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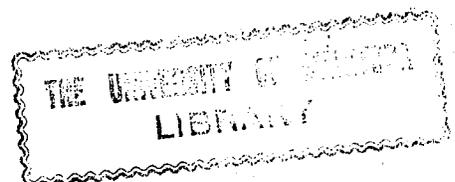
TITLE *The optimism of Robert Browning*.....

Thesis *M.A. 1909*.....

I, the undersigned, agree to refrain from producing,

*Browning's Optimism*

*Jane Lyffe Jones.*



The Optimism of Robert Browning.

Jane Fyfe Yemen.

I

A boon of priceless value to any man, but more especially to a man of genius is a happy childhood. Who does not look upon the early years of Dean Swift or Lord Byron with a compassionate eye or an aching heart, and who does not rejoice in the beautiful homelife which surrounds the sweet serious Puritan boy, Milton, or in the joyous existence which fell to nature's own child, William Wordsworth? "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and happy is the man that getteth understanding"—happy, indeed, is the child whose father hath found wisdom, and whose mother hath gotten understanding! Such a child was Robert Browning. His father and mother are worthy to be remembered for their own sakes, and worthy to share in the fame of their son.

A single act of Browning, the elder, when only a youth passing from his teens, shows the fibre of his morality, and accounts for the untroubled conscience he bore till the close of his life. Two desires had possessed him, one to follow the career of an artist, the other to have a University education. Both these ambitions were thwarted by what looks like a near-sighted parental policy, and the young man was sent off to St. Kitts to oversee a West Indian estate, the property of his mother, who had died when her boy was only seven. There his whole soul revolted against the practices of slavery. Scorning to accept support from such a source he returned to England, as soon as possible, relinquishing for the future, as it proved, all prospects of wealth. At twenty-two he obtained a clerkship in the Bank of England. In 1811 he married Sarah Ann Wiedemann, the daughter of a Dundee Shipowner of German parentage. She inherited from her father a love for music and drawing<sup>2</sup> which in him was manifested in execution,

1. Proverbs III. 13.

2. Biographical Sketch. H. E. S. Cambridge Edition. R. Browning.

in her in good taste and appreciation." She was once described by Carlyle as "the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman"- one of the last century's types of the woman, of whom in older days, a certain Queen-mother spake unto her son King Lemuel.

Of these parents Robert Browning was born at Camberwell in London, May 7, 1812,- only three years behind the famous year which gave to science, music, poetry, statesmanship, masters, each in his craft—and to Robert Browning the poet, his poet-wife. In 1814 was born his only sister known in the household as Sarianna, who for her companionship and sympathy with her brother recalls another devoted sister, Dorothy Wordsworth. "Camberwell at that time was a suburb of London with rural spaces and near access to the open country. There was room for gardening and the keeping of pets, while the country gave opportunity for forays into nature's fastnesses. The boy kept owls and monkeys, magpies and hedgehogs, an eagle, snakes, even..... It is easy for a reader of his poems to detect the close, sympathetic observation which he disclosed for all lower life." A little poem entitled White Witchcraft shows his boyish trait and his sympathy with forms of animal life so often despised. When a boy, Browning had a pet toad. Mrs. Orr shall tell the story.<sup>(2)</sup> He visited it daily, where it burrowed, under a rosetree, announcing himself by a inch of gravel dropped into its hole; and the creature would crawl forth. allow its head to be gently tickled, and reward the act with a loving glance of its soft full eyes."

White Witchcraft.

If you and I could change to beasts, what  
beast should either be ?

Shall you and I play Jove for once? Turn  
fox then, I decree.

Shy wild sweet stealer of the grapes! Now  
do your worst on me!

1 Biographical Sketch, H. E. S. Cambridge Edition. R. Browning.  
2 Mrs Sutherland Orr's R. Browning

And thus you think to spite your friend-  
turned loathsome? What, a toad;  
So, all men shrink and shun me! Dear men  
pursue your road!

Leave but my crevice in the stone, a reptile's  
fit abode!

Now say your worst Canidia! "He's loath-  
some I allow;

There may or may not lurk a pearl beneath  
his puckered brow;

But see his eyes that follow mine- love lasts  
there anyhow."

Browning's parents had rare judgment, and seem to have been peculiarly fitted for managing their "handsome, vigorous, fearless child who soon developed an unresting activity and a fiery temper." His mother's appreciation of music did much to encourage the talent inherited by her son from his Scottish-German grandfather. Her nature was serene, but energetic, and very affectionate. Her religion was simple and earnest. The impress of her character upon Robert Browning's is more and more evident as one reads <sup>through</sup> the poet's work, and returns <sup>again</sup> to Pauline, and the life at Camberwell. Browning reverently spoke of her as "a divine woman", and her death in 1849 was to him one of the deep sorrows of his life. His father's influence was even more marked than his mother's. It would seem that the work in the Bank, though always performed with efficiency, had never been congenial. A solace was furnished him in his artistic and scholastic tastes which had survived disappointment. "He was a wise and exact reader of literature both classical and modern" says Professor Dowden and from the same source we learn that

1. Mrs Sutherland Orr.

he was a dexterous draughtsman, a versifier composing excellent couplets after the eighteenth century manner. His library was a veritable treasure-house for a treasure-seeker. A perennially youthful heart, vigorous health, a wealth of affection and "the love he bore to learning" eminently fitted him to be his son's teacher and companion. A poem called Development gives a vivid glimpse of the tuition of this insatiably curious and imaginatively dramatic child.

