

THE POETICAL WORKS
OF
ROBERT BROWNING
VOLUME I.



Robert Browning.

THE
POETICAL WORKS
OF
ROBERT BROWNING

WITH PORTRAITS

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME I

LONDON
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EDITOR'S NOTE.

THIS edition of Mr. Browning's poems and plays makes no pretence to be critical. One of the most useful of the Shakespearian commentators, Mr. Theobald, has observed that the science of criticism, so far as it affects an editor, is reduced to three classes: "The emendation of corrupt passages, the explanation of obscure and difficult ones, and an inquiry into the beauties and defects of composition." Happily there are no corrupt passages in Browning, but undoubtedly there are some obscure and difficult ones, although the reader will often be surprised to find how frequently obscurity and difficulty will be dissipated and removed by a careful study of the context. So, too, Browning has his beauties and defects of composition; but neither his beauties or defects of composition, nor the obscurities and difficulties of particular passages, are here discussed or explained. All that has been done is to prefix (within square brackets) to some of the plays and poems a few lines explanatory of the characters and events depicted and described, and to explain in the margin of the volumes the meaning of such words as might, if left unexplained, momentarily arrest the understanding of the reader. That some easy words have been explained and some hard ones left alone is more than likely, since, on such a subject, no standard exists either of information or of ignorance. Mr. F. G. Kenyon has been kind enough to make the notes for "The Ring and the Book," but for the rest the Editor alone is responsible.

The edition is a complete one, containing all Mr. Browning's regularly published plays and poems, from *Pauline* (1833) to *Asolando* (1889). In the arrangement of the contents a chronological order has as far as possible been observed; but as Mr. Browning himself rearranged some of his smaller poems regardless of their dates of publication, his publishers have not felt themselves at liberty in these cases to adhere to chronology. In all the poems the poet's latest readings have been followed.

AUGUSTINE BIRRELL.

I DEDICATE THESE VOLUMES TO MY OLD FRIEND JOHN FORSTER, GLAD AND GRATEFUL THAT HE WHO, FROM THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF THE VARIOUS POEMS THEY INCLUDE, HAS BEEN THEIR PROMPTTEST AND STAUCHEST HELPER, SHOULD SEEM EVEN NEARER TO ME NOW THAN ALMOST THIRTY YEARS AGO.

LONDON: *April 21, 1863.*

R. B.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO EDITION OF 1868.

THE poems that follow are printed in the order of their publication. The first piece in the series I acknowledge and retain with extreme repugnance, indeed purely of necessity; for not long ago I inspected one, and am certified of the existence of other transcripts, intended sooner or later to be published abroad: by forestalling these, I can at least correct some misprints (no syllable is changed) and introduce a boyish work by an exculpatory word. The thing was my earliest attempt at "poetry always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine," which I have since written according to a scheme less extravagant and scale less impracticable than were ventured upon in this crude preliminary sketch—a sketch that, on reviewal, appears not altogether wide of some hint of the characteristic features of that particular *dramatis persona* it would fain have reproduced: good draughtsmanship, however, and right handling were far beyond the artist at that time.

R. B.

LONDON: December 25, 1867.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO EDITION OF 1888.

I PRESERVE, in order to supplement it, the foregoing preface. I had thought, when compelled to include in my collected works the poem to which it refers, that the honest course would be to reprint, and leave mere literary errors unaltered. Twenty years' endurance of an eyesore seems more than sufficient: my faults remain duly recorded against me, and I claim permission to somewhat diminish these, so far as style is concerned, in the present and final edition where "Pauline" must needs, first of my performances, confront the reader. I have simply removed solecisms, mended the metre a little, and endeavoured to strengthen the phraseology—experience helping, in some degree, the helplessness of juvenile haste and heat in their untried adventure long ago.

The poems that follow are again, as before, printed in chronological order; but only so far as proves compatible with the prescribed size of each volume, which necessitates an occasional change in the distribution of its contents. Every date is subjoined as before.

R. B.

LONDON: *February 27, 1888.*

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