

1909

# Robert Browning's "Thy plan"

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/47817>

*Downloaded from DSpace Repository, DSpace Institution's institutional repository*

Robert Downing.  
"The Law"

S. J. Parish.

Jan 23. 1909.

Approved

Mac Waters.

3  
The Professor M<sup>r</sup> Watters.

Robert Browning  
"My Plan"

Samuel L. Parish.  
Jan 23-1909.

"The Plan"  
"Maker, remake, complete,"—Robert Browning.

In the content of Browning's finest poem, Rabbi Ben Ezra, is to be found his final conclusion on the life of man covering most perfectly his theology and philosophy. It is clear from the three divisions of God's plan, that He has the Alpha and Omega of man in His hands. He stands as the great teacher bringing forward the materials, teaching and encouraging the pupil until he has done all in his power, then the Master with a few strokes of the brush completes the task. If it could be possible to see a master above our God to whom God must bring the completed task, then it would better explain to the human mind the majesty of the work God assigns to man and then completes. God only finishes what man planned, "the broken arcs are in heaven the perfect round." Advancing stages of eternity as it were, God's master and teacher will complete advancing plans God has for man.

"Delayed it may be through more lives yet

Through worlds I shall traverse not a few." Life and the incompleted work affords Browning the greatest inspiration in his conception of man.

"Can the soul the will die out of man

Ere his body finds the grave that gapes?" Crowell states that the poet wishes us to keep in mind that we must nevertheless not cease to strive toward the perfection unattain-

2

-able upon earth. Such a conception of man, sees God in great  
dignity, for He will therefore complete His task at any cost for He  
puts upon man the same plans as himself; "Man as befits the maker  
repeats God's process in man's due degree, attaining man's propor-  
-tionate results. Creates?, no but resuscitates perhaps—For such  
man's feat is in due degree, mimic creation, galvinism for life."  
The Statue and the Bust, leaves no room but for the highest effort  
to carry out any plan; "If you chose to play; is my principle,

Let a man contend to the uttermost

For his life's set prize, be it what it will

MAKER Orthodoxy marks Browning's conception of the creation  
of man clearly designating his capacity and dependence. He says

"I find writ down from very A B C of fact

In the beginning God made heaven and earth"

And again he writes; "For me I think I speak as I was taught;

I always see the garden and God there

A making man's wife and my lesson learned

The value and significance of flesh

I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards."

There is a charm in God's creation though surrounded by limita-  
-tions which baffle and retard our growth. Yet these limitations  
prevent us from being satisfied with earth and lend to creation  
a new and prophetic meaning, possessing infinite possibility  
entirely dependent upon man's appreciation of his opportunities.  
Many times the poet bursts forth with a shout of song as in the  
Grammarians' Funeral when he sees a man who has really grasped

his infinite possibility. He is always proud that that there is something within aiming at transcending all limitations. There is no injustice in the limitations for a higher set of beings would lessen the value of our achievements. Though many times in life the way is not clear God is by our side.

"God----- stands away

As it were a handbreadth to give room for the Newly made to live." And again

"The truth in God's breast

Lies trace for trace upon ours impressed  
Though he is so light and we are so dim  
We are made in his image to witness him."

With all the sorrows and troubles a wonderful nearness is seen in Brownings Christina,

"Oh we're sunk enough God knows, but not quite so sunk that  
Sure though seldom are denied us, when the spirits true  
Atands out plainly from the false ones and apprise us if  
On the right way or the wrong way to its triumph or ondoing.  
There are flashed struck from midnight, there are fire flames  
Whereby piled up honors perish, whereby swollen ambitions  
While just this or that poor impulse which for once had play  
Seems the whole work of a lifetime that away the rest has  
Again in Paracelsus he writed

"Ther is an inner center in us all,  
Where truth abides in fullness."

The special corner into which we are born does not in

any spoil our chances of success. I should like to have heard Robert Browning say, "How good to live and learn." or "All service ranks the same with God there is no last nor first." It is true that at times he seemed to know of circumstances where the fetters were almost unbreakable, as might be indicated by the following line, "There's many a crown for who can reach." He saw a real dispensation of law and iniquities visited sadly upon the third and fourth generations. But he has a love message which far transcends the worst effect as is seen in Caliban or Setebos the Epilogue and in Saul. The incarnation containing for Browning all true revelation contained also the most glowing example of infinite love in all God's creation.

