

Book Notices.

"The Poetry of Robert Browning." By Stopford A. Brooke, M.A. Author of "Tennyson, His Art and Relation to Modern Life." With portrait. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co. Toronto: William Briggs. 8vo. Pp. 447. Price, \$1.50 net.

Robert Browning has at last come into his kingdom. He had, as Stopford Brooke remarks, to wait a long time for wide recognition, but it has come at last. No recent author is so widely quoted, or is the subject of such profound study and of so many books of comment and elucidation. The latest and best of these is that under review. It treats the entire cycle of Browning literature in a lucid and luminous manner, with critical insight and illuminating skill. Perhaps a great poet should not need such elucidation, but say what one will, as Mr. Brooke remarks, Browning is obscure. Hence the need of books like this which enable one to understand the many recondite allusions and the subtle intellectual difficulties of this great writer. Our critic compares the two great poets of the last century, Browning and Tennyson, points out their distinctive features and marked contrasts. Browning's treatment of nature, and especially of human life, is admirably set forth. He is especially the poet of art and music. No one has ever so interpreted their meaning. That strange riddle, "Sordello," is the subject of two instructive chapters.

In one respect we beg to differ from this accomplished critic. He maintains that Browning did not possess dramatic genius. He may not have had the technical skill to construct an acting drama, but no author was ever more dramatic in his treatment of the many themes which he discusses. They embrace all time, from Lilith, the first wife of Adam, down to Mr. Sludge, the medium, and almost all Occidental and Oriental lands; he projects himself even into the man-beast, Caliban. Every one is dramatically conceived and expressed.

Next to Shakespeare, we deem Robert Browning the greatest dramatic writer in the English language. His collected writings are little less in bulk than Shakespeare's, exceeding

we think, those of any other English poet, and being, we judge, fully twice as great as Tennyson's.

Browning is not always easy reading, but we know no poet who will better repay the study demanded for the comprehension of his works. The difficulties of that task have been greatly exaggerated. "The Ring and the Book" is the longest poem in the language—twice as long as Milton's "Paradise Lost," yet we venture to say that it has fewer obscure lines. It is a marvellous "tour de force." The same story is told ten times over from different points of view. One would imagine it would become insufferably tedious; instead of this the interest increases with each telling, and leaves us filled with admiration for the genius of the writer who can so thoroughly identify himself with so many different narrators.

A distinguished Presbyterian minister, to whom we recommended the study of Browning, declares that to him it was a revelation, as next to the Bible he found no book so helpful in the preparation of his sermons. Browning's Biblical poems—those on Saul, on Cleon, on St. John, and especially the wonderful study of Lazarus—are wonderful interpretations of character. Ruskin declares that in no other piece of modern English prose or verse is there so much told of the Renaissance spirit as in "The Bishop orders his tomb in St. Praxed's." "In thirty lines," he adds, "he compresses the substance of thirty pages of the 'Stones of Venice.'" Browning's facility of rhyme is extraordinary. In one poem of forty lines he introduces thirty-five distinct rhymes.

As an illustration of the condensed force of his method, note the following lines:

"Would a man 'scape the rod?"

 Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,

"See that he turn to God

 The day before his death.

"Ay, could a man inquire,

 When it shall come?" I say,

 The Rabbi's eye shoots fire--

 "Then let him turn to-day!"

Some of the finest chapters in this book are on Browning's treatment of