

Elizabeth Barrett Browning Poems

Sonnets from the Portuguese 43: How do I love thee? Let me count the ways

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints. I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.

Sonnets from the Portuguese 28: My letters! all dead paper, ... mute and white !

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
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A Musical Instrument

I.

WHAT was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river ?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

II.

He tore out a reed, the great god Pan,
From the deep cool bed of the river :
The limpid water turbidly ran,
And the broken lilies a-dying lay,
And the dragon-fly had fled away,
Ere he brought it out of the river.

III.

High on the shore sate the great god Pan,
While turbidly flowed the river ;
And hacked and hewed as a great god can,
With his hard bleak steel at the patient reed,
Till there was not a sign of a leaf indeed
To prove it fresh from the river.

IV.

He cut it short, did the great god Pan,
(How tall it stood in the river !)
Then drew the pith, like the heart of a man,
Steadily from the outside ring,
And notched the poor dry empty thing
In holes, as he sate by the river.

V.

This is the way,' laughed the great god Pan,
Laughed while he sate by the river,)
The only way, since gods began
To make sweet music, they could succeed.'
Then, dropping his mouth to a hole in the reed,

He blew in power by the river.

VI.

Sweet, sweet, sweet, O Pan !

Piercing sweet by the river !

Blinding sweet, O great god Pan !

The sun on the hill forgot to die,

And the lilies revived, and the dragon-fly

Came back to dream on the river.

VII.

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,

To laugh as he sits by the river,

Making a poet out of a man :

The true gods sigh for the cost and pain, —

For the reed which grows nevermore again

As a reed with the reeds in the river.

Patience Taught by Nature

“O Dreary life!” we cry, “O dreary life!”
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven’s true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle. Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land: savannah-swards
Unweary sweep: hills watch, unworn; and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees,
To show, above, the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory. O thou God of old!
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to these;—
But so much patience, as a blade of grass
Grows by contented through the heat and cold.