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Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Dostoyevsky Smith Willis
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Henry Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Vinci
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Gogol Busch
Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato Scott
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Dickens Plato Scott
Andersen Andersen Cervantes Burton Hesse Harte
London Descartes Wells Voltaire Cooke
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The Poetry Of Robert Browning

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CONTENTS

- I. Browning And Tennyson
- II. The Treatment Of Nature
- III. The Treatment Of Nature
- IV. Browning's Theory Of Human Life—Pauline And Paracelsus
- V. The Poet Of Art
- VI. Sordello
- VII. Browning And Sordello
- VIII. The Dramas
- IX. Poems Of The Passion Of Love
- X. The Passions Other Than Love
- XI. Imaginative Representations
- XII. Imaginative Representations—Renaissance
- XIII. Womanhood In Browning
- XIV. Womanhood In Browning—(The Dramatic Lyrics And Pompilia)
- XV. Balaustion
- XVI. The Ring And The Book
- XVII. Later Poems
- XVIII. The Last Poems

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CHAPTER I

BROWNING AND TENNYSON

Parnassus, Apollo's mount, has two peaks, and on these, for sixty years, from 1830 to 1890, [1] two poets sat, till their right to these lofty peaks became unchallenged. Beneath them, during these years, on the lower knolls of the mount of song, many new poets sang; with diverse instruments, on various subjects, and in manifold ways. They had their listeners; the Muses were also their visitants; but none of them ventured seriously to dispute the royal summits where Browning and Tennyson sat, and smiled at one another across the vale between.

Both began together; and the impulses which came to them from the new and excited world which opened its fountains in and about 1832 continued to impel them till the close of their lives. While the poetic world altered around them, while two generations of poets made new schools of poetry, they remained, for the most part, unaffected by these schools. There is nothing of Arnold and Clough, of Swinburne, Rossetti or Morris, or of any of the others, in Browning or Tennyson. There is nothing even of Mrs. Browning in Browning. What changes took place in them were wrought, first, by the natural growth of their own character; secondly, by the natural development of their art-power; and thirdly, by the slow decaying of that power. They were, in comparison with the rest, curiously uninfluenced by the changes of the world around them. The main themes, with which they began, they retained to the end. Their methods, their instruments, their way of feeling into the world of man and of nature, their relation to the doctrines of God and of Man, did not, though on all these matters they held diverse views, alter with the alteration of the world. But this is more true of Browning than of Tennyson. The political and social events of those years touched Tennyson, as we see from *Maud* and the *Princess*, but his way of looking at them was not the way of a contemporary. It might have been predicted from his previous career and work. Then the new movements of Science and Criticism which disturbed Clough and Arnold so deeply, also troubled Tennyson, but not half so seriously.

He staggered for a time under the attack on his old conceptions, but he never yielded to it. He was angry with himself for every doubt that beset him, and angry with the Science and Criticism which disturbed the ancient ideas he was determined not to change. Finally, he rested where he had been when he wrote *In Memoriam*, nay more, where he had been when he began to write.

3There were no such intervals in Browning's thought. One could scarcely say from his poetry, except in a very few places, that he was aware of the social changes of his time, or of the scientific and critical movement which, while he lived, so profoundly modified both theology and religion. [2] *Asolando*, in 1890, strikes the same chords, but more feebly, which *Paracelsus* struck in 1835.

But though, in this lofty apartness and self-unity, Browning and Tennyson may fairly be said to be at one, in themselves and in their song they were different. There could scarcely be two characters, two musics, two minds, two methods in art, two imaginations, more distinct and contrasted than those which lodged in these men—and the object of this introduction is to bring out this contrast, with the purpose of placing in a clearer light some of the peculiar elements in the poetry of Browning, and in his position as a poet.

