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The Poems

VOLUME ONE

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II. GIVE A ROUSE

I
King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II
Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

10 CHORUS. — *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III
To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

20 CHORUS. — *King Charles, and who'll do him right now?*
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III. BOOT AND SADDLE

I
Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery grey,

CHORUS. — *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*

II
Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray

'God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay —
CHORUS. — *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*'

III
Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
10 Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, 'Good fellows ere this, by my fay,
CHORUS. — *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*'

IV
Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, 'Nay!
I've better counsellors; what counsel they?
CHORUS. — *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!*'

My Last Duchess

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace – all and each
 30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men, – good! but thanked
 Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 – E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
 The company below, then. I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Count Gismond

AIX IN PROVENCE

I

Christ God who savest man, save most
 Of men Count Gismond who saved me!
 Count Gauthier, when he chose his post,
 Chose time and place and company
 To suit it; when he struck at length
 My honour, 'twas with all his strength.

II

And doubtlessly ere he could draw
 All points to one, he must have schemed!
 That miserable morning saw
 10 Few half so happy as I seemed,
 While being dressed in queen's array
 To give our tourney prize away.

III

I thought they loved me, did me grace
 To please themselves; 'twas all their deed;
 God makes, or fair or foul, our face;
 If showing mine so caused to bleed
 My cousins' hearts, they should have dropped
 A word, and straight the play had stopped.

IV

They, too, so beauteous! Each a queen
 20 By virtue of her brow and breast;
 Not needing to be crowned, I mean,
 As I do. E'en when I was dressed,
 Had either of them spoke, instead
 Of glancing sideways with still head!

V

But no: they let me laugh, and sing
 My birthday song quite through, adjust
 The last rose in my garland, fling
 A last look on the mirror, trust

- 91 *howlet* owl (archaic form).
 94 *complines* the last daily prayers.
 96 *twats* a notorious gaffe. Browning wrote (Hood, *Letters*, 252) that he thought the word referred to 'a distinctive part of a nun's attire that might fitly pair off with the cowl appropriated to a monk'. Browning misunderstood the reference in *Vanity of Vanities* (1660), 50-51: 'They talk't of his having a Cardinal's Hat, / They'd send him as soon an Old Nuns Twat'. *OED* discreetly describes the word as '*low. Obs.*' and refers one to Bailey's 1727 definition: '*puerum muliebre*'; it cites and explains Browning's error.
 110, 111] Though I passed by them all, and felt no sign. 1849-63.
 113] *All service ranks the same with God* - 'all service, therefore, rates / Alike' (*Sordello* VI, 127-8).
 113-15] *All service is the same with God - / Whose puppets, best and worst, / Are we . . . [She sleeps. 1841.*

Dramatic Lyrics

Dramatic Lyrics, the third pamphlet published at the expense of Browning's father in the series of *Bells and Pomegranates*, appeared in the second half of November 1842. It was made up of sixteen poems, two of which had been published before. All sixteen were subsequently reprinted in all collected editions. Browning had originally planned *Bells and Pomegranates* to include plays, but Edward Moxon, his publisher, urged him to publish some shorter pieces, most of which Browning had already at hand, as likely to be more popular (see Browning's letter of 22 May 1842 in Kenyon, *Browning and Donnell*, 36). The poems were written between 1834 and 1842.

In 1849, under the title of *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, Browning republished these poems and those of *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) in their original order. In 1863, however, he redistributed the poems of *Dramatic Lyrics*, *Dramatic Romances*, and *Men and Women* (1855) in three groupings: 'Lyrics', 'Romances', and 'Men, and Women'. The same groupings were retained in 1868 and 1888. In the new arrangement, 'Lyrics' included fifty poems, most of them from the 1855 *Men and Women*, and only six from the original *Dramatic Lyrics*. Seven of the original poems were included in 'Romances', three went to 'Men, and Women' (Appendix 2 in Volume I gives details of the redistribution, which is not followed in this edition). After 1842 revisions were slight.

Though it included some poems that subsequently became popular and famous, *Dramatic Lyrics* originally attracted little attention. It is now generally regarded as marking an important stage in Browning's career, foreshadowing much of his later work and its more distinctive and valuable qualities.

Browning's note to *Dramatic Lyrics* was the 'advertisement' in 1842.

