

## CALIBAN UPON SETEBOS

By C. R. TRACY

Twenty years after Browning had written *Caliban upon Setebos* he once singled it out as his most representative "dramatic" poem.<sup>1</sup> For Browning the word "dramatic" had, of course, a special meaning, equivalent to a warning that the poem to which it was applied contained no opinions of the poet's own. Modern readers, however, have come to suspect that often when Browning insisted most loudly on the dramatic character of a poem he was behaving like the mother bird when she tries to distract attention from her nest by running noisily in the opposite direction. In *Caliban*, of course, there is none of the autobiography which can now be seen in *Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, and *Sordello*; but at the same time it is not, as Huxley is reported to have said, just "a truly scientific representation of the development of religious ideas in primitive man."<sup>2</sup> For one thing the volume, *Dramatis Personæ* (1864), in which *Caliban* was first published is marked by a wearing thin of the dramatic mask and a tendency to refer more or less openly to subjects which were agitating the world at the time.<sup>3</sup> *A Death in the Desert*, for example, grew out of the controversies which were then raging over the authorship of the fourth gospel, and *Mr Sludge* out of the spiritualist craze. Moreover, as Browning's mind was being attracted more and more by the theological interests which almost preempted his later volumes, it is unlikely that he would have written *Caliban* in 1864 without giving it, in his own mind at least, some significance in respect to these interests. Indeed, in one respect it makes an obvious allusion to a contemporary controversy, for it was clearly the missing link which Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) had recently made a subject of general discussion that suggested the subject to him. Without denying that the primary interest of the poem is still its originality as an imaginative creation, one can also see in it an autobiographical interest, as an

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Robert Browning* (ed. T. L. Hood, New Haven, 1933), p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Arthur Symons, *An Introduction to the Study of Browning* (London, 1886), p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> Miss Nellie Pottle, in an unpublished thesis in the Yale Library, has made a thorough study of *Dramatis Personae* from this point of view. Her conclusions about *Caliban*, however, differ considerably from mine.

expression of Browning's own opinion on certain religious questions of considerable importance.

Right from the beginning, in fact, critics have suspected that *Caliban* should be interpreted as a satire. In 1864 reviews of *Dramatis Personæ* appeared in both the *Athenæum* and the *Eclectic* which took that position about this poem. Unfortunately, however, the reviewers took exactly opposite views on what the object of the satire was. E. Paxton Hood, writing in the *Eclectic*, considered Caliban to be "the sensual soul of the world," and thought the poem would be "a most edifying chapter to innumerable gentlemen of our acquaintance, Darwinians, believers in force and matter, and other such divine and worshipful deities."<sup>4</sup> The writer in the *Athenæum*, however, interpreted it as a satire, not on radical thought, but on orthodox theology, saying "the reader will hardly fail to make out a good deal of the satire which Caliban's theology reflects upon ours."<sup>5</sup> Subsequent critics have fallen pretty largely into these two irreconcilable classes.

The argument of the first class of critics, those who consider the poem an orthodox rebuttal of the beliefs of materialists, evolutionists, and other radical thinkers of the day, rests partly on the support of the sub-title, "Natural Theology in the Island," for natural theology is technically that part which is built up by the human reason independent of revealed truth. Caliban, they say, represents the human reason insofar as it is the product of mere biological evolution, and is an object-lesson to those who put excessive faith in the human reason unaided by supernatural revelation. Consequently the satire is intended both for the higher critics and for the evolutionists. The strongest reason for accepting this argument would be that on the whole Browning was conservative in his religious thinking, and in *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* (1850) had recently come out pretty strongly in favour of evangelical nonconformity and against theological rationalism. On the other hand, however, Browning was not opposed to the theory of evolution, and though he understood it very little (and would probably have been opposed had he understood), he took some pride

<sup>4</sup> *The Eclectic Review*, n. s., VII (1864), p. 70. For the attribution of authorship see Furnivall's bibliography in *The Browning Society's Papers*, I (1881-1884), 136.

<sup>5</sup> *The Athenæum*, # 1910 (1864), p. 767.

in being considered one of the "Darwinized."<sup>6</sup> It must also be remembered that, as Caliban's theology bears no conceivable resemblance to the beliefs of any actual radical thinker of that time or any other, according to this theory the poem must be a mere fantasy, incapable of convincing anyone not predisposed to see the point. And finally, this argument ignores Caliban's religious intuition, which has enabled him to grope beyond the boundaries of his ridiculous system of theology towards the conception of a higher and purer god—the Quiet—entirely without the aid of revelation. Caliban has actually within himself the seeds of a truer faith. So far, then, from being a travesty of advanced thinking, *Caliban* was written partly with the purpose of showing that religious faith can begin even far back in the evolutionary scale.

