

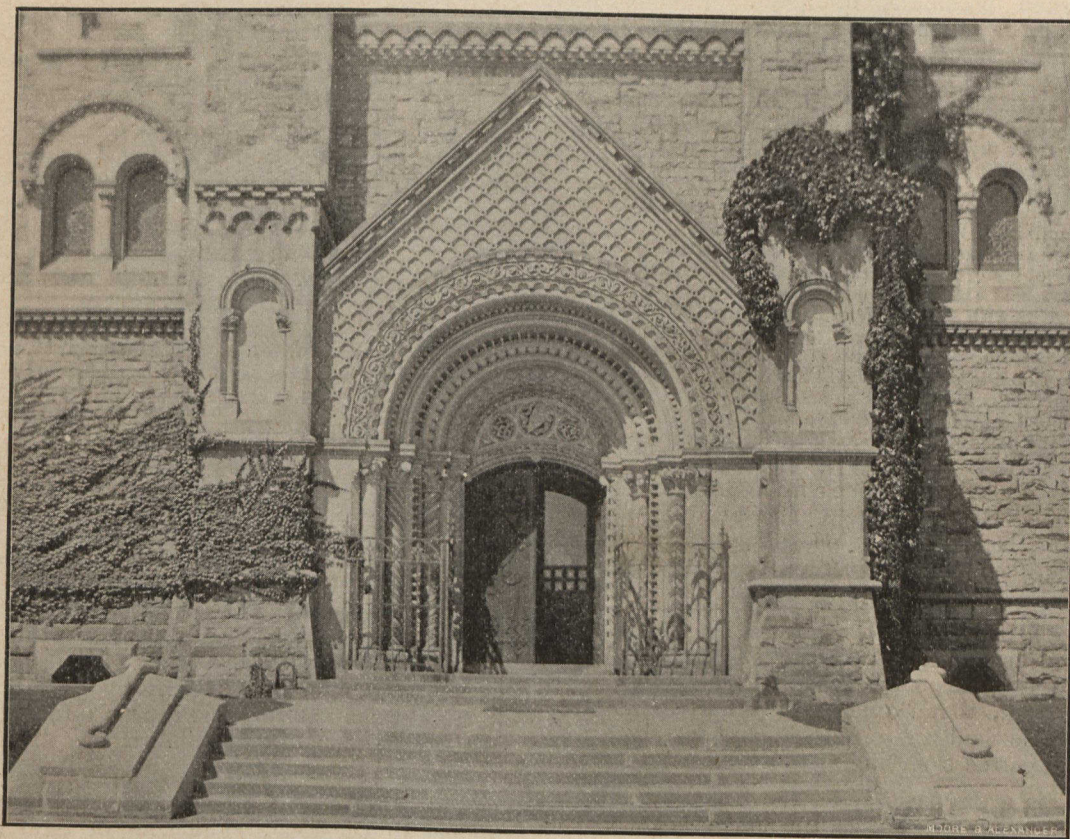
"Pauline," published when the poet had just reached his twenty-first year, he thus addresses the Saviour :

"O thou pale form !
Oft have I stood by thee ;
Have I been keeping lonely watch with thee
In the damp night by weeping Olivet,
Or leaning on thy bosom, proudly less,
Or dying with thee on the lonely cross,
Or witnessing thine outburst from the tomb."

Never for a moment did Browning give up his allegiance to Christ. The poem "Saul," one of the noblest, if not the noblest, of all his poems, is the one most intensely religious. In no other poem is the claim of Christ as the

appears the harmony between its soul and body. The music of each line speaks to the ear with its own peculiar effect ; but with a far deeper music the poem speaks to the heart, and it is with this appeal this brief introduction is concerned.

First of all, one or two interesting facts about its first publication may be noted ; indeed, there is a special interest in the genesis of the poem as showing the gradual development of the thought in the poet's mind. Part 1, or the first nine sections of the poem as we now have it, was printed under the same title in No. 7 of *Bells and Pomegranates* (1844); and again without alteration in *Poems* of 1849. In this first part we have a picture of surpassing



Way, the Truth, and the Life of the world more profoundly or more beautifully asserted. Its climax "To see the Christ stand" is for Browning the highest word of poetry, of religion, and of life. Few, if any, poems in the language touch such depths of the religious life or induce within us the conviction that the incarnation of Christ, besides being the central fact of time, is the central fact of eternity as well. The poem is instinct with a living passion, the effluence from the vital soul whose experience it records. From beginning to end it is informed by a mystical thought and faith. The form in which the poem is set is beautiful. The oftener it is read the more complete

beauty ; the lovely boy-minstrel David by the side of the dark, maddened king. His song is the joy of the hunter, the shepherd, and the reaper ; of the Levites as they march to the temple ; of the joys of the physical life—the mere living :

"Oh, our manhood's prime vigor ! No spirit feels waste,
Not a muscle is stopped in its playing nor sinew unbraced,
Oh, the wild joys of living ! the leaping from rock up to rock,
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,
And the sultriness showing the lion is crouched in his lair.
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed with gold dust divine,
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,