THE PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING

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with special reference to his
philosophy of immortality;
its sources and some conclusions.

by

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I should like to make it clear, at the very outset of this thesis, that my essay is, in no way, an attempt to prove any final formula for the interpretation of Browning's philosophy. An essay of this type cannot hope to uphold any definite theory. It can only try to offer a few suggestions reached by a critical study of the poet, himself, and his contribution to the literature of his time. At once a great thinker, a man of great originality and of great erudition, Browning is a poet of whom it would be impossible to say dogmatically how much of his philosophy is to be attributed to his own erudition and how much to his powers of original thinking. Thomas Carlyle, in his conversations with Gavan Duffy remarked that "Browning is an original man, and by no means a person who would consciously imitate any one." (1) Browning's great literary and philosophical contemporary realised only too well that a great philosophical mind, and especially the philosophical mind that expresses itself in poetry, often derives an idea in a very casual way, from very minor suggestions, only to think it over painfully in his own mind and utter it again in his own particular form

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(1) Gavan Duffy's "Conversations with Carlyle" 1892, p. 56-57.

of expression. This unconscious assimilation of sources and their reexpression in more literary or poetic form naturally obscures the original sources from which momentous thoughts are often derived. "A poet is a most indebted man," says Emerson, and indeed we need only glance at Browning's works to see from what varied material he was often able to derive the most significant philosophical suggestions. His peculiarly alert and sensitive mind easily caught the most subtle philosophical idea that underlay the life or thoughts of any character he met in real life or in his wide readings from literary and philosophical sources. It is, for example, a matter of biographical knowledge that Browning had at his disposal his father's large and very carefully collected library of mediaeval and modern European history and biography, and that he made constant use of these sources of investigations. How far, therefore, Browning consciously derived his own ideas from these sources , or from ~~the~~ existing literature, or how far he was influenced by the associations of his own day, are questions that can never be answered in any final way . Honest literary criticism can never rise to an exact science, and sweeping generalisations, too often lack any sufficient data to support them. To say with Mrs. Sutherland Orr that Browning knew nothing about Kant and the subsequent German movement, on the one hand; or to maintain, on the other hand, that he deliberately

plagiarised from these sources, illustrate, for example, the very kind of sweeping generalisation that I wish to avoid in this thesis. My object is to find out fairly how far Browning was influenced, consciously or unconsciously by this movement, by comparing the main principles of his philosophy with those of his predecessors or contemporaries who admittedly belong to this tradition.

That Browning was one of the most erudite, and, at the same time, one of the most original thinkers of modern times, is, I think, an indisputable fact. We might well, however, be faced, at once, with the statement that erudition does not necessarily imply poetic genius, and that a poet must be judged by his poetryand not by his erudition. Indeed it might ever be contested that a mind which devoted so much time to study and thought could hardly have an opportunity to clothe its ideas in adequate poetical garments. On the other hand, however, it is clear that Browning himself was constantly and accutely aware of this difficult problem. In his well known letter to Mr. W.G.Kingsland, in 1868, Browning showed something of his own attitude towards poetry, "I never pretended", he wrote, "to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes, to an idle man". (1) He is by no means an "idle singer of an empty day". He has no intention to lull his reader into an indifferent calm by soulless melodies. He is always strenuous, restless and virile,

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(1) Wise - Letters of Robert Browning, Vol.I, p.25.

putting before men the hardest problems of human existence. His poetry is full of these delineations of human strength and weakness; full, too, of powerful yet tender warnings or encouragements. His whole work is permeated with the intense desire for truth and right, whose value lies in cheering despondencies or pacifying undue exaltation in triumph. To quote Mr. Nettleship in his "Essays and Thoughts", - "Life and the passion, the sin and the exaltation, of men and women - all the beauty which thrills us in everything human because of its humanity - form together a study beyond the mental grasp save of a few great and loving souls ..... His highest glory is the unflinching zeal with which he has mastered and given to the world the results of his human strife, toil and achievement." (1) In Browning's poems we have the ultimate criticism of all human interests approached by avenues as various as is humanity itself; his work is his great attempt at the interpretation of life, and of human consciousness. "No man," says Coleridge, "was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a great philosopher." Browning's poems depend chiefly for their vigour of inspiration upon the flash of his poetic genius which illuminates the details of his philosophy and raises his poetry to a commanding position.

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(1) Nettleship, "Essays and Thoughts", p. XII.

It would be fa r wide of the truth to hold the opinion that Browning's poetry lapses into the baldest prose, when it is attempting to follow the trend of a philosophical argument. We cannot deny that there are places where Browning's poetic genius deserts him, but the lapses do not necessarily correspond to his moments of philosophic fervour. Indeed, many of his finest passages are those in which he is pronouncing his most weighty and profound thoughts; some of his most sublime chapters are those where he gives a delineation of his philosophic attitude or advances his philosophical proofs.

This "vivida vis animi", the flash of poetic genius, that distinguishes the poet from the speculative philosopher may,indeed, be found in all truly great philosophic poets whom the world honours. Mr. George Santayana, in his admirable series of essays "Three Philosophic poets" has mentioned three such poet-philosophers, Lucretius, Dante and Goethe. On what foundation may we suppose then that Browning should be included among these great philosophic poets? What relation may we suggest to lie between the British Poet and his great forerunners? We can, I think, for the purpose of this essay, neglect any reference to Dante. Dante has little to do with the general trend of this thesis, and, in any case, is a subject too well expounded by other critics to justify a comparison in this short treatise. What, then, of Lucretius? That Browning

was an ardent classical scholar needs no comment. That he knew Euripides and Aristophenes is evident from even a superficial glance at Browning's contribution to poetry. Can we therefore conjecture that Browning must have been influenced somewhat by Lucretius, the Great Roman philosophical poet who admired and imitated so often his Greek models Euripides and Aristophanes? This is a point which I shall endeavour to justify in the subsequent chapters of my thesis in an attempt to show that Browning, in common with these other poets of all times, can claim to incorporate into his works not only mellifluous verse but a well laden philosophy of life and human destiny. For the moment, however, it may be of some interest to inquire into the limits of Lucretius' poetry and philosophy to discover where they restrict one another, and where, on the other hand, they are complementary.

If it has been suggested that Browning was more philosopher than poet, it might well be equally maintained that Lucretius was more poet than philosopher. Lucretius brings the whole weight of Greek philosophic authority to bear up his contentions, and in a long poem attempts a philosophical proof for this theories. What we have said of Browning's philosophical poems may be said too of the "De Rerum Natura". There are times where Lucretius' dissertation loses all sense of poetic inspiration, and becomes nothing but a dull and monotonous catalogue in prose, which is none the less prose though

it conforms to the rules of metrical verse. These passages, however, do not necessarily correspond to moments of philosophic speculation. Indeed, it is far otherwise. It is when Lucretius rises to the heights of some new philosophic truth that his verse, too, takes a step towards the sublime. It is when, by apt illustration and metaphor, he drives home the force of his argument that his genius and inspiration break through the all too often monotonous style of Latin hexameter verse. At moments like these Lucretius forgets the dismal task he must perform and is filled with that optimistic confidence in human nature which is so characteristic of Browning's poetry. Lucretius was too interested in human nature to believe, strive though he might, in the ultimate destruction of man. And it is in those portions of his poem in which he speculates on the philosophy of the human being, his life, his hopes and his nature that Lucretius is found most akin to Browning. The Roman poet is generally known as a materialist, but we can never forget, also, that he is the humanist. His whole materialistic philosophy is subordinate to his interest in humanity, and in the main his object is to find an adequate philosophy of life for the race of mankind. All investigation and reasoning concerning ultimate truth are, in themselves, arduous, but the vision of philosophy is always sublime and beautiful. The order which philosophy reveals in the world is something beautiful, tragic and sympathetic to the human mind, just what every poet is always trying to catch. (1) And it is

(1) George Santagana "Three Philosophic Poets".

always in these moments when Lucretius is the great symbolist of nature, perhaps too, the symbolist of human nature, that his poetry rises to its most perfect form. His alliterations and assonances, the rhythmical movements of his verse, the style and color which he generally imparts are his most direct and obvious means of producing the necessary effect to impress his philosophical truth upon the reader. Even in many of the less poetical parts of his poem he shows a sincerity of thought and a force of reasoning that render a sublime inspiration. And although his method of reasoning and the ultimate truth which he wishes to establish are almost the direct antithesis of Browning, those characteristics we are accustomed to recognize in the Latin poet-philosopher in his moments of sublime humanity form a model with which the more erudite British philosopher-poet could well be compared. For though Browning may be considered the greatest deliberate exponent, and symbolist, perhaps, of human nature in English Literature, he was never the less, in his earlier poems at least, a great symbolist of nature (1)

The poet, however, who felt more keenly perhaps, than either Lucretius or Browning, the great march of events both in nature and mankind was the German, Goethe. An enthusiastic botanist and naturalist in his spare moments, Goethe nevertheless was urged more by the restless stirring of humanity that prophesied the German Romantic movement.

(1) vide Stopford Brooke "Poetry of Robert Browning", ch.II & III on "Treatment of Nature" p. 574.

He, too, owed a great deal to philosophy, though his ideas were more romantic than scientific. He was in general a follower of Spinoza, and perhaps too of Leibnitz, though he did not admit their mechanical interpretation of nature. He welcomed suggestions from these two modern disciples, if I may so call them, of Lucretius. He accepted their doctrine in so far as it was kindred to his own way of thinking; he even at times openly appropriated many of its results and processes, and tried to avoid a biased attitude to any doctrine that was not compatible with his conception of humanity and man's place in nature. Indeed, we can see in Goethe a synthesis not only of humanism and naturalism, a correlation between a philosophy of human na ture and a speculation about nature, but we find, too, a notable example of the synthesis of philosophy and poetry. Goethe is, however, like Browning, primarily a poet with a great philosophy of life, he is the poet of life with all its restlessness, its dissatisfaction and its revolt. The Weltschmerz that is to be found so poignantly expressed in his "Werther" is also reflected in his more mature "Tasso" and even in his last monumental work "Faust". The Weltschmerz attitude towards humanity, it is true, is essentially despondent, regarding man as "a degraded mass of animated dust." It voices the restless cry of a growing revolt against the existing order in nature "Why the poverty and pain of human existence?" .This philosophic and somewhat mystic theory of the tragedy and pain in human life that permeates all Goethe's poetry, also lies at

the root and beginning of the great optimism that inspired Browning. A careful perusal of Pauline, Paracelsus and Sordello will disclose a marked despondency in the poet's early outlook on life. This early period of Strum and Drang, this spirit of restlessness and revolt reflect in Browning's earlier works the influence, to some extent at least, of Byron and Shelly, but certainly they also reflect the insistent cry of the German Weltschmerz. There can be little doubt that "Pauline" is Browning's "Werther":

"Pauline" was published in 1833, and 1833 was a momentous year in the history of literature and philosophy. This "annus mirabilis", curiously enough, was the year that saw the death of Hegel, the greatest exponent of the German Romantic Movement in pure philosophy, and the death of Goethe, its greatest exponent in prose and verse; this year also saw the publication or birth, if I may call it such, in England, of Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus", a work that remains to this day the most complete expression of the German movement in English prose. Can we not safely say, therefore, that Browning must have had some conscious knowledge of this great movement and its rising expression in England? May we not even say, perhaps, that Browning helped this movement to express itself in English literature?

There are many eminent critics of Browning who hold that he is not influenced or even conscious of his literary environment, and among them are Mrs. Sutherland Orr and

Stopford Brooke. Mrs. Orr in her attempt to establish the originality of Browning has been led to express very broad generalisations. "It is essential to bear in mind", she says, "that Mr. Browning is a metaphysical poet and not a metaphysical thinker, to do justice to the depth and originality of his creative power; for his imagination includes everything which, at a given moment, a human being can think or feel, and often finds itself, therefore, at some point to which other minds have reasoned their way. The coincidence occurs most often with German lines of thought and it has therefore been concluded that he has studied the works in which they are laid down, or has otherwise moved in the same track; the fact being that he has no bond of union with German philosophers, but the natural tendencies of his own mind. It may be easily ascertained that he did not read their language until late in life; and if what I have said of his mental habits is true, it is equally certain that their methods have been more foreign to him still. He resembles Hegel, Fichte or Schelling, as the case may be, by the purely creative impulse which has met their thought, and which if he had lived earlier, might have forestalled it." (1) That Mrs. Orr has exceeded the bounds of probability in her enthusiasm needs hardly be pointed out. For when we consider the affinities of Brownings philosophy, it seems increasingly evident that he owed a great deal to the great German philosophers and poets of the Romantic Movement. He certainly could never have been so ignorant of them as Mrs. Orr represents him to

(1) Sutherland Orr, "Handbook to Browning's Poems" p.4.

have been. He would have been a very ignorant man indeed if he had not a certain knowledge of their influence. We could hardly concede that he was an erudite genius, if we acknowledged that he was not conscious of the profoundest rational and literary influence in the England of his day. Whether his agreement with them in so many respects was due chiefly to direct influence or to independent reflection on similar problems on philosophy is largely the problem of this thesis. We cannot afford, at any rate, to overlook the likeness of his philosophy to the ideas of the great German philosophers before him. Indeed in a letter to Alfred Dommet on September 31st, 1842, he asks, "Do you still prosecute German study? I read pretty well now." (1) He was apparently, also, reading Tieck's and Schlegee's translations of Shakespeare to help him with his German; many quarterlies of the day were issued containing articles on Leibnitz, Kant and his follower Fichte; translations, too, of Kant appeared well before 1819, (2) All these facts it

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(1)"Robert Browning and Alfred Domnet" by F.G.Kenyon, p.89.

(2) The following is an extract from the University of Wisconsin studies in Language and Literature, Vol.16, p/281, in which Bayard and Quincy Morgan has compiled the bibliography of translations from German Authors in England.

Translations of Kant.

