

THE COMPLETE WORKS
OF
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

Edited with Introductions and Notes by

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THE RUNAWAY SLAVE AT PILGRIM'S
POINT.

I.

I STAND on the mark beside the shore
Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee,
Where exile turned to ancestor,
And God was thanked for liberty.
I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,
I bend my knee down on this mark :
I look on the sky and the sea.

II.

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you !
I see you come proud and slow
From the land of the spirits pale as dew 10
And round me and round me ye go.
O pilgrims, I have gasped and run
All night long from the whips of one
Who in your names works sin and woe !

III.

And thus I thought that I would come
And kneel here where ye knelt before,
And feel your souls around me hum
In undertone to the ocean's roar ;
And lift my black face, my black hand,
Here, in your names, to curse this land 20
Ye blessed in freedom's, evermore.

IV.

I am black, I am black,
And yet God made me, they say :

But if He did so, smiling back
He must have cast His work away
Under the feet of His white creatures,
With a look of scorn, that the dusky features
Might be trodden again to clay.

V.

And yet He has made dark things
To be glad and merry as light : 30
There's a little dark bird sits and sings,
There's a dark stream ripples out of sight,
And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,
And the sweetest stars are made to pass
O'er the face of the darkest night.

VI.

But *we* who are dark, we are dark !
Ah God, we have no stars !
About our souls in care and cark
Our blackness shuts like prison-bars :
The poor souls crouch so far behind 40
That never a comfort can they find
By reaching through the prison-bars.

VII.

Indeed we live beneath the sky,
That great smooth Hand of God stretched out
On all His children fatherly,
To save them from the dread and doubt
Which would be if, from this low place,
All opened straight up to His face
Into the grand eternity.

VIII.

And still God's sunshine and His frost, 50
 They make us hot, they make us cold,
 As if we were not black and lost ;
 And the beasts and birds, in wood and fold,
 Do fear and take us for very men :
 Could the whip-poor-will or the cat of the glen
 Look into my eyes and be bold ?

IX.

I am black, I am black !
 But, once, I laughed in girlish glee,
 For one of my colour stood in the track
 Where the drivers drove, and looked at me, 60
 And tender and full was the look he gave —
 Could a slave look so at another slave ? —
 I look at the sky and the sea.

X.

And from that hour our spirits grew
 As free as if unsold, unbought :
 Oh, strong enough, since we were two,
 To conquer the world, we thought.
 The drivers drove us day by day ;
 We did not mind, we went one way,
 And no better a freedom sought. 70

XI.

In the sunny ground between the canes,
 He said "I love you" as he passed ;
 When the shingle-roof rang sharp with the rains,
 I heard how he vowed it fast :

While others shook he smiled in the hut,
 As he carved me a bowl of the cocoa-nut
 Through the roar of the hurricanes.

XII.

I sang his name instead of a song,
 Over and over I sang his name,
 Upward and downward I drew it along 80
 My various notes, — the same, the same !
 I sang it low, that the slave-girls near
 Might never guess, from aught they could hear,
 It was only a name — a name.

XIII.

I look on the sky and the sea.
 We were two to love, and two to pray :
 Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,
 Though nothing didst Thou say !
 Coldly Thou sat'st behind the sun :
 And now I cry who am but one, 90
 Thou wilt not speak to-day.

XIV.

We were black, we were black,
 We had no claim to love and bliss,
 What marvel if each went to wrack ?
 They wrung my cold hands out of his
 They dragged him — where ? I crawled to touch
 His blood's mark in the dust . . . not much,
 Ye pilgrim-souls, though plain as *this* !

xv.

Wrong, followed by a deeper wrong !
 Mere grief's too good for such as I : 100
 So the white men brought the shame ere long
 To strangle the sob of my agony.
 They would not leave me for my dull
 Wet eyes ! — it was too merciful
 To let me weep pure tears and die.

xvi.

I am black, I am black !
 I wore a child upon my breast,
 An amulet that hung too slack,
 And, in my unrest, could not rest :
 Thus we went moaning, child and mother, 110
 One to another, one to another,
 Until all ended for the best.

xvii.

For hark ! I will tell you low, low,
 I am black, you see, —
 And the babe who lay on my bosom so,
 Was far too white, too white for me ;
 As white as the ladies who scorned to pray
 Beside me at church but yesterday,
 Though my tears had washed a place for my knee.

xviii.