The other class of critics considers the poem a satire on some form of orthodoxy. At a meeting of the Browning Society in 1884 Cotter Morison read a paper in which, after a long preamble, he finally suggested that the poem "is a free and spirited, but not less a faithful, translation of much which passes for orthodox opinion."<sup>7</sup> In the discussion which followed the paper Berdoe rose to say that the poem was certainly to his mind "a very bitter satire upon Calvinistic theology."<sup>8</sup> Since then this opinion has been reiterated several times.<sup>9</sup> A close reading of the poem will bring to light passages which suggest at once doctrines held by the Calvinists, especially the fundamentalist fire-eaters of those times. For instance, the a-moral character of the Calvinist God is parodied in this passage:

' Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him,  
Nor kind, nor cruel: He is strong and Lord.  
' Am strong myself compared to yonder crabs

<sup>6</sup> See his letter to Furnivall in 1881 (*Letters, ed. cit.*, pp. 199-200); also *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau* and the *Parleying with Furini*. For a treatment of Browning and evolution see Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* (New York, 1936), pp. 435-454.

<sup>7</sup> *The Browning Society's Papers*, I (1881-1884), 496.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121\*.

<sup>9</sup> By Professor Symes (*ibid.*, II, 82\*-83\*), and Berdoe again in *The Browning Cyclopaedia* (London, 1891); also by A. W. Benn (*The History of English Rationalism* [London, 1906], II, 279) and by Paul de Reul (*L'Art et la Pensée de Robert Browning* [Brussels, 1929], p. 166).

That march now from the mountain to the sea; —  
 'Let twenty pass, and stone the twenty-first,  
 Loving not, hating not, just choosing so.

The doctrine of election and reprobation also is alluded to in these lines:

He hath a spite against me, that I know,  
 Just as He favours Prosper, who knows why?

To this evidence may be added as corroboration that of one of Browning's earliest poems—*Johannes Agricola in Meditation*—in which the poet had already written a somewhat similar satire on Calvinism, holding up to scorn the spiritual pride which would result from a man's considering himself one of the elect.<sup>10</sup> All of these things together leave no doubt that *Caliban upon Setebos* must be held as in part a satire upon popular Calvinism.<sup>11</sup>

Caliban, however, is not a Calvinist altogether, and hence the poem is a satire only in part. Setebos, as he conceives of him, is essentially a subordinate deity, always subject to the Quiet that made him, and trying to win some comfort in his miserable condition from the pitiful amusement of plaguing his creatures. His joy and grief "both derive from weakness in some way." Caliban can explain the ills of his own life only as the product of the will of a creature equally miserable, as a natural theologian using Paley's argument from design in his own way. Complex as the conception is, Setebos in all his characteristics is anthropomorphic. The Quiet, on the other hand, as has been already suggested, is a dim foreshadowing of an infinite and impersonal deity. The Quiet lives in the stars and is omnipotent: "This Quiet, all it hath a mind to, doth." Though remote and uninterested in Caliban, the Quiet is on the whole a beneficent deity, to which Caliban looks ultimately to drive away Setebos, or else convert him to kindlier courses. It is not anthropomorphic, feels "nor joy nor grief," and is referred to by Caliban always in the neuter. In fact Caliban seems to think

<sup>10</sup> C. R. Tracy, "Browning's Heresies," *Studies in Philology*, XXXIII (1936), 610-625. The present article is a sequel to the one referred to by this note.

<sup>11</sup> A. W. Benn (*loc. cit.*) considers that the conclusion of the poem, where Caliban gives up the choicest portions of his diet to appease the wrath of Setebos, is a satire on the fastings of the Anglo-Catholics. It is characteristic of Browning to kill two birds with one stone in this manner.

of it rather as an abstract state of being than as a concretely conceived personality, for he suggests that some day Setebos may "grow into it As grubs grow butterflies," unless some other fate overtakes him first. The Quiet is a magnificent conception, hazy as it is, produced by Caliban on those dark nights of joyous dancing safe from the eye of Setebos, when exhausted he paused to rest and allowed his mind to range over the mystery of the stars. Setebos was conceived empirically to explain hard facts in Caliban's everyday experience: the Quiet, on the other hand, is an intuitive answer to the deeper needs of his soul.

