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# Robert Browning as a religious teacher

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ROBERT BROWNING  
AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

1916

THESIS FOR GRADUATION

HARRY M. FISHEL.

Robert Browning as a Religious Teacher.

Bibliography.

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The following poems of Browning.

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## ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

### His Life.

To understand a great man in any measure we must know something of his life as well as his works. The life of Robert Browning is full of interest, not in a public way, for he was not in public life except indirectly, but because his life helps us to understand his poetry.

In accordance with a time-honored custom we will begin with the ancestry of Browning. His grandfather, also a Robert Browning, was a clerk in the Bank of England. At twenty he entered the bank and served it in many positions for fifty years. "He was an able energetic and worldly man; an Englishman very much of the provincial type." He possessed a handsome person and a strong constitution, living to the age of 84, but afflicted in his old age with gout. He saw very little of his grandchildren, the poet and his sister, perhaps because as we are told, he dreaded the lively boy's vicinity to his afflicted foot. He married a Miss Seymour, a Creole, who was born in the West Indies, and from this union three children were born, Robert, the poet's father, a daughter, and another son who died in infancy. The mother died also when the eldest boy was only seven. This boy, the poet's father, fell under the displeasure of his step-mother, a hard woman who managed Mr. Browning in the way which has become proverbial with step-mothers. In many ways she made life unpleasant for her step-son; when he wanted to go to the University he was forbidden although he was willing to pay his own way out of money left him by his mother. An ambition to be an artist was also frustrated by his father. Something of the poet's moral fiber is seen in his father who was given a lucrative position about this time on one of the West India islands but gave it up in disgust with the slavery system there. He was later given a position in the Bank of England and remained there until his retirement in 1853. He was not at all inclined to bank work but it was the only thing open to him. He was married in 1811 to a Miss

Wiedemann and settled down in Camberwell where Robert Browning was born in 1812, and his sister in 1814.

The mother of the poet was the daughter of a German ship-owner who had settled in Dundee and taken a Scottish wife. Carlyle said of her, "She was the true type of Scottish gentlewoman." Her character was summed up by Browning himself in the words, "She was a divine woman." She was a delicate woman and it is to her probably that the poet's nervous temperament is to be traced. Needless to say that the poet had a much happier boyhood than his father.

As a boy Browning was passionate, impatient, imaginative and quick to learn. His brilliant mental endowments were apparent early. His love for his mother and something of his own poetic nature are shown in an incident of his childhood. "His attendance at Miss Ready's school kept him from home from Monday until Saturday of every week; but when called upon to confront his first five days of banishment, he felt sure that he would not survive them. A leaden cistern belonging to the school had in or outside of it, the raised image of a face. He chose the cistern for his place of burial, and converted the face into his epitaph by passing his hand over and over it to a continuous chant of 'In memory of unhappy Browning'-- the ceremony being renewed in his spare moments till the acute stage of the feeling had passed away." (Browning by Mrs. Orr)

The boy Browning early became a great reader as his father also was. The house was crammed with books and he had no difficulty in finding suitable material. His father directed his reading and as the elder Browning was a great lover of poetry, the boy secured a good knowledge of the best English poetry. We are told that he was passionately fond of Byron at this early period. Later he was greatly influenced by Shelley and to some extent by Keats. His education was carried on at home during a great part of his life under his father's direction and was for the most part purely literary. He also had lessons in music, singing, dancing,

riding, boxing, fencing. He also had a French tutor for two years and during a term or more studied Greek at London University. His study of music seems to have been more prolonged than the others and was carried on under two masters. He wrote music for songs occasionally and delighted in singing. His love of music and knowledge of it are well shown in his Abt Vogler,-

"But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,  
 Existent behind all laws: that made them, and lo, they are!  
 And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,  
 That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but  
 a star.

Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is naught;  
 It is everywhere in the world- loud, soft, and all is said:  
 Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought,  
 And, there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow  
 the head!"

When Browning was eighteen he had obtained his father's consent to a literary career. Not only had he secured the paternal permission, but he had been assured of his father's support. How much that meant to him can be somewhat understood when we learn that Paracelsus and the volume "Bells and Pomegranates" were published at his father's expense, and never, strange to say, brought him any returns. We are told that with his decision to adopt literature as a profession, Browning read and digested the whole of Johnson's Dictionary.

"The whole of the boyhood and youth of Browning has as much of the quality of pure poetry as the boyhood and youth of Shelley. We do not find in it any trace of the analytical Browning who is believed in by learned ladies and gentlemen. How indeed would such sympathisers feel if informed that the first poems that Browning wrote, in a volume called "Incondita" were noticed to contain the fault of "Too much splendor of

language and too little wealth of thought." Macready, the actor, said of him "He looks and speaks more like a young poet than anyone I have ever seen." A picturesque tradition remains that Thomas Carlyle, riding out on one of his solitary gallops necessitated by his physical sufferings was stopped by one whom he described as a strangely beautiful youth, who poured out to him without preface or apology, his admiration for the great philosopher's works." (Robert Browning- by Chesterton)

After the appearance of "Pauline" came "Paracelsus" and with it Browning's introduction to the world of letters. It won him many friends among them being the celebrated critic, John Forster, who taking up the poem for the purpose of slating it became exceedingly curious concerning its author before he had closed the book. In 1840 Sordello was published. Its reception was altogether unique for no one professed to understand it sufficiently either to praise or blame it with any definiteness. This obscurity of course, is its condemnation. Carlyle said of it, that his wife had read it with great interest and would like to know whether Sordello was a man, a city, or a book. Tennyson said that the first line, - "Who would may hear Sordello's story told", and the last line, - "Who would has heard Sordello's story told" were the only lines in the poem that he understood and they were both lies. One of the best stories told concerning Sordello is that of a man who was recovering from an illness when he began to read Sordello. He had no sooner begun than he turned deadly pale and said to himself "My God! I'm an idiot. My health is restored but my mind is gone. I can't understand two consecutive lines of an English poem." Summoning his family he silently gave the book into their hands and asked them to read the poem. When he saw in their faces both astonishment and perplexity as they read, he sighed a great sigh of relief and fell asleep.

The cause of Browning's obscurity has been a subject of some debate. It has sometimes been laid to intellectual vanity, but such an

accusation is wide the mark. There is not the least evidence that Browning was intellectually proud. The best explanation of his obscurity, especially in this poem, 'Sordello', which was written when he was but twenty-four, is not intellectual vanity but rather humility. He thought his ideas were too obvious. They had become so clear to him that he did not realize the obscurity of his expression. As Chesterton says, "He was not a young pedant anxious to exaggerate his superiority before the public, but a hot-headed, strong-minded, inexperienced, and essentially humble man who had more ideas than he knew how to disentangle from each other." In this poem, he evidently expects the reader to know almost as much as he himself knew of one of the darkest and most shadowy periods of Italian history, - the period of the Guelph and Ghibelline struggles. This knowledge had come to him in such a perfectly natural way, through his father's interest in it, that he supposed it common property, and in this supposition he shows, as Chesterton says, "about as much literary egotism as an English baby shows when it talks English to an Italian organ-grinder."

