CHAPTER II - EARLY WORKS

In 1840 Sordello was published. Its reception by the great majority of readers, including some of the ablest men of the time, was a reception of a kind probably unknown in the rest of literary history, a reception that was neither praise nor blame. It was perhaps best expressed by Carlyle, who wrote to say that his wife had read Sordello with great interest, and wished to know whether Sordello was a man, or a city, or a book. Better known, of course, is the story of Tennyson, who said that the first line of the poem--

"Who will, may hear Sordello's story told,"

and the last line--

"Who would, has heard Sordello's story told,"

were the only two lines in the poem that he understood, and they were lies.

Perhaps the best story, however, of all the cycle of Sordello legends is that which is related of Douglas Jerrold. He was recovering from an illness; and having obtained permission for the first time to read a little during the day, he picked up a book from a pile beside the bed and began Sordello. No sooner had he done so than he turned deadly pale, put down the book, and said, "My God! I'm an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind's gone. I can't understand two consecutive lines of an English poem." He then summoned his family and silently gave the book into their hands, asking for their opinion on the poem; and as the shadow of perplexity gradually passed over their faces, he heaved a sigh of relief and went to sleep. These stories, whether accurate or no, do undoubtedly represent the very peculiar reception accorded to Sordello, a reception which, as I have said, bears no resemblance whatever to anything in the way of eulogy or condemnation that had ever been accorded to a work of art before. There had been authors whom it was fashionable to boast of admiring and authors whom it was fashionable to boast of despising; but with Sordello enters into literary history the Browning of popular badinage, the author whom it is fashionable to boast of not understanding.

Putting aside for the moment the literary qualities which are to be found in the poem, when it becomes intelligible, there is one question very relevant to the fame and character of Browning which is raised by Sordello when it is considered, as most people consider it, as hopelessly unintelligible. It really throws some light upon the reason of Browning's obscurity. The ordinary theory of Browning's

obscurity is to the effect that it was a piece of intellectual vanity indulged in more and more insolently as his years and fame increased. There are at least two very decisive objections to this popular explanation. In the first place, it must emphatically be said for Browning that in all the numerous records and impressions of him throughout his long and very public life, there is not one iota of evidence that he was a man who was intellectually vain. The evidence is entirely the other way. He was vain of many things, of his physical health, for example, and even more of the physical health which he contrived to bestow for a certain period upon his wife. From the records of his early dandyism, his flowing hair and his lemon-coloured gloves, it is probable enough that he was vain of his good looks. He was vain of his masculinity, his knowledge of the world, and he was, I fancy, decidedly vain of his prejudices, even, it might be said, vain of being vain of them. But everything is against the idea that he was much in the habit of thinking of himself in his intellectual aspect. In the matter of conversation, for example, some people who liked him found him genial, talkative, anecdotal, with a certain strengthening and sanative quality in his mere bodily presence. Some people who did not like him found him a mere frivolous chatterer, afflicted with bad manners. One lady, who knew him well, said that, though he only met you in a crowd and made some commonplace remark, you went for the rest of the day with your head up. Another lady who did not know him, and therefore disliked him, asked after a dinner party, "Who was that too-exuberant financier?" These are the diversities of feeling about him. But they all agree in one point--that he did not talk cleverly, or try to talk cleverly, as that proceeding is understood in literary circles. He talked positively, he talked a great deal, but he never attempted to give that neat and æsthetic character to his speech which is almost invariable in the case of the man who is vain of his mental superiority. When he did impress people with mental gymnastics, it was mostly in the form of pouring out, with passionate enthusiasm, whole epics written by other people, which is the last thing that the literary egotist would be likely to waste his time over. We have therefore to start with an enormous psychological improbability that Browning made his poems complicated from mere pride in his powers and contempt of his readers.

There is, however, another very practical objection to the ordinary theory that Browning's obscurity was a part of the intoxication of fame and intellectual consideration. We constantly hear the statement that Browning's intellectual complexity increased with his later poems, but the statement is simply not true. Sordello, to the indescribable density of which he never afterwards even approached, was begun before Strafford, and was therefore the third of his works, and even if we adopt his own habit of ignoring Pauline, the second. He wrote the greater part of it when he was twenty-four. It was in his youth, at the time when a man is thinking of love and publicity, of sunshine and singing birds, that he gave birth to this horror of great darkness; and the more we study the matter with any

knowledge of the nature of youth, the more we shall come to the conclusion that Browning's obscurity had altogether the opposite origin to that which is usually assigned to it. He was not unintelligible because he was proud, but unintelligible because he was humble. He was not unintelligible because his thoughts were vague, but because to him they were obvious.

