AN ANALYSIS OF
SOME OF BROWNING'S MAJOR CHARACTERS

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In my thesis I am attempting to show the variety and skill of Browning's portrayal of character and to prove that the unifying force in his treatment of character is the development of the poet himself. This unifying element I have purposely kept in the background until the final chapter, in order that full value might be given to the study of the characters themselves.
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CHAPTER I

Browning's Early Characters

Browning was one of the most versatile of the English poets. He said of himself,

"My life has not been that of those whose heaven
Was lampless save where poesy shone out."

He loved music and painting and had considerable skill in both of these arts. His scientific and historical information was rather remarkable, as judged by the references to these in his poetry, as well as by the comments of his biographers. He had a sincere love for nature in all her forms and found much of his constructive power "in the silence of nature in the night;" yet, "after all, the vision (of the city) was more to him than that which brought woods and fields beneath his ken. It was the world of

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1 Browning's Complete Poems, "Pauline", page 5. All references to Browning's poems in this work will be found in the Cambridge Edition.

2 Browning's Complete Poems, "Biographical Sketch", page XI.
men and women toward which his gaze was directed all his life. Here, indeed, it was that Browning's greatest interest lay. He held it to be the mission of the poet to interpret God to man, "to save the world." From his earliest years he sensed a power within himself which he dared not lightly use. It seemed to be his sense of guilt from being tempted to turn aside from his purpose that inspired the writing of Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession. Biographers call attention to the fact that the author in later years felt a great distaste for this poem, revealing, as it did, the struggle, the morbidness, and the half-formed imaginings of an adolescent boy; but, after all, it formed a remarkable study of a growing youth with his hopes, ideals, dreams, and disillusionments.

First was painted the picture of a young imaginative child in the "first dawn of life

Which passed alone with wisest ancient books

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Ibid., page XI.

4 Harriet Gaylord, Pompilia and Her Poet, page 104.

All halo-girt with fancies."

The youth himself

"Want with the tale—a god
Wandering after beauty, or a giant
Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos."

Within his soul he felt a "vague sense of power all folded up." Yet soon a change set in; there was a great unrest; the inner force began to stir. His thoughts and deeds were wayward, as though he walked in a delirious dream. He felt as if all "the world's wrong" spotted him. At length, however, the chrysalis burst its shell; and the new being came into existence; peace reigned once more.

For a short interval he was content to rest and fan his wings. As he expressed it,

"I had an impulse
but no yearning—only sang."

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.
But the new wings must be tried; so, with the confident strength of a short experience, he flew to meet life.

"'Twas in my plan to look on real life,
The life all new to me; my theories were firm, so them I left, to look and learn
Mankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys;
And, as I pondered on their ways, I sought 9
How best life's end might be attained."

He vowed himself to liberty and the exaltation of mankind; but the exertion was too great for untried wings; they began to droop. His confidence wavered. A paralyzing disillusionment set in:

"First went my hopes of perfecting mankind,
Next, faith in them, and then in freedom's self,
And virtue's self, then my own motives, ends
And aims and loves and human love went last." 10

9 Ibid., page 6.
10 Ibid., page 6.
Wit, mockery, and light-heartedness took the place of the lost things. He refused to think; yet he knew that around the altar of his soul dark shadows sat, and God was gone. At first he was content to be served by the shadows, but not for long. His desire for praise and pleasure became satiated. His soul could not be chained, but began again its search for God. Through a knowledge of his own limitations, he acquired humility and a realization of his dependence upon God's love. At last he was able to turn his back upon doubt and to cry,

"Suntreader, I believe in God
and truth
And love!"

The disturbance, doubt, and struggle so vividly depicted in this poem seem common to the youth of all ages, but was particularly typical of the youth of the author's day. Judging by the records, there were, unfortunately, few of that day who were able to win the victory over doubt respecting God or even concerning the worth of their own ideals.
In his later poem, *Paracelsus*, Browning more fully developed and analyzed the unfolding character and the struggle of a young man similar to the one in *Pauline*. Paracelsus was a young medical student who aspired to know

"The secret of the world
Of man, and man's true purpose, path,
and fate."

He too felt power within him and was filled with hope and confidence. All that he was was to be devoted to the effort to know. He abjured magic and tradition, and was determined to learn from experience alone. He would not "snatch the torch from runner still" but would brave the "trackless air" rather than take the path beaten out by those who had gone before. He refused their light. Moreover, while he would serve mankind, he would not love them. His friends, Festus and Michael, cautioned him concerning his bold plan.

Festus asked,

"How can that course be safe which from the first

Browning, "*Paracelsus*", page 15.
But Paracelsus, secure in his high purpose, prayed,

"Make no more giants, God,
But elevate the race at once!"

I go to gather this
The sacred knowledge, here and there dispersed
About the world, long lost or never found."

He told them that he plunged a pauper, but would rise a prince. His friends agreed to await him when he rose.

The Paracelsus who rose nine years later in a conjurer's house in Constantinople was certainly very different from the inspired young student who set out on his quest for knowledge; but he was yet no prince. He had even come to doubt the value of the treasure which he had sought. For he had

"dared
Come to a pause with knowledge, to scan for once
The heights already reached without regard to the extent above."

The fortune teller had promised to give him the complete meaning of life if he would write down his previous life's attainment. Heretofore he had been too intent on gain to stay and scrutinize the little gained. At length he found

"The whole
Slip in the blank space 'twixt an idiot's gibber
And a mad lover's ditty."

A passage written in the book by another seemed to him to sum up life:

"Time fleets, youth fades, life is an empty dream."

His strength was spent, and confusion gripped his brain. He desired only "an end and rest," although once he had

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., page 20.
17 Ibid.
determined

"To become
The greatest and most glorious man on earth."

However, since that time "all life had been forgotten."
He had failed to realize that truth is a living thing,
ot dead and inanimate. To him

"Life, death, light, and shadow,
The shows of the world, were bare receptacles
Or indiges of truth."

In his wanderings he had lost his "primal light" and,
realizing his loss, cried:

"I see the robe now—then I saw the form.

My youth and its brave hopes all dead and gone,
In tears which burn."

18 Ibid., page 21.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Self rather than God's will had become the dominating force. The fire which had been intended to last till morning, had burned out before the dawn. He feared that he might go mad; so he prayed:

"Crush not my mind, dear God, though I be crushed. Give me but one hour of my first energy."

His faith was in some measure renewed, and he was able to say:

"God is good---------------------
God that created all things can renew."

Real knowledge came to him through the song of Aprile, the poet who had aspired to love and be loved but had been unwilling to toil to grasp the prize, desiring to seize it at once. The poet had failed in his mission of saving the world, although to him God had lent great gifts; for these he had misused. Perceiving finally that Aprile, who had possessed love and beauty but not power,
had failed as completely as he himself had failed, who possessed power, but not love, Paracelsus came to understand that both love and power are necessary to the task of saving mankind.

Yet, in spite of the knowledge which he had attained, the state of his soul did not improve. For five years later, although he was serving men as physician and instructor at Basel, still he did not love them. In fact, because of the blindness and fickleness of men, Paracelsus had lost faith in them. Even his faith in God had gone, and he felt that his life had been spent in vain. He declared to Pestus,

"I shall rejoice
When my part in the farce is shuffled through,
And the curtain falls; I must hold out till then."

He continued to serve those whom he secretly despised, realizing that his popularity was only temporary, few being really interested in truth. Nevertheless a certain sympathy sprang up in his heart, and he tried to teach them and to quit merely showing off. His followers then began to drift away; and, when two years later he expressed his contempt for a priest who refused to pay the fee for the

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Ibid., page 30.
saving of his life and for the judge who refused to interfere, he was cast out. In spite of the fact that he had known that this time would come, he was greatly embittered, and determined to forget the past with its dreams and struggles and to blot out everything except the present by indulgence in all the low pleasures which he had hitherto shunned. Festus was unable to reach him in his fallen condition until he told him that Michael was dead. Then Paracelsus softened a little and told him that he thought "the soul could never taste death."

Thirteen years later the world with its buffets and scorn had proved too much for Paracelsus. He lay wounded and dying in a hospital cell at Salzburg. Festus sat beside him and prayed that his friend might awake and know him. For a long time Paracelsus raved in delirium, reviewing his past life, but was finally brought out of his feverish dream by the voice of Festus as he first pled the case of his friend with God, then sang the song of the Mayne, which began:

"Thus the Mayne glideth

Ibid., page 24
Where my soul abideth."

At last the heart of Paracelsus was stirred and the darkness passed away.

"'Tis a strange thing: I am dying, Festus,
And now that fast the storm of life subsides,
I first perceive how great the whirl has been."

He began to realize that his life had not been utterly in vain. He counted it a happy time when he vowed himself to man; for he believed that in time man would become a completed man. But he had learned that

"In completed man begins anew
A tendency toward God."

So to serve man was his task;

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25 Ibid., page 44.
26 Ibid., page 45.
27 Ibid., page 47.
"For God is glorified in man."

He had failed because he had gazed on power until he grew blind; then he had been filled with despair because the power he had sought for man had seemed to be God's. At last he had learned the worth of love in man's estate; love must precede power, and the greater the power, the more love required. In the light of his broader knowledge he saw the reason for his failure.

"In my own heart love had not been made wise To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind, To know even hate is but a mask of love's, To see a good in evil, and a hope In ill-success; to sympathize, be proud Of their half-reasons, faint aspiring, dim Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies, Their prejudices and fears and cares and doubts, All with a touch of nobleness, despite Their error, upward tending all, though weak, Like plants in mines which never saw the sun, But dream of him, and guess where he may be, And do their best to climb and get to him.

**Ibid.**
All this I knew not, and I failed."

He himself in dying came near the sun, his cloud of doubt dispelled, so that he was able to say,

"If I stoop

Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud

It is but for a time; I press God's lamp

Close to my breast; its splendor, soon, or late,

Will pierce the gloom;

I shall emerge one day."

Another of Browning's characters, which again showed the conflict in the life of a young man during his period of development was Sordello. The struggle here presented grew out of the clash between the man and the poet.

After one glimpse of this mature poet of ancient days, mentioned by Dante in his Divine Comedy, and after an explanation of the political situation in Italy, Sordello was shown in his retreat at the Castle of Goito, where his boyhood was spent. Here wandering through the woods and

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Ibid., page 48.

Ibid.
marshes, he permitted his fancy to wander at will and enjoyed to the full all with which he came in contact. He employed his poetic ability merely for his own pleasure. The world with its disturbance, grief, and pain was shut out.

"Beyond the glades
On the fir-forest border, the rim
Of the low range of mountain, was for him
No other world: but this seemed his own
To wander through at pleasure and alone."

At length, however, the growing boy felt the need of human approval. His childish pleasure of

"Tasting joys by proxy"

became insufficient. He sought and found a crowd to exercise his will and vanity upon.

"He discerned

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31 Browning, "Sordello", page 80.
32 Ibid., page 81.
award the laurel crown to the victor. Impulsively Sordello took up the song of Apollo, which Eglmor had sung rather indifferently. Without knowing that a prize had been offered, he won it; then he swooned as Palma crowned him and laid her scarf about his neck. Thus his triumph began with Eglmor's defeat. This poet's life had been merged with his art; so, since he was no longer to be allowed to serve poetry, he paid homage to Sordello, then died. At Eglmor's burial, Sordello felt his poetic genius enriched by a feeling of gentleness as he laid his crown on Eglmor's breast.

After becoming Palma's minstrel, he heard and verified a rumor concerning his birth. It seemed that he was the son of an archer, who had rescued Ecelin's wife Adelaide and their infant son during an attack upon the city. He had been reared by Ecelin's family, out of gratitude. This report destroyed the idea of his supremacy by birth, which he craved. Thwarted in this desire, he determined that henceforth he would devote his faculties to strength, wisdom, and love, all three, but never to one alone. He would imagine all things; and men should find all their powers perfected in him and pay him homage. His chief weakness was his desire to impress others.

He accepted Maddo's invitation to go to Mantua, where for a while his songs were effective. He was hailed as a
a true poet, who built on man's common nature. However, knowing how much he was influenced by his desire for effect-
iveness, and feeling the unconscious joy of people in his songs, which to them were real, he was beset by a suspicion that their more limited joy was more desirable than his own lofty forswearing of special pleasures for love of all.

Yet disregarding this feeling, he set himself to perfect his language, but found it quite as hard to find a muse as to become Apollo. The people were unappreciative of his creative ability, being totally absorbed in the char-
acter which he had created. Consequently he turned scorn-
fully upon them and ceased to think it worth while to seek through them for the display which he craved. In attempt-
ing to satisfy his craving and vanity as a man by means of his poetry, he had let his ability as a poet suffer. The man and poet had clashed. His poetry had become a tool, and only the formal part was left him. In deferring to public opinion he had taken refuge in conventionalities. His disgust at the futility of trying to force all life's labor—large enough for eternity—into the narrow space of present life grew. He decided that it was too large for this life. At times he sang of body and ignored soul, at other times he swung to the other extreme. His confused restless-
ness and dissatisfaction reached a climax at the time of
Taurello's visit to Mantua. He sought refuge at Coite again, and Naido had to explain to Taurello why there was no poet present at the festivities.

Here in communion with nature, Sordello found himself again. He saw all of his experiences as rounds of a ladder, by means of which his soul could rise. He came to the conclusion that real happiness was to feed being with seeing, and that to become what was perceived was the true use of life. When Palma sent for him, he was ready to go back. Upon meeting her again, he learned that during her whole life she had waited for some "out-soul" whose will would shape her course, and that now she bestowed her love upon him. She wished to make him executant of her plans for her family. At last, through her Sordello decided to take an active part in life.

Here Browning himself came to the front of the stage to say that some men, like Salinguerra, saw little but did their utmost; that others, like Sordello, saw the world and reported concerning what they saw; but that those were greatest who made others see.

Sordello wondered whether he could do more good through the Guelfs or the Ohiellina. He conferred with Taurello, and his mind became painfully disturbed by the chief's heartless attitude, although he knew that this man of power did serve the people. After talking with Palma, he
at last decided that he could best serve both parties by serving Rome. Instantly arose his dream of building a new Rome for mankind. Soon, however, his vision crumbled; for he knew he could never charm it into being. He had visualized man's whole work, that was to be accomplished by all men, each man doing his part and so advancing toward perfection. In verse the collective man surpassed what the individual could do. Human suffering goaded him into espousing the Caelum cause.

He tried to convince Taurello that this cause should be his. The experienced old man regarded Sordello good-naturedly, but was unmoved by his argument. The poet was valiant but ineffective. Yet Taurello threw the Imperial badge around Sordello's neck. Palma then told them of Adelaide's confession that Sordello was Taurello's son. Taurello laid his plans before Sordello. Sordello soliloquized: Each attempt of life was not in itself wrong, but only as it thwarted some other attempt. The right way of progress was made up of all ways. Good being evident about him, what fear that the best existed to lure him on? Men were capable of being more than they were. He wondered if man held within himself the evolving force that led him on. The people were identical with him. A service to any was a service to all. If the soul attempted to refine matter beyond its capability, sorrow
resulted. He had sought to transcend the conditions of life. He knew now that this could not be done since soul and body were supplementary. He won in the conquest of his own self-seeking; but, stamping upon the imperial badge, he died, relinquishing his own life for the multitude. He was a visionary to the last, never a man of practical affairs. For he failed to seize the opportunity occurring once in a century of reconciling in his own person the conflicting influences of individual and social welfare. In writing this poem, Browning's chief interest lay in showing the development of the character of this man. In fact he was so intent upon this growth that he left the details of the story extremely vague so that he has been justly accused of being obscure.