My own, own child ! I could not bear 120
 To look in his face, it was so white ;
 I covered him up with a kerchief there,
 I covered his face in close and tight :

And he moaned and struggled, as well might be,
 For the white child wanted his liberty —
 Ha, ha ! he wanted the master-right.

xix.

He moaned and beat with his head and feet,
 His little feet that never grew ;
 He struck them out, as it was meet,
 Against my heart to break it through : 130
 I might have sung and made him mild,
 But I dared not sing to the white-faced child
 The only song I knew.

xx.

I pulled the kerchief very close :
 He could not see the sun, I swear,
 More, then, alive, than now he does
 From between the roots of the mango . . . where ?
 I know where. Close ! A child and mother
 Do wrong to look at one another
 When one is black and one is fair. 140

xxi.

Why, in that single glance I had
 Of my child's face, . . . I tell you all,
 I saw a look that made me mad !
 The *master's* look, that used to fall
 On my soul like his lash . . . or worse !
 And so, to save it from my curse,
 I twisted it round in my shawl.

XXII.

And he moaned and trembled from foot to head,
 He shivered from head to foot ;
 Till after a time, he lay instead 150
 Too suddenly still and mute.
 I felt, beside, a stiffening cold :
 I dared to lift up just a fold,
 As in lifting a leaf of the mango-fruit.

XXIII.

But *my* fruit . . . ha, ha ! — there, had been
 (I laugh to think on't at this hour !)
 Your fine white angels (who have seen
 Nearest the secret of God's power)
 And plucked my fruit to make them wine,
 And sucked the soul of that child of mine 160
 As the humming-bird sucks the soul of the flower.

XXIV.

Ha, ha, the trick of the angels white !
 They freed the white child's spirit so.
 I said not a word, but day and night
 I carried the body to and fro,
 And it lay on my heart like a stone, as chill.
 — The sun may shine out as much as he will :
 I am cold, though it happened a month ago.

XXV.

From the white man's house, and the black man's hut,
 I carried the little body on ; 170
 The forest's arms did round us shut,
 And silence through the trees did run :

They asked no question as I went,
 They stood too high for astonishment,
 They could see God sit on His throne.

XXVI.

My little body, kerchiefed fast,
 I bore it on through the forest, on ;
 And when I felt it was tired at last,
 I scooped a hole beneath the moon :
 Through the forest-tops the angels far, 180
 With a white sharp finger from every star,
 Did point and mock at what was done.

XXVII.

Yet when it was all done aright, —
 Earth, 'twixt me and my baby, strewed, —
 All, changed to black earth, — nothing white, —
 A dark child in the dark ! — ensued
 Some comfort, and my heart grew young ;
 I sate down smiling there and sung
 The song I learnt in my maidenhood.

XXVIII.

And thus we two were reconciled, 190
 The white child and black mother, thus ;
 For as I sang it soft and wild,
 The same song, more melodious,
 Rose from the grave whereon I sate :
 It was the dead child singing that,
 To join the souls of both of us.

XXIX.

I look on the sea and the sky.

Where the pilgrims' ships first anchored lay
The free sun rideth gloriously,

But the pilgrim-ghosts have slid away 200
Through the earliest streaks of the morn :
My face is black, but it glares with a scorn
Which they dare not meet by day.

XXX.

Ha ! — in their stead, their hunter sons !

Ha, ha ! they are on me — they hunt in a ring !
Keep off ! I brave you all at once,

I throw off your eyes like snakes that sting !
You have killed the black eagle at nest, I think :
Did you ever stand still in your triumph, and shrink
From the stroke of her wounded wing ? 210

XXXI.

(Man, drop that stone you dared to lift ! —)

I wish you who stand there five abreast,
Each, for his own wife's joy and gift,

A little corpse as safely at rest
As mine in the mangoes ! Yes, but *she*
May keep live babies on her knee,
And sing the song she likes the best.

XXXII.

I am not mad : I am black.

I see you staring in my face —
I know you staring, shrinking back, 220
Ye are born of the Washington-race,

And this land is the free America,
And this mark on my wrist — (I prove what I say)
Ropes tied me up here to the flogging-place.

XXXIII.

You think I shrieked then ? Not a sound !

I hung, as a gourd hangs in the sun ;
I only cursed them all around
As softly as I might have done
My very own child : from these sands
Up to the mountains, lift your hands, 230
O slaves, and end what I begun !

XXXIV.

