

The background of the page features a faint, light green line-art illustration of four faces. The faces are arranged in a square pattern, with two on the left and two on the right. The lines are thin and sketchy, giving it a delicate, artistic feel. The faces appear to be looking in various directions, some towards the center and some towards the corners.

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the terms of the overture. He temporarily dissembled with Fouché, and despatched immediately to Bâle one Fleury de Chaboulon, a faithful adherent, whom Maret, Duke of Bassano, had before sent to Elba, to inform Napoleon of the state of public opinion in France. Fleury de Chaboulon presented himself immediately before Werner at Bâle, as the envoy of Fouché. He insisted with Werner, in the name of the Duke of Otranto, that parties had wholly changed since the first restoration took place, that all classes were agreed in deeming Napoleon necessary to France, that the nation was arming *en masse*, that 400,000 national guards were added to 400,000 regulars, that it were better to come to terms than slaughter tens of thousands in hope of restoring a dynasty which France would accept no more, and that his principal, the Duke of Otranto, would be happy to be the mediator of such an understanding between France and Austria! Werner, not detecting the ruse, was astonished at the support lent to Napoleon by the first malcontent in France, and of course relieved his own government from the fallacy that the French people were disunited. Finally, indeed, the negotiation fell through. The Austrian Minister was perhaps more astute than his envoy. But the Monk of St. Gall could hardly have told a better story of the talent and the jest of Charlemagne.

The counterpart of this picture is clearly drawn in the misgovernment of the Bourbons when they were at peace, and in their vacillation when they were in danger. But the contrast between the two dynasties, broad as it is, is hardly greater than the contrast between the two Imperial Governments. What, then, does M. Thiers think of the present Empire? Does he regard Napoleon the Third as now rebuilding by degrees that fabric of Constitutional Imperialism, as it is termed, which he declares that the Allied Despots so ruthlessly threw down? Does he suppose that Napoleon I., even under the most favourable circumstances, would have given to Europe more peace, or to France more freedom, than they have obtained from Napoleon III.? If he seeks for a living example of the spirit of the institutions of the Empire, he has only to look around him. Yet by a singular contradiction, M. Thiers is at once the great apologist of the Empire in his books, and its antagonist in his political life; so that the consistency of his conduct is the condemnation of his opinions.

- ART. IX.—1. *Poems.* By ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING. 4th ed. 3 vols. London: 1856.
2. *Aurora Leigh.* By ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING. London: 1856.
3. *Poems before Congress.* By ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING. London: 1860.

ONE of the most peculiar characteristics of modern literary taste is the interest which readers find, not so much in the positive beauty and attractiveness of the works of a poet, as in the study of the character from which they spring. This feeling is excited not only by that love of psychological and individual analysis which is a growth of modern times, but also by the spectacle of an enthusiastic nature remaining courageously and unweariedly true to its own aspirations; and these, if they are worshipped with the entire energy of a highly gifted and imaginative temperament, can hardly be other than of a lofty character. They may contain much that is chimerical and impossible of application, either by the individual or by society at large, but they acquire dignity from the height of endeavour to which they are exalted, and attract attention from the rarity of their existence and the poetic dress in which they are embodied. Such minds are like the extraordinary visitants among the celestial luminaries; which though they fulfil none of the everyday functions of our planetary attendants, yet have a peculiar grace of their own, and remind us of those remote regions in which even the imagination barely ever permits itself to wander. The works of such writers will never arrive at universal popularity. Few can find pleasure in breathing in that attenuated atmosphere to which they love especially to soar. The chords they strike are usually too fine for ordinary ears; they seldom aim at calling forth those deep central tones of human feeling which find echoes in the universal heart; and it is rarely or ever that they admit of due appreciation till the whole life of the poet lies extended before us.

The gifted person, whose recent death calls forth this notice from us, was in truth more fortunate than might be expected from the nature of her productions. In looking over the three volumes of her collected writings anterior to the publication of 'Aurora Leigh,' the number of poems which are sufficiently simple, tasteful, and interesting to catch the general ear, is very small; and yet for some years, even before the appearance

of 'Aurora Leigh,' they enjoyed considerable popularity, which was wonderfully increased by the appearance of that extraordinary and extravagant work of fiction; so that some time before her decease, the authoress may be said to have enjoyed all the honours due to her genius, her uncommon accomplishments, and her courageous and generous nature. Our admiration for the undeviating resolution with which Mrs. Browning pursued her literary career is heightened by the knowledge that nature had endowed her with a frame so frail and a constitution so delicate, that it seemed barely equal to the necessities of existence; and that her spiritual energy remained undiminished by intense mental and physical suffering, and was proof against years of trial and the confinement of a sick chamber.

Her father was a gentleman of some opulence, and we believe her youth was past at his country residence in the county of Herefordshire, in sight of the Malvern Hills. At least, in one of her poems she says:—

'Green the land is where my daily
Steps in jocund childhood played;
Dimpled close with hill and valley,
Dappled very close with shade:

Summer snow of apple blossoms running up from glade to glade.'

She appears from earliest youth to have shown extreme precocity,—to have written largely at ten, to have been in print at fifteen, and a contributor to periodicals while under twenty. Her earliest studies, which included Greek and Latin, were carried on in concert with a favourite brother; and when he left home she addressed to him a copy of verses which afford some glimpse of the authoress of 'Aurora Leigh' in her girlhood:—

'Together have we past our infant hours;
Together sported Childhood's spring away;
Together cull'd young Hope's just budding flow'rs,
To wreath the forehead of the coming day:
For then the present's sun made e'en the future gay.
And when the laughing mood was nearly o'er,
Together many a minute did we wile,
On Horace' page and Maro's sweeter lore:
While one young critic in the classic style,
Would sagely try to frown and make the other smile.
And now alone thou con'st the ancient tome;
And sometimes thy dear studies, it may be,
Are cross'd by dearer dreams of me and home.
Alone I muse on Homer, thoughts are free,
And if mine often stray, they go in search of thee.'