1. Their public fate was singularly different. In 1842 Tennyson, with his two volumes of *Collected Poems*, made his position. The *Princess*, in 1847, increased his reputation. In 1850, *In Memoriam* raised him, it was said, above all the poets of his time, and the book was appreciated, read and loved by the greater part of the English-speaking world. The success and popular fame which now followed were well deserved and wisely borne. They have endured and will endure. A host of imitators, who caught his music and his manner, filled the groves and ledges which led up to the peak on which he lived. His side of Parnassus was thronged.

It was quite otherwise with his brother-poet. Only a few clear-eyed persons cared to read *Paracelsus*, which appeared in 1835. *Strafford*, Browning's first drama, had a little more vogue; it was acted for a while. When *Sordello*, that strange child of genius, was born in 1840, those who tried to read its first pages declared they were incomprehensible. It seems that critics in those days had either less intelligence than we have, or were more impatient and less

attentive, for not only *Sordello* but even *In Memoriam* was said to be exceedingly obscure.

Then, from 1841 to 1846, Browning published at intervals a series of varied poems and dramas, under the title of *Bells and Pomegranates*. These, one might imagine, would have grasped the heart of any public which had a care for poetry. Among them were such diverse poems as *Pippa Passes*; *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*; *Saul*; *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*; *My Last Duchess*; *Waring*. I only mention a few (all different in note, subject and manner from one another), in order to mark the variety and range of imaginative power displayed in this wonderful set of little books. The 5Bells of poetry's music, hung side by side with the golden Pomegranates of thought, made the fringe of the robe of this high priest of song. Rarely have imagination and intellect, ideal faith and the sense which handles daily life, passion and quietude, the impulse and self-mastery of an artist, the joy of nature and the fates of men, grave tragedy and noble grotesque, been mingled together more fully—bells for the pleasure and fruit for the food of man.

Yet, on the whole, they fell dead on the public. A few, however, loved them, and all the poems were collected in 1849. *In Memoriam* and this Collected Edition of Browning issued almost together; but with how different a fate and fame we see most plainly in the fact that Browning can scarcely be said to have had any imitators. The groves and ledges of his side of Apollo's mountain were empty, save for a few enchanted listeners, who said: "This is our music, and here we build our tent."

As the years went on, these readers increased in number, but even when the volumes entitled *Men and Women* were published in 1855, and the *Dramatis Personæ* in 1864, his followers were but a little company. For all this neglect Browning cared as a bird cares who sings for the love of singing, and who never muses in himself whether the wood is full or not of listeners. Being always a true artist, he could not stop versing and playing; and not one grain of villain envy touched his happy heart when he looked across the valley to Tennyson. He loved his mistress Art, and his love made him always joyful in creating.

6At last his time came, but it was not till nearly twenty years after the Collected Poems of 1849 that *The Ring and the Book* astonished the reading public so much by its intellectual *tour de force* that it was felt to be unwise to ignore Browning any longer. His past work was now discovered, read and praised. It was not great success or worldwide fame that he attained, but it was pleasant to him, and those who already loved his poems rejoiced with him. Before he died he was widely read, never so much as Tennyson, but far more than he had ever expected. It had become clear to all the world that he sat on a rival height with Tennyson, above the rest of his fellow-poets.

Their public fate, then, was very different. Tennyson had fifty years of recognition, Browning barely ten. And to us who now know Browning this seems a strange thing. Had he been one of the smaller men, a modern specialist like Arnold or Rossetti, we could better understand it. But Browning's work was not limited to any particular or temporary phase of human nature. He set himself to represent, as far as he could, all types of human nature; and, more audacious still, types taken from many diverse ages, nations and climates. He told us of times and folk as far apart as Caliban and Cleon, as Karshish and Waring, as Balaustion and Fifine, as St. John and Bishop Blougram. The range and the contrasts of his subjects are equally great. And he did this work with a searching analysis, a humorous keenness, a joyous boldness, and an opulent imagination at once penetrative and passionate. When, then, we realise this as we realise it now, we are the more astonished 7that appreciation of him lingered so long. Why did it not come at first, and why did it come in the end?

