The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1 of 2) eBook

The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1 of 2) by Frederic G. Kenyon

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Portrait of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. *Frontispiece Casa Guidi*

The letters
of
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

CHAPTER I

1806-1835

Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, still better known to the world as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, was born on March 6, 1806, the eldest child of Edward and Mary Moulton Barrett. I Both the date and place of her birth have been matters of uncertainty and dispute, and even so trustworthy an authority as the ‘Dictionary of National Biography’ is inaccurate with respect to them. All doubt has, however, been set at rest by the discovery of the entry of her birth in the parish register of Kelloe Church, in the county of Durham.[2] She was born at Coxhoe Hall, the residence of Mr. Barrett’s only brother, Samuel, about five miles south of the city of Durham. Her father, whose name was originally Edward Barrett Moulton, had assumed the additional surname of Barrett on the death of his maternal grandfather, to whose estates in Jamaica he was the heir. Of Mr. Barrett it is recorded by Mr. Browning, in the notes prefixed by him to the collected edition of his wife’s poems, that ’on the early death of his father he was brought from Jamaica to England when a very young child, as a ward of the late Chief Baron Lord Abinger, then Mr. Scarlett, whom he frequently accompanied in his post-chaise when on circuit. He was sent to Harrow, but received there so savage a punishment for a supposed offence (burning the toast)’—which, indeed, has been a ‘supposed offence’ at other schools than Harrow—’by the youth whose fag he had become, that he was withdrawn from the school by his mother, and the delinquent was expelled. At the age of sixteen he was

sent by Mr. Scarlett to Cambridge, and thence, for an early marriage, went to Northumberland.’ His wife was Miss Mary Graham-Clarke, daughter of J. Graham-Clarke, of Fenham Hall, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, but of her nothing seems to be known, and her comparatively early death causes her to be little heard of in the record of her daughter’s life.

[Footnote 2: See *Notes and Queries* for July 20, 1889, supplemented by a note from Mr. Browning himself in the same paper on August 24.]

Nothing is to be gained by trying to trace back the genealogy of the Barrett family, and it need merely be noted that it had been connected for some generations with the island of Jamaica, and owned considerable estates there.[3] It is a curious coincidence that Robert Browning was likewise in part of West Indian descent, and so, too, was John Kenyon, the lifelong friend of both, by whose means the poet and poetess were first introduced to one another.

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[Footnote 3: These estates still remain in the family, and Mr. Charles Barrett, the eldest surviving brother of Mrs. Browning, now lives there.]

The family of Mr. Edward Barrett was a fairly large one, consisting, besides Elizabeth, of two daughters, Henrietta and Arabel, and eight sons—Edward, whose tragic death at Torquay saddened so much of his sister's life, Charles (the 'Stormie' of the letters), Samuel, George, Henry, Alfred, Septimus, and Octavius; Mr. Barrett's inventiveness having apparently given out with the last two members of his family, reducing him to the primitive method of simple enumeration, an enumeration in which, it may be observed, the daughters counted for nothing. Not many of these, however, can have been born at Coxhoe; for while Elizabeth was still an infant—apparently about the beginning of the year 1809—Mr. Barrett removed to his newly purchased estate of Hope End, in Herefordshire, among the Malvern hills, and only a few miles from Malvern itself. It is to Hope End that the admirers of Mrs. Browning must look as the real home of her childhood and youth. Here she spent her first twenty years of conscious life. Here is the scene of the childish reminiscences which are to be found among her earlier poems, of 'Hector in the Garden,' 'The Lost Bower,' and 'The Deserted Garden.' And here too her earliest verses were written, and the foundations laid of that omnivorous reading of literature of all sorts and kinds, which was so strong a characteristic of her tastes and leanings.

On this subject she may be left to tell her own tale. In a letter written on October 5, 1843, to Mr. R.H. Horne, she furnishes him with the following biographical details for his study of her in 'The New Spirit of the Age.' They supply us with nearly all that we know of her early life and writings.

'And then as to stories, my story amounts to the knife-grinder's, with nothing at all for a catastrophe. A bird in a cage would have as good a story, Most of my events, and nearly all my intense pleasures, have passed in my *thoughts*. I wrote verses—as I dare say many have done who never wrote any poems—very early; at eight years old and earlier. But, what is less common, the early fancy turned into a will, and remained with me, and from that day to this, poetry has been a distinct object with me—an object to read, think, and live for. And I could make you laugh, although you could not make the public laugh, by the narrative of nascent odes, epics, and didactics crying aloud on obsolete muses from childish lips. The Greeks were my demi-gods, and haunted me out of Pope's Homer, until I dreamt more of Agamemnon than of Moses the black pony. And thus my great "epic" of eleven or twelve years old, in four books, and called "The Battle of Marathon," and of which fifty copies were printed because papa was bent upon spoiling me—is Pope's Homer done over again, or rather undone; for, although a curious production for a child, it gives evidence

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only of an imitative faculty and an ear, and a good deal of reading in a peculiar direction. The love of Pope's Homer threw me into Pope on one side and into Greek on the other, and into Latin as a help to Greek—and the influence of all these tendencies is manifest so long afterwards as in my "Essay on Mind," a didactic poem written when I was seventeen or eighteen, and long repented of as worthy of all repentance. The poem is imitative in its form, yet is not without traces of an individual thinking and feeling—the bird pecks through the shell in it. With this it has a pertness and pedantry which did not even then belong to the character of the author, and which I regret now more than I do the literary defectiveness.

'All this time, and indeed the greater part of my life, we lived at Hope End, a few miles from Malvern, in a retirement scarcely broken to me except by books and my own thoughts, and it is a beautiful country, and was a retirement happy in many ways, although the very peace of it troubles the heart as it looks back. There I had my fits of Pope, and Byron, and Coleridge, and read Greek as hard under the trees as some of your Oxonians in the Bodleian; gathered visions from Plato and the dramatists, and eat and drank Greek and made my head ache with it. Do you know the Malvern Hills? The hills of Piers Plowman's Visions? They seem to me my native hills; for, although I was born in the county of Durham, I was an infant when I went first into their neighbourhood, and lived there until I had passed twenty by several years. Beautiful, beautiful hills they are! And yet, not for the whole world's beauty would I stand in the sunshine and the shadow of them any more. It would be a mockery, like the taking back of a broken flower to its stalk.'[4]

[Footnote 4: R.H. Horne, *Letters of E.B. Browning*, i. 158-161.]

So, while the young Robert Browning was enthusiastically declaiming passages of Pope's Homer, and measuring out heroic couplets with his hand round the dining table in Camberwell, Elizabeth Barrett was drinking from the same fount of inspiration among the Malvern Hills, and was already turning it to account in the production of her first epic. The fifty copies of the 'Battle of Marathon,' which Mr. Barrett, proud of his daughter's precocity, insisted on having printed, bear the date of 1819. Only five of them are now known to exist, and these are all in private hands; even the British Museum possesses only the reprint which the hero-worship of the present generation caused to be produced in 1891. Seven years later, when she had just reached the age of twenty, her first volume of verse was offered to the world in general. It was entitled 'An Essay on Mind, and other Poems,' and included, besides the didactic poem after the manner of Pope which formed the *piece de resistance*, a number of shorter pieces, several of which, as she informed Horne,[5] had been written when she was not more than thirteen.

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[Footnote 5: R.H. Horne, *Letters of E.B. Browning*, i. 164.]

It was during the years at Hope End that Elizabeth Barrett was first attacked by serious illness. 'At fifteen,' she says in her autobiographical letter, already quoted in part, 'I nearly died;' and this may be connected with a statement by Mrs. Richmond Ritchie, to the effect that 'one day, when Elizabeth was about fifteen, the young girl, impatient for her ride, tried to saddle her pony alone, in a field, and fell with the saddle upon her, in some way injuring her spine so seriously that she was for years upon her back.'[6] The latter part of this statement cannot indeed be quite accurate; for her period of long confinement to a sick-room was of later date, and began, according to her own statement, from a different cause. Mr. R. Barrett Browning states that the injury to the spine was not discovered for some time, but was afterwards attributed, not to a fall, but to a strain whilst tightening her pony's girths. No doubt this injury contributed towards the general weakness of health to which she was always subject.

[Footnote 6: *Dict. of Nat. Biography*, vii. 78.]

Of her earliest letters, belonging to the Hope End period, very few have been preserved, and most of those which remain are of little interest. The first to be printed here belongs to the period of her mother's last illness, which ended in her death on October 1, 1828. It is addressed to Mrs. James Martin, a lifelong friend, whose name will appear frequently in these pages. At the time when it was written she was living near Tewkesbury, within visiting distance of the Barretts.

To Mrs. Martin Hope End: Thursday, [about September 1828].

My dear Mrs. Martin,—I am happy to be able to tell you that Mr. Garden was here two days ago, and that he has not thought it necessary to adopt any violent measure with regard to our beloved invalid. He seems entirely to rely, for her ultimate restoration, upon a discipline as to diet, and a course of strengthening medicine. This is most satisfactory to us; and her spirits have been soothed and tranquillised by his visit. She has slept quietly for the last few nights, and reports herself to be *brisker* and stronger, and to be comparatively free from pain. This account is, perhaps, too favorable,[7] and will appear so to you when you see her, as I am afraid you will, not looking much better, *much* more cheerful, than when you paid us your last visit. But when we are very *willing* to hope, we are apt to be too *ready* to hope: though really, without being *too* sanguine, we may consider quiet nights and diminished pain to be satisfactory signs of amendment. I know you will be glad to hear of them, and I hope you will *witness* them very soon, in spite of this repulsive snow. It will do mama good, and I am sure it will give us all pleasure, to benefit by some of your charitable pilgrimages over the hill.

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With our best regards, and sincerest thanks for your kind interest

Believe me, dear Mrs. Martin, most truly yours,

E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 7: Mrs. Browning usually spells such words as ‘favour,’ ‘honour,’ and the like, without the *u*, after the fashion which one is accustomed to regard as American.]

To Miss Commeline Hope End: Monday, [October 1828].

My dear Miss Commeline,—Thank you for the sympathy and interest which you have extended towards us in our heavy affliction. Even *you* cannot know *all* that we have lost; but God knows, and it has pleased Him to take away the blessing that He gave. And all *must* be right since He doeth all! Indeed we did not foresee this great grief! If we had we could not have felt it less; but I should not then have been denied the consolation of being with her at the last.

It is idle to speak now of such thoughts, and circumstances have unquestionably been rightly and mercifully ordered. We are all well and composed—poor papa supporting us by his own surpassing fortitude. It is an inexpressible comfort to me to witness his calmness.

I cannot say that we shall not be glad to see you, but the weather is dreary and the distance long: and if you were to come, we might not be able to meet you and to speak to you with calmness. In that case you would receive a melancholy impression which I should like to spare you. Perhaps it would be better for you and less selfish in us, if we were to defer this meeting a little while longer—but do what you prefer doing! I can never forget the regard and esteem entertained for you by one whose tenderness and watchfulness I have felt every day and hour since she gave me that life which her loss embitters—whose memory is more precious to me than any earthly blessing left behind; I have written what is ungrateful, and what I ought not to have written, and what I ought not to feel, and do not always feel, but I did not just then remember that I had so much left to love.

To Mrs. Boyd Hope End: Saturday morning, [1828-1832].

My dear Mrs. Boyd,—You were quite wrong in supposing that papa was likely to complain about ‘the number of letters from Malvern;’ and as to my doing so, why did you suggest that? To fill up a sentence, or to conjure up some kind of limping excuse for idle people? Among idle people, perhaps you have written *me* down. But the reason of my silence was far more reasonable than yours. I have been engaged in alternately wishing in earnest and wishing in vain for the power of saying when I could go to Malvern—and in being unwell besides. For the last week I have not been at all well,

and indeed was obliged yesterday to go to bed after breakfast instead of after tea, where I contrived to abstract myself out of a good deal of pain into Lord Byron's Life by Moore. To-day this abstraction is not necessary; I am much better; and, indeed, little remains of the indisposition but the *vulgar fractions* of a cough and cold. I dare say (and Occyta[8] agrees with me) cold was at the bottom of it all, for I was so very wise as to lie down upon the grass last Monday, when the sun was shining deceitfully, though the snow was staring at me from the hedges, with an expression anything but dog-daysical!

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Henrietta's face-ache is quite well, and I don't mean to give any more bulletins to-day. I hope your 'tolerably well' is turned into 'quite well' too by this time.

In reply to your query, I will mention that *the existence* actually extended until Thursday without the visit here—a phenomenon in physics and metaphysics. I was desired by a note a short time previously, 'to embrace all my circle with the utmost tenderness,' *as proxy*. Considering the extent of the said circle, this was a very comprehensive request, and a very unreasonable one to offer to anyone less than the hundred-armed Indian god Baly. I am glad that your alternative of a house is so near to the right side of the turnpike—in which case, a *miss* is certainly not as *bad* as a *mile*. May Place is to be vacated in May, though its present inhabitants do not leave Malvern. I mention this to you, but pray don't *re-mention* it to anybody. The rent is 15L. Mr. Boyd[9] will not be angry with me for not going to see him sooner than I can. At least, I am sure he ought not. Though you are all kind enough to wish me to go, I always think and know (which is consolatory to everything but my vanity) that no one can wish it half as much as I myself do.

Believe me, dear Mrs. Boyd, affectionately yours,

E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 8: Octavius, her youngest brother.]

[Footnote 9: Hugh Stuart Boyd, the blind scholar whose friendship with Elizabeth Barrett is commemorated in her poem, 'Wine of Cyprus,' and in three sonnets expressly addressed to him. He was at this time living at Great Malvern, where Miss Barrett frequently visited him, reading and discussing Greek literature with him, especially the works of the Greek Christian Fathers. But to call him her tutor, as has more than once been done, is a mistake: see Miss Barrett's letter to; him of March 3, 1845. Her knowledge of Greek was due to her volunteering to share her brother Edward's work under his tutor, Mr. MacSwiney.]

The fear 1832 brought a great change in the fortunes of the Barrett family, and may be said to mark the end of the purely formative period in Elizabeth Barrett's life. Hitherto she had been living in the home and among the surroundings of her childhood, absorbing literature rather than producing it; or if producing it, still mainly for her own amusement and instruction, rather than with any view of appealing to the general public. But in 1832 this home was broken up by the sale, of Hope End,[10] and with the removal thence we seem to find her embarking definitely on literature as the avowed pursuit and occupation of her life. Sidmouth in Devonshire was the place to which the Barrett family now removed, and the letters begin henceforth to be longer and more frequent, and to tell a more connected tale.

[Footnote 10: Mr. Ingram, in his *Life of E.B. Browning* ('Eminent Women' Series) connects this fact with the abolition of colonial slavery, and a consequent decrease in Mr. Barrett's income; but since the abolition only took place in 1833, while Hope End was given up in the preceding year, this conclusion does not appear to be certain.]

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To Mrs. Martin [Sidmouth: September 1832.]

How can I thank you enough, dearest Mrs. Martin, for your letter? How kind of you to write so soon and so very kindly! The postmark and handwriting were in themselves pleasant sights to me, and the kindness yet more welcome. Believe that I am grateful to you for *all* your kindness—for your kindness now, and your kindness in the days which are past. Some of those past days were very happy, and some of them very sorrowful—more sorrowful than even our last days at dear, dear Hope End. *Then*, I well recollect, though I could not then thank you as I ought, how you *felt for* us and *with* us. Do not think I can ever forget *that time*, or *you*. I had written a note to you, which the bearer of Bummy's and Arabel's to Colwall[11] omitted to take. Afterwards I thought it best to spare you any more farewells, which are upon human lips, of all words, the most natural, and of all the most painful.

They told us of our having past your carriage in Ledbury. Dear Mrs. Martin, I cannot dwell upon the pain of that first hour of our journey; but you will know what it must have been. The dread of it, for some hours before, was almost worse; but it is all over now, blessed be God. Before the first day's journey was at end, we felt inexpressibly relieved—relieved from the restlessness and anxiety which have so long oppressed us—and now we are calmer and happier than we have been for very long. If we could only have papa and Bro and Sette[12] with us! About half an hour before we set off, papa found out that he *could not* part with Sette, who sleeps with him, and is always an amusing companion to him. Papa was, however, unwilling to separate him perforce from his little playfellows, and asked him whether he wished very much to go. Sette's heart was quite full, but he answered immediately, 'Oh, no, papa, I would *much* rather stay with *you*.' He is a dear affectionate little thing. He and Bro being with poor Papa, we are far more comfortable about him than we should otherwise be—and perhaps our going was his sharpest pang. I hope it was, as it is over. Do not think, dear Mrs. Martin, that you or Mr. Martin can ever 'intrude'—you know you use that word in your letter. I have often been afraid, on account of papa not having been for so long a time at Colwall, lest you should fancy that he did not value your society and your kindness. Do not fancy it. Painful circumstances produce—as we have often had occasion to observe—different effects upon different minds; and some feeling, with which I certainly have no sympathy has made papa shrink from society of any kind lately. He would not even attend the religious societies in Ledbury, which he was so much pledged to support, and so interested in supporting. If you knew how much he has talked of you, and asked every particular about you, you could not fancy that his regard for you was estranged.

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He has an extraordinary degree of strength of mind on most points—and strong feeling, when it is not allowed to run in the natural channel, will sometimes force its way where it is not expected. You will think it strange; but never up to this moment has he even alluded to the subject, before *us*—never, at the moment of parting with us. And yet, though he had not power to say *one word*, he could play at cricket with the boys on the very last evening.

We slept at the York House in Bath. Bath is a beautiful town *as a town*, and the country harmonises well with it, without being a beautiful country. As *mere country*, nobody would stand still to look at it; though as town country, many bodies would. Somersetshire in general seems to be hideous, and I could fancy from the walls which intersect it in every direction, that they had been turned to stone by looking at the *Gorgonic* scenery. The part of Devonshire through which our journey lay is nothing *very* pretty, though it must be allowed to be beautiful after Somersetshire. We arrived here almost in the dark, and were besieged by the crowd of disinterested tradespeople, who *would* attend us through the town to our house, to help to unload the carriages. This was not a particularly agreeable reception in spite of its cordiality; and the circumstance of there being not a human being in our house, and not even a rushlight burning, did not reassure us. People were tired of expecting us every day for three weeks. Nearly the whole way from Honiton to this place is a descent. Poor dear Bummy said she thought we were going into the *bowels of the earth*, but suspect she thought we were going much deeper. Between you and me, she does not seem *delighted* with Sidmouth; but her spirits are a great deal better, and in time she will, I dare say, be better pleased. *We* like very much what we have seen of it. The town is small and not superfluously clean, but, of course, the respectable houses are not a part of the town. Ours is one which the Grand Duchess Helena had, not at all *grand*, but extremely comfortable and cheerful, with a splendid sea view in front, and pleasant green, hills and trees behind. The drawing-room's four windows all look to the sea, and I am never tired of looking out of them. I was doing so, with a most hypocritical book before me, when your letter arrived, and I *felt* all that you said in it. I always thought that the sea was the sublimest object in nature. Mont Blanc—Niagara must be nothing to it. *There*, the Almighty's form glasses itself in tempests—and not only in tempests, but in calm—in space, in eternal motion, in eternal regularity. How can we look at it, and consider our puny sorrows, and not say, 'We are dumb—because *Thou* didst it'? Indeed, dear Mrs. Martin, we must feel every hour, and we shall feel every year, that what He did is *well done*—and not only well, but mercifully.

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Mr. and Mrs. H——, with whom papa is slightly acquainted, have called upon us, and shown us many kind attentions. They are West India people, not very polished, but certainly *very* good-natured. We hear that the place is extremely full and gay; but this is, of course, only an *on dit* to us at present. I have been riding a donkey two or three times, and enjoy very much going to the edge of the sea. The air has made me sleep more soundly than I have done for some time, and I dare say it will do me a great deal of good in every way.

You may suppose what a southern climate this is, when I tell you that myrtles and verbena, three or four feet high, and hydrangeas are in flower in the gardens—even in ours, which is about a hundred and fifty yards from the sea. I have written to the end of my paper. Give our kindest regards to Mr. Martin, and ever believe me,

Your affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.

[Footnote 11: The Martins' home near Malvern, about a mile from Hope End.]

[Footnote 12: Her brothers Edward and Septimus.]

To Mrs. Martin [Sidmouth:] Wednesday, September 27, 1832 [postmark].

How very kind of you, dearest Mrs. Martin, to write to me so much at length and at such a time. Indeed, it was exactly the time when, if we were where we have been, we should have wished you to walk over the hill and talk to us; and although, after all that the most zealous friends of letter writing can say for it, it is *not* such a happy thing as talking with those you care for, yet it is the next happiest thing. I am sure I thought so when I read your letter ...

And now I must tell you about ourselves. Papa and Bro and Sette have made us so much happier by coming, and we have the comfort of seeing dear papa in good spirits, and not only satisfied but pleased with this place. It is scarcely possible, at least it seems so to me, to do otherwise than admire the beauty of the country. It is the very land of green lanes and pretty thatched cottages. I don't mean the kind of cottages which are generally thatched, with pigstyes and cabbages and dirty children, but thatched cottages with verandas and shrubberies, and sounds from the harp or piano coming through the windows. When you stand upon any of the hills which stand round Sidmouth, the whole valley seems to be thickly wooded down to the very verge of the sea, and these pretty villas to be springing from the ground almost as thickly and quite as naturally as the trees themselves. There are certainly many more houses out of the town than in it, and they all stand apart, yet near, hiding in their own shrubberies, or behind the green rows of elms which wall in the secluded lanes on either side. Such a number of green lanes I never saw; some of them quite black with foliage, where it is

twilight in the middle of the day, and others letting in beautiful glimpses of the spreading heathy hills or of the sunny sea.

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I am sure you would like the transition from the cliffs, from the bird's eye view to, I was going to say, the mole's eye view, but I believe moles don't see quite clearly enough to suit my purpose. There are a great number of people here. Sam was at an evening party a week ago where there were a hundred and twenty people; but they don't walk about the parade and show themselves as one might expect. *We* know only the Herrings and Mrs. and the Miss Polands and Sir John Kean. Mrs. and Miss Weekes, and Mr. and Mrs. James have called upon us, but we were out when they came. I suppose it will be necessary to return their visits and to know them; and when we do, you shall hear about them, and about everybody whom we know. I am certainly much better in health, stronger than I was, and less troubled with the cough. Every day I attend [*word torn out*] their walks on my donkey, if we do not go in a boat, which is still pleasanter. I believe Henrietta walks out about *three* times a day. She is looking particularly well, and often talks, and I am sure still oftener thinks, of you. You know how fond of you she is. Papa walks out with her—and *us*; and we all, down to

Occyta, breakfast and drink tea together. The dining takes place at five o'clock. To-morrow, if this lovely weather will stand still and be accommodating, we talk of rowing to Dawlish, which is about ten miles off. We have had a few cases of cholera, at least *suspicious* cases: one a fortnight before we arrived, and five since, in the course of a month. All dead except one. I confess a little nervousness; but it is wearing away. The disease does not seem to make any progress; and for the last six days there have been no patients at all.

Do let us hear very soon, my dear Mrs. Martin, how you are—how your spirits are, and whether Rome is still in your distance. Surely no plan could be more delightful for you than this plan; and if you don't stay *very* long away, I shall be sorry to hear of your abandoning it. Do you recollect your promise of coming to see us? *We* do.

You must have had quite enough now of my 'little hand' and of my details. Do not go to Matton or to the Bartons or to Eastnor without giving my love. How often my thoughts are at *home*! I cannot help calling it so still in my thoughts. I may like other places, but no other place can ever appear to me to deserve that name.

Dearest Mrs. Martin's affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

To Mrs. Martin Sidmouth: December 14, 1832.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I hope you are very angry indeed with us for not writing. We are as penitent as we ought to be—that is, I am, for I believe I am the idle person; yet not altogether idle, but procrastinating and waiting for news rather more worthy of being

read in Rome than any which even now I can send you.... And now, my dear Mrs. Martin, I mean to thank you, as I ought

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to have done long ago, for your kindness in offering to procure for me the *Archbishop of Dublin's*[13] valuable opinion upon my 'Prometheus. I am sure that if you have not thought me very ungrateful, you must be very indulgent. My mind was at one time so crowded by painful thoughts, that they shut out many others which are interesting to me; and among other things, I forgot once or twice, when I had an opportunity, to thank *you*, dear Mrs. Martin. I believe I should have taken advantage of your proposal, but papa said to me, 'If he criticises your manuscript in a manner which does not satisfy you, you won't be easy without defending yourself, and he might be drawn into taking more trouble than you have now any idea of giving him.' I sighed a little at losing such an opportunity of gaining a great advantage, but there seemed to be some reason in what papa said I have completed a preface and notes to my translation; and since doing so, a work of exactly the same character by a Mr. Medwin has been published, and commended in Bulwer's magazine.[14] Therefore it is probable enough that my trouble, excepting as far as my own amusement went, has been in vain. But papa means to try Mr. Valpy, I believe. He left us since I began to write this letter, with a promise of returning before Christmas Day. We *do* miss him. Mr. Boyd has made me quite angry by publishing his translations by rotation in numbers of the 'Wesleyan Magazine,' instead of making them up into a separate publication, as I had persuaded him to do. There is the effect, you see, of going, even for a time, out of my reach! The readers of the 'Wesleyan Magazine' are pious people, but not cultivated, nor, for the most part, capable of estimating either the talents of Gregory or his translator's. I have begun already to *insist* upon another publication in a separate form, and shall gain my point, I dare say. I have been reading Bulwer's novels and Mrs. Trollope's libels, and Dr. Parr's works. I am sure *you* are not an admirer of Mrs. Trollope's. She has neither the delicacy nor the candour which constitute true nobility of mind and her extent of talent forms but a scanty veil to shadow her other defects. Bulwer has quite delighted me. He has all the dramatic talent which Scott has, and all the passion which Scott has not, and he appears to me to be besides a far profounder discriminator of character. There are very fine things in his 'Denounced.' We subscribe to the best library here, but the best is not a good one. I have, however, a table-load of my own books, and with them I can always be satisfied. Do you know that Mr. Curzon has left Ledbury? We were glad to receive your letter from Dover although it told us that you were removing so far from us. Do let us hear of your enjoying Italy. Is there much English society in Rome, and is it like English society here? I can scarcely fancy an invitation card, 'Mrs. Huggin-muggin at home,' carried through the *Via Sacra*. I am sure my 'little hand' has done its duty to-day. I shall leave the corners to Henrietta. Give our kindest regards to Mr. Martin, and ever believe me, my dear Mrs. Martin,

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Your affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 13: Archbishop Whately.]

[Footnote 14: *The New Monthly Magazine*, at this time edited by Bulwer, afterwards the first Lord Lytton.]

The letter just printed contains the first allusion in Miss Barrett's letters to any of her own writings. The translation of the 'Prometheus Bound' of Aeschylus was the first-fruits of the removal to Sidmouth. It was written, as she told Horne eleven years afterwards, 'in twelve days, and should have been thrown into the fire afterwards—the only means of giving it a little warmth.'[15] Indeed, so dissatisfied did she subsequently become with it, that she did what she could to suppress it, and in the collected edition of 1850 substituted another version, written in 1845, which she hoped would secure the final oblivion of her earlier attempt.[16] The letter given above shows that the composition of the earlier version took place at the end of 1832; and in the following year it was published by Mr. Valpy, along with some shorter poems, of which Miss Barrett subsequently wrote that 'a few of the fugitive poems may be worth a little, perhaps; but they have not so much goodness as to overcome the badness of the blasphemy of Aeschylus.' The volume, which was published anonymously, received two sentences of contemptuous notice from the 'Athenaeum,' in which the reviewer advised 'those who adventure in the hazardous lists of poetic translation to touch anyone rather than Aeschylus, and they may take warning by the author before us.'[17]

[Footnote 15: *Letters to R.H. Home*, i. 162.]

[Footnote 16: It need hardly be said that the literary resurrectionist has been too much for her, and the version of 1833 has recently been reprinted. Of this reprint the best that can be said is that it provides an occasion for an essay by Mrs. Meynell.]

[Footnote 17: *Athenaeum*, June 8, 1833.]

To Mrs. Martin Sidmouth: May 27, 1833.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I am half afraid of your being very angry indeed with me; and perhaps it would be quite as well to spare this sheet of paper an angry look of yours, by consigning it over to Henrietta. Yet do believe me, I have been anxious to write to you a long time, and did not know where to direct my letter. The history of all my unkindness to you is this: I delayed answering your kind welcome letter from Rome, for three weeks, because Henrietta was at Torquay, and I knew that she would like to write in it, and because I was unreasonable enough to expect to hear every day of her coming home. At the end of the three weeks, and on consulting your dates and plans, I found out that you would probably have quitted Rome before any letter of mine arrived there.

Since then, I have been inquiring, and all in vain, about where I could find you out. All I could hear was, that you were somewhere between Italy and England; and all I could do was, to wait

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patiently, and throw myself at your feet as soon as you came within sight and hearing. And now do be as generous as you can, my dear Mrs. Martin, and try to forgive one who never *could* be guilty of the fault of forgetting you, notwithstanding appearances. We heard only yesterday of your being expected at Colwall. And although we cannot welcome you there, otherwise than in this way, at the distance of 140 miles, yet we must welcome you in this way, and assure both of you how glad we are that the same island holds all of us once more. It pleased us very much to hear how you were enjoying yourselves in Rome; and you must please us now by telling us that you are enjoying yourselves at Colwall, and that you bear the change with English philosophy. The fishing at Abbeville was a link between the past and the present; and would make the transition between the eternal city and the eternal tithes a little less striking. My wonder is how you could have persuaded yourselves to keep your promise and leave Italy as soon as you did. Tell me how you managed it. And tell me everything about yourselves —how you are and how you feel, and whether you look backwards or forwards with the most pleasure, and whether the influenza has been among your welcomers to England. Henrietta and Arabel and Daisy[18] were confined by it to their beds for several days and the two former are only now recovering their strength. Three or four of the other boys had symptoms which were not strong enough to put them to bed. As for me, I have been quite well all the spring, and almost all the winter. I don't know when I have been so long well as I have been lately; without a cough or anything else disagreeable. Indeed, if I may place the influenza in a parenthesis, we have all been perfectly well, in spite of our fishing and boating and getting wet three times a day. There is good trout-fishing at the Otter, and the noble river Sid, which, if I liked to stand in it, *might* cover my ankles. And lately, Daisy and Sette and Occyta have studied the art of catching shrimps, and soak themselves up to their waists like professors. My love of water concentrates itself in the boat; and this I enjoy very much, when the sea is as blue and calm as the sky, which it has often been lately. Of society we have had little indeed; but Henrietta had more than much of it at Torquay during three months; and as for me, you know I don't want any though I am far from meaning to speak disrespectfully of *Mr. Boyds*, which has been a pleasure and comfort to me. His house is not farther than a five minutes' walk from ours; and I often make it *four* in my haste to get there. Ask Eliza Cliffe to lend you the May number of the 'Wesleyan Magazine;' and if you have an opportunity of procuring last December's number, *do* procure *that*. There are some translations in each of them, which I think you will like. The December translation is my favourite, though I was amanuensis only in the May one.

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Henrietta and Arabel have a drawing master, and are meditating soon beginning to sketch out of doors—that is, if before the meditation is at an end we do not leave Sidmouth. Our plans are quite uncertain; and papa has not, I believe, made up his mind whether or not to take this house on after the beginning of next month; when our engagement with our present landlord closes. If we do leave Sidmouth, you know as well as I do where we shall go. Perhaps to Boulogne! perhaps to the Swan River. The West Indians are irreparably ruined if the Bill passes. Papa says that in the case of its passing, nobody in his senses would think of even attempting the culture of sugar, and that they had better hang weights to the sides of the island of Jamaica and sink it at once. Don't you think certain heads might be found heavy enough for the purpose? No insinuation, I assure you, against the Administration, in spite of the dagger in their right hands. Mr. Atwood seems to me a demi-god of ingratitude! So much for the 'fickle reek of popular breath' to which men have erected their temple of the winds—who would trust a feather to it? I am almost more sorry for poor Lord Grey who is going to ruin us, than for our poor selves who are going to be ruined. You will hear that my 'Prometheus and other Poems' came into light a few weeks ago—a fortnight ago, I think. I dare say I shall wish it out of the light before I have done with it. And I dare say Henrietta is wishing me anywhere, rather than where I am. Certainly I have past *all bounds*. Do write soon, and tell us everything about Mr. Martin and yourself. And ever believe me, dearest Mrs. Martin,

Your affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 18: Alfred, the fifth brother.]

To Mrs. Martin Sidmouth: September 7, 1833.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Are you a *little* angry *again*? I do hope not. I should have written long ago if it had not been for Henrietta; and Henrietta would have written very lately if it had not been for me: and we must beg of you to forgive us both for the sake of each other. Thank you for the kind letter which I have been so tardy in thanking you for, but which was not, on that account, the less gladly received. Do believe how much it pleases me *always* to see and read dear Mrs. Martin's handwriting. But I must try to tell you some less ancient truths. We are still in the ruinous house. Without any poetical fiction, the walls are too frail for even *me*, who enjoy the situation in a most particularly particular manner, to have any desire to pass the winter within them. One wind we have had the privilege of hearing already; and down came the tiles while we were at dinner, and made us all think that down something else was coming. We have had one chimney pulled down to prevent it from tumbling down; and have received especial injunctions from the bricklayers not to lean too much out of the windows, for fear the walls should follow the destiny

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of the chimney. Altogether there is every reasonable probability that the whole house will in the course of next winter be as like Persepolis as anything so ugly can be! If another house which will fit us can be found in Sidmouth, I am sure papa will take it; but, as he said the other day, 'If I can't find a house, I must go.' I hope he may find one, and as near the sea as this ruin. I have enjoyed its moonlight and its calmness all the summer; and am prepared to enjoy its tempestuousness of the winter with as true an enjoyment. What we shall do ultimately, I do not even dream; and, if I know papa, *he* does not. My visions of the future are confined to 'what shall I write or read next,' and 'when shall we next go out in the boat,' and *they*, you know, can do no harm to anybody. Of one thing I have a comforting certainty—that wherever we may go or stay, the decree which moves or fixes us will and must be the 'wisest virtuousest discreetest best!' ...

So, I will change the subject to myself. You told me that you were going to read my book, and I want to know what you think of it. If you were given to compliment and insincerity, I should be afraid of asking you; because, among other *evident* reasons, I might then appear to be asking for your praise instead of your opinion. As it is—I want to know what you think of my book. Is the translation stiff? If you know me at all (and I venture to hope that you do) you will be certain that I shall *like* your honesty, and love you for being honest, even if you put on the very blackest of black caps....

Of course you know that the late Bill has ruined the West Indians. That is settled. The consternation here is very great. Nevertheless I am glad, and always shall be, that the negroes are—virtually—free!

May God bless you, dear Mrs. Martin!
Ever believe me, your affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd Sidmouth: Friday [1834].

My dear Friend,—I don't know how I shall begin to persuade you not to be angry with me, but perhaps the best plan will be to confess as many sins as would cover this sheet of paper, and then to go on with my merits. Certainly I am altogether guiltless of your charge of not noticing your book's arrival because no Calvinism arrived with it. I told you the bare truth when I told you *why* I did not write immediately. The passage relating to Calvinism I certainly read, and as certainly was sorry for; but as certainly as both those certainties, such reading and such regret had nothing whatever to do with the silence which made you so angry with me.

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The other particular thing of which I should have written is Mr. Parker and my letters. I am more and, more sorry that you should have sent them to him at all—not that their loss is any loss to anybody, but that I scarcely like the idea—indeed, I don't like it at all—of their remaining, worthless as they are, at Mr. P.'s mercy. As for my writing about them, I should not be able to make up my mind to do *that*. You know I had nothing to do with their being sent to Mr. Parker, and was indeed in complete ignorance of it. Besides, I should be half ashamed to write to him now on any subject. A very long interregnum took place in our correspondence, which was his own work; and when he wrote to me the summer before last, I delayed from week to week, and then from month to month, answering it. And now I feel ashamed to write at all.

Perhaps you will wonder why I am not ashamed to write to *you*. Indeed I have meant to do it very, very often. Don't be severe upon me. I am always afraid of writing to you too often, and so the opposite fault is apt to be run into—of writing too seldom. IF THAT is a *fault*. You see my scepticism is becoming faster and faster developed.

Let me hear from you soon, if you are not angry. I have been reading the Bridgewater treatise, and am now trying to understand Prout upon Chemistry. I shall be worth something at last, shall I not? Who knows but what I may die a glorious death under the *pons asinorum* after all? Prout (if I succeed in understanding him) does not hold that matter is infinitely divisible; and so I suppose the seeds of matter—the ultimate molecules—are a kind of *tertium quid* between matter and spirit. Certainly I can't believe that any kind of matter, primal or ultimate, can be *indivisible*, which it must according to his view.

Chalmers's treatise is, as to eloquence, surpassingly beautiful; as to matter, I could not walk with him all the way, although I longed to do it, for he walked on flowers, and under shade—'no tree on which a fine bird did not sit.' ...

Believe me, your affectionate friend,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd Sidmouth: September 14, [1834].

My dear Mr. Boyd,—I won't ask you to forgive me for not writing before, because I know very well that you would rather have not heard from me immediately.... And so, you and Mrs. Mathew have been tearing to pieces—to the very rags—all my elaborate theology! And when Mr. Young is 'strong enough,' he is to help you at your cruel work! 'The points upon which you and I differed' are so numerous, that if I really *am* wrong upon every one of them, Mrs. Mathew has indeed reason to 'punish me with hard thoughts.' Well, she can't help my feeling for her much esteem, although I never saw her. And if I *were* to see her, I would not argue with her; I would only ask her to let me love her. I am weary of controversy in religion, and should be so were I stronger and more successful in it than I am or care to be. The command is not 'argue with one another,' but 'love one

another.’ It is better to love than to convince. They who lie on the bosom of Jesus must lie there *together*!

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Not a word about your book![19] Don't you mean to tell me anything of it? I saw a review of it—rather a satisfactory one—I think in an *August* number of the 'Athenaeum.' If you will look into 'Fraser's Magazine' for August, at an article entitled 'Rogueries of Tom Moore,' you will be amused with a notice of the 'Edinburgh Review's' criticism in the text, and of yourself in a note. We have had a crowded Bible meeting, and a Church Missionary and London Missionary meeting besides; and I went last Tuesday to the Exmouth Bible meeting with Mrs. Maling, Miss Taylor, and Mr. Hunter. We did not return until half-past one in the morning.... The Bishop of Barbadoes and the Dean of Winchester were walking together on the beach yesterday, making Sidmouth look quite episcopal. You would not have despised it *half so much*, had you been here.

Do you know any person who would like to send his or her son to Sidmouth, for the sake of the climate, and private instruction: and if you do, will you mention it to me? I am very sorry to hear of Mrs. Boyd being so unwell. Arabel had a letter two days ago from Annie, and as it mentions Mrs. Boyd's having gone to Dover, I trust that she is well again. Should she be returned, give my love to her.

The black-edged paper may make you wonder at its cause. Our dear aunt Mrs. Butler died last month at Dieppe—and died *in Jesus*. Miss Clarke is going, if she is not gone, to Italy for the winter.

Believe me, affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

Write to me whenever you *dislike it least*, and tell me what your plans are. I hear nothing about our leaving Sidmouth.

[Footnote 19: *The Fathers not Papists*, including a reprint of some translations from the Greek Fathers, which Mr. Boyd had published previously.]

To Miss Commeline September 22, 1834 [Sidmouth].

I am afraid that there can be no chance of my handwriting at least being unforgotten by you, dear Miss Commeline, but in the case of your having a very long memory you may remember the name which shall be written at the end of this note, and which belongs to one who does not, nor is likely to forget you! I was much, *much* obliged to you for the kind few lines you wrote to me—how long ago! No, do not remember how long—do not remember *that* for fear you should think me unkind, and—what I am not! I have intended again and again to answer your note, and I am doing it—*at last*! Are you all quite well? Mrs. Commeline and all of you? Shall I ever see any of you again? Perhaps I shall not; but even if I do not, I shall not cease to wish you to be well and happy 'in the body or out of the body.'

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We came to Sidmouth for two months, and you see we are here still; and when we are likely to go is as uncertain as ever. I like the place, and some of its inhabitants. I like the greenness and the tranquillity and the sea; and the solitude of one dear seat which hangs over it, and which is too far or too lonely for many others to like besides myself. We are living in a thatched cottage, with a green lawn bounded by a *Devonshire lane*. Do you know what that is? Milton did when he wrote of 'hedgerow elms and hillocks green.' Indeed Sidmouth is a nest among elms; and the lulling of the sea and the shadow of the hills make it a peaceful one. But there are no majestic features in the country. It is all green and fresh and secluded; and the grandeur is concentrated upon the ocean without deigning to have anything to do with the earth. I often find my thoughts where my footsteps once used to be! but there is no use in speaking of that....

Pray believe me, affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

To Mrs. Martin Sidmouth: Friday, December 19, 1834 [postmark].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—... We have lately had deep anxiety with regard to our dear papa. He left us two months ago to do his London business: and a few weeks since we were told by a letter from him that he was ill; he giving us to understand that his complaint was of a rheumatic character. By the next coach, we were so daring (I can scarcely understand how we managed it) as to send Henry to him: thinking that it would be better to be scolded than to suffer him to be alone and in suffering at a London hotel. We were not scolded: but my prayer to be permitted to follow Henry was condemned to silence: and what was said being said emphatically, I was obliged to submit, and to be

thankful for the unsatisfactory accounts which for many days afterwards we received.... I cannot help being anxious and fearful. You know he is *all* left to us—and that without him we should indeed be orphans and desolate. Therefore you may well know what feelings those are with which we look back upon his danger; and forwards to any threatening of a return of it.... It may not be so. Do not, when you write, allude to my fearing about it. Our only feeling now should certainly be a deep feeling of thankfulness towards that God of all consolation Who has permitted us to know His love in the midst of many griefs; and Who while He has often cast upon us the sorrow and the shadow, has yet enabled us to recognise it as that 'shadow of the wings of the Almighty,' wherein we may 'rejoice.' We shall probably see our dear papa next week. At least we know that he is only waiting for strength and that he is already able to go out—I fear, not to *walk* out. Here we are all well. Belle Vue is sold, and we shall probably have to leave it in March: but I do not think that we shall do so before. Henrietta is still very anxious to leave Sidmouth

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altogether; and I still feel that I shall very much grieve to leave it: so that it is happy for us that neither is the *decider* on this point. I have often thought that it is happier *not* to do what one pleases, and perhaps you will agree with me—if you don't please at the present moment to do something very particular. And do tell me, dear Mrs. Martin, what you are pleasing to do, and what you are doing: for it seems to me, and indeed is, a long time since I heard of you and Mr. Martin *in detail*. Miss Maria Commeline sent a note to Henrietta a fortnight ago: and in it was honorable mention of you—but I won't interfere with the sublimities of your imagination, by telling you what it was.... I should like to hear something of Hope End: whether there are many alterations, and whether the new lodge, of which I heard, is built. Even now, the thought stands before me sometimes like an object in a dream that I shall see no more those hills and trees which seemed to me once almost like portions of my existence. This is not meant for murmuring. I have had much happiness at Sidmouth, though with a character of its own. Henrietta and Arabel and I are the only guardians just now of the three youngest boys, the only ones at home: and I assure you, we have not too little to do. They are no longer *little* boys. There is an anxiety among us just now to have letters from Jamaica—from my dear dear Bro—but the packet is only 'expected.' The last accounts were comforting ones; and I am living on the hope of seeing him back again in the spring. Stormie and Georgie are doing well at Glasgow. So Dr. Wardlaw says.... Henrietta's particular love to you; and *do* believe me always,

Your affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

You have of course heard of poor Mrs. Boyd's death. Mr. Boyd and his daughter are both in London, and likely, I think, to remain there.

To H.S. Boyd Sidmouth: Tuesday [spring 1835].

My dear Mr. Boyd,—... Now I am going to tell you the only good news I know, and you will be glad, I know, to be told what I am going to tell you. Dear Georgie has taken his degree, and very honorably, at Glasgow, and is coming to us in all the dignity of a Bachelor of Arts. He was examined in Logic, Moral Philosophy, Greek and Latin, of course publicly: and we have heard from a fellow student of his, that his answers were more pertinent than those of any other of the examined, and elicited much applause. Mr. Groube is the fellow student—but he has ceased to be one, having found the Glasgow studies too heavy for his health. Stormie shrank from the public examination, on account of the hesitation in his speech. He would not go up; although, according to report, as well qualified as Georgie. Mr. Groube says that the ladies of Glasgow are preparing to break their hearts for Georgie's departure: and he and Stormie leave Glasgow on May I. Now, I am sure you will rejoice with me in the result of the examination. Do you not, dear friend? I was very anxious about it; and almost resigned

to hear of a failure—for Georgie was in great alarm and prepared us for the very worst. Therefore the surprise and pleasure were great.

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I can't tell you of our plans; although the Glasgow students come to us in a week and this house will be too small to receive them. We may leave Sidmouth immediately, or not at all. I shall soon be quite qualified to write a poem on the 'Pleasures of *Doubt*'—-and a very good subject it will be. The pleasures of certainty are generally far less enjoyable—I mean as pleasures go in this unpleasing world. Papa is in London, and much better when we heard from him last—and we are awaiting his decree....

And now what remains for me to tell you? I believe I have read more Hebrew than Greek lately; yet the dear Greek is not less dear than ever. Who reads Greek to you? Who holds my office? Some one, I hope, with an articulation of more congenial slowness.

Give Annie my kind love. May God preserve both of you!

Believe me, your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

CHAPTER II

1835-1841

The residence of the Barretts at Sidmouth had never been a very settled one—never intended to be permanent, and yet never having a fixed term nor any reason for a fixed term. Hence it spread itself gradually over a space of nearly three years, before the long contemplated move to London actually took place. During the latter part of that period, however, extant letters of Miss Barrett are almost wholly wanting, and there is little information from any other source as to the course of her life. It was apparently in the summer of 1835 that Sidmouth was finally left behind, Mr. Barrett having then taken a house at 74 Gloucester Place (near Baker Street), which, though never regarded as more than a temporary residence, continued to be the home of his family for the next three years.

The move to London was followed by two results of great importance for Elizabeth Barrett. In the first place, her health, which had never been strong, broke down altogether in the London atmosphere, and it is from some time shortly after the arrival in Gloucester Place that the beginning of her invalid life must be dated. On the other hand, residence in London brought her into the neighbourhood of new friends; and although the number of those admitted to see her in her sick-room was always small, we yet owe to this fact the commencement of some of her closest friendships, notably those with her distant cousin, John Kenyon, and with Miss Mitford, the authoress of 'Our Village,' and of a correspondence on a much fuller and more elaborate scale than any of the earlier period. To this, no doubt, the fact of her confinement to her room contributed not a little; for being unable to go out and see her friends, much of her communication

with them was necessarily by letter. At the same time her literary activity was increasing. She began to contribute poems to various magazines, and to be brought thereby into connection with literary men; and she was also employed on the longer compositions which went to make up her next volume of published verse.

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All this was, however, only of gradual development; and for some time her correspondence is limited to Mr. Boyd, who was now living in St. John's Wood, and Mrs. Martin. The exact date of the first letter is uncertain, but it seems to belong to a time soon after the arrival of the Barretts in town.

To H.S. Boyd [74 Gloucester Place, London: autumn 1835.]

My dear Mr. Boyd,—As Georgie is going to do what I am afraid I shall not be able to do to-day—namely, to visit *you*—he must take with him a few lines from *Porsonia greeting*, to say how glad I am to feel myself again at only a short distance from you, and how still gladder I shall be when the same room holds both of us. Don't be angry because I have not visited you immediately. You know—or you *will* know, if you consider—I cannot open the window and fly.

Papa and I were very much obliged to you for the poison—and are ready to smile upon you whenever you give us the opportunity, as graciously as Socrates did upon his executioner. How much you will have to say to me about the Greeks, unless you begin first to abuse me about the *Romans*; and if you begin *that*, the peroration will be a very pathetic one, in my being turned out of your doors. Such is my prophecy.

Papa has been telling me of your abusing my stanzas on Mrs. Hemans's death. I had a presentiment that you would: and behold, why I said nothing to you of them. Of course, I maintain, *versus* both you and papa, that they are very much to be admired: as well as everything else proceeding from or belonging to ME. Upon which principle, I hope you will admire George particularly.

Believe me, dear Mr. Boyd, your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

Arabel's and my love to Annie. Won't she come to see us?

To Mrs. Martin 74 Gloucester Place, Portman Square, London: Jan. I, 1836.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I am half willing and half unwilling to write to you when, among such dearer interests and deep anxieties, you may perhaps be scarcely at liberty to attend to what I write. And yet I *will* write, if it be only briefly, that you may not think —if you think of us at all—that we have changed our hearts with our residence so much as to forget to sympathise with you, dear Mrs. Martin, or to neglect to apprise you ourselves of our movements. Indeed, a letter to you should have been written among my first letters on arriving in London, only Henrietta (my scape-goat, *you* will say) said, '*I* will write to Mrs. Martin.' And then after I had waited, and determined to write without waiting any longer, we heard of poor Mrs. Hanford's affliction and your anxiety, and I have considered day after day whether or not I should intrude upon you; until I find myself—*thus*!

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I do hope that you have from the hand of God those consolations which only He in Jesus Christ can give to the so afflicted. For I know well that you are afflicted with the afflicted, and that with you sympathy is suffering; and that while the tenderest earthly comfort is administered by your presence and kindness to your dear friends, you will feel bitterly for them what a little thing earthly comfort is, when the earthly beloved perish before them. May He who is the Beloved in the sight of His Father and His Church be near to them and you, and cause you to *feel* as well as *know* the truth, that what is sudden sorrow, to our judgments, is only long-prepared mercy in *His* will whose names are *Wisdom* and *Love*. Should it not be, dear friend, that the tears of our human eyes ought to serve the happy and touching purpose of reminding us of those tears of Jesus which He shed in assuming our sorrow with our flesh? And the memory of those tears involves all comfort. A recognition of the oneness of the human nature of that Divine Saviour who ever liveth, with ours which perishes and sorrows so; an assurance drawn from thence of *His* sympathy who sits on the throne of God, with us who suffer in the dust of earth, and of all those doctrines of redemption and sanctification and happiness which come from Him and by Him.

Now you will forgive me for writing all this, dearest Mrs. Martin. I like to write my thoughts and feelings out of my own head and heart, just as they suggest themselves, when I write to you; and I cannot think of affliction, particularly when it comes near to me in the affliction or anxiety of dear friends, without looking back and remembering what voice of God used to sound softly to me when none other could speak comfort. You will forgive me, and not be angry with me for trying, or seeming to try, to be a sermon writer.

Perhaps, dear Mrs. Martin, when you do feel inclined and able to write, you would write me a few lines. Remember, I do not ask for them *now*. No, do not think of writing now. I shall very much like to hear how your dear charge is—whether there should appear any prospect of improvement; and how poor Mrs. Hanford bears up against this heavy calamity; and whether the anxiety and nursing affect your health. But we shall try to hear this from the Biddulphs; and so do put me out of your head, except when its thoughts would dwell on those on earth who sympathise with you and care for you.

You see we are in London after all, and poor Sidmouth left afar. I am almost inclined to say ‘poor us’ instead of ‘poor Sidmouth.’ But I dare say I shall soon be able to see in my dungeon, and begin to be amused with the spiders. Half my soul, in the meantime, seems to have stayed behind on the seashore, which I love more than ever now that I cannot walk on it in the body. London is wrapped up like a mummy, in a yellow mist, so closely that I have had scarcely a glimpse of its countenance since

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we came. Well, I am trying to like it all very much, and I dare say that in time I may change my taste and my senses—and succeed. We are in a house large enough to hold us, for four months, at the end of which time, if the experiment of our being able to live in London succeed, I *believe* that papa's intention is to take an unfurnished house and have his furniture from Ledbury. You may wonder at me, but I wish that were settled *so*, and *now*. I am *satisfied* with London, although I cannot enjoy it. We are not likely, in the case of leaving it, to return to Devonshire, and I should look with weary eyes to another strangership and pilgrimage even among green fields that know not these fogs. Papa's object in settling here refers to my brothers. George will probably enter as a barrister student at the Inner Temple on the fifth or sixth of this month, and he will have the advantage of his home by our remaining where we are. Another advantage of London is, that we shall see here those whom we might see nowhere else. This year, dear Mrs. Martin, may it bring with it the true pleasure of seeing *you*! Three have gone, and we have not seen you.... May God bless you and all that you care for, being with you always as the God of consolation and peace.

Your affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

It is from the middle of this year that Miss Barrett's active appearance as an author may be dated. Hitherto her publications had been confined to a few small anonymous volumes, printed rather to please herself and her friends than with any idea of appealing to a wider public. She was now anxious to take this farther step, and, with that object, to obtain admission to some of the literary magazines. This was obtained through the instrumentality of Mr. R.H. Home, subsequently best known as the author of 'Orion.' He was at this time personally unknown to Miss Barrett, but an application through a common friend led both to the opening to the poetess of the pages of the 'New Monthly Magazine,' then edited by Bulwer, and also to the commencement of a friendship which has left its mark in the two volumes of published letters to Mr. Home. The following is Mr. Home's account of the opening of the acquaintance ('Letters,' i. 7, 8):

'My first introduction to Miss Barrett was by a note from Mrs. Orme, inclosing one from the young lady containing a short poem with the modest request to be frankly told whether it might be ranked as poetry or merely verse. As there could be no doubt in the recipient's mind on that point, the poem was forwarded to Colburn's "New Monthly," edited at that time by Mr. Bulwer (afterwards the late [first] Lord Lytton), where it duly appeared in the current number. The next manuscript sent to me was "The Dead Pan," and the poetess at once started on her bright and noble career.'

The poem with which Miss Barrett thus made her bow to the world of letters was 'The Romaunt of Margret,'[20] which appeared in the July number of the magazine. Mr. Home must, however, have been in error in speaking of 'The Dead Pan' as its

successor, since that was not written till some years later. More probably it was ’The Poet’s Vow,[21] which was printed in the October number of the ‘New Monthly.’

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[Footnote 20: *Poetical Works*, ii. 3.]

[Footnote 21: *Ib*. i. 277.]

To H.S. Boyd [London:] October 14, Friday [1836].

My dear Friend,—Be as little angry with me as you can. I have not been very well for a day or two, and shall enjoy a visit to you on Monday so much more than I shall be able to do to-day, that I will ask you to forgive my not going to you this week, and to receive me kindly on that day instead—provided, you know, it is not wet.

The [Greek: Achaiides] approach the [Greek: Achaioi][22] more tremblingly than usual, with the 'New Monthly Magazine' in their hands. Now pray don't annoy yourself by reading a single word which you would rather not read except for the sake of being kind to me. And my prophecy is, that even by annoying yourself and making a *strenuous* effort, the whole force of friendship would not carry you down the first page. Georgie says you want to know the verdict of the 'Athenaeum.' That paper unfortunately has been lent out of the house; but my memory enables me to send you the words very correctly, I think. After some observations on other periodicals, the writer goes on to say: 'The "New Monthly Magazine" has not one heavy article. It is rich in poetry, including some fine sonnets by the Corn Law Rhymer, and a fine although too dreamy ballad, "The Poet's Vow." We are almost tempted to pause and criticise the work of a writer of so much inspiration and promise as the author of this poem, and exhort him once again, to greater clearness of expression and less quaintness in the choice of his phraseology; but this is not the time or place for digression.'

You see my critic has condemned me with a very gracious countenance. Do put on yours,

And believe me, affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

I forgot to say that you surprised and pleased me at the same time by your praise of my 'Sea-mew.'[23] Love to Annie. We were glad to hear that she did not *continue* unwell, and that you are well again, too. I hope you have had no return of the rheumatic pain.

[Footnote 22: Miss Barrett's Greek is habitually written without accents or breathings.]

[Footnote 23: *Poetical Works*, ii. 278.]

To H.S. Boyd [74 Gloucester Place:] Saturday, [October 1836].

My dear Friend,—I am much disappointed in finding myself at the end of this week without having once seen you—particularly when your two notes are waiting all this time to be answered. Do believe that they were not, either of them, addressed to an

ungrateful person, and that the only reason of their being received *silently* was my hope of answering them more agreeably to both of us—by talking instead of writing.

Yes; you have read my mystery.[24]

You paid a tithe to your human nature in reading only *nine-tenths* of it, and the rest was a pure gift to your friendship for me, and is taken and will be remembered as such. But you have a cruel heart for a parody, and this one tried my sensibility so much that I cried—with laughing. I confess to you notwithstanding, it was *very fair*, and dealt its blow with a shining pointed weapon.

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But what will you say to me when I confess besides that, in the face of all your kind encouragement, my Drama of the Angels[25] has never been touched until the last three days? It was *not* out of pure idleness on my part, nor of disregard to your admonition; but when my thoughts were distracted with other things, books just begun inclosing me all around, a whole load of books upon my conscience, I could not possibly rise up to the gate of heaven and write about my angels. You know one can't sometimes sit down to the sublunary, occupation of reading Greek, unless one feels *free* to it. And writing poetry requires a double liberty, and an inclination which comes only of itself.

But I have begun. I tried the blank metre once, and it *would not do*, and so I had to begin again in lyrics. Something above an hundred lines is written, and now I am in two panics, just as if one were not enough. First, because it seems to me a very daring subject—a subject almost beyond our sympathies, and therefore quite beyond the sphere of human poetry. Perhaps when all is written courageously, I shall have no courage left to publish it. Secondly, because all my tendencies towards mysticism will be called into terrible operation by this dreaming upon angels.

Yes; you *will* read a mystery,

but don't make any rash resolutions about reading anything. As I have begun, I certainly will go on with the writing.

Here is a question for you:

Am I to accept your generous sacrifice of reading nine-tenths of my 'Vow,' as an atonement for your WANT OF CONFIDENCE IN ME? Oh, your conscience will understand very well what I mean, without a dictionary.

Arabel and I intend to pay you a visit on Monday, and if we can, and it is convenient to you, we are inclined to invite ourselves to your dinner table. But this is all dependent on the weather.

Believe me, dear Mr. Boyd, your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 24: An allusion to the first line of 'The Poet's Vow.']

[Footnote 25: The 'Seraphim,' published in 1838.]

To H.S. Boyd [74 Gloucester Place:] November 26, 1836 [postmark].

My dear Mr. Boyd,—I have been so busy that I have not been able until this morning to take breath or *inspiration* to answer your lyrics. You shall see me soon, but I am sorry to say it can't be Monday or Tuesday.

I have had another note from the editor of the 'New Monthly Magazine'—very flattering, and praying for farther supplies. The Angels were not ready, and I was obliged to send something else, which I will not ask you to read. So don't be very uneasy.

Arabel's and my best love to Annie. And believe me in a great hurry, for I won't miss this post,

Yours affectionately,
E.B. BARRETT.

Your lyrics found me dull as prose
Among a file of papers
And analysing London fogs
To nothing but the vapours.

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They knew their part; but through the fog
Their flaming lightning raising;
They missed my fancy, and instead,
My choler set a-blazing.

Quoth I, 'I need not care a pin
For charge unjust, unsparing;
Yet oh! for ancient bodkin[26] keen,
To punish this *Pindaring*.

'Yet oh! that I, a female Jove,
These fogs sublime might float on,
Where, eagle-like, my dove might show
A very [Greek: *ugron noton*].[27]

'Then lightning should for lightning flash,
Vexation for vexation,
And shades of St. John's Wood should glow
In awful conflagration.'

I spoke; when lo! my birds of peace,
The vengeance disallowing,
Replied, 'Coo, coo!' But *keep in mind*,
That *cooing* is not *cowing*.[28]

[Footnote 26: The bodkin seems to be a favourite weapon with ancient dames whose genius was for killing (note by E.B.B.).]

[Footnote 27: A reference to Pindar, *Pyth*.i. 9.]

[Footnote 28: These verses are inclosed with the foregoing letter, as a retort to Mr. Boyd's parody.]

To Mrs. Martin 74 Gloucester Place: December 7, 1836.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Indeed I have long felt the need of writing to you (I mean the need to myself), and although so many weeks and even months have passed away in silence, they have not done so in lack of affection and thought.

I had wished very much to have been able to tell you in this letter where we had taken our house, or where we were going to take it. We remain, however, in our usual state of conscious ignorance, although there is a good deal of talking and walking about a house in Wimpole Street—which, between ourselves, I am not very anxious to live in, on account of the gloominesses of that street, and of that part of the street, whose walls look so much like Newgate's turned inside out. I would rather go on, in my old way,

inhabiting castles in the air than that particular house. Nevertheless, if it *is* decided upon, I dare say I shall contrive to be satisfied with it, and sleep and wake very much as I should in any other. It will certainly be a point gained to be settled somewhere, and I do so long to sit in my own armchair—strange as it will look out of my own room—and to read from my own books.... For our own particular parts, our healths continue good—none of us, I think, the worse for fog or wind. As to wind, we were almost elevated into the prerogative of *pigs* in the late storm. We could almost *see* it, and the feeling it might have been fatal to us. Bro and I were moralising about shipwrecks, in the dining-room, when down came the chimney through the skylight into the entrance passage. You may imagine the crashing effect of the bricks bounding from the staircase downwards, breaking the stone steps in the process, in addition to the falling in of twenty-four

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large panes of glass, frames and all. We were terrified out of all propriety, and there has been a dreadful calumny about Henrietta and me—that we had the hall door open for the purpose of going out into the street with our hair on end, if Bro had not *encouraged* us by shutting the door and locking it. I confess to opening the door, but deny the purpose of it—at least, maintain that I only meant to keep in reserve a way of escape, *in case*, as seemed probable, the whole house was on its way to the ground. Indeed, we should think much of the *mercy* of the escape. Bro had been on the staircase only five minutes before. Sarah the housemaid was actually there. She looked up accidentally and saw the nodding chimneys, and ran down into the drawing-room to papa, shrieking, but escaping with one graze of the hand from one brick. How did *you* fare in the wind? I never much imagined before that anything so true to nature as a real live storm could make itself heard in our streets. But it has come too surely, and carried away with it, besides our chimney, all that was left to us of the country, in the shape of the Kensington Garden trees. Now do write to me, dearest Mrs. Martin, and soon, and tell me all you can of your chances and mischances, and how Mr. Martin is getting on with the parish, and yourself with the parishioners. But you have more the name of living at Colwall than the thing. You seem to me to lead a far more wandering life than we, for all our homelessness and 'pilgrim shoon.' Why, you have been in Ireland since I last said a word to you, even upon paper....

I sometimes think that a pilgrim's life is the wisest—at least, the most congenial to the 'uses of this world.' We give our sympathies and associations to our hills and fields, and then the providence of God gives *them* to another, It is better, perhaps, to keep a stricter *identity*, by calling only our thoughts our own.

Was there anybody in the world who ever loved London for itself? Did Dr. Johnson, in his paradise of Fleet Street, love the pavement and the walls? I doubt *that*—whether I ought to do so or not—though I don't doubt at all that one may be contented and happy here, and love much *in* the place. But the place and the privileges of it don't mix together in one's love, as is done among the hills and by the seaside.

I or Henrietta must have told you that one of my privileges has been to see Wordsworth twice. He was very kind to me, and let me hear his conversation. I went with him and Miss Mitford to Chiswick, and thought all the way that I must certainly be dreaming. I saw her almost every day of her week's visit to London (this was all long ago, while you were in France); and she, who overflows with warm affections and generous benevolences, showed me every present and absent kindness, professing to love me, and asking me to write to her. Her novel is to be published soon after Christmas, and I believe a new tragedy

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is to appear about the same time, 'under the protection of Mr. Forrest.' Papa has given me the first two volumes of Wordsworth's new edition. The engraving in the first is his *own face*. You might think me affected if I told you all I felt in seeing the living face. His manners are very simple, and his conversation not at all *prominent*—if you quite understand what I mean by *that*. I do myself, for I saw at the same time Landor—the brilliant Landor!—and *felt* the difference between great genius and eminent talent; All these visions have passed now. I hear and see nothing, except my doves and the fireplace, and am doing little else than [*words torn out*] write all day long. And then people ask me what I *mean* in [*words torn out*]. I hope you were among the six who understood or half understood my 'Poet's Vow'—that is, if you read it at all. Uncle Hedley made a long pause at the first part. But I have been reading, too, Sheridan Knowles's play of the 'Wreckers.' It is full of passion and pathos, and made me shed a great many tears. How do you get on with the reading society? Do you see much or anything of Lady Margaret Cocks, from whom I never hear now? I promised to let her have 'Ion,' if I could, before she left Brighton, but the person to whom it was lent did not return it to me in time. Will you tell her this, if you do see her, and give her my kind regards at the same time? Dear Bell was so sorry not to have seen you. If she had, you would have thought her looking *very* well, notwithstanding the thinness—perhaps, in some measure, on account of it—and in *eminent* spirits. I have not seen her in such spirits for very, very long. And there she is, down at Torquay, with the Hedleys and Butlers, making quite a colony of it, and everybody, in each several letter, grumbling in an undertone at the dullness of the place. What would *I* give to see the waves once more! But perhaps if I were there, I should grumble too. It is a happiness to them to be *together*, and that, I am sure, they all feel....

Believe me, dearest Mrs. Martin, your affectionate
E.B.B.

Oh that you would call me Ba![29]

[Footnote 29: Elizabeth Barrett's 'pet name' (see her poem, *Poetical Works*, ii. 249), given to her as a child by her brother Edward, and used by her family and friends, and by herself in her letters to them, throughout her life.]

To H.S. Boyd [74 Gloucester Place:] Thursday, December 15, 1836 [postmark].

My dear Mr. Boyd,—... Two mornings since, I saw in the paper, under the head of literary news, that a change of editorship was taking place in the 'New Monthly Magazine;' and that Theodore Hook was to preside in the room of Mr. Hall. I am so much too modest and too wise to expect the patronage of two editors in succession, that I expect both my poems in a return cover, by every twopenny post. Besides, what has Theodore Hook to do with Seraphim? So, I shall leave that poem of mine to your

imagination; which won't be half as troublesome to you as if I asked you to read it; begging you to be assured—to write it down in your critical rubric—that it is the very finest composition you ever read, *next* (of course) to the beloved 'De Virginitate' of Gregory Nazianzen.[30]

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Mr. Stratten has just been here. I admire him more than I ever did, for his admiration of my doves. By the way, I am sure he thought them the most agreeable of the whole party; for he said, what he never did before, that he could sit here for an hour! Our love to Annie—and forgive me for Baskettiring a letter to you. I mean, of course, as to size, not type.

Yours affectionately,
E.B. BARRETT.

Is your poem printed yet?

[Footnote 30:Do you mind that deed of Ate Which you bound me to so fast,— Reading 'De Virginitate,' From the first line to the last? How I said at ending solemn, As I turned and looked at you, That Saint Simeon on the column Had had somewhat less to do?

'Wine of Cyprus' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 139)]

To H.S. Boyd [74 Gloucester Place:] Tuesday [Christmas 1836].

My dear Friend,—I am very much obliged to you for the *two* copies of your poem, so beautifully printed, with such 'majestical' types, on such 'magnifical' paper, as to be almost worthy of Baskett himself. You are too liberal in sending me more than one copy; and pray accept in return a duplicate of gratitude.

As to my 'Seraphim,' they are not returned to me, as in the case of their being unaccepted, I expressly begged they might be. Had the old editor been the present one, my inference would of course be, that their insertion was a determined matter; but as it is, I don't know what to think.[31] A long list of great names, belonging to *intending* contributors, appeared in the paper a day or two ago, and among them was Miss Mitford's.

Are you wroth with me for not saying a word about going to see you? Arabel and I won't affirm it mathematically—but we are, metaphysically, *talking* of paying our visit to you next Tuesday. Don't expect us, nevertheless.

Yours affectionately,
E.B. BARRETT.

What are my Christmas good wishes to be? That you may hold a Field in your right hand, and a Baskerville in your left, before the year is out! That degree of happiness will satisfy at least the *bodily* part of you.

You may wish, in return, for *me*, that I may learn to write rather more legibly than 'at these presents.'

Our love to Annie.

Won't you send your new poem to Mr. Barker, to the care of Mr. Valpy, with your Christmas benedictions?

[Footnote 31: As a matter of fact, 'The Seraphim' was not printed in the *New Monthly*, being probably thought too long.]

To Mrs. Martin. [74 Gloucester Place:] January 23, 1837 [postmark].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I am standing in Henrietta's place, she says—but not, *I* say, to answer your letter to *her* yesterday, but your letter to *me*, some weeks ago—which I meant to answer much more immediately if the *ignis fatuus* of a house (you see to what a miserable fatuity I am reduced, of applying your pure country metaphors to our brick pollutions) had not been gliding just before us, and I had not much wished to be able to tell you of our settlement. As it is, however, I must write, and shall keep a solemn silence on the solemn subject of our shifting plans....

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No! I was not at all disappointed in Wordsworth, although perhaps I should not have singled him from the multitude as a great man. There is a *reserve* even in his countenance, which does not lighten as Landor's does, whom I saw the same evening. His eyes have more meekness than brilliancy; and in his slow even articulation there is rather the solemnity and calmness of *truth* itself, than the animation and energy of those who seek for it. As to my being quite at my ease when I spoke to him, why how could you ask such a question? I trembled both in my soul and body. But he was very kind, and sate near me and talked to me as long as he was in the room—and recited a translation by Cary of a sonnet of Dante's—and altogether, it was quite a dream! Landor too—Walter Savage Landor ... in whose hands the ashes of antiquity burn again—gave me two Greek epigrams he had lately written ... and talked brilliantly and prominently until Bro (he and I went together) abused him for *ambitious* singularity and affectation. But it was very interesting. And dear Miss Mitford too! and Mr. Raymond, a great Hebraist and the ancient author of 'A Cure for a Heartache!' I never walked in the skies before; and perhaps never shall again, when so many stars are out! I shall at least see dear Miss Mitford, who wrote to me not long ago to say that she would soon be in London with 'Otto,' her new tragedy, which was written at Mr. Forrest's own request, he in the most flattering manner having applied to her a stranger, as the authoress of 'Rienzi,' for a dramatic work worthy of his acting—after rejecting many plays offered to him, and among them Mr. Knowles's.... She says that her play will be quite opposed, in its execution, to 'Ion,' as unlike it 'as a ruined castle overhanging the Rhine, to a Grecian temple.' And I do not doubt that it will be full of ability; although my own opinion is that she stands higher as the authoress of 'Our Village' than of 'Rienzi,' and writes prose better than poetry, and transcends rather in Dutch minuteness and high finishing, than in Italian ideality and passion. I think besides that Mr. Forrest's rejection of any play of Sheridan Knowles must refer rather to its unfitness for the development of his own personal talent, than to its abstract demerit, whatever Transatlantic tastes he may bring with him. The published title of the last play is 'The Daughter,' not 'The Wreckers,' although I believe it was acted as the last. I am very anxious to read 'Otto,' not to *see* it. I am not going to see it, notwithstanding an offered temptation to sit in the authoress's own box. With regard to 'Ion,' I think it is a beautiful work, but beautiful *rather* morally than intellectually. Is this right or not? Its moral tone is very noble, and sends a grand and touching harmony into the midst of the full discord of this utilitarian age. As dramatic *poetry*, it seems to me to want, not beauty, but power, passion, and condensation. This is my *doxy* about 'Ion.' Its author[32] made me very proud by sending it to me, although we do not know him personally. I have *heard* that he is a most amiable man (who else could have written 'Ion'?), but that he was a little *elevated* by his popularity last year!...

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I have read Combe's 'Phrenology,' but not the 'Constitution of Man.' The 'Phrenology' is very clever, and amusing; but I do not think it logical or satisfactory. I forget whether 'slowness of the pulse' *is* mentioned in it as a symptom of the poetical aestus. I am afraid, if it be a symptom, I dare not take my place even in the 'forlorn hope of poets' in this age so forlorn as to its poetry; for my pulse is in a continual flutter and my feet not half cold enough for a pedestal—so I must make my honours over to poor papa straightway. He has been shivering and shuddering through the cold weather; and partaking our influenza in the warmer. I am very sorry that you should have been a sufferer too. It seems to have been a universal pestilence, even down in Devonshire, where dear Bummy and the whole colony have had their share of 'groans.' And one of my doves shook its pretty head and ruffled its feathers and shut its eyes, and became subject to pap and nursing and other infirmities for two or three days, until I was in great consternation for the result. But it is well again—cooing as usual; and so indeed we all are. But indeed, I can't write a sentence more without saying some of the evil it deserves—of the utilitarianisms of this corrupt age—among some of the chief of which are steel pens!

I am so glad that you liked my 'Romaunt,' and so resigned that you did not understand some of my 'Poet's Vow,' and so obliged that you should care to go on reading what I write. They vouchsafed to publish in the first number of the new series of the 'New Monthly' a little poem of mine called 'The Island,'[33] but so incorrectly that I was glad at the additional oblivion of my signature. If you see it, pray alter the last senseless line of the first page into 'Leaf sounds with water, in your ear,' and put 'amreeta' instead of 'amneta' on the second page; and strike out '*of*' in the line which names Aeschylus! There are other blunders, [but] these are intolerable, and cast me out of my 'contentment' for some time. I have begged for [proof] sheets in future; and as none have come for the ensuing month, I suppose I shall have nothing in the next number. They have a lyrical dramatic poem of mine, 'The Two Seraphim,' which, whenever it appears, I shall like to have your opinion of. As to the incomprehensible line in the 'Poet's Vow' of which you asked me the meaning, 'One making one in strong compass,' I meant to express how that oneness of God, 'in whom are all things,' produces a oneness or sympathy (sympathy being the tendency of many to become one) in all things. Do you understand? or is the explanation to be explained? The unity of God preserves a unity in men—that is, a perpetual sympathy between man and man—which sympathy we must be subject to, if not in our joys, yet in our griefs. I believe the subject itself involves the necessity of some mysticism; but I must make no excuses. I am afraid that my very Seraphim will not be thought to stand in a very clear light, even at heaven's gate. But this is much *asay* about nothing ...

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The Bishop of Exeter is staying and preaching at Torquay. Do you not envy them all for making part of his congregation? I am sure I do *as much*. I envy you your before-breakfast activity. I am never a *complete man* without my breakfast—it seems to be some integral part of my soul. *You* 'read all O'Connell's speeches.' I never read any of them—unless they take me by surprise. I keep my devotion for *unpaid* patriots; but Miss Mitford is another devotee of Mr. O'Connell ...

Dearest Mrs. Martin's affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

Thank you for the 'Ba' in Henrietta's letter. If you knew how many people, whom I have known only within this year or two, whether I like them or not, say 'Ba, Ba,' quite naturally and pastorally, you would not come to me with the detestable 'Miss B.'

[Footnote 32: Serjeant Talfourd.]

[Footnote 33: *Poetical Works*, ii. 248.]

To Mrs. Martin London: August 16, 1837.

My dear Mrs. Martin,—It seems a long long time since we had any intercourse; and the answer to your last pleasant letter to Henrietta *must* go to you from me. We have heard of you that you don't mean to return to England before the spring—which news proved me a prophet, and disappointed me at the same time, for one can't enjoy even a prophecy in this world without something vexing. Indeed, I do long to see you again, dearest Mrs. Martin, and should always have the same pleasure in it, and affection for you, if my friends and acquaintances were as much multiplied as you *wrongly* suppose them to be. But the truth is that I have almost none at all, in this place; and, except our relative Mr. Kenyon, not one literary in any sense. Dear Miss Mitford, one of the very kindest of human beings, lies buried in geraniums, thirty miles away. I could not conceive what Henrietta had been telling you, or what you meant, for a long time—until we conjectured that it must have been something about Lady Dacre, who kindly sent me her book, and intimated that she would be glad to receive me at her conversations—and you know me better than to doubt whether I would go or not. There was an equal unworthiness and unwillingness towards the honor of it. Indeed, dearest Mrs. Martin, it is almost surprising how we contrive to be as dull in London as in Devonshire—perhaps more so, for the sight of a multitude induces a sense of seclusion which one has not without it; and, besides, there were at Sidmouth many more known faces and listened-to voices than we see and hear in this place. No house yet! And you will scarcely have patience to read that papa has seen and likes another house in Devonshire Place, and that he *may* take it, and we *may* be settled in it, before the year closes. I myself think of the whole business indifferently. My thoughts have turned so long on the subject of houses, that the pivot is broken—and now they won't turn any more. All that

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remains is, a sort of consciousness, that we should be more comfortable in a house with cleaner carpets, and taken for rather longer than a week at a time. Perhaps, after all, we are quite as well *sur le tapis* as it is. It is a thousand to one but that the feeling of four red London walls closing around us for seven, eleven, or twenty-five years, would be a harsh and hard one, and make us cry wistfully to 'get out.' I am sure you will look up to your mountains, and down to your lakes, and enter into this conjecture.

Talking of mountains and lakes is itself a trying thing to us poor prisoners. Papa has talked several times of taking us into the country for two months this summer, and we have dreamt of it a hundred times in addition; but, after all, we are not likely to go I dare say. It would have been very delightful—and who knows what may take place next summer? We may not absolutely *die*, without seeing a tree. Henrietta has seen a great many. You will have heard, I dare say, of the enjoyment she had in her week at Camden House. She seems to have walked from seven in the morning to seven at night; and was quite delighted with the kindness within doors and the sunshine without. I assure you that, fresh as she was from the air and dew, she saluted us amidst the sentiment of our sisterly meeting just in this way—it was almost her first exclamation—-'What a very disagreeable smell there is here!' And this, although she had brought geraniums enough from Camden to perfume the Haymarket!...

I am happy to announce to you that a new little dove has appeared from a shell—over which nobody had prognosticated good—on August 16, 1837. I and the senior doves appear equally delighted, and we all three, in the capacity of good sitters and indefatigable pullers-about, take a good deal of credit upon ourselves....

Arabel has begun oil painting, and without a master—and you can't think how much effect and expression she has given to several of her own sketches, notwithstanding all difficulties. Poor Henrietta is without a piano, and is not to have one again *until we have another house*! This is something like 'when Homer and Virgil are forgotten.' *Speaking of Homer and Virgil*, I have been writing a 'Romance of the Ganges,'[34] in order to illustrate an engraving in the new annual to be edited by Miss Mitford, Finden's tableaux for 1838. It does not sound a *very* Homeric undertaking—I confess I don't hold any kind of annual, gild it as you please, in too much honour and awe—but from my wish to please her, and from the necessity of its being done in a certain time, I was 'quite frightful,' as poor old Cooke used to say, in order to express his own nervousness. But she was quite pleased—she is very soon pleased—and the ballad, gone the way of all writing, now-a-days, to the press. I do wish I could send you some kind of news that would interest you; but you see scarcely any except all this selfishness is in my beat. Dearest Bro draws and reads German, and I fear is dull notwithstanding. But we are every one of us more reconciled to London than we were. Well! I must not write any more. Whenever you think of me, dearest Mrs. Martin, remember how deeply and

unchangeably I must regard you—both with my *mind*, my *affections*, and that part of either, called my gratitude. BA.

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Henrietta's kindest love and thanks for your letter. She desires me to say that she and Bro are going to dine with Mrs. Robert Martin to-morrow. I must tell you that Georgie and I went to hear Dr. Chalmers preach, three Sundays ago. His sermon was on a text whose extreme beauty would diffuse itself into any sermon preached upon it—God is love. His eloquence was very great, and his views noble and grasping. I expected much from his imagination, but not so much from his knowledge. It was truer to Scripture than I was prepared for, although there seemed to me some *want* on the subject of the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart, which work we cannot dwell upon too emphatically. 'He worketh in us to will and to do,' and yet we are apt to will and do without a transmission of the praise to Him. May God bless you.

[Footnote 34: *Poetical Works*, ii. 83.]

To Miss Commeline London: August 19, 1837.

My dear Miss Commeline,—I could not hear of your being in affliction without very frequent thoughts of you and a desire to express some of them in this way, and although so much time has passed I do hope that you will believe in the sympathy with which I, or rather *we*, have thought of you, and in the regard we shall not cease to feel for you even if we meet no more in this world. It is blessed to know both for ourselves and for each other that while there is a darkness that *must* come to all, there is a light which *may*; and may He who is the light in the dark place be with you [now] and always, causing you to feel rather the glory that is in Him than the shadow which is in all beside—that so the sweetness of the consolation may pass the bitterness of even grief. Do give my love to Mrs. Commeline and to your sisters, and believe me, all of you, that the friends who have gone from your neighbourhood have not gone from my old remembrance, either of your kindness to them, or of their own feelings of interest in you.

Trusting to such old remembrances, I will believe that you care to know what we are doing and how we are settling—that word which has now been on our lips for years, which it is marvellous to think how it got upon human lips at all. We came from Sidmouth to try London and ourselves, and see whether or not we could live together; and after more than a year and a half close contact with smoke we find no very good excuse for not remaining in it; and papa is going on with his eternal hunt for houses—-the wild huntsman in the ballad is nothing to him, all except the sublimity—intending very seriously to take the first he can. He is now about one in particular, but I won't tell where it is because we have considered so many houses in particular that our considerations have come to be a jest in general. I shall be heartily glad, at least I *think* so, for it is possible that the reality of being bricked up for a lease time may not be very agreeable.

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I think I shall be heartily glad when a house is taken, and we have made it look like our own with our furniture and pictures and books. I am so anxious to see my old books. I believe I shall begin at the beginning and read every story book through in the joy of meeting, and shall be as sedentary as ever I was in my own arm-chair. I remember when I was a child spreading my vitality, not over trees and flowers (I do that still—I still believe they have a certain animal susceptibility to pleasure and pain; 'it is my creed,' and, being Wordsworth's besides, I am not ashamed of it), but over chairs and tables and books in particular, and being used to fancy a kind of love in them to suit my love to them. And so if I were a child I should have an intense pity for my poor folios, quartos, and duodecimos, to say nothing of the arm-chair, shut up all these weeks and months in boxes, without a rational eye to look upon them. Pray forgive me if I have written a great deal of nonsense—'Je m'en doute.'

Henrietta has spent a fortnight at Chislehurst with the Martins, and was very joyous there, and came back to us with that happy triumphant air which I always fancy people 'just from the country' put on towards us hapless Londoners.

But you must not think I am a discontented person and grumble all day long at being in London. *There are many advantages here*, as I say to myself whenever it is particularly disagreeable; and if we can't see even a leaf or a sparrow without soot on it, there are the parrots at the Zoological Gardens and the pictures at the Royal Academy; and real live poets above all, with their heads full of the trees and birds and sunshine of paradise. I have stood face to face with Wordsworth and Landor; and Miss Mitford, who is in herself what she is in her books, has become a dear friend of mine, but a distant one. She visits London at long intervals, and lives thirty miles away....

Bro and I were studying German together all last summer with Henry, before he left us to become a German, and I believe this is the last of my languages, for I have begun absolutely to detest the sight of a dictionary or grammar, which I never liked except as a means, and love poetry with an intenser love, if that be possible, than I ever did. Not that Greek is not as dear to me as ever, but I write more than I read, even of Greek poetry, and am resolute to work whatever little faculty I have, clear of imitations and conventionalisms which cloud and weaken more poetry (particularly now-a-days) than would be believed possible without looking into it....

As to society in London, I assure you that none of us have much, and that as for me, you would wonder at seeing how possible it is to live as secludedly in the midst of a multitude as in the centre of solitude. My doves are my chief acquaintances, and I am so very intimate with *them* that they accept and even demand my assistance in building their innumerable nests. Do tell me if there is any hope of seeing any of you in London at any time. I say 'do tell me,' for I will venture to ask you, dear Miss Commeline, to write me a few lines in one of the idlest hours of one of your idlest days just to tell me a

little about you, and whether Mrs. Commeline is tolerably well. Pray believe me under all circumstances,

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Yours sincerely and affectionately,
E.B. BARRETT.

The spring of 1838 was marked by two events of interest to Miss Barrett and her family. In the first place, Mr. Barrett's apparently interminable search for a house ended in his selection of 50 Wimpole Street, which continued to be his home for the rest of his life, and which is, consequently, more than any other house in London, to be associated with his daughter's memory. The second event was the publication of 'The Seraphim, and other Poems,' which was Miss Barrett's first serious appearance before the public, and in her own name, as a poet. The early letters of this year refer to the preparation of this volume, as well as to the authoress's health, which was at this time in a very serious condition, owing to the breaking of a blood-vessel. Indeed, from this time until her marriage in 1846 she held her life on the frailest of tenures, and lived in all respects the life of an invalid.

To H.S. Boyd Monday morning, March 27, 1838 [postmark].

My dear Friend,—I do hope that you may not be very angry, but papa thinks—and, indeed, I think—that as I have already *had* two proof sheets and forty-eight pages, and the printers have gone on to the rest of the poem, it would not be very welcome to them if we were to ask them to retrace their steps. Besides, I would rather—*I* for myself, *I*—-that you had the whole poem at once and clearly printed before you, to insure as many chances as possible of your liking it. I am *promised* to see the volume completed in three weeks from this time, so that the dreadful moment of your reading it—I mean the 'Seraphim' part of it—cannot be far off, and perhaps, the season being a good deal advanced even now, you might not, on consideration, wish me to retard the appearance of the book, except for some very sufficient reason. I feel very nervous about it—far more than I did when my 'Prometheus' crept out [of] the Greek, or I myself out of the shell, in the first 'Essay on Mind.' Perhaps this is owing to Dr. Chambers's medicines, or perhaps to a consciousness that my present attempt *is* actually, and will be considered by others, more a trial of strength than either of my preceding ones.

Thank you for the books, and especially for the *editio rarissima*, which I should as soon have thought of your trusting to me as of your admitting me to stand with gloves on within a yard of Baxter. This extraordinary confidence shall not be abused.

I thank you besides for your kind inquiries about my health. Dr. Chambers did not think me worse yesterday, notwithstanding the last cold days, which have occasioned some uncomfortable sensations, and he still thinks I shall be better in the summer season. In the meantime he has ordered me to take ice—out of sympathy with nature, I suppose; and not to speak a word, out of contradiction to my particular, human, feminine nature.

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Whereupon I revenge myself, you see, by talking all this nonsense upon paper, and making you the victim.

To propitiate you, let me tell you that your commands have been performed to the letter, and that one Greek motto (from 'Orpheus') is given to the first part of 'The Seraphim,' and another from *Chrysostom* to the second.

Henrietta desires me to say that she means to go to see you very soon. Give my very kind remembrance to Miss Holmes, and believe me,

Your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

I saw Mr. Kenyon yesterday. He has a book just coming out.[35] I should like you to read it. If you would, you would thank me for saying so.

[Footnote 35: *Poems, for the most part occasional*, by John Kenyon.]

To John Kenyon[36] [1838.]

Thank you, dearest Mr. Kenyon; and I should (and *shall*) thank Miss Thomson too for caring to spend a thought on me after all the Parisian glories and rationalities which I sympathise with by many degrees nearer than you seem to do. We, in this England here, are just social barbarians, to my mind—that is, we know how to read and write and think, and even talk on occasion; but we carry the old rings in our noses, and are proud of the flowers pricked into our cuticles. By so much are they better than we on the Continent, I always think. Life has a thinner rind, and so a livelier sap. And *that* I can see in the books and the traditions, and always understand people who like living in France and Germany, and should like it myself, I believe, on some accounts.

Where did you get your Bacchanalian song? Witty, certainly, but the recollection of the *scores* a little ghastly for the occasion, perhaps. You have yourself sung into silence, too, all possible songs of Bacchus, as the god and I know.

Here is a delightful letter from Miss Martineau. I cannot be so selfish as to keep it to myself. The sense of natural beauty and the *good* sense of the remarks on rural manners are both exquisite of their kinds, and Wordsworth is Wordsworth as she knows him. Have I said that Friday will find me expecting the kind visit you promise? *That*, at least, is what I meant to say with all these words.

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 36: John Kenyon (1784-1856) was born in Jamaica, the son of a wealthy West Indian landowner, but came to England while quite a boy, and was a conspicuous

figure in literary society during the second quarter of the century. He published some volumes of minor verse, but is best known for his friendships with many literary men and women, and for his boundless generosity and kindliness to all with whom he was brought into contact. Crabb Robinson described him as a man 'whose life is spent in making people happy.' He was a distant cousin of Miss Barrett, and a friend of Robert Browning, who dedicated to him his volume of 'Dramatic Romances,' besides writing and sending to him 'Andrea del Sarto' as a substitute for a print of the painter's portrait which he had been unable to find. The best account of Kenyon is to be found in Mrs. Crosse's 'John Kenyon and his Friends' (in *Red-Letter Days of My Life*, vol. i.).]

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To John Kenyon Wimpole Street: Sunday evening [1838?].

My dear Mr. Kenyon,—I am *so* sorry to hear of your going, and I not able to say 'good-bye' to you, that—I am *not* writing this note on that account.

