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BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER

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OUTLINE

BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER

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A. Summary.

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1. Browning theologian as well as poet.
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3. Weakened religious teachings by discounting human knowledge as necessary to complete understanding of love.
"If one would make a worthy man it is necessary to begin with his grandparents." This homely bit of philosophy is indeed true. But to it might also be added, "look well to the neighborhood in which he is to be born." A more fitting birth-place for a poet could not have been chosen than Camberwell, where Robert Browning was born May 7, 1812. Here at the time, nature might still be seen, if not in her glory, at least to the extent of affording a breathing space from the crowded monotony of the great city just at hand. This commingling of the peace of nature with the noisy clamor of the city was enjoyed by Browning when a boy, from the hill crowned with three large elms back of his home. Here was for him a source of romance and imagination, given to the world in an early description of a visit to London. This visit gave him his first impression of the teeming city by night when he saw and heard her under the silence of the stars.

A genealogy of Robert Browning does not give much of a foundation, but the little it does
afford is sufficiently substantial to establish his genius. His father and grandfather before him were bank clerks in London. Both bore the name Robert. The senior Robert Browning, by punctual attendance to business and the practice of frugality, acquired a comfortable living. He was thus able to gratify his literary and artistic tastes. Furthermore he was of a cheerful disposition and had a genuine sociability which made him welcome in any company.

A great many of Browning's characteristics he owes to his mother. She was what Carlyle described as "the true type of Scottish gentlewoman." According to the poet's description of her she "was a divine woman." Her religious training came in large measure from her mother while her father bequeathed to her a talent for music and art. Browning's artistic qualities came from his Scotch descent while his metaphysical bent came from his German ancestry. There was about him a tender affection toward his mother, a feeling which expressed itself in that mystical, emotional, and impresible side of his disposition. These elements had their source in an organic inheritance coming from her and not from his father. His maternal grandmother was a
Creole which may explain his mystical nature and his love for music. Shart in his biography of the poet Robert Browning\(^{(1)}\) tells a story to the effect that in his childhood Browning was keenly susceptible to the strains of music. Coming one day into the room where his mother was playing, he listened for a moment, then in a paroxysm of weeping threw himself into her arms.

These incidents coming early in his life were bound to influence his later thinking. Moreover, his ideas were also shaped by the literary tastes formed in his childhood home. His father had a copy of the first edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, an early edition of Milton, several old Bibles, and a wide variety of Elizabethan Literature. It was a part of his early training to commit to memory many passages of the scriptures. In this way he became literally saturated with the old Hebraic poetry. He studied over and over with ecstatic joyousness the simple but powerful expression of Isaiah and the other prophets. The story is told of his walking across one of the parks in London with his hat in his left hand, his right waving back and forth, and

\(^{(1)}\) Robert Browning, Great Writers' Series. W. Scott Publishing Co.
his hair blowing about his face. He was so enraptured with the beautiful strain of Biblical music
that he did not notice the group of eager children who thought he was going to make a speech. It was
this early training at the hands of his mother which caused him to use the Bible as a continuous thread
woven into all his literary works.

Robert Browning's attendance at school ended when he was fourteen years of age. He contin-
ued his studies for four years under private tutors. At eighteen he entered London University where he
spent two years. His formal schooling served among other things to broaden his perspective in that he
became more acquainted with the world and its ways. He became versed in French. He visited galleries
and made some progress in art. He studied music and had a strong interest in the stage. None of
these interests, however, caused him to turn his back upon nature. The close contact which he had
with nature was interpreted as a revelation of God. He was familiar with forests, meadows, trees, animals,
and stones. Everything that he saw he watched intently. His eye was quick to see the flying bird and the
crawling snail. He noted the activity of the busy bee as it hummed from flower to flower, the green
fly darting hither and yon, the spider weaving her
gossamer thread among the twigs, the woodpecker
examining the gnarled oak bole in his search for
food, and the passage of the wind through the
leaves or across the grass. By this habit of obser-
vation he was able to gather his future materials
when the opportunity was presented.

The importance of this early training was
enhanced in Browning's career by the personal con-
tacts and influences which he experienced in later
life. It is thus possible to trace the "very
distinct passing of the torch into his hand from
that of a great predecessor." He had by the time
he was twelve years of age composed some stanzas
which were Byronic in character. These had not
been published for no one would undertake the
uncertain task of placing them upon the public
market. Shortly after this an incident occurred
which changed his whole poetic structure, which,
fortunately, he had just begun. "Passing a book
stall one day," says William Sharp, "he saw in a
box of second-hand volumes a little book adver-
tised as 'Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poem; very
scarce.' He had never heard of Shelley ... but
these discarded blossoms touched him to a new
emotion. Pope became further removed than ever: Byron, even, lost his magnetic supremacy. From vague remarks in reply to his inquiries, and from one or two casual allusions, he learned that there really was a poet called Shelley; that he had written several volumes; that he was dead." His mother became interested for him and secured collections both of Shelley and Keats. He thus came under an influence which remained with him throughout his life but in a lesser degree during his later years.

