

## The Cry of the Children

By Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Do ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,  
 Ere the sorrow comes with years ?  
 They are leaning their young heads against their  
 mothers, —  
 And that cannot stop their tears.  
 The young lambs are bleating in the meadows ;  
 The young birds are chirping in the nest ;  
 The young fawns are playing with the shadows ;  
 The young flowers are blowing toward the west—  
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
 They are weeping bitterly !  
 They are weeping in the playtime of the others,  
 In the country of the free.

Do you question the young children in the sorrow,  
 Why their tears are falling so ?  
 The old man may weep for his to-morrow  
 Which is lost in Long Ago —  
 The old tree is leafless in the forest —  
 The old year is ending in the frost —  
 The old wound, if stricken, is the sorest —  
 The old hope is hardest to be lost :  
 But the young, young children, O my brothers,  
 Do you ask them why they stand  
 Weeping sore before the bosoms of their mothers,  
 In our happy Fatherland ?

They look up with their pale and sunken faces,  
 And their looks are sad to see,  
 For the man's grief abhorrent, draws and presses  
 Down the cheeks of infancy —  
 "Your old earth," they say, "is very dreary;"  
 "Our young feet," they say, "are very weak !"  
 Few paces have we taken, yet are weary—  
 Our grave-rest is very far to seek !  
 Ask the old why they weep, and not the children,  
 For the outside earth is cold —  
 And we young ones stand without, in our  
 bewildering,  
 And the graves are for the old !"

"True," say the children, "it may happen  
 That we die before our time !  
 Little Alice died last year her grave is shapen  
 Like a snowball, in the rime.  
 We looked into the pit prepared to take her —  
 Was no room for any work in the close clay :  
 From the sleep wherein she lieth none will wake her,  
 Crying, 'Get up, little Alice ! it is day.'  
 If you listen by that grave, in sun and shower,  
 With your ear down, little Alice never cries ;  
 Could we see her face, be sure we should not know  
 her,  
 For the smile has time for growing in her eyes, —  
 And merry go her moments, lulled and stilled in  
 The shroud, by the kirk-chime !  
 It is good when it happens," say the children,  
 "That we die before our time !"

Alas, the wretched children ! they are seeking  
 Death in life, as best to have !  
 They are binding up their hearts away from  
 breaking,  
 With a cerement from the grave.  
 Go out, children, from the mine and from the city —  
 Sing out, children, as the little thrushes do —  
 Pluck you handfuls of the meadow-cowslips pretty  
 Laugh aloud, to feel your fingers let them through !  
 But they answer, " Are your cowslips of the  
 meadows  
 Like our weeds anear the mine ?  
 Leave us quiet in the dark of the coal-shadows,  
 From your pleasures fair and fine!

"For oh," say the children, "we are weary,  
 And we cannot run or leap —  
 If we cared for any meadows, it were merely  
 To drop down in them and sleep.  
 Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping —  
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go ;  
 And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,  
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.

For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,  
Through the coal-dark, underground —  
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron  
In the factories, round and round.

"For all day, the wheels are droning, turning, —  
Their wind comes in our faces, —  
Till our hearts turn, — our heads, with pulses  
burning,  
And the walls turn in their places  
Turns the sky in the high window blank and reeling  
—  
Turns the long light that droppeth down the wall, —  
Turn the black flies that crawl along the ceiling —  
All are turning, all the day, and we with all ! —  
And all day, the iron wheels are droning ;  
And sometimes we could pray,  
'O ye wheels,' (breaking out in a mad moaning)  
'Stop ! be silent for to-day ! ' "

Ay ! be silent ! Let them hear each other breathing  
For a moment, mouth to mouth —  
Let them touch each other's hands, in a fresh  
wreathing  
Of their tender human youth !  
Let them feel that this cold metallic motion  
Is not all the life God fashions or reveals —  
Let them prove their inward souls against the notion  
That they live in you, or under you, O wheels ! —  
Still, all day, the iron wheels go onward,  
As if Fate in each were stark ;  
And the children's souls, which God is calling  
sunward,  
Spin on blindly in the dark.

Now tell the poor young children, O my brothers,  
To look up to Him and pray —  
So the blessed One, who blesseth all the others,  
Will bless them another day.  
They answer, " Who is God that He should hear us,  
While the rushing of the iron wheels is stirred ?  
When we sob aloud, the human creatures near us  
Pass by, hearing not, or answer not a word !  
And we hear not (for the wheels in their resounding)  
Strangers speaking at the door :

Is it likely God, with angels singing round Him,  
Hears our weeping any more ?

" Two words, indeed, of praying we remember ;  
And at midnight's hour of harm, —  
'Our Father,' looking upward in the chamber,  
We say softly for a charm.  
We know no other words, except 'Our Father,'  
And we think that, in some pause of angels' song,  
God may pluck them with the silence sweet to  
gather,  
And hold both within His right hand which is strong.  
'Our Father !' If He heard us, He would surely  
(For they call Him good and mild)  
Answer, smiling down the steep world very purely,  
'Come and rest with me, my child.'

"But, no !" say the children, weeping faster,  
" He is speechless as a stone ;  
And they tell us, of His image is the master  
Who commands us to work on.  
Go to ! " say the children,—"up in Heaven,  
Dark, wheel-like, turning clouds are all we find !  
Do not mock us ; grief has made us unbelieving —  
We look up for God, but tears have made us blind."  
Do ye hear the children weeping and disproving,  
O my brothers, what ye preach ?  
For God's possible is taught by His world's loving —  
And the children doubt of each.

And well may the children weep before you ;  
They are weary ere they run ;  
They have never seen the sunshine, nor the glory  
Which is brighter than the sun :  
They know the grief of man, without its wisdom ;  
They sink in the despair, without its calm —  
Are slaves, without the liberty in Christdom, —  
Are martyrs, by the pang without the palm, —  
Are worn, as if with age, yet unretrievingly  
No dear remembrance keep,—  
Are orphans of the earthly love and heavenly :  
Let them weep ! let them weep !  
They look up, with their pale and sunken faces,  
And their look is dread to see,  
For they think you see their angels in their places,

With eyes meant for Deity ;—  
 "How long," they say, "how long, O cruel nation,  
 Will you stand, to move the world, on a child's heart,  
 —

Stifle down with a mailed heel its palpitation,  
 And tread onward to your throne amid the mart ?  
 Our blood splashes upward, O our tyrants,  
 And your purple shews your path ;  
 But the child's sob curseth deeper in the silence  
 Than the strong man in his wrath !

## My Last Duchess

By Robert Browning

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
 Looking as if she were alive. I call  
 That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands  
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
 "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read  
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps  
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps  
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint  
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
 Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff  
 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough  
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
 A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,  
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
 The bough of cherries some officious fool  
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace—all and each  
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,  
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but  
 thanked  
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill  
 In speech—which I have not—to make your will  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let  
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set  
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—  
 E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose  
 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;  
 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
 The company below, then. I repeat,  
 The Count your master's known munificence  
 Is ample warrant that no just pretense  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,  
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