A man who is intellectually vain does not make himself incomprehensible, because he is so enormously impressed with the difference between his readers' intelligence and his own that he talks down to them with elaborate repetition and lucidity. What poet was ever vainer than Byron? What poet was ever so magnificently lucid? But a young man of genius who has a genuine humility in his heart does not elaborately explain his discoveries, because he does not think that they are discoveries. He thinks that the whole street is humming with his ideas, and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself. Browning's impenetrable poetry was the natural expression of this beautiful optimism. Sordello was the most glorious compliment that has ever been paid to the average man.

In the same manner, of course, outward obscurity is in a young author a mark of inward clarity. A man who is vague in his ideas does not speak obscurely, because his own dazed and drifting condition leads him to clutch at phrases like ropes and use the formulæ that every one understands. No one ever found Miss Marie Corelli obscure, because she believes only in words. But if a young man really has ideas of his own, he must be obscure at first, because he lives in a world of his own in which there are symbols and correspondences and categories unknown to the rest of the world. Let us take an imaginary example. Suppose that a young poet had developed by himself a peculiar idea that all forms of excitement, including religious excitement, were a kind of evil intoxication, he might say to himself continually that churches were in reality taverns, and this idea would become so fixed in his mind that he would forget that no such association existed in the minds of others. And suppose that in pursuance of this general idea, which is a perfectly clear and intellectual idea, though a very silly one, he were to say that he believed in Puritanism without its theology, and were to repeat this idea also to himself until it became instinctive and familiar, such a man might take up a pen, and under the impression that he was saying something figurative indeed, but quite clear and suggestive, write some such sentence as this, "You will not get the godless Puritan into your white taverns," and no one in the length and breadth of the country could form the remotest notion of what he could mean. So it would have been in any example, for instance, of a man who made some philosophical discovery and did not realise how far the world was from it. If it had been possible for a poet in the sixteenth century to hit upon and learn to regard as obvious the evolutionary theory of Darwin, he might have written down some such line as "the radiant offspring of

the ape," and the maddest volumes of mediæval natural history would have been ransacked for the meaning of the allusion. The more fixed and solid and sensible the idea appeared to him, the more dark and fantastic it would have appeared to the world. Most of us indeed, if we ever say anything valuable, say it when we are giving expression to that part of us which has become as familiar and invisible as the pattern on our wall paper. It is only when an idea has become a matter of course to the thinker that it becomes startling to the world.

It is worth while to dwell upon this preliminary point of the ground of Browning's obscurity, because it involves an important issue about him. Our whole view of Browning is bound to be absolutely different, and I think absolutely false, if we start with the conception that he was what the French call an intellectual. If we see Browning with the eyes of his particular followers, we shall inevitably think this. For his followers are pre-eminently intellectuals, and there never lived upon the earth a great man who was so fundamentally different from his followers. Indeed, he felt this heartily and even humorously himself. "Wilkes was no Wilkite," he said, "and I am very far from being a Browningite." We shall, as I say, utterly misunderstand Browning at every step of his career if we suppose that he was the sort of man who would be likely to take a pleasure in asserting the subtlety and abstruseness of his message. He took pleasure beyond all question in himself; in the strictest sense of the word he enjoyed himself. But his conception of himself was never that of the intellectual. He conceived himself rather as a sanguine and strenuous man, a great fighter. "I was ever," as he says, "a fighter." His faults, a certain occasional fierceness and grossness, were the faults that are counted as virtues among navvies and sailors and most primitive men. His virtues, boyishness and absolute fidelity, and a love of plain words and things are the virtues which are counted as vices among the æsthetic prigs who pay him the greatest honour. He had his more objectionable side, like other men, but it had nothing to do with literary egotism. He was not vain of being an extraordinary man. He was only somewhat excessively vain of being an ordinary one.

