



MRS ROBERT BARRETT BROWNING.

THE LIFE OF FANNIE CODDINGTON BROWNING

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Abstract

Fannie Coddington was born in New York on September 6, 1853. Her father, Thomas B. Coddington, was a wealthy metal merchant with locations in both New York and London. In 1868, Fannie moved with her family to London where she became acquainted with the poet, Robert Browning, and his family. Pen Browning, Robert's son, was attracted to Fannie and after a few years proposed marriage. The Coddington family disapproved of the match and in 1875, Fannie returned to New York. There, she dedicated herself to religious and charitable work with Grace Church.

After the deaths of her father, mother, and elder sister, Fannie traveled to England with her younger sister, Marie. She was reunited with Pen Browning and on October 4, 1887, the couple were married. They purchased the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice as their home. The poet, who had the greatest love and admiration for his daughter-in-law, was visiting them when he became ill and died on December 12, 1889.

Although the couple had many friends and were socially active in Venice, their life was unhappy.

Fannie was unable to bear a child and suffered frequently from disabling physical pain as well as from the resulting emotional strain. Pen hired a beautiful Venetian nurse/model who aroused Fannie's jealousy and eventually caused a separation. In 1893, after six years of marriage, Fannie left for New York where she spent the next few years in philanthropic endeavors.

In 1899, at the encouragement of her friend Enid Layard, Fannie agreed to meet Pen to try to reconcile their differences. In May, she returned to Venice and her husband but left again in January of 1900 to live at Enid Layard's until she finally acquired her own apartment in March of that year. She lived independently, boarding nurses and working with various charitable organizations.

In 1906, Fannie chose to leave Italy and to make her home at Oxford in England. In July 1912, Pen died and because he left no will, an auction of the Browning estate was held the following May.

Fannie moved to America, making her home in Washington, D.C. in 1914. In 1928, she published Some Memories of Robert Browning.

In 1931, Fannie returned to England to Hayward Heath, London. There, in 1933, she hired Miss Dorothy Ivatt, an employee of Hayward Heath Hospital whom she

had come to know and trust; she consequently dismissed her companion of twenty years, Miss Louise Vincent. Shortly afterward, she tried to break the trust fund of almost \$400,000 which she had established a few years earlier, but lost the case because the judge ruled that she was influenced by Miss Ivatt. Fannie lived with Miss Ivatt in Anchorhold cottage in Hayward Heath until her death on September 20, 1935.

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Preface

I have attempted in this thesis to write a brief life of Fannie Coddington Browning, daughter-in-law of the poets Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, concentrating chiefly on information gleaned from a group of previously unpublished letters. As most of the letters are to Lady Enid Layard and written during the years 1889-1900, the emphasis of my endeavor is on the relationship between Fannie and her husband, Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, during that time. My work involved reading the letters, transcribing some parts, familiarizing myself with the people and events mentioned, dating many of the letters from content clues, and arranging them chronologically to illuminate a segment of Fannie's life.

Because so much has been written on the Brownings, I tried to limit my work to Fannie, and not repeat the life stories of the other members of the family. However, a familiarity with certain episodes and relationships in the lives of Robert and Elizabeth would be helpful to any student of the life of Fannie. W. Hall Griffin's The Life of Robert Browning is a reliable

source of information on the poet. On the life of Pen Browning, Maisie Ward's The Tragi-Comedy of Pen Browning and N. Arthur Woychuk's thesis (Baylor University), The Life of Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, are very thorough.

For their aid during the research of this thesis, I would like to thank the staffs of the Armstrong Browning and Moody libraries. I am especially grateful to Mrs. Betty Coley and Mrs. Rita Humphrey for their encouragement and assistance. I sincerely appreciate the guidance of Dr. Jack Herring who suggested the topic and directed my work.

Chapter I
The Two Sides of Fannie

When Browning scholars hear the name of Fannie Browning, they usually recall only that she was the rich American heiress who married the poet's son and perhaps that she cared for Robert Browning during the illness which led to his death. From Browning's own letters, it is evident that he had a great love for his daughter-in-law. Shortly after the couple's marriage, he wrote to George Barrett, "Fannie is thoroughly good, affectionate, full of ambition for Pen, to whom she is devoted--," . . . "Fannie is all you say; and most dear and precious to us all." He congratulated Pen, "I do approve of your choice with all my heart: there is no young person I know at all comparable to Miss C." And finally to Fannie, herself, Browning confided, "Dearest Fannie,--all I can say is, I trust I shall have you for a Daughter. You must know I love you as one."

However, others have not felt such affection for Robert Browning's beloved daughter-in-law. She has been described as "a prude of pathological proportions who today would be led to submit herself to psychiatric

treatment";¹ Marie Ada Molineux said of Fannie, "It is a pity that the diseased imagination of a woman whose ill-health warped her mind should be permitted to soil the son of such a family."² Mabel Luhan Dodge called Fannie "a neurotic, hysterical woman."³ Fannie's own husband said that she was "incapable of reasoning," had no sense of humor, was "contemptible, but entitled to pity;" and he stated that he was "at a loss to know how to stop the tongue of a half crazy woman."⁴

Fannie has been accused of capitalizing on the Browning name. Betty Miller observed that the grandest moments of Fannie's life were during the death and burial of her father-in-law, and that although she and Pen were estranged after only a few years of marriage, she nevertheless kept his name throughout her life. In a letter to Miss Leigh Smith, Pen charged, "It is as you say--but that I knew long ago, that

¹ "Maisie Ward--Tragi-Comedy," London Books and Bookmen, September 1973. This is a review which has been clipped and preserved in the clipping files of the Armstrong Browning Library; no page number has been preserved. In the following footnotes, the abbreviation, n. pag., will be used to indicate those sources where no page number is available.

² Marie Ada Molineux, Letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, 1 January 1934. This is an original letter preserved in the correspondence files of the Armstrong Browning Library. Throughout this thesis all original letters cited are a part of the Armstrong Browning Library collection unless some other location is specified. This applies also to Miss Molineux' notes.

³ B. R. Jerman, "The Death of Robert Browning," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXV (1965), 69.

⁴ Pen Browning, Letter to Miss Leigh Smith, 6 October 1906.

she was in love with my name rather than with me!"⁵

So, what type of person was Fannie Coddington Browning? How did she change (if indeed she did) from the daughter-in-law that Browning loved so dearly into the hysterical woman who could not live with the poet's son? Biographers of Browning tend to dismiss Fannie with only a line or two about the couple's engagement, happy marriage, and then the break-up after Browning's death. But perhaps Fannie Coddington deserves a more significant place in the Browning story. Perhaps, in many respects, Fannie was truly a "daughter" to Browning. From childhood, she had worshipped the Brownings and held as sacred all for which they stood. Throughout her life she consistently devoted her time to helping others. Browning scholars look at Fannie's life and see only her failure as a wife. But perhaps a closer look will show her to be a worthy person in her own right.

Lilian Whiting, who knew Fannie during the last years of Fannie's life, seemed to see her most clearly. She held that Fannie was really two persons: "one was

⁵ Pen Browning, Letter to Miss Leigh Smith, 14 May 1907.

a highly cultured and most lovable and delightful personality--a very rare and beautiful personality; the other was the terrible attack of her illness--her ill health."⁶ Fannie suffered from gynecological problems and had several miscarriages. Miss Whiting said that Fannie was the victim of her time and age. Born in the middle of the nineteenth century, she came into a world of people who were cultivated in a way, educated, doing acts of charity, but who were really as "unchristian as heathens" and had no "perception of the Christ-life."⁷

Fannie had high ideals and her intentions were good; however, when life did not measure up to her expectations and she felt helpless to alter the situations, she resorted to the only measures she knew. First, with fits of hysteria and crying, she attempted to evoke sympathy or to force her way. When this means of manipulation was ineffectual, she sulked, indulging in self-pity as well as aiming to gain sympathy from all who would listen to her woes. Finally, she entered into complete resignation, putting faith in God that conditions

⁶ Lilian Whiting, Letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, 1 August 1941.

⁷ Whiting, Letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, 19 June 1940.

would improve or that she would be given strength to bear "her cross."

A modern reader may find it difficult not to pass judgment on Fannie, labeling her as insecure, immature, and a religious fanatic. But, given the time and the conditions under which she lived, one is able to empathize with her plight, and her reactions and feelings seem understandable. Fannie's life work was altruistic and idealistic; it is regrettable that she and her husband were not better able to understand and communicate with each other.

Chronology of Fannie Coddington's Life

- 1853 September 6, born in New York.
- 1866 Visits cousins in England and meets poet.
- 1868 Moves to London with family; attends school on the Isle of Wight. Meets Pen at Christmas celebration.
- 1875 Returns to America; works for church. Her sister, Martha Anne, dies.
- 1878 Her mother dies.
- 1886 Her father dies. Travels to England with her sister, Marie; becomes reunited and engaged to Pen Browning.
- 1887 October 4, marries and spends three-week honeymoon in Venice. Goes to America in November. Miscarries.
- 1888 March, returns with Pen to England; April, moves to Palazzo Doria in Venice; December, purchase of Palazzo Rezzonico is complete.
- 1889 November 1, Robert and Sarianna visit; December 12, Robert Browning dies.
- 1891 Suffers nervous breakdown; goes to Austria for treatment.
- 1893 Lace school is opened in Asolo to honor poet. Leaves Pen after six years of marriage and goes to New York.
- 1895 Marie removes Fannie's possessions from Asolo and Rezzonico. Fannie vacations briefly in Germany.
- 1898 Works for Red Cross during the Spanish American War.

- 1899 Vacations in Europe; reconciled with Pen in Genoa. Returns to the Rezzonico in May. Pen publishes his parents' love letters.
- 1900 Leaves Pen in January; lives at Enid Layard's home, Ca' Capello. Moves to rented home, 2807 Campo San Stefhano, Venice, on March 19.
- 1903 April 22, Sarianna Browning dies at La Torre all'Antella.
- 1906 Makes her home at Oxford in England.
- 1911 Employs Miss Louise Vincent as companion.
- 1912 July 8, Pen dies.
- 1913 May auction of Browning estate. Fannie serves Browning Settlement.
- 1914 Moves to Washington, D.C. Spends summers in Gloucester, Massachusetts.
- 1917 Aids Serbians.
- 1925 Moves from apartment to home.
- 1928 Publishes Some Memories of Robert Browning.
- 1931 Moves from Washington, D.C. to Hayward Heath, London.
- 1933- Dismisses Miss Vincent; hires Miss Dorothy Ivatt.
1934 Battle over trust fund ensues. Purchases Anchorhold cottage.
- 1935 Dies, September 20.

Chapter II
The Coddingtons

Family Background

Fannie Coddington was born September 6, 1853, to Thomas Butler and Almira Flaxton Price Coddington of New York. The Coddingtons were a wealthy and respected family with an estate at No. 41 5th Avenue, near Washington Square.¹ The Coddingtons had earned their place in New York society, actually in an almost "rags to riches" manner. Fannie's father, Thomas Butler Coddington, born at Perth Amboy, New Jersey, December 5, 1814, was orphaned at the age of seven. The family Bible records how his father, John Coddington, "sailed from Perth Amboy, master of the schooner 'Planter' bound to North Carolina thence to Tenereefe, on the 19th of September 1815 and never was heard of after that date."²

¹ "His Yankee Spouse," Boston Herald. This is an undated clipping in the files of the Armstrong Browning Library; n. pag.

² Coddington Family Bible, University of Texas, Fannie Browning Collection.

Thomas' mother, Martha, died six years later at the age of thirty leaving Thomas and his brother, David (who lived only to the age of 18) to the care of an uncle, Nathaniel Randolph Coddington, and a grandmother, Elizabeth Coddington. When Thomas was fifteen, he traveled to New York where he met and was befriended by James A. Moore, a merchant of white lead. Moore acted as a father figure to young Thomas, opening his home to him and guiding Thomas' growing interest in business.³ In 1835, the T. B. Coddington copper firm was established at 90 Water Street, New York. According to the New York city directory, a Samuel Coddington, perhaps a cousin, was in partnership with Thomas. The couple added other metals and as the business grew, changed locations to 40 Broad Street and then 65 Broad Street. When Samuel died on January 29, 1852, his widow, Catharine, took over his share of the business. In 1854, the importation of bar iron and steel was added to that of other metals and later a house was established in Liverpool,

³ Portrait Gallery of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, compiled by George Wilson (New York: Press of the Chamber of Commerce, 1890), pp. 125-27.

England. T. B. Coddington & Company became known as one of the foremost houses in the metal trade.⁴

Two years after the establishment of his first metal business, Thomas Coddington married Almira Flaxton Price, the daughter of Reverend Eliphalet Price, a Presbyterian minister, and Ann Price, an Irish immigrant.⁵ The wedding took place on October 17, 1837. Thomas was twenty-three and Almira was eighteen. Two years later, Martha Anne, their first child, was born.

Business continued to increase and the Coddingtons prospered financially, but at home, life looked more glum. Almira had given birth to four boys: John Delion, 1841; Thomas Moore, 1842; Frederick Meyer, 1844; and Charles Theodore, 1847. (Twin girls were born in 1845, but died shortly after birth.)⁶ During the summer months of 1847, all four baby boys died. One can only speculate concerning the type of epidemic which caused the deaths, but most likely it was cholera; cholera took the lives of millions worldwide during those years. Because of the Great Potato Famine there was a heavy

⁴ New York City Directories, 1835-1856, courtesy of New York Public Library, n. pag.

⁵ New York County Census of 1850, Western half of 15th Ward, enumerated 8 October 1850, p. 99.

⁶ Coddington Family Bible.

influx of Irish immigrants to America and especially New York in 1846-47 and with them came disease and infection.⁷

During the next few years, the Coddingtons were blessed with more children, William Mumford in 1848, Emily in 1849, and David FitzRandolph in 1851. In 1851 the Coddingtons set up residence at 112 Eleventh Street in New York.⁸ That same year, tragedy struck once again with the death of William Mumford; and in 1853, two year old David also died. It was to this family, then, that Fannie Coddington was born on September 6, 1853. Although she was the eleventh child, she had only two surviving sisters, Martha, 14, and Emily, 4, and she was brotherless. The Coddingtons had two more children after Fannie's birth, Marie Frederika in 1856, who would be closest of all to Fannie, and Louisa, in 1858, who died one year later.

The Coddingtons and their four daughters lived at one more residence, 131 West 14th, before making their permanent home at No. 41 5th Avenue.⁹

⁷ Jay Robert Nash, Darkest Hours: a narrative encyclopedia of world-wide disasters from ancient times to the present (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1976).

⁸ New York City Directory, 1850-51, n. pag.

⁹ Directory, 1855-56, n. pag.

First Encounter with
the Brownings

In 1866 the Coddington family made a trip to England where they visited with cousins at Kensington Park Gardens and checked on business affairs. It was here that Fannie, as a girl of thirteen, first became acquainted with the poet, Robert Browning. While playing in the garden Fannie noticed a striking gentleman with a beard of snowy white pass by each Tuesday and Friday at two o'clock. When told that he was a famous poet on his way to read poetry to a neighbor, Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Fannie was properly impressed.¹⁰

Fannie's earliest education was most likely obtained from Trinity Public School in New York where her father was a trustee and treasurer.¹¹ In 1868, the Coddingtons moved to London and Fannie was enrolled in a school on the Isle of Wight.¹² During her seven years in London, Fannie became very well acquainted with Robert

¹⁰ Louise Greer, Browning and America (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), p. 108.

¹¹ Portrait Gallery of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, p. 127.

¹² Lilian Whiting, "'Pen' Browning and His Wife Recalled," Republican, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2 September 1939, n. pag.

Browning, his sister Sarianna, and his son Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning or "Pen" as he was better known. Browning later recorded that he had first met Fannie's "estimable parents" in the company of Dean Stanley, with whom they were great friends.¹³ Fannie, in her Memories, remembers meeting Pen at an old-fashioned English Christmas party where old and young alike came together to celebrate. After that, Fannie and her mother or older sister often went to call on the poet and his family and by doing so established a link with such intellectual London society as Mrs. Bryan Waller Procter, widow of the poet Barry Cornwall, and Mrs. Procter's daughter, Adelaide, also a poet. Fannie also met Alma-Tadema in St. John's Woods and visited the studios of Sir Luke Fildes and other artists.¹⁴

Browning was a favorite with young people and would often entertain them by reading and by executing such feats as writing the Lord's Prayer in a circle no

¹³ Dean Stanley visited the Coddingtons in 1878. He authored Addresses and Sermons in America, published in early 1879. Lady Augusta Stanley, his wife, died on Ash Wednesday, 1876, and Robert Browning served as a pall bearer at her funeral at Westminster Abbey. (The Browning Newsletter, Waco, Texas: Baylor Press, Fall 1972, p. 7.)

¹⁴ "Mrs. Browning Loses \$400,000 Trust Fund Suit," unknown newspaper, 1934, Clipping file in Armstrong Browning Library, n. pag.

larger than the size of a shilling. During these days, Pen Browning was busy preparing for Oxford, but there must have been time in his life for Fannie Coddington, because in 1887 Pen told his father that he had proposed to Fannie fourteen years earlier but she had not accepted.¹⁵ Fannie's family had objected to the match. In 1875 the Coddingtons moved back to New York. Fannie was twenty-two.

Religion and Charity

The Coddingtons were a religious family. Almira, the mother, had been reared as the daughter of a Presbyterian minister and Thomas Butler held many positions of leadership in his church. No doubt Fannie and her sisters were instilled with religious doctrine from childhood, and this accounts for Fannie's readily quoting scriptures and the dogmatic overtones that permeated her writing and thinking throughout her life. Although the family attended the Church of the

¹⁵ Thurman L. Hood, Letters of Robert Browning, collected by Thomas J. Wise (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 274.

Annunciation and Trinity Chapel, they later made Grace Church their family church.¹⁶

Grace Church, a Protestant Episcopal church, has as its site one of the most commanding and dramatic in the city, the corner where Broadway turns at Tenth Street and begins its westward slant across Manhattan. It is one of the most beautiful and historic churches in New York.¹⁷ Thomas Coddington served as a member of the church vestry from 1876-1886, and from 1877 until 1884 he was a delegate to the Diocesan Convention. The Coddingtons had their own family pew in Grace Church, but in 1920 the pew was deeded to be a free pew in memory of their father by Fannie and Marie. Fannie (known as Frances in church records) and her sister, Marie, taught Sunday School at Grace Church during the years 1884, 1885, and 1886.¹⁸

From childhood, the Coddington children were taught to recognize the responsibility to serve others. Fannie worked fervently with her church which was foremost in varied active social and religious work

¹⁶ Obituaries from New York Times, 12 October 1859, 29 October 1875, 29 October 1929.

¹⁷ Grace Church in New York, a pamphlet.

¹⁸ Edith McKittrick, Archivist of Grace Church, Letter to Sherrell Slavik, 12 January 1982.

among the poor. Fannie served on committees of the State Charities Aid Association and along with two friends helped to establish the first Working Girls' Club in New York, out of which grew the Girls' Club movement of the U.S. and Federation of Girls' Clubs. Besides teaching Sunday school, she also conducted Bible classes and visited in hospitals. In the summers, she took charge of the village library which she founded near her father's summer home and from which she worked a flower mission for the Girls' Club.¹⁹

In 1875, Fannie's oldest sister, Martha Ann, died at the age of thirty-six. Three years later, Fannie's mother, aged fifty-nine, passed away. In 1880, Thomas Coddington bought and donated two of Grace Church's forty-six magnificent stained glass windows in memory of his wife and daughter.²⁰

¹⁹ Fellowship, Journal of the Robert Browning Settlement, 1914, p. 254.

²⁰ Edith McKittrick, Letter to Sherrell Slavik, 12 January 1982.

Chapter III
Early Married Life

Engagement and Marriage

On February 23, 1886, when Fannie was thirty-three, her father died. Shortly afterward, bereaved and hoping that a change of scenery might improve her sister's health, Fannie accompanied her sister, Marie, to England. There Fannie and Marie stayed with cousins who had rented Hawkwell Place at Pembury in Kent for the summer. It was at this time that Fannie again saw Pen Browning. Pen, who was in London visiting his father, called and begged an invitation. Upon seeing Fannie, he extended his arms and in the warmest fashion proclaimed, "Well, it is nice to see you again after fourteen years!"¹ Fannie later wrote that she was attracted to Pen because he was so like his father and had the "same kind and gentle manner." Pen's sympathy and his remembrances of

¹ Fannie Barrett Browning, Some Memories of Robert Browning (Boston: Marshall Jones, 1928), p. 8.

Fannie's father and of happy times touched Fannie, and when Pen proposed marriage this time she accepted.²

Robert Browning was delighted with the news of the match. He had known Fannie for years and had always had the highest regard for her. Now Fannie and her sister, Marie, paid a visit to the poet and his sister at the Villa Berry in St. Moritz, Switzerland, where they were staying as houseguests of Mrs. Bloomfield Moore. Fannie had long serious talks with the poet and his sister concerning the forthcoming marriage. As a result, Browning wrote to Pen:

Dearest Pen,--I waited for the letter in reply to my last,--which I knew would be on the way,--before answering the more important one--which took me by surprise indeed,--but a very joyful surprise. I think you could not do a wiser, better thing than marry the in every way suitable lady whom you have been fortunate enough to induce to take such a step, and who, you are bound to feel, behaves with the utmost generosity. You know very well I have never had any other aim than your happiness in all I have done: the kind of life you have been forced to lead for these last years always seemed comfortless and even dangerous to me,--whatever might be said for it as helpful to your art (and that it no doubt was)--you must know it had lasted long enough for the purpose, and could not, in the nature of things, continue as you advance in years:

² Maisie Ward, Robert Browning and His World: Two Robert Brownings? (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 252.

"no home"--is sad work,--and with a home, and such a home as [one with] such a wife as yours will be, your further progress will be infinitely more easy and rapid. I do approve of your choice with all my heart: there is no young person I know at all comparable to Miss C. She has every requisite to make you happy and successful, if you deserve it--as I believe you will endeavour to do. . . . Miss C. has spoken to me with the greatest frankness and generosity of the means she will have of contributing to your support--for my part, I can engage to give you £300 a year: this, with the results of your work--if you manage to sell but a single picture in the year--will amply suffice.³

Sarianna, Pen's aunt, also wrote congratulating him:

Dearest Pen,

I am very happy indeed to think you are going to be married. Hotel life is very comfortless as well as very expensive, and you have now had quite enough of it. You will not, I trust, work less well for having a happy home. I am sure I shall be very fond of Fannie, and altogether approve of your choice. This afternoon I went over to her, and we had a long talk. She is very different from the fast American girls who abound here. You have every prospect of happiness--God bless you.⁴

Both of these letters, though congratulatory, indicate dissatisfaction with Pen's lifestyle. Browning was anxious for Pen to settle down and marry. Pen was thirty-eight years of age, extravagant, and still being supported

³ Hood, p. 265.

⁴ Hood, pp. 266-67.

by his father. Pen had chosen art as his career, having studied under M. Hyermans in Antwerp, and was enjoying considerable success in painting--in which Browning took great pride. But there had been problems. While studying at Antwerp, Pen had been involved in a scandal which caused his father a great deal of trouble. According to the stories told by the Antwerp innkeeper where Pen had lived, Pen was involved with peasant girls and fathered two illegitimate children.⁵ There was talk of a marriage but Browning managed to stop it, possibly by paying off the girl's family. Now, Pen was living alone in hotels and pursuing his art. Browning was concerned that this life was lonely and comfortless and he wanted his son to know the joys of a caring wife and a lovely home. He probably also hoped that marriage would be a solution to faults of his son, such as his extravagance and unscrupulous amorous activities. So, Browning hoped that Fannie Coddington would be the answer to all of Pen's problems. She was devoted to him, would help him settle down and concentrate on his art, and financially could provide for him a comfortable

⁵ Marie Ada Molineux, Letters to A. J. Armstrong, 15 October and 17 October 1934. Mrs. Molineux was corresponding secretary of the Boston Browning Society.

home since she had received a rather large inheritance from the death of her father and intended to contribute generously to the marriage. Browning wrote to Reverend J. D. Williams:

We were altogether in ignorance of his [Pen's] desires until perhaps two months ago, when our quietude at St. Moritz was startled by a letter--the least expected possible--to inform me, after a good and proper fashion, of what he proposed doing--but fortunately all the rest was abundantly compensative of the startle, for we well knew the lady, and had long ago known her estimable parents--great friends of Dean Stanley, in whose company I met them first. It appears that the attachment is fourteen years old,--Pen having made up and spoken out his mind so long ago! Then came a long separation--then, only the other day, by the accident of the lady's return to England for the benefit of the health of her sister, an immediate renewal of both feeling and its expression,--whereof the end was--the letter aforesaid. Now, it happens that I could have chosen, within the circle of my acquaintance, no young person more qualified, so far as I can judge, to make Pen eminently happy--the match presenting every advantage without a single drawback: what was to be done, therefore, but accept and be thankful? Fannie, my daughter in love and law, is good, true, sympathetic in every way,--a few years younger than Pen,--very pretty, we think, very devoted to him, we know,--and having been an admirable daughter and sister will presumably become as fitting a wife. She has all the ambition for his sake which I could wish, and is eminently distinguished for common sense: so that--I repeat--how can I be other than thankful? I ought to add that the means of comfortable life are abundant in this case--indeed Pen

might become independent of my own assistance, did either he or I permit of such an arrangement.⁶

Although the marriage was certainly convenient and Browning was glad that Fannie had the means of providing for his son, it is also very evident that Browning had true affection for his daughter-in-law-to-be. To Fannie he confided, "Dearest Fannie,--all I can say is, I trust I shall have you for a Daughter. You must know I love you as one."⁷ To the Schlesingers, he extolled Fannie's virtues when he wrote of the marriage, "nothing in the world could delight me more thoroughly" and of Fannie,

I never have fallen in with a person more qualified to make him [Pen] happy . . . I cannot conceive of a better, fitter wife for Pen than this choice he has been privileged to make,--one whom already I love with all my heart, as I think she knows.⁸

To Pen, also, this marriage must have meant more than merely a marriage of convenience. Certainly, Pen was aware of his father's wishes and that may have influenced his decision to marry at this time; but Pen had proposed to Fannie fourteen years earlier when there

⁶ Hood, p. 274.

⁷ Hood, p. 269.

⁸ Hood, pp. 270-72.

was no such pressure for him to marry. Mrs. Baly, great-grand-daughter of Browning's Uncle Reuben, stated that she did not think that Pen married Fannie for her money. She remembered that Pen was in love with Fannie's beauty and enjoyed showing her off. Mrs. Baly described Fannie as having "glorious Titian red hair, lovely colouring, and sparkling eyes which lit up in moments of emotion."⁹

The date for the wedding was set and the couple busily prepared for their marriage. Fannie left for Paris, most likely to shop for her wedding gown and trousseau. Pen paid a short visit to Venice where he wished to make a particular study of the sea for a picture that he wanted to complete before the wedding.¹⁰ Browning offered to handle arrangements for the wedding since he was returning to London from his vacation in Switzerland. He applied in person at the Vestry of St. Mary Abbotts and directed the clerk at Kensington to publish the Banns for three consecutive Sundays beginning September 18. Browning was somewhat concerned that the clerk might object since Pen was out of the country, but

⁹ Maisie Ward, The Tragi-Comedy of Pen Browning (New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1972), p. 112.

¹⁰ Hood, p. 270.

the clerk carried out the directions telling Browning, "You will hear the publication next Sunday if you go to Church."¹¹

The couple returned to London and the day of the wedding arrived. The event was almost disastrous. During all the last minute arrangements, it seems that Pen was more concerned with the transportation of his birds and animals than with his bride, upsetting the neglected Fannie and causing her to declare that there would be no room left for her in the carriage. Then, upon reaching the church, Fannie became hysterical when offered a peacock quill to sign the register because she believed it was unlucky.¹² But finally the ceremony began and the wedding was lovely. The wedding was a quiet family affair performed on Tuesday, October 4, 1887, by Reverend R. S. Woodgate, vicar of the parish, in the charming old church of Pembury.¹³ The church was decorated very simply with autumn leaves for the occasion. A wedding breakfast followed the ceremony and was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Henry Schlesinger at Hawkwell Place, Pembury, Tunbridge Wells. As a

¹¹ Hood, pp. 271-72.

¹² Maisie Ward, Tragi-Comedy, p. 112.

¹³ The New York Evening Post, 5 October 1887, n. pag.

wedding gift, Browning gave Fannie a golden brooch set with three large topazes, which had belonged to Elizabeth.¹⁴

Miscarriage

The newly-wed couple chose Venice as the site for their honeymoon and spent three weeks there before returning to London. Although one can assume that their honeymoon was pleasurable and that the couple fell in love with Venice because they later chose it as their home, there is one event that certainly marred the memory of this otherwise joyous occasion for Fannie. Years later in remembering her wedding journey, Fannie told Marie Ada Molineux that Pen had asked her for money to send in compliance with a demand to a former mistress.¹⁵ Mr. Grove asserted that Pen had lived for seven years with the innkeeper's daughter at Dinant who

¹⁴ Fellowship, Journal of the Robert Browning Settlement, 1914, p. 61. In 1914 Fannie gave the brooch to Mrs. Stead of the Settlement. Baylor University now owns this brooch.

¹⁵ Molineux notes.

became the mother of Pen's child, and that this was the woman whom Fannie's money served to quiet.¹⁶

Shortly before the wedding, Browning had moved from Warwick Crescent to De Vere Gardens. During the honeymoon, Fannie's sister, Marie, visited Browning there and aided him in receiving the many wedding gifts that were sent for the young couple. When Pen and Fannie returned from Venice, they spent the week with Browning, before leaving for Liverpool and then went on to New York on the "Aurania" where they went to settle Fannie's unfinished business affairs.¹⁷ After their visit Browning wrote to George Barrett:

I am more and more satisfied with the match,-- indeed no one drawback to my satisfaction is discoverable. Fannie is thoroughly good, affectionate, full of ambition for Pen, to whom she is devoted--and he is fully aware of his good fortune in obtaining such a wife.¹⁸

The couple's passage to America was surprisingly good considering that other boats crossing the same weather-line suffered greatly, and the couple proved to be good

¹⁶ Maisie Ward, Tragi-Comedy, pp. 114-15. Ms. Ward gives no further identification of Mr. Grove.

¹⁷ Paul Landis and Ronald Freeman, eds., Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), p. 309.

¹⁸ Landis and Freeman, p. 310.

sailors.¹⁹ However, Browning wrote to George Barrett later that apparently Fannie had suffered during the passage and remained in a weakened condition during the visit. This interfered with what otherwise would have been a pleasant occasion: Pen did not get to travel and see much of the scenery, and Fannie did not get to visit American friends that she longed to see.

Two months after their passage to America, Fannie was expecting a child, but her health rendered this otherwise happy occasion a difficult one and the announcement was met with a hesitating concern. Browning wrote to Fannie:

Dear Fannie, you must bear being martyred for the glory of us all, and Pen must feel how much he is bound to love and be helpful to the mother of his child, if God please. Oh, Fannie, if you knew how certain women I have known would have gone joyfully through any amount of suffering to be in the condition that costs so much but promises to bless you in the end. What a comfort to us here that we are absolutely certain that your part will be played gallantly and heroically,--that we need not concern ourselves with advice that you will be careful. . . .²⁰

One week later, he again wrote with sympathy and encouragement:

¹⁹ Hood, p. 276.

²⁰ Hood, p. 281.

It is needless to say how much I feel for poor Fannie, prevented from going to Boston and the kind friends there: fortunately one knows that the difficulties will not last too long. She is never out of my thoughts.²¹

On January 23, however, Browning received a telegram from Pen that Fannie had lost the child. Attempting to console the couple, Browning replied:

We trust that Fannie is "convalescent" indeed-- and it is useless to say how anxious we must be till we hear next. Don't be disappointed at this first failure of your natural hopes-- it may soon be repaired. Your dearest Mother experienced the same misfortune, at much about the same time after marriage: and it happened to my own mother before I was born.²²

And later he again encouraged the couple:

The great business now will be for dearest Fannie to lay in all the stock of strength that will assist her on a future occasion: when, with no previous irritation from sea voyages, all is likely to go happily.²³

Pen and Fannie had planned to return to London in January but due to the unfortunate circumstances delayed their return until March. They left New York just escaping a terrible blizzard and their ship voyage was

²¹ Hood, p. 283.

²² Hood, p. 284.

²³ Hood, p. 285.

this time altogether favorable. Upon their return, they did not stay with Browning; Mrs. Schlesinger got them rooms at a hotel in a neighborhood nearby.²⁴

Browning had hoped that Pen and Fannie would decide to reside near him in London. He said, "The prospect of his [Pen] and Fannie's taking up their abode near me seems too good to be true--but I am confident of Fannie's excellent sense, and will hope for what so lately appeared to be impossible."²⁵ Upon their return, however, the couple had to break the bad news to Browning that they would not be living near him, but had decided to reside in Venice. Browning explained to George Barrett:

They leave next week for Venice,--where Pen is bent upon settling for some months, in order to paint certain aspects of the city and its inhabitants which he fancies have never been made use of before. He will go first, for a short stay, to Paris where he wants to finish a picture still at his studio there. His purposes "in the rough" are to return to London, and at least spend part of every "Season" there--first ascertaining how he may like a partial residence abroad. All this apparent vagrancy is induced by very real and reasonable considerations,--and completely sympathized in by his wife--of whom I will merely say in the fewest words possible, that

²⁴ Hood, p. 290.

²⁵ Hood, p. 270.

we love and esteem her more and more as day by day we (my sister and myself) become acquainted with her qualities: as for Pen, he quite realizes his supremely good fortune, and I am certain that his Mother would have agreed with us in every respect.²⁶

Life and Friends in Venice

The couple arrived in Venice around the middle of May 1888 after stopping in Paris and Milan. They first took an apartment in the Palazzo Dario in May and were there almost one year. Sarianna, Browning's sister, inquired after their comfort there, saying that she remembered the beautiful outside of the Dario, but that her friend, Miss Kerr had said that the inside was very uncomfortable. Fannie and Pen already had several pets; but Sarianna advised that if she were they and lived in Venice, she would tame some infant sea gulls.²⁷

In September of 1888, Browning and Sarianna arrived for a four-month visit with Pen and Fannie. Before Pen's marriage, in 1885, Browning had tried to purchase a piece of Venetian property, the Palazzo Manzoni, for his son who had come to Venice for the first time since his

²⁶ Landis and Freeman, p. 312.

²⁷ Hood, p. 293.

childhood and was charmed with the city; but the foundation had proved unsound and the plan had to be cancelled.²⁸ Now, Browning was delighted to find that Pen had, on his own, acquired another palace of Venice. Browning wrote to Lady Martin:

You remember our troubles at Llangollen about the purchase of a Venetian house . . .? My son, however, nothing daunted, and acting under abler counsels than I was fortunate enough to obtain, has obtained a still more desirable acquisition, in the shape of the well-known Rezzonico Palace (that of Pope Clement 13th)--and, I believe, is to be congratulated on his bargain. I cannot profess the same interest in this as in the earlier object of his ambition, but am quite satisfied by the evident satisfaction of the "young people."²⁹

To George Barrett, Browning wrote:

I don't think I have told you what an advantageous bargain Pen has made in acquiring his huge Rezzonico Palace,--the finest now obtainable in Venice. He was most efficiently helped by his kind and clever friend Mr. Malcolm, a thoroughly business man,--and he possesses a magnificent property worth more than double what was paid for it: he could sell the mere adornments of the building,--

²⁸ W. Hall Griffin (Completed by Minchin), The Life of Robert Browning (Revised) (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1938), p. 276.

