

Handout 1 – Ella Sophia Armitage

89:274. Ella Sophia Armitage to RB

Easthill

Rotherham

Dec. 6. 1889

Dear Mr Browning

I have for the last three years been conducting a little Browning Society during the winter months, and this has led me to realize what an admirable instrument of culture the study of your poetry is. It has made me long very much that working-men might become acquainted with it. **What do people most want, whose lives are filled up with hard and monotonous work, but great thoughts to uplift them out of the narrow circle in which they live, and at the same time to shed a nobler light upon their daily toil? But at present it is impossible for the working-man to read your poems; the price is beyond his reach, and besides that he requires a key to open the meaning and to explain the unaccustomed learning which they contain.** Now I am writing to ask you if you will give me permission to edit a Working Man's Browning; to wit, a small selection of your poems, with an analysis and notes attached to each. I should hope to make it such a taste of your works as should make the reader wish for more. **I hate anthologies and selections myself; but a working-man's reading time is short, and he requires help towards the best books, and help in them.** My plan would be to give the text first, unpolluted by any notes or references; then to follow it by an analysis of the poem, with notes explaining the difficult words. I enclose as a specimen an analysis of A Grammarian's Funeral. The poems which I have thought of as suitable for such a selection are as follows:

Love among the ruins.

The Lost Leader

By the Fireside

The Guardian Angel

Incident of the French Camp

The Patriot

The Boy and the Angel

The Italian in England

The Last Ride Together

A Grammarian's Funeral

Holy Cross Day

Christmas Eve.

Fra Lippo Lippi.

Bishop Blougram's Apology

Dis Aliter Visum

Abt Vogler

Rabbi Ben Ezra

A Death in the Desert

Prospice

One Word more.

But if you should be gracious to my proposal, I would of course take any poems which you were pleased to select, if the above list does not commend itself to you. I have roughly calculated that the above poems, with a sufficient allowance of analysis and notes, might be printed in a volume of the same size as the "Camelot Classics", which sell for a shilling; and a shilling is the price that I aim at, as best suited to my working-men friends. As regards the business part of the transaction, I should not wish for any share in the profits of the sale during your lifetime, as this would be to me entirely a labour of love and gratitude. I send you herewith a copy of a book I published some years ago, to show you that I have a certain amount of equipment of knowledge. This book also was written with the view of bringing the delight of English history within reach of the uneducated classes.

I cannot conclude this letter without expressing what I should like to utter, whether my design finds favour in your eyes or not, my deep gratitude to you for the uplifting and enlarging which I & so many others have got from your poetry.

Yours faithfully

Ella S. Armitage