

Dramatic Romances eBook

Dramatic Romances by Robert Browning

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INTRODUCTION

[The Dramatic Romances, . . . enriched by some of the poems originally printed in *Men and Women*, and a few from *Dramatic Lyrics* as first printed, include some of Browning's finest and most characteristic work. In several of them the poet displays his familiarity with the life and spirit of the Renaissance—a period portrayed by him with a fidelity more real than history—for he enters into the feelings that give rise to action, while the historian is busied only with the results growing out of the moving force of feeling.

The egotism of the Ferrara husband outraged at the gentle wife because she is as gracious toward those who rendered her small courtesies, and seemed as thankful to them as she was to him for his gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name, opens up for inspection the heart of a husband at a time when men exercised complete control over their wives, and could satisfy their jealous, selfish instincts by any cruel methods they chose to adopt, with no one to say them "nay." The highly developed artistic sense shown by this husband is not incompatible with his consummate selfishness and cruelty, as many tales of that time might be brought forward to illustrate. The husband in "The Statue and the Bust" belongs to the same type, and the situation there is the inevitable outcome of a civilization in which women were not consulted as to whom they would marry, and naturally often fell a prey to love if it should come to them afterwards. Weakness of will in the case of the lovers in this poem wrecked their lives; for they were not strong enough to follow either duty or love. Another glimpse is caught of this period when husbands and brothers and fathers meted out what they considered justice to the women in "In a Gondola." "The Grammarian's Funeral" gives also an aspect of Renaissance life—the fervor for learning characteristic of the earlier days of the Renaissance when devoted pedants, as Arthur Symonds says in referring to this poem, broke ground in the restoration to the modern world of the civilization and learning of ancient Greece and Rome." Again, "The Heretic's Tragedy" and "Holy-Cross Day" picture most vividly the methods resorted to by the dying church in its attempts to keep control of the souls of a humanity seething toward religious tolerance.

With only a small space at command, it is difficult to decide on the poems to be touched upon, especially where there is not one but would repay prolonged attention, due no less to the romantic interest of the stories, the marvellous penetration into human motives, the grasp of historical atmospheres, than to the originality and perfection of their artistry.

A word must be said of "The Flight of the Duchess" and "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," both poems which have been productive of many commentaries, and both holding their own amid the bray [sic] of critics as unique and beautiful specimens of poetic art. Certainly no two poems could be chosen to show wider diversity in the poet's genius than these.

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The story told by the huntsman in "The Flight of the Duchess" is interesting enough simply as a story, but the telling of it is inimitable. One can see before him the devoted, kindly man, somewhat clumsy of speech, as indicated by the rough rhymes, and characteristically drawing his illustrations from the calling he follows. Keen in his critical observation of the Duke and other members of the household, he, nevertheless, has a tender appreciation of the difficulties of the young Duchess in this unloving artificial environment.

When the Gypsy Queen sings her song through his memory of it, the rhymes and rhythm take on a befitting harmoniousness and smoothness contrasting finely with the remainder of the poem.

By means of this song, moreover, the horizon is enlarged beyond the immediate ken of the huntsman. The race-instinct, which has so strong a hold upon the Gypsies, is exalted into a wondrous sort of love which carries everything before it. This loving reality is also set over against the unloving artificiality of the first part of the poem. The temptation is too strong for the love-starved little Duchess, and even the huntsman and Jacinth come under her hypnotic spell.

Very different in effect is "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came." The one, rich in this lay of human emotion, couched in the simple language of reality; the other, a symbolic picture of the struggle and aspiration of the soul. Interpreters have tried to pin this latter poem down to the limits of an allegory, and find a specific meaning for every phrase and picture, but it has too much the quality of the modern symbolistic writing to admit of any treatment so prosaic. In this respect it resembles music. Each mind will draw from it an interpretation suited to its own attitude and experiences. Reduced to the simplest possible lines of interpretation, it symbolizes the inevitable fate which drives a truth-seeking soul to see the falsity of ideals once thought absolute, yet in the face of the ruin of those ideals courage toward the continuance of aspiration is never for a moment lost.

As a bit of art, it is strikingly imaginative, and suggests the picture-quality of the tapestried horse, which Browning himself says was the chief inspiration of the poem. It is a fine example of the way in which the "strange and winged" fancy of the poet may take its flight from so simple an object as this tapestried horse, evidently a sorry beast too, in its needled presentment, or the poetic impulse would not have expressed itself in the vindictive, "I never saw a horse [sic] I hated so."

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,



On a little mound, Napoleon
 Stood on our storming-day;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
 Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
 Oppressive with its mind.

Page 3

II

Just as perhaps he mused, "My plans
That soar, to earth may fall, 10
Let once my army-leader Lannes
Waver at yonder wall."
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect 20
(So tight he kept his lips compressed
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace
"We've got you Ratisbon!
"The Marshal's in the market-place,
And you'll be there anon
To see your flag-bird flap his vans
Where I, to heart's desire, 30
Perched him—" The chief's eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The chief's eye flashed, but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle's-eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes,
"You're wounded!" "Nay," the soldier's pride
Touched to the quick, he said:



“I’m killed, Sire!” And his chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead. 40

Notes: “Incident of the French Camp.” A story of modest heroism. The incident related is said by Mrs. Orr to be a true one of the siege of Ratisbon by Napoleon in 1809—except that the real hero was a man.

I. Ratisbon: (German Regensburg), an ancient city of Bavaria on the right bank of the Danube, has endured seventeen sieges since the tenth century, the last one being that of Napoleon, 1809.

II. Lannes: Duke of Montebello, one of Napoleon’s generals.

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

I

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

II

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, “Good folk, mere noise repels—
But give me your sun from yonder skies!”
They had answered, “And afterward, what else?” 10

III



Page 4

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Nought man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

IV

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow. 20

V

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

VI

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?"—God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so. 30

Notes: "The Patriot" is a hero's story of the reward and punishment dealt him for his services within one year. To act regardless of praise or blame, save God's, seems safer.

MY LAST DUCHESS Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read



Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
the curtain I have drawn for you, but I) 10
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat"; such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough 20
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good!

Page 5

but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech (which I have not) to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
E'en that would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Notes: "My Last Duchess" puts in the mouth of a Duke of Ferrara, a typical husband and art patron of the Renaissance, a description of his last wife, whose happy nature and universal kindliness were a perpetual affront to his exacting self-predominance, and whose suppression, by his command, has made the vacancy he is now, in his interview with the envoy for a new match, taking precaution to fill more acceptably.

3. Fra Pandolf, and 56. Claus of Innsbruck, are imaginary.

COUNT GISMOND

Aix IN Provence

**I**

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

II

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
All points to one, he must have schemed!
That miserable morning saw
Few half so happy as I seemed, 10
While being dressed in queen's array
To give our tourney prize away.

III

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

IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
By virtue of her brow and breast; 20
Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
Had either of them spoke, instead
Of glancing sideways with still head!



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V

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
 My birthday song quite through, adjust
The last rose in my garland, fling
 A last look on the mirror, trust
My arms to each an arm of theirs,
And so descend the castle-stairs— 30

VI

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

VII

And they could let me take my state
 And foolish throne amid applause
Of all come there to celebrate
 My queen's-day—Oh I think the cause 40
Of much was, they forgot no crowd
Makes up for parents in their shroud!

VIII

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

IX

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
 With his two boys: I can proceed. 50



Well, at that moment, who should stalk
Forth boldly—to my face, indeed—
But Gauthier, and he thundered “Stay!”
And all stayed. “Bring no crowns, I say!”

X

“Bring torches! Wind the penance-sheet
About her! Let her shun the chaste,
Or lay herself before their feet!
Shall she whose body I embraced
A night long, queen it in the day?
For honour’s sake no crowns, I say!” 60

XI

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

XII

Till out strode Gismond; then I knew
That I was saved. I never met
His face before, but, at first view,
I felt quite sure that God had set 70
Himself to Satan; who would spend
A minute’s mistrust on the end?

XIII

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



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XIV

This glads me most, that I enjoyed
The heart of the joy, with my content 80
In watching Gismond unalloyed
By any doubt of the event:
God took that on him—I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

XV

Did I not watch him while he let
His armourer just brace his greaves,
Rivet his hauberk, on the fret
The while! His foot. . . my memory leaves
No least stamp out, nor how anon
He pulled his ringing gauntlets on. 90

XVI

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

XVII

Which done, he dragged him to my feet
And said "Here die, but end thy breath
In full confession, lest thou fleet
From my first, to God's second death! 100
Say, hast thou lied?" And, "I have lied
To God and her," he said, and died.

XVIII

Then Gismond, kneeling to me, asked
What safe my heart holds, though no word



Could I repeat now, if I tasked
My powers for ever, to a third
Dear even as you are. Pass the rest
Until I sank upon his breast.

XIX

Over my head his arm he flung
Against the world; and scarce I felt 110
His sword (that dripped by me and swung)
A little shifted in its belt:
For he began to say the while
How South our home lay many a mile.

XX

So 'mid the shouting multitude
We two walked forth to never more
Return. My cousins have pursued
Their life, untroubled as before
I vexed them. Gauthier's dwelling-place
God lighten! May his soul find grace! 120

XXI

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

Notes: "Count Gismond: Aix in Provence" illustrates, in the person of the woman who relates to a friend an episode of her own life, the power of innate purity to raise up for her a defender when caught in the toils woven by the unsuspected envy and hypocrisy of her cousins and Count Gauthier, who attempt to bring dishonor upon her, on her birthday, with the seeming intention of honoring her. Her faith that the trial by combat between Gauthier and Gismond must end in Gismond's victory and her vindication reflects most truly, as Arthur Symonds has pointed out, the medieval atmosphere of chivalrous France.



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124. Tercel: a male falcon.

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

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

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

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

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

Then back again his curls he threw,
And cheerful turned to work anew. 10

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

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

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

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

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone. 20

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

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

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



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

And morning, evening, noon and night,
Praised God in place of Theocrite. 30

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

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

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

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

God said, "A praise is in mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear: 40

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

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

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

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

In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery, 50

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

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

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

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



And rising from the sickness drear
He grew a priest, and now stood here. 60

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

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



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

"Thy voice's praise seemed weak; it dropped—
Creation's chorus stopped!

"Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain. 70

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

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

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

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

Notes: "The Boy and the Angel." An imaginary legend illustrating the worth of humble, human love to God, who missed in the praise of the Pope, Theocrite, and of the Angel Gabriel, the precious human quality in the song of the poor boy, Theocrite.

INSTANS TYRANNUS

I

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

II

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



III

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

IV

Had he kith now or kin, were access
To his heart, did I press:
Just a son or a mother to seize!
No such booty as these.
Were it simply a friend to pursue
’Mid my million or two,
Who could pay me in person or pelf
What he owes me himself! 30
No: I could not but smile through my chafe:
For the fellow lay safe
As his mates do, the midge and the nit,
—Through minuteness, to wit.

V

Then a humour more great took its place
At the thought of his face,
The droop, the low cares of the mouth,
The trouble uncouth
’Twixt the brows, all that air one is fain
To put out of its pain. 40
And, “no!” I admonished myself,
“Is one mocked by an elf,
Is one baffled by toad or by rat?



Page 10

The gravamen's in that!
How the lion, who crouches to suit
His back to my foot,
Would admire that I stand in debate!
But the small turns the great
If it vexes you, that is the thing!
Toad or rat vex the king? 50
Though I waste half my realm to unearth
Toad or rat, 'tis well worth!"

VI

So, I soberly laid my last plan
To extinguish the man.
Round his creep-hole, with never a break
Ran my fires for his sake;
Over-head, did my thunder combine
With my underground mine:
Till I looked from my labour content
To enjoy the event. 60

VII

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
Did I say "without friend"?
Say rather, from marge to blue marge
The whole sky grew his targe
With the sun's self for visible boss,
While an Arm ran across
Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
Where the wretch was safe prest!
Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
The man sprang to his feet, 70
Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
—So, I was afraid!

Notes: "Instans Tyrannus" is a despot's confession of one of his own experiences which showed him the inviolability of the weakest man who is in the right and who can call the



spiritual force of good to his aid against the utmost violence or cunning.—“Instans Tyrannus,” or the threatening tyrant, suggested by Horace, third Ode in Book *iii*:

“Justum et tenacem propositi vlrum,
Non civium ardor prava jubentium,
Non vultus instantis tyranni,” *etc.*

[The just man tenacious of purpose is not to be turned aside by the heat of the populace nor the brow of the threatening tyrant.]

MESMERISM

I

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

II

If at night, when doors are shut,
And the wood-worm picks,
And the death-watch ticks,
And the bar has a flag of smut,
And a cat's in the water-butt— 10

III

And the socket floats and flares,
And the house-beams groan,
And a foot unknown
Is surmised on the garret-stairs,
And the locks slip unawares—

IV

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

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V

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

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

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

IX

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



X

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

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

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



XV

And must follow as I require,
 As befits a thrall,
 Bringing flesh and all,
Essence and earth-attire
To the source of the tractile fire:

XVI

Till the house called hers, not mine,
 With a growing weight
 Seems to suffocate
If she break not its leaden line
And escape from its close confine. 80



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XVII

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

XVIII

Making thro' rain and wind
O'er the broken shrubs,
'Twixt the stems and stubs,
With a still, composed, strong mind,
Nor a care for the world behind— 90

XIX

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

XX

While I—to the shape, I too
Feel my soul dilate
Nor a whit abate,
And relax not a gesture due,
As I see my belief come true. 100

XXI

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



XXII

Ha! was the hair so first?
What, unfileted,
Made alive, and spread
Through the void with a rich outburst,
Chestnut gold-interspersed? 110

XXIII

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

XXIV

“Now—now”—the door is heard!
Hark, the stairs! and near—
Nearer—and here—
“Now!” and at call the third
She enters without a word. 120

XXV

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

XXVI

First I will pray. Do Thou
That ownest the soul,
Yet wilt grant control
To another, nor disallow
For a time, restrain me now! 130

XXVII

I admonish me while I may,
 Not to squander guilt,
 Since require Thou wilt
At my hand its price one day!
What the price is, who can say?

Notes: “Mesmerism.” With a continuous tension of will, whose unbroken concentration impregnates the very structure of the poem, a mesmerist describes the processes of the act by which he summons shape and soul of the woman he desires; and then reverent perception of the sacredness of the soul awes him from trespassing upon another’s individuality.



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THE GLOVE

(Peter Ronsard, loquitur)

“Heigho!” yawned one day King Francis,
“Distance all value enhances.
When a man’s busy, why, leisure
Strikes him as wonderful pleasure:
Faith, and at leisure once is he?
Straightway he wants to be busy.
Here we’ve got peace; and aghast I’m
Caught thinking war the true pastime.
Is there a reason in metre?
Give us your speech, master Peter!” 10
I who, if mortal dare say so,
Ne’er am at loss with my Naso
“Sire,” I replied, “joys prove cloudlets:
“Men are the merest Ixions”—
Here the King whistled aloud, “Let’s
—Heigho—go look at our lions.”
Such are the sorrowful chances
If you talk fine to King Francis.

And so, to the courtyard proceeding,
Our company, Francis was leading, 20
Increased by new followers tenfold
Before he arrived at the penfold;
Lords, ladies, like clouds which bedizen
At sunset the western horizon.
And Sir De Lorge pressed ’mid the foremost
With the dame he professed to adore most.
Oh, what a face! One by fits eyed
Her, and the horrible pitside;
For the penfold surrounded a hollow
Which led where the eye scarce dared follow 30
And shelved to the chamber secluded
Where Bluebeard, the great lion, brooded.

The King hailed his keeper, an Arab
As glossy and black as a scarab,
And bade him make sport and at once stir
Up and out of his den the old monster.
They opened a hole in the wire-work



Across it, and dropped there a firework,
And fled: one's heart's beating redoubled;
A pause, while the pit's mouth was troubled, 40
The blackness and silence so utter,
By the firework's slow sparkling and sputter;
Then earth in a sudden contortion
Gave out to our gaze her abortion.
Such a brute! Were I friend Clement Marot
(Whose experience of nature's but narrow
And whose faculties move in no small mist
When he versifies David the Psalmist)
I should study that brute to describe you
Illum Juda Leonem de Tribu. 50
One's whole blood grew curdling and creepy
To see the black mane, vast and heapy,
The tail in the air stiff and straining
The wide eyes, nor waxing nor waning,
As over the barrier which bounded
His platform, and us who surrounded
The barrier, they reached and they rested
On space that might stand him in best stead:
For who knew, he thought, what the amazement,
The eruption of clatter and blaze meant, 60
And if, in this minute of wonder,
No outlet, 'mid lightning and thunder,
Lay broad, and, his shackles all shivered,
The lion at last was delivered?
Ay, that was the open sky o'erhead!
And you saw by the flash on his forehead,

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By the hope in those eyes wide and steady,
He was leagues in the desert already
Driving the flocks up the mountain
Or catlike couched hard by the fountain 70
To waylay the date-gathering negress:
So guarded he entrance or egress.
“How he stands!” quoth the King: “we may well swear,
(No novice, we’ve won our spurs elsewhere
And so can afford the confession)
We exercise wholesome discretion
In keeping aloof from his threshold;
Once hold you, those jaws want no fresh hold,
Their first would too pleasantly purloin
The visitor’s brisket or surloin: 80
But who’s he would prove so fool-hardy?
Not the best man of Marignan, pardie!”

