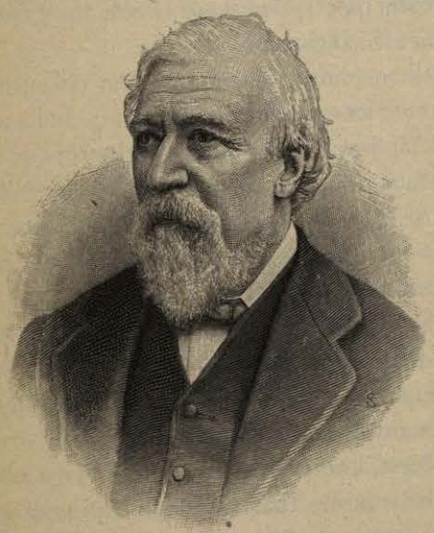
Fourth, Browning's allusions are often far-fetched, referring to some odd scrap of information which he has picked up in his wide reading, and the ordinary reader finds it difficult to trace and understand them. Finally, Browning wrote too much and revised too little. The time which he should have given to making one thought clear was used in expressing other thoughts that flitted through his head like a flock of swallows. His field was the individual soul, never exactly alike in any two men, and he sought to express the hidden motives and principles which govern individual action. In this field he is like a miner delving underground, sending up masses of mingled earth and ore; and the reader must sift all this material to separate the gold from the dross.



ROBERT BROWNING

Here, certainly, are sufficient reasons for Browning's obscurity; and we must add the word that the fault seems unpardonable, for the simple reason that Browning shows himself capable, at times, of writing directly, melodiously, and with noble simplicity.

So much for the faults, which must be faced and overlooked before one finds the treasure that is hidden in Browning's poetry. Of all the poets in our literature, no other is so completely, so consciously, so magnificently a teacher of men. He feels his mission of faith and courage in a world of doubt and timidity. For thirty years he faced

Browning as a Teacher

indifference or ridicule, working bravely and cheerfully the while, until he made the world recognize and follow him. The spirit of his whole life is well expressed in his *Paracelsus*, written when he was only twenty-two years old:

> I see my way as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive, — what time, what circuit first,
> I ask not; but unless God send his hail
> Or blinding fire-balls, sleet or stifling snow,
> In some time, his good time, I shall arrive;
> He guides me and the bird. In his good time.

He is not, like so many others, an entertaining poet. One cannot read him after dinner, or when settled in a comfortable easy-chair. One must sit up, and think, and be alert when he reads Browning. If we accept these conditions, we shall probably find that Browning is the most stimulating poet in our language. His influence upon our life is positive and tremendous. His strength, his joy of life, his robust faith, and his invincible optimism enter into us, making us different and better men after reading him. And perhaps the best thing he can say of Browning is that his thought is slowly but surely taking possession of all well-educated men and women.

Life. Browning's father was outwardly a business man, a clerk for fifty years in the Bank of England; inwardly he was an interesting combination of the scholar and the artist, with the best tastes of both. His mother was a sensitive, musical woman, evidently very lovely in character, the daughter of a German shipowner and merchant who had settled in Scotland. She was of Celtic descent, and Carlyle describes her as the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman. From his neck down, Browning was the typical Briton, — short, stocky, large-chested, robust; but even in the lifeless portrait his face changes as we view it from different angles. Now it is like an English business man, now like a German scientist, and now it has a curious suggestion of Uncle Remus, — these being, no doubt, so many different reflections of his mixed and unremembered ancestors.

He was born in Camberwell, on the outskirts of London, in 1812. From his home and from his first school, at Peckham, he could see

London; and the city lights by night and the smoky chimneys by day had the same powerful fascination for the child that the woods and fields and the beautiful country had for his friend Tennyson. His schooling was short and desultory, his education being attended to by private tutors and by his father, who left the boy largely to follow his own inclination. Like the young Milton, Browning was fond of music, and in many of his poems, especially in "Abt Vogler" and "A Toccata of Galuppi's," he interprets the musical temperament better, perhaps, than any other writer in our literature. But unlike Milton, through whose poetry there runs a great melody, music seems to have had no consistent effect upon his verse, which is often so jarring that one must wonder how a musical ear could have endured it.

