CHAPTER IV

STUDIES IN BROWNING

ROBERT BROWNING very much reminds us in some respects of the American thinker, Emerson. The main doctrine of Emerson is Individualism; and this happens also to be the main doctrine of Browning. By Individualism, Emerson and Browning mean self-cultivation. Both thought that the highest possible duty of every man was to develop the best powers of his mind and body to the utmost possible degree. Make yourself strong — that is the teaching. You are only a man, not a god; therefore it is very likely that you will do many things which are very wrong or very foolish. But whatever you do, even if it be wrong, do it well — do it with all your strength. Even a strong sin may be better than a cowardly virtue. Weakness is of all things the worst. When we do wrong, experience soon teaches us our mistake. And the stronger the mistake has been, the more quickly will the experience come which corrects and purifies. Now you understand what I mean by Individualism — the cultivation by untiring exercise of all our best faculties, and especially of the force and courage to act.

This Individualism in Emerson was founded upon a vague Unitarian pantheism. The same fact is true of Browning's system. According to both thinkers, all of us are parts of one infinite life, and it is by cultivating our powers that we can best serve the purpose of the Infinite Mind. Leaving out the words "mind" and "purpose," which are anthropomorphisms, this doctrine accords fairly well with evolutional philosophy; and both writers were, to a certain degree, evolutionists. But neither yielded much to the melancholy of nineteenth century doubt. Both were

optimists. We may say that Browning's philosophy is an optimistic pantheism, inculcating effort as the very first and highest duty of life. But Browning is not especially a philosophical poet. We find his philosophy flashing out only at long intervals. Knowing this, we know what he is likely to think under certain circumstances; but his mission was of another special kind.

His message to the world was that of an interpreter of life. His art is, from first to last, a faithful reflection of human nature, the human nature of hundreds of different characters, good and bad, but in a large proportion of cases, decidedly bad. Why? Because, as a great artist, Browning understood very well that you can draw quite as good a moral from bad actions as from good ones, and his unconscious purpose is always moral. Such art of picturing character, to be really great, must be dramatic; and all of Browning's work is dramatic. He does not say to us, "This man has such and such a character"; he makes the man himself act and speak so as to show his nature. The second fact, therefore, to remember about Browning is that artistically he is a dramatic poet, whose subject is human nature. No other English poet so closely resembled Shakespeare in this kind of representation as Browning.

There is one more remarkable fact about the poet. He always, or nearly always, writes in the first person. Every one of his poems, with few exceptions, is a soliloquy. It is not he who speaks, of course; it is the "I" of some other person's soul. This kind of literary form is called "monologue." Even the enormous poem of "The Ring and the Book" is nothing but a gigantic collection of monologues, grouped and ordered so as to produce one great dramatic effect.

In the case of Browning, I shall not attempt much illustration by way of texts, because a great deal of Browning's form could be not only of no use to you, but would even be mischievous in its influence upon your use of language. In Browning every rule of rhetoric, of arrangement, is likely

to be broken. The adjective is separated by vast distances from the noun; the preposition is tumbled after the word to which it refers; the verb is found at the end of a sentence of which it should have been the first word. When Carlyle first read the poem called "Sordello," he said that he could not tell whether "Sordello" was a man or a town or a book. And the obscurity of "Sordello" is in some places so atrocious that I do not think anybody in the world can unravel it. Now, most of Browning's long poems are written in this amazing style. The text is, therefore, not a good subject for literary study. But it is an admirable subject for psychological study, emotional study, dramatic study, and sometimes for philosophic study. Instead of giving extracts, therefore, from very long poems, I shall give only a summary of the meaning of the poem itself. If such summary should tempt you to the terrible labour of studying the original, I am sure that you would be very tired, but after the weariness, you would be very much surprised and pleased.

Providing, of course, that you would understand; and I very much doubt whether you could understand. I doubt because I cannot always understand it myself, no matter how hard I try.

One reason is the suppression of words. Browning leaves out all the articles, prepositions, and verbs that he can. I met some years ago a Japanese scholar who had mastered almost every difficulty of the English language except the articles and prepositions; he had never been abroad long enough to acquire the habit of using them properly. But it was his business to write many letters upon technical subjects, and these letters were always perfectly correct, except for the extraordinary fact that they contained no articles and very few prepositions. Much of Browning's poetry reads just in that way. You cannot say that there is anything wrong; but too much is left to the imagination. Therefore he has been spoken of as writing in telegraph language.

Not to make Browning too formidable at first, let us begin with a few of his lighter studies, in very simple verse. I will take as the first example the poem called "A Light Woman." This is a polite word for courtesan, "light" referring to the moral character. The story, told in monologue, is the most ordinary story imaginable. It happens in every great city of the world almost every day, among that class of young men who play with fire. But there are two classes among these, the strong and the weak. The strong take life as half a joke, a very pleasant thing, and pass through many dangers unscathed simply because they know that what they are doing is foolish; they never consider it in a serious way. The other class of young men take life seriously. They are foolish rather through affection and pity than through anything else. They want a woman's love, and they foolishly ask it from women who cannot love at all — not, at least, in ninety cases out of a hundred. They get what seems to them affection, however, and this deludes them. Then they become bewitched; and the result is much sorrow, perhaps ruin, perhaps crime, perhaps suicide. In Browning's poem we have a representative of each type. A strong man, strong in character, has a young friend who has been fascinated by a woman of a dangerous class. He says to himself, "My friend will be ruined; he is bewitched; it is no use to talk to him. I will save him by taking that woman away from him. I know the kind of man that she would like; she would like such a man as I." And the rest of the cruel story is told in Browning's verses too well to need further explanation.

So far as our story approaches the end,
  Which do you pity the most of us three? —
My friend, or the mistress of my friend
  With her wanton eyes, or me?

My friend was already too good to lose,
  And seemed in the way of improvement yet,

When she crossed his path with her hunting-noose,
  And over him drew her net.

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
  A shame, said I, if she adds just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
  The hundredth for a whim!

And before my friend be wholly hers,
  How easy to prove to him, I said,
An eagle's the game her pride prefers,
  Though she snaps at a wren instead!

So, I gave her eyes my own eyes to take,
  My hand sought hers as in earnest need,
And round she turned for my noble sake,
  And gave me herself indeed.

The eagle am I, with my fame in the world,
  The wren is he, with his maiden face.
—You look away and your lip is curled?
  Patience, a moment's space!

For see, my friend goes shaking and white;
  He eyes me as the basilisk:
I have turned, it appears, his day to night,
  Eclipsing his sun's disk.

And I did it, he thinks, as a very thief:
  "Though I love her—that, he comprehends—
"One should master one's passions, (love, in chief),
  "And be loyal to one's friends!"

And she—she lies in my hand as tame
  As a pear late basking over a wall;
Just a touch to try, and off it came;
  'T is mine,—can I let it fall?

With no mind to eat it, that's the worst!
  Were it thrown in the road, would the case assist?

'T was quenching a dozen blue-flies' thirst
  When I gave its stalk a twist.

And I,—what I seem to my friend, you see;
  What I soon shall seem to his love, you guess:
What I seem to myself, do you ask of me?
  No hero, I confess.

'T is an awkward thing to play with souls,
  And matter enough to save one's own:
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
  He played with for bits of stone!

One likes to show the truth for the truth;
  That the woman was light is very true:
But suppose she says,—Never mind that youth!
  What wrong have I done to you?

Well, anyhow, here the story stays,
  So far at least as I understand;
And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
  Here 's a subject made to your hand!

Now let us see how much there is to study in this simple-seeming poem. It will give us an easy and an excellent example of the way in which Browning must be read; and it will require at least an hour's chat to explain properly. For, really, Browning never writes simply.

Here we have a monologue. It is uttered to the poet by a young man with whom he has been passing an hour in conversation. We can guess from the story something about the young man; we can almost see him. We know that he must be handsome, tall, graceful, and strong; and full of that formidable coolness which the sense of great strength gives—great strength of mind and will rather than of body, but probably both. Let us hear him talk. "You see that friend of mine over there?" he says to the poet. "He hates me now. When he looks at me his lips turn white. I can't say that he is wrong to hate me, but really

I wanted to do him a service. He got fascinated by that woman of whom I was speaking; she was playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse or with a bird before killing it. Well, I thought to myself that my friend was in great danger, and that it was better for me to try to save him. You see, he is not the kind of man that a woman of that class could fancy; he is too small, too feeble, too gentle; they like strong men only, men they are afraid of. So, just for my friend's sake, I made love to her one day, and she left him immediately and came to me. I have to take care of her now, and I do not like the trouble at all. I never cared about the woman herself; she is not the kind of woman that I admire; I did all this only to save my friend. And my friend does not understand. He thinks that I took the woman from him because I was in love with her; he thinks it quite natural that I should love her (which I don't); but he says that even in love a man ought to be true to his friends."

At this point of the story the young man sees that the poet is disgusted by what he has heard, but this does not embarrass him; he is too strong a character to be embarrassed at all, and he resumes: "Don't be impatient—I want to tell you the whole thing. You see, I have destroyed all the happiness of my friend merely through my desire to do him a service. He hates me, and he does not understand. He thinks that I was moved by lust; and everybody else thinks the same thing. Of course it is not true. But now there is another trouble. The woman does not understand. She thinks that I was really in love with her; and I must get rid of her as soon as I can. If I tell her that I made love to her only in order to save my friend, she will say, 'What had that to do with your treatment of me? I did not do you any harm; why should you have amused yourself by trying to injure and to deceive me?' If she says that, I don't know how I shall be able to answer. So it seems that I have made a serious mistake; I have lost my friend, I have wantonly wronged a woman whose only fault

toward me was to love me, and I have made for myself a bad reputation in society. People cannot understand the truth of the thing."

This is the language of the man, and he perhaps thinks that he is telling the truth. But is he telling the truth? Does any man in this world ever tell the exact truth about himself? Probably not. No man really understands himself so well as to be able to tell the exact truth about himself. It is possible that this man believes himself to be speaking truthfully, but he is certainly telling a lie, a half-truth only. We have his exact words, but the exact language of the speaker in any one of Browning's monologues does not tell the truth; it only suggests the truth. We must find out the real character of the person, and the real facts of the case, from our own experience of human nature. And to understand the real meaning behind this man's words, you must ask yourselves whether you would believe such a story if it were told to you in exactly the same way by some one whom you know. I shall answer for you that you certainly would not.

And now we come to the real meaning. The young man saw his friend desperately in love with a woman who did not love that friend. The woman was beautiful. Looking at her, he thought to himself, "How easily I could take her away from my friend!" Then he thought to himself that not only would this be a cause of enmity between himself and his friend, but such an action would be severely judged by all his acquaintances. Could he be justified? When a man wishes to do what is wrong, he can nearly always invent a moral reason for doing it. So this young man finds a moral reason. He says, "My friend is in danger; therefore I will sacrifice myself for him. It will be quite gratifying both to my pride and to my pleasure to take that woman from him; then I shall tell everybody why I did it. My friend would like to kill me, of course, but he is too weak to avenge himself." He follows this course, and really tries to persuade himself that he is justified in following it.

When he says that he did not care for the woman, he only means that he is now tired of her. He has indulged his lust and his vanity by the most treacherous and brutal conduct; yet he tries to tell the world that he is a moral man, a martyr, a calumniated person. Such is the real meaning of his apology.