The sentence no sooner was uttered,
Than over the rails a glove fluttered,
Fell close to the lion, and rested:
The dame ’twas, who flung it and jested
With life so, De Lorge had been wooing
For months past; he sat there pursuing
His suit, weighing out with nonchalance
Fine speeches like gold from a balance. 90

Sound the trumpet, no true knight’s a tarrier!
De Lorge made one leap at the barrier,
Walked straight to the glove—while the lion
Ne’er moved, kept his far-reaching eye on
The palm-tree-edged desert-spring’s sapphire,
And the musky oiled skin of the Kaffir—
Picked it up, and as calmly retreated,
Leaped back where the lady was seated,
And full in the face of its owner
Flung the glove.

“Your heart’s queen, you dethrone her? 100
So should I!”—cried the King—“’twas mere vanity
Not love set that task to humanity!”



Lords and ladies alike turned with loathing
>From such a proved wolf in sheep's clothing.

Not so, I; for I caught an expression
In her brow's undisturbed self-possession
Amid the Court's scoffing and merriment,
As if from no pleasing experiment
She rose, yet of pain not much heedful
So long as the process was needful,— 110
As if she had tried in a crucible,
To what "speeches like gold" were reducible,
And, finding the finest prove copper,
Felt the smoke in her face was but proper;
To know what she had not to trust to,
Was worth all the ashes and dust too.
She went out 'mid hooting and laughter;
Clement Marot stayed; I followed after,
And asked, as a grace, what it all meant?
If she wished not the rash deed's recalment? 120
For I"—so I spoke—"am a poet:
Human nature,—behoves that I know it!"

She told me, "Too long had I heard
Of the deed proved alone by the word:
For my love—what De Lorge would not dare!
With my scorn—what De Lorge could compare!
And the endless descriptions of death
He would brave when my lip formed a breath,
I must reckon as braved, or, of course,
Doubt his word—and moreover, perforce,



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130

For such gifts as no lady could spurn,
Must offer my love in return.
When I looked on your lion, it brought
All the dangers at once to my thought,
Encountered by all sorts of men,
Before he was lodged in his den—
>From the poor slave whose club or bare hands
Dug the trap, set the snare on the sands,
With no King and no Court to applaud,
By no shame, should he shrink, overawed, 140
Yet to capture the creature made shift,
That his rude boys might laugh at the gift
—To the page who last leaped o'er the fence
Of the pit, on no greater pretence
Than to get back the bonnet he dropped,
Lest his pay for a week should be stopped.
So, wiser I judged it to make
One trial what 'death for my sake'
Really meant, while the power was yet mine,

Than to wait until time should define 150
Such a phrase not so simply as I,
Who took it to mean just 'to die.'
The blow a glove gives is but weak:
Does the mark yet discolour my cheek?
But when the heart suffers a blow,
Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

I looked, as away she was sweeping.
And saw a youth eagerly keeping
As close as he dared to the doorway.
No doubt that a noble should more weigh 160
His life than befits a plebeian;
And yet, had our brute been Nemean—
(I judge by a certain calm fervour
The youth stepped with, forward to serve her)
—He'd have scarce thought you did him the worst turn
If you whispered "Friend, what you'd get, first earn!"
And when, shortly after, she carried
Her shame from the Court, and they married,



To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur. 170

For De Lorge, he made women with men vie,
Those in wonder and praise, these in envy;
And in short stood so plain a head taller.
That he wooed and won . . . how do you call her?
The beauty, that rose in the sequel
To the King's love, who loved her a week well.
And 'twas noticed he never would honour
De Lorge (who looked daggers upon her)
With the easy commission of stretching
His legs in the service, and fetching 180
His wife, from her chamber, those straying
Sad gloves she was always mislaying,
While the King took the closet to chat in,—
But of course this adventure came pat in.
And never the King told the story,
How bringing a glove brought such glory,
But the wife smiled—"His nerves are grown firmer:
Mine he brings now and utters no murmur."

Venienti occurrite morbo!
With which moral I drop my theorbo. 190

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Notes: "The Glove" gives a transcript from Court life, in Paris, under Francis I. In making Ronsard the mouthpiece for a deeper observation of the meaning of the incident he is supposed to witness and describe than Marot and the rest saw, characteristic differences between these two poets of the time are brought out, the genuineness of courtly love and chivalry is tested, and to the original story of the glove is added a new view of the lady's character; a sketch of her humbler and truer lover, and their happiness; and a pendent scene showing the courtier De Lorges, having won a beauty for his wife, in the ignominious position of assisting the king to enjoy her favors and of submitting to pleasantries upon his discomfiture. The original story as told by Poullain de St. Croix in his *Essais Historiques sur Paris* ran thus: "One day whilst Francis I amused himself with looking at a combat between his lions, a lady, having let her glove drop, said to De Lorges, 'If you would have me believe that you love me as much as you swear you do, go and bring back my glove.' De Lorges went down, picked up the glove from amidst the ferocious beasts, returned, and threw it in the lady's face; and in spite of all her advances and cajoleries would never look at her again." Schiller running across this anecdote of St. Croix, in 1797, as he writes Goethe, wrote a poem on it which adds nothing to the story. Leigh Hunt's 'The Glove and the Lions' adds some traits. It characterizes the lady as shallow and vain, with smiles and eyes which always seem'd the same." She calculates since "king, ladies, lovers, all look on," that "the occasion is divine" to drop her glove and "prove his love, then look at him and smile"; and after De Lorges has returned and thrown the glove, "but not with love, right in the lady's face," Hunt makes the king rise and swear "rightly done! No love, quoth he, but vanity, sets love a task like that!" This is the material Browning worked on; he makes use of this speech of the king's, but remodels the lady's character wholly, and gives her an appreciative lover, and also a keen-eyed young poet to tell her story afresh and to reveal through his criticism the narrowness of the Court and the Court poets.

12. Naso: Ovid. Love of the classics and curiosity as to human nature were both characteristic of Peter Ronsard (1524-1585), at one time page to Francis I, the most erudite and original of French medieval poets.

45. Clement Marot: (1496-1544), Court poet to Francis I. His nature and verse were simpler than Ronsard's, and he belonged more peculiarly to his own day.

48. Versifies David: Marot was suspected of Protestant leanings which occasioned his imprisonment twice, and put him in need of the protection Francis and his sister gave him. Among his works were sixty-five epistles addressed to grandees, attesting his courtiership, and the paraphrase of forty-nine of the Psalms to which Ronsard alludes.

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50. Illum Juda, *etc.*: that lion of the tribe of Judah.

89. Venienti, *etc.*: Meet the coming disease; that is, if evil be anticipated, don't wait till it seizes you, but dare to assure yourself and then forestall it as the lady did.

190. Theorbo: an old Italian stringed instrument such as pages used.

TIME'S REVENGES

I've a Friend, over the sea;
I like him, but he loves me.
It all grew out of the books I write;
They find such favour in his sight
That he slaughters you with savage looks
Because you don't admire my books.
He does himself though,—and if some vein
Were to snap tonight in this heavy brain,
To-morrow month, if I lived to try,
Round should I just turn quietly, 10
Or out of the bedclothes stretch my hand
Till I found him, come from his foreign land
To be my nurse in this poor place,
And make my broth and wash my face
And light my fire and, all the while,
Bear with his old good-humoured smile
That I told him "Better have kept away
Than come and kill me, night and day,
With, worse than fever throbs and shoots,
The creaking of his clumsy boots." 20
I am as sure that this he would do,
As that Saint Paul's is striking two.
And I think I rather . . . woe is me!
—Yes, rather would see him than not see,
If lifting a hand could seat him there
Before me in the empty chair
To-night, when my head aches indeed,
And I can neither think nor read
Nor make these purple fingers hold
The pen; this garret's freezing cold! 30

And I've a Lady—there he wakes,
The laughing fiend and prince of snakes
Within me, at her name, to pray



Fate send some creature in the way
Of my love for her, to be down-torn,
Upthrust and outward-borne,
So I might prove myself that sea
Of passion which I needs must be!
Call my thoughts false and my fancies quaint
And my style infirm and its figures faint, 40
All the critics say, and more blame yet,
And not one angry word you get.
But, please you, wonder I would put
My cheek beneath that lady's foot
Rather than trample under mine
That laurels of the Florentine,
And you shall see how the devil spends
A fire God gave for other ends!
I tell you, I stride up and down
This garret, crowned with love's best crown, 50
And feasted with love's perfect feast,
To think I kill for her, at least,
Body and soul and peace and fame,
Alike youth's end and manhood's aim,
—So is my spirit, as flesh with sin,
Filled full, eaten out and in
With the face of her, the eyes of her,
The lips, the little chin, the stir
Of shadow round her mouth; and she
—I'll tell you,—calmly would decree 60
That I should roast at a slow fire,

Page 18

If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.

There may be heaven; there must be hell;
Meantime, there is our earth here—well!

Notes: “Time’s Revenges.” An author soliloquizes in his garret over the fact that he possesses a friend who loves him and would do anything in his power to serve him, but for whom he cares almost nothing. At the same time he himself loves a woman to such distraction that he counts himself crowned with love’s best crown while sacrificing his soul, his body, his peace, and his fame in brooding on his love, while she could calmly decree that he should roast at a slow fire if it would compass her frivolously ambitious designs. Thus his indifference to his friend is avenged by the indifference the lady shows toward him.

46. The Florentine: Dante. Used here, seemingly, as a symbol of the highest attainments in poesy, his (the speaker’s) reverence for which is so great that he would rather put his cheek under his lady’s foot than that poetry should suffer any indignity at his hands; yet in spite of all the possibilities open to him through his enthusiasm for poetry, he prefers wasting his entire energies upon one unworthy of him.

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

That second time they hunted me
>From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
And Austria, hounding far and wide
Her blood-hounds thro’ the country-side,
Breathed hot and instant on my trace,—
I made six days a hiding-place
Of that dry green old aqueduct
Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
The fire-flies from the roof above,
Bright creeping thro’ the moss they love: 10
—How long it seems since Charles was lost!
Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
The country in my very sight;
And when that peril ceased at night,
The sky broke out in red dismay
With signal fires; well, there I lay
Close covered o’er in my recess,
Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
Thinking on Metternich our friend,



And Charles's miserable end, 20
And much beside, two days; the third,
Hunger overcame me when I heard
The peasants from the village go
To work among the maize; you know,
With us in Lombardy, they bring
Provisions packed on mules, a string
With little bells that cheer their task,
And casks, and boughs on every cask
To keep the sun's heat from the wine;
These I let pass in jingling line, 30
And, close on them, dear noisy crew,
The peasants from the village, too;
For at the very rear would troop
Their wives and sisters in a group
To help, I knew. When these had passed,
I threw my glove to strike the last,
Taking the chance: she did not start,
Much less cry out, but stooped apart,



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One instant rapidly glanced round,
And saw me beckon from the ground. 40
A wild bush grows and hides my crypt;
She picked my glove up while she stripped
A branch off, then rejoined the rest
With that; my glove lay in her breast.
Then I drew breath; they disappeared:
It was for Italy I feared.

An hour, and she returned alone
Exactly where my glove was thrown.
Meanwhile came many thoughts: on me
Rested the hopes of Italy. 50
I had devised a certain tale
Which, when 'twas told her, could not fail
Persuade a peasant of its truth;
I meant to call a freak of youth
This hiding, and give hopes of pay,
And no temptation to betray.
But when I saw that woman's face,
Its calm simplicity of grace,
Our Italy's own attitude
In which she walked thus far, and stood, 60
Planting each naked foot so firm,
To crush the snake and spare the worm—
At first sight of her eyes, I said,
"I am that man upon whose head
They fix the price, because I hate
The Austrians over us: the State
Will give you gold—oh, gold so much!
If you betray me to their clutch,
And be your death, for aught I know,
If once they find you saved their foe. 70
Now, you must bring me food and drink,
And also paper, pen and ink,
And carry safe what I shall write
To Padua, which you'll reach at night
Before the duomo shuts; go in,
And wait till Tenebrae begin;
Walk to the third confessional,



Between the pillar and the wall,
And kneeling whisper, Whence comes peace?
Say it a second time, then cease; 80
And if the voice inside returns,
>From Christ and Freedom; what concerns
The cause of Peace?—for answer, slip
My letter where you placed your lip;
Then come back happy we have done
Our mother service—I, the son,
As you the daughter of our land!”

Three mornings more, she took her stand
In the same place, with the same eyes:
I was no surer of sun-rise 90
Than of her coming. We conferred
Of her own prospects, and I heard
She had a lover—stout and tall,
She said—then let her eyelids fall,
“He could do much”—as if some doubt
Entered her heart,—then, passing out

“She could not speak for others, who
Had other thoughts; herself she knew,”
And so she brought me drink and food.
After four days, the scouts pursued 100
Another path; at last arrived
The help my Paduan friends contrived
To furnish me: she brought the news.
For the first time I could not choose
But kiss her hand, and lay my own
Upon her head—“This faith was shown
To Italy, our mother; she
Uses my hand and blesses thee.”
She followed down to the sea-shore;
I left and never saw her more. 110



Page 20

How very long since I have thought
Concerning—much less wished for—aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die!
I never was in love; and since
Charles proved false, what shall now convince
My inmost heart I have a friend?
However, if I pleased to spend
Real wishes on myself—say, three—
I know at least what one should be. 120
I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
—Nor much for that am I perplexed—
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employers. Last
—Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length 130
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
—Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so-perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine—
Are turning wise: while some opine
“Freedom grows license,” some suspect
“Haste breeds delay,” and recollect 140
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen “All's for best,”
The land seems settling to its rest.
I think then, I should wish to stand
This evening in that dear, lost land,
Over the sea the thousand miles,
And know if yet that woman smiles
With the calm smile; some little farm
She lives in there, no doubt: what harm 150
If I sat on the door-side bench,
And, while her spindle made a trench
Fantastically in the dust,



Inquired of all her fortunes—just
Her children's ages and their names,
And what may be the husband's aims
For each of them. I'd talk this out,
And sit there, for an hour about,
Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
Mine on her head, and go my way. 160

So much for idle wishing—how
It steals the time! To business now.

Notes: "The Italian in England." An Italian patriot who has taken part in an unsuccessful revolt against Austrian dominance, reflects upon the incidents of his escape and flight from Italy to the end that if he ever should have a thought beyond the welfare of Italy, he would wish first for the discomfiture of his enemies and then to go and see once more the noble woman who at the risk of her own life helped him to escape. Though there is no exact historical incident upon which this poem is founded, it has a historical background. The Charles referred to (lines 8, 11, 20, 116, 125) is Charles Albert, Prince of Carignano, of the younger branch of the house of Savoy. His having played with the patriot in his youth, as the poem says, is quite possible, for Charles was brought up as a simple

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citizen in a public school, and one of his chief friends was Alberta Nota, a writer of liberal principles, whom he made his secretary. As indicated in the poem, Charles at first declared himself in sympathy, though in a somewhat lukewarm manner, with the rising led by Santa Rosa against Austrian domination in 1823, and upon the abdication of Victor Emanuel he became regent of Turin. But when the king Charles Felix issued a denunciation against the new government, Charles Albert succumbed to the king's threats and left his friends in the lurch. Later the Austrians marched into the country, Santa Rosa was forced to retreat from Turin, and, with his friends, he who might well have been the very patriot of the poem was obliged to fly from Italy.

19. Metternich: the distinguished Austrian diplomatist and determined enemy of Italian independence.

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THE ENGLISHMAN IN ITALY Piano di Sorrento

Fort<u`>, Fort<u`>, my beloved one,
 Sit here by my side,
On my knees put up both little feet!
 I was sure, if I tried,
I could make you laugh spite of Scirocco.
 Now, open your eyes,
Let me keep you amused till he vanish
 In black from the skies,
With telling my memories over
 As you tell your beads; 10
All the Plain saw me gather, I garland
 —The flowers or the weeds.

