

THE BROWNINGS: THE RECIPROCAL NATURE OF THEIR GENIUS.

by

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## OUTLINE.

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### CONCLUSION.

1. The effect on the moral and poetic world.

In the protestant cemetery at Florence, Italy, "a place, so beautiful," says Keats, "that it might make one in love with death to be buried there," lies the one whom the English call "Shakespeare's Daughter" and Edmund Clarence Stedman names the "Passion Flower of the Century;" there, in the beloved land of her adoption, lies Elizabeth Barrett Browning; and in the beautiful Westminster Cemetery, lies her lovable companion, the one whom we all know as the greatest poet-philosopher, Robert Browning.

Early tradition had much to do with the instinctive and and complete comprehension of each other's mental processes; neither had had regular training, but their homes and modes of living were different. Miss Barrett's father had a wonderful force of character, and of her mother we have no remembrance; while Robert Browning's father was stern, a lover of good books, and his mother was sweet, saint-like, and a lover of Shelly.

When Robert Browning was born, on May 7, 1812, in one of the suburbs of London, Miss Barrett had been breathing the pure air of the village Coxhoe Hall for six years. He was sent to school and had every chance to broaden and strengthen himself, but during this period of the poet's early expansion and recognition, the poetess was becoming more miserable, narrow and externally sad. Her life was melancholy, but she possessed within herself the unquestionable and

indisputable evidence of unseen things.

While Miss Barret was strolling thru the gardens and fields of her native town, meditating her epic on the "Battle of Marathon," Robert Browning was measuring off heroic couplets on his father's studio table, which he barely reached. Even if no formal record had been kept of the poetess' youth, the spirit of it is told in "Aurora Leigh."

Robert Browning, Sr., never suffered his child to enter the toils of the school-room, but taught him at home and then sent him to Italy. Robert Browning not only gained the intellectual training and enthusiasm for poetry he had in Italy, but he also gained a knowledge of nature and joy of life which is expressed in every word he writes. Miss Barrett had been an invalid for years, and her life was very sad and lonely, her father being her public and companion. When she injured herself, she felt, from her inner self, that she was not to die, and wrote:

"Oh, let the solid ground  
Not frail beneath my feet,  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet!"

The Poet and Poetess often times read each other's poetry, but it was not until Mrx. Kenyon, Miss Barrett's cousin, spoke to Robert Browning of Miss Barrett that he learned to love her poetry. He then began to love it very much; and, as he expressed it to her, in

one of his letters, before they met, "I love your verses with all my heart, Miss Barrett, . . . . and I love you too."

Their meeting was planned by Mr. Kenyon, but, as Miss Barrett was allowed to see only her nurse and physician, besides the family, it was sometime before they were successful. Several letters were written each week, and soon he gained admittance. He went away treading on air, he cared for no one and nothing, he was even forgetful of his eating and sleeping, for he loved her. Robert Browning was bound to give freedom and love to this wonderful soul, who had seen but the dark side of life. Her life had been spent in writing letters for she felt that she must express, to someone, the beautiful feelings and thoughts of her inward self. At first she was afraid of her love for him, and then she not only finds courage, but finds that life is brighter and happier.

The love between two poets of such high rank is unique in the annals of literature. They were the hero and heroine of the most wonderful love story ever known. After they met, her life was transformed and changed, not her physical soul but her mental soul was reaching the acme which her high ambition had sought.

Now, that she had attained her full intellectual power, the mental taint which followed became increasingly conspicuous in her letters. The influence of Robert Browning on Elizabeth Barrett opened up a complex nature. It opened the fountain of love which brought out that magnificent phase of life which opened and devoted

her woman's soul. He said: "She is the Genius, and I am the clever person," and it is her love and influence which portrays the beautiful and grand in nature, to him, to impart it to us in celestial song.

Their letters were given to their son by Robert Browning, and he said: "There they are, do with them as you please when I am dead and gone!" The letters have been published, and the poet's and poetess' beautiful nature, their love and perfect companionship are portrayed to us in them.

After a great deal of planning, the ever memorable and most romantic marriage occurred, in 1846. She returned home and staid a week, at which time she and her dog "Flush" walked out of the house, while the rest were at their noon-meal, to meet her husband. They fled to France and then wrote for forgiveness which was of no avail. The manner of life upon which they now entered was to be theirs with a few exceptions. No other woman, before or since her days, has been endowed with anything like her sustained and imaginative power. She was very original and creative. Her life was beautiful, her slight, delicate figure, with curls drooping on each side of her most expressive face, her smile, like a sun-beam, and her shining black eyes, portray to us her wonderful nature. The sweetness of her disposition is invincible, and it must be owned that this famous pair made a striking personality which bring us to the good and beautiful in one's life.

The perfect companionship of these two gifted souls has been described by Browning, himself:

"When if I think but deep enough,  
 You are wont to answer as prompt as rhyme,  
 You are to find without a rebuff  
 The response your soul seeks, many a time  
 Piercing its fine flesh stuff."

