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THE GROWTH OF LOVE

ROBERT BRIDGES

NOTE. In issuing *The Growth of Love* the publisher has desired to set forth the high estimate recently come to be held regarding the poetry of MR. ROBERT BRIDGES. To do this effectually, no more fitting introduction could have been given than the contribution by MR. LIONEL JOHNSON, to be found in the *Century Guild Hobby Horse* (October, 1891), and here reprinted entire. It was and is almost as inaccessible as one of MR. BRIDGES' privately printed pamphlets.

It only remains to say that this reprint is made direct from a copy of the original *Growth of Love*, of which 100 copies in FELL'S Old English Type (Fcap 4to.) were put forth from the private press of REV. H. DANIEL, Oxford, 1890. The punctuation (or rather the lack of it) has been literally followed. The half-title immediately preceding the Sonnets is that of the original title page, while the printer's device at the end of the book is also reproduced in *facsimile* from this unique edition.

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and forty on Van Gelder's hand-made paper. Each
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No. 5

THE GROWTH OF LOVE
BY ROBERT BRIDGES

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THE POEMS OF MR. BRIDGES:
A BRIEF AND GENERAL CON-
SIDERATION.

THE POEMS OF MR. BRIDGES :
A BRIEF AND GENERAL CON-
SIDERATION.

THE supreme duties of the artist toward his art, as of all students toward their studies, are two in number, but of one kind: a duty of reverence, of fidelity, of understanding, toward the old, great masters; and a duty of reverence, of fidelity, of understanding, toward the living age and the living artists. But that our age lives well, and that our artists live well, who shall assure us? Life, its energies and its activities, ourselves can recognize: but we require a touchstone and a test, some image of that perfect state, *which lieth in the heavens*, seen there by Plato, *eternal in the heavens*, proclaimed by Paul, before we can accept with joy, and follow with readiness, the ways of our living age, of our living artists. Here too, we have a double duty, one to the past and one to the present: if we fulfil it, then we cannot lack the necessary test or standard, whereby to assay our-

selves and others. In the first place: *Securus judicat orbis terrarum*: sure and sound is the whole world's judgment: in Sophocles and in Virgil, in Dante and in Milton, virtue and truth shine clearly. The general voice of men, the more authoritative voice of artists and of students, go together in praise of the old, great masters. "But they lived in their times, we live now; what have we to do with them?" Neither did the old, great masters flourish together: yet examine, I pray you, the debt of Virgil to Homer, the debt of Dante to Virgil, the debt of Milton to Homer, to Virgil, and to Dante. Do you not find it an inestimable debt of reverence, of fidelity, and of understanding? Or can you discover in those masters any sign of a servile obedience to each other? Call it rather, not a debt due, but a grace sought and received. Be we artists then, or students merely, let us judge ourselves and our age, let us value ourselves and our age, according to the *mind* of the great masters, and in their *spirit*. In the second place: at one with our test by antique excellence, is the test by our proper conscience. There are occasions in our work, when we

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say, with a confidence beyond expression, *This is right*: against text-book and precept, warning and exhortation, we know our work to be true. And; while the pedant, with a mechanic reverence, in a blind fidelity, through a dulled understanding, quotes against us his Aristotle, his Vitruvius, his Pope, his Reynolds; we know, that we are their dutiful sons, not he: that what we do, following our conscience and our light, is in the spirit and in the truth of what they did, following theirs. "And your lawless profaner of art, your ignorant contemner of the past: will not he say as much?" Well! such an one may lie, indeed: and let him look to his conscience. He will find there a witness to his profanity and to his ignorance: he will confess, that he has not meditated the great past, nor the fine tradition; that the old masters were loyalists, himself a rebel; they bent upon a rational development, he upon a mindless innovation; they true to the constitutions of art, he careless for their violation. As in the spiritual or interior life, the Church would have a man perfect himself by the help of approved rules and meditations, not super-

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seding, but directing, his conscience : so in art, which also has its interior life, the general wisdom of the great masters must help to nourish and to strengthen that conscience, which cannot thrive wholly upon the desires and the intimations of its own genius. If we regard such men, as Spenser and as Sidney in Elizabethan times, or as Mr. Whitman in our own, we find not their greatness, nor their felicity, to lie in the attempt to compose English verse in the ancient metres of Greece and Rome, nor in the attempt to rob English verse of all metrical law.

It is upon these principles, thus briefly declared, that I purpose to estimate, if may be, the poems of a living poet ; one standing, in point of time, between Mr. Symonds and Mr. Lang, or between Mr. Dobson and Mr. Gosse : one standing, in place of honour, by the judgment of Mr. Robinson Ellis, "second only to Mr. Swinburne", as "an Oxford poet." I will not consider the degree of excellence indicated by that position : suffice it to say, that the eminent Reader in Latin at the University of Oxford intended to confer upon our

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poet, Mr. Bridges, a great measure of his approbation and of his praise.

Were we to reckon the number of Mr. Bridges' performances, by the number of works, bearing his name, in an historical or chronological list, we would do him a wrong: he is not one of those writers, whose own writings compose no small part of their own libraries. Such a list would give the names of some seventeen volumes, including small pamphlets and the products of a private press; the earliest volume would be recorded under the year 1873, the latest under the year 1891: but of these seventeen works, published during these eighteen years, many are, so to say, the writer's anthologies, or deliberate collections, chosen from the earlier volumes, together with new matter. Indeed, the lover of excellence in English literature must often have felt a passing vexation, a shade of annoyance; so difficult has he found the search for many rare, choice poems, either sacrificed by Mr. Bridges' careful conscience, or hidden away by him in editions hard to procure. Yet it may be thought, that this touch of antiquity,

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the need for this exhilarating *bibliomania*, add something pleasant to the study of Mr. Bridges: we have so many popular poets, and popular editions of their Collected Works, that retirement, leisure, anxiety, in a living poet, are virtues the more estimable and distinguished. They are virtues, no less, to be emulated and respected by a critic: and in considering Mr. Bridges' poems, I shall say nothing about those, which he has, in the full exercise of his judgment, cast away. *Litera scripta manet*: they are indestructible, and cannot escape the antiquary: so far as they deserve to be sought out and remembered, posterity will do well to annul the over-rigorous sentence of Mr. Bridges. For the present, let it stand.

The poems of Mr. Bridges are of the lyrical kind, of the narrative, and of the dramatic: and before examining each kind apart, let me say something applicable to the whole of them, in greater or less degree. These poems, then, represent, with much else that is admirable, the scholarship of poetry; a certain erudite air of mastery over the secrets of rhythm and of metre;

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a trained skill in music, and in those delicate devices, which give so excellent a distinction to the older English poets. To whatever Mr. Bridges set his hand, he preserves discretion and propriety: the scholar's instinct, no less than the poet's, making it impossible for him to outrage fine taste, by the fantastic freaks of some great men amongst us. "At the present time," so he tells us with lamentable truth, "men seem to affect to have outgrown the rules of art": but he, at least, reverencing the great masters, makes an "attempt to work in their manner." Not that he is a slavish follower of the great masters, their captive rather than their votarist: at times, he may have fallen somewhat into that attitude, but not for long, it is not characteristic of him. It is his characteristic virtue, that he moulds his thought, guides his imagination, into fresh and living forms, with a scholarly knowledge of what has been done before him, in like manner, though not in the same: thus, some among his poems are noticeable for their boldness of metrical experiment and invention; but we can trust him, who wrote those two good treat-

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ises *On the Prosody of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes*, and *On the Elements of Milton's Blank Verse in Paradise Lost*. The invention may displease us, the experiment prove unhappy: yet we recognize a justifiable enterprise, a scholar's venture; not the frantic impertinence of one writing, in despair of nature, and in contempt of art. And this learned competence, so abundant in his form, is naturally abundant in his matter: for matter and form, to repeat a simple and neglected truth, are inseparable. Mr. Bridges is not enamoured of a new thing, for its novelty: his thoughts are his own thoughts, but his expression of them is in harmony with the matured wisdom of many ages, meditating the common, human things, with gravity or in gladness. That is Horace, we say, or Catullus; there is Theognis or Meleager; and here is Marvell, here Vaughan, here Herrick; and this brings Landor to mind, Landor, or Collins, or Wordsworth; and now Shakespeare, now Terence, now Fletcher comes across us, with elder Athenian spirits: yet the final outcome is no mere freshened memory of old greatness and delights, but a

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recognition of the true and living poet in Mr. Bridges, who thus delicately preserves for modern use an antique charm. Delicately: in a generous appreciation of ancient excellences, and with a full sense of all, that they can do, to help him also on the hard way to an honourable perfection. So, the passion of his verse is an ardent and an austere passion, filled with the ardours and the austerities of a mind, that enjoys with reverence, almost with fear and trembling, the joys of art and nature, the true savour of them, their decent comeliness and admired grace.

