

ing's religious teaching and his own personal faith. One thing can be safely and strongly said, that everything he wrote is pervaded by a deep, reverential, sacred sentiment. If he ever speaks or makes any of his characters speak, disparagingly, slightly, sneeringly of religion, it is only of its fictitious and false forms, and its hypocritical and Pharisaical expressions—the true spirit of religion he treats throughout with respect and reverence. Indeed, the main drift of all he wrote was religious, intensely religious. How could a writer be anything but religious whose master theme is the human soul—the human soul, with its infinite wants and its infinite capabilities. Browning is a very varied writer, he goes into all fields, and not superficially, but deeply, into all fields, and into whatsoever field he goes—nature, history, science, art—one and all he views from the side of the human soul—its origin, its growth, its development, its destiny. To give any fair idea of his religious teaching at all would take not one but many papers. A very good course might be given in any of our theological colleges from the works of Browning, and such courses from the writings of several modern prophets might prove highly helpful. All I propose to do in this paper is to try to strike the key note of his creed and teaching, and that key note undoubtedly is optimism. It has been questioned, and it is open to question, whether this optimism is compatible with what we call sound Christianity. There is a great tribute paid to Browning's religious faith from a quarter from which we would have least expected it—from one who does not hail with welcome, but wonders over with flippant regret, Browning's Christianity. He marvels that such a great mind can be Christian, and yet that it is so he admits—that he is Christian he says is as clear as noonday, to the most purblind vision.

And is it not a matter of profound thankfulness, when so much to-day is hostile to Christianity, to religion, that the greatest of our modern poets is religious—religious, certainly, and Christian, though not perhaps conforming altogether to the particular tenets of any one church? There is scarcely