Browning was one of those magnanimous souls who rejoice in the triumphs of others, though they be strangers. His spontaneous delight in the achievements of others took the form of an almost naive hero-worship. In this generous praise of the work of others, he became an admirer of the poetry of Elizabeth Barrett long before he made her acquaintance. She was a poet, as the world has since learned, of no little power. Chesterton says, "Her verse at its best was quite as strong as Browning's own, and very nearly as clever." Elizabeth Barrett was the daughter of Edward Moulton Barrett, who before coming to England had been a land-owner in the West Indies. Though capable of great affection, he was something of a despot in his own household, and made his daughters far from happy. He took a kind of melancholy delight in the invalidism of Elizabeth, who in her girlhood, had suffered an injury to her spine. In

spite of all this, she was high-spirited, courageous and even optimistic. Her chief fault was impatience. Chesterton says of her,—"Impetuosity, vividness, a certain absoluteness and urgency in her demands, marked her in the eyes of all who came in contact with her. In after years, when Browning had experimentally shaved off his beard, she told him with emphatic gestures that it must be grown again 'that minute'." Browning's acquaintance with her came through a friend of his father named Kenyon, whom Miss Barrett playfully called her fairy godfather. They met in 1845 and Browning soon after had fallen in love with her and proposed marriage. The attitude of the Barrett family on the subject of Elizabeth's marriage is illustrated by a characteristic letter of her's. "I will tell you what I once said in jest; if a prince of El Dorado should come with a pedigree of lineal descent from some signory in the moon in one hand and a ticket of good behavior from the nearest Independent chapel in the other, why even then, said my sister Arabell, it would not do. And she was right, we all agreed that she was right."

It was not strange that Browning's proposals were not treated seriously, when we learn that Miss Barrett's life was passed between a bed and a sofa. She was denied friends, was forbidden to move, and was not allowed even proper sunlight. Browning believed her condition was much better than was generally supposed, and felt that the tyranny of her father was responsible for many unnecessary restrictions. Her doctors unwittingly helped his suit when they declared that she should be sent to Italy. Her father refused. Browning pressed his suit and finally won. They were married without her father's knowledge or consent in September 1846 Marylebone, and after a short time left for Italy. Mrs. Browning's feats in Italy must have surprised the Barrett family and their medical advisers. She had hardly reached Italy before she was riding up hill and down dale on a donkey, which could hardly be called an easy mode of travel. These years in Italy filled with happiness and health for Mrs. Brown-

ing justify without doubt, the daring elopement which made them possible. This period was on the whole, a very fruitful one for the poet. "One event and one alone could really end this endless life of Italian Arcadia. That event happened on June 29th, 1861. Browning's wife died, stricken by the death of her sister, and almost as hard (it is a characteristic touch) by the death of Cavour. She died alone in the room with Browning. ----- He closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface." (Chesterton page 104)

"My Star" is generally believed to be Browning's poetic tribute to his wife.

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

Browning had by this time become famous, but his magnum opus had not yet appeared. One day in Italy sometime before the death of his wife, he picked up out of a heap of rubbish at a book stall, an old Latin record of an Italian criminal case, and from this record he later developed his great poem, - The Ring and the Book. After the death of Mrs. Browning he felt the need of something immense in its scope to keep his mind occupied, and began work on the poem, thinking as did Tennyson that

"For the unquiet heart and brain,  
 A use in measured language lies;  
 The sad mechanic exercise,  
 Like dull narcotics numbing pain."

In this poem, Browning has taken a sordid story of intrigue and murder and used it to reveal wondrous riches of divine goodness.

Browning was not, as he is often supposed to have been, an intellectual, nor did he consider himself such. His wife wrote a paradox of him, that his genius was the least important thing about him. He thought himself a strenuous, vigorous man. "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 aesthetic prigs who pay him the greatest honor." (Chesterton, p40) He was a somewhat voluble talker but had nothing of the air of literary or intellectual superiority. A kind of boyish humility characterised his conversation. He was anxious to be a man of the world, but he never quite succeeded. He was as Chesterton says, "too much a man of the universe to be a man of the world." His own contagious optimism, sturdy faith, and heroic courage are found in the lines taken from the latest of his poems, the Epilogue to Asolando.

"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.

"No, at noon-day in the bustle of man's work-time  
 Greet the undeen with a cheer!  
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,  
 'Strive and thrive!' cry 'Speed!- fight on, fare ever  
 There as here'".

His declining years were spent in Italy in the winter, in Lon-

don, in the summer. He was in Venice when his death came in 1889. He was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, the choir singing the poem of his wife, "He giveth his beloved sleep."

"Of all the thoughts of God that are  
Borne inward unto souls afar,  
Along the psalmist's music deep,  
Now tell me if there any is,  
For gift or grace surpassing this:  
'He giveth his beloved sleep.'"

## ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

### His Teaching concerning Faith.

Browning has well been called a prophet of these modern times in the great concerns of morality and religion. He is like the great prophets of old in that he frequently seems to be roused into utterance by the power of his convictions rather than by "the subtle incitements of the poetic sensibility". He is not a philosopher having an ordered system which is founded upon the iron rules of logic; he is intuitive in his work as a poet should be, but his intuitions are not fancies of the passing mood. Rather they are great intellectual foundations held with all the resources of reason and of feeling as well.

Although he is not a philosopher in having an ordered system, he is not inconsistent in the great convictions which he utters with sublime impressiveness. If he thinks that reason is not able to establish faith, he only puts himself in company with Kant and Fichte, who both base religion upon the moral consciousness. His philosophy is idealism and is rooted in the moral consciousness. Love is a fundamental explanation of the universe and in thinking so he does not shut his eyes to the great problem of evil. His teachings are not merely the results of optimism which thrives by ignoring the darker aspects of existence; he too has had his doubts,-

"Rather I prize the doubt

Low kinds exist without,

Finished and finite clods, untroubled by a spark."

Browning is not one of those who are ready to believe anything which comes with the earmarks of ecclesiastical authority. He holds that a faith which is worth anything must be fought for and then can be kept only by a battle.

"Then, welcome each rebuff

That turns earth's smoothness rough,

Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!

Be our joys three parts pain!

Strive, and hold cheap the strain;

Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

Browning was far from any form of intolerance in religious matters. He felt that the faith of the peasant who worshipped in a crude way and believed in crude things meant just as much to the great Master as his own faith. In all his poetry he is a true democrat and writes not for the learned few but for the many. It is surely a great misfortune that his style is so obscure in many places for he deserves to be read by the people who frequently have no knowledge of his work.

When the poet laments the failure of intelligence, he turns to the moral consciousness as the basis of faith. The victory of the good over the evil of the world is not to be proved by reason, it is to be found in the faith of the heart, and the demands of the moral nature. Perfect knowledge would leave no room for faith, and a world without evil would leave nothing for the moral nature of man to overcome. In holding to the failure of knowledge, Browning seems to be asking for the impossible, i.e. for absolute knowledge, and he does not see that he has entered the realm of abstractions, where all arguments are valueless. However, his appeal to the moral consciousness is instinctive and fundamental, for most of us will trust where we cannot see, and where there is any dispute as to the primacy of the heart or the head, we will unhesitatingly choose the heart.

