

A sexton's life is a life of little opportunities, and these opportunities are as varied as you can imagine, from speaking "the word in due season" at some crisis which only the sexton may have chanced to see, to rolling a restless baby in his carriage up and down the sidewalk while his mother listens to the sermon, or scrubbing up a dirty little child from some wretched home, so that the contrast between her and the other children will not be too great.

Should these humble confessions fall into the hands of other sextons, let me say to them, never mind if some of your people forget and leave things helter-skelter for you to clear up; others will say, "How good you were, Mr. Sexton, to take all this trouble for us! There are not many such." Never mind if you've worked for a day or two getting ready for some fashionable wedding, warming the church, waiting on the decorators, personating the minister at the rehearsal, and then have spent the best part of another day getting the

flowers out and things generally into shape again, and when it was all over had to remember that the pastor's wife had all the fees there were and you hadn't even a "thank you"; there will be other weddings where "our obliging Mr. Sexton" will come in for a generous share of the remembrances.

If some committees keep you up half the night with their conferences, there will be others who will say, "No need of your staying here to wait for us, Brother Sexton; we can turn off the light and lock the door just as well as you can." Cheer up, brother sextons. Be patient, be faithful, be good-natured. The world, even the Christian world, is a good deal like a looking-glass, it reflects a good-natured face.

And if perchance, brother, these confessions should meet the eye of some that are numbered among the "powers that be" in the church, and next Sunday you should happen to get a hand-shake that is a bit heartier than usual, let us both smile and be glad.—*The Congregationalist*.

## The Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning

BY MISS BESSIE HARTNOLL

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING is the greatest poetess England ever produced, and an American critic calls her "the most inspired woman of all who have written, in any language, in any age or clime." She is perhaps best known by her shorter poems, "Cowper's Grave," "Victoria's Tears," "The Sleep," and "The Cry of the Children," being among the most admired. Nothing could exceed the beauty of the thought and wording of those poems.

We must remember, when reading "Cowper's Grave," the strange fits of melancholy mania to which the man was subjected, who yet could write such glorious hymns as "There is a Fountain Filled with Blood" and "Hark, My Soul, it is the Lord," then we will understand why the poetess wrote at his grave:

"O poets! from a maniac's throat  
There poured the deathless singing;  
O Christians! at your cross of hope  
A hopeless hand was clinging.  
O men! this man in brotherhood  
Your care and woe beguiling,  
Groaned inly while he taught you peace,  
And died while you were smiling.

"With quiet sadness, and no grief,  
I learn to think upon him;  
With meekness, that is gratefulness,  
To God whose heaven hath won him;  
Who suffered once the madness cloud  
From His own love to blind him,  
Yet gently led the blind along  
Where light and bird could find him."

"Victoria's Tears" tells how, at some time during the coronation ceremonies, the Queen turned away her head and wept:

"O maiden, heir of kings,  
A king has left his place,  
The majesty of death has swept  
All other from his face.  
And thou, upon thy mother's breast,  
No longer lean adown;  
But take the glory for the rest,  
And rule the land that loves thee best.  
The maiden wept,  
Yea! wept, to wear a crown."

How like a prophecy, which we know has been fulfilled, one of the verses is:

"God save thee, weeping queen,  
Thou shalt be well beloved,  
The tyrant's sceptre cannot move  
As these pure tears have moved.  
We see the nature in thine eyes  
That tyrants cannot own—  
The love that guardeth liberties:  
Strange blessing on that nation lies  
Whose monarch wept,  
Yea! wept, to wear a crown."

"He Giveth His Beloved Sleep" was one of Mrs. Browning's

favorite Scripture passages, and from it she gives us beautiful thoughts concerning the "Sleep of Death":

"Sleep soft, beloved! we sometimes say,  
Yet have no tune to charm away  
Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep;  
But never doleful dream again  
Shall break the happy slumber, when  
He giveth His beloved sleep."

"His dew drops mutely on the hill;  
His cloud above it saileth still,  
Though on its slope men toil and reap;  
More softly than the dew is shed,  
Or cloud is floated overhead,  
He giveth His beloved sleep."

"And friends—dear friends! when it shall be,  
That this low breath is gone from me,  
And round my hier ye come to weep,  
Let one, most loving of you all,  
Say, not a tear o'er her must fall,  
He giveth His beloved sleep."

"The Cry of the Children" is not only beautiful as a poem, but it served a noble purpose. The thought of little children working underground in the dark mines, and all the day long in factories, filled the heart of the poetess with pity and indignation, and thus does she plead for them:

"They look up with their pale and sunken faces,  
And their looks are sad to see,  
For the old man's hoary anguish draws and presses  
Down the cheeks of infancy.  
'Your old earth,' they say, 'is very dreary';  
'Our little feet,' they say, 'are very weak';  
Few paces have we taken yet are weary,  
Our grave-rest is very far to seek."

"And well may the children weep before ye!  
They are weary ere they run;  
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory,  
That is brighter than the sun.  
They know the grief of man, without his wisdom;  
They sink in man's despair, without his calm;  
Are slaves, without the liberty of Christdom;  
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm;  
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretiringly,  
The harvest of its memories cannot reap,  
Are orphans of the earthly love, and heavenly—  
Let them weep! Let them weep!"

"Their blood splashes upward, O God heaper,  
And your purple shows your path;  
But the child's sob in the silence curses deeper  
Than the strong man in his wrath."

This poem appeared at the same time that Lord Shaftesbury delivered his speech in Parliament on the same subject, and did much to secure the enactment of a law abolishing the employment of children in mines and restricting it in factories. A love of liberty and hatred of oppression was one of Mrs. Browning's characteristics. The cry of the slaves reached to her across the sea:

"I heard an angel speak last night,  
And he said 'Write,'  
Write a nation's curse for me,  
And send it o'er the Western sea."