The first answer to that question is a general one. During the years between 1860 and 1890, and especially during the latter half of these years, science and criticism were predominant. Their determination to penetrate to the roots of things made a change in the general direction of thought and feeling on the main subjects of life. Analysis became dearer to men than synthesis, reasoning than imagination. Doubtful questions were submitted to intellectual decision alone. The Understanding, to its great surprise, was employed on the investigation of the emotions, and even the artists were drawn in this direction. They, too, began to dissect the human heart.

Poets and writers of fiction, students of human nature, were keenly interested, not so much in our thoughts and feelings as in exposing how and why we thought or felt in this or that fashion. In such analysis they seemed to touch the primal sources of life. They desired to dig about the tree of humanity and to describe all the windings of its roots and fibres—not much caring whether they withered the tree for a time—rather than to describe and sing its outward beauty, its varied foliage, and its ruddy fruit. And this liking to investigate the hidden inwardness of motives—which many persons, weary of self-contemplation, wisely prefer to keep hidden—ran through the practice of all the arts. They became, on the whole, less emotional, more intellectual. The close marriage between passion and thought, without whose cohabitation no work of genius is born in the arts, was dissolved; and the intellect of the artist often worked by itself, and his emotion by itself. Some of the parthenogenetic children of these divorced powers were curious products, freaks, even monsters of literature, in which the dry, cynical, or vivisection temper had full play, or the naked, lustful, or cruel exposure of the emotions in ugly, unnatural, or morbid forms was glorified. They made an impudent claim to the name of Art, but they were nothing better than disagreeable Science. But this was an extreme deviation of the tendency. The main line it took was not so detestable. It was towards the ruthless analysis of life, and of the soul of man; a part, in fact, of the general scientific movement. The outward forms of things charmed writers less than the motives which led to their making. The description of the tangled emotions and thoughts of the inner life, before any action took place, was more pleasurable to the writer, and easier, than any description of their final result in act. This was borne to a wearisome extreme in fiction, and in these last days a comfortable reaction from it has arisen. In poetry it did not last so long. Morris carried us out of it. But long before it began, long before its entrance into the arts, Browning, who on another side of his genius delighted in the representation of action, anticipated in poetry, and from the beginning of his career, twenty, even thirty years before it became pronounced in literature, this tendency to the intellectual analysis of human nature. When he began it, no one cared for it; and *Paracelsus*, *Sordello* and the soul-dissecting poems in *Bells and Pomegranates* fell on an unheeding world. But Browning did not heed the unheeding of the

world. He had the courage of his aims in art, and while he frequently shaped in his verse the vigorous movement of life, even to its moments of fierce activity, he went on quietly, amid the silence of the world, to paint also the slowly interwoven and complex pattern of the inner life of men. And then, when the tendency of which I speak had collared the interest of society, society, with great and ludicrous amazement, found him out. "Here is a man," it said, "who has been doing in poetry for the last thirty years the very thing of which we are so fond, and who is doing it with delightful and varied subtlety. We will read him now." So Browning, anticipating by thirty years the drift of the world, was not read at first; but, afterwards, the world having reached him, he became a favoured poet.

However, fond as he was of metaphysical analysis, he did not fall into the extremes into which other writers carried it, *Paracelsus* is, indeed, entirely concerned with the inner history of a soul, but *Sordello* combines with a similar history a tale of political and warlike action in which men and women, like Salinguerra and Palma, who live in outward work rather than in inward thought, are described; while in poems like *Pippa Passes* and some of the Dramas, emotion and thought, intimately interwoven, are seen blazing, as it were, into a lightning of swift deeds. Nor are other poems wanting, in which, not long analysis, but short passion, fiery outbursts of thought, taking immediate form, are represented with astonishing intensity.