Browning shows clearly the need of having some practical philosophy of life if we are to get the most out of life. He teaches that at every point in life we touch the Infinite. As Mrs. Browning writes,-

"The earth is cram'd with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God."

In Paracelsus we have a fine passage on the immanence of God,-

"Above birds fly in merry flocks, the lark  
 Soars up and up, shivering for very joy;  
 Afar the ocean sleeps; white fishing gulls  
 Flit where the strand is purple with its tribe  
 Of nested limpets; savage creatures seek  
 Their loves in wood and plain- and God renews  
 His ancient rapture. Thus He dwells in all,  
 From life's minute beginnings, up at last  
 To man- the consummation of this scheme  
 Of being, the completion of this sphere of life."

Browning's teaching echoes again and again the words of Paul "In Him we live and move and have our being." His poetry is frequently a bringing up into the clear light of the Divine of something which ordinarily is seen only as sordid or mean. For him consistency of life can only mean belief; atheism is inconsistent the minute there is a demand for action.

In Bishop Blougram's Apology we have "the case for belief" as Browning puts it in the mouth of a bishop of the Catholic Church. The bishop is not an admirable character but he at least has an admirable defence of the faith. And so we see life as it is, the gold mixed with the dross, the serious reasoning beneath a vein of humor. The Bishop is entertaining at dinner, Mr. Gigadibs, a literary man and a sceptic. When the supper is over, the Bishop immediately begins a religious discussion pertaining to faith. He seems to be angry with Gigadibs because of a magazine article which the latter has written but he restrains himself knowing that he has his man in his power. He begins: "So Mr. Gigadibs, you don't like the world as it is. Things might have been improved upon. There are too many hard and cruel things in life. Fires, earthquakes, flood and famine, what purpose do they serve? It is true that these things present a problem,- they are hard to understand. But have you considered that to re-arrange these things to suit you would mean to

re-arrange the universe itself. To change one thing we must needs change all, up to man himself. No, these things are the best surroundings for us. We need them to develop our soul's strength. It is idle to speculate upon what might be.

"The common problem, yours- mine, every one's  
Is- not to fancy what were fair in life,  
Provided it could be- but finding first  
What may be, then find how to make it fair  
Up to our means; a very different thing."

"To show more plainly what I mean. We all must cross the ocean of life. There is no choice in the matter. We are already on board ship when we are born. Each one has a certain amount of space and we must plan to utilize it well. What will you take? An India screen, a piano, a few sets of books, a marble bath, some pictures, and a few other odds and ends? You are informed that you have only six feet square. There is no use in talking, rules are rules. Besides if every one had *all these things* how many people could they carry? So you make the best of it and get along with a trunk or two filled with things which will add to your comfort. Well, it is even so with life. We found ourselves here without being consulted; the world was all arranged, so why fret and fume over things which we cannot change? Meanwhile we all know some things which we can and must do if we would have happiness in life."

"But you say you can't believe. Well I also will try not to believe. We'll throw our faith overboard and try unbelief. Now you agree to hold fixedly to unbelief; faith shall be banished. Ah, but can it be done? I think not. All we've gained is that faith, as unbelief before, shakes us by fits, confounds us like its predecessor.

"Just when we're safest, there's a sunset touch,  
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,  
A chorus-ending from Euripides-  
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears

As old and new at once as nature's self,  
 To rap and knock and enter in our soul,  
 Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring  
 Round the ancient Idol, on his base again,  
 The grand Perhaps!

-----  
 Once feel about and soon or late you hit  
 Some sense in which it might be after all,  
 Why not, "The Way, The Truth, The Life?"

Thus you see that doubt is not more sure than faith. Your unbelief is unsettled as often as my faith; all that can be gained by unbelief is a reversal of the procedure; instead of faith diversified by doubt, we have doubt diversified by faith. We called the chess-board white, now we call it black.

But Gigadibs is ready with a reply. "You confess that ~~that~~ there is as much reason for unbelief as for faith." "Ah no, that's where I have you, friend. You have forgotten that we must cross the ocean of this life. There is work to do, loads to lift and I need that attitude toward life which shall enable me the best to do my work in this busy workaday world. Belief brings out the best of me and bears me fruit in power, peace, pleasantness and length of days." "Faith is my waking life." Of course there is a place for sleep and dreams but the main thing with most of us is the awake life. We work, build, plan, study, make friends, and then we lie down and sleep and dream a little to refresh us for the morrow. "What's midnight doubt before the day-spring's faith?" Now you who disbelieve spend all your time in sleep and dreams, and "to be consistent you should keep your bed." In this way Browning points out that a man who does not believe is living to no purpose: He has no goal in life, he should welcome death as the consistent end of this dream of existence. We are reminded of Hamlet's soliloquy, "To be or not to be." Belief is thus pointed out to be not an empty

theory of life divorced from action and the everyday life, but a dynamic faith that vitalizes every purpose and ambition in life with the moral and spiritual life of God. There are many theories in life which do not matter much; they affect life little or not at all, but our theory of the beginning and end of all things, the great first cause and the final goal of all our striving, is not to be numbered among these empty beliefs.

Faith with Browning meant essentially the Christian faith. If one is going to believe he should believe the best, the fullest that can be. And so he asks in the words of the Bishop,-

"What think ye of Christ, friend? when all's done and said,

Like you this Christianity or not?

It may be false, but will you wish it true?

Has it your vote to be so, if it can?"

In a different poem, he says,

"the acknowledgement of God in Christ

Accepted by the reason, solves for thee

All questions in the earth and out of it."

Gigadibs cannot understand why faith is not easier. Why are there no unmistakable signs of God in the world? Blougram replies that what he wants is not faith but sight; besides "you don't know what you ask. Just as a man's body could not stand the agony of eyes without lids or a brain without a pan and exposed to the burning rays of the sun, so man could not live were he brought face to face with God. You would like to have lived back six hundred years when everyone believed; when a traveler returning from Palestine told how he had seen the ark lying on Mt. Ararat, but he did not go up to the top, for it was getting dark and besides, there were robbers about. The desire for an easy faith is "man's wonderful and wide mistake." God deals with us not in bundles but as individuals. "Ask thy lone soul what laws are plain to thee, thee and no other- stand or fall by them!" With arguments such as these the Bishop

silenced his skeptic and the last heard of him he was outward bound for Australia, where the Bishop hopes he would have time to read his St. John, and meditate in quiet upon the deep things of God.

Faith and its opposite, unbelief, are not, usually, purely intellectual. Rather they are personal; they arise within a man's life because of his whole experience or because of some particular experience. How frequently does the denial of God come from some hard experience in the life of man, when out of the darkness of his night he can see no light from Heaven. It may be he has utterly failed in some great desire of his life, it may be that the hand of Death has visited his home and taken one dearer to him than life itself. Perhaps the failure has been his own failure; the deep despair that follows in the path of sin and guilt, when rather than face the purity and holiness of a personal God, he tries to banish God from his world. In these crises of life, Browning comes with great power to guide the perplexed and defeated soul to God his Father. At such times we want, not words of lofty wisdom from some wretched comforter who means well but does not comprehend, rather, the golden silence of some dumb friend who follows blindly at our feet. The words we want at such times are the words which half reveal and half conceal the hard experiences which gave them birth; divine words wrung from the depths of the soul's despair; words, therefore, of deepest sympathy and healing. The waters from the poet's spring of hope forever flow, waters of life for the soul's health.

