

Literature.

A DREAM.

That old, strange dream came back again last night :
 In sleep I felt the strong touch of the sun,
 While near me, but in shadow, wandered one
 Whom my soul loved. With him the chilling blight
 Of death and bitter winds ; with me fair sight
 Of flowering trees, and streams that swiftly run ;
 Ah, would, I yearned, mine were the heavens dun,
 And his this fragrant garden of delight !
 And so it was ; but while to him the change
 Brought blossoming boughs, and lull of tender sound,
 For me the bitter breezes of the shade
 Were blithe child spirits. Transformation strange !
 I seemed to tread upon enchanted ground,
 While round my steps the happy angels played.

A. E. W.

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MRS. BROWNING'S LYRICS.

Mrs. Browning's philosophy of life, as revealed in her lyrics, is decidedly humanitarian. A life of isolation, exclusively devoted to self-culture and contemplation, is, in her view, incomplete, not to say selfish. She holds that the reciprocal working of life upon life is an essential condition of true being ; or, as she expresses it in one of her sonnets :—

" We cannot live, except thus mutually
 We alternate, aware or unaware,
 The reflex act of life."

In one of her longer lyrics, "The Poet's Vow," we find depicted the rueful effects of a resolution to "forswear man's sympathies," made by one who seeks to satisfy the wants of his human soul by solitary communion with nature. The author's comments are unequivocal. Dwelling upon the unfeeling repose which marks the brow of the stern recluse, she says :—

" The self-poised God may dwell alone
 With inward glorying,
 But God's chief angel waiteth for
 A brother's voice to sing,
 And a lonely creature of sinful nature,
 It is an awful thing.

Mrs. Browning gives her verdict in favour of a life spent in unwearyed endeavor. Her poems certainly do not recognize the seeming hopelessness of a task as any warrantable motive for resigning it. In "A Vision of Poets," the leading argument is that the pre-eminently favoured among mortals are those whose pursuit of a worthy object has been accompanied by the chastening power of suffering. Her life fully exemplified her doctrine. She pursued her literary career with unflinching energy, supported by an enthusiastic faith in her own poetical aspirations.

A prevailing feature of her mind was the conviction that the revelations of her own inner consciousness, if fully expressed would constitute true poetry.

A favorite theme with Mrs. Browning, and one continually arising in her verse, is that premonition of the unseen world, which visits every soul with greater or less frequency, and recalls it from a too great absorption in earthly cares. Her most philosophical poem, "A Rhapsody of Life's Progress," has a beautiful allusion to these spiritual communings :—

" We lie in the dark here, swathed doubly around
 With our sensual relations and social conventions,

Yet are 'ware of a sight, yet are 'ware of a sound,
 Beyond Hearing and Seeing ;
 Are aware that a Hades rolls deep on all sides,
 With its infinite tides
 About and above us, until the strong arch
 Of our life creaks and bends as if ready for falling,
 And thro' the dim rolling, we hear the sweet calling
 Of spirits that speak in a soft under-tongue
 The sense of the mystical march."

Another poem, "Human Life's Mystery," dwells solely upon this theme.

When spiritual influences are earnestly sought after and left unobliterated by opposing forces, they must certainly work with greater effect upon the nature subjected to them. As Mrs. Browning's temperament and state of seclusion fitted her to be a more than usually favored recipient of these influences, it can scarcely be deemed an overweening presumption that she should consider her especial mission as a poet to lie in singing to others of the beauties which were revealed to her own consciousness ; or, as she herself puts it, to "deliver right the music of her nature." The poems which this conviction produced have the merit of recalling the world-engrossed thoughts of their readers to that higher life for which all this world's course should be a conscious preparation.

Sometimes Mrs. Browning's enthusiastic fervour of soul finds its expression in a series of spasmodic raptures clothed in language that is barely intelligible. In "The Seraphim" and "The Drama of Exile," this, and the mysticism of the frame work of both poems, are noticeable defects. Yet, in "The Drama of Exile," there are some delicately beautiful lyrical effusions. In the chorus of Eden Spirits, sung to Adam and Eve on their flight from Paradise, there are some beautiful pathetic lines alluding to those same dimly suggested ideals which Mrs. Browning loves to keep before us :—

" Harken, oh harken ! ye shall harken surely
 For years and years
 The noise beside you, dripping coldly, purely,
 Of spirits' tears.
 The yearning to a beautiful denied you
 Shall strain your powers,
 Ideal sweetnesses shall overglide you,
 Resumed from ours.
 In all your music, our pathetic minor
 Your ears shall cross,
 And all good gifts shall mind you of diviner,
 With sense of loss."

It is evident that Mrs. Browning's favorite themes are those of an exalted mystical nature, yet she shows a warm, sympathetic interest in the great practical questions of life. She is an ardent champion of the universal extension of human liberty. Though not a political economist herself, she yet assisted in the preliminary work of reform by helping to rouse the feeling which precedes any beneficial change in society.

As companion piece to her appeals for the oppressed negro slaves of America, is the collection of songs wherein Mrs. Browning celebrates the patriotic contest in her adopted Italy. In both instances the one principle, Liberty, is contended for, yet the attitude and spirit are different. In advocating the cause of the American slave, Mrs. Browning dwells with emphasis on the wrong inflicted, and sends forth solemn invective against the oppressor ; in the Songs of Italy our attention is directed rather to the struggle against the wrong, and she displays a joyous participating enthusiasm in the progress and triumph of the avengers of tyranny. "The Forced Recruit," one of the most touching of Mrs. Browning's lyrics, is written in connection with this subject.

While Mrs. Browning's heart beats warmly for the weak and oppressed everywhere, her most earnest appeal is for the poor child-outcasts in England. Some political economists maintain