BROWNINGS
FOR THE YOUNG

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EDITED BY

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PREFACE

In this little volume a selection from the best poems of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning is offered to those who are, comparatively speaking, beginners in the study and enjoyment of poetry. It is a selection from the writings of one who, in the opinion of many, is the greatest poet of the Victorian age, and of one who, without any question, is the greatest poetess in our literature of this or any other age. And not only are they thus associated in greatness; they also furnish the unique example of two great writers linked to one another by the closest and most sacred tie of all—as husband and wife. There is, therefore, a special appropriateness in bringing together (I believe for the first time) a selection from the poetry of each of them within the cover of a single volume. The selection is intended especially for young readers, who may not yet have made acquaintance with these poets in a more complete form; but if it should come into the hands of their elders, I would bespeak the favour of all lovers of Robert or Elizabeth Barrett Browning for an undertaking, the effect of which may be, it is hoped, to increase the number of those who share their devotion.

The two poets whose names are thus asso-

ciated with one another for ever, dedicated themselves to poetry from their very childhood. At the age of twelve Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (as she then was) had written an epic in four books on the battle of Marathon, and by the same age Robert Browning had produced an impassioned ode to a young lady, fifteen years his senior, besides much minor verse of various kinds. Both of them were insatiate readers of poetry. With both, it is interesting to observe, the prime favourite of their childhood was Pope's translation of Homer; and though in later days their tastes and styles travelled far enough from Pope, they retained to the end the love of Greek literature which they had acquired thus early. Elizabeth Barrett's first published volume of poetry appeared in 1826, Robert Browning's in 1833; and the second publication of each of them (Miss Barrett's "Seraphim," and Browning's "Paracelsus"), secured them honourable prominence among the poets of the day. It was not until 1846 that they met, but long before that time they had known and admired each other's poetry; and the acquaintance thus begun ripened rapidly into affection. They were married in 1849; and their marriage was followed by twelve years of perfect happiness, to which the only drawback was the frail condition of Mrs. Browning's health. For many years before her marriage she had lived the life of an invalid, confined to her room, with apparently little prospect of ever regaining strength.

Marriage and removal to the warmer climate of Italy brought about a marvellous improve-

ment, which lasted for several years; but her ardent and emotional spirit seemed to wear out her delicate frame, and in 1861 her death ended the earthly duration of this happy union. How happy it was, and how deep and beautiful their affection, may be learnt from the husband's "One Word More" and "By the Fireside," and from the wife's "Sonnets from the Portuguese;" but poems such as these do not come within the scope of the present selection. Robert Browning lived on until 1889, gaining continually that fuller recognition as one of the leading poets of the day which for many years (in spite of his first successes) had been denied him; until, at the time of his death, full of years and honour, there was but one other poet who was commonly named in the same breath with him. It is useless to argue the question of precedence between Tennyson and Browning. They lie side by side in our great Abbey; and side by side they represent the poetic achievements of the reign of Victoria.

The poetic styles of the husband and wife are as wide asunder as the poles, and it was perhaps for this very reason that each so heartily admired and prized the poetry of the other. Among young readers, they appeal, perhaps, to different audiences; and if Robert Browning's courage, manliness, and serene hopefulness commend him especially to boys, Mrs. Browning's passionate emotion and sympathy with all that is true and good, especially if it be down-trodden or in pain, should find

acceptance at least as warmly among girls. Both are commonly thought of as being too difficult for the young to read—Robert Browning as being too intellectually subtle in thought and obscure in expression, and his wife as too emotional in tone and literary in allusions. On this point the following selection must, however, speak for itself. I believe that it contains nothing which boys and girls with some taste for literature may not both understand and enjoy; but I have tried to make their path easier by the addition of short introductions to most of the poems, and occasional explanatory notes. I have been anxious not to overlay the text with commentary, and to leave the poetry, in the main, to speak for itself; but the mean between too much and too little is hard to hit.

In making a selection for the young, I have been compelled to exclude poems which, however simple and beautiful they may be, are yet concerned with subjects in which they have not yet learnt to feel an interest. On this ground I have excluded all poems of which the main theme is love. No one can feel more strongly than I do that this rule shuts out much of the finest poetry of both Robert and Elizabeth Browning; but I hope that those young readers who are attracted by the poems here given, will be encouraged in due season to make a fuller acquaintance with both poets in their complete works. I can testify to a love of Browning which began at a very early age with the "Pied Piper," and which has but grown and expanded since that time; and it is in the hope that many

who begin their acquaintance with Browning in the same simple way may push forward until they have mastered that supreme achievement of "The Ring and the Book," and that those who start from the "Romaunt of the Page" may learn in time to love the "Sonnets from the Portuguese," that the present selection has been made. It does not contain nearly all that is good in the writings of these two great poets; but I believe it contains nothing that is not good. nothing that does not present alike that truth and that beauty which both set before themselves as the highest aim and achievement of their art.

F. G. K.

December 1895.

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ROBERT BROWNING

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

ROBERT BROWNING

1812-1889

THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

A CHILD'S STORY

(WRITTEN FOR, AND INSCRIBED TO,
W. M. THE YOUNGER)

THIS story in verse was written to amuse Willie Macready, son of the great actor of that name, and was originally printed only to fill up a few blank pages at the end of a volume of poems. It is founded on a German legend, which tells how, in the fourteenth century, a certain mysterious piper delivered the town of Hamelin from a plague of rats, and afterwards, when the magistrates of the town refused to pay him the sum which they had promised, led away by his piping all the children of the town. The event was said to have been commemorated by a window in one of the churches. Similar legends are found in other countries. It is a curious fact that Robert Browning's father had begun a poem on the same subject, but left off when he found that his son had a version of it on hand.

I.

HAMELIN Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and wide,
Washes its wall on the southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never spied;
But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

An hour they sat in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell,
"I wish I were a mile hence!

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

V.

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

VI.

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

89. *The Cham:* the Emperor of China.
91. *The Nizam:* the sovereign of a great Indian state.
95. *Guilders:* a coin equivalent to a florin.

VII.

Into the street the Piper stept,
Smiling first a little smile,
As if he knew what magic slept
In his quiet pipe the while;
Then, like a musical adept,
To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled,
And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled,
Like a candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;
And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered,
You heard as if an army muttered;
And the muttering grew to a grumbling;
And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling;
And out of the houses the rats came tumbling.
Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats,
Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats,
Grave old plodders, gay young friskers,
Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins,
Cocking tails and pricking whiskers,
Families by tens and dozens,
Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives—
Followed the Piper for their lives.
From street to street he piped advancing,
And step for step they followed dancing,
Until they came to the river Weser,
Wherein all plunged and perished!
—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:

125. While Julius Cæsar was besieged in Alexandria, he once escaped only by swimming; and the story was that he held the manuscript of his "Commentaries" above water with one hand, while he swam with the other.

Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe,
"I heard a sound as of scraping tripe,
"And putting apples, wondrous ripe,
"Into a cider-press's gripe:
"And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards,
"And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards,
"And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks,
"And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks:
"And it seemed as if a voice
"(Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery
"Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice!
"'The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!
"'So munch on, crunch on, take your nuncheon,
"'Breakfast, supper, dinner, luncheon!'
"And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon,
"All ready staved, like a great sun shone
"Glorious scarce an inch before me,
"Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!'
"—I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

VIII.

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

138. *Drysaltery:* provision-store.
139. *Nuncheon:* meal, luncheon.

IX.

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

X.

The Piper's face fell, and he cried
"No trifling! I can't wait, beside!
"I've promised to visit by 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,

179. *Caliph:* the title of the sovereign of Bagdad, once the capital of the Mohammedan empire in the East; familiar to every reader of the "Arabian Nights."

"Of a nest of scorpions no survivor :
"With him I proved no bargain-driver,
"With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver !
"And folks who put me in a passion
"May find me pipe after another fashion."

XI.

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

XII.

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

182. *A stiver:* a very small Dutch coin, used to mean "the least little bit."

XIII.

The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood
As if they were changed into blocks of wood,
Unable to move a step, or cry
To the children merrily skipping by,
—Could only follow with the eye
That joyous crowd at the Piper's back.
But how the Mayor was on the rack,
And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,
As the Piper turned from the High Street
To where the Weser rolled its waters
Right in the way of their sons and daughters!
However he turned from South to West,
And to Koppelberg Hill his steps addressed,
And after him the children pressed;
Great was the joy in every breast.
"He never can cross that mighty top!
"He's forced to let the piping drop,
"And we shall see our children stop!"
When, lo, as they reached the mountain-side,
A wondrous portal opened wide,
As if a cavern was suddenly hollowed;
And the Piper advanced and the children followed,
And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
Did I say, all? No! One was lame,
And could not dance the whole of the way;
And in after years, if you would blame
His sadness, he was used to say,—
"It's dull in our town since my playmates left!
"I can't forget that I'm bereft

"Of all the pleasant sights they see,
"Which the Piper also promised me.
"For he led us, he said, to a joyous land,
"Joining the town and just at hand,
"Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
"And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
"And everything was strange and new;
"The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
"And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
"And honey-bees had lost their stings,
"And horses were born with eagle's wings:
"And just as I became assured
"My lame foot would be speedily cured,
"The music stopped and I stood still,
"And found myself outside the hill,
"Left alone against my will,
"To go now limping as before,
"And never hear of that country more!"

XIV.

Alas, alas for Hamelin!
There came into many a burgher's pate
A text which says that heaven's gate
Opes to the rich at as easy rate
As the needle's eye takes a camel in!
The Mayor sent East, West, North and South,
To offer the Piper, by word of mouth,
Wherever it was men's lot to find him,
Silver and gold to his heart's content,
If he'd only return the way he went,
And bring the children behind him.
But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour,

And Piper and dancers were gone for ever,
They made a decree that lawyers never
  Should think their records dated duly
If, after the day of the month and year,
These words did not as well appear,
"And so long after what happened here
  "On the Twenty-second of July,
"Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"
And the better in memory to fix
The place of the children's last retreat,
They called it, the Pied Piper's Street—
Where any one playing on pipe or tabor
Was sure for the future to lose his labour.
Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern
  To shock with mirth a street so solemn;
But opposite the place of the cavern
  They wrote the story on a column,
And on the great church-window painted
The same, to make the world acquainted
How their children were stolen away,
And there it stands to this very day.
And I must not omit to say
That in Transylvania there's a tribe
Of alien people who ascribe
The outlandish ways and dress
On which their neighbours lay such stress,
To their fathers and mothers having risen
Out of some subterraneous prison
Into which they were trepanned
Long time ago in a mighty band
Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land,
But how or why, they don't understand.

206. *Trepanned:* decoyed.

XV.

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

300. *Willy:* Willie Macready, for whom the poem was originally written.

HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX

[16—.]

THE story of a desperate ride by three men, to carry a message to the town of Aix in time to save it from destruction. What the message was, or what was the exact danger threatening Aix, we are not told; and the poem was not, in fact, based upon any historical event. It was written during a voyage, when the poet had been at sea "long enough to appreciate even the fancy of a gallop on the back of a certain good horse, 'York,' then in my stable at home." We can, however, imagine that the condition of Aix was supposed to be something like that of the town of Mitylene in Greek history. It had revolted from Athens, and had been retaken, and the Athenians sent off a ship with orders to the general who had taken it that all the inhabitants should be put to death; but the next day they repented, and agreed to spare the captives. A second ship was sent to stop the massacre, and by great exertions arrived just in time to save the town. Such a message we may suppose to have been carried to Aix by the three riders in this splendid galloping poem. A similar story of a ride to the rescue is found in the fine poem of A. Lindsay Gordon, the Australian poet, called "From the Wreck."

I.

I SPRANG to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;

"Good speed!" cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
"Speed!" echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Düffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, "Yet there is time!"

10. *Pique:* the peak or fore-part of the saddle.

IV.

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each butting away
The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,—ever that glance
O'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, "Stay spur!
"Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
"We'll remember at Aix"—for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,

And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII.

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And "Gallop," gasped Joris, "for Aix is in sight!"

VIII.

"How they'll greet us!"—and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight
Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-socket's rim.

IX.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;

Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X.

And all I remember is—friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

CAVALIER TUNES

THESE are three songs supposed to be sung by the Cavaliers or Royalists during the Civil War between Charles I. and the Parliament. They are full of the enthusiasm which impelled nearly all the country gentlemen to fight for the King when the war broke out.

I. MARCHING ALONG

I.

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

II.

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

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

---

7. *Pym:* the great Parliamentary leader, John Pym.

III.

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

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

IV.

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

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

II. GIVE A ROUSE

I.

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

13. *Hampden:* John Hampden, whose refusal to pay the tax of ship-money was one of the chief events leading to the quarrel between the King and Parliament. Hazelrig, Fiennes, and Harry (Vane) were other Parliamentary leaders.

II.

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

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

III.

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

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

III. BOOT AND SADDLE

I

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

CHORUS.—*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

---

16. *Noll:* Oliver Cromwell.

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, "Nay!
"I've better counsellors; what counsel they?
CHORUS.—"*Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*"

HERVÉ RIEL

THIS spirited ballad, telling of the courage and skill of a Breton sailor, whereby a remnant of the French fleet was saved from destruction after the defeat of La Hogue in 1692, was originally published by the poet in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1871. He received a hundred guineas in payment for it, and sent the money as a contribution to a fund then being raised for the relief of the starving French after the siege of Paris. The story which it tells is a true one, as has been proved by reference to official records in Paris; but it was quite unknown until Browning chanced upon it, and gave immortality by his verse to the brave sailor whom his own country had forgotten.

I.

ON the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

5. *The Rance:* the river which runs into the English Channel at Saint-Malo, in Brittany.

II.

'Twas the squadron that escaped, with the victor
in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great
ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;
And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us
quick—or, quicker still,
Here's the English can and will!"

III.

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and
leapt on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like
these to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the
passage scarred and scored,—
Shall the *Formidable* here, with her twelve
and eighty guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single
narrow way,
Trust to enter—where 'tis ticklish for a craft of
twenty tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 'tis slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV.

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you
have them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together
stern and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels
on the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V.

Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck
amid all these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first,
second, third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!
But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville
for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the
Croisickese.

44. *Croisickese:* native of Le Croisic, a village at the mouth of the Loire, where this poem was written.

