

THE DRAMAS
OF
ROBERT BROWNING

--By--

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I N T R O D U C T I O N.

"To the motive, the endeavor, the hearts' self
Hiss quick sense looks: he crowns and calls aright
The soul o' the purpose, ere 'tis shaped in act,
Takes flesh i' the world, and clothes itself a king."¹

In the dramas of Robert Browning there are but two realities, and but two subjects, Life and Thought. On these imagination and intellect are expended more consistently and in a higher degree than can be said of any English dramatist since Shakespeare.² Life and thought, the dramatic and the metaphysical are not considered separately, but woven into one seamless tissue; and for both he has one point of view and one manner of treatment. Browning's endeavor is not to set men in action for the pleasure of seeing them move; but to see and show, in their action and inaction alike, the real impulses of their being: to see how each soul conceives of itself.

The dramatic poet, in the sense in which we apply it to Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, aims at showing, by means of action, the development of character as it manifests itself to the world in deeds, in action. But there is another sense in which a poet may be a dramatist, another form possible for the drama, which

"Peradventure may outgrow,
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume,
And take for a nobler stage the soul itself,
In shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences,
To keep the pauses of the rhythmic sounds."³

1. Luria, Act III, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. III, p.33, ed. F. G. Kenyon.
2. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, p.2.
3. E. B. Browning, Aurora Leigh, Book Fifth, Works of E. B. Browning, p.424, ed. F. G. Kenyon.

This form of drama is the drama as we see it in Browning, a drama of the interior, a tragedy or comedy of the soul. If the outer world does come in, it is as a background on which the real action - namely, that of thought or passion - is cast. The dramas are not genuinely objective.

Browning very clearly explains his method in the original Advertisement to Paracelsus: "to reverse the method usually adopted by writers whose aim it is to set forth any phenomenon of the mind or the passions, by the operation of persons and events; and that, instead of having recourse to an external machinery of incidents to create and evolve the crisis I desire to produce, I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress, and have suffered the agency by which it is influenced and determined, to be generally discernible in its effects alone, and subordinate throughout, if not altogether excluded."¹

In this way, by making the soul the centre of action, he is enabled to bring out its characteristics, to reveal its nature. The characters, enveloped in their own moods, do not turn from their predestined course. Outward circumstances serve to reveal their qualities, but there is otherwise little response to them, and little development. They are so charged with their passion, whether it is of the intellect or the soul, that the smaller things of life cannot effect them. They are freighted with their destiny from the first, Mildred with her woe, Pym with his great love for England, Luria with the tropic wealth of his generous nature, Colombe with the simple maidenhood that will always set love above the pomp of state, and Valence with his stormy straightforwardness, and his great heart.

And if, as a dramatist, ordinary distinctions fail, if

1. Reprint of discontinued Preface to Paracelsus, London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 38-39.

Browning breaks through our limitations and definitions just because he is a poet whose soul ever dwells amidst the fundamental elements of life, may we not say:

"Curs the fault
 Who still misteach, mislead, throw hook and line
 Thinking to land leviathan forsooth,
 Tame the scaled neck, play with him as a bird,
 And bind him for our maidens! Better bear
 The Thing of Pride go wantoning awhile,
 Unplagued by cord in nose and thorn in jaw,
 Through deep to deep, followed by all that shine,
 Churning the blackness hoary."¹

"To Robert Browning we must pay homage for whatever is good, great, and profound in the second period of the Poetic Drama of England. It is not what his predecessors sought to find; it is not what Shakespeare found without seeking; it is something never found before, and never sought before. It is the body blossoming into soul."²

1. The Pope, The Ring and the Book, Robert Browning, ed. Edward Dowden, Bk. X, p.404.
2. Richard Henry Stoddard, Browning, Appleton's Journal, Nov. 11, 1871, Vol. VI.

Strafford was written as an interlude between the commencement and completion of Sordello. It was dedicated to the actor Macready, at whose request it was written. Macready and Browning were introduced to each other by Mr. Fox early in the winter of 1835-6; the meeting is chronicled thus in Macready's diary, November 27.¹

"Went from chambers to dine with Rev. William fox, Bayswater. Mr. Robert Browning, the author of Paracelsus, came in after dinner; I was very much pleased to see him. His face is full of intelligence. I took Mr. Browning on, and requested to be allowed to improve my acquaintance with him. He expressed himself warmly, as gratified by the proposal, wished to send me his book; we exchanged cards and parted."

Macready invited Browning to spend New Year's Day at his country home, Elm Place, Elstree, and on the last day of 1835 Browning found himself at 'The Blue Posts' waiting for the coach, in company with two or three others, among whom were George Cattermole and John Forster. Waiting for the coach to start, they eyed each other with interest, neither knowing who the other was.

Soon after his introduction to Macready, Browning became busy with the thought of writing for the stage. Macready's diary has this entry for February 16, 1836:

"Forster and Browning called and talked over the plot of a tragedy, which Browning had begun to think of, the subject Narses. He said that I had bit him by my performance of Othello, and I told him I hoped I should make the blood come. It would indeed be some recompense for the miseries, the

1. Macready's Reminiscences, ed. Pollock, Vol. I, p. 474.

humiliation, the heart-sickening disgusts which I have endured in my profession, if by its exercise, I had awakened a spirit of poetry whose influence would elevate, ennoble, and adorn our degraded drama. May it be!"¹

But the subject of Narses, the eunuch who conquered Italy for Justinian, was abandoned, and the more serious inspiration was to come later. It connected itself with one of the pleasant social occurrences which Browning must always have remembered. On May 26, 1836, Talfourd's new tragedy of Ion had been performed for the first time and with great success, Mr. Macready sustaining the principal part. After the performance at Covent Garden Theatre, the great actor and a number of their friends had met at supper at Talfourd's house to celebrate the occasion. This was a momentous occasion to Mr. Browning.

He found himself seated opposite to Macready, who was supported on his right and left by William Wordsworth, and Walter Savage Landor. In the course of the evening Talfourd, with marked kindness, proposed the name of the youngest English poet, and Wordsworth, leaning across the table, said, with august affability, "I am proud to drink your health, Mr. Browning!" The success of Ion had whetted the appetite of all the luckless playwrights of the day, and one of them. Miss Mitford, with pert audacity, ventured to propose a poetic play to the tragedian, while he was at table. But she utterly failed in her ruse, and Browning was, therefore, double surprised when, as the guests were leaving, Macready came behind him on the stairs, and, laying his hand on his arm, said, "Write me a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America!" And Browning simply replied, "Shall it be historical or English? What do you say to a drama on Strafford?"²

This ready response on the poet's part showed that Strafford, as a dramatic subject, had been occupying his thoughts. Browning's friend Forster

1. Macready's Reminiscences, ed. Pollock, Vol.II, p. 8
2. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, pp. 41 - 43.

was then bringing out the life of Strafford and had been disabled through illness, from finishing it. Browning had largely helped him in its completion.¹

On the 19th of November, the tragedy of Strafford was brought, almost finished, to Macready; in March of the next year it was completed and put in rehearsal, and, on the 1st of May, 1836, it was brought out on the boards of Covent Garden Theatre.

Strafford was published by Messrs. Longman at their own expense simultaneously with its appearance on the stage, but (in spite of a temporary intention in 1843 to include it in the series of Bells and Pomegranates) did not appear again in print until it was included in the three-volume collected works of 1863. In 1861 Mrs. Browning spoke of it as "his poorest work of all." "Nevertheless, at the time - a time when England was poor in vigorous and original literature - it strengthened his position among the rising poets of the day, and widened his reputation among those who were capable of judging."²

The manuscript of Strafford is preserved in the Forster Library, at South Kensington Museum.³

1. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 88.
2. F. G. Kenyon, Introduction to The Works of Robert Browning, pub. Smith, Elder Co., London, Vol. II, pp. 6 - 7.
3. Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century, ed. Nicoll & Wise, Vol. I, p. 364.

2. "PIPPA PASSES"

Pippa Passes was written after Browning returned from Italy in 1838 and while he was finishing Sordello.¹

The circumstances of the origin of Pippa have been recorded. One fortunate day as he strolled alone in the Dulwich wood - "the image flashed upon him of one walking thus alone through life, one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it; and the image shaped itself into the little silk-winder of Asolo, Felippa or Pippa."²

This origin of Pippa is described by Mrs. Orr obviously on information derived from the poet himself. The setting for the idea thus imagined was provided by his Italian tour of 1838, when he had visited Osolo. The poem, with its beautiful simplicity, directness and charm must have been written in a reaction from the concentrated brain work of Sordello, and was ready by the time the latter was printed. At the end of Sordello, Moxon, the publisher, had advertised as "nearly ready" Pippa Passes, King Victor and King Charles and Mansoor the Hierophant afterwards renamed The Return of the Druses. An allusion to the three plays so advertised is made by Browning in a letter to A. Domett, March, 1840: "Meantime I am busy on some plays (those advertised)".³ These three plays then had been completed before the end of 1840. But this amazing fertility of composition was met by a blank difficulty of publication. Macready was unwilling to accept either of the two plays offered to him; publishers were probably shy of another work by the author of Sordello.

1. W. Hall Griffin and H. C. Minchin, The Life of Robert Browning, p. 125.

2. Mrs. Orr, Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning, p. 55.

3. Robert Brown and A. Domett, ed. Frederic Kenyon, p. 29.

From the popular point of view Sordello was a failure and in the face of so much poetry still unprinted, Mr. Browning could not but ruefully remember how expensive his books had been to his sympathetic and uncomplaining father. . . . One day, as the poet was discussing the matter with Mr. Edward Moxon, the publisher, the latter remarked that at that time he was bringing out some editions of the old Elizabethan dramatists in a comparatively cheap form, and that if Mr. Browning would consent to print his poems as pamphlets, using this cheap type, the expense would be very inconsiderable. The poet jumped at the idea and it was agreed that each poem should form a separate brochure of just one sheet, - sixteen pages, in double column, - the entire cost of which should not exceed twelve or fifteen pounds. In this fashion began the celebrated series of Bells and Pomegranates, eight numbers of which, a perfect treasury of fine poetry, came out successively between 1841 and 1846. Pippa Passes led the way, and was priced first at sixpence; then, the sale being inconsiderable, at a shilling, which greatly encouraged the sale; and so, slowly, up to half a crown, at which the price of each number finally rested.¹

In a discarded preface to Pippa Passes Browning explained his reason for adopting this mode of publication. Ever since "a pit-full of good natured people" had applauded Strafford he had been "desirous of doing something in the same way that should better reward their attention;" and added, with rather a pathetic reference to his rejected dramas, "What follows I mean for the first of a series of Dramatical Pieces to come out at intervals, and I amuse myself by fancying that the cheap mode in which they appear will for once help me to a sort of Pit audience again."²

In one of her letters to Browning in 1846 Miss Barrett asks him for an explanation of the meaning of the title Bells and Pomegranates. "What

1. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, pp. 52 - 53.

2. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 113.

can be the meaning of the title Bells and Pomegranates?" she would know; she and Mr. Kenyon, "although they might be considered fairly intelligent," cannot arrive at the significance of the symbol. She thinks it may refer to the Hebraic priestly garment - she thinks it does, but Mr. Kenyon won't allow that.¹

The title of the series was thus explained by Browning in a letter to Miss Barrett.²

"The Rabbis make Bells and Pomegranates symbolical of pleasure and profit, the grave and the gay, the poetry and the prose, singing and sermonizing - such a mixture of effects as in the original hour (that is, quarter of an hour) of confidence and creation, I mean the whole should prove at last."

A much less lucid version of the same explanation was affixed (at Miss Barrett's earnest entreaty) to the final number of the series.

The eight parts of Bells and Pomegranates were as follows:-

- I. Pippa Passes (1841)
- II. King Victor and King Charles (1842)
- III. Dramatic Lyrics (1842)
- IV. The Return of the Druses (1843)
- V. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon (1843)
- VI. Colombe's Birthday (1844)
- VII. Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
- VIII. Luria and A Soul's Tragedy (1846)

As stated above Pippa Passes led the way in the series of Bells and Pomegranates. Its inconspicuous form was probably responsible for the

1. Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, Vol. I, p. 248.
2. Ibid. Vol. I, p. 250.

smallness of the impression made by it. Miss Barrett, however, had read it before making the acquaintance of the author, and, while not regarding it as his finest work, told him that she could find it in her heart to covet the authorship of it, more than any other of his works.¹ A hostile review called forth a vigorous protest in verse by Domett;² but the general response was in no way commensurate with the beauty of the poem, and it does not seem to have had any effect in rescuing the poet's reputation from the blight of Sordello.³

The poem as it now appears varies considerably from its original form. It was revised for the collected Poems of 1849, and gained in the process. The earlier form may be seen in the reprint of Bells and Pomegranates, published by Messrs. Ward, Lock and Co., in 1896; and the more important variations are quoted in Nicoll and Wise's Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century, Vol. I, pp. 508-12. The song A King Lived Long Ago, is an amended version of a poem which Browning had contributed to W. J. Foxe's Monthly Repository in 1835.⁴

1. Letters of Robert Brown^{ing} and Elizabeth Barrett, Vol. I, pp. 22, 24.
2. R. Browning and A. Domett, p. 20.
3. Introduction by F. C. Kenyon to The Works of Robert Browning, p. 12.
4. Ibid.

3. KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The second part of Bells and Pomegranates, containing this play, was published early in 1842. The tragedy is one of the two which, in a letter to Miss Haworth written about August, 1837, Browning mentions that he already had in his head,¹ and when Sordello was published in 1840, it was announced as nearly ready. It was written for the stage, but was declined by Macready, and was consequently still in the author's desk when the series of Bells and Pomegranates was commenced. It was subsequently reprinted in all the collected editions of his works, but has never been acted, at any rate on the regular stage.

1. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., pp. 103-104.

4. THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

In the sequence of the parts of Bells and Pomegranates, this drama was separated from King Victor and King Charles by the Dramatic Lyrics which constituted part III. This was due to the suggestion of the publisher, who thought it better to break the series of dramas by a group of shorter and more popular poems.¹ Otherwise The Return of the Druses would have followed King Victor and King Charles in publication. In the letter to Miss Haworth Browning described himself as in search of "a subject of the most wild and passionate love"² and by the time of the publication of Sordello this subject had been found, and had materialized into the present play, which, under its first title of Mansoor the Hierophant, was then advertised as nearly ready.

Browning wrote the play with a view to having it produced on the stage but it failed of acceptance by Macready in 1840 and formed part IV of Bells and Pomegranates and was published at the beginning of 1843.³ When once a friend belonging to the Browning Society told the poet she had been seriously occupied with the possibility of producing the Eastern play, he assented to the idea with a simplicity that was almost touching, "It was written for the stage," he said, "and has only one scene."⁴

1. Robert Browning and A. Domett, p. 36

2. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 104.

3. F. C. Kenyon, Introduction to The Works of Robert Browning, p. 15.

4. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 129.

5. A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Macready's criticism of his conception of self-forgetting love as embodied in the Aneal of the Druses, led Browning to produce in hot haste his other picture of self-forgetting devotion, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. The date of its composition is fixed by a letter from Browning to Macready.¹ This letter, dated from Hanover Cottage, Southhampton Street, announces to Macready the completion of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. It must have been written before the end of December, 1840 for in that month the Brownings left Camberwell and the Southhampton street home. The play was devised and composed in the space of five days. Browning while at work on it, as we learn from a letter of Dante Rossetti to William Allingham, was kept indoors by a slight indisposition; his father on going to see him "was each day received boisterously and cheerfully with the words: 'I have done another act, father.'"² The drama was not accepted by Macready until the autumn of 1841, toward the close of his third Haymarket engagement under Webster, and was not produced till February, 1843, more than two years after it was offered to him. The story of its production and the consequent disastrous misunderstanding is given elsewhere. (Stage Productions of Browning's Plays).

In order to defeat an attempt made by Macready to rewrite certain portions of the play (especially the ending, where he wished to convert Tresham's suicide into a retirement to a monastery), Browning had it hastily printed and issued in February, 1843, as part V of Bells and Pomegranates, following The Return of the Druses at an interval of only a few weeks. It went into a second edition in the course of the same year.³

1. Letters from Robert Browning to Various Correspondents, ed. by Thomas J. Wise, Vol. I, p. 6.
2. Letters of D. G. Rossetti to William Allingham, p. 168.
3. F. G. Kenyon, Introduction to The Works of Robert Browning, p. 18, pub. by Smith, Elder and Co., London.

6. COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

In 1845 Browning recalled the fact that the actor Charles Kean had offered to give him £500 for any play that might suit him;¹ and it was presumably on the strength of this encouragement that he wrote Colombe's Birthday. It must have been taken in hand shortly after the stage production of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, for in May, 1843, Browning writes to Domett that he "must make up his mind to finish a play I wrote lately for Charles Kean, if he will have it (Macready has used me vilely)."² But again delays intervened, and the result was a disagreement between poet and actor. In March, 1844, Browning read his play to Kean, who wished to keep it unpublished and unproduced until Easter in the following year. Browning regarded this delay as unreasonable: "It certainly never entered my mind that anybody, even an actor, could need a couple of months to study a part, only, in a piece, which I could match with such another in less time by a good deal."³ The last remark throws an interesting light on Browning's rate of composition and rapid production.

His words are interesting, since they show that the series of Bells and Pomegranates had been gradually working their way into favour, and regaining the ground lost by Sordello. "Something I must print, or risk the hold, such as it is, I have at present on my public and two or three hundred pounds will pay me but indifferently for hazarding the good fortune which seems slowly but not mistakenly setting in upon me thus now."⁴ Accordingly, no other work being at the moment ready for production, Colombe's Birthday was at once sent to the printers, and appeared in 1844, as part VI

1. Letters of Robert Browning to E. B. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 200.

2. Robert Browning and A. Domett, p. 55.

3. Letter to G. Dowson, printed in Wise's Letters from Robert Browning to Various Correspondents, 1895, p. 8.

4. Ibid. p. 9.

of Bells and Pomegranates.

The Manuscript of Colombe's Birthday, which is preserved in the Library of Mr. Buxton Forman, may be safely said to be the only extant manuscript of Browning's poetry of this period, - that is to say, the period covered by the composition of the numerous poems and dramas issued under the general title of Bells and Pomegranates. The previous history of the manuscript is given in a letter to Mr. Forman from Browning, on hearing of the purchase: "When it came back from the printer, my father caused the MS. to be bound, and I have no notion how it passed out of his or my possession. It is the single poem in the series that I copied with my own hand, my sister being my amanuensis in those days."¹

The manuscript is a beautifully neat folio written upon 30 sheets of blue foolscap paper on one side only. Each sheet is numbered in the poet's handwriting on the first leaf. Of the sixty leaves the first bears the title, list of dramatis personae, etc., the rest are numbered "1" to "59" in another hand, doubtless that of the foreman who gave out the "copy" to the compositors, whose names are written at the top of the various portions of the manuscript allotted to them.²

1. Wise, Letters of Robert Browning, p. 55.

2. Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 1, pp. 369-70, ed. Nichol and Wise.

7.

LURIA AND A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

The eighth and last part of Bells and Pomegranates contained Luria and A Soul's Tragedy. Luria was in an early stage of composition in February, 1845, when it is mentioned in one of the first of the poet's letters to Miss Barrett.¹ In the subsequent correspondence references to it are frequent. In a letter of Miss Barrett's dated February 17, 1845, she asks: "And what is Luria? A poem and not a drama? I mean, a poem not in the dramatic form? Well! I have wondered at you sometimes, not for daring, but for bearing to trust your noble works into the great mill of the 'rank, popular' playhouse, to be ground to pieces between the teeth of vulgar actors and actresses."² And in reply Browning writes to Miss Barrett on February 26, 1845, "That 'Luria' you enquire about shall be my last play - for it is but a play, woe's me! I have one done here 'A Soul's Tragedy' as it is properly enough called, but that would not do to end with (end I will)."³ On Saturday, May 3, 1845, he writes to her: "I have a constant pain in my head for these two months which stops my Luria and much besides."⁴ The play was finished in February, 1846, and on February 11, Browning mentions it again in a letter to Miss Barrett: "And now, 'Luria' so long as the parts cohere and the whole is discernible, all will be well yet. I shall not look at it, nor think of it for a week or two, and then see what I have forgotten. There is no hurry - I suppose it is no use publishing much before Easter."⁵ It was published the following April. On its publication Luria was well received by Forster in the Examiner, and cordially

1. Letters of Robert Browning and E. B. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 17, ed. Harper & Bros.
2. Ibid. p. 22.
3. Ibid. p. 26.
4. Ibid. p. 58.
5. Ibid. pp. 466-7.

received by the poet's friends, notably, of course, by Miss Barrett, who refused the dedication of it. Landor accepted the dedication:

"I dedicate
This last attempt for the present at dramatic poetry
To a great dramatic poet;
'Wishing what I write may be read by his light';
If a phrase originally addressed, by not the least
worthy of his contemporaries,
to Shakespeare,
May be applied here, by one whose sole privilege is in
a grateful admiration
To Walter Savage Landor"

London, 1846.¹

Landor replied to this dedication in his characteristic and kindly fashion: "Accept my thanks for the richest of Easter offerings made to any one for many years. I staid at home last evening to read Luria, and if I lost any good music (as I certainly did) I was well compensated in kind. Today I intend to devote the rany hours entirely to The Soul's Tragedy. Go on and pass us poor devils! If you do not go far ahead of me, I will crack my whip at you and make you spring forward. So, to use a phrase of Queen Elizabeth,

"Yours as you demean yourself,

"W. Landor."²

1. The Works of Robert Browning, Vol. III, p. 5, pub. Smith, Elder and Co., London.
2. Sidney Colvin, Landor, p. 188.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

A Soul's Tragedy followed Luria in Part VIII of Bells and Pomegranates, and brought the series to its conclusion; but it had preceded it in order of composition. In February, 1845, when Luria was still unwritten, Browning refers to A Soul's Tragedy as done: "I have one done here, 'A Soul's Tragedy' as it is probably enough called."¹ It is probably the "wise metaphysical play, about a great mind and soul turning to ill," which he speaks of his intention to finish, in a letter written to Alfred Domett on May 22, 1842.² But, for some reason or other, the poet was dissatisfied with it. He describes it to Miss Barrett as "all sneering and disillusion," and is prepared to burn it if she says the word.³ Fortunately Miss Barrett, whose critical taste was singularly fine and discriminating, recognized the remarkable merit of the piece as soon as she saw it, and fairly scolded the author for his depreciation of it. On Tuesday, March 10, 1846, she writes of it to Mr. Browning: "It is a great work, and worthy of a place next Luria. And do observe how excellently balanced the two will be and how the tongue of this next silver Bell will swing from side to side."⁴

With Luria and A Soul's Tragedy, the series of Bells and Pomegranates came to an end; and although neither of them was intended for the stage, they stand at the head of Browning's productions in dramatic form, the one for its poetry, the other for its wit and skill in characterization.

