

The background of the page features a faint, light green line-art illustration of three faces. One face is at the top, looking slightly to the right. Below it, two other faces are shown in profile, facing each other as if in conversation. The lines are thin and sketchy, creating a subtle, artistic backdrop for the text.

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning
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respectfully applied, and would also give Her-
 Miller claim to high rank among the names
 of the family of scholars of his name. The same
 may be said of Her Jacob's voluminous essays
 on the "Origin of the Mind and the Obedience."
 Her Miller in the course of his inquiry into
 the origin of the gods by the different, and by
 turns dominant Greek races positively discover
 the superiority of the "Mind" from that of the
 "Obedience," which he asserts to be a later pro-
 duction. Her Jacob is of that opinion. Her
 Jacob further, and is inclined, after tender
 consideration, to give the preference to the many
 ministrations. "On first attempting to form a judg-
 ment," he says, "he turned to the belief, and
 long remained to maintain it that positively
 standing the gods and scriptures raised by the
 deeper erudition and greater contents, out-
 lined and 'Obedience' rather than the 'Mind'
 "The gravity of this announcement will
 not pass a single man in Germany, where the dis-
 pute is now ancient, and the battle threatens to
 be as immortal as the Sphinx. The name he
 thought and searched, the less he could conceive
 it so. We may say and say, but it is almost
 time for us to speak something more to the pur-
 pose. Her Jacob is a worthy adversary—have
 we not English Adversaries? In Dr. Donnellson's
 and since Jacob was ravished from him? The
 head body of Homer lies between contending
 poets on the fields of Troy, and the enemy is in
 much force that he will soon be torn from us—
 together, unless some hero with the same
 falls on his forehead, stand forth and
 might from their feet these resolutions boys
 of carriage who respect not friendship.

Ueber die Entstehung der Götter und der
 Götter. Von August Jacob. Berlin: Georg
 Reimer. 1851.

A short History of the Obedience, M. Jacob
 and H. Miller's "Origin of the Mind and the Obedience"
 Greek Jacob's "new words of more beautiful
 classical significance, and applied to a smaller
 class in the country than they will find at home.
 The first gives the gods in succession, and proper-
 their poetic appellations, and story, to discover
 meaning and the symbolic image from which
 they sprang. Her Jacob compared them to later
 as a more prolific mother, and was killed in
 Jacob by Apollo and Artemis. "Consequently,
 Jacob appears to believe the stars of heaven
 whose children the stars were killed by the
 rays of sun and moon." "Many beautiful deities
 were no doubt out and down on the ox-
 body which Apollo takes the Morning-
 lady's name. Apollo's epithet the Morning-
 lady.

"Very commonly, for instance in the 'Mind'
 Apollo is named the daughter of Zeus. Her
 mother is Diana (Sartorius Divana) in relation to
 the sky, the heaven, is in other words, Apollo
 the same concept, in the bosom of her mother
 the stars conceived in heaven. . . . Every-
 where the stars for weakness; the Morning-
 soon dies extinguished by the shining of the sun
 the cleanness of the day; and the more remarkable
 is her beauty."

Her Miller's publication is the last part of an
 attempt to track the old Greek hero traditions
 in their relation to Hellenic history and religion.
 It is a work of profound inquiry—a title to be

"Denkmäler zur Hellenischen Geschichte der
 griechischen Mythologie." Von Leo Meyer. Ges-
 talt: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 1857.
 "Mythologie der griechischen Götter." Von
 Heinrich Dietrich Müller. Fester Teil: die grie-
 chische Hellenen in ihren Verhältnissen zur Ge-
 schichte und Religion. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck
 und Ruprecht. 1857.

WESTMINSTER REVIEW.

VOLUME LXVIII.

JULY—OCTOBER, 1857.

"Truth can never be confirm'd enough,
 Though doubts did ever sleep."
 SHAKESPEARE.

"Wahrheitstiefe zeigt sich darin, daß man überall das Gute zu finden und zu schätzen weiß."
 GÖTTE.

AMERICAN EDITION.

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of Power. It passes through all the stages of decay. Taste becomes pedantry, science becomes magic, Virgil is turned into an enchanter, and civilization has become the prolific mother of the thousand forms of barbarism.

Adspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum!

ART. V.—AURORA LEIGH.

MRS. BARRETT BROWNING has won for herself the first place among our female poets. Falling short of the exquisite grace characterizing the masterpieces of Felicia Hemans, without the simplicity of L. E. L., or the variety of dramatic power which distinguishes Joanna Baillie, her earlier volumes contain poems evincing a depth of thought and subtlety of expression peculiarly her own. The "Graves of a Household" is not more delicately beautiful than those verses of "Caterina to Camoens," or more passionately tender than "Isabel's Child." "The Romaunt of the Page," "The Swan's Nest among the Reeds," "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," "The Rhyme of the Duchess May," "The Rhapsody of Life," with some of the best sonnets and the most stirring lyrics in the language, give proof of poetic genius no less various than powerful, and would of themselves vindicate for the Authoress the position we have assigned her. No one could fail therefore to regard "Aurora Leigh"—the most mature, as well as the longest of her works—that into which she says her "highest convictions upon Life and Art have entered"—with profoundest interest and sanguine expectations.

