

notably the *Christian Morals* and *Antiquities of Norwich*, were prepared for publication, and appeared after his death. In 1671 he received the honour of knighthood from Charles II. on his visit to Norwich; and in 1682 he died on his seventy-seventh birthday.

Browne is in every way a remarkable and peculiar writer. His writings are among the few specimens of purely literary work produced during a period of great political excitement and discord. England was passing through its greatest convulsion; events of mighty moment were being transacted round him, and he remained placidly indifferent. While the grandest minds of his country were busied with the important affairs of state, he was revising his *Religio Medici*, and his book was published in the very year in which the civil war broke out. While England was torn with civil discord, and the liberty of her children was being bought with their blood, Browne serenely pursued his studies at Norwich, to all appearance as indifferent to contemporary events as if he had belonged to another planet. Just when there came a lull in the conflict, when the royal power was broken, and the air was filled with doubts, anxieties, and negotiations, Browne published his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*. The death of the king, the expulsion of the parliament, the establishment of the protectorate, passed by him like a breath which he heeded not. But the unearthing of some sepulchral urns at once roused his attention, and furnished occasion for a train of most magnificent and majestic reflections on the short space of human life, on the signs and symbols of mortality. A mind like this is a psychological curiosity, and its peculiarities are faithfully reflected in the form and matter of his works. In some respects, of course, he resembles his contemporaries; in his, as in all other writings of the 17th century, there is a plentiful display of erudition, copious citation of authorities, and lavish quotation from older writers. Some part also of the peculiarity of his style may be ascribed to the general tendency of the language at that period. It was a time of unusual richness of diction; great writers did not hesitate to coin words and phrases as occasion required them, and ample raw material was supplied by the great mass of literature, which had been but recently opened up, and which was then being assimilated. But Browne stands apart from his contemporaries by reason of the peculiar and unique cast of his mind. Deeply speculative, imbued with the Platonic mysticism which taught him to look upon this world as only the image, the shadow of an invisible system, he regarded the whole of experience but as food for contemplation. Nothing is too great or too small, too far removed or too near at hand for him; all finds a place in the universe of being, which he seems to regard almost from the position of an outsider. His general mood may be characterized as the metaphysical; not that he speculated systematically on the problems of existence, but because he dwells repeatedly, and with evident delight, upon what transcends the little sphere of our life, and, like Shakespeare, is fond of meditating on the outward and visible signs of mortality, and on what lies beyond the grave.

Of Browne, however, as of our greatest writers, it is true that the style is the man. The form of his thought is as peculiar and remarkable as the matter; the two, indeed, react upon one another. It is a style altogether unique, rich, with a lavish use of metaphor and analogy—majestic and swelling; and with a fine antique flavour about it. Much of its quaintness, no doubt, depends on the excessive employment of Latinized words, great part of which have never succeeded in making their way into the standard language; but the peculiarities of the vocabulary do not entirely exhaust those of the style. Of his four masterpieces the *Religio Medici* is that in which we are most in

contact with the writer himself. The book was a puzzle to contemporaries, and is still hard to understand. It is the confession of faith of a mind keen and sceptical in some aspects, but on the whole deeply imbued with the sense of the mysteriousness of true religion, and willing to yield itself up without reserve to the requirements of faith. "I love," he says, "to lose myself in a mystery, to pursue my reason to an *O, Altitudo!*" The *Vulgar Errors* is a wonderful storehouse of out-of-the-way facts and scraps of erudition, exhibiting a singular mixture of credulity and shrewdness. The style is more direct and simple than in the other works. The *Garden of Cyrus* is a continued illustration of one quaint conceit. The whole universe is ransacked for examples of the *Quincunx*, and he discovers, as Coleridge says, "quincunxes in heaven above, quincunxes in earth below, quincunxes in the mind of man, quincunxes in tones, in optic nerves, in roots of trees, in leaves, in everything!" But the whole strength of his genius and the wonderful charm of his style are to be sought in the *Urburial*, the concluding chapter of which, for richness of imagery and majestic pomp of diction, can hardly be paralleled in the English language. For anything at all resembling it we must turn to the finest passages of Jeremy Taylor or of Milton's prose writings.