The impulse which had driven Browning into dramatic composition, and which had received expression mainly in the series of Bells and Pomegranates from 1841 to 1846, was now exhausted. As he wrote to Miss Barrett, all he had done

1. Letters of Robert Browning and E. B. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 26, ed. Harper & Bros., New York and London.
2. Robert Browning and Alfred Domett, p. 36, ed. Frederic C. Kenyon.
3. Letters of Robert Browning and E. B. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 467.
4. Ibid. pp. 540-1.

was the prelude, and the real work was to begin.¹ In a remarkable letter written to Domett on July 13, 1846, he gives vivid expression to the feeling that he had reached a breathing point in his poetic development, - had worked off a number of conceptions by which his mind had been beset, had learnt much in the workmanship of his craft, and was now ready, after a reasonable rest, to start with more assured hope and determination on whatever "real work" should present itself to be done. Moreover a fresh interest and inspiration had now entered into his life. In January, 1845, his acquaintance with Miss Marrett had begun. In September, 1846, five months after the publication of Luria and A Soul's Tragedy, he was married to her, and left England for that fifteen years' residence in Italy, which was to be the crown of his life, both as poet and man.

1. Letters of Robert Browning and E. B. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 471.

8. IN A BALCONY

This one-act piece was Browning's sole attempt at regular drama after the conclusion of the series of Bells and Pomegranates. It was written in the summer of 1853, during a three months' stay at Bagni di Lucca, and published in Men and Women in 1855. In this, its first appearance it was divided into three parts, ending respectively at lines 339, 605, and 919. In the Poetical Works of 1863, when the foundation of the present arrangement was made by the reclassification of all the shorter poems, In a Balcony was removed from Men and Women, and placed among the "Tragedies and other Plays" which occupied Vol. II; and in 1868 it received its present position, which chronologically is the most suitable, between Men and Women and Dramatis Personae.

CHAPTER II

SOURCES OF BROWNING'S DRAMAS

AND USE MADE OF THEM

It would seem a well-nigh hopeless undertaking to state with any certainty what special sources have been the foundation for Browning's dramas. Even the author himself would have found it a difficult task to definitely account for his source for every particular detail. All the reading, all the 'sources' created a picture, a conception, which became thoroughly his own, and from which he created the drama as an independent work. With Chaucer's keen interest in human nature deepened to a profound insight into the very soul of humanity, and the added wealth of a wonderful knowledge of centuries of human history, Browning not only had a far wider range of choice in subject matter, but he was enabled to instil into it greater intellectual and emotional complexities. The characters and incidents in his stories are frequently the result of pure invention, but he sets them in an environment re-created from history, developing their individualities in harmony with the environment, thus giving at one stroke the spirit of the time, and the qualities of special representatives of the time. Where the character is imaginary he is made to act and talk in a way perfectly in keeping with the spirit of the time. Luria, A Soul's Tragedy and In A Balcony, all represent the same method.

In Browning's dramas he has completely shaken himself free from the trammels of classic and mediaeval literature. He seems the first to produce poetry in which there are no echoes of Arthur and his Knights, the shadows of the Greek gods and goddesses exert no spell. There are comparatively few cases where he has taken a complete story of any kind. When he has taken a complete story from history and developed its spiritual possibilities without much change in external detail, his art is fully adequate to such ends. The historical

dramas of Strafford and King Victor and King Charles fully prove this.

In some of Browning's loveliest work, the subject-matter is, as far as we know, the creation of pure unadulterated fancy. The Blot in the Scutcheon, Colombe's Birthday and In a Balcony immediately present themselves to the mind.

"Truly speaking, the whole range of thought and emotion is the raw material of Browning's subject matter, and this he has caused to take shape in forms that would best give life to the manifestations of the spirit. In his dramas are presented phases of spiritual and ethical growth centralized in individualities that live and breath before us."¹

Strafford. In our search to find out what sources Browning used for his first historical drama, information may be gathered from the original preface to Strafford. In this preface the poet gives his own point of view at the time: "The portraits are, I think, faithful; and I am exceedingly fortunate in being able, in proof of this, to refer to the subtle and eloquent exposition of the characters of Eliot and Strafford in the Lives of Eminent British Statesmen now in the course of publication in Lardner's Cyclopaedia, by a writer whom I am proud to call my friend; and whose biographies of Hampden, Pym, and Vane, will, I am sure, fitly illustrate the present year - the Second Centenary of the Trial concerning Ship-money. My Carlisle, however, is purely imaginary; I at first sketched her singular likeness roughly in, as suggested by Matthew and the memoir-writers - but it was too artificial, and the substituted outline is exclusively from Voiture and Waller.

"The Italian boat-song in the last scene is from Redi's Bacco, long since naturalized in the joyous and delicate version of Leigh Hunt."²

1. Miss Ariel, Choice of Subject Matter in the Poets, Poet-lore, Vol. VII, p. 366.

2. Introduction to The Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 8, Smith, Elder & Co., London.

It is not surprising that Browning should have been attracted to the period of the reign of Charles I when he contemplated the writing of a play on an English subject. His liberty-loving mind would naturally find congenial occupation in depicting this great English struggle for liberty, the great events which chiseled into shape the future of England. Forster's Lives of the English Statesmen in Lardner's Cyclopaedia furnished plenty of material, and he was besides familiar with some if not all of Forster's materials for the lives. He had helped his friend John Forster with a Life of Strafford, which the latter had undertaken to produce by a certain date, and was prevented by illness from completing. With Browning's assistance the Life came out to time in 1836. Professor Gardiner, the historian, was of the opinion from internal evidence that the Life was more Browning's than Forster's.

In an introduction prefixed to an annotated edition of Strafford (by Miss E. H. Hickey) published in 1884, Professor S. R. Gardiner sums up with decisive authority the relation of Browning's tragedy to the truth of history. "Only here and there does anything in the course of the drama take place as it could have taken place at the actual court of Charles I. Not merely are there frequent minor inaccuracies, but the very roots of the situation are untrue to fact. The real Strafford was very far from opposing the war with the Scots at the time when the Short Parliament was summoned. Pym never had such a friendship for Strafford as he is represented as having. We have still to ask, how far the impression (of the principal characters) is a true one. For myself, I can only say that, every time I read the play, I feel more certain that Mr. Browning has seized the real Strafford, the man of critical brain, of rapid decision, and tender heart, who strove for the good of his nation without sympathy for the generation in which he lived. Charles too, with his faults perhaps exaggerated,

is nevertheless the real Charles. Of Lady Carlisle we know too little to speak with anything like certainty, but, in spite of Mr. Browning's statement that his character of her is imaginary there is parallelism between the Lady of the play and the less noble Lady Carlisle of history."¹

This is high praise; for it is the dramatist's function to display truth of character, not accuracy of historical detail. Strafford's career was picturesque and tragic and his personality so striking that more than one interpretation of his remarkable life is possible. It is almost needless to say that Browning's perception of Strafford's character was penetrating and sympathetic. It must be remembered too that the aim of the dramatist was to place Strafford before the eyes of men, not to produce an exact representative of the statesmen of the Long Parliament.

King Victor and King Charles. In his preface to the historical tragedy Browning sets out his authorities, and his claim to have followed faithfully the inner historic truth of the interplay of the four characters who constitute the dramatis personae.

"So far as I know, this tragedy is the first artistic consequence of what Voltaire, termed a 'terrible event without consequences'; I have taken more pains to arrive at the history than most readers would thank me for particularising; since acquainted, as I will hope them to be, with the chief circumstances of Victor's remarkable European career (a tolerable account of which is to be found in Abbé Roman's Récit, or even the fifth of Lord Orrery's Letters from Italy).²

Historic accounts of Victor Amadeus II, King of Sardinia, and his son Charles afterwards king are somewhat contradictory and confused, but Browning,

1. Strafford, pp. 14 - 16, ed. Miss E. H. Hickey)

2. Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 161, pub. Smith, Elder & Co., London.

with a poet's privilege has seized those points which would tell best dramatically. These points were gathered up from the histories of Voltaire, Costa da Beauregard, and Gallenga,¹ and the story runs as follows: Victor Amadeus II, born in 1666, was Duke of Savoy. He obtained the kingdom of Sicily by treaty from Spain, which he afterwards exchanged with the Emperor of the island of Sardinia. He was fierce and unscrupulous but had the interests of his kingdom at heart. He made secret engagements with Spain, France and Austria, but at last, seeing that his intrigues were about to be discovered, decided to abdicate, affecting a philosophic love of repose which was far from his character, as proved to by attempt later to remount the throne. According to Gallenga in his history of Piedmont, the later years of Victor were crowned with proeperity, and his abdication was really due to weariness of the world, while his desire to return to rule was due to the ennui he suffered in his retreat at Chambéry and the ambition of the Marchioness, who had set her heart on being queen.

The Lord Orrery letter mentioned by Browning in his preface is of interest because Lord Orrery was writing from Italy where he had actually seen King Charles and heard the story related as the gossip of the time. Browning was, of course, familiar with the story as told by Orrery and the glimpses of Turin and the palace as it existed at that time. "The floors of the King's apartments are inlaid, and so nicely kept that you view yourself as you walk upon them. The chapel, which opens into the great church, is clear, but it is heavy and dismal. The pillars are of black marble. The lamps and tapers give little light and less cheerfulness.

"The king (Charles) in his younger days is said to have been of a gay

1. Helen Clarke, Browning's Italy, p. 112.

and sprightly disposition; but soon after the death of his father he contracted a more serious behavior, which is now growing apace into the melancholy of devotion.¹

According to Lord Orrery's account Victor became his son's prisoner after his attempt to regain his crown. He often desired to see his son and an interview was promised but not performed. "Grief and disappointment ended, in less than two years, the life of this unhappy prince, whose sunset was excessively languid in comparison of his meridian glory."²

There Browning deliberately departs from history and causes Charles to return the crown to his father. Loyalty and love to his father are the ruling impulses of Charles's life as the poet portrays him and while he also has loyalty and love to his subjects, when these two come in conflict his devotion to his father conquers.

The historian Beauregard emphasises this filial devotion in his account of the scene between father and son upon the former's resignation of the crown.

For the character of d'Ormea, the Minister in the play, the poet took a hint from Voltaire. "He was a man without birth, whom Victor found in utter misery. This minister had rendered him the service of ending the differences with the Court of Rome, which had existed during a great part of his reign."³

In this play there are but four characters, Victor, Charles, d'Ormea, and Polyxena, wife of Charles. The historical events are in reality merely the factors by means of which the natures of these four individuals reveal themselves.

1. Helen Clarke, Browning's Italy, p. 115.

2. Ibid, p. 118.

3. Ibid, p. 120.

Pippa Passes. A chance inspiration led Browning to attempt to show how a lyric soul "flinging its soul-seed unconsciously forth in song might become the involuntary deus ex machina in the tangle of passion and plot through which she moved, resolving its problems and averting its catastrophes."¹

The result was a poem which Elizabeth Barrett "could find it in her soul to envy."² It was while walking alone in a wood near Dulwich that the idea flashed upon Browning of some one walking thus through life; and the image shaped itself into the little silk-winder of Asolo.³

The setting for the idea thus imagined was provided by his Italian tour of 1838, when he had visited Asolo. It counted for something, that Italy, and above all the little hill town in which the scene was laid, was a vivid personal memory to Browning, not a vague region of fancy like his Sardinia or Lebanon. In 1835 Asolo was, as now, a very picturesque mediaeval fortified town, in the province of Treviso in Venetia, Italy, at the foot of a hill surmounted by the ruins of a castle, from which one of the most extensive panoramas of the great plain of the Brenta and the Piave with the encircling Alps, and the distant insulated group of the Euganean hills, opens before the traveller.⁴ Venice, with its cupolas and steeples, is seen near the extreme east horizon, which is terminated by the blue line of the Adriatic; whilst behind, to the north, the snow-capped peaks of the Alps rise in majestic grandeur. The village of Asolo is surrounded by a wall with mediaeval turrets, and several of its houses present curiously sculptured façades. The castle, is an interesting monument of the thirteenth century. It was the residence of the beautiful

1. C. H. Herford, Robert Browning, p. 49.

2. Letters of Robert Browning and E. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 28.

3. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 55.

4. Edward Berdoe, Browning Cyclopaedia, p. 50.

Caterina Cornaro, the last queen of Cyprus, after her resignation of her kingdom to the Venetians in 1489.

Browning loved this secluded little hill town from the moment when, in that first youthful walking trip, he first gazed from its height on the touch of white that is Venice, the squat castle, the arcaded streets and splendid sunsets of the little old fortified city. It seemed by natural that Pippa should be placed in the pure-aired hills of Asolo. Its walls and turrets, its bishop's palace and duomo, and girls sitting on the steps, its upland farms among the cherry orchards, its "warm slow yellow moonlit nights" of May, its legend of "Kate the Queen", gave Browning color and types for his drama.

Too much has, perhaps, been made of the very slight connection between Pippa's "Kate the Queen" and the historical Catarina. There is nothing of historical verisimilitude in the song itself; and the noble lady beloved by the page, who grieves because fortune has placed her above all need of his help, might be any other dame of high degree as well as the dethroned Venetian girl, as far as the appropriateness of the incident is concerned. This song, and the trifling allusions to the Emperor Francis of Austria, to Silvio Pellico, the Italian dramatist and Patriot, and the general recognition of the struggle of Italy for unity, as shown in the scene between Luigi and his mother, are all the touches in the play that relate to actual events.¹

Luria. The drama of Luria belongs to that group of poems on Italian subjects which are the outcome of Browning's profound study and almost lifelong love of Italy. It is only by recalling poem after poem which has Italy as the source of its inspiration, that we can realize how extended and how vital the

1. Isabel Francis Bellows, Pippa Passes, Poet Lore, Vol. VI, pp. 134 -135.

Italian influence has been in his work. Widely as Browning has drawn from the great storehouse of human life and experience, he has turned to no country so often or so sympathetically as Italy.

The young poet was but twenty when he first visited Italy; and he threw himself into the study of Italian life and history with all the intensity of a youthful enthusiasm.

"Luria is by no means the least important of Browning's poems of Italy. From an historical point of view the play is a study of the Florence of the fifteenth century, certainly for a time the most marvellous of the cities of the modern world. It was in this Florence that art and beauty blossomed out of the filth of social and domestic corruption; that letters and culture were set up in the place of religion and goodness; that low intrigue and secret crime were the regular accompaniments of government and that statesmanship meant a diabolical duplicity, subtlety, and craft. Yet it is of this Florence that Hermann Grimm wrote 'All that happened in Italy between 1250 and 1530 is colorless when placed side by side with the history of this one city.'"¹

The tragedy of Luria deals with one of the many outbreaks of the hereditary feud between Florence and Pisa. The poet seems to have in mind the struggle between the two cities, which took place almost at the beginning of the fifteenth century, although he does not hamper himself by too strict an observance of actual facts. At the beginning of the fifteenth century the early death of Gian Galeazzo Cusconti had put an end for a time to the power of that ambitious and dangerous family in Florence. But Pisa, the old enemy of the Florentines, had fallen under the tyrannous supremacy of a member of the hated house of Visconti, - Gabriello Moria, a son of Gian Galeazzo.

1. H. S. Pancoast, Luria, Poet Lore, Vol. I, p. 556.

Florence had thus a new cause of grievance; she detested not only the city, but its ruler. In 1404 she fitted out an expedition against Pisa, and two years later captured the city. This is apparently the bare historical foundation of the play. Of these materials, aided perhaps by a hint from an old Italian writer, Mr. Browning makes characteristic use.

In the drama, the Florentine Seigniorly intrusts the command of this expedition against Pisa to a stranger, Luria, a Moorish mercenary, deposing Puccio, a Florentine general, who has formerly been at the head of the army. The object of this change is characteristic of the Florentine policy of that time.

The Seigniorly shrinks from putting a Florentine at the head of the army, one whom it may feel obliged to reward in case of victory, or who may use his power to subvert the newly recovered liberties of the city. They will let the work be done by a hireling, - a man paid to win battles, a half barbarian, unable to win any sympathy from the people he has served. One Braccio, a man trained in the pitiless statecraft of the Italians is sent to act as spy on Luria. "The toils are woven so skilfully that by the time Luria has won their battle for them, they will have accumulated all the evidence which is required, and the death sentence will be pronounced as the victory is sure."¹

Professor Pancoast, in his valuable papers on Luria in Poet Lore, Vol. I p. 555, and Vol. II, p. 19, says: "It is possible that Mr. Browning may have found the suggestion for this situation in a passage in Sapia Amminato's Istoria Fiorentina, relating to this expedition against Pisa. 'And when all was ready, the expedition marched to the gates of Pisa, under the command of Conte Partoldo Ursini, a Ventusian captain in the Florentine service, accompanied by

1. Edward Berdoe, The Browning Cyclopaedia, p. 261.

Filippo di Megalotti, Rinaldo di Gian Figliuzzi, and Maso degli Albizzi, in character of commissioners of the commonwealth. For, although we have every confidence in the honour and fidelity of our general, you see it is always well to be on the safe side. And in the matter of receiving possession of a city, these nobles with the old feudal names! We know the ways of them! An Orsini might be as bad in Pisa as a Visconti, so we might as well send some of our own people to be on the spot. The three commissaries therefore accompanied the Florentine general to Pisa."¹

These words throw an instructive light on Mr. Browning's drama, and seem to justify its motive. We cannot read these words of the Italian historian, without being impressed with the truth of Luria, to the spirit of the history, if not to the letter.

It is interesting to know that Browning's Luria is the source of Maeterlinck's beautiful drama, Monna Vanna. Story, situation, motive are different; but the same historic strife of the rival cities Pisa and Florence, appear. Maeterlinck might have constructed his drama, as Browning did, from incidents that are matter of historic record. But he did not. He says himself that he went to Browning for his material and that Luria inspired Monna Vanna.

Maeterlinck wrote to Professor William Lyons Phelps about this matter: "I am a constant reader and ardent admirer of Browning, who is, in my opinion, one of the greatest poets England ever had. I consider him, therefore, as belonging to the classic and universal literature everybody is expected to know. It is, then, permissible and natural to borrow from him a situation, or rather a piece of a situation just as one borrows every day from Aeschylus, Sophokles, or

1. Am. XVII, Lib. Goup. 675.

Shakespeare. Such borrowings, when it is a question of poets of this rank, constitute, so to speak, a sort of public homage, coram populo.

"It is this same way that my new piece, Joyzelle, has been inspired in me by Shakespeare's Tempest. If it seem natural to look for a point of departure and an inspiring motive in Shakespeare, why should one be astonished that they are sought in Browning?"¹

Colombe's Birthday. This drama is founded on an imaginary episode in the history of a German Duchy of the seventeenth century. It was not an old legend retold but an original conception of Browning's. It is a question whether any creation exists more chivalrous in its tone than this drama and it is given a setting which is both appropriate and harmonious. After leaving Rotterdam on his outward journey to Russia in 1834, Browning passed by the home of the heroine of his Colombe's Birthday:-

"Castle Ravestein
That sleeps out trustfully its extreme age
On the Meuse' quiet bank where she lived green,
Over the water-buds."²

And then he passed through "ancient famous happy Cleaves," whence came Colombe's lover, advocate Valence, while the "thriving little burgh" of Juliers, now Germanized as Julich, which he makes the scene of his drama lies not far to the East of Aix.³

The Ravestein which Browning saw in 1834 is still the small town of Ravestein or Ravenstein, on the Meuse, in the Dutch province of North Brabant. It has about eight hundred inhabitants and an old castle. It is thirty miles west of Cleves. Browning named his heroine Colombe of Ravestein, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves. Juliers is a fortified town in Rhemish Prussia, twenty

1. Reviews and Notes, Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, pp. 141 - 142.
2. Colombe's Birthday, Act I, ll. 14 - 17, ed. William Rolfe.
3. Griffin & Minchin, Life of Robert Browning, p. 62.

miles north east of Aix-la-Chapelle, and Cleves is a town of Rhemish Prussia, near the Rhine, about seventy miles below Cologne. It is the ancient capital of the Duchy of Cleves, now a few miles from the Dutch frontier, and is a favorite summer resort. In his Life of Robert Browning, Mr. Griffin states that the poet was familiar with these towns and used his knowledge of them in creating an appropriate setting for his drama.

A Soul's Tragedy. In A Soul's Tragedy the connection with actual history is remote. It is dated with the same delightful vagueness as Luria, simply 15 -. It may easily be conjectured, however, that Browning had in mind the Italy after the Sack of Rome, Italy under the yoke of foreign rule. The best towns were in ruins or depopulated. The country was in a state of wretchedness and fertile plains once fields of grain were reduced to deserts.¹ Familiar with this period of Italian history, Browning has the events of his drama to have occurred at Faenza, a city of Italy about twenty miles south east of Ravenna, in the sixteenth century,² during one of the political upheavals so common in that time and land. A sentence of banishment against the chief agitator had provoked an assault upon the ruler. The blow was spark to tinder, the city rose, the wounded Provost fled, the supposed assassin was the hero of the hour. Then came the papal legate to administer, and through his adroit handling the old order was restored.

