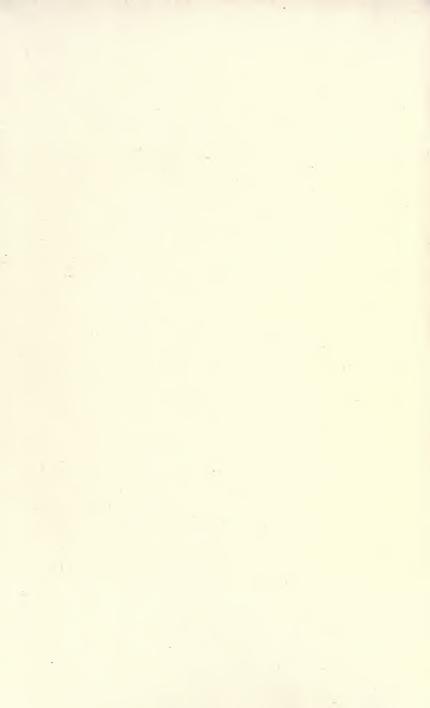


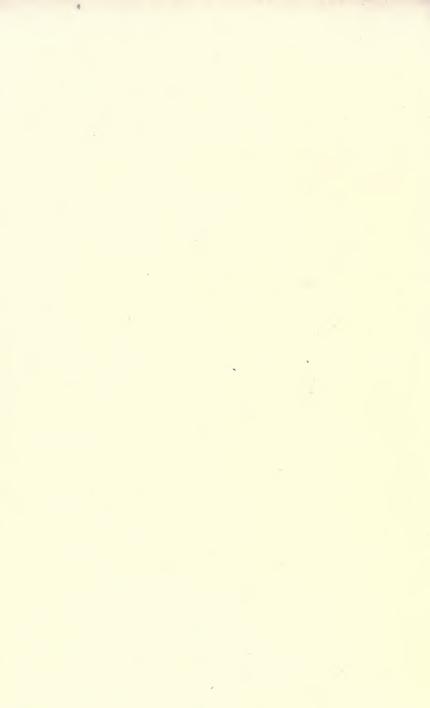


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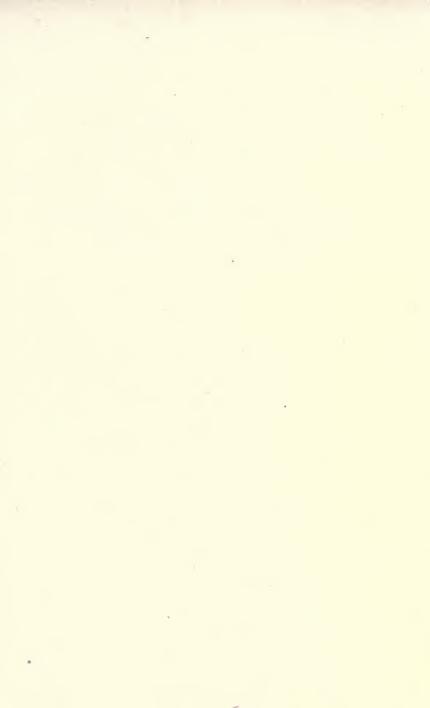
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Wey draw nige You when "Whe brot is yet tobe" You when "Whe brot is yet tobe"



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RABBI · BEN · EZRA

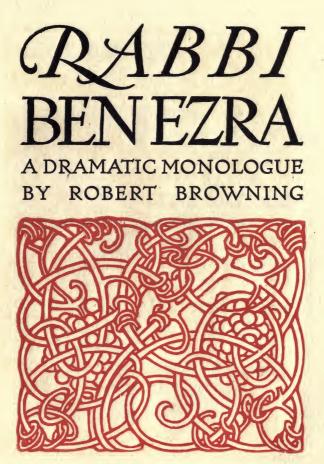
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RABBI BEN EZRA



ROW OLD A-LONG WITH ME: THE BEST IS YET TO BE, THE LAST OF LIFE, FOR WHICH THE FIRST WAS MADE:

OUR TIMES ARE IN HIS HAND WHO SAITH "A WHOLE I PLANNED, YOUTH SHOWS BUT HALF; TRUST GOD: SEE ALL NOR BE AFRAID!" OT that, amassing flowers, Youth sighed, "Which rose make ours, Which lily leave and then as best recall?" Not that, admiring stars, It yearned, "Nor Jove, nor Mars; Mine be some figured flame which blends, transcends them all!"

III

Not for such hopes and fears Annulling youth's brief years, Do I remonstrate: folly wide the mark! Rather I prize the doubt Low kinds exist without, Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark.

IV

Poor vaunt of life indeed, Were man but formed to feed On joy, to solely seek and find and feast: Such feasting ended, then As sure an end to men; Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

V

REJOICE we are allied To That which doth provide And not partake, effect and not receive! A spark disturbs our clod; Nearer we hold of God Who gives, than of His tribes that take, I must believe. Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

VII

For thence,—a paradox Which comforts while it mocks,— Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail: What I aspired to be, And was not, comforts me: A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale.

VIII

WHAT is he but a brute Whose flesh has soul to suit, Whose spirit works lest arms and legs want play? To man, propose this test— Thy body at its best, How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?

IX

Yet gifts should prove their use : I own the Past profuse Of power each side, perfection every turn: Eyes, ears took in their dole, Brain treasured up the whole; Should not the heart beat once "How good to live and learn?" Not once beat "Praise be Thine! I see the whole design, I, who saw power, see now Love perfect too: Perfect I call Thy plan: Thanks that I was a man! Maker, remake, complete,— I trust what Thou shalt do!"

