

## Bishop Blougram's Apology by Robert Browning

No more wine? then we'll push back chairs and talk.  
A final glass for me, though: cool, i' faith!  
We ought to have our Abbey back, you see.  
It's different, preaching in basilicas,  
And doing duty in some masterpiece  
Like this of brother Pugin's, bless his heart!  
I doubt if they're half baked, those chalk rosettes,  
Ciphers and stucco-twiddlings everywhere;  
It's just like breathing in a lime-kiln: eh?  
These hot long ceremonies of our church  
Cost us a little--oh, they pay the price,  
You take me--amply pay it! Now, we'll talk.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.  
No deprecation,--nay, I beg you, sir!  
Beside 't is our engagement: don't you know,  
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,  
We'd see truth dawn together?--truth that peeps  
Over the glasses' edge when dinner's done,

And body gets its sop and holds its noise  
And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time:  
'T is break of day! You do despise me then.  
And if I say, "despise me,"--never fear!  
I know you do not in a certain sense--  
Not in my arm-chair, for example: here,  
I well imagine you respect my place  
( Status, entourage , worldly circumstance)  
Quite to its value--very much indeed:  
--Are up to the protesting eyes of you  
In pride at being seated here for once--  
You'll turn it to such capital account!  
When somebody, through years and years to come,  
Hints of the bishop,--names me--that's enough:  
"Blougram? I knew him"--(into it you slide)  
"Dined with him once, a Corpus Christi Day,  
"All alone, we two; he's a clever man:  
"And after dinner,--why, the wine you know,--  
"Oh, there was wine, and good!--what with the wine . .  
"Faith, we began upon all sorts of talk!  
"He's no bad fellow, Blougram; he had seen  
"Something of mine he relished, some review:  
"He's quite above their humbug in his heart,  
"Half-said as much, indeed--the thing's his trade.  
"I warrant, Blougram's sceptical at times:  
"How otherwise? I liked him, I confess!"

Che che , my dear sir, as we say at Rome,  
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;  
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:  
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Thus much conceded, still the first fact stays--  
You do despise me; your ideal of life  
Is not the bishop's: you would not be I.  
You would like better to be Goethe, now,  
Or Buonaparte, or, bless me, lower still,

Count D'Orsay,--so you did what you preferred,  
Spoke as you thought, and, as you cannot help,  
Believed or disbelieved, no matter what,  
So long as on that point, whate'er it was,  
You loosed your mind, were whole and sole yourself.  
--That, my ideal never can include,  
Upon that element of truth and worth  
Never be based! for say they make me Pope--  
(They can't--suppose it for our argument!)  
Why, there I'm at my tether's end, I've reached  
My height, and not a height which pleases you:  
An unbelieving Pope won't do, you say.  
It's like those eerie stories nurses tell,  
Of how some actor on a stage played Death,  
With pasteboard crown, sham orb and tinselled dart,  
And called himself the monarch of the world;

Then, going in the tire-room afterward,  
Because the play was done, to shift himself,  
Got touched upon the sleeve familiarly,  
The moment he had shut the closet door,  
By Death himself. Thus God might touch a Pope  
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,  
And whose part he presumed to play just now?  
Best be yourself, imperial, plain and true!

So, drawing comfortable breath again,  
You weigh and find, whatever more or less  
I boast of my ideal realized,  
Is nothing in the balance when opposed  
To your ideal, your grand simple life,  
Of which you will not realize one jot.  
I am much, you are nothing; you would be all,  
I would be merely much: you beat me there.

No, friend, you do not beat me: hearken why!  
The common problem, yours, mine, every one's,  
Is--not to fancy what were fair in life  
Provided it could be,--but, finding first  
What may be, then find how to make it fair  
Up to our means: a very different thing!  
No abstract intellectual plan of life  
Quite irrespective of life's plainest laws,

But one, a man, who is man and nothing more,  
May lead within a world which (by your leave)  
Is Rome or London, not Fool's-paradise.  
Embellish Rome, idealize away,  
Make paradise of London if you can,  
You're welcome, nay, you're wise.

A simile!  
We mortals cross the ocean of this world  
Each in his average cabin of a life;  
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.  
Now for our six months' voyage--how prepare?  
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list  
Of things he calls convenient: so they are!

An India screen is pretty furniture,  
A piano-forte is a fine resource,  
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,  
The new edition fifty volumes long;  
And little Greek books, with the funny type  
They get up well at Leipsic, fill the next:  
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!  
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!  
'T were pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow  
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,  
Since he more than the others brings with him  
Italy's self,--the marvellous Modenese!--

