

An Unpoetical Nose

Sarah Flower

He is very interesting from his great power of conversation and thorough originality, to say nothing of his personal appearance, which would be unexceptionably poetical if Nature had not played him an ugly trick in giving him an ugly nose.

Letter to Celina Flower, June 1833, in Richard and Edward Garnett, *The Life of W. J. Fox* (London, 1910), p. 193; *Correspondence*, iii.327

Notes

Sarah Flower, from 1834 Sarah Flower Adams (1805–48), was a poet, known for her readings, and sister of Eliza Flower. During the teenage Browning's period of Shelleyan atheism she too, temporarily, had some doubts: 'It was in answering Robert Browning that my mind refused to bring forward argument, turned recreant, and sided with the enemy' (to William Johnson Fox, 23 November 1827, *Correspondence*, ii.354). The sisters got to know him again after a gap of several years as a result of Fox's interest in *Pauline*.

'Robert talks immensely'

Katie Bromley

Robert Browning was there, rather to Mr. Fox's annoyance as he wanted to have been writing his sermon. Robert talks immensely, and how self-conscious! To me, distressingly so. He read some splendid scenes from Victor Hugo's 'Triboulet' and 'Lucretia Borgia'¹ – and some things that overwhelm you, and then when he had finished, instead of dealing with the magnificence of the writing or the powerful interest, he turned your attention to himself and his translating, forcing you to pay him compliments about it, because he kept saying how badly he had done it!²

But I still hope better things of him if Mr. Fox is his friend, that friendship must raise him above himself.

Diary entry for 8 November 1833, in A. M. W. Stirling, *The Merry Wives of Battersea and Gossip of Three Centuries* (London, 1956), pp. 121–2