Nevertheless we cannot altogether dislike this young man. He is selfish and proud and not quite truthful, but these are faults of youth. On the other hand we can feel that he is very gifted, very intelligent, and very brave, and, what is still better, that he is ashamed of himself. He has done wrong, and the very fact that he lies about what he has done shows us that he is ashamed. He is not all bad. If he does not tell us the whole truth, he tells a great deal of it; and we feel that as he becomes older he will become better. He has abused his power, and he feels sorry for having abused it; some day he will probably become a very fine man. We feel this; and, curiously, we like him better than we like the man whom he has wronged. We like him because of his force; we despise the other man because of his weakness. It would be a mistake to do this if we did not feel that the man who has done wrong is really the better man of the two. What he has done is not at all to be excused, but we believe that he will redeem his fault later on. This type is an English or American type—perhaps it might be a German type. There is nothing Latin about it. Its faults are of the Northern race.

But now let us take an unredeemable type, the purely bad, the hopelessly wicked, a type not of the North this time, but purely Latin. As the Latin races have been civilized for a very much longer time than the Northern races, they have higher capacities in certain directions. They are physically and emotionally much more attractive to us. The beauty of an Italian or French or Spanish woman is incomparably more delicate, more exquisite, than the beauty of the Northern women. The social intelligence of the Italian or Spaniard or Frenchman is something immeasura-

bly superior to the same capacity in the Englishman, the Scandinavian, or the German. The Latins have much less moral stamina, but imaginatively, æsthetically, emotionally, they have centuries of superiority. The Northern races were savages when these were lords of the world. But the vices of civilization are likely to be developed in them to a degree impossible to the Northern character. If their good qualities are older and finer than ours, so their bad qualities will be older and stronger and deeper. At no time was the worst side of man more terribly shown than during the Renaissance. Here is an illustration. We know that for this man there is no hope; the evil predominates in his nature to such an extent that we can see nothing at all of the good except his fine sense of beauty. And even this sense becomes a curse to him.

MY LAST DUCHESS

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Frà Pandolf" by design: for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus.

Let us paraphrase the above. It is a duke of Ferrara who speaks. The person to whom he is speaking is a marriage-maker, a *nakodo* employed by the prince of a neighbouring state. For the duke wishes to marry the daughter of that prince. When the match-maker comes, the duke draws a curtain from a part of the wall of the room in which the two men meet, and shows him, painted upon the wall, the

picture of a wonderfully beautiful woman. Then the duke says to the messenger: "That is a picture of my last wife. It is a beautiful picture, is it not? Well, it was painted by that wonderful monk, Frà Pandolf. I mention his name on purpose, because everybody who sees that picture for the first time wants to know why it is so beautiful, and would ask me questions if they were not afraid. I have shown it to several other people; but nobody, except myself, dares draw the curtain that covers it. Yes, Frà Pandolf painted it all in one day; and the expression of the smiling face still makes everybody wonder. You wonder; you want to know why that woman looks so charming, so bewitching in the picture."

Now listen to the explanation. It is worthy of the greatest of the villains of Shakespeare:

> Sir, 't was not
> Her husband's presence only, called that spot
> Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
> Frà Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
> "Over my lady's wrist too much," or, "Paint
> "Must never hope to reproduce the faint
> "Half-flush that dies along her throat:" such stuff
> Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
> For calling up that spot of joy. She had
> A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
> Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
> Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
> The dropping of the daylight in the West,
> The bough of cherries some officious fool
> Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
> She rode with round the terrace—all and each
> Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
> Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
> Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
> My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
> With anybody's gift.

The explanation at least shows us the sweet and childish character of the woman, which the speaker tries to describe as folly: "It was not her gladness at seeing me, her husband, that made her smile so beautifully, that brought the rosy dimple to her cheek. Probably the painter said something to flatter her, and she smiled at him. She was ready to smile at anything, at anybody, she was altogether too easily pleased; she liked everything and everybody that she saw, and she took a pleasure in looking at everything and at everybody. Nothing made any difference to her. She would smile at the jewel which I gave her, but she would also smile at the sunset, at a bunch of cherries, at her mule, at anything or anybody. Any matter would bring the dimple to her cheek, or the blush of joy. I do not blame her for thanking people, but she had a way of thanking people that seemed to show that she was just as much pleased by what a stranger did for her, as by the fact that she had become the wife of a man like myself, head of a family nine hundred years old." Notice how the speaker calls the man who gave his wife a bough with cherries upon it "an officious fool." We can begin to perceive what was the matter. He was insanely jealous of her, without any cause; and she, poor little soul! did not know anything about it. She was too innocent to know. The duke does not want anybody else to know, either; he is trying to give quite a different explanation of what happened:

> Who 'd stoop to blame
> This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
> In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
> Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
> "Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
> "Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
> Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
> Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
> —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
> Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile?

This means, "A man like me cannot afford to degrade himself by showing what he feels under such circumstances; a man like me cannot say to a woman, 'I am greatly vexed and pained when I see you smile at any one except myself.' If I were to speak to her about the matter at all, she might think I was jealous. Of course she would insult me by making excuses, by saying that she did not know, which would be nothing less than daring to oppose her judgment to mine. To speak about my feelings in any case would require a skill in the use of language such as only poets or such vulgar people possess. I am a prince, not a poet, and I shall never disgrace myself by telling anybody, especially a woman, that I do not like this or I do not like that. So I said nothing. Perhaps you think that she did not smile when she saw me. That would be a mistake; she always smiled when I passed. But she smiled at everybody else in exactly the same way." He found the smile unbearable at last,and the poet lets him tell us the rest in a very few words:

This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.

In other words, he caused her to be killed; told somebody to cut her throat, probably, or to give her a drink of poison, all without having ever allowed her to know how or why he had been displeased with her. And he is not a bit sorry. No, looking at the dead woman's picture, in company with the marriage-maker, he coolly expresses his admiration for it as a work of realistic art—as much as to say, "You can see for yourself how beautiful she was; but that did not prevent me from killing her." Listen to his atrocious chatter:

There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,

> The Count your master's known munificence
> Is ample warrant that no just pretence
> Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
> Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
> At starting, is my object. Nay, we 'll go
> Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
> Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
> Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Evidently both had seated themselves in front of the picture. The count says, "Now she is as if alive; and we shall go downstairs together. As for the matter of the new marriage, you can tell your master that I am quite sure so generous a man will not make any objection to my just demands for a dowry—though, of course, it is his daughter that I principally want." Here the messenger bows, to allow the duke to go first downstairs. He answers: "No, we can go down together this time." On the way, probably at a turn of the grand staircase, the count points to a fine bronze statue, representing the god of the sea, and asks the man to admire it. That is all.

This is a Renaissance character, and a very terrible one. But it is also very complicated. We must think a little before we can even guess the whole range and depth of this man's wickedness. Even then we can only guess, because he lets us know only so much about him as he wishes us to know. Every word that he says is carefully measured in its pride, in its falsehood, in its cruelty, in its cunning. Just this much he tells us: "I had a beautiful wife, but you must not think that I can be influenced by beauty. Look at the picture of her. You would worship a woman like that. But I cut her throat. Why did I do it? Just because I did not like her way of smiling; she was too tender-hearted to love. And I would do the same thing tomorrow to any one who displeased me. Some people will think that I am jealous; let them think so. But you had better tell the girl who now expects to become my wife what kind of person I am."

How much of this is the truth? Probably more than half. Undoubtedly the man was jealous, and he wishes to deceive us in regard to the whole extent of that jealousy. He has no shame or remorse for crime, but he has shame of appearing to be weak. Jealousy is a weakness; therefore he does not like to be suspected of being weak in that way. He gives a strong suggestion that he must not have future cause for jealousy — nothing more. But the fact that he most wishes to have understood is that his wife must be a wicked woman, a vulture among vultures. He does not want a dove. And he hated his first wife much more because she was good and gentle and loving, than because she smiled at other people. You may ask, why should he hate a woman for being good? The answer is simple. In the courts of such princes as the Borgias, a good woman could only do mischief. She could not be used for cunning and wicked purposes. She would have refused to poison a guest, or to entice a man to make love to her only in order to get that man killed; and as you will discover if you read the terrible history of the Italian republics, all these things had to be done. Morality was a hindrance to such men. Power remained only to cunning and strength; all kind-heartedness was regarded as criminal weakness. When you have become familiar with the real history of Ferrara, you will perceive the terrible truth of this poem.

The most unpleasant fact still remains to be noticed. The wickedness of this man is not a wickedness of ignorance. It is a wickedness of highly cultivated intelligence. The man is an artist, a judge of beauty, a connoisseur. To suppose that cultivation makes a naturally wicked man better is a great educational mistake, as Herbert Spencer showed long ago. Education does not make a man more moral; it may give him power to be more immoral. Italian history furnishes us with the most extraordinary illustrations of this fact. Some of the wickedest of the Italian princes were great poets, great artists, great scholars, and great patrons of learning. Among the monsters, we have, for

example, the terrible Malatesta of Rimini, whose life was given to us some years ago by the French antiquarian Yriarte. He wrote the most delicate and tender poetry, and he committed crimes so terrible that they cannot be named. When he laid his hand, however lightly, upon a horse, the animal began to tremble from head to foot. Yet he could love, and be the most devoted of gallants. Again, you know the case of Benvenuto Cellini, a splendid artist and an atrocious murderer, who actually tells us the pleasure that he felt in killing. And there were the Borgias, all of them, father, daughter, and brothers, who committed every crime and never knew remorse, yet who were beautiful and gifted lovers of art and poetry. So in this case Browning is true to life when he shows us the duke pointing out the beauty of pictures and statues, even in the same moment that he is uttering horrors. There is a strange mixture of the extremes of the bad and of the good in the higher types of the Italian race—a mingling that gives us much to think about in regard to moral problems. Probably that is why a very large number of Browning's studies are of the dark side of Italian character.

Now we can take a lighter subject. It is not black, it is only gloomy, and the interest of it will chiefly be found in the extraordinary moral comment made by Browning. This is one of the few studies which is not all written in the first person. It is called "The Statue and the Bust." It is a tale or tradition of Florence.

The legend is that a certain duke of Florence, by name Ferdinand, attempted to captivate the young bride of a Florentine nobleman named Riccardi. But Riccardi, a very keen man, observed what was going on; and he said to his wife very quietly and firmly, "This is your room in my house; you shall stay in this room and never leave it during the rest of your life, never leave it until you are carried to the graveyard." So she had to live in that room. But the duke, who was a very handsome man, got a splendid bronze statue of himself on horseback erected in the public street

opposite the window of the lady's room, so that she could always look at him. Then she had a bust of herself made and placed above the window, so that the duke could see the bust whenever he rode by. That is all the story—but not all the story as Browning tells it. Browning tells us the secret thoughts and feelings of the imprisoned wife and of the duke. At first the two intended to run away together. It would have been an easy matter. The woman would only have had to dress herself like a boy, and drop from the window, and get help from the duke to reach his palace. The duke thought to himself, "I can get this woman whenever I wish; but it will be better to wait a little while; then we can manage to live as we please without making too much trouble." So they both waited till they became old. Then the woman called an artist and said:

"Make me a face on the window there,
"Waiting as ever, mute the while,
"My love to pass below in the square!

"And let me think that it may beguile
"Dreary days which the dead must spend
"Down in their darkness under the aisle,

"To say, 'What matters it at the end?
"'I did no more while my heart was warm
"'Than does that image, my pale-faced friend.'"

