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BROWNING'S WOMEN

by

Maurine Robb E. A.

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BROWNING'S WOMEN.

No movement of the past one hundred and fifty years has been more completely revolutionary in its many phases than the woman's movement. "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, there a little", woman's sphere has been broadening until today, there is scarcely a country which has not conceded the same rights to women as to man.

The history of the ages is ^{the} survival of the fittest. Semi-barbaric ages decreed that woman must be governed by man since strength was the deciding factor. Here originated the idea that woman, because physically weaker, is inferior.

All through the ages, this idea has been universally held. In recent years, however, so numerous were the protests raised against this supposition that it was changed to women's so-called "superiority". Considering the treatment accorded to women, one might be excused for being credulous as to the stability of the pedestal upon which women were placed, and lay this preconceived idea at the root of the struggle women have had to make for higher education and the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship.

Woman's position in literature has been determined to a great extent, by this superiority. Although a few great thinkers, among them John Stuart Mill, had written books on the slavery in which one half of the race was held, the majority retained the old ideas. But the nineteenth century however, the intelligence displayed by the outstanding women figures of the preceding centuries, and the steady progress of the sex, even under such a stigma as inferiority, caused a change in the world's conception of woman.

This change was nowhere more apparent than in the literary works of the age. Until the nineteenth century, this change was almost imperceptible. The writers of this epoch however, helped to bring the cause of womanhood to the fore. Wordsworth revered woman; Keats idealized her; Tennyson made a strong appeal for a higher, broader education for woman; it remained for Browning to blaze the trail for her complete emancipation. (1) "In the time of Plato, woman was the slave of man's passion; in the time of Dante, she was the Goddess of his sentimental love; in the time of Browning she had become the object of his personal esteem, loved for her own sake, and because he found in her a companionship which supplemented and revealed his own individuality."

Browning was one of the few men who did not believe in woman's inferiority. He agrees with George Willis Cook, who states in his address to the Browning Society. (2) "We have found in woman an equal, not an inferior, that becomes in some strange mystical way the symbol to us of the divine life." Because the fundamental principles underlying Brownings treatment of women were not circumscribed by convention and prejudice, Browning was able to depict woman accurately and with great discernment; he could understand the deep intricate currents of a woman's soul.

We see, in Browning's works, women who are distinct from all others in our literature. He does not exalt, nor on the other hand does he condemn. He leaves women where they are, and writes of them as living, thinking individuals. He does not, it is true, go into rhapsodies over their physical charms, or write sonnets on my "lady's eyebrow", nor does he set womanhood up before him, examine her critically, then expound theories as to the treatment she should receive

(a)
a23--George Willis Cook, "Romantic Love." Browning's Society Papers.

as Tennyson seemed to be doing in the Princess, but Browning is content to let live. He sees in womanhood something of intense interest, worthy of acute observation, indeed it has been urged that Browning took more delight in portraying a woman than he did a man. Undoubtedly, she is given a prominent place in his poems. A great many poems are named from the woman whom they depict--Pauline, Pippa, Colombe, Balustion, and certainly Mildred, Polyxena, and Pompilia are drawn with as much sympathy and understanding as Henry Mertoun, Charles or Guidp.

~~Henry Mertoun, Charles or Guido.~~

The fact that Browning even in his youth, was modern in his ideas, is shown by his attitude toward "Pauline". This, his first poem, published in 1833, seemed to contain the narrow idea of a woman who lived only as a supplément to her lover, a weak clinging creature, endowed with mere physical charm. Yet, even here, Browning broke away, for in the note in French which he affixes to Pauline, Browning showed her gifted with a much stronger character than her lover imagined her to have. Moreover, Browning himself was so strongly prejudiced against this poem that he withdrew it from the publishers, and always disliked it. He was afraid lest there be the slightest opportunity to accuse him of being narrow-minded and dwarfed in his attitude toward women.

It is impossible to classify Browning's heroines. They are all possessed of such striking individuality and distinctiveness that each has a place indisputably her own. It is very suggestive to note that no two of Browning's critics agree as to who is the best of his woman characters. Some emphasize Pompilia, some Pippa, others Mildred. Then too, each critic takes interest in some of the minor poems-- but nearly all choose different ones. Thus it would seem that nowhere, even in the smallest poem has Browning portrayed a woman who does not hold some special interest for one or the other of Browning students.

There is something curiously refreshing about the very names of Browning's heroines. Gather them together-- Colombe, Pippa Anael Polyxena, Balaustion Pompilia-- do they not give promise of

unusual interest? They may not be called types- they are individuals- some English-some Italian- some French. That ^{is} was an odd thing about Browning- the nationality- the class, the age or the temperment, ^{does} did not seem to concern him- he deal^s with souls. He ^{is} was daring in his democracy. He ventures to depict those of the misjudged unfortunate ones, who, having not kept to the straight and narrow path of Duty, in the eyes of the world are to be avoided, spoken of in whispers, with significant glances and a mocking laugh. Browning lifts the curtain which hides the woman's soul, and portrays it in moments when it rises above all sordidness. He does not omit from his poems therefore, women whom the world refuses to recognize, but says rather-

"How the world is made for each of us,

"How all we perceive and know in it

"Tends to some moment's product thus,

"When a soul declares itself- to wit,

"By its fruit, the thing it does". (1)

Browning, in his broad minded, optimistic love, watches for that moment when the soul will betray itself. Ottima, apparently so steeped in sin that she is beyond the reach of any good influence, at the psychological moment is carried away from her carnal passions. Her love becomes unselfish. Her last breath is a prayer to God- for another- not for herself.

"Not me- to him, O God be merciful". (2)

With the possible exception of Pompilia, Browning did not paint any full length portraits of women. He was, as I have said, a strong believer in moments. He would seize upon a character at some

(1) from By the Fireside XLIV., (2) from Pippa Passes.

critical point in its development. When an unusual situation was presented, and with a few sharp strokes— a touch here— a dash there, he would portray women who each and all have their special niche to fill. Complex, subtle, intricate problems attract him— Anael, with the struggle between love for the man and adoration for the God; Colombe, forced to choose between wealth and love; Pompilia, with a forked path before her— Duty seeming to call both ways; Mildred, an innocent girl betrayed by that very innocence. Yet, never for one moment does Browning let us forget that he reveres and honors womanhood, and that this reverence and honor, ^{is} based upon a clear, impartial understanding of woman's essential nature.

