Robert Browning: The Poems

VOLUME ONE

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Men and Women

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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 through the twilight, stray or stop
As they crop—
Was the site once of a city great and gay,
(So they say)
Of our country’s very capital, its prince
Ages since
Held his court in, gathered councils, wielding far
Peace or war.

II
Now, — the country does not even boast a tree,
As you see,
To distinguish slopes of verdure, certain rills
From the hills
Intersect and give a name to, (else they run
Into one)
Where the domed and daring palace shot its spires
Up like fires
O’er the hundred-gated circuit of a wall
Bounding all,
Made of marble, men might march on nor be pressed,
Twelve abreast.

III
And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o’erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone—
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago;
Lust of glory pricked their hearts up, dread of shame
Struck them tame;
And that glory and that shame alike, the gold
Bought and sold.

IV
Now, — the single little turret that remains
On the plains,
By the caper over-rooted, by the gourd
Overscored,
While the patching houseleek’s head of blossom winks
Through the chinks —
Marks the basement whence a tower in ancient time
Sprang sublime,
And a burning ring, all round, the chariots traced
As they raced,
And the monarch and his minions and his dames
Viewed the games.

V
And I know, while thus the quiet-coloured eve
Smiles to leave
To their folding, all our many-tinkling fleece
In such peace,
And the slopes and rills in undistinguished grey
Melt away —
That a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there
In the turret whence the charioteers caught soul
For the goal,
When the king looked, where she looks now, breathless, dumb
Till I come.

VI
But he looked upon the city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades’
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts, — and then,
All the men!
When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
Either hand
On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace

70 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!

80 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
Kunnels, which rillets swell,
Must be dancing down the dell,

10 With a foaming head
On the beryl bed
Paven smooth as a hermit’s cell;
Each with a tale to tell,
Could my Love but attend as well.
III
Dearest, three months ago!
When we lived blocked-up with snow, —
   When the wind would edge
In and in his wedge,
In, as far as the point could go —
   Not to our ingle, though,
Where we loved each the other so!

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

V
What's in the 'Times'? — a scold
At the Emperor deep and cold;
   He has taken a bride
To his gruesome side,
That's as fair as himself, is bold:
   There they sit ermine-stoiled,
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
Through the finger-tips

VIII
In a fire which a few discern,
   And a very few feel burn,
And the rest, they may live and learn!

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

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

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 Stow
   With his hand's first sweep
Put the earth to sleep:
'Twas a time when the heart could show
   All — how was earth to know,
'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro?
xii
Dearest, three months ago
When we loved each other so,
Lived and loved the same
Till an evening came
When a shaft from the devil's bow
Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe!

xiii
Not from the heart beneath -
'Twas a bubble born of breath,
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth!
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

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

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

xvi
What of a hasty word?
Is the fleshly heart not stirred
By a worm's pin-prick
Where its roots are quick?

110 See the eye, by a fly's foot blurred--
    Ear, when a straw is heard
Scratch the brain's coat of curd!

xvii
Foul be the world or fair
More or less, how can I care?
'Tis the world the same
For my praise or blame,
And endurance is easy there.
Wrong in the one thing rare--
Oh, it is hard to bear!

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

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

xx
Then, were the world well stripped
Of the gear wherein equipped
We can stand apart,
Heart dispense with heart
In the sun, with the flowers unnipped,-
Oh, the world's hangings ripped,

140 We were both in a bare-walled crypt!
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!'

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!

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 through the hinge's chink.

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 astray,
Till God's hand beckoned unawares,-
And the sweet white brow is all of her.

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 naught to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

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.

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.

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!
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,
'Tis May perhaps ere the snow shall have withered well off the
heights:
You've the brown ploughed land before, where the oxen steam
and wheeze,
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint grey olive-trees.

VI
Is it better in May, I ask you? You've summer all at once;
In a day he leaps complete with a few strong April suns.
'Mid the sharp short emerald wheat, scarce risen three fingers
well,
The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for the children to pick and sell.

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 couch — 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 you cypress that points like death's lean lifted forefinger.
Some think fireflies pretty, when they mix 't the corn and mingle,
Or thrid the stinking hemp till the stalks of it seem a-tingle.
Late August or early September, the stunning cicala is shrill,
And the bees keep their tiresome whine round the resinous firs on
the hill.
Enough of the seasons, — I spare you the months of the fever and
chill.

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:
MEN AND WOMEN

40 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,

50 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.

A Woman's Last Word

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

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

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

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

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

VI
Be a god and hold me
With a charm!
Be a man and fold me
With thine arm!
VII
Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought —

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

IX
That shall be tomorrow
Not tonight:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight:

X
— Must a little weep, Love,
(Foolish me!)
And so fall asleep, Love,
40 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, 'tis 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?

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,

20 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 pichards, 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.

40 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
You know them and they take you? like enough!
I saw the proper twinkly 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,
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
And saints again. I could not paint all night—

50 Out! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs 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.
Scarcely 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, ha'! 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 tomorrow 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!

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, 'twas reflection-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,
And put the front on it that ought to be!
And hereupon he bade me durb 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-foots;
150
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
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
160
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 "Tis 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 pet the dog!
170
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,
180
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,
190
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
200
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 naught.
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
210
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 naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
220
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.
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!

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240

250

260

A—making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

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270

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 starcs and lets no atom drop:
His name is Guidi — he'll not mind the monks —
They call him Huluing 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,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,

290

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.'
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 Lawrence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
‘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, Got 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 if you think 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 where you least expect,
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 scroll 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 perfect 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!

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, 'tis 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 Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 besemeth age,
While the shutters flap as the cross-wind blows
And I turn the page, and I turn the page,
Not verse now, only prose!

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

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

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

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

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

VIII
A turn, and we stand in the heart of things;
The woods are round us, heaped and dim;
From slab to slab how it slips and springs,
The thread of water single and slim,
Through the ravage some torrent brings!
IX
Does it feed the little lake below?
That speck of white just on its marge
Is Pella; see, in the evening-glow,
How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
When Alp meets heaven in snow!

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

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

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

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

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

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

XVI
Poor little place, where its one priest comes
On a festa-day, if he comes at all,
To the dozen folk from their scattered homes,
Gathered within that precinct small
By the dozen ways one roams —

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

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

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

XX
And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,
But that is its own affair.
XXI
My perfect wife, my Leonor,
Oh heart, my own, oh eyes, mine too,
Whom else could I dare look backward for,
With whom beside should I dare pursue
The path grey heads abhor?

XXII
For it leads to a crag's sheer edge with them;
Youth, flowery all the way, there stops —
Not they; age threatens and they contend,
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,
Mute, 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 read
This path back, is it not in pride
To think how little I dreamed it led
To an age so blest that, by its side,
Youth seems the waste instead?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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,
270 And wonder at the moss.

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.

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,
180 Take the path again – but wait!

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!

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
210 Till the trouble grew and stirred.

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!

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,
200 Friends – lovers that might have been.

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.

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:
210 But a last leaf – fear to touch!

Yet should it unfasten itself and fall
Eddy ing 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!

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
220 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—
Shouldst love so truly, and couldst love me still
A whole long life through, had but love its will,
Would death that leads me from thee brook delay.

II
I have but to be by thee, and thy hand
Will never let mine go, nor heart withstand
The beating of my heart to reach its place.

When shall I look for thee and feel thee gone?
When cry for the old comfort and find none?
Never, I know! Thy soul is in thy face.
III
Oh, I should fade—'tis willed so! Might I save,
Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave
Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too.
It is not to be granted. But the soul
Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole;
Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new.

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

V
So, how thou wouldst be perfect, white and clean
Outside as inside, soul and soul's demesne
Alike, this body given to show it by!
Oh, three-parts through the worst of life's abyss,
What plaudits from the next world after this,
Couldst thou repeat a stroke and gain the sky!

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

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

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

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

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

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

XII
—Ah, but the fresher faces! 'Is it true,'
Thou'lt ask, 'some eyes are beautiful and new?
Some hair, —how can one choose but grasp such wealth?
And if a man would press his lips to lips
Fresh as the wilding hedge-rose-cup there slips
The dew-drop out of, must it be by stealth?
XIII
It cannot change the love still kept for Her,
More than if such a picture I prefer
Passing a day with, to a room's bare side:
The painted form takes nothing she possessed,
Yet, while the Titian's Venus lies at rest,
A man looks. Once more, what is there to chide?

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

XV
Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
Away to the new faces — disenfranchised,
(Say it and think it) obdurate no more:
Re-issu(e) 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 called'st, 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 handwork
(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)
MEN AND WOMEN

— To Abib, all-sagacious in our art,
Breeder in me of what poor skill I boast,
Like me inquisitive how pricks and cracks
10 Befall the flesh through too much stress and strain,
Whereby the wily vapour faint 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, pound'd fine, for charms than drugs)
20 And writeth now the twenty-second time.

My journeyings were brought to Jericho:
Thus I resume. Who studious in our art
Shall count a little labour unrepaid?
I have shed sweat enough, left flesh and bone
On many a flinty furlong of this land.
Also, the country-side is all on fire
With rumours of a marching hitherward:
Some say Vespasian cometh, some, his son.
A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;
30 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 clates me, thus reposed and safe,
40 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;

STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARISHISH

Take five and drop them . . . but who knows his mind,
The Syrian runagate I trust this to?
50 His service payeth me a sublimate
Blown up his nose to help the ailing eye.
Best wait: I reach Jerusalem at morn,
There set in order my experiences,
Gather what most deserves, and give thee all—
Or I might add, Judea's gum-tragacanth
Scales off in purer flakes, shines clearer-grained,
Crackt 'twixt the pestle and the porphyray,
In fine exceeds our produce. Scalp-disease
Confounds me, crossing so with leprosy—
60 Thou hast admired one sort I gained at Zoar—
But zeal outruns discretion. Here I end.

Yet stay: my Syrian blinketh gratefuly,
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—
70 His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.
So, pardon if—(lest presently I lose
In the great press of novelty at hand
The care and pains this somehow stole from me)
I bid thee take the thing while fresh in mind,
Almost in sight—for, wilt thou have the truth?
The very man is gone from me but now,
Whose ailment is the subject of discourse.
Thus then, and let thy better wit help all!

'Tis but a case of mania—subinduced
80 By epilepsy, at the turning-point
Of trance prolonged unduly some three days:
When, by the exhibition of some drug
Or spell, exorcization, stroke of art
Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
The evil thing out-breaking 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

The first conceit that entered might inscribe
90 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-scratches
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

100 By a Nazarene physician of his tribe:
— ‘Sayeth, the same bade ‘Rise,’ and he did rise,
‘Such cases are diurnal,’ thou wilt cry.
Not so this figment — not, that such a fume,
Instead of giving way to time and health,
Should eat itself into the life of life,
As saffron tingeth flesh, blood, bones and all!
For see, how he takes up the after-life.
The man — it is one Lazarus a Jew,
Sanguine, proportioned, fifty years of age,

110 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,

120 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

STRANGE MEDICAL EXPERIENCE OF KARSHISH 569

130 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 need 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,

140 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 witsless of the size, the sum,
The value in proportion of all things,
Or whether it be little or be much.
Discourse to him of prodigious armaments
Assembled to besiege his city now,
And of the passing of a mule with gourds —
’Tis one! Then take it on the other side,

150 Speak of some trifling fact, — he will gaze rapt
With stupor at its very littleness,
(As far as I see) as if in that indeed
He caught prodigious import, whole results;
And so will turn to us the by-standers
In every 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

160 For scarce abatement of his cheerfulness,
Or pretermission of the daily craft!
While a word, gesture, glance from that same child
At play or in the school or laid asleep,
Will startle him to an agony of fear,
Exasperation, just as like. Demand
The reason why — ‘tis but a word, — object —
‘A gesture’ — he regards thee as our lord
Who lived there in the pyramid alone,
Looked at us (dost thou mind?) when, being young,

170 We both would unadvisedly recite
Some charm’s beginning, from that book of his,
Able to bid the sun throb wide and burst
All into stars, as suns grown old are wont.
Thou and the child have each a veil alike
Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
Over a mine of Greek fire, did ye know!
He holds on firmly to some thread of life
(It is the life to lead perforcefully)

Which runs across some vast distracting orb
Of glory on either side that meagre thread,
Which, conscious of, he must not enter yet
The spiritual life around the earthly life:
The law of that is known to him as this,
His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here.
So is the man perplexed with impulses
Sudden to start off crosswise, not straight on,
Proclaiming what is right and wrong across,
And not alone, this black thread through the blaze

‘It should be’ balked by ‘here it cannot be.’
And oft the man’s soul springs into his face
As if he saw again and heard again
His sage that bade him ‘Rise’ and he did rise.
Something, a word, a tick 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 the daily bread;
And studiously the humbler for that pride,

Professedly the faultier that he knows
God’s secret, while he holds the thread of life.
Indeed the especial marking of the man
Is prone submission to the heavenly will—
Seeing it, what it is, and why it is.
‘Sayeth, he will wait patient to the last
For that same death which must restore his being
To equilibrium, body loosening soul
Divorced even now by premature full growth:
He will live, nay, it pleaseth him to live

So long as God please, and just how God please.
He even seeketh not to please God more
(Which meaneth, otherwise) than as God please.
Hence, I perceive not he affects to preach

The doctrine of his sect whate’er it be,
Make proselytes as madmen thirst to do:
How can he give his neighbour the real ground,
His own conviction? Ardent as he is—
Call his great truth a lie, why, still the old
‘Be it as God please’ reassureth him.

I probed the sore as thy disciple should:
‘How, beast,’ said I, ‘this stolid carelessness
Sufficeth thee, when Rome is on her march
To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once?’
He merely looked with his large eyes on me.
The man is apathetic, you deduce?
Contrariwise, he loves both old and young,
Able and weak, affects the very brutes
And birds — how say I? flowers of the field—

As a wise workman recognizes tools
In a master’s workshop, loving what they make.
Thus is the man, as harmless as a lamb:
Only impatient, let him do his best,
At ignorance and carelessness and sin—
An indignation which is promptly curbed:
As when in certain travels I have feigned
To be an ignoramus in our art
According to some preconceived design,
And haphazard the land’s practitioners

Steeped in conceit subdued by ignorance,
Prattle fantastically on disease,
Its cause and cure — and I must hold my peace!

Thou wilt object — Why have I not ere this
Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene
Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source,
Conferring with the frankness that befits?
Alas! it grieveth me, the learned leech
Perished in a tumult many years ago,
Accused — our learning’s fate, — of wizardry,

Rebellion, to the setting up a rule
And creed prodigious as described to me.
His death, which happened when the earthquake fell
(Prefiguring, as soon appeared, the loss
To occult learning in our lord the sage
Who lived there in the pyramid alone
Was wrought by the mad people – that’s their wont!
On vain recourse, as I conjecture it,
To his tried virtue, for miraculous help –
How could he stop the earthquake? That’s their way!

The other imputations must be lies:
But take one, though I loathe to give it thee,
In mere respect for any good man’s fame.
(And after all, our patient Lazarus
Is stark mad; should we count on what he says?
Perhaps not: though in writing to a leech
’Tis well to keep back nothing of a case.)
This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As – God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on 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
Blue-flowering borage, the Aleppo sort,
Aboundeth, very nitrous. It is strange!

Thy pardon for this long and tedious case,
Which, now that I review it, needs must seem
Unduly dwelt on, prolixly set forth!
Nor I myself discern in what is writ
Good cause for the peculiar interest
And awe indeed this man has touched me with.
Perhaps the journey’s end, the weariness
Had wrought upon me first. I met him thus:
I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
Like an old lion’s cheek teeth. Out there came
A moon made like a face with certain spots
Multiform, manifold and menacing:
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met

In this old sleepy town at unaware,
The man and I. I send thee what is writ.
Regard it as a chance, a matter risked
To this ambiguous Syrian – he may lose,
Or steal, or give it thee with equal good.
Jerusalem’s repose shall make amends
For time this letter wastes, thy time and mine;
Till when, once more thy pardon and farewell!

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

Mesmerism

I
All I believed is true!
I am able yet
All I want, to get
By a method as strange as new:
Dare I trust the same to you?

II
If at night, when doors are shut,
And the wood-worm picks,
And the death-watch ticks,
And the bar has a flag of smut,
And a cat’s in the water-butt –

III
And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares –
MEN AND WOMEN

IV
And the spider, to serve his ends,
By a sudden thread,
Arms and legs outspread,
On the table's midst descends,
20 Comes to find, God knows what friends!

V
If since eve drew in, I say,
I have sat and brought
(So to speak) my thought
To bear on the woman away,
Till I felt my hair turn grey

VI
Till I seemed to have and hold,
In the vacancy
'Twixt the wall and me,
From the hair-plait's chestnut gold
30 To the foot in its muslin fold

VII
Have and hold, then and there,
Her, from head to foot,
Breathing and mute,
Passive and yet aware,
In the grasp of my steady stare

VIII
Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
40 In the clutch of my steady ken

IX
Having and holding, till
I imprint her fast
On the void at last
As the sun does whom he will
By the calotypist's skill

X
Then, - if my heart's strength serve,
And through all and each
Of the veils I reach
To her soul and never swerve,
50 Knitting an iron nerve

XI
Command her soul to advance
And inform the shape
Which has made escape
And before my countenance
Answers me glance for glance

XII
I, still with a gesture fit
Of my hands that best
Do my soul's behest,
Pointing the power from it,
60 While myself do steadfast sit

XIII
Steadfast and still the same
On my object bent,
While the hands give vent
To my ardour and my aim
And break into very flame

XIV
Then I reach, I must believe,
Not her soul in vain,
For to me again
It reaches, and past retrieve
70 Is wound in the toils I weave;

XV
And must follow as I require,
As befits a thrall,
Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire,
To the source of the tractile fire:
XVI
Till the house called hers, not mine,
With a growing weight
Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine.

XVII
Out of doors into the night!
On to the maze
Of the wild wood-ways,
Not turning to left nor right
From the pathway, blind with sight—

XVIII
Making through rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind—

XIX
Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift
Through the darkness and the drift!

XX
While I— to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true.

XXI
For, there! have I drawn or no
Life to that lip?
Do my fingers dip
In a flame which again they throw
On the cheek that breaks a-glow?

XXII
Hal was the hair so first?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed?

XXIII
Like the doors of a casket-shrine,
See, on either side,
Her two arms divide
Till the heart betwixt makes sign,
Take me, for I am thine!

XXIV
'Now—now'—the door is heard!
Hark, the stairs! and near—
Nearer—and here—
'Now!' and at call the third
She enters without a word.

XXV
On doth she march and on
To the fancied shape;
It is, past escape,
Herself, now: the dream is done
And the shadow and she are one.

XXVI
First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant control
To another, nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now!

XXVII
I admonish me while I may,
Not to squander guilt,
Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day!
What the price is, who can say?
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,
10 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,
20 To my lute I left the rest.

V
So wore night; the East was grey,
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 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,
30 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.’

VII
Never say – as something bodes–
’S, the worst has yet a worse!
When life halts ’neath double loads,
Better the taskmaster’s curse
40 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,
50 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
60 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 darts 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.

Instans Tyrannus

I
Of the million or two, more or less,
I rule and possess,
One man, for some cause undefined,
Was least to my mind.

II
I struck him, he grovelled of course –
For, what was his force?
I pinned him to earth with my weight
And persistence of hate:
And he lay, would not moan, would not curse,
10 As his lot might be worse.

III
‘Were the object less mean, would he stand
At the swing of my hand!
For obscurity helps him and blots
The hole where he squats.’
So, I set my five wits on the stretch
To inveigle the wretch.
All in vain! Gold and jewels I threw,
Still he couched there perdue;
I tempted his blood and his flesh,
20 Hid in roses my mesh,
Choicest cates and the flagon’s best splith:
Still he kept to his filth.

IV
Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press:
Just a son or a mother to seize!
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
‘Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me myself!
No; I could not but smile through my chafe:
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
– Through minuteness, to wit.

V
Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
’Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain.
And, ‘no!’ I admonished myself,
‘Is one mocked by an elf,
Is one baffled by toad or by rat?
The gravemen’s in that!
How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire that I stand in debate!’
But the small turns the great
If it vexes you, – that is the thing!

Toad or rat vex the king?
Though I waste half my realm to unearh
Toad or rat, ’tis well worth!

VI
So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event.

VII
When sudden... how think ye, the end?
Did I say ‘without friend’?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun’s self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!

Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet,
Stood erect, caught at God’s skirts, and prayed!
– So, I was afraid!

A Pretty Woman

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

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

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

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

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

VI
But for loving, why, you would not, Sweet,
Though we prayed you,
Paid you, brayed you
In a mortar – for you could not, Sweet!

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

VIII
And while the face lies quiet there,
Who shall wonder
That I ponder
A conclusion? I will try it there.
As, - why must one, for the love foregone,
Scout mere liking?
Thunder-striking
Earth, - the heaven, we looked above for, gone!

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

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

Is the creature too imperfect, say?
Would you mend it
And so end it?
Since not all addition perfects aye!

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

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

Or else kiss away one's soul on her?
Your love-fancies!
- A sick man sees

Truer, when his hot eyes roll on her!

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

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

Then how grace a rose? I know a way!
Leave it, rather.
Must you gather?
Smell, kiss, wear it - at last, throw away!

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.

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there,
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,
III
If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV
For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out through 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
Freeler outside, (since all is o'er, he saith,
‘And the blow fallen no grieving can amend’;)

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

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

VIII
So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
That hateful cripple, out of his highway
Into the path he pointed. All the day
Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
Red leer to see the plain catch its 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, 'twas 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 thrive:
For flowers – as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to aye,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

XI
No! penury, inertia and grimace,
In some strange sort, were the land's portion. 'See
Or shut your eyes,' said Nature peevishly,
'It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
'Tis the Last Judgement'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 balk
All hope of greenness? 'tis 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.

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 - laugh! what hangman-hands
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own hands
   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 hung 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.

XI
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, ouch! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

XII
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 plush? 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 deearth.

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 palled 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!
Naught in the distance but the evening, naught
To point my footstep further! At the thought,
A great black bird, Apollon’s bosom-friend,
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap — perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII
For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
*Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
All round to mountains — with such name to grace
Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
How thus they had surprised me, — solve it, you!
How to get from them was no clearer case.

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

XXX
Burningly it came on me all at once,
This was the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . 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?'

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,
Through 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!

A Light Woman

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

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

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

IV
And before my friend be wholly hers,
How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
Though she snaps at a wren instead!
V
So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed.

VI
The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
The wren is he, with his maiden face.
— You look away and your lip is curled?
Patience, a moment's space!

VII
For see, my friend goes 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;
'Tis mine, — can I let it fall?

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

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

XII
'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own:
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone!

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

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

The Statue and the Bust

There's a palace in Florence, the world knows well,
And a statue watches it from the square,
And this story of both do our townsmen tell.

Ages ago, a lady there,
At the farthest window facing the East
Asked, 'Who rides by with the royal air?'

The bridesmaids' prattle around her ceased;
She leaned forth, one on either hand;
They saw how the blush of the bride increased —

They felt by its beats her heart expand —
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, 'The Great-Duke Ferdinand.'

That self-same instant, underneath,
The Duke rode past in his idle way,
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath.
MEN AND WOMEN

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back – 'Who is she?'
- 'A bride the Riccardi brings home today.'

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure –
Carved like the heart of the coal-black tree,

Crisped like a war-steed's encolure –
And vainly sought to dissemble her eyes
Of the blackest black our eyes endure.

And lo, a blade for a knight's emprise
Filled the fine empty sheath of a man, –
The Duke grew straightway brave and wise.

He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes:
The past was a sleep, and 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.)

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 –

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

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 brisk
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.

Calmly he said that her lot was cast,
That the door she had passed was shut on her
Till the final catafalque repassed.

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East,
She could watch like a convent's chronicler.

Since passing the door might lead to a feast,
And a feast might lead to so much beside,
He, of many evils, chose the least.

'Freely I choose too,' said the bride –
'Your window and its world suffice,'
Replied the tongue, while the heart replied –

'If I spend the night with that devil twice,
May his window serve as my loop of hell
Whence a damned soul looks on paradise!'

'I fly to the Duke who loves me well,
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow
Ere I count another ave-bell.

'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul – but not tomorrow.'
(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)
    'My father tarries to bless my state:
I must keep it one day more for him.

'Is one day more so long to wait?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know;
We shall see each other, sure as fate.'

She turned on her side and slept. Just so!
So we resolve on a thing and sleep:
So did the lady, ages ago.

That night the Duke said, 'Dear or cheap
As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove
To body or soul, I will drain it deep.'

And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove)

And smiled 'Twas a very funeral,
Your lady will think, this feast of ours,—
A shame to efface, whate'er befall!

'What if we break from the Arno bower,
And try if Petraia, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?'

The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said, 'Too much favour for me so mean!