²⁹ Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, Vol. II (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), p. 588.

its statues, pillars (internal decorations) and painted cielings [sic] (two by Tiepolo) for the full price of the palazzo itself. He is full of energy, and superintends all the restoration work, (all that is requisite, and not much of even that) and may safely be considered "the right man in the right place." Far from neglecting his art, he has every motive for devoting himself to it: and there seems only one circumstance likely to overcloud the sunshine of his life--the uncertain health of his wife. The two would otherwise really seem perfectly happy in every condition of their fortunes³⁰

The Palazzo Rezzonico, overlooking the Grand Canal, was described by the 1890 Home Journal as "the most beautiful of the palatial houses of Venice."³¹ Up until 1758 it was occupied by Cardinal Rezzonico, who became Pope Clement XIII. The palace, built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a magnificent structure of white marble, richly carved and ornate. Pen intended to occupy the Pope's old apartment, "the snugest," and to furnish the entire palace bit by bit. Pen and Fannie chose one especially beautiful alcove in the palace and set it aside as a memorial to the memory of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. They collected every treasure connected with her life and work and enjoyed allowing

³⁰ Landis and Freeman, p. 317.

³¹ Home Journal, February 1890, Clipping File of Armstrong Browning Library, n. pag.

visitors to examine the shrine.³² One writer with particular insight noticed that it was almost as if Pen Browning were trying to recreate his happy childhood by collecting all that was associated with it, even to the wife who affected so well Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "languorous attitude on the sofa."³³

The restoration of the Rezzonico was obviously very expensive and Fannie must have paid the bulk of the cost. For months, twenty workmen were employed transforming the Rezzonico into a comfortable home for Fannie and Pen.³⁴ Two gondoliers waited outside the door to bear the couple and their guests through the canals of Venice. It is no wonder that Henry James described the scene as being a bit "pompous."³⁵

In February of 1889 the couple were firmly established in their new home as Browning recounted to George Barrett:

³² Lilian Whiting, The Brownings: Their Life and Art (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1911), p. 262.

³³ Betty Miller, "The Child of Casa Guidi," Cornhill Magazine, 163 (Spring, 1949), p. 426.

³⁴ Maisie Ward, Tragi-Comedy, p. 118.

³⁵ Miller, p. 426.

I hear from the couple at Venice constantly--from Pen yesterday. They are, within the last few days, lodged in their fine Palazzo: they gave two modest entertainments there by way of house-warming, and were congratulated by everybody on what they had done for Pope Clement XIII, whose apartment they occupy: and it is pleasant to hear how grateful the old Venetian families are at the palace having fallen into such reverent hands . . . not being destined to vile uses, turned into an hotel, or the like. It is really, on the whole, the best palace in Venice, and has never been modified in the least--except in the trifling business of blocking up windows &c--all which Pen has carefully restored. I am particularly happy to know that his wife,--a woman of whom I can imagine no greater praise than I imply when I say Pen's Mother would have thoroughly loved and esteemed her,--she is as satisfied with her new conditions as Pen's self.³⁶

At this time, Pen and Fannie's marriage was all but perfect, with the couple busy and excited over the progress of their new home. Browning wrote to George Barrett of their happiness:

I believe that Pen's most happy marriage is mainly attributed to his being the son of his mother--whom his wife from her girlhood has all but worshipped. They are actually going to dedicate to her memory the little chapel in their palazzo--once a witness of the daily devotions of Rezzonico--Pope Clement XIII.³⁷

³⁶ Landis and Freeman, p. 322.

³⁷ Landis and Freeman, p. 325.

And to Fannie's sister, Marie, Browning writes that he hopes that she can visit Pen and Fannie in Venice:

I am certain that their happiness is "catching" and would communicate itself to you--as it did to us who have been close to it for so long. . . . You will be amused, and I think greatly interested when you see the famous palazzo their property, which Pen is doing his best to make as comfortable as it is magnificent. They have charming friends too--no few Americans--and are altogether in an enviable condition--would but that dearest Fannie's health continue³⁸

Indeed, Fannie and Pen seemed to have had a wonderful life in Venice. Fannie had a magnificent new home and entertained many new and important friends in Venice. She became quite close to several people who played significant roles in her life and whom she mentions often in her letters. Among these friends was Ariana Curtis, a friend of Sargent, Henry James and other great artists. Mrs. Curtis lived at the Palazzo Barbaro. She was a "deeply religious and simple soul."

Caroline Eden settled in Venice with her husband, Frederic, who had been disabled in an accident. Frederic had an electric launch in which he went from their Palazzo Barbarigo to the great garden on the Giudecca,

³⁸ Hood, p. 300.

called the "Garden of Eden." Mrs. Eden had a flair for horticulture and Mr. Eden did watercolor sketches of his wife's gardens at their summer villa near Belluno. The Edens were sympathetic to all of Fannie's problems and advised her during her marriage.

Alethea Wiel, or Thea as Fannie called her, was of the noble strain of the Lawleys and was a historian whose book, The Venetian Navy, was widely known. She was deeply religious and one of the earliest members of the Gibraltar garden in Bellunese. Fannie was involved in charitable work of which Alethea was a part.

Clara Montalba was from a family of artists: four artist sisters and one artist brother. She resided at Campo S. Agnese.³⁹

Edith Bronson lived in Venice at Ca' Alvisi. She and her mother, Mrs. Arthur (Katherine) Bronson, experienced many happy times with the poet and his family. In the Bronsons' summer home, La Mura, built into the walls of Asolo, Browning finished Asolando.

³⁹ These four ladies are characterized in the article "Four Gracious Ladies: Some Venetian Memories (from a correspondent)." This clipping is in the Fannie Browning Collection at the University of Texas, n. pag.

There is now a plaque on the wall of the house, and the street has been named Via Robert Browning.⁴⁰

Perhaps Fannie's best friend was Lady Enid Layard, wife of Sir Henry Layard. Enid resided at Ca Capello and welcomed regularly the resident British society and distinguished strangers. Enid Layard was tall, stately, brought up in wealth, and "held all the correct views." As evidenced in her letters to Fannie, she believed that "a woman should stick to the man she loves through thick & thin."⁴¹ Enid Guest, as was her maiden name, married Sir Henry Layard, an influential English political figure, in 1869 when she was but twenty-five and he was fifty-two years of age. In the late 1870's they retired to Venice where he pursued his hobby, Italian art, and where Lady Layard spent her time painting, playing the guitar, singing, entertaining, bathing at the Lido, and making observations in her diary which she kept for forty years.⁴² It was to Enid Layard that

⁴⁰ Landis and Freeman, p. 330.

⁴¹ Gordon Waterfield, Layard of Ninevah (London: William Clowes & Sons Ltd., 1963), p. 310.

⁴² B. R. Jerman, The Young Disraeli (Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 31-32. Lady Layard's diary is in the British Museum (Add. MSS 46153-46170).

Fannie wrote her most intimate and revealing thoughts on her relationship with her husband.

In addition to her numerous friends in Venice, Fannie met and entertained many out-of-town houseguests. Her home was a constant whirl of activity. Fannie's sister, Marie, stayed with her from August until October 21, 1889, after coming from Germany where she took therapeutic baths in the spring. Another houseguest, Evelyn Barclay, recorded in her diary the type of activity occurring at the Rezzonico:

Constance, [sic] and I arrived in Venice the 14th October, 1889. Miss Coddington, Mrs. Barrett Browning's sister, left on the 17th. The Nashes Wednesday the 23rd. Mr. Giles came on Tuesday the 22nd. Mr. Harrison left Wednesday 30th with Pen Browning and Mr. Giles, who returned the following day, Thursday the 31st, with Mr. and Miss Browning, whom they had gone to Asolo to meet and bring back with them.⁴³

The Poet's Last Visit

As Evelyn Barclay's diary recounts, on November 1, 1889, Browning and Sarianna arrived in Venice to visit with his son and daughter-in-law. Browning may have come

⁴³ Evelyn Giles Barclay, Diary (Waco, Texas: Baylor Browning Interests, 1932), p. 1.

to visit to get out of England after being embarrassed in the FitzGerald affair; he may have had in mind Pen's plan to finish a portrait of Sarianna; and he may have been induced by Mrs. Arthur Bronson to purchase a piece of property in "Pippa's country."⁴⁴ Browning had first gone to Asolo with Sarianna and had taken rooms adjacent to Edith Bronson's summer place there. Browning wanted to buy a small piece of property in Asolo where he and Sarianna might spend a few months each year. He told Mrs. Bronson, "I shall have a tower whence I can see Venice at every hour of the day, and I shall call it 'Pippa's Tower.'"⁴⁵ A final reason for Browning's visit to Venice was that he and his sister usually went on a long journey every autumn, but this year because of failing health, he shrank from such a trip. Whatever the reason, this year the poet decided to visit his son and daughter-in-law in their new palace. He planned to be back in London in November to supervise a new edition

⁴⁴ B. R. Jerman, "The Death of Robert Browning," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXXV (1965), p. 48. Edward FitzGerald "thanked God" that Mrs. Browning was dead because it meant that there would be no more "Aurora Leighs." Browning retaliated by publishing a poem which he later regretted.

⁴⁵ Jerman, "Death of Browning," p. 48.

of his wife's works, but his plans were never realized because this visit proved to be his last.

While "magnificently lodged in this vast Palazzo," he maintained his customary two hour's walk each day along the Lido, but one chilly, foggy day returned with the symptoms of a bronchial cold. An Italian physician was called on December 1. Fannie had Browning moved to an upstairs bedroom which was more full of sunshine and which had fresher air. The gondoliers carried him up the stairs which the doctor had ordered that he no longer climb. Fannie asked the doctor to give her directions for applying linseed poultices to his chest, and for giving digitalis every half hour. Both Browning and Sarianna had told Fannie how glad they were that they were in Venice during this illness and not in London. "The dear patient was always thanking me and expressing such gratitude to everyone who cared for him:--it was most touching," Fannie stated.⁴⁶ By December 8th, two doctors were attending Browning regularly and Fannie wrote the next day that a trained nurse was en route and

⁴⁶ Edward Dowden, Robert Browning (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1905), p. 29.

that she should be very relieved to have her there.⁴⁷

Fannie cared for Browning and answered the many inquiries of those who asked after the poet's health each day.

On December 12, 1889, weakened from his illness, Robert Browning died from apparent heart failure. "My father died without pain or suffering other than that of a weakness or weariness--His death was what death ought to be, but rarely is--so said the doctor," Pen stated.⁴⁸

Fannie wrote:

I do not remember ever seeing him more active and vigorous in both mind and body than during these last six weeks of his life. I could liken it, at the time, to the flaring up of a candle before it suddenly goes out. He was so pleased and delighted with the way my husband had completed the restorations, and with the homelikeness and the comfort even, of those large and lofty rooms.⁴⁹

On the day before Browning's death, Fannie asked the doctor's permission to give him the first published copy of Asolando, which had arrived a day or two before,

⁴⁷ Fannie Browning, Letters to Enid Layard, 8 and 9 December 1889. Fannie's style and punctuation in letter erratic and inconsistent.

⁴⁸ Dowden, p. 387.

⁴⁹ Fannie Browning, Memories, p. 19.

but had not been given to him for fear that it might excite him. Browning was pleased and gave the copy to Fannie as a gift.⁵⁰

In the grand sala of the Palazzo Rezzonico, with its lofty ceiling and black Italian marble floor, a private funeral service was held. A fleet of gondolas bore the casket to its temporary resting place in the chapel of San Michele. Fannie, Pen, and the poet's sister, Sarianna, rode on Admiral Noce's launch, which towed the gold and black barge carrying Browning's body. The poet's body was then transferred to England where he was buried in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey; the cemetery in Florence where his wife's body lay had been closed.⁵¹

After the poet's death, Fannie handled all the arrangements and attended to the masses of flowers and the requests of the hosts of friends. Fannie wrote to Mrs. FitzGerald that she laid all the flowers of Browning's most intimate friends on the coffin:

Lord Tennyson sent a lovely wreath of violets & white flowers--my dear sister Marie sent a very sweet little wreath of dried flowers--pink & white & my own offering was a solid

⁵⁰ Evelyn Barclay, Diary, p. 5.

⁵¹ Whiting, The Brownings: Their Life and Art, p. 294.

cross of violets which was laid on the centre of the pall Lord Tennysons wreath at the head--& Marie's at the foot--& when the pall was taken off at the grave these were put on it again before it was lowered into the grave.⁵²

Fannie described the London service:

I can't begin to tell you how impressive the whole service & music was. Especially the Meditation of "He giveth His beloved sleep.--" & the Committal Service. How this goes thro' & thro' one with a pang--no matter how often one hears it.⁵³

⁵² Fannie Browning, Letter to Mrs. Thomas FitzGerald, 1 January, 1890.

⁵³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Mrs. Thomas FitzGerald, 1 January, 1890.

Chapter IV
Marital Difficulties

Breakdown of Life and Health

After the poet's death, Sarianna, who had lived with Browning for many years, came to live with Pen and Fannie. During the months that followed, more and more visitors, sparked by an additional interest in seeing the Rezzonico because of Browning's death, toured the palace. Fannie was a gracious hostess and did her utmost to welcome and to entertain everyone who visited her home. A visitor from Boston described Fannie:

Mrs. Browning is an American, a blonde, with a lovely, soulful face, which attracts no more, however, than her charming manners, and she has the gift of making all who come into her presence feel immediately at ease and at home with her. She is a fine linguist, speaking well many languages and she is an enthusiastic lover of Venice, as is also Mr. Browning.¹

Another visitor, the writer Henry James, paints a picture of an unwell Fannie. During his visit, Fannie,

¹ Louise B. Robinson, unknown Boston newspaper, 5 March 1892, n. pag.

"frail, still, after a recent illness, sat against the cushions with her small dog, Max, in her lap." Pen, "a plump middle-aged man with a drooping moustache . . . bustled about the room" serving tea and cake baked by Wilson, the maid who had been a servant to the Barrett family since Pen was a child.²

Fannie, it seems, could not keep up with the pace of life at the Rezzonico. Fatigued and strained from Browning's death and the heavy influx of visitors to her home, she suffered a nervous breakdown. She wrote to Enid Layard on June 27, 1891, that

the house & so much excitement as I had during the month of May was too much for my nerves! Over 100 people I counted. I had recd. & seen (strangers) & then couldn't remember them all who were in Venice as visitors! & dozens I had gone over the house with!

Fannie retired to the Villa Zeidler in Marienbad, Austria, where she immersed herself in the treatment of the "drinking of waters and mud baths." She wrote, "I have had a really serious nervous breakdown, but I hope

² Miller, p. 426.

to be a better self, than I have been in a long time after this."³

Pen explained to Sir Henry Layard:

Mrs. Browning writes that at Marienbad they sit over fires: she is enjoying the companionship of her sister there and I am in hopes the waters will agree with her.⁴

During this time Pen was continuing to complete the Rezzonico with furnishings from Browning's London house. He also purchased a cottage at Asolo which Fannie declared "is going to be my paradise." Here, Pen busied himself trying to re-establish the silk mill immortalized in Browning's poem, "Pippa Passes." Pen's attempt to revive the silk industry failed, but he then turned his endeavors toward lace making. He opened a lace factory where he employed forty girls of Pippa's age who worked in the open air of the beautiful Italian countryside. The lace school, called "Scuola di Merletti Browning" in honor of the poet, was Fannie's conception and she supervised its beginning, inviting a few little

³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 27 June 1891.

⁴ Pen Browning, Letter to Sir Henry Layard, 24 June 1891.

girls for daily meetings in her home where they were instructed in lace making by a skilled mistress.⁵

Because of Fannie's continuing ill health, Pen hired a young Venetian girl as a housekeeper and nurse/companion for his wife. Her name was Ginevra Biagiotti and soon Fannie and Pen both became especially fond of her, so much so that some sources say that they wanted to adopt her. Pen began to use Ginevra as a model. He loved to paint her "with her little head thrown back, her hair falling down over her exquisite arms and smooth, shapely shoulders."⁶ One of Pen's greatest works, the head "Hope" may have been modeled after Ginevra. Helene Sullivan, a resident of Venice who remembers Ginevra, said that despite the Italian name, Ginevra was Nordic, tall, blonde and beautiful and spoke Italian with a slight accent which Mrs. Sullivan supposed to be Swiss.⁷ After Ginevra had been living with the couple for quite a while, Fannie had to go to London under the care of a physician and left Ginevra in charge of the household at Venice. Upon her return, one of the servants

⁵ Fellowship, 1914, p. 254.

⁶ "His Yankee Spouse," Boston Herald, n. pag.

⁷ Ward, Tragi-Comedy, p. 138.

whispered ugly rumors which had been circulating during Fannie's absence. Fannie's jealousy was awakened and she demanded that Ginevra be dismissed. However, Pen denied all of Fannie's charges and refused to send Ginevra away. He felt that doing so would be to admit guilt and would also blacken Ginevra's character.

Elaine Baly, a descendent of Reuben Browning, knew Fannie's companion, Dorothy Ivatt, and relates some astounding information:

I could swear on oath Dorothy Ivatt's direct statement to me that Ginevra was Pen's daughter, that Fannie knew it and at first adored Ginevra as her own daughter--believing that she herself would add to the family. She also liked to be thought charitable in taking a girl into her home. The fact that Sarianna not only condoned Ginevra but loved her, and the fact that Pen saw her well-married--as a father would, dispels the many tales that Ginevra was one of Pen's 'ladies.'⁸

Mrs. Baly believes that after Fannie suffered several miscarriages and realized that she would be unable to bear Pen a child of their own, that the sight of Ginevra so happy with Pen "rubbed salt in the wounds."

Actually, since Browning's death, there had been little to hold the couple together. Fannie had been

⁸ Elaine Baly, Letter to Sherrell Slavik, 1 July 1982.

nervous and constantly ill. Other factors attributed to the downfall of the marriage are Pen's extravagance with Fannie's money, and his odd work habits which included keeping huge, live snakes and screeching birds which terrorized Fannie. At a fair near Asolo, Pen paid 300 lire for a python which he draped around his model but had to shoot it when it started constricting. In Venice, Pen paid 1000 lire for another snake.⁹ A maid, Ersilia Nardine, testified that at one time, Pen owned twenty-three dogs, thirteen horses, several peacocks and a monkey.¹⁰ To one with such a conventional and narrow background as Fannie's, all of these "abnormalities" were beyond imagining or coping.

At last Fannie could endure no more. To Pen, it was a matter of self pride. To Fannie, Pen was choosing the pretty young Venetian girl over her. There was room for only one of them in the house and since Pen made it clear that he would keep Ginevra, Fannie had to leave. Humiliated and unwilling to listen to reason or excuses, she packed her bags and walked out after six years of marriage.

⁹ Ward, Robert Browning and His World, p. 297.

¹⁰ Ward, Robert Browning and His World, p. 301.

Rest and Reconciliation

After leaving her husband, Fannie went first to England where she made many "fruitless personal efforts to arrange things amicably over and over again." When Pen refused to come to her in England, she offered to meet him on the continent--anywhere--to settle their difficulties. Finally, Pen agreed to meet Fannie in Paris, but only under the condition that the cause of their unhappiness not be mentioned between them. The meeting was useless and Fannie wrote, "I could not wish my greatest enemy to go through the moral torture of those five days."¹¹

On September 7, 1893, Fannie left to visit her sisters, Marie and Emily, in New York. During her stay, she sent Pen fourteen letters, but received no answer. Finally Pen wrote, but the letter was unsatisfactory and Fannie decided to give up her hopes of a settlement between them. On November 8, she sailed from New York and returned to London.¹²

¹¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Hilda, 14 January 1894. Hilda is Hilda Montalba.

¹² Fannie Browning, Letter to Hilda, 14 January 1894.

During the spring of 1894, Marie went to Italy and collected Fannie's belongings from the Rezzonico and from Asolo. Fannie wrote to Lady Layard:

The Spring's experience--thro' my Sister's going to Italy to receive my things from Venice & Asolo--told on us both. It was most distressing & painful & I can never say what I think of Marie's having had courage & strength to undertake it & her power of endurance! ---My Sister's devotion is so touching and her sympathy priceless. What she has submitted to & done (because only Papa wasn't alive to do it, & she is first like him in moral things & nature!) for me--is marvellous [sic].¹³

Marie then joined Fannie who was then vacationing in Germany. Fannie had been in Stuttgart but left in June to meet Marie in the Black Forest. Fannie was ill for four weeks and she and her sister found German hotels to be a delusion. The Black Forest was crowded with "2nd class Germans" and Fannie missed quiet and comfort. So, on August 13, 1895, Fannie and Marie sailed for home on the ship "Havel" of the New York Lloyd.¹⁴

Once at home in America again, Fannie sought comfort from her old church. Having taught Sunday school and done charitable work before, she now

¹³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 12 August 1895.

¹⁴ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 12 August 1895.

reimmersed herself in all sorts of philanthropic work. She chose to put aside all luxury and to live in the east side settlement of Grace Church. She became a housemother, boarding and handling the business affairs of the deaconesses of the parish, as well as taking an active part in the work of helping slum children. She taught classes in the Girls' Friendly Society. One class was made up of sixty girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen; for the class of older girls Fannie furnished a room on the top floor of the building, making it cheerful and pretty by providing comfortable chairs and other furnishings. She often gave her time reading aloud, including selections from the English poets and sketches of their lives.¹⁵

When the Spanish-American War broke out, Fannie volunteered her services. She worked for the Red Cross during the summer of 1898 and was awarded the Red Cross Medal.¹⁶ Tired from her work, she decided to "break away entirely, & take a good rest this year."¹⁷ She planned a trip to Athens where she would pass the winter

¹⁵ Fellowship, 1914, pp. 254-55.

¹⁶ Fellowship, 1914, p. 255.

¹⁷ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 2 January 1899.

with a friend. Fannie had hired a thirty-two year old orphan girl, Miss Hoffman, to be her nurse and companion.¹⁸ The girl's mother had been a great belle in the old New York days and had been a Bronson, related to the Mrs. Katherine Bronson whom Fannie knew in Venice. On December 10, 1899, Miss Hoffman and Fannie left New York to vacation in Athens. While en route, Fannie met and visited with Enid Layard for two days in Naples. Enid was concerned over Pen and Fannie's separation, and she wished to act as a mediator between the couple. During the visit, Enid convinced Fannie that she could arrange a meeting during which Fannie and Pen might resolve their past difficulties. Fannie's plans were to vacation in Greece and then to return to America via Naples and Genoa. Enid wrote to Pen asking him to meet Fannie at Genoa since he and his aunt would be in Rome at this time. Fannie wrote the following letter especially for Lady Layard to send to Pen:

Reports having reached me from various sources that the circumstances are now radically changed, that made me feel obliged to leave my husband in the Autumn of /93; & also hearing that he is as sorry as I, myself that any circumstances whatsoever should ever have

¹⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 2 January 1899.

existed to have caused so much pain & suffering. I should be willing to return to him on certain conditions; if it be true that he wishes me to do so.

First, the past must be a closed book, never to be opened by him, or his Aunt or any friends at Asolo or Venice.

Secondly.--I must have the management of the interior house-hold arrangements & be at the head of my own house, managing according to my best judgment everything. Thirdly. As my income is less than half what it was in former years, I should be only able & willing to contribute a certain amount of it to the general fund of living expenses, reserving the remainder for my personal & discretionary use. If you should see my husband or have any communication with him, on this matter I give you full permission to tell him what I have said to you here, or show him this letter.¹⁹

Fannie was very concerned lest any rumor of the attempted reconciliation should get back to her sister, Marie, in America. She wrote to Enid:

. . . really it would be terrible for me if any rumour or report however vague should get afloat at home, (in America, I mean) among my friends, as coming from Italy that I thought of such a thing as you & I are doing! I do not think my Sister Marie would ever forgive me that. . . . The Americans in Italy are closely connected & correspond with my acquaintances & friends of both Miss H. & myself in Boston & N. York & you know--or perhaps you don't the publicity alas! of my affairs. They are everyone's property!²⁰

¹⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 27 January 1899.

²⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 20 January 1899.

Pen wrote Lady Layard that he was perfectly willing to "let by gones be by gones, provided Fannie is willing to say that she unreservedly acknowledges and recognizes the injustices of unworthy insinuations which have been made against me owing to her absence." He continued:

I do not hesitate to make this simple condition because, otherwise, our reconciliation would rest on a very insecure foundation.

I may add that Fannie will find no difficulty in resuming her life with me, since I have always given as a reason for her absence that she had left me on account of her health.²¹

One of the reasons that Fannie may have considered reconciliation with Pen is that Ginevra had married. Ginevra had continued housekeeping for Pen and his aunt, and Pen had set her up as superintendent of the lace-making industry. She had become engaged to Pen's manager at the lace factory, Engineer Luyegnere Cantoni, and was given in marriage by Pen himself. This tended to exonerate Pen because it seems unlikely, if Pen had indeed been guilty of having an affair with Ginevra as accused, that he would have kept her on as a housekeeper in the same house with his Aunt Sarianna, set her up in

²¹ Pen Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 5 February 1899.

charge of his lace school, and then finally given her away in marriage as a father would a daughter.²²

Although Ginevra's marriage may have been the decisive factor in Fannie's attempt to be reconciled with Pen, it is clear that Fannie never believed in Pen's innocence although she was willing to forgive him. Fannie was infuriated by Pen's "simple condition" under which she could return. She wrote:

He willingly allowed thro' an infatuation a girl of notoriously bad character (which he knew,) to come between us, in our home, & defied all the decent conventionalities of society--for his & her own reasons. I don't ever wish to know what they were & placed me in an impossible position, the personal treatment to me I won't touch upon! & then defends all he has done & been by placing me in the wrong & saying my health was the cause. His cleverness & subtlety frightens me! This letter of his does it's so clever, in looking out for himself. I consider really his higher value is deformed just as any poor deformed body can be--& I can never help him--until God cures him first.²³

With this, Fannie dismissed any consideration of reconciliation with Pen; she planned to return to America, but Enid went to see Pen in Venice and after talking with him, persuaded Fannie to go through with

²² Ward, Robert Browning and His World, p. 303.

²³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 15 February 1899.

the meeting in Genoa. She wrote to Fannie, "Pen says he is sorry he did not express himself better in his letter--that he had not the slightest intention of asking you to make any public declaration or even to make the least reference to the matter."

I spoke to him very straight abt Genevra & he declared to me that he was not guilty and that he did not believe that you thought in your heart that he could have been capable of such a disgraceful thing & such an insult to you in your own house.²⁴

Enid continued, scolding Fannie, "Remember you swore solemnly to take him for better & for worse--& you cannot deny your vows."

Pen had explained to Lady Layard that neither Ginevra nor her husband were aware that there had been any question of jealousy and that as he was on intimate terms with her husband, "I believe that such a suggestion would be a real surprise, not to say a shock to them both."²⁵

After Enid's entreaties, Fannie at last submitted and agreed to a meeting. So the long awaited reunion

²⁴ Enid Layard, Letter to Fannie Browning, 4 March 1899.

²⁵ Pen Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 17 March 1899.

finally transpired on Saturday, the 18th of March in 1899. Fannie arrived in Genoa at the Hotel de Londres from Rome at 6:35 a.m.; Pen had arrived at midnight. After Fannie had dressed and had breakfast, Pen came to her room. Fannie later said, "I had on all my armour for the supreme strength, & was very bright & cheerful & natural, & put him entirely at his ease." The couple went for a long, pleasant walk and sat in some gardens and chatted, keeping their conversation on surface matters. Pen complimented Fannie, telling her that she looked five years younger; and though she, of course, didn't tell him, she thought he looked much older and fatter. She also found him to be "embittered against all the world"; but she said, "I think I can with God's help really unconsciously do him good in that, for I haven't an enemy & never say a bitter or harsh word nor have such a feeling against a human being." The couple had a luncheon which was "very jolly and nice" but later that afternoon, before Pen's departure they sat for three hours and had a serious, culminating talk. Fannie described the ordeal:

He wanted it: brought up the subject; & of course in speaking of the future the past had to be threshed out! How I got thro' it I shall never know! I only know as in such

fearful ordeals--Christ's presence was with me, & if it had not been that I heard His voice within, more strongly than our two with my outward ears. I could never have had the strength or courage to be as I was & to have the result.²⁶

The result was that Fannie decided to return to Venice and live as Pen's wife. She said that she had promised Pen never to say anything about their reconciliation but that they had had a long talk and had come to an agreement and she said that now, come what may, no one would come between them. However, it was as though the whole idea appealed to Fannie's sense of martyrdom, and she seemed to look upon her decision to return to Pen as a venture of self-sacrifice. She and Pen, in truth, did not agree, and Fannie resented what Pen had put her through the past few years. She wrote of her husband:

I know he loves me, in his own pitiably selfish & egotistical way. First himself then me because it makes him more comfortable morally. His way of seeing things morally is absolutely unlike any other human being!! He cannot be judged as anyone else, it is an abnormal case but he is my husband, & he wants us to jog on together. I believed all he said to me. . . . I can't tell you what I said, nor how I did it, but I knew it was God's will for me. What a

²⁶ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 23 March 1899. The quotations in the previous paragraph are also from this letter.

thing life is. I take up this new phase of the cross perfectly happy, because it is His will. All human help or friendship--or anything you said or say or can say is worth nothing, in comparison to my peace of mind now. Life is so short at the best, & this will all then, seem nothing in comparison to the joy & final rest & happiness of His approval & Paradise at last.

I love my dear husband with unbounded tender pity, but the mystery of his nature & character as a whole is a deep one. He is a genuine bohemian! & this living 6 years out of the world absorbed in himself being in a false position in the eyes of the world has become a mania almost. All he did or was he never takes into account--even tho' he be innocent in the letter & as for me & what he was the cause of making me, & my life. That he is oblivious to. It doesn't hurt me now, anymore for I see that it is queerness. It would be laughable if it were not tragic & pitiable.²⁷

Fannie was anxious about the reaction that Marie would take to the news of her returning to Pen. Marie had been her chief consolation during the separation and, as is natural in such circumstances, probably heard the very worst of her brother-in-law. Now Fannie had to break the news that she was returning to the very person who had been the object of her animosity. Fannie wrote to Lady Layard concerning Marie:

You don't know her or the situation or you would see how impossible it is for me to prevent her coming abroad! She will come if

²⁷ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 23 March 1899.

she can & has lots of grit & pluck & self control, & I feel somehow as if she will take it better than I think I wrote her of course frankly all--after seeing Pen, my duty only, I didn't tell her too much but was honest & open & frankly told her all.

I tore up yr letter to her--as you told me to do for tho' I appreciate fully yr sweetness in offering to write--yet there were some things in it, which would have been like a red flag to a bull! I feel sure that will come out better than we think. It broke my heart to write to her to have to pain her.²⁸

Although Fannie's health had generally improved since her marriage and she felt she was looking well and the doctor said she was "wonderful in nerves & spirits," she continued to be plagued by gynecological illness and almost monthly was bedridden with pain. She describes one such incident:

I had to have laudanum injections, & 3 poultices, 2 bottles all at once last time & was crying with pain. Miss Hoffman was up 3 nights & then I had a nurse for 24 hrs. I couldn't move in bed I was so bad. I think in these days if anything can be done, & one has the money it is silly to let such things go on. I was completely done up for 10 whole days before leaving Athens.²⁹

²⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 23 March 1899.

²⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 23 March 1899.

So before Fannie returned to Pen in Venice, she planned to have an operation. She said that the operation was not dangerous, but that it was serious enough to have to lie in bed for about ten days afterward. The operation took place at Mrs. Taylor's hospital at No. 16 Montague Place in London during Easter week, 1899. Chloroform was administered and then the womb was dilated and curettaged.

Fannie told Pen about the surgery and he was "awfully tender & sympathetic & nice about it." She said, "I told him I hadn't had a maid in 5 years & had never been so well, only suffering frightfully once in the month & that my last time at Athens was so fearful."³⁰ After the operation, Fannie planned to go at once to Venice to be with Pen. Pen wanted to meet in Asolo but Fannie said that it "would be easier anywhere than Asolo just at first." Fannie wrote:

It would all not seem so frighteningly hard, if G. [Ginevra] were not living there. But God will help me, & I have no feeling really against her as an enemy. Pen, I can manage but the other thing is awful.³¹

³⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 23 March 1899.

³¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 29 March 1899.

Inability to Cope:
Hysteria and Illness

In early May of 1899, Fannie returned to the Rezzonico. Fannie described her first week there as the most "terrible one of strain I ever went thro' anywhere--at anytime so far in my experience."³² Pen was irritable and nervous and dragged up the past over and over both in public and in private. Fannie began having scenes of "the same old hysteria" which she said she had not experienced in six years. She would have fits of crying for days. She would get over one, only to commence again in a few hours. Fannie felt that Pen drove her to these attacks, but she said,

I only want to do my duty as his wife & as a married woman. . . . I can do it I know--but I have a terrible enemy & handicap in this being the time in my life it is & having nerves tried so in all my married life--& my internal (bodily) affairs troubling me as they do. . . .³³

Fannie told Pen that she would not have returned to him if she had known she could possibly get into such states

³² Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May 1899.

³³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May 1899.

of hysteria, and he sympathized saying he understood and knew that she had physical reasons.

That Fannie had "fits" of hysteria is certain, as visitors to the Rezzonico have recorded stories of her attacks.

The Marchesa Peruzzi was invited to the Rezzonico. She found all lovely; Fannie seemed pleasant, Pen was attentive, and in general the entire household was running smoothly. After dinner, they retired to the drawing room for relaxation and conversation. Suddenly, Fannie rose, went upstairs, locked the door, and (apparently, from the noises she made) was lying kicking on the floor. Pen and the Marchesa rushed up, but Fannie refused to open the door or even to answer. Embarrassed, the Marchesa left early the next morning.³⁴

Another such incident was recorded by A. H. Sayce who was invited to lunch at the Rezzonico in 1899.

I had been in the drawing room a few minutes only when I heard a hysterical shriek which rang through the whole building, & Browning entered the room shortly afterwards in a state

³⁴ Lilian Whiting, Letter to A. J. Armstrong, 11 February 1941.

of agitation. He told me his wife had been seized with a sudden fit of illness. She left Venice the next day and, I believe, never saw her husband again.³⁵

If, as Fannie leads us to believe, these attacks were uncontrollable and caused by nerves and illness, she may be forgiven for the scenes of embarrassment to which she subjected her husband. But it is altogether possible that these fits were tantrums of temper and jealous anger meant to provoke her husband into letting her have her way or to evoke sympathy from her friends. For example, after the scene during the Marchesa Peruzzi's stay, the Marchesa left the next morning. The Marchesa was the former Edith Story, an intimate childhood friend of Pen's. Pen was devoted to her.³⁶

³⁵ A. H. Sayce, Reminiscences (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1923), p. 180.

³⁶ Gertrude Reese, "Browning and His Son," PMLA, 61 (1946), p. 803. In later years, Pen proved his loyalty. The Marchesa was living in seclusion in Florence as a result of a social disgrace. Her eldest son, Bindo Peruzzi di Medici, had been involved in a scandal, reportedly of a homosexual nature, and was expelled from the Italian army. He later committed suicide. Pen avoided neither the mother nor the son as others did, and helped them by buying La Torre all'Antella to ease their financial difficulties. Pen and the Marchesa remained devoted friends and it was the Marchesa, and not Fannie, who tended Pen at his bedside during the last days of his life.

Fannie may have sensed the intimacy between the two and out of jealousy used her hysteria to force the early departure.

Another similar story was told by Marie Ada Molineux of a young American girl whom Fannie invited to her home. At Fannie's suggestion, the young lady accompanied by Pen went to a social event because Fannie did not feel well enough to attend. Later, however, Fannie, in a jealous fit, accused Pen of leaving her alone because he preferred the company of the young lady to hers.³⁷

One cannot place blame entirely on Fannie for these "scenes," however. Although Fannie's extreme actions may not have been justified and Pen may have been completely innocent, it was certainly in Pen's nature to "be free" with the women, and he had had such a reputation in the past as Fannie was well aware. Fannie no doubt expected that as a husband who truly cared for his wife, he should have been more sensitive to her feelings and done his utmost to ease her suspicions. Fannie's reactions, often labeled as hysterical, may have been the result of her extreme frustration and helplessness under the circumstances of trying to keep a husband who did not return her devotion.