I love all beauteous things,
I seek and adore them;
God hath no better praise,
And man in his hasty days
Is honoured for them.

I too will something make
And joy in the making;
Altho' to-morrow it seem
Like the empty words of a dream
Remembered on waking.

Mr. Bridges published his first book of poems in 1873; a pamphlet of verse in 1879, and another in 1880; a fourth volume is

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sued, in 1884, from the private press of Mr. Daniel, Fellow and Bursar of Worcester College, Oxford, reprinting some of the earlier poems : in 1890 appeared *The Shorter Poems of Robert Bridges*, of which the first three parts are mainly reprints from the former collections, whilst the last part is wholly new. In 1890 also came, from Mr. Daniel's excellent press, a book of sonnets, *The Growth of Love* : some of these had already been published. Apart from the lyrical portions of his dramatic poems, this is the sum of Mr. Bridges' lyrics : and, for our present purpose, we need consider but the *Shorter Poems* and *The Growth of Love*.

The *Shorter Poems*, the ripe harvest of Mr. Bridges' labours, are seventy-eight in number : to state a general truth, we may determine the spirit and beauty of them to be meditative, in two fashions. Either these lyrics show forth the powerful charm of life in its natural air, upon its natural ground ; the stir and the silence, the change and the endurance, of this natural world, working upon the contemplative mind : or, they express the contemplative mind, dwelling upon its proper works and business, of

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reason and of art, of thought and of aspiration, in the light of nature and of man's place in nature. The two aspects are harmonious: and much extravagance of life and of thought has come of ignoring their harmony. Have we not wearied ourselves, many a time, over the reproaches and the sorrows of those, who, as it were, *go up into the mountain alone*, but rather to weep, than *to pray*, or to keep silence? And there are those, who weary us with the ceaseless agitation of their active life and thoughts; crowds are round about them, noise is their music: they quote us their Terence, *Homo sum*, as though Terence would have them turn the universe into a committee room for universal talk. The posture of Mr. Bridges' mind, displayed in these poems, is rather that of those earlier poets, Elizabethans and Jacobeans, to whom the world looked half a court of grave observances, and half a cloister of delights: and their service in either kind, a service of solemnity and of elegance together. Only by some such phrase, can I express that dainty and cheerful spirit of pleasure, which makes the sacred verse of Marvell or of

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Herrick, of Ben Jonson or of Crashaw, sound like the strain of rich music at a feast, where all is gracious and entirely to be relished. It is an excellent view of life, which looks upon the world as a chamber of God, where what is *secular* is eternal, what is *spiritual* is ideal: and all good, fine things are the ornaments and garniture of an eternal spirit immanent there. I find something of this view in all great poetry: Lucretius cannot obscure it:

tibi suaveis daedala tellus
Submittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
Placatumque nitet diffuso lumine coelum.

In Pope or in Gray, an exquisite refinement of taste and workmanship declares their love of a pleasing order among things: Keats, once clear from the prodigalities of youth, is great in virtue of it: Wordsworth is magnificent in praise of it, for what does he ascribe to Duty, for an office and a grace?

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads;
Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong;
And the most ancient Heavens, through Thee, are
fresh and strong.

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Arnold, by dwelling with such serenity of mind upon the great things thought and done in the world, and with such gladness of heart upon the seemliness and the strength of nature, helped us to an appreciation of this view: Newman, in all his perfect expression of life's real unity and concord; in all his lamentation, so like to Milton's, over the breaking of that *fair music* and *divine concert*; taught us the same enduring truth. Mr. Pater, realizing with so singular a delight of intellect, the qualities of all admirable things and natures, loves to call them *hieratic*, or *precise*, or *comely*: he follows the ritual order of human life and of human thought. Nay, come to the greatest things: what is the Theology of the Church Catholic, but the patient and adoring Science of God, guarded from wild dreams, grounded upon divine sanctions? But in our day men love to think of themselves, as lost in the world, homeless in the universe; each wandering fancy is fashioned into a "lyrical cry": without meditation, without reverence, without patience, they utter, and would have us hear, their disconnected and uncertain

thoughts. They have no habitual, nor constant, principles of thought; no test, no standard of judgment: loose sentiment and lawless imagination are the signs to them of free and fearless genius. So, the form of poetry being inseparable from its matter, this random and unconsidered matter is expressed in forms, devoid of all scholarship and all proportion: poetry is degraded to a mechanical trick of recording immediate impressions or vagrant fancies. It is one main source of our pleasure in reading these *Shorter Poems*, that not the slightest of them is thus trivial and mean: modern they are, of our own day; but their romance of tone is classical, their meditative quality is immemorial. As with states, so it is with thoughts: the poet, too, who would deal with the fresh moods and influences of his day, must

Cast the kingdoms old
Into another mould.

Mark the word: not, cast them into original chaos, the land of Dullness and of the Dunces; but into a new *mould*, a fresh form and feature, no less precise of design than were the former. For an example:

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compare Mr. Bridges' *Spring: Invitation to the Country*, and his *Spring: Reply*, with Randolph's *Ode to Master Anthony Stafford*, and with Cotton's *Retirement, Stanzas Irreguliers: to Mr. Izaak Walton*. Or go farther back, into a greater antiquity: read again Martial *Ad Licinianum de Hispaniae locis*, or Horace *Ad Virgilium*: and see, how this living poet can once more play upon the old theme of life's aspect and of life's virtue, in town and country, in winter and in spring. Or make another comparison: read Campion's rich and moving verses:

"When thou must home to shades of underground,
And there arrived, a new admired guest,
The beauteous spirits do engirt thee round,
White Iope, blithe Helen, and the rest,
To hear the stories of thy finished love
From that smooth tongue whose music hell can move;
Then wilt thou speak of banqueting delights,
Of masques and revels which sweet youth did make,
Of tourneys and great challenges of knights,
And all those triumphs for thy beauty's sake:
When thou hast told these honours done to thee,
Then tell, O tell, how thou didst murder me."

The classic, romantic splendour and beauty of that, so full of Propertian fire

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and Spenserian solemnity, cannot escape you : now read Mr. Bridges' *Elegy on a Lady, whom Grief for the Death of her Betrothed killed* : I must mutilate it, by quotation : it thus concludes :

But now for many days the dewy grass
Has shown no markings of his feet at morn :
And watching she has seen no shadow pass
The moonlit walk, and heard no music borne
 Upon her ear forlorn.
In vain has she looked out to greet him ;
He has not come, he will not come, alas !
So let us bear her out where she must meet him.

Now to the river bank the priests are come :
The bark is ready to receive its freight :
Let some prepare her place therein, and some
Embark the litter with its slender weight :
 The rest stand by in state,
And sing her a safe passage over ;
While she is oared across to her new home,
Into the arms of her expectant lover.

And thou, O lover, that art on the watch,
Where, on the banks of the forgetful streams,
The pale indifferent ghosts wander, and snatch
The sweeter moments of their broken dreams, —
 Thou, when the torchlight gleams,
When thou shalt see the slow procession,
And when thine ears the fitful music catch,
Rejoice ! for thou art near to thy possession.

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Arnold, we find, is not the only poet of our day, who without a specious resemblance can use the ancient symbols and imageries, for the stately expression of a sorrow: but this power of true assimilation is rare enough, and not to be had, but by patient study educating a native sense for the distinctions of art.

A thorough consideration of Mr. Bridges' poetry would ponder long his skill in music and in metre: for in these he has something of the master's touch, and beyond the dexterity of a novice. But so full of minute and of technical scholarship is he, that a treatise were required for the exhibition of his theoretic science and actual practice. But I will say, that, if he err at all, it is in a certain concision and compactness, coming of many strong monosyllables, too little tempered and relieved by words of a more prolonged melody: it is an effect, something between briskness and sprightliness, common in the less deft and versatile of Elizabethan lyrists, and unequal to occasions of great and moving beauty. Such verses are, indeed, of a pleasant tone and of a just economy; their structure is neat and clean,

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they are without waste and profusion of words : but coming from Mr. Bridges, they come rather as "copies of verses", done in the scholar's humour, for the leisurely exercise' sake, than as the best products of his imagination. When he chooses to sing or to chaunt, with more of various melody and concerted music, we regret, not without some ingratitude, his less delicate or lofty strain. In certain measures, devised with a great subtilty of accents, equal in number upon each line, but in each line prevailing over various reaches, or disposed at various intervals, Mr. Bridges has not yet attained a perfect ease : but he contrives many pleasurable effects : witness some of the lines *On a Dead Child*.

Perfect little body, without fault or stain on thee,
With promise of strength and manhood full and fair!
 Though cold and stark and bare,
The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain
on thee.

And again :

So quiet! doth the change content thee? — Death,
whither hath he taken thee?
To a world, do I think, that rights the disaster of
this ?

 The vision of which I miss,

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Who weep for the body, and wish but to warm thee
and awaken thee?

