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THE

NORTH BRITISH REVIEW.

NOVEMBER, 1856, AND FEBRUARY, 1857.

VOLUME XXVI.

AMERICAN EDITION, VOL. XXI.

NEW YORK:

PUBLISHED BY LEONARD SCOTT & CO.,

79 FULTON STREET, CORNER OF GOLD STREET.

1857.

Mr. Schott of the United States Coast Survey has contributed a map of the isothermal lines for each month of the year from Dr. Kane's observations, and those made at other places, based on Dove's isothermal charts. He ought to have given what would have been more instructive, the annual curves.

Although Rensselaer Harbor, where the observations were made, is nearly four degrees farther north than Melville Island, yet its distance from the cold meridian ought to have given it a greater mean temperature. The concavity of the isothermal curves of more southern localities in the same meridian justify us in expecting such a result, and we have no doubt that some sufficient cause, arising either from the spirit-of-wine thermometers, or the method of observing them, may yet be found to account for the high temperature of Rensselaer Harbour. This suspicion is confirmed by the anomalous low temperature of the month of March 1854, namely—38°, which in the preceding table is reduced to—38°.03, in consequence of using for the mean temperature—38°.97 of the same month for 1855. In almost every latitude, and in that of Prince Patrick and Melville Islands, March is the first month of spring, and warmer than February, whereas in Dr. Kane's table it is the last and the coldest month of winter, a fact which we can hardly admit, in opposition to the general character of the isothermal curves.

The magnetical observations were made with an unifilar magnetometer belonging to the United States Survey, and a dip circle received from Professor Henry through the kindness of General Sabine. The following observations were made on the variation and dip of the needle :—

Variation.

June 16th, 1854, 108° 21.5′ west.

Dip.

Mean dip at	New York,	72°	57′
"	Fiskernaes,	80	41
"	Sukkertoppen,	80	50
"	Force Bay,	85	8
"	Marshall Bay,	85	26
"	Winter Harbour,	84	48

The most important and interesting result of the expedition is the discovery of an open sea at the northern extremity of Smith's Sound, a phenomenon which had long before been rendered probable by the form of the isothermal lines, and by the law of temperature in the meridian which passes through the west of Europe. In Mr. Morton's northern journey, after he had been travelling over a solid area, choked with bergs and frozen fields, he was startled by the growing weakness of the ice. It became so rotten at its surface, and the snow so wet and pulpy, that his dogs, seized with terror, refused to advance. Upon landing on a new coast, and continuing his journey, he found himself on the shores of a channel so open that a fleet of frigates might have navigated it. As he travelled southward it expanded into an "iceless area," the extent of which he estimated at upwards of 4000 square miles. Animal life burst upon them as they went. Flocks of the Brent goose, the eider, the king-duck, and the swallow, indicated a new climate, and as he advanced the Arctic petrel made its appearance. At Cape Constitution, the termination of his journey, he could not see "a speck of ice," and from an altitude of 480 feet, which commanded a horizon of nearly 40 miles, his ears were gladdened with the novel music of resounding waves, and of a surf dashing over the rocks at his feet and staying his further progress. "This mysterious fluidity," as Dr. Kane observes, "in the midst (or rather at the end) of vast plains of solid ice, was well calculated to arouse emotions of the highest order, and there was not a man among us who did not long for the means of embarking upon its bright and lonely waters."

The discovery of the traces of Sir John Franklin and his party by Dr. Rae have led to a general belief that the whole of them have perished. Such a conclusion is certainly not justified by the facts in our possession, and we are disposed to adopt the more sanguine views of Dr. Kane. "Of the one hundred and thirty-six picked men," he remarks, "of Sir John Franklin in 1846, northern Orkneymen, Greenland whalers, so many young and hardy constitutions, with so much intelligent experience to guide them, I cannot realize that some may not yet be alive, that some small squad or squads, aided or not aided by the Esquimaux of the expedition, may not have found a hunting-ground, and laid up from summer to summer enough of fuel and food and seal-skins to brave *three* or *even four more* winters in succession. . . . My mind never realizes the complete catastrophe—the destruction of all Franklin's crew. I picture them to myself broken into detachments, and my mind fixes itself on one little group of some thirty who have found the open spot of some tidal eddy, and, under the teaching of an Esquimaux, or perhaps one of their own Greenland whalers, have set bravely to work, and trapped the fox, speared the bear, and killed the seal, and walrus, and whale."

But even if these views are extravagant, it is the duty of a great commercial nation like ours to cling to the slightest hope of rescue, and to ascertain the mysterious fate of men who have nobly perished in the service of their country. Science adds her voice to that of humanity, and calls upon the maritime powers of Europe, and France in particular, to imitate the noble example of the United States—if not to search for the lost, at least to explore those remarkable regions which have hitherto defied the approach of man. The science of England will never rest till she places her foot on each Pole of the globe, and has established the laws of those physical agencies which have a peculiar development in the Arctic and Antarctic zones.

The Hudson's Bay Company, already distinguished above all other commercial institutions by their exertions in the interests of science and humanity, have equipped an expedition, to start from the Great Slave Lake, in order to visit the locality where Dr. Rae found the relics of Sir John Franklin's party; and we trust that the earnest application of the distinguished members of the Geographical and Royal Societies will induce our own Government to embark in the same noble cause.

Art. V.—1. *Poems.* By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Fourth Edition. 3 vols. 8vo. 1856.

2. *Aurora Leigh.* By Elizabeth Barrett Browning. 8vo. 1856.

The poetical reputation of Mrs. Browning, late Miss Barrett, has been growing slowly, until it has reached a height which has never before been attained by any modern poetess, though several others have had wider circles of readers. An intellect of a very unusual order has been ripened by an education scarcely less unusual for a woman; and Mrs. Browning now honourably enjoys the title of poetess in her own right, and not merely by courtesy.

