

**THE BROWNINGS
AND AMERICA**

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The Brownings and America by Elizabeth Porter Gould

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By

ELIZABETH PORTER GOULD

Author of "One's Self I Sing and Other Poems;" "Anne Glöchrist
and Walt Whitman;" "John Adams and Daniel Webster
as Schoolmasters;" "Ezekiel Cheever: Schoolmaster,"
"A Pioneer Doctor: A Story of the Seventies," etc.

BOSTON
THE POET-LORE COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

1904

For my dear friends Mr. and Mrs.
Maxton - Not to settle the old
controversy - but to keep it
happily in mind.
— Richard M. Neal Sweeney.

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Receiving such seemed to her, as she wrote in reply (April, 1846), "to authorize or, at least, to encourage" her to try to express what she had long felt, her sense of the high honor he had done her in his country and hers, in the dedication of his poems. "It is too great a distinction," she continues, "conferred by a hand of too liberal generosity. I wish for my own sake I were worthy of it. But I may endeavor, by future work, to justify a little what I cannot deserve anywise now. For it, meanwhile, I may be grateful, because gratitude is the virtue of the humblest." After this "imperfect acknowledgment" of her personal obligation, she goes on to thank him, as another reader would thank him, for this "vivid writing, this power which is felt! Your Raven," she declares, "has produced a sensation, a 'fit horror' here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it and some by the music. I hear of persons haunted by the 'Nevermore,' and one acquaintance of mine who has the misfortune of possessing a bust of Pallas never can bear to look at it in the twilight." She then tells that "our great poet, Mr. Browning,

the author of 'Paracelsus' and the 'Bells and Pomegranates,' was struck much by the rhythm of that poem."

From four different quarters, besides from the author himself, she had received the *Raven* when it had only a newspaper life. But though it had for her an "uncommon voice and effect," she could not feel "the immoderate joy" her friend John Kenyon felt upon reading it. "It is the rhythm which has taken him with glamour, I fancy." This, as she wrote Mr. Horne in May, 1845, "acted excellently upon the imagination, the 'Nevermore' having a solemn chime;" yet the poem did not seem to her to be the "natural expression of a sane intellect in whatever mood." She thought this should be specified in its title. She felt that some of the lyrics had power of a "less questionable sort." She even declared that Poe showed more faculty in his account of that horrible mesmeric experience (mad or not mad) than in his poems. This tale of mesmerism (*The Case of M. Valdemar*) which she wrote him she did not find in the dedicatory volume, but which was going the round of the newspapers, was

throwing them all into "most admired disorder" and "dreadful doubts as to whether it could be true, as the children said of ghost stories." But she had to confess to the "power of the writer, and the faculty he had of making horrible improbabilities seem near and familiar."

While Miss Barrett was reading Poe's works he was reading hers; for about this time his friend Mrs. Frances S. Osgood, in sending the English poet a volume of her *Poems* from America, wrote that she ought to come to New York "only to see Mr. Poe's wild eyes flash through tears," when he read her verses. Could she then have entered the little Fordham cottage where the loved young wife Virginia was slowly dying she would have seen among the books on the little hanging bookshelf hers and Mr. Browning's holding posts of honor; and she would have seen the "quiet exultation" with which Poe drew from his pocket to read to a friend who tells it the letter he had received from Miss Barrett. It would have rejoiced his sensitive heart could he have heard years later (1851) the conversation between the Brownings and his literary friend

John R. Thompson when they declared they had formed "an ardent and just admiration" of the author of *The Raven*, and felt a "strong desire to see his memory vindicated from moral aspersion." (Harrison's Life of Poe.)

Not only the American poets, but the American magazines and papers, early appreciated this gifted woman's work; notably the *Arcturus*, a New York journal edited by Cornelius Mathews and Evert A. Duyckinck (February, 1841); the *North American Review* of July, 1842; *Graham's Magazine* of December, 1842; *Democratic Review* of July and October, 1844; and the *Evening Mirror* of December 7, 1844.

The writer in the *North American Review*, in taking up the three publications she, as Miss Barrett, had then published,* began by confessing ignorance of the author as "to her lineage, education, tastes, and (last and not least where a lady is concerned) her personal attractions."

* *An Essay on Mind*, with other Poems, London, 1826; *Prometheus Bound*, translated from the Greek of Æschylus, and Miscellaneous Poems by the Translator. London, 1833; *The Seraphim*, and other Poems. London, 1838.