

Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

- poems -

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)

An English poet widely read by her contemporaries, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was born the eldest of eleven children in Coxhoe Hall near Durham. The family moved to Hope End in Herefordshire in 1809 where Elizabeth spent her childhood. An avid reader, she was educated at home where her father gave her access to his classical library. Her first volume of poems was privately published when she was 14.

She suffered from ill health for most of her life. Her mother died in 1828 and her father was forced to sell Hope End in 1832 during the Abolition movement with the result that the family moved to London. Ten years later Elizabeth was more or less an invalid, but used her confinement to write *Poems* (1844) which was celebrated by all and which led to her introduction by letter to the poet Robert Browning. She also became a good friend of Miss Mitford at this time. On 12 September 1846 she clandestinely married Browning, and moved immediately to Italy. They settled in Florence, in Casa Guidi where in 1849 she gave birth to a son, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning.

Her health improved greatly during her years in Italy, allowing her to travel throughout Europe. By the time of the publication of *Aurora Leigh*, a poem dealing with the restrictions imposed on women by Victorian society, she was firmly established as a poet of distinction. In fact, most of her work expresses her concern for the liberal causes of her day, including the cause of Italian nationalism. The *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850) altered the conventions of the love sonnet by the use of a tone of playful humour. In the last years of her life she was influenced by the popular interest in spiritualism. The *Poems Before Congress* (1860), although written in her final years when her health was deteriorating, are said to contain some of her most forceful and beautiful lyrics.

A Child Asleep

How he sleepeth! having drunken
Weary childhood's mandragore,
From his pretty eyes have sunken
Pleasures, to make room for more---
Sleeping near the withered nosegay, which he pulled the day before.

Nosegays! leave them for the waking:
Throw them earthward where they grew.
Dim are such, beside the breaking
Amaranths he looks unto---
Folded eyes see brighter colours than the open ever do.

Heaven-flowers, rayed by shadows golden
From the paths they sprang beneath,
Now perhaps divinely holden,
Swing against him in a wreath---
We may think so from the quickening of his bloom and of his breath.

Vision unto vision calleth,
While the young child dreameth on.
Fair, O dreamer, thee befalleth
With the glory thou hast won!
Darker wert thou in the garden, yestermorn, by summer sun.

We should see the spirits ringing
Round thee,---were the clouds away.
'Tis the child-heart draws them, singing
In the silent-seeming clay---
Singing!---Stars that seem the mutest, go in music all the way.

As the moths around a taper,
As the bees around a rose,
As the gnats around a vapour,---
So the Spirits group and close
Round about a holy childhood, as if drinking its repose.

Shapes of brightness overlean thee,---
Flash their diadems of youth
On the ringlets which half screen thee,---
While thou smilest, . . . not in sooth
Thy smile . . . but the overfair one, dropt from some aethereal mouth.

Haply it is angels' duty,
During slumber, shade by shade:
To fine down this childish beauty
To the thing it must be made,
Ere the world shall bring it praises, or the tomb shall see it fade.

Softly, softly! make no noises!
Now he lieth dead and dumb---
Now he hears the angels' voices
Folding silence in the room---

Now he muses deep the meaning of the Heaven-words as they come.

Speak not! he is consecrated---
Breathe no breath across his eyes.
Lifted up and separated,
On the hand of God he lies,
In a sweetness beyond touching---held in cloistral sanctities.

Could ye bless him---father---mother ?
Bless the dimple in his cheek?
Dare ye look at one another,
And the benediction speak?
Would ye not break out in weeping, and confess yourselves too weak?

He is harmless---ye are sinful,---
Ye are troubled---he, at ease:
From his slumber, virtue winful
Floweth outward with increase---
Dare not bless him! but be blessed by his peace---and go in peace.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Curse For A Nation

I heard an angel speak last night,
And he said 'Write!
Write a Nation's curse for me,
And send it over the Western Sea.'

I faltered, taking up the word:
'Not so, my lord!
If curses must be, choose another
To send thy curse against my brother.

'For I am bound by gratitude,
By love and blood,
To brothers of mine across the sea,
Who stretch out kindly hands to me.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
From the summits of love a curse is driven,
As lightning is from the tops of heaven.'

'Not so,' I answered. 'Evermore
My heart is sore
For my own land's sins: for little feet
Of children bleeding along the street:

'For parked-up honors that gainsay
The right of way:
For almsgiving through a door that is
Not open enough for two friends to kiss:

'For love of freedom which abates
Beyond the Straits:
For patriot virtue starved to vice on
Self-praise, self-interest, and suspicion:

'For an oligarchic parliament,
And bribes well-meant.
What curse to another land assign,
When heavy-souled for the sins of mine?'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.
Because thou hast strength to see and hate
A foul thing done within thy gate.'

'Not so,' I answered once again.
'To curse, choose men.
For I, a woman, have only known
How the heart melts and the tears run down.'

'Therefore,' the voice said, 'shalt thou write
My curse to-night.

Some women weep and curse, I say
(And no one marvels), night and day.

'And thou shalt take their part to-night,
Weep and write.
A curse from the depths of womanhood
Is very salt, and bitter, and good.'

So thus I wrote, and mourned indeed,
What all may read.
And thus, as was enjoined on me,
I send it over the Western Sea.

The Curse

Because ye have broken your own chain
With the strain
Of brave men climbing a Nation's height,
Yet thence bear down with brand and thong
On souls of others, -- for this wrong
This is the curse. Write.

Because yourselves are standing straight
In the state
Of Freedom's foremost acolyte,
Yet keep calm footing all the time
On writhing bond-slaves, -- for this crime
This is the curse. Write.

Because ye prosper in God's name,
With a claim
To honor in the old world's sight,
Yet do the fiend's work perfectly
In strangling martyrs, -- for this lie
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while kings conspire
Round the people's smouldering fire,
And, warm for your part,
Shall never dare -- O shame!
To utter the thought into flame
Which burns at your heart.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while nations strive
With the bloodhounds, die or survive,
Drop faint from their jaws,
Or throttle them backward to death;
And only under your breath
Shall favor the cause.
This is the curse. Write.

Ye shall watch while strong men draw
The nets of feudal law
 To strangle the weak;
And, counting the sin for a sin,
Your soul shall be sadder within
 Than the word ye shall speak.
 This is the curse. Write.

When good men are praying erect
That Christ may avenge His elect
 And deliver the earth,
The prayer in your ears, said low,
Shall sound like the tramp of a foe
 That's driving you forth.
 This is the curse. Write.

When wise men give you their praise,
They shall praise in the heat of the phrase,
 As if carried too far.
When ye boast your own charters kept true,
Ye shall blush; for the thing which ye do
 Derides what ye are.
 This is the curse. Write.

When fools cast taunts at your gate,
Your scorn ye shall somewhat abate
 As ye look o'er the wall;
For your conscience, tradition, and name
Explode with a deadlier blame
 Than the worst of them all.
 This is the curse. Write.

Go, wherever ill deeds shall be done,
Go, plant your flag in the sun
 Beside the ill-doers!
And recoil from clenching the curse
Of God's witnessing Universe
 With a curse of yours.
 This is the curse. Write.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Dead Rose

O Rose! who dares to name thee?
No longer roseate now, nor soft, nor sweet;
But pale, and hard, and dry, as stubble-wheat,---
Kept seven years in a drawer---thy titles shame thee.

The breeze that used to blow thee
Between the hedgerow thorns, and take away
An odour up the lane to last all day,---
If breathing now,---unsweetened would forego thee.

The sun that used to smite thee,
And mix his glory in thy gorgeous urn,
Till beam appeared to bloom, and flower to burn,---
If shining now,---with not a hue would light thee.

The dew that used to wet thee,
And, white first, grow incarnadined, because
It lay upon thee where the crimson was,---
If dropping now,---would darken where it met thee.

The fly that lit upon thee,
To stretch the tendrils of its tiny feet,
Along thy leaf's pure edges, after heat,---
If lighting now,---would coldly overrun thee.

The bee that once did suck thee,
And build thy perfumed ambers up his hive,
And swoon in thee for joy, till scarce alive,---
If passing now,---would blindly overlook thee.

The heart doth recognise thee,
Alone, alone! The heart doth smell thee sweet,
Doth view thee fair, doth judge thee most complete,---
Though seeing now those changes that disguise thee.

Yes, and the heart doth owe thee
More love, dead rose! than to such roses bold
As Julia wears at dances, smiling cold!---
Lie still upon this heart---which breaks below thee!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Man's Requirements

I

Love me Sweet, with all thou art,
Feeling, thinking, seeing;
Love me in the lightest part,
Love me in full being.

II

Love me with thine open youth
In its frank surrender;
With the vowing of thy mouth,
With its silence tender.

III

Love me with thine azure eyes,
Made for earnest grantings;
Taking colour from the skies,
Can Heaven's truth be wanting?

IV

Love me with their lids, that fall
Snow-like at first meeting;
Love me with thine heart, that all
Neighbours then see beating.

V

Love me with thine hand stretched out
Freely -- open-minded:
Love me with thy loitering foot, --
Hearing one behind it.

VI

Love me with thy voice, that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush that burns
When I murmur 'Love me!'

VII

Love me with thy thinking soul,
Break it to love-sighing;
Love me with thy thoughts that roll
On through living -- dying.

VIII

Love me in thy gorgeous airs,

When the world has crowned thee;
Love me, kneeling at thy prayers,
With the angels round thee.

IX

Love me pure, as muses do,
Up the woodlands shady:
Love me gaily, fast and true,
As a winsome lady.

X

Through all hopes that keep us brave,
Farther off or nigher,
Love me for the house and grave,
And for something higher.

XI

Thus, if thou wilt prove me, Dear,
Woman's love no fable,
I will love thee -- half a year --
As a man is able.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Musical Instrument

What was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river:
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

High on the shore sat the great god Pan
While turbidly flowed the river;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of the leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river!)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sat by the river.

'This is the way,' laughed the great god Pan
(Laughed while he sat by the river),
'The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.'
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,
He blew in power by the river.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan!
Piercing sweet by the river!
Blinding sweet, O great god Pan!
The sun on the hill forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, --
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds in the river.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Sea-Side Walk

We walked beside the sea,
After a day which perished silently
Of its own glory---like the Princess weird
Who, combating the Genius, scorched and seared,
Uttered with burning breath, 'Ho! victory!'
And sank adown, an heap of ashes pale;
So runs the Arab tale.

The sky above us showed
An universal and unmoving cloud,
On which, the cliffs permitted us to see
Only the outline of their majesty,
As master-minds, when gazed at by the crowd!
And, shining with a gloom, the water grey
Swang in its moon-taught way.

Nor moon nor stars were out.
They did not dare to tread so soon about,
Though trembling, in the footsteps of the sun.
The light was neither night's nor day's, but one
Which, life-like, had a beauty in its doubt;
And Silence's impassioned breathings round
Seemed wandering into sound.

O solemn-beating heart
Of nature! I have knowledge that thou art
Bound unto man's by cords he cannot sever---
And, what time they are slackened by him ever,
So to attest his own supernal part,
Still runneth thy vibration fast and strong,
The slackened cord along.

For though we never spoke
Of the grey water anal the shaded rock,---
Dark wave and stone, unconsciously, were fused
Into the plaintive speaking that we used,
Of absent friends and memories unforsook;
And, had we seen each other's face, we had
Seen haply, each was sad.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Thought For A Lonely Death-Bed

IF God compel thee to this destiny,
To die alone, with none beside thy bed
To ruffle round with sobs thy last word said
And mark with tears the pulses ebb from thee,--
Pray then alone, ' O Christ, come tenderly !
By thy forsaken Sonship in the red
Drear wine-press,--by the wilderness out-spread,--
And the lone garden where thine agony
Fell bloody from thy brow,--by all of those
Permitted desolations, comfort mine !
No earthly friend being near me, interpose
No deathly angel 'twixt my face and thine,
But stoop Thyself to gather my life's rose,
And smile away my mortal to Divine ! '

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Woman's Shortcomings

She has laughed as softly as if she sighed,
She has counted six, and over,
Of a purse well filled, and a heart well tried -
Oh, each a worthy lover!
They "give her time"; for her soul must slip
Where the world has set the grooving;
She will lie to none with her fair red lip:
But love seeks truer loving.

She trembles her fan in a sweetness dumb,
As her thoughts were beyond recalling;
With a glance for one, and a glance for some,
From her eyelids rising and falling;
Speaks common words with a blushful air,
Hears bold words, unreproving;
But her silence says - what she never will swear -
And love seeks better loving.

Go, lady! lean to the night-guitar,
And drop a smile to the bringer;
Then smile as sweetly, when he is far,
At the voice of an in-door singer.
Bask tenderly beneath tender eyes;
Glance lightly, on their removing;
And join new vows to old perjuries -
But dare not call it loving!

Unless you can think, when the song is done,
No other is soft in the rhythm;
Unless you can feel, when left by One,
That all men else go with him;
Unless you can know, when unpraised by his breath,
That your beauty itself wants proving;
Unless you can swear "For life, for death!" -
Oh, fear to call it loving!

Unless you can muse in a crowd all day
On the absent face that fixed you;
Unless you can love, as the angels may,
With the breadth of heaven betwixt you;
Unless you can dream that his faith is fast,
Through behoving and unbehoving;
Unless you can die when the dream is past -
Oh, never call it loving!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A Year's Spinning

1
He listened at the porch that day,
To hear the wheel go on, and on;
And then it stopped, ran back away,
While through the door he brought the sun:
But now my spinning is all done.

2
He sat beside me, with an oath
That love ne'er ended, once begun;
I smiled--believing for us both,
What was the truth for only one:
And now my spinning is all done.

3
My mother cursed me that I heard
A young man's wooing as I spun:
Thanks, cruel mother, for that word--
For I have, since, a harder known!
And now my spinning is all done.

4
I thought--O God!--my first-born's cry
Both voices to mine ear would drown:
I listened in mine agony--
It was the silence made me groan!
And now my spinning is all done.

5
Bury me 'twixt my mother's grave,
(Who cursed me on her death-bed lone)
And my dead baby's (God it save!)
Who, not to bless me, would not moan.
And now my spinning is all done.

6
A stone upon my heart and head,
But no name written on the stone!
Sweet neighbours, whisper low instead,
"This sinner was a loving one--"
And now her spinning is all done."

7
And let the door ajar remain,
In case he should pass by anon;
And leave the wheel out very plain,--
That HE, when passing in the sun,
May see the spinning is all done.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Adequacy

NOW, by the verdure on thy thousand hills,
Beloved England, doth the earth appear
Quite good enough for men to overbear
The will of God in, with rebellious wills !
We cannot say the morning-sun fulfils
Ingloriously its course, nor that the clear
Strong stars without significance insphere
Our habitation: we, meantime, our ills
Heap up against this good and lift a cry
Against this work-day world, this ill-spread feast,
As if ourselves were better certainly
Than what we come to. Maker and High Priest,
I ask thee not my joys to multiply,--
Only to make me worthier of the least.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

An Apprehension

IF all the gentlest-hearted friends I know
Concentred in one heart their gentleness,
That still grew gentler till its pulse was less
For life than pity,--I should yet be slow
To bring my own heart nakedly below
The palm of such a friend, that he should press
Motive, condition, means, appliances,

My false ideal joy and fickle woe,
Out full to light and knowledge; I should fear
Some plait between the brows, some rougher chime
In the free voice. O angels, let your flood
Of bitter scorn dash on me ! do ye hear
What I say who hear calmly all the time
This everlasting face to face with GOD ?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Aurora Leigh (excerpts)

[Book 1]

I am like,
They tell me, my dear father. Broader brows
Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth
Of delicate features, -- paler, near as grave ;
But then my mother's smile breaks up the whole,
And makes it better sometimes than itself.
So, nine full years, our days were hid with God
Among his mountains : I was just thirteen,
Still growing like the plants from unseen roots
In tongue-tied Springs, -- and suddenly awoke
To full life and life 's needs and agonies,
With an intense, strong, struggling heart beside
A stone-dead father. Life, struck sharp on death,
Makes awful lightning. His last word was, `Love --'
`Love, my child, love, love !' -- (then he had done with grief)
`Love, my child.' Ere I answered he was gone,
And none was left to love in all the world.
There, ended childhood. What succeeded next
I recollect as, after fevers, men
Thread back the passage of delirium,
Missing the turn still, baffled by the door ;
Smooth endless days, notched here and there with knives ;
A weary, wormy darkness, spurr'd i' the flank
With flame, that it should eat and end itself
Like some tormented scorpion. Then at last
I do remember clearly, how there came
A stranger with authority, not right,
(I thought not) who commanded, caught me up
From old Assunta's neck ; how, with a shriek,
She let me go, -- while I, with ears too full
Of my father's silence, to shriek back a word,
In all a child's astonishment at grief
Stared at the wharf-edge where she stood and moaned,
My poor Assunta, where she stood and moaned !
The white walls, the blue hills, my Italy,
Drawn backward from the shuddering steamer-deck,
Like one in anger drawing back her skirts
Which supplicants catch at. Then the bitter sea
Inexorably pushed between us both,
And sweeping up the ship with my despair
Threw us out as a pasture to the stars.
Ten nights and days we voyaged on the deep ;
Ten nights and days, without the common face
Of any day or night ; the moon and sun
Cut off from the green reconciling earth,
To starve into a blind ferocity
And glare unnatural ; the very sky
(Dropping its bell-net down upon the sea
As if no human heart should 'scape alive,)
Bedraggled with the desolating salt,
Until it seemed no more that holy heaven

To which my father went. All new and strange
 The universe turned stranger, for a child.
 Then, land ! -- then, England ! oh, the frosty cliffs
 Looked cold upon me. Could I find a home
 Among those mean red houses through the fog ?
 And when I heard my father's language first
 From alien lips which had no kiss for mine
 I wept aloud, then laughed, then wept, then wept,
 And some one near me said the child was mad
 Through much sea-sickness. The train swept us on.
 Was this my father's England ? the great isle ?
 The ground seemed cut up from the fellowship
 Of verdure, field from field, as man from man ;
 The skies themselves looked low and positive,
 As almost you could touch them with a hand,
 And dared to do it they were so far off
 From God's celestial crystals ; all things blurred
 And dull and vague. Did Shakspeare and his mates
 Absorb the light here ? -- not a hill or stone
 With heart to strike a radiant colour up
 Or active outline on the indifferent air.
 I think I see my father's sister stand
 Upon the hall-step of her country-house
 To give me welcome. She stood straight and calm,
 Her somewhat narrow forehead braided tight
 As if for taming accidental thoughts
 From possible pulses ; brown hair pricked with grey
 By frigid use of life, (she was not old
 Although my father's elder by a year)
 A nose drawn sharply yet in delicate lines ;
 A close mild mouth, a little soured about
 The ends, through speaking unrequited loves
 Or peradventure niggardly half-truths ;
 Eyes of no colour, -- once they might have smiled,
 But never, never have forgot themselves
 In smiling ; cheeks, in which was yet a rose
 Of perished summers, like a rose in a book,
 Kept more for ruth than pleasure, -- if past bloom,
 Past fading also.