In his *Lips Lasses* he has presented a very different and a much happier character. This little working girl possessed all the freshness, innocence, and charm of the one in Breton's picture, *The Song of the Lark*. Even the sunbeams, reflected from her basin of water, filled her with joy. Her soul was so saturated with life and beauty that she would have been happy even without playing the little game of pretending to be the four people, each in turn, whom she regarded as the happiest in Asolo. She showed the wisdom of a sage in her judgment. In fact it might be argued that the author's endowing her with so much understanding has prevented her being true to life;
A sort of human life: at last, was turned
A stream of life-like figures through his brain.
Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,
Er he could choose, surrounded him; a stuff
To work his pleasure on."

Inspired by his imaginary audience, he would become the
representative of grace or power which they admired. After
impersonating Ecelin, the emperor, and Eglamor, he finally
chose to become Apollo, who combined within his person both
grace and power. He would

"Compress the starriest into one star."

He would also have Pelma, daughter of Ecelin, for his
Daphne. But even his most poignant fancies became in-
sufficient.

Then one day in spring, driven by a restless pursuit
of his visions, having passed through a wood, he found
himself among a crowd of people holding a court of love
about a pavilion. Pelma sat in the midst of it waiting to
but many children have had a sense of true values, that they lost when they had grown old. In the words of Wordsworth the young person

"Beholds the light and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy!"

So Fippe, basking in that light and being eager to seize the one opportunity of the year of giving expression to her joy, would first make believe that she was haughty Ottima, the mistress of Schofd and wife of old Luca, wealthy owner of the mills where Fippe labored. Yet realizing that this type of love was short-lived and after all of a low order, she would later be the bride of young Julas, whom he was bringing home that day. She knew surely, as she considered the matter, that wedded love was best. Even here her fancy did not stay but flitted on to hover wistfully over the devoted mother love which she had seen bestowed upon Luigi, and which she herself had been denied. For a part of the day, in imagination she would be the person whom such love had blessed. Finally, however, as the crowning event of the day she would be Monsignor, who would be the recipient of

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William Wordsworth, Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.
God's love, since he himself served God and loved his fellowmen. Then came a happy realization that even she could share the love of God with Monsignor the whole year through, for

"All service ranks the same with God."

Hence this day sank into its proper place with her true conception of values. Still she would enjoy it fully by carrying out her original plan.

The character of Pippa grew all the brighter as she appeared against the background of the lives of the other people along the way. The sincerity, beauty, and innocent joy of her singing aroused the latent power for good that lay buried in each tarnished soul with which she came in contact. Having heard her song, Sebald came to abhor and loathe the voluptuous beauty of Ottina which had lured him on to commit the crime of murdering her husband. The best of Ottina rose to the surface; and, she, forgetful of self, prayed for God's mercy upon her lover. The little girl with joy in her heart as she strolled in the sunshine formed a striking contrast to the man and woman, whose lives were so blackened by passion, sin, and misery,
that they crouched stricken in the shadow.

Also in comparison with Pippa's simple delight in the happiness of Jules and then, the jealous malice and treachery of the students form an ugly picture. That the life of a high-minded, talented young man would be wrecked troubled them not at all, as long as their spite was vented; and the fate of a girl like Ithea mattered nothing. But then showed that she was of finer material than the students had supposed by being uplifted by Jules' love and nobility, while Jules himself, inspired by Pippa's song of Kate, the Queen, proved that he was a big enough person to surmount the tremendous obstacle which they had thrown in his path. Through the inspiration of her own light-heartedness and purity, the life of promise, which Pippa had dreamed for them, seemed possible to be realized.

Blupocks and the policemen were vile and contemptible characters, whose unwholesome influence seemed for a while threatening to dim the sunlight of Pippa's own path, as well as menacing Luigi's safety. For shadow had also fallen across the lives of Luigi and his mother. Fear of losing her son, who was a member of the Carbonari, weighed heavily upon the mother's heart. The light was withdrawn for a moment from the spirit of her son, when anticipated pleasures of life seemed about to win him from what he regarded as his high calling. With Pippa's singing, the sun
again shone out and lighted up the cliff which he was scaling; so bidding farewell to his mother, he set out to perform his mission which would most certainly result in death for him. Perhaps his mother's grief was made more bearable by his exaltation of purpose, although she had lost in the struggle to keep him beside her.

Darkness again seemed about to enshroud Fippa's life as night came on; for the four girls, whose lives were hopelessly soiled and ruined, sought to ensnare her in the net that would drag her down to their level. The old Monsignor, descended from a powerful yet dissolute family, knowing that he had only a short time to live, was for a moment tempted by the rascally intendant to agree to his plan for destroying Fippa; for she was his brother's child and, if living, would receive the estate of his brother, which he desired for the church. But Fippa's song of sweetness and trust dispersed the clouds of temptation and caused him to have the guards seize his tempter without regard for cost to him or to the church. Thus, regardless of whatever the future might hold for her, Fippa's day had been successful and happy. Her songs, which had sprung from her heart, had influenced lives for good in ways which she could never know.
CHAPTER II

Characters As His Work Began to Take Definite Form

During the years between the writing of his first four long poems and 1846, Browning wrote very prolifically. His poetry of this period took several forms, with drama predominating. His characters were many and varied.

One group embodied loyalty. Wordsworth in the Lost Leader was mourned, not merely because the Liberal Party had suffered less, but also because Wordsworth himself had suffered a moral lapse.

In the Italian in England is pictured a man who gave all for his country. Yet his was a nature that could have enjoyed to the full the blessing of home. But, because of his devotion to Italy, he was estranged from his brothers, who were in Austria's pay. Charles had proved disloyal to the cause, thus destroying most of the patriot's trust in human beings. He had never had time for love, but the woman who had befriended him in time of his and Italy's need had found a lasting place in his heart. He felt more closely drawn to her than to anyone else, and one of his three wishes for himself was that some day he might visit in her home and see her and her children. But even his dream took too much time. He must be about Italy's business.
The character of Strafford in the play by that name was that of a man wholly devoted to his king, although it would be hard to imagine a less worthy object of devotion. He sacrificed fortune, friends, home, love, and even the good of England herself in the interest of Charles I, who continually failed to support him. Finally Strafford took upon himself the blame which rightfully belonged to Charles and was condemned to die upon the block. Yet, when a word from Charles would have saved him, Charles refused to give that word. So Strafford was put to death, simply giving thanks that he would not be alive to see the fate which he foresaw would overtake the king at no distant day.

This same unwavering loyalty to an unworthy object was manifested by Luria, the Moorish general of the Florentine forces. He had been chosen by the city of Florence to command her troops against Pisa instead of a native of Florence, because he would not have to be rewarded after the war was over, as would a successful native leader. The latter might even make himself ruler of the city. To make doubly sure that there would be no undesirable consequences, the city officials had begun to collect evidence against Luria when he took command. Unscrupulous and jealous Florentines were employed to do this work so that the case against him would be completed by the time the victory was won. His reward for service was to be a death warrant. Luria's
integrity was fully proved; for he was entirely aware of the treachery of Florence. Intercepted letters had been brought to him, which he destroyed without reading. After the victory was won, he would have saved himself. It was probably the greatest test of his loyalty and courage that he refused to save himself at the expense of Florence, even after he had been betrayed by the powers of that city. He refused to accept the command of the Pisan forces and thus turn the victory to Pisa. He could easily have done this; for his own Florentine troops would not have fought against him. Domizia, whom he loved, desiring to avenge her family, turned her influence against Florence also, thus adding weight to Luria's temptation. Yet, in spite of everything, to a person of his nobility it was easier to die than to prove false to his trust. So, though he was a victorious general, he drank poison and died.

In The Return of the Druses Djabal is another leader of a people—this time his own people, the Druses, who had been enslaved on the Island of Lebanon since the Emir, his father, and his family had been massacred. He himself had escaped to Europe. Here he had met and made a friend of Lois de Dreux, a young nobleman destined to become a Knight Hospitaller of Rhodes. The Island of Lebanon was garrisoned by these knights, whose prefect was a very corrupt man and cruel tyrant. Djabal also had to choose
between success as a man and success as a leader. He had fallen in love with Anael, a Druze girl; but, in order to establish his authority among the people he had declared that he was the reincarnation of Hakem, the Druze deity. The assumption was that at the proper time he would exalt himself and appear as the god. He had obtained the aid of Venice and meant to kill the Prefect himself. His difficulty lay in the fact that he knew he could not transform himself into the god, as Anael and the others expected him to do. The only way out of his dilemma was to leave the island as soon as his people were freed. However, when Anael, in order to raise herself to the level of Djabal, killed the Prefect herself and demanded that her lover exalt them both at once, he had to confess that he was only a man. While it was the man she loved, yet she determined to denounce him as an imposter. Still, when he was brought to trial, she found that she could not testify against him. The man had triumphed, but Anael fell dead. It developed that the tragedy had been unnecessary since Lois, who had loved Anael also in spite of his vow to celibacy, supplanted the old Prefect and had planned to institute reforms. Therefore, after giving some parting instructions to his followers, while the ships of Venice were in the harbor, Djabal stabbed himself and died beside Anael. However, in so far as possible, he had been loyal to all concerned; and Anael
and Lois had both been loyal to him.

Colombe of Ravenstein was a refreshing little person with all the delightful charm of an attractive young girl, in spite of the fact that she was a duchess. She was an appealing little figure as, on her birthday morn, she awaited her courtiers in her audience room. These advisers were a craven, selfish crew, completely lacking in loyalty. Not one of them would break the news to her that she was to be deposed and that Prince Berthold would reign in her stead. Each intended to pledge swift allegiance to the prince as soon as he arrived. The task was finally allotted to Valence, Advocate of Cleves, who truly loved Colombe and his city, Cleves. He did not know what the paper contained which he presented to the duchess. She, however, recognized his courage and devotion and made him her counselor instead of those deserting their posts. Although he loved her, he expected nothing for himself, but simply worked for her good and that of Cleves, with no thought of his own fate when Berthold should arrive. Berthold proved to be a strong, ambitious man of keen discernment and justice. He treated the former officials with the contempt which they merited but made an offer of marriage to the duchess. Valence was further tried by having to plead the prince's suit with her. This he did; but the duchess answered that she would take Valence and give up Juliers and the world. It was her
birthday. The prince thought that she had chosen wisely as he had made no pretense of offering love. Once again love won in the conflict over power.

In A blot in the 'Sestos' Browning depicted two interesting but very unhappy characters. Mildred Tresham and the Earl of Mertoun were young people greatly favored by fortune, in as much as they were of old aristocratic families. Seemingly they had the world before them. Their unhappiness had grown out of the fact that they had met, fallen in love, and then allowed youthful passion to override conventional decency. Many times he had visited in her apartment after midnight; and, even after he had obtained her family's consent to their marriage, he must visit her in her room once more. He was discovered by Lord Tresham, brother of Mildred, as he started to climb the tree that led to the window of her room. A duel followed, and Mertoun was killed; for he had not tried to defend himself. Yet, before he died, he asked pardon of Tresham for the wrong done him, offering his youth and ignorance as excuse. Tresham forgave him and promised to take his last message of love to Mildred. The shock of Mertoun's death killed Mildred, and a few moments later Earl Tresham died from the poison which he had taken. Blood had washed away the blot.

In his Dramatic Lyrics and Dramatic Romances Browning
furnished glimpses of a great variety of persons as they trouped across the stage of life, each with a few lines to speak that revealed the speaker's personality or thoughts. For his characters were revealed by what they did or said and not by any descriptive passages by the author. They were given to the public as they flashed in kaleidoscopic procession across the poet's mind.

First out of the smoke of battle up to a little mound where Napoleon stood watching the outcome of the struggle below, rode a boy. He flung himself from his galloping horse, supporting himself lightly by its mane.

"Well," cried he, "by God's grace 37
We've got you, Ratisbon!"

He himself had planted the flag in the market place. His chief's eye flashed, then softened, as he noticed the boy's condition; then he said, "You're wounded!

"No," said the boy, "I'm killed Sire!" and fell dead.

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38 Ibid.
Certainly a stirring bit of drama was the Incident of the French Camp, filled with unutterable things, chief among which were the pride, grace, gallantry, and courage of the boy and the ruthlessness of the emperor, who would demand such sacrifice, to satisfy his craving for fame. But this player only occupied the stage for a moment; then quite a different one took his place.

In My Last Duchess the scene changed from a battle field to the interior of a palace. In a richly furnished room upstairs sat two men, one a duke, the other a count's messenger. On the wall beside them was a life-size painting of a beautiful girl, her eyes aglow, and her face flushed with pleasure. The duke was a hard, polished man of the world, the dominant expression of whose face was a fierce pride and cruelty. In a nonchalant manner he explained that this was a picture of his last duchess. Now no one drew aside the curtain except him; so she smiled for him alone. Formerly, the slightest favor from anyone called up that flush of pleasure,

"Somehow—I know not how—æs if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-and-forty-year-old name
With anybody's gift."

Browning, My Last Duchess, 252.
He disdained to explain, to stoop, but gave commands. Then, "all smiles stopped together." What happened to her was never told, but there she stood as if alive. The duke, changing the subject, said he was certain that there would be no trouble with the count concerning a suitable dowery for his daughter. It was the girl herself in whom he was interested. After he had thus tactfully and definitely explained what he expected of a wife, he suggested that they return to the company below. On the way down the stairs he called attention to an exquisitely carved statue of Neptune, taming a sea-horse made, by Claus of Innsbruck. The remark was that of a connoisseur of art or a man of culture; but doubtless the taming of anything—an animal, or a woman—in the manner of a god would be satisfying to him. However his lines were soon spoken and he made way for another actor.

A gentleman stood in a garden, holding a rather dilapidated book in his hand. He called down maledictions upon all pedants such as the one who wrote that book centuries ago. A month ago he had dutifully read it from cover to cover just at the beginning of spring, when the birds were mating and the flowers putting forth buds. In revenge he had dropped it down the hole in a hollow plum tree, that would have made a fine nest for an owl. He had heard it splash in the water collected in the bottom of the hole, then had placed on top a handful of blossoms to bury it with. A spider had spun its web across the top, when he
finally decided to fish it out and see what indignities it had suffered. The binding had blistered and the ink had run. A toadstool was growing in chapter six; worms, slugs, and efts had taken their toll of it; and on it a water-beetle had deposited her eggs. A newt had borrowed a part of the preface to tile in the top of his wife's closet. The gentleman chuckled over the idea of all that life, fun, and frolicking over such a dry book's leaves. It was as if John Knox had been taken to the ballet in Paris or Munich. In compunction he dried the book of old Sibrandus out in the sun, then propped it up on his shelf where it might dry-rot at ease until the Judgment day.

