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I.

THE RELATION OF CHRISTIAN ART TO THEOLOGY.

I.

THERE is a reasonable excuse for the many who see no connection between the development of art and that of theological ideas in the history of Christianity, and fail to perceive that art and literature were twin sisters in the service of religion, inspired by the same thoughts, but appealing, the one to the sentiment, the other to the intellect. For this connection was severed long since—fully four centuries ago—never to be fully renewed, and its existence can now be conceived only by an effort of the imagination conjuring up the ghost of departed realities that appeal no more to the common consciousness of the nineteenth century. In art, far more than in literature, the scene shifts as rapidly as the colors of a sunset: words retain their meaning, but a work of art has a different one for every generation. It is strangely difficult for us to grasp the meaning of the fact that through the general illiteracy of the people, works of religious art were the direct means of instruction in religious belief for nine-tenths of the body of Christians up to the time of the Reformation. And yet, what use has been made of this fact? In what history is the aid of the monuments called in systematically? In what work on the development of Christian theology is a place given to the paintings and sculptures which, through a period of over a thousand years, show more strikingly than words the beliefs of the people and their teachers, with all their slight, temporal and local variations? As a modern writer well says: “The faintest shadows that darkened, or the lightest breath that disturbed the

VII.

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL NOTES.

ROBERT BROWNING.

ONE-AND-TWENTY years ago Browning began his "Ring and the Book" with a sort of inscription to the people of England, saying:

"Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you !)"

and closed it with a kind of *l'envoy*:

"So, British Public, who may like me yet,
(Marry and amen !)"

In these one-and-twenty years the "British Public" has, perhaps, not learned to like or love the name of Robert Browning any better than it did. To the great mass of English readers, to the great mass of readers of English, the poetry of Browning is still, except for a few poems which have forced themselves into the ears and hearts of young and old, a sealed book. But the attitude of the literary world has changed towards it. A man to-day can as little pretend to culture without some knowledge of Browning as without some knowledge of Shakespeare. Societies have sprung up everywhere for the study and elucidation of his poetry. That these societies have done the poet some injury, finding difficulties where no difficulties were to be discovered, discovering beauties which no honest eye can recognize, is true. But, on the other hand, they have kept the poet in the strong light of public scrutiny, and no poet can stand such scrutiny better. The cult which they have built up has a ridiculous side, but it has not rendered Browning, nor his poems, ridiculous. The worst that has been done has been to mystify that class of readers who read reviews instead of books and take their opinions at second hand.

Born at Camberwell, London, in 1812, Browning at a very early age felt and expressed his conviction of his poetic calling. He had little in common with most youthful poets. He began his career as a serious business, and to the day of his death his view of it never changed. In 1833, shortly before the attainment of his majority, he published "Pauline," a long narrative poem. This was followed, in 1835, by "Paracelsus," which for want of a better term we call a drama. In 1837, came the historical drama, "Strafford;" in 1840, the strange epos, "Sordello;" in 1841, the exquisite little lyrical drama,

"Pippa Passes;" in 1842, "King Victor and King Charles." It was evident that Browning believed his genius was dramatic and that his true field was the drama. Up to this time, a period of nine years, he had mainly devoted himself to it. In the fruit of these years a casting about for a suitable form is marked. "Pauline" was a dramatic narrative; "Paracelsus" scarcely more than a narrative poem in dialogue; "Strafford" and "King Victor and King Charles" fell into the form of the legitimate drama; while "Pippa Passes" was merely a series of dramatic episodes strung on a tenuous thread of connection, the little maid Pippa serving as a very modified lyrical chorus to introduce and unite the wholly disjointed parts. "Paracelsus" had strength, but lacked congruity; it contained splendid bursts of song and fragments of speech, but it was prolix and turgid. It was full of promise—but promise of what? It was only in "Pippa Passes" that the poet at all fulfilled this promise, till, in 1842, he published the first of his "Dramatic Lyrics." The mark touched by these poems was high. The poet had found his congenial form, and thenceforth his best work took the form of short poems, dramatic in nature, and either narrative or lyrical in form. These appeared under various names: "Dramatic Romances" (1845), "Men and Women" (1855), "Dramatis Personæ" (1864), "Dramatic Idylls" (1879, 1880); but they were all closely akin in form and character.

It took some time to convince Browning that the legitimate drama was not his proper sphere. He published a series of dramas from 1843 to 1846, one of which, "A Blot in the Scutcheon," is a beautiful poem, and came very near, despite obvious faults, succeeding on the stage. In 1846, he practically abandoned this form of composition, passing from "A Soul's Tragedy," by no very violent transition, to a new series of contemplative, semi-religious poems, of which "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day," published together in 1850, were the first, as they were the best. After touching his highest point in the "fifty poems" of "Men and Women," he still continued down to a few months of his death 'active composition. "The Ring and the Book," his most voluminous composition, appeared in 1868-9. The most notable work of his later years was a series of transcripts from the Greek dramatists, "Balaustion's Adventure," "The Alkestis" (1871); "Aristophanes' Apology," the "Herakles" (1875); and the "Agamemnon" (1877).