My father was a scholar and knew Greek,  
When I was five years old, I asked him once  
" What do you read about ? "

" The Siege of Troy."

" What is a siege, and what is Troy?"

Whereat

He piled up chairs and tables for a town,  
Set me a-top for Priam, called our Cat  
- Helen, enticed away from home (he said)  
By wicked Paris, who couched somewhere close  
Under the footstool being cowardly,  
But whom - since she was worth the pains, poor  
puss -

By taking Troy to get possession of  
- Always when great Achilles ceased to sulk,  
(My pony in the stable ) - fourth would prance  
And put <sup>to</sup> flight Hector - our page-boy's self.  
This taught me who was who and what was what;

So far I rightly understood the case  
At five years old; a huge delight it proved  
And still proves - thanks to that instructor sage  
My father, who knew better than turn straight  
Learning's full flare on weak-eyed ignorance,  
Or, worse yet, leave weak eyes to grow sand-blind  
Content with darkness and vacinty.

1 Goldsmith's - Village Teacher

It happened, two or three years afterward,  
That - I and playmates playing at Troy's  
Siege -

My father came upon our make-believe.

"How would you like to read yourself the tale  
Properly told, of which I gave you first  
Merely such notion as a boy could bear?  
Pope, now, would give you the precise account  
Of what, some day, by dint of scholarship,  
You'll hear - who knows ? - from Homer's very  
mouth.

Learn Greek by all means, read the " Blind  
Old Man,"  
Sweetest of singers"

Time enough

Try, anyhow, to master him someday;  
Until then, take what serves for substitute,  
Read Pope, by all means.

So I ran through Pope.  
Time passed I ripened somewhat; one fine day  
"Quite ready for the Iliad, nothing less?  
There's Heine, where the big books block the shelf;  
Don't skip a work, thumb well the Lexicon!"

Learning was a great game to play, and with what zest he  
played. Art pressed upon him, music, painting, and poetry. Nature  
touched his senses to perceive and reverence beauty. Home love  
wrapped him about with loving ~~sympathetic~~ sympathetic compan-  
ionship, and the boy grew up unspoiled, and unconsciens that he was  
clever.

A subtle and profound change was taking place in the intel-  
lectual atmosphere, induced largely no doubt by the efforts of Words-  
worth, Coleridge, Shelly, Keats, and Byron. By 1824 the last  
three had died, but their fame was steadily increasing, and it was

they, particularly Shelly<sup>e</sup>, who "opened up for his young and enthusiastic follower," Robert Browning, "new vistas leading towards the infinite, towards the unattainable Best".

From 1833 when he published his first poem Pauline, he wrote persistently, Bracelsus, Strafford, and Sordello followed in succession, meeting in turn with a cold or indifferent reception, unless by the clear-sighted appreciative few. In 1841 Pippa Passes appeared, and with it, the "real Browning of the Modern world," says Chesterton. The public began to realize that a great man dwelt among them, when his Dramatic Lyrics were published in 1842. The Lyrics established him in the literary world.

Much has been written upon Browning's marriage with Miss Elizabeth Barrett in 1846. The fifteen years of blissful life which followed under Italian skies is "a beautiful and happy story beginning and ending nowhere". These years known as the Italian Period saw Brownings best work. Bells and Pomegranates, Men and Women, Christmas Eve, and Dramatic Personae made him famous.

One feels that the Arcadian existence should have continued indefinitely, but the health of Mrs. Browning, always delicate, failed under a double blow, the death of a favorite sister, and that of Cavour. She died on June 29, 1861. "The grief of the desolate man was an uncontrollable passion; his heart was strong, and all its strength entered into his sorrow."

The education of his only son, born at Asolo in 1849, required his removal to London, where his genial nature and constantly increasing fame caused him to be the centre of much of London's social life. His great epic The Ring and the Book which occupied some five or six years of his life appeared in 1868. It is a remarkable fact that, in the years following 1870 he produced a greater volume of work than in the thirty-five of his literary activity preceding "The Ring and the Book."

During the later years of his life he lived sometimes

- 1 Dowden's, R. Browning.
- 2 Chesterton - Chapter 'Browning in Italy'
- 3 Dowden R. Browning, Chapter XI.

with his sister, sometimes with his son, spending his winters in Italy, his Summers in England. In August 1888, he went to Italy for the last time " His work was over and done." He was soon to go forth, like a hero of old, " to one fight more, the best and last."<sup>2</sup> Death came for him at Venice on December, 12, 1889

Prospice.

