APOLLO

Ye drink?

THE FATES

We demur.

APOLLO

Sweet Trine, be indulgent nor scout the contrivance
Of Man—Bacchus-prompted! The juice, I uphold,
Illuminates gloom without sunny connivance,
Turns fear into hope and makes cowardice bold,—
Touching all that is leadlike in life turns it gold!

115. *Wine:* symbol of Imagination, the gods' last gift to Man. This, Apollo argues, is a human invention—Man has within himself a creative power that can fashion dynamic illusions independent of divine inspiration.

126. *Trine:* Trinity of Fates.

THE FATES

Faith foolish as false!

APOLLO

But essay it, soft sisters!
Then mock as ye may. Lift the chalice to lip!
Good: thou next—and thou! Seems the web, to you twisters
Of life's yarn, so worthless?

CLOTHO

Who guessed that one sip
Would impart such a lightness of limb?

LACHESIS

I could skip

In a trice from the pied to the plain in my woof!
What parts each from either? A hair's breadth, no inch.
Once learn the right method of stepping aloof,
Though on black next foot falls, firm I fix it, nor flinch,
—Such my trust white succeeds!

ATROPOS

One could live—at a pinch!

APOLLO

What, beldames? Earth's yield, by Man's skill, can effect
Such a cure of sick sense that ye spy the relation
Of evil to good? But drink deeper, correct
Blear sight more convincingly still! Take your station
Beside me, drain dregs! Now for edification!

Whose gift have ye gulped? Thank not me but my brother,
Blithe Bacchus, our youngest of godships. 'T was he
Found all boons to all men, by one god or other
Already conceded, so judged there must be
New guerdon to grace the new advent, you see!

Else how would a claim to Man's homage arise?
The plan lay arranged of his mixed woe and weal,

So disposed—such Zeus' will—with design to make wise
  The witless—that false things were mingled with real,
Good with bad: such the lot whereto law set the seal.

Now, human of instinct—since Semele's son,
  Yet minded divinely—since fathered by Zeus,
With naught Bacchus tampered, undid not things done,
  Owned wisdom anterior, would spare wont and use,
Yet change—without shock to old rule—introduce.

Regard how your cavern from crag-tip to base
  Frowns sheer, height and depth adamantine, one death!
I rouse with a beam the whole rampart, displace
  No splinter—yet see how my flambeau, beneath
And above, bids this gem wink, that crystal unsheathe!

Withdraw beam—disclosure once more Night forbids you
  Of spangle and sparkle—Day's chance-gift, surmised
Rock's permanent birthright: my potency rids you
  No longer of darkness, yet light—recognized—
Proves darkness a mask: day lives on though disguised.

If Bacchus by wine's aid avail so to fluster
  Your sense, that life's fact grows from adverse and thwart
To helpful and kindly by means of a cluster—
  Mere hand-squeeze, earth's nature sublimed by Man's art—
Shall Bacchus claim thanks wherein Zeus has no part?

Zeus—wisdom anterior? No, maids, be admonished!
  If morn's touch at base worked such wonders, much more
Had noontide in absolute glory astonished
  Your den, filled a-top to o'erflowing. I pour
No such mad confusion. 'T is Man's to explore

Up and down, inch by inch, with the taper his reason:
  No torch, it suffices—held deftly and straight.

---

156. *Semele:* daughter of Cadmus, King of Thebes; mother of Bacchus.
160. For Browning, the poetic imagination, like alcohol, can make things look better "without shock to old rule," and lead men to "acquiescence in fate" (185). Contrast Shelley's view of the revolutionary function of poetry. Browning admired Shelley but did not emulate him.

Eyes, purblind at first, feel their way in due season,
  Accept good with bad, till unseemly debate
Turns concord—despair, acquiescence in fate.

Who works this but Zeus? Are not instinct and impulse,
  Not concept and incept his work through Man's soul
On Man's sense? Just as wine ere it reach brain must brim pulse,
  Zeus' flash stings the mind that speeds body to goal,
Bids pause at no part but press on, reach the whole.

For petty and poor is the part ye envisage
  When—(quaff away, cummers!)—ye view, last and first,
As evil Man's earthly existence. Come! *Is* age,
  Is infancy—manhood—so uninterspersed
With good—some faint sprinkle?

CLOTHO

I 'd speak if I durst

APOLLO

Draughts dregward loose tongue-tie.

LACHESIS

I 'd see, did no web
Set eyes somehow winking.

APOLLO

Drains-deep lies their purge
—True collyrium!

ATROPOS

Words, surging at high-tide, soon ebb
From starved ears.

APOLLO

Drink but down to the source, they resurge.
Join hands! Yours and yours too! A dance or a dirge?

190. *Cf.* "A Grammarian's Funeral," 83–97; "Abt Vogler," 72; "Andrea del Sarto," 97–8; *etc.*
192. *Cummers:* gossips.
198. *Collyrium:* eyewash.

CHORUS

Quashed be our quarrel! Sourly and smilingly,
  Bare and gowned, bleached limbs and browned,
Drive we a dance, three and one, reconcilingly,
  Thanks to the cup where dissension is drowned,
Defeat proves triumphant and slavery crowned.

Infancy? What if the rose-streak of morning
  Pale and depart in a passion of tears?
Once to have hoped is no matter for scorning!
  Love once—e'en love's disappointment endears!
A minute's success pays the failure of years.

Manhood—the actual? Nay, praise the potential!
  (Bound upon bound, foot it around!)
What *is?* No, what *may* be—sing! that 's Man's essential!
  (Ramp, tramp, stamp and compound
Fancy with fact—the lost secret is found!)

Age? Why, fear ends there: the contest concluded,
  Man *did* live his life, *did* escape from the fray:
Not scratchless but unscathed, he somehow eluded
  Each blow fortune dealt him, and conquers to-day:
To morrow—new chance and fresh strength,—might we say?

Laud then Man's life—no defeat but a triumph!
[Explosion from the earth's centre.

CLOTHO

Ha, loose hands!

LACHESIS

I reel in a swound.

ATROPOS

Horror yawns under me, while from on high—humph!
  Lightnings astound, thunders resound,
Vault-roof reverberates, groans the ground!
[Silence

209. *Cf.* "Cristina" and "Bad Dreams I."
211. *Cf.* "Rabbi Ben Ezra," 40–41.

APOLLO

I acknowledge.