Ah! little at best can all our hopes avail us
To lift this sorrow, or cheer us, when in the dark,
Unwilling, alone we embark,
And the things we have seen and have known and
have heard of, fail us.

But those, who wish to study the metrical achievements of Mr. Bridges, in various kinds, had best read his comedy, *The Feast of Bacchus*, written in "English six-stressed verse"; his *Eden, an Oratorio*, set to music by Mr. Villiers Stanford; the choral parts of his play, *Achilles in Scyros*; to name but these.

Besides the *Shorter Poems*, the volume of seventy-nine sonnets, entitled *The Growth of Love*, is of noticeable beauty: it may be thought, in point of mental and imaginative strength, his finest work. Unlike most sonnets of our time, these sonnets are weighty with close thought, and rich with images, in the Shakespearian, and in Milton's ways: yet not obscure, nor luxuriant, in the less happy manner of Rossetti. And their substance is congruous with the form: each grave or exulting thought finds within

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the limits of the fourteen lines, an exact place for it to fill: so Petrarch conceived the sonnet, and so Sidney. I present one, at random:

The dark and serious Angel, who so long
Vexed his immortal strength in charge of me,
Hath smiled for joy and fled in liberty
To take his pastime with the peerless throng.
Oft had I done his noble keeping wrong,
Wounding his heart to wonder what might be
God's purpose in a soul of such degree:
And there he had left me, but for mandate strong.

But seeing thee with me now, his task at close
He knoweth, and wherefore he was bid to stay
And work confusion of so many foes.
The thanks he looks to have from me I pay,
Yet fear some heavenly envy as he goes
Unto what great reward I cannot say.

The narrative poem, *Eros and Psyche*, published in 1885, is one of those versions, in which "Apuleius has been simply followed." It is written in graceful stanzas of seven lines, and dedicated, in significant terms, *To the Celestial Spirit of Henry Purcell by an Unworthy Lover*. The poem is in no sense a translation: indeed, Mr. Bridges has a note, in which he speaks of "the substitution of Hellenism for Latin vulgarity,"

somewhat to the consternation of the present writer, who is equally surprised at reading of "the dull furniture of Apuleius." The poem is a felicitous piece of fancy, embellished with many devices : but the lover of Apuleius will prefer the miraculous rendering by Mr. Pater. Nowhere in Mr. Bridges' poem is there so perfect a phrase, as that of "the craftsman, divine or half-divine, who by the subtlety of his art had breathed so wild a soul into the silver!" *Qui magnæ artis subtilitate tantum efferavit argentum.* Mr. Bridges' poem has the same degree of excellence, that has Mr. Lang's *Helen of Troy*: but it can hardly claim an higher place, for all its ready invention, and its grace of scholarship.

Prometheus the Firegiver: A Spectacle in the Greek Manner was first printed in the year 1883, by Mr. Daniel, and at a public press in 1884: *Nero, The Feast of Bacchus, Palicio, Return of Ulysses, The Christian Captives, Achilles in Scyros*, have followed *Prometheus*. It is here, that I can best dwell upon another distinction of Mr. Bridges, as a poetical craftsman. That he is no contemner of the past, has been said :

but he is also, as appears from his works, a very careful searcher into the literary fashions, tastes, habits, adventures, of the old craftsmen. Men of letters, and poets above all, are in these days content to know little about such matters: to have a general view of Sophocles and of Shakespeare, but to be extremely ignorant of Calderon and of Alfieri; to know much of Milton, but nothing of Vondel, much of Lessing, but nothing of Opitz: to read Spenser, and Chaucer, and Dryden, but not Browne, nor Gower, nor Cowley. And who shall say, that to know the great Masters is not the first necessity of an artist? Yet we might think, that a true man of letters would eagerly explore all tracts and byways of literature, all tentative methods and forsaken aims of his predecessors. In the other arts, this apathy less prevails: we have with us still those, who are willing to study the old "Italian tractates", to explore old music-rooms, to pursue the obscure traces of all past excellence. Mr. Bridges, whilst displaying throughout his work a loving familiarity with both old and foreign literature, seems, if I may make the conjecture, to have stud-

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ied with especial care the spectacular and the musical history of the stage : to know, wherein precisely consists the virtue of any dramatic form, at a given period. Thus, in his *Feast of Bacchus*, he has done in English, what no one else has done : he has given us the very soul and body of Terence, with the ghost of the lost and shadowy Menander. Such a study is, he sings, a wintertide's employment :

Then oft I turn the page
In which our country's name,
Spoiling the Greek of fame,
Shall sound in every age :
Or some Terentian play
Renew, whose excellent
Adjusted folds betray
How once Menander went.

In all his plays, he exhibits a just conception of his subject and of its treatment : he knows, when to catch the spirit of the Italian Renaissance, or of the Spanish school ; when to plan his chorus in the austere manner of Milton, or with something of Shelley's brilliance ; when the Sophoclean tone is in season, and when that of Euripides ; what degree of license is permissible,

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in handling classic matters after the Elizabethan way. In all that, he is never at a loss: his plays are quick-witted, ingenious, facile: although his dexterous craftsmanship rarely enables him to make the dramatic form embody the high dramatic spirit. All that he writes in dramatic form, we enjoy; it is infinitely skilful and attractive: but for a power essentially, pre-eminently, dramatic, we look to the one English dramatist of greatness, now living; to Michael Field. Mr. Bridges gives us the humour of the drama, its various attendant charms and graces, not without a real and an original force: but in his lyrics he is perfectly fine.

Briefly, and generally, I have touched upon the characteristic virtues, as I see them, of this excellent poet: rather indicating, than attempting to expound, his peculiar charm. It is a limited charm: not that it is one liable to decay with time, or to pass with the reader's passing moods. But it is limited, in the sense that this poetry in all its simplicity, in all its skill, is too dainty a thing for common use. Unlike the poems of Arnold or of Wordsworth, of Virgil or

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of Keats, of Milton or of Goethe, they cannot be read daily and in all places. That is test of great poetry: its abiding and un-failing power upon us, because of its indifference to time and place. A line of Virgil, written by the Bay of Naples, in some most private hour of meditation, all those long years ago! comes home to us, as though it were our own thought: upon each repetition, experience has made it more true and touching. Or take some verse of Arnold, written at Oxford or in London, some few years past: it comes home to us, as though a thousand years had pondered it, and found it true. And in beauty, in power of music and of phrase, the great poets are all contemporaries: an eternal beauty is upon the great works of art, as though they were from everlasting. Poets of exquisite charm, true to their art, true to its traditions, full of its inner spirit, may still miss that final grace and grandeur: and of these, Mr. Bridges is, in my poor judgment, the most admirable in recent times. Had a friend been reading Herrick to me, or Catullus; were I lying in the gardens of New College in Oxford,

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or in Winchester Meads; did some one play to me a fugue of Bach: I might, at this hour, rate the *Shorter Poems of Robert Bridges* far higher than my conscience, unperverted by delights, will suffer me. For they are poems. unaffected and simple, yet with an air of dainty luxury about them: free from all trivial show and glitter, yet not commanding and compelling us by their intrinsic greatness. Read *England's Helicon*, or Mr. Palgrave's anthology of English Lyrics: neither book contains one page of absolutely bad work, and either contains a vast deal that is very good. We might with reason grow enthusiastic over these delightful pages: but then, with what a sudden revulsion of feeling we read an ode of Milton, a lyric of Shakespeare!

You meaner Beauties of the Night,
That poorly satisfie our Eies,
More by your number, than your light,
You Common-people of the Skies;
What are you when the Sun shall rise?

But in our zeal for the Sun, let us not shut our eyes to the stars: and in the heavens of Poetry, where now few stars, perchance,

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not a full Pleiad, are shining, none shines
more purely, nor more serenely, than the
star of our consideration.

LIONEL JOHNSON.

The Growth of
Labe



I

THEY that in play can do the thing they would
Having an instinct throned in reason's place,
— And every perfect action hath the grace
Of indolence or thoughtless hardihood —
These are the best: yet be there workmen good
Who lose in earnestness control of face
Or reckon means and rapt in effort base
Reach to their ends by steps well understood.

Me whom thou sawst of late strive with the pains
Of one who spends his strength to rule his nerve —
Even as a painter breathlessly who strains
His scarcely moving hand lest it should swerve —
Behold me now free from the care that stains
And master of the art I chose to serve.

II

FOR thou art mine. And now I am ashamed
To have used means to win so pure acquit
And of my trembling fear that might have missed
Through very care the gold at which I aimed :
And am as happy but to hear thee named,
As are those gentle souls by angels kissed
In pictures seen leaving their marble cist
To go before the throne of grace unblamed.

Nor surer am I water hath the skill
To quench my thirst or that my strength is freed
In measure, grace and motion as I will
Than that to be myself is all I need
For thee to be most mine : so I stand still
And save to taste my joy no more take heed.