The best edition of Sir T. Browne is that by Simon Wilkin, 4 vols., 1836,—3 vols. (Bohn), 1851, where full biographical and bibliographical information will be found. Prefixed to it is Johnson's celebrated *Life*.

BROWNE, WILLIAM, an English poet, descended of a good family, was born at Tavistock in Devonshire, in 1590. Having passed through the grammar school of his native place, he was sent to Exeter College, Oxford, and became tutor to Robert Dormer, afterwards earl of Carnarvon. After having received in 1624 the honorary degree of M.A., he was taken into the family of William, earl of Pembroke, and improved his fortune so much that he is said to have purchased an estate. Nothing seems to be known of his after life, and no date has ever been given for his death. All his work was done in his youth, the first part of *Britannia's Pastorals* having been published in 1613, *The Shepherd's Pipe* in 1614, and the second part of the *Pastorals* in 1616. He belongs to the school of Spenser, and his merits may be summed up briefly as extreme sweetness of verse, idyllic nature-painting, and richness of descriptive faculty. The *Pastorals* are about the finest specimens we have in earlier literature of luxuriant sensuous description of ordinary country life. They were highly popular in their time. (See Wood, *Athen. Oxon.*)

BROWNE, WILLIAM GEORGE, an eminent traveller, was born at Great-Tower-Hill, London, July 25, 1768. At seventeen he was sent to Oriel College, Oxford. Having had a moderate competence left him by his father, on leaving the university he applied himself entirely to literary pursuits. But the fame of Bruce's travels, and of the first discoveries made by the African Association, determined him to become an explorer of Central Africa. Accordingly, he left England at the close of 1791 and arrived at Alexandria in January 1792. He spent a few months in visiting Siwah, the supposed site of the temple of Jupiter Ammon, and employed the remainder of the year in examining the whole of Egypt. In the spring of 1793 he visited Suez and Sinai, and in May set out for Darfūr. This was his most important journey, in which he acquired a great variety of original information. He endured much hardship, and was unable to effect his purpose of returning by Abyssinia. He did not reach Egypt till 1796; after this he spent a year in Syria, and did not arrive in London till September 1798. In 1800 he published his travels in Africa, Egypt, and Syria, from the year 1792 to 1798, in one volume 4to. The work was highly esteemed, and is classed by Major Rennell

among the first performances of the kind; but, from the abruptness and dryness of the style, it never became very popular. In 1800 Browne again left England, and spent three years in visiting Greece, some parts of Asia Minor, and Sicily. In 1812 he set out on a more extensive journey, proposing to penetrate to Samarkand, and survey the most interesting regions of Central Asia. He spent the winter in Smyrna, and in the spring of 1813 proceeded through Asia Minor and Armenia, made a short stay at Erzeroum, and arrived on the 1st of June at Tabriz, where he met Sir Gore Ouseley. About the end of the summer of 1813 he left Tabriz for Teheran, intending to proceed thence into Tartary; but unhappily he never reached that destination. Near the banks of the Kizil-Ouzen his party were attacked by banditti, and, according to the report of the survivors, Browne was plundered and murdered. Suspicion attached to his companions, and even to the Persian Government, but nothing occurred to confirm these surmises. Some bones, believed to be his, were afterwards found and interred near the grave of Thevenot, the celebrated French traveller. His volume of travels in Africa has already been mentioned. Robert Walpole published in the second volume of his *Memoirs* relating to European and Asiatic Turkey (4to, 1820), from papers left by Browne, the account of his journey in 1802 through Asia Minor to Antioch and Cyprus; also "Remarks written at Constantinople."

