

BROWNING'S RELATION TO PAINTING,

MUSIC AND SCULPTURE.

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## Chapter 1.

### INTRODUCTION

From his father, a man of scholarly culture and literary tastes, Robert Browning inherited his love of the classics, his all-absorbing interest in reading and his innate knowledge of art. Being a clever draughtsman himself, the elder Browning was likewise a collector of rare old prints and the Browning home possessed a wealth of valuable engravings. One writer gives a fascinating glimpse of the child Robert sitting for hours among the priceless collection before a glowing fire. An old engraving from Caravaggio of "Andromeda and Perseus" (1) was one of the sources of inspiration of Browning's boyhood. Like all children he loved an oft-repeated tale and never tired of asking his father to re-tell the beautiful story of the old masterpiece till its truths penetrated thoroughly his consciousness; and in later years he had the same picture hung near his desk that it might always serve as an inspiration. When still under fourteen years of age there was no delight for the boy comparable to that of a visit to the Dulwich Gallery, a small but representative collection of the

(1) In almost all the Lives of Robert Browning the name of the religious painter, Corregio, is given when referring to this picture which had such a powerful influence on the poet. Sharp and Hall Griffin, however, both give Caravaggio. The last-named writer says the Browning family left Camberwell in 1840 for a larger house at Hatcham and the poet worked there in his study "where was hung the precious Andromeda of Caravaggio, rescued years since from among the father's prints."

English, Italian, Spanish, French and Dutch schools of painting. He would sit in silent contemplation before one picture unmindful of time, enjoying its beauty and lost in the suggestions it offered.

Browning's love for painting and painters grew with him, developing and stimulating his desire for technical knowledge, and filling his poetic soul with much of the unconscious culture which surrounded him. Through the language of poetry he gave to the world his great message, often embodying it in the lives and from the words of those whose life-work was the fine arts--painters, sculptors and musicians. From all this comes the conviction which is the very essence and vital center of Browning's works--that ultimate success is attained through partial failure.

"And what is our failure here but a  
triumph's evidence  
For the fulness of the days? Have we  
withered or agonized?  
Why else was the pause prolonged  
but that singing might issue thence?  
Why rushed the discords but that  
harmony should be prized?" (1)

"From first to last Browning regards life as an adventure of the soul, which sinks, falls, rises, recovers itself, relapses into faithlessness to its higher powers, yet sees the wrong and aims to retrieve it; gropes through darkness to light; and though 'tired, troubled, tempted,' never yields to alien forces and ignominious failure. That is the crystallization of the message of Browning." (2)

It is to Browning's mother we must turn for his inherited love of music. Dowden says: "The love of music which her Scottish-German father possessed in a high degree, leaping over a generation, re-

(1) "Abt Vogler", line 81.

(2) "The Brownings, Their Life and Art" by Lillian Whiting, p. 15.

appeared in Robert Browning." (1) We know that the poet loved his mother with an all-absorbing attachment and that she was a true Scottish gentlewoman, characterized by a deeply religious spirit, having a delicacy of perception and a natural talent for music as well as a marked susceptibility to its influence. Mrs. Browning's chief happiness seems to have been derived from her favorite hour of the day, where the rays of the setting sun lengthened into deepest shadows - a time which she devoted to her soul-absorbing music, and her son loved the twilight hours when he could listen to his mother's soft sweet melodies. Browning himself says he felt the artistic impulse stirring within him like the rising of sap in a tree. "He remembered his mother's music and hoped to be a musician: he recollected his father's drawings, and certain seductive landscapes and seascapes by painters whom he had heard called 'the Norwich men', and he wished to be an artist: then reminiscences of the Homeric lines he loved, of haunting verse-melodies, moved him most of all", (2) and we find the man who might have been a successful painter, sculptor or musician devoting his life to the Muse of Poetry. However, as Hugh Walker says: "Like the great leaders of the Italian Renaissance, Browning did not confine his interest within the limits of one art. As Rafael wrote his solitary poem, and as Dante prepared to paint his single angel, so Browning felt the impulse to express himself through another medium than words. He even studied the art of painting and modelling, and though the labor he spent probably yielded nothing worth preserving in the shape of picture or bust, it gave him knowledge of which he has made good use in his poetry." (3)

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning" by Edward Dowden, p. 5.

(2) "Robert Browning" by William Sharp, p. 29.

(3) "Literature of the Victorian Era" by Hugh Walker, LL.D., p. 424.

According to Stopford Brooke: "He represented the way in which the main elements of the Renaissance appeared to him in poems which were concerned with music, poetry, painting, and the rest of the arts, but chiefly with painting." (1) Browning seems to have been the only poet of the nineteenth century, till we come to Rossetti, who through the art of poetry has celebrated painting and sculpture and Rossetti said of Browning that his knowledge of early Italian art was beyond that of anyone he ever met, and "encyclopaedically beyond that of Ruskin himself." (2)

Ruskin in his "Modern Painters" says: "Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes of the Middle Ages; always vital, right, and profound; so that in the matter of art, with which we have been specially concerned, there is hardly a principle connected with the mediaeval temper, that he has not struck upon in those seemingly careless and too rugged rhymes of his. There is a curious instance, by the way, in a short poem referring to this very subject of tomb and image sculpture; and illustrating just one of those phases of local human character which, though belonging to Shakespeare's own age, he never noticed, because it was specially Italian and un-English; connected also closely with the influence of mountains on the heart, and therefore with our immediate inquiries. I mean the kind of admiration with which a southern artist regarded the stone he worked in; and the pride which populace or priest took in the possession of precious mountain substance, worked into the pavements of their cathedrals, and the shafts of their tombs.

(1) "Robert Browning" by Stopford A. Brooke, p. 302.

(2) "Life of Robert Browning" by Edward Dowden, p. 190.

Observe, Shakespere, in the midst of architecture and tombs of wood, or freestone, or brass, naturally thinks of gold as the best enriching and ennobling substance for them;-- in the midst also of the fever of the Renaissance he writes, as everyone else did, in praise of precisely the most vicious master of that school-- Giulio Romano; but the modern poet, living much in Italy, and quit of the Renaissance influence, is able fully to enter into the Italian feeling, and to see the evil of the Renaissance tendency, not because he is greater than Shakespere, but because he is in another element, and has seen other things. I miss fragments here and there not needed for my purpose in the passage quoted, without putting asterisks, for I weaken the poem enough by the omissions, without spoiling it also by breaks.

THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB IN ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH

As here I lie  
In this state chamber, dying by degrees,  
Hours, and long hours, in the dead night, I ask,  
Do I live--am I dead? Peace, peace, seems all.  
St. Praxed's ever was the church of peace  
And so, about this tomb of mine, I fought  
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know;  
Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care.  
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner south  
He graced his carrion with.  
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence  
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle side,  
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,  
And up into the airy dome where live  
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk.  
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,  
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,  
With those nine columns round me, two and two,  
The odd one at my feet, where Anselm stands;  
Peach-blossom marble all.  
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years;  
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?  
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--  
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else  
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?  
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,  
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance



Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase of so,  
The Saviour at his Serom on the Mount,  
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan,  
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know  
Ye marke me not! What do they whisper thee,  
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope  
To revel down my villas while I gasp,  
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine,  
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!  
Nay, boys, ye love me--all of jasper, then!  
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--  
And have I not St. Praxed's ear to pray  
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts?  
That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,  
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,  
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line--  
Tully, my master? Ulpian serves his need.

I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,--its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I said of the central Renaissance in thirty pages of the "Stones of Venice" put into as many lines, Browning's being also the antecedent work. The worst of it is that this kind of concentrated writing needs so much solution before the reader can fairly get the good of it, that people's patience fails them, and they give the thing up as insoluble; though truly, it ought to be the current of common thought, like Saladin's talisman dipped in clear water, not soluble altogether but making the element medicinal." (1)

Another writer, Elizabeth Luther Cary in "Browning--Poet and Man--A Survey" states: "His poems on painting and music do not try to represent the impressions produced by these arts, as his poetry in general does not try to compete with them in producing such impressions. They represent, instead, the creative or critical

(1) "Modern Painters" by Ruskin, Vol. IV., p. 393.

spirit in painters and musicians, express in their own language, and by their individual turns of thought growing out of their special associations. " (1)

One does not read many lines of Browning without observing that he was personally intimate with the feelings of an artist towards his canvas or a musician towards his music, and his precise use of the technical terms of workers in these two branches of art is undoubtedly due to his own experience. His interest in art was a living, growing desire to see how things were done. Besides having tried music and painting, we know from Mrs. Browning's letters that the poet studied modelling with Story in Italy, and that he used this pastime as a respite from his poetry, destroying almost immediately the work of his handicraft. To this interest, knowledge and experience in the arts may be attributed many of the so-called "obscurities" of Browning which are, in reality, often only metaphors drawn from the technicality of the arts, but which are beyond the comprehension of the casual, uninstructed reader.

Chesterton, more than any other, I think, gives us the truest glimpse of Browning's great interest in Italian art and Italian life. In speaking of the poet's admirable poems--"Fra Lippo Lippi" and "Andrea del Sarto" and "Pictor Ignotus"--he says everyone who knows them "will remember how fully they deal with technicalities, how they are concerned with canvas, with oil, with a mess of colours. Sometimes they are so technical as to be mysterious to the casual reader. An extreme case may be found in that of a lady I once

(1) "Browning--Poet and Man--A Survey" by Elizabeth Luther Cary, Chapter LX, p. 165.

knew who had merely read the title of 'Pacchiarotto and how he worked in distemper', and thought that Pacchiarotto was the name of a dog, whom no attacks of canine disease could keep from the fulfilment of his duty. These Browning poems do not merely deal with painting; they smell of paint. They are the works of a man to whom art is not what it is to so many of the non-professional lovers of art, a thing accomplished, a valley of bones: to him it is a field of crops continually growing in a busy and exciting silence. Browning was interested, like some scientific man, in the obstetrics of art. There is a large army of educated men who can talk art with artists--he could talk shop with them. Personally he may not have known enough about painting to be more than a fifth-rate painter, or enough about the organ to be more than a sixth-rate organist. But there are, when all is said and done, some things which a fifth-rate painter knows which a first-rate art critic does not know; there are some things which a sixth-rate organist knows which a first-rate judge of music does not know. And these were the things that Browning knew.

He was, in other words, what is called an amateur. The word amateur has come by the thousand oddities of language to convey an idea of tepidity; whereas the word itself has the meaning of passion. Nor is this peculiarity confined to the mere form of the word; the actual characteristic of these nameless dilettanti is a genuine fire and reality. A man must love a thing very much if he not only practices it without any hope of fame or money, but even practices it without any hope of doing it well. Such a man must love the toils of the work more

than any other man can love the rewards of it. Browning was in this strict sense a strenuous amateur. He tried and practised in the course of his life half a hundred things at which he can never have even for a moment expected to succeed. The story of his life is full of absurd little ingenuities, such as the discovery of a way of making pictures by roasting brown paper over a candle. In precisely the same spirit of fruitless vivacity, he made himself to a very considerable extent, a technical expert in painting, a technical expert in sculpture, a technical expert in music. In his old age, he shows traces of being so bizarre a thing as an abstract police detective, writing at length in letters and diaries his view of certain criminal cases in an Italian town. Indeed, his own 'Ring and the Book' is merely a sublime detective story. He was in a hundred things this type of man; he was precisely in the position, with a touch of greater technical success, of the admirable figure in Stevenson's story who said, 'I can play the fiddle nearly well enough to earn a living in the orchestra of a penny gaff, but not quite'. The love of Browning for Italian art, therefore, was anything but an antiquarian fancy; it was the love of a living thing."<sup>(1)</sup>

Browning, then, holds a unique place among the world poets with regard to his poems on the fine arts. The latent qualities which might have made of him a famous painter or musician have developed themselves in his poetry, and many of his finest works are those in which he speaks the language of an Andrea del Sarto or an Abt Vogler, and yet it would almost seem as though toward the end of his life he regretted his impotence regarding both these

(1) "Robert Browning" by G. K. Chesterton, Chapter lll., p.82.

arts, for with Alexander of old he cries out for more worlds  
to conquer in these lines from "One Word More":

"I shall never, in the years remaining  
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,  
Make you music that should all-express me;  
So it seems: I stand on my attainment,  
This of verse alone, one life allows me;  
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.  
Other heights in other lives, God willing:  
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love!" (1)

(1) "One Word More" XII.

Chapter 11.

THE RENAISSANCE

Twice in the world's history has the progress of art kept pace with the intellectual life of the people, and reached its highest point of development synchronously with the crest of social and cultural attainment. The first occurred when after the Persian Wars, the Greeks rebuilt the temples of Athens, and Phidias raised the Parthenon, still so perfect even in its ruins; the second took place "in the great days of the Italian Renaissance, when the spirit of beauty descended again on the earth, resplendent in joyous colour, and borne in triumphal progress to the sound of universal rejoicings." (1)

At the close of the Middle Ages a civilization had developed in Italy which, spreading thence, replaced the mediaeval and became the modern. The Renaissance, then, was the re-birth or revival of the ancient Greek and Roman culture. In matters of literature and art, especially, the Italians of this period were profoundly sensible of their debt to the ancients and copied them in every possible way. "It was not until the appearance of Cimabue, about 1290, that any advance was made beyond the rigid formulae of the Byzantine precedent, but from then on, particularly after Giotto with his humanism and naturalism, the progress was headlong in its impetuosity. It was a purely secular move-

(1) "Master Painters" by Stewart Dick, p. 3.

ment and a secular art, so far as its creators were concerned, but it was eagerly seized on by the Church that realized at once its didactic and emotional power, and to the end, three centuries later, it was the ecclesiastical power that gave the new art its strongest backing as it offered through religion itself the most stimulating subjects and the most powerful motive force.

