

# THE COURIER CLUBS WITH ANY MAGAZINE. WRITE FOR TERMS.

**THE BROWNING LETTERS.**

It is safe to say that everyone who reads the charming letters of this wonderful man and woman must agree with Miss Barrett that letters are indeed the most vital part of biography. Certainly these volumes give an insight into the personality of two great poets, never before vouchsafed to their admirers. It is more than a biography. It is the story of a most romantic love, told in the poets' own words, and has all the fascinating elements of a novel of the old letter-writing school. The first thing to be noted about the letters is that they are worthy of their authors. They are such as one would expect from the author of "Sonnets from the Portuguese" and "Aurora Leigh"—from the author of "Pippa Passes" and "The Ring and the Book." Throughout two volumes of some twelve hundred pages, we find much thoughtful comment on literature and life, but it is after all rather incidental to the main subject. Above everything else they are love letters, and their writers show that their chief interest lies only in their love for each other and each other's work.

As a commentary on the immortal work Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett have given to the English language, their letters will be indispensable to every American who has learned to know and love them. Of special interest are the comments made from time to time on American authors. Says Miss Barrett, referring to James Russell Lowell: "He has a refined fancy, and is graceful for an American critic, but the truth is, otherwise, that he knows nothing of English poetry, or the next thing to nothing, and has merely had a dream

of the early dramatists. The amount of his reading in that direction is an article in the Retrospective Review, which contains extracts, and he re-extracts the extracts and re-quotes the quotations. How a writer of his talents and pretensions could make up his mind to make up a



Robert Browning in 1845. After a photograph in "Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett." Copyright, 1898, by Harper & Brothers.

book on such slight substratum is a curious proof of the state of literature in America. Why, a lecturer on the English dramatists for a 'young ladies' academy here in England might take it to be necessary to have better information than he could gather from an odd volume of an old review. Altogether the fact is an epigram on the surface literature of America. As you say, their books do not suit us."

On Edgar Allan Poe Miss Barrett is not quite so severe. "I send you," she

writes, "a most frightful extract from an American magazine sent to me yesterday on the subject of mesmerism, and you are to understand that the Mr. Edgar Poe who stands committed in it is my dedicatory; so while I am sending, you shall have his poems with his mesmeric experience, and decide whether the outrageous compliment to Elizabeth Barrett Browning or the experiment on M. Valdemar goes furthest to prove him mad. There is poetry in the man, though now and then seen through the great gaps of bathos. 'Politian' will make you laugh as the 'Raven' made me laugh, though with something in it which accounts for the hold it took upon people such as N. P. Willis and his peers. Some of the lyrics have power of a less questionable sort. For the author, I do not know him at all, and in my opinion there is more faculty shown in the account of that horrible mesmeric experience than in his poems."

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