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G. K. CHESTERTON

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BY

G. K. CHESTERTON

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ROBERT BROWNING

CHAPTER I

BROWNING IN EARLY LIFE

On the subject of Browning's work innumerable things have been said and remain to be said; of his life, considered as a narrative of facts, there is little or nothing to say. It was a lucid and public and yet quiet life, which culminated in one great dramatic test of character, and then fell back again into this union of quietude and publicity. And yet, in spite of this, it is a great deal more difficult to speak finally about his life than about his work. His work has the mystery which belongs to the complex; his life the much greater mystery which belongs to the simple. He was clever enough to understand his own poetry; and if he understood it, we can understand it. But he was also entirely unconscious and impulsive, and he was never clever enough to understand his own character; consequently we may be excused if that part of him which was hidden from him is partly hidden from us. The subtle man is always immeasurably easier to understand than the natural man; for the subtle man keeps a diary of his moods, he practises the art of self-analysis and self-revelation, and can tell us how he came to feel this