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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Etta Culbertson Kennedy entitled "Louis Napoleon in Browning's Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau: A True Portrait of a Double Personality." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

ARRAY(0x7f6ffe3d1dc0)

Accepted for the Council:
Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

December 6, 1949

To the Committee on Graduate Study:

I am submitting to you a thesis written by Etta Culbertson Kennedy entitled "Louis Napoleon in Browning's *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau:* A True Portrait of a Double Personality." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Committee

Dean of the Graduate School

LOUIS NAPOLEON IN BROWNING'S PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

A TRUE PORTRAIT OF A DOUBLE PERSONALITY

A THESIS

Submitted to
The Committee on Graduate Study
of
The University of Tennessee
in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

by

Etta Culbertson Kennedy

December 1949

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor Kenneth L. Knickerbocker for his helpful guidance and courteous cooperation during the months devoted to this study of Browning's poem on Louis Napoleon. It was through a discussion with Professor Knickerbocker that I became interested in the subject, and I sincerely feel that whatever value this work may have is owing to his admirable direction. It has been a pleasure to work with him.

E.C.K.

268070

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INTRODUCTION

The following study consists of an attempt to show that Robert Browning has drawn a reliable portrait of Louis Napoleon, the last Emperor of the French, in the poem *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society.* The study is divided into four parts. Chapter I is concerned with the questions of whether Browning has allowed his artistic ability to prevent him from presenting the true portrait of Louis Napoleon and whether *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* deserves to be called a poem. Chapter II traces the development of Browning's interest in Louis Napoleon and states why the poet wrote the self-apology of the Emperor's life. Chapter III is devoted to the poet's technique in the composition of the poem and in drawing the portrait of the Emperor. Chapter IV is an analysis of Louis Napoleon's policy as it is presented in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.*

In this study I have used the first edition of *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* (1871). For comparisons with later editions and for line numbers I have used the Porter and Clarke edition (1926).

Through this study I have found that Browning has drawn a true portrait of Louis Napoleon by presenting two profiles of the man. The first profile is that of the apologist, the Prince of the poem. In supporting Browning's lines that portray the idealistic side of Louis Napoleon I have

relied on the letters of Mrs. Browning, who made the Emperor her hero, and the writings of Louis Napoleon himself. The most important of these works are Ideas of Napoleonism (1839), L'Idée Napoléonienne (1840), and Extinction of Pauperism (1844). In all three of these works Louis Napoleon has defended Napoleon I for the good works of his reign and excused him for his mistakes. These works were originally published as separate books, but I used them as they appear in the 1852 edition of Louis Napoleon's Political and Historical Works, which was based on the text of the Temblaire edition of 1848. I have not been able to ascertain whether or not Browning read Louis Napoleon's works. They are not listed among the works in Browning's library, but they were published separately and collectively twenty years before the appearance of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. I have also relied extensively on Memoirs of The Empress Eugenie, edited by Le Comte Fleury, a personal friend of the Emperor and the Empress.

The second profile of the poem is that of Napoleon III, the Emperor, as he appears in histories of the period and in the letters of Robert Browning. The two profiles combine to give the portrait of the dreamy idealist who became the unstable opportunist with imperialistic ambitions.

CHAPTER I

BROWNING — BOTH ARTIST AND HISTORIAN IN PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

The publication of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society, in December, 1871, gave rise to many comments. It was obvious that the poem was concerned with the life of Louis Napoleon, the last Emperor of the French. The defeated Emperor was a popular topic of discussion when the poem came off the press; therefore, every critic seized the opportunity of reviewing the poet's work. There was disagreement as to Browning's interpretation of the Emperor's character. Some called it an eulogy; others saw it as an attack on the man. Some said the poet did not intend for it to be taken as a portrait of the Emperor; others said it was a portrait. A satisfactory answer has not yet been given: was Browning an artist, a historian, or both in writing Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau? The following are a few of the many statements which have been made in answer to this question. Berdoe claims that it is

> not precisely a soul-portrait of the Emperor Napoleon III. Mr. Browning does not draw portraits — he analyses characters. He has therefore used the Emperor as a model is used by an artist.[1]

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[1]Edward Berdoe, The Browning Cyclopaedia (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), p. 360.

King agrees that

> Browning is taking Napoleon III, as a model from which he will work, yet he is not endeavouring to make us understand what he conceives was that monarch's real character.[2]

Cooke says that "the poet does not adhere strictly to history."[3] Sim sees the poem as an outline "portraiture of Napoleon III in 1871."[4]

Through the following analysis of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau I believe I can prove that each of these statements is unreliable. Browning has analyzed the character of Napoleon III, but he has also drawn his portrait. It is not the man's portrait in 1871, however, but his portrait while he was still the Emperor of the French in 1868. The poem does adhere closely to the historical facts of the Republic and the Second Empire. Although the poet lets the Emperor speak his apology, he does reveal what he thought was "that monarch's real character." Browning has traced Louis Napoleon's growth from the idealistic youth to the imperialistic ruler. In this way he has presented two profiles of the Emperor: the one presented

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[2]Joseph King, Jun., "On Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," The Browning Society's Papers, Part XI, No. 53 (1889), p. 350.

[3]George Willis Cooke, A Guide-Book to the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1891), p. 304.

[4]Frances M. Sim, Robert Browning, Poet and Philosopher (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1924), p. 142.

in Mrs. Browning's letters, and the other given by historians. I believe Griffin and Minchin have more nearly stated what Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau really is: "the poem is neither an attack nor an eulogy; but the kind of sophistical defence which an opportunist might offer for his opportunism."[5]

In letters to friends Browning has given a similar explanation of the poem. To Edith Story he wrote:

> I don't think, when you have read more, you will find I have 'taken the man for any Hero' — I rather made him confess he was the opposite, though I put forward what excuses I thought he was likely to make for himself, if inclined to try.[6]

To Isa Blagden he added: "it is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say for himself."[7]

Browning has let Louis Napoleon make a reasonable apology for his life. In doing this the poet has selected those facts from the Emperor's life that he thought needed defending the most. He has elaborated on his selections by using illustrations and figures characteristic of the Emperor's interests and speech. On first reading the poem one may think that

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[5]W. Hall Griffin and Harry C. Minchin, The Life of Robert Browning (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1938), p. 244.

[6]Letters of Robert Browning, collected by T. J. Wise, ed. T. L. Hood (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), p. 152. Additional references will be cited: Hood, op. cit.

[7]Letters of Robert Browning to Miss Isa Blagden, arranged for publication by A. J. Armstrong (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 1923), p. 197. Additional references will be cited: Blagden, op. cit.

Browning has let his artistic imagination go to work on the facts. Instead of over-shadowing the portrait with irrelevant details, however, these illustrations and figures add the fine details to the portrait that the cold facts of history omit. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is a peculiar combination of the idealistic and the realistic; so was Louis Napoleon. The reader of his early works — Ideas of Napoleonism, Extinction of Pauperism, and L'Idée Napoléonienne — will find many parallels with Browning's lines. Browning has been an artistic historian in writing the Emperor's apology. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau has "mystified most of its readers";[8] Louis Napoleon has mystified historians. In approaching a study of the poem it is well to keep in mind a statement by Griffin and Minchin: "no one who approaches his [Browning's] work with those two qualifications — intelligence and sympathy — need go away empty."[9]

There are those, however, who do not believe that Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau deserves to be called a poem. Dowden says that it is "an interesting intellectual exercise, and if this constitutes a poem, a poem it is; but the theme

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[8]C. H. Herford, Robert Browning (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1905), p. 197.

[9]Griffin and Minchin, op. cit., p. 302.

is fitter for a prose discussion."[10]

At the time of the composition of the poem Browning wrote to Isa Blagden that he considered it a sample of his "very best work."[11] Three months later, however, he qualified his first judgment in a letter to Edith Story:

> What poetry can be in a sort of political satire, made the milder because of the present fortunes of the subject? So, all you are to understand by the gift of the thing is that, for want of better, it is my best at present.[12]

Political casuistry is a heavy subject for poetry, and certainly Browning did not think of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau as a poem in the same terms in which he thought of "Abt Vogler," "Saul," and "By the Fire-Side." Parts of the poem do read almost like prose; yet the lines fall into rhythmical groups and sentences. Even those who adversely criticize the poem as a whole quote the following lines as an example of pure poetry:

> Ay, still my fragments wander, music-fraught,
> Sighs of the soul, mine once, mine now, and mine
> For ever! Crumbled arch, crushed aqueduct,
> Alive with tremors in the shaggy growth
> Of wild-wood, crevice-sown, that triumphs there
> Imparting exultation to the hills!
> Sweep of the swathe when only the winds walk
> And waft my words above the grassy sea
> Under the blinding blue that basks o'er Rome.
> ll. 834-42

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[10] Edward Dowden, Robert Browning (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1904), p. 297.

[11] Blagden, op. cit., p. 193.

[12] Hood, op. cit., p. 152.

Alliteration, assonance, balance, shifting caesuras, and imagery combine in making this an unusually effective passage. Such poetic devices are used to advantage throughout the poem. Note the balance and repetition in the following lines:

> Rather than his way: way superlative.
> *l*. 1264
>
> Bravest of thinkers, bravest of the brave.
> *l*. 1831

Images are drawn from the fields of mathematics and astrology. As it will be shown in Chapter III, however, these images not only reflect the poet's interests but are in keeping with the Emperor's interests; therefore, their use as poetic devices should not be over-emphasized. The following lines are used effectively by the Prince of the poem to defend his position as the ruler of France and also a lover of Italy, but the graceful poetic image that they present cannot be overlooked:

> Up you mount in minute mist,
> And bridge the chasm that crushed your quietude,
> A spirit-rainbow, earthborn jewelry
> Outsparkling the insipid firmament
> Blue above Terni and its orange-trees.
> *ll*. 1141-45

In other words, although there are prosaic sections of the poem and although the subject is heavy for poetry, Browning does rise to pure poetry at times. *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* is truly a poem, not merely an intellectual exercise. As Phelps reminds us, Browning has given an adequate reason for the use of poetry in relating history or biography. Poetry

was the best medium at his disposal for giving the world his thoughts on any subject; therefore, he used it freely.[13]

At the end of The Ring and the Book, Browning explains the value of the artistic in relating thoughts:

> So, British Public, who may like me yet,
> (Marry and amen!) learn one lesson hence
> Of many which whatever lives should teach:
> This lesson, that our human speech is naught,
> Our human testimony false, our fame
> And human estimation words and wind.
> Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
> Because, it is the glory and good of Art,
> That Art remains the one way possible
> Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.[14]

In Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau Browning has been both artist and historian. As the following chapters attempt to prove, he has written a reliable review of the life and character of Louis Napoleon in poetic form. For the addition of the artistic to the historical the reader should be grateful, for as Schevill has stated: "To be completely objective is to be as dry and colorless as an adding-machine."[15]

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[13] William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning: How to Know Him (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1915), p. 9.

[14] Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book in The Complete Poetical Works of Browning, ed. H. E. Scudder (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1895), p. 601.

[15] Hermann Oncken, Napoleon III and the Rhine, introduction by Ferdinand Schevill (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), p. xvii.

CHAPTER II

BROWNING'S INTEREST IN NAPOLEON III

Browning was interested in the career of Louis Napoleon from the time that he was elected President of the French Republic in 1848 until his death in 1873. There are references in several poems from 1855 to 1879 to the Emperor. "A Lovers' Quarrel" (1855) contains a reference to the adverse criticism of the Emperor's marriage:

> What's in the "Times"? — a scold
> At the Emperor deep and cold;
> He has taken a bride
> To his gruesome side,
> That's as fair as himself is bold:
> There they sit ermine-stoled,
> And she powders her hair with gold.
> ll. 29-35

In "Apparent Failure" (1863) he says that it has been seven years since he was in Paris to see the baptism of the Prince, Louis Napoleon's only son. He ironically attributes one of the suicides to the man's aspiration to be "Buonaparte" and live in the Tuileries. In 1871 appeared Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society, an apology for the Emperor's life. As late as 1873 the poet had not cleared his mind of Napoleon III, for there are at least three direct references to him in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. There is a slash at the Emperor's false promise to liberate Italy:

> And, woe's me, still placards the Emperor
> His confidence in war he means to wage,
> God aiding and the rural populace.
> 11. 134-36

The Emperor is mentioned along with other leaders of the period in section iv of the poem, and later Browning attacks the Empress's influence over Napoleon's twenty years of usurpation. Finally, the reference to the Emperor's illness in "Doctor" — (1879) may be to Louis Napoleon's last years, for he died while being prepared for a third kidney operation.

It is obvious that Browning was more than casually interested in the life of Louis Napoleon, and from these references alone it is evident that the poet did not admire the Emperor. The question naturally arises as to why Browning was interested in the man and why he decided to write a review of his life in the form of a self-apology. The answer is three-fold. In the first place, Browning was very much interested in the liberation of Italy; therefore, he became interested in the man who professed to be the liberator. In the second place, Mrs. Browning became an ardent admirer of Louis Napoleon and defended him at every opportunity. In the third place, Browning was always interested in anyone who appeared to be a failure and whom the public condemned. In following through these three points of interest it becomes obvious why Browning wrote Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.

