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AND
OTHER POEMS

— BY —
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

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No. 47.
ENGLISH CLASSICS.

THANATOPSIS
AND OTHER POEMS.

BY WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.



WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY J. W. ABERNETHY, PH. D.,

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH LITERATURE IN THE ADELPHI ACADEMY, BROOKLYN.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION.

THE life of the "father of our song" was almost co-extensive with the life of our republic. His eighty-four years began during the administration of Washington and ended during that of Hayes. His greatest poem was written eight years before Irving's "Sketch Book," nine years before Cooper's first novel, and twenty-eight years before Longfellow's first volume of poetry appeared. Indeed, the history of American literature may properly be said to begin with "Thanatopsis"

William Cullén Bryant was born at Cummington, Massachusetts, November 3, 1794. His father, Peter Bryant, was a physician, held in high esteem both for his professional skill and for his superior learning and culture. The first of his name in this country was Stephen Bryant, who came from England about twelve years after the arrival of the Mayflower. His mother, Sarah Snell Bryant, traced the line of her ancestry back to John Alden and Priscilla Mullins, celebrated in Longfellow's poem. Thus our two most eminent poets, Longfellow and Bryant, divided the honor of descent from Captain Miles Standish's famous lieutenant. The remarkable development of Bryant's poetic faculty in early youth was largely due, probably, to the encouragement and careful training received from his father. It was he—

"who taught my youth
The art of verse, and in the bud of life
Offered me to the muses."

The love of literature and some skill in the "art of verse" were a part of the family inheritance through several generations. "My father delighted in poetry," he says, "and wrote verses himself, mostly humorous and satirical." One of the poet's brothers also was a writer of verses of considerable merit. To the mother he owed much of that stern integrity of character which won for him many triumphs outside the field of poetry. She was a person of "quick and sensitive moral judgment, and had no patience with any form of deceit or duplicity," and he adds, "if, in the discussion of public questions, I have in my riper age endeavored to keep in view the great rule of right without much regard to persons, it has been owing in great degree to the force of her example, which taught me never to countenance a wrong because others did."

Bryant began to make verses in his eighth year, one of his earliest efforts being a paraphrase of the first chapter of the Book of Job, and another, a poetical address before his school. In his thirteenth year he surprised his family and the public with a political satire of over five hundred lines, which was published at Boston under the title, "The Embargo, or Sketches of the Times; a Satire, by a Youth of Thirteen." It appeared in a second edition the following year, together with several other poems of a political character. More than forty pieces of verse were written before he was sixteen years old—odes, elegies, satires, songs, and translations; but they are little more than mocking-bird rhymes, in manner echoing Pope, whose influence was still dominant, and in matter rehearsing the political sentiments of the times; moreover, they contain not the slightest hint of the characteristics of his later poetry.

In 1810 he entered the sophomore class of Williams College, then an institution consisting of a president, one professor, and two tutors. He remained here only seven months, having decided to continue his course at Yale; but this he was unable to do, on account of his father's limited means. Accordingly he began the study of law, and in 1816 opened an office in Plainfield, removing the following year to Great Barrington, villages not far from his native town. In the latter place he continued a successful practice until 1825.

It is pretty certain that during these years his happiest hours were spent with the muses: Although he studied his law-books diligently, yet he continued to read "greedily" the works of the English poets, with which his father kept him well supplied. "I read all the poetry that came in my way," he says. In 1810, the year that he entered college, he made the precious discovery of Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads," in which he found for the first time a poetic embodiment of his own undefined feelings for external nature. He once said to a friend that "upon opening the book a thousand springs seemed to gush up at once in his heart, and the face of nature, of a sudden, to change into a strange freshness and life." He had early formed the habit—which remained with him during life—of roaming the fields and woods whenever he could "steal an hour from study and care." In an unfinished poem of his old age, he says of himself at this period:

"Ever apart from the resorts of men
He roamed the pathless woods, and hearkened long
To winds that brought into their silent depths
The murmurs of the mountain waterfalls."

Under the influence of Wordsworth he now began to comprehend more fully that "various language" of Nature which he was soon to interpret so beautifully, and to engage in that subtle communion with all her

visible forms, from which the inspiration of his best poetry was to be drawn. It was during one of those solitary rambles, in 1811, that "Thanatopsis" was composed, "the greatest poem ever written by so young a man." In 1814 the "Yellow Violet" was written; in 1815, "The Waterfowl" and the "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood" were added; and in 1819 and 1820, "Green River," "A Winter Piece," and "The West Wind."

The year 1821 was an eventful one in the poet's history. He was married to the "fairest of the rural maids"; he was invited to deliver a poem before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard, and for this occasion wrote "The Ages," one of his longest and most elaborate poems; and the first volume of his serious poetry was published, containing only eight poems, but such poems as had never been written in America. During the next four years about thirty poems were written, containing some of the finest work of his life. Among these were "The Rivulet," "Monument Mountain," "Autumn Woods," "Hymn to the North Star," and the "Forest Hymn."

It is evident from "Green River" that the practice of law was uncongenial to Bryant from the first, and from various allusions in his private letters it would seem also that, with Macaulay, he had come to believe it more than questionable "whether the rules and doctrines observed among lawyers be agreeable to reason and morality." He was certainly ill at ease among the "hoary-headed wranglers" of court-rooms, and was conscious of a gross perversion of his refined poetic faculties in continuing to "drudge for the dregs of men." In 1825, therefore, he abandoned the law, went to New York as a "literary adventurer," and soon became editor of the "New York Review and Athenæum." But in this position there was little promise of success or even of a livelihood. The sombre little poem, "The Journey of Life," written at this time, shows him groping in the darkness where—

"The lights that tell of cheerful homes appear
Far off; and die like hope amid the glooms."

The next year he became assistant editor, and in 1829 editor-in-chief, of the "Evening Post," with which journal he continued to be associated the remainder of his life. Poetry was now necessarily neglected, and his best energies were engaged in the fervid toil of daily journalism, where genius loses its individuality and serves only to make a part of that vague force for good in the world known as the "power of the press." His long career as a journalist was to a remarkable degree successful and honorable; but it is as a poet, not as a journalist, that posterity will continue to honor him.

In 1832 a volume containing about ninety poems appeared. It was republished in England, with a dedication to the poet Rogers by Wash-

ington Irving, and won much unwilling praise from the English critics. In 1836 another edition was issued, and in 1842 a little volume containing twenty new poems appeared under the title of "The Fountain and Other Poems." Henceforth new poems were added, at infrequent intervals, until the last year of his life. Among the most popular of the later poems are "The Song of the Sower," "Planting of the Apple Tree," "Among the Trees," and the two fairy pieces, "Sella" and "The Little People of the Snow." The grand music of the "Forest Hymn" of his early years is continued in "A Hymn of the Sea," and in "The Flood of Years," written in his eighty-second year, the lofty and solemn chord of "Thanatopsis" and the "Hymn to Death" is again sounded.

As material prosperity increased, Bryant became a great traveller, visiting the old world six times, and many of the remoter parts of his own country. About the only literary fruits of his extensive journeying are the "Letters of a Traveller" and "Letters from the East." These, and a volume of "Orations and Addresses" constitute his prose works which are likely to live. A "Popular History of the United States" bears his name, to which, however, he contributed only the preface. He edited a popular anthology, "The Library of Poetry and Song," and was associated with Mr. E. A. Duyckinck in editing an edition of Shakespeare, which is yet to appear.

That "grim power" whose praises the poet had sung in his youth, in 1866 took from him his wife, who for forty-five years had been "the brightness of his life." She is frequently alluded to in his poetry, and an unfinished piece, found upon his desk seven years after her death, is filled with the tenderest memories of "that happy past," beginning:

"The morn hath not the glory that it wore,
Nor doth the day so beautifully die,
Since I can call thee to my side no more,
To gaze upon the sky.

"For thy dear hand with each return of Spring,
I sought in sunny nooks the flowers she gave;
I seek them still, and sorrowfully bring
The choicest to thy grave."