The attempt to write a *novel*,—which shall be also a *poem*,—is a daring one. We have abandoned the absurdity of setting limits to the sphere of poetry, but there is a certain incongruity between the natural variety and expansion of the one, and the concentration required in the other. The general success of this effort is remarkable. Few volumes of verse have such intense interest. It has been found by an ingenious critic to contain more lines than "Paradise Lost" or the "Odyssey,"—yet there are few people who do not try to read it at a sitting. Once into the vortex of the story, we are whirled on, forgetful of criticism, of the Authoress, and of ourselves. This is a high recommendation, and has contributed largely towards

the enthusiastic reception of the work; but when one has leisure to be censorious, he is met by defects equally striking. The difficulties of the design have not been entirely surmounted. The Authoress is given to a diffusive style: she drags us through many pages in "Aurora Leigh" which are unnecessary, trifling, and wearisome. That it may become a story, it sometimes ceases to be a poem. Blank verse is the most flexible and accommodating of all measures: it can sound, as in "The Brook," like graceful conversation, or with the Æolian pulsation of the "Morte d'Arthur," preserving its harmonious fulness; but in "Aurora Leigh" there are cases in which Mrs. Browning has broken loose altogether from the meshes of versification, and run riot in prose cut-up into lines of ten syllables. Is there any sign of verse, for example, in the following:—"When he came from college to the country, very often he crossed the hills on visits to my aunt, with gifts of blue grapes from the hothouses, a book in one hand,—mere statistics (if I chanced to lift the cover), count of all the goats whose beards are sprouting." Yet, with the simple change of *often* into *oft*, Mrs. Browning has made six lines out of it, as good as about one-third of those in the volume. There are so many minor faults throughout the poem, that they cease to be *minor* faults, and are a serious hindrance to our enjoyment of its beauties. Those are not mere deviations from conventional practice. At the present day such deviations, in Art at least, are not apt to be harshly judged. The age is past when critics presumed to lay down rules for poetry, strict as the dogmas of heraldry, and more meaningless. The reaction against classicism has reached its climax. Even the Unities have died out. We favour an artist who has ventured on a new method, or sought to evolve a new design; let him but keep within the bounds of reason, he obtains the praise of originality.

It would be fortunate if, in revolting against restraint, we were never led to transgress those laws of rhythm and construction which, fixed by Nature herself, are never forgotten but with offence to harmony, taste, and sense. The affectation of Originality is the next fault to the want of it. Irregular lines, extravagant metaphors, jarring combinations, are the occasional *defects*, never the *signs* of genius. An ostentation of strength is the most infallible proof of weakness. A profusion of words is no voucher for richness of thought. Those are not the best scholars who make the most numerous quota-

tions from the Greek. We know no poem so good as this, with so many glaring offences against those first principles. Mrs. Browning's greatest failure is in her metaphors: some of them are excellent, but when they are bad—and they are often bad,—they are very bad. By a single ugly phrase, a single hideous word, dragged in, one would think, from the furthest ends of the earth, she every now and then mars the harmony of a whole page of beauty. She sadly wants simplicity, and the calm strength that flows from it. She writes in a high fever. She is constantly introducing geographical, geological, and antiquarian references, almost always out of place, and often incorrect.* Here are three wise lines of her own, which ought to have preserved her from many errors:

"We strain our natures at doing something
great,
Far less because it's something great to do,
Than, haply, that we, so, commend our-
selves
As being not small."

Mrs. Browning seems at once proud and ashamed of her womanhood. She protests, not unjustly, against the practice of judging artists by their sex; but she takes the wrong means to prove her manhood. In recoil for mincing fastidiousness, she now and then becomes coarse. She will not be taxed with squeamishness, and introduces words unnecessarily, which are eschewed in the most familiar conversation. To escape the imputation of over-refinement she swears without provocation. Those are grave accusations: but the Authoress would be the first to disclaim the shield of that spurious gallantry which accords her sex an exemption from the full severity of legitimate censure. A few examples, taken almost at random from among many, will vindicate the justice of our remarks.

The description of a face that haunted Aurora's early years, gives scope for a perfect shoal of mangled and pompous similes. It was, she says, "by turns

"Ghost, fiend, and angel, fairy, witch, and
sprite,—
A dauntless Muse, who eyes a dreadful Fate,
A loving Psyche who loses sight of Love,

* Is it hypercritical to advert to the fact that the main incident in "Aurora Leigh" is, as Mrs. Browning represents the circumstances, *physiologically impossible*? Mrs. Browning ought to have known that a reversal of any great law of nature is beyond poetic licence.

A still Medusa, with mild milky brows
All curdled and all clothed upon with snakes
Whose slime falls fast as sweat will; or anon
Our Lady of the Passion, stabbed with swords
Where the Babe sucked; or Lamia in her
first
Moonlighted pallor, ere she shrunk and blink-
ed,
And shuddering, wriggled down to the un-
clean."

What a confusion of violence is the account given of London streets and the wretched beings who dwell there:—

"Faces! phew,
We'll call them vices festering to despairs,
Or sorrows petrifying to vices: not
A finger-touch of God left whole in them;
All ruined—lost—the countenance worn out
As the garments, the will dissolute as the acts,
The passions loose and dragging in the dirt
To trip the foot up at the first free step!
Those faces! 'twas as if you had stirred up
hell
To heave its lowest dreg-fiends uppermost
In fiery swirls of slime," &c.

How much more full of meaning, to one who has seen such sights, is the simple phrase of our Laureate's, in "Maud:—"

"And I loathe the squares and streets,
And the faces that one meets."