Did Browning make his women serve any definite purpose? Both his men and women act as mediums through which he portrays his own soul. Through them, we see the poet— the man, and we learn the philosophy of life and love in which he so firmly, optimistically believed. There is a deep sincere protest breathed against the treatment which outcast women receive from the hands of the world, in *Fifine*. There we see the strong humanitarianism of the man through the words of the poet. In the "Flight of the Duchess," he expounds his theory,

"How love is the only good in the world"

While "In the Balcony" portraying Constance, who with each additional falsehood, involves herself in further difficulties, is a strong plea for truth, for sincerity.

Because of his attitude toward women, Browning's treatment of love is different from that of other poets. Browning is

essentially a poet of love, but he goes farther than most poets. He does not deal with only one phase of love, but depicts it in a variety of ways. The love of friend for friend, parent for child, man for maid- in each portrayal Browning is master. Dealing with the love between man and woman, Browning excels. He be^{le}ieves in a love which is eternal, which grows stronger as it grows older. There is more than the mere passion of the senses- there is an additional soul passion which transcends the others. Love to Browning is not sickly sentimentalism, but his lovers remain in full possession of their senses; for them "love greatens and glorifies". The optimism which was the outstanding characteristic of his nature, is well shown in his conception of love. He be^{le}lieved that no love was^{as} lost. "Evelyn Hope" is perhaps the most beautiful example of this.

Evelyn Hope has passed away at the age of sixteen, before she was aware of the love she had awakened in the man who speaks in the poem. He is standing in her room and gazes around him at the surroundings in which she bloomed, a pure soul, for so brief a space. He is told, but will not be^{le}ieve,

"Each was nought to each"

He answers simply, and in his answer we have a wonderful thought on Immortality and Love.

"No indeed, for God above

"Is great to grant, as Mighty to make,

"And creates the love to ~~ward~~ the love:

"I claim you still, for my own love's sake,

"Delayed it may be for more lives yet,

"Thru' worlds I shall traverse, not a few:

"Much is to learn, much to forget

"Ere the time be come for taking you" (1)

We might call Browning's woman, the woman triumphant. Where the world could see only failure, Browning could see success. The calibre of which his women are made is responsible in some measure for this. A strong soul can never fail. "In a year" shows the attitude assumed by a girl whose lover has ceased to care for her. Another poet might make her pine away, and lose interest in life, or at least rail against the perversity of fate. Browning turns her gaze upward- to God.

"Dear the pang is brief,

"Do thy part,

"Have thy pleasure; How perplexed

"Grows belief"

"Well, this cold clay clod

"Was man's heart:

"Crumble it and what comes next?

"Is it God? "

In James Lee's Wife, Browning deals with a different situation- one which convention would call certainly a failure. Yet, through the Poet's eyes we see again, still more clearly the "Triumphant woman"- another "soul" victory.

Fate has been unkind to James Lee's wife. Her husband has lost interest in her. Coolly and methodically she arranges the facts before her, concluding at the last, that he loves her no longer. But the failure is not on her side- for she does not cease

to love him.

"The man was my whole world

"With his flowers to praise, or his weeds to blame

"And either, or both to love".

Although it is extremely hard for her to realize his lack of understanding, when she eventually does, her decision is made, and she leaves him. She has not failed- her love is true. After all his indifference, as she leans over the rail of the vessel which takes her from him, she can say,

"How strange it were if you had all me

"As I have all you in my heart and brain,

"You whose least word brought gloom or glee

"Who never lifted the hand in vain-

"Will hold mine yet, from over the sea".

In spite of the loss of all life holds dear, James Lee's wife does not bow her head before the storm, but faces it bravely. Her words are those of a soul which does not know defeat,

"Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world:

"Tune to whose rise and fall we live and die.

"Rise with it, then. Rejoice that man is hurled

"From change to change unceasingly,

"His soul's wings never furled."

I have always been sorry that Browning never finished "In a Balcony". It would be interesting to know what would have happened. Constance and the Queen are both characters needing careful study. The former is unattractive, for she is so insincere

and speaks and acts entirely without reason. I wonder that Norbert, who is so straightforward can love her. The Queen I pity and admire. Norbert's declaration of love to her arouses a depth of feeling- a passion of love that Constance is utterly unable to understand. So long restrained, ^{the Queen's} her emotions carry her out of herself, and she is right when she exclaims

"I have the strong soul: let me teach you here

"I think I have borne enough, and long enough

"And patiently enough, the world remarks

"To have my own way now, unblamed by all"

Constance, ~~who~~ though she loved before, must learn something from the vibrant words of the Queen,

"You will have many lovers, and love one.

"Love him, like me. Give all away to him

"Think never of yourself: throw by your pride,

"Hope, fear, - your own good as you saw it once,

"And love him simply for his very self

"Remember I (and what am I to you?)

"Would give up all for one, leave throne, lose life

"Do all but just unlove him. He loves me.

We are not told what the Queen did when she left the balcony after Norbert had shattered her new found happiness. In the first revulsion of grief and anger, she will probably want Norbert and Constance both to suffer, to atone for her suffering. Hence the guard comes to take them to prison. But later- the Queen will think it over. She loves Norbert, he is not to blame for that- nor

is he to blame for his inability to return her passion. Constance she will begin to pity, ^{Her} nobility of character enabling her to conquer her desire for vengeance, she will send for Constance and her lover and in the supreme unselfishness of a love which does not seek its own happiness, she will grant to Norbert his heart's desire. Here is another "woman triumphant"—a woman capable of a great love, a love which is service, a love which does really "greaten and glorify". ^POne may never really understand Browning's women, without making a careful study of at least those figures which he has most fully sketched. His treatment is always suggestive, rather than complete. Yet this serves to create additional interest in them, because it leaves room in which the readers imagination may run riot.

"The Blot on the Scutcheon" it is declared was Browning's most popular drama. The character of Mildred, the girlish heroine, ~~a~~ has created more controversy than any other of Browning's female characters. To understand Mildred one must not only be familiar with the story, but one must try and look at her through Browning's glasses. Mildred is a young girl whose guardian is her brother, Thorold Lord Tresham. She has been receiving, for some time, secret midnight visits from a lover. When the play opens, this ~~a~~ same lover is asking Thorold for Mildred's hand in marriage. He is accepted, and ~~Guendolyn~~, the wife of Mildred's brother Austin, goes up to Mildred's room to tell her about the new suitor. ~~Guendolyn~~ suspects something, for Mildred seems most anxious to get rid of her. Well may she be— for in spite of the fact that soon they may be together forever, that night Henry comes again to her room. They

agree that the following night shall be the last visit before their marriage.