In Italy, where it all began, the religious quality in painting, so strong at first in the work of Duccio, Cimabue and Giotto, continued with considerable, but diminishing force, well into the middle of the sixteenth century, disappearing finally with Leonardo, Michelangelo and Tintoretto." (1)

The Renaissance which had established a new paganism and a new society, sumptuous, luxurious, splendid with outward beauty, intellectually brilliant, filled with wars and manifold disorders was from any earlier Christian point of view quite licentious and amoral. As the records appear in the nineteenth century histories, the ethical standards of the time were most deplorable, while the morals of many of the clergy may be held up to shame and condemnation. It must be borne in mind that during the Renaissance custom justified or at least condoned what the nineteenth century would condemn with horror and disgust. More than likely the morals of the clerics were somewhat better than those of the nobility and the general public, which is not saying anything very much to their credit.

However, the fact remains that the Church and State vied with each other in the pursuit of intellectual and aesthetic

(1) "The Catholic Church and Art" by Ralph Adams Cram, p. 88.

culture, and princes, nobles and churchman unanimously became patrons of art of every kind, rewarding the workers bounteously and fostering and encouraging the different forms of art. All lines of distinction between the arts seems to have been broken down for we read of goldsmiths becoming architects and painters, sculptors turning to poetry and the learned of the day following the muse of painting. In the universal movement towards art in all its branches the Italians accepted the new style and the Renaissance, which so admirably suited the Italian temperament, became fixed in one generation.

In art as in music and literature great difficulties beset the path of any who dare break away from the well-beaten track of conventionalities, and probably for that reason the brilliant conquests of the Italian Renaissance are a most fascinating study. Each of the painters seems to have mapped out his own line of development and then followed his road unhesitatingly, quite certain it would bring him to the goal of his ambition.

The general and greatest art of this period is mostly attributed to Raphael, Michel Angelo and their contemporaries, but Browning immortalizes in his poems the names of earlier Italian painters who paved the way for these by breaking away from the universally accepted Byzantine style.

Browning seems to have felt that these pioneers in the Renaissance did not receive their due measure of praise for he says in "Old Pictures in Florence":



"But the wronged great souls--can they be quit  
Of a world where their work is all to do,  
Where you style them you of the little wit,  
Old Master This and Early the Other,  
Not Dreaming that Old and New are fellows:  
A younger succeeds to an elder brother,  
Da Vincis derive in good time from Dellos."

Although Browning was attracted by art in all its forms, and to artists of all classes, he seems to have had a particular fondness for painters, if we judge by the poems in which he deals directly with them. Regarding the poet's attitude to the Renaissance we find its three phases illustrated in as many different sets of poems: Greek Art or early mediaeval art in "Old Pictures in Florence"; later mediaeval art or early Renaissance in "Fra Lippo Lippi"; and later Renaissance in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's", and "Andrea del Sarto".

In "Essays on Browning" by Marion Little, we find the following paragraph: "The Italian painters of the thirteenth century aimed at representing the invisible through their art. They themselves made no mistake about it; they knew that this was best accomplished by fidelity to nature; but later, their successors, in their striving after the invisible, arrived in time at a method by which they represented the visible in a manner in which all fidelity to nature was forgotten or despised as unnecessary. Thereupon arose the art of the Renaissance with its exuberant sensuousness, its insistence upon the value of mere physical life. And in any movement of reform on the one side or on the other, the swinging of the pendulum just a little too far has always to be

calculated upon. All this, and much more, is strikingly brought out in two poems of Browning's, 'Old Pictures in Florence' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi'; the watch-word of the one being, 'Bring the invisible full into play'; of the other, 'The value and significance of flesh.'" (1)

It is interesting to note the historical value of each of these early Renaissance artists mentioned by the poet in "Old Pictures in Florence". I begin with Giotto, not because he belongs there chronologically but because Browning addresses him first in these lines:

"'Tis a life-long toil till our lump be leaven--  
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.  
Things learned on earth we shall practice in heaven:  
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.  
Thyself shalt afford the example Giotto!  
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,  
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not) 'O!'  
Thy great Campanile is yet to finish."

No painter ever made such an impression on his age as Giotto (1265-1337). All fourteenth century art betrays his influence. His greatest triumphs in art and the thorough manner in which his successors imitated him proved how fully he embodied the national genius. Vasari relates that Cimabue, rambling one day in the neighborhood of Colle, saw a young shepherd lad drawing one of his sheep with a pointed rock on a smooth slate, and Cimabue thereupon took the lad and instructed him. The story is a pretty bit of fancy. There is no foundation for it as it is now known Giotto's father was a free-holder and therefore in easy circumstances. Another version of the story of Giotto's boyhood is that he was apprenticed to a Florentine wool merchant, but

(1) "Essays on Browning", by Marion Little, p. 145.

that instead of going to work he spent his time in Cimabue's shop watching the artists; whereupon his father applied to the master to have the boy taught painting. The legends of his marvelous skill, the stories of the fly that Cimabue tried vainly to brush off his picture, or the round O which he drew before the Pope's envoy with one sweep of his pencil, are proofs of the wonder and admiration which Giotto's attempts to follow nature more closely excited among his contemporaries.

Vasari with interesting and lengthy details tells the famous story of Giotto's O concluding with these words: "The messenger, unable to obtain anything more, went away very ill-satisfied and fearing that he had been fooled. Nevertheless, having despatched the other drawings to the Pope with the names of those who had done them he sent that of Giotto also, relating the mode in which he had made his circle, without moving his arm and without compasses; from which the Pope, and such of the courtiers as were well versed in the subject, perceived how far Giotto surpassed all the other painters of his time." (1) Historically, nothing is really known of Giotto's life until he was thirty years old. As an artist he is the true son of St. Francis as no less than twenty-eight frescoes of that saint's life have been done by Giotto. His epoch-making work was <sup>the</sup> decoration in fresco of Chapel of Santa Maria dell' Arend in Padua. Browning loved him for his work on the bell-tower of the famous Pisan Campanile and the Buomo of which the poet sings in "Luria". Again in "Old Pictures in Florence" Browning reproaches Giotto for not helping him to unearth some precious

(1) "Lives of the Painters" by Vasari, p. 103, Vol. 1.

works of art of which he might have become the owner--

".....But Giotto, you,  
Have you allowed, as the town-tongues babble it,--  
Oh, never! it shall not be counted true--  
That a certain precious little tablet  
Which Buonarroti eyed like a lover,  
Was buried so long in oblivion's womb  
And, left for another than I to discover,  
Turns up at last! and to whom? -- to whom?"

The other painters mentioned in the poem are brought in  
in the following order:

"But at any rate I have loved the season  
Of Art's spring-birth so dim and dewy:  
My sculpture is Nicolo the Pisan,  
My painter--who but Cimabue?  
Nor ever was man of them all indeed,  
From these to Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo,  
Could say that he missed my critic-meed.  
So, now to my special grievance--heigh ho!

Their ghosts still stand, as I said before,  
Watching each fresco flaked and rasped,  
Blocked up, knocked out, or whitewashed o'er:  
--No getting again what the Church has grasped!  
The works on the wall must take their chance;  
'Works never conceded to England's thick clime!'  
(I hope they prefer their inheritance  
Of a bucketful of Italian quick-lime.)

When they go at length, with such a shaking  
Of heads o'er the old delusion, sadly  
Each master his way thro' the black streets taking,  
Where many a lost work breathes tho' badly--  
Why don't they bethink of them of who has merited?  
Why not reveal, while their pictures dree  
Such doom, how a captive might be out-ferreted?  
Why is it they never remember me?

Not that I expect the great Bigordi,  
Nor Sandro to hear me, chivalric, bellicose;  
Nor the wronged Lippino; and not a word I  
Say of a scrap of Fra Angelico's:  
But are you too fine, Taddeo Gaddi,  
To grant me a taste of your intonaco,  
Some Jerome that seeks the heaven with a sad eye?  
Not a churlish saint, Lorenzo Monaco?

Could not the ghost with the close red cap,  
My Pollajolo, the twice a craftsman,  
Save me a sample, give me the hap  
Of a muscular Christ that shows the draughtsman?  
No Virgin by him the somewhat petty,  
Of finical touch and tempera crumbly--  
Could not Alesso Baldovinetti  
Contribute so much, I ask him humbly?

Margheritone of Arezzo,  
With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret  
(Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so,  
You bald old saturnine poll-clawed parrot?)  
Not a poor glimmering Crucifixion  
Where in the foreground kneels the donor?  
If such remain, as is my conviction,  
The hoarding it does you but little honour.

They pass; for them the panels my thrill,  
The tempera grow alive and tinglish;  
Their pictures are left to the mercies still  
Of dealers and stealers, Jews and the English,  
Who, seeing mere money's worth in their prize,  
Will sell it to somebody calm as Zeno  
At naked High Art, and in ecstasies  
Before some clay-cold vile Carlino!"

To Nicolo of Pisa (1206 - 1278) is conceded the praise of having courageously given the death blow to the stiff Byzantine in the art of sculpture. His inspiration came from the antique reliefs of the Greco-Roman art which may still be seen in Pisa and his influence was felt not only in Italy but it even penetrated to Germany. His greatest achievement is the marble pulpit of the Baptistery in Pisa (1260). He is recognized as the predecessor, and in some sense as the inspirer of the Florentine painter Giotto.

John C. Van Dyke in his "History of Painting" says Cimabue (1240-1302) seems to be the most notable instance in early times of a Byzantine-educated painter who departed from the art-teachings of that period. Being a man of greater originality and ability than his contemporaries he retained some of the Byzantine patterns but infused his figures with a little appearance of life, loosened

the lines of the draperies and made several small improvements upon the well accepted traditional form of painting. The well known story of Cimabue's painting of the Virgin for the church of Santa Maria Novella which has been used by countless writers is now known to have no historical foundation. The story is found in Vasari's "Lives of the Painters" which says that the people of Florence were so delighted with Cimabue's painting of the Virgin that they carried it in solemn procession through the streets of the city. It is now an established fact that the Madonna of Santa Maria Novella which now hangs in a transept of that church and formerly attributed to the brush of Cimabue is the work of an artist of Siena, Duccio di Buoninsegna (1258). (1) This is proved by the discovery of a contract in the records of Florence, and also from the evident relationship between this immortal work of art and other works of Duccio. Again it has been discovered that the triumphal procession to which Vasari refers in his account of Cimabue was held not in Florence but in Siena (June 9, 1311) in honour of another masterpiece by this same Duccio, the great Maesta, or "Madonna of Majesty" which may now be seen at the Opera del Duomo in Siena.

The Bronze Doors of the Florence Baptistry designed and executed by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1381-1455) are the epoch-making works of modern sculpture. These were finished in 1450 and nothing similar was again attempted in Italy until the Italian decadence had set in.

The city of Florence, Italy, contains many frescoes by Ghirlandajo (1449-1494)--some of them in a good state of preservation--

(1) Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume III, Page 771.

others much faded. In the church of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Trinita are his finest frescoes. Those in the latter edifice illustrate the life of St. Francis and those in the former are scenes in the lives of the Virgin and St. John in which many of the figures are portraits of distinguished Florentine families. Browning also refers to Ghirlandajo by his family name Bigordi.

In speaking of the well-loved Botticelli a modern writer has said: "Of all the artists of the Fifteenth Century, there was no one who more fully exercised his imaginative faculty than Sandro Filipepi, generally called Botticelli, and no one who more fully represents the spirit of the Renaissance." (1) Into the oft-repeated themes of ecclesiastical art; Botticelli infused his own strong and abundant life painting with a vigor and energy never before known. His imagination was also captivated by the poetic legends of the ancient pagan world and we find among his paintings subjects from the poets of Greece and Rome. In the diversity of his work Botticelli also turned to Dante whose spirit penetrated his most famous paintings and whose influence can be traced in his great altar pieces.

Fillippino Lippi (1458-1515) was at an early age placed in Botticelli's studio. He was only twenty years old when he painted the picture of the "Vision of St. Bernard" preserved at Badia of Florence, which is perhaps the most charming of all Florentine altar-pieces. Fillippino had no pupils of distinction. As he was too much dominated by the influence of

(1) "Famous Paintings" -- The Nativity, (Botticelli)  
by Cosmo Monkhouse, p. 157.

others he founded no tradition of art.

John Addington Symonds says that in tracing the history of Italian painting one is pursuing a journey down an ever broadening river, whose affluence are Giotto and Masaccio, Ghirlandajo, Signorelli, and Mantegna. We have to turn aside and land upon the shore to visit a heaven-reflecting lakelet self-encompassed and secluded whom he calls Fra Angelico. Living in that wonderful age of the early Renaissance Fra Angelico (1387-1455) was one of its most characteristic products. He was the first of the painters to make use of classical forms, the first to represent from nature a landscape that can be identified and also the first to attempt to solve certain problems in aerial perspective. He was the last disciple of Giotto and the first harbinger of Raphael. To Fra Angelico belongs the undying glory of fixing in a series of imperishable visions the religious ideal of the Middle Ages, just at the time when it might have disappeared forever. His most important works were a series of frescoes on the walls of St. Mark's Convent, Florence. He is otherwise admired and known for his Angel Musicians which surround one of his Madonnas in Florence. In this and other oil paintings his colouring is remarkably delicate and vivid. The expressions of his faces are pure and soulful to a degree scarcely otherwise known to art.