Fear death ? - to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe;  
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go;  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall,  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.  
I was ever a fighter, so— one fight more,  
The best and last!  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,  
And bade me creep past.  
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers  
The heroes of old.  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears  
Of pain, darkness and cold,  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minutes at end,  
And the elements rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shall dwindle, shall blend,  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast

- 1 Tennyson's Ode to the Duke of Wellington.
- 2 Prospice.

O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,  
And with God be at rest!

II

The spirit of pessimistic melancholy found, in the Teutonic temperament, an environment favorable for its growth. The very conditions, which threatened the survival of the Teuton himself, promoted its development. The gloomy fatalism of his religion conspired with the unknown and relentless forces of nature, and with cruel human foes, to foster ~~this~~ this sombre cast of mind. In all the centuries since, this dark spirit has struggled for supremacy. Numerous powerful agencies have mitigated its harshness, until, at intervals, its music <sup>becomes</sup> ~~is~~ one of the chief charms of English verse. The softening influences of Christianity, the assimilation of Celtic imagination and sprightliness of thought, with Teutonic meditation and seriousness, the genial personality of Chaucer with his humour, love of nature, and sympathy for humanity, the discovery of the New World, the Renaissance, the Elizabethan writers, and Shakespeare the poet<sup>1</sup> for all time," - these were some of the forces before which the gloom fled, or was softened into twilight.

Then followed periods of political and religious conflict, of low standards of morality. The poets, save one whose <sup>+</sup> "soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart"<sup>2</sup> lost interest in man, and in individuality; they scorned sweet laughter, nature and imagination - and again pessimism swayed men's hearts. New ideals in religion, politics, literature and ethics entered the ~~strife~~, but the battle with doubt and perplexity was long - passing from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century. Life became vastly more complex; men became more highly civilized, and began to <sup>2</sup> "live less in the present, more in the past, and more yet in the future."<sup>3</sup> The spirit of inquiry was abroad. Darwin, Huxley,

<sup>1</sup> Ben Jonson

<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth's Sonnet - 'To Milton'

<sup>3</sup> Dr. C. H. Saleeby - 'Worry - The Disease of the Age,'  
Canadian Magazine, Jan 1907.

Tyndall, and Herbert Spencer devoted themselves to scientific investigation. Evolution has impressed the literature with what may be termed the "growth idea". "The age is distinguished by a groping after truth in every direction. Physics, geology, biology, psychology, religion, sociology, ethics, government and every other subject that seemed to point towards truth - all have had patient investigators. The hypothesis of evolutionary development has caused men to regard from a new point of view, the origin of life, its worth here and its destiny hereafter". For a time men seemed to have lost themselves in the maze of theories. Swinburne, in the following lines, reflects the materialistic thought which in its train surely brings Weltschmerz.

<sup>2.</sup>  
"We thank thee with brief thanksgiving

Whatever gods may be  
That no life lives forever;  
That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

"Then star nor sun shall waken,  
Nor anything of light;  
Nor sound of waters shaken,  
Nor any sound or sight;  
Nor wintry leaves nor vernal,  
Nor days nor things diurnal;  
Only to sleep eternal  
In an eternal light."

Is life worth living? asked men. Then God whispered in the ear of one of his musicians, as long ago, he had whispered in the ear of young David, and forthwith Browning sang for the curing of His wavering, faithless, pessimistic, analysis-torment-

1. Halleck's History of English Literature by Halleck.
2. This extract from Swinburne is quoted by Halleck.
3. I can tell whether this was, Dowden's, Chesterton's, or Brooke's.

ed world".

" And it came to pass when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed. and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him ". I Sam.XVI.23.

I.

Said Abner " At last thou art come, Ere I tell, ere thou speak,

Kiss my cheek, wish me well, " Then I wished it, and did kiss his cheek.

And he; " Since the king, O my friend, for thy countenance sent,

Neither drunken nor eaten have we; nor until from his tent,

Thou return with the joyful assurance the king loveth yet,

Shall our lip with the honey be bright, with the water be wet,

For out of the black mid-tent's silence, a space of three days,

Not a sound hath escaped to the servants of prayer nor of praise,

To betaken that Saul, and the spirit have ended their strife,

And that, faint in his triumph, the monarch sinks back upon life.

II

"Yet now my heart leaps, O beloved! God's child with his dew

On thy gracious ~~hair~~ gold hair, and those lilies still living and blue

Just broken to twine round the harp-strings, as if no wild heat

Were now raging to torture the desert !"

III

Then I, as was meet,  
Knelt down to the God of my fathers, and rose  
on my feet,  
And ran o'er the sand burnt to powder, The  
tent was unlooped;  
I pulled up the spear that obstructed, and under  
I stooped;  
Hands and knees on the slippery grass-patch,  
all withered and gone,  
That extends to the second enclosure, I  
groped my way on  
Till I felt where the foldskirts fly open  
Then  
once more I prayed,  
And opened the foldskirts, and entered, and  
was not afraid  
But spoke, " Here is David, thy servant!"  
And no voice replied.  
At the first I saw naught but the blackness!  
\* → the vast, the upright  
\* → Grew a figure against it, gigantic and  
blackest of all,  
Then a sunbeam, that burst through the  
tent-roof showed Saul.