VI.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?"
cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins! Are you
cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took
the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every
swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the
river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love
the lying's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of
Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were
worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs,
believe me there's a way!
Only let me lead the line,
Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this *Formidable* clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage
I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;

46. *Malouins:* natives of St. Malo.
49. *Disembogues:* enters the sea.

And if one ship misbehave,—
— Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I've nothing but my life,—here's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII.

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace.
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII.

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.

"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!
Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships.
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville."

92. *Rampired:* fortified.

X.

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,
As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 'tis ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!
You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.

135. *The Louvre:* the great museum and picture-gallery in Paris.

So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy
wife the Belle Aurore!

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

ANOTHER story of French courage, and again a true one, though the real hero was not a boy, as he is here represented, but a man. The storming of Ratisbon took place during Napoleon's campaign against Austria in 1809.

I.

YOU know, we French stormed Ratisbon :
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day ;
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

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

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.

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM THE SEA

THE poet, at sea off the southern coast of Spain, sees at one moment the scenes of five great English victories: Cape Saint Vincent, where Jervis and Nelson defeated the Spanish fleet in 1797; Cadiz Bay, where Drake "singed the King of Spain's beard" by burning the store-ships prepared for the Armada in 1587, and where Howard, Essex, and Raleigh destroyed the Spanish fleet and stormed the town in 1596; Trafalgar, the scene of Nelson's victory and death in 1805; and Gibraltar, defended by Sir Hugh Elliot against the united fleets of France and Spain in 1779-1782. Deeds such as these have made it an honour to be an Englishman; and it is therefore the duty of every Englishman in return to do what he can to keep England great.

NOBLY, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the
North-west died away;
Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into
Cadiz Bay;
Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face
Trafalgar lay;
In the dimmest North-east distance dawned
Gibraltar grand and gray;
"Here and here did England help me: how
can I help England?"—say,
Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to
praise and pray,
While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over
Africa.

HOME-THOUGHTS, FROM ABROAD

HERE, again, the poet is thinking of England from abroad; but this time it is not of England's glory, but of her beauty; of the charm of early spring in England, and of the sights and sounds of country life, which he observes so minutely and describes so beautifully. How many people have noticed for themselves what he has noticed about the song of the thrush?

I.

OH, to be in England
Now that April's there,
And whoever wakes in England
Sees, some morning, unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now!

II.

And after April, when May follows,
And the whitethroat builds, and all the swallows!
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray's edge—

That's the wise thrush; he sings each song
twice over,
Lest you should think he never could re-
capture
The first fine careless rapture!
And though the fields look rough with hoary
dew
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children's dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower!

"DE GUSTIBUS——"

"DE gustibus non est disputandum" is a Latin proverb, equivalent to our English saying, "There's no accounting for tastes." The proverb is illustrated by this pair of poems, the first of which, like "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad," expresses the love of English scenery, while the second is in praise of Italy. They form a companion pair of pictures of the characteristic scenery of the two countries.

I.

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

II.

What I love best in all the world
Is a castle, precipice-encurled,
In a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine.
Or look for me, old fellow of mine,

(If I get my head from out the mouth
O' the grave, and loose my spirit's bands,
And come again to the land of lands)—
In a sea-side house to the farther South,
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth,
And one sharp tree—'tis a cypress—stands,
By the many hundred years red-rusted,
Rough iron-spiked, ripe fruit-o'ercrusted,
My sentinel to guard the sands
To the water's edge. For, what expands
Before the house, but the great opaque
Blue breadth of sea without a break?
While, in the house, for ever crumbles
Some fragment of the frescoed walls,
From blisters where a scorpion sprawls.
A girl bare-footed brings, and tumbles
Down on the pavement, green-flesh melons,
And says there's news to-day—the king
Was shot at, touched in the liver-wing,
Goes with his Bourbon arm in a sling:
—She hopes they have not caught the felons.
Italy, my Italy!
Queen Mary's saying serves for me—
(When fortune's malice
Lost her—Calais)—
Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, "Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she:
So it always was, so shall ever be!

22. *Cicala:* an insect of the grasshopper kind, common in Italy.

35–37. This refers to the misgovernment of Naples by the oppressive Bourbon kings, which drove all patriotic Italians into sympathy with those who made attempts on their lives.

"ALL SERVICE RANKS THE SAME WITH GOD"

THIS song is taken from the play of "Pippa Passes." It is sung by the little silk-weaving girl, Pippa, as she sets out to enjoy her one day's holiday in all the year. The whole play shows the truth of the song; for a chance song from little Pippa, as she passes by, proves to be the turning-point in a great crisis in the life of each of four persons—the four whom Pippa, in her innocence, regards as the greatest and happiest people in the world. She is quite unconscious of what she has done; she is "God's puppet," and what seems an extremely small event is in fact of the greatest importance in each of these four cases.

ALL service ranks the same with God:
If now, as formerly He trod
Paradise, His presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we; there is no last nor first.

Say not "a small event!" Why "small"
Costs it more pain that this, ye call
A "great event," should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power shall fall short in or exceed!

10–12. The meaning of these lines is that to God it is just as easy to bring to pass what we call a great event as a small one. In every deed His power is exactly equal to what is required.

"THE YEAR'S AT THE SPRING"

ANOTHER song from "Pippa Passes." As she sings it, she is passing within hearing of two great but sinful people, Sebald and Ottima, and this chance word of hers, "God's in His heaven," startles them from the enjoyment of their sin, and makes them loathe their wickedness.

THE year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in His heaven—
All's right with the world!

THE BOY AND THE ANGEL

THIS curious legend teaches that God values the praise and thankfulness of His creatures, and that we cannot tell in what state of life we can praise and please Him best. The boy Theocrite praises God day and night; but he prays that he may become Pope, that he may praise Him better. His prayer is granted; he falls ill, and is carried away by an angel to become a priest, and at last Pope. But meanwhile God has missed the boy's praise, in which He used to take delight; so the angel Gabriel descends to earth, takes Theocrite's place, and praises God day and night. But God finds a difference between an angel's praise, which is unmixed with doubt or fear, and the human praise which He loved; so Gabriel flies to Rome, where Theocrite has just been consecrated Pope. He tells Theocrite to go back to his old home, and take up again the praise which God had missed; while he himself remains at Rome to play the part of Pope till Theocrite dies, when the boy and the angel go side by side to God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Night passed, day shone,
And Theocrite was gone.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,

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

48. *Saint Peter's Dome:* the great cathedral of St. Peter's, at Rome.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LOST LEADER

THESE fine lines are supposed to be spoken by one of a band of men who, though poor and humble in rank, are striving for great and good objects in the world, for truth and freedom and justice. The leader of this band, the man whom they all trusted and reverenced, has been bribed to leave it by the hope of the wealth and empty honours which the other side can give him; and his followers grieve over their loss, and his fall. The idea of the poem was suggested by the change in the poet Wordsworth, when, after being enthusiastically in favour of liberty and progress in his youth, he went over to the party which opposed all reform; but it does not pretend to represent accurately either the character of Wordsworth's change of views, or the motives which led him to it. Browning, as he himself declared, would never have wished to charge his great predecessor with any sordid or discreditable action.

I.

JUST for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat—
Found the one gift of which Fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags—were they purple, his heart had been proud!

We that had loved him so, followed him,
honoured him,
Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear
accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,—they watch
from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the free-
men,
—He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II.

We shall march prospering,—not thro' his
presence;
Songs may inspirit us,—not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,—while he boasts his
quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade
aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul
more,
One task more declined, one more footpath
untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for
angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult
to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back
to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation, and pain,

Forced praise on our part—the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him—strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

THE PATRIOT

AN OLD STORY

THIS is the "old story" of the fickleness of crowds. The patriot has devoted himself to what he believes to be his country's good, and at first the people are enthusiastic in their devotion to him. But a year later his efforts have ended in failure. He has been declared a traitor, and condemned to death by the tyrannical government; and now the people turn round and pelt him with stones as he goes to the scaffold, along the road where formerly he passed in triumph and was greeted with showers of roses. His comfort is, that as he has not been rewarded in this world, he may be rewarded in heaven.

I.

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

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

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

V.

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

VI.

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

THE TWINS

THIS poem was printed in a little pamphlet along with a poem by Mrs. Browning, for sale at a bazaar in aid of a Refuge for Young Destitute Girls. Its meaning (expressed in a sort of parable which was used by Martin Luther, the Reformer) is that charity and prosperity go together: "Give, and it shall be given to you."

I.

GRAND rough old Martin Luther
  Bloomed fables—flowers on furze,
The better the uncouther:
  Do roses stick like burrs?

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

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

V.

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

VI.

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

VII.

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

16. *Date* = "give"; *dabitur* = "it shall be given (to you)."

SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS

THE story of a humorous revenge taken upon a dull and pedantic book. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis is supposed to be the name of its author, but it is, of course, an imaginary one.

I.

PLAGUE take all your pedants, say I !
He who wrote what I hold in my hand,
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land ;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together.

II.

Into the garden I brought it to read,
And under the arbute and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.
Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge ;
Added up the mortal amount ;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

III.

Yonder's a plum-tree with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage ;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the Middle Age,
Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber ;
When he'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber :
Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

IV.

Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
—At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate :
Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate ;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis ;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

V.

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo :
So, I took pity, for learning's sake,
And, *de profundis*, *accentibus lætis*,
Cantate! quoth I, as I got a rake ;
And up I fished his delectable treatise.

19. *Pont-levis:* a drawbridge.
38. *De profundis*, &c. : "out of the depths sing ye joyfully."

VI.

Here you have it, dry in the sun,
With all the binding all of a blister,
And great blue spots where the ink has run,
And reddish streaks that wink and glister
O'er the page so beautifully yellow:
Oh, well have the droppings played their tricks!
Did he guess how toadstools grow, this fellow?
Here's one stuck in his chapter six!

VII.

How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and browsed him all over,
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover?
—When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face
Made of her eggs the stately deposit,
And the newt borrowed just so much of the preface
As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet?

VIII.

All that life and fun and romping,
All that frisking and twisting and coupling,
While slowly our poor friend's leaves were swamping
And clasps were cracking and covers suppling!

52. *Right of trover:* right to use what one has found.

As if you had carried sour John Knox
To the play-house at Paris, Vienna, or Munich,
Fastened him into a front-row box,
And danced off the ballet with trousers and tunic.

IX.

Come, old martyr! What, torment enough is it?
Back to my room shall you take your sweet self.
Good-bye, mother-beetle; husband-eft, *sufficit!*
See the snug niche I have made on my shelf!
A.'s book shall prop you up, B.'s shall cover you,
Here's C. to be grave with, or D. to be gay,
And with E. on each side, and F. right over you,
Dry-rot at ease till the Judgment-day!

67. *Sufficit:* "that's enough!"

A TALE

THIS pretty story is taken from a poem in the Greek Anthology (ix. 584). The application which Browning gives to it in the final stanzas is, of course, his own. It was first written as the Epilogue to the volume containing *La Saisiaz* and *The Two Poets of Croisic.*

I.

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

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

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

V.

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

VI.

When, a mischief ! Were they seven
  Strings the lyre possessed ?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
  Thank you ! Well, sir,—who had guessed
Such ill luck in store ?—it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII.

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

VIII.

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

IX.

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

X.

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

38. *Cicada:* the Latin name for an insect of the cricket or grasshopper kind.

XI.

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

XII.

No! This other, on returning
  Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
  (Sir, I hope you understand!)
—Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

XIII.

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

XIV.

That's the tale: its application?
  Somebody I know

65. *Lotte:* that is, the friend whose love and sympathy have caused his success. Some poets have had such friends, and have abandoned them when their company ceased to interest or stimulate them. The reference here is to the great German poet, Goethe.

Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that's—Oh,
All so learned and so wise,
And deserving of a prize!

XV.

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

XVI.

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

XVII.

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

95. Referring, of course, to the loss of his wife.

XVIII.

But you don't know music! Wherefore
  Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet? All I care for
  Is—to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

106–8. Here is the "moral" of the whole poem: the death of his wife took away the inspiration of his genius; but the friendship of a girl may in part supply the necessary encouragement, and prevent his poetry growing too gruff and heavy.

TRAY

THIS poem was written at a time when the question of vivisection, or the right of man to cut up living animals for the purpose of scientific research, was being warmly debated. Browning thought it both cowardly and cruel on the part of man to

> "Have no end of brutes
> Cut up alive to guess what suits
> My case and saves my toe from shoots,'

as he expresses it in another poem. In "Tray" he represents himself as asking for a poem about a hero; and after rejecting two high-flown stories which are first offered him, listens to the tale of a heroic rescue by a dog, and of the self-satisfied comments of the human bystanders, one of whom wants forthwith to cut up the dog alive in order to see how his brain works.

SING me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of souls, ye bards!
Quoth Bard the first:
"Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm and eke his habergeon . . ."
Sir Olaf and his bard——!

"That sin-scathed brow" (quoth Bard the second)
"That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting death . . ."
You too without your host have reckoned!

4 *Habergeon:* coat of mail.

"A beggar-child" (let's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

"'Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet!
Good dog! What, off again? There's yet
Another child to save? All right!

"'How strange we saw no other fall!
It's instinct in the animal.
Good dog! But he's a long while under:
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall!

"'Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be? Well, that's prime!
Now, did you ever? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime!'

" And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—
Till somebody, prerogatived
With reason, reasoned : 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

" 'John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase—that animal for me !
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteenpence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we'll see '"

PHEIDIPPIDES

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν

THIS is the story of the great runner who, when the Persians invaded Attica, ran from Athens to Sparta to call on the Spartans to help in the defence of Greece. When the Spartans, not unwilling to see Athens destroyed, made excuses and pretended delays, he ran back to Athens in time to take part in the great battle of Marathon. After the battle was won, he was called upon to run to Athens with the news of the victory, and as he burst into the market-place with the cry, Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν ("Rejoice, we are victorious"), he dropped dead. The god Pan, whom he had seen on his way back from Sparta, had promised him a worthy reward; and this was in truth a worthy reward, to die in the moment of victory, and at the summit of his glory.

FIRST I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all!
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,

2. *Dæmons:* supernatural beings, including those lower than the gods.

4. *Her of the ægis and spear:* Athené, the patron-goddess of Athens. The ægis was her breastplate.

5. *Ye of the bow and the buskin:* Phœbus Apollo and Artemis.