Yet was not on your list before, perhaps.  
--Alas, friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name?  
The captain, or whoever's master here--  
You see him screw his face up; what's his cry  
Ere you set foot on shipboard? "Six feet square!"  
If you won't understand what six feet mean,  
Compute and purchase stores accordingly--  
And if, in pique because he overhauls  
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board  
Bare--why, you cut a figure at the first  
While sympathetic landsmen see you off;  
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,  
You peep up from your utterly naked boards  
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,  
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug--  
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)  
And mortified you mutter "Well and good;  
"He sits enjoying his sea-furniture;  
"T is stout and proper, and there's store of it:  
"Though I've the better notion, all agree,  
"Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,  
"Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances--  
"I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!"  
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind--  
You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't  
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.  
See my way: we're two college friends, suppose.  
Prepare together for our voyage, then;  
Each note and check the other in his work,--  
Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticize!  
What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Why first, you don't believe, you don't and can't,  
(Not stately, that is, and fixedly  
And absolutely and exclusively)  
In any revelation called divine.  
No dogmas nail your faith; and what remains  
But say so, like the honest man you are?  
First, therefore, overhaul theology!  
Nay, I too, not a fool, you please to think,  
Must find believing every whit as hard:  
And if I do not frankly say as much,  
The ugly consequence is clear enough.

Now wait, my friend: well, I do not believe--  
If you'll accept no faith that is not fixed,  
Absolute and exclusive, as you say.  
You're wrong--I mean to prove it in due time.  
Meanwhile, I know where difficulties lie  
I could not, cannot solve, nor ever shall,  
So give up hope accordingly to solve--

(To you, and over the wine). Our dogmas then  
With both of us, though in unlike degree,  
Missing full credence--overboard with them!  
I mean to meet you on your own premise:  
Good, there go mine in company with yours!

And now what are we? unbelievers both,  
Calm and complete, determinately fixed  
To-day, to-morrow and for ever, pray?  
You'll guarantee me that? Not so, I think!  
In no wise! all we've gained is, that belief,  
As unbelief before, shakes us by fits,  
Confounds us like its predecessor. Where's  
The gain? how can we guard our unbelief,  
Make it bear fruit to us?--the problem here.  
Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides,--  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears  
As old and new at once as nature's self,  
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,  
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,--  
The grand Perhaps! We look on helplessly.  
There the old misgivings, crooked questions are--  
This good God,--what he could do, if he would,

Would, if he could--then must have done long since:  
If so, when, where and how? some way must be,--  
Once feel about, and soon or late you hit  
Some sense, in which it might be, after all.  
Why not, "The Way, the Truth, the Life?"

--That way  
Over the mountain, which who stands upon  
Is apt to doubt if it be meant for a road;  
While, if he views it from the waste itself,  
Up goes the line there, plain from base to brow,  
Not vague, mistakeable! what's a break or two  
Seen from the unbroken desert either side?  
And then (to bring in fresh philosophy)  
What if the breaks themselves should prove at last  
The most consummate of contrivances  
To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith?  
And so we stumble at truth's very test!  
All we have gained then by our unbelief  
Is a life of doubt diversified by faith,  
For one of faith diversified by doubt:  
We called the chess-board white,--we call it black.

"Well," you rejoin, "the end's no worse, at least;  
"We've reason for both colours on the board:  
"Why not confess then, where I drop the faith  
"And you the doubt, that I'm as right as you?"

Because, friend, in the next place, this being so,  
And both things even,--faith and unbelief  
Left to a man's choice,--we'll proceed a step,  
Returning to our image, which I like.

A man's choice, yes--but a cabin-passenger's--  
The man made for the special life o' the world--  
Do you forget him? I remember though!  
Consult our ship's conditions and you find  
One and but one choice suitable to all;  
The choice, that you unluckily prefer,  
Turning things topsy-turvy--they or it  
Going to the ground. Belief or unbelief  
Bears upon life, determines its whole course,  
Begins at its beginning. See the world  
Such as it is,--you made it not, nor I;  
I mean to take it as it is,--and you,  
Not so you'll take it,--though you get nought else.  
I know the special kind of life I like,  
What suits the most my idiosyncrasy,  
Brings out the best of me and bears me fruit  
In power, peace, pleasantness and length of days.  
I find that positive belief does this  
For me, and unbelief, no whit of this.  
--For you, it does, however?--that, we'll try!  
'T is clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,

Induce the world to let me peaceably,  
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,  
"I absolutely and peremptorily  
"Believe!"--I say, faith is my waking life:  
One sleeps, indeed, and dreams at intervals,  
We know, but waking's the main point with us  
And my provision's for life's waking part.  
Accordingly, I use heart, head and hand  
All day, I build, scheme, study, and make friends;  
And when night overtakes me, down I lie,  
Sleep, dream a little, and get done with it,  
The sooner the better, to begin afresh.  
What's midnight doubt before the dayspring's faith?  
You, the philosopher, that disbelieve,  
That recognize the night, give dreams their weight--  
To be consistent you should keep your bed,  
Abstain from healthy acts that prove you man,  
For fear you drowse perhaps at unawares!  
And certainly at night you'll sleep and dream,  
Live through the day and bustle as you please.  
And so you live to sleep as I to wake,  
To unbelieve as I to still believe?  
Well, and the common sense o' the world calls you  
Bed-ridden,--and its good things come to me.  
Its estimation, which is half the fight,  
That's the first-cabin comfort I secure:

The next . . . but you perceive with half an eye!  
Come, come, it's best believing, if we may;  
You can't but own that!