Like Tennyson, this boy found his work very early, and for fifty years hardly a week passed that he did not write poetry. He began at six to produce verses, in imitation of Byron; but fortunately this early work has been lost. Then he fell under the influence of Shelley, and his first known work, *Pauline* (1833), must be considered as a tribute to Shelley and his poetry. Tennyson's earliest work, *Poems by Two Brothers*, had been published and well paid for, five years before; but Browning could find no publisher who would even consider *Pauline*, and the work was published by means of money furnished by an indulgent relative. This poem received scant notice from the reviewers, who had pounced like hawks on a dovecote upon Tennyson's first two modest volumes. Two years later appeared *Paracelsus*, and then his tragedy *Strafford* was put upon the stage; but not till *Sordello* was published, in 1840, did he attract attention enough to be denounced for the obscurity and vagaries of his style. Six years later, in 1846, he suddenly became famous, not because he finished in that year his *Bells and Pomegranates* (which is Browning's symbolic name for "poetry and thought" or "singing and sermonizing"), but because he eloped with the best known literary woman in England, Elizabeth Barrett, whose fame was for many years, both before and after her marriage, much greater than Browning's, and who was at first considered superior to Tennyson. Thereafter, until his own work compelled attention, he was known chiefly as the man who married Elizabeth Barrett. For years this lady had been an almost helpless invalid, and it seemed a quixotic thing when Browning, having failed to gain her family's consent to the marriage, carried her off romantically. Love and Italy

proved better than her physicians, and for fifteen years Browning and his wife lived an ideally happy life in Pisa and in Florence. The exquisite romance of their love is preserved in Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, and in the volume of *Letters* recently published, — wonderful letters, but so tender and intimate that it seems almost a sacrilege for inquisitive eyes to read them.

Mrs. Browning died in Florence in 1861. The loss seemed at first too much to bear, and Browning fled with his son to England. For the remainder of his life he lived alternately in London and in various parts of Italy, especially at the Palazzo Rezzonico, in Venice, which is now an object of pilgrimage to almost every tourist who visits the beautiful city. Wherever he went he mingled with men and women, sociable, well dressed, courteous, loving crowds and popular applause, the very reverse of his friend Tennyson. His earlier work had been much better appreciated in America than in England; but with the publication of *The Ring and the Book*, in 1868, he was at last recognized by his countrymen as one of the greatest of English poets. He died in Venice, on December 12, 1889, the same day that saw the publication of his last work, *Asolando*. Though Italy offered him an honored resting place, England claimed him for her own, and he lies buried beside Tennyson in Westminster Abbey. The spirit of his whole life is magnificently expressed in his own lines, in the Epilogue of his last book:

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

Works. A glance at even the titles which Browning gave to his best known volumes — *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Men and Women* (1855), *Dramatis Personæ* (1864) — will suggest how strong the dramatic element is in all his work. Indeed, all his poems may be divided into three classes, — pure dramas, like *Strafford* and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon;* dramatic narratives, like *Pippa Passes*, which are dramatic in form, but were not meant to be acted; and dramatic lyrics, like *The Last Ride Together*, which are short poems expressing some

strong personal emotion, or describing some dramatic episode in human life, and in which the hero himself generally tells the story.

Though Browning is often compared with Shakespeare, the reader will understand that he has very little of Shakespeare's dramatic talent. He cannot bring a group of people together and let the actions and words of his characters show us the comedy and tragedy of human life. Neither can the author be disinterested, satisfied, as Shakespeare was, with life itself, without drawing any moral conclusions. Browning has always a moral ready, and insists upon giving us his own views of life, which Shakespeare never does. His dramatic power lies in depicting what he himself calls the history of a soul. Sometimes, as in *Paracelsus*, he endeavors to trace the progress of the human spirit. More often he takes some dramatic moment in life, some crisis in the ceaseless struggle between good and evil, and describes with wonderful insight the hero's own thoughts and feelings; but he almost invariably tells us how, at such and such a point, the good or the evil in his hero must inevitably have triumphed. And generally, as in "My Last Duchess," the speaker adds a word here and there, aside from the story, which unconsciously shows the kind of man he is. It is this power of revealing the soul from within that causes Browning to fascinate those who study him long enough. His range is enormous, and brings all sorts and conditions of men under analysis. The musician in "Abt Vogler," the artist in "Andrea del Sarto," the early Christian in "A Death in the Desert," the Arab horseman in "Muléykeh," the sailor in "Hervé Riel," the mediæval knight in "Childe Roland," the Hebrew in "Saul," the Greek in "Balaustion's Adventure," the monster in "Caliban," the immortal dead in "Karshish," — all these and a hundred more histories of the soul show Browning's marvelous versatility. It is this great range of sympathy with many different types of life that constitutes

Browning and Shakespeare

Browning's chief likeness to Shakespeare, though otherwise there is no comparison between the two men.

