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QUOTATIONS FROM  
BROWNING





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Quotations from Browning

The title is rendered in a stylized, orange-red, calligraphic font. The text is set against a decorative background of black and white line art, featuring a dense arrangement of leaves and three prominent flowers with orange centers. The overall design is horizontal and spans the width of the page's upper section.









# Quotations From Browning



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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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**B**ROWNING supplies abundant material to the intelligent and judicious quoter. It is not of the sort, however, that is useful—at least is much used—for merely decorative purposes. Our poet is never the musical and picturesque phraser of commonplace. His lines are “rammed with thought”; they are too condensed and profound for the elegant trifler with poetic shreds. Often a single stanza, or a brief sentence, flashes upon the reader a truth that at once shocks and grips the mind, suddenly widening its vision, stimulating the whole intellectual movement, and making an impression that endures. Many such may be culled from poems like “Paracelsus” and “Sordello” and “The Ring and the Book.” The use of these as quotations is perilous, save in the hands of a master, for they are likely so to outshine and overweight their setting as to cheapen it hopelessly.

Apart from their use as quotations, excerpts from Browning have a value, unequalled save by Shakespeare, as stimulants to reflection or material for the elaborative processes of thought. They almost invariably have the effect, also, of inciting the appreciative reader to seek a fuller acquaintance with this profound and illuminating interpreter of life. Collections of them, therefore, are always self-justifying.

R. W. L. has made in this booklet a selection that is creditable to her judgment and taste. It might have

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*I N T R O D U C T O R Y   N O T E*

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been much enlarged, for the store at her disposal is only broached, not exhausted. But, limited as it is in bulk, it gives evidence of wide and discriminating reading of the poet, and it contains many of his noblest and most pregnant utterances. Instinctively she has chosen those passages which touch directly on "daily life and duty"—on the common problem of living sanely and courageously and victoriously amidst the perplexities and sorrows and temptations that confront every soul in this world. Here, in many a line, Browning sounds his dominant note of faith in God and the soul, of loyalty to the truth that is revealed within, of undying cheer and unquenchable hope. Thus the disciple has become the modest and welcome purveyor of the treasures with which the master has enriched her own thought and life.

PHILIP STAFFORD MOXOM.

Springfield, Mass.

July 27, 1903.



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## Quotations from Browning

Look one step onward, and secure that step!



I shall arrive,—what time, what circuit first,  
I ask not : but unless God send his hail  
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,  
In some time, his good time, I shall arrive :  
He guides me and the bird. In his good time !



Knowing ourselves, our world, our task so great,  
Our time so brief, 't is clear if we refuse  
The means so limited, the tools so rude  
To execute our purpose, life will fleet,  
And we shall fade, and leave our task undone.



We will be wise in time : what though our work  
Be fashioned in despite of their ill-service,  
Be crippled every way? 'T were little praise  
Did full resources wait on our goodwill  
At every turn. Let all be as it is.

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Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts !



Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity ;  
These are its sign and note and character.



So doth Thy right hand guide us through the world  
Wherein we stumble.



'T is only when they spring to heaven that angels  
Reveal themselves to you ; they sit all day  
Beside you, and lie down at night by you  
Who care not for their presence, muse or sleep,  
And all at once they leave you, and you know them !



'T is fruitless for mankind  
To fret themselves with what concerns them not ;  
They are no use that way : they should lie down  
Content as God has made them, nor go mad  
In thriveless cares to better what is ill.



The sorriest bat which cowers throughout noontide  
While other birds are jocund, has one time  
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime  
Of earth is his to claim, nor fined a peer.

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Oh! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,  
To the day's task; compel your slave provide  
Its utmost at the soonest; turn the leaf  
Thoroughly conned.



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



Things learned on earth we shall practise in heaven.



I but open my eyes,—and perfection, no more and no  
less,  
In the kind I imagined, full-fronts me, and God is seen  
God  
In the star, in the stone, in the flesh, in the soul and the  
clod.



But what if I fail of my purpose here?  
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,  
To dry ones eyes and laugh at a fall,  
And baffled, get up and begin again,—  
So the chase takes up one's life, that 's all.

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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.



In youth I looked to these very skies,  
And probing their immensities,  
I found God there, his visible power ;  
Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense  
Of the power, an equal evidence  
That his love, there too, was the nobler dower.



