

BROWNING AS A PREACHER.

SECOND PAPER.

THE first part of this essay was occupied with an attempt to define some aspects of Mr. Browning's position amongst contemporary poets; and the tone and temper in which his poetry enters upon one of its functions—preaching—(this word I used advisedly as better befitting poetry than the term *teaching*). His art and his preaching are, indeed, inextricably interwoven in all his writings; and the result of an endeavour to abstract either one or other from the whole, must of course be unsatisfactory; nevertheless, in some measure I must aim at tracing one or two of his characteristics as preacher, to their expression in some of his sermons. Within a space so limited, I can only allude to a very few poems: a thorough analysis of any, would be, one need hardly say, useless to attempt. 'Easter-day' is perhaps of all others, the most strikingly illustrative of the Browning peculiarities, the one which least of all could have been the work of any other man. Viewed side by side with his 'Christmas-eve,' it is, one feels, the more difficult of apprehension: it seems more complex in meaning, and full of subtle transitions of thought and mood. It is possible to a certain extent to content ourselves with an interpretation of 'Christmas-eve,' but the other poem seems to grow with each successive reading; and by newly perceived connections of thought or feeling, to modify our old exegeses. One feels that one is admitted more immediately in this, into the mysterious presence of a human mind. The impression one gets from comparison of the two poems is that the whole of the vivid artist and man-consciousness of which the 'Easter-day' is a product, is not brought into action in the formation of the poem of 'Christmas-eve;' and in this latter there is less absolute demand than in the other, that his readers should have some degree of intellectual and moral affinity with the writer.

Granting that there is this difference in the poems, we may perhaps

discern a reason for it in the difference of the subjects which occupy them; the subject dealt with in 'Christmas-eve,' belonging to the region of matters practical—that of 'Easter-day' extending into the speculative.

Vigorous and clear-sighted though Browning is in his dealings with these former, it is in a speculative region only that the full force of his nature seems to develop itself in that passionate pressing on after substantial reality of *some* sort or other—whether good or evil, at least *truth*—which is the ultimate attitude of all his intellectual and emotional action.

'Christmas-eve' starts from beliefs, which it takes for granted concerning the relations of humanity to an unseen spiritual world. It belongs to the world of intercourse with our fellow men, a region where our beliefs are certainties, or as good as certainties. The question it treats of is one *within* the Christian Church. The lesson it gives is a practical one of broad charity and tolerance, a tolerance which, resulting out of the love to be learned by contemplation of the Human-Divine love, is to be able to overcome all intellectual variances and fastidious repugnances of taste. There is wrought out in the poem the grand feeling of a brotherhood, including within its comprehensive hold the manifold varieties of human lives. Browning by his deep digging into humanity, finds essential root-union, where Matthew Arnold with his languid scratching at the surface, finds only dissimilarities forbidding sympathy. He unites himself and us with the men and women of the Zion Chapel meeting, whose portraits he places before his readers in terms so grotesquely graphic,—omitting no offensive detail to render them thoroughly life-like; and effectually preventing any mere æsthetic sentiment from being the basis of our Christian charity. The absence of sweetness and light, and the presence of certain repulsive characteristics (there is a vein of humour akin to Dickens's, in the way in which these are individualized), in the 'preaching-man,' alike, and in the flock that sat under the 'pig-of-lead-like pressure,' of his 'immense stupidity,' are things that Browning insists on our realising to the full. Then, over the disgust awakened in us, he gains and makes us gain, as the poem proceeds, a victory sublime, both as ethics and as art. (I said in the earlier pages of this essay, that Browning had no *pathos*—no sense of grand incongruities; I retract:—this is what one might call an *inverted* pathos. The unlooked-for discovery that the reality is nobler than the appearance, is the pathos belonging to Browning, and, to Christianity; just as the finding truth to be smaller and meaner than illusion, had been the pathos of Paganism). 'Christmas-eve' unites us, also, with the crowd of ignorant worshippers in Rome at the 'raree show of Peter's successor,' who (typical of a multitude in all sections of the Church), remain in the days when the 'world's eyes are open'

