

a grand lady too, that's uneasy by their firesides to-night. There'll be many a brave fellow the less before the morning."

"Raving!" she said, in answer to another whisper of the doctor to her daughter; "that's what you bookish folks say the sea does when the winds blow across it, and the waves come dashing up the beach, one over the other, like mad things. Eugh! there's a deal more in the world than your books 'll ever teach you. There's not one of you ever heard it sing the song I've heard it sing; though I've sung it myself many a time, and so has Jenny too there:

"Under the waters waste and wild,
Sing heigho the winds and the waves.
He sleeps for ever that fair-hair'd child,
Sing heigho the winds and the waves.
O woe for the lady that waits in her bower!
Sing heigho the winds and the waves.
And woe for the lord that looks from his
tower!
Sing heigho the winds and the waves.
Wait ever and watch, but for ever in vain:
Sing heigho the winds and the waves.
Your fair-hair'd boy will come never
again,
Sing heigho the winds and the waves."
"That's somewhat like a song, and

the sea's sung it many a day, and many a night too; and I've been the only one that knew what it was singing; and it's singing it now: there, don't you hear it?

"Your fair-hair'd boy will come never again.

Never, never again. But it will never sing it more after to-night, never more, nor there will be no one to understand it."

And in the hall the same tragedy of death was enacting; the same in the carpeted and curtained chamber as within the bare walls of the fisherman's hut. The reputed Lord Lilworth was dying, his secret escaping amid the ravings of fever, to which the wind played a fearful music, though far less fearful than that human voice, so changed, jangled, out of tune; and about the same time that the old fishwife fell into the slumber that preceded death, her son (we will call him Lord Lilworth no longer, on his death-bed) breathed his last; and the mother and son, who had been divided in life, were joined in death—beyond which let none presume to follow them.

MEN AND WOMEN. BY ROBERT BROWNING.*



AM not going to attempt a regular classification of Robert Browning's "Men and Women;" yet the poems do fall naturally into some order, or rather some of them go pretty much together; and, as I have no great space, I will go through those that do so fall together, saying little or nothing about the others.

The three that strike me first, are 'The Epistle of Karshish,' 'Cleon,' and 'Bishop Blougram's Apology.'

They have all three to do with belief and doubt, with the thoughts and fancies, and strange longings that circle round these; they are dramatic too, not expressing, except quite incidentally, the poet's own thoughts. 'Cleon,' and the 'Epistle of Karshish,' are especially dramatic, and are very considerably alike: they both tell of the desires and doubts of men out of Christianity, and in the days when Christianity was the true faith of a very few unknown men, not a mere decent form to all the nations.

* "Men and Women," by Robert Browning; 2 vols. Chapman and Hall, 1855.

Karshish is an Arab physician, a man of science; Cleon is poet, painter, sculptor. The Arab is the more genial of the two, less selfish, somewhat deeper too, I think; Cleon, with his intense appreciation of beauty, even with his long life spent in producing that beauty, is yet intensely selfish; he despises utterly the common herd; he would bring about, if he could, a most dreary aristocracy of intellect, where the commoners would be bound hand and foot, mere slaves to the great men, and their great lordly minds, not loyal freemen, honouring the heroes; he plumes himself, too, on being no less great than his fathers, greater even than they, saying:

“Marvel not,

We of these latter days, with greater mind
Than our forerunners, since more com-
site, [way),
Look not so great (beside their simple
To a judge who only sees one way at once,
One mind-point, and no other at a time;
Compares the small part of a man of us
With some whole man of the heroic age,
Great in his way—not ours, nor meant
for ours,
And ours is greater, had we skill to know.”

Saying wrongly, too, as I am sure, for it was little more than mere restless vanity that made him try to master so many things, instead of giving up his mind to one, as the grand elders did.