Probably to escape the depression of spirits caused by this great sorrow, Bryant began in 1866 the translation of Homer, and five years later gave us a complete version of the great world-poet, the best, perhaps, ever made in English. After this crowning achievement the sabbath calm of his days was not often broken. His life, as he had hoped, was now—

"Journeying in long serenity away."

He was always active in promoting every movement of art, literature, and benevolence, and, though instinctively shrinking from publicity, was often sought by his fellow-citizens to assume the chief honor at public festivals. While performing one of these characteristic duties, the delivery of an address at the unveiling of a statue to Mazzini in Central Park, he was stricken by the heat of the sun and died a few days later, June 12, 1878. It was as he had fancifully wished in his poem "June," written fifty-three years before—that he might be laid to rest "in flowery June," the season of—

"Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom."

The proper rank of Bryant among our great poets it would be difficult to fix, so many and so uncertain are the tests of poetical greatness. The range of his poetic conceptions was limited, and it was a part of his wisdom to recognize the limitations of his genius and never to poach upon the domains of other poets. His thoughts are at times even commonplace, but it was his peculiar merit to be able to think the most common thoughts with most uncommon force and beauty. Certain it is that in the spiritual depth of the inspiration of his nature-poetry and in its grave, majestic music, he has not been equalled by any American poet. He is superior also in what may be called the power of condensed imagination, "the art of presenting the greatest things in the fewest words and of suggesting the indescribable and the illimitable." He has been called the "American Wordsworth," but the epithet is likely to be misleading if used to describe his poetry. "He is not merely a worshipper at Nature's shrine," says Whipple, "but a priest of her mysteries, and an interpreter of her symbolic language to men. Though he resembles Wordsworth in this bias of his genius, he resembles him in little else, and imitates nobody." His love of nature was intense, and the extent and accuracy of his knowledge of even the minutest facts of the outward world was hardly surpassed by that of the trained naturalist. "I was always from my earliest years a delighted observer of external nature," he says. Nearly two-thirds of his poems are direct suggestions from some object or aspect of nature. He possessed the instinct of the artist for detecting everywhere even the most evanescent shades of beauty, and the instinct of the moralist for perceiving the remotest analogies of spiritual truth.

His poetry has never been popular, in the ordinary sense of the word; neither has the poetry of Shelley and Wordsworth, to whom, among English poets, he stands nearest in poetical kinship. He is too meditative and too distant from average human sympathies to give general pleasure. Besides, he loved nature better than he did men, and in nature he loved best the solemn and sublime aspects. His reflections are always serious and often sad. The burden of his song is the transi-

toriness of life. The voices of nature are constantly repeating this message in his attentive ear. It is whispered in the rustling leaves by the winds, murmured by the complaining brooks, and echoed by the rock-bound hills. Deliberate moralizing in poetry is perhaps never artistic and not often pleasing; but Bryant's morals are pointed so delicately and gracefully that they cannot offend, and cannot often fail to please.

Of the technical qualities of his poetry, its simplicity will always command admiration. No poet has ever illustrated so well the sustained power and beauty of simple Saxon speech. Of blank verse he was an acknowledged master. "Among modern authors," says Bayard Taylor, "not one has shown a finer natural perception of the best qualities of blank verse, or has employed that simplest, yet most difficult of measures, with more distinguished success." In the refining of his expression, Bryant was scrupulously nice, sometimes almost finical. An unpoetic phrase or unrhythmic line can hardly be found in his poetry. It is not surprising, therefore, that the quantity of his verse is small; but it is enough for his fame. It is natural to regret that so much of his energy was given to journalism and so little to poetry, but possibly his poetry is the better for it. Poetry loses its divinity when it becomes a regular occupation. The muses are always poor servants. Had Longfellow given much more time to the work of his professorship, no harm would have resulted to his best poetic fame. Indeed, it is rather appalling to contemplate the extent to which the works of many a great poet might be abridged without serious effect upon the reader's pleasure or the writer's reputation. Bryant never wrote except in strict accord with his poetic conscience, and therefore what he gave us was of the very essence of his finest being, and none of it could well be spared.

NOTE.—Through the courtesy of Mr. Parke Godwin, the son-in-law of Mr. Bryant and executor of his estate, the editor has been allowed to use the poems contained in this collection.

BRYANT'S POEMS.

Thanatopsis.*

Introductory Note.—This remarkable poem was written in the author's seventeenth year, shortly after leaving Williams College. Contrary to his custom, he did not submit it to his father for criticism, but hid it carefully in a desk, with a few other shorter poems. About six years later Dr. Bryant discovered it and procured its publication in the *North American Review* for September, 1817. "I believe it was composed in my solitary rambles in the woods," says the poet. The pale cast of thought which was upon him in these rambles is not sufficiently accounted for by saying that his mind was naturally disposed to pensive and sombre musings. It is probable that the books which he happened to be reading at this time had much to do with directing his thoughts to "the last bitter hour." He had recently come upon the melancholy verses of Henry Kirke White, which he read, he says, "with great eagerness, and so often that I had committed several of them to memory." He was also reading that singular poem, Blair's "Grave," "dwelling with great pleasure upon its finer passages," and another poem in blank verse on "Death" by Bishop Porteus. From these crude "melodies of death" the suggestion of "Thanatopsis" undoubtedly arose. The passages from Blair's poem given in the notes will indicate the nature of the indebtedness.

The poem was well received at its first appearance, and in all these years no criticism concerning it has been uttered except in praise, by those who are capable of appreciating its sublime qualities. Christopher North declared it to be "a noble example of true poetic enthusiasm," and added that "it alone would establish the author's claim to the honors of genius." "If we did not know," says Stoddard, "that 'Thanatopsis' was the work of a young man, we would never guess that such was the fact, it is so serious, so elevated, so noble." Of another phase of the poem's significance George William Curtis says: "It was the first adequate poetic voice of the solemn New England spirit; and in the grandeur of the hills, in the heroic Puritan tradition of sacrifice and endurance, in the daily life, saddened by imperious and awful theologic dogma, in the hard circumstances of the pioneer household, the contest with the wilderness, the grim legends of Indians and the war—have we not some outward clue to the strain of 'Thanatopsis'—the depthless and entrancing sadness, as of inexorable fate, that murmurs, like the autumn wind through the forest, in the melancholy cadences of this hymn to Death? Moreover, it was without a harbinger in our literature, and without a trace of the English masters of the hour."

The poem as originally written consisted of forty-nine lines; four rhymed stanzas on the subject of death were at first prefixed to it, mistakenly supposed by Dr. Bryant to be an introduction. It appeared with its present introduction and conclusion in the edition of 1821. As a comparison of the poem as we now know it with the original form will be found instructive, it is here presented as first printed:

— "Yet a few days, and thee,
The all-beholding sun, shall see no more,
In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in th' embrace of ocean shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim

* The word *Thanatopsis* signifies a view or contemplation of death; from the Greek *θάνατος*, death, and *ὄψις*, a view.

Thy growth, to be resolv'd to earth again ;
 And, lost each human trace, surrend'ring up
 Thine individual being, shalt thou go
 To mix forever with the elements,
 To be a brother to th' insensible rock
 And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
 Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
 Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.
 Yet not to thy eternal resting place
 Shalt thou retire alone—nor couldst thou wish
 Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
 With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings
 The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
 Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
 All in one mighty sepulchre.—The hills,
 Rock-ribb'd and ancient as the sun,—the vales
 Stretching in pensive quietness between ;
 The venerable woods—the floods that move
 In majesty,—and the complaining brooks,
 That wind among the meads, and make them green,
 Are but the solemn decorations all,
 Of the great tomb of man.—The golden sun,
 The planets, all the infinite host of heaven
 Are glowing on the sad abodes of death,
 Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
 The globe are but a handful to the tribes
 That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings
 Of morning—and the Borean desert pierce—
 Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
 That veil Oregon, where he hears no sound
 Save his own dashings—yet—the dead are there,
 And millions in those solitudes, since first
 The flight of years began, have laid them down
 In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.—
 So shalt thou rest—and what if thou shalt fall
 Unnoticed by the living—and no friend
 Take note of thy departure? Thousands more
 Will share thy destiny.—The tittering world
 Dance to the grave. The busy brood of care
 Plod on, and each one chases as before
 His favourite phantom.—Yet all these shall leave
 Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
 And make their bed with thee !”

