

CHAPTER X

POEMS ON HEROIC SUBJECTS

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

THE afternoon lectures to be given in this class will chiefly consist of lectures and readings in poetry—though I hope to diversify this general plan in various ways. Why should we take poetry rather than prose? Because this class is especially a text-class; and the highest form of English literature furnishes the best texts for study. The highest form of every literature, ancient or modern, is poetry,—of course, I include drama in this statement, because the best of all Western dramas happens to be written in poetic form.

It would be very natural if you should ask, “Why poetry is a higher form of literature than prose?” That question has been asked by the most famous scholars and men of letters; and it is worth thinking about, although it is very hard to answer. Remember that I am speaking of Western literature only. One man who asked this question in our own time was Matthew Arnold—himself a good poet—but he declared that nobody could answer it. Another person who asked the question—a person whose name will hereafter be always related to studies in this University was Prof. Max Müller—certainly one of the greatest of modern scholars and a poet as well as a prose writer. He challenged the truth of Arnold’s statement and dared to say that no such distinction as that usually made between poetry and prose ought to exist. He held that what can be done in verse might also be done in prose; and he boldly classed certain kinds of prose as true poetry. For the purpose of poetry is to express emotion more than anything else;—therefore we may well ask why should not emotion be equally well expressed

by good prose. The professor even went so far as to ask the poet Tennyson, "What is the use of rhyme?" Tennyson would not perhaps have answered such a question if it had been asked by a common person; but he knew that he was speaking with a greater scholar than himself, and he promptly replied, "To help the memory," and that is the true fact. The only use of rhyme is to help memory; what is more, we might say that the whole machinery of poetry—feet, pauses, accents, alliterations, stanzas—have no other original meaning than this. The purpose of all these forms is to help us to remember. Certainly rhyme is not necessary: the old Greeks, who wrote better poetry than the modern, scarcely used rhyme at all. The best of even English poetry is not in rhyme. And if there can be poetry without rhyme, can there not be poetry without measure of any fixed kind? Prof. Max Müller said, "Yes;"—others have said the same thing. Then why should it happen that the best of every Western literature from ancient time has been in verse? Is it because of some fashion, obliging people to put one class of thoughts and feelings into verse, and another class into prose? Partly perhaps—but not to any great extent. Is it because of a great example anciently made by the Greeks, and followed afterward by the rest of Europe? Scarcely—because we find the very same thing in literatures older than any European literature—Indian, Hebrew, Persian, for example. In every literature the same law prevails, the highest expression of sentiment takes the form of verse.

Therefore there must be something in verse which gives it a particular advantage over prose—or, rather, something which gave it such an advantage in ancient times, before prose became really developed. I think you know that literature began in many countries before writing had been invented; we call unwritten literature "oral literature;" that means mouth-literature or literature of the lips only. The heroic poems of Homer may have been composed and sung long before they were written down; and you know that this was the case in regard to old Arabian poetry. Probably

it was the case in most countries. And it was natural that this mouth-literature should take the shape of verse. All literature, written or unwritten, appears to have begun with song. Even to-day, among many tribes of men, who do not know how to write, the memory of great events is kept alive by means of songs—which are learned by heart, and taught by one generation to another. They can be remembered in this way because they have either measure or rhyme “to help the memory” as Tennyson said.

But this only explains an origin: it does not tell us why later poetry should be better than prose. No answer to this question can be very simple; there are too many reasons. But I venture to say that the chief reason is as follows:—the form of poetry everywhere obliges writers to take much more pains in choosing their words and in arranging their thoughts than it is necessary to take in prose. The value of poetical form has been the value of severe discipline. Under that discipline language has gained the best part of its strength and beauty.

But in the case of a language as perfect as English or French, could not the same discipline be applied to prose as to poetry? Certainly it could; and some excellent critics have declared that perfect prose is harder to write than perfect poetry. Indeed, this fact is well shown by a comparison of the bulk of prose with the bulk of poetry in any civilized literature. The amount of poetry is very small by comparison. A man may work for fifty years to produce one book of first-class poetry; in the same time he would have been able to write twenty-five or thirty first-class books of prose. Of course this fact argues that men take twenty-five times less pains with prose than with poetry. And why? Because the fashion has been set for ages to do the best that one can only in the case of verse. And this, again, has brought about such a differentiation in the methods of poetry and of prose that the same method of working towards perfection could not be adopted in the two cases. We might insist upon quite as careful

work in prose as in poetry; but the care could not now be directed to exactly the same ends. Perfect prose could not be just the same thing as perfect poetry. If you want to have an illustration—nothing is easier. Take, for example, a page of good poetry, and a page of good prose; and then try which you can most quickly read and understand. The result will be that you will find the poetry at least twice, probably three times, as hard to read as prose. The reason is that the prose writer naturally aims above all things at being clear, easily understood; and he expresses himself in the most natural and direct way. But the poet must aim first of all at beauty; his principal purpose is to bestir an emotion, and he is content to do that slowly, by any means of which words are capable. He turns the order of a sentence upside down—drops articles, relative pronouns, prepositions—leaves out every word that can be spared—tries to suggest even more than he says by obliging the reader to stop and think. A book of prose, constructed in the same way, would find few readers. Readers are impatient. They have become accustomed to read poetry; but they want the help of sound measure, rhyme or rhythm. Without such help they would feel as if in a theatre in which no music was permitted. The forms of poetry are really devices by which people are persuaded to read slowly and to think.

Nevertheless, I believe that, in some future time, when men can have obtained more culture than they have now, poetry may cease to exist in its present shape. For a beautiful emotion can be quite as well expressed—I should think even better expressed by melodious prose than by any kind of verse. Only, it would be necessary to give intense care to such prose. The poet Gray is said to have given fourteen years to the production of a little poem about four pages long;—who would give fourteen years to the production of four pages of prose? The example is an extreme one; but it illustrates all the better what I mean. Before the world gets tired of poetry in the form of verse, men must become willing to give just as much care to prose as ever

was given to the production of verse. Very possibly poetry is even now slowly preparing the human mind for some still higher future form of prose expression. And now for an illustration of the degree in which we find poetry pleasing and useful, I am going to dictate a famous poem in the form of plain prose; and after that we shall read the same thing in verse-form. It will be very short—but very striking. The poem is called “Home-Thoughts, from the Sea.”

“The great shape of Cape St. Vincent stretched away in noble outline towards the north-west. The sun was setting; and his splendid blood-red light poured into the Bay of Cadiz—a glorious spectacle. Over the flaming sea I beheld before me Trafalgar a bluish shape. North-east, and far away—very dim—appeared the grand gray form of Gibraltar. As I looked from the deck of the ship at these famous places, I thought of what England had done for my sake at Trafalgar, at Cadiz, at Gibraltar. How she poured out her best blood, making this sea then as crimson as it is crimson now in the light of the setting sun. Then a great feeling of gratitude filled my heart; and I asked myself, “What can I do in return to help England to-day? You, whoever you are, who tonight in this place praise God and give thanks for England’s victory, while you see the beautiful evening star hanging over the silent African coast—tell me, what shall I do?”

