IMMORTALITY

TENNYSON AND BROWNING

SIR HENRY JONES

The Immortality of the Soul in the Poems of Tennyson and Browning

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PREFACE

In doing me the honour of inviting me to deliver 'The Essex Hall Lecture' for 1905, the British and Foreign Unitarian Association expressed the desire that it should be published. I could wish that the lecture better repaid their courtesy.

It is not merely that the treatment I have been able to offer of the theme is inadequate; but I have ventured to apply the methods of philosophy to the poets. And if I have done wrong, I can offer no apology, for the wrong is deliberate.

It has long seemed to me that the current distinctions between the methods of the philosopher and the poet, and of the scientific and the common consciousness, are less significant than they seem to be: that

in the last resort there is only one way of seeking to know what is true, and one way of holding it when it is found.

This fact has not been overlooked by recent writers on philosophy. But, on the whole, the use they have made of it has been destructive. They have sought to expose the hypothetical and imaginative character of reasoned thought, rather than to bring into view the broad principles that give coherence to our great imaginative literature, and stability and sanity to the ordinary experience of mankind.

I have sought in this lecture to put this conception of the ultimate affinity of all forms of human experience to another use; and especially in its reference to the objects of religious faith. I have tried to show that to these, too, belong the cogency that comes from reason. In so far as religious conceptions serve to make the world more intelligible and man's practice more rational, they share the right to convince which belongs

to the most secure of all the human sciences. The function of reason in religious life is denied or limited only because its nature is little understood. And we wrong our great poets, even as they wronged themselves, when we treat the truths they bring as if they were but rapt, unreasoned utterances, expressing nothing more than their individual moods.

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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL IN TENNYSON AND BROWNING

'THE Immortality of the Soul' is one of those grave matters on which most men of refinement are naturally reticent. They break their silence, as a rule, only when they are deeply moved: the solemn thoughts that lie in the still recesses of their soul are brought to the surface only by the swinging of the waters after a great storm. It was the death of Socrates, the apparent victory of the wicked and ignorant over 'the wisest and justest and best of all the men of his time,' which led Plato to speak of Immortality, as almost no other has done. With that consummate art which is perfect truth, he makes Socrates discuss the meaning of death and of that which may lie beyond death, during the solemn hours between the dawn and the evening twilight of his last day upon earth. 'As I am going to

another place, it is very meet for me to be thinking and talking of the nature of the pilgrimage which I am about to make. What can I do better in the interval between this and the setting sun ? '

It is in a similar way and similar spirit that Tennyson and Browning raised this great question. Their thoughts had often ranged along the line of the horizon where man's destiny dips out of sight. But it was the death of Arthur Hallam that, for once, disturbed the even equipoise and well-nigh broke down the strong restraints of Tennyson's spirit, which ordinarily moved like a star to its own music in the twilight sky of his thoughts. Browning was habitually less reticent on all matters that concern the human soul, and the speculative impulse in him was more daring. He often spoke of the future life during the fifty years and more of his poetic labour. But if it was the death of Arthur Hallam that brought the wild grief, the sustained reflection, and the solemn joy of *In Memoriam*, it was the sudden death of Browning's young friend at La Saisiaz—she who was ' summoned in

that dread way, without premonitory touch as she talked and laughed,' which startled his knightly spirit to put on its armour, and led him to challenge his own faith, and to dare his own doubts of Immortality.

It would thus seem that ' Death ' and ' Immortality ' are not subjects for speech in ordinary moods or amongst ordinary circumstances. A certain preparation of spirit—some impressive glimpse of the narrow and uncertain limits of the present life or of the exceeding weight of things eternal —is required before we can profitably raise these grave questions.

Indeed, there are many men, and these amongst the best and the most wise, who maintain that we do not well in concerning ourselves with these matters. ' Let us think on living,' they say. ' Let us keep faithful sentry at our post, in the midst of the impenetrable darkness that surrounds our little lives, and refuse to perplex our souls with questions which we cannot answer. Sufficient unto the day is the duty thereof. To a man who is within his duty, Death does not count.'

Now, I cannot withhold my reverence for the men who in the strength of their moral faith assume this attitude, and who rank loyalty to simple truth, even when truth is silent, above whatever peace those hopes may bring which may turn out false. In the marvellous picture that Plato draws of the last hours of his master, there is nothing more perfect in its beauty than the utter loyalty of Socrates to the truth. He is afraid lest the nearness of death and the magnitude of the issues which are at stake should lead him to pervert the truth in his own favour and to argue falsely for the life hereafter. 'I would ask you,' he says, 'to be thinking of the truth and not of Socrates. Agree with me, if I seem to you to be speaking the truth; or, if not, withstand me might and main, that I may not deceive you, as well as myself, in my enthusiasm, and, like the bee, leave my sting in you before I die.'