To him who in the love of Nature holds
 Communion with her visible forms, she speaks
 A various language ; for his gayer hours
 She has a voice of gladness, and a smile
 And eloquence of beauty, and she glides
 Into his darker musings, with a mild
 And healing sympathy, that steals away
 Their sharpness, ere he is aware. When thoughts
 Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
 Over thy spirit, and sad images

Of the stern agony, and shroud, and pall,
 And breathless darkness, and the narrow house,
 Make thee to shudder, and grow sick at heart ;—
 Go forth, under the open sky, and list
 To Nature's teachings, while from all around— 15
 Earth and her waters, and the depths of air—
 Comes a still voice—Yet a few days, and thee
 The all-beholding sun shall see no more
 In all his course ; nor yet in the cold ground,
 Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears, 20
 Nor in the embrace of ocean, shall exist
 Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
 Thy growth, to be resolved to earth again,
 And, lost each human trace, surrendering up
 Thine individual being, shalt thou go 25
 To mix for ever with the elements,
 To be a brother to the insensible rock
 And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
 Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
 Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould. 30

Yet not to thine eternal resting-place
 Shalt thou retire alone, nor couldst thou wish
 Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
 With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings,

23. **Growth**, *i.e.*, the product of growth. **Resolved** here used in its strictly etymological sense, as in Dryden's lines:—

“Ye immortal souls, who once were men,
 And now resolved to elements again.”

33 *et seq.* Compare with this part of the poem the following passages from Blair's "Grave":—

—“'Tis here all meet.
 The shivering Icelander and sunburnt Moor,
 Men of all climes who never met before,
 And of all creeds, the Jew, the Turk, the Christian.
 Here the proud prince, and favorite yet prouder,
 His sovereign's keeper and the people's scourge.”

* * * * *
 “Here are the wise, the generous, and the brave,
 The just, the good, the worthless, the profane.”
 * * * * *

—“What is this world?
 What but a spacious burial-field unwall'd
 Strewed with death's spoils, the spoils of animals
 Savage and tame, and full of dead men's bones.”

Compare also *Job* iii, 13-19.

The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good, 35
 Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
 All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills
 Rock-ribbed and ancient as the sun,—the vales
 Stretching in pensive quietness between ;
 The venerable woods—rivers that move 40
 In majesty, and the complaining brooks
 That make the meadows green ; and, poured round all,
 Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste,—
 Are but the solemn decorations all
 Of the great tomb of man. The golden sun, 45
 The planets, all the infinite host of heaven,
 Are shining on the sad abodes of death,
 Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
 The globe are but a handful to the tribes
 That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings 50
 Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,
 Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
 Where rolls the Oregon, and hears no sound,

37. **The hills, etc.** Notice the force and beauty of the epithets in this sentence. "Rock-ribbed" is hardly equaled in Bryant's other descriptions of hills and mountains, and is as good as Shakespeare's "heaven-kissing hills." Stedman borrowed it in his poem on "The Death of Bryant," making "rock-ribbed heights." "The venerable woods" suggests Keats' "green-robed senators of mighty wood." "Complaining" is thus used again in "The Wind and Stream."

42, 43. These two lines are a substitute for the original line—

"That wind among the meads and make them green."

"The grandest of all his changes is the addition which he made to the natural scenery that surrounds the great tomb of man, and which rounds off and encloses the whole with a Homeric or Hebraic glimpse of the sea."—*R. H. Stoddard.*

48. "The number of the dead long exceedeth all that shall live. The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the equinox?"—*Sir Thomas Browne's Hydriotaphia.*

50. "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea."—*Psalms cxxxix, 9.*

51. **Pierce the Barcan wilderness.** Originally written "the Barcan desert pierce." Fearing that one could not "pierce" a desert, the poet changed the line to "traverse Barca's desert sands," but soon restored the original word at the advice of his friend Richard H. Dana. "It is the very term," he writes, "and affects the mind with any poetry in it, as if making its way straight through the mists of that whose verge had never been passed before." In the later editions, however, the word "wilderness" was adopted, used in its primitive signification—*i. e.*, any wild or desert place (A. S. *wild-deor*, wild animal). *Barca* is a country of northern Africa, bordering on the Libyan desert.

53. **Oregon** is another name for the Columbia River. Lewis and Clarke made their famous expedition to the mouth of this river in 1804-6. The thrilling narratives current upon the return of these explorers would readily suggest this region as the best example of a vast primeval forest.

Compare this line with the original.

Save his own dashings—yet the dead are there :
 And millions in those solitudes, since first 55
 The flight of years began, have laid them down
 In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.
 So shalt thou rest, and what if thou withdraw
 In silence from the living, and no friend
 Take note of thy departure ? All that breathe 60
 Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
 When thou art gone, the solemn brood of care
 Plod on, and each one as before will chase
 His favorite phantom ; yet all these shall leave 65
 Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
 And make their bed with thee. As the long train
 Of ages glides away, the sons of men,
 The youth in life's fresh spring, and he who goes
 In the full strength of years, matron, and maid,
 The speechless babe, and the gray-headed man,— 70
 Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
 By those, who in their turn shall follow them.

58. 59. Originally "what if thou shalt fall unnoticed by the living." Other readings are "what if thou shouldst fall," and "what if thou withdraw unheeded by the living."

66. **And make their bed with thee.** A scriptural phrase. See *Psalms* cxxxix, 8. Compare Blair's lines—

" 'Tis but a night, a long and moonless night,
 We make the grave our bed, and then are gone.

67. **Glides**, written **glide** in many editions.

67-72. Compare with these lines the following passages from Blair's "Grave":—

" Here querulous old-age winds up his tale ;
 Here is the large-limb'd peasant ; here the child
 Of a span long that never saw the sun,
 * * * * *
 The sober widow and the young green virgin,
 Cropp'd like a rose before 'tis fully blown.
 * * * * *
 The very turf on which we tread once lived,
 And we that live must lend our carcasses
 To cover our own offspring ; in their turns
 They too must cover theirs."

68. **Life's fresh spring.** In many editions, "Life's green spring."

70. This line is a substitute for two in the edition of 1821 :—

" The bowed with age, the infant in the smile
 And beauty of its innocent age cut off.

The improvement made by the change may be questioned, as the present line is somewhat hackneyed. "The speechless babe" was first written "And the sweet babe."

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
 The innumerable caravan, which moves
 To that mysterious realm, where each shall take 75
 His chamber in the silent halls of death,
 Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
 Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed
 By an unfaltering trust, approach thy grave,
 Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch 80
 About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

To a Waterfowl.

Introductory Note.—This poem was suggested by the flight of a wild duck which the poet saw while on his way to Plainfield, where he was about to begin the practice of law. The incident is thus described by his biographer, Parke Godwin: "He says in a letter that he felt, as he walked up the hills, very forlorn and desolate indeed, not knowing what was to become of him in the big world, which grew bigger as he ascended, and yet darker with the coming on of night. The sun had already set, leaving behind it one of those brilliant seas of chrysolite and opal which often flood the New England skies; and, while he was looking upon the rosy splendor with wrapt admiration, a solitary bird made wing along the illuminated horizon. He watched the lone wanderer until it was lost in the distance, asking himself whither it had come and to what far home it was flying. When he went to the house where he was to stop for the night, his mind was still full of what he had seen and felt, and he wrote those lines, as imperishable as our language, 'The Waterfowl.'"

It would be difficult to find in all our literature a more beautiful expression of the lesson of confidence in divine goodness than this little poem. In its chaste simplicity it is as perfect a piece of art as the cutting upon an ancient gem. "Nothing more exquisite can be conceived," says Dr. Ray Palmer, "than the picture it presents to the mental eye of the imaginative reader. The melody of the verse is as sweet as it is simple. The choice of language is perfect. Made up very largely of monosyllabic words, the stanzas are clear and strong."

The form of the stanza was suggested by Southey's poem, "The Ebb Tide." It is used again in "Autumn Woods."

WHITHER, midst falling dew,
 While glow the heavens with the last steps of day,
 Far, through their rosy depths, dost thou pursue
 Thy solitary way?
 Vainly the fowler's eye 5
 Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong,

75. To that mysterious realm. Bryant first wrote "To the pale realms of shade," which his friend Dana good-naturedly pronounced "utterly abominable." Compare *Hamlet* iii, 1:—

"The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns."

