But you are mistaken in supposing me to have been “intimately” acquainted with George Eliot: deeply impressed by her genius I could not fail to be, and some particular acts of personal kindness, beside a general extreme cordiality endeared her much to me, − still I only began to know her on returning to England after a long absence − during which her relation with Lewes had been entered into, under circumstances I really am all but quite ignorant about. Lewes I had a slight acquaintance with, many years before: and it was on the occasion of his being reported to me as the writer of an article which greatly obliged me by its sympathy that I called on him and was introduced to her: He would permit me to add, I am sure, that I was greatly struck at what seemed to me the disappearance of certain little touches of unnecessary self-assertion even intolerance which prevented his society from being so attractive as it afterwards became. I never conversed with either of them on any matters of deeper importance than the news of the day, literary or political. The death of poor Lewes came with a shock the more sensible that I had supposed, − from a clever gay letter which he addressed to Leighton, some few days only before, − that his health was re-established: and, in answer to the few words I could not but address to George Eliot, I received an invitation to the Funeral which I obeyed with more than willingness. The effect of the bereavement was described to me as overwhelming at first: I have since ascertained that composure is returning, and that the necessity of completing the unfinished works of Lewes will be a sufficient restorative in the end: so let us hope!

NOTES

The poet Robert Browning (1812–89, *ODNB*) first called on GE on 12 December 1862 (Haight, p. 371). The following July he presented her with a photograph of his deceased wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which GE hung in her room (*Journals*, p. 118). In October 1865, Browning showed GE ‘the objects Mrs. Browning used to have about her, her chair, tables, books etc. An epoch to be remembered’ (*Journals*, p. 126).

1. Browning returned to England after his wife’s death in 1861. He had been away fifteen years. The idea that he and GE were close was one he also disputed with Moncure Daniel Conway (see *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning’s Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. by Edward C. McAleer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 167).

2. Browning thought the change in GHL ‘astounding!’ (*Dearest Isa*, p. 147); Ashton, p. 267, mentions others who found his rough edges smoothed. The sympathetic article may have been GHL’s ‘Robert Browning and the Poetry of the Age’, *British Quarterly Review*, 6 (1847), 490–509, or ‘Browning’s New Poem’, *Leader*, 27 April 1850, 111. GE also reviewed Browning favourably (*‘Belles Lettres’, Westminster Review* (1856), repr. in *Essays*, pp. 349–57, and in *Writings*, pp. 234–42).

3. One wonders. George W. Smalley remarks that Browning ‘was content with those nearest him till he had a proposition in metaphysics or a theory of music to announce, and when that moment came it was useless to compete with him; nor did many men try; or not twice’ (*Anglo-American Memories*, 2nd series (New York and London: Putnam, 1912), p. 281). This comment provides background for something GE said to William Allingham in April 1873, when they were discussing several writers, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, who had suggested the specifically conceptual (and perhaps divine) origin of language. ‘Emerson would have liked to hear some of Browning’s opinions’, GE told William Allingham. ‘Have you ever heard any of Browning’s opinions?’ (*William Allingham: A Diary*, ed. by H. Allingham and D. Radford (London: Macmillan, 1907), p. 222).

4. In his note to GE Browning mentioned how much he had valued GHL’s sympathy (*Letters*, vii, 86). GHL’s letter to Frederic Leighton has remained untraced.

FRIENDS’ FACES

*James Sully*

Not long after George Lewes’s death, Charles told me that his mother (as he always called her) would like to see me, to talk over the plan of my assisting her in the revision of Lewes’s posthumous volume of the “Problems of Life and Mind,” as well as an article on Lewes’s life and work which I was about to write for a review. It was a dark afternoon when I called, and the lamp was not yet lit. I found a stranger talking with George Eliot. Shortly afterwards he left, and I had my turn. I could see that she was very solicitous about my proposed article on Lewes, and it was a relief when, after I had sent her a proof of it, she wrote to assure me that she had “read the article with very grateful feelings.”

About this time Francis Galton was making experimental inquiries into variations of visualizing power among individuals. He told me he particularly wanted to get George Eliot’s “co-efficient.” I brought up the subject