³⁷ Molineux notes.

When Fannie had moved back into the Rezzonico, Pen had put a bed into his own room and did not attempt to sleep with Fannie, but would go all the way around rather than come into his room through hers. This act hurt Fannie deeply and she confided to Lady Layard that the first night she slept only three hours because the loneliness and the flood of memories was overwhelming.³⁸

Fannie remained firm on her decision that she would not go to Asolo if she were expected to receive Ginevra and be friendly to her. She told Mrs. Morison (who was staying as a guest of Aunt Sarianna) that she could not

go there & be as they all were & as I was before I knew what sort of girl G. [Ginevra] was & had been; & that even if she had not in the letter lived with Pen-- she was not the sort of person-- considering all that had happened I could be friends with!³⁹

So while Pen and his aunt spent much of their time in Asolo, Fannie remained behind in the huge Rezzonico. She was depressed and unhappy with the situation:

³⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May 1899.

³⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May 1899.

. . . he has taken it for granted I stay here--
 he lives in A. [Asolo] & comes to see me
 That's the best that can be done --now. I know
 he thinks in time he can force me to get his
 way!-- & it will be thro' my not being able to
 keep up this house --as he wants it kept up--
 I am now --paying every expense here --9
 servants to feed; 3 guests his Aunt & himself
 & myself. also paying 2 gondoliers & all the
 incidentals⁴⁰

Pen and Fannie argued fiercely over money. Fannie
 apparently received only a yearly trust or allowance from
 her inheritance for she tried to budget herself to £10
 a week; her operation had cost over £80 and she had very
 little (£360) left for the year. Pen expected Fannie to
 pay all the operational expenses of the Rezzonico and
 when he pinned her down into telling him exactly the
 amount that existed and saw that she could not pay the
 expenses, he was very angry. He was, as Fannie com-
 plained, a "real Barrett, so obstinate, brought up all
 the injustice he had fr me by my going away & his having
 had this palace to keep up --which he only did for me
 to come back to!!!!!!"⁴¹

⁴⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May
 1899.

⁴¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 8 May
 1899.

Pen also insisted that Fannie return all of her things to the Rezzonico, as he thought the place was an eyesore without them. Fannie had intended to sell her Italian furniture, silver, and books, but decided to store them until the end of the year until she could reach a decision.

Fannie also felt the strain of having to ease relations with Pen's Aunt Sarianna. She said:

I try my best to keep things smooth but it is always an apparent difference. his Aunt & he--
versus--me in conversation. Pen & I could &
can --when we are alone --get on much more
smoothly⁴²

And, "When his Aunt dies Pen will realize more how I love him, & always have & will need me & lean on me more."⁴³

Fannie thought that Aunt Sarianna purposefully treated her as an outsider. At the table, when the topic of Browning came up, in "all reminiscences of the past," Fannie explained, "she never speaks of or to me as if I were one of them" Fannie described Sarianna's actions:

⁴² Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 24 May 1899.

⁴³ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 24 May 1899.

Her hardness & bitterness & assertiveness--it comes out all the time against me & mine; & separating herself & not wanting to acknowledge or see I am entirely one with Pen & her. I have to have the mere mention of my cousins--casually to be received by her looking down in her lap--& silence. As to my sisters--or any friends of mine they used to know & like & who liked them. I don't dare to speak of them!⁴⁴

Fannie became very ill in early June and was confined to her room in the Rezzonico for eleven days, in bed for nine. Pen came to be with her twice, for two days each time. Fannie emphasized that he came "alone without his Aunt." She said, "When we were alone it all came so right. I knew it would. He says he is very happy!"⁴⁵ Fannie continued to experience pain and depression and was disappointed that her operation had not given her permanent relief. She had known other women who had had as many as a dozen such operations, at last having to resort to a "regular operation" or hysterectomy. Fannie did not really want another operation and Pen objected to any operation "except to save life,"⁴⁶ but Fannie feared that her illness might

⁴⁴ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, *9 August 1899.

⁴⁵ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 16 June 1899.

⁴⁶ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 9 August 1899.

go on for five or six years so she decided to see an old family doctor, Dr. Polk. Her feelings on the matter were:

. . . under certain circumstances, and for high moral reasons, even at a risk of life, especially very slight risk--such things (operations) are right to better matters. To me, now if I had no one to consider--if the best & highest authority (medical) decided--for the reasons I have in mind only, that an operation was necessary, I should have it done the next day, & be willing if God willed to die--for I somehow feel as if now, I had done all I had it in my powers to do. I have now & am winning back my husband's heart to mine, with great things against me even still, & this health does so tell against my efforts & goodwill. . . . The way I am going on now--ought to be bettered if possible--It handicaps me wholly morally in my work. My life work & what I came back to accomplish & also to fulfil [sic] my life.⁴⁷

Near the end of July, Fannie gave up her resolution not to go to Asolo. She said of her decision, "now . . . I have done everything that my husband & his Aunt-- for he identifies with her, & not with me . . . felt was necessary to set themselves right in the eyes of the world."⁴⁸ Fannie loved being in Asolo and taking drives with Pen late in the evenings and dining in the courtyard.

⁴⁷ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 9 August 1899.

⁴⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 3 August 1899.

She took a great interest working in the lace school and she loved the view from Pen's studio, "The Torricella," which was located in a "heavenly garden." Pen was busy at work on a statue and Fannie enjoyed having him point out to her all its various points. Every day at 4:30, she served tea to Sarianna in the sitting room. She did all that she could to make life pleasant with Pen; entering into all Italian conversation, reading the papers, and throwing herself "into all his life & surroundings & being just as he is with every one, model & all."⁴⁹ However, try as she might, her marriage was not destined to endure.

There were many factors contributing to Fannie's unhappiness. First of all, there was the very real physical discomfort. As Fannie continued to experience pain and illness, she arranged to go to Paris and consult with her old doctor, Dr. Polk from New York, on the 31st of August. However, when she brought up the subject of the operation to Pen, he was very much against it. Fannie said that once she knew "how he felt about it all, the whole subject of my health," she realized, "how infinitely more worthwhile it was (rather than that there

⁴⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 10 December 1899.

should be any more grievances as regards my health & my seeing doctors (all such nonsense really) to go on patiently & suffer until time & nature gives me relief."⁵⁰ Of course, Fannie did not really agree with Pen, but she allowed herself to be dominated by his will, and perhaps she even enjoyed no small measure of consolation from indulgence in self pity and the sympathy of her friends.

When Fannie was not suffering from illness, she experienced the discomforts of her surroundings. During the month of December, the temperature in the sala at Asolo was 38 Fahrenheit, although there was a nice large stove unlit! Pen was "very Italian as regards the fires" and would allow no fire, except for dinner at 7:30 in the dining room.⁵¹ At all times Fannie kept a fire in her room located on the north side, but the rest of the house was cold. She complained several times in her letters that she was "freezing in the house, but comfortable when out walking." It was just as uncomfortable in the summer. In August, Fannie recorded:

⁵⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 25 August 1899.

⁵¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 12 December 1899.

Last week I was very very ill -- with my regular trouble. & The great heat & monsquitoes [sic]-- No sleep at night scarcely --& the thermometer 81. at midnight-- in my huge bedrooms. . . .⁵²

In addition to her physical discomforts during this time, Fannie was also dealt a huge moral blow by her husband's publication of his parents' love letters. Fannie felt that the letters were sacred and private. When, in later years, Julia Schelling told Fannie that she had not read the published letters, Fannie cried, "I love you for that. I have never read them myself. They are too sacred for even my eyes to look upon."⁵³ Other family members and friends agreed with Fannie's view. C. J. Moulton-Barrett, Elizabeth's brother wrote:

In spite of earnest protests, Mr. Browning, with a want of delicacy hardly conceivable, has published the letters of his father and mother previous to their marriage--few sons, either for gain or love of notoriety, would make public the confidential letters of their mother.⁵⁴

⁵² Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 3 August 1899.

⁵³ Julia E. Schelling, "Asolo and the Brownings," article in files of Armstrong Browning Library, n. pag.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Luther Cary, Browning: Poet and Man (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), p. 87.

Because of this act and others, Fannie began to distrust her husband. In all he did and said, he seemed only to regard his own interests. To Fannie, the word which best described Pen was "selfish." She soon became suspicious that Pen was trying to turn all of the Italian servants against her and to use them as confidants who would report to him against her. She felt that Pen was attempting to force her own personal maid and friend to leave. She wrote:

Things have been made very difficult for both me & her. She saw thro' it all shortly after she got here, & as she only has my interests at heart, she suggested my parting with her, which completely disarmed my husband, as he never thought I would give her up. Knowing she was my confidential one & to be trusted servant. . . . I have nothing to hide, so his not having been able to make my Mary like the Italian servants in relation to him won't hurt me! I feel so unsafe, for before my good actions & motives were turned against me & may be again.⁵⁵

Separation

In January of 1900, Fannie could no longer abide such conditions. When Enid Layard offered her the use

⁵⁵ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 10 December 1899.

of her home, Ca' Capello, Fannie gladly accepted. Enid was away for the winter and was concerned over Fannie's complaints of the cold; Enid had no desire to cause a separation. When Fannie went to Asolo to remove some of her things, she had an upsetting experience which served to re-enforce her decision to live apart from her husband.

Hall Griffin from London, a lecturer on Browning, was visiting Pen. He divulged that he had visited Pen two years earlier when Ginevra was living there; he even mentioned sending Ginevra a wedding gift and asked for directions for visiting her. Fannie was irate that he should accept Ginevra with no questions. Fannie also learned that Ginevra's photographs were put away each time that she (Fannie) came to Asolo, and Fannie believed that her own photographs weren't allowed out because of Ginevra. Fannie also saw that Pen was becoming more and more involved in his art, arranging a new studio at the Belvedere, and she was especially quick to notice that he was sculpting the same model regularly. Of Pen's latest likeness of the model, she noted that it was

graceful and pretty as a statuette, "but I do not think I should care for it life size."⁵⁶

Fannie returned to Ca' Capello all the more determined never to return to her husband. She felt that she could not afford to live in the Rezzonico and that Asolo was no home for her. She planned to get an unfurnished apartment in the Palazzo Tiepolo for not more than 1,200 francs and to furnish it with furniture from the Rezzonico.⁵⁷ With very little money to finish the year, however, she had to dismiss her maid, borrow £100 from her sister, and resort to selling her jewelry and bonds.⁵⁸ Fannie wrote to Enid of her situation:

. . . since Pen has so decidedly shown me that he wishes me to lead a life quite independent of him (this not only openly & in outward things but by all his moral treatment of me since I am back, in our conversations as regards money, my place under his roof &c &c) & as he has as it were forced me into the position (a most uncomfortable one too) of going out of the P. Rezzonico on account of not having the means to live in it, he not choosing to give me any monetary help, or live there with me, & too plainly showing me he

⁵⁶ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, January 1900.

⁵⁷ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 3 February 1900.

⁵⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 2 March 1900.

didn't wish for my companionship or living at Asolo, all his deception & doubleness & fickleness & not telling me the truth, & all his selfishness, seem to me to be reason enough dear Enid, for taking this independent step. I must keep my dignity & self respect.⁵⁹

Fannie wanted to save both Pen and herself from the awful talk and publicity that had followed their first separation. She wished to make it clear to everyone that this was not an end of the marriage:

I have myself thought a great deal--about such a vital matter & am much relieved since I've settled to do this.--Not to make any real outward break or separation! Only to start--go on now leading an absolutely independent life from him here in Venice--seeing as little of him as possible⁶⁰

Fannie wanted to keep up appearances by proceeding with everything as natural such as working with the lace school,--"to keep the 'world' everywhere in America Eng wherever we have friends fr talking more than is necessary. In common parlance 'not' (a second time) wash our dirty-linen in public!"⁶¹ Fannie was also constantly

⁵⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 4 February 1900.

⁶⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 28 January 1900.

⁶¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 28 January 1900.

concerned over worrying her sister, Marie, whom she felt she had pained enough over the past few years.

Fannie's plan for conducting her new independent life was to take charge for four months of each year, March through June, of the Nurses Institute Fund.⁶² As she had had experience with the deaconesses in New York, she felt that she could board and handle the business affairs of the nurses from Guy's Hospital in London.⁶³ The nurses would stay with Fannie only when out of work and Fannie would receive thirty-two francs per month for one large room, plus expenses for their board and personal needs. The nurses would work among the poor in Venice as well as the rich travelers and tourists. Fannie loved charitable work, and felt that having such an interest would be "the saving" of her as well as a means to afford life on her own. Fannie had been approached by her doctor with the idea of boarding the nurses several months earlier when she was still living with Pen, but Pen met the proposal by falling into an awful rage, so

⁶² Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 4 February 1900.

⁶³ Guy's Hospital still stands at Southwark on the south side of St. Thomas Street.

Fannie had let the subject drop.⁶⁴ Now, she was full of enthusiasm at getting to enter into the type of work and life that she loved.

. . . to serve & minister to those with my heart and hands who work for their living, or who are poor gives me the greatest possible satisfaction & comfort & solace. It satisfies all my higher self & keeps me & brings me closer to the One whose whole life was the giving of self for others! The very thought of having this work to do makes my heart ache less.⁶⁵

It seemed that Fannie had the support and encouragement of most of her friends in this matter. The Edens were for Fannie taking more "openly decided steps" than she did and they encouraged her "not [to] wait till April, now was the time to do it" ⁶⁶ Mr. Eden advised Fannie legally and told her not to tell Pen the location of her new apartment. Fannie's doctor also reassured her that Pen had no right to say anything about what she was doing. Mrs. Curtis told Fannie that the apartment she planned to take would be perfect,

⁶⁴ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 4 February 1900.

⁶⁵ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 12 or 13 February 1900.

⁶⁶ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 4 February 1900.

since it was so near friends, was such a nice house, and was priced moderately. Mr. Huntington told Fannie not to worry over money matters. Thea Wiel helped her to choose the apartment which was next to her own. Fannie wrote, "The perfect sympathy & understandingness of my friends here is my Salvation, & makes me strong."

Fannie wrote to Pen conveying her intentions to take an apartment and to remove her possessions from the Rezzonico. She wrote, "As you do not live in the Rezzonico, & I cannot possibly ever live there would it not only be a commonsense thing for you to sell it? it seems to me!" Pen answered that he could not afford to keep up the Rezzonico and Asolo, but he refused to sell the Rezzonico as Fannie suggested. He forbade Fannie to take an apartment and said that he must know what she intended to do. Fannie, however, did not let his temper dissuade her, excusing him with, "Oh! he is only one single word impossible for any woman to have to do with & for him not drive almost crazy, so I put him out of my mind, & do until legally things can be settled."⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 30 March 1900.

Meanwhile, Fannie waited at Ca' Capello, anxious for the news of her apartment and not wanting to infringe upon Enid's hospitality by overstaying her welcome. When no news came, she went several times to the agent who was in charge of the apartment in the Palazzo Tiepolo, but for three weeks she could get no commitment as to whether or not she could have it. Finally, when she insisted on having an answer, she was refused. She at once offered to pay a higher price, but was given such a lame excuse that it made her suspect that Pen had communicated with the agent.⁶⁸ Exasperated and feeling helpless, Fannie went to other apartments, but no one would rent to a woman without her husband's signature. Fannie offered to pay for the first six months, but to no avail. Finally, however, she succeeded in locating a small furnished house with two floors, and although it was not at all what she wanted and far from friends, she decided that if she brought over rugs, tablecovers, photographs, she could "try and make the usual hideous lodging house furniture a little less so."⁶⁹ She was

⁶⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 13 March 1900.

⁶⁹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 13 March 1900.

also relieved that this would mean avoiding the controversy with Pen over removing furniture from the Rezzonico. She moved in on Monday, the 17th of March.

Pen greatly disapproved of the life Fannie chose to lead, and tried to persuade Fannie to see him, but she refused. She said that she would see him only with her lawyer. In order to claim her money and some of her possessions, she consulted her English lawyer, Mr. Kingsford, and a Italian lawyer in Venice recommended by Mr. Eden.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 2 May 1900.

Chapter V

Independence Too Late

Devotion to Others

During the next six years, Fannie led the independent life that she loved. Again, as during her first separation, she devoted her life to charity and helping the poor. It seemed that working for others was Fannie's first love and the only activity that made her happy. Fannie continued her work with the Nurses Institute, which she considered to be invaluable.

My work with the nurses is a great boon & comfort & I like it more & more. The Dr. & I get on perfectly as workers, & I get on perfectly with the nurses. Now they all 4 are very busy, & a new one arrives tomorrow evening. There are several very ill people here now. These women are really invaluable in the hotels to people I should think, & an immense help & comfort to the Doctor's work.¹

Fannie visited in hospitals twice a week, making very many friends among the poor. She gave out work to

¹ Fannie Browning, Letter to Enid Layard, 2 May 1900.

those who needed it and once a week during the coldest weather she would invite elderly people into her home for a hot meal during which she should read to them stories from the Bible.²

In 1906, Fannie made her home at Oxford in England. She continued to suffer from ill health, but nevertheless she remained active by working with the "Personal Service League" in Southeast London and she also took an interest in foreign missions.³

Although Fannie was at all times involved in noble philanthropic activities, she did seem to have one major fault. She could not resist the temptation to tell everyone everything of her life with Pen. During their separation, Pen had continued his involvement in the lace industry as well as in buying real estate. He purchased La Torre all'Antella located near Florence, from the Marchesa Peruzzi, and he and his aunt made it their home. On April 22, 1903, Sarianna Browning died. Pen enjoyed a peaceful and interesting life, but his ease was disturbed by rumors of Fannie's gossip about their married days. Deciding to confront Fannie, he wrote to her. She denied that she had ever spoken ill

² Fellowship, 1914, p. 255.

³ Fellowship, 1914, p. 255.

of him. "I know I never called on anyone, once or twice in London to talk of you, or even to express any feelings of my own on the subject." Fannie told Pen that when she had seen him the previous spring that she had been surprised that "in the death of the old love, there has arisen a far far higher greater deeper love & friendship on an infinitely higher plain than I ever had for you before."⁴ Pen greeted all of this with anger. He wrote to Leigh Smith:

I shall be glad to have your opinion. Mine is that she is irresponsible for her words and actions, just as I have always thought. She is incapable of reasoning, and therefore it is hopeless to attempt arguing with her. She never had a sense of humour, nor has any, or she would have refrained from sending extracts from the Scriptures which apply in this case to herself rather than to me!

On the gravity of this state of things I am full sensible, but I am at a loss to know how to stop the tongue of a half crazy woman. She is contemptible, but entitled to pity. That is my opinion.⁵

Ten months later, in August of 1906, Pen wrote:

I have not heard very lately from Fannie: but this time I did not answer her last letter as

⁴ Fannie Browning, Letter to Pen Browning, 21 September 1900.

⁵ Pen Browning, Letter to Miss Leigh Smith, 16 October 1906.

promptly as I always have done. I dare say she will find it difficult to stay any time in any place. You see Venice was an exception: It had been her home, and she stuck there as it were from force of habit. Now she will shift and wander about like a leaf fallen from a tree.⁶

In 1907, Fannie visited the Browning Settlement. Pen was upset when he learned of this because he felt that she was gleaning praise and recognition off her marriage into the family and he resented it. He wrote to Leigh Smith: "I sent you the account of F's visit to the 'B. Settlement! It is as you say--but that I knew long ago, that she was in love with my name rather than with me!"⁷

The last word that we hear from Pen on his wife was on February 15, 1908: "I hear nothing of Fannie & wonder where she is."

In 1910 Fannie wrote from her address in England at Barncote Reigate Surrey that she had for quite some time been unwell and had been obliged to lead the life of a semi-invalid. She suffered from hernias on her left side which undermined her general health, and she had dreadful

⁶ Pen Browning, Letter to Miss Leigh Smith, 1 August 1906.

⁷ Pen Browning, Letter to Miss Leigh Smith, 14 May 1907.

dyspepsia. Servants and a secretary did her housekeeping and waited on her, as most of every afternoon she spent in bed resting. Although she could no longer take an active physical part in her work, she said, "with my brain and fingers I can still work for God and His Church, and my home I use only for His people, a great privilege."⁸

Pen's Death

In 1912, news reached Fannie that her husband was dying. Just before Christmas of 1911, Pen started from Florence to Asolo on a night train. The train was crowded and Pen gave up his seat and stood during the entire journey. He never recovered from an illness which ensued. The Marchesa Peruzzi was at Pen's bedside during the entire bout. More than once she urged sending for Fannie, but Pen strongly objected and finally said, "I should die if she should come."⁹ This was never told to Fannie and never put into print. Just before Pen died, however, the Marchesa did telegraph to Fannie. Fannie

⁸ Fannie Browning, Letter to Mrs. Griffith Thomas, 30 August 1910.

⁹ Lilian Whiting, Letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, 11 February 1941.

came immediately, but was too late to see her husband alive. Pen had died on the morning of July 8, 1912.

Fannie made the arrangements for the funeral and her husband was buried in a little cemetery of the Carmellites which was located outside of Asolo. Several years later, however, Fannie had Pen's body moved. The famous tragedienne, Eleanore Duse, was buried beside Pen, and because of rumors, the Catholic directors of the little cemetery asked Fannie to remove the body to another part of the cemetery. They purported that they intended to build a fence right over the grave of Mr. Browning. Fannie took offense and instead moved the body to another cemetery, the Cimiterio Degli Allori, a cemetery where the elite Italian are buried, in Florence. Here Fannie purchased two spaces, the second space intended for herself; but it was never used.¹⁰

Pen Browning had spoken often of his will and of money bequeathed to Asolo and to the Cantoni family, who were servants. However, after his death, there was no will to be found.¹¹ Pen supposedly told a servant, Engineer Cantoni, in which drawer his will was kept and

¹⁰ Whiting, Letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong, 20 January 1941.

¹¹ Ward, Tragi-Comedy, p. 146.

others saw the will lying on a table the night before his death.¹² Conjecture is that either the Marchesa Peruzzi or Fannie destroyed the will. The Marchesa would have had little to gain in destroying the will, but Fannie may have profited. By Italian law, Fannie could get one third of the estate if there were no will.¹³

In May of 1913, the firm of Sotheby, Wilkinson & Hodge of London held an auction in which the entire Browning estate including manuscripts and letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning were sold.¹⁴ To lovers of the Brownings, this sale represents a tragedy since many of the poets' possessions may never be recovered. Marie Ada Molineux called the event "a terrible scattering of treasures" and knew that it was not Pen's intention. She wrote, "Mr. Barrett Browning in his communication with me indicated his deep reverence for any morsel that had had any connection with his

¹² Anthony Woychuk, The Life of Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning, Thesis at Baylor University, Waco, Texas, 1942, p. 272.

¹³ Ward, Tragi-Comedy, p. 147.

¹⁴ Browning Newsletter, 9, Fall 1972, p. 3.

father and his mother and I am certain he made a will altho' none was found."¹⁵

After Pen's debts (which amounted to £21,000) there remained £27,000. Sixteen Barrett cousins stepped in to claim £21,000 and to Fannie went the remaining £6,000.¹⁶

Fannie's extensively annotated copy of the catalogue of the Browning Sale has been saved; and this volume may be of considerable importance to those trying to recollect the relics associated with the Brownings.¹⁷

Final Years

Shortly after her husband's death, Fannie received condolences and an invitation to visit the Browning Settlement in London. She responded with the following letter:

Dear Sir,--

I beg you will convey to the Council of the Robert Browning Settlement my most sincere and grateful thanks for their kind sympathy to me in the great loss of my dear husband, and their late President.

It is a very real consolation to know how greatly touched and delighted he was at the

¹⁵ Molineux notes, November 1920.

¹⁶ Ward, Robert Browning and His World, p. 304.

¹⁷ Browning Newsletter, 9, Fall 1972, p. 3.

worldwide recognition of his great father's life-work, and nowhere more so than at the Browning Settlement.

I shall hope to have an opportunity sometime of renewing my personal knowledge of all you are doing, and beg you will believe my interest will be always as keen as my husband's.¹⁸

At the centenary celebration of the poet's birth, Fannie met with the Browning Settlement, visiting Robert Browning's tomb and shaking hands with all who came to honor the poet. The Settlement journal said that meeting the daughter-in-law of the poet on such a day was an event that those present would "doubtless remember." In honor of her first visit, Fannie was presented with a brazen candlestick encircled with seven of the Settlement's Centenary Badges to keep as a momento.¹⁹

During the next two years, Fannie worked earnestly for the Browning Settlement. She wrote of the Settlement:

. . . no more singularly appropriate Memorial could be attempted than the beautiful social work now being carried on in the very neighborhood where the Poet spent his early years. A

¹⁸ Fellowship, 1912, p. 159.

¹⁹ Fellowship, 1913, p. 4.

work done under the inspiration of his own philosophy of life in the desire to uplift the lives of others.²⁰

Fannie might well have taken this philosophy of life as her own, for she devoted the remainder of her life to helping and giving to others. To the Browning Settlement she gave many gifts and donated her time. On January 22, 1913, she gave to the Settlement locks of Browning's and Sarianna's hair.²¹ Also during that year, she presided personally over the Browning Birthday Contest.²² The Settlement was very interested in Fannie's efforts to revitalize the Browning Lace School in Asolo; she bought the building and intended to put it on a permanent foundation and to give personal supervision to the girls working there. Unfortunately, Fannie had to abandon the project.²³

²⁰ The Browning World, University of Texas, Fannie Browning Collection, n. pag.

²¹ Fellowship, 1913, p. 35.

²² Fellowship, 1913, p. 92. On Browning's birthday each year a contest in singing and reciting the poems of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning was held at Browning Hall, Walworth, London, for elementary school children. Shields were awarded by Baylor University, Texas, and the Los Angeles Browning Society.

²³ Fellowship, 1913, p. 6.

Fannie was elected as vice-president of the Settlement in 1913 and served as chairman of the Greenhow committee. The Greenhow was a college for working women, with a holiday home for children. It consisted of seven houses and gardens covering three-fifths of an acre at Turner's Hill, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire.²⁴ The aim of the Greenhow was to build up a "strong, wise Christian womanhood" and the course offerings were a combination of homemaking, childcare, and religious instruction, all the things that went into the making of a perfect turn-of-the-century wife! Fannie promised to equip the library of the Greenhow and to that end supplied bookcases, an oak table, vases, framed photographs, several of her husband's paintings, chairs, rugs, a sewing machine, kitchen supplies, and the list goes on. In addition, she presided over a drive to equip the rest of the college. Her friend from earlier days, Evelyn Barclay, acted as vice chairman of the Greenhow and aided Fannie in this endeavor.²⁵ Other gifts bestowed by Fannie on the Browning Settlement include the marriage vows of Robert and Elizabeth, Robert's

²⁴ Fellowship, 1914, p. 21.

²⁵ Fellowship, 1914, p. 53.

drinking flask, his hat, and several books. She wrote, "I know no one by whom they would be held in more reverent keeping than by yourself for the work associated so closely with him and his."²⁶

At its July 1914 meeting, the Settlement Council was notified of Fannie's intentions to live in the United States and reside with her sister, Marie. She was asked to keep permanently her positions in the Settlement, and as she was staying at Great Malvern and was too ill to travel to London, the Settlement warden visited her there. Fannie was presented The Browning Cross in gold (not in silver as was customary) for her involvement and work. On one side was the Settlement device in relief and on the other were the words "Fannie Browning, 1912" the date of the poet's centenary and her husband's death, as well as the date on which she became associated with the Settlement. Fannie said that few things had given her more delight.²⁷

Upon reaching America, Fannie communicated with the Settlement that she was steadily making progress toward

²⁶ Fannie Browning, Letter to Browning Settlement President. Fannie Browning Collection, University of Texas.

²⁷ Fellowship, 1914, p. 253.

recovery. For the first time since leaving England, she was able to walk "twenty minutes at a stretch."²⁸

Once in Washington, D.C., Fannie took an apartment at The Connecticut located on Connecticut Avenue. This became her winter home. In the summer, she made her residence on the Eastern Point of Cape Ann in Gloucester, Massachusetts.²⁹ She named her little cottage "The Villino Browning," in honor of the poet. Although continuing bouts with bad health sometimes made her own life miserable, she nevertheless found time and energy for her contribution to society. In Arlington, near Boston, was an institution for children to which Fannie would go for days, working for their welfare. Also, because of her devout ritualism, she never let a "saints' day" pass without attending church.³⁰ When World War I began, Fannie administered to the needs of the Serbians (now Yugoslavians) and Mrs. Ellen Maury Slayden, who lived in Washington at that time, recorded meeting Fannie at a Serbian Relief meeting:

²⁸ Fellowship, 1914, p. 255.

²⁹ Lilian Whiting, Letter to A. J. Armstrong, 23 August 1919.

³⁰ Lilian Whiting, "Fannie Coddington, Who Married Son of Browning," unknown newspaper, 1935, Clipping file of Armstrong Browning Library, n. pag.

Wednesday January 6, 1917

Mrs. Porter and I dropped in at a Serbian Relief meeting Wednesday afternoon more to see Mrs. Barrett Browning, the hostess, than from any new interest in the Serbians whose woes are always ringing in our ears. It was a company of prominent women of the kind who wear shabby hats, loose clothes and ostentatiously flat shoes because everyone knows they can afford better ones. . . . I had a chance to study Mrs. Browning and found it hard to adjust to her my preconceived ideal of a poet's household. She is about medium height but almost double width, and a dress of alternate rounds of black satin and black chiffon was a peculiarly unfortunate selection for her figure. Her face is fine without being especially intellectual, and her manner was friendly and practical. The rooms were full of things, portraits, sketches and bibelots that I saw were connected with the other Brownings and longed to look at, but I never had a chance to ingratiate myself to that extent.³¹

Two years later, in 1919, the following account appears in the same journal and portrays Fannie as self-sacrificing and generous:

Mrs. Barrett Browning is an inexplicable sort of person. All her ties and interests must be in Europe, so it is quite natural for her to work for the Serbians, Italians, etc., but how did she become interested in the "po' whites" of the Blue Ridge Mountains? There she was at a meeting of the auxiliary, held annually in Dr. W. C. Rive's charming library. . . . She was stouter than ever, and her clothes looked

³¹ Ellen Maury Slayden, Washington Wife: Journal of Ellen Maury Slayden from 1897-1919 (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 290.

rough and badly worn--she must give to the ultimate penny. Like many other people, she seemed surprised to find me still in town and said she was sorry she hadn't invited me to her sale of Italian laces; she had made more than \$800. "But I sold some of my silver, too," she said. "I cannot bear the thought of so much suffering, and why should I keep the silver? I want to go back to Italy to spend at least two years when conditions are better."³²

In 1921, Fannie went to London for the Fourth of July celebration of the Browning Settlement. For the occasion, Lilian Whiting sent a photograph and the clasped hands of Robert and Elizabeth. Fannie insisted on framing the photograph and became so enthusiastic during the celebration that she pulled a ring from her hand and gave it to Mr. Stead of the Settlement declaring that it was the last thing that she owned of Mrs. Browning's that the poet had given her.³³

In December of 1923, Fannie again travelled to London, this time for nine months duration. She stayed with G. R. Gregory, Esq. at 62 London Wall E. C. She became extremely ill and could scarcely carry out her intentions during the visit. While she was away, her

³² Slayden, pp. 359-60.

³³ Whiting, Letter to A. J. Armstrong, 3 October 1921.

sister, Emily, who had been an invalid for the past few years, passed away on July 19, 1924, at the age of 75. Fannie returned to America in August and to Washington in early October.

Upon her return, she decided to leave her apartment of nine years, The Connecticut, and to purchase a country home near the cathedral to get better air, more quiet, and sunshine in the winter. In January, at the age of seventy-two, Fannie had to undergo another operation, which she described as grave, but said that "barring very bad walking powers" she expected to be in better health than she had in a long time.³⁴

During her last years, Fannie's chief work was her correspondence with the numerous institutions and individuals who were interested in Elizabeth and Robert, her in-laws. She wrote literally hundreds of letters and received even more asking for information or desiring Browning memorabilia. Many who wrote were considerate, but more than a few were rudely persistent. Fannie either gave or sold almost every relic that she owned which was connected with Robert Browning. Although she was gratified that there existed such a love for

³⁴ Fannie Browning, Letter to A. J. Armstrong, 20 May 1926.

Browning, she at last became overburdened by the responsibility of replying to the many requests. One letter to Dr. A. J. Armstrong conveys these feelings:

I think I must beg of you (trusting to your understanding me) not to keep on asking me questions or writing on this subject at present. All my Browning things I have just sent away packed here yesterday for the Wellesley Collection; & feel I have done my part in caring for those I have had in my own possession these 14 years since my husband's 'death.' And I can feel I want a little respite from thinking too much³⁵

In 1927 Thurman L. Hood (who later published Letters of Robert Browning, Collected by Thomas J. Wise in 1933) wrote to Fannie, suggesting that she write a book about her recollections of the poet.³⁶ Fannie took his advice and wrote a very short work which she hoped would clear up some of the inaccuracies of other publications. She entitled her little book Some Memories of Robert Browning, and though it is very insignificant as a biography of the poet, it nevertheless serves to inform the reader of several personal incidents in Fannie's life with Browning. Some Memories was published by Marshall Jones Co. of

³⁵ Fannie Browning, Letter to A. J. Armstrong, 20 May 1926.

³⁶ Browning Newsletter, 9, p. 6.

Boston in 1928 and Fannie wished copies to be sold for \$1.50 each.³⁷ All proceeds went to the Browning Settlement in Walworth, Southeast London.³⁸

On October 28, 1929, Fannie's last close relative, her sister Marie, died. Marie and Fannie had been almost inseparable since childhood, and it was to Marie that Fannie went for support during the difficult periods of her life. Now, with this tie severed, Fannie decided to leave America and return to England for the remainder of her life. Her many years abroad had made it too difficult to adjust to 20th century American life.

Lilian Whiting analyzed Fannie:

She was born and bred in a conservative order of culture, refinement and strict social usages, and the latterday American life did not commend itself to her. She was born to the usage of engraved cards, delivered by private messengers, rather than to the unpremeditated telephone call. She was preeminently of the "early Victorian" traditions, some of which might, to be sure, be still held in respect without disadvantage to polite society. Endowed with intellectual gifts, with exquisite culture in letters and art, with refinement that was not, indeed, without its even

³⁷ Browning Newsletter, 9, p. 6.

³⁸ "Mrs. Browning Loses \$400,000 Trust Fund Suit," unknown newspaper, 1935, Clipping file of Armstrong Browning Library, n. pag.

unwarranted exclusiveness, Fannie Coddington Browning was a personality more easily misunderstood than comprehended.³⁹

In March of 1930, she departed for England with her English companion, Miss Louise Vincent, who had been with her since before 1914. Before leaving, she drew up a will by which she left her home in Washington as a retreat for clergymen, with \$30,000 for its maintenance.⁴⁰ At this time she also established a trust fund into which she placed nearly \$400,000, money that she had inherited from the deaths of her sisters. As trustees, she chose her nephew, Schuyler Meyer of Huntington, Long Island, and Percy S. Weeks of Oyster Bay.

Fannie chose as her residence the quiet little village of Hayward Heath, London. It was here that Fannie became reacquainted with Miss Dorothy Ivatt, whose father, Henry Alfred Ivatt, had retired to Hayward Heath at a house called St. Clair. It is not clear how the two ladies first met; it may have been in America in the early 1920's or during World War I when Dorothy played the piano and gave concerts for the troops. Or

³⁹ Lilian Whiting, "Fannie Coddington, Who Married Son of Browning."

⁴⁰ "Mrs. Browning Loses \$400,000 Trust Fund Suit."

possibly the two met as early as 1904 in Italy where Dorothy vacationed with her father.⁴¹ Dorothy may have received much of her education in Italy because she wrote with a "fine Italian hand."⁴² Nevertheless, Miss Ivatt, who had been employed at the Hayward Heath Hospital as a radiographer, came to live with and care for Fannie.