As, darkly painted on the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

Seek'st thou the plashy brink
Of weedy lake, or marge of river wide, 10
Or where the rocking billows rise and sink
On the chafed ocean side?

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast—
The desert and illimitable air— 15
Lone wandering, but not lost.

All day thy wings have fanned,
At that far height, the cold, thin atmosphere,
Yet stoop not, weary, to the welcome land,
Though the dark night is near. 20

And soon that toil shall end;
Soon shalt thou find a summer home and rest,
And scream among thy fellows; reeds shall bend,
Soon, o'er thy sheltered nest.

7. *Darkly painted on the crimson sky.* In various editions of the poems we find "limned upon," "shadowed on," and "seen against," the last form appearing in nearly all of the later editions.

"From a very early period," says Bryant,—"I am not sure that it was not from the very time that I wrote the poem—there seemed to me an incongruity between the idea of a figure painted on the sky and a figure moving, 'floating' across its face. If the figure were painted, then it would be fixed. The incongruity distressed me, and I could not be easy until I had made the change. I preferred a plain prosaic expression to a picturesque one which seemed to me false. 'Painted' expresses well the depth and strength of color which fixed my attention when I saw the bird—for the scene was founded on a real incident—but it contradicted the motion of the winds and the progress of the bird through the air."

Is not the critical conscience of the poet too seriously affected by this incongruity? It is not the truth of a physical fact that he wishes to express, but the truth of an artistic impression upon the imagination. Moreover, because of the "distant flight" the bird's motion is hardly perceptible, and the effect of the whole scene upon the beholder is simply that of a picture upon whose crimson background the floating bird *seems* to be painted.

9. *Plashy.* Essentially the same as *splashy*, from an old root-verb, meaning to strike with the palm, beat, slap. An old substantive *plash* means a puddle, a shallow pool. "Plashy snow" occurs in "A Winter Piece."

18. Why "cold, thin" atmosphere?

22. Compare with this poem the address to the flying swan in Shelley's "Alastor":

"Thou hast a home.
Beautiful bird! thou voyagest to thine home," &c.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven 25
 Hath swallowed up thy form ; yet, on my heart
 Deeply hath sunk the lesson thou hast given,
 And shall not soon depart.

He who, from zone to zone,
 Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight, 30
 In the long way that I must tread alone,
 Will lead my steps aright.

Green River.

Introductory Note.—Green River is the name of a small tributary of the Housatonic which runs near the village of Great Barrington, where the poet was practising law when this poem was written, in 1819. The poem is notably autobiographical, expressing clearly the increasing dissatisfaction with his profession. Washington Allston, on reading "Green River," remarked, "That man is a true poet, his *heart* is in it. What he gives you comes from his own spirit."

WHEN breezes are soft and skies are fair,
 I steal an hour from study and care,
 And hie me away to the woodland scene,
 Where wanders the stream with waters of green,
 As if the bright fringe of herbs on its brink 5
 Had given their stain to the wave they drink ;
 And they, whose meadows it murmurs through,
 Have named the stream from its own fair hue.

Yet pure its waters—its shallows are bright
 With colored pebbles and sparkles of light, 10
 And clear the depths where its eddies play,
 And dimples deepen and whirl away,
 And the plane-tree's speckled arms o'ershoot
 The swifter current that mines its root,
 Through whose shifting leaves, as you walk the hill, 15
 The quivering glimmer of sun and rill
 With a sudden flash on the eye is thrown,
 Like the ray that streams from the diamond-stone.

Oh, loveliest there the spring days come,
 With blossoms, and birds, and wild bees' hum ; 20
 The flowers of summer are fairest there,
 And freshest the breath of the summer air ;
 And sweetest the golden autumn day
 In silence and sunshine glides away.

Yet, fair as thou art, thou shunnest to glide, 25
 Beautiful stream ! by the village side ;
 But windest away from haunts of men,
 To quiet valley and shaded glen ;
 And forest, and meadow, and slope of hill,
 Around thee, are lonely, lovely, and still. 30
 Lonely, save when, by thy rippling tides,
 From thicket to thicket the angler glides ;
 Or the simpler comes, with basket and book,
 For herbs of power on thy banks to look ;
 Or haply, some idle dreamer, like me, 35
 To wander, and muse, and gaze on thee.
 Still—save the chirp of birds that feed
 On the river cherry and seedy reed,
 And thy own wild music gushing out
 With mellow murmur or fairy shout, 40
 From dawn to the blush of another day,
 Like traveller singing along his way.

That fairy music I never hear,
 Nor gaze on those waters so green and clear,
 And mark them winding away from sight, 45
 Darkened with shade or flashing with light,
 While o'er them the vine to its thicket clings,
 And the zephyr stoops to freshen his wings,
 But I wish that fate had left me free
 To wander these quiet haunts with thee, 50

23, 24. The edition of 1821 had, instead of these two lines :—

“ And the swimmer comes in the season of heat
 To bathe in those waters so pure and sweet.”

33. **Simpler.** *Simples* is the old word for *herbs*, so-called from the belief that each vegetable possesses some particular virtue, thus constituting a simple remedy.

40. The edition of 1836 has *and* instead of *or*.

Till the eating cares of earth should depart,
 And the peace of the scene pass into my heart ;
 And I envy thy stream, as it glides along
 Through its beautiful banks in a trance of song.

Though forced to drudge for the dregs of men, 55
 And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen,
 And mingle among the jostling crowd,
 Where the sons of strife are subtle and loud—
 I often come to this quiet place,
 To breathe the airs that ruffle thy face, 60
 And gaze upon thee in silent dream,
 For in thy lonely and lovely stream
 An image of that calm life appears
 That won my heart in my greener years.

The West Wind.

BENEATH the forest's skirt I rest,
 Whose branching pines rise dark and high,
 And hear the breezes of the West
 Among the thread-like foliage sigh.

Sweet Zephyr ! why that sound of woe ? 5
 Is not thy home among the flowers ?
 Do not the bright June roses blow,
 To meet thy kiss at morning hours ?

And lo ! thy glorious realm outspread— 10
 Yon stretching valleys, green and gay,
 And yon free hill-tops, o'er whose head
 The loose white clouds are borne away.

And there the full broad river runs,
 And many a fount wells fresh and sweet
 To cool thee when the mid-day suns 15
 Have made thee faint beneath their heat.

4. "The threaded foliage," in some editions.

Thou wind of joy, and youth, and love ;
 Spirit of the new-wakened year !
 The sun, in his blue realm above,
 Smooths a bright path when thou art here. 20

In lawns the murmuring bee is heard,
 The wooing ring-dove in the shade ;
 On thy soft breath the new-fledged bird
 Takes wing, half happy, half afraid.

Ah ! thou art like our wayward race ;—
 When not a shade of pain or ill
 Dims the bright smile of Nature's face,
 Thou lov'st to sigh and murmur still.

Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood.

Introductory Note.—In the same package with "Thanatopsis" Dr. Bryant found this poem, and it was published in the same number of the *North American*, September, 1817. As first printed the poem ended at the middle of the thirty-ninth line, and throughout it has been very much changed and improved. The wood for which the "inscription" was written is nearly in front of the old homestead at Cummington.

Compare with the opening lines a passage from Emerson's essay on "Nature":—"The tempered light of the woods is like a perpetual morning, and is stimulating and heroic. The anciently reported spells of these places creep on us. The stems of pines, hemlocks, and oaks almost gleam like iron on the excited eye. The incommunicable trees begin to persuade us to live with them, and quit our life of solemn trifles. Here no history, or church, or state is interpolated on the divine sky and the immortal year."

STRANGER, if thou hast learned a truth which needs
 No school of long experience, that the world
 Is full of guilt and misery, and hast seen
 Enough of all its sorrows, crimes, and cares,
 To tire thee of it, enter this wild wood 5
 And view the haunts of Nature. The calm shade
 Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze

22. **Ring-dove.** "A species of pigeon, so called from the white feathers which form a portion of a ring round its neck." Also called ring-pigeon and wood-pigeon.

