

"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" describes most powerfully the wrongs of slavery.

When she made her home in Florence, the struggle for a free and united Italy was going on. Loving liberty as she did, it was natural that her sympathy should be strongly enlisted. This found expression in her poems, "Casa Guidi Windows," which describe her personal impressions as she looked out from the windows of her Italian home upon the military processions as they surged through the streets of Florence.

The vivid pictures, the grasp of political problems and the love for Italy which those poems display make them a lasting monument to her fame. Many of her shorter poems also deal with the same subject, and the Italians deeply appreciated her sympathy. On the wall of the house in which the Brownings lived the city of Florence has placed a marble slab, on which is inscribed, in letters of gold, "Here wrote and died Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who, in her woman's heart, united the learning of a sage with the genius of a poet, and made of her poetry a golden bond uniting Italy with England."

Her longest poem, "Aurora Leigh," is considered to be the most finished expression of her genius. It is really a story in verse, but it deals with the weightiest social problems, and



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in it, the author tells us, are woven her highest convictions of life and art. We can gather from it that with her poetry was not a mere pastime, but a serious business, her great desire being to make the world better by what she had to give.

No less a critic than Ruskin calls "Aurora Leigh" "the noblest monument of modern English poetry," while Leigh Hunt declares it to be "a hundred times the best poem ever written by a woman." In this poem, as in others, the poetess places emphasis on the dignity and duty of work:

"Get leave to work  
In this world—'tis the best you get at all;  
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts  
Than man in benediction. God says, 'Sweet  
For forebuds': men say 'crowns': and so we are crowned;  
Aye, gashed with some tormenting circle of steel  
That snaps with secret spring.  
Get work! Get work!  
Be sure 'tis better than what you work to get."

"Free men freely work,  
Whoever fears God, fears to sit at ease."

"After Adam work was curse,  
But after Christ work turns to privilege,  
And henceforth one with our humanity,  
The six day worker, working still in us,  
Doth call us freely to work on with Him  
In high companionship."

One reason why the reading of good poetry is helpful is because it not only leads us to see the beauty of the world we live in, but also to see God in nature. With Mrs. Browning nature seemed immediately to draw her thoughts toward God, and she ever recognized, as she says, that—

"Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God."

Thus she finishes describing an English scene:

"Hedgerows all alive with birds, and gnats, and large white butterflies;  
Hills, vales, woods, dotted in a silver mist;  
Farms, granges, doubled up among the hills;  
And cattle grazing in the watered vales;  
And cottage gardens smelling everywhere,  
Confused with smell of orchids. "See!" I said,  
'And see! is not God with us on the earth?'"

After describing a sunrise in the woods, she says:

"And no one looking round the wood  
Could help confessing as he stood,  
This Poet-God is glad and good."

It is worth noticing that, in spite of all the sadness and suffering she experienced, her writings are free from any complaining note. Instead, we find her declaring—

"I think we are too ready with complaints  
In this fair world of God's."

And again—

"We overstate the ills of life, and take  
Imagination (given us to bring down  
The choirs of singing angels overshore  
By God's clear glory) down our earth, to rake  
The dismal songs instead."

And another sonnet concludes:

"Maker, and High Priest,  
I ask Thee not my joys to multiply,  
Only to make me worthier of Thee."

Not always can comfort be found in God seen in nature, but we have to go to God Himself. In a poem written after the tragic death of her brother she gives expression to this. After telling how bitter and heartrending the loss was, she says:

"A voice reproves me thereupon,  
More sweet than Nature's;  
God's voice, not Nature's! Night and noon  
He sits upon the great white throne,  
And listens for the creatures' praise."

"He reigns above, He reigns alone;  
Systems burn out, and leave His throne;  
Fair mists of seraphs melt and fall  
Around Him, changeless amid all,—  
Ancient of days, whose days go on."

"For us whatever's undergone,  
Thou knowest, wiltest, what is done,  
Grief may be joy misunderstood,  
Only the good discerns the good,  
I trust Thee while my days go on."

"Through dark and death, through fire and frost,  
With emptied arms, and treasure lost,  
I thank Thee while my days go on."

So can faith triumph over grief, and she sees in sorrow a means that God uses to draw men to Himself:

"There is no God,' the foolish saith,  
But none 'There is no sorrow';  
And Nature oft the cry of faith  
In bitter need will borrow;  
Eyes that the preacher could not school,  
By wayside graves are raised;  
And lips cry 'God be pitiful,'  
That ne'er said 'God be praised.'"

In Dean Farrar's new book, "The Life of Lives," he says: "Poetry is the choicest flower of all human thought, and just as the greatest poets of the ancient world who knew God, like Isaiah and the psalmist, sung of the coming Christ, so, since he has come, all the supreme poets—Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson—have come to Him with their singing robes about them, and laid their garlands most humbly at His feet." And this might be