She had lived, we'll say,
 A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
 A quiet life, which was not life at all,
 (But that, she had not lived enough to know)
 Between the vicar and the country squires,
 The lord-lieutenant looking down sometimes
 From the empyrean to assure their souls
 Against chance-vulgarisms, and, in the abyss
 The apothecary, looked on once a year
 To prove their soundness of humility.
 The poor-club exercised her Christian gifts
 Of knitting stockings, stitching petticoats,
 Because we are of one flesh after all

And need one flannel (with a proper sense
Of difference in the quality) -- and still
The book-club, guarded from your modern trick
Of shaking dangerous questions from the crease,
Preserved her intellectual. She had lived
A sort of cage-bird life, born in a cage,
Accounting that to leap from perch to perch
Was act and joy enough for any bird.
Dear heaven, how silly are the things that live
In thickets, and eat berries !

I, alas,

A wild bird scarcely fledged, was brought to her cage,
And she was there to meet me. Very kind.
Bring the clean water, give out the fresh seed.
She stood upon the steps to welcome me,
Calm, in black garb. I clung about her neck, --
Young babes, who catch at every shred of wool
To draw the new light closer, catch and cling
Less blindly. In my ears, my father's word
Hummed ignorantly, as the sea in shells,
'Love, love, my child.' She, black there with my grief,
Might feel my love -- she was his sister once,
I clung to her. A moment, she seemed moved,
Kissed me with cold lips, suffered me to cling,
And drew me feebly through the hall into
The room she sate in.

There, with some strange spasm
Of pain and passion, she wrung loose my hands
Imperiously, and held me at arm's length,
And with two grey-steel naked-bladed eyes
Searched through my face, -- ay, stabbed it through and through,
Through brows and cheeks and chin, as if to find
A wicked murderer in my innocent face,
If not here, there perhaps. Then, drawing breath,
She struggled for her ordinary calm
And missed it rather, -- told me not to shrink,
As if she had told me not to lie or swear, --
'She loved my father, and would love me too
As long as I deserved it.' Very kind.

[Book 5]

AURORA LEIGH, be humble. Shall I hope
To speak my poems in mysterious tune
With man and nature ? -- with the lava-lymph
That trickles from successive galaxies
Still drop by drop adown the finger of God
In still new worlds ? -- with summer-days in this ?
That scarce dare breathe they are so beautiful ?--
With spring's delicious trouble in the ground,
Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,
And softly pricked by golden crocus-sheaves

In token of the harvest-time of flowers ?--
 With winters and with autumns, -- and beyond,
 With the human heart's large seasons, when it hopes
 And fears, joys, grieves, and loves ? -- with all that strain
 Of sexual passion, which devours the flesh
 In a sacrament of souls ? with mother's breasts
 Which, round the new-made creatures hanging there,
 Throb luminous and harmonious like pure spheres ? --
 With multitudinous life, and finally
 With the great escapings of ecstatic souls,
 Who, in a rush of too long prisoned flame,
 Their radiant faces upward, burn away
 This dark of the body, issuing on a world,
 Beyond our mortal ? -- can I speak my verse
 Sp plainly in tune to these things and the rest,
 That men shall feel it catch them on the quick,
 As having the same warrant over them
 To hold and move them if they will or no,
 Alike imperious as the primal rhythm
 Of that theurgic nature ? I must fail,
 Who fail at the beginning to hold and move
 One man, -- and he my cousin, and he my friend,
 And he born tender, made intelligent,
 Inclined to ponder the precipitous sides
 Of difficult questions ; yet, obtuse to me,
 Of me, incurious ! likes me very well,
 And wishes me a paradise of good,
 Good looks, good means, and good digestion, -- ay,
 But otherwise evades me, puts me off
 With kindness, with a tolerant gentleness, --
 Too light a book for a grave man's reading ! Go,
 Aurora Leigh : be humble.

There it is,
 We women are too apt to look to One,
 Which proves a certain impotence in art.
 We strain our natures at doing something great,
 Far less because it 's something great to do,
 Than haply that we, so, commend ourselves
 As being not small, and more appreciable
 To some one friend. We must have mediators
 Betwixt our highest conscience and the judge ;
 Some sweet saint's blood must quicken in our palms
 Or all the life in heaven seems slow and cold :
 Good only being perceived as the end of good,
 And God alone pleased, -- that's too poor, we think,
 And not enough for us by any means.
 Ay, Romney, I remember, told me once
 We miss the abstract when we comprehend.
 We miss it most when we aspire, -- and fail.
 Yet, so, I will not. -- This vile woman's way
 Of trailing garments, shall not trip me up :
 I 'll have no traffic with the personal thought

In art's pure temple. Must I work in vain,
Without the approbation of a man ?
It cannot be ; it shall not. Fame itself,
That approbation of the general race,
Presents a poor end, (though the arrow speed,
Shot straight with vigorous finger to the white,)
And the highest fame was never reached except
By what was aimed above it. Art for art,
And good for God Himself, the essential Good !
We 'll keep our aims sublime, our eyes erect,
Although our woman-hands should shake and fail ;
And if we fail .. But must we ? --
 Shall I fail ?

The Greeks said grandly in their tragic phrase,
' Let no one be called happy till his death.'
To which I add, -- Let no one till his death
Be called unhappy. Measure not the work
Until the day 's out and the labour done,
Then bring your gauges. If the day's work 's scant,
Why, call it scant ; affect no compromise ;
And, in that we have nobly striven at least,
Deal with us nobly, women though we be.
And honour us with truth if not with praise.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Autumn, The

Go, sit upon the lofty hill,
And turn your eyes around,
Where waving woods and waters wild
Do hymn an autumn sound.
The summer sun is faint on them --
The summer flowers depart --
Sit still -- as all transform'd to stone,
Except your musing heart.

How there you sat in summer-time,
May yet be in your mind;
And how you heard the green woods sing
Beneath the freshening wind.
Though the same wind now blows around,
You would its blast recall;
For every breath that stirs the trees,
Doth cause a leaf to fall.

Oh! like that wind, is all the mirth
That flesh and dust impart:
We cannot bear its visitings,
When change is on the heart.
Gay words and jests may make us smile,
When Sorrow is asleep;
But other things must make us smile,
When Sorrow bids us weep!

The dearest hands that clasp our hands, --
Their presence may be o'er;
The dearest voice that meets our ear,
That tone may come no more!
Youth fades; and then, the joys of youth,
Which once refresh'd our mind,
Shall come -- as, on those sighing woods,
The chilling autumn wind.

Hear not the wind -- view not the woods;
Look out o'er vale and hill--
In spring, the sky encircled them --
The sky is round them still.
Come autumn's scathe -- come winter's cold --
Come change -- and human fate!
Whatever prospect Heaven doth bound,
Can ne'er be desolate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Best Thing in the World, The

What's the best thing in the world?
June-rose, by May-dew impearled;
Sweet south-wind, that means no rain;
Truth, not cruel to a friend;
Pleasure, not in haste to end;
Beauty, not self-decked and curled
Till its pride is over-plain;
Love, when, so, you're loved again.
What's the best thing in the world?
--Something out of it, I think.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Bianca Among The Nightingales

The cypress stood up like a church
That night we felt our love would hold,
And saintly moonlight seemed to search
And wash the whole world clean as gold;
The olives crystallized the vales'
Broad slopes until the hills grew strong:
The fireflies and the nightingales
Throbbled each to either, flame and song.
The nightingales, the nightingales.

Upon the angle of its shade
The cypress stood, self-balanced high;
Half up, half down, as double-made,
Along the ground, against the sky.
And we, too! from such soul-height went
Such leaps of blood, so blindly driven,
We scarce knew if our nature meant
Most passionate earth or intense heaven.
The nightingales, the nightingales.

We paled with love, we shook with love,
We kissed so close we could not vow;
Till Giulio whispered, 'Sweet, above
God's Ever guarantees this Now.'
And through his words the nightingales
Drove straight and full their long clear call,
Like arrows through heroic mails,
And love was awful in it all.
The nightingales, the nightingales.

O cold white moonlight of the north,
Refresh these pulses, quench this hell!
O coverture of death drawn forth
Across this garden-chamber... well!
But what have nightingales to do
In gloomy England, called the free.
(Yes, free to die in!...) when we two
Are sundered, singing still to me?
And still they sing, the nightingales.

I think I hear him, how he cried
'My own soul's life' between their notes.
Each man has but one soul supplied,
And that's immortal. Though his throat's
On fire with passion now, to her
He can't say what to me he said!
And yet he moves her, they aver.
The nightingales sing through my head.
The nightingales, the nightingales.

He says to her what moves her most.
He would not name his soul within

Her hearing, & rather pays her cost
With praises to her lips and chin.
Man has but one soul, 'tis ordained,
And each soul but one love, I add;
Yet souls are damned and love's profaned.
These nightingales will sing me mad!
The nightingales, the nightingales.

I marvel how the birds can sing.
There's little difference, in their view,
Betwixt our Tuscan trees that spring
As vital flames into the blue,
And dull round blots of foliage meant
Like saturated sponges here
To suck the fogs up. As content
Is he too in this land, 'tis clear.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

My native Florence! dear, forgone!
I see across the Alpine ridge
How the last feast-day of Saint John
Shot rockets from Carraia bridge.
The luminous city, tall with fire,
Trode deep down in that river of ours,
While many a boat with lamp and choir
Skimmed birdlike over glittering towers.
I will not hear these nightingales.

I seem to float, we seem to float
Down Arno's stream in festive guise;
A boat strikes flame into our boat,
And up that lady seems to rise
As then she rose. The shock had flashed
A vision on us! What a head,
What leaping eyeballs! & beauty dashed
To splendour by a sudden dread.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

Too bold to sin, too weak to die;
Such women are so. As for me,
I would we had drowned there, he and I,
That moment, loving perfectly.
He had not caught her with her loosed
Gold ringlets... rarer in the south...
Nor heard the 'Grazie tanto' bruised
To sweetness by her English mouth.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

She had not reached him at my heart
With her fine tongue, as snakes indeed
Kill flies; nor had I, for my part,
Yearned after, in my desperate need,

And followed him as he did her
To coasts left bitter by the tide,
Whose very nightingales, elsewhere
Delighting, torture and deride!
For still they sing, the nightingales.

A worthless woman! mere cold clay
As all false things are! but so fair,
She takes the breath of men away
Who gaze upon her unaware.
I would not play her larcenous tricks
To have her looks! She lied and stole,
And spat into my love's pure pyx
The rank saliva of her soul.
And still they sing, the nightingales.

I would not for her white and pink,
Though such he likes—her grace of limb,
Though such he has praised—nor yet, I think,
For life itself, though spent with him,
Commit such sacrilege, affront
God's nature which is love, intrude
'Twixt two affianced souls, and hunt
Like spiders, in the altar's wood.
I cannot bear these nightingales.

If she chose sin, some gentler guise
She might have sinned in, so it seems:
She might have pricked out both my eyes,
And I still seen him in my dreams!
- Or drugged me in my soup or wine,
Nor left me angry afterward:
To die here with his hand in mine
His breath upon me, were not hard.
(Our Lady hush these nightingales!)

But set a springe for him, 'mio ben',
My only good, my first last love!—
Though Christ knows well what sin is, when
He sees some things done they must move
Himself to wonder. Let her pass.
I think of her by night and day.
Must I too join her... out, alas!...
With Giulio, in each word I say!
And evermore the nightingales!

Giulio, my Giulio!—sing they so,
And you be silent? Do I speak,
And you not hear? An arm you throw
Round some one, and I feel so weak?
- Oh, owl-like birds! They sing for spite,
They sing for hate, they sing for doom!

They'll sing through death who sing through night,
They'll sing and stun me in the tomb—
The nightingales, the nightingales!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Change Upon Change

Five months ago the stream did flow,
The lilies bloomed within the sedge,
And we were lingering to and fro,
Where none will track thee in this snow,
Along the stream, beside the hedge.
Ah, Sweet, be free to love and go!
For if I do not hear thy foot,
The frozen river is as mute,
The flowers have dried down to the root:
And why, since these be changed since May,
Shouldst thou change less than they.

And slow, slow as the winter snow
The tears have drifted to mine eyes;
And my poor cheeks, five months ago
Set blushing at thy praises so,
Put paleness on for a disguise.
Ah, Sweet, be free to praise and go!
For if my face is turned too pale,
It was thine oath that first did fail, --
It was thy love proved false and frail, --
And why, since these be changed enow,
Should I change less than thou.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Cheerfulness Taught By Reason

I THINK we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God's. Had we no hope
Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
Of yon gray blank of sky, we might grow faint
To muse upon eternity's constraint
Round our aspirant souls; but since the scope
Must widen early, is it well to droop,
For a few days consumed in loss and taint ?
O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted
And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road
Singing beside the hedge. What if the bread
Be bitter in thine inn, and thou unshod
To meet the flints ? At least it may be said
' Because the way is short, I thank thee, God. '

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Chorus of Eden Spirits

HEARKEN, oh hearken! let your souls behind you
Turn, gently moved!
Our voices feel along the Dread to find you,
O lost, beloved!
Through the thick-shielded and strong-marshalled angels,
They press and pierce:
Our requiems follow fast on our evangels,—
Voice throbs in verse.
We are but orphaned spirits left in Eden
A time ago:
God gave us golden cups, and we were bidden
To feed you so.
But now our right hand hath no cup remaining,
No work to do,
The mystic hydromel is spilt, and staining
The whole earth through.
Most ineradicable stains, for showing
(Not interfused!)
That brighter colours were the world's foregoing,
Than shall be used.
Hearken, oh hearken! ye shall hearken surely
For years and years,
The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
Of spirits' tears.
The yearning to a beautiful denied you,
Shall strain your powers.
Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,
Resumed from ours.
In all your music, our pathetic minor
Your ears shall cross;
And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
With sense of loss.
We shall be near you in your poet-languors
And wild extremes,
What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
Or mock with dreams.
And when upon you, weary after roaming,
Death's seal is put,
By the foregone ye shall discern the coming,
Through eyelids shut.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Comfort

SPEAK low to me, my Saviour, low and sweet
From out the hallelujahs, sweet and low
Lest I should fear and fall, and miss Thee so
Who art not missed by any that entreat.
Speak to me as to Mary at thy feet !
And if no precious gums my hands bestow,
Let my tears drop like amber while I go
In reach of thy divinest voice complete
In humanest affection -- thus, in sooth,
To lose the sense of losing. As a child,
Whose song-bird seeks the wood for evermore
Is sung to in its stead by mother's mouth
Till, sinking on her breast, love-reconciled,
He sleeps the faster that he wept before.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Consolation

All are not taken; there are left behind
Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices, to make soft the wind:
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all this world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoin'd;
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving
I stood alone (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth)
Crying 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'—
I know a voice would sound, 'Daughter, I AM.
Can I suffice for Heaven and not for earth?'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Cry Of The Children, The

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers---
And that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west---
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!---
They are weeping in the playtime of the others
In the country of the free.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
Why their tears are falling so?---
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago---
The old tree is leafless in the forest---
The old year is ending in the frost---
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest---
The old hope is hardest to be lost:
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy---
"Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary;"
"Our young feet," they say, "are very weak!
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary
Our grave-rest is very far to seek.
Ask the old why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,---
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.

"True," say the young children, "it may happen
That we die before our time.
Little Alice died last year---the grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her---
Was no room for any work in the close clay:
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her
Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries!---
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes---
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in

The shroud, by the kirk-chime!
It is good when it happens," say the children,
"That we die before our time."