These events, of course, are not the prime interest of the play. They are merely the enveloping action. But the added value which comes from having the few characters relieved against such a background is great. Through all the conversation that eager, tumultuous Italian life is present to our consciousness; and the speakers have a reality and dignity that people and events presented with no historic setting inevitably lack.³

1. Helen Clarke, Browning's Italy, pp. 95 - 96.

2. Berdoe, Browning's Cyclopaedia, p. 514

3. Ella Goodenow Willcox, Browning's A Soul's Tragedy, Poet Lore, Vol. XIII, pp. 412 - 415.

The Return of the Druses. Neither characters nor incidents in this drama appear to have any historical foundation, but much reference is made to the manners and religion of a very peculiar people. In his study of the Druse race Browning frequently consulted the Biographic Universelle.

The Druses are a mysterious, uncommunicative people who occupy the mountainous region of Syria near Lebanon, not many miles from Damascus. Their history is obscure but what is known of them begins in the tenth century. They hold with remarkable tenacity to their tradition and customs, and are a rich feudal aristocracy. They number about two hundred thousand, making no converts, and having no renegades.

They were Moslems until the advent of "Namza" their John the Baptist. They accept the teachings of both Mahomet and Jesus, but consider them to be incomplete and partial manifestations of God. They hold to the absolute unity of God and believe he makes himself manifest to men at different epochs, in the human form, without partaking of human weakness and frailty. They pride themselves on their hospitality, virtue, culture, and equality. To become an Initiate Druse and enter into a full knowledge of the mysteries, the candidate must undergo a severe ordeal to test his power of endurance and restraint.

The play was written by Browning in 1840. The Druses had at that time been brought to his attention by an uprising to defend their integrity and faith, not unlike the one recently in progress against the French.

The story embodied in the drama is wholly imaginary though based upon an exceedingly sympathetic and correct appreciation of the history, traits, and religion of this strange, exclusive people.¹

The careful study of Druse history and manners shows itself everywhere in the play. For instance, when in Act II Anael is arraying herself for her

1. Programme for Stage Presentation of The Return of the Druses, Pasadena, California, 1927.

nuptials puts on the khandjar or dagger,¹

"You tell me how a khandjar hangs?
The sharp side, thus, along the heart, see, marks
The maiden of our class."

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. Though not founded upon any story, this play has been given an English setting by Browning. In the Blot, we get a glimpse of eighteenth century aristocratic England. The estate over which Lord Tresham presided was one of those typical country kingdoms, which have for centuries been so conspicuous a feature of English life. Pride in their ancient lineage was, of course, common to noble families, though probably few of them could boast as Tresham did that there was no blot in their escutcheons.

Perhaps Browning may have had the Sidney family in mind, for the imaginary house of Tresham may be said to have its closest counterpart in the Sidneys, for many generations owners of Penhurst, and with a traditional character according to which the men were all brave and the women were all pure.² Furthermore, the brotherly and sisterly relations of Tresham and Mildred are not unlike those of Sir Philip Sidney and his sister Mary. They studied and worked together in great sympathy, broken into only by the tragic fate of Sir Philip.

The story of the love of Mildred and Mertoun is the universally human one, and belongs to no one country or no one period of civilization more than another, but the attitude of all the actors in the tragedy belongs distinctively to the phase of moral culture which we see illustrated in the youth of Sir Philip Sidney, and is characteristic of English ways of thinking whenever their moral force comes uppermost.

Thus though characters and incidents in this drama are the result

1. Gamaliel Bradford, The Return of the Druses, Boston Browning Society Papers, p. 271.
2. Helen A. Clarke, Browning's England, p. 224.

of pure invention, Browning has set them in an environment where their individualities are developed in harmony with the spirit of the time, in this case, eighteenth century aristocratic England,

In a Balcony. The Source of this drama was in Browning's mind, He imagined the story, its characters and incidents. The poet succeeded in creating a picture of intense life with a remarkably appropriate setting. Truth and worldly ambition clash; the inevitable struggle between them for ascendancy takes place; truth, as it must ever be, is triumphant, but, in this case, at a tremendous cost.

To sum up we may say that whatever sources Browning used for his drama, he made them completely his own but his direct sources were few. His dramas bear that impress of inspiration which is real originality and are not the result of a long antecedent growth of tangled history and legend. They are based on no preceding lore, but are rather poetic expressions of a mind more or less consciously stored with antecedent culture and broadened spiritual vision.

CHAPTER III STAGE PRODUCTIONS AND CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

1. STRAFFORD

The Stage History of Strafford, Browning's first drama written for the stage, is brief. The play was the outcome of the memorable evening already alluded to, of the supper at Sergeant Talfourd's house on May 26th, 1836, in honour of the first night of Ion. By August the poet had pledged himself to achieve this first dramatic adventure, and in March 1837, the play was in Macready's hands and had been accepted by Osboldistone, the manager of Covent Garden. Macready's Diary, March 30, says that Osboldistone caught at it with avidity and agreed to produce it without delay.¹ On the following May Day it was produced at Covent Garden by Macready, who himself took the part of Strafford. The cast included Miss Helena Faucit as Lady Carlisle; Mr. Vandenhoff as Pym; Mr. Dale as King Charles; Miss Vincent as Queen Henrietta; Mr. G. Bennett as Denvil Hollis and Mr. Harris as John Hampden.

Helena Saville Faucit, who took the part of Lady Carlisle, was at this time a novice on the stage, having made her first professional appearance at Covent Garden on January 5th, 1836. She became one of the great actresses of Great Britain and during the early and middle '30's she was considered to be one of the three most popular and beautiful young actresses on the English stage. She was a woman of histrionic genius, personal beauty and individual charm. The quality which contributed most to her fame was the vividness with which she realized her characters.² Miss Faucit took leading parts in three of Browning's plays.

In her sketch of Browning Miss Anne Thackeray quotes a letter from

1. Macready's Diary, Vol. I, p. 383.

2. Shakespeare on the Stage, p. 246, William Winter.

Miss Helen Faucit regarding Macready's production of Strafford, which to anyone interested in the production of plays has an abiding charm. She refers to her surprise and delight upon hearing that Mr. Browning desired her to take the part of Lady Carlisle; and she speaks of trying her best to understand Mr. Browning's own view of the character. She mentions that Mr. Browning's "demeanor was so kind, considerate, and courteous, so grateful for the attention shown to his wishes" at rehearsals, that all the players "tried to do their best to insure its success." She says that though Strafford was considered a success on its first night she went home very sad, for she feared that its success might not last long, and that perhaps kind Mr. Browning would think they had not all done their best for him!¹

On close scrutiny of the criticisms from the daily papers on the first performance of Strafford we find that the dramatic critics of the day appear to have considered this drama as one of considerable promise and merit. The Morning Herald of May 4th, 1837, was exceptionally encouraging, - 'Covent Garden Theatre', - "Last night Mr. Browning's tragedy of Strafford was performed a second time at this house and received with applause, warm indeed but not so much as it deserved. The author has produced an acting tragedy, which is equally remarkable on our stage and in our literature." And further on in the same article, - "We have no hesitation in expressing our opinion that Strafford is by far the best tragedy, that has been produced in this, or any other of our great theatres for many years."² In the Examiner of May 7th, 1837, John Forster states that Strafford suggested the most brilliant career of dramatic authorship that we have known in our time. "This is the work of a writer who is capable of

1. Miss Elizabeth McCracken, - Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 116, "Stage Productions of Browning's Plays".
2. The London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. ix, p. 176.

achieving the highest objects and triumphs of dramatic literature".¹

But though praise of the author was high, the performers with the exception of Macready and Miss Faucit, were condemned. According to the Post the Herald, the Times, and the Examiner, the great historical characters of the play were presented by actors who strutted or slouched in ill-fitting costumes and who whimpered or drawled their lines. Mr. Forster describes them as a barn-wonder to look at. The King Charles of Mr. Dale seems to have been particularly atrocious and is made perfectly imbecile. Mr. Vandenhoff who took the important part of Pym seems to have been addicted to a strange whining noise which he constantly introduced into his most feeling conceptions. Mr. Webster also is accused of too much whimpering, through the part of young Vane.

The play truly seemed to have been weighted with misfortune for the financial distress at Covent Garden forbade any splendour or even dignity of scenery or of costumes; the manager on the point of bankruptcy had been extremely parsimonious in both dresses and scenery; the text was considerably altered and not always judiciously,² and the rehearsals had been such a wretched mix-up that the young author was disgusted and anticipated a total failure. Curiously enough, however, Strafford did not fail on the first night, but was carried through to triumph and warmly applauded on the second. The Constitutional for the second of May remarked: "Such a reception as was given to this play last night gives the lie to any twaddling assertion that there is no taste, and no patronage left in England for the real drama. At every concluding act the house rang with plaudits." The playbill had the following statement: "The New Tragedy of Strafford continuing to be received with the same marks of approbation as attended its first representation, will be repeated this evening

1. John Forster, - The Examiner, May 7, 1837, p. 294.

2. Edward Dowden, - The Life of Robert Browning, ch. iii, p. 45.

and on Thursday next." It ran for five nights. Then the actor who played Pym, got into a rumpus with the management and receiving at the same time an engagement in America, abruptly withdrew from the cast and there was no Thursday performance of Strafford. The financial condition of the theatre, in spite of the undiminished popularity of the piece, put an end to the representation. Still Edward Fitzball, who had a performance on May 30th, and had a number of plays to choose from, selected Strafford, "the highly popular Historical Tragedy", for the simple reason that it had been uncommonly well received.¹

On the 21st of December, 1886, at two o'clock, at the Strand Theatre, the London Browning Society's performance of Strafford took place before a large and appreciative audience. The representation was most successful and most interesting.

The Play was produced under the direction of Mr. G. R. Foss, assisted by Mr. W. R. Stanley. The following was the cast:-

Charles I	Mr. T. C. Bindloss
Sir Thomas Wentworth	Mr. George R. Foss
John Pym	Mr. Bennett Gould
John Hampden	Mr. F. Powell
Sir Henry Vane	Mr. C. Bodsworth
Countess of Carlisle	Miss Webster
Queen Henrietta Maria	Miss Helen Leighton

It is interesting to note that Miss Alma Murray was compelled through ill-health to give up studying the part of Lady Carlisle. It was taken by Miss Webster of St. James Theatre.²

The Browning Society members seem to have been quite frank in criticizing both the play and the players. The drama was put on by friends who wished to see how Browning's plays would act and critics realized that the actors

1. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 555.
2. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. ix, p. 175.

were not of the best nor had thousands of pounds been spent on its production. Critics such as Dr. Furnival, Dr. Todhunter, and Bernard Shaw agreed that the performance was a very creditable one.

The play was next given at Oxford Theatre, February 12, 1890, by members of the Oxford University Dramatic Society. An acting edition made by Mr. Courtney, Fellow of New College, was used. The scenery was painted by Mr. Hall from designs used for the production by Mr. Alma-Tadema. Mr. Irving of Newcastle, son of Sir Henry Irving, was the Earl; Mr. Clark, also of Newcastle was Pym; and Mrs. Charles was Lucy Carlisle. This was a production of much merit and it was warmly received.¹ "Taken as a whole the representation of the play must be pronounced a most decided success. Allowing that much of the enthusiasm showed by last night's house was due to the admirable scenery of Mr. Alma-Tadema, and the general excellence of the mounting of Strafford, still, unless the acting had been fully up to the mark, such a play, unrelieved as it is by the slightest comic element, and depending entirely on the earnest interpretation of the chief characters, must have fallen flat, instead of, as last night, thoroughly awakening the sympathies of the audience....." "Daily News", February 13, 1890.²

In 1896 a representation of the play was given in Australia by members of Trinity College of the University of Melbourne.³

1. Miss Elizabeth McCracken, - "Stage Productions of Browning's Plays", Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 119.
2. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. III, pt. xii, p. 54.
3. Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 119.

2.

STAGE PRODUCTIONS OF

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

1. Drury Lane Theatre, London, England,
Produced by William Macready.
Helena Faucit as Mildred Tresham. February 11, 1843.
2. Sadler's Wells Theatre, London,
Revival by Mr. Phelps. November 27, 1848.
3. St. George's Hall, London,
Under auspices of London Browning Society. May 2, 1885.
4. Washington, U. S. A.
Philadelphia,
New York,
Boston,
Mr. Lawrence Barrett's Production. December 19, 1884.
January 3, 1885.
March 9, 1885.
March 16, 1885.
5. Olympic Theatre, London,
Alma Murray as Mildred Tresham. March 15, 1885.
6. Gentleman's Concert Hall, Manchester, England.
Martin Harvey as Mertoun. March 27, 1893.
7. Opera Comique, London, England.
Martin Harvey. June 15, 1893.
8. Liverpool, England.
Under auspices of Art's Club. January, 1894.
9. Hudson Theatre, New York.
Produced by Mrs. Le Moyne. April 7, 1905.
Park Theatre, Boston
by Mrs. Le Moyne. May 15, 1905.

MACREADY'S PRODUCTION OF
A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

From the biographical point of view A Blot in the 'Scutcheon is the most important of all Browning's dramas. The date of its composition is fixed by a letter from Browning to Macready, - "I have written a spick and span new Tragedy..... and will send it to you if you care to be bothered so far. There is action in it drabbing, stabbing, et autre gentillesse - who knows but the Gods may make me good even yet?" This letter as Mr. Griffin has shown was written before the end of 1840, and the play was finally accepted by Macready late in 1841 and acted not by him but under his mismanagement on the eleventh of February, 1843.¹

Since the career of Robert Browning as a dramatist is so indissolubly connected with the energies and activities of the great tragedian, it is important for us to remember that Macready was at this time recognized as by far the most able and eminent tragedian in the English speaking world and about him the hopes of the young dramatic poets were clustered. After performing for a season at the Haymarket Macready took Drury Lane Theatre under his own management and held out flattering promises to the young poets.

When the Drury Lane season began Macready informed Browning that he should produce his play, when he had brought out two others, - The Patrician's Daughter, and Plighted Troth: The Patrician's Daughter was a work of promise and had been much discussed in literary and theatrical circles. It was distinctly understood that if it was a great success the public was to be rewarded by a series of original tragedies by poets of repute. Everything

1. Phelps William Lyon, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 558.

seemed as auspicious as possible for the success of Browning's play but nobody knew what a dangerous game Macready was playing. He was on the verge of bankruptcy and driven almost to distraction by a variety of vexations.

Unfortunately Marston's play from which he expected so much was a financial failure,¹ and The Plighted Troth proved miserable trash and a total failure.

Macready wrote to Browning that these plays had smashed arrangements altogether but he would still produce his play. The poet had no inkling whatever of Macready's embarrassments and not the slightest notion that it was hoped he would withdraw the piece: "I had - in my ignorance of certain symptoms better understood by Macready's professional acquaintances - I had no notion that it was a proper thing, in such a case, to 'release him from his promise'; on the contrary I should have fancied that such a proposal was offensive."² On Saturday, the 4th of February, 1843, Macready called Mr. Browning into his private room and said to him:- "Your play was read to the actors yesterday and they received it with shouts of laughter."

"Who read it?"

"Oh, Mr. Wilmot."³

Now, Wilmot, the prompter, was a broadly comic personage with a wooden leg and a very red face, whose vulgar jokes were the joy of all the idle jesters that hung about the theatre. That such a drama should be given to Wilmot to read was an insult. In Blackwood's Magazine for March 1881, Helen Faucit writes: "It seems but yesterday that I sat by his (Mr. Elton's) side in the green room at the reading of Robert Browning's beautiful drama A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. As a rule Macready always reads the new plays. But owing, I suppose, to some press

1. Edmund Gosse, - Personalia, p. 60.

2. Letter from Browning to Mr. Hill, Mrs. S. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 118.

3. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, p. 62.



of business, the task was intrusted on this occasion to the head prompter, - a clever man in his way, but wholly unfitted to bring out, or even to understand Mr. Browning's meaning. Consequently the delicate, subtle lines were twisted, perverted and sometimes made even ridiculous in his hands. My 'cruel father' was a warm admirer of the poet and tried by gentle asides to make me see the real meaning of the verse. But somehow the mischief seemed irreparable, for a few of the actors, during the rehearsals chose to continue to misunderstand the text and never took the interest in the play which they must have done had Mr. Macready read it - for he had great power as a reader. I always thought it was chiefly because of this contretemps that a play so thoroughly dramatic, failed, despite its painful story to make the great success which was justly its due."¹ I have thought it worth while to quote this letter and highly important because it gives a great actress's opinion of the damage done by the reading of Wilmot. Macready tried to make amends by reading the play next morning, but announced that he, in consequence of the state of his mind could not act it himself, but, that Phelps, then quite a new man, would take the principal part. This was quite an unheard of thing in those days when it was supposed Macready was absolutely essential to a new tragedy. Of course his hope was that Mr. Browning would withdraw the play. But the actor's manner was so far from suggesting the truth that the poet never suspected the real state of the case.

When rehearsals began, as Phelps was ill, Macready read his part and on the morning after the third rehearsal he told Browning that he himself would now take the part of Tresham. But Browning was not pleased with this shuffling, and still further annoyed by the changes in the text. He determined

1. Helena Faucit, - Blackwood's Magazine, March 1881, p. 326.

that Phelps should take the part, and taking him to the room where Macready was already studying the play, informed the great actor that he would be very glad to intrust the part of Lord Tresham to Mr. Phelps. "Upon which Macready crumpled up the play he was holding in his hand and threw it to the other end of the room."¹

Mr. Browning himself has reviewed these events in a letter to Mr. William Archer - "then, after proposing to take away from his substitute the opportunity of distinction he had given him (to which I refused my consent), leaving the play to a fate which it somehow managed to escape Macready was fuori di se from the moment, when, in pure ignorance of what he was driving at, I acquiesced in his proposal that a serious play of any pretension should appear under his management with any other protagonist than himself One friendly straightforward word to the effect that what was intended for an advantage, would under circumstances of which I was altogether ignorant, prove the reverse - how easy to have spoken, and what regret it would have saved us both."²

Macready, who had thus been mortally offended by Browning's decision in regard to Mr. Phelps, at once wished to reduce the importance of the play and did all he could to invite its failure. He tried to leave out much of the text but here was baffled by Browning's having it printed within twenty-four hours. Not a shilling either was spent on scenery or dresses.

Under such circumstances as these it is not surprising that Browning awaited the first performance on February 11th with a sore heart. But his expectations of failure were not realized. Phelps acted magnificently and Miss Faucit almost surpassed herself as Mildred. When the curtain went down the

1. Edmund Gosse, - Personalia, p. 66.

2. Montrose J. Moses, Representative British Dramas, p. 189.

applause was vociferous. Phelps was called and recalled and then there arose the cry of "Author". The "author" however was deaf to this appeal and went home very cross with Macready and his vexatious schemings.

The play was performed with success after this for a week when the final collapse of Macready's schemes brought it abruptly to a close. As in the case of Strafford a purely accidental circumstance cut it short in the midst of a successful run.

The quarrel with Macready is told in considerable detail because it was an event which had far reaching consequences. To Browning both personally, and as a dramatist, it was disastrous. It cost him the friendship of Macready; a friendship which had given much warmth and color to his life. But it is to be remembered also that one of the great friendships of Browning's life grew out of this connection with the stage - that of Sir Theodore and Lady Martin who as Helena Faucit played the part of Mildred Tresham. Looking back now on the first appearance of his tragedy we can well understand Browning declaring as he did to Lady Martin, that her perfect behavior as a woman and her admirable playing as an actress had been the one gratifying circumstance connected with the performance.¹ Mr. Browning spoke of what Miss Faucit had done for his heroine in the following lines - written in her album, soon after the production of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.

"Is it but three weeks today
Since they played a luckless play,
And 'the Treshams' like a band
Of full-fledged nestlings, left my hand
To flutter forth, the wide world over?
Just three weeks! yet see - each rover
There, with more or less unsteady
Winglets, nearly reached already,
In the Past, so dim, so dim,
A place where Lucy, Strafford, Pym,
My elder brood of earlier years,
Wait peacefully their new compeers.

1. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 127.

Then good voyage! shall it grieve me
Vastly, that such ingrates leave me?

.
Helen Faucit, you have twice
Proved my Bird of Paradise!
He, who would my wits inveigle
Into boasting him my eagle,
Turns out very like a Raven.
Fly off, Blacky, to your haven!
But you, softest dove, must never -
Leave me, as he does, forever -
I will strain my eyes to blindness,
Ere lose sight of you and kindness,
'Genius' is a common story!
Few guess the spirit's glory,
They hail nightly, is the sweetest,
Fairest, gentlest, and completest
Shakespeare's - Lady's ever port
Longed for! Few gues this: I know it."

"Hatcham, Surrey, Mar. 4. '43."

