

ROBERT AND ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

BY ANNE THACKERAY RITCHIE.

I.

THE sons and daughters of men and women eminent in their generation are from circumstances fortunate in their opportunities. From childhood they know their parents' friends and contemporaries, the remarkable men and women who are the makers of the age, quite naturally and without excitement. At the same time this facility may perhaps detract in some degree from the undeniable glamour of the Unknown; and, indeed, it is not till much later in life that the time comes to appreciate. B or C or D is a great man; we know it because our fathers have told us; but the moment when we *feel* it for ourselves comes suddenly and mysteriously. My own experience certainly is this. The friends existed first, then, long afterwards, they became to me the notabilities, the interesting people as well, and these two impressions were oddly combined in my mind.

"Such men are even now upon the earth,
Serene amid the half-formed creatures round."*

When the writer was a child living in Paris, she used to look with a certain mingled terror and fascination at various pages of grim heads drawn in black and red chalk, something in the manner of Fuseli. Masks and faces were depicted, crowding together with malevolent or agonized or terrific expressions. There were the suggestions of a hundred weird stories on the pages which we gazed at with creeping alarm. These pictures were all drawn by a kind and most gentle neighbor of ours, whom we often met and visited, and of whom we were not in the very least afraid. His name was Mr. Robert Browning. He was the father of the poet, and he lived with his daughter in calm and pleasant retreat in those Champs Élysées to which so many people used to come at that time, seeking well-earned repose from their labors by crossing the Channel instead of the Styx. I don't know whether Mr. and Miss Browning always lived in Paris; they are certainly among the people I can longest recall there. But one day I found myself listening with some interest to a conversation

* Paracelsus.

which had been going on for some time between my grandparents and Miss Browning—a long matter-of-fact talk about houses, travellers, furnished apartments, sunshine, south aspects, etc., etc., and on asking who were the travellers coming to inhabit the apartments, I was told that our Mr. Browning had a son who lived abroad, and who was expected shortly with his wife from Italy, and that the rooms were to be engaged for them, and I was also told that they were very gifted and celebrated people; and I further remember that very afternoon being taken over various vacant houses and lodgings by my grandmother. Mrs. Browning was an invalid, my grandmother told me, who could not possibly live without light and warmth. So that by the time the travellers had really arrived, and were definitively installed, we were all greatly excited and interested in their whereabouts, and well convinced that wherever else the sun might or might not fall, it must shine upon *them*. In this homely fashion the shell of the future—the four walls of a friendship—began to exist before the friends themselves walked into it. We were taken to call very soon after they arrived. Mr. Browning was not there, but Mrs. Browning received us in a low room with Napoleonic chairs and tables, and a wood fire burning on the hearth.

I don't think any girl who had once experienced it could fail to respond to Mrs. Browning's motherly advance. There was something more than kindness in it; there was an implied interest, equality, and understanding which is very difficult to describe and impossible to forget.* This generous humility of nature was also to the last one special attribute of Robert Browning himself, translated by him into cheerful and vigorous good-will and utter absence of affectation. But, indeed, one form of greatness is the gift of reaching the reality in all things, instead of keeping to the formalities and the affectations of life. The free-and-easiness of the small is a very different thing from this. It may be as false in its way as formality

* Notwithstanding an incidental allusion in Mrs. Orr's life of Browning, I can only adhere to my own vivid impression of the relations between Mrs. Browning and my father.

itself, if it is founded on conditions which do not and can never exist.

To the writer's own particular taste there never will be any more delightful person than the simple-minded woman of the world, who has seen enough to know what it is all worth, who is sure enough of her own position to take it for granted, who is interested in the person she is talking to, and unconscious of anything but a wish to give kindness and attention. This is the impression Mrs. Browning made upon me from the first moment I ever saw her to the last. Alas! the moments were not so very many when we were together. Perhaps all the more vivid is the impression of the peaceful home, of the fireside where the logs are burning while the lady of that kind hearth is established in her sofa corner, with her little boy curled up by her side, the door opening and shutting meanwhile to the quick step of the master of the house, to the life of the world without as it came to find her in her quiet nook. The hours seemed to my sister and to me warmer, more full of interest and peace, in her sitting-room than elsewhere. Whether at Florence, at Rome, at Paris, or in London once more, she seemed to carry her own atmosphere always, something serious, motherly, absolutely artless, and yet impassioned, noble, and sincere. I can recall the slight figure in its black dress, the writing apparatus by the sofa, the tiny inkstand, the quill-nibbed pen—the unpretentious implements of her magic. "She was a little woman; she liked little things," Mr. Browning used to say. Her miniature editions of the classics are still carefully preserved, with her name written in each in her delicate, sensitive handwriting, and always with her husband's name above her own, for she dedicated all her books to him; it was a fancy that she had. Nor must his presence in the home be forgotten any more than in the books—a spirited domination and inspired common-sense, which seemed to give a certain life to her vaguer visions. But of these visions Mrs. Browning rarely spoke; she was too simple and practical to indulge in many apostrophes.

II.

To all of us who have only known Mrs. Browning in her own home as a wife and a mother, it seems almost impossible to realize the time before her home existed



ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

—when Mrs. Browning was *not*, and Elizabeth Barrett, dwelling apart, was weaving her spells like the Lady of Shalott, and subject, like the lady herself, to the visions in her mirror.

Mrs. Browning* was born in the county of Durham, on the 6th of March, 1809. It was a golden year for poets, for it was also that of Tennyson's birth. She was the eldest daughter of Edward Moulton, and was christened by the names of Elizabeth Barrett. Not long after her birth, Mr. Moulton, succeeding to some property, took the name of Barrett, so that in after-times, when Mrs. Browning signed herself at length as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, it was her own Christian name that she used without any further literary assumptions. Her mother was Mary Graham, the daughter of a Mr. Graham, afterwards known as Mr. Graham Clark of Northumberland. Soon after the child's birth her parents brought

* The facts and passages relating to Mrs. Browning's early life are taken (by the kind permission of the proprietors and editor) from an article contributed by the present writer to the *Biographical Dictionary* published by Messrs. Smith, Elder, and Co.

her southward, to Hope End, near Ledbury, in Herefordshire, where Mr. Barrett now possessed a considerable estate, and had built himself a country house. The house is now pulled down, but it is described by one of the family as "a luxurious home standing in a lovely park, among trees and sloping hills all sprinkled with sheep"; and this same lady remembers the great hall, with the great organ in it, and more especially Elizabeth's room, a lofty chamber, with a stained-glass window casting lights across the floor, and little Elizabeth as she used to sit propped against the wall, with her hair falling all about her face. There were gardens round about the house leading to the park. Most of the children had their own plots to cultivate, and Elizabeth was famed among them all for success with her white roses. She had a bower of her own all overgrown with them; it is still blooming for the readers of the lost bower "as once beneath the sunshine." Another favorite device with the child was that of a man of flowers, laid out in beds upon the lawn—a huge giant wrought of blossom. "Eyes of gentianella azure, staring, winking at the skies."

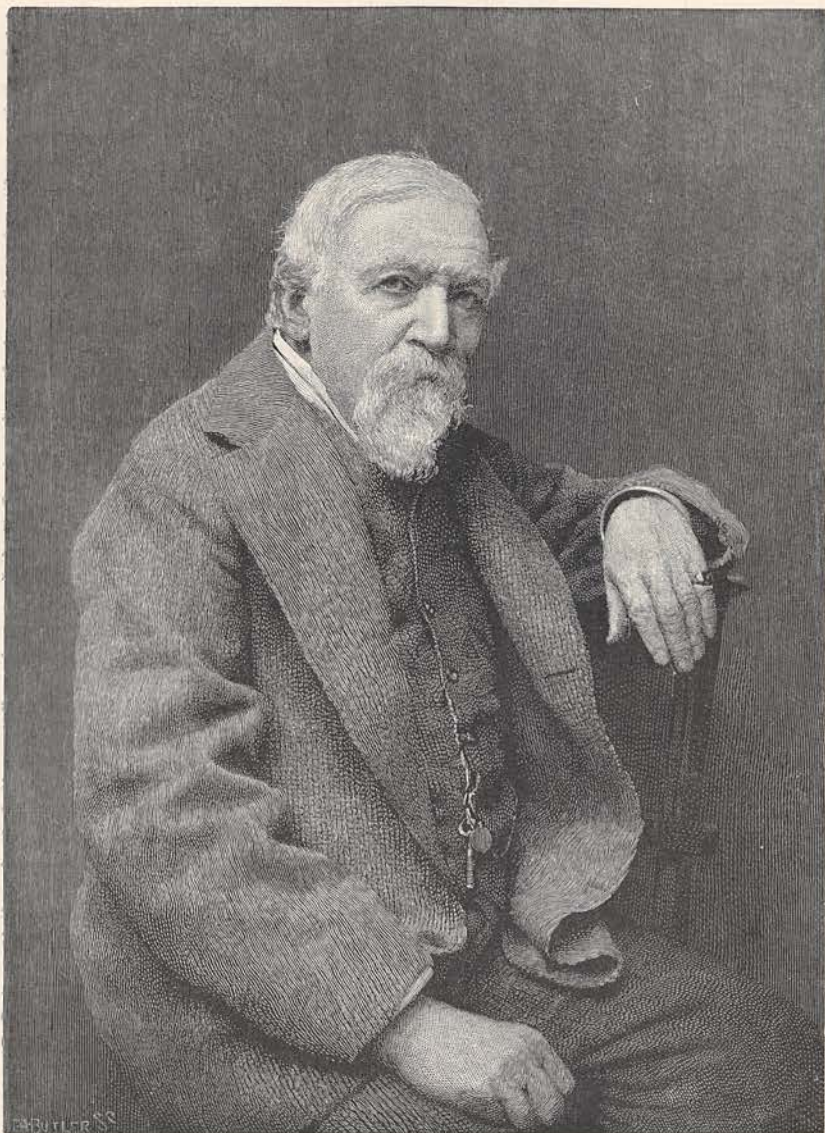
Mr. Barrett was a rich man, and his daughter's life was that of a rich man's child, far removed from the stress, and also from the variety and experience, of humbler life; but her eager spirit found adventure for itself. Her gift for learning was extraordinary. At eight years old little Elizabeth had a tutor and could read Homer in the original, holding her book in one hand and nursing her doll on the other arm. She has said herself that in those days "the Greeks were her demi-gods; she dreamed more of Agamemnon than of Moses, her black pony." At the same small age she began to try her childish powers. When she was about eleven or twelve, her great epic of the battle of Marathon was written in four books, and her proud father had it printed. "Papa was bent upon spoiling me," she writes. Her cousin remembers a certain ode the little girl recited to her father on his birthday; as he listened, shading his eyes, the young cousin was wondering why the tears came falling along his cheek. It seems right to add, on this same authority, that their common grandmother, who used to stay at the house, did not approve of these readings and writings, and said she had

far rather see Elizabeth's hemming more carefully finished off than hear of all this Greek.