Now we will read the poem; it has the peculiarity of being “a single rhymed poem;” all the lines end with the same sound:—

Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-West died away;
 Sunset ran, one glorious blood-red, reeking into Cadiz Bay;
 Bluish mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;
 In the dimmest North-East distance, dawned Gibraltar grand and gray;
 “Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?”—say,
 Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
 While Jove’s planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

If Browning had tried to write this thought and memory

in prose, could he have done it so well? Perhaps—but that would have meant very much greater labour. I doubt if he would have resigned himself to such labour. No ordinary man could give the same effect in prose at all: only a man of genius. Any ordinary attempt to paraphrase this is simply shocking—my own paraphrase is, of course, extremely bad. Moreover, in prose, many more words would have to be used, to make the same impression. How wonderful are the words in the poem!—every adverb and verb and adjective is carefully chosen to express two meanings. “Nobly” refers directly to the outline; but indirectly it refers to the memory of a noble victory—thus it expresses two things. The term “ran” in the second line applies apparently to the spectacle of sunlight upon the moving water: but when we get to the adjective “blood-red,” we suddenly remember the great sea-fight. But the full strength of the line comes to our minds when we reach the tremendous words “reeking”—the word especially used for bloodshed. And the reference to Cadiz Bay brings with it the memory of great captains long before Nelson—the daring sea-men of Elizabeth’s day, Drake and Essex. The next line is splendid only in colour, with its contrast of pale-blue and fiery-red; the fourth line is also coloured mostly—colours of mist and distance: both only serve to strengthen the force of the first two amazing lines. Then comes the surprise of the fine thought of gratitude—with the adjuration following. But the last line is not the least wonderful. The name Africa, with its effect of strangeness, reminds us of much more than geographical position:—even if it did not, the term “Jove’s planet” would. The poet is referring to Jupiter as the evening star just seen over the African coast; but he speaks of it as the Romans did—and we suddenly remember that all this Africa and the Spanish peninsula opposite were once Roman; and that the might of England at sea has supplanted the power of Rome. So, while praising his country, and calling upon all Englishmen to do likewise, the poet also reminds us—by the mere use of one or two words—how really great she is, how justly one may

be proud of her. We know all this without Africa on reading the poem; because we expect a poem to be suggestive, and we look for surprises. But we would not look for them in prose, because we would not expect them. Yet, again there is another thing to notice. If this had been written in prose, could you remember the effect of it so well. Certainly not. You read this in verse; and you cannot forget because of the peculiar force of the words in their startling succession and the strong beauty of the single rhyme ending every verse. Now, at present, poetry is a great help to the memorizing of great thoughts; and it will be a very long time before men will have become wise enough and sensitive enough to do without it.

So ends our little introductory chat about the emotional value of poetry as form. And now we can well begin a series of exemplary studies of different kinds of poetry. The kind of which I have just given you a short example from Browning is not a bad kind to begin with—I mean poetry about heroic subjects and patriotic subjects. Although at first thought you might not feel attracted by subjects of foreign patriotism, on second thought you will certainly see that a knowledge of patriotic expression by foreign poets will almost certainly help to strengthen your own national sentiments, and to suggest new ways of fostering Japanese patriotism in drama or in song. And the first piece which I shall quote to you, you will find to have an element of common sympathy. It is a true story of a poor French fisherman who by an act of moral courage, once changed the course of French history.

HERVÉ RIEL

The time of this incident was the time of Louis XIV; and the battle referred to was very important—as it broke the power of the French at sea. Browning received one hundred pounds for the poem, i.e. about a thousand yen, according to the present value of money. When the poem was published in an English magazine, the French Naval

Department hastily said that the story was not true. But the poet insisted that it was true and the French Naval authorities went back to the old records of more than two hundred years ago. Then they found that Browning was right and that they were wrong. He had got the story in the little fishing-village of Croisic, in Brittany, where it was well remembered.

Now the kind of courage described in this poem is not a common kind—not simple courage that makes a good soldier or sailor, but moral courage which is a very different thing. Many a man who is not afraid to die in battle, may be afraid to put himself in opposition to the will of his commanders, and to face the anger of his comrades, for a purely moral reason. In this case a common sailor boldly goes into the presence of princes and admirals, and tells them that they are all wrong, and that they do not love their country as they ought to;—moreover, he dares to tell them that their advisers are liars and cowards—which was true. But only a very brave and very honest man would have done that. Everyone else had said that the French ships must be destroyed, because they could not be saved. Only one ignorant fisherman, a new sailor dared to shout out that they could be saved and that he could save them—which he did. The manner of telling the story in this poem is very true to life; for Browning lived among the fisher-folk of Brittany, and knew their tale by heart. We shall presently see that the colloquial expressions used in the poem are not exactly English. They are the English literal translation of the French colloquial; and this artistic trick makes the incidents seem very much more real.

I

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter thro' the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to St. Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victors in full chase;
 First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
 Close on him fled, great and small,
 Twenty-two good ships in all;
 And they signalled to the place
 "Help the winners of a race!
 "Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—or, quicker still,
 "Here's the English can and will!"

III

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt on board;
 "Why, what hope or chance have ships like these to pass?"
 laughed they:
 "Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage scarred and
 scored,
 "Shall the '*Formidable*' here with her twelve and eighty guns
 "Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow way,
 "Trust to enter where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty tons,
 "And with flow at full beside?
 "Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
 "Reach the mooring? Rather say,
 "While rock stands or water runs,
 "Not a ship will leave the bay!"

The pilots of St. Malo ridiculed the idea of getting the great warships into the river-mouth out of danger. It cannot be done, they think. There are rocks to the right and rocks to the left; and all the way is full of danger—even for a little fishing-boat it would be "ticklish,"—that it is dangerous to pass even when the tide is full. But now the tide is at its very lowest: nobody could save the ships. (Note some of the terms or colloquialisms here used. First, "put out brisk" is a regular sailor's term: to put out is to leave the shore in a boat. "Twelve and eighty" is the nearest possible English rendering of the French "quatre-vingt-douze;" the modern French having no word for ninety, and substituting "four-twenty" for eighty. But Medieval French had a noun for ninety—nonante. The word "ticklish" is also a sailor's word—signifying dangerous; but it is used

a great deal now by all classes in England and America. A "ticklish place" means a dangerous place. "Slack tide" is equivalent to low tide; but the original meaning is not the same. "Slack," probably means "loose," not tight—as we say of a rope, which had not been tightly stretched. "It is too slack" from signifying "loose," came to mean weak; and "slack tide" probably means a low tide during the time the current of the sea is weak or slack.)

IV

Then was called a council straight.
 Brief and bitter the debate:
 "Here's the English at our heels; would you have them take in tow
 "All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern and bow,
 "For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
 "Better run the ships aground!"
 (Ended Damfreville his speech).
 Not a minute more to wait!
 "Let the Captains all and each
 "Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on the beach!
 "France must undergo her fate.

V

"Give the word!" But no such word
 Was ever spoke or heard;
 For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
 —A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second, third?
 No such man of mark, and meet
 With his betters to compete!
 But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
 A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI

And, "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
 "Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
 "Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
 "On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
 "'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
 "Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying's for?
 "Morn and eve, night and day,

"Have I piloted your bay,
 "Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
 "Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty
 Hogues!
 "Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's
 a way!
 "Only let me lead the line,
 "Have the biggest ship to steer,
 "Get this '*Formidable*' clear,
 "Make the others follow mine,
 "And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
 "Right to Solidor past Grève,
 "And there lay them safe and sound;
 "And if one ship misbehave,
 "—Keel so much as grate the ground,
 "Why, I've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

The admiral, finding no pilot, called his officers in council, and after a short and very painful discussion, Dampreville says, "I do not see any help for it. The English are right behind us. If they catch us, they will take all the ships as prizes, and tow them into Plymouth—do you want that shameful thing to happen? No—then we must run the ships ashore and blow them up or burn them. It cannot be helped." But the word of command to destroy the ships was not given, because a man suddenly came forward and interrupted the council of the officers. Perhaps you think that this man was at least a captain, or a lieutenant, or a first-mate, or a second-mate, or a third-mate. But he was not. He was only a poor Breton pilot, who had been pressed into the service as a common sailor. ("To press" means to force a man to do duty as a sailor by law, against his will.) And he cried out, "What folly or what wickedness is this, you people of Malo. You may tell these officers, who do not know the river-mouth—you can tell them lies. But you cannot tell lies to me, because I know every inch of the way. I have passed through night and day hundreds of times. It is said that people lie for love and for money—are you telling lies for the sake of English

money? Or are you lying just because you love to lie?" This is very rough language; but it is the rough language of a brave and honest man, made angry by the cowardice and untruthfulness of other men who do not realize the duty which they owe to their country. And, remember, this Hervé Riel has no particular reason to be grateful to the government, which took him away by force from his home, and obliged him to fight without wages. But he is too good a man to feel the least selfishness, when the country is in danger. And he turns to the officers passionately and cries, "Don't listen to those liars—trust me: I can save you. You have nothing to risk by trusting me. Give me the biggest ship, the admiral's ship and order the other ships to follow me; and I will steer you out of danger. If anything happens—if a single accident happens—then you can cut off my head: is not that a good bargain for you?" And the great admiral knows—not by argument, but by the look of the honest face that this man can save them. So they put him in charge of the whole fleet. I suppose you know that when a pilot takes charge, the captain's authority stops. So, for that one day, this poor fisher-pilot was actually in command of the whole French fleet. ("To run aground" is to run a ship, i.e. to sail her, so that she goes upon the beach and sticks there. Notice the third line of the fifth verse—a curious construction, but immensely energetic "for up stood, for out stepped, for in struck"—the man stood up from the place where he had been sitting and listening, then he stepped out:—to "step out," in naval language, means to come forward;—and in presence of the council he strikes in, i.e. interrupts the discussion. To "strike in," is a very common colloquial phrase for "to interrupt." "Malouins," a French form of name for the people of the little town of St. Malo alone. "Disembogues," discharges. A river is said to disembogue at a place where it discharges its waters into the sea. "Get clear" is a sailor's expression; "to get clear a ship" means to get her safely through the mouth of a river or harbour or between other ships that happen to be moored in the way.)