A servant, unfortunately had seen Henry entering Mildred's window. She is summoned to the library and accused by Thorold, who demands the name of her seducer. Mildred denies nothing, but for some reason, refuses to give his name. Guendolyn, by her intuition discovers his identity, but yields to Mildred's entreaties to conceal her knowledge. The poor thoughtless child, in spite of the events of the day, gives the accustomed signal. Her brother, Thorold, anticipating this, is waiting in the garden. He compels the youth to disclose his identity, then makes him fight. Offering no resistance, the boy falls. Then, and only then, does Thorold relent, and consent to listen to his dying words. At this moment Guendolyn and Austin appear on the scene although too late to avert the tragedy. Thorold filled with remorse, hastens to Mildred whose tender heart, failing her at the news of her lover's death, she dies in her brother's arms. Her death is followed a few minutes later by Thorold's who has taken poison- and the play closes with Guendolyn's words-

"We can but- remember you".

A great deal of criticism has been adversely extended to Browning for his character portrayal of Mildred. Thomas R. Lounsbury declares that had she possessed the lofty characteristics which her brother and lover attributed to her, she could never have surrendered so completely to her lover. Again- this same professor remarks that the song which Mertoun sings as he

(1) Thomas R. Lounsbury - Four Lectures on B.
Page 139 +

Approaches her chamber, is a farce, and an insult to pure womanhood.

"There's a woman like a dew drop, she's so purer than the
purest:

"And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's
the surest:

"And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth
of lustre

"Hid in the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the
wild grape cluster,

"Hush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted
marble:

"Then her voice's music... call it the well's bubbling,
the birds warble.

Fortunately some critics can see the purity of the girl
and the pathos of her story, with unbiased eyes. Charles Dickens,
in writing of this play declares,

"I know nothing that is so affecting, nothing in any book
that I have ever read, as Mildred's recurrence to that "I was so
young- I had no mother"

(1)

Both Arthur Symonds, (page 62 and in Introduction to Study
of Browning) and Edward Dowden, (page 63-life) speak feelingly of
Mildred's girlish simplicity, her total ignorance of sin. In her
deep, true love, she gave, simply, trustfully, all she had. Not until
she pictures to herself the deceit necessary- not until she sees
herself receiving Henry Mertoun at the altar as a stranger, does
the fact come home to her that in her ignorant innocence she has

.....
(1) Foster's Life of Dickens, Vol. II page 24.

sinned; This causes her to utter the words which harsh uncomprehending critics declare to be foil to innocence and purity.

"God forgot me- and I fell.

Although there is something pathetic in the words with which her brother describes her, nevertheless it is impossible not to feel- to know that they are true.

"You cannot know the good and tender heart-

"It's girl's trust, and its woman's constancy,

"How pure, yet passionate- how calm yet kind

"How grave yet joyous- how reserved, yet free

"As light where friends are, - how unlined with lore

"The world most prizes- yet the simplest yet-

"The- one might know I talked of Mildred"

The same loving brother after he has killed Mertoun in his rage at the "plot" on the family honor of the Treshams, sees his mistake — realizes too late that he has misjudged two innocent souls. What a revelation is there in the lines,

"Why as he lay there,

"The moon on his flushed cheek- I gathered all

"The story ere he told it- I saw thru"

"The troubled surface of his crime and yours

"A depth of purity immovable" (1)

Although the critics may disagree in the interpretation of Mildred's character, in Guendolen there is no opportunity for disputation. Guendolen is a fully developed woman, her strong capable womanlikeness forming a background to Mildred's simple, trustful girlishness. Perhaps her outstanding characteristic is intuitiveness.

(1) Blot on Scutcheon.

she picks Mildred's story from her so easily that one feels a touch of pity for Mildred, and a feeling of thankfulness that Guendolen is her friend.

"I said how gracefully his mantle lay

"Beneath the rings of his light hair?"

"Brown hair" comes Mildred's quick reply. Such a very little thing yet by just such suggestive touches, Browning brings out his characters. How noble and tender does Guendolen prove herself when Mildred has been denounced, when her brother Thorold has left her, and Austin is about to follow.

"Why?

"Where's my place

"But by her side."

Here is a picture such as only Browning can paint. A spacious old-fashioned library, with massive mahogany furniture and heavy velvet drapings. The walls are lined from floor to ceiling with books. Stretched upon the Oriental rug is Mildred, her slight girlish form dressed in white. Kneeling beside her, and supporting her head, Guendolen, her head erect, her eyes flashing, as she presents her stirring appeal to the man who stands looking down upon Mildred. Guendolen appeals to his manhood—his chivalry. How can he resist her when she declares that to neglect any woman who needs help would make them unworthy.

"To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog

"Which, if that sword were broken in your face

"Before a crowd, that badge torn off your breast

"And you cast out with loathing and contempt,

"Would push his way through all the hooters, gain

"Your side, go off with you and all your shame

"To the next ditch you choose to die in."

The splendid things about her when she closes her vehement speech is that she does not even question Austin, but knows that he will play the man's part .

"Here's Austin, Mildred, - here's

"Your brother, says he does not believe half-

"No, nor half that- of all he heard. He says

"Look up and take his hand."

To my mind there is no scene in any of Browning's poems or dramas which shows more plainly his unbounded faith in the womanlieness of woman, and the certainty that manhood will leap forth to that appeal.

A figure with much the same characteristics as Guendolen is that of Lady Carlisle, in "Stafford". Had Carlisle been Mildred's friend- I feel she would have acted in just such a manner. Indeed Carlisle would probably have been able to ~~have~~ ^{save} Mildred. ~~Here,~~ however, it is a great man who reaps the benefit of her steadfast support during all his difficulties, and who gains the knowledge of her love too late- although- is it ever too late? Lady Carlisle has the most commendable character of those who figure in this drama. Her constant desire to serve Stafford is equally ^{ed} ~~done~~ only by ~~his~~ constant desire to serve the king. Many and many a time there is a repressed bitterness behind her words. But, perhaps an extraordinary thing in a woman, she never loses control of herself. She possesses the ability to think and act discreetly under the most trying circumstances. She talks little, yet her clever grasp

of the state matters is excelled by none of the men.

Although Lady Carlisle's whole life is bound up in Stafford, her love is most unselfish. She does more for him than anyone. Yet tries to prevent him from discovering it is she who is working in his interests- for she feels that he would rather be indebted to Charles. What a wonderful love is here.