Time for rain! for your long hot dry Autumn
 Had net-worked with brown
The white skin of each grape on the bunches,
 Marked like a quail's crown,
Those creatures you make such account of,
 Whose heads—speckled white



Over brown like a great spider's back,
As I told you last night— 20
Your mother bites off for her supper.
Red-ripe as could be,
Pomegranates were chapping and splitting
In halves on the tree:
And betwixt the loose walls of great flintstone,
Or in the thick dust
On the path, or straight out of the rockside,
Wherever could thrust
Some burnt sprig of bold hardy rock-flower
Its yellow face up, 30
For the prize were great butterflies fighting,
Some five for one cup.
So, I guessed, ere I got up this morning,



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What change was in store,
By the quick rustle-down of the quail-nets
Which woke me before
I could open my shutter, made fast
With a bough and a stone,
And look thro' the twisted dead vine-twigs,
Sole lattice that's known. 40
Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net-poles,
While, busy beneath,
Your priest and his brother tugged at them,
The rain in their teeth.
And out upon all the flat house-roofs
Where split figs lay drying,
The girls took the frails under cover:
Nor use seemed in trying
To get out the boats and go fishing,
For, under the cliff, 50
Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind-rock.
No seeing our skiff
Arrive about noon from Amalfi,
—Our fisher arrive,
And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps, 60
Which only the fisher looks grave at,
While round him like imps
Cling screaming the children as naked
And brown as his shrimps;
Himself too as bare to the middle
—You see round his neck
The string and its brass coin suspended,
That saves him from wreck.
But to-day not a boat reached Salerno,
So back, to a man, 70
Came our friends, with whose help in the vineyards
Grape-harvest began.
In the vat, halfway up in our houseside,



Like blood the juice spins,
While your brother all bare-legged is dancing
Till breathless he grins
Dead-beaten in effort on effort
To keep the grapes under,
Since still when he seems all but master,
In pours the fresh plunder 80
>From girls who keep coming and going
With basket on shoulder,
And eyes shut against the rain's driving;
Your girls that are older,—
For under the hedges of aloe,
And where, on its bed
Of the orchard's black mould, the love-apple
Lies pulpy and red,
All the young ones are kneeling and filling
Their laps with the snails 90
Tempted out by this first rainy weather,—
Your best of regales,
As to-night will be proved to my sorrow,
When, supping in state,
We shall feast our grape-gleaners (two dozen,
Three over one plate)
With lasagne so tempting to swallow,
In slippery ropes,
And gourds fried in great purple slices,
That colour of popes. 100
Meantime, see the grape bunch they've brought you:



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The rain-water slips
O'er the heavy blue bloom on each globe
Which the wasp to your lips
Still follows with fretful persistence:
Nay, taste, while awake,
This half of a curd-white smooth cheese-ball
That peels, flake by flake,
Like an onion, each smoother and whiter;
Next, sip this weak wine 110
>From the thin green glass flask, with its stopper,
A leaf of the vine;
And end with the prickly-pear's red flesh
That leaves thro' its juice
The stony black seeds on your pearl-teeth.
Scirocco is loose!
Hark, the quick, whistling pelt of the olives
Which, thick in one's track,
Tempt the stranger to pick up and bite them,
Tho' not yet half black! 120
How the old twisted olive trunks shudder,
The medlars let fall
Their hard fruit, and the brittle great fig-trees
Snap off, figs and all,
For here comes the whole of the tempest!
No refuge, but creep
Back again to my side and my shoulder,
And listen or sleep.
O how will your country show next week,
When all the vine-boughs 130
Have been stripped of their foliage to pasture
The mules and the cows?
Last eve, I rode over the mountains,
Your brother, my guide,
Soon left me, to feast on the myrtles
That offered, each side,
Their fruit-balls, black, glossy and luscious,—
Or strip from the sorbs
A treasure, or, rosy and wondrous,
Those hairy gold orbs! 140
But my mule picked his sure sober path out,



Just stopping to neigh
When he recognized down in the valley
His mates on their way
With the faggots and barrels of water;
And soon we emerged
>From the plain, where the woods could scarce follow;
And still as we urged
Our way, the woods wondered, and left us,
As up still we trudged 150
Though the wild path grew wilder each instant,
And place was e'en grudged
'Mid the rock-chasms and piles of loose stones
Like the loose broken teeth
Of some monster which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath—
Place was grudged to the silver-grey fume-weed
That clung to the path,
And dark rosemary ever a-dying
That, 'spite the wind's wrath, 160
So loves the salt rock's face to seaward,
And lentisks as staunch
To the stone where they root and bear berries,
And . . . what shows a branch
Coral-coloured, transparent, with circlets
Of pale seagreen leaves;
Over all trod my mule with the caution
Of gleaners o'er sheaves,
Still, foot after foot like a lad

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Till, round after round, 170
He climbed to the top of Calvano,
And God's own profound
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.

Oh, heaven and the terrible crystal!
No rampart excludes
Your eye from the life to be lived
In the blue solitudes. 180
Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement!
Still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
If quickly you turn
And, before they escape you surprise them.
They grudge you should learn
How the soft plains they look on, lean over
And love (they pretend) 190
—Cower beneath them, the flat sea-pine crouches,
The wild fruit-trees bend,
E'en the myrtle-leaves curl, shrink and shut:
All is silent and grave:
'Tis a sensual and timorous beauty,
How fair! but a slave.
So, I turned to the sea; and there slumbered
As greenly as ever
Those isles of the siren, your Galli;
No ages can sever 200
The Three, nor enable their sister
To join them,—halfway
On the voyage, she looked at Ulysses—
No farther to-day,
Tho' the small one, just launched in the wave,
Watches breast-high and steady
>From under the rock, her bold sister
Swum halfway already.



Fort<u>, shall we sail there together
And see from the sides 210
Quite new rocks show their faces, new haunts
Where the siren abides?
Shall we sail round and round them, close over
The rocks, tho' unseen,
That ruffle the grey glassy water
To glorious green?
Then scramble from splinter to splinter,
Reach land and explore,
On the largest, the strange square black turret
With never a door, 220
Just a loop to admit the quick lizards;
Then, stand there and hear
The birds' quiet singing, that tells us
What life is, so clear?
—The secret they sang to Ulysses
When, ages ago,
He heard and he knew this life's secret
I hear and I know.

Ah, see! The sun breaks o'er Calvano;
He strikes the great gloom 230
And flutters it o'er the mount's summit
In airy gold fume.
All is over. Look out, see the gipsy,
Our tinker and smith,
Has arrived, set up bellows and forge,
And down-squatted forthwith
To his hammering, under the wall there;
One eye keeps aloof
The urchins that itch to be putting

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His jews'-harps to proof, 240
While the other, thro' locks of curled wire,
Is watching how sleek
Shines the hog, come to share in the windfall
—Chew, abbot's own cheek!
All is over. Wake up and come out now,
And down let us go,
And see the fine things got in order
At church for the show
Of the Sacrament, set forth this evening.
To-morrow's the Feast 250
Of the Rosary's Virgin, by no means
Of Virgins the least,
As you'll hear in the off-hand discourse
Which (all nature, no art)
The Dominican brother, these three weeks,
Was getting by heart.
Not a pillar nor post but is dizen'd
With red and blue papers;
All the roof waves with ribbons, each altar
A-blaze with long tapers; 260
But the great masterpiece is the scaffold
Rigged glorious to hold
All the fiddlers and fifers and drummers
And trumpeters bold,
Not afraid of Bellini nor Auber,
Who, when the priest's hoarse,
Will strike us up something that's brisk
For the feast's second course.
And then will the flaxen-wigged Image
Be carried in pomp 270
Thro' the plain, while in gallant procession
The priests mean to stomp.
All round the glad church lie old bottles
With gunpowder stopped,
Which will be, when the Image re-enters,
Religiously popped;
And at night from the crest of Calvano
Great bonfires will hang,
On the plain will the trumpets join chorus,



And more poppers bang. 280
At all events, come-to the garden
As far as the wall;
See me tap with a hoe on the plaster
Till out there shall fall
A scorpion with wide angry nippers!

—“Such trifles!” you say?
Fortune, in my England at home,
Men meet gravely to-day
And debate, if abolishing Corn-laws
Be righteous and wise 290
—If ’twere proper, Scirocco should vanish
In black from the skies!

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IN A GONDOLA

He sings.

I send my heart up to thee, all my heart
In this my singing.
For the stars help me, and the sea bears part;
The very night is clinging
Closer to Venice' streets to leave one space
Above me, whence thy face
May light my joyous heart to thee its dwelling-place.

She speaks.

Say after me, and try to say
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord, 10
In your own voice, in your own way:



“This woman’s heart and soul and brain
Are mine as much as this gold chain
She bids me wear, which (say again)
I choose to make by cherishing
A precious thing, or choose to fling
Over the boat-side, ring by ring.”
And yet once more say . . . no word more!
Since words are only words. Give o’er!

Unless you call me, all the same, 20
Familiarly by my pet name,
Which if the Three should hear you call,
And me reply to, would proclaim
At once our secret to them all.
Ask of me, too, command me, blame—
Do, break down the partition-wall
’Twixt us, the daylight world beholds
Curtained in dusk and splendid folds!
What’s left but—all of me to take?
I am the Three’s: prevent them, slake 30
Your thirst! ’Tis said, the Arab sage,
In practising with gems, can loose
Their subtle spirit in his cruce
And leave but ashes: so, sweet mage,
Leave them my ashes when thy use
Sucks out my soul, thy heritage!



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He sings.

I

Past we glide, and past, and past!
What's that poor Agnese doing
Where they make the shutters fast?
Grey Zanobi's just a-woeing 40
To his couch the purchased bride:
Past we glide!

II

Past we glide, and past, and past!
Why's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast?
Guests by hundreds, not one caring
If the dear host's neck were wried:
Past we glide!

She sings.

I

The moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made believe 50
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide ope I burst..

II

The bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so all is rendered up, 60
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.



He sings.

I

What are we two?
I am a Jew,
And carry thee, farther than friends can pursue,
To a feast of our tribe;
Where they need thee to bribe
The devil that blasts them unless he imbibe.
Thy . . . Scatter the vision for ever! And now
As of old, I am I, thou art thou! 70

II

Say again, what we are?
The sprite of a star,
I lure thee above where the destinies bar
My plumes their full play
Till a ruddier ray
Than my pale one announce there is withering away
Some . . . Scatter the vision forever! And now,
As of old, I am I, thou art thou!

He muses.

Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?
The land's lap or the water's breast? 80
To sleep on yellow millet-sheaves,
Or swim in lucid shallows just
Eluding water-lily leaves,
An inch from Death's black fingers, thrust
To lock you, whom release he must;
Which life were best on Summer eves?

He speaks, musing.

Lie back; could thought of mine improve you?
>From this shoulder let there spring
A wing; from this, another wing;
Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you! 90
Snow-white must they spring, to blend
With your flesh, but I intend
They shall deepen to the end,
Broader, into burning gold,
Till both wings crescent-wise enfold

Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
As if a million sword-blades hurled
Defiance from you to the world!



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Rescue me thou, the only real! 100
And scare away this mad ideal
That came, nor motions to depart!
Thanks! Now, stay ever as thou art!

Still he muses.

I

What if the Three should catch at last
Thy serenader? While there's cast
Paul's cloak about my head, and fast
Gian pinions me, Himself has past
His stylet thro' my back; I reel;
And . . . is it thou I feel?

II

They trail me, these three godless knaves, 110
Past every church that saints and saves,
Nor stop till, where the cold sea raves
By Lido's wet accursed graves,
They scoop mine, roll me to its brink,
And . . . on thy breast I sink!

She replies, musing.

Dip your arm o'er the boat-side, elbow-deep,
As I do: thus: were death so unlike sleep,
Caught this way? Death's to fear from flame or steel,
Or poison doubtless; but from water—feel!
Go find the bottom! Would you stay me? There! 120
Now pluck a great blade of that ribbon-grass
To plait in where the foolish jewel was,
I flung away: since you have praised my hair,
'Tis proper to be choice in what I wear.

He speaks.

Row home? must we row home? Too surely
Know I where its front's demurely
Over the Giudecca piled;
Window just with window mating,



Door on door exactly waiting,
All's the set face of a child: 130
But behind it, where's a trace
Of the staidness and reserve,
And formal lines without a curve,
In the same child's playing-face?
No two windows look one way
O'er the small sea-water thread
Below them. Ah, the autumn day
I, passing, saw you overhead!
First, out a cloud of curtain blew,
Then a sweet cry, and last came you— 140
To catch your lory that must needs
Escape just then, of all times then,
To peck a tall plant's fleecy seeds,
And make me happiest of men.
I scarce could breathe to see you reach
So far back o'er the balcony
To catch him ere he climbed too high
Above you in the Smyrna peach
That quick the round smooth cord of gold,
This coiled hair on your head, unrolled, 150
Fell down you like a gorgeous snake
The Roman girls were wont, of old,
When Rome there was, for coolness' sake
To let lie curling o'er their bosoms.
Dear lory, may his beak retain
Ever its delicate rose stain
As if the wounded lotus-blossoms
Had marked their thief to know again!

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Stay longer yet, for others' sake
Than mine! What should your chamber do? 160
—With all its rarities that ache
In silence while day lasts, but wake
At night-time and their life renew,
Suspended just to pleasure you
Who brought against their will together
These objects, and, while day lasts, weave
Around them such a magic tether
That dumb they look: your harp, believe,
With all the sensitive tight strings
Which dare not speak, now to itself 170
Breathes slumberously, as if some elf
Went in and out the chords, his wings
Make murmur wheresoe'er they graze,
As an angel may, between the maze
Of midnight palace-pillars, on
And on, to sow God's plagues, have gone
Through guilty glorious Babylon.
And while such murmurs flow, the nymph
Bends o'er the harp-top from her shell
As the dry limpet for the lymph 180
Come with a tune he knows so well.
And how your statues' hearts must swell!
And how your pictures must descend
To see each other, friend with friend!
Oh, could you take them by surprise,
You'd find Schidone's eager Duke
Doing the quaintest courtesies
To that prim saint by Haste-thee-Luke!
And, deeper into her rock den,
Bold Castelfranco's Magdalen 190
You'd find retreated from the ken
Of that robed counsel-keeping Ser—
As if the Tizian thinks of her,
And is not, rather, gravely bent
On seeing for himself what toys
Are these, his progeny invent,
What litter now the board employs
Whereon he signed a document
That got him murdered! Each enjoys
Its night so well, you cannot break 200



The sport up, so, indeed must make
More stay with me, for others' sake.

She speaks.

I

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

II

Your gondola—let Zorzi wreathe
A mesh of water weeds about 210
Its prow, as if he unaware
Had struck some quay or bridge-foot stair!
That I may throw a paper out
As you and he go underneath.
There's Zanze's vigilant taper; safe are we.
Only one minute more to-night with me?
Resume your past self of a month ago!
Be you the bashful gallant, I will be
The lady with the colder breast than snow.
Now bow you, as becomes, nor touch my hand 220
More than I touch yours when I step to land,
And say, "All thanks, Siora!"—
Heart to heart
And lips to lips! Yet once more, ere we part,
Clasp me and make me thine, as mine thou art!

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[He is surprised, and stabbed.

It was ordained to be so, sweet!—and best
Comes now, beneath thine eyes, upon thy breast.
Still kiss me! Care not for the cowards! Care
Only to put aside thy beauteous hair
My blood will hurt! The Three, I do not scorn
To death, because they never lived: but I 230
Have lived indeed, and so—(yet one more kiss)—can die!

Notes: “In a Gondola” is a lyric dialogue between two Venetian lovers who have stolen away in a gondola spite of “the three”—“Himself,” perhaps a husband, and “Paul” and “Gian,” her brothers—whose vengeance discovers them at the end, but not before their love and danger have moved them to weave a series of lyrical fancies, and led them to a climax of emotion which makes Life so deep a joy that Death is of no account.

“The first stanza was written,” writes Browning, “to illustrate Maclise’s picture, for which he was anxious to get some line or two. I had not seen it, but from Forster’s description, gave it to him in his room impromptu When I did see it I thought the serenade too jolly, somewhat, for the notion I got from Forster, and I took up the subject in my own way.”

113. Lido’s . . . graves: Jewish tombs were there.

127. Giudecca: a canal of Venice.

155. Lory: a kind of parrot.

186. Schidone’s eager Duke: an imaginary painting by Bartolommeo Schidone of Modena (1560-1616).

188. Haste-thee-Luke: the English form of the nickname, Luca-f<a`>-presto, given Luca Giordano (1632-1705), a Neapolitan painter, on account of his constantly being goaded on in his work by his penurious and avaricious father.

190. Castelfranco: the Venetian painter, Giorgione, called Castelfranco, because born there, 1478, died 1511.

193. Tizian: (1477-1516). The pictures are all imaginary, but suggestive of the style of each of these artists.



WARING

[Mr. Alfred Domett, C.M.G., author of “Ranolf and Amohia,” full of descriptions of New Zealand scenery.]

I

What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London town?

II

Who'd have guessed it from his lip
Or his brow's accustomed bearing,
On the night he thus took ship
Or started landward?—little caring 10
For us, it seems, who supped together
(Friends of his too, I remember)
And walked home thro' the merry weather,
The snowiest in all December.
I left his arm that night myself
For what's-his-name's, the new prose-poet
Who wrote the book there, on the shelf—
How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day? 20
Never looked he half so gay!

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III

He was prouder than the devil:
How he must have cursed our revel!
Ay and many other meetings,
Indoor visits, outdoor greetings,
As up and down he paced this London,
With no work done, but great works undone,
Where scarce twenty knew his name.
Why not, then, have earlier spoken,
Written, bustled? Who's to blame 30
If your silence kept unbroken?
"True, but there were sundry jottings,
Stray-leaves, fragments, blurrs and blottings,
Certain first steps were achieved
Already which (is that your meaning?)
Had well borne out whoe'er believed
In more to come!" But who goes gleaning
Hedgeside chance-glades, while full-sheaved
Stand cornfields by him? Pride, o'erweening
Pride alone, puts forth such claims 40
O'er the day's distinguished names.

IV

Meantime, how much I loved him,
I find out now I've lost him.
I who cared not if I moved him,
Who could so carelessly accost him,
Henceforth never shall get free
Of his ghostly company,
His eyes that just a little wink
As deep I go into the merit
Of this and that distinguished spirit— 50
His cheeks' raised colour, soon to sink,
As long I dwell on some stupendous
And tremendous (Heaven defend us!)
Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous
Demoniac-seraphic
Penman's latest piece of graphic.
Nay, my very wrist grows warm
With his dragging weight of arm.