Taddeo Gaddi (1300-1366) has a claim to immortality only in that he was a favorite pupil of Giotto but his frescoes have not withstood the ravages of time.



Of the Pollajolo brothers, Antonio (1432-1498) and Pietro (1443-1496), it may be said their contribution to the Renaissance lies chiefly in the direction of the study of anatomy; but their art is characterized by a display of over-developed muscles, vigorous action and a frank brutality. Antonio was a pupil of Donatello and his masterpieces are a bas-relief of the Nativity in the Baptistry (museum of the Duomo) and work in gold craft which was done in the studio of Ghiberti. As a sculptor, he excelled in the treatment of bronze. Pietro's chief work was the painting of altar-pieces.

According to Vasari, Alesso Baldovinetti (1427-1499) was the master of the famous Ghirlandajo. He experimented much with colours in fresco and oil, but his remaining works are badly preserved. He had the reputation of being the ablest worker in mosaics of his day.

Margheritone of Arezzo (1219-1289) is a name of importance because he is one of the first to depart from the Byzantine style. His special work was Crucifix painting.

The frescoes of the church of Santa Maria Novella which represent the Inferno and Paradiso of Dante are said to be the work of Orgagna (? - 1368). In his work there is said to be great beauty and variety of expression.

In "Browning's Italy", Helen Archibald Clarke in writing of Browning's omission of the great name "Masaccio" among the old masters states: "It seems a little curious that while Browning was calling up so many of these old

artists, that he should have omitted to mention Masaccio, who is by general consent considered one of the greatest-- the link indeed between Giotto and Raphael. Lafenestre, the art critic, says of him that 'he determines anew the destiny of painting by setting it again, but this time strengthened by a perfected technique in the broad straight path which Giotto had opened. In technique he added to art a fuller comprehension of perspective, especially of aerial perspective, the differences in the planes of figures in the same composition. Simplicity and style were both his to such an extent that the Chapel of the Brancacci became a school room to the masters of the fifteenth century. His color was agreeable, gray and atmospheric, his drawing direct and simple'.

Another critic adds to this 'He was at once an idealist and a realist, having the merit, not of being the only one to study familiar reality, but of understanding better than any of his predecessors the conditions in virtue of which reality becomes worthy of art'.

We may get over the difficulty by imagining that Masaccio was one of those painters between Ghiberti and Ghirlandajo who had not 'missed' his 'critic meed'." (1)

Most of the great critics and students of art give to these early painters a goodly share of praise. Some are even extravagantly enthusiastic over them, so that we might be tempted to think Browning's note of praise

(1) "Browning's Italy" by Helen A. Clarke, p. 238.

almost superfluous, but his is the view of the modern man looking back at early art and regretting the fate which has befallen so many of the early masterpieces--the neglect, the whitewashings, the removals at the hands of the ignorant and unappreciative.

Chapter lll.

POEMS ON PAINTING

Many critics of art and poetry have divided Browning's three poems, "Pictor Ignotus", "Fra Lippo Lippi", and "Andrea del Sarto" into three different forms of work on art as regards time, as well as three different aspects of the aesthetic impulse. The first belongs to the early Renaissance "the season of Art's spring-birth, so dim and dewy", (1) -- the impulse by which the first monastic painters felt within themselves the gift and the power to break away from the set laws of their art, but who were held back by a dread of submitting their work to contact with the world and who, instead, devoted their talent to pure, beautiful though monotonous repetition of sacred subjects.

"Pictor Ignotus" is the first of the poems about painting into which Browning put his finest work. He who loved intensely all sort of experimentation must have felt pity for a character such as the Unknown Painter who lacked the courage to strike out boldly into a new phase of art, while all the time feeling he had the power to do so. In answer to praise the painter hears lavished on another man's work he says:

"I could have painted pictures like that youth's  
Ye praise so. How my soul springs up! No bar  
Stayed me--ah, thought which saddens while it soothes!  
--Never did fate forbid me, star by star,  
To outburst on your night, with all my gift  
Of fires from God: nor would my flesh have shrunk  
From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift  
And wide to heaven, or straight like thunder, sunk  
To the centre, of an instand; or around

(1) "Old Pictures in Florence".

Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan  
The license and the limit, space and bound,  
Allowed to truth made visible in man."

His words have all the bitterness of suppressed longing.  
He feels he could reach the height of his ambition--the goal of  
his dreams, and that he, too, could send forth one of his  
pictures-- (alluding to Cimabue's):

"Bound for the calmly satisfied great State,  
Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went,  
Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,  
Thro' old streets named afresh from the event."

The painter feels all this glory and fame must be bought  
by trafficking in his art, exposing it to the gaze of the vulgar  
world, hearing it criticised--perhaps mocked at by those who  
know not its value, and in view of this, he prefers to remain  
obscure and in that way guard his creations from exploitation  
and sacrilege. He says, imagining his work on view,

"They drew me forth, and spite of me..enough!  
These buy and sell our pictures, take and give,  
Count them for garniture and household-stuff,  
And where they live needs must our pictures live  
And see their faces, listen to their prate,  
Partakers of their daily pettiness,  
Discussed of,--'This I love, or this I hate  
This likes me more, and this affects me less!'  
Wherefore I chose my portion. If at whiles  
My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint  
These endless cloisters, and eternal aisles  
With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint,  
With the same cold calm beautiful regard,--  
At least no merchant traffics in my heart;  
The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward  
Vain tongues from where my pictures stand apart:  
Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine  
While, blackening in the daily candle-smoke,  
They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,  
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke."

But still the poet has not yet completed the painter's monologue.

He would have him settle down to a state of mournful resignation, accepting with a saddened soul oblivion and ignominy in preference to the questionable reward of publicity--a reward from which his too sensitive, doubting nature shrinks. He exclaims:

"So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!  
O youth, men praise so,--holds their praise its worth?  
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?  
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?"

In speaking of this poem Dowden says: "The true gift of art--Browning in later poems frequently insists upon this--is not for the connoisseur or collector who rests in a material possession, but for the artist who, in the zeal of creation, presses through his own work to that unattainable beauty, that flying joy which exists beyond his grasp and for ever lures him forward. In "Pictor Ignotus" the earliest study in his lives of the painters was made by the poet. The world is gross, its touch unsanctifies the sanctities of art; yet the brave audacity of genius is able to penetrate this gross world with spiritual fire. Browning's unknown painter is a delicate spirit, who dares not mingle his soul with the gross world; he has failed for lack of a robust faith, a strenuous courage. But his failure is beautiful and pathetic, and for a time at least his Virgin, Babe, and Saint will smile from the cloister wall with their 'cold, calm, beautiful regard'. And yet to have done otherwise! to have been other than this; to have striven like that youth--the Urbinate--men praise so!" (1)

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning" by Edward Dowden, p. 79.

In his chapter on "Imaginative Representations" Stopford Brooke in speaking of the Renaissance says: "There are some minor poems which represent different phases of its life. One of these is the "Pictor Ignotus". There must have been many men, during the vital time of the Renaissance, who, born, as it were, into the art-ability of the period, reached without trouble a certain level in painting, but who had no genius, who could not create; or who, if they had some touch of genius, had no boldness to strike it into fresh forms of beauty; shy, retiring men, to whom the criticism of the world was a pain they knew they could not bear. These men are common at a period when life is racing rapidly through the veins of a vivid city like Florence. The general intensity of the life lifts them to a height they would never reach in a dull and sleepy age. The life they have is not their own, but the life of the whole town. And this keen perception of life outside of them persuades them that they can do all that men of real power can do. In reality, they can do nothing and make nothing worth a people's honour. Browning, who himself was compact of boldness, who loved experiment in what was new, and who shaped what he conceived without caring for criticism, felt for these men, of whom he must have met many; and, asking himself 'How they would think; what they would do; and how life would seem to them', wrote this poem. In what way will poor human nature excuse itself for failure? How will the weakness in the man try to prove that it was power? How, having lost the joy of life, will

he attempt to show that his loss is gain, his failure a success; and, being rejected of the world, approve himself within?

This was a subject to please Browning; meat such as his soul loved: a nice, involved Daedalian, labyrinthine sort of thing, a mixture of real sentiment and self-deceit; and he surrounded it with his pity for its human weakness.

'I could have painted any picture that I pleased', cries this painter; 'represented on the face any passion, any virtue'. If he could he would have done it, or tried it. Genius cannot hold itself in. . . . . Alas! had he had genius, no fear would have stayed his hand, no judgment of the world delayed his work. What stays a river breaking from its fountain-head?

So he sank back, saying the world was not worthy of his labours. 'What? Expose my noble work (things he had conceived but not done) to the prate and pettiness of the common buyers who hang it on their walls! No, I will rather paint the same monotonous round of Virgin, Child, and Saints in the quiet church, in the sanctuary's gloom. No merchant then will traffic in my heart. My pictures will moulder and die. Let them die. I have not vulgarised myself or them.' (1) Having spoken of "Fra Lippo Lippi", "Andrea del Sarto", and "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church" the same author says: "Brilliant and nobly wrought as the first three poems are of which I have

(1) "The Poetry of Robert Browning" by Stopford Brooke, p. 313.



written, this quiet little piece (Pictor Ignotus) needed and received a finer workmanship, and was more difficult than they." (1)

The next poem, "Fra Lippo Lippi" portrays the invasion of the realistic spirit in the realms of art and religion--the second phase of the Renaissance which had turned from representing the soul to representing the body in beauty and natural movement; from representing saints, angels and virtues to representing real men and women from the streets and houses of Florence--"from symbolism to reality" (2)

As a mono-drama the poem is past excellence, being done in the poet's masterly fashion and redolent of joy and incessant movement, showing in the monk's words the conflict between mediaeval art and the growing spirit of the Renaissance. This poem brings out very clearly the transition period. It analyzes a time which was doing away with the past, living the present joyfully and intensely, and peering into the future with a prophetic spirit. Probably no other poem so perfectly represents the condition of art, as well as the life of the city of Florence, and shows it through the conversation of a humorous figure, which according to Arthur Symons, is Browning's finest figure of comedy. Speaking of this poem he says:

"The story of Filippo Lippi is taken, like that of Andrea,

(1) "The Poetry of Robert Browning" by Stopford Brooke, p. 315.

(2) "The Poetry of Robert Browning" by Stopford Brooke, p. 304.

from Vasari's "Lives": it is taken as literally, it is made as authentically living, and, in its own more difficult way, it is no less genuine a poem. The jolly, jovial tone of the poem, its hearty humour and high spirits, and the breathless rush and hurry of the verse, render the scapegrace painter to the life. Not less in keeping is the situation in which the unsaintly friar is introduced: caught by the civic guard, past midnight, in an equivocal neighborhood, quite able and ready, however, to fraternise with his captors, and pour forth, rough and ready, his ideas and adventures. A passage from the poem placed side by side with an extract from Vasari will show how faithfully the record of Fra Lippo's life is followed, and it will also show, in some small measure, the essential newness, the vividness and revelation of the poet's version.

'By the death of his father', writes Vasari, 'he was left a friendless orphan at the age of two years, his mother also having died shortly after his birth. The child was for some time under the care of a certain Mona Lapaccia, his aunt, the sister of his father, who brought him up with great difficulty until he had attained his eighth year, when, being no longer able to support the burden of his maintenance, she placed him in the above-named convent of the Carmelites.'

Here is Browning's version:--

'I was a baby when my mother died  
And father died and left me in the street.  
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two  
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,  
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,  
My stomach being empty as your hat,  
The wind doubled me up and down I went.  
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,  
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)  
And so along the wall, over the bridge,  
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,  
While I stood munching my first bread that month:  
'So, boy, you're minded', quoth the good fat father,  
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,--  
'To quit this very miserable world?'

But not only has Browning given a wonderfully realistic portrait of the man; a man to whom life in its fulness was the only joy, a true type of the Renaissance spirit, metamorphosed by ironic fate into a monk; he has luminously indicated the true end and aim of art and the false asceticism of so-called 'religious' art, in the characteristic comments and confessions of an innovator in the traditions of religious painting." (1)

Another author writes: "In "Fra Lippo Lippi", a poem seldom quoted in connection with Browning's interest in art, he touches hands with realism of the fiery, youthful, joyous type. There are few poems that come nearer to the painter's idea than this one, showing as it does the passion for 'the shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades, changes, surprises', by which the master of Botticelli was inspired. Here, much more than in the "Andrea del Sarto", Browning displays his sympathy with the instinct for making portraits pure and simple of the visible world. Never mind soul, Lippi says to his Prior, that has nothing to do with painting; paint the flesh aright and count it crime to let a truth slip, and you'll see what you will get:

'Say there's beauty with no soul at all--  
(I never saw it--put the case the same--)  
If you get simple beauty and naught else,  
You get about the best thing God invents;  
That's somewhat; and you'll find the soul you have missed,  
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.'