VII

Not a minute more to wait.
 "Steer us in, then, small and great!
 "Take the helm, lead the line, sail the squadron!" cried its chief.
 Captains, give the sailor place!
 He is Admiral, in brief.
 Still the north-wind, by God's grace!
 See the noble fellow's face
 As the big ship, with a bound,
 Clears the entry like a hound,
 Keeps the passage as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!
 See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
 How they follow in a flock,
 Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
 Not a spar that comes to grief!
 The peril, see, is past,
 All are harboured to the last,
 And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate
 Up the English come, too late!

VIII

So, the storm subsides to calm:
 They see the green trees wave
 On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
 Hearts that bled are stanch'd with balm.
 "Just our rapture to enhance,
 "Let the English rake the bay,
 "Gnash their teeth and glare askance
 "As they cannonade away!
 "'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
 How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
 Out burst all with one accord,
 "This is Paradise for Hell!
 "Let France, let France's King
 "Thank the man that did the thing!"
 What a shout, and all one word,
 "Hervé Riel!"
 As he stepped in front once more,
 Not a symptom of surprise

In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

He cannot wait a moment longer—so, “Steer us in if you can,” the admiral says to Riel. “Captains, give up your command to this man;—he is now commander of the fleet for the time being. Fortunately for us through the mercy of God, the wind is still from the north—not against us!” Ah! that was wonderfully done!—Look at that man’s fine face! He does not even seem to know what a wonderful thing he is doing, as he makes this great ship leap through the narrow passage, just as a hunting-dog might leap through a hole in a fence! And the ship could not have more than an inch of room to spare. But she went on as smoothly as if she had the whole sea on each side of her. And all the other ships followed just as well—not a single accident—not one scraping of a bottom on the rocks—not even one spar broken or damaged. Now the danger is all over—every ship is safely in; and, as we expected, just as Riel shouts to anchor, the English come in sight. They are too late!

After the excitement, now everything is quiet again. The French sailors are happy;—they look up at the green trees on the river banks above them;—they are like wounded men who have been well cared for. And they say:—“What does it matter if the English now keep shooting into the bay—they cannot hurt us; and it is rather amusing to see how angry they are with disappointment. The great fort above us can protect us very well from them. But we must not forget the man who saved us—we must thank him—the government must thank him! Call him!” And he is called. But he does not seem to know that he has done anything beyond his duty. He is not in the least embarrassed, and not in the least proud—just as natural as ever, and he looks straight into the face of the admiral without the slightest appearance of shyness or of vanity.

(“To misbehave,” when used of a ship, means “to become unmanageable.” “Comes to grief”—this expression means

to become badly injured or broken, when applied to *things*. When applied to *persons* it means to suffer misfortunes. "Rake" is an old military and naval term, signifying to sweep a certain zone, or surface, with a storm of shot; the lines of shot running so parallel that, if drawn, they would give the appearance of lines made with a rake upon the ground. Observe that the poet speaks of blue eyes as being particularly Breton. I suppose you know that the people of Brittany are not, strictly speaking, French at all,—though Brittany is a French province. Like the Irish or Welsh, the Britons are Celts; and they still preserve their ancient language, which has not the least possible resemblance to French—though, in the towns, both languages are spoken. Blue or gray eyes, with or without dark hair, are much more common among the Celts of Brittany than among the French.)

IX

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
 "I must speak out at the end,
 "Though I find the speaking hard.
 "Praise is deeper than the lips:
 "You have saved the King his ships,
 "You must name your own reward.
 "'Faith our sun was near eclipse!
 "Demand whate'er you will,
 "France remains your debtor still.
 "Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not
 Damfreville."

X

Then a beam of fun outbroke
 On the bearded mouth that spoke,
 As the honest heart laughed through
 Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
 "Since I needs must say my say,
 "Since on board the duty 's done,
 "And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but

a run?--

“Since ’t is ask and have, I may—

“Since the others go ashore--

“Come! A good whole holiday!

“Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle
Aurore!”

That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

Then the admiral said to the common sailor addressing him as an equal—and you must remember Damfreville was a great nobleman:—“My friend, I must, now, at last speak to you—though I find it very difficult to tell you how I feel. Please remember that I feel more grateful to you than any words can say; for you have saved the French fleet. In truth we were very nearly being destroyed. You must name your own reward; and no matter what you may ask for—and no matter what we may give you,—France will always consider herself indebted to you for this day. Now, do not be ashamed—tell me whatever you would like to have; and I swear to you you shall get it.” But at these words, the honest sailor only laughed good-humoredly, and answered straight:—“Well since I must say something,—and since the duty on board is finished, and all the other sailors will be allowed to go on shore,—and since from this place to my home it is only a short distance—why, I will ask this: Let me go home for one whole day, and see my wife, whom I call Beautiful Dawn.” That was all he asked for; and that was all that the government ever gave him. (Only Browning did not know this—the government exempted him from naval service for the rest of his life.)

(“A run”—this is a regular pilot’s term, meaning a single quick course from one point to another: a pilot, in olden times, used to charge payment by the “run.” “Go ashore”—still used in the navy—signifies the sailor’s going on shore by permission—permission not being given at every port, nor upon frequent occasions. Observe how very careful the man is not to ask for anything that would seem to make him more favoured than his fellow-sailors: all can go

ashore, so he can go ashore too; but all cannot go home, and the right to go home for one day seems to him all the favour that he has a right to ask. The "Come," with the exclamation mark immediately afterwards, seems a little rude in English; but it is the best possible English rendering of the French "Allons!" which, in this place, would only have the force of "Very well, then!")

Perhaps it would seem to you strange that the sailor speaks affectionately of his wife—even in a jocose way to the great admiral. But this is a splendid human touch on the part of the poet;—it is exactly what such a man would do under the circumstances out of the sincerity of his heart;—it is only his way of telling the admiral that his wife is in fear about him as she knows that he has been in the battle. Therefore he wants to see her. Again, you must remember that French people especially are very frank in talking about their homes, and their families,—no soldier, for example, would be ashamed to speak of his wife or children to a friendly officer, at a proper time: that would only be a reason for sympathy between them. But this is not imagination on the part of the poet at all. The French government records declare that "this poor man only asked to go to see his wife (qu'on nommait la Belle Aurore)." This gives a slightly different meaning; the French phrase exactly means "the woman that was called the Belle Aurore." It would seem that she was known among the country people by that name, not that it was given to her by her husband. Aurore is still a common name among the French people—a name that we can trace very far back into old Roman times. And in the country parts of France a handsome woman, or a handsome man is apt to be known by her or his name pre-fixed with the word Belle, or Bel, according to sex. Thus you will often see, in studies of French country life, such appellations as la Belle Jeanne or le Bel Alphonse, or le Beau Pasquier. So it is probable that Riel's wife was very well known in the country as a fine woman; and the government records ought to be good authority for the statement that she was called

la Belle Aurore.

