

**THE EARLIER  
POEMS, 1826-1833**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649566419

The Earlier Poems, 1826-1833 by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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THE EARLIER POEMS OF  
ELIZABETH BARRETT  
BROWNING

1826-1833



LONDON

*Bartholomew Robson Cranbourn-street*

M.DCCC.LXXVIII.

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## INTRODUCTION.

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ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT, afterwards Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the foremost of English poetesses, and with the single exception of Sappho, of whom only some noble fragments remain to us, the foremost poetess of all time, was born in the year 1806, and was consequently in her seventeenth year when her earliest Poems were published—"verse," as an accomplished critic has lately remarked, "upon which was the stamp of true genius—poems eminently worthy of preservation."\*

"It appears," says the writer of an article in the *Edinburgh Review*, "that her father encouraged her love for rhyme, since she has not only inscribed her collected poems to him in a dedication, written with great delicacy and tenderness of feeling, but in her

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\* Mr. G. Barnett Smith in an article on "Elizabeth Barrett Browning," in the new (ninth) edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, vol. iv. (1877), p. 391.

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earliest published volume there is also a poem addressed to him containing the lines :—

'For 'neath thy gentleness of praise,  
My Father ! rose my early lays !  
And when the lyre was scarce awake,  
I loved its strings for *thy* loved sake :  
Woo'd the kind Muses—but the while  
Thought only how to win thy smile.'

The small volume from which the above lines are taken, was published anonymously in 1826, and entitled 'An Essay on Mind, and other Poems,' with the modest motto from Tasso, '*Brama assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede,*' and is remarkable principally for the ambition of the young authoress ; who after citing the authority of 'that immortal writer we have just lost,' (Byron), to prove that 'ethical poetry is the highest of all poetry, as the highest of all objects is moral truth,' proceeds at once to grapple with an ethical subject as wide as the universe itself. The poem is written in heroic verse, and extends over eighty-eight pages. The quality of the verse is not much above the level of Hayley or Miss Seward; but is remarkable for the precocious audacity with which she deals with the greatest names in the whole range of literature and science. Gibbon, Berkeley, Condillac, Plato,

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Bacon, Bolingbroke, all come in for treatment in the scope of the young girl's argument. The minor poems, however, which conclude the volume, show much greater promise of originality."\*

A lapse of seven years occurred before the publication of Elizabeth Barrett's next volume, which appeared in 1833, in her twenty-fourth year. The translation of the *Prometheus Bound* of Æschylus, which opened it, was replaced by the authoress in later years by an entirely new version. We have therefore not thought it wise or desirable to re-produce the earlier crude attempt or the girlish preface that accompanied it. But the original poems which followed—far in advance, as might be expected, of those in her first volume—are, for the most part, in no sense immature, or unworthy of the genius of the writer,—notably the *Vision of Life and Death*, the lines entitled, *Earth*, 'comparatively free from the stiffness of most of her blank verse, and surely a powerful composition ;† the lines *To a Poet's Child*, full of terrible

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\* *Edinburgh Review*, Oct. 1861, p. 515.

† *Quarterly Review*, Sept. 1840, § MODERN ENGLISH  
POETRESSES—Miss Barrett.



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irony and suppressed bitterness, *The Image of God, The Appeal, Idols, Weariness*, and several others.

The "exquisite touch" that "bides in the birth of things" is peculiarly apparent in the first bursting into bud and leaf of a new poetic genius. The summer of its manifestation may have greater fervour, and richer pomp and majesty of foliage, but about its early spring there must always be a nameless and peculiar charm. And therefore all that is best and worthiest in this book is to such a poem as *Aurora Leigh*, as an exquisite day of April is to a fervid day in August. Both have their own glory and sweetness; but the perfect summer flowers, be it remembered, were always reared "from seeds of April's sowing."

The cycle of Elizabeth Barrett's earlier work is completed by her third volume, entitled *The Seraphim and other Poems*, published in 1838, in her twenty-ninth year. Some of the minor poems in this book had appeared during the two previous years in the *Athenæum* and the *New Monthly Magazine*. Such of these pieces as have not been included in her *Collected Writings* may be added to a future edition of the present volume, should it prove acceptable to poetical students.

AN  
ESSAY ON MIND,

WITH

*OTHER POEMS.*

"BRAMA ASSAI, POCO SPERA, E NULLA CHIEDE."  
*Tosco.*

LONDON:  
JAMES DUNCAN, PATERNOSTER-ROW.  
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