THE FATES

Hence, trickster! Straight sobered are we!
The portent assures 't was our tongue spoke the truth,
Not thine. While the vapour encompassed us three
We conceived and bore knowledge—a bantling uncouth,
Old brains shudder back from: so—take it, rash youth!

Lick the lump into shape till a cry comes!

APOLLO

I hear.

THE FATES

Dumb music, dead eloquence! Say it, or sing!
What was quickened in us and thee also?

APOLLO

I fear.

THE FATES

Half female, half male—go, ambiguous thing!
While we speak—perchance sputter—pick up what we fling!

Known yet ignored, nor divined nor unguessed,
Such is Man's law of life. Do we strive to declare
What is ill, what is good in our spinning? Worst, best,
Change hues of a sudden: now here and now there
Flits the sign which decides: all about yet nowhere.

'T is willed so,—that Man's life be lived, first to last,
Up and down, through and through,—not in portions, forsooth,

227–8. It seems that the original attitude of the Fates was nearer to the *actualities;* they should not have glorified this life, which is only preparatory. Nothing can "alter life's law for ephemeral man" (54), not even Art—nor does Art wish to do so (55). But the Fates have gained knowledge of the *potentialities* of Man. Browning's optimism is one of hope for the future; his vision of human life as it is, psychologically, and as it has been, historically, resembles the bleak estimate expressed earlier by the Fates. Nor was the poet "willing" (*cf.* 55) to try to eliminate this evil.

To pick and to choose from. Our shuttles fly fast,
  Weave living, not life sole and whole: as age—youth,
So death completes living, shows life in its truth.

Man learningly lives: till death helps him—no lore!
  It is doom and must be. Dost submit?

APOLLO

I assent—
Concede but Admetus! So much if no more
  Of my prayer grant as peace-pledge! Be gracious though, blent,
Good and ill, love and hate streak your life-gift!

THE FATES

Content!
Such boon we accord in due measure. Life's term
  We lengthen should any be moved for love's sake
To forego life's fulfilment, renounce in the germ
  Fruit mature—bliss or woe—either infinite. Take
Or leave thy friend's lot: on his head be the stake!

APOLLO

On mine, griesly gammers! Admetus, I know thee!
  Thou prizest the right these unwittingly give
Thy subjects to rush, pay obedience they owe thee!
  Importunate one with another they strive
For the glory to die that their king may survive.

Friends rush: and who first in all Pheræ appears
  But thy father to serve as thy substitute?

CLOTHO

Bah!

APOLLO

Ye wince? Then his mother, well-stricken in years,
Advances her claim—or his wife—

256. *Gammers:* old women.

261. *Pherae:* town in Thessaly where Pherae, father of Admetus, reigned.

262–3. As a matter of fact, not all the predictions of Apollo are fulfilled in the story. His hopes are illusions; men are not so noble. But in

LACHESIS

Tra-la-la!

APOLLO

But he spurns the exchange, rather dies!

ATROPOS

Ha, ha, ha!

[*Apollo ascends. Darkness.*

PROLOGUE TO *ASOLANDO**

"THE Poet's age is sad: for why?
In youth, the natural world could show
No common object but his eye
At once involved with alien glow—
His own soul's iris-bow.

"And now a flower is just a flower:
Man, bird, beast are but beast, bird, man—
Simply themselves, uncinct by dower
Of dyes which, when life's day began,
Round each in glory ran."

Friend, did you need an optic glass,
Which were your choice? A lens to drape
In ruby, emerald, chrysopras,
Each object—or reveal its shape
Clear outlined, past escape,

Browning's view, such illusions lead Man on, and the result is Progress. In his "A Death in the Desert" the man is praised who "Enjoyed the falsehood, touched it on to truth," above the man who could see nothing before him (in "the ineffectual clay") except what was already actually there.

* This "Prologue" to *Asolando* (1889) has special reference to the subtitle of the volume, *Fancies and Facts*, expressing the realist's preference for "facts." It is a counterpart of Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*, admitting with the Romantic "That there hath past away a glory from the earth," but resolutely refusing to feel any romantic regret.

5. Iris was goddess of the rainbow.
13. *Chrysopras:* a kind of quartz.

The naked very thing?—so clear
  That, when you had the chance to gaze,
You found its inmost self appear
  Through outer seeming—truth ablaze,
Not falsehood's fancy-haze?

How many a year, my Asolo,
  Since—one step just from sea to land—
I found you, loved yet feared you so—
  For natural objects seemed to stand
Palpably fire-clothed! No—

No mastery of mine o'er these!
  Terror with beauty, like the Bush
Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
  Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
Silence 't is awe decrees.

And now? The lambent flame is—where?
  Lost from the naked world: earth, sky,
Hill, vale, tree, flower,—Italia's rare
  O'er-running beauty crowds the eye—
But flame? The Bush is bare.

Hill, vale, tree, flower—they stand distinct,
  Nature to know and name. What then?
A Voice spoke thence with straight unlinked
  Fancy from fact: see, all 's in ken:
Has once my eyelid winked?

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21. *Asolo:* Small town in the Treviso, Italy, that Browning had visited as a young man on his first trip to Italy, when he was charmed with the place. His first work of great inspiration and poetic success, *Pippa Passes,* has Asolo for its setting. He visited the town again at the end of his life, and had been there a few weeks before his death in December, 1889. He records his disappointment not only in this poem but elsewhere: "I used to dream about [Asolo] so often in the old days, till at last I saw it again, and the dreams stopped" (Whiting, *The Brownings,* pp. 282–3). The title *Asolando* plays upon the name of the town. Browning got the verb *asolare* from Cardinal Bembo, who had lived near Asolo, and he uses it, he says, "for love of the place." It means, he explains in his dedication, "to disport in the open air, amuse oneself at random."

27–28. See Exodus, iii, 2.

No, for the purged ear apprehends
  Earth's import, not the eye late dazed:
The Voice said "Call my works thy friends!
  At Nature dost thou shrink amazed?
God is it who transcends."

DUBIETY*

I WILL be happy if but for once:
  Only help me, Autumn weather,
Me and my cares to screen, ensconce
  In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!

Sleep? Nay, comfort—with just a cloud
  Suffusing day too clear and bright:
Eve's essence, the single drop allowed
  To sully, like milk, Noon's water-white.