When the creation is so acceptable, man made in God's image, and God neglects no portion of all the world, and by His love covers and forgives every deficiency in the human race when man has done his best, behold, how grand indeed is the work of the Maker.

"Man is not God, but hath God's end to serve  
 A Master to obey a cause to take  
 Somewhat to cast off, somewhat to become."

"Therefore to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable name, Builder and maker Thou of houses not made with hands. The prayer in Rabbi Ben Ezra, is for this great Maker

who has made man as living stones, to "Remake" him according to His plan. Browning indicates that there is only one condition on the part of man, and that is that he will surrender to God and

REMAKE

do his best. "The great sin is after all the unlit lamp."

In personal history this work of God has been partly conducted by men and circumstances. It is being true to his own life for Browning to find a very significant force in the influence of mankind. As Hellen Keller saw her first light and received her first impulse through her teacher, so Browning received his first inspiration through Shelley and Keats. Though indeed never a fatalist "Shelley's voice came like the call of an eagle from the blue depths above to the imprisoned eaglet upon the earth. His influence loosed once for all his pinioned soul for imaginative flights of song." And he burst forth with joy,

"This world is no blot for us nor blank,

It means intensely and means good

To find its meaning is my meat and drink." He came forward for a real heart to heart contact with man in an age when the scientific steela of research were plunged into the very depth of the soul to found things upon reason. How much this dear old poet assisted in the task he assigned to God no one will ever know. But indeed many a power long buried and many a heart crushed in sorrow and despair rose through the influence of Robert Browning to successes never dreamed of without his inspiration. He sang to poor human nature:

"Where brooding darkness spreads his jealous wings and the night raven sings." and stirred through the real warmth of his heart these blighted lives, for God. The quality of kindness thus changing gloom into sunshine left the life of the man who



gave it only to return with the transforming power of the Great Artist. "Rejoice we are allied to that which doth provide and not partake---

A spark disturbs our clod, nearer we hold of God than of His tribes that take I must believe."

2 A new and beautiful idea is again in the assistance of the intimate. The personfication of the notes in the life of the musician as told in Abt Vogler lends to the reader great encouragement. "Ah one and all how they helped, depart now and now combine

Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise."

Indeed the tribute he pays to the resisting forces seems very little below the above. "Than welcome each rebuff, that turns earth smoothness rough, That bids nor sit nor stand but go." These two forms, Browning never ceases to use as man's friends. Though they are not allowed any purpose in the average mind the poet puts them so close to man, that they commune with him, have an interest in his welfare, and "plunge themselves down to hell" for his success. The forces of earth are so arranged that they will put forward their greatest effort to assume the most advantageous place to advance their master. They seem to be "living stones" willing to "rush into place" at the master's touch, hardly waiting for the touch of the chisel even in the uncouth block of marble to form the lines of the Grecian beauty.

It seems hardly less influential than the power of man in the remaking of humanity when this unfeeling volume of creation takes up our cause when that which seems to be real sorrow and defeat has become our friend and these two link arms to elevate

human existence and put the most beautiful interpretation upon life's struggles.

But in a strange hour Browning has been chilled by both men and circumstances ~~and~~ for they have not carried forward their part of the work at all times. Then it is that the true prophet is seen: Thy soul and God stands sure." The real modifying force is after all man's nearness to God.

Arch Bishop Williams said: "Man leads his fellow man to light." Charles Kingsley said: "Modern tragedy is man conquering circumstances." It is St. Paul who writes Robert Browning's most advanced method of transformation, when he says: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you to will and do of His own good pleasure." Phil. 2, 12-13. Whatever man may have missed, whatever trying and friendly surroundings may have omitted in the reconstruction of man if the human aspirations are right God will complete. More than once in his writings the poet indicates their failures so real indeed that it seems to be from his own experience. In this he has preached a very high type of Theism. Man and circumstances have carried the work as far as they can, but God has better things for him. The human clay cannot be moulded without His help. God is not satisfied that man leave His control even for the three score and ten years. Again and again the Heavenly Master comes forward with the Divine touch and blends the lines of beauty where any other means would be too poor a representation of the Perfect. It is true Browning was well satisfied with evolution when there was

8.

a God to run it. Much as religious commentators may write about Browning's evolutionary tendencies, he has interwoven the natural with the supernatural in a way far transcending the spasmodic favor dealing God of the average man. Browning has thus left us a more supernatural God and a more natural man. Man's highest achievement, man's proudest accomplishment are not honored until they open to him through the vista of human faculties the vision of a world grander and more perfect of which any human possibility is only a promise. How becoming God has arranged His part and keeps the great lights burning far ahead and pointing to a newer and better day. "That to which I cannot attain and yet some day I shall possess", is the key to the third and greatest moulding force of mankind.