The Browning then who published Sordello we have to conceive, not as a young pedant anxious to exaggerate his superiority to the public, but as a hot-headed, strong-minded, inexperienced, and essentially humble man, who had more ideas than he knew how to disentangle from each other. If we compare, for example, the complexity of Browning with the clarity of Matthew Arnold, we shall realise that the cause lies in the fact that Matthew Arnold was an intellectual aristocrat, and Browning an intellectual democrat. The particular peculiarities of Sordello illustrate the matter very significantly. A very great part of the difficulty of Sordello, for instance, is in the fact that before the reader even approaches to tackling the difficulties of Browning's actual narrative, he is apparently expected to start with an exhaustive knowledge of that most shadowy and bewildering of

all human epochs--the period of the Guelph and Ghibelline struggles in mediæval Italy. Here, of course, Browning simply betrays that impetuous humility which we have previously observed. His father was a student of mediæval chronicles, he had himself imbibed that learning in the same casual manner in which a boy learns to walk or to play cricket. Consequently in a literary sense he rushed up to the first person he met and began talking about Ecelo and Taurello Salinguerra with about as much literary egotism as an English baby shows when it talks English to an Italian organ grinder. Beyond this the poem of Sordello, powerful as it is, does not present any very significant advance in Browning's mental development on that already represented by Pauline and Paracelsus. Pauline, Paracelsus, and Sordello stand together in the general fact that they are all, in the excellent phrase used about the first by Mr. Johnson Fox, "confessional." All three are analyses of the weakness which every artistic temperament finds in itself. Browning is still writing about himself, a subject of which he, like all good and brave men, was profoundly ignorant. This kind of self-analysis is always misleading. For we do not see in ourselves those dominant traits strong enough to force themselves out in action which our neighbours see. We see only a welter of minute mental experiences which include all the sins that were ever committed by Nero or Sir Willoughby Patterne. When studying ourselves, we are looking at a fresco with a magnifying glass. Consequently, these early impressions which great men have given of themselves are nearly always slanders upon themselves, for the strongest man is weak to his own conscience, and Hamlet flourished to a certainty even inside Napoleon. So it was with Browning, who when he was nearly eighty was destined to write with the hilarity of a schoolboy, but who wrote in his boyhood poems devoted to analysing the final break-up of intellect and soul.

Sordello, with all its load of learning, and almost more oppressive load of beauty, has never had any very important influence even upon Browningites, and with the rest of the world the name has passed into a jest. The most truly memorable thing about it was Browning's saying in answer to all gibes and misconceptions, a saying which expresses better than anything else what genuine metal was in him, "I blame no one, least of all myself, who did my best then and since." This is indeed a model for all men of letters who do not wish to retain only the letters and to lose the man.

When next Browning spoke, it was from a greater height and with a new voice. His visit to Asolo, "his first love," as he said, "among Italian cities," coincided with the stir and transformation in his spirit and the breaking up of that splendid palace of mirrors in which a man like Byron had lived and died. In 1841 Pippa Passes appeared, and with it the real Browning of the modern world. He had made the discovery which Byron never made, but which almost every young man does at last make--the thrilling discovery that he is not Robinson Crusoe. Pippa Passes is the greatest poem ever written, with the exception of one or two by Walt

Whitman, to express the sentiment of the pure love of humanity. The phrase has unfortunately a false and pedantic sound. The love of humanity is a thing supposed to be professed only by vulgar and officious philanthropists, or by saints of a superhuman detachment and universality. As a matter of fact, love of humanity is the commonest and most natural of the feelings of a fresh nature, and almost every one has felt it alight capriciously upon him when looking at a crowded park or a room full of dancers. The love of those whom we do not know is quite as eternal a sentiment as the love of those whom we do know. In our friends the richness of life is proved to us by what we have gained; in the faces in the street the richness of life is proved to us by the hint of what we have lost. And this feeling for strange faces and strange lives, when it is felt keenly by a young man, almost always expresses itself in a desire after a kind of vagabond beneficence, a desire to go through the world scattering goodness like a capricious god. It is desired that mankind should hunt in vain for its best friend as it would hunt for a criminal; that he should be an anonymous Saviour, an unrecorded Christ. Browning, like every one else, when awakened to the beauty and variety of men, dreamed of this arrogant self-effacement. He has written of himself that he had long thought vaguely of a being passing through the world, obscure and unnameable, but moulding the destinies of others to mightier and better issues. Then his almost faultless artistic instinct came in and suggested that this being, whom he dramatised as the work-girl, Pippa, should be even unconscious of anything but her own happiness, and should sway men's lives with a lonely mirth. It was a bold and moving conception to show us these mature and tragic human groups all at the supreme moment eavesdropping upon the solitude of a child. And it was an even more precise instinct which made Browning make the errant benefactor a woman. A man's good work is effected by doing what he does, a woman's by being what she is.