'But, alas! my lady leaves the South;
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth:

'Nor a way exists, the wise opine,
If she quits her palace twice this year,
To avert the flower of life's decline.'

Quoth the Duke, 'A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraia is cold this spring:
Be our feast tonight as usual here!'

And then to himself—'Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool—
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king!

'Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For tonight the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with myself, my tool.

'I need thee still and might miss perchance.
Today is not wholly lost, beside,
With its hope of my lady's countenance:

'For I ride—what should I do but ride?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window—well betide!'

So said, so done: nor the lady missed
One ray that broke from the ardent brow,
Nor a curl of the lips where the spirit kissed.

Be sure that each renewed the vow,
No morrow's sun should arise and set
And leave them then as it left them now.

But next day passed, and next day yet,
With still fresh cause to wait one day more
Ere each leaped over the parapet.

And still, as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth:
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.
Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose:
The world and its ways have a certain worth:

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy; better wait:
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

Meantime, worse fates than a lover's fate,
Who daily may ride and pass and look
Where his lady watches behind the grate!

And she—she watched the square like a book
Holding one picture and only one,
Which daily to find she undertook:

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun.

So weeks grew months, years; gleam by gleam
The glory dropped from their youth and love,
And both perceived they had dreamed a dream;

Which hovered as dreams do, still above:
But who can take a dream for a truth?
Oh, hide our eyes from the next remove!

One day as the lady saw her youth
Depart, and the silver thread that streaked
Her hair, and, worn by the serpent's tooth,

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked,—
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-checked,

Fronting her silent in the glass—
'Summon here,' she suddenly said,
Before the rest of my old self pass,

'Hiim, 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—

(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 gaps?'

'John of Douay shall effect my plan,
Set me on horseback here aloft,
Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

'In the very square I have crossed so oft:
That men may admire, when future suns
Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

'While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze -
Admire and say, 'When he was alive
How he would take his pleasure once!'

'And it shall go hard but I contrive
To listen the while, and laugh in my tomb
At idleness which aspires to strive.'

So! While these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss -
Since, the end of life being manifest,
He had burned his way through the world to this.

I hear you reproach, 'But delay was best,
For their end was a crime.' - Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?
Where a button goes, 'twere an epigram
To offer the stamp of the very Guelph.

The true has no value beyond the sham:
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,

Do your best, whether winning or losing it,
If you choose to play! - is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is - the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)

How strive you? De te, fabula.

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.

Yet the day wears,
And door succeeds door;
I try the fresh fortune –
Range the wide house from the wing to the centre.
Still the same chance! she goes out as I enter.
Spend my whole day in the quest, – who cares?
But ’tis twilight, you see, – with such suites to explore,
Such closets to search, such alcoves to impotence!

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,
And, baffled, get up and begin again, –
So the chase 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 courteously once and conscientious still,
And many might have worn it, though none did:
The cloak, that somewhat shone and showed the threads,
Had purpose, and the ruff, significance.

He walked and tapped the pavement with his cane,
Scenting the world, looking it full in face,
An old dog, bald and blindish, at his heels.
They turned up, now, the alley by the church,
That leads 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 vendor’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,

40 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
As back into your mind the man's look came.

50 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,

60 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 some 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,

80 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,
Through 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 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II
My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.
Who knows but the world may end tonight?

III
Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once—
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

IV
Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,

MS: Might I gain, so might I miss.

Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V
Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.

I thought,—All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI
What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.
VII
What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII
And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
'Greatly his opera's strains intend,
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!
Naught 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 palesied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
   At the Shambles' Gate — or, better yet,
20 By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

V
I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
   A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
   For they fling, whoever has a mind,
   Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

VI
Thus I entered, and thus I go!
   In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
   'Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
      Me?' — God might question; now instead,
30 'Tis 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,
10 Make the world prick up its ear!

III
See, the church empties apace:
   Fast they extinguish the lights.
Hallo, sacristan! Five minutes' grace!
   Here's a crank pedal wants setting to rights,
   Baiks one of holding the bass.

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
20 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,
30 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
40 Whence you still peeped in the shade.
IX
Sure you were wishful to speak?
You, with brow ruled like a score,
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
Like two great breves, as they wrote them of yore,
Each side that bar, your straight beak!

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 scioliants shent,

Parted the sheep from the goats!'

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!

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.

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.

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.

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.

One is incisive, corrosive;
Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant;
Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive;
Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant:

Five... O Danalses, O Sieve!

Now, they ply axes and crowbars;
Now, they prick pins at a tissue
Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's
Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?
Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

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!

What with affirming, denying,
Holding, risposting, subjoining,
All's like... it's like... for an instance I'm trying...
There! See our roof, its girt moulding and groining
Under those spider-webs lying!

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 ’twas for something, his organ-pipes sounded,
Tiring three boys at the bellows?

XXII
Is it your moral of Life?
Such a web, simple and subtle,
Weave we on earth here in impotent strife,
Backward and forward each throwing his shuttle,
Death ending all with a knife?

XXIII
Over our heads truth and nature—
Still our life’s zigzags and dodges,
Ins and outs, weaving a new legislature—
God’s gold just shining its last where that lodges,
Palled beneath man’s usurpature.

XXIV
So we o’ershadow stars and roses,
Cherub and trophy and garland;
Not things grow something which quietly closes
Heaven’s earnest eye: not a glimpse of the far land
Gets through our comments and glozes.

XXV
Ah but traditions, inventions,
(Say we and make up a visage)
So many men with such various intentions,
Down the past ages, must know more than this age!
Leave we the web its dimensions!

XXVI
Who thinks Hugues wrote for the deaf,
Proved a mere mountain in labour?
Better submit; try again; what’s the clef?
’Tis no trifle for pipe and for tabor—
Four flats, the minor in F.

XXVII
Friend, your fugue taxes the finger:
Learning it once, who would lose it?
Yet all the while a misgiving will linger,
Truth’s golden o’er us although we refuse it—
Nature, through cobwebs we string her.

XXVIII
Hugues! I advise meli poenà
(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?

Bishop Blougram’s Apology

No more wine? then we’ll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, though: cool, I believe!
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 rossets,
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;
It’s just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?

These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it! Now, we’ll talk.
So, you despise me, Mr Gigadibs.
No deprecation, nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 'tis 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:
'Blougarm? 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, Blougarm; 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, Blougarm's sceptical at times:
How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!
C'est c'est, my dear sir, as we say at Rome,
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays—
You do despise me; your ideal of life
Is not the bishop's: you would not be I.
You would like better to be Goethe, now,
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,

Count D'Orsay, — so you did what you preferred,
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,
Believed or disbeliefed, 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 bebased! 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 cerei 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!

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!

110 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 Leipzig, fill the next:
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!
'Twere 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?

120 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;
'Tis 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 –

140 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?

150 Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,
(Not starded, 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,

160 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,

170 Missing full credence – overboard with them!
I mean to meet you on your own premise:
Good, there go mine in company with yours!
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, whatsoever 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,
What'ere the process of conviction was:
For nothing can compensate his mistake
On such a point, the man himself being judge:
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now, there's one great form of Christian faith
I happened to be born in — which to teach
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,
As best and readiest means of living by;
The same on examination being proved
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise
And absolute form of faith in the whole world —
Accordingly, most potent of all forms
For working on the world. Observe, my friend!

Such as you know me, I am free to say,
In these hard latter days which hamper one,
Myself — by no immoderate exercise
Of intellect and learning, but the tact
To let external forces work for me,
— Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;
Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world
And make my life an ease and joy and pride;
It does so, — which for me's a great point gained,

Who have a soul and body that exact
A comfortable care in many ways.
There's power in me and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:
In many ways I need mankind's respect,
Obedience, and the love that's born of fear:
While at the same time, there's a taste I have,
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.
The naked life is gross till clothed upon:

I must take what men offer, with a grace
As though I would not, could I help it, take!
An uniform I wear though over-rich —
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake
And despicable therefore! now folk kneel
And kiss my hand – of course the Church's hand.
Though 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 'twere better if 'twere 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-sty, I should strive
To make what use of each were possible;

And as this cabin gets upholstery,
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes
Enumerated so complacently,
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find
In this particular life I choose to lead
No fit provision for them. Can you not?
Say you, my fault is I address myself
To grosser estimators than should judge?

And that's no way of holding up the soul,
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools' –
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.
I pine among my million imbeciles
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense
Eye me and know me, whether I believe
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her
And am a knave, – approve in neither case,

Withhold their voices though I look their way:
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end
(The thing they gave at Florence, – what's its name?)
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here –
That even your prime men who appraise their kind
Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel.

See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch – he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books –
We watch while these in equilbrium 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 seldom, 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,
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,
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.

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

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

Why then should I who play that personage,
The very Pandolph 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 Pandolph, 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 Saint Gothard last July
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?
We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,
Could fancy he too had them when he liked,
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,
He would not have them also in my sense.
We play one game; I send the ball aloft
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get.
He struck balls higher and with better skill,
But at a poor fence level with his head,
And hit – his Stratford house, a coat of arms,
Successful dealings in his grain and wool, –
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game?

Believe – and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat;
Only, we can't command it; fire and life
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact's the same, – belief's fire, once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself:
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron – this turns steel,
That burns to ash – all's one, fire provokes its power
For good or ill, since men call fame 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, reclames God's earth for God, he says,
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.
He flared out in the flaring of mankind;
Such Luther's luck was: how shall such be mine?
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do:
And if he did not altogether—well,
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be
I might be also. But to what result?
He looks upon no future: Luther did.

What can I gain on the denying side?
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,
Read the text right, emancipate the world—
The emancipated world enjoys itself
With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first
It could not owe a farthing,—not to him
More than Saint Paul! 'twould press its pay, you think?
Then add there's still that plaguey hundredth chance
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run—
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured

A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,
Supposing death a little altered things.

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

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point.

Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.
We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's free will, God gave for that!
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:
That's our one act, the previous work's his own.
You criticize the soil? it reared this tree—
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!

What matter though I doubt at every pore,
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show,

The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?

All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,
God means mankind should strive for and show forth
Whatever be the process to that end,—
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,
And metaphysical acumen, sure!
'What think ye of Christ,' friend? when all's done and said,
Like you this Christianity or not?
It may be false, but will you wish it true?
Has it your vote to be so if it can?

Trust you an instinct silenced long ago
That will break silence and enjoin you love
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,
And all in vain, with bidding you despise?
If you desire faith—then you've faith enough:
What else seeks God—nay, what else seek ourselves?
You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,
On hearsay; it's a favourable one:
'But still' (you add), 'there was no such good man,
Because of contradiction in the facts.

One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,
This Blougram; yet throughout the tales of him
I see he figures as an Englishman.
Well, the two things are reconcilable.
But would I rather you discovered that,
Subjoining—'Still, what matter though they be?
Blougram concerns me 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 disimprisoned heart
Less certainly would wither up at once
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.
But time and earth case-harden us to live;
The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child
Feels God a moment, ichors o’er the place,
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.
With me, faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake ’neath Michael’s foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
Or, if that’s too ambitious, — here’s my box —
I need the excitation of a pinch
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.
‘Leave it in peace’ advise the simple folk:
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,
Say I — let doubt occasion still more faith!
You’ll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.
How you’d exult if I could put you back
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,
Geology, ethnology, what not,
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell
That signifies some faith’s about to die),
And set you square with Genesis again,—
When such a traveller told you his last news,
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat
But did not climb there since ‘twas 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, ’t the middle: the soul wakes

And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave growing till the life to come!
Here, we’ve got callous to the Virgin’s winks
That used to puzzle people wholesomely:
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.
What are the laws of nature, not to bend
If the Church bid them? — brother Newman asks.
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then —
On to the rack with faith! — is my advice.
Will not that hurry us upon our knees,
Knocking our breasts, ‘It can’t be — yet it shall!
Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?
Low things confound the high things!’ and so forth.
That’s better than acquitting God with grace
As some folk do. He’s tried — no case is proved,
Philosophy is lenient — he may go!

You’ll say, the old system’s not so obsolete
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?
King Bomba’s lazzaroni foster yet
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;
But even of these, what ragamuffin saint
Believes God watches him continually,
As he believes in fire that it will burn,
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire’s law,
Sin against rain, although the penalty
Be just a singe or soaking? ‘No,’ he smiles;
‘Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves.’

The sum of all is — yes, my doubt is great,
My faith’s still greater, then my faith’s enough.
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,
Yet would die rather than avow my fear
The Naples’ liquefaction may be false,
When set to happen by the palace-clock
According to the clouds or dinner-time.
I hear you recommend, I might at least
Eliminate, 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,
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? 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 foolish
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 cumbersome for Algiers!
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,
A superfluity at Timbuctoo.
When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?
I'm at ease now, friend; worldly in this world,
I take and like its way of life: I think
My brothers, who administer the means,

Live better for my comfort - that's good too;
And God, if he pronounce upon such life,
Approves my service, which is better still.
If he keep silence, - why, for you or me
Or that brute beast pulled-up in today's 'Times,'
What odds it's, 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!
'Tis there I'm on the watch for you. How one acts
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:
And how you'll act is what I fain would see
If, like the candid person you appear,
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme
As I of mine, live up to its full law
Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.
Put natural religion to the test
You've just demolished the revealed with - quick,
Down to the root of all that checks your will,
All prohibition to lie, kill and thief,
Or even to be an atheistic priest!
Suppose a pricking to incontinence -
Philosophers deduce you chastity
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,
So, stood a ready victim in the reach
Of any brother savage, club in hand;
Hence saw the use of going out of sight
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:
I read this in a French book 'tother day.
Does law so analysed coerce you much?
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,
But you who reach where the first thread begins,
You'll soon cut that! - which means you can, but won't,
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,
You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,
But there they are, and so you let them rule.
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,
Without the good the slave expects to get,
In case he has a master after all!
You own your instincts? why, what else do I,
Who want, am made for, and must have a God
Ere I can be aught, do aught? - no mere name
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,
Touching from head to foot - which touch I feel,
And with it take the rest, this life of ours!
I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

- Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)
Disfigure such a life and call it names,
While, to your mind, remains another way
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.

There needs no crucial effort to find truth
If here or there or anywhere about:
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,
And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least
The right, by one laborious proof the more,
To graze in 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 tu Dominus.' You find
In this the pleasant pasture of our life
Much you may eat without the least offence,
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock
Open great eyes at you and even butt,
And thereupon you like your mates so well
You cannot please yourself, offending them;
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and beats
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 unbuttered 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:
MEN AND WOMEN

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 tonight: well, here am I,
Such were my gains, life born this fruit to me,
While writing all the same my articles
On music, poetry, the fictile vase
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon’s Greek.
But you — the highest honour in your life,
The thing you’ll crown yourself with, all your days,
Is — dining here and drinking this last glass
I pour you out in sign of amity
Before we part for ever. Of your power
And social influence, worldly worth in short,
Judge what’s my estimation by the fact,
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,
Hint secrecy on one of all these words!
You’re shrewd and know that should you publish one
The world would brand the lie — my enemies first,
Who’d sneer — the bishop’s an arch-hypocrite
And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool.’
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,
Before the chaplain who reflects myself —
My shade’s so much more potent than your flesh.
What’s your reward, self-abnegating friend?
Stood you confessed of those exceptional
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine —
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,
A poet just about to print his ode,
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,
An artist whose religion is his art —

BISHOP BLOUGRAM’S APOLOGY

I should have nothing to object: such men
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,
Their druggist’s worth my purple, they beat me.
But you, — you’re just as little 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)
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,
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 ('tis 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 Saint 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!

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 moultered 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,
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 tomorrow, 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 tomorrow to my work
Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.

Tomorrow, how you shall be glad for this!
Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet —
My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less.
You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony!
A common greyness silvers everything, —
All in a twilight, you and I alike
— You, at the point of your first pride in me
(That's gone you know), — but I, at every point;
My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down

To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
That length of convent-wall across the way
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
As if I saw alike my work and self
And all that I was born to be and do,
A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.

How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!

I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
This chamber for example — turn your head —
All that's behind us! You don't understand
Nor care to understand about my art,
But you can hear at least when people speak:
And that cartoon, the second from the door
— It is the thing, Love! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna! — I am bold to say.

I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly,
I do not boast, perhaps; yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France.
At any rate 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,

— Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive — you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat, —
Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
There burns a truer light of God in them,

In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or what'er else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
Enter and take their place there sure enough,
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.
The sudden blood of these men! at a word —
Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.

I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. Somebody remarks
Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
Speak as they please, what does the mountain care?
Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what’s a heaven for? All is silver-grey
Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
I know both what I want and what might gain,
And yet how professed to know, to sigh
‘Had I been two, another and myself,
Our head would have o’erlooked the world!’ No doubt.
Yonder’s a work now, of that famous youth
The Urbinate who died five years ago.
(‘Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
Above and through his art – for it gives way;
That arm is wrongly put – and there again –
A fault to pardon in the drawing’s lines,
Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
He means right – that, a child may understand.
Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
But all the play, the insight and the stretch –
Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think –
More than I merit, yes, by many times.
But had you – oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler’s pipe, and follows to the snare –
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. Had the mouth there urged
‘God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
Raphael 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 Raphael, or has Agnolo?
In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
Yet the will’s somewhat – somewhat, too, the power –
And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
‘Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
That I am something underrated here,
Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
The best is when they pass and look aside;
But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Raphael’s daily wear,
In that humane great monarch’s golden look, –
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth’s good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts, –
And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward!
A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know –
‘Tis done and past; ‘twas right, my instinct said;
Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
And I’m the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
How could it end in any other way?
You called me, and I came home to your heart.
The triumph was – to reach and stay there; since
I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
Let my hands frame your face in your hair’s gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
‘Raphael did this, Andrea painted that;
The Roman's is the better when you pray,  
But still the other's Virgin was his wife —'

Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge  
Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows  
My better fortune, I resolve to think.  
For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,  
Said one day Agnolo, his very self,  
To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .  
(When the young man was flaming out his thoughts  
Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,  
Too lifted up in heart because of it)  
'Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub  
Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,  
Who, were he set to plan and execute  
As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,  
Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!'  
To Rafael's! — And indeed the arm is wrong.  
I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,  
Give the chalk here — quick, thus the line should go!  
Ayi, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!  
Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,  
(What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?)  
Do you forget already words like those?)  
If really there was such a chance, so lost, —  
Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased.  
Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!  
This hour has been an hour! Another smile?  
If you would sit thus by me every night  
I should work better, do you comprehend?  
I mean that I should earn more, give you more.  
See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;  
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,  
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by.  
Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,  
Inside the melancholy little house  
We built to be so gay with. God is just.  
King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights  
When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,  
The walls become illumined, brick from brick  
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,  
That gold of his I did cement them with!  
Let us but love each other. Must you go?

That Cousin here again? he waits outside?  
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?  
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that?  
Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?  
While hand and eye and something of a heart  
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?  
I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit  
The grey remainder of the evening out,  
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly.  
How I could paint, were I but back in France,  
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,  
Not yours this time! I want you at my side  
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —  
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.  
Will you? Tomorrow, 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 tonight.  
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 tonight.  
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, Raphael, Agnolo and me  
To cover – the three first without a wife,  
While I have mine! So – still they overcome  
Because there's still Lucrezia, – as I choose.

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

Before

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

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

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

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

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

VI
What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant at his side,  
A leer and lie in every eye of its obsequious hide?  
When will come an end to all the mock obeisance,  
And the price appear that pays for the misfeasance?

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

VIII
All or nothing, stake it! 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!  
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
MEN AND WOMEN

Nor his wrong nor my vengeance; both strike
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
10 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, unchange, 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.
10 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?

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 cried
After the warmth and scent inside,
Through lights and darks how manifold—
20 The dark inspired, the light controlled!
As early Art embrowsn 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,
30 With chance not easily defied,
With an end somewhere undescribed.'
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.

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 ailed arch
   Of the villa-gate this warm March day,
No flash snapped, no dumb thunder rolled
   In the valley beneath where, white and wide
And washed by the morning water gold,
   Florence lay out on the mountain-side.

II
River and bridge and street and square
   Lay mine, as much at my beck and call,
Through the live translucent bath of air,
   As the sights in a magic crystal ball.
And of all I saw and of all I praised,
   The most to praise and the best to see
Was the startling bell-tower Giotto raised:
   But why did it more than startle me?

III
Giotto, how, with that soul of yours,
   Could you play me false who loved you so?
Some slight if a certain heart endures
   Yet it feels, I would have your fellows know!
I' faith, I perceive not why I should care
   To break a silence that suits them best,
But the thing grows somewhat hard to bear
   When I find a Giotto join the rest.

IV
On the arch where olives overhead
   Print the blue sky with twig and leaf,
(That sharp-curved leaf which they never shed)
   'Twixt the aloe's, 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 chaff, come and go
   For pleasure or profit, her men alive—
My business was hardly with them, I trow,
   But with empty cells of the human hive;
   -With the chapter-room, the cloister-porch,
     The church's apsis, aisle or nave,
Its crypt, one fingers along with a torch,
   Its face set full for the sun to shave.

VI
Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
   Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
Till the latest life in the painting stops,
   Stands One whom each fainter pulse-tick pains:
One, wishful each scrap should clutch the brick,
   Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
- A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
     The wronged great soul of an ancient Master.

VII
For oh, this world and the wrong it does!
   They are safe in heaven with their backs to it,
The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and buzz
   Round the works of, you of the little wit!
Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
   Now that they see God face to face,
And have all attained to be poets, I hope?
   'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

VIII
Much they 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 gins
And the puppy pack of poodles yelp.
What, not a word for Stefano there,
Of brow once prominent and starry,
Called Nature's Ape and the world's despair
For his peerless painting? (See Vasari.)

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!
'Tis looking downward that makes one dizzy.

XI
'If you knew their work you would deal your dole.'
May I take upon me to instruct you?
When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,
Thus much had the world to boast in fructu —
The Truth of Man, as by God first spoken,
Which the actual generations garble,
Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)
And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.

XII
So, you saw yourself as you wished you were,
As you might have been, as you cannot be;
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:
And grew content in your poor degree
With your little power, by those statues' godhead,
And your little scope, by their eyes' full sway,
And your little grace, by their grace embodied,
And your little date, by their forms that stay.

XIII
You would fain be kingly, 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 'tis the common soul,
The collective, I mean: the race of Man
That receives life in parts to live in a whole,
And grow here according to God's clear plan.

XV
Growth came when, looking your last on them all,
You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start — What if we so small
Be greater and grander the while than they?
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature;
For time, theirs — ours, for eternity.

XVI
Today's brief passion limits their range;
It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect — how else? they shall never change:
We are faulty — why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested
With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished;
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.
XVII
'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven –
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) 'O!'
Thy great Campanile is still to finish.

XVIII
Is it true that we are now, and shall be hereafter,
But what and where depend on life's minute?
Hails heavenly cheer or infernal laughter
Our first step out of the gulf or in it?
Shall Man, such step within his endeavour,
Man's face, have no more play and action
Than joy which is crystallized for ever,
Or grief, an eternal 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?'

XX
Give these, I exhort you, their guerdon and glory
For daring so much, before they well did it.
The first of the new, in our race's story,
Beats the last of the old; 'tis no idle quiddit.
The worthies began a revolution,
Which if on earth you intend to acknowledge,
Why, honour them now! (ends my allocution)
Nor confer your degree when the folk leave college.

XXI
There's a fancy some lean to and others hate –
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

XXII
Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene, –
When our faith in the same has stood the test –
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one.

XXIII
But at any rate I have loved the season
Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy;
My sculptor is Nicolo the Pisan,
My painter – who but Gimabue?
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;
Nor the wronged 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 gab and swaddling barret
(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,
You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot?)
Not a poor glisterning Crucifixion,
Where in the foreground kneels the donor?
If such remain, as is my conviction,
The hoarding it does you but little honour.

XXIX
They pass; for them the panels may thrill,
The tempera grow alive and tingly;
Their pictures are left to the mercies still
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,
Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,
Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno
At naked High Art, and in ecstasies
Before some clay-cold vile Carlino!

XXX
No matter for these! But Giotto, you,
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it, –
Oh, never! it shall not be counted true –
That a certain precious little tablet
Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover, –
Was buried so long in oblivion's womb
And, left for another than I to discover,
Turns up at last! and to whom? – to whom?

XXXI
I, that have haunted the dim San Spirito,
(Or was it rather the Ognissanti?)
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 Gianschid, the Persian Sofi's eye;
So, in anticipative gratitude,
What if I take up my hope and prophesy?

XXXII
When the hour grows ripe, and a certain dotard
Is pitched, no parcel that needs invoicing,
To the worse side of the Mont Saint Gothard,
We shall begin by way of rejoicing;
None of that shooting the sky (blank cartridge),
Nor a civic guard, all plumes and lacquer,
Hunting Radetzký'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 vides ante)
Shall ponder, once Freedom restored to Florence,
How Art may return that departed with her,
Go, hated house, go each trace of the Lorraine's,
And bring us the days of Orgagna hither!

