THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT
OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

A Thesis Presented for the
Degree of Master of Arts

By

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I
INTRODUCTION

I am a part of all that I have met. - Tennyson

In a letter addressed to Mr. Boyd, December 4, 1842, Elizabeth Barrett (Browning) wrote:

I liberal in commending Byron! . . . .
I am always reproached for my love to Byron.
... Why, people say to me, 'You, who over-praise Byron!' Why, when I was a little girl (and whatever you may think, my tendency is not to cast off old loves!) I used to think seriously of dressing up like a boy and running away to be Lord Byron's page.

Mrs. Browning seemed to suggest here that at an early age she was a firm believer in the principles of freedom and liberty and that as she grew older, she did not alter her beliefs. In fact, a study of her poetry and letters seems to reveal that she maintained this attitude throughout her whole lifetime; furthermore, it appears to be the basic idea back of all her social and political outbursts.

Upon a consideration of the social and political thought of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, one is immediately

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1Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Letters, ed. with biographical additions by Frederick G. Kenyon, Vol. I, p. 115. (Will be referred to hereafter in this discussion as "Kenyon Letters.")
confronted with the following question - how could an individual who lived such a secluded life during her youth take an interest in and develop such significant ideas about the problems of her day?

A partial explanation is that Mrs. Browning was a highly sensitive person who was keenly aware of what was happening about her (even though her illness kept her apart from daily events). She was one whose subsequent acting and thinking was somewhat affected by whatever and whomever she met.

One of the most significant contacts of her life was that of meeting Robert. Yet, he alone cannot be considered responsible for the soundness of the political and social ideas which she formulated and advanced. Certainly, it is reasonable to suppose that her early training, her reading, and her associates had some part in this thought development. Likewise, the journeys to France, the residence in Italy, the many friendships which the Brownings made there, and the proximity to current political crises after their marriage must have been contributory to the development of her social and political thought.

Consequently, through a more detailed consideration of the various factors which touched Elizabeth Barrett Browning's life and through a study of her writings, an
attempt will be made in this discussion

1. To reveal the most essential ideas and most salient characteristics of her social and political thought, and

2. To indicate to some degree how these attitudes developed as a result of certain external and personal influences which she encountered, or, in other words, to show what was back of these "explosions" of hers.
II

EARLY INFLUENCES (1806-1835)

As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined. - Pope

In a series of articles entitled "As the Twig is Bent," which appeared recently in a current periodical, Leslie B. Homan of John Hopkins writes:

Human nature is easy to shape at birth and through young childhood. It soon begins to set, and by the time puberty is reached the chance for all basic molding is gone. If I can control training until the twelfth year, I am confident of changing radically the behavior patterns and personality of any child. Between the twelfth and fifteenth year I am less confident. Beyond the fifteenth nothing really fundamental or revolutionary can be accomplished.1

If Dr. Hopkins' statement is accepted, it becomes interesting to delve into the happenings of Elizabeth Barrett's early life in order to discover those fundamental factors of environment which may have been underlying her social and political thought.

The influence which her family, especially her father, had upon her is particularly significant. Her early life was on the whole a happy one, spent in the company of congenial brothers and sisters who treated her with the

utmost kindness after her illness. But her pleasure was marred by the cloud of a Victorian parent's tyranny, which must have been exceedingly disturbing to a child with an innate love of freedom, especially when she stopped to realize the great love which he really revealed for his favorite. She wrote years later of her father's affection as that of a proprietor for his possessions:

After using one's children as one's chattels for a time the children drop lower and lower toward the level of chattels, and the duties of human sympathy to them becomes difficult in proportion. ¹

C. E. Lawrence, however, in his review of Isabel Clark's book, Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Portrait, sees beyond this mean disposition of Mr. Barrett to an ultimate good which developed out of his strange behavior. He writes:

If Mr. Edward Barrett, the father of his unique daughter, had not been warped and in effect a brutal eccentric, the poetical powers of Elizabeth Barrett Browning would not have grown to their fine strength and blossomed into living light and strength. That is the one justification - no justification for him - of the harsh and irreducible persistency with which he cribbed, cabined, and confined the persons and individualities of his eleven surviving children. ²

¹Mrs. Louise (Schultz) Boas, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, p. 3.
²C. E. Lawrence, review of "Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Portrait" by Isabel Clark, London Bookman, Vol. 76, p. 176.
This comment implies that the forced seclusion of Elizabeth was not an altogether terrible thing as some critics are inclined to maintain. For during this time she was devoting herself almost entirely to reading and writing under her father's direction. And what reading! Among the books, which according to her own statement, she was devouring were: Paine's *Age of Reason*, Voltaire's *Philosophical Dictionary*, Hume's *Essay*, as well as the products of Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft.¹ These books caught her attention when her father directed her away from the other side of the library, where Gibbon's *History* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*, which he forbade her reading, were shelved.

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Yes, she had been obedient - but how interesting to speculate upon the influence the philosophies of these "advocates of freedom" must have had in the molding of the thought of impressionable young Elizabeth. How little the Victorian father could have known of the ideas that were growing in the mind of his eldest!

Elizabeth discovered early in her life that she could avert her father's wrath and frowns by carrying to him for approval her youthful poetic attempts. "'See my poem, papa!' she would cry, offering for his perusal a couplet of filial reverence."² At times he would unbend enough to

²Ibid., p. 5.
take part in tragedies which Elizabeth had composed for the older children to act out in the nursery. And being "bent upon spoiling" her, he had printed fifty copies of her epic, The Battle of the Marathon, which she wrote at the age of twelve. Barrett was pleased with her talent and encouraged her to write more and to take pride in her juvenilia. He liked to feel that he had a scholar in the family. And this encouragement is significant because it stimulated her desire to write.

Mr. Barrett possessed certain humanitarian traits which were praiseworthy. In Ledbury, near their home, he read and prayed with the untaught people—a thing which was very uncommon among the wealthy of his day. "He was truly 'the friend of the unfriended poor,' and by his side, with wondering, upturned, childish eyes, was the little Elizabeth, an ardent and sympathetic companion."2

This relationship with her father may have been the starting point of her social attitudes. But her first recorded humanitarian view took a turn which her father could not have endorsed. It dealt with her sympathy for the slaves of the West Indies. On September 7, 1833, she wrote:

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2Lillian Whiting, The Brownings, Their Life and Art, p. 21.
Of course, you know that the late Bill has ruined the West Indies. That is settled. The consternation here is very great. Nevertheless, I am glad, and always shall be that the Negroes are - virtually - free.1

One readily realizes that "a man who had owned over 30,000 acres of sugar land in Jamaica and a thousand slaves, and who had been broken financially by the Emancipation Act of 1834"2 could not have been in accord with his daughter on this issue. Other of her outbursts against social injustices will be treated when discussing "The Cry of the Children" and Aurora Leigh.

This change from "opulence to mere wealth"3 made it necessary for the family to move to Sidmouth, Devonshire, and was considered tragic by Barrett. But "to Elizabeth, with her cheerful nature, the present by its very contrast to the past was stimulating,"4 and the new beauties of this place beside the sea where they remained until moving to London brought her new inspiration.

One person, Hugh Stuart Boyd, outside the family circle was an important early influence, inasmuch as he was the first literary personage with whom Elizabeth exchanged ideas. He was a blind scholar, with whom she

3Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 16.
4Ibid., p. 16.
shared an interest in Greek. "She loved to record her indebtedness to him 'for many happy hours.'"\(^1\)

It was under such influences as these that Elizabeth continued to live until she was twenty-nine, at Coxhoe Hall, Durham; Hope End, Herefordshire; and Sidmouth, Devonshire, respectively. Of this period of her life she later wrote to R. H. Horne in answer to his request for biographical data to be used in his *A New Spirit of the Age*:

> And then as to stories, mine amounts to the knife-grinder's, with nothing at all for a catastrophe. A bird in a cage would have as good a story. Most of my events and nearly all my intense pleasures, have passed in my thoughts.\(^2\)

But it is probable that these thoughts were of greater importance than she realized, for in them may have been developing the ideas which she poured forth later on political and social issues, although there are no poetical outbursts of significance from this period existing as proof. Her only poems until the time the family moved to London were of a highly romantic nature. In addition to her youthful attempts already mentioned, there had appeared an *Essay on Mind* in 1826 and *Prometheus* in 1833.

\(^1\)Lillian Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
III
IN LONDON (1835-1845)

...................... Came a morn
I stood upon the brink of twenty-years
And looked before and after as I stood,
Woman and artist, either incomplete,
Both credulous of completion.

- Aurora Leigh

In the summer of 1835 the Barretts moved to London. This was a momentous step in the life of Elizabeth, for there she began to be conscious of and take a direct interest in current events. Also, she formed a number of interesting and valuable literary connections, which stimulated her own expression on problems of the day.

Before this time most of her writings had been of a romantic, imaginative nature, being either initiative or direct translations. Even so, there are indications that while composing poetry of that nature, there had been formulating within her mind ideas of her own, which began to find expression shortly after her arrival in London. For in 1843 she wrote to R. H. Horne that her Essay of Mind, published in 1826, contained "the traces of an individual thinking and feeling - the bird pecks through the shell in it."¹ She also asserted that in The Seraphim there were


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"faults enough . . . but my voice is in it, in its individual tones, and not inarticulately."\(^1\)

And just two years after they had established residence in London, she confided to Miss Commelius:

I am resolute to work whatever little faculty I have, clear of imitations and conventionalisms which cloud and weaken more poetry (particularly now-a-days) than would be believed possible without looking in to it.\(^2\)

And she immediately did proceed to carry out her resolution to think and to speak for herself, even though she was almost completely confined to her room, for the London atmosphere had caused her health to break completely.

Chesterton claims that a discussion of her seclusion really deserves "a far less important place than has hitherto been attached to it,"\(^3\) for he feels that

She lived her second and real life in literature and the things of the mind - in a very genuine and strenuous sense . . . she used her brains seriously . . . had, and retained even to the hour of her death, a passionate and quite practical interest in great public questions.\(^4\)

And Lawrence in reviewing Isabel Clark's *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: A Portrait* agrees that "it is not difficult to believe that without those stringent years of reading and

\(^{1}\)Ibid., p. 163.
\(^{4}\)Ibid., p. 61.
enlightened contemplation on the sick bed\(^1\) she never could have risen to the heights to which she did.

At any rate, within this one room her world was widening. Her correspondence increased, as did her contributions to literary magazines, and these two activities in turn brought her into contact with literary men and women.

One of these men, R. H. Horne, was instrumental in introducing her to the literary world in 1836. Through a mutual friend Elizabeth applied to him for comments on her "The Romaut of the Rose," which he in turn sent to the *New Monthly Magazine*, wherein it was published a short time thereafter.

The letters of Miss Barrett and Mr. Horne are quite worthy of notice. Mayer, who edited their correspondence, says in his prefatory note:

> The struggle, not only for emancipation from solitude but for life itself during which they were written, gives them psychological as well as literary value in the key they supply to her mind as expressed in her poems.\(^2\)

And Horne says of her letters to himself:

> Within they were the perfection of confiding frankness, and the complete undistinguished expression of the writer's thought and feeling upon every subject she touched.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) E. Lawrence, *loc. cit.*


Although there are occasional allusions to contemporary problems in these letters to Mr. Horne, most of them deal with their mutual literary interests. She wrote concerning her several contributions to a modernized version of Chaucer, which finally became Horne's burden, although it was originally to have been compiled by a number of contemporaries under the guidance of Wordsworth, who had first proposed the project. She also corresponded at length with Horne about his *A New Spirit of the Age*, and wrote several valuable articles and the mottoes for this book. Other letters dealt with a projected Greek drama, on which they were to collaborate, but they got no farther than the outline.

Another important literary acquaintance of this period was Miss Mary Russell Mitford, author of *Our Village*, who was nineteen years Elizabeth's elder. It was to this friend that Miss Barrett addressed most of her political remarks after moving to the Continent. It is interesting to note that Miss Mitford in her correspondence to Elizabeth included comments to be forwarded to Mr. Horne. She gave the dog, Flush, to Miss Barrett, and would travel forty miles to see the poet for an hour.

A frequent caller at Elizabeth's London home was Mr. John Kenyon, the "friend and dearest cousin,"\(^1\) to whom she

\(^1\)Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, dedication, p. l.
dedicated *Aurora Leigh*. He had an almost fatherly affection for her, and from the first recognized his young relative's genius. He was her constant visitor and link with the outside world, and once suggested to Browning an introduction to his second cousin, Elizabeth Barrett. In his will Kenyon left the Brownings a legacy of ten thousand guineas, thus "insuring them that freedom from material care which is so indispensable to the best achievements in art."¹

Mrs. Anna Brownell Jameson, writer on Italian art, was also a frequent visitor at Wimpole Street. The two became acquainted in November 1844 and in the early part of 1846 Elizabeth assisted this friend in the preparation of a volume of collected papers, by contributing a translation from the *Odyssey*. This friendship "was destined to play a salient part in the life of Elizabeth Barrett,"² for it was Mrs. Jameson who aided the Brownings in getting to Pisa shortly after their marriage.

Under the stimulation of these new friends Miss Barrett began to direct her attention to the specific social and political problems of her age, and to comment upon them.

¹Lillian Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
²Ibid., p. 73.
That she was by 1838 evincing a direct antagonism to the corruptions and conservatism of her day is apparent from a letter to Mr. Kenyon:

We, in this England, here, are just social barbarians, to my mind - that is, we know how to read and write and think, and even talk on occasions, but we carry the old rings in our noses, and are proud of the flowers pricked into our cuticles.¹

In her lines to Mr. Horne three years later her attack upon these social injustices was bolder:

It is an atrocious system altogether - the system established in this England of ours - wherein no river finds its level, . . . her fools lifted into chairs of state, her wise men waiting behind them, and her poets made cinderellas of, and promoted into accurate counters of pots and pans. We need not wonder at the selections. Everything 'is rotten in the state of Denmark'.²

She agreed with Mr. Kenyon that Punch, a current news publication was the one from which "we should be more willing to take our politics."³

That the principles of Carlyle gained her approval was revealed in a letter of May 1, 1843, to John Kenyon about Past and Present: "Full of beauty and truth as the book is and strongly as it takes hold of my sympathies,

there is nothing new in it."¹ She concluded, however, that "the world being blind and deaf, and rather stupid requires a reiteration of certain uncongenial truths."²

In The Seraphim and Other Poems which was published in 1838 Elizabeth Barrett included several short poems about London life as it first appeared to her. In stanza II of "The Soul's Travelling" she enumerated the kinds and classes of people to be found in the busy city, over whose situation she lamented

I dwell amid the city,
And hear the flow of souls in act and speech,
For pomp or trade, for merry makers or folly:
I hear the confluence and sum of each,
And that is melancholy.³

In the symbolic little poem, "My Doves," she expressed the sadness which at first was in her heart over the change from the solitude of the country to the "city prison" where there could be heard only

The stir without the glow of passion,
The triumph of the mart,
The gold and silver as they clash on
Man's cold metallic heart,
The roar of wheels, the cry of bread.⁴

She also included in this group several patriotic poems, "The Young Queen," and "Victoria's Tears," in honor of the

¹Ibid., p. 136.
²Ibid., p. 136.
³Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Complete Poetical Works, p. 36. (Will be referred to hereafter in this discussion as "Poems.")
⁴Ibid., p. 51.
new queen, Victoria, who ascended the throne the same year the poems were published.

One of the most widely known of her poems dealing with the social conditions in England at that time was "The Cry of the Children," which was published in 1843 in Blackwood's Magazine. It is "memorable for focusing attention upon child labor" and appeared almost simultaneously with Lord Shaftesbury's great speech in Parliament on child labor. Elizabeth wrote to Mr. Horne that the poem owed "its utterance to (his) exciting causations." She was referring to his report on the "Employment of Children in Mines and Manufactories."

In the first two lines she plead for attention to this evil, and concluded the stanza by lamenting the children's position, for

They are weeping in the playtime of the others; She continued by explaining that the children really have nothing to live for, and that

It is good when it happens... That we die before our time.

She bewailed the fact that no help was offered by adults, and that they even ignored the problem,

3Poems, p. 156.
4Ibid., p. 156.
When we (the children) sob aloud, the human creatures near us
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word.¹

And a most scathing denunciation was voiced in the concluding words,

Our blood splashes upward, O gold-heaper,
And your purple shows your path;
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper
Than the strong man in his wrath.²

In the "Cry of the Human" which appeared in 1842 in Graham's magazine, she again tiraded the factory system and the evils of material gain. She wrote to Mr. Boyd concerning the content of this poem, "The subject (the factory miseries) is scarcely an agreeable one to the fancy."³

She was considering the advantage taken of the poor when she wrote

We reap our brothers for the wains
And call the harvest - honor.⁴

And was attacking the capitalists in

The plague of gold strikes far and near,
And deep and strong it enters.⁵

And the Corn Laws were assailed in

The curse of gold upon the land
The lack of bread enforces;

¹Ibid., p. 156.
²Ibid., p. 158.
⁴Poems, p. 167.
⁵Ibid., p. 168.
The poor die mute, with staring gaze,
On corn-ships in the offing.\(^1\)

Apparently this attack on the Corn Laws gained some recognition, for in 1844 she wrote to Mr. Martin:

I am vainglorious in announcing to you that the Anti-Corn Law League has taken up my poems on the top of its pikes as antithetic to 'War and Monopoly.'\(^2\)

The poem **Lady Geraldine's Courtship**, coming at the close of this period of her life, boldly satirizes social injustices, particularly class prejudices. It was the "prime favorite"\(^3\) of her **Poems**, published in 1844. Of it she asserted to Mr. Boyd:

It is a 'romance of the age; treating of railroads, routes, and all manner of temporalities,' and in so radical a temper that I expect to be reproved for it by Conservative reviews round.\(^4\)

She clearly revealed her hatred for class discrimination in a contrast of the earl's daughter and a young earl, both of high social rank, with the humble lover poet, with whom Elizabeth seemed to identify herself.

Lady Geraldine was portrayed as one who possessed all the affectations of the Victorian lady and as one who

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 168.
\(^3\)Lillian Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
treads the crimson carpet and breathes
the perfumed air

Far too tender, too cruel far, her smile
upon the poor was.1

And the earl who requested the fair lady's hand in marriage
as one possessing a

soul that matched his station,
.........; far too proud to doubt his domination
Of the common people.2

She deprecated the haughtiness, hypocrisy, and sham of
these two through the mouth of the poet lover, who was
"quite low-born, self-educated,"3 but who "could sit at
rich men's tables"4 because the public praised him. He
denounced Lady Geraldine, (and thus English society) by
saying:

I plucked up her social fictions, bloody-rooted
though leaf-verdant
Trod them down with words of shaming,5

And entreated her to

Learn more reverence, madam, not for rank
or wealth
But for Adam's seed, MAN.6

She prophesied beyond the class prejudices of her own
day by having the haughty Geraldine soften to the pleas of
the poet.

1Poems, pp. 118-19.
2Ibid., p. 123.
3Ibid., p. 119.
4Ibid., p. 119.
5Ibid., pp. 124-25.
6Ibid., p. 125.
Through this same poem Mrs. Browning revealed her attitude about the position of women in her day. She expressed a distaste for their show and pretense when she spoke of the

Lovely London ladies (who) trod the floors with gliding feet; And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted.¹

She commented on her idea of the position of women a number of times in her letters to Mr. Horne. On one occasion she struck a very modern twentieth century note, a belief in a single standard,

... When I talk of women, I do not speak of them (as many men do, and as you yourself are somewhat inclined to do) according to a separate, peculiar, and womanly standard, but according to a common standard of nature.²

And at another time she wrote, "I lay up the compliment about being 'a woman of business' because I ... never received the like before."³

She must have seemed exceedingly bold in the eyes of the average Victorian woman when she dared to utter great admiration for George Sand. In a sonnet to this French writer she wrote:

¹Ibid., p. 120.
³Ibid., letter of Sept. 1844, p. 15.
True genius, but true woman! dost deny
The woman's nature with a manly scorn,
And break away the gauds and armlets worn
By weaker women in captivity?\(^1\)

However, she disliked George Sand's moral laxity, about
which she lamented to Horne:

\[\ldots\] she has suffered her senses to leaven her
soul - to permeate it through and through, and
make a sensual soul of it. She is a wonderful
woman, and, I hope, rising into a purer atmos-
phere by the very strength of her wing.\(^2\)

It is apparent from Miss Barrett's letters that her
interests were not confined to the problems of her home-
land but also touched the problems of neighboring countries.

She was sympathetic with the Irish who were struggling
to obtain religious freedom. However, she did not like
O'Connell, their leader, about whom she wrote several
times to her friend, Mrs. Martin. She evidently doubted
his sincerity for she stated in 1837, "I keep my devotion
for unpaid patriots."\(^3\) And in 1844 she wrote:

I was delighted on every account at his late
victory.\ldots, or rather, at the late victory of
justice and constitutional law. He never was a
hero of mine and is not likely to become one.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Poems, p. 103.
\(^4\) Ibid., letter of Sept. 10, 1844, p. 195.
As an expression of her interest in the French king, she wrote to Mrs. Martin, "He is the noblest king, according to my idea in Europe."\(^1\) However, this interest did not arise out of any sympathy with the king's politics, but rather from the fact that he was an enthusiastic believer in arts and letters.

She had an affinity for Americans, and suggests to Boyd that they were "as good-natured to me, as if they took me for the high Radical I am."\(^2\) She upheld them when she voiced her disapproval of Dickens's *America*,

If I were an American, it would make me rabid, and certain of the free citizens are furious, I understand. . . . I love the Americans, . . . I can not possibly admire and love this book.\(^3\)

The Americans' ready acceptance of Carlyle's *Past and Present* pleased her. Of their reception she wrote to Mr. Horne:

It is replete with favorable promise for that great country and indicative of a noble love of truth in its passing the love of dollars.\(^4\)

Her writings also were received more readily in America than in England. Some of her closest personal and literary friends were Americans. Edgar Allen Poe dedicated a volume to her in which he spoke of her as the "noblest

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\(^1\)Ibid., letter of Oct. 8, 1844, p. 206.  
\(^2\)Ibid., letter of Jan. 5, 1843, p. 119.  
\(^3\)Ibid., letter of Jan. 1843, p. 122.  
of her sex."¹ These facts should be borne in mind when considering her political interest in America.

In 1840 a crucial event occurred in the life of Elizabeth Barrett, which threatened to eclipse her interest and sympathy in the affairs of her day. In 1838 her state of health had been such that her doctor advised her removal to Torquay, a warmer climate, where she remained for three years with her brother, Edward, who had accompanied her thence. On July 11, 1840, this brother was drowned, a tragedy which utterly wrecked her life for a time and caused a long break in her correspondence, and gave utterance to "De Profundis" later.

Miss Mitford noted this experience as good. She felt that "Elizabeth's first real contact with grief, then, led into a softening of character . . . she developed into serenity and self-sufficiency."²

At any rate, in 1841, the poet resumed the thread of her life, returned to London and to the literary occupations, which have already been discussed at length. "She herself said work was her only help in recovering."³ There in her room on Wimpole Street she remained except for a few hours at a time, "until the day, five years later, when she finally left it to join her husband, Robert."⁴

¹Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 49.
²Ibid., p. 47.
⁴Ibid., p. 91.
IV

ELIZABETH BARRETT AND ROBERT BROWNING (1845-1846)

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
Move still, oh, still, beside me. - Sonnet VII

On January 10, 1845, Robert Browning discovered a
pretext for writing to Miss Barrett. She had made a ref-
erence to his Bells and Pomegranates in Lady Geraldine's
Courtship. That gave him excuse to write to her, "I love
your verses with all my heart, my dear Miss Barrett."¹

Thus began the beautiful literary romance, known the
world over, which in turn furnished a most powerful stimu-
lus to Elizabeth Barrett's thinking; for the "even course
of her secluded life was shaken to its foundations by the
advent of Robert,"² and "it was natural and inevitable
that the influence of her love for Browning should trans-
figure her poetry as well as transform her life."³

There immediately sprung up between them a most sig-
nificant correspondence, which Chesterton described as
"the sort which cannot be pursued very much by the outside

¹Lillian Whiting, op. cit., p. 74.
²Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Life and Letters of Robert
Browning, p. 132.
³Sir Henry Jones, "Robert Browning and Elizabeth
Barrett Browning," Cambridge History of English Literature,
p. 83.
public. . . . They write each other in a language of their own, an almost exasperatingly impressionist language."¹

But this inspiring correspondence did not satisfy Robert. He begged permission to call on her; she consented. Upon his return home he sent her a proposal which she felt obliged to refuse on account of her invalidism. At his request she returned the letter with the plea that it be destroyed and that their friendship be continued on the basis of their intellectual comradeship. Browning apparently acquiesced.

However, "in bridging the difficult gap between his literary friendship with Miss Barrett and the love of which he was forbidden to speak or write, Browning showed rare strategy."² He requested that she criticize and correct his Flight of the Duchess, in which he had purposely included an allegory pertaining to her, her father, and himself. By insisting that she read the manuscript critically he made certain that she would see her own future in the situation of the emancipated Duchess.

Although most of their letters dealt with their affection for each other, yet she expressed some social attitudes therein which are worthy of consideration. In

¹G. K. Chesterton, op. cit., p. 68.
them she spoke out plainly and sincerely, for she was writing to one in whom she had the utmost confidence.

Quite pertinently she wrote to him on matrimony, revealing that it was not always the best state, "To see the marriages which are made every day! worse than solitudes and more desolate!" In the same letter she expressed her hatred of the Victorian attitude of the position of a wife:

- why, how can you, who are just, blame women . . . when you must know what the "system" of man is towards them, - and of men not ungenerous otherwise? . . . And your 'honourable men,' the most loyal of them, (for instance) is it not a rule with them (unless when taken unaware through a want of self-government) to force a woman (trying all means) . . . to stand committed in her affections?

She continued on the topic just a month prior to their marriage:

When women are chosen for wives, they are not chosen for companions. A fulness of sympathy, a sharing of life. . . , is scarcely ever looked for except in a narrow conventional sense. Men like to come home and find a blazing fire and a smiling face. . . . Their serious thoughts, and earnest aims in life, they like to keep on one side. And this is the carrying out of love and marriage, almost everywhere in the world - and this the degrading of women by both.3


2Ibid., p. 352.

Curiously enough, although she revealed indirectly in the above statements that she did not like a double standard, she agreed with Robert that women should not take an active part in politics,

- women have not mental strength any more than they have bodily; have not instruction, capacity, wholeness of intellect enough. . . . Then you are right again in affirming that the creators have no business there, with the practical men.

On French writers she commented that though they have a faculty and imagination surpassing English romance-writers, yet they "have besides a devil . . . and we do not recommend them as fit reading for English families."^2

On the relation of church and state she insisted:

I like . . . the simplicity of the dissenters . . . and the principle of the church, as they hold it, . . . I hold it too . . . quite apart from state-necessities . . . pure from the law.^3

At another time she seems to have forecast the composition of Aurora Leigh. She spoke of writing

- a sort of novel poem . . . as completely modern as 'Geraldine's Courtship,' running into the midst of our conventions, and rushing into drawing rooms and the like 'whāre angels fear to tread,' and so meeting face to face and without

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^1Ibid., letter of July 1, 1846, pp. 282-3.
^2Ibid., letter of April 24, 1846, pp. 102-3.
mask the Humanity of the age, and speaking the
truth, as I conceive of it, out plainly.¹

Other correspondence during her courtship was slight,
for she wished to keep her days free for Robert - to have
his visits uninterrupted, to write to him, to peruse his
letters. Even "friends of the past - Miss Mitford, Mr.
Kenyon, hitherto welcome relatives - seemed now an imper-
tinent interruption."² Yet, some of her letters to
friends contained ideas worth noting.

She sustained her interest in the Irish question by
writing to Mrs. Martin on April 3, 1845:

Well, and you are . . . angry and satisfied,
just as I am! satisfied with the justice as far
as it goes, and angry and disgusted at the
hideous shrieks of intolerance and bigotry which
run through the country.³

She continued about this issue to Mr. Horne in 1846, "And
so you are going to Ireland. . . . I wish you the most
satisfying of successes in the dirt of politics."⁴

She stated her sympathy for the Anti-Corn Law League
to Kenyon, about a request made by the League for a poem:

I am pleased with the request so made, and
if left to myself I should be likely at once to
say 'yes,' and write an agricultural-evil poem
to complete the factory-evil circle. And I do

²Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 69.
not myself see how it would be implicating my name with a political party to the extent of wearing a badge.¹

In a discussion of the education of women she wrote to Miss Thompson: "In the case of the multitude it is different; and the mere fashion of scholarship among women would be a vain, disagreeable thing."²

By the fall of 1845 Elizabeth's physician suggested a trip to Italy in order to safeguard her health from the rigors of the severe winter of England. Such a trip would have necessitated the taking of Arabella and Stormie, a sister and brother, with her. And, of course, Mr. Barrett, who never wanted his family separated, would not consent, even though his daughter's life were at stake. Even the intercessions and promises of Mrs. Jameson to take her were of no avail.

Browning, who had been informed of the projected trip, wrote of following Elizabeth to Italy, or better still, begged her to marry him. But she kept putting him off all that winter, the next spring, and summer. Finally, the following fall she agreed, since her father from some reason or other - perhaps, he surmized Robert's intention - spoke of moving the family to Reigate under the pretext

¹Ibid., letter of Feb. 8, 1845, p. 240.
²Ibid., letter of May 16, 1845, p. 260.
of remodeling the London house. Elizabeth seized upon her only means of escape. She married Robert September 12, 1846, at Marlyebone church in London, and according to the well-known story left for France with her husband a week later.

However, with or without her father's intervention, the outcome of that courtship would probably have been the same. For things had been pointing in that direction from the first.

At the very outset of their correspondence she wrote of Browning to a friend, "I had a letter from Browning, the poet, last night, which threw me into ecstacies."¹ A short time later she confessed that she was getting "deeper and deeper into correspondence with Robert Browning and that they were growing to be the truest friends."² Three months from the time that she returned his love letter, she betrayed herself, when she had received no letter from him for two days, by writing, "I do not hear; and come to you to ask the alms of one line, having taken into my head that something is the matter. . . ."³

"'Catarina to Camoens' was but a transparent veil for her own feelings toward Robert Browning."⁴ Her denial

¹Lillian Whiting, op. cit., p. 73.
²Ibid., p. 74.
³Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 71.
⁴Lillian Whiting, op. cit., p. 83.
broke down in "A Denial" in the lines,

Here's no more courage in my soul to say,
Look in my face and see.¹

And again in "Insufficiency,"

I love thee so, Dear, that I only can leave thee.²

Also through reading "'Question and Answer,' 'Proof
and Disproof,' 'A Valediction,' 'Loved Once,' and 'Inclu-
sions'"³ further insight into her feelings for Robert can
be gained.

In the end it was she who wrote to Robert in haste,
proposing immediate marriage:

It seems quite too soon and too sudden for
us to set out on our Italian adventure now -
.... Well - but you must think for both of
us. .... I will do as you wish - understand.⁴

It might appear that far too much space has been
devoted in this chapter to matters which have relatively
little to do with Elizabeth Barrett's social and political
thought. And yet this very significant period of her life
deserves consideration in an observation of her social
and political outbursts after her marriage. "In all Mrs.
Browning's poetry after her marriage one may trace the
effect of this new life - in a new intensity, concentration,

¹Poems, p. 212.
²Ibid., p. 214.
³Lillian Whiting, op. cit., p. 84.
⁴Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., pp. 118-19.
vigor of treatment."

It is through Robert that her spirit is fully liberated, her freedom complete - to think, to act, to live as she wishes. And with this freedom came the utmost happiness, which is bound to color her thought. She herself reported this change to Horne in a letter of December 4, 1846, "Mrs. Jameson ... called me at the end of six weeks, notwithstanding all the emotion and fatigue, 'rather transformed than improved.'"

IN ITALY AND FRANCE UNTIL THE PUBLICATION OF AURORA LEIGH (1845-1857)

It's sublime,
This perfect solitude of foreign lands. - Bianca

Upon their departure from England the Brownings set out for Italy, where by 1848 they established a permanent residence at Casa Guidi in Florence. There they were exceedingly content, as living expenses were modest and the climate conducive to the improvement of Elizabeth's health. As Wilson, the maid, and Robert did all the household tasks, Elizabeth spent long, pleasant days - reading, writing poetry or letters to her friends, meditating on the political problems of the day, occasionally visiting the beautiful art galleries of the city, receiving friends into her home, or taking little side trips into various parts of Italy with her husband.

Sometimes they took these excursions for pleasure and sight-seeing, but more frequently for the purpose of escaping the heat of the summers in Florence. Occasionally they went up to Paris, and several times returned to England, generally on business.
Friends who called at the Browning home or whom they met on their trips included the Stories, Landor, Mrs. Jameson, Mrs. Stowe, Lytton, Ida Blagden, Margaret Fuller, George Sand, Milsand, Fanny Kremble, William Page, Mrs. Trollope, the Hawthornes, the Ossolisa, Hiram Powers, and many others.

It is small wonder that Mrs. Browning's correspondence during this period became voluminous. There was so much and such new things for her to write about to her friends back in England.

Her letters included many comments on the Italian struggle for freedom, for "no one followed with fuller sympathy the changing fortunes of Italy. . . . She was profoundly moved by the agitation for freedom. Italy was the land where she herself first knew freedom, and her emotions swept her into"\textsuperscript{1} sympathy and expression.

In September 1847 she wrote to Miss Westbrook concerning the Italian situation:

We were glad to be here just now when there is new animation and energy given to Italy by this new wonderful Pope, who is a great man and doing greatly. . . . Think how seldom the liberation of a people begins . . . from a papal throne, which is so high and straight.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Sir Henry Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
\textsuperscript{2}Kenyon Letters, Vol. I, p. 344.
However, before long she saw the Pope in his true colors, as a statesman, which caused her to be far from "caught up in the wave of popular enthusiasm for Pio Nono that swept over Italy."¹

Poor Florence, so dead . . . so trodden flat in the dust of the vineyards by these mules of Austria and these asses of the papacy.²

And she commented about him again that winter to Ida Blagden:

The old serpent, the Pope, is wriggling his venom into the heart of all possibilities of free thought and action. Austria the hand, the papal power the brain.³

She is justified by history in regarding his gravest errors as those of judgment rather than those of conscious intention.

Rather than in the Pope she placed her trust in the Grand Duke, Leopold II, who seemed so kindly a man, so sincere in his work for liberty of the press that it is small wonder that she misplaced her faith. She spoke of him as the "new hope of Italy"⁴ and wrote concerning him to her sister:

Good Grand Duke! . . . Such an excellent constitution he has given to Tuscany, with

¹Lillian Whiting, op. cit., p. 115.
³Ibid., letter of 1853, p. 98.
every religious distinction abolished at one sweep. I like him and I like his face.\(^1\)

But, by 1849 she had begun to distrust the duke as a leader, for she felt that he had recanted his liberal views and was sanctioning Austrian invasion into Italy. And she always looked adversely upon Austria in any moves of this nature. She expressed her loss of faith in Leopold in a letter to her sister:

I, individually, give up the Grand Duke, if it is proved, as it almost seems to be, that he has invited or connived at this Austrian intervention. . . . I give him up, having fought for him gallantly. . . . 'Put not your trust in Princes'. . . . faithless and ignoble, . . . . Wretched, infamous man. That ever I should have felt compassion for that man.\(^2\)

In a letter addressed to Mrs. Martin, May 14, 1849, she evidenced vexation with the province of Tuscany, which she regarded as an accomplice in the crime of Austrian intervention:

But Tuscany has acted a vile part, so vile, that I am skeptical about the Romans. We expect daily the Austrians in Florence, and have made up our minds to be very kind.\(^3\)

To Miss Mitford she declared that this province, which had been granted a constitution just a short time before by

\(^1\)Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Letters to Her Sister*, p. 77. (Will be referred to hereafter in this discussion as "Sister.")

\(^2\)Sister, letter of May 1849, p. 105.

the Grand Duke, did not have "brains enough to govern itself."1

Mrs. Browning regretted deeply the almost indifferent attitude which the Italians in general seemed to hold toward gaining their freedom. About this she wrote to Horne in 1846:

One thing is certain — that the Italians won't spoil their best surtouts by venturing out in a shower of rain through whatever burst of revolutionary ardour, nor will they forget to take their ices through loading of their guns.2

And again on their lack of initiative she exclaimed in 1848 to Miss Mitford, "They have only the rhetoric of patriots and soldiers, I fear! . . . the people wants stamina, wants conscience, wants self-reverence." 3 And to this same friend she continued in 1849, "My faith in every species of Italian is, . . . nearly worn out. I don't believe they are men at all, much less heroes and patriots." 4

Mrs. Browning's hope, like that of some of the Italians, was that Napoleon might step in to save Italy from Austrian domination. She explained to Mrs. Martin:

The Italians have been hanging their whole hope's weight upon Louis Napoleon ever since he came to power, and if he does now what he can for them I shall be proud of my protege.1

Toward Austria she always maintained a hatred because she felt that the people of that country, with strong Catholic interests, were in league with the Pope and were attempting to keep Italy from becoming a free state. In 1854 she wrote to Miss Mitford:

I don't like hand-shaking with Austria; I would rather be picking her pocket of her Italian provinces . . . here in Italy we have long been all opening our mouths like so many young thrushes in a nest, expecting some 'worme small' from your Emperor. Now if there's an Austrian alliance instead . . . .2

Just how seriously she was affected and disillusioned when Napoleon, through Cavour's shrewdness, finally did intervene in the Italian crisis will be discussed in Chapter VII.

When writing to Mrs. Jameson in 1853, the poet expressed both fear and sympathy for Mazzini, conspicuous republican leader:

I am much relieved by hearing that Mazzini is gone from Italy . . . . Every day I expected to be told that he was taken at Milan and shot. A noble man, though incompetent, I think, to his own aspiration; but a man who has my sympathies always.3

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2Ibid., letter of Dec. 11, 1854, p. 182.
3Ibid., letter of April 12, 1853, p. 109.
He had gained some renown in Italy as leader of the association, "Young Italy," which he had established after deserting the secret Carbonari.

That the French Revolution also caught Mrs. Browning's attention and gained her sympathy is evident from reading her letters. Of this uprising in 1848 she wrote to her sister:

By no means do I approve of everything done or attempted just now in that Wonderful Paris of mine where men see half-truths - so high and pure that they are not seen at all by men in general - but, still half truths, and as such dangerous and impossible to render into practice.1

And again on April 22, 1848, she confided:

I don't embrace the French system altogether... My idea of a republic is for every born man in it to have room for his faculties - which is perfectly different from swamp- ing individuality in a mob... I would rather have dear England as she is than as France is... the 'price of blood' has been too heavy.2

Yet, she felt that France had been obliged to use extreme measures and that after the radical theories of socialism and communism were finally tempered much good for the country might be observed. However, in a letter to Mrs. Martin of 1851, she stated that this would take time, "It seems to me probable that the door is open to a

1Sister, letter of April 1, 1848, p. 81.
2Ibid., p. 83.
wider and calmer political liberty than France has yet enjoyed. Let us wait.¹

She by no means embraced socialism. In 1848 she wrote to Miss Mitford:

I fear that mad theories promising the impossible may in turn make the people mad. ... Nothing can be more hateful to me than this communistic idea of quenching individualities in the mass.²

And again in 1850 she commented to this friend:

I would rather (for me) live under the absolutism of Nicholas of Russia than in a Fourier machine, with my individuality sucked out of me by a social air pump.³

And finally in 1852 to Mrs. Martin:

As for the socialists ... some of their chief men are full of pure and noble aspiration ... still they hold ... in their clean hands ideas that kill, ideas which defile, ideas which, if carried out, would be the worst and most crushing kind of despotism.⁴

She came to regard Louis Napoleon as one of her favorites and wrote to Mrs. Martin, May 14, 1849:

I was vexed rather at their selection of Louis Napoleon, - a selection since justified by the firmness and apparent integrity of the man.⁵

²Ibid., letter of April 15, 1848, p. 359.
³Ibid., p. 359.
⁴Ibid., letter of Feb. 27, 1852.
She maintained that he did as well as anyone in his position could, in a letter to Miss Mitford, August 31, 1849:

It seems to me that he has given proof, so far as the evidence goes, of prudence, integrity, and conscientious patriotism; the situation is difficult and he fills it honorably.¹

The Brownings were in Paris at the time of the coup d'etat and that she approved this step as occurring only by the will of the people is evident from, "I do maintain that . . . to insult him where he is, is to insult the people who placed him there."² She explained that

Lamartine's work on the Revolution of '48 is one of the best apologies for Louis Napoleon, and, if you want another, take Louis Blanc's work on the same.³

She protested violently against the deplorable, inaccurate reports of these revolutions printed in the English newspapers. In 1853 she wrote to Miss Mitford:

Mr. Cobden and the Peace Society are pleasing me infinitely just now in making head against the immorality (that's the word) of the English press. . . . The tone taken up towards France is immoral in the highest degree . . . if the English press were in earnest in the cause of liberty, there would be something to say for our poor trampled down Italy.⁴

She attacked the Athenaeum for reporting that books were being suppressed in France to the extent that men were

¹Ibid., p. 419.
³Ibid., letter of March 17, 1853, p. 108.
being thrown out of work when exactly the opposite was true. ¹

Much as Mrs. Browning hated warfare she expressed in a letter of 1854 to her sister the feeling that ultimate good might arise out of the Crimean War:

It seems to me a most righteous and necessary war. . . . There are great interests involved beside the specific Turkish interests - the liberty and civilization of all Europe, and the good of the world for centuries. ²

She saw in it specific good for England, which she suggested to Mrs. Jameson, February 24, 1855:

The results will, however, be good if we are induced to come down from the English pedestal in Europe of incessant self-glorification. ³

Her attitude toward Florence Nightingale's service in this war was not as elevated as that of most English women. Of the nurse's work she wrote to Mrs. Jameson:

I confess myself to be at a loss to see any new position for the sex, or the most imperfect solution of the 'women's question' in this step of hers. ⁴

She also expressed a bitter hatred toward American slavery. On February 8, 1847, she explained to Miss Mitford:

¹Ibid., letter of May 2, 1856, p. 230.
⁴Ibid., p. 189.
I have just finished my rough sketch of an anti-slavery ballad and sent it off to America where nobody will print it ... because I could not help making it bitter.¹

The poem to which she referred was "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," written upon request for a "volume entitled, 'The Liberty Bell,' published in Boston, 1848, for sale at the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazaar held that year."²

She spoke of Mrs. Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin as "an individual glory full of healthy influence and benediction to the world,"³ and as "quite a sign of the times."⁴

Her feeling toward all slavery is summed up in a letter of November 5, 1855, to Ruskin:

In regard to the slaves, no, no, no; I belong to a family of West Indian slaveholders, and if I believed in curses, I should be afraid. I can at least thank God that I am not an American.⁵

The problem of class distinctions was one on which Mrs. Browning frequently commented. She often drew contrasts between the state of the poor in Italy and France with the unfortunate in England, bringing out the fact

⁴Ibid., letter of April 12, 1853, p. 110.
⁵Ibid., p. 220.
that the situation in her homeland was deplorable. She related the comments of her baker's wife, with which she was heartily in accord, in a letter to her sister, September 13, 1847:

They are treated like dogs there (England), and never enjoy anything like other human beings. . . . Here we are all men and women and can reach to the same pleasures.¹

She made a strong plea for the less fortunate children in the poem, "A Song for the Ragged Schools of London," written in 1854 for the table at a Charity Bazaar in London. She begged that the neglected poor children be given a chance,

But a place in Ragged Schools  
Where the outcasts may to-morrow  
Learn by gentle words and rules  
Just the uses of their sorrow.²

She constantly slapped at the Victorians' concentration on material gain by suggesting how cheaply she and Robert were able to live in France and Italy. Once she wrote to Horne:

If we were in England perhaps we should have to make out life with mustard and cress. . . . Here, we live for nothing, or next to nothing.³

¹Sister, p. 48.  
²Poems, p. 432.  
On another occasion she sent specific advice to her sister, Henrietta, on how to manage on a modest income after marriage.¹

In various letters she commented on marriage, suggesting to Miss Mulock in 1852 that love is the first consideration in matrimony.² At another time she wrote to her sister that marriage was not necessary to women, but certain conditions were necessary to marriage.³ And, in 1847, prompted by Mr. Horne's engagement, she suggested to Miss Mitford that "the singleness of a man when his youth is over is a sadder thing than the saddest which an unmarried woman can suffer."⁴

In keeping with Victorian conventions she recognized the obligation of children toward parents. It was because of this attitude that she deeply regretted her own father's unforgiveness. She spoke in a letter to her sister of Robert's duty to his father, who at the time of writing was rather elderly.

Mrs. Browning's writing had been interrupted for two months during this period of her life because of the birth of a son, Robert Wiedeman Barrett Browning, March 7, 1849.

¹The Brownings, Twenty-two Unpublished Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning, pp. 70-3.
³Sister, p. 71.
With his arrival her joy and happiness was complete. That the love for her own child taught her the love of all mothers is apparent from some of her correspondence. Knowing a mother's joys made it possible for her to write such poems as "A Child's Grave at Florence," and "Only a Curl."

A recapitulation of the ideas of Mrs. Browning mentioned in this chapter would indicate that from the time of her setting foot on the Continent she became increasingly more aware of the problems of her day; furthermore, under the stimulus of Robert's personality she began to speak out more boldly, firmly, and bitterly than ever before. Comments on her two most important poems of this period will be discussed in the next chapter.
VI

AURORA LEIGH AND CASA GUIDI WINDOWS

The world we've come to late is swollen hard
With perished generations and their sins
...:..:...:..:
Under and over is the social spasm
And crises of the ages. - Aurora Leigh

* * * * *

I heard last night a little child go singing
'Neath Casa Guidi windows, by the church
'O Bella liberta, O bella!' - Casa Guidi Windows

With the exception of the incomparable "Sonnets from the Portuguese," slipped timidly into her husband's pocket one morning in 1849 while they were at Bagni di Lucca, Mrs. Browning's Aurora Leigh and Casa Guidi Windows are considered her best poems. A rather extended consideration of each is justifiable here; for satire on social problems is presented in the former and sympathy for the Italians in their struggle for freedom is manifest in the latter.

Aurora Leigh, a novel in verse, the nine books of which were composed in three years and published in 1856, is "as daring as Jane Eyre from which it borrows occasionally tone and incident."¹ In the dedication to her cousin,

¹Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 187.
John Kenyon, the author spoke of it as the "most mature of my works and the one into which my highest convictions upon life and art have entered."\(^1\)

The "story is a thin thread on which are strung the opinion of the writer on all manner of matters - educational, social, artistic, and ethical."\(^2\) "To estimate it only as a social treatise is to recognize but one element in its kaleidoscopic interest,"\(^3\) yet it is the social element which makes the poem of interest to this discussion.

"The events she described and the characters she drew were saturated with her own sympathies."\(^4\) Consequently, she cannot be identified with any one individual portrayed in the story, as Aurora, for example. Rather she must be thought of as standing for the noble, high principles which any of the characters may uphold. The novel may be regarded as autobiographical in the account of development of the heroine's mind.

The story itself concerned Aurora Leigh, a child of Florentine mother and English father, who at the age of thirteen was brought from Italy to England to be reared by

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\(^1\)Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh*, p. 1.
\(^2\)Sir Henry Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-3.
\(^3\)Lillian Whiting, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
a Victorian aunt, Assunta. This relative, strait-laced, unloving, fearful of all emotion except hate, was satirized as one who lived

A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
A quiet life, which was not life at all.¹

Through a detailed description of the traditional training of the child - cross-stitching, modeling wax flowers, reading books which held that women should abjure from thinking - the poet scorned the women of her day, who were products of such a system.

On Aurora's twentieth birthday, Romney Leigh, her cousin and owner of the estate, Leigh Hall, proposed to her. Her immediate refusal revealed Mrs. Browning's argument in behalf of the emancipation of Victorian women. Aurora felt that marriage should be considered only on the basis of love and that no woman should be expected to forfeit her individuality in exchange for marriage. She explained

I, too, have my vocation, - work to do.²

Soon thereafter the aunt died and Aurora was left almost penniless. However, she refused the legacy which Romney offered her because she did not wish to be duty-

¹Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Aurora Leigh, p. 14.
²Ibid., p. 55.
bound to him. Instead, she set out for London to become a writer, while Romney, afire with humanitarian zeal, attempted to lift the masses. In describing his social work many comments were advanced on the labor problems of England, where

Your children work for you, not you for them,
Or else they better had been choked with air
The first breath drawn. . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

The account of Aurora's career in London satirized the critics and booksellers of the day. Of her work Aurora mused

And being but poor, I was constrained, for life
To work with one hand for the booksellers
While working with the other for myself

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
In England no one lives by verse that lives.²

While in London, Aurora was visited by Lady Waldemar, who "had the low voice of your English dames."³ She had come to solicit Aurora's aid in preventing Romney's marriage to the commoner, Marian Erle. Aurora then called on Marian, heard the story of her early unhappy life and of Romney's proposal. He had explained to Marian that their marriage would serve as an example to people of all times, for it would unite the "two extremes of social classes," for "God made them of the same clay," he being

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¹Ibid., p. 113.
²Ibid., p. 90.
³Ibid., p. 91.
"born what men call noble," and she being "issued from the
noble people."¹ Aurora approved of their marriage and
requested Romney that she be permitted to arrange for the
wedding to be held at her home. But Romney, true to his
social theories protested,

I take my wife
Directly from the people; and she comes
As Austria's daughter to imperial France,
From Margaret's Court at garret-height, to meet
And wed me at St. James.²

The scene portraying the people assembled for the
wedding afforded Mrs. Browning occasions to sympathize
with the poor,

A holiday of miserable men
Is sadder than a burial-day of kings.³

And to tirade the actions and conversations of the fash-
onable, about whom Lord Howe, one of the guests, com-
mented to Aurora,

We're all gone wrong. The time in us is lost;
And whistling down back alleys to the moon
Will never catch it.⁴

Meanwhile, through Lady Waldemar's persuasion, Marian ran
away instead of appearing for the wedding.

¹Ibid., all four references to Marian and Romney's
station in life taken from p. 123.
²Ibid., p. 131.
³Ibid., p. 137.
⁴Ibid., p. 142.
Some months later at a fashionable gathering Aurora learned that Lady Waldemar and Romney were to be married. Somewhat aside from the story itself was a significant conversation of two men, which she overheard at this party, in which the older man upheld the younger generation—a very unusual attitude for Victorian times. He said

The young run on before, and see the thing
That's coming. Reverence for the young, I cry.

* * * * *

. . . . . . . . . Would I were
Eighteen and worthy to admonish you.¹

In the meantime Marian had fallen into the hands of cruel people, had been drugged and seduced. But she had managed to secure work as a maid in a good home. However, her mistress, in true Victorian manner, superciliously and self-righteously, banished the unfortunate girl immediately upon discovering her plight. This enabled Mrs. Browning to make a strong plea for the unprotected girls of the city. As a suggestion for the consideration which such girls should receive, Aurora upon finding Marian and her child took them to Italy.

There they were comparatively happy, while Aurora spent her days writing and Marian devoted her time to her

¹Ibid., p. 181.
child. They were saddened by the news that without justification the ungrateful, misunderstanding rabble had burned Leigh Hall, which Romney had had converted into almshouses.

Soon afterward Romney himself came to visit them in Italy. Aurora surmised that he was on his honeymoon with Lady Waldemar. But she soon learned that he had come to marry Marian and to adopt her baseborn son. Certainly this gesture symbolized a severe attack upon Victorian conventionality. However, Marian nobly rejected his offer and dedicated her life to her son. She resolved to gain for him equal opportunity with every child of the world.

Aurora then was shocked to learn that Romney was blind, as a result of an accident during the fire at Leigh Hall. Mrs. Browning claimed that this incident had metaphysical significance, for through losing his physical sight Romney assured Aurora that

The spirit from behind this dethroned sense,
Sees, . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Aurora then yielded to her love for him by professing

. . . . . . . . . . I love you, sir;
And when a woman says she loves a man,
The man must hear her, though he love her not.²

¹Ibid., p. 338.
²Ibid., p. 339.
Thus Aurora boldly reestablished the author's original point concerning marriage, that love is the prime requisite to happy wedded life.

To Mrs. Browning it was the implications behind this story which were important, but "the general public saw little beyond a melodramatic romance, . . . which was easily read, easily understood, and which was vastly entertaining."¹ It was considered extremely bold and shocking. It is difficult to comprehend the reception of *Aurora Leigh* in its own age, for now a writer can present almost any topic quite frankly without disturbing his reader.

Concerning the reception of her novel, Mrs. Browning wrote to Mrs. Jameson:

I am assured, too, . . . that the 'mamas of England' in a body refuse to let their daughters read it. Still, the daughters emancipate themselves and do, that is certain; for the number of young women, not merely 'the strong-minded' as a sect, but pretty, affluent, happy women, surrounded by all the temptations of English respectability, that cover it with the most extravagant praise is surprising to me.²

At another time she wrote about its acceptance to Mrs. Jameson:

¹Mrs. Louise Boas, *op. cit.*, p. 198.
People have been so kind that, in the first place, I really come to modify my opinions somewhat upon their conventionality, to see the progress made in freedom of thought.¹

And to her sister she confided:

Aurora Leigh, however, has done well. . . . 'Celestial purity' attributed to it here, and 'shameful immorality' there. All sorts of contrary outcry.²

Although a few protested, many people, critics in particular, praised the novel; there were complimentary letters from strangers, generous press notes, even a request from Milsand to translate it into French. Ruskin commented "Mrs. Browning's Aurora Leigh is, as far as I know, the greatest poem which the century has produced in any language."

It is well that Mrs. Browning had waited to write this story, about which she had had some ideas twelve years earlier, for by 1856 she viewed life quite philosophically. Its scope was broad and revealed that she had "a mind to which all crises appealed."³ After its completion there was little left for her to say. Of the seriousness with which she composed it, she wrote, "I have put much of myself in it, . . . I mean to say, of my soul,

²Sister, letter of March 4, 1857, p. 27.
³Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, op. cit., p. 1220.
my thoughts, emotions, opinions.¹

*Casa Guidi Windows,* which was published in 1851, five years before *Aurora Leigh,* was about as unpopular in England as the novel was popular. It was a "succession of pictures and comments on the stirring events of the time"² in Italy with an interval of three years elapsing between the composition of the two parts.

It was scarcely to be expected that the English public would take a very keen interest in a poem dealing with Italian affairs, especially when half of it concerned politics of three years standing. Furthermore, it was difficult to discuss contemporary politics adequately in poetry; at best it was considered "merely a woman's expression of a woman's viewpoint. . . . Men did not want women meddling with their politics."³

A discrepancy existed between the two parts because of the interval of three years that elapsed between the composition of each. Mrs. Browning was quite aware of this, but wisely decided to let them go as originally written (she seldomly revised), for each presented the attitudes which she felt at the time of writing. In the

preface to this work the poet explained that

She had attempted 'no continuous narrative, no explanation of political philosophy,' but merely a 'simple story of personal impressions whose only value is in the intensity with which they were received, as proving her warm attachment for a beautiful and unfortunate country.'

The first part was optimistic. It began with her recollection of a small child who passed by Casa Guidi the previous night singing "O bella liberta, O bella!" So it is not only at Mussolini's command that small Italian children have learned songs of patriotism! The child's song caused her to meditate upon the Italian people's desire for freedom and to think of their country as a "Juliet of nations." She compared the spirit of the heroes of the past with that displayed by the masses as they paraded below the windows of Casa Guidi from which the Brownings were watching the spectacle. She was pleased with this mingling of the people of all ranks and claimed that

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3Ibid., p. 225.
Here, as in her early letters, she expressed her loyalty to the Grand Duke. "Leopold II, though an aristocrat, was a lenient one, a kindly if dull individual whom his people liked well enough."¹ Mrs. Browning described him as

careful with the care that shuns a lapse
Of faith and duty, studious not to add
A burden in the gathering of a gain.²

And, as in her correspondence, she looked upon the Pope as insincere, an individual in whom little confidence could be placed. "His first proceedings were admirable . . . during the first year of his rule he seemed to his countrymen the ideal pontiff . . . the destined regenerator of Italy."³ But soon he was seen by some in the colors which caused Mrs. Browning to question

A pope? Ah, there we stop and cannot bring
Our faith up to the leap, with history's bell
So heavy round the neck of it.⁴

This part closed with a note of hope and confidence in the Italian people, upon whom "Austrian Metternich can fix no yoke unless the neck agree,"⁵ for "they (the Italians) shall not fail."⁶

¹William Hall Griffin and Harry Christopher Minchin, The Life of Robert Browning, p. 159.
³William Hall Griffin and Harry Christopher Minchin, op. cit., p. 157.
⁵Ibid., p. 234.
⁶Ibid., p. 242.
By 1851, when the second part was composed, Mrs. Browning's mood had changed; she had become less hopeful and somewhat pessimistic. The Grand Duke had not lived up to her expectations; she now spoke of him as "thou false Duke Leopold"\(^1\) and blamed him for the Austrian invasion:

And since the Grand Duke has come back and brought
This army of the North which thus requires
His filial South, we leave him to be taught.\(^2\)

She lamented her trust in this leader by begging

Absolve me, patriots, of my woman's faults
That ever I believed the man was true.\(^3\)

She turned to the people themselves as the remaining hope of the country

Not 'Live the Duke,' who has fled for good or ill,
But 'Live the People,' who remained and must
The unrenounced and unrenounceable.\(^4\)

Also in this section her attitude toward the Pope had become more bitter; she maintained some confidence in Mazzini and Garibaldi; and she turned to other lands, particularly France, for aid, asking

No hope for Rome, free France, chivalric France?\(^5\)

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 242.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 248.
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 243.
\(^4\)Ibid., p. 244.
\(^5\)Ibid., p. 251.
Casa Guidi Windows appeared in June 1851, just as the Brownings were setting out on an extensive tour to Venice, Milan, Paris, and finally to London to arrange for the publication of Aurora Leigh. They were gone for seventeen months. For that reason, perhaps, little appeared in Mrs. Browning's correspondence concerning the reception of the new political lyrics. However, she did predict England's attitude toward them in a letter to Ida Blagden, May 1, 1851:

I have a little book coming out in England called Casa Guidi Windows, which will prevent everybody else (but you) from speaking to me again.¹

And after its publication she wrote to Miss Mitford:

Tell me how you like this poem — honestly, truly — which numbers of people will be sure to dislike profoundly and angrily, perhaps.²

But, "to those who look . . . to its warm-hearted championship of a great cause, it will always hold a high place of its own among Mrs. Browning's writings."³

This consideration of the social and political implications of Aurora Leigh and Casa Guidi Windows seems to reveal that, after establishing her residence on the Continent, Mrs. Browning developed a far more modern point of view than the average individual of her day possessed.

²Ibid., letter of June 4, 1853, p. 7.
³Ibid., p. 3.
Furthermore, she dared to express her attitudes quite frankly and boldly.
Pass homeward, onward, to our Italy. - Aurora Leigh

After completing publication arrangements for *Aurora Leigh*, the Brownings left England in the fall of 1856 to return to Florence. This trip to England marked Mrs. Browning's last venture from Italy, with the exception of a short excursion to Normandy during the summer of 1858 to visit Mr. Browning's father and sister, Sarianna.

Upon her return from England Mrs. Browning began to indicate through her correspondence a renewed interest in Italy's struggle for liberation. Her interest in political matters had been less intense while she had been absorbed in the composition of *Aurora Leigh* and engrossed in the so-called "spiritual manifestations."

These letters of the last five years of her life revealed a decided change in her political attitude. Doubtlessly, this was due in part to her weakened state of health, for she was overcome frequently by severe coughing spells. She disclosed her weariness in the last stanza of the poem, "My Heart and I,"

Yet who complains? My heart and I?  
In this abundant earth no doubt  
Is little room for things worn-out;

- 63 -
Disdain then, break them, throw them by!
And if before the days grow rough
We once were loved, used, — well enough,
I think, we've fared, my heart and I. \(^1\)

"Her body had never been equal to the emotional
strain of her sympathies; spiritualism, Italian liberty,
English . . . policies, all had excited her." \(^2\) And by
1857 the constant turmoil and military agitation in Italy
disturbed her more than ordinarily; even her emotions
seemed enfeebled. Perhaps, too, the long hours spent in
writing *Aurora Leigh* had been harmful.

Furthermore, the emotional upsets which she experi-
cenced upon receiving word of the death of Mr. Kenyon,
December 3, 1856; of her father, April 3, 1857; of her
sister, Henrietta, in the fall of 1860, were also quite
harmful. In the case of Mr. Kenyon she was disturbed not
only over the loss of such a dear friend, but also about
the legacy which he bequeathed the Brownings. For some
misunderstanding friends had dared to suggest that the
Brownings had persuaded Mr. Kenyon to leave them this
fortune. In reality he had left it to them of his own
accord so that they might follow their "art" without
financial concern. With her father's death had come an

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\(^1\) *Poems*, p. 434.
\(^2\) *Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit.*, p. 214.
end to the hope of his forgiveness, which she had cherished to the very last. By the time she received the news of her sister's death several years later, her state of health was such that any grief was bound to be a severe blow.

On account of her weakened condition she was obliged to rest much and to receive few friends. But she was "left to herself altogether too much for a person inclined toward morbid introspection." And as a result of this solitude with her thoughts, her letters and poems took on a bitter, almost cynical tone.

By 1859 Mrs. Browning's two deepest political convictions were united in one - her faith in the honesty of Louis Napoleon and her enthusiasm for Italian freedom. For by then the Emperor had come to Italy's aid against Austrian invasion from the north.

She had always maintained confidence in Napoleon and wrote of him to her sister in 1857:

The Emperor is in most difficult circumstances, both in France and with regard to Europe - but he never vacillates though the necessities of diplomatic language make him appear to do so sometimes... 'That great head and heart,' say I. Still, I may change my mind... I may be deceived here as elsewhere. And when I know it I will be candid and tell you.  

1Ibid., p. 213.
She was overjoyed when Napoleon marched into Italy to prevent further invasion from Austria and quite annoyed with England for doubting his sincerity. She expressed her vexation to Miss Browning in 1859:

I for one can receive no compliments about 'English honesty,' etc. After the ignoble way we are behaving about Italy. I dare say M. Miland (who doesn't sympathize much with our Italy) thinks it 'imprudent' of the Emperor to make this move, but that it is magnanimous and generous he will admit. The only great-hearted politician in Europe, but chivalry always came from France.1

Apparently Mrs. Browning ignored the fact that Cavour had sent troops to the aid of France in the Crimean War and that Napoleon's move into Italy was merely reciprocation. And perhaps the Emperor hoped through this campaign to gain a little popularity for himself as well as some new territory and the protectorship of Italy for his country.

She was pleased to have any country attempt to drive out Austria, whom she hated with a vengeance, largely because it was to that nation that the Pope, whom she distrusted, looked for help. Her aversion for this country was evidenced in a letter to her sister-in-law:

We who have lived in Italy all these years, know the full pestilent meaning of Austria

everywhere. What is suffered in Lombardy exceeds what is suffered elsewhere.¹

She even censured Austria for refusing Prussia’s offer of assistance:

What made the very help of Prussia unaccept-
able to Austria was the circumstance of Prussia’s
using that opportunity of Austria’s need to
wriggle herself to the military headship of the
Confederation.²

Mrs. Browning’s absolute faith in Napoleon was
severely shaken by the part he played in the treaty of
Villafranca, where it was agreed that Austria might have
Venice if France were given Nice and Savoy. The extent of
the shock she suffered was reported in a letter to Miss
Browning, July 1859:

It was the blow on the heart after the peace
after the excitement and exultation, that walk-
ing on the clouds for weeks and months, and
then the sudden stroke and fall, and the impo-
tent rage against all the nations of the earth
- selfish, inhuman, wicked - who forced the
hand of Napoleon and truncated his great inten-
tions. . . . As for me, I was struck, couldn’t
sleep, talked too much, and at last this bad
attack came on.³

But it was not long until she had found excuses for
her favorite. In August 1859 she explained to Miss Haworth:

He did at Villafranca what he could not
help but do. Since then he has simply changed

¹Tbid., letter of April 1859, p. 311.
³Tbid., p. 329.
the arena of the struggle; he is walking under the earth instead of on the earth, but straight and to unchanged ends.\footnote{Ibid., p. 323.}

She could not have understood the good military reasons Napoleon had for not risking a reversal. She did not know that his victories before Villafranca had come through luck and the utter weakness of Austria's army rather than by any strength of his own. And so she blamed the supposed intrigues of England and Germany for the frustration of his intentions.

She particularly disliked England because this nation saw fit to sympathize with Austria and to look upon Napoleon's interference with suspicion; she was inclined to rationalize personal reasons for disliking England into political reasons. The Italians themselves did not share her enmity and recognized the genuine support and sympathy which England extended to them in their struggle for unity. She attacked England's report of the Italian War in \textit{The Times} as unjust, confiding to Mrs. Martin, "Believe nothing which you read . . . the reader sees (there) nothing clearly except that somehow or other . . . Louis Napoleon is a rascal."\footnote{Ibid., letter of Sept. 1859, p. 329.} Later that winter she complained about that same paper,
Whose soul policy is, it seems to me, to get up war between England and France. . . . The amount of fierce untruth uttered in this paper and sworn to by the Saturday Review makes the moral sense curdle within.1

As to the annexation of Venetia to Austria through the peace terms of Villafranca, she wrote, "If it were not for Venetia the peace would have proved a benefit rather than otherwise."2 And again a short time later, "Certainly the Emperor of Austria's offer to Tuscany . . implies a consciousness on his part of holding Venetia with a broken wrist at least."3 And she would not agree that Napoleon had been bribed by the offer of Savoy:

As to Napoleon's waiting for the bribe of Savoy before he would pass beyond Villafranca, this is making him ignoble; and I do not believe it in the least.4

Finally, although Napoleon marched against Garibaldi at Rome, she still looked upon him as unerring and wrote to Ida Blagden, "The Emperor is really to do for Italy whatever will not sacrifice France, I am convinced more than ever."5 One feels obliged to agree with Miss Clark who grants as one of the "few inevitable blemishes in her

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1Ibid., letter of Dec. 29, 1859, p. 359.
3Ibid., letter of Sept. 1859, p. 331.
4Ibid., letter of April 2, 1860, p. 373.
5Ibid., letter of Nov. or Dec. 1860, p. 393.
heroine . . . this utter faith shown in that superb charlatan, Louis Napoleon, who ruined France as Napoleon the Third."

Mrs. Browning's renewed faith in the ability of the Italians to free themselves was expressed in a letter of May 1859, to Miss Browning:

The unanimity and constancy of the Italian people are beautiful to witness. The affliction of ten years has ripened these souls. Never was a contrast greater than what is today and what was in '48. No more distrust, nor division, nor vacillation, and a gratitude to the French people which is quite pathetic.  

At another time she wrote of the soldiers,

Nobody anymore will say that the Italians fight ill. Remember that Garibaldi has with him simply the volunteers from all parts of Italy, not the trained troops.  

Of Garibaldi she continued with pity and respect:

Our poor Garibaldi, hero as he is, and an honest hero, is in truth the weakest and most malleable of men, and has become at last the mere mouthpiece of the Mazzinians.  

Mrs. Browning's love for liberty caused her to take issue against American slavery at various times. She anticipated the Civil War when she wrote to Miss Blagden:

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1 C. E. Lawrence, loc. cit.
3 Ibid., letter of June 1859, p. 313.
If the north will be faithful to its conscience there will be only an increase of greatness after a few years, even though it may rain blood between now and then.\footnote{Ibid., letter of Jan. 1861, p. 419.}

She wrote to Mrs. Martin of this American crisis in April of the same year:

\ldots Not that it may not be well to let the Southern States secede. Perhaps better so. What I feared was that the North would compromise; and I fear still that they were not heroically strong on their legs on the moral question. If they can but hold up it will be noble.\footnote{Ibid., p. 439.}

Like her letters, Mrs. Browning's poetry of these closing years of her life dealt mainly with political issues. \textit{Poems before Congress} was published in 1860 and contained only eight poems, all but one of which related to the Italian question. She forecast their composition in a letter to Miss Haworth during the winter of 1859, "My emperor at least hasn't deceived me and I'm going into the fire for him with a little 'brochure' of political poems."\footnote{Ibid., p. 356.} The volume "expressed her disappointment over England's lassitude, Italy's mistakes, and her own weariness."\footnote{Mrs. Louise Boas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 211.}

Since these poems treated matters which were still current controversy, they could be looked upon as
pamphleteering rather than as poetry. They were not well received in England; naturally no Englishman found much pleasure in reading poetry about Italy, especially when he was chided therein for his own stand. She wrote of their reception to Miss Haworth:

As for me, it's only what I expected, and I have had that deep satisfaction of 'speaking though I died for it,' which we are all apt to aspire to now and then.\(^1\)

In the first poem, "Napoleon III in Italy," she praised Napoleon, the "Sublime Deliverer,"\(^2\) and others who had rendered service to Italy unselfishly. In "An August Voice" she "satirized the Grand Duke of Tuscany who was trying to stand well with both Austria and Italy."\(^3\)

He cheated, betrayed and forsook,
Then called in the foe to protect you.\(^4\)

"The Dance" symbolized the mingling of the Italian and French peoples, while "A Court Lady" told the tale of a fine lady who paid a visit to the soldiers' hospital. There she praised the representatives of each duchy, with the exception of Venice, placing, of course, the greatest credit with the Piedmontese, for

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\(^2\)Poems, p. 411.

\(^3\)William Edward Meade, op. cit., p. 456.

\(^4\)Poems, p. 419.
Out of the Piedmont lion
Cometh the sweetness of freedom.¹

"A Tale of Villafranca" lamented the peace made at that place; while "Italy and the World" cast a reflection upon England's stand during the war.

She carries her rifles too thick for me
Who spares them so in the cause of a brother.²

The last, "A Curse for a Nation," at first mistaken by some as a thrust at England, was a very bitter cry against American slavery.

A few of her final poems contained significant political comments. "She was pungent in her 'Summing Up in Italy,' where the cold, calculating intrigues of the scheming liberators were brought to light."³ In "First News from Villafranca" she revealed her disappointment over the peace; "King Victor Emanuel Entering Florence" was a tribute to both the king and Cavour. "The Forced Recruit" asked that at least a tear be shed for the youth who had given his life for his country. "Mother and Poet" contains a significant modern Italian note in the idea that a mother should experience joy in her son's losing his life for his country,

When Italy's made, for what ends is it done,
If we have not a son?⁴

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¹Ibid., p. 418.
²Ibid., p. 422.
⁴Poeme, p. 448.
Other political poems were "Died......," "The Sword of Castruccio Castracani," and "Garibaldi."

Another poem of interest in the final group was "Bianca among the Nightingales" which presented a contrast of "gloomy England" and "my native Florence." Also, "Lord Walter's Wife" should be considered because Thackeray felt obliged to reject it from the *Cornhill Magazine*. He maintained that the account within of an unlawful passion felt by a man for a married woman would have displeased his readers. Her significant reply against this Victorian stand was, "I am deeply convinced that the corruption of our society requires not shut doors and windows, but light and air."¹

On January 7, 1861, Mrs. Browning penned her last letter to her sister-in-law. In it she paid tribute to Cavour, who had died the preceding day:

> We came home into a cloud here. I can scarcely command voice or hand to name Cavour. That great soul, which mediated and made Italy, has gone to the Divine country. If tears or blood could have saved him to us, he should have had mine.²

On the twenty-ninth of that same month her life closed. It is supposed that her death was hastened by

the shock she experienced over the statesman's. She
"was buried in Florence and a tablet on the walls of Casa
Guidi expresses the gratitude of the city for her advocacy
of Italian freedom."\(^1\)

The writings of this final period of Mrs. Browning's
life reveal that her intense nature and sympathetic spirit
caused her to give herself unreservedly to the Italian
cause. "And in the Italy to which she had come there was
enough to stir a heart colder than hers."\(^2\) If in looking
back over her ideas of this period, some appear a bit
unsound, it should be remembered that her health was fail-
ing rather rapidly. As a result her attitudes may have
been somewhat exaggerated and even hysterical. It should
be granted that her "errors were noble and arose from a
passionate nobility of character, to which much might be
forgiven, if there was much to forgive."\(^3\)

\(^1\)Sir Henry Jones, op. cit., p. 81.
VIII

CONCLUSION

Sweet Liberty! thou art a Spirit fair and exquisite.
- Leila: A Tale

In a final consideration of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's social and political thought it should be remembered that the love of liberty - a word to which her heart always thrilled - was back of many of her attitudes.

It was her love of freedom which caused her to attack the social injustices of the England of her day - to advocate the emancipation of Victorian woman from worn-out traditions and conventions, to plead for the release of children from long hours of drudgery in dismal factories, and to beg men to look beyond material gain to the more intrinsic values of life.

She felt that through freedom the Italian and French peoples could gain an opportunity to rule themselves, the Irish could secure the right to worship God as they chose, and the Negro could obtain an equal chance with other races of men.

Mrs. Browning was a very sensitive individual who felt sorry for all who were in any way oppressed or
hampered by the pressure of society; her sympathies became world-wide. And it was "when she came to deal with these subjects relating to her own time, which encouraged as it were, an immediate outpouring of the self, the talent of Mrs. Browning was at last fully liberated."1

She looked upon all these problems of which she wrote seriously - "with her whole heart and soul, for she was never one to skim lightly over any experience."2 Furthermore, she considered all political and social questions as moral issues. She once wrote to Mr. Chorley: "Whatever I may have ever written of the least worth, has represented a conviction in me, something in me as truth."3

Yet, she was not without a sense of humor. One critic has mentioned this as a side of Mrs. Browning:

Which has been too much ignored in the efforts to appreciate her sensibility and her spiritual exaltation. . . . Few letters of the nineteenth century are comparable with hers in lambent, flashing appreciation of little incongruities, such shrewd and piercing thrusts at weakness, or hypocrisy, or mistaken opinion. . . . Almost every page of Aurora Leigh gleams with some humorously turned comment, some piquant phrase, some pointed satire.4

1 Emile Legouis and Louis Jazamian, op. cit., p. 1220.
2 Mrs. Louise Boas, op. cit., p. 185.
In general, her attitudes were just. Many times she prophesied quite correctly in her political comments. She once wrote to her sister, Henrietta, "Tell Arabel I am thinking of setting up as a seer in politics, I am right so often." Yet she herself realized that she was sometimes prejudiced and tried to guard against this fault.

She spoke out frankly and candidly about whatever she felt. She had an indomitable spirit and was more radical than her husband, who could not endorse completely her last opinions in regard to Italy's struggle for freedom. Her point of view was so modern that she must certainly be regarded as one of the women leaders of her day in the campaign for the emancipation of Victorian woman.

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1Sister, letter of Feb. 10, 1859, p. 305.
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This bibliography is divided into three sections. The first lists those writings of Elizabeth Barrett Browning which were examined in preparation of this thesis; the second includes the bibliographical, biographical, and critical references consulted; and the last, the magazine and periodical articles utilized.

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