

‘The pretty nothings, the subtle flatteries of the poet’s talk’*Lilian Aldrich*

Nothing in his appearance, excepting the white hair, proclaimed the poet. He was faultlessly dressed; the white waistcoat, the galloon¹ on his trousers, all were of the *dernier cri*. The diamond studs at his breast sparkled and twinkled with mischievous irony, seeming to say: ‘Ah, simple one, where is your lost Leader now? “Just for a handful of silver he left us, just for a ribbon to stick in his coat”.’² But more disquieting even than the diamond studs was a crush hat, which Mr Browning carried under his arm, and sat upon through the dinner. The words I had longed to say – all the things I had ached to say – vanished; tears of disappointment were in very slight ambush at the pretty nothings, the subtle flatteries of the poet’s talk.

[Mrs Thomas Bailey Aldrich], *Crowding Memories*
(London, 1921), pp. 178–9.

Notes

Aldrich was married to American writer and editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836–1907). They visited England in 1875. Browning’s works ‘had been the God of [her] girlish idolatry’.

- 1 Galloon: ‘a kind of narrow, close-woven ribbon or braid, of gold, silver, or silk thread’ (OED).
- 2 Browning’s ‘The Lost Leader’, ll. 1–2.

‘He was a rich banker, he was a perfected butler’*Julian Hawthorne*

My appointment-book for that week mentions ‘Smalleys, 5 p.m.’¹ It had become a pleasant and profitable habit to go to afternoon tea there Thursdays. ... The room was spacious, with a large bow window, in which, on these afternoons, Robert Browning was often to be found philandering with Mrs Smalley’s pretty daughters and telling them fairy-tales. How different from when I had first seen him in Siena and Florence twenty years before! Then he was a man of five-and-forty, but still a boy, leaping across the narrow Siena street, apparently over a waggon that was passing, both hands outstretched, his vivid face alight in his brown jungle of bushy hair