But, you will ask, should not the reticence of the wise, the sufficiency of duty for the good, and the uncertainty of the matter, teach us to fortify ourselves against these

questionings? I believe not, for several reasons.

In the first place, it is very doubtful if we *can* do so.

> Just when we are safest, there's a sunset-touch,
> A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
> A chorus-ending from Euripides,—
> And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
> As old and new at once as nature's self,
> To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
> Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
> Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
> The grand Perhaps!
>
> *Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

In the second place, it is doubtful whether it is wise to shut down these thoughts and seek to reconcile ourselves to ignorance, even if that were in our power. Those who do not sometimes pause to reflect upon the ultimate problems of human destiny while the tide of life is still at the flood and its interests are many, are liable, when the ebb comes, and life is sinking into emptiness, to welcome the crudest superstition that is next to hand. And that most certainly is not good.

In the last place, it is only by coming to a reckoning with death that those magnificent convictions of which we have spoken can be gained by man. 'That death does not count,' that 'Come what may, the duty of the moment sufficeth,' are not beliefs which can be possessed by the thoughtless. Those who have gained them, so far from avoiding the thought of death and what may come after, have looked it in the face and seen that there are things to be feared more than death. They have put the thought of death in so vast and so spiritual a context that its significance is dwarfed; and all the meaning that remains for it is not natural any more, but spiritual.

This, it seems to me, is, in its essence, what has been done by both of these great poets. Each, in his own way, has challenged death; and each has found that, provided the moral world stands and God remains, death cannot in itself mean much, and what it does mean is good. To understand this is to appropriate their thought upon this question of the Immortality of the Soul.

Now, there are two ways of considering

what they have said. One is to examine their utterances critically, in order to bring out the similarities and differences in the details of their faith and the subtle nuances of the spiritual disposition which finds expression in these utterances. This is the method of the commentator, and it is full of interest and instruction. The other method is to dwell upon the broad features of their belief with the view of discovering the basis on which they made it to rest: to find out what validity, what value for others, there is in their trust. This is the method I shall follow. I shall look to the poets for help for myself in the contemplation of this problem of death and immortality—dealing with them as teachers of truth, rather than as poets or ministers of beauty.

Perhaps the first thing that impresses the student of Tennyson and Browning is the fulness of their belief in the Immortality of the Soul. If they did ever doubt its truth—which is very questionable—doubt only shook the torpor of assurance from their creed: it left the belief itself more strong

and fixed. Its roots travelled deeper into their experience and intertwined itself with it ever the more vitally as their life matured to its close.

A close examination of Tennyson's poems would show that he entertained, at different times, different conceptions regarding the state of the soul after death. He repudiates the view that the soul 'passes at once into a final state of bliss or woe.'

> No sudden heaven, nor sudden hell, for man,
> But thro' the will of One who knows and rules—
> And utter knowledge is but utter love—
> Æonian Evolution, swift or slow,
> Thro' all the Spheres—an ever opening height,
> An ever lessening earth.
>
> *The Ring.*

Browning emphatically sets aside both the final woe and the final extinction of the wicked. The first of these notions he discards in a passage of extraordinary force in the *Inn Album*—probably the most powerful exposure in our language of the astounding doctrine of eternal punishment.

> After death,
> Life: man created new, ingeniously

> Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
> That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
> Was proved a failure; intellect at length
> Replacing old obtuseness, memory
> Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
> Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
> Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart;
> New gift of observation up and down
> And round man's self, new power to apprehend
> Each necessary consequence of act
> In man for well or ill—things obsolete—
> Just granted to supplant the idiocy
> Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
> With ill or well momentously its fruit;
> A faculty of immense suffering
> Conferred on mind and body,—mind, erewhile
> Unvisited by one compunctious dream
> During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
> Stung through and through by sin's significance
> Now that the holy was abolished—just
> As body which, alive, broke down beneath
> Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
> Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
> Achieve aught worthy,—which grew old in youth,
> And at its longest fell a cut-down flower,—
> Dying, this too revived by miracle
> To bear no end of burden now that back
> Supported torture to no use at all,
> And live imperishably potent—since
> Life's potency was impotent to ward
> One plague off which made earth a hell before.

This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
One sane sight of the general ordinance—
Nature,—and its particular object,—Man,—
Which one mere eye-cast at the character
Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
Had dissipated once and evermore,—
This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.

The Inn Album.

The idea of the extinction of the wicked is rejected by Browning at the close of the Pope's soliloquy in the *Ring and the Book*, in another of his most splendid passages. Speaking of the sentence of death he has just passed on Guido, the main criminal, the Pope says :—

For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
Through her whole length of mountain visible :
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And, like a ghost disshrouded, white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.