BROWNING, ELIZABETH BARRETT, the most distinguished poet of her sex that England has produced, was born in London in the year 1809. She was the daughter of Mr Barrett, an English country gentleman. From a very early age, almost before the years of childhood had passed, she exhibited a remarkable preference for the arts, but especially that of the poetic. Previous to attaining her fifteenth year she had written verse upon which was the stamp of true genius—poems eminently worthy of preservation. Whatever she wrote, however, was sacred to all eyes save those of her father, to whom she refers in the first collected edition of her poems as "my public and my critic." Her physical constitution was most fragile and delicate, but nature seemed to have supplemented her deficiency in this respect by bestowing upon her an unusually sensitive mental and spiritual organization. One who knew her intimately, Miss Mitford, has described her as a "slight delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on each side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes, richly fringed by dark eye-lashes, and a smile like a sunbeam." All descriptions of Miss Barrett concur in this, that she possessed a grace and a delicacy which defied representation by the artist. Her studies were early directed to the poets of antiquity, and, under the guidance of her blind tutor, Boyd, whose name she always warmly cherished, she mastered the rich treasures of Æschylus. The sublime Grecian possessed for her a charm which was only equalled by the fascination held over her wondering spirit by our own Shakespeare. Her knowledge of Greek literature was most profound; she was intimately familiar with all the Attic writers in tragedy and comedy. Yet this did not prevent her from drinking at the wells of English undefiled. Her correspondence with eminent contemporaries of both sexes proves her to have been thoroughly acquainted with English literature in its progress from Chaucer downwards. The circumstances of her own life, and her lack of robust health, conspired to make her seek, even more than she might have otherwise done, the communion of the great departed in arts and letters. Not being able to pass from place to place without fatigue and danger, the solitude she was compelled to maintain probably threw her still more ardently into those pursuits which, while dear to the mind, were probably injurious to the body. Most frail from her birth, as we have already seen, it was her misfor-

tune further to have her existence endangered in 1837 by the bursting of a blood-vessel in the lungs. By the exercise of extreme care her life was preserved, but the incident was succeeded by a long period of weakness and suffering. Some two years after this first severe shock to her system, and before she had quite recovered from its effects, she was again assailed by misfortune, experiencing the keenest anguish on witnessing the death of her favourite brother, who was drowned at Torquay. As might have been expected from one of her clinging and affectionate disposition, a long period of danger followed this catastrophe, and when at length she was able to be removed to her father's house, it was only to become an invalid, with the prospect of a life couch-ridden to its close. This period of seclusion lasted for seven long years; and the interval was employed by Miss Barrett in eagerly devouring all the books which could be brought within her reach. At this time also she was sedulously cultivating the art that was afterwards to ensure for her immortality. When she was in her thirty-seventh year, that is, in 1846, she was married to Mr Browning, and the union was singularly felicitous. More cannot be said, as the author of *The Ring and the Book* still lives. Mr Browning bore his wife to Italy, and for some years the sunny skies of the south were instrumental in giving to Mrs Barrett Browning that health which had so long forsaken her in her native land. The villa of the Brownings in Florence was the resort of many noble spirits, eminent either for patriotism or in the arts. Mrs Browning died at Florence in the year 1861, after testifying in many ways her singular devotion to the country of her adoption.

The poetry of this writer is distinguished for its emotional spirit; had her imagination equalled her capacity for feeling she might have taken rank with the highest of our poets. Sensibility and intuition, those endowments of supreme importance to writers of genius, whose greatness is to grow in proportion to their understanding and interpretation of human life, were in her united in a degree seldom witnessed. The aspirations she indulged, and the character she doubtless wished to be impressed upon her own works, were well set forth when she observed on one occasion, "we want the touch of Christ's hand upon our literature as it touched other dead things; we want the sense of the saturation of Christ's blood upon the souls of our poets, that it may cry through them in answer to the ceaseless wail of the sphinx of our humanity, expounding agony into renovation. Something of this has been perceived in art when its glory was at the fullest. Something of a yearning after this may be seen among the Greek Christian poets, something which would have been much with a stronger faculty." Imbued fully with this idea of the sacredness of poetry, Mrs Browning went to the deepest fount of all inspiration—the human heart—and endeavoured to read clearly its intimate relations with God. A peculiar tenderness breathes through her writings, whether of the humblest or the most ambitious description. Almost her first work bore upon it the traces of her Greek studies, being an excellent translation of the *Prometheus*. Another very early production, *The Drama of Exile*, is unquestionably marked by great sublimity of thought, though the conception may lack the mighty outlines of the majestic Milton. Eloquent and sustained, however, the poem made manifest a pure and original writer. Mrs Browning's genius had two sides—the lyric and the dramatic. Her lyrical capabilities were of the highest order; she was greater probably in this particular than either Campbell or Tennyson, though on several occasions Campbell touched the loftiest point such a writer can attain. The heart, which has always given our lyric poets their greatest power, was the strength of Mrs Browning; her song was a living