Again the scene shifted to another garden—that of a Spanish cloister. In it was a young man in training for priesthood. The sight of Brother Lawrence an abbot, of the order, put him in a savage mood. He had been given orders by the brother superior to tend the garden. He went about his work, muttering all the while about the hypocrisy of Brother Lawrence and how he hated him, snipping off a lily bud or a choice blossom merely to spite the other man whenever the opportunity offered. He hoped to make the leathened one trip just as he was dying so that he would have no chance of forgiveness and so go to hell. Perhaps he could smuggle in his scrofulous French novel among the abbot's belongings; perhaps he might make a pact with Satan. He
had just snipped off a rose-acacia when Vespers sounded. From force of habit he stopped muttering curses long enough to say a prayer, then ended, "Gr-r-r, you swine!" Although the ludicrous behavior of this person filled the spectator with amusement at first, a feeling of horror finally prevailed when he considered the vile practices of one in a position of authority, who was supposed to be serving God, that had brought the young man to this deplorable condition. Through this and other poems Browning's hatred of hypocrisy seemed as apparent as his love of loyalty in others.

In the poem, Up at a Villa-Down in the City, a view of an Italian villa,

"Struck like the horn of a bull
Just on a mountain-edge as bare as the creature's skull,
Save a mere shag of a bush with hardly a leaf to pull!"

was revealed. There sat an old Italian of quality, musing over the advantages of living in the city and grieving

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40 G. K. Chesterton, Robert Browning, pages 182-185.

41 Browning, Up at a Villa-Down in the City, page 174.
because he could not be there. The snow on the mountain, the fresh green of the wheat, the misty gray-green of the olive trees on the slopes meant nothing to him. He could derive no pleasure from the sunshine, the blue of the sky, or the song of birds. He could only dream of the straight rows of houses facing the city streets, of the gossip, the news, the fifes and the drums, and the gay colors of the religious processions. But living there cost too much; and, as beggars could not be choosers, the city was not for him, but the villa. Yet, the pity!—the pity!—Browning realized that it took all kinds of people to make a world—those who prefer the cheap and tawdry things of man's invention to the beautiful simplicity of nature, which was theirs for the asking, along with the others. But did not he also mean that most people lose much of the grandeur and loveliness of life about them by focusing their attention upon things of little worth upon which they have set their hearts?

The organist in Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha afforded considerable amusement and food for thought while he occupied the stage. As he sat in the organ loft and watched the people leave the church, he attempted to coax Master Hugues, whose fugue he had been playing, to come out from among the pipes, where he had seen him lurking, and tell him what was the

42 Gaylord, Harriet, Pompilia and Her Poet, page 41.
meaning of this piece of music. As he had watched him there

"With brow ruled like a score,
Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,
Like two great breves as they wrote them of yore,
Each side that bar, the straight beak,"

the composer had seemed eager to speak. The organist had
told the sacristan to give him five minutes while he set
a pedal to rights. They were alone; so he begged the master
to speak. Faithfully had he studied the score and played
the music; but the notes had argued and struggled; the mean-
ing had been confused. Yet he hoped

"Twas for something, his organ pipes sounded
Tiring three boys at the bellows."

He thought it might have been Hugues' moral of life. Per-
haps it was such a web as a man wove here on earth, with
the shuttle moving backward and forward until death ended

43 Browning, Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, page 196.

44 Ibid.
all. But while he continued his colloquy with the ghostly musician, his candle burned out. Irascibly he called to the sacristan,

"Show a light there!
Down it dips, gone like a rocket
What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
Sweeping the church up for first morning prayers,
And find a poor devil has ended his cares
At the foot of your rotten-runged, rat-riddled stairs?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket?"

Browning also brought some cavaliers galloping across the stage singing their rollicking tunes. Heartily they rolled the chorus:

"Marching along, fifty score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song."

Following them, came an Arab riding his faithful

45  Ibid.
46  Browning, Cavalier Tunes, page 165.
horse across the desert sand, singing light-heartedly and
courageously as he rode through the Metidja to Abdel-Kadr.

The next actors occupied a part of the stage far away
from the desert sands and the English highways. A gondola
moved slowly along the canals of Venice. In it reclined
a young man and woman among the cushions. Each poured out
his love for the other. She mentioned the mysterious three
to whom she belonged and begged that he leave them only the
ashes of her after he had drawn her soul from her body as,
it was said, the Arab sage drew out the spirit from gems.
In his happiness he merely sang to her as a bird to its
mate. He mingled his love song with comments on the things
about them. Her answering verse was concerned solely with
their love. Fancifully he imagined them to be ether things,
a Jew, a sprite of a star; but always he came back to the
thing that was best:

"As we old, I am I, thou art thou."

She wondered which was best, to roam through the world
or to rest. He contemplated what would happen if the three
should catch him, her lover. Only her touch could drive

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Browning, *In a Gondola*, page 263.
away the premonition of what would happen to him. He
felt death for himself to be inevitable. She mused on death.
It was very like sleep, particularly if it were with him
and from water. But the time had come to row home. He
pled that she stay with him longer, lightly urging that she
should give the treasures of her room time to visit with
each other. She made plans for their meeting on the morrow;
but, as he clasped her in his arms at parting, he was stabbed.
He had known, however, that this was ordained. He disdained
the three, because they had never lived. But through her
love, he had lived indeed, and so could die. No tawdriness
attached itself to their love though it was illicit. At
all times it was exalted and beautiful. Browning seemed
to feel that true love, whatever its guise, was sanctified.

That he believed that only one real love was given
to a mortal was shown more fully in his Evelyn Hope. For
a brief moment the lover was seen standing by the casket of
the dead girl. She had died before she had reached the
time for love. So one phase of his life was left unfulfilled.
But that would not always be; for God, who created love, re-
warded love; and, though it might be delayed for many lives,
until he had traversed other worlds, still someday he would
claim her for his own. He slipped a leaf into her hand and

Phelps, W. L., Robert Browning, pp. 154-155.
admonished her to sleep; sometime she would wake, remember, and understand.

This lover was resigned to wait eons, if need be, for the fulfillment of his dream of love; and Browning approved. But he had little patience or sympathy with the man and the woman who appeared in The Statue and the Bust. Time had turned back to ages past in Florence. A lady sat at the window of a palace. She leaned from the window to ask who the distinguished man was who was riding by. The bridesmaids told her that it was the great Duke Ferdinand. He, riding by as empty as a swordless sheath, was attracted by her at the same time. He learned that she was the bride of Riccardi. The life of the man was no longer empty, and she was as one waking from sleep.

During the colorful festival of the evening, they met for a moment, face to face. The duke, according to courtly custom kissed the lady; and the bridegroom bowed low. No word was spoken by any of them; but that night her husband told her that she was to stay in her room for the remainder of her life, merely watching the world from the window. She apparently acquiesced, but determined to escape and go to the duke before another day passed. But she would wait until her father left. Meanwhile she could watch the duke from the window.

The duke invited the bride and groom to Petraia for
a fitting celebration, but the Riccardi refused the invitation. Then the duke determined to steal the lady away from her husband; but he must wait until the envoy from France had come and gone. Until then he would watch for her at the window. Day after day passed by, and still they waited.

"And still as love's brief morning wore,
With a gentle start, half smile, half sigh,
They found love not as it seemed before."

His life was filled with affairs of the world; she watched the square like a book that contained but one picture. Life was empty save for that. So the years rolled on. The glory was gone from youth and love. Each realized he had only dreamed.

Noticing the signs of age creeping over her, the lady had Robbia paint her face in its youth and beauty upon the window. The duke had a statue of himself on his horse erected in the park.

Browning seemed to imply the painted face and the statue did quite as well as flesh and blood anyway, since both were empty of spirit. Neither was less guilty, because he failed to carry the fight through. The author stated his own attitude

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in these words:

"Stake your counter as boldly every whit,
Venture as warily, use the same skill,
Do your best whether winning or losing it,

"If you choose to play!—is my principle
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will!

"And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin
Though the end in sight was a vice, I say."

In the struggle for life, Browning, as is shown in his comments on the characters in The Statue and the Bust, abhorred living ignorantly, unthinkingly. His respect for a person who strove to know how to live, even though his striving prevented his having time for real living, caused him to create another character of great nobility, the old medieval student and teacher, the grammarian.

The old scholar was dead and his pupils were carrying

50 Ibid., page 286.
51 Corson, H., Robert Browning's Poetry, page 134.
him to his final resting place, the top of the highest peak of the mountains. It was fitting that he should be buried there, where men's thoughts were "intenser, rarer;" for his had been an ever upward journey; some lives belonged to the plain and the night; but he belonged to the morning. While he had struggled and sung, youth had gone; still he courageously struggled on. Here directions were given to the other members of the little procession, which in reality symbolized their old friend's attitude:

"Keep the mountainside,

Make for the city."

He became very learned but was not satisfied. He said,

"Grant I have mastered learning's crabbed text,

Still there's the comment."

Once again the aside to the climbers was a symbol of

52
Browning, A Grammarians Funeral, page 279.

53
Ibid.
their old friend's life.

"Here's the town-gate reached; there's the market place
Caping before us."

He never took time to rest; but time was after all unimportant; man had eternity. He would not draw a premature circle, heedless of the things that lay beyond but ventured his all, trusting God to "make the heavenly period perfect the earthly."

Only a place which winged creatures could reach, where

"Clouds form,
Lightenings are loosened, (and)
Stars come and go,"

was a suitable resting place for him, who had lived and died more loftily than the world knew.

Browning himself strove to know, and had a broad, profound knowledge; but he understood much of the "comment"

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., page 280.
as well. So he knew much about how to live also. This understanding in a person constitutes wisdom; and it was this wisdom which enabled him to write Saul, in which he touched all phases of complex human nature, leaving nothing of its rich variation, yet properly evaluating its attributes.

The setting is a tent pitched on the plains of Palestine. In front of the tent, a Jewish general, Abner, greeted David, the musician and shepherd boy. For three days King Saul had been shut in his tent, weighed down by melancholy. No word had come from him since he had sent for David to come to him. David entered the tent, and the rest of the scene was acted in darkness. Finally, however, as his eyes became adjusted, he saw a figure blacker than the shadow, leaning against the main prop of the tent. This figure stood motionless, with his arms resting upon the cross-support in the center, insensible to his surroundings.

Softly the boy touched the strings of his harp, playing his shepherd's song, that quieted and drew his sheep. Slowly he changed to the tune which attracted the quail and other little creatures after his sheep were folded. This ended, a vigorous tune of the reapers followed. But the reaping song soon gave place to the funeral dirge, in which man is charitably extolled, all his faults being forgotten.
Again, however, death and sorrow yielded to the joy and life of the coming generation, and the marriage chant sounded, calling up a vision of all the great varied procession, from the maidens and bride to the priest at the altar.

Here Saul groaned, shuddered, and shook his head so that the jewels in his turban sparkled; then he was again still. The young musician, who had been standing breathless, struck a chord from his harp and sang of the vigor of manhood and the goodness of life, recalling the words of his mother:

"I have lived, seen God's hand through a lifetime, and all was for best."

He reminded the king of his boyhood, its promise, and the success with which it was crowned. Now he was king. The harpist sang of Saul's fame until the weight of depression slid off, leaving him quivering and bare.

"Death was past, life not come."

The shepherd looked into the king's eyes; and dreams, which

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Ibid.

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the lad had fed on the mountain side while tending his sheep, came to life.

The king had done well, David told him, to reject mere physical pleasures.

"Leave the flesh to the fate it was fit for!

The spirit be thine."

Even after his majesty was dead, he would be remembered; and his spirit live on. The young poet, conscious of the help of a higher power, sang on. At last the monarch began to assume his kingly bearing, and again to become

"The same, God did choose,

To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose."

"He sank along by the tent prop" and sat supported by his armor and war-cloak. He placed his hand upon the player's head and, tilting it back, looked into eyes filled with a

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_80_ Ibid., page 182.

_61_ Ibid.
great love for him.

Then David laid aside his harp and spoke in a voice that thrilled the listener. He felt that he was a work of God's hand, made for that purpose. He reported

"As a man may of God's work, all's love, yet all's law."

He realized that he could trust to the Infinite Care; for the Creator was perfection, Infinite "Wisdom laid bare." Moreover God was love. He had the will and the power to remake Saul so that he might be taught enough by life's dream in this world to make good in the next. The speaker knew that he himself was weak, yet

"'Tis not what man does which exalts him, but what man would do."

David prayed

"Oh, speak through me now."

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Ibid., page 183.

Ibid., page 184.

Ibid.
Then, gaining strength and inspiration he cried,

"O Saul, it shall be
A face like my face that receives thee; a man
like to me
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a
Hand like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!

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See the Christ stands!"

The singer was stirred to the depths of his being by
the power of his own words. In the early dawn, as he made
his way homeward, he felt that he was attended by heavenly
hosts. All the universe seemed conscious that a Divine
Presence walked with him, and he still felt the Guiding Hand.
CHAPTER III

Character of Poems Produced
When Life Was Fullest for Browning

Any study of the poems of this period of Browning's life reveals the fact that Browning's acquaintance with the world had been growing broader and deeper. The next fifteen years brought about a decided change in his life. During this time he produced comparatively few poems, but all that he did produce were great. He was too busy living his ideals to write very much about them. These were the years of his love and marriage. The Potter's wheel was spinning, completing the shaping of the soul of Robert Browning. Soon the fires were to be applied which would set and harden the mould. Coming age would add a mellow lustre and adornment, but the shape of the vessel was completed at the close of this time.

With the exception of Christmas Eve and Easter Day, poems in which Browning himself discoursed in a fanciful yet earnest manner about the struggles of a weak humanity— to find and worship God, about God's love, pity, and understanding of men, and about the difficulty and privilege of

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Browning's Complete Poems, "Biographical Sketch", pages XIV-XVI.
being a Christian, the volume of poems entitled *Men and Women* was the only production of these years. In this group were included some of the most excellent character sketches in the English language. They are portraits, painted in the words of the subjects themselves. The book might be considered a picture gallery.

Among the most notable pictures, is a double portrait—one of an Arab physician and Lazarus of Bethany. In his letter to his master the Arabian sketched with bold strokes the outline of himself:

"Karshish, the picker-up of learning’s crumbs,

The not insidious in God’s handiwork

This man’s flesh he hath admirably made,

Blown like a bubble, kneaded like a paste,

To coop up and keep down on earth a space,

That puff of vapor from his mouth, man’s soul."

Next followed an account of his activities, that proved him possessed of many a false belief, though he believed himself to be a very wise man. He too had suffered hardships on the road to Jericho and was rather travel-sore and weather-beaten from his journeyings in search of knowledge. However,
he had added certain details concerning several diseases
to his store of knowledge along with a few remedies picked
up here and there. So to his travel-worn appearance was added
an expression of self-satisfaction. Yet sharper lines of
suspicion were drawn in by his distrust of his Syrian messenger.
But the predominant feeling which his countenance showed was
a struggle against wonder, awe, and credulity as he gazed at
the memory, fresh in his mind, of the Jew, Lazarus of Bethany,
whom he himself and others said Christ raised from the dead.
The physician desired to appear well before his master and
to impress him with the fact that he knew the men had only
had catalepsy and that the reports could not be true; but
there had been something in the manner of the men himself
that compelled belief. It was as if he had knowledge beyond
his time; tranquility, peace, and understanding reigned in
his soul and showed in his eyes. He was disturbed neither by
personal affairs nor by the report that the Romans were marching
upon Jerusalem. His only care was to live so that he
might please God, whom he loved, and who loved him. For the
One who had raised him from the tomb was the Son of God.
But why should he, Karashish, speak of trifles? He had found
a useful herb on the border of a pool. He had tried to get
in touch with the great healer whom Lazarus mentioned; but
he had been put to death by the people whom he had served,
accused of wizardry, learning's fate. Of course it was an
idle tale; but

"Through the thunder comes a human voice
Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
Face my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine.
But love I gave thee with myself to love,
And thou must love me who have died for thee."