E'en so, swimmingly appears,
Through one's after-supper musings, 60
Some lost lady of old years
With her beauteous vain endeavour
And goodness unrepaid as ever;
The face, accustomed to refusings,
We, puppies that we were . . . Oh never
Surely, nice of conscience, scrupled
Being aught like false, forsooth, to?
Telling aught but honest truth to?
What a sin, had we centupled
Its possessor's grace and sweetness! 70
No! she heard in its completeness
Truth, for truth's a weighty matter,
And truth, at issue, we can't flatter!
Well, 'tis done with; she's exempt
>From damning us thro' such a sally;
And so she glides, as down a valley,
Taking up with her contempt,
Past our reach; and in, the flowers
Shut her unregarded hours.

V

Oh, could I have him back once more, 80
This Waring, but one half-day more!
Back, with the quiet face of yore,
So hungry for acknowledgment
Like mine! I'd fool him to his bent.
Feed, should not he, to heart's content?
I'd say, "to only have conceived,
Planned your great works, apart from progress,
Surpasses little works achieved!"



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I'd lie so, I should be believed.
I'd make such havoc of the claims 90
Of the day's distinguished names
To feast him with, as feasts an ogress
Her feverish sharp-toothed gold-crowned child!
Or as one feasts a creature rarely
Captured here, unreconciled
To capture; and completely gives
Its pettish humours license, barely
Requiring that it lives.

VI

Ichabod, Ichabod,
The glory is departed! 100
Travels Waring East away?
Who, of knowledge, by hearsay,
Reports a man upstarted
Somewhere as a god,
Hordes grown European-hearted,
Millions of the wild made tame
On a sudden at his fame?
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?
Or who in Moscow, toward the Czar,
With the demurest of footfalls 110
Over the Kremlin's pavement bright
With serpentine and syenite,
Steps, with five other Generals
That simultaneously take snuff,
For each to have pretext enough
And kerchiefwise unfold his sash
Which, softness' self, is yet the stuff
To hold fast where a steel chain snaps,
And leave the grand white neck no gash?
Waring in Moscow, to those rough 120
Cold northern natures born perhaps,
Like the lambwhite maiden dear
>From the circle of mute kings
Unable to repress the tear,



Each as his sceptre down he flings,
To Dian's fane at Taurica,
Where now a captive priestess, she alway
Mingles her tender grave Hellenic speech
With theirs, tuned to the hailstone-beaten beach
As pours some pigeon, from the myrrhy lands 130
Rapt by the whirlblast to fierce Scythian strands
Where breed the swallows, her melodious cry
Amid their barbarous twitter!
In Russia? Never! Spain were fitter!
Ay, most likely 'tis in Spain
That we and Waring meet again
Now, while he turns down that cool narrow lane
Into the blackness, out of grave Madrid
All fire and shine, abrupt as when there's slid
Its stiff gold blazing pall 140
>From some black coffin-lid.
Or, best of all,
I love to think
The leaving us was just a feint;
Back here to London did he slink,
And now works on without a wink
Of sleep, and we are on the brink
Of something great in fresco-paint:
Some garret's ceiling, walls and floor,
Up and down and o'er and o'er 150
He splashes, as none splashed before
Since great Caldara Polidore.
Or Music means this land of ours
Some favour yet, to pity won
By Purcell from his Rosy Bowers—
"Give me my so-long promised son,
Let Waring end what I begun!"
Then down he creeps and out he steals
Only when the night conceals
His face; in Kent 'tis cherry-time,



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160

Or hops are picking: or at prime
Of March he wanders as, too happy,
Years ago when he was young,
Some mild eve when woods grew sappy
And the early moths had sprung
To life from many a trembling sheath
Woven the warm boughs beneath;
While small birds said to themselves
What should soon be actual song,
And young gnats, by tens and twelves, 170
Made as if they were the throng
That crowd around and carry aloft
The sound they have nursed, so sweet and pure,
Out of a myriad noises soft,
Into a tone that can endure
Amid the noise of a July noon
When all God's creatures crave their boon,
All at once and all in tune,
And get it, happy as Waring then,
Having first within his ken 180
What a man might do with men:
And far too glad, in the even-glow,
To mix with the world he meant to take
Into his hand, he told you, so—
And out of it his world to make,
To contract and to expand
As he shut or oped his hand.
Oh Waring, what's to really be?
A clear stage and a crowd to see!
Some Garrick, say, out shall not he 190
The heart of Hamlet's mystery pluck?
Or, where most unclean beasts are rife,
Some Junius—am I right?—shall tuck
His sleeve, and forth with flaying-knife!
Some Chatterton shall have the luck
Of calling Rowley into life!
Some one shall somehow run a muck
With this old world for want of strife
Sound asleep. Contrive, contrive
To rouse us, Waring! Who's alive? 200
Our men scarce seem in earnest now.



Distinguished names!—but 'tis, somehow,
As if they played at being names
Still more distinguished, like the games
Of children. Turn our sport to earnest
With a visage of the sternest!
Bring the real times back, confessed
Still better than our very best!

||

I

“When I last saw Waring . . .”
(How all turned to him who spoke! 210
You saw Waring? Truth or joke?
In land-travel or sea-faring?)

||

“We were sailing by Triest
Where a day or two we harboured:
A sunset was in the West,
When, looking over the vessel's side,
One of our company espied
A sudden speck to larboard.
And as a sea-duck flies and swims
At once, so came the light craft up, 220
With its sole lateen sail that trims
And turns (the water round its rims
Dancing, as round a sinking cup)
And by us like a fish it curled,
And drew itself up close beside,
Its great sail on the instant furled,
And o'er its thwarts a shrill voice cried,
(A neck as bronzed as a Lascar's)

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'Buy wine of us, you English Brig?
Or fruit, tobacco and cigars? 230
A pilot for you to Triest?
Without one, look you ne'er so big,
They'll never let you up the bay!
We natives should know best.'
I turned, and 'just those fellows' way,'
Our captain said, 'The 'long-shore thieves
Are laughing at us in their sleeves.'

III

"In truth, the boy leaned laughing back;
And one, half-hidden by his side
Under the furled sail, soon I spied, 240
With great grass hat and kerchief black,
Who looked up with his kingly throat,
Said somewhat, while the other shook
His hair back from his eyes to look
Their longest at us; then the boat,
I know not how, turned sharply round,
Laying her whole side on the sea
As a leaping fish does; from the lee
Into the weather, cut somehow
Her sparkling path beneath our bow 250
And so went off, as with a bound,
Into the rosy and golden half
O' the sky, to overtake the sun
And reach the shore, like the sea-calf
Its singing cave; yet I caught one
Glance ere away the boat quite passed,
And neither time nor toil could mar
Those features: so I saw the last
Of Waring!"—You? Oh, never star
Was lost here but it rose afar! 260
Look East, where whole new thousands are!
In Vishnu-land what Avatar?

Notes: "Waring." In recounting the sudden disappearance from among his friends of a man proud and sensitive, who with fine powers of intellect yet incurred somewhat of disdain because of his failure to accomplish anything permanent, expression is given to the deep regret experienced by his friends now that he has left them, his absence having brought them to a truer realization of his worth. If only Waring would come back, the speaker, at least, would give him the sympathy and encouragement he craved instead of playing with his sensibilities as he had done. Conjectures are indulged in as to Waring's whereabouts. The speaker prefers to think of him as back in London preparing to astonish the world with some great masterpiece in art, music, or literature. Another speaker surprises all by telling how he had seen the "last of Waring" in a momentary meeting at Trieste, but the first speaker is certain that the star of Waring is destined to rise again above their horizon.

1. Waring: Alfred Domett (born at Camberwell Grove, Surrey, May 20, 1811), a friend of Browning's, distinguished as a poet and as a Colonial statesman and ruler. His first volume of poems was published in 1832. Some verses of his in Blackwood's, 1837, attracted much attention to him as a rising young poet. In 1841 he was called to the bar, and in 1841 went out to New Zealand among the earliest settlers. There he lived for thirty years, filling

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several important official positions. His unceremonious departure for New Zealand with no leave-takings was the occasion of Browning's poem, which is said by Mrs. Orr to give a lifelike sketch of Domett's character. His "star" did, however, rise again for his English friends, for he returned to London in 1871. The year following saw the publication of his "Ranolf and Amohia," a New Zealand poem, in the course of which he characterizes Browning as "Subtlest Asserter of the Soul in Song." He met Browning again in London, and was one of the vice-presidents of the London Browning Society. Died Nov.12, 1877.

15. I left his arm that night myself: George W. Cooke points out that in his *Living Authors of England* Thomas Powell describes this incident, the "young author" mentioned being himself: "We have a vivid recollection of the last time we saw him. It was at an evening party, a few days before he sailed from England; his intimate friend, Mr. Browning, was also present. It happened that the latter was introduced that evening for the first time to a young author who had just then appeared in the literary world. This, consequently, prevented the two friends from conversation, and they parted from each other without the slightest idea on Mr. Browning's part that he was seeing his old friend Domett for the last time. Some days after, when he found that Domett had sailed, he expressed in strong terms to the writer of this sketch the self-reproach he felt at having preferred the conversation of a stranger to that of his old associate."

54. Monstr'-inform'-ingens-horrend-ous: a slight transposition of part of a line in Virgil describing Polyphemus, "Monstrum horrendum informe ingens," a monster horrid, misshapen, huge.

55. Demoniaco-seraphic: these two lines form a compound of adjectives humorously used by Browning to express the inferiority of the writers he praised to Waring.

99. Ichabod: "Ichabod, the glory is departed." I Samuel IV. 21.

112. syenite: Egyptian granite

122. Lamb-white maiden: Iphigenia, who was borne away to Taurus by Diana, when her father, Agamemnon, was about to sacrifice her to obtain favorable winds for his expedition to Troy.

152. Caldara Polidore: Surnamed da Caravaggio. He was born in Milan in 1492, went to Rome and was employed by Raphael to paint the friezes in the Vatican. He was murdered by a servant in Messina, 1543.

155. Purcell: an eminent English musician, composer of church music, operas, songs, and instrumental music. (1658-1695).—Rosy Bowers: One of Purcell's most celebrated

songs. “‘From Rosie Bowers’ is said to have been set in his last sickness, at which time he seems to have realized the poetical fable of the Swan and to have sung more sweetly as he approached nearer his dissolution, for it seems to us as if no one of his productions was so elevated, so pleasing, so expressive, and throughout so perfect as this” (Rees’s Cyclopaedia, 1819).

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190. Garrick: David, an English actor, celebrated especially for his Shakespearian parts (1716-1779).

193. Junius: the assumed name of a political writer who in 1769 began to issue in London a series of famous letters which opposed the ministry in power, and denounced several eminent persons with severe invective and pungent sarcasm.

195. Some Chatterton shall have the luck of calling Rowley into life: the chief claim to celebrity of Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) is the real or pretended discovery of poems said to have been written in the fifteenth century by Thomas Rowley, a priest of Bristol, and found in Radcliffe church, of which Chatterton's ancestors had been sextons for many years. They are now generally considered Chatterton's own.

THE TWINS "Give" and "It-shall-be-given-unto-you"

I

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

II

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

III

"Poor, who had plenty once,
When gifts fell thick as rain: 10
But they give us nought, for the nonce,
And now should we give again?"

IV

Then the beggar, "See your sins!
Of old, unless I err,



Ye had brothers for inmates, twins,
Date and Dabitur.

V

"While Date was in good case
Dabitur flourished too:
For Dabitur's lenten face
No wonder if Date rue. 20

VI

"Would ye retrieve the one?
Try and make plump the other!
When Date's penance is done,
Dabitur helps his brother.

VII

"Only, beware relapse!"
The Abbot hung his head.
This beggar might be perhaps
An angel, Luther said.

Notes:

"The Twins" versifies a story told by Martin Luther in his "Table Talk," in which the saying, "Give and it shall be given unto you," is quaintly personified by the Latin words equivalent in meaning: Date, "Give," and Dabitur, "It-shall-be-given-unto-you."

I. Martin Luther: (1483-1546), the leader of the Reformation.

A LIGHT WOMAN

I

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



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II

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

III

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she adds just him 10
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth for a whim!

IV

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

V

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
And gave me herself indeed. 20

VI

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

VII

For see, my friend goes shaking and white;
He eyes me as the basilisk:



I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
Eclipsing his sun's disk.

VIII

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
"Though I love her—that, he comprehends— 30
One should master one's passions (love, in chief)
And be loyal to one's friends!"

IX

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

X

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst!
Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?
'Twas quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
When I gave its stalk a twist. 40

XI

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

XII

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

XIII

One likes to show the truth for the truth;
That the woman was light is very true: 50

But suppose she says,—Never mind that youth!
What wrong have I done to you?



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XIV

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

Notes: "A Light Woman" is the story of a dramatic situation brought about by the speaker's intermeddling to save his less sophisticated friend from a light woman's toils. He deflects her interest and wins her heart, and this is the ironical outcome: his friendly, dispassionate act makes him seem to his friend a disloyal passion's slave; his scorn of the light woman teaches him her genuineness, and proves himself lighter than she; his futile assumption of the god manoeuvring souls makes the whole story dramatically imply, in a way dear to Browning's heart, the sacredness and worth of each individuality.

[I cannot agree with Porter and Clarke's estimate of the speaker's act as "friendly, dispassionate." They fail to take into account his supercilious attitude toward the man he calls his friend, and he proves to be more self-serving—and more self-deceiving—than they are willing to admit. That is why it is a subject made to Browning's hand.—Editor of the *pg* text]

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I

I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame, 10
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

II

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs



When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
 With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride, 20
So, one day more am I deified.
 Who knows but the world may end tonight?

III

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once—
 And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near, 30
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
 Thus lay she a moment on my breast.



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IV

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss. 40
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

V

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labour, yet no less 50
Bear up beneath their unsuccess
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

VI

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen? 60
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.



VII

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed 70
You hold things beautiful the best,
 And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
 Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

VIII

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave, 80
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
 You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown grey
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,
Put in music we know how fashions end!"
 I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

IX



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Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate 90
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
 Have a bliss to die with, dim-described.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
 Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

X

And yet—she has not spoke so long! 100
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
 We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity—
And heaven just prove that I and she
 Ride, ride together, forever ride? 110

Notes: "The Last Ride Together." The rapture of a rejected lover in the one more last ride which he asks for and obtains, discovers for him the all-sufficing glory of love in itself. Soldiership, statesmanship, art are disproportionate in their results; love can be its own reward, yes, heaven itself.

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN: A CHILD'S STORY.

(Written for, and inscribed to, W. M. the Younger.)

I

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
 By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;



But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II

Rats! 10
They fought the dogs and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,
Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,
And even spoiled the women's chats
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats. 20

III

At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking
"Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy,
And as for our Corporation—shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking 30
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.



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IV

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
“For a guilder I’d my ermine gown sell,
I wish I were a mile hence!
It’s easy to bid one rack one’s brain—
I’m sure my poor head aches again, 40
I’ve scratched it so, and all in vain.
Oh for a trap, a trap, a trap!”
Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
“Bless us,” cried the Mayor, “what’s that?”
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous 50
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
“Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!”

V

“Come in!” the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,
With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin, 60
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin,
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smiles went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:
And nobody could enough admire
The tall man and his quaint attire.
Quoth one: “It’s as my great-grandsire,
Starting up at the Trump of Doom’s tone,
Had walked this way from his painted tombstone!”



VI

He advanced to the council-table 70
And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,
By means of a secret charm, to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck 80
 A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque
 And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers, they noticed, were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon this pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)
"Yet," said he, "poor piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,
 Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats; 90
I eased in Asia the Nizam
 Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
And as for what your brain bewilders,
 If I can rid your town of rats
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!"-was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.



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VII

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept 100
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling. 110
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
>From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing, 120
Until they came to the river Weser
Wherein all plunged and perished!
—Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:
Which was, “At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
Into a cider-press’s gripe: 130
And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
And it seemed as if a voice
(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
Is breathed) called out, ‘Oh rats, rejoice!
The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!



So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!' 140
And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
All ready staved, like a great sun shone
Glorious scarce an inch before me
Just as methought it said 'Come, bore me!
—I found the Weser roiling o'er me."

VIII

You should have heard the Hamelin people
Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple.
"Go," cried the Mayor, "and get long poles,
Poke out the nests and block up the holes!
Consult with carpenters and builders, 150
And leave in our town not even a trace
Of the rats!"-when suddenly, up the face
Of the Piper perked in the market-place,
With a, "First, if you please, my thousand guilders!"

IX



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A thousand guilders! The Mayor looked blue;
So did the Corporation too.
For council dinners made rare havoc
With Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock;
And half the money would replenish
Their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish. 160
This sum to a wandering fellow
With a gipsy coat of red and yellow!
"Beside," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink,
Our business was done at the river's brink;
We saw with our eyes the vermin sink,
And what's dead can't come to life, I think.
So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink
>From the duty of giving you something for drink,
And a matter of money to put in your poke;
But as for the guilders, what we spoke 170
Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.
Beside, our losses have made us thrifty.
A thousand guilders! Come, take fifty!"