Man therefore, stands on his own stock  
Of love and power as a pin-point rock :  
And, looking to God who ordained divorce  
Of the rock from his boundless continent,  
Sees, in his power made evident,  
Only excess by a million-fold  
O're the power God gave man in the mould.

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We die : which means to say, the whole 's removed,  
Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin,—  
To be set up anew elsewhere, begin  
A task indeed, but with a clearer clime  
Than the murk lodgment of our building-time.



And God's own profound  
Was above me, and round me the mountains,  
And under, the sea,  
And within me my heart to bear witness  
What was and shall be.



This world 's no blot for us,  
Nor blank ; it means intensely, and means good :  
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.



Why stay we on the earth unless to grow ?



The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too  
hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the  
sky,  
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard ;  
Enough that he heard it once : we shall hear it by  
and by.

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There shall never be one lost good: What was, shall  
live as before ;  
The evil is null, is naught.



But deep within my heart of hearts there hid  
Ever the confidence, amends for all,  
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did.



And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence  
For the fullness of the days? Have we withered or  
agonized ?  
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might  
issue thence ?  
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should  
be prized ?



Rejoice that man is hurled  
From change to change unceasingly,  
His soul's wings never furled !



Make the low nature better by your throes!  
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above !



For kind  
Calm years, exacting their accompt  
Of pain, mature the mind.



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Man might live at first  
The animal life : but is there nothing more ?  
In due time, let him critically learn  
How he lives ; and, the more he gets to know  
Of his own life's adaptabilities,  
The more joy-giving will his life become.  
Thus man, who has this quality, is best.



How soon a smile of God can change the world !  
How we are made for happiness—how work  
Grows play, adversity a winning fight !



Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true.



Narrow creeds of right and wrong, which fade  
Before the unmeasured thirst for good.



If I stoop  
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,  
It is but for a time ; I press God's lamp  
Close to my breast ; its splendor, soon or late,  
Will pierce the gloom : I shall emerge one day.



Well, when the eve has its last streak  
The night has its first star.

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I know Thee, who has kept my path, and made  
Light for me in the darkness, tempering sorrow  
So that it reached me like a solemn joy ;  
It were too strange that I should doubt Thy love.



Could we by a wish  
Have what we will and get the future now  
Would we wish aught done undone in the past ?  
So let us wait God's instant men call years.



The moral sense grows but by exercise



Healthy minds let by-gones be.



Help us to turn disaster to account.



All human plans and projects come to naught :  
My life, and what I know of other lives,  
Prove that : no plan nor project ! God shall care !



Reflect that God, who makes the storm desist,  
Can make an angry violent heart subside.

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And, all day, I sent prayer like incense up  
To God the strong, God the beneficent,  
God ever mindful in all strife and strait,  
Who, for our own good, makes the need extreme,  
Till at the last he puts forth might and saves.



How can man love but what he yearns to help?  
And that which men think weakness within strength,  
Angels know for strength.



Be sure they sleep not whom God needs.



Because a man has shop to mind  
In time and place, since flesh must live,  
Needs spirit lack all life behind,  
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,  
All loves except what trade can give?



My business is not to remake myself,  
But make the absolute best of what God made.



No, when the fight begins within himself,  
A man 's worth something.

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All is as God overrules.  
Besides, incentives come from the soul's self;  
The rest avail not.



In this world, who can do a thing, will not;  
And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:  
Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—  
And thus we half-men struggle.



I count life just a stuff  
To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.  
Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.



Each deed thou hast done  
Dies, revives, goes to work in the world.



I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.  
I regret little, I would change still less.  
Since there my past life lies, why alter it?



Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,  
Or what's a heaven for?

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Poor vaunt of life indeed,  
Were man but formed to feed  
On joy.



Then, welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough.



Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the  
throe!



What I aspired to be,  
And was not, comforts me:  
A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the  
scale.



Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and  
learn"?



The Future I may face now I have proved the Past.



For more is not reserved  
To man, with soul just nerved  
To act to-morrow what he learns to-day.

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All I could never be,  
All, men ignored in me,  
This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher  
shaped.



Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize  
to-day.



He fixed thee 'mid this dance  
Of plastic circumstance.



This Present, thou, forsooth, would fain arrest:  
Machinery just meant  
To give thy soul its bent.



My times be in Thy hand!  
Perfect the cup as planned!



How strange now looks the life he makes us lead;  
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!



God's in his heaven:  
All's right with the world.

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'T is not what man does which exalts him, but what man  
would do.