As early as 1844 Browning was keenly sympathetic with the Italian cause, for in "The Italian in England," written shortly after his visit to Italy in that year, no words were too harsh for the Austrian leader. If the Italian patriot could have three wishes one of them would be:

> I would grasp Metternich until
> I felt his red wet throat distil
> In blood through these two hands.
> ll. 121-23

When the Brownings went to Florence in 1847, the move for Italian unity was already in the air. The Austrian flag flew in Lombardy and Venetia. It was thought that England would send a minister to the Vatican, and Browning offered his services by writing to R. M. Milnes from Pisa on March 31 of the same year: "I would be glad and proud to be the secretary to such an embassy, and to work like a horse in my vocation."[1]

The English government, however, did not send a mission to the Vatican. In 1848 Sicily revolted, and the Austrians were driven out of Milan. Charles Albert began a national movement; the Austrians were evacuated from Venice. Then came the news that Louis Philippe had abdicated and that a Republic was proclaimed in Paris. Most of the English in Italy became alarmed and left immediately, but the Brownings

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[1] T. Wemyss Reid, The Life, Letters, and Friendships of Richard Monckton Milnes (London: Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1890), V. I, p. 384.

remained at Casa Guidi. In 1849, when the Grand Duke was driven from Florence, a tree of liberty was planted near the Brownings' door. Soon, however, Charles Albert abdicated in favor of his son, Victor Emmanuel. Garibaldi and his followers were no match for the Austrians, and the cause of Italian unity was temporarily lost. The Grand Duke returned to Florence in an Austrian uniform. All of these activities were keenly observed by the Brownings; in fact, it has been suggested that Browning's poem "The Patriot" may refer to the Grand Duke's exit from and return to Florence.[2]

In 1849 French troops were left in Rome to protect the Temporal Power of the Pope. Mrs. Browning was disturbed and wanted Louis Napoleon to remove them. On December 1, 1849, she wrote:

> he has shown himself up to this point to be an upright man with noble impulses . . . what, after all, will he manage to do at Rome? . . . there is a stain upon France in the present state of the Roman affair . . . I yearn to see the act cancelled.[3]

At this time, Mrs. Browning was only interested in Louis Napoleon because of the Italian situation, but her esteem

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[2]William Clyde DeVane, A Browning Handbook (New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1935), p. 354.

[3]The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, ed. Frederic G. Kenyon (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1897), V. I, pp. 428-29. Additional references will be cited: Kenyon, op. cit.

for him personally soon began to grow. In 1851 the Brownings made a visit to their homeland and on their return to Italy halted in Paris. They were on hand for the *coup d'état* of December 2 and witnessed Louis Napoleon's progress through the city before he took the title of Emperor. Mrs. Browning earnestly defended the *coup d'état* and vividly described Paris as she saw it on the days following Louis Napoleon's seizure of power. He had broken his oath, but it was only "the husk of an oath," and he was honest and sincere.[4] In her opinion the whole state of affairs was exaggerated, and the brilliant military display delighted her. On January 6, 1852, she wrote that Paris was "a city of fairs just now — brilliant with sunshine and gaiety."[5] On April 1, she continued to praise the Emperor:

> there are unmistakable symptoms everywhere of reviving prosperity. . . . considering the tremendous complications of the position, I believe he has done nearly as well as any other honest and able man could do. . . . I liked the President's reception — it was frank and bold, and direct . . . at the present moment he stands strongly.[6]

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[4]Kenyon, *op. cit.*, V. II, pp. 36-37.

[5]*Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to Her Sister, 1846-1859*, ed. Leonard Huxley (London: John Murray, 1929), p. 153. Additional references will be cited: Huxley, *op. cit.*

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 159.

From this time on her enthusiasm for the Emperor grew rapidly. In 1849 she had written: "I have not made a demi-god of Louis Napoleon."[7] In 1852 she wrote: "I do maintain that, ape or demi-god, to insult him where he is, is to insult the people who placed him there."[8]

In the fall of 1852 the Brownings returned to Florence, where they continued to observe the political events of the time. Even in such an artistic work as Browning's "Old Pictures in Florence" (1853) there is a reflection of the poet's sympathy with the Italian cause. He attacks the Grand Duke and sees that Art will return to Italy once her freedom is restored.

Mrs. Browning continued to follow the actions of Louis Napoleon. Her young son took the Emperor for his hero. In November, 1855, the Brownings were back in Paris, and Mrs. Browning was again delighted with the state of affairs. Louis Napoleon had favored universal suffrage, aided the poor, and beautified the city. In December, Mrs. Browning wrote to her sister: "It's a wonderful place, and of Louis Napoleon I think with increasing respect, the more I get at facts."[9]

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[7]Kenyon, op. cit., V. I, p. 428.

[8]Ibid., V. II, p. 51.

[9]Huxley, op. cit., p. 236.

By November, 1856, the Brownings had returned to Florence. Mrs. Browning came to believe so completely in her hero that in April, 1857, she wrote Louis Napoleon a letter pleading the recall of Victor Hugo from exile. The letter was never sent, but it exemplifies the absolute faith she had in the man.

On May 3, 1859, Louis Napoleon promised to free Italy "to the Adriatic." On June 8 he entered Milan in triumph but retreated when Russia threatened to support the Austrians. Even Mrs. Browning was temporarily shaken: "Napoleon had done so much . . . that one was not prepared for his retreating before the risk of a general war."[10] Her faith quickly returned, for a few weeks later she wrote: "Observe — I believe entirely in the Emperor. He did at Villafranca what he could not help but do."[11]

By September Mrs. Browning had composed and sent to The Athenaeum her narrative poem, "A Tale of Villafranca," in which she proclaims that Napoleon was a great idealist fighting for democracy and that he had been misunderstood. Soon afterwards she wrote "Napoleon III in Italy," in which she pictures him as the champion of democracy betrayed by

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[10]Huxley, op. cit., p. 319.

[11]Kenyon, op. cit., V. II, p. 323.

England and Prussia. Both of these works are defenses of the Emperor.

Browning, also, at this time expressed his views of Napoleon III in poetry, for Mrs. Browning said in a letter in March, 1860:

> Robert and I began to write on the Italian question together, and our plan was (Robert's own suggestion!) to publish jointly. When I showed him my ode on Napoleon he observed that I was gentle to England in comparison to what he had been, but after Villafranca . . . he destroyed his poem and left me alone. What Robert had written no longer suited the moment.[12]

He evidently had praised the Emperor to some extent for his assistance to Italy, but he lost all faith in the man after the peace treaty of Villafranca.

Mrs. Browning died on June 29, 1861, and Browning left Italy before the end of the summer. He never returned, although he remained interested in the country. His feeling for the Italian people is summed up in a statement from a letter to Isa Blagden on May 19, 1866: "their rights are indubitable: my liking for Italy was always a selfish one."[13]

Both Mr. and Mrs. Browning were intensely interested in the liberation of Italy and came to be interested in Louis

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[12]Kenyon, *op. cit.*, V. II, pp. 368-69.

[13]Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Napoleon because of his outward concern for the Italians. Mrs. Browning made the Emperor her hero, and she has presented a defense of his life in her letters that, as it will be shown later, parallels the defense Browning later let the Emperor speak for himself in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. Browning did not lose interest in Napoleon III after the close of the Austrian War and the death of Mrs. Browning, for he continued to speak of the Emperor in his letters.

Browning never admired Louis Napoleon, and as the years went by he became more and more disgusted with the man. In 1870 came the Franco-Prussian War; in July Browning wrote to Isa Blagden: "Well, Isa, here is the horrible war, -- after all the professions of peace! . . . I think, in the interests of humanity, he wants a sound beating this time and probably may get it!"[14]

In August he again wrote to Miss Blagden that "Napoleon is far from his old self, and these indecisions succeeded by rashnesses have tried the world's temper too long."[15] Three days later he wrote of "misfortune huddling upon misfortune to poor France, -- how broken she seems to be!"[16] One wonders

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[14] Hood, op. cit., pp. 138-39.

[15] Ibid., p. 141.

[16] Ibid., p. 142.

what defense Mrs. Browning would have made at this time for her Emperor, for Browning wrote that "not one human being could venture to approve the conduct of the Emperor — for what was ever more palpably indefensible?"[17]

In October, 1870, Browning vividly described Napoleon III as he saw him:

> there has been no knavery, only decline and fall of the faculties corporeal and mental: these came to their height ten years ago: since then he has been sinking into all the ordinary ways of the vulgar king, with "the dynasty" dangled before his nose by the verminous people about him.[18]

In 1871, the year of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, the poet spoke of the Emperor as "the wretched impostor," "a lazy old and wornout voluptuary," who had "neglected every duty, ignored every necessary."[19] At this time in a letter to Isa Blagden Browning revealed the true reason for his dislike for Napoleon III. It was not so much that the Emperor was ruthless and selfish, he was simply a weak character. Browning said: "he is not, nor ever was, a devil, only a weaker mortal than one's respect for human nature thought conceivable when given such splendid opportunities for good."[20]

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[17] Hood, op. cit., p. 142.

[18] Ibid., p. 143.

[19] Blagden, op. cit., p. 186.

[20] Ibid., pp. 186-87.

Following the publication of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Browning summed up his opinion of the defeated Emperor in two letters. To Isa Blagden he wrote:

> I thought badly of him at the beginning of his career, et pour cause; better afterward on the promises he made, and gave indications of intending to redeem; I think him very weak in the last miserable year. At his worst I prefer him to Thiers' best.[21]

And to Edith Story he wrote:

> I never at any time thought much better of him than now; and I don't think so much worse of the character as shown us in the last few years, because I suppose there to be a physical and intellectual decline of faculty, brought about by the man's own faults, no doubt — but I think he struggles against these.[22]

Browning's lack of admiration for Napoleon III is a third reason for his being interested in the man. Although the poet gave the Emperor credit for the good he accomplished, he never spoke a word of true praise for the man. Why, then, did Browning choose to write a long poem on the life of one for whom he had no admiration? Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is the Emperor's apology for his life; it is an adequate and reasonable apology. Browning did soften his criticism of the Emperor in his last years, but he never defended the man's career as Mrs. Browning did. He condemned him. The Emperor

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[21]Blagden, op. cit., p. 196.

[22]Hood, op. cit., p. 152.

of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is not the broken, tired old man of 1870-73; he is the Emperor of the French in 1868.

The answer is, of course, that Browning delighted in letting a character whose life seemed indefensible speak his own defense. He utterly despised Home, the medium; yet he wrote Mr. Sludge, "The Medium" in which the medium speaks his defense of spiritualists. It has been suggested that Bishop Blougram's Apology was directed at Cardinal Wiseman.[23] Certainly Blougram is not an admirable character, but the poet has let him speak a reasonable apology for his philosophy. Guido, the criminal in The Ring and the Book, was certainly unjustifiable in his actions; but Browning has let him speak a defense that is equal to one of any criminal lawyer. The poet did like to defend, in poetic form, anyone who had been universally criticized. Phelps states that he considers Browning "the greatest master of special pleading in all literature."[24] Napoleon III was considered a complete failure after the Franco-Prussian War; but he was not an ordinary tyrant. His life was a paradox; therefore, he was particularly suited for Browning's art. As Herford points out:

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[23] DeVane, op. cit., p. 214.

[24] Phelps, op. cit., p. 246.

> Louis Napoleon, who knew 'how life tastes to who sweeps the doorway,' and aspired to be 'king all the better he was cobbler once,' who had been capable of bold and noble projects, and who yet as emperor had not so much ignored them as acted in the directly contrary sense, offered indeed a golden chance.[25]

The contrast between what Louis Napoleon professed to be and what he really proved to be appealed to Browning and led him into a study of the man, which resulted in the portrait of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. By putting the apologia in the mouth of the Emperor himself the poet was able to express certain sophistries that otherwise would not seem plausible.

In October, 1870, Browning spoke of Napoleon III as "the greatest failure on record,"[26] but he did not consider the man a "complete" failure. In his poem, "Apparent Failure," written eight years before Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, the poet defended all so-called failures:

> The thickest cloud earth ever stretched;
> That, after Last, returns the First,
> Though a wide compass round be fetched;
> That what began best, can't end worst,
> Nor what God blessed once, prove accurst.
> ll. 59-63

Louis Napoleon would have been a better person if he had kept his many promises, if he had been true to the

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[25]C. H. Herford, "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," The Browning Society's Papers, Part VIII, No. 37 (1886), p. 136.

[26]Hood, op. cit., p. 143.

Italian cause, if he had not had imperialistic dreams; but he was one of God's creatures and as such he could not be a complete failure.

Browning had three reasons for being interested in the character of Louis Napoleon: the Emperor promised to liberate Italy; he was Mrs. Browning's hero; he was a paradoxical character, an "apparent" failure. The combination of these three interests resulted in Browning's writing Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.

CHAPTER III

AN ANALYSIS OF BROWNING'S TECHNIQUE IN WRITING PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

i.

An analysis of Browning's technique in writing Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau consists of two parts: the external aspects of the poem and the characterization of Louis Napoleon. The poem is probably a revised and enlarged copy of the long poem that Mrs. Browning states Browning was working on in 1860. Browning himself refers to an early draft of the poem in several letters. To Edith Story on January 1, 1872, he wrote:

> I . . . conceived the poem, twelve years ago in the Via del Tritone -- in a little handbreadth of prose, -- now yellow with age and Italian ink, -- which I breathed out into this full-blown bubble in a couple of months this autumn that is gone -- thinking it fair so to do.[1]

In a note accompanying the manuscript given to Balliol College, the poet is quoted as saying he finished the poem at Milton House, Glen Fincastle, Perthshire, on October 7, 1871. It seems, however, that Browning thought he had completed the poem on September 30, for this date stands opposite what is now line 1908 of the poem. This date was cancelled and October 7 was placed at the end of the manuscript.[2]

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[1]Hood, op. cit., p. 152.

[2]De Vane, op. cit., p. 316.

There can be only speculations as to why Browning evidently thought he had completed the poem at line 1908 and within the next seven days added 238 new lines. I believe, however, the answer is given within the poem. The central theme of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is Louis Napoleon's policy of expediency with especial attention to his participation in Italian affairs. With line 1908 the poet has brought this discussion to an end: "So Italy was free." He had written a sketch of the poem in 1860 when the Emperor's premature peace treaty at Villafranca was the uppermost topic of discussion throughout Europe. When the poet had let the man defend this action, he probably thought he had completed the Emperor's apology. Browning soon realized, however, that he had not completed the poem to his own satisfaction. He had never been sympathetic with the Emperor's truckling to the Empress and with his dynastic ambitions for his son. If he were going to portray the true character of Louis Napoleon, it was necessary to present these problems. The lines devoted to the Emperor's marriage and his heir bring the poem down to line 2072.

Why, then, did Browning add the final 74 lines to the poem? Line 2072 is certainly a fitting close for a poem on Louis Napoleon. The law of his life was based on expediency; line 2072 reads:

> And meanwhile use the allotted minute . . .