Peevish as ever to be suckled,
Lulled by the same old baby prattle,
With intermixture of the rattle ;

and with the Göttingen professor who, with an inconsistency nobler than his logic, retains the *feeling* of faith in and love for what his reason has reduced to a myth. (Were it not that this paper must abstain from viewing Browning as an artist, I would notice as a specimen of his power as a portrait painter, the way in which with a few vigorous touches he sets before us the whole '*personnel*' outer and inner, of this 'virgin-minded studious martyr to mild enthusiasm.') The poem has its culminating idea in the grand trust that can say—

— Subsisteth ever
God's care above, and I exult
That God, by God's own ways occult
May—doth I will believe—bring back
All wanderers to a single track.'

Browning lets us see clearly what the nature of this feeling of brotherhood is ; and guards jealously against any possibility of confounding it with 'mild indifferentism' or 'lazy glow of benevolence over the various modes of man's beliefs.' He makes no attempt to harmonize the different creeds and tempers of religious feeling, by the modern method of eliminating the peculiarities of each as non-essentials. He, on the contrary, insists that what constitutes each man's earthly care, is to 'strive—to find some one chief way of worship, and contrive' that his fellows 'take their share.' His tolerance is only the result of his confidence that here where man's care ends, 'God's, which is above it and distinct,' begins. He cannot take the philosophical bird's-eye view of the different creeds, which is possible to men who are sufficiently impersonal to themselves to contemplate at their ease, and compare impartially, the various religious systems and cults spread out before them. All conclusions taking as their premises only the aspects of men in masses, are unsatisfactory to him. All problems of life, social or ecclesiastical, are unintelligible to him until he have gained a solvent for them through the solution of the problem of the life individual. The unit from which his reasonings start is neither Humanity, nor the portion of it included within a church, but the ego (the only ego he knows as a basis for argument being his own). And it is only through his individual realisations, attained through the toil and struggle of personal faith, that he gets his hope for the destinies of other men : it is only because of what he has himself discerned, that he is enabled to reach—by a leap, not by a logical process—to the trust that the discernings of his fellows, though varying from his own, are not illusory. The ratio of his power of sympathy and tolerance is exactly that of the strength of his own dogmatic beliefs.

It is in the 'Easter day' that we have to look for the record of how an earnest human soul attains to that faith in the unseen, which in 'Christmas eve' is assumed all along as the basis of the argument. The poem concerns itself with no questions of the ecclesiastical life, but of the individual Christian life, which includes within itself the idea of the objectively-including ecclesiastical life. Here Browning's especial faculty—the strong venturing of faith—finds exercise. There are men (and many amongst the highest orders of men) whose motions of thought and feeling gain in firmness and freedom by the consciousness of belonging to and acting with an ecclesiastical organisation or great public movement of opinion. But Browning's mind has no place amongst minds of this class: it is equally unfitted to move in an army organised under a definite church system, or in an irregular force banded together by 'the spirit of an age;' its victories must be won in single combat, if won at all.

Here, parenthetically, we may notice this isolated working of Browning's thought, as the source of two characteristic imperfections—or, more properly, limitations—in it. 1st, owing to this, his conception of Christianity lacks the solidarity that arises out of the corporate feeling and consciousness of historic permanence. It has never the broad firm grandeur of the mood of the Ambrosian hymns, for instance, or the 'Te Deum.' According to his view, each generation of men have just the same sort of work to do which they would have to do were all the work of their ancestors to be blotted out, and leave no vestige of itself or its effects. The objective creed is not placed by him ever in any secure independence of our subjective hold upon it. 2ndly, though from this mental aloneness comes the chief glory of his work as truthseeker,—his way of getting face to face with his beliefs, and seeing whatever he sees, directly and through no medium of languidly accepted traditions,—yet from the same source there comes one characteristic, which limits the range of his helpfulness, and makes his teaching incapable of influencing more than one class of minds. His own view of the immeasurable expanse of truth makes him, indeed, profoundly tolerant of the views of other men whose standpoints are not his: but is he wholly free from exclusiveness in his notions as to what should be accounted the lawful organ in human nature for truth-discerning? Does he not seem to make his very peculiar self the measure of other men, and become sometimes intolerant of varieties of *ways* in which variously constituted men arrive at and hold their beliefs? In himself two natures are met in rare combination; each of these natures being of heroic size and vigour. There is the union of intellectual strength and subtlety, with a vividly imaginative and emotional temperament. He is at once a hard thinker and a passionate feeler—a logician and a poet; and is, for his own part, able

