

**AN INTRODUCTION  
TO THE STUDY OF  
BROWNING**

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An introduction to the study of Browning by Arthur Symons

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NEW EDITION  
REVISED AND ENLARGED

1906  
LONDON  
J. M. DENT & CO.  
29 & 30 BEDFORD STREET, W.C.

" . . . Browning, a great poet, a very great poet indeed, as the world will have to agree with us in thinking."—LANDOR.

PK  
1884  
1884

TO

GEORGE MEREDITH

NOVELIST AND POET

THIS LITTLE BOOK ON AN ILLUSTRIOUS CONTEMPORARY

IS WITH DEEP RESPECT AND ADMIRATION

INSCRIBED.





## PREFACE

THIS *Introduction to the Study of Browning*, which is now reprinted in a new form, revised throughout, and with everything relating to facts carefully brought up to date, has been for many years out of print. I wrote it as an act of homage to the poet whom I had worshipped from my boyhood; I meant it to be, in almost his own words, used of Shelley, some approach to "the signal service it was the dream of my boyhood to render to his fame and memory."

It was sufficiently rewarded by three things: first, by the generous praise of Walter Pater, in the *Guardian*, which led to the beginning of my friendship with him; then, by a single sentence from George Meredith, "You have done knightly service to a brave leader"; lastly, by a letter from Browning himself, in which he said: "How can I manage even to thank—much more praise—what, in its generosity of appreciation, makes the poorest recognition 'come too near the praising of myself'?"

I repeat these things now, because they seem to justify me in dragging back into sight a book written when I was very young, and, as I am only too conscious, lacking in many of the qualities which I have since acquired or developed. But, on going over it, I have found, for the most part, what seems to me a sound foundation, though little enough may be built on that foundation. I have revised many sentences, and a few opinions; but, while conscious that I should approach the whole subject now

in a different way, I have found surprisingly few occasions for any fundamental or serious change of view. I am conscious how much I owed, at that time, to the most helpful and judicious friend whom I could possibly have had at my elbow, Dykes Campbell. There are few pages of my manuscript which he did not read and criticise, and not a page of my proofs which he did not labour over as if it had been his own. He forced me to learn accuracy, he cut out my worst extravagances, he kept me sternly to my task. It was in writing this book under his encouragement and correction that I began to learn the first elements of literary criticism.

This new edition, then, of my book is new and yet the same. I have altered everything that seemed to require altering, and I have made the style a little more equable; but I have not, I hope, broken anywhere into a new key, or added any sort of decoration not in keeping with the original plainness of the stuff. When Pater said: "His book is, according to his intention, before all things a useful one," he expressed my wish in the matter; and also when he said: "His aim is to point his readers to the best, the indisputable, rather than to the dubious portions of his author's work." In the letter from which I have quoted, Browning said: "It does indeed strike me as wonderful that you should have given such patient attention to all those poems, and (if I dare say further) so thoroughly entered into—at any rate—the spirit in which they were written and the purpose they hoped to serve." If Browning really thought that, my purpose, certainly, had been accomplished.

*April 1906.*