Else I avert my face, nor follow him
Into that sad obscure sequestered state
Where God unmakes but to remake the soul
He else made first in vain ; which must not be.

The Pope : The Ring and the Book.

Neither could Tennyson adopt the belief that any soul would in the end be excluded from a God of love.

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

In Memoriam, lv.

Both of the poets recur again and again to the conception of the soul as entering on a second individual life after death, and, indeed, on a series of lives—whether on earth or elsewhere—'The soul in each embodiment reaching a higher stage of being, and approaching more and more nearly to God.'

Live thou ! and of the grain and husk, the grape
And ivyberry, choose ; and still depart
From death to death thro' life and life, and find
Nearer and ever nearer Him, who wrought
Not Matter, nor the finite-infinite,
But this main-miracle, that thou art thou,
With power on thine own act and on the world.

De Profundis.

This is the habitual attitude of Tennyson; and to him the final union with God in which the process culminates, 'the loss of personality (if so it were), seemed to be not extinction but the true life.'

In like manner, Browning gives frequent expression to this idea of continued evolution from life to life.

It seethes with the morrow for us and more.

Things learned on earth, we shall practise in heaven.

There's a fancy some lean to and others hate—
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practised in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all.

Yet I hardly know. When a soul has seen
By the means of Evil that Good is best,
And, through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene—
When our faith in the same has stood the test—
Why, the child grown man, you burn the rod,
The uses of labour are surely done;
There remaineth a rest for the people of God:
And I have had troubles enough, for one.

Old Pictures in Florence.

With this note, as of momentary weariness, rarely heard from this strong and strenuous spirit, we shall turn aside from these secondary questions as to the manner of the soul's life after death, and take up the question of Immortality itself—meaning simply by that 'the conscious and indefinitely prolonged life of the soul beyond death.' This was 'undoubtedly a matter of fixed belief' for both the poets; and of 'an importance so great that life without the belief in it seemed to them to have neither sense nor value.'[1]

My own dim life should teach me this,
That life shall live for evermore,
Else earth is darkness at the core,
And dust and ashes all that is.

In Memoriam, xxxiv.

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated,
learnt and taught
This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world
distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in
the aim,

[1] See Professor A. C. Bradley's 'Commentary on *In Memoriam*': Macmillan & Co.

If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other
feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just
probation-space,
Mine, for me. *La Saisiaz.*

But there is no need that I should dwell further upon this matter. They have given expression to this belief so frequently, and in such a variety of ways, both in their poems and in their letters, that no one can doubt that the 'Grand Perhaps' of Immortality was for them a final and inexpressibly significant conviction.

In nothing did they reveal their affinity to their times, more than in this. For at the heart of the thought, nay of the very disposition of the mind of their age and ours is the conception that the natural world and the natural life of man signify much more than that which at first meets the eye. Ever since the days of Lessing and Kant mankind has been travelling away from the narrow infinitude and hard-lined limitedness of the days of Hume. Philosophers and poets alike—almost all of the greatest of

them—Fichte and Schelling, Hegel and Goethe, Carlyle and Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, and Browning, have steeped the present life in the life to come. Thought and sense, spirit and nature interpenetrate; time is saturated with eternity. The universe is spirit-woven, God is immanent in it, and every meanest object is in its way 'filled full of magical music, as they freight a star with light.' There has been no age in the world's history when doubt was more deep or stern. The lines of science were never drawn more stringently, binding together in an ever closer phalanx the ranks of necessity, and limiting ever more remorselessly the charter of an irresponsible imagination. But the doubt itself contains the promise, and is even the reflex of a larger faith—faith in an order whose sweep is wider and its spiritual significance indefinitely deeper. This faith, as Tennyson says,

..Reels not in the storm of warring words,
She brightens at the clash of 'Yes' and 'No,'
She sees the Best that glimmers thro' the Worst,
She feels the sun is hid but for a night,
She spies the summer thro' the winter bud,
She tastes the fruit before the blossom falls,

She hears the lark within the songless egg,
She finds the fountain where they wail'd 'Mirage!'
The Ancient Sage.

But what I desire to ask is the stern question: Have we verily any right to such a triumphant conviction? What gave it to our poets? On what grounds did they hold it? And what validity have those grounds?

To these questions we shall now turn. And the answer offered plainly, both by Tennyson and Browning, is that these grounds are not intellectual grounds.

Thou canst not prove the Nameless, O my son,
Nor canst thou prove the world thou movest in,
Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one:
Thou canst not prove thou art immortal, no
Nor yet that thou art mortal. . . .
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven: wherefore thou be wise,
Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!
The Ancient Sage.