The poems before us are divisible into three tolerably distinct classes; first, the imaginative compositions, which form the bulk of *Miss Barrett's* poems, and several of which *Mrs. Browning* tells us she "would willingly have withdrawn, if it were not almost impossible to extricate what has once been caught and involved in the machinery of the press." Secondly, the poems which have immediately arisen from personal feeling and personal observation. Of these the chief are the so-called "Sonnets from the Portuguese," and "Casa Guidi Windows." Thirdly, the novel-in-verse, or present-day epic, called "Aurora Leigh." Besides the poems belonging to these three classes, there are several "occasional pieces" of more or less significance.

Pieces which the authoress confesses that she "would willingly have withdrawn," are, by that confession, almost withdrawn from criticism. We imagine that the two dramas, "a Drama of Exile," and "the Seraphim," are among the number of those which Mrs. Browning, in her last edition, introduces with "a request to the generous reader that he may use their weakness, which no subsequent revision has succeeded in strengthening, less as a reproach to the writer, than as a means of marking some progress in her other attempts." We will only say concerning these and some other useful essays, that we think the authoress mistaken in supposing that the "machinery of the press" will give them the deprecated perpetuity, unless she herself continues to reprint them; and that their value "as a means of marking some progress in her other attempts," is of a kind which her personal friends will appreciate much better than the world, for whom, we presume, she writes and publishes.

Dismissing the whole of the first volume of the "Poems" as containing very little that is worthy of the authoress's matured powers—although much that would be remarkable in any other recent poetess—we come, in the early part of the second volume, to one of Mrs. Browning's most beautiful pieces, "Bertha in the Lane." It contains a most skilful and touching delineation of disappointed affection, and the workings of that feeling. This poem is not only "simple, sensuous, and passionate," as Milton said that poetry should be; but it is also very artistical in its form and contrasted details, and in the construction of the measure, which beautifully answers to the feeling. Mrs. Browning will probably be popularly remembered as much by this little poem, as by any she has written; and, excellent as it is in its present state, its value might be, at least, doubled by condensation, and a more thoroughly polished diction. No poet of Mrs. Browning's rank should condescend to the use of capital letters to give emphasis to her words, or to change an adjective into a substantive, or to the introduction of such expressions as "fever-bale," when a little trouble would have supplied others, suited to the simplicity of grief, and the laws of the English language; nor can we understand how a writer, capable of such a strain of strong and simple feeling, could mar it at the end by such an odd jumble of Christian

doctrine and classical allusion as the following:—

"Jesus, Victim, comprehending
Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angel's hands of fire!
I aspire while I expire."

The piece that follows "Bertha in the Lane" is one which is a favourite, we believe, with many of Mrs. Browning's admirers. We cannot say that it is so with us; for, although it contains many noble and subtle lines, and a current of true passion runs through the whole, it appears to us to be fundamentally damaged by the social fallacy—a very common one with novelists and poets of inferior standing to that of Mrs. Browning—upon which it is built. "Lady Geraldine's Courtship; a Romance of the Age," is the story of a peasant-poet's love, told by himself. He tells us that, although he was "Quite low-born, self-educated," yet, "because he was a poet, and because the public praised him," "he could sit at rich men's tables." At these he had an opportunity of seeing, and of falling in love with, "an Earl's daughter,"—which was not wonderful, or out of course; but that she should have fallen in love with and married him is, and, we will venture to add, ought to be so. The more one knows of men and women, the less one thinks of the wisdom and possibility of happiness in a *mésalliance* of this kind; and the case is not made a whit the better by the hero's being a poet. A woman, moreover, is not essentially the better for being an Earl's daughter; grace and goodness, as substantial, might have been found for Bertram in a sphere not wholly and hopelessly removed from his own. That which really does distinguish a Lady Geraldine from any other graceful and equally well-disposed lady in a lower sphere, is precisely what Bertram could not possibly have enjoyed, and what he would have deprived her of, namely, the *station in society*. It seems to us, that Mrs. Browning has not consulted the poet's true dignity, in making so poor and worldly an exaltation a part of the honour of which he is capable and desirous. Or, if that was not her intention, if she meant, rather, to display the nobility of the Lady, in leaving the condition in which she had passed her life, for the sake of passing it henceforward in the unsophisticated company of an uneducated poet, and his friends and relations, she ought, in order to have brought out her meaning artistically, to have shown that the Lady was not only fully aware of the sacrifice she was making, but that she was also capable of enduring it to the end, with all its trying circumstances of social contempt and dissonance of habits. But Mrs. Browning has not done either of these things; so that our feeling, on coming to the "happy conclusion" of the poem, is one of unmixed commiseration for the hero and heroine, who are putting their heads into so desperate a noose, without having the slightest notion of what they are about. This poem, however, is more than usually rich in graceful and powerful descriptions.

In this, as in all Mrs. Browning's pieces of any length, there are parts obviously not so good as Mrs. Browning might have made them had she chosen. The best that an author has written is a fair standard to try all the rest by; and it is clear that one who is capable of such subtle and finished lines as,—

"And the shadow of a monarch's crown is softened in her hair;"

and several others in the same poem, should have known better than to degrade them by the proximity of such baldness as,—

"She treads the crimson carpet, and she breathes the perfumed air;"

and much more in the same poem.

This is not a time in which a poet can afford to do anything but the best. There are several carelessly written poems in these volumes which would bear a high polish—to say which is to commend their substance as gem-like. Great polish is an indication of the highest poetry, because none but the highest poetry will take it. With a few very great poets—in English only Shakspere—poetry seems always to have flowed forth from the writer's heart in a condition of absolute finish. All who are really poets have probably known this wonderful mood now and then—it has produced a few rapidly written yet perfect passages or small poems; but a poet who works with a right understanding of what he is about, will aim at leaving nothing which a *reader* can point out as being less happily conceived and executed than those inspired morsels.