Browning's first printed poem, Pauline, appeared when he was twenty years of age. It contained a glowing apostrophe to Shelley and proclaimed Browning's ardent devotion to the poet. Twenty years later he wrote an Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley which served as an introduction to a spurious collection of letters purporting to come from Shelley. The most familiar of Browning's poems on Shelley is the lyric Memorabilia in which he tells how the sudden acquaintance with the poet was the one memorable event in his early life.

Paracelsus appeared in 1835 and it was through this poem that Browning came in contact with other literary men of his day. It introduced
him to John Forster, and through Forster, Browning became acquainted with Dickens, Leigh Hunt, Wordsworth, and Landor. It was not altogether his works which brought recognition from these men. His personal characteristics which included a musical voice and a winning smile attracted men to him in such a manner that they were glad to be called his friends.

The most profound event in the life of Robert Browning came when he met Elizabeth Barrett. They were brought together through their mutual friend, John Kenyon, who was interested in the poems of both. Miss Barrett was an invalid and her father did not sanction the friendship which soon ripened into love. His stubbornness led to an elopement into Italy where the two lovers spent most of their married life together. Their happiness brought new strength to Mrs. Browning. At Pisa she showed her husband the Sonnets from the Portuguese which was her contribution to a world made roseate by the deep emotional romance through which she was passing. During the fifteen years of their married life they lived in Italy with summers in England and long periods of residence in France. Robert Browning produced less in these years than at any time during his literary career. This may
be accounted for by the new responsibilities coming from the family relationship. Mrs. Browning was very frail, and two sons were born to them during the time, one of whom died. It is possible, however, that in no other period of his career did he reach the power of expression that came at this time. The first collection of his poems was published in 1849, to be followed the next year by Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day, and then in 1855 by Men and Women, a group of poems which is the climax of Browning's career.

The death of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, June 29, 1861 ended this wonderful example of human companionship. It vitally affected the habits of life and the poetical productiveness of Robert Browning. He returned to England and gave his time to the education of his son. He was confused and did not realize just how he was again to gather up the broken threads of his life. Order gradually came out of chaos and he was again able to assume much of his old cheerfulness. His chief production of this period is undoubtedly The Ring and the Book, although he wrote Balaustion's Adventure, Aristophanes' Apology, and the Agamemnon of Aeschylus. Fame was now his portion beyond
dispute. He was sought after for every gathering of note. He acquiesced gracefully to the demands of his friends, but his heart never recovered from the blow occasioned by the death of his wife. He died December 12, 1889 at his son's home in Venice. His tomb is in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey. His race was run, but his works remain. His influence in the religious world has been such that it cannot be ignored. The outstanding principles of his religious teachings touch every believer in Christianity and he has influenced the formation of modern Christian ideas in such a way that he must be reckoned with as a philosopher and a theologian as well as a poet. His epitaph might well be taken from La Saisaiz:

"He at least believed in Soul,
was very sure of God."

The first element of Browning's teaching is his idea of God as developed from his use of Biblical material. This idea came, as a matter of course, through a gradual development, the result of years of selecting and fitting his thoughts into a structure suitable for human conceptions. The simplest statement of Browning's early creed is contained in a letter written to a friend. He
says that "God is sufficient to cause us to wonder. This wonder leads to reverence, and reverence leads to worship." That the poet was a worshipper is evident from his habit when in London of attending the meetings at a little Congregational chapel in his neighborhood. Here he reverently stood to join in the simple hymns, and humbly knelt to commune with the Father. Moreover this spirit of worship is expressed in Pippa's song in the poem, Pippa Passes:

"The year's at the spring,
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven -
All's right with the world."

The first impression which the student gets of Browning's idea of God, is his teaching of what God is not rather than what he is. There is here, in other words, a classification of the negative qualities of Jehovah as well as an enumeration of the positive elements. Thus Browning does not regard God as a metaphysical abstraction. He is
vital in the economy of men's lives, and in accordance with that vitality is a source of all that is commendable in character. Moreover, God is not an abstract force in any sense but his qualities are such as to lay hold on men's powers of reason. God is immanent and his intrinsic worth comes from his abiding quality. This abiding tendency of God, therefore, opens the way for a specific relation to man who has the distinction of being "made in the image of the Father." Furthermore, this image has an important bearing upon the next step in the Browning doctrine which is that God is not impersonal. His argument here is that impersonality cannot appeal to man's personal ambitions and ideals. These ambitions and ideals must come from the unceasing activity of a mind seeking after the better things of life. This activity is governed by man's motives and desires to the extent that he acknowledges himself overshadowed by an all-prevading personality which urges him forward at every turn. This is the corner stone of man's religious structure. Here is also the beginning of a progressive development in Browning's conception of Deity which kept unfolding until it blossomed into a full-blown flower of faith. The fully developed
flower did not come until Browning was well past middle age, but there is a golden thread of its development running through his literary works which cannot but be obvious to the reader. The climax comes in Easter-Day when the poet pictures Christ as revealing himself to the soul:

"Then did the form expand, expand -
I knew him through the dread disguise
As the whole God within His eyes
Embraced me."

Such a belief coming after years of development could have but one result. The early influence of "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poem" was discarded. The doubtings of Shelley and Rousseau were cast aside like a threadbare garment and Browning's highest conception of God was revealed to the world in all its singular beauty and power.

Having solved the problem of the Being or the Personality of God, Browning was now ready to take an additional step in his philosophy. He had, prior to this stage in his development, been inclined to question the wisdom of Jehovah in the creation of good and evil. But his conception of God as having a progressing personality was the means of opening the avenues of his soul to a
knowledge of good and evil as contrasts used to teach the value of morals and ethics. Heat and cold, darkness and light, love and hate, good and evil - all are easily explained by the inevitable function of natural law applied to the physical and spiritual realms alike. The way was thus opened for man to satisfy his quest for the highest good in life. The sacredness of individuality as taught by Jesus had sprung up in the rich soil of Robert Browning's soul and was beginning to bear fruit "mete for the Master's Kingdom." Evil, therefore, is the opposite element of good which in itself serves as an aid to man's power of selecting the good of life. God might destroy evil if he so desired. It is not that he is unable to do so. His plan is, however, to permit its existence in order that man may develop his highest talent which is the ability to choose the better part. This important development of Browning's teaching is invaluable in its office as a reinforcement of the ideas of both the Old and New Testaments on the subject. In Abt Vogler he sets forth his belief in these words:
"There shall never be one lost good!
What was shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence
implying sound;
What was good shall be good, with, for
evil so much good more;
On the earth the broken arcs; in the
heaven a perfect round."

It can now be asserted that Browning's belief was neither sectarian nor professional. He had a vital faith and he meant to express that faith in his poems. His "best men and women" may be said to be but a self-revelation of his own ideas in regard to belief in God. His mother was a Dissenter and Browning was brought up in an atmosphere of a faith so deep that the world, the flesh, and the devil could not quench his spiritual ardor. But he had no place for dogmatism in his interpretation of religious principles. His belief was based upon the religion of logic and was in sympathy with the progress of science. He did not accept the more radical teachings of Darwin but was impressed with the logic of evolution. To his mind there is no other method quite so reasonable as that which pictures God as revealing himself
gradually to men. This is satisfactory and is to be defended. But one thing much in evidence from Browning's poetry is that he is not in sympathy with any formality of ritualism. For this sin he does not spare Romanism a scourging of which The Ring and the Book is the best known example. Here the poet condemns not only ritualism but decries the cheapening of forgiveness in the confessional, scorns the claims to miracles on the part of the priesthood, derides their profession of church unity by cataloguing the petty hatreds of their monks and bishops, and bemoans their worldliness and lack of spirituality. In spite of his condemnation of these tendencies in Roman Catholicism we find that he is equally harsh in dealing with dogmatism or intolerance wherever he found it. Browning's faith may be defined, then, as a belief in the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. God does not change in essence and attributes, but our conception of him is continually undergoing modifications. The mind of man must continually change if he is to live up to his opportunities, and this change must affect his conception of Deity. Browning recognized this principle although he would not permit his
knowledge of logic and science to inflict injury upon himself. His own mind carried a complement of checks and balances which gave him an invaluable insight into the analysis of religious principles. As a result he also enjoyed a spiritual insight coming from familiarity with the revelation of God as contained in Scripture. This insight was a priceless asset when he came to record his emotions and he has thus given the world a new interpretation of Christianity in the form of poetry.

In addition to the negative elements of Browning's teaching concerning God there are also the positive elements. The first of these is that God is a Personal God of power. The power of God is an attribute of his by which he manifests himself to the world. The greatest demonstration of this power on the part of God comes from having given individuals freedom of personality. God could have made it inevitable for men to serve himself but instead he gave freedom of choice which man may abuse. The essential thing in life is the opportunity of choice which leads to determination of character. Moreover Browning's God is one of glorious nature whom men should worship gladly. The power which makes for righteousness in the world manifests itself in men. Man's nature is
thus a divine endowment with a power that rules his life "in the beauty of holiness." Browning's principle of power comes from his familiarity with the prophetic teachings of Isaiah and is expressed in the lines taken from Asolando:

"When there dawns a day,
If not on the homely earth,
Then yonder, worlds away,
Where the strange and new have birth,
And power comes full in play."