There is one other point about Pippa Passes which is worth a moment's attention. The great difficulty with regard to the understanding of Browning is the fact that, to all appearance, scarcely any one can be induced to take him seriously as a literary artist. His adversaries consider his literary vagaries a disqualification for every position among poets; and his admirers regard those vagaries with the affectionate indulgence of a circle of maiden aunts towards a boy home for the holidays. Browning is supposed to do as he likes with form, because he had such a profound scheme of thought. But, as a matter of fact, though few of his followers will take Browning's literary form seriously, he took his own literary form very seriously. Now Pippa Passes is, among other things, eminently remarkable as a very original artistic form, a series of disconnected but dramatic scenes which have only in common the appearance of one figure. For this admirable literary departure Browning, amid all the laudations of his "mind" and his "message," has scarcely ever had credit. And just as we should, if we took Browning seriously as a poet, see that he had made many noble literary forms, so

we should also see that he did make from time to time certain definite literary mistakes. There is one of them, a glaring one, in Pippa Passes; and, as far as I know, no critic has ever thought enough of Browning as an artist to point it out. It is a gross falsification of the whole beauty of Pippa Passes to make the Monseigneur and his accomplice in the last act discuss a plan touching the fate of Pippa herself. The whole central and splendid idea of the drama is the fact that Pippa is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms. To make her in the end turn out to be the niece of one of them, is like a whiff from an Adelphi melodrama, an excellent thing in its place, but destructive of the entire conception of Pippa. Having done that, Browning might just as well have made Sebald turn out to be her long lost brother, and Luigi a husband to whom she was secretly married. Browning made this mistake when his own splendid artistic power was only growing, and its merits and its faults in a tangle. But its real literary merits and its real literary faults have alike remained unrecognised under the influence of that unfortunate intellectualism which idolises Browning as a metaphysician and neglects him as a poet. But a better test was coming. Browning's poetry, in the most strictly poetical sense, reached its flower in Dramatic Lyrics, published in 1842. Here he showed himself a picturesque and poignant artist in a wholly original manner. And the two main characteristics of the work were the two characteristics most commonly denied to Browning, both by his opponents and his followers, passion and beauty; but beauty had enlarged her boundaries in new modes of dramatic arrangement, and passion had found new voices in fantastic and realistic verse. Those who suppose Browning to be a wholly philosophic poet, number a great majority of his commentators. But when we come to look at the actual facts, they are strangely and almost unexpectedly otherwise.

Let any one who believes in the arrogantly intellectual character of Browning's poetry run through the actual repertoire of the Dramatic Lyrics. The first item consists of those splendid war chants called "Cavalier Tunes." I do not imagine that any one will maintain that there is any very mysterious metaphysical aim in them. The second item is the fine poem "The Lost Leader," a poem which expresses in perfectly lucid and lyrical verse a perfectly normal and old-fashioned indignation. It is the same, however far we carry the query. What theory does the next poem, "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," express, except the daring speculation that it is often exciting to ride a good horse in Belgium? What theory does the poem after that, "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr," express, except that it is also frequently exciting to ride a good horse in Africa? Then comes "Nationality in Drinks," a mere technical oddity without a gleam of philosophy; and after that those two entirely exquisite "Garden Fancies," the first of which is devoted to the abstruse thesis that a woman may be charming, and the second to the equally abstruse thesis that a book may be a bore. Then comes "The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," from which the most ingenious "Browning

student" cannot extract anything except that people sometimes hate each other in Spain; and then "The Laboratory," from which he could extract nothing except that people sometimes hate each other in France. This is a perfectly honest record of the poems as they stand. And the first eleven poems read straight off are remarkable for these two obvious characteristics--first, that they contain not even a suggestion of anything that could be called philosophy; and second, that they contain a considerable proportion of the best and most typical poems that Browning ever wrote. It may be repeated that either he wrote these lyrics because he had an artistic sense, or it is impossible to hazard even the wildest guess as to why he wrote them.