Let gauziness shade, not shroud,—adjust,
  Dim and not deaden,—somehow sheathe
Aught sharp in the rough world's busy thrust,
  If it reach me through dreaming's vapour-wreath.

Be life so, all things ever the same!
  For, what has disarmed the world? Outside,
Quiet and peace: inside, nor blame
  Nor want, nor wish whate'er betide.

What is it like that has happened before?
  A dream? No dream, more real by much.
A vision? But fanciful days of yore
  Brought many: mere musing seems not such.

Perhaps but a memory, after all!
  —Of what came once when a woman leant
To feel for my brow where her kiss might fall.
  Truth ever, truth only the excellent!

36–45. In the spirit of realistic science, Browning here attacks the romanticism that was dazzled into thinking it found God in Nature. He admits that he has been guilty of that error.

* In the autumn of his life he recalls the real facts of his love affair, more excellent than any fancy. This was published in *Asolando* (1889).

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 our 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!

HUMILITY**

What girl but, having gathered flowers,
Stript the beds and spoilt the bowers,
From the lapful light she carries
Drops a careless bud?—nor tarries
To regain the waif and stray:
"Store enough for home"—she 'll say.

So say I too: give your lover
Heaps of loving—under, over,
Whelm him—make the one the wealthy!
Am I all so poor who—stealthy
Work it was!—picked up what fell:
Not the worst bud—who can tell?

* He asks her to give him the present "moment eternal" for the ecstasy of love, at the cost of past and future. This poem of passionate abandon was published at the end of Browning's life, in *Asolando* (1889).

** Published in *Asolando* (1889), this love lyric is called by DeVane "perhaps, an old man's poem." It expresses appreciation for any bud of love that may be dropped carelessly by the girl in giving her lover "heaps of loving."

POETICS*

"So say the foolish!" Say the foolish so, Love?
"Flower she is, my rose"—or else "My very swan is she"—
Or perhaps "Yon maid-moon, blessing earth below, Love,
That art thou!"—to them, belike: no such vain words from me.

"Hush, rose, blush! no balm like breath," I chide it:
"Bend thy neck its best, swan,—hers the whiter curve!"
Be the moon the moon: my Love I place beside it:
What is she? Her human self,—no lower word will serve.

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.

A PEARL, A GIRL***

A simple ring with a single stone
To the vulgar eye no stone of price:
Whisper the right word, that alone—
Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice,

* This appeared in *Asolando*, whose subtitle is *Fancies and Facts* (1889). It is the "poetics" of a *realistic* love poet. The beauties of his mistress should not be compared to the rose or the swan—she can be compared only to herself.

** The *summum bonum* is the ultimate good, the end sought by all systems of ethics. For the Stoics the supreme good was duty; for the Epicureans, pleasure. For the Christian the *summum bonum* is the love of God.

*** Published in *Asolando* (1889).

1. *Ring:* like the ring of Solomon mentioned in "Abt Vogler."

And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)
Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole
Through the power in a pearl.

A woman ('t is I this time that say)
With little the world counts worthy praise
Utter the true word—out and away
Escapes her soul: I am wrapt in blaze,
Creation's lord, of heaven and earth
Lord whole and sole—by a minute's birth—
Through the love in a girl!

SPECULATIVE*

Others may need new life in Heaven—
Man, Nature, Art—made new, assume!
Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
Nature—new light to clear old gloom,
Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.

I shall pray: "Fugitive as precious—
Minutes which passed,—return, remain!
Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
You with old pleasure, me—old pain,
So we but meet nor part again!"

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."

* An expression of what Browning looks forward to at the end of his life. This appeared in *Asolando,* which was published on the day of his death, December 12, 1889. He will pray not for new life in Heaven, but that the past return and remain. Notice that Browning's prayer is the opposite of the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven." Similarly in *Ferishtah's Fancies* (in the lyric at end of "Two Camels") he says of Heaven, "Let it but resemble Earth myself have known! No bliss that's finer, fuller" (than the bliss of a blushing cheek and "a lip's mere tremble" which "effect a heartquake").

** This is the first of four poems named "Bad Dreams" published in *Asolando: Fancies and Facts* (1889). Here the woman tells that she

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."

BAD DREAMS. II*

You in the flesh and here—
  Your very self! Now, wait!
One word! May I hope or fear?
  Must I speak in love or hate?
Stay while I ruminate!

The fact and each circumstance
  Dare you disown? Not you!
That vast dome, that huge dance,
  And the gloom which overgrew
A—possibly festive crew!

For why should men dance at all—
  Why women—a crowd of both—
Unless they are gay? Strange ball—
  Hands and feet plighting troth,
Yet partners enforced and loth!

Of who danced there, no shape
  Did I recognize: thwart, perverse,

dreamed he said he had no faith in her, and that love was estranged. But she had the bliss of knowing that she "loved on the same." This is characteristic of Browning's interest in Love as a benefit to the one who loves.

* The man speaks first of a dream betraying his unconscious doubt of her faithfulness. (See "Bad Dreams. I.") In this poem of the subconscious, Browning anticipates the psychology of psychoanalysis so popular with authors like Eugene O'Neill and Jean Cocteau in the 1920's and 1930's. Notice the comment on this poem in Berdoe's *Browning Cyclopaedia:* "The soul in sleep, free from the disguises of the day, wanders at will. Perhaps it may indeed be that our suppressed evil thoughts—thoughts that, kept down by custom, conventionality, and respect for public opinion, never become incarnate in act—walk at night and revel in unfettered freedom. . . ." Not only in conceptions, but in the very atmosphere of disgust and horror, this poem would seem to belong to our own twentieth-century poetry of disillusionment and despair.

Each grasped each, past escape
  In a whirl or weary or worse:
Man's sneer met woman's curse,

While he and she toiled as if
  Their guardian set galley-slaves
To supple chained limbs grown stiff:
  Unmanacled trulls and knaves—
The lash for who misbehaves!

And a gloom was, all the while,
  Deeper and deeper yet
O'ergrowing the rank and file
  Of that army of haters—set
To mimic love's fever-fret.

By the wall-side close I crept,
  Avoiding the livid maze,
And, safely so far, outstepped
  On a chamber—a chapel, says
My memory or betrays—

Closet-like, kept aloof
  From unseemly witnessing
What sport made floor and roof
  Of the Devil's palace ring
While his Damned amused their king.

