

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

BY ROBERT BROWNING

Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!

Water your damned flower-pots, do!

If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,

God's blood, would not mine kill you!

What? your myrtle-bush wants trimming?

Oh, that rose has prior claims--

Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?

Hell dry you up with its flames!

At the meal we sit together;

Salve tibi! I must hear

Wise talk of the kind of weather,

Sort of season, time of year:

Not a plenteous cork crop: scarcely

Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt;

What's the Latin name for "parsley"?

What's the Greek name for "swine's snout"?

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,

Laid with care on our own shelf!

With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,

And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps--
Marked with L. for our initial!
(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

Saint, forsooth! While Brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
--Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
(That is, if he'd let it show!)

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange pulp--
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
While he drains his at one gulp!

Oh, those melons! if he's able

We're to have a feast; so nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice.
How go on your flowers? None double?
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!--And I, too, at such trouble,
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

There's a great text in Galatians,
Once you trip on it, entails
Twenty-nine district damnations,
One sure, if another fails;
If I trip him just a-dying,
Sure of heaven as sure can be,
Spin him round and send him flying
Off to hell, a Manichee?

Or, my scrofulous French novel
On grey paper with blunt type!
Simply glance at it, you grovel
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe;
If I double down its pages
At the woeful sixteenth print,
When he gathers his greengages,
Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

Or, there's Satan!--one might venture

Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave

Such a flaw in the indenture

As he'd miss till, past retrieve,

Blasted lay that rose-acacia

We're so proud of! *Hy, Zy, Hine...*

'St, there's Vespers! *Plena gratia*

Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r--you swine!