Yes, he is selfish—so selfish that he can see little joy in those powers of creation which he possessed; the king had said, in his letter, that though he, a mere king, would die utterly, yet it would not be so with Cleon, for his pictures, poems, statues, would live after him, he would live through them. Cleon says the king stumbles at mere words; that the reality is otherwise:

“What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is,
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes
than thine,) [how
With feeling joy? confound the knowing
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actually living? Otherwise,
Where is the artist's vantage o'er the
king? [art king!”
I know the joy of kingship: well—thou

He says too, that this same appreciation of beauty, of enjoyment, all the knowledge that he has, all his desires, so much finer than those of other men, only make the fear of death bitterer than it otherwise would be:

“Every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
In power and insight) more enlarged, more
keen, [more,
While every day my hairs fall more and
My hand shakes, and the heavy years in-
crease, [year,
The horror quickening still from year to
The consummation coming past escape,
When I shall know most, and yet least
enjoy.”

Till at last, in his agony, fierce words
are wrung from the calm proud man;
he cannot help it—he cries out,

“It is so horrible,

I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state reveal'd to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us,
That, stung by straitness of our life, made
strait

On purpose to make sweet the life at large,
Freed by the throbbing impulse we call
death,

We burst then as the worm into the fly,
Who while a worm still, wants his wings.

But no!

Zeus has not yet reveal'd it; and, alas!
He must have done so, were it possible!”

And from this agony he comes down again to a kind of careless despair, and ends by saying just a little, contemptuously enough, of Paulus and his new doctrines; the cursed pride of knowledge lowering him so, that he even seems to be jealous that the king has sent presents and enquiries to Paulus also, a barbarian, one circumcised; so that about the doctrines of Paulus, he says:

“And (as I gathered from a by-stander)
His doctrines could be held by no sane
man.”

Poor Cleon! he was not wont to accept things on hearsay; yet now so has his pride lowered him; and we must leave him and his longings for Karshish the Arab.

Karshish is, as I said, a better man than Cleon; a simpler man, one with great knowledge, always thirsting after more, and brave in his pursuit of it; yet, on the whole, I think, kindly, and not puffed up with that knowledge. He writes from Jerusalem to his old master, to tell him how he has seen Lazarus; yet he is half fearful that he will seem ridiculous, unphilosophical, and does not like to acknowledge at first, even to himself, till he grows warmer from the longings that stir within him, what impression has been made on him; and he breaks off now and then to talk about his knowledge; yet he comes back to this always at last, for he cannot help it; and so he writes; very beautifully does he tell of the perfect faith of Lazarus, of his love of God and man, nay, of beasts, nay, of the very flowers; of his resignation and obedience to God through everything; of his strange clear second-sight; yearningly does he dwell on all this, excusing himself from ridicule now and then, by saying, "yet the man was mad." He knows how little all knowledge is, how it can never be perfected through all the generations; but he longs to love perfectly; his God is different from Lazarus's God; his idea of Him is so different, that he mentions with shuddering horror that which Lazarus had told him; "that he, Lazarus, who stood there in the flesh, had seen God in the flesh too;" in horror; yet if it only could be true, that story told by the madman!

"The very God! think, Abib, dost thou think?"

So, the All-great, were the All-Loving too;
So, through the thunder comes a human
voice, [here!

Saying, 'O heart I made, a heart beats
Face, my hands fashion'd, see it in my-
self. [of mine,

Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive
But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for
thee!' [strange."

The madman saith he said so: it is

You see, too, he does not say, as Cleon did to his dream of Heaven. "it is

not possible;" he only says, "it is strange."

It is all gloriously told; here is something beside our present question which I quote for its beauty; Karshish's first meeting with Lazarus:

"I met him thus—

I cross'd a ridge of short sharp broken
hills, [came
Like an old lion's cheek-tooth—out there
A moon made like a face, with certain spots
Multiform, manifold, and menacing:
Then a wind rose behind me. So we met
In this old sleepy town at unawares,
The man and I."

