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Review of "The Brownings"

Elizabeth W. Hibbs
Dickinson College

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Brownings. Osbert Burdett. Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929

The Brownings is a sympathetic study of the two English poets, which considers the life and writing of each contributory to a single life-story. That story is a romantic one. The author states it tersely when he says, "Among love stories it is a fairytale, and it is true."

Mr. Burdett has viewed the two Brownings as opposites, in their early life, their writing, their health, and much of their thinking. "She was wholly feminine . . . and he, as man and artist, was masculine to the core." One-half in itself was inadequate, but together, a nearly perfect whole was formed.

It was with this thought in mind that the chapters were planned. The youth of Elizabeth Barrett, in the first place, is presented as a direct contrast to that of Robert Browning; then, their early writings are unlike. The chapters which follow contain the love letters; which, this author maintains, reveal the real genius of the woman better than any of her poems. The next sections are concerned with the period of married life, during which Mrs. Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* and Browning's masterpieces, *Men and Women* and *The Ring and the Book* were produced. A concluding chapter is devoted to Browning's widowed years, but always with reference to the influence of his wife upon him, even after her death.

The biographer has done his utmost to be judicious. It is obvious that he admires both Brownings, but at the same time he has not failed to indicate defects in their writing and their characters. Her prose, as exemplified in the letters, ranks with Browning's best poetry, whereas his prose style is poorer than her worst poems. The author supports his contentions by numerous excerpts from the letters and the poems, to the end that our appetites are whetted to read more of the originals.

Aside from the valuable critical study, the impetus to further reading given by this volume is its chief recommendation. After completing the book, the reader cannot overcome an irresistible urge to read the poems and the love letters in their entirety.

Elizabeth W. Hibbs.

Ann Vickers. Sinclair Lewis. Doubleday, Doran, 1933

In his recent novel, *Ann Vickers*, Sinclair Lewis is essentially a realist. His drawing of the Copperhead Gap Penitentiary is probably one of his most vivid pictures; certainly it is one of his most natural-