

work for anyone undertaking it, and many of his poems would fill an evening. So that one feels little can be said of him in a short article.

His Life.

HE was well born. His father was an English gentleman of whom Browning said: "He might have been a notable man had he known what ambition, or love of money, or social influence meant. As it was, on his death, he left enough to give his son that ease and luxury necessary for a literary man.

From his father he inherited his exuberant vitality, his insatiable intellectual curiosity and capacity.

His home life was peculiarly happy. He describes himself as a child sitting on his father's knee, listening to tales of classic lore, while his mother played or sang her weird and tender Scottish songs in an adjoining room.

His father's brain was a library in itself, and his heart was young and buoyant, so that he made excellent company for his boy and girl.

Of his mother, Carlyle said: "She was a true type of Scottish gentlewoman." Browning said of her with emotion, "She was a divine woman." She had a deep evangelical religious nature, derived from her mother who was also Scotch. Her father was a German.

Blessed with such a gifted parentage no wonder the gifted lad found the ordinary school-life slow, and after an attempt at such school life, he was educated by tutors until he went to the university.

His father approved of his resolve to be a poet. At first his efforts were not successful, but in the interval he made many friends. Byron was his favorite poet, whom at first he tried to imitate.

He travelled abroad somewhat, and in 1844, after returning from a trip to Italy, he was persuaded by a mutual friend to meet Miss Elizabeth Barrett, in whose poetry he had become interested. His fate was sealed at first sight, but she was not easily won, and her poor health seemed a barrier to their marriage.

Her father also strongly objected. But when the doctor ordered Italy for the winter, Browning pressed his suit. She finally consented to a private marriage with the full approval of the rest of her family; her father never forgave her and she never saw him again.

The Brownings spent their winters in Italy and Paris, with a few summers in England, at last settling in Florence, where they lived a quiet life, drawing about them the literary stars of both continents. Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne, the Carlyles, Cardinal Manning, Landor and others.

During this period Browning did not write much. After a happy married life his wife died in 1861. He then settled in England in order to educate his son. His father died in 1866, and from now on he and his sister lived together. His mother had died some time before. His wife, writing of him at the time, said she never saw anyone express such bitter grief.

He finished many of his poems and began to reap the results of a slow but steadily won fame. Many home universities wished to honor him. He was happy and genial, was no recluse like Wordsworth, but loved the society of his fellowmen. He had no personal peculiarities which are supposed to be a mark of genius. The romance of his life he cherished like a religion. He died in 1889 at the age of 77, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

His Work.

EARLY in his career Browning aimed at being a dramatist. He wrote several poems in that form, but they were not a success. He could not make his character show the scenes around them. The moral effect of a drama shows the value of it. However, he has used the dramatic monologue with much success, and many of his best poems are written in that form.

His poems are taken from many sources; he has broken ground, unbroken before, by any other poet. History, biography, his own experience, from true incidents, popular legend and the classics, all yield him their quota of subjects. He studied the Middle Age, not for its picturesque externals, but for its strange spiritual conceptions.

Wordsworth got his subjects chiefly from nature; Browning from his fellowmen with whom he freely mingled, and

everyone was made to yield him something. There is no form of life which he does not attempt to portray; the bishop, sage, artist, musician, politician, criminal or quack. His range of subjects is due to the psychological depth of his imagination, the interest is wholly spiritual or intellectual. The poetic motive of all his work is aspiration, that energy which urges on the human soul to achievement, showing the development of life at some crucial point, as the outcome of some past development or decay. Many of his poems deal with conflict between good and evil, or between lower and higher ideals, either between individuals or in the struggle of every human soul.

Struggles in human nature are always the same, but expressed differently in different ages. Browning's interpretation is subtle and dramatic. He carried his observations of the realities of life into regions no other poet ever did; into the motives of humanity, which are the sources of world movements.