"My own hope is, a sun will pierce

The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;

That, after Last, returns the First,

Though a wide compass round be fetched;

That what began best, can't end worst,

Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst."

Just as the songs of home and country inspire soldiers who are away from their native soil, so the songs of Browning rouse the martial spirit of

those who are out upon a perilous march. He cheers the discouraged, he gives new hope to the faint and weary, he rebukes the cowardly by his own heroism, he has contempt for those who can be reached in no other way. Up to the last he is ever a fighter. When the last great enemy, -Death, appears; he thinks not of the possible terror, but of the splendid things in the life that is past, and of the even greater things of the future. life with God.

"Fear death"-to feel the fog in my throat,

The mist in my face,

When the snows begin, and the blasts denote

I am nearing the place,  
-----

I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,

And bade me creep past.

No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers

The heroes of old,

Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears

Of pain, darkness and cold.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,

The black minute's at end,

And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,

Shall dwindle, shall blend,

Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,

Then a light, then thy breast,

O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,

And with God be the rest!"

## ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

### His Teaching concerning Conversion.

With every re-birth of Spring, earth's ever recurring miracle of life, we feel the power of the Divine forces in our old world.

"Every clod feels a stir of might,

An instinct within it that reaches and towers,

And, groping blindly above it for light,

Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers."

(Vision of Sir Launfal)

In response to the call of the Sun in his might, plant and flower and tree, bird and beast and man throw off the dead garment of winter and come forth into the sunlight of God's new world. This has long been a symbol of the winter of sin and despair which is broken up by the light and power of God within and without the soul of man. In some such way Browning loves to picture the conversion of the soul. He shows us all the climates of the inner life of sin and evil, from the mild winter of some secret sin to the severe Arctic winter of cold and relentless cruelty. And in each case he shows us how the power of the Sun of Love and Righteousness bursts the bands of sin's hardness and frigidity and the soul comes forth in newness of life and power.

As we read the newspapers and much of the current literature, we see a certain spirit implied and expressed, which shows the drift of much of the thinking of the age,- a fatal drift toward a materialistic view, better called perhaps, a Mammonistic view of life. The philosophical materialism of a past generation has reached the level of the common thinking and is bearing its fruits of indifference and agnosticism toward the things of God. Men say, "Why bother about things of which we know nothing? Why not take the world as we see it? It doesn't pay to give time to religion. While a man is giving time to it, someone is getting ahead of him in the race for success. Better stick to business and

leave religion for someone else. It's money that counts in this world. 'Take the cash and let the credit go.' Besides these religious people are so finicky about how a man makes his money. The laws aren't good enough for them. Etc." This sort of philosophy, common enough in any age, seems especially prevalent just now. With our advancement along material lines has come a kind of worship of these things. Robert Browning saw clearly the outcome of this sort of thinking and the effect it was having upon his time, and used the great resources of his mind and heart to stem the tide. He continually points out as did Paul that these things are not to be compared with the glories which shall be revealed in us; that the riches of this world are pitiably small when set along side of the unsearchable riches of Christ. He saw that "the world is too much with us; that getting and spending we lay waste our powers." His philosophy of life would permit of no materialistic principles of action; all life must spring from the great love-principle upon which the whole creation is founded. Not self but service, not possessions but the passion for true life in God. He says in "Cristina",-

"Oh, we're sunk enough here God knows!

But not quite so sunk that moments

Sure tho seldom are denied us,

When the spirit's true endowments

Stand out plainly from its false ones,

And apprise it, if pursuing

Or the right way, or the wrong way

To its triumph or undoing.

There are flashes struck from midnights,

There are fire-flames noon-days kindle,

Whereby piled-up honors perish,

Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,

While just this or that poor impulse,  
 Which for once had play unstifled,  
 Seems the whole work of a life-time,  
 That away the rest have trifled."

I must confess that as I read these lines I am reminded of nothing so much as the ninth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, where we read of one who, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, went with authority from the chief priests to a work of persecution. And as he journeyed, suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven and he fell to the earth, crying, "Who art thou, Lord?" And, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Trembling and astonished, he was led into the city of the friends of God, for he was blinded by the great Light. Just as Saul of Tarsus saw in the great Light from heaven the wickedness of his own heart and the futility of his evil ways, so Browning pictures the crumbling of the structure of sin and selfishness through the soul-shakings of the Almighty.

Those who emphasize <sup>only</sup> the slow growth of character and insist that the moral life is continuous, stressing the facts of heredity and the laws of nature and human nature, will not appreciate the suddenness of Browning's delineations of conversion. It is a veritable leap of the soul to God. The trouble with much of the thinking spoken of above is that it reduces the poetry of life to dull prose. God, instead of being our loving heavenly Father, becomes an impersonal Energy behind the machinery of this world, or at best he becomes an empty Ego and we must needs apologize for speaking too familiarly of Him. Browning not only thought about God but he also allowed himself to feel about God, nor was he ashamed to confess that sometimes his feelings about God lifted him above the self he had formerly been.

"In man's self arise,  
 August anticipations, symbols, types,

Of a dim splendour, ever on before,  
In that eternal circle run by life."

These are the truths as Wordsworth says, which,

"Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make  
Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,  
To perish never"

It may be that in crossing one of the dreary moors of life, an eagle's feather from the blue of God's heaven falls at our feet, which forever hallows that spot for us.

"I crossed a moor with a name of its own,  
And a certain use in the world no doubt;  
Yet a hand's breadth of it shines alone  
'Mid the blank miles round about;

For there I picked up on the heather,  
And there I put inside my breast  
A moulted feather, an eagle feather!  
Well, I forget the rest."

God may touch a man at any time, even in the midst of the most trivial and commonplace things, and thereafter he can never be the same. In Bishop Blougram's Apology, we have the picture of an actor who played the part of Death, ~~and~~ who when retiring to the dressing room was touched by Death himself. And Browning says,-

"Thus God might touch a Pope  
At unawares, ask what his baubles mean,  
And whose part he presumed to play just now.  
Best be yourself, imperial, plain, and true."

When God touches us we see the things of life that He has touched at their true worth, the false stand out plainly from the true in the clear light of His countenance.

It is, of course, always possible that a man will refuse to obey the heavenly vision. Like the rich young ruler, he may turn away because the choice would be unprofitable; he prefers this world's goods. In the poem, *The Lost Leader*, Browning shows his thought of those who turn away from their high calling.

"Just for a handful of silver he left us,  
 Just for a ribband to stick in his coat-  
 Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,  
 Lost all the others, she lets us devote;  
 -----  
 We shall march prospering, - not thro his presence;  
 Songs may inspirit us, - not from his lyre;  
 Deeds will be done, - while he boasts his quiescence,  
 Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire."

In the poem, *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, he is filled with sorrow for the gay and thoughtless company who idle away their time while Galuppi is playing music that should awake their souls to better things.