In another passage (p. 178) Mrs. Browning designates the hard heart of society as—

"This social Sphinx,
Who sits between the sepulchres and stews,
Makes mock and mow against the crystal
heavens,
And bullies God,"—

Payne Knight (p. 186) is compared to a "mythic mountaineer"

"Who travelled higher than he was born to
live,
And showed sometimes the goitre in his
throat
Discoursing of an image seen through fog."

To illustrate the way in which individual words are often misused, we may take the following. "My life," Romney says (p. 388)—

"Scarce lacked that thunderbolt of the falling
beam,
Which *nicked* me on the forehead as I passed."

Of Florence (p. 307) she says—

"The town, there, seems to seethe
In this Medæan *boil-pot* of the sun,
And all the patient hills are bubbling round
As if a prick would leave them flat."

Of Romney Leigh excited (p. 164)—

"Was that his face I saw?
Which tossed a sudden horror like a sponge
Into all eyes."

Of an angel face, that it shone in Heaven
in "a blotch" of light!

To Lady Waldemar, Aurora writes (p. 287) with a strange confusion of biblical reference—

"For which inheritance beyond your birth
You sold that *poisonous porridge* called your
soul."

Those pieces of bad taste mainly arise from that straining after strength which mar some of the Authoress's best writings; but there are others which, in their rough treatment of themes we are accustomed to see handled with reverence, are still more repulsive. Witness the comparison of Christ to a hunter of wild beasts (p. 343).

In the picture of London (p. 95), she has so overlaid her colours, as quite to destroy the effect of what might have been a most impressive sketch. Sometimes the mixture of metaphors is such as to make the passage utterly unintelligible; as for instance, in the invective against the German scholar, Wolf, who, good unsuspecting man, when he first ventured to criticize Homer in his study at Halle, never dreamt of being called such names by an English poetess.

A considerable portion of the book is devoted to a minute and not very profitable analysis of the process of making verses. There is surely some "playing at art" here, and science too:—

"I ripped my verses up,
And found no blood upon the rapier's point;
The heart in them was just an embryo's heart,
Which never yet had beat that it should die;
Just gasps of make-believe galvanic life;
Mere tones inorganized to any tune."—(p. 98.)

This "ripping up" does not seem to have been sufficiently savage; but Mrs. Browning has her excuse for the jolting of her Pegasus—

"But I felt
My heart's life throbbing in my verse to show
It lived, it also—certes incomplete—
Disordered with all Adam in the blood,
But even its very tumours, warts, and wens
Still organized by and implying life."—(p. 101.)

Yet it is those very warts and wens that we complain of as degrading her best poetry from the first to the second rank. It

is that exaggerated mysticism and confusion of phrases that has given men, who pride themselves on their common sense, a distaste to metaphorical or even imaginative writing, and has done more than anything else to lower the esteem in which works of Art are held.

Did our survey cease here, we should not be so unfair as the *Saturday Reviewer*; but we would give the reader only some such conception of Aurora Leigh as he would have of the Ajax, from the bad joke on the hero's name,—of "Romeo and Juliet," from the wretched puns it contains,—of Byron's "Don Juan," from the stanzas in which he offends against delicacy,—of Wordsworth's "Idyls" from Goody Blake and Harry Gill, or of Tennyson's "Maud," from the rudest of his hobbling hexameters. The worst pieces are short. The poem contains passages of concentrated beauty and sustained grandeur, enough to establish half a dozen reputations. In the presentation alike of character and scenery Mrs. Browning has proved herself in every sense a Master. Those pictures of England and of Italy which so adorn the first and seventh books are already familiar to our readers; and they will take a permanent rank among our best specimens of descriptive poetry. Some of the portraits exhibit a fund of subtle humour. Witness that oft-quoted sketch of the Aunt, a lady whose temper is perhaps best represented in those three lines—

"And English women, she thanked God and
sighed
(Some people always sigh in thanking God),
Were models to the universe."

There are many passages which we value, as much for the truth they condense as for the beauty of their language. We shall select one or two of those wise sentences at a venture:—

"We get no good
By being ungenerous, even to a book,
And calculating profits—so much help
By so much reading. It is rather when
We gloriously forget ourselves, and plunge
Soul-forward, headlong, into a book's profound,
Impassioned for its beauty and salt of truth,"—
'Tis then we get the right good from a book."—
(p. 26.)

"Many tender souls
Have strung their losses on a rhyming thread
As children cowslips:—the more pains they take
The work more withers. Young men, ay, and
maids,
Too often sow their wild oats in tame verse,
Before they sit down under their own vine
And live for use. Alas, near all the birds

Will sing at dawn; and yet we do not take
The chaffering swallow for the holy lark."—(p. 34.)

"The rest are like it; those Olympian crowns
We run for, till we lose sight of the sun
In the dust of the racing chariots."—(p. 72.)

"There's not a crime
But takes its proper change out still in crime,
If once rung on the counter of this world;
Let sinners look to it."—(p. 120.)

"We are wrong always when we think too
much
Of what we think or are; albeit our thoughts
Be verily as bitter as self-sacrifice,
We're no less selfish."—(p. 151.)