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have!
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city---
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do---
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty---
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!
But they answer, "Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap---
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping---
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground---
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

"For, all day, the wheels are droning, turning,---
Their wind comes in our faces,---
Till our hearts turn,---our head, with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places---
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling---
Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall---
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling---
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.---
And, all day, the iron wheels are droning;
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)
'Stop! be silent for to-day!' "

Ay! be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth---
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals---
Let them prove their inward souls against the notion
That they live in you, os under you, O wheels!---
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,

Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

Now, tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray---
So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, "Who is God that He should hear us,
White the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word!
And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door:
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
Hears our weeping any more?

"Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,---
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words except 'Our Father,'
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
'Come and rest with me, my child.'

"But no!" say the children, weeping faster,
"He is speechless as a stone;
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!" say the children,---"Up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving---
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving---
And the children doubt of each.

And well may the children weep before you;
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun:
They know the grief of man, but not the wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm---
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,---
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm,---
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly

No dear remembrance keep,---
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly:
Let them weep! let them weep!

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in their places,
With eyes meant for Deity;---
"How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,
And your purple shows yo}r path;
But the child's sob curseth deeper in the silence
Than the strong man in his wrath!"

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

De Profundis

I

The face, which, duly as the sun,
Rose up for me with life begun,
To mark all bright hours of the day
With hourly love, is dimmed away—
And yet my days go on, go on.

II

The tongue which, like a stream, could run
Smooth music from the roughest stone,
And every morning with ' Good day'
Make each day good, is hushed away,
And yet my days go on, go on.

III

The heart which, like a staff, was one
For mine to lean and rest upon,
The strongest on the longest day
With steadfast love, is caught away,
And yet my days go on, go on.

IV

And cold before my summer's done,
And deaf in Nature's general tune,
And fallen too low for special fear,
And here, with hope no longer here,
While the tears drop, my days go on.

V

The world goes whispering to its own,
'This anguish pierces to the bone;'
And tender friends go sighing round,
'What love can ever cure this wound ?'
My days go on, my days go on.

VI

The past rolls forward on the sun
And makes all night. O dreams begun,
Not to be ended! Ended bliss,
And life that will not end in this!
My days go on, my days go on.

VII

Breath freezes on my lips to moan:
As one alone, once not alone,

I sit and knock at Nature's door,
Heart-bare, heart-hungry, very poor,
Whose desolated days go on.

VIII

I knock and cry, —Undone, undone!
Is there no help, no comfort, —none?
No gleaning in the wide wheat plains
Where others drive their loaded wains?
My vacant days go on, go on.

IX

This Nature, though the snows be down,
Thinks kindly of the bird of June:
The little red hip on the tree
Is ripe for such. What is for me,
Whose days so winterly go on?

X

No bird am I, to sing in June,
And dare not ask an equal boon.
Good nests and berries red are Nature's
To give away to better creatures, —
And yet my days go on, go on.

XI

I ask less kindness to be done, —
Only to loose these pilgrim shoon,
(Too early worn and grimed) with sweet
Cool deadly touch to these tired feet.
Till days go out which now go on.

XII

Only to lift the turf unmown
From off the earth where it has grown,
Some cubit-space, and say 'Behold,
Creep in, poor Heart, beneath that fold,
Forgetting how the days go on.'

XIII

What harm would that do? Green anon
The sward would quicken, overshone
By skies as blue; and crickets might
Have leave to chirp there day and night
While my new rest went on, went on.

XIV

From gracious Nature have I won
Such liberal bounty? may I run
So, lizard-like, within her side,
And there be safe, who now am tried
By days that painfully go on?

XV

—A Voice reproves me thereupon,
More sweet than Nature's when the drone
Of bees is sweetest, and more deep
Than when the rivers overleap
The shuddering pines, and thunder on.

XVI

God's Voice, not Nature's! Night and noon
He sits upon the great white throne
And listens for the creatures' praise.
What babble we of days and days?
The Day-spring He, whose days go on.

XVII

He reigns above, He reigns alone;
Systems burn out and have his throne;
Fair mists of seraphs melt and fall
Around Him, changeless amid all,
Ancient of Days, whose days go on.

XVIII

He reigns below, He reigns alone,
And, having life in love forgone
Beneath the crown of sovran thorns,
He reigns the Jealous God. Who mourns
Or rules with Him, while days go on?

XIX

By anguish which made pale the sun,
I hear Him charge his saints that none
Among his creatures anywhere
Blaspheme against Him with despair,
However darkly days go on.

XX

Take from my head the thorn-wreath brown!

No mortal grief deserves that crown.
O supreme Love, chief misery,
The sharp regalia are for Thee
Whose days eternally go on!

XXI

For us, —whatever's undergone,
Thou knowest, willest what is done,
Grief may be joy misunderstood;
Only the Good discerns the good.
I trust Thee while my days go on.

XXII

Whatever's lost, it first was won;
We will not struggle nor impugn.
Perhaps the cup was broken here,
That Heaven's new wine might show more clear.
I praise Thee while my days go on.

XXIII

I praise Thee while my days go on;
I love Thee while my days go on:
Through dark and dearth, through fire and frost,
With emptied arms and treasure lost,
I thank Thee while my days go on.

XXIV

And having in thy life-depth thrown
Being and suffering (which are one),
As a child drops his pebble small
Down some deep well, and hears it fall
Smiling—so I. THY DAYS GO ON.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Deserted Garden, The

I mind me in the days departed,
How often underneath the sun
With childish bounds I used to run
 To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite;
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
The greenest grasses Nature laid
 To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
For no one entered there but I;
The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
 And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
And spread their boughs enough about
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
 But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
I crept beneath the boughs, and found
A circle smooth of mossy ground
 Beneath a poplar tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
Bedropt with roses waxen-white
Well satisfied with dew and light
 And careless to be seen.

Long years ago it might befall,
When all the garden flowers were trim,
The grave old gardener prided him
 On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
Here moving with a silken noise,
Has blushed beside them at the voice
 That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
She often may have plucked and twined,
Half-smiling as it came to mind
 That few would look at them.

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
A child would watch her fair white rose,
When buried lay her whiter brows,
 And silk was changed for shroud!

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorns
For men unlearned and simple phrase,)

A child would bring it all its praise
By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat,
Though never a dream the roses sent
Of science or love's compliment,
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
The trace of human step departed:
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken
Has childhood 'twixt the sun and sward;
We draw the moral afterward,
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
In silence at the rose-tree wall:
A thrush made gladness musical
Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white;
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought dear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To "Gentle Hermit of the Dale,"
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew
Its fairy circle round: anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are;
No more for me! myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
"The time will pass away."

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was past away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray!

The time is past; and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose, --

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The color draws from heaven, --

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Discontent

LIGHT human nature is too lightly tost
And ruffled without cause, complaining on--
Restless with rest, until, being overthrown,
It learneth to lie quiet. Let a frost
Or a small wasp have crept to the inner-most
Of our ripe peach, or let the wilful sun
Shine westward of our window,--straight we run
A furlong's sigh as if the world were lost.
But what time through the heart and through the brain
God hath transfixed us,--we, so moved before,
Attain to a calm. Ay, shouldering weights of pain,
We anchor in deep waters, safe from shore,
And hear submissive o'er the stormy main
God's chartered judgments walk for evermore.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Exaggeration

WE overstate the ills of life, and take
Imagination (given us to bring down
The choirs of singing angels overshone
By God's clear glory) down our earth to rake
The dismal snows instead, flake following flake,
To cover all the corn; we walk upon
The shadow of hills across a level thrown,
And pant like climbers: near the alder brake
We sigh so loud, the nightingale within
Refuses to sing loud, as else she would.
O brothers, let us leave the shame and sin
Of taking vainly, in a plaintive mood,
The holy name of GRIEF!---holy herein
That by the grief of ONE came all our good.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

From 'The Soul's Travelling'

God, God!
With a child's voice I cry,
Weak, sad, confidingly—
 God, God!
Thou knowest, eyelids, raised not always up
Unto Thy love (as none of ours are), droop
 As ours, o'er many a tear!
Thou knowest, though Thy universe is broad,
Two little tears suffice to cover all:
Thou knowest, Thou, who art so prodigal
Of beauty, we are oft but stricken deer
Expiring in the woods—that care for none
Of those delightful flowers they die upon.

O blissful Mouth which breathed the mournful breath
We name our souls, self-spoilt!—by that strong passion
Which paled Thee once with sighs,—by that strong death
Which made Thee once unbreathing—from the wrack
Themselves have called around them, call them back,
Back to Thee in continuous aspiration!
 For here, O Lord,
For here they travel vainly,—vainly pass
From city-pavement to untrodden sward,
Where the lark finds her deep nest in the grass
Cold with the earth's last dew. Yea, very vain
The greatest speed of all these souls of men
Unless they travel upward to the throne
Where sittest THOU, the satisfying ONE,
With help for sins and holy perfectings
For all requirements—while the archangel, raising
Unto Thy face his full ecstatic gazing,
Forgets the rush and rapture of his wings.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Futurity

AND, O beloved voices, upon which
Ours passionately call because erelong
Ye brake off in the middle of that song
We sang together softly, to enrich
The poor world with the sense of love, and witch,
The heart out of things evil,--I am strong,
Knowing ye are not lost for aye among

The hills, with last year's thrush. God keeps a niche
In Heaven to hold our idols; and albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised, complete,
The dust swept from their beauty,--glorified
New Memnons singing in the great God-light.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Grief

I TELL you, hopeless grief is passionless;
That only men incredulous of despair,
Half-taught in anguish, through the midnight air
Beat upward to God's throne in loud access
Of shrieking and reproach. Full desertness,
In souls as countries, lieth silent-bare
Under the blanching, vertical eye-glare
Of the absolute Heavens. Deep-hearted man, express
Grief for thy Dead in silence like to death--
Most like a monumental statue set
In everlasting watch and moveless woe
Till itself crumble to the dust beneath.
Touch it; the marble eyelids are not wet:
If it could weep, it could arise and go.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

House Of Clouds, The

I would build a cloudy House
For my thoughts to live in;
When for earth too fancy-loose
And too low for Heaven!
Hush! I talk my dream aloud---
I build it bright to see,---
I build it on the moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with thee.

Cloud-walls of the morning's grey,
Faced with amber column,---
Crowned with crimson cupola
From a sunset solemn!
May mists, for the casements, fetch,
Pale and glimmering;
With a sunbeam hid in each,
And a smell of spring.

Build the entrance high and proud,
Darkening and then brightening,---
If a riven thunder-cloud,
Veined by the lightning.
Use one with an iris-stain,
For the door within;
Turning to a sound like rain,
As I enter in.

Build a spacious hall thereby:
Boldly, never fearing.
Use the blue place of the sky,
Which the wind is clearing;
Branched with corridors sublime,
Flecked with winding stairs---
Such as children wish to climb,
Following their own prayers.

In the mutest of the house,
I will have my chamber:
Silence at the door shall use
Evening's light of amber,
Solemnising every mood,
Softemng in degree,---
Turning sadness into good,
As I turn the key.

Be my chamber tapestried
With the showers of summer,
Close, but soundless,---glorified
When the sunbeams come here;
Wandering harpers, harping on
Waters stringed for such,---
Drawing colours, for a tune,

With a vibrant touch.

Bring a shadow green and still
From the chestnut forest,
Bring a purple from the hill,
When the heat is sorest;
Spread them out from wall to wall,
Carpet-wove around,---
Whereupon the foot shall fall
In light instead of sound.

Bring the fantasque cloudlets home
From the noontide zenith
Ranged, for sculptures, round the room,---
Named as Fancy weeneth:
Some be Junos, without eyes;
Naiads, without sources
Some be birds of paradise,---
Some, Olympian horses.

Bring the dew the birds shake off,
Waking in the hedges,---
Those too, perfumed for a proof,
From the lilies' edges:
From our England's field and moor,
Bring them calm and white in;
Whence to form a mirror pure,
For Love's self-delighting.

Bring a grey cloud from the east,
Where the lark is singing;
Something of the song at least,
Unlost in the bringing:
That shall be a morning chair,
Poet-dream may sit in,
When it leans out on the air,
Unrhymed and unwritten.

Bring the red cloud from the sun
While he sinketh, catch it.
That shall be a couch,---with one
Sidelong star to watch it,---
Fit for poet's finest Thought,
At the curfew-sounding,--- ;
Things unseen being nearer brought
Than the seen, around him.

Poet's thought,----not poet's sigh!
'Las, they come together!
Cloudy walls divide and fly,
As in April weather!
Cupola and column proud,

Structure bright to see---
Gone---except that moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with thee!

Let them! Wipe such visionings
From the Fancy's cartel---
Love secures some fairer things
Dowered with his immortal.
The sun may darken,---heaven be bowed---
But still, unchanged shall be,---
Here in my soul,---that moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with THEE!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

How Do I Love Thee?

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love with a passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints, -- I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! -- and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Human Life's Mystery

We sow the glebe, we reap the corn,
We build the house where we may rest,
And then, at moments, suddenly,
We look up to the great wide sky,
Inquiring wherefore we were born...
For earnest or for jest?

The senses folding thick and dark
About the stifled soul within,
We guess diviner things beyond,
And yearn to them with yearning fond;
We strike out blindly to a mark
Believed in, but not seen.

We vibrate to the pant and thrill
Wherewith Eternity has curled
In serpent-twine about God's seat;
While, freshening upward to His feet,
In gradual growth His full-leaved will
Expands from world to world.

And, in the tumult and excess
Of act and passion under sun,
We sometimes hear—oh, soft and far,
As silver star did touch with star,
The kiss of Peace and Righteousness
Through all things that are done.

God keeps His holy mysteries
Just on the outside of man's dream;
In diapason slow, we think
To hear their pinions rise and sink,
While they float pure beneath His eyes,
Like swans adown a stream.

Abstractions, are they, from the forms
Of His great beauty?—exaltations
From His great glory?—strong previsions
Of what we shall be?—intuitions
Of what we are—in calms and storms,
Beyond our peace and passions?

Things nameless! which, in passing so,
Do stroke us with a subtle grace.
We say, 'Who passes?'—they are dumb.
We cannot see them go or come:
Their touches fall soft, cold, as snow
Upon a blind man's face.

Yet, touching so, they draw above
Our common thoughts to Heaven's unknown,
Our daily joy and pain advance

To a divine significance,
Our human love—O mortal love,
That light is not its own!

And sometimes horror chills our blood
To be so near such mystic Things,
And we wrap round us for defence
Our purple manners, moods of sense—
As angels from the face of God
Stand hidden in their wings.

And sometimes through life's heavy swound
We grope for them!—with strangled breath
We stretch our hands abroad and try
To reach them in our agony,—
And widen, so, the broad life-wound
Which soon is large enough for death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair:
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,--
'Guess now who holds thee ? '--' Death,' I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang,--' Not Death, but Love.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said,--Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening ! and replied
One of us . . . that was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,--that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend !
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart !
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
Of chief musician. What hast thou to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree ?
The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew,--
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Insufficiency

When I attain to utter forth in verse
Some inward thought, my soul throbs audibly
Along my pulses, yearning to be free
And something farther, fuller, higher, rehearse
To the individual, true, and the universe,
In consummation of right harmony:
But, like a wind-exposed distorted tree,
We are blown against for ever by the curse
Which breathes through Nature. Oh, the world is weak !
The effluence of each is false to all,
And what we best conceive we fail to speak.
Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall,
And then resume thy broken strains, and seek
Fit peroration without let or thrall.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Irreparableness

I HAVE been in the meadows all the day
And gathered there the nosegay that you see
Singing within myself as bird or bee
When such do field-work on a morn of May.
But, now I look upon my flowers, decay
Has met them in my hands more fatally
Because more warmly clasped,--and sobs are free
To come instead of songs. What do you say,
Sweet counsellors, dear friends ? that I should go
Back straightway to the fields and gather more ?
Another, sooth, may do it, but not I !
My heart is very tired, my strength is low,
My hands are full of blossoms plucked before,
Held dead within them till myself shall die.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems ! where
The dancers will break footing, from the care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
For hand of thine ? and canst thou think and bear
To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door ?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof !
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation ! there 's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

IX

Can it be right to give what I can give ?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations ? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right ! We are not peers,
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas !
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love--which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee ! let it pass.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Lady's Yes, The

"Yes," I answered you last night;
"No," this morning, Sir, I say.
Colours seen by candlelight,
Will not look the same by day.

When the viols played their best,
Lamps above, and laughs below---
Love me sounded like a jest,
Fit for Yes or fit for No.

Call me false, or call me free---
Vow, whatever light may shine,
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change on mine.

Yet the sin is on us both---
Time to dance is not to woo---
Wooer light makes fickle troth---
Scorn of me recoils on you.

Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high;
Bravely, as for life and death---
With a loyal gravity.

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies,
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.

By your truth she shall be true---
Ever true, as wives of yore---
And her Yes, once said to you,
SHALL be Yes for evermore.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, The

The breaking waves dashed high
On a stern and rock-bound coast,
And the woods, against a stormy sky,
Their giant branches tost;

And the heavy night hung dark
The hills and water o'er,
When a band of exiles moored their bark
On the wild New England shore.