This is no less Browning than Lippi, at the moments when Browning is most an artist, when he cares least about his way

(1) "An Introduction to the Study of Browning", by Arthur Symonds,  
p. 107.

of looking at things and most about the thing looked at, when he writes not with the idea of teaching any lesson or pointing any moral, but for the sheer love of a beautiful or interesting theme on which he can exercise his skill and ingenuity to his heart's content. Perhaps the fact that these pagan moments are rare with him makes them the more precious. Perhaps, also, the fact that they reveal, even more than his prayerful and didactic hours, his wholesome and impulsive nature, his abhorrence of insincerity and vulgarity, his liking for the brightest and richest, the most amusing and interesting aspects of life, makes them seem to us to hold the finest distillation of his genius." (1)

In the poem, the monk, who had been forced into a monastery to lead a life for which he was in no way fitted, and who has been caught in a night frolic, introduces himself to the reader in these lines:

"I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!  
You need not clap your torches to my face.  
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!  
What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,  
And here you catch me at an alley's end  
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?  
The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,  
Do,--harry out, if you must show your zeal,  
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,  
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,  
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!"

He goes on to tell the police he could not stay imprisoned in the Cosimo di Medici place, so he escaped by making a ladder of the bed clothing and draperies after he had heard a gay group

(1) "Browning--Poet and Man--A Survey", by Elizabeth Luther Cary, Chapter IX, p. 169.

of singing girls pass by. Then he tells the pathetic story of his own life. Left an orphan, living in the streets of the city, the half-starved Lippo had been taken to the monastery by an aunt and left there to be made a monk although only eight years of age. His experience in the streets of Florence became of great use to him. Books were a drudgery, so instead of studying he filled his copybooks with men's faces, drew arms and legs on the notes in the music of antiphons, and sketched countless pictures "on the wall, the bench, the door". The Prior then put Lippo to painting the cloister walls which he covered with figures, living and realistic. He drew

"First every sort of monk, the black and white,  
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,  
From good old gossips waiting to confess  
Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,--  
To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,  
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there  
With the little children round him in a row  
Of admiration, half for his beard, and half  
For that white anger of his victim's son  
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,  
Signing himself with the other because of Christ  
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this  
After the passion of a thousand years)  
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,  
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve  
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,  
Her pair of ear-rings and a bunch of flowers  
(The brute took growling) prayed, and so was gone.  
I painted all, then cried, 'Tis ask and have;  
Choose, for more's ready!'--laid the ladder flat,  
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall."

All these appealed to the monks who came to view it, but to the Prior and the men of the old school it was shocking and sensuous: "Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!" they said, but the monk had no inclination to stick to the old

method--he argued one must paint beautiful bodies to portray the soul--saying beauty was the greatest of God's inventions. Dowden speaking of this point in "Fra Lippo Lippi" writes: "Browning does not mean that art in its passionate pursuit of the highest ends should be indifferent to the means, or that things spiritual do not require as adequate a sensuous embodiment as they are capable of receiving from the painter's brush or the poet's pen. Were art a mere symbol or suggestion, two bits of sticks nailed crosswise might claim to be art as admirable as any. What is the eye for, if not to see with vivid exactness? What is the hand for, if not to fashion things as nature made them? It is through body that we reach after the soul; and the passion for truth and reality is a passion for the invisible which is expressed in and through these. Such is the pleading of Fra Lippo Lippi, the tonsured painter caught out of bounds, in that poem in which the dramatic monologue of Browning attains its perfection of life and energy. Fra Lippo is intoxicated by the mere forms and colours of things, and he is assured that these mean intensely and mean well:

'The beauty and the wonder and the power,  
The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,  
Changes, surprises--and God made it all!'

These are the gospel to preach which he girds loin and lights the lamp, though he may perforce indulge a patron in shallower pieties of the conventional order, and though it is not all gospel with him, for now and again, when the moon shines and girls go skipping and singing down Florence Streets--

'Zooks, sir, flesh and blood, that's all I'm made of!'

Fra Lippo with his outbreaks of frank sensuality is far nearer to Browning's kingdom of heaven than is the faultless painter; he presses with ardour towards his proper goal in art; he has full faith in the ideal, but with him it is to be sought only through the real; or rather it need not be sought at all, for one who captures any fragment of reality captures also undesignedly and inevitably significance." (1)

The monk wishes to assure his hearers that God meant the artists to let us use their minds with which to see the beauties He has created.

" . . . . . We're made so that we love  
First when we see them painted, things we have passed  
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;  
And so they are better, painted--better to us,  
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out."

Nevertheless, he continues his monologue by saying he rubbed out his men and women, though now he may paint as he pleases with a Medici for a patron, but he sticks to the old schooling and works away at his saints until the constraint of the monastic life becomes unbearable to him and he breaks away for a few days. He ends with a laughing promise to make up to the Church for his misbehaviour by painting a wonderful picture.

" . . . . . I shall paint  
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,  
Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,  
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet  
As puff on puff of grated orris-root  
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning" by Edward Dowden, p. 192.

And then i' the front, of course a saint or two--  
Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,  
Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white  
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,  
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,  
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,  
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these  
Secured at their devotion, up shall come  
Out of a corner when you least expect,  
As one by a dark stair into a great light,  
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!"

The picture thus described is "Coronation of the Virgin" which hangs in the Accademie delle Belle Arti at Florence. One writer says: "The Coronation of the Virgin", described at the end of the poem, was according to Vasari, the picture which made Lippo Lippi known to Cosimo de' Medici, but it has been shown on other authority that this picture was executed long after Cosimo first knew Lippo Lippi, so Browning is justified in imagining it a kind of a penance picture for the escapade described. It has been said that the woman with the children in the foreground in this picture is either Spinetta or Lucrezia Buti, but at the time they were both small children.

One of these, Lucrezia, was the beautiful girl with whom Lippo fell in love at the Convent of Santa Margherita in Prato. He asked the nuns to allow him to use her for the model of the Virgin in the picture he was painting for them for the high altar. They consented and the result was that he carried her off from the convent. The nuns felt deeply disgraced and the father was outraged, but Lucrezia could not be prevailed upon to return. She became the mother of the famous painter Filippino Lippi, and it is said that Lippo and Lucrezia were afterwards granted a dispensation of marriage from the Pope. It is evidently to her that Lippo refers as 'a sweet angelic



slip of a thing' in the poem.

All these events are woven into the poem, and life-likeness is given to the scene by its dramatic form and the introduction of the guard and of the girls singing the fascinating little flower songs, --the Stornelli,--which the Italians at that time used to improvise with the greatest ease. The criticism which Browning puts into the mouths of the monks, who objected to his eminently human portraiture of sacred subjects does not seem to be justified by Vasari's accounts of the way in which his work was received. Symonds, among modern critics, comes the nearest to voicing their objections when he says, 'Bound down to sacred subjects, he was too apt to make angels out of street urchins and to paint the portraits of peasant-loves for Virgins. His delicate sense of natural beauty gave peculiar charm to this false treatment of religious themes. Nothing, for example, can be more attractive than the rows of angels bearing lilies in his "Coronation of the Virgin"; and yet, when we regard them closely, we find that they have no celestial quality of form or feature'.

It is this very fact of an intense quality of human sympathy that commends him to others and makes him a most important factor in the development of art." (1)

Art critics recognize that to Fra Lippo Lippi belongs the great work of having humanized the Madonna and Child. In exchange for the conventionalized type which had

(1) "Browning's Italy" by Helen A. Clarke, p. 247.

been called divine, he brought to the world the human - a real mother and child - giving both the features of people living at that time. With joyous realism he sounded the first utterance of modern painting in the severe school of the fifteenth century.

"Andrea del Sarto", the third poem of the art group and in the opinion of many the finest of Browning's dramatic monologues, reveals the full Renaissance and the impulse of one of its masters, who could have been among the greatest, but who sacrificed sincerity to popularity, adopted a ruinous tendency towards a compromise and wasted his energy in the effort to serve God and mammon. It is "the mournful self-revelation of the painter Andrea, so full of the sentiment of better things, so unable to overcome the conscious weakness of nature". (1)

The occasion which caused Browning to write this poem is told by Mrs. Andrew Crosse who says Mr. John Kenyon, a friend of the poet's, had asked him to secure a copy of the painting "Andrea del Sarto and his Wife" which hangs in the Pitti Art Gallery in Florence. As Browning was unable to secure the desired copy he wrote the poem which he sent to his friend, -- thus giving to the world this great monologue, a work of surpassing beauty which has so fundamentally grasped the painter's character as mirrored in his life and works.

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1531) was a pupil of Pietro di Cosimo whose attention he attracted when working in a goldsmith's shop where he had been apprenticed at an early age by

(1) "The Victorian Age of English Literature" by Margaret Cliphant, p. 222.

his father, and where, instead of working at his craft, he copied the designs of his master. Being a clever draughtsman and having acquired a marvelous skill in the handling of colours, he soon obtained commissions to paint in several monasteries and churches. His finest frescoes are in the Church of the Annunziata and remain his most charming and attractive work although painted when he was a little over twenty. By this time Andrea's talent had attracted the notice of one of the Medici and in 1515 when Pope Leo X, the great art patron of the Vatican, visited Florence, he employed Andrea to construct a temporary facade for the Cathedral, adorned with Chiaroscuro paintings in imitation of statues and bas-reliefs, which excited general admiration. This and a series of paintings from the life of the Baptist in the cloisters of the Scalzo or Barefooted Friars in the Via Larga are works which reveal the artist's wonderful powers in all their fullness. The story of Andrea's marriage is familiar to us from the pages of Vasari, who at one time was a pupil of the artist's and whose dislike for Lucrezia, according to some critics, lessened in no way the accounts of her immoral life and her evil influence over Andrea. In 1518 Andrea found a generous patron in the French Monarch, Francis I. The sad narrative of his leaving Fontainebleau at the oft-repeated request of Lucrezia, and his dishonesty in squandering the funds entrusted to him by the French King brings us to his pitiful and steady downfall. Instead of achieving any further greatness, the painter, realizing the completeness of the influence of his wife, painted only such pictures as would bring ready

gain, and he died when comparatively young in extreme poverty, deserted by the woman for whom he had sacrificed his life, his honour and his art, and whose face lives on as the Madonna in all his pictures.

The Italians called him "il pittore senza errori" or "the faultless painter". By this they meant his drawings of line and mass, his light and shadow, his handling of colours and graceful disposition of draperies (which are now considered over-crowded)--all these they considered above criticism. And yet with his unerring hand, his admirable technique of composition, Andrea is not ranked as a great painter of the Renaissance because he lacked precisely the qualities Browning deploras--lofty ideals, spiritual insight, depth of emotion, and courage to do right in the face of difficulties. One art critic says: "A great deal has been written and said about the influence of other artists upon the art of Del Sarto, and critics of ability have sought to trace in him the manners of Fra Bartolommeo and Leonardo, of Ghirlandajo and Michelangelo. But though there may, of course, be truth in pronouncements of this sort, we are inclined to believe that, beyond the subtle influence and stimulating incitement which all great works must necessarily impose upon contemporary workers, Del Sarto was free from seeking to follow the manner of any who went before him. Reminiscences of Piero de Cosimo may be found in his earlier works. Durer aroused his liveliest admiration, and we know that the frescoes of Masaccio were the constant study of his youth, and must have determined to a large degree the colorist Del Sarto was yet to be; but these were but passing influences, while

the only abiding inspirer of his art was, and ever remained, Nature herself!

Del Sarto worthily represents the Golden Age of the Cinquecento. The Renaissance was over. It had touched a time when technical processes were perfected, but when already the aim after ideal beauty was beginning to sink, and an achieved greatness, which the age could no longer support, sank rapidly into that mediocrity which marked the arts generally at the close of the sixteenth century." (1)

One could quote indefinitely a variety of opinions from art critics on Andrea del Sarto. Swinburne in "Essays and Studies" declares we need a sweeter and purer speech than our English language to praise him, that it is in his own city of Florence only we can trace and tell how great a painter he was. On the other hand, Eugene Muntz in his "Histoire de l'art pendant la renaissance" says that few artists in the history of the Renaissance are more difficult to criticize, with anything like precision, because his work contains such a mingling of subtle deductions and intangible defects. Several other critics rank him immediately after Leonardo di Vinci, Michael Angelo and Raphael.

Whatever may be the position of Andrea as an artist, we know that Browning has assigned him a place among the most brilliantly endowed painters of that period, but as one who failed because he lacked strength to break the bonds which held him captive to the charms of an unworthy wife; one who

(1) "Masters in Art" by H. Guinness, Vol. 11, Part 22, p. 31.

knew he was not using his God-given gift to its fullest capacity, and who remained satisfied with earthly love when he might have had divine.