Elizabeth was growing up meanwhile under happy influences; she had brothers and sisters in her home; her life was not all study, she had the best of company, that of happy children as well as of all natural things; she loved her hills, her gardens, her woodland play-ground. As she grew older she used to drive a pony and go farther afield. There is a story still told of a little girl, flying in terror along one of the steep Herefordshire lanes, perhaps frightened by a cow's horn beyond the hedge, who was overtaken by a young girl, with a pale spiritual face and a profusion of dark curls, driving a pony-carriage, and suddenly caught up into safety and driven rapidly away. These scenes are turned to account in "Aurora Leigh." Very early in life the happy drives and rides were discontinued, and the sad apprenticeship to suffering began. It probably was Moses, the black pony, who was so nearly the cause of her death. One day, when she was about fifteen, the young girl, impatient, tried to saddle her pony in a field alone, and fell, with the saddle upon her, in some way injuring her spine so seriously that she lay for years upon her back.

She was about twenty when her mother's last illness began, and at the same time some money catastrophe, the result of other people's misdeeds, overtook Mr. Barrett. He would not allow his wife to be troubled or to be told of this crisis in his affairs, and he compounded with his creditors at an enormous cost, materially diminishing his income for life, so as to put off any change in the ways at Hope End until change could trouble the sick lady no more. After her death, when Elizabeth was a little over twenty, they came away, leaving Hope End among the hills forever. "Beautiful, beautiful hills," Miss Barrett wrote long after from her closed sick-room in London, "and yet not for the whole world's beauty would I stand among the sunshine and shadow of them any more; it would be a mockery, like the taking back a broken flower to its stalk."

The family spent two years at Sidmouth, and then came to London, where Mr. Barrett first bought a house in Gloucester Place, and then removed to Wimpole Street. His daughter's contin-



ROBERT BROWNING.

From a copyrighted photograph by W. H. Grove, 174 Brompton Road, London.

ued delicacy and failure of health kept her for months at a time a prisoner to her room, but did not prevent her from living her own life of eager and beautiful aspiration. She was becoming known to the world. Her "Prometheus," which was published when she was twenty-six years old, was reviewed in the *Quarterly Review* for 1840, and there Miss Barrett's name comes second among a list of the

most accomplished women of those days, whose little tinkling guitars are scarcely audible now, while this one voice vibrates only more clearly as the echoes of her time die away.

Her noble poem on "Cowper's Grave" was republished with the "Seraphim," by which (whatever her later opinion may have been) she seems to have set small count at the time, "all the remain-

ing copies of the book being locked away in the wardrobe in her father's bedroom." "entombed as safely as *Cedipus* among the olives."

From Wimpole Street Miss Barrett went, an unwilling exile for her health's sake, to Torquay, where the tragedy occurred which, as she writes to Mr. Horne, "gave a nightmare to her life forever." Her companion-brother had come to see her and to be with her and to be comforted by her for some trouble of his own, when he was accidentally drowned, under circumstances of suspense which added to the shock. All that year the sea beating upon the shore sounded to her as a dirge, she says in a letter to Miss Mitford. It was long before Miss Barrett's health was sufficiently restored to allow of her being brought home to Wimpole Street, where many years passed away in confinement to a sick-room, to which few besides members of her own family were admitted. Among these exceptions was her devoted Miss Mitford, who would "travel forty miles to see her for an hour." Besides Miss Mitford, Mrs. Jameson also came, and, above all, Mr. Kenyon, the friend and dearest cousin, to whom Mrs. Browning afterwards dedicated "*Aurora Leigh*." Mr. Kenyon had an almost fatherly affection for her, and from the first recognized his young relative's genius. He was a constant visitor and her link with the outside world, and he never failed to urge her to write, and to live out and beyond the walls of her chamber.

As Miss Barrett lay on her couch with her dog Flush at her feet, Miss Mitford describes her as reading every book, in almost every language, and giving herself heart and soul to poetry. She also occupied herself with prose, writing literary articles for the *Athenæum*, and contributing to a modern rendering of Chaucer which was then being edited by her unknown friend Mr. R. H. Horne, from whose correspondence with her I have already quoted, and whose interest in literature and occupation with literary things must have brought wholesome distractions to the monotonies of her life.

But such a woman, though living so quietly and thus secluded from the world, could not have been altogether out of touch with its changing impressions. The early letters of Mrs. Browning's to Mr. Horne, written before her marriage,

and published with her husband's sanction after her death, are full of the suggestions of her delightful fancy. Take, for instance, "Sappho, who broke off a fragment of her soul for us to guess at." Of herself, she says (apparently in answer to some questions), "my story amounts to the knife-grinder's, with nothing at all for a catastrophe! *A bird in a cage would have as good a story; most of my events and nearly all my intense pleasures have passed in my thoughts.*" Here is another instance of her unconscious presence in the minds of others. "I remember all those sad circumstances connected with the last doings of poor Haydon." Mr. Browning writes to Professor Knight, in 1882: "He never saw my wife, but interchanged letters with her occasionally. On visiting her, the day before the painter's death, I found her room occupied by a quantity of studies—sketches and portraits—which, together with paints, palettes, and brushes, he had chosen to send in apprehension of an arrest or, at all events, an 'execution' in his own house. The letter which apprised her of this step said, in excuse of it, 'they may have a right to my goods; they can have none to my mere work tools and necessities of existence,' or words to that effect. The next morning I read the account in the *Times*, and myself hastened to break the news at Wimpole Street, but had been anticipated. Every article was at once sent back, no doubt. I do not remember noticing Wordsworth's portrait—it never belonged to my wife, certainly, at any time. She possessed an engraving of the head; I suppose a gift from poor Haydon...."

III.

My friend Professor Knight has kindly given me leave to quote from some more of his letters from Robert Browning. One most interesting record describes the poet's own first acquaintance with Mr. Kenyon. The letter is dated January the 10th, 1884; but the events related, of course, to some forty years before.

"With respect to the information you desire about Mr. Kenyon, all that I do 'know of him—better than anybody,' perhaps—is his great goodness to myself. Singularly, little respecting his early life came to my knowledge. He was the cousin of Mr. Barrett; second cousin, therefore, of my wife, to whom

he was ever deeply attached. I first met him at a dinner of Sergeant Talfourd's, after which he drew his chair by mine and inquired whether my father had been his old school-fellow and friend at Cheshunt, adding that, in a poem just printed, he had been commemorating their play-ground fights, armed with sword and shield, as Achilles and Hector, some half-century before. On telling this to my father at breakfast next morning, he at once, with a pencil, sketched me the boy's handsome face, still distinguishable in the elderly gentleman's I had made acquaintance with. Mr. Kenyon at once renewed his own acquaintance with my father, and became my fast friend; hence my introduction to Miss Barrett.

"He was one of the best of human beings, with a general sympathy for excellence of every kind. He enjoyed the friendship of Wordsworth, of Southey, of Landor; and, in later days, was intimate with most of my own contemporaries of eminence. I believe that he was born in the West Indies, whence his property was derived, as was that of Mr. Barrett, persistently styled a 'merchant' by biographers who will not take the pains to do more than copy the blunders of their forerunners in the business of article-mongery. He was twice married, but left no family. I should suggest Mr. Scharf (of the National Portrait Gallery) as a far more qualified informant on all such matters, my own concern having mainly been with his exceeding goodness to me and mine."

IV.

When Mrs. Orr's admirable history of Robert Browning appeared, the writer felt that it was but waste of time to attempt anything like a biographical record. Others, with more knowledge of his early days, have described Robert Browning as a child, as a boy, and a very young man. How touching, among other things, is the account of the little child among his animals and pets; and of the tender mother taking so much pains to find the original editions of Shelley and of Keats, and giving them to her boy at a time when their works were scarcely to be bought! This much I will just note, that Browning was a year younger than my own father, and was born at Camberwell in May, 1812. He went to Italy when he was twenty years of age, and there he studied hard, laying in a noble treasury of facts and fancies to be dealt out in after-life, when the time comes to draw upon the past, upon that youth which age spends liberally, and which is "the background of pale gold" upon which all our lives are painted.

Browning's first published poem was "Pauline," coming out in the same year as the "Miller's Daughter" and the "Dream of Fair Women." And we are also told that Dante Rossetti, then a very young man, admired "Pauline" so much that he copied* the whole poem out from the book in the British Museum.

In 1834 Robert Browning went to Russia, and there wrote "Porphyria's Lover," published by Mr. Jonathan Fox in a Unitarian magazine, where the poem must have looked somewhat out of place. It was at Mr. Fox's house that Browning first met Macready.

Notwithstanding many differences and consequent estrangements, I have often heard Mr. Browning speak of the great actor with interest and sympathy, the last time being when *Recollections of Macready*, a book of Lady Pollock's, had just come out. She had sent Mr. Browning a copy, with which he was delighted, and he quoted page after page from memory. His memory was to the last most remarkable.