Mrs. Browning shines nowhere to greater advantage than in the sonnet. Her lyrical verse is seldom good. In proportion as poetry aims at lyrical character, it becomes necessary that it should possess that absolute perfection of verbal expression, which is given by vivid lyrical feeling—that rarest of all poetical qualities. To write a good

sonnet demands power of a high order. It requires that some grave and novel thought should be expressed in high and pure language, and in an extremely elaborate form, the limits of which are fixed. Mrs. Browning brings to her task the industry, the thoughtfulness, and the power of language which are requisite; and accordingly she has written several sonnets which will bear comparison with the best in the language. It must be confessed, however, that Mrs. Browning gives us specimens of sonnets presenting very marked defects. It is quite wonderful into what mistakes this lady sometimes falls, particularly when she is under the impression that she is doing something remarkably good. Perhaps the most absurd line that was ever written by so good a poet is the following, concluding the sonnet to "Hiram Powers' Greek Slave," and adjuring her to

"Strike and shame the strong,
By thunders of white silence overthrown."

Mrs. Brownings worst fault is her almost constant endeavour to be "striking." This tendency has deformed her volumes with scores of passages scarcely less offensive to true taste than the above. Such passages are not only bad in themselves, but, being as it were, the hypocrisy of art, they cast suspicion and discredit upon their context wherever they occur. They are proof positive of absence of true feeling—of the tone of mind that "voluntary moves harmonious numbers"—at the time of writing; and the only poem of Mrs. Browning's from which they are almost entirely absent, is the series of "Sonnets from the Portuguese," for the originals of which we fancy that we must seek in vain, unless we detect them in the personal feelings of the writer. In this series of sonnets we have unquestionably one of Mrs. Browning's most beautiful and worthy productions. In style they are openly—indeed by the title avowedly—an imitation of the fourteenth and fifteenth century love-poetry; but to imitate this is so nearly equivalent to imitating nature of the simplest and loftiest kind, that it is scarcely to be spoken of as a defect of originality. The forty-four sonnets constitute consecutive stanzas of what is properly speaking one poem. They are lofty, simple, and passionate—not at all the less passionate for being highly intellectual and even metaphysical. Nothing is more untrue than the common notion that deep and subtle thought is foreign to passion. On the contrary, under the influence of passion, an obtuse mind will often become witty, and a naturally subtle intellect will be made still more piercing and abundant in, what to inferior minds may seem, excessive refinements of thought and imagery. The following sonnet deserves to rank with the very best of Milton and Wordsworth.

"I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old and young:
And, as I mused it, in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair,
And a voice said in mastery while I strove,
'Guess now who holds thee?' 'Death!' I said. But there,
The silver answer rang—'Not Death, but Love.'"

"Casa Guidi Windows" is one of the very few things that have been lately written about the political condition of Italy in a tone with which, upon the whole, a sensible man may sympathize. Mrs. Browning says in her preface to this poem, that it "contains the impressions of the writer upon events in Tuscany, of which she was a witness. 'From a window,' the critic may demur. She bows to the objection in the very title of her work. No continuous narrative nor exposition of political philosophy is attempted by her. It is a simple story of personal impressions, whose only value is the intensity with which they were received, as proving her warm affection for a beautiful and unfortunate country, and the sincerity with which they are related, as indicating her own good faith and freedom from partizanship."

"Casa Guidi Windows" is, to our thinking, the happiest of its author's performances, if not the highest. The difficulty of the metre, in which every rhyme occurs thrice, here as in the sonnet, seems to act as a restraint upon the authoress's imagination, preventing it from indulging in that kind of flight of which boldness may be said to be the only recommendation. So difficult a metre is furthermore in itself a kind of compulsory finish which is a great advantage to the verses of a writer evidently not much given to the drudgery of polish, where it may be shirked. It has been said of the poet, that he

"Freely sings
In strictest bonds of rhyme and rule,
And finds in them, *not bonds, but wings.*"

And this is more than usually true of Mrs. Browning. Her genius nowhere rises in so spirited a style, or maintains so steady an altitude, as in those poems in which she submits herself to the heaviest fetters of external form; whereas in blank verse, and in other measures, *not sufficiently weighted with rule*, her imagination "pitches" like a kite without a tail.

Of the two parts of "Casa Guidi Windows," says Mrs. Browning, writing in 1851, "the first was written nearly three years ago," (1848,) "while the second resumes the actual situation." The first is full of hope, pardonably felt and finely expressed, for the immediate future of Italy. In this part there is little or no action. It is all aspiration, mingled, however, with moderation and shrewdness. In her preface she congratulates herself on not having caught the "epidemic enthusiasm for Pio Nono." In Part I. we find the causes which prevented the Pope from fulfilling revolutionary hopes admirably shown, and in Part II. we find no less exactly and candidly stated the causes of the people's failing in the hour of their opportunity. Our limits do not permit of lengthened extracts. We give the return of the Grand Duke Leopold, as one of Mrs. Browning's highest achievements:—

"I saw and witnessed how the Duke came back.
The regular tramp of horse and tread of men
Did smite the silence like an anvil black
And sparkless. With her wide eyes at full strain,
Our Tuscan nurse exclaim'd, 'Alack, alack,
Signora, these shall be the Austrians.' 'Nay,
Be still,' I answered: 'Do not wake the child!'
For so, my two-months' baby sleeping lay
In milky dreams upon the bed, and smiled,
And I thought 'he shall sleep on while he may,
Through the world's baseness. Not being yet defiled
Why should he be disturbed by what is done?'
Then, gazing, I beheld the long drawn street
Live out, from end to end, full in the sun,
With Austrian thousands, sword and bayonet,
Horse, foot, artillery, cannons rolling on,
Like blind slow storm-clouds gestant 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 overflow'd
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, not an eye deflect
To left or right, to catch a novel form
Of Florence city, adorn'd by architect
And carver, or of Beauties, live and warm,
Scared at the casements! all, straight-forward eyes
And faces, held as steadfast as their swords,
And cognizant of acts not imageries.
The key, O Tuscan, too well fits the wards!
Ye ask'd for mimes—these bring you tragedies.
For purple—these shall wear it as your lords."