"Prolegomena & Metaphysical foundations of Natural Science": Tr. E.B.Bax, 1791.
Perpetual Peace: Tr. M.C. Smith, 1795.
Principles of Critical Philosophy: Tr. 1797
Metaphysics of Ethics: Tr. 1799.
Elements of critical Philosophy: Tr. A.F.M.Willich,1798-9
Metaphysical Works: Tr. J.Richardson, 1818.

Translations of Hegel in Wisconsin University St. p.228

Translations by F.H.Hedge in "Prose writers of Germany" 1849
Bohn's Translations in History of Philosophy, 1852.

would seem lend colour to contradict the assertion that "he had no bond of union with the German philosophers but the natural tendencies of his own mind", and that, "he resembles Hegel, Fichte or Schelling - by the purely creative impulse which has met their thought". In any case there can be no doubt that after 1849 (3) he was very conscious of the German movement. His later works abound in allusions to Goethe, Schelling and other German thinkers. But how far may we suppose that he was influenced before 1833, before he published "Pauline" and "Paracelsus," The influence is obvious on Coleridge before him, on Carlyle, His great friend and contemporary, and on Mathew Arnold after him; how far was he himself influenced? That is a problem with which I will deal in some subsequent chapters of this thesis.

In 1819, as I pointed out before, John Richardson published his translations of "The Metaphysical works of the

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(2) cont'd from page 12.

Translations of Fichte, p. 106.
"Characteristics of Present Age", Tr. W.Smith, 1844.
"The Destination of Man", Tr. Jane Smart, 1846.

(3) For bibliography of Browning up to 1849, see "Archiv Für Das Studium der Neueren Sprachen." Where Kant, Goethe, Fichte, Leibnitz, and Shelling are mentioned with definite assurance.

celebrated Emmanuel Kant". In this introduction I can touch only briefly and superficially on one or two of the salient features of the great German Philosopher's doctrines. The relations between the philosophy of Kant and that of Browning, however, has had very little recognition. The points of similarity have always been an intriguing field of inquiry, though few have taken the trouble to investigate the question with any degree of patience or insight.

The two great and fundamental principles of Kant's whole philosophy are the doctrines of the "ego", and of "immortality". Lying as they do at the basis of the German Philosopher's whole speculation, it need hardly be pointed out that these two doctrines are fundamentally related.

The doctrine of the "ego" as enunciated by Kant is briefly this. (1) The"ego", that conscious self, here and now, which I call "Me", is the first and simplest assumption of all true philosophy. "The identity of self-consciousness is obviously the necessary condition of all consciousness and knowledge in its manifold determinations." Everything I know or can know must be related to this conscious self. Without this "ego" or unity of apperception, as Kant would call it, no knowledge or experience is possible. "The transcendental unity of self-consciousness is the supreme condition of all knowledge." This self is always, therefore, the centre of the only world I know or can know. I measure right and left, and up and down,

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(1) For a clear interpretation of Kant's Original synthetic unity of apperception see "Kant Explained" by J.Watson, p. 145 ff.

and far and near, and before and after, always with reference to this particular here and now, which I call myself. The pure consciousness of self excludes all determinations. I alone am I, the centre of this universe of experience and knowledge. Compare this with the following lines from Pauline:-

I am made up of an intensest life
Of a most clear idea of consciousness
Of self - distinct from all its qualities
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers;
And thus far it exists, if tracked in all
But linked in me, to self supremacy,
Existing as a centre to all things
Most potent to create, and rule, and call
Upon all things to minister to it; .....

It would, I suggest, be impossible to find in all literature a more complete and compact summary of Kant's doctrine of the "ego" than in these nine lines from "Pauline". In the two verses above that I have underlined Browning has included the fundamental ideas of a whole chapter in Kant's long "Critique of Pure Reason". "Pauline" was written in 1833; translations of Kant had appeared as early as 1819; may we not, then, assume with some confidence that the omnivorous reader, Browning, was familiar with the main tenets of Kant's celebrated treatise?

A conscious self, then, is the essential factor to all knowledge and experience. The "ego", too, it is scarcely necessary to point out, is a prerequisite to any adequate belief in immortality whatsoever. If there be no soul or self, there cen be no sound belief or hope of personal immortality. It was only natural, then, that the next great problem which Kant discussed should have been the question of this very immortality of the soul. And the striking similarity between Browning's belief in immortality and that set out by Kant is, also, highly suggestive. These two theories are clearly too closely allied for this striking similarity to be attributed to coincidence arising "from the purely creative impulse" of each rising to meet the thought of the other. And I am inclined to doubt, therefore, that if Browning "had lived earlier, he might have forestalled 'Kant's" celebrated proof of immortality.

Let us look more carefully, therefore, into this doctrine of Kant concerning the immortality of the soul. Briefly, the theory is as follows. We are commanded to attain perfection; perfection cannot be attained in this life therefore there must be a life to come in which the pursuit of perfection is continued eternally. Let me quote a passage from Kant's"Critique of Practical Reason" Book II, Chapter II, section 4, to illustrate my point more fully. "The perfect harmony of the will with the moral law is holiness, a perfection of which no rational being existing in a world of sense is capable at any moment of his life. Yet holiness

is demanded as practically necessary, and it can be found only in an infinite progress towards perfect harmony with the moral law .... Now this infinite progress is possible only if we presuppose that the existence of a rational being is prolonged to infinity, and that he retains his personality for all time. This is what we mean by the immortality of the soul." In other words we are commanded to attain the unattainable. That perfection is essentially unattainable in this life or the hereafter is the basis of any true theory of immortality. Self-conscious life is eternal life. If the eternal struggle after self-perfection is not the basis of conscious life, then the whole universe is irrational. Why the futile struggle after an unattainable ideal, if aspiration is to be cut off at death? The real significance of Kant's proof of immortality cannot be over emphasized. Its influence on the whole world of modern thought has been profound. All poets, it is true, have sung the "credo" of immortality; but their songs have been cries of longing and of consequent expectation; and it is only in modern times that poets have attempted to found this hope on a definite philosophical basis; and of all these poets in modern English verse, Browning is the most obvious. Conscience, always a major force in philosophy, demands perfect rectitude, even our lower demands require satisfaction. I would "be all, have, see, know, taste, feel all - and I should thus have been

though gifted lower than the meanest soul". Even the boot black has a "soul far other than his stomach" and would seek higher satisfaction, higher aspirations than his bodily comforts. (1) In art, in science, and, in fact, in all phases of conscious existence we find that poignant yearning or demand for perfect proof with the mathematical precision of 2 + 2 = 4 or the perfection of Giotto's "O". We need very little quotation to show that this is essentially the foundation of Browning's buoyant belief in immortality. And whether we take the simple or the abstruse poems, Browning's theme of immortality is essentially the same; in his first poem and in his last we find that same note of aspiration and ambition restlessly struggling ~~#~~there and here" Browning even takes the despairing cry of a "Werther" in the age of Weltschmerz and turns his despond wail into an expression of belief in a higher perfection. ~~/Browning takes the inevitable German problem-character, but how different is his conclusion./~~ The German will ask, "what is the explanation of the tragic course of so many lives on which nature seems so bountifully to have bestowed her gifts? They were amply equipt for the battle of life, yet failed utterly, their hearts becoming filled with a pessimistic scorn of all human existence. Goethe's terse but somewhat inadequate answer is "They are problematical characters, who are never equal to the situation in which they are placed, and whom no situation satisfies.

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(1) vide "Everlasting Yea"

Therefore arises the terrible conflict that consumes their lives without happiness". The answer in Browning's language would probably have been, "Yes! the situation is indeed beyond their capabilities. Therefore arises the terrible conflict which they carry on with an eternal hope for happiness, satisfied that they are doing their utmost to cope with their circumstances on this earth!" And so, may we not say, we find Browning correcting the dispondent tendency which the German Transcendental Movement took from an impetus given to it by Kant, by applying rightly Kant's central doctrine of the eternal struggle in everlasting time towards perfection in an imperfect world.

Browning was not, however, the only literary genius to introduce these doctrines of German philosophy into England. As I mentioned before, Carlyle in 1833 also published "Sartor Resartus". In this great work, too, we find that eternal command to attain perfection, that restless dissatisfaction with the imperfections of this world. One short passage from the "Everlasting Yea" will, I think amply illustrate my point.

"Man's unhappiness. as I construe it, comes of his greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the finite. Will the whole, Finance Ministers and upholsterers and confectioners of modern Europe undertake, in joint-stock company, to make one shoeblack HAPPY? They cannot accomplish

it, above an hour or two: for the shoeblack also has a soul quite other than his stomach: and would require, if you consider it, for his permanent satisfaction and saturation simply this allotment, no more, and no less: God's infinite Universe altogether to himself, therein to enjoy infinitely, and fill every wish as fast as it rose..... Try him with half of a universe, of an Omnipotence, he sets to qua rrelling with the proprietor of the other half, and declares himself the most maltreated of men. - Always there is a black spot in our sunshine; it is, even as I said, the Shadows of Ourselves."

Could we ever find a finer expression of the "divine discontent" on which an optimism for the ultimate perfection of humanity could be founded? I hardly think so. We find here that Carlyle, too, had his "Werther" period, his stage of"doubt and denial" with the despondent outlook on a world where the "loathsomeness of rotten institutions" and the "reeling frenzy of the unguided multitude" were left in utter darkness. This spirit, shall we call it, mental agony, soon passed, we find him looking on the ugly, terrible times with a hope for reformation towards the good. Here, too, we find the great doctrine of the "ego" reflected. "Each 'I' stands in the middle of his own world, each measures up and down, fore and aft, from where he stands, each has his own blue dome and his own horizon." Could we find a better, if I may call it, translation of the ideas of Kant's philosophy into English than this? And with his great belief in force and the will of the individual and the race he comes to the

conclusion that "This world is built, not on jargon and falsehood, but on Truth and Reason." In fine, thereis no need to remark on Carlyle's indebtedness to the German movement. What, then, may be said about Carlyle's influence on Browning? It is a well known fact of biography that Carlyle and Browning were intimate friends after 1840, and the probability of Browning having many conversations on the subject of the German Transcendental Movement in England with Carlyle may be taken for granted. Their friendship may not, however, have begun so late in the lives of each as this. There is a picturesque tradition that remains that Thomas Carlyle, riding out upon 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. (1) Whatever may be the foundation for this legend, there remains the latent probability that Browning may have been familiar with the works of Carlyle in his earlier days, and may even have derived many of the ideas for his earlier poems from his knowledge of this great English exponent of the German philosophical and literary movement.

All truly great philosophical inspirations have had their expression at one time or another in the genius of poetry. Indeed all philosophy itself, in those moments of divine inspiration when it rises to the sublime heights

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(1) William Sharp's "Life of Browning".

of truth, takes on the fervor and enthusiasm of poetic expression. How easy it is, then, for the poet to grasp these great flashes of imaginative insight and translate them into passages of poetic beauty, unsurpassed in all literature. This is exactly what did happen. "Werther" represents Goethe struggling with the romantic restlessness, the tempermental Goethe struggling with that movement in its philosophic phrases. The "Sartor Resartus" is the expression of Thomas Carlyle, the man of moods and storm, struggling with the same problem. The Elements of Weltschmerz are obvious enough in both. A superficial reading of Browning, on the other hand, might lead us to arrive at the conclusion that he was naturally of far too buoyant a temper to be touched at all by the pain of the Weltschmerz. But let anyone read "Pauline" or "Paracelsus" and this easy theory of Browning's optimism will be somewhat modified. Indeed the main characters in each of these two poems are essentially of the same type as Werther and Teufelsdroeckh. The dominant undertone of each character is a dissatisfaction with the world, a painful complaint at the misery and woe of human life in the imperfect and vainly struggling universe. In "Pauline", "Paracelsus" and "Sordello" we see exhibited the failure of humanity in an attempt to manifest the infinite scope of their ambition or to realise the infinite energy of their will.

At this point, then, we might well ask the question what are the fundamental concepts and elements of Browning's poetry? In broad outline we may say that there are three basic

doctrines to be found in all his works; first, there is the doctrine of personality, the eternal ego, the "I am I"; next we will find a profound plea for immortality; and lastly, an optimism that reached the highest limits of Romanticism. Perhaps the most striking example that we find in all literature of the theory of personality is the persistent determined cry, through all the Sturm and Drang period of Pauline and Ponacelsus, of the indominable unquenchable "I am made up of intensest life". In"Rabbi Ben Ezra"we have as a later example the emphasis on personality and personal achievement, the power of personality to overcome the spirit of pain and death. How much of this essential doctrine did he owe to the restless German Transcendentalism.

To give examples of Browning's belief in Immortality would be to trace already hackneyed examples. His whole works abound in allusions to the infinite progress, the cry to "strive on, there as here". Browning lived in a Transcendental era, this much is obvious, How much, then, can we fairly estimate that Browning was influenced by this movement? In "Old Pictures in Florence"and many others poems he gives expression to this eternal transcendtal thoery of Immortality as laid down by Kant. Here we find echoed and reechoed the great cry that there is a vast gulf fixed in human life between our clear powers to conceive perfection and our pathetic powers to achieve it. Why did Giotto fail to complete his Campanile? Why do we see in Greek art that evidence of perfection which we would be but cannot be? Browning's theory

of personality, his unbounded faith in immortality and his buoyant Romantic optimism are all held in common with the German movement. That Browning and Kant built their philosophy upon the same foundations is obvious. How far, therefore, are we entitled, in a critical way, to attribute these basic principles in the English Poet's philosophy to the German Transcendental Movement, which began with Kant and which reached its zenith during the generation that immediately preceded Browning? That is the principle problem of this essay.

CHAPTER I

PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

"The admirers of Browning alike make him out to be a pedant rather than a poet. The only difference between the Browningite and the anti-Browningite, is that the second says he was not a poet but a mere philosopher, and the first says he was a philosopher and not a mere poet. The admirer disparages poetry in order to exalt Browning; the opponent exalts poetry in order to disparage Browning; and all the while Browning himself exalted poetry above all earthly things, served it with a single-hearted intensity, and stands among the few poets who hardly wrote a line of anything else."(1) This misunderstanding, however, that has supposed Browning to be other than poetical, because his form was often prose-ful and abrupt, has usually arisen from an inadequate study of the basic principles of both philosophy and poetry. Before we can proceed, therefore, to any adequate study of Browning's thought and his expression of that thought, we must, it seems, first inquire into the definite limits of both philosophy and poetry. We must see whether they are to be held as mutually exclusive, each holding its own sphere of interest; or, whether they are not, after all, complementary.