"Then they left you for their pleasure; till in due time, one  
 by one,  
 Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well  
 undone,  
 Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the  
 sun."

Browning points out again and again this failure to follow the leading of the soul's inner voice. He knows how the sounds of this world drown the celestial harmonies; he knows the pitfalls and hidden temptations that insidiously entrap the unwary. The lure of ease and comfort is the downfall of Chiappino in *A Soul's Tragedy*. His good resolutions for the reform of existing evil in the political conditions of his native city, are soon "sicklied o'er with a pale cast of thought" in the midst of his unaccustomed comforts and power. There <sup>are</sup> ~~is~~ also the scorn and reproaches

of the world which cause many to sink to the rear and choose the pleasures of sin for a season, rather than bear the hardships of the life of spiritual conflict. But if there are times when the seed falls upon hard and stony ground or among the thorns, which spring up and choke the growing life, there are also times when it falls upon good ground and bears blessed fruitage. If there are times when the light fails to pierce the fog and gloom and darkness of sin, there are also those times when the darkness of the night of sin is quickly dispelled and the light of God floods the soul, If there are defeats, there are also glorious victories.

The reason for these times of vision when the soul of man gains a view of things eternal, is to be found in the fundamental relationship of God to man. He hath created man in His own image and likeness; this Browning holds to in spite of the contentions of unbelievers that man creates God in his image. His is the will to believe because belief increases the joys and the strength of life. In Bishop Blougram's Apology he says,-

"Friends,

I absolutely and peremptorily

Believe!- I say, faith is my waking life."

He teaches that the soul, however imprisoned it may be by the accumulated weight of wrong and sin, may be freed by the light and power of God within and without the life. The main thing is to give the Divine power access to the life within. In many ways the light of God may reach the soul of the Prodigal; a letter from the old home; hallowed associations fragrant with the memories of those we love may be suggested by the face of a stranger, the sight of a flower, or the song of a child. God uses many means to touch man in his need.

In the exquisite poem called Pippa Passes, Browning tells how God used the song of a girl to reach the lives of four who sadly needed His truth and life. Pippa, a little Italian peasant girl,- an orphan,

sets out one morning to spend her one holiday, - New Year's Day, strolling in the sunshine and singing her songs of joy and cheer. She passed the great house of Ottima, where she with Sebald, her paramour, have just arisen. Sebald's conscience has stirred within him as he looks out upon the world in the beauty of the morning; but his tempter is too near, and he is about to yield again to evil, when Pippa passes, singing, -

"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."

And so singing she passed on, but her song remained and sang itself into the heart of guilty Sebald. "God's in His heaven!" he muttered, "Do you hear that, Ottima?" Suddenly his whole past life of sin appears before him in ghastly outline and he hates it all. And in that moment of vision of holy things, he kills himself. His last words are that he feels a hurrying down within him, "as of waters loosened to smother up some ghastly pit; whirls from a black fiery sea!" God had come into his life and all foulness was poured out. He was saved from evil even at death.

"That little peasant's voice  
Has righted all again; though I be lost,  
I know which is the better never fear,  
Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,  
Nature or trick!"

Pippa passes on in her ministry of song and goes before the window of Jules, a young artist. He has been cruelly deceived by enemies and is on the point of throwing up his life-work as a sculptor and with it his ideals of life, when he hears Pippa singing. Her song becomes a message of God to him and he recalls his resolve, and remains true to himself and to God. Next Pippa passes the tower of Luigi, an Italian patriot who had embarked upon the venture of freeing his beloved Italy

from the Austrian oppressor. His mother, in what may be pardonable selfishness, is trying to turn him aside from his great enterprise. She speaks of one whom he has loved for long years--he is about to delay, as he allows himself to picture the joy of his own home-- and just then he hears the voice of Pippa singing. "'Tis God's voice calls; how could I stay? Farewell!" With these words he casts aside his hesitation and hurries out and away upon his great undertaking. Finally, late at night, she went by the windows of the bishop who at that moment was considering a terrible partnership in crime. Her song, wafted through his windows on the night air, stopped him and caused him to cry out to his servants to come to his aid. "Gag this villain who tempts me, and remove him quick. Miserere mei, Domine!" So it was, that Pippa all unknowing, carried the forgiveness and love of God into four lives, where He was all but unknown. God grant that the miracle of her unconscious ministry may be enacted many times in the world of life!

In "An Epistle" of Karshish, an Arab physician, to his friend and master, Abib, we have the story of Lazarus and the profound impression which it produced upon the sceptical medical man. The physician, while traveling in Palestine, came to the town of Bethany and there met Lazarus, who, being interviewed, told him of his death and life again through the power of the Nazarene Physician. The character of Lazarus and his manner of life, together with the wondrous tale of the Christ, ~~tion~~ so affect Karshish that he cannot get away from them. He apologizes to Abib for his superstitious consideration of such a case and tries to dismiss it as a case of mania induced by epilepsy. After he has finished his letter and said farewell, he adds this postscript;--

"Thé: very God! think, Abib, dost thou think?

So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too--

So, through the thunder comes a human voice

Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!"

Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!

Thou hast no power nor may'st conceive of mine:

But love I gave thee, with myself to love,

And thou must love me who have died for thee!

The madman saith He said so: it is strange."

It is the old, old story of God's love in Christ, of the Divine sacrifice on Calvary, that arrests the attention and fascinates the imagination of all men in all ages.

ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER,

His Optimism.

From the earliest times, men have attempted to justify the ways of God to man. Pain and suffering and all the woe of sin and evil have been known from the beginning. Reflection upon life with all its burdens and sorrows has led many a man to curse the day when he was born. Many a sufferer like Job has had to bear not only the unintelligible weight of woe, but also the reproaches of the sanctimonious. The intellectual problem of evil is no doubt important, but it appears small when seen beside some definite personal problem. The burden of evil can never be very acute when thought of in a general way; the real weight rests upon some person. And if ever a man needs faith, it is when some great woe has overtaken him and with its weight has crushed him to the ground. He can be saved if only he numbers among his resources that which is the substance of hope.

"I falter where I firmly trod,  
And falling with my weight of cares  
Upon the great world's altar -stairs  
That slope thro' darkness up to God,  
  
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
And gather dust and chaff, and call  
To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope."

(In Memoriam)

It would be hard to find among poets or philosophers one who teaches us better than Browning how to transmute the evils of life into the gold of character. However dark our outlook, he assures us that "a wind will come and cleanse our sky." Browning's faith, furthermore, is not nourished in solitude, away from contact with the harsh and cruel things of life. He has seen life face to face and yet has heard above

its tumult the still small voice of conscience and of God. He shows us that he too has seen and felt the pain that is in the world. He has seen the relentless rule of force in nature; he knew the terrible toll of life which wars and earthquakes and famines have always taken; he knew of man's inhumanity to man, of brutal cruelty and satanic treachery. He has experienced those moods of gloom and despair which envelop the soul and take from life its youthful joyousness and freshness. But he never allowed doubt to benumb his simple faith in the goodness of God and of his world. His words ring like the Psalmist's, - "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men." He would have been willing to admit that there are many things hard to understand, if indeed they can be understood. But though we see here through a glass darkly, we believe that we shall know as we are known.

