

Very gently does she contrast their aims :—

" . . . Always Romney Leigh
Was looking for the worms, I for the gods.
A godlike nature his : the gods look down
Incurious of themselves."

Still she abides fast by her own belief.

In Romney's system there would be no room for poets :—

" . . . The world's hard pressed ;
The sweat of labour in the early curse
Has (turning acrid in six thousand years)
Become the sweat of torture. Who has time,
An hour's time . . . think . . . to sit upon a bank
And hear the cymbal tinkle in white hands?"

Besides, he says, "We want the best in Art or no Art," and you're a woman, and not capable of it. A true poet must have world-wide, all-embracing sympathies ; but

" You generalize
Of nothing !—not even grief !" . . .

" . . . The human race
To you means such a child, or such a man,
You saw one morning waiting in the cold
Beside that gate, perhaps."

" . . . Women as you are,
Mere women, personal and passionate,
You give us floating mothers and chaste wives,
Sublime Madonnas, and enduring Saints !
We get no Christ from you,—and verily
We should not get a poet, in my mind."

Aurora makes an indignant rejoinder ; and so the tale and argument run on. In the marvellous Fifth Book begins a subtle analysis of the poet's character. Here, too, we find a new note struck—a flute's voice breaking in upon the grand storm of harp-strings. Aurora's books have brought her fame ; and yet, sitting alone in her London lodgings, she exclaims, how passionately—almost agonizingly :—

" O my God, my God :
O Supreme Artist, who as sole return
For all the cosmic wonder of Thy work,
Demandest of us just a word a name,
' My Father ! '—Thou hast knowledge—only
How dreary 'tis for women to sit still [Thou,
On winter nights, by solitary fires,
And hear the nations praising them far off,
Too far ! ay, praising our quick sense of love,
Our very heart of passionate womanhood,
Which could not beat so in the verse without
Being present also in the un-kissed lips,
And eyes undried because there's none to ask
The reason they grew moist."

" Fame, indeed, 'twas said,
Means simply love. It was a man said that,
And then there's love and love ; the love of all
(To ask in turn a woman's paradox)
Is but a small thing to the love of one."

Clearly, thinks Aurora Leigh, Art needs Love to give it highest motives, largest possibilities.

In the next two Books occurs the awful incident of Marian Eric's be-

trayal. The Fifth and Sixth appear to me to contain, perhaps, the finest writing in the poem ; particularly that description of true poetry in the latter, in which she asserts its *one province* to be " Humanity." I dare not venture to quote ; I could not quote enough ; and less than enough would be more than unjust. She merely concludes :—

" Let us pray
God's grace to keep God's image in repute ;
That so the poet and philanthropist
(Even I and Romney) may stand side by side,
Because we both stand face to face with men,
Contemplating the people in the rough—
Yet each so follow a vocation—his
And mine."

Hers, the poet's, to train men to look up to what they may become—to urge them to aspire to realize that ideal, to fall short of which is to defeat the end of being : *his*, the philanthropists, to make more tolerable what they are, till fitted for a better. Therefore the poet's is the eternal, the more Godlike. It was well said by the ancients—*Vatis sacra*. Yet it is a hard life—this poet's. Aurora wails most musically :—

" O sorrowful great gift
Conferred on poets of a two-fold life,
When one life has been found enough for pain !
We, staggering 'neath our burden as mere men,
Being called to stand up straight as demigods,
Support the intolerable strain and stress
Of the universal, and send clearly up,
With voices broken by the human sob,
Our poems to find rhymes among the stars."

None ever felt this more than Mrs. Browning. Do you remember those exquisite verses of hers—more exquisite and intense than anything I know of—entitled, " A Musical Instrument ? " How the " great god Pan " sat by the river side where the dragon-flies were dreaming on the lilies, and tore up a reed—the tallest,

" How deep it stood in the river ! "

And how he made havoc in so doing,

" Trampling and splashing with the hoofs of a
And breaking the golden lilies afloat [goat,
With the dragon-flies on the river."

And then how he stripped, and notched, and hewed it to a pipe, and

" Dropped his mouth to a hole in the reed,
And blew in strength by the river."

And then the result :—

" Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan,
Blinding sweet, by the river !
Piercing sweet, O great god Pan,
The sun on the hills forgot to die,
And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly
Came back to dream on the river."

Lastly, the lesson :—

" Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,

To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man ;
The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain,
For the reed that grows never more again,
As a reed with the reeds in the river."

It was the tallest reed, the one that yearned upwards to God's sun strongest, yet its roots were deepest twined about its fellows in their common bed ; so much the greater the wrench required to tear it away—it was only by pain it could be fitted to be a mouth-piece to a god. But remember the result : it charmed back disordered nature to more than her wonted peace and joy. Glorious office of the poet—to sing back creation from its second chaos, as the Angels celebrated its emancipation from the first.

The last Book sums up all. Its concluding verses sound like a full-voiced antiphon—Ebal and Gerizim—only both in blessing. Romney had fled from England—his schemes of philanthropy destroyed—his dream of universal right to be achieved gone—his ancient hall, which he had turned into a phalanstery, burnt—himself blinded, and humbled, and his great heart well nigh broken. He had found Aurora on the balcony of her wild retreat among the Tuscan Hills ; and so at last poet and philanthropist—each confessing each other's need in the righting of the world—stand together on

" This moonlit promontory of earth,"

While he exclaims :—

" . . . Beloved, let us love so well,
Our work shall still be better for our love,
And still our love be sweeter for our work,
And both commended, for the sake of each,
By all true workers, and true lovers born."

The book ends with an enumeration of the foundations of the New Jerusalem—the true Utopia :—

" . . . ' Jasper first,' I said,
' And second, sapphire ; third, chalcedony ;
The rest in order . . . last, an amethyst.' "

Concluding words of what is to me quite the completest, perfectest, truest poem in our language.

I have been able to glance at it only very superficially, attempting no criticism, but merely giving a brief analysis of the main argument, chiefly in the hope of inducing any who may not have read it for themselves, to do so at once. I have left untouched the story itself, and all the incidental beauties of detail. It is so compact of varied wisdom, so rich in epigram, so apt for quotation that the difficulty would be not to draw attention to its most salient excellences, but to deter-