XI

Name and deed alike are lost :
 Not a pillar nor a post
 In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell ;
 Not a head in white and black
 On a single fishing smack,
 In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
 All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
 Go to Paris: rank on rank
 Search the heroes flung pell-mell
 On the Louvre, face and flank!
 You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
 So for better and for worse,
 Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
 In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
 Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

The name of the man and the recollection of what he did are forgotten. In his own native village there is not even a pillar nor a wooden post with an inscription to record his great action—to keep the memory of it alive. In that fishing village there are plenty of fishing boats with figureheads, painted black and white; but no one ever thought of putting either the head or the name of this hero on a boat—although had it not been for him France would have lost every ship in her fleet. If you do go to Paris, visit that great art-gallery of the Louvre; and look there at all the pictures—hundreds of pictures—representing the heroes of France. No matter how long you look you will not find a single picture of Hervé Riel. Look at the statues of the front and at the sides of the building—you will not find any statue of him. Therefore I thus now speak to his spirit:—“Hervé Riel, my poetry may not be very good; but it is meant to praise you—so please accept it, whether it is good or bad, as my little tribute of honour and admiration! In my verse, do you once save the French fleet, the honour of France, your country, and confess your affec-

tion for your wife whom people call 'La Belle Aurore!'"

("Smack"—a common term for fishing vessels, both in England and America. Sometimes we say "fishing smack" but often we say only "smack." "To bear the bell" is a common expression for winning a victory or a prize. "Pell-mell": this expression means a disorderly manner or heaped together upside down. In speaking of the building, the word "face" means the front of course; but we more generally use the French term "façade" which has been adopted into English.)

Two hundred years since, but most of our English poems of heroism relate to matters much more modern. There is just as much courage now as there ever was; and the world of to-day probably has quite as many heroes as it had two hundred or two thousand years ago. Indeed, I sometimes think that there are more heroes now than ever before; only we do not talk so much about them, and thousands of brave and noble things are not heard of outside of certain small circles. Brave men and heroes do not like to talk about what they do; but in old times—in Scandinavia, for example—a hero was obliged to talk about himself, and to make songs about his own great deeds. The heroes of Homer acted in the same way. But the bravest man of to-day may do things quite as great as any of Homer's heroes and never obtain any recognition or reward for it. So I find that it is not always the best things that have inspired the best modern poetry about heroism. We are more impressed by immense facts than by small ones—more impressed by the sacrifice of thousands than by the sacrifice of tens. Yet the smaller sacrifice may be the greater of the two. Everybody knows the story of the Light Brigade—there were about six hundred men in that charge. Everybody has heard of the still greater and much more terrible charge of the cuirassiers at Reichshofen. Everybody has heard of the loss of the troop-ship Birkenhead on board of which a thousand English soldiers drawn up in rank on deck, went down with the vessel, firing their own funeral volley just before the water closed above

their heads. A peculiarly terrible thing about this catastrophe was that the ship was surrounded by hundreds of great sharks waiting to devour the soldiers. Well, as I said, these things become more widely known, because of the numbers of persons sacrificed—because of the multitude of lives lost. Yet a dozen men may be quite as much of heroes as the thousands of French cavalry who perished under the fire of German artillery at Reichshofen or the six hundred English cavalry who attacked a Russian battery to no purpose. You know that the latter fact was caused by a mistake—a foolish order. Well, another foolish order given by a commander in Northern India many years ago produced just as wonderful a display of courage; but there were only eleven men killed. These eleven men have been celebrated by a poet—not a Tennyson, but a very good poet; and I think you will find them well worthy of praise. The main point of the poem, however,—the particular thing to which I wish to call your attention,—is that the enemies of those men praised them before the poet did. The highest possible praise is not from one's friend: it is the praise which an enemy gives. Whoever wins such praise as that may certainly be called a hero in the best sense.

The facts in the case were these:—a general in Afghanistan, commanding an English division, sent orders to a company to capture a fortress upon the top of the mountain, which was held by a strong force of the enemy. The fortress was considered impregnable, and should have been attacked only with the greatest caution, and the help of artillery. But the subordinate who first received the order did not understand, and he simply told ten soldiers and a sergeant to take the fort. In other words, they were told to do the impossible. But they went straight up the mountain to the wall of the fort, where they were all killed. After they were killed, their bodies were stripped and thrown down; but the Afghans first gave them the highest honour which a warrior could receive,—tying a red cord round both wrists of each man. The poem tells the rest. It was written by Sir Francis

Doyle, the author of several heroic poems. I shall quote only the first parts :

THE RED THREAD OF HONOUR

Eleven men of England
 A breast-work charged in vain ;
 Eleven men of England
 Lie stripp'd, and gash'd, and slain.
 Slain; but of foes that guarded
 Their rock-built fortress well.
 Some twenty had been master'd,
 When the last soldier fell.

The robber-chief mused deeply,
 Above those daring dead;
 "Bring here," at length he shouted,
 "Bring quick, the battle thread.
 Let Eblis blast for ever
 Their souls, if Allah will :
 But WE must keep unbroken
 The old rules of the Hill.

* * *

"Still, when a chief dies bravely,
 We bind with green *one* wrist—
 Green for the brave, for heroes
 ONE crimson thread we twist.
 Say ye, oh gallant Hillmen,
 For these, whose life has fled,
 Which is the fitting colour,
 The green one, or the red?"

"Our brethren, laid in honour'd graves, may wear
 Their green reward," each noble savage said;
 "To these, whom hawks and hungry wolves shall tear,
 Who dares deny the red?"

Thus conquering hate, and stedfast to the right,
 Fresh from the heart that haughty verdict came ;
 Beneath a waning moon, each spectral height
 Roll'd back its loud acclaim.

Once more the chief gazed keenly
 Down on those daring dead;
 From his good sword their heart's blood
 Crept to that crimson thread.
 Once more he cried, "The judgment,
 Good friends, is wise and true,
 But though the red *be* given,
 Have we not more to do?"

"These were not stirr'd by anger,
 Nor yet by lust made bold;
 Renown they thought above them,
 Nor did they look for gold.
 To them their leader's signal
 Was as the voice of God:
 Unmoved, and uncomplaining,
 The path it show'd they trod.

"As, without sound or struggle,
 The stars unhurrying march,
 Where Allah's finger guides them,
 Through yonder purple arch,
 These Franks, sublimely silent,
 Without a quicken'd breath,
 Went, in the strength of duty,
 Straight to their goal of death.

"If I were now to ask you,
 To name our bravest man,
 Ye all at once would answer,
 They call'd him Mehrab Khan.
 He sleeps among his fathers,
 Dear to our native land,
 With the bright mark he bled for
 Firm round his faithful hand.

"The songs they sing of Roostum
 Fill all the path with light;
 If truth be in their music,
 He was a noble knight.

But were those heroes living,
 And strong for battle still,
 Would Mehrab Khan or Roostum
 Have climb'd, like these, the Hill?"

Because it was known to be certain death, he asks the question. Even the bravest man does not care to throw his life away to no purpose; and the great heroes mentioned, being themselves free to do as they pleased, would not have climbed the hill unless they wished to die in vain. But here was a fact of another kind: those foreign soldiers knew that they were going to die, and that their death would be of no use at all. Nevertheless they had received an order, and that it was their duty to obey that order. The courage of military obedience may be even greater than the courage which makes men famous. For the first time these Afghans, who have always been at once the bravest and yet the most disobedient of soldiers—even their own princes find it nearly impossible to make them obey—observed this kind of courage, which surpassed them and bestirred their honest admiration. And this was their reply:—

And they replied, "Though Mehrab Khan was brave,
 As chief, he chose himself what risks to run;
 Prince Roostum lied, his forfeit life to save,
 Which these had never done."

Rustum, or Roostum, as the poet spells the name, is the hero of the great epic poem of Persia. In the *Shahnama*, or "Book of Kings," there is a record also of his many exploits. Matthew Arnold took the story of this hero for the subject of a poem; and in Matthew Arnold's poem you will find some reference to the subject; by which the Prince once saved his life in a moment of danger. The expression "forfeit life" signifies a life already forfeited, or lost, by right of battle. The Prince had been fairly conquered; and his enemy had the right to kill him—but he saved himself by an untruth. . . . Thus we see that the Afghans by general consent, pronounced these Englishmen braver than even their own heroes, and

therefore more worthy of honour. And the chief decided so to honour:—

“Enough!” he shouted fiercely;
 “Doom’d though they be to hell,
 Bind fast the crimson trophy
 Round BOTH wrists—bind it well.
 Who knows but that great Allah
 May grudge such matchless men,
 With none so deck’d in heaven,
 To the fiends’ flaming den?”