XXXIV
How we shall prologize, how we shall perorate,
Utter fit things upon art and history,
Feel truth at blood-heat and falsehood at zero rate,
Make of the want of the age no mystery;
Contrast the fructuous and sterile eras,
Show — monarchy ever its uncouth cub licks
Out of the bear's shape into Chimera's,
While Pure Art's birth is still the republic's.

XXXV
Then one shall propose in a speech (cure Tuscan,
Expurgate and sober, with scarcely an 'issimo,')
To end now our half-told tale of Cambuscan,
And turn the bell-tower's alti to alissimo:
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, unbaflled
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!

In a Balcony

PERSONS

Norbert
Constance
The Queen

CONSTANCE and NORBERT

NORBERT: Now!
CONSTANCE: Not now!

NORBERT: Give me them again, those hands:
Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs!
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes through!
You cruellest, you dearest in the world,
Let me! The Queen must grant whate'er I ask —
How can I gain you and not ask the Queen?
There she stays waiting for me, here stand you;
Some time or other this was to be asked:
Now is the one time — what I ask, I gain:
Let me ask now, Love!

CONSTANCE: Do, and ruin us.

NORBERT: Let it be now, Love! All my soul breaks forth.
How I do love you! Give my love its way!
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my fate —
Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul!

CONSTANCE: I am not yours then? How content this man!
I am not his — who change into himself,
Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my hair,
Give all that was of me away to him —
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,
Takes part with him against the woman here,
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw
As caring that the world be cognizant
MEN AND WOMEN

How he loves her and how she worships him.
You have this woman, not as yet that world.
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me
By saving what I cease to care about,
The courtly name and pride of circumstance –
The name you’ll pick up and be cumbered with
Just for the poor parade’s sake, nothing more;
Just that the world may slip from under you –
Just that the world may cry ‘So much for him –
The man predestined to the heap of crowns:
There goes his chance of winning one, at least!’
NORBERT: The world!
CONSTANCE: You love it. Love me quite as well,
And see if I shall pray for this in vain!
Why must you ponder what it knows or thinks?
NORBERT: You pray for – what, in vain?
CONSTANCE: Oh my heart’s heart,
How I do love you, Norbert! That is right:
But listen, or I take my hands away!
You say, ‘let it be now;’ you would go now
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,
You love me – so you do, thank God!
NORBERT: Thank God!
CONSTANCE: Yes, Norbert, – but you faint would tell your love,
And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her
My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,
Listening to me. You are the minister,
The Queen’s first favourite, nor without a cause.
Tonight completes your wonderful year’s-work
(This palace-feast is held to celebrate)
Made memorable by her life’s success,
The junction of two crowns, on her sole head,
Her house had only dreamed of anciently;
That this mere dream is grown a stable truth,
Tonight’s feast makes authentic. Whose the praise?
Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved
What turned the many heads and broke the hearts?
You are the fate, your minute’s in the heaven.
Next comes the Queen’s turn. ‘Name your own reward!’
With leave to clench the past, chain the to-come,
Put out an arm and touch and take the sun
And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,
Possess yourself supremely of her life, –
You choose the single thing she will not grant;
Nay, very declaration of which choice
Will turn the scale and neutralize your work:
At best she will forgive you, if she can.
You think I’ll let you choose – her cousin’s hand?
NORBERT: Wait. First, do you retain your old belief
The Queen is generous, – nay, is just?
CONSTANCE: There, there!
So men make women love them, while they know
No more of women’s hearts than . . . look you here,
You that are just and generous beside,
Make it your own case! For example now,
I’ll say – I let you kiss me, hold my hands –
Why? do you know why? I’ll instruct you, then –
The kiss, because you have a name at court;
This hand and this, that you may shut in each
A jewel, if you please to pick up such.
That’s horrible? Apply it to the Queen –
Suppose I am the Queen to whom you speak:
I was a nameless man; you needed me;
Why did I proffer you my aid? there stood
A certain pretty cousin at your side.
Why did I make such common cause with you?
Access to her had not been easy else.
You give my labour here abundant praise?
‘Faith, labour, which she overlooked, grew play.
How shall your gratitude discharge itself?
Give me her hand!’
NORBERT: And still I urge the same.
Is the Queen just? just – generous or no!
CONSTANCE: Yes, just. You love a rose; no harm in that:
But was it for the rose’s sake or mine
You put it in your bosom? mine, you said –
Then, mine you still must say or else be false.
You told the Queen you served her for herself;
If so, to serve her was to serve yourself,
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face!
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,
One sees the twenty pictures; there’s a life
Better than life, and yet no life at all.
Conceive her born in such a magic dome,
Pictures all round her! why, she sees the world,
Can recognize its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,
Chases and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers and fruit—
And who shall question that she knows them all,
In better semblance than the things outside?
Yet bring into the silent gallery
Some live thing to contrast in breath and blood,
Some lion, with the painted lion there—
You think she'll understand composedly?
— Say, 'that's his fellow in the hunting-piece
Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred times'?
Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.
The real exists for us outside, not her:
How should it, with that life in these four walls—
That father and that mother, first to last
No father and no mother—friends, a heap,
Lovers, no lack—a husband in due time,
And every one of them alike a lie!

Things painted by a Rubens out of naught
Into what kindness, friendship, love should be;
All better, all more grandiose than the life,
Only no life; mere cloth and surface-paint,
You feel, while you admire. How should she feel?
Yet now that she has stood thus fifty years
The sole spectator in that gallery,
You think to bring this warm real struggling love
In to her of a sudden, and suppose
She'll keep her state untroubled? Here's the truth—
She'll apprehend truth's value at a glance,
Prefer it to the pictured loyalty?
You only have to say, 'so men are made,
For this they act; the thing has many names,
But this the right one: and now, Queen, be just!'
Your life slips back; you lose her at the word:
You do not even for amends gain me.
He will not understand; oh, Norbert, Norbert,
Do you not understand?

NORBERT:  The Queen's the Queen:
     I am myself—no picture, but alive
     In every nerve and every muscle, here
     At the palace-window o'er the people's street,
     As she in the gallery where the pictures glow:
     The good of life is precious to us both.
     She cannot love; what do I want with rule?
     When first I saw your face a year ago
     I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice—
     'The woman yonder, there's no use of life
     But just to obtain her! heap earth's woes in one
     And bear them—make a pile of all earth's joys
     And spurn them, as they help or help not this;
     Only, obtain her!' How was it to be?
     I found you were the cousin of the Queen;
     I must then serve the Queen to get to you.
     No other way. Suppose there had been one,
     And I, by saying prayers to some white star
     With promise of my body and my soul,
     Might gain you, —should I pray the star or no?
     Instead, there was the Queen to serve! I served,
     Helped, did what other servants failed to do.
     Neither she sought nor I declared my end.
     Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,—
     I therefore name you as that recompense.
     She dreamed that such a thing could never be?
     Let her wake now. She thinks there was more cause
     In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty?
     Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
     Chasing such shades. Then, I've a fancy too;
     I worked because I want you with my soul:
     I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now!

CONSTANCE: Had I not loved you from the very first,
     Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus
     So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,
     You might become impatient. What's conceived
     Of us without here, by the folk within?
     Where are you now? immersed in cares of state—
     Where am I now? intent on festal robes—
     We two, embracing under death's spread hand!
     What was this thought for, what that scruple of yours
     Which broke the council up? — to bring about
One minute's meeting in the corridor!
And then the sudden sleights, strange secrecy
Complots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,
Long-planned chance-meetings, hazards of a look,
'Does she know? does she not know? saved or lost?'
A year of this compression's ecstasies
All goes for nothing! you would give this up
For the old way, the open way, the world's,
His way who beats, and his who sells his wife!
What tempts you? - their notorious happiness
Makes you ashamed of ours? The best you'll gain
Will be - the Queen grants all that you require,
Concedes the cousin, rids herself of you
And me at once, and gives us ample leave
To live like our five hundred happy friends.
The world will show us with officious hand
Our chamber-entry, and stand sentinel
Where we so oft have stolen across its traps!
Get the world's warrant, ring the falcons' feet,
And make it duty to be bold and swift,
Which long ago was nature. Have it so!
We never hawked by rights till flung from fist?
Oh, the man's thought! no woman's such a fool.

NORBERT: Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which is
more -
One made to love you, let the world take note!
Have I done worthy work? be love's the praise,
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against
By set forms, blinded by forced secrecy
Set free my love, and see what love can do
Shown in my life - what work will spring from that!

The world is used to have its business done
On other grounds, find great effects produced
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in men's mouth.
So, good: but let my low ground shame their high!
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true!
And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!
I choose to wear you stamped all over me,
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge,
That men may see, all over, you in me -
That pale loves may die out of their prentence

In face of mine, shame's thrown on love fall off.
Permit this, Constance! Love has been so long
Subdued in me, eating me through and through,
That now 'tis all of me and must have way.
Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,
Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,
That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,
Trembling at last to its assured result:
Then think of this revulsion! I resume
Life after death, (it is no less than life,
After such long unlovely labouring days)
And liberate to beauty life's great need
O' the beautiful, which, while it prompted work,
Suppressed itself meanwhile. This eve's the time,
This eve intense with yon first trembling star
We seem to pant and reach; scarce aught between
The earth that rises and the heaven that bends;
All nature self-abandoned, every tree
Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed,
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat;
All under God, each measured by itself.
These statues round us stand abrupt, distinct,
The strong in strength, the weak in weakness fixed,
The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre,
Nymph to her fawn, and Silence to her rose:
See God's approval on his universe!
Let us do so - aspire to live as these
In harmony with truth, ourselves being true!
Take the first way, and let the second come!
My first is to possess myself of you;
The music sets the march-step - forward, then!
And there's the Queen, I go to claim you of;
The world to witness, wonder and applaud.
Our flower of life breaks open. No delay!

CONSTANCE: And so shall we be ruined, both of us.
Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone:
You do not know her, were not born to it,
To feel what she can see or cannot see.

Love, she is generous, - ay, despite your smile,
Generous as you are: for, 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,
Exactions and acquittance of the past!
Begin so—see what justice she will deal!
We women hate a debt as men a gift.

Suppose her some poor keeper of a school
Whose business is to sit through summer months
And dole out children leave to go and play,
Herself superior to such lightness—she
In the armchair's state and pedagogic pomp—
To the life, the laughter, sun and youth outside:
We wonder such a face looks black on us?
I do not bid you wake her tenderness,
(That were vain truly—none is left to wake)
But let her think her justice is engaged
To take the shape of tenderness, and mark
If she'll not coldly pay its warmest debt!
Does she love me? I ask you? not a whit:
Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged
To help a kinswoman, she took me up—
Did more on that bare ground than other loves
Would do on greater argument. For me,
I have no equivalent of such cold kind
To pay her with, but love alone to give
If I give anything. I give her love:
I feel I ought to help her, and I will.
So, for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice
That women hate a debt as men a gift.
If I were you, I could obtain this grace—
Could lay the whole I did to love's account,
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go—
Declaring my success was recompense;
It would be so, in fact: what were it else?
And then, once loose her generosity,—
Oh, how I see it!—then, were I but you,
To turn it, let it seem to move itself,
And make it offer what I really take,
Accepting just, in the poor cousin's hand,
Her value as the next thing to the Queen's—
Since none love Queens directly, none dare that,
You say 'why doubt it?'—you see him and me.

It is because the Mother has such grace
That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—
Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us;
Yet still we let our whims prescribe despair,
Our fancies thwart and cramp our will and power,
And while, accepting life, abjure its use.
Constance, I had abjured the hope of love
And being loved, as truly as you palm
The hope of seeing Egypt from that plot.

Constance: Heaven!

Queen: But it was so, Constance, it was so!

Men say—or do men say it? fancies say—
'Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.
Too late—no love for you, too late for love—
Leave love to girls. Be queen; let Constance love,'
One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,
Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.
'Oh love, true, never think of love again!
I am a queen: I rule, not love forsooth.'
So it goes on; so a face grows like this,
Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,
Till,—nay, it does not end so, I thank God!

Constance: I cannot understand—

Queen: The happier you!
Constance, I know not how it is with men:
For women (I am a woman now like you)
There is no good of life but love— but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love,
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!
O Constance, how I love you!

Constance: I love you.

Queen: I do believe that all is come through you.
I took you to my heart to keep it warm
When the last chance of love seemed dead in me;
I thought your fresh youth warmed my withered heart.
Oh, I am very old now, am I not?
Not so! it is true and it shall be true!
Constance: Tell it me; let me judge if true or false.

Queen: Ah, but I fear you! you will look at me

And say, 'she's old, she's grown unlovely quite
Who ne'er was beauteous: men want beauty still.'
Well, so I feared—the curse! so I felt sure!

Constance: Be calm. And now you feel not sure, you say?
Queen: Constance, he came,—the coming was not strange—
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?
Yet this seemed somewhat worse than heretofore;
The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,
And I still older, with less flesh to change—
We two those dear extremes that long to touch.
It seemed still harder when he first began
To labour at those state-affairs, absorbed
The old way for the old end—interest.
Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts
Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,
Professing they've no care but for your cause,
Thought but to help you, love but for yourself,—
And you the marble statue all the time
They praise and point at as preferred to life,
Yet leave for the first breathing woman's smile,
First dancer's, gypsy's or street baladine's!

Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear men's speech
Stilled for fear it should alarm my ear,
Their gait subdued lest step should startle me,
Their eyes declined, such quiddom to respect,
Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,
While not a man of them broke rank and spoke,
Wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a hand!
There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clapped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with my soul.

Constance: Who could have comprehended?

Queen: Ay, who—who?

Why, no one, Constance, but this one who did.
Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps
It comes too late—would you but tell the truth.
CONSTANCE: I wait to tell it.

QUEEN: Well, you see, he came,

Outfaced the others, did a work this year
Exceeds in value all was ever done,
You know - it is not I who say it - all
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)
I grew aware not only of what he did,
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake -
Souls need a finer aim to light and lure!
I felt, I saw, he loved - loved somebody.
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you know,
I did believe this while 'twas you he loved.

CONSTANCE: Me, madam?

QUEEN: It did seem to me, your face
Met him where'er he looked: and whom but you
Was such a man to love? It seemed to me,
You saw he loved you, and approved his love,
And both of you were in intelligence.
You could not loiter in that garden, step
Into this balcony, but I straight was stung
And forced to understand. It seemed so true,
So right, so beautiful, so like you both,
That all this work should have been done by him
Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,
But that at last - suppose, some night like this -
Borne on to claim his due reward of me,
He might say 'Give her hand and pay me so.'
And I (O Constance, you shall love me now!)
I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,
- 'And he shall have it. I will make her blest,
My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,
My happiest woman's self that might have been!
These two shall have their joy and leave me here,'
Yes - yes!

CONSTANCE: Thanks!

QUEEN: And the word was on my lips
When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear
A mere calm statement of his just desire
For payment of his labour. When - O heaven,
How can I tell you? lightning on my eyes
And thunder in my ears proved that first word

Which told 'twas love of me, of me, did all -
He loved me - from the first step to the last,
Loved me!

CONSTANCE: You hardly saw, scarce heard him speak
Of love; what if you should mistake?

QUEEN: No, no -
No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!
He had not dared to hint the love he felt -
You were my reflex - (how I understood!)
He said you were the ribbon I had worn,
He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,
And love, love came at end of every phrase.
Love is begun; this much is come to pass:
The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours!
I will learn, I will place my life on you,
Teach me but how to keep what I have won!
Am I so old? This hair was early grey;
But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,
And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.
I could sing once too; that was in my youth.
Still, when men paint me, they declare me... yes,
Beautiful - for the last French painter did!
I know they flatter somewhat; you are frank -
I trust you. How I loved you from the first!
Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out
And set her by their side to take the eye:
I must have felt that good would come from you.
I am not generous - like him - like you!
But he is not your lover after all:
It was not you he looked at. Saw you him?
You have not been mistaking words or looks?
He said you were the reflex of myself.
And yet he is not such a paragon
To you, to younger women who may choose
Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the truth!
You know you never named his name to me:
You know, I cannot give him up - ah God,
Not up now, even to you!

CONSTANCE: Then calm yourself.

QUEEN: See, I am old - look here, you happy girl!
I will not play the fool, deceive - ah, whom?
'Tis all gone; put your cheek beside my cheek
And what a contrast does the moon behold!
But then I set my life upon one chance,
The last chance and the best — am I not left,
My soul, myself? All women love great men
If young or old; it is in all the tales:
Young beauties love old poets who can love —
Why should not he, the poems in my soul,
The passionate faith, the pride of sacrifice,
Life-long, death-long? I throw them at his feet.
Who cares to see the fountain’s very shape,
Whether it be a Triton’s or a Nymph’s
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all around?
You could not praise indeed the empty conch;
But I’ll pour floods of love and hide myself.
How I will love him! Cannot men love love?
Who was a queen and loved a poet once
Humpbacked, a dwarf? ah, women can do that!
Well, but men too; at least, they tell you so.
They love so many women in their youth,
And even in age they all love whom they please;
And yet the best of them confide to friends
That ‘tis not beauty makes the lasting love —
They spend a day with such and tire the next:
They like soul, — well then, they like phantasy,
Novelty even. Let us confess the truth,
Horrible though it be, that prejudice,
Prescription ... curses! they will love a queen.
They will, they do: and will not, does not — he?

Constance: How can he? You are wedded: ‘tis a name
We know, but still a bond. Your rank remains,
His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled
As you believe and I incline to think,
Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all?

Queen: Hear her! There, there now — could she love like me?

What did I say of smooth-cheeked youth and grace?
See all it does or could do! so youth loves!
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do
What I will — you, it was not born in! I
Will drive these difficulties far and fast
As yonder mists curdling before the moon.
I’ll use my light too, gloriously retrieve
My youth from its enforced calamity,

Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

Constance: You will do — dare do ... pause on what you say!

Queen: Hear her! I thank you, sweet, for that surprise.
You have the fair face: for the soul, see mine!
I have the strong soul: let me teach you, here.
I think I have borne enough and long enough,
And patiently enough, the world remarks,
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.
It does so happen (I rejoice for it)
This most unhoped-for issue cuts the knot.
There’s not a better way of settling claims

Than this; God sends the accident express:
And were it for my subjects’ good, no more,
’Twere best thus ordered. I am thankful now,
Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,
And bless God simply, or should almost fear
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate!
How strong I am! Could Norbert see me now!

Constance: Let me consider. It is all too strange.

Queen: You, Constance, learn of me; do you, like me!

You are young, beautiful: my own, best girl,
You will have many lovers, and love one —
Light hair, not hair like Norbert’s, to suit yours:
Taller than he is, since yourself are tall.
Love him, like me! Give all away to him;
Think never of yourself; throw by your pride,
Hope, fear, — your own good as you saw it once,
And love him simply for his very self.
Remember, I (and what am I to you?)
Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life,
Do all but just unlove him! He loves me.

Constance: He shall.

Queen: You, step inside my inmost heart!
Give me your own heart: let us have one heart!
I’ll come to you for counsel; ‘this he says,
This he does; what should this amount to, pray?
Beseech you, change it into current coin!
Is that worth kisses? Shall I please him there?
And then we’ll speak in turn of you — what else?
Your love, according to your beauty’s worth,
For you shall have some noble love, all gold:
Whom choose you? we will get him at your choice.
— Constance, I leave you. Just a minute since,
I felt as I must die or be alone
Breathing my soul into an ear like yours:
Now, I would face the world with my new life,
Wear my new crown. I'll walk around the rooms,
And then come back and tell you how it feels.
How soon a smile of God can change the world!
How we are made for happiness — how work
Grows play, adversity a winning fight!
True, I have lost so many years: what then?
Many remain: God has been very good.
You, stay here! ’Tis as different from dreams,
From the mind’s cold calm estimate of bliss,
As these stone statues from the flesh and blood.
The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God’s moon!
[She goes out, leaving CONSTANCE. Dance-music from within]

[NORBERT enters]

NORBERT: Well? we have but one minute and one word!
CONSTANCE: I am yours, Norbert!
NORBERT: Yes, mine.
CONSTANCE: Not till now!

NORBERT: Constance?
CONSTANCE: Your own! I know the thriftier way

Of giving — haply, ’tis the wiser way.
Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole
Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,
With a new largess still at each despair)
And force you keep in sight the deed, preserve
Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,
My giving and your taking; both our joys
Dying together. Is it the wiser way?
I choose the simpler; I give all at once.
Know what you have to trust to, trade upon!

Use it, abuse it, — anything but think
Hereafter, ‘Had I known she loved me so,
And what my means, I might have thriven with it.’
This is your means. I give you all myself.

NORBERT: I take you and thank God.
CONSTANCE: Look on through years!
We cannot kiss, a second day like this;
Else were this earth no earth.

NORBERT: With this day’s heat
We shall go on through years of cold.
CONSTANCE: So, best!
— I try to see those years — I think I see.
You walk quick and new warmth comes; you look back
And lay all to the first glow — not sit down
For ever brooding on a day like this
While seeing embers whiten and love die,
Yes, love lives best in its effect; and mine,
Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

NORBERT: Just so. I take and know you all at once.
Your soul is disengaged so easily,
Your face is there, I know you; give me time,
Let me be proud and think you shall know me.
My soul is slower: in a life I roll
The minute out whereto you condense yours —
The whole slow circle round you I must move,
To be just you. I look to a long life
To decompose this minute, prove its worth.
’Tis the sparks’ long succession one by one
Shall show you, in the end, what fire was crammed
In that mere stone you struck: how could you know,
If it lay ever unproved in your sight,
As now my heart lies? your own warmth would hide
Its coldness, were it cold.

CONSTANCE: But how prove, how?

NORBERT: Prove in my life, you ask?
CONSTANCE: Quick, Norbert — how?
NORBERT: That’s easy told. I count life just a stuff
To try the soul’s strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.
As with the body — he who hurst a lance
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength alike:
So must I seize and task all means to prove
And show this soul of mine, you crown as yours,
And justify us both.

CONSTANCE: Could you write books,
Paint pictures! One sits down in poverty
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

**Norbert:** And loves one's painting and one's writing, then,
And not one's mistress! All is best, believe,
And we best as no other than we are.
We live, and they experiment on life—
Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
To overlook the farther. Let us be
The thing they look at! I might take your face
And write of it and paint it—to what end?
For whom? what pale dictatrix in the air

**Feeds,** smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form
With earth's real blood and breath, the beauteous life
She makes despised for ever? You are mine,
Made for me, not for others in the world,
Nor yet for that which I should call my art,
The cold calm power to see how fair you look.
I come to you; I leave you not, to write
Or paint. You are, I am: let Rubens there
Paint us!

**Constance:** So, best!

**Norbert:** I understand your soul.
You live, and rightly sympathize with life,
With action, power, success. This way is straight;
And time were short beside, to let me change
The craft my childhood learnt: my craft shall serve.
Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,
Manure their barren lives, and force thence fruit
First for themselves, and afterward for me
In the due tithe; the task of some one soul,
Through ways of work appointed by the world.
I am not bid create—men see no star
Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—
Bar find and bind and bring to bear their wills.
So I began: tonight sees how I end.
What if it see, too, power's first outbreak here
Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,
And instincts of the heart that teach the head?
What if the people have discerned at length
The dawn of the next nature, novel brain
Whose will they venture in the place of theirs,
Whose work, they trust, shall find them as novel ways
To untried heights which yet he only sees?

I felt it when you kissed me. See this Queen,
This people—in our phrase, this mass of men—
See how the mass lies passive to my hand
Now that my hand is plastic, with you by
To make the muscles iron! Oh, an end
Shall crown this issue as this crowns the first!
My will be on this people! then, the strain,
The grappling of the potter with his clay,
The long uncertain struggle,—the success
And consummation of the spirit-work,
Some vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,
While rounded fair for human sense to see
The Graces in a dance men recognize
With turbulent applause and laughs of heart!
So triumph ever shall renew itself;
Ever shall end in efforts higher yet,
Ever begin...

**Constance:** I ever helping?

**Norbert:** Thus!

[As he embraces her, the Queen enters]

**Constance:** Hist, madam! So have I performed my part.
You see your gratitude's true decency,
Norbert? A little slow in seeing it!

**Norbert:** Begin, to end the sooner! What's a kiss?

**Constance:** Why, must I teach it you again?
You want a witness to your dullness, sir?
What was I saying these ten minutes long?
Then I repeat—when some young handsome man
Like you has acted out a part like yours,
Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,
So very far beyond him, as he says—
So hopelessly in love that but to speak
Would prove him mad,—he thinks judiciously,
And makes some insignificant good soul,
Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant,
And very walking-horse to cover him
In following after what he dares not face.
When his end's gained—(sir, do you understand?)
When she, he dares not face, has loved him first,
—May I not say so, madam?—tops his hope,
And overpasses his wildest dream,
With glad consent of all, and most of her
The confidant who brought the same about –
Why, in the moment when such joy explodes,
I do hold that the merest gentleman
Will not start rudely from the stalking-horse,
Dismiss it with a 'There, enough of you!'
Forget it, show his back unmannerly:
But like a liberal heart will rather turn
And say, 'A tingling time of hope was ours;
Betwixt the fears and flatterings, we two lived
A chanceful time in waiting for the prize:
The confidant, the Constance, served not ill.
And though I shall forget her in due time,
Her use being answered now, as reason bids,
Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts, –
Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,
The first good praise goes to the prosperous tool,
And the first – which is the last – rewarding kiss.'

