

• Riverside Literature Series •

BROWNING'S  
The Pied Piper  
*of*  
Hamelin  
and Other Poems

Houghton Mifflin Co.

The Riverside Literature Series

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THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN  
CAVALIER TUNES  
THE LOST LEADER  
AND OTHER POEMS

BY

ROBERT BROWNING

IVRY

BY

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

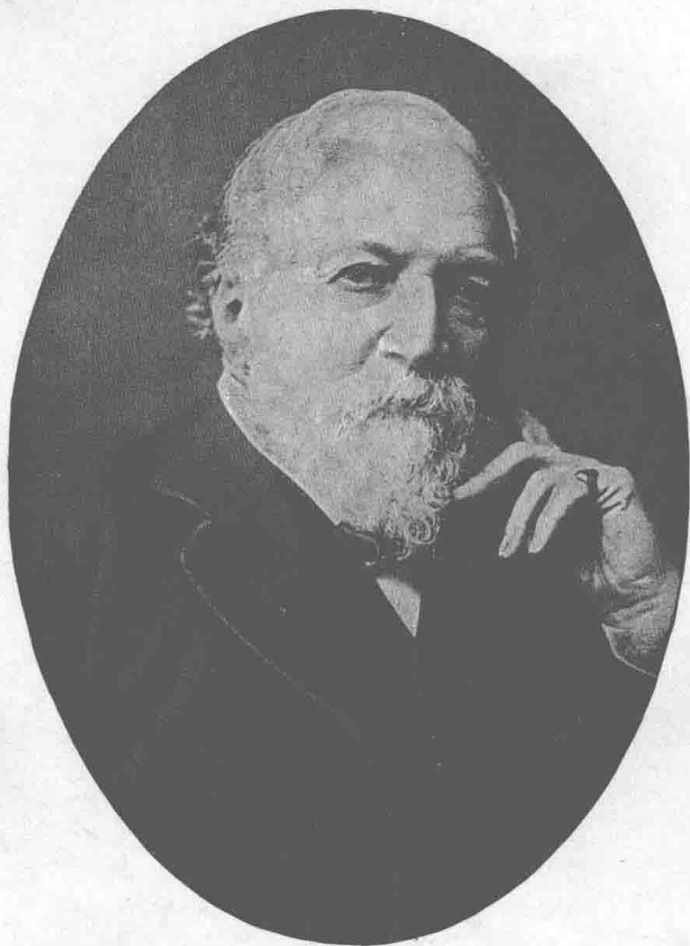
WITH BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES AND NOTES



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*Robert Browning*

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF ROBERT BROWNING.

WHEN the student of English literature hereafter takes account of the latter half of the nineteenth century he will find two poets, who, by the amount and quality of their poetry and by their reflection of the age in which they lived, will be sure to demand his attention. These two are Tennyson and Browning; their lives were contemporaneous; there was a difference of but three years in the dates of their birth, and but three in the dates of their death. They both wrote from early manhood till the end of life, and the volume of verse of each was great, though Browning outran his contemporary in this respect.

But when one comes to compare the two poets in their art, he is at once struck with the difference between them. Tennyson's poetry is always melodious, exquisitely finished, and bears the marks of artistic labor expended upon a few familiar and recognized forms of English verse. Browning's poetry is sometimes melodious, sometimes in the line of English poetic tradition, but is more apt to impress one as vigorously independent of tradition, the individual note of a mind that is eager to experiment with new forms, and superabundant in artistic activity.

When one is considering the two poets in the subjects they choose and their mode of treatment, he is even more impressed by the divergence. Tennyson wrote dramas and most of his poetry has to do with persons, but the reader always thinks of the poet as narrating and describing and picturing. Browning was always dramatic. He had an unappeasable curiosity to know how persons would feel and act under various circumstances, and his mind was so fer-

tile, his imagination so vivid, and he had so keen an insight, that he was unceasingly inventing men and women and imagining them in all manner of conditions and times, ancient Greek heroes, mediæval knights, modern peasants, Italians, Englishmen, Frenchmen, lovers, fighters, scholars, and as he saw each not only in his outward appearance, but in the windings and turnings of his mind, so he could not keep out of his poetry the interest which he himself felt, and he sometimes chased down the thoughts of his characters till his imagination ran away with him.