Then all those gallant robbers
 Shouted a stern “Amen!”
 They raised the slaughter’d serjeant,
 They raised his mangled ten.
 And when we found their bodies
 Left bleaching in the wind,
 Around BOTH wrists in glory
 That crimson thread was twined.

The words of the chief may need a little explanation. According to the Mohammedan religion, only believers can be saved, and foreigners who do not believe in the Prophet must go to hell after they die. Therefore this chief says of them. “I suppose they may have to go to hell—these dead foreigners; but that is no reason why we should refuse to them the tribute of bravery. None of our fathers have ever had the red thread tied round both wrists; and perhaps when God sees the dead bodies of these men so honoured, he will refuse to let them go to hell—since he has no such men, perhaps, in his own paradise.”

Further explanation is not necessary except perhaps in the case of the word “mangled” which, in case of a dead body, means much more than wounded or cut; it means all cut up and disfigured. As a matter of fact, the Afghans generally cut up the bodies of their enemies after victory, much in the same way that the Chinese did during the late war. But that was only a war custom with the Afghans; and they did not prevent their honouring the dead as well as mangl-

ing them. The story was told by the English general Sir Charles Napier.

Poems of this class exist of course in the literature of every nation; and yet you may find it a little surprising that the number of really great short poems on heroes and patriots is not large. The reason is that great poets generally treat of such matters in epic form—which you know is very long; and lesser poets, wishing to appeal to the people at large on behalf of a hero, usually adopt the ballad form which does not often rise to the height of great poetry. So, of the thousands of European poems of this character, the majority are ballads or epics (and they are unsuited for illustrated use in a lecture). I might interest you by quoting a ballad about a German trumpeter which exactly repeats the familiar story of the Japanese trumpeter; or I might quote to you a striking ballad about the French sentry who, being surprised at his post by the enemy, and ordered to keep silence on pain of death, nevertheless shouted the alarm, and saved his country by the sacrifice of his life. But, noble as is the story, the poetry is not of the finest and I want to give you examples of only the best short work. This will probably confine me to the use of about four pieces more,—the next brings us to Switzerland. The story is the story of Winkelried, who in the fourteenth century secured the independence of Switzerland by voluntarily sacrificing his life in battle. It was a strange battle—known in history as the battle of Sempach. The Austrians were all clad in steel from head to foot—every man like a statue of iron: it was the age in which armour had obtained its greatest perfection. All these iron-men formed a prodigious square, or phalanx, using long spears—the spears of the men behind reaching over the shoulders of the men in front—so that between every two men there were four or five spears to help them while they used their own. And against this tremendous array, there were only some thousands of half naked peasants, mountaineers, herders, hunters, fighting for their liberty and their country. The odds were very great; but hunters, and men

of that class are generally very quick to see an advantage in war; and they soon saw one thing, namely,—that if they could only break into the square at any point they could win the battle; for they could strike harder and move more quickly than the men in armour. For a long time they tried to break the square in vain. Then one strong man, Arnold von Winkelried, shouted; “If you follow me, and climb over me, you can break the square.” He then ran forward and seized ten spears in his arms. Of course every spear went through his body. But he held fast; and before they could draw their spears out of his body again, his comrades climbed over him, into the square, and began the terrible slaughter that ended the battle and won the independence of Switzerland. That was a very grand feat of individual heroism. It was imitated in modern times—once, I believe, at Waterloo, when the French cavalry attacked an English square successfully. One brave soldier blindfolded his horse, and made the animal leap on the bayonets of the infantry. Both he and the horse were instantly killed; but his comrades leaped over him into the square and destroyed it within a few moments. The case of Winkelried more impresses us, because of the great consequences, the political liberty of Switzerland. It was an astonishing example of what the death of one man could accomplish for his country. Of course there have been a great many poems written about that action. One of them, by Montgomery, I think you know, as it is to be found in many anthologies—beginning with the words:

“Make way for liberty!” he cried,
Made way for liberty, and died.

But this is not by any means the best of the compositions. It is written much in the style of Sir Walter Scott’s earlier verse. Very much better is the poem by Walter Thornbury. From this poem we can make some good quotations. In the opening we have a description of the two armies; and the description is supposed to be made by the

Swiss who took part in the battle against Archduke Leopold.
When the Swiss saw the army coming, the signal was given
by blowing horns on all the mountain tops.

The young and old from fair Lucerne gathered to bar the way,
The reapers threw their sickles down, and ran to join the fray :

* * *

Burghers of Berne, the lads of Schwitz, and Unterwalden's best,
Warriors of Uri, strong as bulls, were there among the rest;
The oldest of our mountain priests had come to fight,—not pray,
Our women only kept at home upon that battle-day.

The shepherds, sturdy wrestlers with the grim mountain bear,
The chamois hunters, lithe and swift, mingle together there;
Rough boatmen from the mountain lakes, and fishermen by scores;
The children only had been left to guard the nets and oars.
The herdsmen joined us from their huts on the far mountain-side,
Where cow-bells chimed among the pines, and far above in pride
The granite peaks rose soaring up in snowy pinnacles,
Past glaciers' ever-gaping jaws and vultures' citadels.

Such was indeed the bulk of the Swiss army—hunters,
shepherds, herders, fishermen; but there were among them
some citizen groups from the towns. However, the heavy
fighting was chiefly done by the peasants. Yet it was a
kind of fighting which took them by surprise—a kind of
fighting in which strength and bravery seem to be set at
naught by the machine-discipline of the iron-clad:—

How fierce we ran with partisan and axe and spear and sword,
With flail and club and shrieking horns, upon that Austrian horde!
But they stood silent in the sun, mocking the Switzer bear,
Their helmets crested, beaked, and fanged, like the wild beasts
that they were.

Like miners digging iron ore from some great mountain heart,
We strove to hew and rend and cleave that hill of steel apart;
But clamped like statues stood the knights in their spiked
phalanx strong,
Though our Swiss halberds and our swords hewed fiercely at the
throng.

Hot, sharp, and thick our arrows fell upon their helmet crests,
Keen on their visors' glancing bars, and sharp upon their breasts;
Fierce plied our halberds at the spears, that thicker seemed to grow:
The more we struck, more boastfully the banners seemed to blow.

"We rushed upon the enemy fiercely with all kinds of weapons, sounding our horns; but the Austrians stood in silence mocking the strength of Switzerland, and looking with their fantastic crested helmets, like some strange and horrible kind of beasts—and, in their hearts, they were beasts indeed! But we could do nothing against them for a long time. It was like working at a mountain of iron,—like trying to break out ore. Those men, in their armour, seemed to be clamped to the ground and to each other; and we could not cut into them. We shot at them, so that our arrows fell upon them thick as hail;—we tried to cut through the spear-shafts with our halberds. But all this made no impression,—the more that we cut the spears, the more spears there appeared to be to cut."

Notice in the second of the above three stanzas, the fine use of words relating to metal. "Clamp" means to fasten together with a band of iron; and a finer word could not have been chosen to express the fixing of the knight's ranks.

So the fight continued;—the enemy always slowly advancing as a mountain might move with the pressure of an earthquake behind it. Then Winkelried devoted himself to the cause of victory.

Till Winkelried stepped forth, and said, knitting his rugged brow,
"Out on ye, men of Zurich town! go back and tend your plough;
Sluggards of Berne, go hunt and fish, when danger is not nigh;
See now how Unterwalden taught her hardy sons to die!"

Then out he rushed with head bent low; his body, breast, and hands
Bore down a sheaf of spears, and made a pathway for our bands.
Four lances splintered on his brow, six shivered in his side,
But still he struggled fiercely on, and, shouting "Victory!" died.