NORBERT: Constance, it is a dream – ah, see, you smile!
CONSTANCE: So, now his part being properly performed,
Madam, I turn to you and finish mine
As duly; I do justice in my turn.
Yes, madam, he has loved you – long and well;
He could not hope to tell you so – 'twas I
Who served to prove your soul accessible,
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their place
When they had wandered else into despair,
And kept love constant toward its natural aim.
Enough, my part is played; you stoop half-way
And meet us royally and spare our fears;
'Tis like yourself. He thanks you, so do I.
Take him – with my full heart! my work is praised
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both!
Yourself – the only one on earth who can –
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart
Which though warm is not useful in its warmth
As the silk vesture of a queen! fold that
Around him gently, tenderly. For him –
For him, – he knows his own part!

NORBERT: Have you done?
I take the jest at last. Should I speak now?
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish child,
Or did you but accept it? Well – at least

You lose by it.

CONSTANCE: Nay, madam, 'tis your turn!
Restrain him still from speech a little more,
And make him happier as more confident!
Pity him, madam, he is timid yet!
Mark, Norbert! Do not shrink now! Here I yield
My whole right in you to the Queen, observe!
With her go put in practice the great schemes
You teem with, follow the career else closed –
Be all you cannot be except by her!
Behold her! – Madam, say for pity's sake
Anything – frankly say you love him! Else
He'll not believe it: there's more earnest in
His fear than you conceive: I know the man!

NORBERT: I know the woman somewhat, and confess
I thought she had jested better: she begins
To overcharge her part. I gravely wait
Your pleasure, madam: where is my reward?

QUEEN: Norbert, this wild girl (whom I recognize
Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,
Eccentric speech and variable mirth,
Not very wise perhaps and somewhat bold,
Yet suitable, the whole night's work being strange)
– May still be right: I may do well to speak
And make authentic what appears a dream
To even myself. For, what she says, is true:
Yes, Norbert – what you spoke just now of love,
Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,
But justified a warmth felt long before.
Yes, from the first – I loved you, I shall say:
Strange! but I do grow stronger, now 'tis said.

Your courage helps mine; you did well to speak
Tonight, the night that crowns your twelvemonths' toil:
But still I had not waited to discern
Your heart so long, believe me! From the first
The source of such zeal was almost plain,
In absence even of your own words just now
Which hazarded the truth. 'Tis very strange,
But takes a happy ending – in your love
Which mine meets: be it so! as you chose me,
So I choose you.
NORBERT: And worthily you choose.

820 I will not be unworthy your esteem,
No, madam. I do love you; I will meet
Your nature, now I know it. This was well.
I see, - you dare and you are justified:
But none had ventured such experiment,
Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,
Less confident of finding such in me.
I joy that thus you test me ere you grant
The dearest richest beauteousest and best
Of women to my arms: 'tis like yourself.
So - back again into my part's set words -
Devotion to the uttermost is yours,
But no, you cannot, madam, even you,
Create in me the love our Constance does.
Or - something truer to the tragic phrase -
Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent
Invites a certain insect - that's myself -
But the small eye-flower nearer to the ground.
I take this lady.

CONSTANCE: Stay - not hers, the trap -
Stay, Norbert - that mistake were worst of all!

840 He is too cunning, madam! It was I,
I, Norbert, who . . .

NORBERT: You, was it, Constance? Then,
But for the grace of this divinest hour
Which gives me you, I might not pardon here!
I am the Queen's; she only knows my brain:
She may experiment upon my heart
And I instruct her too by the result.
But you, sweet, you who know me, who so long
Have told my heart-beats over, held my life
In those white hands of yours, - it is not well!

CONSTANCE: Tush! I have said it, did I not say it all?
The life, for her - the heart-beats, for her sake!

NORBERT: Enough! my cheek grows red, I think. Your test?
There's not the meanest woman in the world,
Not she I least could love in all the world,
Whom, did she love me, had love proved itself,
I dare insult as you insult me now.
Constance, I could say, if it must be said,
'Take back the soul you offer, I keep mine!'
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
check.

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 unlopped;
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 through 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 unorn by the bushes, for lo, they have fed
Where the long grasses stifle the water within the stream's bed;
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star follows star
Into eve and the blue far above us, — so blue and so far!

VI
— Then the tune, for which quails on the cornland will each leave
his mate
To fly after the player; then, what makes the crickets elate
Till for boldness they fight one another: and then, what has
weight
To set the quick jerboa 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
50 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! Arc 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 chant
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
60 As the Levites go up to the altar in glory enthroned.
But I stopped here: for here in the darkness Saul groaned.

VIII
And I paused, held my breath in such silence, and listened apart;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered: and sparkles
'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once with a start,
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous at heart.
So the head: but the body still moved not, still hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it unchecked,
As I sang, —

IX
‘Oh, our manhood's prime vigour! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver
shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of
wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!
80 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 through a lifetime, and all was for best"?
Then they sung through their tears in strong triumph, not much,
but the rest.
And thy brothers, the help and the contest, the working whence grew
Such result as, from seething grape-bundles, the spirit strained true:
And the friends of thy boyhood— that boyhood of wonder and hope,
90 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 three
That, a-work in the rock, helps its labour and lets the gold go)
High ambition and deeds which surpass it, fame crowning them,
-- all
Brought to blaze on the head of one creature— King Saul!'

And lo, with that leap of my spirit,— heart, hand, harp and voice,
Each lifting Saul's name out of sorrow, each bidding rejoice
Saul's fame in the light it was made for — as when, dare I say,
The Lord's army, in rapture of service, strains through its array,
And 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

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,

110 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 ringed, 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

120 Held the brow, helped the eyes left too vacant forthwith to remand
To their place what new objects should enter: 'twas Saul as before.
I looked up and dared gaze at those eyes, nor was hurt any more
Than by slow pallid sunsets in autumn, ye watch from the shore,
At their sad level gaze o'er the ocean — a sun's slow decline
Over hills which, resolved in stern silence, o'erlap and entwine
Base with base to knit strength more intensely: so, arm folded arm
O'er the chest whose slow heavings subsided.

130 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.

160

Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for! the spirit be thine!
By the spirit, when age shall o'ercome thee, thou shalt enjoy
More indeed, than at first when unconscious, the life of a boy.
Crush that life, and behold its wine running! Each deed thou hast done
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world; until e'en as the sun
Looking down on the earth, though clouds spoil him, though tempests efface,
Can find nothing his own deed produced not, must everywhere trace
The results of his past summer-prime,—so, each ray of thy will,
Every flash of thy passion and prowess, long over, shall thrill!
Thy whole people, the countless, with ardour, till they too give forth

170

Alike 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?

180

Up above see the rock's naked face, where the record shall go
In great characters cut by the scribe,—Such was Saul, so he did;
With the sages directing the work, by the populace chid,—
For not half, they'll affirm, is comprised there! Which fault to amend,
In the grove with his kind grows the cedar, whereon they shall spend
(See, in tablets 'tis level before them) their praise, and record
With the gold of the graver, Saul's story, — the statesman's great word
Side by side with the poet's sweet comment. The river's a-wave
With smooth paper-reeds grazing each other when prophet-winds rave:
So the pen gives unborn generations their due and their part
In thy being! Then, first of the mighty, thank God that thou art!

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 uphicates
The dawn struggling with night on his shoulder, and Kidron retrieves
Slow the damage of yesterday's sunshine.

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 prize
I foresaw from all men in all time, to the man patient there;
And thus ended, the harp falling forward. Then first I was 'ware
That he sat, as I say, with my head just above his vast knees
Which were thrust out on each side around me, like oak-roots which please
To encircle a lamb when it slumbers. I looked up to know
If the best I could do had brought solace: he spoke not, but slow
Lifted up the hand slack at his side, till he laid it with care
Soft and grave, but in mild settled will, on my brow: through 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!'

Then the truth came upon me. No harp more — no song more!
outhroke —
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 insiphering 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
To be run, and continued, and ended — who knows? — or endure!
The man taught enough, by life’s dream, of the rest to make sure;
By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,
And the next world’s reward and repose, by the struggles in this.

XVIII

‘I believe it!’ ’Tis thou, God, that givest, ’tis I who receive:
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All’s one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my
prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread
Sabaoth:

I will? — the mere atoms despise me! Why am I not loth
To look that, even that in the face too? Why is it I dare
Think but lightly of such impuissance? What stops my despair?
This; — ’tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man
Would do!

See the King — I would help him but cannot, the wishes fall
through.
Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would — knowing which,
I know that my service is perfect. Oh, speak through me now!

Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou — so wilt thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with death!
As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the
most weak.
'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I seek
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever; a Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ
stand!

XIX
I know not too well how I found my way home in the night.
There were witnesses, cohorts about me, to left and to right,
Angels, powers, the unuttered, unseen, the alive, the aware:
I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news –
Life or death. The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with
her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tinged 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 sunk to rest.
Anon at the dawn, all that trouble had withered from earth –
Not so much, but I saw it die out in the day's tender birth;
In the gathered intensity brought to the grey of the hills;
In the shuddering forests' held breath; in the sudden wind-
thrills;
In the startled wild beasts that bore off, each with eye sidling
still
Though averted with wonder and dread; in the birds stiff and
chill
That rose heavily, as I approached them, made stupid with awe:
E'en the serpent that slid away silent, – he felt the new law.
The same stared in the white humid faces upturned by the
flowers;
The same worked in the heart of the cedar and moved the vine-
bowers:
And the little brooks witnessing murmured, persistent and low,
With their obstinate, all but hushed voices – 'E'en so, it is so'

11
What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-curled,
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 lose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands) –
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
And one sharp tree – 'tis a cypress – stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'er-crusted,
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 today – the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
MEN AND WOMEN

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!

WOMEN AND ROSES

I
I dream of a red-rose tree.
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

II
Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved today.

Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens,
Beauties yet unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

III
Dear rose, thy term is reached,
Thy leaf hangs loose and bleached:
Bees pass it unimpeached.

IV
Stay then, stoop, since I cannot climb,
You, great shapes of the antique time!
How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,
Break my heart at your feet to please you?

OH
Hearts that beat 'neath each pallid breast!
Once but of love, the poesy, the passion,
Drink but once and die! — In vain, the same fashion,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

V
Dear rose, thy joy's undimmed,
Thy cup is ruby-rimmed,
Thy cup's heart nectar-brimmed.

VI
Deep, as drops from a statue's plinth
The bee sucked in by the hyacinth,
So will I bury me while burning,
Quench like him at a plunge my yearning,
Eyes in your eyes, lips on your lips!
Fold me fast where the cincture slips,
Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure,
Girdle me for once! But no — the old measure,
They circle their rose on my rose tree.

VII
Dear rose without a thorn,
Thy bud's the babe unborn:
First streak of a new morn.

VIII
Wings, lend wings for the cold, the clear!
What is far conquers what is near.
Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
Sprung from the dust where our flesh moulders.
What shall arrive with the cycle's change?
A novel grace and a beauty strange.
I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her,
Shaped her to his mind! — Alas! in like manner
They circle their rose on my rose tree.
Protus

Among these latter busts we count by scores,
Half-emperors and 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, 'twould 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
A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved

40 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. 'Tis 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

50 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 gripped 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 be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespattered 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, saw, 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 - 'tis sermon-time!

II
Boh, here's Barnabas! Job, that's you?
Up stumps Solomon - bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handel the bishop's shaving-shears?
Fair play's a jewel! Leave friends in the lurch?
Stand on a line ere you start for the church!

III
Higgledy piggledy, packed we lie,
Rats in a hamper, swine in a sty,
Wasps in a bottle, frogs in a sieve,
Worms in a carcase, fleas in a sleeve.
Hist! square shoulders, settle your thumbs
And buzz for the bishop - here he comes.

IV
Bow, wow, wow - a bone for the dog!
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog.
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.

V
Aaron's asleep - shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!
Look at the purse with the tassel and knob,
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob!
What's he at, quota? reading his text!
30 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 sparsely;
You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune - and fortune gets you; mind that!

VII
Give your first groan - compunction's at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah - the selfsame beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!
Here's a knife, clip quick - it's a sign of grace -
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

VIII
Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I'll tell him tomorrow, 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 handt indeed
Which gutted my purse would throttle my creed:
And it overflows when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins help me to their God.
XI
But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra’s Song of Death.

XII
For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons’ sons to his side,
And spoke, ‘This world has been harsh and strange;
Something is wrong: there needeth a change.
But what, or where? at the last or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

XIII
‘The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:
To Jacob’s House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV
‘Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place:
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same,
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o’er
The oppressor triumph for evermore?

XV
‘God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
’Mid a faithless world,—at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set:
Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet.

XVI
‘Thou! if thou wast He, who at mid-watch came,
By the starlight, naming a dubious name!
And if, too heavy with sleep—too rash
With fear–O Thou, if that martyr-gash
Fell on Thee coming to take thine own,
And we gave the Cross, when we owed the Throne—

XVII
‘Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
But, the Judgement 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 Ghettos’ 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.]
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,
Back to its proper size again, and smoothing
Distortion down till every nerve had soothing,
And all lay quiet, happy and suppressed.

V
How soon all worldly wrong would be repaired!
I think how I should view the earth and skies
And sea, when once again my brow was bared
After thy healing, with such different eyes.
O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.
What further may be sought for or declared?

VI
Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend!) — that little child to pray,
Holding the little hands up, each to each
Pressed gently, — with his own head turned away
Over the earth where so much lay before him
Of work to do, though heaven was opening o’er him,
And he was left at Fano by the beach.

VII
We were at Fano, and three times we went
To sit and see him in his chapel there,
And drink his beauty to our soul’s content
— My angel with me too: and since I care
For dear Guercino’s fame (to which in power
And glory comes this picture for a dower,
Fraught with a pathos so magnificent) —

VIII
And since he did not work thus earnestly
At all times, and has else endured some wrong—
I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song.
My love is here. Where are you, dear old friend?
How rolls the Wairoa at your world’s far end?
This is Ancona, yonder is the sea.
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!

They give thy letter to me, even now:
I read and seem as if I heard thee speak.
The master of thy galley still unlades
Gift after gift; they block my court at last
And pile themselves along its portico

Royal with sunset, like a thought of thee:
And one white she-slave from the group dispersed
Of black and white slaves (like the chequer-work
Pavement, at once my nation's work and gift,
Now covered with this settle-down of doves),
One lyric woman, in her crocus vest
Woven of sea-wools, with her two white hands
Commends to me the strainer and the cup
Thy lip hath bettered ere it blesses mine.

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!

For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life;
Nor call thy spirit barely adequate
To help on life in straight ways, broad enough
For vulgar souls, by ruling and the rest.
Thou, in the daily building of thy tower, –
Whether in fierce and sudden spasms of toil,
Or through dim lulls of unapparent growth,
Or when the general work 'mid good acclaim
Climbed with the eye to cheer the architect, –
Didst ne'er engage in work for mere work's sake –
Had'st 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
40 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

50 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 Pocile, 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.

60 For music, – why, I have combined the moods,
Inventing one. In brief, all arts are mine;
Thus much the people know and recognize,
Throughout our seventeen islands. Marvel not.
We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more composite,
Look not so great, beside their simple way,
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point and no other at a time, –
Compares the small part of a man of us

70 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 analysed 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 judgement which should give the due to each,
Show where the labour lay and where the case,
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 unwavering 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 our youth.
What, and the soul alone deteriorates?
I have not chanted verse like Homer, no—

Nor swept string like Terpander, no—nor carved
And painted men like Phidias and his friend:
I am not great as they are, point by point.
But I have entered into sympathy
With these four, running these into one soul,
Who, separate, ignored each other’s art.
Say, is it nothing that I know them all?
The wild flower was the larger; I have dashed
Rose-blood upon its petals, pricked its cup’s
Honey with wine, and driven its seed to fruit,

And show a better flower if not so large:
I stand myself. Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another’s hand: what then?
I pass too surely: let at least truth stay!
And next, of what thou followest on to ask.
This being with me as I declare, O king,
My works, in all these varicoloured kinds,
So done by me, accepted so by men—
Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men’s hearts)
I must not be accounted to attain
The very crown and proper end of life?
Inquiring thence how, now life closeth up,
I face death with success in my right hand:
Whether I fear death less than dost thyself
The fortunate of men? ‘For’ (writest thou)
‘Thou leavest much behind, while I leave naught.
Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?
The brazen statue to o’erlook my grave,
Set on the promontory which I named.
And that—some supple courtier of my heir
Shall use its robed and sceptred arm, perhaps,
To fix the rope to, which best drags it down.
I go then: triumph thou, who dost not go!’

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

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

But thou, king, hadst more reasonably said:
‘Let progress end at once, — man make no step
Beyond the natural man, the better beast,
Using his senses, not the sense of sense.’
In man there’s failure, only since he left
The lower and 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 (’tis no dream—
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there’s a world of capability.
240 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,

250 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?

260 She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread:
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. Is it for Zeus to boast,
'See, man, how happy I live, and despair -
That I may be still happier - for thy use!'
If this were so, we could not thank our lord,
As hearts beat on to doing; 'tis not so -
Malice it is not. Is it carelessness?
Still, no. If care - where is the sign? I ask,
And get no answer, and agree in sum,

270 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,
Confounded the accurate view of what joy is

280 (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 Phoebus, am I therefore young?
Methinks I'm older that I bowed myself

290 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 naught, 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.

300 I know the joy of kingship: well, thou art king!

'But,' sayest thou - (and I marvel, I repeat
To find thee trip on such a mere word) 'what
Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
And Aeschylus, because we read his plays!
Why, if they live still, let them come and take
Thy slave in my despite, drink from thy cup,
Speak in my place. Thou diest while I survive?
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,

310 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,

320 Alive still, in the praise of such as thou,
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 strictness of our life, made strait
On purpose to make prized the life at large -
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call death,
We burst there as the worm into the fly,
Who, while a worm still, wants his wings. But no!
Zeus has not yet revealed it; and alas,
He must have done so; were it possible!

Live long and happy, and in that thought die:
Glad for what was! Farewell. And for the rest,
I cannot tell thy messenger aright
Where to deliver what he bears of thine
To one called Paulus; we have heard his fame
Indeed, if Christus be not one with him -
I know not, nor am troubled much to know.
Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongest our philosophy, O king,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all!
He writeth, doth he? well, and he may write.

Oh, the Jew findeth scholars! certain slaves
Who touched on this same isle, preached him and Christ;
And (as I gathered from a bystander)
Their doctrine could be held by no sane man.

The Twins

'Give' and 'It-shall-be-given-unto-you.'

I
Grand rough old Martin Luther
Bloomed fables - flowers on furze,
The better the uncouthier:
Do roses stick like burrs?

II
A beggar asked an alms
One day at an abbey-door,
Said Luther; but, seized with qualms,
The abbot replied, 'We're poor!

III
'Poor, who had plenty once,
When gifts fell thick as rain:
But they give us naught, for the nonce,
And how should we give again?'

IV
Then the beggar, 'See your sins!
Of old, unless I err,
Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,
Date and Dabitur.'

V
'While Date was in good case
Dabitur flourished too:
For Dabitur's lenten face
No wonder if Date rue.

VI
'Would ye retrieve the one?
Try and make plump the other!
When Date's penance is done,
Dabitur helps his brother.'
VII
‘Only, beware relapse! 
The Abbot hung his head, 
This beggar might be perhaps 
An angel, Luther said.

Popularity

I
Stand still, true poet that you are! 
I know you; let me try and draw you. 
Some night you’ll fail us: when afar 
You rise, remember one man saw you, 
Knew you, and named a star!

II
My star, God’s glow-worm! Why extend 
That loving hand of his which leads you, 
Yet locks you safe from end to end 
Of this dark world, unless he needs you, 
Just saves your light to spend?

III
His clenched hand shall unclose at last, 
I know, and let out all the beauty: 
My poet holds the future fast, 
Accepts the coming ages’ duty, 
Their present for this past.

IV
That day, the earth’s feast-master’s brow 
Shall clear, to God the chalice raising; 
‘Others give best at first, but thou 
Forever set’st our table praising, 
Keep’st the good wine till now!’

V
Meantime, I’ll draw you as you stand, 
With few or none to watch and wonder: 
I’ll say – a fisher, on the sand 
By Tyre the old, with ocean-plunder, 
A netful, brought to land.

VI
Who has not heard how Tyrian shells 
Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes 
Whereof one drop worked miracles, 
And coloured like Astarte’s eyes

30 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

40 Through foam the rock-weeds thresh.

IX
Enough to furnish Solomon 
Such hangings for his cedar-house, 
That, when gold-robed he took the throne 
In that abys 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,

50 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, flaked and fine,
    And priced and salable 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, — straightforwardly:
    Nobbs prints blue, — claret crowns his cup:
Nokes outdresses Stokes in azure feats, —
    Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?

The Heretic's Tragedy
A Middle-Age Interlude

ROSA MUNDI; SEU, FULCITE ME FLORIBUS. A CONCEPT OF MASTER
GESCRECHT, CANON-REGULAR OF SAINT JODOCUS-BY-THE-EAR, YPRES
CITY, CANTUQUE. VIRGILIAN. AND HATH OFTEN BEEN SINGED AT FESTIVALS AND
FESTIVALS. GAVISUS EBERAM, JESTIXES.

(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 Frenish brains to brains, during
the course of a couple of centuries.)

I
PREDAMONISETH 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
10 John, Master of the Temple of God,
    Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aladabrod,
    He sold it to Sultan Saladin:
Till, caught by Pope Clement, — 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 the grace of late or clavisithem, 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;
20 "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;
30 Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith;
    Larch-heap 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  
Laud Deo — who bids clap-to the torch.

V  
John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,  
Is burning alive in Paris square!  
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?  
Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there?  
Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?  
Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?  
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound?  
— Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.  
[Here one crosseth himself]

VI  
Jesus Christ — John had bought and sold,  
Jesus Christ — John had eaten and drunk;  
To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.  
(Salva reverentid)  
Now it was, 'Saviour, bountiful lamb,  
I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me!  
See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!  
Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!'  

CHORUS  
'Tis John the mocker cries, 'Save thou me!'

VII  
Who maketh God's menace an idle word?  
— Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,  
Than a damsel's threat to her wanton bird?  
— For she too prattles of ugly names.  
— Saith, he knoweth but one thing, — what he knows?  
That God is good and the rest is breath;  
Why else is the same styled Sharon's rose?  
Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

CHORUS  
O, John shall yet find a rose, he saith!

VIII  
Alack, there be roses and roses, John!  
Some, honied of taste like your leman's tongue:  
Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!)  
Their tree struck root in devil's-dung.  
When Paul once reasoned of righteousness  
And of temperance and of judgement to come,  
Good Felix trembled, he could no less:  
John, snickering, crooked 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 chocking 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!
Two in the Campagna

I
I wonder do you feel today
   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 west,

IV
Where one small orange cup amassed
   Five beetles, - blind and green they grope
Among the honey-meal: and last,
   Everywhere on the grassy slope
I traced it. Hold it fast!

V
The champaign with its endless fleece
   Of feathery grasses everywhere!
Silence and passion, joy and peace,
   An everlasting wash of air -
Rome's ghost since her decease.

VI
Such life here, through such lengths of hours,
   Such miracles performed in play,
Such primal naked forms of flowers,
   Such letting nature have her way
While heaven looks from its towers!

VII
How say you? Let us, O my dove,
   Let us be unashamed of soul,
As earth lies bare to heaven above!
   How is it under our control
To love or not to love?

VIII
I would that you were all to me,
   You that are just so much, no more.
Nor yours nor mine, nor slave nor free!
   Where does the fault lie? What the core
O' the wound, since wound must be?

IX
I would I could adopt your will,
   See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
   At your soul's springs, - your part my part
In life, for good and ill.

X
No, I yearn upward, touch you close,
   Then stand away, I kiss your cheek,
Catch your soul's warmth, - I pluck the rose
   And love it more than tongue can speak -
Then the good minute goes.

XI
Already how am I so far
   Out of that minute? Must I go
Still like the thistle-ball, no bar,
   Onward, whenever light winds blow,
Fixed by no friendly star?
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.
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 furl'd?
Show me their shaping,
Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage, -
Give?' - So, he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain:
'Time to taste life,' another would have said,
'Up with the curtain!'
This man said rather, 'Actual life comes next?
Patience a moment!
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
Still there's the comment.
Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
Painful or easy!
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
Ay, nor feel queasy.'
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner, he spurned it.
Image the whole, then execute the parts -
Fancy the fabric
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!