102. This second remarkable power of his touches the transition which has begun to carry us, in the last few years, from the subjective to the objective in art. The time came, and quite lately, when art, weary of intellectual and minute investigation, turned to realise, not the long inward life of a soul with all its motives laid bare, but sudden moments of human passion, swift and unoutlined impressions on the senses, the moody aspects of things, flared-out concentrations of critical hours of thought and feeling which years perhaps of action and emotion had brought to the point of eruption. Impressionism was born in painting, poetry, sculpture and music.

It was curious that, when we sought for a master who had done this in the art of poetry, we found that Browning—who had in long poems done the very opposite of impressionism—had also, in a

number of short poems, anticipated impressionist art by nearly forty years. *Porphyria's Lover*, many a scene in *Sordello*, *My Last Duchess*, *The Laboratory*, *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, are only a few out of many. It is pleasant to think of the ultimate appearance of Waring, flashed out for a moment on the sea, only to disappear. In method, swiftness and colour, but done in verse, it is an impressionist picture, as vivid in transient scenery as in colour. He did the same sort of work in poems of nature, of human life, of moments of passion, of states of the soul. That is another reason why he was not read at first, and why he is read now. He was impressionist long before Impressionism arrived. When it arrived he was found out. And he stood alone, for Tennyson is never impressionist, and never could have been. Neither was Swinburne nor Arnold, Morris nor Rossetti.

3. Again, in the leisured upper ranges of thought and emotion, and in the extraordinary complexity of human life which arose, first, out of the more intimate admixture of all classes in our society; and secondly, out of the wider and more varied world-life which increased means of travel and knowledge afforded to men, Tennyson's smooth, melodious, simple development of art-subjects did not represent the clashing complexity of human life, whether inward in the passions, the intellect or the soul, or in the active movement of the world. And the other poets were equally incapable of representing this complexity of which the world became clearly conscious. Arnold tried to express its beginnings, and failed, because he tried to explain instead of representing them. He wrote about them; he did not write them down. Nor did he really belong to this novel, quick, variegated, involved world which was so pleased with its own excitement and entanglement. He was the child of a world which was then passing away, out of which life was fading, which was tired like Obermann, and sought peace in reflective solitudes. Sometimes he felt, as in *The New Age*, the pleasure of the coming life of the world, but he was too weary to share in it, and he claimed quiet. But chiefly he saw the disturbance, the unregulated life; and, unable to realise that it was the trouble and wildness of youth, he mistook it for the trouble of decay. He painted it as such. But it was really young, and out of it broke all kinds of experiments in social, religious, philosophical and political thought, such as

we have seen and read of for the last thirty years. Art joined in the experiments of this youthful time. It opened a new fountain and sent forth from it another stream, to echo this attempting, clanging and complicated society; and this stream did not flow like a full river, making large or sweet melody, but like a mountain torrent thick with rocks, the thunderous whirlpools of whose surface were white with foam. Changing and sensational scenery haunted its lower banks where it became dangerously navigable. Strange boats, filled with outlandish figures, who played on unknown instruments, and sang of deeds and passions remote from common life, sailed by on its stormy waters. Few were the concords, many the discords, and some of the discords were never resolved. But in one case at least—in the case of Browning's poetry, and in very many cases in the art of music—out of the discords emerged at last a full melody of steady thought and controlled emotion as (to recapture my original metaphor) the rude, interrupted music of the mountain stream reaches full and concordant harmony when it flows in peace through the meadows of the valley.

These complex and intercleaving conditions of thought and passion into which society had grown Browning represented from almost the beginning of his work. When society became conscious of them—there it found him. And, amazed, it said, "Here is a man who forty years ago lived in the midst of our present life and wrote about it." They saw the wild, loud complexity of their world expressed in his verse; and yet were dimly conscious, to their consolation, that he was aware of a central peace where the noise was quieted and the tangle unravelled.