Now Browning believed that there are two diverse ways in which men think of God. In the first place He is a person, who knows both love and anger, joy and sorrow. In the second He is an infinite and omnipotent deity, whose nature is awful, mysterious, and beyond the powers of the imagination to define. Both of these views, incompatible as they are, are included in the orthodox Christian faith, and for Browning the first may be generally equated with Jesus Christ, and the second with the Godhead. For Browning, in fact, the first person of the Trinity was never anthropomorphic, but rather "the Supreme Being of metaphysics than the God of theology."<sup>12</sup> So far was Browning from abjuring anthropomorphism, however, that he himself centred his faith on the "face" of Jesus Christ (*Epilogue to Dramatis Personæ*); for in the apt words of Moncure Conway, "it was a necessity of his genius to project a divine drama into the universe."<sup>13</sup> Several times in his later poems, for example in *Ferishtah's Fancies* and *The Parleyings*, he touches again upon this subject and each time he argues for the validity of an anthropomorphic faith against the cavils of objectors like Herbert Spencer.<sup>14</sup> For Browning believed that the attributes

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Orr, "Religious Opinions of Robert Browning," *Contemporary Review*, LX (1891), 883. To the third person of the Trinity Browning never refers.

<sup>13</sup> M. D. Conway, *Autobiography* (Boston and New York, 1904), II, 30.

<sup>14</sup> In *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) Browning deals with this subject in the section entitled *The Sun*, in which one of Ferishtah's pupils reports to his master a thinly disguised version of the story of the incarnation. Ferishtah replies to his pupil's incredulity that, though there may be no truth in the tale, yet it is magnificent, for it is natural for a human being to wish to worship a god with human characteristics, and not a mere impersonal force, like the sun. In the *Parleying with Mandeville*

of the Godhead exceeded all the powers of the human comprehension, and that one might as well hope to look undazzled with naked eyes upon the brilliance of the noon-day sun as to form a concept of the Godhead which would be of practical use to a believer. Hence, in order to have a living faith, one is obliged to break up the pure white radiance of truth into the earthly colours of the spectrum, and to believe that the Unknowable had once taken on the form of the Knowable, even though there may be no historical truth in the myth thus created. Though consequently the life of Jesus upon earth may be only a myth, as a symbol of the divine character it is eternally true; and such a symbol is the only means whereby an eternal truth can be made available to finite intelligences.<sup>15</sup> The distinction of Browning's theology was that he set up a definite relationship between the anthropomorphic and the non-anthropomorphic elements in his religion, the former standing always as symbolic of the latter. In *Caliban upon Setebos*, then, one must beware of seeing a satirical warning against anthropomorphism.

After making allowances for difference in evolutionary scale,

(1887) there is a similar thought. Man was constantly peering into the sun (Ferishtah's figure again), but was only dazzled for his pains, until Prometheus came to his aid with a glass which would condense the blinding light into an image man can look at: "Sun's self made palpable to Man!" (l. 300.) Consequently man is justified in forming for himself anthropomorphic notions of God, for only in a human form can He come close to him and enter into his life. See the chapter on the *Parleying with Mandeville* in W. C. DeVane, *Browning's Parleyings* (New Haven, 1927). For the use of the sun figure and the Prometheus story see Helen Clarke, "Sun Symbolism in Browning," *Poet-Lore*, XI (1899), 55-73. That Browning knew the philosophy of Herbert Spencer is unlikely, though he knew the philosopher himself (see David Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* [New York, 1908], I, 279), but in *Ferishtah's Fancies* Browning was most likely attacking some popular version of Spencer's opinion that the great mistake of historical Christianity has been that "while with one breath it has asserted that the Cause of all things passes understanding, it has, with the next breath, asserted that the Cause of all things possesses such or such attributes—can be in so far understood." (Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* [London, 1862], p. 101.)

<sup>15</sup> Browning's estimate of the powers of the human reason was sceptical. See Henry Jones, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher* (Glasgow, 1891). For his views on the authenticity of the gospel narratives see W. O. Raymond, "Browning and Higher Criticism," *PMLA*, XLIV (1929), 590-621.