Thus it often takes a nimble mind to follow the eager poet. It is a little like the attempt of the eye to take in all the exuberance of a Gothic cathedral and yet not lose sight of the large forms inclosing and bounding the whole. For there is a whole, and this is the strength of Browning's art, that however minute he may be in detail through his restlessness of vision which brings everything within range, he has the central conception firmly in mind and holds that with an extraordinary logical power. This is most noticeable in his massive masterpiece *The Ring and the Book*.

The poems contained in this brief collection are necessarily his shorter poems, and they show him on his lyrical almost as much as on his dramatic side, yet it will soon be seen that his most lyrical pieces have a distinct dramatic character. The collection is merely a convenient introduction to a poet whom one never really knows till one has read everything he has written. One of the pleasures afforded by a reading of Browning is the constant surprise which awaits one in discovering new, unsuspected fields. A sketch of the poet's life to be of the most value would be a study of the successive poetic ventures as illustrating the growth of his mind, but here we must content ourselves with a running catalogue of his works. There is little to relate save the appearance of one volume after another.

Robert Browning was born in the parish of St. Giles,



Camberwell, London, May 7, 1812. His mother was a Scottish gentlewoman, who had a love of music and drawing, and was of a serene, gentle, affectionate nature. She was a devout Christian, brought up in the Scottish kirk, but followed her husband afterward when he left the Church of England for the Congregationalist. Browning's father was a bank clerk in London, as his father before him had been. Thus the poet, born in London, had two generations of Londoners before him, and we may indulge the fancy that one who was to crowd his books with such a multitude as no poet since Shakespeare had gathered was nourished of a populous city.

Camberwell, at the time of Browning's childhood, was a suburb of London, with rural spaces and near access to the open country, though the stony foot of the metropolis was already stepping outward upon the pleasant lanes and fields. The boy kept a great variety of pets, owls and monkeys, magpies and hedgehogs, an eagle, snakes even, and was touched with the collector's pride, as when he started a collection of rare creatures with a couple of lady-birds brought home one winter day and placed in a box lined with cotton wool and labeled, "Animals found surviving in the depths of a severe winter." No one can read his poems attentively without perceiving how closely and sympathetically he had observed the humble life of nature.

Browning's father was passionately fond of his children and made them his companions from early life. One of the poet's recollections, his biographer tells us, "was that of sitting on his father's knees in the library, and listening with enthralled attention to the Tale of Troy, with marvelous illustrations among the glowing coals in the fireplace; with, below all, the vaguely heard accompaniment — from the neighboring room, where Mrs. Browning sat, 'in her chief happiness, her hour of darkness and solitude and music' — of a wild Gaelic lament, with its insistent falling cadences."

The boy grew up with much informal schooling. For one thing his father was a great reader, with tastes that led him into all sorts of out of the way fields; the two were companions and strayed together among eighteenth and seventeenth century writers. The country life, also, had a distinct influence on the growing boy. From the vantage-ground of a wooded spot near his home he could look out on the distant city lying on the western horizon, and fretting the evening sky with its spires and towers and ragged lines. The sight for him had a great fascination. Here would he lie for hours, looking and dreaming, and he has told how one night in his boyhood he stole out to the elms and saw the great city glimmering through the darkness. Even so early, it was human life, rather than nature or even books, that held his attention most.

Of formal schooling he had little, but after making headway in the languages he matriculated at London University and spent two years there. In this period of private and public tuition, his scope was widening with systematic intent. He learned dancing, riding, boxing and fencing. He became versed in French. He visited galleries, and made some progress in drawing, especially from casts. He studied music with able teachers. He had a strong interest in the stage, and displayed on occasions a good deal of histrionic ability. It was the fashion at one time to fancy Shakespeare a lawyer and a physician, as well as an actor, from the familiarity with which he used the terms of these professions and arts. It would be easy to trace the variety of Browning's accomplishments in the easy reference in his verse to all manner of technical knowledge.

From earliest years he played with verse-making. His sister recalls that when he was a very little child he would walk round and round the dining-room table, spanning the table with his palm as he marked off the scansion of the verses he had composed. Even before this, rhyme had been put into his hands as an instrument, for his father had



taught him words by their rhymes, and aided his memorizing of Latin declensions in the same way. Naturally when he came to read poetry, he turned copyist, and first Pope, then Byron for a time was his inspiration. Then he fell into the hands of Shelley and Keats.

When he was twenty years old he wrote and published anonymously a poem *Pauline*, which was strongly tinctured with his admiration for Shelley, but as a mark of Browning's independence, it was not at all in Shelley's manner, but rather the exercise of a youth who had tried to dramatize Shelley himself in his mind. The verses called *Memorabilia* in this collection show something of Browning's admiration of Shelley. The publication of *Pauline* was followed by a period of travel. He went to Russia nominally as secretary to the Russian consul-general, and was so attracted by diplomatic life, with its abundant opportunity for following intricate human movements, that he essayed to enter it, but failed.

