

**THE GREEK CHRISTIAN  
POETS AND THE  
ENGLISH POETS**

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The Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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BY  
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following pieces, first printed in 1842 by the 'Athenæum,' are now reprinted with the liberal permission of that Journal.

It was intended by its Writer, that the account of the Greek Christian Poets should receive corrections, or certainly additions: a project which new objects of interest came to delay. The glancing series of notes upon the English Poets seems suggested by, as well as consequent upon, the account; unless it arose from the publication of Wordsworth's 'Poems of early and late years, including The Borderers,'—in the form of a review of which, the latter part of the paper originally appeared: the for-

mer was occasioned by 'The Book of the Poets,'  
a compilation of the day.

Both performances, laid away long ago, and only lately unfolded for the first time, were perhaps almost forgotten by their Author; but on the whole, in all likelihood, some way or other reproduction was desired: and this is effected accordingly.

A name, which occurs unworthily enough toward the close, should be withdrawn were it found possible: its presence may be pardoned as serving at least to mark more dates than one.

*London, February, 1863.*



## SOME ACCOUNT OF THE GREEK CHRISTIAN POETS.

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THE Greek language was a strong intellectual life, stronger than any similar one which has lived in the breath of "articulately speaking men," and survived it. No other language has lived so long and died so hard,—pang by pang, each with a dolphin colour—yielding reluctantly to that doom of death and silence which must come at last to the speaker and the speech. Wonderful it is to look back fathoms down the great Past, thousands of years away—where whole generations lie unmade to dust—where the sounding of their trumpets, and the rushing of their scythed chariots, and that great shout which brought down the birds stone dead from beside the sun, are more silent than the dog breathing at our feet, or the fly's paces on our

window-pane; and yet, from the heart of which silence, to feel *words* rise up like a smoke—words of men, even words of women, uttered at first, perhaps, in “excellent low voices,” but audible and distinct to our times, through “the dreadful pother” of life and death, the hissing of the steam-engine and the cracking of the cerement! It is wonderful to look back and listen. Blind Homer spoke this Greek after blind Demodocus, with a quenchless light about his brows, which he felt through his blindness. Pindar rolled his chariots in it, prolonging the clamour of the games. Sappho’s heart beat through it, and heaved up the world’s. Æschylus strained it to the stature of his high thoughts. Plato crowned it with his divine per-adventures. Aristophanes made it drunk with the wine of his fantastic merriment. The later Platonists wove their souls away in it, out of sight of other souls. The first Christians heard in it God’s new revelation, and confessed their Christ in it from the suppliant’s knee, and presently from the bishop’s throne. To all times, and their transitions, the language lent itself. Through the long summer of above two thousand years,

from the grasshopper Homer sang of, to that grasshopper of Manuel Phile, which might indeed have been "a burden," we can in nowise mistake the chirping of the bloodless, deathless, wondrous, creature. It chirps on in Greek still. At the close of that long summer, though Greece lay withered to her root, her academic groves and philosophic gardens all leafless and bare, still from the depth of the desolation rose up the voice—

O cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,  
Or but a wandering voice?

which did not grow hoarse, like other cuckoos, but sang not unsweetly, if more faintly than before. Strangely vital was this Greek language—

Some straggling spirits were behind, to be  
Laid out with most thrift on its memory.

It seemed as if nature could not part with so lovely a tune, as if she felt it ringing on still in her head—or as if she hummed it to herself, as the watchman used to do, with "night wandering round" him, when he watched wearily on the palace roof of the doomed house of Atreus.