"Ah, have I spared

"Stafford a pang, and shall I seek reward

"Beyond that memory? Surely, too, some way

"He is the better for my love. No, no-

"He would not look so joyous- I'll believe

"His very eye would never sparkle thus,

"Had I not prayed for him this long, long while"

Even at the last, when "all have shrunk beside" and Hollis says

"The king has signed

"The warrant for his death. The queen was sick

"Of the eternal subject. For the court,-

"The trial was amusing in its way,

"Only too much of it: the earl withdrew

"In time. But you, fragile, alone, so young

"Amid rude mercenaries- you desire

"A plan to save him. Even though it fails

"What shall reward you?

".....

"My gentle friend

"He should know all and love you"

even then- although knowing how much she has done and is doing for him- Carlisle will not claim the small reward of letting

Stafford know it is she who is his best friend.

Her unselfish service is rewarded in the prison, ^{where} Hollis is forced to tell Stafford of Carlisle's endeavours to aid him. Stafford when he learns of her great love, is "in his simplicity sublime" (1)

"You love me, child? Oh, Stafford can be loved

"As well as Vane.....

".....

"I think, if you could know how much

"I love you, you would be repaid, my friend"

At the close, when her plan to save him has been frustrated by Pym, it is nevertheless she who will comfort and sustain Stafford in his last hour, and she will hide her own grief- lest it add to his. Can we not go farther too, and picture her returning to the prison, watch her as she gathers Stafford's children to her aching heart, and bless her as she cares for them, and protects them in the years to come, from the unkindness of the world which has so misused their father. There is a slight difference between Browning's treatment of Guendolen and Carlisle, and his method of portraying Colombe. The first, two are fully developed characters, but Colombe passes through several distinct tests, and her character strengthens perceptibly. She who was but a child ^{is} was forced to make a final decision, where her womanhood is put to the test, and comes through the fire nobler and purer.

The story of this drama is worthy of note, since the events have so much to do with our final interpretation of Colombe's character. The young girl a year before the play opens, had been

(1) Tennyson's "Ode to Death of Wellington"

taken from her quiet childhood's home, where nature was her closest companion, to the court where she was surrounded by the joys and temptations attendant upon royalty. Her court duties have set lightly upon her. She seems a play duchess, masquerading and taking keen delight in the homage paid her.

We learn through the conversation of her courtiers, that the reason for the small crowd waiting to congratulate Colombe upon her birthday morning, is that a letter has arrived from the duke, an old claimant for the duchy. Having had his claims recognized by law, he is on his way to depose her. This letter is presented to her by Valence, the advocate of Cleaves, who is totally ignorant of its contents. The courtiers, not wishing to be the direct medium through which their little duchess receives the blow, have used the unsuspecting Valence as their tool. ~~She evinces no surprise, no concern at the loss of her royalty, but rather grief at the faithlessness of her courtiers.~~

The conduct of ~~the~~ Colombe when she reads the letter throws additional light upon her character. She shows neither surprise nor concern at the loss of her wealth. This in itself is remarkable. That which does concern her is the faithlessness of her courtiers. The very resentment in her words,

"What have I done to you?"

"Your deed or mine

"Was it, this crowning me?"

is a clear indication that she had trusted and believed implicitly in the fidelity of those surrounding her at the court. Her trust has been betrayed, and we cannot help wondering whether she will

ever be able to confide in human nature again. (Not only does she show lack of surprise, but unconcern at the loss of what one would think to be of great value to her. Instead, she experiences bitter resentment at the position in which she is placed and deplores the faithlessness of her courtiers— *repeated by mistake*

"What have I done to you?"

"Your deed or mine"

"Was it this crowning me?")

At this point Valence springs forward and declares that he and Cleves will remain her faithful subjects. The passionate loyalty in his words rekindles the trust and courage of the duchess. She places the coronet upon her head again and declares proudly,

"Then I remain Cleve's duchess"

"Take you note"

"While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp"

"I stand her lady till she waves me off."

"For her sake, all the prince claims I withhold"

"Laugh at each menace: and, his power defying,"

"Return his missive with its due contempt"

The duke arrives, and begins to fear that he will have difficulty in deposing the duchess. The, realizing what a splendid mate she would be, he changes his tactics and proposes to her. Although she seems favorably inclined, she will give no immediate answer. A most interesting interview takes place between Valence and Colombe. They conclude that is it useless to protest further against the duke, who has the law on his side. Then the duchess tells Valence of the duke's marriage proposition. Valence, by his vehemence in

protesting the duke does not love her, arouses her curiosity as to why he is so sure. In reply to her question, Valence is forced to admit that being in love himself, he knows. The duchess in spite of a slight feeling of jealousy, advises him to profer his suit, (although in his opinion it is useless) and offers to help him to obtain the object of his choice. To her utter amazement Valence drops on one knee before her. Colombe's first feelings are of disappointment, when she discovers that Valence worked through love of her, and not loyalty to her cause.

"Alas ,sir, is it to be ever thus?

"Even with you as with the world?

Valence, after his enforced declaration of his love, pleads his own cause with as much nobility, although with less assurance than he pleaded for cleaves. Very clearly he shows the duchess what her choice will mean. All's cleared, a stage

"For trial of the question kept so long

"For you- is love or vanity the best.

"You, solve it for the world's sake-

"You speak first

"What all will shout one day- you vindicate

"Our earth and be its angel".

Colombe begins to think of the duke in the light of her new lover's revelation. During the final interview she questions the duke. In reply - he offers to her wealth- riches- honor- everything but love. Then the little duchess springs up, radiant with the wonderful realization which has come to her, and gives herself to Valence and love.

The gradual development of the character of the duchess is interesting. Her gay, careless, childlike joy; her disappointment at the smallness of the crowd gathered to do her honor; her seriousness, her newly acquired dignity when she declares her intention of remaining duchess of Cleves; her hesitation at the proposal of the duke; her slight display of jealousy when she learns that Valence is in love; pervading all, the suggestion that she is being tested— is being weighed in the balance, holds the reader's attention, and there is a feeling of satisfaction that at the last, she remains true to the highest ideals of womanhood by choosing Valence.

Guendolen, Carlisle and Colombe are each an example of a very superior type of womanhood. Browning is very fond of portraying women with such noble characteristics. He is exceptional in this— for what other poet has laid such stress of woman's strength of will; her intellectual ability; the faithfulness of her friendship and the unselfishness of her love?

It would be impossible to pass over this point without giving an appreciation of Balaustion. Ethel Mayne, in her book on Browning's Heroines has spoken of this girl poet as the "Queen of Browning's Heroines". I do not agree with such excessive praise, for she does not interest me equally with either Guendolen, Carlisle or Colombe. There is something thrilling, palpitatingly alive in this girl. Added to extraordinary brilliancy of intellect and ability to command, is a charm and grace, a "darlingness" as Browning expressed it, that makes Balaustion stand out as clearly from the pages of Browning as she stood on the prow of the boat.

her song inspiring the rowers to almost superhuman efforts as they endeavoured to escape the pirates.