Now, henceforth and for ever,—O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See, 'tis myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!
Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens sink,

9. *Archons:* the chief magistrates of Athens. *Tettix:* the grasshopper, worn as the national emblem of Athens.
15. The distance from Athens to Sparta is about 150 miles.
19. *Eretria:* one of the chief towns in the island of Eubœa, off the coast of Attica.

Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there's lightning in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athené, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!

Count we no time lost time which lags through
respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, what-
ever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed,
is unable to take
Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she
rounds to it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment
suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I
had mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off
and away was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on
the false and the vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each
hillock and plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing
past them again,
"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours
we paid you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome liba-
tion! Too rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service
so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to
enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the
Persian's foot,

37. The Spartan answer was that they could not start on an expedition until the moon was full. When the full moon came, they set out, but only arrived after the battle was over.

You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn a slave!
Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract!
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure? at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute!"

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across:
"Where I could enter, there I depart by! Night in the fosse?
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise! No bridge
Better!"—when—ha! what was it I came on, of wonders that are?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan!
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof:

52. *Parnes:* the mountain range between Attica and Bœotia. In the original story, told by Herodotus, it was on Mount Parthenium, in Arcadia, that Pheidippides met the god Pan; not on Parnes, which did not lie on the direct route between Athens and Sparta.

All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious began:
"How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more helpful of old?
Ay, and still, and for ever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the pledge!'"
(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear

68. Pan is represented with the legs of a goat.

—Fennel—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—
whatever it bode)
"While, as for thee . . . " But enough! He
was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no
longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was
my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no
more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a
guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner
of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is
promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother
demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but,
lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he
gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For
what thou hast done
Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be
allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in
praise or in pelf!'

86. *On the razor's edge:* a Greek expression for a position of great danger.

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him—so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried, "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!
'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,

105. *Akropolis:* the citadel of Athens.
108. *The Fennel-field:* the name Marathon means "fennel-field."

Till in he broke : "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!"—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a God loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

113. *Rejoice:* χαῖρε or χαίρετε, the ordinary Greek form of salutation.

ECHETLOS

ANOTHER story of Marathon. It was said that, while the fight was raging at its hottest, the figure as of a countryman of great stature was seen in front of the Greek ranks, armed only with a ploughshare, with which he struck down the Persians on every side. When the fight was over, he vanished; and men said that one of the gods had been fighting among them in the form of the countryman. But as they did not know which of the gods it might be, the oracle bade them call him simply Echetlos, "the holder of the ploughshare."

HERE is a story shall stir you! Stand up, Greeks dead and gone,
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on,
Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was Marathon!

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought away
In his tribe and file: up, back, out, down—was the spear-arm play:
Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing that day!

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,
As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the rear,
Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he ! but, a goat-skin all his wear,
Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and bare,
Went he ploughing on and on : he pushed with a ploughman's share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the shark
Precipitates his bulk? Did the right-wing halt when, stark
On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch?

Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,
As he routed though the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh, —look far and wide
From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-plashed seaside,—

15. *Polemarch:* the polemarch (="general") was the nominal commander-in-chief at Athens, and Kallimachos, in virtue of his office, had given his casting-vote at the council of war in favour of fighting. The actual commander on the day of Marathon was, as is well known, Miltiades.

18. *Sakian . . . Mede:* two of the chief peoples in the Persian empire.

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged and brown,
Shearing and clearing still with the share before which—down
To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for Greece, that clown!

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name at all!
Say but just this: 'We praise one helpful whom we call
The Holder of the Ploughshare.' The great deed ne'er grows small."

Not the great name! Sing—woe for the great name, Míltiadés
And its end at Paros isle! Woe for Themistokles
—Satrap in Sardis court! Name not the clown like these!

28–30. Refers to the discreditable endings of the careers of both Miltiades and Themistocles, well-known to all readers of Greek history. Miltiades, the victor at Marathon, died of a wound received in an expedition against Paros, undertaken to serve his private ends, having first been heavily fined for his discreditable failure. Themistocles, the victor at Salamis, entered into treasonable correspondence with Persia, fled thither when it was found out, and eventually committed suicide while living under the protection of the Persian king.

MULÉYKEH

AN Arabian story, telling how a poor man loved his matchless mare so much that he preferred to let her be carried off from him by his enemy, rather than regain her at the expense of her being beaten in speed for the first time in her life.

IF a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A churl's!"
Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"
—"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn
More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking pearls,
—Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán?
They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the due,
Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began,

Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the
match of you,
And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at
men's land and gold!'

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—
and right, I say,
Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Out-
stripping all,
Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor's
staff.
Who started, the owner's hope, gets shamed and
named, that day.
'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we
use to call
Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right,
Hóseyn, I say, to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger
replies: "Be sure
On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away
in heart
For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness
admits no cure.
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same
with an oath,
'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl
is a prize apart.'"

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to
Hóseyn's tent,
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and
"Peace!" bids he.

"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty
shall mend the wrong.
'Tis said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred
camels spent
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such
prudence is far from me
Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley
may last too long."

Said Hóseyn, "You feed young beasts a many,
of famous breed,
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of
Múzennem:
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as
it climbs the hill.
But I love Muléykeh's face: her forefront
whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your
camels—go gaze on them!
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am
the richer still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again
rides Duhl.
"You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a
very prince.
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare
your simple gift!
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my
wife prompts 'Fool,
Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the re-
warder, since
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders
on Him shows thrift.'"

Said Hóseyn, "God gives each man one life, like a lamp, then gives
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted—hold high, wave wide
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what help is left?
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Muléykeh lives.
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died?
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-bereft?"

Another year, and—hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?
He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,
But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench
Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night combines
With the robber—and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to crime,
Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my store,
And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?
Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one!
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay, more—

For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two :
I will beg ! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and son.

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,
And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die :
Let him die, then,—let me live ! Be bold—but not too rash !
I have found me a peeping-place : breast, bury your breathing while
I explore for myself ! Now, breathe ! He deceived me not, the spy !

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy ! Beside
Stands tethered the Pearl : thrice winds her headstall about his wrist :
'Tis therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the roof reveals.
And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and wide,
Buhéyseh, her sister born : fleet is she, yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case some thief
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.

What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once
mount her we both escape."
Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a
serpent disturbs no leaf
In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a
nest: clean through,
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned,
he performs the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the
girth, has clipped
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves
thrice bound as before,
He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the
desert like bolt from bow.
Up starts our plundered man: from his breast
though the heart be ripped,
Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a
minute more,
He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose
worth we know!

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has
learned long since to ride,
And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they
are gaining fast
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj
to cross and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety
till that be spied!
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-
length off at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel,
the touch of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the strange and queer :
Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and must,
Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—joy ! fear !
What folly makes Hóseyn shout, "Dog Duhl, Damned son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's left flank !"

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt perceived
Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for evermore.
And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may :
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping : and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-Asad
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him of his grief ;
And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound

His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad!
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: "Poor Hóseyn is crazed past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!"—
"And the beaten in speed!" wept Hóseyn: "You never have loved my Pearl."

THE POPE AND THE NET

AN imaginary story of how a Pope once got himself elected; showing how an appearance of humility may be the best means of bringing about the most ambitious designs.

WHAT, he on whom our voices unanimously ran,
Made Pope at our last Conclave? Full low his life began:
His father earned the daily bread as just a fisherman.

So much the more his boy minds book, gives proof of mother-wit,
Becomes first Deacon, and then Priest, then Bishop: see him sit
No less than Cardinal ere long, while no one cries "Unfit!"

But some one smirks, some other smiles, jogs elbow and nods head:
Each winks at each: "'I-faith, a rise! Saint Peter's net, instead
Of sword and keys, is come in vogue!" You think he blushes red?

2. *Conclave:* the assembly of Cardinals by whom the Pope is elected.

Not he, of humble holy heart! "Unworthy me!" he sighs:
"From fisher's drudge to Church's prince—it is indeed a rise:
So, here's my way to keep the fact for ever in my eyes!"

And straightway in his palace-hall, where commonly is set
Some coat of arms, some portraiture ancestral, lo, we met
His mean estate's reminder in his fisher-father's net!

Which step conciliates all and some, stops cavil in a trice:
"The humble holy heart that holds of newborn pride no spice!
He's just the saint to choose for Pope!" Each adds "'Tis my advice."

So, Pope he was: and when we flocked—its sacred slipper on—
To kiss his foot, we lifted eyes, alack the thing was gone—
That guarantee of lowlihead,—eclipsed that star which shone!

Each eyed his fellow, one and all kept silence. I cried "Pish!
I'll make me spokesman for the rest, express the common wish.
Why, Father, is the net removed?" "Son, it hath caught the fish."

MUCKLE-MOUTH MEG

THIS story is founded on fact. In the last days of the sixteenth century, when the inhabitants on either side of the Scotch border still made war on one another occasionally, a young William Scott of Harden was captured while plundering the lands of Sir Gideon Murray of Elibank, and was about to be hanged when Lady Murray suggested that they had three unmarried daughters, and that the culprit was heir to a good estate. Accordingly he was allowed to escape the gallows on condition of marrying the plainest of the three; and the marriage-contract, which was promptly executed on the parchment of a drum, is still in existence. The couple thus strangely united were among the ancestors of Sir Walter Scott.

FROWNED the Laird on the Lord: "So, red-handed I catch thee?
Death-doomed by our Law of the Border!
We've a gallows outside and a chiel to despatch thee:
Who trespasses—hangs: all's in order."

He met frown with smile, did the young English gallant:
Then the Laird's dame: "Nay, Husband, I beg!
He's comely: be merciful! Grace for the callant
—If he marries our Muckle-mouth Meg!"

7. *Callant:* young fellow.
8. *Muckle-mouth: i.e.*, large-mouthed.

"No mile-wide-mouthed monster of yours do
I marry:
Grant rather the gallows!" laughed he.
"Foul fare kith and kin of you—why do you
tarry?"
"To tame your fierce temper!" quoth she.

"Shove him quick in the Hole, shut him fast
for a week:
Cold, darkness, and hunger work wonders:
Who lion-like roars now, mouse-fashion will
squeak,
And 'it rains' soon succeed to 'it thunders.'"

A week did he bide in the cold and the dark
—Not hunger: for duly at morning
In flitted a lass, and a voice like a lark
Chirped "Muckle-mouth Meg still ye're
scorning?

"Go hang, but here's parritch to hearten ye
first!"
"Did Meg's muckle-mouth boast within some
Such music as yours, mine should match it or
burst:
No frog-jaws! So tell folk, my Winsome!"

Soon week came to end, and, from Hole's door
set wide,
Out he marched, and there waited the lassie:
"Yon gallows, or Muckle-mouth Meg for a
bride!
Consider! Sky's blue and turf's grassy:

21. *Parritch:* porridge.

"Life's sweet: shall I say ye wed Muckle-mouth Meg?"
"Not I," quoth the stout heart: "too eerie
The mouth that can swallow a bubblyjock's egg:
Shall I let it munch mine? Never, Dearie!"

"Not Muckle-mouth Meg? Wow, the obstinate man!
Perhaps he would rather wed me!"
"Ay, would he—with just for a dowry your can!"
"I'm Muckle-mouth Meg," chirruped she.

"Then so—so—so—so—" as he kissed her apace—
"Will I widen thee out till thou turnest
From Margaret Minnikin-mou', by God's grace,
To Muckle-mouth Meg in good earnest!"

30. *Eerie:* unnatural.
31. *Bubblyjock:* a turkey.
39. *Minnikin-mou':* tiny-mouthed.

PROSPICE

THE poem of a brave man face to face with death, who will die fighting, with a sure hope of a blessed hereafter.

FEAR death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness, and cold.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

A PISGAH SIGHT

THIS little poem expresses a vision of the freedom of the soul when released from the body. It does not matter what becomes of the body; the soul is free now to rise to "sunshine and love." The lines were written as introduction to a longer poem in memory of a dead friend.

I.

GOOD, to forgive;
Best, to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
Soul, clap thy pinion!
Earth have dominion,
Body, o'er thee!

II.

Wander at will,
Day after day,—
Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber:
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

III.

Waft of soul's wing!
  What lies above?
  Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
  Ferns of all feather,
  Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

EVELYN HOPE

ANOTHER study of death. A girl of sixteen is lying dead, and the speaker declares that, though he was three times as old as she, he has yet loved her all the while. In this life his love has been fruitless; he has seemed to have nothing to do with her; but the love must have had a meaning, and in the life to come he will claim her as his own.

I.

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

II.

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

III.

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

IV.

No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

V.

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

19. *Horoscope:* a term of astrology, meaning the position of the planets at the moment of a person's birth, from which it was supposed that his fortune could be foretold.

VI.

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

VII.

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

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL

SHORTLY AFTER THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING IN EUROPE

THIS poem is supposed to be chanted by a band of young scholars as they carry their master's body up a lofty mountain to bury it. It gives a vivid picture of the enthusiasm for learning which was felt, especially in Italy, in the fifteenth century, when the knowledge of the Greek language and literature was coming back to Western Europe, after having been lost for many centuries. The "Grammarian," whose funeral is here described, is a man who has devoted his whole life to the study of learning. He refuses all suggestions that it is time to leave off learning and enjoy what he has learnt; he goes on labouring incessantly at those small points of grammar which form the foundation of all sound knowledge of a language. His life has come to an end, while his task is still unfinished; but he has been quite content to trust the result to God, knowing that man has eternity to look to. It is a finer thing to aim at a great result and miss by a little, than to aim at a low result and succeed. So this man's life, though apparently incomplete and a failure, has really been one of noble aspirations, which will surely receive their ful reward hereafter.

LET us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether

3. *Crofts:* small farms. *Thorpes:* villages.

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

Sleep, crop and herd ! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
Safe from the weather !
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
Singing together,

8. *Rimming the rock-row :* that is, just showing behind the rim of the rocks on the sky-line.

He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo!
Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
Winter would follow?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
"My dance is finished?"
No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city!)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity;
Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping:
"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled?
"Show me their shaping,
"Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
"Give!"—So, he gowned him,
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.
Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
Accents uncertain:
"Time to taste life," another would have said,
"Up with the curtain!"

40. Notice Browning's way of expressing a negative by a question. This passage means, "When he found his youth departing, did he mourn that his career was finished? No, he only set himself to work more seriously." A similar use of a question occurs in lines 57 and 140.

