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BROWNING
FOR THE
TRENCHES

1918

PUBLISHED BY THE

BOSTON BROWNING SOCIETY

1568 BEACON ST., BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



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BROWNING FOR
THE TRENCHES

B R O W N I N G
F O R T H E
T R E N C H E S

SELECTIONS FROM
THE POETRY OF
ROBERT BROWNING

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DEDICATED TO ALL
WHO, SPEAKING BROWNING'S
MOTHER-TONGUE,
HAVE FOUGHT FOR
HUMANITY'S HIGHEST IDEALS
AND SHARE THE GLORY OF
THE GREAT VICTORY

PREFACE

After America's entry into the great war, in 1917, the Boston Browning Society decided to prepare and publish a small book of selections from the poetry of Robert Browning, for American soldiers and sailors under the title "Browning for the Trenches." The endeavor was to select passages that express courage, good cheer and great ideals. Browning's poetry abounds in these, and the principal editorial difficulty was to keep the book small enough for the desired purpose.

Upon publication, the book met with an enthusiastic reception. It made its way into every training-camp and naval base in the United States, and then across the Atlantic and actually into the trenches in France. It went also among men of the British army. It has followed the American soldiers into Siberia and Russia—it has gone literally around the world. More than thirty thousand copies have carried the message of Browning to men in many parts of the earth. Letters from soldiers and sailors have testified to the influence of this message.

In answer to a large number of requests, the

Boston Browning Society now publishes this edition for the general public. It is confidently believed that it will serve as an introduction to the great poet. The title is retained, because it has come to be, for many brave men, one of the expressions of that spirit of dauntless courage that has carried our fighting forces to victory, a victory which is shared by valiant men of many nations.

In the times of reconstruction, there will be many men and women, serving as "soldiers of the common good," who will derive inspiration from Browning's idealism.

H. H. S.

EPILOGUE TO ASOLANDO.

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? . . .

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!"

AMONG THE ROCKS

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth,
This autumn morning! How he sets his bones
To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees and feet
For the ripple to run over in its mirth;
Listening the while, where on the heap of stones,
The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true:
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and knows.
If you loved only what were worth your love,
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for you:
Make the low nature better by your throes!
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

I am made up of an intensest life,
Of a most clear idea of consciousness
Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers;
And thus far it exists, if tracked, in all:
But linked, in me, to self-supremacy,
Existing as a centre to all things,
Most potent to create and rule and call
Upon all things to minister to it;
And to a principle of restlessness
Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all —
This is myself; and I should thus have been
Though gifted lower than the meanest soul.

And of my powers, one springs up to save
From utter death a soul with such desire
Confined to clay — of powers the only one
Which marks me — an imagination which
Has been an angel to me, coming not
In fitful visions but beside me ever
And never failing me; so, though my mind
Forgets not, not a shred of life forgets,
Yet I can take a secret pride in calling
The dark past up to quell it regally.

A mind like this must dissipate itself,
But I have always had one lode-star; now,
As I look back, I see that I have halted
Or hastened as I looked towards that star —
A need, a trust, a yearning after God:

PAULINE.

And I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult,
May — doth, I will believe — bring back
All wanderers to a single track.
Meantime, I can but testify
God's care for me.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit
feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced.
Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver
shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust
divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of
wine,
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.
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!
Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father, whose sword thou
didst guard
When he trusted thee forth with the armies, for glorious re-
ward?
Didst thou see the thin hands of thy mother, held up as men
sung
The low song of the nearly-departed, and hear her faint tongue
Joining in while it could to the witness, 'Let one more attest,
I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for
best?'

SAUL.

SUMMUM BONUM

All the breath and the bloom of the year in the bag of one bee:
All the wonder and wealth of the mine in the heart of one gem:
In the core of one pearl all the shade and the shine of the sea:
Breath and bloom, shade and shine, — wonder, wealth, and
— how far above them —
Truth that's brighter than gem,
Trust, that's purer than pearl, —
Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe — all were for me
In the kiss of one girl.