These lines were accompanied by the following letter:-

"My dear Miss Faucit, - Here is your album, with my best thanks
for the honour which you have done me by asking some rhymes for it: and here
are the rhymes themselves - poor enough, most probably, but sincere, quite as
certainly. I wish from my soul it were in my power to find some worthier way
of proving the admiration and gratitude with which I remain, my dear Miss
Faucit, yours ever faithfully,

"Robert Browning."¹

To Browning as a dramatist, the misunderstanding over the initial
performance of the play was disastrous. It was discouraging; it occurred
at a time when he most needed encouragement. Dickens was much pleased with
the play and his favorable opinion would have meant a great deal to the young
poet, but it was forty years before Browning came across Dickens' opinion.
For some unknown reason Forster did not communicate to Browning, (as he was

1. Miss Helen Faucit, - Some of Shakespeare's Female Characters, pp. 396 - 397.

authorized to do) the praise of Dickens: it was not until he published it in his Life of Dickens that Browning heard of it. Thus he was deprived of a testimonial which might have carried much weight with the public at a time when he needed such help. In his Life of Dickens Forster says: "This was the date too, of Mr. Browning's tragedy of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon which I took upon myself after reading the manuscript, privately to impart to Dickens, and I was not mistaken in my belief that it would profoundly touch him. 'Browning's play', wrote Dickens, 'has thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrows' It is full of genius, natural and beautiful in its vigor I swear it is a tragedy which must be played and it must be played moreover by Macready, And if you tell Browning that I have seen it, tell him that I believe from my soul that there is no man living (and not many dead) who could produce such a work.'" ²

One cannot help but wish this letter had been shown to Browning by Forster. Praise of this play from such a quarter would have meant much at a time when its production had so humiliated and discomfited him. I think Mr. Lawrence Barrett, the eminent American Actor was not far wrong when he said that the mortification and disappointment which Browning had endured in his relations with Macready "drove from the stage a poet who only needed the experience at the manager's table which all the great dramatists have found so valuable to have given us a new gallery of stage portraits."¹

This opinion of Mr. Lawrence Barrett's is highly important because he was a great and experienced actor, one who had thoroughly tested the possibilities of the play on the stage. In the same article he makes the statement, - "No event seems to have borne greater misfortune to the stage and the drama generally than the misunderstanding between Mr. Browning and Macready

1. Lawrence Barrett, William J. Rolfe's edition to A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 14.
2. Forster's Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 25.

over the initial performance of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.

Professor William Lyon Phelps in writing about Browning as a dramatist in the Yale Review is inclined to agree with Professor Thorndyke, who thinks that the quarrel between Macready and Browning was one of the most unfortunate things that happened to English drama in the nineteenth century. One fact is certain: Browning had in him the potential ability to write acting plays: "With Macready's steady counsel and assistance, the greatest dramatic poet of the day and the greatest actor would have made a combination that might have produced many permanent results!"¹ Ashley W. Thorndike states that, "If theatrical conditions had been favorably, if the union of Macready and Browning could have continued, one fancies that the romantic drama might yet have succeeded Since the Restoration no poet had come to the theatre so gifted with dramatic genius, no poet so concerned with the study of the vicissitudes of human motive so alive to the dramatic values of crucial moments, so curious as to the meaning of passion and pain, suffering and evil in the drama of life. Strafford and A Blot in the 'Scutcheon have the weaknesses of youth but the study of Strafford is almost the first independent and acute study of an Englishman of history in all the historical tragedies since Henry V". "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon one of the few plays to realize individual passions since Otway, Browning needed the discipline of a severe apprenticeship such as Shakespeare served and his monologues and lyrics might have been dramas. But the fiasco with Macready was the end of the period and the defeat of the poetical drama."²

There were differences of opinion in 1843 as there are now about the dramatic value of Browning's drama, but the fact remains that it has survived

1. Browning as a Dramatist, William Lyon Phelps, Yale Review, Vol. 1, p. 558.
2. Ashley Thorndyke, - Tragedy, p. 364.

on the stage all other contemporary English plays and if it should be really proved, and no one has satisfactorily done that yet, that it was a failure in 1843, then fortunately we have had other opportunities to estimate its value and stage succedd. Since 1843 it has been produced many times and in many places.

REVIVAL BY MR. PHELPS AT

SADLER'S WELLS, 1848

Mr. Phelps revived A Blot in the 'Scutcheon at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London on November 27, 1848. Mr. Phelps was Tresham; Mr. Dickinson, Mertoun; Miss Cooper, Mildred; Miss Huldart was Gwendolen; and Mr. Graham, Gerard. It held the stage for two weeks and according to several accounts was admirably acted and well received.¹ An account of this performance was given in the Athenaeum of Saturday, December 2nd, 1848 - "Sadler's Wells, - The reproduction of Mr. Browning's fine drama A Blot in the 'Scutcheon was on Monday an exciting incident to the admirers of this gentleman's genius. The play is an attempt to give a poetic interest to a melo-dramatic subject. The experiment succeeded perfectly."² The Examiner of December 9th gives the following complimentary criticism of Mr. Phelp's production. "We ought not to pass without mention a careful revival of Mr. Browning's poetical and passionate play of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon at Sadler's Wells Theatre..... We could not expect to see better scenes anywhere than the opening hall of the mansion of the

1. Miss McCracken, Stage Productions of Browning's Plays, Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 15.

2. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, p. 121.

Treshams with their shielded 'scutcheons; than the chamber of Mildred; or than those dark old clusters of gloomy forest trees which witness at the last and do their best to conceal the family shame. Mr. Phelps has fully comprehended the poetry of a play and can reproduce it in the arrangements of the scene."¹

It is significant that Mr. Phelps, "the person most completely aware of the untoward circumstances which stood originally in the way of success,"² should have produced the play at his own theatre. Phelps was undoubtedly recognized as one of the best "all round" actors the English Stage had known taking rank with such actors as Kemble, Young, and Macready.³ Critics who spend so much time denouncing Browning's plays as "failures" on the stage might well enquire as to how it happened that an experienced actor who had himself taken a leading part in and tested the worth of the play on the stage produced it years after at his own theatre. I am rather inclined to think that Mr. Stopford Brooke and Mr. Lounsbury are both wrong and Mr. Barrett and Mr. Phelps both right along with Dickens in thinking the Blot a fine acting tragedy. Actors and producers of plays estimate effects on audiences as a rule much more truly than literary critics.

Mr. Phelps produced the play when the Brownings were in Italy. Mrs. Browning wrote to Miss Mitford from Florence on December 16th: "We have been, at least I have been, a little anxious lately about the fact of the Blot in the 'Scutcheon which Mr. Phelps applied for my husband's permission to revive at Sadler's..... We are very grateful to dear Mr. Chorley, who gave us the story of the result, and never, he says, was a more legitimate success. The play want

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. 1, p. 122.

2. Letters of Robert Browning to Mr. Hill, Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters, 2nd ed., p. 124.

3. Brander Matthews, - Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and Ireland, p. 739.

straight to the hearts of the audience, it seems, and we hear of its continuance on the stage, from the papers. You may remember how Macready brought it out and put his foot on it, in the flush of a quarrel between actor and author, and Phelps, knowing the whole secret and feeling the power of the play, determined on making a revival of it at his own theatre."¹

Representations of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon
in 1885

In 1885 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon had two representations, one given by the London Browning Society and the other in Washington, U.S.A., in the winter of 1885 by the eminent actor Mr. Lawrence Barrett.²

The former of these performances took place at St. George Hall, London, May 2, 1885.

The following was the Cast:

Mildred Tresham	Miss Fores Brette
Gwendolen Tresham	Miss Annie Woodzell
Thorold Earl Tresham	Mr. Arthur R. Ayres
Austin Tresham	Mr. William Bell
Henry Earl Mertoun	Mr. Charles Fry

The actors and actresses were in all instances amateurs and inexperienced, nevertheless the representation was pronounced a creditable achievement. No structural alteration was made in the play, but with a view to more picturesque costumes, the story was, with the author's consent, put back in the early Stuart period.³

The venerable and distinguished Mrs. Mary Cowden Clarke, who had

1. Mrs. Orr, - Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., p. 161.
2. William Rolfe, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 14.
3. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, p. 61, Extract from The Daily News.

seen the play under Macready's mismanagement in 1843, was still alive in 1884, and when she heard of the production by the Society wrote from Genoa on April 16, 1885, a letter of congratulation to Mr. Charles Fry, the producer. The following extract is interesting:

"I think it is a fine piece of artistic courage, your having selected Browning's noble play, to my mind the most beautiful and admirable of all his productions. You remember the enthusiastic mention of it at page 25, Vol. II of Forster's Life of Charles Dickens. If not, pray get the book and read what C. D. so truly says in praise of this great tragic drama."¹

Mr. Lawrence Barrett's Production
in America, 1885.

Mr. Lawrence Barrett has himself given a very valuable testimony in regard to his production of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. This is found in William Rolfe's edition of the play. On reading the drama Mr. Barrett was much impressed with the dramatic quality of the story, "which stamped the author at once as a master of theatric form of narration."² He saw that the characters were suited to stage purposes; Mildred and Mertoun a pair of lovers compare with Juliet and Romeo, Gwendolen was a revival of Imogen. He saw that the play, like many plays of earlier dramatists needed slight alterations and modern staging.

Mr. Barrett asked the permission of Mr. Browning for such treatment of his text and "found him as eager for the glory of the theatre as when he produced Strafford, and while he was unable to go over the text extensively to meet the stage requirements, he would gladly consent to its presentation with the ordinary

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, p. 61, ~~Extract from the Daily News~~.
2, Letter of Mr. Barrett - Rolfe's ed., p. 13.

changes which the stage manager makes in such matters.¹

The result was that, with a few verbal inversions and a slight cutting of the text, the play was given in Washington before a most distinguished audience with remarkable effect. It has since taken its place in the repertoire of Lawrence Bartett, along with the other great plays of kindred dramatists.

The play was produced at Washington, on December 19th, 1884, with Mr. Barrett as Tresham, Mr. Mosley and Miss Allen as Mertoun and Mildred and Miss Gale and Mr. Rogers as Gwendolen and Gerard. It was performed again at Philadelphia on January 3rd, 1885, in New York on March 5th, and in Boston on March 16th.

The performances of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon in Washington and Philadelphia were more or less experimental, but in New York the play received the favorable verdict of a great metropolitan audience. "At the old Star Theatre the curtain rose upon the gallery leading from Lord Tresham's dining hall. (In Mr. Barrett's version the first scene among the retainers is left out). Earl Mertoun, a pale, fair-haired boy, dressed in crimson velvet, is supposed to have dined with the family and is taking his leave. Then the scene changes to Mildred's chamber, where she is discovered dressed in white, close by the painted window, and the signal light in readiness upon the table. The terrible character of the situation is revealed by the scene between the lovers, and the opening of the second act shows that the horror is increasing as it spread, by the contrast between the calm and gracious nobleman who received his sister's wooer, and the haggard man who drags his woodman after

1. Letter of Mr. Barrett, Rolfe's ed., p. 13.

him into the library and bolts the door. From this point the play progresses to its climax, which is found in the middle of this act, with Mildred's half eager, half fearful query, "But Thorold, if I will receive him as I said?" and when she repeats entreatingly, "I will receive him," Tresham's passion bursts all bounds, and the rest of the scene to his exit passes like a whirlwind. Mr. Barrett's acting grew steadily in power as the scene progressed, till at the culmination it had reached the highest point at which he has yet been seen in tragedy. At the close of this act an important change in construction was introduced. After Gwendolen's words to Mildred,

"Remember sweet,
He said there was a clue! I hold it, come!"

instead of the curtain falling upon the end of the act, Tresham re-enters, subdued and master of himself again, and putting the others aside addresses to Mildred the following lines, put together from an earlier speech in this act:

"We two will somehow wear
This one day out; the dead must leave their hearts
Under the marble of our chapel-floor;
They cannot rise and blast you! You may wed
Your paramour above our mother's tomb;
Our mother cannot move from 'neath your foot,
I'll hide your shame and mine from every eye."

The yew tree avenue of the third act gave an opportunity for a very impressive scene, with the moonlight casting great twisted shadows across the stage, and the purple lighted pane in Mildred's window shining through the branches. The play is brought to a close here rather than in Mildred's chamber because of the important effect gained.¹

Although Miss Elizabeth McCracken, in her article on Stage Productions of Browning's Plays, states that a haze of remoteness surrounds the production of

1. Henry Norman, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon in New York, London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 43 - 44.

Mr. Barrett in Boston I have found in the London Browning Society Papers several interesting accounts of the performance of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon in Boston in 1885. The Boston Home Journal for March 21, 1885, while rendering much credit to Mr. Barrett, criticises him for cutting out the lively opening scene that Browning wrote, in which the gay and proud retainers watch the arrival of the Earl accompanied by his suite to formally ask the hand of their young mistress. "The act was nearly over before those unfamiliar with the piece, comprehended even the relative positions of the persons on the stage."¹

The Boston Evening Transcript: The Boston Evening Transcript gives a most enthusiastic criticism of the "first night" in Boston, March 16, 1885. The following is an extract: "Last evening proved beyond a doubt that A Blot in the 'Scutcheon is pre-eminently fitted for actual dramatic performance. From the beginning it lays hold on you, and its grip on the attention and the emotions closes tighter and tighter until the curtain falls upon the last act. Mr. Browning's characters speak an essentially modern dialect; his phraseology is his own, but his style has all the higher characteristics of that of the great Greek dramatists. In terrible directness and truth to its immediate purpose it is matched only by them and by Shakespeare."²

An able critique of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon and its representation in Boston was written by Mr. Langdon Mitchell of Boston. This opinion was written for a member of the Browning Society and is free from the inevitable insincerities and restrictions of newspaper report.

Mr. Mitchell had never read the play before seeing it acted and saw it acted twice in the same week. He had no pre-conceptions, had not read the

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 61 - 62.

2. Ibid, Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 62 - 63.

plot, and was entirely unprejudiced. On the second occasion he paid nearly as much attention to the house as to the tragedy and so was enabled to give his opinion not only as one of an audience seeing a play for the first time, but also as a careful observer of the audience before whom it was acted. Mr. Mitchell favors the omission of the first scene as being of little use and not necessary, but thinks the play would have been more effective had the very beautiful song at the beginning of the second act not been left out. "It would have given a chance for excellent acting on Mildred's part and would have introduced Mertoun with delightful grace. The whole scene, putting aside its very exquisite literary value, struck me as very powerful on the stage.

"As to the audience on both occasions, the house, considering its size, was fairly full. On the first I was not able to see the people; to say that they showed no signs of discontent, and were seemingly interested, is to say that they were Americans in a theatre. On the second occasion, a Saturday matinée, I sat where I could see both house and theatre. It was the kind of audience to which I think the dramatist would rather appeal than to the one of the night before, which had a somewhat larger sprinkling of what we sometimes call our 'first families'. Most of these had read the play and came with every sort of prejudice and preconception as to Mr. Browning, the play, the actors, the characters, the poetry, and the way the poetry ought to be delivered. Doubtless the most of them appreciated far better the literary beauties of the work; its dramatic qualities I am inclined to think they entirely overlooked. The Saturday matinée audience, however, on the other hand had no prejudices..... I may certainly say I seldom saw a larger number of handkerchiefs in use, than at various times during the second and third acts. No doubt they enjoyed the poetry unconsciously - were affected

by it without knowing why. The play they certainly enjoyed and this surprised me for our people scarcely understand the meaning of family pride, and as an outcome of this, the idea they had formed of a 'Scutcheon must have been very vague. That the audience was thoroughly interested, despite this, was, I think, sufficient testimony to Mr. Browning's qualities, (in this play) as a playwright"¹

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon in London, 1888

In March, 1888, Miss Alma Murray appeared as Mildred Tresham in A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. The performance took place under the auspices of the London Browning Society, on the afternoon of Thursday, 15th March, in the Olympic Theatre, London. The cast was as follows:

Thorold Tresham	Mr. C. J. Fulton
Austin Tresham	Mr. B. Webster
Henry, Earl Mertoun	Mr. F. Rodney
Gerard	Mr. G. R. Ross
Mildred Tresham	Miss Alma Murray
Gwendolen Tresham	Miss Alexis Leighton

The play was produced under the direction of Mr. G. R. Foss, assisted by Mr. W. R. Stavely.²

This was the first occasion on which the great poet and thinker had seen Miss Murray in a play of his own; Robert Browning, an authority whose every clearly recorded opinion on matters of art will be treasured as long as the English language lasts, had already emphatically designated Alma Murray as "a woman of genius" and "the poetic actress without a rival."³

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 77 - 78.

2. Ibid, Vol. II, pt. x, p. 250.

3. Alma Murray, Elkin Mathews, Publisher, p. 6.

Immediately after Miss Murray's performance in A Blot in the
'Scutcheon, Browning wrote to her thus:

"What am I to say of your performance yesterday? How thoroughly you understood; how perfectly you looked; how powerfully and how beautifully you acted the part of 'Mildred', I hardly can acknowledge in the quiet way which gives criticism its importance. But; criticism put aside for the moment; need I attempt to express the gratitude I feel at your giving my work the generous help of your admirable histrionic genius? No less than the poetic sympathy with which you have so long and so signally made me your debtor? Such treatment as yours to a play much maltreated so many years ago, goes near to reviving in its author something of the old impulse once strong in him to try afresh in that direction. Whether or no that is to be, one obstacle is completely removed; and could he but create the right character, it would be easy to find the adequate representative - capable besides of heightening his attempts to many graces all her own.

"Believe me your very sincerely,

"Robert Browning".¹

By this performance, added to her Beatrice Cenci, in which she secured an unassailable and world-wide reputation, it is not surprising that the poet should have been stimulated to feel the possibility of returning to dramatic writing, "recognising as he must have done in Miss Murray the only actress of the English-speaking world, to tell the sober truth, the French-speaking stage, since Miss Helen Faucit, capable of completely presenting the intellectual aspects of her art, of creatively interpreting great character on the highest literary ground, and of conveying great tragic impressions. Subsequently to

1. Alma Murray, Published by Elkin Mathews, London, p. 8.

the date of the foregoing letter, much passed between Mr. Browning, Dr. Furnival and Miss Murray, regarding the contemplated new play, and there is little doubt that, had the poet's life been spared but a year or two longer, Miss Murray would have been accorded the supreme glory of appearing in a tragedy, written expressly for her by one of the four greatest of her country's poets."¹

This performance of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon was reviewed in twenty-three papers of which the following is a list:

The Academy	The Globe
The Athenaeum	The Era
The Star	The Referee
Topical Times	People
Sunday Times	The Scotsman
Land and Water	St. James's Gazette
The Stage	Pictorial World
Weekly Advertiser	Dramatic Review
Public Opinion	Folkestone News
The Table	Brixton Free Press
Bradford Observer	

In the main, the criticisms were favorable, giving praise to the drama as an acting play and to Miss Alma Murray as an ideal representative of Mildred Tresham. Mr. Frederick Wedmore in the Academy speaks of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon as a great example of true dramatic literature; the criticism in the Athenaeum judges the play as a dramatic poem winning keen admiration; the Star says: "The experiments of the Browning Society have shown that there is a public ready for the poetic drama as soon as ever the poetic drama is ready for its public;" the Stage criticises unfavorably the dramatic qualities of the play; the Free Press critic states: "I do not think I have ever seen a finer piece of acting than that of Miss Murray as Mildred Tresham, every movement, every word, every tone told, and during the whole scene one might

1. Alma Murray, Published by Elkin Mathews, London, p. 9.

have almost heard a pin drop, so intense was the feeling of the audience." This criticism also speaks of the play as being intensely dramatic.¹

Other Stage Representations of

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon was performed at Gentleman's Concert Hall, Manchester, England, on March 27th, 1893, with Miss May Harvey as Mildred, Miss Ada Wyniard as Gwendolen, L. Calvert as Tresham, E. V. Reynolds as Austin and Martin Harvey as Mertoun.

It is of special interest to modern play goers to know that Sir John Martin Harvey played in A Blot in London, on June 15th, 1893, at the Opera Comique, with Miss Harvey and L. Calvert as at Manchester, and Miss N. De Silva as Gwendolen.

Another production was given at Liverpool, England, in January 1894, under the auspices of the Arts Club, with Miss Ada Millon as Gwendolen.²

Sir John Martin Harvey has given the writer the following information regarding his performance in 1893. - "The performance of The Blot was organized by an old friend of mine, Mr. Charles Hughes of Manchester, an enthusiastic admirer of Browning's. It was received with great enthusiasm, and my sister showed promise of very unusual tragic powers and received high praise for her performance of Mildred Tresham. The reason why the play has not been permanently successful, I imagine, is the fact that Browning shows very little knowledge of

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. x, pp. 253 - 254.
2. W. Davenport Adams, A Dictionary of the Drama, Vol. I.

stage craft in its construction. He introduces the young hero in the first scene having a very painful interview with Thorold, and one is not aware of what is causing the young man such pain until the following scene, when it transpires that Mildred Tresham and he are already lovers. This is rather a fatal defect in the play, which I imagine has hindered its revival."¹

1. Letter from Sir John Martin Harvey to the Writer, Toronto, March 27, 1928.

A Blot in the 'Scutcheon in New York, 1905

In the spring of 1905, at the Hudson Theatre in New York, Mrs. Le Moyne gave a performance of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. It was intended that there should be but one presentation, the proceeds to be devoted to charity. But about \$3,500 was realized and the play was so successful that it was repeated many times, in Boston at the Park Theatre on May 15th, and later taken on the road.¹

Professor William Lyon Phelps gives, in the Yale Review, an interesting account of the effect of this drama upon his own feelings. Professor Phelps, in spite of the fact that he had already seen a very successful performance of another play by Browning, sent to the Hudson Theatre on April 7th, expecting to see little more than a literary curiosity, because his head was full of the universal critical opinion that Browning never could be successfully produced on the stage. "But", he goes on to say, "in the first scene in Mildred's chamber, I suddenly found, to my surprise, that I was crying, real tears running down my cheeks. I have no great mind to cry in private and I particularly dislike crying in public. It seemed so absurd that I should be shaken by the work of a man who knew absolutely nothing about the technique of the stage; whose plays were all failures and deserved to be When the curtain fell I earnestly hoped no one had observed my emotion; no one had, for all my neighbours were engaged in removing traces of their own tears. After I got out on Broadway I felt more composed. And yet, though I knew better, having been thoroughly informed beforehand that this drama was a failure, I somehow could not entirely repress the growing conviction that Browning was not only a great poet, but a great dramatist; and this

1. Phelps William Lyon, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 561.

conviction was based, not on what any friend or enemy said about him, but simply on my own feelings as a spectator."¹

But Mr. Phelps was not the only one impressed with the success of A Blot in the 'Scutchson. Mr. Henry B. Harris, the sagacious manager of the Hudson Theatre was so assured of its stage possibilities that two years later he announced a revival of the play with a new production of Colombe's Birthday. Miss Grace Elliston made such a conspicuous triumph in the role of Mildred that it led to her engagement in popular contemporary plays. Indeed, Mildred's nature and character seemed almost ideally incarnate in Miss Elliston's still and grave ingenuousness. "She showed in her personation just the last and ripest phase of a youthfulness still mere girlhood while bordering on the mature, and a character precociously intelligent, but quite devoid of the external sprightliness and buoyant shrewdness so generally belonging to modern American girlhood. Such a girl would be slow to distrust the conventional ideals of honor upheld by a beloved brother. Miss Elliston's beautiful voice and repressed manner were as well adjusted as her person to create the illusion which the character of Mildred requires."²

The selection of this actress for the interpretation speaks very highly for Mrs. Le Moyne's cultured judgment. It is not easy to find characters who have the depth of character, - the soul, necessary for the personation of Browning's heroines. This is, no doubt, the one great difficulty to be encountered in the production of Browning's plays.

