

PROSPICE.

Composition and publication. Written in the autumn following his wife's death, 1861. "That noble lyrical defiance of death."—W. Sharp. Published in *Dramatis Personæ*, 1864.

Theme and treatment. Browning's view of death is rendered here with all his faith, his optimism, his love. It may be compared with his Epilogue to *Pacchiarotto* and Tennyson's *Crossing the Bar*.

Metrical form. The metre is anapestic-iambic, four-accent lines alternating with two-accent riming *a b a b*.

Page 136. Title. Prospice (*pros' pī sē*, or *pros' pī kē*). Look forward. (Lat., 2nd per. imper. of *prospicio*, I look forward.)

l. 19.—**life's arrears.** Browning's gratitude for the joy of life was so great that he felt in much debt to life. The darkness and pain of death helped him to readjust the balance.

l. 23.—**fiend voices.** The ancient belief was that the soul at the moment of separation from the body is the object of a struggle between the angels, whose office is to bear away the freed spirit (Luke xiv, 22) and the powers of darkness who strive to snatch it from salvation. For this reason fervent prayers are offered for a soul on the point of departure. The Litany in the Book of Common Prayer contains a petition for deliverance "in the hour of death," and the following is from the office for the dying in the Roman Breviary: "Cedat tibi teterimus satanas cum satellitibus suis: in adventu tuo te comitantibus Angelis contremiscant atque in aeternae noctis chaos immane diffugiat. . . . Confundantur igitur et erubescant omnes tartareae legiones, et ministri satanae iter tuum impedire non audeant."

"O, beat away the busy meddling fiend
That lays strong siege unto this wretch's soul."

—Shakspeare I., *Henry VI.*, III, iii, 21f.

l. 27.—**soul of my soul.** Browning's love of his wife may be seen in *My Star*; *The Ring and the Book*, bk. I.

"O lyric love, half angel and half bird."