Furthermore Browning's imagination works in The Ring and the Book showing how the "weak things of God shall confound the things of the mighty." It is the weakness in a true faith which appeals to the better self thus helping man to find that strength rests in its imploring appeal to the heart. The poet has given this principle to the world in language based upon Paul's writings to the Corinthians:

"What but the weakness in a faith supplies
The incentive to humanity, no strength
Absolute, irresistible, comports!
How can man love but what he yearns
to help?"
And that which men think a weakness
within strength,
But angels know for strength and
stronger yet -
What were it else but the first things
made new,
But repetition of the miracle,
The divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends and aye begins for man?"

Another positive element in Robert Browning's religious teachings is that God is revealed to us through Jesus Christ. Doubt and unbelief are thus driven out of the life of a man who has seen Jesus and become acquainted with his teachings from the extracts given in the New Testament. His poems entitled Karshish and A Death in the Desert are attempts on the part of the poet to remove all grounds for doubt. He expresses in all his poems, which touch on the subject at all, his belief in the divinity of Jesus. Not a single trace of unbelief is to be found in any of Browning's great characters. This is bound to reflect the poet's own thoughts on the subject, and from every side Christ is pictured not only as a prophet and an exemplar, but as the divine Son of God.
St. John voices the belief of Browning in *A Death in the Desert* by saying:

"'Since love is everywhere
And since ourselves can love and would be loved,
We ourselves make the love, and Christ was not,' -
How shall ye help this man who knows himself,
That he must love and would be loved again,
Yet, owning his own love that proveth Christ,
Rejecteth Christ through very need of Him?"

God is thus revealed through Christ in such a manner as to shake the very foundations of doubt and unbelief. This doubt and unbelief is not an external force but is in the very heart of the church. The shaking might, therefore, serve a good purpose in breaking up the formal and conventional monotony of orthodoxy.

It is natural for Browning now to move forward to the third position which is that the soul of man is immortal. God is a personal Being
who is revealed to us through Jesus. He shows his power in making man a free moral agent, thus portraying the attributes of immortality. If God, then, is immortal, the soul of man must be immortal because of our belief in God. It must be acknowledged that Browning has not dealt with the doctrine of immortality with such care as have some other writers. This is true especially in comparison with Wordsworth and Goethe. This fact may be explained by saying that Browning took it for granted that his belief is accepted by most men. He thus presupposes the fact and starts with the immortality of the individual. There are, however, two natures in man, the individual and the universal. From the individual side man considers the world as his own. From the universal side he regards himself as a unit in that world. Individual freedom is the greatest possession of man and through it he possesses a divine spark which kindles into an unquenchable fire. It is thus natural for Browning to ask in Rabbi Ben Ezra:

"Thy body at its best,

How far can that project thy soul on its lone way?"
Having dealt somewhat in detail with Browning's idea of God as developed from his interpretation of Biblical material, the next principle to be considered in his idea of ethical relationships coming from the same source. Here again the poet deals with the individual. Browning realizes that man owes his neighbor due consideration. He thus lays emphasis upon the teaching of Jesus on the subject of neighborliness. "Who is thy neighbor?" asks the humble Carpenter, and the question is reiterated in all of Browning's works. The consciousness of a mixture of German, Scotch, English, and Spanish-Creole in his own blood may have caused Browning to ignore racial characteristics. Yet he realized that various types of individuals are inevitable in society, and has given an interesting study of comparisons in Caliban and Guido. Here is the monster both from the angle of one mentally deficient and one morally deficient. Both must be provided for if we are to "love our neighbor as ourself."

On the other hand Browning pictures it as an easy task to recognize the good and worthy in life. Moreover, the good in life is a manifestation of the power of God. Evil, then, serves
the purpose of emphasizing this tenet and helps
the individual to make a clear analysis of what
is good. Guido was thus created to give a tangible
image of evil at its worst. Here is a reversion
to the idea treated in a preceding paragraph by
which man contrasts good and evil in order that he
may be enabled to choose the better part. This is
life at its highest point of efficiency and is
described by the poet in Fifine at the Fair as a
"Yearning to dispense,
Each its own amount of gain thro' its own mode
Of practising with life."
The great task, then, is to see life not only par-
tially but to see it wholly. Browning was aware
of this and as a part of his outlook upon life
gave an interpretation of it second in power only
to that of the Apostle Paul.