The same conviction we find almost anywhere in Browning, and especially in his later poems, where imagination passes into philosophic reflection. Human knowledge, he believes, fails at every great crisis, and he bids us

Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme concern!
Living here means nescience simply: 'tis next life that helps to learn.
La Saisiaz.

What need to confess again
No problem this to solve
By impotence? *Asolando.*

In some of his poems, and especially in *La Saisiaz*, he develops an argument that sure knowledge of the hereafter might destroy our liberty of choice here. So that hope of immortality is not only all that we can have, but all that we ought to desire in this sphere of probation—hope alternating with fear.

This argument, you will observe, gives a positive value to ignorance, making it a condition of the moral life: 'Neither good nor evil does man, doing what he must' (*La Saisiaz*). But it is not hard to meet. It can be shown to rest on confusion

between the natural necessity which compels, and the moral necessity which is self-imposed. And, besides, the whole course of human history, in so far as it is progressive, consists in escaping from the yoke of the former in order to pass into the willing service of the latter. 'Behold how I love thy law,' says the Psalmist.

But what we have to deal with is the main conclusion of these poets.

> We have but faith: we cannot know;
> For knowledge is of things we see.
>
> *In Memoriam.*

> Thus much at least is clearly understood—
> Of power does Man possess no particle:
> Of knowledge—just so much as shows that still
> It ends in ignorance on every side.
>
> *Francis Furini.*

'Sad summing up of all' is Browning's own verdict on this conclusion. Ignorance, necessary, inexpugnable, rooted in the very nature of our minds, ignorance of precisely those matters which, if true, are momentous beyond all else—how can man call such a condition good, or not cry out

> Oh, this false for real,
> This emptiness which feigns solidity,—
> Ever some grey that's white, and dun that's black—
> When shall we rest on the thing itself,
> Not on its semblance? Soul—too weak, forsooth,
> To cope with fact—wants fiction everywhere!
> Mine tires of falsehood: truth at any cost!
>
> *A Bean-Stripe.*

Now, I believe that this impatience of mere seeming is the proper attitude of the human spirit. Amongst the needs of man, meant to be satisfied, is the need of knowledge. But a faith that is separated from reason cannot satisfy this need. Those who rest on *such* a faith, or have recourse to 'intuition' which is only tradition and habit in disguise, or to 'feeling' which in fact can give neither truth nor error, are distinguished from the Agnostic in nowise except that he is better aware of his ignorance and more frank in the confession of it.

This solution by means of an Agnostic faith is much too easy to be right. It heals the wounds of the soul too slightly: they bleed afresh when touched by doubt. This, indeed, is the universal experience of all who have really doubted. Man has neither

the right nor the power to be satisfied with a faith that is divorced from reason. And the religious man who relies on such a faith, gives away his case.

I believe, moreover, that he is entitled to take stronger ground. Nay, I shall try to show that our poets, in spite of all they say of knowledge, themselves take stronger grounds. So far from ousting reason from this great quest of Immortality, they have employed it as their guide; and reason, so far from failing them in their hour of need, is just that which has gained for them those splendid convictions which they attribute to faith. Using the well-known phrase of Kant, I may say that their faith is the 'faith of reason.' It was reason that selected the elements which it contains, and it was reason that compacted these elements into a consistent, congruous, and self-sustained whole.

Their doubt of reason and despair of knowledge arose, I believe, from confusion as to their nature. And it is to confusion of thought regarding these that we must attribute much of that acknowledged and

unacknowledged Agnosticism of this and other times, which is the insecure refuge of intellectual despair. The importance of the matter more than justifies us in dwelling upon it with some fulness, for it is the joint in the armour of religious belief at which doubt always aims its fatal shaft.

It will assist us to remove this confusion if we begin by distinguishing between Reason and Logic. That distinction is precisely parallel to the difference between Geology and the earth, or Astronomy and the stars and planets, or Botany and plants. Geology, Astronomy, and Botany are sciences, or more or less systematic bodies of knowledge; but the earth, the stars, the planets, the plants, are the facts for which these sciences offer an explanation. This is evident. We do not confuse these, nor speak of the theories as if they were the facts themselves. But we are less careful in matters that pertain to our mental life. We often confuse theology which is the science of religion, with religion which is the fact—and the supremest of all the facts of our experience—much to the detriment and dispeace of both private

and public life. And still more frequently, and with still wider ill effects, we confuse between Logic, which is the science of reason, and the process of reasoning for which this science, even at its best, lamely and most inadequately accounts. As a rule ancient theories are accepted regarding this psychological process, by which reason moves from the little to the better known ; and the most general laws of logic are treated as if they were adequate descriptions of the operation of those most complex forces by means of which experience grows. These laws must, of course, be kept, just as the merchant must add and subtract correctly when he makes up his accounts. But just as British commerce is more than addition and subtraction, so the reason of man is more than the logician's laws. Whether in ordinary human intercourse or in the pursuit of scientific knowledge, the elements which lead us to our conclusions are so numerous and so subtly interwoven as to render our theoretic account of them entirely inadequate. Here as elsewhere facts are larger than our knowledge, and are known only imperfectly