For Browning not only represented this discordant, varied hurly-burly of life, but also, out of all the discords which he described, and which, when he chose, even his rhythms and word-arrangements realised in sound, he drew a concordant melody at last, and gave to a world, troubled with itself, the hope of a great concert into which all the discords ran, and where they were resolved. And this hope for the individual and the race was one of the deepest elements in Browning's religion. It was also the hope of Tennyson, but Tennyson was often uncertain of it, and bewailed the uncertainty. Browning was certain of his hope, and for the most part resolved his discords. Even when he did not resolve them, he

firmly believed that they would be resolved. This, his essential difference from the other poets of the last fifty years, marks not only his apartness from the self-ignorance of English society, and the self-sceptical scepticism which arises from that self-ignorance, but also how steadily assured was the foundation of his spiritual life. In the midst of the shifting storms of doubt and trouble, of mockery, contradiction, and assertion on religious matters, he stood unremoved. Whatever men may think of his faith and his certainties, they reveal the strength of his character, the enduring courage of his soul, and the inspiring joyousness that, born of his strength, characterised him to the last poem he wrote. While the other poets were tossing on the sea of unresolved Question, he rested, musing and creating, 14on a green island whose rocks were rooted on the ocean-bed, and wondered, with the smiling tolerance of his life-long charity, how his fellows were of so little faith, and why the sceptics made so much noise. He would have reversed the Psalmist's cry. He would have said, "Thou art not cast down, O my soul; thou art not disquieted within me. Thou hast hoped in God, who is the light of thy countenance, and thy God."

At first the world, enamoured of its own complex discords, and pleased, like boys in the street, with the alarms it made, only cared for that part of Browning which represented the tangle and the clash, and ignored his final melody. But of late it has begun, tired of the restless clatter of intellectual atoms, to desire to hear, if possible, the majestic harmonies in which the discords are resolved. And at this point many at present and many more in the future will find their poetic and religious satisfaction in Browning. At the very end, then, of the nineteenth century, in a movement which had only just begun, men said to themselves, "Browning felt beforehand what we are beginning to hope for, and wrote of it fifty, even sixty years ago. No one cared then for him, but we care now."

Again, though he thus anticipated the movements of the world, he did not, like the other poets, change his view about Nature, Man and God. He conceived that view when he was young, and he did not alter it. Hence, he did not follow or reflect from year to year the opinions of his time on these great matters. When *Paracelsus* was published in 1835 Browning had fully thought out, and in that 15poem fully expressed, his theory of God's relation to man, and of

man's relation to the universe around him, to his fellow men, and to the world beyond. It was a theory which was original, if any theory can be so called. At least, its form, as he expressed it, was clearly original. Roughly sketched in *Pauline*, fully rounded in *Paracelsus*, it held and satisfied his mind till the day of his death. But Tennyson had no clear theory about Man or Nature or God when he began, nor was he afterwards, save perhaps when he wrote the last stanzas of *In Memoriam*, a fully satisfied citizen of the city that has foundations. He believed in that city, but he could not always live in it. He grew into this or that opinion about the relations of God and man, and then grew out of it. He held now this, now that view of nature, and of man in contact with nature. There was always battle in his soul; although he won his brittle in the end, he had sixty years of war. Browning was at peace, firm-fixed. It is true the inward struggle of Tennyson enabled him to image from year to year his own time better than Browning did. It is true this struggle enabled him to have great variety in his art-work when it was engaged with the emotions which belong to doubt and faith; but it also made him unable to give to his readers that sense of things which cannot be shaken, of faith in God and in humanity wholly independent, in its depths, of storms on the surface of this mortal life, which was one of Browning's noblest legacies to that wavering, faithless, pessimistic, analysis-tormented world through which we have fought our way, and out of which we are emerging.