Concerning 'Bishop Blougram's Apology' I can say little here, it embraces so many things; the Bishop's interlocutor, "Gigadibs, the literary man," comes in only as an objector, or little else; he is a man without fixed faith; the bishop is one who is trying to 'believe that he believes,' and is succeeding, I think, pretty well: for my part I dislike him thoroughly, yet he says many true things, as Browning says in the Epilogue; "he said true things, but called them by wrong names."

He agrees too with Cleon concerning the unpleasantness of the possession of the creative power. It is of no use to *him*, he says; he is more selfish even than Cleon, and not nearly so interesting: he is tolerably well content with the present state of things as regards himself, has no such very deep longings, and is not so much troubled with doubts probably as even he says he is. Browning says of him, "For Blougram, he believed, say half he spoke."

I will go on to the next band that seem to go together, those about art, namely; they are Andrea del Sarto, Fra Lippo Lippi, Old Pictures at Florence, A Toccata of Galuppi, and Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.

Andrea del Sarto, and Fra Lippo Lippi are a good deal alike, only the first has more about the man, the second about the art he lives in. What a joy it is to have these men brought up before us made alive again, though

they have passed away from the earth so long ago; made alive, seeming indeed not as they might very likely have seemed to us, the lesser men, had we lived in their times; but rescued from the judgment of the world, "which charts us all in its broad blacks or "whites"—and shown to us as they really were.

Think of Andrea del Sarto sitting there in Florence, looking over to Fiesole, trying to forget all the shame, all the weariness, to forget the pain of them at least, to live for one half-hour in the present; yet so, that the past and the future may mingle with it very quietly, like the long weeds that the stream sways with it. And Lucrezia is sitting by him, Lucrezia, who he knows is not worthy of his love—no, not even of *his* love, the breaker of troth, the runaway; and yet he goes on loving her nevertheless, she has wound her toils about him so. Oh! true story, told so often, in so many ways. And it shall all go into a picture for the wearied man resting there:

"The whole seems to fall into a shape,
As if I saw alike my work and self,
And all that I was bound to be and do,
A twilight-piece."

And how calmly he can talk of himself and his art, his great success that was rather a bitter failure to him now:

"I do what many dream of all their lives,
—Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty
such [town,
On twice your fingers, and not leave this
Who strive—you don't know how the
others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smear'd,
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,
Yet do much less, so much less, some one
says,
(I know his name, no matter) so much less!
Well, less is more, Lucrezia! I am judged,
There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vex'd, beating, stuff'd and stopp'd-
up brain, [prompt
Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's
hand of mine. [selves, I know,
Their works drop groundward, but them-
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut
to me,

Enter and take their place there sure
enough, [the world."
Though they come back and cannot tell

Calmly he speaks of the wrong she had been to him, of what she might have been; calmly of his life in France, and of his sin even when he fled from thence a very thief: and she, in spite of all, is rather in a hurry to get away, is rather bored by his talk, howsoever loving, for her 'cousin' waits for her below: and so you can almost see the flutter of her dress through the doorway, almost hear her feet down the stairs, and the greeting of the bad woman without a heart with that 'cousin.' Almost? nay, quite.

Then for Fra Lippo Lippi. He, found in questionable haunts by the police, first awes them somewhat by mention of his patron's name, Cosimo de Medici; then, being a man with wrongs and one who must speak to somebody, he tells the officer the very simple story of his life, and his grievance:

"Rub all out! well, well, there's my life,
in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since—
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken
bounds.

"And yet the old schooling sticks—the
old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still. 'It's Art's decline,
my son! [old:
You're not of the true painters, great and
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find:
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer—
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the
third.'"

"I'm not the third then: bless us, they
must know! [know!
Don't you think they're the likeliest to
They, with their Latin? so I swallow my
rage, [and paint
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight,
To please them."