The mad man said he said so. It was strange.

Thus there hangs the life-like picture of the progressive
scientific man of his day, shrewd, alert, making many errors,
but for once stirred more than he cared to admit by some-
thing in the look of the other man.

"Whence has the man the balm that brightens all?"

Just beyond the likeness of the young doctor, is the
portrait of a priest, Fra Lippo Lippi. Still rubbing his
throat, he sat in a doorway with a captain of the night
watch, who had caught and handled him rather roughly

Ibid., page 341.

Ibid., page 339.
"At an alley's end

Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar."

He had been released after telling them that he was the artist staying with Cessimo of the Medici. He had been locked in his room at the palace for three weeks in order that he might finish some paintings. He had been leaning out the window when the girls came by singing and dancing. Quickly tearing up the curtains and counterpane, he had followed them. Stroke by stroke the jollity and coarseness of the face had been painted in. But that wistful pathetic look—how came that there? His mother and father had died leaving him in the street, where he had starved for a year or two; then he had been taken to the convent.

"There,

While I was munching my first bread that month,

'So, boy, you are minded' quoth the good fat father,

'To quit this miserable world?'

He had renounced the world at eight years old.

He was no good at books, but his talent for painting

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was early revealed. While his faculties had been sharpened by hunger, he had studied men's faces and learned the look of things. He had drawn men's faces in his copy book and on music scores and elsewhere until the monks looked black and threatened to turn him out. But the prior recognized his ability and encouraged him in his drawing. He eagerly painted the monks and all the others who came to the convent, and all went well for a time. Then someone noticed that the bodies were very real. Orders came: he must not paint flesh but the souls of men. Men must not forget to praise because of marveling at the bodies. Shadows of frustration darkened his face. To him, with his keen sense of beauty, of proportion, not to be able to represent things as they were was torture. Even if it were possible to paint perfect beauty without a soul, he felt that there could hardly be a finer thing than that. But heeding their admonition he had painted to please them--sometimes pleasing, sometimes not. Still, the world and life were too big to pass for a dream, and occasionally his soul overflowed so that he did wild things in sheer despite. He knew that celibacy was not right.

"I always see the garden and God there

A-making man's wife."

Ibid, page 544.
The fact that he felt himself a beast did not help matters. Yet, why not paint things as they are in all their beauty, wonder, power, color, light, and shade? All are works of — God. Moreover in this world the painter played his part; for

"We are made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we've passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see."

This was the artist's task;

"God uses us to help each other so."

He felt that the world was of intensest meaning and was good.

"To find its meaning is my meat and drink."

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73 Ibid., page 545.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
So, in addition to marks of dissipation, the shadows of discontent, and a wistful sweetness, the light of longing and creative genius shone out. The artist's eyes were at all times awake to the potential pictures about him. But the cunning acquired through the years was also in evidence; for, regardless of his sincerity, he had been entertaining the night watch in order to obtain his own release and to make sure of the other man's silence. The dawn was breaking and soon he must be on his way. The portrait of Fra Lippo Lippi shows a soul, battered, baffled, degraded, yet retaining many of the manly and beautiful qualities with which he had originally been endowed—a remarkable study in character. Yet it is no more remarkable than the picture hanging by it.

The latter is a portrait of a man and a woman, sitting by a window in a studio overlooking Fiesole. Greater emphasis has been given to the figure of the man; yet the figure of the woman is necessary for a complete development of the subject. The man was Andrea del Sarto, the painter, who was holding the hand of his wife, Lucrezia, a woman of extraordinary physical beauty, yet strangely lacking in spiritual qualities. Her expression was chiefly a mixture of vanity, selfishness, petulance, and impatient toleration. The worship of perfect beauty with which she inspired him shone in his face. Weariness and knowledge of her perfidy were there also; but an underlying weakness of character would prevent
any decided action on his part, just as it had led him to neglect his old parents and to misuse the funds given him by Francis, King of France. The most striking feature of Andrea was the consciousness of his own ability to paint. He saw and he could have corrected a defect in the arm of Raphael's Madonna. But this consciousness of skill was over-shadowed by the knowledge of the misuse of this gift. He had expended his talent on trivial things. Others had not achieved as much as he; but they had striven for more.

"A man's reach should exceed his grasp,

Or what's a heaven for?"

Some had the will to do but not the power; others, having the power, lacked the will—half-men all. The gray of the twilight surrounding them was typical of the weariness and irresolution overpowering his soul. He had never really risen above the fog and mist of the valley into the golden sunshine of the mountain top. Perhaps he could not have risen; but, however that might be, he chose to stay by the side of the woman who had no desire to rise. Shadows of sorrow and disappointment marked his face. Understanding

Browning, Andrea del Sarto, page 346.
had made his torture more acute, but weariness had so dulled all feeling that he felt a certain measure of content and peace merely in resting and in taking whatever crumbs of comfort that fell to his lot.

"In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance."

Next to the portraits of Andrea del Sarto and of Fra Lippo Lippi hang a group of three, Cleon, the Greek poet, Rabbi Ben Hanash, and the Bishop of Saint Remi's Church, each differing as much as possible from the others. Yet in one respect all three men were alike: each was expected to point the way of truth to his fellowman.

In the first picture Cleon sat at his table and wrote to Protus, King of Greece, who had sent him many gifts, among which was a beautiful slave girl, bringing a letter from the king. He was an Epicurean scholar, poet, artist, and musician of the ancient times, clothed in all the elegance and radiating all the pride of intellect and attainment common to men of his type. He assured the king that all he had heard of his fame was true; nor did he regard the power of the men of that day inferior to that of the giants
of old. For he believed that man should be viewed as a whole the sum of all his parts, and people should not compare

"The small part of man of us

With some whole man of the heroic age."

He thought the king, however, erred in saying that while Cleon would continue to live, leaving much behind him, he, the king, left nothing. He was confounding

"The knowing how

And showing how to live (my faculty)

With actual living."

To know how to enjoy was something, but to enjoy was more. Carving a statue of Phoebus did not make him young. He wrote love odes, but the young slave girl was an ode. He sang of love but was too old to be beloved. He knew the joy of kingship, but Protus was king. The fate of the man of learning was the most deadly of all, since

78 Browning, Cleon, page 359.

79 Ibid.
"Every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen;
While every day my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase--
The horror quickening still from year to year,
The consummation coming past escape,
When I shall know most and yet least enjoy--
When all my works, wherein I prove my worth,
Being present still to mock me in men's mouths,
Alive still,------------------
80
I sleep in my urn."

Hence a shadow of dissatisfaction and unrest lay across
the brow of this fastidious, yet learned man. He even im-
agined at times that Zeus might reveal some future state,—
unlimited in its capacity for joy so that the great hunger
in men's hearts might be appeased, which nothing on earth
did appease. Death might even free man from the worm state
and change him into a glorious being in a future life. But
Zeus had not revealed it; so there was no hope. Man could
but live long and happily, then die, thankful for what had
been.

He could not tell the king how to reach Paulus. He

Ibid., page 361.
himself had heard vague reports of this man and also of the Christus; possibly they were the same. The man was only a barbarian Jew, and he (Clean) was surprised that the king would stoop to inquire of such a person. Certainly he could know nothing worth listening to. Some slaves had preached Christ on that island, but a bystander had told him that no sane man could believe their doctrine. So the expression of aristocratic intolerance about the eyes, nose, and mouth was explained; and, incidentally, it was this very thing that prevented this pagan philosopher hearing the message of hope and immortality for which his whole soul cried out. One more human being, regardless of his need, had rejected Christ because He identified Himself with the humble and lowly.

The stern, old, bearded Rabbi in the space next to Clean belonged to the despised barbarian race to whom the cultured Greek had felt so superior. About him were grouped several young men and boys; for he

"Taught babes in grace their grammar,
And struck the simple solemn."

He had just said that, if a person wished to be spared punishment, he must turn to God before his death. One youngster
had asked when death would come. Fiercely the old teacher told him, "Turn to-day!" Then a young Sadducee asked him if it were certain that they had souls. Sarcastically and sneeringly the old man replied,

"Certainly, a soul have I--
We may have none."

Thus the old Rabbi sat, his countenance showing belief in Jehovah, strength, sternness, and zeal. Bigotry was recorded there too, as well as in the face of Cleon; but no love was there. It remained for Christ to bring to the world a conception of the power of love. Yet did the Rabbi help to crucify Christ?

A very different picture is presented on the other side of the Rabbi. In a room of state, with the curtains drawn to soften the light, lay an old man, nearing death. Around the bed stood his nephews—or sons—though he was not supposed to have sons, being a churchman. His duty had been to point out to men the way to God; but he had lost sight of his high mission because of selfish desires and petty jealousies, so that now, as he approached the end of his days on earth, instead of a dignified and peaceful passing, he had lost

Ibid.
consciousness of all things except finally getting the better of his old enemy, Gandolf, by having a finer tomb than his. The first jealousy grew out of the fact that they loved the same woman. As he lay there dying by inches, he imagined how he would lie in state through the centuries in a choice part of the church where mass would be said, candles burn steadily, and incense arises. His slab was to be of black basalt, the base of the tomb a bronze frieze made up impartially of figures taken from Greek mythology and the Bible. There were to be nine columns of peach blossom marble; and, buried in the vineyard, they would find a blue lump of lapis lazuli; this they were to set in the tomb. Some of this stone he had stolen when his church had burned. He pled with them to use some jesper, green as a pistachio nut. He was afraid they would not do as he asked them but begged that they would, so that, while they enjoyed his villas and property, he might lie at peace in his church and see if old Gandolf still leered at him in envy as he did in years past because of their mother. The superficiality of the bishop's last moments seemed typical of his life. The wasted form of the old churchman lay like a corpse already, with the bed clothing falling in straight folds as though carved from marble. His diseased ravished features bore none of the spiritual imprint that would be expected in a man of his calling. The only sign of life was an eager stupidity that gleamed in
his eyes. A man who had preached hope and salvation to the world had himself forfeited all right to that consolation.

The next picture, however, is as full of life and beauty as the last was of sadness and gloom. This picture presented in By the Fireside affords a glimpse of the Brownings themselves in their own home. They sat by the fire; and he watched his wife as she sat

"Reading by fire-light, that great brow
And the spirit small hand propping it,"

Browning looked at her with whom alone he would dare pursue the path that led through the gray years ahead. He amused himself by thinking how, when the autumn of life should come, they would sit by the fire and he would review the world they had passed through, either from some great wise book or by reviewing their lives together. He would remember their courtship. How well worth striving for were those dark gray eyes and the lovely dark hair. Theirs had been a complete union in spite of the mortal screen. He felt that he was born to love her. Their love would be the only star when evening came and the gray of twilight began. Yet to them, so blest, even youth seemed a waste, instead of age. A more charming or inspiring picture could hardly be imagined.

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Browning, By the Fireside, page 185.
Another glimpse of this couple is revealed in his poem *One Word More*, in which he presented the volume to her.

"There they are my fifty men and women

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Take them Love, the book and me together;

Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also."

Through these fifty men and women he had spoken to the world as Raphael through his painting and Dante through his poetry. But now he would speak once in his true person; for, as Raphael had written a cycle of sonnets to his loved one, and as Dante had painted the picture of an angel for Beatrice, so

"God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures

Boasts two soul sides, one to face the world with

One to show a woman when he loves her!"

He also paid tribute to her power as a poet and, as an admirer of the poet, took his stand with the rest of that company.

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84 Browning, *One Word More*, page 361.

85 Ibid., page 365.
"But the best is when I glide without them,
Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
Come out on the other side."

Thus the picture immortalizes a momentary view of a pair of lovers more beautiful in their reality than lovers ever were in dreams. The time was near when Elizabeth Browning would take leave of this earthly existence; but the tie which bound their souls together was never loosened; and Robert Browning continued to look forward to the time when

"0 thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!"

86 Ibid.

87 Browning, Prospice, page 395.
CHAPTER IV

Characters Produced

Just After Browning's Time of Sorrow

For a brief period following his wife's death, Browning wrote nothing. He was passing through the furnace whose fires try men's souls. From it he would emerge with a spirit, purified and more durable, having had the dross burned away. Leaving Italy, he took his small son with him to England. In 1864 he published another volume of poems, Dramatis Personae. This collection of poems gave to the world some of Browning's finest characters. One of the best of these was Abt Vogler. Browning, being a musician himself, was one of the few poets capable of interpreting a composer's feelings and thoughts in such circumstances.

The musician was seated at the organ extemporeizing. As he played, a marvelous palace seemed to rise. Its foundation rested on the nether springs, its pinnacles rose until they disappeared from sight. Higher and higher it towered until its spires reached the sky.

"Not a point, not a peak but found and fixed its wandering star,

Meteor moons, balls of blaze: and they did not
pale nor pine,  
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no  
more near nor far."

In this marvelous palace he felt the presence of some who  
had never been born and of some who had been long dead.  
Music and musician had reached perfection at last. The  
musician's art was the highest of all; for it showed forth  
the will of God, existent behind all laws. His soul was  
alive and reverent filled with the beauty of sound, but  
the harmony ceased at last, and his palace vanished away.  
His spirit was so downcast that nothing remained of the  
beautiful structure which he had wrought. He could derive  
comfort only when he turned to God who was changeless, all-  
powerful, and good. Through trust in his power, he perceived  
a bit of divine truth:

"There shall never be one last good! What was  
shall live as before:  
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying  
sound;  
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On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a

---88---

Browning, Abt Vogler, page 382.
He knew at last that all the good he had dreamed of should exist. All the high aspirations, some that were too high for earth, were "music sent up, to God"; he would hear it by and by. Even his failure here was an evidence of triumph later, just as the pause in music made ready for the singing. The discords, sorrow, and doubt were hard to bear; but they made the harmony only the more prized. He became reconciled to earth, where silence resumed her reign; for the silence implied sound. His fingers touched the keys again, not to rise to the heights as before; but he felt for the common chord, by degrees sank to a minor, then gradually found his resting place, the "C major of this life". From here he could survey the heights from which he had rolled into the deep. Peace had filled his soul and he felt that he could sleep.

Browning's own understanding of and harmony with life was shown through this character and helped him to create another of equal importance. This person was also an ecclesiastic. But Rabbi Ben Ezra was of a very different nature from Rabbi Ben Karshook. He had lost his sternness.

Ibid., page 363.

Harriet Gaylord, Pompilia and Her Poet, page 163.
as the years rolled by and had developed a most wholesome and satisfying philosophy. What a startling philosophy the old sage gave utterance to in the first sentence!

"Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be."

How few ever realize the truth of that assertion! Could age with its infirmities and heartaches, with its neglect and loneliness, be the best of life? Yet the Rabbi was growing old; and he said that it was so. God had planned a whole life for man, and youth was only a part. Youth was a time of striving; but age proved the gain or loss; the years left the ashes behind; what survived was gold. Then he would be able to judge true values; for being old, he would know. But what was to be the basis of his judgment concerning the worth of a life? The decision should not rest upon the wealth accumulated, or even upon the work done.