Browning does not spend much time exhort-
ing citizens to be loyal to their nation. The
national element in ethics is subordinated to that
of individual morality. The poet is not worried
over the state of the nation but maintains the
position that national problems will care for them-
selves when individuals adopt the principles of
Christ's teachings. Here is no burdensome weight
of national tradition. He does not set for himself the task of compiling a book on the etiquette of nations but lays down one simple rule which, if followed faithfully, will cause any nation to become as a "city set on a hill" to lead other lands. This rule is taken bodily from the New Testament record of the sayings of Jesus and is called the first commandment. It is "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind;" then he added, "and thy neighbor as thyself."

Browning's doctrine of ethics and morals in a national sense is not his doctrine of international relationships. Browning's poems do not deal with nations so much as they deal with a universe and individual relations to it. The poet's attitude toward life has given him an interpretation of religion which sees God immanent in the universe. His immanence is to be found in universal elements and emotions rather than in the narrow confines of nationalism. Browning's teachings thus revert to the importance of individual personality as against society taken as a unit. He does not discount the propriety of national governments but simply regards them as a subordinate
interest in the lives of men, an interest which fosters religious instincts by teaching lessons of patriotism, obedience, and respect. A God who is worthy of the reverence which the soul of man affords is a God too great to exist for nations alone. He must be adequate to create, regulate, and control a universe if he is to command the love and worship of man. This is the "sumnum bonum" of Browning's faith. The universe is beauty and order, and it must be governed by a Being who has the elements of beauty and order. Motives which have their source in these elements are not the shallow things which the lazy sluggard calls life. In the poem _Fra Lippo Lippi_, then, Browning sees that,

"The world and life's too big to pass for a dream," and in _Saul_ he again voices his principle of life by saying,

"How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to employ All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy."

The question may come to him who is concerned with Browning's interpretation of international relationships, How is man to know this God
who rules the universe? The answer is that to know God, man must be able to see and interpret the beauty of the universe. Again the question arises, If this be true, why is the mental capacity of men so unequal? Surely God has dealt unjustly with his creatures because some more than others may more readily discern the things of God. Again Browning falls back on his theory of the freedom of human personality and says that while this power of discernment will never be perfect because man is imperfect, yet some are more perfectly developed than others due to different circumstances or hereditary traits. Man could not be otherwise and still enjoy moral freedom to choose for himself the good or evil part. God is, then, the only hope whereby man is to be harmonized with the world of beauty. Caliban cannot be harmonized to any sense of beauty for he has no power of choice. He must live his life "sprawling flat on his belly in the pit's much mire, ... eating not this month one little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape," because he is but an object in the hands of a capricious God, thus having no power to choose his own lot. A striking comparison this with the individual who is free to determine his own work in his
relationship to the universe of individuals. This freedom will ultimately clear the way for God to rule the universe. The doctrine is as old as the Hebrew Prophets: its ultimate attainment is set forth by Isaiah in that marvelous picture of the Golden Age when all nations are to be members of that spiritual union where "wolf and lamb shall dwell together, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them." There will be great travail of soul in bringing this reign of Christ upon earth. The light must necessarily be imperfect for it is as impossible to see in absolute light as it is in absolute darkness. But these imperfections in "Man-soul" must not discourage him to the stage of inactivity. He must understand that the ideal expressed is more to be desired than attained in Pippa's singing:

"God's in his heaven -
All's right with the world."

It is for man, therefore, to recognize that there are things that blind and deeds that require minute explanation. Browning voiced this recognition by saying:
"Clouds obscure -
But for which obscuration all were bright,
Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffered,
A cloud may soothe the eye made blind
by blaze -
Better the very clouds of heaven."

Browning has done much to influence Christianity by his ideas concerning the Person of God, and his principles formulated from a study of God's ethical relationships. His religious conception comes into full flower, however, when he enters the realm of God's love for the universe. This principle of love as it has developed from his religious teaching must be familiar to any one who poses as an authority in the field of religion. It is thus the first task of the student of Browning's religious and philosophical teachings to determine whether this principle is subjective or objective. The poet himself says that he deems it his task to find and show man the truth. That he succeeded in the task is beyond the shadow of a doubt. He gives the mediating links between experience and absolute truth which is the gist of philosophy. Browning starts, then, with the assumption that man is immortal. He also takes for
granted the two sides of man's nature, that of the individual and that of the universal. Looking at life from the standpoint of an individual Browning considers the universe as his own world and is broad enough to admit that every other man has the same rights as himself. From the universal side the individual is nothing more than a unit in that world which he inhabits. The poet is, therefore, both subjective and objective in his principle of love. He is subjective in that the individual eventually transcends the earth, and is objective in that he makes the individual, on the other hand, a part of the universe. The teaching of the New Testament is seen here as an outstanding influence in shaping Browning's thinking on the matter of man's relationship to God as determined by his principle of love.