It appears, too, that her father encouraged her love for rhyme, since she has not only inscribed her collected poems to him in a dedication written with great delicacy and tenderness of feeling, but in her earliest published volumes there is also a poem addressed to him containing the lines:—

'For 'neath thy gentleness of praise,
My father! ran my early lays.
And when the lyre was scarce awake,
I lov'd its strings for thy dear sake
And the kind Muses; but the while
Thought only how to win thy smile.'

The small volume from which the above lines are taken was published anonymously thirty-five years ago, in 1826, and entitled 'An Essay on Mind, and other Poems,' with the modest motto from Tasso, '*Brama assai poco spera e nulla chiede,*' and is remarkable principally for the ambition of the young authoress; who, after citing the authority of 'that immortal writer we have just lost' (Byron), to prove that 'ethical poetry is the highest of all poetry, as the highest of all objects 'in moral truth,' proceeds at once to grapple with an ethical subject as wide as the universe itself. The poem is written in heroic verse, and extends over eighty-eight pages. The quality of the verse is not much above the level of Hayley or Miss Seward, but is remarkable for the precocious audacity with which she deals with the greatest names in the whole range of literature and science. Gibbon, Berkeley, Condillac, Plato, Bacon, Bolingbroke, all come in for treatment in the scope of the young girl's argument. The minor poems, however, which conclude the volume show much greater promise of originality.

Elizabeth Barrett does not appear at this age to have been an invalid. The severe illness to which she was so long a victim appears, as Miss Mitford in the passage cited below relates, to have commenced with the breaking of a blood-vessel. Her Greek studies at this period were under the direction of Hugh Stuart Boyd, to whom she has addressed some affectionate sonnets, and also dedicated one of her prettiest lyrics, entitled 'Wine of Cyprus,' in which the course of their studies is charmingly depicted:—

'And I think of those long mornings,
Which my thought goes far to seek
When betwixt the folio's turnings
Solemn flowed the rhythmic Greek.
Past the pane the mountain spreading,
Swept the sheep-bell's tinkling noise,
While a girlish voice was reading,
Somewhat low for *ai's* and *oi's*.

'Then what golden hours were for us,
While we sat together there;
How the white vests of the chorus
Seemed to wave up a live air.
How the cothurns trod majestic
Down the deep iambic lines,
And the rolling anapæstic
Curled like vapour over shrines!

'Oh, our Æschylus, the thunderous!
How he drove the bolted breath
Through the cloud to wedge it ponderous
In the gnarled oak beneath.
Oh, our Sophocles, the royal,
Who was born to monarch's place;
And who made the whole world loyal
Less by kingly power than grace!

'Our Euripides the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,
And his touches of things common,
Till they rose to touch the spheres.
Our Theocritus; our Bion;
And our Pindar's shining goals;
These were cup-bearers undying
Of the wine that's meant for souls.

'And my Plato the divine one!
If men know the gods aright;
By their motions as they shine on,
With a glorious trail of light.
And your noble Christian bishops,
Who mouthed grandly the last Greek;
Though the sponges or their hyssops
Were distent with wine — too weak.'

(Vol. iii. p. 27.)

Her next publication was, in 1833, a translation of the 'Prometheus Bound' of Æschylus; after which she wrote several poems which appeared anonymously in the 'New Monthly Magazine' and the 'Athenæum,' and at last in 1838 appeared the 'Seraphim, and other Poems,' under her own name. It must have been, however, about the year 1835 that Miss Mitford first saw her, and to this period must be referred the following portrait in the 'Recollections of a Literary Life':—

'My first acquaintance with Elizabeth Barrett commenced about fifteen years ago. She was certainly one of the most interesting persons I had ever seen. Everybody who then saw her said the

same; so that it is not merely the impression of my partiality or my enthusiasm. Of a slight delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on either side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes richly fringed by dark eyelashes, a smile like a sunbeam, and such a look of youthfulness, that I had some difficulty in persuading a friend, in whose carriage we went together to Chiswick, that the translator of the "Prometheus" of Æschylus, the authoress of the "Essay on Mind," was old enough to be introduced into company, in technical language, — was out. Through the kindness of another invaluable friend, to whom I owe many obligations, but none so great as this, I saw much of her during my stay in town.

'The next year was a painful one to herself and to all who loved her. She broke a blood-vessel upon the lungs which did not heal. If there had been consumption in the family, that disease would have intervened. There were no seeds of the fatal English malady in her constitution, and she escaped. Still, however, the vessel did not heal, and after attending her for about a twelvemonth at her father's house in Wimpole Street, Dr. Chambers, on the approach of winter, ordered her a milder climate. Her eldest brother, a brother in heart and in talent worthy of such a sister, together with other devoted relatives, accompanied her to Torquay; and there occurred the fatal event which saddened her bloom of youth, and gave a deeper hue of thought and feeling to her poetry.

'Nearly a twelvemonth had passed, and the invalid, still attended by her affectionate companions, had derived much benefit from the mild sea breezes of Devonshire. One fine summer morning her favourite brother, together with two other fine young men his friends, embarked on board a small sailing-vessel for a trip of a few hours. Excellent sailors all, and familiar with the coast, they sent back the boatmen, and undertook themselves the management of the little craft. Danger was not dreamt of by any one. After the catastrophe no one could divine the cause; but in a few minutes after their embarkation, in sight of their very windows, just as they were crossing the bar, the boat went down, and all who were in her perished. Even the bodies were never found. I was told by a party who were travelling that year in Devonshire and Cornwall, that it was most affecting to see on the corner houses of every village street, on every church door, and almost on every cliff, for miles and miles along the coast, handbills offering large rewards for linen cast ashore marked with the initials of the beloved dead; for it so chanced that all the three were of the dearest and the best, one, I believe, an only son, the other the son of a widow.