Dr. Berdoe traces the character of the painter scornfully in this light: "'Faultless but soulless' is the verdict of art critics on Andrea's works. Why is this? Mr. Browning's poem tells us in no hesitating phrase that the secret lay in the fact that Andrea was an immoral man, an infatuated man, passionately demanding love from a woman who had neither heart nor intellect, a wife for whom he sacrificed his soul and the highest interest of his art. He knew and loved Lucrezia while she was another man's wife; he was content that she should also love other men when she was his. He robbed King Francis, his generous patron, that he might give the money to his unworthy spouse. He neglected his parents in their poverty and old age. Is there not in these facts the secret of his failure? To Mr. Browning there is, and his poems tells us why. But, it will be objected, many great geniuses have been immoral men. This is so, but we cannot argue the point here; the poet's purpose is to show how in this particular case the evil seed bore fruit after its kind. The poem opens with the artist's attempts to bribe his wife by money to accord him a little semblance of love: he promises to paint that he may win gold for her. The keynote of the poem is struck in these opening words. It is evening, and Andrea is weary with his work, but he is never weary of praising Lucrezia's beauty; sadly he owns

that he is at best only a shareholder in his wife's affections, that even her pride in him is gone, that she neither understands nor cares to understand his art. He tells her that he can do easily and perfectly what at the bottom of his heart he wishes for, deep as that might be; he could do what others agonize to do all their lives and fail in doing, yet he knows, for all that, there burns a truer light of God in them than in him. Their works drop groundward, though their souls have glimpses of heaven that are denied to him. He could have beaten Rafael had he possessed Rafael's soul; for the Urbinate's technical skill, he takes a childish delight in showing, is inferior to his own; and had his Lucrezia urged him, inspired him, to claim a seat by the side of Michelangelo and Rafael, he might for her sake have done it. He sees he is but a half-man working in an atmosphere of silver-grey. He had his chance at Fontainebleau; there he sometimes seemed to leave the ground, but he had a claim which dragged him down. Lucrezia called him. Not only for her did he forsake the higher art ambitions, but the common ground of honesty; he descended to cement his walls with the gold of King Francis which he had stolen, and for her. From dishonesty to connivance at his wife's infidelity is an easy step; and so, while in the act of expressing his remorse at his ingratitude to the King, we find him asking Lucrezia quite naturally, as a matter of ordinary occurrence:

'Must you go?

That cousin here again? he waits outside?

Must see you--you, and not with me?'

Here we discover the secret of the soullessness; the fellow has the tailor in his blood, even though the artist is supreme at the fingers' ends. He is but a craftsman after

all. Think of Fra Angelico painting his saints and angels on his knees, straining his eyes to catch the faintest glimpse of the heavenly radiance of Our Lady's purity and holiness, feeling that he failed, too dazzled by the brightness of Divine light to catch more than its shadow, and we shall know why there is soul in the great Dominican painter, and why there is none in the Sarto. Lucrezia, despicable as she was, was not the cause of her husband's failure. His marriage, his treatment of Francis, his allowing his parents to starve, to die of want, while he paid gaming debts for his wife's lover,--all these things tell us what the man was. No woman ruined his soul; he had no soul to ruin." (1)

A more kindly critic has said of this same character, and she is well worth quoting at length: "Andrea del Sarto had fallen on what were for him evil days. The great Renaissance was in full swing; the pioneers had done their work; and now it was for the rank and file to follow on into the breach, and along the path that they had opened out. Early as it was, signs were not wanting that pointed to the thralldom in which the great Raphael was to hold the world for three hundred years after his death. Signs of the method of Raphael becoming stereotyped into a set of dogmas, and of the evolution of a school after his manner, were springing up. And Andrea del Sarto, with his fatal facility of execution, found that he could paint

(1) "The Browning Cyclopaedia" by Edward Berdoe, p. 17.



pictures that pleased and sold, while working upon other men's lines, the 'fundamental brain-work' absent.

But it was reserved for Browning to bring out the full pathos of all that this story implies: Browning, whose especial good gift it is to be able to breathe on the dry bones of facts and make them live. He who, from the bald records of an old murder case, could evolve a Caponsacchi, a Pompilia, and an Innocent XII, such as he presents him, now breathes upon Vasari's biography, and the man lives before us.

And it is an achievement peculiar to Browning's self, that, in giving us this picture of a man without a moral backbone, yet, so just is his estimate of him, so large and generous his view of human nature at its weakest, that the man is one to whom our heart goes out in pity, not one from whom we shrink back in contempt. And this in spite of the fact that the moral failure is placed in the most striking light, and that it is failure which Browning's individual bent would cause him to place in the category of sins of the most deadly class; for is it not the deliberate turning away from the light of a man to whom light has been given, until at last the moral nature is so weakened that a turning back is impossible? But the man is generous, gentle, and lovable. His love for Lucrezia is not all passion of the lower kind; it is full of tender making allowances, bearing with excusing. Throughout it is the infinite pathos, the

unutterable sadness of sin that oppresses us." (1)

The poem "Andrea del Sarto" is a series of word pictures which are extraordinarily vivid. We can visualize the man and the woman as they sit hand in hand in "the melancholy little house" they "built to be so gay with", - built with the gold of the French King. Through the twilight "A common greyness silvers everything" and we feel the settled, hopeless melancholy of the man, a melancholy against which he has even ceased to struggle.

"My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down,  
To yonder sober, pleasant Fiesole.  
There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;  
That length of convent-wall across the way  
Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;  
The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,  
And autumn grows, autumn in everything."

'My youth, my hope, my art,' how much is contained in these words from one only thirty-seven years old! His life is practically over. He no longer strives after his ideals - he has failed and rests upon his failure. Andrew knew his own capacity. He says:

"I can do with my pencil what I know,  
What I see, what at bottom of my heart  
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep--  
Do easily too--when I say, perfectly,  
I do not boast, perhaps: . . . . .  
I do what many dream of, all their lives,  
--Dream? strive to do, and agonise to do  
And fail in doing."

The faultless painter aimed too low. He sought to do the things he knew and a task well within his grasp. Never did he reach out as Raphael "that Heaven might so replenish

(1) "Essays on Robert Browning" by Marion Little, p. 166.

him, above and through his art." Had he done so he would not have failed. He whose eye for form was so true that he could correct the faults in the great Urbanite's work knew he had not reached the heights scaled by artists less endowed than he. Andrea realized, too, that artistic success of the kind he achieved meant moral failure, and that he fell below his compeers as well as many an unnamed artist whose works have come to nothing, and who did much less than he:

"So much less!

Well, less is more, Lucrezia, I am judged.  
There burns a truer light of God in them,  
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,  
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes to prompt  
This low-pulsed forthright craftsmen's hand of mine  
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,  
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,  
Enter and take their place there, sure enough,  
Though they come back and cannot tell the world.  
My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here."

The words just quoted "but I sit here" contain the pathos of lost possibilities and the painter's resignation to the said depth of his unalterable failure.

Andrea does not try to palliate his great weakness nor does he lay the blame on Lucrezia. She had given him what he had required of her: "the perfect brow, the perfect eyes, the more perfect mouth, the low voice", and yet, on this evening he realizes more clearly than ever what he might have been had his wife been a helpmate:

"Had you, with these the same, but  
    brought a mind!  
Some women do so. Had the mouth  
    there urged

God and the glory! Never care for  
gain.  
The present by the future, what  
is that?  
Live for fame, side by side with  
Angelo!  
Raphael is waiting: up to God  
all three!"

But Andrea knows that the golden gates are not to be opened for him because he has allied his soul to that which cannot be taken with him. In the weakness of his love for Lucrezia he has painted and painted profusely, selling his pictures to buy his wife's smiles: -

"While hand and eye and something  
of a heart  
Are left me, work's my ware, and  
what's it worth?  
I'll pay my fancy."

As the faultless painter looked over his life in retrospect a thought crossed his mind that voiced itself in these words:-

"Had I been two, another and  
myself,  
Our head would have o'erlooked  
the world."

But now, worn out and powerless to hold Lucrezia's love for which he has sold his soul and art, Andrea is resigned, though a faint desire to paint one more Madonna possesses him:

"Only let met sit  
The grey remainder of the evening out,  
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly  
How I could paint, were I but back in France,  
One picture, just one more--the Virgin's face,  
Not yours this time!"

This passing fancy gives place to fatalistic mood in which seeing his past he exclaims:

"--the whole seems to fall into a shape  
As if I saw alike my work and self  
And all that I was born to be and do,  
A twilight piece. Love, we are in God's hand,  
How strange now looks the life he makes us lead;  
So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!  
I feel he laid the fetter; let it lie!"

It would seem as though Andrea sensed there would be failure even after death, for in heaven, where perhaps he might have "new chances, one more chance" the four great walls in the new Jerusalem would be given to Leonardo, Raphael, Michael Angelo and himself to cover, but the three first without wives would still overcome him "because there's still Lucrezia, - as I choose" and so, tired out physically from the hard work such prolific painting entailed, his moral energy at its lowest ebb, the faultless painter lost his grip on life and art; and died in poverty deserted by Lucrezia.

Dr. Berdoe has said that as "Abt Vogler" is Browning's greatest poem on music, so "Andrea del Sarto" is his greatest art-poem,--no poet ever having given such utterances on music and painting as found in these works, and that if all the poet's work were to perish save these, they alone would be sufficient to ensure immortality for their author.

Chapter IV.

POEMS ON MUSIC

As each of the art poems presents a different type of artist and a different period of time, so Browning's three greatest poems on music deal with a trio of very different characters and display the same diversity of time and place. "Abt Vogler", feeling "the finger of God, the flash of the will than can" (1) in his work, portrays the inspired type who loses all sense of things earthly: "A Toccata of Galuppi's" represents the popular type, who, catering to the Venetian public in the frivolity of his day, had still the power to make the gay dancers "leave off talking" (2) to listen to his music; "Master Hugues of Saxe-Cotha", who is purely an imaginative character, gives us the type of musician whose fugue has become nothing but a mathematical production, and from which the old organist turns with relief to the music of Palestrina. A fourth work of Browning's dealing with music should also be included in this category of poems. It is "Charles Avison" from "Parleying with Certain People of Importance in their Day." He is the learned critic of the domain of music who says:

"There is no truer truth obtainable  
by man than comes from music." (3)

- (1) "Abt Vogler".
- (2) "A Toccata of Galuppi's."
- (3) "Charles Avison".

The author of "Robert Browning -- Essays and Thoughts" says: "To Browning belongs the honor among the poets of having discovered, or at any rate told us in verse, that in their method of working through the ear and of achieving results, the art which attacks the brain through the ear and the art which attacks the brain through the eye have one thing in common--the wish to interpret some secret of nature for the benefit of the artist and his fellow-men. An unconscious desire, of course: the first makers of hieroglyphics had probably no other thought than a method of communication which would pay them with their fellow-men in social consideration at least, if not in pecuniary profit; the first makers of music possibly merely sounded rude notes of love or war. In any case, the well established fact remains for what it is worth: music appeals to civilized beings alone, and to them only as human beings with a mind 'looking before and after'; the plastic art appeals to man and animal alike through their sense of sight and the power of associating visible images.

Browning then has from his own mind evolved the idea--probably latent in many other minds--that music and plastic arts have as developed in the last 400 to 500 years, gradually sought, and gradually found, a common standpoint of sympathy. Artists in both lines, according to him, want to know, because they love, love because they want to know, their subject. To both he attributes in their highest development the consequent or antecedent desire to know, nay, eventual power to know, human life, and for its sake all organic life. But in dealing poetically with painting or sculpture Browning has to appeal to his sense which exists in a

Bornean tree-dweller as much as in Mr. Ruskin, that is, to a sense existent in millions; with music he appeals to a faculty which exists only in a small minority of the human race, though reckoned by tens of thousands. That he brings the workers in these three arts together, as uniting on the common ground of loving their race, is at least one of the triumphant efforts of his genius . . . . . "Master Hugues", "A Toccata of Galuppi's", "Abt Vogler" are his three avowed poems about music. In each there is the poetic presentment of the soul, man's essence, at the back of, and more or less plainly moving with the inarticulate harmonies or discords; and however astonished any such composer as Master Hugues might be at having any meaning apart from that of technical construction applied to his fugue, Galuppi would surely have said, 'You divine the world I lived in and played for'; Abt Vogler or any great inventive composer would admit the value of even simple musical intervals (the 'commiserating sevenths' of Galuppi, the 'blunting into a ninth' of the Abbe) as modes of soul expression; nay the latter is distinctly formulated in the poem:

'I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep.'

I stand apart, see myself as I was, exalted too high and brought too low; the C major brings me back, not to the height of fantasy or aspiration, but the firm middle ground of this life.

A similar and much more elaborate blending of the soul's action with the construction of a composition of Schumann's, the Carnival which is worked out in "Fifine at the Fair", is Browning's only other direct and complete use of music as an interpreter of the



soul. True, all the poet's allusions to music are those of a man to whom music speaks in a plain tongue; and speaking in a less direct way, "One Word More", "In a Gondola", the songs in "Paracelsus", the songs in "Pippa Passes", the description of Arion in "Fifine at the Fair", seem as if written to a rhythmic chant or harmony audible only to the brain-sense of their maker. Not merely vocal melody: strings, reeds, pipes, silver or brass instruments, wail or triumph as only wordless music can, above the rhythm of the words." (1)

It has been said, and aptly so, that "Abt Vogler" is "the richest, deepest, fullest poem on music in the language" (2) and that it is "a very glimpse into the heaven where music is born" (3). None but a thorough musician could have written this poem, so perfect in detail, so technically correct that it can be written on the staff and the simple harmonic modulation played from the common chord, "sliding by semi-tones" through the various intervals named, until reaching the height of a ninth one modulates back to C major. Mrs. Orr reports that Browning studied under two different masters--"the Great John Refle" to whom reference is made in "Charles Avison" and who was the author of a valuable work on counter-point, and Mr. Abel, a pupil of Moscheles, who taught the poet execution. Browning must have found time for fairly continual practice of the piano and organ, for many writers of lives of the Brownings refer to evenings in Florence when the poet played Chopin, and an American writer visiting the "Casa Guidi" in 1847 spoke of Mrs. Browning sitting under the trees, or in the dusky convent

(1) "Robert Browning--Essays and Thoughts" by John T. Nettleship, p.271.

