

dramas, but it is not in this field that he has met with his greatest success. They are too subjective, and the action is too limited. The drama of action is not Browning's sphere, because, in it, character is subordinate to, and exists for, the movement of action, whereas Browning is interested in environment and action only for the sake of character. The product and not the process receives the emphasis from him. His true power is in psychological analysis. He is interested only in the evolution of the conscience and character of men. Life is a discipline, and it is not so much the external events of life which deserve attention, as the attitude of the soul towards these. Hence the dramatic method which Browning used has little of the dramatic element in it at all, only enough to form a basis for the laying bare of the heart of the subject, and the exposure of its inner workings. The poetic form best adapted to effect this result is the dramatic monologue.

Before proceeding with his remarks on "My Last Duchess," Prof. Alexander urged the necessity of each one making an independent attempt to understand for himself any poem set for study. The tendency now-a-days is to rely too much on annotations, and to try to get along with as little thought as possible. Such a course means slow intellectual suicide, and loss of mental grasp and power. One of the merits of Browning's poetry as a subject for study is that it cannot be understood at all without close thought.

"My Last Duchess" is a fairly typical instance of Browning's use of the monologue. We cannot fully understand the beginning, or any part of it until we have read it through. We know nothing about the concrete surroundings, nor the person addressed. We have to gather all this from the words of the speaker, and from the changes in the drift of the thought. This leads to extreme condensation, and sometimes even to obscurity in

the thought. The feeling with which we must approach a poem of Browning's, such as "My Last Duchess," is that it will be necessary to watch every word and phrase, knowing that each fills a large place, and will come in valuable for the understanding of all the rest of the poem, and for the full conception of the characters portrayed. We must know that no touch is superfluous.

These general principles are all instanced in "My Last Duchess." The word "last" in the title must be noted, and the name of the place in which the scene is laid, an item of information which Browning generally leaves to be gotten from the body of the poem. After noticing these points, we pass on abruptly into the monologue, with no idea who the speaker may be. We learn however, from the first few lines, that it is the Duke of Ferrara who is commenting to some visitor or friend on the beauty of the painted picture of his dead wife which hangs before them on the wall, and he had had another wife or wives before this one, because he calls her his last duchess. We do not have to go farther into the poem to get some idea of the cold and unloving character of this man. The language and rhythm of these opening lines reveal it. Neither shows the presence of passion or emotion. The painting is a wonder in color, and that is all he sees in it. The memory of his dead wife stirs no feeling of tenderness.

We gather from the next few lines that an expression of wonder and surprise passes over the stranger's face as he gazes on the picture. He has seen the depth and passion of the earnest glance which the painter had imparted to the pictured countenance of the duchess, and his expression of wonder arises from the suspicion that there may have been improper relations between the painter and the woman. But the duke anticipates this feeling of surprise. He tells his visitor that all others for whom he choose to