"I've known the pregnant thinkers of this time,
And stood by breathless, hanging on their lips,
When some chromatic sequence of fine thought,
In learned modulation phrased itself
To an un conjectured harmony of truth.
And yet I've been more moved, more raised, I
say,
By a simple word—a broken, easy thing,
A three-years infant might say after you—
A look, a sigh, a touch upon the palm,
Which meant less than 'I love you' . . . than
by all
The full-voiced rhetoric of those master-mouths."
—(p. 174.)

"The Greeks said grandly, in their tragic phrase,
'Let no one be called happy till his death.'
To which I add,—Let no one till his death
Be called unhappy. Measure not the work
Until the day's out, and the labour done;
Then bring your gauges. If the day's work's
scant,
Why, call it scant; affect no compromise;
And, in that we have nobly striven, at least
Deal with us nobly, women though we be,
And honour us with truth, if not with praise."
—(p. 183.)

It is, however, to the general management of the poem that we must look for its main excellences, as well as for its gravest defects. The outline of the story is well known. The writer—whose sentiments and opinions we cannot avoid identifying to a large extent with those of the Authoress—is a Tuscan girl, left from her birth alone with an English father, to grow up, at once shy and impetuous, under Italian skies. He dies in her thirteenth year, leaving her to be conveyed by strangers to a strange land, under the charge of his sister. This lady has harboured a long hatred against Aurora's mother, who bewitched the stiff English gentleman, from his home, his duties, and his estate. She receives the child with all the chill kindness of an unsympathetic guardian. Under her, the wild girl has to become tame—to grow in the prescribed way to the prescribed end.

And so she shoots up into womanhood in outward conformity, yet fluttering more and more against her cage, seeking a solace from the weariness of her tasks in the land of thought and fancy:—

"I was not, therefore, sad;
My soul was singing at a work apart,
Behind the wall of sense, as safe from harm
As sings the lark when sucked up out of sight,
In vortices of glory and blue air."

"Gradually she grows to learn the beauty of that England which at first seemed cold and repulsive. Here is introduced that exquisite landscape painting to which we have referred. (See pp. 39-41.) Then comes the crisis of her life—the scene with her cousin Romney. He has lived near them, and seen Aurora daily, and grown to love her. She, too, loves him, unconsciously to herself, plainly enough to the reader; but they have their own distinct views of life. He is a poet in action—she in verse. His soul is "grey with poring over the long sum of ill"—of wretchedness, and poverty, and vice, in the world around him: he has, with all the foolish enthusiasm of youth, resolved to devote his fortune and his life to lessen this ill. One fine morning he comes to seek a helpmate in his career of beneficence. But *she* is twining wreaths around her brow, dreaming of Dante and Florentine bays. Their interview has been compared to that famous one between Jane Eyre and St. John. There is some show of resemblance between them; but the difference as to the essential question is infinite. St. John thought of Jane as a mere missionary; he would as willingly have had her go with him as a sister, were it not for public opinion. Romney loves Aurora far more deeply than she deserved; and he shows this by tone and look and gesture throughout the whole colloquy. He talks too much, perhaps, of his philanthropy, his schemes—some foolish, some as wise as any yet devised for reforming the world; but he is diverted from superfluous display of tenderness, by the noblest thoughts of others and their welfare—

"Thinking love's best proved unsaid,
And by words the dignity
Of true feeling's often lost,
He was vowed to life's broad duty,
Man's great business uppermost
In his mind—not woman's beauty."

She, on the other hand, turns from him because she thinks too much of herself. Because he will not protest that she is

born to be a poet, she distrusts and rejects his love with a most magniloquent disdain :—

“ Now, I said, ‘ may God
Be witness ’twixt us two ! ’ and with the word
Meseemed I floated into a sudden light
Above his stature,—and I proved too weak
To stand alone, yet strong enough to bear
Such leaners on my shoulder? poor to think,
Yet rich enough to sympathize with thought?—
Incompetent to sing, as blackbirds can,
Yet competent to love, like Him? I paused:
Perhaps I darkened, as the lighthouse will
That turns upon the sea. ”

He writes next day, renewing the assurance of his affection, but the aunt in her indignation has let out the secret that Aurora, by her father's foreign marriage, is left undowered, and Romney, the sole heir;—interpreting his offer as an act of charity, her pride revolts still more. Shortly after, her aunt dies, holding in her hand a letter with a transfer of a large portion of Romney's estate to her, and so, by inheritance, to Aurora. Unfortunately it is found unopened, and the heroine tears it up with infinite grandeur. “ Penthesilea mediis in armis; ” or, as she modestly expresses it, like the whirlwind on Valdarno. The cousins separate—she to the central seat of English life, to work out her independence, he to forget his own great sorrow in the activity of a greater mission. Seven years after, she writes the first part of this history from her room three stories high, in Kensington, where she has found for herself a sphere of action and a taste of her much coveted fame. Yet the memory of that morning in the summer garden haunts her still :—

“ He bears down on me through the slanting
years,
The stronger for the distance. ”

The account of her London career gives occasion for a good deal of humorous satire on the fashionable life and talk of the metropolis. We find nothing indeed to rival the cunning disclosures of Thackeray; but in the fourth and fifth books there is a large amount of vivid characterization. Some of the minor dramatis personæ are drawn with great power; such as the good Lord Howe, the cautious philanthropist, never out of his depth, never honest; clever Mister Smith, and Sir Blaise Delorme—

“ with quiet, priest-like voice,
Too used to syllable damnations round
To make a natural emphasis worth while; ”

and above all, Lady Waldemar—the rich, the beautiful, the fascinating, the hateful

Lady Waldemar, who, herself in love with Romney, comes to ask Aurora's aid in averting a marriage which, in practical illustration of his communism, he is about to contract with a daughter of the people—a poor girl who has lived pure in the midst of horror and penury and crime, whom he has saved from death, or worse than death, and whom he is resolved in front of all the world to make his wife. The lady fails in her mission :—

“ You take it so, ”
She said; ‘ farewell, then. Write your books in
peace,
As far as may be, for some secret stir
Now obvious to me,—for most obviously,
In coming hither I mistook the way.’
Whereat she touched my hand, and bent her
head,
And floated from me like a silent cloud
That leaves the sense of thunder.”—(p. 115.)