(Here’s the town-gate reached: there’s the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus!)
That before living he’d learn how to live—
No end to learning:
Earn the means first—God surely will contrive

80
Use for our earning.
Others mistrust and say, ‘But time escapes:
Live now or never!’
He said, ‘What’s time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever.’
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
*Calculus* racked him:
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
*Tussi* attacked him.
‘Now, master, take a little rest!’—not he!

90
(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-hydropic 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

100
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

110
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.

120
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and un perplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled *hoti*’s business—let it be!—

130
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—

140
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.
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!
Today I venture all I know.

10 She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III
My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

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 knew
(But shall not discover,
Since ears are dull,
And time discloses)

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

II
Well, dear, in-doors with you!
True! serene deadness
Tries a man's temper.

What's in the blossom
June sports on her bosom?
Can it clear scores with you?

Sweetness and redness.

Eadem semper!

20 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 berefulgent

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:

30 Or if, with experience of man and of spider,
June use my June-lightning, the strong insect-riddler,
And stop the fresh film-work,—why, June will consider.

'Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books'

Stop playing, poet! May a brother speak?
'Tis you speak, that's your error. Song's our art:

Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.
— True thoughts, good thoughts, thoughts fit to treasure up!
But why such long prolixion 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!
MEN AND WOMEN

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, 'tis 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 happened, 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!
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.

MISCONCEPTIONS

Misconceptions

I

This is a spray the Bird clung to,
Making it blossom with pleasure,
Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
Fit for her nest and her treasure.
Oh, what a hope beyond measure
Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to, -
So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

II

This is a heart the Queen leant on,
Thrilled in a minute erratic,
Ere the true bosom she bent on,
Meet for love's regal dalmatic.
Oh, what a fancy ecstatic
Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on -
Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

One Word More

TO E.B.B.
1855

I

There they are, my fifty men and women
Naming me the fifty poems finished!
Take them, Love, the book and me together:
Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.

II

Raphael 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?

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 Manonnas —
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.

You and I will never read that volume.
Guido Reni, like his own eye's apple
Guarded long the treasure-book and loved it.
Guido Reni dying, all Bologna
Cried, and the world cried too, 'Ours, the treasure!'
Suddenly, as rare things will, it vanished.

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper 'Beatrice.'
While he mused and traced it and retraced it,
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left-hand 'i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rankle
Let the wretch go festering through Florence) —
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel, —
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he — 'Certain people of importance'
(Such he gave his daily dreadful line to)

'Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet.'
Says the poet — 'Then I stopped my painting.'

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? — than read a fresh Inferno.

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.

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.

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;
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!
Their's, 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 Ethiopin bondslove,)
He would envy you dumb patient camel,
Keeping a reserve of scanty water
Meant to save his own life in the desert;
Ready in the desert to deliver
(Kneeling down to let his breast be opened)
Hoard and life together for his mistress.

XII
I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!

XIII
Yet a semblance of resource avails us —
Shade so finely touched, love's sense must seize it.
Take these lines, look lovingly and nearly,
Lines I write the first time and the last time.

He who works in fresco, steals a hairbrush,
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-marble with flowers.
He who blows through bronze, may breathe through silver,
Fitsly serenade a slumberous 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 disbeliefing:
I am mine and yours — the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty.
Let me speak this once in my true person,
Not as Lippo, Roland or Andrea,
Though the fruit of speech be just this sentence:

Pray you, look on these my men and women,
Take and keep my fifty poems finished;
Where my heart lies, let my brain lie also!
Poor the speech; be how I speak, for all things.

XV
Not but that you know me! Lo, the moon's self!
Here in London, yonder late in Florence,
Still we find her face, the thrice-transfigured.
Curving on a sky imbued with colour,
Drifted over Pisa by twilight,
Came she, our new crescent of a hair's-breadth.

Full she flared it, lamping Samminiatto,
Rounder 'twixt the cypress and rounder,
Perfect till the nightingales applauded.
Now, a piece of her old self, impoverished,
Hard to greet, she traverses the house roofs,
Hurries with unhandsome thrift of silver,
Goes dispiritedly, glad to finish.

XVI
What, there's nothing in the moon noteworthy?
Nay: for if that moon could love a mortal,
Use, to charm him (so to fit a fancy),

All her magic ('tis the old sweet mythos)
She would turn a new side to her mortal,
Side unseen of herdsman, huntsman, steersman —
Blank to Zoroaster on his terrace,
Blind to Galileo on his turret,
Dumb to Homer, dumb to Keats — him, even!
Think, the wonder of the moonstruck mortal —
When she turns round, comes again in heaven,
Opens out anew for worse or better!
Proves she like some portent of an iceberg

Swimming full upon the ship it founders,
Hungry with huge teeth of splintered crystals?
Proves she as the paved work of a sapphire
Seen by Moses when he climbed the mountain?
Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu
Climbed and saw the very God, the Highest,
Stand upon the paved work of a sapphire.
Like the bodied heaven in his clearness
Shone the stone, the sapphire of that paved work,
When they ate and drank and saw God also!

XVII
What were seen? None knows, none ever 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 he thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her!

XVIII
This I say of me, but think of you, Love!
This to you — yourself my moon of poets!
Ah, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder,

Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
There, in turn I stand with them and praise you —
Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
But the best is when I glide from out them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side, the novel
Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,
Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX
Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,

Wrote one song — and in my brain I sing it,
Drew one angel — borne, see, on my bosom!

R. B.
87 very good Genesis 31.  
891 One minute after you dispense MS., 1852; One minute after day dispense 1853–8.  
841 Of all the sounds] The thousand sounds MS., 1850–68.  
842 Innumerable] In, on him, MS., 1850–63; In on him 1868.  
910 wind-lyres Almost certainly, Browning refers to the Aeolian harp and is mistranslating the German Windklaarfe (wind harp). Probably a unique use of the word.  
920 breath of wind.  
932, 33 Able to wound it, not sustain —  
But let me not choose all in vain! MS. first reading.  
945 Old memories to new dreams] Ic fragments to my whole MS., 1850–68.  
100 Was this a vision? ‘Was it a vision or a waking dream?’ (Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, 79).  

Men and Women  
The two volumes of Men and Women were published by Chapman and Hall on 10 November 1855. In later collections, all fifty-one poems in the collection were reprinted, sometimes after fairly extensive revision. In 1863 ‘In a Balcony’ became independent, and the other poems were rearranged in three groupings together with poems from Dramatic Lyrics and Dramatic Romances and Lyric: thirty poems went to ‘Lyrics’, twelve to ‘Romances’, eight to ‘Men, and Women’ (details of the groupings are in the Appendix to Volume II of the present edition). The same groupings were retained in 1868 and 1888 under the titles of ‘Dramatic Lyrics’, ‘Dramatic Romances’ and ‘Men and Women’. Of the poems printed in 1855 only ‘The Twins’ (1854) and the first nine sections of ‘Saul’ had appeared before.  
The volume title probably alludes to the twenty-sixth sonnet in Mrs Browning’s Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850), the opening lines of which are: ‘I lived with visions for my company / instead of men and women, years ago’. The dates of composition of most poems in Men and Women are unknown, and difficult or impossible to determine with any precision. The dedication to (and the epilogue of) the collection, ‘One Word More’, was the last written (September 1855). ‘The Guardian Angel’ (July 1848) may have been the first written, and it is the only poem that can positively be said, despite frequent conjectures masquerading as facts, to have been written before 1853. On 5 June 1854 Browning wrote to his friend John Forster that the poems were ‘not written before last year’ (New Letters, 77), and it is almost certain that the vast mass of the poems in Men and Women was written in 1853–5. On 24 February 1853 Browning wrote of ‘writing — a first step towards popularity for me — lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see’ (W. Thomas, ‘Deux lettres inédites de Robert Browning à Joseph Miland’, Revue germanique, XII, 1921, 253). Mrs Browning described her husband as being at work on 24 August 1853, and in September 1854 she is reported to have said that her husband was ready to publish and that he had considered publication in the Summer of 1854. Browning, however, continued work on the collection. On 12 July 1855 he brought the manuscript, which has apparently perished, to London. There are, however, extant MSS. of a handful of the poems. Further MS. readings are also preserved in a set of proofs in the Huntington Library (see W. S. Peterson, ‘The Proofs of Browning’s Men and Women’, SBLIG III, No. 2, 1975, 23–39).
With the possible exception of *The Ring and the Book*, *Men and Women* is the most highly regarded of all Browning's works. Now agreed to be one of Victorian England's most distinguished books, it had little impact at the time: of the fairly small run (2,000?), many copies were still available a decade later, and there was no second edition. Browning continued to be known as his wife's husband.


**LOVE AMONG THE RUINS**

First published as the first poem of *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. In these printings it was divided into fourteen stanzas of six lines each; for 1868 Browning made the final division into seven stanzas of twelve lines each. There were no verbal revisions after 1855. A manuscript, entitled 'Sicilian Pastoral', is in Harvard's Houghton Library; see J. Maynard, 'Browning's "Sicilian Pastoral"', *Harvard Library Bulletin* XX, 1974, 43-43.

DeVane (*Handbook*, 212) states that the poem was written in an apartment on the Champs Elysées on 3 January 1853, but one of the two references he cites does not support his statement, and the other contradicts it (see J. Parr, *The Date and Composition of Browning's Love Among the Ruins*, *PQ* XXXII, 1953, 443-6, and J. Hineboldt's note in *VP* IV, 1966, 51-4). F. J. Furnivall (*BSP* I, 159), probably reporting Browning, stated that the poet wrote 'Love Among the Ruins, Women and Roses, and Childe Roland' in three successive days 1, 2 and 3 January 1853; but the date of composition remains uncertain, especially since Furnivall was never addicted to accuracy and since Browning wrote on 5 June 1854 that the *Men and Women* poems were not written before 1853. Parr's suggestion that the poem was written in Florence in 1853 is as reasonable as any, and it has implicit support in *Whiting, The Brownings*, 261.

Despite the MS. title, the setting of the poem derives in part from visits to the Campania, the countryside around Rome. In part it comes from Browning's reading about ancient ruined cities, notably Nineveh and Babylon (see J. Parr, *The Site and Ancient City of Browning's Love Among the Ruins*, *PMLA* LXXIII, 1953, 129-37). Debits have also been suggested to such writings as *Herodotus* description of Babylon, *Revelation, Raleigh's History of the World*, and *Spenser's Complaints* (see R. K. E. Thornton, in *N & Q* CCXIII, 1968, 178-9). For criticism, see W. Cadbury, *Lyric and Anti-Lyric Forms*, *TQ* XXXIV, 1964, 49-67 (reprinted in *Tracy, Browning's Mind and Art, 32-50*), and Cook, *Browning's Lyrics*, 163-73.

7 a city great and gay 'all that in this world is great or gay, / Doth as a vapour vanish, and decay' (Spenser, *Ruines of Time*, 55-6).
8 OJ Was MS.
9 gathered...whirling far] had his...sent afar MS.
10 shot its spires 'stirruped steeples high shot up in air' (Spenser, *Ruines of Rome*, 16).

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21 hundred-gated Babylon and the Egyptian Thebes were reputed to have had a hundred gates.
29 By the caper over-rooted] Which the caper roots a-top of MS.
30 caper a small shrub.
41 houseleek a flowering plant that generally grows on walls or roofs.
42 Mark!] Was MS.
46 he looked upon the city the city he looked out on MS.
49 saucy saucy.
77 Yet reserved a thousand] And yet mustered five-score MS.
79 frescoes The MS. shows Browning debating between the first reading frescoes and the second reading tingles.
84 Love is best.] This is best! MS.; Love is best! 1855-63.

**A LOVERS' QUARREL**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. Revisions after 1855 were trifling. The poem was probably written in Florence in March 1853. The Brownings disagreed about Napoleon III, and about spiritualism, a majorfad in Florence in 1852-3. On the poem, see Cook, *Browning's Lyrics*, 138-41.

7 a like that rather.
8 riddles small riddles.
10 beryl light-green.
20 ingle fireplace.
30 Emperor Napoleon III of France married on 30 January 1853; *The Times* criticized the extravagance.
36 Pampas the plains of South America.
43 will our tale turn? that is, in a spiritualist ritual. Mrs Browning believed in spiritualism, her husband did not.
64 skirt open and close quickly, or wave smartly (OEId).
68 two spots of the nostrils.
90-91 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue' (Proverbs xviii 21).
105 threats threatens (archaism).
120 minor third The interval in the cuckoo's notes increases as spring progresses. The tone of the minor third is towards the middle of spring.
125 guelder-rose a variety of cranberry.
131-2 The giant's speech is from the folk-tale of Jack the Giant-killer. Jack, unlike Tom Thumb, is valiant; Browning probably confused two stories.

**EVELYN HOPE**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. Later revisions were trifling. The date of composition is unknown.

**UP AT A VILLA — DOWN IN THE CITY**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. Later revisions were trifling. The date of writing is unknown; the setting is Tuscan. D. C. Allen (Andrew Marvell, 123) suggests a debt to Martial. See Cook, *Browning's Lyrics*, 178-90.
4 Bacchus (Dionysus) god of wine, associated with revels.
9 shag tangled mass.
28 pass stroke with brooms.
34 thread thread (archaism).
39 diligence stage-coach.
42 Puccinello-trumpet the trumpet announcing the puppet-show. (Puccinello is a kind of Punch-figure.)
46 Duke the Tuscan Grand-Duke, Leopold II.
48-9 That is, roughly, the priest combines great philosophical poet, fiction writer, love poet, translator, rhetorician and preacher.
52 seven swords representing the Virgin's Seven Sorrows.
56 new tax...gate In Italy, taxes on salt and on produce entering cities were fairly heavy.

A WOMAN'S LAST WORD

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. There were no verbal changes after 1855. Date of composition is unknown. That a woman always gets the last word had been further popularized by Mrs Caudle in Douglas Jerrold's Mrs Caudle's Certain Lectures, first published in 1845. See M. R. Sullivan, 'Irony in "A Woman's Last Word"', BSN V, No. 2, 1975, 14–17.

FRA LIPPO LIPPI

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it remained in 'Men, and Women'. Revisions after 1855 were trifling. The poem was probably written in Florence in the first half of 1853. Its main and only really essential source, apart from Browning's familiarity with the paintings of Fra Filippo Lippi (c. 1406–69), is Vasari's Lives of the Artists, which gave many of the facts, and supports the general tenor of Browning's poem.

It is generally agreed that Lippo's artistic creed reflects much in Browning's, and that he is really a kind of spokesman for the poet, paralleling in his comments much that Browning had said in his essay on Shelley. In the reorganized 'Men, and Women' of 1863 and later collected editions, 'Andrea del Sarto', an obvious companion poem, followed 'Pictor Ignotus' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi'. Among a host of essays on this perennial favourite are: Jack, Browning's Major Poetry, 273–84; J. L. Kendall, 'Lippo's Vision', VNL 18, 1960, 18–21; King, The Bow and the Lyre, 32–51; W. D. Shaw, 'Character and Philosophy in "Fra Lippo Lippi"', VP II, 1964, 127–32.

3 zoaks abbreviation of Gadswoods' (God's hooks), a mild oath.
7 Carmine the monastery of the religious order of the Carmelites in Florence. Vasari says Lippo left the order at the age of seventeen.
17 Cosimo of the Medici the Florentine ruler and patron of the arts.
18 house the Medici Riccardi Palace, built 1444–60.
19 capri crowned.
28 florin a word applied indiscriminately to various continental coins.
34 John Baptist Vasari mentions the saint as a subject painted by Lippo; his frescoes of the saint are at Prato.

41 take catch the fancy of (OED 10).
47 new cage.
52 whiffs whiffs.
53–7 The three-line Tuscan folksong beginning with a reference to a flower is called a stornello.
67 Saint Lawrence the church of San Lorenzo.
73 Jerome the highly ascetic saint (340–420) whom Lippo painted for Cosimo in his Virgin Adoring the Child with Saint Hilariun. The work is now in the Uffizi in Florence (for a photograph, see SIB I, No. 2, 1973, 34).
75 map seize.
81–2 Vasari says Lippo was orphaned at the age of two, and then for six years brought up by his aunt, Mona Lapaccia.
121 Eight the eight magistrates of Florence.
132 antiphonary book with choral music.
135 looked black] were mauzed Huntington proof.
139 Camboldese The religious order had a convent near Florence.
140 preaching friars Dominicans.
146 fat and lean] good and bad Huntington proof.
148 cries petty theses.
150 dropped] threw Huntington proof.
179 niece almost certainly not a relation, but one with whom he has relations.
179 funked expired in smoke.
186 when you die it leaves your mouth There is an old doctrine (referred to again in 'An Epistle', 6) that the soul departs from the body in the form of vapour with the last breath.
189 Giotto the great Florentine painter and architect (1267–1347).
190 Herodias mother of Salome, who, after dancing for Herod, asked him for the head of John the Baptist (Matthew xiv). The same error is in Vasari.
229 Those great rings The iron rings referred to still survive.
235 Angelico Fra Angelico (1387–1455), one of the most ethereal of painters. J. Parr, 'Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi', Vasari's Masaccio, and Mrs. Jameson', English Language Notes V, 1968, 273–83, suggests that the contrast between Lippo and Fra Angelico may have been suggested by the writings of the Brownings' friend, Mrs Jameson.
236 Lorenzo Lorenzo Monaco (c. 1370–c. 1425), painter, Fra Angelico's master.
237 Pag toil.
250 the cup runs over 'my cup runneth over' (Psalm xxviii, 5).
313 blot trap Huntington proof.
323–4 Saint Lawrence...Prato The saint was roasted to death in 258. Some of Lippo's best work was done in the town near Florence. The painting is probably invented, though Lippo did paint Saint Lawrence at least twice.
327 phiz face (slang).
328 turn turned Huntington proof.
337 wot knows (archaism).
346 Saint Ambrogio's a convent in Florence for which Lippo painted his Coronation
of *the Virgin* (now in the Uffizi), the painting described in the following lines. It was, Vasari says, this painting that got Cosimo interested in Lippo. (A photograph faces page 402 in Griffin and Minchini, *Life*.)

347 cast o’ my office sampling of my work.

351 iris-root iris-root. Some kinds are used in perfumes.

354 Saint John the patron-saint of Florence.

355 Saint Ambrose Lippo seems confused. Saint Ambrose, patron-saint of Sanct’Ambrogio, was the fourth-century Archbishop of Milan, but Lippo seems to mean Ambrose the Camaldulian (1386–1439), friend of Cosimo de’ Medici and translator of Greek theologians, born near Florence.

358 Us Job i.

356 Mazed bewildered (archaism).

370 slip Saint Lucy, a figure in *The Coronation of the Virgin*.

375 camel-hair Saint John wore camel hair (Matthew iii 4; Mark i 6).

377 *Lis perfecit opus* Latin (actually, *Lo perfecit opus*): ‘This man arranged the work’. In Browning’s time, the words, occurring on a scroll in the painting, were thought to mean ‘This man did the work!’ the figure then thought to be Lippo himself, as in the poem, is now known to be the Canon Maringhi who commissioned the painting in 1441.

380 kirtles skirts.

381 hot cocktes technically a rustic game; here a euphemism for vigorous amorous activity.

387 Saint Lucy The martyr was a virgin; the Prior’s ‘niece’ is almost certainly not.

**A TOCCATA OF GALUPPI’S**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in *Lyrics*. Revisions after 1855 were trifling. Date of composition is unknown. J. C. Maxwell (*N & Q*, n.s. XX, 1973, 270) suggests that it was not written before 1850, the date of publication of Thackeray’s poem in the same metre on King Canute in *Rebecca and Rowena*.

A *toccata* (toccata, ‘to touch’ in Italian) is a fast-moving keyboard piece, often written to display technical prowess. Baldassare Galuppi (1700–56), the Venetian composer, is known mainly for his light operas, for many of which Goldoni was librettist. He visited England in 1741, and had considerable influence on English music. In 1889 Browning wrote that he had two manuscript volumes of Galuppi ‘toccata-pieces’ which he described as ‘apparently a slighter form of the Sonata to be “touched” lightly off’. The poem and its intention have been much discussed. Essays include: Cook, *Browning’s Lyrics*, 173–8; E. F. Harden, ‘A New Reading of Browning’s’ *A Toccata of Galuppi’s*’, *VP XI*, 1973, 330–36.

1 Baldassare an error for ‘Baldassare’.

6 Saint Mark’s and the sea with rings Saint Mark’s is the cathedral of Venice. The Dukes of Venice used annually to symbolize the maritime power of the city by wedding it to the sea in a ceremony in which a ring was cast into the sea.

8 Skylace’s bridge the Rialto.

18 clavichord a stringed keyboard instrument, ancestor of the modern piano.

19 lesser thirds This technical term and those that follow are, in terms of their effects, given their traditional associations within the poem itself. Here, ‘lesser’ means ‘minor’; a ‘third’ is a chord of two notes seven semitones apart.

sixths diminished A ‘sixth’ is a chord made up of two notes nine semitones apart; ‘diminished’ (by two semitones) it becomes one of two notes seven semitones apart.

It is going a little far to suggest that ‘mentioning diminished sixths in this off-hand way is rather like casually speaking of breakfasting off roc’s egg as a matter of every-day occurrence’ (see H. E. Greene, ‘Browning’s Knowledge of Music’, *PMLA* LXII, 1947, 1097). It would seem that ‘diminished’ Browning may have meant ‘minor’.

20 suspensions A suspension is a note held from one chord to another, first producing a discord, and then resolving concordantly.

21 solutions resolutions. A ‘resolution’ (technical term) is a concord following a discord.

24 the dominant’s persistence till it must be answered to A ‘dominant’ is ‘the note in a mode or scale which, in traditional harmonic procedures, most urgently demands resolution upon the tonic’ (Grove): it is the fifth note above the tonic or key-note.

25 octave The octave, being a perfect consonance, gives the ‘answer’ to (resolves) the dominant.

30 tacitly running on ‘ tacit’ (Latin: ‘it is silent’), the word indicating an extended rest for a player on an orchestral score.

32 want lack.

**BY THE FIRE-SIDE**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in *Lyrics*. After 1855 there were a few verbal revisions, and many in punctuation. The poem is traditionally thought to have been written late in 1853, after a summer in which the Browns had occupied a house near Lucca, from which they had made a number of trips, including one in mid-September with their friends, the Storys, to Prato Florio, which, it has been said, provides most of the details for the setting of the poem. The poem, however, may have been written as early as 1849, since the locale has been clearly shown to be based on information given in a guidebook consulted by the Browns in planning a tour, which they never made, to the Lake of Orta, and perhaps also on descriptions by friends (see J. S. Lindsay, ‘The Central Episode of Browning’s *By the Fire-Side*’, *SP* XXXIX, 1942, 571–9, and D. Robertson, ‘Browning on the Colle di Colma’, *BSN* V, No. 2, 1975, 6–13). Probable are the traditional date, and a composite landscape of the imagination rather than a factual one. While biographical elements are subdied, the poem is one of Browning’s rare more personal utterances, and the portrait of ‘Leonor’ is one of Mrs Browning. In a letter of 6 April 1888 (see *SBHC* II, No. 1, 1974, 62), Browning wrote of the poem: ‘all but the personality is fictitious – that is, the portraiture only is intended to be like – the circumstances are a mere imaginary framework’. Among discussions are: L. Armstrong, ‘Browning and the Grotesque Style’, *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations*, 105–11; Cook, *Browning’s Lyrics*, 214–27; Jacob Korg, ‘Browning’s Art and “By the Fire-Side”’, *VP* XV, 1977, 147–58; G. Tillotson, ‘A Word for Browning’, *Sewanee Review* LXXII, 1964, 389–97.

22 widens] narrows 1853–63.

43 Fella village in north-west Italy.

45 Alp Monte Rosa.

58 boss the protrubance at the centre of a shield.
ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863, it was included in *Lyrics*. Revisions were trifling. The date of writing is unknown. It has been suggested that the poem was prompted by Browning’s father’s being sued for breach of promise in 1852, three years after the death of Browning’s mother.

18 *soul makes all things new* ‘Behold, I make all things new’ (Revelation xx. 5).
71 *wilding* growing wild.
77 *Titian’s Venus* Probably Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538), in the Uffizi in Florence.
94 *sealing up the sum* ‘Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty’ (Ezekiel xxviii. 12).

AN EPISODE... OF KARSHISH

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863–6 it was retained in *Men and Women*. After 1855, revisions were extensive, but of minor significance. The date of writing is unknown. *Cleon* is a companion poem.