— “Ay, we boast,
We warriors in our youth, that with the sword
Man goes the swiftest to the uttermost —

“Takes the straight way thro’ lands yet unexplored
To absolute Right and Good, — may so obtain
God’s glory and man’s weal too long ignored,

“Too late attained by preachments all in vain —
The passive process. Knots get tangled worse
By toying with: does cut cord close again?

“Moreover there is blessing in the curse
Peace-praisers call war. What so sure evolves
All the capacities of soul, proves nurse

“Of that self-sacrifice in men which solves
The riddle — *Wherein differs Man from beast?*
Foxes boast cleverness and courage wolves:

“Nowhere but in mankind is found the least
Touch of an impulse “To our fellows — good
I’ the highest! — not diminished but increased

“ ‘By the condition plainly understood
— Such good shall be attained at price of hurt
I’ the highest to ourselves!’ Fine sparks, that brood

“Confusedly in Man, ’t is war bids spurt
Forth into flame: as fares the meteor-mass,
Whereof no particle but holds inert

“Some seed of light and heat, however crass
The enclosure, yet avails not to discharge
Its radiant birth before there come to pass

“Some push external, — strong to set at large
Those dormant fire-seeds, whirl them in a trice
Through heaven, and light up earth from marge to marge:

“Say there’s a tyrant by whose death we earn
Freedom, and justify a war to wage:
Good! — were we only able to discern

“Exactly how to reach and catch and cage
Him only and no innocent beside!
Whereas the folk whereon war wrecks its rage

“— How shared they his ill-doing? Far and wide
The victims of our warfare strew the plain,
Ten thousand dead, whereof not one but died

“In faith that vassals owed their suzerain
Life: therefore each paid tribute — honest soul —
To that same Right and Good ourselves are fain
To call exclusively our end.”

JOCHANAN HAKKADOSH.

I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
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!

One man shall crawl
Through life surrounded with all stirring things,
Unmoved; and he goes mad: and from the wreck
Of what he was, by his wild talk alone,
You first collect how great a spirit he hid.
Therefore, set free the soul alike in all,
Discovering the true laws by which the flesh
Accloys the spirit! We may not be doomed
To cope with seraphs, but at least the rest
Shall cope with us. Make no more giants, God,
But elevate the race at once! We ask
To put forth just our strength, our human strength,
All starting fairly, all equipped alike,
Gifted alike, all eagle-eyed, true-hearted —

See if we cannot beat thine angels yet!
Such is my task. I go to gather this
The sacred knowledge, here and there dispersed
About the world, long lost or never found.
And why should I be sad or lorn of hope?
Why ever make man's good distinct from God's,
Or, finding they are one, why dare mistrust? . . .
But one thing, Festus, Michal! . . . say
Do you believe I shall accomplish this? . . .
Are there not, Festus, are there not, dear Michal,
Two points in the adventure of the diver,
One — when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
One — when, a prince, he rises with his pearl?
Festus, I plunge!

PARACELSUS.

“DE GUSTIBUS — ”

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, forever 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!

SPECULATIVE

Others may need new life in Heaven —
 Man, Nature, Art — made new, assume!
Man with new mind old sense to leaven,
 Nature, — new light to clear old gloom,
Art that breaks bounds, gets soaring-room.

I shall pray: "Fugitive as precious —
 Minutes which passed, — return, remain!
Let earth's old life once more enmesh us,
 You with old pleasure, me — old pain,
So we but part nor meet again!"

Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and maker, Thou, of houses not made with hands!
What, have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power
expands?
There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as
before;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much good
more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist;
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
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.

And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
For the fulness 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?
Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear,
Each sufferer says his say, his scheme of the weal and woe:
But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome: 't is we musicians* know.
*[Mystics], ABT VOGLER.

Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!

BY THE FIRESIDE.

ONE WAY OF LOVE

I

All June I bound the rose in sheaves.
Now, rose by rose, I strip the leaves
And strew them where Pauline may pass.
She will not turn aside? Alas!
Let them lie. Suppose they die?
The chance was they might take her eye.