III

THE whole world now is but the minister
Of thee to me : I see no other scheme
But universal love from timeless dream
Waking to thee his joy's interpreter.
I walk around and in the fields confer
Of love at large with tree and flower and stream
And list the lark descant upon thy theme
Heaven's musical accepted worshipper.

Thy smile outfaceth ill : and that old feud
'Twixt things and me is quashed in our new truce :
And Nature now dearly with thee endued
No more in shame ponders her old excuse
But quite forgets her frowns and antics rude
So kindly hath she grown to her new use.

IV

THE very names of things we love are dear
And sounds will gather beauty from their sense,
As many a face through love's long residence
Groweth to fair instead of plain and sere :
But when I say thy name it hath no peer
And I suppose fortune determined thence
Her dower, that such beauty's excellence
Should have a perfect title for the ear :

For I must think the adopting Muses chose
Their sons by name, knowing none would be heard
Or writ so oft in all the world as those :
Dan Chaucer, mighty Shakespeare, then for third
The classic Milton, and to us arose
Shelley with liquid music in the word.

V

THE poets were good teachers for they taught
Earth had this joy, but that 't would ever be
That fortune should be perfected in me
My heart of hope dared not engage the thought.
So I stood low, and now but to be caught
By any self-styled lords of the age with thee
Vexes my modesty, lest they should see
I hold them owls and peacocks, things of nought.

And when we sit alone, and as I please
I taste thy love's full smile and can enstate
The pleasure of my kingly heart at ease:
My thought swims like a ship, that with the weight
Of her rich burden sleeps on the infinite seas
Becalmed, and cannot stir her golden freight.

VI

WHILE yet we wait for spring and from the dry
And blackening east that so embitters March,
Well housed must watch grey fields and meadows parch
And driven dust and withering snowflake fly :
Already in glimpses of the tarnished sky
The sun is warm and beckons to the larch,
And where the covert hazels interarch
Their tasselled twigs, fair beds of primrose lie.

Beneath the crisp and wintry carpet hid
A million buds but stay their blossoming
And trustful birds have built their nests amid
The shuddering boughs, and only wait to sing
Till one soft shower from the south shall bid
And hither tempt the pilgrim steps of spring.

VII

In thee my spring of life hath bid the while
A rose unfold beyond the summer's best,
The mystery of joy made manifest
In love's self-answering and awakening smile :
Whereby the lips in silence reconcile
Desire with peace, and pleading in arrest
Of passion, shew the beauty left unguessed
Of Greece to adorn at last the Tuscan style :

When first the wonder conquering faith had kenned
Fancy pourtrayed, above the strength of oath
Revealed of God or light of poem panned,
The countenance of ancient-plighted troth
'Twixt heaven and earth, that in one moment blend
The hope of one and happiness of both.

VIII

FOR beauty being the best of all we know
Sums up the unsearchable and secret aims
Of nature, and on joys whose heavenly names
Were never told can form and sense bestow.
And man hath sped his instinct to outgo
Nature in sound and shape, and daily frames
Much for himself to countervail his shames,
Building a tower above the head of woe.

And never was there work for beauty found
Fairer than this, that she should make to cease
The jarring woes that in the world abound.
Nay with his sorrow may his smiles encrease,
If from man's greater need beauty redound
And claim his tears for homage of his peace.

IX

THUS to thy beauty doth my fond heart look
That late dismayed her faithless faith forebore
And wins again her love lost in the lore
Of schools and script of many a learned book :
For thou what ruthless death untimely took
Shalt now in better brotherhood restore
And save my battered ship that far from shore
High on the dismal deep in tempest shook.

So in despite of sorrow lately learned
I still hold true to truth since thou art true,
Nor wail the woe which thou to joy hast turned :
Nor come the heavenly sun and bathing blue
To my life's need more splendid and unearned
Than hath thy gift outmatched desire and due.

X

WINTER was not unkind because uncouth,
His prisoned time made me a closer guest
And gave thy graciousness a warmer zest
Biting all else with keen and angry tooth :
And bravelier the triumphant blood of youth
Mantling thy cheek its happy home possess
And sterner sport by day put strength to test
And custom's feast at night gave tongue to truth.

Or say hath flaunting summer a device
To match our midnight revelry that rang
With steel and flame along the snow-girt ice ?
Or when we harked to nightingales that sang
On dewy eves in spring, did they entice
To gentler love than winter's icy fang ?

XI

THERE 's many a would-be poet at this hour
Rhymes of a love and truth he never wooed
And o'er his lamplit desk in solitude
Deems that he sitteth in the Muses' bower.
And while such thewless kine the fat devour
And ever grow the leaner for their food
Men look askance upon an art pursued
By clerks that lack the pulse and smile of power.

So none of all our company, I boast,
But now would mock my writing could they see
How down the right it maps a jagged coast :
Seeing they hold the manlier praise to be
Strong hand and will and the heart best when most
'T is sober, simple, true and fancy-free.

XII

How could I quarrel or blame you most dear
Who all thy virtues gavest and kept back none :
Kindness and gentleness, truth without peer
And beauty that my fancy fed upon ?

Now not my life's contrition for my fault
Can blot that day nor work me recompense,
Though I might worthily thy worth exalt
Making thee long amends for short offence.

For surely nowhere, love, if not in thee
Are grace and truth and beauty to be found :
And all my praise of these can only be
A praise of thee, howe'er by thee disowned :

While still thou must be mine though far removed,
And I for one offence no more beloved.

XIII

Now since to me although by thee refused
The world is left, I shall find pleasure still :
The art I have ever loved but little used
Will yield a world of fancies at my will.

And though where'er thou goest it is from me,
I where I go thee in my heart must bear :
And what thou wert that wilt thou ever be,
My choice, my best, my loved and only fair.

Farewell, yet think not such farewell a change
From tenderness, though once to meet or part
But on short absence so could sense derange
That tears have graced the greeting of my heart :

They were proud drops and had my leave to fall :
Not on thy pity for my pain to call.

XIV

WHEN sometimes in an ancient house where state
From noble ancestry is handed on,
We see but desolation through the gate
And richest heirlooms all to ruin gone :

Because maybe some fancied shame or fear
Bred of disease or melancholy fate
Hath driven the owner from his rightful sphere
To wander nameless save to pity or hate.

What is the wreck of all he hath in fief
When he that hath is wrecking? nought is fine
Unto the sick, nor doth it burden grief
That the house perish when the soul doth pine.

Thus I my state despise, slain by a sting
So slight 't would not have hurt a meaner thing.

XV

WHO builds a ship must first lay down the keel
Of health, whereto the ribs of mirth are wed :
And knit with beams and knees of strength, a bed
For decks of purity, her floor and ceil.
Upon her masts, adventure, pride and zeal,
To fortune's wind the sails of purpose spread :
And at the prow make figured maidenhead
O'er ride the seas and answer to the wheel.

And let him deep in memory's hold have stored
Water of Helicon : and let him fit
The needle that doth true with heaven accord :
Then bid her crew, love, diligence and wit
With justice, courage, temperance come aboard,
And at her helm the master reason sit.

XVI

THIS world is unto God a work of art
Of which the unaccomplished heavenly plan
Lives in his masterpiece and grows with man
Unto perfection and success in part.
The ultimate creation stayed to start
From the last creature for whom all began :
Who child in what he is and what he can
Hath yet God's judgment and desire at heart.

Knowledge denied him, and his little skill
Cumbered by laws he never can annul,
Baffled by qualities adverse and ill,
With feeble hands, few years and senses dull,
His art is nature's nature, and love still
Makes his abode with the most beautiful.

XVII

SAY who be these light-bearded sunburnt faces
In negligent and travel-stained array
That in the city of Dante come to-day
Haughtily visiting her holy places?
O these be noble men that hide their graces,
True England's blood, her ancient glory's stay,
By tales of fame diverted on their way
Home from the rule of Oriental races.

Life-trifling lions these, of gentle eyes
And motion delicate, but swift to fire
For honour, passionate where duty lies,
Most loved and loving: and they quickly tire
Of Florence, that she one more day denies
The embrace of wife and son, of sister or sire.

XVIII

WHERE San Miniato's convent from the sun
At forenoon overlooks the city of flowers
I sat, and gazing on her domes and towers
Called up her famous children one by one:
And three who all the rest had far outdone,
Mild Giotto first, who stole the morning hours,
I saw, and god-like Buonarroti's powers,
And Dante, gravest poet, her much wronged son.

Is all this glory, I said, another's praise?
Are these heroic triumphs things of old
And do I dead upon the living gaze?
Or rather doth the mind that can behold
The wondrous beauty of the works and days
Create the image that her thoughts enfold.

XIX

REJOICE ye dead, where'er your spirits dwell,
Rejoice that yet on earth your fame is bright
And that your names remembered day and night
Live on the lips of those that love you well.
Rejoice ye living ye that now excel
And guard in nameless homes the sacred light :
Rejoice, though prosperous folly in her spite
Banish all them that from her rule rebel.

