

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Not long after the appearance of "Paracelsus" the Browning family removed from Camberwell to a more commodious house at Hatching, where the poet lived quietly for two or three years, an important intimacy being formed by him with the great actor Macready. Being urged by the latter to write for the stage, Browning set to work upon "Strafford," which was published on May 1st, 1837, and produced at Covent Garden Theatre, where it ran for only five performances, in spite of the fine acting of Macready and Helen Fancit.

"Strafford" was followed by "Sordello," a long narrative poem, which took several years to complete, and though probably commenced shortly after "Paracelsus," was not published before 1840, when it was coldly received by the critics and the public. Whilst "Sordello" was in preparation, Browning made his second trip to Italy, in the spring of 1838, and many of his best lyrics were written during this period. On his return to England he first made the acquaintance of John Kenyon, his father's old schoolfellow, who was afterwards instrumental in introducing him to Elizabeth Barrett.

"Pippa Passes"  
see page 6

"Pied Piper of  
Hamelin"  
see page 11

Elizabeth Barrett  
Browning  
see page 5

No. 50, Wimpole  
Street  
see page 2

Between 1841 and 1846 were produced a series of eight numbers of "Bells and Pomegranates," the first of these being "Pippa Passes," which appeared in 1841. The idea of this poem is said to have presented itself to Browning in a wood near Dulwich, where an image came to his mind of a figure walking alone through life, humble and obscure, yet capable of exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every turn. This image shaped itself finally into the little silk-winder of Asolo. "Dramatic Lyrics," the third of the "Bells and Pomegranates" series, included "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," a poem written in May, 1842, with the intention of amusing Macready's little son, William.

In the autumn of 1844 Browning paid his third visit to Italy, and very shortly after his return to England was induced by Mr. Kenyon to write to Elizabeth Barrett and tell her of the deep impression that her newly published volume of poems had made upon him. Correspondence led to a request on Browning's part for an interview, which was refused by Miss Barrett, with the touching plea that "there is nothing to see in me, nothing to hear in me. I am a weed fit for the ground and darkness." Her objection being finally overcome, their first meeting took place on Tuesday, May 20th, 1845, at No. 50, Wimpole Street, the house in which Miss Barrett passed many years in the confinement of a sick room, and where she composed "The Cry of the Children."

"She whom he now saw for the first time," wrote Mrs. Sutherland Orr, describing the poet's future wife, "had long been to him one of the greatest of living poets; she was learned as women seldom were in those days. It must have been apparent, in the most fugitive contact, that her moral nature was as exquisite as her mind was exceptional. She looked much younger than her age, which he only recently knew to have been six years beyond his own, and her face was filled with beauty by the large expressive eyes."

It soon became obvious to Browning that the happiness, perhaps even the life, of the invalid depended on her removal from the atmosphere in which she languished under the stern and eccentric governance of her father.