There is a touching passage in Mrs. Orr's book describing the meeting of Browning and Macready after their long years of estrangement. Both had seen their homes wrecked and desolate; both had passed through deep waters. They met unexpectedly and held each other's hands again. "Oh! Macready," said Browning. And neither of them could speak another word.

As we all know, it was Mr. Kenyon who first introduced Robert Browning to his future wife; and the story, as told by Mrs. Orr, is most romantic. The poet was about thirty-two years of age at this time, in the fulness of his powers. She was supposed to be a confirmed invalid, confined to her own room and to her couch, seeing no one, living her own spiritual life, indeed, but looking for none other, when Mr. Kenyon first brought Mr. Browning to her father's house. Miss Barrett's reputation was well established by this time. "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" was already published, in which the author had written of Browning among other poets as of "some pomegranate, which, if cut deep down the middle, shows a heart within blood-tinct-

* The writer has in her possession a book in which her own father, somewhere about that same year, copied out Tennyson's "Day Dream" verse by verse.

ured, of a veined humanity"; and one can well believe that this present meeting must have been but a phase in an old and long-existing sympathy between kindred spirits. Very soon afterwards the poets became engaged, and they were married in the autumn of the year 1846.

Who does not know the story of this marriage of true souls? Has not Mrs. Browning herself spoken of it in words indelible and never to be quoted without sympathy by all women? while *he* from his own fireside has struck chord after chord of manly feeling than which this life contains nothing deeper or more true.

The sonnets from the Portuguese were written by Elizabeth Barrett to Mr. Browning before her marriage, although she never even showed them to him till some years after they were man and wife. They were sonnets such as no Portuguese ever wrote before, or ever will write again. There is a quality in them which is beyond words, that echo which belongs to the highest human expression of feeling. But such a love to such a woman comes with its own testament.

Some years before her marriage the doctors had positively declared that Miss Barrett's life depended upon her leaving England for the winter, and immediately after their marriage Mr. Browning took his wife abroad.

Mrs. Jameson was at Paris when Mr. and Mrs. Browning arrived there. There is an interesting account* of the meeting, and of their all journeying together southwards by Avignon and Vaucluse. Can this be the life-long invalid of whom we read, perching out-of-doors upon a rock, among the shallow curling waters of a stream? They come to a rest at Pisa, whence Mrs. Browning writes to her old friend Mr. Horne, to tell him of her marriage, adding that Mrs. Jameson calls her, notwithstanding all the emotion and fatigue of the last six weeks, rather "*transformed*" than improved. From Pisa the new married pair went to Florence, where they finally settled, and where their boy was born in 1849.

Poets are painters in words, and the color and the atmosphere of the country to which they belong seem to be repeated almost unconsciously in their work and its setting. Mrs. Browning was an English woman; though she lived in Italy,

* *Life of Mrs. Jameson*, by Mrs. Macpherson.

though she died in Florence, though she loved the land of her adoption, yet she never, for all that, ceased to breathe her native air as she sat by the Casa Guidi windows; and though Italian sunshine dazzled her dark eyes, and Italian voices echoed in the street, though her very ink was mixed with the waters of the Arno, she still wrote of Herefordshire lakes and hills, of the green land where "jocund childhood" played, "dimpled close with hill and valley, dappled very close with shade." . . . Now that the writer has seen the first home and the last home of that kind friend of her girlhood, it seems to her as if she could better listen to that poet's song, growing sweeter, as all true music does, with years.

We had been spending an autumn month in Mrs. Browning's country when we drove to visit the scene of her early youth, and it seemed to me as if an echo of her melody was still vibrating from hedge-row to hedge-row, even though the birds were silent, and though summer and singing-time was over. We drove along, my little son and I, towards Hope End, by a road descending gradually from the range of the Malvern Hills into the valley; it ran across commons sprinkled with geese and with lively donkeys, and skirted by the cottages still alight with sunflowers and nasturtium beds, for they were sheltered from the cold wind by the range of purple hills "looming arow"; then we dipped into lanes between high banks heaped with ferns and leaves of every shade of burnished gold and brown, fenced up by the twisting roots of the chestnuts and oak-trees; and all along the way, as our old white horse jogged steadily on, we could see the briers and the blackberry sprays travelling too, advancing from tree to tree and from hedge to hedge, flashing their long flaming brands and warning tokens of winter's approaching armies. The wind was cold and in the north; the sky overhead was broken and stormy. Sometimes we dived into sudden glooms among rocks overhung with ivy and thick brushwood, then we came out into an open space again, and caught sight of vast skies dashed with strange lights, of a wonderful cloud-capped country up above that seemed to reach from ocean to ocean, while the storm-clouds reared their vast piles out of these sapphire

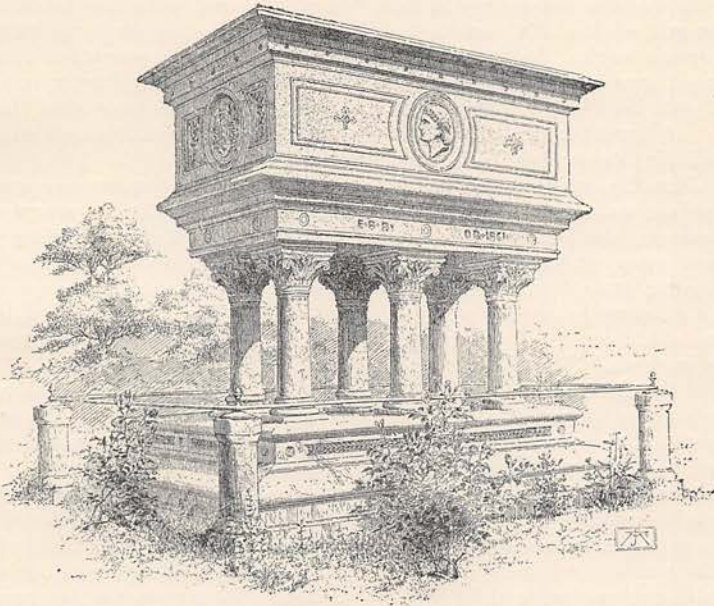
depths. Our adventures were not along the road, but chiefly overhead. My boy amused himself by counting the broken rainbows and the hail-storms falling in the distance; and then at last, just as we were getting cold and tired, we turned into the lodge gates of Hope End.

I don't know how the park strikes other people; to me, who paid this one short visit, it seemed a sort of enchanted garden revealed for an hour, and I almost expected that it would then vanish away.* The green sides of the hills sloped down

herds, wild creatures, sympathetic, not yet afraid! Finally came a sight of the river, where a couple of water-fowl were flying into the sedges. But where was the wild swan's nest? and why was not the great god Pan there to welcome us? It all seemed so natural and so vivid that I should not have been startled to see him sitting there by the side of the river.

IV.

The only memorandum I ever made of Mrs. Browning's talk was when I was



MRS. BROWNING'S TOMB AT FLORENCE.

into the garden, and rose again crowned with pine-trees; everything was wild, abrupt, and yet suddenly harmonious. We passed an unsuspected lake covered with water-lilies. A flock of sheep at full gallop plunged across the road, then came ponies with long manes and round wondering eyes trotting after us. Sometimes in the Alps one has met such

* "Here's the garden she walked across....

Down this side of the gravel-walk

She went, while her robe's edge brushed the box:

And here she paused in her gracious talk

To point me a moth on the milk-white flox.

Roses ranged in valiant row,

I will never think she passed you by!"....

—"GARDEN FANCIES," R. B.

about sixteen years old, and I heard her saying of some one else, "That without illness, she saw no reason why the mind should ever fail." The visitor to whom she was talking seems to have come away complaining that the conversation had been too matter-of-fact, too much to the point; nothing romantic, nothing poetic, such as one might expect from a poet! Another person also present had answered that that was just the reason of Mrs. Browning's power—she kept her poetry for her poetry, and didn't scatter it about where it was not wanted; and then comes a girlish note: "I think Mrs. Browning is the greatest woman I ever saw in all

my life. She is very small; she is brown, with dark eyes and dead brown hair; she has white teeth and a low, curious voice; she has a manner full of charm and kindness; she rarely laughs, but is always cheerful and smiling; her eyes are very bright. Her husband is not unlike her. He is short; he is dark, with a frank open countenance, long hair streaked with gray; he opens his mouth wide when he speaks; he has white teeth."

When I first remember Mr. Browning he was a comparatively young man—though, for the matter of that, he was always young, as his father had been before him—and he was also happy in this, that the length of his life can best be measured by his work. In those days I had not read one single word of his poetry, but somehow one realized that it was there.* Almost the first time I ever really recall Mr. Browning, he and my father and Mrs. Browning were discussing spiritualism in a very human and material fashion, each holding to their own point of view, and my sister and I sat by listening and silent. My father was always immensely interested by the stories thus told, though he certainly did not believe in them. Mrs. Browning believed, and Mr. Browning was always irritated beyond patience by the subject. I can remember her voice, a sort of faint minor chord, as she, lisping the "r" a little, uttered her remonstrating "Robert!" and his loud dominant barytone sweeping away every possible plea she and my father could make; and then came my father's deliberate notes, which seemed to fall a little sadly—his voice always sounded a little sad—upon the rising waves of the discussion. I think this must have been just before we all went to Rome: it was in the morning, in some foreign city. I can see Mr. and Mrs. Browning, with their faces turned towards the window, and my father with his back to it, and all of us assembled in a little high-up room. Mr. Browning was dressed in a brown rough suit, and his hair was black hair then; and she, as far as I can remember, was, as usual, in soft-falling flounces of black silk, and with her heavy curls drooping, and a thin gold chain hanging round her neck.

* An incidental allusion in Mrs. Orr's life of Browning has only recalled my own vivid impression of the happy relations between my father and Mrs. Browning.