For the world's exile hath a richer meed
Than a king's favourite: he shall arrive
With the like triumph and return decreed
To him who ne'er revisited alive
His home but sang, — Doubt not I shall succeed
For all the hindrance they within contrive.

XX

Who praiseth? If the poet have not known
His work is beautiful, none can persuade:
Nor doth our time that so wrongs Handel's shade
Contrive his condemnation but its own.
The comment writ on Shakespeare hath not shown
The perfect judgment that alive he laid
On his own work, which taketh since 't was made
Grace nor disgrace save but of love alone.

And love in loving nothing that is vile
Knows not the error of the mind, nor fears
To set his seal in secret with a smile:
But O could one as Purcell win the tears
Of love, such praise were more than to beguile
The learned fancies of a thousand years.

XXI

THE world still goeth about to shew and hide,
Befooled of all opinion, fond of fame:
But he that can do well taketh no pride
And seeth his error, undisturbed by shame :
 So poor's the best our longest days can do,
The most so little, diligently done,
So mighty is the beauty that doth woo,
So vast the joy that love from love hath won.

 God's love to win is easy, for He loveth
Desires fair attitude, nor strictly weighs
The broken thing, but all alike approveth
Which love hath aimed at Him : that is heaven's praise :
 And if we look for any praise on earth
'T is in man's love : all else is nothing worth.

XXII

O FLESH and blood, comrade to tragic pain
And clownish merriment : whose sense could wake
Sermons in stones, and count death but an ache,
All things as vanity, yet nothing vain :
The world set in thy heart thy passionate strain
Revealed anew : but thou for man didst make
Nature twice natural, only to shake
Her kingdom with the creatures of thy brain.

Lo Shakespeare, since thy time nature is loth
To yield to art her fair supremacy :
In conquering one thou hast so enriched both.
What shall I say? for God — whose wise decree
Confirmeth all He did by all He doth —
Doubled His whole creation making thee.

XXIII

I WOULD be a bird, and straight on wings I arise
And carry purpose up to the ends of the air :
In calm and storm my sails I feather and where
By freezing cliffs the unransomed wreckage lies :
Or strutting on hot meridian banks surprise
The silence : over plains in the moonlight bare
I chase my shadow and perch where no bird dare
In treetops torn by fiercest winds of the skies.

Poor simple birds, foolish birds, then I cry,
Ye pretty pictures of delight, unstirred
By the only joy of knowing that ye fly :
Ye are not what ye are, but rather, summed in a word,
The alphabet of a god's idea, and I
Who master it, I am the only bird.

XXIV

O WEARY pilgrims chaunting of your woe
That turn your eyes to all the peaks that shine,
Hailing in each the citadel divine
The which ye thought to have entered long ago :
Until at length your feeble steps and slow
Falter upon the threshold of the shrine,
And your hearts overburdened doubt in fine
Whether it be Jerusalem or no :

Disheartened pilgrims, I am one of you,
For having worshipped many a barren face
I scarce now greet the goal I journeyed to :
I stand a pagan in the heavenly place,
Beneath the lamp of truth I am found untrue
And question with the glory I embrace.

XXV

SPRING hath her own bright days of calm and peace :
Her melting air, at every breath we draw,
Floods heart with love to praise God's gracious law :
But suddenly — so short is pleasure's lease —
The cold returns, the buds from growing cease
And nature's conquered face is full of awe :
As now the traitrous north with icy flaw
Freezes the dew upon the sick lamb's fleece.

And 'neath the mock sun searching everywhere
Rattles the crispéd leaves with shivering din :
So that the birds are silent with despair
Within the thickets, nor their armour thin
Will gaudy flies adventure in the air
Nor any lizard sun his spotted skin.

XXVI

NOTHING is joy without thee : I can find
No rapture in the first relays of spring,
In songs of birds, in young buds opening,
Nothing inspiriting and nothing kind :
For lack of thee who once wert throned behind
All beauty, like a strength where graces cling :
The jewel and heart of light which everything
Wrestled in rivalry to hold enshrined.

Ah, since thou 'rt fled and I in each fair sight
The sweet occasion of my joy deplore,
Where shall I seek thee best or whom invite
Within thy sacred temples and adore ?
Who shall fill thought and truth with old delight
And lead my soul in life as heretofore ?

XXVII

THE work is done and from the fingers fall
The bloodwarm tools that brought the labor through :
The tasking eye that overrunneth all
Rests, and affirms there is no more to do.

Now the third joy of making, the sweet flower
Of blessed work bloometh in godlike spirit :
Which whoso plucketh holdeth for an hour
The shrivelling vanity of mortal merit.

And thou, my perfect work, thou 'rt of to-day :
To-morrow a poor and alien thing wilt be,
True only should the swift life stand at stay :
Therefore farewell nor look to bide with me.

Go find thy friends if there be one to love thee :
Casting thee forth, my child, I rise above thee.

XXVIII

THE fabled sea-snake, old Leviathan,
Or else what grisly beast of scaly chine
That champed the oceanwrack, and swashed the brine
Before the new and milder days of man,
Had never rib nor bray nor swindging fan
Like his iron swimmer of the Clyde or Tyne,
Late born of golden seed to breed a line
Of offspring swifter and more huge of plan.

Straight is her going, for upon the sun
When once she hath looked, her path and place are plain :
With tireless speed she smiteth one by one
The shuddering seas and foams along the main :
And her eased breath when her wild race is run
Roars through her nostrils like a hurricane.

XXIX

A THOUSAND times hath in my heart's behoof
My tongue been set his passion to impart :
A thousand times hath my too coward heart
My mouth reclosed and fixed it to the roof :
Then with such cunning hath it held aloof,
A thousand times kept silence with such art
That words could do no more : yet on thy part
Hath silence given a thousand times reproof.

I should be bolder, seeing I commend
Love that my dilatory purpose primes,
But fear lest with my fears my hope should end.
Nay I would truth deny and burn my rhymes,
Renew my sorrows rather than offend,
A thousand times and yet a thousand times.

XXX

I TRAVEL to thee with the sun's first rays
That lift the dark west and unwrap the night :
I dwell beside thee when he walks the height
And fondly toward thee at his setting gaze.
I wait upon thy coming, but always —
Dancing to meet my thoughts if they invite —
Thou hast outrun their longing with delight
And in my solitude dost mock my praise.

I well might say 't were better not to have been
Than such I am to be for such as thou :
And couldst thou love me more my heart I 'd wean
And win a claim that none could disallow :
But since that cannot be, O love, I lean
Upon thy strength and ne'er was strong till now.

XXXI

My lady pleases me and I please her,
This know we both and I besides know well
Wherefore I love her and I love to tell
My love as all my loving songs aver.
But what on her part could the passion stir
Though 't is more difficult for love to spell
Yet can I dare divine how this befel
Nor will her lips deny it if I err.

She loves me first because I love her, then
Loves me for knowing why she should be loved,
And that I love to praise her, loves again.
So from her beauty both our loves are moved
And by her beauty are sustained, nor when
The earth falls from the sun is this disproved.

XXXII

IN all things beautiful I cannot see
Her sit or stand, but love is stirred anew :
'T is joy to watch the folds fall as they do,
And all that comes is past expectancy.
If she be silent, silence let it be :
He who would bid her speak might sit and sue
The deep-browed Phidian Jove to be untrue
To his two thousand years' solemnity.

Ah but her launchéd passion when she sings
Wins on the hearing like a shapen prow
Borne by the mastery of its urgent wings :
Or if she deign her wisdom, she doth show
She hath the intelligence of heavenly things
Unsullied by man's mortal overthrow.

They that in play can do the thing they would
Having an instinct throned in reasons place/
—And every perfect action hath the grace
Of indolence or thoughtless hardihood—
These are the best: yet be there workmen good
Who lose in earnestness control of face
Or reckon means and rapt in effort base
Reach to their ends by steps well understood.

Of whom thou sawst of late strive with the pains
Of one who spends his strength to rule his nerve—
Even as a painter breathlessly who strains
His scarcely moving hand lest it should swerve—
Behold me now free from the care that stains
And master of the art I chose to serve.

THEY WERE IN THE CITY FOR THE FIRST TIME
AND THEY WERE VERY INTERESTED IN THE
SIGHTS AND SCENERY AROUND THEM
THEY WERE VERY HAPPY AND ENJOYED
THEMSELVES VERY MUCH
THEY WERE VERY WELL AND
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XXXIII

THUS to be humbled : 't is that ranging pride
No refuge hath : that in his castle strong
Brave reason sits beleaguered who so long
Kept field but now must starve where he doth hide :
That industry who once the foe defied
Lies slaughtered in the trenches : that the throng
Of idle fancies pipe their foolish song
Where late the puissant captains fought and died.