Not as the conqueror comes,
They, the true-hearted, came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
And the trumpet that sings of fame;

Not as the flying come,
In silence and in fear, -
They shook the depths of the desert's gloom
With their hymns of lofty cheer.

Amidst the storm they sang,
And the stars heard and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free.

The ocean-eagle soared
From his nest by the white wave's foam,
And the rocking pines of the forest roared -
This was their welcome home!

There were men with hoary hair
Amidst that pilgrim band:
Why had they come to wither there,
Away from their childhood's land?

There was woman's fearless eye,
Lit by her deep love's truth;
There was manhood's brow serenely high,
And the fiery heart of youth.

What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of the seas? the spoils of war? -
They sought a faith's pure shrine!

Ay, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod!
They have left unstained what there they found -
Freedom to worship God!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Look, The

The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word,
No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those who have seen
Wronged lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy--
'I never knew this man'--did quail and fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turned free
And went out speechless from the face of all
And filled the silenc, weeping bitterly.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Lord Walter's Wife

I

'But where do you go?' said the lady, while both sat under the yew,
And her eyes were alive in their depth, as the kraken beneath the sea-blue.

II

'Because I fear you,' he answered;--'because you are far too fair,
And able to strangle my soul in a mesh of your gold-coloured hair.'

III

'Oh that,' she said, 'is no reason! Such knots are quickly undone,
And too much beauty, I reckon, is nothing but too much sun.'

IV

'Yet farewell so,' he answered; --'the sunstroke's fatal at times.
I value your husband, Lord Walter, whose gallop rings still from the limes.

V

'Oh that,' she said, 'is no reason. You smell a rose through a fence:
If two should smell it what matter? who grumbles, and where's the pretense?

VI

'But I,' he replied, 'have promised another, when love was free,
To love her alone, alone, who alone from afar loves me.'

VII

'Why, that,' she said, 'is no reason. Love's always free I am told.
Will you vow to be safe from the headache on Tuesday, and think it will hold?

VIII

'But you,' he replied, 'have a daughter, a young child, who was laid
In your lap to be pure; so I leave you: the angels would make me afraid.'

IX

'Oh that,' she said, 'is no reason. The angels keep out of the way;
And Dora, the child, observes nothing, although you should please me and stay.'

X

At which he rose up in his anger,--'Why now, you no longer are fair!
Why, now, you no longer are fatal, but ugly and hateful, I swear.'

XI

At which she laughed out in her scorn: 'These men! Oh these men overnice,
Who are shocked if a colour not virtuous is frankly put on by a vice.'

XII

Her eyes blazed upon him--'And you! You bring us your vices so near
That we smell them! You think in our presence a thought 'twould defame us to hear!

XIII

'What reason had you, and what right,--I appel to your soul from my life,--
To find me so fair as a woman? Why, sir, I am pure, and a wife.

XIV

'Is the day-star too fair up above you? It burns you not. Dare you imply
I brushed you more close than the star does, when Walter had set me as high?

XV

'If a man finds a woman too fair, he means simply adapted too much
To use unlawful and fatal. The praise! --shall I thank you for such?

XVI

'Too fair?--not unless you misuse us! and surely if, once in a while,
You attain to it, straightaway you call us no longer too fair, but too vile.

XVII

'A moment,--I pray your attention!--I have a poor word in my head
I must utter, though womanly custom would set it down better unsaid.

XVIII

'You grew, sir, pale to impertinence, once when I showed you a ring.
You kissed my fan when I dropped it. No matter! I've broken the thing.

XIX

'You did me the honour, perhaps, to be moved at my side now and then
In the senses--a vice, I have heard, which is common to beasts and some men.

XX

'Love's a virtue for heroes!--as white as the snow on high hills,
And immortal as every great soul is that struggles, endures, and fulfils.

XXI

'I love my Walter profoundly,--you, Maude, though you faltered a week,
For the sake of . . . what is it--an eyebrow? or, less still, a mole on the cheek?

XXII

'And since, when all's said, you're too noble to stoop to the frivolous cant
About crimes irresistible, virtues that swindle, betray and supplant.

XXIII

'I determined to prove to yourself that, whate'er you might dream or avow
By illusion, you wanted precisely no more of me than you have now.

XXIV

'There! Look me full in the face!--in the face. Understand, if you can,
That the eyes of such women as I am are clean as the palm of a man.

XXV

'Drop his hand, you insult him. Avoid us for fear we should cost you a scar--
You take us for harlots, I tell you, and not for the women we are.

XXVI

'You wronged me: but then I considered . . . there's Walter! And so at the end
I vowed that he should not be mulcted, by me, in the hand of a friend.

XXVII

'Have I hurt you indeed? We are quits then. Nay, friend of my Walter, be mine!
Come, Dora, my darling, my angel, and help me to ask him to dine.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Meaning Of The Look, The

I think that look of Christ might seem to say--
'Thou Peter ! art thou then a common stone
Which I at last must break my heart upon
For all God's charge to his high angels may
Guard my foot better ? Did I yesterday
Wash thy feet, my beloved, that they should run
Quick to deny me 'neath the morning sun ?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray ?
The cock crows coldly.--GO, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear !
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here;
My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I KNOW this man, let him be clear.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Minstrelsy

For ever, since my childish looks
Could rest on Nature's pictured books;
For ever, since my childish tongue
Could name the themes our bards have sung;
So long, the sweetness of their singing
Hath been to me a rapture bringing!
Yet ask me not the reason why
I have delight in minstrelsy.

I know that much whereof I sing,
Is shapen but for vanishing;
I know that summer's flower and leaf
And shine and shade are very brief,
And that the heart they brighten, may,
Before them all, be sheathed in clay! --
I do not know the reason why
I have delight in minstrelsy.

A few there are, whose smile and praise
My minstrel hope, would kindly raise:
But, of those few -- Death may impress
The lips of some with silentness;
While some may friendship's faith resign,
And heed no more a song of mine. --
Ask not, ask not the reason why
I have delight in minstrelsy.

The sweetest song that minstrels sing,
Will charm not Joy to tarrying;
The greenest bay that earth can grow,
Will shelter not in burning woe;
A thousand voices will not cheer,
When one is mute that aye is dear! --
Is there, alas! no reason why
I have delight in minstrelsy.

I do not know! The turf is green
Beneath the rain's fast-dropping sheen,
Yet asks not why that deeper hue
Doth all its tender leaves renew; --
And I, like-minded, am content,
While music to my soul is sent,
To question not the reason why
I have delight in minstrelsy.

Years pass -- my life with them shall pass:
And soon, the cricket in the grass
And summer bird, shall louder sing
Than she who owns a minstrel's string.
Oh then may some, the dear and few,
Recall her love, whose truth they knew;
When all forget to question why

She had delight in minstrelsy!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Mother and Poet

I.

Dead ! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Dead ! both my boys ! When you sit at the feast
And are wanting a great song for Italy free,
Let none look at me !

II.

Yet I was a poetess only last year,
And good at my art, for a woman, men said ;
But this woman, this, who is agonized here,
-- The east sea and west sea rhyme on in her head
For ever instead.

III.

What art can a woman be good at ? Oh, vain !
What art is she good at, but hurting her breast
With the milk-teeth of babes, and a smile at the pain ?
Ah boys, how you hurt ! you were strong as you pressed,
And I proud, by that test.

IV.

What art's for a woman ? To hold on her knees
Both darlings ! to feel all their arms round her throat,
Cling, strangle a little ! to sew by degrees
And 'broider the long-clothes and neat little coat ;
To dream and to doat.

V.

To teach them ... It stings there ! I made them indeed
Speak plain the word country. I taught them, no doubt,
That a country's a thing men should die for at need.
I prated of liberty, rights, and about
The tyrant cast out.

VI.

And when their eyes flashed ... O my beautiful eyes ! ...
I exulted ; nay, let them go forth at the wheels
Of the guns, and denied not. But then the surprise
When one sits quite alone ! Then one weeps, then one kneels !
God, how the house feels !

VII.

At first, happy news came, in gay letters moiled
With my kisses, -- of camp-life and glory, and how
They both loved me ; and, soon coming home to be spoiled
In return would fan off every fly from my brow
With their green laurel-bough.

VIII.

Then was triumph at Turin : `Ancona was free !'

And some one came out of the cheers in the street,
With a face pale as stone, to say something to me.
My Guido was dead ! I fell down at his feet,
While they cheered in the street.

IX.

I bore it ; friends soothed me ; my grief looked sublime
As the ransom of Italy. One boy remained
To be leant on and walked with, recalling the time
When the first grew immortal, while both of us strained
To the height he had gained.

X.

And letters still came, shorter, sadder, more strong,
Writ now but in one hand, ` I was not to faint, --
One loved me for two -- would be with me ere long :
And Viva ! Italia ! -- he died for, our saint,
Who forbids our complaint."

XI.

My Nanni would add, ` he was safe, and aware
Of a presence that turned off the balls, -- was imprest
It was Guido himself, who knew what I could bear,
And how 'twas impossible, quite dispossessed,
To live on for the rest."

XII.

On which, without pause, up the telegraph line
Swept smoothly the next news from Gaeta : -- Shot.
Tell his mother. Ah, ah, ` his, ' ` their ' mother, -- not ` mine, '
No voice says "My mother" again to me. What !
You think Guido forgot ?

XIII.

Are souls straight so happy that, dizzy with Heaven,
They drop earth's affections, conceive not of woe ?
I think not. Themselves were too lately forgiven
Through THAT Love and Sorrow which reconciled so
The Above and Below.

XIV.

O Christ of the five wounds, who look'dst through the dark
To the face of Thy mother ! consider, I pray,
How we common mothers stand desolate, mark,
Whose sons, not being Christs, die with eyes turned away,
And no last word to say !

XV.

Both boys dead ? but that's out of nature. We all
Have been patriots, yet each house must always keep one.
'Twere imbecile, hewing out roads to a wall ;
And, when Italy 's made, for what end is it done

If we have not a son ?

XVI.

Ah, ah, ah ! when Gaeta's taken, what then ?
When the fair wicked queen sits no more at her sport
Of the fire-balls of death crashing souls out of men ?
When the guns of Cavalli with final retort
Have cut the game short ?

XVII.

When Venice and Rome keep their new jubilee,
When your flag takes all heaven for its white, green, and red,
When you have your country from mountain to sea,
When King Victor has Italy's crown on his head,
(And I have my Dead) --

XVIII.

What then ? Do not mock me. Ah, ring your bells low,
And burn your lights faintly ! My country is there,
Above the star pricked by the last peak of snow :
My Italy 's THERE, with my brave civic Pair,
To disfranchise despair !

XIX.

Forgive me. Some women bear children in strength,
And bite back the cry of their pain in self-scorn ;
But the birth-pangs of nations will wring us at length
Into wail such as this -- and we sit on forlorn
When the man-child is born.

XX.

Dead ! One of them shot by the sea in the east,
And one of them shot in the west by the sea.
Both ! both my boys ! If in keeping the feast
You want a great song for your Italy free,
Let none look at me !

[This was Laura Savio, of Turin, a poetess and patriot, whose sons were killed at Ancona and Gaeta.]

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

My Heart and I

I.

ENOUGH ! we're tired, my heart and I.
We sit beside the headstone thus,
And wish that name were carved for us.
The moss reprints more tenderly
The hard types of the mason's knife,
As heaven's sweet life renews earth's life
With which we're tired, my heart and I.

II.

You see we're tired, my heart and I.
We dealt with books, we trusted men,
And in our own blood drenched the pen,
As if such colours could not fly.
We walked too straight for fortune's end,
We loved too true to keep a friend ;
At last we're tired, my heart and I.

III.

How tired we feel, my heart and I !
We seem of no use in the world ;
Our fancies hang grey and uncurled
About men's eyes indifferently ;
Our voice which thrilled you so, will let
You sleep; our tears are only wet :
What do we here, my heart and I ?

IV.

So tired, so tired, my heart and I !
It was not thus in that old time
When Ralph sat with me 'neath the lime
To watch the sunset from the sky.
'Dear love, you're looking tired,' he said;
I, smiling at him, shook my head :
'Tis now we're tired, my heart and I.

V.

So tired, so tired, my heart and I !
Though now none takes me on his arm
To fold me close and kiss me warm
Till each quick breath end in a sigh
Of happy languor. Now, alone,
We lean upon this graveyard stone,
Uncheered, unloved, my heart and I.

VI.

Tired out we are, my heart and I.
Suppose the world brought diadems
To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
Of powers and pleasures ? Let it try.
We scarcely care to look at even

A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
We feel so tired, my heart and I.

VII.

Yet who complains ? My heart and I ?
In this abundant earth no doubt
Is little room for things worn out :
Disdain them, break them, throw them by
And if before the days grew rough
We once were loved, used, -- well enough,
I think, we've fared, my heart and I.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

My Letters! all dead paper. . . (Sonnet XXVIII)

My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee tonight.
This said; he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand. . . a simple thing,
Yes I wept for it; this . . . the paper's light. . .
Said, Dear, I love thee; and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, I am thine; and so its ink has paled
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

On A Portrait Of Wordsworth

WORDSWORTH upon Helvellyn ! Let the cloud
Ebb audibly along the mountain-wind,
Then break against the rock, and show behind
The lowland valleys floating up to crowd
The sense with beauty. He with forehead bowed
And humble-lidded eyes, as one inclined
Before the sovran thought of his own mind,
And very meek with inspirations proud,
Takes here his rightful place as poet-priest
By the high altar, singing prayer and prayer

To the higher Heavens. A noble vision free
Our Haydon's hand has flung out from the mist:
No portrait this, with Academic air !
This is the poet and his poetry.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

On A Portrait Of Wordsworth By B. R. Haydon

Wordsworth upon Helvellyn ! Let the cloud
Ebb audibly along the mountain-wind,
Then break against the rock, and show behind
The lowland valleys floating up to crowd
The sense with beauty. He with forehead bowed
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Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Only a Curl.

I.
FRIENDS of faces unknown and a land
Unvisited over the sea,
Who tell me how lonely you stand
With a single gold curl in the hand
Held up to be looked at by me, --

II.
While you ask me to ponder and say
What a father and mother can do,
With the bright fellow-locks put away
Out of reach, beyond kiss, in the clay
Where the violets press nearer than you.

III.
Shall I speak like a poet, or run
Into weak woman's tears for relief ?
Oh, children ! -- I never lost one, --
Yet my arm 's round my own little son,
And Love knows the secret of Grief.

IV.
And I feel what it must be and is,
When God draws a new angel so
Through the house of a man up to His,
With a murmur of music, you miss,
And a rapture of light, you forgo.

V.
How you think, staring on at the door,
Where the face of your angel flashed in,
That its brightness, familiar before,
Burns off from you ever the more
For the dark of your sorrow and sin.

VI.
'God lent him and takes him,' you sigh ;
-- Nay, there let me break with your pain :
God 's generous in giving, say I, --
And the thing which He gives, I deny
That He ever can take back again.

VII.
He gives what He gives. I appeal
To all who bear babes -- in the hour
When the veil of the body we feel

Rent round us, -- while torments reveal
The motherhood's advent in power,

VIII.

And the babe cries ! -- has each of us known
By apocalypse (God being there
Full in nature) the child is our own,
Life of life, love of love, moan of moan,
Through all changes, all times, everywhere.

IX.

He 's ours and for ever. Believe,
O father ! -- O mother, look back
To the first love's assurance. To give
Means with God not to tempt or deceive
With a cup thrust in Benjamin's sack.

X.

He gives what He gives. Be content !
He resumes nothing given, -- be sure !
God lend ? Where the usurers lent
In His temple, indignant He went
And scourged away all those impure.

XI.

He lends not ; but gives to the end,
As He loves to the end. If it seem
That He draws back a gift, comprehend
'Tis to add to it rather, -- amend,
And finish it up to your dream, --

XII.

Or keep, -- as a mother will toys
Too costly, though given by herself,
Till the room shall be stiller from noise,
And the children more fit for such joys,
Kept over their heads on the shelf.

XIII.

So look up, friends ! you, who indeed
Have possessed in your house a sweet piece
Of the Heaven which men strive for, must need
Be more earnest than others are, -- speed
Where they loiter, persist where they cease.

XIV.

You know how one angel smiles there.

Then weep not. 'Tis easy for you
To be drawn by a single gold hair
Of that curl, from earth's storm and despair,
To the safe place above us. Adieu.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Pain In Pleasure

A THOUGHT ay like a flower upon mine heart,
And drew around it other thoughts like bees
For multitude and thirst of sweetnesses;
Whereat rejoicing, I desired the art
Of the Greek whistler, who to wharf and mart
Could lure those insect swarms from orange-trees
That I might hive with me such thoughts and please
My soul so, always. foolish counterpart
Of a weak man's vain wishes ! While I spoke,
The thought I called a flower grew nettle-rough
The thoughts, called bees, stung me to festering:
Oh, entertain (cried Reason as she woke)
Your best and gladdest thoughts but long enough,
And they will all prove sad enough to sting !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Past And Future

MY future will not copy fair my past
On any leaf but Heaven's. Be fully done
Supernal Will ! I would not fain be one
Who, satisfying thirst and breaking fast,
Upon the fulness of the heart at last
Says no grace after meat. My wine has run
Indeed out of my cup, and there is none
To gather up the bread of my repast
Scattered and trampled; yet I find some good
In earth's green herbs, and streams that bubble up
Clear from the darkling ground,--content until
I sit with angels before better food: --
Dear Christ ! when thy new vintage fills my cup,
This hand shall shake no more, nor that wine spill

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Past and Future.