Caliban's pair of deities represent a dual notion of divinity similar to Browning's. The Quiet is the result of Caliban's intuitive search for abstract truth, and like Browning's notion of the God-head, it is remote from all human concerns. The chief deficiency of Caliban's theology is, that though he has discarded his dam's simple dualism of a creating and a destroying god, he has not yet altogether perceived the symbolic relationship which exists between them. Setebos does not represent any single abstract principle.<sup>16</sup> In most of his activities he is evil, explaining for Caliban the evils in his own experience, but he is still not the representative of the powers of evil, for Caliban expressly says that he is "good i' the main." Moreover, Caliban has rejected belief in immortality because he cannot believe in the doctrine of eternal punishment—against which Browning always fought—and hence has taken a step, not behind but ahead of Calvinism, by perceiving that evil is neither absolute nor eternal. He has had the first glimpse of an understanding of the first principle of Browning's faith, that behind all the evil of life there is good to be found by those who seek it. Ultimately he believes Setebos may change or even grow into the Quiet, "as grubs grow butterflies." At the heart of the universe, he is beginning to see, there are not two conflicting principles, eternal right and eternal wrong, but rather one all-embracing principle of which both right and wrong are modifications. Caliban, however, has been largely unable so far to apply this knowledge to particular cases, just as Paracelsus had been unable to translate his great thirst for human love into a sympathetic understanding of the foibles of actual human beings. Consequently he still believes in two gods and is unable to find precisely where the good is to be found in this life; but he has begun to see the light.

Though *Caliban upon Setebos* is not a direct expression of Browning's own mind, it is a study of the gropings of an unde-

<sup>16</sup> Josiah Royce, in his paper on "Browning's Theism" (*The Boston Browning Society Papers, 1886-1897* [New York, 1897], pp. 7-34), maintains that, as according to Browning the two attributes of God are power and love, Caliban conceives of Setebos as personifying the former and the Quiet the latter. But that will not bear examination. Ethel M. Naish (*Browning and Dogma* [London, 1906]) thinks that in one aspect Setebos is the "representative of the powers of evil" (p. 21). This also is too sweeping, unless one remembers that evil is for Browning a merely relative term.



veloped mind towards the truth as he saw it. One can see that Browning has not forgotten the lessons he learned in his youth from the Unitarians.<sup>17</sup> His scorn of Calvinism remains, and also his rejection of the doctrine of eternal punishment. His metaphysical notion of God too was most likely the result of his contact with Unitarianism. Although his anthropomorphism definitely was not Unitarian, yet as he held that the truth of the Gospel story is symbolic, not historic, he shows the influence of radical thought, probably of the Hegelianism which had been preached at South Place Chapel. But this may seem to be reading too much into the poem. Fortunately it is possible to substantiate it, circumstantially at least, by a study of Browning's intellectual associations at the time the poem was taking shape in his mind.

The poem was published in 1864, and could not have been written before 1859, when Darwin's *Origin of Species* came out. Moreover, it is well known that after Mrs. Browning's death in 1861 Browning did practically no original writing until late in 1863. Consequently *Caliban* was certainly composed either in the winter of 1859-1860 or in that of 1863-1864. Between these two dates there seems to be no means of choosing.

In the winter of 1859-1860 the Brownings were enjoying frequently the company of a very engaging man, the American Unitarian, Theodore Parker, who had come to Italy for his health and was to die in Florence in the spring. Parker's most intimate friends in Rome that winter were the Storys, who of course were also very intimate with the Brownings. The Brownings arrived in Rome for the winter on December 3, and made Parker's acquaintance four days later. Parker frequently mentions them in his letters, always favourably (except for some scepticism about Pen), and summed up the poet in these words: "Browning is a fine hearty, hale Englishman with a little gray in his hair, full of literature, anecdote, and fun."<sup>18</sup> Parker in turn seems to have dazzled the

<sup>17</sup> See my article previously referred to.

<sup>18</sup> From a MS. letter in the Boston Public Library, for my transcript of which I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Zoltán Haraszti, Keeper of Rare Books. Parker describes Pen as "a bright, fantastically-dressed boy of 12, who seems likely to turn out like other sons of a genius & to be brought up as well as only sons commonly are." For other remarks by Parker on the Brownings see John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker* (London, 1863), II, 382, 390, 406.