His mode of expressing his thoughts is entirely original, different from any poet past or present. Tennyson always expresses himself in smooth, polished and well-rounded words or phrases. Browning's words are rough and thorny, he delights to use the uncouth and unusual. He chooses abnormal character types, and describes them with odd and grotesque expressions; he avoids "shallow prettiness." Any rough phrase or metaphor, will serve his purpose. Dr. Holmes said



Solomon's Seal.

of him, "That his was the dark meat, while Tennyson's was the white meat." The masculine taste prefers the dark as having a gamier flavor.

Arnold says, "He has made rough language a vehicle for high thought." The roughness is due to the dramatic quality of his poetry, and in spite of his style is very powerful.

The most astonishing example of Brownings' mental vigor is his huge composition, "The Ring and the Book," published in 1868. It is a poem in which the same story is told in eleven different ways. A story of a criminal trial, which took place in Rome about 1700, of one Count Guido, for the murder of his young wife.

First the poet tells the tale himself; then he tells what one-half the world and what the other said; then the deposition of the dying girl; and the testimony of the witnesses; the speech of the count in his own defence; the arguments of the counsel, etc.; finally the judgment of the Pope.

So cunningly does he weave the motives at work in the tragedy and lay bare the secrets of the heart, that the interest increases to the end of the tale.

Browning seldom deals directly with the pathetic. But he does in the "Last Ride Together," and the "Incident of the French Camp."

He is very humorous; take the "Pied Piper," so familiar to us all, and this

trait runs through many of his other poems.

His chief characteristic, perhaps, was his optimism, *The Will to Live*, appreciates the mere joy of living. He sees the evil in the world, but believes the general tendency is upward, step by step. Perfection is not attained in this life, and the full meaning of life is not unfolded here, but in some future state when the anomalies of life are rounded off.

Our life here is but a fragment of the real life. There must be a future life to make up for the deficiencies in this. In his song from "Pippa Passes," this thought is expressed, and in the tale of Rabbi "Ben Ezra," an old Jewish writer gives his experience of life.

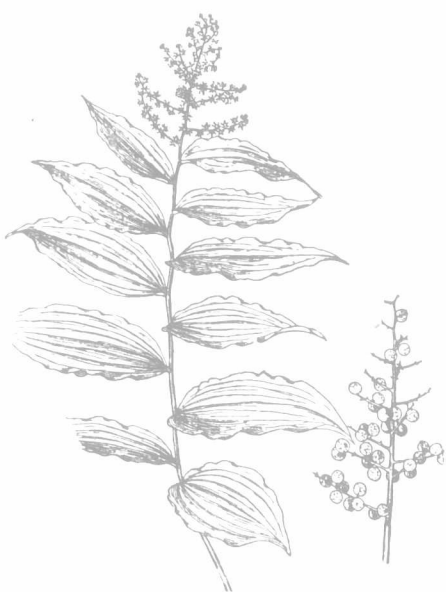
Of his music poems take "Tocatta of Galluppi," which shows the influence of music and "Abt Vogler," in which he shows his belief in the ultimate fulfilment of ideals, as brought out by Abt Vogler who has implicit faith in his own intuition.

His love poems are unique, in them he deals with the purely personal emotions. In the story of the Glove he gives a new interpretation to the story. In that view of life which gives satisfaction to the emotions there may be an ideal. Browning takes a calm, clear, sympathetic view of life, but refuses to accept mere romance, reason must help along.

In the usual version of this story the lady is put to shame. In Browning's view the lady wishes to test her admirer's fine speeches, and when he throws the glove in her face, she is in no way disconcerted, as the poet discovers, for she has proved her point, and soon marries another man more to her liking. While the rejected lover merges into a mere social fop.

His art poems show a belief in art for art's sake. In "Andrea del Sarto," we have a story of the revival of art in Italy. The artist full of his subject should take a first rank as an artist, but fails to do so. Browning is attracted to him because in this he shows so much human nature. The story is written in monologue and discloses the gentle, sensitive nature of the man who was called in Florence "the faultless painter." He depreciated himself though he hoped to be successful yet. His own estimate of his work is that he can do all he tries to do, but he has no great depth. He has no great ideal and there is a lack of earnestness and concentration of energy. His art expresses his own character perfectly.

In Fra "Lippo Lippi," we note the humor in the poem, and see how a good artist is spoiled by being put in priestly robes, a position with which he was entirely out of sympathy.