It is a begging note, and now I am wondering to myself whether you will think me very childish or womanish, or silly enough to be both together (I know your thoughts upon certain parallel subjects), if I go on to do my begging fully. I hear that you are going to Mr. Wordsworth's—to Rydal Mount—and I want you to ask *for yourself*, and then to send to me in a letter—by the post, I mean, two cuttings out of the garden—of myrtle or geranium; I care very little which, or what else. Only I say 'myrtle' because it is less given to die and I say *two* to be sure of my chances of saving one. Will you? You would please me very much by doing it; and certainly not *dis* please me by refusing to do it. Your broadest 'no' would not sound half so strange to me as my 'little crooked thing' does to you; but you see everybody in the world is fanciful about something, and why not *E.B.B.*?

Dear Mr. Kenyon, I have a book of yours—M. Rio's. If you want it before you go, just write in two words, 'Send it,' or I shall infer from your silence that I may keep it until you come back. No necessity for answering this otherwise. Is it as bad as asking for autographs, or worse? At any rate, believe me *in earnest* this time—besides being, with every wish for your enjoyment of mountains and lakes and 'cherry trees,'

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd [May 1838.]

My dear friend,—I am rather better than otherwise within the last few days, but fear that nothing will make me essentially so except the invisible sun. I am, however, a little better, and God's will is always done in mercy.

As to the poems, do forgive me, dear Mr. Boyd; and refrain from executing your cruel threat of suffering 'the desire of reading them to pass away.'

I have not one sheet of them; and papa—and, to say the truth, I myself—would so very much prefer your reading the preface first, that you must try to indulge us in our phantasy. The book Mr. Bentley half promises to finish the printing of this week. At any rate it is likely to be all done in the next: and you may depend upon having a copy *as soon* as I have power over one.

With kind regards to Miss Holmes,
Believe me, your affectionate friend,
E.B.B.

BOOKRAGS

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street; Wednesday [May 1838].

Thank you for your inquiry, my dear friend. I had begun to fancy that between Saunders and Otley and the 'Seraphim' I had fallen to the ground of your disfavour. But I do trust to be able to send you a copy before next Sunday.

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I am thrown back a little just now by having caught a very bad cold, which has of course affected my cough. The worst seems, however, to be past, and Dr. Chambers told me yesterday that he expected to see me in two days nearly as well as before this casualty. And I have been, thank God, pretty well lately; and although when the stethoscope was applied three weeks ago, it did not speak very satisfactorily of the state of the lungs, yet Dr. Chambers seems to be hopeful still, and to talk of the wonders which the summer sunshine (when it does come) may be the means of doing for me. And people say that I look rather better than worse, even now.

Did you hear of an autograph of Shakespeare's being sold lately for a very large sum (I *think* it was above a hundred pounds) on the credit of its being the only genuine autograph extant? Is yours quite safe? And are *you* so, in your opinion of its veritableness?

I have just finished a very long barbarous ballad for Miss Mitford and the Finden's tableaux of this year. The title is 'The Romaunt of the Page,'[37] and the subject not of my own choosing.

I believe that you will certainly have 'The Seraphim' this week. Do macadamise the frown from your brow in order to receive them.

Give my love to Miss Holmes.
Your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 37: *Poetical Works*, ii. 40.]

To H.S. Boyd June 7, 1838 [postmark].

My dear Mr. Boyd,—Papa is scarcely inclined, nor am I for myself, to send my book or books to the East Indies. Let them alone, poor things, until they can walk about a little! and then it will be time enough for them to 'learn to *fly*.'

I am so sorry that Emily Harding saw Arabel and went away without this note, which I have been meaning to write to you for several days, and have been so absorbed and drawn away (all except my thoughts) by other things necessary to be done, that I was forced to defer it. My ballad,[38] containing a ladye dressed up like a page and galloping off to Palestine in a manner that would scandalise you, went to Miss Mitford this morning. But I augur from its length that she will not be able to receive it into Finden.

Arabel has told me what Miss Harding told her of your being in the act of going through my 'Seraphim' for the second time. For the feeling of interest in me which brought this

labour upon you, I thank you, my dear friend. What your opinion *is*, and *will* be, I am prepared to hear with a good deal of awe. You will *certainly not approve of the poem*.

There now! You see I am prepared. Therefore do not keep back one rough word, for friendship's sake, but be as honest as—you could not help being, without this request.

If I should live, I shall write (*I believe*) better poems than 'The Seraphim;' which belief will help me to survive the condemnation heavy upon your lips.

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Affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 38: 'The Romaunt of the Page.']

'The Seraphim, and other Poems,' a duodecimo of 360 pages, at last made its appearance at the end of May. At the time of its publication, English poetry was experiencing one of its periods of ebb between two flood tides of great achievement. Shelley, Keats, Byron, Scott, Coleridge were dead; Wordsworth had ceased to produce poetry of the first order; no fresh inspiration was to be expected from Landor, Southey, Rogers, Campbell, and such other writers of the Georgian era as still were numbered with the living. On the other hand, Tennyson, though already the most remarkable among the younger poets, was still but exercising himself in the studies in language and metrical music by which his consummate art was developed; Browning had published only 'Pauline,' 'Paracelsus,' and 'Strafford;' the other poets who have given distinction to the Victorian age had not begun to write. And between the veterans of the one generation and the young recruits of the next there was a singular want of writers of distinction. There was thus every opportunity for a new poet when Miss Barrett entered the lists with her first volume of acknowledged verse.

Its reception, on the whole, does credit alike to its own merits and to the critics who reviewed it. It does not contain any of those poems which have proved the most popular among its authoress's complete works, except 'Cowper's Grave;' but 'The Seraphim' was a poem which deserved to attract attention, and among the minor poems were 'The Poet's Vow,' 'Isobel's Child,' 'The Romaunt of Margret,' 'My Doves,' and 'The Sea-mew.' The volume did not suffice to win any wide reputation for Miss Barrett, and no second edition was called for; on the other hand, it was received with more than civility, with genuine cordiality, by several among the reviewers, though they did not fail to note its obvious defects. The 'Athenaeum'[39] began its review with the following declaration:

This is an extraordinary volume—especially welcome as an evidence of female genius and accomplishment—but it is hardly less disappointing than extraordinary. Miss Barrett's genius is of a high order; active, vigorous, and versatile, but unaccompanied by discriminating taste. A thousand strange and beautiful views flit across her mind, but she cannot look on them with steady gaze; her descriptions, therefore, are often shadowy and indistinct, and her language wanting in the simplicity of unaffected earnestness.

[Footnote 39: July 7, 1838.]

The 'Examiner,'[40] after quoting at length from the preface and 'The Seraphim,' continued:

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Who will deny to the writer of such verses as these (and they are not sparingly met with in the volume) the possession of many of the highest qualities of the divine art? We regret to have some restriction to add to an admission we make so gladly. Miss Barrett is indeed a genuine poetess, of no common order; yet is she in danger of being spoiled by over-ambition; and of realising no greater or more final reputation than a hectical one, like Crashaw's. She has fancy, feeling, imagination, expression; but for want of some just equipoise or other, between the material and spiritual, she aims at flights which have done no good to the strongest, and therefore falls infinitely short, except in such detached passages as we have extracted above, of what a proper exercise of her genius would infallibly reach.... Very various, and in the main beautiful and true, are the minor poems. But the entire volume deserves more than ordinary attention.

[Footnote 40: June 24, 1838.]

The 'Atlas,'[41] another paper whose literary judgments were highly esteemed at that date, was somewhat colder, and dwelt more on the faults of the volume, but added nevertheless that 'there are occasional passages of great beauty, and full of deep poetical feeling. In 'The Romaunt of Margret' it detected the influence of Tennyson—a suggestion which Miss Barrett repudiated rather warmly; and it concluded with the declaration that the authoress 'possesses a fine poetical temperament, and has given to the public, in this volume, a work of considerable merit.'

[Footnote 41: June 23, 1838.]

Such were the principal voices among the critical world when Miss Barrett first ventured into its midst; and she might well be satisfied with them. Two years later, the 'Quarterly Review'[42] included her name in a review of 'Modern English Poetesses,' along with Caroline Norton, 'V.,' and others whose names are even less remembered to-day. But though the reviewer speaks of her genius and learning in high terms of admiration, he cannot be said to treat her sympathetically. He objects to the dogmatic positiveness of her prefaces, and protests warmly against her 'reckless repetition of the name of God'—a charge which, in another connection, will be found fully and fairly met in one of her later letters. On points of technique he criticises her frequent use of the perfect participle with accented final syllable—'kissed,' 'bowed,' and the like—and her fondness for the adverb 'very;' both of which mannerisms he charges to the example of Tennyson. He condemns the 'Prometheus,' though recognising it as 'a remarkable performance for a young lady.' He criticises the subject of 'The Seraphim,' 'from which Milton would have shrunk;' but adds, 'We give Miss Barrett, however, the full credit of a lofty purpose, and admit, moreover, that several particular passages in her poem are extremely fine; equally profound in thought and striking in expression.' He sums up as follows:

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[Footnote 42: September 1840.]

In a word, we consider Miss Barrett to be a woman of undoubted genius and most unusual learning; but that she has indulged her inclination for themes of sublime mystery, not certainly without displaying great power, yet at the expense of that clearness, truth, and proportion, which are essential to beauty; and has most unfortunately fallen into the trammels of a school or manner of writing, which, of all that ever existed—Lycophron, Lucan, and Gongora not forgotten—is most open to the charge of being *vitiis imitabile exemplar*.

So much for the reception of 'The Seraphim' volume by the outside world. The letters show how it appeared to the authoress herself.

The first of them deserves a word of special notice, because it is likewise the first in these volumes addressed to Miss Mary Russell Mitford, whose name holds a high and honourable place in the roll of Miss Barrett's friends. Her own account of the beginning of the friendship should be quoted in any record of Mrs. Browning's life.

'My first acquaintance with Elizabeth Barrett commenced about fifteen years ago.[43] She was certainly one of the most interesting persons that I had ever seen. Everybody who then saw her said the same; so that it is not merely the impression of my partiality or my enthusiasm. Of a slight, delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on either side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes, richly fringed by dark eyelashes, a smile like a sunbeam, and such a look of youthfulness that I had some difficulty in persuading a friend, in whose carriage we went together to Chiswick, that the translatress of the "Prometheus" of Aeschylus, the authoress of the "Essay on Mind," was old enough to be introduced into company, in technical language, was 'out.' Through the kindness of another invaluable friend,[44] to whom I owe many obligations, but none so great as this, I saw much of her during my stay in town. We met so constantly and so familiarly that, in spite of the difference of age,[45] intimacy ripened into friendship, and after my return into the country we corresponded freely and frequently, her letters being just what letters ought to be—her own talk put upon paper.'[46]

[Footnote 43: This was written about the end of 1851.]

[Footnote 44: Probably John Kenyon, whom Miss Mitford elsewhere calls 'the pleasantest man in London;' he, on his side, said of Miss Mitford that 'she was better and stronger than any of her books.']

[Footnote 45: Nineteen years, Miss Mitford having been born in 1787.]

[Footnote 46: *Recollections of a Literary Life*, by Mary Russell Mitford, p. 155 (1859).]

Miss Barrett's letters show how warmly she returned this feeling of friendship, which lasted until Miss Mitford's death in 1855. Of the earlier letters many must have disappeared: for it is evident from Miss Mitford's just quoted words, and also from many references in her published correspondence, that they were in constant communication during these years of Miss Barrett's life in London. After her marriage, however, the extant letters are far more frequent, and will be found to fill a considerable place in the later pages of this work.

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To Miss Mitford 50 Wimpole Street: Thursday [June 1838].

We thank you gratefully, dearest Miss Mitford. Papa and I and all of us thank you for your more than kindnesses. The extracts were both gladdening and surprising—and the one the more for being the other also. Oh! it was *so* kind of you, in the midst of your multitude of occupations, to make time (out of love) to send them to us!

As to the ballad, dearest Miss Mitford, which you and Mr. Kenyon are indulgent enough to like, remember that he passed his criticism over it—before it went to you—and so if you did not find as many obscurities as he did in it, the reason is—*his* merit and not mine. But don't believe him—no!—don't believe even Mr. Kenyon—whenever he says that I am *perversely* obscure. Unfortunately obscure, not perversely—that is quite a wrong word. And the last time he used it to me (and then, I assure you, another word still worse was with it) I begged him to confine them for the future to his jesting moods. Because, *indeed*, I am not in the very least degree perverse in this fault of mine, which is my destiny rather than my choice, and comes upon me, I think, just where I would eschew it most. So little has perversity to do with its occurrence, that my fear of it makes me sometimes feel quite nervous and thought-tied in composition....

I have not seen Mr. Kenyon since I wrote last. All last week I was not permitted to get out of bed, and was haunted with leeches and blisters. And in the course of it, Lady Dacre was so kind as to call here, and to leave a note instead of the personal greeting which I was not able to receive. The honor she did me a year ago, in sending me her book, encouraged me to offer her my poems. I hesitated about doing so at first, lest it should appear as if my vanity were dreaming of a *return*; but Mr. Kenyon's opinion turned the balance. I was very sorry not to have seen Lady Dacre and have written a reply to her note expressive of this regret. But, after all, this inaudible voice (except in its cough) could have scarcely made her understand that I was obliged by her visit, had I been able to receive it.

Dr. Chambers has freed me again into the drawing-room, and I am much better or he would not have done so. There is not, however, much strength or much health, nor any near prospect of regaining either. It is well that, in proportion to our feebleness, we may feel our dependence upon God.

I feel as if I had not said half, and they have come to ask me if I have not said *all*! My beloved friend, may you be happy in all ways!

Do write whenever you wish to talk and have no one to talk to nearer you than I am! *Indeed*, I did not forget Dr. Mitford when I wrote those words, although they look like it.

Your gratefully affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: Wednesday morning [June 1838].

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My dear Friend,—Do not think me depraved in ingratitude for not sooner thanking you for the pleasure, made so much greater by the surprise, which your note of judgment gave me. The truth is that I have been very unwell, and delayed answering it immediately until the painful physical feeling went away to make room for the pleasurable moral one—and this I fancied it would do every hour, so that I might be able to tell you at ease all that was in my thoughts. The fancy was a vain one. The pain grew worse and worse, and Dr. Chambers has been here for two successive days shaking his head as awfully as if it bore all Jupiter's ambrosial curls; and is to be here again to-day, but with, I trust, a less grave countenance, inasmuch as the leeches last night did their duty, and I feel much better—God be thanked for the relief. But I am not yet as well as before this attack, and am still confined to my bed—and so you must rather imagine than read what I thought and felt in reading your wonderful note. Of course it pleased me very much, very very much—and, I dare say, would have made me vain by this time, if it had not been for the opportune pain and the sight of Dr. Chambers's face.

I sent a copy of my book to Nelly Bordman *before* I read your suggestion. I knew that her kind feeling for me would interest her in the sight of it.

Thank you once more, dear Mr. Boyd! May all my critics be gentle after the pattern of your gentleness!

Believe me, affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: June 17 [1838].

My dear Friend,—I send you a number of the 'Atlas' which you may keep. It is a favorable criticism, certainly—but I confess this of my vanity, that it has not altogether pleased me. You see what it is to be spoilt.

As to the 'Athenaeum,' although I am *not* conscious of the quaintness and mannerism laid to my charge, and am very sure that I have always written too naturally (that is, too much from the impulse of thought and feeling) to have studied '*attitudes*,' yet the critic was quite right in stating his opinion, and so am I in being grateful to him for the liberal praise he has otherwise given me. Upon the whole, I like his review better than even the 'Examiner,' notwithstanding my being perfectly satisfied with *that*.

Thank you for the question about my health. I am very tolerably well—for *me*: and am said to look better. At the same time I am aware of being always on the verge of an increase of illness—I mean, in a very excitable state—with a pulse that flies off at a word and is only to be caught by digitalis. But I am better—for the present—while the sun shines.

Thank you besides for your criticisms, which I shall hold in memory, and use whenever I am not particularly *obstinate*, in all my SUCCEEDING EDITIONS!

You will smile at that, and so do *I.*

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Arabel is walking in the Zoological Gardens with the Cliffes—but I think you will see her before long.

Your affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

Don't let me forget to mention the Essays[47]. You shall have yours—and Miss Bordman hers—and the delay has not arisen from either forgetfulness or indifference on my part—although I never deny that I don't like giving the Essay to anybody because I don't like it. Now that sounds just like 'a woman's reason,' but it isn't, albeit so reasonable! I meant to say 'because I don't like the ESSAY.'

[Footnote 47: *i.e*. copies of the *Essay on Mind*.]

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: Thursday, June 21 [1838].

My dear Friend,—Notwithstanding this silence so ungrateful in appearance, I thank you at last, and very sincerely, for your kind letter. It made me laugh, and amused me—and gratified me besides. Certainly your 'quality of mercy is not strained.'

My reason for not writing more immediately is that Arabel has meant, day after day, to go to you, and has had a separate disappointment for every day. She says now, '*Indeed*, I hope to see Mr. Boyd to-morrow.' But *I* say that I will not keep this answer of mine to run the risk of another day's contingencies, and that *it* shall go, whether *she* does or not.

I am better a great deal than I was last week, and have been allowed by Dr. Chambers to come downstairs again, and occupy my old place on the sofa. My health remains, however, in what I cannot help considering myself, and in what, I *believe*, Dr. Chambers considers, a very precarious state, and my weakness increases, of course, under the remedies which successive attacks render necessary. Dr. Chambers deserves my confidence—and besides the skill with which he has met the different modifications of the complaint, I am grateful to him for a feeling and a sympathy which are certainly rare in such of his profession as have their attention diverted, as his must be, by an immense practice, to fifty objects in a day. But, notwithstanding all, one breath of the east wind undoes whatever he labours to do. It is well to look up and remember that in the eternal reality these second causes are no causes at all.

Don't leave this note about for Arabel to see. I am anxious not to alarm her, or any one of my family: and it may please God to make me as well and strong again as ever. And, indeed, I am twice as well this week as I was last.

Your affectionate friend, dear Mr. Boyd,
E.B. BARRETT.

I have seen an extract from a private letter of Mr. Chorley, editor of the 'Athenaeum,'[48] which speaks *huge* praises of my poems. If he were to say a tithe of them in print, it would be nine times above my expectation!

[Footnote 48: This is an error. Mr. Chorley was not editor of the *Athenaeum*, though he was one of its principal contributors.]

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To H.S. Boyd [June 1838.]

My dear Friend,—I begged your servant to wait—how long ago I am afraid to think—but certainly I must not make this note very long. I did intend to write to you to-day in any case. Since Saturday I have had my thanks ready at the end of my fingers waiting to slide along to the nib of my pen. Thank you for all your kindness and criticism, which is kindness too—thank you at last. Would that I deserved the praises as well as I do most of the findings-fault—and there is no time now to say more of *them*. Yet I believe I have something to say, and will find a time to say it in.

Dr. Chambers has just been here, and does not think me quite as well as usual. The truth is that I was rather excited and tired yesterday by rather too much talking and hearing talking, and suffer for it to-day in my *pulse*. But I am better on the whole.

Mr. Cross,[49] the great lion, the insect-making lion, came yesterday with Mr. Kenyon, and afterwards Lady Dacre. She is kind and gentle in her manner. She told me that she had 'placed my book in the hands of Mr. Bobus Smith, the brother of Sidney Smith, and the best judge in England,' and that it was to be returned to her on Tuesday. If I *should* hear the 'judgment,' I will tell you, whether you care to hear it or not. There is no other review, as far as I am aware.

Give my love to Miss Bordman. When is she coming to see me?

The thunder did not do me any harm.

Your affectionate friend, in great haste, although your servant is not likely to think so, E.B.B.

[Footnote 49: Andrew Crosse, the electrician, who had recently published his observations of a remarkable development of insect life in connection with certain electrical experiments—a discovery which caused much controversy at the time, on account of its supposed bearings on the origin of life and the doctrine of creation.]

To H.S. Boyd [June 1838.]

My dear Friend,—You must let me *feel* my thanks to you, even when I do not *say* them. I have put up your various notes together, and perhaps they may do me as much good hereafter, as they have already, for the most part, given me pleasure.

The 'burden pure *have* been' certainly was a misprint, as certainly 'nor man nor nature satisfy'[50] is ungrammatical. But I am *not* so sure about the passage in Isobel:

I am not used to tears at nights Instead of slumber—nor to prayer.

Now I think that the passage may imply a repetition of the words with which it begins, after 'nor'—thus—'nor *am I used* to prayer,' &c. Either you or I may be right about it, and either 'or' or 'nor' may be grammatical. At least, so I pray.[51]

You did not answer one question. Do you consider that '*apolyptic*' stands without excuse?[52]

I never read Greek to any person except yourself and Mr. MacSwiney, my brother's tutor. To him I read longer than a few weeks, but then it was rather guessing and stammering and tottering through parts of Homer and extracts from Xenophon than reading. *You* would not have called it reading if you had heard it.

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I studied hard by myself afterwards, and the kindness with which afterwards still you assisted me, if yourself remembers gladly *I* remember *gratefully* and gladly.

I have just been told that your servant was desired by you *not to wait a minute*.

The wind is unfavorable for the sea. I do not think there is the least probability of my going before the end of next week, if then. You shall hear.

Affectionately yours,
E.B. BARRETT.

I am tolerably well. I have been forced to take digitalis again, which makes me feel weak; but still I am better, I think.

[Footnote 50: Altered in later editions to 'satisfies.']

[Footnote 51: In later editions 'not' is repeated instead of 'nor,' which looks like a compromise between her own opinion and Mr. Boyd's.]

[Footnote 52: The poem entitled 'Sounds,' in the volume of 1838, contained the line 'As erst in Patmos apolyptic John,' presumably for 'apocalyptic.' This being naturally held to be 'without excuse,' the line was altered in subsequent editions to 'As the seer-saint of Patmos, loving John.']

In the course of this year the failure in Miss Barrett's health had become so great that her doctor advised removal to a warmer climate for the winter. Torquay was the place selected, and thither she went in the autumn, accompanied by her brother Edward, her favourite companion from childhood. Other members of the family, including Mr. Barrett, joined them from time to time. At Torquay she was able to live, but no more, and it was found necessary for her to stay during the summers as well as the winters of the next three years. Letters from this period are scarce, though it is clear from Miss Mitford's correspondence that a continuous interchange of letters was kept up between the two friends, and her acquaintanceship with Horne was now ripening into a close literary intimacy. A story relating to Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter, the hero of so many racy anecdotes, is contained in a letter of Miss Barrett's which must have been written about Christmas of either 1838 or 1839:—

'He [the bishop] was, however, at church on Christmas Day, and upon Mr. Elliot's being mercifully inclined to omit the Athanasian Creed, prompted him most episcopally from the pew with a "whereas;" and further on in the Creed, when the benign reader substituted the word *condemnation* for the terrible one—"Damnation!" exclaimed the bishop. The effect must have been rather startling.'

A slight acquaintance with the words of the Athanasian Creed will suggest that the story had suffered in accuracy before it reached Miss Barrett, who, of course, was unable to

attend church, and whose own ignorance on the subject may be accounted for by remembering that she had been brought up as a Nonconformist. With a little correction, however, the story may be added to the many others on record with respect to 'Henry of Exeter.'

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The following letter is shown, by the similarity of its contents to the one which succeeds it, to belong to November 1839, when Miss Barrett was entering on her second winter in Torquay.

To Mrs. Martin Beacon Terrace, Torquay: November 24 [1839].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Henrietta *shall not* write to-day, whatever she may wish to do. I felt, in reading your unreproaching letter to her, as self-reproachful as anybody could with a great deal of innocence (in the way of the world) to fall back upon. I felt sorry, very sorry, not to have written something to you something sooner, which was a possible thing—although, since the day of my receiving your welcome letter, I have written scarcely at all, nor that little without much exertion. Had it been with me as usual, be sure that you should not have had any silence to complain of. Henrietta knew I wished to write, and felt, I suppose, unwilling to take my place when my filling it myself before long appeared possible. A long story—and not as entertaining as Mother Hubbard. But I would rather tire you than leave you under any wrong impression, where my regard and thankfulness to you, dearest Mrs. Martin, are concerned.

To reply to your kind anxiety about me, I may call myself decidedly better than I have been. Since October I I have not been out of bed—except just for an hour a day, when I am lifted to the sofa with the bare permission of my physician—who tells me that it is so much easier to make me worse than better, that he dares not permit anything like exposure or further exertion. I like him (Dr. Scully) very much, and although he evidently thinks my case in the highest degree precarious, yet knowing how much I bore last winter and understanding from him that the worst *tubercular* symptoms have not actually appeared, I am willing to think it may be God's will to keep me here still longer. I would willingly stay, if it were only for the sake of that tender affection of my beloved family which it so deeply affects me to consider. Dearest papa is with us now—to my great comfort and joy: and looking very well!—and astonishing everybody with his eternal youthfulness! Bro and Henrietta and Arabel besides, I can count as companions—and then there is dear Bummy! We are fixed at Torquay for the winter—that is, until the end of May: and after that, if I have any will or power and am alive to exercise either, I do trust and hope to go away. The death of my kind friend Dr. Bury was, as you suppose, a great grief and shock to me. How could it be otherwise, after his daily kindness to me for a year? And then his young wife and child—and the rapidity (a three weeks' illness) with which he was hurried away from the energies and toils and honors of professional life to the stillness of *that* death!

'*God's Will*' is the only answer to the mystery of the world's afflictions....

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Don't fancy me worse than I am—or that this bed-keeping is the result of a gradual sinking. It is not so. A feverish attack prostrated me on October 2—and such will leave their effects—and Dr. Scully is so afraid of leading me into danger by saying, 'You may get up and dress as usual' that you should not be surprised if (in virtue of being the senior Torquay physician and correspondingly prudent) he left me in this durance vile for a great part of the winter. I am decidedly better than I was a month ago, really and truly.

May God bless you, dearest Mrs. Martin! My best and kindest regards to Mr. Martin. Henrietta desires me to promise for her a letter to Colwall soon; but I think that one from Colwall should come first. May God bless you! Bro's fancy just now is painting in water colours and he performs many sketches. Do you ever in your dreams of universal benevolence dream of travelling into Devonshire?

Love your affectionate BA,

—found guilty of egotism and stupidity 'by this sign' and at once!

To H.S. Boyd 1 Beacon Terrace, Torquay: Wednesday, November 27, 1839.

If you can forgive me, my ever dear friend, for a silence which has not been intended, there will be another reason for being thankful to you, in addition to the many. To do myself justice, one of my earliest impulses on seeing my beloved Arabel, and recurring to the kindness with which you desired that happiness for me long before I possessed it, was to write and tell you how happy I felt. But she had promised, she said, to write herself, and moreover she and only she was to send you the ballad—in expectation of your dread judgment upon which I delayed my own writing. It came in the first letter we received in our new house, on the first of last October. An hour after reading it, I was upon my bed; was attacked by fever in the night, and from that bed have never even been lifted since—to these last days of November—except for one hour a day to the sofa at two yards' distance. I am very much better now, and have been so for some time; but my physician is so persuaded, he says, that it is easier to do me harm than good, that he will neither permit any present attempt at further exertion, nor hint at the time when it may be advisable for him to permit it. Under the circumstances it has of course been more difficult than usual for me to write. Pray believe, my dear and kind friend, in the face of all circumstances and appearances, that I never forget you, nor am reluctant (oh, how could that be?) to write to you; and that you shall often have to pay 'a penny for my thoughts' under the new Postage Act—if it be in God's wisdom and mercy to spare me through the winter. Under the new act I shall not mind writing ten words and then stopping. As it is, they would scarcely be worth eleven pennies.

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Thank you again and again for your praise of the ballad, which both delighted and *surprised* me ... as I had scarcely hoped that you might like it at all. Think of Mr. Tilt's never sending me a proof sheet. The consequences are rather deplorable, and, if they had occurred to you, might have suggested a deep melancholy for life. In my case, *I*, who am, you know, hardened to sins of carelessness, simply look *aghast* at the misprints and mispunctuations coming in as a flood, and sweeping away meanings and melodies together. The annual itself is more splendid than usual, and its vignettes have illustrated my story—angels, devils and all—most beautifully. Miss Mitford's tales (in prose) have suffered besides by reason of Mr. Tilt—but are attractive and graphic notwithstanding—and Mr. Horne has supplied a dramatic poem of great power and beauty.

How I rejoice with you in the glorious revelation (about to be) of Gregory's second volume! The 'De Virginitate' poem will, in its new purple and fine linen, be more dazzling than ever.

Do you know that George is barrister-at-law of the Inner Temple—*is*? I have seen him gazetted.

My dearest papa is with me now, making me very happy of course. I have much reason to be happy—more to be grateful—yet am more obedient to the former than to the latter impulse. May the Giver of good give gratitude with as full a hand! May He bless *you*—-and bring us together again, if no more in the flesh, yet in the spirit!

Your ever affectionate friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

Do write—when you are able and *least* disinclined. Do you approve of
Prince Albert or not?[53]

[Footnote 53: The engagement of Prince Albert to Queen Victoria took place in October 1839.]

To H.S. Boyd Torquay: May 29, 1840.

My ever dear Friend,—It was very pleasant to me to see your seal upon a letter once more; and although the letter itself left me with a mournful impression of your having passed some time so much less happily than I would wish and pray for you, yet there remains the pleasant thought to me still that you have not altogether forgotten me. Do receive the expression of my most affectionate sympathy under this and every circumstance—and I fear that the shock to your nerves and spirits could not be a light one, however impressed you might be and must be with the surety and verity of God's love working in all His will. Poor poor Patience! Coming to be so happy with you, with that joyous smile I thought so pretty! Do you not remember my telling you so? Well—it

is well and better for her; happier for her, if God in Christ Jesus have received her, than her hopes were of the holiday time with you. The holiday is *for ever* now....

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I heard from Nelly Bordman only a few days before receiving your letter, and so far from preparing me for all this sadness and gloom, she pleased me with her account of you whom she had lately seen—dwelling upon your retrograde passage into youth, and the delight you were taking in the presence and society of some still more youthful, fair, and gay *monstrum amandum*, some prodigy of intellectual accomplishment, some little Circe who never turned anybodies into pigs. I learnt too from her for the first time that you were settled at Hampstead! Whereabout at Hampstead, and for how long? She didn't tell me *that*, thinking of course that I knew something more about you than I do. Yes indeed; you *do* treat me very shabbily. I agree with you in thinking so. To think that so many hills and woods should interpose between us—that I should be lying here, fast bound by a spell, a sleeping beauty in a forest, and that *you*, who used to be such a doughty knight, should not take the trouble of cutting through even a hazel tree with your good sword, to find out what had become of me. Now do tell me, the hazel tree being down at last, whether you mean to live at Hampstead, whether you have taken a house there and have carried your books there, and wear Hampstead grasshoppers in your bonnet (as they did at Athens) to prove yourself of the soil.

All this nonsense will make you think I am better, and indeed I am pretty well just now—quite, however, confined to the bed—except when lifted from it to the sofa baby-wise while they make it; even then apt to faint. Bad symptoms too do not leave me; and I am obliged to be blistered every few days—but I am free from any attack just now, and am a good deal less feverish than I am occasionally. There has been a consultation between an Exeter physician and my own, and they agree exactly, both hoping that with care I shall pass the winter, and rally in the spring, both hoping that I may be able to go about again with some comfort and independence, although I never can be fit again for anything like exertion....

Do you know, did you ever hear anything of Mr. Horne who wrote 'Cosmo de Medici,' and the 'Death of Marlowe,' and is now desecrating his powers (I beg your pardon) by writing the life of Napoleon? By the way, he is the author of a dramatic sketch in the last Finden.

He is in my mind one of the very first poets of the day, and has written to me so kindly (offering, although I never saw him in my life, to cater for me in literature, and send me down anything likely to interest me in the periodicals), that I cannot but think his amiability and genius do honor to one another.

Do you remember Mr. Caldicott who used to preach in the infant schoolroom at Sidmouth? He died here the death of a saint, as he had lived a saintly life, about three weeks ago. It affected me a good deal. But he was always so associated in my thoughts more with heaven than earth, that scarcely a transition seems to have passed upon his locality. 'Present with the Lord' is true of him now; even as 'having his conversation in heaven' was formerly. There is little difference.

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May it be so with us all, with you and with me, my ever and very dear friend! In the meantime do not forget me. I never can forget *you*.

Your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Arabel desires her love to be offered to you.

To H.S. Boyd 1 Beacon Terrace, Torquay: July 8, 1840.

My ever dear Friend,—I must write to you, although it is so very long, or at least seems so, since you wrote to me. But you say to Arabel in speaking of me that I '*used* to care for what is poetical;' therefore, perhaps you say to yourself sometimes that I *used* to care for *you*! I am anxious to vindicate my identity to you, in that respect above all.

It is a long, dreary time since I wrote to you. I admit the pause on my own part, while I charge you with another. But *your* silence has embraced more pleasantness and less suffering to you than mine has to me, and I thank God for a prosperity in which my unchangeable regard for you causes me to share directly....

I have not rallied this summer as soon and well as I did last. I was very ill early in April at the time of our becoming conscious to our great affliction—so ill as to believe it utterly improbable, speaking humanly, that I ever should be any better. I am, however, a very great deal better, and gain strength by sensible degrees, however slowly, and do hope for the best—'the best' meaning one sight more of London. In the meantime I have not yet been able to leave my bed.

To prove to you that I who 'used to care' for poetry do so still, and that I have not been absolutely idle lately, an 'Athenaeum' shall be sent to you containing a poem on the subject of the removal of Napoleon's ashes.[54] It is a fitter subject for you than for me. Napoleon is no idol of *mine. I* never made a 'setting sun' of him. But my physician suggested the subject as a noble one and then there was something suggestive in the consideration that the 'Bellerophon' lay on those very bay-waters opposite to my bed.

Another poem (which you won't like, I dare say) is called 'The Lay of the Rose,'[55] and appeared lately in a magazine. Arabel is going to write it out for you, she desires me to tell you with her best love. Indeed, I have written lately (as far as manuscript goes) a good deal, only on all sorts of subjects and in as many shapes.

Lazarus would make a fine poem, wouldn't he? I lie here, weaving a great many schemes. I am seldom at a loss for thread.

Do write sometimes to me, and tell me if you do anything besides hearing the clocks strike and bells ring. My beloved papa is with me still. There are so many mercies close around me (and his presence is far from the least), that God's *Being* seems

proved to me, *demonstrated* to me, by His manifested love. May His blessing in the full lovingness rest upon you always! Never fancy I can forget or think of you coldly.

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Your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 54: 'Crowned and Buried' *(Poetical Works*, iii. 9).]

[Footnote 55: *Poetical Works*, iii. 152.]

The above letter was written only three days before the tragedy which utterly wrecked Elizabeth Barrett's life for a time, and cast a deep shadow over it which never wholly passed away—the death of her brother Edward through drowning. On July 11, he and two friends had gone for a sail in a small boat. They did not return when they were expected, and presently a rumour came that a boat, answering in appearance to theirs, had been seen to founder in Babbicombe Bay; but it was not until three days later that final confirmation of the disaster was obtained by the discovery of the bodies. What this blow meant to the bereaved sister cannot be told: the horror with which she refers to it, even at a distance of many years, shows how deeply it struck. It was the loss of the brother whom she loved best of all; and she had the misery of thinking that it was to attend on her that he had come to the place where he met his death. Little wonder if Torquay was thenceforward a memory from which she shrank, and if even the sound of the sea became a horror to her.

One natural consequence of this terrible sorrow is a long break in her correspondence. It is not until the beginning of 1841 that she seems to have resumed the thread of her life and to have returned to her literary occupations. Her health had inevitably suffered under the shock, and in the autumn of 1840 Miss Mitford speaks of not daring to expect more than a few months of lingering life. But when things were at the worst, she began unexpectedly to take a turn for the better. Through the winter she slowly gathered strength, and with strength the desire to escape from Torquay, with its dreadful associations, and to return to London. Meanwhile her correspondence with her friends revived, and with Horne in particular she was engaged during 1841 in an active interchange of views with regard to two literary projects. Indeed, it was only the return to work that enabled her to struggle against the numbing effect of the calamity which had overwhelmed her. Some time afterwards (in October 1843) she wrote to Mrs. Martin: 'For my own part and experience—I do not say it as a phrase or in exaggeration, but from very clear and positive conviction—I do believe that I should be *mad* at this moment, if I had not forced back—dammed out—the current of rushing recollections by work, work, work.' One of the projects in which she was concerned was 'Chaucer Modernised,' a scheme for reviving interest in the father of English poetry, suggested in the first instance by Wordsworth, but committed to the care of Horne, as editor, for execution. According to the scheme as originally planned, all the principal poets of the day were to be invited to share the task of transmuting Chaucer into modern

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language. Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, Horne, and others actually executed some portions of the work; Tennyson and Browning, it was hoped, would lend a hand with some of the later parts. Horne invited Miss Barrett to contribute, and, besides executing modernisations of 'Queen Annelida and False Arcite' and 'The Complaint of Annelida,'[56] she also advised generally on the work of the other writers during its progress through the press. The other literary project was for a lyrical drama, to be written in collaboration with Horne. It was to be called 'Psyche Apocalypte,' and was to be a drama on the Greek model, treating of the birth and self-realisation of the soul of man.

[Footnote 56: These versions are not reprinted in her collected *Poetical Works*, but are to be found in 'Poems of Geoffrey Chaucer modernised,' (1841).]

The sketch of its contents, given in the correspondence with Horne, will make the modern reader accept with equanimity the fact that it never progressed beyond the initial stage of drafting the plot. It is allegorical, philosophical, fantastic, unreal—-everything which was calculated to bring out the worst characteristics of Miss Barrett's style and to intensify her faults. Fortunately her removal from Torquay to London interrupted the execution of the scheme. It was never seriously taken up again, and, though never explicitly abandoned, died a natural death from inanition, somewhat to the relief of Miss Barrett, who had come to recognise its impracticability.

Apart from the correspondence with Horne, which has been published elsewhere, very few letters are left from this period; but those which here follow serve to bridge over the interval until the departure from Torquay, which closes one well-marked period in the life of the poetess.

To Mrs. Martin December 11, 1840.

My ever dearest Mrs. Martin,—I should have written to you without this last proof of your remembrance—this cape, which, warm and pretty as it is, I value so much more as the work of your hands and gift of your affection towards me. Thank you, dearest Mrs. Martin, and thank you too for *all the rest*—for all your sympathy and love. And do believe that although grief had so changed me from myself and warped me from my old instincts, as to prevent my looking forwards with pleasure to seeing you again, yet that full amends are made in the looking back with a pleasure more true because more tender than any old retrospections. Do give my love to dear Mr. Martin, and say what I could not have said even if I had seen him.

Shall you really, dearest Mrs. Martin, come again? Don't think we do not think of the hope you left us. Because we do indeed.

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A note from papa has brought the comforting news that my dear, dear Stormie is in England again, in London, and looking perfectly well. It is a mercy which makes me very thankful, and would make me joyful if anything could. But the meanings of some words change as we live on. Papa's note is hurried. It was a sixty-day passage, and that is all he tells me. Yes—there is something besides about Sette and Occy being either unknown or misknown, through the fault of their growing. Papa is not near returning, I think. He has so much to do and see, and so much cause to be enlivened and renewed as to spirits, that I begged him not to think about me and stay away as long as he pleased. And the accounts of him and of all at home are satisfying, I thank God....

There is an east wind just now, which I feel. Nevertheless, Dr. Scully has said, a few minutes since, that I am as well as he could hope, considering the season.

May God bless you ever!
Your gratefully attached
BA.

To Mrs. Martin March 29, 1841.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Have you thought 'The dream has come true'? I mean the dream of the flowers which you pulled for me and I wouldn't look at, even? I fear you must have thought that the dream about my ingratitude has come true.

And yet it has not. Dearest Mrs. Martin, it has *not*. I have not forgotten you or remembered you less affectionately through all the silence, or longed less for the letters I did not ask for. But the truth is, my faculties seem to hang heavily now, like flappers when the spring is broken. *My* spring *is* broken, and a separate exertion is necessary for the lifting up of each—and then it falls down again. I never felt so before: there is no wonder that I should feel so now. Nevertheless, I don't give up much to the pernicious languor—the tendency to lie down to sleep among the snows of a weary journey—I don't give up much to it. Only I find it sometimes at the root of certain negligences—for instance, of this toward *you*.

Dearest Mrs. Martin, receive my sympathy, *our* sympathy, in the anxiety you have lately felt so painfully, and in the rejoicing for its happy issue. Do say when you write (I take for granted, you see, that you will write) how Mrs. B—— is now—besides the intelligence more nearly touching me, of your own and Mr. Martin's health and spirits. May God bless you both!

Ah! but you did not come: I was disappointed!

And Mrs. Hanford! Do you know, I tremble in my reveries sometimes, lest you should think it, guess it to be half unkind in me not to have made an exertion to see Mrs.

Hanford. It was not from want of interest in her—least of all from want of love to *you*. But I have not stirred from my bed yet. But, to be honest, that was not the reason—I did not feel as if I *could*, without a painful effort, which, on the other hand, could not, I was conscious, result in the slightest shade of satisfaction to her, receive and talk to her. Perhaps it is hard for you to *fancy* even how I shrink away from the very thought of seeing a human face—except those immediately belonging to me in love or relationship—(yours *does*, you know)—and a stranger's might be easier to look at than one long known....

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For my own part, my dearest Mrs. Martin, my heart has been lightened lately by kind, *honest* Dr. Scully (who would never give an opinion just to please me), saying that I am 'quite right' to mean to go to London, and shall probably be fit for the journey early in June. He says that I may pass the winter there moreover, and with impunity—that wherever I am it will probably be necessary for me to remain shut up during the cold weather, and that under such circumstances it is quite possible to warm a London room to as safe a condition as a room *here*. So my heart is lightened of the fear of opposition: and the only means of regaining whatever portion of earthly happiness is not irremediably lost to me by the Divine decree, I am free to use. In the meantime, it really does seem to me that I make some progress in health—if the word in my lips be not a mockery. Oh, I fancy I shall be strengthened to get home!

Your remarks on Chaucer pleased me very much. I am glad you liked what I did—or tried to do—and as to the criticisms, you were right—and they sha'n't be unattended to if the opportunity of correction be given to me.

Ever your affectionate
BA.

To H.S. Boyd August 28, 1841.

My very dear Friend,—I have fluctuated from one shadow of uncertainty and anxiety to another, all the summer, on the subject to which my last earthly wishes cling, and I delayed writing to you to be able to say I am going to London. I may say so now—as far as the human may say 'yes' or 'no' of their futurity. The carriage, a patent carriage with a bed in it, and set upon some hundreds of springs, is, I believe, on its road down to me, and immediately upon its arrival we begin our journey. Whether we shall ever complete it remains uncertain—*more* so than other uncertainties. My physician appears a good deal alarmed, calls it an undertaking full of hazard, and myself the 'Empress Catherine' for insisting upon attempting it. But I must. I go, as 'the doves to their windows,' to the only earthly daylight I see here. I go to rescue myself from the associations of this dreadful place. I go to restore to my poor papa the companionships family. Enough has been done and suffered for *me*. I thank God I am going home at last.

How kind it was in you, my very kind and ever very dear friend, to ask me to visit you at Hampstead! I felt myself smiling while I read that part of your letter, and laid it down and suffered the vision to arise of your little room and your great Gregory and your dear self scolding me softly as in the happy olden times for not reading slow enough. Well—we do not know what *may* happen! I *may* (even that is probable) read to you again. But now—ah, my dear friend—if you could imagine me such as I am!—you would not think I could visit you! Yet I am wonderfully better this summer; and if I can but reach home and bear the first painful excitement, it will do me more good than anything—I know it will! And if it does not, it will be *well* even so.

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I shall tell them to send you the ‘Athenaeum’ of last week, where I have a ’House of Clouds,’[57] which papa likes so much that he would wish to live in it if it were not for the damp. There is not a clock in one room—that’s another objection. How are your clocks? Do they go? and do you like their voices as well as you used to do?

I think Annie is not with you; but in case of her still being so, do give her (and yourself too) Arabel’s love and mine. I wish I heard of you oftener. Is there nobody to write? May God bless you!

Your ever affectionate friend,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd August 31, 1831 [*sic*].

Thank you, my ever dear friend, with almost my last breath at Torquay, for your kindness about the Gregory, besides the kind note itself. It is, however, too late. We go, or mean at present to go, to-morrow; and the carriage which is to waft us through the air upon a thousand springs has actually arrived. You are not to think severely upon Dr. Scully’s candour with me as to the danger of the journey. He *does* think it ‘likely to do me harm;’ therefore, you know, he was justified by his medical responsibility in laying before me all possible consequences. I have considered them all, and dare them gladly and gratefully. Papa’s domestic comfort is broken up by the separation in his family, and the associations of this place lie upon me, struggle as I may, like the oppression of a perpetual night-mare. It is an instinct of self-preservation which impels me to escape—-or to try to escape. And In God’s mercy—though God forbid that I should deny either His mercy or His justice, if He should deny me—we may be together in Wimpole Street in a few days. Nelly Bordman has kindly written to me Mr. Jago’s favourable opinion of the patent carriages, and his conviction of my accomplishing the journey without inconvenience.

May God bless you, my dear dear friend! Give my love to dearest Annie! Perhaps, if I am ever really in Wimpole Street, *safe enough for Greek*, you will trust the poems to me which you mention. I care as much for poetry as ever, and could not more.

Your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 57: *Poetical Works*, iii. 186.]

CHAPTER III

1841-1843

In September 1841 the journey from Torquay was actually achieved, and Miss Barrett returned to her father's house in London, from which she was never to be absent for more than a few hours at a time until the day, five years later, when she finally left it to join her husband, Robert Browning. Her life was that of an invalid, confined to her room for the greater part of each year, and unable to see any but a few intimate friends. Still, she regained some sort of strength, especially during the warmth of the summer months, and was able to throw herself with real interest

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into literary work. In a life such as this there are few outward events to record, and its story is best told in Miss Barrett's own letters, which, for the most part, need little comment. The letters of the end of 1841 and beginning of 1842 are almost entirely written to Mr. Boyd, and the main subject of them is the series of papers on the Greek Christian poets and the English poets which, at the suggestion of Mr. Dilke, then editor of the 'Athenaeum,' she contributed to that periodical. Of the composition of original poetry we hear less at this time.

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: October 2, 1841.

My very dear Friend,—I thank you for the letter and books which crossed the threshold of this house before me, and looked like your welcome to me home. I have read the passages you wished me to read—I have read them *again*: for I remember reading them under your star (or the greater part of them) a long while ago. You, on the other hand, may remember of *me*, that I never could concede to you much admiration for your Gregory as a poet—not even to his grand work 'De Virginitate.' He is one of those writers, of whom there are instances in our own times, who are only poetical in prose.

The passage imitative of Chryses I cannot think much of. Try to be forgiving. It is toasted dry between the two fires of the Scriptures and Homer, and is as stiff as any dry toast out of the simile. To be sincere, I like dry toast better.

The Hymns and Prayers I very much prefer; and although I remembered a good deal about them, it has given me a pleasure you will approve of to go through them in this edition. The one which I like best, which I like far best, which I think worth all the rest ('De Virginitate' and all put together), is the *second* upon page 292, beginning 'Soi charis.' It is very fine, I think, written out of the heart and for the heart, warm with a natural heat, and not toasted dry and brown and stiff at a fire by any means.

Dear Mr. Boyd, I coveted Arabel's walk to you the other day. I shall often covet my neighbour's walks, I believe, although (and may God be praised for it!) I am more happy—that is, nearing to the feeling of happiness now—than a month since I could believe possible to a heart so bruised and crushed as mine has [been] be at home is a blessing and a relief beyond what these words can say.

But, dear Mr. Boyd, you said something in a note to Arabel some little time ago, which I will ask of your kindness to avoid saying again. I have been through the whole summer very much better; and even if it were not so I should dread being annoyed by more medical speculations. Pray do not suggest any. I am not in a state to admit of experiments, and my case is a very clear and simple one. I have not *one symptom* like those of my old illness; and after more than fifteen years' absolute suspension of them, their recurrence is scarcely probable.

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My case is very clear: not tubercular consumption, not what is called a ‘decline,’ but an affection of the lungs which leans towards it. You know a blood-vessel broke three years ago, and I never quite got over it. Mr. Jago, not having seen me, could scarcely be justified in a conjecture of the sort, when the opinions of four able physicians, two of them particularly experienced in diseases of the chest, and the other two the most eminent of the faculty in the east and west of England, were decided and contrary, while coincident with each other. Besides, you see, I am becoming better—and I could not desire more than that. Dear Mr. Boyd, do not write a word about it any more, either to me or others. I am sure you would not willingly disturb me. Nelly Bordman is good and dear, but I can’t let her prescribe for me anything except her own affection.

I hope Arabel expressed for me my thankful sense of Mrs. Smith’s kind intention. But, indeed, although I would see *you*, dear Mr. Boyd, gladly, or an angel or a fairy or any very particular friend, I am not fit either in body or spirit for general society. I *can’t* see people, and if I could it would be very bad for me. Is Mrs. Smith writing? Are you writing? Part of me is worn out; but the poetical part—that is, the *love* of poetry—is growing in me as freshly and strongly as if it were watered every day. Did anybody ever love it and stop in the middle? I wonder if anybody ever did?... Believe me your affectionateE.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: December 29, 1841.

My dear Friend,—I should not have been half as idle about transcribing these translations[58] if I had fancied you could care so much to have them as Arabel tells me you do. They are recommended to your mercy, O Greek Daniel! The *last* sounds in my ears most like English poetry; but I assure you I took the least pains with it. The second is obscure as its original, if it do not (as it does not) equal it otherwise. The first is yet more unequal to the Greek. I praised that Greek poem above all of Gregory’s, for the reason that it has *unity and completeness*, for which, to speak generally, you may search the streets and squares and alleys of Nazianzum in vain. Tell me what you think of my part.

Ever affectionately yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Have you a Plotinus, and would you trust him to me in that case? Oh no, you do not tempt me with your musical clocks. My time goes to the best music when I read or write; and whatever money I can spend upon my own pleasures flows away in books.

[Footnote 58: Translations of three poems of Gregory Nazianzen, printed in the *Athenaeum* of January 8, 1842.]

To Mr. Westwood[59] 50 Wimpole Street: January 2, 1842.

Miss Barrett, inferring Mr. Westwood from the handwriting, begs his acceptance of the unworthy little book[60] he does her the honour of desiring to see.

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It is more unworthy than he could have expected when he expressed that desire, having been written in very early youth, when the mind was scarcely free in any measure from trammels and Popes, and, what is worse, when flippancy of language was too apt to accompany immaturity of opinion. The miscellaneous verses are, still more than the chief poem, 'childish things' in a strict literal sense, and the whole volume is of little interest even to its writer except for personal reasons—except for the traces of dear affections, since rudely wounded, and of that *love* of poetry which began with her sooner than so soon, and must last as long as life does, without being subject to the changes of life. Little more, therefore, can remain for such a volume than to be humble and shrink from circulation. Yet Mr. Westwood's kind words win it to his hands. Will he receive at the same moment the expression of touched and gratified feelings with which Miss Barrett read what he wrote on the subject of her later volumes, still very imperfect, although more mature and true to the *truth* within? Indeed she is thankful for what he said so kindly in his note to her.

[Footnote 59: Mr. Thomas Westwood was the author of a volume of 'Poems,' published in 1840, 'Beads from a Rosary' (1843), 'The Burden of the Bell' (1850), and other volumes of verse. Several of his compositions were appearing occasionally in the *Athenaeum* at the time when this correspondence with Miss Barrett commenced.]

[Footnote 60: The *Essay on Mind*.]

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: January 6, 1842.

My dear Friend,—I have done your bidding and sent the translations to the 'Athenaeum,' attaching to them an infamous prefatory note which says all sorts of harm of Gregory's poetry. You will be very angry with it and me.

And you *may* be angry for another reason—that in the midst of my true thankfulness for the emendations you sent me, I ventured to reject one or two of them. You are right, probably, and I wrong; but still, I thought within myself with a womanly obstinacy not altogether peculiar to me,—'If he and I were to talk together about them, he would kindly give up the point to me—so that, now we cannot talk together, *I might as well take it*.' Well, you will see what I have done. Try not to be angry with me. You shall have the 'Athenaeum' as soon as possible.

My dear Mr. Boyd, you know how I disbelieved the probability of these papers being accepted. You will comprehend my surprise on receiving last night a very courteous: note from the editor, which I would send to you if it were legible to anybody except people used to learn reading from the pyramids. He wishes me to contribute to the 'Athenaeum' some prose papers in the form of reviews—'the review being a mere form, and the book a mere text.' He is not very clear—but I fancy that a few translations of *excerpta*, with a prose

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analysis and synthesis of the original author's genius, might suit his purpose. Now suppose I took up some of the early Christian Greek poets, and wrote a few continuous papers *so*?[61] Give me your advice, my dear friend! I think of Synesius, for one. Suppose you send me a list of the names which occur to you! *Will* you advise me? Will you write directly? Will you make allowance for my teazing you? Will you lend me your little Synesius, and Clarke's book? I mean the one commenced by Dr. Clarke and continued by his son. Above all things, however, I want the advice.

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd Wednesday, January 13, 1842 (postmark).

My dear Friend,—Thank you, thank you, for your kind suggestion and advice altogether. I had just (when your note arrived) finished two hymns of Synesius, one being the seventh and the other the ninth. Oh! I do remember that you performed upon the latter, and my modesty should have certainly bid me 'avaunt' from it. Nevertheless, it is so fine, so prominent in the first class of Synesius's beauties, that I took courage and dismissed my scruples, and have produced a version which I have not compared to yours at all hitherto, but which probably is much rougher and *rather* closer, winning in faith what it loses in elegance. 'Elegance' isn't a word for me, you know, generally speaking. The barbarians herd with me, 'by two and three.'

I had a letter to-day from Mr. Dilke, who agrees to everything, closes with the idea about 'Christian Greek poets' (only begging me to keep away from theology), and suggesting a subsequent reviewal of English poetical literature, from Chaucer down to our times.[62] Well, but the Greek poets. With all your kindness, I have scarcely sufficient materials for a full and minute survey of them. I have won a sight of the 'Poetae Christiani,' but the price is ruinous—*fourteen guineas*, and then the work consists almost entirely of Latin poets, deducting Gregory and Nonnus, and John Damascenus, and a cento from Homer by somebody or other. Turning the leaves rapidly, I do not see much else; and you know I may get a separate copy of John Dam., and have access to the rest. Try to turn in your head what I should do. Greg. Nyssen did not write poems, did he? Have I a chance of seeing your copy of Mr. Clarke's book? It would be useful in the matters of chronology.

I humbly beg your pardon, and Gregory's, for the insolence of my note. It was as brief as it could be, and did not admit of any extended reference and admiration to his qualities as an orator. But whoever read it to you should have explained that when I wrote 'He was an orator,' the word *orator* was marked emphatically, so as to appear printed in capital letters of emphasis. Do not say 'you *chose*,' 'you *chose*.' I didn't and don't choose to be obstinate, indeed; but I can't see the sense of that 'heavenly soul.'

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Ever your grateful and affectionate
E.B.B.

I shall have room for praising Gregory in these papers.

[Footnote 61: The series of papers on the Greek Christian Poets appeared in the *Athenaeum* for February and March 1842; they are reprinted in the *Poetical Works*, v. 109-200.]

[Footnote 62: This scheme took shape in the series of papers on the English Poets which appeared in the *Athenaeum* in the course of June and August 1842 (reprinted in *Poetical Works*, v. 201-290).]

To H.S. Boyd February 4, 1842.

My dear Friend,—You must be thinking, if you are not a St. Boyd for good temper, that among the Gregorys and Synesiuses I have forgotten everything about you. No; indeed it has not been so. I have never *stopped* being grateful to you for your kind notes, and the two last pieces of Gregory, although I did not say an overt 'Thank you;' but I have been very very busy besides, and thus I answered to myself for your being kind enough to pardon a silence which was compelled rather than voluntary.

Do you ever observe that as vexations don't come alone, occupations don't, and that, if you happen to be engaged upon one particular thing, it is the signal for your being waylaid by bundles of letters desiring immediate answers, and proof sheets or manuscript works whose writers request your opinion while their 'printer waits'? The old saints are not responsible for all the filling up of my time. I have been *busy upon busy*.

The first part of my story about the Greek poets went to the 'Athenaeum' some days ago, but, although graciously received by the editor, it won't appear this week, or I should have had a proof sheet (which was promised to me) before now. I must contrive to include all I have to say on the subject in *three parts*. They will admit, they tell me, a fourth *if I please*, but evidently they would prefer as much brevity as I could vouchsafe. Only two poets are in the first notice, and *twenty* remain—and neither of the two is Gregory.

Will you let me see that volume of Gregory which contains the 'Christus Patiens'? Send it by any boy on the heath, and I will remunerate him for the walk and the burden, and thank you besides. Oh, don't be afraid! I am not going to charge it upon Gregory, but on the younger Apollinaris, whose claim is stronger, and I rather wish to refresh my recollection of the height and breadth of that tragic misdemeanour.

It is quite true that I never have suffered much pain, and equally so that I continue most decidedly better, notwithstanding the winter. I feel, too—I do hope not ungratefully—the

blessing granted to me in the possibility of literary occupation,—which is at once occupation and distraction. Carlyle (not the infidel, but the philosopher) calls literature a 'fireproof pleasure.' How truly! How deeply I have felt that truth!

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May God bless you, dear Mr. Boyd. I don't despair of looking in your face one day yet before my last.

Ever your affectionate and obliged
E.B.B.

Arabel's love.

To H.S. Boyd March 2, 1842.

My ever very dear Friend,—Do receive the assurance that whether I leave out the right word or put in the wrong one, you never can be other to me than just *that* while I live, and why not after I have ceased to live? And now—what have I done in the meantime, to be called 'Miss Barrett'? 'I pause for a reply.'

Of course it gives me very great pleasure to hear you speak so kindly of my first paper. Some *bona avis* as good as a nightingale must have shaken its wings over me as I began it; and if it will but sit on the same spray while I go on towards the end, I shall rejoice exactly four-fold. The third paper went to Mr. Dilke to-day, and I was so fidgety about getting it away (and it seemed to cling to my writing case with both its hands), that I would not do any writing, even as little as this note, until it was quite gone out of sight. You know it is possible that he, the editor, may not please to have the *fourth* paper; but even in that case, it is better for the 'Remarks' to remain fragmentary, than be compressed till they are as dry as a *hortus siccus* of poets.

Certainly you do and must praise my number one too much. Number one (that's myself) thinks so. I do really; and the supererogatory virtue of kindness may be acknowledged out of the pale of the Romish Church.

In regard to Gregory and Synesius, you will see presently that I have not wronged them altogether.

As you have ordered the 'Athenaeums,' I will not send one to-morrow so as to repeat my ill fortune of being too late. But tell me if you would like to have any from me, and how many.

It was very kind in you to pat Flush's[63] head in defiance of danger and from pure regard for me. I kissed his head where you had patted it; which association of approximations I consider as an imitation of shaking hands with you and as the next best thing to it. You understand—don't you?—that Flush is my constant companion, my friend, my amusement, lying with his head on one page of my folios while I read the other. (Not *your* folios—I respect *your* books, be sure.) Oh, I dare say, if the truth were known, Flush understands Greek excellently well.

I hope you are right in thinking that we shall meet again. Once I wished *not* to live, but the faculty of life seems to have sprung up in me again, from under the crushing foot of heavy grief.

Be it all as God wills.

Believe me, your ever affectionate

E.B.B.

[Footnote 63: Miss Barrett's dog, the gift of Miss Mitford. His praise is sung in her poem, 'To Flush, my Dog' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 19), and in many of the following letters. He accompanied his mistress to Italy, lived to a good old age, and now lies buried in the vaults of Casa Guidi.]

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To H.S. Boyd Saturday night, March 5, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I am quite angry with myself for forgetting your questions when I answered your letter.

Could you really imagine that I have not looked into the Greek tragedians for years, with my true love for Greek poetry? That is asking a question, you will say, and not answering it. Well, then, I answer by a 'Yes' the one you put to me. I had two volumes of Euripides with me in Devonshire, and have read him as well as Aeschylus and Sophocles—that is *from* them—both before and since I went there. You know I have gone through every line of the three tragedians long ago, in the way of regular, consecutive reading.

You know also that I had at different times read different dialogues of Plato; but when three years ago, and a few months previous to my leaving home, I became possessed of a complete edition of his works, edited by Bekker, why then I began with the first volume and went through the whole of his writings, both those I knew and those I did not know, one after another: and have at this time read, not only all that is properly attributed to Plato, but even those dialogues and epistles which pass falsely under his name—everything except two books I think, or three, of the treatise 'De Legibus,' which I shall finish in a week or two, as soon as I can take breath from Mr. Dilke.

Now the questions are answered.

Ever your affectionate and grateful friend,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd Thursday, March 10, 1842 [postmark].

My very dear Friend,—I did not know until to-day whether the paper would appear on Saturday or not; but as I have now received the proof sheets, there can be no doubt of it. I have been and *am* hurried and hunted almost into a corner through the pressing for the fourth paper, and the difficulty about books. You will forgive a very short note to night.

I have read of Aristotle only his Poetics, his Ethics, and his work upon Rhetoric, but I mean to take him regularly into both hands when I finish Plato's last page. Aristophanes I took with me into Devonshire; and after all, I do not know much more of *him* than three or four of his plays may stand for. Next week, my very dear friend, I shall be at your commands, and sit in spirit at your footstool, to hear and answer anything you may care to ask me—but oh! what have I done that you should talk to *me* about 'venturing,' or 'liberty,' or anything of that kind?

From your affectionate and grateful catechumen,
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd. March 29, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I received your long letter and receive your short one, and thank you for the pleasure of both. Of course I am very *very* glad of your approval in the matter of the papers, and your kindness could not have wished to give me more satisfaction than it gave actually. Mr. Kenyon tells me that Mr. Burgess[64] has been reading and commending the papers, and has brought me from him a newly discovered scene of the 'Bacchae' of Euripides, edited by Mr. Burgess himself for the 'Gentlemen's Magazine,' and of which he considers that the 'Planctus Mariae,' at least the passage I extracted from it, is an imitation. Should you care to see it? Say 'Yes,'—and I will send it to you.

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Do you think it was wrong to make *eternity* feminine? I knew that the Greek word was not feminine; but imagined that the English personification should be so. Am I wrong in this? Will you consider the subject again?

Ah, yes! That was a mistake of mine about putting Constantine for Constantius. I wrote from memory, and the memory betrayed me. But say nothing about it. Nobody will find it out. I send you Silentiarius and some poems of Pisida in the same volume. Even if you had not asked for them, I should have asked you to look at some passages which are fine in both. It appears to me that Silentiarius writes difficult Greek, overlaying his description with a multitude of architectural and other far fetched words! Pisida is hard, too, occasionally, from other causes, particularly in the 'Hexaemeron,' which is not in the book I send you but in another very gigantic one (as tall as the Irish giants), which you may see if you please. I will send a coach and six with it if you please.

John Mauropus, of the Three Towns, I owe the knowledge of to *you. You* lent me the book with his poems, you know. He is a great favorite of mine in all ways. I very much admire his poetry.

Believe me, ever your affectionate and grateful

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Pray tell me what you think. I am sorry to observe that the book I send you is marked very irregularly; that is, marked in some places, unmarked in others, just as I happened to be near or far from my pencil and inkstand. Otherwise I should have liked to compare judgments with you.

Keep the book as long as you please; it is my own.

[Footnote 64: George Burges, the classical scholar. He had in 1832 contributed to the *Gentleman's Magazine* (under a pseudonym) some lines purporting to be a newly discovered portion of the *Bacchae*, but really composed by himself on the basis of a parallel passage in the *Christus Patiens*. It is apparently to these lines that Miss Barrett alludes, though the 'discovery' was then nearly ten years old.]

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: April 2, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—... As to your kind desire to hear whatever in the way of favorable remark I have gathered together for fruit of my papers, I put on a veil and tell you that Mr. Kenyon thought it well done, although 'labour thrown away, from the unpopularity of the subject;' that Miss Mitford was very much pleased, with the warmheartedness common to her; that Mrs. Jamieson [*sic*] read them 'with great pleasure' unconsciously of the author; and that Mr. Home the poet and Mr. Browning the poet were not behind in approbation. Mr. Browning is said to be learned in Greek,

especially in the dramatists; and of Mr. Home I should suspect something similar. Miss Mitford and Mrs. Jamieson, although very gifted and highly cultivated women, are not Grecians, and therefore judge the papers simply as English compositions.

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The single unfavorable opinion *is* Mr. Hunter's, who thinks that the criticisms are not given with either sufficient seriousness or diffidence, and that there is a painful sense of effort through the whole. Many more persons may say so whose voices I do not hear. I am glad that yours, my dear indulgent friend, is not one of them.

Believe me, your ever affectionate

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd May 17, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—Have you thought all unkindness out of my silence? Yet the inference is not a true one, however it may look in logic.

You do not like Silentiarius *very much* (that is *my* inference), since you have kept him so short a time. And I quite agree with you that he is not a poet of the same interest as Gregory Nazianzen, however he may appear to me of more lofty cadence in his versification. My own impression is that John of Euchaita is worth two of each of them as a poet. His poems strike me as standing in the very first class of the productions of the Christian centuries. Synesius and John of Euchaita! I shall always think of those two together—not by their similarity, but their dignity.

I return you the books you lent me with true thanks, and also those which Mrs. Smith, I believe, left in your hands for me. I thank *you* for them, and *you* must be good enough to thank *her*. They were of use, although of a rather sublime indifference for poets generally....

I shall send you soon the series of the Greek papers you asked for, and also perhaps the first paper of a Survey of the English Poets, under the pretence of a review of 'The Book of the Poets,' a bookseller's selection published lately. I begin from Langland, of Piers Plowman and the Malvern Hills. The first paper went to the editor last week, and I have heard nothing as to whether it will appear on Saturday or not, and perhaps if it does you won't care to have it sent to you. Tell me if you do or don't. I have suffered unpleasantly in the heart lately from this tyrannous dynasty of east winds, but have been well otherwise, and am better, in *that*. Flushie means to bark the next time he sees you in revenge for what you say of him.

Good bye, dear Mr. Boyd; think of me as

Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.

To H.S. Boyd June 3, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I disobeyed you in not simply letting you know of the publication of my ‘English Poets,’ because I did not know myself when the publication was to take place, and I hope you will forgive the innocent crime and accept the first number going to you with this note. I warn you that there will be two numbers more at *least*. Therefore do not prepare yourself for perhaps the impossible magnanimity of reading them through.

And now I am fit for rivalship with your clocks, papa having given me an Aeolian harp for the purpose. Do you know the music of an Aeolian harp, and that nothing below the spherical harmonies is so sweet and soft and mournfully wild? The amusing part of it is (after the poetical) that Flushie is jealous and thinks it is alive, and takes it as very hard that I should say ‘beautiful’ to anything except his ears!

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Arabel talks of going to see you; but if you are sensible to this intense and most overcoming heat, you will pardon her staying away for the present.

We have heard to-day that Annie proposes to publish her Miscellany by subscription; and although I know it to be the only way, compatible with publication at all, to avoid a pecuniary loss, yet the custom is so entirely abandoned except in the case of persons of a lower condition of life than *your daughter*, that I am sorry to think of the observations it may excite. The whole scheme has appeared to me from the beginning *most foolish*, and if you knew what I know of the state and fortune of our ephemeral literature, you would use what influence you have with her to induce her to condemn her 'contributions' to the adorning of a private annual rather than the purpose in unhappy question. I wish I dared to appeal through my true love for her to her own good sense once more.

My very dear friend's affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.

If you *do* read any of the papers, let me know, I beseech you, your full and free opinion of them.

To H.S. Boyd June 22, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I thank you gratefully for your two notes, with their united kindness and candour—the latter still rarer than the former, if less 'sweet upon the tongue.' Sir William Alexander's tragedy *(that* is the right name, I think, Sir William Alexander, Earl of Stirling) you will not find mentioned among my dramatic notices, because I was much pressed for room, and had to treat the whole subject as briefly as possible, striking off, like the Roman, only the heads of the flowers, and I did not, besides, receive your injunction until my third paper on the dramatists was finished and in the press. When you read it you will find some notice of that tragedy by Marlowe, the first knowledge of which I owe to you, my dear Mr. Boyd, as how much besides? And then comes the fourth paper, and I tremble to anticipate the possible—nay, the very probable—scolding I may have from you, upon my various heresies as to Dryden and Pope and Queen Anne's versificators. In the meantime you have breathing time, for Mr. Dilke, although very gracious and courteous to my offence of extending the two papers he asked for *into four*,[65] yet could find no room in the 'Athenaeum' last week for me, and only *hopes* for it this week. And after this week comes the British Association business, which always fills every column for a month, so that a further delay is possible enough. 'It will increase,' says Mr. Dilke, 'the zest of the reader,' whereas *I* say (at least think) that it will help him quite to forget me. I explain all this lest you should blame me for neglect to yourself in not sending the papers. I am so pleased that you like at least the second article. That is encouragement to me.

Flushie did not seem to think the harp alive when it was taken out of the window and laid close to him. He examined it particularly, and is a philosophical dog. But I am sure that at first and while it was playing he thought so.

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In the same way he can't bear me to look into a glass, because he thinks there is a little brown dog inside every looking glass, and he is jealous of its being so close to *me*. He used to tremble and bark at it, but now he is *silently* jealous, and contents himself with squeezing close, close to me and kissing me expressively.

My very dear friend's ever gratefully affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 65: Ultimately five.]

To John Kenyon 50 Wimpole Street: Sunday night [September 1842].

My dear Mr. Kenyon,—Having missed my pleasure to-day by a coincidence worse for me than for you, I must, tired as I am to-night, tell you—ready for to-morrow's return of the books—what I have waited three whole days hoping to tell you by word of mouth. But mind, before I begin, I don't do so out of despair ever to see you again, because I trust steadfastly to your kindness to *come* again when *you* are not 'languid' and I am alone as usual; only that I dare not keep back from you any longer the following message of Miss Mitford. She says: 'Won't he take us in his way to Torquay? or from Torquay? Beg him to do so—and of all love, to tell us *when*.' Afterwards, again: 'I think my father is better. Tell Mr. Kenyon what I say, and stand my friend with him and beg him to come.'

Which I do in the most effectual way—in her own words.

She is much pleased by means of your introduction. 'Tell dear Mr. Kenyon how very very much I like Mrs. Leslie. She seems all that is good and kind, and to add great intelligence and agreeableness to these prime qualities.'

Now I have done with being a messenger of the gods, and verily my caduceus is trembling in my hand.

O Mr. Kenyon! what have you done? You will know the interpretation of the reproach, your conscience holding the key of the cypher.

In the meantime I ought to be thanking you for your great kindness about this divine Tennyson.[66] Beautiful! beautiful! After all, it is a noble thing to be a poet. But notwithstanding the poetry of the novelties—and you will observe that his two preceding volumes (only one of which I had seen before, having inquired for the other vainly) are included in these two—nothing appears to me quite equal to 'Oenone,' and perhaps a few besides of my ancient favorites. That is not said in disparagement of the last, but in admiration of the first. There is, in fact, more thought—more bare brave working of the intellect—in the latter poems, even if we miss something of the high ideality, and the music that goes with it, of the older ones. Only I am always inclined to believe that

philosophic thinking, like music, is involved, however occultly, in high ideality of any kind.

You have not a key to the cypher of this at least, and I am so tired that one word seems tumbling over another all the way.

Ever affectionately yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

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You will let me keep your beautiful ballad and the gods[67] a little longer.

[Footnote 66: This refers to the recent publication of Tennyson's *Poems*, in two volumes, the first containing a re-issue of poems previously published, while the second was wholly new, and included such poems as the 'Morte d'Arthur,' 'Ulysses,' and 'Locksley Hall.']

[Footnote 67: No doubt Mr. Kenyon's translation of Schiller's 'Gods of Greece,' which was the occasion of Miss Barrett's poem 'The Dead Pan.']

To H.S. Boyd September 14, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I have made you wait a long time for the 'North American Review,' because when your request came it was no longer within my reach, and because since then I have not been so well as usual from a sweep of the wing of the prevailing epidemic. Now, however, I am *better* than I was even before the attack, only wishing that it were possible to hook-and-eye on another summer to the hem of the garment of this last sunny one. At the end of such a double summer, to measure things humanly, I might be able to go to see you at Hampstead. Nevertheless, winters and adversities are more fit for us than a constant sun.

I suppose, dear Mr. Boyd, you want only to have this review read to you, and not *written*. Because it isn't out of laziness that I send the book to you; and Arabel would copy whatever you please willingly, provided you wished it. Keep the book as long as you please. I have put a paper mark and a pencil mark at the page and paragraph where I am taken up. It seems to me that the condemnation of 'The Seraphim' is not too hard. The poem wants *unity*.

As to your 'words of fire' about Wordsworth, if I had but a cataract at command I would try to quench them. His powers should not be judged of by my extracts or by anybody's extracts from his last-published volume.[68] Do you remember his grand ode upon Childhood—worth, to my apprehension, just twenty of Dryden's 'St. Cecilia's Day'—his sonnet upon Westminster Bridge, his lyric on a lark, in which the lark's music swells and exults, and the many noble and glorious passages of his 'Excursion'? You must not indeed blame me for estimating Wordsworth at *his height*, and on the other side I readily confess to you that he is occasionally, and not unfrequently, heavy and dull, and that Coleridge had an intenser genius. Tell me if you know anything of Tennyson. He has just published two volumes of poetry, one of which is a republication, but both full of inspiration.

Ever my very dear friend's affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.

[Footnote 68: *Poems, chiefly of early and late years, including The Borderers, a Tragedy* (1842).]

To Mrs. Martin 50 Wimpole Street: October 22, 1842.

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My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Waiting first for you to write to me, and then waiting that I might write to you cheerfully, has ended by making so long a silence that I am almost ashamed to break it. And perhaps, even if I were not ashamed, you would be angry—-perhaps you *are* angry, and don't much care now whether or not you ever hear from me again. Still I must write, and I must moreover ask you to write to me again; and I must in particular assure you that I have continued to love you sincerely, notwithstanding all the silence which might seem to say the contrary. What I should like best just now is to have a letter speaking comfortable details of your being comparatively well again; yet I hope on without it that you really are so much better as to be next to quite well. It was with great concern that I heard of the indisposition which hung about you, dearest Mrs. Martin, so long—I who had congratulated myself when I saw you last on the promise of good health in your countenance. May God bless you, and keep you better! And may you take care of yourself, and remember how many love you in the world, from dear Mr. Martin down to—E.B.B.

Well, now I must look around me and consider what there is to tell you. But I have been uneasy in various ways, sometimes by reason and sometimes by fantasy; and even now, although my dear old friend Dr. Scully is something better, he lies, I fear, in a very precarious state, while dearest Miss Mitford's letters from the deathbed of her father make my heart ache as surely almost as the post comes. There is nothing more various in character, nothing which distinguishes one human being from another more strikingly, than the expression of feeling, the manner in which it influences the outward man. If I were in her circumstances, I should sit paralysed—it would be impossible to me to write or to cry. And she, who loves and feels with the intensity of a nature warm in everything, seems to turn to sympathy by the very instinct of grief, and sits at the deathbed of her last relative, writing there, in letter after letter, every symptom, physical or moral—even to the very words of the raving of a delirium, and those, heart-breaking words! I could not write such letters; but I know she feels as deeply as any mourner in the world can. And all this reminds me of what you once asked me about the inscriptions in Lord Brougham's villa at Nice. There are probably as many different dialects for the heart as for the tongue, are there not?...

And now you will kindly like to have a word said about myself, and it need not be otherwise than a word to give your kindness pleasure. The long splendid summer, exhausting as the heat was to me sometimes, did me essential good, and left me walking about the room and equal to going downstairs (which I achieved four or five times), and even to going out in the chair, without suffering afterwards. And, best of all, the spitting of blood (I must tell you), which

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more or less kept by me continually, *stopped quite* some six weeks ago, and I have thus more reasonable hopes of being really and essentially better than I could have with such a symptom loitering behind accidental improvements. Weak enough, and with a sort of pulse which is not excellent, I certainly remain; but still, if I escape any decided attack this winter—and I am in garrison now—there are expectations of further good for next summer, and I may recover some moderate degree of health and strength again, and be able to *do* good instead of receiving it only.

I write under the eyes of Wordsworth. Not Wordsworth's living eyes, although the actual living poet had the infinite kindness to ask Mr. Kenyon twice last summer when he was in London, if he might not come to see me. Mr. Kenyon said 'No'—I couldn't have said 'No' to Wordsworth, though I had never gone to sleep again afterwards. But this Wordsworth who looks on me now is Wordsworth in a picture. Mr. Haydon the artist, with the utmost kindness, has sent me the portrait he was painting of the great poet—an unfinished portrait—and I am to keep it until he wants to finish it. Such a head! such majesty! and the poet stands musing upon Helvellyn! And all that—poet, Helvellyn, and all—is in my room![69]

Give my kind love to Mr. Martin—*our* kind love, indeed, to both of you—and believe me, my dearest Mrs. Martin,

Your ever affectionate BA.

Is there any hope for us of you before the winter ends? Do consider.

To H.S. Boyd Monday, October 31, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I have put off from day to day sending you these volumes, and in the meantime *I have had a letter from the great poet*! Did Arabel tell you that my sonnet on the picture was sent to Mr. Haydon, and that Mr. Haydon sent it to Mr. Wordsworth? The result was that Mr. Wordsworth wrote to me. King John's barons were never better pleased with their Charta than I am with this letter.[70]

But I won't tell you any more about it until you have read the poems which I send you. Read first, to put you into good humour, the sonnet written on Westminster Bridge, vol. iii. page 78. Then take from the sixth volume, page 152, the passage beginning 'Within the soul' down to page 153 at 'despair,' and again at page 155 beginning with

I have seen
A curious child, &c.

down to page 157 to the end of the paragraph. If you admit these passages to be fine poetry, I wish much that you would justify me further by reading, out of the *second*

volume, the two poems called ‘Laodamia’ and ‘Tintern Abbey’ at page 172 and page 161. I will not ask you to read any more; but I dare say you will rush on of your own account, in which case there is a fine ode upon the ‘Power of Sound’ in the same volume. Wordsworth is a philosophical and Christian poet, with depths in his soul to which poor Byron could never reach. Do be candid. Nay, I need not say so, because you always are, as I am,

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Your ever affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 69: It was this picture that called forth the sonnet, 'On a Portrait of Wordsworth by B.R. Haydon' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 62), alluded to in the next letter.]

[Footnote 70: The following is the letter from Wordsworth which gave such pleasure to Miss Barrett, and which she treasured among her papers for the rest of her life. Two slips of the pen have been corrected between brackets.

'Rydal Mount: Oct. 26, '42.

'Dear Miss Barrett,—Through our common friend Mr. Haydon I have received a sonnet which his portrait of me suggested. I should have thanked you sooner for that effusion of a feeling towards myself, with which I am much gratified, but I have been absent from home and much occupied.

'The conception of your sonnet is in full accordance with the painter's intended work, and the expression vigorous; yet the word "ebb," though I do not myself object to it, nor wish to have it altered, will I fear prove obscure to nine readers out of ten.

"A vision free
And noble, Haydon, hath thine art released."

Owing to the want of inflections in our language the construction here is obscure. Would it not be a little [better] thus? I was going to write a small change in the order of the words, but I find it would not remove the objection. The verse, as I take it, would be somewhat clearer thus, if you would tolerate the redundant syllable:

"By a vision free
And noble, Haydon, is thine art released."

I had the gratification of receiving, a good while ago, two copies of a volume of your writing, which I have read with much pleasure, and beg that the thanks which I charged a friend to offer may be repeated [to] you.

'It grieved me much to hear from Mr. Kenyon that your health is so much deranged. But for that cause I should have presumed to call upon you when I was in London last spring.

'With every good wish, I remain, dear Miss Barrett, your much obliged

'WM. WORDSWORTH.'

[Postmark: Ambleside, Oct. 28, 1842.]

It may be added that although Miss Barrett altered the passage criticised by the great poet, she did not accept his amendment. It now runs

’A noble vision free
Our Haydon’s hand has flung out from the mist.

To H.S. Boyd December 4, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—You will think me in a discontented state of mind when I knit my brows like a ‘sleeve of care’ over your kind praises. But the truth is, I *won’t* be praised for being liberal in Calvinism and love of Byron. *I* liberal in commending Byron! Take out my heart and try it! look at it and compare it with yours; and answer and tell me if I do not love and admire Byron more warmly than you yourself do. I suspect it indeed. Why, I am always reproached for my love to Byron. Why, people say to me, ‘*You*, who overpraise Byron!’ Why, when I was a little girl (and, whatever you may think, my tendency is not to cast off my old loves!) I used to think seriously of dressing up like a boy and running away to be Lord Byron’s page. And *I* to be praised now for being ‘liberal’ in admitting the merit of his poetry! *I*!

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As for the Calvinism, I don't choose to be liberal there either. I don't call myself a Calvinist. I hang suspended between the two doctrines, and hide my eyes in God's love from the sights which other people *say* they see. I believe simply that the saved are saved by grace, and that they shall hereafter know it fully; and that the lost are lost by their choice and free will—by choosing to sin and die; and I believe absolutely that the deepest damned of all the lost will not dare to whisper to the nearest devil that reproach of Martha: 'If the Lord had been near me, I had not died.' But of the means of the working of God's grace, and of the time of the formation of the Divine counsels, I know nothing, guess nothing, and struggle to guess nothing; and my persuasion is that when people talk of what was ordained or approved by God before the foundations of the world, their tendency is almost always towards a confusion of His eternal nature with the human conditions of ours; and to an oblivion of the fact that with *Him* there can be no after nor before.

At any rate, I do not find it good for myself to examine any more the brickbats of controversy—there is more than enough to think of in truths clearly revealed; more than enough for the exercise of the intellect and affections and adorations. I would rather not suffer myself to be disturbed, and perhaps irritated, where it is not likely that I should ever be informed. And although you tell me that your system of investigation is different from some others, answer me with your accustomed candour, and admit, my very dear friend, that this argument does not depend upon the construction of a Greek sentence or the meaning of a Greek word. Let a certain word[71] be 'fore-know' or 'publicly *favor*,' room for a stormy controversy yet remains. I went through the Romans with you partially, and wholly by myself, by your desire, and in reference to the controversy, long ago; and I could not then, and cannot now, enter into that view of Taylor and Adam Clarke, and yourself I believe, as to the *Jews and Gentiles*. Neither could I conceive that a particular part of the epistle represents an actual dialogue between a Jew and Gentile, since the form of question and answer appears to me there simply rhetorical. The Apostle Paul was learned in rhetoric; and I think he described so, by a rhetorical and vivacious form, that struggle between the flesh and the spirit common to all Christians; the spirit being triumphant through God in Christ Jesus. These are my impressions. Yours are different. And since we should not probably persuade each other, and since we are both of us fond of and earnest in what we fancy to be the truth, why should we cast away the thousand sympathies we rejoice in, religious and otherwise, for the sake of a fruitless contention? 'What!' you would say (by the time we had quarrelled half an hour), 'can't you talk without being excited?' Half an hour afterwards: 'Pray *do* lower your voice—it goes through my head!' In another ten minutes: 'I could scarcely have believed you to be so obstinate.' In another: 'Your prejudices are insurmountable, and your reason most womanly—you are degenerated to the last degree.' In another—why, *then* you would turn me and Flush out of the room and so finish the controversy victoriously.

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Was I wrong too, dearest Mr. Boyd, in sending the poems to the 'Athenaeum'? Well, I meant to be right. I fancied that you would rather they were sent; and as your *name* was not attached, there could be no harm in leaving them to the editor's disposal. They are not inserted, as I anticipated. The religious character was a sufficient objection—-their character of *prayer*. Mr. Dilke begged me once, while I was writing for him, to write the name of God and Jesus Christ as little as I could, because those names did not accord with the secular character of the journal!

Ever your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Tell me how you like the sonnet; but you won't (I prophesy) like it.
Keep the 'Athenaeum.'

[Footnote 71: The Greek [Greek: progignoskein], used in Romans viii. 29.]

To H.S. Boyd December 24, 1842.

My very dear Friend,—I am afraid that you will infer from my silence that you have affronted me into ill temper by your parody upon my sonnet. Yet 'lucus a non lucendo' were a truer derivation. I laughed and thanked you over the parody, and put off writing to you until I had the headache, which forced me to put it off again....

May God bless you, my dear Mr. Boyd. Mr. Savage Landor once said that anybody who could write a parody deserved to be shot; but as he has written one himself since saying so, he has probably changed his mind. Arabel sends her love.

Ever your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd January 5, 1842 [1843].

My very dear Friend,—My surprise was inexpressible at your utterance of the name. What! Ossian superior as a poet to Homer! Mr. Boyd saying so! Mr. Boyd treading down the neck of Aeschylus while he praises Ossian! The fact appears to me that anomalous thing among believers—a miracle without an occasion.

I confess I never, never should have guessed the name; not though I had guessed to Doomsday. In the first place I do not believe in Ossian, and having partially examined the testimony (for I don't pretend to any exact learning about it) I consider him as the poetical *lay figure* upon which Mr. Macpherson dared to cast his personality. There is a sort of phraseology, nay, an identity of occasional phrases, from the antique—but that these so-called Ossianic poems were ever discovered and translated as they stand in their present form, I believe in no wise. As Dr. Johnson wrote to Macpherson, so I would say, 'Mr. Macpherson, I thought you an impostor, and think so still.'

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It is many years ago since I looked at Ossian, and I never did much delight in him, as that fact proves. Since your letter came I have taken him up again, and have just finished 'Carthon.' There are beautiful passages in it, the most beautiful beginning, I think, 'Desolate is the dwelling of Moina,' and the next place being filled by that address to the sun you magnify so with praise. But the charm of these things is the *only* charm of all the poems. There is a sound of wild vague music in a monotone—nothing is articulate, nothing *individual*, nothing various. Take away a few poetical phrases from these poems, and they are colourless and bare. Compare them with the old burning ballads, with a wild heart beating in each. How cold they grow in the comparison! Compare them with Homer's grand breathing personalities, with Aeschylus's—nay, but I cannot bear upon my lips or finger the charge of the blasphemy of such comparing, even for religion's sake....

I had another letter from America a few days since, from an American poet of Boston who is establishing a magazine, and asked for contributions from my pen. The Americans are as good-natured to me as if they took me for the high Radical I am, you know.

You won't be angry with me for my obliquity (as you will consider it) about Ossian. You know I always talk sincerely to you, and you have not made me afraid of telling you the truth—that is, *my* truth, the truth of my belief and opinions.

I do not defend much in the 'Idiot Boy.' Wordsworth is a great poet, but he does not always write equally.

And that reminds me of a distinction you suggest between Ossian and Homer. *I* fashion it in this way: Homer sometimes nods, but Ossian *makes his readers nod*.

Ever your affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Did I tell you that I had been reading through a manuscript translation of the 'Gorgias' of Plato, by Mr. Hyman of Oxford, who is a stepson of Mr. Haydon's the artist? It is an excellent translation with learned notes, but it is *not elegant*. He means to try the public upon it, but, as I have intimated to him, the Christians of the present day are not civilised enough for Plato.

Arabel's love.

To H.S. Boyd [About the end of January 1843.]

My very dear Friend,—The image you particularly admire in Ossian, I admire with you, although I am not sure that I have not seen it or its like somewhere in a classical poet, Greek or Latin. Perhaps Lord Byron remembered it when in the 'Siege of Corinth' he

said of his Francesca's uplifted arm, 'You might have seen the moon shine through.' It reminds me also that Maclise the artist, a man of poetical imagination, gives such a transparency to the ghost of Banquo in his picture of Macbeth's banquet, that we can discern through it the lights of the festival. That is good poetry for a painter, is it not?

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I send you the magazines which I have just received from America, and which contain, one of them, 'The Cry of the Human,' and the other, four of my sonnets. My correspondent tells me that the 'Cry' is considered there one of the most successful of my poems, but you probably will not think so. Tell me exactly what you do think. At page 343 of 'Graham's Magazine,' *Editor's Table*, is a review of me, which, however extravagant in its appreciation, will give your kindness pleasure. I confess to a good deal of pleasure myself from these American courtesies, expressed not merely in the magazines, but in the newspapers; a heap of which has been sent to me by my correspondent—the 'New York Tribune,' 'The Union,' 'The Union Flag,' &c.—all scattered over with extracts from my books and benignant words about their writer. Among the extracts is the whole of the review of Wordsworth from the London 'Athenaeum,' an unconscious compliment, as they do not guess at the authorship, and one which you won't thank them for. Keep the magazines, as I have duplicates.

Dearest Mr. Boyd, since you admit that I am not prejudiced about Ossian, I take courage to tell you what I am thinking of.

I am thinking (this is said in a whisper, and in confidence—of two kinds), *I am thinking that you don't admire him quite as much as you did three weeks ago*.

Ever most affectionately yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Arabel not being here, I send her love without asking for it.

To Mrs. Martin January 30, 1843.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Thank you for your letter and for dear Mr. Martin's thought of writing one! Ah! *I* thought he would not write, but not for the reason you say; it was something more palpable and less romantic! Well, I will not grumble any more about not having my letter, since you are coming, and since you seem, my dear Mrs. Martin, something in better spirits than your note from Southampton bore token of. Madeira is the Promised Land, you know; and you should hope hopefully for your invalid from his pilgrimage there. You should hope with those who hope, my dearest Mrs. Martin....

