

- 1 Isa Blagden (1816?–73) was the Brownings' closest friend in Florence; after his wife's death Browning attempted to write to Blagden once a month and took an interest in the publication of her novels.
- 2 Cobbe for a time shared this villa, on the hill of Bellosuardo above Florence, with Blagden.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Conversation

Kate Field

Mrs Browning's conversation was most interesting. It was not characterized by sallies of wit or brilliant repartee, nor was it of that nature which is most welcome in society. It was frequently intermingled with trenchant, quaint remarks, leavened with a quiet, graceful humour of her own; but it was eminently calculated for a *tête-à-tête*. Mrs Browning never made an insignificant remark. All that she said was *always* worth hearing; – a greater compliment could not be paid her. She was a most conscientious listener, giving you her mind and heart, as well as her magnetic eyes. Though the latter spoke an eager language of their own, she conversed slowly, with a conciseness and point that, added to a matchless earnestness, which was the predominant trait of her conversation as it was of her character, made her a most delightful companion. *Persons* were never her theme, unless public characters were under discussion, or friends were to be praised, – which kind office she frequently took upon herself. One never dreamed of frivolities in Mrs Browning's presence, and gossip felt itself out of place. *Yourself* (not *herself*) was always a pleasant subject to her, calling out all her best sympathies in joy, and yet more in sorrow. Books and humanity, great deeds, and, above all, politics, which include all the grand questions of the day, were foremost in her thoughts, and therefore oftenest on her lips. I speak not of religion, for with her everything was religion. Her Christianity was not confined to church and rubric: it meant *civilization*.

'Elizabeth Barrett Browning', *Atlantic Monthly*, 8 (1861), p. 373

Browning's 'celerity, or ... immediateness'

William Michael Rossetti

The mental quality which I felt most in him was celerity, or (if I may coin the word) immediateness. Whatever he had to consider or speak about, he disposed of in the most forthright style. Along with the