MY future will not copy fair my past
On any leaf but Heaven's. Be fully done,
Supernal Will ! I would not fain be one
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Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Patience Taught By Nature

'O DREARY life,' we cry, ' O dreary life ! '
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven's true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle ! Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land, savannah-swards
Unweary sweep, hills watch unworn, and rife
Meek leaves drop year]y from the forest-trees
To show, above, the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory: O thou God of old,
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these !--
But so much patience as a blade of grass
Grows by, contented through the heat and cold.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Perplexed Music

EXPERIENCE, like a pale musician, holds
A dulcimer of patience in his hand,
Whence harmonies, we cannot understand,
Of God; will in his worlds, the strain unfolds
In sad-perplexed minors: deathly colds
Fall on us while we hear, and countermand
Our sanguine heart back from the fancyland
With nightingales in visionary wolds.
We murmur ' Where is any certain tune
Or measured music in such notes as these ? '
But angels, leaning from the golden seat,
Are not so minded their fine ear hath won
The issue of completed cadences,
And, smiling down the stars, they whisper--
SWEET.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Poet And The Bird, The

Said a people to a poet---" Go out from among us straightway!
While we are thinking earthly things, thou singest of divine.
There's a little fair brown nightingale, who, sitting in the gateways
Makes fitter music to our ears than any song of thine!"

The poet went out weeping---the nightingale ceased chanting;
"Now, wherefore, O thou nightingale, is all thy sweetness done?"
I cannot sing my earthly things, the heavenly poet wanting,
Whose highest harmony includes the lowest under sun."

The poet went out weeping,---and died abroad, bereft there---
The bird flew to his grave and died, amid a thousand wails:---
And, when I last came by the place, I swear the music left there
Was only of the poet's song, and not the nightingale's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Prisoner, The

I count the dismal time by months and years
Since last I felt the green sward under foot,
And the great breath of all things summer-
Met mine upon my lips. Now earth appears
As strange to me as dreams of distant spheres
Or thoughts of Heaven we weep at. Nature's lute
Sounds on, behind this door so closely shut,
A strange wild music to the prisoner's ears,
Dilated by the distance, till the brain
Grows dim with fancies which it feels too
While ever, with a visionary pain,
Past the precluded senses, sweep and Rhine
Streams, forests, glades, and many a golden train
Of sunlit hills transfigured to Divine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Rosalind's Scroll

I LEFT thee last, a child at heart,
A woman scarce in years:
I come to thee, a solemn corpse
Which neither feels nor fears.
I have no breath to use in sighs;
They laid the dead-weights on mine eyes
To seal them safe from tears.

Look on me with thine own calm look:
I meet it calm as thou.
No look of thine can change this smile,
Or break thy sinful vow:
I tell thee that my poor scorn'd heart
Is of thine earth--thine earth--a part:
It cannot vex thee now.

I have pray'd for thee with bursting sob
When passion's course was free;
I have pray'd for thee with silent lips
In the anguish none could see;
They whisper'd oft, 'She sleepeth soft'--
But I only pray'd for thee.

Go to! I pray for thee no more:
The corpse's tongue is still;
Its folded fingers point to heaven,
But point there stiff and chill:
No farther wrong, no farther woe
Hath licence from the sin below
Its tranquil heart to thrill.

I charge thee, by the living's prayer,
And the dead's silentness,
To wring from out thy soul a cry
Which God shall hear and bless!
Lest Heaven's own palm droop in my hand,
And pale among the saints I stand,
A saint companionless.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point, The

I.
I stand on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark . . .
I look on the sky and the sea.

II.
O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!
I see you come out proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew. . .
And round me and round me ye go!
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe.

III.
And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where I knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's evermore.

IV.
I am black, I am black;
And yet God made me, they say.
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast His work away
Under the feet of His white creatures,
With a look of scorn,--that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V.
And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light.
There's a little dark bird sits and sings;
There's a dark stream ripples out of sight;
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI.
But we who are dark, we are dark!
Ah, God, we have no stars!
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison bars:
The poor souls crouch so far behind,
That never a comfort can they find

By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed, we live beneath the sky, . . .
That great smooth Hand of God, stretched out
On all His children fatherly,
To bless them from the fear and doubt,
Which would be, if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to His face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost:
And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
Do fear and take us for very men!
Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of the glen
Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX.

I am black, I am black!--
But, once, I laughed in girlish glee;
For one of my colour stood in the track
Where the drivers drove, and looked at me--
And tender and full was the look he gave:
Could a slave look so at another slave?--
I look at the sky and the sea.

X.

And from that hour our spirits grew
As free as if unsold, unbought:
Oh, strong enough, since we were two
To conquer the world, we thought!
The drivers drove us day by day;
We did not mind, we went one way,
And no better a liberty sought.

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said "I love you" as he passed:
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook, he smiled in the hut
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut,
Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song;
Over and over I sang his name--
Upward and downward I drew it along
My various notes; the same, the same!

I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
Might never guess from aught they could hear,
It was only a name.

XIII.
I look on the sky and the sea--
We were two to love, and two to pray,--
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing didst Thou say.
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun!
And now I cry who am but one,
How wilt Thou speak to-day?--

XIV.
We were black, we were black!
We had no claim to love and bliss:
What marvel, if each turned to lack?
They wrung my cold hands out of his,--
They dragged him . . . where ? . . . I crawled to touch
His blood's mark in the dust! . . . not much,
Ye pilgrim-souls, . . . though plain as this!

XV.
Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong!
Mere grief's too good for such as I.
So the white men brought the shame ere long
To strangle the sob of my agony.
They would not leave me for my dull
Wet eyes!--it was too merciful
To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI.
I am black, I am black!--
I wore a child upon my breast
An amulet that hung too slack,
And, in my unrest, could not rest:
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
Until all ended for the best:

XVII.
For hark ! I will tell you low . . . Iow . . .
I am black, you see,--
And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
Was far too white . . . too white for me;
As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
Beside me at church but yesterday;
Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII.
My own, own child! I could not bear
To look in his face, it was so white.

I covered him up with a kerchief there;
I covered his face in close and tight:
And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
For the white child wanted his liberty--
Ha, ha! he wanted his master right.

XIX.
He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
His little feet that never grew--
He struck them out, as it was meet,
Against my heart to break it through.
I might have sung and made him mild--
But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
The only song I knew.

XX.
I pulled the kerchief very close:
He could not see the sun, I swear,
More, then, alive, than now he does
From between the roots of the mango . . . where
. . . I know where. Close! a child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another,
When one is black and one is fair.

XXI.
Why, in that single glance I had
Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
I saw a look that made me mad . . .
The master's look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash . . . or worse!
And so, to save it from my curse,
I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.
And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
He shivered from head to foot;
Till, after a time, he lay instead
Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold, . . .
I dared to lift up just a fold . . .
As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII.
But my fruit . . . ha, ha!--there, had been
(I laugh to think on't at this hour! . . .)
Your fine white angels, who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power, . . .
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine,
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, for the trick of the angels white!
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but, day and night,
I carried the body to and fro;
And it lay on my heart like a stone . . . as chill.
--The sun may shine out as much as he will:
I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
I carried the little body on,
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run:
They asked no question as I went,--
They stood too high for astonishment,--
They could see God sit on His throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest . . . on:
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon.
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright, . . .
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed,
All, changed to black earth, . . . nothing white, . . .
A dark child in the dark,--ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew young:
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother, thus:
For, as I sang it, soft and wild
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate!
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky!
Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay,
The free sun rideth gloriously;
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn.
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX.

Ah!--in their 'stead, their hunter sons!
Ah, ah! they are on me--they hunt in a ring--
Keep off! I brave you all at once--
I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting!
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think:
Did you never stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing?

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!--)
I wish you, who stand there five a-breast,
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangos!--Yes, but she
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she liketh best.

XXXII.

I am not mad: I am black.
I see you staring in my face--
I know you, staring, shrinking back--
Ye are born of the Washington-race:
And this land is the free America:
And this mark on my wrist . . . (I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then? Not a sound!
I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun.
I only cursed them all around,
As softly as I might have done
My very own child!--From these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV.

Whips, curses; these must answer those!
For in this UNION, you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each: and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair;
While HE sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men
Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. We who bleed . . .
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss!

We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI.

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky:
The clouds are breaking on my brain;
I am floated along, as if I should die
Of liberty's exquisite pain--
In the name of the white child, waiting for me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
In my broken heart's disdain!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Seraph and Poet, The

The seraph sings before the manifest
God-One, and in the burning of the Seven,
And with the full life of consummate
Heaving beneath him like a mother's
Warm with her first-born's slumber in that
The poet sings upon the earth grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-forgiven
For wronging him,--and in the darkness prest
From his own soul by worldly weights.

Even so,
Sing, seraph with the glory ! heaven is high;
Sing, poet with the sorrow ! earth is low:
The universe's inward voices cry
' Amen ' to either song of joy and woe:
Sing, seraph,--poet,--sing on equally !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 01 - I thought once how Theocritus had sung

I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair:
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,—
'Guess now who holds thee? '—'Death,' I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang,—'Not Death, but Love.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 02 - But only three in all God's universe

II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said,—Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
One of us . . . that was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,—that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend!
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 03 - Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!

III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
Of chief musician. What hast thou to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
The chrism is on thine head,—on mine, the dew,—
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 04 - Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor

IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems! where
The dancers will break footing, from the care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear
To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation! there 's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 05 - I lift my heavy heart up solemnly

V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
O my Beloved, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 06 - Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore—
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 07 - The face of all the world is changed, I think

VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 08 - What can I give thee back, O liberal

VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the-wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
Not so; not cold, — but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colors from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 09 - Can it be right to give what I can give?

IX

Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers,
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love—which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 10 - Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed

X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptation. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark! . . . I love thee—in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that proceed
Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I feel, across the inferior features
Of what I am, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 11 - And therefore if to love can be desert

XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,—why advert
To these things? O Beloved, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,—
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 12 - Indeed this very love which is my boast

XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost, —
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne, —
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek!)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 13 - And wilt thou have me fashion into speech

XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each?—
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself—me—that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,—
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 14 - If thou must love me, let it be for nought

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile—her look—her way
Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'—
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee,—and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,—
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 15 - Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear

XV

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee—on thee—
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 16 - And yet, because thou overcomest so

XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low!
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,
Even so, Beloved, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If thou invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 17 - My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
A shade, in which to sing—of palm or pine?
A grave, on which to rest from singing? Choose.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 18 - I never gave a lock of hair away

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
'Take it.' My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified, —
Take it thou, — finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 19 - The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise

XIX

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies, —
As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purple tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Beloved, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black!
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 20 - Beloved, my Beloved, when I think

XX

Beloved, my Beloved, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand,—why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder ! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech,—nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 21 - Say over again, and yet once over again

XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem 'a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
Cry, 'Speak once more—thou lovest! 'Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me—toll
The silver iterance!—only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 22 - When our two souls stand up erect and strong

XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curved point,—what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Beloved,—where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 23 - Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead

XXIII

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head?
I marvelled, my Beloved, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine—
But . . . so much to thee? Can I pour thy wine
While my hands tremble ? Then my soul, instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love! look on me—breathe on me!
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 24 - Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife

XXIV

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life—
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 25 - A heavy heart, Beloved, have I borne

XXV

A heavy heart, Beloved, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
My heavy heart. Then thou didst bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 26 - I lived with visions for my company

XXVI

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come—to be,
Beloved, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors (better, yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fonts),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 27 - My own Beloved, who hast lifted me

XXVII

My own Beloved, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found thee!
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,—so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 28 - My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!

XXVIII

My letters! all dead paper, mute and white!
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.
This said, & he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it! & this, . . . the paper's light . . .
Said, Dear, I love thee; and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, I am thine & so its ink has paled
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 29 - I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud

XXIX

I think of thee!—my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the stragglng green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,—burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee—I am too near thee.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 30 - I see thine image through my tears to-night

XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause?—Beloved, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's Amen.
Beloved, dost thou love? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come—falling hot and real?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 31 - Thou comest! all is said without a word

XXXI

Thou comest! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion—that we two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 32 - The first time that the sun rose on thine oath

XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love!—more like an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on thee. For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,—
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 33 - Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear

XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God—call God!—So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name,—and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 34 - With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee

XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name—
Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee—ponder how—
Not as to a single good, but all my good!
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 35 - If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
That 's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved sol am hard to love.
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 36 - When we met first and loved, I did not build

XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .
Lest these enclasped hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false! if he, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 37 - Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make

XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranty, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 38 - First time he kissed me, he but only kissed

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its 'Oh, list,'
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, 'My love, my own.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 39 - Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace

XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race, —
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens, — because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed, —
Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 40 - Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!

XL

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,—and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Beloved! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry 'Too late.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 41 - I thank all who have loved me in their hearts

XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
To hearken what I said between my tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee! Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That they should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 42 - 'My future will not copy fair my past'

XLII

'My future will not copy fair my past'—
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, un hoped for in the world!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 43 - How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

XLIII

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,—I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet 44 - Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers

XLIV

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here 's ivy!—take them, as I used to do
Thy fowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colors true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet I

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair:
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,--
'Guess now who holds thee ? '--' Death,' I said. But, there,
The silver answer rang,--' Not Death, but Love.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet I: I Thought Once How Theocritus

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young;
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
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A shadow across me. Straightaway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,--
Guess now who holds thee?--*Death,* I said, But, there,
The silver answer rang,--*Not Death, but Love.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet II

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said,--Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening ! and replied
One of us . . . that was God, . . . and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,--that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. 'Nay' is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend !
Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet II: But Only Three in All God's Universe

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou has said,--Himself, beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! and replied
One of us...that was God,...and laid the curse
So darkly on my eyelids, as to amerce
My sight from seeing thee,--that if I had died,
The deathweights, placed there, would have signified
Less absolute exclusion. Nay is worse
From God than from all others, O my friend!
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Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend;
Our hands would touch for all the mountain-bars:
And, heaven being rolled between us at the end,
We should but vow the faster for the stars.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet III

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart !
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
Of chief musician. What hast thou to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree ?
The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew,--
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet III: Unlike Are We, Unlike

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
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The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew--
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet IV

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems ! where
The dancers will break footing, from the care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
For hand of thine ? and canst thou think and bear
To let thy music drop here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door ?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof !
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation ! there 's a voice within
That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone, aloof

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet IV: Thou Hast Thy Calling

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
Most gracious singer of high poems! where
The dancers will break footing, from the care
Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
And dost thou lift this house's latch too poor
For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear
To let thy music drip here unaware
In folds of golden fulness at my door?
Look up and see the casement broken in,
The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
Hush, call no echo up in further proof
Of desolation! there's a voice within
That weeps...as thou must sing...alone, aloof.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet IX

Can it be right to give what I can give ?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations ? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right ! We are not peers,
So to be lovers; and I own, and grieve,
That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas !
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love--which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee ! let it pass.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet IX: Can It Be Right to Give

Can it be right to give what I can give?
To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
As salt as mine, and hear the sighing years
Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
Through those infrequent smiles which fail to live
For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
That this can scarce be right! We are not peers,
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That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!
I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
Nor give thee any love--which were unjust.
Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
O my Beloved, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then ! go.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet V: I Lift My Heavy Heart Up

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
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Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The grey dust up,...those laurels on thine head,
O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then! go.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore--
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VI: Go From Me

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforth in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
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And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VII: The Face of All the World

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the-wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse ? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all ?
Not so; not cold,--but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colors from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther ! let it serve to trample on.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet VIII: What Can I Give Thee Back

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
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To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptation. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark ! . . . I love thee--in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that proceed
Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I feel, across the inferior features
Of what I am, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet X: Yet Love, Mere Love

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptance. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
<i>I love thee</i>...mark!...<i>I love thee</i>--in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that proceed
Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I <i>feel,</i> across the inferior features
Of what I <i>am,</i> doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,--
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,--why advert
To these things ? O Beloved, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place !
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,--
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XI: And Therefore If to Love

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,--
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,--why advert
To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,--
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost,--
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,--
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek !)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XII: Indeed This Very Love

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost,--
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,--
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek--)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIII

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each ?--
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself--me--that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,--
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIII: And Wilt Thou Have Me

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light upon each?
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself.. me.. that I should bring thee proof,
In words of love hid in me...out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,
Seeing that I stand unwon (however wooed)
And rend the garment of my life in brief
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile--her look--her way
Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'--
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee,--and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,--
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby !
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIV: If Thou Must Love Me

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
*"I love her for her smile--her look--her way
Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"* -
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee,--and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, -
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIX

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,--
As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purple tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Beloved, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black !
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XIX: The Soul's Rialto

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,--
As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpleal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, ...
The bay-crown's shade, Belovèd, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it so black!
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XL

Oh, yes ! they love through all this world of ours !
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,--and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Beloved ! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry ' Too late.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XL: Oh, Yes! They Love

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of ours!
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth,
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours,
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,-- and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Belovèd! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry *Too late.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
To hearken what I said between my tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee ! Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That they should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLI: I Thank All

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
To hearken what I said between my tears,...
Instruct me how to thank thee! Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That they should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLII

' My future will not copy fair my past'--
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul ! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhopd for in the world !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLII: My Future

My future will not copy fair my past -
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhopd for in the world!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLIII

How do I love thee ? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLIII: How Do I Love Thee?