False Solomon's Seal.

So in the "Bishop Orders His Tomb," we find another who has always craved the beautiful in art, but who has not attained to it, and on his death-bed his half-conscious ravings are of art, and he tells his attendants how to make his tomb, that he may have at death what he could not get in life.

Many of Browning's best poems have to do with the Renaissance. He had a sympathy with the past which enabled him to interpret it perfectly. Bishop Blougram (supposed to be Cardinal Wiseman, the first foreign bishop in England) gives an apology in defence of his faith. He claims that doubt may

have a certain value in leading a man to think and see more clearly. Note the humor in this poem also.

In the "Grammarian's Funeral," he deals with the revival of learning in Europe, when Europe began to kindle her life at the life of Greece and Rome. The work of the grammarian was the very important task of translating other languages. At his death his pupils gave him an honorable funeral, singing his praises, as they carry his body to the grave.

It is Browning's belief that a good many lives may be sacrificed for an ideal. Sometimes the individuals own interests are so mingled that the ideal is lost. Note the harsh words and phrases used to convey his thought.

In "Cleon" we come to another great epoch in the history of the human race, in the decay of Greek thought, and the advent of Christianity. Cleon is a poet who seems to have everything that life can desire. He knows all the best in art, literature, music and philosophy. Like Cicero, he has very little faith in the old Roman religion. No man will work heartily for an ideal which is not a reality in the world. Religious consciousness needs a moral imperative. These men tried to do right, they had high culture and refined sentiments. The stoic had wise self-control and fortitude; the epicurean had pleasure. Yet the spirit sees more than it can enjoy, and he would fain hope that there is another place where life will be continued. Hearing of the Christian religion he hopes it may be able to solve the problem of life.

In the "Epistle of Karshish," we have the tale of an Arab physician, which defines the new moral consciousness—knowledge of good and evil. He was travelling in Palestine and heard the strange tale of Lazarus, and would like to know more of the One who had healed him.

Human love must end with God. Nothing else promises a continuing personality. Cleon and Karshish were both haunted by a god of love. They tried to find him, not knowing he was so near. In this there is pathos.

So much for a study of Browning, may it serve as an introduction to those who have not made his acquaintance, when you do know him, may it be to enjoy him.

Wild Flowers Worth Knowing.

TODAY are presented four beautiful "cousins" in the plant world, all belonging to the Lily family, as may be guessed from their graceful growth.

Solomon's Seal (Polygonatum biflorum). In bloom, May and June, in rich woods. The stalk, from 1 to 3 feet high bears pretty ovate leaves alternately on the upper side, the pendant, bell-shaped, greenish yellow flowers hanging beneath, singly or in pairs. The fruit is a small blue berry. This plant will grow splendidly in a rich, partially shaded place in the garden. It gets its name from the scars left along the root-stalk by the last year's stems, and which resemble the stamp of a seal upon wax; but what Solomon had to do with it is not clear.

False Solomon's Seal, or False Spikenard (Smilacina racemosa).—Sometimes, also, called "Solomon's Zig-zag" from the fact that its stem zig-zags somewhat. The leaves and leaf-stalk very much resemble those of the Solomon's Seal, but the small greenish-white flowers grow in a compound panicle at the end of the stalk. The flowers come in May, and are followed by brownish or purplish spotted green berries that turn red later.

Two-leaved Solomon's Seal, or False Lily-of-the-Valley (Maianthemum Canadense) resembles the lily-of-the-valley in its leaves, which grow in pairs on the edges of moist mossy woods and about the bases of old trees. The whole plant is only about 5 inches tall, and the flowers, which look like those of a small false Solomon's Seal are followed by spikes of pretty red berries.

Twisted Stalk.—Somewhat resembling the Solomon's Seal in its leaves and manner of growth is the *Streptopus roseus*, or sessile-leaved twisted stalk, but the flowers are pinkish. They are followed in August by beautiful, pendant red berries. . . . Another species, *Streptopus amplexifolius*, has greenish flowers. The leaves, which are strongly clasping, have a whitish bloom underneath.