If we separate all these dramatic poems into three main periods, — the early, from 1833 to 1841; the middle, from 1841 to 1868; and the late, from 1868 to 1889, — the work of the beginner will be much more easily designated. Of his early soul studies, *Pauline* (1833), *Paracelsus* (1835), and *Sordello* (1840), little need be said here, except perhaps this: that if we begin with these works, we shall probably never read anything else by Browning. And that were a pity. It is better to leave these obscure works until his better poems have so attracted us to Browning that we will cheerfully endure his worst faults for the sake of his undoubted virtues. The same criticism applies, though in less degree, to his first drama, *Strafford* (1837), which belongs to the early period of his work.

First Period of Work

The merciless criticism which greeted *Sordello* had a wholesome effect on Browning, as is shown in the better work of his second period. Moreover, his new power was developing rapidly, as may be seen by comparing the eight numbers of his famous *Bells and Pomegranates* series (1841–1846) with his earlier work. Thus, the first number of this wonderful series, published in 1841, contains *Pippa Passes*, which is, on the whole, the most perfect of his longer poems; and another number contains *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, which is the most readable of his dramas. Even a beginner must be thrilled by the beauty and the power of these two works. Two other noteworthy dramas of the period are *Colombe's Birthday* (1844) and *In a Balcony* (1855), which, however, met with scant appreciation on the stage, having too much subtle analysis and too little action to satisfy the public. Nearly all his best lyrics, dramas, and dramatic poems belong to this middle period of labor; and when *The Ring and the Book* appeared, in 1868, he had given to the world the noblest expression of his poetic genius.

Second Period

In the third period, beginning when Browning was nearly sixty years old, he wrote even more industriously than before, and published on an average nearly a volume of poetry a year. Such volumes as *Fifine at the Fair*, *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, *The Inn Album*, *Jocoseria*, and many others, show how Browning gains steadily in the power of revealing the hidden springs of human action; but he often rambles most tiresomely, and in general his work loses in sustained interest. It is perhaps significant that most of his best work was done under Mrs. Browning's influence.

Third Period

What to Read. Of the short miscellaneous poems there is such an unusual variety that one must hesitate a little in suggesting this or that to the beginner's attention. "My Star," "Evelyn Hope," "Wanting is — What?" "Home Thoughts from Abroad," "Meeting at Night," "One Word More" (an exquisite tribute to his dead wife), "Prospice" (Look Forward); songs from *Pippa Passes;* various love poems like "By the Fireside" and "The Last Ride Together"; the inimitable "Pied Piper," and the ballads like "Hervé Riel" and "How They Brought the Good News," — these are a mere suggestion, expressing only the writer's personal preference; but a glance at the contents of Browning's volumes will reveal scores of other poems, which another writer might recommend as being better in themselves or more characteristic of Browning.[1]

Among Browning's dramatic soul studies there is also a very wide choice. "Andrea del Sarto" is one of the best, revealing as it does the strength and the weakness of "the perfect painter," whose love for a soulless woman with a pretty face saddens his life and hampers his best work. Next in importance to "Andrea" stands "An Epistle," reciting the experiences of Karshish, an Arab physician, which is one of the best examples of Browning's

Soul Studies

[1] An excellent little book for the beginner is Lovett's *Selections from Browning.* (See Selections for Reading, at the end of this chapter.)