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right.
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLIV

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here 's ivy !--take them, as I used to do
Thy fowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colors true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XLIV: Belovèd, Thou Hast Brought Me

Belovèd, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those bed and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy!--take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul, their roots are left in mine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XV

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee--on thee--
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XV: Accuse Me Not

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee--on thee--
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low !
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,
Even so, Beloved, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If thou invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVI: And Yet, Because Thou

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low!
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth;
Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If *thou* invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use ?
A hope, to sing by gladly ? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse ?
A shade, in which to sing--of palm or pine ?
A grave, on which to rest from singing ? Choose.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVII: My Poet, Thou Canst Touch

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
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Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
A hope, to sing by gladly? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse?
A shade, in which to sing--of palm or pine?
A grave, on which to rest from singing? Choose.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
' Take it.' My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified,--
Take it thou,--finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XVIII: I Never Gave a Lock of Hair

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
<i>Take it.</i> My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified,--
Take it thou,--finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XX

Beloved, my Beloved, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link,
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand,--why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder ! Wonderful,
Never to feel thee thrill the day or night
With personal act or speech,--nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing ! Atheists are as dull,
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XX: Belovèd, My Belovèd

Belovèd, my Belovèd, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but, link by link
Went counting all my chains as if that so
They never could fall off at any blow
Struck by thy possible hand,--why, thus I drink
Of life's great cup of wonder! Wonderful,
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With personal act or speech,--nor ever cull
Some prescience of thee with the blossoms white
Thou sawest growing! Atheists are as dull
Who cannot guess God's presence out of sight.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem ' a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
Cry, ' Speak once more--thou lovest ! ' Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year ?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me--toll
The silver iterance !--only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXI: Say Over Again

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem "a cuckoo-song," as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
Cry, *Speak once more--thou lovest!* Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me--toll
The silver iterance!--only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curved point,--what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented ? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Beloved,--where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXII: When Our Two Souls Stand Up

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curvèd point,--what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Belovèd,--where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIII

Is it indeed so ? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine ?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head ?
I marvelled, my Beloved, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine--
But . . . so much to thee ? Can I pour thy wine
While my hands tremble ? Then my soul, instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love ! look on me--breathe on me !
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIII: Is It Indeed So?

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head?
I marvelled, my Belovèd, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine--
But...so much to thee? Can I pour your wine
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Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love! Look on me--breathe on me!
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIV

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life--
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIV: Let the World's Sharpness

Let the world's sharpness like a clasping knife
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life -
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer;
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIX

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better ! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere !
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXIX: I Think of Thee

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee,as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
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And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere!
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXV

A heavy heart, Beloved, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
My heavy heart. Then thou didst bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being ! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXV: A Heavy Heart, Belovèd

A heavy heart, Belovèd, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
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Deep being! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVI

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come--to be,
Beloved, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors (better, yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fountains),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVI: I Lived With Visions

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then thou didst come--to be,
Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors (better, yet the same,
As river water hallowed into fonts),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVII

My own Beloved, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss ! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found thee !
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,--so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVII: My Dear Belovèd

My dear Belovèd, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found *thee!*
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,--so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVIII

My letters ! all dead paper, mute and white !
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.
This said,--he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it !--this, . . . the paper's light . . .
Said, Dear, I love thee; and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, I am thine--and so its ink has paled
With Iying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXVIII: My Letters

My letters-- all dead paper, mute and white!
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night,
This said,--he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand...a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it!--this...the paper's light...
Said, *Dear, I love thee;* and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, *I am thine*--and so its ink has paled
With lying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this...O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause ?--Beloved, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad ? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's Amen.
Beloved, dost thou love ? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes ? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come--falling hot and real ?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXX: I See Thine Image

I see thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause?--Beloved, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's amen.
Beloved, dost thou love? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come--falling hot and real?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXI

Thou comest ! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt ! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion--that we two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
Thou dovelike help ! and, when my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXI: Thou Comest!

Thou comest! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion--that we two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
Thou dovelike help! and, when my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love!--more like an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on thee. For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,--
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXII: The First Time

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love!--more like an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on thee. For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,--
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name ! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God--call God!--So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name,--and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIII: Yes, Call Me by My Pet-Name!

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
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Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God--call God!--So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name,--and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name--
Lo, the vain promise ! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy ?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee--ponder how--
Not as to a single good, but all my good !
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIV: With the Same Heart

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name--
Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee--ponder how--
Not as to a single good, but all my good!
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run as fast as this blood.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race,--
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens,--because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,--
Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXIX: Because Thou Hast the Power

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race,
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens,--because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighbourhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all of which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,--
Nothing repels thee,...Dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me ? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this ?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change ?
That 's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved sol am hard to love.
Yet love me--wilt thou ? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXV: If I Leave All for Thee

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessings and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change?
That's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved so I am hard to love.
Yet love me--wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow ? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .
Lest these enclasped hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false ! if he, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVI: When We Met First

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear ... O love, O troth ...
Lest these enclasped hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false! if he, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranly, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVII: Pardon, Oh, Pardon

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranly, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple gate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its ' Oh, list, '
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed !
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, ' My love, my own.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnet XXXVIII: First Time He Kissed Me

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The finger of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its "Oh, list,"
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed!
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, "My love, my own."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese i

I THOUGHT once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wish'd-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw in gradual vision through my tears
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years--
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair;
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove,
'Guess now who holds thee?'--'Death,' I said. But there
The silver answer rang--'Not Death, but Love.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese ii

UNLIKE are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
Unlike our uses and our destinies.
Our ministering two angels look surprise
On one another, as they strike athwart
Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
A guest for queens to social pageantries,
With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
Of chief musician. What hast thou to do
With looking from the lattice-lights at me--
A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
The chrism is on thine head--on mine the dew--
And Death must dig the level where these agree.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese iii

GO from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore--
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese iv

IF thou must love me, let it be for naught
Except for love's sake only. Do not say,
'I love her for her smile--her look--her way
Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'--
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee--and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry:
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese v

WHEN our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curving point,--what bitter wrong
Can the earth do us, that we should not long
Be here contented? Think! In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us, and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Beloved--where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Soul's Expression, The

With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling interwound
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it,--as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Substitution

WHEN some beloved voice that was to you
Both sound and sweetness, faileth suddenly,
And silence, against which you dare not cry,
Aches round you like a strong disease and new--
What hope ? what help ? what music will undo
That silence to your sense ? Not friendship's sigh,
Not reason's subtle count; not melody
Of viols, nor of pipes that Faunus blew;
Not songs of poets, nor of nightingales
Whose hearts leap upward through the cypress-trees
To the clear moon; nor yet the spheric laws
Self-chanted, nor the angels' sweet ' All hails,'
Met in the smile of God: nay, none of these.
Speak THOU, availing Christ !--and fill this pause.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Tears

THANK God, bless God, all ye who suffer not
More grief than ye can weep for. That is well--
That is light grieving ! lighter, none befell
Since Adam forfeited the primal lot.
Tears ! what are tears ? The babe weeps in its cot,
The mother singing, at her marriage-bell
The bride weeps, and before the oracle
Of high-faned hills the poet has forgot
Such moisture on his cheeks. Thank God for grace,
Ye who weep only ! If, as some have done,
Ye grope tear-blinded in a desert place

And touch but tombs,--look up I those tears will run
Soon in long rivers down the lifted face,
And leave the vision clear for stars and sun

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Autumn

Go, sit upon the lofty hill,
And turn your eyes around,
Where waving woods and waters wild
Do hymn an autumn sound.
The summer sun is faint on them --
The summer flowers depart --
Sit still -- as all transform'd to stone,
Except your musing heart.

How there you sat in summer-time,
May yet be in your mind;
And how you heard the green woods sing
Beneath the freshening wind.
Though the same wind now blows around,
You would its blast recall;
For every breath that stirs the trees,
Doth cause a leaf to fall.

Oh! like that wind, is all the mirth
That flesh and dust impart:
We cannot bear its visitings,
When change is on the heart.
Gay words and jests may make us smile,
When Sorrow is asleep;
But other things must make us smile,
When Sorrow bids us weep!

The dearest hands that clasp our hands, --
Their presence may be o'er;
The dearest voice that meets our ear,
That tone may come no more!
Youth fades; and then, the joys of youth,
Which once refresh'd our mind,
Shall come -- as, on those sighing woods,
The chilling autumn wind.

Hear not the wind -- view not the woods;
Look out o'er vale and hill--
In spring, the sky encircled them --
The sky is round them still.
Come autumn's scathe -- come winter's cold --
Come change -- and human fate!
Whatever prospect Heaven doth bound,
Can ne'er be desolate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Best Thing in the World

What's the best thing in the world?
June-rose, by May-dew impearled;
Sweet south-wind, that means no rain;
Truth, not cruel to a friend;
Pleasure, not in haste to end;
Beauty, not self-decked and curled
Till its pride is over-plain;
Love, when, so, you're loved again.
What's the best thing in the world?
--Something out of it, I think.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Cry Of The Children

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the sorrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers---
And that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west---
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!---
They are weeping in the playtime of the others
In the country of the free.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,
Why their tears are falling so?---
The old man may weep for his to-morrow
Which is lost in Long Ago---
The old tree is leafless in the forest---
The old year is ending in the frost---
The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest---
The old hope is hardest to be lost:
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
Do you ask them why they stand
Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,
In our happy Fatherland?

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,
And their looks are sad to see,
For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses
Down the cheeks of infancy---
'Your old earth,' they say, 'is very dreary;'
'Our young feet,' they say, 'are very weak!
Few paces have we taken, yet are weary
Our grave-rest is very far to seek.
Ask the old why they weep, and not the children,
For the outside earth is cold,---
And we young ones stand without, in our bewildering,
And the graves are for the old.

'True,' say the young children, 'it may happen
That we die before our time.
Little Alice died last year---the grave is shapen
Like a snowball, in the rime.
We looked into the pit prepared to take her---
Was no room for any work in the close clay:
From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her
Crying, 'Get up, little Alice! it is day.'
If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,
With your ear down, little Alice never cries!---
Could we see her face, be sure we should not know her,
For the smile has time for growing in her eyes---
And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in

The shroud, by the kirk-chime!
It is good when it happens,' say the children,
'That we die before our time.'

Alas, alas, the children! they are seeking
Death in life, as best to have!
They are binding up their hearts away from breaking,
With a cerement from the grave.
Go out, children, from the mine and from the city---
Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do---
Pluck your handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty---
Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through!
But they answer, 'Are your cowslips of the meadows
Like our weeds anear the mine?
Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,
From your pleasures fair and fine!

'For oh,' say the children, 'we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap---
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping---
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground---
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.

'For, all day, the wheels are droning, turning,---
Their wind comes in our faces,---
Till our hearts turn,---our head, with pulses burning,
And the walls turn in their places---
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling---
Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall---
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling---
All are turning, all the day, and we with all.---
And, all day, the iron wheels are droning;
And sometimes we could pray,
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)
'Stop! be silent for to-day!' '

Ay! be silent! Let them hear each other breathing
For a moment, mouth to mouth---
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh wreathing
Of their tender human youth!
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals---
Let them prove their inward souls against the notion
That they live in you, os under you, O wheels!---
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,

Grinding life down from its mark;
And the children's souls, which God is calling sunward,
Spin on blindly in the dark.

Now, tell the poor young children, O my brothers,
To look up to Him and pray---
So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,
Will bless them another day.
They answer, 'Who is God that He should hear us,
White the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred?
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word!
And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)
Strangers speaking at the door:
Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,
Hears our weeping any more?

'Two words, indeed, of praying we remember,
And at midnight's hour of harm,---
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,
We say softly for a charm.
We know no other words except 'Our Father,'
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to gather,
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.
'Our Father!' If He heard us, He would surely
(For they call Him good and mild)
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,
'Come and rest with me, my child.'

'But no!' say the children, weeping faster,
'He is speechless as a stone;
And they tell us, of His image is the master
Who commands us to work on.
Go to!' say the children,---'Up in Heaven,
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find.
Do not mock us; grief has made us unbelieving---
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind.'
Do you hear the children weeping and disproving,
O my brothers, what ye preach?
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving---
And the children doubt of each.

And well may the children weep before you;
They are weary ere they run;
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory
Which is brighter than the sun:
They know the grief of man, but not the wisdom;
They sink in man's despair, without its calm---
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom,---
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm,---
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly

No dear remembrance keep,---
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly:
Let them weep! let them weep!

They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,
And their look is dread to see,
For they mind you of their angels in their places,
With eyes meant for Deity;---
'How long,' they say, 'how long, O cruel nation,
Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,
Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,
And tread onward to your throne amid the mart?
Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,
And your purple shows yo}r path;
But the child's sob curseth deeper in the silence
Than the strong man in his wrath!'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Deserted Garden

I mind me in the days departed,
How often underneath the sun
With childish bounds I used to run
 To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanished quite;
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,
The greenest grasses Nature laid
 To sanctify her right.

I called the place my wilderness,
For no one entered there but I;
The sheep looked in, the grass to espy,
 And passed it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,
And spread their boughs enough about
To keep both sheep and shepherd out,
 But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!
I crept beneath the boughs, and found
A circle smooth of mossy ground
 Beneath a poplar tree.

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,
Bedropt with roses waxen-white
Well satisfied with dew and light
 And careless to be seen.

Long years ago it might befall,
When all the garden flowers were trim,
The grave old gardener prided him
 On these the most of all.

Some lady, stately overmuch,
Here moving with a silken noise,
Has blushed beside them at the voice
 That likened her to such.

And these, to make a diadem,
She often may have plucked and twined,
Half-smiling as it came to mind
 That few would look at them.

Oh, little thought that lady proud,
A child would watch her fair white rose,
When buried lay her whiter brows,
 And silk was changed for shroud!

Nor thought that gardener, (full of scorns
For men unlearned and simple phrase,)

A child would bring it all its praise
By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat,
Though never a dream the roses sent
Of science or love's compliment,
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see
The trace of human step departed:
Because the garden was deserted,
The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken
Has childhood 'twixt the sun and sward;
We draw the moral afterward,
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide
In silence at the rose-tree wall:
A thrush made gladness musical
Upon the other side.

Nor he nor I did e'er incline
To peck or pluck the blossoms white;
How should I know but roses might
Lead lives as glad as mine?

To make my hermit-home complete,
I brought dear water from the spring
Praised in its own low murmuring,
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew
(Without the melancholy tale)
To 'Gentle Hermit of the Dale,'
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze
Made sounds poetic in the trees,
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write
I hear no more the wind athwart
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart
Delighting in delight.

My childhood from my life is parted,
My footstep from the moss which drew
Its fairy circle round: anew
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse
The madrigals which sweetest are;
No more for me! myself afar
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me, ah me! when erst I lay
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought,
I laughed unto myself and thought
'The time will pass away.'

And still I laughed, and did not fear
But that, whene'er was past away
The childish time, some happier play
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away,
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,
Did I look up to pray!

The time is past; and now that grows
The cypress high among the trees,
And I behold white sepulchres
As well as the white rose, --

When graver, meeker thoughts are given,
And I have learnt to lift my face,
Reminded how earth's greenest place
The color draws from heaven, --

It something saith for earthly pain,
But more for Heavenly promise free,
That I who was, would shrink to be
That happy child again.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The House Of Clouds

I would build a cloudy House
For my thoughts to live in;
When for earth too fancy-loose
And too low for Heaven!
Hush! I talk my dream aloud---
I build it bright to see,---
I build it on the moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with thee.

Cloud-walls of the morning's grey,
Faced with amber column,---
Crowned with crimson cupola
From a sunset solemn!
May mists, for the casements, fetch,
Pale and glimmering;
With a sunbeam hid in each,
And a smell of spring.

Build the entrance high and proud,
Darkening and then brightening,---
If a riven thunder-cloud,
Veined by the lightning.
Use one with an iris-stain,
For the door within;
Turning to a sound like rain,
As I enter in.

Build a spacious hall thereby:
Boldly, never fearing.
Use the blue place of the sky,
Which the wind is clearing;
Branched with corridors sublime,
Flecked with winding stairs---
Such as children wish to climb,
Following their own prayers.

In the mutest of the house,
I will have my chamber:
Silence at the door shall use
Evening's light of amber,
Solemnising every mood,
Softemng in degree,---
Turning sadness into good,
As I turn the key.

Be my chamber tapestried
With the showers of summer,
Close, but soundless,---glorified
When the sunbeams come here;
Wandering harpers, harping on
Waters stringed for such,---
Drawing colours, for a tune,

With a vibrant touch.

Bring a shadow green and still
From the chestnut forest,
Bring a purple from the hill,
When the heat is sorest;
Spread them out from wall to wall,
Carpet-wove around,---
Whereupon the foot shall fall
In light instead of sound.