Then on that broken flying rout, we Swiss, rejoicing, rushed,

With sword and mace and partisan that struck and stabbed and
crushed;
Their banners beaten to the earth, and all their best men slain,
The Austrians threw away their shields and fled across the plain.

(“Out on ye!” is an old English expression signifying “For shame!” In referring to the attitude of Winkelried, in rushing forward, you may remark that the poet describes him as running with his head down,—of course he bent his head, covered by a helmet probably, only because if any of the spears were to strike him directly in the face, he could not have reached the phalanx. In the third line of the same stanza you may notice the word “shivered;”—it does not mean “trembled,” but means broken into very small pieces.)

The foregoing poem has very considerable merit as a strong ringing composition. Yet I am not sure whether it is not more easy to describe the act of a hero in battle, than the act of a heroine—a woman, able to help her country only by gentler and unobtrusive means. Certainly the next poem which I shall quote represents a very much higher art than this poem of Winkelried. And it is only the story of a poor Italian peasant girl, who risked her life to save a patriot. The poem is simply entitled, “The Italian in England.” The Italian is relating, in exile, a memory of his youth. I suppose you know that in the early part of the nineteenth century, a great deal of Italy was under Austrian rule, and that it would be still under Austrian rule but for the unselfish efforts of great patriots—earnest men, many of whom gave up their lives in order to free their country. Many of these men, besides the statesmen, were men of rank and learning. Prices were actually put upon the heads of some. Some of these men fled to England, some to France, and earned an honourable living as teachers, artists, musicians. English literature, for example, owes to this episode in history the contribution of the Rossetti family. Of course there were thousands of poor folks too, who were patriots and refugees. But Browning has properly chosen for poetical use the story of a refugee

of a noble class. Nearly all the great English poets of the Victorian period strongly sympathized with the Italian patriots;—indeed English sympathy very much helped toward the freeing of Italy. And the greatest of their statesmen, Mazzini, used to read and translate this poem to his Italian friends, to show them how well an Englishman could sympathize with the patriots. The poem opens with the speaker's account of how he had to hide from the Austrian police with a price upon his head:—

THE ITALIAN IN ENGLAND

That second time they hunted me
 From hill to plain, from shore to sea,
 And Austria, hounding far and wide
 Her blood-hounds thro' the country-side,
 Breathed hot and instant on my trace.—
 I made, six days, a hiding-place
 Of that dry green old aqueduct
 Where I and Charles, when boys, have plucked
 The fire-flies from the roof above,
 Bright creeping thro' the moss they love:
 —How long it seems since Charles was lost!
 Six days the soldiers crossed and crossed
 The country in my very sight;
 And when that peril ceased at night,
 The sky broke out in red dismay
 With signal-fires. Well, there I lay
 Close covered o'er in my recess,
 Up to the neck in ferns and cress,
 Thinking on Metternich our friend,
 And Charles's miserable end,
 And much beside, two days; the third,
 Hunger o'ercame me when I heard
 The peasants from the village go
 To work among the maize . . .

The first mention of six days refers to the whole time during which he had to hide in the weeds;—he lay there the first two days without food—not daring to move; but the third day when he heard the peasants passing by to work,

he had become so hungry that he ventured to seek for help. The reference to Metternich is, of course, ironical; and the word "friend" really means deadly enemy;—Metternich, as you know, was the Austrian prime minister, and bitterly hated by every Italian patriot. But Charles, the friend of the speaker, and his playmate in boyhood, had become a traitor to his country. That is the meaning of the word "lost." Now while the man is hiding in the aqueduct in ruins—he remembers that when he was a boy, he and Charles used to go there to catch fireflies; and it was just through that memory of childhood that he knew how to find so good a hiding place. Nothing else needs explanation except the word "instant" in the fifth line, which signifies without delay, without respite. "Hot and instant" means that the pursuit was fierce and uninterrupted.

In the lines which follow there is a pretty study of human nature; but I will not dictate it as I am obliged to curtail. The substance, however, is this:—

The man watches the peasants from his hiding place, wishing to speak; but his instinct tells him to let all the men and boys go by, and to wait for the women. Danger tells him that he can trust the woman's heart better. And he waits. Presently the women come—one, two, three, ten—twenty: still he hesitates, until it is almost too late. Then, quickly, he takes off one of his gloves and throws it at the last of the procession, a tall girl, who has the good sense to stoop down quietly, and pick it up and hide it in her bosom, without saying anything. Then she goes straight on to her work. But the fugitive, hiding in the aqueduct, knows very well that she will come back again when opportunity offers. She does not yet know what is wanted of her. And he thinks to himself: "When she comes back, I must tell her a lie, in order to get her help. What lie shall I tell her? She is a young girl; and girls sympathize with lovers. Suppose I tell her that I am hiding here because of some trouble that I got into on account of a love affair." But at that moment, the girl comes back; and when he looks straight into her

face, he finds that he cannot, dare not, tell her a lie; and he utters the whole truth, heedless of his life.

But when I saw that woman's face,
 Its calm simplicity of grace,
 Our Italy's own attitude
 In which she walked thus far, and stood,
 Planting each naked foot so firm,
 To crush the snake and spare the worm—
 At first sight of her eyes, I said,
 "I am that man upon whose head
 "They fix the price, because I hate
 "The Austrians over us; the State
 "Will give you gold—oh, gold so much!—
 "If you betray me to their clutch,
 "And be your death, for aught I know,
 "If once they find you saved their foe.
 "Now, you must bring me food and drink,
 "And also paper, pen, and ink
 "And carry safe what I shall write
 "To Padua, which you 'll reach at night
 "Before the ducmo shuts; go in,
 "And wait till Tenebræ begin;
 "Walk to the third confessional,
 "Between the pillar and the wall,
 "And kneeling whisper, *Whence comes peace?*
 "Say it a second time, then cease;
 "And if the voice inside returns,
 "*From Christ and Freedom; what concerns*
 "*The cause of Peace?*—for answer, slip
 "My letter where you placed your lip;
 "Then come back happy we have done
 "Our mother service—I, the son,
 "As you the daughter of our land!"

The full meaning of the emotion here expressed deserves a little comment. When the woman comes back, she does not go straight to where the man is lying, but only to where the glove has been thrown, and stands there, and looks at him. And all her attitude, full of strength and dignity, signifies, "Do not dare to attempt any nonsense with me;

but tell me at once what you want." The reference to the killing of the snake, and the sparing of the worm strongly paints this firm character—and, by the way, you should here remember, that in the Italian paintings of the mother, she is represented as crushing a snake under her naked foot. Just what the line signifies is this,—the girl is kind-hearted enough not to hurt even an insect, but she would not be afraid even to kill a man if it were necessary to defend her virtue. And that is exactly the kind of woman that can best help him—brave and kind. So he tells her everything, and reminds her only that it is not for his sake, but for the sake of Italy, that the help is needed.

Make a note only on some unfamiliar terms. "Duomo," a cathedral—this word is closely allied to the English "dome." "Tenebræ," a particular church service, celebrated during Holy Week. As the name implies, the service has reference to the legendary darkness which happened at the death of Christ. "Confessional" is the private cabinet, in which confessions are heard; and the phrase "where you placed your lip" refers to the window through which the penitent whispers his or her confession to the priest inside.

Three mornings more she took her stand
 In the same place, with the same eyes:
 I was no surer of sun-rise
 Than of her coming: we conferred
 Of her own prospects, and I heard
 She had a lover—stout and tall,
 She said—then let her eyelids fall,
 "He could do much"—as if some doubt
 Entered her heart,—then, passing out,
 "She could not speak for others, who
 "Had other thoughts; herself she knew:"
 And so she brought me drink and food.
 After four days, the scouts pursued
 Another path; at last arrived
 The help my Paduan friends contrived
 To furnish me: she brought the news.
 For the first time I could not choose

But kiss her hand, and lay my own
 Upon her head—"This faith was shown
 "To Italy, our mother; she
 "Uses my hand and blesses thee!"
 She followed down to the sea-shore;
 I left and never saw her more.