1 *Karshish* Arabic for ‘one who gathers’, or, roughly, ‘the picker-up of learning’s crumbs’ (see M. Wright’s letter in TLS, 1 May 1953, 285).
6 Karshish refers to the old doctrine that the soul leaves the body with the last breath in the form of vapour. Compare ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, 186.
15 *vagrant* wandering.
17 *snakesstone* a stone used in treating snake bites.
20 Karshish’s formal opening to his epistle is rather like that to a Pauline one—
MESMERISM
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in ‘Romances’. Revisions after 1855 were trifling. Date of writing is unknown, but similarities to ‘A Lovers’ Quarrel’ make a date of March 1853 a reasonable guess. Mesmerism was a topic of much interest in the decade before *Men and Women* (Arnold had seen his Scholar-Gypsy of 1853 as the first mesmerist). Mrs Browning believed in it, Browning disliked it. Jack, *Browning’s Major Poetry*, 159–61, suggests that the speaker may be insane and the action imaginary. J. C. Austin suggests a debt to Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* in ‘The Hawthorne and Browning Acquaintance: Including an Unpublished Browning Letter’, *VNL* 20, 1961, 13–18.

10 to have and hold ‘to have and to hold’ (marriage service).
14 calotyphus photographer.
75 tractile capable of being drawn out.

A SERENADE AT THE VILLA
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in ‘Lyrics’. After 1855 revisions were trifling. Date of composition is uncertain. Arthur Symons suggested the influence of a song from Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* with the same metre and subject. There has been some disagreement as to the poem’s attitude towards the speaker, and as to whether he is dead or alive. On the poem, see Cook, *Browning’s Lyrics*, 135–8, and J. Maynard in *BSN* VI, No. 1, 1976, 3–10.

6 fly fire-fly.
7 worm glow-worm.
9 forbore a term were quiet for a while.

MY STAR
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in ‘Lyrics’. After 1855 there were minor revisions only in punctuation. The date of composition is unknown. The MS in the Boston Public Library reported in Robert *Browning: A Bibliography*, 13, is, as suggested there, a late souvenir autograph. On 9 November 1845 Browning wrote to Elizabeth Barrett: ‘Dearest, I believed in your glorious genius and knew it for a true star from the moment I saw it, — long before I had the blessing of knowing it was M Y star, with my fortune and futurity in it’; that the poem pays tribute to Mrs Browning is almost universally agreed. Most readers have, however, not limited the poem’s symbolism only to her, especially since Browning often uses imagery of white light and the colours composing it with reference to poetry and its creation. On the poem, see Cook, *Browning’s Lyrics*, 204–8; and J. F. Loucks, Jr, ‘New Light on “My Star”’, *BSN* IV, No. 2, 1974, 25–7.

4 angoted star crystalline mineral substance with sparkling facets.
9 dartles darts, shoots forth repeatedly. Perhaps a Browning neologism.
11 Saturn the second largest planet, and a bright one.

INSTANS TYRANNUS
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in ‘Romances’. After 1855 revisions were trifling. Date of composition is unknown. The title, ‘The Threatening Tyrant’, is from Horace, *Odes* III, iii, 3; and details come from the same ode, in which Horace says that the just man cannot be frightened by a threatening tyrant nor Jove’s thunder and lightning, or a falling sky.

18 perdue concealed.
21 spith effusion.
33 nit young loose.
44 grievance.
47 admire wonder.
64 targe shield.
65 boss protuberance at the centre of a shield.

A PRETTY WOMAN
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in ‘Lyrics’. After 1855 there were no verbal changes. The date of composition is uncertain; De Vane (Handbook, 228) suggests 1842, proposing that the poem’s model was Gerardiæ Bate, niece of the Brownings’ friend, Mrs Anna Jameson. Miss Bate visited the Brownings in April 1842, irritated Browning, and was described by Mrs Browning as ‘just pretty and no more at all’.

23 bras’d ground.
34 Stout reject with disdain.
65 grace rose gild the lily.

‘CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME’
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in ‘Romances’. After 1855 revisions were few and minor. The date of writing is uncertain (see J. Huebenthal’s note in *FP* IV, 166, 51–4), despite DeVane’s statement (Handbook, 251) that Browning himself gave the date of a January 1852 (Browning did not). F. J. Furnivall (*Browning Society’s Papers* I, 159), probably citing Browning himself, gives 3 January 1852 as the date, and Griffin and Minchin (Life, 189) echo him. The information given by L. Whiting (*The Brownings*, 251), if correct, makes the accepted date impossible, since he reports Browning as saying he wrote the poem in Florence (in 1866, however, he wrote that he composed it in Paris). The one thing that seems likely from the conflicting evidence is that Browning wrote ‘Childe Roland’ the day after he wrote ‘Women and Roses’. The poet recalled that he had written the poem in one day.

Often questioned about the poem, Browning said that it came upon him ‘as a kind of dream’ that had to be written, that he did not know what it meant, that he was ‘very fond of it, that it was “only a fantasy” with “no allegorical intention”’. Asked if it meant that ‘he that endureth to the end shall be saved’, Browning replied ‘Just about that’. The debt to *King Lear* he acknowledged in the title. He also pointed to the influence of a horse from a tapestry (now in Vicenza in Miami) in his living-room, a painting seen in Paris, a strange tower in Massa-Carrara among low hills. Scholars

Title The title quotes Edgar (in his role as the madman, Poor Tom) in *King Lear* III. 4.187 (Browning originally thought the Fool spoke the words). A childe is a candidate for knighthood.

25–36 ‘As virtuous men pass mildly away, / And whisper to their souls, to go, / Whilst some of their sad friends do say, / The breath goes now, and some say, no. / (D’Anne, ‘A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning’, 1–4) — see R. L. Lowe in *NEQ* CXCVIII, 1953, 491–2. ‘I could no more, but lay like one in trance, / That hears his burial talked of by his friends, / And cannot speak, nor move, nor make one sign, / But lies and dries his doom’ (Tennyson, ‘The Princess’ VII, 136–9) — see C. Ricks in *NEQ*, n.s., XIV, 1967, 374.

48 *estray* stray animal.

58 *cockle, spurge* weeds.

64 *nothing skills* is no use.

66 *Calcine* burn to ashes.

68 *bonds coarse grasen.*

72 *Pushing* trampling (dialectal).

76 *stiff blind horse* (dialectal).

80 *collared* cut up like pieces of meat? An unusual usage: *OED* defines the participial adjective, ‘Having collars or thick folds of fat or flesh’. That is clearly not the meaning here. Browning seems to have formed his participial adjective from the noun in its sense of ‘a slice of meat’ (*OED* 2b). Even for Browning, the use of language in ‘Childe Roland’ is unusually unusual.

99 ‘I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none’ (*Macbeth* I. 7.45–7).

106 *hoyse* owl (dialectal).

114 *begaste* bespattered (archaic).

130 *gad* tread down (dialectal in this sense).

131 *flash* puddle.

133 *circum* circus, or circular space, or natural amphitheatre.

135 *mews* The word means ‘stables’, but is used here to mean ‘place of confinement’ (new).

141 *brake* heavy harrow for crushing cobs.

143 *Tophet* the Biblical valley of burning; symbolic of Hell.

145 *stubb* abounding in stubs (*OED*’s first recorded usage in this sense).

147–9 *a foul finite mirth, / Makes a thing and then mars it* ‘Making and marring’ (*Callamian upon Setebos*, 97).

149 *road* a quarter of an acre.

160 *Agollyn* the Devil (Revelation ix 11), and a monster with ‘wings like a dragon’ in *Pilgrim’s Progress*.

161 *pened* winged.

182 *blind as the foul’s heart* ‘The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good’ (Psalm xiv, 1).

187–204 There are clear debts here to *Inferno* xxxi, and to the end of *Jack the Giant-Killer*.

203 *slag-born* ‘Slaghorn’ is an early form of ‘slogan’. Probably Browning was misled by Chatterton into thinking it meant ‘trumpet’, but the suggestion of ‘slogan’ has point, and the use of language here is like that in the poem generally. The situation here, given the hero’s name, leads many readers to recall Roland and his horn (which he three times refused to sound until it was too late) at Roncevalles.

**RESPECTABILITY**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in *Lyrics*. After 1855 there were minor changes in punctuation only. The reference in line 22 suggests a date soon after 5 February 1852. See L. Perrine, ‘Browning’s “Respectability”’, *College English* XIV, 1953, 347–8.

15 *Boulevard* Boulevard.

21 *Institute* The French Academy is a branch of the Institute of France.

22 *Guitard receives Montalbemt* On 5 February 1852, at a ceremony at which Browning was apparently present, François Guitard had to welcome his enemy Charles Montalbemt into the French Academy.

23 *lanpions* small oil-burning lamps, in the courtyard of the Institute.

**A LIGHT WOMAN**

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in *Lyrics*. Changes after 1855 were very minor. The date of writing is unknown.

26 *basilisk* the fabulous monster, which killed with a look.

34 *late* hung 1855.
55 writer of plays Until Men and Women, Browning had published more volumes of plays than poems.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST
First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Romances'. After 1855 revisions were fairly extensive, but of minor significance. The date of composition is unknown. It has been suggested that the story probably had special appeal for Browning because of his strong belief that it would have been wrong had he and Elizabeth Barrett not married, and because of the extended platonic relation of J. S. Mill and Harriet Taylor (the two finally married in 1851).

In a hitherto neglected letter of 22 April 1888 to Edmund Yates (printed in the World, 18 December 1889), Browning wrote: 'the fiction in the poem ... comprises everything but the (legendary) fact that the lady was shut up there by a jealous husband, and that the Duke commemorated his riding past her window by the statue's erection, as you see it; so my old friend Kirkup, preeminently learned in such legends, told me. There are niches in the palace wall where such a bust might have been placed, "and if not, why not?" "The poets are such liars," says the venacious Byron.' The equestrian statue of Ferdinand de Medici (1549-1608), who became Grand-Duke of Florence in 1587, dominates the Piazza Annunziata in Florence (Griffin and Minchin, Life, facing page 198, has a photograph). It is the work of John of Douay (line 202), better known as Giovanni da Bologna (1524-1608). The bust is fictional. About the two palaces in the poem, Browning himself does not appear to be clear, and the result has been inextricable confusion - DeVane's attempt (Handbook, 234) to clear things up makes them worse. The palace of line 33, where the Duke holds his feast, is the one now called the Medici-Riccardi Palace. It stands on the Via Larga (line 34), now called the Via Cavour, is the palace from which Lippo escaped, is famous, and plays little part in 'The Statue and the Bust'. The other palace (line 1), the one from which the Lady looks out on the Duke and in which she is imprisoned, is, probably, the one now called as the Badini-Gattai. It is not famous (despite line 1), and Browning does not seem to distinguish it clearly from the other palace.


18 the Riccardi a leading Florentine family.
21 coal-black tree ebony.
22 encloure a nonce-word, here used to mean 'mane' (it is the French word for the neck of a horse).
23 disseible simulate by imitation (an obsolete usage).
25 emprise enterprise.
36 crime the suppression of Florentine liberty following the return of Cosimo de Medici in 1434. The cursed son's name was Piero; Browning probably meant the grandson, Lorenzo the Magnificent.
57 catafalque structure supporting a coffin or corpse.
68 loop loop-hole.
72 ave-kell the bell calling to evening prayer.
94 Arno the river on which Florence stands.

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95 Petraia Ferdinand had a villa here, just north of Florence.
100 leaves comes from.
140 single foolish.
143 pass] lean 1855.
149 the picture at] it all 1855.
151 years] not in Huntington proof.
159 serpent's tooth The phrase, normally associated with ingratitude (King Lear I.4.370), has other associations here.
163 Plotting confronting.
169 Robbia name of a family of Florentine sculptors, the most notable of which was Luca della Robbia (1400-1482). Della Robbia ware became famous.
191 lean] not in 1855.
213 idleness] indolence 1855.
219 chapel church of the Santissima Annunziata.
220 Only] Surely 1855.
226 kno[t] row Huntington proof.
228 chivalry] band of knights.
232 burned cut 1855.
234 Guelph A Guelpho or Grosso Guelpho was a fourteenth-century Florentine coin.
237 When your table's a hat for rolling dice on? dream a very light weight, that is, a trifling state.
239 nearly] truly 1855-62.
247 the unit lamp and the ungirt loin Luke xi 35-7. Probably also relevant are the unit lamps of the foolish virgins (Matthew xxv), and 'gird up the loins of your mind' (1 Peter i 13).
248 vice] crime 1855.
250 De te, fabula 'The story is about you' (Horace, Satires I, 1, 69-70).

LOVE IN A LIFE
First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. After 1855 there were minor punctuation changes only. Date of composition is unknown. The poem's imagery is characteristic of Browning; a parallel is provided by his letter to Elizabeth Barrett of 5 April 1846: 'Oh, how different it all might be! In this House of Life - where I go, you go, - where I ascend you run before, - where I descend, it is after you. Now, one might have a piece of Ba, but a very little of her, and make it up into a Lady and a Mistress, and find her a room to her mind . . . visit her there . . . and then, - after a time, leave her there and go . . . whither one liked - after, to me, the most melancholy fashion in the world. How different with us! If it were not, indeed - what a mad folly would marriage be!' On the poem, see Cook, Browning's Lyrics, 143-7.

LIFE IN A LOVE
First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it joined its companion in 'Lyrics'. After 1855 there were two minor verbal changes, and some in punctuation. On the poem, see Cook, Browning's Lyrics, 143-7.

28 goes] drops 1855.
HOW IT STRIKES A CONTEMPORARY

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; it remained with 'Men and Women'. After 1855 there were several revisions, none of much significance although the allegory was made less obtrusive by reducing the number of capital letters. Date of composition is unknown, but the poem may have been written soon after Browning completed his essay on Shelley late in 1851. For the title, Browning is indebted to 'How It Strikes a Stranger', a story by Jane Taylor (1783–1824) which Browning later used for 'Rephan' (1889); a 'corregidora de Valladolid' and a housekeeper called Jacinta appear in Le Sage's *Le Gil Blas de la Jeunesse*. Carlyle has been suggested as the model for the poem's hero. The poem is one of Browning's most important poetic statements about the nature of his art.

3 *Valladolid* town about 100 miles north-west of Madrid.
12 *dog* rather like Mrs Browning's 'Flush'.
28 *fly-leaf* broadside; printed on one sheet.
39–44 The lines recall Lear's speech to Cordelia on their way to prison, and especially the reference to 'God's spies' (V. 3:17). On 10 December 1855 Browning wrote to Ruskin: 'A poet's affair is with God, to whom he is accountable, and of whom is his reward.'
48 *tang* sting.
73–7 *his home ... change his plate* 'there's no denying the deep delight of playing the Eastern Jew's part here in this London— they go about, you know by travel-books, with the tokens of extreme destitution and misery, and steal by blind ways and bypaths to some blank dreary house, one obscure door in it— which being well shut behind them, they grope on through a dark corridor or so, and then, a blaze follows the lifting a curtain or the like, for they are in a palace-hall with fountains and light, and marble and gold, of which the anxious are never to dream' (Robert Browning to Elizabeth Barrett, 9 July 1845).
76 *Titian* paintings by Titian, the Venetian artist (c. 1485–1577).
79 *Corregidora* Chief Magistrate.
96 *memorized* memorized.
115 *Prado* Promenade.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Romances'. After 1855 there were no verbal revisions. Date of composition is unknown. Possible significances of *ride* have been explored; one commentator suggests that the poem is about sexual intercourse. I. Orenstein associates the lady with the Muse in 'A Fresh Interpretation of "The Last Ride Together"', *Baylor Browning Interests* 18, 1961, 3–10. The poem is one of Browning's most-loved lyrics. J. K. Stephen wrote a celebrated parody in which the lady replies to Mr B.

62 *They honour him with burial in Westminster Abbey.*
90 *sublimate* refine, exalt.

THE PATRIOT

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; it was included in 'Romances' in 1863. Except for the sixth stanza, which was heavily revised, changes after 1855 were extremely minor. The original title was 'The Old Story' (Huntington proof). Date of composition is unknown, but the poem may belong to the spring of 1849 after the Battle of Novara and the collapse of the Italian struggle for freedom. The 'Old' of the title has the sense of 'Recurring'; no particular story lies behind the poem. On it, see D. J. Delaughter, *The Religious Imagery in Browning's "The Patriot"*, *PMLA* 21, 1962, 16–18.

19 *Shambles* slaughter-house.
26 *entered* entered Brescia 1855. (The change was probably made to avoid the identification, denied by Browning, of his hero with Arnold of Brescia, hanged in 1155.)
30 *repay* required 1855.

MASTER HUGHES OF SAXE-GOTHA

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855; in 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. After 1855 revisions were minor. Date of composition is unknown, but it may well have been 1853. Master Hughes is fictional; his name, despite frequent spellings and pronunciations to the contrary, conveniently rhymes with 'fugues'. Saxe-Gotha, a duchy in central Germany, was near the birthplace of J. S. Bach (1685–1750), but Browning in a letter of 30 June 1887 said that his composer of fugues was not 'meant for the glorious Bach' but for 'one of the dry-as-dust imitators who would elaborate ... [a trifling subject] for a dozen pages altogether' (see H. E. Greene, *Browning's Knowledge of Music*, *MLA* LXII, 1947, 1095–9). A fugue is a composition in which a 'subject' is introduced, repeated, and complexly developed. In 1856 Browning, who himself played the organ, said 'that he had no allegorical intent in his head when he wrote the poem; that it was composed in an organ- loft and was merely the expression of a fugue—the construction of which he understood ... because he had composed fugues himself; it was an involved labyrinth of entanglement leading to nothing—the only allegory in it was the possible reflection of the labyrinth of human life. That was all ...' (L. C. Collins, *Life and Memoirs of J. C. Collins*, 1912). On the poem see R. D. Altick, 'The Symbolism of Browning's "Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha"', *VP III*, 1965, 1–7.

66 *house of the sounds* organ.
26 *Alux and Jurien and Fast* presumably the Church's saints.
29 *sacrament-false* the face of the altar-cloth.
35 *holie handle*.
39 *claviers* keyboards.
42 *ruler like a score* furrowed as with horizontal lines on a musical score.
44 *breves* double long notes used to be written as solid black rectangles.
45 *bar* vertical line at the end of a bar.
48 *Company's votes* the ones that made Hughes church organist.
49 *scientists sheet* people with superficial knowledge shamed.
52 *snuff* charred part of a wick.
56 *phrase "subject" of the fugue.*
57 *propound* The 'proposta is the 'subject'.
60 *Two* The 'subject' is answered by the second 'voice'. This fugue is a 'five-voiced' one.
67 *dissent* disagree.
73 *vociferance* clamour.
and eccentric, of whom Rogers remarked, 'There goes Solon, Lycurgus, Demosthenes, Archimedes, Sir Isaac Newton, Lord Chesterfield, and a great many more in one post-chaise.' The heavy, closed and normally four-wheeled carriage is named after him, while a 'gig' is a light, open, two-wheeled carriage. The name 'Gigandia' is, quite apart from its triviality and silliness of sound, otherwise suggestive: a 'gig' is a fish-spear, to 'dibb' is to fish. OED also defines 'gig' as 'a whipping top', 'a set of feathers', 'a light, giddy girl', 'a fancy, joke, whim', 'fun, merriment, glee', 'a squeaking noise'. OED definitions of 'dibb' and 'dibs' include 'a small hollow', 'a game played by children', 'a counter used in playing at cards, etc. as a substitute for money', 'a slang term for money', 'a puddle', 'a dibble'. The word 'Apology' in the title is probably deliberately ambiguous, having the senses of 'statement of regret for error' and 'justification'. Critical argument about the poem has concentrated mainly on suggesting which of the senses dominates: the two poles are represented by, say, Chesterton’s view of 'a vulgar, fashionable priest, justifying his own cowardice' (page 201), and F. L. E. Priestley of the Bishop as one whose argument is dictated by the vulgar nature of his petty opponent ('Blougram’s Apologies', TQ XV, 139-47; reprinted in Litzinger and Knickerbocker, The Browning Critics, 167-80). Chesterton’s often-cited statement that Browning had said the poem was not a satire (there is nothing hostile about it) has been shown to be apocryphal. What Browning probably did say is that Blougram ‘was not treated ungenerously’ (see Sir Charles Duffey, My Life in Two Hemispheres II, 1898, 250-51, from which it appears, incidentally, that Browning may have pronounced his character’s name ‘Blougram’).


3 Abbey Westminster Abbey, taken over by Henry VIII.

6 Pugin A. W. N. Pugin (1812-52), a convert to Roman Catholicism, and an architect of the Gothic Revival.

21 Truth’s ‘Tis 1855-58. (Browning made the revision for the second impression of 1888.)

26 Status, entourage rank, household.

34 Corpus Christi Day commemorating the celebration of the Eucharist, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday.

43 Faith in faith.

63 Che loche an Italian exclamation: here, roughly, ‘Come, come!’

44 D’Orsay Count D’Orsay (1801-52), famous Victorian dandy.

70 trea-room dressing room.

78 comfortable used in the archaic or obsolete sense of sustaining or inspiriting.

108-9 Balzac’s novels A set of the French novelist (1799-1850) in fifty-five volumes began to appear in 1836; it had been advertised in 1835.


113 Parme’s pride, The Jerome The picture of Saint Jerome is in the Ducal Academy in Parme.

114 Correggio The Italian painter (c. 1494-1534) studied in Modena (line 117).

125 overhauled hauled overboard.
182.3 ‘The sound of distant music or a plaintive note, a passing word, or the 
momentary scent of a flower, or the sound of a bell, or the retiring of the day, or 
the falling leaf of autumn... all these will touch a chord!’ (Isaac Williams, The Passion, 
1848, 434). Williams (1802–65) participated in the Oxford Movement.

184 Euripides Browning’s favourite Greek dramatist.

190 The grand Perhaps ‘I go to seek a grand perhaps (un grand peut-être)’ —
attributed to Rabelais on his death-bed.

197 The Way, the Truth, the Life ‘Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, 
and the life’ (John xiv 6).

199 it be meant for ‘it’s indeed 1855; it be indeed 1863–8.

209 mayjl can 1865.

230 Comport accord.

231 go hang! be lost Huntingdon proof.

315 ‘If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread’
(Matthew iv 3).

316 Peter’s creed, or rather, Hildebrand’s Saint Peter was the first Pope; Hildebrand 
(Gregory VII, Pope 1073–85) fought for Papal temporal power.

335 haunchet] buttocks Huntingdon proof.

349 should judge] I need 1855–63.

357 winking Virgin Newman defended the belief that the Virgin’s eyes move in 
some pictures.

358 Verdi... worst opera The Allusion is probably to the Macbeth of Verdi 
(1847–51), first produced at Florence in 1847.

386 Rossini The composer (1792–1868) was in Florence in 1847.

388 prime men] journalists.

397 demirep] woman of doubtful reputation.

411 Schelling the German Idealist philosopher (1775–1854). He stressed the 
ultimate compatibility of apparently incompatible ideas.

425 Peter’s chains] Saint Peter’s chains were miraculously removed by an angel
(Acts xii 7).

426 Brave splendid.

Nouvelle] ‘The word was coined by Sydney Smith in 1810.

puff] bombast.

456 The State, that’s it ‘L’État, c’est moi’ was said by Louis XIV, not Napoleon.

472 Austrian marriage Napoleon married Marie Louise of Austria in 1810.

473 resurrection of the old régime The ancien régime was the period before the
French Revolution; Napoleon was crowned Emperor in 1804.

475 Austerlitz Napoleon’s victory of 1805 over the Russians and Austrians.

513 towers and gorgeous palaces ‘The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces’
(The Tempest IV. 1.152).

514 trimness house] New Place, bought by Shakespeare in 1597.

516 Giulio Romano] Italian painter (c. 1492–1546), referred to anachronistically in 
The Winter’s Tale (V. 2.126).

Downland] The English lutinist and composer (1653–1669) is mentioned in The 
Passionate Pilgrim, a book attributed to Shakespeare.

559 Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal a quotation from Shakespeare’s Pandulph, 
powerful spokesman for expediency, in King John (III. 1.138).

533 Tern’s fall] the waterfall north of Rome.

534 Gothard’s stop] The Saint Gothard is the major pass between Switzerland and Italy.

538 coat of arms] Shakespeare’s father received his coat of arms in 1596.

553 cousin of Queen Bess] close acquaintance of Queen Elizabeth I.

572 Re-open a shut book] has the Bible translated.

577 Strauss The author of the Life of Jesus (1885) here represents, as in ‘Christmas 
Eve’, the Higher Criticism in Biblical studies.

585 farthing] the least valuable of English coins (a quarter of a penny).

592 you lack!] I lack 1855.

593 You] I 1855.


630 born in Rome] Wiseman was born in Seville; he served in Rome 1838–40.

640 icsors] liquids issuing from wounds to help healing.

656 Michael] The archangel who threw Satan out of Heaven is often represented 
as a snake or dragon.

673 box] snuff-box.

683 Greek endings] suffices like —ogy (study).

685 Avarat] the mountain in Turkey where Noah’s ark landed (Genesis viii 4).

703 Newman] John Henry Newman, who had become a Roman Catholic in 1845, 
was a strong spokesman for miracles.

704 Immaculate Conception] The Pope proclaimed the Doctrine (that the Virgin 
was free from original sin with Christ’s birth) in 1844. Browning seems to have
shared a general misunderstanding of the Doctrine which confuses it with the
perpetual Virginity (see J. Britton, S.J., in Explicator XVII, 1859, Item 50).

