

who are spellbound? No! The bird delights to sing—the nightingale will tell its plaint to the dusk, even if no one hears but God. Listen to Mrs. Browning:

"O shame! to poets' lays
Sung for the dole of praise—
Hoarsely sung upon the highway
With that *obulum da mihi*.

"Shame! shame! to poet's soul,
Pining for such a dole,
When heaven-chosen to inherit
The high throne of a chief spirit.

"Sit still upon your thrones
O ye poetic ones!
And if, sooth, the world decry you,
Let it pass unchallenged by you!

"Ye to yourselves suffice
Without its flatteries.
Self-contentedly approve you
Unto Him who sits above you."

Fourthly, for her the poet must be in touch with life. The "Poet's Vow" reminds one of Tennyson's "Palace of Art," and the story recalls "Elaine." Mrs. Browning shows that the poet needs to keep in touch with life. Matthew Arnold was fond of saying that poetry was a "criticism of life," and any reader of Mrs. Browning knows how she dealt with life—its hopes and fears and sorrows. Her poetry is full of tears.

Fifthly, she admits that poetic expression is a difficult thing. In that fine sonnet, "Self-expression," she says:

"This song of soul I struggle to
outbear through portals of the
sense," and she often recurs to this idea. Song came easy to her, and probably her greatest fault is carelessness—not taking time to finish her work.

To close, I would simply say that she had a high notion of her art. It

permeates that touching poem on "Cowper's Grave," or that little gem, "The Poet and the Bird":

"And, when I last came by the place,
I swear the music left there
Was only the poet's song, and not
the nightingales."

And "Lady Geraldine's Courtship" shows that the power of song was in the eyes of one of more value than money or station. And who can forget the delightful picture of the young woman reading to blind Hugh Stewart Boyd:

"But the reader's voice dropped
lower
When the poet called him blind!"

Let herself speak last:

"The poet hath the child's sight in
his breast,
And sees all new. What oftenest he
has viewed,
He views with the first glory. Fair
and good
Pall never on him, at the fairest,
best,
But stand before him, holy and
undressed
In weekday false conventions, such
as would
Drag other men down from the
altitude
Of primal types, too early dis-
possessed.
Why, God would tire of all His
heavens as soon
As thou, O Godlike, childlike poet,
didst
Of daily and nightly sights of sun
and moon!
And therefore hath He set thee in
the midst,
Where men may hear thy wonder's
ceaseless tune,
And praise His world for ever, as
thou bidst."