It is a series of pictures which Browning draws for us here, of the "wild pomegranate flower". The first as she "passionately cried to who would hear" that they should never throw Athens off for Sparta, but go to Athens: the second as she excited the rowers to a frenzy by her inspiring song: the third as she recited the play of Euripides to gain the favour of the islanders. In each and all, her passionality dominates and she emerges triumphant.

Balaustion, the radiant girl, is further developed in "Aristophanes Apology". Here she is a woman, with less of her former impetuosity, but otherwise the same ardent, clever girl that she was when Browning first introduced her to us. It could be said with truth that she had been softened, matured by the gentle touch of love. Balaustion had married Euthukles, the boy who had crouched by the steps in Syracuse, while she recited the Alkestis, and who followed her when she left the island.

In the Apology, husband and wife sit mourning their favorite Euripides when a knock comes at the door, and Aristophanes, the successful rival of their poet, enters, followed by the revellers. We cannot help feeling a thrill of pride that Browning has made Balaustion, as she rises and fronts this great, victorious poet, no less noble and cultured a figure than he. The dignity marriage added to her has enhanced and given weight to her brilliancy. Aristophanes realizes the greatness of her intellect and comes to her home in an effort to gain her appreciation. Balaustion is not narrow-minded or prejudiced against Aristophanes, but is

clever enough to show logically why she prefers Euripides. Had Browning believed in the conventional theory of woman's inferiority, he would never have endowed a heroine with the ability to carry on an extended, thoroughly logical argument with one of the greatest Greek minds, as to the relative merits of a Greek poet, Euripides, and his rival Aristophanes.

More than ordinary interest should attach to both these poems, "Balaustion's Adventure", and "Aristophanes Apology". The former was written in 1871, and was the result of a "great read" at Euripides. (1)., Euripides was Mrs Browning's favorite Greek poet, and this explains in a measure the time and attention which Browning spent upon it. The poem is "Expressly associated with her memory by the quotation from her poem 'Wine of Cyprus', prefixed to it" (2). Moreover near the close of the poem, there is an appreciative account of a picture, "Heracles struggling with death for life of Alkestis", painted by Frederic Leighton and exhibited in Royal Academy in 1871. This painter had designed Mrs Browning's tomb in Florence. Aristophanes Apology being a continuation of Balaustion's Adventure is connected with Mrs Browning's memory in a similar way. There is a slight difference, however, for Balaustion's adventure is concerned mainly with the translation, while in "Aristophanes Apology", the real interest centers around the discussion between Balaustion and Aristophanes as to the merits of Euripides. One does not need a vivid imagination to see in Balaustion Mrs Browning, as she puts forth arguments for her favorite poet, and this makes us love Balaustion more than ever.

A peculiar figure, placed in a situation entirely imaginary on Browning's part, i.e., with no historical significance, and in

whom is raging a peculiar struggle, such a figure is Anael. I must admit that on first reading the "Return of the Druses", I neither cared for, nor understood a great deal about this heroine of Browning's. After reading the commentary by Dowden this girl assumed new significance.

The character of Anael is not as noble as that of Guendolen, nor does she resemble Balaustion. Her characteristics are more nearly those of Mildred. Like all of Browning's women, Anael is exactly like no other. She is strong and noble, although not to the same degree as Carlisle. She is placed in a similar position, however. Both are in love with a strong man, laboring under difficulties, and both endeavour to help him. Carlisle is clever and more capable than Anael, who is influenced by her impulses, rather than her reason, and who completes her sacrifice by her life. To Browning, more can be accomplished for friendship and love by living, than by dying, and so Anael is transcended by Carlisle.

Anael's heart is torn by a doubt. She loves Djabal, whom she supposes to be the Hakeem, yet feels that she loves him as a man, and not as a God. Thinking that Djabal desires her to test herself by killing the perfect, she performs the deed. When she tells Djabal, and hands him the bloody dagger, he sinks on his knees before her, and confesses that he is not Hakeem, but a base deceiver. Then her nobility, and her love conquering all, she declares:

"Come.

"Will I not share it with thee? Best at once

"So, feel less pain. Let them deride, - thy tribe

"Now trusting in thee, - boys shall deride.

"Come to them, hand in hand, with me confess

"Now that the end is gained - (I love thee now)

"That thou hast so deceived them - (perchance love thee

"Better than ever) Come, receive their doom

"Of infamy. O, best of all I love thee.

"Shame with the man, no triumph with the God

"Be mine. Come."

To her surprise, scorn, and momentary loathing, he refuses to make public his deception, ~~he refuses to make it known~~, and without another word, Anael goes out and betrays him.

Events now begin to turn against Djabal. The Nuncio by his persuasive eloquence partially succeeds in winning the Druses away from Djabal. The tribe demand some proof of his deception and the veiled figure of Anael is brought in to speak the final word which will condemn Djabal. As she faces him, Djabal at last throws off his mask of deceit, tells her to denounce him, for he is ready to take his punishment as a man should. Anael's love for him conquers all else. Instead of condemning him, she utters the one word which will save her lover. "Hakeem" and falls dead at his feet.

It seems a little difficult to determine what Browning wishes to bring out, in the "Return of the Druses". Anael is certainly an example of a girl who disdains all pretense - sincerity is her strongest characteristic. She possesses, too, in common with most of Browning's women - a perfect trust in mankind. Yet, rising above all else, with her last breath she could utter a falsehood - to save the man she loves. But it is only after his

own words prove to her that he is worthy.

No character in Browning is so dear and lovable as Pippa. She sings her way into the hearts of all who see her and know her. She is the incarnation of happiness which flits from place to place, touching human hearts and bringing to light the good. Her innocence and purity, her utter unconsciousness of her own influence, make her doubly dear. She has been kept unspotted from the world. Evil fades away from contact with her pure soul, like darkness before light. When she meets the party of young girls who try to lead her pure mind astray, she smiles - that is all - and passes on singing. "She is of too pure eyes to behold evil". True when she returns to her room, for a moment she muses on what might be the name of this unknown man who is said to be in love with her, but the thought goes as quickly as it came and she climbs into bed humming the hymn

"All service ranks the same with God -

"With God, whose puppets, best and worst

"Are we; there is no last nor first".

The most attractive element about Pippa is her utter ignorance of her power. The four souls whom she pictures as the happiest in Asolo (how little she really knows) are the four with whom she would like best to come in contact. Yet, in her naivety she dreams not for a moment that her wish may be fulfilled. But it is - and how?