peculiar method of presenting the truth. The half-scoffing, half-earnest, and wholly bewildered state of this Oriental scientist's mind is clearly indicated between the lines of his letter to his old master. His description of Lazarus, whom he meets by chance, and of the state of mind of one who, having seen the glories of immortality, must live again in the midst of the jumble of trivial and stupendous things which constitute our life, forms one of the most original and suggestive poems in our literature. "My Last Duchess" is a short but very keen analysis of the soul of a selfish man, who reveals his character unconsciously by his words of praise concerning his dead wife's picture. In "The Bishop Orders his Tomb" we have another extraordinarily interesting revelation of the mind of a vain and worldly man, this time a churchman, whose words tell you far more than he dreams about his own character. "Abt Vogler," undoubtedly one of Browning's finest poems, is the study of a musician's soul. "Muléykeh" gives us the soul of an Arab, vain and proud of his fast horse, which was never beaten in a race. A rival steals the horse and rides away upon her back; but, used as she is to her master's touch, she will not show her best pace to the stranger. Muléykeh rides up furiously; but instead of striking the thief from his saddle, he boasts about his peerless mare, saying that if a certain spot on her neck were touched with the rein, she could never be overtaken. Instantly the robber touches the spot, and the mare answers with a burst of speed that makes pursuit hopeless. Muléykeh has lost his mare; but he has kept his pride in the unbeaten one, and is satisfied. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," which refuses analysis, and which must be read entire to be appreciated, is perhaps the most quoted of all Browning's works, and contains the best expression of his own faith in life, both here and hereafter. All these wonderful poems are, again, merely a suggestion. They indicate simply the works to which one reader turns when he feels mentally vigorous enough to pick

up Browning. Another list of soul studies, citing "A Toccata of Galuppi's," "A Grammarian's Funeral," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Saul," "Cleon," "A Death in the Desert," and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," might, in another's judgment, be more interesting and suggestive.

Among Browning's longer poems there are two, at least, that well deserve our study. *Pippa Passes*, aside from its rare poetical qualities, is a study of unconscious influence. The idea of the poem was suggested to Browning while listening to a gypsy girl singing in the woods near his home; but he transfers the scene of the action to the little mountain town of Asolo, in Italy. Pippa is a little silk weaver, who goes out in the morning to enjoy her one holiday of the whole year. As she thinks of her own happiness she is vaguely wishing that she might share it, and do some good. Then, with her childish imagination, she begins to weave a little romance in which she shares in the happiness of the four greatest and happiest people in Asolo. It never occurs to her that perhaps there is more of misery than of happiness in the four great ones of whom she dreams; and so she goes on her way singing,

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!

Fate wills it that the words and music of her little songs should come to the ears of four different groups of people at the moment when they are facing the greatest crises of their lives, and turn the scale from evil to good. But Pippa knows nothing of this. She enjoys her holiday, and goes to bed still singing, entirely ignorant of the good she has done in the world. With one exception, it is the most perfect of all

Browning's works. At best it is not easy, nor merely entertaining reading; but it richly repays whatever hours we spend in studying it.

The Ring and the Book is Browning's masterpiece. It is an immense poem, twice as long as *Paradise Lost*, and longer by some two thousand lines than the *Iliad;* and before we begin the undoubted task of reading it, we must understand that there is no interesting story or dramatic development to carry us along. In the beginning we have an outline of the story, such as it is — a horrible story of Count Guido's murder of his beautiful young wife; and Browning tells us in detail just when and how he found a book containing the record of the crime and the trial. There the story element ends, and the symbolism of the book begins. The title of the poem is explained by the habit of the old Etruscan goldsmiths who, in making one of their elaborately chased rings, would mix the pure gold with an alloy, in order to harden it. When the ring was finished, acid was poured upon it; and the acid ate out the alloy, leaving the beautiful design in pure gold. Browning purposes to follow the same plan with his literary material, which consists simply of the evidence given at the trial of Guido in Rome, in 1698. He intends to mix a poet's fancy with the crude facts, and create a beautiful and artistic work.

The Ring and the Book

The result of Browning's purpose is a series of monologues, in which the same story is retold nine different times by the different actors in the drama. The count, the young wife, the suspected priest, the lawyers, the Pope who presides at the trial, — each tells the story, and each unconsciously reveals the depths of his own nature in the recital. The most interesting of the characters are Guido, the husband, who changes from bold defiance to abject fear; Caponsacchi, the young priest, who aids the wife in her flight from her brutal husband, and is unjustly accused of false motives; Pompilia, the young wife, one of the noblest characters in literature, fit

in all respects to rank with Shakespeare's great heroines; and the Pope, a splendid figure, the strongest of all Browning's masculine characters. When we have read the story, as told by these four different actors, we have the best of the poet's work, and of the most original poem in our language.

