

Dr. Alexander has presented us with a work fitted in no slight degree to smooth the way for those who have heretofore declined to grapple with the obstacles of style, language and method which at the outset have sorely tried the patience of so many readers.

And yet we must confess that we miss in the "introduction" what we deem necessary to a true understanding of any writer, but absolutely indispensable to a comprehension of Browning and the work which he has given us—a fairly minute *resume* of the incidents of his life. It is true that a few facts are mentioned at the beginning of the chapters on "development," but these are inadequate for the purpose. In the case of a metaphysical poet like Browning, whose eyes are open and whose understanding is clear to all that is transpiring around him, we need a lucid, it may be concise, narrative of his career, so that we may comprehend the conditions under which he wrote, and all the forces within and without him which moulded his character and opinions, and contributed to make him the great poet and potent influence for good which he undoubtedly is. Dr. Alexander says, and there is truth in the remark, that "a man's work is determined not only by the character of his genius, but also by the conditions of his age." Surely, if that is the case, we ought to have detailed in the most forcible manner possible the leading features of the great social, political, religious and philosophical questions which agitate the public mind in as far as their influence is observable in the works of Browning. But we hold that every truly original man who has a message to deliver to his fellows, and is gifted with the faculty of utterance, be he poet or preacher, man of letters or social reformer, is not the mere reflex of his age, but is much in advance of it; and hence his difficulty in finding an audience. It is only by constant repetition, by being instant in season and out of season, by ignoring failure and hoping against hope that at last he succeeds in obtaining a hearing, and wrings from his listeners an acknowledgment of the truth, while to him is reserved the satisfaction which springs from the consciousness that he has not lived in vain. So has it been with Browning. People have long admitted the high and generous aims of the poet, but too many have been willing to accept on trust the opinions of the few who read and felt and understood. They were repelled by his obscurity, his eccentricities of style and expression, and his endless discussion of metaphysical topics; but aided by the patient and pious toil of such scholars as Dr. Alexander and others the appreciative reader can dig deep in the vast mass of original material which he has given to the world, and bring up pure untempered gold.

It is deeply to be regretted that Browning did not profit by such experience as is to be gained at the public school and the university. Educated in private he pursued only such courses of study as might fit him for the career of a poet. Besides the restricted view which he thereby obtained of a liberal education, he was exposed to the danger which threatens all who are privately or self educated, of becoming narrow in his sympathies and opinionative in his judgments. In the rough-and-tumble of school and college life, many corners and rough edges are rubbed off the student's character; he must mingle with his fellows and is not allowed to dream alone. Idealist and transcendentalist as he was, Browning would have been all the better of closer association with his kind, and his works would have borne, in a less degree, the impress of the recluse. It would in no way have impaired the force or dimmed the brightness of his favorite ideas "that spiritual discipline and consequent growth are the proper object and end of the existing system of things; that imperfection is a necessary and beneficial attribute of our present sphere; that here truth, beauty, goodness, are but relative,—dim and imperfect images that serve to kindle our aspirations and lead them upwards towards the absolute;" but it would, by bringing him into more intimate and more sympathetic relationships with mankind at large, have greatly facilitated the reception of the communications which he had to make to them.

In his selection of illustrative passages from the works of Robert Browning, Dr. Alexander has shown admirable taste and judgment. In his comments, though we cannot always agree with him, he exhibits careful study and a knowledge of the literature of his subject, wide and intimate. He discusses with acuteness and discrimination the distinguishing intellectual and moral characteristics of the great master of psychological monologue and the dramatic lyric, and satisfies us that though the gold is sometimes hard to find, still it is there to reward the patient seeker.

We do not suppose that Browning will ever become a popular poet. His foreign subjects and exceptional types of character go far to prevent it. But among those who think, his readers will always be on the increase, and Dr. Alexander has undoubtedly contributed to this result by the publication of his *Introduction to the Study of the Poetry of Robert Browning*.

The teaching of grammar, in a good many instances, is a matter more of memorizing definitions than in appealing to the proper qualities of the mind to be brought in operation in the pursuit of this study.—*Inspector Bridges, N. B.*