There is a very fine touch of strong character here also. The refugee naturally asks her if she does not know any man whom she can trust—because he thinks that she is undergoing a great deal of fatigue for his sake—she is doing what only a strong man ought to be asked to do. She acknowledges that she has a sweetheart; and yet, though she loves him, she will not risk another man's life by telling even him. So she answers, "I do not know what other people think;—I only know my own heart well." A finer answer could not have been given. And the stern reserve of the girl is such that the man whom she helps dares only at the last moment to express his thanks demonstratively by kissing her hand—an act expressing humility,—and by blessing her, for which he feels obliged to apologize—reminding her that it is Italy, not he, who thanks her. Two such characters would certainly make an excellent match—notwithstanding the fact that he is a statesman, and she only a poor peasant girl. But the finest part of the poem is to come—the close,—from which we can guess at the secret thoughts of the speaker. He has been many years in exile; and he can think of only three things in the world worth wishing for:—

How very long since I have thought
 Concerning—much less wished for—ought
 Beside the good of Italy,
 For which I live and mean to die!
 I never was in love; and since
 Charles proved false, what shall now convince
 My inmost heart I have a friend?
 However, if I pleased to spend
 Real wishes on myself—say, three—
 I know at least what one should be.

I would grasp Metternich until
I felt his red wet throat distil
In blood thro' these two hands. And next,
—Nor much for that am I perplexed—
Charles, perjured traitor, for his part,
Should die slow of a broken heart
Under his new employers. Last
—Ah, there, what should I wish? For fast
Do I grow old and out of strength.
If I resolved to seek at length
My father's house again, how scared
They all would look, and unprepared!
My brothers live in Austria's pay
—Disowned me long ago, men say;
And all my early mates who used
To praise me so—perhaps induced
More than one early step of mine—
Are turning wise: while some opine
“Freedom grows license,” some suspect
“Haste breeds delay,” and recollect
They always said, such premature
Beginnings never could endure!
So, with a sullen “All 's for the best,”
The land seems settling to its rest.

He has nothing to look forward to in his own country—father, brothers, sisters, friends, all disown him—through fear. Insincere people,—cowardly people,—the very people who formerly encouraged him in his undertaking, now say that too much freedom is bad; that he was too rash; that they had always warned him not to go too fast. Italy, still enslaved, is becoming shamefully accustomed to slavery; and weak minds exclaim, “It cannot be helped—it is all for the best!” These are the real trials of the reformer—the cowardice of friends, and the indifference and selfishness of the very people for whom he is fighting. He will fight still—for he loves Italy just the same; but he has no wish to see his father's house. He has only three wishes—the first is that he could only once take the Austrian prime minister

by the throat, and squeeze that throat until the blood came squirting through his fingers. That is a wish of hate, but it is patriotic hate; and we may excuse it. The second wish is that the friend of his boyhood, who played traitor, should be punished by remorse only—should die of remorse in the employment of his Austrian friends. And the third wish is this:—

I think, then, I should wish to stand
 This evening in that dear, lost land,
 Over the sea the thousand miles,
 And know if yet that woman smiles
 With the calm smile;—some little farm
 She lives in there, no doubt: what harm
 If I sat on the door-side bench,
 And while her spindle made a trench
 Fantastically in the dust,
 Inquired of all her fortunes—just
 Her children's ages and their names,
 And what may be the husband's aims
 For each of them. I'd talk this out,
 And sit there, for an hour about,
 Then kiss her hand once more, and lay
 Mine on her head, and go my way.

So much for idle wishing—how
 It steals the time! To business now.

The reference to the door-side bench is particularly Italian;—in that mild climate, the people live as much out of doors as they can; and many of the peasants' houses have little outside benches, built against the wall, beside the door; and here the women can spin and weave under the sun. What the speaker wishes is that he might be allowed to sit on such a bench outside that woman's house, and talk to her about her children, and their future—while she, perhaps, embarrassed by this unexpected visit, would scratch the ground with her spindle,—would draw little aimless figures in the dust, as they talked. And the way—the restraint and

brief way, in which this wish is uttered, betrays the real feeling of the speaker. He does not simply love her—and of course it would be of no use if he did. He reverences her, with that kind of affection which is much higher than mere love. For in her, typified, he beholds, and knows all that he loves in Italy,—in the country for which he would die a thousand deaths if it were necessary. To him she is more than woman: she is Italy.

The next example which I am going to give takes us back again to France, and to the subject of war. It is a little poem which vividly describes—I might say “celebrates”—the pure delight of the soldier in dying for his chief. It is the ecstasy of loyalty combined with the patriotic spirit. Of all persons who ever lived, probably Napoleon best understood how to fill his soldiers’ hearts with this spirit. He made them to understand that it was not simply an honour to die for their country, but that it was, or should be a joy to die for him personally. He appeared to them almost as a god;—doubtless the Greek soldiers who followed Alexander to the conquest of India thought of their chief as divine. Perhaps this was the reason why Napoleon dared to tell his armies upon one occasion, that they should consider it their business to get killed. “Oh, you want rest?” he said. “You never shall have any rest—never—never! I shall take you into country after country, until every one of you is killed.” Yet they could endure that—perhaps they admired it. Frederick the Great was nearly as brutal in some of his military speeches; it was he who once asked his troops, when they wanted some rest, “You scoundrels! You want to live forever?” Nevertheless those troops adored their rough old king.

Well, here is the little poem that I refer to; it is called “An Incident of the French Camp”—and the incident is true:—

I

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day;

With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
 Legs wide, arms locked behind,
 As if to balance the prone brow
 Oppressive with its mind.

This represents, as well as verse can do it, the customary attitude of Napoleon standing, as shown in hundreds of pictures, and even in some of the famous statues made of him. In this verse, the word "prone" signifies bending forward, and the word "oppressive" means more than oppressive—heavy. The appearance of the head was peculiar; the lower part of the face being quite delicate, and the upper part presenting a remarkable aspect of weight—as if the brain were too heavy for the little body. And the poet suggests that the attitude of Napoleon standing with his legs apart and his hands behind, looked as if a slight body was trying to balance itself against the weight of the brain But, though the appearance is quite correctly described, the fact is that the brain of Napoleon was found to be rather small—much lighter in fact than the brain of far less remarkable men.

II

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
 "That soar, to earth may fall,
 "Let once my army leader Lannes
 "Waver at yonder wall,—"
 Out 'twixt the battery smokes there flew
 A rider, bound on bound
 Full-galloping; nor bridle drew
 Until he reached the mound.

III

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
 And held himself erect
 By just his horse's mane, a boy:
 You hardly could suspect—
 (So tight he kept his lip compressed
 Scarce any blood came through)
 You looked twice ere you saw his breast
 Was all but shot in two.

IV

“Well,” cried he, “Emperor, by God’s grace
“We ’ve got you Ratisbon!
“The Marshal ’s in the market-place,
“And you ’ll be there anon
“To see your flag-bird flap his vans
“Where I, to heart’s desire,
“Perched him!” The Chief’s eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V

The Chief’s eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle’s eye
When her bruised eaglet breathes.
“You ’re wounded!” “Nay,” his soldier’s pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
“I ’m killed, Sire!” And his Chief beside,
Smiling the boy fell dead.

If Ratisbon could not have been taken on that day, Napoleon’s plans would very probably have had to be changed. Notice the plural in the word “battery smokes”—the separate smoke puffs of the cannons are thus referred to: “To draw bridle” means to stop the horse, to halt. The word “boy” need not surprise you when you know that a considerable part of Napoleon’s army consisted of boys of sixteen to seventeen years old. During the Empire, also, boys were allowed, if strong enough to enlist in the army, at the age of sixteen. But in England a young man of twenty-seven is often called, rather caressingly, a boy. In the fourth stanza remember that the word “van” (a word often used by Milton) means “wing;” and the “flag-bird” is of course the French eagle. To perch the eagle above the stone fortress, means of course to plant the flag as a sign of victory. The boy who brought the news, with his body half cut in two by a cannon shot was the standard bearer. Notice also the splendid force of the last line of the stanza,—the comparison of Napoleon’s plans, plans of destruction, to the rising and

soaring of fire. In the fifth stanza you must understand that the word "film" is the nominative in the clause. "Film" means a very thin skin or very thin layer of moisture, or of fluid of any kind. What the poet means to say is that, just as the eye of an eagle might become moist on seeing her young wounded, so Napoleon's eye softened—became gentle, on seeing the condition of the young soldier. Neither Napoleon nor the eagle would shed tears, but the eye might become a little moist, under the influence of emotion—sheathed by a film, as the poet says. Remember that the verb "sheathe" often means only to cover. The boy does not like the mistake which Napoleon makes in imagining him to be wounded only—that hurts his pride; for he wants his chief to know that he is simply shot to pieces, dying, and that he is delighted to die. And he dies smiling.

