

The Rockwood Review.

ROBERT BROWNING ON FIDDLES.

Robert Browning was essentially the poet or artists and musicians. His knowledge of the paintings of Italy was not a merely superficial one, as such poems as "Old Pictures at Florence," "A Guardian Angel," "Andrea del Sarto," "Lippo Lippi," testify; but he entered into the spirit of the work before him, and possessed himself of the very soul of the painter. If it was so with painting it was even more so with music, for he was a finished player of the piano, and thoroughly versed in the science and history of music, as we learn from his "Abt Volger," Master Hughes, of Saxe Gotha, his "Parleying with Charles Avison," or that wonderful "Toccata of Galuppi's." That he was a constant attendant at all the great musical functions of his time is well known, and he has recorded his keen appreciation of the Monday and Saturday Popular Concerts in a poem inscribed in an album presented to their founder, from which we venture to quote the concluding lines:—

"Thanks then to Andrew Chappell,
—thanks to him
Whose every guest henceforth not
idly vaunts
Sense has received the utmost
nature grants,
My cup was filled with rapture to
the brim,
When, night by night,—ah, mem-
ory, how it haunts!—
Music was poured by perfect min-
istrants,
By Halle, Schumann, Piatti, Joa-
chim."

For the pleasure and edification of such violinists as may not be acquainted with Browning's poetry,

we give the following extract from his Red Cotton Nightcap Country," which was written in 1873, the famous exhibition of fiddles at South Kensington Museum having been held in 1872:—

"Ask him what a fiddle means,
And 'Just a fiddle' seems the apt
reply.
Yet, is not there, while we two
pace the beach,
This blessed moment, at your
Kensington,
A special fiddle-show, and rare
array
Of all the sorts were ever set to
cheek,
'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-
hand-wise,
Or touched lute-fashion, and fore-
finger plucked?
I doubt not there be duly catalogued
Achievements all and some of Italy,
Guarnerius, Stradivarius—old and
new,
Augustly rude, refined so finicking,
This mammoth with his belly full
of blare,
That mouse of music—inch-long
silvery wheeze,
And here a specimen has effloresced
Into the scroll head, there subsides
supreme,
And with the tail piece satisfies
mankind.
Why should I speak of woods,
grains, stains, and streaks,
The Topaz varnish or the Ruby
gum?
We preferably pause where tickets
teach,
'Over this sample would Corelli
croon,
Grieving, by minors, like the cushat
dove,
Most dulcet Giga, dreamiest Sara-
band.'
From this did Paganini combe the
fierce
Electric sparks, or to tenuity
Pull forth the inmost wailing of
wire—
No cat-gut could swoon out so
much of soul,
Three hundred violin-varieties
Exposed to public view!"