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,  
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,  
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;  
Enough that He heard it once: we shall hear it by-and-by."

Browning believes thoroughly that his view of life, which is essentially the Christian view of life, will dispose of all difficulties. He is sure, -

"That he, the Eternal First and Last,  
Who, in His power, had so surpassed  
All man conceives of what is might, -  
Whose wisdom, too, showed infinite,  
- Would prove as infinitely good;  
Would never, (my soul understood,)  
With power to work all love desires,  
Bestow e'en less than man requires."

It is because of the certainty of his faith in the ultimate triumph of

the good, that Browning depicts the worst there is in life. He loves to bring the good out of evil, and to show that even the evil may fit in with God's great purposes for men. In the Ring and the Book, he gives us the story of an innocent and beautiful girl, Pompilia, who is entrapped by Guido, one of the most satanic characters in all literature. In a veritable Inferno, made so by the presence of Guido's brothers, his mistress, and his mother, who are only less evil than he himself, Pompilia prays to Heaven for deliverance, and just in time there comes,-

"A bolt from heaven to cleave roof and clear place,

----- then flood;

And purify the scene with outside day-

Which yet, in the absolute drench of dark,

Ne'er wants its witness, some stray beauty-beam

To the despair of hell."

Browning shows the necessity for evil in the world if we are to know the good. We cannot become free, rational, and moral beings if there are not such things as bondage, ignorance, and evil. We are far from having attained the full stature of manhood or womanhood; we must ever press on toward the mark for the prize of our high calling in God. Life is development only made possible by the fact that there are things to overcome.

"And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence

For the fullness of the days? Have we withered or agonized?

Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue  
thence?

Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?"

We could not be "we" without the evil of the world. We should not know the beautiful but for the ugly; the virtue of forgiveness could not be attained were there no wrongs to forgive; love could not exist for us except we know hate also. The joys of moral achievement are possible because of defeats, and because the presence of evil makes conflict nec-

essary.

In Rabbi ben Ezra, Browning shows us his attitude toward the hard things of life,- those things which make us question the wisdom and the love of the Creator. He takes the objection that we are just clay in the hands of the Potter who makes or breaks us at his will, and holds that the hard things of life which we would fain arrest, are,-

"Machinery just meant

To give thy soul its bent,

Try thee, and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed."

In the babble of opinions who shall arbitrate concerning the true meaning of life? There are those who counsel in the midst of merriment and with a jest at life,- "Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." What if the world does pass false judgment upon our work, call it worthless, and fling the jibe; what if "Time's wheel" does stop. "Potter and clay endure." We can take the fatalist's figure and wring from this evil also its quota of good. Is not a potter an intelligent personal being? Does he work without end or aim in making or breaking his designs? So, the great Potter is working to make something out of us. He desires "to amend what flaws may lurk." All instincts for the good that are immature, all purposes unsure, these swell a man's amount, though they are not counted by the weighmasters of this world. Why should we think only of what we are or have been? The potter thinks not only of the clay with which he works, but far more of the cup which he is turning out. So we are to turn our thoughts not down but up. Think of the cup and its possible uses! At the festal board of Heaven, the Master may take the cup which your earthly life has finished and perfected!

"Look not thou down but up

To uses of a cup,

The festal board, lamps flash and trumpet peal,

The new wine's foaming flow,

The Master's lips aglow!

"Thou heaven's consummate cup what needst thou with earth's wheel?"  
 We are all children in God's great school of life; we seek the education of the soul, or we should. Let us not then complain if there is chastisement, for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and if He chasten us not then are we not sons.

"Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith "A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

This idea of developement which Browning stresses is the key which unlocks the door of misunderstanding with regard to free-will. All life is an unfolding of human freedom. We begin life bound by ignorance, by instincts and moral taints due to heredity. Habits due to early environment fetter us. But as life goes on we gain freedom through moral conquest and knowledge. The truth makes us free. God purposes freedom for all, but freedom to have any worth must be gained by struggle. And so man by moral conflict wins his freedom just as a nation which takes to arms for the defence of its rights. This developement of the soul is not an easy process according to Browning. Knowledge does not always make virtue, at least not knowledge which is gained without conflict and struggle. It is not the growth which is exemplified in nature. It is the growth which is called out in a man by the battle with evil. He says in Bishop Blougram's Apology,-

"No, when the fight begins within himself,

A man's worth something. God stoops o'er his head,

Satan looks up between his feet,- both tug-

He's left, himself, i' the middle: the soul awakes

And grows. Prolong that battle through this life!

Never leave growing till the life to come."

Concerning the fate of those who persist in evil, Browning's belief seems to be that of Tennyson, who says,-

"Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;"

In the Ring and the Book, the Pope trusts that the suddenness of Guido's death may flash the truth for one instant into his soul. Browning has yet another hope; evil must not defeat the good, nor Satan, God, ~~and the universe~~  
~~and the universe~~

"Else I avert my face, nor follow him  
Into that sad sequestered state  
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul  
He else made first in vain: which must not be."

There are those who would blot out all distinctions between good and evil when thought of from the standpoint of merit. They would quote from Pippa Passes,-

"All service ranks the same with God-  
With God; whose puppets best and worst,  
Are we: there is no last or first."

Undoubtedly there are many comparisons of a sort rightly called odious, but we can as little blot out distinctions of merit, as blot out the moral consciousness itself or the sense of freedom. There is all the distance of the moral universe between Lincoln and Wilkes Booth, between Pippa and Ottima, between Pompilia and Guido. We can vindicate the justice of God without doing away with moral distinctions. Nor need we say that evil does not exist, at least from a practical standpoint. Whatever may be the ultimate nature of evil, its existence for us is a fact too apparent, to <sup>be</sup> easily set aside. Despite the existence of such characters as Guido in life, we can still say with Browning that "All's right

with the world!" But it is because "God's in His heaven" and therefore all life, and especially the spiritual life of men, is moving toward Him. The evil of life is being emptied, the good is being made more abundant. The true optimism then is, not in equalizing merit, which practically means the denial of freedom, but in showing the divine purpose for evil. The moral imperative, the voice of God within the soul, finding only burdens and evil without, makes the soul restless until it rests in God. So "religion, when fully manifested, is the triumphant reconciliation of all contradictions," - triumphant because through evil, we win God.

"I can believe this dread machinery  
 Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else  
 Devised - all pain at most expenditure  
 Of pain by Who devised pain-to evolve  
 By new machinery in counterpart,  
 The moral qualities of man-how else?  
 To make him love in turn and be beloved,  
 Creative and self-sacrificing too,  
 And thus eventually God-like."

(The Pope)

If a man is determined to see only blind chance or iron necessity in life, our reasonings will be futile. It is at last a personal problem because it can only be solved by the individual himself. From his own experience, he must find the knife which will cut this Gordian knot. Pessimism, fatalism, and many other isms are due <sup>often,</sup> not to keen reasoning, but to poor digestion or bad health. Some great disappointment may set a man's views of life all awry. So it is that the triumph must come from his own powers to slay the doubts that defeat him. He must discover One who is "nearer than breathing, closer than hands or feet", who is greater than his doubts, whose Light is sufficient to dispell all fear.