In the winter of 1853-4 we lived in Rome, in the Via della Croce, and the Brownings lived in the Bocca di Leone hard by. The evenings our father dined away from home our old donna (so I think cooks used to be called) would conduct us to our tranquil dissipations, through the dark streets, past the swinging lamps, up and down the black stone staircases; and very frequently we spent an evening with Mrs. Browning in her quiet room, while Mr. Browning was out visiting some of the many friends who were assembled in Rome that year. At ten o'clock came our father's servant to fetch us back, with the huge key of our own somewhat imposing palazzo. It was a happy and an eventful time, all the more eventful and happy to us for the presence of the two kind ladies, Mrs. Browning and Mrs. Sartoris, who befriended us.

I can also remember one special evening at Mrs. Sartoris's, when a certain number of people were sitting just before dinner-time in one of those lofty Roman drawing-rooms, which become so delightful when they are inhabited by English people, which look so chill and formal in their natural condition. This saloon was on the first floor, with great windows at the farther end. It was all full of a certain mingled atmosphere of flowers and light, and comfort and color. It was in contrast but not out of harmony with Mrs. Browning's quiet room—in both places existed the individuality which real home-makers know how to give to their homes. Here swinging lamps were lighted up, beautiful things hung on the walls, the music came and went as it listed, a great piano was drawn out and open, the tables were piled with books and flowers. Mrs. Sartoris, the lady of the shrine, dressed in some flowing, pearly satin tea gown, was sitting by a round table reading to some other women who had come to see her. She was reading from a book of poems which had lately appeared; and as she read in her wonderful Muse-like way she paused, she re-read the words, and she emphasized the lines, then stopped short, the others exclaiming, half laughing, half protesting. . . . It was a lively, excitable party, outstaying the usual hour of a visit; questioning, puzzling, and discursive—a Browning society of the past—into the midst of which a door opens (and it is this fact which recalls it to my

mind), and Mr. Browning himself walks in, and the burst of voices is suddenly reduced to one single voice, that of the hostess, calling him to her side, and asking him to define his meaning. But he evaded the question, began to talk of something else—he never much cared to talk of his own poetry—and the Browning society dispersed.

Mrs. Sartoris used to describe many pleasant meetings between the Brownings and themselves, and there is one particular festival she used to like to speak of—a certain luncheon at their house, which she always said was one of the most delightful entertainments she could remember in all her life. One wonders whether the guests or the hosts contributed most. Each one had been happy and talked his or her best, and when the Sartorises got up reluctantly to go, saying "How delightful it had been," Mr. Browning cried, "Come back to sup with us, do"; and Mrs. Browning exclaimed, "Oh, Robert, how can you ask them! There is no supper, nothing but the remains of the pie." And then, cries Robert Browning, "Well, come back and finish the pie."

The *Pall Mall Gazette* of April 9, 1891, contains an amusing account of a journey from London to Paris taken forty years ago by Mr. and Mrs. Browning. The companion they carried with them writes of the expedition, dating from Chelsea, September 4, 1851:

"The day before yesterday, near midnight, I returned from a very short and very insignificant excursion to Paris, which, after a month at Malvern water-cure and then a ten days at Scotsbrig, concludes my travels for this year. Miserable puddle and tumult all my travels are; of no use to me except to bring agitation, sleeplessness, sorrow, and distress. Better not to travel at all unless when I am bound to do it. But this tour to Paris was a promised one. I had engaged to meet the Ashburtons (Lord and Lady) there, on their return from Switzerland and Hamburg, before either party left London. The time at last suited; all was ready except will on my part; so, after hesitation and painful indecision enough, I did resolve, packed my baggage again, and did the little tour I stood engaged for."

The chronicle begins on Monday, September 21st, when "Brother John" and Carlyle go to Chorley to consult about passports, routes, and conditions. . . .

"At Chapman's shop I learned that Robert Browning (poet) and his wife were just about

setting out for Paris. I walked to their place; had, during that day and the following, consultations with these fellow-pilgrims, and decided to go with them *via* Dieppe on Thursday. . . .

"Up, according, on Thursday morning, in unutterable flurry and tumult—phenomena on the Thames all dreamlike, one spectralism chasing another—to the station in good time; found the Brownings just arriving, which seemed a good omen. Browning with wife and child and maid, then an empty seat for cloaks and baskets; lastly, at the opposite end from me, a hard-faced, honest Englishman or Scotchman all in gray with a gray cap, who looked rather ostrich-like, but proved very harmless and quiet—this was the loading of our carriage; and so away we went, Browning talking very loud and with vivacity, I silent rather, tending towards many thoughts. . . .

"Our friends, especially our French friends, were full of bustle, full of noise, at starting; but so soon as we had cleared the little channel of Newhaven and got into the sea or British Channel all this abated, sank into the general sordid torpor of seasickness, with its miserable noises—'houhah, hoh!'—and hardly any other, amid the rattling of the wind and sea. A sorry phasis of humanity! Browning was sick—lay in one of the bench-tents horizontal, his wife below. I was not absolutely sick, but had to be quite quiet and without comfort, save in one cigar, for seven or eight hours of blustering, spraying, and occasional rain."

And so with mention of the prostration into doleful silence, of evanition into utter darkness, of the poor Frenchman who was so lively at starting.

"At Dieppe, while the others were in the hotel having some very bad cold tea and colder coffee, Browning was passing our luggage, brought it all in safe about half past ten o'clock, and we could address ourselves to repose. So to bed in my upper room, bemoaned by the sea and small incidental noises of the harbor. Next morning Browning, as before, did everything. I sat out-of-doors on some logs at my ease and smoked, looking at the population and their ways. Browning fought for us, and we—that is, the woman, the child, and I—had only to wait and be silent. At Paris the travellers came into a crowding, jingling, vociferous tumult, in which the brave Browning fought for us, leaving me to sit beside the woman."

Mr. Browning once told us a little anecdote of the Carlyles at tea in Cheyne Row, and of Mrs. Carlyle pouring out the tea, with a brass kettle boiling on the hob, and Mr. Browning presently seeing that the kettle was needed, and that Carlyle was not disposed to move, rose from his own chair, and filled the teapot for his hostess, and then stood by her tea.

table still talking and absently holding the smoking kettle in his hand.

"Can't you put it down?" said Mrs. Carlyle, suddenly; and Mr. Browning, confused and somewhat absent, immediately popped the kettle down upon the carpet, which was a new one.

Mrs. Carlyle exclaimed in horror—I have no doubt she was half laughing—"See how fine he has grown! He does not any longer know what to do with the kettle!"

And, sure enough, when Mr. Browning penitently took it up again, a brown oval mark was to be seen clearly stamped and burned upon the new carpet. "You can imagine what I felt," said Mr. Browning. "Carlyle came to my rescue. 'Ye should have been more explicit,' said he to his wife."

V.

When my father went for the second time to America, in 1856, my sister and I remained behind, and for a couple of days we staid on in our home before going to Paris. Those days of parting are always sad ones, and we were dismally moping about the house and preparing for our own journey when we were immensely cheered by a visitor. It was Mr. Browning, who came in to see us, and who brought us an affectionate little note from his wife. We were to go and spend the evening with them, the kind people said. They had Mr. Kenyon's brougham at their disposal, and it would come and fetch us and take us back at night, and so that first sad evening passed far more happily than we could ever have imagined possible. I remember feeling, as young people do, utterly, hopelessly miserable, and then suddenly very cheerful every now and then. I believe my father had planned it all with them before he went away.

This was in the autumn of 1856, and "Aurora Leigh" was published in 1857. It must have been on the occasion of their journey home to England that "Aurora Leigh" was lost in its box at Marseilles.

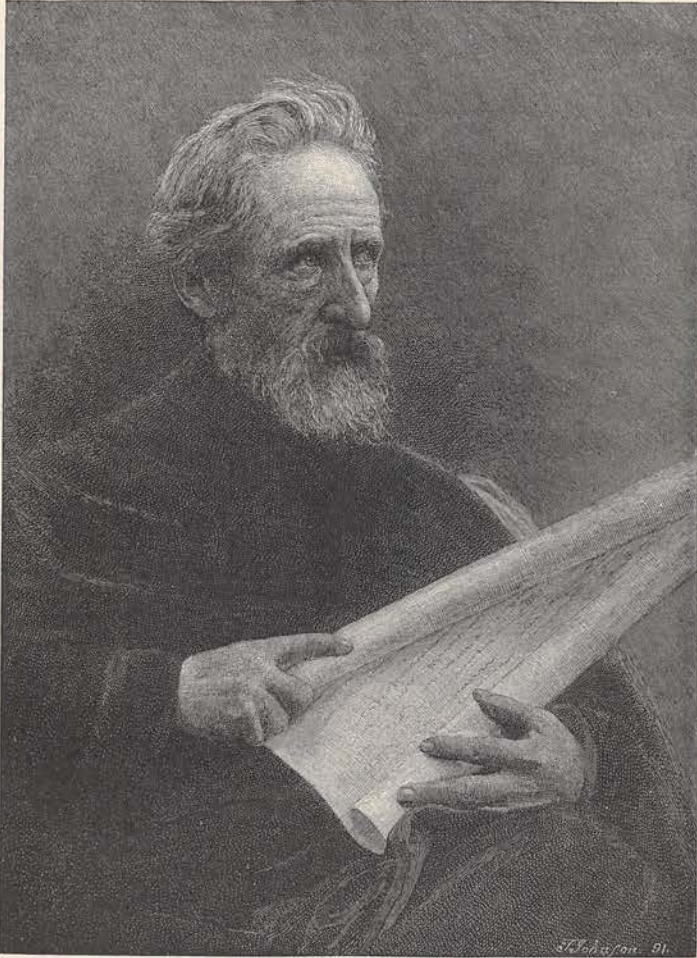
The box was at Marseilles, where it had been left by some oversight, and all the MSS. had been packed in it. In this same box were also carefully put away certain velvet suits and lace collars, in which the little son was to make his appearance among his English relatives. Mrs. Browning's chief concern was not for her

MSS., but for the loss of her little boy's wardrobe, which had been devised with so much motherly pride. Who shall blame her if her taste in boys' costume was somewhat too fanciful and poetic for the days in which she lived?

Happily for the world at large, one of Mrs. Browning's brothers chanced to pass through the place, and the box was discovered by him stowed away in a cellar at the customs.