(2) "Introduction to Browning" by Arthur Symons, p. 22.

(3) " " " " " by " " , p. 22.

chapel at twilight, while Browning played delightful fugues and toccatas on the organ.

In this poem, as in "Andrea del Sarto", Browning has written of a real personage. George Joseph Vogler was born at Wurzburg in 1749. At a very early age he showed such a decided talent for music that his father encouraged him to devote his life to it, and the Elector Karl Theodor sent the boy to Italy to study under an eminent Italian master. While in Rome he studied for the priesthood and was ordained in 1775. He then went to Mannheim where he became court-chaplain and established a school of music. He invented a portable organ-orchestration, built on a simplified plan, and traveled with it all over Europe, everywhere creating interest on account of his virtuosity and sensational means of attracting attention. Vogler composed a large quantity of music, sacred as well as profane, practically all of which is now forgotten. In 1807 he settled at Darmstadt where he founded a school of music and where he died in 1814. His most lasting title to fame is the fact that C. M. von Weber and Giacomo Meyerbeer were his pupils.

All critics agree that no other poet has written so fully on music as Browning. Certainly no other has so vividly portrayed the immediate inspiration and the spiritual aspect of a musician's soul, entering into its inmost recesses and disclosing the earnest yearning, the lofty aspirations, and the prayerful hopes of the Abbe as he sits extemporizing on his orchestration. "The musician's sense of the reality of his work is wonderfully rendered. It is a palace

(1) "The Literature of the Victorian Era" by Hugh Walker, p. 425.

of sound that he rears; and the reaction, the starting of the tears as the palace vanishes away is followed immediately by the faith that 'there shall never be one lost good: what is lost in time will be found again in eternity'" (1) -- which was one of the poet's favorite beliefs.

"All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;  
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty nor good, nor power  
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist  
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour." (2)

Stopford Brooke says Browning entered so fully into his subject that he saw "Abt Vogler" in the silent church, playing to himself before the golden towers of the organ, and slipping with sudden surprise into a strain which is less his than God's. He saw the vision which accompanied the music, and the man's heart set face to face with the palace of music he had built. He saw him live in it and then pass to heaven with it and lose it. And he saw the close of the experience, with all its scenery in the church and in Abt Vogler's heart, at the same time, in one vision. In this unconscious shaping of his thought into a human incident, with its soul and scenery, is the imagination creating, like a god, a thing unknown, unseen before.

Having thus shaped the form, the imagination passed on to make the ornament. It creates that far-off image of Solomon and his spirits building their palace for the Queen of Sheba which exalts the whole conception and enlarges the reader's imagination through all the legends of the great King--and then it makes, for fresh adornment, the splendid piling up of the

(1) "The Literature of the Victorian Era" by Hugh Walker, p. 425.

(2) "Abt Vogler", Stanza X.

sounds into walls of gold, pinnacles, splendours and meteor moons; and lastly, with upward sweeping of its wings, bids the sky to fall in love with the glory of the palace, and the mighty forms of the noble Dead to walk in it. This is the imagination at play with its conception, adorning, glorifying, heightening the full impression, but keeping every imaged ornament misty, impalpable, as in a dream--for so the conception demanded.

And then, to fill the conception with the spirit of humanity, the personal passion of the poet rises and falls through the description, as the music rises and falls. We feel his breast beating against ours; till the time comes when, like a sudden change in a great song, his emotion changes into ecstasy in the outburst of the 9th verse:

"Therefore to whom turn I but to thee, the ineffable Name?"

It almost brings tears into the eyes. This is art-creation--this is what imagination, intense emotion, and individuality have made of the material of thought--poetry, not prose.

Even at the close, the conception, the imagination, and the personal passion keep their art. The rush upwards of the imaginative feeling dies slowly away; it is as evanescent as the Vision of the Palace, but it dies into another picture of humanity which even more deeply engages the human heart. Browning sees the organ-loft now silent and dark, and the silent figure in it, alone and bowed over the keys. The church is still, but aware of what has been. The golden pipes of the

organ are lost in the twilight and the music is over--all the double vision of the third heaven into which he has been caught has vanished away. The form of the thing rightly fits the idea. Then, when the form is shaped, the poet fills it with the deep emotion of the musician's soul, and then with his own emotion; and close as the air to the earth are the sorrow and exultation of Abt Vogler and Browning to the human heart--sorrow for the vanishing and the failure, exultant joy because what has been is but an image of the infinite beauty they will have in God. In the joy they do not sorrow for the failure. It is nothing but an omen of success. Their soul, greater than the vision, takes up common life with patience and silent hope. We hear them sigh and strike the chord of C." (1)

"Well, it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign:  
I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.  
Give me the keys. I feel for the common chord again,  
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,--yes,  
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep;  
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,  
The C. Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep."

In the sixth and seventh stanzas of the poem Browning, through the soul of the old organist, exalts music to the highest pinnacle in a paean of praise and this:

"All through my keys that gave their sounds to a wish of my soul,  
All through my soul that praised as its wish flowed visibly forth,  
All through music and me! . . . . .  
But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,  
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!  
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,  
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.  
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;  
It is everywhere in the world--loud, soft, and all is said:  
Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:  
And there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!"

(1) "The Poetry of Robert Browning" by Stopford Brooke, p. 151.

Of the words "out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star", one critic writes: "Three sounds and a Star! Is this the Musician's madness or the Poet's license? Neither, it is a truth and one 'we have heard and seen', and, adds Browning:

'consider and bow the head!'

and Mrs. Browning, too, reminds us:

'Earth's crammed with heaven  
And every common bush afire with God;  
But only he who sees--takes off his shoes."

Again we must go to Jacob Boehme with whom Browning seems to have been well acquainted. Three is a mystic number. Three discrete forms of one principle mixed, or crossed, make, not a fourth principle but a Star! . . . . .

The elucidation of the term "Star" is to be found in Eastern lore. The Eastern mind is much more subjective than our Western mind. It sees not merely an object but what that object means and represents. The old Oriental with his physical eyes saw in the sky a Star, but with his mental eyes he saw a light which reveals. To him every secret of Heaven or Nature shown to Man is a Star--something made known--so in the Revelation, we read of One who holds in His Hand the Seven Stars, which to the initiated means that He holds in His Power the All and Everything of that which can be revealed.

As regards the assertion in the poem, it is quite true that 'we have heard and seen'.

We have been told of the Music, of the Palace and of the Story of the two together. And the three great Arts of

Music, Architecture and Poetry, mingled together as they are in this marvellous poem, make 'not a fourth' Art, but become an exponent, a Star, to reveal by means of Tone Form, Line Form, and Word Form, thoughts of beauty and profundity which would otherwise be hidden." (1)

In the tenth stanza the poet reaches the highest philosophical truth - his beliefs in the existence of a home of pure ideals where the efforts of man on earth refined and purified shall form his delight throughout Eternity.

"The high that proved too high, the  
                                  heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to  
                                  lose itself in the sky,  
Are music sent up to God by the  
                                  lover and the bard;  
Enough that he heard it once: we  
                                  shall hear it by and by."

And so the musician strengthened by the vision of the beautiful, now more patient to bear the sorrows of earth, can acquiesce in the round of common daily tasks.

A toccata is an old form of piece for the organ or harpsichord, somewhat in the free and brilliant style of the prelude, fantasia, or capriccio, and in the late examples often showily complicated and contrapuntal. Using this style of musical composition, Browning has in word and verse enriched our literature by the "Tocatta of Galuppi" which brings before our eyes the gay Venetian life of the eighteenth century. Through the lines of the poem one may follow the capricious, fantastic mood of the music, always sprightly and lively of touch, but into which are interwoven here and there grave, sonorous chords--

(1) "The Seen and Unseen in Browning" by Emma Burt, Page 21.

suggestive of the inequalities, trials and troubles of life. The Republic of Venice had started down the hill of political and social degeneracy. "Ambition led Venice to extend her dominions beyond her lagoons to the mainland, prosperity brought upon her responsibilities as a great nation (the war with the Turks, for example), which she could not sustain single-handed; and envy set the other states of Italy upon her, for as one writer says, while the Republic was actually hurling headlong to ruin, the outward pomp, the glory, the splendor of her civilization were for the first time attracting the eyes of Europe. There is something splendid as well as pitiful about the manner in which Venice, with all her wantonness and her frivolity, put up a brave front to the world and gave up at last only to the all-devouring grasp of Napoleon. Browning finds a deeper reason for the decay of Venice in her lack of spiritual aspiration, which is reflected only too surely in the deadness of Galuppi's music. The fires of the Renaissance had burned out because of the smoke of selfish ambition that had become mingled with the flame." (1)

Symons says the poem is "as rare a rendering as can anywhere be found of the impressions and sensations caused by a musical piece." (2) In the "Life of Robert Browning" Dowden writes: "The poem of Italian music, "A Toccata of Galuppi's", wholly subordinates the science to the sentiment of the piece. It is steeped in the melancholy of pleasure; Venice of the eighteenth century lives before us with its mundane joys, its transitory

(1) "Browning's Italy" by Helen Archibald Clarke, p. 376.

(2) "An Introduction to the Study of Browning" by Arthur Symons, p. 22.



passions, its voluptuous hours; and in the midst of its warmth and colour a chill creeps upon our senses and we shiver. Browning's artistic self-restraint is admirable; he has his own truth to utter aloud if he should please; but here he will not play the prophet; the life of eighteenth-century Venice is dust and ashes; the poet will say not a word more than the musician has said in his toccata; the ruthlessness of time and death make him a little remorseful; it is enough, and too much, that through this music of the hours of love and pleasure we should hear, as it were, the fall of the clay upon a coffin-lid."<sup>(1)</sup>

Galuppi Baldassari (1706-1785) was an Italian musician, famous in his day, - an industrious composer of seventy operas, of which none has survived. He lived and worked for a time in London, then in Russia, and afterwards became organist of St. Mark's, Venice, where he died in 1785.

The vivid imagery of the poem shows the brilliant, frivolous Venetian people when:  
"Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,  
When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?"

It tells of Galuppi seated at the clavichord playing toccatas.

There was a hush in the gay talk as the dancers listened.

"What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished,  
sigh on sigh,  
Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions--  
"Must we die?"  
Those commiserating sevenths--"Life might last! we can but  
try!"

After praising Galuppi for his music and telling him he was "good alike at grave and gay", a sad note breaks in when the poet says:

(1) An Introduction to the Study of Browning" by Arthur Symons,  
p. 22.

"Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time,  
one by one,  
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as  
well undone,  
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see  
the sun.

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor  
swerve,  
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close  
reserve,  
In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every  
nerve.

Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house  
was burned:  
"Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what  
Venice earned,  
The soul, doubtless, is immortal--where a soul can be  
discerned."

The three last stanzas of the poem deal with the Scientists and their researches. Browning has placed them by way of contrast beside the pleasure-seekers, just as in a Toccata a dainty staccato passage is followed by graver, sedate measures. Dr. Berdoe says: "The Venetians--who seemed to the poet merely born to blow and droop, who lived frivolous lives of gaiety and love-making--lived lives which came to nothing, and did deeds better left undone--heard the music which dreamily told them they must die, but went on with their kissing, and their dancing till death took them where they never see the sun. The other class, immersed in the passion for knowledge, the class which despises the vanities and frivolities of the butterfly's life, and consecrates itself to science, not the less surely dissipates its energies and misses the true end of life if it has nothing higher to live for than 'physics and geology.' (1)

Into the writing of "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha", Browning has worked out the most difficult form of musical composition-- a

(1) "The Browning Cyclopaedia" by Edward Berdoe, p. 544.

fugue and with it a moral lesson in which the old organist finds parts of the fugue resembling the vicissitudes of life. It contains a great deal of rough humour and Symons says its personification of the five different voices is "a brilliantly ingenious tour de force" (1). Most musical dictionaries give the following definition of the fugue: a fugue is the most highly developed art-form of concertante style, in which the equalisation of the various parts is brought to the highest pitch, in that, a short pregnant theme runs through them alternately, making now one, now the other prominent.