This too is an often-told tale, to be told many times again I fear before the world is done with. To this same officer he vindicates himself: everything almost is worth painting, surely it is best (whatever may be good) to paint everything as well as possible:

"You be judge!
 You speak no Latin more than I, belike—
 However, you're my man, you've seen the
 world— [power,
 The beauty and the wonder and the
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights
 and shades, [all!"
 Changes, surprises,—and God made it

"What's it all about?
 To be pass'd o'er, despised? or dwelt upon,
 Wonder'd at? oh, this last of course, you
 say; [these
 But why not do as well as say,—paint
 Just as they are, careless of what comes of
 it? [crime
 God's works—paint any one, and count it
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, 'His
 works

Are here already—nature is complete:
 Suppose you reproduce her—(which you
 can't) [then!"
 There's no advantage! you must beat her,
 For, don't you mark? we're made so that
 we love [have pass'd
 First, when we see them painted, things we
 Perhaps a hundred times, nor cared to see;
 And so they are better, painted—better
 to us, [for that—
 Which is the same thing. Art was given
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out."

It is very grand, this intense love of art; and I suppose that those who cannot paint, and who therefore cannot feel quite the same herein, have nevertheless sometimes had a sick longing for the power to do so, without being able to give any reason for it, such a longing as I think is felt for nothing else under the sun,—at least for no other power.

And so we leave Fra Lippo Lippi, not certainly feeling altogether disgusted with the man, in spite of his sins; you see, he had not a very good education, and yet is not so selfish as one might have expected him to be either.

No less great than these two is "Old Pictures at Florence;" beautiful in the beginning, that gazing on Florence from the garden, in spring-tide; beautiful and very true, that indignant vindication of the early mediæval painters; that comparison of their imperfect painting, with the perfect sculpture of the Greeks, perfect, but not so

higher in its aim, higher in the thoughts that it called up in men's minds; higher too, that in its humility it gave more sympathy to poor struggling, falling men. Here is a stanza or two of that vindication:—

"Wherever a fresco peels and drops,
 Wherever an outline weakens and wanes
 Till the latest life in the painting stops,
 Stands one whom each fainter pulse-tick
 pains! [brick,
 One, wishful each scrap should clutch its
 Each tinge not wholly escape the plaster,
 A lion who dies of an ass's kick,
 The wrong'd great soul of an ancient
 master.

"For oh, this world and the wrong it does!
 They are safe in heaven with their backs
 to it, [buzz
 The Michaels and Rafaels, you hum and
 Round the works of, you of the little
 wit! [scope,
 Do their eyes contract to the earth's old
 Now that they see God face to face,
 And have all attain'd to be poets, I hope?
 'Tis their holiday now, in any case.

"Much they reckon of your praise and you!
 But the wronged great souls—can they
 be quit

Of a world where all their work is to do?"

These are the three that have most to do with artists and painting. Then come two concerning music, "A Toccata of Galuppi," and "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha."

There is not so much to say about the first of these, it seems to have been written principally for the music; yet I think Galuppi's music itself could not have beaten it, played though it was between the sea and the palaces, it rings so gloriously throughout; not one line in it falls from beginning to end, from the first:

"Oh, Galuppi Baldassaro, this is very
 sad to find!
 I could hardly misconceive you; it would
 prove me deaf and blind;
 But although I give you credit, 'tis with
 such a heavy mind!"

to the last:

"'Dust and ashes!' so you creak it, and
 I want the heart to scold.
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too—
 what's become of all the gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I

Worthy to go with this for music is "Master Hugues;" exquisite in melody, it is beautiful also in its pictures, true in its meaning. As to its melody, there is to me something perfectly wonderful in the piling up of the words from verse to verse. The thing fascinates me, though I cannot tell where the wonder is;—but it is there; the first stanza is almost as good as any for this music:

"Hist, but a word, fair and soft!
Forth and be judged, Master Hugues!
Answer the question I've put you so oft—
What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?
See, we're alone in the loft."

Then these others go together in my mind; "Before" and "After," "Childe Roland to the dark tower came," "The Patriot," "A light Woman," and perhaps some others; but these will do. They are all more concerned with action than thought, and are wholly dramatical.

