

The Cry of Children

“For oh,” say the children, “we are weary
 And we cannot run or leap;
 If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
 To drop down in them and sleep.
 Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping,
 We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
 And underneath our heavy eyelids drooping
 The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.

For, all day, we drag our burden tiring
 Through the coal – dark, underground;
 Or, all day we drive the wheels or iron
 In the factories, round and round.”

- *Elizabeth Barrett Browning*



About the poet

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861) was a great poet of English language. She published a collection of poems, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, *Aurora Leigh*, *The Seraphim* and *Other Poems*. She married Robert Browning, a famous English poet and moved to Italy. Most of her poems deal with human emotions.



Glossary

- weary (*adj*) : tired and lost all the strength
 meadows (*n*) : land that is covered with grass
 merely (*adv*) : only

- sorely (*adv*) : in a painful manner
drooping (*adj*) : hanging downward
pale (*adj*) : not bright/ light in colour



Comprehension

Answer the following questions.

1. What kind of places are the children working in?
2. 'The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.' What does the phrase 'reddest flower' refer to? Why does it become pale?
3. How does the work affect the children?
4. Do children enjoy themselves when engaged in work?
5. If the poem is written from the point of view of a factory owner, what kind of things would he say about children?
6. What is the poet's attitude towards child labour? Pick out the words / expressions that reveal her attitude.

C Reading

Reaching the Unreached

Romesh was fourteen years old. He left his widowed mother and three younger sisters back in Bihar. He took up a long travel of hundreds of miles to find a new future. He reached Hyderabad, one of the main cities in India.

On reaching the city, he found that the streets were not paved with gold. Finding a job was not an easy task. Cursed by hunger, he joined a group of rag pickers. He started working early in the morning and toiled until late evening, only to earn a mere Rs. 10 a day. Life was not a dream for him.

Luckily, he got a helping hand from "The Childline" when some rescuer called 1098 helpline. Romesh is now one of the beneficiaries of Andhra Pradesh State based project for the elimination of Child Labour.

Many such children fall to similar fate due to domestic violence and abject poverty. One such example was Shanti, a nine year old kid. She was taken out of the school by her