These final 74 lines, however, contain the key to the method of the poem, a key several critics have overlooked. Cooke says that throughout the poem Napoleon III is "addressing a woman who has asked about his career."[3] Sim maintains that the "poem is made difficult of understanding by the introduction of his listener, a woman of classic Greece."[4] King says the poem ends with the Prince's discovery that his companion is asleep.[5] Berdoe says "the Prince is talking with Lais, an adventuress, in a room near Leicester Square."[6] Dowden calls the poem a "casuistical monologue."[7] Although she goes on to interpret the poem as a "waking dream," Mrs. Orr calls it a "monologue."[8] Today the method Browning used for the Prince's apology is still misinterpreted by some, for Smalley wrote in 1948:

> Hohenstiel-Schwangau finds a pretty attentive listener who, like him, has seen better days. He can talk to her in private without fear that she can later use his confidences against him.[9]

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[3]Cook, op. cit., p. 303.

[4]Sim, op. cit., p. 144.

[5]King, op. cit., p. 360.

[6]Berdoe, op. cit., p. 361.

[7]Dowden, op. cit., p. 279.

[8]Mrs. Sutherland Orr, A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1892), p. 161.

[9]Browning's Essay on Chatterton, ed. Donald Smalley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 88-89.

But the poem is not a monologue; it is a reverie. Browning uses these final lines to tell us that the Prince has been alone all of the time in the Residenz and not in Leicester Square talking to the "bud-mouthed arbitress." The poem reads:

> So, i' the Residenz yet, not Leicester-square,
> Alone, — no such congenial intercourse! —
> My reverie concludes, as dreaming should,
> With daybreak.
>
> ll. 2135-38 (1871 ed.)

There are those, fortunately, who have read the poet's lines correctly. Herford states: "the whole experience turns out on the last page to be a dream, from which he awakens, 'still in the Residenz not Leicester Square.'"[10] Porter and Clarke summarize the situation:

> In this poem the Sphinx who puzzled all Europe is presented in solitude floating out a reverie in cigar-smoke, and solacing his dreamy soul by confiding a justification of his past life to an imaginary Lais.[11]

There is no question of the poem's being a reverie, not a monologue. But why did Browning decide to make this change in his technique? Certainly if the poem had ended at line 1908 or at line 2072 it would have been a monologue. Browning, moreover, originally planned to write a monologue, for he wrote to Robert Buchanan on January 25, 1871: "I wrote, myself, a

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[10]Herford, No. 37, op. cit., p. 136.

[11]Robert Browning, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, etc., ed. Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1926), p. ix.

monologue in his [Napoleon III's] name twelve years ago, and never could bring the printing to my mind as yet."[12]

The monologue certainly suited one side of Louis Napoleon's unstable character, and the choice of a courtesan for his listener was in keeping with his voluptuous nature, his preference for the gay, shady side of life. But the character of Louis Napoleon needed more than a monologue. A soliloquy would have served for the man's rationalizations, for as Browning stated in a letter to Edith Story: "depend on it, in a soliloquy, a man makes the most of his good intentions and sees great excuse in them -- far beyond what our optics discover!"[13] Some critics have interpreted Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau to be a soliloquy. Elisabeth Cary speaks of it as "this tangled soliloquy."[14] Mary Wilson says:

> the entire piece may be taken as the Emperor's soliloquy as he sits smoking in the Tuileries, through the small hours, sometime in the sixties. . . . he amuses himself by uttering, in dream shape, a defence of his life work.[15]

But if Browning had written the poem as a soliloquy, if the Prince had spent the night talking to himself, the effect of the courtesan would have been lost. He could have rationalized

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[12]Hood, op. cit., p. 145.

[13]Ibid., p. 152.

[14]Elisabeth Luther Cary, Browning, Poet and Man, A Survey (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), p. 146.

[15]F. Mary Wilson, A Primer on Browning (London: Macmillan and Company, 1891), pp. 166-67.

to himself, but an audience is necessary for an apology to sound convincing. The Prince calls the courtesan his "arbitress"; she is to decide whether his life is defensible. Therefore, the poem is not a soliloquy. For Louis Napoleon's apology a monologue was preferable to a soliloquy; but the monologue omits an outstanding trait of the man's character — his dreamy idealism. Palm states that when Louis Napoleon was in exile in England as a youth most people "were inclined to regard him as an inane dreamer."[16] He was a dreamer and his Political and Historical Works read like idealistic visions. The editor of the 1852 edition of these works says: "It seems like a dream to read these brief but teeming sentences, and to contrast the picture they present with the reality of what has since occurred."[17]

In keeping with the dreamy character of Louis Napoleon and with the contrast between what he professed to be and what he really was, Browning decided to turn the monologue into a reverie. In doing this, all that the poet needed to do was to add a few lines saying the Prince has spent the night dreaming. If Browning had gone back and inserted a passage at the beginning of the poem saying it was a reverie, much of the

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[16]Franklin Charles Palm, England and Napoleon III (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1948), p. 5.

[17]The Political and Historical Works of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (London: Office of the Illustrated London Library, 1852), V. I, p. 109. Further references will be cited: Napoleon III, Works.

effect of the apology would have been lost. He let the work stand as a monologue until the conclusion was reached. In this way he has clearly portrayed the two sides of the enigmatic Emperor's character — his incontinence and his dreaminess. He successfully completed the poem and revealed what he really thought of the man with the reference to Napoleon III's final imperialistic gamble in 1870.

This was the first edition of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau as it appeared in book form in December, 1871. The poem was successful in the beginning, for Browning wrote on December 29: "I am told my little thing is succeeding: sold 1400 copies in the first five days and before any notices appeared."[18] As interest in the fallen Emperor waned, however, the poem's popularity died; there was no second edition.

In the collected edition of Browning's works in 1888-89 nine new lines were added to the poem, several words altered, and the entire poem repunctuated. These new lines are lines 2135-44, which correct and explain the poet's mistake of using the name Clitumnus for Nemi in the section on the priestly mode of choosing successors. The question arises as to why the poet did not simply make the necessary changes in order to correct his mistake rather than write nine new lines. Certainly he did not fail to make the correction in the body of the poem simply

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[18] Blagden, op. cit., p. 196.

because he did not want to change lines he had previously written, for he did make many changes throughout the poem between the 1871 edition and the later copy. Many of these changes were simply words here and there, spellings, or punctuations. For example, in the later copy the poet has made such changes as "Head's" for "his," "I" for "we," "obsolete" for "stolen away," "proving" for "being," and "vaunting" for "mocking." In other passages, the wording of lines has been turned around or changed almost entirely. The following passages exemplify these changes. The 1871 wording is given first:

> Of the refiner, one and all, were flung
> To feed the flame their utmost, — e'en that block,
> He holds out breathlessly triumphant, — breaks
> Into some poisonous ore, its opposite.
>
> Of the refiner, one and all, are flung
> To feed the flame, he saw that e'en the block
> Such perfect man holds out triumphant, breaks
> Into some poisonous ore, gold's opposite.
>
> ll. 1323-26

Such changes have been improvements either by making the lines more rhythmical or by making the references more specific. Browning did not hesitate to change what he had written in order to improve the poetry, but he did not wish to make a change that would necessitate the deletion of effective lines. The passage misrepresenting the name of the lake is an "ox-whitening piece of prettiness"; so why destroy it?

The poet has done an excellent job of correcting his error. He has inserted the explanatory paragraph just after he has said:

> and somehow words deflect
> As the best cannon ever rifled will.
> _ll_. 2133-34

There is nothing unusual in misrepresenting the name of the lake. The Prince has been dreaming and one dreams many things that are not true; but when he awakens he should correct his error. Browning did not want to change the effective lines he had written; yet it was necessary to correct his error in some way. There was a place near the end of the poem where such an explanation would fit in perfectly; therefore, he wrote the nine lines explaining his mistake.

ii.

It has been seen that the poet began the poem as a monologue and concluded it as a reverie. In the beginning the courtesan, the Prince's imaginary auditress, is given a great deal of attention; as the poem progresses she gradually drops into the background. In the second part of the poem, she is completely forgotten until the speaker awakens from his dream. Why did Browning follow this technique in writing _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau_?

Browning wrote a sketch of the poem in Italy in 1860, and at that time he probably decided on a setting for the poem

in keeping with the Emperor's voluptuous nature. When he resumed work on the poem in 1871, he did not change basically what he had written earlier; he merely revised and enlarged it. He said himself that he added about 1800 new lines.[19] I believe Browning made the necessary revisions, owing to the passage of time, and proceeded to write, not realizing the poem would grow to the length it did. The imaginary listener is an important part of the setting, and the poet continues to remind us of her presence throughout the first part of the poem. The Prince even speaks for the "bud-mouthed arbitress" occasionally, as at the beginning of the third paragraph:

> Now I permit your plump lips to unpurse:
> "So far, one possibly may understand
> "Without recourse to witchcraft!" True, my dear.
> <u>ll</u>. 45-47

After an explanation of some act of his life, he often adds such a phrase as "You see?" or "Eh, my dear?" These brief breaks in the Prince's discourse are excellent reminders that he is trying to convince his listener of his sincerity in following the best possible course in life. He compares his station in life with hers. He asks her to try "the concluding sugar-drop" of tea while he continues his apology. Although the reader becomes less and less aware of her presence, the

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[19] Blagden, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 193.

Prince continues to remind us that she is there. When he begins to explain the means he has used to achieve his mission in life, he asks:

> Keep we together or part company?
> l. 650

The reader may wonder if this line is a suggestion that the woman is soon to be dropped from the poem. Soon the Prince continues the imaginary setting by reminding us the two are in Leicester-square and not the Residenz. The Prince, however, does become engrossed in his apology and less aware of the courtesan's presence. He addresses her for the last time at the end of his self-apology:

> There, my arch stranger-friend, my audience, both
> And arbitress, you have one half your wish,
> At least: you know the thing I tried to do!
> ll. 1199-1201

I believe Browning gradually realized, while writing, that the poem was going to be long and it was time to dispense with the listener. The presence of the courtesan as the Prince's imaginary audience was very effective in the beginning. She has served a very necessary purpose, for an apologist needs an audience; but the game can be carried too far. The political discourse has been rather deep matter for the prostitute to comprehend; so the poet decided to change his technique in mid-stream. He brought the Prince's self-apology to a close; the courtesan was no longer needed. Browning did not, however,

simply forget her and proceed with the Thiers-and-Victor-Hugo exercise; she is told to sit still and listen:

> Hear what I never was, but might have been
> I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke:
> ll. 1224-25

But why did Browning add the poet-historian's apology to the poem? Why did he not conclude the work with the Prince's self-apology? The Prince has given an excellent apology for Louis Napoleon's life, but it is in the second section of the poem that the poet unfolds the true portrait of Napoleon III, the Emperor of the French. Browning wanted to reveal the unscrupulous character of the Emperor, but in an apology he must do it in a shrewd manner. He added, therefore, the second part of the poem in which the poet-historian continues the apology by showing the life that the Emperor should have lived. Then, the poet created the character Sagacity to tell the facts of the man's life. The poet-historian-Sagacity discourse is an excellent piece of satire. Sagacity's so-called "lies" present the vices of Napoleon III's reign and ridicule the idealistic picture given by the poet-historian.

Although he says very little, Sagacity plays a very important role in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. It is, in fact, a triple role. In the first place, he gives the poem a dramatic effect which it greatly needed. During the first part of the poem the occasional side-lines to the imaginary listener give

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a suggestion of the dramatic, but the effect is not impressive. Sagacity, however, interrupts the idealistic apology at the most admirable line of defense with a suggestion, a groan, or a question of the truth. In this way he plays his second role of revealing the truth of the Emperor's career. The poet was wise in not letting Sagacity say too much, just enough to give the true picture and to suggest more. His third role is the suggesting of what Browning really thought of Napoleon III. The first line Sagacity speaks indicates this:

> There's no such certain mark of a small mind!
> _l_. 1449

It was the weakness in Louis Napoleon's character which Browning disliked most. Browning thought of himself as an objective artist, which he was to a certain extent; but the reader of his letters concerning Napoleon III sees much of Robert Browning in the character of Sagacity.

Opposed to Sagacity stands the poet-historian, the Thiers-Hugo character, who speaks the apology of the second part of the poem. Browning made a fortunate choice in combining the politician Thiers with the idealist Hugo to form the character who paints the admirable picture of the life of Napoleon III — the life he should have led but did not. Both Thiers and Hugo were exiled by Napoleon III after the _coup d'état._ In speaking of the criticisms of the Emperor's reign, Guérard states:

> The system was assailed from two sides: the Radical Republican, and the bourgeois Parliamentarian. Of the first Victor Hugo was the most eloquent spokesman and remains the symbol. Of the second, the ablest exponent was Adolphe Thiers.[20]

The poet rounds out the picture by letting the Emperor awake from his reverie. In this way, he draws together the two parts of the dream — the earlier setting of the self-apology with the imaginary courtesan as the audience and the latter idealistic Thiers-Hugo apology refuted by Sagacity.

The preceding analysis of Browning's technique in writing Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau has shown that he did not set out with one technique in mind and follow it through to the end; rather he let the poem grow as he wrote and when he decided to change his technique he did so. It seems reasonable to expect such a procedure to result in a bewildering hodge-podge. Certainly the poem has confused many of its readers. If one follows the poem through carefully, however, the various techniques fall in together and the outline is easy to pursue. I do not believe Browning had any clear-cut technique planned for the poem, but I do believe he has succeeded amazingly in writing it in a way that characterizes the puzzling Emperor. Herford has well described the result of the poet's technique:

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[20] Albert Guérard, Napoleon III (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1943), p. 247.

> The shifting standpoints of such a man are reproduced with superfluous fidelity in his supposed Defence, which seems designed to be as elusive and impalpable as the character it reflects.[21]

iii.