Next, concede again,  
If once we choose belief, on all accounts  
We can't be too decisive in our faith,  
Conclusive and exclusive in its terms,  
To suit the world which gives us the good things.  
In every man's career are certain points  
Whereon he dares not be indifferent;  
The world detects him clearly, if he dare,  
As baffled at the game, and losing life.  
He may care little or he may care much  
For riches, honour, pleasure, work, repose,  
Since various theories of life and life's  
Success are extant which might easily  
Comport with either estimate of these;  
And whoso chooses wealth or poverty,  
Labour or quiet, is not judged a fool  
Because his fellow would choose otherwise:  
We let him choose upon his own account  
So long as he's consistent with his choice.  
But certain points, left wholly to himself,  
When once a man has arbitrated on,  
We say he must succeed there or go hang.

Thus, he should wed the woman he loves most  
Or needs most, whatsoe'er the love or need--  
For he can't wed twice. Then, he must avouch,  
Or follow, at the least, sufficiently,  
The form of faith his conscience holds the best,  
Whate'er the process of conviction was:  
For nothing can compensate his mistake  
On such a point, the man himself being judge:  
He cannot wed twice, nor twice lose his soul.

Well now, there's one great form of Christian faith  
I happened to be born in--which to teach  
Was given me as I grew up, on all hands,  
As best and readiest means of living by;  
The same on examination being proved  
The most pronounced moreover, fixed, precise  
And absolute form of faith in the whole world--  
Accordingly, most potent of all forms  
For working on the world. Observe, my friend!  
Such as you know me, I am free to say,  
In these hard latter days which hamper one,  
Myself--by no immoderate exercise  
Of intellect and learning, but the tact  
To let external forces work for me,  
--Bid the street's stones be bread and they are bread;

Bid Peter's creed, or rather, Hildebrand's,  
Exalt me o'er my fellows in the world  
And make my life an ease and joy and pride;  
It does so,--which for me's a great point gained,  
Who have a soul and body that exact  
A comfortable care in many ways.  
There's power in me and will to dominate  
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else:  
In many ways I need mankind's respect,  
Obedience, and the love that's born of fear:  
While at the same time, there's a taste I have,  
A toy of soul, a titillating thing,  
Refuses to digest these dainties crude.  
The naked life is gross till clothed upon:  
I must take what men offer, with a grace  
As though I would not, could I help it, take!  
An uniform I wear though over-rich--  
Something imposed on me, no choice of mine;  
No fancy-dress worn for pure fancy's sake  
And despicable therefore! now folk kneel  
And kiss my hand--of course the Church's hand.  
Thus I am made, thus life is best for me,  
And thus that it should be I have procured;  
And thus it could not be another way,  
I venture to imagine.

You'll reply,  
So far my choice, no doubt, is a success;  
But were I made of better elements,  
With nobler instincts, purer tastes, like you,  
I hardly would account the thing success  
Though it did all for me I say.

But, friend,  
We speak of what is; not of what might be,  
And how't were better if't were otherwise.  
I am the man you see here plain enough:  
Grant I'm a beast, why, beasts must lead beasts' lives!  
Suppose I own at once to tail and claws;  
The tailless man exceeds me: but being tailed  
I'll lash out lion fashion, and leave apes  
To dock their stump and dress their haunches up.  
My business is not to remake myself,  
But make the absolute best of what God made.  
Or--our first simile--though you prove me doomed  
To a viler berth still, to the steerage-hole,  
The sheep-pen or the pig-stye, I should strive  
To make what use of each were possible;  
And as this cabin gets upholstery,  
That hutch should rustle with sufficient straw.

But, friend, I don't acknowledge quite so fast  
I fail of all your manhood's lofty tastes

Enumerated so complacently,  
On the mere ground that you forsooth can find  
In this particular life I choose to lead  
No fit provision for them. Can you not?  
Say you, my fault is I address myself  
To grosser estimators than should judge?  
And that's no way of holding up the soul,  
Which, nobler, needs men's praise perhaps, yet knows  
One wise man's verdict outweighs all the fools'--  
Would like the two, but, forced to choose, takes that.  
I pine among my million imbeciles  
(You think) aware some dozen men of sense  
Eye me and know me, whether I believe  
In the last winking Virgin, as I vow,  
And am a fool, or disbelieve in her  
And am a knave,--approve in neither case,  
Withhold their voices though I look their way:  
Like Verdi when, at his worst opera's end  
(The thing they gave at Florence,--what's its name?)  
While the mad houseful's plaudits near out-bang  
His orchestra of salt-box, tongs and bones,  
He looks through all the roaring and the wreaths  
Where sits Rossini patient in his stall.