The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,  
Is—not to fancy what were fair in life  
Provided it could be,—but, finding first  
What may be, then find how to make it fair  
Up to our means: a very different thing!



How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to  
employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy!



Let each task present its petty good to thee.



Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise  
From outward things.



I am  
A man yet: I need never humble me.  
I would have been—something, I know not what;  
But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl.

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Affirm an absolute right to have and use  
Your energies; as though the rivers should say—  
“We rush to the ocean; what have we to do  
With feeding streamlets, lingering in the vales,  
Sleeping in lazy pools?”



How the world is made for each of us!  
How all we perceive and know in it  
Tends to some moment's product thus,  
When a soul declares itself—to wit,  
By its fruit, the thing it does!



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



How should this earth's life prove my only sphere?  
Can I so narrow sense but that in life  
Soul still exceeds it?



And one dream came to a pale poet's sleep,  
And he said, “I am singled out by God,  
No sin must touch me.”



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Then life is—to wake not sleep,  
Rise and not rest, but press  
From earth's level where blindly creep  
Things perfected, more or less,  
To the heaven's height, far and steep.



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.



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!"



Burn and not smoulder, win by worth,  
Not rest content with a wealth that's dearth!



Let me enjoy my own conviction,  
Not watch my neighbor's faith with fretfulness,  
Still spying there some dereliction  
Of truth, perversity, forgetfulness!

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God, whose pleasure brought  
Man into being, stands away  
As it were a handbreadth off, to give  
Room for the newly-made to live,"  
And look at him from a place apart,  
And use his gifts of brain and heart,  
Given, indeed, but to keep forever.



Have I been sure this, Christmas-Eve,  
God's own hand did the rainbow weave,  
Whereby the truth from heaven slid  
Into my soul?



What is left for us, save, in growth  
Of soul, to rise up, far past both,  
From the gift looking to the giver,  
And from the cistern to the river,  
And from the finite to infinity,  
And from man's dust to God's divinity?



The truth in God's breast  
Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed :  
Though he is so bright and we so dim,  
We are made in his image to witness him.

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So plain is it that, all the more  
A dispensation's merciful,  
More pettishly we try and cull  
Briers, thistles, from our private plot,  
To mar God's ground where thorns are not!



While, when the scene of life shall shift,  
And the gay heart be taught to ache,  
As sorrows and privations take  
The place of joy,—the thing that seems  
Mere misery, under human schemes,  
Becomes, regarded by the light  
Of love, as very near or quite  
As good a gift as joy before.



But shall we award  
Less honor to the hull which, dogged  
By storms, a mere wreck, waterclogged,  
Masts by the board, her bulwarks gone  
And stanchions going, yet bears on,—  
Than to mere lifeboats, built to save,  
And triumph o'er the breaking wave?



No matter what the object of a life,  
Small work or large,—the making thrive a shop,  
Or seeing that an empire take no harm,—  
There are known fruits to judge obedience by.

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And so I live, you see,  
Go through the world, try, prove, reject,  
Prefer, still struggling to effect  
My warfare ; happy that I can  
Be crossed and thwarted as a man,  
Not left in God's contempt apart,  
With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,  
Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.



I find advance i' the main, and notably  
The Present an improvement on the Past,  
And promise for the Future — which shall prove  
Only the Present with its rough made smooth,  
Its indistinctness emphasized.



Learn, my gifted friend,  
There are two things i' the world, still wiser folk  
Accept—intelligence and sympathy.



King, all the better he was cobbler once,  
He should know, sitting on the throne, how tastes  
Life to who sweeps the doorway.



Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for ! the spirit be thine.

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I like the thought he should have lodged me once  
I' the hole, the cave, the hut, the tenement,  
The mansion and the palace; made me learn  
The feel o' the first, before I found myself  
Loftier i' the last, not more emancipate;  
From first to last of lodging, I was I,  
And not at all the place that harbored me.



Hear the truth, and bear the truth,  
And bring the truth to bear on all you are  
And do, assured that only good comes thence  
Whate'er the shape good take!



Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,  
That I doubt his own love can compete with it?



I believe it! 'T is thou, God, that givest, 't is I who  
receive :  
In the first is the last, in Thy will is my power to believe.



He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall  
stand the most weak.  
'T is the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh,  
that I seek  
In the Godhead! I seek and I find it.