It is on this very complicated form of music Browning bases his poem in which he makes the old organist interrogate the supposed composer of the fugue and from the symbols of music draw his moral lesson. The very difficult formation of this particular style of composition is well told in the following paragraph, which makes one realize its intricacies and how incomprehensible its music can be to the uneducated musical ear: "The essence of the form in its mature state is simply that the successive parts shall enter like several voices, one after another, with a 'subject'--which is a musical phrase of sufficiently definite melody and rhythm to stand out from its context and be identifiable--and that this subject shall give the cue to the mood of the movement at the outset and reappear frequently throughout. Artistic interest and variety of effect are maintained by the manner in which the voices or parts sometimes sound all at once, and sometimes are reduced to a minimum

(1) "The Browning Cyclopaedia" by Edward Berdoe, p. 544.

of one or two. Climaxes are obtained by making them busier and busier with the subject; making it appear at one time in one part, and at another time in another, the voices or parts catching one another up like people who are so eager in the discussion of their subject that they do not wait for each other to finish their sentences. Subordinate subjects are made to circle round the principal one, and the various ideas are made to appear in different relations to one another, sometimes high and sometimes low, sometimes quick and at other times slow, but always maintaining a relevancy in mood and style. And the course of the movement simultaneously makes a complete circuit by passing to subordinate keys, which allow of constant change in the presentation of the subject, and ultimately comes round to the first key again and closes firmly therein. All sorts of devices had been contrived for giving additional effect and interest to the scheme and in Bach's time fugue became the highest representative form of the period of art." (1)

The poet has seized the spirit of the music, and in short, humorous verses pictures the organist alone in the choir loft after the evening services have ended and the sacristan is preparing to close the church for the night. The old musician has asked Master Hugues to have a colloquy with him and after a long conversation he breaks into the following:

Vlll

Page after page as I played,  
Every bar's rest, where one wipes  
Sweat from one's brow, I looked up and surveyed,  
O'er my three claviers, yon forest of pipes  
Whence you still peeped in the shade.

(1) "The Evolution of the Art of Music" by C. Hubert H. Parry, p. 178.

LX

Sure you were wishful to speak?  
You, with brow ruled like a score,  
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,  
Like two great breves, as they wrote them of yore,  
Each side that bar, your straight beak!

X

Sure you said--"Good, the mere notes!  
Still, couldst thou take my intent,  
Know what procured me our Company's votes--  
A master were lauded and sciolists shent,  
Parted the sheep from the goats!"

XI

Well then, speak up, never flinch!  
Quick, ere my candle's a snuff  
--Burnt, do you see? to its uttermost inch--  
I believe in you, but that's not enough:  
Give my conviction a clinch!

Then Browning in his imitable way brings into the poem the theme of the fugue, the phrases in their successive parts, the subordinate and principal subjects and the climaxes through the conversation of the old organ master.

XII

First you deliver your phrase,  
--Nothing propound, that I see,  
Fit in itself for much blame or much praise--  
Answered no less, where no answer needs be:  
Off start the Two on their way.

XIII

Straight must a Third interpose,  
Volunteer needlessly help;  
In strikes a Fourth, a Fifth thrusts in his nose,  
So the cry's open, the kennel's a-yelp,  
Argument's hot to the close.

XIV

One dissertates, he is candid;  
Two must discept,--has distinguished  
Three helps the couple, if ever yet man did;  
Four protests; Five makes a dart at the thing wished:  
Back to One, goes the case bandied.

XV

One says his say with a difference;  
More of expounding, explaining!  
All now is wrangle, abuse and vociferance;  
Now there's a truce, all's subdued, self-restraining:  
Five, though, stands out all the stiffer hence.

XVI

One is incisive, corrosive;  
Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant;  
Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive;  
Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant:  
Five . . . O Danaides, O Sieve!

XVII

Now, they ply axes and crowbars;  
Now, they prick pins at a tissue  
Fine as a skein of the casuist Escobar's  
Worked on the bone of a lie. To what issue?  
Where is our gain at the Two-bars?

XVIII

Est fuga, volvitur rota.  
On we drift: where looms the dim port?  
One, Two, Three, Four, Five, contribute their quota;  
Something is gained, if one caught but the import--  
Show it us, Hugues of Saxe-Gotha!

Just as the inventor of the fugue has partly obliterated the beauty of his first musical theme by the introduction, the mingling, and the contrary motion of the various parts, so the old organ master soliloquizes on the fact that God's gold would shine more clearly through our souls were we not so subject to evasions, pretences and shams which dull its brilliancy. Despite the fact that we also have truth and nature over our heads.

"...we o'ershroud stars and roses,  
Cherub and trophy and garland;  
Nothings grow something which quietly closes  
Heaven's earnest eye: not a glimpse of the far land  
Gets thro' our comments and glozes."

Finally the musician tells Master Hugues that his fugue taxes the finger, and that once having learned it one would not dare lose it.

"Yet all the while a misgiving will linger,  
Truth's golden o'er us altho' we refuse it--  
Nature, thro' cobwebs we string her."

and we feel that it must have been with relief that he played on the full organ the "mode Palestrina" which is the perfect and most beautiful music of the church.

The following quotation epitomizes the position of the fugue in relation to Art: "If, as generally accepted, the highest Art be Art's most perfect concealment, then the poet's objections to the fugue are essentially valid. For in all music-literature--with the possible exception of some of Bach's masterpieces--the fugue-form is itself the ultimate aim of the composition, rather than being a medium for the expression of anything; its greatest claim to distinction lies in the development of contrapuntal niceties which are totally lost on even a musically trained auditor except he be himself acquainted with the piece rendered, and even in that case he is unable to appreciate those subtleties as keenly and fully from an audible performance as from a reading of the notes in his study-chair. For these reasons it certainly seems that, unless we modify or extend the now universally accepted definition of Art, the fugue belongs outside Art's true province. At any rate Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha has been so far unable to answer his astute interrogator. Perhaps someone else may do so. The attempt would at least be interesting." (1)

"Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day," published in 1887, Browning's last volume but one, betrays not the slightest decline in his mental vigour. It suffers, however, from the fact that several of the 'Parleyings' are discussions--emotional, it is true, as well as intellectual--of somewhat abstract themes,

(1) "Browning-Poet and Man-A survey" by Elizabeth Luther Cary, p. 177.

that these discussions are often prolonged beyond what the subject requires, and that the 'People of Importance' are in some instances not men and women, but mere sounding-boards to throw out Browning's own voice!"(1) --such is the opinion of Dowden. "Charles Avison", one of the Parleyings, was written when Browning was advanced in years and could with the vision of a seer, glance back in retrospect over the effect of the arts in his own life and that of others. It contains his greatest exposition of the power of music--the art which touches the human soul more closely than any other. Extraordinarily vivid in its imagery and strong in the emotions it conveys, the poem seeks to tell us of the love, the hate, the joy, the fear, and the hope in the soul, all of which are brought to the surface through the influence of music.

Seeing a bird, a blackcap, one cold spring morning struggling to pull a bit of flannel from a wall in order to help the building of his nest, the poet's fancy was attracted by the fact that the bird should try so hard to get this special bit of woven wool, when there must have been such a large quantity more easily available in the countryside. Using this little incident, Browning says, it resembled his wishing to bring out of oblivion a forgotten March by Avison, when to do so he had to ignore the rich music of his own day.

Born in Newcastle in 1710, Charles Avison died in the same city sixty years later. He seems to have been a highly cultured student and a celebrated writer of several works on music, although none of his own composition are known or used in the present

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning", by Edward Dowden, p. 370.



day. He studied in Italy and on his return to his native land became the organist of St. Nicholas' Church, Newcastle.

Browning remembered a March written by Charles Avison and which in its day had been a source of joy and inspiration to the people of England. The melody of the old March, martial and vigorous, haunted the poet's brain until, through its very persistence, it seemed to gain in force and perfection. The poet began musing on the fact that to the people of Charles Avison's time this March appeared as perfect as the music enjoyed by the people of Browning's England, and he wondered why the March should have been cast aside. Mrs. Orr says: "He finds his answer in the special relation of this art to the life of man. Music resembles painting and poetry in the essential characteristic that her province is not Mind but Soul--the swaying sea of emotion which underlies the firm ground of attainable, if often recondite, fact. All three have this in common with the activities of Mind that they strive for the same result; they aim at recording feeling as science registers facts. The two latter in some measure attain this end, because they deal with those definite moments of the soul's experience which share the nature of fact. But music dredges deeper in the emotional sea. She draws forth and embodies the more mysterious, more evanescent, more fluid realities of the soul's life; and so, effecting more than the sister arts, she yet succeeds less. Her forms remain; the spirit ebbs away from them. As, however, Mr. Browning's own experience has shown, the departed spirit may return:--

' . . . . . off they steal--  
How gently, dawn-doomed phantoms! back come they  
Full-blooded with new crimson of broad day--  
Passion made palpable once more.'

The revived passion may breathe under the name of another man; it may stir again in the utterance of one dead and forgotten; and Mr. Browning, borrowing the language of chemistry, invokes the reactive processes through which its many-coloured flamelets may spring to life. He then passes by an insensible--because to him very natural--transition from the realities of feeling to those of thought, and to the underlying truth from which both series derive: and combats the idea that in thought, any more than in feeling, the present can disprove the past, the once true reveal itself as delusion. Time--otherwise growth--widens the range as it complicates the necessities of musical, i. e. emotional expression. It destroys the enfolding fictions which shield without concealing the earlier stages of intellectual truth. But the emotions were in existence before music began; and Truth was potentially 'at full' within us when as it were reborn to grow and bud and blossom for the mind of man. Therefore, he has said, addressing Avison's March, 'Blare it forth, bold C Major!' and 'Therefore', he continues, in a swift return of fancy:--

' . . . . . Bank the drums,  
Blow the trumps, Avison! March motive? That's  
Truth which endures resetting. Sharps and flats,  
Lavish at need, shall dance athwart thy score  
When ophicleide and bombardon's uproar  
Mate the approaching trample, even now  
Big in the distance--or my ears deceive--  
Of federated England, fitly weave  
March-music for the future!'

The musical transformation is for a moment followed back to the days of Elizabethan plain-song, and then arrested at those of Avison, where he may be imagined as joining chorus with Bach in celebrating the struggle for English liberty. The closing stanzas are written to the music of Avison's March, which is also given at

the end of the poem, and throws a helpful light on its more technical parts." (1)

"Fife, trump, drum, sound! and singers then  
Marching say, 'Pym, the man of men!'  
Up, heads, your proudest--out, throats, your loudest--  
'Somerset's Pym!'

Strafford from the block, Eliot from the den,  
Foes, friends, shoud 'Pym, our citizens!'  
Wail, the foes he quelled,--hail, the friends he held,  
'Tavistock's Pym!'

Hearts prompt heads, hands that ply the pen  
Teach babes unborn the where and when  
--Tyrants, he braved them--patriots, he saved them--  
'Westminster's Pym!'"

(1) "Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning" by Mrs. Sutherland Orr,  
p. 358.

CHAPTER V.

S C U L P T U R E.

In dealing with sculpture in Browning's poetry we do not find he has used this branch of art as subject matter for a whole poem, as he did in painting and music, nor has he used the sculptor for one of his dramatic monologues. In several of his great works there are parts in which the sculptor figures, or where the poet expresses in sublime passages his conception of art and its ethical function, so we find that Browning has applied his fundamental principles to the sphere of sculpture. Just as in his poems on the other arts, he judges the handiwork of the sculptor to be good in so far as it has been a stimulus to greater spiritual development. If progress in the creative is visible, then the poet claims his work will be a help to the clearer appreciation of truth and beauty for all those who are less endowed, and the artist himself will advance on towards the heights of perfection. If the aim be lofty even though the ideals be inadequately realized, the work then surpasses a more perfect, conceived of lower ideals, with which the artist is complacently satisfied. Dowden has crystallized Browning's theories when he says:- "The true glory of art is that in its creation there arise desires and aspirations never to be satisfied on earth, but generating new desires and new aspirations, by which the spirit of man mounts to God

Himself." (1) and again "The true artist is ever sent through and beyond his art unsatisfied to God, the fount of light and beauty." (2)

Browning pays no tribute to Greek art. It had indeed attained its end, the portrayal of the human body in its perfection, and this very perfection was the seal of its incompleteness, looked at in the light of absolute truth and beauty. The great works of Phidias, whose name has been given to one of the greatest ages of Attic culture, and who was the master sculptor of the Parthenon with its Pentelic marbles, and who was, likewise, the fellow worker of Pericles, evoked no praise from the poet - nor did Praxiteles, the next renowned Greek sculptor who made such a change in the history of Art, and the beauty of whose work has merited for him the title of "Master of Grace". None of these moved Browning as did the first art of the Christians who attempted to portray man, not as a body only, but as a soul. In "Old Pictures in Florence" he writes:-

"When Greek art ran and reached  
the goal,  
This much had the world to  
boast in fructu-  
The Truth of Man, as by God  
first spoken,  
Which the actual generations  
garble,  
Was re-uttered, and Soul (which  
Limbs betoken)  
And Limbs (Soul informs) made  
new in marble."

"So you saw yourself as you wished  
you were,  
As you might have been, as you  
can not be;  
Earth here, rebuked by Olympus there:

- (1) "Studies in Literature by Edward Dowden, p. 222.  
(2) "Studies in Literature by Edward Dowden, p. 223.

"And grew content in your poor  
degree  
With your little power, by those  
statues' godhead,  
And your little scope, by  
their eyes' full sway,  
And your little grace, by their  
grace embodied,  
And your little date, by their  
forms that stay."

"So, testing your weakness  
by their strength,  
Your meagre charms by their  
rounded beauty,  
Measured by Art in your  
breadth and length,  
You learned - to submit is  
a mortal's duty.  
- When I say "you" 'Tis the  
common soul,  
The collective, I mean: the  
race of man  
That receives life in parts to  
live in a whole  
And grow here according to  
God's clear plan."