2. Originally "Experience more than reason." In the next line "known" instead of "seen."

7. **Kindred calm.** First written "kinder calm."

That makes the green leaves dance, shall waft a balm
 To thy sick heart. Thou wilt find nothing here
 Of all that pained thee in the haunts of men 10
 And made thee loathe thy life. The primal curse
 Fell, it is true, upon the unsinning earth,
 But not in vengeance. God hath yoked to guilt
 Her pale tormentor, misery Hence these shades
 Are still the abodes of gladness; the thick roof 15
 Of green and stirring branches is alive
 And musical with birds, that sing and sport
 In wantonness of spirit; while below
 The squirrel, with raised paws and form erect,
 Chirps merrily. Throngs of insects in the shade 20
 Try their thin wings and dance in the warm beam
 That waked them into life. Even the green trees
 Partake the deep contentment; as they bend
 To the soft winds, the sun from the blue sky
 Looks in and sheds a blessing on the scene. 25
 Scarce less the cleft-born wild-flower seems to enjoy
 Existence, than the winged plunderer
 That sucks its sweets. The mossy rocks themselves,
 And the old and ponderous trunks of prostrate trees
 That lead from knoll to knoll a causey rude, 30
 Or bridge the sunken brook, and their dark roots,
 With all their earth upon them, twisting high,
 Breathe fixed tranquillity. The rivulet
 Sends forth glad sounds, and tripping o'er its bed
 Of pebbly sands, or leaping down the rocks, 35

9. Originally "Here thou wilt nothing find."

13-18. These lines at first read thus:—

—"Misery is wed
 To guilt. Hence in these shades we still behold
 The abodes of gladness; here from tree to tree
 And through the rustling branches flit the birds
 In wantonness of spirit; theirs are strains
 Of no dissembled rapture."

20, 21. Originally:—

"In the warm glade the throngs
 Of dancing insects sport in the mild beams
 That waked them into life."

25. **Looks.** Substituted for "Peeps."

31. **Brook.** Substituted for "stream."

Seems, with continuous laughter, to rejoice
 In its own being. Softly tread the marge,
 Lest from her midway perch thou scare the wren
 That dips her bill in water. The cool wind,
 That stirs the stream in play, shall come to thee, 40
 Like one that loves thee nor will let thee pass
 Ungreeted, and shall give its light embrace.

Autumn Woods.

ERE, in the northern gale,
 The summer tresses of the trees are gone,
 The woods of Autumn, all around our vale,
 Have put their glory on.

The mountains that infold, 5
 In their wide sweep, the colored landscape round,
 Seem groups of giant kings, in purple and gold,
 That guard the enchanted ground.

I roam the woods that crown
 The upland, where the mingled splendors glow, 10
 Where the gay company of trees look down
 On the green fields below.

My steps are not-alone
 In these bright walks; the sweet south-west at play,
 Flies, rustling, where the painted leaves are strown 15
 Along the winding way.

1. **Northern gale.** Winds especially abounded in the region of Bryant's early home, and references to them are very frequent throughout his poems. We have in this poem "gale," "northern gale," "breeze," "gentle wind," "sweet south-west," and "soft south-west."

1-4. That is, before the trees in the valley have lost their "summer tresses," the woods upon the hills around put on their autumn colors; a familiar fact to those acquainted with autumn scenery in New England.

3. **Our vale.** The view from the poet's Cummington home is thus described by Mr. H. N. Powers: "The center of the view is hollowed to a deep and narrow valley, where flows a branch of the Westfield River, and on the eastern rim are the pleasant slopes of Plainfield. Spring lags on these high grounds, and Autumn here puts on imperial splendors; for the trees, among which the sugar-maple predominates, are of a kind to glow royally under the effects of frost."

And far in heaven, the while,
The sun, that sends that gale to wander here,
Pours out on the fair earth his quiet smile,—
The sweetest of the year. 20

Where now the solemn shade,
Verdure and gloom where many branches meet;
So grateful, when the noon of summer made
The valleys sick with heat?

Let in through all the trees 25
Come the strange rays; the forest depths are bright;
Their sunny-colored foliage, in the breeze,
Twinkles like beams of light.

The rivulet, late unseen,
Where bickering through the shrubs its waters run, 30
Shines with the image of its golden screen
And glimmerings of the sun.

But, 'neath yon crimson tree,
Lover to listening maid might breathe his flame,
Nor mark, within its roseate canopy, 35
Her blush of maiden shame.

Oh, Autumn! why so soon
Depart the hues that make thy forests glad,
Thy gentle wind and thy fair sunny noon,
And leave thee wild and sad? 40

Ah! 'twere a lot too blest
For ever in thy colored shades to stray;
Amid the kisses of the soft south-west
To rove and dream for aye;

And leave the vain low strife 45
That makes men mad—the tug for wealth and power,
The passions and the cares that wither life,
And waste its little hour.

30. Meaning and force of "bickering"? In "Our Fellow-Worshippers" the waters are "huddling."

31. The golden foliage which borders and overhangs the stream is reflected as a painted screen.

43. Note the different expressions in the poem for *wind*—six in all.

Hymn to the North Star.

"The reader on whom the solemnity and majesty of this hymn make no impression, has no poetry in his soul."—W. J. SNELLING.

THE sad and solemn night
 Hath yet her multitude of cheerful fires ;
 The glorious host of light
 Walk the dark hemisphere till she retires ;
 All through her silent watches, gliding slow, 5
 Her constellations come, and climb the heavens, and go.

Day, too, hath many a star
 To grace his gorgeous reign, as bright as they ;
 Through the blue fields afar,
 Unseen, they follow in his flaming way: 10
 Many a bright lingerer, as the eve grows dim,
 Tells what a radiant troop arose and set with him.

And thou dost see them rise,
 Star of the Pole ! and thou dost see them set.
 Alone, in thy cold skies, 15
 Thou keep'st thy old unmoving station yet,
 Nor join'st the dances of that glittering train,
 Nor dipp'st thy virgin orb in the blue western main.

There, at morn's rosy birth,
 Thou lookest meekly through the kindling air, 20
 And eve that round the earth
 Chases the day, beholds thee watching there ;
 There noontide finds thee, and the hour that calls
 The shapes of polar flame to scale heaven's azure walls.

Alike, beneath thine eye, 25
 The deeds of darkness and of light are done ;
 High towards the star-lit sky

3. **Host.** Printed *hosts* in Godwin's edition of the poems.

6. **Climb.** Originally "round."

18. Spenser has—

"the steadfast star
 That was in ocean waves yet never wet."

Towns blaze, the smoke of battle blots the sun,
 The night-storm on a thousand hills is loud,
 And the strong wind of day doth mingle sea and cloud. 30

On thine unaltering blaze,
 The half-wrecked mariner, his compass lost,
 Fixes his steady gaze,
 And steers, undoubting, to the friendly coast ;
 And they who stray in perilous wastes, by night, 35
 Are glad when thou dost shine to guide their footsteps
 right.

And, therefore, bards of old,
 Sages, and hermits of the solemn wood,
 Did in thy beams behold
 A beauteous type of that unchanging good, 40
 That bright eternal beacon, by whose ray
 The voyager of time should shape his heedful way.

The Death of the Flowers.

Introductory Note.—The title under which the poem was at first printed was “The Close of Autumn.” Of the words of this piece ninety-two per cent. are Saxon. It should be compared in this respect with “Thanatopsis,” which has eighty-four per cent. of Saxon. The beautiful adaptation of the rhythm to the subject should be noticed: compare it in this respect with “The Gladness of Nature.”

THE melancholy days are come, the saddest of the year,
 Of wailing winds, and naked woods, and meadows brown and sere,
 Heaped in the hollows of the grove, the autumn leaves lie dead ;
 They rustle to the eddying gust, and to the rabbit's tread.
 The robin and the wren are flown, and from the shrubs the jay, 5
 And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day.

2. Force of the word *sere*?

And— “The leaves they were withered and sere.”

“Our thoughts they were palsied and sere.”

Poe's Utalume.

3. **Autumn leaves.** Other readings are “withered leaves” and “summer leaves.”