Not only did Browning combine techniques in forming the skelton of the poem, but he has also used several techniques in characterizing Louis Napoleon. In the first place, he has given the reverie a definite time setting:

> And thinks a man of sixty at the prime?
> <u>l</u>. 21

Louis Napoleon was born in 1808; the year of the reverie is 1868. This was the most fitting year in the Emperor's life for the reverie in which he reviews his past life. The poem opens with the lines:

> You have seen better days, dear? So have I —
> And worse too.
> <u>ll</u>. 1-2

The Second Empire reached its height in 1856, the year of the birth of Napoleon III's only son. An amnesty was granted to all who had been expelled from France after the events of 1848 and 1851. Peace with Russia had been signed at the end of March, and all the political parties in France seemed to have laid aside their hostile sentiments. Louis Napoleon said of this period: "I was then looked upon as the

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[21]Herford, <u>Robert Browning</u>, p. 195.

arbiter of Europe and the protector of monarchical authority."[22] By 1868, however, the gay, prosperous times were waning. Louis Napoleon was ill and aging rapidly; his policy was again being questioned. The danger of war with Prussia was already being sensed by the people. But he was still the Emperor and resided in the Tuileries; he could give commands and expect obedience. In the poem the Prince says that he must fulfill the mission God has given him just as his courier must obey him. He says "last July" he could have sent his courier on a mission. In July of 1868, Napoleon III was _making_ a supreme effort to impress upon his ministers his power as ruler of France. He sent Prince Napoleon, his cousin, on many diplomatic missions and exacted from him promptness and obedience to the letter. The Emperor had seen worse days, also, such as the period of ridicule and criticism following the Mexican fiasco in 1866.

When the Prince awakens from his reverie, the exact time of day is given. It is five o'clock in the morning; he has spent the night dreaming.

The period of the reverie is further identified by references to fashions, current terms, topics of public interest, and well-known personages. The Prince pictures the courtesan as the Oedipus who may

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[22] _Memoirs of the Empress Eugenie_, ed. Le Comte Fleury (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1920), V. I, p. 260. Further references will be cited: Fleury, _op. cit_.

lurk at last
Under a pork-pie hat and crinoline.
ll. 6-7

"Pork-pie" hats and "crinolines" were fashions during the Second Empire. Hat styles during the period changed from the high pyramids to little string-bonnets, flat and framing the face -- "pork-pie" hats. The Empress wore these hats for traveling and walks. The Brownings were well aware of these styles, for Mrs. Browning wrote to her sister, Henrietta, in 1855:

> Tell me how bonnets are worn in England? . . . I and Punch resisted this unnatural and most uncomfortable fashion as long as we could; and now that tyrant Robert insists on my 'wearing hats like other people.' Really it diminishes my happiness in life, and I owe an immense grudge to the Empress Eugenie for tormenting me so, just because she likes to show her own beautiful face![23]

Crinolines were "wire cages" which held up a whole shopful of material. Browning was more than casually aware of this fashion, also, for Mrs. Browning wrote again to her sister in 1857:

> everybody now is fasting and sighing, — and enlarging their petticoats . . . The least advanced of my female friends, here, are in whalebone, and the others armed 'in complete steel.' . . . and I stand lingeringly by that species of crinoline-petticoat called 'the tower of Malakoff' which I bought as I passed through [Paris].[24]

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[23]Huxley, op. cit., p. 217.

[24]Ibid., p. 270.

In defending his protection of the Vatican, the Prince of the poem uses the term "greybeards" to refer to the Cardinals. This was the title that the young liberals gave to their elders in the 1860's. Browning has chosen the exact word Louis Napoleon would have used to express youthful intolerance of older heads.

The period is further identified by the references to duties and taxes throughout the poem:

> We fight
> Now — by forbidding neighbours to sell steel
> Or buy wine, not by blowing out their brains!
> _ll_. 1722-24

> these
> Will have to abdicate their primacy
> Should such a nation sell them steel untaxed.
> _ll_. 1835-37

When Louis Napoleon came into power, French industry was protected against foreign competition by means of a whole system of high duties and prohibitive tariffs. In 1852 negotiations were opened with England with a view of reducing custom duties. Between 1853 and 1855 the duties on coal, iron, steel and cast-iron goods were reduced. In 1856, at the Congress of Paris, Napoleon III expressed hopes of Free Trade. There was a great demand for the mutual abolition of custom barriers so that France might sell her wines. Finally, on January 23, 1860, a ten-year treaty was formed between France and England.

The Prince defends his policy of giving the masses his first attention by saying he could not stand by and see them starve:

> Oh those mute myriads that spoke loud to me —
> The eyes that craved to see the light, the mouths
> That sought the daily bread and nothing more,
> The hands that supplicated exercise,
> Men that had wives, and women that had babes,
> And all these _making_ suit to only live!
>
> _ll_. 740-45

When Louis Napoleon became Emperor there were literally "myriads" who "sought daily bread and nothing more." There were bad harvests in 1853 and 1854. The price of wheat rose; foreign corn was imported; subsidies were given. The agricultural depression was universal as potatoes, vines, and silkworms were all attacked by disease. The cholera plague carried off 150,000 victims; the Rhone, Garonne, and Loire rivers flooded. Louis Napoleon did give bread to the starving; duties were reduced on cereals and cattle.

Browning scatters throughout the poem references to men, particularly critics and philosophers, who were well-known during the Second Empire. The adventuress wishes to know the Prince; so have others:

> Wise men, 't is said, have sometimes wished the same,
> And wished and had their trouble for their pains.
>
> _ll_. 4-5

The "wise men" of France in 1848 — Thiers, Changarnier, and others — wished to know Louis Napoleon, for they thought he was a puppet whose strings they could pull once they set him

up as the head of the government; they were sent into exile by this puppet in 1851.

There is also a passage in the poem that may be taken as Louis Napoleon's attack on Victor Hugo. The Prince attacks the "bard" who considers man insignificant in the presence of Nature. In this passage Browning is certainly attacking Byron, who praised the supremacy of Nature to man while he was himself a lover of Bond Street. The passage is one of the few in the poem where the poet obviously speaks for himself. It does, however, reflect Louis Napoleon's dislike for Hugo, the author of "Napoleon 'The Little'," "Indignation!" and "The Withheld Thunderbolts." In both "Song of Ocean" and "Legend of the Centuries, Titan on Olympus" Hugo makes man insignificant in the presence of Nature.

Browning mentions specifically Proudhon, a writer on social problems during Louis Napoleon's reign. The socialist was imprisoned twice by Louis Napoleon: once for three years in 1849, and again in 1858 because of a pamphlet directed against the Emperor and the Roman Church.

The Prince of the poem discredits philosophers:

> Let us not risk the whiff of my cigar
> For Fourier, Comte and all that ends in smoke!
> <u>ll</u>. 439-40

Fourier and Comte represent two schools of thought prevalent in Louis Napoleon's age. Comte, a Positivist, was deprived of his professorship at the Paris Polytechnic School on the

accession of Louis Napoleon.

The poet also characterizes the period by referring to the wide-spread criticism of the Emperor. The Prince asks the courtesan to listen to his words, even though she has heard much about him:

> You've read a ton's weight, now, of newspaper —
> Lives of me, gabble about the kind of prince.
> ll. 222-23

Tons of newspaper print did appear during the Second Empire. At least 142 French newspapers carried varied reports on Louis Napoleon's policy. The Paris Moniteur upheld the Emperor; the London Times condemned him. Mrs. Browning urged her sister: "Don't believe the Times."[25] In his defense written in exile after the Franco-Prussian War, Louis Napoleon said of these criticisms:

> One might reap a rich harvest and gain much information by the perusal of the numerous articles, pamphlets, speeches and publications of various sorts which appeared at this time, all dealing with me and my policy.[26]

These references in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau not only give the reverie a definite time setting but also help to characterize Louis Napoleon. Browning has further characterized the Emperor by describing him personally, by exemplifying the various qualities of his personality, and

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[25]Huxley, op. cit., p. 149.

[26]Fleury, op. cit., V. I, p. 22.

by illustrating his interests.

The title of the poem, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society, characterizes Louis Napoleon. The first part of the title is a German name; Louis Napoleon was a Dutch Prince, for his father was King Louis of Holland, brother of Napoleon I. There was at one time an extremely ornate and lavish castle in Bavaria named Hohen Schwangau. The reign of Louis Napoleon has been severely criticized for the extravagance of the Emperor and the Empress. As a youth the Prince spent several months in Bavaria with his mother. Although he had a French tutor, he spoke German and attended German schools. Throughout his life Louis Napoleon preferred German literature to French. While he was in prison waiting trial following his unsuccessful attempt to seize power in France in 1838, he amused himself by translating Schiller's "Die Ideale." It is a popular criticism by historians that the Emperor was more German than French in character. Herford translates the word "hohenstiel" to fit the character of Louis Napoleon:

> it is the flower still hanging free on its lofty stalk, but swung to and fro by many a passing wind, and yet amid all its giddy contortions striving hard to keep up an air of balanced decorum and high-principled respectability.[27]

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[27]Herford, No. 37, op. cit., p. 137.

This interpretation certainly characterizes Louis Napoleon in 1868.

The second half of the title, Saviour of Society, is likewise appropriate, for this was the title the Bonapartists gave Louis Napoleon when he became President of the Republic in 1848. The Emperor, of course, considered himself the "saviour of society." Among the papers found in the Tuileries just before it was burnt was a little lyric, written in 1858. One stanza reads:

> Rendez grâce à l'Empereur,
> Il est votre sauveur,
> Sur ce petit coin de l'onde
> Comme il le fut du monde.[28]

Browning properly chose a quotation from Hercules Furens of Euripides for the motto of the poem. Browning's translation reads:

> I slew the Hydra, and from labour pass'd
> To labour — tribes of labours! Till, at last,
> Attempting one more labour, in a trice,
> Alack, with ills I crowned the edifice.

These four lines sum up the career of Napoleon III. He "slew the Hydra" with the coup d'état of December 2, 1851. The many acts of his reign, both civil and military acts, were "tribes of labours." Then, with a final imperialistic gamble in 1871 he "crowned the edifice" of his ills with the

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[28] Papiers Secrets Brûlés dans l'Incendie des Tuileries (Bruxelles: J. Rozez, Libraire-Éditeur, 1871), p. 141. Further references will be cited: Papiers Secrets Brûlés.

downfall of the Empire. Browning has correctly interpreted this final phrase in relation to Napoleon III's career. Mrs. Browning, however, put an entirely different meaning into the phrase when she wrote in April, 1861: "You see, my Emperor is 'crowning the edifice'; it is the beginning."[29]

Browning describes the Emperor's personal appearance in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. Louis Napoleon's two outstanding facial features were his nose and his moustache. The courtesan in the poem likes the Prince's "nose," and he pinches his "moustache to a point" as he begins his defense. Guérard says that when Louis Napoleon entered the Assembly on September 26, 1848: "The one trait which struck the cartoonist was his curved and prominent nose."[30] The Emperor set a fashion that has never been forgotten with his long, waxed moustache, "the imperial goatee."[31] It was a habit of his to pinch his moustache as he sat and talked.

The Prince of the poem contines to describe himself:

> But I'm no poet, and am stiff i' the back.
> l. 108.

In 1868 Louis Napoleon was "stiff i' the back," for he was riddled by a kidney infection. Certainly he did not think of himself as a poet, but he did write a few lyrics which were adversely criticized.

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[29]Kenyon, op. cit., V. II, p. 440.

[30]Guérard, op. cit., p. 89.

[31]Ibid., p. 144.

Browning characterizes Louis Napoleon by illustrating his outstanding traits. A setting in a cigar-filled room in exile with a courtesan for the audience certainly fitted the unstable character of Louis Napoleon. He did have many mistresses throughout his life. After he became Emperor and before the appearance of Eugenie, he paraded one of these, Miss Howard, an English woman, in semi-official capacity at his court.

Louis Napoleon was quite a heavy smoker. Historians remark on the great number of cigarettes and cigars he smoked. Sencourt says often "he would light his cigar and dream."[32]

Much of Louis Napoleon's life before 1848 was spent in exile in England; therefore, it is fitting for him to dream of another exile in the same vicinity. He was, of course, exiled in England again after his downfall in the Franco-Prussian War.

Browning opens the poem with a suggestion of the Prince's shady character; he closes it with a similar implication:

> Twenty years are good gain, come what come will!
> Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?
> _ll_. 2145-46 (1871 ed.)

Louis Napoleon was a gambler throughout his life. Not only did he take chances for the promotion of his imperialistic

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[32]Robert Sencourt, _Napoleon III_: _The Modern Emperor_ (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1933), p. 91.

desires, but he was considered a gambler as a youth. While he was in exile in London he spent his nights in betting-rooms where he played for high and desperate stakes.[33] He was ever ready to play "double and quits" — "to go for what the French call a martingale, and to stand the hazard of a desperate cast of the political dye /sic/."[34]

In the concluding paragraph of the reverie the poet suggests the possibility of the Emperor's illegitimacy:

> And prove there's nothing so unproveable
> As who is who, what son of what a sire.
> ll. 2056-57

Although there were rumors that King Louis was not Louis Napoleon's father, the King himself never raised the question. Louis Napoleon, however, did have an illegitimate brother, "Demorny," son of Hortense and Count de Flahault. This half-brother was unscrupulous, daring, and probably influenced the Emperor more than anyone else.

Throughout Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau Browning emphasizes the Emperor's unreliability. One of the best examples is his unfaithfulness to the Italian cause. The poet lets the Prince defend his position of keeping the troops in Italy to protect the Vatican, but at the same time

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[33]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 46.