Ay, for a low lamp burned,
  And a silence lay about
What I, in the midst, discerned
  Though dimly till, past doubt,
'T was a sort of throne stood out—

High seat with steps, at least:
  And the topmost step was filled
By—whom? What vestured priest?
  A stranger to me,—his guild,
His cult, unreconciled

To my knowledge how guild and cult
  Are clothed in this world of ours:
I pondered, but no result
  Came to—unless that Giaours
So worship the Lower Powers.

When suddenly who entered?
  Who knelt—did you guess I saw?
Who—raising that face where centred
  Allegiance to love and law
So lately—off-casting awe,

Down-treading reserve, away
  Thrusting respect . . . but mine
Stands firm—firm still shall stay!
  Ask Satan! for I decline
To tell—what I saw, in fine!

Yet here in the flesh you come—
  Your same self, form and face,—
In the eyes, mirth still at home!
  On the lips, that commonplace
Perfection of honest grace!

Yet your errand is—needs must be—
  To palliate—well, explain,
Expurgate in some degree
  Your soul of its ugly stain.
Oh, you—the good in grain—

How was it your white took tinge?
  "A mere dream"—never object!
Sleep leaves a door on hinge
  Whence soul, ere our flesh suspect,
Is off and away: detect

Her vagaries when loose, who can!
  Be she pranksome, be she prude,
Disguise with the day began:
  With the night—ah, what ensued
From draughts of a drink hell-brewed?

54. *Giaours:* infidels.

Then She: "What a queer wild dream!
  And perhaps the best fun is—
Myself had its fellow—I seem
  Scarce awake from yet. 'T was this—
Shall I tell you? First, a kiss!

"For the fault was just your own,—
  'T is myself expect apology:
You warned me to let alone
  (Since our studies were mere philology)
That ticklish (you said) Anthology.

"So I dreamed that I passed *exam*
  Till a question posed me sore:
'Who translated this epigram
  By—an author we best ignore?'
And I answered, 'Hannah More'!"

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

95. *Anthology:* the Greek Anthology, ancient collection of poems and epigrams.

100. Hannah More (1745–1833) was a writer of pious and moralizing fictions, very priggish and prudish, representing, with their conscious innocence, the opposite kind of imaginative life from the unrestrained self-revelation of the man's dream. Hence I do not agree with DeVane's comment that this is a "meaningless dream" (*Browning Handbook*, p. 480). The priggish sentimentality of Hannah More and the surrealism of Jean Cocteau, a century and a half later, may be said to mark the two extremes in the literature of uncritical emotionalism which rose in the latter eighteenth century and has plunged to the depths in our own day. Browning stands at the middle point in this same romantic stream.

* No poem by Browning is harder to interpret; yet, unlike "Childe Roland," it demands interpretation. It was published in *Asolando* (1889); if it had been written 40 years later, the "Dream" might be the result of reading Spengler's *Decline of the West* with its argument that all civilizations come ultimately to a dead level of degradation: metropolitan sophistication swallowing up all natural feeling, and primitive force destroying the culture of every "lucid City," until the cities are abandoned and the simple

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 thy 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!

energy of the countryfolk spoiled. In the love tragedy of the "Bad Dreams" the man who speaks seems to fear that the woman has allowed intellect and "Art" to corrupt the naturalness of love, and that her animal instincts have destroyed the spiritually beautiful city that he once saw. The "Bad Dreams" I and II have already indicated that he had lost faith in her.

35–6. This may be Browning's commentary on the Naturalistic movement in the art of literature—perfidious snake-plants strangling ideals that were a pavilion once.

WHICH?*

So, the three Court-ladies began
Their trial of who judged best
In esteeming the love of a man:
Who preferred with most reason was thereby confessed
Boy-Cupid's exemplary catcher and cager;
An Abbé crossed legs to decide on the wager.

First the Duchesse: "Mine for me—
Who were it but God's for Him,
And the King's for—who but he?
Both faithful and loyal, one grace more shall brim
His cup with perfection: a lady's true lover,
He holds—save his God and his king—none above her."

"I require"—outspoke the Marquise—
"Pure thoughts, ay, but also fine deeds:
Play the paladin must he, to please
My whim, and—to prove my knight's service exceeds
Your saint's and your loyalist's praying and kneeling—
Show wounds, each wide mouth to my mercy appealing."

Then the Comtesse: "My choice be a wretch,
Mere losel in body and soul,
Thrice accurst! What care I, so he stretch
Arms to me his sole saviour, love's ultimate goal,

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* Published in *Asolando* (1889). This is a contest, such as might have taken place in Castiglione's Urbino or any salon of the Old Régime. Three currents of thought important in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries lie behind these decisions. The Duchesse prefers the man who holds none above his lady except his God and his king. (Thus she maintains the three chivalric loyalties of courtly love, the Church, and knightly service.) The Marquise requires pure thoughts and fine deeds—the Platonic ideal especially admired by the Renaissance. The Comtesse (Countess) wins the contest by preferring the wretch whose soul is worthless, but who looks upon her as his sole saviour. The poem is thus on the side of Calvinism against the more aristocratic ideals.

12. *Above her:* compare the Cavalier sentiment of the seventeenth-century poet Lovelace:

I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.

20. *Losel:* a worthless person.

Out of earth and men's noise—names of 'infidel,' 'traitor,'
Cast up at him? Crown me, crown's adjudicator!"

And the Abbé uncrossed his legs,
Took snuff, a reflective pinch,
Broke silence: "The question begs
Much pondering ere I pronounce. Shall I flinch?
The love which to one and one only has reference
Seems terribly like what perhaps gains God's preference."

"IMPERANTE AUGUSTO NATUS EST—"*

WHAT it was struck the terror into me?
This, Publius: closer! while we wait our turn
I 'll tell you. Water 's warm (they ring inside)
At the eighth hour, till when no use to bathe.

Here in the vestibule where now we sit,
One scarce stood yesterday, the throng was such
Of loyal gapers, folk all eye and ear
While Lucius Varius Rufus in their midst

29. This Puritanic conception, of a love that has reference to one only, should be contrasted with the Platonic conception of love as rising to higher and higher objects through love of inferior objects.

30. Browning's Calvinistic background is evident in this opinion that God does not love any man for his good deeds or moral character, but showers love upon men who are totally depraved. It is doubtful whether a Catholic "Abbé" would express such a doctrine. The love enjoined by Christ is not to have reference to God only.

