

TO AURELIO SAFFI

I

YEAR after year has fallen on sleep, till change
 Hath seen the fourth part of a century fade,
 Since you, a guest to whom the vales were strange
 Where Isis whispers to the murmuring shade
 Above her face by winds and willows made,
 And I, elate at heart with reverence, met.
 Change must give place to death ere I forget
 The pride that change of years has quenched not yet.

II

Pride from profoundest humbleness of heart
 Born, self-uplift at once and self-subdued,
 Glowed, seeing his face whose hand had borne such part
 In so sublime and strange vicissitude
 As then filled all faint hearts with hope renewed
 To think upon, and triumph; though the time
 Were dense and foul with darkness cast from crime
 Across the heights that hope was fain to climb.

III

Hope that had risen, a sun to match the sun
That fills and feeds all Italy with light,
Had set, and left the crowning work undone
That raised up Rome out of the shadow of night :
Yet so to have won the worst, to have fought the fight,
Seemed, as above the grave of hope cast down
Stood faith, and smiled against the whole world's frown,
A conquest lordlier than the conqueror's crown.

IV

To have won the worst that chance could give, and worn
The wreath of adverse fortune as a sign
More bright than binds the brows of victory, borne
Higher than all trophies borne of tyrants shine—
What lordlier gift than this, what more divine,
Can earth or heaven make manifest, and bid
Men's hearts bow down and honour? Fate lies hid,
But not the work that true men dared and did

V

The years have given and taken away since then
More than was then foreseen of hope or fear.
Fallen are the towers of empire: all the men

Whose names made faint the heart of the earth to hear
Are broken as the trust they held so dear
Who put their trust in princes : and the sun
Sees Italy, as he in heaven is, one ;
But sees not him who spake, and this was done.

VI

Not by the wise man's wit, the strong man's hand,
By swordsman's or by statesman's craft or might,
Sprang life again where life had left the land,
And light where hope nor memory now saw light :
Not first nor most by grace of these was night
Cast out, and darkness driven before the day
Far as a battle-broken host's array
Flies, and no force that fain would stay it can stay.

VII

One spirit alone, one soul more strong than fate,
One heart whose heat was as the sundawn's fire,
Fed first with flame as heaven's immaculate
Faith, worn and wan and desperate of desire :
And men that felt that sacred breath suspire
Felt by mere speech and presence fugitive
The holy spirit of man made perfect give
Breath to the lips of death, that death might live.

VIII

Not all as yet is yours, nor all is ours,
That shall, if righteousness and reason be,
Fulfil the trust of time with happier hours
And set their sons who fought for freedom free;
Even theirs whose faith sees, as they may not see,
Your land and ours wax lovelier in the light
Republican, whereby the thrones most bright
Look hoar and wan as eve or black as night.

IX

Our words and works, our thoughts and songs turn
thither;
Toward one great end, as waves that press and roll.
Though waves be spent and ebb like hopes that wither,
These shall subside not ere they find the goal.
We know it, who yet with unforgetful soul
See shine and smile, where none may smite or strive,
Above us, higher than clouds and winds can drive,
The soul beloved beyond all souls alive.