NOTES

Browning

Over no poet have the critics ever wrangled as they do over Browning. He is the greatest poet of the ages for one; for another, the greatest impostor; for a third his verses are the *dernier cri* of art and melody; while a fourth cannot endure his harsh jargon. No doubt he is often involved, and often rugged; he is full of surprises; and he laughs at conventional canons when the humor seizes him. But he is not by any means the obscure poet his hostile critics proclaim, and if it be granted that his lines are not always tuneful, it must also be said that you will find in his work music as sweet as any of our poets have made for us. He is strong and vigorous, he is unusual, he is not commonplace, he demands attention and earnestness from his readers; and these things are in themselves enough to explain why he has enemies. Swinburne tells us that his dominant qualities are decisive faculty of thought, intensity of perception, rapid and trenchant resolution of aim. It is hopeless, says the same critic, "to enjoy the charm or to apprehend the gist of his writings except with a mind thoroughly alert, an attention awake at all points, a spirit open and ready to be kindled by the writer's." And not only is he a rapid thinker, but he is also a complex thinker and involves you in two or three cross-currents of thought before you realise it. This, and his newness, his independence of pre-conceived notions of what poetry ought to be like and what poets ought to write like, is what has come to be called his obscurity. For detailed investigation on that point we refer our readers to Mr. Birrell

His Message

Some poets give forth their message more clearly than many preachers who speak *ex professo* from a text. Browning is not of these. His message is beneath the surface and it is not for the casual reader. It must strike the most superficial that Browning was a believer in cheerfulness and healthiness, and that he hated shams. But there was a profounder message than that in his work. Mr. Chesterton tells us that Browning had opinions just as he had a dress suit or a vote for Parliament, and that he did not hesitate to express these opinions any more than he would have hesitated to fire off a gun or to open an umbrella, if he had possessed those articles and realised their value. And according to the same authority the two opinions which he did express most forcibly were bound up with the hopefulness which is based on the imperfection of man. That is a paradox after Mr. Chesterton's heart, but like all his paradoxes it is full of meaning. A cosmos where incompleteness implies completeness is an argument for immortality, and the sorrows and hidden sufferings of man are also his privileges. On these fundamental thoughts the poet works out noble and beautiful sentiments concerning the human spirit and its destiny and its trials. He is an optimist who takes man as he finds him and feels reason to rejoice about him. He has been described as a barbarian poet by Professor Sanayana exactly because of his healthy optimism and his natural joyousness. Browning's poetry is based on healthy primitive feeling and you feel throughout the work the elastic spirits of a schoolboy who has not yet discovered that he has a digestion. He finds a place in his philosophy for pain and suffering and misery, and he exhorts us to tackle life in reality and to make its defects stepping-stones towards perfection:

The welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand, but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap, the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!

And again:

It's wiser being good than bad!
It's safer being meek than fierce:
It's fitter being sane than mad.
My own hope is, that a sun will pierce
The thickest cloud ever stretched;
That after Last returns the First,
Though a wide compass round be fetched.

Benson in Rome

In an interesting article in the American *Ecclesiastical Review* Canon Conry writes his reminiscences of days spent with Monsignor Benson in Rome. Benson in those days was a rather untidy cleric—by choice it appears—who for a time at least felt like a fish out of water among the priests and students with whom he was associated. He had the reputation of being very "near." His letters written in the early days there are not always in the best of taste, and not remarkable as a proof of his sympathy and understanding. About his preaching there can be only one opinion: it was a decided success. During the Lents of 1909 and 1911 he preached Lenten courses at the request of Father Dolan, P.S.M. Father Dolan and Father Benson played chess every evening during these periods: "With amazing regularity the Englishman won every game on two nights each week, namely, Wednesday and Saturday, the vigils of the days on which he was to preach. Few discerned how the blue eyes from Roscommon twinkled at the signs of joy given by the victor on these occasions. What wonder is it, as the author of *My New Curate* asks, that the British Government tries to fill every important diplomatic post from London to Constantinople with Irishmen? On the other five nights of the week Roscommon beat Westminster in almost every game and laughed softly at the end of each."

Newman's Invective Against Achilli

The famous oration which ended in a libel action against Newman and an adverse verdict which made the *Times* declare that it destroyed all confidence in trial by jury is not given in later editions of the great Cardinal's works. The following is the passage which annihilated the creature of the No-Popery gang for ever:—

"Ah! Dr. Achilli, I might have spoken of him last week, had time admitted of it. The Protestant world flocks to hear him, because he has something to tell of the Catholic Church. He has something to tell, it is true; he *has* a scandal to reveal, he *has* an argument to exhibit. It is a simple one, a powerful one as far as it goes—and it is *one*. That argument is himself; it is his presence which is the triumph of Protestants; it is the sight of him which is a Catholic's confusion. It is indeed our confusion that our holy mother could have had a priest like him. He feels the force of the argument, and he shows himself to the multitude that is gazing on him. 'Mothers of families,' he seems to say, 'gentle maidens, innocent children, look at me for I am worth looking at. You do not see such a sight every day. Can any church live over the imputatian of such a sight as I am? I have been a Catholic and an infidel; I have been a Roman priest and a hypocrite, I have been a profligate under a cowl. I am that Father Achilli, who, as early as 1826, was deprived of my faculty to lecture for an offence which my superiors did their best to conceal. (Here follows an enumeration of abominable crimes.) I am he who was afterwards found guilty of sins, similar or worse, in other towns of the neighborhood. . . . Look on me, ye mothers of England, a confessor against Popery, for 'ye ne'er may look upon my like again.' I am that veritable priest, who after all this began to speak against, not only the Catholic faith, but against the moral law, and perverted others by my teaching. I am that Cavalieri Achilli, who then went to Corfu, made the wife of a tailor faithless to her husband, and lived publicly and travelled about with the wife of a chorus singer. I am that Professor in the Protestant College at Malta, who with two others was dismissed from my post for offences which the authorities cannot get themselves to describe. And now attend to me, such as I am, and you shall see about the barbarity and profligacy of the Inquisitors of Rome."

The Cardinal's denunciation finished the work of Achilli in England where the people had enough self-respect to turn their backs on an exposed No-Popery blackguard.

DEATH OF FATHER MAPLES.

A telegraphic message from Stratford informs us of the death of Rev. Father Maples, parish priest of that town for 13 years, and formerly pastor of Petone, who passed away at an early hour on Friday; aged 81 years. He was educated at Cambridge, was associated with Brompton Oratory, London, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1872 by the late Cardinal Manning, arriving in New Zealand 27 years ago. The solemn obsequies were to take place on Tuesday commencing at 10 a.m. A feeling tribute to the departed priest was paid by the Right Rev. Dr. Whyte, Bishop of Dunedin, before commencing his sermon at St. Joseph's Cathedral on Sunday night.—R.I.P.