"But all the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb,
So passed in making up the main account.
"Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow set,

"All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This was I worth to God."

Along with this sense of value had come another truth: the soul was immortal.

"All that is at all,
Lasts ever, past recall;
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure."

Life might be hard; the pleasures of youth might have fled; and grinning skeletons might press close; but a man should remember that he belonged to the Master, and ought to be happy in His service. He himself had never forgotten that God had need of him, even when the whirl of the wheel had been worst. He marvelled that the master should need an earth-made vessel, but had always felt his need for God. So, as life drew to a close, as the vessel was nearing

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92 Ibid., page 385.

93 Ibid.
completion, he prayed,

"So take and use thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same."

Browning himself seemed convinced of the truth of this belief; therefore, he did not fear death but considered it as a fulfillment of life. He awaited the next experience. He knew, however, that not all persons were capable of such exalted ideas concerning God and life, but that each man interpreted God according to his own nature. Each person imagined God to have attributes similar to his own. Thus Caliban, half-man, half-beast, as he wallowed in the mire while small creatures creeping over his body made him laugh, with little or no appreciation for the flowers and sunbeams about him, muttered to himself and talked about God. Since

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94
Ibid.

95
he was selfish and did things for spite, he imagined that God (Setebos) had created the universe (albeit a comparatively small place in Caliban's mind) for that reason. That was, he created the cold moon, where he lived, and the earth and the sun, but not the stars. Being ill at ease and uncomfortable, he had created the growing things, which were to him playthings, that he both admired and mocked. He had made things worthier than himself which he envied; hence he had arranged it that his creatures do nothing, except through him. If they tried anything on their own account, he smashed the work with his foot. Caliban thought perhaps that Setebos had some power (the Quiet) over Him that felt no joy or grief, something to which he might look up, strive toward at the expense of those he worked upon.

Caliban felt joy when the quails came; and joy was good; but he would have felt no thrill, could he have brought them whenever he desired. But, looking up, he had perceived that he could not soar to the quiet above him and happy life; so he aped the higher world, and for sport tormented the weaker creatures about him. He felt that Setebos was unreasonable, favoring Prospero but punishing him for spite. He did not know how to win his favor for actions that pleased once time did not necessarily prove acceptable a second time. If this deity were not absorbed into the Quiet some day, there was no hope of change for Caliban. He believed that there would
be no after life, that after the worst and final pain death brought an end. His dam had thought otherwise. Thus he proved that he had descended in the scale of life. Meanwhile the best way to escape the ire of Setebos was not to seem too happy. He himself killed two flies disporting themselves happily, but moved a stick from out the path of two black beetles who were hard at work. Hence he, Caliban, strove to appear to work hard, danced only on dark nights, moaned in the sun, and stuck his head in a hole to laugh. He never dared to speak his mind, except when in solitude. Otherwise he would have had to sacrifice some of his best property to appease His wrath and make a show of penitence, although secretly his heart was filled with hate. All that remained to him was to hope that some strange day the quiet would conquer Him or, what was more probable, that He would become so decrepit that He would constantly doze—"as good as die."

But a cloud had overspread the sun, lightening flashed, followed by thunder, and trees snapped. Caliban immediately imagined that his rebellious words had in some manner come to the ear of the ruler of his world, who took this means of punishing him. Therefore he began to grovel on his face and make vain promises about small sacrifices which he would endure if only he might escape.

What a horrible idea of a deity! Yet how typical of the conception built up in the minds of so many people. He
had no thought of a God whose power was love, and whose plan was one of marvelous organization, and development. How pitiable true that, even as Caliban, human beings interpret the attributes of others, of God, himself, in the light of their own dim souls. Only the "broken arcs" are visible and the poor earthling's never conceive of the "perfect rounds." Hence they sprawl in their slough of misery and curse God or deny his existence, if their picture of Him becomes too horrible to be endured.

Another low form of being was incorporated in Mr. Sludge, the medium. The mind of Browning leathed the thought of a man who would, for the sake of the livelihood which he could earn in that way, traffic in the deepest emotions, heartaches, and longings of fellow-beings, leading them by tricks to believe in false contacts with the world beyond. Yet, no matter how obnoxious a man's opinions or practices might be, still, as an interpreter of the lives of men and women, the poet strove to be just and reasonable.

In stating his case Mr. Sludge showed that in him was combined some of the charm and pathos as well as the rascality of Fra Lippo Lippi with much of the vindictiveness and sneering comprehensiveness of the priest in the

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Edward Dowden, Robert Browning, pp. 161-166.
Salileguy of the Spanish Cloister. Like Fra Lippo Lippi, throughout the scene, he was talking primarily to secure his release and to obtain a promise of silence from the man in whose power he found himself, although much that he said was spoken with sincerity. The picture of the boy who was gradually drawn into the vortex of deceit, fraud, and imposition was certainly for the purpose of arousing sympathy, but it was probably none the less true for all that. Having been detected in fraud by his patron or dupe, who was interested in spiritualism, Mr. Sludge, the medium, first tried to pretend that his cheating was due to an accident, a slip, caused by the wine he had drunk, that he had never cheated before. But when at the mention of the spirit of his patron's mother, whom he had supposedly called up, the enraged man choked and shook him, he admitted that his occupation was dishonest, that he was a charlatan. However he excused his dishonesty by saying that society had made him so. The patron agreed to let him go provided he would tell him all about his tricks, leave the country, and promise never to engage in that sort of work again. Mr. Sludge agreed to these terms provided he should receive sixty five-pound notes; but he compromised for thirty. If the patron refused that, the charlatan was going to tell that his employer had picked the quarrel in order to get back the gifts he had given. As soon as his point was gained, all hint of threat disappeared.
from his manner; he became affable again and strove to be at ease. This poise came gradually as he lost himself in his subject. His nerve never deserted him; for he prefaced his remarks with

"It's all your own fault, you curious gentle folk! You're prigs,—excuse me,—like to look so spry."

They were always talking about the ways of the world—about how men made money. If a poor boy in the house, desiring the things that he saw about him and having listened to their talk, should gain their interest by saying that he had seen a ghost, they would urge him on to tell of it, explaining away his hesitation, and suggesting other phases of the matter which he had never thought of. Moreover, he found money and luxuries supplied, which would have come to him in no other way; for he could never before have explained how he came by a five-pound note, so that they would have believed him, but would have been branded thief.

Whatever measures the boy might have taken to retract were effectually blocked; for his original discoverer must call on his friends to share his find with them. They must not doubt, as doubt spoiled manifestations. Thus the hesitant,
shivering boy was pushed on until he dived to stop the shivering. Afterward he held the circle bound as he narrated visions, heard raps or set to spirit writing. Finally that, which was never meant to be so bad, became a monstrous thing. Yet he was still protected by his patron; and, if his guests had doubts, they were too polite to mention them. They did not criticize their host's furniture or his wine. Why should they criticize his medium? If Bacon's spelling were bad,—why, perhaps, it was not Bacon! or, what of that? A medium was only a means—imperfect, of course. It was not even surprising when Beethoven's sonata came out the Shapers' Hymn in G, or even the Stars and Stripes. Sludge had waved his hat in triumph, or at times he did not; for sometimes he felt helpless, like a fractious child dandled on its spoilers knee, and, feeling the ruin of his soul, envied even a decent dog when he saw him pass. The women were the worst with their pets and suggestions. He found himself raised from the gutter, pampered, and

"Set on a stool buttressed by ladies' knees."

Though ordinarily shrinking from masculine contact with ladylike prudishness, they had not hesitated to fondle

**Ibid., page 400.**
him, as if he himself were insensate. He had found his revenge by making the spirits which he called up present truth naked. They had blushed, were shocked, but had to forgive.

"In the next world all our conventions are reversed, --perhaps
Made light of: something like old prints, my dear."

He, stimulated by them and by their prompting, swept swiftly on to the cataract ahead. Still he had studied and worked at his trade; a novice could not have continued to carry on. Also his ability to garner and store stray facts helped him to convince certain ones of his truth; but the disturbed emotions of those who hoped to speak with their loved ones had helped him more. Beyond this he charged that

"There's a real love of a lie,
Liars find ready-made for lies they make."

Add to these general helps which he received the fact that his host did not want him to be found out, and the stupidity

---99---
Ibid., page 403.

100
Ibid., page 404.
of

"The social sage's, Solomon of saloons
And philosophic diner-out, the fribble
Who wants a doctrine for a shopping-block
To try the edge of his faculty upon,
Prove how much common sense he'll lack and how
I' the critical moment 'twixt the soup and fish!"

He found these men the most disgusting of all. They had no real convictions of their own, no true understanding of philosophic truth; yet they must assume a learned pose, cast away all conventions and formerly accepted truths without regard for their worth in order that they might impress their associates with the idea of their intellectual importance and progressiveness. He felt that they were merely empty-headed cacklers and felt no compunction at deceiving those who wished to be deceived.

He admitted that he had cheated, was a fraud; but, after all, there was a spirit world. All about were forces that no man understood. He had felt the truth of this even through the fraud. True, he proved that his religious belief was inextricably entangled with superstition. Still

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Ibid., page 405.
these forces were real. However a certain amount of sincerity did not prevent him using every argument that he could invent to improve his case with his patron while his boldness and rage broke through at frequent intervals. He maintained that he had been born with soul so sensitive and soul so alert that he was aware of the spirit world.

"While you,
Blind as a beetle that way,—for amends,
Why you can double fist and floor me, sir!

"Never brag, never bluster, never blush,—
In short, you've pluck, when I'm a coward."

His cowardice had led him to mix a little insidious flattery with the unpalatable truth with which he had begun.

He had cheated for so long that he was not certain where the cheating left off and reality began. In fact, he had merely cheated in self-defense. That was his answer to a world of cheats. Why even poets sang of things that never were, so raising men to greater heights, and were honored for their work. He, Sludge, had merely acted out what they had sung and should be praised as much as
they. Well, he had merely wished to show that

"The devil's not all devil."

He did not pretend that he was an angel, and certainly not a gentleman like his patron. In short his flattery and simulated grief at parting with his patron were so successful that he was given twenty more five-pound notes and a promise of silence. However, he almost incurred the patron's wrath again by another ill-advised mention of his mother.

Once out of the house and its owner's restraining presence, his anger and vengeful spirit flared once more; and he wished he had the courage to burn down the house, to accuse him of poisoning his mother, or, at least, that he had remembered to prophesy his death within the year. Thus, he was a mixture of the charlatan and the real until the last. In spite of his contempt for a person of this type, Browning was able to enter into him and understand his personality and thus make him live before his readers as just another human being with yearnings, strivings, and heartaches, another actor on life's stage, although his warped soul prevented his taking any save a very sordid

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Ibid., page 412.
part. Yet, because of the truth of presentation, the spectators, while recognizing the enormity of his offenses, were filled with pity instead of condemnation for his twisted soul. Browning had thus supplied further evidence to show that "to understand all was to forgive all." His attitude showed that there was no room in his heart for littleness, or hatred. The trials and sorrows through which he himself had passed seemed to have burned all of that away. He was now ready to give to the world his greatest poem, that interpretation of all the amazing heights and depths that a human soul could compass, of the quips, quirks, and pathos of life, of the tremendous, recurrent, and eternal surge of that sea of emotions in human hearts; and, at the same time, of the powerful and steady rhythmic throb of the life-giving and regulating force of the universe, The Ring and the Book. All the experiences of his life, all the love, joy and sorrow, all that he had observed, or felt, or been, all that Elizabeth Barrett had meant to him, apparently went into the making of this book.

The facts of the story he had found in the old yellow book which he had found in the old shop in Florence. The

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104 Edward Dowden, Robert Browning, pp. 161-165.

105 Browning's Complete Poems, "Biographical Sketch", pp. XVI-XVII.
facts were the gold. But, during the two hundred years which had elapsed since these events had taken place, all memory of them had passed from the minds of men. Yet, as the poet read this record, something which belonged to him amalgamated with the mass.

"I fused my live soul and that inert stuff."

The mass afterward could be hammered and filed and beaten into shape. Having read the book, and having seen the dead, bare account come to life by means of the breath which he had breathed into it, he had stepped out upon the narrow terrace overhanging the street to free himself from these actors of a former age and to get in touch with the world, the spirit of the universe again. Rain had cooled the hot pavement, but the sky was still overcast with clouds. He was conscious of the busy human sense below; and, now and then, a flash of lightening from cloud to cloud revealed groups of townsmen in twos and threes talking.

"Drinking the blackness in default of air."

106
Browning, The Ring and the Book, page 419.

107
Ibid., page 419.
A lamp-fly beat in and out among the terrace plants, lured by the single branch of datura. From the lighted windows of the church across the way, came a chant of praise. He felt the pulsating throb of the universe but found it beating through the two-centuries old drama again. Deep called unto deep; and he saw the pageant unroll before him in the localities where it had actually taken place. It was a cross-section of life. The Hand, which seemed to be always above his shoulder guiding him, which had directed his steps into the old shop in Florence, which had caused him to see the drama in its entirety that night, led him later, when he was in London, to record his vision.

After he had in mind the bare facts of the case he turned his attention toward the characters. The mass of the Roman populace, as they seethed, gossiped, and reacted to the reports which were brought to them, first occupied the stage. The Comparini, who had been murdered by Guido and his accomplices, were exposed to view before the altar of the church of St. Lorenzo-in-Lucina, where Fempilia had been christened and later married. A great crowd of people had gathered to see the bodies and exhibited all the usual characteristics of a mob. Opinion concerning the tragedy was divided, each interpreting events in the light of his own character.

The attitude of the first group was reflected by the
man who buttonholed the cousin of a certain jackmanapes, that
had been too attentive to the speaker's wife, and drew him
a little apart from the crowd. His sympathy was all with
Guido, the husband and murderer. In his judgment Violante
was simply a wicked designing woman, who first deceived her
husband, passing off Pompilia as her child, defrauded the
rightful heirs, and then inveigled Guido into marrying the
girl. This man, so typical of half of Rome, wise in his
own conceit, held a very poor opinion of women. The author
made him sufficiently real as an individual to create the
understanding in the reader's mind, that he had certainly
not endeared himself to his wife. Moreover he appeared too
biased to be a just witness; so, while he defamed Pompilia's
character, the reader wondered what the truth really was.
He imputed to her the foulest of motives for her actions,
believing her to be the mistress of Caponsacchi, the disre-
lute priest. To him, Guido, her husband, tricked into marry-
ing the illegitimate daughter of a depraved woman, if Violante's
tale were not merely a concoction to cheat him, was a great-
ly abused man. Guido became so insanely enraged upon hear-
ing of the birth of his son and heir, or perhaps only the
priest's son and his heir, that he took the law into his own
hands and avenged his wrongs by committing the triple murder.
His use of Caponsacchi's name to gain entrance to the Com-
parini's home he had represented as a final test of his wife.
The fact that she opened the door upon hearing it proved her guilt. According to the version of this representative of the people, Guido was entirely justified in thus wiping the disgrace from his name. He intimated that he himself might resort to violence if a certain lute player continued to be too civil to his wife.

But judgment could not be based upon only one opinion, especially one of so apparent untrustworthiness. This man was too prejudiced by class sympathy and distrust of his wife to form a just estimate of the case. Browning turned to hear the opinion of another part of the throng. This opinion was voiced by a bachelor of somewhat romantic tendencies, although a man of rather fine sensibilities, slightly marred by an intensely critical attitude.