II

How many a month I strove to suit
These stubborn fingers to the lute!
To-day I venture all I know.
She will not hear my music? So!
Break the string; fold music's wing:
Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

III

My whole life long I learned to love.
This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion — heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'Tis well!
Lose who may — I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

My God, my God, let me for once look on thee
As though naught else existed, we alone!
And as creation crumbles, my soul's spark
Expands till I can say, — Even from myself
I need thee and I feel thee and I love thee.
I do not plead my rapture in thy works
For love of thee, nor that I feel as one
Who cannot die: but there is that in me
Which turns to thee, which loves or which should love.

PAULINE.

A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one;

LURIA.

Still, so the dry-rot had been nursed into
Blood, bones and marrow, that, from worst to best,
All, — clearest brains and soundest hearts save here, —
All had this lie acceptable for law
Plain as the sun at noonday — “War is best,
Peace is worst; peace we only tolerate
As needful preparation for new war:
War may be for whatever end we will —
Peace only as the proper help thereto.”

. . . War for war's sake, war for sake
O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,
Is damnable and damned shall be. You want
Glory? Why so do I, and so does God.
Where is it found, — in this paraded shame, —
One particle of glory? Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory. Now, you fain would war
Because the neighbor prospers overmuch, —
Because there has been silence half-an-hour,
Like Heaven on earth, without a cannon-shot. . . .

No more war

For war's sake, then! And, — seeing wickedness
Spring out of folly, — no more foolish dread
O' the neighbor waxing too inordinate
A rival, through his gain of wealth and ease!

Does that mean — no war at all

When just the wickedness I here proscribe
Comes, haply, from the neighbor? Does my speech
Precede the praying that you beat the sword
To ploughshare, and the spear to pruning-hook,
And sit down henceforth under your own vine
And fig-tree through the sleepy summer month,
Letting what hurly-burly please explode
On the other side the mountain-frontier? No,
Beloved! I foresee and I announce
Necessity of warfare in one case,
For one cause: one way, I bid broach the blood
O' the world. For truth and right, and only right
And truth, — right, truth, on the absolute scale of God,

No pettiness of man's admeasurement, —
In such case only, and for such one cause,
Fight your hearts out, whatever fate betide
Hands energetic to the uttermost!
Lie not! Endure no lie which needs your heart
And hand to push it out of mankind's path —
No lie that lets the natural forces work
Too long ere lay it plain and pulverized! —

PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU.

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!

.

Ay, 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 today!"

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.

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,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

RABBI BEN EZRA.

HOME-THOUGHTS FROM THE SEA

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.

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

IN A GONDOLA.

Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
Earth's returns
For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
Shut them in,
With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
Love is best.

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS.

But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broad way, were the best —
Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.
I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness fuse.”

BIFURCATION.

But, O world outspread beneath me! only for myself I speak,
Nowise dare to play the spokesman for my brothers strong and
weak,

Full and empty, wise and foolish, good and bad, in every age,
Every clime, I turn my eyes from, as in one or other stage
Of a torture writhe they, Job-like couched on dung and crazed
with blains

— Wherefore? whereto? ask the whirlwind what the dread
voice thence explains!

I shall "vindicate no way of God's to man," nor stand apart,
"Laugh, be candid!" while I watch it traversing the human heart.
Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on: no less
Mine results in, "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. For at what moment did I so advance
Near to knowledge as when frustrate of escape from ignorance?
Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
Rule, and truth seem more than ever potent because falsehood
reigned?

While for love — Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves
succeed

By the death-pang to the birth-throe — learning what is love
indeed?

Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup un-
spilled,

Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop
distilled,

I shall boast it mine — the balsam, bless each kindly wretch
that wrung

From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapp'd the root whence pleas-
ure 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!"

[REASON SPEAKS.]

Henceforth man's existence bows to the monition

"Wait!

Take the joys and bear the sorrows — neither with extreme con-
cern!

Living here means nescience simply: 't is next life that helps to learn.