164. The danger in art, or for an artist, of so settled a theory is that in expression it tends to monotony; and sometimes, when we find almost every poem of Browning's running up into his theory, we arrive at the borders of the Land of Weary-men. But he seems to have been aware of this danger, and to have conquered it. He meets it by the immense variety of the subjects he chooses, and of the scenery in which he places them. I do not think he ever repeats any one of his examples, though he always repeats his theory. And the pleasant result is that we can either ignore the theory if we like, or rejoice over its universal application, or, beyond it altogether, be charmed and excited by the fresh examples alone. And they are likely to charm, at least by variety, for they are taken from all ages of history; from as many diverse phases of human act, character and passion as there are poems which concern them; from many periods

of the arts; from most of the countries of Europe, from France, Germany, Spain, Italy, (rarely from England,) with their specialised types of race and of landscape; and from almost every class of educated modern society. Moreover, he had a guard within his own nature against the danger of this monotony. It was the youthful freshness with which, even in advanced age, he followed his rapid impulses to art-creation. No one was a greater child than he in the quickness with which he received a sudden call to poetry from passing events or scenes, and in the eagerness with which he seized them as subjects. He took the big subjects now and then which the world expects to be taken, and treated them with elaborate thought and steadfast feeling, but he was more often like the girl in his half-dramatic poem, whom the transient occurrences and sights of the day touched into song. He picked up his subjects as a man culls flowers in a mountain walk, moved by an ever-recurring joy and fancy in them—a book on a stall, a bust in an Italian garden, a face seen at the opera, the market chatter of a Tuscan town, a story told by the roadside in Brittany, a picture in some Accademia—so that, though the ground-thought might incur the danger of dulness through repetition, the joy of the artist so filled the illustration, and his freshness of invention was so delighted with itself, that even to the reader the theory seemed like a new star.

In this way he kept the use of having an unwavering basis of thought which gave unity to his sixty years of work, and yet avoided the peril of monotony. An immense diversity animated his unity, filled it with gaiety and brightness, and secured impulsiveness of fancy. This also differentiates him from Tennyson, who often wanted freshness; who very rarely wrote on a sudden impulse, but after long and careful thought; to whose seriousness we cannot always climb with pleasure; who played so little with the world. These defects in Tennyson had the excellences which belong to them in art, just as these excellences in Browning had, in art, their own defects. We should be grateful for the excellences, and not trouble ourselves about the defects. However, neither the excellences nor the defects concern us in the present discussion. It is the contrast between the two men on which we dwell.

185. The next point of contrast, which will further illustrate why Browning was not read of old but is now read, has to do with his-

torical criticism. There arose, some time ago, as part of the scientific and critical movement of the last forty years, a desire to know and record accurately the early life of peoples, pastoral, agricultural and in towns, and the beginning of their arts and knowledges; and not only their origins, but the whole history of their development. A close, critical investigation was made of the origins of each people; accurate knowledge, derived from contemporary documents, of their life, laws, customs and language was attained; the facts of their history were separated from their mythical and legendary elements; the dress, the looks of men, the climate of the time, the physical aspects of their country—all the skeleton of things was fitted together, bone to bone. And for a good while this merely critical school held the field. It did admirable and necessary work.

But when it was done, art claimed its place in this work. The desire sprang up among historians to conceive all this history in the imagination, to shape vividly its scenery, to animate and individualise its men and women, to paint the life of the human soul in it, to clothe it in flesh and blood, to make its feet move and its eyes flash—but to do all these things within the limits of the accurate knowledge which historical criticism had defined. "Let us saturate ourselves," said the historians, "with clear knowledge of the needful facts, and then, without violation of our knowledge, imagine the human life, the landscape, the thinking and feeling of a primitive man, of his early religion, of his passions; of Athens when the Persian came, of Rome when the Republic was passing into the Empire, of a Provincial in Spain or Britain, of a German town in the woods by the river. Let us see in imagination as well as in knowledge an English settlement on the Welsh border, an Italian medieval town when its art was being born, a Jewish village when Christ wandered into its streets, a musician or a painter's life at a time when Greek art was decaying, or when a new impulse like the Renaissance or the French Revolution came upon the world." When that effort of the historians had established itself, and we have seen it from blossoming to fruitage, people began to wonder that no poet had ever tried to do this kind of work. It seemed eminently fitted for a poet's hand, full of subjects alluring to the penetrative imagination. It needed, of course, some scholarship, for it demanded accuracy in its grasp of the main ideas of the time to be represented; but that being given,

immense opportunities remained for pictures of human life, full of colour, thought and passions; for subtle and brilliant representations of the eternal desires and thinkings of human nature as they were governed by the special circumstances of the time in which the poem was placed; and for the concentration into a single poem, gathered round one person, of the ideas whose new arrival formed a crisis in the history of art.

