

burne and Dobson. Dickens and Thackeray, have joined the majority but their seats are not empty, Eliot and Bronte, Reade and Collins, Trollope and Payne, represent an age richer in thought and imagination than any preceding. Mill and Macaulay, were followed in due order by Carlyle, Newman, Ruskin, Freeman, Froude and Green, Goldwin Smith and Harrison. The domain of science has repaired the loss of Herschell, Lyell and Owen, by Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, Clifford, Lubbock, all names that call to our minds theories and researches that no previous epoch can show. There are indeed as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, and when we see younger men on every hand such as Haggard, Guthrie, Russel, Howells, Clark, Oliphant, Stevenson, we need not trouble for the future, but let genius take care of itself.

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"RABBI BEN EZRA."

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Browning, at twenty and Browning at seventy-six,—young, lancif<sup>1</sup>, rugged—intense, plain, masterful. Thus the years have marked this Columbus of a new era,—an age when strong and fresh shall breathe a newer atmosphere above the *clay-charged* sentiment.

One man touches the key-note of a century and determines thus the course of its thought and action— which vein is worked and abandoned but for a richer.

Sooth to say, the note of the 20th vibrates even now 'neath the song of Robert Browning, and as long as its amplifications are sounded will his work ever welcome and excite the "choristers." Though to-day snarls at his heels, criticises and condemns already it yields a reluctant obedience and follows the guidance of the "Poet-Philosopher" as he throws open his many treasure-houses.

Long he himself followed Tennyson till the place grew too narrow and cramped, when breaking loose, on an *upward* angle he clove new ways to suit his keener sense. Where he left the "Laureate" the stream divides, and, though its newer course is far less *easy*, the very vigor of its current lures the "shipping" and ensures for it the passage of those millions which may be.

Now, where the rapid, deep-toned torrent boils away from its placid, law-abiding neighbour let us place Ben Ezra, a fit index to the "mariner" who enters here to strive—"to see what God sees."

Rabbi Ben Ezra was written by Browning in mid-life, while yet the voice of *her* to whom he so lovingly addresses his "One Word More" was strong in his ears. Far richer is he now than he was, far more tender than he has been. His wife dead, with a strong hand he probes the soul's embodiment and *the subject* admires but does not leave the artist.

Ben Ezra is the song-philosophy of a man born above and apart from the *hurrying throng*, who escaping thus the load of common-place sees with clearer vision the little turns that save the bruise, the upward glance that easier fits the yoke.

Bid adieu the old prejudice, climb out of the old rut, stand forth *clean* and then, and only then read,— "Grow old along with me."

Clear-cut, forcible, unrestful, its every breath a challenge, 'tis the daring cry of a strong soul. No dreamy, half-closed languor drapes its any portion, alive, prominent and aggressive is its beginning and finish.

In sense, the stanzas are didactic, for truly the "law and gospel" are laid down, yet like few structures of the kind by no means are they wanting in beauty touched with emotion. Indeed, 'tis the only one of Brownings own maturer works where wisdom and beauty are so well balanced, so perfectly inwoven. Then, the billowy canvas, fold on fold of clinging white, decks the strong spars—now the "good ship" under *bare poles* nears her haven.

Two little breaks of three feet, a longer swell; again the three foot breaks, then, with the long and steady sweep of an Hexameter the stanza closes. If the meaning be altogether neglected and the uneven sway and swell alone be sounded 'twill be unexpected music to the attentive ear.

Again in his choice of words Browning is ever happy. Yes, though they drop into place with a *click* their combination is rich, though the soft "g" sounds are few and the sharp "c's" abundant—though not voluptuous, in themselves they are freshly musical and truly their breath is bracing.

And now, what is the purport of the "law and gospel" or, in other words, the object of the Poem? The answer comes,—more nicely to adjust and more fully to reconcile man to Divine Law. A noble purpose surely, for could we all but *know* and *feel* the reality and inevitableness, the sympathy and harmony of the relations of man to his God how few "would dash up against the thick-bossed shield of His judgment!"