Henceforth we are seized upon by a new interest which makes us hurry over everything else. Stately Aurora Leigh, her theories, her speculations and her pride,—the London life, the balls, the gossip of ladies in rustling silks, the talk of artists and old rakes and embryo philosophers, amusing and graphic as they are, are cast into the shade by the apparition and the tragedy of Marian Erle. Aurora goes to see her, and finds in the midst of one of the wretched streets in London “ an ineffable white face,” which we get to think more beautiful than any other in the book—

“ She was not white or brown,
But could look either like a mist that changed
According to being shone on more or less. ”

She tells her sad story with irresistible pathos—how, born in a miserable hut, she led a hard life with cruel parents, driven from place to place and set to all mean tasks, yet consoled by the beauty around, which from nature and stray books she draws to herself by some unborn instinct. At last her wretched mother offers to sell her to a rich squire in the neighbourhood. She tears herself from their hands and escapes. The account of her flight (p. 127) is a wonderful piece of writing. We read it with the breathless haste which it describes, in sympathy with the passion of fear that gave wings to the fugitive. She is found by Romney in an hospital to which she has been conveyed. He addresses her in kind words, which she never forgets—

“ since, in any doubt or dark,
They came out like the stars, and shone on her
With just their comfort; ”

and in tones of music that haunt her still in the London milliner's, where he has sent her to work and hope :—

“ Then she drew
The stitch, and mused how Romney's face would
look,
And if 'twere likely he'd remember hers
When they two had their meeting after death. ”

He meets her again when she has left her position to nurse a sick companion, and after a time seeks in her that fit associate for his task. The day is fixed for the marriage. There is an extraordinary meeting of rags and silks to solemnize the cementing of social distinctions which Romney desires to symbolize in this ceremony—

“ Half St. Giles' in frieze
Was bidden to meet St. James in cloth of gold. ”

All is ready, but the bride has disappeared. He seeks her east, he seeks her west, but no trace is to be found; nothing for love or money but a mysterious letter from Marian, declining marriage, yet showing her love, evidently concealing more than it reveals :—

“ Very kind,
I pray you mark, was Lady Waldemar,
She came to see me nine times, rather ten;—
So beautiful, she hurts me like the day
Let suddenly on sick eyes. ”

Time passes. We have a great deal about London society, and profuse speculation on art and artists. Meantime the report grows that Romney is affianced to Lady Waldemar. We hear no more until, a year or so after, on her route towards Italy, Aurora meets Marian accidentally in the streets of Paris, with a child in her arms. Borne off in the crowd, she is again found by chance, after a long, fruitless search, and this time Aurora succeeds in tracking her to a retreat in the suburbs, “ scarce larger than a grave,” where she lives with her infant. There is nothing more exquisite in the poem than some of the lines which refer to this infant,—

“ While we stood there dumb—
For oh, that it should take such innocence
To prove just guilt, I thought, and stood there
dumb;
The light upon his eyelids pricked them wide,
And staring out at us with all their blue,
As half perplexed between the angelhood
He had been away to visit in his sleep,
And our most mortal presence—gradually
He saw his mother's face, accepting it
In change for heaven itself, with such a smile
As might have well been learnt there,—never
moved,

But smiled on, in a drowse of ecstasy,
So happy (half with her and half with heaven),
He could not have the trouble to be stirred,
But smiled and lay there. Like a rose I said,
As red and still indeed as any rose,
That blows in all the silence of its leaves,
Content, in blowing, to fulfil its life.”—(p. 250.)

But it is difficult to select; the whole of the succeeding pages, as also that passage in pp. 288–289, present a picture of innocence and maternal fondness such as perhaps has never before been realized in verse, and which reminds one more than anything else of the masterpieces of Raphael. We confess to entertain very different sentiments regarding the two heroines of this poem. Aurora's self-consciousness repels—her speculations do not much interest us; her genuine human feeling is reserved for the closing scene. There is something about Marian, on the other hand, that is especially attractive. All the little incidents of her early life, the court in London, the flowers, the way she tells her tale, with the exception of one or two misplaced scientific phrases, so artless and natural,—the shrinking, clinging, half reverence, half love she feels for Romney, combine to exhibit a winning beauty and grace. But nothing in the book is so grand as the revelation to Aurora of her dreadful secret—how, beguiled by the serpent kindness of the Lady Waldemar to believe herself an obstacle to Romney's happiness, committed to the charge of some female fiend, and lured into a home of horror in France, she “ fell unaware, and came to butchery,” doomed to live ever after subject to that law—

“ The common law by which the poor and weak
Are trodden under foot by vicious man,
And loathed for ever after by the good. ”