Shut those eyes, next life will open, — stop those ears, next life will teach

Hearing's office, — close those lips, next life will give the power of speech!

Or, 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."

LA SAISIAZ.

Day!

Faster and more fast,

O'er night's brim, day boils at last;

Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim

Where spurting and suppressed it lay;

For not a froth-flake touched the rim

Of yonder gap in the solid gray

Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;

But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,

Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,

Rose, reddened, and its seething breast

Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed the world. . .

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!

PIPPA PASSES.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP.

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.

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.

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.

"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.

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.

Was the trial sore?
Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time!
Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot,
And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray
“Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!”
Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold,
Lead such temptations by the head and hair,
Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight,
That so he may do battle and have praise!
Do I not see the praise? — that while thy mates
Bound to deserve i’ the matter, prove at need
Unprofitable through the very pains
We gave to train them well and start them fair, —
Are found too stiff, with standing ranked and ranged,
For onset in good earnest, too obtuse
Of ear, through iteration of command,
For catching quick the sense of the real cry, —
Thou didst push forward and show mettle, shame
The laggards, and retrieve the day. Well done!
Be glad thou hast let light into the world,
Through that irregular breach o’ the boundary, — see
The same upon thy path and march assured,
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear,
Loyalty to the life’s end! Ruminating,
Deserve the initiatory spasm, — once more
Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

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 splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom; I shall emerge one day.

PARACELSUS.

There's heaven above, and night by night
I look right through its gorgeous roof;
No suns nor moons though e'er so bright
Avail to stop me; splendour-proof
I keep the broods of stars aloof:
For I intend to get to God,
For 'tis to God I speed so fast,
For in God's breast, my own abode,
Those shoals of dazzling glory passed,
I lay my spirit down at last.
I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me his child.

JOHANNES AGRICOLA IN MEDITATION.

I trust in nature for the stable laws
Of beauty and utility. — Spring shall plant,
And Autumn garner to the end of time:
I trust in God — the right shall be the right
And other than the wrong, while he endures:
I trust in my own soul, that can perceive
The outward and the inward, nature's good
And God's.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY.

"I believe it! 'Tis thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:
In the first is the last, in thy will is my power to believe.
All's one gift: thou canst grant it moreover, as prompt to my
prayer
As I breathe out this breath, as I open these arms to the air.
From thy will, stream the worlds, life and nature, thy dread
Sabaoth: . . .
So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown —
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with
death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being Beloved!
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand
the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that I
seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this
hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ
stand!"

SAUL.

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,

Where, amid what strifes and storms
May wait the adventurous quest,
Power is Love — transports, transforms
Who aspired from worst to best,
Sought the soul's world, spurned the worms'.

I have faith such end shall be:
From the first, Power was — I knew.
Life has made clear to me
That, strive but for closer view,
Love were as plain to see.

When see? When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And Power comes full in play.

REVERIE.

THE LOST LEADER

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, honored 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 freemen,
— He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!
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! . . .

No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,
Satan looks up between his feet — both tug —
He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul wakes
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!
Never leave growing till the life to come!

BISHOP BLOUGRAM'S APOLOGY.

Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will.

THE STATUE AND THE BUST.

WANTING IS — WHAT?

Wanting is — what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
— Where is the blot?

Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
— Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Roses embowering with naught they embower!
Come then, complete incompleteness, O come,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
 Breathe but one breath
 Rose-beauty above,
 And all that was death
 Grows life, grows love,
 Grows love!

But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost,
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face;
The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms
Like chrysalids impatient for the air,
The shining dross are busy, beetles run
Along the furrows, ants make their ado;
Above, birds fly in merry flocks, the lark
Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;
Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing gulls
Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe
Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek
Their loves in wood and plain — and God renews
His ancient rapture.

PARACELSUS.

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.

SAUL.