She thinks to console herself a moment by saying, "What is life worth? When I was young and beautiful and impulsive, I did no more harm or good, no more right or wrong, than the bust that resembles me. It is a comfort to think that I did nothing wrong." But is that enough?

"Where is the use of the lip's red charm,
"The heaven of hair, the pride of the brow,
"And the blood that blues the inside arm—

"Unless we turn, as the soul knows how,
"The earthly gift to an end divine?
"A lady of clay is as good, I trow."

Somehow or other she feels that it is no consolation not to have done wrong. She wonders what was the use of being so beautiful, if she could not make use of that beauty. The bust itself lived just as much as she did. And all this is true; but she is nearer to living than the duke. What does he say?

"Set me on horseback here aloft,
"Alive, as the crafty sculptor can,

"In the very square I have crossed so oft:
"That men may admire, when future suns
"Shall touch the eyes to a purpose soft,

"While the mouth and the brow stay brave in bronze—
"Admire and say, 'When he was alive
" 'How he would take his pleasure once!' "

Nothing else; he only wants to be admired after his death, to have people say, looking at his statue, "What a splendid looking man he must have been, how the women must have loved him!" And they both died, and were buried in the church near where they lived; and the English poet Browning went to that church, and heard the story, and thought about it, and gives us the moral of it. It is a startling moral and needs explanation. I think you will be shocked when you first hear it, but you will not be shocked if you think about it. The following verses are the poet's own reflections:

So! While these wait the trump of doom,
How do their spirits pass, I wonder,
Nights and days in the narrow room?

Still, I suppose, they sit and ponder
What a gift life was, ages ago,
Six steps out of the chapel yonder.

Only they see not God, I know,
Nor all that chivalry of his,
The soldier-saints who, row on row,

Burn upward each to his point of bliss—

He condemns them. Why? Because they did not do anything. Anything? You do not mean to say that they ought to have committed adultery?

I hear your reproach—"But delay was best,
"For their end was a crime."—Oh, a crime will do
As well, I reply, to serve for a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Must a game be played for the sake of pelf?

. . . . . .

The true has no value beyond the sham:
As well the counter as coin, I submit,
When your table's a hat, and your prize, a dram.

Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as truly, use the same skill,
Do your best, whether winning or losing it,

If you choose to play!—is my principle.
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

The counter our lovers staked, was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost

Is, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say.

In order to understand the full force of this strange ethical philosophy, you must remember that the word "counter" is

here a gambling term; it is used for the round buttons or disks of bone or ivory, not in themselves money, but representing money to be eventually received or paid. Remembering this, we can simplify Browning; this is what he says:

"These people were the most contemptible of sinners; they deliberately threw their lives away. They were afraid to commit a sin. To wish to commit a sin and to be afraid to commit it, is much worse than committing it. All their lives those two dreamed and purposed and desired a sin; they wanted to commit adultery. If they had committed the crime, there would have been some hope for them; there is always hope for the persons who are not afraid. When a young man begins to doubt what his parents and teachers tell him about virtue, it is sometimes a good thing for him to test this teaching by disobeying it. Human experience has proclaimed in all ages that theft and murder and adultery and a few other things can never give good results. It is not easy to explain the whole why and wherefore to a young person who is both self-willed and ignorant. But let him try for himself what murder means, or theft means, or adultery means, and after he has experienced the consequences, he will begin to perceive what moral teaching signifies. If he is not killed, or imprisoned for life, he will very possibly become wise and good at a later time. Now in regard to those two lovers, they wanted to have an experience; and the experience might have been so valuable to them that it would have given them a new soul—but they were afraid; they were criminals without profit; and their great sin was that of being too cowardly to commit sin. Never will God forgive such weakness as that!" Of course all great religions teach that the man who wishes to do wrong does the wrong in wishing as truly as if he did it with his body; there is only a difference of degree. Now Browning goes a little further than such religious teaching; he tells us that only wishing under certain circumstances may be incomparably worse than doing, because the doing

brings about its punishment in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, and the punishment becomes a moral lesson, forcing the sufferer to think about the moral aspect of what he has done. That is why Browning says, "A sin will do to serve for a test." But only to wish to do, and not do, leaves a person in the state of inexperience. There is an old proverb, which is quite true: "Any man can become rich who is willing to pay the price." With equal truth it might be said, "You can do anything that you please in this world, if you are willing to pay the price, but the price of acts and thoughts is fixed by the Eternal Powers, and you must not try to cheat them."

Philosophers will tell you that our moral laws are not always perfect, that man cannot make a perfect code invariably applicable to all times and circumstances. This is true. But it is also true that there is a higher morality than human codes, and when human law fails to give justice, a larger law occasionally steps in to correct the failure. Browning delights in giving us examples of this kind, extraordinary moral situations, wrong by legal opinion, right by the larger law of nature, which is sometimes divine. A startling story which he tells us, entitled "Ivàn Ivànovitch," will show us how he treats such themes. Ivàn, the hero of the story, is a wood-cutter, who works all day in his native village, to support a large family. He is the most highly respected of the young peasants, the strong man of the community, a good father and a good husband. One day, while he is working out of doors in the bitter cold, a sledge drawn by a maddened and dying horse enters the village, with a half dead woman on it. The woman is the wife of Ivàn's best friend, and she has come back alone, although she had taken her three children with her on the homeward journey. Ivàn helps her into the house, gives her something warm to drink, caresses her, comforts her, and asks at last for her story. The sledge had been pursued by wolves, and the wolves had eaten the three children, one after another. Ivàn listens very carefully to the mother's

relation of how the three children were snatched out of the sledge by the wolves. As soon as she has told every one in her own way, Ivàn takes his sharp axe, and with one blow cuts the woman's head off. To the other peasants he simply observes, "God told me to do that; I could not help it." Of course Ivàn knew that the woman had lied. The wolves had not taken the children away from her: she had dropped one child after another out of the sledge in order to save her own miserable life.

At the news of the murder, the authorities of the village all hurry to the scene. There is the dead body without its head, and the blood flowing, or rather crawling like a great red snake over the floor. The lord of the village declares that Ivàn must be executed for this crime. The Stārosta, or head man, takes the same view of the situation. But, just as Ivàn is about to be arrested, the old priest of the village, the Pope as the peasants call him, a man more than a hundred years of age, comes into the assembly and speaks. He is the only man who has a word to say on behalf of Ivàn, but what he says is extraordinary in its force and primitive wisdom. All of it would be too long to quote. I give you only the conclusion, which immediately results in Ivan's being acquitted both by law and by public opinion.

> "A mother bears a child: perfection is complete
> So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat
> The miracle of life,—herself was born so just
> A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
> Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's torch
> Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,
> Let fall the same? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings:
> The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things
> Shall she be classed?"

Of course the old Pope is speaking from the Christian point

of view when he says that perfection is complete in a birth; he refers to the orthodox belief that the soul of man is created a perfect thing of its kind, a perfect spiritual entity, to be further made or marred by its own acts and thoughts. The mother does not give birth only to a body, but to a soul also, expressly made by God to fit that body. She is allowed to repeat the miracle of creation thus far; as mother she is creator, but only in trust. She has made the vessel of the soul; her most sacred duty is to guard that little body from all harm. A mother who would even let her child fall to escape pain herself would be incomparably more ignoble than the most savage of animals. The rule is that during motherhood even the animal-mother for the time being becomes the ruling power; the male animal then allows her to have her own way in all things.

"Because of motherhood, each male
Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:
His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,
Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.
The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire
Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,
Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest
Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.
What's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,
Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now!
Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge
On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost'
Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post
Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels:
That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—
Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.
Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less
To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold He saw
The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law,
Whereof first instrument was first intelligence
Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense,
The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface

Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.
Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found
A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,
Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.

. . . . . .

I proclaim

Ivān Ivānovitch God's servant!"

On hearing this speech the peasantry are at once convinced; the Russian lord orders the proclamation to be made that the murderer is forgiven, and the head man of the village goes to Ivān's house to bring the good news. He expects to find Ivān on his knees at prayer, very much afraid of the police and coming punishment. But on opening the door the head man finds Ivān playing with his five children, and making for them a toy-church out of little bits of wood. It has not even entered into the mind of Ivān that he did anything wrong. And when they tell him, "You are free, you will not be punished," he answers them in surprise, "Why should I not be free? Why should you talk of my not being punished?" To this simple mind there is nothing to argue about. He has only done what God told him to do, punished a crime against Nature.

The story is a strange one; but not stranger than many to be found in Browning. None of his moral teachings are at discord with any form of true religion, yet they are mostly larger than the teachings of any creed. Perhaps this is why he has never offended the religious element even while preaching doctrines over its head. The higher doctrines thus proclaimed might be anywhere accepted; they might be also questioned; but no one would deny their beauty and power. We may assume that Browning usually considers all incidents in their relation to eternal law, not to one place or time, but to all places and to all times, because the results of every act and thought are infinite. This doctrine especially is quite in harmony with Oriental philosophy, even when given such a Christian shape as it takes in the beautiful verses of "Abt Vogler."

Abt Vogler was a great musician, a great improvisor. Here let me explain the words "improvise" and "improvisation," as to some of you they are likely to be unfamiliar, at least in the special sense given to them in this connection. An improvisation in poetry means a composition made instantly, without preparation, at request or upon a sudden impulse. In Japanese literary history, I am told, there are some very interesting examples of improvisation. For example, the story of that poetess who, on being asked to compose a poem including the mention of something square, something round, and something triangular, wrote those celebrated lines about unfastening one corner of a mosquito-curtain in order to look at the moon.* Among Europeans improvisation is now almost a lost art in poetry, except among the Italians. Some Italian families still exist in which the art of poetical improvisation has been cultivated for hundreds of years. But in music it is otherwise. Improvisation in music is greatly cultivated and esteemed. Most of our celebrated musicians have been great improvisors. Those who heard such music would regret that it could not be reproduced, not even by the musician himself. It was a beautiful creation, forgotten as soon as made, because never written down.

Now you know what Browning means by improvisation in his poem "Abt Vogler." The musician has been improvising, and the music, made only to be forgotten, is so beautiful that he himself bitterly regrets the evanescence of it. We may quote a few of the verses in which this regret is expressed; they are very fine and very strange, written in a measure which I think you have never seen before.

Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
  Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
  Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons that lurk,

*A *haikai* by Chiyo-ni, of Kaga: "Kaya no sumi hitotsu hazushite Tsukimi kana."

Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,
  Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed,—
Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
  And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved!

The musician is comparing the music that he makes to magical architecture; he refers to the Mohammedan legends of Solomon. Solomon knew all magic; and all men, animals, angels, and demons obeyed him. God has ninety-nine names by which the faithful may speak of him, but the hundredth name is secret, the Name ineffable. He who knows it can do all things by the utterance of it. When Solomon pronounced it, all the spirits of the air and of heaven and of hell would rush to obey him. And if he wanted a palace or a city built, he had only to order the spirits to build it, and they would build it immediately, finishing everything between the rising and the setting of the sun. That is the story which the musician refers to. He has the power of the master-musician over sounds; but the sounds will not stay.

Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
  This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
  Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,
  Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
  Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.

The musician wishes that his architecture of sound could remain, as remained the magical palace that Solomon made the spirits build to please Queen Balkis. He remembers how beautiful his music was; he remembers how the different classes of notes combined to make it, just as the different classes of spirits combined to make the palace of Solomon. There the deep notes, the bass chords, sank down thundering like demon-spirits working to make the foundation in the very heart of the earth. And the treble notes

seemed to soar up like angels to make the roof of gold, and to tip all the points of the building with glorious fires of illumination. Truly the palace of sounds was built, but it has vanished away like a mirage; the builder cannot reproduce it. Why not? Well, because great composition of any kind is not merely the work of man; it is an inspiration from God, and the mystery of such inspired composition is manifested in music as it is manifested in no other art. For the harmonies, the combinations of tones, are mysteries, and must remain mysterious even for the musician himself. Who can explain them?