Our '*event*' just now is a new purchase of a 'Holy Family,' supposed to be by Andrea del Sarto. It has displaced the Glover over the chimney-piece in the drawing-room, and dear Stormie and Alfred nearly broke their backs in carrying it upstairs for me to see before the placing. It is probably a fine picture, and I seem to see my way through the dark of my ignorance, to admire the grouping and colouring, whatever doubt as to the expression and divinity may occur otherwise. Well, you will judge. I won't tell you *how* I think of it. And you won't care if I do. There is also a new very pretty landscape piece, and you may imagine the local politics of the arrangement and hanging, with their talk and consultation; while *I*, on the storey higher, have my arranging

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to manage of my pretty new books and my three hyacinths, and a pot of primroses which dear Mr. Kenyon had the good nature to carry himself through the streets to our door. But all the flowers forswear me, and die either suddenly or gradually as soon as they become aware of the want of fresh air and light in my room. Talking of air and light, what exquisite weather this is! What a summer in winter! It is the fourth day since I have had the fire wrung from me by the heat of temperature, and I sit here *very warm indeed*, notwithstanding that bare grate. Nay, yesterday I had the door thrown open for above an hour, and was warm still! You need not ask, you see, how I am.

Tell me, have you read Mr. Dickens's 'America;' and what is your thought of it like? If I were an American, it would make me rabid, and certain of the free citizens *are* furious, I understand, while others 'speak peace and ensue it,' admire as much of the book as deserves any sort of admiration, and attribute the blameable parts to the prejudices of the party with whom the writer 'fell in,' and not to a want of honesty or brotherhood in his own intentions. I admire Mr. Dickens as an imaginative writer, and I love the Americans —I cannot possibly admire or love this book. Does Mr. Martin? Do *you*?

Henrietta would send her love to you if I could hear her voice nearer than I do actually, as she sings to the guitar downstairs. And her love is not the only one to be sent. Give mine to dear Mr. Martin, though he can't make up his mind to the bore of writing to me. And remember us all, both of you, as we do you.

Dearest Mrs. Martin, your affectionate BA.

To James Martin February 6, 1843.

You make us out, my dear Mr. Martin, to be such perfect parallel lines that I should be half afraid of completing the definition by our never meeting, if it were not for what you say afterwards, of the coming to London, and of promising to come and see Flush. If you should be travelling while I am writing, it was only what happened to me when I wrote not long ago to dearest Mrs. Martin, and everybody in this house cried out against the fatuity of the coincidence. As if I could know that she was travelling, when nobody told me, and I wasn't a witch! If the same thing happens to-day, believe in the innocence of my ignorance. I shall be consoled if it does—for certain reasons. But for none in the world can I help thanking you for your letter, which gave me so much pleasure from the first sight of the handwriting to the thought of the kindness spent upon me in it, that after all I cannot thank you as I would.

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Yet I won't let you fancy me of such an irrational state of simplicity as not to be fully aware that *you*, with your 'nature of the fields and forests,' look down disdainfully and with an inward heat of glorying, upon *me* who have all my pastime in books—dead and seethed. Perhaps, if it were a little warmer, I might even grant that you are right in your pride. As it is, I grumble feebly to myself something about the definition of *nature*, and how we in the town (which 'God made' just as He made your hedges) have *our* share of nature too; and then I have secret thoughts of the state of the thermometer, and wonder how people can breathe out of doors. In the meantime, Flush, who is a better philosopher, pushes deep into my furs, and goes to sleep. Perhaps I should fear the omen for my correspondent.

Oh yes! That picture in 'Boz' is beautiful. For my own part, and by a natural womanly contradiction, I have never cared so much in my life for flowers as since being shut out from gardens—unless, indeed, in the happy days of old when I had a garden of my own, and cut it out into a great Hector of Troy, in relievo, with a high heroic box nose and shoeties of columbine.[72] But that was long ago. Now I count the buds of my primrose with a new kind of interest, and you never saw such a primrose! I begin to believe in Ovid, and look for a metamorphosis. The leaves are turning white and springing up as high as corn. Want of air, and of sun, I suppose. I should be loth to think it—want of friendship to *me*!

Do you know that the royal Boz lives close to us, three doors from Mr. Kenyon in Harley Place? The new numbers appear to me admirable, and full of life and blood—whatever we may say to the thick rouging and extravagance of gesture. There is a beauty, a tenderness, too, in the organ scene, which is worthy of the gilliflowers. But my admiration for 'Boz' fell from its 'sticking place,' I confess, a good furlong, when I read Victor Hugo; and my creed is, that, *not* in his tenderness, which is as much his own as his humour, but in his serious powerful Jew-trial scenes, he has followed Hugo closely, and never scarcely looked away from 'Les Trois Jours d'un Condamne.'

If you should not be on the road, I hope you won't be very long before you are, and that dearest Mrs. Martin will put off building her greenhouse—you see I believe she *will* build it—until she gets home again.

How kind of you and of her to have poor old Mrs. Barker at Colwall!

Do believe me, both of you, with love from all of *us*,

Very affectionately yours,
BA.

[Footnote 72: See 'Hector in the Garden' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 37).]

To H.S. Boyd February 21, 1843.

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Thank you, my very dear friend, I am as well as the east wind will suffer me to be; and *that*, indeed, is not very well, my heart being fuller of all manner of evil than is necessary to its humanity. But the wind is changed, and the frost is gone, and it is not quite out of my fancy yet that I may see you next summer. *You and summer are not out of the question yet*. Therefore, you see, I cannot be very deep in tribulation. But you may consider it a bad symptom that I have just finished a poem of some five hundred lines in stanzas, called 'The Lost Bower,'[73] and about nothing at all in particular.

As to Arabel, she is not an icicle. There are flowers which blow in the frost—when we brambles are brown with their inward death—and she is of them, dear thing. *You* are not a bramble, though, and I hope that when you talk of 'feeling the cold,' you mean simply to refer to your sensation, and not to your health. Remember also, dearest Mr. Boyd, what a glorious winter we have had. Take away the last ten days and a few besides, and call the whole summer rather than winter. Ought we to complain, really? Really, no.

I venture another prophecy upon the shoulders of the ast, though my hand shakes so that nobody will read it.

You can't abide my 'Cry of the Human,' and four sonnets. They have none of them found favor in your eyes.

In or out of favor,

Ever your affectionate E.B.B.

Do you think that next summer you *might, could*, or *would* walk across the park to see me—supposing always that I fail in my aspiration to go and see you? I only ask by way of *hypothesis*. Consider and revolve it so. We live on the verge of the town rather than in it, and our noises are cousins to silence; and you should pass into a room where the silence is most absolute. Flush's breathing is my loudest sound, and then the watch's tickings, and then my own heart when it beats too turbulently. Judge of the quiet and the solitude!

[Footnote 73: *Poetical Works*, iii. 105.]

To H.S. Boyd April 19, 1843.

My very dear Friend,—The earth turns round, to be sure, and we turn with it, but I never anticipated the day and the hour for *you* to turn round and be guilty of high treason to our Greeks. I cry '*Ai*! *ai*!' as if I were a chorus, and all vainly. For, you see, arguing about it will only convince you of my obstinacy, and not a bit of Homer's supremacy. Ossian has wrapt you in a cloud, a fog, a true Scotch mist. You have caught cold in the critical faculty, perhaps. At any rate, I can't see a bit more of your reasonableness than

I can see of Fingal. *Sic transit*! Homer like the darkened half of the moon in eclipse! You have spoilt for me now the finest image in your Ossian-Macpherson.

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My dearest Mr. Boyd, you will find as few believers in the genuineness of these volumes among the most accomplished antiquarians in poetry as in the genuineness of Chatterton's Rowley, and of Ireland's Shakespeare. The latter impostures boasted of disciples in the first instance, but the discipleship perished by degrees, and the place thereof, during this present 1843, knows it no more. So has it been with the belief in Macpherson's Ossian. Of those who believed in the poems at the first sight of them, who kept his creed to the end? And speaking so, I speak of Macpherson's contemporaries whom you respect.

I do not consider Walter Scott a great poet, but he was highly accomplished in matters of poetical antiquarianism, and is certainly citable as an authority on this question.

Try not to be displeased with me. I cannot conceal from you that my astonishment is profound and unutterable at your new religion—your new faith in this pseud-Ossian—-and your desecration, in his service, of the old Hellenic altars. And by the way, my own figure reminds me to inquire of you whether you are not sometimes struck with a *want* in him—a want very grave in poetry, and very strange in antique poetry—the want of devotional feeling and conscience of God. Observe, that all antique poets rejoice greatly and abundantly in their divine mythology; and that if this Ossian be both antique and godless, he is an exception, a discrepancy, a monster in the history of letters and experience of humanity. As such I leave him.

Oh, how angry you will be with me. But you seemed tolerably prepared in your last letter for my being in a passion.... Ever affectionately yours,

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

Why should I be angry with Flush? *He* does not believe in Ossian. Oh,
I assure you he doesn't.

The following letter was called forth by a criticism of Mr. Kenyon's on Miss Barrett's poem, *The Dead Pan*, which he had seen in manuscript; but it also meets some criticisms which others had made upon her last volume (see above, p. 65).

To John Kenyan Wimpole Street: March 25, 1843.

My very dear Cousin,—Your kindness having touched me much, and your good opinion, whether literary or otherwise, being of great price to me, it is even with tears in my eyes that I begin to write to you upon a difference between us. And what am I to say? To admit, of course, in the first place, the injuriousness to the 'popularity,' of the scriptural tone. But am I to sacrifice a principle to popularity? Would you advise me to do so? Should I be more worthy of your kindness by doing so? and could you (apart from the kindness) call my refusal to do so either perverseness or obstinacy? Even if you could,

I hope you will try a little to be patient with me, and to forgive, at least, what you find it impossible to approve.

My dear cousin, if you had not reminded me of Wordsworth's exclamation—

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I would rather be
A pagan, suckled in a creed outworn—

and if he had never made it, I do think that its significance would have occurred to me, by a sort of instinct, in connection with this discussion. Certainly *I* would rather be a pagan whose religion was actual, earnest, continual—for week days, work days, and song days—than I would be a *Christian* who, from whatever motive, shrank from hearing or uttering the name of Christ out of a 'church.' I am no fanatic, but I like truth and earnestness in all things, and I cannot choose but believe that such a Christian shows but ill beside such a pagan. What pagan poet ever thought of casting his gods out of his poetry? In what pagan poem do they not shine and thunder? And if *I*—to approach the point in question—if *I*, writing a poem the end of which is the extolment of what I consider to be Christian truth over the pagan myths shrank even *there* from naming the name of my God lest it should not meet the sympathies of some readers, or lest it should offend the delicacies of other readers, or lest, generally, it should be unfit for the purposes of poetry in what more forcible manner than by that act (I appeal to Philip against Philip) can I controvert my own poem, or secure to myself and my argument a logical and unanswerable shame? If Christ's name is improperly spoken in that poem, then indeed is Schiller right, and the true gods of poetry are to be sighed for mournfully. For be sure that *Burns* was right, and that a poet without devotion is below his own order, and that poetry without religion will gradually lose its elevation. And then, my dear friend, we do not live among dreams. The Christian religion is true or it is not, and if it is true it offers the highest and purest objects of contemplation. And the poetical faculty, which expresses the highest moods of the mind, passes naturally to the highest objects. Who can separate these things? Did Dante? Did Tasso? Did Petrarch? Did Calderon? Did Chaucer? Did the poets of our best British days? Did any one of these shrink from speaking out Divine names when the occasion came? Chaucer, with all his jubilee of spirit and resounding laughter, had the name of Jesus Christ and God as frequently to familiarity on his lips as a child has its father's name. You say 'our religion is not vital—not week-day—enough.' Forgive me, but *that* is a confession of a wrong, not an argument. And if a poet be a poet, it is his business to work for the elevation and purification of the public mind, rather than for his own popularity! while if he be not a poet, no sacrifice of self-respect will make amends for a defective faculty, nor *ought* to make amends.

My conviction is that the *poetry of Christianity* will one day be developed greatly and nobly, and that in the meantime we are wrong, poetically as morally, in desiring to restrain it. No, I never felt repelled by any Christian phraseology in Cowper—although he is not a favorite poet of mine from other causes—nor in Southey, nor even in James Montgomery, nor in Wordsworth where he writes 'ecclesiastically,' nor in Christopher North, nor in Chateaubriand, nor in Lamartine.

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It is but two days ago since I had a letter—and not from a fanatic—to reproach my poetry for not being Christian enough, and this is not the first instance, nor the second, of my receiving such a reproach. I tell you this to open to you the possibility of another side to the question, which makes, you see, a triangle of it!

Can you bear with such a long answer to your letter, and forbear calling it a 'preachment'? There may be such a thing as an awkward and untimely introduction of religion, I know, and I have possibly been occasionally guilty in this way. But for *my principle* I must contend, for it is a poetical principle *and more*, and an entire sincerity in respect to it is what I owe to you and to myself. Try to forgive me, dear Mr. Kenyon. I would propitiate your indulgence for me by a libation of your own eau de Cologne poured out at your feet! It is excellent eau de Cologne, and you are very kind to me, but, notwithstanding all, there is a foreboding within me that my 'conventicleisms' will be inodorous in your nostrils.

[*Incomplete*.]

To John Kenyon Tuesday [about March 1843].

My very dear Cousin,—I have read your letter again and again, and feel your kindness fully and earnestly. You have advised me about the poem,[74] entering into the questions referring to it with the warmth rather of the author of it than the critic of it, and this I am sensible of as absolutely as anyone can be. At the same time, I have a strong perception rather than opinion about the poem, and also, if you would not think it too serious a word to use in such a place, I have a *conscience* about it. It was not written in a desultory fragmentary way, the last stanzas thrown in, as they might be thrown out, but with a *design*, which leans its whole burden on the last stanzas. In fact, the last stanzas were in my mind to say, and all the others presented the mere avenue to the end of saying them. Therefore I cannot throw them out—I cannot yield to the temptation even of pleasing *you* by doing so; I make a compromise with myself, and *do not throw them out, and do not print the poem*. Now say nothing against this, my dear cousin, because I am obstinate, as you know, as you have good evidence for knowing. I *will not* either alter or print it. Then you have your manuscript copy, which you can cut into any shape you please as long as you keep it out of print; and seeing that the poem really does belong to you, having had its origin in your paraphrase of Schiller's stanzas, I see a great deal of poetical justice in the manuscript copyright remaining in your hands. For the rest I shall have quite enough to print and to be responsible for without it, and I am quite satisfied to let it be silent for a few years until either I or you (as may be the case even with *me*!) shall have revised our judgments in relation to it.

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This being settled, you must suffer me to explain (for mere personal reasons, and not for the good of the poem) that no mortal priest (of St. Peter's or otherwise) is referred to in a particular stanza, but the Saviour Himself. Who is 'the High Priest of our profession,' and the only 'priest' recognised in the New Testament. In the same way the altar candles are altogether spiritual, or they could not be supposed, even by the most amazing poetical exaggeration, to 'light the earth and skies.' I explain this, only that I may not appear to you to have compromised the principle of the poem, by compromising any truth (such in my eyes) for the sake of a poetical effect.

And now I will not say any more. I know that you will be inclined to cry, 'Print it in any case,' but I will entreat of your kindness, which I have so much right to trust in while entreating, *not to say one such word. Be kind, and let me follow my own way silently*. I have not, indeed, like a spoilt child in a fret, thrown the poem up because I would not alter it, though you have done much to spoil me. I act advisedly, and have made up my mind as to what is the wisest and best thing to do, and personally the pleasantest to myself, after a good deal of serious reflection. 'Pan is dead,' and so best, for the present at least.

I shall take your advice about the preface in every respect, and thanks for the letter and Taylor's memoirs.

Miss Mitford talks of coming to town for a day, and of bringing Flush with her, as soon as the weather settles, and to-day looks so like it that I have mused this morning on the possibility of breaking my prison doors and getting into the next room. Only there is a forbidding north wind, they say.

Don't be vexed with me, dear Mr. Kenyon. You know there are obstinacies in the world as well as mortalities, and thereto appertaining. And then you will perceive through all mine, that it is difficult for me to act against your judgment so far as to put my own tenacity into print.

Ever gratefully and affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 74: 'The Dead Pan' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 280).]

It is to the honour of America that it recognised from the first the genius of Miss Barrett; and for a large part of her life some of the closest of her personal and literary connections were with Americans. The same is true in both respects of Robert Browning. As appears from some letters printed farther on in these volumes, at a time when the sale of his poems in England was almost infinitesimal, they were known and highly prized in the United States. Expressions of Mrs. Browning's sympathy with America and of gratitude for the kindly feelings of Americans recur frequently in the letters, and it is probable that there are still extant in the States many letters written to

friends and correspondents there. Only three or four such have been made available for the present collection; and of these the first follows

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here in its place in the chronological sequence. It was written to Mr. Cornelius Mathews, then editor of 'Graham's Magazine,' who had invited Miss Barrett to send contributions to his periodical. The warm expression in it of sympathy with the poetry of Robert Browning, whom she did not yet know personally, is especially interesting to readers of this later day, who, like the spectators at a Greek tragedy, watch the development of a drama of which the *denouement* is already known to them.

To Cornelius Mathews 50 Wimpole Street: April 28, 1843.

My dear Mr. Mathews,—In replying to your kind letter I send some more verse for Graham's, praying such demi-semi-gods as preside over contributors to magazines that I may not appear over-loquacious to my editor. Of course it is not intended to thrust three or four poems into one number. My pluralities go to you simply to 'bide your time,' and be used one by one as the opportunity is presented. In the meanwhile you have received, I hope, a short letter written to explain my unwillingness to apply, as you desired me at first, to Wiley and Putnam—an unwillingness justified by what you told me afterwards. I did not apply, nor have I applied, and I would rather not apply at all. Perhaps I shall hear from them presently. The pamphlet on International Copyright is welcome at a distance, but it has not come near me yet; and for all your kindness in relation to the prospective gift of your works I thank you again and earnestly. You are kind to me in many ways, and I would willingly know as much of your intellectual habits as you teach me of your genial feelings. This 'Pathfinder' (what an excellent name for an American journal!) I also owe to you, with the summing up of your performances in it, and with a notice of Mr. Browning's 'Blot on the Scutcheon,' which would make one poet furious (the 'infelix Talfourd') and another a little melancholy—namely, Mr. Browning himself. There is truth on both sides, but it seems to me hard truth on Browning. I do assure you I never saw him in my life—do not know him even by correspondence—and yet, whether through fellow-feeling for Eleusinian mysteries, or whether through the more generous motive of appreciation of his powers, I am very sensitive to the thousand and one stripes with which the assembly of critics doth expound its vocation over him, and the 'Athenaeum,' for instance, made me quite cross and misanthropical last week. [75] The truth is—and the world should know the truth—it is easier to find a more faultless writer than a poet of equal genius. Don't let us fall into the category of the sons of Noah. Noah was once drunk, indeed, but once he built the ark. Talking of poets, would your 'Graham's Miscellany' care at all to have occasional poetical contributions from Mr. Horne? I am in correspondence with him, and I think I could manage an arrangement upon the same terms as my engagement rests on, if you please and your

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friends please, that is, and without formality, if it should give you any pleasure. He is a writer of great power, I think. And this reminds me that you may be looking all the while for the 'Athenaeum's' reply to your friend's proposition—of which I lost no time in apprising the editor, Mr. Dilke, and here are some of his words: 'An American friend who had been long in England, and often conversed with me on the subject, resolved on his return to establish such a correspondence. In all things worth knowing—all reviews of good books' (which 'are published first or simultaneously,' says Mr. Dilke, 'in London'), 'he was anticipated, and after some months he was driven of necessity to geological surveys, centenary celebrations, progress of railroads, manufactures, &c., and thus the prospect was abandoned altogether.' Having made this experiment, Mr. Dilke is unwilling to risk another. Neither must we blame him for the reserve. When the international copyright shall at once protect the national *meum* and *tuum* in literature and give it additional fullness and value, we shall cease to say insolently to you that what we want of your books we will get without your help, but as it is, the Mr. Dilkes of us have nothing much more courteous to do. I wish I could have been of any use to your friend—I have done what I could. In regard to critical papers of mine, I would willingly give myself up to you, seeing your good nature; but it is the truth that I never published any prose papers at all except the series on the Greek Christian poets and the other series on the English poets in the 'Athenaeum' of last year, and both of which you have probably seen. Afterwards I threw up my brief and went back to my poetry, in which I feel that I must do whatever I am equal to doing at all. That life is short and art long appears to us more true than usual when we lie all day long on a sofa and are as frightened of the east wind as if it were a tiger. Life is not only short, but uncertain, and art is not only long, but absorbing. What have I to do with writing '*scandal*' (as Mr. Jones would say) upon my neighbour's work, when I have not finished my own? So I threw up my brief into Mr. Dilke's hands, and went back to my verses. Whenever I print another volume you shall have it, if Messrs. Wiley and Putnam will convey it to you. How can I send you, by the way, anything I may have to send you? Why will you not, as a nation, embrace our great penny post scheme, and hold our envelopes in all acceptation? You do not know—cannot guess—what a wonderful liberty our Rowland Hill has given to British spirits, and how we '*flash* a thought' instead of 'wafting' it from our extreme south to our extreme north, paying 'a penny for our thought' and for the electricity included. I recommend you our penny postage as the most successful revolution since the 'glorious three days' of Paris.

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And so, you made merry with my scorn of my 'Prometheus.' Believe me—believe me absolutely—I did not strike that others might spare, but from an earnest remorse. When you know me better, you will know, I hope, that I am *true*, whether right or wrong, and you know already that I am right in this thing, the only merit of the translation being its closeness. Can I be of any use to you, dear Mr. Mathews? When I can, make use of me. You surprise and disappoint me in your sketch of the Boston poet, for the letter he wrote to me struck me as frank and honest. I wonder if he made any use of the verses I sent him; and I wonder what I sent him—for I never made a note of it, through negligence, and have quite forgotten. Are you acquainted with Mrs. Sigourney? She has offended us much by her exposition of Mrs. Southey's letter, and I must say not without cause. I rejoice in the progress of 'Wakondah,' wishing the influences of mountain and river to be great over him and in him. And so I will say the 'God bless you' your kindness cares to hear, and remain,

Sincerely and thankfully yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

(Endorsed in another hand) E.B. Barrett, London, received May 12, 1843, 4 poems, previously furnished to *Graham's Magazine*, $50.

[Footnote 75: The *Athenaeum* of April 22 contained a review of Browning's 'Dramatic Lyrics,' charging him with taking pleasure in being enigmatical, and declaring this to be a sign of weakness, not strength. It spoke of many of the pieces composing the volume as being rather fragments and sketches than having any right to independent existence.]

To John Kenyan May 1, 1843

My dear Cousin,—Here is my copyright for you, and you will see that I have put 'word' instead of 'sound,' as certainly the proper 'word.' Do let me thank you once more for all the trouble and interest you have taken with me and in me. Observe besides that I have altered the title according to your unconscious suggestion, and made it 'The Dead Pan,' which is a far better name, I think, than the repetition of the *refrain*.

But I spoil my exemplary docility so far, by confessing that I don't like 'scornful children' half—no, not half so well as my 'railing children,' although, to be sure, you proved to me that the last was nigh upon nonsense. You proved it—that is, you almost proved it, for don't we say—at least, *mightn't* we say—'the thunder was silent'? '*thunder*' involving the idea of noise, as much as 'railing children' do. Consider this—I give it up to you.[76]

I am ashamed to have kept Carlyle so long, but I quite failed in trying to read him at my "usual pace—he *won't* be read quick. After all, and full of beauty and truth as that book is, and strongly as it takes hold of my sympathies, there is nothing new in it—not even a new Carlyleism, which I do not say by way of blaming the book, because the author of it

might use words like the apostle's: 'To write the same things unto you, to me indeed is not grievous, and to you it is safe.' The world being blind and deaf and rather stupid, requires a reiteration of certain uncongenial truths....

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Thank you for the address.
Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

I observe that the *most questionable rhymes* are not objected to by
Mr. Merivale; also—but this letter is too long already.

[Footnote 76: Mr. Kenyon's view evidently prevailed, for stanza 19 now has 'scornful children.']

To Mrs. Martin May 3, 1843.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—If *you* promised (which you did), *I* ought to have promised—-and therefore we may ask each other's pardon....

How is the dog? and how does dear Mr. Martin find himself in Arcadia? Do we all stand in his recollection like a species of fog, or a concentrated essence of brick wall? How I wish—and since I said it aloud to you I have often wished it over in a whisper—that you would put away your romance, or cut it in two, and spend six months of the year in London with us! Miss Mitford believes that wishes, if wished hard enough, realise themselves, but my experience has taught me a less cheerful creed. Only if wishes *do* realise themselves!

Miss Mitford is at Bath, where she has spent one week and is about to spend two, and then goes on her way into Devonshire. She amused me so the other day by desiring me to look at the date of Mr. Landor's poems in their first edition, because she was sure that it must be fifty years since, and she finds him at this 1843, the very Lothario of Bath, enchanting the wives, making jealous the husbands, and 'enjoying,' altogether, the worst of reputations. I suggested that if she proved him to be seventy-five, as long as he proved himself enchanting, it would do no manner of good in the way of practical ethics; and that, besides, for her to travel round the world to investigate gentlemen's ages was invidious, and might be alarming as to the safe inscrutability of ladies' ages. She is delighted with the *scenery of Bath*, which certainly, take it altogether, marble and mountains, is the most beautiful town I ever looked upon. Cheltenham, I think, is a mere commonplace to it, although the avenues are beautiful, to be sure....

Mrs. Southey complains that she has lost half her income by her marriage, and her friend Mr. Landor is anxious to persuade, by the means of intermediate friends, Sir Robert Peel to grant her a pension. She is said to be in London now, and has at least left Keswick for ever. It is not likely that Wordsworth should come here this year, which I am sorry for now, although I should certainly be sorry if he did come. A happy state of contradiction, not confined either to that particular movement or no-movement, inasmuch as I was gratified by his sending me the poem you saw, and yet read it with such extreme pain as to incapacitate me from judging of it. Such stuff we are made of!

This is a long letter—and you are tired, I feel by instinct!

May God bless you, my dearest Mrs. Martin. Give my love to Mr. Martin, and think of me as

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Your very affectionate,

BA.

Henry and Daisy have been to see the *lying in state*, as lying stark and dead is called whimsically, of the Duke of Sussex. It was a fine sight, they say.

To H.S. Boyd May 9, 1843 [postmark].

My very dear Friend,—I thank you much for the copies of your 'Anti-Puseyistic Pugilism.' The papers reached my hands quite safely and so missed setting the world on fire; and I shall be as wary of them evermore (be sure) as if they were gunpowder. Pray send them to Mary Hunter. Why not? Why should you think that I was likely to 'object' to your doing so? She will laugh. *I* laughed, albeit in no smiling mood; for I have been transmigrating from one room to another, and your packet found me half tired and half excited, and *whole* grave. But I could not choose but laugh at your Oxford charge; and when I had counted your great guns and javelin points and other military appurtenances of the Punic war, I said to myself—or to Flush, 'Well, Mr. Boyd will soon be back again with the dissenters.' Upon which I think Flush said, 'That's a comfort.'

Mary's direction is, 111 London Road, Brighton. You ought to send the verses to her yourself, if you mean to please her entirely: and I cannot agree with you that there is the slightest danger in sending them by the post. Letters are never opened, unless you tempt the flesh by putting sovereigns, or shillings, or other metallic substances inside the envelope; and if the devil entered into me causing me to write a libel against the Queen, I would send it by the post fearlessly from John o' Groat's to Land's End inclusive.

One of your best puns, if not the best,

Hatching succession apostolical,
With other falsehoods diabolical,

lies in an octosyllabic couplet; and what business has *that* in your heroic libel?

The 'pearl' of maidens sends her love to you.

Your very affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd May 14, 1843.

My very dear Friend,—I hear with wonder from Arabel of your repudiation of my word 'octosyllabic' for the two lines in your controversial poem. Certainly, if you count the syllables on your fingers, there are ten syllables in each line: of *that* I am perfectly

aware; but the lines are none the less belonging to the species of versification called octosyllabic. Do you not observe, my dearest Mr. Boyd, that the final accent and rhyme fall on the eighth syllable instead of the tenth, and that *that* single circumstance determines the class of verse—that they are in fact octosyllabic verses with triple rhymes?

Hatching succession apostolical,
With other falsehoods diabolical.

Pope has double rhymes in his heroic verses, but how does he manage them? Why, he admits eleven syllables, throwing the final accent and rhyme on the tenth, thus:

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Worth makes the man, and want of it the f_e_llow,
The rest is nought but leather and prun_e_lla.

Again, if there is a double rhyme to an octosyllabic verse, there are always *nine* syllables in that verse, the final accent and rhyme falling on the eighth syllable, thus:

Compound for sins that we're incl_i_ned to,
By damning those we have no m_i_nd to.

('Hudibras.')

Again, if there is a triple rhyme to an octosyllabic verse (precisely the present case) there must always be ten syllables in that verse, the final accent and rhyme falling on the eighth syllable; thus from 'Hudibras' again:

Then in their robes the penit_e_ntials
Are straight presented with cred_e_ntials.
Remember how in arms and p_o_litics,
We still have worsted all your h_o_ly tricks.

You will admit that these last couplets are precisely of the same structure as yours, and certainly they are octosyllabics, and made use of by Butler in an octosyllabic poem, whereas yours, to be rendered of the heroic structure, should run thus:

Hatching at ease succession apostolical,
With many other falsehoods diabolical.

I have written a good deal about an oversight on your part of little consequence; but as you charged me with a mistake made in cold blood and under corrupt influences from Lake-mists, why I was determined to make the matter clear to you. And as to the *influences*, if I were guilty of this mistake, or of a thousand mistakes, Wordsworth would not be guilty *in* me. I think of him now, exactly as I thought of him during the first years of my friendship for you, only with *an equal* admiration. He was a great poet to me always, and always, while I have a soul for poetry, will be so; yet I said, and say in an under-voice, but steadfastly, that Coleridge was the grander genius. There is scarcely anything newer in my estimation of Wordsworth than in the colour of my eyes!

Perhaps I was wrong in saying '*a pun.*' But I thought I apprehended a double sense in your application of the term 'Apostolical succession' to Oxford's 'breeding' and 'hatching,' words which imply succession in a way unecclesiastical.

After all which quarrelling, I am delighted to have to talk of your coming nearer to me—-within reach—almost within my reach. Now if I am able to go in a carriage at all this summer, it will be hard but that I manage to get across the park and serenade you in Greek under your window.

Your ever affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd May 18, 1843.

My very dear Friend,—Yes, you have surprised me!

I always have thought of you, and I always think and say, that you are truthful and candid in a supreme degree, and therefore it is not your candour about Wordsworth which surprises me.

He had the kindness to send me the poem upon Grace Darling when it first appeared; and with a curious mixture of feelings (for I was much gratified by his attention in sending it) I yet read it with *so* much pain from the nature of the subject, that my judgment was scarcely free to consider the poetry—I could scarcely determine to myself what I *thought* of it from feeling too much.

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But I do confess to you, my dear friend, that I suspect—through the mist of my sensations—the poem in question to be very inferior to his former poems; I confess that the impression left on my mind is, of its decided inferiority, and I have heard that the poet's friends and critics (all except *one*) are mourning over its appearance; sighing inwardly, 'Wordsworth is old.'

One thing is clear to me, however, and over *that* I rejoice and triumph greatly. If you can esteem this poem of 'Grace Darling,' you must be susceptible to the grandeur and beauty of the poems which preceded it; and the cause of your past reluctance to recognise the poet's power must be, as I have always suspected, from your having given a very partial attention and consideration to his poetry. You were partial in your attention *I*, perhaps, was injudicious in my extracts; but with your truth and his genius, I cannot doubt but that the time will come for your mutual amity. Oh that I could stand as a herald of peace, with my wool-twisted fillet! I do not understand the Greek metres as well as you do, but I understand Wordsworth's genius better, and do you forgive that it should console me.

I will ask about his collegian extraction. Such a question never occurred to me. Apollo taught him under the laurels, while all the Muses looked through the boughs.

Your ever affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT,

Oh, yes, it delights me that you should be nearer. Of course you know that Wordsworth is Laureate.[77]

[Footnote 77: Wordsworth was nominated Poet Laureate after the death of Southey in March 1843.]

To John Kenyan May 19, 1843,

Thank you, my dear cousin, for all your kindness to me. There is ivy enough for a thyrsus, and I almost feel ready to enact a sort of Bacchus triumphalis 'for jollitie,' as I see it already planted, and looking in at me through the window. I never thought to see such a sight as *that* in my London room, and am overwhelmed with my own glory.

And then Mr. Browning's note! Unless you say 'nay' to me, I shall keep this note, which has pleased me so much, yet not more than it ought. *Now*, I forgive Mr. Merivale for his hard thoughts of my easy rhymes. But all this pleasure, my dear Mr. Kenyon, I owe to *you*, and shall remember that I do.

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

To Mrs. Martin May 26, 1843.

... I thank you for your part in the gaining of my bed, dearest Mrs. Martin, most earnestly; and am quite ready to believe that it was gained by *wishdom*, which believing is wisdom! No, you would certainly never recognise my prison if you were to see it. The bed, like a sofa and no Bed; the large table placed out in the room, towards the wardrobe end of it; the sofa rolled where a sofa should be rolled—opposite the arm-chair: the drawers crowned with a coronal

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of shelves fashioned by Sette and Co. (of papered deal and crimson merino) to carry my books; the washing table opposite turned into a cabinet with another coronal of shelves; and Chaucer's and Homer's busts in guard over these two departments of English and Greek poetry; three more busts consecrating the wardrobe which there was no annihilating; and the window—oh, I must take a new paragraph for the window, I am out of breath.

In the window is fixed a deep box full of soil, where are *springing up* my scarlet runners, nasturtiums, and convolvuluses, although they were disturbed a few days ago by the revolutionary insertion among them of a great ivy root with trailing branches so long and wide that the top tendrils are fastened to Henrietta's window of the higher storey, while the lower ones cover all my panes. It is Mr. Kenyon's gift. He makes the like to flourish out of mere flowerpots, and embower his balconies and windows, and why shouldn't this flourish with me? But certainly—there is no shutting my eyes to the fact that it does droop a little. Papa prophesies hard things against it every morning, 'Why, Ba, it looks worse and worse,' and everybody preaches despondency. I, however, persist in being sanguine, looking out for new shoots, and making a sure pleasure in the meanwhile by listening to the sound of the leaves against the pane, as the wind lifts them and lets them fall. Well, what do you think of my ivy? Ask Mr. Martin, if he isn't jealous already.

Have you read 'The Neighbours,' Mary Howitt's translation of Frederica Bremer's Swedish? Yes, perhaps. Have you read 'The Home,'[1] fresh from the same springs? *Do*, if you have not. It has not only charmed me, but made me happier and better: it is fuller of Christianity than the most orthodox controversy in Christendom; and represents to my perception or imagination a perfect and beautiful embodiment of Christian outward life from the inward, purely and tenderly. At the same time, I should tell you that Sette says, 'I might have liked it ten years ago, but it is too young and silly to give me any pleasure now.' For *me*, however, it is not too young, and perhaps it won't be for you and Mr. Martin. As to Sette, he is among the patriarchs, to say nothing of the lawyers—and there we leave him....

Ever your affectionate
BA.

To John Kenyan 50 Wimpole Street: Wednesday, or is it Thursday? [summer 1843].

My dear Cousin,—... I send you my friend Mr. Horne's new epic,[78] and beg you, if you have an opportunity, to drop it at Mr. Eagles' feet, so that he may pick it up and look at it. I have not gone through it (I have another copy), but it appears to me to be full of fine things. As to the author's fantasy of selling it for a farthing, I do not enter into the secret of it—unless, indeed, he should intend a sarcasm on the age's generous patronage of poetry, which is possible.

[Footnote 78: *Orion*, the early editions of which were sold at a farthing, in accordance with a fancy of the author. Miss Barrett reviewed it in the *Athenaum* (July 1843).]

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To John Kenyan June 30, 1843.

Thank you, my dear Mr. Kenyon, for the Camden Society books, and also for these which I return; and also for the hope of seeing you, which I kept through yesterday. I honor Mrs. Coleridge for the readiness of reasoning and integrity in reasoning, for the learning, energy, and impartiality which she has brought to her purpose, and I agree with her in many of her objects; and disagree, by opposing her opponents with a fuller front than she is always inclined to do. In truth, I can never see anything in these sacramental ordinances except a prospective sign in one (Baptism), and a memorial sign in the other, the Lord's Supper, and could not recognise either under any modification as a peculiar instrument of grace, mystery, or the like. The tendencies we have towards making mysteries of God's simplicities are as marked and sure as our missing the actual mystery upon occasion. God's love is the true mystery, and the sacraments are only too simple for us to understand. So you see I have read the book in spite of prophecies. After all I should like to cut it in two—it would be better for being shorter—and it might be clearer also. There is, in fact, some dullness and perplexity—a few passages which are, to my impression, contradictory of the general purpose—-something which is not generous, about nonconformity—and what I cannot help considering a superfluous tenderness for Puseyism. Moreover she is certainly wrong in imagining that the ante-Nicene fathers did not as a body teach regeneration by baptism—even Gregory Nazianzen, the most spiritual of many, did, and in the fourth century. But, after all, as a work of theological controversy it is very un-bitter and well-poised, gentle, and modest, and as the work of a woman *you* must admire it and *we* be proud of it—*that* remains certain at last.

Poor Mr. Haydon! I am so sorry for his reverse in the cartoons.[79] It is a thunderbolt to him. I wonder, in the pauses of my regret, whether Mr. Selous is *your* friend—whether 'Boadicea visiting the Druids,' suggested by you, I think, as a subject, is this victorious 'Boadicea' down for a hundred pound prize? You will tell me when you come.

I have just heard an uncertain rumour of the arrival of your brother. If it is not all air, I congratulate you heartily upon a happiness only not past my appreciation.

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

I send the copy of 'Orion' for *yourself*, which you asked for. It is in the fourth edition.

[Footnote 79: This refers to the competition for the cartoons to be painted in the Houses of Parliament, in which Haydon was unsuccessful. The disappointment was the greater, inasmuch as the scheme for decorating the building with historical pictures was mainly due to his initiative.]

To Mrs. Martin July 8, 1843.

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Thank you, my dearest Mrs. Martin, for your kind sign of interest in the questioning note, although I will not praise the *stenography* of it. I shall be as brief to-day as you, not quite out of revenge, but because I have been writing to George and am the less prone to activities from having caught cold in an inscrutable manner, and being stiff and sore from head to foot and inclined to be a little feverish and irritable of nerves. No, it is not of the slightest consequence; I tell you the truth. But I would have written to you the day before yesterday if it had not been for this something between cramp and rheumatism, which was rather unbearable at first, but yesterday was better, and is to-day better than better, and to-morrow will leave me quite well, if I may prophesy. I only mention it lest you should have upbraided me for not answering your note in a moment, as it deserved to be answered. So don't put any nonsense into Georgie's head—forgive me for beseeching you! I have been very well—downstairs seven or eight times; lying on the floor in Papa's room; meditating *the chair*, which would have amounted to more than a meditation except for this little contrariety. In a day or two more, if this cool warmth perseveres in serving me, and no Ariel refills me 'with aches,' I shall fulfil your kind wishes perhaps and be out—and so, no more about me!...

Oh, I do believe you think me a Cockney—a metropolitan barbarian! But I persist in seeing no merit and no superior innocence in being shut up even in precincts of rose-trees, away from those great sources of human sympathy and occasions of mental elevation and instruction without which many natures grow narrow, many others gloomy, and perhaps, if the truth were known, very few prosper entirely, lit is not that I, who have always lived a good deal in solitude and live in it still more now, and love the country even painfully in my recollections of it, would decry either one or the other—solitude is most effective in a contrast, and if you do not break the bark you cannot bud the tree, and, in short (not to be *in long*), I could write a dissertation, which I will spare you, 'about it and about it.' ...

Tell George to lend you—nay, I think I will be generous and let him give you, although the author gave me the book—the copy of the new epic, 'Orion,' which he has with him. You have probably observed the advertisement, and are properly instructed that Mr. Horne the poet, who has sold three editions already at a farthing a copy, and is selling a fourth at a shilling, and is about to sell a fifth at half a crown (on the precise principle of the aerial machine—launching himself into popularity by a first impulse on the people), is my unknown friend, with whom I have corresponded these four years without having seen his face. Do you remember the beech leaves sent to me from Epping Forest? Yes, you must. Well, the sender is the poet, and the poem I think a very noble one, and I want you to think so too. So hereby I empower you to take it away from George and keep it for my sake—if you will!

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Dear Mr. Martin was so kind as to come and see me as you commanded, and I must tell you that I thought him looking so better than well that I was more than commonly glad to see him. Give my love to him, and join me in as much metropolitan missionary zeal as will bring you both to London for six months of the year. Oh, I wish you would come! Not that it is necessary for *you*, but that it will be *so* good for *us*.

My ivy is growing, and I have *green blinds*, against which there is an outcry. They say that I do it out of envy, and for the equalisation of complexions.

Ever your affectionate,
BA.

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: August 1843.

Dear Mr. Westwood,—I thank you very much for the kindness of your questioning, and am able to answer that notwithstanding the, as it seems to you, fatal significance of a woman's silence, I am alive enough to be sincerely grateful for any degree of interest spent upon me. As to Flush, he should thank you too, but at the present moment he is quite absorbed in finding a cool place in this room to lie down in, having sacrificed his usual favorite place at my feet, his head upon them, oppressed by the torrid necessity of a thermometer above 70. To Flopsy's acquaintance he would aspire gladly, only hoping that Flopsy does not 'delight to bark and bite,' like dogs in general, because if he does Flush would as soon be acquainted with a *cat*, he says, for he does not pretend to be a hero. Poor Flush! 'the bright summer days on which I am ever likely to take him out for a ramble over hill and meadow' are never likely to shine! But he follows, or rather leaps into my wheeled chair, and forswears merrier company even now, to be near me. I am a good deal better, it is right to say, and look forward to a possible prospect of being better still, though I may be shut out from climbing the Brocken otherwise than in a vision.

You will see by the length of the 'Legend'[80] which I send to you (in its only printed form) *why* I do not send it to you in manuscript. Keep the book as long as you please. My new volume is not yet in the press, but I am writing more and more in a view to it, pleased with the thought that some kind hands are already stretched out in welcome and acceptance of what it may become. Not as idle as I appear, I have also been writing some fugitive verses for American magazines. This is my confession. Forgive its tediousness, and believe me thankfully and very sincerely yours,

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 80: *The Lay of the Brown Rosary*.]

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: September 2, 1843.

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Dear Mr. Westwood,—Your letter comes to remind me how much I ought to be ashamed of myself.... I received the book in all safety, and read your kind words about my 'Rosary' with more grateful satisfaction than appears from the evidence. It is great pleasure to me to have written for such readers, and it is great hope to me to be able to write for them. The transcription of the 'Rosary' is a compliment which I never anticipated, or you should have had the manuscript copy you asked for, although I have not a perfect one in my hands. The poem is full of faults, as, indeed, all my poems appear to myself to be when I look back upon them instead of looking down. I hope to be worthier in poetry some day of the generous appreciation which you and your friends have paid me in advance.

Tennyson is a great poet, I think, and Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' has to my mind very noble capabilities. Do you know Mr. Horne's 'Orion,' the poem published for a farthing, to the wonder of booksellers and bookbuyers who could not understand 'the speculation in its eyes?' There are very fine things in this poem, and altogether I recommend it to your attention. But what is 'wanting' in Tennyson? He can think, he can feel, and his language is highly expressive, characteristic, and harmonious. I am very fond of Tennyson. He makes me thrill sometimes to the end of my fingers, as only a true great poet can.

You praise me kindly, and if, indeed, the considerations you speak of could be true of me, I am not one who could lament having 'learnt in suffering what I taught in song.' In any case, working for the future and counting gladly on those who are likely to consider any work of mine acceptable to themselves, I shall be very sure not to forget my friends at Enfield.

Dear Mr. Westwood, I remain sincerely yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To Mrs. Martin September 4, 1843. Finished September 5.

My dearest Mrs. Martin, ... I have had a great gratification within this week or two in receiving a letter—nay, two letters—from Miss Martineau, one of the last strangers in the world from whom I had any right to expect a kindness. Yet most kind, most touching in kindness, were both of these letters, so much so that I was not far from crying for pleasure as I read them. She is very hopelessly ill, you are probably aware, at Tynemouth in Northumberland, suffering agonies from internal cancer, and conquering occasional repose by the strength of opium, but 'almost forgetting' (to use her own words) 'to wish for health, in the intense enjoyment of pleasures independent of the body.' She sent me a little work of hers called 'Traditions of Palestine.' Her friends had hoped by the stationary character of some symptoms that the disease was suspended, but lately it is said to be gaining ground, and the serenity and elevation of her mind are more and more triumphantly evident as the bodily pangs thicken....

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And now I am going to tell you what will surprise you, if you do not know it already. Stormie and Georgie are passing George's vacation on the Rhine. You are certainly surprised if you did not know it. Papa signed and sealed them away on the ground of its being good and refreshing for both of them, and I was even mixed up a little with the diplomacy of it, until I found *they were going*, and then it was a hard, terrible struggle with me to be calm and see them go. But *that* was childish, and when I had heard from them at Ostend I grew more satisfied again, and attained to think less of the fatal influences of *my star*. They went away in great spirits, Stormie 'quite elated,' to use his own words, and then at the end of the six weeks they *must* be at home at Sessions; and no possible way of passing the interim could be pleasanter and better and more exhilarating for themselves. The plan was to go from Ostend by railroad to Brussels and Cologne, then to pass down the Rhine to Switzerland, spend a few days at Geneva, and a week in Paris as they return. The only fear is that Stormie won't go to Paris. We have too many friends there—a strange obstacle.

Dearest Mrs. Martin, I am doing something more than writing you a letter, I think.

May God bless you all with the most enduring consolations! Give my love to Mr. Martin, and believe also, both of you, in my sympathy. I am glad that your poor Fanny should be so supported. May God bless her and all of you!

Dearest Mrs. Martin's affectionate
BA.

I am very well for *me*, and was out in the chair yesterday.

To H.S. Boyd September 8, 1843.

My very dear Friend,—I ask you humbly not to fancy me in a passion whenever I happen to be silent. For a woman to be silent is ominous, I know, but it need not be significant of anything quite so terrible as ill-humour. And yet it always happens so; if I do not write I am sure to be cross in your opinion. You set me down directly as 'hurt,' which means *irritable*; or 'offended,' which means *sulky*; your ideal of me having, in fact, 'its finger in its eye' all day long.

I, on the contrary, humbled as I was by your hard criticism of my soft rhymes about Flush,[81] waited for Arabel to carry a message for me, begging to know whether you would care at all to see my 'Cry of the Children'[82] before I sent it to you. But Arabel went without telling me that she was going: twice she went to St. John's Wood and made no sign; and now I find myself thrown on my own resources. Will you see the 'Cry of the Human'[83] or not? It will not please you, probably. It wants melody. The versification is eccentric to the ear, and the subject (the factory miseries) is scarcely an agreeable one to the fancy. Perhaps altogether you had better not see it, because I know you think me to be deteriorating, and I don't want you to have further hypothetical

evidence of so false an opinion. Humbled as I am, I say ‘so false an opinion.’ Frankly, if not humbly, I believe myself to have gained power since the time of the publication of the ‘Seraphim,’ and lost nothing except happiness. Frankly, if not humbly!

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With regard to the ’House of Clouds’[84] I disagree both with you and Miss Mitford, thinking it, comparatively with my other poems, neither so bad nor so good as you two account it. It has certainly been singled out for great praise both at home and abroad, and only the other day Mr. Horne wrote to me to reproach me for not having mentioned it to him, because he came upon it accidentally and considered it ‘one of my best productions.’ Mr. Kenyon holds the same opinion. As for Flush’s verses, they are what I call cobweb verses, thin and light enough; and Arabel was mistaken in telling you that Miss Mitford gave the prize to them. Her words were, ’They are as tender and true as anything you ever wrote, but nothing is equal to the “House of Clouds."’ Those were her words, or to that effect, and I refer to them to you, not for the sake of Flush’s verses, which really do not appear even to myself, their writer, worth a defence, but for the sake of *your* judgment of *her* accuracy in judging.

Lately I have received two letters from the profoundest woman thinker in England, Miss Martineau—letters which touched me deeply while they gave me pleasure I did not expect.

My poor Flush has fallen into tribulation. Think of Catiline, the great savage Cuba bloodhound belonging to this house, attempting last night to worry him just as the first Catiline did Cicero. Flush was rescued, but not before he had been wounded severely: and this morning he is on three legs and in great depression of spirits. My poor, poor Flushie! He lies on my sofa and looks up to me with most pathetic eyes.

Where is Annie? If I send my love to her, will it ever be found again?

May God bless you both!
Dearest Mr. Boyd’s affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.

[Footnote 81: ‘To Flush, my dog’ (*Poetical Works*, iii. 19).]

[Footnote 82: Published in *Blackwood’s Magazine* for August 1843, and called forth by Mr. Horne’s report as assistant commissioner on the employment of children in mines and manufactories.]

[Footnote 83: Evidently a slip of the pen for ‘Children.’]

[Footnote 84: *Poetical Works*, iii. 186. Mr. Boyd’s opinion of it may be learnt from Miss Barrett’s letter to Horne, dated August 31, 1843 (*Letters to R.H. Horne*, i. 84): ’Mr. Boyd told me that he had read my papers on the Greek Fathers with the more satisfaction because he had inferred from my “House of Clouds” that illness had *impaired my faculties*.’]

To H.S. Boyd Monday, September 19, 1843.

My own dear Friend,—I should have written instantly to explain myself out of appearances which did me injustice, only I have been in such distress as to have no courage for writing. Flush was stolen away, and for three days I could neither sleep nor eat, nor do anything much more rational than cry. *Confiteor tibi*, oh reverend father. And if you call me very silly, I am so used to the reproach throughout the week as to be hardened to the point of vanity. The worst of it is, now, that there will be no need of more 'Houses of Clouds' to prove to you the deterioration of my faculties. Q.E.D.

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In my own defence, I really believe that my distress arose somewhat less from the mere separation from dear little Flushie than from the consideration of how he was breaking his heart, cast upon the cruel world. Formerly, when he has been prevented from sleeping on my bed he has passed the night in moaning piteously, and often he has refused to eat from a strange hand. And then he loves me, heart to heart; there was no exaggeration in my verses about him, if there was no poetry. And when I heard that he cried in the street and then vanished, there was little wonder that I, on my part, should cry in the house.

With great difficulty we hunted the dog-banditti into their caves of the city, and bribed them into giving back their victim. Money was the least thing to think of in such case; I would have given a thousand pounds if I had had them in my hand. The audacity of the wretched men was marvellous. They said that they had been 'about stealing Flush these two years,' and warned us plainly to take care of him for the future.

The joy of the meeting between Flush and me would be a good subject for a Greek ode—I recommend it to you. It might take rank next to the epical parting of Hector and Andromache. He dashed up the stairs into my room and into my arms, where I hugged him and kissed him, black as he was—black as if imbued in a distillation of St. Giles's. Ah, I can break jests about it *now*, you see. Well, to go back to the explanations I promised to give you, I must tell you that Arabel *perfectly forgot* to say a word to me about 'Blackwood' and your wish that I should send the magazine. It was only after I heard that you had procured it yourself, and after I mentioned this to her, that she remembered her omission all at once. Therefore I am quite vexed and disappointed, I beg you to believe—*I*, who have pleasure in giving you any printed verses of mine that you care to have. Never mind! I may print another volume before long, and lay it at your feet. In the meantime, you *endure* my 'Cry of the Children' better than I had anticipated—just because I never anticipated your being able to read it to the end, and was over-delicate of placing it in your hands on that very account. My dearest Mr. Boyd, you are right in your complaint against the rhythm. The first stanza came into my head in a hurricane, and I was obliged to make the other stanzas like it—*that* is the whole mystery of the iniquity. If you look Mr. Lucas from head to foot, you will never find such a rhythm on his person. The whole crime of the versification belongs to *me*. So blame *me*, and by no means another poet, and I will humbly confess that I deserve to be blamed in some *measure*. There is a roughness, my own ear being witness, and I give up the body of my criminal to the rod of your castigation, kissing the last as if it were Flush.

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A report runs in London that Mr. Boyd says of Elizabeth Barrett: 'She is a person of the most perverted judgment in England.' Now, if this be true, I shall not mend my evil position in your opinion, my very dear friend, by confessing that I differ with you, the more the longer I live, on the ground of what you call 'jumping lines.' I am speaking not of particular cases, but of the principle, the general principle, of these cases, and the tenacity of my judgment does not arise from the teaching of 'Mr. Lucas,' but from the deeper study of the old master-poets—English poets—those of the Elizabeth and James ages, before the corruption of French rhythms stole in with Waller and Denham, and was acclimated into a national inodorousness by Dryden and Pope. We differ so much upon this subject that we must proceed by agreeing to differ, and end, perhaps, by finding it agreeable to differ; there can be no possible use in an argument. Only you must be upright in justice, and find Wordsworth innocent of misleading me. So far from having read him more within these three years, I have read him *less*, and have taken no new review, I do assure you, of his position and character as a poet, and these facts are testified unto by the other fact that my poetry, neither in its best features nor its worst, is adjusted after the fashion of his school.

But I am writing too much; you will have no patience with me. 'The Excursion' is accused of being lengthy, and so you will tell me that I convict myself of plagiarism, *currente calamo*.

I have just finished a poem of some eight hundred lines, called 'The Vision of Poets,'[85] philosophical, allegorical—anything but popular. It is in stanzas, every one an octosyllabic triplet, which you will think odd, and I have not *sanguinity* enough to defend.

May God bless you, my dearest Mr. Boyd! Yes, I heard—I was glad to hear—of your having resumed that which used to be so great a pleasure to you—Miss Marcus's society. I remain,

Affectionately and gratefully yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

My love to dear Annie.

[Footnote 85: *Poetical Works*, i. 223.]

To Mr. Westwood October 1843.

You are probably right in respect to Tennyson, for whom, with all my admiration of him, I would willingly secure more exaltation and a broader clasping of truth. Still, it is not possible to have so much beauty without a certain portion of truth, the position of the Utilitarians being true in the inverse. But I think as I did of 'uses' and 'responsibilities,' and do hold that the poet is a preacher and must look to his doctrine.

Perhaps Mr. Tennyson will grow more solemn, like the sun, as his day goes on. In the meantime we have the noble ‘Two Voices,’ and, among other grand intimations of a teaching power, certain stanzas to J.K. (I think the initials are) on the death of his brother,[86] which very deeply affected me.

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Take away the last stanzas, which should be applied more definitely to the *body*, or cut away altogether as a lie against eternal verity, and the poem stands as one of the finest of monodies. The nature of human grief never surely was more tenderly intimated or touched—it brought tears to my eyes. Do read it. He is not a Christian poet, up to this time, but let us listen and hear his next songs. He is one of God's singers, whether he knows it or does not know it.

I am thinking, lifting up my pen, what I can write to you which is likely to be interesting to you. After all I come to chaos and silence, and even old night—it is growing so dark. I live in London, to be sure, and except for the glory of it I might live in a desert, so profound is my solitude and so complete my isolation from things and persons without. I lie all day, and day after day, on the sofa, and my windows do not even look into the street. To abuse myself with a vain deceit of rural life I have had ivy planted in a box, and it has flourished and spread over one window, and strikes against the glass with a little stroke from the thicker leaves when the wind blows at all briskly. *Then* I think of forests and groves; it is my triumph when the leaves strike the window pane, and this is not a sound like a lament. Books and thoughts and dreams (almost too consciously *dreamed*, however, for me—the illusion of them has almost passed) and domestic tenderness can and ought to leave nobody lamenting. Also God's wisdom, deeply steeped in His love, *is* as far as we can stretch out our hands.

[Footnote 86: The lines 'To J.S.,' which begin:

'The wind that beats the mountain blows
More softly round the open wold.'

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: December 26, 1843.

Dear Mr. Westwood,—You think me, perhaps, and not without apparent reason, ungrateful and insensible to your letter, but indeed I am neither one nor the other, and I am writing now to try and prove it to you. I was much touched by some tones of kindness in the letter, and it was welcome altogether, and I did not need the 'owl' which came after to waken me, because I was wide awake enough from the first moment; and now I see that you have been telling your beads, while I seemed to be telling nothing, in that dread silence of mine. May all true saints of poetry be propitious to the wearer of the 'Rosary.'

In answer to a question which you put to me long ago on the subject of books of theology, I will confess to you that, although I have read rather widely the divinity of the Greek Fathers, Gregory, Chrysostom, and so forth, and have of course informed myself in the works generally of our old English divines, Hooker, Jeremy Taylor, and so forth, I am not by any means a frequent reader of books of theology as such, and as the men of our times have made them. I have looked into the 'Tracts' from curiosity

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and to hear what the world was talking of, and I was disappointed *even* in the degree of intellectual power displayed in them. From motives of a desire of theological instruction I very seldom read any book except God's own. The minds of persons are differently constituted; and it is no praise to mine to admit that I am apt to receive less of what is called edification from human discourses on divine subjects, than disturbance and hindrance. I read the Scriptures every day, and in as simple a spirit as I can; thinking as little as possible of the controversies engendered in that great sunshine, and as much as possible of the heat and glory belonging to it. It is a sure fact in my eyes that we do not require so much *more knowledge*, as a stronger apprehension, by the faith and affections, of what we already know.

You will be sorry to hear that Mr. Tennyson is not well, although his friends talk of nervousness, and do not fear much ultimate mischief....[87]

It is such a lovely *May* day, that I am afraid of breaking the spell by writing down Christmas wishes.

Very faithfully yours,
ELIZABETH BARRETT.

[Footnote 87: About the same date she writes to Home (*Letters to R.H. Horne*, i. 86): 'I am very glad to hear that nothing really very bad is the matter with Tennyson. If anything were to happen to Tennyson, the world should go into mourning.']

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: December 31, 1843.

If you do find the paper I was invited to write upon Wordsworth[88], you will see to which class of your admiring or abhorring friends I belong. Perhaps you will cry out quickly, 'To the blind admirers, certes.' And I have a high admiration of Wordsworth. His spirit has worked a good work, and has freed into the capacity of work other noble spirits. He took the initiative in a great poetic movement, and is not only to be praised for what he has done, but for what he has helped his age to do. For the rest, Byron has more passion and intensity, Shelley more fancy and music, Coleridge could see further into the unseen, and not one of those poets has insulted his own genius by the production of whole poems, such as I could name of Wordsworth's, the vulgarity of which is childish, and the childishness vulgar. Still, the wings of his genius are wide enough to cast a shadow over its feet, and our gratitude should be stronger than our critical acumen. Yes, I *will* be a blind admirer of Wordsworth's. I *will* shut my eyes and be blind. Better so, than see too well for the thankfulness which is his due from me....

Yes, I mean to print as much as I can find and make room for, 'Brown Rosary' and all. I am glad you liked 'Napoleon,'[89] but I shall be more glad if you decide when you see

this new book that I have made some general progress in strength and expression. Sometimes I rise into hoping that I may have done so, or may do so still more.

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The poet's work is no light work. His wheat will not grow without labour any more than other kinds of wheat, and the sweat of the spirit's brow is wrung by a yet harder necessity. And, thinking so, I am inclined to a little regret that you should have hastened your book even for the sake of a sentiment. Now you will be angry with me....

There are certain difficulties in the way of the critic unprofessional, as I know by experience. Our most sweet voices are scarcely admissible among the most sour ones of the regular brotherhood....

Harriet Martineau is quite well,'trudging miles together in the snow,' when the snow was, and in great spirits. Wordsworth is to be in London in the spring. Tennyson is dancing the polka and smoking cloud upon cloud at Cheltenham. Robert Browning is meditating a new poem, and an excursion on the Continent. Miss Mitford came to spend a day with me some ten days ago; sprinkled, as to the soul, with meadow dews. Am I at the end of my account? I think so.

Did you read 'Blackwood'? and in that case have you had deep delight in an exquisite paper by the Opium-eater, which my heart trembled through from end to end? What a poet that man is! how he vivifies words, or deepens them, and gives them profound significance....

I understand that poor Hood is supposed to be dying, really dying, at last. Sydney Smith's last laugh mixes with his, or nearly so. But Hood had a deeper heart, in one sense, than Sydney Smith, and is the material of a greater man.

And what are you doing? Writing—reading—or musing of either? Are you a reviewer-man—in opposition to the writer? Once, reviewing was my besetting sin, but now it is only my frailty. Now that I lie here at the mercy of every reviewer, I save myself by an instinct of self-preservation from that 'gnawing tooth' (as Homer and Aeschylus did rightly call it), and spring forward into definite work and thought. Else, I should perish. Do you understand that? If you are a reviewer-man you will, and if not, you must set it down among those mysteries of mine which people talk of as profane.

May God bless you, &c. &c.
ELIZABETH BARRETT.

[Footnote 88: In the *Athenaeum*.]

[Footnote 89: 'Crowned and Buried' (*Poetical Works*, iii. 9).]

To Mr. Westwood [Undated.]

You know as well as I do how the plague of rhymers, and of bad rhymes, is upon the land, and it was only three weeks ago that, at a 'Literary Institute' at Brighton, I heard of the Reverend somebody Stoddart gravely proposing 'Poetry for the Million' to his

audience; he assuring them that ‘poets made a mystery of their art,’ but that in fact nothing except an English grammar, and a rhyming dictionary, and some instruction about counting on the fingers, was necessary in order to make a poet of any man!

This is a fact. And to this extent has the art, once called divine, been desecrated among the educated classes of our country.

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Very sincerely yours,
ELIZABETH BARRETT.

Besides the poems, to which reference has been made in the above letters, Miss Barrett was engaged, during the year 1843, in co-operating with her friend Mr. Home in the production of his great critical enterprise, 'The New Spirit of the Age.' In this the much daring author undertook no less a task than that of passing a sober and serious judgment on his principal living comrades in the world of letters. Not unnaturally he ended by bringing a hornets' nest about his ears—alike of those who thought they should have been mentioned and were not, and of those who were mentioned but in terms which did not satisfy the good opinion of themselves with which Providence had been pleased to gift them. The volumes appeared under Home's name alone, and he took the whole responsibility; but he invited assistance from others, and in particular used the collaboration of Miss Barrett to no small extent. She did not indeed contribute any complete essay to his work; but she expressed her opinion, when invited, on several writers, in a series of elaborate letters, which were subsequently worked up by Home into his own criticisms.[90] The secret of her cooperation was carefully kept, and she does not appear to have suffered any of the evil consequences of his indiscretions, real or imagined. Another contribution from her consisted of the suggestion of mottoes appropriate to each writer noticed at length; and in this work she had an unknown collaborator in the person of Robert Browning. So ends the somewhat uneventful year of 1843.

[Footnote 90: Her contributions to the essays on Tennyson and Carlyle have recently been printed in Messrs. Nichols and Wise's *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, i. 33, ii. 105.]

CHAPTER IV

1844-46

The year 1844 marks an important epoch in the life of Mrs. Browning. It was in this year that, as a result of the publication of her two volumes of 'Poems,' she won her general and popular recognition as a poetess whose rank was with the foremost of living writers. It was six years since she had published a volume of verse; and in the meanwhile she had been gaining strength and literary experience. She had tried her wings in the pages of popular periodicals. She had profited by the criticisms on her earlier work, and by intercourse with men of letters; and though her defects in literary art were by no means purged away, yet the flights of her inspiration were stronger and more assured. The result is that, although the volumes of 1844 do not contain absolutely her best work—no one with the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' in his mind can affirm so much as that—they contain that which has been most generally popular,

and which won her the position which for the rest of her life she held in popular estimation among the leaders of English poetry.

The principal poem in these two volumes is the ‘Drama of Exile.’ Of the genesis of this work, Miss Barrett gives the following account in a letter to Home, dated December 28 1843:

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’A volume full of manuscripts had been ready for more than a year, when suddenly, a short time ago, when I fancied I had no heavier work than to make copy and corrections, I fell upon a fragment of a sort of masque on “The First Day’s Exile from Eden”—or rather it fell upon me, and beset me till I would finish it.’[91]

[Footnote 91: *Letters to R.H. Home*, ii. 146.]

At one time it was intended to use its name as the title to the two volumes; but this design was abandoned, and they appeared under the simple description of ‘Poems, by Elizabeth Barrett Barrett.’ The ‘Vision of Poets’ comes next in length to the ‘Drama’; and among the shorter pieces were several which rank among her best work, ’The Cry of the Children,’ ‘Wine of Cyprus,’ ‘The Dead Pan,’ ’Bertha in the Lane,’ ‘Crowned and Buried,’ ‘The Mourning Mother,’ and ‘The Sleep,’ together with such popular favourites as ‘Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,’ ‘The Romaunt of the Page,’ and ‘The Rhyme of the Duchess May.’ Since the publication of ‘The Seraphim’ volume, the new era of poetry had developed itself to a notable extent. Tennyson had published the best of his earlier verse, ‘Locksley Hall,’ ‘Ulysses,’ the ’Morte d’Arthur,’ ‘The Lotus Eaters,’ ‘A Dream of Fair Women,’ and many more; Browning had issued his wonderful series of ‘Bells and Pomegranates,’ including ‘Pippa Passes,’ ‘King Victor and King Charles,’ ’Dramatic Lyrics,’ ‘The Return of the Druses,’ and ’The Blot on the ‘Scutcheon’; and it was among company such as this that Miss Barrett, by general consent, now took her place.

To Mrs. Martin January 8, 1844.

Thank you again and again, my dearest Mrs. Martin, for your flowers, and the verses which gave them another perfume. The ’incense of the heart’ lost not a grain of its perfume in coming so far, and not a leaf of the flowers was ruffled, and to see such gorgeous colours all on a sudden at Christmas time was like seeing a vision, and almost made Flush and me rub our eyes. Thank you, dearest Mrs. Martin; how kind of you! The grace of the verses and the brightness of the flowers were too much for me altogether. And when George exclaimed, ’Why, she has certainly laid bare her greenhouse,’ I had not a word to say in justification of myself for being the cause of it.

Papa admired the branch of Australian origin so much that he walked all over the house with it. Beautiful it is indeed; but my eyes turn back to the camellias. I do believe that I like to look at a camellia better than at a rose; and then *these* have a double association....

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I meant to write a long letter to you to-day, but Mr. Kenyon has been to see me and cut my time short before post time. You remember, perhaps, how his brother married a German, and, after an exile of many years in Germany, returned last summer to England to settle. Well, he can't bear us any longer! His wife is growing paler and paler with the pressure of English social habits, or rather unsocial habits; and he himself is a German at heart; and besides, being a man of a singularly generous nature, and accustomed to give away in handfuls of silver and gold one-third of every year's income, he dislikes the social obligation of *spending* it here. So they are going back. Poor Mr. Kenyon! I am full of sympathy with him. This returning to England was a dream of all last year to him. He gave up his house to the new comers, and bought a new one; and talked of the brightness secured to his latter years by the presence of his only remaining near relative; and I see that, for all his effort towards a bright view of the matter, he is disappointed—very. Should you suppose that four hundred pounds in Vienna go as far as a thousand in England? I should never have fancied it.

You shall hear from me, my dearest Mrs. Martin, in another few days; and I send this as it is, just because I am benighted by the post hour, and do not like to pass your kindness with even one day's apparent neglect.

May God bless you and dear Mr. Martin. The kindest wishes for the long slope of coming year, and for the many, I trust, beyond it, belong to you from the deepest of our hearts.

But shall you not be coming—setting out—very soon, before I can write again?

Your affectionate
BA.

To John Kenyan [?January 1844.]

I am so sorry, dear Mr. Kenyon, to hear—which I did, last night, for the first time—of your being unwell. I had hoped that to-day would bring a better account, but your note, with its next week prospect, is disappointing. The 'ignominy' would have been very preferable—to us, at least, particularly as it need not have lasted beyond to-day, dear Georgie being quite recovered, and at his law again, and no more symptoms of small-pox in anybody. We should all be well, if it were not for me and my cough, which is better, but I am not quite well, nor have yet been out.

A letter came to me from dear Miss Mitford a few days since, which I had hoped to talk to you about. Some of the subject of it is Mr. Kenyon's '*only fault*,' which ought, of course, to be a large one to weigh against the multitudinous ones of other people, but which seems to be: 'He has the habit of walking in without giving notice. He thinks it saves trouble, whereas in a small family, and at a distance from a town, the effect is that one takes care to be provided for the whole time that one expects him, and then, by

some exquisite ill luck, on the only day when one's larder is empty, in he comes!' And so, if you have not written to interrupt her in this process of indefinite expectation, the 'only fault' will, in her eyes, grow, as it ought, as large as fifty others.

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I do hope, dear Mr. Kenyon, soon to hear that you are better—and well—and that your course of prophecy may not run smooth all through next week.

Very truly yours,
E. BARRETT.

Saturday.
To John Kenyon
Saturday night [about March 1844].

I return Mr. Burges's criticism, which I omitted to talk to you of this morning, but which interested me much in the reading. Do let him understand how obliged to him I am for permitting me to look, for a moment, according to his view of the question. Perhaps my poetical sense is not convinced all through, and certainly my critical sense is not worth convincing, but I am delighted to be able to call by the name of Aeschylus, under the authority of Mr. Burges, those noble electrical lines (electrical for double reasons) which had struck me twenty times as Aeschylean, when I read them among the recognised fragments of Sophocles. You hear Aeschylus's footsteps and voice in the lines. No other of the gods could tread so heavily, or speak so like thundering.

I wrote all this to begin with, hesitating how else to begin. My very dear and kind friend, you understand—do you not?—through an expression which, whether written or spoken, must remain imperfect, to what deep, full feeling of gratitude your kindness has moved me.[92] The good you have done me, and just at the moment when I should have failed altogether without it, and in more than one way, and in a deeper than the obvious degree—all this I know better than you do, and I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart. I shall never forget it, as long as I live to remember anything. The book may fail signally after all—*that* is another question; but I shall not fail, to begin with, and *that* I owe to *you*, for I was falling to pieces in nerves and spirits when you came to help me. I had only enough instinct left to be ashamed, a little, afterwards, of having sent you, in company, too, with Miss Martineau's heroic cheerfulness, that note of weak because unavailing complaint. It was a long compressed feeling breaking suddenly into words. Forgive and forget that I ever so troubled you—no, 'troubled' is not the word for your kindness!—and remember, as I shall do, the great good you have done me.

May God bless you, my dear cousin.

Affectionately yours always,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 92: Referring to Mr. Kenyon's encouraging comments on the 'Drama of Exile,' which he had seen in manuscript at a time when Miss Barrett was very despondent about it.]

This note is not to be answered.

I am thinking of writing to Moxon, as there does not seem much to arrange. The type and size of Tennyson's books seem, upon examination, to suit my purpose excellently.

To John Kenyan March 21, 1844.

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No, you never sent me back Miss Martineau's letter, my dear cousin; but you will be sure, or rather Mr. Crabb Robinson will, to find it in some too safe a place; and then I shall have it. In the meantime here are the other letters back again. You will think that I was keeping them for a deposit, a security, till I 'had my ain again,' but I have only been idle and busy together. They are the most interesting that can be, and have quite delighted me. By the way, *I*, who saw nothing to object to in the 'Life in the Sick Room,' object very much to her argument in behalf of it—an argument certainly founded on a miserable misapprehension of the special doctrine referred to in her letter. There is nothing so elevating and ennobling to the nature and mind of man as the view which represents it raised into communion with God Himself, by the justification and purification of God Himself. Plato's dream brushed by the gate of this doctrine when it walked highest, and won for him the title of 'Divine.' That it is vulgarised sometimes by narrow-minded teachers in theory, and by hypocrites in action, might be an argument (if admitted at all) against all truth, poetry, and music!

On the other hand, I was glad to see the leaning on the Education question; in which all my friends the Dissenters did appear to me so painfully wrong and so unworthily wrong at once.

And Southey's letters! I did quite delight in *them*! They are more *personal* than any I ever saw of his; and have more warm every-day life in them.

The particular Paul Pry in question (to come down to *my* life) never 'intrudes.' It is his peculiarity. And I put the stop exactly where I was bid; and was going to put Gabriel's speech,[93] only—with the pen in my hand to do it—I found that the angel was a little too exclamatory altogether, and that he had cried out, 'O ruined earth!' and 'O miserable angel!' just before, approaching to the habit of a mere caller of names. So I altered the passage otherwise; taking care of your full stop after 'despair.' Thank you, my dear Mr. Kenyon.

Also I sent enough manuscript for the first sheet, and a note to Moxon yesterday, last night, thanking him for his courtesy about Leigh Hunt's poems; and following your counsel in every point. 'Only last night,' you will say! But I have had *such* a headache—and some very painful vexation in the prospect of my maid's leaving me, who has been with me throughout my illness; so that I am much attached to her, with the best reasons for being so, while the idea of a stranger is scarcely tolerable to me under my actual circumstances.

The 'Palm Leaves'[94] are full of strong thought and good thought—thought expressed excellently well; but of poetry, in the true sense, and of imagination in any, I think them bare and cold—somewhat wintry leaves to come from the East, surely, surely!

May the change of air be rapid in doing you good—the weather seems to be softening on purpose for you. May God bless you, dear Mr. Kenyon; I never can thank you

enough. When you return I shall be rustling my ‘proofs’ about you, to prove my faith in your kindness.

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Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 93: In the 'Drama of Exile,' near the beginning (*Poetical Works*, i. 7).]

[Footnote 94: By Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton.]

To H.S. Boyd March 22, 1844.

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—I heard that once I wrote three times too long a letter to you; I am aware that nine times too long a silence is scarcely the way to make up for it. Forgive me, however, as far as you can, for every sort of fault. When I once begin to write to you, I do not know how to stop; and I have had so much to do lately as scarcely to know how to begin to write to you. *Hence these* faults—not quite tears—in spite of my penitence and the quotation.

At last my book is in the press. My great poem (in the modest comparative sense), my 'Masque of Exile' (as I call it at last[95]), consists of some nineteen hundred or two thousand lines, and I call it 'Masque of *Exile*' because it refers to Lucifer's exile, and to that other mystical exile of the Divine Being which was the means of the return homewards of my Adam and Eve. After the exultation of boldness of composition, I fell into one of my deepest fits of despondency, and at last, at the end of most painful vacillations, determined not to print it. Never was a manuscript so near the fire as my 'Masque' was. I had not even the instinct of applying for help to anybody. In the midst of this Mr. Kenyon came in by accident, and asked about my poem. I told him that I had given it up, despairing of my republic. In the kindest way he took it into his hands, and proposed to carry it home and read it, and tell me his impression. 'You know,' he said, 'I have a prejudice against these sacred subjects for poetry, but then I have another prejudice *for you*, and one may neutralise the other.' The next day I had a letter from him with the returned manuscript—a letter which I was absolutely certain, before I opened it, would counsel *against* the publication. On the contrary! His impression is clearly in favour of the poem, and, while he makes sundry criticisms on minor points, he considers it very superior as a whole to anything I ever did before—more sustained, and fuller in power. So my nerves are braced, and I grow a man again; and the manuscript, as I told you, is in the press. Moreover, you will be surprised to hear that I think of bringing out *two volumes of poems* instead of one, by advice of Mr. Moxon, the publisher. Also, the Americans have commanded an American edition, to come out in numbers, either a little before or simultaneously with the English one, and provided with a separate preface for themselves.

There now! I have told you all this, knowing your kindness, and that you will care to hear of it.

It has given me the greatest concern to hear of dear Annie's illness, and I do hope, both for your sake and for all our sakes, that we may have better news of her before long.

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But I don't mean to fall into another scrape to-day by writing too much. May God bless you, my very dear friend!

I am ever your affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 95: There was, however, a still later last, when it became the 'Drama of Exile.']

To H.S. Boyd April I, 1844.

My very dear Friend,—Your kind letter I was delighted to receive. You mistake a good deal the capacities in judgment of 'the man.'[96] The 'man' is highly refined in his tastes, and leaning to the classical (I was going to say to *your* classical, only suddenly I thought of Ossian) a good deal more than I do. He has written satires in the manner of Pope, which admirers of Pope have praised warmly and deservedly. If I had hesitated about the conclusiveness of his judgments, it would have been because of his confessed indisposition towards subjects religious and ways mystical, and his occasional insufficient indulgence for rhymes and rhythms which he calls '*Barrettian*.' But these things render his favourable inclination towards my 'Drama of Exile' still more encouraging (as you will see) to my hopes for it.

Still, I do tremble a good deal inwardly when I come to think of what your own thoughts of my poem, and poems in their two-volume development, may finally be. I am afraid of you. You will tell me the truth as it appears to you—upon *that* I may rely; and I should not wish you to suppress a single disastrous thought for the sake of the unpleasantness it may occasion to me. My own faith is that I have made progress since 'The Seraphim,' only it is too possible (as I confess to myself and you) that your opinion may be exactly contrary to it.

You are very kind in what you say about wishing to have some conversation, as the medium of your information upon architecture, with Octavius—Occy, as we call him. He is very much obliged to you, and proposes, if it should not be inconvenient to you, to call upon you on Friday, with Arabel, at about one o'clock. Friday is mentioned because it is a holiday, no work being done at Mr. Barry's. Otherwise he is engaged every day (except, indeed, Sunday) from nine in the morning to five in the afternoon. May God bless you, dearest Mr. Boyd. I am ever

Your affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 96: John Kenyon: see the last letter.]

To Mr. Westwood April 16, 1844.

... Surely, surely, it was not likely I should lean to utilitarianism in the notice on Carlyle, as I remember the writer of that article leans somewhere—*I*, who am reproached with trans-trans-transcendentalisms, and not without reason, or with insufficient reason.

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Oh, and I should say also that Mr. Home, in his kindness, has enlarged considerably in his annotations and reflections on me personally.[97] My being in correspondence with all the Kings of the East, for instance, is an exaggeration, although literary work in one way will bring with it, happily, literary association in others.... Still, I am not a great letter writer, and I don't write 'elegant Latin verses,' as all the gods of Rome know, and I have not been shut up in the dark for seven years by any manner of means. By the way, a barrister said to my barrister brother the other day, 'I suppose your sister is dead?' 'Dead?' said he, a little struck; 'dead?' 'Why, yes. After Mr. Home's account of her being sealed up hermetically in the dark for so many years, one can only calculate upon her being dead by this time.'

ELIZABETH BARRETT.

Several of the letters to Mr. Boyd which follow refer to that celebrated gift of Cyprus wine which led to the composition of one of Miss Barrett's best known and most quoted poems.

[Footnote 97: In *The New Spirit of the Age*.]

To H.S. Boyd June 18, 1844.

Thank you, my very dear friend! I write to you drunk with Cyprus. Nothing can be worthier of either gods or demi-gods; and if, as you say, Achilles did not drink of it, I am sorry for him. I suppose Jupiter had it instead, just then—Hebe pouring it, and Juno's ox-eyes bellowing their splendour at it, if you will forgive me that broken metaphor, for the sake of Aeschylus's genius, and my own particular intoxication.

Indeed, there *never was*, in modern days, such wine. Flush, to whom I offered the last drop in my glass, felt it was supernatural, and ran away. I have an idea that if he had drunk that drop, he would have talked afterwards—either Greek or English.

Never was such wine! The very taste of ideal nectar, only stiller, from keeping. If the bubbles of eternity were on it, *we* should run away, perhaps, like Flush.

Still, the thought comes to me, ought I to take it from you? Is it right of me? are you not too kind in sending it? and should you be allowed to be too kind? In any case, you must, not think of sending me more than you have already sent. It is more than enough, and I am not less than very much obliged to you.

I have passed the middle of my second volume, and I only hope that critics may say of the rest that it smells of Greek wine. Dearest Mr. Boyd's

Ever affectionate
E.B. BARRETT.

To Mr. Westwood June 28, 1844.

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My dear Mr. Westwood,—I have certainly and considerably increased the evidence of my own death by the sepulchral silence of the last few days. But after all I am not dead, not even *at heart*, so as to be insensible to your kind anxiety, and I can assure you of this, upon very fair authority, neither is the book dead yet. It has turned the corner of the *felo de se*, and if it is to die, it will be by the critics. The mystery of the long delay, it would not be very easy for me to explain, notwithstanding I hear Mr. Moxon says: 'I suppose Miss Barrett is not in a hurry about her publication;' and *I* say: 'I suppose Moxon is not in a hurry about the publication.' There may be a little fault on my side, when I have kept a proof a day beyond the hour, or when 'copy' has put out new buds in my hands as I passed it to the printer's. Still, in my opinion, it is a good deal more the fault of Mr. Moxon's not being in a hurry, than in the excessive virtue of my patience, or vice of my indolence. Miss Mitford says, as you do, that she never heard of so slow-footed a book.

To H.S. Boyd 50 Wimpole Street: Wednesday, August I, 1844 [postmark].

My very dear Friend,—Have you expected to hear from me? and are you vexed with me? I am a little ambitious of the first item—yet hopeful of an escape from the last. If you did but know how I am pressed for time, and how I have too much to do every day, you would forgive me for my negligence; even if you had sent me nectar instead of mountain,[98] and I had neglected laying my gratitude at your feet. Last Saturday, upon its being discovered that my first volume consisted of only 208 pages, and my second of 280 pages, Mr. Moxon uttered a cry of reprehension, and wished to tear me to pieces by his printers, as the Bacchantes did Orpheus. Perhaps you might have heard my head moaning all the way to St. John's Wood! He wanted to tear away several poems from the end of the second volume, and tie them on to the end of the first! I could not and would not hear of this, because I had set my mind on having 'Dead Pan' to conclude with. So there was nothing for it but to finish a ballad poem called 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' which was lying by me, and I did so by writing, *i.e*. composing, *one hundred and forty lines last Saturday!*[99] I seemed to be in a dream all day! Long lines too—-with fifteen syllables in each! I see you shake your head all this way off. Moreover it is a 'romance of the age,' treating of railroads, routes, and all manner of 'temporalities,' and in so radical a temper that I expect to be reproved for it by the Conservative reviews round. By the way, did I tell you of the good news I had from America the third of this month? The 'Drama of Exile' is in the hands of a New York publisher; and having been submitted to various chief critics of the country on its way, was praised loudly and extravagantly. This was, however, by a *private*

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reading only. A bookseller at Philadelphia had announced it for publication—he intended to take it up when the English edition reached America; but upon its being represented to him that the New York publisher had proof sheets direct from the author and would give copy money, he abandoned his intention to the other. I confess I feel very much pleased at the kind spirit—the spirit of eager kindness indeed—with which the Americans receive my poetry. It is not wrong to be pleased, I hope. In this country there may be mortifications waiting for me; quite enough to keep my modesty in a state of cultivation. I do not know. I hope the work will be out this week, and *then*! Did I explain to you that what 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' was wanted for was to increase the size of the first volume, so as to restore the equilibrium of volumes, without dislocating 'Pan'? Oh, how anxious I shall be to hear your opinion! If you tell me that I have lost my intellects, what in the world shall I do *then*—what *shall* I do? My Americans—that is, my Americans who were in at the private reading, and perhaps I myself—are of opinion that I have made great progress since 'The Seraphim.' It seems to me that I have more *reach*, whether in thought or language. But then, to *you* it may appear quite otherwise, and I shall be very melancholy if it does. Only you must tell me the *precise truth*; and I trust to you that you will let me have it in its integrity.

All the life and strength which are in me, seem to have passed into my poetry. It is my *pou sto*—not to move the world; but to live on in.

I must not forget to tell you that there is a poem towards the end of the second volume, called 'Cyprus Wine,' which I have done myself the honor and pleasure of associating with your name. I thought that you would not be displeased by it, as a proof of grateful regard from me.

Talking of wines, the Mountain has its attraction, but certainly is not to be compared to the Cyprus. You will see how I have praised the latter. Well, now I must say 'good-bye,' which you will praise *me* for!

Dearest Mr. Boyd's affectionate
E.B.B.

P.S.—*Nota bene*—I wish to forewarn you that I have cut away in the text none of my vowels by apostrophes. When I say 'To efface,' wanting two-syllable measure, I do not write 'T' efface' as in the old fashion, but 'To efface' full length. This is the style of the day. Also you will find me a little lax perhaps in metre—a freedom which is the result not of carelessness, but of *conviction*, and indeed of much patient study of the great Fathers of English poetry—not meaning Mr. Pope. Be as patient with me as you can. You shall have the volumes as soon as they are ready.

[Footnote 98: Evidently a reference to the name of some wine (perhaps Montepulciano) sent her by Mr. Boyd. See the end of the letter.]

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[Footnote 99: It will be observed that this is not quite the same as the current legend, which asserts that the whole poem (of 412 lines) was composed in twelve hours.]

To H.S. Boyd August 6, 1844.

My very dear Friend,—I cannot be certain, from my recollections, whether I did or did not write to you before, as you suggest; but as you never received the letter and I was in a continual press of different thoughts, the probability is that I did not write. The Cyprus wine in the second vial I certainly *did* receive; and was grateful to you with the whole force of the aroma of it. And now I will tell you an anecdote.

In the excess of my filial tenderness, I poured out a glass for papa, and offered it to him with my right hand.

'*What is this*?' said he.

'*Taste it*,' said I as laconically, but with more emphasis.

He raised it to his lips; and, after a moment, recoiled, with such a face as sinned against Adam's image, and with a shudder of deep disgust.

'Why,' he said, 'what most beastly and nauseous thing is this? Oh,' he said, 'what detestable drug is this? Oh, oh,' he said, 'I shall never, never, get this horrible taste out of my mouth.'

I explained with the proper degree of dignity that 'it was Greek wine, Cyprus wine, and of very great value.'

He retorted with acrimony, that 'it might be Greek, twice over; but that it was exceedingly beastly.'

I resumed, with persuasive argument, that 'it could scarcely be beastly, inasmuch as the taste reminded one of oranges and orange flower together, to say nothing of the honey of Mount Hymettus.'

He took me up with stringent logic, 'that any wine must positively be beastly, which, pretending to be wine, tasted sweet as honey, and that it was beastly on my own showing!' I send you this report as an evidence of a curious opinion. But drinkers of port wine cannot be expected to judge of nectar—and I hold your 'Cyprus' to be pure nectar.

I shall have pleasure in doing what you ask me to do—that is, I *will*—if you promise never to call me Miss Barrett again. You have often quite vexed me by it. There is Ba—Elizabeth—Elzbeth—Ellie—any modification of my name you may call me by—but I won't be called Miss Barrett by *you*. Do you understand? Arabel means to carry your copy of my book to you. And I beg you not to fancy that I shall be impatient for you to

read the two volumes through. If you *ever* read them through, it will be a sufficient compliment, and indeed I do not expect that you *ever will*.

May God bless you, dearest Mr. Boyd.

I remain,

Your affectionate and grateful
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

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The date of this last letter marks, as nearly as need be, the date of publication of Miss Barrett's volumes. The letters which follow deal mainly with their reception, first at the hand of friends, and then by the regular critics. The general verdict of the latter was extremely complimentary. Mr. Chorley, in the 'Athenaeum,'[100] described the volumes as 'extraordinary,' adding that 'between her [Miss Barrett's] poems and the slighter lyrics of most of the sisterhood, there is all the difference which exists between the putting-on of "singing robes" for altar service, and the taking up lute or harp to enchant an indulgent circle of friends and kindred.' In the 'Examiner,'[101] John Forster declared that 'Miss Barrett is an undoubted poetess of a high and fine order as regards the first requisites of her art—imagination and expression.... She is a most remarkable writer, and her volumes contain not a little which the lovers of poetry will never willingly let die,' a phrase then not quite so hackneyed as it has since become. The 'Atlas'[102] asserted that 'the present volumes show extraordinary powers, and, abating the failings of which all the followers of Tennyson are guilty, extraordinary genius.' More influential even than these, 'Blackwood'[103] paid her the compliment of a whole article, criticising her faults frankly, but declaring that 'her poetical merits infinitively outweigh her defects. Her genius is profound, unsullied, and without a flaw.' All agreed in assigning her a high, or the highest, place among the poetesses of England; but, as Miss Barrett herself pointed out, this, in itself, was no great praise.[104]

[Footnote 100: August 24, 1844.]

[Footnote 101: October 5, 1844.]

[Footnote 102: September 31, 1844.]

[Footnote 103: November 1844.]

[Footnote 104: See letter of January 3, 1845.]

With regard to individual poems, the critics did not take kindly to the 'Drama of Exile,' and 'Blackwood' in particular criticised it at considerable length, calling it 'the least successful of her works.' The subject, while half challenging comparison with Milton, lends itself only too readily to fancifulness and unreality, which were among the most besetting sins of Miss Barrett's genius. The minor poems were incomparably more popular, and the favourite of all was that masterpiece of rhetorical sentimentality, 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship.' It must have been a little mortifying to the authoress to find this piece, a large part of which had been dashed off at a single heat in order to supply the printers' needs, preferred to others on which she had employed all the labour of her deliberate art; but with the general tone of all the critics she had every reason to be as content as her letters show her to have been. Only two criticisms rankled: the one that she was a follower of Tennyson, the other that her rhymes were slovenly and careless. And these appeared, in varying shapes, in nearly all the reviews.

