

before us as a real and palpable character. He is, for the most part, a bloodless phantom, conjured from oblivion to exhibit and voice some of Browning's own ideas. Taurello is the only strikingly successful creation in the poem. Of Ecelin, Adelaide and Naddo, we get most striking and suggestive hints, but their portraits are not worked out. There is the same allusiveness (if the word may be permitted) and lack of completeness in the historical and descriptive details. They are not welded together. Nor do we pass easily and naturally to and fro between picturesque details and abstract thought. Sometimes the concrete incident and description are wholly wanting, and sometimes given in a fulness which violates the unity and proportion of the poem. The poet, in truth, has not got far enough away from his abstract thought, and hence is not successful in rendering it objective,—in accommodating it to characters long since dead, and an era of history very different from his own. But however defective the picturesque setting is as a whole and as an embodiment of the abstract thought, in fragments it is admirable. Perhaps one cannot do better than quote, in closing, one or two passages which illustrate at once the excellence and the defects of Browning's descriptive powers.

Take, for example, the following description of Sordello's walk across the marshes of the Mincio, amidst the awakening life and brightness of a Spring morning:—

The woods were long austere with snow : at last
 Pink leaflets budded on the beach, and fast
 Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
 Brightened * * * * *

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Forth wandered our Sordello. Naught so sure
 As that to-day's adventure will secure
 Palma, the visioned lady—only pass
 O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,
 Under the brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
 Of withered fern with gold, into those walks
 Of pine and take her ! Buoyantly he went.