"Casa Guidi Windows," we repeat, is the happiest of Mrs. Browning's performances, because it makes no pretensions to high artistic character, and is really "a simple story of personal impressions." The first thing that a poet, or indeed any other workman, has to do, is to find out what he is well able to do; and he should always determine to do a little less than he is able, in order that his limitations may not appear. There is no knowing how much a poet may do who has done nothing he has attempted ill; and it is a great point in art, as well as in worldly prosperity, not to let your neighbours know the figure of your fortune. And this as much for their sakes as for yours. All good art is the very best thing in its way that ever was done or ever will be done; and the best, in whatever way, is related to the best in all things, and has its aspect towards the Infinite in all directions. Now, this lovely freedom on the face of art seems to be contradicted by any appearance of strain and insufficiency. A dead wall—though it were the wall of China—is a bad background for any landscape. It is the misfortune of nearly all our living poets that the dead wall of their limitations is the most conspicuous feature in their picture. This is because they take in more ground than their talents give them a title to. In "Casa Guidi Windows," and in the "Sonnets from the Portuguese," Mrs. Browning attempted nothing but what she was perfectly competent to perform, and therefore they were better *poems* than others which may contain a great deal more *poetry*.

"Aurora Leigh" is the latest, and Mrs. Browning tells us, in the dedication, "the most mature" of her works; the one into which her "highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered." It was not well judged to prejudice the reader, at the very outset, with the inevitable doubt, "Is a poem the right place for 'highest convictions upon Life and Art?'" This poem is two thousand lines longer than "Paradise Lost." We do not know how to describe it better than by saying that it is a novel in verse,—a novel of the modern didactic species, written chiefly for the advocacy of distinct "convictions upon Life and Art." If poetry ought to consist only of "thoughts that voluntary move harmonious numbers," a very large portion of this work ought unquestionably to have been in prose. But the question seems open to discussion, and we give Mrs. Browning the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps the chief misfortune for the poem is, that there may always be two opinions on all "convictions upon Life and Art." For example, we ourselves dissent altogether from certain of the views advocated. We think that "conventions," which are society's unwritten laws, are condemned in too sweeping and unexamining a style; that the importance of an ordinary education in the formation of character is too emphatically denied by the example of Marian Erle, whom we regard as an impossible person, under her circumstances; that Art is not the highest power in the world; and so forth. "Aurora Leigh" would assuredly have been a more *poetical* work if it had made the question, "Do you agree with it?" an absurd one, and had only allowed of the question, "Do you or do you not understand it?" The safest way of speaking of this poem, which, expressly or by implication, has so considerable a polemic element in it, is to place a simple analysis of it before our readers. Concerning the great beauty and subtlety of some of the extracts we shall give, there fortunately cannot be two opinions.

The father of Aurora Leigh "was an austere Englishman, who, after a dry lifetime, spent at home in college-learning, law, and parish-talk," went to Italy, and fell suddenly in love with an Italian girl who passed him in a procession.

"Her face flashed like a cymbal on his face,
And shook with silent clangours brain and heart,
Transfiguring him to music."

Mr. Leigh gained the hand of the fair Florentine, and Aurora was born; but before the child was four years old, her mother died, having changed the nature of her husband, and made the "austere Englishman" into a man of sentiment.

"There's a verse he set
In Santa Croce to her memory:
'*Weep for an infant, too young to weep much*
When death removed this mother'—stops the mirth
To-day on women's faces, when they walk
With rosy children hanging on their gowns."

Mr. Leigh left Florence, and lived in almost entire solitude, with his child and one servant, "among the mountains above Pelago," and there he

"Who through love had suddenly
Thrown off the old conventions, broken loose
From chinbands of the soul, like Lazarus,"

taught his child "what he had learned best," grief and love, and, as it afterwards appears, Latin and Greek; also, "the ignorance of men," how

"A Fool will pass for such through one mistake,
While a Philosopher will pass for such
Through said mistakes being ventured in the gross,
And heaped up to a system."

So nine years passed, and Aurora Leigh thus describes herself at thirteen:—

"'I am like,
They tell me, my dear father; broader brows,
Howbeit, upon a slenderer undergrowth
Of delicate features; paler, near as grave—
But then my mother's smile breaks up the whole,
And makes it sometimes better than itself.'"

At this time Mr. Leigh suddenly died. The child was soon torn from her nurse, now her only companion, by "a stranger with authority," from England, who conducted her to the house of her father's sister. This lady is thus described:—

"She stood straight and calm,
Her somewhat narrow forehead braided tight,
As if for taming accidental thoughts
From possible pulses; brown hair, pricked with grey,
By frigid use of life (she was not old,
Although my father's elder by a year);
A nose drawn sharply, yet in delicate lines;
A close, mild mouth, a little soured about
The ends, through speaking unrequited loves,
Or, peradventure, niggardly half-truths;
Eyes of no colour, once they might have smiled,
But never, never have forgot themselves
In smiling; cheeks in which was yet a rose
Of perished summers, like a rose in a book,
Kept more for ruth than pleasure, if past bloom,
Past fading also.

* * * * *

She, my aunt,
Had loved my father truly, as she could,
And hated, with the gall of gentle souls,
My Tuscan mother, who had fooled away
A wise man from wise courses, a good man
From obvious duties, and, depriving her,
His sister, of the household precedence,
Had wronged his tenants, robbed his native land,
And made him mad, alike by life and death,
In love and sorrow. She had pored for years
What sort of woman could be suitable
To her sort of hate, to entertain it with;
And so, her very curiosity
Became hate too, and all the idealism
She ever used in life was used for hate,
Till hate, so nourished, did exceed at last
The love from which it grew, in strength and heat,
And wrinkled her smooth conscience with a sense
Of disputable virtue (say not sin)
When Christian doctrine was enforced at church."