Oltima and Sebald have been guilty of the vilest crimes. They have murdered Luca, Oltima's husband, and are at the height of their evil passions, when suddenly through the open casement

comes this clear sweet voice of Pippa, as she passes

"The year's at the spring,

"The day's at the morn:

"Morning's at seven:

"The hill-side's dew pearled:

"The lark's on the wing:

"The snail's on the thorn:

"God's in his heaven

"All's right with the world. "

The good, hidden deep down in Sebald's nature, springs up again. He feels sharp pangs of repentance for the murder of Luca, repulses Oltima, curses her, and stabs himself- Oltima surpasses him in her repentance- her love becomes unselfish. Dying by her own hand her last breath is a prayer to God, for Sabald

"Not me- to him, O God, be merciful"

The next persons whom Pippa's healing voice blesses, are the artist Jules and his bride, the "white Greek girl". A trick has been played upon them- and he is about to turn his bride from him, just as she for the first time, in her short, sad life, has found someone who recognizes her rights as an individual. What a wealth of meaning- what a wonder of pathos in these lines in which she sums up her life,

"You creature with the eyes

"If I could look forever up to them,

"As now you let me, - I believe all sin,

"All memory of wrong done, suffering borne

"Would drop down, low and lower, to the earth

"Whence all that's low comes, and there touch, stay

"Never to overtake the rest of me,

"All that, unspotted, reaches up to you

"Drawn by those eyes."

The voice of Pippa reaches Jules's heart, which has been turned cold by the deception played upon him by the students. He sees the reality in his love for Phene, and here for him, through all the hateful sham which preceded their marriage. Pippa's song arouses new ideals in his heart.

"Is she wrong?— To the rescue of her honor

"My heart

"Is she poor? What costs it to be styled a donor?

"Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.

"But that fortune should have trust all this upon her"

Luigi and his mother are the third pair whom Pippa has wished to impersonate. Duty calls Luigi to save his country by killing its tyrant. The attempt involves his own personal safety and his mother pleads with him. Danger threatens, love holds him back, he weakens, when suddenly, clear comes the pretty voice of Pippa. His wavering purpose is strengthened and he rushes out exclaiming

"Tis God's voice calls: How could I stay,

"Farewell."

The fourth group, unlike the other three, is connected with Pippa herself. It appears Pippa is the unrecognized child of monsignor's brother, who has died. The intendant is trying to persuade monsignor to let him do away with Pippa's honor— her life even. At this moment Pippa's own voice comes sweetly through

the windows to the ears of the two men, and prevents the crime.

"May, I could all but understand

"Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges;

"And just when out of her soft fifty changes

"No unfamiliar face might overlook me

"Suddenly God took me"

Pippa is the beginning of a Pompilia. Pompilia for the first twelve years of her life, was as joyous and carefree as little Pippa. Pompilia is the most perfect creature of Browning and one of the most pathetic figures in literature. Her life is a tragedy. At the age of thirteen, her mother Violante married her to Guido. Violante's object being to obtain a good name for her child, Guido's being to obtain a dowry. Pompilia was a passive agent in this transaction. As she herself says,

"Well I no more saw sense in what she said

"Than a lamb does in people clipping wool:

"Only lay down and let myself be clipped"

She knew not the meaning of marriage, till she was taken, dazed and bewildered to Guido's home in Arezzo. Then Violante makes a startling confession. She tells the court that Pompilia is not her child but the offspring of a foul father and a misguided mother, from whom she had bought the child, and ^{gave} ~~again~~ it to Pietro as his own. Her motives were right,

"She thought, moreover, real lies, were lies told

"For harm's sake: whereas this had good at heart.

"Good for my mother, good for me, and good

"For Pietro, who was meant to love a babe:

"And needed one to make his life of use" (1)

Guido is enraged at the deception played upon him by Violante-
 furious that the court will not grant him Pompilia's dowry, he
 wrecks his vengeance upon the flowerlike Pompilia. For three
 long years she ^{is} was forced to endure his hate. His cruelty ^{is} was
 only exceeded by her courage. She appealed^s to the governor, to
 the arch-bishop, her father confessor- but all in vain,

In the fourth year of her marriage, Pompilia awakens
 one morning to the wonderful realization that she is to become
 a mother,

"Done, another day.

"How good to sleep and so get nearer death.

"When, what, first thing at daybreak, pierced the sleep

"With a summons to me? Up I sprang alive

"Light in me, light without me, everywhere

"Change."

With this thought Pompilia grows strong. She cannot expose her
 unborn child to the hatred of Guido's house. The child must
 develop in love- not hate. She makes the decision for her babe
 which she was too unselfish to make for herself alone. She will
 flee to Rome. But how?

At the theatre one night, Pompilia had been attracted
 by the face of Caponsacchi, a young priest

"the other, silent, grave,

"Solemn almost saw me, as I saw him;

"At once she pierces the fine flesh stuff

.....

(1) The Ring and the Book, Pompilia VII.

"And realizes what a mind and soul is there.

"Had there been a man like that,

"To lift me with his strength out of all strife

"Into the calm, how I could fly and rest."

Now that her great need has come, she sends for him, in spite of the incriminating letters which have from time to time come to her from him, she has not lost her trust in his goodness and purity.

"Friend, foolish words were borne from you to me

"Your soul behind them is the pure strong wind

"Not dust and feathers which its breath may bear

"I speak to the strong soul, no weak disguise.

"You go to Rome they tell me, take me there,

"Put me back with my people".

The journey to Rome is begun, continuing night and day till within a few hours distance of Rome. Here Pompilia's physical strength fails her, and they are forced to delay. Here it is that Guido overtakes them, pronounces his vile accusation and both Pompilia and Caponsacchi are sent to prison. A few months later they are released, the priest going to Civita, Pompilia to Violante.

Her wish is fulfilled, however, Her babe is born at the villa, the mother tended affectionately by Violante and Pietro. Although three days later her son is taken from her, to be placed in safety yet Pompilia is happy, growing strong in the thought that she will be with him again in a month's time.

Guido allows her only two weeks happiness. With four assassins, one night he sets out for the villa where she is

living, and stabs Violante, Pietro, and Pompilia, his child wife. She lives just long enough to confess and be absolved.

In Pompilia, Browning gives his most complete portrait of a woman--or, would it not be more truthful to say, a child--for Pompilia seems a mere child to the end. Indeed numbered in years--her life was short; numbered in sorrows of long, long duration. At her marriage, Pompilia was only thirteen. Yet this girl, who had never before known what sorrow was, displayed a strength and courage which it is almost impossible to understand.

