

## APPENDIX IV

### *EBB's Letters to Her Sister Henrietta*

LEONARD HUXLEY, in his introduction to *Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Letters to Her Sister, 1846–1859* (1929), makes the following comment: “Henrietta lovingly preserved those [letters] which were written to her; in 1875, many years after her death, her husband reinsured their existence with no less care by copying them all into a set of quarto MS. books. His invaluable foreword and notes explain family history and allusions in a way possible only to one who still had personal knowledge of those concerned.” Huxley did not prepare his edition of EBB’s letters to Henrietta from the holographs, but worked from the transcripts made by Surtees, who edited out over two-fifths of their content. Huxley made further excisions, “many nursery details” and “passing references to persons and things that have no general interest,” with the result that he published approximately half of the text.

Within a few months of the appearance of Huxley’s work, the family was approached by a book dealer who acquired the original letters. They exchanged hands several times and eventually became an integral part of the private library of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. While in his possession, Mr. Houghton graciously allowed the present editors to prepare full transcripts. The holographs remained with Mr. Houghton until 13 June 1979 when they sold at Christie’s, London, as lot 66. Their present whereabouts are unknown.

The copies made by Surtees are still in family hands and have been used extensively by the present editors. We consider his introduction, written from an unique perspective, merits publication. We extend our gratitude to Mary V. Altham for permission to present it here.

#### HAPPY YEARS OF ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

by William Surtees Altham (*né* Cook)

Elizabeth Barrett (whose works the public are familiar with) was the daughter of Edward Barrett Moulton-Barrett of Hope End Herefordshire J.P. and Sheriff for the county in 1814. Her father was born 28<sup>th</sup> of May 1785, was educated at Harrow, and at Trinity College Cambridge as a gentleman Commoner; and he died at his house 50 Wimpole Street, in London, 27<sup>th</sup> of April 1857. The paternal name was, originally, Moulton; but in 1798, when minors, he and his brother Samuel

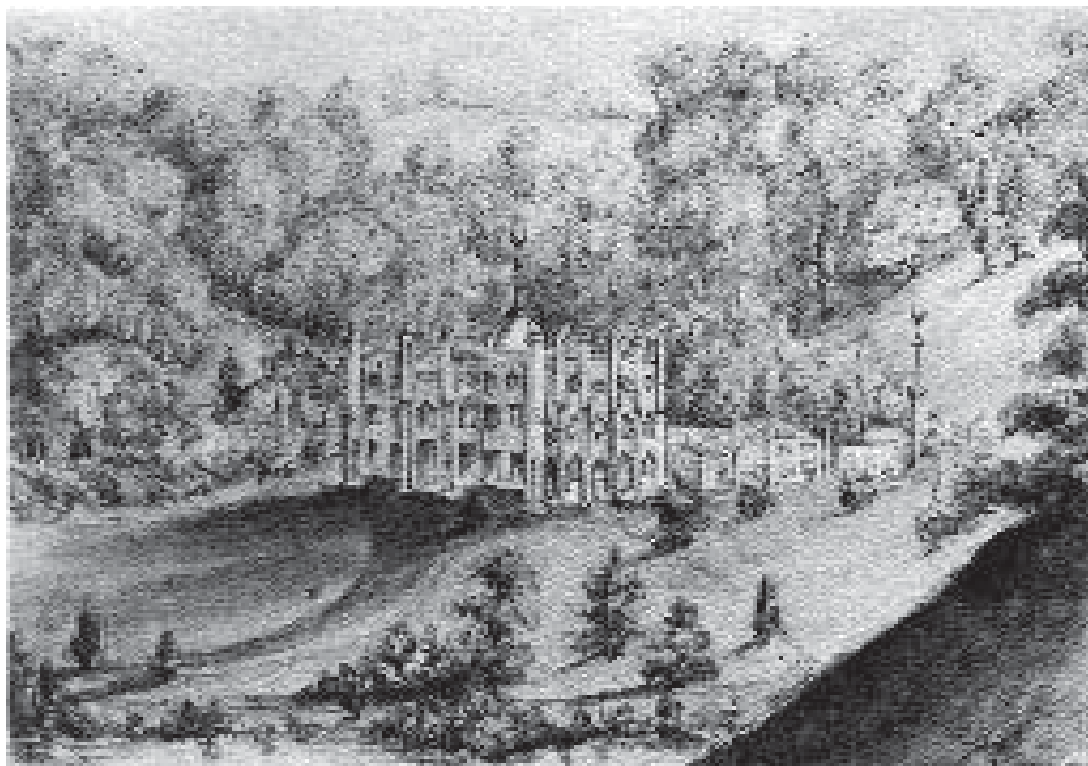
Moulton-Barrett, (of Carlton Hall Yorkshire, M.P. for Richmond in that county, who died without issue,) on succeeding to the estates, in Jamaica, of their maternal grandfather, Edward Barrett of Cinnamon Hill, had the surname of Barrett conferred on them and their descendants, by licence from the Crown, in *addition* to that of Moulton. The name was, therefore, in reality, Moulton-Barrett, though the tendency was to drop the Moulton altogether. The Moultons were an old Royalist family. The Barretts were whigs.