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The man taught enough by life's dream, of the rest to  
make sure ;

By the pain-throb, triumphantly winning intensified bliss,  
And the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles  
in this.



The rose will bloom when the storm is passed.



That what began best, can't end worst,  
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.



Live long and happy, and in that thought die ;  
Glad for what was.



Nay, got foretaste too  
Of better life beginning where this ends.



No work begun shall ever pause for death !



'T is Venice, and 't is Life—as good you sought  
To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone  
Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,  
As hinder Life the evil with the good  
Which make up Living, rightly understood.

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And here where your praise might yield returns,  
And a handsome word or two give help.



'T is looking downward that makes one dizzy.



A world, as God has made it! All is beauty:  
And knowing this, is love, and love is duty.



God's gift was that man should conceive of truth  
And yearn to gain it, catching at mistake,  
As midway help till he reach fact indeed.



Man is not God but hath God's end to serve,  
A master to obey, a course to take,  
Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become.



Man must pass from old to new,  
From vain to real, from mistake to fact.  
From what once seemed good, to what now proves best.



Was man made a wheelwork to wind up,  
And be discharged, and straight wound up anew?  
No!—grown, his growth lasts; taught, he ne'er forgets.

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Man should mount on each  
New height in view ; the help whereby he mounts,  
The ladder-rung his foot has left, may fall,  
Since all things suffer change save God the Truth.



Then, as new lessons shall be learned in these  
Till earth's work stop and useless time run out  
So duly, daily, needs provision be  
For keeping the soul's prowess possible,  
Building new barriers as the old decay,  
Saving us from evasion of life's proof,  
Putting the question ever, does God love and will ye  
Hold that truth against the world ?



Is not God now i' the world his power first made ?  
Is not his love at issue still with sin,  
Visibly when a wrong is done on earth ?



Nothing can be as it has been before ;  
Better, so call it, only not the same.  
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core,  
And keep it changeless ! such our claim.



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Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,  
Do out the duty! Through such souls alone  
God stooping shows sufficient of his light  
For us i' the dark to rise by.



The proper  
Friend-making, everywhere friend-finding soul,  
Fit for the sunshine, so, it followed him.  
A happy-tempered bringer of the best  
Out of the worst.



When man, appalled at Nature, questioned first,  
What if there lurk a might behind this might?  
He needed satisfaction God could give,  
And did give.



Oh, we'er sunk enough here, God knows!  
But not quite so sunk that moments,  
Sure though seldom are denied us,  
When the spirit's true endowments  
Stand out plainly from its false ones  
And apprise it if pursuing  
Or the right way or the wrong way,  
To its triumph or undoing.

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“ But the soul is not the body : ” and the breath is not  
the flute ;  
Both together make the music : either marred and all is  
mute.

Only grant a second life ; I acquiesce  
In this present life as failure, count misfortune’s worst  
assaults  
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more  
exalts  
Gain about to be.

Take the joys and bear the sorrows — neither with  
extreme concern !  
Living here means nescience simply : ’t is next life that  
helps to learn.

Only grant my soul may carry high through death her  
cup unspilled,  
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life’s loss drop  
by drop distilled,  
I shall boast it mine — the balsam, bless each kindly  
wrench that wrung  
From life’s tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence  
pleasure sprung,  
Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the  
berry, left all grace  
Ashes in death’s stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place !

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Not alone do I declare  
Life must needs be borne,—I also will that man become  
aware

Life has worth incalculable, every moment that he spends  
So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life  
depends.



If action more amuse thee than the passive attitude,  
Bravely bustle through thy being, busy thee for ill or  
good,  
Reap this life's success or failure! Soon shall things be  
unperplexed  
And the right and wrong, now tangled, lie unravelled in  
the next.



In this first  
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at  
worst:  
Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,  
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde.



Just the creature I was bound  
To be, I should become, nor thwart at all  
God's purpose in creation. I conceive  
No other duty possible to man,—  
Highest mind, lowest mind,—no other law  
By which to judge life failure or success.

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Do the best with the least change possible :  
Carry the incompleteness on, a stage,  
Make what was crooked straight, and roughness smooth,  
And weakness strong.



The love of peace, care for the family,  
Contentment with what 's bad but might be worse —  
Good movements these ! and good, too, discontent,  
So long as that spurs good, which might be best,  
Into becoming better, anyhow.



