

My Last Duchess

- Robert Browning.

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive. I call That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands Worked busily a day, and there she stands. Will't please you sit and look at her? I said "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read Strangers like you that pictured countenance, The depth and passion of its earnest glance, But to myself they turned (since none puts by The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, How such a glance came there; so, not the first Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not Her husband's presence only, called that spot Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint Must never hope to reproduce the faint Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough For calling up that spot of joy. She had A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad, Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast, The dropping of the daylight in the West, The bough of cherries some officious fool Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule She rode with round the terrace—all and each Would draw from her alike the approving speech, Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame This sort of trifling? Even had you skill In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse, —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt, Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet The company below, then. I repeat, The Count your master's known munificence Is ample warrant that no just pretence Of mine for dowry

*will be disallowed; Though his fair daughter's self, as I
avowed At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go Together
down, sir. Notice Neptune, though, Taming a sea-horse,
thought a rarity, Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in
bronze for me!*