and gradually. It is one thing to make use of nerves and muscles in walking—this a little child can do ; but not every physiologist could name all the nerves and muscles that the child calls into play. In like manner, it is one thing to proceed from fact to fact in knowledge, to bind truth to truth in the ever more complex organism of experience ; it is another thing to be able to set forth one by one the organic filaments that give it unity and order. A child may reason, and he is always reasoning and he builds up his world by reasoning ; but not all the theorists in the world can tell us *all* about the way in which he does it—so complex is the process.

The complexity of the process is easily accounted for. It arises from the fact that in reasoning we bring the whole of our past experience to bear upon the particular statement we wish to test, or the object or event we wish to comprehend. The mathematician brings the knowledge, the literary critic brings the experience of his lifetime, to bear on each new problem. All our yesterdays are concentrated upon our to-day, and

all our experience is in the field when we reject or adopt a truth and try to form a judgment. So wonderful is the accumulative power of the human spirit.

Now, if this be really the rational process which takes place, important consequences follow. And especially this consequence: that the truth which we test by means of our experience and accept when tested is built into the system of experience and is supported by that system. This is as much as to say that in such a case the grounds on which we accept the fact, the premises of our conclusion, are the totality of our experience. So bound up are experience and the particular fact, that we cannot admit the former without admitting the latter, or deny the latter without overthrowing the former.

This is the case with all those convictions which we say are 'deeply felt.' They *are* deeply felt. But their strength lies not in the feeling. The feeling arises from the consciousness of their strength, and their strength from the fact that they have been made one with our rational life by a thousand

judgments and practical experiences. The feeling of their vital truth is the result of a satisfied intelligence, and the intelligence is satisfied only when experience seems to be a congruous whole. This truth is seen, for example, in ordinary argumentation: you endeavour to refute your opponent by showing that his error carries some other error with it, that this second error carries still another, and that ultimately his whole rational experience is imperilled by his clinging to his false idea. You give him the highwayman's choice—'Your error, or your intellectual life.' 'Deny this,' we say, 'and nothing remains,' for behind this, nay, incorporated with it and implicated in its fate, is the whole system of your associated thoughts.

Such, then, is proof or the psychological process called reasoning. It is the bringing of facts together within a congruous or systematic experience. The proof of any fact or belief is at its strongest and completest when its premises ramify into experience as a whole, so that to deny it is to uproot and destroy experience.

This is precisely the proof of Immortality

that is offered by our poets. Grant us this conception they say, make this life the prelude to a life to come and the present world a part of a larger cosmos, then its sin and sorrow will have some significance, and God be at least conceivably wise and just and merciful. But refuse us this conception, and the world becomes the scene either of iron necessity or of blind chance; man a pathetic compound of greatness and littleness—greatness in his needs and aims and utter weakness in the satisfaction of them; while the Being who could set so great a burden on so weak a back, who could call the incongruity into existence, is not a God but either a blundering or a cruel monster.

Now, it is possible that the argument is not sound, in the sense that there are false steps in it; but I desire to emphasize the fact that, even if it be imperfectly applied, the *method* is legitimate. It is in truth the method followed by us in all our knowing, and the one way we have of reasoning. And hence, in this respect, it is not less and not more open to the assault of scepticism than the surest knowledge we possess.

Let me illustrate this identity of method by reference to our scientific knowledge.

There is, I suppose, no physicist in the world who would deny the truths which Newton sought to express in his laws of motion. He will tell us that they are the presuppositions on which his whole science rests. No sooner, however, has he said this than the modern metaphysician seizes upon the word 'presupposition,' and answers: 'Yea, verily, your science rests upon presuppositions, but "presupposition," like "hypothesis," is only another word for an assumption, a guess, a fabrication of the mind, an intellectual construct which you use for purposes of explanation.' And the answer is right, and altogether irrefutable so far as it goes. But only so far as it goes: it is a truth, but not the whole truth. For a presupposition, or hypothesis, is something more than a guess, which man may concoct at his own pleasure. It is a guess imposed upon his mind by the facts, it is the mind's first intuition of *their* meaning, it is the construct of an intellect guided by the realm of the real, and it is maintained only so long

as the realm of reality seems to support it. 'Implicated with the truth of these laws of motion is the whole of my science,' replies the physicist; nay, the whole of your own daily doings as a physical agent. Deny these truths and stand by your denial of them, and it is not only my science which will fall down in ruins, but your own practical life: you will be able to move neither hand nor foot, nor even the tongue that makes the denial. Every act of yours, every muscle you expand or contract in your standing or walking or lying down, is a proof of the truth of these principles. And surely what is proved by every one, everywhere, at all times, and whether he will or no, is tolerably secure, even although it is still called a hypothesis.'