Men looked for this in Tennyson and did not find it. His Greek and mediæval poems were modernised. Their imaginative work was uncritical. But when the historians and the critics of art and of religious movements happened at last to look into Browning, they discovered, to their delight and wonder, that he had been doing, with a curious knowledge, this kind of work for many years. He had anticipated the results of that movement of the imagination in historical work which did not exist when he began to write; he had worked that mine, and the discovery of this made another host of people readers of his poetry.

We need scarcely give examples of this. *Sordello*, in 1840 (long before the effort of which we speak began), was such a poem—the history of a specialised soul, with all its scenery and history vividly mediæval. Think of the *Spanish Cloister*, *The Laboratory*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*, the *Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, poems, each of which paints an historical period or a vivid piece of its life. Think of *The Ring and the Book*, with all the world of Rome painted to the life, and all the soul of the time!

The same kind of work was done for phases and periods of the arts from Greek times to the Renaissance, I may even say, from the Renaissance to the present day. *Balaustion's Prologue* concentrates the passage of dramatic poetry from Sophocles to Euripides. *Aristophanes' Apology* realises the wild licence in which art and freedom died in Athens—their greatness in their ruin—and the passionate sorrow of those who loved what had been so beautiful. *Cleon* takes us into a later time when men had ceased to be original, and life and art had become darkened by the pain of the soul. We pass on to two different periods of the Renaissance in *Fra Lippo Lippi* and in *Andrea del Sarto*, and are carried further through the centuries of art when we read *Abt Vogler* and *A Toccata of Galuppi's*. Each of these

poems is a concentrated, accurate piece of art-history, with the addition to it of the human soul.

Periods and phases of religious history are equally realised. *Caliban upon Setebos* begins the record—that philosophic savage who makes his God out of himself. Then follows study after study, from *A Death in the Desert* to *Bishop Blougram's Apology*. Some carry us from early Christianity through the medieval faith; others lead us through the Paganism of the Renaissance and strange shows of Judaism to Browning's own conception of religion in the present day contrasted with those of the popular religion in *Christmas-Day* and *Easter-Day*.

Never, in poetry, was the desire of the historical critic for accuracy of fact and portraiture, combined with vivid presentation of life, so fully satisfied. No wonder Browning was not read of old; but it is no wonder, when the new History was made, when he was once found out, that he passed from a few to a multitude of readers.

6. Another contrast appears at the very beginning of their career. Tennyson, in his two earliest books in 1830 and 1833, though clearly original in some poems, had clinging round his singing robes some of the rags of the past. He wrote partly in the weak and sentimental strain of the poets between 1822 and 1832. Browning, on the contrary, sprang at once into an original poetic life of his own. *Pauline* was unfinished, irregular in form, harsh, abrupt, and overloaded, but it was also entirely fresh and distinct. The influence of Shelley echoes in it, but much more in admiration than in imitation of him. The matter, the spirit of the poem were his own, and the verse-movement was his own. Had Browning been an imitator, the first thing he would have imitated would have been the sweet and rippling movement of Shelley's melodies. But the form of his verse, such as it was, arose directly out of his own nature and was as original as his matter. Tennyson grew into originality, Browning leaped into it; born, not of other poets, but of his own will. He begat himself. It had been better for his art, so far as technical excellence is concerned, had he studied and imitated at first the previous masters. But he did not; and his dominant individuality, whole in itself and creating its own powers, separates him at the very beginning from Tennyson.