CAVALIER TUNES

Probably written in 1842, the bicentenary of the outbreak of the Civil Wars in England between the Royalist or Cavalier forces of Charles I and the Parliamentary or Roundhead forces. The 'Tunes' are a kind of by-product of Browning's work on Strafford in 1836-7 when he helped with Forster's *Life* and published his own play, *Strafford*. They are indebted to Scott's *Woodstock* (1826) (see R. L. Lowe in *N & Q* CXCVII, 1952, 103-4). The manuscript, on paper watermarked 1836, is at Yale, and

its appearance suggests that the three poems were written about the same time. The 'Tunes' remained in 'Lyrics' in later collections.

I Marching Along

- 1 *Kentish Sir Byng* probably a Browning invention, though the surname of Byng has Kentish associations. Kent was a Royalist county.
 2 *crop-headed Parliament* Royalists wore their hair long, Parliamentarians (Roundheads), short.
 3 *pressing* enlisting, impressing.
 7 *Pym* John Pym, leading Parliamentarian until his death in 1643. He had led the attack on Strafford.
carles churls.
 8 *parles* obsolete form of 'parleys' - here 'speeches' or 'words'.
 13 *Hampden* John Hampden, leading Parliamentarian, killed in battle in 1643.
 14 *Hazelrig,* Rudyard, and *MS., 1842.*
Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry Sir Arthur Hazelrig, Nathaniel Fiennes and Henry Vane were leading Parliamentarians. *Young Harry* because his father, Sir Henry, was Charles's Secretary of State.
 15 *Rupert* Prince Rupert of Bavaria, nephew of Charles I, and a leading Cavalier general.
 22 *Nottingham* The King's raising of his standard here in central England in August 1642 marked the beginning of the Civil Wars.

II Give a Rouse

- Rouse* cheer.
 8 *found* kept.
 16 *Noll's damned troopers* Oliver Cromwell's famed Ironsides. The toast clearly belongs to a later stage of the Wars.

III Boot and Saddle

- Title]* MY WIFE GERTRUDE *MS., 1842.*
 4 *Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!* 'sound, boot and saddle - to horse and away' (Scott, *Woodstock*).
 10 *Brancepeth]* Barham *MS. first reading.* Brancepeth is just south-west of Durham in north-east England, Barham is in eastern Kent.
 11 *fay* faith.

MY LAST DUCHESS

In 1842 the poem was grouped with 'II. France' (later called 'Count Gismond') under the general title of 'Italy and France' as 'I. Italy'. In 1849 it had its present title, and in 1863 it was reassigned to 'Romances'. The poem is another by-product of *Sordello*, and perhaps too of the 'Essay on Chatterton' (purportedly an essay on Tasso); as L. S. Friedland showed in 'Ferrara and *My Last Duchess*', *SP* XXXIII, 1936, 656-84, the Duke is modelled on Alfonso II, fifth Duke of Ferrara, and the host of the Este family with which Browning had dealt in *Sordello*, and patron of Tasso. Alfonso II was born in 1533, and married Lucrezia de Medici, then fourteen, in 1558. She died in 1561, and poison was suspected. In 1564 the Duke married the daughter of Ferdinand I, Count of Tyrol, whose capital was Innsbruck. The emissary conducting the negotiations for her marriage was one Nikolaus Madruz.

The poem was almost certainly written in the summer or early autumn of 1842. It has been exhaustively discussed. One book is entirely devoted to it: R. J. Berman, *Browning's Duke*, Richards Rosen Press, 1972. L. R. Stevens (*VNL* 28, 1965, 25-6) suggests the influence of Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World* (1678); L. Stevenson (*MLN* LXXIV, 1959, 489-92) suggests that of Byron's *Parisina*. Criticism includes: J. Adler, 'Structure and Meaning in Browning's "My Last Duchess"', *VP* XV, 1977, 219-27; B. R. Jerman, 'Browning's Witless Duke', *PMLA* LXXII, 1957, 488-93 (in Litzinger and Knickerbocker, *The Browning Critics*, 329-35); Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience*, 82-5; L. Perrine, 'Browning's Shrewd Duke', *PMLA* LXXIV, 1959, 157-9; B. N. Pipes, Jr, 'The Portrait of "My Last Duchess"', *VS* III, 1960, 381-6; W. D. Shaw, 'Browning's Duke as Theatrical Producer', *VNL* 29, 1966, 18-22.

3 *Frà Pandolf* probably an imaginary painter of an imaginary painting. There are extant portraits of Lucrezia de Medici (see Berman).

30 *approving*] forward 1842.

36 *to*] could 1842.

45 *I gave commands* According to H. Coxson (*An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry*, 3rd edn, Heath, 1903, viii), Browning said, 'I meant that the commands were that she should be put to death . . . Or he might have had her shut up in a convent.' Browning said also that the Duke used his wife's shallowness 'as an excuse - mainly to himself - for taking revenge on one who had unwittingly wounded his absurdly pretentious vanity, by failing to recognize his superiority in even the most trifling matters'.

