

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

A Grammarian's Funeral Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe

1 Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
2 Singing together.
3 Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
4 Each in its tether
5 Sleeping safe on the bosom of the plain,
6 Cared-for till cock-crow:
7 Look out if yonder be not day again
8 Rimming the rock-row!
9 That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
10 Rarer, intenser,
11 Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
12 Chafes in the censer.
13 Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
14 Seek we sepulture
15 On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
16 Crowded with culture!
17 All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
18 Clouds overcome it;
19 No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
20 Circling its summit.
21 Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
22 Wait ye the warning?
23 Our low life was the level's and the night's;
24 He's for the morning.
25 Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
26 'Ware the beholders!
27 This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
28 Borne on our shoulders.

29 Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
30 Safe from the weather!
31He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
32 Singing together,
33He was a man born with thy face and throat,
34 Lyric Apollo!
35Long he lived nameless: how should spring take note
36 Winter would follow?
37Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
38 Cramped and diminished,
39Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
40 My dance is finished"?
41No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
42 Make for the city!)
43He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
44 Over men's pity;
45Left play for work, and grappled with the world
46 Bent on escaping:
47"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled
48 Show me their shaping,
49Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,--
50 Give!"--So, he gowned him,
51Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
52 Learned, we found him.
53Yea, but we found him bald too, eyes like lead,
54 Accents uncertain:
55"Time to taste life," another would have said,
56 "Up with the curtain!"
57This man said rather, "Actual life comes next?
58 Patience a moment!
59Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,
60 Still there's the comment.
61Let me know all! Prate not of most or least,
62 Painful or easy!

63 Even to the crumbs I'd fain eat up the feast,
64 Ay, nor feel queasy."
65 Oh, such a life as he resolved to live,
66 When he had learned it,
67 When he had gathered all books had to give!
68 Sooner, he spurned it.
69 Image the whole, then execute the parts--
70 Fancy the fabric
71 Quite, ere you build, ere steel strike fire from quartz,
72 Ere mortar dab brick!

73 (Here's the town-gate reached: there's the market-place
74 Gaping before us.)
75 Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace
76 (Hearten our chorus!)
77 That before living he'd learn how to live--
78 No end to learning:
79 Earn the means first--God surely will contrive
80 Use for our earning.
81 Others mistrust and say, "But time escapes:
82 Live now or never!"
83 He said, "What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
84 Man has Forever."
85 Back to his book then: deeper drooped his head:
86 *Calculus* racked him:
87 Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
88 *Tussis* attacked him.
89 "Now, master, take a little rest!"--not he!
90 (Caution redoubled
91 Step two abreast, the way winds narrowly!)
92 Not a whit troubled,
93 Back to his studies, fresher than at first,
94 Fierce as a dragon
95 He (soul-hydroptic with a sacred thirst)
96 Sucked at the flagon.

97 Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
98 Heedless of far gain,
99 Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
100 Bad is our bargain!
101 Was it not great? did not he throw on God,
102 (He loves the burthen)--
103 God's task to make the heavenly period
104 Perfect the earthen?
105 Did not he magnify the mind, show clear
106 Just what it all meant?
107 He would not discount life, as fools do here,
108 Paid by instalment.
109 He ventured neck or nothing--heaven's success
110 Found, or earth's failure:
111 "Wilt thou trust death or not?" He answered "Yes:
112 Hence with life's pale lure!"
113 That low man seeks a little thing to do,
114 Sees it and does it:
115 This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
116 Dies ere he knows it.
117 That low man goes on adding one to one,
118 His hundred's soon hit:
119 This high man, aiming at a million,
120 Misses an unit.
121 That, has the world here--should he need the next,
122 Let the world mind him!
123 This, throws himself on God, and unperplexed
124 Seeking shall find him.
125 So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
126 Ground he at grammar;
127 Still, thro' the rattle, parts of speech were rife:
128 While he could stammer
129 He settled *Hoti's* business--let it be!--
130 Properly based *Oun*--
131 Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,

132 Dead from the waist down.
133 Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
134 Hail to your purlieus,
135 All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
136 Swallows and curlews!
137 Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
138 Live, for they can, there:
139 This man decided not to Live but Know--
140 Bury this man there?
141 Here--here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
142 Lightnings are loosened,
143 Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
144 Peace let the dew send!
145 Lofty designs must close in like effects:
146 Loftily lying,
147 Leave him--still loftier than the world suspects,
148 Living and dying.

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