It is almost superfluous now to assert that Robert Browning accepts God as the first principle of life. But for a better conception of the significance of the poet this statement cannot be made too often. He does accept God as the supreme arbiter of man's soul and in so doing makes the term synonymous with Love. The only abiding and unchanging element in existence is God, and God
is Truth or Love. This is the explanation of Browning's statement in Fifine at the Fair to the effect that "falsehood is change and truth is permanence." This makes God, or Love the master-key which unlocks the treasure chest wherein the pearls are contained. Browning himself had found this master-key through his own experiences of the faith in God which enabled him as stated in The Ring and the Book

"To go on trusting, namely, 'till faith

move

Mountains. And faith here made the mountains

move."

These experiences are set forth in pictures that are true to life. The world is thus enabled to detect Love as the permanent spiritual unity underlying changing circumstances. Furthermore his doctrine of Love gives his poems organic life due to the fact that Love is the basis of life itself.

There are two ways by which love manifests itself in the world. One of these is by power, and the other is by knowledge. Professor Bury holds to the theory in his book which he calls Browning's Philosophy that Love, or God is a verbal abstraction unless it is conscious. Its nature is to manifest
itself. Its modes of manifestation, therefore, are Power and Knowledge. Power is the method of Love's manifestation in nature. Knowledge is Love's recognition of itself through the medium of power. It is this knowledge which gives man faith to stand as it is stated in Christmas-Eve:

"...on his own stock
Of love and power as a pin-point rock,
And looks to God who ordained divorce
Of the rock from His boundless continent."

The foregoing statement of Browning's faith establishes Love and Knowledge as complementary. Knowledge is necessary to Love if God is to be conscious of himself. If the human soul does not recognize God it does not know the highest meaning of the word and has only half a truth. Perfect love should give a perfect knowledge of God if the human soul is to be able to choose the beautiful rather than the sordid. This explains the poet's statement in Paracelsus:

"I, you and God, can comprehend each other."

Man is wise because of his method of trial and failure. By training he thus becomes capable of making a selection of those elements which are for his welfare. Ideals are built up to include God
through this method for God ultimately becomes the ideal of every sincere man. The ideal relationship of God and man is, therefore, the subsequent outcome in which God is of course superior. God has now developed to such an extent in Browning's thinking that he is "over us, under us, round us, every side, a part of our very selves." Furthermore spiritual or mystical intuitions are unnecessary in order for man to reach him. God is to be found when man recognizes the identity of Thought and Being with Love and Knowledge.

Power and Knowledge are unavailing in giving a revelation of God, however, unless Love comes from a Human-Divine relationship upon which it is dependent. Some other method of approach must be had in order to provide an avenue by which man may reach God. This avenue of approach is Love, and it provides a common meeting place between the individual and Jehovah. Browning recognized this Human-Divine relationship, and in his treatment of the theme of Love there lies "a vital energy whose inspiring power we are yet destined to feel." The inner life of man is satisfied by this inspiration which is the office of religion after all, for among the things confronting the
soul, those of the inner life are the experiences which cry most loudly for a solution. Bishop Blougram emphasizes this idea by saying:

"There's power in me, and will to dominate
Which I must exercise, they hurt me else."

In the light of this doctrine man cannot escape the assumption that life is actuated by divine love in spite of all its limitations. This principle of Browning is the very essence of his religious teachings and opens the way for his acceptance of the divine element in Christ. Christ is the expression of a Father's love for his creation which has "fallen from the estate wherein it was created."

Christ is the instrument by which the individual interprets the natural world. Here is the secret of the poet's optimistic outlook upon life both in its relation to this world and in the world to come. This interpretation of the natural world as a basis for optimism is touched upon in the poem, Parlyings with Bernard de Mandeville:

"Man's fancy makes the fault!
Man, with the narrow mind, must cram inside
His finite God's infinitude, - earth's vault
He bids comprise the heavenly far and wide,
Since Man may claim a right to understand
What passes understanding."
The emphasis which Browning puts on his treatment of the principle of Love is an important phase of his religious interests. Browning is preeminently the poet of Love because he finds in this attribute the constructive element of life. He thus makes Love necessary to the spiritual development of man. Here again he falls back upon the teaching of the New Testament which offers the Incarnation as an evidence of the love of God.

Jesus was well aware that evil in the world creates a moral problem that is baffling. But he came to teach men above all things else the love of God. William Lyons Phelps in his essay on Browning and Christianity says:

"As a moral teacher, as a guide to life, he was remarkable and impressive. But there have been other great moral teachers and men who have believed that goodness was the strongest force in the world. The essential thing about the Founder of Christianity is not his moral precepts, but his assertion that he was the living manifestation of God - and that God is the concrete name for Love."