Thus to be humbled : 't is to be undone,
A forest felled, a city razed to ground,
A cloak unsewn, unwoven and unspun
Till not a thread remains that can be wound.
And yet, O lover, thee the ruined one
Love who hath humbled thus hath also crowned.

XXXIV

I CARE not if I live, though life and breath
Have never been to me so dear and sweet.
I care not if I die, for I could meet —
Being so happy — happily my death.
I care not if I love : to-day she saith
She loveth, and love's history is complete.
Nor care I if she love me : at her feet
My spirit bows entranced and worshipping.

I have no care for what was most my care
But all around me see fresh beauty born
And common sights grown lovelier than they were :
I dream of love, and in the light of morn
Tremble beholding all things very fair
And strong with strength that puts my strength to scorn.

XXXV

O MY goddess divine, — sometimes I say :
Now let this word for ever and all suffice :
Thou art insatiable, and yet not twice
Can even thy lover give his soul away :
And for my acts, that at thy feet I lay,
For never any other by device
Of wisdom love or beauty could entice
My homage to the measure of this day.

I have no more to give thee : lo, I have sold
My life, have emptied out my heart and spent
Whate'er I had : till like a beggar, bold
With nought to lose, I laugh and am content.
A beggar kisses thee, nay love, behold,
I fear not : thou too art in beggarment.

XXXVI

ALL earthly beauty hath one cause and proof,
To lead the pilgrim soul to beauty above :
Yet lieth the greater bliss so far aloof
That few there be are weaned from earthly love.

Joy's ladder it is, reaching from home to home,
The best of all the work that all was good :
Whereof 't was writ the angels aye upclomb,
Down sped, and at the top the Lord God stood.

But I my time abuse, my eyes by day
Centered on thee, by night my heart on fire —
Letting my numbered moments run away —
Nor e'en 'twixt night and day to heaven aspire.

So true it is that what the eye seeth not
But slow is loved and loved is soon forgot.

XXXVII

ALREADY far have we sailed out to sea,
Enough have proved our bark and hear the roar
Of tempest overnigh that more and more
Rages and lightens on the whitened lea.
See how with naked masts the tall ships flee
Like frightened phantoms from the dangerous shore,
And not a boat contrives with sail or oar
To stem the foundering waves : how then shall we ?

Now time it is to make for port and haste
In safety with the joy our perils earn :
But let us bow that first the shrine be graced
Of him who moves and draws all souls that yearn,
With fair memorials of devotion placed
For venturous voyage and for safe return.

XXXVIII

THE bliss that Adam lost — eating in haste —
He lost not all, for what he had he had :
And still his sons are born as pure and glad
As he when first by God in Eden placed.
But what he took for them — daring to taste —
He won outright, whether for good or bad :
And in his footsteps all must issue sad
Out of their garden, exiled and disgraced.

And therefore knowledge hath two hands : with one
Pressed to her prisoned heart that mourns and yearns
She guards her firstborn joy and shares with none :
But with her busy right she moves and turns
All tangible things, or gazing on the sun
Shades her adventurous eye and ever learns.

XXXIX

O MY life's mischief, once my love's delight,
That drewst a mortgage on my heart's estate,
Whose baneful clause is never out of date,
Nor can avenging time restore my right :
Whom first to lose sounded that note of spite
Whereto my doleful days were tuned by fate :
That art the well-loved cause of all my hate,
The sun whose wandering makes my hopeless night :

Thou being in all my lacking all I lack,
It is thy goodness turns my grace to crime,
Thy fleetness from my goal which holds me back :
Wherefore my feet go out of step with time,
My very grasp of life is old and slack
And even my passion falters in my rhyme.

XL

At times with hurried hoofs and scattering dust
I race by field or highway, and my horse
Spare not but urge direct in headlong course
Unto some fair far hill that gain I must :
But near arrived the vision soon mistrust,
Rein in and stand as one who sees the source
Of strong illusion, shaming thought to force
From off his mind the soil of passion's gust.

My brow I bare then and with slackened speed
Can view the country pleasant on all sides
And to kind salutation give good heed.
I ride as one who for his pleasure rides
And stroke the neck of my delighted steed
And seek what cheer the village inn provides.

XLI

AN idle June day on the sunny Thames,
Floating or rowing as our fancy led,
Now listening to sweet things the young birds said
And choosing now a nosegay from the gems
That star the embroidery of the bank that hems
The current that our skiff from Henley sped
To where the Cliefden woods o'er Maidenhead
Bar its still surface with their mirrored stems.

I would have life — thou saidst — all as this day,
Simple enjoyment calm in its excess,
With not a grief to cloud and not a ray
Of passion overhot my peace to oppress:
With no ambition to reproach delay,
Nor rapture to disturb its happiness.

XLII

WHETHER it be happiness to have enough
And fear no want while most are poorly fed,
To bring untired limbs to an easy bed
While any workman's couch is cold and rough :
And whether honour be of such dull stuff
As likes the peace for which a brother bled,
And virtue yet untried in comfort bred
Can know her name and feel no self-rebuff :

Or if to yield themselves to worse and worse
Were truly solace for the hearts that chafe —
Since their nobility would choose the curse
Rather to be than once deride the waif,
Or hear the laugh — O blame not my poor verse
That it is sad while comfort still is safe.

XLIII

A MAN that sees by chance his picture, made
As once a child he was, handling some toy,
Will gaze to find his spirit within the boy,
Yet hath no secret with the soul portrayed :
He cannot think the simple thought which played
Upon those features then so frank and coy :
'T is his, yet oh, not his : and o'er the joy
His fatherly pity bends in tears dismayed.

Proud of his prime maybe he stand at best
And lightly wear his strength or aim it high,
Most master now of all he e'er possess :
Yet in the pictured face a charm doth lie,
The one thing lost more worth than all the rest,
Which seeing he fears to say — This child was I.

XLIV

TEARS of love, tears of joy and tears of care,
Comforting tears that fell uncomforted,
Tears o'er the new-born, tears beside the dead,
Tears of hope, pride and pity, trust and prayer :
Tears of contrition, all tears whatso'er,
Of tenderness or kindness had she shed
Who here is pictured, ere upon her head
The fine gold might be turned to silver there.

The smile that charmed the father hath given place
Unto the furrowed care wrought by the son :
But virtue hath transformed all change to grace.
So that I praise the artist who hath done
A portrait for my worship of the face
Won by the heart my father's heart that won.

XLV

IF I could but forget and not recall
So well my time of pleasure and of play
When ancient nature was all new and gay
Light as the fashion that doth last enthrall :
Ah mighty nature, when my heart was small
Nor dreamed what fearful searchings underlay
The flowers and leafy ecstasy of may,
The breathing summer sloth, the scented fall.

Could I forget, then were the fight not hard,
Pressed in the melee of accurséd things,
Having such help in love and such reward :
But that 't is I who once — 't is this that stings —
Once dwelt within the gate that angels guard,
Where yet I 'd be had I but heavenly wings.

XLVI

WHEN I see childhood on the threshold seize
The prize of life from age and likelihood,
I mourn time's change that will not be withstood,
Thinking how Christ said — Be like one of these :
For in the forest among many trees
Scarce one in all is found that hath made good
The virgin pattern of its slender wood
That courtesied in joy to every breeze :

But scathed, but knotted trunks that raise on high
Their arms in stiff contortion, strained and bare :
Whose crowns in patriarchal sorrow sigh.
So little children ye — nay nay, ye ne'er
From me shall learn how sure the change and nigh
When ye shall share our strength and mourn to share.

XLVII

WHEN parched with thirst, astray on sultry sands
The traveller faints, upon his closing ear
Steals a fantastic music : he may hear
The babbling fountain of his native land.
Before his eyes the vision seems to stand
Where at its terraced brink the maids appear
Who fill their deep urns at its waters clear
And not refuse the help of lover's hand.

O cruel jest — he cries, as some one flings
The sparkling drops in sport or shew of ire —
O shameless, O contempt of holy things.
But never of their wanton play they tire
As not athirst they sit beside the springs
While he must quench in death his lost desire.

XLVIII

THE image of thy love, rising on dark
And desperate days above my sullen sea
Wakens again fresh hope and peace in me,
Gleaming above upon my groaning bark.
Whate'er my sorrow be I then may hark
A loving voice : whate'er my terror be
This heavenly comfort still I win from thee
To shine my lodestar that wert once my mark.

Prodigal nature makes us but to taste
One perfect joy, which given she niggard grows
And lest her precious gift should run to waste
Adds to its loss a thousand lesser woes :
So to the memory of the gift that graced
Her hand, her graceless hand more grace bestows.

XLIX

I WILL not marry thee, sweet Hope — I said —
For all thy beauty nor thy promise sworn :
Though thou the dayspring pledge, and rosy morn
Already captive in thy train hast led.
No clouded terror o'er the sun is spread,
No noonday darkness like of love outworn :
The cold star on his shining orbit borne
With all his valleys dry, his verdure dead.

