

**POEMS OF
EMILY BRONTË**

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR SYMONS



LONDON
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INTRODUCTION

THIS was a woman young and passionate,
Loving the Earth, and loving most to be
Where she might be alone with liberty ;
Loving the beasts, who are compassionate ;
The homeless moors, her home ; the bright elate
Winds of the cold dawn ; rock and stone and tree ;
Night, bringing dreams out of eternity ;
And memory of Death's unforgetting date.
She too was unforgetting : has she yet
Forgotten that long agony when her breath
Too fierce for living fanned the flame of death ?
Earth for her heather, does she now forget
What pity knew not in her love from scorn,
And that it was an unjust thing to be born ?

THE Stoic in woman has been seen once only, and that in the only woman in whom there has been seen the paradox of passion without sensuousness. Emily Brontë lived with an unparalleled energy a life of outward quiet, in a loneliness which she shared only with the moors and with the animals whom she loved. She required no passionate experience to en-

dow her with more than a memory of passion. Passion was alive in her as flame is alive in the earth. And the vehemence of that inner fire fed on itself, and wore out her body before its time, because it had no respite and no outlet. We see her condemned to self-imprisonment, and dying of too much life.

Her poems are few and brief, and nothing more personal has ever been written. A few are as masterly in execution as in conception, and almost all have a direct truth of utterance, which rarely lacks at least the bare beauty of muscle and sinew, of a kind of naked strength and alertness. They are without heat or daylight, the sun is rarely in them, and then 'blood-red'; light comes as starshine, or comes as

'hostile light
That does not warm but burn.'

At times the landscape in this bare, grey, craggy verse, always a landscape of Yorkshire moors, with its touches of stern and tender memory, 'The mute bird sitting on the stone,' 'A little and a lone green lane,' has a quality more thrilling than that of Wordsworth.

There is none of his observation, and none of his sense of a benignant 'presence far more deeply interfused'; but there is the voice of the heart's roots, crying out to its home in the earth.

At first this unornamented verse may seem forbidding, may seem even to be ordinary, as an actual moorland may, to those for whom it has no special attraction. But in the verse, as on the moors, there is space, wind, and the smell of the earth; and there is room to be alone, that liberty which this woman cried for when she cried:

'Leave the heart that now I bear,
And give me liberty.'

To be alone was for her to be alone with 'a chainless soul,' which asked of whatever powers might be only 'courage to endure,' constancy not to forget, and the right to leave the door wide open to those visions that came to her out of mere fixed contemplation: 'the God of Visions,' as she called her imagination, 'my slave, my comrade, and my king.' And we know that her courage was flawless, heroic, beyond praise; that she forgot nothing, not even that love for her unspeakable brother,

for whom she has expressed in two of her poems a more than masculine magnanimity of pity and contempt; and that at all times she could turn inward to that world within, where her imagination waited for her,

‘Where thou, and I, and Liberty
Have undisputed sovereignty.’

Yet even imagination, though ‘benignant,’ is to her a form of ‘phantom bliss’ to which she will not trust herself wholly. ‘So hopeless is the world without’: but is the world within ever quite frankly accepted as a substitute, as a truer reality? She is always on her guard against imagination as against the outer world, whose ‘lies’ she is resolved shall not ‘beguile’ her. She has accepted reason as the final arbiter, and desires only to see clearly, to see things as they are. She really believed that

‘Earth reserves no blessing
For the unblest of heaven’;

and she had an almost Calvinistic sense of her own condemnation to unhappiness. That being so, she was suspicious of those opportunities of joy which did come to her, or at

least resolute not to believe too implicitly in the good messages of the stars, which might be mere dreams, or of the earth, which was only certainly kind in preparing for her that often thought-of grave. 'No coward soul is mine' is one of her true sayings; but it was with difficulty that she trusted even that message of life which she seemed to discover in death. She has to assure herself of it, again and again: 'Who once lives, never dies!' And that sense of personal identity which aches throughout all her poems is a sense, not of the delight, but of the pain and ineradicable sting of personal identity.

Her poems are all outcries, as her great novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is one long outcry. A soul on the rack seems to make itself heard at moments, when suffering has grown too acute for silence. Every poem is as if torn from her. Even when she does not write seemingly in her own person, the subjects are such disguises as 'The Prisoner,' 'Honour's Martyr,' 'The Outcast Mother,' echoes of all the miseries and useless rebellions of the earth. She spells over the fading characters in dying faces, unflinchingly, with an austere curiosity;

and looks closely into the eyes of shame, not dreading what she may find there. She is always arguing with herself, and the answers are inflexible, the answers of a clear intellect which rebels but accepts defeat. Her doubt is itself an affirmation, her defiance would be an entreaty but for the 'quenchless will' of her pride. She faces every terror, and to her pained apprehension birth and death and life are alike terrible. Only Webster's dirge might have been said over her coffin.

'What my soul bore my soul alone
Within itself may tell,'

she says truthfully; but some of that long endurance of her life, in which exile, the body's weakness, and a sense of some 'divinest anguish' which clung about the world and all things living, had their share, she was able to put into ascetic and passionate verse. It is sad-coloured and desolate, but when gleams of sunlight or of starlight pierce the clouds that hang generally above it, a rare and stormy beauty comes into the bare outlines, quickening them with living splendour.

ARTHUR SYMONS.