to work in whatever engages him, with the faculties that belong to this two-fold nature, and choose to which set of faculties he will entrust the work he cares most about. His poems portray or suggest mental processes in which progress into scepticism and out of it takes place usually thus:—the keen dialectic intellect first takes up the question in hand, and works at it until it has made visible all the difficulties that are to be found in it;—then, at the point where all objections have been fairly brought into notice, the ego does not set the part of its nature—the intellect—which began operations with them, to the further task of attempting either to find explanation and answer to them, or to relegate them beyond the province of things explicable; but with a sudden change of mood, the consciousness (leaving all these as and where they are) flings itself with a passionate leap away from them, into the emotional part of human nature, and seeks its faith in a refuge from, rather than in an encounter with, intellectual difficulty.

Whatever imperfections there are in Mr. Browning's power of sympathy, are to be found on the side that is turned towards the class of thinkers incapable, from mental constitution, of reaching faith by such methods. His Christianity seems to exclude men born to belong to what Mr. R. H. Hutton (in a somewhat 'hard'-mooded essay—out of tune with the others in his two recently-published volumes,) styles the 'Hard Church.' From these,—the men feebler in imagination and emotion, than in intellectual power,—men whose feelings flow only as after-consequences from beliefs which they in no way helped to form—men who for doubts of reason must find either satisfaction by reason, or find by it good cause for the impossibility of such satisfaction—from such men Browning holds aloof. His preaching rejects with somewhat of contempt the evidences which are *their* faith's *all*. He casts impatiently aside the evidence, *e.g.*, of the 'greater probability'—which to many a man *must* be the sole ground of his belief in Christianity, and a ground which would seem to melt from under him, if emotion or desire intruded upon a mood dispassionately judicial. Browning's mind, itself able instinctively to feel out the 'mightiness of love inextricably curled about' all 'power and beauty in the world;' and able to transcend, in the strength of these intuitive perceptions, the chasm intervening between Nature and the Christian Tale; refuses to recognise the existence of any logical footway of historical evidence, whereby alone a mind such as, *e.g.*, Archbishop Whately's could arrive at belief in the truth of the story.

The failing to behold 'lover' written 'on the foreheads' of the men who must lovelessly *know* before they can love, is *the* imperfection discernible in the great fraternal-hearted poet-thinker.

It happens often that men far more rigidly exclusive as to the 'what' of other people's beliefs, are less so than Mr. Browning with regard to the

'how.' This sort of tolerance results from their accepting the creed of a church as handed down, and not making religious truth a matter of individual investigation. The creed of a church represents the aggregate action of varieties of minds; it is the centre of agreement where opinions meet, irrespective of how they have travelled. Whoever, therefore, takes this already-arrived-at creed as his own starting-point of thought or feeling, acquiesces thereby in the lawfulness of roads (be these what they may) which have brought other men to it. Keble, for instance, though a man immeasurably narrower in inherent sympathies than Browning, has in some ways a larger toleration for minds of a different order from his own, and holds in honour modes of thought such as Bishop Butler's. This is made possible to him (though for his own part his faith would rest upon feeling only), by his having at the outset abstained from individual truth-seeking, and merged his own life in the catholic life of a church.

In Browning's teaching there is in many respects a repetition alike of the perfections and imperfections of Coleridge's. In both of these men the same intense inwardness and vivid self-concentrated thought which fits them to accomplish—as their own peculiar work—the maintaining of the subjective evidences for religious truth, inclines them to the same sort of impatience towards all others, who, not able to trust the instinctive voices from within, have to seek faith through investigation and comparison of what is without.