X

The Piper's face fell, and he cried:
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
I've promised to visit by dinner time
Bagdat, and accept the prime
Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in,
For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen,
Of a nest of scorpions no survivor: 180
With him I proved no bargain-driver,
With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver!
And folks who put me in a passion
May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI

"How? cried the Mayor, "d'ye think I brook
Being worse treated than a Cook?
Insulted by a lazy ribald
With idle pipe and vesture piebald?
You threaten us, fellow? Do your worst,
Blow your pipe there till you burst!" 190



XII

Once more he stept into the street
And to his lips again
Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;
And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
Never gave the enraptured air)
There was a rustling that seemed like a bustling
Of merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling,
Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering,
Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering, 200
And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering,
Out came the children running.
All the little boys and girls,
With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls,
And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls,
Tripping and skipping, ran merrily after
The wonderful music with shouting and laughter.

XIII



Page 44

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry 210
To the children merrily skipping by,
—Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed, 220
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!
He's forced to let the piping drop,
And we shall see our children stop!"
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last, 230
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
 And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
 His sadness, he was used to say,—
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
I can't forget that I'm bereft
Of all the pleasant sights they see,
Which the Piper also promised me.
For he led us, he said, to a joyous land, 240
Joining the town and just at hand,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honeybees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings:
And just as I became assured
My lame foot would be speedily cured, 250



The music stopped and I stood still,
And found myself outside the hill,
Left alone against my will,
To go now limping as before,
And never hear of that country more!"

XIV

Alas, alas for Hamelin!
There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in! 260
The mayor sent East, West, North and South
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,
And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
Should think their records dated duly 270
If, after the day of the month and year,

Page 45

These words did not as well appear,
“And so long after what happened here
On the Twenty-second of July
Thirteen-hundred and seventy-six:”
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children’s last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper’s Street—
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour. 280
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there’s a tribe 290
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don’t understand.

XV

So, Willy, let me and you be wipers 300
Of scores out with all men—especially pipers!
And, whether they pipe us free from rats or from mice,
If we’ve promised them aught, let us keep our promise!

Notes: “The Pied Piper of Hamelin.” This clever versification of a well-known tale was written for the little son of the actor William Macready. According to Dr. Furnivall, the version used directly by Browning is from “The Wonders of the Little World: or A



General History of Man,” by Nathaniel Wanley, published in 1578. There are, however, more incidents in common between the poem and the version given by Verstigan in his “Restitution of Decayed Intelligence” (1605). There are many other sources for the story, and it is not improbable that Browning knew more than one version. Tales similar to it occur also in Persia and China. For its kinship to myths of the wind as a musician, and as a psychopomp or leader of souls, see Baring-Gould, “Curious Myths of the Middle Ages”; John Fiske, “Myths and Myth-makers”; Cox, “Myths of the Aryan Races.” —Hamlin, or Hamelin, is a town in the province of Hanover, Prussia.

THE FLIGHT OF THE DUCHESS

I

You’re my friend:

 I was the man the Duke spoke to;

 I helped the Duchess to cast off his yoke, too;

So here’s the tale from beginning to end,

My friend!

II



Page 46

Ours is a great wild country:
If you climb to our castle's top,
I don't see where your eye can stop;
For when you've passed the cornfield country,
Where vineyards leave off, flocks are packed, 10
And sheep-range leads to cattle-tract,
And cattle-tract to open-chase,
And open-chase to the very base
Of the mountain where, at a funeral pace,
Round about, solemn and slow,
One by one, row after row,
Up and up the pine-trees go,
So, like black priests up, and so
Down the other side again
To another greater, wilder country, 20
That's one vast red drear burnt-up plain,
Branched through and through with many a vein
Whence iron's dug, and copper's dealt;
Look right, look left, look straight before—
Beneath they mine, above they smelt,
Copper-ore and iron-ore,
And forge and furnace mould and melt,
And so on, more and ever more,
Till at the last, for a bounding belt,
Comes the salt sand hoar of the great sea shore 30
—And the whole is our Duke's country.

III

I was born the day this present Duke was—
(And O, says the song, ere I was old!)
In the castle where the other Duke was—
(When I was happy and young, not old!)
I in the kennel, he in the bower:
We are of like age to an hour.
My father was huntsman in that day;
Who has not heard my father say
That, when a boar was brought to bay, 40
Three times, four times out of five,
With his huntspear he'd contrive
To get the killing-place transfixed,
And pin him true, both eyes betwixt?
And that's why the old Duke would rather



He lost a salt-pit than my father,
And loved to have him ever in call;
That's why my father stood in the hall
When the old Duke brought his infant out
 To show the people, and while they passed 50
The wondrous bantling round about,
 Was first to start at the outside blast
As the Kaiser's courier blew his horn
Just a month after the babe was born.
"And," quoth the Kaiser's courier," since
The Duke has got an heir, our Prince
 Needs the Duke's self at his side:"
The Duke looked down and seemed to wince,
 But he thought of wars o'er the world wide,
Castles a-fire, men on their march, 60
The toppling tower, the crashing arch;
 And up he looked, and awhile he eyed
The row of crests and shields and banners
Of all achievements after all manners,
 And "ay," said the Duke with a surly pride.
 The more was his comfort when he died
At next year's end, in a velvet suit,
With a gilt glove on his hand, his foot
In a silken shoe for a leather boot,
Petticoated like a herald,



Page 47

70

In a chamber next to an ante-room,
Where he breathed the breath of page and groom,
What he called stink, and they, perfume:
—They should have set him on red Berold
Mad with pride, like fire to manage!
They should have got his cheek fresh tannage
Such a day as to-day in the merry sunshine!
Had they stuck on his fist a rough-foot merlin!
(Hark, the wind's on the heath at its game!
Oh for a noble falcon-lanner 80
To flap each broad wing like a banner,
And turn in the wind, and dance like flame!)
Had they broached a white-beer cask from Berlin
—Or if you incline to prescribe mere wine
Put to his lips, when they saw him pine,
A cup of our own Moldavia fine,
Cotnar for instance, green as May sorrel
And ropy with sweet—we shall not quarrel.

IV

So, at home, the sick tall yellow Duchess
Was left with the infant in her clutches, 90
She being the daughter of God knows who:
And now was the time to revisit her tribe.
Abroad and afar they went, the two,
And let our people rail and gibe
At the empty hall and extinguished fire,
As loud as we liked, but ever in vain,
Till after long years we had our desire,
And back came the Duke and his mother again.

V

And he came back the pertest little ape
That ever affronted human shape; 100
Full of his travel, struck at himself.
You'd say, he despised our bluff old ways?
—Not he! For in Paris they told the elf



Our rough North land was the Land of Lays,
The one good thing left in evil days;
Since the Mid-Age was the Heroic Time,
And only in wild nooks like ours
Could you taste of it yet as in its prime,
And see true castles, with proper towers,
Young-hearted women, old-minded men, 110
And manners now as manners were then.
So, all that the old Dukes had been, without knowing it,
This Duke would fain know he was, without being it;
'Twas not for the joy's self, but the joy of his showing it,
Nor for the pride's self, but the pride of our seeing it,
He revived all usages thoroughly worn-out,
The souls of them fumed-forth, the hearts of them torn-out:
And chief in the chase his neck he perilled
On a lathy horse, all legs and length,
With blood for bone, all speed, no strength; 120
—They should have set him on red Berold
With the red eye slow consuming in fire,
And the thin stiff ear like an abbey-spire!

VI



Page 48

Well, such as he was, he must marry, we heard:
And out of a convent, at the word,
Came the lady, in time of spring.
—Oh, old thoughts they cling, they cling!
That day, I know, with a dozen oaths
I clad myself in thick hunting-clothes
Fit for the chase of urochs or buffle 130
In winter-time when you need to muffle.
But the Duke had a mind we should cut a figure,
And so we saw the lady arrive:
My friend, I have seen a white crane bigger!
She was the smallest lady alive,
Made in a piece of nature's madness,
Too small, almost, for the life and gladness
That over-filled her, as some hive
Out of the bears' reach on the high trees
Is crowded with its safe merry bees: 140
In truth, she was not hard to please!
Up she looked, down she looked, round at the mead,
Straight at the castle, that's best indeed
To look at from outside the walls:
As for us, styled the "serfs and thralls,"
She as much thanked me as if she had said it,
(With her eyes, do you understand?)
Because I patted her horse while I led it;
And Max, who rode on her other hand,
Said, no bird flew past but she inquired 150
What its true name was, nor ever seemed tired—
If that was an eagle she saw hover,
And the green and grey bird on the field was the plover.
When suddenly appeared. the Duke:
And as down she sprung, the small foot pointed
On to my hand,—as with a rebuke,
And as if his backbone were not jointed,
The Duke stepped rather aside than forward
And welcomed her with his grandest smile;
And, mind you, his mother all the while 160
Chilled in the rear, like a wind to Nor'ward;
And up, like a weary yawn, with its pullies
Went, in a shriek, the rusty portcullis;
And, like a glad sky the north-wind sullies,
The lady's face stopped its play,



As if her first hair had grown grey;
For such things must begin some one day.

VII

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

VIII

She was active, stirring, all fire—
Could not rest, could not tire—
To a stone she might have given life!
 (I myself loved once, in my day)
—For a shepherd's, miner's, huntsman's wife,
 (I had a wife, I know what I say)
Never in all the world such an one! 180
And here was plenty to be done,
And she that could do it, great or small,
She was to do nothing at all.



Page 49

There was already this man in his post,
 This in his station, and that in his office,
And the Duke's plan admitted a wife, at most,
 To meet his eye, with the other trophies,
Now outside the hall, now in it,
 To sit thus, stand thus, see and be seen,
At the proper place in the proper minute, 190
 And die away the life between.
And it was amusing enough, each infraction
 Of rule—(but for after-sadness that came)
To hear the consummate self-satisfaction
 With which the young Duke and the old dame
Would let her advise, and criticise,
And, being a fool, instruct the wise,
 And, child-like, parcel out praise or blame:
They bore it all in complacent guise,
As though an artificer, after contriving 200
A wheel-work image as if it were living,
Should find with delight it could motion to strike him!
So found the Duke, and his mother like him:
The lady hardly got a rebuff—
That had not been contemptuous enough,
With his cursed smirk, as he nodded applause,
And kept off the old mother-cat's claws.

IX

So, the little lady grew silent and thin,
 Paling and ever paling,
As the way is with a hid chagrin; 210
 And the Duke perceived that she was ailing,
And said in his heart, "'Tis done to spite me,
But I shall find in my power to right me!"
Don't swear, friend! The old one, many a year,
Is in hell, and the Duke's self . . . you shall hear.



X

Well, early in autumn, at first winter-warning,
When the stag had to break with his foot, of a morning,
A drinking-hole out of the fresh tender ice
That covered the pond till the sun, in a trice,
Loosening it, let out a ripple of gold, 220
 And another and another, and faster and faster
Till, dimpling to blindness, the wide water rolled:
 Then it so chanced that the Duke our master
Asked himself what were the pleasures in season,
 And found, since the calendar bade him be hearty,
He should do the Middle Age no treason
 In resolving on a hunting-party.
Always provided, old books showed the way of it!
 What meant old poets by their strictures?
And when old poets had said their say of it, 230
 How taught old painters in their pictures?
We must revert to the proper channels,
Workings in tapestry, paintings on panels,
And gather up woodcraft's authentic traditions:
Here was food for our various ambitions,
As on each case, exactly stated—
 To encourage your dog, now, the properest chirrup
 Or best prayer to Saint Hubert on mounting your stirrup—

Page 50

We of the household took thought and debated.
Blessed was he whose back ached with the jerkin 240
His sire was wont to do forest-work in;
Blesseder he who nobly sunk “ohs”
And “ahs” while he tugged on his grandsire’s trunk-hose;
What signified hats if they had no rims on,
Each slouching before and behind like the scallop,
And able to serve at sea for a shallop,
Loaded with lacquer and looped with crimson?
So that the deer now, to make a short rhyme on’t,
What with our Venerers, Prickers and Verderers, 250
Might hope for real hunters at length and not murderers,
And oh the Duke’s tailor, he had a hot time on’t!

XI

Now you must know that when the first dizziness
Of flap-hats and buff-coats and jack-boots subsided,
The Duke put this question, “The Duke’s part provided,
Had not the Duchess some share in the business?”
For out of the mouth of two or three witnesses
Did he establish all fit-or-unfitnesses:
And, after much laying of heads together,
Somebody’s cap got a notable feather
By the announcement with proper unction 260
That he had discovered the lady’s function;
Since ancient authors gave this tenet,
“When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
And with water to wash the hands of her liege
In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
Let her preside at the disemboweling.”
Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
As to catch a hawk, some falcon-lanner,
And thrust her broad wings like a banner 270
Into a coop for a vulgar pigeon;
And if day by day and week by week
You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,



Would it cause you any great surprise
If, when you decided to give her an airing,
You found she needed a little preparing?
—I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
If she clung to the perch, as to take it in dudgeon?
Yet when the Duke to his lady signified, 280
Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
In what a pleasure she was to participate,—
And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
And duly acknowledged the Duke's fore-thought,
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
And much wrong now that used to be right,
So, thanking him, declined the hunting— 290
Was conduct ever more affronting?
With all the ceremony settled—
With the towel ready, and the sewer
Polishing up his oldest ewer,

Page 51

And the jennet pitched upon, a piebald,
Black-barred, cream-coated and pink eye-balled—
No wonder if the Duke was nettled!
And when she persisted nevertheless,—
Well, I suppose here's the time to confess
That there ran half round our lady's chamber 300
A balcony none of the hardest to clamber;
And that Jacynth the tire-woman, ready in waiting,

Stayed in call outside, what need of relating?
And since Jacynth was like a June rose, why, a fervent
Adorer of Jacynth of course was your servant;
And if she had the habit to peep through the casement,
How could I keep at any vast distance?
And so, as I say, on the lady's persistence,
The Duke, dumb-stricken with amazement,
Stood for a while in a sultry smother, 310
And then, with a smile that partook of the awful,
Turned her over to his yellow mother
To learn what was held decorous and lawful;
And the mother smelt blood with a cat-like instinct,
As her cheek quick whitened thro' all its quince-tinct.
Oh, but the lady heard the whole truth at once!
What meant she?—Who was she?—Her duty and station,
The wisdom of age and the folly of youth, at once,
Its decent regard and its fitting relation—
In brief, my friend, set all the devils in hell free 320
And turn them out to carouse in a belfry
And treat the priests to a fifty-part canon,
And then you may guess how that tongue of hers ran on!
Well, somehow or other it ended at last
And, licking her whiskers, out she passed;
And after her,—making (he hoped) a face
Like Emperor Nero or Sultan Saladin,
Stalked the Duke's self with the austere grace
Of ancient hero or modern paladin,
>From door to staircase—oh such a solemn 330
Unbending of the vertebral column!



XII

However, at sunrise our company mustered;
And here was the huntsman bidding unkennel,
And there 'neath his bonnet the pricker blustered,
With feather dank as a bough of wet fennel;
For the court-yard walls were filled with fog
You might have cut as an axe chops a log—
Like so much wool for colour and bulkiness;
And out rode the Duke in a perfect sulkiness,
Since, before breakfast, a man feels but queasily 340
And a sinking at the lower abdomen
Begins the day with indifferent omen.
And lo, as he looked around uneasily,
The sun ploughed the fog up and drove it asunder
This way and that from the valley under;
And, looking through the court-yard arch,
Down in the valley, what should meet him
But a troop of Gipsies on their march?
No doubt with the annual gifts to greet him.