Neither could fail to profit by the other's genius and experience. Their union was so absolute that neither felt any need of a fuller emotional life.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's companionship with Robert Browning has brought out her higher nature, and stronger themes which now bore up her wing. Their companionship was the sweetest, the highest, the most intellectual; and each felt that life was more to them by their union. Mrs. Browning gave birth to a son which was the awakening of a new phase of life. Her experience of motherhood had perfected her womanly nature, and in her son she put her life and soul.

Their home in Florence, Italy, was inspiring, and those who entered it could see how the two great poets were so happy. It was here that Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote "Casa Guidi Windows," which was limpid, harmonious and classical. Before she wrote this selection, her wholly noble and natural feelings had been silently recorded in a series of sonnets, which she soon published as "Sonnets from Portugese." They are but one more faithful transcript of an experience which enriches the treasury of high minded love.

"Sonnets from Portugese" are considered the finest subjective poetry in our literature. In them, she has the "expression of love" and the outpourings of a woman's tenderest emotions. Her own great theme was Italy and her beautiful home.

Religion was a part of herself and those who came in touch with her life found a strong and deep feeling of the Divine in the poetess. Her practical self-consciousness was keener than the poet's but she was less an artist than a poet, and she is the poet and he the philosopher of the two. They both wrote more intelligibly during their married life than before. Mrs. Browning once said that the cry of the children will never be forgotten while there are suffering children in this world.

Take one of her volumes of collected poems, and with the weaknesses and faults, what riches it contains!

The affection of readers in distant lands was drawn to her by her broad humanity, her hope, her tender knowledge of children, and her defense of her sex. Love and worship presided over her poems. The instinct of worship and religion of humanity were two prevailing aspects of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life.

Robert Browning is one of the most original poets.

"Paracelsus" portrays him as a generous soul, full of lofty aspirations. He, as well as Elizabeth Browning, prefers to study human hearts rather than the forms of nature. The soundest and best fruits of his genius were produced during the fifteen years of his wedded life, but his popularity did not increase, and his work was destined

to bring him no great fame till his wife lay sleeping under the grasses and violets of the beautiful cemetery in Florence. But one can say his greatest work was produced by her side, or under the stimulus of her society. He became one of the foremost interpreters to men, of Italy's magnificent humanism.

To Miss Barrett, love, marriage, and travel were happiness, desire of life, renewed bodily and spiritual health. In this new life, her eccentricities of manner and language did not grow ~~more~~ more marked, but they diminished, and it was a divine revelation to her, showing that there were many bright sides to life and that companionship and happiness were the acme of life.

The poetry of Robert Browning, addressed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, is of a high order. He paid high poetic tribute to the poetess, after their marriage in "One Word More," "By the Fireside," and in his lyric love poems, which we kindly remember. He wrote of her:

"God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures  
Boast of two soul sides, one to face the world with  
One to show a woman when he loves her."

"Johnson's love for Tetty was strong enough; so was Napoleon's for Josephine;" but their interests lay elsewhere, while Browning's love for his poetess was the real aim, resting place, and tenor of his life.

When death claimed its victory and the grave its goal, it seemed to those around her, as if she died beholding

"----in jasper clear as glass,  
The first foundations of the new near Day  
Which should be builded out of Heaven to God."

Robert Browning had been loyal to her memory all his long years of solitude and sadness, and she held the same old place in his heart until his death. After her death, one of the sweetest poems in English literature was written by Robert Browning, as his tribute to his wife, Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

"MY STAR."

"All that I know  
Of a certain star  
Is, it can throw  
(Like the angled spar)  
Now a dart of red,  
Now a dart of blue;  
Till my friends have said  
They would fain see, too,  
My star that dartles the red and the blue!  
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:  
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.  
What matter to me if their star is a world?  
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it."

It is sad to think of one left in solitude and sadness, but he has much to look back upon, and much, too, that is beautiful to look forward to, and his son who was the only fruit of this happy and extraordinary marriage is sincerely devoted to him.

It was thru her influence, that, after her death, he became a great favorite in London, and created a literature of his own.

Mrs. Browning once said to Ruskin: "What would life be worth if it had not eternal relations." This one little saying helped Robert Browning to aspire and soar to the teachings of his poetess

who had realized the truth of the saying.

We thank both the poet and poetess for having made clear to mankind that two individuals of extraordinary gifts can marry without either being false to their vows or incurring harrowing wretchedness. These were the two most remarkable persons, as far as we know, morally, no less than intellectually, that ever made one flesh in holy wedlock.

Robert Browning won, in the end, such recognition as is rarely accorded to any writer.

The agreement of these two souls, on all high and spiritual things, grew more perfect as the last weeks of their lives passed away.

The reciprocal nature of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning's genius is of the highest and most eternal character.

The master-piece of Shakespeare, the keen intellect of Goethe, the soaring genius of Shelly and Schiller, and the profundity of Whitman have portrayed human nature in many, indeed in all phases, but the Brownings have portrayed that which is higher, nobler, and keener in all nature: The Divine Union and Reciprocity of two great Souls.