Nor hast thou any power to thrust aside
Fate's cruel hand, nor any refuge shewn
Where comfortless my widowed shame could hide.
For me — in my cold sepulchre I'd groan
Hearing men say, — See Hope, so late love's bride,
Whom now this vain Ambition has made his own.

L

In this neglected, ruined edifice
Of works unperfected and broken schemes,
Where is the promise of my early dreams,
The smile of beauty and the pearl of price?
No charm is left now that could once entice
Wind-wavering fortune from her golden streams,
And full in flight decrepit purpose seems
Trailing the banner of his old device.

Within the house a frore and numbing air
Has chilled endeavour: sickly memories reign
In every room and ghosts are on the stair:
And hope behind the dusty window-pane
Watches the days go by, and half aware
Forecasts her last reproach and mortal stain.

LI

ONCE I would say, before thy vision came,
My joy, my life, my love, and with some kind
Of knowledge speak and think I knew my mind
Of heaven and hope, and each word hit its aim.
Whate'er their sounds be, now all mean the same,
Denoting each the fair I cannot find :
Or if I say them 't is as one long blind
Forgets what sights they were he used to name.

Now if men speak of love 't is not my love
Nor are their hopes nor joys mine, nor the life
They choose for praise the life I reckon of :
Nay though they turn from house and child and wife
And self, and in the thought of heaven above
Hold, as do I, all mortal things at strife.

LII

SINCE then 't is only pity looking back,
Fear looking forward, and the busy mind
Will in one woeful moment more upwind
Than lifelong years unroll of bitter or black :
What is man's privilege, his hoarding knack
Of memory with foreboding so combined,
Whereby he comes to dream he hath of kind
The perpetuity which all things lack ?

Which but to hope is doubtful joy, to have
Being a continuance of what, alas,
We mourn and scarcely bear with to the grave :
Or something so unknown that it o'erpass
The thought of comfort : and the sense that gave
Cannot consider it through any glass.

LIII

COME gentle sleep, I woo thee : come and take
Not now the child into thine arms, from fright
Composed by drowsy tune and shaded light,
Whom ignorant of thee thou didst nurse and make :
Nor now the boy who scorned thee for the sake
Of growing knowledge or mysterious night,
Though with fatigue thou didst his limbs invite
And heavily weigh the eyes he strove to wake :

No, nor the man severe who from his best
Failing, alert fled to thee, that his breath,
Blood, force and fire should come at morn redrest :
But me, from whom thy comfort tarrieth,
For all my wakeful prayer sent without rest
To thee, O shew and shadow of my death.

LET man lament his lot and then lament
That he must so lament and then complain
That all his lamentations are in vain :
His tears betray his true affections bent.
For liefest love first falls to discontent :
As they who best know health will rage at pain
And pine beyond their sickness to regain
Their treasure treasured most when lost or spent :

Which being in them a dolour, none the less
Inspires the cries of prime. The truly sad
Are dumb : and they but honour happiness
Who hanker after joys that once they had :
Or surfeited of sweets turn and confess
Their pleasure is to be no longer glad.

LV

THE spirit's eager sense for sad or gay
Filleth with what he will our vessel full :
Be joy his bent, he waiteth not joy's day
But like a child at any toy will pull :

 If sorrow, he will mourn for fancy's sake
And spoil heaven's plenty with forbidden care.
What fortune most denies we slave to take :
Nor can fate load us more than we can bear.

 And since in having, pleasure disappeareth,
He who hath least in hand hath most at heart
While he can hope : as he who always feareth
A grief that never comes hath still the smart :

 And worse than true is such unreal distress
For when God sendeth sorrow, it doth bless.

LVI

THE world comes not to an end : her city-hives
Swarm with the tokens of a changeless trade,
With rolling wheel, driver and flagging jade,
Rich men and beggars, children, priests and wives.
New homes on old are set as lives on lives,
Invention with invention overlaid :
But still or tool or toy or book or blade
Shaped for the hand that holds and toils and strives.

The men I meet work as their fathers wrought
With little bettered means : for works depend
On works and overlap, and thought on thought.
And through all change the smiles of hope amend
The weariest face, the same love changed in nought :
In this thing too the world comes not to an end.

LVII

SINCE in the love of Christ my enterprise
To do thee honour groweth day by day,
And with the growth of love the words I say
Are daily worthier of thee and more wise :
Like a rich Jew I book my merchandise
In fairest hand and hoard my gains away,
Counting the hours ere I shall quite repay
More than the full account against me lies :

But not the joy : alas I in my grave
Shall be and thou in thine ere this befall :
'T is but a memory my verse can save.
Of this my wealth too if I give thee all
Sorrow for pleasure pay I, and I crave
A loan of time that flies beyond recall.

LVIII

O MY uncared-for songs what are ye worth,
That in my secret book with so much care
I write you, this one here and that one there,
Marking the time and order of your birth?
Now, with a fancy so unkind to mirth,
A sense so hard, a style so worn and bare,
Look ye for any welcome anywhere
From any shelf or heart-home on the earth?

Should others ask you this, say then I yearned
To write you such as once, when I was young,
Finding I should have loved and thereto turned.
'T were something yet to live again among
The gentle youth beloved and where I learned
My art be there remembered for my song.

LIX

WHO takes the census of the living dead,
Ere the day come when memory shall o'ercrowd
The kingdom of their fame, and for that proud
And airy people find no room nor stead ?

Ere hoarding Time, that ever thrusteth back
The fairest treasures of his ancient store,
Better with best confound, so he may pack
His greedy gatherings closer, more and more ?

Let the true Muse rewrite her sullied page
And purge her story of the men of hate,
That they go dirgeless down to Satan's rage
With all else foul deformed and miscreate :

She hath full toil to keep the names we love
Honoured on earth as they are bright above.

LX

I HEARD great Hector sounding war's alarms
Where through the listless ghosts chiding he strode,
As though the Greeks besieged his last abode,
And he his Troy's hope still, her king at arms.
But on those gentle meads where nothing harms
And purpose perishes, his passion glowed
Like the cold nightworm's candle nor scarce shewed
The heart death kills not quite nor Lethé charms.

'T was plain to read even by those shadows quaint
How rude catastrophe had dimmed his day
And blighted all his cheer with stern complaint.
To arms, to arms, — what more the voice would say
Was swallowed in the valleys and grew faint
Upon the thin air as he passed away.

LXI

SINCE peace came down to me, I well know whence,
O perfected and happy spirit, 't was sped :
And who did lead me whither I was led,
Drawn by sweet airs and plaintive innocence.
So lost when thou didst seem departing hence,
I too enrolled myself among the dead
And left my home of homes unvisited,
Exiled from memory for my woe's defence.

But see the doors fast shut by grief and pride,
Reopened : see kind peace returned in spite
Of this sad heart which thee so long denied :
For thou my joy, whate'er, or day or night,
I think or do, again art by my side,
My lost and won, my treasure and life's delight.

LXII

SWEET sleep, dear unadornéd bride of toil,
Whom in the dusk of night men's bodies low
Lie to receive, and thy loved coming know,
Closing the cloudy gate on day's turmoil :
Thou through the soft ways enterest to despoil
The ready spirit and on worn flesh bestow
Such comfort as through trembling souls will flow
When God's Welldone doth all their sins assoil.

Thought looseth at thy touch her troubled hold,
Hand, eye and ear fail, and the world's fair show
Is blotted clean : or then thou mayst unfold —
Brightening the hours of sure renewal slow —
Thy careless pageantries, pictures untold,
Joys which the tasking sun melteth like snow.

LXIII

SINCE not the enamoured sun with glance more fond
Kisses the foliage of his sacred tree,
Than doth my waking thought arise on thee,
Loving none near thee, like thee nor beyond :
Nay since I am sworn thy slave and in the bond
Is writ my promise of eternity :
Since to such high hope thou'st encouraged me
That if thou look but from me I despond :

Since thou 'rt my all in all, O think of this :
Think of the dedication of my youth :
Think of my loyalty, my joy, my bliss :
Think of my sorrow, my despair and ruth,
My sheer annihilation if I miss :
Think — if thou shouldst be false — think of thy truth.

LXIV

THESE meagre rhymes which a returning mood
Sometimes o'errateth, I as oft despise :
And knowing them illnated, stiff and rude,
See them as others with contemptuous eyes.

Nay and I wonder less at God's respect
For man, a minim jot in time and space,
Than at the soaring faith of His elect,
That gift of gifts, the comfort of His grace.

O work unsearchable, O heavenly love,
Most infinitely tender, so to touch
The work that we can meanly reckon of :
Surely — I say — we are favoured overmuch.

But of this wonder, what doth most amaze
Is that we know our love is held for praise.