'This tragedy nearly killed Elizabeth Barrett. She was utterly prostrated by the horror and the grief, and by a natural but a most unjust feeling that she had been in some sort the cause of this great misery. It was not until the following year that she could be removed in an invalid carriage, and by journeys of twenty miles a day, to her afflicted family and her London home. The house that she occupied at Torquay had been chosen as one of the most sheltered in the place. It stood at the bottom of the cliffs almost close to the

sea; and she told me herself that during the whole winter the sound of the waves rang in her ears like the moans of one dying. Still she clung to literature and to Greek: in all probability she would have died without that wholesome diversion to her thoughts. Her medical attendant did not always understand this. To prevent the remonstrances of her friendly physician, Dr. Barry, she caused a small edition of Plato to be so bound as to resemble a novel. He did not know, skilful and kind though he were, that to her such books were not an arduous and painful study, but a consolation and a delight.

‘Returned to London, she began the life which she continued for so many years, confined to one large and commodious but darkened chamber, admitting only her own affectionate family and a few devoted friends (I, myself, have often travelled five-and-forty miles to see her, and returned the same evening without entering another house); reading almost every book worth reading in almost every language, and giving herself heart and soul to that poetry of which she seemed born to be the priestess.

‘Gradually her health improved. About four years ago she married Mr. Browning, and immediately accompanied him to Pisa. They then settled at Florence; and this summer I have had the exquisite pleasure of seeing her once more in London, with a lovely boy at her knee, almost as well as ever, and telling tales of Italian rambles, of losing herself in chestnut forests, and scrambling on mule-back up the sources of extinct volcanoes.’

During this long illness, however, Mrs. Browning continued to devote herself to poetry. Dissatisfied with her first version of the ‘Prometheus Bound,’ she wrote another, and reproduced the drama from beginning to end. ‘The Seraphim’ was followed by a collected edition of her poems, in two volumes, published in 1844, and containing the ‘Drama of Exile;’ and it is said that one of her most admired ballads, ‘The Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,’ was written in the space of twelve hours, in order to complete the uniformity of the two volumes, and despatch the proofs to America, although at this time the authoress was still a confirmed invalid. It will be seen from the following extract from the Preface to these two volumes, that she was pursuing her poetical career with an intense sense of its earnestness:—

‘Since my “Seraphim” was received by the public with more kindness than its writer had counted on, I dare not rely on having outgrown the faults with which that volume abounded and was mildly reproached. Something, indeed, I may hope to have retrieved, because some progress in mind and in art every active thinker and honest writer must consciously or unconsciously make with the progress of existence and experience; and in some sort, since we learn “in suffering what we teach in song,” my days may be fitter to teach. But if it were not presumptuous language, on the lips of one to whom life is more than usually uncertain, my favourite wish for this work

would be that it be received by the public as a step in the right track towards a future indication of more value and acceptability. I would fain do better, and I feel as if I might do better. I aspire to do better. In any case, while my poems are full of faults, as I go forward to my critics and confess, they have my heart and life in them; they are not empty shells. Poetry has been as serious a thing to me as life itself, and life has been a very serious thing; there has been no playing at skittles for me in either. I have done my work so far as work; not as mere hand and heart work apart from the personal being, but as the *completest expression of that being* to which I could attain; and as work I offer it to the public, feeling its shortcomings more deeply than any of my readers, because measured from the height of my aspiration; but feeling also that the reverence and sincerity with which the work was done, should give it some protection with the reverent and sincere.’

But notwithstanding the apparent modesty of this preface, we cannot avoid observing that the humility is more professed than real. The writer assumes that her Being alone is sufficient to make good poetry, if she can find the due expression of it—and this assumption accompanied her through life. She studied only to give due expression to what she imagined to be her own nature; not to become acquainted with human nature generally, to find materials for the exercise of her art and to discover the necessary relation between her own powers and the subjects adapted to them, in order to produce works which should embody, in an artistic form, the real life and the best aspirations of the age. A poet can no more spin poems out of his own brain, unassisted by the thoughts and feelings which he should draw from humanity around him, than a weaver can make tissues out of the tips of his fingers. The originality of the poet is shown in the creations he is able to make out of the solid stuff of human life. And this requires not only careful study of human nature generally, but also a power of passing out of self, forgetting self altogether, in the sentiments and feelings of others, so as to invest them with artistic concreteness; or of drawing into one’s own nature the general aspirations and emotions of the time, and finding an echo for them in the individual soul of the poet. But to regard the Poet’s Being as the primary cause and motive power of poetry—as at once subject and object—is a fundamental mistake. Originality, doubtless, is much; but true originality will never be attained by a self-conscious, morbid, restless assertion of the value of a man’s own individuality. This was the prime error of Mrs. Browning’s artistic theories, and drew with it, or perhaps was identical with, other mystical delusions, in which she lost herself and confused her readers. She had persuaded

herself that she had a message from the Infinite to deliver, and to discover this she had only to dive deep enough into the depths of her unassisted internal consciousness. And she possessed so astounding a conception of the revelation concealed in this mysterious Being, that she tells us in one of her sonnets, that if she could disclose it the revelation would end in her own extinction:—

‘With stammering lips and insufficient sound
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night
With dream, and thought, and feeling interwound,
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height,
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of a sensual ground!
The song of soul I struggle to outbear
And utter all myself into the air.
But if I did it, — as the thunder roll
Breaks its own cloud, my flesh would perish there
Before that dread apocalypse of soul.’

(Vol. ii. p. 259.)

This sonnet is doubtless finely expressed, but it is a most unmeasured assertion of her own spiritual value; and holding this opinion as a principle of art and as her chief inspiration through life, it would be no wonder if Mrs. Browning's poetry were only appreciated by a very limited public indeed; for with these views, it was natural that the language and subjects she chose should be all but devoid of interest to those who were not either of a kindred nature with herself, or capable of realising her isolated condition of mind by the force of sympathy.