We must have met again in Paris later in this same year. The Brownings had an apartment near the Rond Point, where we used to go and see them, only to find the same warm and tranquil atmosphere that we used to breathe at Rome—the sofa drawn out, the tiny lady in the corner, the afternoon sun dazzling in at the window. On one occasion Mr. Hamilton Aidé was paying a visit. He had been talking about books, and, half laughing, he turned to a young woman who had just come in and asked her when *her* forthcoming work would be ready. Young persons are ashamed, and very properly so, of their early failures, of their *pattes de mouches* and wild attempts at authorship, and this one was no exception to the common law, and answered "Never," somewhat too emphatically. And then it was that Mr. Browning spoke one of those chance sayings which make headings to the chapters of one's life. "All in good time," he said, and he went on to ask us all if we remembered the epitaph on the Roman lady who sat at home and span wool. "You must spin your wool some day," he said, kindly, to the would-be authoress; "every woman has wool to spin of some sort or another; isn't it so?" he said, and he turned to his wife.

I went home feeling quite impressed by the little speech, it had been so gravely and kindly made. My blurred pages looked altogether different, somehow. It was spinning wool—it was not wasting one's time, one's temper—it was something more than spoiling paper and pens. And this much I may perhaps add for the comfort of the future race of authoresses who are now spinning the cocoons from which the fluttering butterflies and Psyches yet to be will emerge upon their wings: never has anything given more trouble or seemed more painfully hopeless than those early incoherent pages, so full of meaning to one's self, so absolutely idiotic in expression. In later life the words come easily,



MR. MILSAND.

From a copyrighted photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron.

only too readily; but then it is the meaning which lags behind.

It was in that same apartment that I remember hearing Mr. Browning say (across all these long years): "It may seem to you strange that such a thing as poetry should be written with regularity at the same hour in every day. But nevertheless I do assure you it is a fact that my wife and I sit down every morning after breakfast to our separate work; she writes in the drawing-room and I write in here," he said, opening a door into a little back empty room with a window over a court. And then he added, "I never read a word she writes until I see it all finished and ready for publication."

Among the people I remember in the old Paris days there is one friend of very early date, whom we used to see from time to time with Mr. and Miss Browning at the house of Mrs. Corkran and elsewhere, this was Mr. Milsand, a man to whom every one turned with instinctive trust and sympathy, a slight body, a great and generous nature. Mr. Browning has described him in "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," and has dedicated several of his poems to him. By the kindness of Madame Milsand, who, from her house at Dijon, has sent me the following letters, I am able to give some passages of his correspondence with Mr. Browning. Here is a delightful opening

glimpse "by the fireside" of the poet's home:

"FLORENCE, Feb. 24, '58.

"It is far too many weeks now, my dear Milsand, since we got your letter—and certainly it has never once been out of sight any more than out of mind, for I put it over the fireplace where we both sit these long winter evenings, and often, indeed, a glance at it has brought you beside us again, as on those pleasant Paris evenings. We English have a superstition that when people talk of us our *ears* burn—have yours caused you any serious inconvenience that way? You know we three have long since passed the stage in friendship when assurances are necessary to any one of us. For us two here, we gained nothing by our sojourn in Paris like the knowledge and love of you, and yet Paris gave us many valuable things. One day, in all probability, we shall come together again, and meantime the news of you, though never so slight, will be a delight to us; yet your letter has been all this time unanswered; but one reason was that only in the last day or two have I been able to get the review with your article in; it is here on the table at last. In what is it obscure? Strong, condensed, and direct it is, and no doubt the common readers of easy writing feel oppressed by twenty pages of such masculine stuff. My wife will write a few lines about ourselves; she is suffering a little from the cold which has come late, nor very severely either, but enough to influence her more than I could wish. We live wholly alone here; I have not left the house one evening since our return. I am writing, a first step towards popularity for me, lyrics with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see*.....something to follow, if I can compass it.....

"I have a new acquaintance here, much to my taste, Tennyson's eldest brother, who has long been settled here, with many of his brother's qualities, a very earnest, simple, and truthful man, with many admirable talents and acquirements, the whole sicklied o'er by an inordinate dose of our English disease, shyness; he sees next to no company, but comes here, and we walk together.....I knew too little of Mr. Darley;† will he keep the slender memory of me he may have? and do you, dear Milsand, ever know me for yours affectionately,
R. B."

In this same letter there is an interesting paragraph which runs as follows:

* "How a sound shall quicken content to bliss."
—DRAMATIC LYRICS.

† The writer has left the little message to Mr. Darley, which commemorates another very early recollection, that of a gentle, handsome painter whom she as a child remembers. His paintings made no particular impression upon us all, but his kind tranquillity of manner and courteous ways are not to be forgotten.

"Helen Faucit is going to produce an old play of mine never acted, at the Haymarket, *Colombe's Birthday*; look out for it in April, keeping in mind the proverbial uncertainty of things theatrical. My main hope of its success lies in its being wholly an actor's and manager's speculation, not the writer's."

I have been fortunate for years past in being able to count upon the help of a recording friend and neighbor, to whom I sometimes go for the magic of a suggestive touch, when together we conjure up things out of the past.

I wrote to ask her about the production of Mr. Browning's plays upon the stage, and she sent me the following account of her recollections of *Strafford*; nor can I do better now than insert her answer here at length, for to cut out any word is to destroy the impression which it gives:

"April 30, 1891, BRIGHTON.

"The production of Browning's *Strafford* which you ask me about, occurred so early in my career that anything I could say about it would be, I fear, of little use to you. I was so young then, and just a mere novice in my art, so that my first feeling, when I heard the play read, was one of wonder that such a weighty character as Lucy, Countess of Carlisle, should be intrusted to my hands. I was told that Mr. Browning had particularly wished me to undertake it. I naturally felt the compliment implied in the wish, but this only increased my surprise, which did not diminish as I advanced in the study of the character.

"Lady Carlisle, as drawn by Mr. Browning, a woman versed in all the political struggles and intrigues of the times, did not move me. The only interest she awoke in me was due to her silent love for *Strafford* and devotion to his cause; and I wondered why, depending so absolutely as he did upon her sympathy, her intelligence, her complete self-abnegation, he should only have, in the early part, a common expression of gratitude to give her in return.

"This made the treatment of Lucy's character, as you will readily see, all the more difficult in the necessity it imposed upon me of letting her feeling be seen by the audience, without its being perceptible to *Strafford*.

"Of course I did my best to carry out what I conceived was Mr. Browning's view; and he, at all events, I had reason to know, was well satisfied with my efforts. I had met him at Mr. and Mrs. Macready's house previously, so that at the rehearsals we renewed our acquaintance.

"I suppose he was nervous, for I remember Mr. Macready read the play to us in the green-room. And how finely he read! He made the smallest part distinct and prominent. He was accused of under-reading his own part. But I do not think this was so.

"At the rehearsals, when Mr. Browning was introduced to those ladies and gentlemen whom he did not know, his demeanor was so kind, considerate, and courteous, so grateful for the attention shown to his wishes, that he won directly the warm interest of all engaged in the play. So it was that although many doubtful forecasts were made in the greenroom as to the ultimate attraction of a play so entirely turning on politics, yet all were determined to do their very best to insure its success.

"In the play Lucy has only to meet Strafford, King Charles, and Henrietta. It seemed to me that Mr. Macready's Strafford was a fine performance. The character fitted in with his restless, nervous, changeable, impetuous, and emphatic style. He looked the very man as we knew him in Vandyck's famous picture. The royal personages were very feebly represented. I could not help feeling in the scenes with them that my earnestness was overdone, and that I had no business to appear to dominate and sway and direct opinions while they stood nerveless by.

"There were some fine moments in the play. The last scene must have been very exciting and touching. Lucy believes that by her means Strafford's escape is certain; but when the water-gates open, with the boat ready to receive him, *Pym steps out of it!*.....This effect was most powerful.

"It was a dreadful moment. My heart seemed to cease to beat. I sank on my knees, burying my head in my bosom, and stopping my ears with my hands while the death-bell tolled for Strafford.

"I can remember nothing more than that I went home very sad; for although the play was considered a success, yet, somehow, even my small experience seemed to tell me it would not have a very long life, and that perhaps kind Mr. Browning would think we had not done our best for him.

"The play was mounted in all matters with great care. Modern critics seem to have little knowledge of the infinite pains bestowed in all respects before their day upon the representation of historical and Shakespearian *plays* and noteworthy *people* in romance or history.

"I can see my gown now in Lucy Percy, made from a Vandyck picture, and remember the thought bestowed even upon the *kind* of fur with which the gown was trimmed. The same minute attention to accuracy of costume prevailed in all the characters produced. The scenery was alike accurate, if not so full of small details as at present. The *human beings* dominated all."

I need scarcely add that the writer of this letter is Helena Faucit, Lady Martin, and that I have heard from others of her perfect rendering of the part of Lucy Carlisle. Browning himself spoke of

Miss Faucit's "playing as an actress, and her perfect behavior as a woman."

VI.

It was in Florence Mrs. Browning wrote "Casa Guidi Windows," containing the wonderful description of the procession passing by, and that noble apostrophe to freedom beginning, "O magi from the East and from the West." "Aurora Leigh" was also written here, which the author herself calls "the most mature of her works," the one into which her highest convictions have entered. The poem is full of beauty from the first page to the last, and beats time to a noble human heart. The opening scenes in Italy; the impression of light, of silence; the beautiful Italian mother; the austere father with his open books; the death of the mother, who lies laid out for burial in her red silk dress; the epitaph, "Weep for an infant too young to weep much when Death removed this mother." Aurora's journey to her father's old home; her lonely terror of England; her slow yielding to its silent beauty; her friendship with her cousin, Romney Leigh; their saddening, widening knowledge of the burthen and sorrow of life, and the way this knowledge influences both their fates—all is described with that irresistible fervor which is the translation of the essence of things into words.