All at once I looked up with terror.
He was there.
He himself with his human air,
On the narrow pathway, just before.
I saw the back of him, no more —
He had left the chapel, then, as I.
I forgot all about the sky.
No face: only the sight
Of a sweepy garment, vast and white,
With a hem that I could recognize.
I felt terror, no surprise;
My mind filled with the cataract,
At one bound of the mighty fact.
“I remember, he did say
Doubtless that, to this world’s end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend;
Certainly he was there with them!”
And my pulses leaped for joy
Of the golden thought without alloy,
That I saw his very vesture’s hem.
Then rushed the blood back, cold and clear,
 With a fresh enhancing shiver of fear; . . .
And I turned to myself at intervals, —
“So he said, so it befalls.
God who registers the cup
Of mere cold water, for his sake
To a disciple rendered up,
Disdains not his own thirst to slake
At the poorest love was ever offered:
And because my heart I proffered,
With true love trembling at the brim,
He suffers me to follow him
Forever, my own way, — dispensed
From seeking to be influenced
By all the less immediate ways
That earth, in worships manifold,
Adopts to reach, by prayer and praise,
The garment’s hem, which, lo, I hold!” . . .

Take all in a word: 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:
And were no eye in us to tell,

Instructed by no inner sense,
The light of heaven from the dark of hell,
That light would want its evidence, —
Though justice, good and truth were still
Divine, if, by some demon's will,
Hatred and wrong had been proclaimed
Law through the worlds, and right misnamed.
No mere exposition of morality
Made or in part or in totality,
Should win you to give it worship, . . .

And I caught
At the flying robe, and unrepelled
Was lapped again in its folds full-fraught
With warmth and wonder and delight
God's mercy being infinite.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

A PEARL, A GIRL

A simple ring with a single stone
To the vulgar eye no stone of price:
Whisper the right word, that alone —
Forth starts a sprite, like fire from ice,
And lo, you are lord (says an Eastern scroll)
Of heaven and earth, lord whole and sole
Through the power in a pearl.

A woman ('t is I this time that say)
With little the world counts worthy praise:
Utter the true word — out and away
Escapes her soul: I am wrapt in blaze,
Creation's lord, of heaven and earth
Lord whole and sole — by a minute's birth —
Through the love in a girl!



Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception — which is truth,
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and, to KNOW,
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without. . . .

And softer came the voice — “There is a way:
'Tis hard for flesh to tread therein, imbued
With frailty — hopeless, if indulgence first
Have ripened inborn germs of sin to strength:
Wilt thou adventure for my sake and man's,
Apart from all reward?” And last it breathed —
“Be happy, my good soldier; I am by thee,
Be sure, even to the end!” . . .

It must oft fall out
That one whose labor perfects any work,
Shall rise from it with eye so worn that he
Of all men least can measure the extent
Of what he has accomplished. He alone
Who, nothing tasked, is nothing weary too,
May clearly scan the little he effects. . . .

If thou shalt please, dear God, if thou shalt please!
We are so weak, we know our motives least
In their confused beginning. If at first
I sought . . . but wherefore bare my heart to thee?
I know thy mercy; and already thoughts
Flock fast about my soul to comfort it,
And intimate I cannot wholly fail,
For love and praise would clasp me willingly
Could I resolve to seek them. Thou art good,
And I should be content.

PARACELSUS.

LIFE IN A LOVE

Escape me?
Never —
Beloved!
While I am I, and you are you,
 So long as the world contains us both,
 Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear:
 It seems too much like a fate, indeed!
 Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.
But what if I fail of my purpose here?
It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
 To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
And, baffled, get up and begin again, —
 So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
While, look but once from your farthest bound
 At me so deep in the dust and dark,
No sooner the old hope goes to ground
 Than a new one, straight to the selfsame mark,
I shape me —
Ever
Removed!

What stops my despair?
This; — 'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man
 Would do!

SAUL.

It's wiser being good than bad;
 It's safer being meek than fierce,
It's fitter being sane than mad.
 My own hope is, a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
 That, after Last, returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched;
 That what began best, can't end worst,
Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.
 APPARENT FAILURE.

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."
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:
"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.

A GRAMMARIAN'S FUNERAL.