Intimately connected with this error, that ‘the expression of her own being’ is the end towards which she is to direct all her mental culture, was the utter incapacity which she possessed for seeing how far beyond her powers, and indeed almost any human powers, were the subjects which she chose for her chief poetic efforts. With the conviction that ethical poetry was the loftiest flight of the muse, she endeavoured in her teens to instruct the world in the vastest subject which the mind is capable of imagining next to God, namely, itself. In her next great endeavour, the ‘Seraphim,’ she attempted to view the stupendous agony of the Crucifixion, as it would appear, to use her own expression, ‘dilated through a seraph’s eyes.’ In her third attempt, the ‘Drama of Exile,’ she trod in the steps of Milton; and although in her preface she endea-

vours to excuse herself by saying that the Gate of Paradise is shut between herself and England's greatest epic poet, a truer judgment would have told her that the task she was attempting required at least equal powers to those displayed in the ‘Paradise Lost.’ In her last and most successful production she deals with very intricate and vexed questions of society, of which she knew literally nothing; and attempts to portray her own age in an epic, although, as she quaintly says, one can no more get a complete notion of one's own age, than a peasant gathering sticks in the ear of the uncompleted statue of Mount Athos could have of the proportions of the whole figure.

In her three great flights, however, the more Mrs. Browning condescended to place herself on the level of ordinary humanity, the greater was her success; so that one is led the more to regret the false excitement under which she abstracted herself so much from the more ordinary and touching topics of human interest. In the ‘Seraphim’ we can barely attain to any understanding at all of the purport and coherence of the poem. Two Seraphs, Ador the Strong, and Zerah the Bright One, hold dialogues in two parts, in sight of the Crucifixion, in a series of strained metaphors and extravagant conceptions to which the mind refuses to attach any definite meaning; and we can only conceive that the authoress was intoxicated with her own highly wrought but unmeaning language when she speaks, in the words of Zerah, of

‘Forms, Spaces, Motions wide,
Of meek insensate things.

Lights without feet or wings
In golden courses sliding;
Glooms, stagnantly subsiding,
Whose lustrous heart away was prest
Into the argent stars!

Airs universal! thunders lorn
That wait your lightning in cloud-cave
Hewn out by the winds! O brave
And subtle elements! the Holy
Has charged me by your voice with folly.’

(Vol. i. p. 109.)

And we are extremely disposed to add in the next lines uttered by ‘The Bright One’:—

‘Enough, the mystic arrow leaves its wound.
Return ye to your silences inborn,
Or to your inarticulated sound.’

The 'Drama of Exile' is rather more intelligible, and contains ideas of great beauty, though almost lost amid the shadowy mysticism which obscures the whole production. The drama takes place on the outer side of the Gate of Eden after the Fall. The dialogue of the piece is carried on by Adam and Eve, Lucifer, Gabriel, invisible angels and Eden spirits. The introduction of the latter is a beautiful invention, and the choruses in many places contain passages of fine melody and grace. The chant of the spirits of Paradise to Adam and Eve, as they commence their flight into the world of sorrow and sin, is one of the finest of Mrs. Browning's conceptions.

'Hearken! oh, hearken! ye shall hearken surely
 For years and years,
 The noise beside you dripping coldly, purely,
 Of spirits' tears.
 The yearning to a beautiful denied you
 Shall strain your powers.
 Ideal sweetnesses shall over-glide you,]
 Resumed from ours.
 In all your music, our pathetic minor
 Your ears shall cross;
 And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
 With sense of loss.
 We shall be near you in your poet-languors
 And wild extremes,
 What time ye vex the desert with vain angers,
 Or mock with dreams.
 And when upon you, weary after roaming,
 Death's seal is put;
 By the foregone ye shall discern the coming
 Through eyelids shut.'

(Vol. i. p. 13.)

But such passages as these are rare in the 'Drama of Exile.' The purpose of the exhortations and songs of the spirits and angels is to teach the first parents that they are 'only exiled, and not lost.' But the mystic, and sometimes grotesque character of the dialogue involve the attention in such inextricable confusion, that one is tempted to think the writer was describing her own sensations under a dose of opium, when she wrote the song of the 'Morning Star.'

'Around, around the firmamental ocean,
 I swam expanding with delicious fire.
 Around, around! in blind desire
 To be drawn upwards to the Infinite.
 Ha, ha!

Until the motion, flinging out the motion,
 To a keen whirl of passion and avidity;
 To a dim whirl of languor and delight;
 I wound in giant orbits smooth and white
 With that intense rapidity,
 Around, around,
 I wound and interwound;
 While all the cyclic heavens around me spun,
 Stars, planets, suns, and moons dilated broad,
 Then flash'd together into a single sun,
 And wound and wound in one.
 And as they wound, I wound around, around,
 In a great fire I almost took for God—
 Ha, ha! Heosphoros!

(Vol. i. p. 36.)

This last line leads us to another observation, connected with the spiritual assumption already noticed. The poetess was perpetually, in verse, being whirled about in a 'great fire' which she almost took for God.' At whatever page her volumes be opened, the name of God is introduced, apparitions of angels hover about her, and angels' wings flutter in astounding frequency. We have not the slightest doubt that she was sincere in the conviction that she lived in closer communion with the unseen world than ordinary mortals, but the unceasing morbid consciousness of that conviction, her unresting eagerness to deliver some new message from the Infinite, and the celestial society she is ever introducing us to, necessarily weary the most reverent-minded reader, and affect him with a sense of something like impiety. With these phantasmal cravings, she of course endows the whole race of poets.

Speaking of the poet, she says:—

'The palpitating angel in his flesh
 Thrills only with consenting fellowship
 To those innumerable spirits who sun themselves
 Outside of time.'

She says also of the poetic art:—

'Art's a service mark.
 A silver key is given to thy clasp,
 And thou shalt stand unwearied night and day,
 And fix it in the hard, slow turning wards,
 And open in that intermediate door
 Betwixt the different planes of sensuous form
 And form unsensuous, that inferior men
 May learn to feel on still from these to these,
 And bless thy ministrations.'