This is the honor,—that no thing I know,  
Feel or conceive, but I can make my own  
Somehow, by use of hand or head or heart :  
This is the glory,—that in all conceived,  
Or felt or known, I recognize a mind  
Not mine but like mine,—for the double joy,—  
Making all things for me and me for Him.



I say, therefore, to live out one's life  
I' the world here, with the chance,—whether by pain  
Or pleasure be the process, long or short  
The time, august or mean the circumstance  
To human eye,—of learning how set foot  
Decidedly on some one path to Heaven.

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Correct the evil, mitigate your best,  
Blend mild with harsh, and soften black to gray  
If gray may follow with no detriment  
To the eventual perfect purity!



The seed o' the apple-tree  
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:  
'T is the Great Gardener grafts the excellence  
On wildings where he will.



The ingenuities, each active force  
That turning in a circle on itself  
Looks neither up nor down but keeps the spot,  
Mere creature-like and, for religion, works,  
Works only and works ever, makes and shapes  
And changes, still wrings more of good from less,  
Still stamps some bad out, where was worst before,  
So leaves the handiwork, the act and deed,  
Were it but house and land and wealth, to show  
Here was a creature perfect in the kind—  
Whether as bee, beaver, or behemoth,  
What 's the importance ? he has done his work  
For work's sake, worked well, earned a creature's praise.

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Never was so plain a truth  
As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame  
Just where he wills on earth : sometimes where man  
Seems to tempt—such the accumulated store  
Of faculties—one spark to fire the heap ;  
Sometimes where, fireball-like, it falls upon  
The naked unpreparedness of rock,  
Burns, beaconing the nations through their night.



The ignorance, stupidity, the hate,  
Envy malice and uncharitableness  
That bar your passage, break the flow of you  
Down from those happy heights where many a cloud  
Combined to give you birth and bids you be  
The royalest of rivers : on you glide  
Silverly till you reach the summit-edge,  
Then over, on to all that ignorance,  
Stupidity, hate, envy, bluffs and blocks,  
Posted to fret you into foam and noise.  
What of it ? Up you mount in minute mist,  
And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,  
A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry  
Outsparkling the insipid firmament  
Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.

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Such a starved bank of moss  
Till, that May-morn,  
Blue ran the flash across :  
Violets were born !

Sky—what a scowl of cloud  
Till, near and far,  
Ray on ray split the shroud :  
Splendid, a star !

World—how walled about  
Life with disgrace  
Till God's own smile came out :  
That was thy face !



Would you have your songs endure?  
Built on the human heart!—why, to be sure  
Yours is one sort of heart — but I mean theirs,  
Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares  
To build on !



A great is better than a little aim .

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## QUOTATIONS FROM BROWNING

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One great aim, like a guiding-star, above—  
Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift  
His manhood to the height that takes the prize;  
A prize not near—lest overlooking earth  
He rashly spring to seize it—nor remote,  
So that he rest upon his path content:  
But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,  
And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,  
He sees so much as, just evolving these,  
The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength,  
To due completion, will suffice his life,  
And lead him at his grandest to the grave.



Where is the use of the lip's red charm,  
The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,  
And the blood that blues the inside arm —  
Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,  
The earthly gift to an end divine?



Stake your counter as boldly every whit,  
Venture as warily, use the same skill,  
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,  
If you choose to play! — is my principle.  
Let a man contend to the uttermost  
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!



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## QUOTATIONS FROM BROWNING

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But ever, ever this farewell to Heaven,  
Welcome to earth—this taking death for life—  
This spurning love and kneeling to the world—  
Oh Heaven, it is too often and too old!



Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place  
To try man's foot, if it will creep or climb,  
'Mid obstacles in seeming, points that prove  
Advantage for who vaults from low to high  
And makes the stumbling-block a stepping-stone?



To have to do with nothing but the true,  
The good, the eternal—and these, not alone  
In the main current of the general life,  
But small experiences of every day,  
Concerns of the particular hearth and home:  
To learn not only by a comet's rush  
But a rose's birth,—not by the grandeur, God—  
But the comfort, Christ.



Life is probation and the earth no goal  
But starting-point of man: compel him strive,  
Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal.

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## QUOTATIONS FROM BROWNING

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Crush the tree, branch and trunk and root beside,  
Whichever twig or leaf arrests a streak  
Of possible sunshine else would coin itself,  
And drop down one more gold piece in the path.

✱

Why comes temptation but for man to meet  
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,  
And so be pedestalled in triumph?

L. of C.











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