As a thinker, Browning was richly furnished. He possessed largeness of view, coupled with very sharp insight into character. His mind was vigorous, sturdy and often touched with a nobleness of conception which in itself is poetic. His capacity for projecting his thoughts in the form of pictures before his own mind, and, consequently, before his readers, was great. His processes were, indeed, largely intellectual; his emotions, too largely of intellectual inducement. What he chiefly lacked on this side of his character was clear-

ness of thinking. Without clearness of thought, lucidity of expression is impossible. That he could think and write clearly he proved over and over again. This want of clearness of thought seems, therefore, to have been the result of mental sloth, not of incapacity. Browning's genius was not "the power of taking infinite pains." It is astonishing how often his best work is marred by lapses of a sort which show mere want of pains. Again, he was often led astray by the indulgence of intellectual subtlety. He could never resist the temptation to introduce a recondite allusion, or a remote spiritual analogy. This mental trait was greatly increased and exaggerated by a slovenly composition of his sentences, which was chronic with him, and a habit of introducing into the thread of his narrative parenthetical references to every subject in any wise suggested by the story. Judged by Goethe's law, that the master of style is known by what he omits, Browning falls very low. In all things, great and small, he had no experimental knowledge of "self-restraint."

To his natural qualities of mind he added much of acquirement. We may well believe that the vast mass of apparent learning in his poems is somewhat illusive. He was a man of high culture, of great knowledge of the world, and had a natural taste for the by-ways of literature and art. From these by-ways he drew a swarm of comparatively obscure characters, and made them the *dramatis personæ* of his poems. That he knew much more than common, because he possessed uncommon knowledge, was a natural inference, but only an inference.

As an artist, Browning valued substance far above form.

"This poet's a Browning; he neglects the form,"

he says himself. He can hardly be justified in this. That poetic thought is the first and most important element in poetry is true. But poetry is poetic thought expressed in poetic form. To express noble thoughts in halting metre is to mar the thought and not to glorify the metre. Beautiful and idealized as are the dreams of De Quincey, they are not poetry; much of Browning's writing is not poetry, nor yet is it prose. It is a monstrous birth, a lovely soul in a deformed and shapeless body. In this he lacked the instinct of the true artist. Despite this, Browning the poet often burst the shackles consciously riveted by Browning the man and soared into the finest of poetic flights. While we find lyric themes treated in blank verse, stately movements made to mince in choppy lines, and worse solecisms even than these, his verse is full of noble poetry—"sometimes singing and he has many tunes, sometimes talk, far above singing."

So much for Robert Browning the man. If some kindly spirit would blot out a great part of his poetry, leaving us "Pippa Passes," "Men and Women," the best of his other short dramatic poems and an individual poem here and there, there would be enough and to spare to entitle him to a seat among the immortals. A poet has a

right to be judged by the best of his writings, not by the general average. Only by such a rule can the position of some of our greatest poets, notably Wordsworth, be sustained. Taking then the best of his work, we have more than enough to fill two large volumes; one volume, "Men and Women," the fruit of his mature manhood, standing entire as his most characteristic and best work. In these poems we read the poet's method and mark his measure of attainment.

The dramatic element is nearly constant, but it is subjective rather than objective. Even in his most striking situations, the act loses its significance in the greater significance of its motive. The love of psychological rather than material phenomena is written into every one of his poems. The three poems dealing with early Christian history well illustrate this. "The Death in the Desert" deals with the death of John the Evangelist; "The Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician," gives, in a letter to a brother physician, an account of the raising of Lazarus; and "Cleon" presents, also in an epistle, the views of a Neo-Platonist on immortality and redemption, and the bearing of Paul's preaching on these themes. The poet adopts the form of monologue, making his characters speak, while he seeks to

"Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth, the speech a poem."

They all reveal a rare power of mental analysis, with the mastery of the current of thought of the times which is the *sine qua non* of dramatic representation. Their aim is, of course, didactic—in the sense that the Greek drama is didactic; their method is, naturally, philosophical. In most of Browning's poems the philosophy is pure and lofty, empirical largely, for it is impossible to trace his connection with any school. Its expression varies greatly. Here he simply speaks the sentiments of his characters, permitting the speakers to develop and present the stories and leaving the reader to read the moral into them. This is undoubtedly his purest and best method of teaching. In other poems, he has a trick of throwing in, by way of parenthesis, brief comments to point the moral. These glosses are often more difficult to explain than the poems they are meant to elucidate. Thus, in "The Statue and the Bust," the moral has afforded subject for endless discussion as to the tendency of Browning's ethics. There is good reason to think that this moral has generally been misunderstood, but be that as it may, it is safe to say that the ethical teaching of Browning's poems is high and pure. His love for the good, the true and the beautiful is pronounced; his certainty of the place of retribution in God's plan is quite characteristic. Thus he says:

"There may be heaven—there must be hell,"

and speaks with hearty praise of

"Dante, who loved well, because he hated,
Hated wickedness which hinders loving."