It is permissible to say that the Dramatic Lyrics represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history. It is true that he had written already many admirable poems of a far more ambitious plan--Paracelsus with its splendid version of the faults of the intellectual, Pippa Passes with its beautiful deification of unconscious influence. But youth is always ambitious and universal; mature work exhibits more of individuality, more of the special type and colour of work which a man is destined to do. Youth is universal, but not individual. The genius who begins life with a very genuine and sincere doubt whether he is meant to be an exquisite and idolised violinist, or the most powerful and eloquent Prime Minister of modern times, does at last end by making the discovery that there is, after all, one thing, possibly a certain style of illustrating Nursery Rhymes, which he can really do better than any one else. This was what happened to Browning; like every one else, he had to discover first the universe, and then humanity, and at last himself. With him, as with all others, the great paradox and the great definition of life was this, that the ambition narrows as the mind expands. In Dramatic Lyrics he discovered the one thing that he could really do better than any one else--the dramatic lyric. The form is absolutely original: he had discovered a new field of poetry, and in the centre of that field he had found himself.

The actual quality, the actual originality of the form is a little difficult to describe. But its general characteristic is the fearless and most dexterous use of grotesque things in order to express sublime emotions. The best and most characteristic of the poems are love-poems; they express almost to perfection the real wonderland of youth, but they do not express it by the ideal imagery of most poets of love. The imagery of these poems consists, if we may take a rapid survey of Browning's love poetry, of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, window-blinds, burnt cork, fashionable fur coats. But in this new method he thoroughly expressed the true essential, the insatiable realism of passion. If any one wished to prove that Browning was not, as he is said to be, the poet of thought, but pre-eminently one of the poets of passion, we could scarcely find a better evidence of this profoundly passionate element than Browning's

astonishing realism in love poetry. There is nothing so fiercely realistic as sentiment and emotion. Thought and the intellect are content to accept abstractions, summaries, and generalisations; they are content that ten acres of ground should be called for the sake of argument X, and ten widows' incomes called for the sake of argument Y; they are content that a thousand awful and mysterious disappearances from the visible universe should be summed up as the mortality of a district, or that ten thousand intoxications of the soul should bear the general name of the instinct of sex. Rationalism can live upon air and signs and numbers. But sentiment must have reality; emotion demands the real fields, the real widows' homes, the real corpse, and the real woman. And therefore Browning's love poetry is the finest love poetry in the world, because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about window-panes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal much with abstractions; it is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute. He expresses the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven, but about a parasol. And therefore he is, first, the greatest of love poets, and, secondly, the only optimistic philosopher except Whitman.

The general accusation against Browning in connection with his use of the grotesque comes in very definitely here; for in using these homely and practical images, these allusions, bordering on what many would call the commonplace, he was indeed true to the actual and abiding spirit of love. In that delightful poem "Youth and Art" we have the singing girl saying to her old lover--

"No harm! It was not my fault If you never turned your eye's tail up As I shook upon E in alt, Or ran the chromatic scale up."

This is a great deal more like the real chaff that passes between those whose hearts are full of new hope or of old memory than half the great poems of the world. Browning never forgets the little details which to a man who has ever really lived may suddenly send an arrow through the heart. Take, for example, such a matter as dress, as it is treated in "A Lover's Quarrel."

"See, how she looks now, dressed In a sledging cap and vest! 'Tis a huge fur cloak-- Like a reindeer's yoke Falls the lappet along the breast: Sleeves for her arms to rest, Or to hang, as my Love likes best."

That would almost serve as an order to a dressmaker, and is therefore poetry, or at least excellent poetry of this order. So great a power have these dead things of taking hold on the living spirit, that I question whether any one could read

through the catalogue of a miscellaneous auction sale without coming upon things which, if realised for a moment, would be near to the elemental tears. And if any of us or all of us are truly optimists, and believe as Browning did, that existence has a value wholly inexpressible, we are most truly compelled to that sentiment not by any argument or triumphant justification of the cosmos, but by a few of these momentary and immortal sights and sounds, a gesture, an old song, a portrait, a piano, an old door.