In fact, the whole play owed life and inspiration to Mrs. Le Moyne's management. No hearer could fail to thank her with enthusiasm for so poetic a presentment of a charming play. Some of the clumsy subterfuges resorted to

1. Phelps William Lyon, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, pp. 561 - 562.
2. Life and Letters, Poet Lore, Vol. XVI, pt. iii. p. 154.

in the Barrett stage version must have rendered it more stagey, instead of more stageable. Mrs. Le Moyne's version will have proved this once for all.

Other members of the cast, besides Miss Elliston included - Mr. W. Beach as Tresham; Mr. Theo Hamilton as Gerard; Mr. Albough as Mertoun and Mrs. Le Moyne as Gwendolen.

Mrs. Le Moyne's own fulfilment of the part of Gwendolen was not so adequate in personal presentment, quality of voice and repose of manner as in the vivacious intelligence of shades of meaning in her reading, and in her beautiful costuming. "Although incisively and unerringly intuitional, Browning's Gwendolen is one whose intuitions 'toy with the bow, yet hit the white.'"¹

1. Life and Letters, Poet Lore, Vol. XVI, pt. iii, pp. 154 - 155.

3. STAGE PRODUCTIONS OF COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

1. Haymarket Theatre, London, April 25th, 1853.
Colombe - Helena Saville Faucit (Lady Martin)
2. Howard Athenaeum, Boston, February 16th, 1854^x
Colombe - Jean Davenport Lander.
3. House of Mr. Joseph King, London, January 1882,
Private performance by Browning Society Members.
4. St. George's Hall, London, November 19th, 1885.
Colombe - Alma Murray.
5. Smith College, North Hampton, Maine, U.S.A., June 16th, 17th, 1892.
Given by Senior Students.
6. McVickar's Theatre, Chicago, November 30th, 1894.
Colombe - Julia Marlowe.
7. Hollis Street Theatre, Boston, January 14th, 1895.
Colombe - Julia Marlowe.
8. All Souls Church - Unity Club Dramatic Corps, Chicago, 1895.
9. Wellesley College, U. S. A., 1896.
By members of Shakespeare Society.

^xGiven once during Miss Davenport's engagement in Philadelphia, March 31st, 1854.

It is delightful to find, after considerable research, that Colombe's Birthday has had nine productions. The sweet Lady of Ravestein, that "young maid with the bluest eyes", who was so brave and so happy has become to many one of the most cherished of heroines.

Colombe's Birthday

at the Haymarket Theatre, London, 1853.

Colombe's Birthday was first produced by Mr. Phelps and Miss Helen Faucit, at the Haymarket Theatre, London, April 25, 1853, nine years after its publication. It had been supposed that Browning when he wrote the play had no stage presentation in view, but an extract from a letter of Mr. Browning's to Christopher Dawson shows that this was not the case. The letter, which is dated New Cross, March 10, 1844, reads: "Yesterday I read my play to Charles Kean and his charming wife (Ellen Tree) - who is to take the principal part, and all went off au mieux; but he wants to keep it till 'Easter next year', - and unpublished all the time!"¹ As we are aware, before the end of this same month it was published, - and Mrs. Charles Kean never played in it. The cast, at that first performance, included Miss Helen Faucit as heroine, Barry Sullivan as Valence, H. Howe as Prince Berthold, Mr. Farren as Guibert, and Mr. Rogers and Mr. Tilbury in other parts.²

The first allusion to this production comes to us in a letter from the poet (then in Florence), to Lady, then Mrs. Theodore Martin,

"Florence, January 31, '53,

"My dear Mrs. Martin, - be assured that I, for my part, have been in no

1. W. Hall Griffin and H. C. Minchin, The Life of Robert Browning, p. 120.

2. Davenport Adams, Dictionary of Drama, p. 284.

danger of forgetting my promises any more than your performances - which were admirable of all kinds. I shall be delighted if you can do anything for "Colombe" - do what you think best with it, and for me - it will be pleasant to be in such hands - only, pray follow the corrections in the last edition - (Chapman and Hall will give you a copy) - as they are important to the sense. As for the condensation into three acts - I shall leave that, and all cuttings and the like, to your own judgment - and, come what will, I shall have to be grateful to you, as before. For the rest, you will play the part to heart's content, I know And how good it will be to see you again, and make my wife see you too- she who "never saw a great actress" she says unless it was Déjazet!" ¹

Mr. Edmund Gosse has seen a copy of the edition referred to in the above letter and alludes in his Personalia to the greatly increased knowledge of the stage which its minute directions displayed. They included the proviso that "unless a very good Valence" could be found an extremely fine speech, perhaps the jewel of the play is to be left out. ² It is that in which Valence defies the platitudes so often launched against rank and power, and shows that these may be very beautiful things - in which he pleads for his rival and against his own heart. Valence speaks:

"So shall he go on, every day's success,
Adding, to what is He, a solid strength, -
An airy might to what encircles him,
Till at the last, so life's routine shall grow,
That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk
Become a comfort or a portent; how
He trails his ermine take significance, -
Till even his power shall cease his power to be,
And most his weakness men shall fear, nor vanquish
Their typified invincibility.
So shall he go on greatening, till he ends -
The man of men, the spirit of all flesh,
The fiery centre of an earthy world!" ³

1. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd ed., pp. 194 - 195.

2. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, p. 70.

3. Ibid., pp. 71 - 72.

In the present editions of Colombe's Birthday the verses run otherwise.

Mrs. Browning writes about the performance, April 12, 1853:

".... I am beginning to be anxious about Colombe's Birthday. I care much more about it than Robert does. He says that no one will mistake it for his speculation; it's Mr. Buckstone's affair altogether. True - but I should like it to succeed, being Robert's play, notwithstanding. But the play is too subtle and refined for pits and galleries. I am nervous about it. On the other hand, those theatrical people ought to know, - and what in the world made them select it, if it is not likely to answer their purpose? By the way, a dreadful rumour reaches us of its having been "prepared for the stage by the author." Don't believe a word of it. Robert just said "yes" when they wrote to ask him, and not a line of communication has passed since. He has prepared nothing at all, suggested nothing, modified nothing. He referred them to his new edition, and that was the whole....."¹

She communicates the result in May: ".... Yes, Robert's play succeeded, but there could be "no run" for a play of that kind. It was a "succès d'estime" and something more which is surprising perhaps, considering the miserable acting of the men. Miss Faucit alone did us justice...."²

Among the various criticisms which appeared in the leading magazines and papers there were some very favorable ones, whereas disapproved of the drama while praising the poem.

Athenaeum. The Athenaeum for April 30, 1853, speaks highly of the acting of Miss Faucit. "Colombe, the Duchess of Juliers and Cleaves, is one of those delicate creations which the histrionic genius of this actress best delights to embody. The beautiful scene in the fourth act expressive of the

1. Mrs. Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, 2nd. ed., O. 194.

2. Ibid, pp. 194 - 195.

moral conflict in the mind of the Duchess is beautifully interpreted by Miss Faucit. To the worn and wearied play-goer who can turn for a moment out of the beaten path, nothing could well be more delicious. We can record the dramas perfect success on the first night."¹

Examiner. On the performance, The Examiner of Saturday, April 30, 1853, winds up its review by: "The applause was unmixed at the close of the play, and many passages, as it proceeded, excited evident admiration and sympathy. If it remains on the stage longer than we have ventured to anticipate, we shall think all the better of the audiences at the Haymarket."²

Literary Gazette. Appreciation also is the chief note of the Literary Gazette of April 30, 1853, "The attention of the audience was close and fascinated. Much has been said about the obscurity of the play but that is the cant of those who have never given it attention. The story is clear, the language is clear, the emotions are simple and direct - ideas rise naturally and out of circumstances. If the drama does not succeed, it is from want of power in the actors and want of appreciation by the critics whose duty it is to attract the public to it. If unfitness there be it lies in this, that the play demands performers of a higher stamp than are now upon the stage."³

Colombe's Birthday in Boston, 1854.

On the 16th of February, 1854, Colombe's Birthday was produced in Boston at the Howard Atheneum; and Jean Davenport Lander was Colombe. Miss Lander also played in it in Philadelphia, March 31, 1854. In the notes of Dr.

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, pt. iii., pp. 122- 123.

2. Ibid, p. 123.

3. Ibid, pp. 123 - 124.

Rolfe's and Miss Hersey's edition Mrs. Lander's acting version is fully indicated. It is also stated that the representation occupied two hours, including the intervals between the acts. Mr. Moncure D. Conway in his valuable article on Robert Browning in the Victoria Magazine for February 1st, 1864, gives an account of the first American production of Colombe's Birthday. "I remember well to have seen a vast miscellaneous crowd in an American Theatre (Boston) hanging with breathless attention upon every word of an interview in Act IV between Valence and the Duchess down to the splendid climax where he kneels to her, - every heart evidently feeling each word as an electric touch, and all giving vent to their emotion in round after round of hearty applause."¹

Colombe's Birthday produced in London, 1885.

On the 19th of November, 1885, at St. George's Hall, London, an elaborate representation of Colombe's Birthday was given under the auspices of the Browning Society, with Miss Alma Murray as Colombe of Ravenstein. Thirty-two years previously Miss Helen Faucit had, in the same queenly and captivating role, excited the interest of a large audience and now Miss Murray - the poetic actress without a rival, - as she was justly styled by Robert Browning, gave with distinctive success and rare artistic finish her portrayal of Colombe of Ravenstein, the "play-queen" of Juliers and Cleves.

Alma Murray was an actress with a mind capable of understanding great tragic poetry and of combining that understanding with truly great tragic

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, pt. ii, p. 128.

poetry and of combining that understanding with truly great tragic acting. Authorities have designated her as an artist who could completely present the intellectual aspects of her art, and successfully portray the greatest creations of the greatest poets. The Browning Society was on this occasion indeed fortunate in having such invaluable services placed at its disposal and in obtaining in Miss Murray such a delightful representative of Colombe. In the Academy of November 28, 1885, the following criticism of Miss Murray's interpretation was given: "Miss Murray's elocution is perfect, and there can be but one opinion about the finished delicacy of her gesticulation. She speaks blank verse as hardly one other actress on the modern stage can speak it; and her whole reading of the part of Colombe stimulated the poetic sense of her hearers as it is very rarely stimulated in the theatre nowadays."¹

A detailed account of Miss Murray's Colombe is to be found in a pamphlet entitled "The First Performance of Shelley's Tragedy 'The Cenci'" compiled chiefly from the "Shelley Society's Note-Book." It was Miss Murray's portrayal of Beatrice Cenci in May, 1886, which secured for her at one stroke an unassailable and world-wide reputation and on the day after the event she received a letter of congratulation from Browning who characteristically hastened to put on record without a moment's delay his conviction that Miss Murray was - "the Poetic Actress without a rival."²

Browning was absent in Venice when the representation of Colombe was given at St. George's hall but upon his return to London, Miss Murray received from him the following interesting and characteristic letter dated December 29th, 1885:- "I could not have expected that the year would all but run out before I had written even a single word of the many I was minded to send you when, on

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. viii, p. 95.

2. Letter from Mr. Browning to Miss Murray, printed in Shelley Society's Note-Book Part I.

returning to London, I heard from friends I could trust and strangers whose testimony there was no reason to doubt - how admirably you have done honour to my play by your performance of Colombe. There has been no attempt at the poor piece of flattery supposed acceptable to a playwright; that 'his poetry had hardly been done justice to' and so forth: it thoroughly delighted me to hear and to believe that you had realized my idea and probably added graces of your own. When I observe what preparations for a theatrical venture are supposed requisite for success, - the thousands of pounds spent on scenery and costume; the hundreds of rehearsals - and the dozens of paragraphs - preliminary; I look with wonder and no little satisfaction on the circumstance that an old play composed under the old conditions and brought out in the hope of living through one night only; should have rewarded the efforts in its favor, as it has more than satisfied the author's ambition, I am sure. Take my renewed thanks, dear Mrs. Forman, and believe that you will be followed in your career by the deep interest of

"Yours truly ever,

"Robert Browning."¹

"It may be admitted at once that all who were merely acquainted with Colombe's Birthday as a poem, learned from last week's rendering of it that it had some sterling dramatic qualities which they had not previously recognised." - Such are the opening lines of Sidney L. Lee's criticism on Colombe's Birthday in the Academy of November 28, 1885,² and they surely expressed the universal feeling in literary circles. Critical appreciations of the drama appeared in The Academy, The Athenaeum, The St. James Gazette and The Pall Mall Gazette.

1. Alma Murray, Portrait as Beatrice Cenci, pp. 7, 8. Elkin Mathews, London.

2. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, pt. viii, p. 93.

Sidney L. Lee's criticism is the fullest. As it is too long to be cited in extenso I shall here give only the essential part of it. After the opening sentence cited above, it goes on to say that "It may be true that the chief interest of Colombe's Birthday lies in the solution of a series of ethical problems - in the extrication of Colombe, Galence, and Guibert, from what has been called, without much reason, metaphysical dilemmas. But this fact is not sufficient in itself to damn the play. Hamlet is, in a sense, an ethical exercise; and the same may be said of every play where the plot turns on a conflict between duty and desire. The dramatist adequately satisfies the conditions of his art, if he enunciates and solves his problem so that the spectators admit involuntarily the relevancy of all his episodes and arguments. The artist must leave no intervals in the solution to be supplied by the independent thought of his audience. Shakespeare of course, always fulfils these conditions. He has a perfect mastery over his own ideas, and can work them out slowly and surely. When the charge is brought against Mr. Browning that in his plays he grows too purely psychological, the critic really means that Mr. Browning is unable to control the rapid workings of his own intelligence, and leaves gaps in his dramatic argument to be supplied by the reader or spectator at the expense of much independent mental labour, which the supreme artist invariably spares him.

"In a representation of any one of Mr. Browning's plays it follows therefore that everything depends on the actors. His plays unlike many of Shakespeare's will not act themselves. Colombe has to express by tone or gesture a transition from one emotion to another, which is not expressed in words; and she has, if she is to perform the part successfully, to convey the impression to the audience that every transition has an adequate motif. The

compressed significance of every one of Mr. Browning's lines has either to be drawn out to the full, or sink into utter vapidty. We can conceive of no higher testimony to an actor or actress's capacity than to be able to state that he or she has interpreted one of Mr. Browning's characters so as to excite the interest of a large audience. Thirty-two years ago Miss Helen Faucit accomplished so much for the part of Colombe at the Haymarket; Miss Alma Murray did little less at St. George's Hall last week."¹

The Contemporary criticism of The Pall Mall Gazette, The St. James's Gazette, and The Athenaeum of November 25, 1885, may be summarized as thoroughly appreciative of the poem, and of the acting of Miss Murray, but as less sanguine about its merits as an acting-play. While admitting that the presentation was competent and the performance a pleasure to the audience, critics of the 1885 performance seem to have arrived at the conclusion that an "art-loving public is necessary to render Colombe's Birthday acceptable on the stage" that it is too subtle and psychological for any but a cultivated audience to enjoy, and here again one is reminded of Mrs. Browning's letter of April 12, 1853, in which she speaks of the play as too subtle and refined for pits and galleries.

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, pt. viii, pp.93-4.

Colombe's Birthday, by the Julia Marlowe
Taber Company, 1894, 1895.

On the evening of November 30, 1894, at McVicker's Theatre, Chicago, the Julia Marlowe Taber Company gave a successful performance of Colombe's Birthday, with Miss Julia Marlowe as Colombe; Mr. Robert Taber, Valence; Mr. William Owen, Guibert; and Mr. Thomas Coleman, Prince Berthold. Under the direction of Miss S. Ada Fisher, the original five-act play had been shortened to one act, with a single change of scene. When the performance was given in Boston Mr. Henry Austin Clapp wrote of this acting version, "The process of condensing Browning's five acts into a single act, with two scenes, was done with extraordinary skill and little loss of that which was best worth retaining and representing."¹

Mr. Oscar Lovell Triggs records in Poet Lore that in this condensation, as given in Chicago, all the long speeches were shortened, even that one in which Valence describes Berthold. Acts I and II were given nearly entire, except for the shortening of the speeches. Much of Act III was omitted. Act IV dialogue was given in full. Act V was shortened to the scene between Berthold, Valence and Colombe. The part of Melchior was entirely omitted. Mr. Triggs justifies the formal change of the drama to one act. "For Colombe's Birthday depends for its interest, not upon acts, but upon the delicate play of feeling, contrasts of true and false destiny."² "As to the fitness of this play for the stage," writes Mr. Triggs, "there can be

1. Elizabeth McCracken, Stage Productions of Browning's Plays, Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, p.126.

2. Osgar Triggs, Colombe's Birthday, Poet Lore, Vol. VII, p.32-3.

now no question. Simple and idealistic in motif as the poem is, so reflective and subdued in feeling, so lacking in action, with neither plot, nor counter plot, yet the interest of the audience, which was not in any marked degree literary, was sustained to the close."¹

This criticism rather contradicts that of the 1885 critics who insist on an "art-loving audience" for true appreciation of the drama. Mr. Trigg's impression of the effect of Colombe's Birthday on the audience is less enthusiastic but very similar to Mr. Moncure D. Conway's. It is good to remember again that in 1854 "a vast miscellaneous crowd in an American theatre hung with breathless attention upon every word" of Colombe's Birthday.²

Miss Marlowe gave the play in Boston, at the Hollis Street Theatre, January 14, 1895. Mr. Clapp's criticism in the Advertiser for January 15, 1895 praises the productions as a whole, as well as Miss Marlowe's impersonation of Colombe.³

1. Osgar Triggs, Colombe's Birthday, Poet Lore, Vol. VII, p.33.
2. Elizabeth McCracken, Stage Productions of Browning's Plays, Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, p.125.
3. Ibid., Vol. XIV, p.125.

4.

STAGE PRODUCTIONS OF IN A BALCONY.

1. Princes' Hall, London, England, November 28, 1884.
By London Browning Society.
Constance^{x1}, - Alma Murray.
2. Bijou Theatre, Boston, U.S.A., January 18, 19, 1898.
By Boston Browning Society.
3. Wallack's Theatre, New York, October 26, 1900.^{x2}
The Queen - Mrs. Le Moyne.
Constance - Eleanor Robson.
Norbert - Otis Skinner.
4. Tremont Theatre, Boston, May 9, 10, 1901.
Same cast as in (3).
5. Hyperion Theatre, New Haven, June 5, 1901.
Same cast as in (3).
6. At a private house in Pasadena, June, 1915.
7. At a private house in Pasadena, May, 1921.
8. Community Playhouse, Pasadena, May 28, 1926.

x1. Miss Janet Ashurch under-studied the Part, and played it before the Century Club at Birmingham on Tuesday, December 16, 1884.

x2. Produced by same company in many other American cities during 1900, 1901.

In a Balcony in London, 1884.

In a Balcony was performed for the first time on November 28, 1884, at Princes' Hall, Picadilly, London, with Miss Alma Murray as Constance, Miss Nora Garstenberg as the Queen, and Mr. Philip Beck as Norbert.¹

A criticism of the performance appeared in The Academy of December 6, 1884, from the hand of Mr. Frederick Wedmore. Praise is given to Miss Murray as an actress exceptionally well fitted to interpret such a part as Constance. "Her performance was instinct with intelligence, fire and grace. The more exacting was the situation, the more evident became the capacity of the actress to grapple with it. It was the performance of an actress who had thought of all the part contained, and had understood it - who knew how to compose a role as a whole and how to execute it."²

While admitting that the interpretation was picturesque, moving and a pleasure to all, Mr. Wedmore fancies that In a Balcony is for the few, not the many. "The audience on Friday included many of the most intelligent and sympathetic people in London, many literary and artistic notabilities, from the President of the Royal Academy downward, and so the piece not only interested but charmed. But I fancy a Peckham upper box or Camden Town pit listening at the best with polite patience to dialogue which is the quintessence of intellect, a very attar of roses of subtle passion."³

After the performance Dr. Furnival gave a little speech of thanks to the players and expressed his opinion that the event had proved the great poet, in whose honour the audience had assembled, to be a great dramatist as well.⁴

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, p. 5^x
2. Frederick Wedmore, Mr. Browning's In a Balcony, The Academy, December 6, 1884.
3. Ibid.
4. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, p. 7^x; Report from Pall Mall Gazette, December 1st, 1884.)