Inspired with such convictions, she was ever ready, to use her own words, to 'rush exultant on the Infinite,' and endeavour to shadow out the indescribable, in high-sounding but at the same time highly unintelligible verse, and not seldom to adopt metaphors, and take subjects in hand, which a more modest reverence would have taught her to abstain from. Another morbid tendency derivable from the same source, was the constant harping upon the dignity and sufferings of the poet. No matter how serious her convictions may have been of the sanctity of the poet's office, it would have shown a far healthier spirit if she had said fewer fine things about it, and increased its dignity by leaving calmer and more solid works of art behind her. It is very questionable taste for a poetess to be continually declaiming on the superiority of her craft. The following lines are taken at random amid crowds of similar passages:—

'O sorrowful great gift
Conferred on poets of a two-fold life,
When one life has been found enough for pain!
We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere men,
Being called to stand up straight as demi-gods,
Support the intolerable strain and stress
Of the universal.'

We had marked for quotation some other similar passages; but they are so offensive to good taste and right feeling, that in mercy to the memory of their authoress we omit them. The fate of society would certainly be dreary enough if, as she imagined, 'the only teachers who instruct mankind' were poets of Mrs. Browning's school. These extravagances interfered most materially with her own success in her vocation. Partly from her mystic sense of a closer intimacy with the Infinite, partly from her transcendental view of the duties and glory of the poet's mission, and partly from her idea of being true to the expression of her being, she has left behind a great deal of verse, in some portions of which she attained to force and delicacy of expression, accompanied with great exaltation of feeling; but which, as a whole, is not equal to the result that might have been expected from her highly poetic nature. She was unquestionably a woman of rare genius, if that term can with propriety be applied to an excess of ardent irregular power. She had also learning and power of thought; but she was entirely deficient in the highest gifts of her own art. She had neither simplicity, taste, or good sense. Her style was always inflated; and her fame would be ten times as great and as deserved as it is, if she had left us a single lucid and

finished performance, instead of a crowd of incoherent thoughts and extravagant images.

For these errors of spirit also affected most seriously the form of Mrs. Browning's verse. She appears to have written to please herself, with little care of the unpleasant feelings which are excited in the minds of others by distorted conceits and mean and often ridiculous versification. She is often more quaint than Quarles in her imagery, more grotesque than Cowley or Donne in her ideas, more eccentric in her rhymes than the author of 'Hudibras,' and often more coarsely masculine than any known female writer. She invests inanimate objects and abstractions with human features which make pure nonsense. 'The rose lifts up her white hand.' Eternity smiles with dim grand lips! A mystery has a knee! The Dark has a lap. Wonders breathe. The earth wields a sceptre, and the 'Universe shakes dew drops from its mane like a roused lion.' 'Aurora Leigh' is a rank unweeded garden of the most intolerable conceits, of which this may stand as a sample:—

'Earth, shut up

By Adam, like a fakir in a box
Left too long buried, remained stiff and dry,
A mere dumb corpse; till Christ the Lord came down,
Unlocked the door, forced open the blank eyes,
And used his kingly chrisms to straighten out
The leathery tongue turned back into the throat.

(*Aurora Leigh*, p. 185.)

Due allowance, therefore, being made for these strange defects, it stands beyond doubt that much as Mrs. Browning sank at times below the commonest demands of harmony and expression, yet that no woman has ever handled the English tongue with greater force and spirit when she is at her best. Any endeavour, however, to form a due estimate of her genius would be incomplete without measuring the best things she has written by that mystic exaltation by which she was so constantly inspired.

Perhaps it is in the 'Rhapsody of Life's Progress' that she attained her greatest triumph in spiritual expression: and the subjoined strophes may be taken as a fair specimen of her powers, where they are not entirely overcome by her defects.

'Then we grow into thought, and with inward ascensions
Touch the bounds of our Being.
We lie in the dark here, swathed doubly around
With our sensual relations and social conventions;
Yet are 'ware of a sight, yet are 'ware of a sound
Beyond hearing and seeing.—

Are 'ware of a Hades rolls deep on all sides,
 With its infinite tides—
 About and above us—until the strong arch
 Of our life creaks and bends as if ready for falling,
 And through the dim rolling we hear the sweet calling
 Of spirits that speak in a soft under tongue
 The sense of a mystical march.
 And we cry to them softly, "Come nearer, come nearer!"
 "And lift up the lap of this Dark, and speak clearer,
 "And teach us the song that ye sung."

And we smile in our thought if they answer or no,
 For to dream of a sweetness is sweet as to know.
 Wonders breathe in our face,
 And we ask not their name;
 Love takes all the blame
 Of the world's prison place.
 And we sing back the songs as we guess them, aloud:
 And we send up the lark of our music that cuts
 Untired through the cloud,
 To beat with its wings at the lattice heav'n shuts.
 Yet the angels look down and the mortals look up
 As the little wings beat;
 And the poet is blessed with their pity or hope.
 'Twixt the heavens and the earth can a poet despond?
 O Life! O Beyond!
 Thou art strange, thou art sweet!

'Help me, God! help me, man! I am low, I am weak.
 Death loosens my sinews and creeps in my veins;
 My body is cleft by these wedges of pains,
 From my spirits serene;
 And I feel the externe and insensate creep in
 On my organised clay.
 I sob not, nor shriek,
 Yet I faint fast away!
 I am strong in the spirit, deep-thoughted, clear-eyed;
 I could walk step by step with an angel beside.
 On the heaven height of truth
 Oh! the soul keeps its youth.
 But the body faints sore; it is tired in the race,
 It sinks from the chariot ere reaching the goal.
 It is weak, it is cold,
 The rein drops from its hold;
 It sinks back with death in its face.
 On chariot! on soul!
 Ye are all the more fleet;
 Be alone at the goal
 Of the strange and the sweet.'