This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
"Patience a moment!
"Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
"Still there's the comment.
"Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
"Painful or easy!
"Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
"Ay, nor feel queasy."
Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
When he had learned it,
When he had gathered all books had to give!
Sooner, he spurned it.
Image the whole, then execute the parts—
Fancy the fabric
Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
Ere mortar dab brick!

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

64. *Queasy:* sick

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

86. *Calculus :* the Latin name of a disease.

88. *Tussis :* cough.

95. *Soul-hydroptic :* hydroptic means afflicted with a disease which produces a consuming thirst ; so the whole phrase here means " consumed with a sacred thirst in his soul," namely, the thirst for learning.

107, 108. That is, he would not anticipate the full enjoyment of life hereafter by an imperfect enjoyment of it now, before he had learnt its full use and meaning.

"Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered
"Yes:
"Hence with life's pale lure!"
That low man seeks a little thing to do,
Sees it and does it:
This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
Dies ere he knows it.
That low man goes on adding one to one,
His hundred's soon hit:
This high man, aiming at a million,
Misses an unit.
That, has the world here—should he need the next,
Let the world mind him!
This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
Seeking shall find him.
So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—
Properly based *Oun*—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.
Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!

129–131. *Hoti—Oun—De:* Greek particles, meaning respectively "that" (or "because"), "therefore," "towards."
134. *Purlieus:* regions.

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

EPILOGUE TO ASOLANDO

THESE lines are the last published by Robert Browning. The volume of which they are the conclusion appeared on the day on which he died; though he himself received an advance copy of it shortly before his death, and heard that the first reviews gave it a very favourable reception. The third stanza describes, as well as anything he ever wrote, his constant bearing in life—his courage, his hopefulness, his perseverance. The poem looks forward, too, to a continuance of useful work after death. He does not wish to be pitied, as if death were a prison which ended all activity. His whole life on earth has shown that his sympathies are not with the helpless and hopeless, that he has been always brave and hopeful, and he is prepared to greet with a cheer the unseen life which is to come. No fitter or more characteristic words could have been chosen to end the message of Robert Browning to mankind.

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

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

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

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

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

1809-1861

THE ROMAUNT OF THE PAGE

THE story of a lady who followed her husband to the wars in the disguise of a page, and died when he (not guessing who she was) declared that he would never love a wife who so demeaned herself.

I.

A KNIGHT of gallant deeds
And a young page at his side,
From the holy war in Palestine
Did slow and thoughtful ride,
As each were a palmer and told for beads
The dews of the eventide.

II.

"O young page," said the knight,
"A noble page art thou!
Thou fearest not to steep in blood
The curls upon thy brow;
And once in the tent, and twice in the fight,
Didst ward me a mortal blow."

III.

"O brave knight," said the page,
"Or ere we hither came,
We talked in tent, we talked in field,
Of the bloody battle-game;
But here, below this greenwood bough,
I cannot speak the same.

5. *Palmer:* a pilgrim to the Holy Land. *Beads:* the beads of a rosary, used for counting prayers.

IV.

"Our troop is far behind,
The woodland calm is new;
Our steeds, with slow grass-muffled hoofs,
Tread deep the shadows through;
And, in my mind, some blessing kind
Is dropping with the dew.

V.

"The woodland calm is pure—
I cannot choose but have
A thought from these, o' the beechen-trees,
Which in our England wave,
And of the little finches fine
Which sang there while in Palestine
The warrior-hilt we drave.

VI.

"Methinks, a moment gone,
I heard my mother pray!
I heard, sir knight, the prayer for me
Wherein she passed away;
And I know the heavens are leaning down
To hear what I shall say."

VII.

The page spake calm and high,
As of no mean degree;
Perhaps he felt in Nature's broad
Full heart, his own was free:
And the knight looked up to his lifted eye,
Then answered smilingly—

VIII.

"Sir page, I pray your grace!
Certes, I meant not so
To cross your pastoral mood, sir page,
With the crook of the battle-bow;
But a knight may speak of a lady's face,
I ween, in any mood or place,
If the grasses die or grow.

IX.

And this I meant to say—
My lady's face shall shine
As ladies' faces use, to greet
My page from Palestine;
Or, speak she fair or prank she gay,
She is no lady of mine.

X.

"And this I meant to fear—
Her bower may suit thee ill;
For, sooth, in that same field and tent,
Thy *talk* was somewhat still:
And fitter thy hand for my knightly spear
Than thy tongue for my lady's will!"

XI.

Slowly and thankfully
The young page bowed his head;
His large eyes seemed to muse a smile,
Until he blushed instead,

45. *Certes:* certainly.
55. *Prank:* dress herself up.

And no lady in her bower, pardiè,
Could blush more sudden red :
"Sir Knight,—thy lady's bower to me
Is suited well," he said.

XII.

Beati, beati, mortui!
From the convent on the sea,
One mile off, or scarce so nigh,
Swells the dirge as clear and high
As if that, over brake and lea,
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of Saint Mary,
And the fifty tapers burning o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess dead before it,
And the chanting nuns whom yesterweek
Her voice did charge and bless,—
Chanting steady, chanting meek,
Chanting with a solemn breath,
Because that they are thinking less
Upon the dead than upon death.
Beati, beati, mortui!
Now the vision in the sound
Wheeleth on the wind around :
Now it sweepeth back, away—
The uplands will not let it stay
To dark the western sun :
Mortui!—away at last,—
Or ere the page's blush is past!
And the knight heard all, and the page heard none.

67. *Pardiè:* an old Norman-French ejaculation; literally, "by God."

71. *Beati, beati, mortui:* "blessed, blessed are the dead."

XIII.

"A boon, thou noble knight,
If ever I servèd thee!
Though thou art a knight and I am a page
Now grant a boon to me;
And tell me sooth, if dark or bright,
If little loved or loved aright
Be the face of thy ladye."

XIV.

Gloomily looked the knight—
"As a son thou hast servèd me,
And would to none I had granted boon
Except to only thee!
For haply then I should love aright,
For then I should know if dark or bright
Were the face of my ladye.

XV.

"Yet it ill suits my knightly tongue
To grudge that granted boon,
That heavy price from heart and life
I paid in silence down;
The hand that claimed it, cleared in fine
My father's fame: I swear by mine,
That price was nobly won!

XVI.

"Earl Walter was a brave old earl,
He was my father's friend;
And while I rode the lists at court
And little guessed the end,

118. *Rode the lists:* took part in tournaments

My noble father in his shroud
Against a slanderer lying loud,
He rose up to defend.

XVII.

"Oh, calm below the marble grey
My father's dust was strown!
Oh, meek above the marble grey
His image prayed alone!
The slanderer lied: the wretch was brave—
For, looking up the minster-nave,
He saw my father's knightly glaive
Was changed from steel to stone.

XVIII.

"Earl Walter's glaive was steel,
With a brave old hand to wear it,
And dashed the lie back in the mouth
Which lied against the godly truth
And against the knightly merit:
The slanderer, 'neath the avenger's heel,
Struck up the dagger in appeal
From stealthy lie to brutal force—
And out upon the traitor's corse
Was yielded the true spirit.

XIX.

"I would mine hand had fought that fight
And justified my father!
I would mine heart had caught that wound
And slept beside him rather!

129. *Glaive:* sword.

I think it were a better thing
Than murdered friend and marriage-ring
Forced on my life together.

XX.

"Wail shook Earl Walter's house;
His true wife shed no tear;
She lay upon her bed as mute
As the earl did on his bier:
Till—'Ride, ride fast,' she said at last,
'And bring the avengèd's son anear!
Ride fast, ride free, as a dart can flee,
For white of blee with waiting for me
Is the corse in the next chambère.'

XXI.

"I came, I knelt beside her bed;
Her calm was worse than strife:
'My husband, for thy father dear,
Gave freely when thou wast not here
His own and eke my life.
A boon! Of that sweet child we make
An orphan for thy father's sake,
Make thou, for ours, a wife.'

XXII.

"I said, 'My steed neighs in the court,
My bark rocks on the brine,
And the warrior's vow I am under now
To free the pilgrim's shrine;

155. *White of blee:* white in appearance.

But fetch the ring and fetch the priest
And call that daughter of thine,
And rule she wide from my castle on Nyde
While I am in Palestine.'

XXIII.

"In the dark chambère, if the bride was fair,
Ye wis, I could not see,
But the steed thrice neighed, and the priest fast prayed,
And wedded fast were we.
Her mother smiled upon her bed
As at its side we knelt to wed,
And the bride rose from her knee
And kissed the smile of her mother dead,
Or ever she kissed me.

XXIV.

"My page, my page, what grieves thee so,
That the tears run down thy face?"—
"Alas, alas! mine own sistèr
Was in thy lady's case:
But *she* laid down the silks she wore
And followed him she wed before,
Disguised as his true servitor,
To the very battle-place."

XXV.

And wept the page, but laughed the knight,
A careless laugh laughed he:
"Well done it were for thy sistèr,
But not for my ladye!

My love, so please you, shall requite
No woman, whether dark or bright,
Unwomaned if she be."

XXVI.

The page stopped weeping and smiled cold—
"Your wisdom may declare
That womanhood is proved the best
By golden brooch and glossy vest
The mincing ladies wear;
Yet is it proved, and was of old,
Anear as well, I dare to hold,
By truth, or by despair."

XXVII.

He smiled no more, he wept no more,
But passionate he spake—
"Oh, womanly she prayed in tent,
When none beside did wake!
Oh, womanly she paled in fight,
For one belovèd's sake!—
And her little hand, defiled with blood,
Her tender tears of womanhood
Most woman-pure did make!"

XXVIII.

"Well done it were for thy sistèr,
Thou tellest well her tale!
But for my lady, she shall pray
I' the kirk of Nydesdale.
Not dread for me but love for me
Shall make my lady pale;

No casque shall hide her woman's tear—
It shall have room to trickle clear
Behind her woman's veil."

XXIX.

—"But what if she mistook thy mind
And followed thee to strife,
Then kneeling did entreat thy love
As Paynims ask for life?"
"I would forgive, and evermore
Would love her as my servitor,
But little as my wife.

XXX.

"Look up—there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!
So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman's honour lies."
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen—
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes.

XXXI.

Then dimly dropped his eyes away
From welkin unto hill—
Ha! who rides there?—the page is 'ware,
Though the cry at his heart is still:
And the page seeth all and the knight seeth none,
Though banner and spear do fleck the sun,
And the Saracens ride at will.

220. *Casque:* helmet.
226. *Paynims:* heathen, especially the Saracens.
234. *Sheen:* bright. 238. *Welkin:* sky.

XXXII.

He speaketh calm, he speaketh low,—
"Ride fast, my master, ride,
Or ere within the broadening dark
The narrow shadows hide."
"Yea, fast, my page, I will do so,
And keep thou at my side."

XXXIII.

"Now nay, now nay, ride on thy way,
Thy faithful page precede.
For I must loose on saddle-bow
My battle-casque that galls, I trow,
The shoulder of my steed ;
And I must pray, as I did vow,
For one in bitter need.

XXXIV.

"Ere night I shall be near to thee,—
Now ride, my master, ride !
Ere night, as parted spirits cleave
To mortals too beloved to leave,
I shall be at thy side."
The knight smiled free at the fantasy,
And down the dell did ride.

XXXV.

Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
No smile the word had won ;
Had the knight looked up to the page's face,
I ween he had never gone :

Had the knight looked back to the page's geste,
I ween he had turned anon,
For dread was the woe in the face so young,
And wild was the silent geste that flung
Casque, sword to earth, as the boy down-sprung
And stood—alone, alone.

XXXVI.

He clenched his hands as if to hold
His soul's great agony—
"Have I renounced my womanhood,
For wifehood unto *thee*,
And is this the last, last look of thine
That ever I shall see?

XXXVII.

"Yet God thee save, and mayst thou have
A lady to thy mind,
More woman-proud and half as true
As one thou leav'st behind!
And God me take with HIM to dwell—
For Him I cannot love too well,
As I have loved my kind."

XXXVIII.

She looketh up, in earth's despair,
The hopeful heavens to seek;
That little cloud still floateth there,
Whereof her loved did speak:
How bright the little cloud appears!
Her eyelids fall upon the tears,
And the tears down either cheek.

268 *Geste:* gesture.

XXXIX.

The tramp of hoof, the flash of steel—
The Paynims round her coming!
The sound and sight have made her calm,—
False page, but truthful woman;
She stands amid them all unmoved:
A heart once broken by the loved
Is strong to meet the foeman.

XL.

"Ho, Christian page! art keeping sheep,
From pouring wine-cups resting?"—
"I keep my master's noble name,
For warring, not for feasting;
And if that here Sir Hubert were,
My master brave, my master dear,
Ye would not stay the questing."

XLI.

"Where is thy master, scornful page,
That we may slay or bind him?"—
"Now search the lea and search the wood,
And see if ye can find him!
Nathless, as hath been often tried,
Your Paynim heroes faster ride
Before him than behind him."

XLII.

"Give smoother answers, lying page,
Or perish in the lying!"—
"I trow that if the warrior brand
Beside my foot, were in my hand,
'Twere better at replying!"

307. *Stay the questing:* stop to ask the question.

They cursed her deep, they smote her low,
They cleft her golden ringlets through ;
The Loving is the Dying.

XLIII.

She felt the scimitar gleam down,
And met it from beneath
With smile more bright in victory
Than any sword from sheath,—
Which flashed across her lip serene,
Most like the spirit-light between
The darks of life and death.

XLIV.

Ingemisco, ingemisco !
From the convent on the sea,
Now it sweepeth solemnly,
As over wood and over lea
Bodily the wind did carry
The great altar of St. Mary,
And the fifty tapers paling o'er it,
And the Lady Abbess stark before it,
And the weary nuns with hearts that faintly
Beat along their voices saintly—
Ingemisco, ingemisco !
Dirge for abbess laid in shroud
Sweepeth o'er the shroudless dead,
Page or lady, as we said,

330. *Ingemisco:* I bewail.
333. *As: i.e.*, as if.

With the dews upon her head,
All as sad if not as loud.
Ingemisco, ingemisco!
Is ever a lament begun
By any mourner under sun,
Which, ere it endeth, suits but *one?*

349. Here the lament which was begun for the abbess suits. the page also.

THE ROMANCE OF THE SWAN'S NEST

"So the dreams depart,
So the fading phantoms flee,
And the sharp reality
Now must act its part."
—WESTWOOD'S *Beads from a Rosary.*

A GIRL'S day-dream as to what her lover will be like. As the reward of his devotion, after he has done great deeds for her, and as a sign of accepting his love, she means to show him a certain swan's nest, which she has found hidden among the rushes, and in which she takes great delight. But she goes and finds the nest deserted and destroyed; and this seems to upset all the story she has been imagining, and suggests that reality seldom comes up to our expectations. We expect great things when we are children, but we obtain very few of them when we are grown up.