IV

He stood as erect as that tent-prop, both arms stretched  
out wide  
On the great cross-support in the centre,  
that goes to each side;  
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as,  
caught in his pangs

\* The copist has omitted two lines, or rather parts of two,  
but soon I descried  
a something more black than the blackness  
The vast, the upright  
main post which sustains the pavilion: and slow into sight

And waiting his change, the king-serpent  
all heavily hangs,  
Far away from his kind, in the pine, till deliver-  
ance come,  
With the springtime - so agonized Saul,  
drear and stark, blind and dumb.

It is impossible to resist the charm of David's  
personality. Upon Abner his presence has a wonderful effect.  
The tried and valient captain has been well-nigh despairing,  
now he knows that all will be well, that David "will" return  
with the joyful assurance that king liveth yet " His boyish  
beauty and ~~rank~~ grace appeal to the stern soldier.

" O beloved! God's child with  
his dew  
On thy gracious gold hair!"  
Abner loves him; so do we.

David's childlike trust in God, his impetuosity, his  
acute observation, his ready comprehension of Saul's need,  
his compassion for the agonized Saul, cause us to bow our  
hearts in reverent gladness for such glorious youth and its  
possibilities. All these characteristics of David's were char-  
acteristics of Browning's. It is Browning who tunes his harp  
and sings to a people in darkness.

What joy he finds in mere living and how contagious is  
his exuberance!

Oh, our manhood's prime vigor! No spirit feels waste,  
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor  
sinue unbraced.

Oh the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock  
up to rock,

The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree,  
the cool silver shock  
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the  
hunt of the bear,  
And the sultriness showing the lion is  
couched in his lair,  
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over  
with gold dust divine  
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher,  
the full draught of wine.  
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where  
bulrushes tell  
That the water was wont to go warbling  
so softly and well.  
How good is man's life, the mere living!  
how fit to employ  
All the heart and soul and the senses  
forever in joy!

Strength and ecstasy mark every phrase;  
"manhood's firm vigor", "leaping from rock up to rock",  
" the strong rending boughs", "the cool silver shock", of  
the plunge in a pool's living water". " the hunt of the bear",  
" the lion", "the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust "  
and the "draught of wine ".

All Browning's environment, all the material things that  
pressed upon his quickened senses, all the gifts with which he  
was endowed called forth rejoicing in some form or other.

' Have you found your life distasteful ?

My life did and does smack sweet, he wrote after he had  
passed his sixtieth year and in the same poem are these ex-  
quisite lines,

1 *The Mermaid* -

I find earth not gray, but rosy,  
Heaven not grim, but fair of hue,  
Do I stop? I pluck a posy.  
Do I stand and stare? All's blue.  
Equally beautiful and simple; calm and restful as  
Wordsworth, are these pictures.  
And I played the tune all our sheep know, as,  
    one after one,  
So docile they come to the pen-door till folding  
    be done.  
They are while and untorn by the bushes,  
    for lo, they have fed  
Where the long grasses stifle the water within  
    the stream's bed;  
And now one after one seeks its lodging, as  
    star follows star  
Into eve and the blue far above us, —  
    so blue and so far!

<sup>1</sup> " A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,  
One after one,"<sup>2</sup> coming home " from the "still  
waters", under the deep blue sky dotted with stars. In love  
among the Ruins is another twilight landscape.

Where the quiet colored end of evening smiles  
    Miles and miles  
On the solitary pastures where our sheep  
    Half-asleep  
Tinkle homeward through the twilight,  
    stray or stop

As they crop-

Our poet delights in distance, in wide expanse, in color,

<sup>1</sup> Wordsworth Sonnet to 'Sleep'

<sup>2</sup> Ps. XXIII.

and in the sky. The silence, made only more marked by the tinkle of the sheep-bells, is rare in Browning and for that reason more effective. In these extracts as, in very many of his other poems in a much greater degree, the reader has the sense of inhaling the fresh, cool, evening air. There is no "curfew" tolling the knell of parting day<sup>1</sup>. no suggestions that all around is "change and decay"<sup>2</sup>.

— Then the tune for which quails on the cornland will ~~leave~~  
each leave his mate

To fly after the player; then, what makes the  
crickets elate

Till for boldness they fight one another;  
and then what has weight

To set the quick jerboa a-musing outside  
his sand-house -

There are none such as he for a wonder,  
half-bird and half-mouse!

God made all the creatures and gave them

our love and our fear,

To give sign, we and they are his

children, one family here.

There is evident his deep sympathy with animal life and his recognition of its rights. No poet has ever treated so many different animals in his work; certainly none have ever shown the interest in spider, butterfly, bat, lizard, toad, etc, nor regarded them with Browning's deep respect. All are God's creatures.

You've seen the world

—The beauty and the wonder and the power,

The shapes of things, their colours, lights  
and shades,

Changes, surprises, - and God made it all!

1. Gray's Elegy.
2. Lytle's - Abide with Me.

The quails and the crickets are as much the creatures of God's Hand as is man. and even while they dwell in man's fear they are to have his love. The poets' delight in God's creation is reflected in his own delight of creation.