Edward and Samuel Moulton-Barrett had rather a long minority. They started in life, on coming of age, each with a clear income of at least £12000 a year; but they of course felt the effects of the change of England's policy in Jamaica—the abolition of that evil thing slavery. Their hearts and consciences went with emancipation, but their purses suffered. Edward Moulton-Barrett, who by the way was never in Jamaica,<sup>1</sup> always maintained that the withdrawal

of duty on slave grown sugar was the only grievance proprietors, if they were Christian men, could legitimately complain of. This he argued was unjust, a cowardly concession to mistaken clamour, and an encouragement to that slavery which we profess so to abominate. The slave owner might fairly urge that he cannot forego good income, and therefore must have slaves to work his plantations, if the British consumer be allowed to plead that he cannot forego cheap sugar, and must buy from Cuba. The difference is only in degree. When the shoe pinches the world is apt to be inconsistent. Edward Moulton-Barrett's eldest surviving son (and present representative), when a very young man, once had the temerity to proclaim, in the generosity of his heart, at a festive board in Jamaica in 1839, to the dismay of his fellow guests, that he thought the compensation money allotted by Parliament ought not to have gone to the Landowners, but to the slaves as a compensation for their sufferings.

Hope End, the beautiful seat of Edward Moulton-Barrett, beneath the Malvern Hills, eventually passed to another family. We give a sketch of the mansion as it stood in 1832. A new proprietor has stamped out the Hope End where

1. Surtees has the following note: "R. Browning says he was brought from Jamaica to England as a small child, on the death of his father." For Edward Moulton-Barrett's childhood see our Volume 1, pp. 286–287. Charles Moulton, his father, did not die until 1819.



Hope End Mansion

Elizabeth Barrett Browning passed her childhood and youth. An Elizabethan edifice now appears in its place: but we hear it was hard work to pick to pieces the costly pile erected by Edward Moulton-Barrett; and it would seem, to the uninitiated, rather a capricious waste of substantial stone masonry. We might, at one time, almost have said, with another poet:—

Here didst thou dwell, here schemes of pleasure plan,

Beneath yon mountain's ever beauteous brow:

But now, as if a thing unblest by man,  
Thy faery dwelling is as lone as thou!

*Childe Harold.*

The mother of Elizabeth Barrett Browning of whom so little has been said, (and from whom so much sweetness of disposition, so much gentleness, goodness, beauty, permeated to her descendants,) was the daughter of John Graham-Clarke of Kenton Lodge, Northumberland, by Arabella daughter and co-heir of Roger Altham, who derived from Mark-hall in Latton, Essex. We are all proud of consanguinity to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Beautiful in mind as in person, her mother was one whom to know, it was said, was to love. Edward Moulton-Barrett fixed his first, his earliest, his only affections, in this direction. His guardian, the first Lord Abinger, conceiving it to be a mere boyish passion that would pass away, would not, at first, yield consent. He had never seen the Lady, and it was artfully arranged that he should meet her at a dinner party, where it was contrived that he should escort to the dining room the very fascinating and beautiful young creature who had so charmed his ward. On being told who she was, he exclaimed, (so it has been handed down,) "I hold out no longer—she is far too good for him!" They were married on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 1805, the bridegroom being under age. In conformity with Sir Bernard Burke's courteous custom, we do not give the date of birth, where ladies are concerned. She died Oct. 1. 1828; and the parents of Elizabeth Barrett Browning rest in peace, in one grave, in Ledbury Church, Herefordshire, the parish in which Hope End is situated, where a marble monument, by Lough, has been erected to their memory. A pleasant path on the southern side of a piece of water in Hope

End park, where M<sup>rs</sup> Moulton-Barrett was wont to take exercise in her last illness, used to be known, in the long years ago, as "M<sup>rs</sup> Barrett's walk."

Of this marriage there were eight sons, of whom five survive; and three daughters. The eldest son, Edward, was drowned in 1839, with two other young men, by the capsizing of a small yacht, at Torquay, where he had gone, with his sister the poetess who had broken a small blood vessel, her delicacy of health proceeding from no other cause. This was the source of her long sorrow. They were the nearest in years, the "Bro and Ba" (pet names) who clung to each other with more than usual tenderness; and the terrible idea would possess her mind that, had he not gone to Torquay on her account, his young life might have been spared. We do not think the gloom of this sad event altogether passed away until her marriage with Robert Browning in 1846, when a new life sprung upon her, new hopes, more cheerful writing, effulgence, happiness, which may easily be perceived pervading her letters. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died at Florence on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1861, where she was buried. Her sisters were Henrietta Barrett, (to whom the letters were addressed,) who married in 1850, her second cousin William Surtees Cook, (late a Major in 83<sup>d</sup> Foot); she died in 1860: and Arabella who died unmarried, in 1868, at her residence of Delamere Terrace, London. How the three sisters cleaved to each other, in wondrous affection, the letters abundantly show.

We believe this is all that need be stated. A hope was once whispered, by a gentle spirit "gone before," that these letters might one day be submitted to the public. A new generation is cropping up that "know not Joseph"; and the hand may soon be still who alone is familiar with all the niceties, all the delicacy required in fulfilling the hope— It has been said that the letters, especially domestic letters, unguarded and unprepared, of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, were thrown off with such facility, and always so naturally, so happily and pleasantly expressed that they indicate a latent power in prose, which might, had she so selected, have equalled, if not surpassed in brilliancy her own poetry. The public will judge for themselves.