I.

LITTLE Ellie sits alone
Mid the beeches of a meadow,
By a stream-side on the grass,
And the trees are showering down
Doubles of their leaves in shadow
On her shining hair and face.

II.

She has thrown her bonnet by,
And her feet she has been dipping
In the shallow water's flow:
Now she holds them nakedly
In her hands, all sleek and dripping,
While she rocketh to and fro.

III.

Little Ellie sits alone,
And the smile she softly uses
Fills the silence like a speech
While she thinks what shall be done,
And the sweetest pleasure chooses
For her future within reach.

IV.

Little Ellie in her smile
Chooses—"I will have a lover
Riding on a steed of steeds:
He shall love me without guile,
And to *him* I will discover
The swan's nest among the reeds.

V.

"And the steed shall be red-roan,
And the lover shall be noble,
With an eye that takes the breath:
And the lute he plays upon
Shall strike ladies into trouble,
As his sword strikes men to death.

VI.

"And the steed it shall be shod
All in silver, housed in azure,
And the mane shall swim the wind;
And the hoofs along the sod
Shall flash onward and keep measure,
Till the shepherds look behind.

VII.

"But my lover will not prize
All the glory that he rides in,
When he gazes in my face:
He will say, 'O Love, thine eyes
Build the shrine my soul abides in,
And I kneel here for thy grace!'

VIII.

"Then, ay, then he shall kneel low,
With the red-roan steed anear him
Which shall seem to understand,
Till I answer, 'Rise and go!
For the world must love and fear him
Whom I gift with heart and hand.'

IX.

"Then he will arise so pale,
I shall feel my own lips tremble
With a *yes* I must not say,
Nathless maiden-brave, 'Farewell,'
I will utter and dissemble—
'Light to-morrow with to-day!'

32. *Housed in azure:* covered with bright blue trappings, or robes.

52. *Nathless:* nevertheless.

X.

" Then he'll ride among the hills
To the wide world past the river,
There to put away all wrong ;
To make straight distorted wills,
And to empty the broad quiver
Which the wicked bear along.

XI.

" Three times shall a young foot-page
Swim the stream and climb the mountain
And kneel down beside my feet—
' Lo, my master sends this gage,
Lady, for thy pity's counting !
What wilt thou exchange for it ? '

XII.

" And the first time I will send
A white rosebud for a guerdon,
And the second time, a glove ;
But the third time—I may bend
From my pride, and answer—' Pardon
If he comes to take my love.'

XIII.

" Then the young foot-page will run,
Then my lover will ride faster,
Till he kneeleth at my knee :
' I am a duke's eldest son,
Thousand serfs do call me master,
But, O Love, I love but *thee !* '

64. *Gage :* pledge, or sign of his love.
68. *Guerdon :* reward.

XIV.

"He will kiss me on the mouth
Then, and lead me as a lover
Through the crowds that praise his deeds;
And, when soul-tied by one troth,
Unto *him* I will discover
That swan's nest among the reeds."

XV.

Little Ellie, with her smile
Not yet ended, rose up gaily,
Tied the bonnet, donned the shoe,
And went homeward, round a mile,
Just to see, as she did daily,
What more eggs were with the two.

XVI.

Pushing through the elm-tree copse,
Winding up the stream, light-hearted,
Where the osier pathway leads,
Past the boughs she stoops—and stops.
Lo, the wild swan had deserted,
And a rat had gnawed the reeds!

XVII.

Ellie went home sad and slow.
If she found the lover ever,
With his red-roan steed of steeds,
Sooth I know not; but I know
She could never show him—never,
That swan's nest among the reeds!

THE SEA-MEW

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED TO M. E. H.

THE story of a captive sea-bird, which pined away with longing for its own free life on the sea and could not live among human folk.

I.

How joyously the young sea-mew
Lay dreaming on the waters blue
Whereon our little bark had thrown
A little shade, the only one,
But shadows ever man pursue.

II.

Familiar with the waves and free
As if their own white foam were he,
His heart upon the heart of ocean
Lay learning all its mystic motion,
And throbbing to the throbbing sea.

III.

And such a brightness in his eye
As if the ocean and the sky
Within him had lit up and nurst
A soul God gave him not at first,
To comprehend their majesty.

IV.

We were not cruel, yet did sunder
His white wing from the blue waves under,
And bound it, while his fearless eyes
Shone up to ours in calm surprise,
As deeming us some ocean wonder.

V.

We bore our ocean bird unto
A grassy place where he might view
The flowers that curtsey to the bees,
The waving of the tall green trees,
The falling of the silver dew.

VI.

But flowers of earth were pale to him
Who had seen the rainbow fishes swim;
And when earth's dew around him lay
He thought of ocean's wingèd spray,
And his eye waxèd sad and dim

VII.

The green trees round him only made
A prison with their darksome shade;
And drooped his wing, and mournèd he
For his own boundless glittering sea—
Albeit he knew not they could fade.

VIII.

Then One her gladsome face did bring,
Her gentle voice's murmuring,
In ocean's stead his heart to move
And teach him what was human love :
He thought it a strange, mournful thing.

IX.

He lay down in his grief to die,
(First looking to the sea-like sky
That hath no waves) because, alas !
Our human touch did on him pass,
And, with our touch, our agony.

TO FLUSH, MY DOG

I.

LOVING friend, the gift of one
Who her own true faith has run
  Through thy lower nature,
Be my benediction said
With my hand upon thy head,
  Gentle fellow-creature!

II.

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
Flow thy silken ears adown
  Either side demurely
Of thy silver-suited breast
Shining out from all the rest
  Of thy body purely.

III.

Darkly brown thy body is,
Till the sunshine striking this
  Alchemize its dulness,
When the sleek curls manifold
Flash all over into gold
  With a burnished fulness.

1. Flush, Mrs. Browning's dog, was given to her by Miss Mitford, the authoress of "Our Village" and many other stories and plays.

15. *Alchemize its dulness:* turn its dulness into brightness, as the alchemists professed to turn any substance into gold.

IV.

Underneath my stroking hand,
Startled eyes of hazel bland
  Kindling, growing larger,
Up thou leapest with a spring,
Full of prank and curveting,
  Leaping like a charger.

V.

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
  Canopied in fringes;
Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
Flicker strangely, fair and fine
  Down their golden inches.

VI.

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
Little is't to such an end
  That I praise thy rareness;
Other dogs may be thy peers
Haply in these drooping ears
  And this glossy fairness.

VII.

But of *thee* it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
  Day and night unweary,
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
  Round the sick and dreary.

38–42. Mrs. Browning refers to her own sick-room. For many years before her marriage she was an invalid, owing to an accident as a girl.

VIII.

Roses, gathered for a vase,
In that chamber died apace,
  Beam and breeze resigning;
This dog only, waited on,
Knowing that when light is gone
  Love remains for shining.

IX.

Other dogs in thymy dew
Tracked the hares and followed through
  Sunny moor or meadow;
This dog only, crept and crept
Next a languid cheek that slept,
  Sharing in the shadow.

X.

Other dogs of loyal cheer
Bounded at the whistle clear,
  Up the woodside hieing;
This dog only, watched in reach
Of a faintly uttered speech
  Or a louder sighing.

XI.

And if one or two quick tears
Dropped upon his glossy ears
  Or a sigh came double,
Up he sprang in eager haste,
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
  In a tender trouble.

XII.

And this dog was satisfied
If a pale thin hand would glide
  Down his dewlaps sloping,—
Which he pushed his nose within,
After,—platforming his chin
  On the palm left open.

XIII.

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blither choice
  Than such chamber-keeping,
"Come out!" praying from the door,—
Presseth backward as before,
  Up against me leaping.

XIV.

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
  Render praise and favour:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
  Therefore and for ever.

XV.

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
  Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
  Leaning from my Human.

XVI.

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
Sugared milk make fat thee!
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
Nevermore, to pat thee!

XVII.

Downy pillow take thy head,
Silken coverlid bestead,
Sunshine help thy sleeping!
No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup
Set for drinking deep in.

XVIII.

Whiskered cats arointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations!

XIX.

Mock I thee, in wishing weal?—
Tears are in my eyes to feel
Thou art made so straitly,
Blessing needs must straiten too,—
Little canst thou joy or do,
Thou who lovest *greatly*.

103. *Arointed:* driven away.

XX.

Yet be blessèd to the height
Of all good and all delight
  Pervious to thy nature;
Only *loved* beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
  Loving fellow-creature!

117. *Pervious:* accessible, which thy nature can reach.

MY DOVES

IN the last poem Mrs. Browning addressed her pet dog; in this she writes about her tame doves. They have come from a bright, sunny land to cold and noisy London, yet still they sing as softly and musically as ever, and seem to teach her to hope and sing in spite of all the depression which surrounds her, and to love as they do.

MY little doves have left a nest
  Upon an Indian tree
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
  Or motion from the sea;
For, ever there the sea-winds go
With sunlit paces to and fro.

The tropic flowers looked up to it,
  The tropic stars looked down,
And there my little doves did sit
  With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature's deep delight.

And God them taught, at every close
  Of murmuring waves beyond
And green leaves round, to interpose
  Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting that love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.

Fit ministers ! Of living loves
Theirs hath the calmest fashion,
Their living voice the likest moves
To lifeless intonation,
The lovely monotone of springs
And winds and such insensate things.

My little doves were ta'en away
From that glad nest of theirs
Across an ocean rolling grey
And tempest-clouded airs :
My little doves, who lately knew
The sky and wave by warmth and blue.

And now, within the city prison,
In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
For sounds of past content,
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut-fruit falling from the trees.

The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
Man's cold metallic heart,
The roar of wheels, the cry for bread,—
These only sounds are heard instead.

Yet still, as on my human hand
Their fearless heads they lean,
And almost seem to understand
What human musings mean,
(Their eyes with such a plaintive shine
Are fastened upwardly to mine !)—

Soft falls their chant as on the nest
  Beneath the sunny zone;
For love that stirred it in their breast
  Has not aweary grown,
And 'neath the city's shade can keep
The well of music clear and deep.

And love, that keeps the music, fills
  With pastoral memories;
All echoings from out the hills,
  All droppings from the skies,
All flowings from the wave and wind,
Remembered in their chant, I find.

So teach ye me the wisest part,
  My little doves! to move
Along the city-ways with heart
  Assured by holy love,
And vocal with such songs as own
A fountain to the world unknown.

'Twas hard to sing by Babel's stream—
  More hard, in Babel's street:
But if the soulless creatures deem
  Their music not unmeet
For sunless walls—let *us* begin,
Who wear immortal wings within!

To me, fair memories belong
  Of scenes that used to bless,

67. *Babel's stream:* this refers to Psalm cxxxvii.: "By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept, when we remembered thee, O Zion. . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

For no regret, but present song
  And lasting thankfulness,
And very soon to break away,
Like types, in purer things than they.

I will have hopes that cannot fade,
  For flowers the valley yields ;
I will have humble thoughts instead
  Of silent, dewy fields :
My spirit and my God shall be
My seaward hill, my boundless sea.

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN

In this poem Mrs. Browning recalls her own childhood, and especially her delight in the story of Troy, as told by Homer. She had a garden bed dug out in the shape of a man to represent Hector, and various flowers were planted and arranged in it so as to stand for his hair, his eyes, his helmet, his sword, his breastplate, and so on; and she used to dream over it till she almost fancied that it was alive, and that Hector's spirit itself was in it. But at the end she reminds herself that she must stop dreaming about her childhood, and must be up and doing the work which lies before her in life.

I.

Nine years old! The first of any
Seem the happiest years that come:
Yet when *I* was nine, I said
No such word! I thought instead
That the Greeks had used as many
In besieging Ilium.

II.

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
To my childhood's haunted spring;
I had life, like flowers and bees,
In betwixt the country trees,
And the sun the pleasure taught me
Which he teacheth every thing.

6. *Ilium:* Troy, besieged by the Greeks under Agamemnon and Achilles, and defended by Hector.

III.

If the rain fell, there was sorrow :
Little head leant on the pane,
Little finger drawing down it
The long trailing drops upon it,
And the "Rain, rain, come to-morrow,"
Said for charm against the rain.

IV.

Such a charm was right Canidian,
Though you meet it with a jeer !
If I said it long enough,
Then the rain hummed dimly off,
And the thrush with his pure Lydian
Was left only to the ear ;

V.

And the sun and I together
Went a-rushing out of doors :
We our tender spirits drew
Over hill and dale in view,
Glimmering hither, glimmering thither
In the footsteps of the showers.

VI.

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
Through the grasses wet and fair,
Straight I sought my garden-ground
With the laurel on the mound,
And the pear-tree oversweeping
A side-shadow of green air.

19. *Right Canidian:* as successful as the charms of Canidia, a celebrated Greek sorceress.

24. *Lydian:* a kind of Greek music.

VII.

In the garden lay supinely
A huge giant wrought of spade!
Arms and legs were stretched at length
In a passive giant strength,—
The fine meadow turf, cut finely,
Round them laid and interlaid.

VIII.

Call him Hector, son of Priam!
Such his title and degree.
With my rake I smoothed his brow,
Both his cheeks I weeded through,
But a rhymer such as I am,
Scarce can sing his dignity.

IX.

Eyes of gentianellas azure,
Staring, winking at the skies:
Nose of gillyflowers and box;
Scented grasses put for locks,
Which a little breeze at pleasure
Set a-waving round his eyes:

X.

Brazen helm of daffodillies,
With a glitter toward the light;
Purple violets for the mouth,
Breathing perfumes west and south;
And a sword of flashing lilies,
Holden ready for the fight:

XI.

And a breastplate made of daisies,
Closely fitting, leaf on leaf;
Periwinkles interlaced
Drawn for belt about the waist;
While the brown bees, humming praises,
Shot their arrows round the chief.

XII.

And who knows (I sometimes wondered)
If the disembodied soul
Of old Hector, once of Troy,
Might not take a dreary joy
Here to enter—if it thundered,
Rolling up the thunder-roll?