Nay, friend, I meet you with an answer here--  
That even your prime men who appraise their kind

Are men still, catch a wheel within a wheel,  
See more in a truth than the truth's simple self,  
Confuse themselves. You see lads walk the street  
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?  
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;  
Him you must watch--he's sure to fall, yet stands!  
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.  
The honest thief, the tender murderer,  
The superstitious atheist, demirep  
That loves and saves her soul in new French books--  
We watch while these in equilibrium keep  
The giddy line midway: one step aside,  
They're classed and done with. I, then, keep the line  
Before your sages,--just the men to shrink  
From the gross weights, coarse scales and labels broad  
You offer their refinement. Fool or knave?  
Why needs a bishop be a fool or knave  
When there's a thousand diamond weights between?  
So, I enlist them. Your picked twelve, you'll find,  
Profess themselves indignant, scandalized  
At thus being held unable to explain  
How a superior man who disbelieves  
May not believe as well: that's Schelling's way!  
It's through my coming in the tail of time,  
Nicking the minute with a happy tact.  
Had I been born three hundred years ago

They'd say, "What's strange? Blougram of course believes;"  
And, seventy years since, "disbelieves of course."  
But now, "He may believe; and yet, and yet  
"How can he?" All eyes turn with interest.  
Whereas, step off the line on either side--



You, for example, clever to a fault,  
The rough and ready man who write apace,  
Read somewhat seldomer, think perhaps even less--  
You disbelieve! Who wonders and who cares?  
Lord So-and-so--his coat bedropped with wax,  
All Peter's chains about his waist, his back  
Brave with the needlework of Noodledom--  
Believes! Again, who wonders and who cares?  
But I, the man of sense and learning too,  
The able to think yet act, the this, the that,  
I, to believe at this late time of day!  
Enough; you see, I need not fear contempt.

--Except it's yours! Admire me as these may,  
You don't. But whom at least do you admire?  
Present your own perfection, your ideal,  
Your pattern man for a minute--oh, make haste  
Is it Napoleon you would have us grow?  
Concede the means; allow his head and hand,  
(A large concession, clever as you are)

Good! In our common primal element  
Of unbelief (we can't believe, you know--  
We're still at that admission, recollect!)  
Where do you find--apart from, towering o'er  
The secondary temporary aims  
Which satisfy the gross taste you despise--  
Where do you find his star?--his crazy trust  
God knows through what or in what? it's alive  
And shines and leads him, and that's all we want.  
Have we aught in our sober night shall point  
Such ends as his were, and direct the means  
Of working out our purpose straight as his,  
Nor bring a moment's trouble on success  
With after-care to justify the same?  
--Be a Napoleon, and yet disbelieve--  
Why, the man's mad, friend, take his light away!  
What's the vague good o' the world, for which you dare  
With comfort to yourself blow millions up?  
We neither of us see it! we do see  
The blown-up millions--spatter of their brains  
And writhing of their bowels and so forth,  
In that bewildering entanglement  
Of horrible eventualities  
Past calculation to the end of time!  
Can I mistake for some clear word of God  
(Which were my ample warrant for it all)

His puff of hazy instinct, idle talk,  
"The State, that's I," quack-nonsense about crowns,  
And (when one beats the man to his last hold)  
A vague idea of setting things to rights,  
Policing people efficaciously,  
More to their profit, most of all to his own;  
The whole to end that dimmest of ends  
By an Austrian marriage, cant to us the Church,  
And resurrection of the old régime?  
Would I, who hope to live a dozen years,  
Fight Austerlitz for reasons such and such?

No: for, concede me but the merest chance  
Doubt may be wrong--there's judgment, life to come!  
With just that chance, I dare not. Doubt proves right?  
This present life is all?--you offer me  
Its dozen noisy years, without a chance  
That wedding an archduchess, wearing lace,  
And getting called by divers new-coined names,  
Will drive off ugly thoughts and let me dine,  
Sleep, read and chat in quiet as I like!  
Therefore I will not.

Take another case;  
Fit up the cabin yet another way.  
What say you to the poets? shall we write  
Hamlet, Othello--make the world our own,

Without a risk to run of either sort?  
I can't--to put the strongest reason first.  
"But try," you urge, "the trying shall suffice;  
"The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life:  
"Try to be Shakespeare, leave the rest to fate!"  
Spare my self-knowledge--there's no fooling me!  
If I prefer remaining my poor self,  
I say so not in self-dispraise but praise.  
If I'm a Shakespeare, let the well alone;  
Why should I try to be what now I am?  
If I'm no Shakespeare, as too probable,--  
His power and consciousness and self-delight  
And all we want in common, shall I find--  
Trying for ever? while on points of taste  
Wherewith, to speak it humbly, he and I  
Are dowered alike--I'll ask you, I or he,  
Which in our two lives realizes most?  
Much, he imagined--somewhat, I possess.  
He had the imagination; stick to that!  
Let him say, "In the face of my soul's works  
"Your world is worthless and I touch it not  
"Lest I should wrong them"--I'll withdraw my plea.  
But does he say so? look upon his life!  
Himself, who only can, gives judgment there.  
He leaves his towers and gorgeous palaces  
To build the trimmest house in Stratford town;