But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is nought;
It is everywhere in the world—loud, soft, and all is said:
Give to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!

But for the same reason that they are mysteries and cannot be understood because they relate to the infinite, they are eternal. That is the consolation. The musician need not regret that the music composed in a moment of divine inspiration cannot be remembered; he need not regret that it has been forgotten. Forgotten it is by the man who made it; forgotten it is by the people who heard it; forgotten it is therefore by all mankind. Nevertheless it is eternal, because the Universal Soul that inspired it never forgets anything. I think that the verse in which this beautiful thought is expressed — the verse that contains the whole of Browning's religion, is the most beautiful thing in all his work. But you must judge for yourselves:

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good, shall exist:
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.

The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by.

By the phrase "when eternity affirms the conception of an hour," the poet means when we ourselves, in a future and higher state of being, shall see the worth of our good acts and thoughts proved by the fact that they survive along with us. Eternity affirms them—that is, recognizes them as worthy of immortality by suffering them to exist. This line gives us the key to the philosophy of the rest. It is quite in harmony with Buddhist philosophy. Browning holds that all good acts and thoughts are eternal, whether men in this world remember them or not. But what of the bad acts and thoughts? Are they also eternal? Not in the same sense. Evil acts and thoughts do indeed exert an influence reaching enormously into the future, but it is an influence that must gradually wane, it is a Karma that must become exhausted. As for regretting that nobody sees or knows the good that we do, that is very foolish. The good will never die; it will be seen again — perhaps only in millions of years, yet this should make no difference. To the dead the time of a million years and the time of a moment may be quite the same thing.

But you must not suppose that Browning lives much in the regions of abstract philosophy. He is human in the warmest way, and very much alive to impressions of sense. Not even Swinburne is at times more voluptuous, but the voluptuous in Browning is always natural and healthy as well as artistic. I must quote to you some passages from the wonderful little dramatic poem entitled "In a Gondola." You know that a gondola is a peculiar kind of boat which in Venice takes the place of carriages or vehicles of any kind. In the city of Venice there are no streets to speak of, but canals only, so that people go from one place to another only by boat. These boats or gondolas of Venice are

not altogether unlike some of the old-fashioned Japanese pleasure-boats; they have a roof and windows and rooms, and it is possible to travel in them without being seen by anybody. In the old days of Venice, many secret meetings between lovers and many secret meetings of conspirators were held in such boats. The poet is telling us of the secret meeting of two lovers, at the risk of death, for if the man is seen he will certainly be killed. At the end of the poem he actually is killed; the moment he steps on shore he is stabbed, because he has been watched by the spies of a political faction that hates him. But this is not the essential part of the poem at all. The essential part of the poem is the description of the feelings and thoughts of these two people, loving in the shadow of death; this is very beautiful and almost painfully true to nature. We get also not a few glimpses of the old life and luxury of Venice in the course of the narrative. As the boat glides down the long canals, between the high ranges of marble palaces rising from the water, the two watch the windows of the houses that they know, and talk about what is going on inside.

Past we glide, and past, and past!
  What's that poor Agnese doing
Where they make the shutters fast?
  Grey Zanobi's just a-wooing
To his couch the purchased bride:
  Past we glide!

Past we glide, and past, and past!
  Why 's the Pucci Palace flaring
Like a beacon to the blast?
  Guests by hundreds, not one caring
If the dear host's neck were wried:
  Past we glide!

It is the man who is here looking and talking and criticizing. The woman is less curious; she is thinking only of love, and what she says in reply has become famous in English

literature; we might say that this is the very best we have in what might be called the "literature of kissing."

The moth's kiss, first!
Kiss me as if you made believe
You were not sure, this eve,
How my face, your flower, had pursed
Its petals up; so, here and there
You brush it, till I grow aware
Who wants me, and wide ope I burst.

The bee's kiss, now!
Kiss me as if you entered gay
My heart at some noonday,—
A bud that dares not disallow
The claim, so, all is rendered up,
And passively its shattered cup
Over your head to sleep I bow.

Of course you know all about the relation of insects to flowers — how moths, beetles, butterflies, and other little creatures, by entering flowers in order to suck the honey, really act as fertilizers, carrying the pollen from the male flower to the female flower. It is the use of this fact from natural history that makes these verses so exquisite. The woman's mouth is the flower; the lips of the man, the visiting insect. "Moth" is the name which we give to night butterflies, that visit flowers in the dark. What the woman says is this in substance: "Kiss me with my mouth shut first, like a night moth coming to a flower all shut up, and not knowing where the opening is." The second comparison of the bee suggests another interesting fact in the relation between insects and flowers. A bee or wasp, on finding it difficult to enter a flower from the top, so as to get at the honey, will cut open the side of the flower, and break its way in. The woman is asking simply, "Now give me a rough kiss after the gentle one." All this is mere play, of course, but by reason of the language used it rises far

above the merely trifling into the zones of supreme literary art. Later on, we have another comparison, made by the man, which I think very beautiful. The thought, the comparison itself, is not new: from very ancient times it has been the custom of lovers to call the woman they loved an angel. I fancy this custom is reflected in the amatory literature of all countries; it exists even in Japanese poetry. But really it does not matter whether a comparison be new or old; its value depends upon the way that a poet utters it. Browning's lover says:

> Lie back; could thought of mine improve you?
> From this shoulder let there spring
> A wing; from this, another wing;
> Wings, not legs and feet, shall move you!
> Snow-white must they spring, to blend
> With your flesh, but I intend
> They shall deepen to the end,
> Broader, into burning gold,
> Till both wings crescent-wise enfold
> Your perfect self, from 'neath your feet
> To o'er your head, where, lo, they meet
> As if a million sword-blades hurled
> Defiance from you to the world!

This is a picture painted after the manner of the Venetian school; we seem to be looking at something created by the brush of Titian or Tintoretto. I am not sure that it will seem to you as beautiful as it really is, for it is intended to appeal to the imagination of persons who have actually seen the paintings of the Italian masters, or at least engravings of them. Angels were frequently represented by those great artists as clothed with their own wings, the wings, white below, gold above, meeting over the head like two new moons joining their shining tips. What the poet means by "sword-blades" are the long narrow flashing feathers of the angel-wings, which, joined all together, look like a cluster of sword-blades. But one must have seen the

pictures of the Italian masters to appreciate the skill of this drawing in words. Here I may remind you that Dante, in his vision of Paradise, uses colours of a very similar sort—blinding white and dazzling gold appear in the wings of his angels also.

The above examples of the merely artistic power of Browning will suffice for the moment; great as he always is when he descends to earth, he is most noteworthy in those other directions which I have already pointed out, and which are chiefly psychological. I want to give you more examples from the poems of the psychological kind, partly because they are of universally recognized value in themselves, and partly because it is these that make the distinction between Browning and his great contemporaries. One of these pieces, now quoted through the whole English-speaking world, is "A Grammarian's Funeral." This poem is intended to give us the enthusiasm which the students of the later Middle Ages felt for scholarship, the delight in learning which revived shortly before the Renaissance. I suppose that many of you recollect the first enthusiasm for Western studies in Japan; people then studied too hard, tried to do even more than they could do. So it was in Europe at the time of the revival of learning; men killed themselves by overstudy. In this poem Browning makes us listen to the song sung by a company of university students burying their dead teacher; they are carrying him up to the top of a high mountain above the mediæval city, there to let him sleep for ever above the clouds and above the vulgarities of mankind. The philosophy in it is very noble and strong, though it be only the philosophy of young men.

Let us begin and carry up this corpse,
Singing together.
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorpes
Each in its tether
Sleeping safe in the bosom of the plain,
Cared-for till cock-crow:

Look out if yonder be not day again
Rimming the rock-row!
That's the appropriate country; there, man's thought,
Rarer, intenser,
Self-gathered for an outbreak, as it ought,
Chafes in the censer.
Leave we the unlettered plain its herd and crop;
Seek we sepulture
On a tall mountain, citied to the top,
Crowded with culture!
All the peaks soar, but one the rest excels;
Clouds overcome it;
No! yonder sparkle is the citadel's
Circling its summit.
Thither our path lies; wind we up the heights:
Wait ye the warning?
Our low life was the level's and the night's;
He's for the morning.
Step to a tune, square chests, erect each head,
'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

Some little description will be necessary before we can go further with the poem. It was dark, before daybreak, when the students assembled for the funeral, and it is still rather dark when the funeral procession starts up the mountain. This appears from the lines, "Look out if yonder be not day again rimming the rock-row" — meaning, see if that is not daylight up there at the top of the mountains. It is not full day, but they can see, far up, the lights of the citadel. The poet wants to give us the feeling of a fortified city of the Middle Ages. You must understand that multitudes of cities, especially in France and in Germany, were then built upon mountain tops, so that they could be better fortified and defended against attack. Part of such a city would be of course on sloping ground. But the very highest place was always reserved, inside the city, for military purposes. Outside the city were walls and ditches and

towers. Inside the city there was a smaller city or citadel, also surrounded by ditches and walls and towers, and occupying the highest place possible. An enemy, after capturing the city proper, would still have the citadel to capture, always a very difficult military feat. Now you will understand better the suggestions of immense height in the poem. The students are going up above the citadel to bury their teacher. They say that the place is appropriate because the air at that height is, like intellectual thought, cold and pure and full of electricity, the symbol of mental energy and moral effort. You may notice that the students are still somewhat rough in their ways. It was a rough age; they do not intend to submit to any interference on the way, nor even to any curiosity, so the ignorant "beholders" are bidden to be very careful.

At this point the poem gives us the students' account of their teacher's life. They are singing a song about it, and you must understand that all the lines in parentheses do not necessarily mean interruptions of the narrative, though some of them do. A little careful reading will make everything clear; then you will perceive how very fine the spirit of the whole thing is.

Sleep, crop and herd! sleep, darkling thorpe and croft,
Safe from the weather!
He, whom we convoy to his grave aloft,
Singing together,
He was a man born with thy face and throat,
Lyric Apollo!
Long he lived nameless: how should Spring take note
Winter would follow?
Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone!
Cramped and diminished,
Moaned he, "New measures, other feet anon!
My dance is finished?"
No, that's the world's way: (keep the mountain-side,
Make for the city!)
He knew the signal, and stepped on with pride
Over men's pity;

Left play for work, and grappled with the world
Bent on escaping:
"What's in the scroll," quoth he, "thou keepest furled?
Show me their shaping,
Theirs who most studied man, the bard and sage,—
Give!"—So he gowned him.
Straight got by heart that book to its last page:
Learned, we found him.

When his first students met him, they met him as a youthful and a learned man; these latest students found him old, bald, scarcely able to see — and yet he had not allowed himself any rest. In spite of the fact that he felt death was coming, he continued to study day and night, he read all the books then existing, and when he had read them all, he said only, "Now I have got to the beginning of my real studies. The material is in my hands; now I shall use it." Sickness or health made no difference to him. This life he thought of only as the commencement of eternity.

He said, "What's Time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever."
Back to his books then; deeper drooped his head:
Calculus racked him:
Leaden before, his eyes grew dross of lead:
Tussis attacked him.