Miss Leigh's notions of female education differed widely from her brother's. She seems to have thought both love and grief were weeds or flowers that need no cultivating, but spring up readily enough in every woman's heart. Here is Aurora's English school programme, which, with many hundreds of lines like them, have certainly no right to be called verse :—

"I learnt the collects and the catechism,
* * * * *
And various popular synopses of
Inhuman doctrines never taught by John,
Because she liked instructed piety.
I learnt my complement of classic French
(Kept pure of Balzac and neologism),
And German also, since she liked a range
Of liberal education,—tongues, not books.
I learnt a little algebra, a little
Of the mathematics; brushed with extreme flounce
The circle of the sciences, because
She misliked women who were frivolous.
I learnt the royal geneaologies
Of Oviedo, the internal laws
Of the Burmese empire, by how many feet
Mount Chimborazo outsoars Himmeleh,
What navigable river joins itself
To Lara, and what census of the year five
Was taken at Klagenfurt."

Aurora had a cousin, Romney Leigh, the owner of the family estate, Leigh Hall. The two children saw much of each other, but were of dispositions and tastes so opposite, that their intercourse consisted chiefly of disputes. As they grew up they diverged further from one another. Romney became a philanthropic socialist, bent on utilitarian plans of action, and pondering on the dregs of humanity; while Aurora grew into a poetess, for ever musing on the ideal and beautiful. She discovered, in an attic, piles of books marked with her father's name, and from this sanctuary would steal spiritual food, unknown to her aunt. She read "books good and bad;" and makes the following admirable remarks upon the perils of such a course of study :—

"You cheer him on
As if the worst could happen were to rest
Too long beside a fountain. Yet behold,
Behold!—the world of books is still the world;
And worldlings in it are less merciful
And more puissant. For the wicked there
Are winged like angels. Every knife that strikes
Is edged from elemental fire to assail
A spiritual life. The beautiful seems right
By force of beauty, and the feeble wrong
Because of weakness. Power is justified
Though armed against St. Michael.
* * * * *
True, many a prophet teaches in the roads;
True, many a seer pulls down the flaming heavens
Upon his own head in strong martyrdom,
In order to light men a moment's space.
But stay!—who judges?—who distinguishes?
Twixt Saul and Nahash justly, at first sight,
And leaves King Saul precisely at the sin,
To serve King David? Who discerns at once
The sound of the trumpets, when the trumpets blow
For Alaric as well as Charlemagne?
Who judges prophets, and can tell true seers
From conjurors?"

The delineation of her mind at this period gives occasion to the following remarkable passage :—

"The cygnet finds the water, but the man
Is born in ignorance of his element,
And feels out blind at first, disorganized
By sin i' the blood,—his spirit-insight dull'd
And crossed by his sensations. Presently
We feel it quicken in the dark sometimes;
Then mark, be reverent, be obedient—
For those dumb motions of imperfect life
Are oracles of vital Deity
Attesting the Hereafter. Let who says
'The soul's a clean white paper,' rather say,
A palimpsest, a prophet's holograph
Defiled, erased and covered by a monk's,—
The Apocalypse, by a Longus! poring on
With obscene text, we may discern perhaps
Some fair, fine trace of what was written once,
Some upstroke of an alpha and omega
Expressing the old scripture."

From reading poetry, she became a writer of it, and gives us scores of pages of "her highest convictions upon art," all more or less acute, and worth considering, but which would be more in place in a review than an epic. The development of her powers as a poetess is elaborately depicted; but as Mrs. Browning is herself almost the only modern example of such development, the story is uninteresting from its very singularity.

Aurora wrote and read on in secret, her aunt only half suspecting this development, of which she would have disapproved with all her might.

"She said sometimes, 'Aurora, have you done
Your task this morning—have you read that book,
And are you ready for the crochet here?'
As if she said, I know there's something wrong;
I know I have not ground you down enough
To flatten and bake you to a wholesome crust
For household uses and proprieties."

The poetess did her work meekly, her "soul singing at a work apart," and all went on without let or hindrance, till one June morning, when Aurora arose upon her twentieth birthday. She got up early, and left the house, "brushing a green track along the grass," and finding that the world would

not, or rather could not, crown her, seeing that she was a poetess only in secret, she took a sudden fancy to crown herself; and after hesitating between bay, myrtle, verbena, and guelder roses, she turned to a wreath of ivy, and twisted it round her head. At this moment she beheld her cousin beside her,

"With a mouth
Twice graver than his eyes."

Romney had found her manuscript poems, with "Greek upon the margin." A conversation ensues on the subjects of art and philanthropy, the cousins espousing different sides. The burden of Aurora's argument was this :—

"You will not compass your poor ends
Of barley feeding and material ease
Without the Poet's individualism
To work your universal. It takes a soul
To move a body,—it takes a high-souled man
To move the masses—even to a cleaner stye:
It takes the ideal, to blow an inch inside
The dust of the actual: and your Fouriers failed,
Because not poets enough to understand
That life develops from within."

And, as she eloquently says, in another place :—

"the thrushes sang
And shook my pulses and the elm's new leaves,—
And then I turned, and held my finger up,
And bade him mark, that howsoe'er the world
Went ill, as he related, certainly
The thrushes still sang in it.—At which word
His brow would soften,—and he bore with me
In melancholy patience, not unkind,
While breaking into voluble ecstacy,
I flattered all the beauteous country round,
As poet's use . . . the skies, the clouds, the fields,
The happy violets, hiding from the roads
The primroses run down to, carrying gold,—
The tangled hedgerows, where the cows push out
Their tolerant horns, and patient churning mouths
'Twixt dripping ash boughs,—hedgerows all alive,
With birds, and gnats, and large white butterflies,
Which look as if the May-flower had caught life
And palpitated forth upon the wind,—
Hills, vales, woods, netted in a silver mist;
Farms, granges doubled up among the hills,
And cattle grazing in the watered vales,
And cottage chimneys smoking from the woods,
And cottage gardens smelling everywhere,
Confused with smell of orchards. 'See,' I said,
'And see, is God not with us on the earth?
And shall we put Him down by aught we do?
Who says there's nothing for the poor and vile,
Save poverty and wickedness? behold!'
And ankle-deep in English grass I leaped,
And clapped my hands, and called all very fair."