Mrs. Browning was a great writer, but I think she was even more a wife and a mother than a writer, and any account of her would be incomplete which did not put these facts first and foremost in her history.

The author of "Aurora Leigh" once added a characteristic page to one of her husband's letters to Leigh Hunt. She has been telling him of her little boy's illness. "You are aware that that child I am more proud of than of twenty 'Auroras,' even after Leigh Hunt has praised them. When he was ill he said to me, 'You pet, don't be unhappy about *me*, think it's only a boy in the street, and be a little sorry, but not unhappy.' Who could not be unhappy, I wonder!...I never saw your book called *The Religion of the Heart*. I receive more dogmas, perhaps (my 'perhaps' being in the dark rather), than you do."

She says in conclusion, "Churches do all of them, as at present constituted, seem too narrow and low to hold true

Christianity in its proximate development—I at least cannot help believing them so.”

She seemed, even in her life, something of a spirit, as her friend has said, and her view of life's sorrow and shame, of its beauty and eternal hope, is not unlike that which one might imagine a spirit's to be. She died at Florence in 1861. It is impossible to read without emotion the account of her last hours as it is given in Robert Browning's life.

A tablet has been placed on Casa Guidi, voted by the municipality of Florence, and written by Tommaseo:

“Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose woman's heart combined the wisdom of a wise man with the genius of a poet, and whose poems form a golden ring which joins Italy to England. The town of Florence, ever grateful to her, has placed this epitaph to her memory.”

There was a woman living in Florence, an old friend, clever, warm-hearted, Miss Isa Blagden, herself a writer, who went to Mr. Browning and his little boy in their terrible desolation, and who did what little a friend could do to help them. Day after day, and for two or three nights, she watched by the stricken pair until she was relieved, then the father and the little son came back to England. They settled near Miss Barrett, Mrs. Browning's sister, who was living in Delamere Terrace, and upon her own father's death Miss Browning came to be friend, comforter, home-maker, for her brother.

I can remember walking with my father under the trees of Kensington Gardens when we met Mr. Browning just after his return to England. He was coming towards us along the broad walk in his blackness through the sunshine. We were then living in Palace Green, close by, and he came to see us very soon after. But he was in a jarred and troubled state, and not himself as yet, although I remember his speaking of the house he had just taken for himself and his boy. This was only a short time before my father's death. In 1864 my sister and I left our home and went abroad, nor did we all meet again for a very long time.

It was a mere chance, so Mr. Browning once said, whether he should live in this London house that he had taken, and join in social life, or go away to some quiet retreat and be seen no more; but

for great poets, as for small ones, events shape themselves by degrees, and after the first hard years of his return a new and gentler day began to dawn for him. Miss Browning came to them; new interests arose; acquaintances ripened to friends (this blessed human fruit takes time to mature); his work and his influence spread.

He published some of his finest work about this time. “*Dramatis Personæ*,” a great part of which had been written before, came out in 1864; then followed the “*Ring and the Book*,” published by his good friend, and ours, Mr. George Murray Smith, and “*Balaustion*” in 1871. Recognition, popularity, honorary degrees, all the tokens of appreciation, which should have come sooner, now began to crowd in upon him, lord rectorships, and fellowships, and dignities of every sort. He went his own way through it all, cordially accepted the recognition, but chiefly avoided the dignities, and kept his two lives distinct. He had his public life and his own private life, with its natural interests and outcoming friendships and constant alternate pulse of work and play.

VII.

Browning has been described as looking something like a hale naval officer; but in later life, when his hair turned snowy white, he seemed to me more like some sage of by-gone ages. There was a statue in the Capitol of Rome to which Mrs. Sartoris always likened him. I cannot imagine that any draped and filleted sage could ever have been so delightful a companion, so racy, so unselfishly interested in the events of the hour as he. “He was not only ready for talk, but fond of it,” said a writer in the *Standard*. “He was absolutely unaffected in his choice of topics; anything but the cant of literary circles pleased him. If only we knew a tittle of what he knew, and of what, unluckily, he gives us credit for knowing, many a hint that serves only to obscure the sense would be clear enough,” says the same writer, with no little truth.

Among Browning's many gifts that of delightful story-telling is certainly one which should not be passed over. His memory was very remarkable for certain things; general facts, odds and ends of rhyme and doggerel, bits of recondite knowledge, came back to him spontane-

ously and with vivacity. This is all to be noticed in his books, which treat of so many quaint facts and theories. His stories were specially delightful, because they were told so appositely, and were so simple and complete in themselves. A doggerel always had a curious fascination for him, and he preferred to quote the very worst poetry in his talks. On one occasion we were dining at Mr. and Mrs. Lehmann's house in Half-Moon Street; it was a cottage of delight rather than a palace, and Millais, turning round, happened to brush off the head of a flower that Browning wore in his button-hole. Concerning the said flower, the poet immediately remembered a story of a city clerk who had considered himself inspired, and had some of his verses printed. One poem began something like this:

"I love the gentle primrose
That grows beside the rill;
I love the water-lily,
Narcissus, and jonquil."

This last word was by mistake printed "John Quill," which seemed so appropriate a name, and the clerk got so much chaffed about it, that his poetical inspirations were nipped in the bud, and he printed no more poems.

Another reminiscence which my friend Mrs. C— recalls is in a sadder strain. It was a description of something Mr. Browning once saw in Italy. It happened at Arezzo, where he had turned by chance into an old church among the many old churches there, that he saw a crowd of people at the end of an aisle, and found they were looking at the skeleton of a man just discovered by some workmen who were breaking away a portion of the wall opposite the high altar. The skin was like brown leather, but the features were distinguishable. Mr. Browning made inquiries as to who it was. He could hear of no tradition even of a man being walled up. The priests thought it must have been done three or four hundred years ago. A hole had been left above his head to enable him to breathe. Mr. Browning said the dead man was standing with his hands crossed upon his breast, on the face was a look of expectation, an expression of hoping against hope. The man looked up, knowing help could only come from above, and must have died still hoping. Mrs. C— said to Mr. Browning she wondered he had not writ-

ten a poem about it. He replied he *had* done so, and had given it away.

I often find myself going back to Darwin's saying about the duration of a man's friendships being one of the best measures of his worth, and Browning's friendships are very characteristic and convincing. He specially loved Landor. For the Tennysons his was also a real and deep affection. Was there ever a happier, truer dedication than that of his collected selections?—

"TO ALFRED TENNYSON:—

"In poetry illustrious and consummate. In friendship noble and sincere?"

How enduring was his friendship for Mr. Procter, and how often has his faithful coming cheered the dear and kind old man! Of his feeling for Mr. Milsand I have already spoken. Among the women who were Mr. Browning's real friends there is the same feeling of trust and dependence.

VIII.

Besides the actual personal feelings, there are the affinities of a life to be taken into account. The following passages, which I owe to Professor Knight's kindness, are very remarkable, for they show what Browning's estimation was of Wordsworth, and although they were not written till much later, I give them here. Indeed the point of meeting of these two beneficent poet streams is one full of interest to those upon the shore. The first paragraph of the first letter relates to some new honors and dignities gratefully but firmly declined.

"*March 21st, '83.*—I *do* feel increasingly (cowardly as seems the avowal) the need of keeping the quiet corner in the world's van which I have got used to for so many years....

"I will, as you desire, attempt to pick out the twenty poems which strike me (and so as to take away my breath) as those worthiest of the master Wordsworth.

"Speaking of a classification of Wordsworth's poems, in my heart I fear I should do it almost chronologically, so immeasurably superior seem to me the first sprightly runnings. Your selection would appear to be excellent, and the partial admittance of the later work prevents one from observing the too definitely distinguishing black line between supremely good and—well, what is fairly tolerable from Wordsworth, always understand."

To one of the letters addressed to Pro-

fessor Knight there is this touching post-script:

"I open the envelope to say—what I had nearly omitted—that Ld. Coleridge proposed, and my humble self—at his desire—seconded you, last evening, for admission to the Athenæum. I had the less scruple in offering my services that you will most likely never see in the offer anything but a record of my respect and regard, since your election will come on when I shall be—dare I hope?—'elect' in even a higher society!"

Here is another letter also relating to Wordsworth:

"19 WARWICK CRESCENT, W.,
Feb. 24, '86.

"MY DEAR PROFESSOR,—I have kept you waiting this long while—and for how shabby a result! You must listen indulgently while I attempt to explain why I am forced to disappoint you. One remembers few more commonplace admonitions to a poet than that 'he would wiselier have written but a quarter of the works which he has labored at for a lifetime,' unless it be this other, often coupled with it, 'that such works ought to be addressed to the general apprehension, not exclusively suited to the requirements of a (probably quite imaginary) few.' Each precept contradicts the other. Write, on set purpose, for the many, and you will soon enough be reminded of the old 'Tot homines'; and write as conscientiously for the few—your idealized 'Double' (it comes to that)—and you may soon suit him with the extremely little that suits yourself. Now in view of which of these objects should the maker of a selection of the works of any poet worth the pains begin his employment?"

"I have myself attempted the business, and know something of the achievements in this kind of my betters. They furnish a list of the pieces which the selector has found most delight in. And I have found also that others, playing the selector with apparently as good a right and reason, were dissatisfied with this unaccountable addition, and that as inexplicable omission; in short, that the sole selector was not himself; the only case in which no such stumbling-block occurs being that obvious one—if it has ever occurred—when a public wholly unacquainted with an author is presumed to be accessible to a specimen of his altogether untried productions—for, by chance, the sample of the poetry of Brown and Jones may pierce the ignorance of somebody—say of Robinson. It is quite another matter of interest to know what Matthew Arnold thinks most worthy in Wordsworth. But should anybody have curiosity to inquire which 'fifteen or twenty' of his poems have most thoroughly impressed such a one as myself, all I can affirm is that I treasure as precious every poem written during about the

first twenty years of the poet's life; after these, the solution grows weaker, the crystals gleam more rarely, and the assiduous stirring up of the mixture is too apparent and obtrusive. To the end crystals are to be come at; but my own experience resembles that of the old man in the admirable 'Resolution and Independence':

'Once I could meet with them on every side,
But they have dwindled long by slow decay,
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may'

—that is, in the poet's whole work, which I should leave to operate in the world as it may, each recipient his own selector.