[34]Ibid., note p. 137.

he emphasizes the beauty of Italy and the unworthiness of the Catholic body. He speaks of the "decrepit council-chambers," where

> the greybeards huddle in debate,
> Dim cowls and capes, and midmost glimmers one
> Like tarnished gold, and what they say is doubt,
> And what they think is fear.
>
> ll. 847-50

> The scorpion-body with the greedy pair
> Of outstretched nippers.
>
> ll. 863-64

The Prince promised to liberate Italy, but

> now, for deed, we find at door
> O' the council-chamber posted, mute as mouse,
> Hohenstiel-Schwangau, sentry and safeguard
> O' the greybeards all a-chuckle, cowl to cape,
> Who challenge Judas, -- that's endearment's style, --
> To stop their mouths or let escape grimace,
> While they keep cursing Italy and him.
>
> ll. 883-89

These lines describe Louis Napoleon's actions accurately. He did leave French troops in Italy in 1849 because he did not want to stir up Catholic opinion against him. Even Mrs. Browning was disturbed by this act, for she wrote: "To cast Rome helpless and bound into the hands of the priests is dishonor to the actors, however we consider the act."[35]

Underlying Louis Napoleon's unreliability was his imperialistic ambition. Ambition is not necessarily an undesirable quality. Louis Napoleon, however, insisted that he was not ambitious while he used every possible means

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[35]Kenyon, op. cit., V. I, p. 429.

to get what he wanted. Browning illustrates this characteristic in the poem. The Prince insists:

> Out of this same society I save —
> None of it for me!
>
> ll. 645-46

Yet at the end of the poem Sagacity lets it be known that the man used his power to secure the throne for his heir. Louis Napoleon often stated: "I am not an ambitious man."[36] In his apology written at Chislehurst he repeated: "Since I have been in power, I have proved that I have always put the interests of society before my own personal interests."[37] But he was ambitious, for as early as 1846 when he was at Ham he wrote: "Je ne sortirai plus de Ham que pour aller aux Tuileries ou au cimetière."[38] In 1850 he said to his minister: "Monsieur Rouher, ma destinée n'est encore accomplie; je serai empereur."[39] In 1852 the senate passed a senatus consultum for the restoration of the imperial power through Louis Napoleon and his heirs after him. In 1870 the Emperor proposed another senatus consultum which stated that his son would inherit the Empire.

Browning never had any sympathy with the Emperor's ambition for his son. He wrote to Isa Blagden in 1870:

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[36]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 101.

[37]Fleury, op. cit., V. I, p. 31.

[38]Guedalla, op. cit., p. 137.

[39]Ibid.

"I never, when liking Napoleon most, sympathized a bit with his dynastic ambition for his son, — who has no sort of right to be anybody in France."[40]

Louis Napoleon's contradictory statements concerning his ambition lead into another trait of his character: his mysteriousness. He would profess to believe in one cause and then act in the behalf of another. He would remain outwardly impassive for weeks or months and then act suddenly. Browning opens the poem by letting the Prince refer to himself as the "Sphynx in Leicester Square," who is going to solve his riddle for the courtesan and the world, for he does not want to be remembered in the class

> With friend Home's stilts and tongs and medium-ware.
> *l*. 14

Historians speak of Louis Napoleon's enigmatic character and refer to him as "the Sphinx of the Tuileries." Sencourt says that after twenty years of power the leaders of Paris were asking: "What really was their Emperor?"[41] Among the list of French newspapers published in London during this period was one entitled *Le Sphinx.*[42] Mrs. Browning was familiar with the title, for she wrote in 1859: "Certainly if I don't guess 'the Sphinx' right, some of your English guessers

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[40]Hood, *op*. *cit*., p. 138.

[41]Sencourt, *op*. *cit*., p. 296.

[42]*Papiers Secrets Brûlés,* p. 49.

in the 'Times' and elsewhere fail also, as events prove."[43]

Louis Napoleon was acquainted with the medium Hume or Home, and his permitting séances at his court certainly did not raise him in Browning's estimation. It is well known that Browning detested Home, for spiritualism was one of the few subjects on which he and Mrs. Browning held opposite opinions. It is interesting that in the apology of Louis Napoleon, one for whom Browning had no admiration, he mentions another character whom he disliked and whom he had let speak his apology in Mr. Sludge, "The Medium." The Brownings knew that the Emperor was acquainted with Hume, for Mrs. Browning wrote with enthusiasm to her sister in 1857: "Hume's power has returned to him, they say, stronger than ever at Paris; and he has thrice had interviews with Louis Napoleon."[44] The Emperor, however, did not remain a follower of Hume. Shortly after one of the medium's visits to the Tuileries he was condemned "pour vol et pour outrage aux moeurs."[45] Louis Napoleon would not want to be remembered in the class with Hume.

Louis Napoleon's quizzical personality was the source of many comments. He was a queer combination of silence and

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[43]Kenyon, op. cit., V. II, p. 335.

[44]Huxley, op. cit., pp. 270-71.

[45]André Bellessort, La Société française sous Napoléon III (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin, 1932), p. 64.

action. What he called patience, others called indolence and apathy. Browning illustrates this quality of the man's character by letting the Prince defend his platform of conservatism. The Prince insists he is patient; he asks the courtesan to be patient while he carefully outlines his career. Later in the poem he compares the judgment passed on his patience with the criticisms of a statue he saw once at Rome:

> 'T was some artist's whim
> To cover all the accessories close
> I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön
> With neither sons nor serpents to denote
> The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
> Was called to try the question, criticize
> . . . .
> Only one said "I think the gesture strives
> Against some obstacle we cannot see."
> All the rest made their minds up. "'T is a yawn
> Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:
> The statue's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"
> ll. 1185-90, 1194-98

Louis Napoleon recorded a similar incident in a letter to Prince Napoleon concerning the statue of Napoleon I:

> Besides, can we, pygmies that we are, really appreciate at its true value the grand historic figure of Napoleon! As though we were standing in front of some colossal statue, we are powerless to take in the whole of it at one and the same moment. We never see more than the side which meets our view; hence arises the inadequacy of the impression produced, and differences of opinion.[46]

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[46]The Second Empire and Its Downfall: The Correspondence of the Emperor Napoleon III and his Cousin Prince Napoleon, pub. Ernest d'Hauterive, tr. Herbert Wilson (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., n.d.), p. 208. Additional references will be cited: d'Hauterive, op. cit.

Patient or apathetic Louis Napoleon was a domineering and dictatorial ruler. He appeared to be impervious to criticism and he certainly took orders from no one. Browning's Prince insists

> Each has his own mind and no other's mode.
> l. 182

Parties may ask for his support, critics may talk; he follows the dictates of his own head and heart. Throughout the poem these criticisms are cited by such contrasting phrases as: "No more than that?" and "So much as that?" The Prince replies:

> Let all my critics, born to idleness
> And impotency, get their good, and have
> Their hooting at the giver: I am deaf.
> ll. 412-14

In October, preceding the *coup d'état,* Louis Napoleon said:

> I declare, therefore, to those who would wish to organize against me a system of provocation, that from henceforward I shall not reply to any attacks, nor to anything that may be done to excite me to speak, when I choose to remain silent.[47]

After he dissolved the Assembly in December he added: "Provocations, calumnies, insults, alike found me invulnerable."[48]

Impassive to criticism Louis Napoleon was dictatorial. Note the progression of this idea in Browning's poem:

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[47]Napoleon III, *Works,* V. I, p. 100.

[48]*Ibid.,* V. II, p. 356.

I live to please myself.
l. 111

I bid him since I have the right to bid.
l. 139

I count the minutes, call for the result
In quickness and the courier quality.
ll. 145-46

I rule and regulate the course.
l. 465

I know your business better than yourself.
l. 1282

Count de Flahault wrote to his wife on November 1, 1849: "It appears that although very quiet and gentle, nothing has any effect upon him [Louis Napoleon] when his determination is once taken."[49]

This dictatorial quality is characteristic of all of Louis Napoleon's letters to Prince Napoleon. The following is a typical example: "There cannot be two heads under one hat; that cannot and must not be; you cannot hold an opinion differing from that actuating my policy; I will not permit it."[50]

Although Louis Napoleon had an abundance of unattractive traits of character, he did have a certain amount of sympathy with the poverty-stricken and he was courageous.

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[49] *The Secret of the Coup d'État*, unpublished correspondence of *Prince Louis Napoleon*, Mm. de Morny, de Flahaut, and others, ed. The Earl of Kerry (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), p. 110.

[50] d'Hauterive, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

It has been quoted that Browning's Prince defends his interests in the masses because he could not stand by and see them starve. In the Preface to Extinction of Pauperism Louis Napoleon wrote: "It is natural for the unfortunate to think of those who suffer."[51] Mrs. Browning was delighted with the Emperor's sympathy with the poor, writing in December, 1855, that the charities were "wonderfully organized and most fertile. Here in Paris the cause of the poor is being carried out on all sides."[52] During the period of the floods, he worked to have the rivers checked. Mrs. Browning wrote on June 12, 1856: "Louis Napoleon is rising every day in popularity through his conduct during the inundations."[53]

A final outstanding characteristic of Louis Napoleon's personality which Browning illustrates is his courageous spirit. The Prince has had his "ups and downs," but

> Am I discouraged who, — perceiving health,
> Strength, beauty, as they tempt the eye of soul,
> Are uncombinable with flesh and blood, —
> Resolve to let my body live its best,
> And leave my soul what better yet may be
> Or not be, in this life or afterward?
>
> ll. 1165-70

From early youth when the Bonaparte family was driven from France, until he became President of the Republic in 1848,

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[51] Napoleon III, Works, V. II, p. 93.

[52] Huxley, op. cit., p. 236.

[53] Ibid., p. 249.

Louis Napoleon was unwelcome in France and spent most of his time either in exile or in prison. But he never became discouraged. From Ham in 1843 he wrote: "I am not unhappy, for I do not believe my sufferings are without their uses."[54] In 1871 he was ill, tired, and broken, but not discouraged: "I shall sink, perhaps, but standing upright, and not cankered at the roots."[55] Up until a few days before his death he was making plans to return to France.

Louis Napoleon was unreliable, ambitious, quizzical, dictatorial, patient or apathetic, sympathetic, and courageous. Browning has illustrated each of these characteristics in _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau._ The use of the apology itself was characteristic of Louis Napoleon. After he has completed his defense, the Prince concludes:

> All, so far, to my praise and glory — all
> Told as befits the self-apologist, —
> Who ever promises a candid sweep
> And clearance of those errors miscalled crimes
> None knows more, none laments so much as he,
> And ever rises from confession, proved
> A god whose fault was — trying to be man.
> _ll._ 1202-08

On April 10, 1849, Louis Napoleon wrote to Prince Napoleon:

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[54]d'Hauterive, _op. cit._, p. 24.

[55]_Ibid.,_ p. 233.

> Free from all constraint over my mind I shall go forward in the path of honour with my conscience as my guide, and when the time comes for me to relinquish power, if people are able to reproach me for mistakes unhappily inevitable, at least I shall have done what I thought sincerely to be my duty.[56]

Louis Napoleon's sincerity and honesty is certainly questionable, but Mrs. Browning defended his honesty even though she admitted his ambition: "'I do believe he's honest;' . . . But for ambition . . . Is he or is he not an ambitious man? . . . Yes, yes, -- I think, you think, we all think."[57] In 1860 she concluded her defense of her Emperor:

> If the issue of events shall prove me wrong about the E. Napoleon, the worse for *him*, I am bold to say, rather than for me, who have honored him only because I believed his intentions worthy of the honor of honest souls.[58]

Browning extends his characterization of Louis Napoleon in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* through the use of figures which illustrate the Emperor's interests. The Prince illustrates the law by which he has lived by references to mathematics and science. He draws a line from one ink blot to another in exemplifying the path he has followed. Then he says:

> Thus folks begin with Euclid, -- finish, how?
> Trying to square the circle!
>
> *ll*. 48-49

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[56]d'Hauterive, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

[57]Kenyon, *op. cit.*, V. II, pp. 30-31

[58]*Ibid.*, p. 383.

> Rays from all round converge to any point:
> Study the point then ere you track the rays!
> The size o' the circle's nothing.
>
> ll. 65-67

Louis Napoleon was interested in science and mathematics throughout his life. While in prison at Ham he studied these subjects; while at Chislehurst he invented a stove for saving coal. In L'Idée Napoléonienne he praises Napoleon I for raising the "physical and mathematical sciences above the dead languages," and continues to approve the exact sciences for they "give precision to the mind; and it is a fact that drawing teaches the eye to see, and mathematics the mind to think."[59] Louis Napoleon did begin his career with conservative proclamations and end with trying to "square the circle."

Louis Napoleon's writings are filled with effective figures. The following one from Ideas of Napoleonism parallels the poet's figure of the rays of a circle:

> We must also observe in the institutions of the Empire a continual movement, which, from the circumference acted on the centre, and from the centre, reacted on the circumference, like the blood which in the human body flows towards the heart, and from the heart flows back towards the extremities.[60]

The Prince compares the geological changes of the earth with the changes in the government of nations:

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[59]Napoleon III, Works, V. II, pp. 162-63.

[60]Ibid., V. I, p. 310.

See!
Where winter reigned for ages -- by a turn
I' the time, some star-change, (ask geologists)
The ice-tracts split, clash, splinter and disperse,
And there's an end of immobility.
ll. 329-333

Louis Napoleon has used this same analogy:

> This evolution of nationality is sometimes very slow in developing . . . These periods of waiting may be very long; there may seem to be eras during which no signs of development are observable. But sooner or later, the mighty current pushes its way through all obstacles and bursts forth at the moment when it is the least expected.[61]

Finally, the poet draws the Emperor's character through the Prince's discussion of moral problems. Cooke has stated that the poet "often discusses quite other moral problems than those which rightly belong to the character of Napoleon III."[62]

Browning does emphasize moral problems which interested himself, and often these discussions are in opposition to the true character of Louis Napoleon; but I find no problem discussed in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau on which Louis Napoleon did not at some time express an opinion. He professed to be interested in moral problems and to want to see their solution, whether he was speaking sincerely or not.

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[61] Fleury, op. cit., V. II, pp. 183-84.

[62] Cooke, op. cit., p. 304.