He understood Violante’s desert in presenting Pom- pilia to Pietro as their child, and excused it. There was no known heir to the Comparini property; the goods would just be left for strangers to squabble over. He could see no harm in rescuing the little life from the degradation into which it had been cast by birth, transplanting it in a better soil, and giving it a chance to grow in clean air and sunlight. The beautiful little flower, which Pomipilia grew into, justified the deception practiced in the beginning. He did condemn Violante for telling the truth at least at Pomipilia’s expense; for, it seemed to him, her confession
was due to selfish motives; and, although a man of integrity, he felt that the spirit of truth and loyalty were finer and more important than the latter of truth.

His judgment of Caponsacchi was surprisingly just and charitable for a man of the world who would naturally look with suspicion upon any young and attractive man. He introduced him by saying,

"There was a certain young, bold, handsome priest
Popular in the city."

He was of noble birth, versed in all the social graces, and likely to receive preferment at Rome. He had no use for Guido and probably sympathized with the lonely little wife, who wept and sat all day by the window. The speaker did not doubt that the priest saw, pitied, and loved Pompilia; for a priest after all was only a man. That explained why he was willing to toss his own fame and fortune to the winds to alleviate her suffering in some measure. For, just as surely as she had fled from her husband, he had put aside the church which he had espoused. No doubt his love was innocent, but of rather a fiery innocence. Caponsacchi averred that they were innocent of all blame; and he was

Ibid., page 447.
a man of truth and intrepidity, as both his friends and enemies would agree. It was hard to understand why he had told the court that the lady had written first. That seemed unnecessary; he might have spared her that. However, it had been proved that Guido was the guilty party there, having forged the letters which the woman, his mistress had carried between his wife and the priest. Caponsacchi had understood that they could not come from her; for he had never underrated the beauty and purity of her character. This man believed of the priest that

"In the main result
The facts asseverate, he truly says,
As to the very act and deed of him,
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109
The flight was just for flight's sake,"

although one mistrusted the mind of man. Yet, as the priest had pointed out, had Guido's accusation been true, it would have been to the advantage of the lovers to remain in Arezzo. Nothing was to be gained by flight; in fact, all would be lost. So,
"Whatever way in this strange world it was,—
Pompilia and Caponsacchi met in lines,
She at her window, he in the street beneath,
And understood each other at first look."

His bravery in facing the husband at the inn, and his courage
and self-forgetfulness in testifying in court were very commendable. He had preferred to keep the spirit of his vow,
rather than the letter of it. Something about him forced
men to believe when he declared,

"I never touched her lip nor she my hand,
Neither of us thought a thought, much less
Spoke a word which the Virgin might not hear."

However, the spokesman for this part of Rome believed
that the exalted plane upon which the whole affair rested
was due chiefly to Pompilia's influence. His admiration for
her was very great. Throughout it all, Pompilia had been the
pawn, had been as the lamb led to the abattoirs. Married, be-
fore she knew what marriage was, she had become the property

Ibid., page 450.

Ibid., page 453.
of Guido. To this on-looker it appeared that she had been deserted by her foster parents, when it became expedient for them to repudiate her, and left to the merciless torture of her husband, while her shame was published abroad. A part of Guido's plan had been to expose her not only to his own bestiality but to that of his vile brother. He

"set himself
To worry up and down, across, around,
The woman, hemmed in by her household hers,
Chase her about the coop of daily life,
Having first stopped each outlet thence save one."

He had sought deliberately to drive her to the arms of Caponsacchi, so that she, self-sentenced, would leave him free to enjoy all her rights of property without being bothered with her. She had served as a subject upon which to vent his hate. All her appeals for help had failed. The spectator quoted Pompilia's own words:

"Earth was made hell to me who did no harm:
I only could emerge one way from hell
By catching at the one hand held me, so

Ibid. pp. 447-448.
I caught at it and thereby stepped to heaven; 113
If that be wrong, do with me what you will."

He could find no fault with her except that she had remained too passive in the clutch of circumstance. Now that she lay dying, all who came in contact with her felt the compelling power of her truth, purity, and beauty.

At any rate this man was indignant over the commission of such a crime. He regretted the ruin of this lovely child of seventeen years and felt that the one responsible should be punished for it. This person was Guido, the vile fortune-hunting scion of an old family. True his plans had miscarried and he had felt himself to be baffled, cheated, and humiliated when he found that his wife, by means of whom he had planned to recoup his fortunes, was the daughter of a common prostitute. Even his permission to retain her dowry assuaged his wrath but little. His cold blooded plan to retaliate and win sympathy for himself by torturing his innocent child-wife into leaving him was nothing short of fiendish. Yet, when his plan had been consummated, the results were hardly what he had desired. For public opinion was divided in regard to the case, and some people were

Ibid., page 453.
inclined to laugh at him. This doubled his fury. His final crime, however, was cold-bloodedly planned when he realized he had a son through whom he could inherit all the property for which he had been grasping, if only the Comparini and Pompilia were removed. This removal he accomplished by butchering them in the most heartless manner. Some people might consider him the martyr, but not this astute citizen with his critical mind, who easily saw through his devilish schemes.

Nevertheless this gentleman was a little too much drawn by the lady's beauty and charm for his decision to be entirely valid. So the author moved to inquire into the thoughts of a small third group whose ideas differed from those the first two parties. The speaker this time would have liked to have been considered a member of the intelligentsia and of the social elect. The fact, however, that he was striving so hard to interest Her Highness and Her Excellency suggested the probability that he was rather near the outer fringe. Also his purposely sophisticated comments, his weighing and balancing of one party against another in order to render his views palatable to conservative tastes, made his account very insipid. In the beginning, having assumed an intellectual attitude of superiority over the mob he had declared,

"If I fail--"
Favored with such an audience, understand—

To set things right, why class me with the mob

As understander of the mind of man?"  

Then he began a learned harangue, filled with subtle
innuendoes, in what he probably regarded as a realistic
style, steering a safe course between unutterable contempt
for the lower classes and servile respect for the aristocracy. He credited none of the persons involved with any
high motives. Pompilia merited a little sympathy and cer-
tainly should not have been tortured; but in general Guido—
since he belonged to the class who could do no wrong—was
justified in the course of action which he took, according
to Tertium Quid. This arbiter even appeared to admire, to
some extent, the finesse with which Guido avenged his wrongs.

"You see, the man was Aretino, had touch

0' the subtle air that breeds the subtle wit;

Was noble too, of old blood thrice-refined

That shrinks from clownish coarseness in disgust."  

114  
Ibid., page 456.

115  
Ibid., page 463.
Of course, even in cruelty, he would be refined! Pompilia and Caponsacchi were sarcastically termed "the pair of saints". But in spite of this third party's remarkable understanding, talent, and preeminence, his audience made excuses and left him before his tale was completed. Their bored and somewhat confused expressions gave evidence of the worthlessness of his account.

How different was this conceited numbskull, this would-be wit, from the young priest, Caponsacchi, who had dared to befriend Pompilia. He had again been called before the judges before whom he had appeared soon after his and Pompilia's flight had been arrested just outside Rome. His own testimony revealed his character in a more striking and truer light than even his most intimate acquaintance could hope to show it. At first he seemed not quite to comprehend the judges' request to repeat his story, told to them six months before. He asked their patience; for

"In this sudden smoke from hell,—
So things disguise themselves,—I cannot see
My own hand held thus broad before my face
And know it again."

Ibid., page 489.
He commented upon the fact that they were not laughing now as they had laughed then, tittering behind their hands over what they regarded as the escapade of a young priest. In spite of his story of pathos and horror, they had then pronounced a jocular sentence, merely sending him to lounge a while at a little place, Civita. They themselves would be guardians enough for Pompilia without the aid of a pert priest. With seething bitterness he asked them why they did not laugh now; Pompilia was only dying. Once before a throng had laughed while the Roman soldiers cast lots for a certain garment.

The fact that she was dying, murdered, seemed to fill the universe with sight and sound. Yet he strove to be calm and to tell them what they wished to know; but the storm of feeling would come to the surface causing him to pour fearlessly upon them his fiery, scornful, though heart-broken rebuke. He wondered why they were surprised at the end of this affair when they had seen its beginning. Of course they could not listen to him who was only a "priest, coxcomb, fribble, and fool." He had been rebuked.

"A kind of culprit, over-zealous hound,"
He was forced to leave Pompilia to their care, and now she lay there dead.

Impatiently he again asked what they wanted with him. He had served his sentence at Civita then and was now free? He was again rehabilitated as a priest? He thanked them! But what of Pompilia, "the glory of life, the beauty of the world, the splendor of heaven"?

"The glory, I say,
And the beauty, I say, and splendor still say I,
Who priest and trained to live my whole life long
On beauty and splendor, solely at their source,
God—have thus recognized my food in her."

They sat subdued and crest-fallen. Did they perhaps recognize that his attempt to help her might have been consistent with his priesthood? Then, since they recognized their mistake, he would speak once more. He would burn his
soul out and, his part finished, would be through with things of this earth.

He wished with this last spark of his being to show Pompilia in her true light. Again he became incoherent in attempting to speak of her, but at length checked his outburst of feeling, knowing that he would give color to the lie which Guido told: that he loved Pompilia in the way that Guido called love. He did not care what they thought of him, but no unclean thought must mar her white soul. Yet he knew that he himself was taintless. But he was greatly shaken by her sudden death. She was only seventeen. He appreciated their goodness and wisdom in letting him speak. Their forbearance with him showed that after all they had honest hearts. They were Christians; and

"Somehow no one ever plucked
A rag, even, from the body of the Lord,
To wear and mock with, but despite himself,
He looked the greater and was better."

He promised to be calm during the rest of his testimony.

He was a priest of their order, but he was also a younger son of an old and famous house. He had not entered

121
Ibid., page 491.
priesthood because of poverty, but because he was expected to take the place of his uncle who was a bishop. Almost from infancy he had been led to expect to fill the office of a priest. He had gone trippingly through it all until the time came to take the vow. He then suddenly felt his weakness and unworthiness. However the Bishop reassured him. No one expected him "to prop up the church" by breaking his back. Each person had his own peculiar place to fill; his part was to cultivate his gift of poetry and write madrigals. Thus he became a priest, and thus according to instruction he lived. In his own way he proved useful to the church, because of his influence chiefly among the ladies. He was petted by his superiors, encouraged to shirk preaching, and to cultivate wit, tact, and a gentle manner. For three or four years he had led this type of life. Then one evening at the theater he had seen Pomplia, Guido's cousin, Canon Conti, who was with him, tossed a "paper-twist of comfits" into her lap, then stepping behind Caponsacchi looked over his shoulder. She looked in their direction and smiled "the beautiful strange sa

122
Ibid., page 492.

123
Ibid., page 493.
Guido, observing his stare, appeared to be jealous. Caponsacchi's former work began to grow stupid and superficial after that. He enjoyed most walking to a place where he could see the last gleam from her window.

When reprimanded by his master for having neglected his duty, he calmly asked what would happen if he turned Christian. He decided to go to Rome.

Then one evening, as he sat trying to study, while her smile kept glowing out of the page before him, Guido's mistress-maid came in and laid a letter upon the opened book. It purported to come from Pompilia and was only the first of many of like kind. In it Pompilia confessed her love for him and desired him to meet her. Caponsacchi knew at once that Guido was the author; so he wrote back tantalizing letters, which he knew would be taken to Guido, in which he admonished Pompilia to remember that she was a wife and he a priest, but which also included such questions as "Why did you marry your hideous husband?"

He simply took this means of enraging this vile, contemptible person who would pretend that such scorpions issued from the mouth of his "Lady of Sorrows". Once he would have responded in a very different fashion, probably lying in wait for this monster.
at the place appointed in the letters and nudging him. Finally in response to one letter he decided to go stand in the street opposite a certain window as the letter had directed. Guido did not own the street; moreover, the desire to give him a beating was growing more insistent within the heart of the priest; for the scorpion approached too near the madonna's face.

After he had reached the place and had walked up and down a few times expecting Guido, he was surprised to see Pompilia appear with a lamp at the window above. In a moment she came out on the terrace just above him, explained her need to him, and begged him to take her to Rome to her parents. In spite of the letters read to her by the maid, she knew that he meant no harm to her. After one hasty glance at a certain ugly possibility, that perhaps she had written the letters which he had received, he saw through the cloud that for a moment obscured the light of truth. Guido had sent forged letters to her as well as to him. He promised to take her to Rome as soon as arrangements could be made. When ready, he was to pass the window again and again until he found her there. Then he could tell her of what his plans were. Yet, when he had gone home, a bitter conflict arose in his mind concerning the proper interpretation of his duty to God and man.

It was the first of spring, he lay passive; and now
things rushed in while old ones passed away. A new meaning of death came to him. It was "the very immolation made bliss;" it was "the heart of life." All night the battle raged in his soul; and, in the morning, he found himself facing his church. It seemed to say to him that here was his bride, his mystic love, on whose heart of stone he had laid his warm heart. He was to let those who were free bestow their life blood upon a fleshly woman. He came to believe that, what at first he had thought sacrifice to do, was really sacrifice to leave undone. He went home; morning came; then noon. He was sitting stone-still when the setting sun shone through the windows. He knew that she was counting the minutes until he came. But he was a priest. Yet duty to God was duty to her. But God would surely by some miracle save her without his aid. He went to the church, performed his part of the service, then went home again to sit in the dark. If only she could know why he did not come, duty would not be so hard. Morning came again. He determined to work, and tried to believe that duty was wisdom. At any rate he had saved her from scandal. Then feeling secure in his victory, when evening came, he decided to go in his capacity of priest to advise with her. But, when he had seen her and she reproached him for waiting
so long to come, he told her to meet him at the inn just before daybreak, and that they would start. If this were sin he sinned gladly. Incidentally, his story is all the more dramatic because of the moral struggle involved. In him was the inevitable conflict between the priest and the man. He dared not think of an earthly love, and as yet the conception of a heavenly love had not awakened within him, although the light of purity and truth which he recognized in Pompilia had aroused him to a higher sense of life, duty, and religion.

After giving his promise to Pompilia, he set about making preparations for the journey. He even laid aside his priestly garb. Night passed; morning dawned; then came still another day that must be passed. Midnight passed, and time moved on toward morning. He perceived a whiteness moving toward him which proved to be Pompilia. This whiteness he knew to be a spiritual phenomenon; for she was clothed in black. She did not speak but glided into the carriage; he stepped in beside her; in another instant the carriage started; and they were along together. Here in trying to picture to the judges the marvelous purity and beauty of her saint-like soul, Caponsacchi broke down again. From his heart was wrung a cry of anguish:

"Oh, they've killed her, Sirs!"
Can I be calm?"

Again struggling for self-control and gaining it, he began the story of their flight. For the first hour they were silent, he feeling engulfed in a strange blackness of night, with her there beside him. It was as if two martyrs lay in the tomb side by side, as it was their blessing so to die, awaiting

"Through the whole course of the world--------

The last day, but so fearless and so safe!"

The fearlessness and safety came from the fact that she was by his side. He stepped to explain that this feeling was not love but faith, a realization of the fact that God was not only there, but reigned. When she sighed, soft music seemed to hover over her lips; but the silence was a part of the music also. In the morning she looked at him for reassurance that all was well,

"Her face turned full to me,"

Ibid., page 500.