At the thirtieth meeting of the London Browning Society on February 27, 1885, Dr. Furnival read a paper on Miss Alma Murray's creation of Constance in In a Balcony, by B. L. Mosely, L.C.B. The following is an extract: "The production of In a Balcony will remain memorable in our artistic annals, and in the career of Miss Alma Murray, who gave the heroine's part its dramatic embodiment. Constance, both from the poetic and histrionic standpoint is a role worthy a place in the tragic sisterhood already existing between Juliet and Shelley's Beatrice Cenci. Her language is essentially that of a play for stage-representation, not of a mere poem in dialogue. Her interpreter is exposed to the probably unexampled ordeal of being, without intermission, conspicuously in the eye of the audience for an hour and a quarter. During Miss Murray's entire impersonation not a moment passed without affording some special and high delight to the sense of sight or hearing. If carefully watched, during the speeches of Norbert and the Queen, her face seemed to full of quick and vivid comment, that any sense of undue length in the speech was almost lost, Miss Murray gave signal manifestations of the primary qualities of charm, distinction and authority. The world of poetic incident and poetic speech seem to be her "assigned and native dwelling place." My diffidence, as one not professionally versed in dramatic criticism, to put on record any opinion of Miss Murray's Constance was lessened on reading, in the Academy, Mr. Wedmore's description of it as 'Nothing less than a great performance'. Miss Murray would seem indeed to be one of those favored artistic individualities in whom, while in the full freshness of youth, of histrionic qualities, physical, emotional, intellectual, and technical, are found assembled in that state of exact organic equilibrium indispensable to the realization of truly tragic conceptions. In Edinburgh, only a few days before her appearance in In a Balcony, she achieved an unqualified triumph as Juliet. May we not, in the light of her conspicuous

impersonation of Browning's Constance and her ideally adequate rendering of Shakespeare's Juliet, venture to look forward with some degree of hope to a revival at Miss Alma Murray's hands of some of our old tragic glories, with perhaps the 'creation' of the one or two great roles in our poetic literature yet virgin to the life-touch of the actress?"¹

Mrs. LeMoyné's Presentation of

In a Balcony, 1900, 1901

On the 26th of October, 1900, Mrs. LeMoyné produced this play at Wallack's Theatre, New York. She impersonated the Queen, Otis Skinner Norbert and Eleanor Robson Constance. With no opportunity for scenery or stage effects, with no "action" the performance was a magnificent success. William Lyon Phelps writes of this representation, "I have seldom witnessed such excitement as the audience released at the fall of the curtain. All three actors were recalled many times. The Sun, Times, and Herald were enthusiastic. The only dissenting voice was William Winter. Encouraged by this overwhelming triumph, the play was taken on the road, and performed successfully in many American cities clear into the summer season."²

In Mr. Norman Hapgood's Stage in America there is an account of this performance which reminds one of Mr. Conway's account of Colombe's Birthday in 1854. "Of all the performances of purely literary dramas that I have seen", writes Mr. Hapgood, "the one that aroused the most sincere enthusiasm in the

1. London Browning Society Papers, Vol. II, pt. vii, p. 35^x.

2. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 558.

audience was In a Balcony. When the curtain fell, the applause broke out and continued in a volume almost never heard at matinees.

"Mrs. LeMoynes's Queen was nothing less than perfect. To think of an improvement is impossible. No less remarkable, although wholly different was Otis Skinner's triumph. Eleanor Robson's work as Constance, was an admirable performance for so young an actress."¹

When the production was given in Boston at the Tremont Theatre, May 9 and 10, 1901, the expression of enthusiasm did not mount quite to the rapturous heights of Mr. Hapgood's, nevertheless the Boston Herald, whose critic was evidently amazed at the success of the piece, said, "It is difficult to know just what to say of the performance of In a Balcony. It is hardly more than a fragment of a play, almost entirely lacking in motion, and yet it is of the most dramatic interest. As interpreted by the three artists it was given practically an ideal production."²

In a Balcony in Southern California.

In a Balcony was given an amateur representation at a private house in Pasadena, California, in June, 1915, again in May, 1921, and a semi-professional presentation at the Pasadena Community Playhouse on May 28, 1926. Of the first performance, Dr. Margaret Carhart writes, "I had the pleasure of producing the first of these plays in 1915, and of playing the Queen, the most interesting part I ever attempted."³

1. Norman Hapgood, Stage in America.
2. Phelps, William Lyon, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 558.
3. Letter from Dr. Carhart to the Writer, Los Angeles, January 21, 1928.

The single matinee performance of In a Balcony under the auspices of the Pasadena Browning Society, on Friday afternoon, May 28, 1926, at the Community Playhouse was given in honor of the poet's birthday month. The performance was interesting both from the "community" point of view of cultural co-operation with one of the most scholarly and influential literary organizations of California, as well as in the more especial sense of the theatre used, not only as an avenue of popular entertainment, but as an adventurous highroad towards the interpretation of new beauties of the poetic drama.

"The production was in the hands of three of the Community Players whose histrionic gifts have placed them in the forefront of local actors. The play was adapted for the performance by Dr. Bertha Lovewell Dickinson, from ideals originally utilized by the London Browning Society, when the play was presented in England in 1884."¹

The players were Miss Lenore Shanewise as the Queen, Miss Eloise Sterling as Constance, and Mr. Maurice Wells as Norbert. Miss Shanewise's Queen stood out as the predominating tragic figure of the play, reducing to much lesser moment the tragedy of Constance and Norbert, "those two embracing under death's spread hand," who, even in their last embrace, know themselves crowned with love, youth, and romance, whatever the penalty exacted for their betrayal of the Queen's "most sacred majesty." The tragic story of a queen, tricked, humiliated and undone in the eyes of those whom she had trusted and counted on as her friends, is the impression left by the play, largely by the high quality of Miss Shanewise's performance. Her lines had been given most close and careful study and the poet's intention was brought out with

1. The Pasadena Star-News, May 27, 1926.

delicate appreciation. Here again is proof that the quality of intellectual assimilation is an absolute necessity to the player who would successfully impersonate one of Browning's characters. For Browning's medium is thought rather than action and the poetic balance of sustained rhythmic delivery is enough to make the stoutest heart of the most accomplished player quail. But when an actress can be found, whose mental comprehension is fused with high dramatic talent, then the result, as in this presentation of In a Balcony, is of thought - compelling interest. The production justified itself in the only practical way any theatrical presentation can be justified - namely by holding the absorbed and responsive attention of a well-filled house. "The lovely light-plot, the intermittent, harmonious blending of musical accompaniment, the gorgeous costuming of the three protagonists, and the exquisite poetic quality of the lines created that initial thrill of essential illusion and magic make-believe in the minds of the audience without which the best efforts of the best players must appear a thing mechanical and apart."¹

1. Pasadena Star-News, May 29, 1926.

5. STAGE PRODUCTIONS OF PIPPA PASSES.

1. Capley Hall, Boston, U.S.A., May 23, 1899.
By members of Boston Browning Society.
2. Studebaker Theatre, Chicago, December 4, 1904.
By pupils of Chicago Musical College School of Acting.
3. Sinai Temple, Chicago, February 1, 1905.
Same production as above.
4. Majestic Theatre, New York, November 12, 1906.
"Pippa" - Mabel Taliaferro.
"Ottima" - Mrs. LeMoyne.
5. Moving Picture Theatre, New York, October, 1909.
6. Hotel Vista del Arroyo, Pasadena, U.S.A., May 8, 1924.
By Amateurs under direction of Pasadena Browning Society.

Pippa Passes in New York, 1906.

Mrs. LeMoynes produced Pippa Passes at the Majestic Theatre, New York, on the twelfth of November, 1906. This seemed in advance to be a desperate undertaking, one that could not possibly succeed, yet, measured by box office receipts, its success was so great, and the demand so continuous, that it was repeated many times. Most of the newspaper critics condemned it, and of course they were right; "Pippa" is not a "well made play," and is certainly lacking in interest for the average Broadway theatregoer. Still, it drew sufficiently to keep it on the boards for a longer time than anyone expected. In this performance the Luigi scene was omitted; Miss Mabel Taliaferro played the opening and closing Pippa soliloquies with extraordinary grace and charm; but the great scene of passion between Ottima and Sebald, which should be the best thing in the play - and which, three years later, in England, was the only scene that "got across" - was a flat failure. The lines were beautifully spoken by Mrs. LeMoynes, whose elocution on the stage has never been surpassed; but she and Mr. Beach were woefully miscast. On the other hand, the act in Monsignor's apartments was thrilling, and held the breathless attention of the entire house. Mr. Metcalf, writing in Life, called the whole production a "notable performance," and said the achievement reflected great credit on everyone concerned. "New York audiences, accustomed only to conventional dramatic forms, might wonder what it was all about but to anyone with the slightest poetic instinct, it was a great pleasure to the mind, the eye, and the ear. It is many a long day since any dramatic work has been given on a New York stage with

such perfect diction throughout. It sufficed to clear Robert Browning in this instance from the obscurity with which it has long been the custom to charge him both in jest and earnest." The play was managed and staged by Henry Miller, and it was one of the most noteworthy events in his admirable and honorable career as an actor-manager.¹

The dramatic critics disported themselves merrily over this production of Pippa Passes on the New York stage. Jokes about the author's unintelligibility, consecrated by immemorial usage, were warmed over, but some original humor was accidentally perpetrated too, and shed new light upon the poet's work. "Pippa," wailed one critic, "passed by a variety of most difficult people, and we got the variety," a second announces the moral of the Ottima-Sebald scene to be that "when you choose a man to murder your old husband, be sure not to get one with cold feet," while a third declared with great solemnity that "Pippa continually passes, and every time she passes she precipitates a catastrophe."

But criticism was not all 'joking.' The Dramatic Mirror, which is professionally conservative, says "There are moments in the play when dramatic intensity is carried to a point reached nowhere else on the English stage outside of Shakespeare." This is high praise, for it is evident that in this play, the poet limited himself to the embedment of isolated dramatic situations rather than a unified dramatic movement. What splendid dramatic insight is shown by the horror at the infinitesimal span between moral victory and defeat that thrills through to the Bishop's frightened cry: "My people, my people," and his terrified "Miserere me, Domini, miserere me, Domini," as with trembling finger he makes and remakes the sacred cross.²

1. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, pp. 564-5.

2. David Kelly Lambeth, Pippa Passes on The Stage, Poet Lore, Vol. XVIII, pp. 109-111.

Undoubtedly this presentation of Pippa Passes was worth while. It made clearer the expressional richness of Browning's work, the dramatic flashes that lay bare the soul, the insight with which the hurrying moods of thought rise from the action and resolve themselves into action again, the masterful comprehension of the elemental forces that dominate life.¹ Pippa Passes will probably never be a play for a popular audience, it will never be famed for its technical theatrical merits, but its splendid presentation by Mrs. LeMoyne and Mr. Miller has thrown illumination on it as a poem. Action and skilled delivery would help many to a greater appreciation of one of the finest productions of a great poet. Mrs. LeMoyne said in an interview: "If a thing is beautiful to you, it should be more beautiful when to the reading of the eye, are added the cadence of the voice and the artistic environment of setting."² So judged, Pippa Passes on the stage has a raison d'etre, for lines that sometimes baffle the eye alone flash into light when given voice. Pippa on the stage was proof of the essential vitality of certain passages, which not only gained in clarity and force, but provided room for a play of dramatic expression not surpassed by any poet or playwright except Shakespeare. The speeches interpreted themselves into the external of gesture and expression with a readiness as unusual as it was striking.

The punning, rhyming and arabic inscription farce of Bluphock - which the critic could not understand - shows Browning at his most mischievous humor. But the end of the scene is transfigured with that insight into the indistinguishable sources of good and evil,

1. David Kelly Lambeth, Pippa Passes on The Stage, Poet Lore, Vol. XVIII, p. 112.

2. Ibid, Vol. XVIII, p. 112.

which lays the trap for Pippa's entanglement where else but in her singing, which was just her glory. The stage presentation thrusts this home with force. Browning has a searching understanding of the springs of human action, through an instinctive intellect which springs from point to point in a labyrinth no mere plodding could ever traverse, and endows him with subtle insight into the processes of the soul. No amount of technical faults can obscure the gripping realism in the scene between Ottima and Sebald. This is not guesswork, not philosophical theory, it is life, and the poet has reached a tragic height "that places him on a level with the great modern dramatists."¹

Production of Pippa in Boston 1899
and Chicago 1904.

An important stage representation of Pippa Passes was given by members of the Boston Browning Society in Copley Hall, May 23, 1899, in celebration of the one hundred and tenth and also the annual meeting of the society. The arrangement of the play was by Miss Helen A. Clarke, in six scenes. The first was Pippa's Chamber; and Pippa sang "All service ranks the same with God." The second showed Ottima and Sebald; the third, Jules and Phene in Jule's studio; the fourth Luigi and his mother; the fifth, Monsignor and the Intendant; and the sixth Pippa again in her chamber, singing. Special music was written for the occasion, and Copley Hall was crowded with a most enthusiastic audience.

Since this production Pippa Passes has been given many times

1. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, p. 55.

in public halls all over New England, the songs composed for this original presentation being also given.¹

Another performance of Browning's "Pippa" was given on December 8, 1904 at the Studebaker Theatre in Chicago, by the pupils of the Chicago Musical College School of Acting under the direction of Mr. Hart Conway. It was repeated February 1, 1905 at Sinai Temple in Chicago and prefaced Sunday, January 29, by a sermon study on the play, delivered at All Souls Church by Dr. Jenkin Lloyd Jones.²

Scenes from Pippa Passes were given at the Hotel Vista del Arroya, Pasadena on May 8, 1924. The parts were taken by interested amateurs and the production was given under the auspices of the Pasadena Browning Society.³

Pippa Passes as a Moving Picture.

In October, 1909, a curious and most unexpected popularization of Pippa Passes took place, by means of which Browning's dramatic story was brought before the eyes of many thousands of the "common people." The kinetoscopic theatre selected Pippa Passes. The New York Times remarked: "Pippa Passes is being given in the nickelodeon and Browning is being presented to the average motion picture audience, which has received it with applause and is asking for more. The contrast between the 'tired business man' at a roof

1. Poet Lore, Vol. XVI, p. 142, No. I.

2. Ibid, Vol. XVI, p. 142, No. I.

3. Letter to the writer from Dr. Margaret Carhart of the University of California, at Los Angeles, January 21, 1928.

garden and the sweat shop worker applauding Pippa is certainly striking. Not only the nickelodeons of New York but those of many less pretentious towns and cities are demanding Browning."¹

1. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 565.

6. STAGE PRODUCTIONS OF THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES.

1. Chickering Hall, Boston, March 25, 1902.
By members of Browning Society, under
management of Miss Charlotte Porter.
2. Copley Hall, Boston, May 6, 7, 1903.
By members of Browning Society.
3. Community Playhouse, Pasadena, California, May 26, 1927.
Presented by Browning Society of Pasadena,
under supervision of Mr. Maurice Wells.

The Return of The Druses, in Boston, 1902-1903.

Though this tragedy has come to be regarded by many as the most perfectly dramatic of all Browning's dramas, its first stage representation is of very recent date. This production was given in Boston. It was managed and arranged by Miss Charlotte Porter for the Browning Society; and performed in Chickering Hall on the afternoon of Tuesday, March 25, 1902, before a large and most appreciative audience.¹

With the exception of one professional, the persons in the cast were amateurs and included Miss Katherine Jewell Everts as Khalil; Mrs. Mary C. Collar as Anael and Mr. L. H. Richards as the Prefect. The performance was successful and made a deep impression on the audience.

This dramatic triumph of The Druses was repeated in Boston on Wednesday, May 6, and Thursday, May 7, 1903, on the larger stage of Copley Hall, with double the cast and outlay and with far more adequate and beautiful stage setting. Moreover, the actors, who won laurels as Khalil, the Prefect, and Anael, appeared again with an increase of power generally acknowledged with enthusiastic applause and praise. The part of Djabal, originally performed by Mr. Henry L. Southwick, was taken at this time by Mr. Pietro Benedette Cacciatori Isola, and the part of Loys, played by Mr. Walter Bradley Tripp at the first performance was performed by Mr. Charles E. Amory Winslow. The valuable Stage Version prepared by Miss Charlotte Porter was, to the delight of everyone, published in attractive form by T. Y. Crowell and Co.²

1. Stage Production of Browning's Dramas, Elizabeth MacCracken, Post Lore, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 120.
2. Ibid, Vol. XIV, pt. iii, p. 120.

Production of The Druses in Southern California, 1927.

The next production of The Return of the Druses was given under the auspices of the Pasadena Browning Society at the Community Playhouse in Pasadena, on Thursday afternoon, May 26, 1927. In Burns Mantle's new book - The Best Plays of 1926-1927, there is a chapter on "The Season in Southern California," by Dr. Margaret S. Carhart of the University of California. Dr. Carhart speaks of The Return of the Druses as one of the outstanding dramatic events of the season - "Another noteworthy production was a special performance of Browning's The Return of the Druses, which proved an amazing accomplishment."¹

Dr. Carhart, who produced and acted in In a Balcony in 1915, has made, in a letter to the writer, the following reference to the production of The Return of the Druses on May 26: "The last production was semi-professional, and the leading roles played by members of the directing group and chosen actors from the Playhouse clientele."²

Miss Ella J. Abeel, president of the Pasadena Browning Society, has also kindly forwarded the following interesting information regarding The Return of the Druses: "The Browning Society is an active group of people, and we have given since I have been in Pasadena, two plays, first In a Balcony and last spring a very wonderful presentation of The Return of the Druses." In Pasadena we have the Community Theatre, with a very fine lot of young people, very jealous of the reputation of this young and splendid centre of dramatic art. In The Return of the Druses I was very fortunate to find a man among them who was cultured, and who had the authentic costumes. Mr. Nolan is a young

1. Burns Mantle, The Best Plays of 1926-1927, p. 30.

2. Letter from Dr. Carhart to the writer, Los Angeles, Jan. 21, 1928.

man from Pomona College, and has great qualities; Miss Sterling is one of the dramatic teachers at Pomona College. Mr. Brown, director of the Playhouse, is hoping to put the play on for a week at least, a little later.¹

A favorable criticism of the performance is given in the Pasadena Star-News for Friday, May 27, 1927: "When two and a half hours seem no more than one hour in the passing, then the play that speeds those winged moments must be admitted to be a play of more than usual magic impulsion and vividness. And when a five-act tragedy in blank verse flows fluidly from curtain to curtain, borne forward in ever mounting waves of dramatic emotion, it must be conceded that the author of that play has accomplished something which playerfolk designate as 'good theatre'".²

"So strange are time's revenges! For if Browning's genius ever suffered rebuff it was in his experience with the English theatres. I must confess that I did not expect anything half so vivid, brilliant and appealing as Thursday afternoon's production, flashed on and off the Playhouse stage, a lavish and romantic adventure, prepared for in the midst of other important activities which would seem to make its successful accomplishment almost impossible."³

In this production of The Druses, the costumes and grouping were beautifully handled, never allowed to predominate the drama, but evoking an atmosphere of romantic idealism, of historic erudition and suggestive of the mystery of the East and the rich feudal Druse aristocracy. The valuable Druse costumes used were imported directly from the Orient by Mr. Maurice Goldenthal of the Studio of Arab Arts

1. Letter from Miss Ella J. Abeel to the Writer, Pasadena, January 24, 1928.

2. Pasadena Star-News, May 27, 1927.

3. Ibid.

and Crafts, 680 N. El Molino Ave., Pasadena. The Burnouses, striped Djerbas, Gafsa rugs and brasses were loaned by The Souks of Tunis in the Patio of the Community Play House, Mr. Ward Rappolle, Mgr.¹

It would seem as though Professor Phelps' prediction, that there would some day be a fine performance of The Return of the Druses, has come true: "I am living in the hope and in the belief that some day I shall see a fine performance of The Return of the Druses. In tragedy, it has the greatest surprise plot that I know; the climax is so sudden, so tremendous, so overwhelming that the first time I read it remains a vivid mental experience. The play fairly quivers with dramatic intensity; and adequately mounted and acted, the effect would be correspondingly impressive."²

In the light of the recent eminent success of this play it is difficult to see why it has been considered by certain critics as the least promising of the poet's drama. (Mr. Brocke stated that it could never be acted.) It has such great possibilities for scenic effects and for brilliant and varied costuming. It has a fine dramatic motive, dramatic situations, a conflict of ideals, an interplay of emotions, characters vividly imagined and powerfully embodied,- everything in fact, which goes to the making of an impressive drama.³

It has also been stated that an ordinary audience could not appreciate a representation of The Return of the Druses. But why should we be so uncomplimentary to the public as to suppose that they cannot appreciate a good thing. With regard to this play it may be

1. Programme of The Return of the Druses, Community Playhouse, Pasadena, May 26, 1927.
2. Phelps, William Lyon, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 557.
3. Poet Lore, Life and Letters, Vol. XIV, p. 142.

said now that it has been proved to have qualities which appeal to the unthinking public in its picturesque effects, its romance, its tragedy, while the more thinking portions of the audience may extract a deeper enjoyment through their appreciation of the subtle interplay of character. The Pasadena Browning Society is to be congratulated on having made this fact patent by its recent artistic representation in California.

7.

LURIA, AND A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

The only American stage performance of Luria was given at Hartford, U.S.A., on 20th April, 1906, by members of the church of the Rev. Joseph H. Twichell. The play was presented under the direction of the Rev. Philip C. Walcott, who took the role of Luria.¹

A Soul's Tragedy was acted by the Stage Society at the Court Theatre, London, England, on March 13, 1904.² It has been played at various times by dramatic societies in America, but Browning never made any attempt to have it produced.³

1. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 564.
2. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, p. 91.
3. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 564.

8.

CAPONSACCHI

"Let this old woe step on the atage anew,
Act itself o'er anew for men to judge."¹

Caponsacchi is a drama in prologue and three acts by Arthur Goodrich and Rose A. Palmer, based upon Browning's The Ring and the Book. It was produced by Walter Hampden at Hampden's Theatre, New York, October 26, 1926, and ran until June, 1927.²

It has been revived this year, 1928, and is considered one of the best plays of the current theatre season.

The cast during 1926 - 1927 included Walter Hampden as Caponsacchi, Ernest Rowan as Guido Franceschini, J. P. Wilson as Pietro Comparini, Susan Jackson as Violante Comparini, Edith Barrett as Pompilia, and Stanley Howlett as Pope Innocent XII.³

Prologue and Epilogue - A Court of Justice at the Vatican.

Act I. - The Carnival. Act II. - Caponsacchi's
Cell, Arezzo. Street Outside Guido's Palace, Arezzo.