Saves money, spends it, owns the worth of things,  
Giulio Romano's pictures, Dowland's lute;  
Enjoys a show, respects the puppets, too,  
And none more, had he seen its entry once,  
Than "Pandulph, of fair Milan cardinal."  
Why then should I who play that personage,  
The very Pandulph Shakespeare's fancy made,  
Be told that had the poet chanced to start  
From where I stand now (some degree like mine  
Being just the goal he ran his race to reach)  
He would have run the whole race back, forsooth,  
And left being Pandulph, to begin write plays?  
Ah, the earth's best can be but the earth's best!  
Did Shakespeare live, he could but sit at home  
And get himself in dreams the Vatican,  
Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,

And English books, none equal to his own,  
Which I read, bound in gold (he never did).  
--Terni's fall, Naples' bay and Gothard's top--  
Eh, friend? I could not fancy one of these;  
But, as I pour this claret, there they are:  
I've gained them--crossed St. Gothard last July  
With ten mules to the carriage and a bed  
Slung inside; is my hap the worse for that?  
We want the same things, Shakespeare and myself,  
And what I want, I have: he, gifted more,

Could fancy he too had them when he liked,  
But not so thoroughly that, if fate allowed,  
He would not have them also in my sense.  
We play one game; I send the ball aloft  
No less adroitly that of fifty strokes  
Scarce five go o'er the wall so wide and high  
Which sends them back to me: I wish and get  
He struck balls higher and with better skill,  
But at a poor fence level with his head,  
And hit--his Stratford house, a coat of arms,  
Successful dealings in his grain and wool,--  
While I receive heaven's incense in my nose  
And style myself the cousin of Queen Bess.  
Ask him, if this life's all, who wins the game?

Believe--and our whole argument breaks up.  
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat;  
Only, we can't command it; fire and life  
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree:  
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,  
The fact's the same,--belief's fire, once in us,  
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself:  
We penetrate our life with such a glow  
As fire lends wood and iron--this turns steel,  
That burns to ash--all's one, fire proves its power  
For good or ill, since men call flare success.

But paint a fire, it will not therefore burn.  
Light one in me, I'll find it food enough!  
Why, to be Luther--that's a life to lead,  
Incomparably better than my own.  
He comes, reclaims God's earth for God, he says,  
Sets up God's rule again by simple means,  
Re-opens a shut book, and all is done.  
He flared out in the flaring of mankind;  
Such Luther's luck was: how shall such be mine?  
If he succeeded, nothing's left to do:  
And if he did not altogether--well,  
Strauss is the next advance. All Strauss should be  
I might be also. But to what result?  
He looks upon no future: Luther did.  
What can I gain on the denying side?  
Ice makes no conflagration. State the facts,  
Read the text right, emancipate the world--  
The emancipated world enjoys itself  
With scarce a thank-you: Blougram told it first  
It could not owe a farthing,--not to him  
More than Saint Paul! 't would press its pay, you think?

Then add there's still that plaguy hundredth chance  
Strauss may be wrong. And so a risk is run--  
For what gain? not for Luther's, who secured  
A real heaven in his heart throughout his life,  
Supposing death a little altered things.

"Ay, but since really you lack faith," you cry,  
"You run the same risk really on all sides,  
"In cool indifference as bold unbelief.  
"As well be Strauss as swing 'twixt Paul and him.  
"It's not worth having, such imperfect faith,  
"No more available to do faith's work  
"Than unbelief like mine. Whole faith, or none!"

Softly, my friend! I must dispute that point  
Once own the use of faith, I'll find you faith.  
We're back on Christian ground. You call for faith:  
I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.  
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,  
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?  
By life and man's free will, God gave for that!  
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice:  
That's our one act, the previous work's his own.  
You criticize the soul? it reared this tree--  
This broad life and whatever fruit it bears!  
What matter though I doubt at every pore,  
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,  
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,  
Doubts at the very bases of my soul  
In the grand moments when she probes herself--  
If finally I have a life to show,  
The thing I did, brought out in evidence

Against the thing done to me underground  
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?  
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?  
All's doubt in me; where's break of faith in this?  
It is the idea, the feeling and the love,  
God means mankind should strive for and show forth  
Whatever be the process to that end,--  
And not historic knowledge, logic sound,  
And metaphysical acumen, sure!  
"What think ye of Christ," friend? when all's done and said,  
Like you this Christianity or not?  
It may be false, but will you wish it true?  
Has it your vote to be so if it can?  
Trust you an instinct silenced long ago  
That will break silence and enjoin you love  
What mortified philosophy is hoarse,  
And all in vain, with bidding you despise?  
If you desire faith--then you've faith enough:  
What else seeks God--nay, what else seek ourselves?  
You form a notion of me, we'll suppose,  
On hearsay; it's a favourable one:  
"But still" (you add), "there was no such good man,  
"Because of contradiction in the facts.  
"One proves, for instance, he was born in Rome,  
"This Blougram; yet throughout the tales of him

"I see he figures as an Englishman."  
Well, the two things are reconcilable.  
But would I rather you discovered that,  
Subjoining--"Still, what matter though they be?  
"Blougram concerns me nought, born here or there."