715 King Bomba] nickname of Ferdinand II, King of the Two Sicilies 1810–59.

719 lazaroni] beggars.

725 Antonelli] Cardinal Antonelli, secretary to Pius IX.

728 Napoleonic] In 1851 in Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics, 
Newman defended the belief that some of the blood of the patron saint of Naples, 
Saint Januarius, liquefies regularly.

732 decrassify] remove the cress from, purify (a Blougoff neologism).

744 Pichet’s clever cut] The German philosopher (1762–1814) thought God an idea
created by man.

770 prizes] calls for 1855–63.

791 Scorts] mocks at.

819 natural religion] one based on natural things, not on revelation.

833 French book] possibly Balzac’s Physiology of Mutilation (R. N. Dodge in 
TLS, 21 March 1855, 176); probably Diderot’s Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville 

861] Men are not gods, but, properly, are brutes. 1855.

868 Poi’s man’s] 1855.

877 Pastor est tu Dominus] ‘The Lord is your shepherd’ (Latin). ‘The Lord is my
shepherd’ (Psalm xxiii, 1).

914 fettle] moulded.

915 Albanus] a few miles south-east of Rome, site of Roman ruins.

928 Aurecens] Greek lyric poet of the sixth century B.C.

938 this war] The Crimean War began in March 1854.

942 dragoon] coarse material,

953 Blackwood’s Magazine] the leading and powerful magazine.

947 Germans] German criticism of Shakespeare was dominant in much of the
nineteenth century.

951 WhiteCHAPEL] district in eastern London.
Dublin. Wiseman founded the Dublin Review in 1836; Brougham had helped to found (and contributed extensively to) the Edinburgh Review.

973-973 In partibus / Episcopos, nec non ‘Bishop in regions, and also’ (Latin). In 1830 Wiseman ceased to be titular Archbishop of Melitopoli in partibus infidelium (in unbelieving regions), and became Archbishop of Westminster.

979] not in 1855-68.

999 fence swordsmanship.

1014 The point of the line has been much disputed. Gigadbs has read the primary rather than the secondary sources? He has been studying the Gospels intensively? Reviled by people like Blugram, Gigadbs has fled (like the hero of Clough’s Bothia, 1846) to Australia? He has read an after-dinner speech in the last chapter of John of a kind very different from Blugram’s?

MEMORABILIA

First published as the last poem in the first volume of Men and Women on 10 November 1855, and included in ‘Lyrics’ in 1863. Later revisions were minor. The poem may have been written soon after the essay on Shelley was completed in late 1851. H. Reynolds gives a description and facsimile of what may be an early draft of the poem, titled ‘Incident in a Life’, in Christian Science Monitor, 17 September 1946.

One well-known account of the incident that probably led to the poem is that of W. G. Kingsland, who reports Browning as saying: ‘I was one day in the shop of Hodgson, the well-known London bookseller, when a stranger came in, who, in the course of conversation with the bookseller, spoke of something that Shelley had once said to him. Suddenly the stranger paused, and burst into laughter as he observed me staring at him with blanched face; and . . . I still vividly remember how strangely the presence of a man who had seen and spoken with Shelley affected me.’ A different account is, however, given in an unpublished letter of 30 March 1851 (now in the Foshheimer Library) to Buxton Forman. Here Browning writes that the man who saw Shelley plain was a composite of a bookseller whom Browning met only once and who happened to mention seeing the poet, and of a friend who was with Browning in the shop and was surprised by Browning’s amazement. DeVane (Handbook, 244) suggests a date of 1851 for the incident but gives no reasons; Browning wrote, however, that he was a boy at the time. Young Browning’s reverence for Shelley had diminished by 1855, and was profoundly affected when Browning later learned, probably in 1858, more biographical details. The Latin title of the poem means ‘Memorable things’.

9 minor. Browning wrote that it was imaginary.

10 certain. Not in 1855.

15 eagle-feather. Perhaps suggested by some such passage as this (from Shelley’s ‘Ode to Liberty’, 6–8): ‘My soul spurred the chains of its dismay, / And in the rapid plumes of song / Clothed itself, sublime and strong, / (As a young eagle soars the morning clouds among).’

ANDREA DEL SARTO

First published as the first poem of the second volume of Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863–88 it remained in ‘Men and Women’, now placed after its companion poem, ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’. Revisions after 1855 were minor. The word ‘Painter’ was added to the subtitile in proof.

The poem’s origin probably lies in the request by John Kenyon, the Browning’s friend, for a copy (not a photograph) of a painting in the Pitti Palace in Florence, then supposed to be del Sarto’s portrait of himself and his wife; it is now known to be two portraits joined together, no longer attributed to del Sarto, is not thought to depict the painter or his wife, and has been relegated to storage. Unable to get a copy of the painting, Browning instead sent the poem, which was probably written in 1855. Browning was generally familiar with the paintings of del Sarto (1486–1531), and the particular painting behind this poem is clearly a major source (a photograph of it faces page 200 in Griffin and Minchin, Life). As with ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, the main source is Vasari’s Lives of the Artists, which gives most of the facts, and supports the general tenor, of Browning’s poem (Vasari may have been Andrea’s pupil). Browning may have consulted Baldinucci’s Notezze, and may also be indebted to Mussi’s play André del Sarto (1833) — see B. Melchiori’s note in FP IV, 1966, 195–6. J. Markus has argued that the poem is influenced by the break-up of the marriage of Browning’s friend, the artist William Page, and Mrs Page in ‘Andrea del Sarto (Called ‘The Faithless Painter’)’ and William Page (Called ‘The American Titian’), B.S.I. II, 1974, 1–24.

Andrea was called ‘del Sarto’ because his father was a tailor, and ‘the Faithless Painter’ (Il Pittore senza Errari) because of his technique. He married the widowed Lucrezia in 1573; she often served as his model. In 1578–9 he was in the French court of Francis I. The poem is set in 1525, six years before Andrea died of the plague. Recent authorities see as valid Browning’s (and Vasari’s) basic judgement about Andrea, but generally see his treatment (one that twists Vasari’s materials at times) as being somewhat unfair (see D. B. MacCraith’s book on Browning’s ‘Libel’ in FP VIII, 1969, 61–4). Mrs Miller’s fancy, presented briefly in her biography (175–6), that the poem owes much to Browning’s feeling that his wife was stifling his genius is notorious.


15 Fiesole the hill-town just north-east of Florence.

35 common greyness according to modern scholars, not so much a characteristic of Andrea’s art as the effects of time and light.

57 cartoon sketch for a painting.

67 Someone Michelangelo.

83–4 My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: Words without thoughts never to heaven go (Hamlet III. 3.97–9). 93 Mortello mountain north of Florence.

96] not in 1855.

105 the Urbinate Raphael (1483–1520) was born at Urbino.

106 Vasari Giorgio Vasari (1512–44), main source for Browning’s poem, was introduced to Andrea by Michelangelo.
IN A YEAR
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1856 it joined its companion in ‘Lyrics’; after 1855 revisions were trifling. The date of writing is unknown.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE
First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. The Huntington proof shows the original title as ‘Opus Magistri Jacobi’. In 1856 the poem was included in ‘Lyrics’. After 1855 Browning revised the poem extensively but not very significantly. The poem may well have been begun in 1859, when the Brownings were excitedly collecting old pictures in Florence, but most of the work on it would seem to belong to the spring of 1853. Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* and Browning’s direct exposure to Italian art, and especially Florentine art, are the poem’s major sources.

Browning speaks here in his own person in a way not characteristic of most of his work. The poem expands on themes of perennial interest to him, especially on the ‘philosophy of the imperfect’ (so which the unfinished bell-tower of Giotto in the centre of Florence gives body).

3 aloe covered with aloe, a kind of lily (only example in this sense in *OED*),
15 bell-tower Giotto raised Giotto di Bondone (1267–1337), the greatest early Florentine artist, designed the campanile shortly before his death. Nearly a hundred yards high, it is generally regarded as the world’s most beautiful campanile, and as among the greatest examples of Gothic art. His plans included a spire which has never been placed on ‘Giotto’s Tower’.

38 in chief as my favourite spot.
39 chaffeur busker about price.
48 apos apes.
51 Michaels paintings by Michelangelo.
59 their work is all all their work is *Huntington proof*.
64 Delle Dello di Niccolo Delli was a minor fifteenth-century artist.
67 galls snails (Scotticisms).
69–72 Stefano ... Vasari Stefano Fiorentino (1301–50), pupil of Giotto, highly praised by Vasari, and known as the Ape of Nature for his realism. 
76 Sic transit ‘sic transit gloria mundi’: ‘thus passes the world’s glory’ (Latin).
84 fruttu ‘as fruit’ (Latin).
86 actual present.
92–2 Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there: / And Bring your own shortcomings there, / You 1855 (in *Huntington proof* the printed 1855 reading is changed in Browning’s hand to: Earth here rebuked by Olympus there – And).
96 Theseus mythical King of Athens, and Greek hero.
99 Son of Priam either Hector or Paris, both sons of the Trojan King. If Browning has specific works in mind, he may be thinking, as with Theseus, of representations on the Parthenon. One famous Greek sculpture depicted Paris as a kneeling archer.
101 Apollo The Greek god of poetry killed the Python when still a child.
102 Niobe The Queen of Thebes grieved because the gods killed all her children. The Uffizi has a Greek sculpture of her.
103 Racers’ frieze the Procession of Horsemen on the Parthenon frieze.
104 Alexander presumably Alexander the Great.
I132 NOTES, pp. 659–65

108 a mortal is the worst of all.
127 for our copy to be copied by us.
129 'A little leaven leaveth the whole lump' (Galatians v. 9).
135 O Giotto (the famous story is told by Vasari), asked for a sample of his skill by a Papal envoy, immediately drew with one stroke a perfect circle.
140 fray rub away.
150 quiddict quiddity: captious nicety in argument.
159 allocation formal address.
179 Nicola the Pisan early Italian sculptor and architect (c. 1225–c. 1284).
180 Cimabue Giovanni Cimabue (1240–1302), great early Italian painter, reputedly the teacher of Giotto.
182 Ghiberti Lorenzo Ghiberti (1386–1455), Florentine sculptor, best known for the 'Gate of Paradise', the eastern doors of Florence's Baptistery.
183 Ghirlandajo Domenico Bigordi or Ghirlandaio (1449–94), Florentine fresco painter and teacher of Michelangelo.
196 dree suffer (Scotticism or archaism).
201 Bigordi Ghirlandaio.
202 Sandro Botticelli (Alessandro del Filippio) (1444–1510), Florentine painter.
203 wronged Lippo Lippi, Filippo Lippi (1457–1504), son of Fra Filippo Lippi, painter, ‘wronged’ presumably either because paintings of his were attributed to others or because he was illegitimate.
204 Frà Angelico Florentine painter (1387–1455).
205 Taddeo Gaddi fourteenth-century Florentine painter, pupil of Giotto.
206 intomasco plaster background for fresco painting.
207 ferone the fourth-century saint, and a favourite subject for painters.
208 Lorenzo Monaco Florentine painter (c. 1370–c. 1425).
209–10 close red cap, My Pollajolo Antonio Pollaiuolo (c. 1432–98), Florentine artist, painted what Browning thought was a self-portrait in which the subject wears a ‘close red cap’. He is ‘twice a craftsman’ presumably because he turned from goldsmith’s work to painting.
211 hap chance.
212 muscular Christ Browning probably alludes to Pollaiuolo’s Christ at the Column, depicted on a panel owned by the Brownings.
215 Alessio Baldovinetti Florentine painter (1427–99).
217 Margherite of Arrezzo Margarito of Arrezzo, thirteenth-century Sienese painter, is treated with some disdain by Vasari, and by Mrs Browning in Casa Guidi Windows (1851).
218 barber biretta, a priest’s flat cap.
220 poll-crowned parrot ‘poll crowned like a parrot’ (a Henry IV II. 4.282).
226 inglish the only recorded usage in OED.
227 Their pictures] Works rot or Huntington proof.
230 Zeno founder of the Stoic philosophy.
232 Carlini a painting by Carlo Dolci (1616–85), Florentine painter.
236 tablet Browning in a letter of 1886 described this as ‘a famous “Last Supper”’ (page 213), 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, and was at once acquired by a stranger’.
237 Buonarroti Michelangelo.
241 San Spirito church in Florence.
242 Ognissanti church in Florence.
244 Detu amanti ‘It is to be given to one who loves it’ (Latin).

NOTES, pp. 663–5

245 Koh-i-noor ‘Mountain of Light’, the famous diamond given to Queen Victoria in 1849.
246 Gianschid a legendary Persien king, owner of a remarkable ruby.
247 Persian Saffi’s eye ‘Sofiy’ is the former title of Persian kings. In Byron’s Giaour (479), Soul, from Lelis’s eye, beams ‘bright as the jewel of Gianschid’.
251 Most Saint Gothard mountain in the Alps.
252 Radetzky Count Radetzky (1766–1858), Austrian general, was governor of Upper Italy (1849–55). He is the ‘dotard’ of line 449.
256 Moresco mountain north of Florence.
258 stone of Dante ‘the stone / Called Dante’s, a plain flat stone scarce discerned / From others in the pavement, — whereupon / He used to bring his quiet chair out, turned to Brunelleschi’s church, and pour alone / The lava of his spirit when it was burned’ (Mrs Browning, Casa Guidi Windows 1). She goes on to see it as a focal point for the exiled Dante’s thoughts of his city, and to say, ‘thy favourite stone’s elected right / As rest-place for the Tuscans to foresee / Their earliest charts from’.
259 Wiganmet governing council in Anglo-Saxon England.
260 Casa Guidi Mrs Browning’s long poem, Casa Guidi Windows (1851); it pressed the cause of Italian freedom.
261 good vides ante ‘which you may have seen before’ (Latin).
263 Lorraine The Austrian emperors were of the house of Habsburg-Lorraine.
264 Oggagna Andrea di Cione, fourteenth-century Florentine artist, generally known as Orcagna.
269 fructuous fruitful.
271 Chimera legendary fire-breathing monster.
274 issimo the superlative ending for Italian adjectives.
275 half-told tale of Cambuscan Chaucer’s unfinished ‘Squire’s Tale’: ‘Or call up him that left half told / The story of Cambuscan bold’ (Milton, ‘Il Penseroso’), 109–110.
276 alt to altissimo ‘high to highest’ (Italian).
277 beccaccia woodcock (Italian). The only recorded usage in OED.
279 brasca A braccio is an Italian measure of length, a cubit, or nearly two feet. Browning’s plans called for a fifty-braccia spire on the campanile.
285 ‘God and the People’ the motto of Mazzini.
286 tricolour The flag of Italy is green, white and red.
287–81 Why, to hail him, the vindicated Giotto? Thking God for it all, the first am I! Huntington proof; Foreseeing the day that vindicates Giotto? And Florence together, the first am I 1855.

IN A BALCONY
First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1869 it was included with ‘Tragedies and Other Plays’. In 1886 (and 1888) it was made independent, in both editions appearing in a volume with, but not as part of, ‘Dramatis Personae’. After 1855 it was extensively revised, an unusually large number of changes being made for 1888, but the total results are not of much significance. In 1855 the poem was in three parts (1–339, 340–605, 606–916). The divisions were permanently dropped in 1857, in which edition alone the title had ‘A Scene’ added to it.
In 1869 and 1889 Browning dates the play 1853, and indicates that it was written in Leghorn. The Brownings stayed there between July and October 1853, and the fairly successful revival of Columb’s Birthday in London in April 1853 may well have prompted further dramatic experiment. Though written as a closet drama, the
work has been staged several times. The plot and characters are Browning's own. It has been suggested that the contrasting views of Constance and Norbert as to the right approach to the Queen reflect those of Elizabeth Barrett and Browning as to their approach to Mr Barrett in 1846.

On the play, see P. G. Mudford, 'The Artistic Consistency of Browning's *In a Balcony*, VP VII, 1969, 31-40; and E. E. Stoll, 'Browning's *In a Balcony*, MLQ III, 1942, 407-17 (reprinted in his From Shakespeare to Joyce, Doubleday Doran, 1944, 328-38; and in Drew, Robert Browning, 178-88).

17 Hold you and have you 'to have and to hold' (marriage service).

106 dome mansion.

130 Rubens the great Flemish artist (1577-1640).

133 conceit concept.

134 Mother the Virgin Mary.

135 And so accepting life, abjure ourselves 1855; And so, accepting life, abjure ourselves. 1863-8.

238 plot turf 1855.

400 change give up in exchange.

411 smile check 1855-68.

412 baladine female public dancer.

422 halberd long-handled weapon with head combining spear-point and axe.

451 in intelligence mutually aware of the situation.

465 [lightning] cloud was 1855-68.

466 proved at 1855-68.

504 deceive - ah, whom? deceive myself? 1855-68.

513 The love, the passionate faith, the sacrifice, 1855-68.

514 Life-long, death-long The constancy 1855-68.

516 Triton merman-like sea-god.

603 God's moon love. (As moon reflects sun, so love reflects God.)

643 fire was crammed In that mere stone you struck 'fire' the light / Shows not till it be struck. (Tirion of Athens I. 12-3).

688 soul man 1855-68.

690 But bind in one and carry out their wills. 1855-68.

690 wound brain the new man 1855-68.

698 And whom they trust to find them out new ways 1855-68.

And who, they trust, shall find them out new ways 1863-8.

699 To unrivled heights To the new heights 1855; To heights as new as 1863-8.

707-10 The image is developed in 'Rabbi Ben Ezra', 145-92.

710 And consumption] In that uprising 1855.

711 human sense lower men 1855-68.

712 men they 1855; all 1863-8.

744 striking-horse something serving to drive one's intention.

746 constant The heroine's name is clearly used cunningly.

795 overcharge her part overact.

816 hazarded opened out 1855-68.

837 eye-flower Perhaps eyebright, the scarlet pimpernel.

919 The question as to what happens at the play's end has been much discussed. Browning himself said, 'The queen had a large and passionate temperament, which had only once been touched and brought into intense life. She would have died, had by a knife in her heart. The guard would have come to carry away her dead body.' And

he thought it might be well to add stage directions, 'and have it seen that they were carrying her [the queen] across the back of the stage.' (K. de K. Bronson, 'Browning in Venice', Century Magazine LXIII, 1902, 578).

SAUL

The first nine sections of 'Saul' were first published on 6 November 1845 in Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, with a note ('End of Part the First') to indicate that the poem was incomplete. The same sections, again unnumbered (though in manuscript the first nine were divided into four parts), were reprinted with some revisions in 1849. In both printings, each line of the final verse was printed as two lines (with the divisions in the obvious places). On 10 November 1855 when the completed poem was printed in Men and Women, 230 lines (the last ten sections) had been added, and the poem's length more than tripled; the first nine sections, and especially the last few lines of the ninth, had been extensively revised. In 1857, as in later printings, the verse paragraphs were numbered, and the long lines used. After 1857 punctuation revisions were extensive, verbal revisions few and insignificant. In 1865 the poem appeared in 'Lyrics'.

The fragment published in 1845 was probably written in that year: Browning later indicated that he re read Christopher Smart's *Song to David* (1765) in 1845 (he had first been impressed by it in 1827). On 3 May 1845 Browning told Miss Barrett that he would one day show her 'Saul'; by 27 August she had read it and urged its completion. Browning, however, could not finish it; and it would seem clear that he had not worked out his religious ideas in a way that would have allowed him to finish it. Thus he adopted Miss Barrett's suggestion of 9 September that he publish the fragment. When he later completed the poem is not known; Christmas Eve and Easter Day shows that by 1850 Browning's religious views were such as to make completion of 'Saul' possible. Thematically, 'Saul' has much in common with 'An Epistle... of Karshish', and 1853 seems a likely date for both poems.

The biblical source is I Samuel xi.14-23. Smart's *Song to David*, as Browning says in his 'Parleying with Christopher Smart', led him in 1845 to other of Smart's works including the preface in which Smart writes of the 'fine subject' suggested to him of 'David's playing to King Saul when he was troubled with the evil spirit'. The story was well known to the nineteenth century and other sources have been suggested, including a letter of Wordsworth published in 1837 which may have influenced the arguments for a future life in sections XV-XVIII (see M. M. Bevington, *VNL* 20, 1961, 19-21). The only other significant and demonstrable source is, however, Thomas Wyatt's *Seven Penitential Psalms*, especially important in its influence on the structure of 'Saul' (see J. A. S. McFee, 'The Shaping of Saul', *JEGP* XXIV, 1945, 390-400). Other important treatments include: E. Bienz, 'The Ongoing Testament in Browning's "Saul"', *TQ* XLIII, 1974, 145-68; A. W. Crawford, 'Browning's "Saul"', *Queen's Quarterly* XXXXIV, 1947, 448-54; C. Dahl and J. L. Baur, 'Browning's "Saul"' and the Fourfold Vision: A Neoplatonic-Hermetic Approach', *BIS* III, 1975, 101-18; W. Hellstrom, 'Time and Type in Browning's "Saul"', *ELH* XXXIII, 1966, 370-89; King, *The Bow and the Lyre*, 100-123; W. D. Shaw, 'The Analogue Argument of Browning's "Saul"', *VP* II, 1964, 277-82.

The poem was a favourite of the Pre-Raphaelites, and of Browning, who, asked to name four representative poems of moderate length, selected 'Saul' as one of two lyrics. Miss Barrett also admired it; without exception, Browning changed passages she criticized (see New Poems, 155-9), in most cases adopting her suggested change (as indicated in notes that follow).
And ambition that sees a sun lead it[ - 1849]  
> Oh, all of these - all  
Combine to unite in one creature  
> Saul i 825-9.  
100 Extract feels high tension.  
101 cherubim-chariot Ezekiel x 3-17.  
162 inconsciss unconsious (rare).  
179 First King Saul was the first king of Israel.  
188 paper-reefs plants from which papyrus is made.  
200 last] that 1855.  
203 Hebron mountain and city south of Jerusalem, the home of David.  
204 Kidron brook or gully near Jerusalem.  
204-5 retrieve/Slow the damage probably influenced by Horace, Odes IV, vii, 73; see J. C. Maxwell in VP III, 1965, 144.  
213 error Saul had disobeyed God (1 Samuel xv).  
245 Wisdom wisdom 1855.  
291 Sakkoth house or armies.  
292 not] not in 1855.  
327 held breath] new we 1855-63.  

'DE GUSTIBUS-'  
First published in Lm and Wom on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in  
'Lyrics'. After 1855 revisions were minor. The date of composition is unknown. The  
title is from the Latin proverb, 'De gustibus non est disputandum': 'About tastes  
there's no arguing' (not 'There's no accounting for tastes').  

4 roundup field of grain (English usage, not North American).  
35 king Ferdinand II, the Bourbon King of the Two Sicilies (King 'Bomba').  
36 liver-wing right arm.  
40 Queen Mary's saying 'When I am dead and opened, you shall find 'Calais'  
lying in my heart.' (The saying, known to every English schoolboy, referred to her  
grief at the loss of Calais, last British possession in France, in 1558, just before Mary  
Tudor's death.)  
46 shall ever] it still shall 1855. Browning left Italy for England in 1861.  

WOMEN AND ROSES  
First published in Lm and Wom on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in  
'Lyrics'. After 1855 there were eight verbal changes, and a few in punctuation. The  
date of composition is uncertain despite the precision of DeVane's invention (Hand-  
book, 299) of January 1852, a date not supported by any evidence and contradicted  
by some. The evidence for dating is contradictory (see J. Huebenthal's note in VP  
IV, 1966, 52-4). Late in 1857 Browning is reported to have said, 'One year in  
Florence I had been rather lazy; I resolved that I would write something every day.  
Well, the first day I wrote about some roses, suggested by a magnificent basket that  
some one had sent my wife. The next day Childe Roland came upon me as a kind of  
dream' (Whiting, The Brownings, 261). In 1866, however, Browning said he wrote  
'Childe Roland' in Paris; if so, 'Women and Roses' belongs to January 1852. On
balance, 1853 seems the likely date, a day before 'Childe Roland'. There is no support for the frequently made statement (see De Vane, Handbook, 259) that this poem records a vivid (or any other kind of) dream. What is sure is that the meaning of the poem has occasioned dispute, and that (like many other poems of Browning) it is most uncharacteristic of its author. On it, see Cook, Browning's Lyrics, 181-92; L. Puton III, "A Novel Grace and a Beauty Strange": Browning’s ‘Women and Roses’, BSN IV, No. 3, 1974, 15-17; G. Tillotson, ‘A Word for Browning’, Sevens Review LXVII, 1984, 389-97.

15 unimpeached unentangled.