'Easter Day' is all throughout illustrative of Browning's tendency to exclusive reliance upon the subjective evidence of the human instincts. The problem of the poem is the how

'To joint

This flexible, finite life once tight

Into the fixed and infinite.'

—the how to find, first, a 'fixed and infinite.' And for the problem's solution, his mind refuses to avail itself of all aids which the intellect, judging from things external, can offer. Meeting each answer of the interlocutor with freshly occurring objections, he gets down deeper into the difficulty, seeing ever more and more 'how very hard it is to be a Christian.' Then there comes to him, out of his great poet-heart, a means of escape from the throng of surrounding perplexities, in that strange, terribly vivid vision-dream, which brings in succession all earthly things accounted good—earth's exquisite treasures of wonder and delight—the waving of her woods, and flowing of her rivers, and all her vast exhaustless beauty, and endless change—art in its most perfect ancient and modern forms—knowledge, and the power to range Faust-like 'through all circling sciences, philosophies, and histories'—brings all these to the test of the human soul's hunger for satisfaction; until it

feels that none of them is sufficient to stay its cravings; and that its one final desire (to attain which it would let all else go in exchange) is for love. And then there comes the mighty leap up of the human instincts, regardless of intervening intellectual obstacles, towards the love of God as told of in the Christian story,

‘What doubt in thee could countervail
Belief in it—?’

and in ‘it’ he feels that he has found the substance of the gleams that, blending with all the displays of power and beauty on the earth, have been the essence of the brightness and good in her, which men have rejoiced in. The scene which the dream tells of is placed in the after-judgment state; the whole poem, however, is in its scope not illustrative of a belief in a spiritual world, and of man’s probation for it, but tentative of the grounds for such belief; and taking the judgment sentences of condemnation, merely as hypotheses in order to have in them the most searching tests to apply to human instincts.

Characteristically, too, in his ‘Saul,’ Browning makes the Messianic prophecy evolve itself to David from his instincts introspectively perceived. The ‘Caliban upon Setebos’ gives us his views (strikingly un-Paleyan) of the utmost that natural theology would amount to, argued out without the aid of the intuitions of human love. These he illustrates in this (which is one of his most powerfully executed poems), by showing how Caliban, the loveless creature, who is either devoid of human affections, or in whom they have not been called into activity by fellowship with men, can bring no key from within to unlock the meanings of the universe; and therefore all that he can find in it, everywhere, all around, by those shrewd bitterly ironical reasonings which his intellect alone gathers from external things, is only merciless power, and capriciously used strength. And the horrible loathsomeness of this idea is drawn out with a minute perfection curiously fascinating.

Preference for internal evidence is shown, too, in the whole tenor of Pope Innocent’s monologue in the ‘Ring and the Book.’ Here, though truth is sought not through the mere instincts of the heart, but with long patient reasonings of the head, it is still the introspective glance into the human mind which supplies the starting point of the whole argument by which the old Pope, finding therein ideas of strength, intelligence and goodness, larger in conception than in human fulfilment, and finding in the *natural* order of the world, actual fulfilment corresponding to two only of these ideas, arrives (by the necessity of finding some instance of the third) at belief in the Christian story of limitless love and sacrifice.

From within, too, Innocent gets his very beautiful answer to the doubt

that inevitably suggested itself to a man living in days when the earth had become very evil, and lust and cruelty such as Guido's 'had their way i' the world where God should rule,' lest haply Christianity's visible failure should disprove its truth. The query,

'And is this little all that was to be;
Where is the glorious decisive change?
The immeasurable metamorphosis
Of human clay to divine gold, we looked
Should in some poor sort justify the price?
* * * * *

Well, is the thing we see salvation?'

is answered by the guess which is supplied by his own heart instincts, that this very weakness and failure may be, after all,

'But repetition of the miracle,
The Divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends, and aye begins for man.'

and are characteristics necessary in a religion corresponding to the requirements of our truest humanity.

'How can man love but what he yearns to help?
What but the weakness in a faith supplies
The incentive to humanity, no strength
Absolute, irresistible, comports?'