Pure faith indeed--you know not what you ask!  
Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,  
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much  
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne.  
It were the seeing him, no flesh shall dare  
Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:  
I say it's meant to hide him all it can,  
And that's what all the blessed evil's for.  
Its use in Time is to environ us,  
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough  
Against that sight till we can bear its stress.  
Under a vertical sun, the exposed brain  
And lidless eye and disemprisoned heart  
Less certainly would wither up at once  
Than mind, confronted with the truth of him.  
But time and earth case-harden us to live;  
The feeblest sense is trusted most; the child  
Feels God a moment, ichors o'er the place,  
Plays on and grows to be a man like us.

With me, faith means perpetual unbelief  
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot  
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.  
Or, if that's too ambitious,--here's my box--  
I need the excitation of a pinch  
Threatening the torpor of the inside-nose  
Nigh on the imminent sneeze that never comes.  
"Leave it in peace" advise the simple folk:  
Make it aware of peace by itching-fits,  
Say I--let doubt occasion still more faith!

You'll say, once all believed, man, woman, child,  
In that dear middle-age these noodles praise.  
How you'd exult if I could put you back  
Six hundred years, blot out cosmogony,  
Geology, ethnology, what not  
(Greek endings, each the little passing-bell  
That signifies some faith's about to die),  
And set you square with Genesis again,--  
When such a traveller told you his last news,  
He saw the ark a-top of Ararat  
But did not climb there since 't was getting dusk  
And robber-bands infest the mountain's foot!  
How should you feel, I ask, in such an age,  
How act? As other people felt and did;  
With soul more blank than this decanter's knob,  
Believe--and yet lie, kill, rob, fornicate  
Full in belief's face, like the beast you'd be!

No, when the fight begins within himself,  
A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,  
Satan looks up between his feet--both tug--

He's left, himself, i the middle: the soul wakes  
And grows. Prolong that battle through his life!  
Never leave growing till the life to come!  
Here, we've got callous to the Virgin's winks  
That used to puzzle people wholesomely:  
Men have outgrown the shame of being fools.  
What are the laws of nature, not to bend  
If the Church bid them?--brother Newman asks.  
Up with the Immaculate Conception, then--  
On to the rack with faith!--is my advice.  
Will not that hurry us upon our knees,  
Knocking our breasts, "It can't be--yet it shall!  
"Who am I, the worm, to argue with my Pope?  
"Low things confound the high things!" and so forth.  
That's better than acquitting God with grace  
As some folk do. He's tried--no case is proved,  
Philosophy is lenient--he may go!

You'll say, the old system's not so obsolete  
But men believe still: ay, but who and where?

King Bomba's lazzaroni foster yet  
The sacred flame, so Antonelli writes;  
But even of these, what ragamuffin-saint  
Believes God watches him continually,  
As he believes in fire that it will burn,  
Or rain that it will drench him? Break fire's law,  
Sin against rain, although the penalty  
Be just a singe or soaking? "No," he smiles;  
"Those laws are laws that can enforce themselves."

The sum of all is--yes, my doubt is great,  
My faith's still greater, then my faith's enough.  
I have read much, thought much, experienced much,  
Yet would die rather than avow my fear  
The Naples' liquefaction may be false,  
When set to happen by the palace-clock  
According to the clouds or dinner-time.  
I hear you recommend, I might at least  
Eliminate, declassfy my faith  
Since I adopt it; keeping what I must  
And leaving what I can--such points as this.  
I won't--that is, I can't throw one away.  
Supposing there's no truth in what I hold  
About the need of trial to man's faith,  
Still, when you bid me purify the same,  
To such a process I discern no end.

Clearing off one excrescence to see two,  
There's ever a next in size, now grown as big,  
That meets the knife: I cut and cut again!  
First cut the Liquefaction, what comes last  
But Fichte's clever cut at God himself?  
Experimentalize on sacred things!  
I trust nor hand nor eye nor heart nor brain  
To stop betimes: they all get drunk alike.  
The first step, I am master not to take.

You'd find the cutting-process to your taste  
As much as leaving growths of lies unpruned,  
Nor see more danger in it,--you retort.  
Your taste's worth mine; but my taste proves more wise  
When we consider that the steadfast hold  
On the extreme end of the chain of faith  
Gives all the advantage, makes the difference  
With the rough purblind mass we seek to rule:  
We are their lords, or they are free of us,  
Just as we tighten or relax our hold.  
So, others matters equal, we'll revert  
To the first problem--which, if solved my way  
And thrown into the balance, turns the scale--  
How we may lead a comfortable life,  
How suit our luggage to the cabin's size.