Whips, curses ; these must answer those !

For in this UNION you have set
Two kinds of men in adverse rows,
Each loathing each ; and all forget
The seven wounds in Christ's body fair,
While He sees gaping everywhere
Our countless wounds that pay no debt.

XXXV.

Our wounds are different. Your white men

Are, after all, not gods indeed, 240
Nor able to make Christs again
Do good with bleeding. *We* who bleed
(Stand off !) we help not in our loss !
We are too heavy for our cross,
And fall and crush you and your seed.

xxxvi.

I fall, I swoon ! I look at the sky.
 The clouds are breaking on my brain ;
 I am floated along, as if I should die
 Of liberty's exquisite pain.
 In the name of the white child waiting for me 250
 In the death-dark where we may kiss and agree,
 White men, I leave you all curse-free
 In my broken heart's disdain !

HECTOR IN THE GARDEN.

I.

NINE years old ! The first of any
 Seem the happiest years that come :
 Yet when *I* was nine, I said
 No such word ! I thought instead
 That the Greeks had used as many
 In besieging Ilium.

II.

Nine green years had scarcely brought me
 To my childhood's haunted spring ;
 I had life, like flowers and bees,
 In betwixt the country trees, 10
 And the sun the pleasure taught me
 Which he teacheth every thing

III.

If the rain fell, there was sorrow :
 Little head leant on the pane,
 Little finger drawing down it
 The long trailing drops upon it,
 And the " Rain, rain, come to-morrow,"
 Said for charm against the rain.

IV.

Such a charm was right Canidian,
 Though you meet it with a jeer ! 20
 If I said it long enough,
 Then the rain hummed dimly off,
 And the thrush with his pure Lydian
 Was left only to the ear ;

V.

And the sun and I together
 Went a-rushing out of doors :
 We our tender spirits drew
 Over hill and dale in view,
 Glimmering hither, glimmering thither
 In the footsteps of the showers. 30

VI.

Underneath the chestnuts dripping,
 Through the grasses wet and fair,
 Straight I sought my garden-ground
 With the laurel on the mound,
 And the pear-tree oversweeping
 A side-shadow of green air.

Line 122. *The ivy blindly crawleth Round thy brave caduceus*: the caduceus or wand of Mercury was of wood or gold, and was twined with snakes and surmounted by wings. The ivy was especially sacred to Bacchus, and it is probable the poet uses it here to signify that Mercury's wand has been thrown down and is being choked with ivy as ruins in England are, and *not* with any mythological significance.

127. *Crowned Cybele*: a goddess of the earth, worshipped in Phrygia, with enthusiastic din of trumpets, cymbals, and drums, and attended by the Corybantes. She was represented as crowned with turrets and riding in a chariot drawn by tame lions.

131. *Scornful children are not mute*: this line was originally "railing children," but Mr. Kenyon objected to this as being something very near nonsense. To which objection the poet retorted in one of her letters that it was just as allowable as it would be to say "the thunder was silent," for thunder involved the idea of noise just as much as "railing children," but Mr. Kenyon's opinion evidently prevailed. (See Letter of May 1, 1843, to Mr. Kenyon in "The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," edited by Frederic G. Kenyon.)

136. *Vesta*: goddess of the burning hearth, the first-born child of Cronus and Rhea. She scorned the advances of Neptune and Apollo, and preferred to remain single. She received great honor, Jupiter having ordained that her place should be the middle of his palace, and that she should receive the choicest morsels of the Olympian feasts and be revered as the oldest and worthiest of Olympian deities.

149. *Obolus*: a small Greek coin. It was the price paid to Charon for ferrying a corpse across the Styx to Hades, and was placed in the mouth of the corpse.

160. *Ida*: see note, "Wine of Cyprus," line 5.

162. *Calm, of old, the bark went onward*: see remarks at the head of the poem and note thereon.

201. *Dodona's oak*: the oracle of Jupiter at Dodona in

Epirus was the most ancient in Greece. It was founded, according to one account, by one of two black doves that flew from Thebes in Egypt, which alighting on a grove of oaks proclaimed to the inhabitants that an oracle of Jupiter should be established there. The other dove performed a similar service in the Libyan oasis at the temple of Jupiter Ammon. The responses of the oracle were interpreted from the rustling of oak leaves, and also by the vibrating of brazen kettles, which were struck by a lash in the hand of a brazen statue near by, when the wind blew.