Browning sees this manifestation as a reasonable principle of faith and makes love a part of reason,
both uniting for order and growth. The student of Browning cannot fail to be impressed with this rugged faith as compared with the hazy "somehow" of Tennyson, and he is encouraged by the assurance that no element in life will be rejected on the part of God. Tennyson is groping in darkness before a manifestation of Divine Power which he cannot understand. This gives place in his *In Memoriam* to a questioning of Providence which is absent in Browning's optimistic faith. Browning's power is more clearly shown in this optimistic treatment of Love than in any other element of his poetry. The very freshness of his insight and inspiration is a mark in his favor when his writings are placed alongside of the works of his contemporaries. This later freshness of insight and inspiration shows a clear-cut progression from the early position that a rivalry exists between love and knowledge. His later works see in the element of love the most valuable asset to man's character in that it rids the mind of the jelly-fish attitude that life is a mistake. It is one big opportunity, one splendid effort, one superb challenge to put all that one possesses into it because "the soul stung to strength through weakness, strives for good through
evil." This is wholesome doctrine.

Browning also places emphasis upon the quality of love because of its moral and religious value. There is something of the evangelistic note in his appeal for man to regard love as a thing so divine as to be the sole agent for goodness in the midst of corrupt sensuality. The individual, moreover, who possesses this quality will, perforce, be familiar with opposition and struggle. His warfare, on the contrary, will contain the "oil of gladness" for it is by these factors that progressive development comes. This is the poet's way of expressing his approval of the Darwinian theory of "the survival of the fittest." He sees an analogy between spiritual and physical development in that spiritual faculties as well as physical organs must be put to proper use. Thus the development of human virtues comes from effort and patience under all circumstances. Man must struggle with ignorance, infirmity, and temptation if he is to attain wisdom and spiritual perfection. Character comes at a cost of years of toil, watchfulness, and self-government. This is exemplified in the rare beauty of the orchid, coming through its struggle for existence in cross-polinisation, this being
typical of man's own noble qualities coming as a result of his struggle with evil. This struggle means a giving of self and retention of nothing. Moreover, it is educative and through the faculty of intellect man is taught to love. Browning is very emphatic in his belief that it is impossible to love without first having an intellectual capacity capable of grasping the full significance of Love in its synonymous relation with God. This principle fully opens the way for his confession made in Paracelsus:

"God! Thou art Love! I build my faith on that."

Having made the confession that "God is Love" Browning is now ready to deal with the problem of creation. He is ready to defend the final formula of his hypothesis which holds that love is not only present in God as creative and redeeming power and in man as the highest motive and energy of moral life, but it is expressed in a material universe. This idea is more briefly stated by saying that creation is the outcome of the pulsation of a Divine Heart which desired something upon which to lavish its affection. Having decided upon the act of creation Love was concerned with what he could accomplish thus becoming the source of law
and beauty. This principle applies also to the spiritual realm in that there is a coordination of natural law and beauty with spiritual grace and truth. The poet is groping for the same analysis of a natural law in a spiritual world which Henry Drummond made in his book bearing that title. Here Love of God is seen as an all-powerful good and nothing exists which does not reflect it in some measure. "The beauty of holiness" is the most powerful reflector of divine goodness just as a costly bevel-plate mirror reflects almost perfectly the rays of the sun. Nevertheless any evil which involves moral and ethical values throws back a gleam which may be valuable in revealing to man the pitfalls to be avoided on the climb to God. Man must not, therefore, neglect any detail which may prove of value to him in thus making this discovery. Browning preaches a doctrine of spiritual values here by his recognition of the importance of the worm as compared with the lion and the mammoth. Nothing in the economy of God's creation is insignificant either in the realm of the spiritual or that of the physical. Man's mental development thus depends upon a number of circumstances likely to be overlooked. In the
final analysis, then, whether he succeeds or whether he fails depends upon what he makes of his own life. Browning always insists upon a careful weighing of these trifles and realizes that the love of God justifies him in saying in The Ring and the Book:

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

In this faith Browning lived, and wrote, and loved; in this belief he worshipped, and wondered, and died; but his principles will live forever in that noble expression taken from his Epilogue to Asolando in which he said:

"One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted,
wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake."

In this principle man too must find his own spiritual
salvation in order that he also may bear fruit mete for the Master's Kingdom.

The writer has faced the task in the thesis of showing wherein the Bible and its teachings have shaped the thinking of Robert Browning. The events in the life of the poet are first recorded especially in their relation to the formation of his religion and philosophy. Then the teachings of the man Browning are considered in order that it might be shown in particular just how the Biblical material moulded his philosophy of life. It now remains to summarize the material in order that the subject-matter as a whole may be visualized, and to add a few conclusions which have come as a result of such a study.