The tale has too deep a pathos to be expressed in any partial transcription. It is indeed a tragedy too terrible for tears. There is something almost superhuman in the awe of those concluding lines in which Marian describes her wanderings. We read them with a sort of breathless fear and wonder :—

“ Up and down
I went by road and village, over tracts
Of open foreign country, large and strange,
Crossed everywhere by long thin poplar-lines
Like fingers of some ghastly skeleton hand,
Through sunlight and through moonlight ever-
more,
Pushed out from hell itself to pluck me back,
And resolute to get me, slow and sure;
While every roadside Christ upon his cross

Hung reddening through his gory wounds at me.
* * * * *

Brutal men
Stopped short, Miss Leigh, in insult, when they
had seen
My face—I must have had an awful look.
And so I lived: the weeks passed on,—I lived,
'Twas living my old tramp-life o'er again,
But this time in a dream, and hunted round
By some prodigious Dream-fear at my back,
Which ended, yet: my brain cleared presently,
And there I sate one evening, by the road,
I, Marian Erle, myself alone, undone,
Facing a sunset low upon the flats,
As if it were the finish of all time—
The great red stone upon my sepulchre,
Which angels were too weak to roll away."

The rest is soon told. Aurora, Marian,
and the child go together to Italy, a report
having previously reached them that Rom-
ney and Lady Waldemar have been mar-
ried. One glorious evening he himself ap-
pears before them, to announce the error
of this report, the ruin of all his schemes,
the conflagration of the old hall, which he
had turned into a phalanstery for wretches
who brought it down over his head, and
his intention to claim Marian still as his
wife. She appears herself to address him:—

" '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 ecstasy,
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 toward 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.'"

Aurora, too, confirms this, and Marian's
answer illustrates the nature of her devo-
tion:—

" 'Thanks,
My great Aurora.' Forward then she sprang,
And drooping her impassioned spaniel head
With all its broad abandonment of curls
On Romney's feet, we heard the kisses drawn
Through sobs upon the foot, upon the ground—
'O Romney! O my angel! O unchanged!
Though, since we've parted, I have past the
grave;
But death itself could only better thee,
Not change thee! Thee I do not thank at all;

I but thank God who made thee what thou art,
So wholly godlike."

Yet she tells him— " 'You and I
Must never, never, never join hands,'"—

and abides by her resolve to live apart,
and consecrate the rest of her dim life to
the care of her child. Romney announces
to Aurora his penitence for self-confidence
in his schemes, his tardy appreciation of
her genius, and the calamity which has
overtaken him of incurable blindness.
This mutilation (which we consider in
every point of view offensive) enables
Aurora to confide the secret of her own
attachment to him, and the poem concludes
with the magnificent verses expressing the
triumph of love which are already familiar
to most readers.

In an artistic point of view, this work
has all the defects and all the excellences
of the authoress's style. Those excel-
lences more than counterbalance the de-
fects. But it is a work written with an
evident purpose, and it openly challenges
criticism *ethically*. We cannot give a
favourable verdict. Romney tells Aurora,
in that early scene, that women never esti-
mate principles, but only persons. Mrs.
Browning has done her best to establish
the truth of this dictum. If, as she her-
self declares, "wrong thoughts make
wrong poems," there is much to censure
in this one. The estimate she gives of the
French and the eulogy of Louis Napoleon
which follows it, is a glaring evidence of a
judgment easily misled by the outward
show of things, and arrested by the *sem-
blance* of Power.

We do not intend to diverge into the
field of politics to point out in what man-
ner their "twice absolute" Emperor *repre-
sents* this "poet of the nations," or *how*
"his purple is lined with the democracy."
It is more within the scope of our purpose to
contend with those peculiar views of reform
and social philosophy which this volume
has for its text. There is a widespread
and growing error to which its success has
given a new impulse—an error founded in
a truth, perhaps, but none the less fatal.
We allude to the mistake of exaggerating
the effect of Art—whether as exhibited
through Music, Painting, or Poetry—in
ameliorating or elevating the condition of
the masses of the people in any age or
country. It probably results from a trans-
ference of the feelings and sympathies,
which arise from or are possible only
under a certain degree of culture, to
spheres where that culture does not exist.

But, however originating, History and our
every-day experience combine to demon-
strate the error. Art and the perfection
of the poetic sentiments follow, or are con-
temporaneous with an age of prosperity.
They do not constitute, nor can they sup-
ply the place of material comforts and
free institutions. Artistic culture, far
from standing in the place of philanthropic
effort, depends upon the success of that
effort for its own permanence. Men must
be fed, clothed, and washed, ere ever "the
essential prophet's word comes in power"
to awaken, elevate, and sustain their nobler
energies. Mr. Ruskin, among many last-
ing obligations conferred on Art, has yet
done something to adorn this error; and
his agreement with the general drift of
this poem may account for the exagger-
ated estimate of it which he has just re-
corded.* He has found in the higher
classes of our society, already disposed to
extend beyond its due limits the domain
of *Taste*, a wide sympathy with its elo-
quent exposition of its laws, even when he
most misconceives their application. But
in a more stirring time, it was a similar,
though far grander Art-worship, a like
contempt of material wants and depreci-
ation of political struggles, that withheld
many of the noblest minds of Europe
from a comprehension of the great head,
or a full sympathy with the greater heart,
of the gigantic Goethe.