XIII



Page 52

Now, in your land, Gipsies reach you, only 350
After reaching all lands beside;
North they go, South they go, trooping or lonely
And still, as they travel far and wide,
Catch they and keep now a trace here, a trace there,
That puts you in mind of a place here, a place there.
But with us, I believe they rise out of the ground,
And nowhere else, I take it, are found
With the earth-tint yet so freshly embrowned:
Born, no doubt, like insects which breed on
The very fruit they are meant to feed on. 360
For the earth-not a use to which they don't turn it,
The ore that grows in the mountain's womb,
Or the sand in the pits like a honeycomb,
They sift and soften it, bake it and burn it—
Whether they weld you, for instance, a snaffle
With side-bars never a brute can baffle;
Or a lock that's a puzzle of wards within wards;
Or, if your colt's fore-foot inclines to curve inwards,
Horseshoes they hammer which turn on a swivel
And won't allow the hoof to shrivel. 370
Then they cast bells like the shell of the winkle
That keep a stout heart in the ram with their tinkle;
But the sand-they pinch and pound it like otters;
Commend me to Gipsy glass-makers and potters!
Glasses they'll blow you, crystal-clear,
Where just a faint cloud of rose shall appear,
As if in pure water you dropped and let die
A bruised black-blooded mulberry;
And that other sort, their crowning pride,
With long white threads distinct inside, 380
Like the lake-flower's fibrous roots which dangle
Loose such a length and never tangle,
Where the bold sword-lily cuts the clear waters,
And the cup-lily couches with all the white daughters:
Such are the works they put their hand to,
The uses they turn and twist iron and sand to.
And these made the troop, which our Duke saw sally
Toward his castle from out of the valley,
Men and women, like new-hatched spiders,
Come out with the morning to greet our riders. 390
And up they wound till they reached the ditch,
Whereat all stopped save one, a witch



That I knew, as she hobbled from the group,
By her gait directly and her stoop,
I, whom Jacynth was used to importune
To let that same witch tell us our fortune.
The oldest Gipsy then above ground;
And, sure as the autumn season came round,
She paid us a visit for profit or pastime,
And every time, as she swore, for the last time. 400

And presently she was seen to sidle
Up to the Duke till she touched his bridle,
So that the horse of a sudden reared up
As under its nose the old witch peered up
With her worn-out eyes, or rather eye-holes
 Of no use now but to gather brine,
 And began a kind of level whine
Such as they used to sing to their viols

Page 53

When their ditties they go grinding
Up and down with nobody minding 410
And then, as of old, at the end of the humming
Her usual presents were forthcoming
—A dog-whistle blowing the fiercest of trebles,
(Just a sea-shore stone holding a dozen fine pebbles)
Or a porcelain mouth-piece to screw on a pipe-end—
And so she awaited her annual stipend.
But this time, the Duke would scarcely vouchsafe
 A word in reply; and in vain she felt
 With twitching fingers at her belt
 For the purse of sleek pine-martin pelt, 420
Ready to put what he gave in her pouch safe—
Till, either to quicken his apprehension,
Or possibly with an after-intention,
She was come, she said, to pay her duty
To the new Duchess, the youthful beauty.
No sooner had she named his lady,
Than a shine lit up the face so shady,
And its smirk returned with a novel meaning—
For it struck him, the babe just wanted weaning;
If one gave her a taste of what life was and sorrow, 430
She, foolish today, would be wiser tomorrow;
And who so fit a teacher of trouble
As this sordid crone bent well-nigh double?
So, glancing at her wolf-skin vesture,
 (If such it was, for they grow so hirsute
 That their own fleece serves for natural fur-suit)
He was contrasting, 'twas plain from his gesture,
The life of the lady so flower-like and delicate
With the loathsome squalor of this helicat.
I, in brief, was the man the Duke beckoned 440
 From out of the throng, and while I drew near
He told the crone-as I since have reckoned
 By the way he bent and spoke into her ear
With circumspection and mystery—
The main of the lady's history,
Her frowardness and ingratitude:
And for all the crone's submissive attitude
I could see round her mouth the loose plaits tightening,



And her brow with assenting intelligence brightening
As though she engaged with hearty goodwill 450
Whatever he now might enjoin to fulfil,
And promised the lady a thorough frightening.

And so, just giving her a glimpse
Of a purse, with the air of a man who imps
The wing of the hawk that shall fetch the hernshaw,
He bade me take the Gipsy mother
And set her telling some story or other
Of hill or dale, oak-wood or fernshaw,
To wile away a weary hour
For the lady left alone in her bower, 460
Whose mind and body craved exertion
And yet shrank from all better diversion.

XIV



Page 54

Then clapping heel to his horse, the mere curveter,
Out rode the Duke, and after his hollo
Horses and hounds swept, huntsman and servitor,
And back I turned and bade the crone follow.
And what makes me confident what's to be told you
Had all along been of this crone's devising,
Is, that, on looking round sharply, behold you,
There was a novelty quick as surprising: 470
For first, she had shot up a full head in stature,
And her step kept pace with mine nor faltered,
As if age had foregone its usurpature,
And the ignoble mien was wholly altered,
And the face looked quite of another nature,
And the change reached too, whatever the change meant,
Her shaggy wolf-skin cloak's arrangement:
For where its tatters hung loose like sedges,
Gold coins were glittering on the edges,
Like the band-roll strung with tomans 480
Which proves the veil a Persian woman's:
And under her brow, like a snail's horns newly
Come out as after the rain he paces,
Two unmistakeable eye-points duly
Live and aware looked out of their places.
So, we went and found Jacynth at the entry
Of the lady's chamber standing sentry;
I told the command and produced my companion,
And Jacynth rejoiced to admit any one,
For since last night, by the same token, 490
Not a single word had the lady spoken:
They went in both to the presence together,
While I in the balcony watched the weather.

XV

And now, what took place at the very first of all,
I cannot tell, as I never could learn it:
Jacynth constantly wished a curse to fall
On that little head of hers and burn it
If she knew how she came to drop so soundly
Asleep of a sudden and there continue
The whole time sleeping as profoundly 500
As one of the boars my father would pin you
'Twixt the eyes where life holds garrison,



—Jacynth forgive me the comparison!
But where I begin my own narration
Is a little after I took my station
To breathe the fresh air from the balcony,
And, having in those days a falcon eye,
To follow the hunt thro' the open country,
 From where the bushes thinlier crested
The hillocks, to a plain where's not one tree. 510
 When, in a moment, my ear was arrested
By—was it singing, or was it saying,
Or a strange musical instrument playing
In the chamber?—and to be certain
I pushed the lattice, pulled the curtain,
And there lay Jacynth asleep,
Yet as if a watch she tried to keep,
In a rosy sleep along the floor
With her head against the door;
While in the midst, on the seat of state, 520
Was a queen-the Gipsy woman late,



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With head and face downbent
On the lady's head and face intent:
For, coiled at her feet like a child at ease,
The lady sat between her knees
And o'er them the lady's clasped hands met,
And on those hands her chin was set,
And her upturned face met the face of the crone
Wherein the eyes had grown and grown
As if she could double and quadruple 530
At pleasure the play of either pupil
—Very like, by her hands' slow fanning,
As up and down like a gor-crow's flappers
They moved to measure, or bell-clappers.
I said, "Is it blessing, is it banning,
Do they applaud you or burlesque you—
Those hands and fingers with no flesh on?"
But, just as I thought to spring in to the rescue,
At once I was stopped by the lady's expression:
For it was life her eyes were drinking 540
>From the crone's wide pair above unwinking,
—Life's pure fire received without shrinking,
Into the heart and breast whose heaving
Told you no single drop they were leaving,
—Life, that filling her, passed redundant
Into her very hair, back swerving
Over each shoulder, loose and abundant,
As her head thrown back showed the white throat curving;
And the very tresses shared in the pleasure,
Moving to the mystic measure, 550
Bounding as the bosom bounded.
I stopped short, more and more confounded,
As still her cheeks burned and eyes glistened,
As she listened and she listened:
When all at once a hand detained me,
The selfsame contagion gained me,
And I kept time to the wondrous chime,
Making out words and prose and rhyme,
Till it seemed that the music furl'd
Its wings like a task fulfilled, and dropped 560
From under the words it first had propped,



And left them midway in the world:
Word took word as hand takes hand
I could hear at last, and understand,
And when I held the unbroken thread,
The Gipsy said:
"And so at last we find my tribe.
 And so I set thee in the midst,
And to one and all of them describe
 What thou saidst and what thou didst, 570
Our long and terrible journey through,
And all thou art ready to say and do
In the trials that remain:
I trace them the vein and the other vein
That meet on thy brow and part again,
Making our rapid mystic mark;
 And I bid my people prove and probe
 Each eye's profound and glorious globe
Till they detect the kindred spark
In those depths so dear and dark, 580
Like the spots that snap and burst and flee,
Circling over the midnight sea.
And on that round young cheek of thine
 I make them recognize the tinge,
As when of the costly scarlet wine
 They drip so much as will impinge

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And spread in a thinnest scale afloat
One thick gold drop from the olive's coat
Over a silver plate whose sheen
Still thro' the mixture shall be seen. 590
For so I prove thee, to one and all,
 Fit, when my people ope their breast,
To see the sign, and hear the call,
 And take the vow, and stand the test
 Which adds one more child to the rest—
When the breast is bare and the arms are wide,
And the world is left outside.

For there is probation to decree,
And many and long must the trials be
Thou shalt victoriously endure, 600
If that brow is true and those eyes are sure;
Like a jewel-finder's fierce assay
 Of the prize he dug from its mountain tomb—
Let once the vindicating ray
 Leap out amid the anxious gloom,
And steel and fire have done their part
And the prize falls on its finder's heart;
So, trial after trial past,
Wilt thou fall at the very last
Breathless, half in trance 610
With the thrill of the great deliverance,
 Into our arms for evermore;
And thou shalt know, those arms once curled
 About thee, what we knew before,
How love is the only good in the world.
Henceforth be loved as heart can love,
Or brain devise, or hand approve!
Stand up, look below,
It is our life at thy feet we throw
To step with into light and joy; 620
Not a power of life but we employ
To satisfy thy nature's want;
Art thou the tree that props the plant,
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—
Canst thou help us, must we help thee?



If any two creatures grew into one,
They would do more than the world has done:
Though each apart were never so weak,
Ye vainly through the world should seek
For the knowledge and the might 630
Which in such union grew their right:
So, to approach at least that end,
And blend,—as much as may be, blend
Thee with us or us with thee—
As climbing plant or propping tree,
Shall some one deck thee, over and down,
 Up and about, with blossoms and leaves?
Fix his heart's fruit for thy garland-crown,
 Cling with his soul as the gourd-vine cleaves,
Die on thy boughs and disappear 640
While not a leaf of thine is sere?
Or is the other fate in store,
And art thou fitted to adore,
To give thy wondrous self away,
And take a stronger nature's sway?
I foresee and could foretell
Thy future portion, sure and well:
But those passionate eyes speak true, speak true,
Let them say what thou shalt do!
Only be sure thy daily life, 650
In its peace or in its strife,
Never shall be unobserved;
 We pursue thy whole career,

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And hope for it, or doubt, or fear—
Lo, hast thou kept thy path or swerved,
We are beside thee in all thy ways,
With our blame, with our praise,
Our shame to feel, our pride to show,
Glad, angry—but indifferent, no!
Whether it be thy lot to go, 660
For the good of us all, where the haters meet
In the crowded city's horrible street;
Or thou step alone through the morass
Where never sound yet was
Save the dry quick clap of the stork's bill,
For the air is still, and the water still,
When the blue breast of the dipping coot
Dives under, and all is mute.
So, at the last shall come old age,
Decrepit as befits that stage; 670
How else wouldst thou retire apart
With the hoarded memories of thy heart,
And gather all to the very least
Of the fragments of life's earlier feast,
Let fall through eagerness to find
The crowning dainties yet behind?
Ponder on the entire past
Laid together thus at last,
When the twilight helps to fuse
The first fresh with the faded hues, 680
And the outline of the whole,
As round eve's shades their framework roll,
Grandly fronts for once thy soul.
And then as, 'mid the dark, a gleam
 Of yet another morning breaks,
And like the hand which ends a dream,
Death, with the might of his sunbeam,
 Touches the flesh and the soul awakes,
Then—"
 Ay, then indeed something would happen!
 But what? For here her voice changed like a bird's; 690
 There grew more of the music and less of the words;
Had Jacynth only been by me to clap pen



To paper and put you down every syllable
 With those clever clerkly fingers,
 All I've forgotten as well as what lingers
In this old brain of mine that's but ill able
To give you even this poor version
 Of the speech I spoil, as it were, with stammering
 —More fault of those who had the hammering
 Of prosody into me and syntax 700
 And did it, not with hobnails but tintacks!

But to return from this excursion—
Just, do you mark, when the song was sweetest,
The peace most deep and the charm completest,
There came, shall I say, a snap—
 And the charm vanished!
 And my sense returned, so strangely banished,
And, starting as from a nap,
I knew the crone was bewitching my lady,
With Jacynth asleep; and but one spring made I 710
Down from the casement, round to the portal,
 Another minute and I had entered—
When the door opened, and more than mortal
 Stood, with a face where to my mind centred
All beauties I ever saw or shall see,
The Duchess: I stopped as if struck by palsy.
She was so different, happy and beautiful,

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I felt at once that all was best,
And that I had nothing to do, for the rest
But wait her commands, obey and be dutiful. 720
Not that, in fact, there was any commanding;
I saw the glory of her eye,
And the brow's height and the breast's expanding,
And I was hers to live or to die.
As for finding what she wanted,
You know God Almighty granted
Such little signs should serve wild creatures
To tell one another all their desires,
So that each knows what his friend requires,
And does its bidding without teachers. 730
I preceded her; the crone
Followed silent and alone;
I spoke to her, but she merely jabbered
In the old style; both her eyes had slunk
Back to their pits; her stature shrunk;
In short, the soul in its body sunk
Like a blade sent home to its scabbard.
We descended, I preceding;
Crossed the court with nobody heeding;
All the world was at the chase, 740
The courtyard like a desert-place,
The stable emptied of its small fry;
I saddled myself the very palfrey
I remember patting while it carried her,
The day she arrived and the Duke married her.
And, do you know, though it's easy deceiving
Oneself in such matters, I can't help believing
The lady had not forgotten it either,
And knew the poor devil so much beneath her
Would have been only too glad for her service 750
To dance on hot ploughshares like a Turk dervise,
But, unable to pay proper duty where owing
Was reduced to that pitiful method of showing it:
For though the moment I began setting
His saddle on my own nag of Berold's begetting,
(Not that I meant to be obtrusive)
She stopped me, while his rug was shifting,



By a single rapid finger's lifting,
And, with a gesture kind but conclusive,
And a little shake of the head, refused me— 760
I say, although she never used me,
Yet when she was mounted, the Gipsy behind her,
And I ventured to remind her
I suppose with a voice of less steadiness
Than usual, for my feeling exceeded me,
—Something to the effect that I was in readiness
Whenever God should please she needed me—
Then, do you know, her face looked down on me
With a look that placed a crown on me,
And she felt in her bosom—mark, her bosom— 770
And, as a flower-tree drops its blossom,
Dropped me . . . ah, had it been a purse
Of silver, my friend, or gold that's worse,
Why, you see, as soon as I found myself
So understood,—that a true heart so may gain
Such a reward,—I should have gone home again,
Kissed Jacynth, and soberly drowned myself!
It was a little plait of hair
Such as friends in a convent make

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To wear, each for the other's sake— 780
This, see, which at my breast I wear,
Ever did (rather to Jacynth's grudging),
And ever shall, till the Day of Judgment.
And then-and then—to cut short—this is idle,
 These are feelings it is not good to foster—
I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
 And the palfrey bounded—and so we lost her.

XVI

When the liquor's out why clink the cannikin?
I did think to describe you the panic in
The redoubtable breast of our master the mannikin, 790
And what was the pitch of his mother's yellowness,
 How she turned as a shark to snap the spare-rib
 Clean off, sailors say, from a pearl-diving Carib,
When she heard, what she called the flight of the feloness
—But it seems such child's play,
What they said and did with the lady away!
And to dance on, when we've lost the music,
Always made me—and no doubt makes you—sick.
Nay, to my mind, the world's face looked so stern
As that sweet form disappeared through the postern, 800
She that kept it in constant good humour,
It ought to have stopped; there seemed nothing to do more.
But the world thought otherwise and went on,
And my head's one that its spite was spent on:
Thirty years are fled since that morning,
And with them all my head's adorning.
Nor did the old Duchess die outright,
As you expect, of suppressed spite,
The natural end of every adder
Not suffered to empty its poison-bladder: 810
But she and her son agreed, I take it,
That no one should touch on the story to wake it,
For the wound in the Duke's pride rankled fiery,
So, they made no search and small inquiry—
And when fresh Gipsies have paid us a visit, I've



Notice the couple were never inquisitive,
But told them they're folks the Duke don't want here,
And bade them make haste and cross the frontier.
Brief, the Duchess was gone and the Duke was glad of it,
 And the old one was in the young one's stead, 820
 And took, in her place, the household's head,
And a blessed time the household had of it!
And were I not, as a man may say, cautious
How I trench, more than needs, on the nauseous,
I could favour you with sundry touches
Of the paint-smutches with which the Duchess
Heightened the mellowness of her cheek's yellowness
(To get on faster) until at last her
Cheek grew to be one master-plaster
Of mucus and fucus from mere use of ceruse: 830
In short, she grew from scalp to udder
Just the object to make you shudder.

XVII



Page 60

You're my friend—
What a thing friendship is, world without end!
How it gives the heart and soul a stir-up
 As if somebody broached you a glorious runlet,
 And poured out, all lovely, sparklingly, sunlit,
Our green Moldavia, the streaky syrup,
Cotnar as old as the time of the Druids—
Friendship may match with that monarch of fluids; 840
Each supple a dry brain, fills you its ins-and-outs,
Gives your life's hour-glass a shake when the thin sand doubts
Whether to run on or stop short, and guarantees
Age is not all made of stark sloth and arrant ease.
I have seen my little lady once more,
 Jacynth, the Gipsy, Berold, and the rest of it,
For to me spoke the Duke, as I told you before;
 I always wanted to make a clean breast of it:
And now it is made-why, my heart's blood, that went trickle,
 Trickle, but anon, in such muddy dribblets, 850
Is pumped up brisk now, through the main ventricle,
 And genially floats me about the giblets.