56 *Claus of Innsbruck* probably Browning's invention. The Austrian city was a centre for bronze sculpting in the sixteenth century.

COUNT GISMOND

The poem was paired with 'Italy' (later 'My Last Duchess') in 1842, and entitled 'II. France'. In 1849 it was separated from 'My Last Duchess' and given its present title. In 1863 it was included in 'Romances'.

Aix is the old capital of Provence in south-east France. The characters and incident are generally thought to originate with Browning; however, F. Allen, 'Ariosto and Browning: A Reexamination of "Count Gismond"', *VP* XI, 1973, 15-25, suggests a debt to the Geneva-Airodant episode in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and the Hero-Claudio material in *Much Ado*. Conventional straightforward readings of the poem are ingeniously challenged by J. V. Hagopian (*PQ* XL, 1961, 153-5), Sister Marcella M. Holleway (*SP* LX, 1963, 549-53), and J. W. Tilton and R. D Tuttle (*SP* LIX, 1962, 83-95); M. Timko, 'Ah, Did You Once See Browning Plain?', pleads for sanity.

48] Blinds me . . . but the true mist was rain. 1842.

52 *boldly*] calmly 1842.

86 *greaves* armour from knee to ankle.

87 *hauberk* coat of chain mail.

on the fret in an agitated manner.

124 *tersel* male falcon.

INCIDENT OF THE FRENCH CAMP

In 1842 the poem was called 'I - Camp (French)' and grouped with 'II - Cloister (Spanish)' (the poem later called 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister'), under the general title of 'Camp and Cloister'. The poems were separated and present titles adopted in 1849. The poem was included in 'Romances' in 1863. Napoleon had an impressive second burial in December 1841, and the poem was probably written in 1842. The manuscript of the first stanza is in the Ashley Library of the British Library.

Mrs Orr (*Handbook*, 300) said the poem was based on fact, though its hero was man, not boy; a possible source in Excellmanns' life of Napoleon is cited by DeVane, *Handbook*, 112. The French stormed Ratisbon (Regensburg, on the Danube in Bavaria) on 23 April 1809. Marshal Lannes, Duke of Montebello, fatally wounded a month later, fought bravely at Ratisbon.

7 *prone* bent downwards.

29 *flag-bird* the eagle, Napoleon's emblem.

vans wings.

SOLILOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER

In 1842, the poem was called 'II - Cloister (Spanish)' and grouped with 'I - Camp (French)' (the poem later called 'Incident of the French Camp') under the general title of 'Camp and Cloister'. The poems were separated in 1849 and the present titles adopted. In 1863 the poem was No. III of a group called 'Garden Fancies' (I and II were 'The Flower's Name' and 'Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis'). In 1868 that grouping also was dissolved, but the poem remained in 'Lyrics'. Date of composition is unknown, though DeVane (*Handbook*, 114) suggests a date after the completion of *Sordello* in May 1839 when Browning was reading Elizabethan plays. J. U. Rundle (*N&Q* CXCVI, 1951, 252) suggests the influence of Burns's 'Holy Willie's Prayer'. Discussions, often very solemn, are voluminous; among them are: D. Sonstroem, 'Animal and Vegetable in the Spanish Cloister', *VP* VI, 1968, 70-73; M. K. Starkman, 'The Manichee in the Cloister: A Reading of Browning's "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"', *MLN* LXXV, 1960, 399-405.

3 *Brother Lawrence* perhaps a Spanish cousin of another inveterate and dim-witted gardener, Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*?

10 *Salve tibi!* 'Hail to thee!' (Latin).

14 *oak-galls* growths on diseased oak-leaves, valuable for their tannin.

15 *What's the Latin name for 'parsley'?* *petroselinum*.

16 *Swine's Snout* dandelion; in Latin, *rostrum porcinum*.

22 *chaps* 'cheps': cheeks or jaws.

31 *Barbary corsair* The Barbary coast of north-west Africa was famous for its pirates.

33 *refection* a light meal.

39 *Arian* heretical follower of the fourth-century Arius who denied the equality of Christ with God and the doctrine of the Trinity.

49-51 *great text in Galatians . . . damnations* There being no such text, much mathematical ingenuity and ink have been lavished on the lines. Browning, who acknowledged his error in a letter of 26 April 1888 (see *STB* II, No. 1, 1974, 62), may have had in mind as 'text' Deuteronomy xxviii 15-45, but 'Galatians' is a better