

The voice struck the defiant youth as a lightning stroke. He was long silent and cast down his eyes. All were silent; one could only hear the low breathing. Then he spoke, "No other power on earth would have forced me to recant, but I cannot lie to this woman's face—I recant!"

In the meanwhile the tumult of the crowd waged from without, which with the wildest threats against the council demanded the instant liberation of Frau Hollin. The gentlemen, feeling the dangers of delay, after a short secret exchange of words let the Town Clerk therefore acquaint the old woman in a polite manner with the articles of the document she was to swear to. But Frau Hollin answered that she demanded right and not grace; she had also only presented herself that her trial should be carried in due form to a conclusion; to this writing she would not swear. The gentlemen of the council made long faces, and vain would have resorted to persuasion, but they knew already that this woman was not very likely to be taken in by persuasion. Here the old woman observed the turnkey putting heavy chains on Muckenhuber, preparatory to his being taken to a strong cell, and the faltering glance with which he looked over fell heavy on her heart. After short consideration she spoke to the judges: "You gentlemen have put yourselves to bargaining with me, so you are no more really judges; since judges bargain not. But as you are no judges, you cannot do right by me. Go to. I also will offer a bargain. Give me that bad boy free, I will adopt him and take him with me to Ulm, and see if I can bring him up better than you. My property has lain idle during the eleven months I was in the town. You should make good my rents that I have lost in the meantime. Give me this bad boy; I will take him in lieu of the rents which God has allowed to accumulate during my suffering. Under these conditions I will swear to and sign your writing." The crowd in the vestibule of the house were uttering stormy threats. The council had no choice, even if Hollin had made quite different demands.

As she signed the document she found the reckoning beside it for her eleven months' keep. But she handed the paper to the Town Clerk with a polite smile, and as the crowd were already knocking on the door, he tore the interesting appendage into little bits and threw them under the table.

George had in the meanwhile been relieved of his chains; he looked around as in a dream and silently allowed all that befell him; Frau Hollin took him by the hand and went to the door, where both were jubilantly received by the pressing crowd.

The Town Clerk wished now to shew that he was not quite cuffed in the mouth and cried in a half loud voice after the departing couple: "Now find this noble fledgling in Ulm at least a gallows where he may have the right to be hanged." Frau Hollin had understood him well, therefore she turned around in the door and cried in a loud voice: "Town clerk, you yourself should also be imprisoned for twelve months that you might learn to know the human heart; you would then probably find that there are people who not only do not fear death but desire him, so desolate and unattractive is their rough life. Others on the contrary have tasted so deeply the true nobility and powerful courage of life that thereby they despise death, even though they do not fear him. The first fear not death because they have not learned to live; these others fear him even less because of their consummate knowledge of how to live. I will now teach this my son to live, that death, which in his first wild state he knew so well how not to fear, in his other state of true Christianity he may learn how not to despise."

The old woman kept her word. George was in her house an honest and brave man, who rendered so valuable services to his new "native city," Ulm, in the first ten years of the Thirty-Years' War as to keep his name long in thankful and honourable remembrance. But the Nördlingen witch-judges were obliged to lay down their office. The entire council was weeded and renewed, and after these five years of fright followed a better decade in which right and justice reigned again in the honourable empire city.

FRED. A. T. DUNBAR.

TRIBUTES TO BROWNING.

CARLYLE loved to talk of Browning. He told me of their first meeting. He was riding on Wimbledon Common, I think, when this "beautiful youth," walking there alone, stopped him and asked for his acquaintance. The marriage of the Brownings was a well-remembered romance in the house at Chelsea. Miss Barrett had sent Carlyle her early poems, in manuscript, and the rhyme-hater at first discouraged her *suo more*; but when he found that she was hopelessly couch-ridden, and furthermore fairly imprisoned by a tyrannous father, "whose lightest word stood out as a law of the Medes and Persians," he thought it fortunate that she could so beguile her days. Robert Browning received, as it were, his summons to her side in two lines of "Lady Geraldine's Courtship." The lady and her lover culled

—from Browning some pomegranate which, when cut deep down the middle,
Showed a heart within blood-tinctured with a veined humanity.