Miss Ivatt was appalled at the amounts of medication, "bottles and bottles of pills each day," that Fannie was consuming.⁴³ At once, she began to try to get Fannie off the medication which caused her to be incoherent and unalert. Apparently, well-meaning doctors in America had prescribed medicine to lessen Fannie's pain after several operations, the last in 1929. Possibly angered that others had let her condition deteriorate this far, Fannie acted by discharging Miss Vincent, her companion of twenty years, and by branding her previous doctors and nurses as liars. Others attributed her actions to the

⁴¹ James Lawrie, Letters to Sherrell Slavik, 1982.

⁴² "Loses Suit to Void Own Trust Fund," New York Times, 18 March 1934, n. pag.

⁴³ Gertrude Reese Hudson, Telephone conversation with Betty Coley, Armstrong Browning Librarian, 1982.

influence of Miss Ivatt, whose social position in English society forbade her living in the same house with Miss Vincent, a plumber's daughter, and whom they accused of scheming to get Fannie's money.

For whatever reason, in 1933, Fannie sought to regain control of the \$400,000 trust fund. But she found, to her apparent surprise, that she had signed a deed of trust which placed her money irrevocably beyond her reach and provided for the disposition of her estate only after her death. Fannie claimed that she had not understood the conditions of the trust and that she had been weakened mentally and physically because of an operation at the time she had signed. She even accused her nephew, the trustee, of purposefully concealing from her the true nature of the trust fund. She took her case to court before the Supreme Court Justice Henry G. Wenzel on March 17, 1934, in Mineola, Long Island. Fannie's attorneys, Charles R. Weeks and James N. Gehrig, presented depositions of Mrs. Browning and Miss Ivatt, as well as the evidence of physicians and nurses who attended Mrs. Browning at the time of her operation. Notwithstanding, the Justice ruled that Fannie had signed away the right to everything except the interest on the money in trust. The Judge suggested that Fannie's change of heart was inspired by Miss Ivatt.

It must be apparent to any one from the reading of the record what has caused this dear old lady in a few short months to discharge her devoted companion of twenty years [Miss Vincent], dispense with the services of her London solicitor, impugn to her dear friend and religious counselor, Father Powell, the morals of a libertine, brand her nurses and doctors as liars and attack the professional reputation and honesty of her favorite nephew, whom she loved so well.

The fine Italian hand of Miss Ivatt stands out boldly. Here lies matter for the pen of a Dickens. Miss Vincent had to go because she was too loyal and old a friend of Mrs. Browning, and Miss Ivatt wanted her--alone. So Miss Vincent was sent to Oberammergau, and while she was gone the plan by which she was to live with Mrs. Browning at the English 'Anchorhold' was changed because, forsooth, Miss Ivatt's social position forbade her living in the same house with a 'plumber's daughter.'⁴⁴

Of Fannie's plea that she was impaired mentally and physically at the time of setting up the trust, the Justice replied:

Her memory is never at fault [except on cross examination] and she evidences more than the average woman's grasp of business affairs. Yet, with all this, it is apparent that she is dominated by the will and personality of another.⁴⁵

44 "Loses Suit to Void Own Trust Fund."

45 "Loses Suit to Void Own Trust Fund."

Fannie with Miss Ivatt moved into a home on Paddockhall Road, Hayward Heath, West Sussex. The home was known as Anchorhold (once Ankerhold). The house had belonged to a religious sect and probably attracted Fannie because of its unusual design. Round the tops of the walls, the house is adorned with Latin phrases of a devotional nature. The door knocker is a cross.⁴⁶ Fannie lived only one year after retiring to her Anchorhold home. She was eighty-two when she died on September 20, 1935.

After Fannie's death, Miss Ivatt and her sister, Maud, remained in Anchorhold until their deaths. Anchorhold had been bought in Miss Ivatt's name, not Fannie's.⁴⁷ Fannie left most of her money to charity. The following excerpt appeared in the New York Times on November 18, 1935:

Mrs. Fannie Coddington Browning, of Hayward Heath, widow of Robert Barrett Browning and daughter-in-law of the poet, who died on

⁴⁶ James Lawrie, *Letters to Sherrell Slavik*, 1982. The house was given to the Society of St. John the Evangelist and was occupied by a member of that society as late as January, 1969. Today, however, it is being used as a center of exploration into new ways of community life and contemplative prayer.

⁴⁷ Gertrude Reese Hudson, Telephone conversation.

September 20, domiciled in the United States, left estate in England valued at £556. She left the greater part of the property, subject to a life interest--

As to one half to the Society of St. John the Evangelist and as to one half upon trust to pay £600 to the S. P. G., £500 to the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, 500 to the Browning Settlement, £300 to the Leper Hospital, Kumamoto, £200 to the House of Prayer, Burnham, and a balance to the Society of St. John the Evangelist.

The funeral of Fannie Browning took place at Cuckfield, two miles from Hayward Heath. The Reverend P. T. Browning, Prebendary C. W. G. Wilson, and Prebendary J. A. W. Bell officiated. Fannie was buried in the churchyard of the parish church of Cuckfield. A small tombstone adorned with a cross marks her gravesite. On the tombstone is the identification that she would have most wanted:

Born September 1853
 Fannie Coddington Browning
 Daughter-in-law of the poet
 Died 20 September 1935⁴⁸

⁴⁸ James Lawrie, Letters to Sherrell Slavik.

Appendices

Genealogy of the Coddington Family

Paternal Genealogy

Father

Thomas Butler Coddington
 b. 1814, Dec. 5
 d. 1886, Feb. 23

Grandparents

John Coddington	Martha Butler
b. 1789	b. 1791, Oct. 14
d. 1815	d. 1821, June

Great-grandparents

David Coddington	Thomas Butler
b. 1758	b. 1759
d. 1822, Jan. 28	d. 1833, May
Elizabeth	Susan Harriett
b. 1757	b.
d. 1834	d. 1797, Sept. 4

Great-great-grandparents

Nathaniel Harriett

Maternal Genealogy

Mother

Almira Flaxton Price
 b. 1819, Dec. 12
 d. 1878, Aug. 6

Grandparents

Eliphalet Price	Ann
	b. 1785

Fannie Coddington Browning's Family

Thomas Butler Coddington married Almira Flaxton Price on October 17, 1837, and from this union the following children were born:

Martha Anne	Dec. 16, 1839--Nov. 28, 1875 (36)
John Delion	July 1, 1841--July 30, 1847 (6)
Thomas Moore	Sept. 7, 1842--July 5, 1847 (5)
Frederick Meyer	April 14, 1844--July 13, 1847 (3)
Almira & Louisa	Dec. 19, 1845--Dec. 20, 1845 (1 day)
Charles Theodore	Jan. 18, 1847--Aug. 6, 1847 (7 mo.)
William Mumford	July 10, 1848--July 13, 1851 (3)
Emily	Dec. 16, 1849--July 19, 1924 (75)
David FitzRandolph	Dec. 9, 1851--Feb. 18, 1853 (2)
Fannie	Sept. 6, 1853--Sept. 20, 1935 (82)
Marie Frederika	April 10, 1856--Oct. 28, 1929 (73)

Photographs



Robert Wiedemann Barrett Browning



Fannie Coddington Browning



The Rezzonico



The Rezzonico: Interior



Asolo

Copy of Manuscript

Fannie Browning to Enid Layard

8 May 1899

Letters

Correspondence of Fannie Browning

The following letters were selected from the collection of the Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor University because they contain information important for the understanding of Fannie Browning's life and personality. Other correspondence in the collection is chiefly that of Dr. A. J. Armstrong to Fannie.

The letters are typed preserving the punctuation of the writers; as a result, sometimes sentences seem incoherent. Several words in the manuscript are illegible and are therefore denoted [illegible] in this text.

The letters are arranged chronologically and are provided as a more complete reference to quotations in the text of this thesis.

[(1889) December (5), Thursday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

Thursday,

Palazzo Rezzonico

4th December*

A very decided convalescence dear Lady Layard. He slept so well all the early part of the night; & looks & seems so much more natural & his own self again this a.m.--Yrs with love

Fannie B. B.

I got yr kind messages thru Pen & any time I should be so glad to see you.

*Fannie misdated this letter Dec. 4.

[(1889) December 7]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

7th December,

Palazzo Rezzonico.

Thanks dear Lady Layard so much--!

He is feeling very poorly & uncomfortable this evening & depressed & seems a little light headed--

The doctors haven't consulted yet.

Yrs as ever

F. B. B.

[(1889) (December) 8, Sunday evening]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

8th

Sunday evening

Palazzo Rezzonico

FBB

Very many thanks dear Lady Layard, the other caraffe [sic] is not yet finished, & when they both are I will send them back. He liked it--but doesn't drink as much these last 24 hours.--He is tolerably comfortable tonight.

I have had to do so much coaxing today to make him take enough nourishment. He is awfully good though with us two, Pen and myself.--

Ever yr affect

F. B. B.

The two doctors both attend regularly now.

[(1889) December (9), Monday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

Monday 8th December*

Dear Lady Layard,

I have just sent Evelyn Barclay to you to beg the loan of another large screen & she will tell you probably the condition of things this a.m. Certainly they seem graver--as the catarrh is spreading & is already at the base of the right lung & what he coughs up looks bad. Last night he had a thorough examination late, & Cene said his heart was very weak & his temperature too low but with brandy, & the heart stimulant of digitalis every 4 hrs. the latter. That is better today.

Yrs always gratefully

F. B. B.

*Fannie misdated this letter.

[(1889) December]*
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Palazzo Rezzonico]

Palazzo Rezzonico

FBB

Thank you over & over for all you have given us & done for us today. The screen is everything I assure you & your jellies & beef tea delicious. He seems really easier this morning & no worse but the doctors have not been in of course yet. We have had word that the trained nurse leaves tomorrow.

I shall be relieved mentally to have her here.

Yrs. ever

Fannie B. B.

I gratefully keep yr thermometer

*This letter was probably written Dec. 9 or 10.

[1889, December 16, Monday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[(Palazzo Rezzonico)]

Monday 16 December,

1889.

Dear Lady Layard,

I sent back your two screens and sofa with my heartfelt thanks. I can't say how immensely good and sweet and kind I think you. You know I appreciate it and my dear Pen does too I assure you--The bedcover I am going to have covered. It got spoiled much to the distress of our poor darling patient. Who told me 3 or 4 times he didn't do it & was so sorry.--

I am very pressed just now but must see you to give you one farewell kiss before leaving Venice. I said the one thing I didn't like leaving here for was leaving you whom I care more for than anyone outside of my family here.

Your very affect

Fannie--

[1890, Jan. 1]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Mrs. Thomas FitzGerald]

[29 De Vere Gardens]

29 De Vere Gardens

Jan. 1 1890

Dearest Mrs FitzGerald.

I have to thank you for 3 or more letters. I know you have suffered greatly & can feel for you truly.-- Your most beautiful wreath I received from its box with my own hands as I did every one of all that came. All of Monday I spent nearby in the room with the flowers and trying as best I might to satisfy every one who had made a special request.

In turn I lay all those of his and our nearest and most intimate friends on the coffin-- your's was on all of Monday night. From the time it came--I saw the cyclamen & violets & it was very beautiful.

Lord Tennyson sent a lovely wreath of violets & white flowers--my dear sister Marie a very sweet little wreath of dried flowers--pink & white & my own offering was a

solid cross of violets which was laid on the centre of the pall Lord Tennysons wreath at the head-- & Marie's at the foot-- & when the pall was taken off at the grave these were put on it again before it was lowered into the grave. I can't begin to tell you how impressive the whole service & music was. Especially the Meditation of "He giveth Him beloved sleep.-" & the Committal Service. How this goes thro' & thro' one with a pang-- no matter how often one hears it. I heard the Dean preach on him on Sunday morning-- & in the afternoon Canon Westcott on the late Bp. of Durham.

I could tell you much more about everything but I have most pressing kind letters to Venice & to my own people in N. York to get off besides the daily notes & I am tired.

These terrible fogs & smoke is so trying--yet happily it was fine comparatively yesterday & the sun did burst thro' a very little about noon. Aunt S. is better-- & came down on our return yesterday for a little.

I am pretty well also Pen.

Thanks so very much for your sweet little New Year's card. I like the words.

Yrs always affectly

Fannie Browning

[1891, June 24]
[From: Pen Browning]
[To: Sir Henry Layard]
[Palazzo Rezzonico]

June 24 1891
Palazzo Rezzonico

Dear Sir Henry:

Your letter reached me this morning and I must not let a day pass without thanking you for the very kind way in which you write about the "Life" of my father. He, also, had a marked feeling of regard and affection for yourself and Lady Layard, which was heightened by his knowledge of the kindness you extended to ourselves from the time we settled here.

I am sorry to learn that Lady Layard has been suffering from headaches. The loss which you have sustained, and on account of which we have deeply sympathized with you, must have naturally had an unfavourable effect upon her health which, I trust, she will speedily recover.

The weather has been unworthy of June in Venice: we have had many storms and, as yet, no summer heat. Mrs

Browning writes that at Marienbad they sit over fires: she is enjoying the companionship of her sister there and I am in hopes the waters will agree with her. I, myself, am about to leave for Royat: and shall be away from here for a month.

I have seen Mr Hodgson and given him what information I could on various matters. He is pleasant although quiet and reserved. He likes Venice. His congregations seem to have been unusually large but visitors are going away in numbers. The Lady Wenlock sent me 200 francs for the Church which I have duly deposited with Mr Malcolm.

If there is anything I can do for you or Lady Layard on my return here, pray let me know.

My Aunt enjoys Venice greatly and is wonderfully strong and well. She joins me in kindest regards to Lady Layard and yourself.

Believe me

Yours very truly

R. Barrett Browning

[(1891) June 27]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Villa Zeidler, Marienbad, Austria]

Villa Zeidler

Marienbad, Austria

June 27th

Dearest Lady Layard,

I hope Ola* gave you a few of my messages, & told you a little of our news. If she did you will have forgiven my very long silence.

I have been here a week, & am in the depths of the drinking of waters & mud baths. I expect great good from them, & the place too is bracing & surrounded with nothing but pine woods. I have had a really serious nervous break down, but I hope to be a better self, than I have been in a long time after this, & more rest in the future, for a little while at least.

I spoke to Ola about asking you if you thought you could get me a young Eng. footman to be under "Natele" an Italian manservant. When the season is over, before you leave town. You know about what I need, a good cleaner of plate, & boots, & knives, & who understands ordinary

valeting, such as cleaning gentlemen's clothes &c. &c. Ola said she thought I would have to pay about £ 25 & find Livery clothes, washing & wine.

I am not in the least tho' particular as to the arrangements of detail, but leave it to you. I suppose on account of his coming out to Venice, I should perhaps have to pay higher wages.

I have had such trouble & vexation of spirit this spring with the man I brought out in April, & in other ways in the household that after my break down Pen got this house-keeper, whom we have now, & who is turning out day by day to be invaluable.

The house & so much excitement as I had during the month of May, was too much for my nerves! Over 100 people I counted. I had recd. & seen (strangers) & then couldn't remember them all who were in Venice as visitors! & dozens I had gone over the house with!

Enough about myself & the uninteresting subject of health; only in addition I must tell you that I do not see my way clear to undertaking the sale at our house in the autumn.--I have quite a number of things, & shall have some more friends at home, which I will give you-- but I am sure your health too, does not allow you to over-tax yr self. I am so dreadfully sorry that Lady Bagot & Sir Henry both say, how you have suffered from your head

lately I know Marienbad waters & air would do you good!
I am serious!

Why can't you think seriously of it? & ask your doctor. I wish I had come here the year after I was married, instead of staying all summer in Venice--I mean to come each year now! Venice & all our mutual friends there, seem oh very very nice, after our winter in London, our Rezzonico is fast being completed with the furniture from the London house. You never would know it, & as for the Asolo cottage, that is going to be my paradise! I must take you there in the autumn.

If I am not a great deal better than I am now, I am not to be allowed to have any people staying with me in the autumn!

I know it is right, but I shall be disappointed if I cannot.

With the good capable creature I have now, I shall be saved a great deal in many ways!

My sister** begs me to give you her kind love & I add my own in a larger fuller measure.

Yr. sincere & affect friend

Fannie Browning

Anything you settle about the footman I shall be content with. Of course I pay his journey out. Please

remember me very kindly to Sir Henry. We feel so sorry to hear of his loss!

*Ola DuCane was Enid Layard's niece.

**Marie Coddington was Fannie's younger sister.

[1894, January 14]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Hilda Montalba]

[Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria Station, London]

Grosvenor Hotel
Victoria Station,
London.
January 14, 1894.

My dear Hilda,

I am obliged to dictate this by an intimate friend who is with me for the winter, as my eyes have been troubling me a good deal lately. I want to thank you very much for your affectionate and sympathetic letter. It is true, dear, Hilda, that I am not returning to Venice or Asolo. You know me and you know how I idolized my husband, that I always fret there was nothing I would not sacrifice for that ideal love, but when it came to a question of my forfeiting my self-respect I was obliged to take a very grave step--one, in fact, into which no choice--, that of separating from him. I leave you to imagine all I have gone through and am going through now, for the phases of bitterness of a sorrow like this are so many and so great. My

friends in Italy do not know at all what I endured of moral unhappiness to the complete breaking down of my health last spring, ever since April, 1892, and how I kept all worries a secret from every human being, without one, exception, except Pen. Had they known the truth, they would understand that I have taken the only course to take. I made many fruitless personal efforts to arrange things amicably over and over again, before going to America in September and went to the extremist lengths that patience and long-suffering love could go, and even, after my husband's refusal to come and see me in England I offered to go to the Continent, anywhere, to meet him and settle our difficulties. After demurring he agreed to meet me in Paris, but only on the agreement that the cause of my unhappiness should not be mentioned between us. I went, as you know, and I could not wish my greatest enemy to go through the moral torture of those five days. After that meeting I left at once for a six weeks' visit to my sisters in America. From then, September 7th, I had not one line from him until just before sailing from New York on November 8th. Altho' I had sent him fourteen letters, when I received such a letter, that if you, or any friend of mine, could read, you would clearly see the cause for my decision. I write you these details, my dear Hilda, as I find now

the time has come that I can be no longer silent, receiving, as I do, constant letters from many friends who hope to mend matters. These letters, you can easily understand, though so kindly meant only worry and wear upon me, and the answering them takes so much out of me. I therefore ask you, or give you permission to tell anyone who criticizes the stand I have taken, these details. Will you kindly send this to Madam Villari, 10 Via Venezia, Florence, to read as she has written to me in detail and I should only say to her the same thing. I am about starting for the Mediterranean for a few weeks travel with my friend with a great deal of love to you all I am always your loving friend

Fannie Browning

[(1895) February 24]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Hilda Montalba]
[51 Urban Strasse, Stuttgart]

51 Urban Strasse,
Stuttgart,
February 24.

My dear Hilda,

What must you have been thinking of me for not having acknowledged sooner the photograph you sent me of dear Henrietta!

Believe me I was so glad to have it, and shall always treasure it very much--but altho' the spirit in it is very characteristic and life like yet in detail it does not begin to do her justice.

I am afraid we shall not meet this spring in England after all--for I am not leaving Germany--or indeed Stuttgart until June when I am going into the Black Forest after my sister joins me. She is coming to spend a few months with me, and then we return in the autumn to America. You cannot think how sorry I am that we shall

not meet--but we must and can always hope to do so in
the future if we live can we not?

I wonder how you and yours' have been faring during
this bitter cold that has been

Note: this letter is incomplete.

[1895, August 12]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hillman's Hotel, Bremen]

Hillman's Hotel

Bremen

Aug 12./95

My dearest Lady Layard--

I am sending you one little line of farewell, for my Sister & I are sailing for home tomorrow the 13th on the "Havel" of the N.Y. Lloyd fr here.

We had not meant to go till Sept. the 3rd but for various reasons, we changed, as we could secure an excellent cabin, & this ship (1st Class) is not full I am glad to say. It will be very hot on arriving, but we shall go out of town at once, to friends.--

I have been meaning to write--to you all summer-- but it has gone very quickly, & we have had a good deal to struggle with to keep our health tolerable-- & to gain all we wanted before the home going-- The Spring's experience-- thro' my Sister's going to Italy to receive my things from Venice & Asolo--told on us both. It was most

distressing & painful & I can never say what I think of Marie's having had courage & strength to undertake it & her power of endurance!--

I cannot touch on the details, but my disillusionment is complete & far beyond any imagination!

It must be a sealed subject now!--

I know my only place is at home. & if I can only gain ground slowly I shall be content.

Over & over again set backs have come--

I thought of you often & often last month--yr sad memories, & anniversaries but the only way I could share yr burden was in my prayers--

My own cross was just then so heavy, I somehow hadn't any strength to write to you. I took a bad cold which lasted 4 weeks, as I was too run down to throw it off. In early June I left Stuttgart for the Black Forest, where we have been for the last two months.-- It was far too crowded & only 2nd class Germans; to contemplate, we missed quiet & comfort & on the whole think German hotels a delusion!

I have no places yet, for the winter. It will depend upon how I am--& money affairs, whether I shall as yet start even a small home of my own--

My Sister's devotion is so touching & her sympathy priceless. What she has submitted to & done (because only

Papa wasn't alive to do it, & she is first like him in moral things & nature!) for me--is marvellous [sic].

Mrs Eden wrote to me the other day since her mother died--a very sweet letter.

It is, as I felt, a keen sorrow to her.

She said you were going to be with one of yr Brothers when in England--I am sure it will be a most excellent idea & far less lonely than at no 1

I so often think of yr friend Lady Sophia Palmer in reading so much about her Father in all the papers. There has been so much about him in our American "Churchmen"--

I keep in courant (current) [sic] of affairs in England thro' the "Spectator"--which I read devotedly.

A new book of sermons by Dear Paget is at present a great stimulus to me. I shall undertake one piece of work when I get settled down & stick to it, to take up nearly all my day as far as my health allows--& not be dragged into a dozen different things & do too much as was my wont in the old times before my marriage. Dear Lady Layard, our paths in life have for a short time lain side by side--& I shall always keep you--& your kindness & friendship in gratefullest & most affect remembrance.

I know you will think of me sometimes & believe that I shall try to be as brave as I can--& shall never leave off struggling until the end! I feel as if I were the

remains of a great Earthquake (moral) & as yet hardly knew my bearings.-- I can't look back-- or forward only in the present can I trust & believe & rest in The One who makes living after such an experience possible--

Please remember me to Mrs DuCane when you see her.--

I fancy you will be going soon back to Venice, & will have Ola with you.--

Your very affect

Fannie Browning

my "little line" has extended into a long letter!

My sister sends you her kindest remembrances.

[1899, Jan 2]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[West End Hotel, Naples]

West End Hotel
Naples, Jan. 2/99

Dearest Lady Layard;

Your letter I received here this morning. Was it not strange? it arrived in New York the very day I left there 10th & my Sister forwarded it to me.

I telegraphed you at once I should be so pleased to see you here, if you were able to come. Your letter was very, very sweet & kind & I thank you for it & for your friendship which has always been so true, from the bottom of my heart. I cannot incidentally here touch upon the grave subject of my personal things that you write about.

I should be very glad to see you & have a talk for there is so much I could never get into a letter were I to enter into the question on paper. I am on my way to Athens for the winter with a friend. I had got rather over tired at home with my work; & as I had been working for the "Red Cross" during the war in the summer also, I

felt it was better to break away entirely, & take a good rest this year.

It was a great wrench for my whole heart is in my present life, & the people who have done so much for me these 3 past years at the greatest time of my need! But my health in some slight ways could not stand all the strain & wear & tear I give it, for I give out of the full treasure of a heart that God has comforted. All my suffering & sorrow have taught me.

I am so, so, sorry dear Friend to hear that you have met with another great loss in your Brother Arthur's death.

From all you say & your intimate friendship with him (for it isn't always ones nearest are one's friends) it must be a keen trial to you. How I should love to see you for your own sake too, as well as to let you know & see just how I am now. I have a very nice girl (about 32 yrs of age) Miss Hoffman (a friend) as my companion-- who is a splendid sick nurse by nature & takes such good care of me when I am not well. She is an orphan & a very congenial & sympathetic little thing & in mourning for her Mother. She knows Mrs Curtis, & saw her when in Rome last winter with old friends. Her Mother was a beautiful woman, & one of two Sisters great belles in their day in the "Old New York" Days. They were Miss Bronsons,

cousins of our Mrs. Bronson.* I chose Athens for an abiding place for the winter, as I wanted to come to Southern Europe for the climate & beautiful vegetation, & it combined a fair climate with great interests--& I am going to read & study there & try & keep my friend fully occupied.

At home I am so loving in others lives. I can get away & out of myself & I must this year tho' resting have some regular occupation.

I have letters to people attached to the American School from friends at Rome--so we shall have an entree to things that tho' only amateurs professional students only have,--and not be without acquaintances. I have been reading books on Greece, have always longed to see Athens. I shall be here or in the neighborhood until this day week, when I go to Brindisi & sail on the 11th for Patras & on to Athens. My address there will be Thos Cook & Sons, & the same here. I have had rather a troublesome cold--of an influenza type. It was very bad at Gibraltar, & I have added to it so much since--that to day I am in bed (Tuesday) keeping warm & taking medicine & trust to be all right tomorrow. I was 10 days at Gibraltar. I must stop now & lie down.

With very much love & hoping if we do not meet now
we can in the spring. I shall be back here (DV) in
April or May. I am always

your very loving

Fannie

*This refers to Mrs. Katherine Bronson of Venice
and Asolo.

[(1899) Jan. 14]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre.

Athens--Jan. 14th
Saturday

Dearest Lady Layard:

We arrived last evening after one of the most beautiful day's journey's from Patras, along the coast of the Gulf of Corinth, that so far, in my life I have ever made! The mts & air, were as wonderful, as the color of the water, & all the distinctive vegetation!

Our sea journey was very smooth, & the Austrian Lloyd Boat's excellent. We got off at Corfu, & drove about for an hour & a half--getting quite an idea of some of its beauties. It is rather early tho' for the flowers there. I thought after I had enclosed you the two letters for the children so hurriedly, at dawn of day, on leaving the Hotel at Naples, that I stupidly never explained which was Viva & which Bienboli. So you probably have the boxes still. I enclose two tiny envelopes now & once more thank you-- & apologize for my stupidity & hurry.

The post goes out from here twice a week to England they tell me. This morning (Sat.) at 10. o clk--& on Tuesday at the same hour--& comes in twice a week--Fridays & Tuesdays. I fancy it must be the same thing for Italy. --I shall register to day.

"[illegible word]" here at the telegraph office & await yr code. But I feel that if it is practicable for you to see Pen, before you return to Venice the 1st of March it would make it so far less hurried for me in making my arrangements at the last.

If I do go back, & things are arranged satisfactorily thro' you, I shall go in an Austrian Lloyd Steamer from Patras to Trieste direct, parting with Miss Hoffman at Brindisi, she going on to Naples & sailing from there for New York--It is only a 3 days journey for me, less roundabout & fatiguing & less expensive & more practicable, & you & he could come to meet me at Trieste.

It seems a foolish thing to go all around by Naples, Genoa, Milan, &c &c. I will forfeit my day on ship board of a North German Lloyd that I've paid for.

Private

If the Brownings usually come to Rome every winter, & you knew they were coming; why couldn't you ask Pen to

come & see you for a beginning of the matter sooner than Mar. 1st. Of course you will have to see & feel your own way, but it would be less strain the sooner it is begun & as I say a great help to me in my practical & business arrangements. Earlier than her leaving me about Miss H. May 1st as I had arranged.

I can very easily manage about her & no one could be more unselfish & nice & thinking only of me, & she tells me not to give her a thought, but for that reason I want to if it is practicable or possible. She agrees with me. I had better take the shorter way back via Trieste. There is only one thing that has to be considered. I must be laid up my 3 day here before starting at least I mean that those 3 days it is now a days quite out of the question for me to be anywhere but quiet, & I don't want to just arrive for that affair if I go!* But he can easily manage all that. Write to me soon & often. Since you left I have got ever so much stronger & full of courage & I think so one who longs to do the right thing as I do, (I say it not boastfully) but God gives the strength to & anything unsurmountable is not asked of us!

I have learnt so much worldly wisdom thro' my experience, as well as having developed in all higher ways, that the two combined seem to me daily as if an encouraging beginning could be hoped for. Very much love. We have

excellent rooms, a little salon with Stove & a single room
either side--all with sun--excellent food--& I have made
a very good bargain with the properties for all the time.
He was very nice, [illegible word] service, electric light,
3 meals & 3 rooms, for 11 frcs a day, a piece--fire only
extra.--late afternoons & evenings we only need that now.
My love to the Curtis's,

Your always loving friend

Fannie Browning

*Fannie was regularly very ill during her monthly
menstrual cycle and was concerned over traveling during
that time.

[1899, Jan. 20, Friday]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Private

Hotel d' Angleterre
Athens, Jan. 20th/99
Friday

Dearest Lady Layard;

Your postal telling of yr safe arrival back at Rome came by the mail early in the week.

I wrote you on arriving here, & this afternoon or eveg. when the letters come I hope to get a line from you.

My writing now is chiefly for one reason to say--that metaphorically speaking--really it would be terrible for me if any rumour or report however vague should get afloat at home, (in America I mean) among any friends, as coming from Italy what I thought of such a thing as you & I are doing! I do not think my Sister Marie would ever forgive me that. The report being abroad--before she had had any news of anything whatsoever from me. Of my having seen

you at Naples, & of our talking over the matter &c &c--
 I do not want to write her of that yet, nothing would be
 gained, & when I do write to her on the subject it will
 have to be a very honest, open & frank letter taking
 & stating my own view of the situation, & at the same time
 I must be, as I feel, very loving & tender to her, for it
may be a fearful blow, (God only knows!) she may take it
 more reasonably. My prayer that she may be prepared for
 it, (for He can & does prepare our poor hearts for so much)
 I know are heard.

Private

I have just got on my feet again after my 3 bad days
 in bed--I think I am improving, th o' for 2 days I was sick
 & had times of intense pain when only linseed poultices
 as usual relieved me at all but good nights this time.
 It is a shorter business all the time, but up to the last
 minute I was about & felt well no headaches, & I am sure
 this best & delicious climate & not working is doing me
 good.

I am full of hope in this, & in all ways. Happily,
 I am to be well (just over this episode in March--by the
middle of the month, so that would be the time for me to
 go to Trieste the 12th or 15th thereabouts. The boats go

twice a week now, & perhaps 3 times in the spring months. Anyhow the Austrian Lloyd we must take, & I want to know what yr progress is, as soon as I can, to take Miss Hoffman's passage if she is to go back to N.Y.--or to let her write to a very intimate Aunt her Mother's Sister about her coming over to spend the summer in Europe with her, & that all depends on money affairs, both with her Aunt & her own. She under these circumstances would go to some one she knows (a lady who has a pension). She will not allow any of her relations to support her while she is strong & well.

All this is strictly between ourselves. But you can understand how hurried everything would be if I could know nothing before March. You will say to Mrs. Curtis--from yrself (not as coming from me) not to say to anyone anything.

To Louise Broadwood to whom alone I have mentioned your probable visit to Naples. I have not & shall not mention the nature of it.

The Americans in Italy are closely connected & correspond with many acquaintances & friends of both Miss H. & myself in Boston & N. York, & you know--or perhaps you don't the publicity alas! of my affairs. They are everyone's property! The weather is superb. Our rooms delightful--& I am in excellent spirits. God's nearness &

support makes one strong in one's weakness. We both send you our love, yr visit gave great pleasure, & we wish you were here with us.

Always yrs

Fannie Browning

[(1899) Jan. 23]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre

Athens, Jan. 23rd

Dearest Lady Layard;

It seems as if every mail I had something I wanted to say to you! We have had a great blow in the form of sad news from America since yesterday a.m.

Miss Hoffman has lost her favorite & nearest & dearest relation, in her Mother's only sister. The bare fact of her being at rest was cabled her--& we know nothing more. The shock has been very great, & she is bearing up splendidly, & is full of courage, but she was next to her Mother, & they were very strongly attached to each other.

Why I write you this is--it may just be possible on business matters she might have to go home earlier. I scarcely think it will be necessary. But if so, & things were not then settled for me to be on my way to Venice, I would take a maid & stay somewhere. We were so full of peace & interest in our life here, & now this cloud has

come--but very soon I hope this lovely climate & sunshine & her strong will & religious faith & courage will strengthen her. It is a privileged but sad work trying to help or soothe suffering hearts as you know.

Oh! I have heard after posting my last to you--from my Sister & tho' she was relieved beyond words at my telegram fr Naples, she cannot see why you so carefully registered yr letter this time--or what that letter fr Paris also registered means--I myself think she will suspect something when she gets my Naples letters.

Yrs lovingly

Fannie

Ever since we left home I have had a strong feeling this particular Aunt Mrs. Edward Hoffman would die!

[1899, Jan. 27, Friday]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre
Athens Friday Jan. 27 /99

Dearest Lady Layard

Yrs of the 17th January came on Tuesday (or at least Wednesday AM, we get them always). I enclose you the sort of letter you speak about--I have thought about it all a great deal & think & hope I have said the best thing--that is what I want to do. I did not put definitely the amount fr my income I would give in to the general fund for altho' I think I feel he might as well know all my conditions at once, & at the beginning, yet I know him so well, I thought it wiser that thro' a third person such private details about our money matters should not come. When (if he writes to me) there will be plenty of time to say that (just how much! I wish you might be able to send him this letter (the enclosed one) & write to him if they don't come to Rome, you know I will be & mean to be patient, but the being so long a post or mail I should say, away from

you--& on account of my own business arrangements & now from dear Miss Hoffman's unsettled plans. All combine to have me want to know if possible as early in March as possible what is to happen.

I trust you entirely--to do your best--as you see your way to it--remember that! Then again one other thing--on second thoughts I think wiser! That is when he opens the correspondence with me, for us two to decide (if things turn out satisfactorily) that is if he is nice spirited about it all, & I am really to go back) at what time & where we shall meet.--I think he might hate it if any third person were to be there. Ever kind & dear you! You know how peculiar he is. He might think it looked as if he were being taken like a naughty child! You know what I mean! Whereas if he came to meet me where we arranged (he & I) it would be natural. I should suggest to him a place we had never been at together, & perhaps stay there a few days if he liked it. I agree with you that being first in Venice, on account of you & all my good women friends there would be better & easier for me, but rather than hurry on the things (my actually going back) for that reason I think would be a mistake. He & I must have a perfect understanding on paper--& he is slow. At any rate now that my poor little friend has had such a blow & sorrow. We are, I have determined going both

of us together back not later than middle of March to Naples, & if she sails from Genoa on my account, or on her own, I will go with her there & see her on board the steamer. She is better now, but it has been a fearful shock to her physically & to her nerves. For she adored this Aunt (next to her Mother) & they perfectly understand each other & were as close as the most intimate of sisters. She has suffered from the shock, but I have taken great care of her & she herself is so full of common sense, & so brave & strong morally & religiously she has known just what to do, & how to manage herself. Her father died in 15 mts illness in her arms only in /91 or /92 & then all the long months of her mother's suffering when she never left her & losing her has told on her frail constitution. She was just in these last 18 mos. getting so much stronger & better & now her last very own has been taken so suddenly. We drive everyday into the country & she loves nature & it does her good, & since two days she has taken up again a little her reading and books on Greece & Athens, she is every way so good & so considerate & thoughtful of me, & so grateful for all I do for her, & little enough that is at such times. Please destroy this letter. I heard from Gine Halton & [illegible]

Thank you so much for sending the hearts.