Thoroughly Browning-like is the Pope's mood, when in his forecast of the age succeeding his own, his hopes of world-regeneration are placed in his expectation that it will 'shake the torpor of assurance from men's creed,' and compel them, when they shall have grown to disbelieve report, to look inwards for truth, and

'Correct the portrait by the living face;
Man's God, by God's God in the mind of man.'

A noticeable exception to Browning's usual attitude of thought occurs in the closing pages of the 'Paracelsus.' The speech of the dying knowledge-seeker contains a passage (too long to quote, and whose immeasurable poetic beauty must not here be spoken of), where the argument extends over the whole known aspect of our world, viewing man *objectively* in his chronological place in Nature, as an appearance illustrative by its 'supplementary reflux of light' of all foregoing appearances: as the counterpart of anterior creations, a mirror consciously reflectant of the whole.

Mr. Browning is an optimist: and all throughout his poetry his optimism is as the life-blood, circulating through and giving colour to every part of it. Some notion of this element in his creed must be defined in

all criticism of him, either as teacher or artist. The features distinguishing his optimistic theory, are, I think, first, his never at any time ceasing to behold evil as evil, and to hate it as such : and secondly, his seeming not to feel the *oppression* of its mystery that has lain as a burden so heavily on the minds of generations of thinkers.

Moral evil he beholds as a thing in no way resolvable into mere *imperfection*. Where he finds it in the human world it retains for him its old meaning of sin, and is viewed as something wholly distinct from a stunting of the beautiful development of men's natures : by unfavourable outward circumstances, such as the absence of knowledge and culture. His own favourite theory of the position of human impulse, and the homage due to it, never leads him into letting that homage be of a blind indiscriminating sort. He recognises that there is a principle working internally, and sending forth impulses which must not be mistaken for those which are men's lawful guides. With him holiness and healthiness are not quite convertible terms. Caponsacchi and Guido have both acted according to the promptings of impulse, obeying laws which were part of the nature of each : yet between them a difference is set. Rejoicing praise is bestowed by the Pope, in the 'Ring and the Book,' on the obedience yielded to instincts by one of these men ;

' Well done !

Be glad thou hast let light into the world
Through that irregular breach in the boundary,—see
The same upon thy path, and march assured,
Learning anew the use of soldiership,
Self-abnegation, freedom from all fear ;
Loyalty to the life's end.'

And on the other—Guido—whom he images to himself as pleading in self-justification that his course of action has been only the same as that commended, inasmuch as he too has guided his steps according to the tune of impulse, the old man's righteous anger smites the blow of the sentence of temporal death. Wherein does Pope Innocent account this difference just ? In this—that there has been a probation for both ; each of them having within him a something to follow, and a something to resist. Count Guido he beholds as

' Furnished forth for his career,
On starting for his life-chance in our world,
With nearly all we count sufficient help.
Body and mind in balance—a sound frame,
A solid intellect ; the wit to seek,
Wisdom to choose, and courage wherewithal
To deal with whatsoever circumstance
Should minister to man—make life succeed.'

and fortified in his surroundings with 'great birth, good breeding, and the Church for guide.' He accounts that such a man's trial lies in the having *within*, evil impulses balanced more evenly against the good than they are in the man less favourably circumstanced for resistance to evil. He condemns (justly, he feels) him who, if he had so *willed*, might have made the good outweigh the evil,—might have used stumbling-block as stepping-stone; but who has chosen rather to love and believe in—

'Just the vile of life,
Low instinct—base pretension.'

Caponsacchi, too, Innocent views as having undergone trial by urgings of two kinds of impulse; and as having followed the noble and resisted the base,—as having, while yielding to instincts of 'healthy rage' against cruelty and oppression, retained self-government, and kept himself pure in thought, and word, and deed. In his praise there is involved the idea that evil has been present as—

'Temptation . . . for man to meet
And master, and make crouch beneath his feet,
And so be pedestalled in triumph.'

So, too, in the 'Easter Day' (as elsewhere) we find the same doctrine of a probation for all human life by instincts good and evil. To each human soul has been shown—

'The earthly mixed
With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable,—
A taint in each, distinct as well
The heavenly flitted faint and rare
Above them.'