"I only find room to say that I was delighted to make acquaintance with your daughter, and that should she feel any desire to make that of my sister, we shall welcome her gladly.

Believe me ever, my dear Professor,

Yours most truly,

ROBERT BROWNING."

IX.

We were all living in "sea-coast-nook-full" Normandy one year, scattered into various châteaux and shops and tenements. Some of our party were installed in a clematis-wreathed mansion near the church tower; others were at the milk-woman's on the road to the sea. Most of the lively population of the little watering-place was stowed away in chalets, of which the little fronts seemed wide open to the road from morning to night; many people contentedly spent whole days in tents on the sea-shore. It was a fine hot summer, with sweetness and completeness everywhere; the corn-fields gilt and far-stretching, the waters blue, the skies arching high and clear, and the sunsets succeeding each other in most glorious light and beauty. Our old friend Mr. Milsand had a little country lodge at St. Aubin, near Luc-sur-Mer, and I wrote to him from the shady court-yard of our château, and begged him to come over and see us; and when he came he told us Mr. and Miss Browning were also living close by. We were walking along the dusty road and passing the old square tower when he suddenly stood still, and fixing his earnest look upon me, said:

"Tell me why is there some reserve; is anything wrong between you and Robert Browning? I see you are reserved; I see he is also constrained; what is it?"

To which I replied honestly enough that I did not know what it was; there *was* some constraint between me and my old friend. I imagined that some one had

made mischief; I could see plainly enough when we met that he was vexed and hurt, but I could not tell why, and it certainly made me very unhappy. "But this must not be," said Milsand; "this must be cleared." I said it was hopeless; it had lasted for months, and in those days I was still young enough to imagine that a mood was eternal; that coldness could never change. Now I find it almost impossible to give that consideration to a quarrel which is invariably claimed under such circumstances.

I happened to be alone next day; the cousins and the children who were with me had gone down to the sea. I was keeping house in the blazing heat with F—— (the family despot, the late nurse and present housekeeper of the party). The shutters were closed against the blinding light; I was writing in my bedroom, with a pleasant sense of temporary solitude and silence, when I chanced to go to the window, and looked into the old walled court. I saw the great gates open a little way, and a man's broad-shouldered figure coming through them, and then advance, striding across the stones, towards the house. It was Mr. Browning, dressed all in white, with a big white umbrella under his arm. It was the poet himself, and over and beyond this, it was my kind, welcome *old* friend returned, all reserve and coldness gone, never to trouble or perplex again. We had no explanations.

"Don't ask," he said; "the facts are not worth remembering or inquiring into; people make mischief without even meaning it. It is all over now. I have come to ask when you will come to St. Aubin; my sister is away for a few days, but the Milsands are counting on you."

We started almost the next day in a rattle-trap chaise, with an escort of donkeys ridden by nephews and nieces, along the glaring sandy road to Luc. The plains were burning hot and the sea seemed on fire, but the children and donkeys kept up valiantly. At last we reached a little village on the outer edges of Luc-sur-Mer, and in the street stood Monsieur Milsand, in front of a tiny house. How kind was his greeting! How cordial was that of his wife and daughter, coming to the door to make us welcome! Mr. Browning was also waiting in the diminutive sitting-room, where I remember a glimpse of big books and comfortable seats and tables. The feast itself was

spread out-of-doors on the terrace at the back, with a shady view of the sea between lilac-bushes; the low table was laid with dainties, glasses, and quaint decanters. Mr. Milsand was the owner of vineyards in the south, and abstemious though he was, he gave his friends the best of good wine, as well as of words and welcome. From this by-gone and happy feast, two dishes are still present to my mind: a certain capon, and a huge fish lying in a country platter, curled on a bed of fennel, surrounded by a wreath of marigolds, and in its mouth a bunch of flowers. The host helped us each in turn; the Normandy maid appeared and disappeared with her gleaming gold earrings; then came a pause, during which Madame Milsand rose quietly and went into the house. The gentlemen were talking pleasantly, and the ladies listening agreeably (there are many local politics to be discussed on the Normandy coast). But somehow, after a time, the voices ceased, and in the silence we heard the strains of distant martial music. Mr. Milsand looked inquiringly at his daughter.

"It is the regiment marching by," said Mlle. Milsand.

"But where is my wife?" said Monsieur Milsand. "*She* cannot have gone to the review."

Still the music sounded; still we waited. Then to us returned our handsome, dignified hostess. "She had not been to the review," she said, laughing and apologizing; "but, ladies and gentlemen," she added, "you must please content yourselves with your fricandeau, for, alas! there is no news of my larded capon. It went to the pastry-cook's to be roasted; I have just sent the maid to inquire; it was despatched to us, ready for the table, half an hour ago, on a tray carried by the pastry-cook's boy. It is feared that he is running after the soldiers! I am in despair at your meagre luncheon."

But I need not say we were not to be pitied. As we feasted on, as the last biscuit was crumbled, the last fragrant cup of coffee handed round, once more came the Normandy ear-rings.

"Shall I serve the capon, madame? Pierre has just returned from the review."

But we all cried out that we must come back another day to eat the capon. The sun was getting low. If we carried out our intention of walking to St. Aubin and

seeing Mr. Browning's cottage, we must start forthwith. The path ran along the high cliff. Mr. Browning went before us, leading the way to "mine own hired house."

Once more the whole scene comes before me: the sea-coast far below our feet, the arid vegetation of the sandy way, the rank yellow snapdragons lining the paths. There was not much other color; the tones were delicate, half airy, half solid; the sea was in a vast circle around us; the waves were flowing into the scooped sandy bay of Luc-sur-Mer; the rocks of the Calvados were hidden behind the jutting promontories; here and there a rare poppy, like a godsend, shone up by chance. It took us half an hour's quick walk to reach the two little straight sentry-boxes standing on the cliffs against the sky, to which Mr. Browning pointed. He himself has described this habitation in "Red Cotton Nightcap Country":

"That just behind you is mine own hired house,
With right of pathway through the field in front.
No prejudice to all its growth unsheath'd
Of emerald Luzern bursting into blue. . . .
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate!
Yon yellow—what if not wild-mustard flower?
Of that my naked sole makes lawful prize,
Bruising the acrid aromatics out. . . .
And lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last,
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain."

We entered the Brownings' house. The sitting-room door opened to the garden and the sea beyond—a fresh-swept bare floor, a table, three straw chairs, one book upon the table. Mr. Browning told us it was the only book he had with him. The bedrooms were as bare as the sitting-room, but I remember a little dumb piano standing in a corner, on which he used to practise in the early morning. I heard Mr. Browning declaring they were perfectly satisfied with their little house. That his brains, squeezed as dry as a sponge, were only ready for fresh air.

But has not Browning himself best summed up the contrast between the meek, hitherto un-Murrayed, bathing-place and London, where

"My toe trespassed upon your flounce,
Small blame unto you, seeing the staircase party in the square
Was small and early, and you broke no rib."

X.

This visit to St. Aubin was followed by "Red Cotton Nightcap Country," and on this occasion I must break my rule, and trench upon the ground traversed by Mrs. Orr. I cannot give myself greater pleasure than by quoting the following passage from the *Life*:

"The August of 1872 and of 1873 again found him and his sister at St. Aubin, and the earlier visit was an important one, since it supplied him with the materials of his next work, of which Miss Annie Thackeray, there also for a few days, suggested the title. The tragic drama which forms the subject of Mr. Browning's poem had been in great part enacted in the vicinity of St. Aubin, and the case of disputed inheritance to which it had given rise was pending at that moment in the tribunals of Caen. The prevailing impression left on Miss Thackeray's mind by this primitive district was, she declared, that of white cotton nightcaps (the habitual head-gear of the Normandy peasants). She engaged to write a story called 'White Cotton Nightcap Country,' and Mr. Browning's quick sense of both contrast and analogy inspired the introduction of this element of repose into his own picture of that peaceful prosaic existence, and of the ghostly, spiritual conflict to which it had served as background. He employed a good deal of perhaps strained ingenuity in the opening pages of the work in making the white nightcap foreshadow the red, itself the symbol of liberty, and only indirectly connected with tragic events; and he would, I think, have emphasized the irony of circumstance in a manner more characteristic of himself if he had laid his stress on the remoteness from 'the madding crowd,' and repeated Miss Thackeray's title. There can, however, be no doubt that his poetic imagination, no less than his human insight, was amply vindicated by his treatment of the story."

And perhaps the writer may be excused for inserting here a letter which concerns the dedication of "Red Cotton Nightcap Country"—a very unexpected and delightful consequence of our friendly meeting:

"May 9, 1873.

"DEAR MISS THACKERAY,—Indeed the only sort of pain that any sort of criticism could give me would be by the reflection of any particle of pain it managed to give *you*. I dare say that by long use I don't feel or attempt to feel criticisms of this kind, as most people might. Remember that everybody this thirty years has given me his kick and gone his way, just as I am told the understood duty of all highway travellers in Spain is to bestow at least one friendly thump for the mayoral's sake on his horses as they toil along up hill,

'so utterly a puzzle,' 'organ-grinding,' and so forth, come and go again without much notice; but any poke at me which would touch *you*, would vex me indeed; therefore pray don't let my critics into *that* secret! Indeed I thought the article highly complimentary, which comes of being in the category celebrated by Butler:

'Some have been kicked till they know [not] whether
The shoe be Spanish or neat's leather.'

You see, the little patch of velvet in the toe-piece of this slipper seemed to tickle by comparison! Ever yours affectionately,

ROBERT BROWNING."