Where are the flowers, the fair young flowers, that lately sprang
and stood

In brighter light, and softer airs, a beauteous sisterhood?
Alas! they all are in their graves, the gentle race of flowers
Are lying in their lowly beds, with the fair and good of ours. 10
The rain is falling where they lie, but the cold November rain
Calls not from out the gloomy earth the lovely ones again.

The wind-flower and the violet, they perished long ago,
And the brier-rose and the orchis died amid the summer glow;
But on the hill the golden-rod, and the aster in the wood, 15
And the yellow sun-flower by the brook in autumn beauty stood,
Till fell the frost from the clear cold heaven, as falls the plague
on men,
And the brightness of their smile was gone, from upland, glade,
and glen.

And now, when comes the calm mild day, as still such days will come,
To call the squirrel and the bee from out their winter home; 20
When the sound of dropping nuts is heard, though all the trees
are still,

7, 8. These lines stood at first:—

“Where are the flowers, the bright, gay flowers, that smiled beneath the feet,
With hues so passing beautiful, with breath so passing sweet.”

11. **Where they lie.** Originally “on their graves.”

13. **Wind-flower.** The anemone, one of the earliest spring flowers. From the Greek *ανεμος*, the wind, so named because the flower was thought to open only when the wind blows, or “because easily stripped of its leaves.” The most pleasing of Bryant’s references to this flower is in “A Winter Piece.”

“Lodged in sunny cleft,
Where the cold breezes come not, blooms alone
The little wind-flower, whose just opened eye
Is blue as the spring heaven it gazes at—
Startling the loiterer in the naked groves
With unexpected beauty, for the time
Of blossoms and green leaves is yet afar.”

16. **Yellow sun-flower.** Not the familiar denizen of the kitchen garden, but a tall, showy wild-flower, common along fence-rows and road-sides.

Notice the happy manner in which the succession of the seasons is described in this stanza.

18. Originally “And the blossoms never smiled again.”

19-24. “These halcyons may be looked for with a little more assurance in that pure October weather, which we distinguish by the name of the Indian summer. The day, immeasurably long, sleeps over the broad hills and warm wide fields. To have lived through all its sunny hours seems longevity enough.”—*Emerson’s Nature*.

See also the charming descriptions of this season in Longfellow’s “Evangeline.”

And twinkle in the smoky light the waters of the rill,
 The south wind searches for the flowers whose fragrance late he bore,
 And sighs to find them in the wood and by the stream no more.

And then I think of one who in her youthful beauty died, 25
 The fair meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side :
 In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forest cast the leaf,
 And we wept that one so lovely should have a life so brief :
 Yet not unmeet it was that one, like that young friend of ours,
 So gentle and so beautiful, should perish with the flowers. 30

Summer Wind.

Introductory Note.—The minute accuracy of the description in this poem is noteworthy, exhibiting an observation remarkably trained in the subtle movements of nature. As an example of what may be effected by one kind of "word-painting," it may well be used in any comparison of the limitations of painting and of poetry. The manner in which movement and sound are introduced into the scene as effects of the gradual approach of the wind, is especially striking. The attentive reader cannot fail to hear the "mingling of unnumbered sounds," and feel a positive relief from the "too potent fervors" of the sultry day.

It is a sultry day ; the sun has drunk
 The dew that lay upon the morning grass ;
 There is no rustling in the lofty elm
 That canopies my dwelling, and its shade
 Scarce cools me. All is silent save the faint 5
 And interrupted murmur of the bee,
 Settling on the sick flowers, and then again
 Instantly on the wing. The plants around
 Feel the too potent fervors ; the tall maize
 Rolls up its long green leaves ; the clover droops 10
 Its tender foliage, and declines its blooms.
 But far, in the fierce sunshine, tower the hills,

25. The allusion in this stanza is to the poet's favorite sister, who died at an early age. She is referred to in "The Past" as "the beautiful and young," and also in the sonnet "To ———," entitled in some editions "Consumption."

— "Death should come
 Gently, to one of gentle mould like thee,
 As light winds wandering through groves of bloom
 Detach the delicate blossoms from the tree.

With all their growth of woods, silent and stern
 As if the scorching heat and dazzling light
 Were but an element they loved. Bright clouds, 15
 Motionless pillars of the brazen heaven,—
 Their bases on the mountains—their white tops
 Shining in the far ether—fire the air
 With a reflected radiance, and make turn
 The gazer's eyes away. For me, I lie 20
 Languidly in the shade, where the thick turf,
 Yet virgin from the kisses of the sun,
 Retains some freshness, and I woo the wind
 That still delays his coming. Why so slow,
 Gentle and voluble spirit of the air? 25
 Oh, come and breathe upon the fainting earth
 Coolness and life. Is it that in his caves
 He hears me? See, on yonder woody ridge,
 The pine is bending his proud top, and now
 Among the nearer groves, chestnut and oak 30
 Are tossing their green boughs about. He comes!
 Lo, where the grassy meadow runs in waves!
 The deep distressful silence of the scene
 Breaks up with mingling of unnumbered sounds
 And universal motion. He is come, 35
 Shaking a shower of blossoms from the shrubs,
 And bearing on their fragrance; and he brings
 Music of birds, and rustling of young boughs,
 And sound of swaying branches, and the voice
 Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs 40
 Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
 By the road-side and the borders of the brook,
 Nod gayly to each other; glossy leaves
 Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
 Were on them yet, and silver waters break 45
 Into small waves and sparkle as he comes.

Evening Wind.

Introductory Note.—"He sees the regions of land and sea, that the wind has blown over on its journey to his lattice. He knows that it is a delight to others as well as to himself; to the higher forms of nature as well as to mankind; that it rocks the little bird in his nest, curls the still waters, summons the forest harmonies from innumerable boughs, and takes its pleasant way over the closing flowers. The old man leans his silver head to feel it; it kisses the sleeping child, and dries the moistened curls on his temples; and those who watch by the sick man's bed part his curtains to allow it to cool his burning brow. This large, far-reaching sympathy with his fellow-creatures is a marked characteristic of Bryant's poetry, and distinguishes it from that of every other American poet, living or dead."—*R. H. Stoddard.*

In the "New Library of Poetry and Song," edited by Bryant, this poem appears with an additional stanza, inserted between the third and fourth:

"Stoop o'er the place of graves and softly sway
The sighing herbage by the gleaming stone,
That they who near the churchyard willows stray,
And listen in the deepening gloom, alone,
May think of gentle souls who passed away,
Like thy pure breath into the vast unknown;
Sent forth from heaven among the sons of men,
And gone into the boundless heaven again."

But it seems not to have satisfied the poet, as it was not allowed in the standard editions of his poems. Indeed, is not the reason clearly apparent?

SPIRIT that breathest through my lattice, thou
 That cool'st the twilight of the sultry day,
 Gratefully flows thy freshness round my brow;
 Thou hast been out upon the deep at play,
 Riding all day the wild blue waves till now, 5
 Roughening their crests, and scattering high their spray,
 And swelling the white sail. I welcome thee
 To the scorched land, thou wanderer of the sea

 Nor I alone; a thousand bosoms round
 Inhale thee in the fulness of delight; 10
 And languid forms rise up, and pulses bound
 Livelier, at coming of the wind of night;
 And, languishing to hear thy grateful sound,
 Lies the vast inland stretched beyond the sight.
 Go forth into the gathering shade; go forth, 15
 God's blessing breathed upon the fainting earth!

Go, rock the little wood-bird in his nest,
 Curl the still waters, bright with stars, and rouse

- The wide old wood from his majestic rest,
 Summoning from the innumerable boughs 20
 The strange, deep harmonies that haunt his breast :
 Pleasant shall be thy way where meekly bows
 The shutting flower, and darkling waters pass,
 And where the o'ershadowing branches sweep the grass.
- The faint old man shall lean his silver head 25
 To feel thee ; thou shalt kiss the child asleep,
 And dry the moistened curls that overspread
 His temples, while his breathing grows more deep ;
 And they who stand about the sick man's bed,
 Shall joy to listen to thy distant sweep, 30
 And softly part his curtains to allow
 Thy visit, grateful to his burning brow.
- Go—but the circle of eternal change,
 Which is the life of Nature, shall restore,
 With sounds and scents from all thy mighty range, 35
 Thee to thy birthplace of the deep once more ;
 Sweet odors in the sea-air, sweet and strange,
 Shall tell the home-sick mariner of the shore ;
 And, listening to thy murmur, he shall deem
 He hears the rustling leaf and running stream. 40

Robert of Lincoln.