Your Loving friend

Fannie Browning

[1899, January 27]
[From: Lady Layard]
[To: Pen Browning]
[Hotel d' Angleterre, Rome]

Private

Hotel d' Angleterre

Rome

27th Jan. 1899

Dear M. Browning

I have just heard that there is a chance of your coming to Rome so I write to ask you if you are likely to see her soon.

I must tell you frankly that I am the bearer of a message to you from your wife whom I saw a short time ago at Naples on her way to Athens. I should like to give it to you in person for many reasons and therefore should be glad if we could meet soon--

I am sure you will believe that my real attachment to you and your family alone prompts me to venture to interfere in such a delicate matter--for you know that I have always abstained from discussion or gossip on subjects of

other peoples' happiness, of you & Fannie. It wd be a real happiness I am always--but too happy. to. If I had not settled to remain on here during February I might have hoped to meet see you at Venice but if you are coming to Rome soon I should be able to have a quiet talk with you here. You may be assured of my discretion & that whatever you may say to me I shall not repeat.

Believe me, dear M. Browning

Yr. most sincerely

Enid Layard

[(1899) January 27, Friday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Friday eveg Jan 27th

Hotel d' Angleterre

Athens

Dear Lady Layard:

Since posting my letter to you (registered) this afternoon I have got yrs of the 24th Tuesday. It must just have caught the Brindisi Austrian Lloyd & is here so quickly.

This is a great relief to me to hear all you say. I think my letter to you to send or show him is good & right, & I still think it should be the opening wedge for him to write to me--& that he had better meet me above. But of course so much depends just how well he likes having dear kind you be between us. As far as I am concerned I need hardly say it is ten times easier for me to have you settle all you can with him for me. You

know all, & how I feel. I shall go back to Genoa under the conditions I wrote you today.

Your very loving

Fannie Browning

[1899, January 27]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d'Angleterre.

Athens, January 27th, 1899

Dearest Lady Layard;

I have been thinking over very seriously the grave subject you & I were speaking about when together at Naples the other day, & I have come to this decision.

Reports having reached me from various sources that the circumstances are now radically changed, that made me feel obliged to leave my husband in the Autumn of /93; & also hearing that he is as sorry as I, myself that any circumstances whatsoever should ever have existed to have caused so much pain & suffering. I should be willing to return to him on certain conditions; if it be true that he wishes me to do so.

First, the past must be a closed book, never to be opened by him, or his Aunt or any friends at Asolo or Venice.

Secondly.--I must have the management of the

interior house-hold arrangements & be at the head of my own house, managing according to my best judgment everything. Thirdly. As my income is less than half what it was in former years, I should be only able & willing to contribute a certain amount of it to the general fund of living expenses, reserving the remainder for my personal & discretionary use. If you should see my husband or have any communication with him, on this matter I give you full permission to tell him what I have said to you here, or show him this letter. We still continue to like Athens immensely & are being blessed with fine weather. The Apple blossoms are in bloom, & I have a large bunch of them in our little Salon.

With much love I am as ever yrs very affectly

Fannie Browning.

*This letter was enclosed in another letter to Lady Layard and was written especially for the purpose of showing to Pen.

[1899, Jan. 31]

[From: Pen Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo]

Asolo. (Veneto)

Jan. 31, 1899.

Dear Lady Layard,

You heard rightly that we hope to be in Rome for a few days before the winter ends, but it is unfortunately impossible for me to say when we shall be there, as that is dependent on a visit we must first make at Cannes.

I shall probably hear before long from our friends there, and, once the time for our arrival in Rome is known to ourselves, I shall write and tell you. Meanwhile, let me endeavor to express to you my sense of all your kindness and your friendship, which I have always keenly appreciated, and for this I tender you my grateful thanks.

With regard to the message from Fannie which you wish to give me, of course I am entirely ignorant of its nature. No doubt, it will keep till we meet, if you do not care to send it;--and, as I assume, that you would not willingly be the bearer of any but a friendly message. I can

assure you that I shall be glad to receive it; and from no one so gladly as from yourself.

Again thanking you for your kindness

I am, Dear Lady Layard

Yours always most sincerely

R Barrett Browning

[(1899, Jan. 31]

[From: Lady Layard]

[To: Pen Browning]

Private

Dear Mr. Browning

I have just got your letter & seeing that you are not likely to be at Rome while I am here & that I may have left Venice before you return from your visit, I think I had better give you the message by letter at once. Hearing by chance that Fannie was at Naples on her way to Athens, I went to see her there for 2 days & had a long talk with her on the result of which was that she authorized me to tell you that if you are of the same mind to let bygones be bygones she is ready to do the same & to return home to you. I think I can truly assure you that in spite of all the misunderstandings that have arisen between you--her heart is really yours & that during the years she has been away from you she has suffered keenly-- I ventured to tell her when I saw her at Naples that I believe that your affection for her has not diminished & it only required that on each side a little forbearance &

good will to make it possible that you should resume your old confidence in each other--& that if you came together again it would be for the real happiness of both of you.

I am certain that Fannie is much better in health than when she left you and that fact will make things far more easy in the future. I advised her to go on, as she had originally had been intended to Athens & in the meanwhile I would communicate with you and let her know the result. Her idea had been to return to America via Naples & Genova & if you decide to accept a reconciliation would it not be a good thing for you to meet at Genova on your way from Cannes where it would be easier for you both to recommence than beginning life at first at Venice or Asolo. Perhaps you will think I am going rather fast in taking it for granted but yr note of today leads me to hope it may be that you will both consent to make it up. I know you are not so hard hearted & I think you are anxious to do what is right--& so I hope I may be instrumental in contributing to your future happiness. At all events whatever happens you will know that it is my great desire to do so*

*This letter is complete.

[1899, Feb. 5]

[From: Pen Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo (Veneto)]

Asolo. (Venice)

Feb. 5. 1899

Dear Lady Layard,

It is my duty as well as my pleasure to say in reply to Fannie's message, which you have kindly given me, that I also am willing to let by gones be by gones, provided Fannie is willing to say that she unreservedly acknowledges and recognizes the injustices of unworthy insinuations which have been made against me owing to her absense.

I do not hesitate to make this simple condition, because, otherwise, our reconciliation would rest on a very insecure foundation.

I may add that Fannie will find no difficulty in resuming her life with me, since I have always given as a reason for her absence that she had left me on account of her health. Now that she is well enough, it is only

natural that she should return and I am ready to do my best to make this easy & pleasant for her.

Believe me, dear Lady Layard,

yours most sincerely

R Barrett Browning

[(1899) Feb. 11]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre

Athens, Feby 11

Dearest Lady Layard

On Wednesday I read together yr two letters, dated Jan 31st (closed on the 1st Feb) also yr's of Feby 2 in which you had heard from Pen. I hope you will give me yr most earnest prayers at this time. I have had a bad week-- & from last Sunday afternoon until yesterday Friday have been in bed. I took a drive yesterday. The weather is still heavenly which is always a help. I don't know when I have had such a bad time of it but I dare say it is from nervous strain & the result of the shock we had in the bad news fr New York. Miss Hoffman is very much better, & is so beautiful an example of courage & strength. Her efficient devotion & care of me when I am ill--is quite great to any nurse--I think of you all the time in the work you are doing, for me & him--if we do not succeed I shall never but be lovingly grateful. He is so peculiar a

temperament but I mean to be as brave & self controlled now & whatever happens--as possible--for my anchor is a sure one & this one thing we know can never fail as I am so pained that you too should have had a loss & sad memories in yr aged uncle's death. It always seems to me they are so blessed.

Ever yr loving friend

F.B. over

Mrs. Howe has heard you are going to ask me to stay with you in Venice!!!! & she wonders can I go. She speaks of G's [Ginevra's] marriage, & wonders if that could affect me in thinking of going back. She is most tender & loving & tactful so dear!

[1899, Feb. 15]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre

Athens, Feby 15th, 1899.

Please burn--

Dearest Lady Layard;

I cannot say I was wholly unprepared for what the maid brought me in yr letter & the enclosure fr Pen last eveg. altho' I never could have expected all that his letter shews of the very same hard, selfish, really cruel (in his attitude of mind to me) spirit of 4 & 6 years ago! It is really in one way a blow to me for I realize how wholly hardened & selfish & full of himself he is, & his spirit towards me as his wife (after everything) I will not trust myself in words to say even to you, who could not misunderstand me what I think of that!

He practically is exactly where he was at the beginning of it all, & unless God works a miracle in his moral sense of perception before one of us die nothing can ever

be different from what it is now! I consider my letter to you (which I am sorry he has not seen--as I did not specially go into details on money matters thro' a third person on purpose) as I wrote you (but only generally--as one of my 3 conditions) really speaking in all humility) magnanimous. I opened an easy way for him to say he was "as sorry as I any circumstances (let him think then what he liked, but I certainly should be allowed to think then what I liked) ever existed to part us & to have caused so much pain & suffering--that certainly was very broadly charitable & tactful & making it easy for him! and asked that the past should be a closed book not "bygones be by-gones" in an off hand, banal sort of way, as he puts it. He at once wants to talk--to have it & in return for not coercing him & with a making tremendous effort & praying for light every step of the way, by night & day in these last six weeks, sacrificing so much in doing what seemed well nigh too great a work & only willing to do so because I was convinced it was right & my duty & I can never forget he is my husband, & his soul is precious to me). in return for this I am asked by him to acknowledge he is still the victim & the martyr, & I have been & am in the wrong!!! The sublime & ridiculous always meet in tragedies and this is certainly an instance of it. I could no more

dream of doing what he asks than I could do or be I don't know what. I never would have been willing to give him up, except for the very same reasons I could never go back to him as long as his attitude to me is as it is now--as long--in one word as his selfishness envelopes him to the extent that it makes him as he is. I shall never never regret having made this effort, failed as it has & I can never but be grateful to you for yr having ever undertaken or wished to undertake fr such high motives to do this, bring us together. Our ways are not always God's, & I leave it & Pen with Him. I believe in Him, & in anything being marked by God's Holy Spirit, & it will conquer at the end somewhere, & sometime! Only what I went thro' that last 6 mos. of 93. (& the decision to leave him) do I ever remember having tried & prayed to do the right thing & asked for light & guidance in such a crisis as this. The strain has been tremendous--but I have stood it wonderfully. I only wanted light to know the right thing & it has surely been shown me in Pen's first being on the defensive in his first letter to you, & then in this last cruel one! It is plain my going back is not for now!

I can never, never, never possibly agree with you or Mrs Curtis or any of Pen's friends, who lay so much stress on his not having "misbehaved" as he called it to Ralph Curtis "under my own roof." There is no use of going over

& over all the story! He willingly allowed thro' an infatuation a girl of notoriously bad character (which he knew,) to come between us in our home & defied all the decent conventionalities of society--for his & her own reasons. I don't ever wish to know what they were & placed me in an impossible position, the personal treatment to me I won't touch upon! & then defends all he has done & been by placing me in the wrong & saying my health was the cause. His cleverness & subtlety frightens me! This letter of his does it's so clever, in looking out for himself. I consider really his higher value is deformed just as any poor deformed body can be--& I can never help him--until God cures him first.

It isn't a question of the (to be very outspoken) & we will never speak on the subject again) act of adultery at all!--tho' he has taken pains to give me & everyone every reasonable reason to believe it is that--it is worse to my mind & this; hundreds & hundreds of times I've told all of you who think--his obstinacy means that that never took place--Oh! the lengths I went & the chances I gave him until I nearly died in the fight between giving him up & keeping my self respect & listening to my highest nature! --namely my conscience enlightened by God's Holy Spirit! What I have gone thro' never is taken into consideration by him or any one, and what I was willing from

conscientious reasons now to undertake for his best good, & in the name of & for the love of Christ's greatest gift of Charity! It is a wound! but I know it will all be for the best. All this I write you is not "nerves" or want of "self control."

I have waited 24 hrs before answering yr letter. You & Mrs Curtis cannot & never can see the thing as I do, entirely for you are not me--& not his wife. I consider Pen's asking me what he does. What you call his proposal or condition as he calls it really preposterous!

I am saying all this out to you dear Lady Layard not for any reason but that I want you to know just how I feel, & what I think, & again & again I thank you & love you for yr having done all you have! He is humanly speaking impossible. We must not you & I ever misunderstand each other. I do thank you, it was a noble unselfish thing on yr part, & as I told you in Naples, I shall never forget yr goodness in wanting to bring about a reconciliation in such a right way. I am glad we tried you & I. I was willing to give up much, & to have to pain my dear sister, which now I am spared for a duty to him & to do the right thing as I thought. Now he has been God's means of showing me now it is not the right time! As long as I live I shall pray for him & pity him. There must be something else for me now to do than what I with you felt would be my highest

privilege, & reason for living viz influence him for goodness. Because you think it would be "noble" & "magnanimous" to do a thing--(go back & say & do what he asks) & I think it would be saying I believed in a falsehood--does not mean anything but that we cannot from the nature of the case see things exactly from the same standpoint. You don't "blame him" in making my health an excuse. If you had been his wife, you could not but be righteously indignant & consider his saying what he does beneath contempt.

As Miss Hoffman has to go home in April I have determined after thinking it all over to return also. We sail on April 7th from Naples, & go from here on Tues. 14th March. My winter has on the whole, or will have done me a great deal of good, in this delicious climate. With 5 months complete rest from my work, I shall stay some weeks in N.Y.--to be with my Sisters & not do any at all, & then go to friends in New England for a couple of visits before going to Mt Desert Island on the Maine coast (where it is always cool) for the hot months & in the autumn settle myself down in a small "flat," & live alone & do my work, very much less ardently, & less exhaustingly. I feel as if I had gone thro' something now! I think it has always been overhanging me all these years if a way were opened, ever--& I felt it my duty & saw it was--no matter how hard I should try & do it, go back! I am glad we tried!

I might have failed--but as I told you--you & I had nothing to do with results! They are in Higher Hands. I wanted to see the right thing to do, now it has been shewn me. Dear dear Lady Layard; it is a hard fight this Life of ours'. May we each have strength unto the end.

yr loving

Fannie

My love to the Curtis's.

[1899, February 17]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre
Athens. Feby 17/99

Dearest Lady Layard

Since posting you my last, this eveg, I got yrs' of the 14th for which I thank you heartily. I have nothing more to add, only to assure you in the greatest sincerity how I appreciate all you have been willing to do -- & done in the matter. I shall always value your friendship more for it.

It is strange that Edith Rucellai should have written you that!--

From Mrs. Howe in America -- did I tell you -- that I heard from her the other day that you had asked me to go & stay in Venice with you -- & that she was deeply interested to know; if I would care to go into the midst of memories & disturbing circumstances. She also says Mrs. Curtis had written. G [Ginevra] was at last married, in Asolo -- & then Mrs. Howe goes on to say she did not know if that

would make any differences in the exigency of the situation &c &c -- She is always so really tactful & kind-- & considerate in what she says -- I hope -- if you can honestly do so if anyone speaks to you about it ever, you will say, on my part, just that I would have been willing & was anxious to do so -- & just that it was impossible for me to do what he asked -- I cannot let myself think of it! So I will send you from Naples, but I should love to have one from you, even tho' I don't go to Venice. I love it so & shall for your sake.

As ever yr loving

Fannie Browning

[1899, Feb. 23]

[From: Pen Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo]

Asolo

(Veneto)

Feb. 23, 1899

Dear Lady Layard,

In answer to your note which came last night, I hasten to say that of course I will gladly go to see you in Venice, if for no other reason that I may thank you for all your trouble and kindness.

Fannie's answer rather surprises me because I fancied that the simple condition I made had been tacitly assumed; if not frankly expressed by her, from the moment she offered to return; and, indeed, I should have thought that without such an assumption the idea of living with me would have been as unacceptable to her as certainly it would be intolerable for me. I had given her credit for not wishing to pose as an injured wife who had magnanimously condoned an offense of which I am not guilty, but I did seek to protect myself against some of her friends who have brought

about our separation and--alas!--Fannie's answer amply
justifies my caution.

Believe me, Dear Lady Layard
yours ever most sincerely
R Barrett Browning.

[1899, February 27]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angleterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angleterre

Athens, Feby. 27th 99

Dearest Lady Layard

I telegraphed you yesterday that we must consider the whole matter closed. I am very sorry but I cannot let myself think of it for a moment now; since Pen's answer to me in his letter, to you-- which I return.

I can add nothing more to all that I wrote you the other day-- except that I feel that everything has been done that is possible towards a reconciliation-- from my side and now it must be left!-- If he should ever change his attitude eventually on the subject; or, towards me, it will have to be expressed from his side.

I am going to the Hotel Bellenu Corso Vittorio Eunnbbrule in Naples on March 16th-- & leave here the 11th for Patras & Olympia. With very many loving thanks for

all your interest & painstaking about it all I am as
ever your loving friend

Fannie Browning

I think I told you I am going home April 7th from Naples.

[1899, March 4th]
[From: Lady Layard]
[To: Fannie Browning]
[Venice]

Venice

4th March 1899.

Dearest Fannie

In spite of your 2 letters & your telegram I have felt it my duty to see Pen and hear what he had to say & the result is entirely satisfactory and there is no longer the least obstacle to your return to him--He came to Venice today on purpose to see me and dined with me & we had a long talk--He says he is sorry he did not express himself better in his letter to me--that he had not the slightest intention of asking you to make any public declaration or even to make the least reference to the matter, to himself--I told him that the only condition you made was that the "past was to be a closed book between you," and to this he readily assented and said it would certainly be his greatest wish. He said you & he had never had a real quarrel & that his feelings for you had never changed. That when you left him it was understood you were to be

absent for a time & that you subsequently informed him thro' a third person of your intention of not returning-- & under these circumstances you could quite well meet without explanations. Dear Fannie, I am certain that you ought to come & mind I say this to you after mature reflection--I must tell you that I know you will never cease to regret it if you do not--Do not delude yourself with the idea that another time will be better. I believe that if you let this opportunity slip it will not return-- & I say to you most earnestly & solemnly that I think it is your duty to do so. Remember you swore solemnly to take him for better & for worse--& you cannot deny your vows.

He & his Aunt are leaving on Wed. 7th for the Riviera for a fortnight & I told him I should communicate with you & write to him. He would be then willing to come back here to meet you & remain a bit in Venice. I spoke to him very straight abt Ginevra & he declared to me that he was not guilty and that he did not believe that you thought in your heart that he could have been capable of such a disgraceful thing & such an insult to you in your own house. He says that what he meant in that letter to me about the "condition" was that he wanted your friends to be convinced of this as by your leaving him they had (by your action) had reason to think the worst of him--but he

had not meant me to ask you to say so to him. I told him it did not matter what the world thought or said in these moments you had only to think of your own actions & what was right & go straight ahead & not look to the right or left. He said his great anxiety was that if you came together again it should be a permanent thing and therefore wished to speak out now to me. I said I was sure that if you came back you wished the same thing--He said he had shown Sarianna my letters & she was glad when she thought you might come back--

If you would like to see me & have another talk with me why not go straight to Genoa & then come to Milan to see me--I could go there or to Vicenza or Verona about 16th or 18th.

Do be advised by me & do not go back to America I am sure you will never cease to regret it--If it were not such a long way I would go to Naples to meet you but I am not strong enough to run about so much. If you come to Trieste I might meet you there but Milan or Verona would be easier for me--Pen said that he thought you might be happy here or at Asolo where there was no much to interest you--the lace school &c--& he would do his best to make you happy--& he told me how much he had suffered at your leaving him. I said I knew how much you had suffered & that in your heart you were devoted each to the other.

You must not burden your heart--after all, dear Fannie we all have our faults--& you must forgive each other. Did not your friend in America tell you not to "hold back"--& there is really no necessity for you to do so. I wrote to Pen before I got your telegram telling him to come & see me here--& he comes today on the chance & he said over & over again how sorry he was that we should have misjudged the meaning of his letter. He said he never meant to make any difficulties--& I feel sure he did not--send me one word by telegraph--to reassure me--just "reconsidering" & I shall understand that you are thinking of taking my advice. Good bye & God bless your thoughts & lead you right.

Believe me as ever yr loving
friend

Enid Layard

[1899, March 10]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel d' Angletterre, Athens]

Hotel d' Angletterre

Athens. March 10th /99

Dearest Lady Layard:

I telegraphed you to-day on receipt of your letter, which was a very unexpected surprise to me-- and very, very satisfactory.

In saying that, I mean everything, without going into details.-- I was on the point of writing to you for this post to tell you that I had given up going back to America this spring; I was going just now to London on important business of a personal nature, & must be there on a certain day next week -- Such being the case, and now that I am going back to Pen, I want to tell him myself about it-- & so meeting him at Genoa (Hotel de Londres) on Saturday the 18th en route for England.-- I resume my journey on the Sunday-- going straight thro' Via Turin & Mt. Cenis. I cannot say how long I shall be in London,

but no longer than absolutely necessary. We, you & I shall see each other (DV) either there or in Italy. Miss Hoffman sails on March 31st from Naples & she will take the letter I will have to write to my Sister, & it will be a great thing for me that she is willing & so loyal & good, & sen-
sible & sympathetic a friend of mine to go & see her & break her the news. Happily, I have written her I am going to stay over this summer & she has planned to arrive May 12th in Genoa-- & wrote she might go to Florence for a fortnight to some friends, adding "it shows how much stronger I am," (She means morally) "that I can think of going there"! She may please God, take it better than I thought. Before ending I want to say to you-- that I thank you, with tears in my eyes, for all this!-- for all you say, & how you say it in your letter of to day. God has not forsaken me -- ever!-- yesterday was Pen's 50th birthday. It is always a marked day with me -- I thought of & prayed for him much; this morning I was on my knees, at my prayers full of peace, & trust & in a blessed frame of mind, -- and when I got up & found yr letter that Miss Hoffman had brought in & hid near by & read it -- & was alone once more save for that One Divine Presence, in having to make a choice, in a very, very, great turning point in my path of life; His spirit speaking to me thro' my conscience, said to me at once -- that it was my duty to go

& to go on trusting in Him! This is very confidential, & spoken in gratitude very deep to you. God has blessed your efforts on our behalf. Say only to Pen from me that his "simple condition" for my being willing to make the assurance he asks of me unreservedly is quite impossible, & for that reason the question of my return is at an end.

Ever yr loving friend

Fannie B.

Miss H. is going to stay with some cousins in Rome now. I will write you a line often--Address me care Messrs. Brown, Shipley & Co. Bankers London E.C.

FRAGMENT

[1899, March 14]

[From: Lady Layard]

[To: Pen Browning]

[Venice]

Venice

14. Mar. 1899

Dr. Mr. Browning

A letter I have just recd. from Fannie confirms her telegram & tells me that she is quite satisfied with all I told her of my conversation with you. She wishes, as you do, never to return to the old subject--I therefore hope that you may have many happy days together still before you. I assured her that she had not the slightest reason to entertain any jealousy of Ginevra & that once Fannie was in her own house it wd. naturally [sic] depend entirely on herself whether she wished to receive her then.

I cannot tell you, dear Mr. B. how glad I feel to think I have been able to smooth away some of the diff. of yr. & Fannie's life & I have only to say that you always find me ready to be of use to you at any time that you may have occasion to turn to me--

[1899, March 17]
[From: Pen Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Hotel du Cap., Antibes]

Hotel du Cap.
Antibes
March 17, 1899

Dear Lady Layard,

I need not say how grateful I am for the interest you have taken in my happiness, which is again evinced [sic] by your letter just received, and I have especially to thank you for the assurance you have given to Fannie that she had not the slightest reason for the exception she has taken to my supposed relations to Ginevra. I trust however that she will realize the awkward consequences of her taking up an unfriendly position towards Ginevra.

You will see that if Fannie refused to receive Ginevra with my real or supposed assent, there would be an admission on my part of what I strenuously deny--that there had been something in my relations with Ginevra which Fannie could with reason resent, and that I should be lending myself to an act of cruel injustice towards one who is as

innocent as I am myself. It is hardly necessary for me to point out that her husband, (with whom I am on terms of intimate friendship) would be entitled to ask for an explanation; and as for the gossip in a place like Asolo which would arise from the course I deprecate, that is too obvious! I trust Fannie really means to loyally interpret the words, that by gones shall be by gones, not only on my part but also on her own.

I think, in order that you may fully understand the position, I ought to say that as far as I know, neither Ginevra nor her husband is aware that there has been the slightest question of jealousy, and I believe that such a suggestion would be a real surprise, not to say a shock to them both.

Pardon me, Dear Lady Layard, for troubling you at so much length. You will, I am sure, understand my desire in that you should fairly appreciate one of my difficulties.

Ever yours most sincerely

R. Barrett Browning

I am just on the point of leaving for Genoa.

[1899, March 23]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[6 Montague Place, Russell Square, W.C., London]

6 Montague Place

Russell Sqre. W.C.

London March 23 1899

My dear Lady Layard;

I have mentally written you many letters since I arrived in Genoa on Saturday morning, & found yr long letter. But it was a long pull from G. straight thro' to London, & as I had to rest Sunday during the day & only left Sunday eveg.--that gave me a night channel crossing & two consecutive nights en route. However I am very well, & feeling none the worse for all the strain & excitement which, tho' outwardly absolutely calm & composed I could not keep feeling the effects of. I arrived at 6.35 am from Rome & Pen had arrived at midnight, & tho' I asked if he had come they said no. I was thro' my breakfast & had my bath, when he came up. We got on splendidly. I had on all my armour for the surpreme strength, & was very bright & cheerful & natural, & put him entirely at his

ease. We went for a long walk, & sat down in some gardens & talked about many people & things all on the surface but naturally. He seemed really pleased to see me again, & thought I was looking so well & 5 years younger he said! I found him very much changed everyway alas! much older & fatter, but what is most sad so terribly bitter & embittered against all the world, & everyone. I think I can with God's help really unconsciously do him good in that, for I haven't an enemy & never say a bitter or harsh word nor have such a feeling against a human being. I laughed at him sometimes, turned it off, or told him sadly not to talk so.

Then after luncheon which was very jolly & nice,--we two at a little table & I helped the things,--I went to my room for an hour & a half & was to come down & fetch him at 3. o'clk--& he had suggested our going for a little drive, which I liked. But when I did come down he was putting up his few things in his portmanteau as he was returning to Antibes that eveg. having taken my words literally for a few hours, & they his Aunt & he had engagements for Sunday lunch with the Smiths (with whom they are) to meet Mrs Matthew Arnold & others, so of course he had to go. I was going to stay all night, then he proposed my going on & sleeping at Turin. I agreed, but was unable to carry it out.

This last talk which lasted 3 hours was a culminating thing--& all you had done, or ever could have done would have amounted to very little without it--He wanted it: brought up the subject; & of course in speaking of the future the past had to be threshed out! How I got thro' it, I shall never know? I only know as in such fearful ordeals--Christ's presence was with me, & if it had not been that I heard His voice within, more strongly than our two with my outward ears. I could never have had the strength or courage to be as I was & to have the result.

The result is we are friends & tho' I realize the appallingness of what I've undertaken I know I can do it, thro' His strength. My whole self I have given to God for the love of Himself & my poor dear Pen's sake--I promised him (Pen) I would never tell anyone anything, but that we had had a long talk & came to an agreement, & had settled everything. not even you, but he may, I don't know. So now come what may, nobody comes between us.

To me personally he is very tender, & I know he loves me, in his own pitiable selfish & egotistical way. First himself then me because it makes him more comfortable morally. His way of seeing things morally is absolutely unlike any other human being!! He cannot be judged as anyone else, it is an abnormal case but he is my husband, & he wants us to jog on together.

I believed all he said to me. We parted excellent friends. At the last we had tea in his room, & he rushed for his train.

On the way to the station I was with him. Only a few minutes walk, I settled it for once & always. I can't tell you what I said, nor how I did it, but I knew it was God's will for me. What a thing life is. I take up this new phase of the cross perfectly happy, because it is His will. All human help or friendship--or anything you said or say or can say is worth nothing, in comparison to my peace of mind now. Life is so short at the best, & this will all then, seem nothing in comparison to the joy & final rest & happiness of His approval, & Paradise at last.

I love my dear husband with unbounded tender pity, but the mystery of his nature & character as a whole is a deep one. He is a genuine bohemian! & this living 6 years out of the world absorbed in himself being in a false position in the eyes of the world has become a mania almost. All he did or was he never takes into account--even tho' he be innocent in the letter & as for me & what he was the cause of making me, & my life. That he is oblivious too. It doesn't hurt me now, anymore for I see that it is queerness. It would be laughable if it were not tragic & pitiable.

I am not ungrateful dear Lady Layard for saying what I did about yr friendship you made it possible--our meeting & all but all that had gone before was worth nothing, without Pen's & my clutching the thing--going it the last snap & clasp. He can only be himself, whatever impression he gives anyone. This is the last time really he will talk about it you & me--I don't say anything to any friends in detail. I told Pen what I should say & he was of the same opinion. You ought to know this from me-- what I've said here. The reason I asked Pen to come & see me at Genoa was to tell him what I was obliged to come to London for, & he was awfully tender & sympathetic & nice about it. He saw how strong & well my health was & I told him I hadn't had a maid in 5 years & had never been so well, only suffering frightfully once in the month & that my last time at Athens was so fearful. My friends & the doctor & I all decided I must come & see Playfair. As soon as I'm well I am going straight back to Venice. Well! I went yesterday AM & he--the Dr. thinks I'm wonderful in nerves & spirits, but is going to do an operation not dangerous--but serious enough to have to lie in bed a fortnight or 10 days afterwards to have to go into the private hospital no 16 Montague Place on this sheet. I am now at a private boarding house sort of hotel very comfortable, & a respectable & clean

place & not expensive) where I had my rest cure in /93, & then I must wait over & be laid up once--after the operation to see if things are better. I shall have a nurse, & must be under chloroform. This coming Monday or so I expect to be laid up. (monthly illness here, & as Miss Hoffman is not with me. I have a nurse, as I have to have some one at night. & at once when this is over I go down to no 16 & to Mrs Taylor's hospital) & have the operation about the middle or latter part of Easter week.

You will be here about then, so I will write, & tell you how I am. It is no cutting (only dilating & scraping out of the womb inside of it).

I had to have laudanum injections, & 3 poultices 2 bottles all at once last time & was crying with the pain. Miss Hoffman was up 3 nights & then I had a nurse for 24 hrs. I couldn't move in bed I was so bad. I think in these days if anything can be done, & one has the money it is silly to let such things go on. I was completely done up for 10 whole days before leaving Athens.

One more thing! About Marie! You don't know her or the situation or you would see how impossible it is for me to prevent her coming abroad! She will come if she can & she has lots of grit & pluck & self control, & I feel somehow as if she will take it better than I think I wrote her of course frankly all--after seeing Pen, my duty only,

I didn't tell her too much but was honest & open & frankly told her all.

I tore up yr letter to her*--as you told me to do for tho' I appreciate fully yr sweetness in offering to write-- yet there were some things in it, which would have been like a red flag to a bull! I feel sure that will come out better than we think. It broke my heart to write to her to have to pain her. But now everything is all right. Pray for me & for him. I write to him, & am so relieved of that awful weight of the being a separated woman from her husband. I must rest now.

Your ever grateful & affect,

Fannie

I've told Pen about the hospital & operation business, & I also said I didn't suppose he could come on to England & get me, could he leave his Aunt! The earliest I could get away would be the very last day or two of April-- or first days of May. I want the world to see us together naturally & it would be easier anywhere than in Asolo just at first. We are going to be May in Venice. I told him I should travel alone, as I am not going to get a maid, till I get back. The expense of this is something. I'm

none the worse for 2 nights only in bed, in 6 days
travelling!!

*A copy of this letter follows.

[1899, March]

[From: Lady Layard]

[To: Marie Coddington]

Dear Miss Coddington

The news that will be contained in the letter in which Fannie will enclose this note will I fear, give you at first some painful emotions. I have asked Fannie to allow me to send you a line on the subject. My husband & I have for so many years been friends with the Browning family & I have such a personal regard for Fanny [sic] that I could not help being much distressed at the misunderstanding that kept Fannie & Pen so long apart. I therefore determined to say if I could not do some thing to bring about a happier state of affairs between them with this idea I wrote first to Fannie asking her permission to mediate between them. Not being quite certain of Fannie's address at New York, I registered my letter to her--that letter, as you know, reached America the very day she left & followed her to Naples. I had offered to go from Venice to meet her anywhere she might appoint. in Europe & when I found she was at Naples I went at once to see her & to talk to her on the subject. The result

was that I hope I have been able to help in setting matters right and that a new era may be opening before Fannie & Mr Browning. It was a very serious step for me to take for interfering in this matter but after much reflexion I felt that I could not abstain from using what little influence I could bring to bear in causing them to come to an understanding. Having myself taken the solemn vows which bind husband & wife together I could knowing how sacred they are & I had an [illegible] desire & wished to help Pen & Fannie to keep their's to each other--& I believe that you will understand this and that your great love for Fannie will cause you to forget the loss of her which will be so great a trial to you, & to rejoice that she should do what is for her good. I have only now to ask you to forgive you the pain which I know I must cause you by being the cause of a fresh separation between Fannie & you--& to beg you to believe that I have acted for what I truly believe is for her highest good. In the whole negotiations she has constantly thought of you with great tenderness & devotion & has wished she cd. spare you any sorrow. I tell her I am sure you are too good to wish her to do anything but what her conscience tells her is right.

[(1899), March 29]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[45 Ebury St. S.W., London]

45 Ebury St. S.W.

London, March 29th

Dear Lady Layard;

Last eveg I recd yrs forwarded fr No. 6 Montague Place. The food was so bad there I couldn't stand it--& am here most comfortably settled for 10 days or a fortnight with Miss Hill (my little nurse) & the food is excellent (a former cook) & very nicely served.

There were several things in yr letter that hurt me much, but that may be I am too sensitive & you do not know me really well, (but you will from now on) or you could never say them; and because you do--& ever must see things from another point of view than I do. We must make it a solemn vow not to talk on the matter. It will thoroughly unfit me for the taking up of my life--if I exhaust myself by talking to & hearing what even you think & feel on the subject. I am on my own feet, a woman 46 yrs old nearly, & not a child--wholly developed by suffering & entirely

depending on what my Faith is to me, in undertaking what I have. Without God, I couldn't contemplate it. Playfair is my friend.* One of the very few men of unimpeachable honor, & who rings thro' & thro' true, when trusted & tried in friendship. I know many think otherwise, & his trouble has made him many enemies. I believe even if mistaken in judgment his motives cannot err.

Indeed in women or men I hardly know anyone so honest & true. He is absolutely without giving an opinion to me in this I am doing, & trusts me, acting from a high standard, & thinks I am wonderful in my health & courage. Dear Lady Layard you never have meant to pain me but have over & over, but now it is accomplished--believe me I know & realize my duty to my husband; I love him & if I need advice in any difficulties I shall ask you, & go to you first only now I must be let alone. It would all not seem so frighteningly hard if G. [Genevra] were not living there. But God will help me, & I have no feeling really against her as any enemy. Pen I can manage but the other thing is awful. It is a complete self surrender of will to God-- for the love of a human soul. Love me & pray for me always.

yrs ever

Fannie.

The weather is lovely & mild again. I do love London.

*Playfair is Fannie's doctor.

FRAGMENT

[1899, April 1]

[From: Lady Layard]

[To: Pen Browning]

[Venice]

1st Ap. 1899

Venice

Dr. Mr. Browning

Just a line to tell you that I recd. your letter & appreciate your difficulties--but that I am sure they will melt away when the time comes & that Fannie means to bury the old questions. I have no doubt, however that Ginevra knows Fannie's feeling towards her. There are, unfortunately never wanting people in the world ready to tell one unpleasant things.

[(1899), May 8]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

Palazzo Rezzonico

Venice May 8

Dearest Lady Layard;

Yr note to Ebury St. reached me two days ago--it was forwarded to Montague Pl. & from there here.--I asked Mrs Curtis last Thursday when I went to see her, to write to you for me. I have wanted to do so. I felt I owed it to you too, but this last week has been this most suffering--& terrible one of strain I ever went thro' anywhere--at anytime so far in my experience.