From mere animal living he passes " to the help-time of our reapers". " to the glad chaunt of the marriage". " trying to expand the heart in the warmth of brotherliness", a work in which Browning is eminently successful in scores of poems.

Hast thou loved the white locks of thy father,  
whose sword thou didst guard

When he trusted thee forth with the armies,  
for glorious reward?

Didst thou see the thin hands of thy  
mother, held up as men sung

The low song of the newly-departed, and  
hear her faint tongue

Joining in while it could to the witness,  
'Let one more attest

I have lived, seen God's hand through a  
life-time, and all was for best?

With strokes as loving and tender as Burns' in The Cottar's Saturday Night, he gives us a picture of home, and trustful, even triumphant faith, " All was for best". Browning does not write,

<sup>2.</sup> "O yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of all,"

but,

There shall never be lost one good! What was  
Shall live as before;

\* → The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;  
so much good more;

On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.

1 Beddoe's. Primer of Browning. Saul

2 Tennyson. In Memoriam LIV.

\* The copist has omitted a line  
"What was good shall be good, with, for evil,

~~a perfect round~~

This is the exulting chord that thrills the listener in almost all his songs, from Pauline, to the Epilogue, which closed his work on earth, <sup>in</sup> There he wrote,

Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though ~~night~~ were worsted,  
wrong would triumph.

And here comes the miracle of the musician's power and sympathy, likened to the oft-repeated miracle of the winter snows crowding down the mountain side, <sup>at</sup> ~~the~~ "Spring's arrowy summons."

"Saul!" cried I,

and stopped,

And waited the thing that would follow, Then

Saul, who hung propped

By the tent's cross-support in the centre,

was struck by his name,

Have you seen when spring's arrowy

summons goes right to the aim,

And some mountain, the last to withstand

her, that held( he alone,

While the vale laughed in freedom and

flowers) on a broad bust of stone

A year's snow bound about for a breastplate, —

plate, / leaves grasp of the sheet?

Fold on fold all at once it crowds thun-

derously down to his feet,

And there fronts you, stark, black, but

alive yet, your mountain of old,

With his rents, the successive bequeathings of

ages untold -

Tea, each harm got in fighting your battles,  
each furrow and scar  
Of his head thrust 'twixt you and the  
tempest - all hail, there they are!

- Now again to be softened with ver-  
dure, again hold the nest  
of the dove, tempt the goat and its young  
to the green on its crest

For their food in the ardors of summer,  
One long shudder thrilled  
All the tent till the very air tingled, then  
sank and all was stilled  
At the king's self left standing before me,  
released and aware."

X Like a thread of gold in a dark fabric is  
the promise of life to-be,  
"And there fronts you stark, black, but  
alive yet, your mountain of old.

Now again to be softened with verdure,  
again hold the nest  
Of the dove, tempt the goat and its young to  
the green and its crest  
For their food in the ardors of Summer."

Here under a beautiful figure is presented one of the  
happiest truths in this world. There is power to awaken a soul  
dormant under an accumulation of dross. That soul may become  
the dwelling-place of love and peace.

Was not Elisha once ? \_

Who bade them lay his staff on a corpse-face,  
There was no voice, no hearing; he went in  
Therefore, and shut the door upon  
them twain,

And prayed unto the Lord, and he went up

- 1 The Ring and the Book - About half way through Book I.  
X This sentence should have gone across the page to  
separate the parts to which special attention was to be  
drawn.

And lay upon the corpse, dead on the couch,  
And put his mouth upon its mouth, his

eyes

Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,  
And stretched him on the flesh; the flesh

waxed warm;

And he returned, walked to and fro the

house,

*And went up, stretched him on the flesh again,*  
And the eyes opened. 'Tis a credible feat

With the right man and way.

The little silk-winder of Asolo passing in her artless enjoyment of a single holiday in the year, sent the arrowy summons of her songs to many, and from them an avalanche of sin crowded away.

1 The year's at the spring

And day's at the morn;

Morning's at seven;

The hillside's dew-pearled;

The lark's on the wing;

The snail's on the thorn;

God's in his heaven -

~~All~~ All's tight with the world!<sup>d</sup>

2 "Give her but a least excuse to love me,"

Sings Pippa, and Jules recalls the story of a Queen who renounced a throne to marry a page who loved her.

3. How strange!

Look at the woman here with the new soul

Like my own Psyche, - fresh upon her lips

Alit the visionary butterfly,

Waiting my word to enter and make bright,

Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.

This body had no soul before, but slept

1. Song in Pippa Passes. It influences Ottilia and Sebald.
2. Song in Pippa Passes. It influences the lives of Jules & Phe.
3. Jules exclaims, on seeing the change in Phe.

Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free  
From taint or foul with stain, as outward  
things

Fastened their image on its passiveness.

Browning delights in having some of the greatest work  
performed by the humblest instruments. Nothing's small. Pippa's  
work is worthy of a place beside David's.

Saul stands "released and aware".