PROTUS

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1853 the poem was included in 'Romances'. After 1855 revisions were trilling. The date of writing is unknown, but the poem may date from the Browning's visit to Rome from December 1853 to May 1854. The characters are imaginary. Browning is, of course, casting an ironic eye on later Roman emperors.

2 Half-emperors and quarter-emperors After 285 there were usually two or more emperors.

4 Loric and low-browed Gorgon The Roman loric (Browning Anglicizes the word) was a leather cuirass. The breast is decorated with a Gorgon's head, low-browed because of the snaky hair designed to petrify opponents.

9 god Augustus, first Roman emperor, was deified in a.d. 14.

10 porphyry a hard richly coloured rock.

Byzant Byzantium, the site of the new capital of the Roman Empire after 330.

Pannonian from the Roman province south and west of the Danube.

49-50 hunting-stables...dog's Pannonia was famous for its hunting-dogs.

Thrace Roman province in the eastern Balkans.

HOLY-CROSS DAY

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in 'Romances'. Revisions after 1855 were trilling. As with 'Protus', it seems reasonable to assume that the poem is a product of the Browning's stay in Rome, December 1853 to May 1854.

Holy Cross Day is 14 September, but in fact the sermons were not annual but frequent events. They were introduced by Pope Gregory XIII in 1574 and abolished by Pope Gregory XVI in 1836 ('Pope Gregory XVI' in the final note of the poem read 'The present Pope' in 1853). Evelyn's Diary for 7 January 1645 records the Jews' sitting at the sermon 'with so much malice in their countenances, spitting, coughing, humming, and motion, that it is almost impossible they should hear a word from the preacher' - the passage may have suggested the spirit of the opening of Browning's poem, and the 'quotation' from the Secretary's Diary, which is, of course, by Browning. The concluding stanzas are often said to have been based on the Song of Death of Rabbi Ben Ezra (1092-1167), but the supposed Song is probably Browning's invention. On the poem see B. Melchiori, Browning's Poetry of Reticence, 90-113.

Epigraph 3-5 crumb...dogs Matthew xv 22-7.

Epigraph 8 "Compel them to come in" Luke xiv 23.

NOTES, PP. 706-10

1 Foe, fam, fam possibly an echo of the Giant in stories of Jack the Giant-killer; in some versions the Giant goes on to smell the blood of a Christian man.

2 Bubble and squeal a mixture of meat and cabbage which, in England, masquerades as food.

3 Blessed Thursday presumably the Thursday before Lent.

4 Smug and gruff smooth and rough.

10 Handel use first.

18 Shaving-shears To be shaved (see line 41) is to display one's conversion.

20 Acrux full of acorns 'full-armed boar' (Cymbeline II, 5.16).

22 Hour-glass to time the sermon.

23 Chine backbone.

24 Laps folds of skin.

29 Quotha forsooth.

31 Doomed black dozen the 'converts'.

32 Cog...eaten cheat...rick.

38 From a Jew you may to a Turk move some way up the scale of Christian regard.

52 Corso then the main street of Rome.

66 Ben Ezra's Song of Death Ben Ezra was the Spanish Jew and scholar (1092-1167) whom Browning used as a spokesman in 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' (1864). The Song of Death that follows is in all probability not a translation but original Browning. In 1888 Browning wrote to Furnivall: 'in Holy Cross Day, Ben Ezra is not supposed to acknowledge Christ as the Messiah because he returns to the obvious argument "even on your own showing, and accepting for the moment the authority of your accepted Lawgiver, you are condemned by His precepts - let alone ours"' (Hood, Letters, 287-8).

73-8 'For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land; and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob' (Isaiah xiv 1).

83-90 Mark xiii 32-7.

91 He Jesus.

104 Barabbas the murderer whom Pilate released after giving the mob their choice between Barabbas and Jesus.

111 Ghettothe area to which Jews were confined (Borghetto is Italian for 'little town').

120 Pleasant Land Jeremiah iii 19.

THE GUARDIAN-ANGEL

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. Revisions after 1855 were trilling. The poem was written in Ancona in the last week of July 1858, when the Browning's had just seen what Mrs Browning called a 'divine picture' in the Church of San Agostino in Fano, the town a few miles north of Ancona on the east coast of Italy. Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (1591-1666), Guercino ('Squinter'), was a Bolognese artist of some distinction; Browning's initial enthusiasm for his picture at Fano would seem later to have moderated. (A photograph of The Guardian-Angel faces page 166 in Griffin and Minchin's Life.) Browning had seen his work in England, at Dulwich, with his old friend Alfred Domett, whom he addresses in the poem. This is the only poem of Browning's known to have been written in the first three years of his marriage.

2 Child In the painting, the Angel guards a young child standing on a tomb.
4 performed thy special ministry "performs its secret ministry" (Coleridge, "Frost at Midnight"), (1).
18 bird of God Dante, Purgatorio vi, 58 (and elsewhere).
33-5 Browning may be recalling the last lines of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.
40 'The world was all before them' (Milton, Paradise Lost XII, 146).
46 My angel Mrs Browning.
51 wrong perhaps a reference to hostile remarks about Guercino in Ruskin's Modern Painters, and for a book by the Browning's friend, Mrs Jameson, about one of which they had commented on the first visit.
55 Wairau river in New Zealand, where Alfred Domett had gone.

CLEON

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In later collections it stayed in 'Men and Women'. Revisions after 1855 were stilling. The poem is a companion to 'A Sonnet ... of Karshish', and would seem to have been written after it; its date may well be 1854. It has affinities with Arnold's Empedocles on Etna, which had been published in 1852 but withdrawn in 1853; in 1857 it was reprinted at the request of Browning. Browning's epigraph comes from Acts xvii 28: 'For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.' Cleon and Protus are fictional; the time of the poem is about A.D. 52.


1 sprinkled isles probably the Sporades: scattered islands in the Aegean Sea. In Pauline 231, "clustered isles" (probably the Cyclades) are referred to.
4 Tyranny The word is used in its Greek sense as a description of a kind of rule, and without its modern implications.
14 settle-down flock settling down (OED describes it as a nonce word).
15 crocus saffron.
16 sea-wools wool dyed with sea-purple.
43 requirement request, inquiry.
47 epis . . . plates epic poem . . . tablets.
51 sun-god on the plains statue of Apollo on the lighthouse.
53 Pecile the painted Pecile at Athens.
60 modes modes (types of musical scale).
83 rhomb rhombus, equilateral parallelogram.
84 lozenge diamond-shaped figure.

trapezoid trapezium (British usage), four-sided figure without any parallel sides.
132 suave . . . salue sweet . . . wild plum.
138 soul Cleon uses the word in a sense lacking in spirituality and therefore ironic to Christian readers, to mean, roughly, 'inner essence' or 'consciousness'.
140 Terpander seventh-century B.C. founder of Greek music.
141 Phidas and his friend the Greek sculptor of the fifth century B.C., and (probably) Pericles, the great Athenian statesman, or (possibly) Polygnotus, the painter.
151 man, her last, man had yet 1854-63.

NOTES, PP. 712-22

212 intro-active internally active; apparently a neologism.
224 sense of sense analytic self-consciousness.
226 unconscious unconscious (rare).
324 pleasure-house "I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house" (Tennyson, 'The Palace of Art', 1). Browning is probably thinking of Tennyson's isolated 'soul' in the lines that follow.
424 climb climbed (archaic form).
426 reciprocity receptivity.
429 skills avails (archaism).
525 Naisid (statue of a) water-nymph.
528 boot use (archaism).
527-535 In replying to Protus' suggestion about a kind of immortality, Cleon would seem to be replying also to the widely held views of the Utilitarians and Comtists in Victorian England.
528 Phoebus Apollo, god of the sun and poetry.
534 Sappho Greek lyric poet of the seventh century B.C.
535 prion sweet 1855.
538 fly butterfly (emblem of the soul).
533 wants lacks - but perhaps used ambiguously here.
540 Paulus Saint Paul.

THE TWINS

First published in a small pamphlet, Two Poems, with Mrs Browning's 'A Plea for the Ragged Schools of London', on or about 19 April 1854. The pamphlet was sold at a bazaar to raise money for a 'refuge for young destitute girls'; the poems were a response to a request from Arabell Barrett (see DeVane and Knickerbocker, New Letters, 70-71). In 1854 the poem is dated 30 March 1854. With one verbal change and a few revisions in punctuation, it was reprinted in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in 'Romances'. The manuscript is in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

The story is an old one, but Browning found it in Luther's Table-Talk, where it illustrates "Give, and it shall be given unto you' (Luke vi 38; in the Vulgate, 'Date, et dabitur vobis').
24 help joins MS., 1854.
28 Luther said not in the parable. Luther remarks later in Table-Talk that angels perform tasks that even mendicants would not.

POPULARITY

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in 'Lyrics'. After 1855 there were a few verbal and punctuational changes. The date of composition is unknown, but the poem may possibly have been prompted by Milnes's Life, Letters, and Literary Remains of John Keats (1848). The subject of the poem has generally been taken to be John Keats, an identification perhaps made difficult by the use of the third person in the poem's final line after the poet has been addressed in the other sixty-four lines in the second person. B. Worsfold, in his edition of Men and Women (II, 113) proposed Alfred Domett, a suggestion endorsed by Drew, Poetry of Browning, 84-5. In a valuable note (VP I, 1963, 65-6), R. D. Altick persuasively argues that the poet addressed is 'a projection of Browning-him-
The poem's hero (mistakenly called 'John' in the interlude itself) is Jacques du Bourg-Molay, last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, an order which, during the Crusades, had exercised enormous power and acquired great wealth. The order was repressed by Philip IV of France with the support of Pope Clement V; the Grand Master was tortured in prison into confession, and finally burned in Paris, in March 1314.

3 Saint Paul an error; the Abbot paraphrases James i 17.
8, 9 plagal-cadence a cadence in which the subdominant chord immediately precedes the tonic. The cadence is a closing one.
12 Aladdin The gentleman never existed.
13 Saladin The Sultan died fifty years before Jacques was born.
17, 18 clavicembali early keyboard instrument.
22 bane bundles of brushwood.
29 Billets short thick sticks of firewood.
32 cleft furry
35 Landes, a Church service including psalms of praise.
36 Lux Dom Praise to God (Latin).
42 threat threaten (archaism).
48 Salut reverentia 'a saving reverence' (Latin); that is, a bow or genuflection is called for.
60 Sharon's rose Song of Solomon i 1.
64 Ismene lover.
75 Anther pollen-bearing part of a stamen.

TWO IN THE CAMPAGNA

First published in Men and Women on 10 November 1855. In 1865 it was included in 'Lyrics'. The poem was virtually unchanged after 1855. It was probably written in May 1854, a month in which the Brownings spent what Mrs Browning called 'some exquisite hours on the Campagna'. The countryside around Rome is also featured in 'Love Among the Ruins'. Among essays are: R. D. Altick, 'Lovers' Finiteness: Browning's "Two in the Campagna", Papers on Language and Literature III, 1967, 75-80; Cook, Browning's Lyrics, 149-61.

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A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in *Romances*. There were a few minor revisions after 1855. The date of composition is unknown. There has been much discussion as to whether the grammarian is praised or satirised. A page in Browning's autograph was lost with the last twelve lines in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, dated 1 November 1866; headed 'In memoriam Johannis Conington', it would indicate that—in the very least—Browning did not mean the poem to be satire at all (John Conington was the industrious Oxford scholar, 1825–69). Many models for the grammarian have been presented, among them Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614), Thomas Linacre (c. 1480–1524), the sixteenth-century German physician Jacobus Milichius, and Erasmus himself (1466–1536) — no case as yet is convincing. The poem seems to be intended for form, and in part subject, to an obscure poem by John Davies of Hereford of about 1610, 'Invention's Life, Death, and Funeral'.


3 crofts small farms, or small fields.
7 thorpes country villages.
14 sepulture burial.
22 warning the signal to begin.
50 crowned him donned the symbol of academic life.
86 Calculus gallstones.
88 Tussis bronchial coughing.
95 hydroptic excessively thirsty.
120 Misses an unit misses by only a unit.
127 rattles death-rattle.
129 Hoti 'that' (Greek particle).
130 Own 'then' (Greek particle).
131 enclisis De 'towards' (Greek suffix). Browning wrote to Tennyson in 1863 that he wanted his grammarian working on 'the biggest of the littlenesses'.
132 waist running on 'waste'.
134 potions haunts.

ONE WAY OF LOVE

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included in *Romances*. After 1855 there were minor changes in punctuation only. The date of composition is unknown.

ANOTHER WAY OF LOVE

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 it was included with its companion in *Lyrics*. After 1855 there were minor revisions. The date of composition is unknown.

37 Clear scores settle accounts.
39 Eadem semper 'always the same' (Latin).
41 mend improve.
43 And stop the fresh film-work! To stop the fresh spinning 1852; And stop the fresh spinning 1863.
45 film-work cobweb.

'TRANSCENDENTALISM: A POEM IN TWELVE BOOKS'

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. It later remained in 'Men and Women' as the first poem, presumably designed as prefatory to a group for which its subject-matter otherwise scarcely qualifies it. There were more revisions after 1855. The date of composition may well be 1853, when the Brownings were reading Swedenborg, who was interested in Boehme. Inevitably, various models, including Wordsworth, have been suggested for the 'prosy poet chastised in this poem'; R. D. Altick suggests that Browning is chastising the earlier Browning (and that he is indebted to Carlyle): 'Browning's "Transcendentalism"'; *JEB* LVIII, 1959, 24–8.

4 dragging them in sights and sounds 'I am writing—a first step towards popularity for me—lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see' (Browning to his friend J. Milnes, 24 February 1853).
6 proliusion prologue or preliminary flourish.
12 Suisse tube alpenhorn.
22 German] Swedish 1855–67 (Edward Dowden suggested the correction in 1866).
24 Boehme Jacob Boehme (1575–1624), the German shoemaker and mystic. It was probably in a translation of 1664 of Boehme's *Works* that Browning read about Boehme's communion with 'the Herbs and Grass of the field', when 'in his inward Light he saw into their Essences, Use and Properties'. What, if any, particular 'tough book' (line 30) Browning may have had in mind is not known, but the context suggests *De Signatura Rerum*.
26 the daisy had an eye 'Daisy' means 'day's eye'.
37–8 John of Halberstadt was an obscure German canon of the fifteenth century, whose name Browning would have met in *Wayside's Wonders of the Little World*, a favourite childhood book. There he is remarkable chiefly for being turned into a black horse, and is said to have performed a number of prestigous feats almost incredible. His skill with rose-growing is apparently Browning's invention.
48 showed] did 1855–65.
49 finer thinner. The harp's higher notes come from thinner strings placed nearest the harpist's head.

MISCONCEPTIONS

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. In 1863 the poem was included in *Lyrics*. After 1855 the only changes were in indentation. The date of composition is unknown.

11 dalmatic royal coronation robe.

ONE WORD MORE

First published in *Men and Women* on 10 November 1855. Later it remained with the collection, with a note to explain that it had originally been appended to the larger
collection bearing that title. Changes after 1855 were minor. The printer's manuscript is in the Pierpont Morgan Library; there the poem is called 'A Last Word' to E.B.B. In changing the title, Browning probably was mindful of the unfortunate echo of 'A Woman's Last Word'; in choosing the new one, he may well have thought of his wife's remark in a letter of 31 August 1845 as she discouraged his love: 'Therefore we must leave this subject – and I must trust you to leave it without one word more.' Between manuscript and 1855 there were many revisions, which were clearly made in proof. The poem, a favourite of all lovers of the Browning's, was written in London while the other poems of Men and Women were in the printer's hands; the manuscript dates the poem 22 September 1855. It seems altogether probable that Browning wished to dedicate the collection to his wife (especially after her Sonnets from the Portuguese, first published in 1850), and that 'One Word More' stemmed from his thinking about an appropriate form for the dedication. Browning stressed the unusually intense personal nature of the poem by signing it 'R.B.' in editions after 1855 (after his wife's death). On the poem, see Cook, Browning's Lyrics, 229–38.

1 fifty The poem is the fifty-first in Men and Women.

4 Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also. 'where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Matthew vi 21). The line is echoed in 142.

5 lítra is MS.

6 Rafael made a century of sonnets Browning was long said to have erred here. But Baldiniacci, Notizie (used elsewhere by Browning), refers to 'the famous book of a hundred sonnets from the hand of Raphael, which Guido had bought in Rome' (P. Page, TLS, 25 May 1945, 255). Raphael, the great Italian painter (1483–1520), was a special favourite of Browning's.

9–10 but one...Who that one! one eye...Whose that eye cancelled MS. readings. (Did Browning recall his wife's earlier strictures against his reference to a single eye in 'The Flower's Name', 16?)

12 lady of the sonnets probably the reputed model, whose name may have been Margherita, for some of Raphael's paintings, including La Fornarina. Baldiniacci refers to a mistress whom Raphael 'loved until his death', and Vasari also records the devotion.

22 San Sisto the Sistine Madonna at Dresden.

23 the Madonna del Granduca in the Pitti Palace, Florence.

24–5 La Belle Jardinière in the Louvre, Paris. The upper part of the picture is semi-circular.

27 Guido Reni Bolognese painter (1575–1642). Baldiniacci records that Raphael's sonnets disappeared at the time of Reni's death.

28 Guarded long Laid away MS. with it MS.

32 On the first anniversary of Beatrice's death, Dante wrote, 'I was drawing an angel upon my tablet. ... I turned my eyes and saw at my side certain people of importance' (Vita Nuova, xxxv). Beatrice (abbreviated 'Bie') is Dante's platonic love and heroine in the Divine Comedy and the Vita Nuova.

35 pen corroded The phrase and the following lines refer to Dante's attacks on enemies in Inferno (probably begun, in fact, about ten years after Beatrice's death).

37 Inferno xxxii, 97–104.

42 who loved well? the who loved MS.

46 Sec 321.

48–9 The points about seizing and stopping are Browning's, not Dante's.

54 love and Beatrice heaven and on Bice cancelled MS. reading.

58 The one line formed section VIII in MS. and 1855.

60 for one but once MS.

64 one time, art? time, an art MS.

65 Ay.] Out MS.

72 Gain] Save MS.

73 Wherefore? Heaven's] Ah, – for heaven's MS.

74 he who unites the rock Moses. Exodus xvii 6; Numbers xx 11.

77 but [his MS. 1855–63].

82 [smiled] MS.

85 actual present (the usual meaning in Browning).

89,90 Make precipitate or more retarding cancelled MS. reading.

95 The children of Israel 'murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness' and 'said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots' (Exodus xvi 2–3). 97–8 While Moses was in a 'clift' of Mount Sinai, God showed him His glory (Exodus xxxiii 17–23). His face shone as he returned with the Ten Commandments (Exodus xxxiv 30).

98 rod-sweep, tongue's imperial flat] rod-sweep and tongue's regal flat MS.

102 Jethro's daughter Zipporah, wife of Moses (Exodus ii 21, iii 1).

102 Aethingian bondslave wife of Moses (Numbers xii 1).

103 He would Why – he'd MS.

119 these lines] this verse MS.

120 Only in 'One Word More' did Browning use unhymed trochaic pentameter. Lines] Verse MS.

121 a hair] an oil MS.

125 misall-share margin of a prayer-book.

130 Karshik] Karshook MS., 1855–68. The error was first corrected in the Tauchnitz edition of 1872, and then in later reprints of 1868. 'Ben Karshook's Wisdom' had been written in April 1854, but was not published until 1856; presumably Browning simply confused names. In 'The Return of the Druses' (1843), one of the Druses is called Karshook.

Nörkert the hero of 'In a Balcony'.

142 lies] is MS. (Compare 4 and note.)

146 thrice-transfigured perhaps new, full, and waning; perhaps Browning alludes to the (roughly) three lunar months that have passed between the Browning's departure from Florence and the writing of the poem.

148 Fiesole small hill-town a few miles north-east of Florence.

150 San Miniato San Miniato: a church on a hill south-east of Florence.

151 Round] Round MS.

160 mythot he story of the love of Diana, the moon goddess, for Endymion.

162 Zoroaster on his terrace Zoroaster (Zarathustra), sixth-century? religious figure and astronomer. The ziggurat was a terraced temple tower pyramidal in form with extensive terrace space at each storey.

164 Galileo on his turret The leading Renaissance scientist (1564–1642) made discoveries about the moon. The 'turret' is probably the Leaning Tower of Pisa from which Galileo conducted experiments.

165 Homer The Homerica Hymns (translated by Shelley) include one addressed to the moon.

Keats Keats told the story of Endymion (1818), which includes an invocation to the moon (iii 40–71).

NOTES, pp. 739–42
JAMES LEE'S WIFE

James Lee's work was first published in Dramatis Personae on 28 May 1864. The first six stanzas of VI had appeared in the Monthly Repository, n.s. X, May 1836, 270–71, called 'Lines' and signed 'Z'. Browning's regular pseudonym for contributions to the journal. The whole section had appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for June 1864, published a few days before Dramatis Personae. The text (two section-titles excepted) was not revised for the second edition, but there were minor revisions and very substantial additions in 1868, in which the final text was virtually established. The poem's title was changed to James Lee's Wife in 1868. Two section titles were changed: I (originally 'At the Window'), and VI (originally 'Under the Cliff') were given their final titles in the second edition. In the manuscript there are no titles, the sections being merely numbered; Browning made many revisions in proof. On 31 December 1864 the poet wrote, somewhat misleadingly, 'I misled you into thinking the couple were 'proletaire'—but I meant them for just the opposite—people newly-married, trying to realize a dream of being sufficient to each other, in a foreign land (where you can try such an experiment) and finding it break up,--the man being tired first,—and tired precisely of the love:—but I have expressed it all insufficiently, and will break the chain, one day, and leaves so many separate little round rings to roll each its way, if it can' (Curle, Robert Browning and Folia Wedgwood, 123).

It is almost certain that most of the poem was written in southern Britain, where Browning spent the summers of 1852 and 1863, staying near Parnie in Sainte Marie, then a sea-coast hamlet (the view from the house provided the fig-tree and field of III as well as the doorway). Most of the poem was probably composed in 1862, and the mood doubtless reflects a frequent one of Browning himself at the time. The poem may also reflect the general influence of Meredith's Modern Love and Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn (both published in April 1862); and, especially in V, of Tennyson's Maud.


21,2 Title 'By the Fire-Side' is the title of a poem in Men and Women.

172–9 Proves she as when Moses climbed the mountain, Saw the paved-work of a stone, a sapphire, MS.

Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: And they saw the God of Israel and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink! (Exodus xxiv 9–11).

when if MS.

192,3 Seeing mine with all the eyes—our wonder, MS.

197 silence beauty MS.

198–201 part of the preceding section in MS, not a separate section.

Dramatis Personae

Dramatis Personae, with its eighteen poems, was first published on 28 May 1864 by Chapman and Hall. Thirty lines of 'James Lee' had been published in 1836, and 'May and Death' in 1857. With these exceptions, the poems were new, though 'Proprise' and the sixth section of 'James Lee' had appeared a few days before in the Atlantic Monthly, and 'Gold Hair' a month or so before in the same journal. A second printing was called for, and the revised second edition was published later in 1864. Two brief occasional poems, 'Deaf and Dumb' and 'Eurydice to Orpheus', were added to Dramatis Personae when it appeared with substantial revisions in 1868. Further revisions for 1888 were trifling. The title of course means 'Persons of the Drama' and is the Latin phrase often prefixed to the names of plays' characters. Browning appears to have written very little in the years four or so after the publication of Men and Women. In May 1860 Mrs Browning reported: 'he has been writing a good deal this winter—working at a long poem which I have not seen a line of, and producing short lyrics which I have seen, and may declare worthy of him'. Nevertheless, for a poet as productive as Browning could be, the winter of 1859–60 seems to have produced little, and the next eighteen months or so virtually nothing. In March 1861 Mrs Browning optimistically wrote of her husband's plans for working on a new volume in the summer, but her death on 29 June further delayed progress. Browning planned a volume for April or May in 1863, but publication of Dramatis Personae was held back so as not to interfere with the collected edition of 1863 (the first Selectious published in the same year also sold well). In the meantime Browning added further work to the volume that appeared in 1864. The printers' manuscript, very clean except for 'Mr Sludge', is in the Pierpont Morgan Library, and a proof-copy with extensive corrections, which were incorporated in the published text, is in the Beinecke Library of Yale University.

Except for the rather special case of A Blot in the Book (1843), Dramatis Personae was Browning's first work to go into a second edition. For him, sales were reasonably good; Browning, in his fifties, was beginning to attract a fair number of readers. In 1866, however, Chapman and Hall still had 550 copies on hand.

There is only one twentieth-century edition of significance, that of F. B. Pinion (1966); its text is based substantially on the first edition. A brief essay on the volume as a whole is L. Poston III, Loss and Gain: An Essay on Browning's 'Dramatis Personae', University of Nebraska, 1974.