*Pauline* was published in 1833. Two or three sonnets followed, but in 1835 appeared *Paracelsus*, the first poem to which he attached his name. It was characteristic of him that thus early he should be looking for subjects in the occult, and also that his characters, though they carried on a drama in the Middle Ages, should be rather projections of his own moral speculation. The book brought him some literary friendships, out of which grew the opportunity for writing the historical drama *Strafford*, in which his propensity to speculation was curbed by the demands of actual stage representation. He fell back into his own manner more distinctly in *Sordello*, which is the spiritual struggle of a youthful nature finding expression through remote and obscure historic forms.

*Sordello* was published in 1840, and was caviare to the general. But Browning was not a recluse, and he wanted to reach the ears of men and women in his own generation. So he began with a certain bravado the publication in cheap,

popular form of a series of poems and dramatic scenes, under the fantastical title *Bells and Pomegranates*. In this series, extending from 1841 to 1846, he struck the note again and again, in drama, lyric, and romance, which was to be the dominant note of his poetry, that disclosure of the soul of man in all manner of circumstances, as if the world were to the poet a great laboratory of souls, and he was forever to be engaged in solving, dissolving, and resolving the elements. The collection included the *Cavalier Tunes*, *Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, *How They brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, *The Boy and the Angel*, and *Home Thoughts from Abroad*.

The series contained also certain plays, notably *A Blot in the Scutcheon*; but although Browning, with his intense dramatic nature, could not fail in his writing to aim at dramatic representation on the stage, nature foiled him at every turn; for he was too exuberant, too eager in chasing down his fancies, and too much absorbed in what may be called the chemical properties of his characters, not to be impatient at the limitations which the stage presented.

He was ardently engaged in poetic interpretation of human life when he was suddenly caught in a more personal mesh than any of his own weaving. Elizabeth Barrett was a poet who through invalidism was practically a prisoner. Browning's verses came to her with a fullness of meaning, and hers reached him also with such fineness of sympathy, that it was not long before their acquaintance through writing became a personal attachment. Browning offered himself in marriage. He confronted the indomitable refusal of Miss Barrett's father. A physician had held out hopes that a removal to Italy would give the invalid a chance to regain some degree of health, but Mr. Barrett, for some not very clear reason, refused his consent to a journey thither with her brother. It was then that Browning, who can readily be conceived of as a masterful man,

won Miss Barrett's consent to a sudden and clandestine marriage, and a journey to Italy as his wife.

They were married September 12, 1846. For a week the husband and wife did not see each other. Then they met by agreement and went to Paris. Mr. Barrett never forgave his daughter, but so far as Mrs. Browning's physical well-being was concerned, it is clear that the marriage gave her a new lease of life; and what seemed at the moment an audacious taking of fate into their own hands proved to be a case where nature obtained her best of both. Mrs. Browning was indeed let out of prison into a large and free life.

The passionate love which Browning had for his wife often breaks through the thin shell of dramatic representation. One glimpse of it may be had in *By the Fireside*. Mrs. Browning's flame-like aspiration enveloped her husband in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. It is, moreover, a strong witness to the independence of mind which refused to surrender to love, that though Mrs. Browning was a wistful strainer after light through the mists of spiritualism, Browning was a sturdy scoffer, as he has made evident in more than one poem.

During the fifteen years of their married life the Brownings lived for the most part in Italy, with occasional summers in England and long sojourns in Paris. Browning wrote less during this period than he did before and after, yet it was midway in the time that he published the collection of poems *Men and Women*, which many maintain to have marked the high water of his genius. In this group are *Love among the Ruins*, *By the Fireside*, *The Last Ride Together*, *The Patriot*, *The Twins*, *A Grammarian's Funeral*.

The death of Mrs. Browning in 1861 closed this most beautiful human companionship. It made also a great change in Browning's habit of life, and no doubt affected in important ways his poetical productiveness. He left

Italy for England, where he was educating his son. By some strange caprice he chose to make his home in an ugly part of London, and he approached it through a region of disorder and squalor. But with his robust nature he denied himself the luxury of a persistent solitariness, and little by little he returned to society.