The Prince believes that moral happiness is necessary for a contented nation. There must be

> In the age, the various sorts of happiness
> Moral, mark! — not material -- moods o' the mind
> Suited to man and man his opposite.
> ll. 444-47

> all indicates
> Even this self-same fact that soul can starve
> Yet body still exist its twenty years.
> ll. 924-26

Louis Napoleon wrote in Ideas of Napoleonism: "The more an authority is possessed of moral force, the less does it need the employment of material force."[63] Throughout Extinction of Pauperism he emphasized that the interests of the soul cannot be separated from those of the body. At Chislehurst, after the close of his years of dictatorship, he wrote: "Morality and justice will never be reestablished until . . . that which is wrong is called wrong . . . that which is contrary to law is called usurpation."[64] From experience Louis Napoleon knew that the soul can starve while the body exists. From the ages of twenty to forty he kept occupied in exile or in prison, but he wrote: "all this fills up the time without filling the heart."[65]

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[63]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 342.

[64]Posthumous Works and Unpublished Autographs of Napoleon III in Exile, collected by Count de La Chapelle (London: Sampson Low, Marston Low, & Searle, 1873), pp. 19-20.

[65]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 58.

Browning emphasizes the fact throughout his works that evil is necessary for good. The Prince of the poem states:

> Try to make good do good as evil does --
> Were just as if a chemist, wanting white,
> And knowing black ingredients bred the dye,
> Insisted these too should be white forsooth!
> <u>ll.</u> 628-31

Louis Napoleon also realized good was sometimes the result of evil. He considered the order and stability of his Empire a direct result of the revolutions of France for centuries and of the wars of the First Empire. He said it was from such upheavals that society learns of its rotten condition and comes to desire peace and security.[66] In 1832, long before he could have had any definite hope of ruling the French, he wrote:

> It is a very false notion of expediency which sacrifices a thousand real advantages in dread of an inconvenience . . . Such a principle would at length deprive one of the use of fire, because it destroys, and of water because men are drowned in it.[67]

In the second part of the poem, the poet-historian attacks the three "apparent" strong sides of the Prince's character -- morality, philanthropy, and religion:

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[66]Napoleon III, <u>Works,</u> V. I, p. 247 ff. <u>passim.</u>

[67]<u>Ibid.,</u> p. 164.

The moralist, that walks with head erect
I' the crystal clarity of air so long,
Until a stumble, and the man's one mire!
Philanthropy undoes the social knot
With axe-edge, makes love room 'twixt head and trunk!
Religion — but, enough, the thing's too clear!
ll. 1333-38

In his campaign speeches Louis Napoleon combined these three qualities in proclaiming what he would do for the French if he became their ruler:

> I shall win over to religion, morality and comfort those large sections of the people who . . . still hardly know the precepts of Christ, and . . . are barely capable of enjoying the meanest necessities of life.[68]

Louis Napoleon did show an interest in moral problems; Browning has not been irrelevant in bringing these discussions into the poem. They do add many of the fine points to the portrait of Louis Napoleon.

In the preceding pages it has been shown that Browning combined many techniques in portraying the character of Louis Napoleon in the poem. In the following chapter the Emperor's character will be further revealed through an analysis of his policy as it is presented in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau.

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[68] René Arnaud, The Second Republic and Napoleon III, tr. E. F. Buckley (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), p. 83.

CHAPTER IV

AN ANALYSIS OF LOUIS NAPOLEON'S POLICY AS PRESENTED IN PRINCE HOHENSTIEL-SCHWANGAU

Much of Louis Napoleon's policy has been indicated through the preceding discussion of his character. It is necessary, however, to trace the development of the Prince's policy through Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau in order to compare it with Louis Napoleon's policy. The Prince and poet-historian defend this policy just as Mrs. Browning and Louis Napoleon did; Sagacity relates the truth of the Emperor's career just as historians and Browning have.

Louis Napoleon was an enigmatic combination of idealist and realist. He professed admirable intentions; but he acted as an unscrupulous, domineering ruler, not unlike twentieth-century dictators. Mrs. Browning, however, sincerely believed in his honorable intentions. In May, 1860, she wrote: "if he lives long enough, he will explain himself to all."[1]

The life of Louis Napoleon has never been explained to the satisfaction of the world; he remains "the Sphinx of the Tuileries." He did, however, live long enough to attempt an explanation of his life. While he was in exile following

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[1] Kenyon, op. cit., V. II, p. 383.

his downfall in the Franco-Prussian War, he wrote two explanations of his career: Les Principes, on the French policy in general; and Les Forces militaires de la France et la Campagne de 1870, a mild strategic apologia for the fall of the French. These works were written too late for Browning to have seen them before he wrote Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau; but they are a compliment to the poet's intuition, for in them the Emperor has given an apology for his life similar to the one which Browning lets him make in the poem.

Browning has divided Louis Napoleon's apology into three parts. Throughout the first two parts the Prince speaks for himself. First, he states what his policy has been and defends it. Second, he explains and defends the means chosen to achieve his end. In the third part, the apology is given from the point of view of his critics, the politician and poet-idealist.

Before he states his platform, the Prince gives the law by which he has been governed throughout his life: the law of expediency. He cannot remain idle; he has always sought activity. The Prince states this as follows:

> What was the law by which I lived. Let's see:
> l. 25

> 't is my nature, when I am at ease,
> Rather than idle out my life too long,
> To want to do a thing — to put a thought,
> Whether a great thought or a little one,
> Into an act, as nearly as may be.
> ll. 80-84

Expediency was the law of Louis Napoleon's life. Fleury records that he often heard the Emperor say: "Inactivity has always wearied me more than activity."[2] He favored the exact sciences because they "produce workers instead of creating idlers."[3] From youth he worked on the principle: "où j'ai trouvé l'occasion de parler, j'ai parlé: partout où j'ai trouvé l'occasion d'agir, j'ai agi."[4]

Having stated the law by which he has lived, the Prince proceeds to outline his mission in life. He has not attempted any great project; he has simply "saved society" by bringing about order and stability:

> This constitutes my mission, — grant the phrase, —
> Namely, to rule men — men within my reach,
> To order, influence and dispose them so
> As render solid and stabilify.
>
> _ll_. 277-80

> A conservator, call me, if you please,
> Not a creator nor destroyer: one
> Who keeps the world safe.
>
> _ll_. 298-300

> Therefore my end is -- save society!
>
> _l_. 612

In 1840 Louis Napoleon wrote:

> The Napoleonist idea means to reconstitute French society, overthrown by fifty years of revolution, to conciliate order and liberty, the rights of the people, and the principles of law.[5]

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[2]Fleury, _op. cit.,_ V. I, p. 52.

[3]Napoleon III, _Works_, V. II, p. 163.

[4]_Papiers Secrets Brûlés_, p. 9.

[5]Napoleon III, _Works_, V. II, p. 262.

He praised the work of Napoleon I because "the improvements introduced modify, but do not destroy."[6] As President of the Republic he said: "My name presents itself to you as a symbol of order and security."[7] Throughout his life he made such statements as "I desire order," "assure order and tranquillity," and "stability alone constitutes the happiness of the people."[8] Mrs. Browning wrote after the coup d'état: "It will be found I think . . . that everything will be settled on a firm basis for some time."[9]

The Prince proceeds to give a three-fold defense of his mission of conservatism: God appointed him for the mission; he is not a genius; he must work within the short time allotted him. In his first defense he curiously combines his belief that God appointed him to save society with his own ambition. He has worked in a way that pleases both God and himself:

> I live to please myself. I recognize
> Power passing mine, immeasurable, God.
> ll. 111-12

He has worked for just one end:

> Namely, that just the creature I was bound
> To be, I should become, nor thwart at all
> God's purpose in creation.
> ll. 246-48

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[6]Napoleon III, Works, V. II, p. 266.

[7]Ibid., V. I, p. 101.

[8]Ibid., pp. 94, 96, 207.

[9]Huxley, op. cit, p. 150.

He asks no reward:

That I might have none,
I rapped your tampering knuckles twenty years.
<u>ll</u>. 646-47

A characteristic phrase of Louis Napoleon's was: "No one can escape his destiny."[10] In 1847 he wrote:

> I am convinced that from time to time men are created, whom I shall call men of destiny, to whose hands the fate of their country is entrusted. And I believe that I myself am such a man.[11]

Again he said: "I call God to witness, that it is not to gratify a personal ambition, but because I believe I have a mission to fulfill."[12]

The Prince joins the second defense of his mission to the first. God appointed him to be the conservator of society; when the time comes for a genius He will send one:

> When old things terminate and new commence,
> A solitary great man's worth the world.
> God takes the business into His own hands
> At such time.
> <u>ll</u>. 730-33

But he is not such a man:

> Do I class with men
> Most useful to their fellows? Possibly, —
> Therefore, in some sort, best; but, greatest mind
> And rarest nature? Evidently no.
> <u>ll</u>. 294-97

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[10] Napoleon III, <u>Works,</u> V. II, p. 201.

[11] Arnaud, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 123.

[12] Napoleon III, <u>Works,</u> V. I, p. 99.

Some dervish desert-spectre, swordsman, saint,
Law-giver, lyrist, — Oh, we know the names!
Quite other these than I.

ll. 350-52

As he is not a genius, it is his duty to carry on the stage of incompleteness:

I merely tend the corn-field, care for crop.

l. 736

Louis Napoleon did not consider himself "a Moses, a Mahomet, a Charlemagne, an Alexander, a Constantine, a Caesar, nor a Napoleon I"[13]-- "one of those extraordinary beings whom Providence creates to be the majestic instruments of its impenetrable designs."[14] He did realize the necessity of caring for the corn-field:

> Nations are to be pitied who would pretend to gather in the harvest before they have tilled the land and sown the seed, and given the plant time to spring forth, to flower, and to ripen.[15]

Although he was her hero, Mrs. Browning said: "A man of genius he does not seem to be."[16]

The Prince does not, however, consider himself an ordinary person. He is not a genius, but he is a Prince. He has endured hardships, but

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[13]Napoleon III, _Works,_ V. I, p. 252.

[14]_Ibid_., p. 323.

[15]_Ibid_., p. 266.

[16]Kenyon, _op. cit.,_ V. I, p. 429.

> From first to last of lodging, I was I,
> And not at all the place that harboured me.
>
> ll. 1017-18

Louis Napoleon never forgot that he was born in the Tuileries. While he was in prison at Ham he wrote to Prince Napoleon:

> its [the prison's] behaviour will be inconsequent and dastardly if it treats me, who am the son of a king, the nephew of an emperor, and allied to all the sovereigns of Europe, as an ordinary prisoner.[17]

The third defense the Prince gives for his conservatism is that his time is limited. Again, he is ruled by expediency. He would like to do something spectacular, like liberating Italy, but he just does not have time for everything:

> Did only computists confess a fault,
> And multiply the single score by five,
> Five only, give man's life its hundred years.
> Change life, in me shall follow change to match!
> Time were then, to work here, there, everywhere,
> By turns and try experiment at ease!
> Full time to mend as well as mar.
>
> ll. 1068-74

Louis Napoleon attributed the fall of the First Empire to a lack of sufficient time:

> It was not given to the greatest . . . genius to combat at the same time the ancient dynasty on the borders of the Tagus, and that of Moscow, and to regenerate Europe in ten years.[18]

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[17]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 61.

[18]Ibid., V. II, p. 137.

He worked on the principle that man's goal must be in sight:

> Let the goal towards which it strives be near or far, it must, at least, exist, and be comprehensible, that one may judge it . . . for the people will tire of always moving on without the hope of attaining their ends.[19]

Browning's Prince does follow the same defense for his mission in life that Louis Napoleon made, particularly in his youth before he came into power. What, then, were the means employed to achieve this mission? The Prince of the poem admits he has been an opportunist; he has taken advantage of every circumstance in order to achieve his end:

> used my special stock of power --
> Not from the aforesaid head and heart alone,
> But every sort of helpful circumstance,
> Some problematic and some nondescript.
> ll. 237-240

He has

> toiled where was need, reposed
> As resolutely to the proper point,
> Braved sorrow, courted joy, to just one end.
> ll. 243-45

Louis Napoleon was a complete opportunist. As a youth he wrote: "the best government is that which . . . employs the necessary means to make a level and easy path for advancing civilization."[20] In 1865 he wrote:

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[19]Napoleon III, Works, V. II, p. 177.

[20]Ibid., V. I, p. 253.

> The success of superior men . . . depends much more on their skill in taking advantage of circumstances, than on that presumption, blind enough to believe itself capable of creating events, which are in the hands of God alone.[21]

To Prince Napoleon he urged: "every day has its proper task -- security first and then amelioration."[22]

Louis Napoleon did toil "where was need." He made two unsuccessful attempts to seize power in France: at Strasbourg in 1836, and at Boulogne in 1840. Then he "reposed" quietly in England while his friends conducted propaganda programs for the advancement of his prestige in France. After he became President of the Republic he expressed himself in favor of keeping the Republic, but he continued to scheme toward his goal of Emperor. Planned tours were conducted throughout France; everywhere he went he made diplomatic speeches and won the approval of the masses. The _coup d'état_ followed, then the Second Empire.

Louis Napoleon certainly "braved sorrow." He was a child when the Bonaparte family was exiled from France in 1815; his brother, who was his companion in joining the Italian forces in 1831, died of measles; he failed in his two attempts

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[21]Louis Napoleon, _History of Julius Caesar_ (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1865), V. I, p. 463.

[22]d'Hauterive, _op. cit._, p. 54.

to seize the French government; he was an exile in England; he was sent to the United States and refused a passport to any country on the continent when he returned to see his dying mother; he was requested to leave his abode in Switzerland; he was a prisoner at Ham and was refused permission to visit his dying father.

He "courted joy" as well. While in England he moved in social circles; he hob-nobbed with political and literary leaders of the day; he enjoyed the companionship of English women; he won the friendship of Queen Victoria. In France he used his fateful charm over the masses and won their approval. In military and political affairs he "courted" the approval of the leaders on both sides of the questions.

Having admitted his opportunism, the Prince proceeds to defend these means. Again, he has been ruled by expediency. He rationalizes thus:

> Mankind i' the main have little wants, not large:
> I, being of will and power to help, i' the main,
> Mankind, must help the least wants first.
>
> ll. 1057-59

He has used his means to satisfy the wants of mankind. He has equalized the conditions of society, helped the masses, and improved the general appearance of the countryside.