Far on, indeed, in the hereafter, Browning looks on to there being no longer this two-fold and contrary working of impulse. His expectation is that human nature will take its perfection in a grand one-ness. When it shall—

'reach the ultimate, angel's law
Indulging every instinct of the soul,
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing.'

—'A Death in the Desert.'

But he does not confound his hope for the future with his teaching for the needs of the present.

An optimist Browning is *not* in the sense of rejecting or explaining away the dogma that humanity has inherent tendencies to moral evil dark and foul; or proclaiming a freedom to all impulses from any bar save that of physical or social inexpediency; yet an optimist he *is*—and

that not falteringly, but with the conviction of his whole heart—in the sense of being able, all the while he sees the evil which he will not disguise by any other name, to look steadily into its dark hateful face, assured that its ultimate significance is good. He does not conceive that it has come as some unlucky accident to spoil a harmony of order in a world which but for it had been perfect; he holds, rather, that it is through it that a higher perfection is attainable. Feeling this, he does not need that shuffle into a real though unacknowledged Manichœism, which is the refuge of so many men from the perplexities and contradictions of a creed of mingled pessimism and optimism. He believes that the antagonism between principles does not extend beyond the world of finite being; and ventures to refer to the same source the placing in this world of ours the two contrary principles which we call good and evil. Here is some of his doctrine, spoken by the Pope in the 'Ring and the Book.'

He says (having reached the point of acknowledgment that the Christian story is true, and that therein 'God shows complete') :—

'I can believe this dread machinery
Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else
Devised,—all pain, at most expenditure
Of pain by Who devised pain,—to evolve
By new machinery in counterpart
The moral qualities of man—how else?
To make him love in turn and be beloved,
Creating and self-sacrificing too—
And thus eventually, God-like (ay
"I have said ye are Gods"—shall it be said for nought?)
Enable man to wring from out all pain
All pleasure for a common heritage.
* * * * *

The moral sense grows but by exercise,
'Tis even as man grew, probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds.
* * * * *

Life is probation, and this earth no goal,
But starting-point for man, compel him strive,
Which means in man as good as reach the goal.'

Evil he beholds as the immediate bringer to humanity of our chief and peculiar glory—progress, as a messenger sent to institute a race for men, from less to more, from lower to higher. The one thing of which he feels a shrinking horror is 'ghastly smooth life' in which man should be left 'dead at heart;' and his whole spirit leaps up to behold purposes of goodness in the appearance of anything as a deliverer from that.

Browning's is a creed including within it the hope that where during

the earthly probation, men's moral wills have been too feeble to enable them to use temptations by evil as 'points that prove advantage for who vaults from low to high;' the work neglected or failed in here, may yet elsewhere, though under harder conditions, be ultimately done. Even Guido Franceschini, the abominable, he will not allow to depart from our sight unfollowed by words of hope. In the forgivingness of Pompilia, the victim of the murderer in her life and death, there is a gospel of a far-off healing and restoration for *him* even, albeit by God's shadow instead of the light of His face. And the Pope, Guido's judge, thinks of the criminal on whom he pronounces sentence of temporal death, as going forth—

'Into that sad, obscure, sequestered state,
Where God unmakes but to remake a soul
He else had made in vain; which must not be.'

And the same hope comes out, in vaguer expression, in that last phrase of 'Easter Day' (without adding which, the human heart of the poet will not suffer him to let go his vision of the close of the earthly probation):—

'Mercy, every way,
Is infinite—and who can say?'

Very faint, by comparison with Browning's, is Tennyson's trust in the 'larger hope;' though *he*, too, seeks to hold the creed that 'somehow good will be the final goal of ill.' All that Tennyson attains to is an infant's blind crying after it—a groping for it, with 'lame hands of faith.' He looks for his theory of optimism in a direction whither Browning, an idealist in his metaphysics, does not turn in his quests of objective realities. And looking for it all throughout the material world and her analogies, he finds nothing to be a reliable guide to it; and can only fall in the darkness upon that 'great world's altar-stairs;' not feeling assured as to what ultimate law and purpose he should find above them, could he see up their heights.