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The former of these allegations is of little weight. Whatever qualities Miss Barrett may have shared with Tennyson, her substantial independence is unquestionable. It is a case rather of coincidence than imitation; or if imitation, it is of a slight and unconscious kind. The second criticism deserves fuller notice, because it is constantly repeated to this day. The following letters show how strongly Miss Barrett protested against it. As she told Horne,[105] with reference to this very subject: 'If I fail ultimately before the public—that is, before the people—for an ephemeral popularity does not appear to me to be worth trying for—it will not be because I have shrunk from the amount of labour, where labour could do anything. I have *worked* at poetry; it has not been with me reverie, but art.' That her rhymes were inexact, especially in such poems as 'The Dead Pan,' she did not deny; but her defence was that the inexactness was due to a deliberate attempt to widen the artistic capabilities of the English language. Partly, perhaps, as a result of her acquaintance with Italian literature, she had a marked fondness for disyllabic rhymes; and since pure rhymes of this kind are not plentiful in English, she tried the experiment of using assonances instead. Hence such rhymes as *silence* and *islands*, *vision* and *procession*, *panther* and *saunter*, examples which could be indefinitely multiplied if need were. Now it may be that a writer with a very sensitive ear would not have attempted such an experiment, and it is a fact that public taste has not approved it; but the experiment itself is as legitimate as, say, the metrical experiments in hexameters and hendecasyllabics of Longfellow or Tennyson, and whether approved or not it should be criticised as an experiment, not as mere carelessness. That Mrs. Browning's ear was quite-capable of discerning true rhymes is shown by the fact that she tacitly abandoned her experiment in assonances. Not only in the pure and high art of the 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,' but even in 'Casa Guidi Windows,' the rhetorical and sometimes colloquial tone of which might have been thought to lend itself to such devices, imperfect rhymes occur but rarely not exceeding the limits allowed to himself by every poet who has rhymed *given* and *heaven*; and the roll of those who have *not* done so must be small indeed.

[Footnote 105: *Letters to R.H. Horne*, ii. 119.]

The point has seemed worth dwelling on, because it touches a commonplace of criticism as regards Mrs. Browning; but we may now make way for her own comments on her critics and friends.

To H.S. Boyd Tuesday, August 13, 1844 [postmark].

My very dear Friend,—I must thank you for the great kindness with which you have responded to a natural expression of feeling on my part, and for all the pleasure of finding you pleased with the inscription of 'Cyprus Wine.' Your note has given me much true pleasure. Yes; if my verses survive me, I should wish them to relate the fact of my being your debtor for many happy hours.

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And now I must explain to you that most of the ‘incorrectnesses’ you speak of may be ‘incorrectnesses,’ but are not *negligences*. I have a theory about double rhymes for which—I shall be attacked by the critics, but which I could justify perhaps on high authority, or at least analogy. In fact, these volumes of mine have more double rhymes than any two books of English poems that ever to my knowledge were printed; I mean of English poems *not comic*. Now, of double rhymes in use, which are perfect rhymes, you are aware how few there are, and yet you are also aware of what an admirable effect in making a rhythm various and vigorous, double rhyming is in English poetry. Therefore I have used a certain licence; and after much thoughtful study of the Elizabethan writers, have ventured it with the public. And do *you* tell me, *you* who object to the use of a different *vowel* in a double rhyme, *why* you rhyme (as everybody does, without blame from anybody) ‘given’ to ‘heaven,’ when you object to my rhyming ‘remember’ and ‘chamber’? The analogy surely is all on my side, and I *believe* that the spirit of the English language is also.

I write all this because you will find many other sins of the sort, besides those in the ‘Cyprus Wine;’ and because I wish you to consider the subject as *a point for consideration* seriously, and not to blame me as a writer of careless verses. If I deal too much in licences, it is not because I am idle, but because I am speculative for freedom’s sake. It is possible, you know, to be wrong conscientiously; and I stand up for my conscience only.

I thank you earnestly for your candour hitherto, and I beseech you to be candid to the end.

It is tawny as Rhea’s lion.

I know (although you don’t say so) you object to that line. Yet consider its structure. Does not the final ‘y’ of ‘tawny’ suppose an apostrophe and apocope? Do you not run ‘tawny as’ into two syllables naturally? I want you to see my principle.

With regard to blank verse, the great Fletcher admits sometimes seventeen syllables into his lines.

I hope Miss Heard received her copy, and that you will not think me arrogant in writing freely to you.

Believe me, I write only freely and not arrogantly; and I am impressed with the conviction that my work abounds with far more faults than you in your kindness will discover, notwithstanding your acumen.

Always your affectionate and grateful
ELIBET.

To H.S. Boyd Wednesday, August 14, 1844 [postmark].

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—I must thank you for the great great pleasure with which I have this moment read your note, the more welcome, as (without hypocrisy) I had worked myself up into a nervous apprehension, from your former one, that I should seem so ’rudis atque incomposita’ to you, in consequence of certain licences, as to end by being intolerable. I know what an ear you have, and how you can hear the dust on the wheel as it goes on. Well, I wrote to you yesterday, to beg you to be patient and considerate.

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But you are always given to surprise me with abundant kindness—with supererogatory kindness. I believe in *that*, certainly.

I am very very glad that you think me stronger and more perspicuous. For the perspicuity, I have struggled hard....

Your affectionate and grateful
ELZBETH.

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: August 22, 1844.

... Thank you for your welcome letter, so kind in its candour, *I* angry that you should prefer 'The Seraphim'! Angry? No *indeed, indeed*, I am grateful for 'The Seraphim,' and not exacting for the 'Drama,' and all the more because of a secret obstinate persuasion that the 'Drama' will have a majority of friends in the end, and perhaps deserve to have them. Nay, why should I throw perhapses over my own impressions, and be insincere to you who have honoured me by being sincere? Why should I dissemble my own belief that the 'Drama' is worth two or three 'Seraphims'—*my own* belief, you know, which is worth nothing, writers knowing themselves so superficially, and having such a natural leaning to their last work. Still, I may say honestly to you, that I have a far more modest value for 'The Seraphim' than your kindness suggests, and that I have seemed to myself to have a clear insight into the fact that that poem was only borne up by the minor poems published with it, from immediate destruction. There is a want of unity in it which vexes me to think of, and the other faults magnify themselves day by day, more and more, in my eyes. Therefore it is not that I care *more* for the 'Drama,' but I care less for 'The Seraphim.' Both poems fall short of my aspiration and desire, but the 'Drama' seems to me fuller, freer and stronger, and worth the other three times over. If it has anything new, I think it must be something new into which I have lived, for certainly I wrote it sincerely and from an inner impulse. In fact, I never wrote any poem with so much sense of pleasure in the composition, and so rapidly, with continuous flow—from fifty to a hundred lines a day, and quite in a glow of pleasure and impulse all through. Still, you have not been used to see me in blank verse, and there may be something in that. That the poem is full of faults and imperfections I do not in the least doubt. I have vibrated between exultations and despondencies in the correcting and printing of it, though the composition went smoothly to an end, and I am prepared to receive the bastinado to the critical degree, I do assure you. The few opinions I have yet had are all to the effect that my advance on the former publication is very great and obvious, but then I am aware that people who thought exactly the contrary would be naturally backward in giving me their opinion.... Indeed, I thank you most earnestly. Truth and kindness, how rarely do they come together! I am very grateful to you. It is curious that 'Duchess May' is not a favorite of mine,

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and that I have sighed one or two secret wishes towards its extirpation, but other writers besides yourself have singled it out for praise in private letters to me. There has been no printed review yet, I believe; and when I think of them, I try to think of something else, for with no private friends among the critical body (not that I should desire to owe security in such a matter to private friendship) it is awful enough, this looking forward to be reviewed. Never mind, the ultimate prosperity of the book lies far above the critics, and can neither be mended nor made nor unmade by *them*.

To John Kenyan Wednesday morning [August 1844].

I return Mr. Chorley's[106] note, my dear cousin, with thankful thoughts of him—as of you. I wish I could persuade you of the rightness of my view about 'Essays on Mind' and such things, and how the difference between them and my present poems is not merely the difference between two schools, as you seemed to intimate yesterday, nor even the difference between immaturity and maturity; but that it is the difference between the dead and the living, between a copy and an individuality, between what is myself and what is not myself. To you who have a personal interest and—may I say? affection for me, the girl's exercise assumes a factitious value, but to the public the matter is otherwise and ought to be otherwise. And for the 'psychological' side of the question, *do* observe that I have not reputation enough to suggest a curiosity about *my legends*. Instead of your 'legendary lore,' it would be just a legendary bore. Now you understand what I mean. I do not underrate Pope nor his school, but I *do* disesteem everything which, bearing the shape of a book, is not the true expression of a mind, and I know and feel (and so do *you*) that a girl's exercise written when all the experience lay in books, and the mind was suited rather for intelligence than production, lying like an infant's face with an undeveloped expression, must be valueless in itself, and if offered to the public directly or indirectly as a work of mine, highly injurious to me. Why, of the 'Prometheus' volume, even, you know what I think and desire. 'The Seraphim,' with all its feebleness and shortcomings and obscurities, yet is the first utterance of my own individuality, and therefore the only volume except the last which is not a disadvantage to me to have thought of, and happily for me, the early books, never having been advertised, nor reviewed, except by accident, once or twice, are as safe from the public as manuscript.

Oh, I shudder to think of the lines which might have been 'nicked in,' and all through Mr. Chorley's good nature. As if I had not sins enough to ruin me in the new poems, without reviving juvenile ones, sinned when I knew no better. Perhaps you would like to have the series of epic poems which I wrote from nine years old to eleven. They might illustrate some doctrine of innate ideas, and enrich (to that end) the myths of metaphysicians.

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And also agree with me in reverencing that wonderful genius *Keats*, who, rising as a grand exception from among the vulgar herd of juvenile versifiers, was an individual *man* from the beginning, and spoke with his own voice, though surrounded by the yet unfamiliar murmur of antique echoes.[107] Leigh Hunt calls him 'the young poet' very rightly. Most affectionately and gratefully yours,

E.B.B.

Do thank Mr. Chorley for me, will you?

[Footnote 106: Henry Fothergill Chorley (1808-1872) was one of the principal members of the staff of the *Athenaeum*, especially in literary and musical matters. Dr. Garnett (in the *Dictionary of National Biography*) says of him, shortly after his first joining the staff in 1833, that 'his articles largely contributed to maintain the reputation the *Athenaeum* had already acquired for impartiality at a time when puffery was more rampant than ever before or since, and when the only other London literary journal of any pretension was notoriously venal.' He also wrote several novels and dramas, which met with but little popular success.]

[Footnote 107: Compare Aurora Leigh's asseveration:

'By Keats' soul, the man who never stepped
In gradual progress like another man,
But, turning grandly on his central self,
Ensphered himself in twenty perfect years
And died, *not* young.'

('Aurora Leigh,' book i.; *Poetical Works*, vi. 38.)]

To Mrs. Martin Thursday, August 1844.

Thank you, my dearest Mrs. Martin, for your most kind letter, a reply to which should certainly, as you desired, have met you at Colwall; only, right or wrong, I have been flurried, agitated, put out of the way altogether, by Stormie's and Henry's plan of going to Egypt. Ah, now you are surprised. Now you think me excusable for being silent two days beyond my time—yes, and *they have gone*, it is no vague speculation. You know, or perhaps you don't know, that, a little time back, papa bought a ship, put a captain and crew of his own in it, and began to employ it in his favourite 'Via Lactea' of speculations. It has been once to Odessa with wool, I think; and now it has gone to Alexandria with coals. Stormie was wild to go to both places; and with regard to the last, papa has yielded. And Henry goes too. This was all arranged weeks ago, but nothing was said of it until last Monday to me; and when I heard it, I was a good deal moved of course, and although resigned now to their having their way in it, and their

pleasure, which is better than their way, still I feel I have entered a new anxiety, and shall not be quite at ease again till they return....

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And now to thank you, my ever-dearest Mrs. Martin, for your kind and welcome letter from the Lakes. I knew quite at the first page, and long before you said a word specifically, that dear Mr. Martin was better, and think that such a scene, even from under an umbrella, must have done good to the soul and body of both of you. I wish I could have looked through your eyes for once. But I suppose that neither through yours, nor through my own, am I ever likely to behold that sight. In the meantime it is with considerable satisfaction that I hear of your *failure of Wordsworth*, which was my salvation in a very awful sense. Why, if you had done such a thing, you would have put me to the shame of too much honor. The speculation consoles me entirely for your loss in respect to Rydal Hall and its poet. By the way, I heard the other day that Rogers, who was intending to visit him, said, 'It is a bad time of year for it. The god is on his pedestal; and can only give gestures to his worshippers, and no conversation to his friends.' ...

Although you did not find a letter from me on your return to Colwall, I do hope that you found *me*—viz. my book, which Mr. Burden took charge of, and promised to deliver or see delivered. When you have read it, *do* let me hear your own and Mr. Martin's true impression; and whether you think it worse or better than 'The Seraphim.' The only review which has yet appeared or had time to appear has been a very kind and cordial one in the 'Athenaeum.' ...

Your ever affectionate
BA.

To Mr. Westwood August 31, 1844.

My dear Mr. Westwood,—I send you the manuscript you ask for, and also my certificate that, although I certainly was once a little girl, yet I never in my life had fair hair, or received lessons when you mention. I think a cousin of mine, now dead, may have done it. The 'Barrett Barrett' seems to specify my family. I have a little cousin with bright fair hair at this moment who is an Elizabeth Barrett (the subject of my 'Portrait'[108]), but then she is a 'Georgiana' besides, and your friend must refer to times past. My hair is very dark indeed, and always was, as long as I remember, and also I have a friend who makes serious affidavit that I have never changed (except by being rather taller) since I was a year old. Altogether, you cannot make a case of identity out, and I am forced to give up the glory of being so long remembered for my cleverness.

You do wrong in supposing me inclined to underrate Mr. Melville's power. He is inclined to High-Churchism, and to such doctrines as apostolical succession, and I, who, am a Dissenter, and a believer in a universal Christianity, recoil from the exclusive doctrine.

But then, that is not depreciatory of his power and eloquence—surely not.

E.B.

BOOKRAGS

[Footnote 108: *Poetical Works*, iii. 172.]

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: Monday. [About the end of August 1844.]

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Dear Mr. Chorley,—Kindnesses are more frequent things with me than gladnesses, but I thank you earnestly for both in the letter I have this moment received.[109] You have given me a quick sudden pleasure which goes deeper (I am very sure) than self-love, for it must be something better than vanity that brings the tears so near the eyes. I thank you, dear Mr. Chorley.

After all, we are not quite strangers. I have had some early encouragement and direction from you, and much earlier (and later) literary pleasures from such of your writings as did not refer to me. I have studied 'Music and Manners'[110] under you, and found an excuse for my love of romance-reading from your grateful fancy. Then, as dear Miss Mitford's friend, you could not help being (however against your will!) a little my acquaintance; and this she daringly promised to make you in reality some day, till I took the fervour for prophecy.

Altogether I am justified, while I thank you as a stranger, to say one more word as a friend, and *that* shall be the best word—'*May God bless you*!' The trials with which He tries us all are different, but our faces may be turned towards the end in cheerfulness, for '*to* the end He has loved us.' I remain,

Very faithfully, your obliged
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

You may trust me with the secret of your kindness to me. It shall not go farther.

[Footnote 109: A summary of its contents is given in the next letter but one.]

[Footnote 110: *Music and Manners in France and Germany: a Series of Travelling Sketches of Art and Society*, published by Mr. Chorley in 1841.]

To H.S. Boyd Monday, September 1, 1844.

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—I thank you for the Cyprus, and also for a still sweeter amreeta—your praise. Certainly to be praised as you praise me might well be supposed likely to turn a sager head than mine, but I feel that (with all my sensitive and grateful appreciation of such words) I am removed rather below than above the ordinary temptations of vanity. Poetry is to me rather a passion than an ambition, and the gadfly which drives me along that road pricks deeper than an expectation of fame could do.

Moreover, there will be plenty of counter-irritation to prevent me from growing feverish under your praises. And as a beginning, I hear that the 'John Bull' newspaper has cut me up with sanguinary gashes, for the edification of its Sabbath readers. I have not seen it yet, but I hear so. The 'Drama' is the particular victim. Do not send for the paper. I will let you have it, if you should wish for it.

One thing is left to me to say. Arabel told you of a letter I had received from a professional critic, and I am sorry that she should have told you so without binding you to secrecy on the point at the same time. In fact, the writer of the letter begged me *not* to speak of it, and I took an engagement to him *not* to speak of it. Now it would be very unpleasant to me, and dishonorable to me, if, after entering into this engagement, the circumstance of the letter should come to be talked about. Of course you will understand that I do not object to your having been informed of the thing, only Arabel should have remembered to ask you not to mention again the name of the critic who wrote to me.

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May God bless you, my very dear friend. I drink thoughts of you in Cyprus every day.

Your ever affectionate
ELIBET.

There is no review in the ‘Examiner’ yet, nor any continuation in the ’Athenaeum.’[111]

[Footnote 111: The *Athenaeum* had reserved the two longer poems, the ‘Drama of Exile’ and the ‘Vision of Poets,’ for possible notice in a second article, which, however, never appeared.]

To Mrs. Martin September 10, 1844.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I will not lose a post in assuring you that I was not silent because of any disappointment from your previous letter. I could only feel the *kindness* of that letter, and this was certainly the chief and uppermost feeling at the time of reading it, and since. Your preference of ‘The Seraphim’ one other person besides yourself has acknowledged to me in the same manner, and although I myself—perhaps from the natural leaning to last works, and perhaps from a wise recognition of the complete failure of the poem called ’The Seraphim ’—do disagree with you, yet I can easily forgive you for such a thought, and believe that you see sufficient grounds for entertaining it. More and more I congratulate myself (at any rate) for the decision I came to at the last moment, and in the face of some persuasions, to call the book ‘Poems,’ instead of trusting its responsibility to the ‘Drama,’ by such a title as ’A Drama of Exile, and Poems.’ It is plain, as I anticipated, that for one person who is ever so little pleased with the ‘Drama,’ fifty at least will like the smaller poems. And perhaps they are right. The longer sustaining of a subject requires, of course, more power, and I may have failed in it altogether.

Yes, I think I may say that I am satisfied so far with the aspect of things in relation to the book. You see there has scarcely been time yet to give any except a sanguine or despondent judgment—I mean, there is scarcely room yet for forming a very rational inference of what will ultimately be, without the presentiments of hope or fear. The book came out too late in August for any chance of a mention in the September magazines, and at the dead time of year, when the very critics were thinking more of holiday innocence than of their carnivorous instincts. This will not hurt it ultimately, although it might have hurt a *novel*. The regular critics will come back to it; and in the meantime the newspaper critics are noticing it all round, with more or less admissions to its advantage. The ‘Atlas’ is the best of the newspapers for literary notices; and it spoke graciously on the whole; though I do protest against being violently attached to a ‘school.’ I have faults enough, I know; but it is just to say that they are at least my own. Well, then! It is true that the ’Westminster Review’ says briefly what is great praise, and

promises to take the earliest opportunity of reviewing me ‘at large.’ So that with regard to the critics,

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there seems to be a good prospect. Then I have had some very pleasant private letters —one from Carlyle; an oath from Miss Martineau to give her whole mind to the work and tell me her free and full opinion, which I have not received yet; an assurance from an acquaintance of Mrs. Jameson that she was much pleased. But the letter which pleased me most was addressed to me by a professional critic, personally unknown to me, who wrote to say that he had traced me up, step by step, ever since I began to print, and that my last volumes were so much better than any preceding them, and were such *living books*, that they restored to him the impulses of his youth and constrained him to thank me for the pleasant emotions they had excited. I cannot say the name of the writer of this letter, because he asked me not to do so, but of course it was very pleasant to read. Now you will not call me vain for speaking of this. I would not speak of it; only I want (you see) to prove to you how faithfully and gratefully I have a trust in your kindness and sympathy. It is certainly the best kindness to speak the truth to me. I have written those poems as well as I could, and I hope to write others better. I have not reached my own ideal; and I cannot expect to have satisfied other people's expectation. But it is (as I sometimes say) the least ignoble part of me, that I love poetry better than I love my own successes in it.

I am glad that you like 'The Lost Bower.' The scene of that poem is the wood above the garden at Hope End.

It is very true, my dearest Mrs. Martin, all that you say about the voyage to Alexandria. And I do not feel the anxiety I *thought I should*. In fact, *I am surprised to feel so little anxiety*. Still, when they are at home again, I shall be happier than I am now, *that* I feel strongly besides.

What I missed most in your first letter was what I do not miss in the second, the good news of dear Mr. Martin. Both he and you are very vainglorious, I suppose, about O'Connell; but although I was delighted on every account at his late victory,[112] or rather at the late victory of justice and constitutional law, he never was a hero of mine and is not likely to become one. If he had been (by the way) a hero of mine, I should have been quite ashamed of him for being so unequal to his grand position as was demonstrated by the speech from the balcony. Such poetry in the position, and such prose in the speech! He has not the stuff in him of which heroes are made. There is a thread of cotton everywhere crossing the silk....

With our united love to both of you,
Ever, dearest Mrs. Martin, most affectionately yours,
BA.

[Footnote 112: The reversal by the House of Lords of his conviction in Ireland for conspiracy, which the English Court of Queen's Bench had confirmed.]

To Mrs. Martin Wednesday [about September 1844].

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My dearest Mrs. Martin, ... Did I tell you that Miss Martineau had promised and vowed to me to tell me the whole truth with respect to the poems? Her letter did not come until a few days ago, and for a full month after the publication; and I was so fearful of the probable sentence that my hands shook as they broke the seal. But such a pleasant letter! I have been overjoyed with it. She says that her 'predominant impression is of the *originality*'—very pleasant to hear. I must not forget, however, to say that she complains of 'want of variety' in the general effect of the drama, and that she 'likes Lucifer less than anything in the two volumes.' You see how you have high backers. Still she talks of 'immense advances,' which consoles me again. In fact, there is scarcely a word to *require* consolation in her letter, and what did not please me least—-nay, to do myself justice, what put all the rest out of my head for some minutes with joy—is the account she gives of herself. For she is better and likely still to be better; she has recovered appetite and sleep, and lost the most threatening symptoms of disease; she has been out for the first time for four years and a half, lying on the grass flat, she says, with my books open beside her day after day. (That *does* sound vain of me, but I cannot resist the temptation of writing it!) And the means—the means! Such means you would never divine! It is *mesmerism*. She is thrown into the magnetic trance twice a day; and the progress is manifest; and the hope for the future clear. Now, what do you both think? Consider what a case it is! No case of a weak-minded woman and a nervous affection; but of the most manlike woman in the three kingdoms—in the best sense of man—a woman gifted with admirable fortitude, as well as exercised in high logic, a woman of sensibility and of imagination certainly, but apt to carry her reason unbent wherever she sets her foot; given to utilitarian philosophy and the habit of logical analysis; and suffering under a disease which has induced change of structure and yielded to no tried remedy! Is it not wonderful, and past expectation? She suggests that I should try the means—but I understand that in cases like mine the remedy has done harm instead of good, by over-exciting the system. But her experience will settle the question of the reality of magnetism with a whole generation of infidels. For my own part, I have long been a believer, *in spite of papa*. Then I have had very kind letters from Mrs. Jameson, the 'Ennuyee'[113] and from Mr. Serjeant Talfourd and some less famous persons. And a poet with a Welsh name wrote to me yesterday to say that he was writing a poem 'similar to my "Drama of Exile,"' and begged me to subscribe to it. Now I tell you all this to make you smile, and because some of it will interest you more gravely. It will prove to dear unjust Mr. Martin that I do not distrust your sympathy. How could he think so of me? I am half vexed that

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he should think so. Indeed—indeed I am not so morbidly vain. Why, if you had told me that the books were without any sort of value in your eyes, do you imagine that I should not have valued you, reverenced you ever after for your truth, so sacred a thing in friendship? I really believe it would have been my predominant feeling. But you proved your truth without trying me so hardly; I had *both* truth and praise from you, and surely quite enough, and *more* than enough, as many would think, of the latter.

My dearest papa left us this morning to go for a few days into Cornwall for the purpose of examining a quarry in which he has bought or is about to buy shares, and he means to strike on for the Land's End and to see Falmouth before he returns. It depresses me to think of his being away; his presence or the sense of his nearness having so much cheering and soothing influence with me; but it will be an excellent change for him, even if he does not, as he expects, dig an immense fortune out of the quarries....

Your affectionate and ever obliged
BA.

[Footnote 113: Mrs. Jameson's earliest book, and one which achieved considerable popularity, was her *Diary of an Ennuyee*.]

To Cornelius Mathews London, 50 Wimpole Street: October 1, 1844.

My dear Mr. Mathews,—I have just received your note, which, on the principle of single sighs or breaths being wafted from Indies to the poles, arrived quite safely, and I was very glad to have it. I shall fall into monotony if I go on to talk of my continued warm sense of your wonderful kindness to me, a stranger according to the manner of men; and, indeed, I have just this moment been writing a note to a friend two streets away, and calling it 'wonderful kindness.' I cannot, however, of course, allow you to run the tether of your impulse and furnish me with the reviews of my books and other things you speak of at your own expense, and I should prefer, if you would have the goodness to give the necessary direction to Messrs. Putnam & Co., that they should send what would interest me to see, together with a note of the pecuniary debt to themselves. I shall like to see the reviews, of course; and that you should have taken the first word of American judgment into your own mouth is a pleasant thought to me, and leaves me grateful. In England I have no reason so far to be otherwise than well pleased. There has not, indeed, been much yet besides newspaper criticisms—except 'Ainsworth's Magazine,' which is benignant!—there has not been time. The monthly reviews give themselves 'pause' in such matters to set the plumes of their dignity, and I am rather glad than otherwise not to have the first fruits of their haste. The 'Atlas,' the best newspaper for literary reviews, excepting always the 'Examiner,' who does not speak yet, is generous to me, and I have reason to be satisfied with others. And our most influential quarterly

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(after the ‘Edinburgh’ and right ’Quarterly’), the ‘Westminster Review,’ promises an early paper with passing words of high praise. What vexed me a little in one or two of the journals was an attempt made to fix me in a school, and the calling me a follower of Tennyson for my habit of using compound words, noun-substantives, which I used to do before I knew a page of Tennyson, and adopted from a study of our old English writers, and Greeks and even Germans. The custom is so far from being peculiar to Tennyson, that Shelley and Keats and Leigh Hunt are all redolent of it, and no one can read our old poets without perceiving the leaning of our Saxon to that species of coalition. Then I have had letters of great kindness from ‘Spirits of the Age,’ whose praises are so many crowns, and altogether am far from being out of spirits about the prospect of my work. I am glad, however, that I gave the name of ‘Poems’ to the work instead of admitting the ‘Drama of Exile’ into the title-page and increasing its responsibility; for one person who likes the ‘Drama,’ ten like the other poems. Both Carlyle and Miss Martineau select as favorite ‘Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,’ which amuses and surprises me somewhat. In that poem I had endeavoured to throw conventionalities (turned asbestos for the nonce) into the fire of poetry, to make them glow and glitter as if they were not dull things. Well, I shall soon hear what *you* like best—and worst. I wonder if you have been very carnivorous with me! I tremble a little to think of your hereditary claim to an instrument called the tomahawk. Still, I am sure I shall have to think *most*, ever as now, of your kindness; and *truth* must be sacred to all of us, whether we have to suffer or be glad by it. As for Mr. Horne, I cannot answer for what he has received or not received. I had one note from him on silver paper (fear of postage having reduced him to a transparency) from Germany, and that is all, and I did not think him in good spirits in what he said of himself. I will tell him what you have the goodness to say, and something, too, on my own part. He has had a hard time of it with his ‘Spirit of the Age;’ the attacks on the book here being bitter in the extreme. Your ‘Democratic’ does not comfort him for the rest, by the way, and, indeed, he is almost past comfort on the subject. I had a letter the other day from Dr. Shelton Mackenzie, whom I do not know personally, but who is about to publish a ‘Living Author Dictionary,’ and who, by some association, talked of the effeminacy of ’the American poets,’ so I begged him to read your poems on ‘Man’ and prepare an exception to his position. I wish to write more and must not.

Most faithfully yours,
E.B.B.

Am I the first with the great and good news for America and England that Harriet Martineau is better and likely to be better? She told me so herself, and attributes the change to the agency of *mesmerism*.

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To H.S. Boyd October 4, 1844.

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—... As to 'The Lost Bower,' I am penitent about having caused you so much disturbance. I sometimes fancy that a little varying of the accents, though at the obvious expense of injuring the smoothness of every line considered separately, gives variety of cadence and fuller harmony to the general effect. But I do not question that I deserve a great deal of blame on this point as on others. Many lines in 'Isobel's Child' are very slovenly and weak from a multitude of causes. I hope you will like 'The Lost Bower' better when you try it again than you did at first, though I do not, of course, expect that you will not see much to cry out against. The subject of the poem was an actual fact of my childhood.

Oh, and I think I told you, when giving you the history of 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' that I wrote the *thirteen* last pages of it in one day. I ought to have said *nineteen* pages instead. But don't tell anybody; only keep the circumstance in your mind when you need it and see the faults. Nobody knows of it except you and Mr. Kenyon and my own family for the reason I told you. I sent off that poem to the press piece-meal, as I never in my life did before with any poem. And since I wrote to you I have heard of Mr. Eagles, one of the first writers in 'Blackwood' and a man of very refined taste, adding another name to the many of those who have preferred it to anything in the two volumes. He says that he has read it at least six times aloud to various persons, and calls it a 'beautiful *sui generis* drama.' On which Mr. Kenyon observes that I am 'ruined for life, and shall be sure never to take pains with any poem again.'

The American edition (did Arabel tell you?) was to be out in New York a week ago, and was to consist of fifteen hundred copies in two volumes, as in England.

She sends you the verses and asks you to make allowances for the delay in doing so. I cannot help believing that if you were better read in Wordsworth you would appreciate him better. Ever since I knew what poetry is, I have believed in him as a great poet, and I do not understand how reasonably there can be a doubt of it. Will you remember that nearly all the first minds of the age have admitted his power (without going to intrinsic evidence), and then say that he *can* be a mere Grub Street writer? It is not that he is only or chiefly admired by the *profanum vulgus*, that he is a mere popular and fashionable poet, but that men of genius in this and other countries unite in confessing his genius. And is not this a significant circumstance—significant, at least?...

Believe me, yourself, your affectionate and grateful
ELIBET B.B.

How kind you are, far too kind, about the Cyprus wine; I thank you very much.

To Mrs. Martin October 5, 1844.

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My dearest Mrs. Martin,—... Well, papa came back from Cornwall just as I came back to my own room, and he was as pleased with his quarry as I was to have the sight again of his face. During his absence, Henrietta had a little polka (which did not bring the house down on its knees), and I had a transparent blind put up in my open window. There is a castle in the blind, and a castle gate-way, and two walks, and several peasants, and groves of trees which rise in excellent harmony with the fall of my green damask curtains—new, since you saw me last. Papa insults me with the analogy of a back window in a confectioner's shop, but is obviously moved when the sunshine lights up the castle, notwithstanding. And Mr. Kenyon and everybody in the house grow ecstatic rather than otherwise, as they stand in contemplation before it, and tell me (what is obvious without their evidence) that the effect is beautiful, and that the whole room catches a light from it. Well, and then Mr. Kenyon has given me a new table, with a rail round it to consecrate it from Flush's paws, and large enough to hold all my varieties of vanities.

I had another letter from Miss Martineau the other day, and she says she has a 'hat of her own, a parasol of her own,' and that she can 'walk a mile with ease.' *What do miracles mean*? Miracle or not, however, one thing is certain—it is very joyful; and her own sensations on being removed suddenly from the verge of the prospect of a most painful death—a most painful and lingering death—must be strange and overwhelming.

I hope I may hear soon from you that you had much pleasure at Clifton, and some benefit in the air and change, and that dear Mr. Martin and yourself are both as well as possible. Do you take in 'Punch'? If not, you *ought*. Mr. Kenyon and I agreed the other day that we should be more willing 'to take our politics' from 'Punch' than from any other of the newspaper oracles. 'Punch' is very generous, and I like him for everything, except for his rough treatment of Louis Philippe, whom I believe to be a great man—for a king. And then, it is well worth fourpence to laugh once a week. I do recommend 'Punch' to you.[114] Douglas Jerrold is the editor, I fancy, and he has a troop of 'wits,' such as Planche, Titmarsh, and the author of 'Little Peddlington,' to support him....

Now I have written enough to tire you, I am sure. May God bless you both! Did you read 'Coningsby,' that very able book, without character, story, or specific teaching? It is well worth reading, and worth wondering over. D'Israeli, who is a man of genius, has written, nevertheless, books which will live longer, and move deeper. But everybody should read 'Coningsby.' It is a sign of the times. Believe me, my dearest Mrs. Martin,

Your very affectionate
BA.

To John Kenyon Tuesday, October 8, 1844.

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Thank you, my dearest cousin, for your kind little note, which I run the chance of answering by that Wednesday's post you think you may wait for. So (*via* your table) I set about writing to you, and the first word, of course, must be an expression of my contentment with the 'Examiner' review. Indeed, I am more than contented—delighted with it. I had some dread, vaguely fashioned, about the 'Examiner'; the very delay looked ominous. And then, I thought to myself, though I did not say, that if Mr. Forster praised the verses on Flush to you, it was just because he had no sympathy for anything else. But it is all the contrary, you see, and I am the more pleased for the want of previous expectation; and I must add that if *you* were so kind as to be glad of being associated with me by Mr. Forster's reference, *I* was so *human* as to be very very glad of being associated with *you* by the same. Also you shall criticise 'Geraldine' exactly as you like—mind, I don't think it all so rough as the extracts appear to be, and some variety is attained by that playing at ball with the *pause*, which causes the apparent roughness—still you shall criticise 'Geraldine' exactly as you like. I have a great fancy for writing some day a longer poem of a like class—a poem comprehending the aspect and manners of modern life, and flinching at nothing of the conventional. I think it might be done with good effect. You said once that Tennyson had done it in 'Locksley Hall,' and I half agreed with you. But looking at 'Locksley Hall' again, I find that not much has been done in that *way*, noble and passionate and *full* as the poem is in other ways. But there is no story, no *manners*, no modern allusion, except in the grand general adjuration to the 'Mother-age,' and no approach to the treatment of a conventionality. But Crabbe, as you say, has done it, and Campbell in his 'Theodore' in a few touches was near to do it; but *Hayley* clearly apprehends the species of poem in his 'Triumphs of Temper' and 'Triumphs of Music,' and so did Miss Seward, who called it the '*poetical novel*.' Now I do think that a true poetical novel—modern, and on the level of the manners of the day—might be as good a poem as any other, and much more popular besides. Do you not think so?

I had a letter from dear Miss Mitford this morning, with yours, but I can find nothing in it that you will care to hear again. She complains of the vagueness of 'Coningsby,' and praises the French writers—a sympathy between us, that last, which we wear hidden in our sleeves for the sake of propriety. Not a word of coming to London, though I asked. Neither have I heard again from Miss Martineau....

Ever most affectionately and gratefully yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 114: It will be remembered that 'Punch' had only been in existence for three years at this time, which will account for this apparently superfluous advice.]

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To Mrs. Martin October 15, 1844.

... Not a word more have I heard from Miss Martineau; and shall not soon, perhaps, as she is commanded not to write, not to read—to do nothing, in fact, except the getting better. I am not, I confess, quite satisfied myself. But she herself appears to be so altogether, and she speaks of '*symptoms* having given way,' implying a structural change. Yes, I use the common phrase in respect to mesmerism, and think 'there is something in it.' Only I think, besides, that, if something, there must be a great deal in it. Clairvoyance has precisely the same evidence as the phenomenon of the trance has, and scientific and philosophical minds are recognising all the phenomena *as facts* on all sides of us. Mr. Kenyon's is the best distinction, and the immense quantity of *humbug* which embroiders the truth over and over, and round and round, makes it needful: 'I believe in mesmerism, but not in *mesmerists*.'

We have had no other letter from our Egyptians, but can wait a little longer without losing our patience.

The blind rises in favour, and the ivy would not fall, if it would but live. Alas! I am going to try *guano* as a last resource. You see, in painting the windows, papa was forced to have it taken down, and the ivy that grows on ruins and oaks is not usually taken down 'for the nonce.' I think I shall have a myrtle grove in two or three large pots inside the window. I have a mind to try it.

I heard twice from dear Mr. Kenyon at Dover, where he was detained by the weather, but not since his entrance into France. Which is grand enough word for the French Majesty itself—'entrance into France.' By the way, I do hope you have some sympathy with me in my respect for the King of the French—that right kingly king, Louis Philippe. If France had *borne* more liberty, he would not have withheld it, and, for the rest, and in all truly royal qualities, he is the noblest king, according to my idea, in Europe—the most royal king in the encouragement of art and literature, and in the honoring of artists and men of letters. Let a young unknown writer accomplish a successful tragedy, and the next day he sits at the king's table—not in a metaphor, but face to face. See how different the matter is in our court, where the artists are shown up the back stairs, and where no poet (even by the back stairs) can penetrate, unless so fortunate as to be a banker also. What is the use of kings and queens in these days, except to encourage arts and letters? Really I cannot see. Anybody can hunt an otter out of a box—who has nerve enough.

I had a letter from America to-day, and heard that my book was not published there until the fifth of this October. Still, a few copies had preceded the publication, and made way among the critics, and several reviews were in the course of germinating very greenly. Yes, I was delighted with the 'Examiner,' and all the more so from having interpreted the long delay of the notice, the gloomiest manner possible. My friends try to persuade me

that the book is making some impression, and I am willing enough to be convinced. Thank you for all your kind sympathy, my dear friend.

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Now, do write to me soon again! Have you read Dr. Arnold's Life? I have not, but am very anxious to do so, from the admirable extracts in the 'Examiner' of last Saturday, and also from what I hear of it in other quarters. That Dr. Arnold must have been *a man*, in the largest and noblest sense. May God bless you, both of you! I think of you, dearest Mrs. Martin, much, and remain

Your very affectionate
BA.

To John Kenyon Saturday, October 29, 1844.

The moral of your letter, my dearest cousin, certainly is that no green herb of a secret will spring up and flourish between you and me.

The loss of Flush was a secret. My aunt's intention of coming to England (for I know not how to explain what she said to you, but by the supposition of an unfulfilled intention!) was a secret. And Mr. Chorley's letter to me was a third secret. All turned into light!

For the last, you may well praise me for discretion. The letter he wrote was pleasanter to me than many of the kindnesses (apart from your own) occasioned by my book—and when you asked me once 'what letters I had received,' if ever a woman deserved to be canonised for her silence, *I* did! But the effort was necessary—for he particularly desired that I would not mention to 'our common friends' the circumstance of his having written to me; and 'common friends' could only stand for 'Mr. Kenyon and Miss Mitford.' Of course what you tell me, of his liking the poems better still, is delightful to hear; but he reviewed them in the 'Athenaeum' surely! The review we read in the 'Athenaeum' was by his hand—could not be mistaken ...

Well; but Flushie! It is too true that he has been lost—lost and won; and true besides that I was a good deal upset by it *meo more*; and that I found it hard to eat and sleep as usual while he was in the hands of his enemies. It is a secret too. We would not tell papa of it. Papa would have been angry with the unfortunate person who took Flush out without a chain; and would have kicked against the pricks of the necessary bribing of the thief in order to the getting him back. Therefore we didn't tell papa; and as I had a very bad convenient headache the day my eyes were reddest, I did not see him (except once) till Flush was on the sofa again. As to the thieves, you are very kind to talk daggers at them; and I feel no inclination to say 'Don't.' It is quite too bad and cruel. And think of their exceeding insolence in taking Flush away from this very door, while Arabel was waiting to have the door opened on her return from her walk; and in observing (as they gave him back for six guineas and a half) that they intended to have him again at the earliest opportunity and that *then* they must have *ten* guineas! I tell poor Flushie (while he looks very earnestly in my face) that he and I shall be ruined at last, and that I shall have no money to buy him cakes; but the worst is the anxiety! Whether

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I am particularly silly, or not, I don't know; they say here, that I am; but it seems to me impossible for anybody who really cares for a dog, to think quietly of his being in the hands of those infamous men. And then I know how poor Flushie must feel it. When he was brought home, he began to cry in his manner, whine, as if his heart was full! It was just what I was inclined to do myself—' and thus was Flushie lost and won.'

But we are both recovered now, thank you; and intend to be very prudent for the future. I am delighted to think of your being in England; it is the next best thing to your being in London. In regard to Miss Martineau, I agree with you word for word; but I cannot overcome an additional *horror*, which you do not express, or feel probably.

There is an excellent refutation of Puseyism in the 'Edinburgh Review'—by whom? and I have been reading besides the admirable paper by Macaulay in the same number. And now I must be done; having resolved to let you hear without a post's delay. Otherwise I might have American news for you, as I hear that a packet has come in.

My brothers arrived in great spirits at Malta, after a *three weeks' voyage* from Gibraltar; and must now be in Egypt, I think and trust.

May God bless you, my dear cousin.

Most affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

To John Kenyan 50 Wimpole Street: November 5, 1844.

Well, but am I really so bad? ' *Et tu*!' Can *you* call me careless? Remember all the altering of manuscript and proof—and remember how the obscurities used to fly away before your cloud-compelling, when you were the Jove of the criticisms! That the books (I won't call them *our* books when I am speaking of the faults) are remarkable for defects and superfluities of evil, I can see quite as well as another; but then I won't admit that ' it comes' of my carelessness, and refusing to take pains. On the contrary, my belief is, that very few writers called ' correct ' who have selected classical models to work from, pay more laborious attention than I do habitually to the forms of thought and expression. ' Lady Geraldine ' was an exception in her whole history. If I write fast sometimes (and the historical fact is that what has been written fastest, has pleased most), I am not apt to print without consideration. I appeal to Philip sober, if I am! My dearest cousin, do remember! As to the faults, I do not think of defending them, be very sure. My consolation is, that I may try to do better in time, if I may talk of time. The worst fault of all, as far as expression goes (the adjective-substantives, whether in prose or verse, I cannot make up my mind to consider faulty), is that kind of obscurity which is the same thing with inadequate expression. Be very sure—try to be very sure—that I

am not obstinate and self-opiniated beyond measure. To *you* in case, who have done so much for me, and who think of me so more than

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kindly, I feel it to be both duty and pleasure to defer and yield. Still, you know, we could not, if we were ten years about it, alter down the poems to the terms of all these reviewers. You would not desire it, if it were possible. I do not remember that you suggested any change in the verse on Aeschylus. The critic[115] mistakes my allusion, which was to the fact that in the acting of the Eumenides, when the great tragic poet did actually 'frown as the gods did,' women fell down fainting from the benches. I did not refer to the effect of his human countenance 'during composition.' But I am very grateful to the reviewer whoever he may be—very—and with need. See how the 'Sun' shines in response to 'Blackwood' (thank you for sending me that notice), when previously we had had but a wintry rag from the same quarter! No; if I am not spoilt by *your kindness*, I am not likely to be so by any of these exoteric praises, however beyond what I expected or deserved. And then I am like a bird with one wing broken. Throw it out of the window; and after the first feeling of pleasure in liberty, it falls heavily. I have had moments of great pleasure in hearing whatever good has been thought of the poems; but the feeling of *elation* is too strong or rather too *long* for me....

Can it be true that Mr. Newman has at last joined the Church of Rome?[116] If it is true, it will do much to prove to the most illogical minds the real character of the late movement. It will prove what the *point of sight* is, as by the drawing of a straight line. Miss Mitford told me that he had lately sent a message to a R. Catholic convert from the English Church, to the effect—'you have done a good deed, but not at a right time.' It can but be a question of time, indeed, to the whole party; at least to such as are logical—and honest.... [*Unsigned*]

[Footnote 115: In *Blackwood*.]

[Footnote 116: Newman did not actually enter the Church of Rome until nearly a year later, in October 1845.]

To John Kenyan 50 Wimpole Street: November 8, 1844.

Thank you, my dear dear cousin, for the kind thought of sending me Mr. Eagles's letter, and most for your own note. You know we *both* saw that he couldn't have written the paper in question; we *both* were poets and prophets by that sign, but I hope he understands that I shall gratefully remember what his intention was. As to his 'friend' who told him that I had 'imitated Tennyson,' why I can only say and feel that it is very particularly provoking to hear such things said, and that I wish people would find fault with my 'metre' in the place of them. In the matter of 'Geraldine' I shall not be puffed up. I shall take to mind what you suggest. Of course, if you find it hard to read, it must be my fault. And then the fact of there being a *story* to a poem will give a factitious merit in the eyes of many critics, which

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could not be an occasion of vainglory to the consciousness of the most vainglorious of writers. You made me smile by your suggestion about the aptitude of critics aforesaid for courting Lady Geraldines. Certes—however it may be—the poem has had more attention than its due. Oh, and I must tell you that I had a letter the other day from Mr. Westwood (one of my correspondents unknown) referring to 'Blackwood,' and observing on the mistake about Goethe. 'Did you not mean "fell" the verb,' he said, 'or do *I* mistake?' So, you see, some people in the world did actually understand what I meant. I am eager to prove that possibility sometimes.

How full of life of mind Mr. Eagles's letter is. Such letters always bring me to think of Harriet Martineau's pestilent plan of doing to destruction half of the intellectual life of the world, by suppressing every mental breath breathed through the post office. She was not in a state of clairvoyance when she said such a thing. I have not heard from her, but you observed what the 'Critic' said of William Howitt's being empowered by her to declare the circumstances of her recovery?

Again and again have I sent for Dr. Arnold's 'Life,' and I do hope to have it to-day. I am certain, by the extracts, besides your opinion, that I shall be delighted with it.

Why shouldn't Miss Martineau's apocalyptic housemaid[117] tell us whether Flush has a soul, and what is its 'future destination'? As to the fact of his soul, I have long had a strong opinion on it. The 'grand peut-etre,' to which 'without revelation' the human argument is reduced, covers dog-nature with the sweep of its fringes.

Did you ever read Bulwer's 'Eva, or the Unhappy Marriage'? *That* is a sort of poetical novel, with modern manners inclusive. But Bulwer, although a poet in prose, writes all his rhythmetical compositions somewhat prosaically, providing an instance of that curious difference which exists between the poetical writer and the poet. It is easier to give the instance than the reason, but I suppose the cause of the rhythmetical impotence must lie somewhere in the want of the power of concentration. For is it not true that the most prolix poet is capable of briefer expression than the least prolix prose writer, or am I wrong?...

Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 117: Miss Martineau, besides having been cured by mesmerism herself, was blest with a housemaid who had visions under the same influence, concerning which Miss Martineau subsequently wrote at great length in the *Athenaeum*.]

To Cornelius Mathews 50 Wimpole Street: November 14, 1844.

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My dear Mr. Mathews,—I write to tell you—only that there is nothing to tell—only in guard of my gratitude, lest you should come to think all manner of evil of me and of my supposed propensity to let everything pass like Mr. Horne's copies of the American edition of his work, *sub silentio*. Therefore I must write, and you are to please to understand that I have not up to this moment received either letter or book by the packet of October 10 which was charged, according to your intimation, with so much. I, being quite out of patience and out of breath with expectation, have repeatedly sent to Mr. Putnam, and he replies with undisturbed politeness that the ship has come in, and that his part and lot in her, together with mine, remain at the disposal of the Custom-house officers, and may remain some time longer. So you see how it is. I am waiting—simply *waiting*, and it is better to let you know that I am not forgetting instead.

In the meantime, your kindness will be glad to learn of the prosperity of my poems in my own country. I am more than satisfied in my most sanguine hope for them, and a little surprised besides. The critics have been good to me. 'Blackwood' and 'Tait' have this month both been generous, and the 'New Monthly' and 'Ainsworth's Magazine' did what they could. Then I have the 'Examiner' in my favor, and such heads and hearts as are better and purer than the purely critical, and I am very glad altogether, and very grateful, and hope to live long enough to acknowledge, if not to justify, much unexpected kindness. Of course, some hard criticism is mixed with the liberal sympathy, as you will see in 'Blackwood,' but some of it I deserve, even in my own eyes; and all of it I am willing to be patient under. The strange thing is, that without a single personal friend among these critics, they should have expended on me so much 'gentillesse,' and this strangeness I feel very sensitively. Mr. Horne has not returned to England yet, and in a letter which I received from him some fortnight ago he desired to have my book sent to him to Germany, just as if he never meant to return to England again. I answered his sayings, and reiterated, in a way that would make you smile, my information about your having sent the American copies to him. I made my *oyez* very plain and articulate. He won't say again that he never heard of it—be sure of *that*. Well, and then Mr. Browning is not in England either, so that whatever you send for *him* must await his return from the east or the west or the south, wherever he is. The new spirit of the age is a wandering spirit. Mr. Dickens is in Italy. Even Miss Mitford *talks* of going to France, which is an extreme case for *her*. Do you never feel inclined to flash across the Atlantic to us, or can you really remain still in one place?

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I must not forget to assure you, dear Mr. Mathews, as I may conscientiously do, even before I have looked into or received the 'Democratic Review,' that whatever fault you may find with me, my strongest feeling on reading your article will or must be *the sense of your kindness*. Of course I do not expect, nor should I wish, that your personal interest in me (proved in so many ways) would destroy your critical faculty in regard to me. Such an expectation, if I had entertained it, would have been scarcely honorable to either of us, and I may assure you that I never did entertain it. No; be at rest about the article. It is not likely that I shall think it 'inadequate.' And I may as well mention in connection with it that before you spoke of reviewing me *I* (in my despair of Mr. Horne's absence, and my impotency to assist your book) had thrown into my desk, to watch for some opportunity of publication, a review of your 'Poems on Man,' from my own hand, and that I am still waiting and considering and taking courage before I send it to some current periodical. There is a difficulty—there is a feeling of shyness on my part, because, as I told you, I have no personal friend or introduction among the pressmen or the critics, and because the 'Athenaeum,' which I should otherwise turn to first, has already treated of your work, and would not, of course, consent to reconsider an expressed opinion. Well, I shall do it somewhere. Forgive me the *appearance* of my impotency under a general aspect.

Ah, you cannot guess at the estate of poetry in the eyes of even such poetical English publishers as Mr. Moxon, who can write sonnets himself. Poetry is in their eyes just a desperate speculation. A poet must have tried his public before he tries the publisher—-that is, before he expects the publisher to run a risk for him. But I will make any effort you like to suggest for any work of yours; I only tell you how *things are*. By the way, if I ever told you that Tennyson was ill, I may as rightly tell you now that he is well, again, or was when I last heard of him. I do not know him personally. Also Harriet Martineau can walk five miles a day with ease, and believes in mesmerism with all her strength. Mr. Putnam had the goodness to write and open his reading room to me, who am in prison instead in mine.

May God bless you. Do let me hear from you soon, and believe me ever your friend,

E.B. BARRETT.

To Mrs. Martin November 16, 1844.

My dearest Mrs. Martin, ... To-day I perceive in the 'contents' of the new 'Westminster Review' that my poems are reviewed in it, and I hope that you will both be interested enough in my fortunes to read at the library what may be said of them. Did George tell you that he imagined (as I also did) the 'Blackwood' paper to be by Mr. Phillimore the barrister? Well, Mr. Phillimore denies it altogether, has in fact quarrelled with Christopher North, and writes no more for him, so that I am quite at a loss now where to carry my gratitude.

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Do write to me soon. I hear that everybody should read Dr. Arnold's 'Life.' Do you know also 'E[=o]then,' a work of genius? You have read, perhaps, Hewitt's 'Visits to Remarkable Places' in the first series and second; and Mrs. Jameson's 'Visits and Sketches' and 'Life in Mexico.' Do you know the 'Santa Fe Expedition,' and Custine's 'Russia,' and 'Forest Life' by Mrs. Clavers? You will think that my associative process is in a most disorderly state, by all this running up and down the stairs of all sorts of subjects, in the naming of books. I would write a list, more as a list should be written, if I could see my way better, and this will do for a beginning in any case. You do not like romances, I believe, as I do, and then nearly every romance now-a-days sets about pulling the joints of one's heart and soul out, as a process of course. 'Ellen Middleton' (which I have not read yet) is said to be very painful. Do you know Leigh Hunt's exquisite essays called 'The Indicator and Companion' &c., published by Moxon? I hold them at once in delight and reverence. May God bless you both.

I am ever your affectionate
BA.

To Mrs. Martin 50 Wimpole Street: Tuesday, November 26, 1844 [postmark].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I thank you much for your little notes; and you know too well how my sympathy answers you, 'as face to face in a glass,' for me to assure you of it here. Your account of yourselves altogether I take to be satisfactory, because I never expected anybody to gain strength very *rapidly* while in the actual endurance of hard medical discipline. I am glad you have found out a trustworthy adviser at Dover, but I feel nevertheless that you may *both trust* and *hope* in Dr. Bright, of whom I heard the very highest praises the other day....

Now really I don't know why I should fancy you to be so deeply interested in Dr. Bright, that all this detail should be necessary. What I *do* want you to be interested in, is in Miss Martineau's mesmeric experience,[118] for a copy of which, in the last 'Athenaeum,' I have sent ever since yesterday, in the intention of sending it to you. You will admit it to be curious as philosophy, and beautiful as composition; for the rest, I will not answer. Believing in mesmerism as an agency, I hesitate to assent to the necessary connection between Miss Martineau's cure and the power; and also I am of opinion that unbelievers will not very generally become converts through her representations. There is a tone of exaltation which will be observed upon, and one or two sentences are suggestive to scepticism. I will send it to you when I get the number. I understand that an intimate friend of hers (a lady) travelled down from the south of England to Tynemouth, simply to try to prevent the public exposition, but could not prevail. Mr. Milnes has, besides, been her visitor. He is fully a believer, she says, and affirms to having seen the same phenomena in the

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East, but regards the whole subject with *horror*. This still appears to be Mrs. Jameson's feeling, as you know it is mine. Mrs. Jameson came again to this door with a note, and overcoming by kindness, was let in on Saturday last; and sate with me for nearly an hour, and so ran into what my sisters call 'one of my sudden intimacies' that there was an embrace for a farewell. Of course she won my affections through my vanity (Mr. Martin will be sure to say, so I hasten to anticipate him) and by exaggerations about my poetry; but really, and although my heart beat itself almost to pieces for fear of seeing her as she walked upstairs, I do think I should have liked her *without the flattery*. She is very light—has the lightest of eyes, the lightest of complexions; no eyebrows, and what looked to me like very pale red hair, and thin lips of no colour at all. But with all this indecision of exterior the expression is rather acute than soft; and the conversation in its principal characteristics, analytical and examinative; throwing out no thought which is not as clear as glass—critical, in fact, in somewhat of an austere sense. I use 'austere,' of course, in its intellectual relation, for nothing in the world could be kinder, or more graciously kind, than her whole manner and words were to me. She is coming again in two or three days, she says. Yes, and she said of Miss Martineau's paper in the 'Athenaeum,' that she very much doubted the wisdom of publishing it now; and that for the public's sake, if not for her own, Miss M. should have waited till the excitement of recovered health had a little subsided. She said of mesmerism altogether that she was inclined to believe it, but had not finally made up her convictions. She used words so exactly like some I have used myself that I must repeat them, 'that if there was *anything* in it, there was *so much*, it became scarcely possible to limit consequences, and the subject grew awful to contemplate.' ...

On Saturday I had some copies of my American edition, which dazzle the English one; and one or two reviews, transatlantically transcendental in 'oilie flatterie.' And I heard yesterday from the English publisher Moxon, and he was 'happy to tell me that the work was selling very well,' and this without an inquiry on my part. To say the truth, I was *afraid* to inquire. It is good news altogether. The 'Westminster Review' won't be out till next month.

Wordsworth is so excited about the railroad that his wife persuaded him to go away to recover his serenity, but he has returned raging worse than ever. He says that fifty members of Parliament have promised him their opposition. He is wrong, I think, but I also consider that if the people remembered his genius and his age, and suspended the obnoxious Act for a few years, they would be right....

May God bless you both.

Most affectionately yours,
BA.

[Footnote 118: The *Athenaum* of November 23 contained the first of a series of articles by Miss Martineau, giving her experiences of mesmerism.]

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To James Martin December 10, 1844.

I have been thinking of you, my dear Mr. Martin, more and more the colder it has been, and had made up my mind to write to-day, let me feel as dull as I might. So, the vane only turns to *you* instead of to dearest Mrs. Martin in consequence of your letter—your letter makes *that* difference. I should have written to Dover in any case....

You are to know that Miss Martineau's mesmeric experience is only peculiar as being Harriet Martineau's, otherwise it exhibits the mere commonplaces of the agency. You laugh, I see. I wish I could laugh too. I mean, I seriously wish that I could disbelieve in the reality of the power, which is in every way most repulsive to me....

Mrs. Martin is surprised at me and others on account of our 'horror.' Surely it is a natural feeling, and she would herself be liable to it if she were *more credulous*. The agency seems to me like the shaking of the flood-gates placed by the Divine Creator between the unprepared soul and the unseen world. Then—the subjection of the will and vital powers of one individual to those of another, to the extent of the apparent solution of the very identity, is abhorrent from me. And then (as to the expediency of the matter, and to prove how far believers may be carried) there is even now a religious sect at Cheltenham, of persons who call themselves advocates of the 'third revelation,' and profess to receive their system of theology entirely from patients in the sleep.

In the meantime, poor Miss Martineau, as the consequence of her desire to speak the truth as she apprehends it, is overwhelmed with atrocious insults from all quarters. For my own part I would rather fall into the hands of God than of man, and suffer as she did in the body, instead of being the mark of these cruel observations. But she has singular strength of mind, and calmly continues her testimony.

Miss Mitford writes to me: 'Be sure it is *all true*. I see it every day in my Jane'—her maid, who is mesmerised for deafness, but not, I believe, with much success curatively. As a remedy, the success has been far greater in the Martineau case than in others. With Miss Mitford's maid, the sleep is, however, produced; and the girl professed, at the third *seance*, to be able to *see behind her*.

I am glad I have so much interesting matter to look forward to in the 'Eldon Memoirs' as Pincher's biography. I am only in the first volume. Are English chancellors really made of such stuff? I couldn't have thought it. Pincher will help to reconcile me to the Law Lords perhaps.

And, to turn from Tory legislators, I am vainglorious in announcing to you that the Anti-Corn-Law League has taken up my poems on the top of its pikes as antithetic to 'War and Monopoly.' Have I not had a sonnet from Gutter Lane? And has not the journal called the 'League' reviewed me into the third heaven, high up—above the pure ether of

the five points? Yes, indeed. Of course I should be a (magna) chartist for evermore, even without the previous predilection.

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And what do you and Mrs. Martin say about O'Connell? Did you read last Saturday's 'Examiner'? Tell her that I welcomed her kind letter heartily, and that this is an answer to both of you. My best love to her always. May God bless you, dear Mr. Martin! Probably I have written your patience to an end. If papa or anybody were in the room, I should have a remembrance for you.

I remain, myself,

Affectionately yours,
BA.

To Mrs. Martin Wednesday [December 1844].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Hardly had my letter gone to you yesterday, when your kind present and not *et* arrived. I thank you for my boots with more than the warmth of the worsted, and feel all their merits to my soul (each sole) while I thank you. A pair of boots or shoes which 'can't be kicked off' is something highly desirable for me, in Wilson's opinion; and this is the first thing which struck *her*. But the 'great idea' 'a propos des bottes,' which occurred to myself, ought to be unspeakable, like Miss Martineau's great ideas—for I do believe it was—that I needn't have the trouble every morning, *now*, of putting on my stockings....

My voice is thawing too, with all the rest. If the cold had lasted I should have been dumb in a day or two more, and as it was, I was forced to refuse to see Mrs. Jameson (who had the goodness to come again) because I couldn't speak much above my breath. But I was tolerably well and brave upon the whole. Oh, these murderous English winters. The wonder is, how anybody can live through them....

Did I tell you, or Mr. Martin, that Rogers the poet, at eighty-three or four years of age, bore the bank robbery[119] with the light-hearted bearing of a man 'young and bold,' went out to dinner two or three times the same week, and said witty things on his own griefs. One of the other partners went to bed instead, and was not likely, I heard, to 'get over it.' I felt quite glad and proud for Rogers. He was in Germany last year, and this summer in Paris; but he *first* went to see Wordsworth at the Lakes.

It is a fine thing when a light burns so clear down into the socket, isn't it? I, who am not a devout admirer of the 'Pleasures of Memory,' do admire this perpetual youth and untired energy; it is a fine thing to my mind. Then, there are other noble characteristics about this Rogers. A common friend said the other day to Mr. Kenyon, 'Rogers hates me, I know. He is always saying bitter speeches in relation to me, and yesterday he said so and so. *But*,' he continued, 'if I were in distress, there is one man in the world to whom I would go without doubt and without hesitation, at once, and as to a brother, and *that* man is *Rogers*.' Not that I would choose to be obliged to a man who hated me; but it is an illustration of the fact that if Rogers is bitter in his words, which we all know he is,

he is always benevolent and generous in his deeds. He makes an epigram on a man, and gives him a thousand pounds; and the deed is the truer expression of his own nature. An uncommon development of character, in any case.

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May God bless you both!

Your most affectionate
BA.

I am going to tell you, in an antithesis, of the popularising of my poems. I had a sonnet the other day from Gutter Lane, Cheapside, and I heard that Count d'Orsay had written one of the stanzas of 'Crowned and Buried' at the bottom of an engraving of Napoleon which hangs in his room. Now I allow you to laugh at my vaingloriousness, and then you may pin it to Mrs. Best's satisfaction in the dedication to Dowager Majesty. By the way—no, out of the way—it is whispered that when Queen Victoria goes to Strathfieldsea[120] (how do you spell it?) she means to visit Miss Mitford, to which rumour Miss Mitford (being that rare creature, a sensible woman) says: 'May God forbid.'

[Footnote 119: A great robbery from Rogers' bank on November 23, 1844, in which the thieves carried off 40,000L worth of notes, besides specie and securities.]

[Footnote 120: Strathfieldsaye, the Duke of Wellington's house.]

To John Kenyan Wednesday morning [about December 1844].

I thank you, my dear cousin, and did so silently the day before yesterday, when you were kind enough to bring me the review and write the good news in pencil. I should be delighted to see you (this is to certify) notwithstanding the frost; only my voice having suffered, and being the ghost of itself, you might find it difficult to *hear* me without inconvenience. Which is for *you* to consider, and not for *me*. And indeed the fog, in addition to the cold, makes it inexpedient for anyone to leave the house except upon business and compulsion.

Oh no—we need not mind any scorn which assails Tennyson and *us* together. There is a dishonor that does honor—and 'this is of it.' I never heard of Barnes.[121]

Were you aware that the review you brought was in a newspaper called the 'League,' and laudatory to the utmost extravagance—praising us too for courage in opposing 'war and monopoly'?—the 'corn ships in the offing' being duly named. I have heard that it is probably written by Mr. Cobden himself, who writes for the journal in question, and is an enthusiast in poetry. If I thought so to the point of conviction, *do you know, I should be very much pleased*? You remember that I am a sort of (magna) chartist—only going a little farther!

Flush was properly ashamed of himself when he came upstairs again for his most ungrateful, inexplicable conduct towards you; and I lectured him well; and upon asking him to 'promise never to behave ill to you again,' he kissed my hands and wagged his

tail most emphatically. It altogether amounted to an oath, I think. The truth is that Flush's nervous system rather than his temper was in fault, and that, in that great cloak, he saw you as in a cloudy mystery. And then, when you stumbled over the bell rope, he thought the world was come to an end. He is not accustomed, you see, to the vicissitudes of life. Try to forgive him and me—for his ingratitude seems to 'strike through' to me; and I am not without remorse.

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Ever most affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

I inclose Mr. Chorley's note which you left behind you, but which I did not see until just now. *You* know that I am not ashamed of '*progress*.' On the contrary, my only hope is in it. But the question is not *there*, nor, I think, for the public, except in cases of ripe, established reputations, as I said before.

[Footnote 121: William Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, the first part of whose *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect* appeared in 1844.]

To Mr. Westwood (On returning some illustrations of Spenser by Mr. Woods) December 11, 1844.

... With many thanks, cordial and true, I thank you for the pleasure I have enjoyed in connection with these proofs of genius. To be honest, it is my own personal opinion (I give it to you for as much as it is worth—not much!) that many of the subjects of these drawings are unfit for graphic representation. What we can bear to see in the poet's vision, and sustained on the wings of his divine music, we shrink from a little when brought face to face with, as drawn out in black and white. You will understand what I mean. The horror and terror preponderate in the drawings, and what is sublime in the poet is apt to be extravagant in the artist—and this, not from a deficiency of power in the latter, but from a treading on ground forbidden except to the poet's foot. I may be wrong, perhaps—I do not pretend to be right. I only tell you (as you ask for them) what my impressions are.

I need not say that I wish all manner of success to your friend the artist, and laurels of the weight of gold while of the freshness of grass—alas! an impossible vegetable!—-fabulous as the Halcyon!

To H.S. Boyd Monday, December 24, 1844 [postmark].

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—I wish I had a note from you to-day—which optative aorist I am not sure of being either grammatical or reasonable! Perhaps you have expected to hear from *me* with more reason....

I fancied that you would be struck by Miss Martineau's lucid and able style. She is a very admirable woman—and the most logical intellect of the age, for a woman. On this account it is that the men throw stones at her, and that many of her own sex throw dirt; but if I begin on this subject I shall end by gnashing my teeth. A righteous indignation fastens on me. I had a note from her the other day, written in a noble spirit, and saying, in reference to the insults lavished on her, that she was prepared from the first for *publicity*, and ventured it all for the sake of what she considered the truth—she was sustained, she said, by the recollection of Godiva.

Do you remember who Godiva was—or shall I tell you? Think of it—Godiva of Coventry, and peeping Tom. The worst and basest is, that in this nineteenth century there are thousands of Toms to one.

I think, however, myself, and with all my admiration for Miss Martineau, that her statement and her reasonings on it are not free from vagueness and apparent contradictions. She writes in a state of enthusiasm, and some of her expressions are naturally coloured by her mood of mind and nerve.

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May this Christmas give you ease and pleasantness, in various ways, my dearest friend! My Christmas wish for myself is to hear that you are well. I cannot bear to think of you suffering. Are the nights better? May God bless you. Shall you not think it a great thing if the poems go into a second edition within the twelvemonth? I am surprised at your not being satisfied. Consider what poetry is, and that four months have not passed since the publication of mine; and that, where poems have to make their way by force of *themselves*, and not of name nor of fashion, the first three months cannot present the period of the quickest sale. That must be for afterwards. Think of me on Christmas Day, as of one who gratefully loves you.

ELIBET.

A passing reference in a previous letter (above, p. 217) has told of the beginning of another friendship, which was to hold a large place in Miss Barrett's later life; and the next letter is the first now extant which was written to this new friend, Anna Jameson. Mrs. Jameson had not at this time written the works on sacred art with which her name is now chiefly associated; but she was already engaged in her long struggle to earn her livelihood by her pen. Her first work, 'The Diary of an Ennuyee' (1826), written before her marriage, had attracted considerable attention. Since then she had written her 'Characteristics of Women,' 'Essays on Shakespeare's Female Characters,' 'Visits and Sketches,' and a number of compilations of less importance. Quite recently she had been engaged to write handbooks to the public and private art galleries of London, and had so embarked on the career of art authorship in which her best work was done.

The beginning and end of the following letter are lost. The subject of it is the long and hostile comment which appeared in the 'Athenaeum' for December 28 on Miss Martineau's letters on mesmerism.

To Mrs. Jameson [End of December 1844.]

... For the 'Athenaeum,' I have always held it as a journal, first—in the very first rank—-both in ability and integrity; and knowing Mr. Dilke *is* the 'Athenaeum,' I could make no mistake in my estimation of himself. I have personal reasons for gratitude to both him and his journal, and I have always felt that it was honorable to me to have them. Also, I do not at all think that because a woman is a woman, she is on that account to be spared the ordinary risks of the arena in literature and philosophy. I think no such thing. Logical chivalry would be still more radically debasing to us than any other. It is not therefore at all as a Harriet Martineau, but as a thinking and feeling Martineau (now *don't* laugh), that I hold her to have been hardly used in the late controversy. And, if you don't laugh at *that*, don't be too grave either, with the thought of your own share and position in the matter; because, as must be obvious to everyone (yourself included), you did everything

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possible to you to prevent the catastrophe, and no man and no friend could have done better. My brother George told me of his conversation with you at Mr. Lough's, but *are* you not mistaken in fancying that she blames you, that she is cold with you? I really think you must be. Why, if she is displeased with you she must be unjust, *and is she ever unjust*? I ask you. *I* should imagine not, but then, with all my insolence of talking of her as my friend, I only admire and love her at a distance, in her books and in her letters, and do not know her face to face, and in living womanhood at all. She wrote to me once, and since we have corresponded; and as in her kindness she has called me her friend, I leap hastily at an unripe fruit, perhaps, and echo back the word. She is your friend in a completer, or, at least, a more ordinary sense; and indeed it is impossible for me to believe without strong evidence that she could cease to be your friend on such grounds as are apparent. Perhaps she does not write because she cannot contain her wrath against Mr. Dilke (which, between ourselves, she cannot, very well), and respects your connection and regard for him. Is not *that* a 'peradventure' worth considering? I am sure that you have no *right* to be uneasy in any case.

And now I do not like to send you this letter without telling you my impression about mesmerism, lest I seem reserved and 'afraid of committing myself,' as prudent people are. I will confess, then, that my *impression* is in favour of the reality of mesmerism to some unknown extent. I particularly dislike believing it, I would rather believe most other things in the world; but the evidence of the 'cloud of witnesses' does thunder and lightning so in my ears and eyes, that I believe, while my blood runs cold. I would not be practised upon—no, not for one of Flushie's ears, and I hate the whole theory. It is hideous to my imagination, especially what is called phrenological mesmerism. After all, however, truth is to be accepted; and testimony, when so various and decisive, is an ascertainer of truth. Now do not tell Mr. Dilke, lest he excommunicate me.

But I will not pity you for the increase of occupation produced by an increase of such comfort as your mother's and sister's presence must give. What it will be for you to have a branch to sun yourself on, after a long flight against the wind!

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: January 3, 1845.

Dear Mr. Chorley,—I hope it will not be transgressing very much against the etiquette of journalism, or against the individual delicacy which is of more consequence to both of us, if I venture to thank you by one word for the pages which relate to me in your excellent article in the 'New Quarterly.' It is not my habit to thank or to remonstrate with my reviewers, and indeed I believe I may tell you that I never wrote to thank anyone before on these grounds. I could not thank anyone for praising

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me—I would not thank him for praising me against his conscience; and if he praised me to the measure of his conscience only, I should have little (as far as the praise went) to thank him for. Therefore I do not thank you for the praise in your article, but for the kind cordial spirit which pervades both praise and blame, for the willingness in praising, and for the gentleness in finding fault; for the encouragement without unseemly exaggeration, and for the criticisms without critical scorn. Allow me to thank you for these things and for the pleasure I have received by their means. I am bold to do it, because I hear that you confess the reviewership; and am the bolder, because I recognised your hand in an act of somewhat similar kindness in the 'Athenaeum' at the first appearance of the poems.

While I am writing of the 'New Quarterly,' I take the liberty of making a remark, not of course in relation to myself—I know too well my duty to my judges—but to your view of the Vantage ground of the poetesses of England. It is a strong impression with me that previous to Joanna Baillie there was no such thing in England as a poetess; and that so far from triumphing over the rest of the world in that particular product, we lay until then under the feet of the world. We hear of a Marie in Brittany who sang songs worthy to be mixed with Chaucer's for true poetic sweetness, and in Italy a Vittoria Colonna sang her noble sonnets. But in England, where is our poetess before Joanna Baillie—poetess in the true sense? Lady Winchilsea had an *eye*, as Wordsworth found out; but the Duchess of Newcastle had more poetry in her—the comparative praise proving the negative position—than Lady Winchilsea. And when you say of the French, that they have only epistolary women and wits, while we have our Lady Mary, why what would Lady Mary be to us *but* for her letters and her wit? Not a poetess, surely! unless we accept for poetry her graceful *vers de societe*.

Do forgive me if an impulse has carried me too far. It has been long 'a fact,' to my view of the matter, that Joanna Baillie is the first female poet in all senses in England; and I fell with the whole weight of fact and theory against the edge of your article.

I recall myself now to my first intention of being simply, but not silently, grateful to you; and entreating you to pardon this letter too quickly to think it necessary-to answer it....

I remain, very truly yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: January 7, 1845.

Dear Mr. Chorley,—You are very good to deign to answer my impertinences, and not to be disgusted by my defamations of 'the grandmothers,' and (to diminish my perversity in your eyes) I am ready to admit at once that we are generally too apt to run into

premature classification—the error of all imperfect knowledge; and into unreasonable exclusiveness—the vice of it. We spoil

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the shining surface of life by our black lines drawn through and through, as if ominously for a game of the fox and goose. For my part, however imperfect my practice may be, I am intimately convinced—and more and more since my long seclusion—that to live in a house with windows on every side, so as to catch both the morning and evening sunshine, is the best and brightest thing we have to do—to say nothing about the justest and wisest. Sympathies are our opportunities of good.

Moreover, I know nothing of your 'sweet mistress Anne.'[122] I never read a verse of hers. Ignorance goes for much, you see, in all our mal-criticisms, and my ignorance goes to this extent. I cannot write to you of your Anglo-American poetess.

Also, in my sweeping speech about the grandmothers, I should have stopped before such instances as the exquisite ballad of 'Auld Robin Gray,' which is attributed to a woman, and the pathetic 'Ballow my Babe,' which tradition calls 'Lady Anne Bothwell's Lament.' I have certain doubts of my own, indeed, in relation to both origins, and with regard to 'Robin Gray' in particular; but doubts are not worthy stuff enough to be taken into an argument, and certainly, therefore, I should have admitted those two ballads as worthy poems before the *Joannan aera*.

For what I ventured to say otherwise, would you not consent to join our sympathies, and receive the 'choir' (ah! but you are very cunningly subtle in your distinctions; I am afraid I was too simple for you) as agreeable writers of verses sometimes, leaving the word *poet* alone? Because, you see, what you call the 'bad dispensation' by no means accounts for the want of the faculty of poetry, strictly so called. England has had many learned women, not merely readers but writers of the learned languages, in Elizabeth's time and afterwards—women of deeper acquirements than are common now in the greater diffusion of letters; and yet where were the poetesses? The divine breath which seemed to come and go, and, ere it went, filled the land with that crowd of true poets whom we call the old dramatists—why did it never pass, even in the lyrical form, over the lips of a woman? How strange! And can we deny that it was so? I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none. It is not in the filial spirit I am deficient, I do assure you—witness my reverent love of the grandfathers!

Seriously, I do not presume to enter into argument with you, and this in relation to a critical paper which I admire in so many ways and am grateful for in some; but is not the poet a different man from the cleverest versifier, and is it not well for the world to be taught the difference? The divineness of poetry is far more to me than either pride of sex or personal pride, and, though willing to acknowledge the lowest breath of the inspiration, I cannot the 'powder and patch.' As powder and patch I may, but not as poetry. And though I in turn may suffer for this myself—though I too (*anch' io*) may be turned out of 'Arcadia,' and told that I am not a poet, still, I should be content, I hope,

that the divineness of poetry be proved in my humanness, rather than lowered to my uses.

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But you shall not think me exclusive. Of poor L.E.L., for instance, I could write with *more* praiseful appreciation than you can. It appears to me that she had the gift—-though in certain respects she dishonored the art—and her latter lyrics are, many of them, of great beauty and melody, such as, having once touched the ear of a reader, live on in it. I observe in your 'Life of Mrs. Hemans' (shall I tell you how often I have read those volumes?) she (Mrs. H.) never appears, in any given letter or recorded opinion, to esteem her contemporary. The antagonism lay, probably, in the higher parts of Mrs. Hemans's character and mind, and we are not to wonder at it.

It is very pleasant to me to have your approbation of the sonnets on George Sand, on the points of feeling and lightness, on which all my readers have not absolved me equally, I have reason to know. I am more a latitudinarian in literature than it is generally thought expedient for women to be; and I have that admiration for *genius*, which dear Mr. Kenyon calls my 'immoral sympathy with power;' and if Madame Dudevant[123] is not the first female genius of any country or age, I really do not know who is. And then she has certain noblenesses—granting all the evil and 'perilous stuff'—noblenesses and royalnesses which make me loyal. Do pardon me for intruding all this on you, though you cannot justify me—*you*, who are occupied beyond measure, and *I*, who know it! I have been under the delusion, too, during this writing, of having something like a friend's claim to write and be troublesome. I have lived so near your friends that I keep the odour of them! A mere delusion, alas! my only personal right in respect to you being one that I am not likely to forget or waive—the right of being grateful to you.

But so, and looking again at the last words of your letter, I see that you 'wish,' in the kindest of words, 'to do something more for me.' I hope some day to take this 'something more' of your kindness out in the pleasure of personal intercourse; and if, in the meantime, you should consent to flatter my delusion by letting me hear from you now and then, if ever you have a moment to waste and inclination to waste it, why I, on my side, shall always be ready to thank you for the 'something more' of kindness, as bound in the duty of gratitude. In any case I remain

Truly and faithfully yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 122: Probably Miss Anne Seward, a minor poetess who enjoyed considerable popularity at the end of the eighteenth century. Her elegies on Captain Cook and Major Andre went through several editions, as did her *Louisa*, a poetical novel, a class of composition in which she was the predecessor of Mrs. Browning herself. Her collected poetical works were edited after her death by Sir Walter Scott (1810).]

[Footnote 123: The real name of George Sand.]

To Mr. Chorley [*The beginning of this letter is lost*] [1845]

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... to the awful consideration of the possibility of my reading a novel or caring for the story of it (*proh pudor!*), that I am probably, not to say certainly, the most complete and unscrupulous romance reader within your knowledge. Never was a child who cared more for 'a story' than I do; never even did I myself, *as* a child, care more for it than I do. My love of fiction began with my breath, and will end with it; and goes on increasing; and the heights and depths of the consumption which it has induced you may guess at perhaps, but it is a sublime idea from its vastness, and will gain on you but slowly. On my tombstone may be written '*Ci-git* the greatest novel reader in the world,' and nobody will forbid the inscription; and I approve of Gray's notion of paradise more than of his lyrics, when he suggests the reading of romances ever new, [Greek: *eis tous aionas*.] Are you shocked at me? Perhaps so. And you see I make no excuses, as an invalid might. Invalid or not, I should have a romance in a drawer, if not behind a pillow, and I might as well be true and say so. There is the love of literature, which is one thing, and the love of fiction, which is another. And then, I am not fastidious, as Mrs. Hemans was, in her high purity, and therefore the two loves have a race-course clear.

This is a long preface to coming to speak of the 'Improvisatore.'[124] I had sent for it already to the library, and shall dun them for it twice as much for the sake of what you say. Only I hope I may care for the story. I shall try.

And for the *rococo*, I have more feeling for it, in a sense, than I once had, for, some two years ago, I passed through a long dynasty of French memoirs, which made me feel quite differently about the littlenesses of greatnesses. I measured them all from the heights of the 'tabouret,'[125] and was a good Duchess, in the 'non-natural' meaning, for the moment. Those memoirs are charming of their kind, and if life were cut in filagree paper would be profitable reading to the soul. Do you not think so? And you mean besides, probably, that you care for *beauty in detail*, which we all should do if our senses were better educated.

So the confession is not a dreadful one, after all, and mine may involve more evil, and would to ninety-nine out of a hundred 'sensible and cultivated people.' Think what Mrs. Ellis would say to the 'Women of England' about me in her fifteenth edition, if she knew!

And do *you* know that dear Miss Mitford spent this day week with me, notwithstanding the rain?

Very truly yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

I have forgotten what I particularly wished to say—viz. that I never thought of *expecting* to hear from you. I understand that when you write it is pure grace, and never to be expected. You have too much to do, I understand perfectly.

The east wind seems to be blowing all my letters about to-day; the *t's* and *e's* wave like willows. Now if crooked *e's* mean a 'greenshade' (not taken rurally), what awful significance can have the whole crooked alphabet?

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[Footnote 124: By Hans Andersen; an English translation by Mary Howitt was published in 1845.]

[Footnote 125: Duchesses in the French court had the privilege of seating themselves on a *tabouret* or stool while the King took his meals; hence the *droit du tabouret* comes to mean the rank of a duchess.]

To Mrs. Martin Saturday, January 1844 [should be 1845].[126]

I must tell you, my dearest Mrs. Martin, Mr. Kenyon has read to me an extract from a private letter addressed by H. Martineau to Moxon the publisher, to the effect that Lord Morpeth was down on his knees in the middle of the room a few nights ago, in the presence of the somnambule J., and conversing with her in Greek and Latin, that the four Miss Liddels were also present, and that they five talked to her during one *seance* in five foreign languages, *viz*. Latin, Greek, French, Italian, and German. When the mesmeriser touches the organ of *imitation* on J.'s head, while the strange tongue is in the course of being addressed to her, she translates into English word for word what is said; but when the organ of *language* is touched, she simply answers in English what is said.

My 'few words of comment' upon this are, that I feel to be more and more standing on my head—which does not mean, you will be pleased to observe, that I understand.

Well, and how are you both going on? My voice is quite returned; and papa continues, I am sorry to say, to have a bad cold and cough. He means to stay in the house to-day and try what prudence will do.

We have heard from Henry, at Alexandria still, but a few days before sailing, and he and Stormie are bringing home, as a companion to Flushie, a beautiful little gazelle. What do you think of it? I would rather have it than the 'babby,' though the flourish of trumpets on the part of the possessors seems quite in favor of the latter.

And I had a letter from Browning the poet last night, which threw me into ecstasies—-Browning, the author of 'Paracelsus,' and king of the mystics.

[*The rest of this letter is missing*.]

[Footnote 126: The mention of her brothers being at Alexandria is sufficient to show that 1845 must be the true date.]

To Mrs. Martin Saturday, January 1845.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I believe our last letters crossed, and we might draw lots for the turn of receiving one, so that you are to take it for supererogatory virtue in me altogether if I begin to write to you as 'at these presents.' But I want to know how you

both are, and if your last account may continue to be considered the true one. You have been poising yourself on the equal balance of letters, as weak consciences are apt to do, but I write that you may write, and also, a little, that I may thank you for the kindness of your last letter, which was so very kind.

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No, indeed, dearest Mrs. Martin. If I do not say oftener that I have a strong and grateful trust in your affection for me, and therefore in your interest in all that concerns me, it is not that it is less strong and grateful. What I said or sang of Miss Martineau's letter was no consequence of a distrust of *you*, but of a feeling within myself that for me to show about such a letter was scarcely becoming, and, in the matter of modesty, nowise discreet. I suppose I was writing excuses to myself for showing it to you. I cannot otherwise account for the saying and singing. And, for the rest, nobody can say or sing that I am not frank enough to you—to the extent of telling all manner of nonsense about myself which can only be supposed to be interesting on the ground of your being presupposed to care a little for the person concerned. Now am I not frank enough? And by the way, I send you 'The Seraphim'[127] at last, by this day's railroad.

Thursday.

To prove to you that I had not forgotten you before your letter came, here is the fragment of an unfinished one which I send you, to begin with—an imperfect fossil letter, which no comparative anatomy will bring much sense out of—except the plain fact *that you were not forgotten*....

From Alexandria we heard yesterday that they sailed from thence on the first of January, and the home passage may be long.

The *changes* in Mary Minto on account of mesmerism were merely imaginary as far as I can understand. Nobody here observed any change in her. Oh no. These things will be fancied sometimes. That she is an enthusiastic girl, and that the subject took strong hold upon her, is true enough, and not the least in the world—according to my mind—to be wondered at. By the way, I had a letter and the present of a work on mesmerism—-Mr. Newnham's—from his daughter, who sent it to me the other day, in the kindest way, 'out of gratitude for my poetry,' as she says, and from a desire that it might do me physical good in the matter of health. I do not at all know her. I wrote to thank her, of course, for the kindness and sympathy which, as she expressed them, quite touched me; and to explain how I did not stand in reach just now of the temptations of mesmerism. I might have said that I shrank nearly as much from these 'temptations' as from Lord Bacon's stew of infant children for the purposes of witchcraft.

Well, then, I am getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and mystic, and we are growing to be the truest of friends. If I live a little longer shut up in this room, I shall certainly know everybody in the world. Mrs. Jameson came again yesterday, and was very agreeable, but tried vainly to convince me that the 'Vestiges of Creation,' which I take to be one of the most melancholy books in the world, is the most comforting, and that Lady Byron was an angel of a wife. I persisted (in relation to the former clause) in a

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‘determinate counsel’ not to be a fully developed monkey if I could help it, but when Mrs. J. assured me that she knew all the circumstances of the separation, though she could not betray a confidence, and entreated me ‘to keep my mind open’ on a subject which would one day be set in the light, I stroked down my feathers as well as I could, and listened to reason. You know—or perhaps you do *not* know—that there are two women whom I have hated all my life long—*Lady Byron and Marie Louise*. To prove how false the public effigy of the former is, however, Mrs. Jameson told me that she knew *nothing of mathematics, nothing of science*, and that the element preponderating in her mind is the *poetical* element—that she cares much for *my* poetry! How deep in the knowledge of the depths of vanity must Mrs. J. be, to tell me *that*—now mustn’t she? But there was—yes, and is—a strong adverse feeling to work upon, and it is not worked away.

Then, I have seen a copy of a note of Lord Morpeth to H. Martineau, to the effect that he considered the mesmeric phenomena witnessed by him (inclusive, remember, of the *languages*) to be ’equally beautiful, wonderful, and *undeniable*’ but he is prudent enough to desire that no use should be made of this letter ... And now no more for to-day.

With love to Mr. Martin, ever believe me
Your affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 127: A copy of the 1838 volume for which Mrs. Martin had asked.]

To John Kenyan Saturday, February 8, 1845.

I return to you, dearest Mr. Kenyon, the two numbers of Jerold Douglas’s[128] magazine, and I wish ‘by that same sign’ I could invoke your presence and advice on a letter I received this morning. You never would guess what it is, and you will wonder when I tell you that it offers a request from the *Leeds Ladies’ Committee*, authorised and backed by the London *General Council of the League*, to your cousin Ba, that she would write them a poem for the Corn Law Bazaar to be holden at Covent Garden next May. Now my heart is with the cause, and my vanity besides, perhaps, for I do not deny that I am pleased with the request so made, and if left to myself I should be likely at once to say ‘yes,’ and write an agricultural-evil poem to complete the factory-evil poem into a national-evil circle. And I do not myself see how it would be implicating my name with a political party to the extent of wearing a badge. The League is not a party, but ’the meeting of the waters’ of several parties, and I am trying to persuade papa’s Whiggery that I may make a poem which will be a fair exponent of the actual grievance, leaving the remedy free for the hands of fixed-duty men like him, or free-trade women like myself. As to wearing the badge of a party, either in politics or religion, I may say that never in my life was I so far from coveting such a thing. And then poetry breathes in

another outer air. And then there is not an existent set of any-kind-of-politics I could agree with if I tried—*I*, who am a sort of fossil republican! You shall see the letters when you come. Remember what the ‘League’ newspaper said of the ’Cry of the Children.’

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Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 128: Evidently a slip of the pen for Douglas Jerrold, whose 'Shilling Magazine' began to come out in 1845.]

To Miss Commeline 50 Wimpole Street: [February-March 1845].

My dear Miss Commeline,—I do hope that you will allow me to appear to remember you as I never have ceased to do in reality, and at a time when sympathy of friends is generally acceptable, to offer you mine as if I had some right of friendship to do so. And I am encouraged the more to attempt this because I never shall forget that in the hour of the bitterest agony of my life your brother wrote me a letter which, although I did not read it, I was too ill and distracted, I was yet shown the outside of some months afterwards and enabled to appreciate the sympathy fully. Such a kindness could not fail to keep alive in me (if the need of keeping alive *were*!) the memory of the various kindnesses received by me and mine from all your family, nor fail to excite me to desire to impress upon you my remembrance of *you* and my regard, and the interest with which I hear of your joys and sorrows whenever they are large enough to be seen from such a distance. Try to believe this of me, dear Miss Commeline, yourself, and let your sisters and your brother believe it also. If sorrow in its reaction makes us think of our friends, let my name come among the list of yours to you, and with it let the thought come that I am not the coldest and least sincere. May God bless and comfort you, I say, with a full heart, knowing what afflictions like yours are and must be, but confident besides that 'we know not what we do' in weeping for the dearest. In our sorrow we see the rough side of the stuff; in our joys the smooth; and who shall say that when the taffeta is turned the most *silk* may not be in the sorrows? It is true, however, that sorrows are heavy, and that sometimes the conditions of life (which sorrows are) seem hard to us and overcoming, and I believe that much suffering is necessary before we come to learn that the world is a good place to live in and a good place to die in for even the most affectionate and sensitive.

