

34.

There is a very life in our despair,
 Vitality of poison – a quick root
 Which feeds these deadly branches; for it were 300
 As nothing did we die; but Life will suit
 Itself to Sorrow's most detested fruit,
 Like to the apples on the Dead Sea's shore, *
 All ashes to the taste: did Man compute
 Existence by Enjoyment, and count o'er 305
 Such hours 'gainst years of life, – say, would he name threescore?

* The (fabled) apples on the brink of lake Asphaltites were said to be fair without, and within ashes. – *Vide Tacitus, Histor. 5, 7.*⁴²

35.

The Psalmist numbered out the years of Man:
 They are enough: and if thy tale be *true*,
 Thou, who didst grudge him even that fleeting span,
 More than enough – thou fatal Waterloo! 310
 Millions of tongues record thee – and anew
 Their children's lips shall echo them, and say –
 “Here, where the Sword united Nations drew,
 Our countrymen were warring on that day!”
 And this is much, and all which will not pass away. 315

36.

There sunk the greatest – nor the worst of men,⁴³
 Whose Spirit, antithetically mixt,⁴⁴
 One moment of the mightiest, and again
 On little objects with like firmness fixed;
 Extreme in all things! hadst thou been betwixt, 320
 Thy throne had still been thine, or never been;
 For Daring made thy rise as fall: thou seek'st
 Even now to re-assume the imperial mien,
 And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the Scene.

37.

Conqueror and Captive of the Earth art thou! 325
 She trembles at thee still, and thy wild name
 Was ne'er more bruited in men's minds than now
 That thou art Nothing, save the Jest of Fame,
 Who wooed thee once, thy Vassal, and became
 The Flatterer of thy fierceness, till thou wert 330
 A God unto thyself; nor less the same
 To the astounded kingdoms all inert,
 Who deemed thee for a time whate'er thou didst assert.

42: “Asphaltites” (a word from Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*: see entry for *Mare Mortuum*) is the Dead Sea. The Tacitus passage does not quite bear B.'s interpretation. The fruits are fair at first, rotten afterwards.

43: Napoleon. The stanzas about him recall B.'s *Ode To Napoleon Buonaparte*, not the more modest Bonapartist poems he had published anonymously.

44: Compare B. on Burns' letters: “What an antithetical mind!” (BLJ III, 239). The phrenologist Spurzheim told B. that his were very “antithetical” faculties (BLJ IV 182).

38.

Oh, more or less than Man – in high or low,
 Battling with Nations – flying from the field – 335
 Now making Monarchs' necks thy footstool, now
 More than thy meanest soldier taught to yield;
 An Empire thou couldst crush – command – rebuild,
 But govern not thy pettiest passion, nor,
 However deeply in Men's Spirits skilled, 340
 Look through thine own, nor curb the lust of war,
 Nor learn that tempted Fate will leave the loftiest Star.

39.

Yet well thy Soul hath brooked the turning tide
 With that untaught innate philosophy,
 Which, be it Wisdom – Coldness – or deep Pride, 345
 Is Gall and Wormwood to an Enemy,
 When the whole host of hatred stood hard by,
 To watch and mock thee shrinking, thou hast smiled
 With a sedate and all-enduring eye;
 When Fortune fled her spoiled and favourite Child, 350
 He stood unbowed beneath the ills upon him piled.

40.

Sager than in thy Fortunes; for in them
 Ambition steeled thee on too far to show
 That just habitual scorn, which could contemn
 Men and their thoughts; 'twas wise to feel, not so 355
 To wear it ever on thy lip and brow,
 And spurn the instruments thou wert to use⁴⁵
 Till they were turned unto thine overthrow;
 'Tis but a worthless world to win or lose;
 So hath it proved to thee, and all such lot who chuse. 360

41.

If, like a tower upon a headland rock,
 Thou hadst been made to stand or fall alone,
 Such scorn of Man had helped to brave the Shock;
 But Men's thoughts were the steps which paved thy throne,
Their Admiration thy best weapon shone; 365
 The part of Philip's Son⁴⁶ was thine, not then
 (Unless aside thy Purple had been thrown)
 Like stern Diogenes to mock at men;
 For sceptred Cynics Earth were far too wide a den! *

* The great error of Napoleon, "if we have writ our annals true,"⁴⁷ was a continued obtusion on mankind of his want of all community of feeling for or with them; perhaps more offensive to human Vanity than the active cruelty of more trembling and suspicious Tyranny.

Such were his speeches to public assemblies as well as Individuals: and the single expression which he is said to have used on returning to Paris after the Russian Winter had destroyed his army, rubbing his hands over a fire, "This is pleasanter than Moscow," would

45: Macbeth: ... *and such an instrument I was to use.*

46: Alexander the Great, son of Philip of Macedon.

47: *Coriolanus*, V, vi, 114.

probably alienate more favour from his cause than the destruction and reverses which led to the remark.

42.

But Quiet to quick bosoms is a Hell, 370
 And *there* hath been thy bane; there is a fire
 And Motion of the Soul which will not dwell
 In its own narrow being, but aspire
 Beyond the fitting medium of desire;
 And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore, 375
 Preys upon high Adventure, nor can tire
 Of aught but rest; a fever at the Core,
 Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

43.

This makes the Madmen who have made men mad
 By their contagion; Conquerors and Kings, 380
 Founders of Sects and Systems, to whom add
 Sophists – Bards – Statesmen – all unquiet things
 Which stir too strongly the Soul’s secret Springs,
 And are themselves the fools to those they fool;
 Envied, yet how unenviable! what stings 385
 Are theirs! One breast laid open were a school
 Which would unteach mankind the lust to shine or rule:

44.

Their breath is Agitation, and their life
 A Storm whereon they ride, to sink at last,
 And yet so nursed and bigoted to Strife, 390
 That should their days, surviving perils past,
 Melt to calm twilight, they feel overcast
 With Sorrow and Supineness, and so die;
 Even as a flame unfed, which runs to waste
 With its own flickering, or a Sword laid by, 395
 Which eats into itself, and rusts ingloriously.

45.

He who ascends to mountain-tops, shall find
 The loftiest peaks most wrapt in clouds and snow;
 He who surpasses or subdues mankind,
 Must look down on the hate of those below. 400
 Though high *above* the Sun of Glory glow,
 And far *beneath* the Earth and Ocean spread,
Round him are icy Rocks, and loudly blow
 Contending tempests on his naked head,
 And thus reward the toils which to those summits led. 405