Introductory Note.—"I am very little given to envy, but I had a feeling very near akin to it when I read your 'Robert of Lincoln.' It is so bird-like, so charming in its simplicity and its rollicking life! Just what Bob himself would sing if he could only find a publisher. Nay, I am inclined to think he *does* sing it, and you were his inspired interpreter."—*Lydia Maria Child*.

"I know of no other song-bird that expresses so much self-consciousness and vanity, and comes so near being an ornithological cockcomb," says that excellent authority on bird-lore, John Burroughs. His song "at its best, is a remarkable performance, a unique performance, as it contains not the slightest hint or suggestion, either in tone, or manner, or effect, of any other bird-song to be heard. * * No bird has yet been found that could imitate him or even repeat or suggest a single note, as if his song were the product of a new set of organs. It is

20, 22. **Boughs—bows.** The fault of this rhyme was pointed out by a critic in the *Edinburgh Review* and Bryant was much disturbed by it, making several attempts to amend it. It is a fault, but one for which a precedent can be found in the works of every great poet.

said that the mocking-bird is dumb in the presence of the bobolink." See *Scribner's Monthly*, vols. vi and xii.

-
- MERRILY swinging on brier and weed,
 Near to the nest of his little dame,
 Over the mountain-side or mead,
 Robert of Lincoln is telling his name:
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link, 5
 Spink, spank, spink ;
 Snug and safe is that nest of ours,
 Hidden among the summer flowers.
 Chee, chee, chee.
- Robert of Lincoln is gayly drest, 10
 Wearing a bright black wedding-coat ;
 White are his shoulders and white his crest,
 Hear him call in his merry note :
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ; 15
 Look, what a nice new coat is mine,
 Sure there was never a bird so fine.
 Chee, chee, chee.
- Robert of Lincoln's Quaker wife,
 Pretty and quiet, with plain brown wings, 20
 Passing at home a patient life,
 Broods in the grass while her husband sings :
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ;
 Brood, kind creature ; you need not fear 25
 Thieves and robbers while I am here.
 -Chee, chee, chee.
- Modest and shy as a nun is she ;
 One weak chirp is her only note.
 Braggart and prince of braggarts is he, 30
 Pouring boasts from his little throat :
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ;
 Never was I afraid of man ;

- Catch me, cowardly knaves, if you can ! 35
 Chee, chee, chee.
- Six white eggs on a bed of hay,
 Flecked with purple, a pretty sight !
 There as the mother sits all day,
 Robert is singing with all his might : 40
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ;
 Nice good wife, that never goes out,
 Keeping house while I frolic about.
 Chee, chee, chee. 45
- Soon as the little ones chip the shell
 Six little mouths are open for food ;
 Robert of Lincoln bestirs him well,
 Gathering seeds for the hungry brood. 50
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink :
 This new life is likely to be
 Hard for a gay young fellow like me.
 Chee, chee, chee.
- Robert of Lincoln at length is made 55
 Sober with work, and silent with care ;
 Off is his holiday garment laid,
 Half forgotten that merry air :
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ; 60
 Nobody knows but my mate and I
 Where our nest and our nestlings lie.
 Chee, chee, chee.
- Summer wanes ; the children are grown ;
 Fun and frolic no more he knows ; 65
 Robert of Lincoln's a humdrum crone ;
 Off he flies, and we sing as he goes :
 Bob-o'-link, bob-o'-link,
 Spink, spank, spink ;
- When you can pipe that merry old strain, 70
 Robert of Lincoln, come back again.
 Chee, chee, chee.

To the Fringed Gentian.

THOU blossom bright with autumn dew,
 And colored with the heaven's own blue,
 That openest when the quiet light
 Succeeds the keen and frosty night.

Thou comest not when violets lean 5
 O'er wandering brooks and springs unseen,
 Or columbines, in purple dressed,
 Nod o'er the ground-bird's hidden nest.

Thou waitest late and com'st alone, 10
 When woods are bare and birds are flown,
 And frosts and shortening days portend
 The aged year is near his end.

Then doth thy sweet and quiet eye 15
 Look through its fringes to the sky,
 Blue—blue—as if that sky let fall
 A flower from its cerulean wall.

I would that thus, when I shall see 20
 The hour of death draw near to me,
 Hope, blossoming within my heart,
 May look to heaven as I depart.

The Wind and Stream.

Introductory Note.—In a letter to a friend, written in 1866, Richard H. Dana speaks of "that most exquisite of exquisite little things, 'The Wind and the Stream,'" and adds, "What a dear little child he makes of it, so happy in its child-like, flattered vanity—all so pretty; and then its little heart broken that it is so deserted—left all alone. What a *heart* for nature must the man have who could write that!"

1. **Thou blossom bright.** The flower is the *Gentiana crinita* of the botanics. It is mentioned in the sonnet "November":—

"And the blue gentian flower, that, in the breeze,
 Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last."

And in the "Song of the Sower":—

"Loose the tired steer and let him go
 To pasture where the gentians blow."

- A BROOK came stealing from the ground ;
 You scarcely saw its silvery gleam
 Among the herbs that hung around
 The borders of that winding stream,
 The pretty stream, the placid stream, 5
 The softly-gliding, bashful stream.
- A breeze came wandering from the sky,
 Light as the whispers of a dream ;
 He put the o'erhanging grasses by,
 And softly stooped to kiss the stream, 10
 The pretty stream, the flattered stream,
 The shy, yet unreluctant stream.
- The water, as the wind passed o'er,
 Shot upward many a glancing beam,
 Dimpled and quivered more and more, 14
 And tripped along, a livelier stream,
 The flattered stream, the simpering stream,
 The fond, delighted, silly stream.
- Away the airy wanderer flew
 To where the fields with blossoms teem, 20
 To sparkling springs and rivers blue,
 And left alone that little stream,
 The flattered stream, the cheated stream,
 The sad, forsaken, lonely stream.
- That careless wind came never back ; 25
 He wanders yet the fields, I deem,
 But, on its melancholy track,
 Complaining went that little stream,
 The cheated stream, the hopeless stream,
 The ever-murmuring, mourning stream. 30

The Gladness of Nature.

Is this a time to be cloudy and sad,
 When our mother Nature laughs around ;
 When even the deep blue heavens look glad,
 And gladness breathes from the blossoming ground ?

There are notes of joy from the hang-bird and wren, 5
 And the gossip of swallows through all the sky ;
 The ground-squirrel gayly chirps by his den,
 And the wilding bee hums merrily by.

The clouds are at play in the azure space,
 And their shadows at play on the bright green vale, 10
 And here they stretch to the frolic chase,
 And there they roll on the easy gale.

There's a dance of leaves in that aspen bower,
 There's a titter of winds in that beechen tree,
 There's a smile on the fruit and a smile on the flower, 15
 And a laugh from the brook that runs to the sea.

And look at the broad-faced sun, how he smiles
 On the dewy earth that smiles in his ray,
 On the leaping waters and gay young isles ;
 Ay, look, and he'll smile thy gloom away. 20

The Past.

Introductory Note.—From passages in the private letters of Bryant it appears that he regarded this poem as the "best thing" he had written up to that time, 1828, an opinion shared by some of his friends. The poet Stoddard says of it:—"There is a depth, a grandeur, a solemnity in this poem which Bryant had not before attained, and an imaginative presentation of things intangible, which the strong art of the poet summons before us, we know not how. He contrives to re-people

'The dark backward and abysm of time'
 with awful, and sorrowful, and beautiful shapes and shadows."

THOU unrelenting Past!
 Strong are the barriers round thy dark domain,

5. **Hang-bird.** A familiar name for the Baltimore Oriole, so-called from the nest which is suspended from the limb of a tree. **Ground squirrel,** in the same stanza, is better known as the Chipmunk, or Chipmuk.