In vain did his friends and pupils beg him to take a little rest, but he never would; he said that he must learn everything he could before dying.

So, with the throttling hands of death at strife,
Ground he at grammar;
Still, through the rattle, parts of speech were rife;
While he could stammer
He settled *Hoti's* business—let it be!—
Properly based *Oun*—
Gave us the doctrine of the enclitic *De*,
Dead from the waist down.

"Hoti" is the Greek word "that"; "Oun" is the word "then," also "now"; it has other kindred meanings. "De" has the meaning of "toward" when enclitic; but there is another Greek word "de" meaning "but." The reference in the poem is to the rule for distinguishing the Greek "de" meaning "toward" from the Greek "de" meaning "but." "Calculus" is the disease commonly called "stone in the bladder." "Tussis" is a cough.

And now the singers have brought the body to the burial-place at the top of the mountain, and their song ends with this glorious burst:

Well, here's the platform, here's the proper place:
Hail to your purlieus,
All ye highfliers of the feathered race,
Swallows and curlews!
Here's the top-peak; the multitude below
Live, for they can, there;
This man decided not to Live but Know—
Bury this man there?
Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.

We may turn from this fine poem without further comment to a piece entitled "The Patriot." There is a bit, and a very bitter bit, of the true philosophy of life in it. Nothing is so fickle, so uncertain, so treacherous as popularity. Thousands of men who tried to get the applause of the multitude, the love of the millions, and thought that they had succeeded, found out at a later day how quickly that applause could be turned into roars of hate, how quickly that seeming admiration could be changed into scorn. This fact about the instability of human favour

is well known to every clear headed person who enters into what is called the social struggle; but it is more often illustrated in politics. The political aspect of the matter is the most remarkable, and has therefore been chosen by Browning. I do not know to what particular person he may be making reference—perhaps he was thinking of Rienzi. But in all periods of history the fact has been about the same. You will remember, no doubt, the case of Pericles in the history of Athens, and of many others. You may remember also how the French Revolution devoured its own children, how the men that were one day almost worshipped by the people like gods, would be dragged to the guillotine the day after. And even in the history of this country I think you must remember not a few examples of how uncertain popular favour must always be. In this case the victim speaks, some man who once had been regarded as the saviour of the people, but who is now regarded as their enemy, and who is going to be executed as a common criminal, simply because he happened to be unfortunate. He remembers the past, and contrasts it with the cruel present:

> It was roses, roses, all the way,
> With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
> The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
> The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
> A year ago on this very day.
>
> The air broke into a mist with bells,
> The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
> Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels—
> But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
> They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

Here I may say that in Western countries from very ancient times it has been the custom to cover with flowers the road along which some great conqueror or other honoured person was to come. The ancients used especially roses and myrtles, but even to-day it is often the custom to throw

flowers on the ground before the passing of a sovereign or other great person. "Like mad" is an idiom used to express extreme action of any sort; "to laugh like mad," would be to laugh unreasonably and extravagantly. The reference to the apparent movement of the roofs of the houses pictures the crowding of people on the house-tops to see the hero, a custom still kept up. And the reference to the effect of the bells as making "mist," indicates the excessive volume of sound; for it is said that the firing of cannon or the making of any other great noise will often cause rain to fall. The idea is that the people rang the bells so hard that the rain fell, and these were what we call "joy-bells."

"If on that day of my triumph," he says, "I had asked them to give me the sun, they would have answered out of their hearts, 'Certainly — and what else?'" Now it is very different indeed.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
  To give it my loving friends to keep!
Nought man could do, have I left undone:
  And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

There's nobody on the house-tops now—
  Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
  At the Shambles' Gate—or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
  A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
  For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

What he says is this: "I did not ask them for anything for myself; it was I who wanted to give them the sun, or anything else that they wished for. Every possible sacrifice that any man could make I made for these people, and you

see what my reward is to-day—just one year from the time when they honoured and revered me. Nobody now stands on the house-tops to look at me; all have gone to the execution ground to see me die, except a few old people who cannot walk, and who stay at the windows to see me pass, with my hands tied behind my back. People are throwing stones at me, and I think my face is bleeding." The last allusion is to a very cruel custom only of late years abolished in England by better police regulations. In the old times, when a prisoner was being taken to the gallows, people would often strike him, or throw stones at him as he went by, and nobody attempted to protect him. To-day this is not done, simply because the police do not allow it, but the natural cruelty of a mob is perhaps just as great as it ever was.

> Thus I entered, and thus I go!
> In triumphs people have dropped down dead.
> "Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
> Me?"—God might question; now instead,
> 'T is God shall repay: I am safer so.

These are the man's last thoughts. "I came into this city a hero, as I told you; now I am going out of it, to be executed like a vulgar criminal. How much better would it have been if I had died on the day when all the people were honouring me! I have heard that men have fallen dead from joy in the middle of such a triumph as I then had. But would it have been better if I had died happy like that? Perhaps it would not. God is said to demand a strict account in the next world from any human being who has been too happy in this. If I had died that day, God might have said to me, You have had your reward from the world; have you paid to me what you owed in love and duty? But now the world kills me; it is from God only that I can hope for justice. He is terrible, but I can trust him better than this people; I am safer with him!"

I am not sure what Browning refers to in speaking of

those who have been known to drop dead in the middle of a triumph. But perhaps he is referring to the story of the Sicilian, Diagoras, which is one of the most beautiful of all Greek stories, and is fortunately quite true. Diagoras had been the greatest wrestler among the Greeks, the greatest athlete of his time, and was loved and honoured by all men of Greek blood. He had seven sons. When he was a very old man these seven sons went to contend at the great Olympic games (if I remember correctly). There were but seven prizes for all the feats of strength and skill; and these seven prizes were all won by the seven sons of Diagoras—that is to say, they had proved themselves the best men of the whole world at that time, even the boy son winning the prize given only to boys. Then the people demanded to know the name of the father of those young men, and the sons lifted him upon their shoulders to show him to all the people. The people shouted so that birds flying above them, fell down; and the old man in the same moment died of joy, as he was thus supported upon the shoulders of his sons. The Greeks said that this was the happiest death that any man ever died. Perhaps Browning was referring to this story; but I am not sure.

Kings have sometimes been accused of ingratitude, but on the whole, kings have shown more gratitude than mobs; a sovereign is apt to remember that it is good policy to repay loyalty and to encourage affection. Browning gives us a few magnificent specimens of loyal feeling toward sovereigns, feeling which it is pleasant to know was not repaid with ingratitude. I am referring to his "Cavalier Tunes," little songs into which he has managed to put all the fiery love and devotion of the English gentlemen who fought for the king against Cromwell and his Puritans, and who fought, luckily for England, in vain at that time. Right or wrong as we may think their cause, it is impossible not to admire the feeling here expressed. I shall quote the second song first. You must imagine that all these gentlemen are drinking the health of the king, with songs and

cheers, even at the time when the king's cause seems hopeless.

GIVE A ROUSE

King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

(*Single voice*)

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

(*Chorus, answering*)

King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

(*Single voice*)

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

(*Chorus, answering*)

King Charles, and who 'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who 's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here 's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

The father is reminding his friends of the brave death of his own son, who died shouting for the king and laughing at his executioners. I do not think that there is a more spirited song in English literature than this. Perhaps you may observe that the measure in the third stanza does not run smoothly like the measure of the other stanzas; it hesitates a little. But this is a great stroke of art, for it indicates the suppressed emotion of the father speaking of his dead son. The other song, the first of the three given by Browning, represents the feeling of an earlier time in the civil war, probably the time when the aristocracy and

gentry first gathered together to defend the king. There is a splendid swing in it. Both songs are a little rough, because the spirit of the age was rough; the finest gentleman used to swear in those days, and to use words which we now consider rather violent. I may remark, however, that even to-day in the upper ranks of the English army and navy, something of the same scorn of conventions still remains; generals and admirals will swear occasionally in battle, just as these gentlemen of an older school swore as they advanced against the Puritan armies.

MARCHING ALONG

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're—
(*Chorus*) Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell.
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!
England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,
(*Chorus*) Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,
(*Chorus*) March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

The names in this poem are all of them great names of the Civil War. Hampden, you know, was Parliamentary leader in the movement against the king. He was killed in battle, and his place as leader was taken by Pym. The other names are of members of the Long Parliament — except Rupert. Rupert, or Prince Rupert, as he is more generally known, was the leader of the Royal cavalry, one of the most brilliant cavalry leaders of history. He was never beaten seriously until he met Cromwell's Puritan cavalry. A reference may be necessary in regard to Nottingham. There was no fight exactly at Nottingham; but it was at Nottingham that the cavalry gathered round the king's standard before the battle of Edgehill, near Banbury, a drawn battle, not decided either way.

So much for the references. As for the song itself, something remains to be said. I think that the two songs are about the most spirited in English literature. They are so for many reasons, especially because of the fiery emotion which the poet has flung into them, and because of their absolute truth to the feeling of the seventeenth century, both as to form and as to tone. But I wonder whether any of you have noticed what it is that gives such uncommon force to the verses. To a great degree, it is the use of triple rhymes. In both songs the rhymes are triple, while the measure is short, and the result is something of that rough strength which characterizes the old Northern poetry. For instance:

> "Hold by the *right*, you double your *might;*
> So onward to Nottingham, fresh for the *fight.*"
>
> "King Charles, and who 'll do him *right* now?
> King Charles, and who's ripe for *fight* now?
> Give a rouse: here 's in hell's *despite* now,
> King Charles!"

You see that very great effects may be produced by very simple means. In "Marching Along," the "swing" or "lilt"

is partly due to the fact that the three rhymes follow each other not in regular but in irregular succession, a rhymeless measure alternating between the second and the third rhymes, as will be plainly seen if we write the verses in another form:

Kentish Sir *Byng*
Stood for his *king*,
Bidding the crop-headed
Parliament *swing*.

But I want to explain the spirit rather than the workmanship of Browning; and I have turned aside here to the subject of measure only because the instances happened to be very extraordinary. The beauty of the work is really in the glow and strength of the loyal feeling that peals through it.

Do not suppose, however, that the poet picks out by preference the noble or the attractive side of human feeling in any form of society, for his subject. Quite the contrary. Most often he paints the ugly side, even in speaking of kings and courts, nobles and princes. In the splendid poem "Count Gismond," which I dictated last year, you may have seen one very beautiful side of knightly character, but there were horrible phases of human nature exhibited in the story. Browning made the shadows very heavy, with the result that the lights appeared more dazzling. Sometimes we have no lights—all is shadow, and sometimes a shadow of hell. Such is the case in the horrible poem called "The Laboratory," depicting the feelings of a jealous court-lady, as she stands in the laboratory of a chemist who is selling her a poison with which she intends to poison her rival in the favour of the king. The story is laid in the time of Louis XIV, probably, when such things did actually occur in France. A still blacker shadow, a still more infernal picture of humanity's dark side, is "The Heretic's Tragedy," portraying the wicked feelings of a superstitious person while watching a heretic being burned alive. Another frightful thing is "The Confessional," a story of the In-

quisition in Spain, showing how the inquisitors succeeded in seizing, convicting, and burning alive a young man, by taking advantage of the innocence of his sweetheart, who was made to betray him through confession without knowing it. Another piece that is ugly psychologically, is "Cristina and Monaldeschi." Cristina was a queen of Sweden, and one of the most learned women of her time, but very masculine; she liked to wear men's clothes and to follow the amusements of men. She abdicated her throne, merely in order to feel more free in her habits. It is believed that she secretly loved her private secretary, and that he was dishonourable enough to tell other people of his relation to her. At all events, one day she ordered him to come into her room, and after upbraiding him with treachery to her, she had him killed in her presence. The fact shocked Europe a great deal at the time. Browning tries to make us understand Cristina's feeling, and he forces us to sympathize a little with her anger. There are multitudes of poems of this class in Browning. He wants us to know all the strange possibilities of the human soul, bad or good, and he never hesitates because a subject may be shocking to weak nerves. It is just because he does not care about public feeling, ignorant public opinion, upon these matters, that he manages to give us such exact truth; he is not afraid. For a little bit of truth thus exemplified—this is not ugly—let us take a little piece entitled "Which?"* Here is another picture of the manners of the old French court, a very corrupt court and very luxurious. You must read Taine's "Ancien Régime" to understand what its morals were. But let us turn to the little picture. Three great ladies are talking with a priest about love — a fashionable priest, a priest of the old age, ready to make love or to say mass just according as it suited his private interest. A very good priest could scarcely have existed in the court; one had to be very clever and very subtle to live there. The conversation of these four persons give us a hint of the

* from *Asolando.*

feeling of the age. Only one woman really seems to say what she thinks; and she says what she thinks only because she is the most clever of the three.