"What nest should I

urge

To sustain him where song had restored him?

. . . . . ; . . . . .

" I report as a man may of God's works-  
all's love yet all's law".

. . . . .

And God is seen God

In the star, in the stone, in the flesh.

in the soul and the clod.

. . . . . ; I . . . . .

" 'Tis thou, God that givest

' tis I who receive;

In the first is the last, in thy will is

my power to believe.

All's one gift; thou canst grant it more-

over as prompt to my prayer

As I breathe out this breath, as I open

these arms to the air.

From thy will stream the world's life

and nature, thy dread Saboath;

I will ? - the mere stoms despise me, Why

am I not loth

To look that, even that, in the face too? Why

is it I dare

Think but lightly of such impuissance ? What

stops my despair ?

This; - tis not what man Does which

exalts him, but what man Would do!

. . . . .

O speak through me now!

. . . . .

It is by no breath,

Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation

joins issue with death!

As thy Love is discovered almighty, almighty

be proved

Thy power, that exists with and for it,

of being Beloved!

He who did most, shall bear most; the

strongest shall stand the most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength that I

cry for! My flesh that I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and find it

O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee;

a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a

Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!

See the Christ stand!"

Thus ends the magnificent prophetic outburst in which is fore-  
told the Incarnation of Christ. Few will demur with Edward  
Berdoe's statement that Saul "is perhaps the grandest and most

beautiful of all Browning's religious poems". He says too, in  
the Introduction to his Primer of Browning, "The gold is never  
beaten into leaf in Browning; he gives it in nuggets; rough at

times but precious always". Many of these nuggets lie strewn over the pages of Saul. Of one, in the last quotation from the poem,

"The mere atoms despise me", Berdoe says "we have there the utmost that science can tell us of the origin of life, creation, and matter".

I have chosen to quote at what may have seemed needless length from Saul, but the poem offered, in smaller <sup>st</sup> space, <sup>a</sup> *the* greatest <sup>at</sup> variety of Browning's methods and means of swaying human hearts to what he perceives, feels, and believes;

"I believe in God and truth and love",  
he repeats, "All's for the best". "All's love yet all's law"

<sup>2.</sup>  
"E'en the while I felt  
His presence, never acted for myself,  
Still trusted in a hand to lead me through  
All danger"  
Christ "shall throw open the gates of new life to thee". This is a part of Browning's happy creed.

His nature-picture, in naturalness, peace, and beauty, rival those of Tennyson and Wordsworth. For sympathy with animal life he is unsurpassed by any poet. The strongest and best feelings of humanity pervade his verse—reverence, tenderness, pathos, love, <sup>Y</sup>hope and happiness. The power of communicating feeling is very remarkable. The health and joy of his nature react beneficially on the mind and body of the reader.

As, in almost all Browning's poems, the central interest is *the* human. The strong man in agony, and the shepherd-lad, appeal to men as they appealed to the poet, beyond all things else.

Do you feel thankful, ay or no,  
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,  
The mountain round it and the sky above,  
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,  
These are <sup>the</sup> framed to?—

1. Closing lines in "Pauline"
2. About the middle of the poem "Pauline"

"Do you care for nature much?" a friend of his asked him.  
"Yes, a great deal", he said "but for human beings a great deal more." That was it he cared for nature as a setting for his men, women and children. "With him the meanest child of humanity" wore some expression, some blend of eternal joy and eternal sorrow, not to be found in any other countenance" and was used by him to express some of the noblest emotions or longings. Life is a sacred burden to be borne with dignity, reverence and joy.

*1 Chesterton - The Chapter on The Philosophy of Browning*

Browning excels in beautiful lyrics.

One of the loveliest of nature-lyrics is,

Oh to be in England

Now that April's ~~is~~ there,

And whoever wakes in England

Sees some morning, unaware,

That the lowest boughs and the brush-

wood sheaf

Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf;

While the chaffinch sings on the orchard b

bough

In England now!

And after April, when May follows,

And the whitethroat builds, and all

the swallows!

Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree

in the hedge

Leans to the field and scatters on the

clover

Blossoms and dewdrops - at the

bent spray's edge -

That's the wise thrush; he sings

each song twice over.

Lest you should think he never could recapture;

The first fine careless rapture!

And though the fields look rough with

hoard dew,

All will be gay when noontide wakes anew

The Buttercups, the children's dower

- Far bringer than the gaudy melon-flower.

Another bird-song to take its place with Shelley's "Skylark", Wordsworth's "Green Linnet", and Tennyson's "Throstle" each and all the embodiment of joy, the spirit of the season! "April, 'blossoms', 'tiny leaves', the perfume you feel is in the air, 'the chaffinch's song, 'the whitethroat' the "swallows" building but best of all "the wise thrush".

He sings each song twice over  
Lest you should think he never could

recapture

The first fine careless rapture.

Nor is the human intellect <sup>rest</sup> lacking,

"Whoever wakes in England, "'my blossomed pear-tree', and  
"children's dower".

Flowers with their brilliant coloring are everywhere in his poetry.