* Setting: Rome, 2 B.C. The title refers to Christ and is Latin for "he was born [when] Augustus [was] reigning." Browning—historical psychologist—is interested in showing the state of the Roman mind at the time of the birth of Christ. He makes us appreciate what it means to say that the Classical world was ready to accept a Messiah. And he very skillfully allows the speaker to betray that *pride* of the pagan aristocrat which Christianity, a religion of love and humility, was to regard as the first of sins. The poem was published in *Asolando* (1889), at a time when many English writers were attempting a revival of paganism.

3–4. Two Romans are entering the public bath, important center of social life in Ancient Rome. They converse in the vestibule while the water is being heated.

8. Lucius Varius Rufus, Roman poet of the first century before Christ, wrote a panegyric in praise of the Emperor Augustus which has not survived. This is an anachronism, since Rufus died in 14 B.C.

Read out that long-planned late-completed piece,
His Panegyric on the Emperor.
"Nobody like him" little Flaccus laughed
"At leading forth an Epos with due pomp!
Only, when godlike Cæsar swells the theme,
How should mere mortals hope to praise aright?
Tell me, thou offshoot of Etruscan kings!"
Whereat Mæcenas smiling sighed assent.

I paid my quadrans, left the Thermæ's roar
Of rapture as the poet asked "What place
Among the godships Jove, for Cæsar's sake,
Would bid its actual occupant vacate
In favour of the new divinity?"
And got the expected answer "Yield thine own!"—
Jove thus dethroned, I somehow wanted air,
And found myself a-pacing street and street,
Letting the sunset, rosy over Rome,
Clear my head dizzy with the hubbub—say
As if thought's dance therein had kicked up dust
By trampling on all else: the world lay prone,
As—poet-propped, in brave hexameters—
Their subject triumphed up from man to God.
Caius Octavius Cæsar the August—
Where was escape from his prepotency?
I judge I may have passed—how many piles
Of structure dropt like doles from his free hand

10. Caius Octavius Augustus (63 B.C.–14 A.D.) was the first Roman emperor.

11. The Latin poet Horatius Flaccus is usually called Horace. He actually died in 8 B.C., a few years before the time of this poem.

12. *Epos:* epic.

15–16. Romans were proud to trace their ancestry back to the kings of the Etruscans, a people powerful in Italy before Rome. Notice how Horace, while disclaiming ability to praise, is flattering Maecenas, his wealthy patron.

17. *Quadrans:* Roman coin worth half a cent, the price of the bath. *Thermae:* the baths.

21. Some of the Roman poets gave divine honors to the Emperor. *Augustus* means "consecrated in the augury." The god Cronus had dethroned his father Saturn, and had been dethroned by Jove. Jove would be dethroned in time—not, however, by an emperor but by Christ.

34–74. From Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars,* "Augustus," ch. 28–30 and 34.

To Rome on every side? Why, right and left,
For temples you 've the Thundering Jupiter,
Avenging Mars, Apollo Palatine:
How count Piazza, Forum—there 's a third
All but completed. You 've the Theatre
Named of Marcellus—all his work, such work!—
One thought still ending, dominating all—
With warrant Varius sang "Be Cæsar God!"
By what a hold arrests he Fortune's wheel,
Obtaining and retaining heaven and earth
Through Fortune, if you like, but favour—no!
For the great deeds flashed by me, fast and thick
As stars which storm the sky on autumn nights—
Those conquests! but peace crowned them,—so, of peace!
Count up his titles only—these, in few—
Ten years Triumvir, Consul thirteen times,
Emperor, nay—the glory topping all—
Hailed Father of his Country, last and best
Of titles, by himself accepted so:
And why not? See but feats achieved in Rome—
Not to say, Italy—he planted there
Some thirty colonies—but Rome itself
All new-built, "marble now, brick once," he boasts:
This Portico, that Circus. Would you sail?
He has drained Tiber for you: would you walk?
He straightened out the long Flaminian Way.
Poor? Profit by his score of donatives!
Rich—that is, mirthful? Half-a-hundred games
Challenge your choice! - There 's Rome—for you and me
Only? The centre of the world besides!
For, look the wide world over, where ends Rome?
To sunrise? There 's Euphrates—all between!
To sunset? Ocean and immensity:
North,—stare till Danube stops you: South, see Nile,
The Desert and the earth-upholding Mount.
Well may the poet-people each with each
Vie in his praise, our company of swans,

57. Suetonius says that Augustus "could justly boast that he had found it built of brick and left it in marble" (ch. 28). In Suetonius, Browning also found the list of buildings erected by Augustus.

69. *Earth-upholding Mount:* Atlas, in northwestern Africa.

Virgil and Horace, singers—in their way—
Nearly as good as Varius, though less famed:
Well may they cry, "No mortal, plainly God!"

Thus to myself myself said, while I walked:
Or would have said, could thought attain to speech,
Clean baffled by enormity of bliss
The while I strove to scale its heights and sound
Its depths—this masterdom o'er all the world
Of one who was but born,—like you, like me,
Like all the world he owns,—of flesh and blood.
But he—how grasp, how gauge his own conceit
Of bliss to me near inconceivable?
Or—since such flight too much makes reel the brain—
Let 's sink—and so take refuge, as it were,
From life's excessive altitude—to life's
Breathable wayside shelter at its base!
If looms thus large this Cæsar to myself
—Of senatorial rank and somebody—
How must he strike the vulgar nameless crowd,
Innumerous swarm that 's nobody at all?
Why,—for an instance,—much as yon gold shape
Crowned, sceptred, on the temple opposite—
Fulgurant Jupiter—must daze the sense
Of—say, yon outcast begging from its step!
What, anti-Cæsar, monarch in the mud,
As he is pinnacled above thy pate?
Ay, beg away! thy lot contrasts full well
With his whose bounty yields thee this support—
Our Holy and Inviolable One,
Cæsar, whose bounty built the fane above!
Dost read my thought? Thy garb, alack, displays
Sore usage truly in each rent and stain—
Faugh! Wash though in Suburra! 'Ware the dogs
Who may not so disdain a meal on thee!
What, stretchest forth a palm to catch my alms?
Aha, why yes: I must appear—who knows?—
I, in my toga, to thy rags and thee—

94. *Fulgurant:* lightning-flashing.
104. *Suburra:* a street of bad repute in Rome.