Brownings by the fecundity of his knowledge and the activity of his mind, though Mrs. Browning condescended a little towards his opinions.<sup>19</sup> They talked about Italian politics, which naturally exercised everyone in Rome that winter, probably about American slavery, on which Mrs. Browning was writing a poem, certainly about literature, and could hardly have avoided religion. One of the most attractive pictures of their friendship comes from a letter written by an associate of Parker's, Mr. Apthorp, to a friend in America:

His [Parker's] reasoning powers were never clearer or sharper. We were together, a week or two since, on a visit to Mrs Browning. Mr Browning was present, and the conversation turned on Guéronnière's pamphlet, which had just then appeared. Mrs Browning had not seen it, only heard generally its contents, or rather purport. Mr Parker had seen a translation of it in the *Times*, and proceeded, in his unique way, to state its grounds, its argument, and then to draw his own inferences as to its real meaning, object, and probable effect. Mr Browning stood up with his back to the fire, Mrs Browning sat with her face turned half round towards him, and I sat so that I could at once see the faces of all three. It was very interesting to observe how spell-bound they were; and Mrs B. said to me, some days after, "What a masterly statement! What a wonderful man!"<sup>20</sup>

As they were together a great deal during that winter, both the Brownings must have learned much from the lips of this eager and versatile thinker.

The religious opinions Browning would hear expressed by Parker must have reminded him of the days of his association with William Johnson Fox, the Flower sisters, and South Place Chapel. Parker's theology was a curious composite, consisting of a great deal that was radical, which he had learned from his reading in German higher criticism, blended with a mystical belief in innate ideas that was as old-fashioned as the seventeenth century.<sup>21</sup> Yet this would not have been distasteful to a poet who believed that intuition was superior to proof,<sup>22</sup> and who at the same time took

<sup>19</sup> *Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (ed. F. G. Kenyon, New York, 1897), II, 388.

<sup>20</sup> Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 409-410.

<sup>21</sup> See H. S. Commager, "The Dilemma of Theodore Parker," *New England Quarterly*, VI (1933), 257-277.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in W. H. Griffin and H. C. Minchin, *Life of Robert Browning* (London, 1910), p. 295.

pride in being up to date in his thinking. For Parker the permanently valuable element in a man's religion was his intuition of a God who was all-powerful, perfectly wise, and utterly good, and to whom no personal characteristics could be ascribed. Yet, Parker went on to say, man's mind is imperfect, unable to comprehend absolute truth, and prone to form for itself theologies, that is, merely intellectual concepts of God, in place of this essential intuition. Theologies are by their very nature evanescent, for they mix what is by nature timeless with what is by nature temporary. At every stage in its development, Parker held, the race has produced a theology to express as well as it could the highest reaches of its spiritual life at that time, and these theologies have been good so long as the professors of them regarded them as mere poetry or myth rather than as dogma, and allowed them to be changed along with the advancing spiritual life of the people. When encrusted, however, as in a popular fundamentalism, there is nothing worse, he believed, than a theology.

But the idea of God as a being of infinite power, wisdom, love,—in one word, the absolute—does not satisfy. It seems cold; we call it abstract. We are not beings of reason alone; so are not satisfied with mere ideas. We have imagination, feelings, limited affections, understanding, flesh and blood. Therefore we want a conception of God which shall answer to this complex nature of ours. . . . Accordingly the feelings, fear, reverence, devotion, love, naturally personify God; humanize the deity, and represent the infinite under the limitations of a finite and imperfect being, whom we "can know all about." He has the thoughts, feelings, passions, limitations of a man; is subject to time and space; sees, remembers, has a form. This is anthropomorphism. It is well in its place. Some rude men seem to require it. They must paint to themselves a deity with a form—the ancient of days; a venerable monarch seated on a throne, surrounded by troops of followers. But it must be remembered all this is poetry; this personal and anthropomorphic conception is a phantom of the brain that has no existence independent of ourselves.<sup>23</sup>

It is possible to see in these opinions of Parker's almost every element which went into Browning's *Caliban upon Setebos*. Browning's doctrine of anthropomorphism, as it has been interpreted in this article, is similar to Parker's—except for a difference of emphasis—and one can hardly fail to see that the poem is an

<sup>23</sup> Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston, 1907 [*Centenary Edition*]), pp. 146-147.

imaginative presentation of Parker's belief that man in every stage of his evolution produces a theology to suit his own spiritual needs and capabilities at the time. Parker was an amateur biologist, and was reading for the first time Darwin's *Origin of Species* during this last winter of his life. But the concept of development had long been familiar to him, and so evolution did nothing to upset his mind. Moreover, figures from animal life came readily to his tongue as illustrations, and he had a favourite one for the inherent anthropomorphism of the human mind. He used it frequently:

A man rude in spirit must have a rude conception of God. He thinks the deity like himself. If a buffalo had a religion, his conception of deity would probably be a buffalo, fairer limbed, stronger, and swifter than himself, grazing in the fairest meadows of heaven.<sup>24</sup>

