

Robert Browning (1812-89)

4 *Incident of the French Camp*

I.

You know, we French stormed Ratisbon:
A mile or so away,
On a little mound, Napoleon
Stood on our storming-day; 5
With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

II.

Just as perhaps he mused "My plans
"That soar, to earth may fall, 10
"Let once my army-leader Lannes
"Waver at yonder wall," —
Out 'twixt the battery-smokes there flew
A rider, bound on bound
Full-galloping; nor bridle drew 15
Until he reached the mound.

III.

Then off there flung in smiling joy,
And held himself erect
By just his horse's mane, a boy:
You hardly could suspect — 20
(So tight he kept his lips compressed,
Scarce any blood came through)
You looked twice ere you saw his breast
Was all but shot in two.

IV.

"Well," cried he, "Emperor, by God's grace 25
"We've got you Ratisbon!
"The Marshal's in the market-place,
"And you'll be there anon

“To see your flag-bird flap his vans
“Where I, to heart’s desire, 30
“Perched him!” The chief’s eye flashed; his plans
Soared up again like fire.

V.

The chief’s eye flashed; but presently
Softened itself, as sheathes
A film the mother-eagle’s eye 35
When her bruised eaglet breathes;
“You’re wounded!” “Nay,” the soldier’s pride
Touched to the quick, he said:
“I’m killed, Sire!” And his chief beside
Smiling the boy fell dead. 40

1845

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