So, the three Court-ladies began
Their trial of who judged best
In esteeming the love of a man:
Who preferred with most reason was thereby confessed
Boy-Cupid's exemplary catcher and cager;
An Abbé crossed legs to decide on the wager.

First the Duchesse: "Mine for me—
Who were it but God's for Him,
And the King's for—who but he?
Both faithful and loyal, one grace more shall brim
His cup with perfection: a lady's true lover,
He holds—save his God and his king—none above her."

"I require"—outspoke the Marquise—
'Pure thoughts, ay, but also fine deeds:
Play the paladin must he, to please
My whim, and—to prove my knight's service exceeds
Your saint's and your loyalist's praying and kneeling—
Show wounds, each wide mouth to my mercy appealing."

Then the Comtesse: "My choice be a wretch,
Mere losel in body and soul,
Thrice accurst! What care I, so he stretch
Arms to me his sole saviour, love's ultimate goal,
Out of earth and men's noise—names of 'infidel,' 'traitor,'
Cast up at him? Crown me, crown's adjudicator!"

And the Abbé uncrossed his legs,
Took snuff, a reflective pinch,
Broke silence: "The question begs
Much pondering ere I pronounce. Shall I flinch?
The love which to one and one only has reference
Seems terribly like what perhaps gains God's preference."

The answer of the priest, giving the victory to the Comtesse, is clever and double-edged. He probably knows everything

that goes on in the court: he knows how many lovers the Duchesse has had, and the Marquise. He knows that their talk about religion and loyalty as the perfections of man, are not quite sincere. Indeed, the Marquise is much more sincere than the Duchesse; but if she were altogether sincere, she would have recognized that her wish — her expressed wish, at least—must appear as pure pride, not anything else. But the Comtesse tells a bitter truth by pointing out that if it is a question of real love, the place and station of the man can signify nothing at all; love should be a thing of the heart, not a thing of rank and fashion. And the priest, in supporting her claim and in saying that a true love can have reference only to one person, really suggests to his audience, whose love relations have doubtless been very numerous, what he thinks to be the opinion of God on the subject. But "perhaps," as the priest utters the word, is terrible irony. "Perhaps gains God's preference," means "I know, of course, that in the society to which we belong, love only for one's husband is not considered fashionable; yet the opinions of God may not be the same as the opinions of our society. It would not be polite of me to say directly that your opinions and God's opinions are different, but I just hint it." It was a very queer age. Taine, in his history of the time, tells a story about a nobleman who, on entering his wife's room suddenly and finding her making love to another man, took off his hat and saluted her, saying, "Oh, my dear, how can you be so careless! Suppose it had not been your husband who opened the door!" You must understand all this, to understand the mockery of the poem. Then, again, you must understand the desire of the Comtesse even for the love of a "wretch," a mere losel, as meaning that here is a woman who deserves to be loved, but is not loved by her husband, and who has learned that real love has a value in this world beyond all value of rank or money or influence.

If you ask me why I have talked so much about so short a poem, the answer is that nearly all of Browning's short

poems mean a great deal, and force us to think and to talk about them. The reason is that the characters in these poems are really alive; they impress us exactly as living persons do, and excite our curiosity in precisely the same way. Accordingly, notwithstanding their many faults of construction and obscure English, they have something of the greatness of Shakespeare's dramas.

It is now time to turn to the study of the greatest of all Browning's poems. Perhaps I should not call it a poem. It is rather an immense poetic drama. As printed in this single volume* it represents four hundred and seventy-seven pages of closely printed small text. It is, therefore, even considered as a dramatic composition, many times larger than any true drama. But no true drama, except Shakespeare's, is more real or more terrible. Besides, it is a purely psychological drama. There is no scenery, no narrative in the ordinary sense. Everything is related in the first person. The whole is divided into twelve parts, each of which is a monologue. Nearly all of the monologues are spoken by different persons. The first monologue is the author's own, in which he tells us the meaning of the title and the story of the drama.

It is a true story of Italian life in the seventeenth century, the chief incident having really occurred in the year 1698. The poet one day found in an old Italian book shop a little book for sale, which was the history of a celebrated criminal trial. Besides the book, which included the speeches of the lawyers on both sides, and the evidence given before the court, there was a good deal of old manuscripts — papers probably prepared by some lawyer of the time in connection with the case. Browning was able to buy the whole thing for eight pence; that small sum furnished him with material for the most enormous poem in the English language. When he read the facts of the trial, he said he could actually see all the characters as plainly

* The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning. Vol. III, *The Ring and the Book* (1892. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), which we have in the Hearn Library.

as if they were alive, and could even hear them speak. He soon formed in his mind the plan for his poem; but it was a peculiar plan. The plan is indicated by the title of "The Ring and the Book." In Italy there is a great deal of beautiful light gold work made—for rings especially, which looks so delicate that at first sight you cannot understand how it was made. In a gold ring there are leaves and flowers and fruits and insects, so lightly made that even if you let the ring fall they would be injured or destroyed. Gold is very soft. In order to cut the gold in this way, the goldsmith uses a hard composition with which he covers the gold work, and after the carving and engraving have been done, this composition is melted off, so that only the pure gold is left, with all the work upon it. Browning says that he made his book somewhat in the same way that the Italian goldsmith makes his ring — by the use of an alloy. The facts of history and of law represent the gold in this case, and the poet mixes them with an alloy of imagination, emotion, sympathy, which helps him to make the whole story into a perfectly rounded drama, a complete circle, a Ring. This is the meaning of the title.

I shall first tell you the story briefly, according to the historical facts. About the year 1679 there was a family in Rome of the name of Comparini. The family consisted only of husband and wife; but it happened that the fact of their being without children proved a legal obstacle in the way of obtaining some money which they greatly desired. The wife, Violante, knew that her husband was too honest to wish to cheat the law, so she determined to try to get the money without letting him know her deceit in the matter. She pretended to have given birth, unexpectedly, to a child, but the child had really been bought from a woman of loose life—it was a very pretty female child, and was called Francesca Pompilia. Little Pompilia was supposed to be the real child of the Comparini; and the much desired money thus passed into their hands. This is the first act of the tragedy.

Pompilia grew up into a wonderfully beautiful girl; and when she was thirteen years old, many people wished to marry her. Guido Franceschini, Count of Arezzo, noticed the girl's beauty, and heard that she was rich. He determined to marry her if possible, chiefly for the sake of her money. He was a wicked old man, between fifty and sixty years of age, ugly, cunning, and poor. But he had immense influence, both among the nobility and among the church dignitaries, on account of his family relations; and he was himself of high rank. The marriage was negotiated successfully. Pompilia, a child of thirteen, could not naturally have wished to marry this horrible old man, but she had been taught to obey her parents as she obeyed Almighty God, and when she was told to marry him she married him without one word of complaint. By this marriage the wicked Count got into his hands all the property of the Comparini family, but it had been promised that the parents of the girl were to live in the palace of the Count, and to be taken care of for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, as soon as the Count had everything in his hands, he turned the old parents out of his house, in a state of absolute destitution; he had taken from them their daughter and all their money, everything that they had in the world. This is the second act of the tragedy.

Naturally the Comparini family were very angry. The mother of the girl was so angry that she told her husband all about the trick which she had played in passing off Pompilia for her own child. Pompilia, you know, was not her real child at all. This changed the legal aspect of the matter. Old Comparini went to the Count and said, "You took our money, and thought that you were taking our daughter. But you must give back that money. The girl is not our daughter; the money does not belong to her: it will have to be given back to the government that we deceived." This is the third act of the tragedy.

The Count was equal to the occasion. He understood the law; but he understood it much better than the Com-

parini people. So long as he kept Pompilia as his wife, he knew that he could keep the money. If he divorced her, on the ground that she was of vulgar origin, then he would have to give up the money. But this was not the only alternative. There was a third possibility. If Pompilia committed adultery, then he could either kill her or get rid of her and keep the money notwithstanding. Pompilia was a weak child only thirteen years old. He was a wicked and terrible man, with half a century of experience, diabolical cunning, diabolical cruelty, and ferocious determination. He could make her commit adultery. That would be the simplest possible solution of the difficulty. But, strange to say, this terrible man could not conquer that delicate child of thirteen. First he tried to appeal to her passions, to excite her imagination in an immoral way. But her heart was too pure to be corrupted. There was in her no spur of lust. She was a simple good pure wife, too pure for any wicked ideas to be planted in her mind. Then he tried force, atrocious cruelty, horrible menace, always without letting her know what he really intended. What he really intended was to force her to run away from him. She could not run away except in the company of a protector. If she ran away with a protector, then he could kill both her and the man and claim that he had detected the two in adultery. After having tortured the girl hideously, in every moral and immoral way, he did succeed in getting her to ask for protection. She first asked protection from priests and bishops. The priests and bishops were afraid of the Count, and told her, like the cowards that they were, that they could not help her. She wanted to become a nun. The nuns were afraid of the Count, and refused her prayer. At last she did find one priest, a brave man, who was willing to save her if possible. He said, "You must run away with me, though it will look very bad; there is no other way to help you." She ran away with him. Within twenty-four hours the pair were overtaken by the Count and his company of armed men. The opportunity to kill

Pompilia and her "lover" had come; but the so-called "lover," although only an honest poor priest, showed fight, and protected Pompilia against the Count and all his followers. The priest refused to surrender Pompilia except to the Church. The Church arrested both. Pompilia was put into a convent for safe-keeping. The priest was tried for adultery, and acquitted. But he had done wrong by breaking the law of the Church even for a good purpose; therefore he was sentenced to banishment for a certain number of years. This is the fourth act of the tragedy.

The Count finds that all his plans have failed. He has not been able to convict his wife of adultery, although he has been able to injure her reputation in the opinion of the public. He cannot get rid of her, and keep her money too, except by killing her. But she is in the convent. While he is thinking what to do, another event happens which upsets all his calculations. Pompilia gives birth to a child of which he certainly is the father. The money question, the legal aspect of it, is still more complicated by the birth of the child. At once, the Count determines to kill Pompilia and her parents, out of revenge. He knows that on certain days she goes to visit her parents. He watches for such an occasion, and with the help of some professional murderers, he kills the Comparini, and stabs Pompilia twenty-two times with a dagger. He imagined that this could be done so as to remain undiscovered; he thought that the crime could not be proved upon him. But poor Pompilia is very hard to kill. Although her slender body was thus stabbed through and through by a powerful man, she did not die at once; her wonderful youth kept her alive long enough to tell the police what had happened. The Count and his hired murderers were arrested and thrown into prison. This is the fifth act of the tragedy.