But, in spite of the past, Mr. Browning had little to complain of in his future critics. This is not an unappreciative age, the only fault to be found with it is that there are too many mouths using the same words over and over again, until the expressions seem to lose their senses and fly about quite giddily and at haphazard. The extraordinary publicity in which our bodies live seems to frighten away our souls at times; we are apt to stick to generalities, or to well-hackneyed adjectives which have ceased to have much meaning or responsibility; or if we try to describe our own feelings, it is in terms which sometimes grow more and

more emphatic as they are less and less to the point. When we come to say what is our simple and genuine conviction, the effort is almost beyond us. The truth is too like Cordelia's. To say that you have loved a man or a woman, that you admire them and delight in their work, does not any longer mean to you or to others what it means in fact. It seems almost a test of Mr. Browning's true greatness that the love and the trust in his genius have survived the things which have been said about it.

XI.

Not the least interesting part of the Milsand correspondence relates to the MSS. which the cultivated Frenchman now regularly revised for his English friend before they were sent to the printer. Here is a letter to Mr. Milsand, dated May, 1872: "Whenever you get the whole series," Browning says, "you will see what I fail to make you understand, how *inestimable* your assistance has been; there is not one point to which you called attention which I was not thereby enabled to improve, in some cases essentially benefit; the punctuation was nearly as useful as the other apparently more important assistance. The

FAC-SIMILE OF BROWNING'S HANDWRITING.

"Some have been kicked till they know whether
The shoe be Spanish or neat's leather" -
- You see, the little patch of velvet in
the toe-piece of this slipper seemed to
tickle by comparison!
Ever yours affectionately
Robert Browning.

fact is that in the case of a writer with my peculiarities and habits, somebody quite ignorant of what I may have meant to write, and only occupied with what is really written, is needed to supervise the thing produced, and I never hoped or dreamed that I should find such intelligence as yours at my service. I won't attempt to thank you, dearest friend, but simply in my own interest do not you undervalue your service to me, because in logical consequence the next step ought to be that you abate it or withdraw it." In another letter, dated 1875, Mr. Browning writes again about punctuation. "Your way of punctuation (French way) is different from ours—I don't know why; we use—:—where you prefer—;—but I have Frenchified myself in this respect for your sake." "I know how I trouble all but

your goodness," he repeats to his friend. Is it not a pleasure to think of the records in the old carved house at Dijon; of the good service rendered, and so generously acknowledged?

Here is one more extract from the Dijon correspondence, dated April 7, 1878: "I am glad you like the poems. The measures were hitherto unused by me. That of the first poems is

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and the cæsura falls just as you say, and should, as a rule, be strictly observed, but to prevent monotony I occasionally break it." This letter concludes by an allusion to a French friend who is learning English, and speaking of the difficulties of a foreign tongue, Mr. Browning says: "The thoughts outstrip and leave behind the

FAC-SIMILE OF MRS. BROWNING'S HANDWRITING.

Dear Mr. Shackenay, you asked me too long ago for a contribution to your magazine - too long ago in every sense perhaps - for here is my husband who suggests that, being a very ill advised wife for all in England just now (scarcely bettered by a misstatement in the *Atteneum*) I may not be welcome between the wind & your mobility at Cambridge -

But in that case you will return my verses enclosed, & no harm will be done - if indeed it is no harm to read

words; in the slower process of writing, the thought is compelled to wait and get itself suited in a phrase." "Now for yourself," he concludes, "I enjoy altogether your enjoyment of Bébé, and wish that grand'mère may be tyrannized over more and more Turkishly. It is the good time. Give my true love to whoever will take it of your joyous party. Sarianna writes often, I know. We hail the announcement of your speedy arrival as ever."

The house by the water-side in Warwick Crescent, which Browning hastily took, and in which he lived for so many years after his return to England, was a very charming corner, I used to think.

It was London, but London touched by some indefinite romance; the canal used to look cool and deep, the green trees used to shade the crescent; it seemed a peaceful oasis after crossing that dreary Æolia of Paddington, with its many despairing shrieks and whirling eddies. The house was an ordinary London house, but the carved oak furniture and tapestries gave dignity to the long drawing-rooms, and pictures and books lined the stairs. In the garden at the back dwelt, at the time of which I am writing, two weird gray geese, with quivering silver wings and long throats, who used to come to meet their master hissing and fluttering. When I said I liked the place, he told us of some visitor from abroad,

Love to dear Annie & Minnie..
 whom I never forget -
 Yes - and don't I remember
 Mr. Mackersay's kindness to
 little Penoni - who grows
 big, & is learning Latin, &
 riding a pony, & is not much
 changed otherwise -
 With my husband's regards,
 I remain
 most sincerely yours
 Elizabeth Barrett Browning

28. Via del Tritone -

Rome - April 13 -

Where we shall be till the
 end of May - then we return
 to Florence -

who had lately come to see him, who also liked Warwick Crescent, and who, looking up and down the long row of houses and porticos in front of the canal, said, "Why, this is a mansion, sir; do you inhabit the whole of this great building; and do you allow the public to sail upon the water?"

As we sat at luncheon I looked up and down the room, with its comfortable lining of books, and also I could not help noticing the chimney-board heaped with invitations. I never saw so many cards in my life before. Lothair himself might have wondered at them.

Mr. Browning talked on, not of the present London, but of Italy and *villeggiatura* with his friends the Storys; of Siena days and of Walter Savage Landor. He told us the piteous story of the old man wandering forlorn down the street in the sunshine without a home to hide his head. He kindled at the remembrance of the old poet, of whom he said his was the most remarkable personality he had ever known; and then, getting up abruptly from the table, he reached down some of Landor's many books from the shelves near the fireplace, and said he knew no finer reading.

He read us some extracts from the "Conversations with the Dead," quickly turning over the leaves, seeking for his favorite passages.

There is a little anecdote which I think he also told us on this occasion. It concerned a ring which he used to wear, and which had belonged to his wife. One day in the Strand he discovered that the intaglio from the setting was missing. People were crowding in and out, there seemed no chance of recovering; but all the same he retraced his steps, and lo! in the centre of the crossing lay the jewel on a stone, shining in the sun. He had lost the ring on a previous occasion in Florence, and found it there by a happy chance.

XII.

It was not until 1887 that Mr. Browning moved to De Vere Gardens, where I saw him almost for the last time. Once I remember calling there at an early hour with my children. The servant hesitated about letting us in. Kind Miss Browning came out to speak to us, and would not hear of us going away.

"Wait a few minutes. I know he will see you," she said. "Come in. Not into

the dining-room; there are some ladies waiting there; and there are some members of the Browning Society in the drawing-room. Robert is in the study, with some Americans who have come by appointment. Here is my sitting-room," she said; "he will come to you directly."

We had not waited five minutes when the door opened wide and Mr. Browning came in. Alas! it was no longer the stalwart visitor from St. Aubin. He seemed tired, hurried, though not less outgoing and cordial, in his silver age.

"Well, what can I do for you?" he said, dropping into a chair and holding out both his hands.

I told him it was a family festival, and that I had "brought the children to ask for his blessing."

"Is that all?" he said, laughing, with a kind look, not without some relief. He also hospitably detained us, and when his American visitors were gone, took us in turn up into his study, where the carved writing-tables were covered with letters—a milky-way of letters, it seemed to me, flowing in from every direction.

"What! all this to answer?" I exclaimed.

"You can have no conception what it is," he replied. "I am quite tired out with writing letters by the time I begin my day's work."

But his day's work was ending here. Soon afterward he went to Italy, and never returned in life. He closed his eyes in his son's beautiful home at Venice among those he loved best. His son, his sister, his daughter-in-law, were about his bed tending and watching to the last.

When Spenser died in the street in Westminster in which he dwelt after his home in Ireland was burnt and his child was killed by the rebels, it is said that after lingering in this world in poverty and neglect, he was carried to the grave in state, and that his sorrowing brother poets came and stood round about his grave, and each in turn flung in an ode to his memory, together with the pen with which it had been written. The present Dean of Westminster, quoting this story, added that probably Shakespeare had stood by the grave with the rest of them, and that Shakespeare's own pen might still be lying in dust in the vaults of the old abbey. There is something in the story very striking to the imagination.

One pictures to one's self the gathering of those noble, dignified men of the Elizabethan age, whose thoughts were at once so strong and so gentle, so fierce and so tender, whose dress was so elaborate and stately. Perhaps in years to come people may imagine to themselves the men who stood only the other day round Robert Browning's grave, the friends who loved him, the writers who have written their last tribute to this great and generous poet. There are still some eagles' quills among us; there are others of us who have not eagles' quills to dedicate to his memory, only nibs with which to pen a feeling, happily stronger and more various than the words and scratches which try to speak of it: a feeling common to all who knew him, and who loved the man of rock and sunshine, and who were proud of his great gift of spirit and of his noble human nature.

It often happens when a man dies in the fulness of years that, as you look across his grave, you can almost see his

lifetime written in the faces gathered around it. There stands his history. There are his companions, and his early associates, and those who loved him, and those with whom his later life was passed. You may hear the voices that have greeted him, see the faces he last looked upon; you may even go back and find some impression of early youth in the young folks who recall a past generation to those who remember the past. And how many phases of a long and varied life must have been represented in the great procession which followed Robert Browning to his honored grave!—passing along the London streets and moving on through the gloomy fog; assembling from many a distant place to show respect to one

“Who never turned his back, but marched breast forward;
Never doubted clouds would break;
Never dreamed, tho' right were worsted,
Wrong would triumph;
Held, we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.”

WHEN COMES THE NIGHT.

BY W. P. PREBLE, JUN.

WHEN comes the night,
Shall we accuse the sun,
Because the gloom oppresses most
The soul that glows with lustre lost?
And shall we shun
The memory of light?

When comes the ice,
Shall we condemn the rose,
That filled the field with royal bloom,
And scented hall and church and tomb,
When winter throws
His ermine round us thrice?

When sorrows come
Upon us unaware,
Shall we reproach the joy that shed
A glory where the feast was spread,
And in despair
Sit silent, sad, and dumb?

When comes the grave,
Shall we the cradle curse,
The fatal day when daylight came,
Because the night of dreaded name,
A second nurse,
Comes stealing down the nave?