Since the earliest days when literature became a critical art, all good writing has been based on a true criticism of life in all its ethical relations.

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(1) G.K.Chesterton: "Robert Browning", p. 17.

Thus we find even in the earliest Greek and Roman literary critics this great rule of literary execution, so aptly suggested by Horace in his "Ars Poetica".

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae
Aut simul et incunda et idonea dicere vitae.

(A.P. 333-334)

Indeed, Horace, when he compares the respective importance of philosophy and of diction in poetry, gives the preference to philosophy. The art of literature with which he is concerned is that of expressing right thoughts properly, peacefully and harmoniously with the weight, force and energy of good versification. In a discussion, such as this chapter includes, we must really never, therefore, lose sight of the fact that Horace, the greatest literary critic, perhaps, of all time, lays down the final rule that good poetic art must be at once instructive and pleasing. All poetry, to live up to the standards of immortal verse, must be thoughtful as well as beautiful. That Browning never lost sight of this rule is well illustrated in the quotation, which I have already given in my introduction, that he "never pretended to offer such literature as should be a substitute for a cigar, or a game of dominoes, to an idle man." The true poet appeals to reason as well as to the heart; for he not only can see the eternal truths, himself, but he is able to fulfil the highest calling of the poet, that of making men see it for themselves

"For the worst of us to say that they have seen,
For the better, what it was they saw - the best
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest."
(Sordello,Bk.III)

On the other hand, however, we must not forget that a philosophy that is not adequately clothed in comprehensible diction, will fall into the limbo of oblivion, or at best be recast by some patient disciple before it can attain to popular approval. To say that true philosophy must neglect the fineness of form and smoothness of language which is so essential to good poetry, is to stray widely from the mark. Philosophy can never be indifferent to that beauty of form and music of speech which is the distinguishing feature of poetry. Thought and its adequate expression are as inseparable in philosophic discourse as in poetic art. Poetry is but the idealised and monumental utterance of our deepest and most profound human thought; and true philosophy is always to be found in fine art. It is true, no doubt, that poets teach by apt metaphor or illustration, by hints and parables, but these are the mere forms of thought and not thought itself. And it is only when the sublime regions of pure thought are viewed through the eyes of the artistic poet, that sense and reason interpenetrate and offer the highest interpretation of life. At these great moments of inspiration we are shown the truth so vividly and simply that we are very unwilling to make art and philosophy mutually exclusive. We might well, then, ask the question with

Mr. Santayana, "Can it be accidental that the most adequate and probably the most lasting exposition.... of philosophy should have been made by poets? Are poets, at heart, in search of philosophy? Or is philosophy, in the end, nothing but poetry?" (1)

We may, I think, leave out of account the position of the old transcendental doctrine, that poetry must be sensuous and passionate, leaving it to philosophy to deal with the naked abstractions of intellect. Philosophy is an attempt to give a rational explanation of the universe and all that it contains. Art, therefore, attempting as it does to an interpretation or representation of the universe, must make use of certain explanations set forth in philosophical principles. It is true that where philosophy becomes a speculative investigation into, or reasoning upon, the ultimate truth of the world and human existence in the world, there is little in philosophy that can be adapted to poetic expression. No one for a moment would suggest that Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason" is poetic. Yet Kant's vision of philosophy is always sublime. The order it reveals in the world is something beautiful, tragic and sympathetic to the human mind, " just what every poet is trying to catch. "

In philosophy itself, investigation and reasoning are only preparatory parts, mere means, that is, to an end. In a philosophic treatise these necessary foundations are at best tedious and uninteresting, the rough paths that must

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(1) George Santayana: "Three Philosophical Poets".

be travelled up the mountain's side before the beautiful flash of clear landscape is revealed at the summit. When poetry, therefore, is linked with this arduous task it sometimes becomes artificial and only, with bad grace, conforms to the necessities of bare metrical effect. Let us take, for example, Browning's three later poems, "Ferishtah's Fancies", "Parleyings with Certain People", and "Red Cotton Nightcap Country". In these poems his artistic instinct seems only for the adornment of doctrines derived, already, from a metaphysical repository. His art is no longer free, no longer has its own end to serve, but is coerced into an alien service; it has become argumentative, discursive and purely metaphysical. It has ceased to be creative. When Browning tumbles into these metaphysical quagmires and tries to extricate himself, he leaves his art far behind to drag itself slowly to the heights of inspiration. This long and arduous trail of discourse and dissertation, however, nearly always terminates in a flash of imaginative insight, to which, in the real sense of the word, the seeker after truth ultimately arrives. This is true poetry. Here the poet may look with a clear and steady contemplation at all things in their order and worth. Such a contemplation must necessarily be transcendental and imaginative; and a philosopher who has attained it by the force of his creative imagination, is, for the moment, a poet; and the poet who turns his practical and passionate imagination thither, is for the moment, a philosopher. Are we justified then, in

speaking of the philosophy ofa poet? Yes! I think we may well agree with Coleridge that "no man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a great philosopher."

Is Browning, then, a great poet as defined by Coleridge? It is obvious that he offers a theory of humanity, estimated and examined from its philosophical foundations and presuppositions. Browning, too, would write a "Critique of Pure Reason". He offers a definite theory to which he claims attention, not only on account of the poetic beauty that may lie in it, but on the ground, too, that it is a true interpretation and exposition of the true nature of humanity. Indeed, Browning's place will always be with the great interpretators of life, with the poets who use their art to express the shine and shade of life's tragic comedy - to whom the base, the trivial, the frivolous, the grotesque, the absurd seem worth representing along with the pure, the noble and the sublime, since all these elements are human.... His great contribution to literature is seen in the profound and subtle interpretation of human life. (1) Browning, too, would build his system of philosophy and build it well. His power of delineating all human passion is, therefore, invariably sustained by the most profound philosophical thought and insight. Indeed Browning represents, perhaps, the most advanced, liberal, logical and philosophical theory of the nineteenth century. "Nil humanum a me alienum puto". Like Bacon, he has taken

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(1) Phelps: "Browning, How to Know Him". p. 68.

all knowledge for his province. "Of all the poets," wrote Milsand in 'Le Revue des deux Mondes', "he is the most capable of summing up the conceptions of the religion, the ethics, and the theoretical knowledge of our period, in forms which embody the beauty proper to such abstractions."(1) His work is replete with fine drawn conclusions and convictions upon philosophic problems and ideas. They are not mere fragments of some metaphysical tradition. The wide range of his illustration, the Protean, if I may call it, many sidedness of his poetic profession are typical of all philosophical thinking whether in prose or verse. No where, for example, than in even some of his shorter poems can we find a better illustration of this combination of optimistic outlook on human destiny coupled with a critical philosophic belief in immortality.

In Browning, then, we realise the synthesis of the poetry and philosophy that lead to communion with the universe of the finite and infinite. The purpose of poetry is to reveal the spirit of humanity in all its aspirations, hopes and joys, perhaps, too, its sorrows; philosophy has its basic aim in searching within the limits of human reason for a union with the infinite; poetry is concrete, philosophy abstract; the one real, the other ideal; and in Browning we find both. In his works we find the philosophy that offers a thoery of human destiny coupled with a poetic intuition of life in all its fulness and ideal harmony. For example, what more beautiful expression in concrete form, of the passionate

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(1) Griffin and Minchin: "Life of Robert Browning", p. 183.

longing of humanity after life and immortality, can we find than in "Evelyn Hope"

So, hush, - I will give you this leaf to keep -
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand.
There, that is our secret! go to sleep;
You will wake, and remember, and understand.

Or perhaps a more striking example could be found in the passionate moralising of Andrea del Sarto, the perfect painter, amid the sordid circumstances and bitter disappointments of his own life, in search of that perfection of life which can only be hoped for in the life to come.

In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance -
Four great walls in the new Jerusalem,
Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
For Leonard, Raphael, Agnolo and me.

What finer examples, indeed than these, could we have of the end of all true poetry and philosophy? Is not poetry, indeed, always a synthesis of the true and beautiful? Indeed, is not what men call goodness just a synthesis of the true and the beautiful made real in human lives, and all true poetry, therefore, an expression of that goodness? If so, no poet who has ever lived, undertook more conscientiously than Browning to effect this synthesis. That much, at least, is clear.

Thoughts' what they mean by verse and seek in verse
Boys seek for images and melody
Men must have reason - so you aim at men!

(Transcendentalism)

Browning himself by ridiculing the young poet who will give to men "naked thought, good true, treasonable stuff, solid matter, without imagination, imagery or emotion," shows how necessary is this union of beauty and thought. Indeed that Browning realised fully the benefits to be derived from coupling poetry with philosophy can be easily gathered from all his writings. He wrote, for example, to Professor Knight of St. Andrews in 1889 thus:- "It is certainly the right order of things: Philosophy first, and Poetry which is its highest outcome, afterwards - and much harm can be done by reversing the natural process. How capable you are of doing justice to the highest philosophy embodied in poetry, your various studies ..... prove abundantly". (1)

In reviewing, however, what I have said on the subject of poetry and philosophy we must never lose sight of the fact that ultimately a poet's work will be essentially determined by his ability to write poetry, to give adequate expression to his emotions, passions, feelings, thoughts or what ever may be the subject of his verse. "It is with presentment that the artist has, fundamentally, to concern himself. If he cannot present poetically , then he is not, in effect, a poet, though he may be a poetic thinker, or a great philosopher. Browning's eminence is not because of his detachment from what someone has foolishly called "the mere

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(1) Mrs. Sutherland Orr, "Robert Browning", p. 54.

handiwork, the furnisher's business, of the poet. It is the delight of the true artist that the product of his talent should be wrought to a high technique equally by the shaping brain and the dextrous hand. Browning is great because of his formative energy: because despite the excess of burning and compulsive thought.

Thoughts swarm thro' the myriad chambered brain
Like multitudes of bees i'the numerous cells,
Each staggering 'neath the undelivered freight.

he strikes from the form of words an electric flash so transcendentally illuminative that what is commonplace becomes radiant with that light which dwells not in nature, but only in the visioning eye of man.(1) Browning cared more for form, perhaps, than any other poet in the English language. "People accuse me of not taking pains!" he says himself, "I take nothing but pains!" (2) He always finished his work very carefully and was always conscious of the conscientious labor which had to be devoted to the form of poetic art. He was always weaving and modelling and inventing new forms. He was never merely content to use old forms to express his new ideas, to use old skins for new wine; but rather, on the other hand, no sooner had he a new idea than he turned to make a new form for its expression.

So I will sing on - fast as the fancies come
Rudely - the verse being as the mood it paints.
(Pauline).

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(1) Wm. Sharp: "Life of Robert Browning", p. 55.
(2) Mrs. Sutherland Orr: "Life of Robert Browning", p. 553.

CHAPTER II

LUCRETIUS

It is a far cry from Browning to Lucretius. Lucretius was a materialist and Browning an idealist; Lucretius wrote in polished and rigid Latin hexameters, Browning in rugged modern English free verse. Both, however, were philosophical poets; each one of them, indeed, perhaps the most conscious metaphysical poet of his own time. Real metaphysical poets are not as numerous as we sometimes are led to think. Mr. Santayana includes Dante among the philosophical poets but this classification seems distinctly doubtful. Even Goethe's claims to be a philosophical poet are open to question. Goethe himself says over and over again that his mind was not cast on a metaphysical mold. It may not, therefore, I suggest, be going too far to say that Lucretius and Browning are perhaps the two most deliberately metaphysical poets in literature. It will not be out of place, then, I think, to compare at this point the manner in which each of these two poets attempted to clothe their philosophical concepts in the forms of fine poetry.

What may be said of Browning as an originator of verse and an inventor of new ideas may equally be said of the great Roman poet Lucretius, nearly two thousand years before Browning's time.

deinde quod obscura de re tam lucida pango
carmina , musaeo contingens cuncta lepore
---------- volui tibe sauviloquenti
carmine Pierio rationem exponere nostram
et quasi musaeo dulce contingere melle,

si tibi forte animam tali ratione tenere
versibus in nostris possem. (1)

Thus at the very outset of his poem Lucretius would have us know that he has a philosophy of life and of human destiny to expound, and that he intends to make his otherwise dry discourse pleasant, as well as instructive, by overlaying it with the pleasant honey of verse which he will take from the blooming haunts that have never as yet been trodden by the foot of man. He realises that his doctrines must be beautifully clothed in fine poetic garments if they aretto find their fulles t and most satisfactory utterance in human language. To Lucretius, however, the truth of his philosophy was all-important; and to this the graces of his poetry were usually made subordinate. But the truth or falsehood of his philosophy has exceedingly little concern for the purposes of this thesis; my main object is to illustrate how far philosophy at all can find an adequate vehicle of expression in the beauties and graces of poetical composition.

A critical study of both Lucretius and Browning each in relation to his own times, will, I think, reveal a certain similarity in their methods. As in each age the poet could scarcely be an inventor of a new philosophy, both Lucretius and Browning could hardly help adopting one of the systems in vogue at their time, or at least correlating the most compatible doctrines of their times with the particular beliefs they entertained or cherished. If Lucretius derived his philosophy from

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(1) De Rerum Natura : Bk 1, 933-4, 945-49

the prevailing materialism of the 1st Century B.C., we may venture to suggest the more that Browning derived his philosophy from the prevailing idealism of the 18th Century A.D. The true prophet is always the prophet of his own day and generation, the interpreter and voice of his own time. But the voice of the prophet is not usually heard at first with applause; and so we find that both Lucretius and Browning had to wait for some time before the full force of their philosophy was understood and appreciated.

For the promulgation of his philosophy Lucretius possessed in a high degree the two qualities with which a true poet can ill dispense, the power of clear conception and the ability to express these concepts in vivid imagery. By a succession of striking images and comparisons drawn from the world of phenomena he was able to impress the truth of his doctrines on his readers.

> dumtaxat rerum magnarum parva potest res
> exemplare dare et vestigia notitiae. (1)

Indeed, at no place does Lucretius rise to higher heights of grandeur, sublimity and varied beauty, than in those passages where he gives some apt metaphor or illustration intended to clarify vividly in terms of imagery what would otherwise be a somewhat obscure metaphysical concept. There are times, it is true, when he becomes far too technical for the poet, and at other times, also, when he becomes too inaccurate for the philosopher. But what has been said of

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(1) "De Rerum Natura" Bk. IV pp. 123-4.

Browning in the introduction may be said also of Lucretius, that those parts of his poetry which are at best but verses which conform to metrical rule, are not necessarily those parts which embody his main philosophical tenets. On the other hand, also, as with Browning, his most striking violations of the laws of construction very often produce very fine and harmonious effects.

Though Lucretius came at a very unfavorable period in the history of both philosophy and poetry, and was hence given little recognition during the declining years of the Roman Empire or the Middle Ages, his influence has been profound in both philosophy a nd literature since the Augustan Period in European verse. No scholar, therefore, who can claim the knowledge of classics with which Browning is credited could, in his day, have afforded to neglect Lucretius. Then, too, when we consider that Lucretius was perhaps the real foundation stone for the trend of ma terialistic philosophy that was so highly developed during these very years of Browning's life; that Newton in his "Principia", that Darwin in his "Origin of Species" and many other thinkers too numerous to mention, incorporated bodily whole passages from Lucretius into their own treatises, we may well be fairly sure that Browning must have had some acquaintance with Lucretius. And indeed there are many passages in Browning's works that remind us strongly of Lucretius. Let us examine a few examples.

Why where's the need of temples, when the walls
of the earth are that?
(Death in the Desert)

I saw the old boundary and wall of the world
(Pompilia 1546)

Are not these two quotations very similar to the following passage from Lucretius?

"flammantia moenia mundi"

Or again, let us examine another verse from Browning

flaws
Whereby the wily vapour fain would slip
Back and rejoin its source before the time.
(An Epistle)

Can we not find a parallel structure in the following lines from Lucretius?

Atque a nimai
diffugiantt partes per caulas corporis omnis
(Bk. III 254-5)

Or as a final suggestion let us compare a verse from "Abt Vogler" to some lines from the De Rerum Natura,

Would that the structure brave, the manifold
music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch
as when Solomon willed

Armies of angels that soar, legions of demons
that lurk
Man, brute, reptile, fly - alien of end and of aim
Adverse, each from the other heaven high,
hell deep removed -
Should rush into sight at once as he named the
ineffable name,
And piled him a palace straight, to pleasure
the princess he loved.

Here Browning's "Solomon willed", implying the doctrine that when intense desire produces will, will develops force and force develops matter, is comparable to Lucretius' description of the soul atoms whereby the will by its action transmits power through the body and results in action

Ut videas initum motus a corde creari
ex animique voluntate id procedere primum
inde dari porro per totum corpus et artus. (1)

Browning and his wife were very conversant with the works of Lucretius during their happy fifteen years of life in Italy. Indeed we have one of the finest eulogies of Lucretius from Mrs. Browning's own pen

Lucretius - nobler than his mood:
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe, and said "No God",

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(1) C.P. DeRerum Natura, Book II, lines 260-288 for a full explanation.

Finding no bottom: he denied
Divinely the divine and died
Chief poet on the Tiber side

By Grace of God! his face is stern
As one compelled, in spite of scorn
To teach a truth he could not learn

(A Vision of Poets)

In these lines Mrs. Browning has caught subtilly the very essence of Lucretius as poet and philosopher. In his ultimate purpose Lucretius was attempting to preach a doctrine which he himself could not accept. His love of humanity would not permit him to forsee only a hopeless end to consciousness in bodily decay, and it is in his higher moods, when he rises from the slough of Epicurean materialism that he utters his grandest thoughts on humanity in incomparable verse. When he forgets his aim and his heart overrules his mind, Lucretius approaches to that inspiring and confident joy of life and hope for the future that is so characteristic of all Browning's optimistic verse. As Mr. George Santayana aptly states it. "Lucretius was a materialist in natural philosophy and a humanist in ethics ..... he is the reassertion of science and liberty in the modern world, the whole contemporary school that looks to science for its view of the facts, and to the happiness of man on earth for its ideal." (1) That this is the very basis of Browning's philosophy of human destiny

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(1) George Santayana, "Three Philosophical Poets". p. 4.

scarcely needs comment. Browning realises the law, the order and the power that lies outside him. He realises, too, that his own physical nature must pay obedience to their power or suffer in a logical and mathematical way the consequences of breaking the laws of nature. Like Lucretius, too, Browning has seen that there is something within man which does not exactly tally with the law and order outside him, and this something is the power of self-determination or what Lucretius more aptly calls free-will. How, then, does Browning reconcile these two apparently conflicting elements in the universe of animate and inanimate phenomena? Let us discuss this question a little more fully.

I have already given some consideration to the question of Browning's knowledge of the current conceptions of his day, and I will devote a chapter, later, more fully to this question. I think, however, for the purpose of this present argument that we may justifiably hold the opinion that Browning made use of his knowledge of the materialistic philosophy of which Lucretius was the fore-runner, to strengthen still further his belief in immortality. The first principle laid down by Lucretius is that nothing is ever annihilated, a doctrine to which we refer now-a-days as the conservation of matter,

nec rerum summa m commutare ulla potest vis.

(Bk II, 303 ff)

Is it not absurd, then, to suppose that every energy of the universe is conserved, except the energy of the human mind or will? If the mind ceases to function on the dissolution of the body, then it is the only instance of the distruction of a force. Thus we find that modern science, founded on perhaps I should say suggested by Lucretius, has offered to the poet a fact so cogent and reasonable that it is, for the purpose of practical knowledge, unassailable. Indeed Browning is perhaps the first poet in our day who has adequately assimilated this theory completely. This theory is found everywhere in his works as the impregnable foundation for his belief in immortality. "Modern science has taught us that no atom of matter can ever be lost to the world, no infinitesimal measure of energy/is conserved, so Browning holds that there shall never be one lost good. The eternal atoms, the vibrations that cease not through the eternal years, shall not mock at the evanescence of human love of the perfect. (1)

More cogently, perhaps, we can find this doctrine that energy is bound to survive, in one form or another, in "Abt Vogler":-

All that we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist,
Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good,nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of an hour
The high that proved too high, the heroic for the 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;

(1) Berdoe, "Browning Encyclopedia." p. 162.

Enough that he heard it once; we shall hear it by and by.

Browning believes fundamentally that the soul will continue (1) because no force or motion can be lost "ad nihilium", or as Lucretius aptly puts it.

> Nunc age, res quoniam docui non posse creari
> de nilo neque item genitas ad nil revocari
>
> (Book I, 215 ff)

At this point it might be well to realise that in both Browning and Lucretius, science was never the primary object of their interest. Only in so far as science lent color to human life and human confidence in life was it of any consequence to Lucretius; and only in so far as it lent confidence to a belief in immortality was it of any interest to Browning. Science to both of them was only one of life's lessons. Browning always makes science subserve the interests of a philosophy of immortality; while Lucretius, on the pther hand used scientific speculation and materialistic philosophy to bring about a more rational philosophy of life. In a word, Lucretius founded upon the basis of a physical conception of the universe a moral philosophy. Starting with the atom

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(1) I would not wish it to be supposed that Lucretius himself believed in the immortality of the soul. Indeed he definitely denies the pre or post-existence of the soul, in Book III lines 640 - 8 30. My quotation only shows how Lucretius intuition was inconsistent sometimes with his reasoning. His heart often overruled his head.

as his cornerstone he built up the edifice of the sensible and insensible world, the world of phenomena and the world of thought; and thus made his scientific investigations serve the purpose of his inquiry into the "summum bonum" for man. So of Browning can we not say that on a basis of the " sommun bonum" he has built up a hope for immortality? In a word, Browning begins where Lucretius leaves off.

This "summun bonum" needless to say, was for Lucretius founded on human happiness. Its essence is happiness. We need only turn, then, to "Paracelsus" to find the parallel in Browning. To Paracelsus the secret of life was in "that happiness!" He learned that he

> Might seek somew here in this blank life of ours
> For fit delights to stay its longings vast
> And grappling nature, so prevail upon her
> To fill the creature full she dared to frame
> Hungry for joy; and bravely tyrannous
> Grow in demand, still craving more and more
> And made each joy conceded prove a pledge
> Of other joy to follow.

Paracelsus found himself, however, never content with the joy of earth, and out of misery cried for the joy of God. Then he learned the secret of the infinite.

Now God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways - one everlasting bliss
From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds; in whom is life forever more,
Yet whom existence in the lowest form
Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is He!

So every realised enjoyment looks forward to a newer and higher sphere of distant happiness, and when that is reached to another sphere beyond.

With still a flying point of bliss remote
A happiness in store afar, a sphere
Of distant glory in full view; thus climbs
Pleasure its heights forever and forever!

What Browning has really done, therefore, in philosophy is to complete the great pyramid of human destiny, the foundations for which were so well and truly laid by the great Roman philosopher-poet Lucretius.

CHAPTER III

KANT

As I suggested in the closing lines of the last paragraph, Browning's philosophy is based almost entirely upon the doctrine of the "summum bonum" as the infinite progress towards perfection of happiness. Perfection of happiness or the "summum bonum" is attainable only in an infinite or eternal life. This conception, however, was not original, by any means, with Browning. The great German philosopher Kant adopted exactly the same conception for his philosophy of the "summum bonum". That Kant, too, in his turn, was profoundly influenced by the Lucretian philosophy is known to every student of the history of philosophy. Lucretius' conception of the atoms falling eternally through space, his poetic description of the formation of the universe suggested to Kant his earliest work on the nebular hypothesis, and to a great extent formed the basic conception for his early treatise on the "monadologica physica" (1) Following his Latin predecessor, the German philosopher in these works defines matter as the moveable in space and shows that its essence consists in an interplay of repulsion and attraction. His atoms are, however, small points of force and not, as Lucretius suggests, extended hard particles. At other points Kant agrees with Lucretius that it is fundamentally false to assume that if nature were left to herself she would produce nothing but

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(1) Munro, "Lucretius" Vol. II, p. XVIII.

disorder and chaos. Nature produces order and law, not by chance but according to her own laws, the "foedera" of Lucretius. Kant, however, soon broke with Lucretius both in his philosophy of nature and of human destiny. In the "Dissertation" he points out that the matter of happiness is sensuous, as Lucretius suggests, but that its form is purely rational, Here, too, nevertheless, we find a striking resemblance between the Lucretian conception of pure intellectual existence and Kant's philosophy of pure reason. Lucretius takes great pains to define exactly what he means by his "gods". They are purely intellectual beings, purely rational beings, who exist "intermundia", between the world of sense and the infinite void, and who dwell there in eternal philosophic contemplation and calm. The moral ideal for Kant, too, is a life of pure reason, from which the surd of sensibility has been entirely eliminated, a veritable Lucretian god-life. For Kant, however, this purely rational life is only an ideal good, because in this life pure reason is always held in chains by the eternal presence of the fatal surd of sensibility; and it is in the attempt to reconcile these two elements of pure reason and pure sensibility that Kant found his point of departure for his argument in proof of immortality. The "summum bonum" is not completely accomplished until the surd of sensibility has disappeared; but it never disappears from the life of man, mixed as his nature is of reason and sensibility. Thus Kant lies between the two extremes of the Lucretian philosophy of man. On the one hand, Lucretius was led to

lower man's ideas of happiness to what is attainable by man through his own endeavors in this world of sense; while Kant expanded this idea to the hope of attaining a higher happiness in infinite time. Then, too, Lucretius concedes the existence of a world of pure moral idealism divorced from all sensible perception; whereas Kant had always to limit his conception by the ever present fact of sense experience. With these few suggestions, then, concerning the foundation of Kant's conception of the "summum bonum", let us esamine a little more carefully the German Philosopher's doctrine of human existence and human destiny.

There are, as I have already pointed out in my introduction, two great principles which lie at the base of all Kant's philosophy of human life, the principle of personality, and the doctrine of immortality. Kant had always admired the ideals of the French Revolution. Rousseau taught him to honor man as such, and to value the idea of the dignity of man as a personal being. The highest good is the self activity by which each human being makes his own happiness. This is the starting point of Kant's theory of "Personality". I alone am I, the centre of this universe of experience and knowledge. Each "I am I" stands in the centre of its own universe. Each one of us measures up and down, right and left, far and near, and before and after, from his own particular point in space and time; each one of us draws around himself the rim of the world, builds about his head the blue dome of heaven and makes the sun and moon

and all the planets revolve about his head in every day of time. Indeed, Kant, himself, points out clearly that he has effected or tried to effect a revolution in philosophy such as Copernicus effected in astronomy,"Just as the old Ptolemaic astronomy assumed that the spectator standing on earth witnessed the movements of the sun, so the old metaphysician assumes that the knowing subject is passive in the presence of the object. And just as Copernicus inverted the old view of astronomy, showing that it is the spectator carried along by the earth who moves, while the sun is at rest; so this metaphysical view will maintain that to the character of the knowing subject is due the apparent nature of the object. (1) Everything in this world of experience that I can know is related to this conscious self. But why elaborate? Let us see some of Browning's free translations.

Now there is one prime point (hear and be edified)
One truth more true for me than any truth beside -
To wit, that I am I, who have the power to swim
The skill to understand the law whereby each limb
May bear to keep immersed, since, in return, made sure
That its mere movement lifts head clear through coverture.

(Fifine at the Fair)

Or to take another illustration; in "Ferishtah's Fancies" we find Browning stating - since

Son, trust me, this I know and only this
I am in motion and all things beside

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(1) J. Watson, "Selections from Kant" p. 3.

That circle round my passage through their midst,
Motionless, these are, as regarding me:
Which means, myself I solely recognize.
They, too, may recognise themselves, not me
For aught I know or care: but plain they serve
This, if no other purpose - stuff to try
And test my power upon of raying light
And lending hue to all things as I go
Moonlike through vapor. Mark the flying out!
Thinks't thou the halo, painted still afresh
At each new cloud - fleece pierced and passaged through
This was and is and will be ever more
Coloured in permanence? The glory swims
Girdling the glory-river, swallowed straight
By night's abysmal gloom, unglorified
Behind as erst before the advancer: gloom?
Faced by the onward-faring, see, succeeds
From the abandoned heaven a next surprise
And where's the gloom now? silver-smitten straight,
One glow and variegation! So with me
Who move and make, - myself, - the black, the white,
The good, the bad, of life's environment.

(Bean-Stripe)

"I only move", says Ferishtah, "and when I stop, everything Around me is motionless as regards me; and it is I who make life, only as I am conscious of the world about me does it exist for me." Compare these quotations with Kant's

famous dictum "Understanding makes nature, but out of material which itself did not make." These same ideas, too, we find expressed in the earliest poem that Browning published.

> I am made up of an intensest life
> Of a most clear idea of consciousness
> Of self - distinct from all its qualities
> From all affections, passions, feelings, powers,
> And thus far it exists, if tracked in all
> But linked in me, to self supremacy,
> Existing as a centre to all things
> Most potent to create, and rule, and call
> Upon all things to minister to it. (1)

The wealth and profoundity of thought that lies behind these few lines does not appear with the first superficial reading. Indeed, if we examine the lines more closely, so numerous will we find the ideas, that we would be inclined to doubt if a young man of some twenty years, as Browning was at the date of the publication of "Pauline," could be capable of evolving them from the purely creative and unaided impulse of his own genius.

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(1) I take the liberty of quoting this passage again, as there are some points of significance to which I wish to allude, and which I left untouched in the much briefer summary of my introduction.

In the passage just quoted we will find implied nearly the whole doctrine of Kant's chapter on the "Transcendental Analytic". In this chapter we find Kant declaring that "the absolute original or primary condition of all knowledge is simply transcendental apperception." Apperception for Kant is identical with self-consciousness. We can, however, arrive at no knowledge of self by experience; and we have, therefore, to seek for an explanation of self-consciousness, not by referring to experience, but by showing that it is the necessary condition of all possible existence; or to take Descartes' phrase "Cogito, ergo sum" "I think, therefore I am" Or let us take a further passage from one of Browning's very latest poems -

Cause before, effect behind me - blanks!
The midway point I am.
Caused, itself - itself sufficient in that
Narrow space must cram
All experience - out of which there
Crowds conjecture manifold
But, as knowledge, this comes only -
things may be as I behold,
Or may not be, but, without me and above
me, things there are;
I myself am what I know not - ignorance
which proves no bar
To the knowledge that I am, and since I am
can recognise
What to me is pain and pleasure - this is sure,
the rest surmise,

If my fellows are or are not, what may
please them and what pain -
Mere surmise: my own experience - that
is knowledge, once again. (La Saisiaz)

From this passage we can clearly recognize that Browning realises that consciousness of self must be distinguished from empirical consciousness, inasmuch as empirical consciousness involves a particular relation to sense and feeling. Thus the conscious "I think" of Kant cannot be deduced from experience, it is absolutely "a priori" and is thus appropriately called by Kant the "transcendental unity of apperception, that most clear idea of consciousness
of self - distinct from all its qualities
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers .... In other words, all knowledge of self, or rather self-consciousness, is wholly "a priori", and not the empirical result from all those affections, passions, feelings or powers of experience.

The next step in the development of his doctrine is taken by Kant in his "Critique of Practical Reason". Here, on the basis of this ultimate self-consciousness, he builds up his theory of the personal will. "There is nothing in the world, or out of it, which is unconditionally good," he says "except a good will". The moral worth of an action is complete if it is willed, and it is in nowise affected by its outer consequences. Or, as Browning says

"Tis not what man does which exalts him
but what man would do:
(Saul)

A human person is not merely what he does, but what he is capable of doing and being. Persons cannot be understood by what they have achieved at any given moment. It is by what they hope to do or hope to be that their worth is finally revealed.

> Man is and wholly hopes to be
>
> (Death in the Desert)

There are many other passages, however, in Browning's poems which illustrate the doctrines of Kant, for example, "Crestina", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", or later yet "Pacchiarotto" or finally,

> Aspire, break bounds and say
> Endeavor to be good, and better still
> And best! success is nought, endeavors' all!
>
> (Red Cotton Night Cap Country)

This brings us, however, at once to Kant's doctrine of immortality. It is in the persistent will for perfection not in success that lies man's ultimate hope. But the attainments of complete rational perfection calls for an infinite progress. The first condition to the complete realisation of the ideal claims of both ethics and morality is a continued existence, for only by continuing "ad infinitum" can the will be brought into perfect accord with the pure moral law. The "thou shalt" of the moral law, however, implies "thou canst"; hence the infinite "thou shalt", where the will and moral law are brought into

perfect harmony, implies an infinite ability to fulfil it. But an infinite moral ideal cannot be realized in finite time; it, therefore, follows that man, as the subject of such an ideal, must have an infinite time for his ideal to be realised. Man is immortal until his work is done, and the work of man as a mortal is never done. (1) Or as Browning states the same problem,

> Let him work on and on, as if speeding
> work's end - but not dream of succeeding!
> Because of success were intended
> Why heaven would begin e'er earth ended.
>
> (Pacchiarotto)

This endeavour or will to progress, to overcome each obstacle to the attainment of an ideal without ever really hoping to reach the goal is the fundamental conception of immortality common to both Kant and Browning. This infinite struggle after the perfection of self, for example, despite the consciously finite limitations of its attainment, lies at the root of any rational postulate of personal immortality. "Faithfulness to the true self means that we live as if we were immortal. Man is called to an illusory task to live as an immortal while he is only, in reality, a moratl; to conduct himself as a citizen of eternity, when in reality

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(1) Caird, "Critical philosophy of Kant" Bk II, ch. V.

he is only a denizen of time. (1) The strenuous and idealistic moral temper is rooted in the conviction of the eternal meaning of this life in time. Such a life Browning, for example, has pictured in the "Grammarian's Funeral" He has chosen the scholar's devotion to his ideal, the type of good life that is a life not for the day, but for the day to come, a life that knows it has the leisure of eternity for the execution of its eternal task

> Others mistrust and say, 'But time escapes!
> Live now or never! '
> He said! What's time? Leave now for dogs and apes
> Man has forever!

Indeed Browning has dealt with this fascinating problem set by Kant, so philosophically that quotations might be multiplied almost indefinitely from his poems. This very refusal of man to accept time as the measure of his lifes' possibilities is the earnest of his immortality. The present life comes to mean/to mortal man a mere probation place, the Kantian view of time as the ante-chamber to eternity. There is no fruition or fulfilment, no perfect realisation in this life, of this life's purposes. Hence life must be a preparation, a discipline, and an education of the moral being

> For more is not reserved
> To man, with soul just nerved

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(1) "Ethical Principles" by James Seth, p. 457.

To act to-morrow what he learns to-day:
Here, work enough to watch
The master work, and catch
Hints of the proper craft, tricks of the tools true play

He fixed thee midst this dance
Of plastic circumstance
This present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

(Rabbi Ben Ezra)

Or in a later poem,

If you bar me from assuming earth to be
a pupil's place
And life, time - with all their chances, changes
Just a probation space.....

(La Saisiaz)

Life, then, being a probation place for the education of the human being, the question arises, "Is all this painful learning to be undone by mortal dissolution of death? Our moral nature rises up against such a contradiction between man's being and his destiny, between the magnitude of his task and the narrow limits set to its execution. To settle this apparent paradox, Browning and Kant follow the same reasoning. In both we find the conviction that the intellect, from its very nature, knows no limits, and hence can be satisfied

with nothing less than the infinite. If that infinite were unattainable man's gifts of intelligence and will would be the cruellest of mockeries, and human life the saddest of tragedies (1) The essence of life is, then, the irrepressible desire to overstep the limits of mortal possibility. It is an eternal struggle of the will to overcome bodily limitations. We have the desire, in other words, to attain the unattainable. Indeed, the moral life places upon us the command to attain the unattainable. Nevertheless, the commands of rational morality imply the possibility of their perfect realisation, else these commands would be themselves meaningless and irrational. Herein, then lies the hope of immortality.

For thence - a paradox
Which comforts while it mocks -
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail.
What I aspired to be
And was not, comforts me.

(Rabbi Ben Ezra)

This, then, is the main ethical argument for personal immortality, the acknowledged completeness of man's moral life here on earth. Man ever experiences the gulf in his nature between what he is and what he would be or ought to be; the actual is never at one with the ideal. Man forever pursues a receding ideal, the goal is always beyond him. The human being appears in this mundane order as one whose end can never be realised within the confines and limitations

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(1) Thomas Davidson in the International Journal of Ethics, Vol. III, p. 333.

of bodily existence. Hence it seems that if man is condemned by the necessities of his moral and spiritual nature to pursue ideals which the narrow confines of this earthly life forbid him from attaining, it is only reasonable to expect that existence will be given to him for the attain - ment of this ideal somewhere else.

> And thus it is that I supply the chasm
> "Twixt what I am and all I fain would be.
>
> (Pauline)

This is the problem that lies at the base of Kant's "Critique of Practical Reason". There are, however, one or two other leading ideas which should be discussed before turning our full attention to Kant's solution for the problem of immortality.

Kant so severely limits the human faculties in metaphysics, that what he calls Pure Reason can do very little for those who wish to be convinced of immortality. So he expects them to be content with the guidance of what he calls Practical Reason. In the Preface to the "Critique of Pure Reason" Kant points out that while we are precluded from maintaining that we have actual knowledge of immortality, because our knowledge is always conditioned by the forms of our preception and thought, we have the way left open for the practical rea son. Indeed it is evident that the proof of our unavoidable ignorance of immortality is in itself a necessary condition without which immortality is inconceivable.

In this manner the immortality of man may be defended if it can be positively established on the basis of Practical Reason. Knowledge of the transcendental or the supersensible we have not; but this in no way prevents us from holding a practical or rational belief in the existence of things which transcend human experience. Or let me quote, here, a rather apt passage from Professor Caird's lecture at Balliol in 1908. "The indications on human life itself which seem to authorise us to regard it as a transitory stage in a life that does not find completion in this world, our ultimate reason for believing anything that goes beyond our immediate sensible experience, is that we cannot give a rational account of the facts, cannot conceive them as part of an intelligible order, if it be not true. And on this ground I think that there is strong evidence for man's future existence. The whole system of things, of which man is the highest part, can be made coherent with itself only on the view that his earthly life is a part of a greater whole."

"We cannot know about immortality", says Kant, "we can only reason on it". So also Browning condemns knowledge and intellect; he pushes the limitedness of human knowledge into a disqualification of it to reach truth at all." I do not ask, "he wrote in the last year of his life, "a full disclosure of Truth, which would be contrary to the law of things, which applies equally to the body and the soul; that it is only by striving to attain strength (in the one case) and

truth (in the other) that body and soul do so - the effort (common to both) being productive, in each instance, of the necessary initiation into all the satisfactions which result from partial success: absolute success being only attainable for the body in full manhood - for the soul, in its full apprehension of Truth - which will be, not here, at all events." (1) Or to find in his poetry the same theory of the limitation of knowledge to experience we should turn to "La Saisiaz", "Ferishtah's Fancies", "Parleyings", and "Asolando", for it is in these later poems that Browning expands his metaphysical proof of immortality, which he only touches in short flashes of inspiration in his early poems. I can think of no better illustration in English poetry of Kant's statement that we cannot know about immortality, than in the following selection:-

Call this - God, then, call that - soul,
and both - the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? that they o'erpass my
power of proving, proves them such:
Fact it is I know I know not something
which is fact as much
What before ca used all the causes, what
effect of all effects
Haply follows, - these are fancy. Ask
the rush if it suspects
Whence and how the stream which floats
it had a rise and where and how

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(1) Wise, "Letters of Robert Browning" Vol. II, p.90.

Falls or flows on still! What answer
makes the rush except that now
Certainly it floats and is, and, no less
certain than itself,
Is the everyway external stream that now
through shoal and shelf
Floats it onward, leaves it - may be -
wrecked at last, or lands on shore
There to root again and grow and flourish
stable evermore
- May be! mere surmise not knowledge!
much conjecture styled belief
What the rush conceives the stream means
through the voyage blind and brief.

(La Saisiaz)

We are, with this distinction between knowledge and rational belief settled, now in a position to turn to Kant's theory of the "Summum Bonum" and its relation to his doctrine of immortality. In actual life moral virtue is, perhaps, the most outstanding and only intrinsically good quality of character. The moral law, however, demands that happiness should be distributed in exact proportion to virtue; this proportionate distribution is the "Summum Bonum", an ideal known since the days of Epicurus and his poetic disciple Lucretius . In other words we aught to cultivate virtue; and happiness aught to be given in due proportion to our virtue, but what ought to be realised can be realised.

These are the three postulates of Practical Reason. (1) Reason, then, demands the "summum bonum", the union of virtue and happiness. Now the demand by conscience for perfect rectitude or virtue means that a sensuous being wills wills the moral law at every moment of his rational life. Man must struggle toward this perfect harmony which Kant calls holiness. But in a being whose bodily or sensual desires are in conflict with his reason, perfect holiness is only possible by an infinite striving. Hence pure practical reason requires us to postulate an infinite progress toward perfection, an eternal movement from the sensual to the rational existence. Or to express the same idea in Browning's poetry,

> But thou shalt painfully attain to joy
> While hope and fear and love shall keep the man!
>
> (Paracelsus)

Here again we find the theory of an eternal striving after the "summum bonum" (Joy) while retarded by the sensuous emotions of love and fear.

Furthermore, for Kant, this endless progress is only conceivable on the supposition of the endless duration of the personality of the rational being, for only if this being retains its self-consciousness or personality, would it be capable of freely willing this aspiration to holiness. The highest good, then, is possible practically, only on the supposition of a personal immortality. In Browning, too,

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(1) Rodgers: "History of Ethics", p. 201.

We find this same consciousness of endless onward movement, the spirit pursuing its way toward the goal of perfection -

Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse not a few
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

(Evelyn Hope)

Let us state, however at this point, Kant's full doctrine of Immortality, in his very own words. In the "Critique of Practical Reason," Chapter II, Book II, section IV, he says:

"The object of a will that is capable of being determined by the moral law, is the production in the world of the highest good. Now, the supreme condition of the highest good is the perfect harmony of the disposition with the moral law. Such a harmony must be possible, not less than the object of the will, for it is implied in the command to, promote that object. Perfect harmony of the will with the moral law is holiness, a perfection of which no rational existing in the world of sense is capable at any moment of his life. Yet holiness is demanded as practically necessary, and it can be found only in an infinite progress towards perfect harmony with the moral law. Pure practical reason, therefore, forces us to assume such a practical progress towards perfection as the real object of our will.

Now this infinite progress is only possible if we presuppose that the existence of a rational being is prolonged to infinity, and that he retains his personality for all time.

This is what we mean by the immortality of the soul. The highest good is, therefore, practically possible only if we presuppose the immortality of the soul." (1) Thus the metaphysician and his expression of the infinite progress towards perfection and of that perfect harmony of holiness impossible in this life of bodily sense but attainable in the eternal life hereafter! Compare this with the artists' and poets' expression in Browning's "Old Pictures in Florence", and try once more to answer the question. Is the similarity between them a mere adventition or coincidence, or does it show some common tradition, or at least some common spiritual influence in the philosophy and literature of their generations? I do not wish to ring the changes too insistently or wearisomely upon this subject. The metaphysician phrases his thoughts in one way and the artist or poet in another, but the fundamental, profound similarity in their wa ys of thinking is, shall we say, something more than merely intriguing or suggestive.

Hear then the artist's and poet's voice :-

> You would fain be kinglier, say, than I am?
> Even so, you will not sit like Theseus.
> You would prove a model? The Son of Priam
> Has yet the advantage in arms' and knees'use.
> You're wroth - can you slay your snake like Apollo?
> You're grieved - still Niobe's the grander!
> You live - there's the Racers' frieze to follow:
> You die - there's the dying Alexander.

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(1) J. Watson: "Selections from Kant" translated, p. 294.

So, testing your weakness by their strength,
    Your meagre charms by their rounded beauty,
Measured by Art in your breadth and length,
    You learned - to submit is a mortal's duty,
When I say "you" tis the common soul,
    The colective, I mean: the race of Man.
That receives life in parts to live in a whole
    And grow here according to God's clear plan.

Growth came when, looking your last on them all
    You turned your eyes inwardly one fine day
And cried with a start - What if we so small
    Be greater and grander the while than they?
Are they perfect of lineament, perfect of stature?
    In both, of such lower types are we
Precisely because of our wider nature:
    For time, theirs - ours, for eternity.

To-day's brief passion limits their range:
    It seethes with the morrow for us and more.
They are perfect - how else? they shall never change:
    We are faulty - why not? we have time in store.
The Artificer's hand is not arrested.
    With us; we are rough-hewn, nowise polished;
They stand for our copy, and, once invested
    With all they can teach, we shall see them abolished.

'Tis a life-long toil t'll our lump be leaven -
The better! What's come to perfection perishes.
Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven:
Works done least rapidly, Art most cherishes.
Thyself shall afford the example, Giotto!
Thy one work, not to decrease or diminish,
Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?)"O!"
The great Campanile is still to finish.

(Old Pictures in Florence.)

A comparison such as I have just drawn between Kant and Browning, always leaves itself open to the objection that we are reading too much philosophy into the rather hazy and obscure poetry of a n immature youth. But, if we examine this criticism carefully we can see that the very argument that "Pauline", "Paracelsus" and "Old Pictures in Florence" are immature poems, is,I suggest, all the more reason to suppose that the ideas reflected in them were the result of thoughtful reading, rather than the result of pure native genius. It is much more probable that a young poet should read and incorporate ideas from his reading in his own poems, than that at the age of twenty he should have arrived at these high thoughts by the "creative impulse of his own mind." However, if we wish to turn to Browning's more mature and speculative poems we will still find the same ideas reflected as we find in his earlier poems. For example, in "La Saisiaz" to which we have referred already so often, Browning deals in a metaphysical manner with this

very correlation of sense and reason, and its bearing on immortality.

> And soul's earthly -life allotment, wherein
> by hypothesis
> Spul is bound to pass probation, prove its
> powers and exercise
> Sense and thought on fact, and, then, from
> fa ct deduce fit surmise
> Ask itself, and of itself have solely answer
> "Does the scope
> Earth affords of fact to judge by, warrant
> future hope or fear?

In this short section alone, we find compacted the whole range of Kant's theory starting with the assumption that there is a probation place and arriving at the conclusion as a result of practical reasoning about the antithesis of sense and reason (or as Browning more aptly translates Kant's reason, "thought") that there is a life in the future, after death, where man can progress towards pure holiness in eternal time. The whole passage is, indeed, too full of Kantian dialectics to be considered a mere coincidence or meeting of minds.

This hope of immortality in eternal time towards a higher perfection, has, however, still another obvious basis in human life than mere speculative dialectics. There remains the suggestive illustration of the evolution of mankind through the ages. If man has, in the long past, made an advance from

lower to higher degrees of morality, he may hope to continue this progress not only in this life but even beyond it into an infinite life to come. Or in Kant's own words "If in the past men have advanced from lower to higher degreees of morality, and have thus proved the strength of their resolution, they may hope to make unbroken progress in the future as long as they live here and even beyond into the future life. They can never hope in this life, or indeed, at any imaginable point in the future life, to be in perfect harmony with the will of God, but they may hope for this harmony in the infinite duration of their existence" (1) The distinctive feature of both Kant and Browning is the stress they lay on the worth of the moral life of man, the evolution, in other words, of the human character. Both regard evolution as the realisation by men of a progress greater than man's, which rules the aspiration of human beings of this world. And although neither Kant nor Browning developed the organic view of human evolution, to the extent that Darwin did, this view is, nevertheless, implied in their doctrines and is delevoped into an explicit philosophy of its own. Browning, in his own way, recognises the upward trend of nature; man by his self-conscious gathering of all the scattered rays and dim fragments, has found behind the forces of nature not a blind and purposeless action, but

hints and previsions
--- strewn confusedly everywhere about
The inferior natures, and all lead up higher,

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(1) "Selections from Kant": by J. Watson, p. 295.

All shape out dimly the superior race
The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false
And man appeared at last.

This conception of the evolution of man, Browning also proceeds to apply to a belief in evolution toward the infinite life.

When all the race is perfected alike
As man, that is; all tended to mankind
And man produced, all has its end thus far
But in completed man begins anew
A tendency to God. Prognostics told
Man's near approach, so in man's self arise
August anticipations, symbols, types
Of a dim splendour ever on before
In that eternal circle run by life
(Paracelsus V)

Scientific evolution is distinctly foreshadowed in this passage from Paracelsus; not only is it foreshadowed but it is reconciled with the larger philosophic belief in immortality. It might, however, be interesting to compare this passage with a letter written by Darwin, the great originator of scientific evolution. In this letter Darwin discusses the probable influence of his doctrines on the question of immortality.

"With respect to immortality "he writes," "nothing shows me so clearly how strong and almost instinctive a belief

it is, as the consideration of the view now held by most physicists, namely, that the sun with all the planets will in time grow too cold for life, unless, indeed, some great body dashes into the sun, and thus gives it fresh life. Believing as I do that man in the distant future will be a far more perfect creature than he is now, it is an intolerable thought that he and all other sentient beings are doomed to complete annihilation after such a long continued slow progress. For those who fully admit the immortality of the human soul, the destruction of our world would not appear so dreadful. (1)

Thus, some seventeen years after the publication of 'Paracelsus,' Browning finds his conceptions ratified by a scientific investigator. How foolish is it, then, to say that Browning was strongly against Darwin, regretting the truths of science and regretting its advance." (2) These imputations, indeed, he was at consistent pains to refute at length. Let me quote one of his letters on the subject. "It came, I suppose," he writes (11 October 1881) "of Hohenstiel-Schwangau's expressing the notion which was the popular one at the appearance of Darwin's Book - and you might as well charge Shakespeare with holding that there were men whose heads grew beneath their shoulder, because Othello told Desdemona that he had seen such. In reality, all that seems proved in Darwin's scheme was a conception familiar to me from the beginning: see in Paracelsus the progressive

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(1) W.H.Myers: "Science and the Future Life", p.65.
(2) Griffin & Minchin: "Life of R. Browning", p. 295.

development from senseless matter to organical, until man's appearance (Part V). Also in Cleon, see the order of "life's mechanics" - and I dare say in many passages of my poetry: for how can one look at nature as a whole and doubt that, whenever there is a gap, a "link" must be "missing" - through the limited power and opportunity of the looker? But go back and back, as you please, at the back, as Mr.Sludge is made to insist, you find (my faith is as constant) creative intelligence, acting as matter but not resulting from it. Once set the balls rollings, and ball may hit ball and send any number in any direction over the table; but I believe in the cue pushed by a hand." (1)

What has been said about Browning may indeed be said of all poets. Poets seem somehow in some dim way to have a provision of subsequent movements. Browning was before his time in his investigation into the truths of rational interest to the world of thought; and this may, to some extent at least, account for Browning's unpopularity until the later years of his life. Of course his poetry was obscure and meaningless, because it was dealing with concepts with which his reading public had still to come into contact.

I need scarcely say, however, that this conception of evolution was not original with either Browning or Kant. The ancient Greeks were also familiar with this theory. The evidence of geological fossils had interested the Greek philosophers from the time of Anaximander and; indeed, on this subject as in so many others we find a deep similarity between

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(1) Wise: "Letters of Browning", Vol. 1, p.82-4

Kant and Browning and the Greek philosophers of the Lucretian tradition. The methods of all three on this subject, as Sir Henry Jones points out (1) were very similar. For example, in Lucretius, religion is traced back by scientific investigation to the superstition and ghost worship of savages; and thus, as some suppose, made religion nothing more than superstition. In a like manner Kant has traced back morality, with its "Categorical imperative", without a break to the ignorant fear of vengeance of a savage chief. A similar process, by Browning, in the same direction reduces divine love to brute lust.

> Philosophers deduce your chastity
> Or shame, from just the fact that at the first
> Whoso embraced a woman in the plains
> Threw club down, and forewent his brains beside,
> So, stood a ready victim in the reach
> Of any brother savage, club in hand;
> Hence saw the use of going out of sight
> In wood or cave to prosecute his loves:
>
> (Bishop Blougram).

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(1) Jones: "Browning as a Religious & Philosophical Teacher", p.211

CHAPTER IV

Goethe

Leaving Kant, the greatest German philosopher of modern times we will turn now to Goethe, Germany's greatest poet. To call Goethe poet alone, however, would be doing him a great injustice; for he has woven into the texture of his verse some very beautiful and striking threads of philosophy. Goethe, too, was a poet-philosopher.

Goethe never failed in sympathy and admiration for Lucretius, the great poet philosopher of ancient times. Indeed in many places he has been found to have expressed the most unbounded admiration for the Roman (1) And little wonder, for at the base of Goethe's life we find that

"Odium lucisque videndae"

the world weariness that descends on men's minds. The world is too imperfect to be divine, and all humanity wanders disconsolate on its imperfection.

nequaquam nobis divinitus esse creatam
naturum mundi: tanta stat praedita culpa.

(Bk. II. 180)

However, Goethe and Lucretius both had a great love for nature. Perhaps those passages which called for Goethe's praise were the descriptions in Book V, where Lucretius is portraying the evolution of man in his natural surroundings; a section full of the most beautiful descriptive passages. Goethe, too was a great naturalist as well as a scientific poet, and

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(1) Riemer's: Nutthellungen ulber Goethe II, p.645.

deeply admired the spirit of nature worship in the great Roman poet-philosopher.

In addition, however, to his early classical influences Goethe was often greatly impressed with the trend of the philocophical movements of his own times. It is true that in respect to his philosophical interests he claims to have considered himself without the proper faculties for speculation. However, through his great friendship with Shiller, he soon found himself forced to consider seriously the doctrines of his great contemporary Kant. His friendly relations too with Fichte brought him continually into contact with the whole transcendental movement of his early life; and he soon began a course of reading in philosophy which included the works of Kant and Fichte. Thus Goethe owed much to these two philosophers in particular, for he accepted readily any of their suggestions which were kindred to his own thought, and often bodily incorporated whole doctrines when they seemed to lend credence to his own theories. For example, "in the 'Emigrants' he first launched the idea of two souls, which not until later in the mouth of Faust, was to become the watchword for anthithetical natures. Not until he had found the philosophical authority for his first principle - from Kant's physics it leaped at him that attraction and repulsion were inseparable from the nature of matter, and from this he deduced the essential duality of all substance. (1) Goethe

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(1) Emil Ludwig: "Goethe", p. 306.

never met the great German thinker, Kant, for Kant never left his eastern town; and Goethe in his love for his own town of Weimar, had little love for Kant's home, and indeed little love for the man himself and his austere ways. Nevertheless, he was a friend of Fichte's, and would often go for long walks with him; he was a co-contributor to Schiller's magazine "Die Horen", and thought very highly of Fichte's ideas. Hence Goethe was always deeply in contact with either Kant's philosophy itself, or with an interpretation of it from the mouth of Fichte.

It is little wonder, then that we find Goethe's work permeated with ideas from his contemporary philosopher. For example, we can find among his earlier works the doctrine of personality as first pronounced by Kant.

"Here is my world, my all!
Here I am I!
Here every wish is with me,
Incarnate, visibly present.
My myriad minded self
Dispersed and whole in these my well
beloved children.

(Caesar)

Or to take examples from his latest work "Faust", - even in Faust's last moments the ceaseless struggle between his sense and reason is felt. Perpetually urged by his senses to let the Devil win, it is by following divine reason that Faust wins the final victory; and even in Faust's last struggle, therefore,

we find a forecast of this eternal struggle after holiness.

The universe - of that my fill I know -
Beyond, our mortal vision may not go ...
The word will speak to him who has the pluck
Then, wherefore, through Eternity go trailing?
The tangible is here man's unveiling.....
Man must march on, his pain or bliss to buy -
He! whom the moment ne'er can satisfy."

Thus Goethe shows his love for the man who craves to accomplish the impossible. Then, to take a last example, Goethe was always the devotee of the thing in evolution. To him evolution was a finer thing than completion. To Goethe as to Browning,

"Success is nought, Endeavour's All! "

The divine is active in evolution, not in completion or torpor, or as Faust says:-

Yet will I not in torpor seek salvation
For man through awe doth reach his consummation
Though for that sense the world exacts its price
The vast will grip his soul as in a vice.

So we find that Goethe has incorporated into his matchless verse some of the most profound thoughts of his great contemporary Kant; and has flashed these speculations forth in the most cogent and arresting style. That Goethe, then, is one of the best examples of the true-poet-philosopher

in modern times is indesputable. What, then, about Browning? Can we find any resemblance that would justify our placing Browning and Goethe together.

The early tempermental lives of both poets were strangely similar. Goethe at twenty was writing his "Werther", the passionate outcry of his period of "Sturm and Drang". If there ever was a period of "Sturm and Drang" in Browning's life, it was in those early years, too, when he found himself a restless and dissatisfied youth of twenty who poured out his longing in an immature poem,

> First went my hopes of perfecting mankind
> Next - faith in them, and then in freedom's self
> And virtue's self, then my own motives, ends
> And aims and loves; and human love went last.
>
> (Pauline)

Then next we find Goethe, restless, irritable and moody, reading - Paracelsus! The youthful scoffer had come to admire the life of the old alchemist or physician. Strangely enough, too, we find the restless Browning delving into his father's old manuscripts and poring over one volume in particular Paracelsus! Thus we find Goethe, on the one hand, incorporating thoughts and ideas from Paracelsus into his life -long work, "Faust";(1) while Browning, on the other hand, builds around "Paracelsus" a poem replete with passages from the old legends

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(1) In February 1770, before leaving his native city to attend the University of Strasburg, Goethe copied in his notebook a number of quotations from Paracelsus; many of these passages he used in Faust. For the details see "Modern Language Notes" Vol. 25 no 6. "Paracelsus Passages in Faust" by W.A.Cooper.

of Faust.(1)

We must, however, make one great distinction between Goethe's and Browning's outlook during these early years. To Goethe, man was never equal to the situation in which he was placed, and one whom no situation, therefore, satisfied; hence man was considered to be consumed by the terrible conflict against circumstances which robbed him of all happiness. With Browning, on the other hand, the struggle the darkness, the failure of this life has a significance in that it makes life a test which, brief though it is, determines the course of the life eternal. The battle between the dire necessity of working in chains, submitting ourselves to the force of circumstances and the hope and desire to be free, makes the storm and misery of life. But the worst failures, the deepest miseries have this deeper significance, they suggest and to Browning they prove, that this life is but the threshold of eternal life; failure prophesies success in infinite time.

Then, finally, "Faust" is, in truth, the auto-biography of Goethe's life of emotion and thought. Mephisto, on the one side, and Faust, on the other, portray the two

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(1) As an interesting anecdote it might be related that "In December Mrs. Browning notes an interesting visitor to Casa Guidi: Goethe's grandson, who had come to Florence on purpose to discuss the character of Paracelsus with his English interpreter"

(Griffin & Minchin, p. 176)

contending elements in human life. Perhaps, too, Browning can be identified, as much as he can be identified with any of his character sketches, with his Paracelsus, who strove and failed in this life. Like Paracelsus, Faust also is the servant of an ideal: like Paracelsus he strove after his ideal and went astray. Nevertheless, in his necessary errors, he never misses the right road in the end; he may aspire and fall but ultimately he will attain to the infinitude of life eternal. To have an ideal like Paracelsus and Faust, to strive for, and like these two, never to be satisfied on earth, is in itself their ultimate salvation. How strangely similar these two semi-mythical characters were; and how like, too, were their creators!

Faust, in his very last act of drinking poison gives expression to his great dissatisfaction with things as they are; though, indeed, he also gives expression for hope in the future. And so may we not conclude that Goethe kept this immense dejection, that was founded on his youthful restlessness and vague infinite ambition, to his very last days. We find the Prologue in Heaven, Part II, Act V, for example, singing "Whosoever is unflagging in his striving for ever him we can redeem." How very similar is this to Browning's last utterance, too, in poetry -

> Bid him forward, back and breast as either should be
> "Strive and thrive"! cry, "speed - fight on, fare ever
> There as here!"
>
> (Asolando).

CHAPTER V

Carlyle

Carlyle, in England, was the first thinker to discover the full significance of the great period in German thought and literature, and the enormous reinforcement which this poetic and philosophic idealism had brought to the failing faith of man in that generation. (1) In his publication of "German Romances" in 1827 Carlyle pays considerable attention to Goethe's "Werther", and from then on he carried out a program of introducing the prose and poetry of Germany into England with patient faithfulness. He translated mostly from fiction and romance, but also contributed several articles on German criticism and philosophy, writing essays on Lessing, Shiller and Goethe between the years 1826 and 1832. In his Preface to the "German Romances" Carlyle says, "To judge from the signs of the times, this general diffusion of German among us seems a consummation not far distant." Indeed, the revival of interest in German literature in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century was more wide spread in England than is commonly supposed. Carlyle was in truth, not the only critic of German literature and philosophy in England up to his time.

He zealously devoted his energy to translating, reviewing and interpreting such German works as he thought his country

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(1) Edward Caird, "Essays on Literature and Philosophy" Vol. 7, p. 232/

men ought to know. Five collections of German works appeared in 1826 alone, showing the already widespread and growing interest in the literature and philosophy of Germany.(1) And if the interest in the German movement was so widespread during those very years when Browning was beginning to shape the ideas for his future poems, we should conclude that he was a very illiterate man indeed if he did not have, at least, a current acquaintance with the leading principles and doctrines of this Transcendental philosophy.

There are two ways in which the transcendental philosophy came into England: by what may be called the academic translation or setting forth of its books and doctrines; and secondly by the living inculcation of the philosophy through the works of great English authors: De Quincey helped this movement chiefly in an academic way. His articles on Kant set forth in the abstract some of Kant's leading principles and ideas. In this way he laid the foundation for a vital and effective consideration of Kant by English thinkers. Carlyle, on the other hand, while he did not translate to any great extent, nevertheless transfused into the spirit of his "Sartor Resartus", and many other works, ideas from the great German philosophers.

The foremost result of this speculation on Kant's problems had been to teach the England of Browning's early youth, to recognise that objects were essentially, as I pointed

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(1) See Care, "Goethe En Angleterre".
"Modern Philological Review", No. 5.

out before, related to the mind, and that the principles which rule thought enter into the construction of things themselves. This doctrine we find outstanding in Browning's earliest works.

To know
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.

(Paracelsus).

When we are faced with such striking passages as this, which so adequately and tersely sum up the basic principle of Kant's primary idea as it found its first reflection in England, we are inclined to doubt seriously again that Browning was as ignorant of the whole tendency as some critics would hold him to have been. It is not safe to say dogmatically that he was left untouched by the most profound influences of his own day. In fact, so striking was the resemblance between the fundamental idealism of Browning's earliest work "Pauline", and Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus", that Browning's great friend Joseph Arnould accurately described it as a "strange, wild, and in parts singularly magnificent poet-biography; his own early life as it presented itself to his own soul: in fact, psycologically speaking, his Sartor Resartus."(1) As in "Sartor Resartus" it is possible in all essentials to replace the name of "Teufelsdroeckh" by that of Carlyle, so, too, in "Pauline", the boy speaking is in

(1)Griffin & Minchin, "Robert Browning", p. 33

reality Browning. Indeed each laid the foundation for his world of thought in his primary work of importance, Carlyle in "Sartor Resartus" and Browning in "Pauline". That a new epoch in English thought was veritably inaugurated by them is indicated by the surprise and bewilderment that they occasioned with the first appearance of their works. Their work was not, however, original. It had its base in the German movement, as I have already pointed out. Carlyle's "Sartor Resartus" is a vision of a Kantian philosopher Teufelsdroeckh, wandering disconsolately and restlessly in the world weariness that marked Goethe's period of Sturm and Drang. So, also, in "Pauline" and "Paracelsus" we find the restless lover, or insatiable seeker wandering in a labyrinth of Kantian philosophical idealism. But here, too, as in the case of Goethe, Browning differs from Carlyle in one very important subject. While Carlyle is essentially despondent in his outlook, Browning, ever in his moments of utter despair, somehow catches a gleam of hope from very despair itself. Indeed Carlyle, himself, realised this point of difference when he said,

"But there is a contrast between him and me. He seems very content with life, and takes much satisfaction in the world. It is a very strange and curious spectacle to behold a man in these days so confidently cheerful." (1)

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(1) Jones: "Browning as a Religious and Philosophical Teacher." p. 74.

Thus it is, then, that we find, two years after the publication of "Sartor Resartus," perhaps the greatest interpretation in English literature of the German transcendental movement with all its ideals and philosophy, that another history of a soul became the theme of a young poet's first work. In "Paracelsus" we find reflected a great deal of this German idealism, the aspiration after the absolute. The alchemist or physician, which ever he may be called, sought after the absolute in knowledge and failed in his quest; and yet he did not fail, however paradoxical the statement may seem. He failed because he tried to compel the infinite within the limits of a finite life, because he attempted to establish a harmony between what is finite and what is infinite in human nature. And he attained because he realised that "infinite desire, infinite aspiration is the glory and virtue of manhood, and through art, through science, through human love, we ascend unsatisfied to eternal life. (1) Is not this the very essence of the Kantian doctrine of infinite progress? "No one" says Sir Henry Jones, "acquainted with the poetic and philosophic thought of Germany, from Lessing to Goethe, and from Kant to Hegel, can fail to findtherein the source and spring of all contributive principles of our intellectual, social, political and religious life. And there is no doubt that, with Carlyle, Browning is the interpreter of his time, reflecting its confused struggle and chaotic wealth. (2)

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(1) E. Dowden, "Studies in Literature, 1789-1877", p. 80.

(2). Jones: "Browning as a Religious and Philosophical Teacher", p. 73.

CHAPTER VI

Science and Immortality

Beginning with the year 1850, we can trace a slow development of scientific investigation in England; and the corresponding growth of criticism which followed and soon predominated, threw the whole rational life of England into a fervor. The determination to penetrate into the very depths of nature brought about a subtle change in thought and feeling on the main subject of life. This tendency soon pointed definitely in the direction of a ruthless analysis of life and the soul of man. Analysis and reasoning soon overcame intuition and imagination. But long before it began, Browning, who by nature was interested in all activity, anticipated in his poetry and from the very beginning of his career foreshadowed in "Pauline" and "Paracelsus" and others of his early poetry this very tendency to intellectual analysis. It need not be thought strange that Browning should have reflected the scientific development of his age in his poetry, for there is nothing antagonistic in science to poetry. Indeed the object of science is to ascertain and communicate facts; to quicken our life into a higher consciousness through feeling is the function of art. But though knowing and feeling are not identical, and a fact expressed in terms of feeling affects us as other than the same fact expressed in terms of knowing, yet our own emotions rest on and are controlled by our knowledge. Whatever modifies our intellectual conception

powerfully, in due time, affects art powerfully (1) And so Browning could claim no distinction if he had merely reflected in his art the powerful influence of science. But that he should have anticipated this movement is a fact that cannot be passed over too lightly in forming an estimate of his true genius.

Again, however, the poet who expresses best this synthesis of science and poetry is, as I have already suggested, Goethe. Interested as he was in all natural science, geology, botany and other kindred fields of investigation, he nevertheless incorporated this spirit of nature into his verse. One of the finest examples of the union of genius in Science with poetic genius can be found in a well-known passage in Goethe. Here "the spirit of the earth plies with ceaseless energy, with infinite complexity of action, yet to one harmonious result; the shuttle of which we call causes, to weave the web of what we call effects; this is the true vision of the world to modern eyes:-

In life's full flood
And in action's storm
Up and down I wave
To and fro I sweep!
Birth and the grave
An eternal deep
A tissue flowing
A life all glowing.

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(1) E. Dowden: "Studies in Literature 1789-1877", p. 85.

So I weave at the rattling loom of other years
The garment of life which the godhead wears. (1)

Browning, too, and Carlyle, loved to look and wonder at the awe-inspiring power that lay in all nature's life. When "Pauline" was first published John Stuart Mill seemed to catch glimpses "of a self-consciousness compelled by quick and eager senses and vivid intelligence to recognise a host of outer realities not itself, which it constantly tries to bring within itself, as constantly baffled and thrown back by the obstinate objectivity of that outer world. A pure dreamer would have 'contentedly lived in a nut-shell and imagined himself king of infinite space', a purely scientific intelligence would have applied himself to the patient mastery of facts. In "Pauline" the despotic senses and the intellect of science and the imperious imagination coexist . (2) Browning's chief delight was to imagine power and will pouring off the face of the visible world. Carlyle, too, cries out -

"Force, force, everywhere force; we ourselves a mysterious force in the centre of that."

All this is but the anticipation of that latent interest in science which was to burst forth a few years later. What, then, has all this speculation on the science of nature meant to Browning? How has it affected his underlying belief in

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(1) Edward Dowden: "Studies in Literature 1789-1877", p. 85

(2) Herford: "Robert Browning".

immortality?

Science to the poet, has done one thing greater than to disclose the secrets of nature, it has revealed the might of the reasoning power of man; it has given inspiration to the effort to know and has hence offered new foundations for belief. Browning's hope for immortality has one main foundation in the belief that only in an infinite time can the universe become a harmony. But one might well ask, "How do we know that the universe is meant to be a harmony?" Science answers this question for the poet - the persistence of force. Herein lies, perhaps, one of the finest empirical proofs of immortality that can be found. Let us, however, discuss this question of the scientific basis for immortality a little more fully, to see if we can come to some conclusion about its influence upon Browning and his conception of eternal life.

"Science may be said to have at least four points of contact with a belief in immortality. In the first place, it has caused a profound change in man's mind and thoughts within the past century. The introduction of a new factor has modified the views of man's origin, of his place in nature and in consequence of his destiny ..... secondly, modern psycological science dispenses altogether with soul..... This fact gives pause to the scientific student who tries to think of intelligence apart from organisation. Thirdly, the futile search of science for the spirits .... after a careful review of the literature can an impartial observer say that the uncertainty has been rendered less uncertain,

the confusion less confused? I think not ..... Fourthly, knowing nothing of an immortality of the spirit, science has put on an immortality of the flesh ..... The individual is nothing more than the transient offshoot of a germ-plasm which has an unbroken continuity from generation to generation, from age to age ..... Now on the question of the immortality of the soul, the only people who have ever had perfect satisfaction are the idealists, who walk by faith and not by sight".(1)

In this short treatise Dr. Osler has very adequately summed up the real relation of science and theories of immortality. He rightly points out that, indeed, it is only the idealist who can be fully satisfied that there is an immortality. Nevertheless, I think, Dr. Osler has overlooked the fact that a faith founded on empirical proof can be as real as a case in law founded on circumstantial evidence. Both, if truly investigated, can reveal a truth as sure as fact.

Weissmann has given direct evidence for the continued existence of the sensuous and feeling flesh, in his treatise on the immortality of the germ-plasm. What, then, are we to say of the immortality of the soul? Does not this fact of science aid the belief in an eternal soul-life? We suppose the germ-plasm to transmit sensuous life from one generation to another; so, too, on the basis of Comte's "Positivism" we can suggest that consciousness is transmitted from life to

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(1) Wm. Osler: "Science and Immortality".

life. Hence the natural evolution of the race of man "qua" man, both in life and thought, becomes immortal. Browning's various "psycological" poems show, here again, that the poet was entirely familiar with this conception. Take, for example, the numerous references to Comte in "Prince Hohenstein-Schwangau"

"I find advance i' the main and notably
The Present an improvement on the Past
And promise for the Future ..... "

From Comte's Positivism "it is an easy step into the doctrine of Evolution, and it application to the theory of immortality. I have already discussed this theory at some length in pointing out how Browning distinctly foreshadowed the theory of evolution, even as it was later advanced by Darwin. Nevertheless this quotation from his later poem "Prince Hohenstein-Schwangau" may be again suggested here.

"Will you have why and wherefore, and the fact
Made plain as pikestaff?" Modern science asks
"That mass man sprung from was a jelly-lump
Once on a time; he kept an after course
Through fish and insect, reptile, bird and beast
Till he attained to be an ape at last
Or last but one."

The main application and significance of Darwinism is, however, the fact that the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, becomes the basis for the doctrine of the unconditional will to live. So bitter and keen is the struggle for existence

that no conscious being can dare to contemplate the destruction of his life for a moment, since that very moment of weakness might mean its defeat in the competitive struggle for supremacy. Hence as a further deduction the conscious mind of man cannot for a moment forego the belief in existence "ad infinitum". Hence a belief in immortality becomes a postulate for successful existence on this earth. All, too, that can be said about the evolution of the body can also be applied to the evolution of the soul,

What so glorifies
The body that the permeating soul
Finds there no particle elude control?....
Low lie the pleasures, now and here - no herb
But hides its marvel, peace no doubts perturb
In each small mystery of insect life -
Shall the soul's Cause thus gift the soul, yet strife
Continue still of fears with hopes, - for why?
What if the Cause, whereof we now descry
So far the wonder-working, lack at last
Will, power, benevolence - a protoplast,
No consummator, sealing up the sum
Of all things - past and present and to come
Perfection? No, I have no doubt at all!

(Francis Furini. X)

And so Browning builds out of this eternal struggle for existence, this doctrine of evolution, a sure founded theory

of the immortality of the soul by infinite striving in eternal time.

Then, finally, we should discuss the theories of pure science itself, physics and mathematics. What contributions have they to make to Browning's doctrine of the immortal soul?

The first doctrine that modern science expounds is the doctrine of the indestructibility of matter; no atom of matter, it is considered, can ever be lost to the world. And this doctrine of materialism had, as I have shown, its beginning in the poetic enunciation of Lucretius. That atoms are indestructible he insists again and again throughout his "De Rerum Natura",

Sunt igitur solida pollentia simplicitate

(Bk I, line 574)

Matter is, then, eternal; what is essentially and ultimately real is always undying. Or as Browning says it:

"All that is at all lasts ever past recall"

Modern science, too, has taught, that the most infinitesmal measure of energy is conserved . Energy may be transferred into an infinite variety of forms, but the sum of energy remains unimpaired eternally. Hence Browning concludes that it would be absurd to suppose that every energy of the universe is conserved except the power of the human mind and soul. If the activity of the mind becomes non-active at the death of the body, then science is asserting an absurdity, the only instance of the destruction of a force.

All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist
Not its semblance but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
When eternity affirms the conception of a n hour.

(Abt Vogler)

These examples may then, I think, give us some conception of Browning's passion for all the truths of experience. Here, he appeals to the science of his day to show how great a spiritual significance lies behind all matter; he finds beyond the mere facts of physical science the vast wealth of all spiritual meaning. He does not hesitate in his search, but investigates all avenues of experience. His great culture and erudition furnished him with a large world for discovery.

Hill, vale, tree flower - they stand distinct
Nature to know and name.

"This last phrase, know and name, is an extraordinarily characteristic one. It illustrates Browning's whole attitude to truth. His is the rage of knowing. His is, also, the scientist's demand for exactness. He will not only know; he will name, that he may keep his knowledge distinct and clear".(1) Thus Browning searches out all nature, and bases his view upon experience and finds a footing for his faith in the present day world. Is not this an empirical proof of immortality that is cogent and conclusive enough, -

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(1) John Kelman: "Prophets of Yesterday", p. 200.

Enough that now
Here where I stand, this moment's me and mine
Show me what is, permits me to divine
What shall be
(Francis Furini, X)

Thus Browning tests his theory with the persistence and impressive candour of a scientific investigator. He does not attempt to justify the whole by neglecting details. One fact, ultimately irreconsilable with his hypothesis will, he knows utterly destroy it. (1)

What, then, of Browning's poetry? Where does it fit in among this mass of scientific and philosophic discourse of his time? Are we to contend that Browning, in his moments of scientific investigation, so loses the sense of poetic values that his treatise falls into the "chaotic limbo" that lies between science and poetry? There are times, of course, when Browning's poetry becomes nothing but speculative and scientific prose, but it is not by these passages that we judge either his poetic or scientific abilities. It is in these passages where he rises to the height of scientific truth that his poetry, too, rises with him. Let us takem for example, a passage from "Paracelsus" where we can find the superb union of scientific and poetic vision.

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(1) Henry Jones "Browning as a Religious and Philosophical Teacher", p. 80.

The centre-fire heaves underneath the earth,
And the earth changes like a human face;
The molten ore bursts up among the rocks,
Winds into the stone's heart, out-branches bright
In hidden mines, spots barren river-beds,
Crumbles into fine sand where sunbeams bask -
God joys therein! The wroth sea's waves are edged
With foam, white as the bitten lip of hate
When, in the solitary waste, strange groups
Of young volcanos come up, cyclops-like
Staring together with their eyes on flame
God tastes a pleasure in their uncouth pride!
Then all is still; earth is a wintry clod:
But spring-wind, like a dancing psaltress, passes
Over its breast to waken it, rare verdure
Buds tenderly upon rough banks, between
The withered tree-roots and the cracks of frost
Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face;
The grass grows bright, the boughs are swoln with blooms
Like chrysalids impartient for the air
The shining dorrs are busy, beetles run
Along the furrows, ants make their ado;
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!

CHAPTER VII

Browning

We are now, I suggest, in a position to gather together, at least some of the main threads that lead to the sources of Browning's philosophy insofar as they may be fairly summarised, to weave these threads into the fabric of a conclusion, and thus to find out how far he has woven a garment both true in substance and of beautiful pattern, and what are, if any, the main faults in his workmanship. After the inquiry we have carried out into the poetry, philosophy and science of Browning's works, what can we now say, in conclusion, with any degree of assurance, about his position in the world of thought and literature?

> And then thou said'st a perfect bard was one
> Who chronicled the stages of all life.

Beauty, melody, rhythm, time, all that is pleasing to the senses is the average rule of poetry. But to Browning the bard is the reporter of life in all its phases, he is the accurate historian of man's soul with all its emotions, passions joys and sorrows, one who observes human nature in all its manifold manifestations.

The first notable observation, then, about Browning's work is its extent and variety. "He was prodigal of poetic ideas, and wrote for fifty years on nature, art and man, like a magnificent spendthrift of spiritual treasures. So great a store of knowledge lay at his hand, so real and informed

with sympathy, that we can scarcely find any great literature which he has not ransacked, or any phase of life which is not represented in his poems. All kinds of men and women, in every station of life, and at every stage of evil and goodness, crowd his pages. There are few forms of human characters he has not studied, and he has so caught each individual at the supreme moment of his life and in the hardest stress of circumstance, that the inmost working of his nature is revealed." (1) Thus with Browning sound rhythm and beauty stand subordinate to the main theory of human life in its totality. Or perhaps I should not say subordinate, but made to conform to the phase of human life which he is describing. So, for example, the "Ring and the Book", is full of exquisite poetry and amazing felicity of expression, running at times with a fluent rhythm and melody; then again at other times it is full of jolts, harshness, pedantry and coarseness, according to the character which he wishes to represent. But never at any time does Browning relax his effort at writing poetry that was always in conformity with the code of rules which he set for himself. When using conventional metres he tried to vary their monotony by abrupt measures; but when he was inaugurating a new rhythm the verse was always made true to itself.

"So I will sing on - fast as the fancies come"

" Rudely - the verse being as the mood it paints"

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(1) Sir Henry Jones: "Browning as a Religious and Philosophical Teacher." Introduction.

Browning's "great contribution to literature is thus seen in the profound and subtle interpretations of the human heart. In this he is alone - there are lyricists, dramatists, narrators - but there is only one Browning - there is no group of writers in any literature among which he can be classed..... His poems are not of England but of the unindentified realm of the universal in man, they are poems whose setting is the whole world and whose time is any time, eternal perhaps."(1) Thus far his poetry and expression; what about his philosophy?

In Browning's poems action and dramatic treatment are laid side by side with a discussion which is metaphysical. All critics agree that this style of poetry represents a new departure; and, with very few exceptions - and all poets have their moments of weakness - we may conclude that the poet, though dealing with a metaphysical abstraction, has somehow caught the spark of inspiration that lies behind all speculative reasoning, and has transferred it successfully into poetic expression, as, for example, I have endeavoured to prove. Browning has grasped the essential spiritual truth in the transcendental philosopher, Kant, and recoined it in splendid verse.

Knowledge means
Ever renewed assurance by defeat
That victory is somehow still in reach.

How, too, Browning has built up a theory of immortality on this basis of a struggle, how somehow man is striving to attain the unattainable, and paradoxically derives comfort from the knowledge

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(1) William Phelps: "Browning, How to Know Him", p. 68.

that his aspirations can never be fulfilled, has been fully treated as best I can. This dominant ideal has perhaps its most exquisite example in the little lyric, "Evelyn Hope", that strangely mystical and wistful poem of vague longing. We see there how man derives hope from the defeat of his hopes. You can almost imagine the speaker saying, "If I had gained my ideal, should I have looked for heaven? Could I have died as I should die now, with a hope beyond? Would heaven seem best if earth were so good? Defeat in this world returns a hope for heaven in another life.

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?
What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew -
And, just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so wide,
Each was nought to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, nought beside.
No, indeed! for God above
Is great to grant, as mighty to make ....."

Even in Browning's tragic dramas, we can find this same note of optimism which finds its very base in a critical belief. Death, itself, is treated with a noble carelessness which augurs a belief that something greater than death is to follow. Indeed none of Browning's characters ever moved so much in the sensual world of time and space as in eternity and

and among eternal truths. So death does not become death for Browning in the final human sense. His view of death is always that "the last life for which the first was made". For example, Luria steps lightly, with a smile, from the petty throng of little haters to the great calm community of angels. Thorold drops life wearily from him. While even Strafford acquiesces in death without the slightest mortal tremor. Thus, in general, the soul is considered to sit lightly on the body, always ready, nay, even eager to burst the limits of this finite life by which its infinite character is bound. Instead of death it is life, fuller and more abundant, that lies across the threshold. All this is, of course, only th outcome of Browning's conception of life and immortality. It is the eternal striving after perfection which, unattainable on this earth, is, therefore, to be hoped for in the life everlasting. And so instead of mortal shrinking from the agony of death, we have -

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,
The power of the night, the press of the storm
    The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
    Yet the strong man must go;
For the journey is done and the summit attained
    And the barriers fall,

Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so - one fight more,
The best and the last!
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 element's rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace, then a joy,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again
And with God be the rest!

Finally, therefore, can we not conclude that Browning has successfully combined the creative and realistic inspiration of a poet, with the critical idealism of true speculative philosophy? Nevertheless, some contend that Browning's verse is not poetry; others that it is not philosophy; others still who declare that it is neither poetry nor philosophy; and some few who contend that his words are both truly philosophical and poetical. What, then, is Browning? Poet or Metaphysician?

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