In 1833 Louis Napoleon wrote: "Every financial system ought . . . to be reduced to this problem: to relieve the

poor classes."[23] After he became President he said: "No more destitution for the workman stricken with sickness, or for the one whom age compels to rest from his labor."[24]

Mrs. Browning fully approved Louis Napoleon's policy of "equalizing society." In 1852 she wrote: "What has saved him with me from the beginning was his appeal to the people."[25]

He has used the powers given him for the benefit of France, continues the Prince. When he was a youth and could not help France, he helped Italy:

> And once upon a time, when I
> Was like all you, mere voice and nothing more,
> Myself took wings, soared sun-ward, and thence sang.
> ll. 819-21

As a youth Louis Napoleon joined the Italian forces in their struggle for freedom. He wanted to join the French army, but he was refused admission because he would not change his name. He never at any time, however, forgot France. Characteristic statements of his are: "I should not be able to hold anything in higher esteem than the interests of France."[26] . . . "Français, je m'occupe des intérêts de la France."[27]

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[23]Napoleon III, Works, V. II, p. 95.

[24]Guérard, op. cit., p. 128.

[25]Kenyon, op. cit., V. II, p. 51.

[26]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 8.

[27]Papiers Secrets Brûlés, p. 15.

Mrs. Browning made this same defense for Louis Napoleon. She wrote to Isa Blagden that he would always "do for Italy *whatever will not sacrifice France*."[28]

Browning's Prince has defended his mission and the means he used to achieve his end just as Louis Napoleon did. This is the same defense Mrs. Browning made for her Emperor. In concluding this part of the analysis of Louis Napoleon's policy, I find that Browning has let Ogniben, the Pope's legate, in *A Soul's Tragedy,* defend the inconsistency between man's professions and his actions. Ogniben says:

> Ever judge of men by their professions! For though the bright moment of promising is but a moment and cannot be prolonged, yet, if sincere in its moment's extravagant goodness, why, trust it and know the man by it, I say — not by his performance; which is half the world's work, interfere as the world needs must, with its accidents and circumstances: the profession was purely the man's own. I judge people by what they might be, -- not are, nor will be.[29]

In the Prince's self-apology Browning has let the man defend his actions by stating his intentions. The courtesan and the world are to judge him by his professions. If the world has interfered and changed the man's plans, he is not responsible. Louis Napoleon made admirable professions.

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[28]Kenyon, *op. cit.,* V. II, p. 41.

[29]Robert Browning, *A Soul's Tragedy, The Complete Poetical Works of Browning*, ed. Scudder, pp. 295-96.

The world interfered and he changed his plans, but his actions are only half the picture. In order to understand his complete character, it is necessary for one to remember his professions and to consider them when judging the man's life.

In the third part of Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau Browning begins his second technique. The Prince has completed his self-apology; the poet-historian begins his apology for the man. The Prince advances to the title of the "Head." While the poet-historian shows what the Head might have been

> I' the better world where goes tobacco-smoke!
> l. 1225

Sagacity, through his "lying," unfolds the career of Napoleon III. The discussion begins with Louis Napoleon's election to the Presidency of the French Republic in 1848. He was chosen, says the poet-historian,

> To see that they did service one and all.
> l. 1237

When Louis Napoleon took his oath as President of the Republic, he said to the Assembly that he "would treat as enemies of the country whoever should attempt to subvert the constitution."[30] Harmony seemed to reign in France for awhile, but as the President's term drew toward its close the picture changed. The poet-historian continues that as soon as the

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[30]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 108.

"Head-servant" left his office:

> not one minute more did knave or fool
> Mean to keep faith and serve as he had sworn.
> ll. 1247-48

Louis Napoleon was elected for only four years, and before the term was out it became evident that the several parties were waiting to exert their power.

The Head, too, had his dream of "doing sudden duty swift and sure," adds the poet-historian. At this point Browning inserts an imaginary speech for the Head which parallels excellently the proclamations of Louis Napoleon in 1850. The poem reads:

> "Mistress of the servants, these and me,
> Hohenstiel-Schwangu! I, their trusty Head,
> Pounce on a pretty scheme concocting here
> That's stopped, extinguished by my vigilance.
> Your property is safe again: but mark!
> Safe in these hands, not yours, who lavish trust
> Too lightly. Leave my hands their charge awhile!
> I know your business better than yourself:
> Let me alone about it! Some fine day,
> Once we are rid of the embarrassment,
> You shall look up and see your longings crowned!"
> ll. 1275-85

Louis Napoleon had more than a dream; he was determined to be the "Head" regardless of what steps he had to take. He asked for a revision of the Constitution so that he could be re-elected President; but the proposal did not pass. Then he rescinded the May Law, which prevented three millions from voting. With everything under control he began his campaign

tour of France. At Lyons he made a speech which parallels the one spoken by the Head:

> I must tell you frankly who I am and what I want. I stand for no party: I represent those two great manifestations of the national will which, in 1804 as in 1848, have desired to save, through order, the great principles of the French Revolution. I belong to the country, whatever it may require of me. . . . If criminal claims flared up anew, I should reduce them to impotence by invoking again the principle of national sovereignty, for no one has a better right to act as its representative than I have.[31]

The scene, however, soon changed. After the campaign tours, the President became absolutely silent. The poet-historian continues to state the conditions. Everyone expected something; but what? The critics said:

> He cannot but intend some stroke of state
> Shall signalize his passage into peace
> Out of the creaking.
> . . . .
> Dock, by the million, of its friendly joints,
> The electoral body short at once! who did,
> May do again, and undo us beside.
>
> *ll*. 1364-66, 1370-72

The Head remained silent:

> and ne'er a line
> His locked mouth oped the wider, till at last
> O' the long degraded and insulting day,
> Sudden the clock told it was judgment-time.
>
> *ll*. 1377-80

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[31] Guérard, *op*. *cit*., pp. 127-28.

During Louis Napoleon's period of silence in the weeks preceding the <u>coup d'état,</u> everyone did suspect some "stroke of state." Mrs. Browning wrote:

> A crisis was imminent, the whole world knew; and we have expected the culminating point week after week -- though of course without any definite expectation of what actually came.[32]

Anything could be expected, for Louis Napoleon's actions were unpredictable. He had "docked the vote" in May, 1850, for his convenience; he would not have hesitated to do it again if he thought it necessary, even though he had repealed this law so that he could receive the votes of the masses. When the "judgment-time" came, the man did act suddenly. Only three men knew of Louis Napoleon's plans for the <u>coup d'état.</u> He explained his actions: "It was essential that the whole plan should be carried out at the same time, in order that it might strike terror by its arrangements."[33] On the eve of December 2 messages were handed out at a party and the following events were timed exactly so that nothing could prevent their success.

The appeal to the people for their approval followed. The poet has deviated from the facts only slightly. He places the Head's appeal to the people immediately following the

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[32]Huxley, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 149.

[33]Napoleon III, <u>Works,</u> V. II, p. 337.

<u>coup d'état:</u>

> Take me — who know your mind, and mean your good,
> With clearer head and stouter arm than they.
> <u>ll</u>. 1397-98

Actually this appeal followed by a month Louis Napoleon's seizure of power on December 2, but the appeal was the same: "give me the means of accomplishing the grand mission that I hold from you."[34] He asked for and received a plebiscite proclaiming him the absolute ruler of the French. The poem reads:

> He was in his place.
> <u>l</u>. 1412

The people as a whole did welcome the rule of Louis Napoleon. Mrs. Browning wrote on February 15, 1852: "There never was a more legitimate chief of a State than Louis Napoleon is now -- elected by seven millions and a half."[35]

But what of the events immediately following the <u>coup d'état</u>? The poet summarizes these:

> There was uprising, masks dropped, flags unfurled,
> Weapons outflourished in the wind, my faith!
> Heavily did he let his fist fall plumb
> On each perturber of the public peace,
> No matter whose the wagging head it broke.
> <u>ll</u>. 1417-21

> Then followed silence and submission.
> <u>l</u>. 1442

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[34]Napoleon III, <u>Works</u>, V. II, p. 356.

[35]Kenyon, <u>op. cit.</u>, V. II, p. 51.

The unofficial report at the time of the coup d'état was 2000 killed, 2500 sent to Cayenne, and newspapers suppressed in Paris.[36] According to the official report of the Minister of State 26,642 were arrested in all.[37] The members of the Assembly were arrested in their homes in the early morning and later exiled. Anyone who appeared to be objecting to the actions of those in charge was shot immediately. It was a period of absolute dictatorship. Then there was silence and submission, for no one dared act otherwise. Mrs. Browning, however, again defended the actions of her Emperor:

> To talk about 'carnage' is quite absurd. The people never rose — it was nothing but a little popular scum, cleared off at once by the troops . . . And on saturday [sic], Robert and I drove down to the scene of conflict, and examined the windows broken in. There was a great crowd, but all was perfectly tranquil — and Paris, generally, looked as if nothing had been the matter.[38]

The poet has outlined the events leading up to the period of the Second Empire. At this point Sagacity enters the poem and speaks the truth of the Head's actions:

> for want
> O' the by-blow, came deliberate butcher's work!
> ll. 1473-74

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[36]Napoleon III, Works, V. I, p. 146.

[37]Papiers Secrets et Correspondance du Second Empire, annotée par A. Poulet-Malassis (France & Belgique: Chez Tous les Librairies, 1871), p. 124.

[38]Huxley, op. cit., pp. 149-150.

Louis Napoleon could have avoided a certain amount of his "butcher's work" if he had acted more slowly and used persuasion rather than force. He had failed twice to seize the reins of the French government; he did not intend to fail again.

With the entrance of Sagacity to suggest the truth of the Head's actions, the poet-historian begins his apology for the man. He first apologizes for the Head's breaking his oath:

> Rather than stretch one handbreadth of the law,
> I am bound to see it break from end to end.
> <u>ll</u>. 1462-63

The man is in the hands of Hohenstiel-Schwangau (France), and whatever he has done was for her sake:

> all is for her sake:
> 'T was she ordained my service should be so.
> What if the event demonstrate her unwise,
> If she unwill the thing she willed before?
> <u>ll</u>. 1466-69

In 1848 Louis Napoleon swore "to remain faithful to the democratic Republic, one and indivisible, and to fulfill all the duties which the Constitution imposes on me."[39] He certainly broke his oath with the <u>coup d'état,</u> but he excused his action by saying: "Was it not necessary to put order in such incoherency?"[40] Later he said: "I did what seemed the best for the distracted country."[41]

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[39]Napoleon III, <u>Works,</u> V. I, p. 107.

[40]Fleury, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., V. I, p. 36.

[41]<u>Ibid.,</u> p. 58.

Louis Napoleon was thinking about himself when he planned and carried out the *coup d'état*, but Mrs. Browning again justified his action:

> I hold that a pure patriot would be perfectly justifiable in taking the same steps which up to this moment he has taken. He has broken, certainly, the husk of an oath, but fidelity to the intention of it seems to me reconcilable with the breach.[42]

She, just as the poet-historian, said he acted in accordance with the will of France: "if he had not felt that he had the great mass of the people to back him, he is . . . too able a man . . . to have dared what he has dared."[43]

Louis Napoleon did receive the applause of the people on his campaign tours, but he did not take the chance of asking them for their approval at the polls until he already held the government in his hands. Then he began his sway.

The poet-historian gives the same defense for the Head's rule that the Prince gave in his apology:

> govern for the many first,
> The poor mean multitude, all mouths and eyes:
> . . . .
> Equalize things a little!
>
> *ll*. 1491-92, 1501

The means he employed were those which accompany dictatorship:

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[42]Kenyon, *op*. *cit*., V. II, p. 36.

[43]*Ibid*., p. 37.

He wrenched out the whole canker, root and branch,
Deaf to who cried the world would tumble in
At its four corners if he touched a twig.
_ll_. 1523-25

So began the dictatorial reign of Louis Napoleon. He promoted the freedom of the press, but nothing was printed adverse to the Second Empire. He disregarded criticism, always telling the people he was acting for their welfare. After he had used his charm over their minds, he would ask for a plebiscite and then proclaim he was ruling by the will of the people. The poet-historian says the law of the ruler was:

"Each people rules itself
Its own way, not as any stranger please."
_ll_. 1528-29

Therefore,

Hohenstiel
For Hohenstielers! Rome, by parity
Of reasoning, for Romans? That's a jest
Wants proper treatment.
ll. 1533-36

Louis Napoleon said: "It is impossible to characterize any one system as good for all people."[44] What was good for France might not be best for Italy; his first duty was to France. As the poem states, however, this is a jest, for Louis Napoleon did interfere in foreign affairs. And, he did

have to pay the price, in God's good time.
_l_. 1540

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[44]Napoleon III, _Works,_ V. I, p. 196.

Browning wrote to Isa Blagden on October 19, 1870, that if Louis Napoleon had kept his word to Italy "he would have had an Italian army to help him two months ago."[45]

Sagacity again interrupts the discourse of the poet-historian with a suggestion of the truth by letting the Head defend his unstable foreign policy:

> "The work was none of mine:
> . . . .
> Meantime, there's plain advantage, should we leave
> Things as we find them. Keep Rome manacled
> Hand and foot: no fear of unruliness!"
>
> ll. 1545-50

Louis Napoleon did disclaim responsibility for the French troops in Rome in 1849. He did, however, leave them there because he did not want to turn the Catholic party against his government. The Empress was a very strong Catholic and urged this political move. Mrs. Browning hoped Louis Napoleon would remove the troops; but Rome remained manacled. What Louis Napoleon really wanted from Italy is revealed in the following statement made in 1859: "the sole aim of France is to have on her frontiers a friendly people who will owe their regeneration to him."[46]

Then, continues the poet,

> the war came which he knew must be.
>
> l. 1597

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[45]Hood, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.