Now, there is no department of human life in which analogous truths do not evince themselves in similar ways; in which, in other words, there are not found broad assumptions that *are* assumptions, but that are assumptions secured, rendered more and more impregnable, ratified, by every new experience; and which, therefore, constitute just the surest knowledge that

we have. They are not undeniable. Nothing is undeniable: sophistry can find nurture in any garbage. But if they are denied, the world becomes for the spirit of man a Golgotha—a place of skulls—and amongst the dead skulls is the sophist's own; for scepticism refutes itself as well as its opponent and denies its own denial.

Nowhere does this truth appear more clearly than in the matters of so-called 'faith'; nowhere, in other words, is it more evident that there are some principles so vital to experience and therefore so secured by experience (*which is just the thing that reasons*) that to deny them is to reduce the world into chaos. Doubt of them is impossible: it turns into absurdity and madness. 'The mere discussion by anyone of the existence of God,' said that subtle spirit, Heine, 'causes me to feel a strange disquietude, an uneasy dread, such as I once experienced in visiting New Bedlam, when, for a moment, losing sight of my guide, I was surrounded by madmen. God is all that is, and doubt of his existence is doubt of life itself; it is death.' Heine had made

the discovery that God was essentially immanent in all his experience—the principle of sanity in all his life. And if that was so, then, indeed, had he attained the highest proof of God's existence; for all he was and knew proved it.

Now, it is the use of this same method of proof, however unconscious they were of its value, that has lent such power to the utterances of our poets. It is not the strength of their conviction, in the sense of the intensity of their feeling, that gives it cogency, but the broad grounds on which it rested. For the grounds were as broad as their experience.

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.
> *Fra Lippo Lippi.*

> O world, as God has made it! All is beauty:
> And knowing this is love, and love is duty.
> What further may be sought for, or declared?

How can we account for the fact that Browning who had sat so near the heart of humanity and felt the depths of its sorrow and crime and foolishness and frailty, could

so consistently throughout his life strike a note so free and full of joy? Who told him that failure is but success in the making and that shadow implies light? 'His heart,' you will reply. And I agree. But what is 'the heart' in such a context, except the whole rational experience of the man chastened and purified and enlightened by observation up and down the broad order of things and the ways of men, and made wise by much reflection. His faith was, indeed, 'the faith of reason.' It was reason that penetrated through the shows of life to the reality, and recognized, amidst the rubble, the fair proportions of the spiritual edifice that was being built. It was reason that stretched forth its hands and firmly held the principle that gives meaning and sanity and substance to the whole process. And the method which his reason employed is, in the last resort, identical with that which distinguishes between seeming and reality, first appearance and real meaning, in the sciences; and identical, too, with that which establishes more and more securely the broad hypothesis on which we

base our common knowledge of common things and our ordinary conduct and ways of life.

Our poets, all unconsciously, follow the methods of science and ordinary knowledge in still other ways. They employ the negative tests to these hypotheses, just as is done in other departments of knowledge. Supposing, asks Tennyson, we deny man's immortality, make the highest in man end in extinction, disintegrate him into dust, or shut him up into the rocks like a fossil—what follows?

> Shall he,
>
> Man, her last work, who seem'd so fair,
> Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
> Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
> Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,
>
> Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
> Who battled for the True, the Just,
> Be blown about the desert dust,
> Or seal'd within the iron hills?

Is this his whole history? Then, indeed, is he a self-contradictory being, a standing absurdity in the world.

> No more? A monster then, a dream,
> A discord. Dragons of the prime,
> That tare each other in their slime,
> Were mellow music match'd with him.
>
> *In Memoriam*, lvi.

In this answer there is implied the sense of uttermost incongruity which comes from the denial of a great principle, and whose denial, therefore, only serves to make it more sure. Again, they employ the opposite or positive test. 'Grant us these great truths,' they seem to say, 'and what follows? They become as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.' They show all things in their proper place and order; just as a hypothesis brings system and significance into the facts of natural science.

> You groped your way across my room i' the dear dark dead of night,
> At each fresh step a stumble was: but, once your lamp was alight,
> Easy and plain you walked again: so soon all wrong grew right!
>
> *Shah Abbas.*

In the wide context of the lives to come, *sub specie aeternitatis*, as Spinoza used to say, the present life and its natural setting become at least to some degree intelligible.

