

Sonnets from the Portuguese

By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and
markup by Students and Staff of the University of Virginia*

I

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

II

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

III

29 Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
30 Unlike our uses and our destinies.
31 Our ministering two angels look surprise
32 On one another, as they strike athwart
33 Their wings in passing. Thou, bethink thee, art
34 A guest for queens to social pageantries,

35 With gages from a hundred brighter eyes
36 Than tears even can make mine, to play thy part
37 Of chief musician. What hast thou to do
38 With looking from the lattice-lights at me,
39 A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
40 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
41 The chrim is on thine head,—on mine, the dew,—
42 And Death must dig the level where these agree.

IV

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

V

57 I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
58 As once Electra her sepulchral urn,
59 And, looking in thine eyes, I over-turn
60 The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
61 What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
62 And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
63 Through the ashen greyness. If thy foot in scorn
64 Could tread them out to darkness utterly,
65 It might be well perhaps. But if instead
66 Thou wait beside me for the wind to blow
67 The grey dust up, . . . those laurels on thine head,
68 O my Belovèd, will not shield thee so,
69 That none of all the fires shall scorch and shred
70 The hair beneath. Stand further off then! go!

VI

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

VII

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

VIII

99 What can I give thee back, O liberal
100 And princely giver, who hast brought the gold
101 And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold,

102 And laid them on the outside of the wall
103 For such as I to take or leave withal,
104 In unexpected largesse? am I cold,
105 Ungrateful, that for these most manifold
106 High gifts, I render nothing back at all?
107 Not so; not cold,—but very poor instead.
108 Ask God who knows. For frequent tears have run
109 The colours from my life, and left so dead
110 And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
111 To give the same as pillow to thy head.
112 Go farther! let it serve to trample on.

X

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

XI

141 And therefore if to love can be desert,
142 I am not all unworthy. Cheeks as pale
143 As these you see, and trembling knees that fail
144 To bear the burden of a heavy heart,—
145 This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
146 To climb Aornus, and can scarce avail
147 To pipe now 'gainst the valley nightingale
148 A melancholy music,—why advert
149 To these things? O Belovèd, it is plain
150 I am not of thy worth nor for thy place!
151 And yet, because I love thee, I obtain
152 From that same love this vindicating grace

153 To live on still in love, and yet in vain,—
154 To bless thee, yet renounce thee to thy face.

XII

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

XIII

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

XIV

183 If thou must love me, let it be for nought

184 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
185 "I love her for her smile—her look—her way
186 Of speaking gently,—for a trick of thought
187 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
188 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day"—
189 For these things in themselves, Belovèd, may
190 Be changed, or change for thee,—and love, so wrought,
191 May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
192 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry,
193 A creature might forget to weep, who bore
194 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
195 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
196 Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

XV

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

XVI

211 And yet, because thou overcomest so,
212 Because thou art more noble and like a king,
213 Thou canst prevail against my fears and fling
214 Thy purple round me, till my heart shall grow
215 Too close against thine heart henceforth to know
216 How it shook when alone. Why, conquering
217 May prove as lordly and complete a thing
218 In lifting upward as in laying low!
219 And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
220 To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,

221 Even so, Belovèd, I at last record,
222 Here ends my strife. If thou invite me forth,
223 I rise above abasement at the word.
224 Make thy love larger to enlarge my worth!

XVII

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

XVIII

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

XIX

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

XX

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

XXI

281 Say over again, and yet once over again,
282 That thou dost love me. Though the word repeated
283 Should seem a "cuckoo-song," as thou dost treat it,
284 Remember, never to the hill or plain,
285 Valley and wood, without her cuckoo-strain
286 Comes the fresh Spring in all her green completed.
287 Belovéd, I, amid the darkness greeted
288 By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
289 Cry, "Speak once more—thou lovest!" Who can fear

290 Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
291 Too many flowers, though each shall crown the year?
292 Say thou dost love me, love me, love me—toll
293 The silver iterance!—only minding, Dear,
294 To love me also in silence with thy soul.

XXII

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

XXIII

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

XXIV

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

XXV

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

XXVI

351 I lived with visions for my company
352 Instead of men and women, years ago,
353 And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
354 A sweeter music than they played to me.
355 But soon their trailing purple was not free
356 Of this world's dust, their lutes did silent grow,
357 And I myself grew faint and blind below
358 Their vanishing eyes. Then thou didst come—to be,
359 Belovèd, what they seemed. Their shining fronts,

360 Their songs, their splendours, (better, yet the same,
361 As river-water hallowed into fonts)
362 Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
363 My soul with satisfaction of all wants:
364 Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

XXVII

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

XXVIII

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

XXIX

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

XXX

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

XXXI

421 Thou comest! all is said without a word.
422 I sit beneath thy looks, as children do
423 In the noon-sun, with souls that tremble through
424 Their happy eyelids from an unaverred
425 Yet prodigal inward joy. Behold, I erred
426 In that last doubt! and yet I cannot rue
427 The sin most, but the occasion—that we two
428 Should for a moment stand unministered
429 By a mutual presence. Ah, keep near and close,

430 Thou dove-like help! and when my fears would rise,
431 With thy broad heart serenely interpose:
432 Brood down with thy divine sufficiencies
433 These thoughts which tremble when bereft of those,
434 Like callow birds left desert to the skies.

XXXII

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

XXXIII

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

XXXIV

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

XXXV

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

XXXVI

491 When we met first and loved, I did not build
492 Upon the event with marble. Could it mean
493 To last, a love set pendulous between
494 Sorrow and sorrow? Nay, I rather thrilled,
495 Distrusting every light that seemed to gild
496 The onward path, and feared to overlean
497 A finger even. And, though I have grown serene
498 And strong since then, I think that God has willed
499 A still renewable fear . . . O love, O troth . . .

500 Lest these enclasp'd hands should never hold,
501 This mutual kiss drop down between us both
502 As an unowned thing, once the lips being cold.
503 And Love, be false! if he, to keep one oath,
504 Must lose one joy, by his life's star foretold.

XXXVII

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

XXXVIII

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

XXXIX

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

XL

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

XLI

561 I thank all who have loved me in their hearts,
562 With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to all
563 Who paused a little near the prison-wall
564 To hear my music in its louder parts
565 Ere they went onward, each one to the mart's
566 Or temple's occupation, beyond call.
567 But thou, who, in my voice's sink and fall
568 When the sob took it, thy divinest Art's
569 Own instrument didst drop down at thy foot

570 To harken what I said between my tears, . . .
571 Instruct me how to thank thee! Oh, to shoot
572 My soul's full meaning into future years,
573 That they should lend it utterance, and salute
574 Love that endures, from life that disappears!

XLII

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

XLIII

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

XLIV

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