In the poem, "A Bean Stripe", the idea of a worship of nature is brought forth. Why not thank and worship the sun, or any force in na-

ture? Browning replies in the words of Ferishtah,-

"Suppose thou visit my lord Shalim Shah,  
 Bringing thy tribute as appointed. 'Here  
 Come I to pay my due.' Whereat one slave  
 Obsequious spreads a carpet for thy foot.  
 His fellow offers sweetmeats, while a third  
 Prepares a pipe: what thanks or praise have they?  
 Such as befits prompt service. Gratitude  
 Goes past them to the Shah whose gracious nod  
 Set all the sweet civility at work!"

In the same poem, he says, "I eat my apple, relish what is ripe. But, thank an apple!" Rather thank Him who made my mouth for eating. Without Him, the wealth of the orchard might as well have been so many gall-nuts, stocks, or stones. So with all the blessed fruits of life, when our thanks and worship go far enough, they go back behind all the forces of nature to the One who makes all things work together for good to them who love Him. In "A Pillar at Sebzevar", Browning likens man to the child who ~~was~~ grasping for the sun, is given an orange, and for a time is content. But shortly he discovers that it isn't the sun, and then all the joy of his capture is gone. He forgets how good the orange tasted; how he enjoyed it. So with man; "this constitutes the curse which spoils our life." The joys and goodnesses of life are no sooner gained than they are thrown aside, and frequently without thanks to the great Giver. Suppose that while traveling through a desert, you come upon a handful of water in a small hollow. If you are thirsty, you don't wait before drinking to see how much there is. You drink the scoopful, and when it fills again, you empty it once more. So it should be in life; we should thank God for "the sufficient drop" which checks our thirst,-not ask for "a brimful cistern." "Ask the cistern's boon when thou wouldst solace camels."

Browning has said that a man to be consistent in his unbelief, should keep to his bed. He says <sup>also</sup> that there is no such thing as passive goodness. The man who has faith in the ultimate victory of the good, will not keep his faith long unless he enlists under the banner of those who toil, and if need be, suffer, for the right. Spiritual peace, strangely enough, comes during the long night watches, which may be interrupted any moment by the cry of the enemy. The Prince of Peace came to bring not peace but a sword; but His sword wins the conflicts with those <sup>powers</sup> which disturb the peace of the soul.

Browning was an optimist because he was ever a fighter, a toiler in the fields of God. We can win something of his optimism too, if we seek to win it as he did. We are laborers together with God. This is the world-view which shall bring us, contented and joyous, into the Presence of the Master.

ROBERT BROWNING AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

The Revelation of God in Christ.

Browning was not one of those who think that Christianity could get along without Christ; that the truths of Christianity must always go back to the historical Jesus, was certainly his faith. He was not willing to reject the historical foundation of Christianity in favor of a philosophic foundation alone. Revelation for him, we must believe, was not merely general, in nature, in history, and in man, but was particular as recorded in the historic Scriptures, and within nature and humanity. In "A Death in the Desert," he not only shows that he is not hostile to supernatural revelations, but also shows their value for the growth of faith.

"I say, that as the babe you feed awhile,  
Becomes a boy and fit to feed himself,  
So, minds at first must be spoon-fed with truth:  
When they can eat, babe's nurture is withdrawn.  
-----  
I say, that miracle was duly wrought,  
When, save for it, no faith was possible."

That his theology was Christo-centric is seen in the oft-quoted words from the above poem,-

"The acknowledgement of God in Christ  
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee  
All questions in the earth and out of it,  
And has so far advanced thee to be wise."

In the relations between God and man, he believes Christ holds a unique place. He is not alarmed by those who reject the divine authority of Christ and speak of him as merely a good man, a martyr to truth. In the "Epilogue to Dramatis Personae", he pictures the vanishing of the Divine Christ as seen by Renan, the French skeptic. Only unutterable sadness can be read in the lines where this is written,-

"awhile transpired

Some vestige of a Face no pangs convulse,  
 No prayers retard; then even this was gone,  
 Lost in the night at last: We, lone and left  
 Silent through centuries, ever and anon,  
 Venture to probe again the vault bereft  
 Of all now save the lesser lights, a mist  
 Of multitudinous points, yet suns, men say-"

He shows that for him the Divine Christ has not vanished, but has grown to be his sufficient explanation of all things in heaven and on earth.

"That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,  
 Or decomposes but to recompose,  
 Becomes my universe that feels and knows!"

In the poem, "Christmas Eve", Browning attended, one Christmas eve, a chapel service. It was a wild winter's night, and as he stood in the entry, his clothes dripping, the people passed in, eyeing him with suspicion as they went. By and by, he too went in, and shortly afterward, the service commenced. But it was not to his liking. The preacher's irreverence, - even stupidity, grated upon his sensibilities. Provoked by it all, he left the chapel and went out into the night. The storm was gone, and as he stood under the night sky, he said to himself that this was his temple.

"In youth I looked to those very skies  
 And, probing their immensities,  
 I found God there, His Visible Power;  
 Yet felt in my heart, amid all its sense  
 Of the Power, an equal evidence  
 That His Love, there too, was the nobler dower:  
 For the loving worm within its clod  
 Were diviner than a loveless God  
 Amid His worlds, I will dare to say."

As the poet stood gazing into the sky, filled with his own meditations, he suddenly saw a kind of rainbow pathway in the heavens, and on it, when he could clearly see, the figure of the Christ. But His back was toward him, and he saw that He had come from the chapel. In terror, <sup>the poet</sup> ~~he~~ realized that the Master was displeased because he had gone from the poor service held in His name, where He himself had been. The poet pleads for forgiveness and tells how he felt that the service was not worthy of the One meant to be honored. He is pardoned and his worship is rewarded by his being caught up in the eddying vesture of the Divine One, but he has learned that however uncouth and burlesque the forms of worship may appear, the Master is there when the worship is in the spirit of truth. Outworn creeds may hold the Living Water.

The poet ~~is~~ when caught up in the vesture of the Master ~~and~~ is present first at a Christmas Eve Festival in Rome and then at a Christmas Eve lecture at the University of Gottingen. The professor is lecturing upon the "Myth of Christ". He reduces all the life of Christ to a bare minimum, setting aside all supernatural events. Jesus was a good man, who lived a pure and upright life and died as a martyr for the truth. The poet leaves the hall, feeling benumbed, and with a <sup>deep</sup> sense of loss. He returns, however, to listen once more. The professor is concluding. He bids his students, though they cannot longer worship the Christ, "to venerate the myth." The poet is uncertain whether this deserves tears or laughter. What does the advice amount to? What is the value of supporting something which should itself be a means of support? Browning hints that he does not like to embarrass him by likening him to a boy, riding a broom-stick, but pretending that he has a horse which is carrying him. However he has learned his lesson and though he differs with the professor, he does not doubt that his faith, however meager, is sincere and is therefore acceptable to God. And he looks forward to the time when, -

"many peoples, various climes,

Where I may see saint, savage, sage

Fuse their respective creeds in one  
 Before the general Father's throne."