Browning's Place and Message. Browning's place in our literature will be better appreciated by comparison with his friend Tennyson, whom we have just studied. In one respect, at least, these poets are in perfect accord. Each finds in love the supreme purpose and meaning of life. In other respects, especially in their methods of approaching the truth, the two men are the exact opposites. Tennyson is first the artist and then the teacher; but with Browning the message is always the important thing, and he is careless, too careless, of the form in which it is expressed. Again, Tennyson is under the influence of the romantic revival, and chooses his subjects daintily; but "all 's fish" that comes to Browning's net. He takes comely and ugly subjects with equal pleasure, and aims to show that truth lies hidden in both the evil and the good. This contrast is all the more striking when we remember that Browning's essentially scientific attitude was taken by a man who refused to study science. Tennyson, whose work is always artistic, never studied art, but was devoted to the sciences; while Browning, whose work is seldom artistic in form, thought that art was the most suitable subject for a man's study.

Browning and Tennyson

The two poets differ even more widely in their respective messages. Tennyson's message reflects the growing order of the age, and is summed up in the word "law." In his view, the individual will must be suppressed; the self must always be subordinate. His resignation is at times almost Oriental in its fatalism, and occasionally it suggests Schopenhauer in its mixture of fate and pessimism. Browning's message, on the other hand, is the triumph of the individual will over all obstacles; the self is not subordinate

Browning's Message

but supreme. There is nothing Oriental, nothing doubtful, nothing pessimistic in the whole range of his poetry. His is the voice of the Anglo-Saxon, standing up in the face of all obstacles and saying, "I can and I will." He is, therefore, far more radically English than is Tennyson; and it may be for this reason that he is the more studied, and that, while youth delights in Tennyson, manhood is better satisfied with Browning. Because of his invincible will and optimism, Browning is at present regarded as the poet who has spoken the strongest word of faith to an age of doubt. His energy, his cheerful courage, his faith in life and in the development that awaits us beyond the portals of death, are like a bugle-call to good living. This sums up his present influence upon the minds of those who have learned to appreciate him. Of the future we can only say that, both at home and abroad, he seems to be gaining steadily in appreciation as the years go by.

Minor Poets of the Victorian Age

Elizabeth Barrett. Among the minor poets of the past century Elizabeth Barrett (Mrs. Browning) occupies perhaps the highest place in popular favor. She was born at Coxhoe Hall, near Durham, in 1806; but her childhood and early youth were spent in Herefordshire, among the Malvern Hills made famous by *Piers Plowman*. In 1835 the Barrett family moved to London, where Elizabeth gained a literary reputation by the publication of *The Seraphim and Other Poems* (1838). Then illness and the shock caused by the tragic death of her brother, in 1840, placed her frail life in danger, and for six years she was confined to her own room. The innate strength and beauty of her spirit here showed itself strongly in her daily study, her poetry, and especially in her interest in the social problems which sooner or later occupied all the Victorian writers. "My mind to me a kingdom is" might well have been written over the door of the room where this delicate invalid worked and suffered in loneliness and in silence.

In 1844 Miss Barrett published her *Poems*, which, though somewhat impulsive and overwrought, met with remarkable public favor. Such poems as "The Cry of the Children," which voices the protest of humanity against child labor, appealed tremendously to the readers of the age, and this young woman's fame as a poet temporarily overshadowed that of Tennyson and Browning. Indeed, as late as 1850, when Wordsworth died, she was seriously considered for the position of poet laureate, which was finally given to Tennyson. A reference to Browning, in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," is supposed to have first led the poet to write to Miss Barrett, in 1845. Soon afterwards he visited the invalid; they fell in love almost at first sight, and the following year, against the wishes of her father, — who was evidently a selfish old tyrant, — Browning carried her off and married her. The exquisite romance of their love is reflected in Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). This is a noble and inspiring book of love poems; and Stedman regards the opening sonnet, "I thought once how Theocritus had sung," as equal to any in our language.

For fifteen years the Brownings lived an ideally happy life at Pisa, and at Casa Guidi, Florence, sharing the same poetical ambitions. And love was the greatest thing in the world, —

> How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
> I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
> My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
> For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
> I love thee to the level of everyday's
> Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
> I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
> I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise;
> I love thee with the passion put to use
> In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith;
> I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
> With my lost saints, — I love thee with the breath,
> Smiles, tears, of all my life! — and, if God choose,
> I shall but love thee better after death.