Oh the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,  
And thorny balls, each three in one,  
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers!  
For the drop of the woodland fruit's  
begun

Those early November hours,

That crimson the creeper's leaf across

Like a splash of blood, intense, abrupt,  
O'er a shield else gold from rim to boss

And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped  
Elf-needled mat of moss.

and from Pauline,

The blackthorn boughs

So dark in the bare wood, when glistening

In the sunshine were white with coming

buds,

1. *The Fireside*

Like the bright side of a sorrow,  
and the banks  
Had violets opening from sleep like eyes.

The poem entitled The Englishman in Italy  
abounds in examples of his fondness for colour.  
There too is his strange regard for so-called ugly things,  
many of which he teaches us to perceive and love,

" See my<sup>e</sup> tap with a hoe on the plaster  
Till out there shall fall  
A scorpion with wide angry nippers"

Was there ever such another ride as that up from the Plain  
of Sorrento to the top of <sup>c</sup>Valvano! A tempest of wind and rain  
had swept over the parched country during a hot Autumn after-  
noon. Fortin<sup>u</sup> " his beloved one" was fearful of the coming  
Scirocco. To amuse the little girl till the storm should pass  
Browning portrays the beautiful landscape so that the lovely  
scene lies vividly before the reader, while he seems only bent<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>  
on comforting the child. Nothing could exceed the charm of  
the pictures given so lavishly,

- Our fisher arrive  
And pitch down his basket before us,  
All trembling alive  
With pink and grey jellies, Your sea-fruit;  
You touch the strange lumps,  
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner  
of horns and of humps  
Which only the fisher looks grave at,  
While round him like imps  
Cling screaming the children as naked  
And brown as the shrimps.

x The jellies are <sup>very</sup> fine, but the fisher  
and the children are perfect.

x The line should go across the page.

Then, when we know the country, we hear him tell the child that last eve he rode over the mountain. As the mule climbed slowly to the summit, the reader's senses and brain revelled in the profusion and variety of beauty around him. The sensation of climbing, the air growing cooler, fresher, rarer is similar to that experienced in reading The Grammarian's Funeral. His love of space and height gives a magnificent scene.

The top of Calvano,

And God's own profound  
Was above me, and round me the mountains,  
And under, the sea,  
And within me my heart to bear witness  
What was and shall be.

"He is worthy of the glorious sight; full of eternal thoughts."

The April blossom's, the thrush's song, the creeper's leaf like a splash of blood on elf-needled mat of moss. the brown children clustering round the fisher, and mount Calvano, <sup>all</sup> become a sweet half-forgotten memory, when <sup>fra</sup> Lippo Lippi, surrounded by Florentian watchmen, with their torches, at midnight, tells the story of his childhood. Humo<sup>r</sup> and pathos are skilfully blended in the narration, as they <sup>are</sup> seem to be in the life of the little street-Arab.

I was a baby when my mother died,  
And father died and left me in the street,  
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two  
On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,  
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,  
My stomach being empty as your hat,  
The wind doubled me up and down I went,  
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,

1. Stopford Brooke, speaking of Browning

( Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)  
 And so along the wall, over the bridge,  
 By the straight cut to the convent, Six words there  
 While I stood munching my first bread that  
 month;

" So, boy you're reminded," quoth the good fat father  
 Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection -time,-

" To quit this very miserable world ?

"Will you renounce " . . . l . " the mouthful  
 of bread " thought I;

By no means! Brief they made a monk of me;

The man who could write that had a great big warm  
 heart for children, and children must have loved this man.  
 On one occasion, in one of the English Colleges, an  
 Honourary Degree was being conferred on Robert Browning  
 when the men, with their unerring sense of the fitness of  
 things, called, "Speech! Speech!" It seemed that Browning  
 was never an orator. He appeared at a loss, then said -  
 " O young men how I love you," and sat down. I can-  
 not vouch for the truth of the story; but no words  
 Browning could have uttered would have said so much, or  
 have said it with such *eloquently* eloquence, as those seven simple  
 little words.

The Italian in England contains a fine study of a  
 peasant-woman, A patriot, hunted by the Austrialian, has  
 been lying hidden in an old aqueduct for three days. He  
 tells the story.

Hunger o'er came me when I heard  
 The peasants from the village go  
 To work among the maize,  
 . . . . .  
 I threw my glove to strike the last,  
 . . . l . . ; . . .  
 She did not start  
 Much less cry out. - -  
 . . . . .

She picked my glove up while she stripped  
A branch off, then rejoined the rest.

. . . . .  
An hour and she returned alone,

. . . . .

The man, fearing the woman's faith, prepared  
a tale of a youthful freak - this hiding - and gave  
hopes of pay.

"But when I saw that woman's face,  
Its calm simplicity of grace,  
Our Italy's own attitude  
In which she walked thus far, and stood,  
Planting each naked foot so firm,  
To crush the snake and spare the worm -  
At first sight of her eyes, I said,  
'I am that man upon whose head  
They fix the price, because I hate  
The Australians over us; the State  
Will give you gold, - oh, gold so much! -  
If you betray me to their clutch,  
And be your death, for aught I know,  
If once they found you saved their foe.' "

She carried the message entrusted to her.