Quæstor—nay, Ædile, Censor—Pol! perhaps
The very City-Prætor's noble self!
As to me Cæsar, so to thee am I?
Good: nor in vain shall prove thy quest, poor rogue!
Hither—hold palm out—take this quarter-as!

And who did take it? As he raised his head,
(My gesture was a trifle—well, abrupt),
Back fell the broad flap of the peasant's-hat,
The homespun cloak that muffled half his cheek
Dropped somewhat, and I had a glimpse—just one!
One was enough. Whose—whose might be the face?
That unkempt careless hair—brown, yellowish—
Those sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows' ridge
(Each meets each, and the hawk-nose rules between)
—That was enough, no glimpse was needed more!
And terrifyingly into my mind
Came that quick-hushed report was whispered us,
"They do say, once a year in sordid garb
He plays the mendicant, sits all day long,
Asking and taking alms of who may pass,
And so averting, if submission help,
Fate's envy, the dread chance and change of things
When Fortune—for a word, a look, a nought—
Turns spiteful and—the petted lioness—
Strikes with her sudden paw, and prone falls each
Who patted late her neck superiorly,
Or trifled with those claw-tips velvet-sheathed."
"He 's God!" shouts Lucius Varius Rufus: "Man
And worms'-meat any moment!" mutters low
Some Power, admonishing the mortal-born.

Ay, do you mind? There 's meaning in the fact
That whoso conquers, triumphs, enters Rome,

109. *Pol!*—He swears by Pollux, twin of Castor.
113. *Quarter-as:* a penny.
114. *He:* the Emperor Augustus. Lines 114–138 are based on Suetonius' "Augustus," ch. 79 and 91.
127. "It was likewise because of a dream that every year on an appointed day he begged alms of the people, holding out his open hand to have pennies dropped into it." (Suetonius, ch. 91.)

Climbing the Capitolian, soaring thus
To glory's summit,—Publius, do you mark—
Ever the same attendant who, behind,
Above the Conqueror's head supports the crown
All-too-demonstrative for human wear,
—One hand's employment—all the while reserves
Its fellow, backward flung, to point how, close
Appended from the car, beneath the foot
Of the up-borne exulting Conqueror,
Frown—half-descried—the instruments of shame,
The malefactor's due. Crown, now—Cross, when?

Who stands secure? Are even Gods so safe?
Jupiter that just now is dominant—
Are not there ancient dismal tales how once
A predecessor reigned ere Saturn came,
And who can say if Jupiter be last?
Was it for nothing the grey Sibyl wrote
"Cæsar Augustus regnant, shall be born
In blind Judæa"—one to master him,
Him and the universe? An old-wife's tale?
Bath-drudge! Here, slave! No cheating! Our turn next.
No loitering, or be sure you taste the lash!
Two strigils, two oil-drippers, each a sponge!

DEVELOPMENT*

My Father was a scholar and knew Greek.
When I was five years old, I asked him once
"What do you read about?"
"The siege of Troy."
"What is a siege and what is Troy?"

141. *Capitolian:* the Capitoline Hill, with its Temple of Jupiter.
157–9. *Grey Sibyl:* probably the Erethraean Sibyl. In the *Sibylline Oracles* (Bk. III, 55–60; VIII, *etc.*) is a prophecy of the coming of a Messiah.
163. *Strigil:* a flesh brush.

* Published in Browning's last volume, *Asolando* (1889), this is at once his chief statement on educational method, and a comment, by implication, on Biblical scholarship.

3. Homer's *Iliad,* telling of the siege of Troy, became one of Robert Browning's favorite books.

Whereat
He piled up chairs and tables for a town,
Set me a-top for Priam, called our cat
—Helen, enticed away from home (he said)
By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close
Under the footstool, being cowardly,
But whom—since she was worth the pains, poor puss—
Towzer and Tray,—our dogs, the Atreidai,—sought
By taking Troy to get possession of
—Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,
(My pony in the stable)—forth would prance
And put to flight Hector—our page-boy's self.
This taught me who was who and what was what:
So far I rightly understood the case
At five years old: a huge delight it proved
And still proves—thanks to that instructor sage
My Father, who knew better than turn straight
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,
Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind,
Content with darkness and vacuity.

It happened, two or three years afterward,
That—I and playmates playing at Troy's Siege—
My Father came upon our make-believe.
"How would you like to read yourself the tale
Properly told, of which I gave you first
Merely such notion as a boy could bear?
Pope, now, would give you the precise account
Of what, some day, by dint of scholarship,
You 'll hear—who knows?—from Homer's very mouth.
Learn Greek by all means, read the 'Blind Old Man,
Sweetest of Singers'—*tuphlos* which means 'blind,'
Hedistos which means 'sweetest.' Time enough!
Try, anyhow, to master him some day;

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11. *Atreidai:* the sons of Atreus, Menelaus and Agamemnon.

23. While Browning is attacking the misguided educator who fails to soften the light of learning to the "weak eyes" of the pupil, he considers the educator even worse who would be content to leave the child in ignorance of great literature.

30. Alexander Pope's translation of the *Iliad* into heroic couplets (1720) was very popular for several generations.

Until when, take what serves for substitute,
Read Pope, by all means!"
So I ran through Pope,
Enjoyed the tale—what history so true?
Also attacked my Primer, duly drudged,
Grew fitter thus for what was promised next—
The very thing itself, the actual words,
When I could turn—say, Buttmann to account.

Time passed, I ripened somewhat: one fine day,
"Quite ready for the Iliad, nothing less?
There 's Heine, where the big books block the shelf:
Don't skip a word, thumb well the Lexicon!"

I thumbed well and skipped nowise till I learned
Who was who, what was what, from Homer's tongue,
And there an end of learning. Had you asked
The all-accomplished scholar, twelve years old,
"Who was it wrote the Iliad?"—what a laugh!
"Why, Homer, all the world knows: of his life
Doubtless some facts exist: it 's everywhere:
We have not settled, though, his place of birth:
He begged, for certain, and was blind beside:
Seven cities claimed him—Scio, with best right,
Thinks Byron. What he wrote? Those Hymns we have.

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39. Aristotle says in his *Poetics* (IX, 1451 a, b) "it is not the function of the poet to relate what has happened, but what may happen. . . . Poetry, therefore, is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." If the young Browning had taken this attitude towards the tale, his enjoyment could not have been injured by historical research, which would have been merely irrelevant. But it is characteristic of Browning to treat poetry as closer to history than almost any other poet. Hence to find that Homer wrote fiction would distress him, as it would not distress an Aristotelian.