In taking up work again he made excursions in Greek literature, reading Euripides once more. He brought together a new collection of his poems under the title *Dramatis Personæ*, which includes *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Prospice*, and he busied himself in the strange mass of intrigue and cross-purposes which resulted in his greatest poem, *The Ring and the Book*, in 1868. After the publication of that the only new departure of his genius was in the group of poems built upon the foundation of Greek poetry. In 1871 appeared *Balaustion's Adventure*; in 1875 *Aristophanes' Apology*, and in 1877 *The Agamemnon of Æschylus*. These poems represent the thought and criticism of a Gothic mind confronting and admiring Greek art and thought. Browning in these works is not a reproducer in his own terms of Greek life; he is a poet of varied experience, who, coming in contact with a great and distinct manifestation of human life, is moved to strike in here also with his thought and fancy, and, because of the very elemental nature of the material, to find the keenest delight in exercising his genius upon it.

In the last years of his life, when fame came to him, and his versatility made him a ready companion, he led a semi-public life. He was in demand in all directions. He read widely, talked brilliantly, and kept up a large correspondence. He added now and then a volume to his collection of writings, and his very last, *Asolando*, which appeared almost on the day of his death, bore testimony in its title to his affection for Asolo, the village of the silk-spinner Pippa, where he was at the time proposing to buy a villa.

He died in Venice at his son's home, December 12, 1889.

He was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the Poets' Corner, where he belongs among the great and the little singers of England. His multitudinous verse contains poems which have an enduring place in literature, but in the carelessness of his profuse nature, he left Time to winnow his lines, and many will be blown to the winds.

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## THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN, CAVALIER TUNES, AND OTHER POEMS.

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### PIPPA'S SONG.

The first of Browning's writings to win him popularity was his drama, *Pippa Passes*. His biographer says of the origin of the play: "Mr. Browning was walking alone, in a wood near Dulwich, when the image flashed upon him of some one walking thus alone through life; one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it; and the image shaped itself into the little silk-winder of Asolo, Felippa, or Pippa." So Pippa sings this song, all unaware that two guilty souls overhear her, and are suddenly made conscious of their guilt.

THE year's at the spring  
And day's at the morn;  
Morning's at seven;  
The hillside's dew-pearled;  
The lark's on the wing;  
The snail's on the thorn:  
God's in his heaven —  
All's right with the world!

### CAVALIER TUNES.

These three songs were included by Browning in a general group of *Dramatic Lyrics*. These, the poet says, are "often lyric in expression, always dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine." Thus, these *Cavalier Tunes* are the imagined songs of followers of Charles I. and enemies of Oliver Cromwell and the Roundheads. The third was originally entitled

*My Wife Gertrude*, but was renamed by the author. It is supposed to be sung by a party of gentlemen as they saddle preparatory to relieving a besieged castle. The three songs have been set to music by Dr. Villiers Stanford.

## I. MARCHING ALONG.

KENTISH Sir Byng stood for his King,  
 Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing :  
 And, pressing a troop unable to stoop  
 And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,  
 5 Marched them along, fifty-score strong,  
 Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles  
 To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous  
                   parles!  
 Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,  
 10 Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup  
 Till you 're —

CHORUS. — Marching along, fifty-score strong,  
 Great-hearted gentlemen, singing  
                   this song.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell.  
 Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!  
 15 England, good cheer! Rupert is near!  
 Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here,

1. There was a strong following of the king in Kent, so that, not long before the end of the war, Fairfax had to suppress an insurrection there. Browning probably used the name Byng with no more direct reference than would be inferred from the fact that the Byngs were a Kentish family. The great admiral, Sir George Byng, was from the county.

14. Six years before, Browning had written his drama of *Strafford*, and in that had used the historic figures of Hampden, Fiennes, Pym, and Sir Henry Vane, the "young Harry" of this line.

CHO. — Marching along, fifty-score strong,  
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this  
song?

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls  
20 To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!  
Hold by the right, you double your might;  
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

CHO. — March we along, fifty-score strong,  
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this  
song!

## II. GIVE A ROUSE.

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?  
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?  
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,  
King Charles!

5 Who gave me the goods that went since?  
Who raised me the house that sank once?  
Who helped me to gold I spent since?  
Who found me in wine you drank once?

CHO. — King Charles, and who'll do him right  
now?

10 King Charles, and who's ripe for fight  
now?

Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite  
now,  
King Charles!

22. There is no further historical basis for these *Cavalier Tunes* than the general condition of affairs, but it will be remembered that the king raised his standard at Nottingham, August 22, 1642, and there began to gather his followers about him.