I have not the poem beside me, and if I misquote, it is not half so badly as Carlyle did, who, I remember, raised Mrs. Carlyle's wrath by saying, "she compared him to a nectarine"! Browning, he said, had as much difficulty in making his way into the house as the knight who found Sleeping Beauty amid her thorns. And the effect

was much the same. Elizabeth Barrett had not left her sofa for years, but now rose up, and followed him to Marylebone Church, and then to Florence, and through many years of happiness. He was "beautiful," Carlyle said, and had flowing black hair, although for so many years he has been so blonde.—*Moncure D. Conway.*

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It cannot have escaped the notice of any one who knew Robert Browning well, and who compares him in thought with other men of genius whom he may have known, that it was not his strength only, his vehement and ever-eruptive force, that distinguished him, but to an almost equal extent his humanity. Of all great poets, except (one fancies) Chaucer, he must have been the most accessible. It is almost a necessity with imaginative genius of a very high order to require support from without: sympathy, admiration, amusement, must be constantly poured in to balance the creative evaporation. But Mr. Browning demanded no such tribute. He rather hastened forward with both hands full of entertainment for the new-comer, anxious to please rather than hoping to be pleased. The most part of men of genius look upon an unknown comer as certainly a bore and probably an enemy, but to Robert Browning the whole world was full of vague possibilities of friendship. No one resented more keenly an unpleasant specimen of humanity, no one could snub more royally at need, no one was—certain premises being established—more ruthless in administering the *coup de grace*; but then his surprise gave weight to his indignation. He had assumed a new acquaintance to be a good fellow, and behold! against all ordinary experience, he had turned out to be a bore or a sneak. Sudden, irreparable chastisement must fall on one who had proved the poet's optimism to be at fault. And, to those who shared a nearer intimacy than genial acquaintanceship could offer, is there one left to-day who was disappointed in his Browning or had any deep fault to find with him as a friend? Surely, no! He was human to the core, red with warm blood to the centre of his being; and if he erred, as he occasionally did—as lately, to the sorrow of all who knew him, he did err—it was the judgment, not the instinct that was amiss. He was a poet, after all, and not a philosopher.

It was part of Mr. Browning's large optimism, of his splendid and self-sufficing physical temperament, that he took his acquaintances easily—it might almost be said superficially. His poetic creations crowded out the real world to a serious extent. With regard to living men and women he was content to speculate, but with the children of his brain the case was different. These were not the subjects of more or less indolent conjecture, but of absolute knowledge. It must be ten years ago, but the impression of the incident is as fresh upon me as though it happened yesterday, that Mr. Browning passed from languid and rather ineffectual discussion of some persons well known to us both into vivid and passionate apology for an act of his own Colombe of Ravenstein. It was the flash from conventionality to truth, from talk about people whom he hardly seemed to see to a record of a soul that he had formed and could follow through all the mazes of caprice. It was seldom, even in intimacy, I think, that he would talk thus liberally about his sons and daughters of the pen, but that was mainly from a sensible reticence and hatred of common vanity. But when he could be induced to discuss his creations it was easy to see how vividly the whole throng of them was moving in the hollow of his mind. It is doubtful whether he ever totally forgot any one of the vast assemblage of his characters.

In this close of our troubled century, when to so many of the finest spirits of Europe, in the words of Sully Prudhomme, "Toute la vie ardente et triste semble anéantie alentour," the robust health of Robert Browning's mind and body has presented a singular and a most encouraging phenomenon. He missed the morbid over-refinement of the age; the processes of his mind were sometimes even a little coarse, and always delightfully direct. For real delicacy he had full appreciation, but he was brutally scornful of all exquisite morbidity. The vibration of his loud voice, his hard fist upon the table, would make very short work with cobwebs. But this external roughness, like the rind of a fruit, merely served to keep the inner sensibilities young and fresh. None of his instincts grew old. Long as he lived, he did not live long enough for one of his ideals to vanish, for one of his enthusiasms to lose its heat; to the last as he so truly said, he "never doubted that breakers would break, never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph." The subtlest of writers, he was the simplest of men, and he learned in serenity and happiness what he taught in song.—*Edmund Gosse.*

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MR. BROWNING made his last visit to us at our hotel on the day we left Venice, the 7th, I think, of November. He came between ten and eleven o'clock, and remained until near the time of our leaving for the one o'clock train for Bologna. I never knew him to be more communicative and cheery. He told us much about himself—about Asolo, where he wrote, or prepared for publication, the poems contained in his last volume, "Asolando," in the dedication of which, to Mrs. Arthur Bronson, he says, "I unite, you will see, the disconnected poems by a title-name popularly ascribed to the inventiveness of the ancient Secretary of Queen Cornaro, whose palace-tower still overlooks us—Asolare: 'To disport in the open air, amuse one's self at random.' . . . I use it for love of the place, and in requital of your pleasant assurance that an

early poem of mine first attracted you thither, where and elsewhere—at La Mura as Cà Alvisi—may all happiness attend you!"