The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying sound.
Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in, but that harmony should be prized?

Abt Vogler.

Thus did Browning find in this wider conception that links the here to the hereafter and all to God, 'his resting place again,' the C major of his life. 'His hypothesis worked,' as we say; and how much better than any other!

But there is still another way of testing a hypothesis than this of forecasting the broad consequences which result from its assertion or its denial. It is that of detailed experiment, and especially experiment by 'negative instances,' to use the phrase familiar to scientific men. And this, too, our poets employed. They challenged their doubts, and brought their beliefs to the proof of facts. Their virtue was no cloistered virtue, nor their race won without the dust and heat. This, above all, is the reason why they have strengthened the faith of so many thoughtful men and women, and exercised,

justly I believe, so profound an influence upon the religious life of their day. They had themselves been 'perplext in faith; but pure in deeds'; and themselves 'they beat their music out.' Men of vast learning and a wide outlook, hating unbelief, but preferring even that to the sleepy confidence of uninquiring ignorance, they were able to look at the world through the eyes of modern science, and they observed science, neither without sympathy nor yet without fear, build up step by step a natural world of an order immutable and of laws inexorable, apparently a blind mechanism at war with weak humanity. And they at once ask the ultimate question: 'Is the discord final, then?'

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life?

In Memoriam, lv.

'Nay! Is nature careful even of the type?' Tennyson asks again, deepening still further the strain of doubt.

'So careful of the type?' But no.
From scarped cliff and quarried stone
She cries, 'A thousand types are gone:
I care for nothing, all shall go.'

In Memoriam, lvi.

'The ideas of God and immortality are not for the poet the result of reasoning upon the phenomena of external Nature. He appears to have held consistently throughout his life, that if we did not bring them with us to the examination of Nature, but simply used our reason upon it without taking into account the evidence derived from our own nature, we should not believe either in God or in immortality.'[1] And his conclusion from such premises was just. Nature severed from man and the spiritual possibilities he brings with him is, indeed, a defective witness. But Nature with man left out is not Nature, but a fragment of her real self—a fragment, too, that leaves the highest unexpressed. But place man in Nature, and Nature in man; let Nature produce him and let him express her meaning, and we have no longer the impossible task

[1] Professor A. C. Bradley, 'Commentary on *In Memoriam*.'

to confront of deducing the living from the dead. Man throws fresh light upon the processes which have brought him into being.

From the grand result
A supplementary reflux of light,
Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains
Each back step in the circle. . . .
. . . . Man, once descried, imprints for ever
His presence on all life-less things: the winds
Are henceforth voices, wailing or a shout,
A querulous mutter, or a quick gay laugh,
Never a senseless gust now man is born.
The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,
A secret they assemble to discuss.

Paracelsus.

and so on, throughout the close of that magnificent early poem of Browning, wherein his promise shows so vast that even his great life-work has never seemed to me quite to fulfil it. With man come intelligence, with man come spiritual qualities, weak enough at first, but spiritual all the same; and amongst them come love and with love, God himself. And Love explains all, for it finds itself everywhere. It makes Paracelsus wise at length

To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
To see a good in evil, and a hope
In ill-success; to sympathise, be proud
Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts;
All with a touch of nobleness, despite
Their error, upward tending all though weak,
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him.

Paracelsus.

Here at last, do Tennyson and Browning find a conception which is adequate to their needs. Nature implies man; man, in virtue of his spiritual qualities, and especially of his love, implies God; and God, who is most of all God in his love, brings with him all the things that man can need, and amongst these 'Immortality, or something better'—if better there can be. Such, in the last resort, is the argument advanced by both our poets. Love is the good supreme, the veritable substance beneath the shows of life, the reality within their seeming.

There is no good of life but love—but love!
What else looks good, is some shade flung from love,
Love gilds it, gives it worth.

There is no fact which, if seen to the heart, will not prove to have love for its purpose, and, therefore, for its real being and essence. It is the one positive and constitutive principle in the nature of things. And it is through it, as the bursting into some new form of an elemental, all-pervading power, that every event in the history of the world and of man is ultimately to be explained. This is the light, the *logos*, the divine word, which makes all things plain; which shows that

No detail but, in place allotted it, was prime
And perfect.
If I stoop
Into a dark tremendous sea of cloud,
It is but for a time: I press God's lamp
Close to my breast; its splendour, soon or late,
Will pierce the gloom: I shall emerge one day.

Paracelsus.

Both Tennyson and Browning would attribute this final assurance to something else than knowledge, and they would not call it proof.