How glad I should be to hear from you some day, when it is not burdensome for you to write at length and fully concerning all of you—of your sister Maria, and of Laura, and of your brother, and of all your occupations and plans, and whether it enters into your dreams, not to say plans, ever to come to London, or to follow the track of your many neighbours across the seas, perhaps....

For ourselves we have the happiness of seeing our dear papa so well, that I am almost justified in fancying happily that you would not think him altered. He has perpetual youth like the gods, and I may make affidavit to your brother nevertheless that we never boiled him up to it. Also his spirits are good and his 'step on the stair' so light as to comfort me for not being able to run up and down

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them myself. I am essentially better in health, but remain weak and shattered and at the mercy of a breath of air through a crevice; and thus the unusually severe winter has left me somewhat lower than usual without surprising anybody. Henrietta and Arabel are quite well and at home; George on circuit, always obliged by your proffered hospitality; and Charles John and Henry returning from a voyage to Alexandria in papa's own vessel, the 'Statira.' I set you an imperfect example of egotism, and hope that you will double my *I's* and *we's*, and kindly trust to me for being interested in yours....

Yours affectionately,
E.B. BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd Saturday, March 3, 1845.

My dearest Friend,—I am aware that I should have written to you before, but the cold weather is apt to disable me and to make me feel idle when it does not do so quite. Now I am going to write about your remarks on the 'Dublin Review.'

Certainly I agree with you that there can be no necessity for explaining anything about the tutorship if you do not kick against the pricks of the insinuation yourself, and especially as I consider that you *were* in a sense my 'tutor,' inasmuch as I may say, both that nobody ever taught me so much Greek as you, and also that without you I should have probably lived and died without any knowledge of the Greek Fathers. The Greek classics I should have studied by love and instinct; but the Fathers would probably have remained in their sepulchres, as far as my reading them was concerned. Therefore, very gratefully do I turn to you as my 'tutor' in the best sense, and the more persons call you so, the better it is for the pleasures of my gratitude. The review amused me by hitting on the right meaning there, and besides by its percipiency about your remembering me during your travels in the East, and sending me home the Cyprus wine. Some of these reviewers have a wonderful gift at inferences. The 'Metropolitan Magazine' for March (which is to be sent to you when papa has read it) contains a flaming article in my favour, calling me 'the friend of Wordsworth,' and, moreover, a very little lower than the angels. You shall see it soon, and it is only just out, of course, being the March number. The praise is beyond thanking for, and then I do not know whom to thank—I cannot at all guess at the writer.

I have had a kind note from Lord Teynham, whose oblivion I had ceased to doubt, it seemed so *proved* to me that he had forgotten me. But he writes kindly, and it gave me pleasure to have some sign of recollection, if not of regard, from one whom I consider with unalterable and grateful respect, and shall always, although I am aware that he denies all sympathy to my works and ways in literature and the world. In fact, and to set my poetry aside, he has joined that 'strait sect' of the Plymouth Brethren, and, of course, has straitened his views since we met, and I, by the reaction of solitude and suffering,

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have broken many bands which held me at that time. He was always straiter than I, and now the difference is immense. For I think the world wider than I once thought it, and I see God's love broader than I once saw it. To the 'Touch not, taste not, handle not' of the strict religionists, I feel inclined to cry, 'Touch, taste, handle, *all things are pure*.' But I am writing this for you and not for him, and you probably will agree with me, if you think as you used to think, at least.

But I do not agree with *you* on the League question, nor on the woman question connected with it, only we will not quarrel to-day, and I have written enough already without an argument at the end.

Can you guess what I have been doing lately? Washing out my conscience, effacing the blot on my escutcheon, performing an expiation, translating over again from the Greek the 'Prometheus' of Aeschylus.

Yes, my very dear friend, I could not bear to let that frigid, rigid exercise, called a version and called mine, cold as Caucasus, and flat as the neighbouring plain, stand as my work. A palinodia, a recantation was necessary to me, and I have achieved it. Do you blame me or not? Perhaps I may print it in a magazine, but this is not decided. How delighted I am to think of your being well. It makes me very happy.

Your ever affectionate and grateful
ELIBET.

To Mr. Westwood March 4, 1845.

I reproach myself, dear Mr. W., for my silence, and began to do so before your kind note reminded me of its unkindness. I had indeed my pen in my hand three days ago to write to you, but a cross fate plucked at my sleeve for the ninety-ninth time, and left me guilty. And you do not write to reproach me! You only avenge yourself softly by keeping back all news of your health, and by not saying a word of the effect on you of the winter which has done its spiriting so ungently. Which brings me down to myself. For somebody has been dreaming of me, and dreams, you know, must go by contraries. And how could it be otherwise? Although I am on the whole essentially better—on the whole!—yet the peculiar severity of the winter has acted on me, and the truth is that for the last month, precisely the last month, I have been feeling (off and on, as people say) very uncomfortable. Not that I am essentially worse, but essentially better, on the contrary, only that the feeling of discomfort and trouble at the heart (physically) *will* come with the fall of the thermometer, and the voice will go!...

And then I have another question to enunciate—will the oracle answer?

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Do you know *who wrote the article in the 'Metropolitan'*? Beseech you, answer me. I have a suspicion, true, that the critics have been supernaturally kind to me, but the kindness of this 'Metropolitan' critic so passes the ordinary limit of kindness, metropolitan or critical, that I cannot but look among my personal friends for the writer of the article. Coming to personal friends, I reject one on one ground and one on another—for one the graciousness is too graceful, and for another the grace almost too gracious. I am puzzled and dizzy with doubt; and—is it you? Answer me, will you? If so, I should owe so much gratitude to you. Suffer me to pay it!—permit the pleasure to me of paying it!—for I know too much of the pleasures of gratitude to be willing to lose one of them.

To John Kenyan March 6, [1845].

Thank you, dearest Mr. Kenyon—they are very fine. The poetry is in *them*, rather than in Blair. And now I send them back, and Cunningham and Jerrold, with thanks on thanks; and if you will be kind enough not to insist on my reading the letters to Travis[129] within the 'hour,' they shall wait for the 'Responsibility,' and the two go to you together.

And as to the tiring, it has not been much, and the happy day was well worth being tired *for*. It is better to be tired with pleasure than with frost; and if I have the last fatigue too, why it is March, and it is the hour of my martyrdom always. But I am not ill—only uncomfortable.

Ah, the 'relenting'! it is rather a bad sign, I am afraid; notwithstanding the subtilty of your consolations; but I stroke down my philosophy, to make it shine, like a cat's back in the dark. The argument from more deserving poets who prosper less is not very comforting, is it? I trow not.

But as to the review, be sure—be very sure that it is not Mr. Browning's. How you could *think* even of Mr. Browning, surprises me. Now, as for me, I know as well *as he does himself* that he has had nothing to do with it.

I should rather suspect Mr. Westwood, the author of some fugitive poems, who writes to me sometimes; and the suspicion having occurred to me, I have written to put the question directly. You shall hear, if I hear in reply.

May God bless you always. I have heard from dear Miss Mitford.

Ever affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 129: By Porson, on the authenticity of I John v. 7.]

To H.S. Boyd March 29, 1845 [postmark].

My dearest Mr. Boyd,—As Arabel has written out for you the glorification of ’Peter of York,’[130] I shall use an edge of the same paper to ‘fall on your sense’ with my gratitude about the Cyprus wine. Indeed, I could almost upbraid you for sending me another bottle. It is most supererogatory kindness in you to think of such a thing. And I accept it, nevertheless, with thanks instead of remonstrances, and promise you to drink your health in and the spring in together, and the east wind out, if you do not object to it. I have been better for several days, but my heart is not yet very orderly—not being able to recover the veins, I suppose, all in a moment.

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For the rest, you always mean what is right and affectionate, and I am not apt to mistake your meanings in this respect. Be indulgent to me as far as you can, when it appears to you that I sink far below your religious standard, as I am sure I must do oftener than you remind me. Also, it certainly does appear, to my mind, that we are not, as Christians, called to the exclusive expression of Christian doctrine, either in poetry or prose. All truth and all beauty and all music belong to God—He is in all things; and in speaking of all, we speak of Him. In poetry, which includes all things, 'the diapason closeth full in God.' I would not lose a note of the lyre, and whatever He has included in His creation I take to be holy subject enough for *me*. That I am blamed for this view by many, I know, but I cannot see it otherwise, and when you pay your visit to 'Peter of York' and me, and are able to talk everything over, we shall agree tolerably well, I do not doubt.

Ah, what a dream! What a thought! Too good even to come true!

I did not think that you would much like the 'Duchess May;' but among the *profanum vulgus* you cannot think how successful it has been. There was an account in one of the fugitive reviews of a lady falling into hysterics on the perusal of it, although *that* was nothing to the gush of tears of which there is a tradition, down the Plutonian cheeks of a lawyer unknown, over 'Bertha in the Lane.' But these things should not make anybody vain. It is the *story* that has power with people, just what *you* do not care for!

About the reviews you ask a difficult question; but I suppose the best, as reviews, are the 'Dublin Review,' 'Blackwood,' the 'New Quarterly,' and the last 'American,' I forget the title at this moment, the *Whig* 'American,' *not* the Democratic. The most favorable to me are certainly the American unremembered, and the late 'Metropolitan,' which last was written, I hear, by Mr. Charles Grant, a voluminous writer, but no poet. I consider myself singularly happy in my reviews, and to have full reason for gratitude to the profession.

I forgot to say that what the Dublin reviewer did me the honor of considering an Irishism was the expression 'Do you mind' in 'Cyprus Wine.' But he was wrong, because it occurs frequently among our elder English writers, and is as British as London porter.

Now see how you throw me into figurative liquids, by your last Cyprus. It is the true celestial, this last. But Arabel pleased me most by bringing back so good an account of *you*.

Your ever affectionate and grateful
ELIBET.

[Footnote 130: A monster bell for York Minster, then being exhibited at the Baker Street Bazaar. Mr. Boyd was an enthusiast on bells and bell ringing.]

To John Kenyan Friday [about January-March 1845].

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Dearest Mr. Kenyon,—If your good nature is still not at ease, through doubting about how to make Lizzy happy in a book, you will like to hear perhaps that I have thought of a certain 'Family Robinson Crusoe,' translated from the *German*, I think, *not* a Robinson *purified*, mind, but a Robinson multiplied and compounded.[131] Children like reading it, I believe. And then there is a 'Masterman Ready,' or some name like it, by Captain Marryat, also popular with young readers. Or 'Seaward's Narrative,' by Miss Porter, would delight her, as it did *me*, not so many years ago.

I mention these books, but know nothing of their price; and only because you asked me, I do mention them. The fact is that she is not hard to please as to literature, and will be delighted with anything.

To-day Mr. Poe sent me a volume containing his poems and tales collected, so now I *must* write and thank him for his dedication. What is to be said, I wonder, when a man calls you the 'noblest of your sex'? 'Sir, you are the most discerning of yours.' Were you thanked for the garden ticket yesterday? No, everybody was ungrateful, down to Flush, who drinks day by day out of his new purple cup, and had it properly explained how *you* gave it to him (*I* explained *that*), and yet never came upstairs to express to you his sense of obligation.

Affectionately yours always,
E.B.B.

[Footnote 131: No doubt *The Swiss Family Robinson*.]

To John Kenyan Saturday [beginning of April 1845].

My dearest Cousin,—After all *I/* said to *you*, said the other day, about Apuleius, and about what couldn't, shouldn't, and mustn't be done in the matter, I ended by trying the unlawful art of translating this prose into verse, and, one after another, have done all the subjects of the Poniatowsky gems Miss Thompson sent the list of, except *two*, which I am doing and shall finish anon.[132] In the meantime it comes into my head that it is just as well for you to look over my doings, and judge whether anything in them is to the purpose, or at all likely to be acceptable. Especially I am anxious to impress on you that, if I could think for a moment *you would hesitate about rejecting the whole in a body*, from any consideration for *me*, I should not merely be vexed but pained. Am I not your own cousin, to be ordered about as you please? And so take notice that I will not *bear* the remotest approach to ceremony in the matter. What is wrong? what is right? what is too much? those are the only considerations.

Apuleius is *florid*, which favored the poetical design on his sentences. Indeed he is more florid than I have always liked to make my verses. It is not, of course, an absolute translation, but as a running commentary on the text it is sufficiently faithful.

But probably (I say to myself) you do not want so many illustrations, and all too from one hand?

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The two I do not send are ‘Psyche contemplating Cupid asleep,’ and ‘Psyche and the Eagle.’

And I wait to hear how Polyphemus is to *look*—and also Adonis.

The Magazine goes to you with many thanks. The sonnet is full of force and expression, and I like it as well as ever I did—better even!

Oh—such happy news to-day! The ‘Statira’ is at Plymouth, and my brothers quite well, notwithstanding their hundred days on the sea! *It makes me happy*.

Yours most affectionately,
BA.

You shall have your ‘Radical’ almost immediately. I am ashamed. *In such haste*.

[Footnote 132: These versions were not published in Mrs. Browning’s lifetime, but were included in the posthumous *Last Poems* (1862). They now appear in the *Poetical Works*, v. 72-83.]

To H.S. Boyd April 3, 1845.

My very dear Friend,—I have been intending every day to write to tell you that the Cyprus wine is as nectareous as possible, so fit for the gods, in fact, that I have been forced to leave it off as unfit for *me*; it made me so feverish. But I keep it until the sun shall have made me a little less mortal; and in the meantime recognise thankfully both its high qualities and *your* kind ones. How delightful it is to have this sense of a summer at hand. *Shall* I see you this summer, I wonder. That is a question among my dreams.

By the last American packet I had two letters, one from a poet of Massachusetts, and another from a poetess: the *he*, Mr. Lowell, and the *she*, Mrs. Sigourney. She says that the sound of my poetry is stirring the ‘deep green forests of the New World;’ which sounds pleasantly, does it not? And I understand from Mr. Moxon that a new edition will be called for before very long, only not immediately....

Your affectionate and grateful friend,
ELIBET.

Arabel and Mr. Hunter talk of paying you a visit some day.

To Mrs. Martin April 3, 1845.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I wrote to you not many days ago, but I must tell you that our voyagers are safe in Sandgate break in ’an ugly hulk’ (as poor Stormie says despondingly), suffering three or four days of quarantine agony, and that we expect to

see them on Monday or Tuesday in the full bloom of their ill humour. I am happy to think, according to the present symptoms, that the mania for sea voyages is considerably abated. 'Nothing could be more miserable,' exclaims Storm; 'the only comfort of the whole four months is the safety of the beans, tell papa'—and the safety of the beans is rather a Pythagoraean[133] equivalent for four months' vexation, though not a bean of them all should have lost in freshness and value! He could scarcely write, he said, for the chilblains on his hands, and was in utter destitution of shirts and sheets. Oh! I have very good hopes that for the future Wimpole Street may be found endurable.

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Well, and you are at once angry and satisfied, I suppose, about Maynooth; just as I am! satisfied with the justice as far as it goes, and angry and disgusted at the hideous shrieks of intolerance and bigotry which run through the country. The dissenters have very nearly disgusted me, what with the Education clamour, and the Presbyterian chapel cry, and now this Maynooth cry; and certainly it is wonderful how people can see rights as rights in their own hands, and as wrongs in the hands of their opposite neighbours. Moreover it seems to me atrocious that we who insist on seven millions of Catholics supporting a church they call heretical, should *dare* to talk of our scruples (conscientious scruples forsooth!) about assisting with a poor pittance of very insufficient charity their 'damnable idolatry.' Why, every cry of complaint we utter is an argument against the wrong we have been committing for years and years, and must be so interpreted by every honest and disinterested thinker in the world. Of course I should prefer the Irish establishment coming down, to any endowment at all; I should prefer a trial of the voluntary system throughout Ireland; but as it is adjudged on all hands impossible to attempt this in the actual state of parties and countries, why this Maynooth grant and subsequent endowment of the Catholic Church in Ireland seem the simple alternative, obviously and on the first principles of justice. Macaulay was very great, was he not? He appeared to me *conclusive* in logic and sentiment. The sensation everywhere is extraordinary, I am sorry really to say!

Wordsworth is in London, having been commanded up to the Queen's ball. He went in Rogers's court dress, or did I tell you so the other day? And I hear that the fair Majesty of England was quite 'fluttered' at seeing him. 'She had not a word to say,' said Mrs. Jameson, who came to see me the other day and complained of the omission as 'unqueenly;' but I disagreed with her and thought the being '*fluttered*' far the highest compliment. But she told me that a short time ago the Queen confessed she never had read Wordsworth, on which a maid of honour observed, 'That is a pity, he would do your Majesty a great deal of good.' Mrs. Jameson declared that Miss Murray, a maid of honour, very deeply attached to the Queen, assured her (Mrs. J.) of the answer being quite as abrupt as *that*; as direct, and to the purpose; and no offence intended or received. I like Mrs. Jameson better the more I see her, and with grateful reason, she is so kind. Now do write directly, and let me hear of you [in d]etail. And tell Mr. Martin to make a point of coming home to us, with no grievances but political ones. The Bazaar is to be something sublime in its degree, and I shall have a sackcloth feeling all next week. All the rail carriages will be wound up to radiate into it, I hear, and the whole country is to be shot into the heart of London.

May God bless you.

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Your ever affectionate
BA.

I hear that Guizot suffers intensely, and that there are fears lest he may sink. Not that the complaint is mortal.

[Footnote 133: Referring to the Pythagorean doctrine of the sanctity of beans.]

To Mr. Westwood Wimpole Street: April 9, 1845.

Poor Hood! Ah! I had feared that the scene was closing on him. And I am glad that a little of the poor gratitude of the world is laid down at his door just now to muffle to his dying ear the harsher sounds of life. I forgive much to Sir Robert for the sake of that letter—though, after all, the minister is not high-hearted, or made of heroic stuff.[134]

I am delighted that you should appreciate Mr. Browning's high power—very high, according to my view—very high, and various. Yes, 'Paracelsus' you *should* have. 'Sordello' has many fine things in it, but, having been thrown down by many hands as unintelligible, and retained in mine as certainly of the Sphinxine literature, with all its power, I hesitate to be imperious to you in my recommendations of it. Still, the book *is* worth being *studied*—study is necessary to it, as, indeed, though in a less degree, to all the works of this poet; study is peculiarly necessary to it. He is a true poet, and a poet, I believe, of a large '*future in-rus, about to be*.' He is only growing to the height he will attain.

To Mr. Westwood April 1845.

The sin of Sphinxine literature I admit. Have I not struggled hard to renounce it? Do I not, day by day? Do you know that I have been told that *I* have written things harder to interpret than Browning himself?—only I cannot, cannot believe it—he is so very hard. Tell me honestly (and although I attributed the excessive good nature of the 'Metropolitan' criticism to you, I *know* that you can speak the truth *truly*!) if anything like the Sphinxineness of Browning, you discover in me; take me as far back as 'The Seraphim' volume and answer! As for Browning, the fault is certainly great, and the disadvantage scarcely calculable, it is so great. He cuts his language into bits, and one has to join them together, as young children do their dissected maps, in order to make any meaning at all, and to study hard before one can do it. Not that I grudge the study or the time. The depth and power of the significance (when it is apprehended) glorifies the puzzle. With you and me it is so; but with the majority of readers, even of readers of poetry, it is not and cannot be so.

The consequence is, that he is not read except in a peculiar circle very strait and narrow. He will not die, because the principle of life is in him, but he will not live the

warm summer life which is permitted to many of very inferior faculty, because he does not come out into the sun.

Faithfully your friend,
E.B. BARRETT.

[Footnote 134: Hood died on May 3, 1845; while on his deathbed he received from Sir Robert Peel the notification that he had conferred on him a pension of 100L a year, with remainder to his wife.]

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The following letter relates to the controversy raging round Miss Martineau and her mesmerism. Miss Barrett had evidently referred to it in a letter to Mr. Chorley, which has not been preserved.

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: April 28, 1845.

Dear Mr. Chorley,—I felt quite sure that you would take my postscript for a womanish thing, and a little doubtful whether you would not take the whole allusion (in or out of a postscript) for an impertinent thing; but the impulse to speak was stronger than the fear of speaking; and from the peculiarities of my position, I have come to write by impulses just as other people talk by them. Still, if I had known that the subject was so painful to you, I certainly would not have touched on it, strong as my feeling has been about it, and full and undeniable as is my sympathy with our noble-minded friend, both as a woman and a thinker. Not that I consider (of course I cannot) that she has made out anything like a '*fact*' in the Tynemouth story—not that I think the evidence offered in any sort sufficient; take it as it was in the beginning and unimpugned—not that I have been otherwise than of opinion throughout that she was precipitate and indiscreet, however generously so, in her mode and time of advocating the mesmeric question; but that she is at liberty as a thinking being (in my mind) to hold an opinion, the grounds of which she cannot yet justify to the world. Do you not think she may be? Have you not opinions yourself beyond what you can prove to others? Have we not all? And because some of the links of the outer chain of a logical argument fail, or seem to fail, are we therefore to have our 'honours' questioned, because we do not yield what is suspended to an inner uninjured chain of at once subtler and stronger formation? For what I venture to object to in the argument of the 'Athenaeum' is the making a *moral obligation* of an *intellectual act*, which is the first step and gesture (is it not?) in all persecution for opinion; and the involving of the 'honour' of an opponent in the motion of recantation she is invited to. This I do venture to exclaim against. I do cry aloud against this; and I do say this, that when we call it 'hard,' we are speaking of it softly. Why, consider how it is! The 'Athenaeum' has done quite enough to *disprove the proving* of the wreck story,[135] and no more at all. The disproving of the proof of the wreck story is indeed enough to disprove the wreck story and to disprove mesmerism itself (as far as the proof of mesmerism depends on the proof of the wreck story, and no farther) with all doubters and undetermined inquirers; but with the very large class of previous *believers*, this disproof of a proof is a mere accident, and cannot be expected to have much logical consequence. Believing that such things may be as this revelation of a wreck, they naturally are less exacting of the stabilities of the proving process. What we think

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probable we do not call severely for the proof of. Moreover Miss Martineau is not only a believer in the mysteries of mesmerism (and she wrote to me the other day that in Birmingham, where she is, she has present cognisance of *three cases of clairvoyance*), but she is a believer in the personal integrity of her witnesses. She has what she has well called an 'incommunicable confidence.' And this, however incommunicable, is sufficiently comprehensible to all persons who know what personal faith is, to place her 'honour,' I do maintain, high above any suspicion, any charge with the breath of man's lips. I am sure you agree with me, dear Mr. Chorley—ah! it will be a comfort and joy together. Dear Miss Mitford and I often quarrel softly about literary life and its toils and sorrows, she against and I in favour of; but we never could differ about the worth and comfort of domestic affection.

Ever sincerely yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

I am delighted to hear of the novel. And the comedy?

[Footnote 135: One of the visions of Miss Martineau's 'apocalyptic housemaid' related to the wreck of a vessel in which the Tynemouth people were much interested. Unfortunately it appeared that news of the wreck had reached the town shortly before her vision, and that she had been out of doors immediately before submitting to the mesmeric trance.]

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: April 28, 1845.

Dear Mr. Chorley,—... For Miss Martineau, is it not true that she *has* admitted her wreck story to have no proof? Surely she has. Surely she said that the evidence was incapable, at this point of time, of justification to the *exoteric*, and that the question had sunk now to one of character, to which her opponent answered that it had always *been* one of character. And you must admit that the direct and unmitigated manner of depreciating the reputation, not merely of Jane Arrowsmith, but of Mrs. Wynyard, a personal friend of Miss Martineau's to whom she professes great obligations, could not be otherwise than exasperating to a woman of her generous temper, and this just in the crisis of her gratitude for her restoration to life and enjoyment by the means (as she considers it) of this friend. Not that I feel at all convinced of her having been cured by mesmerism; I have told her openly that I doubt it a little, and she is not angry with me for saying so. Also, the wreck story, and (as you suggest) the three new cases of clairvoyance; why, one *cannot*, you know, give one's specific convictions to general sweeping testimonies, with a mist all round them. Still, I do lean to believing this *class* of mysteries, and I see nothing more incredible in the apocalypse of the wreck and other marvels of clairvoyance, than in that singular adaptation of another person's senses,

which is a common phenomenon of the simple forms of mesmerism. If it is credible that a person

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in a mesmeric sleep can taste the sourness of the vinegar on another person's palate, I am ready to go the whole length of the transmigration of senses. But after all, except from hearing so much, I am as ignorant as you are, in my own experience. One of my sisters was thrown into a sort of swoon, and could not open her eyelids, though she heard what passed, once or twice or thrice; and she might have been a prophetess by this time, perhaps, if, partly from her own feeling on the subject, and partly from mine, she had not determined never to try the experiment again. It is hideous and detestable to my imagination; as I confessed to you, it makes my blood run backwards; and if I were *you*, I would not (with the nervous weakness you speak of) throw myself into the way of it, I really would not. Think of a female friend of mine begging me to give her a lock of my hair, or rather begging my sister to 'get it for her,' that she might send it to a celebrated prophet of mesmerism in Paris, to have an oracle concerning me. Did you ever, since the days of the witches, hear a more ghastly proposition? It shook me so with horror, I had scarcely voice to say 'no,' hough I *did* say it very emphatically at last, I assure you. A lock of my hair for a Parisian prophet? Why, if I had yielded, I should have felt the steps of pale spirits treading as thick as snow all over my sofa and bed, by day and night, and pulling a corresponding lock of hair on my head at awful intervals. *I*, who was born with a double set of nerves, which are always out of order; the most excitable person in the world, and nearly the most superstitious. I should have been scarcely sane at the end of a fortnight, I believe of myself! Do you remember the little spirit in gold shoe-buckles, who was a familiar of Heinrich Stilling's? Well, I should have had a French one to match the German, with Balzac's superfine boot-polish in place of the buckles, as surely as I lie here a mortal woman.

I congratulate you (amid all cares and anxieties) upon the view of Naples in the distance, but chiefly on your own happy and just estimate of your selected position in life. It does appear to me wonderfully and mournfully wrong, when men of letters, as it is too much the fashion for them to do, take to dishonoring their profession by fruitless bewailings and gnashings of teeth; when, all the time, it must be their own fault if it is not the noblest in the world. Miss Mitford treats me as a blind witness in this case; because I have seen nothing of the literary world, or any other sort of world, and yet cry against her 'pen and ink' cry. It is the cry I least like to hear from her lips, of all others; and it is unworthy of them altogether. On the lips of a woman of letters, it sounds like jealousy (which it cannot be with *her*), as on the lips of a woman of the world, like ingratitude. Madame Girardin's 'Ecole des Journalistes' deserved Jules Janin's reproof of it; and there

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is something noble and touching in that feeling of brotherhood among men of letters, which he invokes. I am so glad to hear you say that I am right, glad for your sake and glad for mine. In fact, there is something which is attractive to *me*, and which has been attractive ever since I was as high as this table, even in the old worn type of Grub Street authors and garret poets. Men and women of letters are the first in the whole world to me, and I would rather be the least among them, than 'dwell in the courts of princes.'

Forgive me for writing so fast and far. Just as if you had nothing to do but to read me. Oh, for patience for the novel.

I am, faithfully yours,
ELIZABETH B. BARRETT.

To Miss Thomson[136] 50 Wimpole Street: Friday, May 16, 1845 [postmark].

I write one line to thank you, dear Miss Thomson, for *your* translation (so far too liberal, though true to the spirit of my intention) of my work for your album. How could it *not* be a pleasure to me to work for you?

As to my using those manuscripts otherwise than in your service, I do not at all think of it, and I wish to say this. Perhaps I do not (also) partake quite your 'divine fury' for converting our sex into Greek scholarship, and I do not, I confess, think it as desirable as you do. Where there is a love for poetry, and thirst for beauty strong enough to justify labour, let these impulses, which are noble, be obeyed; but in the case of the multitude it is different; and the mere *fashion of scholarship* among women would be a disagreeable vain thing, and worse than vain. You, who are a Greek yourself, know that the Greek language is not to be learnt in a flash of lightning and by Hamiltonian systems, but that it swallows up year after year of studious life. Now I have a 'doxy' (as Warburton called it), that there is no exercise of the mind so little profitable to the mind as the study of languages. It is the nearest thing to a passive recipiency—is it not?—as a mental action, though it leaves one as weary as ennui itself. Women want to be made to *think actively*: their apprehension is quicker than that of men, but their defect lies for the most part in the logical faculty and in the higher mental activities. Well, and then, to remember how our own English poets are neglected and scorned; our poets of the Elizabethan age! I would rather that my countrywomen began by loving *these*.

Not that I would blaspheme against Greek poetry, or depreciate the knowledge of the language as an attainment. I congratulate *you* on it, though I never should think of trying to convert other women into a desire for it. Forgive me.

To think of Mr. Burges's comparing my Nonnus to the right Nonnus makes my hair stand on end, and the truth is I had flattered myself that nobody would take such trouble. I

have not much reverence for Nonnus, and have pulled him and pushed him and made him stand as I chose, never fearing that my naughty impertinences would be brought to light. For the rest, I thank you gratefully (and may I respectfully and gratefully thank Miss Bayley?) for the kind words of both of you, both in this letter and as my sister heard them. It is delightful to me to find such grace in the eyes of dearest Mr. Kenyon's friends, and I remain, dear Miss Thomson,

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Truly yours, and gladly,
E.B.B.

If there should be anything more at any time for me to do, I trust to your trustfulness.

[Footnote 136: Afterwards *Mdme*. Emil Braun; see the letter of January 9, 1850. At this time she was engaged in editing an album or anthology, to which she had asked Miss Barrett to contribute some classical translations.]

To Miss Thomson 50 Wimpole Street: Monday [1845].

My dear Miss Thomson,—Believe of me that it can only give me pleasure when you are affectionate enough to treat me as a friend; and for the rest, nobody need apologise for taking another into the vineyards—least Miss Bayley and yourself to *me*. At the first thought I felt sure that there must be a great deal about vines in these Greeks of ours, and am surprised, I confess, in turning from one to another, to find how few passages of length are quotable, and how the images drop down into a line or two. Do you know the passage in the seventh 'Odyssey' where there is a vineyard in different stages of ripeness?—of which Pope has made the most, so I tore up what I began to write, and leave you to him. It is in Alcinous' gardens, and between the first and second hundred lines of the book. The one from the 'Iliad,' open to Miss Bayley's objection, is yet too beautiful and appropriate, I fancy, for you to throw over. Curious it is that my first recollection went from that shield of Achilles to Hesiod's 'Shield of Hercules,' from which I send you a version—leaving out of it what dear Miss Bayley would object to on a like ground with the other:

Some gathered grapes, with reap-hooks in their hands,
While others bore off from the gathering hands
Whole baskets-full of bunches, black and white,
From those great ridges heaped up into fight,
With vine-leaves and their curling tendrils. So
They bore the baskets ...

... Yes! and all were saying Their jests, while each went staggering in a row Beneath his grape-load to the piper's playing. The grapes were purple-ripe. And here, in fine, Men trod them out, and there they drained the wine.

In the 'Works and Days' Hesiod says again, what is not worth your listening to, perhaps:

And when that Sinus and Orion come
To middle heaven, and when Aurora—she
O' the rosy fingers—looks inquiringly
Full on Arcturus, straightway gather home

The general vintage. And, I charge you, see
All, in the sun and open air, outlaid
Ten days and nights, and five days in the shade.
The sixth day, pour in vases the fine juice—
The gift of Bacchus, who gives joys for use.

Anacreon talks to the point so well that you must forgive him, I think, for being Anacreontic, and take from his hands what is not defiled. The translation you send me does not ‘smell of Anacreon,’ nor please me. Where did you get it? Would this be at all fresher?

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Grapes that wear a purple skin,
Men and maidens carry in,
Brimming baskets on their shoulders,
Which they topple one by one
Down the winepress. Men are holders
Of the place there, and alone
Tread the grapes out, crush them down,
Letting loose the soul of wine—
Praising Bacchus as divine,
With the loud songs called his own!

You are aware of the dresser of the vine in Homer's 'Hymn to Mercury' translated so exquisitely by Shelley, and of a very beautiful single figure in Theocritus besides. Neither probably would suit your purpose. In the 'Pax' of Aristophanes there is an idle 'Chorus' who talks of looking at the vines and watching the grapes ripen, and eating them at last, but there is nothing of vineyard work in it, so I dismiss the whole.

For 'Hector and Andromache,' would you like me to try to do it for you? It would amuse me, and you should not be bound to do more with what I send you than to throw it into the fire if it did not meet your wishes precisely. The same observation applies, remember, to this little sheet, which I have *kept*—delayed sending—just because I wanted to let you have a trial of my strength on 'Andromache' in the same envelope; but the truth is that it is not *begun* yet, partly through other occupation, and partly through the lassitude which the cold wind of the last few days always brings down on me. Yesterday I made an effort, and felt like a broken stick—not even a bent one! So wait for a warm day (and what a season we have had! I have been walking up and down stairs and pretending to be quite well), and I will promise to do my best, and certainly an inferior hand may get nearer to touch the great Greek lion's mane than Pope's did.

Will you give my love to dear Miss Bayley? She shall hear from me—and *you* shall, in a day or two. And do not mind Mr. Kenyon. He 'roars as softly as a sucking dove;' nevertheless he is an intolerant monster, as I half told him the other day.

Believe me, dear Miss Thomson,
Affectionately yours,
E.B.B.

To Mr. Westwood 50 Wimpole Street: May 22, 1845.

Did you persevere with 'Sordello'? I hope so. Be sure that we may all learn (as poets) much and deeply from it, for the writer speaks true oracles. When you have read it through, then read for relaxation and recompense the last 'Bell and Pomegranate' by the same poet, his 'Colombo's Birthday,' which is exquisite. Only 'Pippa Passes' I lean to, or kneel to, with the deepest reverence. Wordsworth has been in town, and is gone.

Tennyson is still here. He likes London, I hear, and hates Cheltenham, where he resides with his family, and he smokes pipe after pipe, and does not mean to write any more poems. Are we to sing a requiem?

Believe me, faithfully yours,
ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT.

To H.S. Boyd Saturday, July 21, 1845 [postmark].

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My very dear Friend,—You are kind to exceeding kindness, and I am as grateful as any of your long-ago kind invitations ever found me. It is something pleasant, indeed, and like a return to life, to be asked by you to spend two or three days in your house, and I thank you for this pleasantness, and for the goodness, on your own part, which induced it. You may be perfectly sure that no Claypon, though he should live in Arcadia, would be preferred by me to *you* as a host, and I wonder how you could entertain the imagination of such a thing. Mr. Kenyon, indeed, has asked me repeatedly to spend a few hours on a sofa in his house, and, the Regent's Park being so much nearer than you are, I had promised to think of it. But I have not yet found it possible to accomplish even that quarter of a mile's preferment, and my ambition is forced to be patient when I begin to think of St. John's Wood. I am considerably stronger, and increasing in strength, and in time, with a further advance of the summer, I may do 'such things—-what they are yet, I know not.' Yes, I *know* that they relate to *you*, and that I have a hope, as well as an earnest, affectionate desire, to sit face to face with you once more before this summer closes. Do, in the meantime, believe that I am very grateful to you for your kind, considerate proposal, and that it is not made in vain for my wishes, and that I am not likely willingly 'to spend two or three days' with anybody in the world before I do so with yourself.

Mr. Hunter has not paid us his usual Saturday's visit, and therefore I have no means of answering the questions you put in relation to him. We will ask him about 'times and seasons' when next we see him, and you shall hear.

Did you ever hear much of Robert Montgomery, commonly called Satan Montgomery because the author of 'Satan,' of the 'Omnipresence of the Deity,' and of various poems which pass through edition after edition, nobody knows how or *why*? I understand that his pew (he is a clergyman) is sown over with red rosebuds from ladies of the congregation, and that the same fair hands have made and presented to him, in the course of a single season, one hundred pairs of slippers. Whereupon somebody said to this Reverend Satan, 'I never knew before, Mr. Montgomery, that you were a *centipede*'

Dearest Mr. Boyd's affectionate and grateful
ELIBET.

Through the summer of 1845, Miss Barrett, as usual, recovered strength, but so slightly that her doctor urged that she should not face the winter in England. Plans were accordingly made for her going abroad, to which the following letters refer, but the scheme ultimately broke down before the prohibition of Mr. Barrett—a prohibition for which no valid reason was put forward, and which, to say the least, bore the colour of unaccountable indifference to his daughter's health and wishes. The matter is of some importance on account of its bearing on the action taken by Miss Barrett in the autumn of the following year.

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To Mrs. Martin Monday, July 29, 1845 [postmark].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—I am ashamed not to have written before, and yet have courage enough to ask you to write to me as soon as you can. Day by day I have had good intentions enough (the fact is) about writing, to seem to deserve some good deeds from you, which is contrary to all wisdom and reason, I know, but is rather natural, after all. What *my* deeds have been, you will be apt to ask. Why, all manner of idleness, which is the most interrupting, you know, of all things. The Hedleys have been flitting backwards and forwards, staying, some of them, for a month at a time in London, and then going, and then coming again; and I have had other visitors, few but engrossing 'after their kind.' And I have been *getting well*—which is a process—going out into the carriage two or three times a week, abdicating my sofa for my armchair, moving from one room to another now and then, and walking about mine quite as well as, and with considerably more complacency than, a child of two years old. Altogether, I do think that if you were kind enough to be glad to see me looking better when you were in London, you would be kind enough to be still gladder if you saw me now. Everybody praises me, and I look in the looking-glass with a better conscience. Also, it is an improving improvement, and will be, until, you know, the last hem of the garment of summer is lost sight of, and then—and then—I must either follow to another climate, or be ill again—*that* I know, and am prepared for. It is but dreary work, this undoing of my Penelope web in the winter, after the doing of it through the summer, and the more progress one makes in one's web, the more dreary the prospect of the undoing of all these fine silken stitches. But we shall see....

Ever your affectionate
BA.

To Mrs. Martin Tuesday [October 1845].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Do believe that I have not been, as I have seemed, perhaps, forgetful of you through this silence. This last proof of your interest and affection for me—in your letter to Henrietta—quite rouses me to *speak out* my remembrance of you, and I have been remembering you all the time that I did not speak, only I was so perplexed and tossed up and down by doubts and sadnesses as to require some shock from without to force the speech from me. Your verses, in their grace of kindness, and the ivy from Wordsworth's cottage, just made me think to myself that I would write to you before I left England, but when you talk really of coming to see me, why, I must speak! You overcome me with the sense of your goodness to me.

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Yet, after all, I will not have you come! The farewells are bad enough which come to us, without our going to seek them, and I would rather wait and meet you on the Continent, or in England again, than see you now, just to part from you. And you cannot guess how shaken I am, and how I cling to every plank of a little calm. Perhaps I am going on the 17th or 20th. Certainly I have made up my mind to do it, and shall do it as a bare matter of duty; and it is one of the most painful acts of duty which my whole life has set before me. The road is as rough as possible, as far as I can see it. At the same time, being absolutely convinced from my own experience and perceptions, and the unhesitating advice of two able medical men (Dr. Chambers, one of them), that to escape the English winter will be *everything for me*, and that it involves the comfort and usefulness of the rest of my life, I have resolved to do it, let the circumstances of the doing be as painful as they may. If you were to see me you would be astonished to see the work of the past summer; but all these improvements will ebb away with the sun—-while I am assured of permanent good if I leave England. The struggle with me has been a very painful one; I cannot enter on the how and wherefore at this moment. I had expected more help than I have found, and am left to myself, and thrown so on my own sense of duty as to feel it right, for the sake of future years, to make an effort to stand by myself as I best can. At the same time, I will not tell you that at the last hour something may not happen to keep me at home. *That* is neither impossible nor improbable. If, for instance, I find that I cannot have one of my brothers with me, why, the going in that case would be out of the question. Under ordinary circumstances I shall go, and if the experiment of going fails, why, then I shall have had the satisfaction of having tried it, and of knowing that it is God's will which keeps me a prisoner, and makes me a burden. As it is, I have been told that if I had gone years ago I *should be well now*; that one lung is very slightly affected, but the nervous system *absolutely shattered*, as the state of the pulse proves. I am in the habit of taking forty drops of laudanum a day, and *cannot do with less*, that is, the medical man *told me* that I could not do with less, saying so with his hand on the pulse. The cold weather, they say, acts on the lungs, and produces the weakness indirectly, whereas the necessary shutting up acts on the *nerves* and prevents them from having a chance of recovering their tone. And thus, without any mortal disease, or any disease of equivalent seriousness, I am thrown out of life, out of the ordinary sphere of its enjoyment and activity, and made a burden to myself and to others. Whereas there is a means of escape from these evils, and God has opened the door of escape, as wide as I see it!

In all ways, for my own *happiness's sake* I do need *a proof* that the evil is irremediable. And this proof (or the counter-proof) I am about to seek in Italy.

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Dr. Chambers has advised *Pisa*, and I go in the direct steamer from the Thames to Leghorn. I have good courage, and as far as my own strength goes, sufficient means.

Dearest Mrs. Martin, more than I thought at first of telling you, I have told you. Much beside there is, painful to talk of, but I hope I have determined to do what is right, and that the determination has not been formed ungently, unscrupulously, nor unaffectionately in respect to the feelings of others. I would die for some of those, but there, has been affection opposed to affection.

This in confidence, of course. May God bless both of you! Pray for me, dearest Mrs. Martin. Make up your mind to go somewhere soon—shall you not?—before the winter shuts the last window from which you see the sun.

Dr. Chambers said that he would 'answer for it' that the voyage would rather do me good than harm. Let me suffer sea sickness or not, he said, he would answer for its doing me no harm.

I hope to take Arabel with me, and either Storm or Henry. This is my hope.

Gratefully and affectionately I think of all your kindness and interest. May dear Mr. Martin lose nothing in this coming winter! I shall think of you, and not cease to love you. Moreover, you shall hear again from

Your ever affectionate
BA.

To H.S. Boyd October 27, 1845 [postmark].

My very dear Friend,—It is so long since I wrote that I must write, I must ruffle your thoughts with a little breath from my side. Listen to me, my dear friend. That I have not written has scarcely been my fault, but my misfortune rather, for I have been quite unstrung and overcome by agitation and anxiety, and thought that I should be able to tell you at last of being calmer and happier, but it was all in vain. I do not leave England, my dear friend. It is decided that I remain on in my prison. It was my full intention to go. I considered it to be a clear duty, and I made up my mind to perform it, let the circumstances be ever so painfully like obstacles; but when the moment came it appeared impossible for me to set out alone, and also impossible to take my brother and sister with me without involving them in difficulties and displeasure. Now what I could risk for myself I could not risk for others, and the very kindness with which they desired me not to think of them only made me think of them more, as was natural and just. So Italy is given up, and I fall back into the hands of God, who is merciful, trusting Him with the time that shall be.

Arabel would have gone to tell you all this a fortnight since, but one of my brothers has been ill with fever which was not exactly typhus, but of the typhoid character, and we knew that you would rather not see her under the circumstances. He is very much better (it is Octavius), and has been out of bed to-day and yesterday.

Do not reproach me either for not writing or for not going, my very dear friend. I have been too heavy-hearted for words; and as to the deeds, you would not have wished me to lead others into difficulties, the extent and result of which no one could calculate. It would not have been just of me.

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And *you*, how are you, and what are you doing?

May God bless you, my dear dear friend!

Ever yours I am, affectionately and gratefully,
E.B.B.

To Mr. Chorley 50 Wimpole Street: November 1845.

I must trouble you with another letter of thanks, dear Mr. Chorley, now that I have to thank you for the value of the work as well as the kindness of the gift, for I have read your three volumes of 'Pomfret'[137] with interest and moral assent, and with great pleasure in various ways: it is a pure, true book without effort, which, in these days of gesture and rolling of the eyes, is an uncommon thing. Also you make your 'private judgment' work itself out quietly as a simple part of the love of truth, instead of being the loud heroic virtue it is so apt in real life to profess itself, seldom moving without drums and trumpets and the flying of party colours. All these you have put down rightly, wisely, and boldly, and it was, in my mind, no less wise than bold of you to let in that odour of Tyrrwhitism into the folds of the purple, and so prevent the very possibility of any 'prestige.' If I complained it might be that your 'private judgment' confines its reference to 'public opinion,' and shuns, too proudly perhaps, the higher and deeper relations of human responsibility. But there are difficulties, I see, and you choose your path advisedly, of course. The best character in the book I take to be *Rose*; I cannot hesitate in selecting him. He is so lifelike with the world's conventional life that you hear his footsteps when he walks, and, indeed, I think his boots were apt to creak just the *soupcon* of a creak, just as a gentleman's boots might, and he is excellently consistent, even down to the choice of a wife whom he could patronise. I hope you like your own Mr. Rose, and that you will forgive me for jilting Grace for Helena, which I could not help any more than Walter could. But now, may I venture to ask a question? Would it not have been wise of you if, on the point of *reserve*, you had thrown a deeper shade of opposition into the characters or rather manners of these women? Helena sits like a statue (and could Grace have done more?) when she wins Walter's heart in Italy. Afterwards, and by fits at the time, indeed, the artist fire bursts from her, but there was a great deal of smouldering when there should have been a clear heat to justify Walter's change of feeling. And then, in respect to *that*, do you really think that your Grace was generous, heroic (with the evidence she had of the change) in giving up her engagement? For her own sake, could she have done otherwise? I fancy not; the position seems surrounded by its own necessities, and no room for a doubt. I write on my own doubts, you see, and you will smile at them, or understand all through them that if the book had not interested me like a piece of real life, I should not find myself *backbiting* as if all these were 'my neighbours.' The pure tender feeling of the closing scenes touched me to better purpose, believe me, and I applaud from my heart and conscience your rejection of that low creed of 'poetical justice' which is neither justice

nor poetry which is as degrading to virtue as false to experience, and which, thrown from your book, raises it into a pure atmosphere at once.

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I could go on talking, but remind myself (I do hope in time) that I might show my gratitude better. With sincere wishes for the success of the work (for just see how practically we come to trust to poetical justices after all our theories—*I*, I mean, and *mine*!), and with respect and esteem for the writer,

I remain very truly yours,
ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT.

[Footnote 137: A novel by Mr. Chorley, a copy of which he had presented to Miss Barrett.]

To Mrs. Jameson 50 Wimpole Street: December 1, 1845.

My dear Mrs. Jameson,—I receive your letter, as I must do every sign of your being near and inclined to think of me in kindness, gladly, and assure you at once that whenever you can spend a half-hour on me you will find me enough myself to have a true pleasure in welcoming you, say any day except next Saturday or the Monday immediately following.

As soon as I heard of your return to England I ventured to hope that some good might come of it to me in my room here, besides the general good, which I look for with the rest of the public, when the censer swings back into the midst of us again. And how good of you, dear Mrs. Jameson, to think of me there where the perfumes were set burning; it makes me glad and grand that you should have been able to do so. Also the kind wishes which came with the thoughts (you say) were not in vain, for I have been very idle and very *well*; the angel of the summer has done more for me even than usual, and till the last wave of his wing I took myself to be quite well and at liberty, and even now I am as well as anyone can be who has heard the prison door shut for a whole winter at least, and knows it to be the only English alternative of a grave. Which is a gloomy way of saying that I am well but forced to shut myself up with disagreeable precautions all round, and I ought to be gratified instead of gloomy. Believe me that I *shall* be so when you come to see me, remaining in the meanwhile

Most truly yours,
ELIZABETH BARRETT.

To Mrs. Martin Friday [about December 1845].

I am the guilty person, dearest Mrs. Martin! You would have heard from Henrietta at least yesterday, only I persisted in promising to write instead of her; and so, if there are reproaches, let them fall. Not that I am audacious and without shame! But I have grown familiar with an evil conscience as to these matters of not writing when I ought; and long ago I grew familiar with your mercy and power of pardoning; and then—and then—if silence and sulkiness are proved crimes of mine to ever such an extreme, why

it would not be unnatural. Do you think I was born to live the life of an oyster, such as I *do* live here? And so, the moaning and gnashing of teeth are best done alone and without taking anyone into confidence. And so, this is all I have to say for myself, which perhaps you will be glad of; for you will be ready to agree with me that next to such faults of idleness, negligence, silence (call them by what names you please!) as I have been guilty of, is the repentance of them, if indeed the latter be not the most unpardonable of the two.

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And what are you doing so late in Herefordshire? Is dear Mr. Martin too well, and tempting the demons? I do hope that the next news of you will be of your being about to approach the sun and visit us on the road. You do not give your wisdom away to your friends, all of it, I hope and trust—not even to Reynolds.

Tell Mr. Martin that a new great daily newspaper, professing '*ultraism*' at the right end (meaning his and mine), is making 'mighty preparation,' to be called the 'Daily News,'[138] to be edited by Dickens and to combine with the most liberal politics such literature as gives character to the French journals—the objects being both to help the people and to give a *status* to men of letters, socially and politically—great objects which will not be attained, I fear, by any such means. In the first place, I have misgivings as to Dickens. He has not, I think, *breadth* of mind enough for such work, with all his gifts; but we shall see. An immense capital has been offered and actually advanced. Be good patriots and order the paper. And talking of papers, I hope you read in the 'Morning Chronicle' Landor's verses to my friend and England's poet, Mr. Browning.[139] They have much beauty.

You know that Occy has been ill, and that he is well? I hope you are not so behindhand in our news as not to know. For me, I am not yet undone by the winter. I still sit in my chair and walk about the room. But the prison doors are shut close, and I could dash myself against them sometimes with a passionate impatience of the need-less captivity. I feel so intimately and from evidence, how, with air and warmth together in any fair proportion, I should be as well and happy as the rest of the world, that it is intolerable—-well, it is better to sympathise quietly with Lady—and other energetic runaways, than amuse you with being riotous to no end; and it is *best* to write one's own epitaph still more quietly, is it not?...

And oh how lightly I write, and then sigh to think of what different colours my spirits and my paper are. Do you know what it is to laugh, that you may not cry? Yet I hold a comfort fast.... Your very affectionate

BA.

[Footnote 138: The first number of the *Daily News* appeared on January 2l, 1846, under the editorship of Charles Dickens.]

[Footnote 139: The well-known lines beginning, 'There is delight in singing.' They appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* for November 22, 1845.]

To Mrs. Martin Saturday [February-March 1846].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Indeed it has been tantalising and provoking to have you close by without being able to gather a better advantage from it than the knowledge that you were suffering. So passes the world and the glory of it. I have been vexed into a

high state of morality, I assure you. Now that you are gone away I hear from you again; and it does seem to me that almost always it happens

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so, and that you come to London to be ill and leave it before you can be well again. It is a comfort in every case to know of your being better, and Hastings is warm and quiet, and the pretty country all round (mind you go and see the 'Rocks' *par excellence*)! will entice you into very gentle exercise. At the same time, don't wish me into the house you speak of. I can lose nothing here, shut up in my prison, and the nightingales come to my windows and sing through the sooty panes. If I were at Hastings I should risk the chance of recovering liberty, and the consolations of slavery would not reach me as they do here. Also, if I were to set my heart upon Hastings, I might break it at leisure; there would be exactly as much difficulty in turning my face that way as towards Italy—ah, you do not understand! And *I do, at last*, I am sorry to say; and it has been very long, tedious and reluctant work, the learning of the lesson....

Did Henrietta tell you that I heard at last from Miss Martineau, who thought me in Italy, she said, and therefore was silent? She has sent me her new work (have you read it?) and speaks of her strength and of being able to walk fifteen miles a day, which seems to me like a fairy tale, or the 'Three-leagued Boots' at least.

What am I doing, to tell you of? Nothing! The winter is kind, and this divine 'muggy' weather (is *that* the technical word and spelling thereof?), which gives all reasonable people colds in their heads, leaves *me* the hope of getting back to the summer without much injury. A friend of mine—one of the greatest poets in England too—brought me primroses and polyanthuses the other day, as they are grown in Surrey![140] Surely it must be nearer spring than we think.

Dearest Mrs. Martin, write and say how you are. And say, God bless you, both the yous, and mention Mr. Martin particularly, and what your plans are.

Ever your affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 140:

Beloved, them hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through,
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.

Sonnets from the Portuguese, xliv.]

To Mrs. Martin Tuesday [end of June 1846].

So, my dearest Mrs. Martin, you are quite angry with all of us and with me chiefly. Oh, you need not say no! I see it, I understand it, and shall therefore take up my own cause

precisely as if I were an injured person. In the first place, dearest Mrs. Martin, when you wrote to me (at last!) to say that we were both guilty correspondents, you should have spoken in the singular number; for I was not guilty at all, I beg to say, while you were on the Continent. You were uncertain, you said, on going, where you should go and how long you should stay, and you promised to write and give me some sort of address—a promise never kept—and where was I to write

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to you? I heard for the first time, from the Peytons, of your being at Pau, and then you were expected at home. So innocent I am, and because it is a pleasure rather rare to make a sincere profession of innocence, I meant to write to you at least ten days ago; and then (believe me you will, without difficulty) the dreadful death of poor Mr. Haydon, [141] the artist, quite upset me, and made me disinclined to write a word beyond necessary ones. I thank God that I never saw him—poor gifted Haydon—but, a year and a half ago, we had a correspondence which lasted through several months and was very pleasant while it lasted. Then it was dropped, and only a few days before the event he wrote three or four notes to me to ask me to take charge of some papers and pictures, which I acceded to as once I had done before. He was constantly in pecuniary difficulty, and in apprehension of the seizure of goods; and nothing of *fear* suggested itself to my mind—nothing. The shock was very great. Oh! I do not write to you to write of this. Only I would have you understand the real case, and that it is not an excuse, and that it was natural for me to be shaken a good deal. No artist is left behind with equal largeness of poetical conception! If the hand had always obeyed the soul, he would have been a genius of the first order. As it is, he lived on the *slope* of greatness and could not be steadfast and calm. His life was one long agony of self-assertion. Poor, poor Haydon! See how the world treats those who try too openly for its gratitude! 'Tom Thumb for ever' over the heads of the giants.

So you heard that I was quite well? Don't believe everything you hear. But I am really in *a way* to be well, if I could have such sunshine as we have been burning in lately, and a fair field of peace besides. Generally, I am able to go out every day, either walking or in the carriage—'*walking*' means as far as Queen Anne's Street. The wonderful winter did not cast me down, and the hot summer helps me up higher. Now, to *keep in the sun* is the problem to solve; and if I can do it, I shall be 'as well as anybody.' If I can't, as ill as ever. Which is the *resume* of me, without a word more....

Your ever affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 141: He committed suicide on June 22, under the influence of the disappointment caused by the indifference of the public to his pictures, the final instance of which was its flocking to see General Tom Thumb and neglecting Haydon's large pictures of 'Aristides' and 'Nero,' which were being exhibited in an adjoining room of the Egyptian Hall.]

To H.S. Boyd June 27, 1846 [postmark].

Dearest Mr. Boyd,—Let me be clear of your reproaches for not going to you this week. The truth is that I have been so much shocked and shaken by the dreadful suicide of poor Mr. Haydon, the artist, I had not spirits for it. He was not personally my friend. I

never saw him face to face. But we had corresponded, and one of his last acts was an act of *trust* towards me. Also I admired his genius. And all to end *so*! It has naturally affected me much.

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So I could not come, but in a few days I *will* come; and in the meantime, I have had the sound of your voice to think of, more than I could think of the deep melodious bells, though they made the right and solemn impression. How I felt, to be under your roof again!

May God bless you, my very dear friend.
These words in the greatest haste.

From your ever affectionate
ELIBET

CHAPTER V

1846-1849

It is now time to tell the story of the romance which, during the last eighteen months, had entered into Elizabeth Barrett's life, and was destined to divert its course into new and happier channels. It is a story which fills one of the brightest pages in English literary history.

The foregoing letters have shown something of Miss Barrett's admiration for the poetry of Robert Browning, and contain allusions to the beginning of their personal acquaintance. Her knowledge of his poetry dates back to the appearance of 'Paracelsus,' not to 'Pauline,' of which there is no mention in her letters, and which had been practically withdrawn from circulation by the author. Her personal acquaintance with him was of much later date, and was directly due to the publication of the 'Poems' in 1844. Chancing to express his admiration of them to Mr. Kenyon, who had been his friend since 1839 and his father's school-fellow in years long distant, Mr. Browning was urged by him to write to Miss Barrett himself, and tell her of his pleasure in her work. Possibly the allusion to him in 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship' may have been felt as furnishing an excuse for addressing her; however that may be, he took Mr. Kenyon's advice, and in January 1845 we find Miss Barrett in 'ecstasies' over a letter (evidently the first) from 'Browning the poet, Browning the author of "Paracelsus" and king of the mystics' (see p. 236, above).

The correspondence, once begun, continued to flourish, and in the course of the same month Miss Barrett tells Mrs. Martin that she is 'getting deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning, poet and mystic; and we are growing to be the truest of friends.' At the end of May, when the return of summer brought her a renewal of strength, they met face to face for the first time; and from that time Robert Browning was included in the small list of privileged friends who were admitted to visit her in person.

How this friendship ripened into love, and love into courtship, it is not for us to inquire too closely. Something has been told already in Mrs. Orr's 'Life of Robert Browning;' something more is told in the long and most interesting letter which stands first in the present chapter. More precious than either is the record of her fluctuating feelings which Mrs. Browning has enshrined for ever in her 'Sonnets from the Portuguese,' and in the handful of other poems—'Life and Love,' 'A Denial,' 'Proof and Disproof,' 'Inclusions,'

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’Insufficiency,’[142] which likewise belong to this period and describe its hesitations, its sorrows and its overwhelming joys. In the difficult circumstances under which they were placed, the conduct of both was without reproach. Mr. Browning knew that he was asking to be allowed to take charge of an invalid’s life—believed indeed that she was even worse than was really the case, and that she was hopelessly incapacitated from ever standing on her feet—but was sure enough of his love to regard that as no obstacle. Miss Barrett, for her part, shrank from burdening the life of the man she loved with a responsibility so trying and perhaps so painful, and refused his unchanging devotion for his sake, not for her own.

[Footnote 142: *Poetical Works*, iv. 20-32.]

The situation was complicated by the character of Mr. Barrett, and by the certainty—for such it was to his daughter—that he would refuse to entertain the idea of her marriage, or, indeed, that of any of his children. The truth of this view was absolutely vindicated not only in the case of Elizabeth, but also in those of two others of the family in later years. The reasons for his feeling it is probable he could not have explained to himself. He was fond of his family after his own fashion—proud, too, of his daughter’s genius; but he could not, it would seem, regard them in any other light than as belonging to himself. The wish to leave his roof and to enter into new relations was looked upon as unfilial treachery; and no argument or persuasion could shake him from his fixed idea. So long as this disposition could be regarded as the result of a devoted love of his children, it could be accepted with respect, if not with full acquiescence; but circumstances brought the proof that this was not the case, and thereby ultimately paved the way to Elizabeth’s marriage.

These circumstances are stated in several of her letters, and alluded to in several others, but it may help to the understanding of them if a brief summary be given here. In the autumn of 1845, as described above, Miss Barrett’s doctors advised her to winter abroad. The advice was strongly pressed, as offering a good prospect of a real improvement of health, and as the only way of avoiding the annual relapse brought on by the English winter. One or more of her brothers could have gone with her, and she was willing and able to try the experiment; but in face of this express medical testimony, Mr. Barrett interposed a refusal. This indifference to her health naturally wounded Miss Barrett very deeply; but it also gave her the right of taking her fate into her own hands. Convinced at last that no refusal on her part could alter Mr. Browning’s devotion to her, and that marriage with him, so far from being an increase of risk to her health, offered the only means by which she might hope for an improvement in it, she gave him the conditional promise that if she came safely through the then impending winter, she would consent to a definite engagement.

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The winter of 1845-6 was an exceptionally mild one, and she suffered less than usual; and in the spring of 1846 her lover claimed her promise. Throughout the summer she continued to gain strength, being able, not only to drive out, but even to walk short distances, and to visit a few of her special friends such as Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Boyd. Accordingly it was agreed that at the end of the summer they should be married, and leave England for Italy before the cold weather should return. The uselessness of asking her father's consent was so evident, and the certainty that it would only result in the exclusion of Mr. Browning from the house so clear, that no attempt was made to obtain it. Only her two sisters were aware of what was going on; but even they were not informed of the final arrangements for the marriage, in order that they might not be involved in their father's anger when it should become known. For the same reason the secret was kept from so close a friend of both parties as Mr. Kenyon; though both he and Mr. Boyd, and possibly also Mrs. Jameson, had suspicions amounting to different degrees of certainty as to the real state of affairs. It had been intended that they should wait until the end of September, but a project for a temporary removal of the family into the country precipitated matters; and on September 12, accompanied only by her maid, Wilson, Miss Barrett slipped from the house and was married to Robert Browning in Marylebone Church.[143] The associations which that ponderous edifice has gained from this act for all lovers of English poetry tempt one to forgive its unromantic appearance, and to remember rather the pilgrimages which Robert Browning on his subsequent visits to England never failed to pay to its threshold.

[Footnote 143: Mrs. Sutherland Orr says that the marriage took place in St. Pancras Church; but this is a mistake, as the parish register of St. Marylebone proves.]

For a week after the marriage Mrs. Browning—by which more familiar name we now have the right to call her—remained in her father's house; her husband refraining from seeing her, since he could not now ask for her by her proper name without betraying their secret. Then, on September 19, accompanied once more by her maid and the ever-beloved Flushie, she left her home, to which she was never to return, crossed the Channel with her husband to Havre, and so travelled on to Paris. Her father's anger, if not loud, was deep and unforgiving. From that moment he cast her off and disowned her. He would not read or open her letters; he would not see her when she returned to England. Even the birth of her child brought no relenting; he expressed no sympathy or anxiety, he would not look upon its face. He died as he lived, unrelenting, cut off by his own unbending anger from a daughter who could with difficulty bring herself to speak a harsh word of him, even to her most intimate friends.

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It was a more unexpected and consequently an even more bitter blow to find that her brothers at first disapproved of her action; the more so, since they had sympathised with her in the struggle of the previous autumn. This disapprobation was, however, less deep-seated, resting partly upon doubts as to the practical prudence of the match, partly, no doubt, upon a natural annoyance at having been kept in the dark. Such an estrangement could only be temporary, and as time went on was replaced by a full renewal of the old affection towards herself and a friendly acceptance of her husband. With her sisters, on the other hand, there was never a shadow of difference or estrangement. That love remained unaffected; and almost the only circumstance that caused Mrs. Browning to regret her enforced absence from England was the separation which it entailed from her two sisters.

In Paris the fugitives found a friend who proved a friend indeed. A few weeks earlier Mrs. Jameson, knowing of the needs of Miss Barrett's health, had offered to take her to Italy; but her offer had been refused. Her astonishment may be imagined when, after this short interval of time, she found her invalid friend in Paris as the wife of Robert Browning. The prospect filled her with almost as much dismay as pleasure. 'I have here,' she wrote to a friend from Paris, 'a poet and a poetess—two celebrities who have run away and married under circumstances peculiarly interesting, and such as to render imprudence the height of prudence. Both excellent; but God help them! for I know not how the two poet heads and poet hearts will get on through this prosaic world.'[144] Mrs. Jameson, who was travelling with her young niece, Miss Geraldine Bate,[145] lent her aid to smooth the path of her poet friends, and it was in her company that, after a week's rest in Paris, the Brownings proceeded on their journey to Italy. It is easy to imagine what a comfort her presence must have been to the invalid wife and her naturally anxious husband; and this journey sealed a friendship of no ordinary depth and warmth. Mrs. Browning bore the journey wonderfully, though suffering much from fatigue. During a rest of two days at Avignon, a pilgrimage was made to Vaucluse, in honour of Petrarch and his Laura; and there, as Mrs. Macpherson has recorded in an often quoted passage of her biography of her aunt, 'there, at the very source of the "chiare, fresche e dolci acque," Mr. Browning took his wife up in his arms, and carrying her across the shallow, curling water, seated her on a rock that rose throne-like in the middle of the stream. Thus love and poetry took a new possession of the spot immortalised by Petrarch's loving fancy.'[146]

[Footnote 144: *Memoirs of Anna Jameson*, by G. Macpherson, p. 218.]

[Footnote 145: Afterwards Mrs. Macpherson, and Mrs. Jameson's biographer.]

[Footnote 146: *Memoirs*, p. 231.]

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So at the beginning of October the party reached Pisa; and there the newly wedded pair settled for the winter. Here first since the departure from London was there leisure to renew the intercourse with friends at home, to answer congratulations and good wishes, to explain what might seem strange and unaccountable. From this point Mrs. Browning's correspondence contains nearly a full record of her life, and can be left to tell its own story in better language than the biographer's. The first letter to Mrs. Martin is an 'apologia pro connubio suo' in fullest detail; the others carry on the story from the point at which that leaves it.

With regard to this first letter, full as it is of the most intimate personal and family revelations, it has seemed right to give it entire. The marriage of Robert and Elizabeth Browning has passed into literary history, and it is only fair that it should be set, once for all, in its true light. Those who might be pained by any expressions in it have passed away; and those in whose character and reputation the lovers of English literature are interested have nothing to fear from the fullest revelation. If anything were kept back, false and injurious surmises might be formed; the truth leaves little room for controversy, and none for slander.

To Mrs. Martin Collegio Ferdinando, Pisa; October 20(?), 1846.[147]

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Will you believe that I began a letter to you before I took this step, to give you the whole story of the impulses towards it, feeling strongly that I owed what I considered my justification to such dear friends as yourself and Mr. Martin, that you might not hastily conclude that you had thrown away upon one who was quite unworthy the regard of years? I had begun such a letter—when, by the plan of going to Little Bookham, my plans were all hurried forward—changed—driven prematurely into action, and the last hours of agitation and deep anguish—for it was the deepest of its kind, to leave Wimpole Street and those whom I tenderly loved—*so* would not admit of my writing or thinking: only I was able to think that my beloved sisters would send you some account of me when I was gone. And now I hear from them that your generosity has not waited for a letter from me to do its best for me, and that instead of being vexed, as you might well be, at my leaving England without a word sent to you, you have used kind offices in my behalf, you have been more than the generous and affectionate friend I always considered you. So my first words must be that I am deeply grateful to you, my very dear friend, and that to the last moment of my life I shall remember the claim you have on my gratitude. Generous people are inclined to acquit generously; but it has been very painful to me to observe that with all my mere friends I have found more sympathy and *trust*, than in those who are of my own household and who have been daily witnesses of my life. I do not say this for papa,

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who is peculiar and in a peculiar position; but it pained me that——, who *knew* all that passed last year—for instance, about Pisa—who knew that the alternative of making a single effort to secure my health during the winter was the severe displeasure I have incurred now, and that the fruit of yielding myself a prisoner was the sense of being of no use nor comfort to any soul; papa having given up coming to see me except for five minutes, a day; ==—, who said to me with his own lips, 'He does not love you—do not think it' (said and repeated it two months ago)—that —— should now turn round and reproach me for want of affection towards my family, for not letting myself drop like a dead weight into the abyss, a sacrifice without an object and expiation—this did surprise me and pain me—pained me more than all papa's dreadful words. But the personal feeling is nearer with most of us than the tenderest feeling for another; and my family had been so accustomed to the idea of my living on and on in that room, that while my heart was eating itself, their love for me was consoled, and at last the evil grew scarcely perceptible. It was no want of love in them, and quite natural in itself: we all get used to the thought of a tomb; and I was buried, that was the whole. It was a little thing even for myself a short time ago, and really it would be a pneumatological curiosity if I could describe and let you see how perfectly for years together, after what broke my heart at Torquay, I lived on the outside of my own life, blindly and darkly from day to day, as completely dead to hope of any kind as if I had my face against a grave, never feeling a personal instinct, taking trains of thought to carry out as an occupation absolutely indifferent to the *me* which is in every human being. Nobody quite understood this of me, because I am not morally a coward, and have a hatred of all the forms of audible groaning. But God knows what is within, and how utterly I had abdicated myself and thought it not worth while to put out my finger to touch my share of life. Even my poetry, which suddenly grew an interest, was a thing on the outside of me, a thing to be done, and then done! What people said of it did not touch *me*. A thoroughly morbid and desolate state it was, which I look back now to with the sort of horror with which one would look to one's graveclothes, if one had been clothed in them by mistake during a trance.

[Footnote 147: The date at the head of the letter is October 2, but that is certainly a slip of the pen, since at that date, as the following letter to Miss Mitford shows, they had not reached Pisa. See also the reference to 'six weeks of marriage' on p. 295. The Pisa postmark appears to be October 20 (or later), and the English postmark is November 5.]

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And now I will tell you. It is nearly two years ago since I have known Mr. Browning. Mr. Kenyon wished to bring him to see me five years ago, as one of the lions of London who roared the gentlest and was best worth my knowing; but I refused then, in my blind dislike to seeing strangers. Immediately, however, after the publication of my last volumes, he wrote to me, and we had a correspondence which ended in my agreeing to receive him as I never had received any other man. I did not know why, but it was utterly impossible for me to refuse to receive him, though I consented against my will. He writes the most exquisite letters possible, and has a way of putting things which I have not, a way of putting aside—so he came. He came, and with our personal acquaintance began his attachment for me, a sort of *infatuation* call it, which resisted the various denials which were my plain duty at the beginning, and has persisted past them all. I began with—a grave assurance that I was in an exceptional position and saw him just in consequence of it, and that if ever he recurred to that subject again I never could see him again while I lived; and he believed me and was silent. To my mind, indeed, it was a bare impulse—a generous man of quick sympathies taking up a sudden interest with both hands! So I thought; but in the meantime the letters and the visits rained down more and more, and in every one there was something which was too slight to analyse and notice, but too decided not to be understood; so that at last, when the 'proposed respect' of the silence gave way, it was rather less dangerous. So then I showed him how he was throwing into the ashes his best affections—how the common gifts of youth and cheerfulness were behind me—how I had not strength, even of *heart*, for the ordinary duties of life—everything I told him and showed him. 'Look at this—and this,' throwing down all my disadvantages. To which he did not answer by a single compliment, but simply that he had not then to choose, and that I might be right or he might be right, he was not there to decide; but that he loved me and should to his last hour. He said that the freshness of youth had passed with him also, and that he had studied the world out of books and seen many women, yet had never loved one until he had seen me. That he knew himself, and knew that, if ever so repulsed, he should love me to his last hour—it should be first and last. At the same time, he would not tease me, he would wait twenty years if I pleased, and then, if life lasted so long for both of us, then when it was ending perhaps, I might understand him and feel that I might have trusted him. For my health, he had believed when he first spoke that I was suffering from an incurable injury of the spine, and that he never could hope to see me stand up before his face, and he appealed to my womanly sense of what a pure attachment should be—whether such a circumstance, if it had been true, was inconsistent with it. He preferred, he said, of free and deliberate choice, to be allowed to sit only an hour a day by my side, to the fulfilment of the brightest dream which should exclude me, in any possible world.

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I tell you so much, my ever dear friend, that you may see the manner of man I have had to do with, and the sort of attachment which for nearly two years has been drawing and winning me. I know better than any in the world, indeed, what Mr. Kenyon once unconsciously said before me—that 'Robert Browning is great in everything.' Then, when you think how this element of an affection so pure and persistent, cast into my dreary life, must have acted on it—how little by little I was drawn into the persuasion that something was left, and that still I could do something to the happiness of another—and he what he was, for I have deprived myself of the privilege of praising him—then it seemed worth while to take up with that unusual energy (for me!), expended in vain last year, the advice of the physicians that I should go to a warm climate for the winter. Then came the Pisa conflict of last year. For years I had looked with a sort of indifferent expectation towards Italy, knowing and feeling that I should escape there the annual relapse, yet, with that *laisser aller* manner which had become a habit to me, unable to form a definite wish about it. But last year, when all this happened to me, and I was better than usual in the summer, I *wished* to make the experiment—to live the experiment out, and see whether there was hope for me or not hope. Then came Dr. Chambers, with his encouraging opinion. 'I wanted simply a warm climate and *air*,' he said; 'I might be well if I pleased.' Followed what you know—or do not precisely know—the pain of it was acutely felt by me; for I never had doubted but that papa would catch at any human chance of restoring my health. I was under the delusion always that the difficulty of making such trials lay in *me*, and not in *him*. His manner of acting towards me last summer was one of the most painful griefs of my life, because it involved a disappointment in the affections. My dear father is a very peculiar person. He is naturally stern, and has exaggerated notions of authority, but these things go with high and noble qualities; and as for feeling, the water is under the rock, and I had faith. Yes, and have it. I admire such qualities as he has—fortitude, integrity. I loved him for his courage in adverse circumstances which were yet felt by him more literally than I could feel them. Always he has had the greatest power over my heart, because I am of those weak women who reverence strong men. By a word he might have bound me to him hand and foot. Never has he spoken a gentle word to me or looked a kind look which has not made in me large results of gratitude, and throughout my illness the sound of his step on the stairs has had the power of quickening my pulse—I have loved him so and love him. Now if he had said last summer that he was reluctant for me to leave him—if he had even allowed me to think *by mistake* that his affection for me was the motive of such reluctance—I was ready to

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give up Pisa in a moment, and I told him as much. Whatever my new impulses towards life were, my love for him (taken so) would have resisted all—I loved him so dearly. But his course was otherwise, quite otherwise, and I was wounded to the bottom of my heart—cast off when I was ready to cling to him. In the meanwhile, at my side was another; I was driven and I was drawn. Then at last I said, 'If you like to let this winter decide it, you may. I will allow of no promises nor engagement. I cannot go to Italy, and I know, as nearly as a human creature can know any fact, that I shall be ill again through the influence of this English winter. If I am, you will see plainer the foolishness of this persistence; if I am not, I will do what you please.' And his answer was, 'If you are ill and keep your resolution of not marrying me under those circumstances, I will keep mine and love you till God shall take us both.' This was in last autumn, and the winter came with its miraculous mildness, as you know, and I was saved as I dared not hope; my word therefore was claimed in the spring. Now do you understand, and will you feel for me? An application to my father was certainly the obvious course, if it had not been for his peculiar nature and my peculiar position. But there is no speculation in the case; it is a matter of *knowledge* that if Robert had applied to him in the first instance he would have been forbidden the house without a moment's scruple; and if in the last (as my sisters thought best as a respectable *form*), I should have been incapacitated from any after-exertion by the horrible scenes to which, as a thing of course, I should have been exposed. Papa will not bear some subjects, it is a thing *known*; his peculiarity takes that ground to the largest. Not one of his children will ever marry without a breach, which we all know, though he probably does not—deceiving himself in a setting up of *obstacles*, whereas the real obstacle is in his own mind. In my case there was, or would have been, a great deal of apparent reason to hold by; my health would have been motive enough—ostensible motive. I see that precisely as others may see it. Indeed, if I were charged now with want of generosity for casting myself so, a dead burden, on the man I love, nothing of the sort could surprise me. It was what occurred to myself, that thought was, and what occasioned a long struggle and months of agitation, and which nothing could have overcome but the very uncommon affection of a very uncommon person, reasoning out to me the great fact of love making its own level. As to vanity and selfishness blinding me, certainly I may have made a mistake, and the future may prove it, but still more certainly I was not blinded *so*. On the contrary, never have I been more humbled, and never less in danger of considering any personal pitiful advantage, than throughout this affair. You, who are generous and a woman, will believe this of me, even if you do

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not comprehend the *habit* I had fallen into of casting aside the consideration of possible happiness of my own. But I was speaking of papa. Obvious it was that the application to him was a mere form. I knew the result of it. I had made up my mind to act upon my full right of taking my own way. I had long believed such an act (the most strictly personal act of one's life) to be within the rights of every person of mature age, man or woman, and I had resolved to exercise that right in my own case by a resolution which had slowly ripened. All the other doors of life were shut to me, and shut me in as in a prison, and only before this door stood one whom I loved best and who loved me best, and who invited me out through it for the good's sake which he thought I could do him. Now if for the sake of the mere form I had applied to my father, and if, as he would have done directly, he had set up his 'curse' against the step I proposed to take, would it have been doing otherwise than placing a knife in his hand? A few years ago, merely through the reverberation of what he said to another on a subject like this, I fell on the floor in a fainting fit, and was almost delirious afterwards. I cannot bear some words. I would much rather have blows without them. In my actual state of nerves and physical weakness, it would have been the sacrifice of my whole life—of my convictions, of my affections, and, above all, of what the person dearest to me persisted in calling *his* life, and the good of it—if I had observed that 'form.' Therefore, wrong or right, I determined not to observe it, and, wrong or right, I did and do consider that in not doing so I sinned against no duty. That I was *constrained* to act clandestinely, and did not *choose* to do so, God is witness, and will set it down as my heavy misfortune and not my fault. Also, up to the very last act we stood in the light of day for the whole world, if it pleased, to judge us. I never saw him out of the Wimpole Street house; he came twice a week to see me—or rather, three times in the fortnight, openly in the sight of all, and this for nearly two years, and neither more nor less. Some jests used to be passed upon us by my brothers, and I allowed them without a word, but it would have been infamous in me to have taken any into my confidence who would have suffered, as a direct consequence, a blighting of his own prospects. My secrecy towards them all was my simple duty towards them all, and what they call want of affection was an affectionate consideration for them. My sisters did indeed know the truth to a certain point. They knew of the attachment and engagement—I could not help that—but the whole of the event I kept from them with a strength and resolution which really I did not know to be in me, and of which nothing but a sense of the injury to be done to them by a fuller confidence, and my tender gratitude and attachment to them for all their love and goodness,

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could have rendered me capable. Their faith in me, and undeviating affection for me, I shall be grateful for to the end of my existence, and to the extent of my power of feeling gratitude. My dearest sisters!—especially, let me say, my own beloved Arabel, who, with no consolation except the exercise of a most generous tenderness, has looked only to what she considered my good—never doubting me, never swerving for one instant in her love for me. May God reward her as I cannot. Dearest Henrietta loves me too, but loses less in me, and has reasons for not misjudging me. But both my sisters have been faultless in their bearing towards me, and never did I love them so tenderly as I love them now.

The only time I met R.B. clandestinely was in the parish church, where we were married before two witnesses—it was the first and only time. I looked, he says, more dead than alive, and can well believe it, for I all but fainted on the way, and had to stop for sal volatile at a chemist's shop. The support through it all was *my trust in him*, for no woman who ever committed a like act of trust has had stronger motives to hold by. Now may I not tell you that his genius, and all but miraculous attainments, are the least things in him, the moral nature being of the very noblest, as all who ever knew him admit? Then he has had that wide experience of men which ends by throwing the mind back on itself and God; there is nothing incomplete in him, except as all humanity is incompleteness. The only wonder is how such a man, whom any woman could have loved, should have loved *me*; but men of genius, you know, are apt to love with their imagination. Then there is something in the sympathy, the strange, straight sympathy which unites us on all subjects. If it were not that I look up to him, we should be too alike to be together perhaps, but I know my place better than he does, who is too humble. Oh, you cannot think how well we get on after six weeks of marriage. If I suffer again it will not be through *him*. Some day, dearest Mrs. Martin, I will show you and dear Mr. Martin how his *prophecy was fulfilled*, saving some picturesque particulars. I did not know before that Saul was among the prophets.

My poor husband suffered very much from the constraint imposed on him by my position, and did, for the first time in his life, for my sake do that in secret which he could not speak upon the housetops. *Mea culpa* all of it! If one of us two is to be blamed, it is I, at whose representation of circumstances he submitted to do violence to his own self-respect. I would not suffer him to tell even our dear common friend Mr. Kenyon. I felt that it would be throwing on dear Mr. Kenyon a painful responsibility, and involve him in the blame ready to fall. And dear dear Mr. Kenyon, like the noble, generous friend I love so deservedly, comprehends all at a word, sends us *not* his forgiveness, but his sympathy, his

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affection, the kindest words which can be written! I cannot tell you all his inexpressible kindness to us both. He justifies us to the uttermost, and, in that, all the grateful attachment we had, each on our side, so long professed towards him. Indeed, in a note I had from him yesterday, he uses this strong expression after gladly speaking of our successful journey: 'I considered that you had *perilled your life* upon this undertaking, and, reflecting upon your last position, I thought that *you had done well*.' But my life was not perilled in the journey. The agitation and fatigue were evils, to be sure, and Mrs. Jameson, who met us in Paris by a happy accident, thought me 'looking horribly ill' at first, and persuaded us to rest there for a week on the promise of accompanying us herself to Pisa to help Robert to take care of me. He, who was in a fit of terror about me, agreed at once, and so she came with us, she and her young niece, and her kindness leaves us both very grateful. So kind she was, and is—for still she is in Pisa—opening her arms to us and calling us 'children of light' instead of ugly names, and declaring that she should have been 'proud' to have had anything to do with our marriage. Indeed, we hear every day kind speeches and messages from people such as Mr. Chorley of the 'Athenaeum,' who 'has tears in his eyes,' Monckton Milnes, Barry Cornwall, and other friends of my husband's, but who only know *me* by my books, and I want the love and sympathy of those who love me and whom I love. I was talking of the influence of the journey. The change of air has done me wonderful good notwithstanding the fatigue, and I am renewed to the point of being able to throw off most of my invalid habits; and of walking quite like a woman. Mrs. Jameson said the other day, 'You are not *improved*, you are *transformed*.' We have most comfortable rooms here at Pisa and have taken them for six months, in the best situation for health, and close to the Duomo and Leaning Tower. It is a beautiful, solemn city, and we have made acquaintance with Professor Ferucci, who is about to admit us to [a sight][148] of the [University Lib]rary. We shall certainly [spend] next summer in Italy *somewhere*, and [talk] of Rome for the next winter, but, of course, this is all in air. Let me hear

from you, dearest Mrs. Martin, and direct, 'M. Browning, Poste Restante, Pisa'—it is best. Just before we left Paris I wrote to my aunt Jane, and from Marseilles to Bummy, but from neither have I heard yet.

With best love to dearest Mr. Martin, ever both my dear kind friends,

Your affectionate and grateful
BA.

[Footnote 148: The original is torn here.]

To Miss Mitford[149] Moulins: October 2, 1846.

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I began to write to you, my beloved friend, earlier, that I might follow your kindest wishes literally, and also to thank you at once for your goodness to me, for which may God bless you. But the fatigue and agitation have been very great, and I was forced to break off—as now I dare not revert to what is behind. I will tell you more another day. At Orleans, with your kindest letter, I had one from my dearest, gracious friend Mr. Kenyon, who, in his goodness, does more than exculpate—even *approves*—he wrote a joint letter to both of us. But oh, the anguish I have gone through! You are good, you are kind. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for saying to me that you would have gone to the church with me. *Yes, I know you would*. And for that very reason I forbore involving you in such a responsibility and drawing you into such a net. I took Wilson with me. I had courage to keep the secret to my sisters for their sakes, though I will tell you in strict confidence that it was known to them *potentially*, that is, the attachment and engagement were known, the necessity remaining that, for stringent reasons affecting their own tranquillity, they should be able to say at last, 'We were not instructed in this and this.' The dearest, fondest, most affectionate of sisters they are to me, and if the sacrifice of a life, or of all prospect of happiness, would have worked any lasting good to them, it should have been made even in the hour I left them. I knew *that* by the anguish I suffered in it. But a sacrifice, without good to anyone—I shrank from it. And also, it was the sacrifice of *two*. And *he*, as you say, had done everything for me, had loved me for reasons which had helped to weary me of myself, loved me heart to heart persistently—in spite of my own will—drawn me back to life and hope again when I had done with both. My life seemed to belong to him and to none other at last, and I had no power to speak a word. Have faith in me, my dearest friend, till you can know him. The intellect is so little in comparison to all the rest, to the womanly tenderness, the inexhaustible goodness, the high and noble aspiration of every hour. Temper, spirits, manners: there is not a flaw anywhere. I shut my eyes sometimes and fancy it all a dream of my guardian angel. Only, if it had been a dream, the pain of some parts of it would have awakened me before now; it is not a dream. I have borne all the emotion of fatigue miraculously well, though, of course, a good deal exhausted at times. We had intended to hurry on to the South at once, but at Paris we met Mrs. Jameson, who opened her arms to us with the most literal affectionateness, *kissed us both*, and took us by surprise by calling us 'wise people, wild poets or not.' Moreover, she fixed us in an apartment above her own in the Hotel de la Ville de Paris, that I might rest for a week, and crowned the rest of her goodnesses by agreeing to accompany us to Pisa, where she was

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about to travel with her young niece. Therefore we are five travelling, Wilson being with me. Oh, yes, Wilson came; her attachment to me never shrank for a moment. And Flush came and I assure you that nearly as much attention has been paid to Flush as to me from the beginning, so that he is perfectly reconciled, and would be happy if the people at the railroads were not barbarians, and immovable in their evil designs of shutting him up in a box when we travel that way.

You understand now, ever dearest Miss Mitford, how the pause has come about writing. The week at Paris! Such a strange week it was, altogether like a vision. Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell scarcely. Our Balzac should be flattered beyond measure by my thinking of him at all. Which I did, but of *you* more. I will write and tell you more about Paris. You should go there indeed. And to our hotel, if at all. Once we were at the Louvre, but we kept very still of course, and were satisfied with the *idea* of Paris. I could have borne to live on there, it was all so strange and full of contrast....

Now you will write—I feel my way on the paper to write this. Nothing is changed between us, nothing can ever interfere with sacred confidences, remember. I do not show letters, you need not fear my turning traitress.... Pray for me, dearest friend, that the bitterness of old affections may not be too bitter with me, and that God may turn those salt waters sweet again.

Pray for your grateful and loving
E.B.B.

[Footnote 149: This letter is of earlier date than the last, having been written *en route* between Orleans and Lyons; but it has seemed better to place the more detailed narrative first.]

To Mrs. Martin [Pisa:] November 5, [1846].

It was pleasant to me, my dearest friend, to think while I was reading your letter yesterday, that almost by that time you had received mine, and could not even seem to doubt a moment longer whether I admitted your claim of hearing and of speaking to the uttermost. I recognised you too entirely as my friend. Because you had put faith in me, so much the more reason there was that I should justify it as far as I could, and with as much frankness (which was a part of my gratitude to you) as was possible from a woman to a woman. Always I have felt that you have believed in me and loved me; and, for the sake of the past and of the present, your affection and your esteem are more to me than I could afford to lose, even in these changed and happy circumstances. So I thank you once more, my dear kind friends, I thank you both—I never shall forget your goodness. I feel it, of course, the more deeply, in proportion to the painful disappointment in other quarters.... Am I, bitter? The feeling, however,

passes while I write it out, and my own affection for everybody will wait patiently to be 'forgiven' in the proper form, when everybody shall be at leisure properly. Assuredly,

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in the meanwhile, however, my case is not to be classed with other cases—what happened to me could not have happened, perhaps, with any other family in England.... I hate and loathe everything too which is clandestine—we *both* do, Robert and I; and the manner the whole business was carried on in might have instructed the least acute of the bystanders. The flowers standing perpetually on my table for the last two years were brought there by one hand, as everybody knew; and really it would have argued an excess of benevolence in an unmarried man with quite enough resources in London, to pay the continued visits he paid to me without some strong motive indeed. Was it his fault that he did not associate with everybody in the house as well as with me? He desired it; but no—that was not to be. The endurance of the pain of the position was not the least proof of his attachment to me. How I thank you for believing in him—how grateful it makes me! He will justify to the uttermost that faith. We have been married two months, and every hour has bound me to him more and more; if the beginning was well, still better it is now—that is what he says to me, and I say back again day by day. Then it is an 'advantage,' to have an inexhaustible companion who talks wisdom of all things in heaven and earth, and shows besides as perpetual a good humour and gaiety as if he were—a fool, shall I say? or a considerable quantity more, perhaps. As to our domestic affairs, it is not to *my* honour and glory that the 'bills' are made up every week and paid more regularly 'than hard beseems,' while dear Mrs. Jameson laughs outright at our miraculous prudence and economy, and declares that it is past belief and precedent that we should not burn the candles at both ends, and the next moment will have it that we remind her of the children in a poem of Heine's who set up housekeeping in a tub, and inquired gravely the price of coffee. Ah, but she has left Pisa at last—left it yesterday. It was a painful parting to everybody. Seven weeks spent in such close neighbourhood—a month of it under the same roof and in the same carriages—will fasten people together, and then travelling *shakes* them together. A more affectionate, generous woman never lived than Mrs. Jameson, and it is pleasant to be sure that she loves us both from her heart, and not only *du bout des levres*. Think of her making Robert promise (as he has told me since) that in the case of my being unwell he would write to her instantly, and she would come at once if anywhere in Italy. So kind, so like her. She spends the winter in Rome, but an intermediate month at Florence, and we are to keep tryst with her somewhere in the spring, perhaps at Venice. If not, she says that she will come back here, for that certainly she will see us. She would have stayed altogether perhaps, if it had not been for her book upon art which she is engaged to bring out next year, and the materials

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for which are to be *sought*. As to Pisa, she liked it just as we like it. Oh, it is so beautiful and so full of repose, yet not *desolate*: it is rather the repose of sleep than of death. Then after the first ten days of rain, which seemed to refer us fatally to Alfieri's 'piove e ripiove,' came as perpetual a divine sunshine, such cloudless, exquisite weather that we ask whether it may not be June instead of November. Every day I am out walking while the golden oranges look at me over the walls, and when I am tired Robert and I sit down on a stone to watch the lizards. We have been to your seashore, too, and seen your island, only he insists on it (Robert does) that it is not Corsica but Gorgona, and that Corsica is not in sight. *Beautiful* and blue the island was, however, in any case. It might have been Romero's instead of either. Also we have driven up to the foot of mountains, and seen them reflected down in the little pure lake of Ascuno, and we have seen the pine woods, and met the camels laden with faggots all in a line. So now ask me again if I enjoy my liberty as you expect. My head goes round sometimes, that is all. I never was happy before in my life. Ah, but, of course, the painful thoughts recur!