I was physically very tired with the journey--our telegrams to each other (Pen's & mine) went astray. I was anxious & worried all thro' the journey--& rightly so as it turned out) his spirit--of being on the defensive & his Aunt's too--his irritability thro' nervousness & terrible temper/ which never was like this to me until Genoa/ his taking revenge in letting it out on me--both in public & dragging up the past over & over in private I was

not equal to nervously -- & I had some scenes -- of the same old hysteria. I had not had in 6 yrs & everything was hopeless, & I was in the hands of that devil despair -- & the suffering of mind & body was only a hell itself! He suffered too -- His outlet drove me into that state he knew it -- & was sorry, & said so both to me -- & downstairs to Mrs Morison & his Aunt. The truth is dear Lady we both love each other, our hearts are all right, but there are certain temperaments -- nerves -- high strung -- not stories sensitive -- like both of ours -- that are very hard to surmount such difficulties as have come into our married life! The things Pen said in his anger -- to me were not himself except in madness. -- Yr wildest imagination or mine could not have imagined them. His characteristics will never change -- his faults that tried my nerves -- & self thro' & thro' are intensified I am going on from his point of view or I would never have come at all -- after the scene in Genoa' I don't think one moment of anything fr my point of view -- I have God's support -- & I never expect justice -- or anything righted in this life. I only want to do my duty as his wife & as a married woman. As you told me in Naples -- it must be a complete sacrifice -- & it is. If I can keep my health my nerve power & self control -- I can do it I know -- but I have a terrible enemy & handicap in this being the time in my life it is & having had nerves

tried so in all my married life -- & my internal (bodily) affairs troubling me as they do -- I unfortunately love him more than I knew

It is a high love-from God -- & I feel sure somehow that it won't be my way or yrs peace -- & love will conquer in the end. He knows I love him -- & I am sure he does me --but temperamentally -- physically, nervously and mentally at times we try each other. He puts me into such attacks tho' I scheme & devise & try & think out every means to avoid them. His tenderness & kindness is very real -- he is underneath his selfishness really fond of me & considerate. I tell him I should never have come had I known I could possibly ever get into such states of awful hysteria. Even by anything he said, & then, he says tenderly & knows its for physical reasons. He is a very delicate man in some ways. I always knew that. He never did live with Ginevra I'm sure now, -- that is the very reason he has felt & does & always will the injury he says I've done him, & taken away his character & c & c & c & broken my marriage vows -- after insisting upon marrying him all of which killed me to hear when it was said out now seems simply ridiculous! He had a bed put up on his own room here -- & never comes into mine from his -- but goes all the way round. The first night I slept 3 hrs. The flood of memories & the loneliness everyway were overwhelming, -- the

being found fault with -- & Oh! how Miss Browning had changed -- She is now getting back into her old nice sweet way! I have been in every way most exaggeratedly loving -- natural simple & considerate to her & Mrs Morison -- put myself in the background, & have conquered that difficulty -- Of course -- I suppose I was sensitive -- but then I know I have ten times the tact in one finger than Pen & his Aunt between them. Now everything is much better -- I can pray, & God's spirit does what nothing I can say or do or be When overcome with depression & smothered in that darkness I cannot -- only words out of the Bible come into my head -- & comfort me -- & I know when not capable of seeing anything God does take care of us! The stress & strain are off now. You see the operation took a lot out of me -- necessarily -- in my nerves I mean. But I was so bright & allright I started the fortnight for here. Pen came to Vicenza -- & got on the train there. -- About Asolo! I am going to stay here -- anyway this summer. That we had no words or scene about thank heaven since Genoa! I was & am firm. I shall never see Asolo or all that would be such a pleasure & interest to me there -- if I must be friends with G. [Ginevra] & her husband. He trusts it would reflect on him & on her character -- Mrs Morison even said to me here the same --- When I had to send for on the first Sunday, asking her in common humanity to help me &

to speak to Pen -- which she did. & it was better -- she said Pen wouldn't have me in Asolo if that was the case -- & I told her I would do my very best here & struggle & fight every difficulty -- but go there & be as they all were & as I was before I knew what sort of girl G. [Ginevra] was & had been; & that even if she had not in the letter lived with Pen -- she was not the sort of person -- considering all that had happened I could be friends with! When Pen wrote to London there was no room in Asolo for my maid -- I said he mustn't give that a thought as she needn't go there at all. I should probably make Venice my headquarters. So in planning for the future -- (as soon as these visitors Kenyons who come today & Mrs Morison are gone) he has taken it for granted I stay here -- he lives in A. [Asolo] & comes to see me That's the best that can be done -- now. I know he thinks in time he can force me to get his way! -- & it will be thro' my not being able to keep up this house -- as he wants it kept up -- I am now -- paying every expense here -- 9. servants to feed; 3 guests his Aunt & himself & myself. also paying 2 gondoliers & all the incidentals -- I told him frankly in G. [Genoa] & again every decidedly & frankly. I had not the money. I had spent already too much money so far this year & was in a very tight place. I ought only to spend £10. a week. & had to tell him -- he pinned me down -- just how many

pounds I had for the rest of the year-- he wouldn't believe me. It is very little -- at this rate of living even for 3 or 4 weeks. I shall have to raise money' I don't worry I feel but can't resist the injustice. He says he sees I can't do it. At first before I told him -- (the bills were on my table 3 days -- & the writers were coming) he said straight out -- I've not no money to live here at all -- of course you must pay all the expense -- Then when I told him gently & firmly facts -- Oh! he was so trying -- real Barrett, so obstinate, brought up all the injustice he had fr me by my going away & his having had this palace to keep us -- which he only did for me to come back to!!!! The morning after I got here we had a talk in which he said -- I must bring back all my things. The cabinets looked so well there (opp. to where we were sitting in the front drawing room) the place was an eyesore to him -- etc etc -- & that he would never sell it as long as he lived -- I told him I was going to sell my Italian furniture & all except my silver & books & little things -- I couldn't now afford to bring them over -- Then he said to bring a few. It was so entirely the spoilt child spirit. I shall keep them stored for the present & not sell anything -- until the end of the year -- & see if the thing is possible (I mean my health standing things better) The money question is thus settled -- He pays the Asolo servants (the cheap ones) I

have to pay Antonio -- 2 gondoliers -- my maid -- & someone to cook for me -- & feed -- 4 servants -- besides myself here - five visitors & friends only tea -- he won't live or let me in the Rezzonico -- so when alone I shall eat up here -- I shall live on a crust or on debts!! which I won't do. Next year I shall begin the year sparingly -- I have only £360 -- for the rest of this year -- & this week -- I am paying -- 598 -- odd Lire for the house expenses -- without water for life -- or washing in the country -- & none of my wages (except the Gondoliers!!!! I ought only to spend £10. a week -- My operation & hospital expenses & the whole affair cost me over 80. -- Dear Lady Layard -- now you know it all. Love me & pray for me. I will fight hard -- & take care of my health. Tomorrow I will write you about one side of the sacrifice. I feel happy in doing it tho' as I feel it is right!

You were right tho', you never knew half the real difficulties here or saw the real Pen.

All the people have been so nice -- & kind in calling. More tomorrow. Except on one side --

Lovingly,

Fannie --

[(1899), May 24]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico, Venice]

Palazzo Rezzonico

Venice

May 24th

Dearest Lady Layard;

I wrote last on Sunday 14th--I had a very stiff week of it up to the 21st & was often in despair. I was ill-- all of 12 days after all, but was up & about as I had no pain--Very--very trying things happened again & again-- & I had hysteria (in crying fits so often & tho' I got over one & went on--in a 12 hrs. another would come on! Sunday last was a great church (?) service and things-- & myself--have been getting better ever since.

Indeed I can't say enough for Pen's sweetness in always acknowledging his fault in saying such trying & unkind ones. &c &c--

No one -- not even you can I tell of how absolutely he must have his own way -- & what he wants & as he wants -- my judgment has to go to the wall -- what anybody else says or thinks ditto -- In choosing the arrangements of the servants & household matters -- all of which I must pay for -- I cannot do as I think best -- He says some little thing that gives me to understand I can be head of the house -- & then his own ideas & ways have to be carried out -- against my judgment -- Friction must be Anyhow now since Monday the visitors have gone and yesterday he & his Aunt went to Asolo -- with one servant, two go tomorrow & another on Monday. That leaves me with the man cook who for the present he Pen wants me to keep -- (he is entirely averse to letting me have any but a man. The man servant (Italian) whom he also insists upon my keeping here. On account of having visitors at 4 -- o'clk -- in the afternoons -- my maid, the old porter & Sister -- & my new kitchen maid -- [illegible] to feed and the two gondoliers -- I must use & keep open all of the two floors -- & use them, & "if I want to please him sit downstairs in the evegs"! -- Last eveg I was out in the gondola with a young girl (deaconess) from New York, whom I stumbled across yesterday and tonight is a thunderstorm again -- & I am writing in my own room! --

Pen's heart is the very dearest -- & I must say we are really daily making great progress. In looking back-- one two three four weeks --it is not the same thing--

I am (when I can make up my mind to put self--my sense of fairness, & judgment in practical things-- &c &c out of my mind completely,) very, very, happy, but it will have to be with great patience and courage & pluck indomitable, & I feel sure I shall win in the end--I am doing so--& have already gained a great deal-- My faith went entirely for a long time --days & days last week. I was so miserable & desperate & over sensitive--But Monday was a Red letter day from darkness to light--after hours of misery up to noon! & I couldn't go to ch at all--I went to the Church meeting on Monday at which Pen presided --& you would have been pleased for yrself as well as for me--he did it all so nicely & got on so well--He gets on splendidly (as I told you with Mr Christie -- Mr Woods was there-- Mr. Montalba Miss West (?) -- Mme Stefani-- & Mr Brown --one greyhaired gentleman & myself -- Mr Christie Mr Woods & Mr Brown are the new Church Improvement Committee.

Mme Wiel has gone. The Eden's garden I go to often. The Curtis's come here often. Pen went there with his

Aunt to call. I try my best to keep things smooth but it is always an apparent difference. his Aunt & he-- versus--me alone--in conversation Pen & I could & can--when we are alone--get on much more smoothly-- for he & I are much more & want to be socially one. and even when alone it is easier for me. he is getting always nicer and different in this but she tho' a great deal more her old self to me when alone with me before anybody. The Kenyons or anybody talks about everything and people and things as apart and separate from me.

When his Aunt dies Pen will realize more how I love him, & always have & will need me & lean on me more. Nothing but prayer can help me in these ten thousand little difficulties.

Everything cannot come at once, my greatest fault is impatience. Because I can come back--& long to take up the old threads of 6 yrs ago where I left them only because thro' superhuman means of grace my cross & pain & suffering has made me better able to do this--his has both [illegible] & emphasized his faults, my faults are less strong while (at the same time his other really very, very, sweet & loveable side he is showing to me more & more.--It is when anybody--or anything my opinion or ideas of mine clashes with his &

oh I am so entirely & absolutely effacing my own wishes & everything for the sake of peace--& do talk very quietly--& gently when I must about my money affairs & that I ought to spend only so & so much a month to come out right at the end of the 7 mos. from June 1st my available income is so small!--& I am far too far ahead in it. I read a long business letter--on Sunday with all details of all that can be had in 1898, a great deal of trouble my business friends like to keep me from worrying & to have me completely understand my financial situation & still I have to do what Pen wants me to do, & have things his way and tho' he suggested my going away to economize in the hot weather middle or end of June--& then come back here again when I have friends here in the Autumn & go away in the winter. I can never afford to warm this place, he says so himself--or want not to be either with him or alone--& never off on my own hook again I told him I didn't--so he proposes coming to me of his own accord. When he went away yesterday he saw & then I felt badly tho' I am sure being a short time alone is good for me--tho; I just long to be alone with him here--I know, now not at first that is what we need. He was too human at first--now he is so much less so! I never was--only hurt & hysterical--I am going to give our ball room for a Concert next

Thursday. Mrs. Eden & Dr. Van Someran both want it & it is to keep a young Eng girl aged 29 & her Mother. It is just exactly what I need--some work for someone else--& the very thought has already done me good. She came to see me this afternoon & I am to have no trouble at all about it--but of course I shall do all I can--& love to do so / in selling tickets &c &c. She gave a very successful concert in [illegible] & brought letters.

I have been to see the Countess Canevaro (?) & she was so kind & will come today with her sister--I was in--& enjoyed her visit so much. When alone with people I am so my brightest & best & most natural self When with the family I feel squashed & nobody & nothing --tho' I try to be perfectly natural--& put myself in the background.

You have seen little or nothing of them in all these years --but they have been phalanxed by old & new Browning adorers.

I mean English people who to shew their sympathy for them, in what they considered a great trouble (my going away -) have made them much a centre & so self centred--Pen also. Next at the table no topic of conversation has come up but Browning. All reminiscences

of the past by Aunt S she never speaks of or to me as if I was one of them but an outsider! It is strange this form of the trial I never imagined.

Pen said yesterday it was very necessary his Aunt should come down now & again & to be kept in touch with me.

I never was--or couldn't be nicer or sweeter to anyone than to her. Since the visitors left she has been much nicer--& it was lovely yesterday on going away--I should no more dream of speaking to her on the subject of the past or any worries, than I should dream of flying. But she has been most nice about my health & [illegible] me to give up in these last 10 days when very tired--& not keep up for the Kenyons sake--

But all that is over & now I am happy--happier than anytime--very hopeful--& tho' some difficulties may settle themselves I must cultivate more faith-- & patience & get more & more pluck & courage. It is with a great object in view this present life of mine with its wear & tear & strain & when my health is better--which when I am getting happier it will be--& must be with time--I dare say this all will seem a

dream & I shall be so glad & thankful I undertook the task--with very much love your loving

Fannie

We all three called on the Montalbas together-- my first visit--to them --& Pen & Aunt S had seen nothing of them in years.

They --Pen & his Aunt-- naturally want to call & be again friends with all the people who call here, & are nice to me. I like the social duty part, it is thoroughly distracting.--

I meant to write a note, & have written a volume!!--

Thanks a thousand times for the little heart.

Lady Kenmare is at the Curtis's. How I wish you were here! I have lots to occupy me & many friends. Really dear Lady Layard, it is all every day now easier.

[(1899), June 16]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico, Venice]

Palazzo Rezzonico

Venice June 16

Dearest Lady Layard,

One short line to say how I was getting on! I cannot begin to tell you how wonderfully & beautifully things have been going ever since this month began-- Providence is very very good to me --In 6 months I could never have dreamed that things would have got on as far as they have now -- 6 weeks tonight!

We had a concert in the Ball Room on the 1st -- & that was the means of keeping me in my work. -- wonderfully.--

Pen was so happy & has been only sweeter & sweeter & dearer & more dear ever since!--

I worked hard for one week -- & then collapsed as my troubles came on at once (in 3 weeks time) & one hell week only!!! I have had a terrifying siege & have been

in my room 11 days in bed 9 -- now its over & today for the first I am wholly without pain, & feel myself. I hope I shall have a free & well fortnight at least--

First one good thing to do & interest my self in has come after the other.

A Jewish friend from N.Y. has been with me a fortnight. She is going to be married to an American here-- in this house whom I also knew and also his people -- & isn't it beautiful -- of her own accord she was baptized here in my bedroom on Monday by Mr Christie. She is delighted with him & he with her. & she has had such nice talks with him. Everyone likes him -- we all do. Pen also -- very much -- He was here yesterday to tea Thrs too. They are coming to the wedding when it can be arranged--

The civil formalities have been so much trouble. Everyone in Venice has been so dear to me. Everyone -- & I cannot tell you -- how even I am -- Of course there is much, much that can only come with time -- But to have got Pen into the frame of mind he is thro' love & what God has helped me to be & to do, is so so much. I have had Pen here twice for two days -- for two days each time, alone without his Aunt. When we were alone it all came so right. I knew it would. He says he is very happy! I wish you here. Regina came & brought me some flowers!

Goodbye for today. I am full of occupations -- house--
selling linen & social things! Dear Lady Layard Oh! it
is so worth now all that suffering & pain.

Yr loving friend

Fannie Browning

My friend asked to come -- so insists on paying me for
food! I have arranged "Il Cottino" & am much more
satisfied -- Mrs Eden is sweet & good to me--

[(1899), August 3]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel des Alpes, Belluno]

Hotel Des Alpes

Belluno. Aug. 3rd

Dearest Lady Layard;

Your kind dear letter has just come.

I think you are very good to suggest my joining you in Switzerland, but it is not possible -- I am so glad you saw Mrs Curtis. It is so much greater a satisfaction for me to have had her see you, & tell you about things, than to write -- for only those who are on the spot, (at Venice) & can see just how wonderfully & beautifully I have been helped to gain ground -- in my life & work -- (morally, with so much against me, in these last three months can quite understand everything.

I came up here last eveg from Asolo, for a little while with Miss Browning. I think she is delighted to have the change. She seemed so pleased at my suggesting it; & this morning when we went out early directly after breakfast to walk around the square, & looked in at the

shop windows, it was quite pathetic to see her pleasure. I stopped over 2 days & nights at Asolo, this last time-- & I cannot tell you how I love being there, & having beautiful drives with my husband of an eveg from 6:30-- or 7. till dinner time & then dining out in the courtyard.

I have to sleep in their spare-room, which they say is to be mine, but it means that any friends of theirs must come, when I am in Venice, and I must-- (shall do so later on) having a very nice room upstairs which has 2 beds in it, for my own--or at least going there, & putting friends of mine, in the spareroom, when I bring anyone up from Venice. The lace school for which I am working most successfully (& it is such a pleasure to both Pen & myself) my success I mean--I think interesting & then the Studio-- ("The Torricella") in that heavenly garden-- & with those views is a gem-- & no mistake. He is deep in a statue.

We had 2 days in Venice-- quite alone-- Sat eveg he came down, & he went up to Asolo Mon. eveg-- & he seems always so particularly happy when there with me now. Last week I was very very ill-- with my regular trouble. & The great heat & mousquitoes [sic]-- No sleep at night scarcely-- & the thermometer 81. at midnight-- in my huge bedrooms, All combined to make me decide to keep away all of August. Just at present my plans are unsettled rather--

for I want my doctor fr New York -- to come & meet me in the Tyrol if he can; he is leaving Karlsbad in a few days for the North, but I hope he can. He is an old & dear friend of all my people & myself; so I know he will if possible.

I shall let you hear results later. My health is a great handicap -- Morally I am going on slowly but I must surely, & now since I have done everything that my husband & his Aunt -- for he identifies himself with her, & not with me (but that is getting always better, & will be quite right with time) felt was necessary to set themselves right in the eyes of the world -- when I determined to go to Asolo. It is all our lives together -- so entirely peaceful and natural -- & I am feeling entirely now as if it must come all right -- all around -- with time & patience. Self & feelings have entirely been sacrificed on my side -- & his love for me & gratitude is very real I know. -- I am very sorry that you haven't been at yr best, & need Plombieres -- but am thankful dear friend that you are wisely taking care of yr health. Switzerland will do you great good.

The reason I want to be able both with health enough & money enough to be part of the scene in Venice -- is that socially, coming in contact with people -- is what my husband needs, in addition to his healthy life & work in Asolo.

My efforts so far have been so successful -- & have worked wonders! I was up here a fortnight ago -- & saw both the Edens & Wiels, both always so kind & dear to me. I love them so -- Mrs Eden & Mme Wiel. This latter comes particularly close to me in deeper things.

With true love & thanking you so much dearest for your kind thought of asking me to join you, I am always
yrs

Lovingly

Fannie Browning.

[(1899), Aug. 9]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Hotel des Alpes, Belluno]

Hotel des Alpes

Belluno. Aug 9th

Dearest Lady Layard;

I have just got your letter, & thank you very much for all you say kind & sympathetic. I think I ought to tell you myself-- just how matters stand as regards my health, for whether you think & feel as I do about things or not, that makes no matter.

There are some situations & things that no one but oneself can judge about-- as we too well know, you & I, in moral things, and as these last months have proved.

The way I am going on now-- ought to be bettered if possible-- It handicaps me wholly morally in my work. My life work, & what I came back to accomplish & also to fulfil [sic] my life.-- I have every 3 weeks a terrible amount of physical suffering, & of course as those parts of one's body are so closely connected with the nerves--

& one's mental life, & mine have had so much strain-- since my return (more than oh-- any previous time in my whole life) of course -- dread it actually.

That in addition to the local trouble has added to it, & I also have acute neuralgia at those times. I was nearly crazy with my last attack, week before last in Venice. Well! Then after that week, (one attack end of May I was 10 days so bad, & off my feet & 14 days upstairs--) I have a bright happy week-- especially if, as I have had, I can get Pen alone with me in Venice for 3 or 4 days.

This last time he came down on Sat eveg. & I had been in bed from the previous Sunday (so awfully bad) & one hour only before he arrived I was up and dressed, & back (?) had acute local neuralgia & couldn't stand up for two days. Then Sunday & Monday I went about & was so happy with him. We went on the Monday eveg. to Asolo & Wednesday evening I left Asolo with Miss Browning to come up here. All this one week here, I have had premonitory symptoms that next week the illness is coming on again-- & great depression, which I have tremendously hard on principle been fighting against & have pain also. Now it comes to this one week only I am well-- & the other two handicapped decidedly.

The operation (which was only stretching may have done a little good, for one time no twice once in the hospital -- & once in Venice I had no pain -- since then I've been as bad & 3 times, worse than ever! I didn't-- at all know for sure it would give me permanent relief. Playfair didn't say it would-- I asked him to do it-- & it is a thing I've known people to have had done as many as a dozen & 15 times, & at the last they have had to resort to a regular operation. -- Now, my feelings on the subject is this! -- & still as I have started out on the road of self sacrifice, & no moral difficulties small or great have turned me aside so far & are not turning me now I am willing to go on suffering but I feel I ought to try & get in a better condition of health, especially as this sort of thing can go on 5 or 6 years or perhaps longer!

I personally feel I have only my husband's wishes to consider, & would not & could not go against them if he disapproved of any operation. for in principle he does, except to save life, he says. All he says is very reasonable fr his point of view. Lots of people do. Lots of Doctors do. Others like myself & like many women friends I have feel that under certain circumstances, and for high moral reasons, even at a risk of life, especially very slight risks -- such things

operations are right to better matters. To me, now if I had no one to consider--if the best & highest authority (medical) decided-- for the reasons I have in mind only, that an operation was necessary, I should have it done the next day, & be willing if God willed to die-- for I somehow feel as if now, I had done all I had it in my powers to do. I have now & am winning back my husband's heart to mine, with great things against me even still, & this health does so tell against my efforts & goodwill!

Yes! I do want to see Dr. Polk--my old family friend & physician, & I hope to catch him somewhere when he comes back to the Continent--or by 25th-- & to have him meet Van Someren--who will have the looking after me generally straight along during these tiresome years. He, Polk is a specialist--besides a general doctor & quite at the top of the heap, & is 60 yrs old, & was first like Van Someren 20 yrs ago, at his age when we first had him up to date, & belonging to the advanced school everyway. As they both know me, & the circumstances of my life at present, & as Dr. Van Someren has tided me over & thro' very dark deep waters in all my fight these past months (as only a good, high minded strong & religious man could, who is one's Doctor. I feel somehow that between them, they could think of something to help even if no operation were necessary, which I'm

sure for every reason, I don't long for I assure you!!
Miss Browning likes it very much here but she will never
be wholly as she was to me.--Her hardness & bitterness
& assertiveness--against me & mine; it comes out all
the time & separating herself & not wanting to acknowledge
or see I am entirely one with Pen & her. I have to have
the mere mention of my cousins--casually to be received
by her looking down in her lap--& silence. As to my
sisters--or any friends of mine they used to know &
like & who liked them. I don't dare to speak of them!--
but--I have to have all. I am cut off from mentioning
them. Pen & I fear my enemies & the people who now make
trouble talked of all for a long time to come for leaving
anything much to do with them. I have tried; & do try
so hard here but sometimes I am "flabbergasted" by the
result! I won a splendid victory here, tho' the other
evening. When she broke forth vehemently against Mrs
Hulton said she had dragged their name in the mud &c &c &c
& I said quietly just what I thought that it was not
worthwhile to have any feeling against anybody anymore.
That certainly I had proved that I had none since I had
done all I had been asked to do--& that my feelings had
entirely been crushed out of sight! She at once gave in,
& changed her tone of mind.

Pen is so just, at least about that. Of course because he is in love with me. He knows & feels after my complete setting aside of self, resting on my own womanly dignity & as one with him: to completely satisfy him--& his Aunt whom he also made me feel as well as himself I had & was injuring--& doing all they wanted out of love for him, he--I say--now never says a hard horrid thing about a soul, friends or relatives of mine or anybody! He knows I have the "whip handle" of the situation thro' the superior moral position I hold in my relations to them & the situation.--& he is wonderfully now back to me by that. God bless him!-- But--his old Aunt has not the really sweet side of his nature for with all the grandfather & oh! but it was him almost risen f. the grave that first 3 or 4 weeks!-- he has much of his mother in him--if I live, with time & patience all the impediments will be removed but it is all the more credit to have so much against you. I suppose if one really wins at the end!--I have often hours of great & deep joy & peace in my faith--& sense of all God's love is, & my husband's love too. & His gifts of so many good helpful dear kind friends near & far away to encourage & help one on. It is a difficult position I have taken up willingly for the sake of someone I love--& of course entails

entire sacrifice of feelings sometimes--very often,
I think it is a privilege the result is so so worthwhile--
then my health pulls me down & the depressing shorter
times must be fought. I will let you know how things
turn out about meeting my old Doctor.

Lovingly

& gratefully

always

Fannie

[(1899, Aug. 25]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Asolo, Veneto]

Asolo, Veneto

Aug. 25th

Dearest Lady Layard,

I am sending you just a word to day, to let you know that I have decided not to go to Paris, to see my Dr.-- Dr. Polk from New York, & have a consultation, altho' I have heard from him & Dr_ van Someren that I could meet them both there on the 31st. When I brought up the subject, & had a conversation here, with Pen about it the other day & knew how he felt about it all, the whole subject of my health & realized how infinitely more worthwhile it was (rather than that there should be any more grievances as regards my health & my seeing doctors (all such nonsense really) to go on patiently & suffer until time & nature give me relief. All he feels about any operation I can quite understand & see & feel in a measure he is right. Any how, my way & I always now take the lowest place & that is as it should be!

I am going probably to Venice next week about the first of the month, & will have been here this time 2 1/2 weeks.

I took a long walk early this am at least an hour & a half walk, on such a beautiful hill-- that Pen bought this spring!!!

I am going on Sunday up to Feltre to see the Montalbas. I miss Mrs Eden & Mme Wiel very much, but I am quite content & happy with things as they are! It is the only way.

Yr very loving friend

Fannie Browning

[(1899) Aug. 28]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo]

Asolo (Veneto) Italy.

Aug. 28th. Monday

Dearest Lady Layard,

This is simply a word to say that I sent you a letter--(my last) to Plombieres--written on the 25th. I hope it will be forwarded--

Yesterday I had a long & very happy day with the Montalbas going over for the day to Feltre & spending it with them.

We talked much of you, & yr ears probably were burning a great deal all day!--

I went alone--as Pen was not very well, & he came & met me in the eveg. at Corumda, & drove me home & we had dinner together.

It was a great pleasure to have a friend again to talk to--here of course I have no-one.

I had something bright--& new--& from outside to bring back to the family, & so I feel much the better for

it. I shall go back to the Rezzonico Wednesday or Thursday this week.

Thank you so immensely for this yr last letter.

You are so dear & good, & I am indeed looking forward to having you back.

I shall I hope have settled all my things & furniture before then. As I wrote you, since my suffering illness here & for other reasons Aunt S. is absolutely sweet, & not one bit horrid in manner to me any more. Oh! I can tell you what I can't write: What real victories This charity has won for me. I see it every day. It is to me perfectly beautiful!! For ten times the pain I wouldn't have, not been convinced of all that the power of the love of Christ His strength can accomplish! As I've told you over & over--never be anything but glad, that God led you to me. It is the most worthwhile life. I've been led up to yet, tho' my will is thwarted all the time. It is for a greater satisfaction than perfect earthly happiness.

Yr loving

Fannie

[(1899 Sept,) Monday morning]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Palazzo Rezzonico]

Palazzo Rezzonico Venice

Monday morning

Dearest Enid;

I have only the best possible report to give you of myself--for I had a most happy & most enjoyable visit & they wanted me to stay on & so I did, & came back last eveg. I had 3 drives with Pen with the ponies, some delicious walks with him too--save the serpent modelled & altogether Aunt S. & Mrs Morrison were as nice as possible to me. They were pleased at my offering to go up & see her I know.

Pen was really devoted & seemed more pleased to see me than I ever remember in these 6 months past anyway, saying it seemed such ages since he had seen me!! You will be glad I know. I am going up on Thursday until Saturday night so I've arranged (& take the two American ladies who go to the Inn, and sat at our house) as they are most anxious to see Asolo, & as they know friends of mine, (old

family ones--& special ones of my own in America. I want them to go. I hear Pen is coming to Venice for a short visit, & later (soon) for a longer one, & he is delighted about yr going to teach them the Plombieres. They have already begun some of the kind, but nothing so handsome. Our visit must come off later. Today I am going to the Lido, & have a long standing engagement for tonight at home, but can I lunch with you tomorrow & ask for only a beef steak.

Yr loving

Fannie

*I dated this letter Sept. as Fannie referred to "these six months past" and she and Pen had been together since April.

[1899, Dec. 10, Sunday]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Asolo]

Asolo (Veneto)
Sunday Dec. 10th 99

Dearest Enid,

When yr servants go to London on the Thursday before Xmas I want my little English maid to go with them. I wish you would be good enough to get me her 2nd class ticket thro' to London at Cooks, if you do for your own household.

I could not manage to have her here under any circumstances, so I gave up having her stay with me, rather than have any excuse for not being here & staying on myself.

Things have been made very difficult for both me & her. She saw thro' it all shortly after she got here, & as she only has my interests at heart, she suggested my parting with her, which completely disarmed my husband, as he never thought I would give her up. Knowing she was my confidential one & to be trusted servant. When I told him she thought she could be of no more use to me he was

very angry. I quietly kept to my purpose & was firm--In many other ways, my orders & wishes expressed to him & thro' him have been entirely countermanded by him!! This is a hard fight at the beginning of this new chapter. Pray for me. Seal yr letters if you write, address Mrs. R. Barrett Browning. Two of my letters to him saying all my business things he says he never got. I've been laid up 1 1/2 days with old pain. Now I'm well. Outwardly all going smooth underneath I feel as if I was on a volcano! The servants in his confidence against me. Now it has been proved! He couldn't get Mary over so he made it impossible for her to stay. I will write more tomorrow. She went to Venice to day.

Yrs lovingly

Fannie

[(1899) Dec. 11]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo]

Asolo (Veneto)

Monday Dec. 10*

Dearest Enid;

I got yr list of things for the sick & wounded this a.m. I thought you proposed the other day that I should ask them to work for the Refugees. I've written to Mrs. Biddness for a detailed list of what they R's need.

Things are better with me to day. He has never men-
tioned Mary's name to me. I have been bright, & gone straight ahead, & he & his Aunt have been markedly & pointedly kind in many little ways. I read the papers, & enter into all the Italian conversation, & am heart & soul & body too (freezing in the house, but comfortable when out walking) throwing myself in all his life & surrounding & being just as he is with every one, model & all. The girl at the studio who sat for the "Eve" & now is sitting for a bust. She is a cousin of two of our servants! Oh! there is nothing like a tremendous pulling of

oneself together & trusting wholly in God's strength. It never can fail one. I'm sure of that! I am full of work, & am now quite well again.

yr loving

Fannie

Please tell me what train & on what day yr servants go.

*This letter was actually written on the 11th.

[1899, Dec. 12th]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Asolo]

Dec. 12th 1899

Asolo (Veneto)

Dear Enid; I was at the school this morning & saw yr piece of work. It was finished all but the long side of the hemstitched which I was not quite sure if you wanted done or no. But I think you did, so it will be done by tomorrow & will go down by post with the 2 yds of linen, & your little frame (?) & the doylies (?)--The teacher had just that pulled work design that is on the white doylie (with white silk Embdy) in our coarser work, but it is not pretty, & the Oriental ones are far beyond them, & as fine work is not in our line I am doubtful if I can get the pocket handchfs done.

Anyhow she is going to try & get a girl to copy off of each (1. corner--of the 3 you gave me) & if I can get some done I feel sure I could use them. The piece of work you did the other night is very possible & will be

done at once. Another snow storm to-day--but it is less cold perhaps--I am never warm. The sala thermometer is 38 Fahrenheit with a nice large stove in it unlit!-- in the tiny sitting room there is another stove unlit!! In the dining room we have no fire! for breakfast but in the farthest little salon an open wood fire & a fire for dinner at 7:30 in the dining room! In my own room, as it is North I have a fire all the time; Pen freezes in his room of a morning dressing & won't have a fire. Before I went away in /93 he had it lit an hour before he went up there to dress.

I get up at 7.30 & manage very well indeed with no maid having my boots & dress brushed & done for me by my own kitchen maid, whom Pen insists upon keeping on. He is very Italian as regards the fires! & many other things when you write me as you do & say what you do to me. I don't know whether to laugh or feel badly (cry) for you could never be in my shoes. Your nature & temperament could never meet Pen's peculiar one peculiar treatment of & relations to me, go thro' it & manage as I do & be as philosophical & not to be gainsaid for my high ideal or difficult life--& path--& if I did one bit--as you propose--I should have been a dead failure--& made a dead failure of it long ago, & this week would have clinched the failure. Here I am beset

& gone throwing myself into his utterly unique bohemianism & go straight ahead asking & getting nothing that a wife should have but being awfully bright & natural & interesting myself in every detail of his life & work & being a good companion to him. You say "don't dwell on things," as if I did ever! The all perplexing, mysterious atmosphere I came into last Wednesday, & only cleared yesterday a.m. a little. I've been so busy, devote myself to regular duties--am ready to pour tea at 4.30 every day for Miss B. in the sitting room, & yesterday was up at the studio for ages with Pen looking at his statue in the plaster, & he explaining to me lots about its various points, all of which I enjoyed.

After tea, I went out at 1/4 to 6 for a walk, & went to see the old woman (a former friend of the Inn, also went to the school, but the teacher was out--Pen heard I had gone there, & came to fetch me to walk home together, but I had gone & I accidentally went to the chemists & found him chatting with the clerk--so we did walk home by moonlight together. Then I knit a good deal & read (light reading now for distracting) to do me good.

I tell you all this to shew you that I am gaining--but you must surely feel--even if you don't want to let me know you do, which I'd a great deal rather you would!

That it's a pretty hard thing for me to have proved that Pen "put up" the servants being so different to both my maid & myself, & has made them his confidantes against myself! Whatever becomes of me ultimately. I must by superhuman means win him over to other methods. I can't be underhand, but I can't trust him his actions all the time shew me that, yet I must treat him as if I could. I have nothing to hide, so his not having been able to make my Mary like the Italian servants in relation to him won't hurt me! I feel so unsafe, for before my good actions & motives were turned against me & may be again. I cannot exasperate him by being anything but what I am now here, a tolerated individual whom in his better moments he respects. This is all far harder than in the summer after the first weeks. But I'm so far well & strong & happy enough outwardly, & have plenty to do.

yrs ever lovingly

Fannie

You must never worry about me. Nothing nobody could turn me aside now!!!

[(1900, January)]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca' Capello]

Ca' Capello

Sunday

Dearest Enid,

I got back on Friday evening -- rather the worse for wear from strain. Altho there was no scene & I was treated like a Queen Regent for the first 24 hrs or so by both Pen & his Aunt. I packed up everything -- books & all -- & shall not need to go there again soon -- I had some fearfully unhappy times & mentally the suffering (as well as morally) was dreadful. Since I broke down in private completely.

