

or the Idyls been written. From all trace of this mannerism, one great poet of our own day is free. Robert Browning is, indeed, original, so original as to startle and scare those whose taste has been formed on the popular literary pabulum.

In both the choice and treatment of his subjects, in his philosophy, in his humour, as in his diction and lyrical machinery, Robert Browning stands alone and reminds us of no other writer. Sometimes the problems to be solved are the same that have been attempted by the more daring metaphysical speculators of the German schools, but Browning's treatment of them is essentially English, straightforward and non-mystical, as that of Bishop Butler himself, a writer of whose power of grasping comprehensively the whole of a difficult position we are often reminded in reading such poems as "Easter Day." Browning is an essentially non-popular poet. His poems are to the readers of popular poetry now, what *Comus* and the *Lyrical Ballads* were to the general use of educated people of their day. He is obscure, he chooses repulsive subjects, his characters are all exceptional, and he does not, like Tennyson, celebrate English life (especially respectable middle class domestic life, so dear to our age and its laureates) but rather is Italian or Cosmopolitan. Such we take it is a fair statement of what is to be said against our position, that Browning's place in literature, is among the greatest of those who rank near the throne where Shakespeare sits supreme.

That some of Browning's poems are difficult to understand, we allow, but this arises from no obscurity of expression, or want of precision in the thoughts. Poems wherein the sad questions that perplex us all, when we look out on this world of warring creeds, and apparently dominant evil, are searchingly handed, must be to a certain extent, difficult reading, if they are worth reading at all. "Christmas Eve," Bloughram's "Apology" and "Protus," are difficult reading, just as Butler's sermons are, that is, they require a sustained effort of attention in order that the sequence of the reasoning may be followed. But the great majority of Browning's lyrics are dramatic rather than philosophical in their character—these are as clear and easily realized as any in the language. Of Browning's lyrics (for our space forbids us the contemplation of the dramas, or of his great psychological epic, *Sordello*.) the earliest published were the "Dramatic lyrics." This name conveys one striking peculiarity of these poems. They are all psychological studies, in each of which the personality of the character assumed is so intensely carried out that we quite lose sight of the author, and are at times at a loss to discover how far his sympathies go with what is written before us. The three Cavalier's tunes, with which this volume opens, are among the best known of Browning's songs.

"Kentish Sir Byng, stood for the king,
Bidding the crop-headed parliament swing,
And pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest men droop,
Marched them along, fifty score strong,
Great hearted gentlemen, singing this song."

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