Robert Browning's entire life reflected his early training and the influence of his mother's religious thinking. She instilled in his mind a devotion and a reverence which never left him in later years. Her method of requiring the boy to memorize passages from the Bible steeped his mind in the diction, style, and material contained in the Bible. This served to shape in a large measure his later poetic genius. Then, too, his life afforded personal contacts which he was unable to
shake off. One of these was his acquaintance with Shelley and the influence which that poet had on the mind of Browning culminating in *Pauline* and other poems. The most powerful force in the life of the poet was his courtship with Elizabeth Barrett and their subsequent marriage. She became his inspiration for fifteen years at which time his poetic powers were never greater. Her delicate health forced them to live for the most part in Italy where he came under the influence of the romance of that country. Mrs. Browning's death left him groping in sorrow for some anchor for his faith and he found it in the son left as the fruit of their happiness. His later life proved less powerful in its poetic triumph and his death came after a long period of productivity.

Three principles of Browning's religious faith as formulated from his acquaintance with the Bible are to be found in the exposition. In the first place he shows a clear-cut development of the idea of God. Negatively, God did not mean, in Browning's thinking, a metaphysical abstraction in which ungoverned force is his only attribute. Such an attribute would make him an impersonal Being and impersonality cannot appeal to man's personal ambitions and motives. This development brought
about the emancipation of Browning from the influence of Shelley and Rousseau. Then, too, the poet gave as the explanation of the problem of good and evil the principle that God is not the author of evil but that it exists to teach the value of morals and ethics. It aids man, therefore, in his quest for the highest good in life for he is enabled by his knowledge of evil to choose good in preference to it. Browning also saw God as unchanging but held that man's ideas of him are changing all the time thus clearing the way for an acceptance of science. Positively Browning held that God is a personal God of power, who is revealed to us through Jesus. Moreover, doubt and unbelief are driven from the heart by a vision of Christ, and Karshish is an attempt to remove the sources of doubt. Furthermore, God is immortal, a fact which makes man immortal because of his belief in God.

In the second place Browning gave a distinct evaluation of the ethical relationships, this also coming from his knowledge of the Bible. He saw the worth of the individual but at the same time he recognized man's duty to his neighbor. He held also that the good in a man's life is a manifestation of the power of God. Evil thus assists
this power by giving a clearer understanding of good. In his emphasis on the sacredness of human values Browning thus subordinated national ethics to individual morality, saying that nations will make progress when individuals adopt the teachings of Jesus as contained in the command to "love thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." Browning's principles of international relationships deal with a universe rather than with nations. God is immanent in the universe, bringing to it order and beauty. In this universe good is ultimately to rule because God is working to bring about harmony between man and the world of law and beauty.

In the third place Browning held that the principle of Love is the outstanding element in the realm of religion and he treats the principle both objectively and subjectively in that he recognized both the individual and the universe as primary. He made Love and God synonymous because the only abiding and unchangeable thing is God, Love, or Truth. Love enables man to open the heart of the world and is manifested by power and knowledge. There is also unity between the Divine and the human coming from the conciliatory principle of love, and
life is inspired by it in spite of limitations. Love is the constructive element in Man's intellect because it is also a part of his reasoning power. It thus becomes the highest element in the development of character. This is due to its moral and religious quality and the one who has learned the secret of love is capable of saying that he knows God. His knowledge, then, leads him to place his life in God's hands in a surrender of himself which withholds nothing. Love, therefore, becomes the motive for a divine creation which brings to earth all sense of law and beauty thus overshadowing evil and reflecting light which helps man in his climb to God.

One cannot escape the conclusion that Robert Browning is a theologian as well as a poet. As a theologian his influence is felt not in a theological sense but in its power to mould the lives of men into conformity to the will of God. This power comes from his intense earnestness, his optimism, and his keen sense of humour in picturing the characters who represent his convictions. He failed to make a proper distinction between pantheistic and Christian morality but this may be due to the fact that he was more vitally concerned with
his self-imposed task of presenting God as the principle of Love than he was in arguing the validity of the claims of Jesus. He also weakened his religious teachings by discounting human knowledge in favor of human love. He holds that a man ought to be able to maintain his faith in God in spite of human knowledge rather than on account of it. Man fails because his intellect is weak, but the sin is not in the weakness manifested but in the weakening of his power to love. These weaknesses are minor in their importance to the entire contribution of Browning not only as a religious and philosophical teacher but also as a poet. Thus, in the language of one of his critics it may be said:

"We love him for his great thoughts, his high enthusiasms, for his faith in God and man and woman....We thank him for the comfort and strength he has given us. We know that he has enriched our sympathies, cheered us under failures and disappointments, and helped us to understand the meaning of life."

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