Mrs. Browning entered with whole-souled enthusiasm into the aspirations of Italy in its struggle against the tyranny of Austria; and her *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) is a combination of poetry and politics, both, it must be confessed, a little too emotional. In 1856 she published *Aurora Leigh*, a novel in verse, having for its hero a young social reformer, and for its heroine a young woman, poetical and enthusiastic, who strongly suggests Elizabeth Barrett herself. It emphasizes in verse precisely the same moral and social ideals which Dickens and George Eliot were proclaiming in all their novels. Her last two volumes were *Poems before Congress* (1860), and *Last Poems*, published after her death. She died suddenly in 1861 and was buried in Florence. Browning's famous line, "O lyric love, half angel and half bird," may well apply to her frail life and aërial spirit.

MRS. BROWNING

Rossetti. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), the son of an exiled Italian painter and scholar, was distinguished both as a painter and as a poet. He was a leader in the Pre-Raphaelite movement[1] and published in the first numbers of

[1] This term, which means simply Italian painters before Raphael, is generally applied to an artistic movement in the middle of the nineteenth century. The term was first used by a brotherhood of German artists who worked together in the convent of San Isodoro, in Rome, with the idea of restoring art to its mediæval purity and simplicity. The term now generally refers to a company of seven young men, — Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother William, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, James Collinson, Frederick George Stevens, and Thomas Woolner, — who formed the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood in England in 1848. Their official literary organ was called *The Germ*, in which much of the early work of Morris and Rossetti appeared. They took for their models the early Italian painters who, they declared, were "simple, sincere, and religious." Their purpose was to encourage simplicity and naturalness in art and literature; and one of their chief objects, in the face of doubt and materialism, was to express the "wonder, reverence, and awe" which characterizes mediæval art. In its return to the mysticism and symbolism of the mediæval age, this Pre-Raphaelitism suggests the contemporary Oxford or Tractarian movement in religion. (See footnote, p. 554).

The Germ his "Hand and Soul," a delicate prose study, and his famous "The Blessed Damozel," beginning,

> The blessed damozel leaned out
> From the gold bar of Heaven;
> Her eyes were deeper than the depth
> Of waters stilled at even;
> She had three lilies in her hand,
> And the stars in her hair were seven.

These two early works, especially "The Blessed Damozel," with its simplicity and exquisite spiritual quality, are characteristic of the ideals of the Pre-Raphaelites.

In 1860, after a long engagement, Rossetti married Elizabeth Siddal, a delicate, beautiful English girl, whom he has immortalized both in his pictures and in his poetry. She died two years later, and Rossetti never entirely recovered from the shock. At her burial he placed in her coffin the manuscripts of all his unpublished poems, and only at the persistent demands of his friends did he allow them to be exhumed and printed in 1870. The publication of this volume of love poems created a sensation in literary circles, and Rossetti was hailed as one of the greatest of living poets. In 1881 he published his *Ballads and Sonnets*, a remarkable volume containing, among other poems, "The Confession," modeled after Browning; "The Ballad of Sister Helen," founded on a mediæval superstition; "The King's Tragedy," a masterpiece of dramatic narrative; and "The House of Life," a collection of one hundred and one sonnets reflecting the poet's love and loss. This last collection deserves to rank with Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and with Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, as one of the three great cycles of love poems in our language. It has been well said that both Rossetti and Morris paint pictures as well in their poems as on their canvases, and this pictorial quality of their verse is its chief characteristic.

Morris. William Morris (1834–1896) is a most interesting combination of literary man and artist. In the latter capacity, as architect, designer, and manufacturer of furniture, carpets, and wall paper, and as founder of the Kelmscott Press for artistic printing and bookbinding, he has laid us all under an immense debt of gratitude. From boyhood he had steeped himself in the legends and ideals of the Middle Ages, and his best literary work is wholly mediæval in spirit. *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870) is generally regarded as his masterpiece. This delightful collection of stories in verse tells of a roving band of Vikings, who are wrecked on the fabled island of Atlantis, and who discover there a superior race of men having the characteristics of ideal Greeks. The Vikings remain for a year, telling stories of their own Northland, and listening to the classic and Oriental tales of their hosts. Morris's interest in Icelandic literature is further shown by his *Sigurd the Volsung*, an epic founded upon one of the old sagas, and by his prose romances, *The House of the Wolfings*, *The Story of the Glittering Plain*, and *The Roots of the Mountains*. Later in life he became deeply interested in socialism, and two other romances, *The Dream of John Ball* and *News from Nowhere*, are interesting as modern attempts at depicting an ideal society governed by the principles of More's *Utopia*.