Pompilia's character is without a flaw. Like the Griselda of Chaucer's tale, each test only shows her more steadfast and pure. Might we not have excused her had she turned against Violante, who had been the means of giving her to Guido? Might we not only have excused, but expected her to hate wretched Guido, from whom she had never received one kindness. But Pompilia does not seem capable of stooping to hate--she can only pity and forgive. She is like the camomile, the more trampled upon, the sweeter the fragrance sent forth to benefit mankind.

It is really wonderful that Browning could conceive characters which were able to trust so implicitly in human nature. Caponsacchi for ought she knows, is a very wicked young man, one who has broken his priestly vows, and persuades her to loosen her marriage ties. Yet Pompilia, with divine instinct, penetrated the outer semblance of guilt to the real man, and her absolute assurance and innate purity makes of Caponsacchi a "soldier saint".

Little Pompilia herself possesses the characteristics of a soldier. She is brave, for did it not require courage to live day after day, month after month, year after year with Guido? She

She is capable of enduring ,and more harsh and bitter the sêge she withstood against cruelty,could not be.She is determined in her adherence to right;and most necessary soldier characteristic of all,she is obedient--first to her parents --next to Guido--last --and always--to God.

It may be said with truth of Pompilia,as it is of strong men,

"The bravest are the tenderest,

"The loving are the daring."

for,with all her strong,noble qualities,Pompilia is a very appealing girl,gentle,affectionate.Moreover,Pompilia is a mother.Here she is so sweet and tender,yet withal so strong and unselfish,that it is impossible to describe her and do her justice.

Pompilia is presented to us from different view points. She relates her own story simply and delicately,"to analyze it is to analyze a rose's perfume,to quote from it is to tear off the petal of a rose."(1)Coponsacchi gives the clearest picture--a picture as she appeared to him in the theatre.

"A lady,young,tall.beautiful,strange and sad"
and later

"When she turned,

"Looked our way,smiled the beautiful and strange smile"

Then as he tells her story to the court,as his thoughts carry him away he exclaims,

"The glory of life,the beauty of the world

"The splendour of Heaven."

How exquisitely does he describe her slumber,

"At times she drew a soft sigh-music seemed

"Always to hover just above her lóps

"Not settle, -break a silence music too."

The dear old pope is wonderfully tender in his sympathetic love
and understanding of Pompilia.

"First of the first,

"Such I pronounce Pompiliathen as now

"Perfect in whiteness-

He is heartsick because of her death,

"My flower,

"My rose, I gather for the breast of God,

"This I praise most in thee, where all I praise,

"This having been obedient to the end

"According to the light allotted, law

"Perscribed thy life, still tried, still standing test, -
 "Dutiful to the foolish parents first,
 "Submissive next to the bad husband, nay,
 "Tolerant of those meaner miserable
 "That did his hests, eked out the dole of pain, -
 "Thou, patient thus, couldst rise from law to law,
 "The old to the new, promoted at one cry
 "O the trump of God to the new service, not
 "To longer bear, but henceforth fight, be found
 "Sublime in new patience with the foe.
 "Endure man and obey God: plant firm foot
 "On neck of man, tread man into the hell
 "Meet for him, and obey God all the more.
 "Oh child that didst despise thy life so much
 "When it seemed only thine to keep or lose,
 "How the fine ear felt fall the first low word
 ("Value life, and preserve life for My sake"
 "Thou didst....how shall I say? ...receive so long
 "The standing ordinance of God on earth
 "What wonder if the novel claim had clashed
 "With old requirement, seemed to supersede
 "Too much the customary law? But, brave,
 "Thou at first prompting of what I call God,
 "And fools call Nature, didst hear, comprehend,
 "Accept the obligations laid on thee,
 "Mother elect, to save the unborn child,
 "As brute and bird do, reptile and the fly

"Ay and, I nothing doubt, even tree, shrub, plant
 "And flower of the field, all in a common pact
 "To worthily defend that trust of trusts,
 "Life from the Ever Living: - didst resist-
 "Anticipate the office that is mine-
 "And with his own sword stay the upraised arm,
 "The endeavour of the wicked, and defend
 "Him who, - again in my default, - was there
 "For visible providence: one less true than thou
 "To touch, in the past, less practised in the right,
 "Approved so far in all docility
 "To all instructions, - how had such an one
 "Made scruple 'Is this portion a decree?'
 "It was authentic to the experienced ear
 "O' the good and faithful servant. Go past me
 "And get thy praise, - and be not far to seek
 "presently when I follow if I may."

(page 406)

Pemphilia's
~~her~~ whole ^{and sweet} story ^{is true} summed up by the man who most fully understood her.

There are four characters which seem to be connected because they all serve a similar purpose, namely, The Duchess in the two poems, "My Last Duchess" and the "Flight of the Duchess"; Lucrezia in Andrea del Sarto; Polyxena, in King Victor and King Charles, and the unnamed woman in "By the Fireside". These poems show us Browning's conception of marriage. The duchess is a young joyous girl, impulsive, warm-hearted, radiant with

happiness and overflowing with love. She understands nature, - nature loves her. In "My last duchess", the vigilant restraint placed upon her by the child duke gradually crushes all happiness and life out of her.

The second duchess, under the constant restrictions of the conventional frigid atmosphere in which marriage with the duke has placed her, droops little by little. Yet she is far from being weak and submissive. She rebels hotly against the harsh rules of the duke's household, and when she realizes the futility of rebellion, her physical strength begins to give way. Her languidness, her lack of interest and desire to remain in the privacy of her own chamber show that the duke and his cat of a mother are slowly killing her; her refusal to go to the hunt shows that they cannot conquer her spirit.

Then the gypsy appears. She presents to the little duchess a picture of the free happy life of the tribe. She offers to the unhappy child-wife, a life filled with love and kind understanding friends. Under her tender words, the duchess's interest awakens. She acts without hesitation, now that the way has been opened for her. Instinctively knowing there is only one thing she can do, for her own sake, and for the child's sake, which may come, she rides away with the gypsy. The appeal met an instant response in her own heart. The tribe wanted her, - loved her: she wanted them - loved them, - needed them. It took courage to make the decision, for it meant renouncing her husband, breaking the conventions she had been taught to respect. To Browning, however,

duty has frequently two voices. His little duchess heard the true voice and

"Out and away escaped her soul"

(A Pearl, a Girl)

In Andrea del Sarto, there is another picture of wedded life which results in failure. This time it is the wife who fails to understand and the husband who craves the love. Strange to say although Browning endows the duchess with the strength which enabled her to save herself from an unhappy, loveless life, he portrays Andrea ~~as~~ still clinging to ^{the} his wife who failed to meet his every need.