XIII.

Rolling this way from Troy-ruin,
In this body rude and rife
Just to enter, and take rest
'Neath the daisies of the breast—
They, with tender roots, renewing
His heroic heart to life?

XIV.

Who could know? I sometimes started
At a motion or a sound!
Did his mouth speak—naming Troy
With an ὀτοτοτοτοῖ?
Did the pulse of the Strong-hearted
Make the daisies tremble round?

82 ὀτοτοτοτοῖ: a Greek exclamation of sorrow.

XV.

It was hard to answer, often :
  But the birds sang in the tree,
  But the little birds sang bold
  In the pear-tree green and old,
And my terror seemed to soften
  Through the courage of their glee.

XVI.

Oh, the birds, the tree, the ruddy
  And white blossoms sleek with rain !
  Oh, my garden rich with pansies !
  Oh, my childhood's bright romances !
All revive, like Hector's body,
  And I see them stir again.

XVII.

And despite life's changes, chances,
  And despite the deathbell's toll,
  They press on me in full seeming :
  Help, some angel ! stay this dreaming !
As the birds sang in the branches,
  Sing God's patience through my soul !

XVIII.

That no dreamer, no neglecter
  Of the present's work unsped,
  I may wake up and be doing,
  Life's heroic ends pursuing,
Though my past is dead as Hector,
  And though Hector is twice dead.

LESSONS FROM THE GORSE

"To win the secret of a weed's plain heart."—LOWELL.

THE gorse, by its strength in living in rough places, by its beauty at times when few flowers are to be seen, and by its lowly growth, teaches us lessons of courage and perseverance, of cheerfulness in adversity, and of humility, for which we may well thank God with tears.

I.

MOUNTAIN gorses, ever-golden,
Cankered not the whole year long!
Do ye teach us to be strong,
Howsoever pricked and holden
Like your thorny blooms, and so
Trodden on by rain and snow,
Up the hill-side of this life, as bleak as where ye grow?

II.

Mountain blossoms, shining blossoms,
Do ye teach us to be glad
When no summer can be had,
Blooming in our inward bosoms?
Ye, whom God preserveth still,
Set as lights upon a hill,
Tokens to the wintry earth that Beauty liveth still!

III.

Mountain gorses, do ye teach us
From that academic chair
Canopied with azure air,
That the wisest word man reaches
Is the humblest he can speak?
Ye, who live on mountain peak,
Yet live low along the ground, beside the grasses meek!

IV.

Mountain gorses, since Linnæus
Knelt beside you on the sod,
For your beauty thanking God,—
For your teaching, ye should see us
Bowing in prostration new!
Whence arisen,—if one or two
Drops be on our cheeks—O world, they are not tears but dew.

22. *Linnæus:* the great Swedish botanist.

THE SLEEP

"He giveth His beloved sleep."—*Psalm* cxxvii.

A POEM of the time of Mrs. Browning's illness before her marriage, when it seemed that rest was all she had to hope for. The verse from the Psalms which she quotes as its motto was one of her most favourite passages in the Bible. The second, fifth, and sixth stanzas of this poem were set to music by Dr. Bridge, as a hymn to be sung at the funeral of Robert Browning in Westminster Abbey.

I.

OF all the thoughts of God that are
Borne inward into souls afar,
Along the Psalmist's music deep,
Now tell me if that any is,
For gift or grace, surpassing this:
"He giveth His belovèd—sleep"?

II.

What would we give to our beloved?
The hero's heart to be unmoved,
The poet's star-tuned harp to sweep,
The patriot's voice to teach and rouse,
The monarch's crown to light the brows?
He giveth His belovèd—sleep.

III.

What do we give to our beloved?
A little faith all undisproved,
A little dust to overweep,
And bitter memories to make
The whole earth blasted for our sake:
He giveth His belovèd—sleep.

IV.

"Sleep soft, beloved!" we sometimes say,
Who have no tune to charm away
Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep;
But never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber when
He giveth His belovèd—sleep.

V.

O earth, so full of dreary noises!
O men, with wailing in your voices!
O delvèd gold, the wailers heap!
O strife, O curse, that o'er it fall!
God strikes a silence through you all,
And giveth His belovèd—sleep.

VI.

His dews drop mutely on the hill,
His cloud above it saileth still,
Though on its slope men sow and reap:
More softly than the dew is shed,
Or cloud is floated overhead,
He giveth His belovèd—sleep.

VII

Ay, men may wonder while they scan
A living, thinking, feeling man
Confirmed in such a rest to keep;
But angels say, and through the word
I think their happy smile is *heard*—
"He giveth His belovèd—sleep."

VIII.

For me, my heart that erst did go
Most like a tired child at a show,
That sees through tears the mummers leap,
Would now its wearied vision close,
Would childlike on His love repose
Who giveth His belovèd—sleep.

IX.

And friends, dear friends, when it shall be
That this low breath is gone from me,
And round my bier ye come to weep,
Let One, most loving of you all,
Say "Not a tear must o'er her fall!
He giveth His belovèd sleep."

45. *Mummers:* actors or performers on a stage.

A CHILD'S THOUGHT OF GOD

I.

THEY say that God lives very high;
  But if you look above the pines
You cannot see our God; and why?

II.

And if you dig down in the mines
  You never see Him in the gold
Though from Him all that's glory shines.

III.

God is so good, He wears a fold
  Of heaven and earth across His face—
Like secrets kept, for love, untold.

IV.

But still I feel that His embrace
  Slides down by thrills, through all things made,
Through sight and sound of every place:

V.

As if my tender mother laid
On my shut lips her kisses' pressure,
Half-waking me at night, and said
"Who kissed you through the dark, dear guesser?"

THE MOURNING MOTHER

(OF THE DEAD BLIND)

I.

DOST thou weep, mourning mother,
For thy blind boy in grave?
That no more with each other
Sweet counsel ye can have?
That he, left dark by nature,
Can never more be led
By thee, maternal creature,
Along smooth paths instead?
That thou canst no more show him
The sunshine, by the heat;
The river's silver flowing,
By murmurs at his feet?
The foliage by its coolness;
The roses by their smell;
And all creation's fulness,
By Love's invisible?
Weepest thou to behold not
His meek blind eyes again,—
Closed doorways which were folded,
And prayed against in vain—
And under which, sat smiling
The child-mouth evermore,
As one who watcheth, wiling
The time by, at a door?

And weepest thou to feel not
His clinging hand on thine—
Which now, at dream-time, will not
Its cold touch disentwine?
And weepest thou still ofter,
Oh, never more to mark
His low soft words, made softer
By speaking in the dark?
Weep on, thou mourning mother!

II.

But since to him when living,
Thou wast both sun and moon,
Look o'er his grave, surviving,
From a high sphere alone:
Sustain that exaltation,
Expand that tender light,
And hold in mother-passion
Thy Blessèd in thy sight.
See how he went out straightway
From the dark world he knew,—
No twilight in the gateway
To mediate 'twixt the two,—
Into the sudden glory,
Out of the dark he trod,
Departing from before thee
At once to light and GOD!—
For the first face, beholding
The Christ's in its divine,
For the first place, the golden
And tideless hyaline,

53. *Hyaline:* the sea of glass, which St. John saw before the throne of God.

With trees at lasting summer
That rock to songful sound,
While angels the new-comer
Wrap a still smile around.
Oh, in the blessed psalm now,
His happy voice he tries,
Spreading a thicker palm-bough,
Than others, o'er his eyes!
Yet still, in all the singing,
Thinks haply of thy song
Which, in his life's first springing,
Sang to him all night long;
And wishes it beside him,
With kissing lips that cool
And soft did overglide him,
To make the sweetness full.
Look up, O mourning mother!
Thy blind boy walks in light:
Ye wait for one another
Before God's infinite.
But thou art now the darkest,
Thou mother left below—
Thou, the sole blind,—thou markest,
Content that it be so,—
Until ye two have meeting
Where Heaven's pearl-gate is,
And *he* shall lead thy feet in,
As once thou leddest *his*.
Wait on, thou mourning mother!

60, 61. His eyes, unaccustomed to light, can even less than others endure the glory of Heaven.

A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

PAN, the Greek god of nature and of natural music, is represented as making a musical pipe out of a reed. To make it he has to cut the reed to pieces, destroy its beauty, and take out its pith; but the music which he produces from it, when it is finished, is beautiful. Just so, says Mrs. Browning, to be made a poet a man must suffer pain and loss, and must cease to be a man like other men.

I.

WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,
  Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
  With the dragon-fly on the river.

II.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
  From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
  Ere he brought it out of the river.

4. Pan is always represented as having the legs and feet of a goat, and with a goat's horns.

III.

High on the shore sat the great god Pan
  While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed
  To prove it fresh from the river.

IV.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
  (How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
  In holes, as he sat by the river.

V.

"This is the way," laughed the great god Pan
  (Laughed while he sat by the river),
"The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed."
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
  He blew in power by the river.

VI.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
  Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
  Came back to dream on the river.

VII.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain,—
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

A LAY OF THE EARLY ROSE

". . . discordance that can accord."
—*Romaunt of the Rose.*

THE first part of this poem tells how a rose begged to be allowed to flower before the others, in order that its beauty might be the more seen and praised; but when its prayer was granted, it found that no notice was taken of it, and it withered away in the cold and rain. A poet sees it, and thinks that his lot is like the rose's; poets are in advance of their own time, and are neglected by the world. But then he remembers that it is a high privilege to be the first to receive some new revelation from God, and that the poet should not be thinking of the reward he may get from the world, but should look up to God and try to please Him by prayers, and faith, and hope, and thanksgiving.

A ROSE once grew within
A garden April-green,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
And the fairer for that oneness.

A white rose delicate
On a tall bough and straight:
Early comer, early comer,
Never waiting for the summer.

Her pretty gestes did win
South winds to let her in,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
All the fairer for that oneness.

9. *Gestes:* manners, gestures.

"For if I wait," said she,
"Till time for roses be,
For the moss-rose and the musk-rose,
Maiden-blush and royal-dusk rose,

"What glory then for me
In such a company?—
Roses plenty, roses plenty,
And one nightingale for twenty!

"Nay, let me in," said she,
"Before the rest are free,
In my loneness, in my loneness,
All the fairer for that oneness.

"For I would lonely stand
Uplifting my white hand,
On a mission, on a mission,
To declare the coming vision.

"Upon which lifted sign,
What worship will be mine!
What addressing, what caressing,
And what thanks and praise and blessing!

"A windlike joy will rush
Through every tree and bush,
Bending softly in affection
And spontaneous benediction.

"Insects, that only may
Live in a sunbright ray,
To my whiteness, to my whiteness,
Shall be drawn as to a brightness,—

28. *The coming vision:* the vision of the approaching summer.

"And every moth and bee
Approach me reverently,
Wheeling o'er me, wheeling o'er me,
Coronals of motioned glory.

"Three larks shall leave a cloud,
To my whiter beauty vowed,
Singing gladly all the noontide,
Never waiting for the suntide.

"Ten nightingales shall flee
Their woods for love of me,
Singing sadly all the suntide,
Never waiting for the noontide.

"I ween the very skies
Will look down with surprise,
When below on earth they see me
With my starry aspect dreamy.

"And earth will call her flowers
To hasten out of doors,
By their curtsies and sweet-smelling
To give grace to my foretelling."

So praying, did she win
South winds to let her in,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
And the fairer for that oneness.

But ah,—alas for her!
No thing did minister
To her praises, to her praises,
More than might unto a daisy's.

44. *Coronals of motioned glory*: in moving circles of glory.

No tree nor bush was seen
To boast a perfect green,
Scarcely having, scarcely having
One leaf broad enough for waving.

The little flies did crawl
Along the southern wall,
Faintly shifting, faintly shifting
Wings scarce long enough for lifting.

The lark, too high or low,
I ween, did miss her so,
With his nest down in the gorses,
And his song in the star-courses.

The nightingale did please
To loiter beyond seas :
Guess him in the Happy Islands,
Learning music from the silence !

Only the bee, forsooth,
Came in the place of both,
Doing honour, doing honour
To the honey-dews upon her.

The skies looked coldly down
As on a royal crown ;
Then with drop for drop, at leisure,
They began to rain for pleasure.

Whereat the earth did seem
To waken from a dream,
Winter-frozen, winter-frozen,
Her unquiet eyes unclosing—

Said to the Rose, "Ha, snow!
And art thou fallen so?
Thou, who wast enthronèd stately
All along my mountains lately?

"Holla, thou world-wide snow!
And art thou wasted so,
With a little bough to catch thee,
And a little bee to watch thee?"

—Poor Rose, to be misknown!
Would she had ne'er been blown,
In her loneness, in her loneness,
All the sadder for that oneness!

Some word she tried to say,
Some *no* . . . ah, wellaway!
But the passion did o'ercome her,
And the fair frail leaves dropped from her.

—Dropped from her fair and mute,
Close to a poet's foot,
Who beheld them, smiling slowly,
As at something sad yet holy,—

Said "Verily and thus
It chances too with *us*
Poets, singing sweetest snatches
While that deaf men keep the watches:

"Vaunting to come before
Our own age evermore,
In a loneness, in a loneness,
And the nobler for that oneness.

"Holy in voice and heart,
To high ends, set apart:
All unmated, all unmated,
Just because so consecrated.

"But if alone we be,
Where is our empery?
And if none can reach our stature,
Who can mete our lofty nature?

"What bell will yield a tone,
Swung in the air alone?
If no brazen clapper bringing,
Who can hear the chimèd ringing?

"What angel but would seem
To sensual eyes, ghost-dim?
And without assimilation,
Vain is interpenetration.

"And thus, what can we do,
Poor rose and poet too,
Who both antedate our mission
In an unpreparèd season?

"Drop, leaf! be silent, song!
Cold things we come among:
We must warm them, we must warm them,
Ere we ever hope to charm them.

130. *Empery:* empire. 132. *Mete:* measure.

139. The meaning is that it is useless for a superior being to mix with men, if they cannot understand and appreciate him. If an angel came among men, they would simply not understand him; and so, the poet thinks, it is with poets also.

143. *Antedate:* begin too early.

"Howbeit" (here his face
Lightened around the place,
So to mark the outward turning
Of its spirit's inward burning)

"Something it is, to hold
In God's worlds manifold,
First revealed to creature-duty,
Some new form of His mild Beauty.