Here is the first stanza from "The Patriot":—

"It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad.
The house-roofs seem'd to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they
A year ago on this very day!" [had,

The poem is very short, yet very attractive, somehow; the man's life is shown wonderfully, though the poem is so short; how he knew before, when he liberated these people, that they would not be faithful to him for long, yet, nevertheless, went on hoping against hope! He is not vain, for he knows he could not have done other than he did; yet he knows he has done well, and so comforts himself, thinking of the next world:—

"Thus I enter'd Brescia, and thus I go!
In such triumphs people have dropp'd
down dead. [owe
'Thou paid by the world—what dost thou
Me?' God might have question'd: but
now instead,
'Tis God shall requite! I am safer so."

Yet, to the reader, it is very sad to read this "old story;" and I think also it was bitter to him, in spite of all.

Telling lies for truth's sake, acting unfaithfully for faith's sake, are what is treated of in the "Light Woman;" it is told, slight sketch though it is, in a masterly way; perhaps we shall hear something more about it soon, judging from the last two lines:

"And, Robert Browning, you writer of plays,
Here's a subject made to your hand!"

"Before" and "After," are rather parts of the same poem, than separate poems. "Before," written in a splendid fighting measure, is spoken by a by-stander, just before a duel: listen, here!

"Why, you would not bid men, sunk in
such a slough, [as now,
Strike no arm out further, stick and stink
Leaving right and wrong to settle the embroilment, [entailment?
Heaven with snaky hell, in torture and
Which of them's the culprit, how must he
conceive [his sleeve!
God's the queen he caps to, laughing in
'Tis but decent to profess oneself beneath
her— [either.
Still, one must not be too much in earnest
Better sin the whole sin, sure that God
observes, [nerves,
Then go live his life out! life will try his
When the sky which noticed all, makes no
disclosure, [posure.
And the earth keeps up her terrible com-
Let him pace at pleasure, past the walls
of rose, [him as he goes;
Pluck their fruits when grape-trees graze
For he 'gins to guess the purpose of the
garden, [a warden.
With the sly mute thing beside there for
What's the leopard-dog-thing, constant to
his side, [ous hide?
A leer and lie in every eye on its obsequi-
When will come an end of all the mock
obeisance, [misfeasance?"
And the price appear that pays for this
Yes, truly so! the one poisoning sin
in a man's life, never to leave him in
the midst of his dearly-bought pleasures;
he has gone wrong once, and the chance of
his turning back is desperate indeed; all his
life is a lie now, with that terrible unrepented
sin lying on him. Did ever any of you read
Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter?" Then for his
adversary:—

"So much for the culprit? Who's the martyr'd man? [he can. Let him bear one stroke more, for be sure Him that strove thus evils lump with good to leaven, [heaven." Let him give his blood at last and get his Yet with neither wronger nor wronged has it come to this yet; death may equalize it somewhat: so in "After," this has indeed happened. I quote it entire without comment:

"Take the cloak from his face, and at first
Let the corpse do its worst—
How he lies in the rights of a man!
Death has done all death can.
And absorb'd in the new life he leads,
He reck's not, he heeds [strike
Nor his wrong nor my vengeance—both
On his senses alike,
And are lost in the solemn and strange
Surprise of the change.
Ha! what avails death to erase
His offence, my disgrace?
I would we were boys as of old
In the field, by the fold;—
His outrage, God's patience, man's scorn,
Were so easily borne.
I stand here now,—he lies in his place—
Cover the face."

I think these two among the most perfect short poems that Robert Browning has written, as perfect in their way as "Evelyn Hope" among the love-poems. "Childe Roland,"—how grand that is! some reviewer thinks it an "allegory," and rates the poet for not having told us what happened to Childe Roland inside the "round, squat turret."