There are some whom I love too tenderly to be easy under their displeasure, or even under their injustice. Only it, seems to me that with time and patience my poor dearest papa will be melted into opening his arms to us—will be melted into a clearer understanding of motives and intentions; I cannot believe that he will forget me, as he says he will, and go on thinking me to be dead rather than alive and happy. So I manage to hope for the best, and all that remains, all my life here, *is* best already, could not be better or happier. And willingly tell dear Mr. Martin I would take him and you for witnesses of it, and in the meanwhile he is not to send me tantalising messages; no, indeed, unless you really, really, should let yourselves be wafted our way, and could you do so much better at Pau? particularly if Fanny Hanford should come here. Will she really? The climate is described by the inhabitants as a 'pleasant spring throughout the winter,' and if you were to see Robert and me threading our path along the shady side everywhere to avoid the 'excessive heat of the sun' in this November (!) it would appear a good beginning. We are not in the warm orthodox position by the Arno because we heard with our ears one of the best physicians of the place advise against it. 'Better,' he said, 'to have cool rooms to live in and warm walks to go out along.' The rooms we have are rather over-cool perhaps; we are obliged to have a little fire in the sitting-room, in the mornings and evenings that is; but I do not fear for the winter, there is too much difference to my feelings between this November and any English November I ever knew. We have our dinner from the Trattoria at two o'clock, and can dine our favorite way on thrushes and chianti

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with a miraculous cheapness, and no trouble, no cook, no kitchen; the prophet Elijah or the lilies of the field took as little thought for their dining, which exactly suits us. It is a continental fashion which we never cease commending. Then at six we have coffee, and rolls of milk, made of milk, I mean, and at nine our supper (call it supper, if you please) of roast chestnuts and grapes. So you see how primitive we are, and how I forget to praise the eggs at breakfast. The worst of Pisa is, or would be to some persons, that, socially speaking, it has its dullnesses; it is not lively like Florence, not in that way. But we do not want society, we shun it rather. We like the Duomo and the Campo Santo instead. Then we know a little of Professor Ferucci, who gives us access to the University library, and we subscribe to a modern one, and we have plenty of writing to do of our own. If we can do anything for Fanny Hanford, let us know. It would be too happy, I suppose, to have to do it for yourselves. Think, however, I am quite well, quite well. I can thank God, too, for being alive and well. Make dear Mr. Martin keep well, and not forget himself in the Herefordshire cold—draw him into the sun somewhere. Now write and tell me everything of your plans and of you both, dearest friends. My husband bids me say that he desires to have my friends for his own friends, and that he is grateful to you for not crossing that feeling. Let him send his regards to you. And let me be throughout all changes,

Your ever faithful and most affectionate
BA.

I am expecting every day to hear from my dearest sisters. Write to them and love them for me.

This letter has been kept for several days from different causes. Will you inclose the little note to Miss Mitford? I do not hear from home, and am uneasy.

May God bless you!

November 9.

I am so vexed about those poems appearing just now in ’Blackwood.’[150] Papa must think it *impudent* of me. It is unfortunate.

[Footnote 150: *Blackwood’s Magazine* for October 1846 contained the following poems by Mrs. Browning, some phrases in which might certainly be open to comment if they were supposed to have been deliberately chosen for publication at this particular time: ’A Woman’s Shortcomings,’ ‘A Man’s Requirements,’ ‘Maude’s Spinning,’ ’A Dead Rose,’ ‘Change on Change,’ ‘A Reed,’ and ‘Hector in the Garden.’]

To Miss Mitford [Pisa]: November 5, 1846.

I have your letter, ever dearest Miss Mitford, and it is welcome even more than your letters have been used to be to me—the last charm was to come, you see, by this distance. For all your affection and solicitude, may you trust my gratitude; and if you love me a little, I love you indeed, and never shall cease. The only difference shall be that two may love you where one did, and for my part I will answer for it that if you could love the poor

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one you will not refuse any love to the other when you come to know him. I never could bear to speak to you of *him* since quite the beginning, or rather I never could dare. But when you know him and understand how the mental gifts are scarcely half of him, you will not wonder at your friend, and, indeed, two years of steadfast affection from such a man would have, overcome any woman's heart. I have been neither much wiser nor much foolisher than all the shes in the world, only much happier—the difference is in the happiness. Certainly I am not likely to repent of having given myself to him. I cannot, for all the pain received from another quarter, the comfort for which is that my conscience is pure of the sense of having broken the least known duty, and that the same consequence would follow any marriage of any member of my family with any possible man or woman. I look to time, and reason, and natural love and pity, and to the justification of the events acting through all; I look on so and hope, and in the meanwhile it has been a great comfort to have had not merely the indulgence but the approbation and sympathy of most of my old personal friends—oh, such kind letters; for instance, yesterday one came from dear Mrs. Martin, who has known me, she and her husband, since the very beginning of my womanhood, and both of them are acute, thinking people, with heads as strong as their hearts. I in my haste left England without a word to them, for which they might naturally have reproached me; instead of which they write to say that never *for a moment* have they doubted my having acted for the best and happiest, and to assure me that, having sympathised with me in every sorrow and trial, they delightedly feel with me in the new joy; nothing could be more cordially kind. See how I write to you as if I could speak—all these little things which are great things when seen in the light. Also R, and I are not in the least tired of one another notwithstanding the very perpetual *tete-a-tete* into which we have fallen, and which (past the first fortnight) would be rather a trial in many cases. Then our housekeeping may end perhaps in being a proverb among the nations, for at the beginning it makes Mrs. Jameson laugh heartily. It disappoints her theories, she admits—finding that, albeit poets, we abstain from burning candles at both ends at once, just as if we did statistics and historical abstracts by nature instead. And do not think that the trouble falls on me. Even the pouring out of the coffee is a divided labour, and the ordering of the dinner is quite out of my hands. As for me, when I am so good as to let myself be carried upstairs, and so angelical as to sit still on the sofa, and so considerate, moreover, as *not* to put my foot into a puddle, why *my* duty is considered done to a perfection which is worthy of all adoration; it really is not very hard work to please this taskmaster. For Pisa, we both like it extremely. The city is full of beauty and

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repose, and the purple mountains gloriously seem to beckon us on deeper into the vineland. We have rooms close to the Duomo and Leaning Tower, in the great Collegio built by Vasari, three excellent bedrooms and a sitting-room, matted and carpeted, looking comfortable even for England. For the last fortnight, except the very last few sunny days, we have had rain; but the climate is as mild as possible, no cold, with all the damp. Delightful weather we had for the travelling. Ah, you, with your terrors of travelling, how you amuse me! Why, the constant change of air in the continued fine weather made me better and better instead of worse. It did me infinite good. Mrs. Jameson says she 'won't call me *improved*, but *transformed* rather.' I like the new sights and the movement; my spirits rise; I live—I can adapt myself. If you really tried it and got as far as Paris you would be drawn on, I fancy, and on—on to the East perhaps with H. Martineau, or at least as near it as we are here. By the way, or out of the way, it struck me as unfortunate that my poems should have been printed *just now* in 'Blackwood;' I wish it had been otherwise. Then I had a letter from one of my Leeds readers the other day to expostulate about the *inappropriateness* of certain of them! The fact is that I sent a heap of verses swept from my desk and belonging to old feelings and impressions, and not imagining that they were to be used in that quick way. There can't be very much to like, I fear, apart from your goodness for what calls itself mine. Love me, dearest dear Miss Mitford, my dear kind friend—love me, I beg of you, still and ever, only ceasing when I cease to think of you; I will allow of that clause. Mrs. Jameson and Gerardine are staying at the hotel here in Pisa still, and we manage to see them every day; so good and true and affectionate she is, and so much we shall miss her when she goes, which will be in a day or two now. She goes to Florence, to Siena, to Rome to complete her work upon art, which is the object of her Italian journey. I read your vivid and glowing description of the picture to her, or rather I showed your picture to her, and she quite believes with you that it is most probably a *Velasquez*. Much to be congratulated the owner must be. I mean to know something about pictures some day. Robert does, and I shall get him to open my eyes for me with a little instruction. You know that in this place are to be seen the first steps of art, and it will be interesting to trace them from it as we go farther ourselves. Our present residence we have taken for six months; but we have dreams, dreams, and we discuss them like soothsayers over the evening's roasted chestnuts and grapes. Flush highly approves of Pisa (and the roasted chestnuts), because here he goes out every day and speaks Italian to the little dogs. Oh, Mr. Chorley, such a kind, feeling note he wrote to Robert from Germany, when he read of our

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marriage in ‘Galignani;’ we were both touched by it. And Monckton Milnes and others —very kind all. But in a particular manner I remember the kindness of my valued friend Mr. Horne, who never failed me nor could fail. Will you explain to him, or rather ask him to understand, why I did not answer his last note? I forget even Balzac here; tell me what he writes, and help me to love that dear, generous Mr. Kenyon, whom I can love without help. And let me love you, and you love me.

Your ever affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.

To Mrs. Jameson
Collegio Ferdinando [Pisa]:
Saturday, November 23, 1846 [postmark].

We were delighted to have your note, dearest Aunt Nina, and I answer it with my feet on your stool, so that my feet are full of you even if my head is not, always. Now, I shall not go a sentence farther without thanking you for that comfort; you scarcely guessed perhaps what a comfort it would be, that stool of yours. I am even apt to sit on it for hours together, leaning against the sofa, till I get to be scolded for putting myself so into the fire, and prophesied of in respect to the probability of a ‘general conflagration’ of stools and Bas; on which the prophet is to leap from the Leaning Tower, and Flush to be left to make the funeral oration of the establishment. In the meantime, it really is quite a comfort that our housekeeping should be your ‘example’ at Florence; we have edifying countenances whenever we think of it. And Robert will not by any means believe that you passed us on our own ground, though the eleven pauls a week for breakfast, and my humility, seemed to suggest something of the sort. I am so glad, we are both so glad, that you are enjoying yourself at the fullest and highest among the wonders of art, and cannot be chilled in the soul by any of those fatal winds you speak of. For me, I am certainly better here at Pisa, though the penalty is to see Frate Angelico’s picture with the remembrance of you rather than the presence. Here, indeed, we have had a little too much cold for two days; there was a feeling of frost in the air, and a most undeniable east wind which prevented my going out, and made me feel less comfortable than usual at home. But, after all, one felt ashamed to call it *cold*, and Robert found the heat on the Arno insupportable; which set us both mourning over our ‘situation’ at the Collegio, where one of us could not get out on such days without a blow on the chest from the ‘wind at the corner.’ Well, experience teaches, and we shall be taught, and the cost of it is not so very much after all. We have seen your professor once since you left us (oh, the leaving!), or *spoken* to him once, I should say, when he came in one evening and caught us reading, sighing, yawning over ‘Nicolo de’ Lapi,’ a romance by the son-in law of Manzoni. Before we could speak, he called it ‘excellent, tres beau,’ one of their very best romances, upon which, of course, dear Robert could not bear to offend

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his literary and national susceptibilities by a doubt even. *I*, not being so humane, thought that any suffering reader would be justified (under the rack-wheel) in crying out against such a book, as the dullest, heaviest, stupidest, lengthiest. Did you ever read it? If not, *don't*. When a father-in-law imitates Scott, and a son-in-law imitates his father-in-law, think of the consequences! Robert, in his zeal for Italy and against Eugene Sue, tried to persuade me at first (this was before the scene with your professor) that 'really, Ba, it wasn't so bad,' 'really you are too hard to be pleased,' and so on; but after two or three chapters, the dullness grew too strong for even his benevolence, and the yawning catastrophe (supposed to be peculiar to the 'Guida') overthrew him as completely as it ever did me, though we both resolved to hold on by the stirrup to the end of the two volumes. The catalogue of the library (for observe that we subscribe now—the object is attained!) offers a most melancholy insight into the actual literature of Italy. Translations, translations, translations from third and fourth and fifth rate French and English writers, chiefly French; the roots of thought, here in Italy, seem dead in the ground. It is well that they have great memories—nothing else lives.

We have had the kindest of letters from dear noble Mr. Kenyon; who, by the way, speaks of you as we like to hear him. Dickens is going to Paris for the winter, and Mrs. Butler[151] (he adds) is expected in London. Dear Mr. Kenyon calls me 'crotchety,' but Robert 'an incarnation of the good and the true,' so that I have everything to thank him for. There are noble people who take the world's side and make it seem 'for the *nonce*' almost respectable; but he gives up all the talk and fine schemes about money-making, and allows us to wait to see whether we want it or not—the money, I mean.

It is Monday, and I am only finishing this note. In the midst came letters from my sisters, making me feel so glad that I could not write. Everybody is well and happy, and dear papa *in high spirits* and *having people to dine with him every day*, so that I have not really done anyone harm in doing myself all this good. It does not indeed bring us a step nearer to the forgiveness, but to hear of his being in good spirits makes me inclined to jump, with Gerardine.[152] Dear Geddie! How pleased I am to hear of her being happy, particularly (perhaps) as she is not too happy to forget *me*. Is all that glory of art making her very ambitious to work and enter into the court of the Temple?...

Robert's love to you both. We often talk of our prospect of meeting you again. And for the *past*, dearest Aunt Nina, believe of me that I feel to you more gratefully than ever I can say, and remain, while I live,

Your faithful and affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 151: Better known as Fanny Kemble.]

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[Footnote 152: Miss Gerardine Bate, Mrs. Jameson's niece.]

To Miss Mitford Pisa: December 19, [1846].

Ever dearest Miss Mitford, your kindest letter is three times welcome as usual. On the day you wrote it in the frost, I was sitting out of doors, just in my summer mantilla, and complaining 'of the heat this December!' But woe comes to the discontented. Within these three or four days we too have had frost—yes, and a little snow, for the first time, say the Pisans, during five years. Robert says that the mountains are powdered toward Lucca, and I, who cannot see the mountains, can see the cathedral—the Duomo—how it glitters whitely at the summit, between the blue sky and its own walls of yellow marble. Of course I do not stir an inch from the fire, yet have to struggle a little against my old languor. Only, you see, this can't last! it is exceptional weather, and, up to the last few days, has been divine. And then, after all we talk of frost, my bedroom, which has no fireplace, shows not an English sign on the window, and the air is not *metallic* as in England. The sun, too, is so hot that the women are seen walking with fur capes and parasols, a curious combination.

I hope you had your visit from Mr. Chorley, and that you both had the usual pleasure from it. Indeed I *am* touched by what you tell me, and was touched by his note to my husband, written in the first surprise; and because Robert has the greatest regard for him, besides my own personal reasons, I do count him in the forward rank of our friends. You will hear that he has obliged us by accepting a trusteeship to a settlement, forced upon me in spite of certain professions or indispositions of mine; but as my husband's gifts, I had no right, it appeared, by refusing it to place him in a false position for the sake of what dear Mr. Kenyon calls my 'crotchets.' Oh, dear Mr. Kenyon! His kindness and goodness to us have been past thinking of, past thanking for; we can only fall into silence. He has thrust his hand into the fire for us by writing to papa himself, by taking up the management of my small money-matters when nearer hands let them drop, by justifying us with the whole weight of his personal influence; all this in the very face of his own habits and susceptibilities. He has resolved that I shall not miss the offices of father, brother, friend, nor the tenderness and sympathy of them all. And this man is called a mere man of the world, and would be called so rightly if the world were a place for angels. I shall love him dearly and gratefully to my last breath; we both shall....

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Robert and I are deep in the fourth month of wedlock; there has not been a shadow between us, nor a *word* (and I have observed that all married people confess to *words*), and that the only change I can lay my finger on in him is simply and clearly an increase of affection. Now I need not say it if I did not please, and I should not please, you know, to tell a story. The truth is, that I who always did certainly believe in love, yet was as great a sceptic as you about the evidences thereof, and having held twenty times that Jacob's serving fourteen years for Rachel was not too long by fourteen days, I was not a likely person (with my loathing dread of marriage as a loveless state, and absolute contentment with single life as the alternative to the great majorities of marriages), I was not likely to accept a feeling not genuine, though from the hand of Apollo himself, crowned with his various godships. Especially too, in my position, I could not, would not, should not have done it. Then, genuine feelings are genuine feelings, and do not pass like a cloud. We are as happy as people can be, I do believe, yet are living in a way to *try* this new relationship of ours—in the utmost seclusion and perpetual *tete-a-tete*—no amusement nor distraction from without, except some of the very dullest Italian romances which throw us back on the memory of Balzac with reiterated groans. The Italians seem to hang on translations from the French—as we find from the library—not merely of Balzac, but Dumas, your Dumas, and reaching lower—long past De Kock—to the third and fourth rate novelists. What is purely Italian is, as far as we have read, purely dull and conventional. There is no breath nor pulse in the Italian genius. Mrs. Jameson writes to us from Florence that in politics and philosophy the people are getting alive—which may be, for aught we know to the contrary, the poetry and imagination leave them room enough by immense vacancies.

Yet we delight in Italy, and dream of 'pleasures new' for the summer—*pastures* new, I should have said—but it comes to the same thing. The *padrone* in this house sent us in as a gift (in gracious recognition, perhaps, of our lawful paying of bills) an immense dish of oranges—two hanging on a stalk with the green leaves still moist with the morning's dew—every great orange of twelve or thirteen with its own stalk and leaves. Such a pretty sight! And better oranges, I beg to say, never were eaten, when we are barbarous enough to eat them day by day after our two o'clock dinner, softening, with the vision of them, the winter which has just shown itself. Almost I have been as pleased with the oranges as I was at Avignon by the *pomegranate* given to me much in the same way. Think of my being singled out of all our caravan of travellers—Mrs. Jameson and Gerardine Jameson[153] both there—for that significant gift of the pomegranates! I had never seen one before, and, of course, proceeded instantly to cut one 'deep down the middle'[154]—accepting the omen. Yet, in shame and confusion of face, I confess to not being able to appreciate it properly. Olives and pomegranates I set on the same shelf, to be just looked at and called by their names, but by no means eaten bodily.

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But you mistake me, dearest friend, about the 'Blackwood' verses. I never thought of writing *applicative poems*—the heavens forfend! Only that just *then*, [in] the midst of all the talk, *any* verses of mine should come into print—and some of them to that *particular effect*—looked unlucky. I dare say poor papa (for instance) thought me turned suddenly to brass itself. Well, it is perhaps more my fancy than anything else, and was only an impression, even there. Mr. Chorley will tell you of a play of his, which I hope will make its way, though I do wonder how people can bear to write for the theatres in the present state of things. Robert is busy preparing a new edition of his collected poems which are to be so clear that everyone who has understood them hitherto will lose all distinction. We both mean to be as little idle as possible.... We shall meet one day in joy, I do hope, and then you will love my husband for his own sake, as for mine you do not hate him now.

Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 153: This surname is a mistake on Mrs. Browning's part; see her letter of October 1, 1849.]

[Footnote 154: See *Lady Geraldine's Courtship*, stanza xli.]

To H.S. Boyd [Pisa:] December 21 [1846].

You must let me tell you, my dearest Mr. Boyd, that I dreamed of you last night, and that you were looking very well in my dream, and that you told me to break a crust from a loaf of bread which lay by you on the table; which I accept on recollection as a sacramental sign between us, of peace and affection. Wasn't it strange that I should dream so of you? Yet no; thinking awake of you, the sleeping thoughts come naturally. Believe of me this Christmas time, as indeed at every time, that I do not forget you, and that all the distance and change of country can make no difference. Understand, too (for *that* will give pleasure to your goodness), that I am very happy, and not unwell, though it is almost Christmas....

Dearest friend, are you well and in good spirits? Think of me over the Cyprus, between the cup and the lip, though bad things are said to fall out so. We have, instead of Cyprus, *Montepulciano*, the famous 'King of Wine,' crowned king, you remember, by the grace of a poet! Your Cyprus, however, keeps supremacy over me, and will not abdicate the divine right of being associated with you. I speak of wine, but we live here the most secluded, quiet life possible—reading and writing, and talking of all things in heaven and earth, and a little besides; and sometimes even laughing as if we had twenty people to laugh with us, or rather *hadn't*. We know not a creature, I am happy to say, except an Italian professor (of the university here) who called on us the other evening and praised aloud the scholars of England. 'English Latin was best,' he said, 'and English Greek foremost.' Do you clap your hands?

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The new pope is more liberal than popes in general, and people write odes to him in consequence.

Robert is going to bring out a new edition of his collected poems, and you are not to read any more, if you please, till this is done. I heard of Carlyle's saying the other day 'that he hoped more from Robert Browning, for the people of England, than from any living English writer,' which pleased me, of course. I am just sending off an anti-slavery poem for America,[155] too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish: but they asked for a poem and shall have it.

If I ask for a letter, shall I have it, I wonder? Remember me and love me a little, and pray for me, dearest friend, and believe how gratefully and ever affectionately

I am your

ELIBET,

though Robert always calls me *Ba*, and thinks it the prettiest name in the world! which is a proof, you will say, not only of blind love but of deaf love.

[Footnote 155: 'The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point' *(Poetical Works*, ii. 192). It was first printed in a collection called *The Liberty Bell*, for sale at the Boston National Anti-slavery Bazaar of 1848. It was separately printed in England in 1849 as a small pamphlet, which is now a rare bibliographical curiosity.]

It was during the stay at Pisa, and early in the year 1847, that Mr. Browning first became acquainted with his wife's 'Sonnets from the Portuguese.' Written during the course of their courtship and engagement, they were not shown even to him until some months after their marriage. The story of it was told by Mr. Browning in later life to Mr. Edmund Gosse, with leave to make it known to the world in general; and from Mr. Gosse's publication it is here quoted in his own words.[156]

[Footnote 156: '*Critical Kit-Kats*,' by E. Gosse, p. 2 (1896).]

'Their custom was, Mr. Browning said, to write alone, and not to show each other what they had written. This was a rule which he sometimes broke through, but she never. He had the habit of working in a downstairs room, where their meals were spread, while Mrs. Browning studied in a room on the floor above. One day, early in 1847, their breakfast being over, Mrs. Browning went upstairs, while her husband stood at the window watching the street till the table should be cleared. He was presently aware of some one behind him, although the servant was gone. It was Mrs. Browning, who held him by the shoulder to prevent his turning to look at her, and at the same time pushed a packet of papers into the pocket of his coat. She told him to read that, and to tear it up if he did not like it; and then she fled again to her own room.'

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The sonnets were intended for her husband's eye alone; in the first instance, not even for his. No poems can ever have been composed with less thought of the public; perhaps for that very reason they are unmatched for simplicity and sincerity in all Mrs. Browning's work. Her genius in them has full mastery over its material, as it has in few of her other poems. All impurities of style or rhythm are purged away by the fire of love; and they stand, not only highest among the writings of their authoress, but also in the very forefront of English love-poems. With the single exception of Rossetti, no modern English poet has written of love with such genius, such beauty, and such sincerity, as the two who gave the most beautiful example of it in their own lives.

Fortunately for all those who love true poetry, Mr. Browning judged rightly of the obligation laid upon him by the possession of these poems. 'I dared not,' he said, 'reserve to myself the finest sonnets written in any language since Shakespeare's.' Accordingly he persuaded his wife to commit the printing of them to her friend, Miss Mitford; and in the course of the year they appeared in a slender volume, entitled 'Sonnets, by E.B.B.,' with the imprint 'Reading, 1847,' and marked 'Not for publication.' It was not until three years later that they were offered to the general public, in the volumes of 1850. Here first they appeared under the title of 'Sonnets from the Portuguese'—a title suggested by Mr. Browning (in preference to his wife's proposal, 'Sonnets translated from the Bosnian') for the sake of its half-allusion to her other poem, 'Catarina to Camoens,' which was one of his chief favourites among her works.

To these sonnets there is, however, no allusion in the letters here published, which say little for some time of her own work.

To Miss Mitford February 8, 1847.

But, my dearest Miss Mitford, your scheme about Leghorn is drawn out in the clouds. Now just see how impossible. Leghorn is fifteen miles off, and though there is a railroad there is no liberty for French books to wander backwards and forwards without inspection and seizure. Why, do remember that we are in Italy after all! Nevertheless, I will tell you what we have done: transplanted our subscription from the Italian library, which was wearing us away into a misanthropy, or at least despair of the wits of all Southerns, into a library which has a tolerable supply of French books, and gives us the privilege besides of having a French newspaper, the 'Siecle,' left with us every evening. Also, this library admits (is allowed to admit on certain conditions) some books forbidden generally by the censureship, which is of the strictest; and though Balzac appears very imperfectly, I am delighted to find him at all, and shall dun the bookseller for the 'Instruction criminelle,' which I hope discharges your Lucien as a 'forcat'—neither man nor woman—and true poet, least of all....

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The ‘Siecle’ has for a *feuilleton* a new romance of Soulie’s, called ‘Saturnin Fichet,’ which is really not good, and tiresome to boot. Robert and I began by each of us reading it, but after a little while he left me alone, being certain that no good could come of such a work. So, of course, ever since, I have been exclaiming and exclaiming as to the wonderful improvement and increasing beauty and glory of it, just to justify myself, and to make him sorry for not having persevered! The truth is, however, that but for obstinacy I should give up too. Deplorably dull the story is, and there is a crowd of people each more indifferent than each, to you; the pith of the plot being (very characteristically) that the hero has somebody exactly like him. To the reader, it’s *all one* in every sense—who’s who, and what’s what. Robert is a warm admirer of Balzac and has read most of his books, but certainly—oh certainly—he does not in a general way appreciate our French people quite with our warmth; he takes too high a standard, I tell him, and won’t listen to a story for a story’s sake. I can bear to be amused, you know without a strong pull on my admiration. So we have great wars sometimes, and I put up Dumas’ flag, or Soulie’s, or Eugene Sue’s (yet he was properly possessed by the ‘Mysteres de Paris’) and carry it till my arms ache. The plays and vaudevilles he knows far more of than I do, and always maintains they are the happiest growth of the French school—setting aside the *masters*, observe—for Balzac and George Sand hold all their honours; and, before your letter came, he had told me about the ‘Kean’ and the other dramas. Then we read together the other day the ‘Rouge et Noir,’ that powerful book of Stendhal’s (Beyle), and he thought it very striking, and observed—what I had thought from the first and again and again—that it was exactly like Balzac *in the raw*, in the material and undeveloped conception. What a book it is really, and so full of pain and bitterness, and the gall of iniquity! The new Dumas I shall see in time, perhaps, and it is curious that Robert had just been telling me the very story you speak of in your letter, from the ‘Causes Celebres.’ I never read it—the more shame! Dearest friend, all this talk of French books and no talk about *you*—the *most* shame! You don’t tell me enough of yourself, and I want to hear, because (besides the usual course of reasons) Mr. Chorley spoke of you as if you were not as cheerful as usual; do tell me. Ah! if you fancy that I do not love you as near, through being so far, you are unjust to me as you never were before. For myself, the brightness round me has had a cloud on it lately by an illness of poor Wilson’s.... She would not go to Dr. Cook till I was terrified one night, while she was undressing me, by her sinking down on the sofa in a shivering fit. Oh, so frightened I was, and Robert ran out for a physician; and I could have shivered too, with the fright. But she is

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convalescent now, thank God! and in the meanwhile I have acquired a heap of practical philosophy, and have learnt how it is possible (in certain conditions of the human frame) to comb out and twist up one's own hair, and lace one's very own stays, and cause hooks and eyes to meet behind one's very own back, besides making toast and water for Wilson—which last miracle, it is only just to say, was considerably assisted by Robert's counsels 'not quite to set fire to the bread' while one was toasting it. He was the best and kindest all that time, as even *he* could be, and carried the kettle when it was too heavy for me, and helped me with heart and head. Mr. Chorley could not have praised him too much, be very sure. I, who always rather appreciated him, do set down the thoughts I had as merely unjust things; he exceeds them all, indeed. Yes, Mr. Chorley has been very kind to us. I had a kind note myself from him a few days since, and do you know that we have a sort of hope of seeing him in Italy this year, with dearest Mr. Kenyon, who has the goodness to crown his goodness by a 'dream' of coming to see us? We leave Pisa in April (did I tell you that?) and pass through Florence towards the north of Italy—to *Venice*, for instance. In the way of writing, I have not done much yet—just finished my rough sketch of an anti-slavery ballad and sent it off to America, where nobody will print it, I am certain, because I could not help making it bitter. If they *do* print it, I shall thank them more boldly in earnest than I fancy now. Tell me of Mary Howitt's new collection of ballads—are they good? I warmly wish that Mr. Chorley may succeed with his play; but how can Miss Cushman promise a hundred nights for an untried work?... Perhaps you may find the two last numbers of the 'Bells and Pomegranates' less obscure—it seems so to me. Flush has grown an absolute monarch and barks one distracted when he wants a door opened. Robert spoils him, I think. Do think of me as your ever affectionate and grateful

BA.

Have you seen 'Agnes de Misanie,' the new play by the author of 'Lucretia'? A witty feuilletoniste says of it that, besides all the unities of Aristotle, it comprises, from beginning to end, *unity of situation*. Not bad, is it? Madame Ancelot has just succeeded with a comedy, called 'Une Annee a Paris.' By the way, *shall you go to Paris this spring*?[157]

[Footnote 157: A list of the works composing Balzac's *Comedie Humaine* is attached to this letter for Miss Mitford's benefit.]

From Mr. Browning's family, though she had as yet had no opportunity of making acquaintance with them face to face, Mrs. Browning from the first met with an affectionate reception. The following is the first now extant of a series of letters written by her to Miss Browning, the poet's sister. The abrupt and private nature of the marriage never seems to have caused the slightest coldness of feeling in this quarter, though it must have caused anxiety; and the tone of the early letters, in which so new

and unfamiliar a relation had to be taken up, does equal honour to the writer and to the recipient.

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To Miss Browning [Pisa: about February 1847.]

I must begin by thanking dearest Sarianna again for her note, and by assuring her that the affectionate tone of it quite made me happy and grateful together—that I am grateful to *all of you*: do *feel* that I am. For the rest, when I see (afar off) Robert's minute manuscripts, a certain distrust steals over me of anything I can possibly tell you of our way of living, lest it should be the vainest of repetitions, and by no means worth repeating, both at once. Such a quiet silent life it is—going to hear the Friar preach in the Duomo, a grand event in it, and the wind laying flat all our schemes about Volterra and Lucca! I have had to give up even the Friar for these three days past; there is nothing for me when I have driven out Robert to take his necessary walk but to sit and watch the pinewood blaze. He is grieved about the illness of his cousin, only I do hope that your next letter will confirm the happy change which stops the further anxiety, and come soon for that purpose, besides others. Your letters never can come too often, remember, even when they have not to speak of illness, and I for my part must always have a thankful interest in your cousin for the kind part he took in the happiest event of my life. You have to tell us too of your dear mother—Robert is so anxious about her always. How deeply and tenderly he loves her and all of you, never could have been more manifest than now when he is away from you and has to talk *of* you instead of *to* you. By the way (or rather out of the way) I quite took your view of the purposed ingratitude to poor Miss Haworth[158]—it would have been worse in him than the sins of 'Examiner' and 'Athenaeum.' If authors won't feel for one another, there's an end of the world of writing! Oh, I think he proposed it in a moment of hardheartedness—we all put on tortoiseshell now and then, and presently come out into the sun as sensitively as ever. Besides Miss Haworth has written to us very kindly; and kindness doesn't spring up everywhere, like the violets in your gravel walks. See how I understand Hatcham. Do try to love me a little, dearest Sarianna, and (with my grateful love always to your father and mother) let me be your affectionate sister,

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING,
or rather BA.

[Footnote 158: Miss E.F. Haworth (several letters to whom are given farther on) was an old friend of Robert Browning's, and published a volume of verse in 1847, to which this passage seems to allude.]

The correspondence with Mr. Westwood, which had lapsed for a considerable time, was resumed with the following letter:

To Mr. Westwood Collegio Ferdinando, Pisa: March 10, 1847.

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If really, my dear Mr. Westwood, it was an 'ill temper' in you, causing the brief note, it was a most flattering ill temper, and I thank you just as I have had reason to do for the good nature which has caused you to bear with me so often and so long. You have been misled on some points. I did not go to Italy last year, or rather the year before last! I was disappointed and forced to stay in Wimpole Street after all; but the winter being so mild, so miraculously mild for England you may remember, I was spared my winter relapse and left liberty for new plans such as I never used to think were in my destiny! Such a change it is to me, such a strange happiness and freedom, and you must not in your kindness wish me back again, but rather be contented, like a friend as you are, to hear that I am very happy and very well, and still doubtful whether all the brightness can be meant for *me*! It is just as if the sun rose again at 7 o'clock P.M. The strangeness seems so great....

I am now very well, and so happy as not to think much of it, except for the sake of another. And do you fancy how I feel, carried; into the visions of nature from my gloomy room. Even now I walk as in a dream. We made a pilgrimage from Avignon to Vaucluse in right poetical duty, and I and my husband sate upon two stones in the midst of the fountain which in its dark prison of rocks flashes and roars and testifies to the memory of Petrarch. It was louder and fuller than usual when we were there, on account of the rains; and Flush, though by no means born to be a hero, considered my position so outrageous that he dashed through the water to me, splashing me all over, so he is baptised in Petrarch's name. The scenery is full of grandeur, the rocks sheathe themselves into the sky, and nothing grows there except a little cypress here and there, and a straggling olive tree; and the fountain works out its soul in its stony prison, and runs away in a green rapid stream. Such a striking sight it is. I sate upon deck, too, in our passage from Marseilles to Genoa, and had a vision of mountains, six or seven deep, one behind another. As to Pisa, call it a beautiful town, you cannot do less with Arno and its palaces, and above all the wonderful Duomo and Campo Santo, and Leaning Tower and Baptistery, all of which are a stone's throw from our windows. We have rooms in a great college-house built by Vasari, and fallen into desuetude from collegiate purposes; and here we live the quietest and most *tete-a-tete* of lives, knowing nobody, hearing nothing, and for nearly three months together never catching a glimpse of a paper. Oh, how wrong you were about the 'Times'! Now, however, we subscribe to a French and Italian library, and have a French newspaper every evening, the 'Siecle,' and so look through a loophole at the world. Yet, not too proud are we, even now, for all the news you will please to send us in charity: 'da obolum Belisario!'

What do you mean about poor Tennyson? I heard of him last on his return from a visit to the Swiss mountains, which 'disappointed him,' he was *said to say*. Very wrong, either of mountains or poet!

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Tell me if you make acquaintance with Mrs. Hewitt's new ballads.

Mrs. Jameson is engaged in a work on art which will be very interesting....

Flush's love to your Flopsy. Flush has grown very overbearing in this Italy, I think because my husband spoils him (if not for the glory at Vaucluse); Robert declares that the said Flush considers him, my husband, to be created for the especial purpose of doing him service, and really it looks rather like it.

Never do I see the 'Athenaeum' now, but before I left England some pure gushes between the rocks reminded me of you. Tell me all you can; it will all be like rain upon dry ground. My husband bids me offer his regards to you—if you will accept them; and that you may do it ask your heart. I will assure you (aside) that his poetry is as the prose of his nature: he himself is so much better and higher than his own works.

In the middle of April the Brownings left Pisa and journeyed to Florence, arriving there on April 20. There, however, the programme was arrested, and, save for an abortive excursion to Vallombrosa, whence they were repulsed by the misogynist principles of the monks, they continued to reside in Florence for the remainder of the year. Their first abode was in the Via delle Belle Donne; but after the return from Vallombrosa, in August, they moved across the river, and took furnished rooms in the Palazzo Guidi, the building which, under the name of 'Casa Guidi,' is for ever associated with their memory.

To Mrs. Martin Florence: April 24, 1847.

I received your letter, my dearest friend, by this day's post, and wrote a little note directly to the office as a trap for the feet of your travellers. If they escape us after all, therefore, they may praise their stars for it rather than my intentions—*our* intentions, I should say, for Robert will gladly do everything he can in the way of expounding a text or two of the glories of Florence, and we both shall be much pleased and cordially pleased to learn more of Fanny and her brother than the glance at Pisa could teach us. As for me, she will let me have a little talking for my share: I can't walk about or see anything. I lie here flat on the sofa in order to be wise; I rest and take port wine by wineglasses; and a few more days of it will prepare me, I hope and trust, for an interview with the Venus de' Medici. Think of my having been in Florence since Tuesday, this being Saturday, and not a step taken into the galleries. It seems a disgrace, a sort of involuntary disgraceful act, or rather no-act, which to complain of relieves one to some degree. And how kind of you to wish to hear from me of myself! There is nothing really much the matter with me; I am just *weak*, sleeping and eating dreadfully well considering that Florence isn't seen yet, and 'looking well,' too, says Mrs. Jameson, who, with her niece, is our guest just now. It would have been wise if I had rested longer at Pisa,

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but, you see, there was a long engagement to meet Mrs. Jameson here, and she expressed a very kind unwillingness to leave Italy without keeping it: also she had resolved to come out of her way on purpose for this, and, as I had the consent of my physician, we determined to perform our part of the compact; and in order to prepare for the longer journey I went out in the carriage a little too soon, perhaps, and a little too long. At least, if I had kept quite still I should have been strong by this time—not that I have done myself harm in the serious sense, observe—and now the affair is accomplished, I shall be wonderfully discreet and self-denying, and resist Venuses and Apollos like some one wiser than the gods themselves. My chest is very well; there has been no symptom of evil in that quarter.... We took the whole coupe of the diligence—-but regretted our first plan of the *vettura* nevertheless—and now are settled in very comfortable rooms in the 'Via delle Belle Donne' just out of the Piazza Santa Maria Novella, very superior rooms to our apartment in Pisa, in which we were cheated to the uttermost with all the subtlety of Italy and to the full extent of our ignorance; think what *that* must have been! Our present apartment, with the hire of a grand piano and music, does not cost us so much within ever so many francisconi. Oh, and you don't frighten me though we are on the north side of the Arno! We have taken our rooms for two months, and may be here longer, and the fear of the heat was stronger with me than the fear of the cold, or we might have been in the Pitti and 'arrostiti' by this time. We expected dear Mrs. Jameson on Saturday, but she came on Friday evening, having suddenly remembered that it was Shakespeare's birthday, and bringing with her from Arezzo a bottle of wine to 'drink to his memory with two other poets,' so there was a great deal of merriment, as you may fancy, and Robert played Shakespeare's favorite air, 'The Light of Love,' and everybody was delighted to meet everybody, and Roman news and Pisan dullness were properly discussed on every side. She saw a good deal of Cobden in Rome, and went with him to the Sistine Chapel. He has no feeling for art, and, being very true and earnest, could only do his best to *try* to admire Michael Angelo; but here and there, where he understood, the pleasure was expressed with a blunt characteristic simplicity. Standing before the statue of Demosthenes, he said: 'That man is persuaded himself of what he speaks, and will therefore persuade others.' She liked him exceedingly. For my part, I should join in more admiration if it were not for his having *accepted money*, but paid patriots are no heroes of mine. 'Verily they have their reward.' O'Connell had arrived in Rome, and it was considered that he came only to die. Among the artists, Gibson and Wyatt were doing great things; she wishes us to know Gibson particularly. As to the Pope he lives in an atmosphere of love and admiration, and 'he

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is doing *what he can*,' Mrs. Jameson believes. Robert says: 'A dreadful situation, after all, for a man of understanding and honesty! I pity him from my soul, for he can, at best, only temporise with truth.' But human nature is doomed to pay a high price for its opportunities. Delighted I am to have your good account of dear Mr. Martin, though you are naughty people to persist in going to England so soon. Do write to me and tell me all about both of you. I will do what I can—like the Pope—but what can I do? Yes, indeed, I mean to enjoy art and nature too; one shall not exclude the other. This Florence seems divine as we pass the bridges, and my husband, who knows everything, is to teach and show me all the great wonders, so that I am reasonably impatient to try my advantages. His kind regards to you both, and my best love, dearest friends....

Your very affectionate
BA.

To Mrs. Jameson Florence: May 12, [1847].

I was afraid, we both were afraid for you, dearest friend, when we saw the clouds gather and heard the rain fall as it did that day at Florence. It seemed impossible that you should be beyond the evil influence, should you have travelled ever so fast; but, after all, a storm in the Apennines, like many a moral storm, will be better perhaps than a calm to look back upon. We talked of you and thought of you, and missed you at coffee time, and regretted that so pleasant a week (for us) should have gone so fast, as fast as a dull week, or, rather, a good deal faster. Dearest friend, do believe that we *felt* your goodness in Coming to us—in making us an object—before you left Italy; it fills up the measure of goodness and kindness for which we shall thank and love you all our lives. Never fancy that we can forget you or be less touched by the memory of what you have been to us in affection and sympathy—never. And don't *you* lose sight of *us*; do write often, and do, *do* make haste and come back to Italy, and then make use of us in any and every possible way as house-takers or house-mates, for we are ready to accept the lowest place or the highest. The week you gave us would be altogether bright and glad if it had not been for the depression and anxiety on your part. May God turn it all to gain and satisfaction in some unlooked-for way. To be a *road-maker* is weary work, even across the Apennines of life. We have not science enough for it if we have strength, which we haven't either. Do you remember how Sindbad shut his eyes and let himself be carried over the hills by an eagle? *That* was better than to set about breaking stones. Also what you could do you have done; you have finished your part, and the sense of a fulfilled duty is in itself satisfying—is and must be. My sympathies go with you entirely, while I wish your dear Gerardine to be happy; I wish it from my heart.... Just after you left us arrived our box with the precious

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deeds, which are thrown into the cabinet for want of witnesses. And then Robert has had a letter from Mr. Forster with the date of *Shakespeare's birthday*, and overflowing with kindness really both to himself and me. It quite touched me, that letter. Also we have had a visitation from an American, but on the point of leaving Florence and very tame and inoffensive, and we bore it very well considering. He sent us a new literary periodical of the old world, in which, among other interesting matter, I had the pleasure of reading an account of my own 'blindness,' taken from a French paper (the 'Presse'), and mentioned with humane regret. Well! and what more news is there to tell you? I have been out once, only once, and only for an inglorious glorious drive round the Piazza Gran Duca, past the Duomo, outside the walls, and in again at the Cascine. It was like the trail of a vision in the evening sun. I saw the Perseus in a sort of flash. The Duomo is more after the likeness of a Duomo than Pisa can show; I like those masses in ecclesiastical architecture. Now we are plotting how to, engage a carriage for a month's service without ruining ourselves, for we *must* see, and I *can't* walk and see, though much stronger than when we parted, and looking much better, as Robert and the looking glass both do testify. I have seemed at last 'to leap to a conclusion' of convalescence. But the heat—oh, so hot it is. If it is half as hot with you, you must be calling on the name of St. Lawrence by this time, and require no 'turning.' I should not like to travel under such a sun. It would be too like playing at snapdragon. Yes, 'brightly happy.' Women generally *lose* by marriage, but I have gained the world by mine. If it were not for some griefs, which are and must be griefs, I should be too happy perhaps, which is good for nobody. May God bless you, my dear, dearest friend! Robert must be content with sending his love to-day, and shall write another day. We both love you every day. My love and a kiss to dearest Gerardine, who is to remember to write to me.

Your ever affectionate
BA.

To H.S. Boyd Florence: May 26, 1847.

I should have answered your letter, my dearest friend, more quickly, but when it came I was ill, as you may have heard, and afterwards I wished to wait until I could send you information about the Leaning Tower and the bells[159]. The book you required, about the cathedral, Robert has tried in vain to procure for you. Plenty of such books, but *not in English*. In London such things are to be found, I should think, without difficulty, for instance, 'Murray's Handbook to Northern Italy,' though rather dear (12_s._), would give you sufficiently full information upon the ecclesiastical glories both of Pisa and of this beautiful Florence, from whence I write to you.... I will answer for the harmony of the bells, as we lived within a stone's throw of them, and they began at four o'clock every

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morning and rang my dreams apart. The Pasquareccia (the fourth) especially has a profound note in it, which may well have thrilled horror to the criminal's heart.[160] It was ghastly in its effects; dropped into the deep of night like a thought of death. Often have I said, 'Oh, how ghastly!' and then turned on my pillow and dreamed a bad dream. But if the bell founders at Pisa have a merited reputation, let no one say as much for the bellringers. The manner in which all the bells of all the churches in the city are shaken together sometimes would certainly make you groan in despair of your ears. The discord is fortunately indescribable. Well—but here we are at Florence, the most beautiful of the cities devised by man....

In the meanwhile I have seen the Venus, I have seen the divine Raphaels. I have stood by Michael Angelo's tomb in Santa Croce. I have looked at the wonderful Duomo. This cathedral! After all, the elaborate grace of the Pisan cathedral is one thing, and the massive grandeur of this of Florence is another and better thing; it struck me with a sense of the sublime in architecture. At Pisa we say, 'How beautiful!' here we say nothing; it is enough if we can breathe. The mountainous marble masses overcome as we look up—we feel the weight of them on the soul. Tesselated marbles (the green treading its elaborate pattern into the dim yellow, which seems the general hue of the structure) climb against the sky, self-crowned with that prodigy of marble domes. It struck me as a wonder in architecture. I had neither seen nor imagined the like of it in any way. It seemed to carry its theology out with it; it signified more than a mere building. Tell me everything you want to know. I shall like to answer a thousand questions. Florence is beautiful, as I have said before, and must say again and again, most beautiful. The river rushes through the midst of its palaces like a crystal arrow, and it is hard to tell, when you see all by the clear sunset, whether those churches, and houses, and windows, and bridges, and people walking, in the water or out of the water, are the real walls, and windows, and bridges, and people, and churches. The only difference is that, down below, there is a double movement; the movement of the stream besides the movement of life. For the rest, the distinctness of the eye is as great in one as in the other.... Remember me to such of my friends as remember me kindly when unreminded by me. I am very happy—happier and happier.

ELIBET.

Robert's best regards to you always.

[Footnote 159: It will be remembered that Mr. Boyd took a great interest in bells and bell ringing. The passage omitted below contains an extract from Murray's *Handbook* with reference to the bells of Pisa.]

[Footnote 160: This bell was tolled on the occasion of an execution.]

To Mrs. Jameson Palazzo Guidi, Via Maggio, Florence: August 7, 1847 [postmark].

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You will be surprised perhaps, and perhaps not, dearest friend, to find that we are still at Florence. Florence 'holds us with a glittering eye;' there's a charm cast round us, and we can't get away. In the first place, your news of Recoaro came so late that, as you said yourself, we ought to have been there before your letter reached us. Nobody would encourage us to go north on any grounds, indeed, and if anybody speaks a word now in favour of Venice, straight comes somebody else speaking the direct contrary. Altogether, we took to making a plan of our own—a great, wild, delightful plan of plunging into the mountains and spending two or three months at the monastery of Vallombrosa, until the heat was passed, and dear Mr. Kenyon decided, and we could either settle for the winter at Florence or pass on to Rome. Could anything look more delightful than that? Well, we got a letter of recommendation to the abbot, and left our apartment, Via delle Belle Donne, a week before our three months were done, thoroughly burned out by the sun; set out at four in the morning, reached Pelago, and from thence travelled five miles along a 'via non rotabile' through the most romantic scenery. Oh, such mountains!—as if the whole world were alive with mountains—such ravines—black in spite of flashing waters in them—such woods and rocks—travelled in basket sledges drawn by four white oxen—Wilson and I and the luggage—and Robert riding step by step. We were four hours doing the five miles, so you may fancy what rough work it was. Whether I was most tired or charmed was a *tug* between body and soul. The worst was that, there being a new abbot at the monastery—an austere man jealous of his sanctity and the approach of women—our letter, and Robert's eloquence to boot, did nothing for us, and we were ingloriously and ignominiously expelled at the end of five days. For three days we were welcome; for two more we kept our ground; but after *that*, out we were thrust, with baggage and expectations. Nothing could be much more provoking. And yet we came back very merrily for disappointed people to Florence, getting up at three in the morning, and rolling or sliding (as it might happen) down the precipitous path, and seeing round us a morning glory of mountains, clouds, and rising sun, such as we never can forget—back to Florence and our old lodgings, and an eatable breakfast of coffee and bread, and a confession one to another that if we had won the day instead of losing it, and spent our summer with the monks, we should have grown considerably *thinner* by the victory. They make their bread, I rather imagine, with the sawdust of their fir trees, and, except oil and wine—yes, and plenty of beef (of *fleisch*, as your Germans say, of all kinds, indeed), which isn't precisely the fare to suit us—we were thrown for nourishment on the great sights around. Oh, but so beautiful were mountains and forests and waterfalls that I could

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have kept my ground happily for the two months—even though the only book I saw there was the chronicle of their San Gualberto. Is he not among your saints? Being routed fairly, and having breakfasted fully at our old apartment, Robert went out to find cool rooms, if possible, and make the best of our position, and now we are settled magnificently in this Palazzo Guidi on a first floor in an apartment which *looks* quite beyond our means, and *would be* except in the dead part of the season—a suite of spacious rooms opening on a little terrace and furnished elegantly—rather to suit our predecessor the Russian prince than ourselves—but cool and in a delightful situation, six paces from the Piazza Pitti, and with right of daily admission to the Boboli gardens. We pay what we paid in the Via Belle Donne. Isn't this prosperous? You would be surprised to see *me*, I think, I am so very well (and look so)—dispensed from being carried upstairs, and inclined to take a run, for a walk, every now and then. I scarcely recognise myself or my ways, or my own spirits, all is so different....

We have made the acquaintance of Mr. Powers,[161] who is delightful—of a most charming simplicity, with those great burning eyes of his. Tell me what you think of his boy listening to the shell. Oh, your Raphaels! how divine! And M. Angelo's sculptures! His pictures I leap up to in vain, and fall back regularly. Write of your book and yourself, and write soon; and let me be, as always, your affectionate BA.

We are here for two months certain, and perhaps longer. Do write.

Dear Aunt Nina,—Ba has said something for me, I hope. In any case, my love goes with hers, I trust you are well and happy, as we are, and as we would make you if we could. Love to Geddie. Ever yours, [R.B.]

[Footnote 161: The American sculptor.]

To Mrs. Martin Florence: August 7, 1847.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—How I have been longing to get this letter, which comes at last, and justifies the longing by the pleasure it gives!... How kind, how affectionate you are to me, and how strong your claim is that I should thrust on you, in defiance of good taste and conventions, every evidence and assurance of my happiness, so as to justify your *faith* to yourselves and others. Indeed, indeed, dearest Mrs. Martin, you may 'exult' for me—and this though it should all end here and now. The uncertainties of life and death seem nothing to me. A year (nearly) is saved from the darkness, and if that one year has compensated for those that preceded it—which it has, abundantly—why, let it for those that shall follow, if it so please God. Come what may, I feel as if I never could have a right to murmur. I have been happy enough. Brought about too it was, indeed, by a sort of miracle which to this moment, when I look back, bewilders me to

think of; and if you knew the details, counted the little steps, and could; compare my moral position

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three years and a half ago with *this*, you would come to despise San Gualberto's miraculous tree at Vallombrosa, which, being dead, gave out green leaves in recognition of his approach, as testified by the inscription—do you remember? But you can't stop to-day to read mine, so rather I shall tell you of our exploit in the mountains. Only one thing I must say first, one thing which you must forgive me for the vanity of resolving to say at last, having had it in my head very often. There's a detestable engraving, which, if you have the ill luck to see (and you *may*, because, horrible to relate, it is in the shop windows), will you have the kindness, for my sake, not to fancy *like Robert*?—it being, as he says himself, the very image of '*a young man at Waterloo House*, in a moment of inspiration—"A lovely blue, ma'am."' It is as like Robert as Flush. And now I am going to tell you of Vallombrosa. You heard how we meant to stay two months there, and you are to imagine how we got up at three in the morning to escape the heat (imagine me!)—and with all our possessions and a 'dozen of port' (which my husband doses me with twice a day because once it was necessary) proceeded to Pelago by vettura, and from thence in two sledges, drawn each by two white bullocks up to the top of the holy mountain. (Robert was on horseback.) Precisely it must be as you left it. Who can make a road up a house? We were four hours going five miles, and I with all my goodwill was dreadfully tired, and scarcely in appetite for the beef and oil with which we were entertained at the House of Strangers. We are simple people about diet, and had said over and over that we would live on eggs and milk and bread and butter during these two months. We might as well have said that we would live on manna from heaven. The things we had fixed on were just the impossible things. Oh, that bread, with the fetid smell, which stuck in the throat like Macbeth's amen! I am not surprised, you recollect it! The hens had 'got them to a nunnery,' and objected to lay eggs, and the milk and the holy water stood confounded. But of course we spread the tablecloth, just as you did, over all drawbacks of the sort; and the beef and oil, as I said, and the wine too, were liberal and excellent, and we made our gratitude apparent in Robert's best Tuscan—in spite of which we were turned out ignominiously at the end of five days, having been permitted to overstay the usual three days by only two. No, nothing could move the lord abbot. He is a new abbot, and; given to sanctity, and has set his face against women. 'While he is abbot,' he said to our mediating monk, 'he *will* be abbot. So he is abbot, and we had to come back to Florence.' As I read in the 'Life of San Gualberto,' laid on the table for the edification of strangers, the brothers attain to sanctification, among other means, by cleaning out pigsties with their bare hands, without spade or shovel; but *that* is uncleanliness

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enough—they wouldn't touch the little finger of a woman. Angry I was, I do assure you. I should have liked to stay there, in spite of the bread. We should have been only a little thinner at the end. And the scenery—oh, how magnificent! How we enjoyed that great, silent, ink-black pine wood! And do you remember the sea of mountains to the left? How grand it is! We were up at three in the morning again to return to Florence, and the glory of that morning sun breaking the clouds to pieces among the hills is something ineffaceable from my remembrance. We came back ignominiously to our old rooms, but found it impossible to stay on account of the suffocating heat, yet we scarcely could go far from Florence, because of Mr. Kenyon and our hope of seeing him here (since lost). A perplexity ended by Robert's discovery of our present apartments, on the Pitti side of the river (indeed, close to the Grand Duke's palace), consisting of a suite of spacious and delightful rooms, which come within our means only from the deadness of the summer season, comparatively quite cool, and with a terrace which I enjoy to the uttermost through being able to walk there without a bonnet, by just stepping out of the window. The church of San Felice is opposite, so we haven't a neighbour to look through the sunlight or moonlight and take observations. Isn't that pleasant altogether? We ordered back the piano and the book subscription, and settled for two months, and forgave the Vallombrosa monks for the wrong they did us, like secular Christians. What is to come after, I can't tell you. But probably we shall creep slowly along toward Rome, and spend some hot time of it at Perugia, which is said to be cool enough. I think more of other things, wishing that my dearest, kindest sisters had a present as bright as mine—to think nothing at all of the future. Dearest Henrietta's position has long made me uneasy, and, since she frees me into confidence by her confidence to you, I will tell you so. Most undesirable it is that this should be continued, and yet where is there a door open to escape?[162] ... My dear brothers have the illusion that nobody should marry on less than two thousand a year. Good heavens! how preposterous it does seem to me! *We* scarcely spend three hundred, and I have every luxury, I ever had, and which it would be so easy to give up, at need; and Robert wouldn't sleep, I think, if an unpaid bill dragged itself by any chance into another week. He says that when people get into 'pecuniary difficulties,' his 'sympathies always go with the butchers and bakers.' So we keep out of scrapes yet, you see....

Your grateful and most affectionate
BA.

We have had the most delightful letter from Carlyle, who has the goodness to say that not for years has a marriage occurred in his private circle in which he so heartily rejoiced as in ours. He is a personal friend of Robert's, so that I have reason to be very proud and glad.

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Robert's best regards to you both always, and he is no believer in magnetism (only *I* am). Do mention Mr. C. Hanford's health. How strange that he should come to witness my marriage settlement! Did you hear?

[Footnote 162: Miss Henrietta Barrett was engaged to Captain Surtees Cook, an engagement of which her brothers, as well as her father, disapproved, partly on the ground of insufficiency of income. Ultimately the difficulty was solved in the same way as in the case of Mrs. Browning.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: August 20, [1847],

I have received your letter at last, my ever dearest Miss Mitford, not the missing letter, but the one which comes to make up for it and to catch up my thoughts, which were grumbling at high tide, I do assure you.... As you observed last year (not without reason), these are the days of marrying and giving in marriage. Mr. Horne, you see[163] ... With all my heart I hope he may be very happy. Men risk a good deal in marriage, though not as much as women do; and on the other hand, the singleness of a man when his youth is over is a sadder thing than the saddest which an unmarried woman can suffer. Nearly all my friends of both sexes have been draining off into marriage these two years, scarcely one will be left in the sieve, and I may end by saying that I have happiness enough for my own share to be divided among them all and leave everyone, contented. For me, I take it for pure magic, this life of mine. Surely nobody was ever so happy before. I shall wake some morning with my hair all dripping out of the enchanted bucket, or if not we shall both claim the 'Flitch' next September, if you can find one for us in the land of Cockaigne, drying in expectancy of the revolution in Tennyson's 'Commonwealth.' Well, I don't agree with Mr. Harness in admiring the lady of 'Locksley Hall.' I *must* either pity or despise a woman who could have married Tennyson and chose a common man. If happy in her choice, I despise her. That's matter of opinion, of course. You may call it matter of foolishness when I add that I personally would rather be teased a little and smoked over a good deal by a man whom I could look up to and be proud of, than have my feet kissed all day by a Mr. Smith in boots and a waistcoat, and thereby chiefly distinguished. Neither I nor another, perhaps, had quite a right to expect a combination of qualities, such as meet, though, in my husband, who is as faultless and pure in his private life as any Mr. Smith of them all, who would not owe five shillings, who lives like a woman in abstemiousness on a pennyworth of wine a day, never touches a cigar even.... Do you hear, as we do, from Mr. Forster, that his[164] new poem is his best work? As soon as you read it, let me have your opinion. The subject seems almost identical with one of Chaucer's. Is it not so? We have spent here the most delightful of summers, notwithstanding the heat, and I begin to comprehend

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the possibility of St. Lawrence's ecstasies on the gridiron. Very hot it certainly has been and is, yet there have been cool intermissions; and as we have spacious and airy rooms, and as Robert lets me sit all day in my white dressing gown without a single masculine criticism, and as we can step out of the window on a sort of balcony terrace which is quite private and swims over with moonlight in the evenings, and as we live upon water melons and iced water and figs and all manner of fruit, we bear the heat with an angelic patience and felicity which really are edifying. We tried to make the monks of Vallombrosa let us stay with them for two months, but their new abbot said or implied that Wilson and I stank in his nostrils, being women, and San Gualberto, the establishes of their order, had enjoined on them only the mortification of cleaning out pigsties without fork or shovel. So here a couple of women besides was (as Dickens's American said) 'a piling it up rayther too mountainious.' So we were sent away at the end of five days. So provoking! Such scenery, such hills, such a sea of hills looking alive among the clouds. *Which* rolled, it was difficult to discern. Such pine woods, supernaturally silent, with the ground black as ink, such chestnut and beech forests hanging from the mountains, such rocks and torrents, such chasms and ravines. There were eagles there, too, [and] there was *no road*. Robert went on horseback, and Flush, Wilson, and I were drawn in a sledge (i.e. an old hamper, a basket wine hamper without a wheel) by two white bullocks up the precipitous mountains. Think of my travelling in that fashion in those wild places at four o'clock in the morning, a little frightened, dreadfully tired, but in an ecstasy of admiration above all! It was a sight to see before one died and went away to another world. Well, but being expelled ignominiously at the end of five days, we had to come back to Florence, and find a new apartment cooler than the old, and wait for dear Mr. Kenyon. And dear Mr. Kenyon does not come (not this autumn, but he may perhaps at the first dawn of spring), and on September 20 we take up our knapsacks and turn our faces towards Rome, I think, creeping slowly along, with a pause at Arezzo, and a longer pause at Perugia, and another perhaps at Terni. Then we plan to take an apartment we have heard of, over the Tarpeian Rock, and enjoy Rome as we have enjoyed Florence. More can scarcely be. This Florence is unspeakably beautiful, by grace both of nature and art, and the wheels of life slide on upon the grass (according to continental ways) with little trouble and less expense. Dinner, 'unordered,' comes through the streets and spreads itself on our table, as hot as if we had smelt cutlets hours before. The science of material life is understood here and in France. Now tell me, what right has England to be the dearest country in the world? But I love dearly dear England, and we hope to spend many

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a green summer in her yet. The winters you will excuse us, will you not? People who are, like us, neither rich nor strong, claim such excuses. I am wonderfully well, and far better and stronger than before what you call the Pisan 'crisis.' Robert declares that nobody would know me, I *look* so much better. And you heard from dearest Henrietta. Ah, both of my dearest sisters have been perfect to me. No words can express my feelings towards their goodness. Otherwise, I have good accounts from home of my father's excellent health and spirits, which is better even than to hear of his loving and missing me. I had a few kind lines yesterday from Miss Martineau, who invites us from Florence to Westmoreland. She wants to talk to me, she says, of 'her beloved Jordan.' She is looking forward to a winter of work by the lakes, and to a summer of gardening. The kindest of letters Robert has had from Carlyle, who makes us very happy by what he says of our marriage. Shakespeare's favorite air of the 'Light of Love,' with the full evidence of its being Shakespeare's favorite air, is given in Charles Knight's edition. Seek for it there. Now do write to me and at length, and tell me everything of yourself. Flush hated Vallombrosa, and was frightened out of his wits by the pine forests. Flush likes civilised life, and the society of little dogs with turned-up tails, such as Florence abounds with. Unhappily it abounds also with *fleas*, which afflict poor Flush to the verge sometimes of despair. Fancy Robert and me down on our knees combing him, with a basin of water on one side! He suffers to such a degree from fleas that I cannot bear to witness it. He tears off his pretty curls through the irritation. Do you know of a remedy? Direct to me, Poste Restante, Florence. Put *via* France. Let me hear, do; and everything of yourself, mind. Is Mrs. Partridge in better spirits? Do you read any new French books? Dearest friend, let me offer you my husband's cordial regards, with the love of your own affectionate

E.B.B., BA.

[Footnote 163: Mr. Horne was just engaged to be married.]

[Footnote 164: Tennyson's *Princess* had just been published.]

To Mr. Westwood Florence: September 1847.

Yes, indeed, my dear Mr. Westwood, I have seen 'friars.' We have been on a pilgrimage to Vallombrosa, and while my husband rode up and down the precipitous mountain paths, I and my maid and Flush were dragged in a hamper by two white bullocks—and such scenery; such hilly peaks, such black ravines and gurgling waters, and rocks and forests above and below, and at last such a monastery and such friars, who wouldn't let us stay with them beyond five days for fear of corrupting the fraternity. The monks had a new abbot, a St. Sejanus of a holy man, and a petticoat stank in his nostrils, said he, and all the I beseeching which we could offer him with joined hands was classed with the temptations of St. Anthony. So we had

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to come away as we went, and get the better as we could of our disappointment, and really it was a disappointment not to be able to stay our two months out in the wilderness as we had planned it, to say nothing of the heat of Florence, to which at the moment it was not pleasant to return. But we got new lodgings in the shade and comforted ourselves as well as we could. 'Comforted'—there's a word for Florence—-that ingratitude was a slip of the pen, believe me. Only we had set our hearts upon a two months' seclusion in the deep of the pine forests (which have such a strange dialect in the silence they speak with), and the mountains were divine, and it was provoking to be crossed in our ambitions by that little holy abbot with the red face, and to be driven out of Eden, even to Florence. It is said, observe, that Milton took his description of Paradise from Vallombrosa—so driven out of Eden we were, literally. To Florence, though! and what Florence is, the tongue of man or poet may easily fail to describe. The most beautiful of cities, with the golden Arno shot through the breast of her like an arrow, and 'non dolet' all the same. For what helps to charm here is the innocent gaiety of the people, who, for ever at feast day and holiday celebrations, come and go along the streets, the women in elegant dresses and with glittering fans, shining away every thought of Northern cares and taxes, such as make people grave in England. No little orphan on a house step but seems to inherit, naturally his slice of water-melon and bunch of purple grapes, and the rich fraternise with the poor as we are unaccustomed to see them, listening to the same music and walking in the same gardens, and looking at the same Raphaels even! Also we were glad to be here just now, when there is new animation and energy given to Italy by this new wonderful Pope, who is a great man and doing greatly. I hope you give him your sympathies. Think how seldom the liberation of a people begins from the throne, *a fortiori* from a papal throne, which is so high and straight.[165] And the spark spreads! here is even our Grand Duke conceding the civic guard,[166] and forgetting his Austrian prejudices. The world learns, it is pleasant to observe....

So well I am, dear Mr. Westwood, and so happy after a year's trial of the stuff of marriage, happier than ever, perhaps, and the revolution is so complete that one has to learn to stand up straight and steadily (like a landsman in a sailing ship) before one can do any work with one's hand and brain.

We have had a delightful letter from Carlyle, who loves my husband, I am proud to say.

[Footnote 165:'This country saving is a glorious thing: And if a common man achieved it? well. Say, a rich man did? excellent. A king? That grows sublime. A priest? Improbable. A pope? Ah, there we stop, and cannot bring Our faith up to the leap, with history's bell

So heavy round the neck of it—albeit
We fain would grant the possibility
For thy sake, Pio Nono!’

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Casa Guidi Windows, part i.]

[Footnote 166: The grant of a National Guard was made by the Grand Duke of Tuscany on September 4, 1847, in defiance of the threat of Austria to occupy any Italian state in which such a concession was made to popular aspirations.]

To Miss Mitford [Florence:] October I, 1847 [postmark].

Ever dearest Miss Mitford,—I am delighted to have your letter, and lose little time in replying to it. The lost letter meanwhile does not appear. The moon has it, to make more shine on these summer nights; if still one may say 'summer' now that September is deep and that we are cool as people hoped to be when at hottest.... Do tell me your full thought of the commonwealth of women.[168] I begin by agreeing with you as to his implied under-estimate of women; his women are too voluptuous; however, of the most refined voluptuousness. His gardener's daughter, for instance, is just a rose: and 'a Rose,' one might beg all poets to observe, is as precisely *sensual* as fricasseed chicken, or even boiled beef and carrots. Did you read Mrs. Butler's 'Year of Consolation,' and how did you think of it in the main? As to Mr. Home's illustrations of national music, I don't know; I feel a little jealous of his doing well what many inferior men have done well—men who couldn't write 'Orion' and the 'Death of Marlowe.' Now, dearest dear Miss Mitford, you shall call him 'tiresome' if you like, because I never heard him talk, and he may be tiresome for aught I know, of course; but you *sha'n't* say that he has not done some fine things in poetry. Now, you *know* what the first book of 'Orion' is, and 'Marlowe,' and 'Cosmo;' and you *sha'n't* say that you don't know it, and that when you forgot it for a moment, I did not remind you.... It was our plan to leave Florence on the 21st. We stay, however, one month longer, half through temptation, half through reason. Which is strongest, who knows? We quite love Florence, and have delightful rooms; and then, though I am quite well now as to my general health, it is thought better for me to travel a month hence. So I suppose we shall stay. In the meanwhile our Florentines kept the anniversary of our wedding day (and the establishment of the civic guard) most gloriously a day or two or three ago, forty thousand persons flocking out of the neighbourhood to help the expression of public sympathy and overflowing the city. The procession passed under our eyes into the Piazza Pitti, where the Grand Duke and all his family stood at the palace window melting into tears, to receive the thanks of his people. The joy and exultation on all sides were most affecting to look upon. Grave men kissed one another, and grateful young women lifted up their children to the level of their own smiles, and the children themselves mixed their shrill little *vivas* with the shouts of the people. At once, a more frenetic gladness and a more innocent manifestation

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of gladness were never witnessed. During three hours and a half the procession wound on past our windows, and every inch of every house seemed alive with gazers all that time, the white handkerchiefs fluttering like doves, and clouds of flowers and laurel leaves floating down on the heads of those who passed. Banners, too, with inscriptions to suit the popular feeling—'Liberty'—the 'Union of Italy'—the 'Memory of the Martyrs'—'Viva Pio Nono'—'Viva Leopoldo Secondo'—were quite stirred with the breath of the shouters. I am glad to have seen that sight, and to be in Italy at this moment, when such sights are to be seen.[167] My wrist aches a little even now with the waving I gave to my handkerchief, I assure you, for Robert and I and Flush sate the whole sight out at the window, and would not be reserved with the tribute of our sympathy. Flush had his two front paws over the window sill, with his ears hanging down, but he confessed at last that he thought they were rather long about it, particularly as it had nothing to do with dinner and chicken bones and subjects of consequence. He is less tormented and looks better; in excellent spirits and appetite always—and *thinner*, like your Flush—and very fond of Robert, as indeed he ought to be. On the famous evening of that famous day I have been speaking of, we lost him—he ran away and stayed away all night—which was too bad, considering that it was our anniversary besides, and that he had no right to spoil it. But I imagine he was bewildered with the crowd and the illumination, only as he *did* look so very guilty and conscious of evil on his return, there's room for suspecting him of having been very much amused, 'motu proprio,' as our Grand Duke says in the edict. He was found at nine o'clock in the morning at the door of our apartment, waiting to be let in—mind, I don't mean the Grand Duke. Very few acquaintances have we made at Florence, and very quietly lived out our days. Mr. Powers the sculptor is our chief friend and favorite, a most charming, simple, straight-forward, genial American, as simple as the man of genius he has proved himself needs be. He sometimes comes to talk and take coffee with us, and we like him much. His wife is an amiable woman, and they have heaps of children from thirteen downwards, all, except the eldest boy, Florentines, and the sculptor has eyes like a wild Indian's, so black and full of light. You would scarcely wonder if they clave the marble without the help of his hands. We have seen besides the Hoppners, Lord Byron's friends at Venice, you will remember. And Miss Boyle, the niece of the Earl of Cork, and authoress and poetess on her own account, having been introduced once to Robert in London at Lady Morgan's, has hunted us out and paid us a visit. A very vivacious little person, with sparkling talk enough. Lord Holland has lent her mother and herself the famous Careggi Villa, where Lorenzo the Magnificent died, and they have been living there among the vines these four months.

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These and a few American visitors are all we have seen at Florence. We live a far more solitary life than you do, in your village and with the 'prestige' of the country wrapping you round. Pray give your sympathies to our Pope, and call him a great man. For liberty to spring from a throne is wonderful, but from a papal throne is miraculous. That's my doxy. I suppose dear Mr. Kenyon and Mr. Chorley are still abroad. French books I get at, but at scarcely a new one, which is very provoking. At Rome it may be better. I have not read 'Martin' even, since the first volume in England, nor G. Sand's 'Lucretia.'

May God bless you. Think sometimes of your ever affectionate

E.B.B.

[Footnote 167: In Tennyson's *Princess*.]

[Footnote 168: A picture of the same scene in verse will be found in *Casa Guidi Windows*, part i.:

'Shall I say
What made my heart beat with exulting love
A few weeks back,' &c.]

The 'month' lengthened itself out, and December found the Brownings still in Florence, and definitely established there for the winter. During this time, although there is no allusion to it in the letters, Mrs. Browning must have been engaged in writing the first part of 'Casa Guidi Windows' with its hopeful aspirations for Italian liberty. It was, indeed, a time when hope seemed justifiable. Pius IX. had ascended the papal throne—then a temporal as well as a spiritual sovereignty—in June 1846, with the reputation of being anxious to introduce liberal reforms, and even to promote the formation of a united Italy. The English Government was diplomatically advocating reform, in spite of the opposition of Austria; and its representative, Lord Minto, who was sent on a special mission to Italy to bring this influence to bear on the rulers of the various Italian States, was received with enthusiastic joy by the zealots for Italian liberty. The Grand Duke of Tuscany, as was noticed above, had taken the first step in the direction of popular government by the institution of a National Guard; and Charles Albert of Piedmont was always supposed to have the cause of Italy at heart in spite of the vacillations of his policy. The catastrophe of 1848 was still in the distance; and for the moment a friend of freedom and of Italy might be permitted to hope much.

Yet a difference will be noticed between the tone of Mrs. Browning's letters at this time and that which marks her language in 1859. In 1847 she was still comparatively new to the country. She is interested in the experiment which she sees enacted before her;

she feels, as any poet must feel, the attraction of the idea of a free and united Italy. But her heart is not thrown into the struggle as it was at a later time. She can write, and does, for the most part, write, of other matters. The disappointment of Milan and Novara could not break her heart, as the disappointment of Villafranca went near to doing. They are not, indeed, so much as mentioned in detail in the letters that follow. It is in 'Casa Guidi Windows'—the first part written in 1847-8, the second in 1851—that her reflections upon Italian politics, alike in their hopes and in their failures, must be sought.

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To Miss Mitford Florence: December 8, 1847.

Have you thought me long, my dearest Miss Mitford, in writing? When your letter came we were distracted by various uncertainties, torn by wild horses of sundry speculations, and then, when one begins by delay in answering a letter, you are aware how a silence grows and grows. Also I heard *of* you through my sisters and Mrs. Duprey[?], and *that* made me lazier still. Now don't treat me according to the Jewish law, an eye for an eye; no! but a heart for a heart, if you please; and you never can have reason to reproach mine for not loving you. Think what we have done since I wrote last to you. Taken two houses, that is, two apartments, each for six months, presigning the contract. You will set it down as excellent poet's work in the way of domestic economy; but the fault was altogether mine as usual, and my husband, to please me, took rooms which I could not be pleased by three days, through the absence of sunshine and warmth. The consequence was that we had to pay heaps of guineas away for leave to go away ourselves, any alternative being preferable to a return of illness, and I am sure I should have been ill if we had persisted in staying there. You can scarcely fancy the wonderful difference which the sun makes in Italy. Oh, he isn't a mere 'round O' in the air in this Italy, I assure you! He makes us feel that he rules the day to all intents and purposes. So away we came into the blaze of him here in the Piazza Pitti, precisely opposite the Grand Duke's palace, I with my remorse, and poor Robert without a single reproach. Any other man, a little lower than the angels, would have stamped and sworn a little for the mere relief of the thing, but as to *his* being angry with *me* for any cause, except not eating enough dinner, the said sun would turn the wrong way first. So here we are on the Pitti till April, in small rooms yellow with sunshine from morning to evening; and most days I am able to get out into the piazza, and walk up and down for some twenty minutes without feeling a shadow of breath from the actual winter. Also it is pleasant to be close to the Raffaels, to say nothing of the immense advantage of the festa days, when, day after day, the civic guard comes to show the whole population of Florence, their Grand Duke inclusive, the new helmets and epaulettes and the glory thereof. They have swords, too, I believe, somewhere. The crowds come and come, like children to see rows of dolls, only the children would tire sooner than the Tuscans. Robert said musingly the other morning as we stood at the window, 'Surely, after all this, they would *use* those muskets.' It's a problem, a 'grand peut-etre.' I was rather amused by hearing lately that our civic heroes had the gallantry to propose to the ancient military that these last should do the night work, *i.e*. when nobody was looking on and there was no credit, as they found it dull and fatiguing.

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Ah, one laughs, you see; one can't help it now and then. But at the real and rising feeling of the people by night and day one doesn't laugh indeed. I hear and see with the deepest sympathy of soul, on the contrary. I love the Italians, too, and none the less that something of the triviality and innocent vanity of children abounds in them. A delightful and most welcome letter was the last you sent me, my dearest friend. Your bridal visit must have charmed you, and I am glad you had the gladness of witnessing some of the happiness of your friend, Mrs. Acton Tyndal, *you* who have such quick sympathies, and to whom the happiness of a friend is a gain counted in your own. The swan's shadow is something in a clear water. For poor Mrs.——, if she is really, as you say Mrs. Tyndal thinks, pining in an access of literary despondency, why *that* only proves to me that she is not happy otherwise, that her life and soul are not sufficiently filled for her woman's need. I cannot believe of any woman that she can think of *fame first*. A woman of genius may be absorbed, indeed, in the exercise of an active power, engrossed in the charges of the course and the combat; but this is altogether different to a vain and bitter longing for prizes, and what prizes, oh, gracious heavens! The empty cup of cold metal! *so* cold, *so* empty to a woman with a heart. So, if your friend's belief is true, still more deeply do I pity that other friend, who is supposed to be unhappy from such a cause. A few days ago I saw a bride of my own family, Mrs. Reynolds, Arlette Butler, who married Captain Reynolds some five months since.... Many were her exclamations at seeing me. She declared that such a change was never seen, I was so transfigured with my betterness: 'Oh, Ba, it is quite wonderful indeed!' We had been calculated on, during her three months in Rome, as a 'piece of resistance,' and it was a disappointment to find us here in a corner with the salt. Just as I was praised was poor Flush criticised. Flush has not recovered from the effects yet of the summer plague of fleas, and his curls, though growing, are not grown. I never saw him in such spirits nor so ugly; and though Robert and I flatter ourselves upon 'the sensible improvement,' Arlette could only see him with reference to the past, when in his Wimpole Street days he was sleek and over fat, and she cried aloud at the loss of his beauty. Then we have had [another] visitor, Mr. Hillard, an American critic, who reviewed me in [the old] world, and so came to *view* me in the new, a very intelligent man, of a good, noble spirit. And Miss Boyle, ever and anon, comes at night, at nine o'clock, to catch us at our hot chestnuts and mulled wine, and warm her feet at our fire; and a kinder, more cordial little creature, full of talent and accomplishment, never had the world's polish on it. Very amusing, too, she is, and original, and a good deal of laughing she and Robert make between them.

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Did I tell you of her before, and how she is the niece of Lord Cork, and poetess by grace of certain Irish Muses? Neither of us know her writings in any way, but we like her, and for the best reasons. And this is nearly all, I think, we see of the 'face divine,' masculine and feminine, and I can't make Robert go out a single evening, not even to a concert, nor to hear a play of Alfieri's, yet we fill up our days with books and music (and a little writing has its share), and wonder at the clock for galloping. It's twenty-four o'clock with us almost as soon as we begin to count. Do tell me of Tennyson's book, and of Miss Martineau's. I was grieved to hear a distant murmur of a rumour of an apprehension of a return of her complaint: somebody said that she could not bear the *pressure of dress*, and that the exhaustion resulting from the fits of absorption in work and enthusiasm on the new subject of Egypt was painfully great, and that her friends feared for her. I should think that the bodily excitement and fatigue of her late travels must have been highly hazardous, and that indeed, throughout her convalescence, she should have more spared herself in climbing hills and walking and riding distances. A strain obviously might undo everything. Still, I do hope that the bitter cup may not be filled for her again. What a wonderful discovery this substitute for ether inhalations[169] seems to be. Do you hear anything of its operation in your neighbourhood? We have had a letter from Mr. Horne, who appears happy, and speaks of his success in lecturing on Ireland, and of a new novel which he is about to publish in a separate form after having printed it in a magazine. We have not set up the types even of our *plans* about a book, very distinctly, but we shall do something some day, and you shall hear of it the evening before. Being too happy doesn't agree with literary activity quite as well as I should have thought; and then, dear Mr. Kenyon can't persuade us that we are not rich enough, so as to bring into force a lower order of motives. He talks of Rome still. Now write, dear, dearest Miss Mitford, and tell me of yourself and your health, and do, *do* love me as you used to do. As to French books, one may swear, but you can't get a new publication, except by accident, at this excellent celebrated library of Vieusseux, and I am reduced to read some of my favorites over again, I and Robert together. You ought to hear how we go to single combat, ever and anon, with shield and lance. The greatest quarrel we have had since our marriage, by the way (always excepting my crying conjugal wrong of not eating enough!), was brought up by Masson's pamphlet on the Iron Mask and Fouquet. I wouldn't be persuaded that Fouquet was 'in it,' and so 'the anger of my lord waxed hot.' To this day he says sometimes: 'Don't be cross, Ba! *Fouquet wasn't the Iron Mask after all*.'

God bless you, dearest Miss Mitford.
Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.

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We are here till April.

[Footnote 169: Chloroform, then beginning to come into use.]

To Mrs. Jameson Florence: December 1847.

Indeed, my dear friend, you have a right to complain of *me*, whether or not *we* had any in thinking ourselves deeply injured creatures by your last silence. Yet when in your letter which came at last, you said, 'Write directly,' I *meant* to write directly; I did not take out my vengeance in a foregone malice, be very sure. Just at the time we were in a hard knot of uncertainties about Rome and Venice and Florence, and a cold house and a warm house; for instance we managed (that is *I* did, for altogether it was my fault) to take two apartments in the course of ten days, each for a term of six months, getting out of one of them by leaving the skirts of our garments, *rent*, literally, in the hand of the proprietor. You have heard most of this, I dare say, from Mr. Kenyon or my sisters. Now, too, you are aware of our being in Piazza Pitti, in a charmed circle of sun blaze. Our rooms are small, but of course as cheerful as being under the very eyelids of the sun must make everything; and we have a cook in the house who takes the office of *traiteur* on him and gives us English mutton chops at Florentine prices, both of us quite well and in spirits, and (though you never will believe this) happier than ever. For my own part, you know I need not say a word if it were not true, and I must say to you, who saw the beginning with us, that this end of fifteen months is just fifteen times better and brighter; the mystical 'moon' growing larger and larger till scarcely room is left for any stars at all: the only differences which have touched me being the more and more happiness. It would have been worse than unreasonable if in marrying I had expected one quarter of such happiness, and indeed I did not, to do myself justice, and every now and then I look round in astonishment and thankfulness together, yet with a sort of horror, seeing that this is not heaven after all. We live just as we did when you knew us, just as shut-up a life. Robert never goes anywhere except to take a walk with Flush, which isn't my fault, as you may imagine: he has not been out one evening of the fifteen months; but what with music and books and writing and talking, we scarcely know how the days go, it's such a gallop on the grass. We are going through some of old Sacchetti's novelets now: characteristic work for Florence, if somewhat dull elsewhere. Boccaccios can't be expected to spring up with the vines in rows, even in this climate. We got a newly printed addition to Savonarola's poems the other day, very flat and cold, they did not catch fire when he was burnt. The most poetic thing in the book is his face on the first page, with that eager, devouring soul in the eyes of it. You may suppose that I am able sometimes to go over to the gallery and adore the Raphaels, and Robert will tell you of the divine Apollino which you missed seeing in Poggio Imperiale, and which I shall be set face to face before, some day soon, I hope....

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Father Prout was in Florence for some two hours in passing to Rome, and of course, according to contract of spirits of the air, Robert met him, and heard a great deal of you and Geddie (saw Geddie's picture, by the way, and thought it very like), was told much to the advantage of Mr. Macpherson,[170] and at the end of all, kissed in the open street as the speaker was about to disappear in the diligence. When you write, tell me of the *book*. Surely it will be out anon, and then you will be free, shall you not? Have you seen Tennyson's new poem, and what of it? Miss Martineau is to discourse about Egypt, I suppose; but in the meanwhile do you hear that she forswears mesmerism, as Mr. Spenser Hall does, according to the report Robert brings me home from the newspaper reading. Now I shall leave him room to stand on and speak a word to you. Give my love to Gerardine, and don't forget to mention her letter. I hope you are happy about your friends, and that, in particular, Lady Byron's health is strengthening and to strengthen. Always my dear friend's

Most affectionate
E.B.B.

Dear Aunt Nina,—A corner is just the place for eating Christmas pies in, but for venting Christmas wishes, hardly! What has Ba told you and wished you in the way of love? I wish you the same and love you the same, but Geddie, being part of you, gets her due part. We are as happy as two owls in a hole, two toads under a tree stump; or any other queer two poking creatures that we let live, after the fashion of their black hearts, only Ba is fat and rosy; yes, indeed! Florence is empty and pleasant. Goodbye, therefore, till next year—shall it not be then we meet? God bless you. R.B.

[Footnote 170: Miss Bate's *fiance*.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: February 22, [1848].

Your letter, my dearest friend, which was written, a part at least, before Christmas, came lingering in long after the new year had seen out its matins. Oh, I had wondered so, and wished so over the long silence. My fault, perhaps in a measure, for I know how silent *I* was before. Yes, and you tell me of your having been unwell (bad news), and of your dear Flush's death, which made me sorrowful for you, as I might reasonably be. And now tell me more. Have you a successor to him? Once you told me that one of the race was in training, but as you say nothing now I am all in a doubt. Let me hear everything. If I had been you, I think I should have preferred some quite other kind of dog, as the unlikeness of a likeness would be apt to bring a pain to me; but people can't reason about feelings, and feelings are like the colour of eyes, not the same in different faces, however general may be the proximity of noses.... The great subject with *everybody* just now is the new hope of Italy, and the liberal constitution, given nobly by our good, excellent Grand Duke, whose praise is in all the houses, streets, and piazzas. The other

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evening, the evening after the gift, he went privately to the opera, was recognised, and in a burst of triumph and a glory of waxen torches was brought back to the Pitti by the people. I was undressing to go to bed, had my hair down over my shoulders under Wilson's ministry, when Robert called me to look out of the window and see. Through the dark night a great flock of stars seemed sweeping up the piazza, but not in silence, nor with very heavenly noises. The '*Evvivas*' were deafening. So glad I was. *I, too*, stood at the window and clapped my hands. If ever Grand Duke deserved benediction this Duke does. We hear that he was quite moved, overpowered, and wept like a child. Nevertheless the most of Italy is under the cloud, and God knows how all may end as the thunder ripens. Now I mustn't, I suppose, write politics. Our plans about England are afloat. Impossible to know what we shall do, but if not this summer, the summer after *must* help us to the sight of some beloved faces. It will be a midsummer dream, and we shall return to winter in Italy. My Flush is as well as ever, and perhaps gayer than ever I knew him. He runs out in the piazza whenever he pleases, and plays with the dogs when they are pretty enough, and wags his tail at the sentinels and civic guard, and takes the Grand Duke as a sort of neighbour of his, whom it is proper enough to patronise, but who has considerably less inherent merit and dignity than the spotted spaniel in the alley to the left. We have been reading over again 'Andre' and 'Leone Leoni,'[171] and Robert is in an enthusiasm about the first. Happy person, you are, to get so at new books. Blessed is the man who reads Balzac, or even Dumas. I have got to admire Dumas doubly since that fight and scramble for his brains in Paris. Now do think of me and love me, and let me be as ever your affectionate

BA.

Robert's regards always. Say particularly how you are, and may God bless you, dearest Miss Mitford, and make you happy.

[Footnote 171: Novels by George Sand.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: April 15, [1848].

... My Flush has recovered his beauty, and is in more vivacious spirits than I remember to have seen him. Still, the days come when he will have no pleasure and plenty of fleas, poor dog, for Savonarola's martyrdom here in Florence is scarcely worse than Flush's in the summer. Which doesn't prevent his enjoying the spring, though, and just now, when, by medical command, I drive out two hours every day, his delight is to occupy the seat in the carriage opposite to Robert and me, and look disdainfully on all the little dogs who walk afoot. We drive day by day through the lovely Cascine (where the trees have finished and spread their webs of full greenery, undimmed by the sun yet), first sweeping through the city, past such a window where Bianca Capello looked out to see the Duke go by,[172] and past such a door where Lapo

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stood, and past the famous stone where Dante drew his chair out to sit.[173] Strange, to have all that old-world life about us, and the blue sky so bright besides, and ever so much talk on our lips about the new French revolution, and the King of Prussia's cunning, and the fuss in Germany and elsewhere. Not to speak of our own particular troubles and triumphs in Lombardy close by. The English are flying from Florence, by the way, in a helter skelter, just as they always do fly, except (to do them justice) on a field of battle. The family Englishman is a dreadful coward, be it admitted frankly. See how they run from France, even to my dear excellent Uncle Hedley, who has too many little girls in his household to stay longer at Tours. Oh, I don't *blame* him exactly. I only wish that he had waited a little longer, the time necessary for being quite reassured. He has great stakes in the country—a house at Tours and in Paris, and twenty thousand pounds in the Rouen railway. But Florence will fall upon her feet we may all be certain, let the worst happen that can. Meanwhile, republicans as I and my, husband are by profession, we very anxiously, anxiously even to pain, look on the work being attempted and done just now by the theorists in Paris; far from half approving of it we are, and far from being absolutely confident of the durability of the other half. Tell me what you think, and if you are not anxious too. As to communism, surely the practical part of *that*, the only not dangerous part, is attainable simply by the consent of individuals who may try the experiment of associating their families in order to the cheaper employment of the means of life, and successfully in many cases. But make a government scheme of *even so much*, and you seem to trench on the individual liberty. All such patriarchal planning in a government issues naturally into absolutism, and is adapted to states of society more or less barbaric. Liberty and civilisation when married together lawfully rather evolve individuality than tend to generalisation. Is this not true? I fear, I fear that mad theories promising the impossible may, in turn, make the people mad. I Louis Blanc knows not what he says. Have I not mentioned to you a very gifted woman, a sculptress, Mademoiselle de Fauveau, who lives in Florence with her mother practising her profession, an exile from France, in consequence of their royalist opinions and participation in the Vendee struggle, some sixteen or fifteen years? On that occasion she was mistaken for and allowed herself to be arrested as Madame de la Roche Jacquelin; therefore she has justified, by suffering in the cause, her passionate attachment to it. A most interesting person she is; she called upon us a short time ago and interested us much. And Mrs. Jameson would tell you that her celebrity in her art is not comparative 'for a woman,' but that, since Benvenuto Cellini, more beautiful works of the kind have not been accomplished. An exquisite

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fountain she has lately done for the Emperor of Russia. She has workmen under her, and is as 'professional' in every respect as if neither woman nor noble. At the first throb of this revolution of course she dreamt the impossible about that dear 'Henri Cinq,' who is as much out of the question as Henri Quatre himself; and now it ends with the 'French Legation' coming to settle in the house precisely opposite to hers, with a hideous sign-painting appended O the Gallic cock on one leg and at full crow inscribed, 'Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.' This, and the death of her favorite dog, whom, after seventeen years' affection, she was forced to have destroyed on account of a combination of diseases, has quite saddened the sculptress. When she came to see us I observed that after so long a residence at Florence she must regard it as a second country. 'Ah non!' (the answer was) 'il n'y a pas de seconde patrie.' What you tell me of 'Jane Eyre' makes me long to see the book. I may long, I fancy. It is dismal to have to disappoint my dearest sisters, who hoped for me in England this summer, but our English visit *must* be for next summer instead; there seems too much against it just now. The drawback of Italy is the distance from England. If it were but as near as Paris, for instance, why in that case we should settle here at once, I do think, the conveniences and luxuries of life are of such incredible cheapness, the climate so divine, and the way of things altogether so serene and suited to our tastes and instincts. But to give up England and the *English*, the dear, dearest treasure of English love, is impossible, so we just linger and linger. The Boyles go to England from the press of panic, Lady Boyle being old and infirm. Ah, but your talking friend would interest you, and you might accept the talk in infinitesimal doses, you know. Lamartine has surely acted down the fallacy of the impractical tendencies of imaginative men. I am full of France just now. Are you all prepared for an outbreak in Ireland? I hope so. My husband has the second edition of his collected poems[174] in the press by this time, by grace of Chapman and Hall, who accept all risks. You speak of Tennyson's vexation about the reception of the 'Princess.' Why did Mr. Harness and others, who 'never could understand' his former divine works, praise this in manuscript till the poet's hope grew to the height of his ambition? Strangely unfortunate. We have not read it yet. I hear that Tennyson had the other day everything packed for Italy, then turned his face toward Ireland, and went there. Oh, for a talk with you. But this is a sort of talk, isn't it? Accept my husband's regards. As to my love, I throw it to you over the [sea] with both hands. God bless you.