Bring the fantasque cloudlets home
From the noontide zenith
Ranged, for sculptures, round the room,---
Named as Fancy weeneth:
Some be Junos, without eyes;
Naiads, without sources
Some be birds of paradise,---
Some, Olympian horses.

Bring the dew the birds shake off,
Waking in the hedges,---
Those too, perfumed for a proof,
From the lilies' edges:
From our England's field and moor,
Bring them calm and white in;
Whence to form a mirror pure,
For Love's self-delighting.

Bring a grey cloud from the east,
Where the lark is singing;
Something of the song at least,
Unlost in the bringing:
That shall be a morning chair,
Poet-dream may sit in,
When it leans out on the air,
Unrhymed and unwritten.

Bring the red cloud from the sun
While he sinketh, catch it.
That shall be a couch,---with one
Sidelong star to watch it,---
Fit for poet's finest Thought,
At the curfew-sounding,--- ;
Things unseen being nearer brought
Than the seen, around him.

Poet's thought,----not poet's sigh!
'Las, they come together!
Cloudy walls divide and fly,
As in April weather!
Cupola and column proud,

Structure bright to see---
Gone---except that moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with thee!

Let them! Wipe such visionings
From the Fancy's cartel---
Love secures some fairer things
Dowered with his immortal.
The sun may darken,---heaven be bowed---
But still, unchanged shall be,---
Here in my soul,---that moonlit cloud,
To which I looked with THEE!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Lady's Yes

'Yes,' I answered you last night;
'No,' this morning, Sir, I say.
Colours seen by candlelight,
Will not look the same by day.

When the viols played their best,
Lamps above, and laughs below---
Love me sounded like a jest,
Fit for Yes or fit for No.

Call me false, or call me free---
Vow, whatever light may shine,
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change on mine.

Yet the sin is on us both---
Time to dance is not to woo---
Wooer light makes fickle troth---
Scorn of me recoils on you.

Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high;
Bravely, as for life and death---
With a loyal gravity.

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies,
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.

By your truth she shall be true---
Ever true, as wives of yore---
And her Yes, once said to you,
SHALL be Yes for evermore.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Lady's Yes.

" Yes !" I answered you last night ;
" No !" this morning, Sir, I say !
Colours, seen by candle-light,
Will not look the same by day.

When the tabors played their best,
Lamps above, and laughs below --
Love me sounded like a jest,
Fit for Yes or fit for No !

Call me false, or call me free --
Vow, whatever light may shine,
No man on your face shall see
Any grief for change on mine.

Yet the sin is on us both --
Time to dance is not to woo --
Wooer light makes fickle troth --
Scorn of me recoils on you !

Learn to win a lady's faith
Nobly, as the thing is high ;
Bravely, as for life and death --
With a loyal gravity.

Lead her from the festive boards,
Point her to the starry skies,
Guard her, by your truthful words,
Pure from courtship's flatteries.

By your truth she shall be true --
Ever true, as wives of yore --
And her Yes, once said to you,
SHALL be Yes for evermore.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers

The breaking waves dashed high
On a stern and rock-bound coast,
And the woods, against a stormy sky,
Their giant branches tost;

And the heavy night hung dark
The hills and water o'er,
When a band of exiles moored their bark
On the wild New England shore.

Not as the conqueror comes,
They, the true-hearted, came;
Not with the roll of the stirring drums,
And the trumpet that sings of fame;

Not as the flying come,
In silence and in fear, -
They shook the depths of the desert's gloom
With their hymns of lofty cheer.

Amidst the storm they sang,
And the stars heard and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free.

The ocean-eagle soared
From his nest by the white wave's foam,
And the rocking pines of the forest roared -
This was their welcome home!

There were men with hoary hair
Amidst that pilgrim band:
Why had they come to wither there,
Away from their childhood's land?

There was woman's fearless eye,
Lit by her deep love's truth;
There was manhood's brow serenely high,
And the fiery heart of youth.

What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of the seas? the spoils of war? -
They sought a faith's pure shrine!

Ay, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod!
They have left unstained what there they found -
Freedom to worship God!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Look

The Saviour looked on Peter. Ay, no word,
No gesture of reproach; the Heavens serene
Though heavy with armed justice, did not lean
Their thunders that way: the forsaken Lord
Looked only, on the traitor. None record
What that look was, none guess; for those who have seen
Wronged lovers loving through a death-pang keen,
Or pale-cheeked martyrs smiling to a sword,
Have missed Jehovah at the judgment-call.
And Peter, from the height of blasphemy--
'I never knew this man'--did quail and fall
As knowing straight THAT GOD; and turned free
And went out speechless from the face of all
And filled the silenc, weeping bitterly.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Meaning Of The Look

I think that look of Christ might seem to say--
'Thou Peter ! art thou then a common stone
Which I at last must break my heart upon
For all God's charge to his high angels may
Guard my foot better ? Did I yesterday
Wash thy feet, my beloved, that they should run
Quick to deny me 'neath the morning sun ?
And do thy kisses, like the rest, betray ?
The cock crows coldly.--GO, and manifest
A late contrition, but no bootless fear !
For when thy final need is dreariest,
Thou shalt not be denied, as I am here;
My voice to God and angels shall attest,
Because I KNOW this man, let him be clear.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Poet And The Bird

Said a people to a poet---' Go out from among us straightway!
While we are thinking earthly things, thou singest of divine.
There's a little fair brown nightingale, who, sitting in the gateways
Makes fitter music to our ears than any song of thine!'

The poet went out weeping---the nightingale ceased chanting;
'Now, wherefore, O thou nightingale, is all thy sweetness done?'
I cannot sing my earthly things, the heavenly poet wanting,
Whose highest harmony includes the lowest under sun.'

The poet went out weeping,---and died abroad, bereft there---
The bird flew to his grave and died, amid a thousand wails:---
And, when I last came by the place, I swear the music left there
Was only of the poet's song, and not the nightingale's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Prisoner

I count the dismal time by months and years
Since last I felt the green sward under foot,
And the great breath of all things summer-
Met mine upon my lips. Now earth appears
As strange to me as dreams of distant spheres
Or thoughts of Heaven we weep at. Nature's lute
Sounds on, behind this door so closely shut,
A strange wild music to the prisoner's ears,
Dilated by the distance, till the brain
Grows dim with fancies which it feels too
While ever, with a visionary pain,
Past the precluded senses, sweep and Rhine
Streams, forests, glades, and many a golden train
Of sunlit hills transfigured to Divine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point

I.
I stand on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark . . .
I look on the sky and the sea.

II.
O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!
I see you come out proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew. . .
And round me and round me ye go!
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe.

III.
And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where I knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land
Ye blessed in freedom's evermore.

IV.
I am black, I am black;
And yet God made me, they say.
But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast His work away
Under the feet of His white creatures,
With a look of scorn,--that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V.
And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light.
There's a little dark bird sits and sings;
There's a dark stream ripples out of sight;
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI.
But we who are dark, we are dark!
Ah, God, we have no stars!
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison bars:
The poor souls crouch so far behind,
That never a comfort can they find

By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed, we live beneath the sky, . . .
That great smooth Hand of God, stretched out
On all His children fatherly,
To bless them from the fear and doubt,
Which would be, if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to His face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost,
They make us hot, they make us cold,
As if we were not black and lost:
And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
Do fear and take us for very men!
Could the weep-poor-will or the cat of the glen
Look into my eyes and be bold?

IX.

I am black, I am black!--
But, once, I laughed in girlish glee;
For one of my colour stood in the track
Where the drivers drove, and looked at me--
And tender and full was the look he gave:
Could a slave look so at another slave?--
I look at the sky and the sea.

X.

And from that hour our spirits grew
As free as if unsold, unbought:
Oh, strong enough, since we were two
To conquer the world, we thought!
The drivers drove us day by day;
We did not mind, we went one way,
And no better a liberty sought.

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,
He said "I love you" as he passed:
When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
I heard how he vowed it fast:
While others shook, he smiled in the hut
As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut,
Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song;
Over and over I sang his name--
Upward and downward I drew it along
My various notes; the same, the same!

I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
Might never guess from aught they could hear,
It was only a name.

XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea--
We were two to love, and two to pray,--
Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
Though nothing didst Thou say.
Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun!
And now I cry who am but one,
How wilt Thou speak to-day?--

XIV.

We were black, we were black!
We had no claim to love and bliss:
What marvel, if each turned to lack?
They wrung my cold hands out of his,--
They dragged him . . . where ? . . . I crawled to touch
His blood's mark in the dust! . . . not much,
Ye pilgrim-souls, . . . though plain as this!

XV.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong!
Mere grief's too good for such as I.
So the white men brought the shame ere long
To strangle the sob of my agony.
They would not leave me for my dull
Wet eyes!--it was too merciful
To let me weep pure tears and die.

XVI.

I am black, I am black!--
I wore a child upon my breast
An amulet that hung too slack,
And, in my unrest, could not rest:
Thus we went moaning, child and mother,
One to another, one to another,
Until all ended for the best:

XVII.

For hark ! I will tell you low . . . Iow . . .
I am black, you see,--
And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
Was far too white . . . too white for me;
As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
Beside me at church but yesterday;
Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

XVIII.

My own, own child! I could not bear
To look in his face, it was so white.

I covered him up with a kerchief there;
I covered his face in close and tight:
And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
For the white child wanted his liberty--
Ha, ha! he wanted his master right.

XIX.
He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
His little feet that never grew--
He struck them out, as it was meet,
Against my heart to break it through.
I might have sung and made him mild--
But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
The only song I knew.

XX.
I pulled the kerchief very close:
He could not see the sun, I swear,
More, then, alive, than now he does
From between the roots of the mango . . . where
. . . I know where. Close! a child and mother
Do wrong to look at one another,
When one is black and one is fair.

XXI.
Why, in that single glance I had
Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
I saw a look that made me mad . . .
The master's look, that used to fall
On my soul like his lash . . . or worse!
And so, to save it from my curse,
I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.
And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
He shivered from head to foot;
Till, after a time, he lay instead
Too suddenly still and mute.
I felt, beside, a stiffening cold, . . .
I dared to lift up just a fold . . .
As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII.
But my fruit . . . ha, ha!--there, had been
(I laugh to think on't at this hour! . . .)
Your fine white angels, who have seen
Nearest the secret of God's power, . . .
And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
And sucked the soul of that child of mine,
As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, for the trick of the angels white!
They freed the white child's spirit so.
I said not a word, but, day and night,
I carried the body to and fro;
And it lay on my heart like a stone . . . as chill.
--The sun may shine out as much as he will:
I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
I carried the little body on,
The forest's arms did round us shut,
And silence through the trees did run:
They asked no question as I went,--
They stood too high for astonishment,--
They could see God sit on His throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
I bore it on through the forest . . . on:
And when I felt it was tired at last,
I scooped a hole beneath the moon.
Through the forest-tops the angels far,
With a white sharp finger from every star,
Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright, . . .
Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed,
All, changed to black earth, . . . nothing white, . . .
A dark child in the dark,--ensued
Some comfort, and my heart grew young:
I sate down smiling there and sung
The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled,
The white child and black mother, thus:
For, as I sang it, soft and wild
The same song, more melodious,
Rose from the grave whereon I sate!
It was the dead child singing that,
To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky!
Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay,
The free sun rideth gloriously;
But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away
Through the earliest streaks of the morn.
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX.

Ah!--in their 'stead, their hunter sons!
Ah, ah! they are on me--they hunt in a ring--
Keep off! I brave you all at once--
I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting!
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think:
Did you never stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing?

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift!--)
I wish you, who stand there five a-breast,
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,
A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangos!--Yes, but she
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she liketh best.

XXXII.

I am not mad: I am black.
I see you staring in my face--
I know you, staring, shrinking back--
Ye are born of the Washington-race:
And this land is the free America:
And this mark on my wrist . . . (I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then? Not a sound!
I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun.
I only cursed them all around,
As softly as I might have done
My very own child!--From these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands,
O slaves, and end what I begun!

XXXIV.

Whips, curses; these must answer those!
For in this UNION, you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each: and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair;
While HE sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men
Are, after all, not gods indeed,
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. We who bleed . . .
(Stand off!) we help not in our loss!

We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

XXXVI.

I fall, I swoon! I look at the sky:
The clouds are breaking on my brain;
I am floated along, as if I should die
Of liberty's exquisite pain--
In the name of the white child, waiting for me
In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
White men, I leave you all curse-free
In my broken heart's disdain!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Seraph and Poet

THE seraph sings before the manifest
God-One, and in the burning of the Seven,
And with the full life of consummate
Heaving beneath him like a mother's
Warm with her first-born's slumber in that
The poet sings upon the earth grave-riven,
Before the naughty world, soon self-forgiven
For wronging him,--and in the darkness prest
From his own soul by worldly weights.

Even so,
Sing, seraph with the glory ! heaven is high;
Sing, poet with the sorrow ! earth is low:
The universe's inward voices cry
' Amen ' to either song of joy and woe:
Sing, seraph,--poet,--sing on equally !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Soul's Expression

WITH stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream and thought and feeling interwound
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground.
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it,--as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Two Sayings

Two sayings of the Holy Scriptures beat
Like pulses in the Church's brow and breast;
And by them we find rest in our unrest
And, heart deep in salt-tears, do yet entreat
God's fellowship as if on heavenly seat.
The first is JESUS WEPT,--whereon is prest
Full many a sobbing face that drops its best
And sweetest waters on the record sweet:
And one is where the Christ, denied and scorned
LOOKED UPON PETER. Oh, to render plain
By help of having loved a little and mourned,
That look of sovran love and sovran pain
Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered, turned
On him who could reject but not sustain !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The Weakest Thing

Which is the weakest thing of all
Mine heart can ponder?
The sun, a little cloud can pall
With darkness yonder?
The cloud, a little wind can move
Where'er it listeth?
The wind, a little leaf above,
Though sere, resisteth?

What time that yellow leaf was green,
My days were gladder;
But now, whatever Spring may mean,
I must grow sadder.
Ah me! a leaf with sighs can wring
My lips asunder -
Then is mine heart the weakest thing
Itself can ponder.

Yet, Heart, when sun and cloud are pined
And drop together,
And at a blast, which is not wind,
The forests wither,
Thou, from the darkening deathly curse
To glory breakest, -
The Strongest of the universe
Guarding the weakest!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

To

Mine is a wayward lay;
And, if its echoing rhymes I try to string,
 Proveth a truant thing,
Whenso some names I love, send it away!

For then, eyes swimming o'er,
And clasped hands, and smiles in fondness meant,
 Are much more eloquent --
So it had fain begone, and speak no more!

Yet shall it come again,
Ah, friend belov'd! if so thy wishes be,
 And, with wild melody,
I will, upon thine ear, cadence my strain --

Cadence my simple line,
Unfashion'd by the cunning hand of Art,
 But coming from my heart,
To tell the message of its love to thine!

As ocean shells, when taken
From Ocean's bed, will faithfully repeat
 Her ancient music sweet --
Ev'n so these words, true to my heart, shall waken!

Oh! while our bark is seen,
Our little bark of kindly, social love,
 Down life's clear stream to move
Toward the summer shores, where all is green --

So long thy name shall bring,
Echoes of joy unto the grateful gales,
 And thousand tender tales,
To freshen the fond hearts that round thee cling!

Hast thou not look'd upon
The flowerets of the field in lowly dress?
 Blame not my simpleness --
Think only of my love! -- my song is gone.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

To Flush, My Dog

Loving friend, the gift of one
Who her own true faith has run
 Through thy lower nature,
Be my benediction said
With my hand upon thy head,
 Gentle fellow-creature!

Like a lady's ringlets brown,
Flow thy silken ears adown
 Either side demurely
Of thy silver-suited breast
Shining out from all the rest
 Of thy body purely.

Darkly brown thy body is,
Till the sunshine striking this
 Alchemise its dullness,
When the sleek curls manifold
Flash all over into gold
 With a burnished fulness.

Underneath my stroking hand,
Startled eyes of hazel bland
 Kindling, growing larger,
Up thou leapest with a spring,
Full of prank and curveting,
 Leaping like a charger.

Leap! thy broad tail waves a light,
Leap! thy slender feet are bright,
 Canopied in fringes;
Leap! those tasselled ears of thine
Flicker strangely, fair and fine
 Down their golden inches

Yet, my pretty, sportive friend,
Little is't to such an end
 That I praise thy rareness;
Other dogs may be thy peers
Haply in these drooping ears
 And this glossy fairness.

But of thee it shall be said,
This dog watched beside a bed
 Day and night unweary,
Watched within a curtained room
Where no sunbeam brake the gloom
 Round the sick and dreary.

Roses, gathered for a vase,
In that chamber died apace,
 Beam and breeze resigning;

This dog only, waited on,
Knowing that when light is gone
Love remains for shining.

Other dogs in thymy dew
Tracked the hares and followed through
Sunny moor or meadow;
This dog only, crept and crept
Next a languid cheek that slept,
Sharing in the shadow.

Other dogs of loyal cheer
Bounded at the whistle clear,
Up the woodside hieing;
This dog only, watched in reach
Of a faintly uttered speech
Or a louder sighing.