Ibid.
Once she said she had lost all sense of pain. Again she asked if he had mother or sister. He told her no; his mother died when he was born; and he never had a sister. She wondered then what woman he had served, that he had learned to be so kind. He did not like that but answered nothing.

When the angelus sounded, she asked him to read the service; he did not like that either; but he read. At Foligno he urged her to stop and rest; but immediately her face became piteous with misery; and she begged to go on. So they drove on through the night. He was tortured by the sight of her lost in troubled dreams, as once more in her sleep she tried to ward off Guido. She was determined to be separated from him forevermore. With waking, peace returned. In answer to her questioning glance, he told her that there were only twelve hours more of the terrible journey. Ah, but she wished that it might last her whole life through. She wished that she might never again "see a face nor hear a voice!"

"Yours is no voice; you speak when you are dumb;"

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Ibid.

Ibid., page 501.
Her face, I see it in the dark."

He liked that better than anything else she had said. Later in the day he persuaded her to rest a while with a woman by a garden wall. He came back to find her holding the woman's baby, with another child by her knee. The rest had done her good. The journey having been resumed, she asked his opinion concerning her guilt. How much sin was involved in what she had done? She began her appeal to him as priest, but ended by calling him friend. That meant much to him.

Yet, as the day wore on, she became delirious; and he became frightened. With the walls of Rome in sight, her strength deserted her; and she wished to stop at the inn; for she must not die now. So

"Out of the coach, into the inn I bore
The motionless and breathless, pure and pale
Pompilia,—bore her through a pitying group
And laid her on a couch."

All night he watched in the passage, fearing that she might

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Ibid.

Ibid., page 502.
die, fearing also lest some evil overtake them before they could reach Rome. His premonition of danger seemed well-founded; for, in the morning, when he was going to bring her to the carriage, he came face to face with Guido, who began his lying version of the tale. Caponsacchi blamed himself that he had not killed this fiend then, as he could have done so easily. But it was so absurd that a creature of such vileness should lay claim to such a woman as Pompeo. He let his opportunity pass; for officers took charge of him. He demanded that he be permitted to lead the way to her room, so that they might judge of the guiltiness of her expression when her eyes met his. With all the force of outraged innocence and dignity she met Guido upon her rude awakening. The priest, her only friend, tried to reach her but was held back. Further maddened by perceiving him under arrest, she seized Guido's sword and would have killed him but was prevented by those around her.

Then Caponsacchi demanded that they be taken to Rome. This was done. He had looked upon her face for the last time in life. Again he lost control of himself and frantically pled that he might be permitted to see her before she died. He had told his story to the end—no he could think of a few more details in regard to the trial. He rehearsed the trial, at all points trying to show forth her true loveliness of soul. But the sordidness, stupidity, injustice, and cruelty
of it so enraged him that his feelings mastered him again. His wit, skill in satire, and vivisection penetration played among the judges, flashing out with the terrific force of his blinding pain. Even the stern old judges wept. Seeing their tears, he strove for calm again. It could not matter very much. Pompilia would soon be dead; and he, a relegated priest, would soon be out of the world. At times he would dream of what might have been; but, when he tried to say that from these dreams he would pass content, he could not finish but cried out in anguish,

"O great, just, good God! Miserable me!"

The central figure of the story is Pompilia, of whom much was said before she herself was permitted to appear on the scene. When she did finally appear, it was to make her dying confession. She began her confession by giving her age and other facts concerning the main incidents of her life, all of which were written in the church register. She left off the enumeration of the usual items of information to hope that they would add that for two weeks she had been the mother of a son. This she would like to have recorded,

Ibid., page 508.
before they recorded her death; for she knew that she was to die that night. She regretted not having had her baby with her more. Those caring for her had taken him away when he was two days old. They had said that he would not even smile before them. Meanwhile she could grow well and strong. So he had been sent away, and she had never seen him since. She would never see him any more, and, worse than that, he would not remember his mother. Nor would he be able to look at others, and so tell how she looked; for she looked no more like

"Girls who look arch or redden when boys laugh,
Then the poor Virgin that I used to know
At our street corner in a lonely niche."

She hoped that he would come to regard her history as a dream; for much of it had been that to her; it was step by step that everything had become so terrible to her and so strange. She had become familiar with fear and was hardly conscious that she sat with her arm about a wolf, or that a snake slid in and out between her feet.

None of the circumstances of her life had been of a
normal variety. She had never known a father or a mother. Her own boy at least had had a mother for two weeks. She had never doubted that Pietro and Violante had given her birth; for they had loved her almost as much as she loved her babe. They had done for her what she had meant to do for her child. But, surprisingly, three years ago they had suddenly declared that she was not their child; so she was nothing to them. Her husband was just such a mistake.

"Every one says that husbands love their wives,
Guard them and guide them, give them happiness;
'Tis duty, law, pleasure, religion: well
You see how much of this comes true in mine."

He was no husband. Instead of protecting her, he had killed her. But there was one other, a friend, a priest, Giuseppe Caponsacchi, who, men said, loved her. Then others would say to her, "No wonder you love him." Yet she was a wife, and he a priest. This naming of relationships in her life was like a game which she and a little neighbor girl had played on a rainy afternoon while she had lived with Pietro

135
Ibid., page 510.

136
Ibid.
and Violante. Each had given the other's name to figures in a tapestry. Not because the figures were like themselves, but only because they had named them so. The circumstances of her life had been too unreal; they would not make sense. Whatever she touched had become a fairy thing and faded away. Even her baby, who, she had thought, would be with her forever, had been taken away. She and her foster parents had been so happy when she had gone back to them after the birth of her child. She was getting stronger and they chatted happily about the babe and how soon they would bring him home. But there came a knock at the door, and all three were slain.

Yet none of them had done anything very wrong. Certainly Pietro had not. Violante was not much to blame, though, of course, she should never have told the falsehood about Pompilia's birth. Then she could never understand her real mother; she knew that she herself could never agree to let another woman take her child, so that he would never know he was her son. But she had had no father; and her mother had been dying; so there was only she, "the unnecessary life to catch up or let fall." Violante had made her happy, and Violante and Pietro had been happy in her. Surely there was not much harm in that. But

137

Ibid., page 511.
"God plants us where we grow."

Still Violante had only wished to move the bud out of harm's way. To her a lie was not a lie unless told to do harm. But a falsehood never brought lasting happiness. In this case, it was really the pricking of Violante's conscience that brought about the marriage of Pompilia to Guido. Her desire to make amends blinded her to the true situation. She had meant well; she herself was to suffer all the pain; for it was hard for her to give Pompilia up. Just how ill it had all turned out, the dying girl could hardly judge. Now that all was nearly over, and danger past, her misery could hardly be remembered. Her son was safe, and

"There seemed not so much pain."

As life drew to a close, things appeared in a softer, better light. Always evening had seemed more beautiful to her than the day.

Ibid.

Ibid.
Life was like a novel where misunderstanding dogs barked at those who stopped to get food. Outside, all was moonlight and a sea of peace wherein someone walked.

All the thirteen years before her marriage had been happy. For three weeks after the wedding there had been no change. Then the storm had broken in all its fury. First it seemed centered in her parents and Guido. Pietro had sent her out of the room, saying that it was not needful to have the victim by while haggling over the price of her blood. Later she had tried to dry Volante's tears, telling her that everything would be all right if only she would not weep. When an understanding had been reached, Guido had been told by his brother the priest to take his 

"Lawful wife

Until death part you!"

From that time on, life had been a blank, a terrible dream. Now that life was over she rubbed her eyes, and lo! the horror
was gone. Now only the good lasted; for evil was only a blank.

But between that first peace and the last, four years had slipped away—a quarter of her life. During that time life was supported for her by only three threads: prayer to God, the hope that came in answer to that prayer, which proved to be the hand of her friend who saved her, and the knowledge of the coming of her child. Only these three things remained, all else was swept away. But, only by faintly recalling her husband’s treatment of her in a light that was later than her time, could she forgive him. Yet by grace of that light of understanding, there was little to forgive. All the wrong had grown out of the blindness of all parties concerned. At last she understood even his thwarted feelings and all his dark designs in regard to her and Caponsacchi, and forgave and pitied him. Yet in one thing she was firm.

“One thing Guido claimed, I had no right to give nor he to take.”

For several months after her marriage she, child that she was, had been unmolested; then Guido had demanded that she
assume the part of a wife. She in terror had gone to the
Archbishop and begged to be placed in a convent; but he re-
 fused to aid her, told her she was blamable. Him she had
obeyed, just as she would have obeyed, had he commanded
her to swallow a live coal. But the Archbishop was wrong.
Guido never pretended that there was any union of souls,
but demanded that he be given

"The fleshly vesture he could reach
And rend and leave just fit for hell to burn!"

She had resisted and wished with all her heart that she
had overcome. Her heart had died. But terrible as this
situation was, she was exposed to a still more awful thing:
the licentious advances of the idle young priest, Guido’s
brother, which her husband saw but did nothing to stop.
The Archbishop refused to see in the brother a serious men-
ace, however, and sent her back to her husband. Thus he
proved himself to be

"Just a man,
And hardly that and certainly no more."

143
Ibid., page 515.

144
Ibid., page 516.
From that time on she looked only to God for help. Because of her own desecrated soul she could better understand her mother, who maybe meant well after all.

Then had come the meeting with Caponsacchi, followed by Guido's apparent jealousy and persecution. After looking into the young priest's eyes she had wistfully thought,

"Had there been a man like that,
To lift me with his strength out of all strife
Into the calm, how I could fly and rest."

Life with her husband meant only the successful feigning of death; but suppose Caponsacchi had been her husband instead of Guido! During the days which followed, Guido's tantrums were supplemented by Margherita's lewd counsel concerning the priest. Finally she brought letters supposed to come from him. But, although she knew he did not write them, Pompilia, hopeless and numbed with pain, remained indifferent. Her chief thought, when night came, was

"Done, another day."

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145
Ibid., page 517.

146
Ibid., page 519.
"O lover of my life, O soldier-saint,
No work begun shall ever pause for death!
Love will be helpful to me more and more
In the coming course, the new path I must tread—
My weak hand in thy strong hand, strong for that!"

She requested those with her to say that all he had said and done for her had blossomed into flowers which covered her, the dying, from head to foot. In heaven there would be true union of souls.

"So let him wait God's instant, men call years.
Do out thy duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of his light
For us in the dark to rise by. And I rise."

Thus passed Pompilia, the lovely white flower, that blossomed in this dismal world for only a short time, but whose perfume remained with all who came in contact with her and has continued to revive centuries later whenever Browning's poem is read. Several critics and Browning
Death was her only hope of release.

But now a change took place. She had heard that Caponsacchi was going to Rome. She would persuade him to take her with him to her parents. Her soul again revived. He became the answer to her prayer. With him she had escaped. And now men called him sinner. But he was her soldier saint.

She cared little what men said of her, nor had there been a moral struggle in her soul. She had looked at life with a clear vision and had seen things as they were. The one thing that she seemed not to be conscious of was the moral conflict which took place within Caponsacchi himself. But perhaps her vision of him, free of all the man-made entanglements, was the real man after all. She had prayed that he might be her guide, and that prayer had been answered. It was her prayer then and would continue to be her prayer. She felt that perhaps all was for the best. Her son would probably be better off without her. She forgave Guido, although she could not love him, and hoped that he might feel God's healing power also.

Her confession finished she wished to compose her soul for God. As she drew nearer the portal, she reached for a—gain and found her one friend, Caponsacchi. The face and eyes, that she could see in the dark, were before her now, To him she called,
lovers have felt that the soul of Pompilia was that of Elizabeth Browning as she appeared to her husband, and the poem was a monument of his love for her. It has been thought too that the attitude of Caponsacchi toward Pompilia expressed in some measure the reverence which Browning had for his wife. In one of his letters he said he could never have written this book if he had not known her.

The shallow superficiality of the lawyers, as they prepare to wrangle over the case, stood out in striking contrast to the depth of soul and intensity of feeling of the last two characters. Neither De Archangeli nor Bottinius had an understanding of any except the external features of the case. However, they were acquainted with all of the tricks of court, and so prepared their speeches that they might make each fact support the interest of the cause which each was espousing. Justice was of no consequence. Winning the case was the only thing to be considered; for, after all the whole affair was merely a matter of business to them. Browning uttered no word of criticism, but the contrast of the depths of suffering and the vital interest of the people concerned in the matter with the farce to be enacted by the

149
Harriet Gaylord, Pompilia and Her Poet, pp.20-21.

150
human instruments, provided for deciding the outcome, was a far more scathing satire than any words could express.

De Archangelus the lawyer for the defense had no idea of proving Guido innocent. For he was already a confessed murderer. But through precedents he hoped to prove his client justified in his action. The lawyer appeared to have no great intelligence at best; and his mind was probably not functioning as well as it might have done, had it been so divided between the case in hand and the coming birthday feast for his little son. To this son he seemed entirely devoted, and he desired no slightest defect to mar the dinner which he had planned. It was strange that, as he studied the case, Pompilia's little son made no impression upon his mind.

Bottinius was a pompous, conceited person, whose thoughts were largely taken up by a consideration of the kind of appearance he was to make in court. He contemplated with admiration the spectacle that he would present as he painted the picture of the lovely Pompilia. His defense of her was worse than Mencken's In Defense of Women. It seemed that she needed a defense against the defender, more than against the accuser. He was a bachelor and had rather a low opinion of women. Of course, he did not believe that she was not in love with Caponsacchi, or that she had not shown him some favor. But suppose she had. Also he admitted that probably the priest took a kiss or two as he carried her into
the inn. But what of that? The whole thing was a vile perversion of facts, that really seemed a sacrilege when the actual testimony of the two young people was considered. Not even Guido had so defamed Pompilia as this man whose duty it was to defend her. It would be hard to imagine two less worthy representatives of the law.

The old Pope upon whom the final decision rested had real understanding. Next to Pompilia he had the clearest vision of them all. He had heard the facts of the case; but, before he pronounced judgment, he reviewed the action taken by his predecessors on similar occasions. The viliness of Guido could not be doubted; for all of his actions proved it, from the time of his marriage to the commission of the final crime. He found that

"This black mark impinges the man, 151
That he believes in just the vile of life."

Guido's wretched brothers, and even his mother received the same denunciation as that pronounced against Guido.

As for Pompilia, the Pope, ignoring any action of hers that the church might find worthy of blame, proclaimed

"First of the first,

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Such I pronounce Pompilia, then as now
Perfect in whiteness; stoop thou down, my child,
Give one good moment to the poor old Pope
Heart-sick at having all his world to blame."

Again in speaking of her, he called her

"My rose, I gather for the breast of God."

To Caponsacchi he said,

"And surely not so very much apart
Need I place thee, my warrior priest."

He had nothing but praise for the young man's action in aiding
Pompilia, but gave him a gentle reprimand for laying aside
his priest's dress. He ignored the significance of the moral
struggle through which the priest had been. In general he,
like Pompilia, seemed concerned only with true values. His
final admonition to Pompilia's deliverer was

152
Ibid., page 562.

153
Ibid., page 563.

154
Ibid., page 563.
"Once more

Work, be unhappy but bear life, my son!"