The Inn at Castelnuovo. Act III. - A Court of Justice at
the Vatican. Pietro's Villa, Rome.

In the Prologue, Caponsacchi, the noble priest of The Ring and the Book is on trial before the ecclesiastic Court at the Vatican, charged with the murder of Pompilia and her parents. As he begins his testimony the lights fade and the action goes back to the story of Guido Franceschini's plot to marry Pompilia, kill her, and her parents, and inherit the estates, and Caponsacchi's noble effort to save her and remain true to his vows despite his consuming love

1. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, p. 20, ed. Edward Dowden.

2. Letter to the Writer from the Dramatic Editor of The New York Times, New York, January 16, 1928.

3. Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1926 - 1927, p. V.

for Pompilia. The Epilogue carries the action back to the trial and a dramatic decision by Pope Innocent XII in defense of truth, honor and Caponsacchi.¹

Thus has Browning's version of the old Roman murder been given to the world in a new form. The tale which set all Rome talking in 1698; the story, which formed the source of Browning's greatest poem, and whose publication in London, was the great literary event of the English speaking world in 1869; has now thrilled thousands in New York. On that June morning in Florence, in the Piazza San Lorenzo sixty-eight years ago, the poet truly recognized the almost incalculable value of the crumpled dilapidated Old Yellow Book. But did he then dream that in that chance purchase he had found material which led to the supreme achievement of his art and which would be still living in dramatic form in 1928?

To Rose Palmer and Arthur Goodrich the public are indebted for the new dramatic form for Browning's poem. Instead of "Books" of Poetry there are "Acts" of a Play. If Browning's experience with stage managers had been more successful he might have in his own day put his great work in drama.

The play has been rightly named "Caponsacchi", for in spirit throughout, the play is Browning's. The Caponsacchi of the play is the poet's conception of Caponsacchi. In the tangled web of low motives of the plot the hero stands forth as one of Browning's greatest characters, worthy of a place beside the characters of Shakespeare. He is an ideal representation of the knight of chivalry, "clad in a glory of armour like St. George."²

" a knight
Who learned anew the use of soldiership
Self abnegation, freedom from all fear
Loyalty to the life's end."³

1. Burns Mantle, Best Plays of 1926 - 1927, pp. 413 - 414.
2. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, p. 14, ed. Edward Dowden.
3. Ibid, p. 406.

"Through such souls alone, God stooping
Shows sufficient of his light
For us in the dark to rise by."¹

1. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, p. 296, ed. Edward Dowden.

THE PIPER

A poem of Browning's, which was no more intended for the stage than Paracelsus, has charmed many thousand people in the theatre within the last few years through the verse-drama by Josephine Preston Peabody, The Piper. But the idea of bringing the children back, which is so effective in her play appeared for the first time in an amateur production. On 8th November, 1907, at San Francisco, there was presented by a Roman Catholic educational institution, the Sacred Heart College Dramatic Club, "The Pied Piper of Hamelin; A Musical Comedy in Three Acts". Based on Robert Browning's Celebrated Poem of the Same Name." The author of this comedy is Brother Leo, and the last paragraph of his introduction is particularly interesting, in view of the great success of the later play by Miss Peabody.¹

1. William Lyon Phelps, Browning as a Dramatist, Yale Review, Vol. I, p. 553.

CHAPTER IV APPRECIATION
STRAFFORD

The chief merit of Strafford lies in the language and style of the dialogue. Through the delicate and subtle lines, we seem actually to see and hear the speakers, and with surprising vividness. The words supply their own accents, looks and gestures.

The interest is centred in the character of Strafford. The leading motive is Strafford's devotion to his king, and the note of discord arises from the ingratitude and faithlessness of Charles set over against the blind fidelity of his minister. Strafford loves the man, not the king, and that against his better reason. Recognition of this fails to influence his heart or his conduct. This is finely expressed in the following lines, spoken by Lady Carlisle:-

"Could you but know what 'tis to bear, my friend,
One image stamped within you, turning blank
The else imperial brilliance of your mind, -
A weakness, but most precious, - like a flaw
I' the diamond, which should shape forth
Some sweet face.
Yet to create, and meanwhile treasured there
Lest nature lose her gracious thought for ever!"¹

Browning has rarely drawn a more pathetic figure. Every circumstance that could contribute to this effect is skilfully emphasised; Charles's incredibly selfish weakness, the sternness of Pym, the prattle of Strafford's children, and their interrupted joyous song in the final scene, all serve to heighten the pity of Strafford.

The fatal figure of Pym is impressive and admirable throughout, and the portrait of the Countess of Carlisle, Browning's second portrait of a woman, is a noble and original one.²

1. Robert Browning, Strafford, Act II, Scene II, Works, Vol. II, p. 41, ed. F. G. Kenyon.
2. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, p. 44.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The interest of this play is, even more than that of Strafford, political. The intrigue turns on questions of government, complicated with questions of relationship and duty. The conflict is between ruler and ruler, who are also father and son, and the true tragedy of the situation seems to be this; shall Charles obey the instincts of a son, and cede to his father's wish to resume the government he has abdicated, or is there a higher duty, the duty of a king to his people? The motive is fine, but hardly handled with Browning's usual skill and subtlety.

King Victor, of whose "fiery and audacious temper, unscrupulous selfishness, profound dissimulation and singular fertility in resources,"¹ Browning speaks in his preface, is an impressive study of "the old age of crafty men".

D'Ormea, who checkmates all the schemes of his old master, is a curious study of one who "serves God at the devil's bidding",² as he himself confesses in the cynical frankness of his own self criticism. After twenty years of unsuccessful intrigue, he has learnt by experience that honesty is the best policy. But at every step his evil reputation clogs and impedes his honest action, and the very men whom he is sincere in helping are the most mistrustful.

Though the character study of this play is interesting, as a piece of literature it is perhaps the least valuable of Browning's plays, the thinnest in structure, and the driest in substance.^{3,4}

1. Preface to King Victor and King Charles, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 161.
2. King Victor and King Charles, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 196.
3. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, pp. 57 - 58.
4. William Lyon Phelps, Browning's Dramas, Yale Review, Vol. I.

PIPPA PASSES

"PASSES what?" asks the dull critic; and Alfred Domett made answer "The comprehension of the critic," though why it should have done surpasses ours. So different indeed is its conception and arrangement from that of the ordinary drama, that one looks about for a special epithet to apply to this collection of scenes, strung together on the golden thread of a young girl's personality. It is written in four varied scenes, separated and connected by interludes and ends with a monologue. In each of the four scenes there are four tremendous crises, involving the most intense and profound issues of life and death; and the flash of light by which the truth is shown to each soul is the clear song of the little silk winding maiden.

In the slender bright thread of Pippa's story the poet hangs four of the most dramatic scenes he ever wrote, and the whole drama has a lightness and charm unrivalled by that of any other of Browning's heroines, unless possibly Colombe. Except when alone in her chamber, she preserves the golden silence of the Greeks, - another mark distinguishing her from other of Browning's heroines.¹

The whole play is permeated with the idea of love at the heart of things. The tragic element almost disappears in the realization of the eternal rightness of things as expressed in Pippa's first song, that "All's right with the world,"² It is hard to understand the fact that the play deals with seven murders, for the poet has woven such delicacy and lightness through the plots of various kinds. It is as if eternal sunshine purified the even in the midst of the evil talk of the poor girls on the steps one of the most perfect lyrics in the English language.

p. 114.

1. Isabel Bellows, Pippa Passes, Poet Lore, Vol. VI, p. 139.
2. Robert Browning, Pippa Passes, The Works of Robert Browning

"You'll love me yet! - and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.

I plant a heartfelt now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield - what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, maybe, like.

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look? - that pays a thousand pains,
What's death? You'll love me yet!"¹

The drama is full of many exquisite passages, which are great poetry. The scene between Ottima and Sebald is considered the finest single scene in all modern dramatic literature.^{2,3,4} Nothing is wanting in action here: the speeches are short and to the point. Ottima and Sebald are flesh-and-blood man and woman. Ottima in trying to turn the haunted mind of her German lover into other channels, follows the same instinct that leads Lady Macbeth to say: "These deeds must not be thought after these ways; so it will make us mad".⁵ But then that song so dear to us all breaks the spell of evil,

"The year's at the spring,
And 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."⁶

Browning's descriptions of Nature in Pippa Passes are "tense, luminous, and wonderful."⁷ The passage spoken by Luigi is full of colour and superb

1. Robert Browning, Pippa Passes, The Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 146.
2. Isabel Bellows, Pippa Passes, Poet Lore, Vol. VI, p. 143.
3. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, p. 54.
4. Edmund Gosse, Personalia, p. 55.
5. William Shakespeare, Macbeth, New Hudson Shakespeare, p. 50.
6. Robert Browning, Pippa Passes, The Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 114.
7. Isabel Bellows, Pippa Passes, Poet Lore, Vol. VI, p. 148.

beauty.¹

"- last year's sunsets, and great stars
That had a right to come first and see ebb
The crimson wave that drifts the sun away -
Those crescent moons with notched and burning rims
That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
Impatient of the azure - and that day
In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm -
May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights -
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!"²

Can the consideration of this unique and beautiful drama be closed better than by repeating with Pippa the lines that form the argument, the inner meaning of the whole play?

"All service ranks the same with God -
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last, nor first."³

1. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, p. 54.
2. Pippa Passes, pp. 138 - 139.
3. Ibid, p. 340.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

The Return of the Druses is a "work which contains more of Browning's typical qualities exhibited in an exquisite literary shape, than can easily be counted."¹ We have in The Return of the Druses his love of the odd corners of history, his interest in the religious mind of the East, with its strange idea of being in the hand of heaven, his love of colour and luxury, of gold and green and purple which made some think he must have been an Oriental himself.

In this play Browning has given himself the task of giving an account of a human being. Djabal, the great Oriental imposter, who is the central character, is a peculiarly subtle character, a compound of blasphemous lying pretensions to Godhead and genuine patriotism: he is a mixture as it were, "of a base divinity and of a noble humanity."² Djabal is important in the history of Browning's mind, for he is the first of that great series of apparently evil men, on which the poet spent so much of his vivid imagination - Djabal, Fra Lippo, Sludge, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and the hero of Fifine at the Fair.

With this play he enters for the first time on the defense of the indefensible. He wished to show that a character like Djabal might be an imposter, a liar, and still be high-minded. Charity was philosophy; his hunger for good made him try to realize in verse the humanity of a noble importer like Djabal.

Djabal is a patriotic Druse, the son of the last Emir, supposed to have perished in the massacre of the Sheikhs, but preserved when a child and educated in Europe. His sole aim is to free his nation from its bondage, and lead it back to Lebanon. But in order to strengthen the people's trust in him, and to lead them back in greater glory, he pretends that he is "Hakeem", their

1. G. K. Chesterton, Robert Browning, p. 51.

2. Ibid., p. 51.

divine predestined deliverer. The delusion grows upon himself, he succeeds triumphantly, but in the very moment of triumph he loses faith in himself, the imposture is all but discovered and he dies, a victim of what was wrong in him, while his successful purpose keeps alive his memory among his people.¹

In the final scene there is a wonderful touch of nature which reminds one of Desdemona's "Nobody: I myself," in its divine and adorable self-sacrifice of truth. Learning what Anael has done, Djabal is about to confess his imposture to the people, who are still under his fascination, when Anael, all her old love (not her old belief) returning upon her, cries with her last breath, "Hakeem!" and dies upon the word. The Druses grovel before him; as he still hesitates, the trumpet of his Venetian allies sounds. Turning to Khalil, Anael's brother, he bids him take his place and lead the people home, accompanied and guarded by Loys. "We follow!" cry the Druses, "now exalt thyself!"

"Dja (bends over Anael) And last to thee!
Ah, did I dream I was to have this day,
Exalted thee, a vain dream - hast thou not
Won greater exaltation? What remains
But press to thee, exalt myself to thee.
Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul!

(He stabs himself: as he falls, supported by Khalil and Loys, the Venetians enter: the Admiral advances.

Admiral. God and St. Mark for Venice! Plant the Lion!

(At the clash of the planted standard, the Druses shout and move tumultuously forward, Loys, drawing his sword.

Dja. (leading them a few steps between Khalil and Loys.)
On to the Mountain! At the Mountain Druses! (Dies.)"²

1. Arthur Symons, Works of Robert Browning, pp. 67 - 68.
2. The Return of the Druses, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 295.

LURIA

Miss Barrett, recognizing with singularly fine critical taste, the remarkable merit of Luria, wrote her appreciation of it to Browning on February 10. 1846: "I have been possessed by your Luria, just as you would have me, and I should like you to understand, not simply how fine a conception the whole work seems to me, so developed, but how it has moved and affected me, without the ordinary means and dialect of pathos, by that calm attitude of moral grandeur which it has - it is very fine. For the execution, that too is worthily done - although I agree with you, that a little quickening and drawing in closer here and there, especially toward the close where there is no time to lose, the reader feels, would make the effect stronger - but you will look to it yourself - and such a conception must make its own way, and will not let its poet go until he speaks it out to the ultimate syllable. And now - surely you think well of the work as a whole? You cannot doubt, I fancy, of the grandeur of it - and of the subtilty too, for it is subtle - too subtle perhaps for stage purposes, though as clear, .. as to expression .. as to medium .. as 'bricks and mortar' .. shall I say?

'A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one.'

There is one of the fine thoughts. And how fine he is, your Luria, when he looks back to his East, through the half-pardon and half disdain of Domizia. Ah - Domizia! would it hurt her to make her more a woman .. a little .. I wonder!"¹

Certainly it was not Luria that Browning sent to Mr. Justice Coleridge, and which for the most part so baffled his intelligence that Browning said, "Ah, well! If a reader of your calibre understands ten per cent of what I write,

1. Letters of Robert Browning and E. Barrett, Vol. I, pp. 459 - 460.

I think he ought to be content." Not to understand nine tenths of Luria and the best part of another, one must be dull indeed. The thought of Luria is crowded and compact but clear and a second, third, or dozenth reading will not exhaust its liberal reserves of beauty, and its wealth of moral inspiration.¹

If there is little of the mere fact of history reproduced in the drama of its spiritual essence there is no lack. As in Othello we breathe the air of Venice, thick-spiced with Eastern gums, the air of brave adventure that blew everywhere in the sixteenth century, so in Luria we breathe the air of Florence, as it caressed things new and old upon her streets, towers, and palaces, and churches, which were already her delight five centuries ago, and still hold themselves proudly up for our felicity.

But the one thing in Luria, the play, that makes it an unspeakable possession is Luria, the man. In dramatic art, this kind of thing is always and unquestionable the best, - the creation of a splendid personality. The tragedy which depends on the poetic justice meted out in the fifth act to teach its moral lesson, comes in no questionable shape, as Shakespeare used the phrase. The true function of the dramatist is to create men and women who think, speak, and act, not as he would have them, but as they must, and always with the accent of their individual life. Browning's Moor of Florence is such a personality.² "He has the reality, the solidity of the best dramatic art. He is no charcoal sketch, like his own of the Duomo. We have no flat colour here, nor low relief, but such modelling that one can walk around it and look at it from every side, Browning could not have created him without often thinking of the Moor of Venice, and we follow in his steps, finding here another large and simple nature, with the breath and freedom of the desert places in his manners and his speech. His

1. John White Chadwick, Luria, Boston Browning Society Papers, p. 251.

2. Ibid, pp. 250 - 257.

words drink colour up from his own East. His images are all reversionions to his former state, as where he argues with himself in favour of a faith built upon calm sagacity."¹

"Such faith stays when mere wild belief would go!
Yes - when the desert creature's heart, at fault
Amid the scattering tempest's pillared sands,
Betrays its step into the pathless drift -
The calm instructed eye of man holds fast
By the sole bearing of the visible star,
Sure that when slow the whirling wreck subsides,
The boundaries, lost now, shall be found again, -
The palm trees and the pyramid over all."²

The sun is in his talk, as in his blood.

"Ah, we Moors get blind
Out of our proper world, where we can see!
The sun that guides is closer to us! There -
There, my own orb! He sinks from out the sky."³

So in that passage which is better known than any other in the play:-

"My own East!
How nearer God we were! He glows above
With scarce an intervention, presses close
And palpitatingly, his soul o'er ours:
We feel him, nor by painful reason know!
The everlasting minute of creation
Is felt there; now it is, as it was then;
His hand is still engaged upon the world."⁴

On an assumption of treason, Luria is being tried for his life at Florence whilst he is fighting her battles so faithfully, and believing in her so proudly. But he has in his Moorish mind a glimmer of the great white light of God contending with heathen gloom. He towers up sublimely above all the suggestions of evil and saves Florence at the sacrifice of himself. There is inexpressible dignity in his death. His sincerity and nobility conquer those who plotted against him. "Browning teaches here as in many other poems

1. John White Chadwick, Luria, Boston Browning Society Papers, p. 257.
2. Robert Browning, Luria, Act II, The Works of Robert Browning, Vol. III, p. 28.
3. Ibid, Act IV, p. 275.
4. Ibid, Act V, p. 228.

that it is worth while to live nobly, generously, and with devotion to high purposes."¹

And still we may dally further in the porch of Luria's significance for our moral life. "Step we across the threshold and look up, and its great dome overarches us like Brunelleschi's there on that duomo in whose shadow Luria liked to see the happy people keeping festival, what is it but the daily miracle of the development of character by the influence of personality!"²

Luria's was the nobility which shames weakness and complacency and compels us to rise to its height, compels us to believe in nobleness, and wish it might be ours. Luria's real battle-field was narrower than any street in Florence. It was his own clouded, rent heart, - to love Florence as Othello Desdemona, and to know she had played him false. There are such battles raging all the time in proud and humble hearts upon our streets. "The spiritual laws are as invariable as those which keep the stars from wrong, and that which Luria did somewhere between Pisa and Florence, or nowhere save in Browning's glorious imagination, is being done by thousands and tens of thousands whom no poet ever sings; and that which those plotting and counter plotting against Luria had done for them by his nobility, thousands and tens of thousands every day are having done for them by men and women who are no Lurias in their height of circumstances, but only in their height of soul. One of the best in literature is Browning's Luria."³

Further interest in Luria lies in the lordly acknowledgment of the dedication to him, which Landor sent to Browning.

1. Vernon Harrington, Browning Studies, p. 284.
2. John White Chadwick, Luria, Boston Browning Society Papers, p. 262.
3. Ibid, p. 263.

"Shakespeare is not our poet but the world's,
Therefore on him no speech! and brief for thee,
Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale
No man has walked along our roads with step
So active, so enquiring eye, or tongue
So varied in discourse. But warmer climes
Give brighter plumage, stronger wing; the breeze
Of Alpine heights thou playest with, borne on
Beyond Sorrento and Amalfi, where
The Siren waits thee, singing song for song."¹

1. William Sharp, Life of Browning, p. 92.

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

"Though A Soul's Tragedy appears to have passed comparatively unnoticed at the time of its publication, subsequent critics and readers have recognized it as perhaps intellectually the most brilliant work of its author up to date."¹ Browning was never satisfied with this drama; believing as he wrote to Miss Barrett that "the proper objection is to the immediate, first effect of the whole, - its moral effect - which is dependent on the contrary supposition of its being really understood, in the main drift of it."² But Miss Barrett's opinion was quite different and on Tuesday, March 10, 1846, she wrote to Browning: "I read your Soul's Tragedy last night and was quite possessed with it, and fell finally into mute wonder how you could for a moment doubt about publishing it. It is very vivid, I think, and vital and impressed me more than the first act of Luria did, though I do not mean to compare such dissimilar things, and for pure nobleness Luria is unapproachable - will prove so, it seems to me. But this 'Tragedy' shows more heat from the first, and then, the words beat down more closely .. well! I am struck by it all as you see. If you keep it up to this passion, if you justify this high key-note, it is a great work, and worthy of a place next Luria. Can it be possible that the same 'Robert Browning' who (I heard the other day) said once that he could 'wait three hundred years', should not feel the life of centuries in this work too - can it be? Why all the pulsas of the life of it are beating in even my ears."³ Further on in the same letter she says: "Do not think of Chiappino, he has a good strong life of his own, and can wait for you. Oh - but let me remember to say of him, that he and the other personages appear to me to articulate with perfect distinctness and clearness -- you need not be afraid

1. Frederick G. Kenyon, Introduction to the Works of Robert Browning, p. 7.
2. Letters of Robert Browning and E. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 471.
3. Ibid, Vol. I, pp. 540 - 541.

of having been obscure in this first part. It is all as livid as noon."¹

Miss Ella Goodenow Wheeler, in her article on A Soul's Tragedy states that Mrs. Browning's criticism rests upon a superficial understanding and that the author's epitome, "It is all sneering and disillusion", is far truer.² Miss Wheeler estimates the theme of the drama to be "Know thyself". It is something more than Ogniben's text, - "Let whose thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Chiappino was not a villain, a Richard III. He simply refused to know himself, letting life drift, and refusing to make definite choice between good and evil.

In the verse of this drama there is not the beauty which one finds in Fippa Passes; none of the impassioned poetry which makes Luria a bugle call. On the other hand there is no obscurity. The verse moves simply and vigorously with enough music to justify it as verse. The prose is compact, incisive, and a model of colloquial style.

1. Letters of Robert Browning and E. Barrett, Vol. I, p. 541.

2. Ella Goodenow Wheeler; A Soul's Tragedy, Poet Lore, Vol. XIII, p. 411.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Many regard A Blot in the 'Scutcheon as the simplest and perhaps the deepest and best of Browning's dramas. The Browning Society's performances with Mr. Barrett's and Mrs. Le Moyne's in America, have proved its acting capacities, its power to hold and thrill an audience. The language is masterly in imagination, quick with passion and thought and combined with a rich simplicity of the highest value, while the effect of the whole is impressive from its unity. The scene is English, the time somewhere in the eighteenth century, the motive family honour and dishonour. The whole action is passionately pathetic, and is infused with a two-fold tragedy, the tragedy of the sin, and that of the misunderstanding, the last and final tragedy, which hangs on a word, spoken only when too late to save three lives. This irony of circumstance, while it is the source of what is saddest in human discords, is also the motive of what has come to be the only satisfying harmony in dramatic art. It is with perfect justice, both moral and artistic, that the fatal crisis, though immediately the result of accident, of error, is shown to be the consequence and the punishment of wrong. A tragedy resulting from the mistakes of the wholly innocent would jar on our sense of right, and could never produce a legitimate work of art. Each of the characters calls down upon his own head the suffering which at first seems to be a mere caprice and confusion of chance.