There is no end to the striking passages which might be cited to show his hearty evangelical Christian attitude. Perhaps one of the little poems, collectively called "Ben Karshook's Wisdom," illustrates the trend of his teaching as well as a dozen fragments could :

" ' Would a man 'scape the rod ?'
 Rabbi Ben Karshook saith,
 ' See that he turn to God
 The day before his death.'

 ' Ay, could a man inquire
 When it shall come !' I say :
 The Rabbi's eye shoots fire—
 ' Then let him turn to-day.' "

The prelude to the second series of "Dramatic Idylls" is another bit of wholesome teaching, expressed in one of the forms which Browning affected, a form lacking in elegance and dignity, but, in the eyes of the "initiate," not lacking in vigor.

" ' You are sick, that's sure '—they say ;
 ' Sick of what ?'—they disagree.
 ' 'Tis the brain '—thinks Dr. A.,
 ' 'Tis the heart '—holds Dr. B.,
 ' The liver—my life I'd lay !'
 ' The lungs !' ' The lights !'
 Ah me !

" ' So ignorant of man's whole
 Of bodily organs plain to see—
 So sage and certain, frank and free,
 About what's under lock and key—
 Man's soul !' "

A broad optimism underlies his philosophy—an optimism which is consistent with man's total depravity; which rests on God's sovereignty, especially His sovereign love. Christian optimism and a broad humanity are practically synonymous. Hence, we find him battling bravely for the oppressed, the hated and the misconstrued, and exposing fraud. How pitiless is his dissection of Schwangau, the political charlatan; of Sludge, the social impostor; of Blougram, the clerical cheat. His scalpel is used with dextrous skill; the result is better suited to the lover of psychological studies than of poetry. These qualities of his mind, taken in connection with the catholicity of his intellectual sympathies, have led some to compare him with Shakespeare; but Browning lacks the power to put off the poet and be all the man.

Finally, his poetry is full of manliness. Virility, is the word; but the frequent use of that noble word in defense of the fleshly school has deprived it of some of its old ring. Browning knows that true manhood blends purity with power, and tenderness with strength. So his poetry is bracing and has the tonic quality of keen mountain

air and of the fresh salt breeze. It affords a wholesome corrective to the supersensuousness of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood on the one hand, and the chaos of Whitman on the other. I had almost said to the cult of "art for art sake," also. But Tennyson has taught us how soul and body can be harmonized in one rich synthesis, art framing a perfect form for the loftiest conceptions. So perhaps what we most long for in Browning's poetry is a little "art for art's sake." Not in the depraved sense which seeks to justify French or Russian immorality, but simply as a matter of form. For it is the want of such artistic power which deprives Browning of popular applause, and which will eventually deprive him of the rank which he might have won by persistent pursuit of the art of poetic expression.

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EXEGETICAL NOTES ON THE PSALMS.

3. PSALM VIII, 2.

כִּפִּי עֲזָלִים וַיִּנְקִים יְסֻדָּתִי לְמַעַן צִוְּרִיךְ
לְהַשְׁבִּית אוֹיֵב וּמִתְנַקֵּם :

Of the praises of children, even babes unweaned hast Thou founded a fortress
for response to Thy foes,
To silence the hating and vengeful.

The former of the above lines presents an interesting study in Hebrew expression.

The central and controlling element in the clause is *yissatdā 'ōz* (יְסֻדָּתִי); R. V., *hast Thou established strength*. But the verb *yāsad* always signifies *to lay a foundation* for a building, though it may include the whole erection; and the following *'ōz*, prop. *strength*, is sometimes used for the concrete form *ma'ōz* (מַעֲזָה), *a stronghold*. See xxviii, 8 (R. V.); xlv, 1; lxii, 7.

Preceding this, prominence is given to the material of the building. It is *peh* (פֶּה), lit. *mouth*; then by metonymy, that which proceeds from the mouth; so, variously translated, *a command* (Gen. xlv, 21), etc.; *an appointment* (Num. xxvii, 7); *a sentence* (legal) (Deut. xvii, 11); *sayings* (Ps. xlix, 14). No metonymy is more frequent in Hebrew. Here the context clearly suggests *praise*. The prep. *min* (of) is the same that is elsewhere prefixed to the material of which anything is made (Gen. ii, 19; Ps. xlv, 14).

In the combination *babes and sucklings*, we have the common Hebrew figure Hendiadys, in which two nouns are connected by the copulative, the latter defining the former; babes, even sucklings, *i. e.*, *unweaned babes*. Bickel ("*Carm. Vet. Test. Metrice*," 1882) finding too many syllables in the line to suit his theory of Hebrew versification, must have some reason for discarding one of these words as a corruption of the text. He does this by a foot-note: "Additamentum sensum per exaggerationem destruit, quia lactantes nondum majestatem Dei