The burden of Romney's argument was, that women write at best but such poetry as gains for highest eulogy, comparison to a man's; that poetry, unless of the very best, is frivolous work; that there is earnest work to do, for him to do, and for her to do, if she will become his helper and his wife.

The young poetess, indignant at being sought as a mere helpmate, refuses the offer. Her aunt, on hearing of Romney's offer and rejection, expresses great grief, and tells Aurora that she will inherit no money, all her father's and all her aunt's being settled on Romney, by a clause in a former deed, excluding offspring by a foreign wife. She told her further, that Romney's father had wished that the cousins should marry, in order to repair this injustice, and that her own father had known and approved the wish, all of which strengthened Aurora in her determination to adhere to her refusal.

Soon after this, the aunt was found dead by her bedside, with an unopened letter in her hand. On the reading of the will, it was found that she had left Aurora three hundred pounds, "and all other monies of which she died possessed." Romney, who, as heir, attended the funeral, told Aurora that the old lady died possessed of £30,000, of which no mention was made in the will; but Aurora, suspecting that her cousin was by some means bestowing upon her this money, insisted on seeing deeds to prove her aunt's possession of it. A little inquiry showed that Romney had presented this sum to his aunt, and that the unopened letter found in her hand, contained the deed of gift, which, though made, had never been accepted. Aurora tore the deed in shreds and went to lodgings in London.

Seven years later, we find her an established authoress, with piles of literary letters; solitary and poor, hard-worked, but uncomplaining. One day a stranger enters, and announces herself as Lady Waldemar. With little prelude, she declared herself to be a widow, and in love with Romney Leigh. She told Aurora that her cousin was on the point of espousing a beggar's daughter from St. Giles's, and asked her help in breaking off, or at any rate, postponing the marriage. Aurora ascertained that Lady Waldemar was commissioned by Romney to tell her the news, and introduce her to his bride-elect, and to get her countenance to the marriage, which marriage Lady Waldemar to him appeared to approve and promote. She would have nothing to say to this double dealing on the part of Lady Waldemar, to whom she plainly says as much, in not very courteous terms. Aurora then hastened to St. Margaret's Court, to see the woman whom her cousin was to marry. "An ineffable face" met her on the threshold of a wretched room, and being

soon assured by Aurora's friendly manner, its owner, Marian Erle, told her story.

She was the daughter of a drunken poaching tramper, who beat her mother, her mother turning in anger to beat her:—

"Her first cry in our strange and strangling air,
When cast in spasms out from the shuddering womb,
Was wrong against the social code, forced wrong.
What business had the baby to cry there?"

She grew up neglected and ill-used, till some ladies got her to a Sunday-school. There she learned to read and write, also to understand the wickedness of her parents, but little else. She found, however, a more profitable school in "Heaven's high blue," which she would steal away to gaze at; and in sundry fragments of the English poets which chanced to come into her hands: thus, we are to suppose, she learned the high code of morality and virtue which she afterwards adhered to, for no one taught or spoke to her but her brutish parents, and the unprofitable Sunday teacher. When she reached early womanhood, her mother attempted to betray her to a drunken squire, from whom she fled in terror. Swooning, she was picked up and taken to an hospital. She had a long illness, and it was on her recovery that she first saw Romney Leigh, who was visiting the sick people, and on hearing that she was about to leave, inquired what her future plans were, and by degrees learned her history. "He sent her to a famous sempstress house far off in London," and there she worked well till one of her companions fell sick. Marian then left the house to nurse her, and after the death of the girl, stayed to watch and nurse the crazy mother, who was now alone. Romney found her at this work. "He was not angry that she had left the house wherein he placed her." "He did not say 'twas well, yet Marian thought he did not take it ill," —and on the day her last patient died, Romney asked her to be his helpmate and wife.

Aurora was charmed by the girl's manner, and embraced her as her future cousin. Romney came in while they were still talking, and Aurora expressed a wish that the wedding should be from her home, but her cousin refused:—

"I take my wife
Directly from the people, and she comes,
As Austria's daughter to imperial France,
Betwixt her eagles, blinking not her race,
From Margaret's Court, at garret height, to meet
And wed me at St. James's, nor put off
Her gown of serge for that. The things we do,
We do: we'll wear no mask, as if we blushed."

The marriage-day arrived, and

"Half St. Giles in frieze
Was bidden to meet St. James in cloth of gold;
And, after contract at the altar, pass
To eat a marriage-feast on Hampstead Heath."

The congregation assembled early, and chatted long, expecting the bride, but she came not; and at the last moment, a letter is delivered to Romney in Marian's hand. In this letter, Marian states her conviction that she best shows her love to Romney by saving him the unhappiness that must follow a union with her:

"It would be dreadful for a friend of yours
To see all England thrust you out of doors,
And mock you from the windows."

She hints at there being some one else whom Romney loves:

"You might say,
Or think, (that worse,) 'There's some one in the house,
I miss and love still!' Dreadful!"

She then goes on to say she shall go where no one can find her:—

"I never could be happy as your wife,—
I never could be harmless as your friend:
I never will look more into your face
Till God says 'Look.'—I charge you seek me not,
Nor vex yourself with lamentable thoughts
That, peradventure, I am come to grief:
Be sure I'm well, I'm merry, I'm at ease!
But such a long way, long way, long way off,
I think you'll find me sooner in my grave."

Inexplicable as the mystery was to Romney, it was still more so to the congregated hundreds of St. Giles's who did not read the letter, and were too much exasperated at their missed triumph to listen to Romney, who wished to address them. "Pull him down, strike him, kill him!" was called out from the crowd, some of whom suggested foul play on the part of the bridegroom; and it was not till the police were called in, that the church could be cleared and order restored.

Romney made long search for Marian, but could find no trace of her. He then left London, and Aurora again lost sight of him. On his return to the country, Romney became more than ever engrossed in his schemes of philanthropy. He turned his family seat into a Phalanstery, and devoted himself to the reformation of the thieves and poachers, who took up their abode there.