And if one or two quick tears
Dropped upon his glossy ears
Or a sigh came double,
Up he sprang in eager haste,
Fawning, fondling, breathing fast,
In a tender trouble.

And this dog was satisfied
If a pale thin hand would glide
Down his dewlaps sloping, --
Which he pushed his nose within,
After, -- platforming his chin
On the palm left open.

This dog, if a friendly voice
Call him now to blither choice
Than such chamber-keeping,
'Come out!' praying from the door, --
Presseth backward as before,
Up against me leaping.

Therefore to this dog will I,
Tenderly not scornfully,
Render praise and favor:
With my hand upon his head,
Is my benediction said
Therefore and for ever.

And because he loves me so,
Better than his kind will do
Often man or woman,
Give I back more love again
Than dogs often take of men,
Leaning from my Human.

Blessings on thee, dog of mine,
Pretty collars make thee fine,
 Sugared milk make fat thee!
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
 Nevermore, to pat thee

Downy pillow take thy head,
Silken coverlid bestead,
 Sunshine help thy sleeping!
No fly's buzzing wake thee up,
No man break thy purple cup
 Set for drinking deep in.

Whiskered cats aointed flee,
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
 Cologne distillations;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
 Turn to daily rations!

Mock I thee, in wishing weal? --
Tears are in my eyes to feel
 Thou art made so straitly,
Blessing needs must straiten too, --
Little canst thou joy or do,
 Thou who lovest greatly.

Yet be blessed to the height
Of all good and all delight
 Pervious to thy nature;
Only loved beyond that line,
With a love that answers thine,
 Loving fellow-creature!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

To George Sand: A Desire

THOU large-brained woman and large-hearted man,
Self-called George Sand ! whose soul, amid the lions
Of thy tumultuous senses, moans defiance
And answers roar for roar, as spirits can:
I would some mild miraculous thunder ran
Above the applauded circus, in appliance
Of thine own nobler nature's strength and science,
Drawing two pinions, white as wings of swan,
From thy strong shoulders, to amaze the place
With holier light ! that thou to woman's claim
And man's, mightst join beside the angel's grace
Of a pure genius sanctified from blame
Till child and maiden pressed to thine embrace
To kiss upon thy lips a stainless fame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

To George Sand: A Recognition

TRUE genius, but true woman ! dost deny
The woman's nature with a manly scorn
And break away the gauds and armlets worn
By weaker women in captivity?
Ah, vain denial ! that revolted cry
Is sobbed in by a woman's voice forlorn, _
Thy woman's hair, my sister, all unshorn
Floats back dishevelled strength in agony
Disproving thy man's name: and while before
The world thou burnest in a poet-fire,
We see thy woman-heart beat evermore
Through the large flame. Beat purer, heart, and higher,
Till God unsex thee on the heavenly shore
Where unincarnate spirits purely aspire !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Two Sayings, The

Two savings of the Holy Scriptures beat
Like pulses in the Church's brow and breast;
And by them we find rest in our unrest
And, heart deep in salt-tears, do yet entreat
God's fellowship as if on heavenly seat.
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That look of sovran love and sovran pain
Which HE, who could not sin yet suffered, turned
On him who could reject but not sustain !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

V

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen grayness. If thy foot in scorn
Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
It might be well perhaps. But if instead
Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
The gray dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
O my Beloved, will not shield thee so,
That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
The hair beneath. Stand farther off then ! go.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

VI

Go from me. Yet I feel that I shall stand
Henceforward in thy shadow. Nevermore
Alone upon the threshold of my door
Of individual life, I shall command
The uses of my soul, nor lift my hand
Serenely in the sunshine as before,
Without the sense of that which I forbore--
Thy touch upon the palm. The widest land
Doom takes to part us, leaves thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double. What I do
And what I dream include thee, as the wine
Must taste of its own grapes. And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

VII

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
Was caught up into love, and taught the whole
Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink,
And praise its sweetness, Sweet, with thee anear.
The names of country, heaven, are changed away
For where thou art or shalt be, there or here;
And this . . . this lute and song . . . loved yesterday,
(The singing angels know) are only dear
Because thy name moves right in what they say.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

VIII

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,
And laid them on the outside of the-wall
For such as I to take or leave withal,
In unexpected largesse ? am I cold,
Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
High gifts, I render nothing back at all ?
Not so; not cold,--but very poor instead.
Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
The colors from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head.
Go farther ! let it serve to trample on.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Weakest Thing, The

Which is the weakest thing of all
Mine heart can ponder?
The sun, a little cloud can pall
With darkness yonder?
The cloud, a little wind can move
Where'er it listeth?
The wind, a little leaf above,
Though sere, resisteth?

What time that yellow leaf was green,
My days were gladder;
But now, whatever Spring may mean,
I must grow sadder.
Ah me! a leaf with sighs can wring
My lips asunder -
Then is mine heart the weakest thing
Itself can ponder.

Yet, Heart, when sun and cloud are pined
And drop together,
And at a blast, which is not wind,
The forests wither,
Thou, from the darkening deathly curse
To glory breakest, -
The Strongest of the universe
Guarding the weakest!

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Work

WHAT are we set on earth for ? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines
For all the heat o' the day, till it declines,
And Death's mild curfew shall from work assoil.
God did anoint thee with his odorous oil,
To wrestle, not to reign; and He assigns
All thy tears over, like pure crystallines,
For younger fellow-workers of the soil
To wear for amulets. So others shall
Take patience, labor, to their heart and hand
From thy hand and thy heart and thy brave cheer,
And God's grace fructify through thee to
The least flower with a brimming cup may stand,
And share its dew-drop with another near.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Work And Contemplation

The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
A pleasant chant, ballad or barcarole;
She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
Far more than of her flax; and yet the reel
Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
With quick adjustment, provident control,
The lines--too subtly twisted to unroll--
Out to a perfect thread. I hence appeal
To the dear Christian Church--that we may do
Our Father's business in these temples mirk,
Thus swift and steadfast, thus intent and strong;
While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
Some high calm spheric tune, and prove our work
The better for the sweetness of our song.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

X

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptation. Fire is bright,
Let temple burn, or flax; an equal light
Leaps in the flame from cedar-plank or weed:
And love is fire. And when I say at need
I love thee . . . mark ! . . . I love thee--in thy sight
I stand transfigured, glorified aright,
With conscience of the new rays that proceed
Out of my face toward thine. There's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I feel, across the inferior features
Of what I am, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XI

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
To bear the burden of a heavy heart,--
This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
A melancholy music,--why advert
To these things ? O Beloved, it is plain
I am not of thy worth nor for thy place !
And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
From that same love this vindicating grace,
To live on still in love, and yet in vain,--
To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XII

Indeed this very love which is my boast,
And which, when rising up from breast to brow,
Doth crown me with a ruby large enow
To draw men's eyes and prove the inner cost,--
This love even, all my worth, to the uttermost,
I should not love withal, unless that thou
Hadst set me an example, shown me how,
When first thine earnest eyes with mine were crossed,
And love called love. And thus, I cannot speak
Of love even, as a good thing of my own:
Thy soul hath snatched up mine all faint and weak,
And placed it by thee on a golden throne,--
And that I love (O soul, we must be meek !)
Is by thee only, whom I love alone.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
'I love her for her smile--her look--her way
Of speaking gently,--for a trick of thought
That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day'--
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee,--and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,--
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby !
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XIV (If thou must love me, let it be for nought)

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say
"I love her for her smile--her look--her way
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Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheek dry,--
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XIX

The soul's Rialto hath its merchandise;
I barter curl for curl upon that mart,
And from my poet's forehead to my heart
Receive this lock which outweighs argosies,--
As purple black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
The dim purpleal tresses gloomed athwart
The nine white Muse-brows. For this counterpart, . . .
The bay-crown's shade, Beloved, I surmise,
Still lingers on thy curl, it is so black !
Thus, with a fillet of smooth-kissing breath,
I tie the shadows safe from gliding back,
And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XL

Oh, yes ! they love through all this world of ours !
I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back but that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and Giaours
Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
Slips on the nut if, after frequent showers,
The shell is over-smooth,--and not so much
Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
Or else to oblivion. But thou art not such
A lover, my Beloved ! thou canst wait
Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to touch,
And think it soon when others cry ' Too late.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XLI

I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot
To hearken what I said between my tears, . . .
Instruct me how to thank thee ! Oh, to shoot
My soul's full meaning into future years,
That they should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XLII

' My future will not copy fair my past'--
I wrote that once; and thinking at my side
My ministering life-angel justified
The word by his appealing look upcast
To the white throne of God, I turned at last,
And there, instead, saw thee, not unallied
To angels in thy soul ! Then I, long tried
By natural ills, received the comfort fast,
While budding, at thy sight, my pilgrim's staff
Gave out green leaves with morning dews impearled.
I seek no copy now of life's first half:
Leave here the pages with long musing curled,
And write me new my future's epigraph,
New angel mine, unhopd for in the world !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XLIII

How do I love thee ? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XLIV

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and showers.
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here unfolded too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdrew
From my heart's ground. Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here 's ivy !--take them, as I used to do
Thy fowers, and keep them where they shall not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colors true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XV

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine,
And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
Were most impossible failure, if I strove
To fail so. But I look on thee--on thee--
Beholding, besides love, the end of love,
Hearing oblivion beyond memory;
As one who sits and gazes from above,
Over the rivers to the bitter sea.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XVI

And yet, because thou overcomest so,
Because thou art more noble and like a king,
Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
May prove as lordly and complete a thing
In lifting upward, as in crushing low !
And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,
Even so, Beloved, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. If thou invite me forth,
I rise above abasement at the word.
Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XVII

My poet, thou canst touch on all the notes
God set between his After and Before,
And strike up and strike off the general roar
Of the rushing worlds a melody that floats
In a serene air purely. Antidotes
Of medicated music, answering for
Mankind's forlornest uses, thou canst pour
From thence into their ears. God's will devotes
Thine to such ends, and mine to wait on thine.
How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use ?
A hope, to sing by gladly ? or a fine
Sad memory, with thy songs to interfuse ?
A shade, in which to sing--of palm or pine ?
A grave, on which to rest from singing ? Choose.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XVIII

I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, Dearest, except this to thee,
Which now upon my fingers thoughtfully,
I ring out to the full brown length and say
' Take it.' My day of youth went yesterday;
My hair no longer bounds to my foot's glee,
Nor plant I it from rose or myrtle-tree,
As girls do, any more: it only may
Now shade on two pale cheeks the mark of tears,
Taught drooping from the head that hangs aside
Through sorrow's trick. I thought the funeral-shears
Would take this first, but Love is justified,--
Take it thou,--finding pure, from all those years,
The kiss my mother left here when she died.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XX

And wilt thou have me fashion into speech
The love I bear thee, finding words enough,
And hold the torch out, while the winds are rough,
Between our faces, to cast light on each ?--
I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself--me--that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief,--
Seeing that I stand unwon, however wooed,
And rend the garment of my life, in brief,
By a most dauntless, voiceless fortitude,
Lest one touch of this heart convey its grief

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXI

Say over again, and yet once over again,
That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
Should seem ' a cuckoo-song,' as thou dost treat it,
Remember, never to the hill or plain,
Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
Cry, ' Speak once more--thou lovest ! ' Who can fear
Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year ?
Say thou dost love me, love me, love me--toll
The silver iterance !--only minding, Dear,
To love me also in silence with thy soul.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXII

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curved point,--what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented ? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Beloved,--where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXIII

Is it indeed so ? If I lay here dead,
Wouldst thou miss any life in losing mine ?
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine
Because of grave-damps falling round my head ?
I marvelled, my Beloved, when I read
Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine--
But . . . so much to thee ? Can I pour thy wine
While my hands tremble ? Then my soul, instead
Of dreams of death, resumes life's lower range.
Then, love me, Love ! look on me--breathe on me !
As brighter ladies do not count it strange,
For love, to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with thee !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXIV

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm,
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life--
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm,
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. Very whitely still
The lilies of our lives may reassure
Their blossoms from their roots, accessible
Alone to heavenly dews that drop not fewer,
Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill.
God only, who made us rich, can make us poor.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXIX

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better ! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere !
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXV

A heavy heart, Beloved, have I borne
From year to year until I saw thy face,
And sorrow after sorrow took the place
Of all those natural joys as lightly worn
As the stringed pearls, each lifted in its turn
By a beating heart at dance-time. Hopes apace
Were changed to long despairs, till God's own grace
Could scarcely lift above the world forlorn
My heavy heart. Then thou didst bid me bring
And let it drop adown thy calmly great
Deep being ! Fast it sinketh, as a thing
Which its own nature doth precipitate,
While thine doth close above it, mediating
Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXVI

I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come--to be,
Beloved, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors (better, yet the same,
As river-water hallowed into fountains),
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXVII

My own Beloved, who hast lifted me
From this drear flat of earth where I was thrown,
And, in betwixt the languid ringlets, blown
A life-breath, till the forehead hopefully
Shines out again, as all the angels see,
Before thy saving kiss ! My own, my own,
Who camest to me when the world was gone,
And I who looked for only God, found thee !
I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,--so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between the good and bad,
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXVIII

My letters ! all dead paper, mute and white !
And yet they seem alive and quivering
Against my tremulous hands which loose the string
And let them drop down on my knee to-night.
This said,--he wished to have me in his sight
Once, as a friend: this fixed a day in spring
To come and touch my hand . . . a simple thing,
Yet I wept for it !--this, . . . the paper's light . . .
Said, Dear, I love thee; and I sank and quailed
As if God's future thundered on my past.
This said, I am thine--and so its ink has paled
With Iying at my heart that beat too fast.
And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXX

I see thine image through my tears to-night,
And yet to-day I saw thee smiling. How
Refer the cause ?--Beloved, is it thou
Or I, who makes me sad ? The acolyte
Amid the chanted joy and thankful rite
May so fall flat, with pale insensate brow,
On the altar-stair. I hear thy voice and vow,
Perplexed, uncertain, since thou art out of sight,
As he, in his swooning ears, the choir's Amen.
Beloved, dost thou love ? or did I see all
The glory as I dreamed, and fainted when
Too vehement light dilated my ideal,
For my soul's eyes ? Will that light come again,
As now these tears come--falling hot and real ?

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXI

Thou comest ! all is said without a word.
I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
In that last doubt ! and yet I cannot rue
The sin most, but the occasion--that we two
Should for a moment stand unministered
By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,
Thou dovelike help ! and, when my fears would rise,
With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXII

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
Quick-loving hearts, I thought, may quickly loathe;
And, looking on myself, I seemed not one
For such man's love!--more like an out-of-tune
Worn viol, a good singer would be wroth
To spoil his song with, and which, snatched in haste,
Is laid down at the first ill-sounding note.
I did not wrong myself so, but I placed
A wrong on thee. For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,--
And great souls, at one stroke, may do and doat.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXIII

Yes, call me by my pet-name ! let me hear
The name I used to run at, when a child,
From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
To glance up in some face that proved me dear
With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
While I call God--call God!--So let thy mouth
Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
Yes, call me by that name,--and I, in truth,
With the same heart, will answer and not wait.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXIV

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
As those, when thou shalt call me by my name--
Lo, the vain promise ! is the same, the same,
Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy ?
When called before, I told how hastily
I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game,
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. When I answer now,
I drop a grave thought, break from solitude;
Yet still my heart goes to thee--ponder how--
Not as to a single good, but all my good !
Lay thy hand on it, best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run fast as this blood.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXIX

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
To look through and behind this mask of me
(Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
With their rains), and behold my soul's true face,
The dim and weary witness of life's race,--
Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
The patient angel waiting for a place
In the new Heavens,--because nor sin nor woe,
Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood,
Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all, self-viewed,--
Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so
To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good !

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXV

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me ? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this ?
Nay, wilt thou fill that place by me which is
Filled by dead eyes too tender to know change ?
That 's hardest. If to conquer love, has tried,
To conquer grief, tries more, as all things prove;
For grief indeed is love and grief beside.
Alas, I have grieved sol am hard to love.
Yet love me--wilt thou ? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXVI

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
To last, a love set pendulous between
Sorrow and sorrow ? Nay, I rather thrilled,
Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
The onward path, and feared to overlean
A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
And strong since then, I think that God has willed
A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .
Lest these enclasped hands should never hold,
This mutual kiss drop down between us both
As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
And Love, be false ! if he, to keep one oath,
Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXVII

Pardon, oh, pardon, that my soul should make,
Of all that strong divineness which I know
For thine and thee, an image only so
Formed of the sand, and fit to shift and break.
It is that distant years which did not take
Thy sovranty, recoiling with a blow,
Have forced my swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake
Thy purity of likeness and distort
Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit:
As if a shipwrecked Pagan, safe in port,
His guardian sea-god to commemorate,
Should set a sculptured porpoise, gills a-snort
And vibrant tail, within the temple-gate.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

XXXVIII

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
And ever since, it grew more clean and white,
Slow to world-greetings, quick with its ' Oh, list, '
When the angels speak. A ring of amethyst
I could not wear here, plainer to my sight,
Than that first kiss. The second passed in height
The first, and sought the forehead, and half missed,
Half falling on the hair. O beyond meed !
That was the chrism of love, which love's own crown,
With sanctifying sweetness, did precede.
The third upon my lips was folded down
In perfect, purple state; since when, indeed,
I have been proud and said, ' My love, my own.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning