

The Varsity.

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BY

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FEBRUARY 23, 1892.

BROWNING.

Professor Alexander, in the course of his lecture, remarked that to turn to Browning from the elegancies of much modern poetry was to escape from the oppressive, enervating atmosphere of the conservatory to the cool, invigorating breezes of the moorland.

As far as the writer knows, the comparison is apt; he had been in the conservatory and felt the depressing hot-house atmosphere, but has usually taken his out-door exercise on Shakespeare mount or the heather hills of Burns. There are some lovely wild flowers on these heights; the breezes are pure and invigorating, the light of heaven pours down and gladdens them without the intervention of smoky panes. These are delightful spots, and we love the modest crimson-tipped flower, and the bank whereon the wild thyme grows; but the wild flower blooms in many places, and we are glad to have the Professor declare that he has found some lovely plants on Browning moor.

It is hard work sometimes to find them though, the moor is rough and the paths uncertain. Only a practised eye can detect them unerringly, but when the delighted traveller sees the lovely petals hidden in the grass, they are beautiful and sweet enough to repay his trouble, and he will not think them the less beautiful or less sweet if the coarse sedges have scarred his fingers in reaching for them.

It is a pity the grass grows so rank though, especially as the moor is somewhat shaded from the full light of day. The obscurity is troublesome to the unaccustomed eye, and so many people now have imperfect sight. It is a pity the light is not better, but if it is all that the Professor says, it is worth visiting, and we think we shall make our next excursion thither. We have been flower-gathering lately in a different sort of place: a lovely lawn of smoothest velvet, the hedges are trimmed with the greatest exactness, the walks are gravelled and wind pleasantly in and out among the trees, without running in any particular direction whatever. That is in general, but occasionally, when one does not expect it, he comes out on some elevation where the path ends abruptly, but from which there is a glorious prospect. He sees

"the visions of the world, and all the wonders that would be and learns
That thro' the ages one increasing purpose runs
And the thoughts of men are widen'd with the process of the suns."

But the path ends here and he retraces his steps and again he is among the flowers and trees. It is a beautiful garden, but it is rather wearying; and we prefer the woods and valleys still. So the prospect of a day on the moor is pleasant. We shall choose some bright afternoon, or

perhaps the morning would be better, and if there is good promise we shall go again and again until we can walk without stumbling through its shadiest spots. Our eyes will surely grow accustomed to the shadows in time.

The popularity of Professor Alexander's lecture shows that the Toronto people have the good sense to recognize ability when they meet it. The hall was crowded on Saturday week. It is delightful to listen to a calm, dispassionate revelation of the beauties of poetic art by one who speaks of that he knows. There is a philosophy of poetry, and the Professor has mastered it. He does not need to indulge in the rant about "sublimity of conception" so often heard from the platform when poetry is under discussion. If Browning is obscure there are reasons for the obscurity, and the fault may be in the reader or in Browning or in both. The Professor does not think obscurity a merit. It may be a necessity of the author's style but it is an unfortunate necessity. Browning is often needlessly obscure, but in great measure it arises from the nature of the subject or is the outcome of great qualities. He has so much to say that he must need avoid unnecessary words. Again, his neglect to represent abstract truths concretely produces those heavy pieces which have been so hurtful to his reputation.

The poet has a philosophy of life; a philosophy purely spiritual, and in "The Grammarian's Funeral" he brings out a character embodying his ideal of a man fulfilling his one aim in life.

Recognizing the relativity of truth and the fallibility of human knowledge, Browning does not in any particular poem reveal his inner self, but in a careful study of his works as a whole the true character of the man comes out. Unlike most modern poets, he is best in objective poetry, but his objectivity differs from that of Shakespeare. He describes the inward emotions directly from their own standpoint instead of leaving them to be inferred from actions, as does the great dramatist; he brings the mind before us on an imaginary stage as Shakespeare has brought the body on a real one.

A song is the expression of a mood; and the peculiarity of Browning's lyrics is that he expresses some one else's mood, hence to understand the song it is essential that we study and understand the situation.

During the course of his lecture the Professor read three of Browning's shorter poems to illustrate his remarks, pointing, in "The Grammarian's Funeral," to his tendency to unite the concrete with the abstract. The march of the bearers up the height, to the lofty spot where the body of the worn-out student is laid, emblematic of the long, noble toil up the steeps of learning to the goal of life.

UNIVERSITY FEES.

To the Editor of THE VARSITY:

DEAR SIR,—I wish to call attention to the flagrant injustice of charging students a dollar a month interest on all fees unpaid after the end of October.

This regulation affects a class of students against whom it is impossible to think it was intended to operate. To the wealthier class of students it is immaterial whether their fees are paid in October or in April, for the necessary money is always obtainable; but the majority, after paying railway fares, buying books, etc., find it impossible to pay their fees during the first term. These latter, who are the least able, have to bear the penalty of not being born with the proverbial silver spoon.

No one would object to paying a fair rate of interest, but when seven dollars is charged for seven months' interest on twenty, it places the University authorities in the unpleasant light of usurers.

You, I think, will agree with me, Mr. Editor, in urging the Senate to give this matter their speedy attention, and right what they must see is a crying injustice. \$27.