He commanded that Guido and his accomplices be executed the following day. The arch criminal was to be beheaded in the People's Square, where his peers might see. His companions were to be hung on either side. He was determined that justice should be done; but he also commanded that prayers be said for the five, although he had little hope that Guido's soul would be saved.

The Pope proved himself to be a man of fine perception, noble purpose, and high intelligence, yet not lacking in human sympathy and love for his fellow beings. He was more alarmed over the greed and selfishness which he found within the church than he was over wickedness outside of it. In fact, he seemed quite worthy of the place which he occupied.

The first and last of the main characters to speak was Guido, the man whose villainy lay at the bottom of all the misery, heartache, and injustice. His first appearance before the trial was very different from his appearance after sentence had been passed. In the beginning he was the hard, suave, dictatorial noble and husband, whose wife was his property to do with as he pleased. In fact, society and the church owed him a debt for maintaining their rights. He felt
very sure that all honest Rome commended him for what he had done. Certainly all manly men would approve. After telling how his hate had flared and been avenged against Pompilia's parents, he sought to justify himself for killing her. His first accusation was that for all her beauty and seeming docility she had never properly fulfilled her duty as his wife. In answer to his commands he found in her the

"Stone strength of white despair."

She

"Would not begin the lie that ends with truth,
Nor feign the love that brings real love about."

He then devised ways to punish her; finally he grew to hate her. His wife

"Proved, whether by her fault or mine--
That's immaterial--a true stumbling block
I' the way of her--husband."

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156
Ibid., page 584.

157
Ibid., page 585.

158
Ibid., page 586.
Then she fled with the priest to Rome.

Had fate not been against him, he would not have been condemned as he was; for his crime

"Just missed of being gravely grandly right."

The story which he had planned to tell would have turned public sentiment all in his favor. But Pompilia had to live until she could confess and win all sympathy for herself. Even the priests had wept; and his chance was spoiled. Finally, feeling the hopelessness of escaping execution he poured forth a tirade of abuse upon the changed society, the church, and the Pope. He left off cringing and showed no signs of softening, until the priests came into his dungeon to administer the sacrament. Then he lost control of himself and, maddened, cried

"Sirs, my first true word, all truth and no lie, Is--Save me notwithstanding! Life is all! I was just stark mad,--let the madman live Pressed by as many chains as you please pile! Don't open! Hold me from them!  

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Ibid., page 586.
Abate,--Cardinal,—Christ,—Maria,—God. . .

Pompilia, will you let them murder me?"

Thus Guido, the hardened, heartless, unscrupulous wretch
lost all of his sustaining pride, egotistical indifference,
and self-sufficiency at last. But the fact that he should
call upon his wife, Pompilia, whom he had so abused, was a
remarkable revelation of his estimate of her character. Per-
haps, through his boundless terror, the lightning of truth
had flashed out and struck so that, as the Pope said and as
Pompilia had hoped, Guido might have seen and been saved.
Even Guido, under the skillful and penetrating understanding
of Browning, seemed to become a human being with a soul to
save.
CHAPTER V

Browning's Later Characters

During the latter part of Browning's life he wrote much beautiful poetry; but, as some of his critics have pointed out, the characters which he created during this period were more for the purpose of voicing his own philosophy and were not so strongly developed as some of his earlier characters were. For, although they showed a marvelous sympathy, breadth of view, and a profound philosophy in the author himself, they were not so clear-cut, forceful or vital in themselves. Yet in several of these poems, the characters once launched upon the stage, assumed a life of their own and played their parts with no assistance from their creator. Such were the characters in Fifine at the Fair.

Some authorities have believed that the writing of this poem was inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite Controversy of 1871, and that the position taken by Browning led to the breaking off of Rossetti's friendship with him. Mrs. Orr and Dowden believed that Fifine represented the world which was drawing him away from the past. William Raymond maintained

Harriet Gaylord, Pomptilia and Her Poet, pp. 171-172.
in his article, *Browning's Dark Mood*, that this work grew out of Browning's state of mind resulting from his affair with Lady Ashburton, and that his contemplated marriage with her was the only thing that ever came between him and the memory of his wife.

Whatever his reason for writing, he was undoubtedly tired of the turmoil of the world about him with its noise, dust, and passion. And not yet being able entirely to slip the tether of mortality and rise to the pure realm of spirit, which he represented by the air and limitless expense of sky, he swam out into the ocean of poetry, which was a human being's best substitute for heaven. He swam in the sea but breathed the divine air of the soul. Yet such were the vices of the flesh, that he wished to keep the land in sight, so that he might return to it when he tired of the surging sea.

By means of the monologue which followed, a very clear impression is given of a man, *Don Juan*, and his wife, *Elvire*. They were strolling through the streets of Fornic, seeing the fair. *Elvire* seemed to be going chiefly because her husband wished her company; but he was attracted by the light, color, and the multitude of human derelicts collected there. He was particularly interested in Fifine, the Gipsy beauty of the fair, who exhibited her physical charms to the crowd.

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for pay, which her husband took from her as they passed into the tent. He began a long philosophical harangue in which he strove to justify the attitude of the sensualist toward life. He wondered why it was that people like these, who had stepped beyond the pale, who had thrown off all restraint and acknowledged the worst, seemed to relish life the more. Why, when remonstrated with, did they laugh at somebody's expense as though they held the kernel of life, while others were content with chaff?

Feeling his wife's distress and noticing the press of her pale fingers upon his arm, and her sad eyes, that probed his heart, he asked her what was wrong, why they were such ocean widths apart. The next moment, however, he was pressing closer to the booth, admiring Fifine and analyzing her voluptuous, barbaric beauty. His wife's words were all in vain. He merely gave Fifine money that she might be better observed. He proclaimed the victory of her

"Whom I call my queen,
Sexless and bloodless sprite; though
mischiefous and mean,
Not free and flower-like too, with loneliness for law,
And self-sustainment made morality."

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Browning, Fifine at the Fair, page 705.
He pointed out that even the vilest of human beings had something divine within them.

He enlarged upon the virtue of beauty, in order to cover up his own sensuous feelings. He knew, however, that Elvire was not deceived. She felt that now he was sure of her, he valued any neighbor's waif more, that, having been given the sun, he desired the laborer's lamp also. Impatiently, he wished that women could comprehend mental analysis, meaning, of course, that she would accept his version of such things. He used his attitude toward the Raphael, which he had purchased a year before, as an example of his feeling for his wife. He had been all eagerness to obtain it; but, once he possessed it, he might prefer to wade through the picture book of Dore for a while. Yet, if the house should burn, forgetful of Dore, he would risk his life to rescue the Raphael. It was Elvire that he loved; but other experiences were valuable in the growth of the soul—if the soul had power to change them into food which it could use. The spiritual flame could be fed as well by straw as by some finer substance. Naturally, his wife recognized the fact that the practical application of his argument was that he sought to develop his soul through sensuous contact with many women. No matter how vile the person, he argued that he could extract some good for his soul. His wife told him frankly that he had descended to the level of a brute. Evidently Don Juan had succeeded in deceiving only himself,
as certainly neither God nor his wife was deceived.

He then illustrated his meaning by using music as an example. He continued his explanation by comparing himself to a swimmer in the sea of life, who could only breathe the divine atmosphere by keeping himself buoyed up by the waves of sense about him. By attempting to grasp the souls of other women, his own soul was enabled to mount to the plane of Elvire, who typified the best reward which his soul aspired. According to his philosophy, women gave all, were absorbed by the man; but they could expect little in return. At best, men merely depended upon someone else. To reach men, a man must stoop to teach; but, to win a woman, he must throw off all disguise and rely upon her mercy. He further declared that Fifine knew him better than his wife. Perhaps this was true, since they were nearer the same level. He rejected the idea of rising through Elvire alone; the voyage would become too safe. His soul craved greater excitement. But, when they neared their villa again, he declared that he was going to live as a quiet married man.

Just then, a letter was placed in his hand. He had given Fifine gold instead of silver. He must go straighten the matter out. Five minutes would suffice. He was gone for much longer than five minutes, however; and, when he returned, Elvire was gone. Through sensuality Don Juan had lost the best that life afforded.
In the epilogue he was shown as a lonely, pathetic and disillusioned figure, satiated with the sort of life which he had lived. As he sat stupidly waiting, his wife's spirit appeared to claim him. He complained of the dreariness of waiting; but

"'Was I so better off up there? quoth she."

How she had continued to care for him surpassed understanding. Yet she concluded with

"Love is all and Death is naught."

Again Browning's power of divination had entered into a person, whose blackened, wasted life most men would have held up in scorn, and made it appear possessed of certain ideals—though mistaken ones—that invested him with a dignity and plausibility common to all human beings.

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164 Ibid., page 736.
165 Ibid.
CHAPTER VI

Browning's Own Personality
Revealed through His Work

It was this power of understanding his fellow men and the ability to look at the world through their eyes, that constituted Browning's greatness as a portrayer of character. He was able to make men and women reveal their true souls by showing their attitudes toward life. Although his treatment of character is mainly objective he does not reach as complete objectivity as Shakespeare did. His own attitude toward life and his own personality are revealed to the mind of the reader. As Walt Whitman said, whatever passes through the mind of another is colored by his personality, partakes of his perfume.

That does not mean that the characters portrayed exhibit definitely or in detail the poet's own nature. However, Professor George Santayana asserted that most of Browning's work was a means of self-expression. His feeling was frequently expressed by his attitude toward the person's character which was being delineated. "Even in poems where the element of impersonality is most successful, the dramatic disguise is usually thrown off in a preface, epilogue, or parenthesis." He was continually seeking "the primal elements
of humanity in his own soul." That he could show forth a Guido or a Hyacinthus de Archangelus merely proved his broad knowledge of life and his profound sympathy with his fellow beings. The characters whose chief trait was loyalty indicate a love of loyalty in the heart of Browning himself. His evident sympathy with the young Spanish priest in the Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister indicated his own hatred of hypocrisy. Pompilia, Caponsacchi, the lovers in In a Gardola, Evelyn Hope, and others revealed his belief in exalted love. Moreover, only a person of finest perception, with the highest regard for womanhood, could have created a character like Pompilia; nor could the creator of Caponsacchi have been any except a man with the highest ideals of manhood.

His understanding of the soul grew out of his interest in and observation of life around him, while his sympathy with it grew out of his individualistic philosophy of life and his conviction regarding the mission of the poet as the interpreter of the soul. The growth of this understanding and philosophy certainty, as Dowden has pointed out, can be traced through his first four long poems, the characters of which have been discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis. If these poems are to be considered as representing Browning's own
experience which assumption may be fairly made, then they show him gradually overcoming his doubt and unrest. He appeared, as these poems suggest, to be strongly breasting the tide in the effort to reach firm ground. It was his Fiercely Fasure that seemed to indicate most clearly that he had at last attained a bit of fundamental knowledge; namely, that life is made up of little things, and that only an all-wise Providence can determine which is great or small. Out of this discovery the happy character of Pippa grew. Browning came to the front long enough to say that a poet's verse, even as Pippa's songs, might help those in need of assistance and cause them to catch again the light of truth. The reader might also conclude that Browning had realized, as in Paracelsus, that lives were not hewn at a single stroke, and that success was not a uniform mass, but that it was made up of many small successes. He seemed to have achieved a happier frame of mind, which would give him courage to go on in spite of adversities and failures. He had struggled through his sea of doubt; his adolescent moroseness and uncertainty, if such it could be termed, were at an end. Henceforth he seemed to sketch and interpret the lives of people with an accuracy, an understanding, and a sureness of touch, possible only to a person assured in his own mind of the true meaning of life. He seemed to have caught a glimpse of the road which he would travel and to have set out on his journey full of confidence. This development
within the poet himself seems reasonably to be indicated by the progressive disposal of the problems within these poems.

The vitality of his own personality and his dynamic philosophic and religious views are felt through his presentation of such characters as Rabbi Ben Ezra, Abt Vogler, Cleon, Karshish, and Saul. Loyalty, the blind devotion to a cause or to a person, which formed the theme of several of his poems seemed typical of Browning. In his youthful poems he made a more militant parade of this virtue than in later years, although his own loyalty to his friends, to the memory of his wife, and to Italy, never abated. His ideals he never ceased to uphold. He never lost faith in the divinity within a human being. He desired that man play whatever game he engaged in with all the force of which he was capable. His contempt for namby-pamby, unaggressive beings was definitely expressed in The Statue and the Bust. The great variety of the persons and situations which appear in his poetry show his wide acquaintance with life and the great extent of his learning. They also show his appreciation of music and art, in which he possessed some skill. Finally, only a man who felt that life was good and who met it with courage and with zest could have written as Browning did.

Bit by bit, as his poems are read, the personality
of the author himself is built up and becomes the dominant
element in the mind of the reader. That the impression thus
established fits so well the outline of the man presented
by his biographers makes the picture doubly satisfying.
The soul revealed through his characters explains the spirit
that looks forth from the eyes of the man which his biographers
have pictured. For the character of the author revealed
through his own words is the real man. Whenever there is
a conflict between words and deeds, it is well to remember
that the inspired writer is often greater than the man him-
self; for

"'Tis not what man does exalts him, but what man
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would do."

when, however, it has happened that words and deeds accord,
the result has been doubly clear and satisfying.

It is this harmony between life and work which has made
Robert Browning so inspiring. Gaylord has said of him, "Robert
172
Browning lived his best poem." To this statement might be

169
Edward Dowden, Robert Browning, pp. 391-393.

170
G. K. Chesterton, Robert Browning, pp. 182-185.

171

172
Harriet Gaylord, Dompilia and Her Poet, page 190.
added that the poet's own character was greater than any which he created. The reader realizes the greatness, the beauty, the sordidness, the ugliness, and the pathos of the characters revealed; then slowly there grows in his mind, overshadowing all else, a realization of Browning himself, attractive, lovable, with all of his grandeur, yet simplicity.

It takes no connoisseur of human pottery to perceive that the product of the Potter's wheel, which was Robert Browning, stands out in striking contrast to the vessels made of ordinary clay. By studying his work, we catch a vision of the soul of the man and, by perceiving its beauty, finally understand how Elizabeth Browning could say:

"How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal grace,
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need by sun and candle-light!
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith."

To find a man who could be loved like that is the dream of a woman's heart; to read of such a man even in fiction is inspiring; but to know, through the expression of his own heart, that he really existed means infinitely more. He has excellently interpreted the heart of humanity, the meaning of life, and man's relation to God. These things he did, by first feeling and understanding them himself; for it was in Browning's sincerity of feeling and clearness in thinking as well as in his inspiration that his chief value to humanity lay. It was this quality of his which caused even the saturnine Carlyle to love him and to write:

"You do not know how cheering to me the sound of a human voice is! I get so little except ape-voices; the whole universe filled with one wide tempestuousackle, which has neither depth, nor sense, nor any kind of truth, or nobleness in it." Through him is caught an echo of the grandeur of the pageantry of Heaven and a flash of the eternal rightness of things.

Moreover, in studying him through his poetry, he is seen not as a completed product, but as a growing, developing

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Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sonnets to the Portuguese.

174

Thomas Carlyle, Letters of Thomas Carlyle.
character. The reader sees, as it were, the Divine Artist as He shapes the life of this man. Browning has made the reader see the turning of the wheel as his life was being shaped; and he rejoices that here, at least, was one vessel which was not greatly marred.
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