(Vol. iii. p. 36.)

Hardly, perhaps, has the profound truth, that every common object has its antitype in the spiritual world, been expressed in finer language than in the subjoining extract from 'Aurora Leigh':—

'But man the two-fold creature apprehends
 The two-fold manner in and outwardly:
 And nothing in the world comes single to him,
 A mere itself;—cup, column, candlestick,
 All patterns of what shall be in the Mount;
 The whole temporal show related royally,
 And built up to eterne significance,
 Through the open arms of God.
 No lily-muffled hum of summer bee,
 But finds some coupling in the spinning stars;
 No pebble at your foot, but proves a sphere;
 No chaffinch, but implies a cherubim
 And—glancing on my own thin-veined wrist—
 In such a little tremour of the blood
 The whole strong clamour of a vehement soul
 Doth utter itself distinct. Earth's crammed with heaven,
 And every common bush afire with God.'

(Aurora Leigh, p. 303.)

Of Mrs. Browning's greater lyrical efforts 'The Lay of the Children' is the most successful, and its popularity the most deserved: it does not go home to the heart, perhaps, so directly as Hood's 'Song of the Shirt,' but the tone of it is more exalted, and pathos and anguish of soul are embodied in a burst of lyric poetry of the most delicate and passionate beauty, and do honour to the authoress both as woman and poetess; 'Cowper's Grave' is also full of deep and tender pathos. Among her more serious lyric pieces 'The Dead Pan' stands also prominently forward, and of the tales and romances the 'Rhyme of the Duchess May,' 'Bertha in the Lane,' 'Lady Geraldine's Courtship,' deserve the favour they have obtained in the eyes of her admirers; among her lesser flights of lyricism, the poems 'To Flush my Dog,' and 'My Doves,' are delicately and tenderly touched, illustrative of the character of the writer, and interesting as exhibiting her to us in her lighter poetic moods.

Indeed, as every poem Mrs. Browning has left behind her is instinct with her own life, so in the three tales just mentioned, she has thrown the greater part of the passionate devotedness and tenderness of her nature. The 'Rhyme of the Duchess May' is a noble tale of womanly devotion, injured by some affectation, and by the occurrence of the very unnecessary and absurd 'Toll slowly' in every stanza. The ballad

is full of quivering life and emotion from beginning to end; and the last lines, descriptive of the victorious struggle of the wife, resolved to die with her husband in his death-leap from the beleaguered castle, have a noble and palpitating energy of description in them: —

- ‘Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, but they closed and clung again;
While she clung as one withstood clasps a Christ upon the rood
In a spasm of deathly pain.
- ‘She clung wild and she clung mute, with her shuddering lips half shut;
Her head fallen as though in swoond, hair and knee swept on the ground,
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.
- ‘Back he reined his steed, back-thrown on the slippery coping-stone:
Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind,
Whence a hundred feet went down.
- ‘And his heel did press and goad in the quivering flank bestrode;
“Friends and brothers, save my wife. Pardon sweet in change for life;
But I ride alone to God.”
- ‘Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like a flame,
She upsprung, she rose upright, in his selle she sate in sight,
By her love she overcame.
- ‘And her head was on his breast, where she smiled as one at rest.
“Ring,” she cried, “O vesper bell, in the beech wood’s old chapelle,
“But the passing bell rings best.”
- ‘They have caught out at the rein which Sir Guy threw loose, in vain;
For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoof pois’d in air,
On the last verge rears amain.
- ‘Now he hangs! he rocks between, and his nostrils curdle in!
Now he shivers head and hoof, and the flakes of foam fall off,
And the face grows fierce and thin.
- ‘And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go;
And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony
Of the headlong death below.
- ‘And “Ring, ring, thou passing bell,” still she cried, “i’ the old chapelle.”
Then back-toppling, crushing back, a dead weight flung out to wrack,
Horse and rider over fell.’

(Vol. ii. p. 73.)

‘Bertha in the Lane’ is, however, the sweetest and most affecting of all the poems which Mrs. Browning has left, precisely because it is the most simple and most true in its quiet and resigned tone of pathos, to the tale of self-abnegation which it portrays, and thus stands in direct contrast to the passionate flow and energy of ‘Lady Geraldine’s Courtship,’ which, though a fervid and rapid narrative, with many touches of delicacy and power, fails to hold the place in the reader’s mind which it occupies on the first perusal. The two actors of the tale are so completely children of Mrs. Browning’s own spirit, and the moral so entirely of Mrs. Browning’s own devising, that it soon ceases to appear natural, without which there can be no enduring charm.

The little lyric, called ‘My Doves,’ is invested with a more delicate and permanent attractiveness, because the writer treats the subject in a simple, tender, and graceful manner, and in her moralising does not ascend unto such lofty regions but that the reader can feel at his ease: —

- ‘My little doves have left a nest
Upon an Indian tree,
Whose leaves fantastic take their rest
Or motion from the sea:
For ever there the sea winds go,
With sunlit paces to and fro.
- ‘The tropic flowers look’d up to it,
The tropic stars look’d down,
And there my little doves would sit
With feathers softly brown,
And glittering eyes that showed their right
To general Nature’s deep delight.
- ‘And God them taught at every close
Of murmuring waves beyond,
And green leaves round to interpose
Their choral voices fond,
Interpreting how love must be
The meaning of the earth and sea.
- ‘And now within the city prison,
In mist and chillness pent,
With sudden upward look they listen
For sounds of past content;
For lapse of water, swell of breeze,
Or nut fruit falling from the trees.
- ‘The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,

The gold and silver as they clash on
 Man's cold metallic heart—
 The roar of wheels, the cry for bread,—
 These only sounds are heard instead.