Of course you are remarking all this time  
How narrowly and grossly I view life,  
Respect the creature-comforts, care to rule  
The masses, and regard complacently  
"The cabin," in our old phrase. Well, I do.  
I act for, talk for, live for this world now,  
As this world prizes action, life and talk:  
No prejudice to what next world may prove,  
Whose new laws and requirements, my best pledge  
To observe then, is that I observe these now,  
Shall do hereafter what I do meanwhile.  
Let us concede (gratuitously though)  
Next life relieves the soul of body, yields  
Pure spiritual enjoyment: well, my friend,  
Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use  
May be to make the next life more intense?

Do you know, I have often had a dream  
(Work it up in your next month's article)  
Of man's poor spirit in its progress, still  
Losing true life for ever and a day  
Through ever trying to be and ever being--  
In the evolution of successive spheres--  
Before its actual sphere and place of life,  
Halfway into the next, which having reached,  
It shoots with corresponding foolery

Halfway into the next still, on and off!  
As when a traveller, bound from North to South,  
Scouts fur in Russia: what's its use in France?  
In France spurns flannel: where's its need in Spain?  
In Spain drops cloth, too cumbrous for Algiers!  
Linen goes next, and last the skin itself,  
A superfluity at Timbuctoo.  
When, through his journey, was the fool at ease?  
I'm at ease now, friend; worldly in this world,  
I take and like its way of life; I think  
My brothers, who administer the means,  
Live better for my comfort--that's good too;  
And God, if he pronounce upon such life,  
Approves my service, which is better still.  
If he keep silence,--why, for you or me  
Or that brute beast pulled-up in to-day's "Times,"  
What odds is't, save to ourselves, what life we lead?

You meet me at this issue: you declare,--  
All special-pleading done with--truth is truth,  
And justifies itself by undreamed ways.  
You don't fear but it's better, if we doubt,  
To say so, act up to our truth perceived  
However feebly. Do then,--act away!  
'T is there I'm on the watch for you. How one acts  
Is, both of us agree, our chief concern:

And how you'll act is what I fain would see  
If, like the candid person you appear,  
You dare to make the most of your life's scheme  
As I of mine, live up to its full law  
Since there's no higher law that counterchecks.  
Put natural religion to the test  
You've just demolished the revealed with--quick,  
Down to the root of all that checks your will,  
All prohibition to lie, kill and thieve,  
Or even to be an atheistic priest!  
Suppose a pricking to incontinence--  
Philosophers deduce you chastity  
Or shame, from just the fact that at the first  
Whoso embraced a woman in the field,  
Threw club down and forewent his brains beside,  
So, stood a ready victim in the reach  
Of any brother savage, club in hand;  
Hence saw the use of going out of sight  
In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:  
I read this in a French book t' other day.  
Does law so analysed coerce you much?  
Oh, men spin clouds of fuzz where matters end,  
But you who reach where the first thread begins,  
You'll soon cut that!--which means you can, but won't,  
Through certain instincts, blind, unreasoned-out,

You dare not set aside, you can't tell why,  
But there they are, and so you let them rule.  
Then, friend, you seem as much a slave as I,  
A liar, conscious coward and hypocrite,  
Without the good the slave expects to get,  
In case he has a master after all!  
You own your instincts? why, what else do I,  
Who want, am made for, and must have a God  
Ere I can be aught, do aught?--no mere name  
Want, but the true thing with what proves its truth,  
To wit, a relation from that thing to me,  
Touching from head to foot--which touch I feel,  
And with it take the rest, this life of ours!  
I live my life here; yours you dare not live.

--Not as I state it, who (you please subjoin)  
Disfigure such a life and call it names,  
While, to your mind, remains another way  
For simple men: knowledge and power have rights,  
But ignorance and weakness have rights too.  
There needs no crucial effort to find truth  
If here or there or anywhere about:  
We ought to turn each side, try hard and see,



And if we can't, be glad we've earned at least  
The right, by one laborious proof the more,  
To graze in peace earth's pleasant pasturage.

Men are not angels, neither are they brutes:  
Something we may see, all we cannot see.  
What need of lying? I say, I see all,  
And swear to each detail the most minute  
In what I think a Pan's face--you, mere cloud:  
I swear I hear him speak and see him wink,  
For fear, if once I drop the emphasis,  
Mankind may doubt there's any cloud at all.  
You take the simple life--ready to see,  
Willing to see (for no cloud's worth a face)--  
And leaving quiet what no strength can move,  
And which, who bids you move? who has the right?  
I bid you; but you are God's sheep, not mine:  
" Pastor est tui Dominus ." You find  
In this the pleasant pasture of our life  
Much you may eat without the least offence,  
Much you don't eat because your maw objects,  
Much you would eat but that your fellow-flock  
Open great eyes at you and even butt,  
And thereupon you like your mates so well  
You cannot please yourself, offending them;  
Though when they seem exorbitantly sheep,  
You weigh your pleasure with their butts and bleats  
And strike the balance. Sometimes certain fears  
Restrain you, real checks since you find them so;  
Sometimes you please yourself and nothing checks:

And thus you graze through life with not one lie,  
And like it best.