Your ever affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 172: See Browning's *The Statue and the Bust*.]

[Footnote 173: '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 burned.' *Casa Guidi Windows*, part i.]

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[Footnote 174: This edition, published in 1849 in two volumes contained only *Paracelsus* and the plays and poems of the *Bells and Pomegranates* series.]

To John Kenyan [Florence:] May I, [1848].

My dearest Mr. Kenyon,—Surely it is quite wrong that we three, Robert, you, and I, should be satisfied with writing little dry notes, as short as so many proclamations, and those of the order of your anti-Chartist magistracy, 'Whereas certain evil disposed persons &c. &c.,' instead of our anti-Austrian Grand duchy's 'O figli amati' (how characteristic of the north and the south, to be sure, is this contrast! Yet, after all, they might have managed it rather better in England!)—little dry notes brief and business-like as an anti-Chartist proclamation! And, indeed, two of us are by no means satisfied, whatever the third may be. The other day we were looking over some of the dear delightful letters you used to write to us. Real letters those were, and not little dry notes at all. Robert said, 'When I write to dear Mr. Kenyon I really do feel overcome by the sense of what I owe to him, and so, as it is beyond words to say, why generally I say as little as possible of anything, keeping myself to matters of business.' An alternative very objectionable, I told him; for to have 'a dumb devil' from ever such grateful and sentimental reasons, when the Alps stand betwixt friend, is damnatory in the extreme. Then, as *you* are not 'too grateful' to *us*, why don't *you* write? Pray do, my dear friend. Let us all write as we used to do. And to make sure of it, I begin.

Since I ended last the world has turned over on its other side, in order, one must hope, to some happy change in the dream. Our friend, Miss Bayley, in that very kind letter which has just reached me and shall be answered directly (will you tell her with my thankful love?), asks if Robert and I are communists, and then half draws back her question into a discreet reflection that *I*, at least, was never much celebrated for acumen on political economy. Most true indeed! And therefore, and on that very ground, is it not the more creditable to me that I don't set up for a communist immediately? In proportion to the ignorance might be the stringency of the embrace of 'la verite sociale:' so I claim a little credit that it isn't. For really we are not communists, farther than to admit the wisdom of voluntary association in matters of material life among the poorer classes. And to legislate even on such points seems as objectionable as possible; all intermeddlings of government with domesticities, from Lacedaemon to Peru, were and must be objectionable; and of the growth of absolutism, let us, theorise as we choose. I would have the government educate the people absolutely, and *then* give room for the individual to develop himself into life freely. Nothing can be more hateful to me than this communist idea of quenching individualities

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in the mass. As if the hope of the world did not always consist in the eliciting of the individual man from the background of the masses, in the evolvement of individual genius, virtue, magnanimity. Do you know how I love France and the French? Robert laughs at me for the mania of it, or used to laugh long before this revolution. When I was a prisoner, my other mania for imaginative literature used to be ministered to through the prison bars by Balzac, George Sand, and the like immortal improprieties. They kept the colour in my life to some degree and did good service in their time to me, I can assure you, though in dear discreet England women oughtn't to confess to such reading, I believe, or you told me so yourself one day. Well, but through reading the books I grew to love France, in a mania too; and the interest, which all must feel in the late occurrences there, has been with me, and is, quite painful. I read the newspapers as I never did in my life, and hope and fear in paroxysms, yes, and am guilty of thinking far more of Paris than of Lombardy itself, and try to understand financial difficulties and social theories with the best will in the world; much as Flush tries to understand me when I tell him that barking and jumping may be unseasonable things. Both of us open our eyes a good deal, but the comprehension is questionable after all. What, however, I do seem least of all to comprehend, is your hymn of triumph in England, just because you have a lower ideal of liberty than the French people have. See if in Louis Philippe's time France was not in many respects more advanced than England is now, property better divided, hereditary privilege abolished! Are we to blow with the trumpet because we respect the ruts while everywhere else they are mending the roads? I do not comprehend. As to the Chartists, it is only a pity in my mind that you have not more of them. That's their fault. Mine, you will say, is being pert about politics when you would rather have anything else in a letter from Italy. You have heard of my illness, and will have been sorry for me, I am certain; but with blessings edging me round, I need not catch at a thistle in the hedge to make a 'sorrowful complaignte' of. Our plans have floated round and round, in and out of all the bays and creeks of the Happy Islands....

Meanwhile here we are—and when do you mean to come to see us, pray? Mind, I hold by the skirts of the vision for next winter. Why, surely *you* won't talk of 'disturbances' and 'revolutions,' and the like disloyal reasons which send our brave countrymen flying on all sides, as if every separate individual expected to be bombarded *per se*. Now, mind you come; dear dear Mr. Kenyon, how delighted past expression we should be to see you! Ah, do you fancy that I have no regret for our delightful gossips? If I have the feeling I told you of for Balzac and George Sand, what must I have for *you*? Now come, and let us see you! And still sooner,

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if you please, write to us—and write of yourself and in detail—and tell us particularly, first if the winter has left no sign of a cough with you, and next, what you mean by something which suggests to my fancy that you have a book in the course of printing. Is that true? Tell me all about it—*all*! Who can be interested, pray, if *I* am not? For your and Mr. Chorley's and Mr. Forster's kind dealings with Robert's poems I thank you gratefully; and as a third volume can bring up the rear quickly in the case of success, I make no wailing for my 'Luria,' however dear it may be.[175]

[Illustration: *Casa Guidi From a Photograph*]

You are not to fancy that I am unwell now. On the contrary, I am nearly as strong as ever, and go out in the carriage for two hours every day, besides a little walk sometimes. Not a word more to-day. Write—do—and you shall hear from us at length. Robert sends his own love, I suppose. We both love you from our hearts.

Your ever affectionate and grateful
BA.
(who can't read over, and writes in such a hurry!)

It was about this time, as appears from the following letter, that the Brownings finally anchored themselves in Florence by taking an unfurnished suite of rooms in the Palazzo Guidi, and making there a home for themselves, Here, in the Via Maggio, almost opposite the Pitti Palace, and within easy distance of the Ponte Vecchio, is the dwelling known to all lovers of English poetry as Casa Guidi, and bearing now upon its walls the name of the English poetess whose life and writings formed, in the graceful words of the Italian poet, 'a golden ring between Italy and England.' Whatever might be their migrations—and they were many, especially in later years—Casa Guidi was henceforth their home.[176]

[Footnote 175: Apparently it had been proposed to omit *Luria* from the new edition; but, if so, the intention was not carried out.]

[Footnote 176: It will interest many readers to know that Casa Guidi is now the property of Mr. R. Barrett Browning.]

To Miss Mitford May 28, 1848.

... And now I must tell you what we have done since I wrote last, little thinking of doing so. You see our problem was to get to England as much in our summers as possible, the expense of the intermediate journeys making it difficult of solution. On examination of the whole case, it appeared manifest that we were throwing money into the like to hear you talk of poor France; how I hope that you are able to hope for her. Oh, this

absurdity of communism and mythological fete-ism! where can it end? They had better have kept Louis Philippe after all, if they are no more practical. Your Madame must be insufferable indeed, seeing that her knowledge of these subjects and men did not make her sufferable to you. My curiosity never is exhausted. What I hold is that the French have a higher ideal than we, and that all this clambering, leaping, struggling

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of indefinite awkwardness simply proves it. But *success in the republic* is different still. I fear for them. My uncle and his family are safe at Tunbridge Wells, my aunt longing to be able to get back again. For those who are still nearer to me, I have no heart to speak of *them*, loving them as I do and must to the end, whatever that end may be; but my dearest sisters write often to me—never let me miss their affection. I am quite well again, and strong, and Robert and I go out after tea in a wandering walk to sit in the Loggia and look at the Perseus, or, better still, at the divine sunsets on the Arno, turning it to pure gold under the bridges. After more than twenty months of marriage, we are happier than ever—I may say *we*. Italy will regenerate herself in all senses, I hope and believe. In Florence we are very quiet, and the English fly in proportion. N.B.—*Always* first fly the majors and gallant captains, unless there's a general. How I should like to see dear Mr. Horne's poem! *He's* bold, at least—yes, and has a great heart to be bold with. A cloud has fallen on me some few weeks ago, in the illness and death of my dear friend Mr. Boyd,[177] but he did not suffer, and is not to be mourned by those without hope [*sic*]. Still, it has been a cloud. May God bless you, my beloved friend. Write soon, and of yourself, to your ever affectionate

BA.

My husband's regards go to you, of course.

[Footnote 177: Mr. Boyd died on May 10, 1848.]

To Miss Browning [Florence: about June 1848.]

My dearest Sarianna,—At last, you see, I give sign of life. The *love*, I hope you believed in without sign or symbol; and even for the rest, Robert promised to answer for me like godfather or godmother, and bear the consequence of my sins....

We are a little uneasy just now as to whether you will be overjoyed or *under* joyed by our new scheme of taking an unfurnished apartment. It would spoil all, for instance, if your dear mother seemed disappointed—vexed—in the least degree. And I can understand how, to persons at a distance and of course unable to understand the whole circumstances of the case, the fact of an apartment taken and furnished may seem to involve some dreadful giving up for ever and ever of country and family—which would be as dreadful to us as to you! How could we give you up, do you think, when we love you more and more? Oh no. If Robert has succeeded in making clear the subject to you, you will all perceive, just as *we know*, that we have simply thus solved the problem of making our small income carry us to England, not only next summer, but many a summer after. We should like to give every summer to dear England, and hide away from the cold only when it comes. By our scheme we shall have saved money even at

the end of the present year; while for afterward, here's a residence—that is, a_pied a terre_—in Italy, all but free

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when we wish to use it; and when we care to let it, producing eight or ten pounds a month in help of travelling expenses. It's the best investment for Mr. Moxon's money we could have looked the world over for. So the learned tell us; and after all, you know, we only pay in the proportion of your working classes in the Pancras building contrived for them by the philanthropy of your Southwood Smiths. I do wish you could see what rooms we have, what ceilings, what height and breadth, what a double terrace for orange trees; how cool, how likely to be warm, how perfect every way! Robert leaned once to a ground floor in the Frescobaldi Palace, being bewitched by a garden full of camellias, and a little pond of gold and silver fish; but while he saw the fish I saw the mosquitos in clouds, such an apocalypse of them as has not yet been visible to me in all Florence, and I dread mosquitos more than Austrians; and he, in his unspeakable goodness, deferred to my fear in a moment and gave up the camellias without one look behind. A heavy conscience I should have if it were not that the camellia garden was certainly less private than our terrace here, where we can have camellias also if we please. How pretty and pleasant your cottage at Windsor must be! We had a long *muse* over your father's sketch of it, and set faces at the windows. That the dear invalid is better for the change must have brightened it, too, to her companions, and the very sound of a 'forest' is something peculiarly delightful and untried to me. I know hills well, and of the sea too much; but now I want forests, or quite, quite mountains, such as you have not in England.

Robert says that if 'Blackwood' likes to print a poem of mine and send you the proofs, you will be so very good as to like to correct them. To me it seems too much to ask, when you have work for him to do beside. Will it be too much, or is nothing so to your kindness? I would ask my *other* sisters, who would gladly, dear things, do it for me; but I have misgivings through their being so entirely unaccustomed to occupations of the sort, or any critical reading of poetry of any sort. Robert is quite well and in the best spirits, and has the headache now only very occasionally. I am as well as he, having quite recovered my strength and power of walking. So we wander to the bridge of Trinita every evening after tea to see the sunset on the Arno. May God bless you all! Give my true love to your father and mother, and my loving thanks to yourself for that last stitch in the stool. How good you are, Sarianna, to your ever affectionate sister

BA.

Always remind your dear mother that we are no more *bound* here than when in furnished lodgings. It is a mere name.

To Mrs. Martin Palazzo Guidi: June 20, [1848].

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My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Now I am going to answer your letter, which I all but lost, and got ever so many days beyond the right day, because you directed it to Mrs. *William* Browning. Pray remember *Robert Browning* for the future, in right descent from *Robert Brunnyng*,[178] the first English poet. Mrs. Jameson says, 'It's ominous of the actual Robert's being the *last* English poet;' a saying which I give you to remember us by, rejecting the omen.... We have grown to be Florentine citizens, as perhaps you have heard. Health and means both forbade our settlement in England; and the journey backwards and forwards being another sort of expense, and very necessary with our ties and affections, we had to think how to live here, when we were here, at the cheapest. The difference between taking a furnished apartment and an unfurnished one is something immense. For our furnished rooms we have had always to pay some four guineas a month; and unfurnished rooms of equal pretension we could have for twelve a year, and the furniture (out and out) for fifty pounds. This calculation, together with the consideration that we could let our apartment whenever we travelled and receive back the whole cost, could not choose, of course, but determine us. On coming to the point, however, we grew ambitious, and preferred giving five-and-twenty guineas for a noble suite of rooms in the Palazzo Guidi, a stone's throw from the Pitti, and furnishing them after our own taste rather than after our economy, the economy having a legitimate share of respect notwithstanding; and the satisfactory thing being that the whole expense of this furnishing—rococo chairs, spring sofas, carved bookcases, satin from cardinals' beds, and the rest—is covered by the proceeds of our books during the last two winters. This is satisfying, isn't it? We shall stand safe within the borders of our narrow income even this year, and next year comes the harvest! We shall go to England in the spring, and return *home* to Italy. Do you understand? Mr. Kenyon, our friend and counsellor, writes to applaud—such prudence was never known before among poets. Then we have a plan, that when the summer (this summer) grows too hot, we shall just take up our carpet-bag and Wilson and plunge into the mountains in search of the monasteries beyond Vallombrosa, from Arezzo go to St. Sepolchro in the Apennines, and thence to Fano on the seashore, making a round back perhaps (after seeing the great fair at Sinigaglia) to Ravenna and Bologna home. As to Rome, our plan is to give up Rome next winter, seeing that we *must* go to England in the spring. I *must* see my dearest sisters and whoever else dear will see me, and Robert *must* see his family beside; and going to Rome will take us too far from the route and cost too much; and then we are not inclined to give the first-fruits of our new apartment to strangers if we could let it ever so easily this year.

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You can't think how well the rooms look already; you must come and see them, you and dear Mr. Martin. Three immense rooms we have, and a fourth small one for a book room and winter room—windows opening on a little terrace, eight windows to the south; two good bedrooms behind, with a smaller terrace, and kitchen, &c., all on a first floor and Count Guidi's favorite suite. The Guidi were connected by marriage with the Ugolino of Pisa, Dante's Ugolino, only we shun all traditions of the Tower of Famine, and promise to give you excellent coffee whenever you will come to give us the opportunity. We shall have vines and myrtles and orange trees on the terrace, and I shall have a watering-pot and garden just as you do, though it must be on the bricks instead of the ground. For temperature, the stoves are said to be very effective in the winter, and in the summer we are cool and airy; the advantage of these thick-walled palazzos is coolness in summer and warmth in winter. I am very well and quite strong again, or rather, stronger than ever, and able to walk as far as Cellini's Perseus in the moonlight evenings, on the other side of the Arno. Oh, that Arno in the sunset, with the moon and evening star standing by, how divine it is!...

Think of me as ever your most affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 178: Otherwise known as Robert Mannyng, or Robert de Brunne, author of the *Handlyng Synne* and a *Chronicle of England*. He flourished about 1288-1338.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: July 4, [1848].

It does grieve me, my ever dearest Miss Mitford, to hear of the suffering which has fallen upon you! Oh, rheumatism or not, whatever the name may be, do take care, do consider, and turn your dear face toward the seaside; somewhere where you can have warm sea bathing and sea air, and be able to associate the word 'a drive' not with mad ponies, but the mildest of donkeys, on a flat sand. The good it would do you is incalculable, I am certain; it is precisely a case for change of air, with quiet....

As for when you come to Florence, we won't have 'a pony carriage between us,' if you please, because we may have a carriage and a pair of horses and a coachman, and pay as little as for the pony-chair in England. For three hundred a year one may live much like the Grand Duchess, and go to the opera in the evening at fivepence-halfpenny inclusive. Indeed, poor people should have their patriotism tenderly dealt with, when, after certain experiments, they decide on living upon the whole on the Continent. The differences are past belief, beyond expectation, and when the sunshine is thrown in, the head turns at once, and you fall straight into absenteeism. Ah, for the 'long chats' and the 'having England at one another's fireside!' You talk of delightful things indeed. We are very quiet, politically speaking, and though we hear now and

then of melancholy mothers who have to part with their sons for Lombardy,[179] and though there are

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processions for the blessing of flags and an occasional firing of guns for a victory, or a cry in the streets, 'Notizie della guerra—leggete, signori;' this is all we know of Radetsky in Florence; while, for civil politics, the meeting of the senate took place a few days since to the satisfaction of everybody, and the Grand Duke's speech was generally admired. The elections have returned moderate men, and many land-proprietors, and Robert, who went out to see the procession of members, was struck by the grave thoughtful faces and the dignity of expression. We are going some day to hear the debates, but it has pleased their signoria to fix upon twelve (noon) for meeting, and really I do not dare to go out in the sun. The hour is sufficiently conclusive against dangerous enthusiasm. Poor France, poor France! News of the dreadful massacre at Paris just reaches us, and the letters and newspapers not arriving to-day, everybody fears a continuation of the crisis. How is it to end? Who 'despairs of the republic?' Why, *I* do! I fear, I fear, that it cannot stand in France, and you seem to have not much more hope. My husband has a little, with melancholy intermediate prospects; but my own belief that the people have had enough of democratic institutions and will be impatient for a kingship anew. Whom will they have? How did you feel when the cry was raised, 'Vive l'Empereur'? Only Prince Napoleon is a Napoleon cut out in paper after all. The Prince de Joinville is said to be very popular. It makes me giddy to think of the awful precipices which surround France—to think, too, that the great danger is on the question of *property*, which is perhaps divided there more justly than in any other country of Europe. Lamartine has comprehended nothing, that is clear, even if his amount of energy had been effectual.... Yes, do send me the list of Balzac, *after* 'Les Miseres de la Vie Conjugale,' I mean. I left him in the midst of 'La Femme de Soixante Ans,' who seemed on the point of turning the heads of all 'la jeunesse' around her; and, after all, she did not strike me as so charming. But Balzac charms me, let him write what he will; he's an inspired man. Tell me, too, exactly what Sue has done after 'Martin.' I read only one volume of 'Martin.' And did poor Soulie finish his 'Dramas'? And after 'Lucretia' what did George Sand write? When Robert and I are ambitious, we talk of buying Balzac in full some day, to put him up in our bookcase from the convent, if the carved-wood angels, infants and serpents, should not finish mouldering away in horror at the touch of him. But I fear it will rather be an expensive purchase, even here. Would that he gave up the drama, for which, as you observe, he has no faculty whatever. In fact, the faculty he has is the very reverse of the dramatic, ordinarily understood.... Dearest Mr. Kenyon is called quite well and delightful by the whole world, though he suffered from cough in the winter; and he is bringing

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out a new book of poems, a ‘Day at Tivoli,’ and others; and he talks energetically of coming to Florence this autumn. Also, we have hopes of Mr. Chorley. I congratulate you on the going away of Madame. Coming and going bring very various associations in this life of ours. Why, if *you* were to come we should appreciate our fortune, and you should have my particular chair, which Robert calls mine because I like sitting in a cloud; it’s so sybaritically soft a chair. Now I love you for the kind words you say of *him*, who deserves the best words of the best women and men, wherever spoken! Yes, indeed, I am happy. Otherwise, I should have a stone where the heart is, and sink by the weight of it. You must have faith in me, for I never can make you thoroughly to understand what he is, of himself, and to me—the noblest and perfectest of human beings. After a year and ten months’ absolute soul-to-soul intercourse and union, I have to look higher still for my first ideal. You won’t blame me for bad taste that I say these things, for can I help it, when I am writing my heart to you? It is a heart which runs over very often with a grateful joy for a most peculiar destiny, even in the midst of some bitter drawbacks which I need not allude to farther....

May God bless you continually, even as I am

Your affectionate
BA.

[Footnote 179: The insurrection of Lombardy against Austrian rule had taken place in March, and was immediately followed by war between Sardinia and Austria, in which the Italians gained some initial successes. Fighting continued through the summer, and was temporarily closed by an armistice in August.]

To Mrs. Jameson Palazzo Guidi: July 15, [1848].

Now at last, my very dear friend, I am writing to you, and the reproach you sent to me in your letter shall not be driven inwardly any more by my self-reproaches. Wasn’t it your fault after all, a little, that we did not hear one another’s voice oftener? You are *so long* in writing. Then I have been putting off and putting off my letter to you, just because I wanted to make a full letter of it; and Robert always says that it’s the bane of a correspondence to make a full letter a condition of writing at all. But so much I had to tell you! while the mere outline of facts you had from others, I knew. Which is just said that you may forgive us both, and believe that we think of you and love you, yes, and talk of you, even when we don’t write to you, and that we shall write to you for the future more regularly, indeed. Your letter, notwithstanding its reproach, was very welcome and very kind, only you must be fagged with the book, and saddened by Lady Byron’s state of health, and anxious about Gerardine perhaps. The best of all was the prospect you hold out to us of coming to Italy this year. Do, do come. Delighted we shall be to see

you in Florence, and wise it will be in you to cast behind your back both the fear of Radetsky and as much English

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care as may be. Now, would it not do infinite good to Lady Byron if you could carry her with you into the sun? Surely it would do her great good; the change, the calm, the atmosphere of beauty and brightness, which harmonises so wonderfully with every shade of human feeling. Florence just now, and thanks to the panic, is tolerably *clean* of the English—you scarcely see an English face anywhere—and perhaps this was a circumstance that helped to give Robert courage to take our apartment here and 'settle down.' You were surprised at so decided a step I dare say, and, I believe, though too considerate to say it in your letter, you have wondered in your thoughts at our fixing at Florence instead of Rome, and without seeing more of Italy before the finality of making a choice. But observe, Florence is wonderfully cheap, one lives here for just nothing; and the convenience in respect to England, letters, and the facility of letting our house in our absence, is incomparable altogether. At Rome a house would be habitable only half the year, and the distance and the expense are objections at the first sight of the subject.... Altogether, if I could but get a supply of French books, turning the cock easily, it would be perfect; but as to *anything* new in the book way, Vieusseux seems to have made a vow against it, and poor Robert comes and goes in a state of desperation between me and the bookseller ('But what *can* I do, Ba?'), and only brings news of some pitiful revolution or other which promises a full flush of republican virtues and falls off into the fleur de lis as usual. Think of our not having read 'Lucretia' yet—George Sand's. And Balzac is six or seven works deep from us; but these are evils to be borne. We live on just in the same way, having very few visitors, and receiving them in the quietest of hospitalities. Mr. Ware, the American, who wrote the 'Letters from Palmyra,' and is a delightful, earnest, simple person, comes to have coffee with us once or twice a week, and very much we like him. Mr. Hillard, another cultivated American friend of ours, you have in London, and we should gladly have kept longer. Mr. Powers does not spend himself much upon visiting, which is quite right, but we do hope to see a good deal of Mademoiselle de Fauveau. Robert exceedingly admires her. As to Italian society, one may as well take to longing for the evening star, for it seems quite as inaccessible; and indeed, of society of any sort, we have not much, nor wish for it, nor miss it. Dearest friend, if I could open my heart to you in all seriousness, you would see nothing there but a sort of enduring wonder of happiness—yes, and some gratitude, I do hope, besides. Could everything be well in England, I should only have to melt out of the body at once in the joy and the glow of it. Happier and happier I have been, month after month; and when I hear *him* talk of being happy too, my very soul seems to swim round with feelings which cannot

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be spoken. But I tell you a little, because I owe the telling to you, and also that you may set down in your philosophy the possibility of book-making creatures living happily together. I admit, though, to begin (or end), that my husband is an exceptional human being, and that it wouldn't be just to measure another by him. We are planning a great deal of enjoyment in this 'going to the fair' at Sinigaglia, meaning to go by Arezzo and San Sepolchro, and Urbino, to Fano, where we shall pitch our tent for the benefit, as Robert says, of the sea air and the oysters. Fano is very habitable, and we may get to Pesaro and the footsteps of Castiglione's 'courtier,' to say nothing of Bernardo Tasso; and Ancona beckons from the other side of Sinigaglia, and Loreto beside, only we shall have to restrain our flights a little. The passage of the Apennine is said to be magnificent, and, altogether, surely it must be delightful; and we take only two carpet bags—not to be weighed down by 'impedimenta,' and have our own home, left in charge of the porter, to return to at last, I am very well and shall be better for the change, though Robert is dreadfully afraid, as usual, that I shall fall to pieces at the first motion....

May God bless you!
Ever I am your affectionate
BA.

Write to Florence as usual—Poste Restante. You will hear how we are in great hopes of dear Mr. Kenyon.

Dear Aunt Nina,—Only a word in all the hurry of setting off. We love you as you love us, and are pretty nearly as happy as you would have us. All love and prosperity to dear Geddie, too; what do you say of 'Landor,' and my not sending it to Forster or somebody? *Che che* (as the Tuscans exclaim), *who* was it promised to call at my people's, who would have tendered it forthwith? I will see about it as it is. Goodbye, dearest aunt, and let no revolution disturb your good will to Ba and

R.B.

To Miss Mitford Florence: August 24, 1848.

Ever dearest Miss Mitford,—It's great comfort to have your letter; for as it came more lingeringly than usual, I had time to be a little anxious, and even my husband has confessed since that he thought what he would not say aloud for fear of paining me, as to the probability of your being less well than usual. Your letters come so regularly to the hour, you see, that when it strikes without them, we ask why. Thank God, you are better after all, and reviving in spirits, as I saw at the first glance before the words said it clearly....

As for ourselves, we have scarcely done so well, yet well; having enjoyed a great deal in spite of drawbacks. Murray, the traitor, sent us to Fano as a ‘delightful summer residence for an English family,’ and we found it uninhabitable from the heat, vegetation scorched with paleness, the very air swooning in the sun, and the gloomy looks of the inhabitants sufficiently corroborative of their words, that no drop of rain

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or dew ever falls there during the summer. A ’circulating library’ ‘which doesn’t give out books,’ and ’a refined and intellectual Italian society’ (I quote Murray for that phrase) which ‘never reads a book through’ (I quote Mrs. Wiseman, Dr. Wiseman’s mother, who has lived in Fano seven years), complete the advantages of the place, yet the churches are beautiful, and a divine picture of Guercino’s is worth going all that way to see.[180] By a happy accident we fell in with Mrs. Wiseman, who, having married her daughter to Count Gabrielli with ancestral possessions in Fano, has lived on there from year to year, in a state of permanent moaning as far as I could apprehend. She is a very intelligent and vivacious person, and having been used to the best French society, bears but ill this exile from the common civilities of life. I wish Dr. Wiseman, of whose childhood and manhood she spoke with touching pride, would ask her to minister to the domestic rites of his bishop’s palace in Westminster; there would be no hesitation, I fancy, in her acceptance of the invitation. Agreeable as she and her daughter were, however, we fled from Fano after three days, and, finding ourselves cheated out of our dream of summer coolness, resolved on substituting for it what the Italians call ‘un bel giro.’ So we went to Ancona, a striking sea city, holding up against the brown rocks and elbowing out the purple tides, beautiful to look upon. An exfoliation of the rock itself, you would call the houses that seem to grow there, so identical is the colour and character. I should like to visit Ancona again when there is a little air and shadow; we stayed a week as it was, living upon fish and cold water. Water, water, was the cry all day long, and really you should have seen me (or you should not have seen me) lying on the sofa, and demoralised out of all sense of female vanity, not to say decency, with dishevelled hair at full length, and ’sans gown, sans stays, sans shoes, sans everything,’ except a petticoat and white dressing wrapper. I said something feebly once about the waiter; but I don’t think I meant it for earnest, for when Robert said, ’Oh, don’t mind, dear,’ certainly I didn’t mind in the least. People *don’t*, I suppose, when they are in ovens, or in exhausted receivers. Never before did I guess what heat was—that’s sure. We went to Loreto for a day, back through Ancona, Sinigaglia (oh, I forgot to tell you, there was no fair this year at Sinigaglia; Italy will be content, I suppose, with selling her honour), Fano, Pesaro, Rimini to Ravenna, back again over the Apennines from Forli. A ‘bel giro,’ wasn’t it? Ravenna, where Robert positively wanted to go to live once, has itself put an end to those yearnings. The churches are wonderful: holding an atmosphere of purple glory, and if one could live just in them, or in Dante’s tomb—well, otherwise keep me from Ravenna. The very antiquity of the houses is whitewashed, and the marshes on all sides send up stenches new and

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old, till the hot air is sick with them. To get to the pine forest, which is exquisite, you have to go a mile along the canal, the exhalations pursuing you step for step, and, what ruffled me more than all beside, we were not admitted into the house of Dante's tomb 'without an especial permission from the authorities.' Quite furious I was about this, and both of us too angry to think of applying: but we stood at the grated window and read the pathetic inscription as plainly as if we had touched the marble. We stood there between three and four in the morning, and then went straight on to Florence from that tomb of the exiled poet. Just what we should have done, had the circumstances been arranged in a dramatic intention. From Forli, the air grew pure and quick again; and the exquisite, almost visionary scenery of the Apennines, the wonderful variety of shape and colour, the sudden transitions and vital individuality of those mountains, the chestnut forests dropping by their own weight into the deep ravines, the rocks cloven and clawed by the living torrents, and the hills, hill above hill, piling up their grand existences as if they did it themselves, changing colour in the effort—of these things I cannot give you any idea, and if words could not, painting could not either. Indeed, the whole scenery of our journey, except when we approached the coast, was full of beauty. The first time we crossed the Apennine (near Borgo San Sepolcro) we did it by moonlight, and the flesh was weak, and one fell asleep, and saw things between sleep and wake, only the effects were grand and singular so, even though of course we lost much in the distinctness. Well, but you will understand from all this that we were delighted to get home—*I* was, I assure you. Florence seemed as cool as an oven after the fire; indeed, we called it quite cool, and I took possession of my own chair and put up my feet on the cushions and was charmed, both with having been so far and coming back so soon. Three weeks brought us home. Flush was a fellow traveller of course, and enjoyed it in the most obviously amusing manner. Never was there so good a dog in a carriage before his time! Think of Flush, too! He has a supreme contempt for trees and hills or anything of that kind, and, in the intervals of natural scenery, he drew in his head from the window and didn't consider it worth looking at; but when the population thickened, and when a village or a town was to be passed through, then his eyes were starting out of his head with eagerness; he looked east, he looked west, you would conclude that he was taking notes or preparing them. His eagerness to get into the carriage first used to amuse the Italians. Ah, poor Italy! I am as mortified as an Italian ought to be. They have only the rhetoric of patriots and soldiers, I fear! Tuscany is to be spared forsooth, if she lies still, and here she lies, eating ices and keeping the feast of the Madonna. Perdoni! but she has

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a review in the Cascine besides, and a gallant show of some ‘ten thousand men’ they are said to have made of it—only don’t think that I and Robert went out to see that sight. We should have sickened at it too much. An amiable, refined people, too, these Tuscans are, conciliating and affectionate. When you look out into the streets on feast days, you would take it for one great ‘rout,’ everybody appears dressed for a drawing room, and you can scarcely discern the least difference between class and class, from the Grand Duchess to the Donna di facenda; also there is no belying of the costume in the manners, the most gracious and graceful courtesy and gentleness being apparent in the thickest crowds. This is all attractive and delightful; but the people wants *stamina*, wants conscience, wants self-reverence. Dante’s soul has died out of the land. Enough of this. As for France, I have ’despaired of the republic’ for very long, but the nation is a great nation, and will right itself under some flag, white or red. Don’t you think so? Thank you for the news of our authors, it is as ’the sound of a trumpet afar off,’ and I am like the war-horse. Neglectful that I am, I forgot to tell you before that you heard quite rightly about Mr. Thackeray’s wife, who is ill *so*. Since your question, I had in gossip from England that the book ‘Jane Eyre’ was written by a governess in his house, and that the preface to the foreign edition refers to him in some marked way. We have not seen the book at all. But the first letter in which you mentioned your Oxford student caught us in the midst of his work upon art.[181] Very vivid, very graphic, full of sensibility, but inconsequent in some of the reasoning, it seemed to me, and rather flashy than full in the metaphysics. Robert, who knows a good deal about art, to which knowledge I of course have no pretence, could agree with him only by snatches, and we, both of us, standing before a very expressive picture of Domenichino’s (the ’David’—at Fano) wondered how he could blaspheme so against a great artist. Still, he is no ordinary man, and for a critic to be so much a poet is a great thing. Also, we have by no means, I should imagine, seen the utmost of his stature. How kindly you speak to me of my dearest sisters. Yes, go to see them whenever you are in London, they are worthy of the gladness of receiving you. And will you write soon to me, and tell me everything of yourself, how you are, how home agrees with you, and the little details which are such gold dust to absent friends....

May God bless you, my beloved friend. Let me ever be (my husband joining in all warm regards) your most affectionate

BA.

[Footnote 180:’Guercino drew this angel I saw teach
(Alfred, dear friend!) that little child to pray
Holding his 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.

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’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.’]

[Footnote 181: The first two volumes of *Modern Painters* bore no author’s name, but were described as being ‘by a graduate of Oxford.’ At a later date Mrs. Browning made Mr. Ruskin’s acquaintance, as some subsequent letters testify.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: October 10, 1848.

My ever dearest Miss Mitford,—Have you not thought some hard thoughts of me, for not instantly replying to a letter which necessarily must have been, to one who loved you, of such painful interest? Do I not love you truly? Yes, indeed. But while preparing to write to you my deep regret at hearing that you had been so ill, illness came in another form to prevent me from writing, my husband being laid up for nearly a month with fever and ulcerated sore throat. I had not the heart to write a line to anyone, much less to prepare a packet to escort your letter free from foreign postage; and to make you pay for a chapter of Lamentations’ without the spirit of prophecy, would have been too hard on you, wouldn’t it? Quite unhappy I have been over those burning hands and languid eyes, the only unhappiness I ever had by *them*, and then he wouldn’t see a physician; and if it hadn’t been that, just at the right moment, Mr. Mahony, the celebrated Jesuit, and Father Prout of ‘Fraser,’ knowing everything as those Jesuits are apt to do, came in to us on his way to Rome, pointed out that the fever got ahead through weakness and mixed up with his own kind hand a potion of eggs and port wine, to the horror of our Italian servant, who lifted up his eyes at such a prescription for a fever, crying, ’O Inglesi, Inglesi!’ the case would have been far worse, I have no kind of doubt. For the eccentric prescription gave the power of sleeping, and the pulse grew quieter directly. I shall always be grateful to Father Prout, always. The very sight of some one with a friend’s name and a cheerful face, his very jests at me for being a ‘bambina’ and frightened without cause, were as comforting as the salutation of angels. Also, he has been in Florence ever since, and we have seen him every day; he came to doctor and remained to talk. A very singular person, of whom the world tells a thousand and one tales, you know, but of whom I shall speak as I find him, because the utmost kindness and warmheartedness have characterised his whole bearing towards us. Robert met him years ago at dinner at Emerson Tennent’s, and since has crossed paths with him on various points of Europe. The first time I saw him was as he stood on a rock at Leghorn, at our disembarkation in Italy. Not refined in a social sense by any manner of means, yet a most accomplished scholar and vibrating all over with learned associations and vivid combinations of fancy and experience—having seen all the ends of the earth and the men thereof,

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and possessing the art of talk and quotation to an amusing degree. In another week or two he will be at Rome.... How graphically you give us your Oxford student! Well! the picture is more distinct than Turner's, and if you had called it, in the manner of the Master, 'A Rock Limpet,' we should have recognised in it the corresponding type of the gifted and eccentric writer in question. Very eloquent he is, I agree at once, and true views he takes of Art in the abstract, true and elevating. It is in the application of connective logic that he breaks away from one so violently.... We are expecting our books by an early vessel, and are about to be very busy, building up a rococo bookcase of carved angels and demons. Also we shall get up curtains, and get down bedroom carpets, and finish the remainder of our furnishing business, now that the hot weather is at an end. I say 'at an end,' though the glass stands at seventy. As to the 'war,' *that* is rather different, it is painful to feel ourselves growing gradually cooler and cooler on the subject of Italian patriotism, valour, and good sense; but the process is inevitable. The child's play between the Livornese and our Grand Duke provokes a thousand pleasantries. Every now and then a day is fixed for a revolution in Tuscany, but up to the present time a shower has come and put it off. Two Sundays ago Florence was to have been 'sacked' by Leghorn, when a drizzle came and saved us. You think this a bad joke of mine or an impotent sarcasm, perhaps; whereas I merely speak historically. Brave men, good men, even sensible men there are of course in the land, but they are not strong enough for the times or for masterdom. For France, it is a great nation; but even in France they want a man, and Cavaignacso[182] only a soldier. If Louis Napoleon had the muscle of his uncle's little finger in his soul, he would be president, and king; but he is flaccid altogether, you see, and Joinville stands nearer to the royal probability after all. 'Henri Cinq' is said to be too closely espoused to the Church, and his connections at Naples and Parma don't help his cause. Robert has more hope of the *republic* than I have: but call ye *this* a republic? Do you know that Miss Martineau takes up the 'History of England' under Charles Knight, in the continuation of a popular book? I regret her fine imagination being so wasted. So you saw Mr. Chorley? What a pleasant flashing in the eyes! We hear of him in Holland and Norway. Dear Mr. Kenyon won't stir from England, we see plainly. Ah! Frederic Soulie! he is too dead, I fear. Perhaps he goes on, though, writing romances, after the fashion of poor Miss Pickering, that prove nothing. I long for my French fountains of living literature, which, pure or impure, plashed in one's face so pleasantly. Some old French 'Memoires' we have got at lately, 'Brienne' for instance. It is curious how the leaders of the last revolution (under Louis XVIII.) seem to have despised one another. Brienne is very dull and flat. For Puseyism, it runs counter to the spirit of our times, after all, and will never achieve a church. May God bless you! Robert's regards go with the love of your ever affectionate

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BA.

[Footnote 182: At this time President of the Council, after suppressing the Communist rising of June 1848.]

To Mrs. Martin Florence: December 3, 1848.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—It seemed long to me that you had not written, and it seems long to me now that I have not answered the kind letter which came at last. Then Henrietta told me of your being unwell at the moment of her mad excursion into Herefordshire. Altogether I want to speak to you and hear from you, and shall be easier and gladder when both are done. Do forgive my sins and write directly, and tell me everything about both of you, and how you are in spirits and health, and whether you really make up your minds to see more danger in the stormy influences of the Continent in the moral point of view than in those of England in the physical. For my part I hold to my original class of fear, and would rather face two or three revolutions than an east wind of an English winter. If I were you I would go to Pau as usual and take poor Abd-el-Kader's place (my husband is furious about the treatment of Abd-el-Kader, so I hear a good deal about him[183]), or I would go to Italy and try Florence, where really democratic ministries roar as gently as sucking doves, particularly when they are safe in place. We have listened to dreadful rumours—Florence was to have been sacked several times by the Livornese; the Grand Duke went so far as to send away his family to Siena, and we had 'Morte a Fiorentini!' chalked up on the walls. Still, somehow or other, the peace has been kept in Florentine fashion; it has rained once or twice, which is always enough here to moderate the most revolutionary when they wear their best surtouts, and I look forward to an unbroken tranquillity just as I used to do, even though the windows of the Ridolfi Palace (the ambassador in London) were smashed the other evening a few yards from ours. Perhaps a gentle and affectionate approach to contempt for our Florentines mixes a little with this feeling of security, but what then? They are an amiable, refined, graceful people, with much of the artistic temperament as distinguished from that of men of genius—effeminate, no, rather *feminine* in a better sense—of a fancy easily turned into impulse, but with no strenuous and determinate strength in them. What they comprehend best in the 'Italian League' is probably a league to wear silk velvet and each a feather in his hat, to carry flags and cry *vivas*, and keep a grand festa day in the piazzas. Better and happier in this than in stabbing prime ministers, or hanging up their dead bodies to shoot at; and not much more childish than these French patriots and republicans, who crown their great deeds by electing to the presidency such a man as Prince Louis Napoleon, simply because 'C'est le neveu de son oncle!'[184] A curious precedent for a president, certainly; but, oh heavens and earth, what curious things abroad everywhere just now, inclusive of the

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sea serpent! I agree with you that much of all is very melancholy and disheartening, though holding fast by my hope and belief that good will be the end, as it always *is* God's end to man's frenzies, and that all we observe is but the fermentation necessary to the new wine, which presently we shall drink pure. Meanwhile, the saddest thing is the impossibility (which I, for one, feel) to sympathise, to go along with, the *people* to whom and to whose cause all my natural sympathies yearn. The word 'Liberty' ceases to make me thrill, as at something great and unmistakable, as, for instance, the other great words Truth, and Justice; do. The salt has lost its savour, the meaning has escaped from the term; we know nothing of what people will *do* when they aspire to Liberty. The holiness of liberty is desecrated by the sign of the ass's hoof. Fixed principles, either of opinion or action, seem clearly gone out of the world. The principle of Destruction is in the place of the principle of Re-integration, or of Radical Reform, as we called it in England. I look all round and can sympathise nowhere. The rulers hold by rottenness, and the people leap into the abyss, and nobody knows why this is, or why that is. As to France, my tears (which I really couldn't help at the time of the expulsion of poor Louis Philippe and his family, not being very strong just then) are justified, it appears, though my husband thought them foolish (and so did I), and though we both began by an adhesion to the Republic in the cordial manner. But, just see, the Republic was a 'man in an iron mask' or helmet, and turns out a military dictatorship, a throttling of the press, a starving of the finances, and an election of Louis Napoleon to be President. Louis Philippe was better than all this, take him at worst, and at worst he did *not* deserve the mud and stones cast at him, which I have always maintained and maintain still. England might have got up ('happy country') more crying grievances than France at the moment of outbreak; but what makes outbreaks now-a-days is not 'the cause, my soul,' but the stuff of the people. You are huckaback on the other side of the Channel, and you wear out the poor Irish linen, let the justice of the case be what it may. Politics enough and too much, surely, especially now when they are depressing to you, and more or less to everybody.... We are still in the slow agonies of furnishing our apartment. You see, being the poorest and most prudent of possible poets, we had to solve the problem of taking our furniture out of our year's income (proceeds of poems and the like), and of not getting into debt. Oh, I take no credit to myself; I was always in debt in my little way ('small *im* morals,' as Dr. Bowring might call it) before I married, but Robert, though a poet and dramatist by profession, being descended from the blood of all the Puritans, and educated by the strictest of dissenters, has a sort of horror about the dreadful fact of owing five

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shillings five days, which I call quite morbid in its degree and extent, and which is altogether unpoetical according to the traditions of the world. So we have been dragging in by inches our chairs and tables throughout the summer, and by no means look finished and furnished at this late moment, the slow Italians coming at the heels of our slowest intentions with the putting up of our curtains, which begin to be necessary in this November tramontana. Yet in a month or three weeks we shall look quite comfortable—before Christmas; and in the meantime we heap up the pine wood and feel perfectly warm with these thick palace walls between us and the outside air. Also my husband's new edition is on the *edge* of coming out, and we have had an application from Mr. Phelps, of Sadler's Wells, for leave to act his 'Blot on the 'Scutcheon,' which, if it doesn't succeed, its public can have neither hearts nor intellects (that being an impartial opinion), and which, if it succeeds, will be of pecuniary advantage to us. Look out in the papers.... My love and my husband's go to you, our dear friends. Let me be always

Your affectionate and grateful
BA.

While Italy shows herself so politically demoralised, and the blood of poor Russia smokes from the ground, the ground seems to care no more for it than the newspapers, or anybody else.

Such a jar of flowers we have to keep December. White roses, as in June.

[Footnote 183: Abd-el-Kader surrendered to the French in Algeria early in 1848, under an express promise that he should be sent either to Alexandria or to St. Jean d'Acre; in spite of which he was sent to France and kept there as a prisoner for several years.]

[Footnote 184: Louis Napoleon was elected President of the French Republic by a popular vote on December 10.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: December 16, [1848].

... You are wondering, perhaps, how we are so fool-hardy as to keep on furnishing rooms in the midst of 'anarchy,' the Pope a fugitive, and the crowned heads packing up. Ah, but we have faith in the *softness* of our Florentines, who must be well spurred up to the leap before they do any harm. These things look worse at a distance than they do near, although, seen far and near, nothing *can* be worse than the evidence of demoralisation of people, governors, and journalists, in the sympathy given everywhere to the assassination of poor Rossi.[185] If Rossi was retrocessive, he was at least a constitutional minister, and constitutional means of opposing him were open to all, but Italy understands nothing constitutional; liberty is a fair word and a watchword, nothing

more; an idea it is not in the minds of any. The poor Pope I deeply pity; he is a weak man with the noblest and most disinterested intentions. His faithful flock have nearly broken his heart by the murder of his two personal friends, Rossi and Palma, and the threat, which they sent him by embassy, of murdering

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every man, woman, and child in the Quirinal, with the exception of his Holiness, unless he accepted their terms. He should have gone out to them and so died, but having missed that opportunity, nothing remained but flight. He was a mere Pope hostage as long as he stayed in Rome. Curious, the 'intervention of the French,' so long desired by the Italians, and vouchsafed *so*.[186] The Florentines open their eyes in mute astonishment, and some of them 'won't read the journals any more.' The boldest say softly that the *Romans are sure not to bear it*. And what is to happen in France? Why, what a world we have just now.... Father Prout is gone to Rome for a fortnight, has stayed three weeks, and day by day we expect him back again. I don't understand how the Prout papers should have hurt him ecclesiastically, but that he should be *known* for their writer is not astonishing, as the secret was never, I believe, attempted to be kept. We have been, at least *I* have been, a little anxious lately about the fate of the 'Blot on the 'Scutcheon,' which Mr. Phelps applied for my husband's permission to revive at Sadler's. Of course, putting the request was a mere form, as he had every right to act the play, and there was nothing to answer but one thing. Only it made one anxious—-made *me* anxious—till we heard the result, and we, both of us, are very grateful to dear Mr. Chorley, who not only made it his business to be at the theatre the first night, but, before he slept, sat down like a true friend to give us the story of the result, and never, he says, was a more complete and legitimate success. The play went straight to the heart of the audience, it seems, and we hear of its continuance on the stage from the papers. So far, so well. You may remember, or may not have heard, how Macready brought it out and put his foot on it in the flash of a quarrel between manager and author, and Phelps, knowing the whole secret and feeling the power of the play, determined on making a revival of it on his own theatre, which was wise, as the event proves. Mr. Chorley called his acting really 'fine.' I see the second edition of the 'Poetical Works' advertised at last in the 'Athenaeum,' and conclude it to be coming out directly. Also my second edition is called for, only nothing is yet arranged on that point. We have had a most interesting letter from Mr. Home, giving terrible accounts, to be sure, of the submersion of all literature in England and France since the French Revolution, but noble and instructive proof of individual wave-riding energy, such as I have always admired in him. He and his wife, he says, live chiefly on the produce of their garden, and keep a cheerful heart for the rest; even the 'Institutes' expect gratuitous lectures, so that the sweat of the brain seems less productive than the sweat of the brow. I am glad that Mr. Serjeant Talfourd and his wife spoke affectionately of my husband, for he is attached to both of them....

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My Flush has grown to be passionately fond of grapes, devouring bunch after bunch, and looking so fat and well that we attribute some virtue to them. When he goes to England he will be as much in a strait as an Italian who related to us his adventures in London; he had had a long walk in the heat, and catching sight of grapes hanging up in a grocer's shop, he stopped short to have a pennyworth, as he said inwardly to himself. Down he sat and made out a Tuscan luncheon in purple bunches. At last, taking out his purse to look for the halfpence: 'Fifteen shillings, sir, if you please,' said the shopman. Now do write soon, and speak particularly of your health, and take care of it and don't be too complaisant to visitors. May God bless you, my very dear friend! Think of me as

Ever your affectionate and grateful
E.B.B.
My husband's regards always.

[Footnote 185: Count Pellegrino Rossi, chief minister to the Pope, was assassinated in Rome, at the entrance of the Chamber of Deputies, on November 15, 1848. Ten days later the Pope fled to Gaeta, and his experiments in 'reform' came to a final end.]

[Footnote 186: The Pope, having declared war against Austria before his flight, had invited French support, with the concurrence of his people; being expelled from Rome, he invited (and obtained) French help to restore him, in spite of the desperate opposition of his people.]

CHAPTER VI

1849-1851

There is here a pause of two months in the correspondence of Mrs. Browning, during which the happiness of her already happy life was crowned by the birth, on March 9, 1849, of her son, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning.[187] How great a part this child henceforward played in her life will be shown abundantly by the letters that follow. Some passages referring to the child's growth, progress, and performances have been omitted, partly in the necessary reduction of the bulk of the correspondence, and partly because too much of one subject may weary the reader. But enough has been left to show that, in the case of Mrs. Browning (and of her husband likewise), the parent was by no means lost in the poet. There is little in what she says which might not equally be said, and is in substance said, by hundreds of happy mothers in every age; but it would be a suppression of one essential part of her nature, and an injury to the pleasant picture which the whole life of this poet pair presents, if her enthusiasms over her child were omitted or seriously curtailed. Biographers are fond of elaborating the details in which the lives of poets have not conformed to the standard of the moral virtues; let us

at least recognise that, in the case of Robert and Elizabeth Browning, the moral and the intellectual virtues flourished side by side, each contributing its share to the completeness of the whole character.

[Footnote 187: Wiedeman was the maiden name of Mr. Browning's mother, her father having been a German who settled in Scotland and married a Scotch wife.]

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The joy of this firstborn's birth was, however, very quickly dimmed by the news of the death, only a few days later, of Mr. Browning's mother, to whom he was devotedly attached. Her death was very sudden, and the shock of the reaction completely prostrated him for a long time. The following letters from Mrs. Browning tell how he felt this loss.

To Miss Browning April i, 1849 [postmark].

I do indeed from the bottom of my heart pity you and grieve with you, my dearest Sarianna. I may grieve with you as well as for you; for I too have lost. Believe that, though I never saw her face; I loved that pure and tender spirit (tender to me even at this distance), and that she will be dear and sacred to me to the end of my own life.

Dearest Sarianna, I thank you for your consideration and admirable self-control in writing those letters. I do thank and bless you. If the news had come unbroken by such precaution to my poor darling Robert, it would have nearly killed him, I think. As it is, he has been able to cry from the first, and I am able to tell you that though dreadfully affected, of course, for you know his passionate love for her, he is better and calmer now—much better. He and I dwell on the hope that you and your dear father will come to us at once. Come—dear, dear Sarianna—I will at least love you as you deserve—-you and him—if I can do no more. If you would comfort Robert, come.

No day has passed since our marriage that he has not fondly talked of her. I know how deep in his dear heart her memory lies. God comfort you, my dearest Sarianna. The blessing of blessed duties heroically fulfilled *must* be With you. May the blessing of the Blessed in heaven be added to the rest!

Robert stops me. My dear love to your father.

Your ever attached sister, BA.

To Miss Browning [April 1849.]

You will have comfort in hearing, my dearest Sarianna, that Robert is better on the whole than when I wrote last, though still very much depressed. I wish I could get him to go somewhere or do something—at any rate God's comforts are falling like dew on all this affliction, and must in time make it look a green memory to you both. Continually he thinks of you and of his father—believe how continually and tenderly he thinks of you. Dearest Sarianna, I feel so in the quick of my heart how you must feel, that I scarcely have courage to entreat you to go out and take the necessary air and exercise, and yet that is a duty, clear as other duties, and to be discharged like others by you, as fully, and with as little shrinking of the will. If your health should suffer, what grief upon grief to those who grieve already! And besides, we who have to live are not to lie down under the burden. There will be time enough for lying down presently, very soon; and in

the meanwhile there is plenty of God's work to do with the body and with the soul, and we have to do it as cheerfully

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as we can. Dearest Sarianna, you can look behind and before, on blessed memories and holy hopes—love is as full for you as ever in the old relation, even though her life in the world is cut off. There is no drop of bitterness in all this flood of sorrow. In the midst of the great anguish which God has given, you have to thank Him for some blessing with every pang as it comes. Never was a more beautiful, serene, assuring death than this we are all in tears for—for, believe me, my very dear sister, I have mourned with you, knowing what we all have lost, I who never saw her nor shall see her until a few years shall bring us all together to the place where none mourn nor are parted. Sarianna, will it not be possible, do you think, for you and your father to come here, if only for a few months? Then you might decide on the future upon more knowledge than you have now. It would be comfort and joy to Robert and me if we could all of us live together henceforward. Think what you would like, and how you would best like it. Your living on *even through this summer at that house*, I, who have well known the agony of such bindings to the rack, do protest against. Dearest Sarianna, it is not good or right either for you or for your dear father. For Robert to go back to that house unless it were to do one of you some good, think how it would be with *him*! Tell us now (for he yearns towards you—we both do), what is the best way of bringing us all together, so as to do every one of us some good? If Florence is too far off, is there any other place where we could meet and arrange for the future? Could not your dear father's leave of absence be extended this summer, out of consideration of what has happened, and would he not be so enabled to travel with you and meet us *somewhere*? We will do anything. For my part, I am full of anxiety; and for Robert, you may guess what his is, you who know him. Very bitter has it been to me to have interposed unconsciously as I have done and deprived him of her last words and kisses—very bitter—and nothing could be so consolatory to me as to give him back to *you* at least. So think for me, dearest Sarianna—think for your father and yourself, think for Robert—and remember that Robert and I will do anything which shall appear possible to you. May God bless you, both of you! Give my true love to your father. Feeling for you and with you always and most tenderly, I am your affectionate sister, BA.

To Miss Mitford Florence: April 30, 1849.

I am writing to you, *at last*, you will say, ever dearest Miss Mitford; but, except once to Wimpole Street, this is the first packet of letters which goes from me since my confinement. You will have heard how our joy turned suddenly into deep sorrow by the death of my husband's mother. An unsuspected disease (ossification of the heart) terminated in a fatal way, and she lay in the insensibility precursive of the grave's, when the letter, written in such

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gladness by my poor husband, and announcing the birth of his child, reached her address. 'It would have made her heart bound,' said her daughter to us. Poor, tender heart, the last throb was too near. The medical men would not allow the news to be communicated. The next joy she felt was to be in heaven itself. My husband has been in the deepest anguish, and indeed, except for the courageous consideration of his sister, who wrote two letters of preparation saying that 'she was not well,' and she 'was very ill,' when in fact all was over, I am frightened to think what the result would have been to him. He has loved his mother as such passionate natures only can love, and I never saw a man so bowed down in an extremity of sorrow—never. Even now the depression is great, and sometimes when I leave him alone a little and return to the room, I find him in tears. I do earnestly wish to change the scene and air; but where to go? England looks terrible now. He says it would break his heart to see his mother's roses over the wall, and the place where she used to lay her scissors and gloves. Which I understand so thoroughly that I can't say, 'Let us go to England.' We must wait and see what his father and sister will choose to do or choose us to do, for of course a duty plainly seen would draw us anywhere. My own dearest sisters will be painfully disappointed by any change of plan, only they are too good and kind not to understand the difficulty, not to see the motive. So do *you*, I am certain. It has been very very painful altogether, this drawing together of life and death. Robert was too enraptured at my safety, and with his little son, and the sudden reaction was terrible. You see how natural that was. How kind of you to write that note to him full of affectionate expressions towards me! Thank you, dearest friend. He had begged my sisters to let you know of my welfare, and I hope they did; and now it is my turn to know of *you*, and so I do entreat you not to delay, but to let me hear exactly how you are and what your plans are for the summer. Do you think of Paris seriously? Am I not a sceptic about your voyages round the world? It's about the only thing that I don't thoroughly believe you *can* do. But (not to be impertinent) I want to hear so much! I want first and chiefly to hear of your health; and occupations next, and next your plans for the summer. Louis Napoleon is astonishing the world, you see, by his firmness and courage; and though really I don't make out the aim and end of his French republicans in going to Rome to extinguish the republic there, I wait before I swear at him for it till my information becomes fuller. If they have at Rome such a republic as we have had in Florence, without a public, imposed by a few bawlers and brawlers on many mutes and cowards, why, the sooner it goes to pieces the better, of course. Probably the French Government acts upon information. In any case, if the Romans are in earnest they may resist

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eight thousand men.[1] We shall see. My *faith* in every species of Italian is, however, nearly tired out. I don't believe they are men at all, much less heroes and patriots. Since I wrote last to you, I think we have had two revolutions here at Florence, Grand Duke out, Grand Duke in.[188] The bells in the church opposite rang for both. They first planted a tree of liberty close to our door, and, then they pulled it down. The same tune, sung under the windows, did for 'Viva la republica!' and 'Viva Leopoldo!' The genuine popular feeling is certainly for the Grand Duke ('O, santissima madre di Dio!' said our nurse, clasping her hands, 'how the people do love him!'); only nobody would run the risk of a pin's prick to save the ducal throne. If the Leghornese, who put up Guerazzi on its ruins, had not refused to pay at certain Florentine cafes, we shouldn't have had revolution the second, and all this shooting in the street! Dr. Harding, who was coming to see me, had time to get behind a stable door, just before there was a fall against it of four shot corpses; and Robert barely managed to get home across the bridges. He had been out walking in the city, apprehending nothing, when the storm gathered and broke. Sad and humiliating it all has been, and the author of 'Vanity Fair' might turn it to better uses for a chapter. By the way, we have just been reading 'Vanity Fair.' Very clever, very effective, but cruel to human nature. A painful book, and not the pain that purifies and exalts. Partial truths after all, and those not wholesome. But I certainly had no idea that Mr. Thackeray had intellectual force for such a book; the power is considerable. For Balzac, Balzac may have gone out of the world as far as we are concerned. Isn't it hard on us? exiles from Balzac! The bookseller here, having despaired of the republic and the Grand Duchy both, I suppose, and taking for granted on the whole that the world must be coming shortly to an end, doesn't give us the sign of a new book. We ought to, be done with such vanities. There! and almost I have done my paper without a single word to you of the *baby*! Ah, you won't believe that I forgot him even if I pretend, so I won't. He is a lovely, fat, strong child, with double chins and rosy cheeks, and a great wide chest, undeniable lungs, I can assure you. Dr. Harding called him 'a robust child' the other day, and 'a more beautiful child he never saw.' I never saw a child half as beautiful, for my part.... Dear Mr. Chorley has written the kindest letter to my husband. I much regard him indeed. May God bless you. Let me ever be (with Robert's thanks and warm remembrance),

Your most affectionate
BA.

Flush's jealousy of the baby would amuse you. For a whole fortnight he fell into deep melancholy and was proof against all attentions lavished on him. Now he begins to be consoled a little and even condescends to patronise the cradle.

Footnote 1: As they did until the 8,000 had been increased to 35,000.]

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[Footnote 188: A revolution, fomented chiefly by the Leghornese, expelled the Grand Duke in March 1849; about seven weeks later a counter-revolution, chiefly by the peasantry, recalled him.]

To Miss Browning [Florence:] May 2, 1849.

Robert gives me this blank, and three minutes to write across it. Thank you, my very dear Sarianna, for all your kindness and affection. I understand what I have lost. I know the worth of a tenderness such as you speak of, and I feel that for the sake of my love for Robert she was ready out of the fullness of her heart to love *me* also. It has been bitter to me that I have unconsciously deprived him of the personal face-to-face shining out of her angelic nature for more than two years, but she has forgiven me, and we shall all meet, when it pleases God, before His throne. In the meanwhile, my dearest Sarianna, we are thinking much of you, and neither of us can bear the thought of your living on where you are. If you could imagine the relief it would be to us—to me as well as to Robert—to be told frankly what we ought to do, where we ought to go, to please you best—you and your dearest father—you would think the whole matter over and use plain words in the speaking of it. Robert naturally shrinks from the idea of going to New Cross under the circumstances of dreary change, and for his sake England has grown suddenly to me a land of clouds. Still, to see you and his father, and to be some little comfort to you both, would be the best consolation to him, I am very sure; and so, dearest Sarianna, think of us and speak to us. Could not your father get a long vacation? Could we not meet somewhere? Think how we best may comfort ourselves by comforting you. Never think of us, Sarianna, as apart from you—as if our interest or our pleasure *could* be apart from yours. The child is so like Robert that I can believe in the other likeness, and may the inner nature indeed, as you say, be after that pure image! He is so fat and rosy and strong that almost I am sceptical of his being my child. I suppose he is, after all. May God bless you, both of you. I am ashamed to send all these letters, but Robert makes me. He is better, but still much depressed sometimes, and over your letters he drops heavy tears. Then he treasures them up and reads them again and again. Better, however, on the whole, he is certainly. Poor little babe, who was too much rejoiced over at *first*, fell away by a most natural recoil (even *I* felt it to be *most natural*) from all that triumph, but Robert is still very fond of him, and goes to see him bathed every morning, and walks up and down on the terrace with him in his arms. If your dear father can toss and rock babies as Robert can, he will be a nurse in great favour.

Dearest Sarianna, take care of yourself, and do walk out. No grief in the world was ever freer from the corroding drop of bitterness—was ever sweeter, holier, and more hopeful than this of yours must be. Love is for you on both sides of the grave, and the blossoms of love meet over it. May God's love, too, bless you!

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Your ever affectionate sister,
BA.

To Mrs. Martin Florence: May 14, [1849].

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—At last I come to thank you for all your kindness, all your goodness, all your sympathy for both of us. Robert would have written to you in the first instance (for we *both* thought of you) if we had not agreed that you would hear as quickly from Henrietta, we not knowing your direct address. Also your welcome little note should have had an immediate acknowledgment from him if he had not been so depressed at that time that I was glad to ask him to wait till I should be ready to write myself. In fact, he has suffered most acutely from the affliction you have since of course heard of; and just because he was *too happy* when the child was born, the pain was overwhelming afterwards. That is easy to understand, I think. While he was full of joy for the child, his mother was dying at a distance, and the very thought of accepting that new affection for the old became a thing to recoil from—do you not see? So far from suffering less through the particular combination of circumstances, as some people seemed to fancy he would, he suffered much more, I am certain, and very naturally. Even now he is looking very unwell—thinner and paler than usual, and his spirits, which used to be so good, have not rallied. I long to get him away from Florence somewhere—*where*, I can't fix my wishes; our English plans seem flat on the ground for the present, *that* is one sad certainty. My dearest sisters will be very grieved if we don't go to England, and yet how can I even try to persuade my husband back into the scene of old associations where he would feel so much pain? Do I not know what I myself should suffer in some places? And he loved his mother with all his power of loving, which is deeper and more passionate than love is with common men. She hearts of men are generally strong in proportion to their heads. Well, I am not to send you such a dull letter though, after waiting so long, and after receiving so much to speak thankfully of. My child you never would believe to be *my child*, from the evidence of his immense cheeks and chins—for pray don't suppose that he has only one chin. People call him a lovely child, and if *I* were to call him the same it wouldn't be very extraordinary, only I assure you 'a robust child' I may tell you that he is with a sufficient modesty, and also that Wilson says he is universally admired in various tongues when she and the nurse go out with him to the Cascine—'What a beautiful baby!' and 'Che bel bambino!' He has had a very stormy entrance upon life, poor little fellow; and when he was just three days old, a grand festa round the liberty tree planted at our door, attended with military music, civic dancing and singing, and the firing of cannons and guns from morning to night, made him start in his cradle, and threw my careful nurse into paroxysms of devotion before the

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‘Vergine Santissima’ that I mightn’t have a fever in consequence. Since then the tree of liberty has come down with a crash and we have had another festa as noisy on that occasion. Revolution and counter-revolution, Guerazzi[189] and Leopold, sacking of Florence and entrance of the Austrian army—we live through everything, you see, and baby grows fat indiscriminately. For my part, I am altogether *blasee* about revolutions and invasions. Don’t think it want of feeling in me, or want of sympathy with ‘the people,’ but really I can’t help a certain political latitudinarianism from creeping over me in relation to this Tuscany. You ought to be here to understand what I mean and how I think. Oh heavens! how ignoble it all has been and is! A revolution made by boys and *vivas*, and unmade by boys and *vivas*—no, there was blood shed in the unmaking—-some horror and terror, but not as much patriotism and truth as could lift up the blood from the kennel. The counter-revolution was strictly *counter*, observe. I mean, that if the Leghornese troops here bad paid their debts at the Florentine coffee houses, the Florentines would have let their beloved Grand Duke stay on at Gaeta to the end of the world. The Grand Duke, too, whose part I have been taking hitherto (because he did seem to me a good man, more sinned against than sinning)—the Grand Duke I give up from henceforth, seeing that he has done this base thing of taking again his Austrian titles in his proclamations coincidently with the approach of the Austrians. Of Rome, knowing nothing, I don’t like to speak. If a republic *in earnest* is established there, Louis Napoleon should not try to set his foot on it. Dearest Mrs. Martin, how you mistake me about France, and how too lightly I must have spoken. If you knew how I admire the French as a nation! Robert always calls them ‘*my beloved French*.’ Their very faults appear to me to arise from an excess of ideality land aspiration; but I was vexed rather at their selection of Louis Napoleon—a selection since justified by the firmness and apparent integrity of the man. His reputation in England, you will admit, did not promise the conclusion. Will he be emperor, do you imagine? And shall I ever have done talking politics? I would far rather talk of *you*, after all. Henrietta tells me of your looking well, but of your not being strong yet. Now do, *for once*, have a fit of egotism and tell me a little about yourself.... Surely I ought especially to thank you, dearest kind friend, for your goodness in writing to—, of which Henrietta very properly told me. I never shall forget this and other proofs of your affection for me, and shall remember them with warm gratitude always. As to—, I have held out both [my] hands, and my husband’s hands in mine, again and again to him; he cannot possibly, in the secret place of his heart, expect more from either of us. My husband would have written to him in the first place,

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but for the obstacles raised by himself and others, and now what *could* Robert write and say except the bare repetition of what I have said over and over for him and myself? It is exactly an excuse—not more and not less. Just before I was ill I sent my last messages, because, with certain hazards before me, my heart turned to them naturally. I might as well have turned to a rock.—has been by far the kindest, and has written to me two or three little notes, and one since the birth of our child. I love them all far too well to be proud, and my husband loves me too well not to wish to be friends with every one of them; we have neither of us any stupid feeling about 'keeping up our dignity.' Yes, I had a letter from—some time ago, in which something was said of Robert's being careless of reconciliation. I answered it most explicitly and affectionately, with every possible assurance from Robert, and offering them from himself the affection of a brother. Not a word in answer! To my poor dearest papa I have written very lately, and as my letter has not, after a week, been sent back, I catch at the hope of his being moved a little. If he neither sends it back nor replies severely, I shall take courage to write to him again after a while. It will be an immense gain to get him only to read my letters. My father and my brothers hold quite different positions, of course, and though he has acted sternly towards me, I, knowing his peculiarities, do not feel embittered and astonished and disappointed as in the other cases. Absolutely happy my marriage has been—never could there be a happier marriage (as there are no marriages in heaven); but dear Henrietta is quite wrong in fancying, or seeming to fancy, that this quarrel with my family has given or gives me slight pain. Old affections are not so easily trodden out of me, indeed, and while I live unreconciled to them, there must be a void and drawback. Do write to me and tell me of both of you, my very dear friends. Don't fancy that we are not anxious for brave Venice and Sicily, and that we don't hate this Austrian invasion. But Tuscany has acted a vile part altogether—*so* vile, that I am sceptical about the Romans. We expect daily the Austrians in Florence, and have made up our minds to be very kind. May God bless you! Do write, and mention your health particularly, as I am anxious about it. I am quite well myself, and, as ever,

Your affectionate
BA.

Don't you both like Macaulay's History? We are delighted just now with it.

[Footnote 189: Chief administrator of the Republic of Tuscany during the short absence of the Grand Duke Leopold.]

To Miss Browning [Florence: about June 1849.]

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I must say to my dearest Sarianna how delighted we are at the thought of seeing her in Florence. I wish it had been before the autumn, but since autumn is decided for we must be content to reap our golden harvest at the time for such things. Certainly the summer heat of Florence is terrible enough—only we should have carried you with us into the shade somewhere to the sea or to the mountains—and Robert has, of course, told you of our Spezzia plan. The 'fatling of the flock' has been sheared closely of his long petticoats. Did he tell you that? And you can't think how funny the little creature looks without his train, his wise baby face appearing to approve of the whole arrangement. He talks to himself now and smiles at everybody, and admired my roses so much the other day that he wanted to eat them; having a sublime transcendental notion about the mouth being the receptacle of all beauty and glory in this world. Tell your dear father that certainly he *is* a 'sweet baby,' there's no denying it. We lay him down on the floor to let him kick at ease, and he makes violent efforts to get up by himself, and Wilson declares that the least encouragement would set him walking. Robert's nursing does not mend his spirits much. I shall be very glad to get him away from Florence; he has suffered too much here to rally as I long to see him do, because, dearest Sarianna, we have to live after all; and to live rightly we must turn our faces forward and press forward and not look backward morbidly for the footsteps in the dust of those beloved ones who travelled with us but yesterday. They themselves are not behind but before, and we carry with us our tenderness living and undiminished towards them, to be completed when the round of this life is complete for us also. Dearest Sarianna, why do I say such things, but because I have known what grief is? Oh, and how I could have compounded with you, grief for grief, mine for yours, for *I* had no last words nor gestures, Sarianna. God keep you from such a helpless bitter agony as mine then was. Dear Sarianna, you will think of us and of Florence, my dear sister, and remember how you have made us a promise and have to keep it. May God bless you and comfort you. We think of you and love you continually, and I am always your most affectionate

BA.

In July the move from Florence, of which Mrs. Browning speaks in the above letter, was effected, the place ultimately chosen for escape from the summer heat in the valley of the Arno being the Bagni di Lucca. Here three months were spent, as the following letters describe. By this time the struggle for Italian liberty had ended in failure everywhere. The battle of Novara, on March 23, had prostrated Piedmont, and caused the abdication of its king, Charles Albert. The Tuscan Republic had come and gone, and the Grand Duke had re-entered his capital under the protection of Austrian bayonets. Sicily had been reduced to subjection to the Bourbons of Naples. On July 2 the French entered Rome, bringing back the Pope cured of his leanings to reform and constitutional government; on the 24th, Venice, after an heroic resistance, capitulated to the Austrians. The struggle was over for the time; the longing for liberty becomes, of necessity, silent; and we hear little, for a space, of Italian politics. For the moment it might seem justifiable to despair of the republic.

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To Miss Mitford Bagni di Lucca, Toscana: [about July 1849].

At last, you will say, dearest friend. The truth is, I have not been forgetting you (how far from that!) but wandering in search of cool air and a cool bough among all the olive trees to build our summer nest on. My husband has been suffering beyond what one could shut one's eyes to in consequence of the great mental shock of last March—loss of appetite, loss of sleep, looks quite worn and altered. His spirits never rallied except with an effort, and every letter from New Cross threw him back into deep depressions. I was very anxious, and feared much that the end of it all (the intense heat of Florence assisting) would be a nervous fever or something similar. And I had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to leave Florence for a month or two—he who generally delights so in travelling, had no mind for change or movement. I had to say and swear that baby and I couldn't bear the heat, and that we must and would go away. *Ce que femme veut*, if the latter is at all reasonable, or the former persevering. At last I gained the victory. It was agreed that we two should go on an exploring journey to find out where we could have most shadow at least expense; and we left our child with his nurse and Wilson while we were absent. We went along the coast to Spezzia, saw Carrara with the white marble mountains, passed through the olive forests and the vineyards, avenues of acacia trees, chestnut woods, glorious surprises of most exquisite scenery. I say olive forests advisedly; the olive grows like a forest tree in those regions, shading the ground with tents of silvery network. The olive near Florence is but a shrub in comparison, and I have learnt to despise a little, too, the Florentine vine, which does not swing such portcullises of massive dewy green from one tree to another as along the whole road where we travelled. Beautiful, indeed, it was. Spezzia wheels the blue sea into the arms of the wooded mountains, and we had a glance at Shelley's house at Lerici. It was melancholy to me, of course. I was not sorry that the lodgings we inquired about were far above our means. We returned on our steps (after two days in the dirtiest of possible inns), saw Seravezza, a village in the mountains, where rock, river, and wood enticed us to stay, and the inhabitants drove us off by their unreasonable prices. It is curious, but just in proportion to the want of civilisation the prices rise in Italy. If you haven't cups and saucers you are made to pay for plate. Well, so finding no rest for the sole of our feet, I persuaded Robert to go to the Baths of Lucca, only to see them. We were to proceed afterwards to San Marcello or some safer wilderness. We had both of us, but he chiefly, the strongest prejudice against these Baths of Lucca, taking them for a sort of wasp's nest of scandal and gaming, and expecting to find everything trodden flat by the Continental English; yet I wanted to see

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the place, because it is a place to see after all. So we came, and were so charmed by the exquisite beauty of the scenery, by the coolness of the climate and the absence of our countrymen, political troubles serving admirably our private requirements, that we made an offer for rooms on the spot, and returned to Florence for baby and the rest of our establishment without further delay. Here we are, then; we have been here more than a fortnight. We have taken an apartment for the season—four months—paying twelve pounds for the whole term, and hoping to be able to stay till the end of October. The living is cheaper than even at Florence, so that there has been no extravagance in coming here. In fact, Florence is scarcely tenable during the summer from the excessive heat by day and night, even if there were no particular motive for leaving it. We have taken a sort of eagle's nest in this place, the highest house of the highest of the three villages which are called the Bagni di Lucca, and which lie at the heart of a hundred mountains sung to continually by a rushing mountain stream. The sound of the river and of the cicala is all the noise we hear. Austrian drums and carriage wheels cannot vex us; God be thanked for it; the silence is full of joy and consolation. I think my husband's spirits are better already and his appetite improved. Certainly little babe's great cheeks are growing rosier and rosier. He is out all day when the sun is not too strong, and Wilson will have it that he is prettier than the whole population of babies here. He fixes his blue eyes on everybody and smiles universal benevolence, rather too indiscriminately it might be if it were not for Flush. But certainly, on the whole he prefers Flush. He pulls his ears and rides on him, and Flush, though his dignity does not approve of being used as a pony, only protests by turning his head round to kiss the little bare dimpled feet. A merrier, sweeter-tempered child there can't be than our baby, and people wonder at his being so forward at four months old and think there must be a mistake in his age. He is so strong that when I put out two fingers and he has seized them in his fists he can draw himself up on his feet, but we discourage this forwardness, which is not desirable, say the learned. Children of friends of mine at ten months and a year can't do so much. Is it not curious that *my* child should be remarkable for strength and fatness? He has a beaming, thinking little face, too; oh, I wish you could see it. Then my own strength has wonderfully improved, just as my medical friends prophesied; and it seems like a dream when I find myself able to climb the hills with Robert and help him to lose himself in the forests. I have been growing stronger and stronger, and where it is to stop I can't tell, really; I can do as much, or more, now than at any point of my life since I arrived at woman's estate. The air of this place seems to penetrate the heart and not

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the lungs only; it draws you, raises you, excites you. Mountain air without its keenness, sheathed in Italian sunshine, think what *that* must be! And the beauty and the solitude—for with a few paces we get free of the habitations of men—all is delightful to me. What is peculiarly beautiful and wonderful is the variety of the shapes of the mountains. They are a multitude, and yet there is no likeness. None, except where the golden mist comes and transfigures them into one glory. For the rest, the mountain there wrapt in the chestnut forest is not like that bare peak which tilts against the sky, nor like that serpent twine of another which seems to move and coil in the moving coiling shadow. Oh, I wish you were here. You would enjoy the shade of the chestnut trees, and the sound of the waterfalls, and at nights seem to be living among the stars; the fireflies are so thick, you would like that too. We have subscribed to a French library where there are scarcely any new books. I have read Bernard's 'Gentilhomme Campagnard' (see how *arrieres* we are in French literature!), and thought it the dullest and worst of his books. I wish I could see the 'Memoirs of Louis Napoleon,' but there is no chance of such good fortune. All this egotism has been written with a heart full of thoughts of you and anxieties for you. Do write to me directly and say first how your precious health is, and then that you have ceased to suffer pain for your friends.... But your dear self chiefly—how are you, my dearest Miss Mitford? I do long so for good news of you. On our arrival here Mr. Lever called on us. A most cordial vivacious manner, a glowing countenance, with the animal spirits somewhat predominant over the intellect, yet the intellect by no means in default; you can't help being surprised into being pleased with him, whatever your previous inclination may be. Natural too, and a *gentleman* past mistake. His eldest daughter is nearly grown up, and his youngest six months old. He has children of every sort of intermediate age almost, but he himself is young enough still. Not the slightest Irish accent. He seems to have spent nearly his whole life on the Continent and by no means to be tired of it. Ah, dearest Miss Mitford, hearts feel differently, adjust themselves differently before the prick of sorrow, and I confess I agree with Robert. There are places stained with the blood of my heart for ever, and where I could not bear to stand again. If duty called him to New Cross it would be otherwise, but his sister is rather inclined to come to us, I think, for a few weeks in the autumn perhaps. Only these are scarcely times for plans concerning foreign travel. It is something to talk of. It has been a great disappointment to me the not going to England this year, but I could not run the risk of the bitter pain to him. May God bless you from all pain! Love me and write to me, who am ever and ever your affectionate E.B.B.

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To Mrs. Jameson Bagni di Lucca: August 11, 1849.

I thank you, dearest friend, for your most affectionate and welcome letter would seem to come by instinct, and we have thanked you in our thoughts long before this moment, when I begin at last to write some of them. Do believe that to value your affection and to love you back again are parts of our life, and that it must be always delightful to us to read in your handwriting or to hear in your voice that we are not exiled from your life. Give us such an assurance whenever you can. Shall we not have it face to face at Florence, when the booksellers let you go? And meantime there is the post; do write to us.... Did you ever see this place, I wonder? The coolness, the charm of the mountains, whose very heart you seem to hear beating in the rush of the little river, the green silence of the chestnut forests, and the seclusion which anyone may make for himself by keeping clear of the valley-villages; all these things drew us. We took a delightful apartment over the heads of the whole world in the highest house of the Bagni Caldi, where only the donkeys and the *portantini* can penetrate, and where we sit at the open windows and hear nothing but the cicale. Not a mosquito! think of that! The thermometer ranges from sixty-eight to seventy-four, but the seventy-four has been a rare excess: the nights, mornings, and evenings are exquisitely cool. Robert and I go out and lose ourselves in the woods and mountains, and sit by the waterfalls on the starry and moonlit nights, and neither by night nor day have the fear of picnics before our eyes. We were observing the other day that we never met anybody except a monk girt with a rope, now and then, or a barefooted peasant. The sight of a pink parasol never startles us into unpleasant theories of comparative anatomy. One cause, perhaps, may be that on account of political matters it is a delightfully ‘bad season,’ but, also, we are too high for the ordinary walkers, who keep to the valley and the flatter roads. Robert is better, looking better, and in more healthy spirits; and we are both enjoying this great sea of mountains and our way of life here altogether. Of course, we remembered to go back to Florence for baby and the rest of our little establishment, and we mean to stay as long as we can, perhaps to the end of October. Baby is in the triumph of health and full-blown roses, and as he does not hide himself in the woods like his ancestors, but smiles at everybody, he is the most popular of possible babies.... We had him baptised before we left Florence, without godfathers and godmothers, in the simplicities of the French Lutheran Church. I gave him your kiss as a precious promise that you would love him one day like a true dear Aunt Nina; and I promise you on my part that he shall be taught to understand both the happiness and the honour of it. Robert is expecting a visit from his sister in the course of this autumn. She has suffered much, and the change

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will be good for her, even if, as she says, she can stay with us only a few weeks. With her we shall have your book, to be disinherited of which so long has been hard on us. Robert's own we have not seen yet. It must be satisfactory to you to have had such a clear triumph after all the dust and toil of the way. And now tell me, won't it be *necessary* for you to come again to Italy for what remains to be done? Poor Florence is quiet enough under the heel of Austria, and Leopold 'l'intrepido,' as he was happily called by a poet of Viareggio in a welcoming burst of inspiration, sits undisturbed at the Pitti. I despair of the republic in Italy, or rather of Italy altogether. The instructed are not patriotic, and the patriots are not instructed. We want not only a *man*, but men, and we must throw, I fear, the bones of their race behind us before the true deliverers can spring up. Still, it is not all over; there will be deliverance presently, but it will not be now. We are full of painful sympathy for poor Venice. There! why write more about politics? It makes us sick enough to think of Austrians in our Florence without writing the thought out into greater expansion. Only don't let the 'Times' newspaper persuade you that there is no stepping with impunity out of England. ... We have 'lectures on Shakespeare' just now by a Mr. Stuart, who is enlightening the English barbarians at the lower village, and quoting Mrs. Jameson to make his discourse more brilliant. We like to hear 'Mrs. Jameson observes.' Give our love to dear Gerardine. I am anxious for her happiness and yours involved in it. Love and remember us, dearest friend.

Your E.B.B., or rather, BA.

The following note is added in Mr. Browning's handwriting:

Dear Aunt Nina,—Will there be three years before I see you again? And Geddie; does she not come to Italy? When we passed through Pisa the other day, we went to your old inn in love of you, and got your very room to dine in (the landlord is dead and gone, as is Peveruda—of the other house, you remember). There were the old vile prints, the old look-out into the garden, with its orange trees and painted sentinel watching them. Ba must have told you about our babe, and the little else there is to tell—that is, for *her* to tell, for she is not likely to encroach upon *my* story which I *could* tell of her entirely angel nature, as divine a heart as God ever made; I know more of her every day; I, who thought I knew something of her five years ago! I think I know you, too, so I love you and am

Ever yours and dear Geddie's
R.B.

To Miss Mitford Bagni di Lucca: August 31, 1849.

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I told Mr. Lever what you thought of him, dearest friend, and then he said, all in a glow and animation, that you were not only his own delight but the delight of his children, which is affection by refraction, isn't it? Quite gratified he seemed by the hold of your good opinion. Not only is he the notability *par excellence* of these Baths of Lucca, where he has lived a whole year, during the snows upon the mountains, but he presides over the weekly balls at the casino where the English 'do congregate' (all except Robert and me), and is said to be the light of the flambeaux and the spring of the dancers. There is a general desolation when he *will* retire to play whist. In addition to which he really seems to be loving and loveable in his family. You always see him with his children and his wife; he drives her and her baby up and down along the only carriageable road of Lucca: so set down that piece of domestic life on the bright side in the broad charge against married authors; now do. I believe he is to return to Florence this winter with his family, having had enough of the mountains. Have you read 'Roland Cashel,' isn't *that* the name of his last novel? The 'Athenaeum' said of it that it was '*new ground*,' and praised it. I hear that he gets a hundred pounds for each monthly number. Oh, how glad I was to have your letter, written in such pain, read in such pleasure! It was only fair to tell me in the last lines that the face-ache was better, to keep off a fit of remorse. I do hope that Mr. May is not right about neuralgia, because that is more difficult to cure than pain which arises from the teeth. Tell me how you are in all ways. I look into your letters eagerly for news of your health, then of your spirits, which are a part of health. The cholera makes me very frightened for my dearest people in London, and silence, the last longer than usual, ploughs up my days and nights into long furrows. The disease rages in the neighbourhood of my husband's family, and though Wimpole Street has been hitherto clear, who can calculate on what may be? My head goes round to think of it. And papa, who *will* keep going into that horrible city! Even if my sisters and brothers should go into the country as every year, he will be left, he is no more movable than St. Paul's. My sister-in-law will probably not come to us as soon as she intended, through a consideration for her father, who ought not, Robert thinks, to stay alone in the midst of such contingencies, so perhaps we may go to seek her ourselves in the spring, if she does not seek us out before in Italy. God keep us all, and near to one another. Love runs dreadful risks in the world. Yet Love is, how much the best thing in the world? We have had a great event in our house. Baby has cut a tooth.... His little happy laugh is always ringing through the rooms. He is afraid of nobody or nothing in the world, and was in fits of ecstasy at the tossing of the horse's

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head, when he rode on Wilson's knee five or six miles the other day to a village in the mountains—screaming for joy, she said. He is not six months yet by a fortnight! His father loves him; passionately, and the sentiment is reciprocated, I assure you. We have had the coolest of Italian summers at these Baths of Lucca, the thermometer at the hottest hour of the hottest day only at seventy-six, and generally at sixty-eight or seventy. The nights invariably cool. Now the freshness of the air is growing almost too fresh. I only hope we shall be able (for the cold) to keep our intention of staying here till the end of October, I have enjoyed it so entirely, and shall be so sorry to break off this happy silence into the Austrian drums at poor Florence. And then we want to see the vintage. Some grapes are ripe already, but it is not vintage time. We have every kind of good fruit, great water-melons, which with both arms I can scarcely carry, at twopence halfpenny each, and figs and peaches cheap in proportion. And the place agrees with Baby, and has done good to my husband's spirits, though the only 'amusement' or distraction he has is looking at the mountains and climbing among the woods with me. Yes, we have been reading some French romances, 'Monte Cristo,' for instance, I for the second time—but I have liked it, to read it with him. That Dumas certainly has power; and to think of the scramble there was for his brains a year or two ago in Paris! For a man to write so much and so well together is a miracle. Do you mean that they have left off writing—those French writers—or that they have tired you out with writing that looks faint beside the rush of facts, as the range of French politics show those? Has not Eugene Sue been illustrating the passions? Somebody told me so. Do *you* tell me how you like the French President, and whether he will ever, in your mind, sit on Napoleon's throne. It seems to me that he has given proof, as far as the evidence goes, of prudence, integrity, and conscientious patriotism; the situation is difficult, and he fills it honorably. The Rome business has been miserably managed; this is the great blot on the character of his government. But I, for my own part (my husband is not so minded), do consider that the French motive has been good, the intention pure, the occupation of Rome by the Austrians being imminent and the French intervention the only means (with the exception of a European war) of saving Rome from the hoof of the Absolutists. At the same time if Pius IX. is the obstinate idiot he seems to be, good and tenderhearted man as he surely is, and if the old abuses are to be restored, why Austria might as well have done her own dirty work and saved French hands from the disgrace of it. It makes us two very angry. Robert especially is furious. We are not within reach of the book you speak of, 'Portraits des Orateurs Francais' oh, we might nearly as well live on a desert island as far as modern books go. And here, at Lucca, even

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Robert can't catch sight of even the 'Athenaeum.' We have a two-day old 'Galignani,' and think ourselves royally off; and then this little shop with French books in it, just a few, and the 'Gentilhomme Campagnard' the latest published. Yes, but somebody lent us the first volume of 'Chateaubriand's Memoires.' Have you seen it? Curiously uninteresting, considering 'the man and the hour.' He writes of his youth with a grey goose quill; the paper is all wrinkled. And then he is not frank; he must have more to tell than he tells. I looked for a more intense and sincere book *outre tombe* certainly. I am busy about my new edition, that is all at present, but some things are written. Good of Mr. Chorley (he is *good*) to place you face to face with Robert's books, and I am glad you like 'Colombe' and 'Luria.' Dear Mr. Kenyon's poems we have just received and are about to read, and I am delighted at a glance to see that he has inserted the 'Gipsy Carol,' which in MS. was such a favorite of mine. Really, is he so rich? I am glad of it, if he is. Money could not be in more generous and intelligent hands. Dearest Miss Mitford, you are only just in being trustful of my affection for you. Never do I forget nor cease to love you. Write and tell me of your dear self; how you are *exactly*, and whether you have been at Three Mile Cross all the summer. May God bless you. Robert's regards. Can you read? Love a little your

Ever affectionate
E.B.B.