I'll tell you what I intend to do:
I must see this fellow his sad life through—
He is our Duke, after all,
And I, as he says, but a serf and thrall.
My father was born here, and I inherit
 His fame, a chain he bound his son with;
Could I pay in a lump I should prefer it,
 But there's no mine to blow up and get done with: 860
So, I must stay till the end of the chapter.
For, as to our middle-age-manners-adaptor,
Be it a thing to be glad on or sorry on,
Some day or other, his head in a morion
And breast in a hauberk, his heels he'll kick up,
Slain by an onslaught fierce of hiccup.
And then, when red doth the sword of our Duke rust,
And its leathern sheath lie o'ergrown with a blue crust,
Then I shall scrape together my earnings;
 For, you see, in the churchyard Jacynth reposes, 870
 And our children all went the way of the roses:
It's a long lane that knows no turnings.
One needs but little tackle to travel in;
 So, just one stout cloak shall I indue:



And for a staff, what beats the javelin
 With which his boars my father pinned you?
And then, for a purpose you shall hear presently,
 Taking some Cotnar, a tight plump skinful,
I shall go journeying, who but I, pleasantly!
 Sorrow is vain and despondency sinful. 880
What's a man's age? He must hurry more, that's all;
 Cram in a day, what his youth took a year to hold:
 When we mind labour, then only, we're too old—
What age had Methusalem when he begat Saul?
And at last, as its haven some buffeted ship sees,
 (Come all the way from the north-parts with sperm oil)
 I hope to get safely out of the turmoil
And arrive one day at the land of the Gipsies,
And find my lady, or hear the last news of her

Page 61

>From some old thief and son of Lucifer, 890
His forehead chapleted green with wreathy hop,
Sunburned all over like an Aethiop.
And when my Cotnar begins to operate
And the tongue of the rogue to run at a proper rate,
And our wine-skin, tight once, shows each flaccid dent,
I shall drop in with—as if by accident—
“You never knew, then, how it all ended,
What fortune good or bad attended
The little lady your Queen befriended?”
—And when that’s told me, what’s remaining? 900
This world’s too hard for my explaining.
The same wise judge of matters equine
 Who still preferred some slim four-year-old
 To the big-boned stock of mighty Berold
And, for strong Cotnar, drank French weak wine,
He also must be such a lady’s scorner!
 Smooth Jacob still robs homely Esau:
 Now up, now down, the world’s one see-saw.
—So, I shall find out some snug corner
Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight, 910
Turn myself round and bid the world good night;
And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet blowing
 Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
To a world where will be no further throwing
 Pearls before swine that can’t value them. Amen!

Notes: “The Flight of the Duchess.” A story of the triumph of a free and loving life over a cold and conventional one. The duke’s huntsman frees his mind to his friend as to his part in the escape of the gladsome, ardent young duchess from the blighting yoke of a husband whose life consisted in imitating defunct mediaeval customs. An old gipsy is the agency that awakens her to the joy and freedom of love. Her mystic chant and charm claim the duchess as the true heir of gipsy blood, thrill her with life, half-hypnotize the huntsman, too, and seem to transform the gipsy crone herself into an Eastern queen. He helps them off, and looks for no better future, when the duke’s death releases him, than to travel to the land of the gipsies and hear the last news of his lady.

The poem grew from the fancies aroused in the poet’s heart by the snatch of a woman’s song he overheard when a boy—“Following the Queen of the Gipsies, O!”



*A Grammarian's funeral,
shortly after the revival of
learning in Europe*

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
 Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
 Each in its tether
Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
 Cared-for till cock-crow:
Look out if yonder be not day again
 Rimming the rock-row!
That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
 Rarer, intenser, 10
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,

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Chafes in the censer.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
 Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
 Crowded with culture!
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
 Clouds overcome it;
No! Yonder sparkle is the citadel's
 Circling its summit. 20
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
 Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
 He's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
 'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous calm and dead,
 Borne on our shoulders.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
 Safe from the weather! 30
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
 Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
 Lyric Apollo!

Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
 Winter would follow?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
 Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, " New measures, other feet anon!
 My dance is finished?" 40
No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
 Make for the city!)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
 Over men's pity;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
 Bent on escaping:
"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled?
 Show me their shaping
Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,



Give!"—So, he gowned him, 50
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain:
"Time to taste life," another would have said,
"Up with the curtain!"
This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
Patience a moment!
Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
Still there's the comment. 60
Let me know all ! Prate not of most or least,
Painful or easy!
Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
Ay, nor feel queasy."
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner, he spurned it.
Image the whole, then execute the parts—
Fancy the fabric 70
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!



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(Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
Gaping before us.)
Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
(Hearten our chorus!)
That before living he'd learn how to live—
No end to learning:
Earn the means first-God surely will contrive
Use for our earning. 80
Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes:
Live now or never!"
He said, " What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever."
Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
Calculus racked him:

Leadens before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
Tussis attacked him.
"Now, master, take a little rest!"—not he!
(Caution redoubled, 90
Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
Not a whit troubled
Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
Fierce as a dragon
He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
Sucked at the flagon.
Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain! 100
Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
(He loves the burthen)
God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthen?
Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
Just what it all meant?
He would not discount life, as fools do here,
Paid by instalment.
He ventured neck or nothing-heaven's success
Found, or earth's failure: 110
"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes:
Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:



This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit. 120
That, has the world here-should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled Hoti's business—let it be!—
Properly based Oun— 130
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic De,
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there:



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This man decided not to Live but Know—
 Bury this man there? 140
 Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
 Lightnings are loosened,
 Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
 Peace let the dew send!
 Lofty designs must close in like effects:
 Loftily lying,
 Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
 Living and dying.

Notes: "A Grammarian's Funeral" is an elegy of a typical pioneer scholar of the Renaissance period, sung by the leader of the chorus of disciples, and interspersed with parenthetical directions to them, while they all bear the body of their master to its appropriate burial-place on the highest mountain-peak. A humorous sense of disproportion in the labors of devoted scholarship to its results heightens their exaltation of the dead humanist's indomitable trust in the supremacy of the immaterial.

86. Calculus: the stone.

88. Tussis: a cough.

95. Hydroptic: dropsical.

129. Hoti: Greek particle, conjunction, that.

130. Oun: Greek particle, then, now then.

131. Enclitic De: Greek , concerning which Browning wrote to the Editor of The News, London, Nov. 21, 1874: "In a clever article you speak of 'the doctrine of the enclitic De—which, with all deference to Mr. Browning, in point of fact, does not exist.' No, not to Mr. Browning, but pray defer to Herr Buttmann, whose fifth list of 'enclitics' ends with the inseparable De,'— or to Curtius, whose fifth list ends also with De (meaning 'towards' and as a demonstrative appendage). That this is not to be confounded with the accentuated 'De, meaning but,' was the 'Doctrine' which the Grammarian bequeathed to those capable of receiving it."

THE HERETIC'S TRAGEDY A MIDDLE-AGE INTERLUDE

Rosa MUNDI; Seu, FULCITE me FLORIBUS.
A conceit of master GYSBRECHT,
canon-regular of saint JODOCUS-by-
the-bar, Ypres city. CANTUQUE,
Virgilius. And hath often been sung

*at Hock-tide and festivals. GAVISUS
Eram, Jessides.*

(It would seem to be a glimpse from the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, at Paris, A.D. 1314, as distorted by the refraction from Flemish brain to brain, during the course of a couple of centuries.)

[Molay was Grand Master of the Templars when that order was suppressed in 1312.]

I

PREADMONISHETH *the abbot* DEODAET.



Page 65

The Lord, we look to once for all,
Is the Lord we should look at, all at once:
He knows not to vary, saith Saint Paul,
Nor the shadow of turning, for the nonce.
See him no other than as he is!
Give both the infinitudes their due—
Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.

[Organ: plagal-cadence.]

As infinite a justice too.

II

[*One singeth*]
John, Master of the Temple of God, 10
Falling to sin the Unknown Sin,
What he bought of Emperor Aldabrod,
He sold it to Sultan Saladin:
Till, caught by Pope Clement, a-buzzing there,
Hornet-prince of the mad wasps' hive,
And clipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to be burned alive.
[And wanteth there grace of lute or
clavicithern, ye shall say to
confirm him who singeth—
We bring John now to be burned alive.]

III

In the midst is a goodly gallows built;
'Twixt fork and fork, a stake is stuck; 20
But first they set divers tumbrils a-tilt,
Make a trench all round with the city muck;
Inside they pile log upon log, good store;
Faggots no few, blocks great and small,
Reach a man's mid-thigh, no less, no more,—
For they mean he should roast in the sight of all.

Chorus.

We mean he should roast in the sight of all.

IV

Good sappy bavins that kindle forthwith;
 Billets that blaze substantial and slow;
Pine-stump split deftly, dry as pith; 30
 Larch-heart that chars to a chalk-white glow:
They up they hoist me John in a chafe,
 Sling him fast like a hog to scorch,
Spit in his face, then leap back safe,
Sing "Laudes " and bid clap-to the torch.

Chorus.

Laus deo—who bids clap-to the torch.

V

John of the Temple, whose fame so bragged,
 Is burning alive in Paris square!
How can he curse, if his mouth is gagged?
 Or wriggle his neck, with a collar there? 40
Or heave his chest, which a band goes round?
 Or threat with his fist, since his arms are spliced?
Or kick with his feet, now his legs are bound?
 —Thinks John, I will call upon Jesus Christ.
 [Here one crosseth himself.]

VI



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Jesus Christ—John had bought and sold,
Jesus Christ—John had eaten and drunk;
To him, the Flesh meant silver and gold.
(Salva reverentia.)
Now it was,” Saviour, bountiful lamb,
“I have roasted thee Turks, though men roast me! 50
“See thy servant, the plight wherein I am!
“Art thou a saviour? Save thou me!”

Chorus.

’Tis John the mocker cries, “Save thou me!”

VII

Who maketh God’s menace an idle word?
—Saith, it no more means what it proclaims,
Than a damsel’s threat to her wanton bird?
For she too prattles of ugly names.
—Saith, he knoweth but one thing—what he knows?
That God is good and the rest is breath;
Why else is the same styled Sharon’s rose? 60
Once a rose, ever a rose, he saith.

Chorus.

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

VIII

Alack, there be roses and roses, John!
Some, honied of taste like your leman’s tongue:
Some, bitter; for why? (roast gaily on!)
Their tree struck root in devil’s-dung.
When Paul once reasoned of righteousness
And of temperance and of judgment to come,
Good Felix trembled, he could no less:
John, snickering, crook’d his wicked thumb. 70

Chorus.

What cometh to John of the wicked thumb?



IX

Ha ha, John plucketh now at his rose
 To rid himself of a sorrow at heart!
Lo,—petal on petal, fierce rays unclose;
 Anther on anther, sharp spikes outstart;
And with blood for dew, the bosom boils;
 And a gust of sulphur is all its smell;
And lo, he is horribly in the toils
 Of a coal-black giant flower of hell!

Chorus.

What maketh heaven, That maketh hell. 80

X

So, as John called now, through the fire amain,
 On the Name, he had cursed with, all his life—
To the Person, he bought and sold again—
 For the Face, with his daily buffets rife—
Feature by feature It took its place:
 And his voice, like a mad dog's choking bark,
At the steady whole of the Judge's face—
 Died. Forth John's soul flared into the dark.

SUBJOINETH *the abbot* DEODAET.

God help all poor souls lost in the dark!

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Notes: “The Heretic’s Tragedy” is an Interlude imagined in the manner of the Middle Ages, and typically representing this period of human development in its quaint piety and prejudice, its childish delight in cruelty, and its cumulative legend-making during the course of two centuries as reflected through the Flemish nature. It is supposed to be sung by an abbot, a choir-singer, and a chorus, in celebration of the burning of Jacques du Bourg-Molay, last Grand Master of the wealthy and powerful secular order of Knights Templar, which came into rivalry with the Church after the Crusades and was finally suppressed by Philip IV of France and Pope Clement V, Molay’s burning at Paris in 1314 being a final scene in their discomfiture and the Church’s triumph.

8. Plagal-cadence: a closing progression of chords in which the sub-dominant or chord on the fourth degree of the scale precedes the tonic or chord on the first degree of the scale. The name arises from the modes used in early church music called Plagal Modes, which were a transposition of the authentic modes beginning on the fourth degree of the authentic modes.

12. Bought of . . . Aldabrod, *etc.*: Clement’s arraignment of Jacques or John being that the riches won piously by the order during the Crusades, he had not scrupled to sell again to Saladin, the Sultan, who is portrayed by Scott in “The Talisman.”

14. Pope Clement: the fifth Clement (1305-1314).

18. Clavicithern: a cithern with keys like a harpsichord.

25. Sing “Laudes”: Sing the seven Psalms of praise making up the service of the Church called Lauds.

48. Salv<a^>, *etc.* the bidding to greet here with a reverence, according to custom, the Host, or Christ’s flesh, which had been mentioned.

60. Sharon’s rose: Solomon’s Song 2.1.

HOLY-CROSS DAY

*On which the jews were forced to attend
an annual Christian sermon in Rome*

[” Now was come about Holy-Cross Day, and now must my lord preach his first sermon to the Jews: as it was of old cared for in the merciful bowels of the Church, that, so to speak, a crumb at least from her conspicuous table here in Rome should be, though but once yearly, cast to the famishing dogs, under-trampled and bespitten-upon beneath the feet of the guests. And a moving sight in truth, this, of so many of the besotted blind restif and ready-to-perish Hebrews! now maternally brought-nay (for He saith, ‘Compel them to come in’) haled, as it were, by the head and hair, and against their obstinate

hearts, to partake of the heavenly grace. What awakening, what striving with tears, what working of a yeasty conscience! Nor was my lord wanting to himself on so apt an occasion; witness the abundance of conversions which did incontinently reward him: though not to my lord be altogether the glory."-Diary by the Bishop's Secretary, 1600.]

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What the Jews really said, on thus being driven to church, was rather to this effect:-

I

Fee, faw, fum! bubble and squeak!
Blessedest Thursday's the fat of the week.
Rumble and tumble, sleek and rough,
Stinking and savoury, smug and gruff,
Take the church-road, for the bell's due chime
Gives us the summons—'tis sermon-time!

II

Boh, here's Barnabas! Job, that's you?
Up stumps Solomon—bustling too?
Shame, man! greedy beyond your years
To handsel the bishop's shaving-shears?
Fair play's a jewel! Leave friends in the lurch? 10
Stand on a line ere you start for the church!

III

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

IV

Bow, wow, wow—a bone for the dog!
I liken his Grace to an acorned hog. 20
What, a boy at his side, with the bloom of a lass,
To help and handle my lord's hour-glass!
Didst ever behold so lithe a chine?
His cheek hath laps like a fresh-singed swine.



V

Aaron's asleep—shove hip to haunch,
Or somebody deal him a dig in the paunch!
Look at the purse with the tassel and knob
And the gown with the angel and thingumbob!
What's he at, quotha? reading his text!
Now you've his curtsey—and what comes next? 30

VI

See to our converts—you doomed black dozen—
No stealing away—nor cog nor cozen!
You five, that were thieves, deserve it fairly;
You seven, that were beggars, will live less sparely;
You took your turn and dipped in the hat,
Got fortune—and fortune gets you; mind that!

VII

Give your first groan—compunction's at work
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah,—the selfsame beard on chin
He was four times already converted in! 40
Here's a knife, clip quick—it's a sign of grace—
Or he ruins us all with his hanging-face.

VIII

Whom now is the bishop a-leering at?
I know a point where his text falls pat.
I'll tell him to-morrow, a word just now
Went to my heart and made me vow
I meddle no more with the worst of trades—
Let somebody else pay his serenades.

IX



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Groan all together now, whee-hee-hee!
It's a-work, it's a-work, ah, woe is me! 50
It began, when a herd of us, picked and placed,
Were spurred through the Corso, stripped to the waist;
Jew brutes, with sweat and blood well spent
To usher in worthily Christian Lent.

X

It grew, when the hangman entered our bounds,
Yelled, pricked us out to his church like hounds:
It got to a pitch, when the hand indeed
Which gutted my purse would throttle my creed:
And it overflows when, to even the odd,
Men I helped to their sins help me to their God. 60

XI

But now, while the scapegoats leave our flock,
And the rest sit silent and count the clock,
Since forced to muse the appointed time
On these precious facts and truths sublime,
Let us fitly employ it, under our breath,
In saying Ben Ezra's Song of Death.

XII

For Rabbi Ben Ezra, the night he died,
Called sons and sons' sons to his side,
And spoke, "This world has been harsh and strange;
Something is wrong: there needeth change. 70
But what, or where? at the last or first?
In one point only we sinned, at worst.

XIII

"The Lord will have mercy on Jacob yet,
And again in his border see Israel set.
When Judah beholds Jerusalem,
The stranger-seed shall be joined to them:



To Jacob's House shall the Gentiles cleave.
So the Prophet saith and his sons believe.

XIV

"Ay, the children of the chosen race
Shall carry and bring them to their place: 80
In the land of the Lord shall lead the same
Bondsmen and handmaids. Who shall blame,
When the slaves enslave, the oppressed ones o'er
The oppressor triumph for evermore?

XV

"God spoke, and gave us the word to keep,
Bade never fold the hands nor sleep
'Mid a faithless world, at watch and ward,
Till Christ at the end relieve our guard.
By His servant Moses the watch was set:
Though near upon cock-crow, we keep it yet. 90

XVI

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

XVII

"Thou art the Judge. We are bruised thus.
But, the Judgment over, join sides with us!
Thine too is the cause! and not more thine
Than ours, is the work of these dogs and swine, 100
Whose life laughs through and spits at their creed!
Who maintain Thee in word, and defy Thee in deed!