' Yet still as on my human hand
 Their fearless heads they lean,
 And almost seem to understand
 What human musings mean
 (Their eyes, with such a plaintive shine,
 Are fastened upwardly on mine),

' Soft falls their chant as on the nest
 Beneath the sunny zone,
 For love that stirred it in their breast
 Has not aweary grown;
 And 'neath the city's shade can keep
 The well of music clear and deep.

' And love that keeps the music fills
 With pastoral memories
 All echoings from out the hills,
 All droppings from the skies.
 All flowings from the wave and wind
 Remembered in their chant I find.

' So teach ye me the wisest part,
 My little doves! to move
 Along the city ways with heart
 Assured by holy love;
 And vocal with such songs as own
 A fountain to the world unknown.'

(Vol. ii. p. 240.)

The impression left on the mind of the reader, after the perusal of such a poem as 'My Doves,' is far more grateful than that which we retain from the remembrance of her most ambitious flight, from the book of fiction which she considered as 'the most mature of my works, and the one into which my highest convictions upon life and art have entered.'

Upon the first appearance of 'Aurora Leigh,' the daring novelty and vehemence of particular passages veiled its many deformities and faults of construction, the prosaic baldness of much of the narrative, its distorted ingenuity, the harsh discordances, transitions, elaborate conceits and grotesqueness of much of the dialogue, the utter impossibility of the story, and the unreality of all its actors. But a return to its pages dispels the reader's illusions, and he is compelled to regard it as a splendid failure in an impossible attempt. The whole of the interest of the story consists in the intellectual and

moral development of two personages, both of whom are projections of Mrs. Browning's own nature; and their views about art and about life are such as Mrs. Browning herself may be supposed to have held at different points of her career. The history of these two chief persons is embarrassed with many indelicate and inconceivable incidents, and interwoven with the actions of other men and women of less interest and less truth of character than those for whose sake they are introduced. The romance, so far as it is a novel, is utterly bad, and only redeemed from ridicule by the occasional bursts of impassioned diction which it contains. We do not dispute that 'Aurora Leigh' contains evidence of originality and power, but even those gifts do not produce a poem in the absence of that judgment and taste which Mrs. Browning certainly did not acquire from her classical studies. It is remarkable that a mind trained, as her's had been, in the love of Greek literature, should have been utterly devoid of the chaste, correct, and finished beauty of Greek art.

Mrs. Browning, after her first departure with her husband, visited England but at rare intervals, and then much of her time was passed under the roof of Mr. John Kenyon, the author of the 'Rhymed Plea for Tolerance;' a gentleman well known in the literary world, a poet himself as well as a relation of the authoress. His cordial generous nature sympathised warmly with the genius of the poetess; though nothing could be more widely removed from the fantastic idealism of Mrs. Browning than the Epicurean wit and good nature of the worthy John Kenyon. It was at his house that the last pages of 'Aurora Leigh' were written, and to him the work was dedicated. The graceful lyric, 'The Dead Pan,' was inscribed to the same gentleman, who died in 1858, leaving his distinguished relative a considerable addition to her fortune.

During the course of her long residence in Florence and Rome, Mrs. Browning took the most impassioned interest in Italian politics; and so identified herself with the state of feeling of that country, that she viewed even the politics of her own country from an Italian point of view. Her poem of 'Casa Guidi Windows,' written in a sort of *terza rima*, and published in 1851, is an evidence of the vivid sympathy with which she had watched the events of 1849. The poem is too special, too full of local allusions, and the spirit of the whole too attenuated to please an ordinary reader; but as a political poem by a woman it must be regarded as an unrivalled production. The entry of the Austrians into Florence is one of the best of the descriptive passages it contains:—

'Then gazing, I beheld the long-drawn street
Live out from end to end, full in the sun
With Austria's thousands — sword and bayonet,
Horse, foot, artillery,—cannons rolling on,
Like blind slow storm-clouds gestic with the heat
Of undeveloped lightnings, each bestrode
By a single man dust-white from head to heel,
Indifferent as the dreadful thing he rode,
Like a sculptured Fate serene and terrible.
As some smooth river which has overflowed,
Will slow and silent down its current wheel
A loosened forest all the pines erect,
So swept in mute significance of storm
The marshalled thousands.'

In 1861 she astonished even her admirers by the exaggerated tone of her 'Poems before Congress,' in which she lavished the whole vocabulary of her passionate genius in eulogising the author of the Peace of Villafranca, in uttering the bitterest sarcasms against her own country, and hurling a most vehement malediction on America for its maintenance of slavery. This latter poem was written so obscurely that the 'Curse for a Nation' was at first supposed to be launched at her own country, but an attentive perusal will enable the reader to perceive that America was really intended. This last small volume was in entire opposition to the prevailing current of English opinion, and met with a less favourable reception than any of her previous publications, though traces of her uncommon originality and powers are discernible in almost every page. To deify the name of Napoleon Mrs. Browning had not waited for the Italian campaign. In one of her previous poems she exclaims

'Napoleon! the renowned name
Shakes the old casements of the world;'

and it is lamentable to think that, with her lofty aspirations, and the cry of freedom on her lips, she should have been ever ready to pay her homage at the shrine of Imperial despotism.