An attentive examination of the latter
books of Mrs. Browning's poem will con-
vince any one that we are not unjust in
charging her with comparative contempt
for the material agencies of civilization, and
disparagement, through precept and ex-
ample, of philanthropic effort. Here are
some of the passages in which the moral
of the whole book is, as it were, summed
up:—

"I walked on, musing with myself
On life and art, and whether, after all,
A larger metaphysics might not help
Our physics, a completer poetry
Adjust our daily life and vulgar wants
More fully than the special outside plans,
Phalansteries and material institutes,
The civil conscriptions and lay monasteries
Preferred by modern thinkers, as they thought
The bread of man indeed made all his life,
And washing seven times in the 'People's
baths'
Were sovereign for a people's leprosy."
..... "What we are, imports us more
Than what we eat; and life, you've granted
me,
Developes from within."—(p. 344.)

* See Appendix to "The Elements of Drawing."

Yet our physics must be seen to first.
A truckle-bed is after all a narrow study
for a metaphysician. It is but poor comfort
to a starving wretch to tell him that it im-
ports him more what he *is*, than what he
eats. It must be a complete poetry indeed
that will undertake the work of Mr. May-
hew among the criminals, or solve the
problem of female labour in our large
cities. There is some poetry that is really
a power among the better portion of the
labouring classes of a nation: but neither
Burns nor Schiller penetrates to those
depths where the zeal of a philanthropist
is most beneficent. We require something
more tangible to touch the under-current
masses: the means of daily bread and the
first rudiments of knowledge. Poetry
about poetry is the last thing to descend
to the people. We suspect the large sale
of "Aurora Leigh" has done but little to
renovate or purify the alleys of London.
We doubt not the good effect of the
Manchester Exhibition, the Handel and
Haydn festivals, on many even of our com-
mon workmen; but their influence is insigni-
ficant compared with the benefit that
would result to England from a good sys-
tem of Secular Education. The new Vene-
tian lecture room at Dublin, and the hints
from Mr. Ruskin which have been acted on
in its construction, must have gone far to
elevate the taste of the masonic craft, but
we suspect that the Northumberland baths
and the National School have done still
more for the morals and health of the city.
In the wilder districts of England, in the
moors of Ireland, in Connemara or Cahir-
seveen, this romance of art appears in its
full absurdity. You must drain those waste
lands, put windows into those mud cabins,
and teach their ragged inmates to read and
to work, else the "prophet and the poet"
will only "thunder down" in the guise of
some wide-mouthed agitator preying on the
passions and ignorance around him. It is
well to know that man developes from
within, that outward schemes are but im-
perfect methods, and that we ought not to
sever poetry from the actual world. But
if we doubt too much of our powers for
doing good—of the possibility of lessening
by enduring effort the ills around us, we fall
into a profitless despair, or a false content
more truly named indifference; "Though
we fail indeed," our authoress tells us:—

"You—I—a score of such weak workers—He
Fails never. If He cannot work by us
He will work over us. Does He want a man,
Much less a woman, think you? Every time
The star winks there, so many souls are born,
Who all shall work too. Let our own be calm:

We should be ashamed to sit beneath those stars,
Impatient that we're nothing."

Ashamed? no; *proud* rather, that we feel so deeply the greatness of each atom of God's work. There is here, and in the magnificent poetry at the conclusion of the book, too much of the spirit of the Lotos Eaters—the most fatal, because the most fascinating form of the *laissez faire*—an acquiescence in the "Everlasting No!" The whole world would come right, we are told, if we leave it to God. *It wont.* Is it not one of the truisms of our morality, that where evil is active, good must be strenuous on all sides, or the fair fabric will go to ruin while the ministers he sent to keep it sound are singing hymns?

Romney Leigh himself seems to be treated no less unfairly than the cause he represents. There are absurd philanthropies in abundance, pretentious schemes with no heart in them, false and idle. Had the hero of this poem advocated the most impracticable of these, his punishment had been too severe. Let us see how Mr. Stephens, of the "Cambridge Essays" would phrase it? Romney Leigh for being a philanthropist,—to be rejected and lectured by his mistress—to have his intended wife stolen from him—to try everything, to succeed in nothing—to be laughed at by everybody—to lose his money—to have his house burned about his ears—to get both his eyes knocked out—to beg pardon of his old mistress at last, and confess that she was all right and he was all wrong—to have her to take charge of him afterwards in his mutilated state!!!

But Romney's schemes were not so impracticable; he was too good and too great a man to devote his whole life and energy to an honest cause without some beneficent result. He did more holy work in his tender care and reformation of those poor girls in London, than his cousin's poems could effect, were they much better than we can imagine them to have been. If he erred, it was through excess of faith and hope and charity;—by trusting too much to the effect of kindness in remoulding rough natures; by a want of practical distrust. "Dear Romney, you're the poet," Aurora says herself; and some one well sings—

"To have the deep, poetic heart
Is more than all poetic fame."

We do not blame Mrs. Browning for not doing what she does not profess to do,—she has, indeed, professed too much,—but for doing wrongly part of what she does.

The work—full of beauty, large-heartedness, and valour, though it be,—has artistic defects sufficient to render it unworthy the place assigned to it by a great critic, as the greatest poem of the century:—it would have had a more prominent position in the first rank had it taught a truer and a nobler lesson.