The character of Mildred, a woman "more sinned against than sinning", is exquisitely and tenderly drawn, We see her, and we see and feel

"The good and tender heart,
Its 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."¹

as her brother, in a memorable passage, describes her.

In Thorold, Earl Tresham, we have an admirable picture of the head of a great house, proud above all things of the honour of the family, its yet stainless 'scutcheon, and proud, with a deep brotherly tenderness of his sister Mildred; a strong and fine nature, one whom men instinctively cite as "the perfect spirit of honour." Gwendolen Tresham is one of the most pleasantly humorous characters in Browning. Her gay light hearted talk brightens the sombre action like a gleam of sunlight.²

The play contains one of Browning's most delicate and musical lyrics, the serenade beginning, "There's a woman like a dew drop." Mr. Barrett was forced to omit this song from the acted play, although he speaks of it as one of the most delightful poems in the world. The dramatic situation was too long delayed by the pause which the song makes. Archdeacon Farrar, in his American lecture on Browning, cited this as the most beautiful song to a woman in the English tongue:

"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 i' the harebell, while her tresses, Sunnier than the
wild-grape cluster,
Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble;
Then her voice's music - call it the well's bubbling, the
bird's warble;
And this woman says, 'My days were sunless and my nights were
moonless,
Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's
outbreak tuneless,

1. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 306.
2. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Study of Robert Browning, pp. 70 - 71.

If you loved me not!' And I who -
 ah, for words of flame! - adore her,
Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her -
I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
And by noontide as by midnight, make her mine,
 as hers she makes me." ¹

1. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 313.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Colombe's Birthday, a drama founded on an imaginary episode in the history of a German duchy of the seventeenth century, is the first play which is mainly subjective; the action is inward rather than outward, and what the characters are in their own souls, constitutes the chief interest. The point on which the action turns is this. Colombe of Ravenstein, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves, is surprised, on the first anniversary of her accession (the day being also her birthday), by a rival claimant, Prince Berthold, who is the true heir. Berthold offers to marry her and she may still retain her position as Duchess. He offers her honor and continuance of her duchy, but does not pretend to love her. Valence, a poor advocate of Cleves, on the other hand, offers her a love, to which she can only respond by giving up her duchy, and an alliance with the Prince, who will one day be Emperor.¹

In this play there is found an impulse rarely dormant in Browning's work, - the impulse to illustrate truth and love within the truth as its inmost essence. Being true to her own soul is the source of Colombe's strength. Strands of love and truth are woven together in Colombe's Birthday and nowhere in literature is love more plainly set forth as the eternally true.

Colombe, the heroine of the drama, is one of the sweetest and completest of Browning's characters. Her character develops during the course of the play - as she herself says,

"This is indeed my birthday - soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years -"²

and it leaves her a nobler and stronger, yet not less charming woman than it found her. She had been brought up at Ravestein, an old castle down upon the

1. Arthur Symons, Introduction to the Study of Browning, p. 73.
2. Colombe's Birthday, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 396.

Meuse; her youth, it would seem, left to its own guidance and innocence. And so she had taken affairs of state lightly - had enjoyed, like one who had seen few pageants, a gay reception which her subjects of Cleves had given her - and had queened it so brightly and kindly that her presence seemed to throw grace over the faded functionaries of her little court - the Sieners Guibert, Gaucelme, Maufroy, and Clugnet, insomuch that it was with something more than selfish anxiety - with a touch of regret - that they received tidings how Duchess Colombe's claims to her inheritance were disputed by a wise and powerful rival. The drama opens with the four courtiers waiting in the ante-chamber, at a loss how to break the calamity to their mistress. Valence the advocate of Cleves had forced his way into this company, with a demand to present to the Duchess a memorial on the wretchedness of Cleves. The courtiers agree on condition that he would place in the Duchess's hand the memorial of Prince Berthold's claim.

Meantime there was waiting the sweet Duchess Colombe, and her one faithful bowerwoman, Sabyne. She must have been more, or less, than woman, not to have been vexed at the thinness of the rank who came to pay court to her, as compared with the throng of the past year. Her consciousness that once having been made a ruler, she can no more return to the pleasures of girlhood - are beautifully expressed:

"Well sunshine's everywhere, and summer too,
Next year 'tis the old place again, perhaps -
The water breeze again, the birds again. ¹
It cannot be! It is too late to be!"¹

And then the sudden heartening up to believe what she wishes, when the courtiers enter:

1. Colombe's Birthday, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 371.

"(Aside). The same words, the same faces, the same love!
I have been over-fearful. These are few -
But these at least stand firmly - these are mine!
As many come as may; and if no more,
'Tis that these few suffice - they do suffice!
What succor may not next year bring to me! Plainly
I feared too soon!"¹

Then Prince Berthold arrived, desirous of conquest, but ready to despise the courtiers, who obsequiously told him with a sneer that Duchess Colombe denied his claim, defied himself - advised by "that blustering advocate of Cleves". These glimpses of a brave spirit in the lady suggested to the Prince a means of winning the Duchy and not discrowning the beautiful Duchess. He put aside the intervention of the cast-off courtiers, and listened with grave deference to Valence. Few things in heroic poetry are finer than the appeal of Valence, who nobly asserts the loyalty of Cleves to the Duchess. Prince Berthold may conquer Cleves, lord it over her people with force,

"But never, in this gentle spot of earth
Can you become our Colombe, our play-queen
Whom we, to furnish lilies for her hair
Would pour our veins out to enrich the soil!
Our Conqueror? Yes! - Our despot? Yes. - our Duke?
Know yourself, know us!"²

Prince Berthold courteously intrusted to Valence the examination of his claims, which proved valid; he also confided to Valence his scheme for offering the lady his hand and the Duchy. But the Duchess had meanwhile discovered that the man of the people was devoted to her. And although Colombe did waver for an hour there was victory. She ended her birthday by choosing the better part - yielding up empty power, and embracing life with its duties, love with its rewards.³

1. Colombe's Birthday, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. II, p. 372.

2. Ibid, Vol. II, p. 392.

3. G. F. Chorley, Review of Bells and Pomegranates, The People's Journal, Vol. II, p. 38.

IN A BALCONY

"Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true! ¹
And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest!"

"Of In a Balcony whatever is said is sure to be disagreed with by somebody! Diversity of interpretation is perhaps the best proof of the vitality and truth to human nature which a drama can have. The artificial and the false do not leave the reader in doubt what is intended, but that which is full of the complexity and the mystery of life inevitably affects different natures in divers ways, and leads them to varied conclusions."²

The theme is the age-old one of conflicting hearts and the human element is essentially predominant. The kinswoman of a queen is sought in marriage by a faithful servant of the crown, whose gifts of statecraft stand in striking juxtaposition to his handling of affairs of the heart. Misconceptions arise, the queen assumes she is the one who is loved and the play's denouement is not wholly explained, and the reader is left to surmise as to
³
the outcome of this court affair.

For the brief space of something more than an hour, upon a balcony, under a canopy of summer stars, to the sound of dance-music from within, three positive and deftly drawn individualities, in the form of the dramatis personae of In a Balcony, step forth and present the conflict of human passions, in the precarious environment of court tradition. The poet has succeeded to a remarkable degree in creating an appropriate setting for a picture of intense life. "We must indeed go to the greatest of the Elizabethans to equal this."
"Despite the length of the speeches, and involved motive, In a Balcony, being

1. In a Balcony, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. IV, p. 190.

2. Arlo Bates, Introduction to Browning's A Blot in the 'Scutcheon and other Dramas, p. XXIV.

3. Arthur Symons, Introduction to Browning, pp. 134 - 135.

acted, as has been the case within the past few years, both in London and Boston, may be said to have stood the dramatic and artistic test with a result in no wise unflattering to Robert Browning, "writer of plays". The intense interest created was undoubtedly by the remarkable dramatic force of the poem."¹

Of the three individualities which make up the dramatis personae, the Queen is the tragic figure. The need of love, as the fulfilment of a woman's destiny, be she queen or lady-in-waiting, Browning recognizes as a prime factor in life. This queen is prematurely old, without personal charm, with an immense heart-capacity, which for fifty years has gone unsatisfied, and now, when it thinks it has attained its desire, is awakened to the fact that it has been deceived, and is once more cast back upon despair. Where in fictitious literature can be found an equally pathetic and tragic figure, unless it be that of King Lear?

Norbert is simple, direct, heroic; love and not ambition is his ruling motive. Here is a soul with whom it is refreshing to come in contact, one who, through the intricacies of state-craft, has worked his way, keeping one aim in view, - viz., the possession of the woman he recognizes as his own.²

"What do I want with rule?
When first I saw your face a year ago
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one voice -
The woman yonder, there's no use of life
But just to obtain her!"³

Constance is the character upon which discussion centres, being very human, therefore complex, and interesting. Critics seem occupied with the task of proving Constance either good or bad. But whatever may be said for or against her, one feels that a little straight forward honesty on the part of

1. A. K. Robertson, In a Balcony, Poet Lore, Vol. II, p. 310.

2. Ibid, Vol. II, p. 313.

3. In a Balcony, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. IV, p. 188.

Constance would have saved the situation. She shows herself all through as the politician, swayed as much, or more, by venial policy as by honorable understanding.

Much might be written of the exquisite poetic quality of the lines. The poem is one of the mature productions of Browning, is filled with amazing beauties and is fraught with delicate expressions of lovers' pangs and dreams. In beautifully cadenced lines the poet sets forth his magnificent prejudice of love as the eternally true.

"There is no good of life but love - but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love;
Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by me,
Never you cheat yourself for one instant! Love,
Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!"¹

Love is no mood or passion, not a light that plays upon the world, but something which transfigures it and even constitutes it. "I am love," says Norbert, "and cannot change; love's self is at your feet!"²

"Let me fulfil my fate -
Grant me my heaven now! Let me know you mine,
Prove you mine, write my name upon your brow,
Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul."³

Being truth, it is the source of every strength, the one purpose great enough to make itself felt as a mastering power in the world's bewildered course.

"Oh never work
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake, -
Souls need a finer aim to light and lure!
I felt, I saw, he loved - loved somebody."⁴

In this drama Browning has given very beautiful expression to his idea of close pressure of nature upon human experience -

1. In a Balcony, Works of Robert Browning, Kenyon edition, Vol. IV, pp. 194 - 195.
2. Ibid, Vol. IV, p. 211.
3. Ibid, Vol. IV, p. 183.
4. Ibid, Vol. IV, p. 196.

"This eve's the time,
This eve intense with yon first trembling star
We seem to pant and reach; scarce aught between
The earth that rises and the heaven that bends;
All nature self-abandoned, every tree
Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed,
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat;
All under God each measured by itself."¹

The cadenced beauty of these lines bring to mind the closing of Saul, in another scene in which nature is brought into intimate relation with human feeling. -

"The stars of night beat with emotion, and
tingled and shot
Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge."

It is difficult not to dwell on the verse of In a Balcony. The poetry has perhaps more flexibility, more beauty and harmony than that of the more formal dramas. Indeed the exquisite modulation, the thoughts, and words of the entire work are fully revelatory of Browning's matured genius.

1. In a Balcony, Works of Robert Browning, Vol. IV, p. 140.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion to the foregoing study we find that to form an appreciation of Browning's Dramas, they should be approached from two stand points: that of literature and that of stage-production. Judging from a literary standpoint no one will deny their claim to greatness, or refuse to admit that they contain some of the noblest poetry in our language. From a dramatic standpoint it may be that the time has not yet come to determine Browning's relative position in the dramatic literature of his country. Such judgments need time, and undoubtedly the last word on the subject is yet to be said. In the meantime, as Mr. Matthew Arnold says somewhere, "the great business of the critic is to get himself out of the way and let humanity decide." If ever this maxim is worth while it is when a great poet has given to the world works so important as In a Balcony, Luria, and Pippa Passes. Critics should beware how they dismiss the works of genius to the limbo of their own preconceived notions about the way in which great works of art should be written. What is good drama is a question that might be answered differently by different nations at different times. An early Greek would exclaim that a Shakespearian play was not a drama. An ancient Hindoo would find a Daly revival of As You Like It very disconcerting.

Very much the same sort of bias has been set up against Browning's plays as Aristophanes set up against Euripides and that lasted for two thousand years.¹ It grew up from the fact that the critic expected to find here what he had found in the plays which had become standards of artistic excellence.

Browning stated in the outset that his dramatic principle was to be "action in character" rather than "character in action". Critics then should

1. Helen A. Clarke, Browning's Dramas, Poet Lore, Vol. XIV, p. 8.

judge the work not by the traditions of the past, but in the light of the new principles set forth by the poet himself.

As befits Browning's idea of presenting action in character, the plot in his plays falls into the background, but what plot there is grows naturally out of the moods and motives of the characters. If he has presented the workings of these motives in a series of dialogues and situations interesting in themselves and linked together by what we may call the plot of developing character, he has succeeded in presenting artistically life as he has chosen to view it in the drama.

There are signs today of a reaction in favor of the literary drama. The modern play goer is willing to enjoy study of character, imparted through dialogues and occasional long speeches without minding too much that little is 'happening' on the stage. In other words literary value is recognized as important enough to make good lack of action.

Research on the stage productions of Browning's plays has shown that in not one instance has the performance been termed a failure and productions have been given of all the plays except King Victor and King Charles and Luria. Helena Faucit, Alma Murray, Eleanor Robson, Otis Skinner, Sarah Cowell Le Moyne, Mabel Taliaferro, Martin Harvey and Julia Marlowe are among those who have at various times successfully interpreted Browning's characters. As Mrs Abeel has stated the reason why the plays have not been performed more often is probably because of the difficulty in finding artists who are capable of interpreting Browning.¹ It is of great significance that this year, in America, there are signs of a revival of interest in Browning's dramatic work. The Return of the Druses has been performed in California and was said to be an

1. Ella J. Abeel, Letter to the writer, January 24, 1928.

amazing accomplishment;¹ Caponsacchi, a play by Arthur Goodrich and Rose A. Palmer based upon The Ring and the Book, ran from October 26, 1926, to June 1927, at Hampden's Theatre, New York, and was revived again this year (1928);² the Playhouse Association of Berkeley, California, have included the possible production of Luria in a tentative list of future performances.³ In England during recent years private performances have been given with success.⁴

It may be that the time has come for Browning's dramas to receive the attention they are entitled to, and when interest in them is revived, appreciation will not be lacking. Then fitting tribute will be given to the genius of one whose name is among the illustrious names of the poets of the world, one about whom another great poet of England has truly written:

"Among the wondrous ways of men and time
He went as one that ever found and sought
And bore in hand the lamp-like spirit of thought
To illumine with instance of its fire sublime
The dusk of many a cloudlike age and clime."⁵

1. Burns Mantle, The Best Plays of 1926 - 1927, p. 30.
2. Ibid, p. 413.
3. George C. Warren, Dramatic Critic to San Francisco Chronicle, Letter to the Writer, January, 1928.)
4. Sir I. Gollancz, Letter to the Writer, London, January, 1928.
5. Algernon Charles Swinburne, Robert Browning, London Browning Society Papers, Vol. III, pt. xii, p. 28^x.

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6. Colombe's Birthday. First appeared in Bells and Pomegranates, No. VI. London. Edward Moxon, Dover Street. 1844.
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<u>Writer</u>	<u>Article</u>	
1. Ernest Radford	"On the Moorish Front to the Duomo in <u>Luria</u> "	London Browning Society Papers Vol. I, pt. ii, pp. 251-252.
2. Mrs. Turnbull	"In a Balcony"	Vol. I, pt. v, pp. 499-502.
3. F.J.Furnival	List of Criticisms and notices of Browning's Works	Vol. I, pt. i, app. IV, pp. 89-110.
4. F. J. Furnival	Browning's Acted Plays	Vol. I, pt. ii, pp. 117-125.
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7. Rev. J. Williams	"A Blot in the 'Scutcheon'"	Vol. I, pt. iv, pp. 76 ^x -77 ^x .
8. Miss Drewry	"Luria"	Vol. I, pt. v, pp. 125 ^x -128 ^x .
9. Arthur Symons	"Is Browning Dramatic?"	Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 1-12.
10. Dr. Todhunter	"On the Performance of <u>Strafford</u> "	Vol. II, pt. ix.
11.	" <u>A Blot in the 'Scutcheon</u> at St. George's Hall."	Vol. II, pt. vii, pp. 59 ^x -63 ^x

<u>Writer</u>	<u>Article</u>	
12. Mr. Langdon Mitchell	Mr. Barrett's Production of <u>A Blot in the 'Scutcheon</u>	Vol. II, pt.vii, pp.74 ^x -78 ^x .
13. Leonard Outram	"Love's Value, <u>Colombe's Birthday</u> "	Vol. II, pt.viii, pp.87-94.
14.	Performance of <u>Colombe's Birthday</u>	Vol. II, pt.viii, pp.93 ^x -97 ^x .
15.	Performance of <u>Strafford</u> , 1886	Vol. II, pt. ix, pp.175 ^x -180 ^x .
16.	Performance of <u>A Blot in the 'Scutcheon</u>	Vol. II, pt. x, pp.250 ^x -255 ^x .
17. Charles Algernon Swinburne	Robert Browning	Vol. III, pt. xii, p. 28 ^x .

V. PERIODICAL MATERIAL

Note:- The following is a list of the principal reviews and criticisms of Robert Browning's dramas contained in magazines, important weekly and daily periodicals. Extracts from these articles are to be found in the London Browning Society Papers, Vol. I, II, III. The magazines are unavailable.

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2. The Gentleman's Magazine, June, 1837. On the performance of Strafford at Covent Garden.
3. The Literary Gazette, May 6, 1837, p. 292. On the "acting" of Strafford.
4. The Examiner, May 7, 1837, pp. 294 - 295. On Strafford, by John Forster.
5. The Examiner, May 14, 1837. On the play of Strafford, by John Forster.
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8. Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine, No. XIII, December, 1845. Review of Bells and Pomegranates, No. VII, (presumably by Douglas Jerrold).
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12. The Examiner, December 9, 1848. On A Blot in the 'Scutcheon.
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16. The North British Review, May, 1861, pp. 350 - 374. On the Poems and Plays of Robert Browning.
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Note:- The articles listed below are not available but extracts are to be found in William J. Rolfe's Edition of Browning's Dramas, pp. 10 - 60.

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3. Putnam's Magazine, April, 1856, Vol. VII. Browning's Poetry.
4. International Review, Vol. VI, p. 176 fol. Browning, George Barrett Smith.
5. Christian Examiner, May, 1850, Vol. XLVIII.
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7. Boston Literary World, December 12, 1885. Article on Colombe's Birthday, A. Mary F. Robinson.
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9. The People's Journal, Vol. II, p. 38 fol. Review of Bells and Pomegranates, G. F. Chorley.
10. Contemporary Review, January, 1867, Vol. IV. A Soul's Tragedy.

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<u>Writer</u>	<u>Article</u>	<u>Magazine</u>
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2. Henry S. Rancoast	"Luria"	Vol. II, pp. 19 - 26.
3. Kate L. Gallagher	"Strafford and Julius Caesar"	Vol. II, pp. 214 - 219.
4. Alice Kent Robertson	"The Tragic Motive of In a Balcony"	Vol. II, pp. 310 - 314.
5. Helen Clarke	"The Secret of Pippa's Power"	Vol. III, June-July.
6. William G. Kingsland	"Forster's Life of Strafford"	Vol. IV, Oct. pp. 524-526.
7. J. J. Britton	"Browning's Mildred"	Vol. V, May, pp. 266-272.
8. Henry Jones	"Browning as a Dramatic Poet"	Vol. VI, Jan. pp. 13 - 28.
9. Isabel Francis Bellows	"Pippa Passes"	Vol. VI, pp. 133 - 150.
10. John White Chadwick	"Browning's Luria"	Vol. VI, May, pp. 251-269.
11. L. A. Sherman	"Luria and Othello, Types and Art Compared."	Vol. VI, Dec., pp. 585-592.
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13. Helen Clarke and Charlotte Porter	"Pippa's Song"	Vol. XIII, pp. 156 - 157.
14. Ella Goodenow Willcox	"Browning's A Soul's Tragedy"	Vol. XIII, pp. 411 - 425.
15. Helen A. Clarke	"Browning as a Dramatist"	Vol. XIV, part 2, pp. 8-13.
16. Helen A. Clarke	"Browning's Plays"	Vol. XIV, pt. iv, pp. 106-107.
17. Elizabeth McCracken	"Stage Performances of Browning's Plays"	Vol. XIV, pt. iii, pp. 115-131.
18. Reviews and Notes	"Maeterlinck and Browning"	Vol. XIV, pt. iii, pp. 141-142.
19. Helen A. Clarke	"Production of The Druses"	Vol. XIV, pt. i, pp. 141-143.
20. Helen Clarke and Charlotte Porter	"Performance of Pippa Passes by Chicago Musical College"	Vol. XVI, pt. 1, p. 142.

21. Helen A. Clarke "Production of A Blot in the
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Le Moyne" Vol. XVI, pt.iii, pp.153-4
22. David Kelly Lambeth "Pippa Passes on the Stage" Vol. XVIII, p. 107.
23. Helen A. Clarke "Is Pippa Passes a Drama" Vol. XVIII, pp. 140-141.
24. Lucy S. Conant "In Asole" Vol. XVIII, p. 247.

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