Swinburne. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) is, chronologically, the last of the Victorian poets. As an artist in technique — having perfect command of all old English verse forms and a remarkable faculty for inventing new — he seems at the present time to rank among the best in our literature. Indeed, as Stedman says, "before his advent we did not realize the full scope of English verse." This refers to the melodious and constantly changing form rather than to the content of Swinburne's poetry. At the death of Tennyson, in 1892, he was undoubtedly the greatest living poet, and only his liberal opinions, his scorn of royalty and of conventions, and the prejudice aroused by the pagan spirit of his early work prevented his appointment as poet laureate. He

has written a very large number of poems, dramas, and essays in literary criticism; but we are still too near to judge of the permanence of his work or of his place in literature. Those who would read and estimate his work for themselves will do well to begin with a volume of selected poems, especially those which show his love of the sea and his exquisite appreciation of child life. His *Atalanta in Calydon* (1864), a beautiful lyric drama modeled on the Greek tragedy, is generally regarded as his masterpiece. In all his work Swinburne carries Tennyson's love of melody to an extreme, and often sacrifices sense to sound. His poetry is always musical, and, like music, appeals almost exclusively to the emotions.

We have chosen, somewhat arbitrarily, these four writers — Mrs. Browning, D. G. Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne — as representative of the minor poets of the age; but there are many others who are worthy of study, — Arthur Hugh Clough and Matthew Arnold,[1] who are often called the poets of skepticism, but who in reality represent a reverent seeking for truth through reason and human experience; Frederick William Faber, the Catholic mystic, author of some exquisite hymns; and the scholarly John Keble, author of *The Christian Year*, our best known book of devotional verse; and among the women poets, Adelaide Procter, Jean Ingelow, and Christina Rossetti, each of whom had a large, admiring circle of readers. It would be a hopeless task at the present time to inquire into the relative merits of all these minor poets. We note only their careful workmanship and exquisite melody, their wide range of thought and feeling, their eager search for truth, each in his own way, and especially the note of freshness and vitality which they have given to English poetry.

[1] Arnold was one of the best known poets of the age, but because he has exerted a deeper influence on our literature as a critic, we have reserved him for special study among the essayists. (See p. 545.)

II. THE NOVELISTS OF THE VICTORIAN AGE

Charles Dickens (1812–1870)

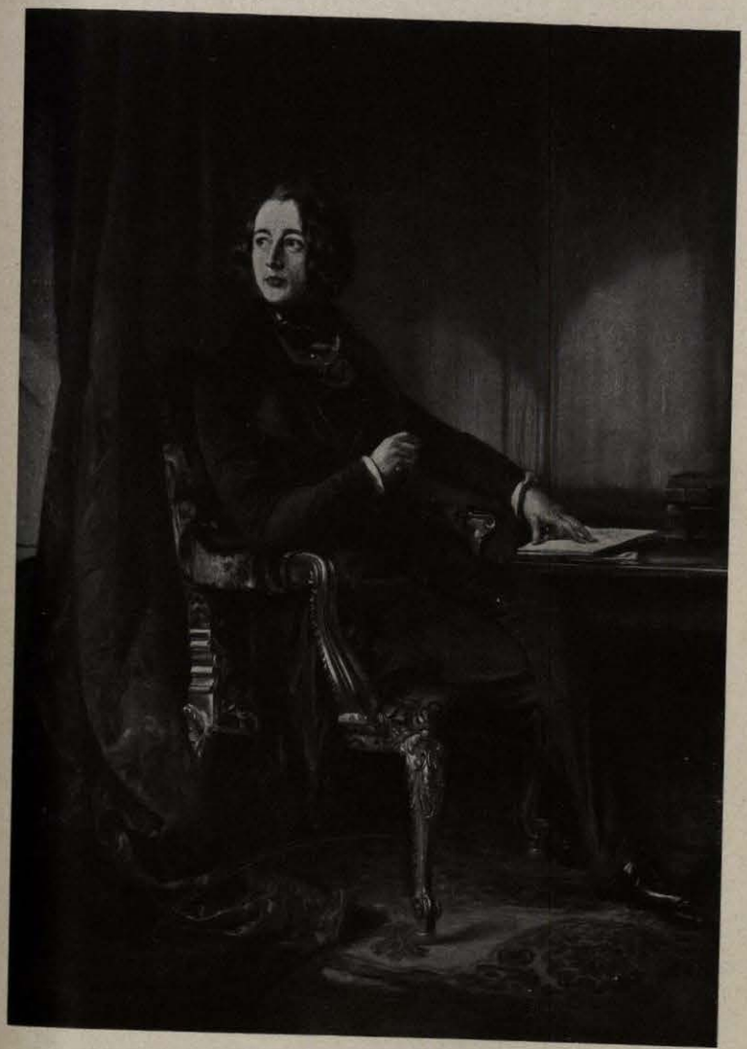
When we consider Dickens's life and work, in comparison with that of the two great poets we have been studying, the contrast is startling. While Tennyson and Browning were being educated for the life of literature, and shielded most tenderly from the hardships of the world, Dickens, a poor, obscure, and suffering child, was helping to support a shiftless family by pasting labels on blacking bottles, sleeping under a counter like a homeless cat, and once a week timidly approaching the big prison where his father was confined for debt. In 1836 his *Pickwick* was published, and life was changed as if a magician had waved his wand over him. While the two great poets were slowly struggling for recognition, Dickens, with plenty of money and too much fame, was the acknowledged literary hero of England, the idol of immense audiences which gathered to applaud him wherever he appeared. And there is also this striking contrast between the novelist and the poets, — that while the whole tendency of the age was toward realism, away from the extremes of the romanticists and from the oddities and absurdities of the early novel writers, it was precisely by emphasizing oddities and absurdities, by making caricatures rather than characters, that Dickens first achieved his popularity.