Well, it may in some sort be an allegory, for in a certain sense everything is so, or almost everything that is done on this earth. But that is not its first meaning; neither, as some people think, was it written for the sake of the fearful pictures merely, or even principally; they, grand as they are, the grandest things of the kind that I have ever read, are yet only a means to an end; for the poet's real design was to show us a brave man doing his duty, making his way on to his point through all dreadful things. What do all these horrors matter to him? he must go on, they cannot stop him; he will be slain certainly, who knows by what unheard-

of death; yet he can leave all this in God's hands, and go forward, for it will all come right at the end. And has not Robert Browning shown us this well? Do you not feel as you read, a strange sympathy for the lonely knight? so very, very lonely; not allowed even the fellowship of kindly memories:

"I shut my eyes and turn'd them on my heart,
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I ask'd one draught of earlier, happier sights
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
Think first, fight afterwards—the soldiers' art: [rights!
One taste of the old times sets all to
Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
An arm in mine to fix me to the place
That way he used. Alas! one night's disgrace! [it cold.
Out went my heart's new fire and left
Better this present than a past like that—
Back therefore to my darkening path again."

Yet, for all this utter loneliness, for all these horrors, so subtly has the consummate poet wrought, through the stately flow of the magnificent rhythm, that we do not feel desponding, but rather triumphant, at the glorious end; an end so glorious, that the former life, whatever it was, was well worth living with that to crown it; and it was well too for the poet to leave us there, so that we see not the mere struggle of physical courage, or the mere groans and tears of suffering humanity under those things which are to be borne indeed, but hardly ever very calmly, hardly ever very resignedly; but now "Childe Roland" passes straight from our eyes to the place where the true and brave live for ever; and as far as we go, his life flows out triumphantly with that blast he blew.

And was it not well to leave us with that snatch of old song ringing through our ears like the very horn-blast that echoed all about the windings of that dismal valley of death?

"I saw them and I knew them all; and
yet
Dauntless the stag-horn to my lips I set,
And blew: 'Childe Roland to the dark
tower came.'"

In my own heart I think I love this poem the best of all in these volumes.

And yet I scarcely know; for this and all the others seem to me but a supplement to the love-poems, even as it is in all art, in all life; love I mean of some sort; and that life or art where this is not the case, is but a wretched mistake after all.

And in these love-poems of Robert Browning there is one thing that struck me particularly; that is their intense, unmixed love; love for the sake of love, and if that is not obtained, disappointment comes, falling-off, misery. I suppose the same kind of thing is to be found in all very earnest love-poetry, but I think more in him than in almost anybody else.

"Any wife to any husband," "The last ride together,"—read them, and I think you will see what I mean. I cannot say it clearly, it cannot be said so but in verse; love for love's sake, the only true love, I must say.—Pray Christ some of us attain to it before we die!

Yet after all I am afraid I shall be able to say less about these love-poems than the others.

"Evelyn Hope" is quite perfect in its way; Tennyson himself has written nothing more beautiful; it is easy to be understood; very simple, everybody *must* like it: so full of faith and quiet manly tenderness, hopeful and brave; a very jewel set in the gold of the poet's crown. I must quote a little:

"I claim you still, for my own love's sake,
Delay'd it may be for more lives yet
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn and much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

"But the time will come,—at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant, I
shall say,
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,

And your mouth of your own geraniums' red—
And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's
stead.

"I have lived, I shall say, so much since
then,

Given up myself so many times,
Gain'd me the gains of various men,
Ransack'd the ages, spoil'd the climes;
Yet one thing, one in my soul's full scope,
Either I miss'd or itself miss'd me—
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

"I loved you, Evelyn, all the while;
My heart seem'd full as it could hold—
There was place and to spare for the frank
young smile,
And the red young mouth, and the hair's
young gold:
So, hush! I will give you this leaf to keep;
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret! go to sleep;
You will wake, and remember, and understand."

Do you not see them there, in the darkened room,—the wise, learned, world-worn man hanging over the fair, dead girl, who "perhaps had scarcely heard his name?" Coming close to "Evelyn Hope" is "A Woman's Last Word," and almost as beautiful as that:

"Be a god and hold me
With a charm—
Be a man, and fold me
With thine arm!

"Teach me, only teach, Love!
As I ought
I will speak thy speech, Love,
Think thy thought.