43. Philipp Carl Buttmann (1764–1829) was a German scholar, famous for his Greek grammar.

46. *Heine:* Christian Gottleib Heyne (1729–1812) whose edition of the *Iliad* was considered a standard text.

57. Seven cities claimed to be Homer's birthplace. The list is sometimes given as: Athens, Rhodes, Argos, Salamis, Smyrna, Colophon, and Chios (Scio).

58. These hymns are no longer ascribed to Homer.

Then there 's the 'Battle of the Frogs and Mice,'
That 's all—unless they dig 'Margites' up
(I 'd like that) nothing more remains to know."

Thus did youth spend a comfortable time;
Until—"What 's this the Germans say is fact
That Wolf found out first? It 's unpleasant work
Their chop and change, unsettling one's belief:
All the same, while we live, we learn, that 's sure."
So, I bent brow o'er *Prolegomena.*
And, after Wolf, a dozen of his like
Proved there was never any Troy at all,
Neither Besiegers nor Besieged,—nay, worse,—
No actual Homer, no authentic text,
No warrant for the fiction I, as fact,
Had treasured in my heart and soul so long,—
Ay, mark you! and as fact held still, still hold,
Spite of new knowledge, in my heart of hearts
And soul of souls, fact's essence freed and fixed
From accidental fancy's guardian sheath.
Assuredly thenceforward—thank my stars!—
However it got there, deprive who could—
Wring from the shrine my precious tenantry,
Helen, Ulysses, Hector and his Spouse,
Achilles and his Friend?—though Wolf—ah, Wolf!
Why must he needs come doubting, spoil a dream?

59–60. The *Batrachomyomachia* ("Battle of the Frogs and Mice"), a mock epic, and the "Margites," a humorous poem, were attributed to Homer.

64. Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) in his *Prolegomena in Homerum* contended that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were not the work of one author but of several whose poems were handed down by oral tradition. After a century of controversy, the "unity of Homer" has been successfully defended by recent scholars.

65. Browning's objection to this "higher criticism" of Homer is similar to his objection to Biblical scholarship. (See "Christmas Eve," *etc.*) This poem hints at an application of its argument to the Higher Criticism of the Bible.

69–73. Excavations later led to the discovery of the actual walls of Homeric Troy, and many scholars now think that the leading names of the *Iliad* represent real men.

81. *Spouse:* Andromache.

But then "No dream 's worth waking"—Browning says:
And here 's the reason why I tell thus much.
I, now mature man, you anticipate,
May blame my Father justifiably
For letting me dream out my nonage thus,
And only by such slow and sure degrees
Permitting me to sift the grain from chaff,
Get truth and falsehood known and named as such.
Why did he ever let me dream at all,
Not bid me taste the story in its strength?
Suppose my childhood was scarce qualified
To rightly understand mythology,
Silence at least was in his power to keep:
I might have—somehow—correspondingly—
Well, who knows by what method, gained my gains,
Been taught, by forthrights not meanderings,
My aim should be to loathe, like Peleus' son,
A lie as Hell's Gate, love my wedded wife,
Like Hector, and so on with all the rest.
Could not I have excogitated this
Without believing such men really were?
That is—he might have put into my hand
The "Ethics"? In translation, if you please,
Exact, no pretty lying that improves,
To suit the modern taste: no more, no less—
The "Ethics": 't is a treatise I find hard
To read aright now that my hair is grey,
And I can manage the original.
At five years old—how ill had fared its leaves!
Now, growing double o'er the Stagirite,
At least I soil no page with bread and milk,
Nor crumple, dogsear and deface—boys' way.

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100. *Peleus' son:* Achilles, hero of the *Iliad.*

106. The *Nichomachean Ethics* of Aristotle, the greatest Classical presentation of the principles of morality. Browning here turns from attacking pedantic historical treatment of the classics, and objects also to the scholastic teachers who would have the pupil learn an abstract science of morality instead of feeding the imagination on great literature.

113. *Stagirite*: Aristotle, so called because of his birthplace, Stagira.

REVERIE*

I KNOW there shall dawn a day
  —Is it here on homely earth?
Is it yonder, worlds away,
  Where the strange and new have birth,
That Power comes full in play?

Is it here, with grass about,
  Under befriending trees,
When shy buds venture out,
  And the air by mild degrees
Puts winter's death past doubt?

Is it up amid whirl and roar
  Of the elemental flame
Which star-flecks heaven's dark floor,
  That, new yet still the same,
Full in play comes Power once more?

Somewhere, below, above,
  Shall a day dawn—this I know—
When Power, which vainly strove
  My weakness to o'erthrow,
Shall triumph. I breathe, I move,

I truly am, at last!
  For a veil is rent between
Me and the truth which passed
  Fitful, half-guessed, half-seen,
Grasped at—not gained, held fast.

* DeVane considers this poem "one of the happiest expressions of Browning's metaphysics." (*Browning Handbook*, 499). It appeared in *Asolando* (1889) at the very end of the poet's life. Yet its themes—the inferiority of perfection, the evidence for Power and for Love in the universe, their ultimate harmony—had been treated by Browning in poems all through his career. *Cf.* "Epistle of Karshish," "A Death in the Desert," etc.

18–21. *Cf.* the sonnet "Batter my Heart" by John Donne (a poet much admired by Browning) especially line 3, "That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me" and 12–13,

> Take me to you, imprison me, for I
> Except you enthrall me, never shall be free.

I for my race and me
  Shall apprehend life's law:
In the legend of man shall see
  Writ large what small I saw
In my life's tale: both agree.

As the record from youth to age
  Of my own, the single soul—
So the world's wide book: one page
  Deciphered explains the whole
Of our common heritage.

How but from near to far
  Should knowledge proceed, increase?
Try the clod ere test the star!
  Bring our inside strife to peace
Ere we wage, on the outside, war!

So, my annals thus begin:
  With body, to life awoke
Soul, the immortal twin
  Of body which bore soul's yoke
Since mortal and not akin.

By means of the flesh, grown fit,
  Mind, in surview of things,
Now soared, anon alit
  To treasure its gatherings
From the ranged expanse—to-wit,

Nature,—earth's heaven's wide show
  Which taught all hope, all fear:
Acquainted with joy and woe,
  I could say, "Thus much is clear,
Doubt annulled thus much: I know.

