



Robert Browning

*The Two Poets
of Croisic*

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Prologue

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I

Such a starved bank of moss
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

II

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud:
Splendid, a star!

III

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

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I

"Fame!" Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was,—how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendor— a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed!
Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed
Beneath the solid seeming roof I broke,
As redly up and out and off they reeled
Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used,—
You now, in childish days or rather nights,—
As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
By that old nurse-taught game which gave the
sprites
Each one his title and career,—confused

Belief 'twas all long over with the flights
From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV

New long bright life! and happy chance befell—
That I know—when some prematurely lost
Child of disaster bore away the bell
From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
Never before my chimney broke the spell!
Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost,
While—never mind Who was it cumbered earth—
Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with—ask the chloride's name
From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass
Its life, I thought was fed on copperas.

VI

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
The style and prowess of that purple one?

Who is the hero other eyes shall see
Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun—
Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
O' the coal,—as Job and Hebrew name a spark,—
What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours
The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent
powers
Constellate proudly,—swords, scrolls, harps, that fill
The vulgar eye to surfeit,—found best flowers
Hid deepest in the dark,—named unplucked grace
Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
Oh and I bid thee,—to whom fortune doled
Scantly all other gifts out—bicker blue,
Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.