

[Browning, Elizabeth Barrett]

[MS-D800]

["The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point"]

[1848?]

[embossed crest in left corner]

~~Black & Mad, [scratched out word], []~~ at Pilgrim's Point

1

The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point

1 1 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

I stand on the mark beside the shore

Of the first white pilgrim's bended knee, —

Where exile changed to ancestor,

And God was thanked for liberty—

I have run [~~again?~~] through the night . . my skin is as dark . . .

I bend my knees down on this mark . . .

I look on the sky and the sea—

2 2 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you—

I see you come out [~~strong?~~] ^ proud & slow,

From the land of the spirits, [~~as?~~] pale as dew. . .

And round me & round me ye go—

O pilgrims, I have gasped and run

All night long from the whips of one

Who, in your names, works sin & woe!

3 3 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

And ~~therefore~~^{thus} I thought that I would come

And kneel here where ye knelt before . .

And feel your souls around me hum

In undertone to the ocean's roar,

And lift my black face, and my hand, ^{^my black hand,}

[“and” & “hand” are underlined in pencil, my black hand is written in pencil and
overwritten in ink]

And^{^Here,} in your names, ^{^to} curse ~~all~~ this land [“And” is underlined in pencil]

Ye blessed in freedom's, heretofore.

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2

4 4 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

I am black, I am black,

And yet God made me, they say;

But if He did so, smiling back

He must have cast His work away

Under the feet of His white creatures,

With a look of scorn,--that the dusky features

Might be trodden again to clay.

5 5 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

And yet He has made dark things

To be glad & merry as light.

There's a little dark bird, sits and sings;

There's a dark [unclear] stream ripples out of sight;

[written in pencil in ^{RB's} another hand before this line]

? joy &c

And the dark frogs chant in the safe morass,--

And the sweetest stars are made to pass

[written in pencil in ^{RB's} another hand before this line]

o'er?

On ^{o'er} the face of the darkest night.

6 6 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

But we who are dark, we are dark!

Ah God! we have no stars!

About our souls in care & cark

Our blackness shuts like prison-bars!

And [unclear] [out] [unclear] And they . . . crouch as our souls far behind,

[in the left margin in pencil—^{in RB's hand.} “crouch or couch &c (because of the bird that sits & sings
just from before)]

That never a comfort can they find,
By reaching through the prison-bars.

> [Page 3]

? 8 7 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

Howbeit God's [^]~~[unclear]~~ sun [^]shine & His ~~and~~ frost,

They make us hot, they make us cold,

As if we were not black [^]~~and~~ lost:

And the beasts & birds, in wood and fold;

Do fear and take us for [^]very men!

Could the whip-poor-will, or the ~~[unclear]~~ ~~[unclear]~~ stag [^]owl of the glen

Look into my eyes and be bold?

^{in RB's hand}
[Note in the left margin in pencil—“ [qⁿ] could not some more characteristic creature be found- and smaller, to pair with the whippoorwill? Martin, racoon, opossum, wild cat &c*]

9 8 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin].

I am black, I am black!--

And once I laughed in girlish glee—

For one of my colour stood in the track

Where the drivers drove, & looked at me—

And tender & full was the look he gave!

A slave look ^{ed}so at another slave[!]—

I look at the sky & the sea.

10 9 [written in two other hands in pencil in the left margin]

And from that hour our spirits grew

As free as if unsold, unbought!

We were strong enough, since we were two,

To conquer the world, we thought—

The drivers drove us day by day—

We did not mind—we went one way,

And no better a liberty (~~unclear~~) sought.

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4

10 [written in another hand in pencil in the left margin] *Does one swear ... or more than once*

In the open ground between the canes,

He said "I love ~~thee~~ ^{^you}" as he passed:

When the shingle-roofs rang sharp with the rains,

I heard how he ~~swore~~ ^{^vowed} it fast!

While others ~~humbled~~ ^{trembled} ^{^shook}, he sate in the hut

And carved me a bowl of the cocoanut,

Through the roar of the hurricanes.

[Note in the left hand margin—^{RB's hand.} "Does one swear fast or ~~more~~ ~~than~~ once?

^{love} [~~unclear~~] ^{fast} [~~breathes~~] [~~breath?~~] x o"]

11 [written in another hand in pencil in the left margin]

I sang his name instead of a song—

Over and over I sang his name!

Backward & forward I drew it along,

~~My~~ My sweetest notes, —it was still the same.

~~for~~ I sang it low, that the slave-girls near

Might never guess, ~~for all~~ ^{^ from what} they could hear,

It was only a ~~char~~anted name.

12 [written in another hand in pencil in the left margin]

I look on the sky and the sea!

We were two to love, and two to pray,—

~~And~~ Yes, two, O God, who cried to Thee,

Though nothing didst Thou say—

~~Thou sittest cold~~ ^{^ Coldly Thou sat'st} behind the sun---

And now I cry who am but one--

Thou wilt not speak to-day!

[Unlear]