A beaver, or a reindeer, if possessed of religious faculties, would also conceive of the deity with the limitations of its own personality, as a beaver or a reindeer.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, in December, 1859, Parker began to write out a little satirical tale (which was not published until after his death) called "A Bumblebee's Thoughts on the Plan and Purpose of the Universe," aimed perhaps primarily at the British Association, but poking fun at the dogmatic conceit of men who read themselves into the universe.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, a lengthy extract from a letter written by Parker to a friend in 1841 makes a striking parallel with Browning's poem:

I am no Pantheist, nor ever was. My friend . . . says "he burns between two fires, Anthropomorphism" (which is the theistical side of Calvinism), "and Pantheism" (which is the religious side of nature, as Coleridge would say if he were here.) Now, for my part, I find a *tertium quid*, and am no more troubled by Pantheism or Anthropomorphism than, at noonday, the evening and morning twilight trouble me. The whole difficulty comes of attempting to get a logical and definite notion of God. The sentiment of religion in a man would naturally come at first to Anthropomorphism, for the human is the highest form known to us; just as an ox, had he religion, would think of God in the form of an ox, counting that the highest. Hence the stories in the Old Testament, among the Greeks, Hindoos, &c. Then reason looks at the stars, and says, God is not like a

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>26</sup> First published in *Album von Combe-Varin zur Erinnerung an T. Parker und H. L. Kuchler*, Zurich, 1861. For the circumstances of composition see Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 390-391.

man. It feels God is *infinite*, so it attempts to separate from the idea all that is finite,—1, the human form; 2, passion; 3, memory, &c., and so on with each attribute of the *finite*, till it comes at last to make God nothing but an abstraction, of which even being cannot be predicated. Plato got up so high one day, and Hegel says, “*Seyn und Nicht-seyn*” are the same thing—no difference between God’s *being* and being *not*.

. . . I think the instinctive feeling and reason also lead direct to God—God all-wise, all-powerful, all-good—who is the good, the beautiful, the true. But they do not *define* him, except so far as to distinguish the idea of God from all other ideas, either actual or possible. Love, wisdom, &c., in Him who made the stars, must be very different from what I feel and know. . . .<sup>27</sup>

Here are the association of Calvinism with anthropomorphism (anthropomorphism being “the theistical side of Calvinism”), the belief that a primitive man would naturally have an anthropomorphic religion, the illustration drawn from the supposed religion of an ox (so familiar on Parker’s tongue), and the significant mention of the stars as the source of truer feelings about God—in short, all the most important elements which compose *Caliban upon Setebos*.<sup>28</sup>

Though one cannot be sure how much of Parker’s writings, if any, Browning knew, and so cannot quote these words of Parker’s as the “source” of *Caliban upon Setebos* in the accepted sense of the word, yet there seems to be every probability that Browning got from Parker—whether by word of mouth or from print—the germ which grew into the poem. Even if the poem was not written until 1863-1864, there is no reason for supposing the impression made on him by Parker had been erased, and by that time Browning could have seen Weiss’s *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, from which the extract above was taken, as well as others

<sup>27</sup> Weiss, *op. cit.*, I, 166-167. I have omitted the argument against pantheism as not to our present purpose.

<sup>28</sup> It may be not entirely fantastic to suggest that a picture of a scene from Shakespeare’s *Tempest* painted by Terry, which was then on view in Rome, may have contributed something to the store of associations which ultimately produced the poem. Weiss (*op. cit.*, II, 387) gives only part of the minute from Parker’s diary, which should run: “. . . the scene from Shakespeare’s *Tempest*—*Prospero, Miranda, Ferdinand, Caliban* in the background.” (The diary for 1859 is in the possession of the Rev. John Haynes Holmes of New York, who very kindly allowed me to see it and to make extracts.)

of Parker's books, including the *Bumblebee*.<sup>29</sup> What Parker believed was not unfamiliar to Browning, for he had already learned much from Unitarians, but it refreshed Browning's memory, clarified his ideas, and supplied him with a striking concrete image for the presentation of an abstract idea. The lesson remained permanently with him, for by 1864 his religious development was mainly complete, even though in after years he gave an ever increasing amount of thought to religious questions. But that was mainly to reiterate and enforce opinions he had formed long before.

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<sup>29</sup> The London edition of Weiss is dated 1863 and the New York 1864. Frances Power Cobbe's edition of the *Collected Works of Theodore Parker* (London) had also begun to appear in 1863, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* bearing that date.