Just how this fourth point may be included in the foregoing can only be felt. "I would not lift it from the heart for the cruel treatment of reason. (10)" Brownings' equipment of the individual specially qualified in God's creation for the transforming power, finds in itself the perfect consummation. Experience is recorded in the poets writings. Here was a man who found but a "hand's-breadth" of his life shining "Mid the blank miles round about", until he felt the power of Shelley. But that inner self which was his salvation is to be the hope of the world. There is a longing after something, which is never satisfied until man finds himself in God; there is a hope created which amid the rays of God's sunlight, "when the earth has done her best in my passion to scale the sky" ~~that~~ presses amid a

thousand changing scenes into the very presence of God. This is indicated to a degree in the following lines: "My own hope is a sun will pierce the thickest cloud ever stretched". Passing on to a higher place he affirms with authority: "Two points in the adventure of a diver, One when a beggar he prepares to plunge,

One where a prince he rises with his pearl"

But from the places of confession and tumult he passed through all the troubles and found within himself the "Image of God."

"World how it walled about  
Life with disgrace  
Till God's own smile came out:  
That was thy face."

In the lives of men Browning indicates the ever present hand of God in whatever form. In the Statue and The Bust there is another prayer almost like that of Rabbi Ben Ezra,

"Him the Carver a hand to aid,  
Who fashions the clay no love will change,  
And fixes a beauty never to fade."

Still another petition is found in the prayer and that

COMPLETE

is that the "Maker" will "Complete" the life of man. "Thou hast done now with eyes for the actual begin with the seers." As the "Time of the Harvest" is a question in the Bible so there is a difference of opinion as to the time when this completion is to take place. Some have thought it to be the period of the New Birth while others think it is a reference to the other worlds and their progressive stages. As there are a few lines indicating the former

and some of the poems which lead us to the latter we will spend a little time on this part of God's plan. If the New Birth is thought of as a restricted condition entirely to a religious awakening the thought will not hold. I cannot but refer to Momorbilia where the author is startled with joy at the very thought of Shelley. When the thought of this man comes into his mind he is at once recalled to a bright day. At one time the thought of the steamboat or gunpowder and in fact any of the useful projects of the world recalled or recalls to some mind a happy day. "God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear

The rest may reason and welcome ; 't is we musicians  
know."

Then as it were the musicians enjoy some thoughts of sweet and happy hours when they came into this great possession. But the music at its best can be the possession only in its presence or in the thought of the heart when one stops to ponder upon it. Browning is not selfish, he does not give to the musician nor indeed to the Grammarian what is outside the reach of any man. The man completed so far as this world is concerned according to God's standard may come long before man is satisfied with his brother. Not on the vulgar mass called work must sentence pass.—

Thoughts hardly to be packed into a narrow act,

Fancies that broke through language and escaped:

All I could never be, all men ignored in me,

This, I was worth to God whose wheel the pitcher  
shaped."

So long as the clay is left in the mould the process of

completion is still going on. A pitcher will not be removed from the wheel until it is perfected according to the Plan of God. The stage succeeding youth indicates a marked advancement "Youth all lay in dispute, I shall know being old." and again "So still within this life though lifted e'er its strife." It is through this knowledge and high position that man reaches his earthly completion, and becomes fit for the "Masters use."

"The submission of man's nothing-perfect to God's all-complete, As by each new obeisance in spirit, I climb to His feet." is according to Browning the completion of God's Plan so far as this world is concerned.

But is this all? He is looking forward to the completing stages of eternity where there will be great changes wrought, and not only will it be God's opportunity to complete, but our's to continue "This earth's life is not my only sphere." and again "you shall wake and remember and understand." also, "Delayed it may be through more lives yet, Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few." It may be that man will have the repetition of this life and the continued stages of eternity will complete advancing plans God has for man: Maker, remake, complete!

completion is still going on. There is however a comfortable stage reached in the period beyond