Perhaps the worst effect of exaggeration is that it excites the opposite extreme. When Art is advocated by the depreciation of the other influences for the elevation of mankind, it receives the deepest injury. They who ignore its real glory and grandeur retaliate by a corresponding depreciation. The great agencies for harmonizing and adorning life should go hand in hand. The world prospers then, when "the poet and the philanthropist stand side by side" in grand equality; and its rough labour is most ennobled when music and poetry accompany and complement the worker's toil.

ART. VI.—THE FOUR EMPIRES.*

Miscellaneous Papers on the Russian War.
London. 1854—1855.

SIR HAMILTON SEYMOUR is a great diplomatist. When we read in the Blue Books the account of his conversations with the Emperor Nicholas, we congratulated ourselves on the dexterous statesman who defended so ably the cause of England and of justice. A monstrous Ahab was coveting the vineyard of another Naboth, and here was a man and an Englishman who could see through his wicked designs, and expose and baffle them. As if in these late days of light and civilization the appropriation of a neighbour's territory by an encroaching power, was an unheard enormity, the country rang with outcries of robbery. Coloured maps filled the shop windows, showing the provinces which during the last century had been torn from Turkey by the Czars; and in an enthusiasm for the cause of right we painted the conflict to ourselves as a war between ci-

* Although we do not assent to all the statements and views contained in this article, we gladly give expression to the opinions of our able and distinguished contributor, and especially on a subject of such acknowledged difficulty and paramount importance as is that of the "Eastern question."—Ed.

vilization and barbarism. The armies of Russia were a second swarm of Vandals and Goths, menacing Europe with a return to mediæval darkness, and Constantinople was to be the first sacrifice.

There is a story of an Irishman on his trial for a felony who brought witnesses to speak for his character. They bore their testimony but too effectively—the catalogue of the novel virtues which were attributed to him so perplexed his imagination that he cried out in Court, "My lord, if I had but known what I was, I would not have done it!" Something of this sort the Turks must have felt when they found themselves treated by the press of Europe as holding the advanced post of civilization, and lauded in Cabinets as the representatives of progress. "No nation in the world," said Lord Palmerston, in the House of Commons, "had in the last twenty years made so great advances." True that the bestiality of social life in Constantinople could be paralleled only in the worst days of Imperial Rome—true, that alone in that one spot in Europe the slave-market was open—true that the Turkish Pashas filled their seraglios with the daughters voluntarily offered by those other champions of freedom, the Circassian chiefs, and that the trade was only checked by Russian cruisers—true that Asiatic Turkey was a wilderness swarming with brigands, that life and property were for the most part insecure a mile beyond the walls of a town, that the administration of justice was iniquity, that if there was honesty anywhere it was among the poor, and that rank and villany ascended in a corresponding ratio. No matter! It was for the interest of Europe that the Turks should keep the keys of the Dardanelles. It was for the interest of decency that they should seem to deserve their position. Ministers therefore imagined excellences for them to supply the lacking reality, the sympathies of the nation were roused easily for a weak people struggling unequally for their liberties, and England threw itself into the quarrel with an enthusiasm for justice and right almost reminding imaginative persons of the days of the early Christians "who were all of one heart and one mind."

When the unanimity was analysed, elements were found indeed in the composition not exceedingly homogeneous. The Republicans expected that at the first cannon-shot the spirit of 1848 would revive again. Moderate Liberals still resented the oppression of Poland. Nicholas had assisted the Austrians to crush Hungary, and those who desired revolution in Ger-

many and Italy, and those who saw in a constitutional system like our own the only permanent bulwark against revolution, looked alike to St. Petersburg as the stronghold of despotism, from which Berlin and Vienna, and the petty princes of the smaller states, alike derived their inspiration. Kossuth had appealed to England in behalf of the "nationalities," and had failed; but the great body of the middle classes, who would not countenance insurrection, which threatened to become a war against property, were pleased with an opportunity of showing that they would strike for liberty in an orthodox manner; they believed that if Russia was seriously weakened, the despotic sovereigns would be compelled to modify their governments. So far the interest was rather political than diplomatic. Formally we were the champions of Turkey; but in reality we were fighting for European freedom.

But, again, there were the statesmen to whom a Russian occupation of Constantinople was the hereditary bugbear. As the restorer of order, as the vindicator of legitimate government against revolution, Russia would be tolerated and applauded; but in possession of the Dardanelles, Russia would command the Mediterranean; in possession of Turkey, she would stretch her swelling influence to the Indus. The balance of power would be compromised; our Eastern Empire would be rendered insecure.

Finally, there were the philosophers who were weary of peace, who believed that the ancient English virtues were stagnating, who saw in war (so that it was just, or could be imagined to be just) a grand spirit of moral regeneration, an electric power which would turn "the snub-nosed rogue" behind the counter into a hero, and "his cheating yard wand" into a champion's sword. These were the feelings which were working in England beyond those which were provoked by the immediate mission of Prince Menschikoff, and the passage of the Pruth, vague all of them, and irreconcilable—able for the moment to rouse the nation to enormous effort; yet containing in their very indefiniteness the seeds of their own ultimate disappointment. Every one was looking to uncertain possibilities. We knew as little what was really attainable as what we really desired. Finland was to be restored to Sweden, the shores of the Euxine to the Turks. When Russia was driven back from the seaboard, when her fortresses were in ruins, and her fleets destroyed, then only a condescending *Edinburgh Review* would