X

XI

FOR pleasant is this flesh; Our soul, in its rose-mesh Pulled ever to the earth, still yearns for rest: Would we some prize might hold To match those manifold Possessions of the brute,—gain most, as we did best!

XII

Let us not always say, "Spite of this flesh to-day I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!" As the bird wings and sings, Let us cry, "All good things Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul!"

XIII

HEREFORE I summon age To grant youth's heritage, Life's struggle having so far reached its term:

Thence shall I pass, approved A man, for aye removed From the developed brute; a God though in the germ.

XIV

And I shall thereupon Take rest, ere I be gone Once more on my adventure brave and new: Fearless and unperplexed, When I wage battle next, What weapons to select, what armor to indue.

XV

Youth ended, I shall try My gain or loss thereby; Leave the fire ashes, what survives is gold: And I shall weigh the same, Give life its praise or blame: Young, all lay in dispute; I shall know, being old.

XVI

FOR note, when evening shuts, A certain moment cuts The deed off, calls the glory from the grey: A whisper from the west Shoots—"Add this to the rest, Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."

XVII

So, still within this life, Though lifted o'er its strife, Let me discern, compare, pronounce at last, "This rage was right i' the main, That acquiescence vain: The Future I may face now I have proved the Past."

XVIII

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

Here, work enough to watch The Master work, and catch Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tool's true play.

XIX

As it was better, youth Should strive, through acts uncouth, Toward making, than repose on aught found made: So, better, age, exempt From strife, should know, than tempt Further. Thou waitedst age: wait death nor be afraid! XX Enough now, if the Right And Good and Infinite Be named here, as thou callest thy hand thine own, With knowledge absolute, Subject to no dispute From fools that crowded youth, nor let thee feel alone.

XXI

E there, for once and all, Severed great minds from small, Announced to each his station in the Past! Was I, the world arraigned, Were they, my soul disdained, Right? Let age speak the truth and give us peace at last!

C

XXII

Now, who shall arbitrate? Ten men love what I hate, Shun what I follow, slight what I receive; Ten, who in ears and eyes Match me: we all surmise, They this thing, and I that: whom shall my soul believe?

XXIII

Not on the vulgar mass Called "work," must sentence pass, Things done, that took the eye and had the price; O'er which, from level stand, The low world laid its hand, Found straightway to its mind, could value in a trice:

XXIV

But all, the world's coarse thumb And finger failed to plumb, So passed in making up the main account; All instincts immature, All purposes unsure, That weighed not as his work, yet swelled the man's amount:

XXV

Thoughts hardly to be packed Into a narrow act, Fancies that broke through language and escaped; All I could never be, All, men ignored in me, This, I was worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped.

XXVI

Y, note that Potter's wheel, That metaphor! and feel Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay,— Thou, to whom fools propound, When the wine makes its round, "Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize to-day!"

XXVII

Fool! All that is, at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure:
What entered into thee,
THAT was, is, and shall be:
Time's wheel runs back or stops:
Potter and clay endure.

XXVIII

He fixed thee 'mid this dance Of plastic circumstance, This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest: Machinery just meant To give thy soul its bent, Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

XXIX

What though the earlier grooves Which ran the laughing loves Around thy base, no longer pause and press? What though, about thy rim, Skull-things in order grim Grow out, in graver mood, obey the sterner stress?

XXX

Look not thou down but up! To uses of a cup, The festal board, lamp's flash and trumpet's peal, The new wine's foaming flow, The Master's lips aglow! Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what needst thou with earth's wheel?

XXXI

BUT I need, now as then, Thee, God, who mouldest men; And since, not even while the whirl was worst, Did I,—to the wheel of life With shapes and colors rife, Bound dizzily,—mistake my end, to slake Thy thirst:

XXXII

So, take and use Thy work: Amend what flaws may lurk, What strain o' the stuff,

what warpings past the aim! My times be in Thy hand! Perfect the cup as planned! Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!



WOE unto them that seek to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?

Ye turn things upside down! Shall the potter be counted as clay; that the thing made should say of him that made it, He made me not; or the thing framed say of him that framed it, He hath no understanding?

Isaíah xxíx: 15, 16

NOTE

BROWNING was pre-eminently the prophet among the poets of the XIX. Century. Born into a time distraught by spiritual revolution & doubt, living in an age half blinded by the dust of crumbling traditions and beliefs, his is the one clear voice that rises unfalteringly above the turmoil. He believed in God & in the capacity of the human soul to attain, through the barriers of the flesh, the threshold of heaven. And so intense was his conviction, that it has broken the clouds for thousands & enabled them to "greet the unseen with a cheer."

This loftily prophetic note, this exalted proclamation that "God is in his

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heaven," and that "all which errs is but a dream" to be dissipated by death, surging through all of his poems, from Pauline to Asolando, attains its culminating power in the Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, "Men and Women," and "Dramatis Personæ." Among the last of these groups, published in 1864, Rabbi Ben Ezra appeared. Taken all in all, it is probably the most adequate expression of his religious conviction that Browning has left. Excepting only Tennyson's "Ancient Sage," which through its mystic minor tones breathes an equally authoritative inspiration, Rabbi Ben Ezra is perhaps the noblest psalm in English verse.

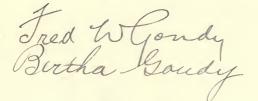
R. **B**.

Here ends RABBI BEN EZRA, a Dramatic Monologue written by Robert Browning, with a note by Robert Bruere. Printed by hand at The Village Press, Hingham, Massachusetts, by Fred and Bertha Goudy. Frontispiece and decorations designed & cut on wood by Will Dwiggins.

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