
ART OF LIVING IN THE POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING

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Abstract: Robert Browning ranks among the major poets of Victorian age. He was primarily a poet of Man. He believed in God, immortality, and life after death. The poetry of Browning conveys a message. It is the message of an optimist, of one who is looking at the world and at the life of Man, with a light of hope in his eyes. The cardinal point of his optimism is his faith in the benignity of the total plan of God. The basic theme is that God is in his heaven and all is right with the world of men. The poetry of Browning gives a word of promise that the human soul is immortal, whereby man must not get obsessed with his failures. There shall be many more lives in which to accomplish what has remained unaccomplished in one. Of course, Browning qualifies his optimism by stressing upon the need of human endeavor. Browning's definition of struggle and success is resounding. He demands the utmost efforts from man, whatever the result may be. The gap between desire and achievement is a universal feature of human life. Continuous human endeavor without aiming at quick returns gives meaning to life. The worth of life lies in the efforts, not in accomplishment, in the intentions and impulses of the soul, not in achievements. Thought is always greater than its execution.

Browning says that a man is not to be judged by the visible output of his life. One should not feel Disheartened if his struggle goes unaccounted in the world's estimation. God knows of the motivation. The aspirations and the silent efforts inherent in man's soul never go unrewarded by God. Browning reminds us of P.B. Shelley's Ode to the West Wind in which Shelley predicts that:

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind"

Life is meaningless without work and struggle. One must give one's contribution to human race for which God has sent us to this earth. According to Browning, success is not the name of self satisfaction and happiness. One should not run after momentary success in worldly sense. To pursue the mirage is not the name of success. Success itself is not a parameter of happiness because the latter depends on so many things. But happiness may be the parameter of success. Human beings should enjoy persistent struggle. A passive man is burden on this earth. It is better to do something than do nothing. Browning's optimism is not wise passiveness. A man may indeed sigh for rest at the end of his life, may even regard the body as a prison-house and look forward to deliverance from it, but Browning's normal gospel is continuous efforts. The so-called difficulties of life are an essential and necessary part of it. Only by testing and using errors, they will crumble themselves. Only by experience, we can wring knowledge from ignorance. Confusing as like may be, puzzling in its mixture of good and evil, the lovely and ugly, it must be faced happily. One should not pick and choose, nor select only the sunny side of the road, take everything. Try to make every work, every moment and every situation enjoyable. In the poem The Last Ride Together, Browning shows the hollowness of so-called success in life. Failure with a degree of hope is

better than laurels of victory, with no hope of future remembrance. In this poem, we have a dejected lover, who tries to muster up enough courage than his very failure. He blesses his beloved and thinks that he will be able to find his love in the next life, for God creates the love to reward the love. The lover consoles himself in a bold and daring manner. He says : "Fail I alone, in words and deeds? Why all men strive and who succeeds? Look at the end of work, contrast The petty Done the Undone vast" Browning says that it is no use of thinking of the disappointments of the past hopes. No man can taste all his plans and turns to reality. The lover who hoped that he would win the beloved's hand and marry her, his achievement is only a last ride with her. But the gap between the aspirations and accomplishments need not depress him. Nor will it serve any purpose to speculate by which methods he might have been able to win his beloved's heart. What a man can do is work. Results are always in the hands of God. Man's duty is to work and make full use of God-given gifts. The poem Rabbi Ben Ezra teaches that rebuffs of life should be considered as sting to urge us on. Our struggle and pain that we have to bear are measure of our ultimate success. Browning teaches us to make ourselves strong. We are only human beings, not God. Therefore, it is likely that we will do so many things which are wrong or foolish. But passiveness is more absurd than doing wrong. To err is human. When we do wrong, experiences soon teach us our mistake. Browning says in Rabbi Ben Ezra:

"Then, 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!"

Persistent struggle is the first and last message from Browning. A man is judged by hidden Motives, striving for noble expression, sincere purpose without finding a language. God does not judge man by his materialistic attainments and successful records. Browning says that the more a man struggles, the more he is rewarded by God in the next world. So struggle never goes in vain. The efforts that may be unsuccessful in the worldly eyes will be rated high in the eyes of God. We should not submit to the sorrows and sufferings. What makes a man distinguished from others is his capacity to handle the odd situations. According to Browning, one should not feel discouraged by the judgment of this world, as God knows everything about us. Not man but God is the real and impartial judge of our aspirations and silent efforts. In Epilogue to Asolando, the poet believes firmly that the better days are bound to come. He inspires that fight with odds and evils make a man strong. Browning says that evil serves as a contrast to good and enhances the value of good, just as silence emphasizes sound and discordant notes heighten the beauty of harmony. He says In Abt Vogler;

"The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying Sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so much
good more"

Browning knows that human life is imperfect and there is evil in spite of benevolence of God. Therefore, the only way is the faith in struggle. It is not the achievement that counts. Even the failure contributes to the evolution. Evil is our foe and no victory is possible without a foe. Hence evil is the necessary condition of man's progress. Perfection is an ideal but this ideal can never be wholly attained. Only greater and greater approximation to it, is possible. Heaven loses charm if ideal is achieved in this world. Therefore, life is preparation for the goal which is not to be attained here, but an ideal that can be realized only in heaven. In the poem Evelyn Hope, the hero, a

middle aged person, is three times older than his sixteen years old beloved. Evelyn Hope, the loved one, dies at the early age of sixteen and the lover is sitting by the side of the dead body. He has never disclosed his feelings to her when she was alive. She hardly knows him. A middle-aged man is in love with a young girl could easily appear ludicrous. But the faith in the justice of God keeps up his confidence. The lover may have to live several lives experience before he is fit to receive the reward of his love. The lover says:

"Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you"

Philosophy such as this will not convince many readers especially in the age of doubt and skepticism. But its value as a source of consolation when one has suffered a great loss cannot be questioned. It is to be noted also that Browning believes in the attainment of perfection or near-perfection by stages, as is clear from the lover's faith that through the various lives he may have to live. So there is no repentance or regret on failure in Browning's poetry. He asserts

"Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
Heedless of far gain,
Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
Bad is our bargain!"

Thus in an era, which is known for doubts and confusion, where the poets like Arnold and Tennyson were crying over the fallen religious values and the sudden demise of faith, Robert Browning Presents himself as a great saint preaching people how to live life smoothly, peacefully and happily. Browning has taught people to believe in God and do the actions as actions are always rewarded later or soon. All this makes Browning's poetry an exquisite expression of his Art of Living and Browning, the most remarkable poet of Victorian age, telling people the mantras of happy life.

References

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