

**POEMS OF ROBERT
BROWNING**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649760077

Poems of Robert Browning by Robert Browning & Charles W. Hodell

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ROBERT BROWNING & CHARLES W. HODELL

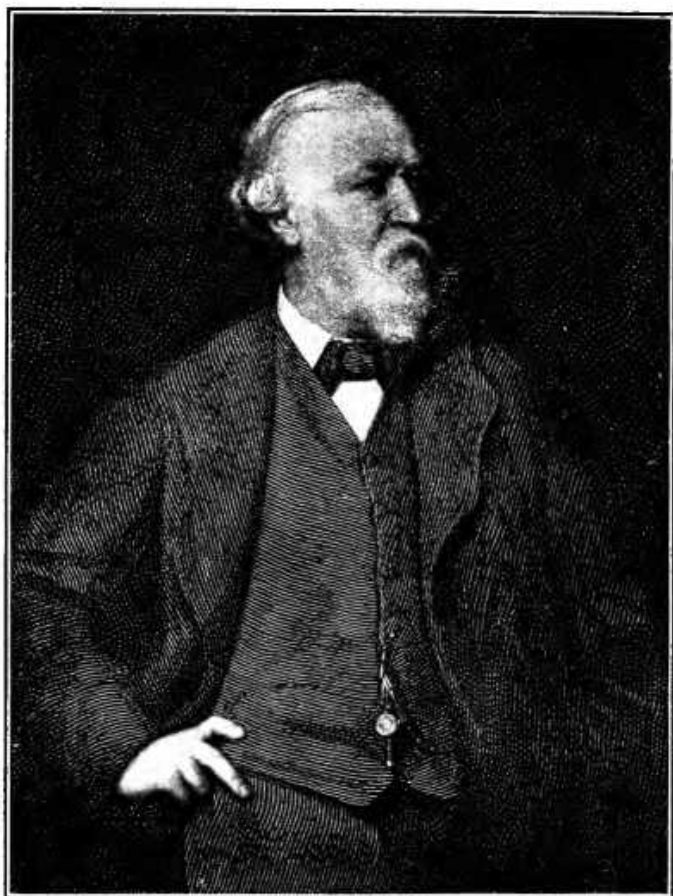
**POEMS OF ROBERT
BROWNING**

English Readings for Schools

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PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN YALE UNIVERSITY



Robert Browning

From a portrait by Rudolf Lehmann, now in the
National Portrait Gallery, London

POEMS
OF
ROBERT BROWNING

SELECTED AND EDITED

BY

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NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1911

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INTRODUCTION

I

BROWNING'S LIFE AND WORKS

ROBERT BROWNING was born in Camberwell, a suburb of London, May 7, 1812.

His father, also named Robert, was a notable man. Though denied the education he craved, the elder Browning became a highly self-educated man, through intimacy with a well-selected library of five thousand volumes, which had been deliberately gleaned from the book-stalls of London and Paris. As a youth he had been sent out to the West Indies to supervise his mother's plantation, but in his horror of slavery as seen there he abandoned his task and his inheritance with it; for his father, who was a sternly practical man, would tolerate no such sentiment and cast him off. The son then entered upon his life of clerical service in the Bank of England. In middle life he declined promotion to great responsibility at a large salary because it involved sacrificing his higher tastes in books and art to the demands of business. He lived to enjoy a long period of relief from toil and to see most of his son's best work. Rossetti speaks of him as "lovable beyond description." W. J. Stillman writes of him: "He had the perpetual juvenility of an ever-blessed

child. If to live in the world as not of it indicates a saintly nature, then Robert Browning the elder was a saint, a serene, untroubled soul, and as gentle as a gentle woman."

Browning's mother contributed chiefly to the emotional and spiritual life of her child. She was tender-hearted, sympathetic, and devoutly religious—"the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman," as Carlyle expressed it. The son was passionately devoted to her, and shared her interest in animals and flowers. In one of his love letters Browning writes: "You cannot conceive my mother's childlike faith in goodness."

"The home in Camberwell," writes Professor Charles Herford, "reflected the serene, harmonious, self-contented character of his parents. Friends rarely disturbed the even tenor of its ways, and the storms of politics seem to have intruded as faintly into this suburban seclusion as the roar of London. Well-to-do Camberwell perhaps contained few homes so pure and refined."

The education of Browning was irregular but he was given every opportunity to store and train his unusual type of mind. It is said that his father hummed him to sleep with the odes of Anacreon, and rimed the primary elements of education to make them the easier for the child to master. There was but a moderate amount of formal schooling, but home instruction and private tutoring amply supplied the lack, and the free range of a large library with the thoughtful guidance of such a father was the best of schooling. The Dulwich Gallery was in easy walking distance, and the galleries and concert rooms of London were visited frequently. He entered for a few lecture courses at University College, London, but went no further in formal college education. In this way he