In 1843 appeared that marvellous drama The Return of the Druses, a work which contains more of Browning's typical qualities exhibited in an exquisite literary shape, than can easily be counted. We have in The Return of the Druses his love of the corners of history, his interest in the religious mind of the East, with its almost terrifying sense of being in the hand of heaven, his love of colour and verbal luxury, of gold and green and purple, which made some think he must be an Oriental himself. But, above all, it presents the first rise of that great psychological ambition which Browning was thenceforth to pursue. In Pauline and the poems that follow it, Browning has only the comparatively easy task of giving an account of himself. In Pippa Passes he has the only less easy task of giving an account of humanity. In The Return of the Druses he has for the first time the task which is so much harder than giving an account of humanity--the task of giving an account of a human being. Djabal, the great Oriental impostor, who is the central character of the play, is a peculiarly subtle character, a compound of blasphemous and lying assumptions of Godhead with genuine and stirring patriotic and personal feelings: he is a blend, so to speak, of a base divinity and of a noble humanity. He is supremely important in the history of Browning's mind, for he is the first of that great series of the apologiæ of apparently evil men, on which the poet was to pour out so much of his imaginative wealth--Djabal, Fra Lippo, Bishop Blougram, Sludge, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and the hero of Fifine at the Fair.

With this play, so far as any point can be fixed for the matter, he enters for the first time on the most valuable of all his labours--the defence of the indefensible. It may be noticed that Browning was not in the least content with the fact that certain human frailties had always lain more or less under an implied indulgence; that all human sentiment had agreed that a profligate might be generous, or that a drunkard might be high-minded. He was insatiable: he wished to go further and show in a character like Djabal that an impostor might be generous and that a liar might be high-minded. In all his life, it must constantly be remembered, he tried always the most difficult things. Just as he tried the queerest metres and attempted to manage them, so he tried the queerest human souls and attempted to stand in their place. Charity was his basic philosophy; but it was, as it were, a fierce charity, a charity that went man-hunting. He was a kind of cosmic detective who walked into the foulest of thieves' kitchens and accused men publicly of

virtue. The character of Djabal in The Return of the Druses is the first of this long series of forlorn hopes for the relief of long surrendered castles of misconduct. As we shall see, even realising the humanity of a noble impostor like Djabal did not content his erratic hunger for goodness. He went further again, and realised the humanity of a mean impostor like Sludge. But in all things he retained this essential characteristic, that he was not content with seeking sinners--he sought the sinners whom even sinners cast out.

Browning's feeling of ambition in the matter of the drama continued to grow at this time. It must be remembered that he had every natural tendency to be theatrical, though he lacked the essential lucidity. He was not, as a matter of fact, a particularly unsuccessful dramatist; but in the world of abstract temperaments he was by nature an unsuccessful dramatist. He was, that is to say, a man who loved above all things plain and sensational words, open catastrophes, a clear and ringing conclusion to everything. But it so happened, unfortunately, that his own words were not plain; that his catastrophes came with a crashing and sudden unintelligibleness which left men in doubt whether the thing were a catastrophe or a great stroke of good luck; that his conclusion, though it rang like a trumpet to the four corners of heaven, was in its actual message quite inaudible. We are bound to admit, on the authority of all his best critics and admirers, that his plays were not failures, but we can all feel that they should have been. He was, as it were, by nature a neglected dramatist. He was one of those who achieve the reputation, in the literal sense, of eccentricity by their frantic efforts to reach the centre.

A Blot on the 'Scutcheon followed The Return of the Druses. In connection with the performance of this very fine play a quarrel arose which would not be worth mentioning if it did not happen to illustrate the curious energetic simplicity of Browning's character. Macready, who was in desperately low financial circumstances at this time, tried by every means conceivable to avoid playing the part; he dodged, he shuffled, he tried every evasion that occurred to him, but it never occurred to Browning to see what he meant. He pushed off the part upon Phelps, and Browning was contented; he resumed it, and Browning was only discontented on behalf of Phelps. The two had a quarrel; they were both headstrong, passionate men, but the quarrel dealt entirely with the unfortunate condition of Phelps. Browning beat down his own hat over his eyes; Macready flung Browning's manuscript with a slap upon the floor. But all the time it never occurred to the poet that Macready's conduct was dictated by anything so crude and simple as a desire for money. Browning was in fact by his principles and his ideals a man of the world, but in his life far otherwise. That worldly ease which is to most of us a temptation was to him an ideal. He was as it were a citizen of the New Jerusalem who desired with perfect sanity and simplicity to be a citizen of Mayfair. There was in him a quality which can only be most delicately described;

for it was a virtue which bears a strange resemblance to one of the meanest of vices. Those curious people who think the truth a thing that can be said violently and with ease, might naturally call Browning a snob. He was fond of society, of fashion and even of wealth: but there is no snobbery in admiring these things or any things if we admire them for the right reasons. He admired them as worldlings cannot admire them: he was, as it were, the child who comes in with the dessert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee: something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.