Life. In Dickens's early life we see a stern but unrecognized preparation for the work that he was to do. Never was there a better illustration of the fact that a boy's early hardship and suffering are sometimes only divine messengers disguised, and that circumstances which seem only evil are often the source of a man's strength and of the influence which he is to wield in the world. He was the second of eight poor children, and was born at Landport in 1812. His father, who is supposed to be the original of Mr. Micawber, was a clerk in a navy office. He could never make both ends meet, and after struggling with debts in his native town for many years, moved to London when Dickens was nine years old.

The debts still pursued him, and after two years of grandiloquent misfortune he was thrown into the poor-debtors' prison. His wife, the original of Mrs. Micawber, then set up the famous Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies; but, in Dickens's words, no young ladies ever came. The only visitors were creditors, and they were quite ferocious. In the picture of the Micawber family, with its tears and smiles and general shiftlessness, we have a suggestion of Dickens's own family life.

At eleven years of age the boy was taken out of school and went to work in the cellar of a blacking factory. At this time he was, in his own words, a "queer small boy," who suffered as he worked; and we can appreciate the boy and the suffering more when we find both reflected in the character of David Copperfield. It is a heart-rending picture, this sensitive child working from dawn till dark for a few pennies, and associating with toughs and waifs in his brief intervals of labor; but we can see in it the sources of that intimate knowledge of the hearts of the poor and outcast which was soon to be reflected in literature and to startle all England by its appeal for sympathy. A small legacy ended this wretchedness, bringing the father from the prison and sending the boy to Wellington House Academy, — a worthless and brutal school, evidently, whose head master was, in Dickens's words, a most ignorant fellow and a tyrant. He learned little at this place, being interested chiefly in stories, and in acting out the heroic parts which appealed to his imagination; but again his personal experience was of immense value, and resulted in his famous picture of Dotheboys Hall, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, which helped largely to mitigate the evils of private schools in England. Wherever he went, Dickens was a marvelously keen observer, with an active imagination which made stories out of incidents and characters that ordinary men would have hardly noticed. Moreover he was a born actor, and was at one time the leading spirit of a band of amateurs who gave entertainments for charity all over England. These three things, his keen observation, his active imagination, and the actor's spirit which animated him, furnish a key to his life and writings.

When only fifteen years old, he left the school and again went to work, this time as clerk in a lawyer's office. By night he studied shorthand, in order to fit himself to be a reporter, — this in imitation of his father, who was now engaged by a newspaper to report the speeches in Parliament. Everything that Dickens attempted seems



CHARLES DICKENS

After the portrait by Daniel Maclise