It is one thing to find the author of a crime, and put him into prison; it is a very different thing to convict and punish him. The Count was very powerful with the army, with the nobility, with the Church; everybody in his native

city was more afraid of him than of the devil. Nothing is so hard to get in this world as justice. The Count's powerful friends and relations all united to defend him. Dukes and great captains, cardinals and bishops and abbots and priests, rich merchants, influential statesmen, all combined to secure his acquittal. They obtained the services of great lawyers. They used money and threats to corrupt witnesses or to terrify them. Yet there was one thing necessary to secure his acquittal—evidence that the deed, which he cannot deny, was justified by adultery. An attempt was made to blacken the character of the murdered wife. But this evidence was overthrown in the court, and the judges pronounced sentence of death. Thereupon all the Count's friends made an appeal to the Pope; the Pope can save the Count, if pressure be brought of a sufficient sort upon his judgment. But the Pope happened to be a good man, and a keen man. He examines the evidence. He sees the truth. He understands the innocence and beauty of the character of the murdered Pompilia; he comprehends also the innocence and the courage of the priest who tried to defend her. He sends word to the prison that the Count must be executed immediately. So justice is obtained, at least so far as the punishment of murder can be called justice. But what becomes of the money? The nuns of the convent in which Pompilia died, they get the money by very discreditable means, and they keep it. The terrible Franceschini family cannot try to get that money from the convent; for the convent means the power of the Church; and the power of the Church is even more terrible than the power of the Franceschini. Of course the Pope knows nothing of this matter; the Pope is the finest character in the whole story. Historically this Pope was Innocent XII, but his character, as drawn in the study of Browning, is much more like the character of one of his predecessors, Innocent XI.

Now I have told you the story, or rather the history of the real tragedy, which happened something more than two hundred years ago. You can imagine how complicated the

whole thing is, from the very short summary which I have made. Now if you had to treat a story like this dramatically, how would you do it? where would you begin? in what way could you hope to make artistic order out of such confusion? The task might have puzzled even Shakespeare. It puzzled Browning for more than a year before he felt how the thing was possible to manage. When I tell you the way in which he treated the whole material of the case, I think you will perceive that only a genius could have thought of the way.

As I have said, Browning divides his poem into twelve parts; and each part is a monologue. I shall now give you in paragraphs as brief as possible, the subject of each monologue. You had better follow the order of the book, using Roman numerals at the beginning of each paragraph, and putting the title of the book in Italic letters:

I. *The Ring and the Book.* Interpretation of the title, and history of the crime and the trial as told in the ancient legal documents. This monologue represents the author's speaking only.

II. *Half-Rome.* Public opinion is always divided upon any extraordinary event. Browning here tries to give us one side of public opinion in the year 1698, upon the Franceschini murder. The monologue represents the ideas of a man of the society of that time.

III. *The Other Half-Rome.* This monologue represents the contrary opinion on the subject. But it is a curious fact that neither form of public opinion even approaches the truth. Both sides are absolutely mistaken, and very unjust to poor Pompilia.

IV. *Tertium Quid* (i.e., "a third somebody or party"). This opinion is quite different from that of the two halves of Rome, but it is equally far from the truth.

V. *Count Guido Franceschini.* Notice that although the three forms of opinion previously expressed all contradict each other, and all are untrue, nevertheless every one of them seems true while you read it. So does the story of

Count Guido Franceschini, the murderer, in his own defence. Although you have been prejudiced against him from the beginning, when you first read his side of the story you cannot help thinking that it is a very reasonable and very true story. He says in substance that he made a great mistake in marrying so young a girl, that she disliked him, that he did everything in his power to obtain her affection and to make her happy, that she ran away from his house with a monk, that even after that he was willing to make every allowance for her, but that at last it was impossible for him, without losing all self-respect, not to punish her crimes, and those of her infamous parents. He makes an excellent speech, this Count Guido Franceschini.

VI. *Giuseppe Caponsacchi.* This is the good priest, the true loyal man that tried to save Pompilia. He tells his story with perfect truthfulness and simplicity, and you know that it is true. But at the same time you feel that no one can believe it. The evidence is against the priest. Although he is innocent, everybody laughs at his protestations of innocence.

VII. *Pompilia.* This is the most horrible part of the book. It is a monologue by Pompilia telling of the cruelty and the atrocious wickedness of her husband. It makes your blood run cold to read it, but you know that nobody would believe that story in a court of justice. It is too terrible, too unnatural. Those who hear it only think that Pompilia is a very cunning wicked woman, trying to make people hate her husband, in order to excuse her own adultery.

VIII. *Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, Pauperum Procurator.* The speech of the lawyer for the defence, very cautious, very learned, very cunning. It was in those days the custom to argue such cases partly in Latin, and the papers were made out in Latin. "Dominus," "lord," was the Latin title of lawyer. "Pauperum Procurator" means the advocate or counsel of the poor; persons without money enough to procure legal services in the ordinary way, might be furnished with a lawyer employed by the state.

IX. *Juris Doctor Johannes-Baptista Bottinius, &c.* The

speech of the lawyer on the other side, equally learned, equally cunning, and equally cautious. The reader is forced to the conclusion that neither of these lawyers really understands the truth of the case. Both are telling untruth, and both are afraid of the truth. But you will notice that the lawyer who should speak in favour of Pompilia really does her more harm than the lawyer whose duty it is to speak against her. This is the result of cowardice and self-interest on both sides.

X. *The Pope.* A beautiful study of character. For the first time we learn the truth in this tenth monologue, so that we feel it is all there, and not to be mistaken by any one who hears it.

XI. *Guido.* Horrible. The murderer's confession of his own character.

XII. *The Book and the Ring.* Conclusion, and moral commentary.

I believe there is only part of this whole drama that has been seriously called into question by critics — the last line of the eleventh monologue, where Guido cries out, "Pompilia, will you let them murder me?" The question is whether the poet is right in representing this terrible man in such a passion of fear that he calls to his dead wife to help him. Certainly it is a general rule that the man capable of studied cruelty to women and children — to the weak, in short—is a coward at heart. But there are exceptions to this rule, and a great many remarkable Italian exceptions. Again many tribes of savages contradict the rule, being at once brave and cruel. I think that the criticism in this case may have been largely inspired by the history of certain Italian families, who were cruel indeed, but ferociously brave as well. However, Browning studied the facts for his characters very closely, and he may be right in representing Guido as a coward. He has been proved to be both treacherous and avaricious by the evidence in the case, and although prudence may sometimes be mistaken for cowardice, there were some facts brought out by witnesses

that seem to show the man to have been as much of a coward as he was a miser.

Now observe the immense psychological work that this treatment of the story involves — the study of nine or ten completely different characters, no one of whom could resemble a character of the nineteenth century, not at least in the matter of thought and speech. To create these was almost as wonderful as to call the dead of two hundred years ago out of their graves, a veritable necromancy. This work alone would make the book a marvellous thing. But the book is more than marvellous; it is in the highest degree philosophically instructive. Almost anything that happens in this world is judged somewhat after the fashion of the judgments delivered in "The Ring and the Book." For example, let us suppose an episode in Tokyo to-day, rather than an episode in Italy two hundred years ago, a case of killing. At first when the mere fact of the killing is known, there is a great curiosity as to the reason of it, and different newspapers publish different stories about it, and different people who knew both parties express different opinions as to the why and how. You may be sure that none of these accounts is perfectly true—they could not be true, because those from whom the accounts come have no perfect knowledge of the antecedents of the crime. But presently the case comes before the criminal court, with lawyers on both sides, to prosecute and to defend. Each does his duty the very best he can, one trying to convict, one trying to secure acquittal. But do these know the real story from beginning to end? Probably not. It is very seldom indeed that a lawyer can learn the inside, the psychological, history of a crime. He learns only the naked facts, and he must theorize largely from these facts. Finally the judge pronounces judgment. Does the judge know all about the matter? Almost certainly not. His duty is fixed by law in rigid lines, and he cannot depart from those lines; he can sentence only according to the broad conclusions which he draws from the facts. And after the

whole thing is over, still the real secrets of the two parties, of the criminal and the victim, remain for ever unknown in a majority of cases. Now what does this prove? It proves that human judgment is necessarily very imperfect, and that nothing is so difficult to learn as the absolute truth of motives and of feelings, even when the truth of the facts is unquestionable. Browning's book tells us more than this; it shows us that in some cases, where power and crime are on one side, and poverty and virtue upon the other, the chances against truth being able to make itself heard are just about a thousand to one. Of course the world is a little better to-day than two hundred years ago; murder is less common, justice is less corrupt. But allowing for these things, the chances of a man persecuted by a rich corporation, without reason, perhaps with monstrous cruelty, to obtain even a hearing, would be scarcely better than those of Pompilia in the story of "The Ring and the Book."

So much for the teaching. There is more than teaching, however; there are studies of character truly Shakespearian. Pompilia is quite as sweet a woman as Shakespeare's Cordelia. Her sweetness is altogether shown by a multitude of details, little words and thoughts and feelings, that we find scattered through her account of her terrible sufferings. The author never interrupts his speakers; he makes them describe themselves. In the case of the Pope, we are brought into the presence of a very superior intellect—one-sided, perhaps, but immensely strong in the direction of moral judgment; the mind of an old man whose entire life has been spent in the finest study of human nature from an ethical point of view, of human nature in its manifestations of good and evil. Nothing but this long experience helps him to see exactly how matters stand. The evidence brought before him is hopelessly confused, and where not confused, the facts are against Pompilia and strongly in favour of the murderer. Moreover, the murderer is powerful in the Church, with all the influence of clergy and nobility upon his side. But the old man can see through the

entire plot; he cuts it open, gets to the heart of it, perceives everything that was hidden. What is the lesson of his character? I think it is this, that a pure nature obtains, simply by reason of its unselfishness and purity, certain classes of perceptions that very cunning minds never can obtain. Very cunning people are peculiarly apt to make false judgments, because they are particularly in the habit of looking for selfish motives. They judge other hearts by their own. A pure nature does not do this; it considers the motive in the last rather than the first place, preferring to judge kindly so long as the evidence allows it. Intellectual training cannot always compensate for purity of character.