However, in speaking of the Tennyson and Browning optimisms, it is not fair to make the quality of *vigour* the point of comparison—nor, indeed, any other quality either. The aim of the two poets, in their search, is essentially different. Tennyson's colder and more symmetrical mind looks to find truth as harmony and proportion; and is always-suspicious of the parts unless it can see the whole. What Browning seeks is truth absolute, not relative; and if he thinks he has got hold of the minutest particle of *that*, it is to him as a thing indestructible by any mass of contradictions; and it suffices to him as a sure earnest of the rest. His own heart's instinctive conviction of a law of Love is out

of the reach of whatever 'evil dreams' Nature may lend, and does not need to concern itself with analogies of her waste and destruction—with appearances such as that 'of fifty seeds, she often brings but one to bear.' The optimistic creed of Tennyson is the result of an effort, very noble, to *comprehend*: that of Browning is an effort to *apprehend*. The one seeks a superhuman solution to the problem, and fails: the other, grasping with a human passion, succeeds in finding satisfaction.

At this part of Browning's creed there is one of the many doors of entrance, from the question of his work as a truth-seeker, into the question of his Art. Into this we may not now trespass, further than to observe that the character of his work, as poet of external Nature, seems to be determined by the negative influence of his optimism, and his method of attaining thereto. His seeking and finding his satisfaction as to the world's purport, in another quarter than in the material world, leaves him free to derive from that world, art of a peculiar and very valuable kind. Browning's poetry of external Nature has some characteristics so rare, that (though in quantity it is much less than what most other great poets have produced) its loss would leave a gap in our literature. It is nowhere mystical, like Wordsworth's, nor æsthetic-scientific, like Tennyson's Nature-poetry; but it is simply full of a noble sensuousness. It is not the product of moods of intellectual and moral tension. It is glad acceptance of the physical influences of external Nature—not truth-seeking in and through her mysteries. The contact of the phenomena which we term material, in ourselves, with the so-called material phenomena outside us, is rested in, for the time being, without endeavour to pursue a further significance. Beautiful art, as well as teaching not a little wholesome, is given to us in Mr. Browning's poems of Nature; of which the speciality is their being *sensuous*, yet restrained by a manly dignity from ever becoming a voluptuous self-abandoning to enslavement by her beauty. We have the same sort of thing only from one other modern English poet—A. H. Clough. (See 'The Bothie.') There is a certain amount of positivism in both Clough's and Browning's acceptance of the material world, which results, in both cases, in a similar sort of purely physical enjoyment of it (the latter's poetical expression of this being, however, by far the superior in varied richness). Their positivisms are, of course, alike in their *effects* only, and are *essentially* different. Clough's is the positivism of a strong mind, sternly setting aside truth-seeking in this direction as bootless, and with a resolute temperate cheerfulness, accepting whatever certain good it can find. Browning's is the positivism of childlike trust—so confident in the truth which it has found elsewhere, that it can afford to pause here from restless searching, and take the earth's beauty as beauty—joys of sense as joy. For illustration of Mr. Browning's poetical feeling for external Nature, we might refer to his

'Pippa Passes,' to his 'Saul' (specially to the passage in it beginning 'Oh, our manhood's prime vigour'), to parts of the 'Paracelsus,' and to other passages, which cannot here be enumerated. Though none other of our poets is so perpetually on the watch to discern transcendental significance, translucent through the facts of mind, yet he, more than most others, is content to behold the facts of matter as (so to speak) 'opaque,' and to describe his impressions from them, directly and unsymbolically. To Wordsworth it would be impossible to tell simply of 'the sense of the yellow mountain flowers.'

