

wife placed them permanently beyond any apprehension of hardship and distress. Nothing in the whole of his Italian wanderings more saddened the poet in its fashion than the sudden apparition of Walter Savage Landor at Florence in 1859, aged, forlorn and penniless. Browning promptly befriended the irreconcilable old man and domiciled him in the rooms in Florence where the weary Titan drew his last breath five years later.

But the sorrow of Browning's life was about to cast its darkening shadow over him. His wife's high hopes for her darling Italy had been rudely shattered by the Treaty of Villa Franca, and she suffered a serious relapse from which she never entirely recovered. At Rome, in the winter of 1860, Browning wrote "Sludge the Medium" to relieve his feelings against the spiritualist cranks who had worried his wife. In the ensuing autumn the condition of her health had grown alarming, and lung trouble augmented his anxieties. By now they were back again in Florence, the poet unremitting in his devotion to his wife, whom he nursed with infinite pains and patience. No untoward result had been looked for, but in the early hours of the morning of June 29th, 1861, she passed away in the poet's arms, in the course of a few minutes, her head upon his cheek. "So God took her to Himself," wrote the bereaved husband, "as you would lift a sleeping child from a dark uneasy bed into your arms and the light. Thank God. Her last word when I asked 'How do you feel?' 'Beautiful.'" He laid her to rest in the Protestant cemetery at Florence, where a memorial in white marble now marks her grave.

For a time Browning was inconsolable, but fortunately the care of the child of his marriage with his best-beloved needed immediate attention, and the occupation thus providentially afforded drew his thoughts from the loss which looked like plunging him in all-consuming grief. As soon as he could he left Florence, which he never again visited, and ultimately made his home at 19, Warwick Crescent, Kensington, where, first, his wife's sister, Miss Arabel Barrett, and afterwards his own sister, kept house for him. In the early years of his mourning he led a greatly secluded life, until finding that the morbid state of mind threatened to become chronic, he determined to throw off a demeanour that was unworthy of him and take his proper place in the best and most intellectual society of the day. This decision had a stimulating effect upon his powers, and he entered upon a second period of remarkable activity. His *Dramatis Personæ* appeared in 1864, and he had also been pondering, at Biarritz and elsewhere, the subject of his masterpiece, *The Ring and the Book*, a "murder-poem" which had been suggested by a parchment-bound copy of the official report of the case that he had picked up in Florence for a few pence. This magnificent poem, a complete study in psychology, was published in four instalments in 1868-9, and was greeted with universal applause. With this success vanished the neglect that had overtaken his earlier works, and henceforth Browning shared with Tennyson the suffrages of the lovers of literature throughout the English-speaking world. To his sorrow his father had not been spared to witness his triumph, for he died in Paris on June 14th, 1866, and two years afterwards, almost to a day, Arabel Barrett, his wife's favourite sister, expired in his arms.

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