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XVIII

"We withstood Christ then? Be mindful how
At least we withstand Barabbas now!
Was our outrage sore? But the worst we spared,
To have called these—Christians, had we dared!
Let defiance to them pay mistrust of Thee,
And Rome make amends for Calvary!

XIX

"By the torture, prolonged from age to age,
By the infamy, Israel's heritage, 110
By the Ghetto's plague, by the garb's disgrace,
By the badge of shame, by the felon's place,
By the branding-tool, the bloody whip,
And the summons to Christian fellowship,—

XX

"We boast our proof that at least the Jew
Would wrest Christ's name from the Devil's crew.
Thy face took never so deep a shade
But we fought them in it, God our aid!
A trophy to bear, as we march, thy band,
South, East, and on to the Pleasant Land!" 120

[Pope Gregory XVI abolished this bad business of the Sermon. —R. B.]

Notes: "Holy-Cross Day" reflects the attitude of the corrupt mediaeval Christians and Jews toward each other. The prose preceding the poem gives the point of view of an imaginary Bishop's Secretary, who congratulates himself upon the good work the Church is doing in forcing its doctrine on the Jews in the Holy-Cross Day sermon, and effecting many conversions. The poem shows that the Jews regard this solicitude on the part of the Christians with hatred and scorn, and that their conversions are in derision of their would-be converters. The sarcasm of the speaker reaches a pinnacle of bitterness when he accuses the Christian bishops of being men he had helped to their sins and who now help him to their God. From scorn toward such followers of Christ, he passes, in the contemplation of Rabbi Ben Ezra's death song, to a defence of Christ against these followers who profess but do not act his precepts, and a hope that if the Jews were mistaken in not accepting Christ, the tortures they now suffer will be received as expiation for their sin.



Holy-Cross Day is September 14. The discovery of the true cross by Saint Helen inaugurated the festival, celebrated both by Latins and Greeks as early as the fifth or sixth century, under the title of the Exaltation of the Cross and later in commemoration of the alleged miraculous appearance of the Cross to Constantine in the sky at midday. Though the particular incidents of the poem are not historical, it is a fact (see Milman's "History of the Jews") that, by a Papal Bull issued by Gregory XIII in 1584, all Jews above the age of twelve years were compelled to listen every week to a sermon from a Christian priest.

52. Corso: a street in Rome

67. Rabbi Ben Ezra: or Ibn Ezra, a mediaeval Jewish writer and thinker, born in Toledo, near the end of the eleventh century.

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III. Ghetto: the Jew's quarter. Pope Paul IV first shut the Jews up in the Ghetto, and prohibited them from leaving it after sunset.

PROTUS

Among these latter busts we count by scores,
Half-emperors and quarter-emperors,
Each with his bay-leaf fillet, loose-thonged vest,
Loric and low-browed Gorgon on the breast,
One loves a baby face, with violets there,
Violets instead of laurel in the hair,
As those were all the little locks could bear.

Now, read here. "Protus ends a period
Of empery beginning with a god;
Born in the porphyry chamber at Byzant, 10
Queens by his cradle, proud and ministrant:
And if he quickened breath there, 'twould like fire
Pantingly through the dim vast realm transpire.
A fame that he was missing spread afar:
The world from its four corners, rose in war,
Till he was borne out on a balcony
To pacify the world when it should see.
The captains ranged before him, one, his hand
Made baby points at, gained the chief command.
And day by day more beautiful he grew 20
In shape, all said, in feature and in hue,
While young Greek sculptors, gazing on the child,
Became with old Greek sculpture reconciled.
Already sages laboured to condense
In easy tomes a life's experience:
And artists took grave counsel to impart
In one breath and one hand-sweep, all their art,
To make his graces prompt as blossoming
Of plentifully-watered palms in spring:
Since well beseems it, whoso mounts the throne, 30
For beauty, knowledge, strength, should stand alone,
And mortals love the letters of his name."

—Stop! Have you turned two pages? Still the same.
New reign, same date. The scribe goes on to say
How that same year, on such a month and day,
"John the Pannonian, groundedly believed



A blacksmith's bastard, whose hard hand reprieved
The Empire from its fate the year before,
Came, had a mind to take the crown, and wore
The same for six years (during which the Huns 40
Kept off their fingers from us), till his sons
Put something in his liquor"—and so forth.
Then a new reign. Stay—"Take at its just worth"
(Subjoins an annotator) "what I give
As hearsay. Some think, John let Protus live
And slip away. 'Tis said, he reached man's age
At some blind northern court; made, first a page,
Then tutor to the children; last, of use
About the hunting-stables. I deduce
He wrote the little tract 'On worming dogs,' 50
Whereof the name in sundry catalogues
Is extant yet. A Protus of the race
Is rumoured to have died a monk in Thrace,
And if the same, he reached senility."

Here's John the Smith's rough-hammered head. Great eye,
Gross jaw and griped lips do what granite can
To give you the crown-grasper. What a man!

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Notes: “Protus” sets in contrast the representations by artist and annalist of the two busts and the two lives of Protus, the baby emperor of Byzantium, born in the purple, gently nurtured and cherished, yet fated to obscurity, and of John, the blacksmith’s bastard, predestined to usurp his throne and save the empire with his harder hand.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST

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

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

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

They felt by its beats her heart expand— 10
As one at each ear and both in a breath
Whispered, “The Great-Duke Ferdinand.”

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

Gay he rode, with a friend as gay,
Till he threw his head back—“Who is she?”
“A bride the Riccardi brings home to-day.”

Hair in heaps lay heavily
Over a pale brow spirit-pure— 20
Carved like the heart of a coal-black tree,

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

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



He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes:
The past was a sleep, and her life began. 30

Now, love so ordered for both their sakes,
A feast was held that selfsame night
In the pile which the mighty shadow makes.

(For Via Larga is three-parts light,
But the palace overshadows one,
Because of a crime which may God requite!

To Florence and God the wrong was done,
Through the first republic's murder there
By Cosimo and his cursed son.)

The Duke (with the statue's face in the square) 40
Turned in the midst of his multitude
At the bright approach of the bridal pair.

Face to face the lovers stood
A single minute and no more,
While the bridegroom bent as a man subdued—

Bowed till his bonnet brushed the floor—
For the Duke on the lady a kiss conferred,
As the courtly custom was of yore.

In a minute can lovers exchange a word?
If a word did pass, which I do not think, 50
Only one out of the thousand heard.

That was the bridegroom. At day's brink
He and his bride were alone at last
In a bedchamber by a taper's blink.



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

The world meanwhile, its noise and stir,
Through a certain window facing the East,
She could watch like a convent's chronicler. 60

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

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

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

"I fly to the Duke who loves me well, 70
Sit by his side and laugh at sorrow!
Ere I count another ave-bell,

"'Tis only the coat of a page to borrow,
And tie my hair in a horse-boy's trim,
And I save my soul—but not to-morrow"—

(She checked herself and her eye grew dim)
"My father tarries to bless my state:
I must keep it one day more for him.

"Is one day more so long to wait?
Moreover the Duke rides past, I know; 80
We shall see each other, sure as fate."

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

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



And on the morrow, bold with love,
He beckoned the bridegroom (close on call,
As his duty bade, by the Duke's alcove) 90

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

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

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

"But, alas! my lady leaves the South; 100
Each wind that comes from the Apennine
Is a menace to her tender youth:

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

Quoth the Duke, "A sage and a kindly fear.
Moreover Petraja is cold this spring:
Be our feast to-night as usual here!"

And then to himself—"Which night shall bring
Thy bride to her lover's embraces, fool— 110
Or I am the fool, and thou art the king!

"Yet my passion must wait a night, nor cool—
For to-night the Envoy arrives from France
Whose heart I unlock with thyself my tool.

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



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"For I ride—what should I do but ride?
And passing her palace, if I list,
May glance at its window-well betide!" 120

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

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

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

And still, as love's brief morning wore, 130
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before.

They thought it would work infallibly,
But not in despite of heaven and earth:
The rose would blow when the storm passed by.

Meantime they could profit in winter's dearth
By store of fruits that supplant the rose:
The world and its ways have a certain worth:

And to press a point while these oppose
Were simple policy; better wait: 140
We lose no friends and we gain no foes.

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

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

When the picture was reached the book was done,
And she turned from the picture at night to scheme
Of tearing it out for herself next sun. 150



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

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

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

The brow so puckered, the chin so peaked, 160
And wondered who the woman was,
Hollow-eyed and haggard-cheeked,

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

“Him, the Carver, a hand to aid,
Who fashions the clay no love will change
And fixes a beauty never to fade.

“Let Robbia's craft so apt and strange
Arrest the remains of young and fair, 170
And rivet them while the seasons range.

“Make me a face on the window there,
Waiting as ever, mute the while,
My love to pass below in the square!

“And let me think that it may beguile
Dreary days which the dead must spend
Down in their darkness under the aisle,

“To say, 'What matters it at the end?
'I did no more while my heart was warm
Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.' 180



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"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
And the blood that blues the inside arm—

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
The earthly gift to an end divine?
A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

But long ere Robbia's cornice, fine,
With flowers and fruits which leaves enlace,
Was set where now is the empty shrine—

(And, leaning out of a bright blue space, 190
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky,
The passionate pale lady's face—

Eyeing ever, with earnest eye
And quick-turned neck at its breathless stretch,
Some one who ever is passing by)

The Duke had sighed like the simplest wretch
In Florence, "Youth—my dream escapes!
Will its record stay?" And he bade them fetch

Some subtle moulder of brazen shapes—
"Can the soul, the will, die out of a man 200
Ere his body find the grave that gapes?

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

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

"While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze—
Admire and say, 'When he was alive
How he would take his pleasure once!' 210

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



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

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

Only they see not God, I know, 220
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

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

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

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself 230
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

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

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

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it, 240

If you choose to play!—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

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

Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive you? De te, fabula! 250

Notes: “The Statue and the Bust” creates the characters and the situation, and dramatically represents a story which is based on a Florentine tradition that Duke Ferdinand I placed his equestrian statue in the Piazza dell’ Annunziata so that he might gaze forever towards the old Riccardi Palace, where a lady he loved was imprisoned by her jealous husband. The bride and her ducal lover are seen exchanging their first looks, through which they perceive the genuineness of their love; and the temporizing of each is presented, through which, for the sake of petty conveniences, they submit to be thwarted by the wary husband, and to have the end they count supreme delayed until love and youth have gone, and the best left them is the artificial gaze interchanged by a bronze statue in the square and a clay face at the window. The closing stanzas point the moral against the palsy of the will, whose strenuous exercise is life’s main gift.

I. There’s a palace in Florence: refers to the old Riccardi Palace, now the Palazzo Antinori, in the square of the Annunziata, where the statue still stands.

22. encolure: neck and shoulder of a horse

33. The pile which the mighty shadow makes: refers to another palace in the Via Larga where the duke (not the lady) lived, and which is to-day known as the Riccardi Palace. Cooke’s “Browning Guide Book” and Berdoo’s “Browning Cyclopaedia” both confuse the two, attributing error to Browning in spite of his letter about it. This confusion was cleared up by Harriet Ford (Poet-love, Dec. 1891, vol. iii. p. 648, “Browning right about the Riccardi Palace”).

36. Because of a crime, *etc.*: refers to the destroying of the liberties of the Florentine republic by Cosimo dei Medici and his grandson, Lorenzo, who lived in the then Medici (now Riccardi) Palace, whose darkening of the street with its bulk symbolizes the crime which took the light from Florence.

57. catafalk: the stage or scaffolding for a coffin whilst in the church

94. Arno bowers: the palace by the Arno, the river flowing through Florence.

95. Petraja: a Florentine suburb.



169. Robbia's craft: the Robbia family were skilled in shaping the bisque known as Della Robbia ware which was long one of the Florentine manufactures, and traces of which, when Browning wrote, still adorned the outer cornice of the palace.

202. John of Douay [Giovanni of Bologna], sculptor (1524-1608). The statue is one of his finest works.

250.. De te, fabula! Concerning thee, this fable!



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PORPHYRIA'S LOVER

The rain set early in to-night,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form 10
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair, 20
Murmuring how she loved me—she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain. 30

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around, 40



And strangled her. No pain felt she;
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
 I warily oped her lids: again
 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
 About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
 I propped her head up as before,
 Only, this time my shoulder bore 50
Her head, which droops upon it still:
 The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
 That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
 Her darling one wish would be heard.
And thus we sit together now,
 And all night long we have not stirred,
 And yet God has not said a word! 60

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Notes: "Porphyria's Lover" relates how, by strangling Porphyria with her own yellow hair, the lover seized and preserved the moment of perfect love when, pure and good, Porphyria left the world she could not forego for his sake, and came to him, for once conquered by her love. A latent misgiving as to his action is intimated in the closing line of the poem.

Remarking upon the fact that Browning removed the original title, "Madhouse Cells," which headed this poem, and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," Mrs. Orr says: "Such a crime might be committed in a momentary aberration, or even intense excitement of feeling. It is characterized here by a matter-of-fact simplicity, which is its sign of madness. The distinction, however, is subtle; and we can easily guess why this and its companion poem did not retain their title. A madness which is fit for dramatic treatment is not sufficiently removed from sanity."

"Childe Roland to the dark tower came."

(See Edgar's song in "*Lear*.")

I

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

II

What else should he be set for, with his staff?
What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
All travellers who might find him posted there, 10
And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

III

If at his counsel I should turn aside
Into that ominous tract which, all agree
Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
I did turn as he pointed: neither pride



Nor hope rekindling at the end descried
So much as gladness that some end might be.

IV

For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope 20
Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
With that obstreperous joy success would bring,
I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

V

As when a sick man very near to death
Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
Freelier outside ("since all is o'er," he saith,
"And the blow fallen no grieving can amend"); 30



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VI

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

VII

Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among "The Band"—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed 40
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best,
And all the doubt was now—should I be fit?

VIII

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

IX

For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two, 50
Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
I might go on; nought else remained to do.

X

So, on I went. I think I never saw
Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:



For flowers-as well expect a cedar grove!
But cockle, spurge, according to their law
Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
You'd think; a burr had been a treasure trove. 60

XI

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

XII

If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk 70
All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

XIII

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



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XIV

Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
 With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain, 80
 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
I never saw a brute I hated so;
 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

XV

I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldier's art:
 One taste of the old time sets all to rights. 90

XVI

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

XVII

Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands
 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
 What honest man should dare (he said) he durst.
Good—but the scene shifts—faugh! what hangman hands 100
Pin to his breast a parchment? His own bands
 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

XVIII

Better this present than a past like that;
 Back therefore to my darkening path again!



No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
I asked: when something on the dismal flat
Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

XIX

A sudden little river crossed my path
As unexpected as a serpent comes. 110
No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
For the fiend's glowing hoof—to see the wrath
Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

XX

So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
The river which had done them all the wrong,
Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit. 120

XXI

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

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XXII

Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
Now for a better country. Vain presage!
Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank 130
Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage—

XXIII

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

XXIV

And more than that—a furlong on—why, there!
What bad use was that engine for, that wheel, 140
Or brake, not wheel—that harrow fit to reel
Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air
Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware
Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

XXV

Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) within a rood—
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth. 150

XXVI

Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
Now patches where some leanness of the soil's



Broke into moss or substances like boils;
Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

XXVII

And just as far as ever from the end!
Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
To point my footstep further! At the thought
A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend, 160
Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
That brushed my cap—perchance the guide I sought.

XXVIII

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

XXIX

Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
Of mischief happened to me, God knows when— 170
In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
Progress this way. When, in the very nick
Of giving up, one time more, came a click
As when a trap shuts—you're inside the den!



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XXX

Burningly it came on me all at once,
 This was the place! those two hills on the right
 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Duncce,
Dotard, a-dozing at the very nonce,
 After a life spent training for the sight! 180

XXXI

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

XXXII

Not see? because of night perhaps?—why, day
 Came back again for that! before it left,
 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay, 190
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—
 “Now stab and end the creature—to the heft!”

XXXIII

Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,—
How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

XXXIV

There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
 To view the last of me, a living frame 200

For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."

Notes: "Childe Roland" symbolizes the conquest of despair by fealty to the ideal. Browning emphatically disclaimed any precise allegorical intention in this poem. He acknowledged only an ideal purport in which the significance of the whole, as suggesting a vision of life and the saving power of constancy, had its due place. Certain picturesque materials which had made their impressions on the poet's mind contributed towards the building up of this realistic fantasy: a tower he saw in the Carrara Mountains; a painting which caught his eye later in Paris; the figure of a horse in the tapestry in his own drawing-room—welded together with the remembrance of the line cited from *King Lear*, iii. 4, 187, which last, it should be remembered, has a background of ballads and legend cycles of which a man like Browning was not unaware. For allegorical schemes of the Poem see Nettleship's "Essays and Thoughts," and *The Critic*, Apr. 24, 1886; for an antidote to these, *The Critic*, May 8, 1886; an orthodox view, *Poet-lore*, Nov. 1890: for interpretations touching on the ballad sources, *London Browning Society Papers*, part iii. p. 21, and *Poet-lore*, Aug.-Sept. 1892.

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