This paper must hasten to conclude, leaving with only a passing mention, one of the aspects of Mr. Browning's preaching—its stern moral lessons, and its peculiar downrightness of enforcing them. As poet of the Will, he has words of unsparing condemnation to bestow on such sins as failure 'through weak endeavour.' There is an earnest severity in 'The Statue and the Bust,' and in his 'Sordello'—terriblest of tragedies, inasmuch as it depicts the deterioration of a soul. The miserable life-failure, of which this latter is the history, is looked on by him as resulting from the man's irresoluteness to overcome and banish his probation-spectre (Do not many of us know something akin to it?); of his haunting double consciousness—fourfold consciousness, rather; of, at the same time, an ego divided by impulses diverging towards two ways of utterance—Art and action; and of another two-fold spectral ego—reflexion of the actual ego—contemplating, as if from some view-point in nowhere, *it* and its work, in their place in the All-of-things. The real self and its reflexion keep on, like opposite mirrors, reflecting each other backwards and forwards, *ad infinitum*; each becoming alternately subject and object, until there is produced in Sordello, as the result, a wretched paralysis of all working-power, either artistic or practical. And all for lack of the vigorous effort of whole-hearted obedience to either impulse, by which his will could have freed him from the thing that wrought the ruin of his life. Sternest of sermons this! on the text, ἀνὴρ δὲ ψυχὸς, ἀκατάστατος, &c., &c. (St. James i., 8.)

Need one say anything with reference to one charge which we sometimes hear brought against Mr. Browning—of being, in 'The Ring and the Book,' too open—offensively coarse, even, of speech? I—a man—feel that he needs no apology in this matter. Those of his readers who are capable of, and willing to take the trouble of entering into the spirit of his poetry, do not fail to find in it, moral saltiness enough to keep its purity untainted by the ugly words which his grave truthfulness sometimes uses in indicating ugly things: and to mere criticism from *without*—from those who neither learn from or sympathise with him—I imagine that Mr. Browning does not greatly care to commend himself and his poems.

Wholly unsatisfied by what these two papers have been able to say as to some of the characteristics noticeable on one side of the most many-sided of contemporary poets, I gladly cease from the attempt to write little definitions of the poetry which I would rather *feel* indefinitely, and grow into increasingly.

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Mr. Browning's latest work, 'Balanstione Adventure,' lets us see, in its whole tenor and purport, the same characteristics of his preaching. There is no slight significance in his choosing for his theme, a Greek play not ranked by critics amongst the finest; but having peculiar attractions for the poet of the will, on account of its being the story of the victory of a will—a half-human will—over death and fate.

For nothing human or divine, does Browning recognise an iron law of necessity. He cares not for the grand Greek lifeless virtue of endurance of the inevitable; and would find his own poetical feeling wholly unsuited to reproduce utterances such as the Æschylean:

Τὴν πεπρωμένην δὲ χροῖ
αἴσαν φέρειν ὡς ῥᾶστα γινώσκονθ' ὅτι
τὸ τῆς Ἀνάγκης ἐστ' ἀδήριτον σθένος

of Prometheus in his majestic passiveness.

There seems to be a curiously personal sympathy in Mr. Browning for Herakles, the labour and effort God, whose strength is a thoroughly human strength of conscious toil. Browning's enlargement of Euripides' portraiture of the hero, has been criticized as exaggerating the idea of joyous helpful strength; and making him too much of a 'muscular christian.' I think that this objection to it fades out of sight, when we view the poem as tinged and explained by the luminous Browning consciousness that indefinitely appears all throughout it. Struggle—and joy and hope in struggle, and all things that he holds to be the portion best suited for the spiritual part of our human life, are connected by him in a deep dim suggestiveness, with his representation of Herakles. It is a *spiritual* truth—and not mere admiration of thews and muscles, and good use of them, that he preaches to us.

In Browning's suggested new version of the story, 'New Admetos new Alkestis,' we may notice his characteristic way of penetrating through all surface appearances. Deep underneath these, he finds a connection between human and infinite truths, and sees there a beautiful 'how,' by which Admetos might worthily let his wife die that he might live. In harmony with all his other teaching, too, is Browning's idea of making the undyingness of Alkestis come to her, not as a mere salvation given from *without*, but as worked out from *within*. The principle of life which cannot be holden of death, is viewed by him always as a thing given to be IN humanity.