The thing that's so cruel in him is, that knowing that by being a certain kind of himself he gains my love for him -- he once cajoled & petted me -- & called me by his pet name for me (making me feel as if I could throw my arms around his neck) & which of course my own dignity & self respect under the circumstances I cannot

do! So as nothing is gained by my being there or going there except to further his ideas & ways & it only does my nerves & health harm. He says he is coming down "on business soon"--& I am very curious to see if he will go to the Rezzonico or come here?! It seems that there is a very good reason for my photographs being absent from the Asolo home! They are not allowed out!!! Many of her's are put away each time before I come--or came!!! Think of it--a man from London named Hall Griffin who lectures & does photos & lantern slides to illustrate his Lectures on Browning for the University Extension in England--happened to go up in the same train & compartment with me--neither of us of course knowing each other!--Then we met at ten at Pen's it was very funny & we recognized each other! Having him there helped me on in acting my part--better. He went to see G. [Ginevra]. I know one afternoon--as he had asked me which was the road to Castelaneco--& he sent her a wedding present this spring--He stayed with Pen--when she was there 2 years ago--He seems a very nice man--but evidently (tho') awfully nice to me--accepts the other thing too--because of the name--& because Pen can be so charming & lovely as he was as a host to him. He has done another statue--of course only a statuette

in the past month. A 'aifnean' the same model-- very graceful & pretty as a statuette--but I do not think I should care for it life size. He is arranging a large studio-- at the Belvedere-- (the [illeg] h. house that was) for doing this thing in marble-- so that's all right-- his having more & more keeping him there. Do you know dear Enid-- since I have my Father's portrait hung up here-- & only photographs & things around associated with happiness & peace-- I am already better. You can never know dear Friend how grateful I am for being here-- under yr roof-- peaceful-- not lonely-- first because the Highest Peace is with me-- & my friends here whom I love-- & are so much help & comfort. The Edens & Mrs Curtis & Mme Wiel & the Doctor. All of them are so thankful with & for me-- No doubt it has had a splendid effect in Asolo! The Dr is back-- & at Kitty Neuman's case, & went yesterday & today. He is very particular with the Anglo Saxon thoroughness-- & wants her temperature taken at night too-- & as Mrs Neuman doesn't hurt herself to do the counting, Mary & I are just starting off for the Institute for Mary to take the temperature. I couldn't get to see the N's yesterday as I was too busy all day-- so am going now. I shall push on the guild work. Oh! how sad that Lord Dufferin's son

has died of his wound. Wasn't the affair at Ladysmith splendid as regards the fighting of our men!--

Dear Enid I must stop & go now--to the Institute--not a ship is in--so there is no service tonight. Mr Douglas preached well--came to the practice--& he had 2 collects afterwards. The Dr came & sang--he has a very nice tenor voice & Mme Wiel played & altogether the choir was good today. I had the two Hulton children with me for lunch & all.

The afternoon--The Meistersinger was only divine--in my estimation the music finest last eveg. I was so depressed & sad & the music took me way up and comforted me.

Yr. ever loving and grateful
friend
Fannie

[1900, January 17th]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Ca Capello, Venice]

Ca Capello,
Jan. 17th -- 1900

Dearest Enid--

I wired you to day to send me an Adams Code -- I have a cable from New York from Mr Huntington in ciphers, as it seems he sent 2 copies of Adams code on Aug 31st which I never got -- I have had a pack of papers of accts & a long business letter explaining them all of it quite clear & to be seen just how bad a year we've had and being now nearly £ 300 in debt to my principle -- I shall have to sell a Bond as I am leaning on my Sister Marie financially, which she can ill afford -- As soon as Mr Huntington gets my letter -- & the bond is sold, he is to send me £ 200 -- & I will then repay you yr kind loan of 100. Our losses have been terriffic [sic] but on the whole he & my sister's brains have improved the condition of affairs. He writes me such a splendid letter privately -- you would approve of every word.

[(1900, January), 21st, Sunday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello, So. Polo, Venice]

Sunday 21st

Ca 'Capello S. Polo Venice

Dearest Enid--yrs of the 19th has come this afternoon. As I have not any wire fr you yesterday, I suppose Bumpus could get the Adams Code. I am sorry to have had to give you all this trouble.

Thank you dear Friend, for your generous & most kind offer in the money matter. You are very dear to say what you did, & I appreciate it. I assure you--But as I have been given money to spend, besides your £100-- of my Sister Marie's, some of her nest egg & she is nearly as crippled as I am thro' small income this year. I don't want to lean on her financially so I have to sell the Bond to repay her anyway. I mean to live on just so little as possible this year, & spend just so little to pay back into my principle acct. The £280 about I've taken beyond my income. The income was very

much less on acct of our fearfully increased taxation than ever we expected. What do you think? I had a turn last eveg, when old Antonio turned up as usual, & said Carolina (his niece) had arrived fr Asolo & that Pen was coming down on Monday or soon! & that she had come to get the sitting room & his room ready in the Rezzonico!!!! He was going to stay 2 or 3 days on business, & then going to Florence. So you see my crisis is very near! So the world & in my own estimation of course means he knows yr taking me in here was not only all on acct of the cold!!!* I am so thankful he didn't come here! I think of course now & even if this hadn't happened my position is untenable not one thing or the other. So when he comes here to see me I am going to speak to him purely about the money question. Tell him that my last year's accts have come in, & that from what I've said to him, before, he will not be surprised to hear that I've so overdrawn my income as to be very pinched now, & that it is absolutely necessary for me to live as I am able to. That I shall like a small apartment & live very cheaply with 2 women servants. That as I cannot afford to pay English wages I have given Mary notice, & she leaves me soon. (which is Tues on the 19th**). I shan't tell him that I'm

going to get an unfurnished apartment for not more than 1,000 francs, & furnish it from furniture in the Rezzonico unless he asks me. Also that I'm glad he came to V. for I was going to write & tell him I positively could not go on with the 150 frcs at the Rezzonico any longer--If he gets angry I mean to be positively cool & firm & not loose [sic] my head or self control. I shall say to him as he doesn't and has not given me anything to live however moderately in the R. there is nothing else left for me to do. If he mentions Asolo I shall say very quietly "you know as well as I do Pen that is no home for me." We have proved that! Later soon it is necessary for him to have more said him I must put it in black & white, & ask you to write to him & enclose it, & it will be finished. I am putting on my armour by a great deal of prayer & a determination not to allow any emotions or feelings to come into the question. He has traded on them straight ahead, as we've seen all these months, as he did before. My strength will be in my making myself do the right thing now, & that he has proved himself wholly unworthy of my going any farther, in attempting an impossible position to maintain!--I think Mr. Huntington's letter so excellent I send it to you to read at yr leisure. My Sister is very anxious about all this trouble

upsetting my nerves again, so the good kind Dr is going to write to her & assure her how strong I am. Of course as she & I think so differently now as she says on so many things it is very hard to write & she is to know all, not very great details as like my having been forced to receive G. [Ginevra]. That's no good! She wrote the other day she was thankful I had an English man for a doctor as she loathes all Italians from all the 6 yrs ago experience. It seems Pen gave the old one in A. a big fee to say that I was crazy last time, & he kept spreading that report tho' he wrote to my lawyers that he wasn't responsible for the report getting about. Oh! Carolina came to me this a.m. & said the Signore had told her he wanted either Glorianna or Emilio & one boat for the days he was in V. [Venice]. I said I had nothing more to do with either of them & had paid them till April!--She said yes she knew, but that it was for his conto. I told her to speak with Antonio. I had nothing to do with them. I wouldn't dream of going out with either of them in either boat so providentially I've a nasty cold in my head, & must stay indoors for several days. A blessing in disguise. I've been trying to cure it myself, but was so seedy this afternoon I got the Dr to give me something. I expect to be ill any day (laid up now) so I shan't have to go out. I must

stop now. Goodnight. I send you yr little cloth.
You have paid for it you know.

Ever yr loving friend

Fannie

I will keep you posted. Don't worry.--I shall get
thro' it!

*Lady Layard made the following note after the word
cold in the middle of the second page:

*I did take her in entirely on acct of the cold at
Pal Rezzonico

Enid Layard

**The 19th was a Monday.

[1900, Jan. 25]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo

Venice

Jan 25th 1900

Dearest Enid--

This afternoon past brought me the Adams Code-- & I have deciphered my cable.

It was what I supposed-- Mr Huntington wanted me to do--To write myself particulars to my Sister by the first mail-- & that he had done as I wished-- viz told her what I had written to him. This I did a week ago on getting this cable--so I can think of her, poor child! For 2 or 3 days as less anxious about my welfare & knowing more-- as she says, & looking at things from her point of view-- for me to be 3000 miles away & walking on the edge of a precipice & with her opinion of what Pen is capable of-- (& of course her opinion is true) She can imagine all possible & impossible things.-- I read your letter yesterday with the cheque & bills--but as I've been in bed &

suffered badly 2 days & nights, I've not been able to write till now. I will with pleasure pay the bills, & keep the receipts for you. The little Union Jack is dear. We will make some here. I hope the bale has arrived. If you have it still could you send me the list I gave you with the lot you took away--

I am going to get up tomorrow, & go into the sitting room. Do you believe this is Thursday eveg. & Pen hasn't come down to Venice yet, I verily believe!!! between us, that he sent Carolina down as a "feeler," to see if I wouldn't write & ask him to come here-- & that he will go straight to Florence fr Asolo-- I told you about the message he sent me thro' Carolina, about the gondoliers!! Anyhow if he had come in these last 4 days I was too sufferingly ill to have spoken to him. I have told Mrs Eden & Mrs Curtis not to come & see me until after he had been-- & dear Thea Wiel only came in yesterday late for a short half hour before dinner because she knew he had not yet come.

The Dr is always the same great moral tower of strength has written such a splendid letter to Marie-- which confirms all I've ever felt as regarded his highmindedness & strong, manly, chivalrous character, & sympathetic friendship for me & my cause. She will be glad to get it & relieved for he assures her about my health

(nerves I mean) & of my position being what it is at present one of womanly dignity. Such, a man friend for a woman in my position is a great thing indeed.-- Goodnight--
I will write again soon

ever yr most loving

Fannie

[(1900), Jan. 28, Sunday evening]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello]

Ca 'Capello

Sunday eveg. 28. Jan.

Dearest Enid;

I have settled now on a plan of action after much serious thought, & consultation & consideration, & I feel sure you will think it as wise as those whose judgment I have for all reasons the greatest respect & feeling for, (of my friends here) I have myself thought a great deal-- about such a vital matter & am much relieved since I've settled to do this.--Not to make any real outward break or separation! Only to start--go on now leading an absolutely independent life from him here in Venice--seeing as little of him as possible--if he comes to see me which I somehow fancy--he won't do--(as he's never come to service at all this week & sent me a letter Thursday wh. I got Friday when I got up & came in here!!!!) I being perfectly cold & indifferent no words or explanations.

I've written him the note about my not going on with Antonio's expenses or anything at the Rezzonico & sent it up to Asolo (he got that yesterday) I made all that very clear & only added that I should "only be able with my very limited income this year to live most economically in a small home of my own here"!!! I won't go to Asolo but thro' the Teacher will keep up my interest in the lace school--pay the money in to Pen thro' her--It is to keep the "world" every where in America Eng wherever we have friends fr talking more than is necessary. In common parlance "not" (a second time) wash our dirty-linen in public"! It will be very hard for me to act this part, but my dignity & self respect will support me, & I can do it! & I can make a life for myself, & inwardly give up my will & way to God. Surrender self to Him & leave it all in His hands, then. I don't undo what I've done since I came back, or put myself in the wrong. I don't give Pen a chance to say I'm "queer", changeable or anything else. He can't say anything if I am simply as independent as he is--for he has shown me that's what he wants, I think, when he sees which way the wind has veered, he'll be very chary of coming to Venice & will try probably thro' others by foul or fair means, to learn things about me. This solicitude for my health in this last letter is too!!!! Oh dear! Oh dear! Well! I'm much happier & relieved.

I feel as if I'd got temporarily out of a high sea where I'd been swimming since weeks & was seeing around me again! It has been splendid, having such serious & practical & valuable help as the Dr has given me from last week. He has thought so much about--& thought out so much--By this When you come home I shall read it to you.

I have heard from my Sister Marie, & she is of course much upset at knowing so little & my writing what she calls "insinuations" instead of "facts" & it nearly drives her mad, my being 3000 miles off!!! Poor child! I am writing her today--in generalities still, for as the Dr says there is nothing gained for her or me by my going too much into detail.

He is such a great help with his high ideal & high mindedness & clear judgment, together with (being a doctor) sympathy for a woman as such & a wife above all--I don't know what I should have done or could do without him. God has been good in giving me the quality of friends as he & Mme Wiel are.

Dearest Enid, I think of you every day in my prayers. My troubles bring me closer & closer to you. I know you feel for me, & I can never never forget all your courage & in taking the step you did. I bless you for it always, remember that, notwithstanding the result. & I love you for it too, for I never can regret it.

I dined at the Hultons last night. Rucellai was there. I told you I had the Hulton children on Sunday--& loved having them.

Pasquale & Regina are so good & kind, & Mary need not leave me till May. As the P. & O. are not taken off till then. Her fathers letter to the "young man" is mere common sense & highmindedness combined & he (Northcote) seems more than everything one could wish. She is not wildly in love, but very appreciative of what she thinks is a good man's affection (having once been badly treated). She is always good to me, & she & Regina & Pasquale are seemingly angelic friends. Goodnight, forgive the egotism of this letter, but I've had a trying day.

Yr ever loving & devoted friend
ever grateful

FBB

Can you send me a roll of dental floss silk? & enquire about the Plombieres lace.

[1900, Feb. 3, Saturday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello, S. Polo]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo.

Saturday Feb 3 1900

Dearest Enid;

I haven't written since I got up last on Wednesday for many reasons. I've had such a deal of extra writing-- business & otherwise that had to be got thro' with. And then I've had things momentous to decide which as you said the other day no one can decide but me. Tho' my friends can help--

I have made an offer for the apartment here in the San Polo, in the Palazzo Tiepolo 1st floor. The one this side of the Wiels. Madame Wiel & I went to look at it, the first time together. She had only heard of it that morning, (one day this week it was I forget now when & she kindly called on the Countess Tiepolo yesterday at 11 by appointment, & as she is a Sister of Conte Lorenzo the owner, & her husband (Tiepolo) goes to Rome on Monday & will see his Brother-in-law he will tell him.

I went to see the agent myself, & he (agent) met us there the next day. They must do several things --(a second W.C.) gas in two or thriceplaces, new kitchen cucina economica. There is dining room &c, & I've said I would give 1.200. (they ask 4.000) Of course they may not accept it. It is so sunny, my bedroom sitting room & dining room all sunny--& two good rooms at the back. One would be a work room, & then the kitchen is in the Mezzonina with a private staircase & several small passages These are where I could have & must have cupboards. Since I have quite determined to live my own life;--the things that follow, no matter what opposition he makes are secondary.

It won't be easy, but I know I am right. I am going to write & tell him (if it's settled, or when I get a place) that I've got it & that I intend taking my furniture just what I need out of the Rezzonico to furnish it!! Of course this one besides being healthy light & airy--is so satisfactory for one being so near you all--you & the Wiels & the Dr & so convenient to the Rialto--& this is the most moderate priced side of the Canal.

As soon as I know anything sure I will tell you. I've a postal fr. my Sister, who is going to write me at length & one fr Mr Huntington (at length). He is so good & sensible & nice & so considerate in his suggestions & ideas always adding that "I only suggest fr yr consideration

what occurs to me--probably it has already been considered by you. And after a decision has once been deliberately made, it usually conduces to peace of mind to consider it as settled beyond re-argument, until new circumstances arise to which the old decision does not apply." It just happens he is right in what he has spoken upon before saying what I've quoted--I have decided to stay on here in Venice, for all the reasons I've told you already. It's a very important thing to keep one's wits about one when in the power as it were of such a cleverly terrible man to deal with as Pen--

We have nothing but rain all the time. Kitty Neuman sits up every day--I got her for you a bottle of port, it cost 5. frcs at Bacelinie's. She is a skeleton her body is. Mrs Eden is ill. It isn't influenza she had a bad cold & cough. The Dr whom I saw a few mts this a. m. says that the cold has gone into something worse. He didn't say what so I didn't ask anything more. Two days ago I went to see her, but the man said she had influenza. They sent for the Dr yesterday. I am just going to walk down to the practice & fetch Mme Wiel first. I shall go to enquire how dear Carry is.* She came out to see me on

Monday, & wasn't fit to.--I think the things are too many
to send by post.

Yrs as ever affectly

Fannie.

*Carry is Caroline Eden.

[1900, Feb. 4, Sunday]
 [From: Fannie Browning]
 [To: Lady Layard]
 [Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello, Sunday
 Feb. 4th 1900
 S. Polo Venice

Dearest Enid, I come home fr church & find yr's of the 2nd. Many thanks for writing when you are so busy. It was only the other morning when I was talking with Mme Wiel (before she went at 11 a.m. to see the Countess Tiepolo up stairs above the apartment I want) & we were facing the whole situation, & we both exclaimed together we wished you were here. For it is I & I only who can take the responsibility of doing the thing--leaving his home the Rezzonico, setting up a separate establishment entirely independently, leading my own life & making one for myself just as irrespective of him, as he has continued & continuous doing of me--& this here in the same place--the best opinion or advise of any friends can never decide (?) that. I emphatically do it. I agree

with the Dr (we sent in for him & we held a conclave over the serious decision for dear Mme Wiel wanted me to realize just what I was doing, which I do,) that since Pen has so decidedly shown me that he wishes me to lead a life quite independent of him (this not only openly & in outward things but by all his moral treatment of me since I am back, in our conversations as regards money, my place under his roof &c &c) & as he has as it were forced me into the position (a most uncomfortable one too) of going out of the P. Rezzonico on account of not having the means to live in it, he not choosing to give me any monetary help, or live there with me, & too plainly showing me he didn't wish for my companionship or living at Asolo, all his deception & doubleness & fickleness & not telling me the truth, & all his selfishness, seem to me to be reason enough dear Enid, for my taking this independent step. I must keep my dignity & self respect. My coming here was the first--his going to the R. while I was here, & you had invited him to come here, should he accepted it. His receiving my last business note in silence & not mentioning it at all.

(that I was going to live in an apartment on my restricted income (for he knows I am into debt on his acct to try & do all I could to please him) also shows plainly I think

that he doesn't dare make a fuss, & can't, for he hasn't-- to use a slang expression a leg to stand on! Now! of course; it remains to be seen whether when I write to him I've taken the apartment, tell him where it is, & that I am going to take my furniture just what little I need & things out of the R. to furnish it & ask him to send me 2 or 3 pieces of curtain material which is in Asolo. (Liberty stuff much needed by me) that I bought in England once--whether he will make a fuss or not--I somehow feel he won't. Anyhow I won't try myself with scenes--or even one scene with him.

I've had enough of them. I'll either very tersely put into as few words as possible & in a note why I've done what I have--or I'll put the words into yr mouth to write to him.

He hasn't got anything to say to me if I do this dear Enid, the Dr says that over & over again. By my staying on here, not saying I won't receive him. (I don't between you & me, & this the Dr also feels having had such unreserved sympathy with my ideal, of doing & trying to be what I've failed in to Pen; win him by love and self sacrifice) cut myself off in case anything happens. That will give me my proper place towards him, an accident or anything, & I won't be going back on my last 10 mos. efforts & life--Do you

see this? This is not for the world to know--only you 2 or 3 who understand me. That's one reason if for no other I would stay here. There are no terms to come to with him! He's done the whole thing himself. I have to live-- & have to have a roof over my head I suppose! as I say, with my money & his selfishness I choose my own life & my own abiding place. Mr Eden & Carry both are very, very much harder on him, & in favor of my taking for more openly decided steps than I am going to, or than was Mme Wiel or the Dr think easiest. They two know me & know most about Pen from me & what it's been these past mos, as do you too, (for I've told you all) & Mrs Eden weeks ago, said to at once not wait till April, now was the time to do it &c &c. That I'd got over my acct's write & tell him I was going to take an apartment and then proceed to take every thing of mine & all I needed out of the house & the sooner I did it the better. No matter what he did or said.

But I shall write & tell him, as I told you before, that he can never say I have been understood. He couldn't possibly say that under any circumstances, I mean to take those rattan tables chairs & sofas out of the ball room, for my sitting room, & my inlaid black & white furniture I brought back from America.

The Curtis's whom I hadn't been to see in a long time I went to yesterday (Sat) at 6, & had a pleasant visit. She took me out in the boat (her gondola) on Wednesday.

She thinks for every reason this place in the S. Polo is perfect. She hasn't seen it yet, but thinks my being so near my friends & it being a nice house, & very moderate. I shall split the difference give 1300. if they won't take 1200. In turning it from American money into Italian paper it amounts to so little in all! I am not worrying over money matters. Mr Huntington in his last letter begs me not to. I shall be as economical as I can. I am so so comfortable here dear Enid. You don't know all it is to me under the circumstances to have the privacy & peace in these rooms putting aside the material comforts which are great.

Now I am going to tell you of a plan of work I mean to carry out if I can, & I don't see why I can't & if Pen objects I can only say to Him there is a great deal in his life I don't approve of, & he does just as he likes so the thing works both ways. Besides, if my life is independent I can do as I like as I would have only the approval of my friends whose opinion was worth anything, & it's a dignified thing to do & would be a tremendous interest to me I am going to undertake it.

It is for 4 mos in the year to take charge of the Nurses Institute Fund, March April May & June so far are they here, & have them (There are never more than 3 at a time out of work) live with me, & let me have the entire charge of the business part of it, & look after the Nurses, as I did the Deaconesses (?) so well, & love that kind of thing, (mine's caring personally to those who work) I think it will be the saving of me, as my work was in N.Y. If I didn't stay here, I should only go to the East end in London. For I never would have the heart to go back to the settlement of Grace Ch. in New York, where I was so happy. They the nurses, are from the Drs Hospital Guy's in London, & Mrs. Burns, Pierpont Morgan's Sister who founded the thing after her daughter's recovery here gave him the first 200 when the Dr nursed her himself & sat up with her several nights, & they consider saved her life, for she was very dangerously ill & I hear she Mrs Burns is coming to Venice tomorrow, so I shall meet her. Her brothers & sisters & Mrs Pierpont Morgan I know. When the fund gets big enough we want to have a regularly established place--& 2 nurses here all the year anyway, & to work among the poor too as well as the rich travellers or tourists. The Dr pays me just what he paid at the [illegible], 32 frcs per month for one large room, (with

3 iron beds (& screens) & 3.50 a day for their board, wine extra, also personal washing. The people apply to me, direct & they are only with me of course when out of work. It was an idea the Dr wrote me about in the summer (only as an human interest for me, when we found how things were ruining after Aug. 1 & when I spoke to Pen about it in letters he got into an awful rage, & I was absolutely calm! & disarmed him entirely, only saying as I was left so much alone here, it would be a great interest, & all my friends would think so. He afterwards was awfully ashamed of himself. I was so at once giving it all up & said we wouldn't speak of it again. Mme Wiel hoped I could do it. Now this time I never thought of it until I saw this nice sized apartment. I could have any friend at other times board with me, & it would be a help in the rent. There is no hurry on their acct to hurry into the apartment, only when the alterations &c &c &c are done, & I get the furniture moved & in place it would be time, nearly April, I have to write to you about other things but am too tired now. I've walked fr the Institute to the school at the Canareggio (?), & was out at ch. this morn at 10.30, & to enquire for Mrs Eden, who is ill but not seriously with a touch of congestion of the lungs. She neglected a cold & bad cough & left going out. She has still

4 or 5 days more to be in bed. She was much better last eveg. Sat. day than in the a.m., & today she was better Kitty Neuman looks like a little child, short hair, clear pink & white cheeks, & 10 yrs younger. They all 3 were glad to see me. I made (?) them quite a visit, & so grateful for the wine. Let me know you get this.

Yr ever loving

Fannie

How engrossing yr work of establishing the officer's homes must be. I am sure we shall win at last. Men & money of course ad libitum. It's splendid to read of the enthusiasm. Tomorrow (Mon) I will send the things. Antonio has found out about their going "paces porlate furmaxis" Mr. Douglas preached a beautiful sermon on sympathy this morning, he goes tonight. Mrs. Churlis (?) returns on Tuesday I believe.

[(1900, Feb. 12 or 13)]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo Venice

Monday

Dearest Enid, I have just got yrs of the 9th also the Balzac. I will attend to yr commision respecting the latter. All thanks for sending me the Punches. I find myself laughing aloud sometimes over some of the children's sayings!--I am glad you think well of the Tiepolo apartment project & nurses. There is very little "actual work" in it for me--as there are only to be very few come over more until one is needed--& never probably more than 3 or 4. They are with me only when out of cases. Mrs. Burns with whom I lunched on Friday had a splendid long talk over it & I also saw her at the station Sat. morning after she had seen the Dr Friday eveg. again & told him all we had settled. She said she had always so much to do with Grays (?) on acct of both her Father & husband--& she would tell Sister

Sarah to be very careful what sort of women she sent out, & the Dr too who is now in London will see her & also impress this upon ladies or as near such as possible-- not that there not being such (as such) would matter to me for I have my own idea as to my relation to them, & have promised Mrs Burns to guard against my weakness & not to "spoil them," & she has impressed this upon me, so I told her I would do my best. If I have no accomplishments or talents my only gift is that of getting on with people human beings as such & if my married life & home life here has been a failure, my work & coming in touch with the numbers & varieties of characters in latter years, indeed always has certainly been a success. I wish you could see the letter I have just read fr the Housemother at the Deaconesses Home I lived at & had charge of one year! I never manage anything or anybody. I only try to keep my right & proper relation to them,--have them keep their's to me. With my own class & kind--as with others in doing any kind of work & to serve & minister to those who work with my heart & hands for their living, or who are poor gives me the greatest possible satisfaction & comfort & solace. It satisfies all my higher self & keeps me & brings me closer to the One whose whole life was the giving of self for others! The very thought of having

this work to do makes my heart ache less. I have been so well these last few weeks & so so busy--today I go to the Hospital. Carry Eden is all right but this a.m. Mme Wiel sends me a note saying she had to go to bed last evening with a sort of internal chill & could not go out with me--Oh! I want to tell you how very good, sympathetic & kind Mrs. Curtis has been, so good. I do love her dearly. I will tell you as I progress with the apartment plan.

*This letter is unsigned.

[(1900, Feb 14]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Lady Layard]
[Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo Venice
Feb. 14th

Dearest Enid,

Just after writing to you last I thought I would speak to Mr Eden about a few things regarding my position legally, if I took the apartment here & got up a different establishment. He felt it would put me in a better position that way, in case Pen made any objection to my taking the furniture out of the Rezzonico to tell him before hand so night before last I sent the enclosed. Mr E. advised not to go into further details by saying where it was, and as you see by my letter to Pen of the 12th it is decided & firm, but not aggressive. You see I had written to him earlier what I intended doing about taking an apartment, but he didn't evidently believe I meant it.

He is taking just the very same tactics he did before, very very much as you & we all at once say like the Boers! He lies entrenched safe, & then pounces down upon me, &

won't come out & have an open talk, & clear the air, & let us know at least where we are! Yesterday p.m. about 5 I got a telegram from Asolo,

"Si prego aspettate la mia lettera. Pen."

& the letter is also here for you to read. He perfectly well sees what I mean & pretends not to, so I think it is I alone who must speak to him very plainly. You can say to him by letter what you feel & want to, but from me he gets my opinion of the situation. I shall not answer his letter at once. I expect to be laid up any day now, & a week from now for him to hear is time enough. He won't come down. This is a crisis that had to come--they are deep waters--think of me.

Yrs ever

Fannie

[1900, Feb. 12]
 [From: Fannie Browning]
 [To: Pen Browning]
 [Ca 'Capello, Venice]

Ca 'Capello Venice
 Feb. 12 1900

No. 1

Copy

Dear Pen,

I want you to have sent down to me those pieces of Liberty Curtain Material that I got in London in /91. When getting the mattings & rugs & things for the Asolo/Torricella house.

I don't know just how many pieces there are, but I remember two at least, entire ones in the linen cupboard. I have made an offer for an apartment which I shall probably succeed in getting, which will suit me & intend to take my furniture for it just what I shall need only out of the Rezzonico.

I am not so situated financially at present to think of buying anything whatsoever but must use what I've already bought.

As you do not live in the Rezzonico, & I cannot possibly ever live there would it not only be a common sense thing for you to sell it? it seems to me! I am very well & walk a great deal, notwithstanding the constant wet weather. I hope you are feeling better by now, & quite free from your gout--

yrs as always

Fannie

[(1900, February)]

[From: Lady Layard

[To: Pen Browning]

Sketch of letter for yr consideration

Dear Mr. Browning

As you know the great interest I have so long taken in Fannie & your happiness, I feel I need not begin by an apology for once more addressing you a few lines on the subject.

You know that just before I left Venice, finding that Fanny was suffering much from the intense cold & discomfort of her own house, I persuaded her to move to mine & to remain on for a while, hoping that you would have gone down to see her & made some arrangements for her comfort. She writes one word that you have not done so & that she has in consequence formed a plan for taking a small apartment in Venice. She also tells me that you object strongly to this scheme. It is very difficult for me at this distance to be of any real use to either of you--but I would be glad if you would let me try to do so.

You must know better than I that Fannie on her own resources cannot afford to keep up the Rezzonico & that

every wife has to look to her husband for her support.
Might I suggest that you should go to Venice & get Fannie
& arrange for you to live in the Mezzanin so that you
would not be at any great expense & that she may be able
to continue all her work in the Sailor's & Nurses Institute
which is such a pleasure & occupation to her.

[fragment]

[1900 Feb 15), Thursday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

['Ca Capello, Venice]

'Ca Capello Venice

Thursday

Dearest Enid;

I am sending this up to the station to go in the 2 o clk train, so I hope you will get it on Saturday by the morning's post.--I have been thro' a very very bad 24 hrs. It is terrible this inward strength. Yesterday when I wrote you I felt that when I did write to Pen, in answer to his letter, a copy of which I sent you, I would enter into the moral question, & tell him all I felt & thought. But after being alone & knitting to keep pace with my thoughts!!! & much praying & thinking I have decided just to stick to outside things, money & since he chooses to lead an independent life, I must too, & in the place & as I think best & wisest in my judgment. Altho' I don't want to see him or let him know or see more than alas! he does already know how his better side touches me, & I must keep my own dignity yet fr him irrevocably in case anything

ever happens at Asolo that my going there might do good. I cannot go back on what I have done & tried to accomplish this last summer. The Dr feels like this too. Let us see if any fruit is to be borne out of the last few mts efforts--dearest Enid I know you are praying for me. It is a great struggle & sorrow. I love being here [illegible] so quietly & peacefully. Mary is a great comfort. She goes on Monday. I only answer Pen's letter after deliberation.

yrs as ever

Fannie

[(1900, February 18), Sunday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca' Capello, Venice]

Ca'Capello

Sunday Venice

Dear Enid,

One line to acknowledge yr last recd on Friday. I have been laid up since that afternoon & couldn't write, till now. I am thankful to say that it's a very easy & painless time -- which is a blessing considering all that's in & on my mind, no poultices required -- & tho' I was awake 3 hrs last night the night before I slept well. Everything is in abeyance, nothing being done, my silence will be good for him! Thursday eveg I found a box of snowdrops & [illegible] under glass Violets (white & purple) addressed to me in his handwriting. I wrote & thanked him & also spoke about having a price list to prospectus printed for the lace school in English, as the people in England ask for one all the time -- & I never mentioned his letter having got it -- A leaf out of his own books. The Dr gets back on Thursday. I fancy at 4.AM -

I have had today a splendid letter from him. I will let you know all I do. & what is decided Thursday. I've not seen Mme. Wiel! I expect she will come in today. Since then we were both very very full of it all! She loves to help me to do the right thing.

Pen does always temporize so. The Dres says today he expects that's what he will do in answer to my letter.

Which is just what he has done!! Anyhow nothing is lost by these few days delay.

Think of me in this crisis I pray of you. I need the prayers of all my friends - for I suffer keenly.

yrs ever

Fannie

Mary goes tomorrow Monday at 2. Regina I've settled with about the woman. She is very good & attentive. I've given her one 25 frcs. & she seemed very much pleased.

[(1900), Feb. 22, Thursday]
 [From: Fannie Browning]
 [To: Lady Layard]
 [Ca' Capello, S. Polo, Venezia]

Feb. 22. Thursday AM.
 Ca' Capello, S. Polo, Venezia.

Dearest Enid;

yrs of Sunday has only just reached me. On account of the storms I suppose, none of us had any letters or Eng newspapers yesterday! -- I have had a very trying & straining week, but day before yesterday I managed to compose a letter, which let my mind enough at ease to let me sleep, & so yesterday I felt less like "a rag" & being physically better I could fight along more easily! -- yesterday morning however I got a letter from the Dr. written Sat day night with "footnts" numbered for me to consider; before I wrote one only or two I adapted & then do you know after all Thea did & I considering it & re-reading & taking it over my letter in the afternoon, we simply decided it would bring forth nothing definite from him & that tho' it was so

conciliatory, dignified & plainly shewing we (I) left it with him to decide whether I should live out of or away fr his roof, & not wanting to make a final break. It was so like me & so much of the moral & not enough of the practical in it did not send it but this short one instead first!--What he must do is to say--will he help me to live in the R. or not (in the Rezzonico) altho' it's a great come down in what I said to myself I would do--go on living there alone & having all the world talk yet-- first to be consistent (& dear Enid I do thank you too, so for understanding just like Thea & the Dr. to be consistent with all I've sacrificed & done & suffered for his sake & with a high motive in these past mos I can go on being lonely, & not have his proper treatment to keep up an outward appearance, in case anything ever happens to bring him to reason as you say-- I have (we all have) (as you) looked at my living out of the R. [Rezzonico] here from his point of view, his hurt pride, &c &c.

I haven't told him yet anything about the "Nurses Institute" It is not a material thing that is, there is no house or "home," & no "Matron." It is only that while any Eng. trained nurses from Gray's are in Venice & brought out & paid by Mrs Burn's Fund

by the 11th Dr, they instead of being in a "pension"-- were to live with me when out of work. I can perfectly well take charge of the whole money part & business part & I place them in a "pension" which is what I shall do --if not practicable or possible to have them under my roof either -- in an apartment or the Rezzonico. Do you see! I could by having them live with me, afford to have a nicer apartment as I am paid 32 frcs a month, 128 frcs in the 4 mos. which helped me out in my rent. Besides liking the occupation & work. Anyhow if I was to, or am, or shall lead an independent life. I can certainly have any American or Eng friend stay with me & pay me. I did Miss Lazarus in the spring! & never asked Pen & told him -- she asked to do it, wanted to come -- I couldn't invite her, as she knew I was not able to have friends as I used to, for I had told her so -- so she paid me -- sent for her maid & paid me for her, it helped me financially some -- of course but didn't cover all the expense! I was under having her & her maid there. Morally it then did wonders for Pen & myself separately, & is making him nicer to me -- I've said so, as I told you. So you see how it is about the nurses! I am going to work the thing even if they don't live with me. He can't possibly object to that. If he does it's preposterous & I'll do it all the same.-- All

your letter I perfectly agree with dearest friend. I thank you fr my heart for understanding it all as you do!-- The Dr_ wrote "perhaps he will give you the money to live in the R_ [Rezzonico]." He knows of us but want to bring him to reason. We all agree. Carry made me a visit on Tuesday, which was a great help.* I cannot forget the nice & the loveable side of him-- our old friendship, his loving me when I was 18 & wanting to marry me then. I found the first letter I ever wrote him the other day-- I have the first he ever wrote me, only little formal notes thanking for gifts this in 1873.