To have offered any estimate of Mrs. Browning, without at the same time pointing out the reason and nature of her failure to achieve that excellence which might have been anticipated from such exalted powers, would be to have failed in the most responsible duties of criticism. Nevertheless, regarding her as a woman of singular genius and accomplishments, who devoted herself heart and soul to one of the loftiest of human pursuits, with an energy as great under the overwhelming pressure of sickness and calamity as in the first ardour of her youthful

intelligence, undauntedly pursuing the cultivation of that ideal which was the joint creation of a highly imaginative temperament and great attainments — one has to look wide over the literary history of every country to find her equal. Considering the great capabilities she possessed, her career may be accepted as some proof of the impossibility that women can ever attain to the first rank in imaginative composition. Such a combination of the finest genius and the choicest results of cultivation and wide-ranging studies has never been seen before in any woman, nor is the world likely soon to see the same again. Mrs. Browning swept over not only the whole range of modern literature, but was also deeply read in Plato and the Neo-Platonists, in Gregory Nazianzen and Synesius, and the whole list of the Christian Fathers. Judging from the character of her writings, her reading seems to have been too exclusively imaginative to the destruction of the reasoning faculties, and thus her mind lacked both health and tone. A poet, perhaps, most of all needs the discipline of fact and reason to drill his intellectual energies and sensibilities into something like hardness and consistency. Men, whether they will it or no, get their minds disciplined in the world; but women, who require it most of all, if they would become great writers, are entirely cut off from this kind of experience, and a really imaginative temperament is not likely to acquire discipline from books. In Mrs. Browning's case the constant confinement to a sick chamber prevented her from attaining to any real knowledge of the world at all. She lived on the outside of it like a spirit; now talking a mystic language, now singing mystic songs, full of mystic hopes and exaltations, and now bewailing in unutterable sorrow over the darkness and desolation of human life, setting its worst calamities and misfortunes to the most inconsolable and mournful strains of music. She had little taste for all the moderate emotions and moderate states of existence, on which so much of the happiness of humanity is founded, and out of which the most pleasing forms of poetry will ever be drawn. Nevertheless it will ever be remembered to her honour how deep was her sympathy for all that was poor, oppressed, and suffering. The 'pale sunken faces' of the factory children disturbed the dreams of her sick couch; the shriek of the slave came to her from over the Atlantic; the despairing eyes of the English poor and homeless were seen by her in the sunny regions of the South; and the whole strength of her soul was attracted by the cause of enslaved nationalities. Such faults as she had were those of her time, exalted and intensified by her exceptional nature and circumstances. Among those who

came immediately in the wake of Byron, whose potent spirit had so long held the world in awe, the task of men who aspired to influence the world by song was indeed a difficult one. Two methods appear to have occurred to all who immediately succeeded, in order to gain some portion of the mantle of power he left behind him,—the one, greater simplicity, and the other, greater elaborateness of style. Mrs. Browning, although on rare occasions she showed her capability for the simple style, cultivated the elaborate to an amazing degree; her inanimate objects are human beings, and her abstractions do everything but eat and drink. In an age of materialism and spirit-hallucinations, she strove vehemently to become one with the spirit-world and to provide for the super-sensual, seraph visions, strains of angelic harmonies, and soul banquets of ætherial luxuries; but it may be doubted whether these will have any greater influence on humanity than the table-turnings and spirit-rappings of the day, or than the meaningless apparitions with which a wandering charlatan can create a short-lived wonder. Not that in any way we would assimilate the ambition of Mrs. Browning's poetry to these vulgar delusions; but they are different manifestations of the same craving of the soul for more than it finds in the daily life before it.

Human life appeared to Mrs. Browning distorted by the atmosphere of a monstrous and feverish dream; consequently, though there are features of resemblance, the actual world, as portrayed in her pages, is as unreal as it is possible to be. She has produced splendid effects of light and shade, most tender concords of melancholy sounds, and bursts of high-souled resonant symphonies, but little that will remain permanently true, without which there can be no permanent life in poetry. It were well for all who aspire to write poetry to be aware that such painful tension of the highest chords of human nature is not likely to produce poetry of enduring value. The sweeter, and truer, and eternally grateful notes are struck with less show of art and less self-conscious ambition. The 'Auld Robin Gray' of Lady Anne Lindsay will last as long as there is a book printed in the English language; the emotions it excites must ever be simple and pure as long as human nature remains as it is, and this because the spirit and form of the ballad itself are simple and pure, and the truth of it universal. The triumphs Mrs. Browning achieved were not wrought in this manner; nevertheless it will be long ere her name will fade from English literature,—ere her memory cease to be regarded with the respect and admiration due to her impassioned genius and high enthusiasm,—and long ere the lovers of literature cease to regret that a premature decay shortened the course of an illustrious career.

ART. X.—*Sunday: its Origin, History, and present Obligation; considered in Eight Lectures, preached before the University of Oxford in the year 1860, on the Foundation of the Rev. John Bampton, M.A., Canon of Salisbury.* By JAMES AUGUSTUS HESSEY, D.C.L., Head Master of Merchant Taylors School, Preacher to the Hon. Society of Gray's Inn, &c. London: 1860.

THERE is something of a happy accident about this book. For it can seldom occur that a Bampton Lecturer, when appointed, should have by him (as Dr. Hessey tells us was his own case) materials ready collected upon a subject at once definite and extensive; and one moreover which, while possessing wide and popular interest, has not recently attracted the attention it deserves. Many an one, over whose shoulders the same mantle has been thrown, even when the choice is essentially a good one, must have found the call singularly embarrassing. We confess that in Dr. Hessey we do not recognise a man endowed very largely with the higher prophetic gifts; but we find a writer who has much to say on an important subject, and who has said it well. We have read his Lectures with great satisfaction and approval, and under their guidance have made much fuller acquaintance than we could claim before with many of his authorities, returning from such investigations with a deeper impression of his candour and diligence, though with a diminished estimate perhaps of the originality of his researches. The subject was so thoroughly investigated in some of its parts by learned writers, and especially English writers, of the seventeenth century, Selden, Heylin, Bramhall, Jeremy Taylor and others, that on these points little, perhaps, could be done, and little has been done by Dr. Hessey, but to select and arrange materials already accumulated, and to confirm or modify the judgment which his predecessors have pronounced. On all points which he touches he gives us the conclusions of a sensible, well-disciplined, and well-stored mind, though he has not in some particulars thrown all the light upon the matter which might be drawn from newly opened sources, nor employed all the approved methods of criticism which modern thought has developed.

Dr. Hessey's views are such as in Scotland would be condemned as singularly lax, and would hardly have obtained a hearing before a Presbyterian audience. Even in England it requires some courage in a clergyman to maintain them; and