Browning's belief in the Incarnation was based upon the principle of love which was his great interpreting principle of life. He believed not only that God exists, but that "His nature and His name is Love". Man's distinctive mark is in progress. He has not yet arrived at the full estate of manhood. "Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

"For life, with all it yields of joy and woe,  
 And hope and fear, - believe the aged friend,-  
 Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,"

(A Death in the Desert.)

We know that God is love because we ourselves must love. We accept the wondrous love of God in Christ because we yield to the love promptings of natures divinely given. Since we have the ability to love, we know that God must have it in infinite degree.

"So, gazing up, in my youth, at love  
 As seen through power, ever above  
 All modes which make it manifest,  
 My soul brought all to a single test-  
 That He, the Eternal First and Last  
 Who, in His power, had so surpassed  
 All man conceives of what is Might-  
 Whose wisdom too, showed infinite,  
 Would prove as infinitely good;  
 Would never(my soul understood)  
 With power to work all love desires,  
 Bestow e'en less than man requires;"

(Christmas Eve)

It might be objected to this teaching that it is anthropomorphic. But it might also be said that any conception of the universe which is

consistent is also anthropomorphic; if it aims at a satisfying explanation of things. Before we do any thinking at all we ought, under this idea, to have some one who is not a man, to say that our thoughts are valid, because our faith that they are, is but the merest anthropomorphism. If we have no right to reason from what in us is highest, to our Creator, we surely have no right to reason at all. All good things are from Him, and in Him exist in their perfection.

In the poem, Saul, Browning portrays the reclaiming of King Saul by David, with his songs. The King has been troubled by an evil spirit and David has been summoned to play and sing for him in the hope that he may bring relief. We read in 1 Samuel, 16, that "David took the harp and played with his hand, Saul was refreshed and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him." When David reaches the tent of the King, he is met by Abner, who has been very anxious about Saul, but looking into the bright joyous face of the young singer, he is reassured. David, after kneeling down to the God of his fathers, ran into the tent of the King, and said, "Here is David, thy servant." But no voice replied. Presently, he discerned in the darkness the figure of the King in his agony, and immediately tuning his harp began to play. First he played the tune which the sheep know when they follow the shepherd to the fold; and then the tune of the quails. Then the reaper's tune with its note of joyous fellowship, and following it the funeral song of the dead,-

"Bear, bear him along

With his few faults shut up like dead flowerets! Are balm-seeds  
not here

To console us? The land has none left such as he on the bier.

Oh, would we might keep thee, my brother!"

Next came the glad chant of the marriage and following it the chorus of the priests as they go to the altar. But here he is interrupted by a groan from Saul, and the whole tent shook as he shuddered. Is life re-

turning? Once again he bent to his playing, and as he played, he sang of the joys of life; the plunge in a pool of living water, the rewards of the hunt, the blessing of sleep.

"How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ

All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!"

He sings of Saul's father and mother, of the father's bravery and the piety of the mother; he sings of Saul's boyhood of wonder and hope, with its bright promise for the future. He sings of the brave deeds which ~~were~~ brought fame and honor, and finally the crown of Israel; all gifts in the world and all glory "brought to blaze on the head of one creature-King Saul!"

The deep feeling of the singer and the old associations which had been coupled with his name, caused Saul to be changed. Just as the avalanche, with a year's weight of snow, fettering the mountain side, lets go with a thunderous din at the summons of the Spring, so the blackness and evil departed from the soul of the King. Death was past, but life not yet come; the mountain is free from its burden of ice and snow, but the verdure, the sign of life, has not appeared. Saul, who had hung propped by the tent's cross-support, now stood upright, his hand to his brow, his eyes like "slow pallid sunsets in autumn", his arms folded across his chest. What next should be done? What would "sustain him where song had restored"? He is as one who praises the vintage, but does not taste it.

"He saith, "It is good;" still he drinks not: he lets me praise  
life,

Gives assent, yet would die for his own part."

Then David sings the blessed gospel of hope, the hope of a new life, an inner spiritual life. "In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit." If the life of the senses was enjoyed as a boy, how much more may the life of the spirit be enjoyed as a man.

"Look forth o'er the years!

Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual; begin with the seeds!

Is Saul dead? In the depth of the vale make his tomb-bid arise  
 A grey mountain of marble heaped four-square, till, built to  
 the skies,

Let it mark where the great First King slumbers; whose fame  
 would ye know?"

So David roused Saul to think of those great deeds which even in their  
 death, revive, and "go to work in the world." So it was that the king  
 "slowly resumed his old motions and habitudes kingly." "He girds now his  
 loins as of yore, and feels slow for the armlets of price".

"He is Saul, ye remember in glory,- ere error had bent  
 The broad brow from the daily communion; and still, though  
 much spent

Be the life and the bearing that front you, the same, God did  
 choose,

To receive what a man may waste, desecrate, never quite lose."  
 Singing thus, David was unaware that Saul had moved to his side, and when  
 he looked up, he was surprised to look into his face, now filled with  
 gentleness. Slowly and gravely the King lifted his hand and stroked the  
 hair of the singer. He looked into the face of the boy "with intent to  
 peruse it, as men do a flower", and David looking into his face loved,  
 him, and yearned to help him.

"I would give thee new life altogether, as good, ages hence,  
 As this moment,- had love but the warrant, love's heart to dis-  
 pense!"

"Then the truth came upon me." With these words the poet himself takes  
 up the thread of the story, without harp, without song, although he  
 speaks as David. He has the whole truth now,- the truth which was not  
 given to David. Man has a degree of knowledge, but how small in compar-  
 ison with the divine Wisdom. Man has thoughtfulness, kindness, but how  
 blind before the Infinite Care. Perfection in all things belongs to God;

man's exaltation comes through humility. I have this day longed to help, to deliver King Saul. In his agony of heart and mind, I, a poor child of this mortal world, would help him because I loved him. Wilt Thou not love him more, O God? If I have love, how much more must be Thy love! Ah, it must be so. I have faith in the smallest things, why not in this, the greatest? Is my nature so full ~~of love~~ that I can compete with God in love? Shall the creature surpass the Creator?

"Would I fain in my impotent yearning do all for this man,  
And dare doubt he alone shall not help him, who yet alone can?"

Would I interpose to save Saul, the mistake, the failure, the ruin, and yet doubt that God would do all this and more? Would I struggle to lift him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich him,-

"Would I suffer for him that I love? So wouldst thou-so wilt  
thou!

So shall crown thee the topmost, ineffablest, uttermost crown-  
And thy love fill infinitude wholly, nor leave up nor down  
One spot for the creature to stand in! It is by no breath,  
Turn of eye, wave of hand, that salvation joins issue with  
death!

As thy love is discovered almighty, almighty be proved  
Thy power, that exists with and for it, of being beloved!  
He who did most, shall bear most; the strongest shall stand the  
most weak.

'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my flesh, that  
I seek

In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. O Saul, it shall be  
A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,  
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ  
stand!"

Thus Browning pictures the redemptive love of God in Christ "at issue still with sin". The Incarnation is, for him, not a theory of schoolmen, not a poetic fancy, but the power of God unto salvation for every one who believeth. The omnipotent God, who created the heavens and the earth, came into the world in love in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord.