

**THE BROWNINGS
FOR THE YOUNG;**

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The Brownings for the young; by Robert Browning & Elizabeth Barrett Browning & Frederic G. Kenyon

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**ROBERT BROWNING & ELIZABETH
BARRETT BROWNING & FREDERIC G. KENYON**

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EDITED BY

FREDERIC G. KENYON

LATE FELLOW OF MAGDALEN COLLEGE
OXFORD

LONDON

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PREFACE

IN this little volume a selection from the best poems of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning is offered to those who are, comparatively speaking, beginners in the study and enjoyment of poetry. It is a selection from the writings of one who, in the opinion of many, is the greatest poet of the Victorian age, and of one who, without any question, is the greatest poetess in our literature of this or any other age. And not only are they thus associated in greatness; they also furnish the unique example of two great writers linked to one another by the closest and most sacred tie of all—as husband and wife. There is, therefore, a special appropriateness in bringing together (I believe for the first time) a selection from the poetry of each of them within the cover of a single volume. The selection is intended especially for young readers, who may not yet have made acquaintance with these poets in a more complete form; but if it should come into the hands of their elders, I would bespeak the favour of all lovers of Robert or Elizabeth Barrett Browning for an undertaking, the effect of which may be, it is hoped, to increase the number of those who share their devotion.

The two poets whose names are thus asso-

ciated with one another for ever, dedicated themselves to poetry from their very childhood. At the age of twelve Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (as she then was) had written an epic in four books on the battle of Marathon, and by the same age Robert Browning had produced an impassioned ode to a young lady, fifteen years his senior, besides much minor verse of various kinds. Both of them were insatiate readers of poetry. With both, it is interesting to observe, the prime favourite of their childhood was Pope's translation of Homer; and though in later days their tastes and styles travelled far enough from Pope, they retained to the end the love of Greek literature which they had acquired thus early. Elizabeth Barrett's first published volume of poetry appeared in 1826, Robert Browning's in 1833; and the second publication of each of them (Miss Barrett's "Seraphim," and Browning's "Paracelsus"), secured them honourable prominence among the poets of the day. It was not until 1846 that they met, but long before that time they had known and admired each other's poetry; and the acquaintance thus begun ripened rapidly into affection. They were married in 1849; and their marriage was followed by twelve years of perfect happiness, to which the only drawback was the frail condition of Mrs. Browning's health. For many years before her marriage she had lived the life of an invalid, confined to her room, with apparently little prospect of ever regaining strength.

Marriage and removal to the warmer climate of Italy brought about a marvellous improve-

ment, which lasted for several years ; but her ardent and emotional spirit seemed to wear out her delicate frame, and in 1861 her death ended the earthly duration of this happy union. How happy it was, and how deep and beautiful their affection, may be learnt from the husband's "One Word More" and "By the Fireside," and from the wife's "Sonnets from the Portuguese ;" but poems such as these do not come within the scope of the present selection. Robert Browning lived on until 1889, gaining continually that fuller recognition as one of the leading poets of the day which for many years (in spite of his first successes) had been denied him ; until, at the time of his death, full of years and honour, there was but one other poet who was commonly named in the same breath with him. It is useless to argue the question of precedence between Tennyson and Browning. They lie side by side in our great Abbey ; and side by side they represent the poetic achievements of the reign of Victoria.

The poetic styles of the husband and wife are as wide asunder as the poles, and it was perhaps for this very reason that each so heartily admired and prized the poetry of the other. Among young readers, they appeal, perhaps, to different audiences ; and if Robert Browning's courage, manliness, and serene hopefulness commend him especially to boys, Mrs. Browning's passionate emotion and sympathy with all that is true and good, especially if it be down-trodden or in pain, should find