Like an Æolian harp that wakes
No certain air, but overtakes
Far thought with music that it makes:

Such seem'd the whisper at my side:
'What is it thou knowest, sweet voice?' I cried.
'A hidden hope,' the voice replied:

So heavenly-toned, that in that hour
From out my sullen heart a power
Broke, like the rainbow from the shower,

To feel, altho' no tongue can prove,
That every cloud, that spreads above
And veileth love, itself is love.

The Two Voices.

Their certainty was what is usually called immediate, intuitive; it anticipated knowledge and outran proof. But we have found the same so-called intuition, the same outrunning of proof—which is really the forecast of reason and the first step of proof—in all our knowledge. We have examples of it in every science, and above all in the conception of the world as ruled by law that somehow secures permanence amidst change, unity in variety, and the strength that clothes itself with beauty. It is in this faith, or on this hypothesis, that science seeks to know and man leads his daily life. And this hypothesis is not proved, for there are still in the natural world causes we

cannot trace, effects we cannot account for. *But it is being proved.* Science, philosophy, nay, the common thoughts of men and their common actions are, in the last resort, nothing else but one continuous and unresting proof of it. It remains a hypothesis, and will remain a hypothesis to the end of time; but it is a hypothesis surer than any particular fact, for it is a condition of the meaning of every fact. This is why I should call it knowledge. And in the same sense, I call that knowledge which our poets call 'faith.'

Now, it is no new thing in our days thus to assimilate religious belief to the creed of science, and to say that the latter like the former rests on hypothesis. But it is intended thereby to disarm the reason that questions as well as the reason that answers. This is to defend the weakness of the one by the weakness of the other, and to seek refuge in the darkest depths of despair.

And yet even this argument is not without its truth or without its use. It *is* true that all our knowledge—not philosophy, not science only, but the knowledge that 'thou art thou and hast hands and feet'—rests

on hypothesis. The element of truth in this argument is, like every truth, a useful truth. And its use lies here: it shows this, at least, that Agnosticism, Positivism, Scepticism have no right to concentrate their attacks upon man's religious beliefs alone. The argument they direct against these beliefs applies in the same manner and has precisely the same validity when directed against all other knowledge, even that which appears to be most immediate and direct. The argument, therefore, proves too much. It destroys the very engines of attack, for it destroys the knowledge with which knowledge is assailed.

'You play the order of Nature, against the higher order of moral law and religious faith,' we can say to them. 'But your probing is not deep enough, and your doubts lack courage. Probe further, intensify your doubt, use your weapons and spare not. You will then find that your weapons are turned against your own breast, and that you are rending your own vitals. You have a half-truth in your hands, and it is the sure mark of a half-truth that it refutes itself,

and makes room for a fuller truth. You have remembered that your beliefs rest on hypotheses: you have forgotten that there are some hypotheses which are so inwrought into the very texture of rational experience that to deny them is to destroy experience.'

Such a hypothesis, I believe, is the hypothesis in which our poets found an anchor that held. And if I have not misunderstood the most daring and, on the whole, the most successful of all the schemes which modern thought has employed to bring some order into this strange world, and into the still stranger life of man, it rests upon the same hypothesis and brings the same message to mankind. *It is the hypothesis of God.*

Harbouring no error that it can detect, fostering no hope however fair that merely flatters, fearing no failure, or contradiction, or sorrow or sin that darkens human life, but confronting them all with open brow, nay, recognizing that on every hand and in every detail of the simplest fact there are meanings it cannot fathom, it still finds its hypothesis work. That which the idea of cause is to the common mind, or the concep-

tion of the order of nature to the man of science—a principle he must hold true or cease to think, and which he is always proving though no proof is final—such is the conception of God to the Idealist. He finds it implied in all his knowledge, the final premise of all his life. To this conception he returns from all his wanderings; indeed it has followed him all the way, for it is the very life of all his thinking.

That it is 'only a hypothesis' is true; and being only a hypothesis, designed to bring order into the life of man and intelligible coherence into the scheme of things, it must stand side by side with other hypotheses—with chance, or fate, with matter or blind necessity. And need we fear the comparison? Can we not ask of this conception what order is there in the life of man or in the world, which is not at least conceivably of its bringing; what achievement, whether in knowledge or in goodness, which it has not inspired and guided? Ultimate proof of its truth can only come when there is no enigma which in its light does not become plain, and the Universe is seen to be the

transparent garment of God. But what advance is there which is not a progressive proof that it is valid? What is the movement of civilization itself except a gradual revelation of God, and the coming of his kingdom? Or is there a better fate that we can desire for man, who 'learns through evil that God is best,' than this of finding ever more fully as the ages move that he lives in God.

> That God, which ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far-off divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves.
>
> *In Memoriam*, cxxxi.

Man has the right of reason to this faith, and this faith brings with it, to quote the wise words of Dr. Edward Caird, 'If not Immortality, then something better, if better there can be.'