We've known each other since 1868, xmas time 32 yrs!**-- All this makes my eyes swim with tears as I write-- as you can understand, & my love has been of a kind God & the Love of God-- Himself only can come from! Pray for me, I do need it. I've been thro' a sadly troublesome time during this siege in bed. The 4th night I had internal physical pain, in addition! Now I'm well. I will let you know everything as we go on. I will keep yr sketch in case later some of it may be of use. Goodbye, we actually have the sun today. It helps one morally. Can you conveniently send me a Blumenthal (?) cheque for the enclosed little acct.-- As you know I live fr hand to mouth now!

How splendidly Lord Roberts is doing! That prayer is beautiful isn't it? Oh we shall come out safe in the end!

Pen might have your ever loving friend come here. I gave him yr invitation so that excuse was invalid! Fannie -- He is such a moral coward!

*Carry is Caroline Eden.

**Fannie is discussing Pen.

[1900, March 1 & March 30]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo, Venice

March 1st 1900

Dearest Enid;

I read your last note (a card) enclosing the cheque for 25 Lire. So I have put you down as having paid 9 frcs towards the Altar Fund, for the 9 coming months. The other 16 Lire for the wine for Kitty. I haven't been able to write to you since the 22nd as Saturday & Sunday indeed since 10 days (until day before yesterday) I have been quite used up & miserable nervously, from anxiety & worry & sleepless nights & anguish of heart & mind. Now I am so much better, & will tell you as shortly as possible the outcome of Pen's final decision. I left it with him to decide which was wisest as you know, & simply asked him if he could & would help me to live in the R. He answered as usual temporising, arguing discussing. He wished it were in his power to keep up both places but I knew he couldn't. It was needless for him to go into details!!!!

Did you ever? For if a wife can't know details who can, & he has insisted on knowing mine.) I could live in the R as I liked which costs him a good deal! (Why doesn't he sell it???) especially now that he has the servants there on his hands!!! again.

III March 30th 1900

Pen keeps on writing impossible letters to answer today I get the 3rd. Of course from the servants at the R or otherwise he knows I'm here, & probably every detail about everything. In my letter to him telling him I had taken these rooms furnished until July 19th. I told him everything. He wrote forbidding my doing it, 2ndly to say he must know what I'm going to do since he has told me of his objections & again shorter, very much more hurt, & only thinking of himself. Oh! he is only one single word impossible for any woman to have to do with & for him not drive almost crazy, so I put him out of my mind, & do until legally things can be settled.

The perfect sympathy & understandingness of my friends here is my Salvation, & makes me strong.

I want once more to tell you how truly I thank you for all yr generous hospitality at Ca 'Capello this

winter. I'm afraid you won't be wanting to leave England at all this spring!

With much love

always yr affect friend

Fannie B.

I have some very nice old friends (Americans) here now.

*This letter must have been finished on March 30.

[(1900), March 2]
 [From: Fannie Browning]
 [To: Lady Layard]
 [Ca 'Capello, S. Polo, Venice]

Ca 'Capello S. Polo, Venice
 March 2nd

Dearest Enid,

I am sending you insured a horseshoe in diamonds of mine, which I wish you would try & sell for me at the best place you know of or can hear of. I should like to get £50 for it or at least 45 if possible. I do not think it would be a good plan to take it where it came from?--& will you if you think of it go & ask once what they would give for the brussels lace flounces. I can send them by Madame Wiel. I wonder if I told you yesterday that Marie had asked me to go & visit her, & she would pay journeys & everything of expense for me, at Courmayeur after July 1st to stay as long as I wanted to--all of any if I wanted to do so, which is very kind & sweet of her (this past year tho' to be blotted out, of the conversations.) She is coming over to be with me. I met Mr Christie to day, & he is most anxious to know what has been done so far about

Hansen. He says to tell you that he (Christie) has been bombarding Matthews the Secty of the "B. & Foreign" with letters on his own account. Kitty Neuman he wants to be confirmed when the Bp. comes. He is very anxious to know when you are coming back. Is it settled? or don't you know yrself.

No news yet fr. the people about the apartment. I have gone again about it.

With love yrs as ever

Fannie

I am better & most comfortable physically in your home.

[(1900), March 13, Tuesday]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[Ca' Capello, Venice]

Ca' Capello, Venice

Tuesday eveg

13th March

Dearest Enid;

I found these difficulties insurmountable in my getting an empty apartment like the one in San Polo -- on account of my circumstances. They won't rent to a woman without her husband's signature -- altho' one pays down the first 6 mos.--

I told you -- I offered 1200. for this San Polo one. They never answered me for nearly 3 weeks tho' I constantly went to the agent. Finally I insisted upon having an answer yes or no -- & he wrote & said Ct Tiepolo refused it. At once I offered the 1400. that they asked -- & made such a lame excuse, we all saw thro it -- at once. Then we found out what I tell you -- & I also believe it is quite possible the agent had been communicated with from Asolo -- for worse underhand things & petty things have been done

before. On Saturday eveg I fully made up my mind-- to take a small furnished one for this spring until I go to Courway, sur in July-- to take in the one--two or three Nurses who may be out here. (There is one here now I went to see her this afternoon at the Grand Hotel. She is with a pneumonia patient of the doctor's an Australian young girl.) & yesterday morning I went out with my eyes wide open-- & mentally & spiritually much refreshed from Monday-- (for the strain & isolation even with all the sympathetic & devoted help of Mme Wiel & the Dr & the con-
stant interest & sympathy of my other long friends-- has been terrible.

In San Stefano I found a small house two floors. No one else but myself & the two old Sisters Mason & their servant-- & we found out just before I took it in the afternoon fm old Angelo of the Curtis'-- who knows all about everybody that they were all right. I have taken it from next Monday the 19th-- & shall take over my few rugs & tablecovers & few photographs from here -- & try & make the usual hideous lodging house furniture a little less so. I have a bedroom & dressing room, dining room & one bedroom for 2 beds and one small place for a bed & quite nice little dressing room attached, for a third nurse. It already has done my good having the interest & active work. Oh! what a difference it makes in carrying

such a burden.-- The trouble & unpleasantnesses I might have had by insisting upon taking my furniture out of the R. / Rezzonico is avoided-- & legally all that can be settled. The Edens, at least Mr E. whom Mme Wiel saw yesterday & who I begged to tell him, is delighted--he thinks it is much the wisest plan-- Even the Dr does too now-- & to have all the rest done in order.--It has been an awful time getting thro' these last weeks-- & the patience & kindness of my friends-- even when they could not help me no one could, after a certain point--I shall never forget.

It is so near everybody & across the Madonetta Traghetto thro' Campo St. Angelo about 8 mls. or less from here. A step fm the Curtis & Edens & Montalbas & Browns & you, Mme Wiel & the Dr all my friends in fact. Pen has gone to Simone Peruzzi's funeral-- & wrote me from the Padua Station last night which I got today. It was apoplexy, very suddenly. Also Count Tiepolo who wouldn't rent me the apartment died yesterday at Bologna of the same thing.--

He (Pen) said he was returning to A at once after the funeral.-- I do not think he would come now to Venice-- as things stand-- until he knows what I am going to do.--

Our invalids are better. Regina was up again today for longer, but Pasquale is slower getting on. Last night

R. had to get out of bed as she says he nearly strangled for want of air in coughing, his cough seems better tho' today. The Dr came this AM & gave him another medicine.--

He hasn't the "coraffio" as you know that R. has & she woman like (I cannot afford to talk!) completely spoils him sick or well.

Lucia & Cesira do very well. Them-- & everything both devoted to me, in doing little kindnesses, & so willing, and today I very proudly swept & quite turned out everything in my own bedroom-- They were much amused. I think having them ill has helped me greatly, in these last 10 or 12 days! They are moving the organ. I was down at the ch. yesterday AM & sent the carpet to be shaken to the R-- & put everything away until Saturday out of the dust & mortar. Goodnight-- I am tired & it is very late. I slept on my bed for over an hour before dinner. It is scirocco very foggy in the early AM's. I came in at 6. so tired out. I fumigate well & am taking a tonic which just now I need

Yr loving

Fannie, No. 2807 Campo San

Stefano after next Monday

[(1900), March 19]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[2807 Campo San Stefano, Venice]

2807 Campo San Stefano

Venice March 19th

Dearest Enid--

I moved in here on Saturday at least some things-- & on Sun eveg. (yesterday, I went to the station to meet Nurse no 3 who is with me. The other two at their cases, & they sleep & have their meals there; only of course they can come here on their off hrs any time they like. I have been tremendously busy as you can imagine, & it is my redemption for my letters both from Pen & America are indeed being "between the Devil & the Deep Seas"!

No human help now means much to me! Only alone with God & being near Him; & having the sense that I've tried my utmost to do an impossible thing-- combat Pen. I have had an answer to my letter of late last week, telling him I'm here, & without going into details he & his words in this letter are impossible!! It would

drive me crazy to think of them -- so I put them out of
my mind! do my daily duties, rest & pray & get my
 strength where alone one can. The extremities (?) in
 leaving of hospitable roof which to sleep I shall in a
 few days, I want to thank you for all you've done in
 letting me be there these last 3 months. It has been
 so peaceful under the trying circumstances! There is a
 lying down so far here & I've no place for the wicker (?)
 one, but I am first as grateful & thank you so much for
 thinking of it. Instead I've brought a bath tub, sheets
 I wanted very much, & I don't want to like things fr the
 R___ I've only taken some linen my spoons & forks &
 blankets I brought the other day from America. & a
 plated candlestick. I want to tell you of 2 accidents
 that I know of at Ca' Capello since I'm there. I knocked
 over the Bassano (?) electric light vase or lamp in my
 bedroom once & broke it all to pieces, stepping on the
 cord, when it was on my nightstand & Mary got some boot
 polish on the cocoanut matting in her room! Both will
 be all right.

Then one more confession! When course of action--
 you see I don't cut myself away from being used when
 the right time comes, if it ever does. If not it's a
 Salutory means & will do him good! I'm not one bit--
 nervous now! about his coming!--

It has been a wet Sunday. I got up & went to the 8.00 a.m. Communion & also at 10.30 very few later no one at 8 but myself. I've had such a peaceful happy blessed day. I had Bimboli & Gioconda for lunch, & had a nice afternoon with them; rested--read--& at 6 went over till 7. to Thea Wiel's--for a chat. Tomorrow AM--she takes me to introduce me at the hospital--& I shall go regularly. We had a nice practice yesterday. I go always to the Montalbas afterwards. There was the Countess Litzone (?)--but I happily wasn't introduced! Oh! she did "pump" the Dr. tremendously about me the other day--& she didn't get more out of him but "that really he knew very little about it"!!!!!! She is awful for

*This letter is incomplete.

[1900, May 2]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Lady Layard]

[2807 Campo San Stefano]

2807 Campo San Stefano

May 2nd 1900

Dearest Enid;

Very many thanks for yours of the 27th April, containing the cheque for 40 Lire Italiane on Blumenthal.

I asked them to send you a cheque book. I have given Mr Christie the 10 Lire yesterday & the extra 4 frcs I have put down to the altar fund.

I am hoping my Sister & her friend will be arriving in London on Friday, day after tomorrow. It will be a great comfort to me to have her within 2 days post instead of 10. I should ask you to go & see her if I feel it would be any satisfaction to either her or you, & I appreciate yr kindness in saying you would do so. But as she has felt all this thing of mine, & suffered so all this past year, nothing would be gained. Private I am in correspondence with my Eng lawyers now, & shortly he (Mr Kingsford is coming out to see me, & also the Italian

lawyer here that Dr Eden recommended highly, & if it is possible for me to have any claim legally on any of the money of mine that is in the Palazzo R. or in the furniture I bought here & in England to get it, as I am really in need of the money. Then too as Pen feels as he does-- & so disapproves of my present life which I mean to go on leading, & in which I have the daily increasing sense of peace & comfort, as well as the respect of my friends to establish definitely my position, which even if I didn't care about, I owe to my friends in any community I love. I am only going to see him with Mr Kingsford, & have a regular legal separation, amicably settled.

He has written me 3 such letters, one on top of the other, none of which I have answered. I only acknowledged the receipt of them, when sending him the lace school money on April 1st. He [and] his Aunt went to Rome for a fortnight. He didn't tell me he was going, but on his return to A. alone wrote & told me he was back. Then last week he wrote & said he was coming to Venice for a night to fetch his Aunt fr Padua next day, & should he come to see me, or would I come to see him. I was strong enough to refuse to see him. I sent a note for him to find on arriving, saying I had work to do that evening, & had an engagement with some American Cousins the next morning & was not able either to receive him, or go to the Rezzonico. He

wrote me (cleverly) a pleasant note back tho' he was very angry, and did not go out of the house. I went out & did my duties, tho' with my heart in my mouth & the strain was great, yet I am all the time stronger morally & physically, so determined I am not to be weak, & have him get around me or take advantage of me again.--

They are both (so he told Mr Christie but it may not be so) coming down to see the show tomorrow eveg at the Rezzonico.

I am going to write a note to Aunt S. & apologize to her for not going to call on her, & tell her why, & I am going to make Pen fix the day for meeting Mr Kingsford before he comes. His fees are enormous & I only want him here 3 days, as 2 are taken to come & 2 to return to London, making the week. I shall simply tell Pen he charges 10 guineas a day after the week -- so he must be ready to see him. I shall have him over anyway for my own satisfaction to show about the monies in the house here & for Kingsford to see.

My work with the nurses is a great boon & comfort & I like it more & more. The Dr & I get on perfectly as workers, & I get on perfectly with the nurses. Now they all 4 are very busy, & a new one arrives tomorrow

evening. There are several very ill people here now. These women are really invaluable in the hotels to people I should think, & an immense help & comfort to the Doctor's work.

I had tea with Mrs Curtis on Sunday, a dear old Boston lady Mrs Benimer (?) was there whom I knew here last spring--unfortunately I loose Thea Wiel next Monday, who goes to Belluno, & then to Eng. For 2 mos. Carry Eden went to Paris, day before yesterday for a fortnight. I saw Mr Eden this a.m. He has a clear head & is a very valuable person to see & throw light on these subjects, when we are baffled often with too much thinking.

Yr loving

Fannie

[1906, August 1]

[From: Pen Browning]

[To: Miss Leigh Smith]

[La Torre all' Antella, Firenze]

Aug. 1.

1906

My dear friend,

All thanks for your letter which, as you see, I am answering at once. Not that I have anything special to say except how glad I am that the news you give of yourself is fairly good:--it is the best of news!

I have not heard very lately from Fannie: but this time I did not answer her last letter as promptly as I have always done. I dare say she will find it difficult to stay any time in any one place. You see Venice was an exception: It had been her home, and she stuck there as it were from force of habit. Now she will shift and wander about like a leaf fallen from a tree.

This is an excerpt from Pen's letter to Leigh Smith.

[1906, September 21]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Pen Browning]

I "have said the old feeling, which meant so much torture since our separation has gone. It has. I was inexpressibly shocked (at what to my untrained powers of discerning by appearances) seemed "written on your face last spring! but in the death of the old love, there has arisen a far far higher greater deeper love & friendship on an infinitely higher plain than I ever had for you before [verso]

I know I never called on anyone, once or twice in London to talk of you, or even to express any feelings of my own on the subject.

From Fannie Browning's letter
to Pen Sep 21st 1906

[This is an excerpt of a letter from Fannie to Pen. It is in the handwriting of Leigh Smith.]

[1906, October 16]
[From: Pen Browning]
[To: Miss Leigh Smith]
[Asolo]

Asolo.

Oct. 16, 1906.

My dear Friend,

Alice's letter was put into my hands just as I was leaving "La Torre" for Padua on Sunday. I read her letter at the station in Florence. I reached Asolo yesterday afternoon, late.

I am delighted to hear you are in Italy, near and within reach again, if not yet in sight! I have been "on the go" and with more on my hands to do than I could manage.

I did not write to Fannie at once after getting your letter, one reason being that I was not certain where she was. She has "settled" now in Oxford; and, having heard from her, I wrote the letter of which I enclose a copy, together with her answer contained in the two letters written the same day. They reached me by the same post.

Please show them to Alice, and when you have read them, kindly return them to me here--I have not written to her since. I must, however.

I shall be glad to have your opinion. Mine is that she is irresponsible for her words and actions, just as I have always thought. She is incapable of reasoning, and therefore it is hopeless to attempt arguing with her. She never had a sense of humour, nor has any, or she would have refrained from sending extracts from the Scriptures which apply in this case to herself rather than to me!

Of the gravity of this state of things I am fully sensible but I am at a loss to know how to stop the tongue of a half crazy woman. She is contemptible, but entitled to pity. That is my opinion. My love to Alice if I cannot write to her today.

Your ever affectionate

Pen.

I am alone here. Young is leaving for Australia.

[1910, August 30]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Mrs. Griffith Thomas]

[Barncote Reigate Surrey]

Barncote

Reigate

Surrey

August 30th, 1910

Dear Mrs. Griffith Thomas.

I was thinking so much of you last week-- first when the lovely photograph came, for which I thank you many times. I shall frame it for my own room and have it among my special treasures. I was so sorry for your friends in England when I heard of your husband having accepted the Toronto appointment, but delighted for him and the Canadian Church. His work will be fine and have such a chance there.

I have been obliged to lead quite a semi-invalid life, for ever since I saw you in Oxford in May I've been very unwell and have been obliged to succumb to great and stringent restrictions as to activities! But

with my brain and fingers I can still work for God and His Church, and my home I use only for His people, a great privilege. I have excellent help in my servants and my secretary who does now most of the housekeeping and waits on me, but the greater part of the afternoon is spent on my back resting.

It is the same old trouble (I had hernias on my left side which undermines my general health and I had dreadful Dyspepsia and looked shockingly, but now that is much better and I look placid and rested, so they say!

I am sending you a tiny pincushion which has in it a bit of Asolo lace from the lace school at Asolo near Venice we founded in memory of my Father-in-law. Will you use it, dear Mrs. Griffith Thomas, for my sake. I have always wanted to see more of you and have you here and now it's too late!

With my best wishes and kindest regards to your husband and love to yourself and dear little Winnie,

As ever yours affectionately

F. Browning

I am going to hunt you up an old photograph.

[1919, December 8]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]
[Washington, D.C.]

Dec. 8th 1919.

My dear Professor Armstrong,

Thank you very much for your kind letter--No, Miss Lilian Whiting is mistaken. What I showed her probably was a plaster cast of my husband's hand as a child. I forget now by whom. I used to know but have forgotten.

It has got very much broken from all its' travels in these past 60 years perhaps more yrs, surely; as it must have been when he was about 8 or 9 years old?

In one of Miss Whiting's books "Women Who Have Ennobled Life" is a sketch of Mrs. Browning. (No, it was of Miss Harriet Hosmer herself, I find on Page 222 a few lines about the "Clasped Hands" Mrs. Lucien Carr has the originals. There have been several reproductions, one that Miss Lilian Whiting owned she gave to the Boston Public Library. & I saw it there last Autumn.

I must thank you for lending me those interesting notices and the programme of the Presentation of the Portrait of the Poet last spring, to your University.

I myself liked it immensely. Always thought it was one of the most characteristic of likenesses.

I envy your going to Asolo next June. I have been thinking of returning to Italy for a visit. Ever since the Armistice, but conditions have made it impossible up till now.

If you ever come to Washington, I hope you will call & see me. It would give me much pleasure.

Yours very sincerely

Fannie Browning

[1920, January 17]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]
[Washington, D.C.]

Jan. 17/20

Dear Professor Armstrong:

I must thank you very much for letting me see the enclosed. Of course I recognize among them a great many European friends! I wish I had anything that would help in being able to look up anything written to the poet by an Italian or French or any Continental writer. In the "Nuova Antologia" a magazine which used to be edited at Florence I think by Prof. Nemceoni [?] in the old days I feel sure I could find something about or at the date of his death for Nemceoni was an enthusiastic admirer of both the Brownings' poetry. He knew him when living in Italy. I am not very well now and don't get out much, but later on if I can find anything I will send it to you.

I wish I might be able to do so.

I gave Prof. William Lyon Phelps of Yale a large album full of cuttings in all the languages at the time of his the Poet's death in 1889.* Which a friend had done for my husband & myself.

I will ask him if there are not some there perhaps?

Thank you very much for your good wishes I am dear
Professor Armstrong

Yours sincerely

Fannie Browning

I am glad to say Miss Beach could come to the last Reading
when I finished "Pompilia."

*Baylor University has this album.

[1920, March 11]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

March 11th 1920.

Dear Professor Armstrong;

I heard yesterday when lunching with my very Special friend Madame Slavko Frowitch-- (The wife of the Serbian Minister to our Country) That in a trip to Texas and Oklahoma to speak for her work, that she is going to Waco. & is going to speak before the Chamber of Commerce there.

I so wish you would be able to arrange for her to do so at Baylor University also.

She is and has been since her youth (for she is an American from W. Virginia) a devoted student & lover of Browning. I have told her about your possessing the portrait done by my husband & I should so like her to see it.

Her address here is

2148 Wyoming Avenue N.

Washington D.C.

& as the tour is now being planned & mapped out, you had better write -- to her direct.

Her work for Serbia has been stupendous since the war began & I have had the joy of doing my very small part in it since 1915.

Yours sincerely

Fannie Browning

[1920, April 16th]
[From: Fannie Browning]
[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]
[Washington, D.C.]

April 16th 1920

Dear Professor Armstrong,

Thank you so much for the Cuttings about Madame Frovitch--I was very glad to see them.

What a royal reception you gave her at Waco, & I am so glad she spoke at the University.

I am writing specially tonight to ask if you would consider buying from me some autograph letters to Robert Browning from various people. & also some relating to getting tickets for Admission to Westminster Abbey for the funeral Dec. 31, 1889.

Also the Visitors Book at the Rezzonico.

I have given away very many of the things I happened to have interesting as connected with the Poets but I need greatly at present to sell these things. for whatever you feel they are worth.

Would you like me to send them to you insured (to see at any sale) by post? You told me you were

anxious to have things associated or connected with the Brownings for your University.

Believe me yours very

sincerely

Fannie Browning.

[1920, May 1]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

May 1st 1920

Dear Professor Armstrong

I received today your letter of April 26th about the Browning Memorials.

The picture of which you say Madame Frovitch told you, was so beautiful--is not a picture but a bust of "Hope" in marble, by my husband who was a sculptor as well as a painter.

I will try & get an estimate of the approximate value of the things if possible -- & will then wire you.

Yours sincerely

Fannie Browning

[1920, May 7]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

May 7th 1920.

Dear Professor Armstrong;

I have just answered your wire received at lunch time today--saying my quotation of \$1500.00 (fifteen hundred dollars would include "Hope" as you were giving all the Collection to the College as a Browning Birthday Memorial gift & because Miss Lilian Whiting's Clapsed Hands were presented to-day. When I hear from you I will have the bust packed by the most responsible people here in Washington. (the Security Storage Company) & will insure it.

The expenses of shipping packing insuring etc. will of course be paid by the College.

The other things I will get to [a] responsible man I know here to pack & send on in the safest way--As I am leaving on the 24th of this month, you will give me as much time as possible to attend to this, will you not,

for I am very busy in many preparations previous to
going abroad.

Yours sincerely

Fannie Barrett Browning.

[1920, May 16]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

May 16th 1920

Dear Professor Armstrong: I have received both of your letters. If you will refer to my correspondence and telegrams, you will see I wrote that I would be glad to send you the letters & Visitors Book to see--on approval-- but that the two other large books were too heavy & too big. There would not have been time in these days of tardy Exprese etc.

When your wire came asking if my quotation of \$1500.00 had included "Hope"--I answered that it would do so--for the reason of its being given as a Memorial Birthday gift to the University on May 7th--& that Miss Whiting's gift of "The Clasped Hands" had been presented that day.

"Hope" had never previously been mentioned by me-- for I never dreamt of selling it now --& it was with rather a pang that I wired you as I did--I felt as my husband's work-- as a painter (his father's portrait

you possess) was there. The "Hope" as a specimen of his work as a Sculptor if it was there too, might interest those who cared for the Brownings, both parents & son's work & gifts. You will remember that from the first I asked you to name the sum that to you looking at them wholly (not from any Commercial value whatever.) but entirely from one of sentiment as a Browning lover & devotee point of view would be what you could afford. It was the only one, one could have!--You would not do so; therefore I did, and reported to you what my friend, a Browning admirer & devotee-- & one I had heard lecture on him--his works said--

The sum he mentioned seemed to me far too exaggerated, I therefore quoted less than a quarter-- and did not increase it when I added in "Hope"! When your cousin called me up on the telephone she said she had heard from you & that for your "school"--you had asked her to come & see some things but she had no idea what they were--& that she was leaving Washington at one o'clk that day for Atlantic City.

I told her not to trouble or disturb herself at all-- that it was entirely a private & personal matter my selling them & one between you & myself. I am quite sure she understood.

With Dr Tupper I practically said the same thing, that it was a delicate matter & very personal & one between ourselves. Their seeing the things unless they were Browning lovers. could only have resulted in a Commercial value opinion & this I could never under any any circumstances have subjected myself or them to.

I hope I have made the whole situation as to facts quite clear to you & beg you will believe me

Yours sincerely

Fannie Browning

[1922, March 6]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

March 6th 1922

Dear Professor Armstrong;

Only two days ago did I receive your kind letter of last summer addressed to 144 Coleham Court London where I spent six months; but left for Haslemere on June 1st.

I should be very pleased to accept your gift of the book you mention for I am sure it will be most interesting & helpful to me.

Yours sincerely

Fannie C. Browning.

[1922, March 15]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

March 15th 1922.

Dear Professor Armstrong.

Thank you very warmly for both the copy of the "Browningana" & your letter of the 10th inst.

In the letter you refer to the little-ring that I gave them at the Browning Settlement last 4th of July.

It is one which was in Mrs. Browning's jewelry-box that the Poet gave me. The ring that he constantly wore on his watchchain was one of Mrs. Browning's own with (if I remember rightly. A.E.I. on it & another one.) One which he wore himself on his little finger with "BA." on it-- cut in-- with an inscription inside. This I gave together with two others (one of my husband's & the other of his mother's) to Sir Frederick Kenyon of the British Museum.

The Ring of "The Ring & the Book" is at Balliol College Oxford where is also the "Book".

The former I gave after my husband's death and the "Book" after my father-in-law's death together with some

bound manuscript Poems. I took up to the then "Master" Professor Jowett--for my husband. So these are the histories of the various rings that I can remember having anything to do with.

The contents of the jewelry box of "E.B.B." I gave to various friends of the Brownings & of my own who valued & treasured them highly.

Mr. Herbert Stead has resigned his wardenship of the Settlement at Walworth; & has since had a very grave illness of double pneumonia with a miraculous recovery.

I am sorry very sorry to say that the "Browning" side of the work has been I believe much set aside.

Believe me sincerely yours

Fannie Browning.

[1923, May 16]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Staten Island, New York]

204 Franklin Avenue
New Brighton
Staten Island, N. Y.
May 16th 1923.

Dear Professor Armstrong

A few days before leaving Washington to come here for the summer I received your kind letter, telling me of the Volumes of Letters of the Poet to Isa Blagden which Baylor University has & you propose sending me, I should be very pleased and interested to accept them.

To-day I was given Miss Lilian Whiting's article in the New York Herald about the book.

I am very sorry to say that I had to give up my trip to England. I had planned to sail on April 10th but on account of the serious illness of an invalid sister, gave up going & am near her instead.

When you are in New York, if you should have time to come over to the Island, I should be very glad to see you.

I am muchly interested in Miss Lucy Beach--altho' I do not see so much of her.

Yours very sincerely

Fannie C. Browning.

[1923, October 7]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Hotel Seville, New York]

October 7th 1923.

My dear Professor Armstrong

Your letter was forwarded to me here, where I am for a short time on my way back to Washington. I look back with much pleasure to your visit -- & our long talk that hot Sunday afternoon this summer. What a wonderful trip you must have had? I should thank you for your notes & post cards. I myself remembered the name of the book about the Poet; at least the author's name afterwards. It was good of you to take all that trouble & write, to the S. Island Librarian.

About the few things I have still of the Brownings' I am, as I believe I told you, pledged to leave them after my death to Wellesley College! For many reasons I want to do this. I may give all or some of them before that event, but I am sure if I gave them away I should miss the atmosphere they create too greatly. I haven't as yet done anything about those poems of my husband when he was a child--but I will write & try & get in touch with whoever

may have them from Mrs. Morrison. Did you do anything at all at Asolo or see the people of the "Torrecella" Mrs. Carter's son in-law--about the grave? & did you see Contessa Maffer in Florence who was head of the Browning Lace School. & you said you might go to her place in Florence about some linen work.

Did you see Mr. Wise I will send you a little photograph of my husband's grave when I get home. Which you expressed a wish to have.

It is very kind of you to say you would like me to go out to see Waco's great Memorial of your Browning Collection would certainly be a great temptation for me to undertake such a long journey.

With kindest regards--& please let me hear from you about Asolo, I am yours always sincerely dear Professor Armstrong

Fannie C. Browning.

PS. I always am hoping to get to Italy for a few months & to England too.

[1923, Dec 14]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Hotel Seville, New York]

Dec. 14/23

Dear Professor Armstrong

I am mailing you the letter you want, & do not at all mind your photographing it.

This loaned as I have written on the package & if I die before I return here to take possession of it again I ask you to send it to the President of Wellesley College Wellesley Mass. Your letter of Oct. 31st -- staid on in this Hotel (for they are very careless & have always been the same about my mail); then went to the dead letter office & as you know was sent back to you to send on to me in Washington.

I have not been at all well. & am here to sail tomorrow in the Majestic for England for nine months. My address will be

c/o G. R. Gregory Esq.

62 London Wall E. C.

London.

I hope you will let me know when you come to London in the
Spring if you do!

Yours very sincerely

Fannie Browning.

[1925, May]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D. C.]

3414 Garfield Street

Washington D. C.

May 1925

Dear Professor Armstrong;

It is a source of great pleasure & satisfaction to me that you possess at Baylor such a remarkably good "Browning collection." Knowing the Poet as I did I am sure he would have appreciated the love & devotion shown by your students and yourself in the study of his poetry.

Believe me Very sincerely yours

Fannie Barrett Browning

[1925, May 16]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

May 16, 1925

My dear Professor Armstrong,

I did not mean that your kind letter of April 22nd should have been left so long unanswered--but I have been slowly getting things back to my normal health after a very grave operation in January. & when I got home again had a bad "grippe" attack.

Now, barring very bad walking powers this weakness of the knees & legs I am very well, and probably shall be in better health, than in a long time--I returned from England last August. I lost a very dear invalid sister while I was away & all the time I was gone I was ill. I could scarcely do anything I went to do -- and meant to do! On getting to Washington in early October I determined to leave the apartment I had been in since nine years & have bought this as it were Country-house near the Cathedral. To get better air and more quiet & it has much sunshine for the winter.

But enough about myself, & to come to the purpose of your letter. There is very little that I can say that you do not already know of what I think & feel about the devotion & appreciation to the Poet & to his great work that Baylor University thro' your enthusiasm & efforts shows-- I wish only it might ever be possible for me to see your Browning Room for myself--but I am afraid that can never be--Since you have my husband's bust when a child I thought you would be interested in owning also in your collection the little Italian New Testament that his Aunt Arabel Barrett gave him, & in which Mrs. Browning has written--I have just sent it registered letter this afternoon.

I am leaving here on the 26th for the summer. so I am sending my English Companion home for a rest & holiday, & I am going to Kerhoukson, New York until October 1st.

I have taken a little house of my own from July 1st but through June will be at Dr. Andrew Foord's Sanitoriam Kerhoukson, N. Y.

Yours very sincerely

Fannie Browning

[1925, May 28]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Hotel Seville, New York]

May 28/25

Dear Professor Armstrong,

I have done my best to gratify your wish--I recd your letter only on the eve of my departure from Washington--on the 26th. But haven't had a chance to write you until now.

Yours sincerely

Fannie Barrett Browning

Let me know you get this thro' c/o Dr. Foord-Kerhoukson,
New York

You will be sure and let me have back that letter won't
you?

[1926, March 31]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

March 31st, 1926

Dear Professor Armstrong,

I have sent you some photographs of the Palazzo Rezzonico in Venice & a few others which I think you will be interested in putting into the Browning Collection at Baylor.

By mistake, one of the poetess with the long ringlets-- was put in with those sent to you, & I meant to have Venables frame it for my own collection of memorials of the 2 poets, which I am sending to Wellesley this spring.

Would it be too much trouble to send it back to me here? Of course you know & have that very photograph no doubt?

Yours sincerely

Fannie C. Browning

(on small card with letter)

Easter Sunday 1926

Dear Prof. Armstrong,

I never saw such perfect lilies than those you sent from Baylor -- nor such a Rambler rose either. A thousand thanks. Such a generous Easter remembrance I am very much changed & can walk so much better now since the Spring days have come. It was a mistake I have found the pictures of E.B.B. which I thought went with the Baylor photos.

Sincerely yrs

F. Br

[1926, May 20]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Washington, D.C.]

May 20th 1926

Dear Prof. Armstrong

The Brackens were English Residents in Florence at the time the Brownings & others lived there in the late forties, fifties, & Early sixties & were intimate friends--especially of the Brownings--Willie B. and my husband being for many years like Brothers. Of course the Isa Blagden Letters should never have been published.

The Poet's body rested from the Sunday afternoon Dec. 16th after the Funeral service in the Sala of our home (the Pal. Rezzonico) in a private Chapel in the Roman Catholic part of the Cemetery on San Michele Island at Venice, which was offered by the Municipality* "A Morgue" a word (on the Continent Tuscan) is I always thought a place where dead bodies are taken to be identified. A graphic description of the one in Paris, is to be found in the Poet's own poem "Apparent Failure."

I think I must beg of you (trusting to your understanding me) not to keep on asking me questions or writing

on this Subject, at present. All my Browning things I have just sent away packed here yesterday for the Wellesley Collection; & feel I have done my part in caring for those I have had in my own possession these 14 years since my husband's 'death.' And I now feel I want a little respite from thinking too much of the sad side of my early married life now, so far in the past! I am sure you will understand.

Yours sincerely

F. Browning

*On Wednesday 19th Dec. went in charge of our private servant to London & to De Vere Gardens, until laid to rest in the Abbey, on Dec. 31st.

[1928, Oct. 2]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Villino Browning, Eastern Point, Gloucester, Mass.]

Villino Browning
Eastern Point
Gloucester, Mass.
Oct. 2nd 1928

Dear Professor Armstrong

I am thro Marshall Jones Company in Boston privately printing a limited number of a short, Monograph I have written-- of my Father-in-law Robert Browning. The price will be \$1.50 (postage extra) and the proceeds are to be given to the Browning Settlement Walsworth London. Will you let me know at the earliest possible date--if you desire any number of copies & how many? It is expected they will be out for Christmas.

Yours faithfully
Fannie Browning

[1933, October 19]

[From: Fannie Browning]

[To: Dr. A. J. Armstrong]

[Anchorhold, Hayward Heath, Sussex]

October 19. 33

Dear Professor Armstrong

The "Bulletin (627) has come. Very much of it has interested me greatly.

I did not know of Miss Barclay's Diary during her stay with us in the Palazzo Rezzonico, at the same time as my Father-in-law & my Aunt were there & which was of course when the fatal illness caused his death.

I shall write & ask her--or her sister who is an intimate friend of mine for a copy.

The Brooch you speak of that Mrs. Herbert Stead sent you was the one I gave her of Mrs. Browning's just when the sale was coming on in 1913 & I gave all the contents of her jewelery box (which my Father-in-law had given me) to various old "Browning friends. (Those who stood out in his work for the Brownings like Mr. Steads at the Settlement.

Of course a few things I kept but now Wellesley College has had my very last of such things!--

I never [illegible] connected with the brooch that
you mention.

Yours sincerely

Fannie C. Browning

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