

thick hair well brushed. Altogether, in my opinion, he looked a prosperous man of business.

Now his retiring, shy, old father, with his quaint ways, simplicity and unworldliness, was, in my estimation, much more like a man of genius than his celebrated son, Robert Browning.

*Celebrities and I*, pp. 31–4

## Browning and his Beard

### *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

A comfort is that Robert is considered here to be looking better than he ever was known to look. And this notwithstanding the greyness of his beard, which indeed is, in my own mind, very becoming to him, the argentine touch giving a character of elevation and thought to the whole physiognomy. This greyness was suddenly developed; let me tell you how. He was in a state of bilious irritability on the morning of his arrival in Rome<sup>1</sup> from exposure to the sun or some such cause, and in a fit of suicidal impatience shaved away his whole beard, whiskers and all! I *cried* when I saw him, I was so horror-struck. I might have gone into hysterics and still been reasonable; for no human being was ever so disfigured by so simple an act. Of course I said, when I recovered breath and voice, that everything was at an end between me and him if he didn't let it all grow again directly, and (upon the further advice of his looking-glass) he yielded the point, and the beard grew. But it grew *white*, which was the just punishment of the gods – our sins leave their traces.

Letter to Sarianna Browning, 8 June 1854 (as 'Late May' in *LEBB*, ii.168)

### Notes

- 1 The Brownings had been in Rome (Via Bocca di Leone 43) between November 1853 and May 1854.

## 'A countenance of April shine and shower'

### *William Michael Rossetti*

[Elizabeth Barrett Browning's] face was a very difficult one to make impressive in a work of art, the features being far from regular or