The studies of Guido himself, which are very horrible, are especially studies of the man of the Renaissance. We have had other studies of this kind in other poems of Browning, some of which I have already quoted to you. But there is a special moral in this study of Guido, the moral that a really wicked man must hate a really good woman, simply for the reason that she is good. Then we have in the two lawyers, two pictures of conflicting selfish interests, of selfishness and falsehood combined to defeat the truth, not because truth is necessarily unpleasant to the lawyer, but because he wants to make no enemies by exposing it. This is the way of the world to-day, and although these men speak the language of the sixteenth or seventeenth century, their feelings are those of the shrewd and selfish modern man of society, the man who has no courage in the face of wrong, if his pocket happens to be in danger. We like only three characters in the whole drama—Pompilia, the Pope, and Caponsacchi. Yet there is nothing very remarkable about Caponsacchi, except in the way of contrast. He is the one character who, although his life and interests and reputation are at stake, boldly risks everything simply for a generous impulse. Happily he is not extraordinary; if he were, one would lose faith in so terrible a world. Happily we know that wherever and

whenever a great wrong is done, there will always be a Caponsacchi to speak out and to do all that is possible against it. But Caponsacchi is crushed; and even the Pope is obliged to punish him for doing what is noble. This is one of the moral problems of the composition. The man who wants to do right, and cannot do right except by disobedience to law, may be loved for doing right, but he must be punished nevertheless for breaking the law. Does this mean that he is punished for doing right? I think we should not look at it in that way. The truth is that the observance of discipline must be insisted upon even in exceptional cases, because it regards the happiness of millions. We cannot allow men to decide for themselves when discipline should be broken. Caponsacchi is thus a martyr in the cause of individual justice. He has to pay, justly, the penalty of setting a dangerous example to thousands of others. But he is not on that account less estimable and lovable, and even the Pope, in punishing him, gives him words of warm praise.

The consideration of this huge poem ought also to tempt some of you at a later day to try some application of its method to some incident of real life. I do not now mean in poetry, but in prose. If you know enough about human nature to make the attempt, there is no better way of telling a story. It was a pure invention on the part of Browning, and we may call it a new method. But of course one must have a very great power of reading character to be able to do anything of the same kind.

This is the most colossal attempt in psychology made by Browning, but a large number of his longer poems are worked out in precisely the same manner as single monologues. "The Bishop orders his Tomb," another Italian study, gives us all the ugly side of the Renaissance character —its selfishness, lust, hypocrisy, and ambition, together with that extraordinary sense of art which gave a certain greatness even to very bad men. "Bishop Blougram's Apology" (which is said to be a satire upon a famous English

cardinal) is quite modern, but it is almost equally ugly. It shows us a very powerful mind arguing, with irresistible logic and merciless cleverness, in an absolutely unworthy cause. The bishop has heard a young free thinker observe that the bishop could not believe the doctrines of the church, he was too clever a bishop for that. So he calls the young man to him, and utterly crushes him by a very clever lecture, in which he proves that belief or unbelief is equally foolish, that right and wrong are interchangeable, that black may be white or white black, that common sense and a knowledge of the world represent the highest wisdom, and that the free thinker is an absolute fool because he tells the world that he is a free thinker. We know that the bishop is morally wrong the whole way through, that every statement which he makes is wrong; yet it would take a clever man to prove him wrong. The logic is too well managed. Few psychological studies are comparable to this. "Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium,'" said to be a satire upon the great Scottish spiritualist and humbug, Home, shows us another kind of quackery; a man who lives by imposture explains to us how he can practise imposture with a good moral conscience, and under the belief that imposture is a benefit to mankind. He talks so well that he obliges even the person who has detected his imposture to lend him or give him a considerable sum of money — in short, he can trick even those who know his trickery. But see how different these beings are from each other, and how different the studies of their character must necessarily prove. Yet Browning seems never to find any difficulty in painting the mind of a man, whether good or bad, whether of to-day or of the Middle Ages. "Paracelsus," for example, is a mediæval character; Browning makes him tell us the story of his researches into alchemy and magic, makes him impart to us the secret ambition that once filled him, and the consequences of disappointment and of failure. "Sordello," again, is of the thirteenth century; you will find his name in the great poem of Dante. Sor-

dello was a poet and troubadour, who tried to succeed socially and politically by the exercise of a brilliant talent, and almost did succeed. Browning's poem on him is the whole story of a human soul; only, it is the man himself who tells it. And the moral is that suffering and sorrow bring wisdom. How various and how wonderful is this range of character-study! Yet I have mentioned only a few out of scores and scores of compositions. I cannot insist too much upon this quality of versatility in Browning, this display of Shakespearian power. In all Tennyson you will find scarcely more than twenty really distinct characters; and some of these are but half drawn. In Rossetti you will find scarcely more than half a dozen, mostly women. In Swinburne there is no character whatever, except the poet's own, outside of that grand singer's dramatic work. But in Browning there are hundreds of distinct characters, and there is nothing at all vague about them; they speak, they move, they act with real and not with artificial life. Sometimes a character may occupy a hundred pages, sometimes it may be drawn in half a dozen lines, but the drawing is equally distinct and equally true. And there is scarcely any kind of human nature of which we have no picture. Even the lowest type of savage is drawn, the primitive savage, for "Caliban upon Setebos" gives us the thoughts and feelings of such a savage about God—God being figured in the savage mind, of course, as only a much stronger and larger kind of savage, possessing magical power.

In all his poems, as I said, Browning is essentially dramatic. Quite rightly has he grouped several collections of short poems under titles which suggest this fact, such as "Dramatic Idyls," "Dramatis Personæ," "Men and Women." Sometimes the poet himself is the only speaker and actor, giving us his own particular feelings of the moment; but in the most noteworthy cases of this kind he is talking, not to the reader, but to ghosts. For instance, "Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their

Day," are imaginary conversations which Browning holds with the ghosts of men long dead — writers, philosophers, statesmen, priests. It is in this collection that you will find the remarkable verses on the great poem of Smart, which revived Smart's work for modern readers after a hundred years of oblivion. I cannot find time to tell you about the other personages of these imaginary conversations; but I may mention that Mandeville is the subject of a special conversation, and that you will find the whole germ of Mandeville's philosophy in this composition. But let us turn to some consideration of Browning's work in the true dramatic form—in plays, tragedies or comedies, and in translations of plays from the Greek.

It would require several lectures to give a summary of Browning's plays; and they do not always represent his best genius. For it is a curious fact that this man who, as a simple poet, was the greatest of English dramatists after Shakespeare, was rarely quite successful when he attempted the true dramatic form. He was great in the monologue; he was not great upon the stage. Some of his plays were acted, such as "Strafford" and "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon"; but they did not prove to be worthy of great success. "In a Balcony," which could not be put upon the stage at all, is much better; and perhaps it is better because it consists only of two monologues, or rather of a conversation between two persons; for the part taken by the other actors is altogether insignificant. "The Return of the Druses" and "Luria," like Tennyson's dramas, are excellent poetry, but they are not suited for the stage. The best of all Browning's dramas, the only one that I really want you to read, is "A Soul's Tragedy." I may say a word about the plot of this. It is a story of friendship between two young men, patriots and statesmen. In a political crisis one of the young men stabs a political enemy, and has fled from the country. But before fleeing, he trusts all his interests and his property to his friend, and asks the friend also to take care of his betrothed. What does the friend do?

Exposed to great temptation, he betrays his trust. He sees a chance to obtain political power by pretending to be the man who really stabbed the politician on the other side—the tyrant of an hour. The people acclaim him as their saviour, make him dictator. Then he goes further in his treachery, by making love to his friend's sweetheart. At last a Roman statesman, Ogniben, appears upon the scene, with power to crush the revolution, or to do anything that he pleases. But Ogniben is a terribly clever man, and he does not want blood-shed; he knows the character of the new dictator, and determines to play with him, as a cat with a mouse. First he flatters him enough to make him betray all his weaknesses, his vanities, his fears. Then, at quite the unexpected moment, he summons the young man who had run away, I mean the friend betrayed, and brings him face to face with the treacherous dictator. The result is of course a moral collapse; that is the real soul's tragedy. I am giving only a thin skeleton of the plot. But you ought to read this play, if only for the wonderful studies of character in it, not the least remarkable of which is the awful Ogniben, far-seeing, cunning beyond cunning, strong beyond force, who can unravel plots with a single word and pierce all masks of hypocrisy with a single glance; but whom you feel to be, in a large way, generous and kindly, and so far as possible, just. I think not only that this is Browning's greatest play, but that as a play it is psychologically superior to anything else which has been done in Victorian drama. It is not fit for the stage, and it is not even very great as poetry—indeed half of it or more is prose, and rather eccentric prose; but it offers wonderful examples of analytical power not surpassed in any other contemporary poet or dramatist.

About Browning's translations from the Greek poets, I scarcely know what to say. Most critics of authority acknowledge that Browning has made the most faithful metrical translation of the "Agamemnon" of Æschylus. But they also declare that in spite of its exactness, the Greek

spirit and feeling have entirely vanished under Browning's treatment. My own feeling about the matter is that you would do much better to read the prose translation of Æschylus. Yet I could not say this in regard to Browning's translation of the "Alcestis" of Euripides, which you will find embodied in the text of "Balaustion's Adventure." Balaustion is a Greek dancing girl. She is taken prisoner with many Athenian people at the time of the disastrous Greek expedition to Syracuse, which you must have read about in history. To please her captors, she repeats for them the wonderful verses of Euripides, by which they are so much affected that they pardon both her and her companions. This incident is founded upon fact, and Browning uses it very well to introduce his translation. Perhaps the genius of Euripides was closer to the genius of Browning than that of Æschylus; for this translation is incomparably better from an emotional point of view than the other. It is very beautiful indeed; and even after having read the Greek play in a good prose translation, I think that you would find both pleasure and profit in reading Browning's verses.

The important thing now for you to get clearly into your mind is one general fact about this enormously various work of Browning. Suppose somebody should ask you what is different in the work of Browning from that of all other modern poets, what would you be able to answer? But unless you can answer, the whole value of this lecture would be lost upon you. Browning himself has excellently answered, in a little verse which forms the prologue to the second series of the Dramatic Idyls.

"You are sick, that's sure,"—they say:
"Sick of what?"—they disagree.
"'Tis the brain,"—thinks Doctor A;
"'Tis the heart,"—holds Doctor B.
"The liver—my life I'd lay!"
"The lungs!" "The lights!"
Ah me!

So ignorant of man's whole
Of bodily organs plain to see—
So sage and certain, frank and free,
About what's under lock and key—
Man's soul!

That is to say, even the wisest doctors cannot agree about the simple fact of a man's sickness, notwithstanding the fact that they have studied anatomy and physiology and osteology, and have examined every part of the body. Yet, although the wisest men of science are obliged to confess that they cannot tell you everything about the body, which can be seen, even ignorant persons think that they know everything about the soul of a man, which cannot be seen at all, and about the mind of a man, to which only God himself has the key. Now all the purpose of Browning's work and life has been to show people what a very wonderful and complex and incomprehensible thing human character is—therefore to show that the most needful of all study is the study of human nature. He is especially the poet of character, the only one who has taught us, since Shakespeare's time, what real men and women are, how different each from every other, how unclassifiable according to any general rule, how differently noble at their best, how differently wicked at their worst, how altogether marvellous and infinitely interesting. His mission has been the mission of a great dramatic psychologist. And if anybody ever asks you what was Robert Browning, you can answer that he was the great Poet of Human Character — not of character of any one time or place or nation, but of all times and places and peoples of which it was possible for him to learn anything.

Here we must close our little studies of Victorian poets —that is to say, of the four great ones. I hope that you will be able to summarize in your own mind the main characteristic of each, as I have tried to indicate in the case of Browning. Remember Tennyson as the greatest influence upon the language of his mother country, because of his

exquisiteness of workmanship and his choice of English subjects in preference to all others. He is the most English of all the four. Remember Rossetti as being altogether different in his personality and feeling—a man of the Middle Ages born into the nineteenth century, and in the nineteenth century still the poet of mediæval feeling. And think of Swinburne — the greatest musician of all, the most perfect master of form and sound in modern poetry — as an expounder of Neo-Paganism, of another Renaissance in the world of literature.