"Whether that form respect
The sense or intellect,
Holy be, in mood or meadow,
The Chief Beauty's sign and shadow!

"Holy, in me and thee,
Rose fallen from the tree,—
Though the world stand dumb around us,
All unable to expound us.

"Though none us deign to bless,
Blessèd are we, natheless;
Blessèd still and consecrated
In that, rose, we were created.

"Oh, shame to poet's lays
Sung for the dole of praise,—
Hoarsely sung upon the highway
With that *obolum da mihi!*

170. *Dole:* a gift, generally a small one, given in charity.
172. *Obolum da mihi:* "give me a penny." It is a shame to a poet if he only cares for the pay which he gets for his songs.

"Shame, shame to poet's soul
Pining for such a dole,
When Heaven-chosen to inherit
The high throne of a chief spirit!

"Sit still upon your thrones,
O ye poetic ones!
And if, sooth, the world decry you,
Let it pass unchallenged by you.

"Ye to yourselves suffice,
Without its flatteries.
Self-contentedly approve you
Unto HIM who sits above you,—

"In prayers, that upward mount
Like to a fair-sunned fount
Which, in gushing back upon you,
Hath an upper music won you,—

"In faith, that still perceives
No rose can shed her leaves,
Far less, poet fall from mission,
With an unfulfilled fruition,—

"In hope, that apprehends
An end beyond these ends,
And great uses rendered duly
By the meanest song sung truly,—

183–188. The meaning is: Do not mind if the world neglect you, but try to please God with prayers, which, while they ascend to Him, will bring back a blessing to you from above.

"In thanks, for all the good
By poets understood,
For the sound of seraphs moving
Down the hidden depths of loving,—

"For sights of things away
Through fissures of the clay,
Promised things which *shall* be given
And sung over, up in Heaven,—

"For life, so lovely-vain,
For death, which breaks the chain,
For this sense of present sweetness,
And this yearning to completeness!"

THE CRY OF THE CHILDREN

THIS stirring and pathetic poem was written to help the movement for shortening the hours during which children were allowed to work in mines and factories. Mr. R. H. Horne, a friend of Mrs. Browning's, and himself a poet, had written an official report to Government on the employment of children, and Mrs. Browning has, in effect, put his report into her own passionate verse. Her poem helped, to no small extent, to bring about a great improvement in the conditions under which children work.

I.

Do you hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
And *that* cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows,
The young birds are chirping in the nest,
The young fawns are playing with the shadows,
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.

II.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow
Why their tears are falling so?
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago;
The old tree is leafless in the forest,
The old year is ending in the frost,
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest,
The old hope is hardest to be lost:
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

III.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's hoary anguish draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy;
"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary,
Our young feet," they say, "are very weak;
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—
Our grave-rest is very far to seek:
Ask the aged why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old."

IV.

"True," say the children, "it may happen
That we die before our time:
Little Alice died last year, her grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her:
Was no room for any work in the close clay!
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,
Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries;
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes:
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in
The shroud by the kirk-chime.
It is good when it happens," say the children,
"That we die before our time."

V.

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have:
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city,
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do;
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty,
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!

56. *Cerement:* grave-cloth, used for wrapping the dead.

But they answer, "Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

VI.

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap;
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
Through the coal-dark underground;
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

VII.

"For all day the wheels are droning, turning;
Their wind comes in our faces,
Till our hearts turn, our heads with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places:
Turns the sky in the high window, blank and reeling,
Turns the long light that drops adown the wall,
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling:
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.

And all day the iron wheels are droning,
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels' (breaking out in a mad moaning),
'Stop! be silent for to-day!'"

VIII.

Ay, be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth!
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals:
Let them prove their living souls against the notion
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels!
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,
Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

IX.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray;
So the blessed One who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, "Who is God that He should hear us,
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?

When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.
And *we* hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door:
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
Hears our weeping any more?

X.

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words except 'Our Father,'
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
'Come and rest with Me, my child.'

XI.

"But, no!" say the children, weeping faster,
"He is speechless as a stone:
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.

115, 116. "A fact," says Mrs. Browning in a note, "rendered pathetically historical by Mr. Horne's report of his Commission."

Go to!" say the children,—"up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving:
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving,
And the children doubt of each.

XII.

And well may the children weep before you!
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun.
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm;
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom;
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm:
Are worn as if with age, yet unretrievingly
The harvest of its memories cannot reap,—
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly.
Let them weep! let them weep!

135. That is, the children judge what God's love may be from what they find the world's love is.

XIII.

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in high places,
With eyes turned on Deity.
"How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,—
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path!
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath."

COWPER'S GRAVE

THE poet Cowper, during a great part of his life, was subject to fits of insanity, during which he believed himself shut out from God's love and doomed to utter destruction. These periods of terrible suffering and depression overshadowed his whole life; and the thought of them, and of the rapture which must have followed his awakening in the kingdom of heaven, prompted this beautiful poem, written by Mrs. Browning after visiting his grave.

I.

IT is a place where poets crowned may feel the heart's decaying;
It is a place where happy saints may weep amid their praying;
Yet let the grief and humbleness as low as silence languish:
Earth surely now may give her calm to whom she gave her anguish.

II.

O poets, from a maniac's tongue was poured the deathless singing!
O Christians, at your cross of hope a hopeless hand was clinging!
O men, this man in brotherhood your weary paths beguiling,
Groaned inly while he taught you peace, and died while ye were smiling!

III.

And now, what time ye all may read through dimming tears his story,
How discord on the music fell and darkness on the glory,
And how when, one by one, sweet sounds and wandering lights departed,
He wore no less a loving face because so broken-hearted,—

IV.

He shall be strong to sanctify the poet's high vocation,
And bow the meekest Christian down in meeker adoration;
Nor ever shall he be, in praise, by wise or good forsaken,
Named softly as the household name of one whom God hath taken.

V.

With quiet sadness and no gloom I learn to think upon him,
With meekness that is gratefulness to God whose heaven hath won him,
Who suffered once the madness-cloud to His own love to blind him,
But gently led the blind along where breath and bird could find him;

VI.

And wrought within his shattered brain such quick poetic senses
As hills have language for, and stars, harmonious influences :
The pulse of dew upon the grass kept his within its number,
And silent shadows from the trees refreshed him like a slumber.

VII.

Wild timid hares were drawn from woods to share his home-caresses,
Uplooking to his human eyes with sylvan tendernesses :
The very world, by God's constraint, from falsehood's ways removing,
Its women and its men became, beside him, true and loving.

VIII.

And though, in blindness, he remained unconscious of that guiding,
And things provided came without the sweet sense of providing,
He testified this solemn truth, while phrenzy desolated,
—Nor man nor nature satisfies whom only God created.

25. Cowper kept tame hares about his quiet home at Olney.

IX.

Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses
And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses,—
That turns his fevered eyes around—"My mother! where's my mother?"—
As if such tender words and deeds could come from any other!—

X.

The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees her bending o'er him,
Her face all pale from watchful love, the unweary love she bore him!
Thus woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,
Beneath those deep pathetic Eyes which closed in death to save him.

XI.

Thus? oh, not *thus!* no type of earth can image that awaking,
Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs, round him breaking,
Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted,
But felt those eyes alone, and knew—"*My* Saviour! *not* deserted!"

XII.

Deserted! Who hath dreamt that when the cross
in darkness rested,
Upon the Victim's hidden face no love was
manifested?
What frantic hands outstretched have e'er the
atoning drops averted?
What tears have washed them from the soul,
that *one* should be deserted?

XIII.

Deserted! God could separate from His own
essence rather;
And Adam's sins *have* swept between the
righteous Son and Father:
Yea, once Immanuel's orphaned cry His uni-
verse hath shaken—
It went up single, echoless, "My God, I am
forsaken!"

XIV.

It went up from the Holy's lips amid His lost
creation,
That, of the lost, no son should use those words
of desolation!
That earth's worst phrenzies, marring hope,
should mar not hope's fruition,
And I, on Cowper's grave, should see his
rapture in a vision.

WINE OF CYPRUS

GIVEN TO ME BY H. S. BOYD, AUTHOR OF "SELECT PASSAGES FROM THE GREEK FATHERS," &C.,

TO WHOM THESE STANZAS ARE ADDRESSED

THIS poem was written in honour of a jar of Cyprus wine, given to Mrs. Browning by Mr. H. S. Boyd, a great friend of hers in her girlhood. It reminds her of the days when he had taught her to read all the great authors of Greece, and she recalls the happy hours which they spent over them together.

I.

IF old Bacchus were the speaker,
He would tell you with a sigh
Of the Cyprus in this beaker
I am sipping like a fly,—
Like a fly or gnat on Ida
At the hour of goblet-pledge,
By queen Juno brushed aside, a
Full white arm-sweep, from the edge.

II.

Sooth, the drinking should be ampler
When the drink is so divine,
And some deep-mouthed Greek exemplar
Would become your Cyprus wine:

1. *Bacchus:* the god of the vine and of drinking.
5. *Ida:* a mountain near Troy, to which, according to Homer, the gods often resorted.

Cyclops' mouth might plunge aright in,
While his one eye overleered,
Nor too large were mouth of Titan
Drinking rivers down his beard.

III.

Pan might dip his head so deep in,
That his ears alone pricked out,
Fauns around him pressing, leaping,
Each one pointing to his throat:
While the Naiads, like Bacchantes,
Wild, with urns thrown out to waste,
Cry, "O earth, that thou wouldst grant us
Springs to keep, of such a taste!"

IV.

But for me, I am not worthy
After gods and Greeks to drink,
And my lips are pale and earthy
To go bathing from this brink:
Since you heard them speak the last time,
They have faded from their blooms,
And the laughter of my pastime
Has learnt silence at the tombs.

V.

Ah, my friend! the antique drinkers
Crowned the cup and crowned the brow.
Can I answer the old thinkers
In the forms they thought of, now?

19. *Fauns:* the woodland creatures who attended Pan.
21. *Naiads:* spirits of the streams. *Bacchantes:* the wild female followers of Bacchus.
34. The Greeks used to wear garlands of flowers at their feasts.

Who will fetch from garden-closes
Some new garlands while I speak,
That the forehead, crowned with roses,
May strike scarlet down the cheek?

VI.

Do not mock me! with my mortal
Suits no wreath again, indeed;
I am sad-voiced as the turtle
Which Anacreon used to feed:
Yet as that same bird demurely
Wet her beak in cup of his,
So, without a garland, surely
I may touch the brim of this.

VII.

Go,—let others praise the Chian!
This is soft as Muses' string,
This is tawny as Rhea's lion,
This is rapid as his spring,
Bright as Paphia's eyes e'er met us,
Light as ever trod her feet;
And the brown bees of Hymettus
Make their honey not so sweet.

43. *Turtle:* turtle-dove. The Greek poet Anacreon has left some verses addressed to a turtle-dove, alluded to in the next lines.

49. Chian wine, from the island of Chios, was very famous.

51. *Rhea*, or Cybelé, the mother of the gods, whose chariot was drawn by lions.

53. *Paphia:* Aphrodité, or Venus, one of whose favourite homes was at Paphos, in Cyprus.

55. *Hymettus:* a mountain near Athens, famed for its honey.

VIII.

Very copious are my praises,
Though I sip it like a fly!
Ah—but, sipping,—times and places
Change before me suddenly:
As Ulysses' old libation
Drew the ghosts from every part,
So your Cyprus wine, dear Grecian,
Stirs the Hades of my heart.

IX.

And I think of those long mornings
Which my thought goes far to seek,
When, betwixt the folio's turnings,
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek:
Past the pane the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep's-bell's tinkling noise
While a girlish voice was reading,
Somewhat low for αι's and οι's.

X.

Then, what golden hours were for us!
While we sat together there,
How the white vests of the chorus
Seemed to wave up a live air!

61. When Ulysses went to Hades, the region of the dead, he poured wine into a trench that the ghosts might drink; after drinking they could speak to him.

72. αι's *and* οι's: Greek syllables, whose full sound is hardly suited by a low voice.

75. *Chorus:* in all old Greek plays there was a group of actors called the chorus, which, besides joining in the action of the play, chanted songs in the intervals of the action.

How the cothurns trod majestic
Down the deep iambic lines,
And the rolling anapæstic
Curled like vapour over shrines!

XI.

Oh, our Æschylus, the thunderous,
How he drove the bolted breath
Through the cloud, to wedge it ponderous
In the gnarlèd oak beneath!
Oh, our Sophocles, the royal,
Who was born to monarch's place,
And who made the whole world loyal
Less by kingly power than grace!

XII.

Our Euripides, the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common
Till they rose to touch the spheres!
Our Theocritus, our Bion,
And our Pindar's shining goals!—
These were cup-bearers undying
Of the wine that's meant for souls.

XIII.

And my Plato, the divine one,
If men know the gods aright
By their motions as they shine on
With a glorious trail of light!

77. *Cothurns:* the high buskin or shoe worn by the actors in tragedy to raise their stature.

78. *Iambic:* the name of a Greek metre, a short syllable followed by a long one, resembling the metre of English blank verse.

79. *Anapæstic:* another Greek metre, two short syllables followed by a long one.

And your noble Christian bishops,
Who mouthed grandly the last Greek
Though the sponges on their hyssops
Were distent with wine—too weak.

XIV.

Yet, your Chrysostom, you praised him
As a liberal mouth of gold ;
And your Basil, you upraised him
To the height of speakers old :
And we both praised Heliodorus
For his secret of pure lies,—
Who forged first his linkèd stories
In the heat of ladies' eyes.

XV.

And we both praised your Synesius
For the fire shot up his odes,
Though the Church was scarce propitious
As he whistled dogs and gods.
And we both praised Nazianzen
For the fervid heat and speech :

103-4. That is, though the inspiration of their writings was too weak to give them a place, as writers, beside the old classic authors.

105. *Chrysostom:* John, Bishop of Constantinople (A.D. 347-407), called Chrysostom (which means "golden-mouthed") on account of his eloquence; it is to this that the next line alludes.

107. *Basil:* Bishop of Cæsarea (A.D. 329-379).

109. *Heliodorus:* Bishop of Tricca, in Thessaly, and author of a romance called *The Ethiopian History*, which is the earliest complete specimen of a romantic love-story.

113. *Synesius:* Bishop of Cyrene, well-known from Kingsley's *Hypatia*, and excellent alike as a bishop and as a sportsman.