LXV

BEAUTY sat with me all the summer day,
Awaiting the sure triumph of her eye :
Nor marked I till we parted how, hard by,
Love in her train stood ready for his prey.
She as too proud to join herself the fray,
Trusting too much to her divine ally,
When she saw victory tarry chid him — Why
Dost thou not at one stroke this rebel slay ?

Then generous Love who holds my heart in fee
Told of our ancient truce : so from the fight
We straight withdrew our forces, all the three.
Baffled but not disheartened she took flight,
Scheming new tactics : Love came home with me
And prompts my measured verses as I write.

LXVI

IN autumn moonlight when the white air wan
Is fragrant in the wake of summer hence
'T is sweet to sit entranced and muse thereon
In melancholy and godlike indolence :

When the proud spirit lulled by mortal prime
To fond pretence of immortality
Vieweth all moments from the birth of time,
All things whate'er have been or yet shall be.

And like the garden where the year is spent,
The ruin of old life is full of yearning,
Mingling poetic rapture of lament
With flowers and sunshine of spring's sure returning :

Only in visions of the white air wan
By godlike fancy seized and dwelt upon.

LXVII

WHEN first I saw thee, dearest, if I say
The spells that conjure back the hour and place,
And evermore I look upon thy face,
As in the spring of years long passed away :
No fading of thy beauty's rich array,
No detriment of age on thee I trace,
But time's defeat written in spoils of grace,
Robbed from the rivals thou didst pity and slay.

So hath thy growth been, thus thy faith is true,
Unchanged in change, still to my growing sense,
To life's desire the same, and nothing new :
But as thou wert in dream and prescience
At love's arising, now thou standst to view
In the broad noon of his magnificence.

LXVIII

'T WAS on the very day winter took leave
Of those fair fields I love, when to the skies
The fragrant Earth was smiling in surprise
At that her heaven-descended quick reprieve,
I wandered forth my sorrow to relieve,
Yet walked amid sweet pleasure in such wise
As Adam went alone in Paradise,
Before God of His pity fashioned Eve.

And out of tune with all the joy around
I laid me down beneath a flowering tree
And o'er my senses crept a sleep profound :
In which it seemed that thou wert given to me,
Rending my body where with hurried sound
I feel my heart beat when I think of thee.

LXIX

Love that I know, love I am wise in, love
My strength, my pride, my grace, my skill untaught,
My faith here upon earth, my hope above,
My contemplation and perpetual thought :
 The pleasure of my fancy, my heart's fire,
My joy, my peace, my praise, my happy theme,
The aim of all my doing, my desire
Of being, my life by day, by night my dream :

 Love, my sweet melancholy, my distress,
My pain, my doubt, my trouble, my despair,
My only folly and unhappiness,
And in my careless moments still my care :
 O love, sweet love, earthly love, love divine,
Sayst thou to-day, O love, that thou art mine ?

LXX

THE dark and serious angel who so long
Vexed his immortal strength in charge of me
Hath smiled for joy and fled in liberty
To take his pastime with the peerless throng.
Oft had I done his noble keeping wrong,
Wounding his heart to wonder what might be
God's purpose in a soul of such degree :
And there he had left me but for mandate strong.

But seeing thee with me now, his task at close
He knoweth, and wherefore he was bid to stay
And work confusion of so many foes.
The thanks he looks to have from me I pay,
Yet fear some heavenly envy as he goes
Unto what great reward I cannot say.

LXXI

THOUGH others love Thee less I will stand true,
Nor can it be that I should ever leave Thee :
Thou knowest my heart and if it could deceive Thee
It would not wrong Thee thus as others do.
I spend the day telling my vows anew,
And hold my courage ready lest I grieve Thee,
And count my words lest chance offence bereave Thee
Of one poor sheep out of Thy flock so few :

And call on Thee my Lord, my Strength, my Stay,
That if I faint or fall Thou wilt restore me
And feed me with fresh comfort day by day.
Nay though it be Thy terrors all pass o'er me
Lo, I will fear no evil, for I say,
Surely Thy grace will be sufficient for me.

LXXII

I WILL be what God made me, nor protest
Against the bent of genius in my time :
That science of my friends robs all the best,
While I love beauty and was born to rhyme.

Be they our mighty men and let me dwell
In shadow among the mighty shades of old,
With love's forsaken palace for my cell :
Whence I look forth and all the world behold :

And say, — These better days, in best things worse,
This bastardy of time's magnificence,
Will mend in fashion and throw off the curse,
To crown new love with higher excellence.

Cursed though I be to live my life alone,
My toil is for man's joy, his joy my own.

LXXIII

I LIVE on hope and that I think do all
Who come into this world, and since I see
Myself in swim with such good company
I take my comfort whatsoe'er befall.
I abide and abide, as if more stout and tall
My spirit would grow by waiting like a tree :
And clear of others' toil it pleaseth me
In dreams their quick ambition to forestall.

And if through careless eagerness I slide
To some accomplishment, I give my voice
Still to desire and in desire abide.
I have no stake abroad : if I rejoice
In what is done or doing, I confide
Neither to friend nor foe my secret choice.

LXXIV

YE blessed saints that now in heaven enjoy
The purchase of those tears the world's disdain,
Doth love still with his war your peace annoy,
Or hath Death freed you from his ancient pain ?

Have ye no springtide and no burst of May
In flowers and leafy trees, when solemn night
Pants with love music, and the holy day
Breaks on the ear with songs of heavenly light ?

What make ye and what strive for ? keep ye thought
Of us, or in new excellence divine
Is old forgot : or do ye count for naught
What the Greek did and what the Florentine ?

We keep your memories well : O in your store
Live not our best joys treasured evermore ?

LXXV

AN heavenly joy! But who hath ever heard,
Who hath seen joy, or who shall ever find
Joy's language? There is neither speech nor word :
Nought but itself to teach it to mankind.

Scarce in our twenty thousand painful days
We may touch something : but there lives — beyond
The best of art, or nature's kindest phase —
The hope whereof our spirit is fain and fond :

The cause of beauty given to man's desires,
Writ in the expectancy of starry skies,
The faith which gloweth in our fleeting fires,
The aim of all the excellence we prize :

Which but to love, pursue and pray for well
Maketh earth heaven, and to forget it, hell.

LXXVI

My wearied heart, whenever, after all,
Its loves and yearnings shall be told complete,
When gentle death shall bid it cease to beat,
And from all dear illusions disenthral:
However then thou shalt appear to call
My fearful heart, since down at others' feet
It bade me kneel so oft, I'll not retreat
From thee nor fear before thy feet to fall.

And I shall say,— Receive this loving heart
Which erred in sorrow only: and in sin
Took no delight: but being forced apart
From thee, without thee hoping thee to win,
Most prized what most thou madest as thou art
On earth, till heaven were open to enter in.

LXXVII

DREARY was winter, wet with changeful sting
Of clinging snowfall and fast-flying frost :
And bitterer northwinds then withheld the spring
That dallied with her promise till 't was lost.

A sunless and half-hearted summer drowned
The flowers in needful and unwelcomed rain :
And Autumn with a sad smile fled uncrowned
From fruitless orchards and unripened grain.

But could the skies of this most desolate year
In its last month learn with our love to glow,
Men yet should rank its cloudless atmosphere
Above the sunsets of five years ago :

Of my great praise too part should be its own,
Now reckoned peerless for thy love alone.

LXXVIII

AWAY now, lovely Muse, roam and be free :
Our commerce ends for aye, thy task is done :
Though to win thee I left all else unwon,
Thou whom I most have won art not for me.
My first desire, thou too forgone must be,
Thou too O much lamented now though none
Will turn to pity thy forsaken son,
Nor the divine sisters will weep for thee.

None will weep for thee : thou return, O Muse,
To thy Sicilian fields : I once have been
On thy loved hills, and where thou first didst use
Thy sweetly balanced rhyme, unthankful queen,
Have plucked and wreathed thy flowers : but do thou choose
Some happier brow to wear thy garlands green.

LXXIX

ETERNAL FATHER who didst all create,
In whom we live and to whose bosom move,
To all men be Thy name known which is Love,
Till its loud praises sound at heaven's high gate.
Perfect Thy kingdom in our passing state,
That here on earth Thou mayst as well approve
Our service as Thou ownest theirs above
Whose joy we echo and in pain await.

Grant body and soul each day their daily bread :
And should in spite of grace fresh woe begin,
Even as our anger soon is past and dead
Be Thy remembrance mortal of our sin :
By Thee in paths of peace Thy sheep be led,
And in the vale of terror comforted.

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NOTE.

SONNET XXXVI. The argument is partly from Michael Angelo:
Madrigal xix.

SONNET XXXVII. From Boccaccio.

SONNET LXXIII. Partly from the anonymous Sonnet No. 3,793, in
the Libro Reale "Io vivo di speranza."

SONNET LXXIV. The first four lines translated from Michael An-
gelo's Madrigal "Beati voi."



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