[46]d'Hauterive, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

Louis Napoleon knew he would eventually enter the Austrian War; this was what he wanted. He planned to force Austria into being the aggressor; then he would be praised as the liberator of the Italian nation.

The poet-historian, however, says Hohenstiel-Schwangau (France) has always been a warlike nation; no government has ever lasted very long in the country. An editorial in *Harper's* for January 21, 1871, refers to France as "the most wanton of warriors."[47] Mrs. Browning praised Louis Napoleon, but she did not consider France a stable nation: "How long any government will stand in France, it is difficult to predicate."[48]

Sagacity interrupts by suggesting that the Head prolong the period of peace "artfully":

> Prolong it! -- artfully, as if intent
> On ending peace as soon as possible.
> Quietly so increase the sweets of ease
> And safety, so employ the multitude,
> Put hod and trowel so in idle hands,
> So stuff and stop the wagging jaws with bread,
> That selfishness shall surreptitiously
> Do wisdom's office.
>
> *ll.* 1652-59

This, of course, is just what Louis Napoleon did. Through his philanthropic and civic measures he turned the minds of the people away from war. At the same time, he kept

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[47] *Harper's Weekly*, XV (January 21, 1871), p. 50.

[48] Huxley, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

a powerful standing army, which he insisted was for security. When Queen Victoria came to the unveiling of the statue of Napoleon I at Cherbourg in 1858, she was perturbed because there were so many battleships near England; but the Emperor reassured her:

> The more powerful a nation, the greater the respect she commands. . . . In such case the peace of a country is not risked for the satisfaction of empty vanity or the winning of an ephemeral popularity.[49]

His aid to the masses was another diplomatic move, for he wrote to Prince Napoleon in 1852:

> When one is the head of the Government, there are two things that must be done: to satisfy the interests of the most numerous class, and to attach to oneself the upper classes. . . . It is only by means of great measures that one can attach the masses to oneself.[50]

Sagacity continues to speak the truth, for the Emperor did surreptitiously substitute the "dagger o' the lath." He was completely prepared for war behind the front of a gay and peaceful nation; when the moment came for action, he acted.

The poet-historian, however, continues to defend the Head by letting him state that he believes there should never be war except for the cause of truth and right. The poem proceeds:

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[49]Arnaud, op. cit., p. 166.

[50]d'Hauterive, op. cit., p. 58.

While I have rule,
Understand! — war for war's sake, war for the sake
O' the good war gets you as war's sole excuse,
Is damnable and damned shall be.

ll. 1739-42

Once you warred
For liberty against the world, and won:
There was the glory.

ll. 1745-47

Before he came into power, Louis Napoleon wrote: "it is a great crime to wage it [war] for a whim, without aiming at a great result."[51] Later, he added:

> humanity . . . curses and condemns immoral wars which kill men with the object only of influencing public opinion, and of supporting an ever insecure government by futile expedients.[52]

Throughout his reign as Emperor, Louis Napoleon continually repeated: "L'Empire, c'est la paix."[53] These were the words of the Napoleon of the Mexican fiasco, the Crimean War, the Austrian War, and the Franco-Prussian War. He defended his entrance into the Crimean War by saying: "The rights of nations had undoubtedly been violated, and that meant war."[54] Mrs. Browning, likewise, excused the Emperor for entering this war: "It seems to me a most righteous and necessary war. . . . Therefore, hating war, I do accept the war as a necessity."[55]

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[51] Napoleon III, Works, V. II, p. 214.

[52] Ibid., p. 218.

[53] Guedalla, op. cit., p. 226.

[54] Fleury, op. cit., V. II, p. 14.

[55] Huxley, op. cit., p. 208.

The poet-historian sees the Austrian War as another battle for truth and right; therefore, the French should free Italy

> for Austria's sake the first,
> Italy's next, and our sake last of all.
> <u>ll.</u> 1878-79

These lines recall Mrs. Browning's words concerning the station of French troops in Rome: "for the sake of France, even more than for the sake of Italy, I yearn to see the act cancelled."[56]

Louis Napoleon, however, entered the Austrian War in order to gain praise for himself, not for any cause of truth and right. Mrs. Browning was elated when France entered the war. On May 27, 1859, she wrote:

> Louis Napoleon has acted . . . sublimely. . . . Italy stretches her arms to him as to the very angel of the resurrection. Emancipation was utterly impossible without foreign help, and he brings it at all risks to himself and to France.[57]

The Head is asking for no personal gain from the war, continues the defense of the poem. Sagacity, however, slyly questions:

> All for nought --
> Not even, say, some patch of province, splice
> O' the frontier? -- some snug honorarium-fee
> Shut into glove and pocketed apace?
> <u>ll</u>. 1892-95

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[56]Kenyon, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., V. I, p. 429.

[57]Huxley, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 314.

Sagacity is correct; Napoleon III did demand the provinces of Savoy and Nice in return for his aid to Italy. In fact, he had this plan in mind as early as 1855, for he later wrote that his only hope was of freeing Lombardy and Venetia and "of obtaining in exchange for this help the province of Savoy."[58] Browning said of this demand: "It was a great action; but he has taken eighteen pence for it -- what a pity."[59] The peace treaty of Villafranca was premature, for Italy was not freed as far as the Adriatic. Mrs. Browning was enthusiastic when Louis Napoleon entered the war, but even she was shaken temporarily by the peace treaty. She wrote:

> Napoleon had done so much, risked so much -- his dynasty, his life -- that one was not prepared for his retreating before the risk of a general war. One was not prepared.[60]

History confirms Sagacity's recital of Napoleon III's policy toward Italy; the poet-historian has defended the man's intentions just as he stated them. Following is Louis Napoleon's own proclamation to the Italian people in 1859:

> Your enemies, who are also mine, have endeavoured to diminish the universal sympathy felt in Europe for your cause, by causing it to be believed that I am <u>making</u> war for personal ambition, or to increase French territory. If there

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[58]Fleury, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., V. II, p. 90.

[59]Kenyon, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., V. II, pp. 368-69.

[60]Huxley, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 319.

> are men who fail to comprehend their
> epoch, I am not one of them. . . .
> Tomorrow you will be the citizens of
> a great country.[61]

The freedom that he gave Italy, however, was an unsatisfactory half-freedom which left her craving for complete freedom and disappointed in Louis Napoleon.

The poet-historian has completed the apology for Louis Napoleon's political policy. Now he asks:

> What else noteworthy and commendable
> I' the man's career?
> _ll_. 1909-10

In other words, what else is there that needs an apology? The answer is his marriage and method of securing the throne for his son. The poet-historian, of course, states that the Head was chosen by the people and did not depend upon hereditary right for his position. Sagacity, however, interrupts this admirable discourse by reminding the Head of his successor. Perhaps he was chosen by the people, but he cannot count on the same thing happening again. He should

> Wed the pick o' the world,
> Where'er you think you find it.
> _ll_. 1934-35

If he can find a queen, she will be approved. If not, he must take one of the other sort -- "bright eye, soft smile,

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[61]The Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco, _The Liberation of Italy, 1815-1870_ (London: Seely and Co., Ltd., 1895), p. 234.

and so forth." If he chooses the latter, he can say:

> I, the man
> O' the people, with the people mate myself:
> So stand, so fall.
>
> ll. 1946-48

> For son, as for his sire, be the free wife
> In the free state!
>
> ll. 1952-53

The poet-historian interrupts by saying Sagacity is propping up one more lie, for the Head realizes the heir does not receive the genius from the sire:

> never was so plain a truth
> As that God drops his seed of heavenly flame
> Just where He wills on earth.
>
> ll. 1958-60

Sagacity is correct again, for Louis Napoleon did become concerned about his heir. At the age of forty-four he was still unmarried. He made offers to two royal families; both refused his hand. Finally, on January 30, 1853, he married Eugenie de Montijo, Countess of Teba, a beautiful Spanish lady of twenty-six. There was wide-spread disapproval of this marriage, but Louis Napoleon again defended himself: "when you have learnt to know her, you will be convinced that on this occasion I have once again been inspired by Providence."[62] Later, of course, he did attempt to secure the throne for his son.

So concludes the analysis of Louis Napoleon's policy as it is presented by Browning in _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau._

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[62]Arnaud, _op_. _cit.,_ p. 90.

In the first two parts of the analysis it has been seen that the poet has presented the policy of the idealist who spoke admirably but did not always put his words into deeds. His policy was one of expediency; his mission was to "save society"; his means were to seize opportunities. The Prince of the poem defends his life's work in an apologetic manner; Louis Napoleon defended himself whenever he felt it was necessary.

In the third part of the analysis it has been shown that the poet has presented an apology for the reign of Napoleon III, the last Emperor of the French, through the words of the poet-historian. Sagacity confutes this apology and reveals the true character of the ambitious dictator. The poet-historian relates many historical facts, but he over-shadows them with fictitious, idealistic acts. Sagacity speaks briefly and accurately.

The two sections of the poem are equally important in order to understand the character of Louis Napoleon. Neither side of the picture reveals the complete man; both are necessary for one to see the full portrait. Browning has drawn together the commendable and the inexcusable acts of Louis Napoleon's life. In presenting the commendable the poet has given the portrait of the author of _Ideas of Napoleonism, Extinction of Pauperism,_ and _L'Idée Napoléonienne._ In presenting the inexcusable acts of the Emperor's career, the poet has given the

portrait of the ruthless dictator who expressed his mind freely in letters to his cousin, Prince Napoleon. Although he has allowed the man to speak an adequate and reasonable defense for his life, the poet has revealed the imperialistic policy of the daring gambler. The Prince and the poet-historian speak admirably, but the "plating" wears through and the true Napoleon III is seen. Browning fully realized the true character of the man, for he wrote to Isa Blagden in July, 1870:

> put not your trust in princes neither in the sons of men . . . the plating wears through, and out comes the copperhead of human nature and weakness and falseness too![63]

The poet has gradually let the truth wear through as the poem progresses. When the end is reached, it is the weakness and falseness that stand uppermost in the reader's mind. Thus stands the apology of the enigmatic character, Louis Napoleon, who once said:

> All men are more or less actors in this world; but each chooses his theatre and his audience, and uses all his efforts as well as his ambition to obtain the suffrage of this pet of his adoption.[64]

The poet concludes:

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[63]Hood, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

[64]Napoleon III, *Works,* V. I, p. 455.

Words have to come: and somehow words deflect
As the best cannon ever rifled will.

ll. 1233-34

Louis Napoleon said: "there is a flagrant contradiction between words and deeds."[65]

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[65] Napoleon III, *Works,* V. II, pp. 186-87.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The preceding study has shown that Robert Browning has drawn a dependable portrait of Louis Napoleon in the poem *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society.* Through the medium of a reverie the poet has portrayed the Emperor as he sat in the Tuileries in 1868 defending his life. Browning has not only given the bare outline of the man, such as a photograph would present, but he has also added the fine details of a portrait by means of illustrations, figures, and phrases characteristic of Louis Napoleon's words and deeds. The finished product has two profiles, equally important for an understanding of the enigmatic character of the portrait. The first is that of the idealistic Dr. Jekyll who wrote and spoke admirably, the author of Ideas of Napoleonism, *L'Idée Napoléonienne,* and *Extinction of Pauperism.* It is the Louis Napoleon who professed to "save society" by bringing order and stability to France, who promised to liberate Italy, and who defended his every act. It is the Louis Napoleon Mrs. Browning admired and defended. I do not know whether Browning read Louis Napoleon's writings or not, but there are remarkable parallels in the poem with the man's own words. If Browning did not read the Emperor's works, he certainly knew the man's character from other sources and his intuition filled in the gaps.

The second profile is that of the unscrupulous Mr. Hyde who broke his promises and used his ruthless power in order to promote his imperialistic ambitions. It is Napoleon III, the dictator of the Second Empire. It is Napoleon III as he is usually described by historians and as Browning saw him in 1869:

> It seems to me that Napoleon was capable, _mutatis mutandis,_ of acting exactly as grossly and abominably as Guido: and that, on the large scale, he _did_ act quite as falsely, as selfishly and cruelly.[1]

The study has been divided into four parts. In the first place, it has shown that Browning was an artistic historian in composing the poem. Through his combination of the idealistic with the realistic he was able to portray the true character of the Emperor. _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau_ is an artistic work and deserves to be called a poem.

In the second place, the study has traced the development of Browning's interest in Louis Napoleon and has shown why he wrote the poem. Browning became interested in Louis Napoleon because of his promise to liberate Italy. Mrs. Browning made a hero of the Emperor and continually defended him. Her defense parallels that of _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau._ Browning was always interested in the paradoxical character,

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[1]_Robert Browning and Julia Wedgwood,_ ed. Richard Curle (New _York:_ Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1937), p. 175.

the "apparent" failure, and he delighted in letting such a person speak his own defense.

In the third place, the study has analyzed Browning's technique in writing the poem. It has shown that the poet began the poem as a monologue and ended it as a reverie. In this way the poet has illustrated two outstanding characteristics of the Emperor: his voluptuousness and his dreaminess. The study has also analyzed Browning's technique in drawing the man's portrait. The poet has described the personal appearance of the Emperor; he has accurately characterized the period of the Second Empire; he has depicted the many traits of the Emperor's personality; he has illustrated the man's interests.

In the fourth place, the study has analyzed Louis Napoleon's policy as it has been presented in _Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau._ This analysis has consisted of three parts: the defense of the Emperor's policy of expediency and of his mission of conservatism; the defense of his opportunism, the means he chose to achieve his mission; the poet-historian defense and its refutation by Sagacity. The defense presented is the defense of the man himself and of Mrs. Browning. Sagacity has revealed the facts of the unstable Emperor's life. He did accomplish a certain amount of commendable work, but his ruthless

reign as dictator overshadows his good works.

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau has puzzled its readers; Napoleon III has puzzled historians. If the poem is not completely understood, the poet has succeeded even further in drawing the portrait of the "Sphinx of the Tuileries." Browning once said himself: "Do you think poetry was ever generally understood -- or can be?"[2]

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[2]W. G. Collingwood, *The Life and Work of John Ruskin* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1893), p. 234.

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