Lucrezia is in no respect like the little duchess, unless it is that she, too, is beautiful. But it is a stately beauty, dark, perfect in its cold mobility, while the duchess is small, fair, and glowing with life

"My surpentine beauty, rounds on round

"How could you ever prick those perfect ears,

"Even to put the pearls there."

Andrea makes appeals to Lucrezia which it is almost impossible to believe any woman could resist. Resist she does, nevertheless offering nothing to her husband but a "half smile" - a moment of her company at the window, in the dusk of twilight, while she waits for the cousin to come for her. Andrea's bitterest cry is

"You don't understand

"Nor care to understand about my art,"

The pity of it all! Andrea might have succeeded, at least he would have been made so happy, had Lucrezia brought to him

something besides her cold, beautiful impassivity,

"Oh, with the same perfect brow,

"And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,

"And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird

"The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare-

"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 Agnolo.

"Raphael is waiting, - up to God all three."

"I might have done it for you."

But Lucrezia did not respond to his appeal. She took no interest in his art, made no effort to arouse the latent powers in him. She was utterly wrapped up in self- her own petty interests and pleasures needed all her attention, and Andrea was only the medium through which her wants were supplied.

Yet It would not be fair to lay all the blame upon Lucrezia. Andrea was weak, he should have resisted her. No woman would have been able to influence him wrongly had his love been noble. But Browning wishes to show in this poem not so much the weakness of Andrea, but rather how great an influence a wife can ~~influence~~ exert over a husband. Lucrezia as wife was a failure. Browning knew the inexpressible joy of a wife who was the counterpart of Lucrezia, and would therefore feel most keenly for poor unfortunate Andrea.

In sharp contrast to Lucrezia is Polyxena, the wife of

King Charles. She is ever by her husband's side, clever enough to give him aid even in matters of state: unselfish enough to bear with him when in a momentary rage he chides her: womanly enough to comfort him with the wealth of her personality when need arises,

How delicate are the touches with which Browning shows us the noble figure of this woman who is an example of the highest ideal of womanhood, expressed in the lines,

"Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine,

"Your heart anticipate my heart,

"You must be just before, in fine,

"See and make me see, for your part,

"New depths of the divine." (1)

When her husband is discouraged and asks her wearily what he shall do, Polyxena with indomitable courage replies,

"Endure, endure, beloved"

How wonderful it must have been for Charles to have someone who loved him so much that she would give up everything for him.

"Oh what happiness it were to live my Charles,

"And die alone with thee"

All his life, Charles had been abused. His brother, more clever and more popular than he, was blessed with the greatest share of the parent's love. Charles was slighted at home, considered dull and stupid, and was not popular with the people. Yet hear him say in heartfelt appreciation of the woman who loved him,

"And so I suffered- scarcely suffered,

"Since I had you at length"

Polyxena alone was able to appreciate his true worth.

(1) *By the Fireside*

She could understand him, sympathize with him, offer encouragement when he needed encouragement, and be ready constantly,

"To serve in place

"Of monarch, minister and mistress"

The most terrible thing Charles can conceive of, as happening to himself, would be separation from her, "his only friend".

Imagine what courage would be inspired in him by her half playful- yet earnest tones.

"Now, force me

"From you. me, close by you as if there gloomed

"No Sebastians, no D'Ormeas on our path,

"At ~~Rivoli~~, or Turin, still at hand,

"Arch-counsellor, prime confidant- force me."

Is there any reason for Brownings noble attitude toward women, and his ability to portray them so minutely and so far in advance of his time? The answer lies in the fragile woman who was his wife. The women of today may thank Elizabeth Barrett for the noble example of glorious womanhood displayed in Browning's works.

Browning did not make a rule of mentioning his wife in his works. It was not necessary for him to mention her to make the reader feel her influence. It was impossible that she ~~share~~ing equally with him in all the joys and trials of life itself, that his poems would not be permeated with her presence, as his ~~life~~ was even after her death.

It has always been recognized however that "By the Fireside" was an account of the courtship of Mr and Mrs Browning,

and that the figure spoken of by him as

"My perfect wife, my Leonor"

was beyond a shadow of a doubt, the figure of his beloved wife.

This poem is one of the most beautiful of all. There is a picture of wedded life so ideal, so wonderful, that we may well say,

"Take off thy shoes, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground".

The actual married life of Mr and Mrs Browning has been historically considered a perfect romance. An ideal of love and marriage which unfortunately nearly always remains an idea. The Brownings were first attracted by their poetry. At that time Elizabeth Barrett was one of the most popular of poets, while Robert ^{Browning} was extremely unpopular. Therefore it is scarcely to be wondered at, that when Browning received a note expressing warm appreciation and understanding of his work, that his soul should respond. He had been an ardent admirer of her poetry for some time, and her letter, reaching him at a period when he was most unhappy and discouraged, made him reach out to her and begin to think that at last there was one who understood. A correspondence followed which has since been made public. Finally the two poet-friends were introduced by Mr Kenyon, who was an ardent admirer of the poetry of both Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett.

It must be remembered that Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid. She had been confined to her room, and under the doctor's care since the age of fifteen, and had been declared incurable. It was because of this that when Robert Browning first proposed

to her, she refused.

When the doctors had given their verdict that she would never survive another English winter, and her father refused to take her away, Robert Browning determined to ^{carry} take her to Italy. He overcame her objections, and as the father would not yield, they eloped and went to Italy, man and wife. Here their courtship began and continued throughout the fifteen years that Mrs Browning lived. Their union was blessed by one son, Robert Barrett Browning. Mrs Browning was very carefully guarded by her husband, and her health improved so much that they were able to travel around Italy together a great deal. (The incident immortalized in "By the Fireside" was an actual walk that had taken place when they were together.)

In spite of his ceaseless vigilance, however, Mrs Browning took ill. After a few days sickness she passed quietly away, alone with her husband. Her last words are a perfect tribute to the man, left bereft of all which had made life so dear to him.

"Ah it was so beautiful"

Browning, lived for years after her death, with her well worn books in his library, her pictures in his room, her image ever present in his heart. Her influence was not lessened because she was removed to another world. Very rarely does a strong man betray his longings as Browning did in the lines from the "Ring and the Book."

"Never may I commence my song, my dear

"To God- who best taught song by gift of thee

"Except with bent head, and beseeching hand

"That still, despite the distance and the darks

"What was again may be."

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