Aurora now wrote a great poem, in

which, after long feeling dissatisfied with her productions, she at last had a consciousness of having in some degree conveyed in words, the things she had thought and felt. She went soon after to a party, and refused an offer from a man of birth and fortune, and heard that Romney was engaged to Lady Waldemar. Almost immediately after this, she left her new poem with a publisher, and set out for Florence.

On her way, Aurora was detained a few days in Paris; and walking one day in the flower market, she met Marian Erle. Marian has a child, and would gladly avoid Aurora, but Aurora persists in going to her home, and succeeds at last in learning the mystery of Marian's flight and present condition.

Lady Waldemar had been often to her, and had contrived to make her believe that misery would follow her marriage with Romney; that Romney had loved her, Lady Waldemar, and she him; that his offer to Marian was prompted by principle only, and would be followed up in a spirit of martyrdom. Lady Waldemar then offered to send her in the charge of a respectable person, who had formerly been her maid, to Australia. Marian gladly accepted the offer, and went with the woman, who, instead of taking her to Australia, had brought her to an infamous house in Paris, where drugs and force were used to accomplish her ruin. She had fled from this place in delirium, was taken in by a farmer's wife; obtained employment, but lost it on its appearing that she was about to become a mother; and had, since then, supported herself and her child, now a year old, by needlework.

Aurora took both mother and child to her own home; and, after long debate, wrote two letters, one to a mutual friend of her's and Romney's, telling him all, and asking him only to communicate this story to her cousin should he not be married to Lady Waldemar; and the other to that lady, reproaching her for having

"Tricked poor Marian Erle,
And set her own love digging her own grave,
Within her green hope's pretty garden ground:
Ay, sent her forth with some one of your sort,
To a wicked house in France."

She adds that, if Lady Waldemar is Romney's wife, and will

"Keep warm his heart, and clean his board, and when
He speaks, be ready with obedience," &c.

If she will attend to all this, she is "safe from Marian and Aurora;" but if she "fail a point," they will

"Open mouth,
And such a noise will follow, the last trump's
Will scarcely seem more dreadful, even to her.

These letters sent, Aurora proceeded with Marian and her child to Florence. A letter from a friend tells her that her poem has won all suffrages, and is doing the work of an evangelist; and then speaks of Romney in words which Aurora misunderstands into conveying news of his marriage with Lady Waldemar. The natural effect of the first news is counterbalanced by the second, and Aurora sinks into a state of melancholy, which lasts till the concluding scene.

On looking up one evening, as she is sitting alone in the garden, she sees Romney standing before her. By this time, it is clear to every one but Aurora herself, and perhaps to her, that she loves him deeply. She is too much agitated to notice, either from his manner of greeting her or sitting down, that he is blind. Romney believes that she has heard of his misfortune, for it was indeed an allusion to it that she had misunderstood for a notice of his marriage; they, therefore, talk for some time at cross purposes. Romney, however, says one thing in a straightforward way:—

"I have read your book,
* * * * *
The book is in my heart;
Lives in me, wakes in me, and dreams with me:
My daily bread tastes of it, and my wine
Which has no smack of it, I pour it out;
It seems unnatural drinking,"—

and refers to their old argument on Aurora's birthday, confessing himself a convert to all she then urged. He also tells her of the failure of his labours at Leigh Hall, where the people had risen up and burnt the old house to the ground; of an illness which had attacked him afterwards; and speaks so plainly, in the course of his narrative, of his unchanged love to Aurora, that she, believing him to be the husband of another woman, rebukes him. All this misunderstanding and beating about the bush, is tedious, though it gives occasion to a magnificent simile—Aurora, bidding her cousin look at the stars,—

"I signed above, where all the stars were out,
As if an urgent heat had started there
A secret writing from a sombre page,
A blank last moment, crowded suddenly
With hurrying splendours."

The *éclaircissement* comes at last. Aurora, mentioning Lady Waldemar as her cousin's wife,—

"Are ye mad?
He echoed—'Wife! mine! Lady Waldemar!'"

and this half of the mistake is rectified; and Romney gives a letter from Lady Waldemar to Aurora, in which that lady repudiates the charge of having sent Marian "to a wicked house in France." She explains that Marian's conductor was an old servant who had lived "five months" in her house, and had money for the voyage to Australia, the embezzlement of which had probably tempted her to stop short on the way. Having finished the letter, which related also how all was broken off between Romney and its writer, Aurora exclaims,—

"Ah, not married!
'You mistake,' he said,
'I'm married,—Is not Marian Erle my wife?
As God sees things, I have a wife and child;
And I, as I'm a man who honours God,
Am here to claim them as my wife and child.'

"I felt it hard to breathe, much less to speak.
Nor word of mine was needed. Some one else
Was there for answering. 'Romney,' she began,
'My great good angel, Romney.'
Then at first
I knew that Marian Erle was beautiful.
She stood there still and pallid as a saint,
Dilated like a saint in ecstacy,
As if the floating moonshine interposed
Betwixt her foot and the earth, and raised her up,
To float upon it. 'I had left my child,
Who sleeps,' she said, 'and having drawn this way
I heard you speaking . . . friend, confirm me now.
You take this Marian, such as wicked men
Have made her, for your honourable wife?'

The thrilling, solemn, proud, pathetic voice!
He stretched his arms out towards the thrilling voice,
As if to draw it on to his embrace.
'I take her as God made her, and as men
Must fail to unmake her, for my honoured wife.'

"She never raised her eyes nor took a step,
But stood there in her place and spoke again—
'You take this Marian's child which is her shame,
In sight of men and women, for your child,
Of whom you will not ever feel ashamed?'

The thrilling, tender, proud, pathetic voice!
He stepped on toward it, still with outstretched arms,
As if to quench upon his breast that voice.
'May God so father me, as I do him,
And so forsake me as I let him feel
He's orphaned haply. Here I take the child
To share my cup, to slumber on my knee,
To play his loudest gambol at my foot,
To hold my finger in the public ways,
Till none shall need inquire, 'Whose child is this?'
The gesture saying so tenderly, 'My own.'"