I may tell you that the incident here described took place in the year 1809, and that the town Ratisbon is in Bavaria.

From Browning one might quote at least a dozen other poems on the subject of patriotism and heroic loyalty. No other English poet, of any other age, has done so much in this direction. And a wonderful fact is that these poems by Browning represent these emotions, not merely as English, but as French, Italian, ancient Greek, modern Arabian. That a man should be able thus to sympathize with the feelings of patriots of other countries and other times is a glorious example; but only a poet of very strong psychological power could do this. I should like to quote all these poems to you; but this is not a lecture on Browning; it is only a lecture about a particular class of poetry in which he was chief easily. I shall therefore attempt only one more quotation,—an Arabian subject. But I will mention to you the beautiful Greek poem of Pheidippides, who went to Sparta to ask for help against the Persians, and who afterwards fought in the great battle of Marathon, running into his native city to announce the victory, and fell dead, as he shouted the joyful news. Again, I should like you should notice

some time the wonderful "Cavalier Tunes" by the same poet—which are little songs, expressing the fierce loyalty of the gentry in the time of Charles the First. Many good poems had been written about the Puritan victories; but Browning was the first to give us really splendid presentations of the noble spirit of the other side—though he himself was no aristocrat in his politics.

Now we may turn to our last example, "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr." The Metidja is the vast space of country lying south of Algeria, toward the great desert. Abd-el-Kadr, born in 1807, was the chief of the Arab tribes of that region, and of the greater part of Northern Africa. When the French invaded the country, he was able to unite all the tribes against them; and after a long war, in which he showed himself to be a consummate general, the French were obliged to make peace with them. But some years after, the French again invaded the Arab territory in great force; and in spite of the skill of their chief, the Arabs were at last overcome. Abd-el-Kadr himself was taken prisoner; and remained some years in France. Afterwards he was set free, on condition that he promised never to return to Africa. He went to Damascus in Syria, and remained there, faithful to his promise, until the year 1883, when he died, greatly respected and admired even by his enemies. During his captivity in France he wrote a number of interesting books—one of which, edited and translated by General Daumas—indeed published under the name of the general—is very famous and interesting. It is a book about horses, the Arab horses of the desert, and is entitled "Les Chevaux du Sahara."

A little poem describes the feeling and thoughts of a young Arab messenger, riding alone through the desert on a mission to Abd-el-Kadr, whom he reverences and loves. Of course it is a terrible journey—full of danger of every kind—danger from sand-storms, danger from men of prey—the wild robbers who live by plunder and murder—danger also from the foreign enemy, who would scruple at no means

of cutting Abd-el-Kadr's communications. But the youth is proud and glad of his dangerous mission;—it is the greatest possible delight for him to face these terrors, though he must think about them. The poem is written in a very curious measure—a measure that actually imitates the motion of a horse speeding over the hot sand.

I

As I ride, as I ride
 With a full heart for my guide,
 So its tide rocks my side,
 As I ride, as I ride,
 That, as I were double-eyed,
 He, in whom our Tribes confide,
 Is described, ways untried
 As I ride, as I ride.

II

As I ride, as I ride,
 To our Chief and his Allied,
 Who dares my heart's pride
 As I ride, as I ride?
 Or are witnesses denied—
 Through the desert waste and wide
 Do I glide unespied
 As I ride, as I ride?

III

As I ride, as I ride,
 When an inner voice has cried,
 The sands slide, nor abide
 (As I ride, as I ride)
 O'er each visioned homicide
 That came vaunting (has he lied?)
 To reside—where he died,
 As I ride, as I ride.

IV

As I ride, as I ride,
 Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
 Yet his hide, streaked and pied,

As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
—Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed—
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride!

V

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that 's meant me—satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I 'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!

Here we have in five stanzas one rhyme-sound repeated no less than sixty-four times—sometimes doubled, sometimes in a dactylic line, sometimes in an anapaestic line. The effect is, and is intended to be, like the motion of a swiftly trotting horse. A curious and effective construction; but the emotional expression is much more effective. Let us paraphrase; and we shall have to paraphrase closely, for this is a very difficult poem.

“As I ride on alone, over the desert sands, with no companion or guide but my own heart—how it is beating, this heart, as if it would burst my side; and so it beats because of the joy and pride that is in me. So does it beat; so does it make the life within me strong and fresh, that it seems as if I had double sight—the sight of the seer of ghosts. For, in imagination only, perhaps, but vividly as if it were real, I see the face of the Chief in whom we trust. I see him always, without trying to see him as I ride.

“As I ride to our Chief and his Arab army, the army of our united tribes, who could blame me,—who dare blame me for the happy pride that I feel? Only—who knows? . . . Yet perhaps I am seen. There may be witnesses—ghostly witnesses, spirits of our desert-ancestors. Perhaps also I am seen, without knowing it, by evil spirits,—by

demons of waste places,—or perhaps by evil men, awaiting to kill me.

“Why indeed should I boast?—Am I boasting too soon? Within me a warning voice seems to say: ‘Look at the bones, the white bones about you in the desert. The sands have covered them, and have left them bare again. They were men who rode this way like you, boastingly;—they prayed here, and stayed here—because they were killed. So, very probably you will be killed.’ Has that voice lied to me? I don’t know—I must not think about it. Let me think only of my duty.

“See my good horse, my brave horse. Never once have I touched him with the spur; but he has never slackened the long fine springing trot of his even for a minute. See his skin; it is all stained and streaked with sweat now; he must be very thirsty; but he does not show it. What a beauty he is! With hoofs like a zebra and thighs like an ostrich! And see how beautifully he steps—every stride of his hind-foot dropping exactly into the hoof-mark left by the fore-foot, as if every stride were competing with every other, but always remaining exactly the same in length measure, just because the horse is doing his very best.

“Well, even if I could see the future, even if I could know what is going to happen to me,—I should not try to find out. Whatever will happen must be the will of Allah—therefore why should I care to know? Before I ask what she intends for me, she might do whatever she pleases. I am contented to wait for the time when the Prophet of God and the Heavenly Bride to whom I shall be united in Paradise will decide that this heart of mine must stop beating. It is beating now too much—the joy is too great: would that it would become a little less excited!”

The reference to the ostrich can only be fully appreciated by those who have seen the bird walk and run. The ostrich stands usually about eight feet high, though there are birds taller than this; and its walk is the most dignified and beautiful of any creature. Of a very

active and graceful man who takes long steps as he walks, the Arabs say, "He walks like an ostrich," but the running of the ostrich is swifter than any horse—for the extraordinary reason that the average length of one stride is no less than twenty-five feet by actual measurement. Thus you will perceive that at every step in running the bird clears a space almost equal to that of this room. The authority for this statement is the article upon the ostrich published in the volume of "The Cambridge Natural History" published a few months ago, "Birds."

"Visioned," in the fifth line of the third stanza, has only the sense of "seen;" and we may render the words "each visioned homicide" by "murdered man seen," that is, the bones of murdered men. Dead bodies in the desert very quickly become dry skeletons, and under the sun they bleach so as to be visible at a great distance; we must suppose that the rider sees many skeletons as he journeys on. The word "pied" in the third line of the fourth stanza signifies "parti-coloured;" (the sweat of the horse, drying, makes whitish stains upon the dark.)

With this remarkable poem I may close the subject of the present lecture. It is a pleasant subject; and we might have many more talks about it. But I want to give you as much variety as I can; and therefore I shall now turn to another topic of equal, though frailer, interest—poems about children. Here I think we shall also have a number of comparatively new experiences.