117. *Nazianzen:* Gregory Nazianzen, author of a tragedy on the death of Christ, modelled upon Euripides. The "lyre hung out of reach" is the style of the great Greek poets, whom he tried to equal, without success.

Only I eschewed his glancing
At the lyre hung out of reach.

XVI.

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

XVII.

For we sometimes gently wrangled,
Very gently, be it said,
Since our thoughts were disentangled
By no breaking of the thread!
And I charged you with extortions
On the nobler fames of old—
Ay, and sometimes thought your Porsons
Stained the purple they would fold.

XVIII.

For the rest—a mystic moaning
Kept Cassandra at the gate,

121. *Atè:* the Greek goddess of retribution or punishment.

123. *De Virginitate:* the title of a treatise attributed to St. Basil.

127. *Saint Simeon:* surnamed Stylites, or "on the column," from his living on the top of a column for thirty-six years. There is a poem on him by Tennyson.

135. *Porsons:* Richard Porson was a great Cambridge scholar. These lines mean that the editors of the classics sometimes injure, rather than benefit, the author whom they edit.

137–152. These stanzas refer to scenes in the greatest Greek plays: Æschylus' *Agamemnon* and *Prometheus Bound*, Euripides' *Medea*, and Sophocles' *Œdipus Tyrannus*.

With wild eyes the vision shone in,
And wide nostrils scenting fate.
And Prometheus, bound in passion
By brute Force to the blind stone,
Showed us looks of invocation
Turned to ocean and the sun.

XIX.

And Medea we saw burning
At her nature's planted stake :
And proud Œdipus fate-scorning
While the cloud came on to break—
While the cloud came on slow, slower,
Till he stood discrowned, resigned !—
But the reader's voice dropped lower
When the poet called him BLIND.

XX.

Ah, my gossip ! you were older,
And more learned, and a man !
Yet that shadow, the enfolder
Of your quiet eyelids, ran
Both our spirits to one level ;
And I turned from hill and lea
And the summer-sun's green revel,
To your eyes that could not see.

XXI.

Now Christ bless you with the one light
Which goes shining night and day !
May the flowers which grow in sunlight
Shed their fragrance in your way !

152. Mr. H. S. Boyd, to whom this poem is addressed, was blind.

Is it not right to remember
  All your kindness, friend of mine,
When we two sat in the chamber,
  And the poets poured us wine?

XXII.

So, to come back to the drinking
  Of this Cyprus,—it is well,
But those memories, to my thinking,
  Make a better œnomel;
And whoever be the speaker,
  None can murmur with a sigh
That, in drinking from *that* beaker,
  I am sipping like a fly.

172. *Œnomel:* a drink composed of wine and honey, after the manner of the ancients.

THE DEAD PAN

"EXCITED by Schiller's *Götter Griechenlands*, and partly founded on a well-known tradition mentioned in a treatise of Plutarch (*De Oraculorum Defectu*), according to which, at the hour of the Saviour's agony, a cry of 'Great Pan is dead!' swept across the waves in the hearing of certain mariners,—and the oracles ceased.

"It is in all veneration to the memory of the deathless Schiller that I oppose a doctrine still more dishonouring to poetry than to Christianity.

"As Mr. Kenyon's graceful and harmonious paraphrase of the German poem was the first occasion of the turning of my thoughts in this direction, I take advantage of the pretence to indulge my feelings (which overflow on other grounds) by inscribing my lyric to that dear friend and relative, with the earnestness of appreciating esteem as well as of affectionate gratitude." (1844.)

The above is the note in which Mrs. Browning herself explained the foundation of her poem, and dedicated it to her friend and cousin. Schiller's poem, to which she refers, is a lament for the disappearance of the old Greek gods, saying that poetry is the poorer for the loss of them. Mrs. Browning tells again the ancient legend of their disappearance at the coming of Christ, of their losing all their strength before Him as false gods before the true, and declares emphatically that poetry can do no good by attempting to revive the belief in them. The inspiration of all the best poetry must be found in truth, not falsehood: "Truest Truth is fairest Beauty."

I.

GODS of Hellas, gods of Hellas,
Can ye listen in your silence?
Can your mystic voices tell us
Where ye hide? In floating islands,

With a wind that evermore
Keeps you out of sight of shore?
Pan, Pan is dead.

II

In what revels are ye sunken
In old Æthiopia?
Have the Pygmies made you drunken,
Bathing in mandragora
Your divine pale lips that shiver
Like the lotus in the river?
Pan, Pan is dead.

III.

Do ye sit there still in slumber,
In gigantic Alpine rows?
The black poppies out of number
Nodding, dripping from your brows
To the red lees of your wine,
And so kept alive and fine?
Pan, Pan is dead.

IV.

Or lie crushed your stagnant corses
Where the silver spheres roll on,
Stung to life by centric forces
Thrown like rays out from the sun?—
While the smoke of your old altars
Is the shroud that round you welters?
Great Pan is dead.

9. In Homer the gods are represented as going to feast with the Æthiopians.

11. *Mandragora:* a plant from which sleeping-draughts can be made.

17. The poppy is another plant which produces sleep. The poetess is asking the old gods whether they are asleep or dead.

V.

"Gods of Hellas, gods of Hellas,"
Said the old Hellenic tongue,—
Said the hero-oaths, as well as
Poets' songs the sweetest sung:
Have ye grown deaf in a day?
Can ye speak not yea or nay,
Since Pan is dead?

VI.

Do ye leave your rivers flowing
All alone, O Naiades,
While your drénchèd locks dry slow in
This cold feeble sun and breeze?
Not a word the Naiads say,
Though the rivers run for aye;
For Pan is dead.

VII.

From the gloaming of the oak-wood,
O ye Dryads, could ye flee?
At the rushing thunderstroke, would
No sob tremble through the tree?
Not a word the Dryads say,
Though the forests wave for aye:
For Pan is dead.

VIII.

Have ye left the mountain places.
Oreads wild, for other tryst?
Shall we see no sudden faces
Strike a glory through the mist?

37. *Naiades:* the nymphs or spirits of the streams.
44. *Dryads:* the nymphs of the trees.
51. *Oreads:* the nymphs of the mountains.

Not a sound the silence thrills
Of the everlasting hills :
Pan, Pan is dead.

IX.

O twelve gods of Plato's vision,
Crowned to starry wanderings,
With your chariots in procession
And your silver clash of wings !
Very pale ye seem to rise,
Ghosts of Grecian deities,
Now Pan is dead.

X.

Jove, that right hand is unloaded
Whence the thunder did prevail,
While in idiocy of godhead
Thou art staring the stars pale !
And thine eagle, blind and old,
Roughs his feathers in the cold.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XI.

Where, O Juno, is the glory
Of thy regal look and tread?
Will they lay, for evermore, thee
On thy dim, straight, golden bed?
Will thy queendom all lie hid
Meekly under either lid?
Pan, Pan is dead.

64. In this and the following stanzas each of the chief Greek gods is addressed individually in turn.

XII.

Ha, Apollo! floats his golden
Hair all mist-like where he stands,
While the Muses hang enfolding
Knee and foot with faint wild hands?
'Neath the clanging of thy bow,
Niobe looked lost as thou!
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIII.

Shall the casque with its brown iron
Pallas' broad blue eyes eclipse,
And no hero take inspiring
From the god-Greek of her lips?
'Neath her olive dost thou sit,
Mars the mighty, cursing it?
Pan, Pan is dead.

XIV

Bacchus, Bacchus! on the panther
He swoons, bound with his own vines;
And his Mænads slowly saunter,
Head aside, among the pines,
While they murmur dreamingly
"Evohe!—ah—evohe!—
Ah, Pan is dead!"

85. *Casque:* the helmet with which Pallas Athené is generally represented in statues. The olive was sacred to her.

92. The car of Bacchus was drawn by panthers. The Mænads were his attendants, and "evohe" (εὐοῖ) their cry of triumph and delight.

XV.

Neptune lies beside the trident,
Dull and senseless as a stone;
And old Pluto deaf and silent
Is cast out into the sun:
Ceres smileth stern thereat,
"We *all* now are desolate
Now Pan is dead."

XVI.

Aphrodite! dead and driven
As thy native foam thou art;
With the cestus long done heaving
On the white calm of thine heart!
Ai Adonis! at that shriek
Not a tear runs down her cheek—
Pan, Pan is dead.

XVII.

And the Loves, we used to know from
One another, huddled lie,
Frore as taken in a snow-storm,
Close beside her tenderly;
As if each had weakly tried
Once to kiss her as he died.
Pan, Pan is dead.

108. *Cestus:* the girdle worn by Aphrodite.
110. *Ai Adonis:* the cry of lament for Adonis, the boy whom Aphrodite loved.
115. *Frore:* frozen.

XVIII.

What, and Hermes? Time enthralleth
All thy cunning, Hermes, thus,
And the ivy blindly crawleth
Round thy brave caduceus?
Hast thou no new message for us,
Full of thunder and Jove-glories?
Nay, Pan is dead.

XIX.

Crownèd Cybele's great turret
Rocks and crumbles on her head;
Roar the lions of her chariot
Toward the wilderness, unfed:
Scornful children are not mute,—
"Mother, mother, walk afoot,
Since Pan is dead!"

XX.

In the fiery-hearted centre
Of the solemn universe,
Ancient Vesta,—who could enter
To consume thee with this curse?
Drop thy grey chin on thy knee,
O thou palsied Mystery!
For Pan is dead.

123. *Caduceus:* the rod carried by Hermes, as the messenger of the gods.

127. *Cybelé*, "the mother of the gods," is represented with a crown of towers on her head.

XXI.

Gods, we vainly do adjure you,—
Ye return nor voice nor sign!
Not a votary could secure you
Even a grave for your Divine:
Not a grave, to show thereby
Here these grey old gods do lie.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXII.

Even that Greece who took your wages
Calls the obolus outworn;
And the hoarse, deep-throated ages
Laugh your godships unto scorn:
And the poets do disclaim you,
Or grow colder if they name you—
And Pan is dead.

XXIII.

Gods bereavèd, gods belated,
With your purples rent asunder!
Gods discrowned and desecrated,
Disinherited of thunder!
Now, the goats may climb and crop
The soft grass on Ida's top—
Now Pan is dead.

XXIV.

Calm, of old, the bark went onward,
When a cry more loud than wind
Rose up, deepened, and swept sunward
From the pilèd Dark behind;

149. *Obolus:* a small Greek coin.
160. *Ida:* in Homer the gods are represented as frequenting Ida, the mountain near Troy.

And the sun shrank and grew pale,
Breathed against by the great wail—
"Pan, Pan is dead."

XXV.

And the rowers from the benches
Fell, each shuddering on his face,
While departing Influences
Struck a cold back through the place;
And the shadow of the ship
Reeled along the passive deep—
"Pan, Pan is dead."

XXVI.

And that dismal cry rose slowly
And sank slowly through the air,
Full of spirit's melancholy
And eternity's despair!
And they heard the words it said—
PAN IS DEAD—GREAT PAN IS DEAD—
PAN, PAN IS DEAD.

XXVII.

'Twas the hour when One in Sion
Hung for love's sake on a cross;
When His brow was chill with dying
And His soul was faint with loss;
When His priestly blood dropped downward
And His kingly eyes looked throneward—
Then, Pan was dead.

XXVIII.

By the love He stood alone in,
His sole Godhead rose complete,
And the false gods fell down moaning,
Each from off his golden seat;
All the false gods with a cry
Rendered up their deity—
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXIX.

Wailing wide across the islands,
They rent, vest-like, their Divine;
And a darkness and a silence
Quenched the light of every shrine;
And Dodona's oak swang lonely
Henceforth, to the tempest only:
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXX.

Pythia staggered, feeling o'er her
Her lost god's forsaken look;
Straight her eyeballs filmed with horror
And her crispy fillets shook,
And her lips gasped, through their foam,
For a word that did not come.
Pan, Pan was dead.

XXXI.

O ye vain false gods of Hellas,
Ye are silent evermore!
And I dash down this old chalice
Whence libations ran of yore.

201. *Dodona:* the seat of an ancient oracle in Greece.

204. *Pythia:* the priestess at Delphi, through whom oracles were given to those who sought them.

See, the wine crawls in the dust
Wormlike—as your glories must,
Since Pan is dead.

XXXII.

Get to dust, as common mortals,
By a common doom and track!
Let no Schiller from the portals
Of that Hades call you back,
Or instruct us to weep all
At your antique funeral.
Pan, Pan is dead.

XXXIII.

By your beauty, which confesses
Some chief Beauty conquering you,—
By our grand heroic guesses
Through your falsehood at the True,—
We will weep *not!* earth shall roll
Heir to each god's aureole—
And Pan is dead.

XXXIV.

Earth outgrows the mythic fancies
Sung beside her in her youth,
And those debonair romances
Sound but dull beside the truth.
Phœbus' chariot-course is run:
Look up, poets, to the sun!
Pan, Pan is dead.

230. *Aureole:* the golden circle shown in pictures round the heads of gods and saints.

234. *Debonair:* graceful, well-mannered.

236. Phœbus, the god of the sun, is no longer believed in; let poets look to the sun itself instead.

XXXV.

Christ hath sent us down the angels;
And the whole earth and the skies
Are illumed by altar-candles
Lit for blessèd mysteries;
And a Priest's hand through creation
Waveth calm and consecration:
And Pan is dead.

XXXVI.

Truth is fair: should we forego it?
Can we sigh right for a wrong?
God himself is the best Poet,
And the Real is His song.
Sing His truth out fair and full,
And secure His beautiful!
Let Pan be dead!

XXXVII.

Truth is large: our aspiration
Scarce embraces half we be.
Shame, to stand in His creation
And doubt truth's sufficiency!—
To think God's song unexcelling
The poor tales of our own telling—
When Pan is dead!

XXXVIII.

What is true and just and honest,
What is lovely, what is pure,
All of praise that hath admonisht,
All of virtue,—shall endure;

262. *That hath admonisht: i.e.*, that hath taught us useful lessons.

These are themes for poets' uses,
Stirring nobler than the Muses,
Ere Pan was dead.

XXXIX.

O brave poets, keep back nothing,
Nor mix falsehood with the whole!
Look up Godward; speak the truth in
Worthy song from earnest soul:
Hold, in high poetic duty,
Truest Truth the fairest Beauty!
Pan, Pan is dead.

THE END

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