This is all Marian required. She would fain have her own consciousness of innocence ratified by such proof from the man she most revered; but sorrow has driven love from her heart; she cannot re-awaken in herself an interest for any but her child; she gratefully but firmly refuses to marry Romney, who believing his love to Aurora unreturned, is taking his leave, when on her alluding again to the stars, he tells her of his blindness, and relates how the illness which produced it, was caused by an assault from Marian Erle's father, whom Romney had endeavoured to save from justice, at the time of the riots at Leigh Hall: he then again says farewell, but is stopped by Aurora, who confesses her love to him: and so the story ends—considerably to the vexation, we should think, of those readers, who may be such thorough-going haters of "conventions" as to wish to have had Romney actually married to Marian Earle.

The command of imagery shown by Mrs. Browning, in this poem, is really surprising, even in this day when every poetaster seems to be endowed with a more or less startling amount of that power; but Mrs. Browning seldom goes out of her way for an image, as nearly all our other versifiers are in the habit of doing continually. There is a vital continuity, through the whole of this immensely long work, which is thus remarkably, and most favourably distinguished from the sand-weaving of so many of her contemporaries. The earnestness of the authoress is, also, plainly, without affectation, and her enthusiasm for truth and beauty, as she apprehends them, unbounded. A work upon such a scale, and with such a scope, had it been faultless, would have been the greatest work of the age; but unhappily there are faults, and very serious ones, over and above those which we have already hinted. The poem has evidently been written in a very small proportion of the time which a work so very ambitiously conceived ought to have taken. The language which in passionate scenes is simple and real, in other parts becomes very turgid and unpoetical; for example:—

"What if even God
Were chiefly God by working out himself
To an individualism of the Infinite,
Eterne, intense, profuse,—still throwing up
The golden spray of multitudinous worlds
In measure to the proclive weight and rush
Of his inner nature,—the spontaneous love
Still proof and outflow of spontaneous life?"

Or, in a different style, the style, unfortunately, of hundreds of lines:—

"In those days, though, I never analyzed
Myself even: all analysis comes late."

Or again:—

"Those faces! 'twas as if you had stirred up hell
To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost
In fiery swirls of slime,—such strangled fronts,
Such obdurate jaws were thrown up constantly."

These, and other artistic defects, detract somewhat from the general effect of the poem; but no one who reads it, with true poetic sympathy, can withhold his tribute of admiration from a work possessing so many of the highest excellencies.

Art. VI.—*Hooker's Works.* Arranged by the Rev. John Keble. 3 Vols. Oxford.

There are few names that call up so many venerable associations as that of Hooker. Walton tells us that King James never mentioned him but with the epithet of *learned*, or *judicious*, or *reverend*, or *venerable* Mr. Hooker; and the portrait drawn by him in his well-known Life exactly answers this description. It is a quiet and ancient picture, majestic in its outlines, and grave in its features, with an air of sad and dim repose about it. We feel in perusing it, as we feel in gazing at certain old family portraits, that, while the truth of nature in her more set moments has been preserved in the noble and impressive presence before us, yet there must have been also other traits, and some intensities of meaning in the original character, of which we can gather little or nothing from that staid quietness and dignity of look.

That this is to some extent true of Walton's portrait there cannot be any doubt. Beautiful and touching as it is, and so far finely expressive of the original, it does not certainly give us the full man as he lived and laboured in those days of earnest controversy. The contemplative aspect so uniformly stamped upon it, is to some degree, although to what degree we cannot well tell, a reflection from the tranquil depths of honest Isaak's own soul. He paints here, as in all his portraits, with an unconscious touch of softening harmony, attaining unity of effect at the expense of breadth and minuteness of detail. He represents very faithfully, we may suppose, the studious calm of the happy days which Hooker passed at Oxford within the shades of Corpus Christi College—perhaps also the somewhat sordid domesticities of "Draiton Beauchamp in Buckinghamshire," and again the innocency and sanctity of his closing pastoral life in Borne; but we cannot persuade ourselves that he gives us any true and living likeness of the preacher in the Temple, the opponent of Travers, and the champion of Anglicanism. We gather this impression from a perusal of Walton's Biography itself, and still more when we turn to Fuller's Church History, and there catch in a broader, but still dim and imperfect light, the picture of the rival preachers, and of the high debate they waged in the Temple Sunday after Sunday,—epitomizing in their resolute opposition the stern conflict which then raged throughout the kingdom. But the chief evidence of the toning down of Walton's portrait, and of the too still and recluse light in which it is set, is to be found in Hooker's own great work. Here we see in no common measure certain elements of character, of which the Life furnishes little or no hint, but which in fact it rather contradicts. The wonderful majesty and repose, the calm elevation, the simplicity and dignity and grave earnestness with which we are familiar in the latter, are all here, and in even yet higher union than we have been led to imagine; but there are also a depth of human feeling, a power of hearty and sometimes scornful humour, and, as naturally accompanying these, a rare sense and knowledge of the world which we could scarcely guess the Hooker of Walton to have possessed. Mr. Keble has drawn attention to this,* and we have marked many traits of this broader and more genial and powerful character throughout the work.

The fact probably is, that Hooker presented in his true nature, and in his ordinary personal demeanour, that sort of contrast which we not unfrequently see in men who are great students, and who live really more in their closets and in their books than they do in the world. In the latter they are staid and formal, and but half expressive of the life that is in them; they move feebly and awkwardly, amid conventionalities which they are never at the trouble to understand, and for which they do not care; they are supposed therefore to be good and simple souls, with little fire of natural feeling in them, and no particular keenness and shrewdness of wit. But let the same men be contemplated with the spirit that is in them once fully awakened, and all the latent features of their intellectual life drawn forth and quickened into intensity of expression, and the aspect which they present to the world, and which has become stamped perhaps in social anecdote, is felt to be at the

* Vol. i., Editor's Preface, pp. 2, 3.