"Growth came when, looking  
your last on them all,  
You turned your eyes inwardly  
one fine day  
And cried with a start--What  
if we so small  
Be greater and grander the  
while than they?  
Are they perfect of lineament,  
perfect of stature?  
In both, of such lower types  
are we  
Precisely because of our  
wide nature;  
For time, theirs -- ours, for  
eternity."

"'Tis a lifelong toil till our  
lump be leaven--  
The better! What's come to  
perfection perishes.  
Things learned on earth, we  
shall practise in heaven;  
Works done least rapidly, Art  
most cherishes."

In the second part of Browning's "Pippa Passes" we have the scene between Jules, the French sculptor, and Phene to whom he has just been married. Nettleship calls this scene "a poem in itself, epical of a sculptor's soul." (1) Tricked by his fellow workers, a group of foreign students, into marrying a girl whom he thought to be his intellectual equal, Jules brings his bride home to his workshop where he tells her:-

". . . . . When I think that once  
This room-ful of rough block-work  
                  seemed my heaven  
Without you! Shall I ever work  
                  again,  
Get fairly into my old ways  
                  again,  
Bid each conception stand, while  
                  trait by trait,  
My hand transfers its lineaments  
                  to stone?  
Will my mere fancies live near  
                  you, their truth--  
The live truth, passing and re-  
                  passing me,  
Sitting beside me?"

Previous to his love for Phene, Jules had sought the perfection of his work through the Greek model, and he had been content. Now he gazes at and goes over the models and half finished statues, and in a passage of unsurpassed beauty the poet has the sculptor voice his own sense of the passion of work-- work done for the sake of love:

". . . . . Why, before I found  
The real flesh Phene, I inured  
                  myself  
To see, throughout all nature,  
                  varied stuff  
For better nature's birth by  
                  means of art:  
With me, each substance  
                  tended to one form

(1) "Robert Browning - Essays and Thoughts" by John T. Nettleship, p. 275.

Of beauty, to the human archetype-  
On every side occurred suggestive  
germs  
Of that - the true, the flower - or  
take the fruit, -  
Some rosy shape, continuing the  
peach,  
Curved beewise o'er its bough; as  
rosy limbs,  
Depending, nestled in the leaves;  
and just  
From a cleft rose-peach the whole  
Dryad sprang.  
But of the stuffs one can be master of,  
How I divined their capabilities!  
From the soft-rinded smoothening  
facile chalk  
That yields your outline to the  
air's embrace,  
Half-softened by a halo's pearly  
gloom;  
Down to the crisp imperious  
steel, so sure  
To cut its one confided thought  
clean out  
Of all the world. But marble! -  
'neath my tools  
More pliable than jelly - as it were  
Some clear primordial creature  
dug from depths  
In earth's heart, where itself  
breeds itself,  
And whence all baser substance  
may be worked:  
Refine it off to air, you may, - con-  
dense it  
Down to the diamond; - is not metal  
there,  
When o'er the sudden specks my  
chisel trips?  
- Not flesh, as flake off flake I scale,  
approach,  
Lay bare those bluish veins of  
blood asleep?"

But Phene has not been able to follow Jules nor understand all this dream of the perfection of his art, and the realization of what has happened is a cruel awakening to the sculptor. For a time only thoughts of revenge on his deceivers occupy his mind, and in his soul-conflict we hear the poet's message that one who has lost satisfaction in his work and ideals must aim higher and in a new plane strive by an endless series



of aspirations and endeavors to reach the highest good. Pippa passes just at the moment Jules has decided to cast Phene aside. On hearing the song his better nature asserts itself and he realizes "Here is a woman with utter need of me". He sees Phene's soul like

"the visionary butterfly,  
Waiting my word to enter and make  
bright,  
Or flutter off and leave all blank  
as first."

His love for Phene had come to him through his art. Now great, over-powering pity for a human soul fills his heart and he finds his salvation in his decision to create in his wife a new soul:

"Shall to produce form out of  
unshaped stuff  
Be Art - and, further to evoke  
a soul  
From form be nothing? This new  
soul is mine!"

Jules breaks up his models - they belong to a past which to him is now dead, and he goes off to begin life anew with Phene in

"Some unsuspected isle  
in far-off seas."

In the eighth part of "James Lee's Wife" entitled "Beside the Drawing Board" Browning gives us a very different glimpse into a soul-struggle--that of a wife who after years of married life realizes she has lost the love of her husband. Seated beside the cast of a hand which the woman has been attempting to draw, she learns something of its beauty, and her soul is elevated to thoughts of God and His wonderful works. The model is one of Leonardo di Vinci's.

"'Tis a clay cast, the perfect thing,  
From Hand live once, dead long ago."

She fain would erase her work and begin again, longing passionately to draw it in all its beauty of perfection, but she turns to a peasant girl sitting beside her exclaiming:

"Little girl with the poor coarse hand  
I turned from to a cold clay cast -  
I have my lesson, understand  
The worth of flesh and blood at last!"

Dr. Berdoe says of this woman: "She has read Bell on the human hand, and she knows something of the infinite uses of the mechanism which is hidden beneath the flesh. She knows what use survives the beauty in the peasant hand that spins and bakes. The living woman is better than the dead cast. She has learned the lesson that all this craving for what can never be hers--for the love she cannot gain, any more than the perfection she cannot draw--is wasting her life. She will be up and doing, no longer dreaming and sighing." (1)

In "Paracelsus" the poet Aprile utters an enraptured description of the work to be done by artists-sculptors, painters, musicians and poets. Critics allege the lines to be Browning's own interest in sculpture:-

"I would carve in stone, or cast  
in brass,  
The forms of earth. No ancient hunter  
lifted  
Up to the gods by his renown, no nymph  
Supposed the sweet soul of a woodland tree  
Or sapphire spirit of a twilight star,  
Should be too hard for me; no  
shepherd-king  
Regal for his white locks; no youth  
who stands  
Silent and very calm amid the throng,  
His right hand ever hid beneath his robe  
Until the tyrant pass; no law giver,  
No swan-soft woman rubbed with lucid oils

(1) "Browning's Cyclopaedia" by Edward Berdoe, p. 233.

Given by a god of love of her-  
too hard!  
Every passion sprung from man,  
conceived by man,  
Would I express and clothe in  
its right form,  
Or show repressed by an ungainly  
form.  
With a fit frame to execute  
its will--  
You should be moved no less  
beside some strong  
Rare spirit fettered to a s  
stubborn body,  
Endeavoring to subdue it and  
inform it  
With its own splendor! All  
this I would do:  
And I would say, this done,  
'His sprites created  
God grants to each a sphere to  
be its world,  
Appointed with the various  
objects needed.  
To satisfy its own peculiar  
want;'  
So, I create a world for these  
my shapes  
Fit to sustain their beauty  
and their strength." (1)

(1) "Paracelsus" - The Poetical Works of Robert Browning, p. 39.

CHAPTER VI.

C O N C L U S I O N

There are not many words in our language the definition of which has given rise to so many and varied answers as the word art. Writers of different nations whether poets, artists, philosophers, novelists, scientists or psychologists all give a meaning to the word relative to the time in which they are writing and the interest they have most at heart. I will restrict myself to the three types of definition given by the author of "The Meaning of Art":

"One method is that of Aristotle, illustrated by his definition of tragedy. It relies on description and classification. It points out the genus or superior class to which the species belongs, an act of association. It distinguishes the differences which separate the given species from others in the same genus, an act of discrimination. A second type of definition functions through the collection of essential marks, signs or characteristics, of which the thing to be defined is an aggregate. This is a comfort to mathematics and it permits us to test hypotheses, because we can thus create artificial classes to which nothing in our experience corresponds, at least before their composition. The last type does not adhere rigidly to the Aristolelian framework nor is it satisfied with the inventory of characteristics. It keeps in mind the purpose of definition rather than its formal relations or component elements. It proceeds from the relatively known to the

relatively unknown; in general, this was the method of Plato's dialectic. We find this type in the definition: Beauty is the permanent element in the phenomena of art." (1) As human beings we are capable of seeing beauty and we obtain our knowledge of it principally through art. Beauty is the essence to which we penetrate through art, and that beauty combined with the good and true makes man's possibility of realizing, recording and communicating beauty almost limitless. Browning fully penetrated with this belief gave in "Fifine at the Fair" his own definition of Art.

"Art, which I might style the love of loving, rage  
Of knowing, seeing, feeling the absolute truth of things  
For truth's sake, whole and sole, nor any good truth brings  
The knower, seer, feeler besides--instinctive art,  
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part,  
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire  
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.  
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,  
Contributes to defects, toils on, till--fiat lux--  
There's the restored, the prime, the individual type!" (2)

Assuredly all through Browning's poetry he has followed the tenets expressed in his definition.

Whether Browning has taken his characters from history or from his imagination he has by his optimistic philosophy led them to impregnable heights of faith, analyzed their emotions, and

(1) "The Meaning of Art" by A. Philip McMahon, Chapter II, p. 7.

(2) "Fifine at the Fair" (XLIV).

noted the development of their souls as they struggled against opposition from within or without until they reached the moment of supreme victory or defeat. The study of the human soul held an unflinching charm for the poet. He is ever the keen analyst and the more unusual and intricate the problems to be solved the more he excelled. No other poet has enriched our Literature by such a vast range of subject-matter and such a diversity of characters. Rarely do we find in Browning any theme which has already been treated poetically excepting the few poems dealing with the classics.

Browning's intense interest in painting, as we know, dated from his childhood. In 1874 he wrote on the fly leaf of "The Art of Painting in all its Branches" by Gerard de Lairese which says: "I read this book more often and with greater delight when I was a child than any other: and still remember the main of it most gratefully for the good I seem to have got from the prints and wonderful text." (1) This volume numbered five hundred pages of solid technical matter and was for years the accepted text book of art students in Europe. Besides the de Lairese Browning used Vasari's "Lives of the Painters" and Pilkington's "Dictionary of Painters" from which most of his early knowledge of the art was learned. All this information, stored away in an exceptionally retentive memory, and coupled with an inherited artistic sense, as well as contact with world paintings in England and especially in Italy, contributed to the making of the versatile master painter-poet.

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning" by W. Hall Griffin, p. 9.

It has been said that Browning is the first of all English poets who truly and thoroughly recognized music for what it is, and one cannot doubt the veracity of such a statement when one knows his life long interest and love of music. His musical education began early in life as he himself says: "I was studying the grammar of music when most children are learning the multiplication table, and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music." (1) Through a long life Browning enjoyed, appreciated, and devoted himself to the art of music and he became the intimate friend of Joachim and Clara Schumann. "At Asolo, during the last months of his life, he would sit in the little loggia of his friend Mrs. Bronson, and in the gathering twilight would discourse old-time melodies upon the little tinkling spinet which his hostess had provided for his pleasure; with perchance a thought of the days when his loved mother used to play in the gloaming among the trees and flowers of Camberwell." (2)

In the poems dealing with music we find what is evidently a deep-rooted conviction with the poet - that music expresses feeling somewhat more truly than it can be expressed in any other way:

"God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear,  
The rest may reason and welcome! 'Tis we musician know." (3)

(1) "The Life of Robert Browning" by W. Hall Griffin, p. 16.

(2) "The Life of Robert Browning" by W. Hall Griffin, p. 17.

(3) "Abt Vogler".

Had Browning contributed nothing more than his poems on music we would already be indebted to him for a priceless boon.

Of these poems a critic says: "Besides the general philosophy which might, indeed, have been educed by any imaginative mind, agile in metaphor, these poems contain a wealth of technical expressions such as not even Milton, with whom music was a passion second only to poetry, ventured to use. And into the dry dust of such phraseology Browning has breathed enough life to make it suggestive, if not completely revealing, to the Philistines as well as to the musician." (1)

Thus through art, whether music, painting or sculpture, Browning has interpreted characters of varying faiths, nationalities, stations and historic periods. He has proved that art is an inspiration and that when the artist is satisfied with his work then he has failed to attain the perfection of his ideal. Art is not to be praised for what it achieves but for what it aspires to, "Tis not what man Does which exalts him, but man Would do!" - ("Saul", Line 295.) In the process of endeavoring to attain an ideal, Browning's "power of entering into the mind of his subject of the moment, of disclosing the unexpected turn of thought, the twists of moral sentiment, the wonderful way in which each man accounts for and justifies - even while sometimes accusing himself, is almost unique in poetic con-

(1) "Browning--Poet and Man--A Survey" by Elizabeth Luther Cary, p. 174.



ception". (1) The idea that some hope may always be based on deficiency itself is a message oft-repeated throughout the art poems, and that truth, beauty and goodness are but relative - imperfect images that serve to draw us upward to the God of all Truth, Beauty and Goodness.

Without Browning the early artists might have remained in obscurity. They were men whose work has been the foundation of the building which is now praised by the world. And "whether we travel back to listen to the early music of Italy and Germany; whether we stand reverently before the forgotten frescoes of Florence and the old Catholic Churches; whether we mourn with 'Pictor Ignotus', yearn with 'Andrea del Sarto', enjoy with 'Fra Lippo Lippi', - we feel after each study that all these art-workers are worthy to be learned by heart, as by-gone builders of a grand temple, and have been nobly and worthily remembered by their brother of the nineteenth century." (2)

- (1) "The Victorian Age of English Literature" by Mrs. Margaret  
Cliphant, p. 221.  
(2) "Robert Browning--Essays and Thoughts" by John T. Nettleship,  
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