"Meet, if thou require it,
Both demands,
Laying flesh and spirit
In thy hands!

"That shall be to-morrow,
Not to-night:
I must bury sorrow
Out of sight.

"Must a little weep, Love!
Foolish me!
And so fall asleep, Love,
Loved by thee."

Is it not perfect in thought as in music? and does it not illustrate what I said just now about the intense passion of these poems?

So does this next one that I come to, "By the Fireside." It is the history of a life of love, that life which first began by the chapel there in Italy; all things to this man, past, present, and to come, are centred in that one fact:

"I am named and known by that hour's feat,
There took my station and degree.
So grew my own small life complete
As nature obtain'd her best of me—
One born to love you, sweet!"

It reminds me a good deal of Tennyson in parts, of "Maud" especially; but I suppose that is the effect of its melody; it is all told in such sweet, half-mournful music, as though in compassion to those who have not obtained this love, who will not obtain it while they live on earth, though they may in heaven.

Such love too is in it for the beautiful country where the new life came to him:

"Oh! woman-country, woo'd, not wed;
Loved all the more by earth's male-lands,
Laid to their hearts instead."

Such pictures of the fair autumn-tide.

"Oh! the sense of the yellow mountain-flowers,
And the thorny balls, each three in one,
The chestnuts throw on our path in showers,
[begun,
For the drop of the woodland fruit's
These early November hours."

I like it one of the best of all.

"The Statue and the Bust" is a story, a sad story too. Unlawful love that was never acted, but thought only, thought through life; yet were the lovers none the less sinners, therefore; rather the more, in that they were cowards; for in thought they indulged their love freely, and no fear of God, no hate of wrong or love of right restrained them, but only a certain cowardly irresolution. So Robert Browning thinks:

"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

"Surely 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—
Since the end of life being manifest,
He had cut his way through the world to this."

I cannot tell the story, you must read it; it is one of the best in the two volumes: the rhythm so wonderfully suited to the story, it draws you along through the days and years that the lovers passed in delay, so quietly, swiftly, smoothly.

Here is another, "The last ride together;" one disappointed in his best hopes of love, looking on the whole world struggling so, with calm hopeless eyes; so calm, though not altogether miserable. There is no need for him to struggle now he thinks; he has failed; that is enough, failed as all others fail: he is not worse off than his fellows. Meanwhile she is riding with him; the present is somewhat blissful; moreover he says:

"Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being; had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-described.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest—
Earth being so good, would heaven seem
best?

Now, Heaven, and she are beyond this ride."

Then over him comes a strange feeling—he does not know—it is all so blissful, so calm: "She has not spoke so long,"—suppose it be that it was Heaven now at this moment.

"What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old, yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity—
And Heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?"

"In a Balcony" is a strange poem, hard to make out at first; and for my part, I am not at all sure that I apprehend it rightly.

It seems to me, that Constance and Norbert, being cowardly, did at first intend merely to deceive the queen, then, that Constance, moved by the poor woman's joy at her supposed lover, and by her unexpected declaration of affection for herself, really intended to sacrifice her love to the queen; but that Norbert's sick fear, his wild passionate terror, overcomes her, and their love is declared, with who knows what fate in store for them; but it is all intricate and difficult—like human action.

"Women and roses" I must mention, seeing that some reviewer thinks it impossible to solve the riddle of it. I will try, not thinking it so very difficult either. Some man thinking, dreaming of women, they fall into three bands—those that have been, those that are, those that will be; but with neither of these bands can he feel entire sympathy. He cannot enter into the heart of them; their very vividness of face and form draws his heart away from their souls, and so they seem to him cold and unloving.

It certainly does not sound very well as I have put it; in fact it does not often help poems much to *solve* them, because there are in poems so many exquisitely small and delicate turns of thought running through their music, and along with it, that cannot be done into prose, any more than the infinite variety of form, and shadow, and colour in a great picture can be rendered by a coloured woodcut.

Which (in the case of the poem) is caused, I suppose, by its being concentrated thought.