Line 204. *Pythia*: the priestess of Apollo at the Delphic oracle.

236. *Phœbus' chariot-course is run*: Phœbus Apollo, the god of the sun, was drawn through the heavens in a flaming chariot.

248. *God Himself is the best Poet*: compare this with a passage in Robert Browning's "Paracelsus" (Part ii., line 648):

"God is the perfect poet,
Who in his person acts his own creations."

POEMS, 1850.

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point. This anti-slavery poem was written for the American publication, *The Liberty Bell*, and was for sale at the Boston "Anti-slavery Bazaar" of 1848. Mrs. Caroline H. Dall, writing to *Poet-lore* in February, 1897 (Vol. ix., p. 459), says that fifteen volumes of *The Liberty Bell* were published by the managers of the "Anti-slavery Bazaar," between 1838 and 1858. During this period the years in which the publication was not issued were 1840, 1850, 1851, 1854, and 1855.

In one of her letters to Mr. Boyd, Mrs. Browning speaks of it as "too ferocious, perhaps, for the Americans to publish; but they asked for a poem and shall have it."

(See "The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," edited by F. G. Kenyon.) Later, when it was included in a volume of her poems, she explained that she wished to have it come next "The Cry of the Children," so that her impartiality as to national grievances might appear.

Line 1. *I stand on the mark beside the shore*: this is probably meant to be the rock at Plymouth, upon which the Pilgrim fathers are said originally to have landed.

Hector in the Garden. This poem relates an actual experience of Mrs. Browning's childhood which she recalls in one of her letters, referring to the high heroic box nose of Hector and his columbine shoe-strings.

6. *In besieging Ilium*: the siege of Troy or Ilium (a name given to this city from one of its kings, Ilus) was brought to a close in the tenth year, when the Greek wooden horse, filled with armed men, was admitted within the walls of the city.

17. "Rain, rain, come to-morrow": the poet evidently has in mind the children's rhyme,

"Rain, rain, go away,
Come again another day."

19. *Canidian*: the name of a sorceress in the fifth and seventeenth Epodes of Horace.

23. *And the thrush with his pure Lydian*: an allusion to the Greek musical mode called the Lydian, which Plato describes as the mode expressive of softness or melancholy. (See "Republic," Book iii., Vol. ii., Jowett's translation.)

43. *Hector, son of Priam*: he was the commander of all the Trojan forces and the most valiant and amiable of his countrymen. His qualities were such as would appeal more to the imagination of a little girl of nine than would those of the Greek hero Achilles sulking in his tent.

49. *Gentianellas*: this plant as described in Anne Pratt's "Flowering Plants of Great Britain" has yellow flowers. The variety which seems most suitable for

Hector's eyes is the spring gentian, or *Gentiana Verna*, described as having a salver-shaped, rather large, intensely blue flower.

Line 82. *Ὄτοτοτοτοῖ*: an exclamation of pain or grief.

SONNETS.

Flush or Faunus. The little dog Flush, which figures constantly in Mrs. Browning's correspondence, and in this and her poem "To Flush, My Dog," was a gift from Miss Mitford. His mistress was constant to him even when new life and happiness opened for her in Italy. Thither he went with her and lived a long and happy life as dogs' lives go, and is now buried in the vaults under Casa Guidi.

9. *Arcadian*: a dweller in Arcadia, the so-called delectable pasture land in the central part of the Peloponnesus, which became the imaginary paradise of the pastoral poets.

10. *Goatly god*: Pan. (See notes, "Wine of Cyprus," line 17, and "The Dead Pan.")

Two Sketches. The first, *H.B.*, is of Mrs. Browning's sister Henrietta Barrett, and the second, *A.B.*, of her sister Arabel Barrett.

Hiram Powers' "Greek Slave." This statue was placed in the great exhibition in London in 1851, where it attained to a remarkable degree of popularity, and gained for the sculptor a European reputation. Powers was the son of a small farmer of Windsor County, Vt., who worked his way up in his art until he finally went to Italy, where his progress was very rapid. Here the Brownings met him, and Mrs. Browning speaks of him in one of her letters as their chief friend and favorite, "A most charming, simple, straightforward, genial American."

Heaven and Earth. 3. *Gyres*: circuits.

Hugh Stuart Boyd: *His Blindness*. [To whom was inscribed, in grateful affection, my poem of "Cyprus Wine." There comes a moment in life when even grati-