"All is effect of cause:
  As it would, has willed and done

45–6. Since the body is mortal it is not akin to the immortal soul, but the body (flesh) aids the soul to grow fit.

Power: and my mind's applause
  Goes, passing laws each one,
To Omnipotence, lord of laws."

Head praises, but heart refrains
  From loving's acknowledgment.
Whole losses outweigh half-gains:
  Earth's good is with evil blent:
Good struggles but evil reigns.

Yet since Earth's good proved good—
  Incontrovertibly
Worth loving—I understood
  How evil—did mind descry
Power's object to end pursued—

Were haply as cloud across
  Good's orb, no orb itself:
Mere mind—were it found at loss
  Did it play the tricksy elf
And from life's gold purge the dross?

Power is known infinite:
  Good struggles to be—at best
Seems—scanned by the human sight,
  Tried by the senses' test—
Good palpably: but with right

Therefore to mind's award
  Of loving, as power claims praise?
Power—which finds naught too hard,
  Fulfilling itself all ways
Unchecked, unchanged: while barred,

Baffled, what good began
  Ends evil on every side.
To Power submissive man
  Breathes "E'en as Thou art, abide!"
While to good "Late-found, long-sought,

58–61. The Power in Nature's Laws discovered and applauded by "mere mind" is not praised by the heart.

Would Power to a plenitude
  But liberate, but enlarge
Good's strait confine,—renewed
  Were ever the heart's discharge
Of loving!" Else doubts intrude.

For you dominate, stars all!
  For a sense informs you—brute,
Bird, worm, fly, great and small,
  Each with your attribute
Or low or majestical!

Thou earth that embosomest
  Offspring of land and sea—
How thy hills first sank to rest,
  How thy vales bred herb and tree
Which dizen thy mother-breast—

Do I ask? "Be ignorant
  Ever!" the answer clangs:
Whereas if I plead world's want,
  Soul's sorrows and body's pangs,
Play the human applicant,—

Is a remedy far to seek?
  I question and find response:
I—all men, strong or weak,
  Conceive and declare at once
For each want its cure. "Power, speak!

"Stop change, avert decay
  Fix life fast, banish death,
Eclipse from the star bid stay,
  Abridge of no moment's breath
One creature! Hence, Night, hail, Day!"

What need to confess again
  No problem this to solve

105. *Dizen:* dress gaudily.

By impotence? Power, once plain
  Proved Power,—let on Power devolve
Good's right to co-equal reign!

Past mind's conception—Power!
  Do I seek how star, earth, beast,
Bird, worm, fly, gain their dower
  For life's use, most and least?
Back from the search I cower.

Do I seek what heals all harm,
  Nay, hinders the harm at first,
Saves earth? Speak, Power, the charm!
  Keep the life there unamerced
By chance, change, death's alarm!

As promptly as mind conceives,
  Let Power in its turn declare
Some law which wrong retrieves,
  Abolishes everywhere
What thwarts, what irks, what grieves!

Never to be! and yet
  How easy it seems—to sense
Like man's—if somehow met
  Power with its match—immense
Love, limitless, unbeset

By hindrance on every side!
  Conjectured, nowise known,
Such may be: could man confide
  Such would match—were Love but shown
Stript of the veils that hide—

Power's self now manifest!
  So reads my record: thine,
O world, how runs it? Guessed
  Were the purport of that prime line,
Prophetic of all the rest!

134. *Unamerced:* unpunished.

"In a beginning God
  Made heaven and earth." Forth flashed
Knowledge: from star to clod
  Man knew things: doubt abashed
Closed its long period.

Knowledge obtained Power praise.
  Had Good been manifest,
Broke out in cloudless blaze,
  Unchequered as unrepressed,
In all things Good at best—

Then praise—all praise, no blame—
  Had hailed the perfection. No!
As Power's display, the same
  Be Good's—praise forth shall flow
Unisonous in acclaim!

Even as the world its life,
  So have I lived my own—
Power seen with Love at strife,
  That sure, this dimly shown,
—Good rare and evil rife.

Whereof the effect be—faith
  That, some far day, were found
Ripeness in things now rathe,
  Wrong righted, each chain unbound,
Renewal born out of scathe.

Why faith—but to lift the load,
  To leaven the lump, where lies
Mind prostrate through knowledge owed
  To the loveless Power it tries
To withstand, how vain! In flowed

Ever resistless fact:
  No more than the passive clay

178. *Rathe:* early in the season.
180. *Scathe:* injury.

Disputes the potter's act,
  Could the whelmed mind disobey
Knowledge the cataract.

But, perfect in every part,
  Has the potter's moulded shape,
Leap of man's quickened heart,
  Throe of his thought's escape,
Stings of his soul which dart

Through the barrier of flesh, till keen
  She climbs from the calm and clear,
Through turbidity all between,
  From the known to the unknown here,
Heaven's "Shall be," from Earth's "Has been"?

Then life is—to wake not sleep,
  Rise and not rest, but press
From earth's level where blindly creep
  Things perfected, more or less,
To the heaven's height, far and steep,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
  May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love—transports, transforms
  Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'.

I have faith such end shall be:
  From the first, Power was—I knew.
Life has made clear to me
  That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

When see? When there dawns a day,
  If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
  Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

189. *Whelmed:* overwhelmed.
190. *Cataract:* overwhelming downpour.

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—
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 drivel
—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!"

* This was the last poem in Browning's last volume; and the day this was published, December 12, 1889, Browning died. On his deathbed he received a telegram from London telling that the critics and the public were receiving his book favorably. His last word was spoken to them on the day of his death, in a poem expressing confidence in immortality.

2. *You:* any loved one who survives him.

5. *Pity me?* follows *will they* of line 3.

7 ff. Contrast this with the Christian attitude of humility described in the parable concerning those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others" in contrast with the publican who "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner," and Christ's comment, "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased" (Luke, xviii, 9–14).

11–15. "One evening, just before his death-illness, the poet was reading this [stanza] from a proof to his daughter-in-law and sister. He said: 'It almost sounds like bragging to say this, and as if I ought to cancel it; but it's the simple truth; and as it's true, it shall stand' " (*Pall Mall Gazette*, February 1, 1890). British soldiers sent out to conquer the Boers in South Africa in the expansion of the British Empire a few years later found that this poem helped them keep up their spirits. Compare *Prospice*.

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