I quote some of this poem ("Women and Roses") :—

"I dream of a red-rose tree,
And which of its roses three
Is the dearest rose to me?

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians go

Floating the women, faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages.
Then follow the women, fresh and gay,
Living and loving, and loved to-day.
Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of
maidens,
Beauties unborn: and all, to one cadence,
They circle the rose on my rose-tree."

Very worthily are the love-poems crowned by the final dedication to E. B. B. I quote the last four lines:

"Oh their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing
it; [bosom!]
Drew one angel—borne, see, on my

Pardon me, reader, that I have said little about many of the best poems; that I have said nothing at all about several; nothing about the ecstasy of prayer and love in "Saul;" nothing about the sacrifice of life, and its enjoyments, to knowledge in the "Grammarian's Funeral;" nothing about the passionate "Lover's Quarrel," about "Mesmerism," "Any wife to any husband," and many others. My consolation is, that we shall have a good deal more to say of Robert Browning in this Magazine, and then we can make amends.

Yet a few words, and I have done. For, as I wrote this, many times angry indignant words came to my lips, which stopped my writing till I could be quieter. For I suppose, reader, that you see whereabouts among the poets I place Robert Browning; high among the poets of all time, and I scarce know whether first, or second, in our own: and, it is a bitter thing to me to see the way in which he has been received by almost everybody; many having formed a certain theory of their own about him, from reading, I suppose, some of the least finished poems among the "Dramatic Lyrics," make all facts bend to this theory, after the fashion of theory-mongers: they think him, or say they think him, a careless man, writing down anyhow anything that comes into his head. Oh truly! "The statue and the bust" shows this! or

the soft solemn flow of that poem, "By the Fireside!" "Paracelsus!"—that, with its wonderful rhythm, its tender sadness, its noble thoughts, must have been very easy to write, surely!

Then they say, too, that Browning is so obscure as not to be understood by any one. Now, I know well enough what they mean by "obscure," and I know also that they use the word wrongly; meaning difficult to understand fully at first reading, or, say at second reading, even: yet, taken so, in what a cloud of obscurity would "Hamlet" be! Do they think this to be the case? they daren't *say* so at all events, though I suspect some of them of thinking so.

Now, I don't say that Robert Browning is not sometimes really obscure. He would be a perfect poet (of some calibre or other) if he were not; but I assert, fearlessly, that this obscurity is seldom so prominent as to make his poems hard to understand on this ground: while, as to that which they call obscurity, it results from depth of thought, and greatness of subject, on the poet's part, and on his readers' part, from their shallower brains and more bounded knowledge; nay, often I fear from mere wanton ignorance and idleness.

So I believe that, though this obscurity, so called, would indeed be very objectionable, if, as some seem to think, poetry is merely a department of "light literature;" yet, if it is rather one of the very grandest of all God's gifts to men, we must not think it hard if we have sometimes to exercise thought

over a great poem, nay, even sometimes the utmost straining of all our thoughts, an agony almost equal to that of the poet who created the poem.

However, this accusation against Browning of carelessness, and consequent roughness in rhythm, and obscurity in language and thought, has come to be pretty generally believed; and people, as a rule, do not read him; this evil spreading so, that many, almost unconsciously, are kept from reading him, who, if they did read, would sympathize with him thoroughly.

But it was always so; it was so with Tennyson when he first published his poems; it was so last year with Maud; it is so with Ruskin; they petted him indeed at first; his wonderful eloquence having some effect even upon the critics; but, as his circle grew larger, and larger, embracing more and more truth, they more and more fell off from him; his firm faith in right they call arrogance and conceit now; his eager fighting with falsehood and wrong they call unfairness. I wonder what they will say to his new volume.

The story of the Præ-Raphaelites—we all know that, only here, thank Heaven! the public has chosen to judge for itself somewhat, though to this day their noblest pictures are the least popular.

Yes, I wonder what the critics would have said to "Hamlet Prince of Denmark," if it had been first published by Messrs. Chapman and Hall in the year 1855.