"Three mornings more she took her stand,  
In the same place, with the same eyes;  
I was no surer of sunrise  
Than of her coming. "

Faith in humanity is strengthened.

" No life

Can be strong in its purpose and pure in its  
strife,  
And all life not be purer and stronger  
thereby".

1. Lines I have in my memory from a poem read

1. Owen Meredith 'Lucille'

-7-

Consider those I have already chosen  
Scores of poems which ~~Browning~~<sup>the</sup> wrote might be used to  
show ~~his~~<sup>Browning's</sup> power in the analysis of character, and his sym-  
pathy of interpretation, ~~besides those I have already~~<sup>but my purpose seemed best served by</sup>  
~~selecting those which gave~~<sup>chosen</sup> the King of Israel, the Shepherd David, the little  
waif, and the Italian Peasant. Browning was not a poet of  
one people, nor of one country. The scenes of his poems  
are set in almost every country in Europe, nor are they  
confined to one continent. He had no insular prejudices  
against foreigners. His poetry will be a silent and potent  
factor in the development of the idea of internationalism.  
"To denationalize the nations into one nation only—the  
nation of mankind," says Stopford Brooke is too vast an  
idea to grow quickly, but in all classes, and perhaps most  
in the working class, there are an increasing number of  
thinking men who say to the varied nations, 'We are all  
one'; our interests, duties, rights, nature, and aims are  
one'. And, for my part, I believe that in the full develop-  
ment of that conception the progress of mankind is most  
deeply concerned, and will be best secured." The world  
of imagination has no special country. Browning thought  
that he belonged to all peoples. His influence is only in  
its infancy. When we know his poetry as we do Tennyson's,  
Shelley's or Wordsworth's, <sup>we shall realize</sup> that Browning was <sup>not only a</sup> ~~both~~ <sup>but a</sup> poet and  
prophet.

In his Editors Preface to Dowden's "Browning" Dugald  
Macfaden writes "Browning has become to many in a measure  
which he could hardly have conceived possible himself, one  
of the authoritative interpreters of the spiritual factors  
in human life. His tonic optimism dissipates the grey  
atmosphere of materialism, which has obscured the sunclad  
heights of life as effectually as a fog. To see life through

Browning's eyes is to see it shot through and through with spiritual issues, with a background of eternal destiny; and to come appreciably nearer <sup>n</sup>that the general consciousness of our time to seeing it steadily and seeing it whole."

This tonic optimism shines through all his writings.

Rabbi Ben Ezra says,  
Grow old along with me!  
The best is yet to be,  
The last of life, for which the first was made;  
Our times are in his hand  
Who saith, "A whole I planned  
Youth shows but half; trust God; see  
all, nor be afraid!"

And a fine example of his steadfast fighting-quality and unyielding energy is,

Then welcome each reffuff;  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids not sit nor stand  
but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare,  
never grudge the throe !

. . . . .  
Earth changes but thy soul and God  
stand sure!

. . . . .  
<sup>2</sup> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed  
his grasp  
Or what's heaven for?

Andrea del Sarto.

1. Rabbi Ben Ezra.
2. Andrea del Sarto.

1 When pain ends, gain ends too.

A Death in the Desert.

None are more inspiring than Abt Vogler,

2 There shall never be lost one good!

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good  
shall exist;

Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty,  
nor good, nor power

Whose voice has gone forth, but each sur-  
vives for the melodist

When eternity affirms the conception of  
an hour,

The high that proved too high, the heroic  
for earth <sup>too</sup> hard,

The passion that left the ground to lose  
itself in the sky,

Are music sent up to God by the lover and  
the bard;

Enough that he heard it once; we  
shall hear it by and by.

Browning believed as firmly as Carlyle in the Gospel of Work.

3 Then life is-to wake not sleep,

Rise and not rest, but press

From earth's level where blingly creep

Things perfected, more or less,

To the heaven's height far and steep.

Reverie

In the final Epilogue all Browning's message to the world was concentrated. In Pauline he had set up the principles which were to govern his life, and for fifty-six years he had

1 A Death in the Desert.

2 Abt Vogler.

3 Reverie.

" marched breast forward " singing his songs of cheer, *and then, as he went forth " to one fight more the last and the best " he sang in triumph*  
At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,

When you set your fancies free,  
Will they pass to where - by death, fools  
think imprisoned -

Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you  
loved so,

---- Pity me ?----

Oh to love so, be so loved, yet so mistaken!

What had I on earth to do  
With the slothful, with the mawkish, the  
unmanly?

Like the aimless, helpless, hopeless, did I  
drivel - Being - Who?

One who never turned his back but marched  
breast forward,

Never doubted clouds would break,  
Never dreamed, though right were worsted  
wrong would triumph,

Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight  
better

sleep to wake

No at noonday in the bustle of man's work-  
time

Greet the unseen with a cheer.

Bid him forward, breast and back

as either should be

" Stive and strive ". " Speed, - fight on  
fare ever

There as here.