This last little volume was not the last in his mind then, for he talked as though he looked forward to many more years of productive work. My wife remarking that he could not be accused of letting his talents lie idle, he replied:

"It would have been quite unpardonable in my case not to have done my best. My dear father put me in a condition most favourable for the best work I was capable of. When I think of the many authors who have had to fight their way through all sorts of difficulties, I have no reason to be proud of my achievements. My good father sacrificed a fortune to his convictions. He could not bear with slavery, and left India and accepted a humble bank office in London. He secured for me all the ease and comfort that a literary man needs to do good work. It would have been shameful if I had not done my best to realize his expectations of me."

I give his own words as nearly as I now remember them.

A servant announcing that the gondola was waiting to take us to the railway station, he arose suddenly from his chair, bade us a cordial good-bye, with a "God bless you both," saying as he hastened off, "Now be sure to come and see me, next May, in London. You'll remember where my little house is, near the Kensington Gardens"—and was gone! We little thought then that we should see him no more in this world.—*Hiram Corson.*

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE COMING CANADIAN COMMONWEALTH.

To the Editor of THE WEEK:

DEAR SIR,—The Dominion of Canada is the third largest country in the world. Its resources are great and varied. Its citizens are strong, apt, intelligent and that the fourth merchant marine flies the maple leaf tells of their industry and capability:

Students of Canadian affairs have agreed that the Dominion cannot remain in her present political position. They differ widely however in their opinions as to what the necessary change should be. Three distinct schemes are before the public, viz., Imperial Federation, Annexation to the United States and Independence. These propositions as yet find their support, not in any particular party but in separate individuals, each claiming for his fad Utopian results.

Imperial Federation has among its supporters a few of high position and undoubted ability, yet the great majority of Statesmen are inclined to consider it a conception vague and void. Its *modus operandi* has never been defined, a fact that may be taken as a trustworthy index to its impracticability. Federation, however, upon a naval basis has been suggested, but the lack of common danger and interest between Britain and the colonies would seem to destroy all likelihood of its success. It would be a strange sight to see a combination, formed as the civilizing agent of the world, based upon readiness for war. That such a basis has been proposed certainly hints that particular advantage is the object of its promoters rather than the general good.

Would a national combination, destroying all balance of power and able to act with a high hand, be a friend to the interests of the world or a constant menace to its peace and prosperity? He who has studied human nature and history must answer the first question by no, the second by yes. The story of the naval Confederacy of Delos, a union born of fear of a common enemy, also helps to dispose of this most plausible form of Imperial Federation. It was created under far more favourable circumstances for its continuance than could be expected for a British naval Confederacy, but soon rivalries arose, dissensions became rife and disintegration ensued. When the strong adhesive of common danger failed to cement the little Greek Confederacy, what is there to assure the success of this proposed short cut to the Parliament of Man? Until some guarantee is forthcoming and some definite plan devised we must consider Imperial Federation a fount of poetical reverie, only that and nothing more.

As to Annexation, it is fair to say that the average Canadian opposes it. He has taken his glass and scoured the social and political arena of the Republic. Far to the south he sees hordes of black men and crowds of white men wrangling and threatening each other, and he calls this the racial problem. In the great cities he sees the rich and poor mustering their forces, the working man and the lordly man nearing a collision, he sees society begin to quake, and he calls this the social problem. If his investigations have inclined him against union the anti-British tactics of White House politicians have made him a confirmed anti-annexationist. If then Canada is to undergo a political change, and Imperial Federation is impracticable and Annexation is held undesirable, we must conclude that the goal for which Canada is bound is Independence.

So it is. The Republicans and Democrats as they harangue against Britain; the Fishery Question and Home Rule Question as they press for solution; the revenue cutter as she chases the Canadian sealer and the British gunboats as they look idly on; the young Canadian as he plans and the English statesman as he ponders, all are helping to bring about Canadian Independence.