To Mrs. Jameson Bagni di Lucca: October 1, [1849].

There seems to be a fatality about our letters, dearest friend, only the worst fate comes to me! I lose, and you are *near* losing! And I should not have liked you to lose any least proof of my thinking of you, lest a worst loss should happen to me as a consequence, even worse than the loss of your letters; for then, perhaps, and by degrees, you might leave off thinking of Robert and me, which, rich as we are in this mortal world, I do assure you we could neither of us afford.... We have had much quiet enjoyment here in spite of everything, read some amusing books (Dumas and Sue—shake your head!), and seen our child grow fuller of roses and understanding day by day. Before he was six months old he would stretch out his hands and his feet too, when bidden to do so, and his little mouth to kiss you. This is said to be a miracle of forwardness among the learned. He knows Robert and me quite well as 'Papa' and 'Mama,' and laughs for joy when he meets us out of doors. Robert is very fond of him, and threw me into a fit of hilarity the other day by springing away from his newspaper in an indignation against me because he hit his head against the floor rolling over and over. 'Oh, Ba, I really can't trust you!' Down Robert was on the carpet in a moment, to protect the precious head. He takes it to be made of Venetian glass, I am certain. We may leave this place much sooner than the end of

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October, as everything depends upon the coming in of the cold. It will be the end of October, won't it, before Gerardine can reach Florence? I wish I knew. We have made an excursion into the mountains, five miles deep, with all our household, baby and all, on horseback and donkeyback, and people open their eyes at our having performed such an exploit—I and the child. Because it is five miles straight up the Duomo; you wonder how any horse could keep its footing, the way is so precipitous, up the exhausted torrent courses, and with a palm's breadth between you and the headlong ravines. Such scenery. Such a congregation of mountains: looking alive in the stormy light we saw them by. We dined with the goats, and baby lay on my shawl rolling and laughing. He wasn't in the least tired, not he! I won't say so much for myself. The Mr. Stuart who lectured here on Shakespeare (I think I told you that) couldn't get through a lecture without quoting you, and wound up by a declaration that no English critic had done so much for the divine poet as a woman—Mrs. Jameson. He appears to be a cultivated and refined person, and especially versed in German criticism, and we mean to *use* his society a little when we return to Florence, where he resides.... What am I to say about Robert's idleness and mine? I scold him about it in a most anti-conjugal manner, but, you know, his spirits and nerves have been shaken of late; we must have patience. As for me, I am much better, and do something, really, now and then. Wait, and you shall have us both on you; too soon, perhaps. May God bless you. How are your friends? Lady Byron, Madame de Goethe. The dreadful cholera has made us anxious about England.

Your ever affectionate
BA.

Mr. Browning adds the following note:

Dear Aunt Nina,—Ba will have told you everything, and how we wish you and Geddie all manner of happiness. I hope we shall be in Florence when she passes through it. The place is otherwise distasteful to me, with the creeping curs and the floggers of the same. But the weather is breaking up here, and I suppose we ought to go back soon. Shall you indeed come to Italy next year? That will indeed be pleasant to expect. We hope to go to England in the spring. What comes of 'hoping,' however, we [know] by this time.

Ever yours affectionately,
R.B.

To Miss Mitford Bagni di Lucca: October 2, 1849.

Thank you, my dearest Miss Mitford: It is great comfort to know that you are better, and that the cholera does not approach your neighbourhood. My brothers and sisters have

gone to Worthing for a few weeks; and though my father (dearest Papa!) is not persuadeable, I fear, into joining them, yet it is something to know that the horrible pestilence is abating in London. Oh, it has made me so anxious: I have caught with such a frightened haste at the newspaper to read the ‘returns,’ leaving even such subjects as Rome and the President’s

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letter to quite the last, as if they were indifferent, or, at most, bits of Mrs. Manning's murder. By the way and talking of murder, how do you account for the crown of wickedness which England bears just now over the heads of the nations, in murders of all kinds, by poison, by pistol, by knife? In this poor Tuscany, which has not brains enough to govern itself, as you observe, and as really I can't deny, there have been two murders (properly so called) since we came, just three years ago, one from jealousy and one from revenge (respectable motives compared to the advantages of the burying societies!), and the horror on all sides was great, as if the crime were some rare prodigy, which, indeed, it is in this country. We have *no punishment of death* here, observe! The people are gentle, courteous, refined, and tenderhearted. What Balzac would call 'femmelette.' All Tuscany is 'Lucien' himself. The leaning to the artistic nature without the strength of genius implies demoralisation in most cases, and it is this which makes your 'good for nothing poets and poetesses,' about which I love so to battle with you. Genius, I maintain always, you know, is a purifying power and goes with high moral capacities. Well, and so you invite us home to civilisation and 'the "Times" newspaper.' We *mean* to go next spring, and shall certainly do so unless something happen to catch us and keep us in a net. But always something does happen: and I have so often built upon seeing England, and been precipitated from the fourth storey, that I have learnt to think warily now. I hunger and thirst for the sight of some faces; must I not long, do you think, to see your face? And then, I shall be properly proud to show my child to those who loved me before him. He is beginning to understand everything—chiefly in Italian, of course, as his nurse talks in her sleep, I fancy, and can't be silent a second in the day—and when told to 'dare un bacio a questo povero Flush,' he mixes his little face with Flush's ears in a moment.... You would wonder to see Flush just now. He suffered this summer from the climate somewhat as usual, though not nearly as much as usual; and having been insulted oftener than once by a supposition of 'mange,' Robert wouldn't bear it any longer (he is as fond of Flush as I am), and, taking a pair of scissors, clipped him all over into the likeness of a lion, much to his advantage in both health and appearance. In the winter he is always quite well; but the heat and the fleas together are too much in the summer. The affection between baby and him is not equal, baby's love being far the stronger. He, on the other hand, looks down upon baby. What bad news you tell me of our French writers! What! Is it possible that Dumas even is struck dumb by the revolution? His first works are so incomparably the worst that I can't admit your theory of the 'first runnings.' So of Balzac. So of Sue! George Sand is probably writing 'banners'

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for the ‘Reds,’ which, considering the state of parties in France, does not really give me a higher opinion of her intelligence or virtue. Ledru Rollin’s[190] *confidante* and councillor can’t occupy an honorable position, and I am sorry, for her sake and ours. When we go to Florence we must try to get the ‘Portraits’ and Lamartine’s autobiography, which I still more long to see. So, two women were in love with him, were they? That must be a comfort to look back upon, now, when nobody will have him. I see by extracts from his newspaper in Galignani that he can’t be accused of temporising with the Socialists any longer, whatever other charge may be brought against him: and if, as he says, it was he who made the French republic, he is by no means irreproachable, having made a bad and false thing. The President’s letter about Rome[191] has delighted us. A letter worth writing and reading! We read it first in the Italian papers (long before it was printed in Paris), and the amusing thing was that where he speaks of the ‘hostile influences’ (of the cardinals) they had misprinted it ‘*orribili* influenze,’ which must have turned still colder the blood in the veins of Absolutist readers. The misprint was not corrected until long after—more than a week, I think. The Pope is just a pope; and, since you give George Sand credit for having known it, I am the more vexed that Blackwood (under ‘orribili influenze’) did not publish the poem I wrote two years ago,[192] in the full glare and burning of the Pope-enthusiasm, which Robert and I never caught for a moment. Then, *I* might have passed a little for a prophetess as well as George Sand! Only, to confess a truth, the same poem would have proved how fairly I was taken in by our Tuscan Grand Duke. Oh, the traitor!

I saw the ’Ambarvalia’[193] reviewed somewhere—I fancy in the ’Spectator ’—and was not much struck by the extracts. They may, however, have been selected without much discrimination, and probably were. I am very glad that you like the gipsy carol in dear Mr. Kenyon’s volume, because it is, and was in MS., a great favorite of mine. There are excellent things otherwise, as must be when he says them: one of the most radiant of benevolences with one of the most refined of intellects! How the paper seems to dwindle as I would fain talk on more. I have performed a great exploit, ridden on a donkey five miles deep into the mountains to an almost inaccessible volcanic ground not far from the stars. Robert on horseback, and Wilson and the nurse (with baby) on other donkeys; guides, of course. We set off at eight in the morning and returned at six P.M., after dining on the mountain pinnacle, I dreadfully tired, but the child laughing as usual, and burnt Brick-colour for all bad effect. No horse or ass, untrained to the mountains, could have kept foot a moment where we penetrated, and even as it was one could not help the natural thrill. No road except the bed of exhausted torrents above

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and through the chestnut forests, and precipitous beyond what you would think possible for ascent or descent. Ravines tearing the ground to pieces under your feet. The scenery, sublime and wonderful, satisfied us wholly, however, as we looked round on the world of innumerable mountains bound faintly with the grey sea, and not a human habitation. I hope you will go to London this winter; it will be good for you, it seems to me. Take care of yourself, my much and ever loved friend! I love you and think of you indeed. Write of your health, remembering this,

And your affectionate,
E.B.B.

My husband's regards always. You had better, I think, direct to *Florence*, as we shall be there in the course of October.

[Footnote 190: Minister of the Interior in the Republic of 1848, and one of the most prominent f the advanced Republican leaders.]

[Footnote 191: A letter, addressed to a private friend but intended to be made public, denouncing the reactionary and oppressive administration of the restored Pope.]

[Footnote 192: Probably the first part of *Casa Guidi Windows*.]

[Footnote 193: By A.H. Clough and T. Burbidge.]

To Florence, accordingly, they returned in October, and settled down once more in Casa Guidi for the winter. Mrs. Browning's principal literary occupation at this time was the preparation of a new edition of her poems, including nearly all the contents of the 'Seraphim' volume of 1838, more or less revised, as well as the 'Poems' of 1844. This edition, published in 1850, has formed the basis of all subsequent editions of her poems. Meanwhile her husband was engaged in the preparation of 'Christmas Eve and Easter Day,' which was also published in the course of 1850.

To Miss Mitford Florence: December I, 1849.

My ever loved friend, you will have wondered at this unusual silence; and so will my sisters to whom I wrote just now, after a pause as little in my custom. It was not the fault of my head and heart, but of this unruly body, which has been laid up again in the way of all flesh of mine....

I am well again now, only obliged to keep quiet and give up my grand walking excursions, which poor Robert used to be so boastful of. If he is vain about anything in the world, it is about my improved health, and I used to say to him, 'But you needn't talk so much to people of how your wife walked here with you and there with you, as if a

wife with a pair of feet was a miracle of nature.' Now the poor feet have fallen into their old ways again. Ah, but if God pleases it won't be for long....

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The American authoress, Miss Fuller, with whom we had had some slight intercourse by letter, and who has been at Rome during the siege, as a devoted friend of the republicans and a meritorious attendant on the hospitals, has taken us by surprise at Florence, retiring from the Roman field with a husband and child above a year old. Nobody had even suspected a word of this underplot, and her American friends stood in mute astonishment before this apparition of them here. The husband is a Roman marquis, appearing amiable and gentlemanly, and having fought well, they say, at the siege, but with no pretension to cope with his wife on any ground appertaining to the intellect. She talks, and he listens. I always wonder at that species of marriage; but people are so different in their matrimonial ideals that it may answer sometimes. This *Mdme*. Ossoli saw George Sand in Paris—was at one of her soirees—and called her 'a magnificent creature.' The soiree was 'full of rubbish' in the way of its social composition, which George Sand likes, *nota bene*. If *Mdme*. Ossoli called it '*rubbish*' it must have been really rubbish—not expressing anything conventionally so—she being one of the out and out *Reds* and scorners of grades of society. She said that she did not see Balzac. Balzac went into the world scarcely at all, frequenting the lowest cafes, so that it was difficult to track him out. Which information I receive doubtingly. The rumours about Balzac with certain parties in Paris are not likely to be too favorable nor at all reliable, I should fancy; besides, I never entertain disparaging thoughts of my demi-gods unless they should be forced upon me by evidence you must know. I have not made a demi-god of Louis Napoleon, by the way—no, and I don't mean it. I expect some better final result than he has just proved himself to be of the French Revolution, with all its bitter and cruel consequences hitherto, so I can't quite agree with you. Only so far, that he has shown himself up to this point to be an upright man with noble impulses, and that I give him much of my sympathy and respect in the difficult position held by him. A man of genius he does not seem to be—and what, after all, will he manage to do at Rome? I don't take up the frantic Republican cry in Italy. I know too well the want of knowledge and the consequent want of i effective faith and energy among the Italians; but there is a stain upon France in the present state of the Roman affair, and I don't shut my eyes to that either. To cast Rome helpless and bound into the hands of the priests is dishonor to the actors, however we consider the act; and for the sake of France, even more than for the sake of Italy, I yearn to see the act cancelled. Oh, we have had the sight of Clough and Burbidge, at last. Clough has more thought, Burbidge more music; but I am disappointed in the book on the whole. What I like infinitely better is Clough's 'Bothie of Toper-na-fuosich,'

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a ‘long vacation pastoral,’ written in loose and more-than-need-be unmusical hexameters, but full of vigour and freshness, and with passages and indeed whole scenes of great beauty and eloquence. It seems to have been written before the other poems. Try to get it, if you have not read it already. I feel certain you will like it and think all the higher of the poet. Oh, it strikes both Robert and me as being worth twenty of the other little book, with its fragmentary, dislocated, unartistic character. Arnold’s volume has two good poems in it: ‘The Sick King of Bokhara’ and ’The Deserted Merman.’ I like them both. But none of these writers are *artists*, whatever they may be in future days. Have you read ‘Shirley,’ and is it as good as ‘Jane Eyre’? We heard not long since that Mr. Chorley had discovered the author, *the* ‘Currer Bell.’ A woman, most certainly. We hear, too, that three large editions of the ‘Princess’ are sold. So much the happier for England and poetry.

Dearest dear Miss Mitford, mind you write to me, and don’t pay me out in my own silence! *You* have not been ill, I hope and trust. Write and tell me every little thing of yourself—how you are, and whether there is still danger of your being uprooted from Three Mile Cross. I love and think of you always. Fancy Flush being taken in the light of a rival by baby! Oh, baby was quite jealous the other day, and strugggled and kicked to get to me because he saw Flush leaning his pretty head on my lap. There’s a great strife for privileges between those two. May God bless you! My husband’s kind regards always, while I am your most

Affectionate
E.B.B.

To Miss Mitford Florence: January 9, 1850.

Thank you, ever dearest Miss Mitford, for this welcome letter written on your birthday! May the fear of small-pox have passed away long before now, and every hope and satisfaction have strengthened and remained!...

May God bless you and give you many happy years, you who can do so much towards the happiness of others. May I not answer for my own?...

Little Wiedeman began to crawl on Christmas Day. Before, he used to roll. We throw things across the floor and he crawls for them like a little dog, on all fours....

He has just caught a cold, which I make more fuss about than I ought, say the wise; but I can’t get resigned to the association of any sort of suffering with his laughing dimpled little body—it is the blowing about in the wind of such a heap of roses. So you prefer ‘Shirley’ to ‘Jane Eyre’! Yet I hear from nobody such an opinion; yet you are very probably right, for ‘Shirley’ may suffer from the natural reaction of the public mind. What

you tell me of Tennyson interests me as everything about him must. I like to think of him digging gardens—room for cabbage and all. At the same time, what he says about the public '*hating* poetry' is certainly not a word for Tennyson. Perhaps

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no true poet, having claims upon attention *solely* through his poetry, has attained so certain a success with such short delay. Instead of being pelted (as nearly every true poet has been), he stands already on a pedestal, and is recognised as a master spirit not by a coterie but by the great public. Three large editions of the 'Princess' have already been sold. If he isn't satisfied after all, I think he is wrong. Divine poet as he is, and no laurel being too leafy for him, yet he must be an unreasonable man, and not understanding of the growth of the laurel trees and the nature of a reading public. With regard to the other garden-digger, dear Mr. Home, I wish as you do that I could hear something satisfactory of him. I wrote from Lucca in the summer, and have no answer. The latest word concerning him is the announcement in the 'Athenaeum' of a third edition of his 'Gregory the Seventh,' which we were glad to see, but very, very glad we should be to have news of his prosperity in the flesh as well as in the *litterae scriptae*....

I have not been out of doors these two months, but people call me 'looking well,' and a newly married niece of Miss Bayley's, the accomplished Miss Thomson, who has become the wife of Dr. Emil Braun (the learned German secretary of the Archaeological Society), and just passed through Florence on her way to Rome, where they are to reside, declared that the change she saw in me was miraculous—'wonderful indeed.' I took her to look at Wiedeman in his cradle, fast asleep, and she won my heart (over again, for always she was a favorite of mine) by exclaiming at his prettiness. Charmed, too, we both were with Dr. Braun—I mean Robert and I were charmed. He has a mixture of fervour and simplicity which is still more delightfully picturesque in his foreign English. Oh, he speaks English perfectly, only with an obvious accent enough. I am sure we should be cordial friends, if the lines had fallen to us in the same pleasant places; but he is fixed at Rome, and we are half afraid of the enervating effects of the Roman climate on the constitutions of children. Tell me, do you hear often from Mr. Chorley? It quite pains us to observe from his manner of writing the great depression of his spirits. His mother was ill in the summer, but plainly the sadness does not arise entirely or chiefly from this cause. He seems to me over-worked, taxed in the spirit. I advise nobody to give up work; but that 'Athenaeum' labour is a sort of treadmill discipline in which there is no progress, nor triumph, and I do wish he would give that up and come out to us with a new set of anvils and hammers. Only, of course, he couldn't do it, even if he would, while there is illness in his family. May there be a whole sun of success shining on the new play! Robert is engaged on a poem,[194] and I am busy with my edition. So much to correct, I find, and many poems to add. Plainly 'Jane Eyre' was by a woman. It used to astound me when sensible people said otherwise. Write to me, will you? I long to hear again. Tell me everything of yourself; accept my husband's true regards, and think of me as your

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Ever affectionate
E.B.B.

[Footnote 194: *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*.]

To Miss Browning Florence: January 29, 1850.

My dearest Sarianna,—I have waited to thank you for your great and ready kindness about the new edition, until now when it is fairly on its way to England. Thank you, thank you! I am only afraid, not that you will find anything too 'learned,' as you suggest, but a good many things too careless, I was going to say, only Robert, with various deep sighs for 'his poor Sarianna,' devoted himself during several days to rearranging my arrangements, and simplifying my complications. It was the old story of Order and Disorder over again. He pulled out the knotted silks with an indefatigable patience, so that really you will owe to *him* every moment of ease and facility which may be enjoyable in the course of the work. I am afraid that at the easiest you will find it a vexatious business, but I throw everything on your kindness, and am not distrustful on such a point of weights and measures.

Your letter was full of sad news. Robert was deeply affected at the account of the illness of his cousin—was in tears before he could end the letter. I do hope that in a day or two we may hear from you that the happy change was confirmed as time passed on. I do hope so; it will be joy, not merely to Robert, but to me, for indeed I never forget the office which his kindness performed for both of us at a crisis ripe with all the happiness of my life.

Then it was sad to hear of your dear father suffering from lumbago. May the last of it have passed away long before you get what I am writing! Tell him with my love that Wiedeman shall hear some day (if we all live) the verses he wrote to him; and I have it in my head that little Wiedeman will be very sensitive to verses and kindness too—he likes to hear anything rhythmical and musical, and he likes to be petted and kissed—the most affectionate little creature he is—sitting on my knee, while I give him books to turn the leaves over (a favorite amusement), every two minutes he puts up his little rosebud of a mouth to have a kiss. His cold is quite gone, and he has taken advantage of the opportunity to grow still fatter; as to his activities, there's no end to them. His nurse and I agree that he doesn't remain quiet a moment in the day....[195]

Now the love of nephews can't bear any more, Sarianna, can it? Only your father will take my part and say that it isn't tedious—beyond pardoning.

May God bless both of you, and enable you to send a brighter letter next time. Robert will be very anxious.

Your ever affectionate sister
BA.
Mention yourself, *do*.

[Footnote 195: A long description of the baby's meals and daily programme follows, the substance of which can probably be imagined by connoisseurs in the subject.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: February 18, 1850.

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Ever dearest Miss Mitford, you *always* give me pleasure, so for love's sake don't say that you 'seldom give it,' and such a magical act as conjuring up for me the sight of a new poem by Alfred Tennyson[196] is unnecessary to prove you a right beneficent enchantress. Thank you, thank you. We are not so unworthy of your redundant kindness as to abuse it by a word spoken or sign signified. You may trust us indeed. But now you know how free and sincere I am always! Now tell me. Apart from the fact of this lyric's being a fragment of fringe from the great poet's 'singing clothes' (as Leigh Hunt says somewhere), and apart from a certain sweetness and rise and fall in the rhythm, do you really see much for admiration in the poem? Is it *new* in, any way? I admire Tennyson with the most worshipping part of the multitude, as you are aware, but I do *not* perceive much in this lyric, which strikes me, and Robert also (who goes with me throughout), as quite inferior to the other lyrical snatches in the 'Princess.' By the way, if he introduces it in the 'Princess,' it will be the only *rhymed* verse in the work. Robert thinks that he was thinking of the Rhine echoes in writing it, and not of any heard in his Irish travels. I hear that Tennyson has taken rooms above Mr. Forster's in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and is going to try a London life. So says Mr. Kenyon.... I am writing with an easier mind than when I wrote last, for I was for a little time rendered very unhappy (so unhappy that I couldn't touch on the subject, which is always the way with me when pain passes a certain point), by hearing accidentally that papa was unwell and looking altered. My sister persisted in replying to my anxieties that they were unfounded, that I was quite absurd, indeed, in being anxious at all; only people are not generally reformed from their absurdities through being scolded for them. Now, however, it really appears that the evil has passed. He left his doctor who had given him lowering medicines, and, coincidently with the leaving, he has recovered looks and health altogether. Arabel says that I should think he was looking as well as ever, if I saw him, and that appetite and spirits are even redundant. Thank God.... To have this good news has made me very happy, and I overflow to you accordingly. Oh, there is pain enough from that quarter, without hearing of his being out of health. I write to him continually and he does not now return my letters, which is a melancholy something gained. Now enough of such a subject.

I certainly don't think that the qualities, half savage and half freethinking, expressed in 'Jane Eyre' are likely to suit a model governess or schoolmistress; and it amuses me to consider them in that particular relation. Your account falls like dew upon the parched curiosity of some of our friends here, to whom (as mere gossip, which did not leave you responsible) I couldn't resist the temptation of communicating it. People *are* so curious —even

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here among the Raffaels—about this particular authorship, yet nobody seems to have read ‘Shirley’; we are too slow in getting new books. First Galignani has to pirate them himself, and then to hand us over the spoils. By the way, there’s to be an international copyright, isn’t there? Something is talked of it in the ‘Athenaeum.’ Meanwhile the Americans have already reprinted my husband’s new edition. ’Landthieves, I mean pirates.’ I used to take that for a slip of the pen in Shakespeare; but it was a slip of the pen into prophecy. Sorry I am at Mrs. —— falling short of your warm-hearted ideas about her! Can you understand a woman’s hating a girl because it is not a boy—her first child too? I understand it so little that scarcely I can believe it. Some women *have*, however, undeniably an indifference to children, just as many men have, though it must be unnatural and morbid in both sexes. Men often affect it—very foolishly, if they count upon the scenic effects; affectation never succeeds well, and this sort of affectation is peculiarly unbecoming, except in old bachelors, for there is a pathetic side to the question so viewed. For my part and my husband’s, we may be frank and say that we have caught up our parental pleasures with a sort of passion. But then, Wiedeman is such a darling little creature; who *could* help loving the child?... Little darling! So much mischief was not often put before into so small a body. Fancy the child’s upsetting the water jugs till he is drenched (which charms him), pulling the brooms to pieces, and having serious designs upon cutting up his frocks with a pair of scissors. He laughs like an imp when he can succeed in doing anything wrong. Now, see what you get, in return for your kindness of ‘liking to hear about’ him! Almost I have the grace to be ashamed a little. Just before I had your letter we sent my new edition to England. I gave much time to the revision, and did not omit reforming some of the rhymes, although you must consider that the irregularity of these in a certain degree rather falls in with my system than falls out through my carelessness. So much the worse, you will say, when a person is *systematically* bad. The work will include the best poems of the ‘Seraphim’ volume, strengthened and improved as far as the circumstances admitted of. I had not the heart to leave out the wretched sonnet to yourself, for your dear sake; but I rewrote the latter half of it (for really it wasn’t a sonnet at all, and ‘Una and her lion’ are rococo), and so placed it with my other poems of the same class. There are some new, verses also.[197] The Miss Hardings I have seen, and talked with them of *you*, a sure way of finding them delightful. But, my dearest friend, I shall not see any of the Trollope party—it is not likely. You can scarcely image to yourself the retired life we live, or how we have retreated from the kind advances of the English society here. Now people seem to understand that we are to be left

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alone; that nothing is to be made of us. The fact is, we are not like our child, who kisses everybody who smiles at him! Neither my health nor our pecuniary circumstances, nor our inclinations perhaps, would admit of our entering into English society here, which is kept up much after the old English models, with a proper disdain for Continental simplicities of expense. We have just heard from Father Prout, who often, he says, sees Mr. Horne, 'who is as dreamy as ever.' So glad I am, for I was beginning to be uneasy about him. He has not answered my letter from Lucca. The verses in the 'Athenaeum'[198] are on Sophia Cottrell's child.

May God bless you, dearest friend. Speak of *yourself* more particularly to your ever affectionate

E.B.B.

Robert's kindest regards. Tell us of Mr. Chorley's play, do.

[Footnote 196: Apparently the *Echo-song* which now precedes canto iv. of the *Princess*, though one is surprised at the opinion here expressed of it. It will be remembered that this and the other lyrical interludes did not appear in the original edition of the *Princess*.]

[Footnote 197: Notably the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.]

[Footnote 198: 'A Child's Death at Florence,' which appeared in the *Athenaeum* of December 22, 1849.]

To Mrs. Martin Florence: February 22, 1850.

My dearest Mrs. Martin,—Have you wondered that I did not write before? It was not that I did not thank you in my heart for your kind, considerate letter, but I was unconquerably uncomfortable about papa; and, what with the weather, which always has me in its power somehow, and other things, I fell into a dislike of writing, which I hope you didn't mistake for ingratitude, because it was not in the least like the same fault. Now the severe weather (such weather for Italy!) has broken up, and I am relieved in all ways, having received the most happy satisfactory news from Wimpole Street, and the assurance from my sisters that if I were to see papa I should think him looking as well as ever. He grew impatient with Dr. Elliotson's medicines which, it appears, were of a very lowering character—suddenly gave them up, and as suddenly recovered his looks and all the rest, and everybody at home considers him to be *quite well*. It has relieved me of a mountain's weight, and I thank God with great joy. Oh, you must have understood how natural it was for me to be unhappy under the other circumstances. But if you thought, dearest friend, that *they* were necessary to induce me to write to him the humblest and most beseeching of letters, you do not know how I

feel his alienation or my own love for him. I With regard to my brothers, it is quite different, though even towards *them* I may faithfully say that my affection has borne itself higher than my pride. But as to papa, I have never contended about the right or the wrong, I have never irritated

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him by seeming to suppose that his severity to me has been more than justice. I have confined myself simply to a supplication for—his forgiveness of what he called, in his own words, the only fault of my life towards him, and an expression of the love which even I must feel I for him, whether he forgives me or not. This has been done in letter after letter, and they are not sent back—it is all. In my last letter, I ventured to ask him to let it be an understood thing that he should before the world, and to every practical purpose, act out his idea of justice by excluding me formally, me and mine, from every advantage he intended his other children—that, having so been just, he might afford to be merciful by giving me his forgiveness and affection—all I asked and desired. My husband and I had talked this over again and again; only it was a difficult thing to say, you see. At last I took courage and said it, because, doing it, papa might seem to himself to reconcile his notion of strict justice, and whatever remains of pity and tenderness might still be in his heart towards me, if there are any such. I *know* he has strong feelings at bottom—otherwise, should I love him so?—but he has adopted a bad system, and he (as well as I) is crushed by it.... If I were to write to you the political rumours we hear every day, you would scarcely think our situation improved in safety by the horrible Austrian army. Florence bristles with cannon on all sides, and at the first movement we are promised to be bombarded. On the other hand, if the red republicans get uppermost there will be a universal massacre; not a priest, according to their own profession, will be left alive in Italy. The constitutional party hope they are gaining strength, but the progress which depends on intellectual growth must necessarily be slow. That the Papacy has for ever lost its prestige and power over souls is the only evident truth; bright and strong enough to cling to. I hear even devout women say: ’This cursed Pope! it’s all his fault.’ Protestant places of worship are thronged with Italian faces, and the minister of the Scotch church at Leghorn has been threatened with exclusion from the country if he admits Tuscans to the church communion. Politically speaking, much will depend upon France, and I have strong hope for France, though it is so strictly the fashion to despair of her. Tell me dear Mr. Martin’s impression and your own—everything is good that comes from you. But most *particularly*, tell me how you both are—tell me whether you are strong again, dearest Mrs. Martin, for indeed I do not like to hear of your being in the least like an invalid. Do speak of yourself a little more. Do you know, you are very unsatisfactory as a letter-writer when you write about yourself—the reason being that you never do write about yourself except by the suddenest snatches, when you can’t possibly help the reference....

Robert sends his true regards with those of your
Gratefully affectionate
BA.

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To Mrs. Jameson April 2, [1850].

You have perhaps thought us ungrateful people, my ever dear friend, for this long delay in thanking you for your beautiful and welcome present.[199] Here is the truth. Though we had the books from Rome last month, they were snatched from us by impatient hands before we had finished the first volume. The books are hungered and thirsted for in Florence, and, although the English reading club has them, they can't go fast enough from one to another. Four of our friends entreated us for the reversion, and although it really is only just that we should be let read our own books first, yet Robert's generosity can't resist the need of this person who is 'going away,' and of that person who is 'so particularly anxious'—for particular reasons perhaps—so we renounce the privilege you gave us (with the pomps of this world) and are still waiting to finish even the first volume. Our cultivated friends the Ogilvys, who had the work from us earliest, because they were going to Naples, were charmed with it. Mr. Kirkup the artist, who disputes with Mr. Bezzi the glory of finding Dante's portrait—yes, and breathes fire in the dispute—has it now. Madame Ossoli, Margaret Fuller, the American authoress, who brought from the siege of Rome a noble marquis as her husband, asks for it. And your adorer Mr. Stuart, who has lectured upon Shakespeare all the winter, entreats for it. So when we shall be free to enjoy it thoroughly for ourselves remains doubtful. Robert promises every day, 'You shall have it next, certainly,' and I only hope you will put him and me in your next edition of the martyrs, for such a splendid exercise of the gifts of self-renunciation. But don't fancy that we have not been delighted with the sight of the books, with your kindness, and besides with the impressions gathered from a rapid examination of the qualities of the work. It seems to us in every way a valuable and most interesting work; it must render itself a *necessity* for art students, and general readers and seers of pictures like me, who carry rather sentiment than science into the consideration of such subjects. We much admire your introduction—excellent in all ways, besides the grace and eloquence. Altogether, the work must set you higher with a high class of the public, and I congratulate you on what is the gain of all of us. Robert has begun a little pencil list of trifling criticisms he means to finish. We both cry aloud at what you say of Guercino's angels, and never would have said if you had been to Fano and seen his divine picture of the 'Guardian Angel,' which affects me every time I think of it. Our little Wiedeman had his part of pleasure in the book by being let look at the engravings. He screamed for joy at the miracle of so many bird-men, and kissed some of them very reverentially, which is his usual way of expressing admiration....

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Whether you will like Robert's new book I don't know, but I am sure you will admit the originality and power in it. I wish we had the option of giving it to you, but Chapman & Hall never seem to think of our giving copies away, nor leave them at our disposal. There is nothing *Italian* in the book; poets are apt to be most present with the distant. A remark of Wilson's[200] used to strike me as eminently true—that the perfectest descriptive poem (descriptive of rural scenery) would *be* naturally produced in a London cellar. I have read 'Shirley' lately; it is not equal to 'Jane Eyre' in spontaneousness and earnestness. I found it heavy, I confess, though in the mechanical part of the writing—-the compositional *savoir faire*—there is an advance. Robert has exhumed some French books, just now, from a little circulating library which he had not tried, and we have been making ourselves uncomfortable over Balzac's 'Cousin Pons.' But what a wonderful writer he is! Who else could have taken such a subject, out of the lowest mud of humanity, and glorified and consecrated it? He is wonderful—there is not another word for him—profound, as Nature is. S I complain of Florence for the want of books. We have to dig and dig before we can get anything new, and *I* can read the newspapers only through Robert's eyes, who only can read them at Vieusseux's in a room sacred from the foot of woman. And this isn't always satisfactory to me, as whenever he falls into a state of disgust with any political *regime*, he throws the whole subject over and won't read a word more about it. Every now and then, for instance, he ignores France altogether, and I, who am more tolerant and more curious, find myself suspended over an hiatus *(valde deflendus*), and what's to be said and done? M. Thiers' speech—-'Thiers is a rascal; I make a point of not reading one word said by M. Thiers.' M. Prudhon—'Prudhon is a madman; who cares for Prudhon?' The President—'The President's an ass; *he* is not worth thinking of.' And so we treat of politics.

I wish you would write to us a little oftener (or rather, a good deal) and tell us much of yourself. It made me very sorry that you should be suffering in the grief of your sister—-you whose sympathies are so tender and quick! May it be better with you now! Mention Lady Byron. I shall be glad to hear that she is stronger notwithstanding this cruel winter. We have lovely weather here now, and I am quite well and able to walk out, and little Wiedeman rolls with Flush on the grass of the Cascine. Dear kind Wilson is doatingly fond of the child, and sometimes gives it as her serious opinion that 'there never *was* such a child before.' Of course I don't argue the point much. Now, will you write to us? Speak of your plans particularly when you do. We have taken this apartment on for another year from May. May God bless you! Robert unites in affectionate thanks and thoughts of all kinds, with your

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E.B.B.—rather, BA.

This letter has waited some days to be sent away, as you will see by the date.

[Footnote 199: Mrs. Jameson's *Legends of the Monastic Orders*, which had just been published.]

[Footnote 200: Presumably *not* Mrs. Browning's maid, but 'Christopher North.']

At the end of March 1850, the long-deferred marriage of Mrs. Browning's sister, Henrietta, to Captain Surtees Cook took place. It is of interest here mainly as illustrating Mr. Barrett's behaviour to his daughters. An application for his consent only elicited the pronouncement, 'If Henrietta marries you, she turns her back on this house for ever,' and a letter to Henrietta herself reproaching her with the 'insult' she had offered him in asking his consent when she had evidently made up her mind to the conclusion, and declaring that, if she married, her name should never again be mentioned in his presence. The marriage having thereupon taken place, his decision was forthwith put into practice, and a second child was thenceforward an exile from her father's house.

To Miss Mitford Florence: [end of] April 1850.

You will have seen in the papers, dearest friend, the marriage of my sister Henrietta, and will have understood why I was longer silent than usual. Indeed, the event has much moved me, and so much of the emotion was painful—painfulness being inseparable from events of the sort in our family—that I had to make an effort to realise to myself the reasonable degree of gladness and satisfaction in her release from a long, anxious, transitional state, and her prospect of happiness with a man who has loved her constantly and who is of an upright, honest, reliable, and religious mind. Our father's objections were to his Tractarian opinions and insufficient income. I have no sympathy myself with Tractarian opinions, but I cannot under the circumstances think an objection of the kind tenable by a third person, and in truth we all know that if it had not been this objection, it would have been another—there was no escape any way. An engagement of five years and an attachment still longer were to have some results; and I can't regret, or indeed do otherwise than approve from my heart, what she has done from hers. Most of her friends and relatives have considered that there was no choice, and that her step is abundantly justified. At the same time, I thank God that a letter sent to me to ask my advice never reached me (the *second* letter of my sisters' lost, since I left them), because no advice *ought* to be given on any subject of the kind, and because I, especially, should have shrunk from accepting such a responsibility. So I only heard of the marriage three days before it took place—no, four days before—and was upset, as you may suppose, by the sudden news. Captain Surtees Cook's sister was one of the bridesmaids, and his brother performed the ceremony. The *means* are

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very small of course—he has not much, and my sister has nothing—still it seems to me that they will have enough to live prudently on, and he looks out for a further appointment. Papa 'will never again let her name be mentioned in his hearing,' he *says*, but we must hope. The dreadful business passed off better on the whole than poor Arabel expected, and things are going on as quietly as usual in Wimpole Street now. I feel deeply for *her*, who in her pure disinterestedness just pays the price and suffers the loss. She represents herself, however, to be relieved at the crisis being passed. I earnestly hope for her sake that we may be able to get to England this year—a sight of us will be some comfort. Henrietta is to live at Taunton for the present, as he has a military situation there, and they are preparing for a round of visits among their many friends who are anxious to have them previous to their settling. All this, you see, will throw me back with papa, even if I can be supposed to have gained half a step, and I doubt it. Oh yes, dearest Miss Mitford. I have indeed again and again thought of your 'Emily,' stripping the situation of 'the favour and prettiness' associated with that heroine. Wiedeman might compete, though, in darlingness with the child, as the poem shows him. Still, I can accept no omen. My heart sinks when I dwell upon peculiarities difficult to analyse. I love him very deeply. When I write to him, I lay myself at his feet. Even if I had gained half a step (and I doubt it, as I said), see how I must be thrown back by the indisposition to receive others. But I cannot write of this subject. Let us change it....

Madame Ossoli sails for America in a few days, with the hope of returning to Italy, and indeed I cannot believe that her Roman husband will be easily naturalised among the Yankees. A very interesting person she is, far better than her writings—thoughtful, spiritual in her habitual mode of mind; not only exalted, but *exaltee* in her opinions, and yet calm in manner. We shall be sorry to lose her. We have lost, besides, our friends Mr. and Mrs. Ogilvy, cultivated and refined people: they occupied the floor above us the last winter, and at the Baths of Lucca and Florence we have seen much of them for a year past. She published some time since a volume of 'Scottish Minstrelsy,' graceful and flowing, and aspires strenuously towards poetry; a pretty woman with three pretty children, of quick perceptions and active intelligence and sensibility. They are upright, excellent people in various ways, and it is a loss to us that they should have gone to Naples now. Dearest friend, how your letter delighted me with its happy account of your improved strength. Take care of yourself, do, to lose no ground. The power of walking must refresh your spirits as well as widen your daily pleasures. I am so glad. Thank God. We have heard from Mr. Chorley, who seems to have received very partial

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gratification in respect to his play and yet prepares for more plays, more wrestlings in the same dust. Well, I can't make it out. A man of his sensitiveness to choose to appeal to the coarsest side of the public—which, whatever you dramatists may say, you all certainly do—is incomprehensible to me. Then I cannot help thinking that he might achieve other sorts of successes more easily and surely. Your criticism is very just. But *I* like his 'Music and Manners in Germany' better than anything he has done. I believe I always *did* like it best, and since coming to Florence I have heard cultivated Americans speak of it with enthusiasm, yes, with enthusiasm. 'Pomfret' they would scarcely believe to be by the same author. I agree with you, but it is a pity indeed for him to tie himself to the wheels of the 'Athenaeum,' to *approfondir* the ruts; what other end? And, by the way, the 'Athenaeum,' since Mr. Dilke left it, has grown duller and duller, colder and colder, flatter and flatter. Mr. Dilke was not brilliant, but he was a Brutus in criticism; and though it was his speciality to condemn his most particular friends to the hangman, the survivors thought there was something grand about it on the whole, and nobody could hold him in contempt. Now it is all different. We have not even 'public virtue' to fasten our admiration to. You will be sure to think I am vexed at the article on my husband's new poem.[201] Why, certainly I am vexed! Who would *not* be vexed with such misunderstanding and mistaking. Dear Mr. Chorley writes a letter to appreciate most generously: so you see how little power he has in the paper to insert an opinion, or stop an injustice. On the same day came out a burning panegyric of six columns in the 'Examiner,' a curious cross-fire. If you read the little book (I wish I could send you a copy, but Chapman & Hall have not offered us copies, and you will catch sight of it somewhere), I hope you will like things in it at least. It seems to me full of power. Two hundred copies went off in the first fortnight, which is a good beginning in these days. So I am to confess to a satisfaction in the American piracies. Well, I confess, then. Only it is rather a complex smile with which one hears: 'Sir or Madam, we are selling your book at half price, as well printed as in England.' 'Those apples we stole from your garden, we sell at a halfpenny, instead of a penny as you do; they are much appreciated.' Very gratifying indeed. It's worth while to rob us, that's plain, and there's something magnificent in supplying a distant market with apples out of one's garden. Still the smile is complex in its character, and the morality—simple, that's all I meant to say. A letter from Henrietta and her husband, glowing with happiness; it makes *me* happy. She says, 'I wonder if I shall be as happy as you, Ba.' God grant it. It was signified to her that she should at once give up her engagement of five years, or leave the house. She married directly. I do not understand how it could be otherwise, indeed. My brothers have been kind and affectionate, I am glad to say; in her case, poor dearest papa does injustice chiefly to his own nature, by these severities, hard as they seem. Write soon and talk of yourself to

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Ever affectionate
BA.

I am rejoicing in the People's Edition of your work. 'Viva!' (Robert's best regards.)

[Footnote 201: The *Athenaeum* review of *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, while recognising the beauty of many passages in the two poems, criticised strongly the discussion of theological subjects in 'doggrel verse;' and its analysis of the theology would hardly be satisfactory to the author.]

To Mrs. Jameson Florence: May 4, [1850],

Dearest Friend,—This little note will be given to you by the Mr. Stuart of whom I once told you that he was holding you up to the admiration of all Florence and the Baths of Lucca as the best English critic of Shakespeare, in his lectures on the great poet....

Robert bids me say that he wrote you a constrained half-dozen lines by Mr. Henry Greenough, who asked for a letter of introduction to you, while the asker was sitting in the room, and the form of 'dear Mrs. Jameson' couldn't well be escaped from. He loves you as well as ever, you are to understand, through every complication of forms, and you are to love him, and *me*, for I come in as a part of him, if you please. Did you get my thanks for the dear Petrarch pen (so steeped in double-distilled memories that it seems scarcely fit to be steeped in ink), and our appreciation as well as gratitude for the books—which, indeed, charm us more and more? Robert has been picking up pictures at a few pauls each, 'hole and corner' pictures which the 'dealers' had not found out; and the other day he covered himself with glory by discovering and seizing on (in a corn shop a mile from Florence) five pictures among heaps of trash; and one of the best judges in Florence (Mr. Kirkup) throws out such names for them as Cimabue, Ghirlandaio, Giottino, a crucifixion painted on a banner, Giottesque, if not Giotto, but *unique*, or nearly so, on account of the linen material, and a little Virgin by a Byzantine master. The curious thing is that two angel pictures, for which he had given a scudo last year, prove to have been each sawn off the sides of the Ghirlandaio, so called, representing the 'Eterno Padre' clothed in a mystical garment and encircled by a rainbow, the various tints of which, together with the scarlet tips of the flying seraphs' wings, are darted down into the smaller pictures and complete the evidence, line for line. It has been a grand altar-piece, cut to bits. Now come and see for yourself. We can't say decidedly yet whether it will be possible or impossible for us to go to England this year, but in any case you must come to see Gerardine and Italy, and we shall manage to catch you by the skirts then—so do come. Never mind the rumbling of political thunders, because, even if a storm breaks, you will slip under cover in these days easily, whether in France or Italy. I can't make out, for my part, how anybody can be afraid of such things.

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Will you be among the likers or dislikers, I wonder sometimes, of Robert's new book? The *faculty*, you will recognise, in all cases; he can do anything he chooses. I have complained of the *asceticism* in the second part, but he said it was 'one side of the question.' Don't think that he has taken to the cilix—indeed he has not—but it is his way to *see* things as passionately as other people *feel* them....

Chapman & Hall offer us no copies, or you should have had one, of course. So Wordsworth is gone—a great light out of heaven.

May God bless you, my dear friend!

Love your affectionate and grateful, for so many reasons, BA.

The death of Wordsworth on April 23 left the Laureateship vacant, and though there was probably never any likelihood of Mrs. Browning's being invited to succeed him, it is worth noticing that her claims were advocated by so prominent a paper as the 'Athenaeum,' which not only urged that the appointment would be eminently suitable under a female sovereign, but even expressed its opinion that 'there is no living poet of either sex who can prefer a higher claim than Mrs. Elizabeth Barrett Browning.' No doubt there would have been a certain appropriateness in the post of Laureate to a Queen being held by a poetess, but the claims of Tennyson to the primacy of English poetry were rightly regarded as paramount. The fact that in Robert Browning there was a poet of equal calibre with Tennyson, though of so different a type, seems to have occurred to no one.

To Miss Mitford Florence: June 15, 1850.

My ever dear Friend,—How it grieves me that you should have been so unwell again! From what you say about the state of the house, I conclude that your health suffers from that cause precisely; and that when you are warmly and dryly walled in, you will be less liable to these attacks, grievous to your friends as to you. Oh, I don't praise anybody, I assure you, for wishing to entice you to live near them. We come over the Alps for a sunny climate; what should we not do for a moral atmosphere like yours? I dare say you have chosen excellently your new residence, and I hope you will get over the fuss of it with great courage, remembering the advantages which it is likely to secure to you. Tell me as much as you can about it all, that I may shift the scene in the right grooves, and be able to imagine you to myself out of Three Mile Cross. You have the local feeling so eminently that I have long been resolved on never asking you to migrate. Doves won't travel with swallows; who should persuade them? This is no migration—-only a shifting from one branch to another. With Reading on one side of you still, you will lose nothing, neither sight nor friend. Oh, do write to me as soon as you can, and say that the deepening summer has done you good and given you strength; say it, if possible. I shall be very anxious for the next letter....

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My only objection to Florence is the distance from London, and the expense of the journey. One's heart is pulled at through different English ties and can't get the right rest, and I think we shall move northwards—try France a little, after a time. The present year has been full of petty vexation to us about the difficulty of going to England, and it becomes more and more doubtful whether we can attain to the means of doing it. There are four of us and the child, you see, and precisely this year we are restricted in means, as far as our present knowledge goes; but I can't say yet, only I do very much fear. Nobody will believe our promises, I think, any more, and my poor Arabel will be in despair, and I shall lose the opportunity of *authenticating* Wiedeman; for, as Robert says, all our fine stories about him will go for nothing, and he will be set down as a sham child. If not sham, how could human vanity resist the showing him off bodily? That sounds reasonable....

Certainly you are disinterested about America, and, of course, all of us who have hearts and heads must feel the sympathy of a greater nation to be more precious than a thick purse. Still, it is not just and dignified, this vantage ground of American pirates. Liking the ends and motives, one disapproves the means. Yes, even *you* do; and if I were an American I should dissent with still more emphasis. It should be made a point of honour with the nation, if there is no point of law against the re publishers. For my own part, I have every possible reason to thank and love America; she has been very kind to me, and the visits we receive here from delightful and cordial persons of that country have been most gratifying to us. The American minister at the court of Vienna, with his family, did not pass through Florence the other day without coming to see us—General Watson Webbe-with an air of moral as well as military command in his brow and eyes. He looked, and talked too, like one of oar dignities of the Old World. The go-ahead principle didn't seem the least over-strong in him, nor likely to disturb his official balance. What is to happen next in France? Do you trust still your President? He is in a hard position, and, if he leaves the Pope where he is, in a dishonored one. As for the change in the electoral law and the increase of income, I see nothing in either to make an outcry against. There is great injustice everywhere and a rankling party-spirit, and to speak the truth and act it appears still more difficult than usual. I was sorry, do you know, to hear of dear Mr. Horne's attempt at Shylock; he is fit for higher things. Did I tell you how we received and admired his Judas Iscariot? Yes, surely I did. He says that Louis Blanc is a friend of his and much with him, speaking with enthusiasm. I should be more sorry at his being involved with the Socialists than with Shylock—still more sorry; for I love liberty so intensely that I hate Socialism. I hold it to be the most desecrating

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and dishonouring to humanity of all creeds. I would rather (for *me*) live under the absolutism of Nicholas of Russia than in a Fourier machine, with my individuality sucked out of me by a social air-pump. Oh, if you happen to write again to Mrs. Deane, thank her much for her kind anxiety; but, indeed, if I had lost my darling I should not write verses about it.[202] As for the Laureateship, it won't be given to *me*, be sure, though the suggestion has gone the round of the English newspapers—'Galignani' and all—and notwithstanding that most kind and flattering recommendation of the 'Athenaeum,' for which I am sure we should be grateful to Mr. Chorley. I think Leigh Hunt should have the Laureateship. He has condescended to wish for it, and has 'worn his singing clothes' longer than most of his contemporaries, deserving the price of long as well as noble service. Whoever has it will be, of course, exempted from Court lays; and the distinction of the title and pension should remain for Spenser's sake, if not for Wordsworth's. We are very anxious to know about Tennyson's new work, 'In Memoriam.' Do tell us about it. You are aware that it was written years ago, and relates to a son of Mr. Hallam, who was Tennyson's intimate friend and the betrothed of his sister. I have heard, through someone who had seen the MS., that it is full of beauty and pathos.... Dearest, ever dear Miss Mitford, speak particularly of your health. May God bless you, prays

Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.
Robert's kindest regards.

[Footnote 202: Referring to the lines entitled *A Child's Grave at Florence*, which had apparently been misunderstood as implying the death of Mrs. Browning's own child.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: July 8, 1850.

My dearest Miss Mitford,—I this moment have your note; and as a packet of ours is going to England, I snatch up a pen to do what I can with it in the brief moments between this and post time. I don't wait till it shall be possible to write at length, because I have something immediate to say to you. Your letter is delightful, yet it is not for *that* that I rush so upon answering it. Nor even is it for the excellent news of your consenting, for dear Mr. Chorley's sake, to give us some more of your 'papers,'[203] though 'blessed be the hour, and month, and year' when he set about editing the 'Ladies' Companion' and persuading you to do such a thing. No, what I want to say is strictly personal to me. You are the kindest, warmest-hearted, most affectionate of critics, and precisely as such it is that you have thrown me into a paroxysm of terror. My dearest friend, *for the love of me*—I don't argue the point with you—but I beseech you humbly,—kissing the hem of your garment, and by all sacred and tender recollections of sympathy between you and me, *don't* breathe a word about any juvenile performance of mine—*don't*, if you have any love left for me. Dear friend,

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‘disinter’ anybody or anything you please, but don’t disinter *me*, unless you mean the ghost of my vexation to vex you ever after. ‘Blessed be she who spares these stones.’ All the saints know that I have enough to answer for since I came to my mature mind, and that I had difficulty enough in making most of the ‘Seraphim’ volume presentable a little in my new edition, because it was too ostensible before the public to be caught back; but if the sins of my rawest juvenility are to be thrust upon me—and sins are extant of even twelve or thirteen, or earlier, and I was in print once when I was ten, I think—what is to become of me? I shall groan as loud as Christian did. Dearest Miss Mitford, now forgive this ingratitude which is gratitude all the time. I love you and thank you; but, right or wrong, mind what I say, and let me love and thank you still more. When you see my new edition you will see that everything worth a straw I ever wrote is there, and if there were strength in conjuration I would conjure you to pass an act of oblivion on the stubble that remains—if anything does remain, indeed. Now, more than enough of this. For the rest, I am delighted. I am even so generous as not to be jealous of Mr. Chorley for prevailing with you when nobody else could. I had given it up long ago; I never thought you would stir a pen again. By what charm did he prevail? Your series of papers will be delightful, I do not doubt; though I never could see anything in some of your heroes, American or Irish. Longfellow is a poet; I don’t refer to *him*. Still, whatever you say will be worth hearing, and the *guide* through ‘Pompeii’ will be better than many of the ruins. ’The Pleader’s Guide’ I never heard of before. Praed has written some sweet and tender things. Then I shall like to hear you on Beaumont and Fletcher, and Andrew Marvell.

I have seen nothing of Tennyson’s new poem. Do you know if the echo-song is the most popular of his verses? It is only another proof to my mind of the no-worth of popularity. That song would be eminently sweet for a common writer, but Tennyson has done better, surely; his eminences are to be seen above. As for the laurel, in a sense he is worthier of it than Leigh Hunt; only Tennyson can wait, that is the single difference.

So anxious I am about your house. Your health seems to me mainly to depend on your moving, and I do urge your moving; if not there, elsewhere. May God bless you, ever dear friend!

I dare say you will think I have given too much importance to the rococo verses you had the goodness to speak of; but I have a horror of being disinterred, there’s the truth! Leave the violets to grow over me. Because that wretched school-exercise of a version of the ‘Prometheus’ had been named by two or three people, wasn’t I at the pains of making a new translation before I left England, so to erase a sort of half-visible and half invisible ‘Blot on the Scutcheon’? After such an expenditure of lemon-juice, you will not wonder that I should trouble you with all this talk about nothing....

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I am so delighted that you are to lift up your voice again, and so grateful to Mr. Chorley.

Ah yes, if we go to Paris we shall draw you. Mr. Chorley shan't have all the triumphs to himself.

Not a word more, says Robert, or the post will be missed. God bless you! Do take care of yourself, and *don't* stay in that damp house. And do make allowances for love.

Your ever affectionate
BA.

How glad I shall be if it is true that Tennyson is married! I believe in the happiness of marriage, for men especially.

[Footnote 203: These are the papers subsequently published under the title *Recollections of a Literary Life*. Among them was an article on the Brownings, giving biographical detail with respect to Mrs. Browning's early life, especially as to the loss of her brother, which caused extreme pain to her sensitive nature, as a later letter testifies.]

Through the greater part of the summer of 1850 the Brownings held fast in Florence, and it was not until September, when Mrs. Browning was recovering from a rather sharp attack of illness, that they took a short holiday, going for a few weeks to Siena, a place which they were again to visit some years later, during the last two summers of Mrs. Browning's life. The letter announcing their arrival is the first in the present collection addressed to Miss Isa Blagden. Miss Blagden was a resident in Florence for many years, and was a prominent member of English society there. Her friendship, not only with Mrs. Browning, but with her husband, was of a very intimate character, and was continued after Mrs. Browning's death until the end of her own life in 1872.

To Miss I. Blagden Siena: September [1850].

Here I am keeping my promise, my dear Miss Blagden. We arrived quite safely, and I was not too tired to sleep at night, though tired of course, and the baby was a miracle of goodness all the way, only inclining once to a *rabbia* through not being able to get at the electric telegraph, but in ecstasies otherwise at everything new. We had to stay at the inn all night. We heard of a multitude of villas, none of which could be caught in time for the daylight. On Sunday, however, just as we were beginning to give it up, in Robert came with good news, and we were settled in half an hour afterwards here, a small house of some seven rooms, two miles from Siena, and situated delightfully in its own grounds of vineyard and olive ground, not to boast too much of a pretty little square flower-garden. The grapes hang in garlands (too tantalising to Wiedeman) about the walls and before them, and, through and over, we have magnificent views of a noble sweep of country, undulating hills and various verdure, and, on one side, the great

Maremma extending to the foot of the Roman mountains. Our villa is on a hill called 'poggio dei venti,' and the winds give us a turn accordingly at every window. It is delightfully cool, and I have not

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been able to bear my window open at night since our arrival; also we get good milk and bread and eggs and wine, and are not much at a loss for anything. Think of my forgetting to tell you (Robert would not forgive me for that) how we have a *specola* or sort of belvedere at the top of the house, which he delights in, and which I shall enjoy presently, when I have recovered my taste for climbing staircases. He carried me up once, but the being carried down was so much like being carried down the flue of a chimney, that I waive the whole privilege for the future. What is better, to my mind, is the expected fact of being able to get books at Siena—*nearly* as well as at Brecker's, really; though Dumas fils seems to fill up many of the interstices where you think you have found something. *Three* pauls a month, the subscription is; and for seven, we get a 'Galignani,' or are promised to get it. We pay for our villa ten scudi the month, so that altogether it is not ruinous. The air is as fresh as English air, without English dampness and transition; yes, and we have English lanes with bowery tops of trees, and brambles and blackberries, and not a wall anywhere, except the walls of our villa.

For my part, I am recovering strength, I hope and believe. Certainly I can move about from one room to another, without reeling much: but I still look so ghastly, as to 'back recoil,' perfectly knowing 'Why,' from everything in the shape of a looking glass. Robert has found an armchair for me at Siena. To say the truth, my time for enjoying this country life, except the enchanting silence and the look from the window, has not come yet: I must wait for a little more strength. Wiedeman's cheeks are beginning to redden already, and he delights in the pigeons and the pig and the donkey and a great yellow dog and everything else now; only he would change all your trees (except the apple trees), he says, for the Austrian band at any moment. He is rather a town baby....

Our drawback is, dear Miss Blagden, that we have not room to take you in. So sorry we both are indeed. Write and tell me whether you have decided about Vallombrosa. I hope we shall see much of you still at Florence, if not here. We could give you everything here except a bed.

Robert's kindest regards with those of
Your ever affectionate
ELIZABETH B. BROWNING.

My love to Miss Agassiz, whenever you see her.

To Miss Mitford Siena: September 24, 1850.

To think that it is more than two months since I wrote last to you, my beloved friend, makes the said two months seem even longer to me than otherwise they would necessarily be—a slow, heavy two months in every case, 'with all the weights of care and death hung at them.' Your letter reached me when I was confined to my bed, and

could scarcely read it, for all the strength at my heart.... As soon as I could be moved, and before I could walk from one room to another, Dr. Harding insisted on

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the necessity of change of air (for my part, I seemed to myself more fit to change the world than the air), and Robert carried me into the railroad like a baby, and off we came here to Siena. We took a villa a mile and *a* half from the town, a villa situated on a windy hill (called 'poggio al vento'), with magnificent views from all the windows, and set in the midst of its own vineyard and olive ground, apple trees and peach trees, not to speak of a little square flower-garden, for which we pay *eleven shillings one penny farthing the week*; and at the end of these three weeks, our medical comforter's prophecy, to which I listened so incredulously, is fulfilled, and I am able to walk a mile, and am really as well as ever in all essential respects.... Our poor little darling, too (see what disasters!), was ill four-and-twenty hours from a species of sunstroke, and frightened us with a heavy hot head and glassy staring eyes, lying in a half-stupor. Terrible, the silence that fell suddenly upon the house, without the small pattering feet and the singing voice. But God spared us; he grew quite well directly and sang louder than ever. Since we came here his cheeks have turned into roses....

What still further depressed me during our latter days at Florence was the dreadful event in America—the loss of our poor friend Madame Ossoli,[204] affecting in itself, and also through association with that past, when the arrowhead of anguish was broken too deeply into my life ever to be quite drawn out. Robert wanted to keep the news from me till I was stronger, but we live too *close* for him to keep anything from me, and then I should have known it from the first letter or visitor, so there was no use trying. The poor Ossolis spent part of their last evening in Italy with us, he and she and their child, and we had a note from her off Gibraltar, speaking of the captain's death from smallpox. Afterwards it appears that her child caught the disease and lay for days between life and death; *recovered*, and then came the final agony. 'Deep called unto deep,' indeed. Now she is where there is no more grief and 'no more sea;' and none of the restless in this world, none of the ship-wrecked in heart ever seemed to me to want peace more than she did. We saw much of her last winter; and over a great gulf of differing opinion we both felt drawn strongly to her. High and pure aspiration she had—yes, and a tender woman's heart—and we honoured the truth and courage in her, rare in woman or man. The work she was preparing upon Italy would probably have been more equal to her faculty than anything previously produced by her pen (her other writings being curiously inferior to the impressions her conversation gave you); indeed, she told me it was the only production to which she had given time and labour. But, if rescued, the manuscript would be nothing but the raw material. I believe nothing was finished; nor, if finished, could the work have been otherwise than deeply coloured

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by those blood colours of Socialistic views, which would have drawn the wolves on her, with a still more howling enmity, both in England and America. Therefore it was better for her to go. Only God and a few friends can be expected to distinguish between the pure personality of a woman and her professed opinions. She was chiefly known in America, I believe, by oral lectures and a connection with the newspaper press, neither of them happy means of publicity. Was she happy in anything, I wonder? She told me that she never was. May God have made her happy in her death!

Such gloom she had in leaving Italy! So full she was of sad presentiment! Do you know she gave a *Bible* as a parting gift from her child to ours, writing in it '*In memory of* Angelo Eugene Ossoli'—a strange, prophetical expression? That last evening a prophecy was talked of jestingly—an old prophecy made to poor Marquis Ossoli, 'that he should shun the sea, for that it would be fatal to him.' I remember how she turned to me smiling and said, 'Our ship is called the "Elizabeth," and I accept the omen.'

Now I am making you almost dull perhaps, and myself certainly duller. Rather let me tell you, dearest Miss Mitford, how delightedly I look forward to reading whatever you have written or shall write. You write 'as well as twenty years ago'! Why, I should think so, indeed. Don't I know what your letters are? Haven't I had faith in you always? Haven't I, in fact, teased you half to death in proof of it? I, who was a sort of Brutus, and oughtn't to have done it, you hinted. Moreover, Robert is a great admirer of yours, as I must have told you before, and has the pretension (unjustly though, as I tell *him*) to place you still higher among writers than I do, so that we are two in expectancy here. May Mr. Chorley's periodical live a thousand years!

As my 'Seagull' won't, but you will find it in my new edition, and the 'Doves' and everything else worth a straw of my writing. Here's a fact which you must try to settle with your theories of simplicity and popularity: *None of these simple poems of mine have been favorites with general readers*. The unintelligible ones are always preferred, I observe, by extracters, compilers, and ladies and gentlemen who write to tell me that I'm a muse. The very Corn Law Leaguers in the North used to leave your 'Seagulls' to fly where they could, and clap hands over mysteries of iniquity. Dearest Miss Mitford—-for the rest, don't mistake what I write to you sometimes—don't fancy that I undervalue simplicity and think nothing of legitimate fame—I only mean to say that the vogue which begins with the masses generally comes to nought (Beranger is an exceptional case, from the *form* of his poems, obviously), while the appreciation beginning with the few always ends with the masses. Wasn't Wordsworth, for instance, both simple and unpopular, when he was most divine? To go to the great from

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the small, when I complain of the lamentable weakness of much in my 'Seraphim' volume, I don't complain of the 'Seagull' and 'Doves' and the simple verses, but exactly of the more ambitious ones. I have had to rewrite pages upon pages of that volume. Oh, such feeble rhymes, and turns of thought—such a dingy mistiness! Even Robert couldn't say a word for much of it. I took great pains with the whole, and made considerable portions new, only your favourites were not touched—not a word touched, I think, in the 'Seagull,' and scarcely a word in the 'Doves.' You won't complain of me a great deal, I do hope and trust. Also I put back your 'little words' into the 'House of Clouds.' The two volumes are to come out, it appears, at the end of October; not before, because Mr. Chapman wished to inaugurate them for his new house in Piccadilly. There are some new poems, and one rather long ballad written at request of anti-slavery friends in America.[205] I arranged that it should come next to the 'Cry of the Children,' to appear impartial as to national grievances....

Oh—Balzac—what a loss! One of the greatest and (most) original writers of the age gone from us! To hear this news made Robert and me very melancholy. Indeed, there seems to be fatality just now with the writers of France. Soulie, Bernard, gone too; George Sand translating Mazzini; Sue in a socialistical state of decadence—what he means by writing such trash as the 'Peches' I really can't make out; only Alexandre Dumas keeping his head up gallantly, and he seems to me to write better than ever. Here is a new book, just published, by Jules Sandeau, called 'Sacs et Parchemins'! Have you seen it? It miraculously comes to us from the little Siena library.

We stay in this villa till our month is out, and then we go for a week into Siena that I may be nearer the churches and pictures, and see something of the cathedral and Sodomas. We calculated that it was cheaper to move our quarters than to have a carriage to and fro, and then Dr. Harding recommended repeated change of air for me, and he has proved his ability so much (so kindly too!) that we are bound to act on his opinions as closely as we can. Perhaps we may even go to Volterra afterwards, if the *finances* will allow of it. If we do, it may be for another week at farthest, and then we return to Florence. You had better direct there as usual. And do write and tell me much of yourself, and set *me* down in your thoughts as quite well, and ever yours in warm and grateful affection.

E.B.B.

[Footnote 204: Drowned with her husband on their way to America.]

[Footnote 205: *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point*.]

To Miss Mitford Florence: November 13, 1850 [postmark].

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I *meant* to cross your second letter, and so, my very dear friend, you are a second time a prophetess as to my intentions, while I am still more grateful than I could have been with the literal fulfilment. Delightful it is to hear from you—do always write when you can. And though this second letter speaks of your having been unwell, still I shall continue to flatter myself that upon the whole 'the better part prevails,' and that if the rains don't wash you away this winter, I may have leave to think of you as strengthening and to strengthen still. Meanwhile you certainly, as you say, have roots to your feet. Never was anyone so pure as you from the drop of gypsey blood which tingles in my veins and my husband's, and gives us every now and then a fever for roaming, strong enough to carry us to Mount Caucasus if it were not for the healthy state of depletion observable in the purse. I get fond of places, so does he. We both of us grew rather pathetical on leaving our Sienese villa, and shrank from parting with the pig. But setting out on one's travels has a great charm; oh, I should like to be able to pay our way down the Nile, and into Greece, and into Germany, and into Spain! Every now and then we take out the road-books, calculate the expenses, and groan in the spirit when it's proved for the hundredth time that we can't do it. One must have a home, you see, to keep one's books in and one's spring-sofas in; but the charm of a home is a home *to come back to*. Do you understand? No, not you! You have as much comprehension of the pleasure of 'that sort of thing' as in the peculiar taste of the three ladies who hung themselves in a French balloon the other day, operatically *nude*, in order, I conjecture, to the ultimate perfection of French delicacy in morals and manners....

I long to see your papers, and dare say they are charming. At the same time, just because they are sure to be charming (and notwithstanding their kindness to me, notwithstanding that I live in a glass house myself, warmed by such rare stoves!) I am a little in fear that your generosity and excess of kindness may run the risk of lowering the ideal of poetry in England by lifting above the mark the names of some poetasters. Do you know, you take up your heart sometimes by mistake, to admire with, when you ought to use it only to love with? and this is apt to be dangerous, with your reputation and authority in matters of literature. See how impertinent I am! But we should all take care to teach the world that poetry is a divine thing, should we not? that is, not mere verse-making, though the verses be pretty in their way. Rather perish every verse *I* ever wrote, for one, than help to drag down an inch that standard of poetry which, for the sake of humanity as well as literature, should be kept high. As for simplicity and clearness, did I ever deny that they were excellent qualities? Never, surely. Only, they will not *make*

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poetry; and absolutely vain they are, and indeed all other qualities, without the essential thing, the genius, the inspiration, the insight—let us call it what we please—without which the most accomplished verse-writers had far better write prose, for their own sakes as for the world's—don't you think so? Which I say, because I sighed aloud over many names in your list, and now have taken pertly to write out the sigh at length. Too charmingly you are sure to have written—and see the danger! But Miss Fanshawe is well worth your writing of (let me say that I am sensible warmly of that) as one of the most witty of our wits in verse, men or women. I have only seen manuscript copies of some of her verses, and that years ago, but they struck me very much; and really I do not remember another female wit worthy to sit beside her, even in French literature. Motherwell is a true poet. But oh, I don't believe in your John Clares, Thomas Davises, Whittiers, Hallocks—and still less in other names which it would be invidious to name again. How pert I am! But you give me leave to be pert, and you know the meaning of it all, after all. Your editor quarrelled a little with me once, and I with him, about the 'poetesses of the united empire,' in whom I couldn't or wouldn't find a poet, though there are extant two volumes of them, and Lady Winchilsea at the head. I hold that the writer of the ballad of 'Robin Gray' was our first poetess rightly so called, before Joanna Baillie.

Mr. Lever is in Florence, I believe, now, and was at the Baths of Lucca in the summer. We never see him; it is curious. He made his way to us with the sunniest of faces and cordialest of manners at Lucca; and I, who am much taken by manner, was quite pleased with him, and wondered how it was that I didn't like his books. Well, he only wanted to see that we had the right number of eyes and no odd fingers. Robert, in return for his visit, called on him three times, I think, and I left my card on Mrs. Lever. But he never came again—he had seen enough of us, he could put down in his private diary that we had neither claw nor tail; and there an end, properly enough. In fact, he lives a different life from ours: he in the ballroom and we in the cave, nothing could be more different; and perhaps there are not many subjects of common interest between us. I have seen extracts in the 'Examiner' from Tennyson's 'In Memoriam' which seemed to me exquisitely beautiful and pathetical. Oh, there's a poet, talking of poets. Have you read Wordsworth's last work—the legacy? With regard to the elder Miss Jewsbury, do you know, I take Mr. Chorley's part against you, because, although I know her only by her writings, the writings seem to me to imply a certain vigour and originality of mind, by no means ordinary. For instance, the fragments of her letters in his 'Memorials of Mrs. Hemans' are much superior to any other letters almost in the volume—certainly to Mrs. Hemans's own. Isn't this so?

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And so you talk, you in England, of Prince Albert's 'folly,' do you really? Well, among the odd things we lean to in Italy is to an actual belief in the greatness and importance of the future exhibition. We have actually imagined it to be a noble idea, and you take me by surprise in speaking of the general distaste to it in England. Is it really possible? For the agriculturists, I am less surprised at coldness on their part; but do you fancy that the manufacturers and free-traders are cold too? Is Mr. Chorley against it equally? Yes, I am glad to hear of Mrs. Butler's success—or Fanny Kemble's, ought I to say? Our little Wiedeman, who can't speak a word yet, waxes hotter in his ecclesiastical and musical passion. Think of that baby (just cutting his eyeteeth) screaming in the streets till he is taken into the churches, kneeling on his knees to the first sound of music, and folding his hands and turning up his eyes in a sort of ecstatical state. One scarcely knows how to deal with the sort of thing: it is too soon for religious controversy. He crosses himself, I assure you. Robert says it is as well to have the eyeteeth and the Puseyistical crisis over together. The child is a very curious imaginative child, but too excitable for his age, that's all I complain of ... God bless you, my much loved friend. Write to

Your ever affectionate
E.B.B.

What books by Soulie have appeared since his death? Do you remember? I have just got 'Les Enfants de l'Amour,' by Sue. I suppose he will prove in it the illegitimacy of legitimacy, and *vice versa*. Sue is in decided decadence, for the rest, since he has taken to illustrating Socialism!

To Miss I. Blagden [Florence:] Sunday morning [about 1850].

My dear Miss Blagden,—In spite of all your *drawing* kindness, we find it impossible to go to you on Monday. We are expecting friends from Rome who will remain only a few days, perhaps, in Florence. Now it seems to me that you very often pass our door. Do you not too often leave the trace of your goodness with me? And would it not be better of you still, if you would at once make use of us and give us pleasure by pausing here, you and Miss Agassiz, to rest and refresh yourselves with tea, coffee, or whatever else you may choose? We shall be delighted to see you always, and don't fancy that I say so out of form or 'tinkling cymbalism.'

Thank you for your intention about the 'Leader.' Robert and I shall like much to see anything of John Mill's on the subject of Socialism or any other. By the 'British Review,' do you mean the *North British*? I read a clever article in that review some months ago on the German Socialists, ably embracing in its analysis the fraternity in France, and attributed, I have since heard, to Dr. Hanna, the son-in-law and biographer of Chalmers. Christian Socialists are by no means a new sect, the Moravians representing the theory with as little offence and

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absurdity as may be. What is it, after all, but an out-of-door extension of the monastic system? The religious principle, more or less apprehended, may bind men together so, absorbing their individualities, and presenting an aim *beyond the world*; but upon merely human and earthly principles no such system can stand, I feel persuaded, and I thank God for it. If Fourierism could be realised (which it surely cannot) out of a dream, the destinies of our race would shrivel up under the unnatural heat, and human nature would, in my mind, be desecrated and dishonored—because I do not believe in purification without suffering, in progress without struggle, in virtue without temptation. Least of all do I consider happiness the end of man's life. We look to higher things, have nobler ambitions.

Also, in every advancement of the world hitherto, the individual has led the masses. Thus, to elicit individuality has been the object of the best political institutions and governments. Now, in these new theories, the individual is ground down into the multitude, and society must be 'moving all together if it moves at all'—restricting the very possibility of progress by the use of the lights of genius. Genius is *always individual*.

Here's a scribble upon grave matters! I ought to be acknowledging instead your scrupulous honesty, as illustrated by five-franc pieces and Tuscan florins. Make us as useful as you can do, for the future; and please us by coming often. I am afraid your German Baroness could not make an arrangement with you, as you do not mention her. Give our best regards to Miss Agassiz, and accept them yourself, dear Miss Blagden, from

Your affectionate
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

To Mr. Westwood Florence: Thursday, December 12, 1850.

My dear Mr. Westwood,—Your book has not reached us yet, and so if I waited for that, to write, I might wait longer still. But I don't wait for that, because you bade me not to do so, and besides we have only this moment finished reading 'In Memoriam,' and it was a sort of miracle with us that we got it so soon....

December 13.—The above sentences were written yesterday, and hardly had they been written when your third letter came with its enclosure. How very kind you are to me, and how am I to thank you enough! If you had not sent me the 'Athenaeum' article I never should have seen it probably, for my husband only saw it in the reading room, where women don't penetrate (because in Italy we can't read, you see), and where the periodicals are kept so strictly, like Hesperian apples, by the dragons of the place, that none can be stolen away even for half an hour. So he could only wish me to catch sight

of that article—and you are good enough to send it and oblige us both exceedingly. For which kindness thank you, thank you! The favor shown to me in it is extreme, and I am as grateful as I ought to be. Shall I ask the 'Note

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and Query' magazine why the 'Athenaeum' does show me so much favor, while, as in a late instance, so little justice is shown to my husband? It's a problem, like another. As for poetry, I hope to do better things in it yet, though I *have* a child to 'stand in my sunshine,' as you suppose he must; but he only makes the sunbeams brighter with his glistening curls, little darling—and who can complain of that? You can't think what a good, sweet, curious, imagining child he is. Half the day I do nothing but admire him—-there's the truth. He doesn't talk yet much, but he gesticulates with extraordinary force of symbol, and makes surprising revelations to us every half-hour or so. Meanwhile Flush loses nothing, I assure you. On the contrary, he is hugged and kissed (rather too hard sometimes), and never is permitted to be found fault with by anybody under the new *regime*. If Flush is scolded, Baby cries as matter of course, and he would do admirably for a 'whipping-boy' if that excellent institution were to be revived by Young England and the Tractarians for the benefit of our deteriorated generations. I was ill towards the end of last summer, and we had to go to Siena for the sake of getting strength again, and there we lived in a villa among a sea of little hills, and wrapt up in vineyards and olive yards, enjoying everything. Much the worst of Italy is, the drawback about books. Somebody said the other day that we 'sate here like posterity'—reading books with the gloss off them. But our case in reality is far more dreary, seeing that Prince Posterity will have glossy books of his own. How exquisite 'In Memoriam' is, how earnest and true; after all, the gloss never can wear off books like that.

And as to your book, it will come, it will come, and meantime I may assure you that posterity is very impatient for it. The Italian poem will be read with the interest which is natural. You know it's a more than doubtful point whether Shakespeare ever saw Italy out of a vision, yet he and a crowd of inferior writers have written about Venice and vineyards as if born to the manner of them. We hear of Carlyle travelling in France and Germany—but I must leave room for the words you ask for from a certain hand below.

Ever dear Mr. Westwood's obliged and faithful

E.B.B.

And the 'certain hand' will write its best (and far better than any poor 'Pippa Passes') in recording a feeling which does not pass at all, that of gratitude for all such generous sympathy as dear Mr. Westwood's for E.B.B. and (in his proper degree) R. BROWNING.

To Miss Mitford Florence: December 13, 1850.

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Did I write a scolding letter, dearest Miss Mitford? So much the better, when people deserve to be scolded. The worst is, however, that it sometimes does them no sort of good, and that they will sit on among the ruins of Carthage, let ever so many messages come from Italy. My only hope now is, that you will have a mild winter in England, as we seem likely to have it here; and that in the spring, by the help of some divine interposition of friends supernaturally endowed (after the manner of Mr. Chorley), you may be made to go away into a house with fast walls and chimneys. Certainly, if you could be made to *write*, anything else is possible. That's my comfort. And the other's my hope, as I said; and so between hope and consolation I needn't scold any more. Let me tell you what I have heard of Mrs. Gaskell, for fear I should forget it later. She is connected by marriage with Mrs. A.T. Thompson, and from a friend of Mrs. Thompson's it came to me, and really seems to exonerate Chapman & Hall from the charge advanced against them. 'Mary Barton' was shown in manuscript to Mrs. Thompson, and failed to please her; and, in deference to her judgment, certain alterations were made. Subsequently it was offered to all or nearly all the publishers in London and rejected. Chapman & Hall accepted and gave a hundred pounds, as you heard, for the copyright of the work; and though the success did not, perhaps (that is quite possible), induce any liberality with regard to copies, they gave *another hundred pounds* upon printing the second edition, and it was not in the bond to do so. I am told that the liberality of the proceeding was appreciated by the author and her friends accordingly—-and there's the end of my story. Two hundred pounds is a good price—isn't it?—for a novel, as times go. Miss Lynn had only a hundred and fifty for her Egyptian novel, or perhaps for the Greek one. Taking the long run of poetry (if it runs at all), I am half given to think that it pays better than the novel does, in spite of everything. Not that we speak out of golden experience; alas, no! We have had not a sou from our books for a year past, the booksellers being bound of course to cover their own expenses first. Then this Christmas account has not yet reached us. But the former editions paid us regularly so much a year, and so will the present ones, I hope. Only I was not thinking of *them*, in preferring what may strike you as an extravagant paradox, but of Tennyson's returns from Moxon last year, which I understand amounted to five hundred pounds. To be sure, 'In Memoriam' was a new success, which should not prevent our considering the fact of a regular income proceeding from the previous books. A novel flashes up for a season and does not often outlast it. For 'Mary Barton' I am a little, little disappointed, do you know. I have just done reading it. There is power and truth—she can shake and she can pierce—but I wish half

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the book away, it is so tedious every now and then; and besides I want more beauty, more air from the universal world—these classbooks must always be defective as works of art. How could I help being disappointed a little when Mrs. Jameson told me that 'since the "Bride of Lammermoor," nothing had appeared equal to "Mary Barton"?' Then the style of the book is slovenly, and given to a kind of phraseology which would be vulgar even as colloquial English. Oh, it is a powerful book in many ways. You are not to set me down as hypercritical. Probably the author will, write herself clear of many of her faults: she has strength enough. As to 'In Memoriam,' I have seen it, I have read it—dear Mr. Kenyon had the goodness to send it to me by an American traveller—and now I really do disagree with you, for the book has gone to my heart and soul; I think it full of deep pathos and beauty. All I wish away is the marriage hymn at the end, and *that* for every reason I wish away—it's a discord in the music. The monotony is a part of the position—(the sea is monotonous, and so is lasting grief.) Your complaint is against fate and humanity rather than against the poet Tennyson. Who that has suffered has not felt wave after wave break dully against one rock, till brain and heart, with all their radiances, seemed lost in a single shadow? So the effect of the book is artistic, I think, and indeed I do not wonder at the opinion which has reached us from various quarters that Tennyson stands higher through having written it. You see, what he appeared to want, according to the view of many, was an earnest personality and direct purpose. In this last book, though of course there is not room in it for that exercise of creative faculty which elsewhere established his fame, he appeals heart to heart, directly as from his own to the universal heart, and we all feel him nearer to us—*I* do—and so do others. Have you read a poem called 'the Roman' which was praised highly in the 'Athenaeum,' but did not seem to Robert to justify the praise in the passages extracted? written by somebody with certainly a *nom de guerre*—Sidney Yendys. Observe, *Yendys* is *Sidney* reversed. Have you heard anything about it, or seen? The 'Athenaeum' has been gracious to me beyond gratitude almost; nothing could by possibility be kinder. A friend of mine sent me the article from Brussels—a Mr. Westwood, who writes poems himself; yes, and poetical poems too, written with an odorous, fresh sense of poetry about them. He has not original power, more's the pity: but he has stayed near the rose in the 'sweet breath and buddings of the spring,' and although that won't make anyone live beyond spring-weather, it is the expression of a sensitive and aspirant nature; and the man is interesting and amiable—an old correspondent of mine, and kind to me always. From the little I know of Mr. Bennett, I should say that Mr. Westwood stood much higher in the matter

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of gifts, though I fear that neither of them will make way in that particular department of literature selected by them for action. Oh, my dearest friend, you may talk about coteries, but the English society at Florence (from what I hear of the hum of it at a distance) is worse than any coterie-society in the world. A coterie, if I understand the thing, is informed by a unity of sentiment, or faith, or prejudice; but this society here is not informed at all. People come together to gamble or dance, and if there's an end, why so much the better; but there's *not* an end in most cases, by any manner of means, and against every sort of innocence. Mind, I imply nothing about Mr. Lever, who lives irreproachably with his wife and family, rides out with his children in a troop of horses to the Cascine, and yet is as social a person as his joyous temperament leads him to be. But we live in a cave, and peradventure he is afraid of the damp of us—who knows? We know very few residents in Florence, and these, with chance visitors, chiefly Americans, are all that keep us from solitude; every now and then in the evening somebody drops in to tea. Would, indeed, you were near! but should I be satisfied with you 'once a week,' do you fancy. Ah, you would soon love Robert. You couldn't help it, I am sure. I should be soon turned down to an underplace, and, under the circumstances, would not struggle. Do you remember once telling me that 'all men are tyrants'?—as sweeping an opinion as the Apostle's, that 'all men are liars.' Well, if you knew Robert you would make an exception certainly. Talking of the artistical English here, somebody told me the other day of a young Cambridge or Oxford man who deducted from his researches in Rome and Florence that 'Michael Angelo was a wag.' Another, after walking through the Florentine galleries, exclaimed to a friend of mine, 'I have seen nothing here equal to those magnificent pictures in Paris by Paul de Kock.' My friend humbly suggested that he might mean Paul de la Roche. But see what English you send us for the most part. We have had one very interesting visitor lately, the grandson of Goethe. He did us the honour, he said, of spending two days in Florence on our account, he especially wishing to see Robert on account of some sympathy of view about 'Paracelsus.' There can scarcely be a more interesting young man—quite young he seems, and full of aspiration of the purest kind towards the good and true and beautiful, and not towards the poor laurel crowns attainable from any possible public. I don't know when I have been so charmed by a visitor, and indeed Robert and I paid him the highest compliment we could, by wishing, one to another, that our little Wiedeman might be like him some day. I quite agree with you about the church of your Henry. It surprises me that a child of seven years should find pleasure even once a day in the long English service—too long, according to my doxy, for matured years.

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As to fanaticism, it depends on a defect of intellect rather than on an excess of the adoring faculty. The latter cannot, I think, be too fully developed. How I shall like you to see our Wiedeman! He is a radiant little creature, really, yet he won't talk; he does nothing but gesticulate, only making his will and pleasure wonderfully clear and supreme, I assure you. He's a tyrant, ready made for your theory. If your book is 'better than I expect,' what will it be? God bless you! Be well, and love me, and write to me, for I am your ever affectionate

BA.

To Mrs. Martin Florence: January 30, 1851.

Here I am at last, dearest friend. But you forget how you told me, when you wrote your 'long letter,' that you were going away into chaos somewhere, and that your address couldn't be known yet. It was this which made me delay the answer to that welcome letter—and to begin to 'put off' is fatal, as perhaps you know. Now forgive me, and I will behave better in future, indeed....

I am quite well, and looking well, they say; but the frightful illness of the autumn left me paler and thinner long after the perfect recovery. The physician told Robert afterwards that few women would have recovered at all; and when I left Siena I was as able to walk, and as well in every respect as ever, notwithstanding everything—think, for instance, of my walking to St. Miniato, here in Florence! You remember, perhaps, what that pull is. I dare say you heard from Henrietta how we enjoyed our rustication at Siena. It is pleasant even to look back on it. We were obliged to look narrowly at the economies, more narrowly than usual; but the cheapness of the place suited the occasion, and the little villa, like a mere tent among the vines, charmed us, though the doors didn't shut, and though (on account of the smallness) Robert and I had to whisper all our talk whenever Wiedeman was asleep. Oh, I wish you were in Italy. I wish you had come here this winter which has been so mild, and which, with ordinary prudence, would certainly have suited dear Mr. Martin.... I tried to dissuade the Peytons from making the experiment, through the fear of its not answering.... We can't get them into society, you see, because we are out of it, having struggled to keep out of it with hands and feet, and partially having succeeded, knowing scarcely anybody except bringers of letters of introduction, and those chiefly Americans and not residents in Florence. The other day, however, Mrs. Trollope and her daughter-in-law called on us, and it is settled that we are to know them; though Robert had made a sort of vow never to sit in the same room with the author of certain books directed against liberal institutions and Victor Hugo's poetry. I had a longer battle to fight, on the matter of this vow, than any since my marriage, and had some scruples at last of taking advantage of the pure goodness which induced him to yield to my wishes;

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but I *did*, because I hate to seem ungracious and unkind to people; and human beings, besides, are better than their books, than their principles, and even than their everyday actions, sometimes. I am always crying out: 'Blessed be the inconsistency of men.' Then I thought it probable that, the first shock of the cold water being over, he would like the proposed new acquaintances very much—and so it turns out. She was very agreeable, and kind, and good-natured, and talked much about *you*, which was a charm of itself; and we mean to be quite friends, and to lend each other books, and to forget one another's offences, in print or otherwise. Also, she admits us on her private days; for she has public days (dreadful to relate!), and is in the full flood and flow of Florentine society. Do write to me, will you? or else I shall set you down as vexed with me. The state of politics here is dismal. Newspapers put down; Protestant places of worship shut up. It is so bad that it must soon be better. What are you both thinking of the 'Papal aggression'?[206] 'Are you frightened? Are you frenzied? For my part I can't get up much steam about it. The 'Great Insult' was simply a great mistake, the consequence (natural enough) of the Tractarian idiocies as enacted in Italy.

God bless both of you, dearest and always remembered friends! Robert's best regards, he says.

Your affectionate
BA.

Tell me your thoughts about France. I am so anxious about the crisis there.[207] We have had a very interesting visit lately from the grandson of Goethe.

[Footnote 206: The Papal Bull appointing Roman Catholic bishops throughout England was issued on September 24, 1850, and England was now in the throes of the anti-papal excitement produced by it.]

[Footnote 207: "Where Louis Napoleon was engaged in his series of encroachments on the power of the Assembly and intrigues for the imperial throne."]

To Miss Browning Florence: April 23, 1851 [postmark].

My dearest Sarianna,—I do hope that Robert takes his share of the blame in using and abusing you as we have done. It was altogether too bad—shameful—to send that last MS. for you to copy out; and I did, indeed, make a little outcry about it, only he insisted on having it so. Was it very wrong, I wonder? Your kindness and affectionateness I never doubt of; but if you are not quite strong just now, you might be teased, in spite of your heart, by all that copying work—not pleasant at any time. Well, believe that I thank you, at least gratefully, for what you have done. So quickly too! The advertisement at

the end of the week proves how you must have worked for me. Thank you, dear Sarianna.

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Robert will have told you our schemes, and how we are going to work, and are to love you *near* for the future, I hope. You, who are wise, will approve of us, I think, for keeping on our Florentine apartment, so as to run no more risk than is necessary in making the Paris experiment. We shall let the old dear rooms, and make money by them, and keep them to fall back upon, in case we fail at Paris. 'But we'll not fail.' Well, I hope not, though I am very brittle still and susceptible to climate. Dearest Sarianna, it will do you infinite good to come over to us every now and then—you want change, absolute change of scene and air and climate, I am confident; and you never will be right till you have had it. We talk, Robert and I, of carrying you back with us to Rome next year as an English trophy. Meanwhile you will see Wiedeman, you and dear Mr. Browning. Don't expect to see a baby of Anak, that's all. Robert is always measuring him on the door, and reporting such wonderful growth (some inch a week, I think), that if you receive his reports you will cry out on beholding the child. At least, you'll say: 'How little he must have been to be no larger now.' You'll fancy he must have begun from a mustard-seed! The fact is, he is small, only full of life and joy to the brim. I am not afraid of your not loving him, nor of his not loving you. He has a loving little heart, I assure you. If anyone pricks a finger with a needle he begins to cry—he can't bear to see the least living thing hurt. And when he loves, it is well. Robert says I must finish, so here ends dearest Sarianna's

Ever affectionate sister
BA.

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