

**ESSAYS ON ROBERT
BROWNING'S
POETRY**

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Essays on Robert Browning's poetry by John T. Nettlehip

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JOHN T. NETTLESHIP

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BY
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PREFACE.

IN AN AGE when knowledge, for its own sake, is by a large class of men as eagerly sought as gold, some apology seems necessary for a composition which professedly avoids facts, and deals in speculation. More especially would this apology seem to be due from anyone attempting to handle the works of a master, the beneficence of whose genius has led him to range in fields of knowledge so wide, and for their own sake to store harvests of learning so plenteous. Any such apology as may be due on this ground I am willing to make; but I should fail in my duty of respect were I to stop there, and refrain from expressing, though in feeble words, the extent of my debt in another way.

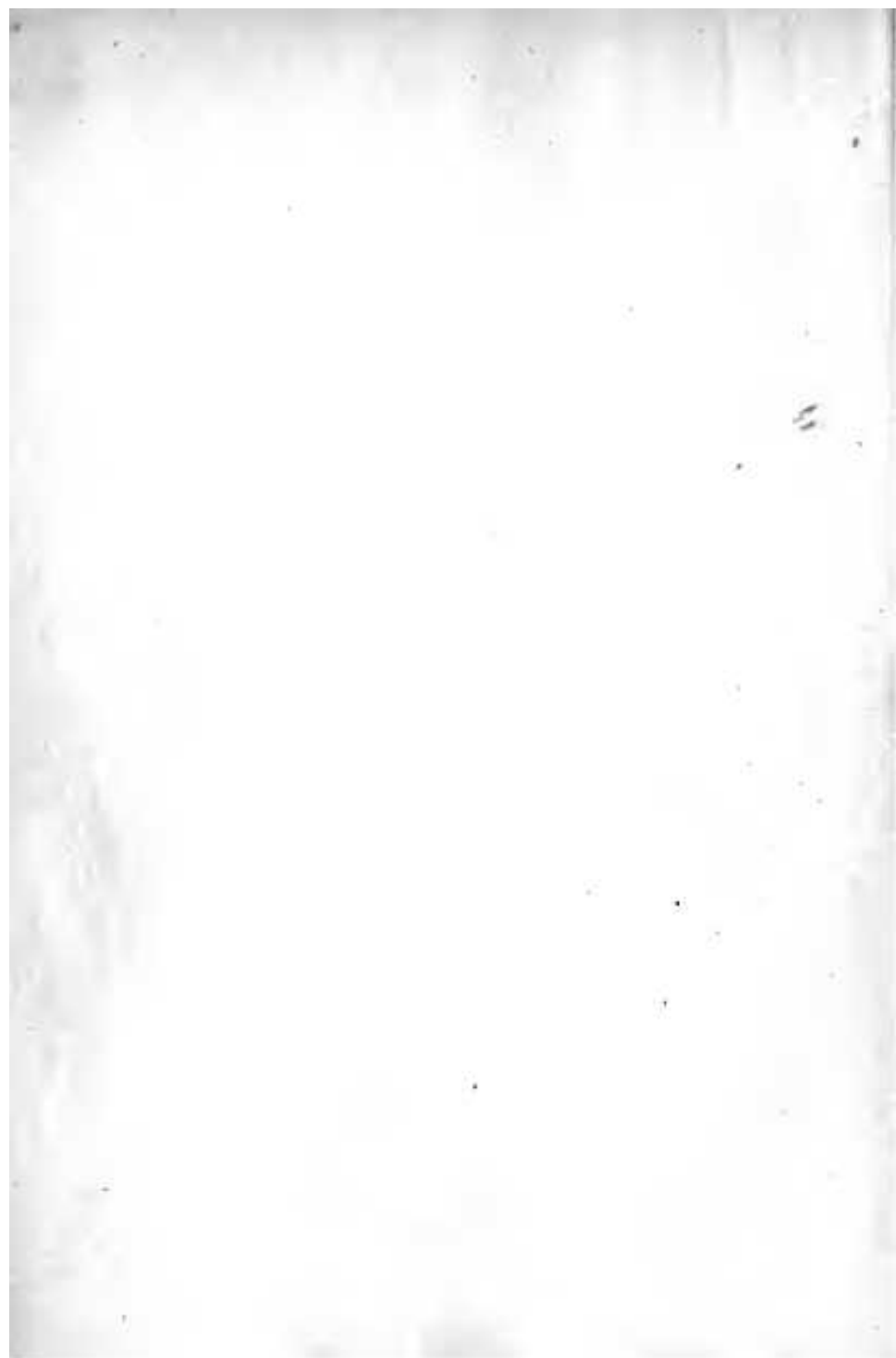
The life and the passion, the sin and exaltation, of men and women—all the beauty which thrills us in everything human because of its humanity—

form together a study beyond the mental grasp of all save a few great and loving souls.

If, without fearing the charge of adulation, one may add to the list of these the name of Robert Browning; if we may affirm that wide and ripe as is his learning, his highest glory is the unflinching zeal with which he has mastered and given to the world the results of human strife, toil, and achievement, I do not fear to maintain such a conclusion; and while acknowledging the profundity of his research, I still venture to pay the dearer tribute, due from my soul to his, of recording here the purpose and the love which have been awakened in one man's life, not by the consciousness that the poet knew so much, but by the overmastering truth of those delineations of human strength and weakness, those strong and tender warnings and encouragements, which have times out of number intensified the desire for truth and right, cheered despondencies, and sweetened triumphs.

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ESSAYS
ON
BROWNING'S POETRY.

INTRODUCTION.

IT is not my purpose in the following Essays to enter into any criticism in the usual sense of the word; that is, in the sense of an examination of the merits or demerits of artistic style. Nor will this be the place to speak of the poet in comparison with other poets present or past. That much is to be said in the way of criticism of style and of comparison with other poets I do not deny; but there is so much important thought of another kind to be worked out in a study of his books, by the process of interpretation, that I could not within reasonable limits handle both criticism and interpretation without sacrificing the latter in an undue degree. Again, considering that no poet of the present day has worked in so wide a field, it would at first sight seem the imperative duty of