But do you, in truth's name?  
If so, you beat--which means you are not I--  
Who needs must make earth mine and feed my fill  
Not simply unbutted at, unbickered with,  
But motioned to the velvet of the sward  
By those obsequious wethers' very selves.  
Look at me, sir; my age is double yours:  
At yours, I knew beforehand, so enjoyed,  
What now I should be--as, permit the word,  
I pretty well imagine your whole range  
And stretch of tether twenty years to come.  
We both have minds and bodies much alike:  
In truth's name, don't you want my bishopric,  
My daily bread, my influence and my state?  
You're young. I'm old; you must be old one day;  
Will you find then, as I do hour by hour,  
Women their lovers kneel to, who cut curls  
From your fat lap-dog's ear to grace a brooch--  
Dukes, who petition just to kiss your ring--  
With much beside you know or may conceive?  
Suppose we die to-night: well, here am I,  
Such were my gains, life bore this fruit to me,  
While writing all the same my articles

On music, poetry, the fictile vase  
Found at Albano, chess, Anacreon's Greek.  
But you--the highest honour in your life,  
The thing you'll crown yourself with, all your days,  
Is--dining here and drinking this last glass  
I pour you out in sign of amity  
Before we part for ever. Of your power  
And social influence, worldly worth in short,  
Judge what's my estimation by the fact,  
I do not condescend to enjoin, beseech,  
Hint secrecy on one of all these words!  
You're shrewd and know that should you publish one  
The world would brand the lie--my enemies first,  
Who'd sneer--"the bishop's an arch-hypocrite  
"And knave perhaps, but not so frank a fool."  
Whereas I should not dare for both my ears  
Breathe one such syllable, smile one such smile,  
Before the chaplain who reflects myself--  
My shade's so much more potent than your flesh.  
What's your reward, self-abnegating friend?  
Stood you confessed of those exceptional  
And privileged great natures that dwarf mine--  
A zealot with a mad ideal in reach,  
A poet just about to print his ode,  
A statesman with a scheme to stop this war,  
An artist whose religion is his art--

I should have nothing to object: such men  
Carry the fire, all things grow warm to them,  
Their drugget's worth my purple, they beat me.  
But you,--you're just as little those as I--  
You, Gigadibs, who, thirty years of age,  
Write stately for Blackwood's Magazine,  
Believe you see two points in Hamlet's soul  
Unseized by the Germans yet--which view you'll print--  
Meantime the best you have to show being still  
That lively lightsome article we took  
Almost for the true Dickens,--what's its name?  
"The Slum and Cellar, or Whitechapel life  
"Limned after dark!" it made me laugh, I know,  
And pleased a month, and brought you in ten pounds.  
--Success I recognize and compliment,  
And therefore give you, if you choose, three words  
(The card and pencil-scratch is quite enough)  
Which whether here, in Dublin or New York,  
Will get you, prompt as at my eyebrow's wink,  
Such terms as never you aspired to get  
In all our own reviews and some not ours.  
Go write your lively sketches! be the first  
"Blougram, or The Eccentric Confidence"--  
Or better simply say, "The Outward-bound."  
Why, men as soon would throw it in my teeth  
As copy and quote the infamy chalked broad  
About me on the church-door opposite.

You will not wait for that experience though,  
I fancy, howsoever you decide,  
To discontinue--not detesting, not  
Defaming, but at least--despising me!

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour  
Sylvester Blougram, styled in partibus  
Episcopus, nec non --(the deuce knows what  
It's changed to by our novel hierarchy)  
With Gigadibs the literary man,  
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,  
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,  
While the great bishop rolled him out a mind  
Long crumpled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.  
The other portion, as he shaped it thus  
For argumentary purposes,  
He felt his foe was foolish to dispute.  
Some arbitrary accidental thoughts  
That crossed his mind, amusing because new,  
He chose to represent as fixtures there,  
Invariable convictions (such they seemed  
Beside his interlocutor's loose cards  
Flung daily down, and not the same way twice)

While certain hell deep instincts, man's weak tongue  
Is never bold to utter in their truth  
Because styled hell-deep ('t is an old mistake  
To place hell at the bottom of the earth)  
He ignored these,--not having in readiness  
Their nomenclature and philosophy:  
He said true things, but called them by wrong names.  
"On the whole," he thought, "I justify myself  
"On every point where cavillers like this  
"Oppugn my life: he tries one kind of fence,  
"I close, he's worsted, that's enough for him.  
"He's on the ground: if ground should break away  
"I take my stand on, there's a firmer yet  
"Beneath it, both of us may sink and reach.  
"His ground was over mine and broke the first:  
"So, let him sit with me this many a year!"

He did not sit five minutes. Just a week  
Sufficed his sudden healthy vehemence.  
Something had struck him in the "Outward-bound"  
Another way than Blougram's purpose was:  
And having bought, not cabin-furniture  
But settler's-implements (enough for three)  
And started for Australia--there, I hope,  
By this time he has tested his first plough,  
And studied his last chapter of St. John.