So, through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine,
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee!"

AN EPISTLE.

All this, and more, comes from some young man's pride
Of power to see, — in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side, —
Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried:

Instances he must — simply recognize?
Oh, more than so! — must, with a learner's zeal,
Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the rest!
Himself the undefeated that shall be:
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test, —
His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest! . . .

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
Just about daybreák, as he looks across
A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul, —

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
"Here is the change beginning, here the lines
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns."

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;
So answered, — Never more!

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled!

JAMES LEE'S WIFE.

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

PROLOGUE, TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

In youth I looked to those 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.
For the loving worm within its clod
Were diviner than a loveless god
Amid his worlds, I will dare to say.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

“Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke.
Soil so quick-receptive, — not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous — prove a poet-soul!”

Indeed?

Rock 's the soil-song rather, surface hard and bare:
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend, — few flowers awaken there:
Quiet in its cleft broods — what the after-age
Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

MY STAR

All that I know
Of a certain star
Is, it can throw
(Like the angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furred:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart.
I — prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start —

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbors, and — forth to thee!

PROLOGUE TO PACCHIAROTTO.

"You are sick, that's sure," — they say:
"Sick of what?" — they disagree.
" 'Tis the brain," — thinks Doctor A;
" 'Tis the heart," — holds Doctor B;
"The liver — my life I'd lay!"
"The lungs!" "The lights!"

Ah me!

So ignorant of man's whole
Of bodily organs plain to see —
So sage and certain, frank and free,
About what's under lock and key —
Man's soul!

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

Oh we're 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.

There are flashes struck from midnights,
There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish,
Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
Which for once had play unstified,
Seems the sole work of a lifetime,
That away the rest have trifled.

CRISTINA.

I will live alone, one does so in a crowd,
And look into my heart a little.

CAPONSACCHI — THE RING AND THE BOOK.

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate —
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene, —
When our faith in the same has stood the test —
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labor are surely done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one.

OLD PICTURES IN FLORENCE.

Remember what a martyr said
On the rude tablet overhead!
"I was born sickly, poor and mean,
A slave: no misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Caesar's envy; therefore twice
I fought with beasts, and three times saw
My children suffer by his law;
At last my own release was earned:
I was some time in being burned,
But at the close a Hand came through
The fire above my head, and drew
My soul to Christ, whom now I see.
Sergius, a brother, writes for me
This testimony on the wall —
For me, I have forgot it all."

EASTER DAY.

Man, with the narrow mind, must cram inside
His finite God's infinitude.

BERNARD DE MANDEVILLE.

WHY I AM A LIBERAL.

"Why?" Because all I haply can and do,
All that I am now, all I hope to be, —
Whence comes it save from fortune setting free
Body and soul the purpose to pursue,
God traced for both? If fetters, not a few,
Of prejudice, convention, fall from me,
These shall I bid men — each in his degree
Also God-guided — bear, and gayly too?

But little do or can the best of us:
That little is achieved through Liberty.
Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,
Who live, love, labor freely, nor discuss
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."

“For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear, — believe the aged friend, —
Is just our chance o’ the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is;
And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth: that is all. . . .
“I say that man was made to grow, not stop;
That help, he needed once, and needs no more,
Having grown but an inch by, is withdrawn:
For he hath new needs, and new helps to these.
This imports solely, 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.”

A DEATH IN THE DESERT.

Ever judge of men by their professions! For though the bright moment of promising is but a moment and cannot be prolonged, yet, if sincere in its moment’s extravagant goodness, why, trust it and know the man by it, I say — not by his performance; which is half the world’s work, interfere as the world needs must, with its accidents and circumstances: the profession was purely the man’s own. I judge people by what they might be, — not are, nor will be.

A SOUL’S TRAGEDY.

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 forever. . . .
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.

PHEIDIPPIDES.*

[*Pheidippides ran from Thermopylae to Athens with the news of victory.]

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did, and does, smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

AT "THE MERMAID."

PROSPICE

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!

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