



TYP  
2230  
V55  
1904





↖  
My dear wife

For whom "My bed is yet to be."  
I am here

May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1913

loving husband









RABBI · BEN · EZRA



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*RABBI*  
**BENEZRA**

A DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE  
BY ROBERT BROWNING





RABBI BEN EZRA



I  
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!"

II

**N**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

**R**EJOICE 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.

## VI

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?”

X

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!"

XI

**F**OR 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

**T**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

**B**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!

## 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

**A**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

**B**UT I need, now as then,  
Thee, God, who moulded 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!



**W**OE 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?

Isaiah xxix: 15, 16



## NOTE

**B**ROWNING 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

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,  
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