20. **Smile thy gloom away.** This poem was written in 1826. "The Journey of Life" had just been written, in which despondency is expressed, arising from the discouragements of the poet's new career in New York. He felt himself to be like one walking at night "beneath the waning moon," where all things are but "dim uncertain shapes that cheat the sight," and journeying on "with faltering footsteps." We see in this piece how he attempted to throw off the burden of despondency.

And fetters, sure and fast,
Hold all that enter thy unbreathing reign.

Far in thy realm withdrawn 5
Old empires sit in sullenness and gloom,
And glorious ages gone
Lie deep within the shadow of thy womb.

Childhood, with all its mirth,
Youth, Manhood, Age that draws us to the ground, 10
And last, Man's Life on earth,
Glide to thy dim dominions, and are bound.

Thou hast my better years,
Thou hast my earlier friends, the good, the kind,
Yielded to thee with tears— 15
The venerable form, the exalted mind.

My spirit yearns to bring
The lost ones back—yearns with desire intense,
And struggles hard to wring
Thy bolts apart, and pluck thy captives thence. 20

In vain—thy gates deny
All passage save to those who hence depart ;
Nor to the streaming eye
Thou giv'st them back—nor to the broken heart.

In thine abysses hide 25
Beauty and excellence unknown ; to thee
Earth's wonder and her pride
Are gathered, as the waters to the sea ;

Labors of good to man,
Unpublished charity, unbroken faith,— 30

16. **The venerable form, the exalted mind.** The allusion here is to the poet's father—

“Who taught my youth
The art of verse, and in the bud of life
Offered me to the Muses.”

Love, that midst grief began,
And grew with years, and faltered not in death.

Full many a mighty name
Lurks in thy depths, unuttered, unrevered ;
With thee are silent fame, 35
Forgotten arts, and wisdom disappeared.

Thine for a space are they—
Yet shalt thou yield thy treasures up at last ;
Thy gates shall yet give way,
Thy bolts shall fall, inexorable Past ! 40

All that of good and fair
Has gone into thy womb from earliest time,
Shall then come forth to wear
The glory and the beauty of its prime.

They have not perished—no ! 45
Kind words, remembered voices once so sweet,
Smiles, radiant long ago,
And features, the great soul's apparent seat.

All shall come back, each tie
Of pure affection shall be knit again ; 50
Alone shall Evil die,
And Sorrow dwell a prisoner in thy reign.

And then shall I behold
Him, by whose kind paternal side I sprung,
And her, who, still and cold, 55
Fills the next grave—the beautiful and young.

33-36. Compare with these lines Gray's "Elegy," of which there are frequent suggestions in the poem.

36. **Wisdom disappeared.** This elliptical expression is open to criticism, but was modestly defended by Bryant. "I have sometimes thought it was a boldness," he says. "*Disappeared* is used nearly in the sense of *vanished*, *departed*, *passed away*; but with more propriety than *vanished*, since that relates to a sudden disappearance. At all events, I do not find it easy to alter the stanza without spoiling it."

53. The allusion in this stanza is again to his father, and to his sister. See notes on "Death of the Flowers."

The Planting of the Apple-Tree.

Introductory Note.—The following passage occurs in one of Bryant's private letters, written two or three years before this poem was printed: "I have been, and am, at my place on Long Island, planting and transplanting trees, in the mist; sixty or seventy; some for shade; most for fruit. Hereafter, men, whose existence is at present merely possible, will gather pears from the trees which I have set in the ground, and wonder what old *covey*—for in those days the slang terms of the present time, by the ordinary process of change in languages, will have become classical—what old *covey* of past ages planted them? Or they will walk in the shade of the mulberry, apricot, and cherry-trees that I have set in a row beside a green lane, and think, if they think at all about the matter—for who can tell what the great grandchildren of ours will think about—that they sprang up of themselves by the way."

COME, let us plant the apple-tree.
 Cleave the tough greensward with the spade;
 Wide let its hollow bed be made;
 There gently lay the roots, and there
 Sift the dark mould with kindly care, 5
 And press it o'er them tenderly,
 As round the sleeping infant's feet
 We softly fold the cradle-sheet;
 So plant we the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree? 10
 Buds, which the breath of summer days
 Shall lengthen into leafy sprays;
 Boughs where the thrush, with crimson breast,
 Shall haunt and sing and hide her nest;
 We plant, upon the sunny lea, 15
 A shadow for the noontide hour,
 A shelter from the summer shower,
 When we plant the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree? 20
 Sweets for a hundred flowery springs
 To load the May-wind's restless wings,
 When, from the orchard row, he pours
 Its fragrance through our open doors;
 A world of blossoms for the bee, 25
 Flowers for the sick girl's silent room,
 For the glad infant sprigs of bloom,
 We plant with the apple-tree.

What plant we in this apple-tree?
 Fruits that shall swell in sunny June,
 And redden in the August noon, 30
 And drop, when gentle airs come by,
 That fan the blue September sky,
 While children come, with cries of glee,
 And seek them where the fragrant grass
 Betrays their bed to those who pass, 35
 At the foot of the apple-tree.

And when, above this apple-tree,
 The winter stars are quivering bright,
 And winds go howling through the night,
 Girls, whose young eyes o'erflow with mirth, 40
 Shall peel its fruit by cottage hearth,
 And guests in prouder homes shall see,
 Heaped with the grape of Cintra's vine,
 And golden orange of the line,
 The fruit of the apple-tree. 45

The fruitage of this apple-tree
 Winds, and our flag of stripe and star,
 Shall bear to coasts that lie afar,
 Where men shall wonder at the view,
 And ask in what fair groves they grew ; 50
 And sojourners beyond the sea
 Shall think of childhood's careless day,
 And long, long hours of summer play,
 In the shade of the apple-tree.

Each year shall give this apple-tree 55
 A broader flush of roseate bloom,
 A deeper maze of verdurous gloom,
 And loosen, when the frost-clouds lower,
 The crisp brown leaves in thicker shower.
 The years shall come and pass, but we 60
 Shall hear no longer, where we lie,
 The summer's songs, the autumn's sigh,
 In the boughs of the apple-tree.

And time shall waste this apple-tree.
 Oh, when its aged branches throw 65
 Thin shadows on the ground below,
 Shall fraud and force and iron will
 Oppress the weak and helpless still?
 What shall the tasks of mercy be,
 Amid the toils, the strifes, the tears 70
 Of those who live when length of years
 Is wasting this apple-tree?

“Who planted this old apple-tree?”
 The children of that distant day
 Thus to some aged man shall say; 75
 And, gazing on its mossy stem,
 The gray-haired man shall answer them:
 “A poet of the land was he,
 Born in the rude but good old times;
 ’Tis said he made some quaint old rhymes 80
 On planting the apple-tree.”

Our Fellow-Worshippers.

THINK not that thou and I
 Are here the only worshippers to-day,
 Beneath this glorious sky,
 Mid the soft airs that o'er the meadows play;
 Those airs, whose breathing stirs 5
 The fresh grass, are our fellow-worshippers.

See, as they pass, they swing
 The censers of a thousand flowers that bend
 O'er the young herbs of spring,
 And the sweet odors like a prayer ascend, 10
 While, passing thence, the breeze
 Wakes the grave anthem of the forest trees.

It is as when, of yore,
 The Hebrew poet called the mountain-steeps,

The forests, and the shore 15
 Of ocean, and the mighty mid-sea deeps,
 And stormy wind, to raise
 A universal symphony of praise.

For, lo! the hills around,
 Gay in their early green, give silent thanks ; 20
 And, with a joyous sound,
 The streamlet's huddling waters kiss their banks,
 And, from its sunny nooks,
 To heaven, with grateful smiles, the valley looks.

The blossomed apple-tree 25
 Among its flowery tufts, on every spray,
 Offers the wandering bee
 A fragrant chapel for his native lay ;
 And a soft bass is heard
 From the quick pinions of the humming-bird. 30

Haply—for who can tell?—
 Aërial beings, from the world unseen,
 Haunting the sunny dell,
 Or slowly floating o'er the flowery green,
 May join our worship here, 35
 With harmonies too fine for mortal ear.

14. The Hebrew poet called the mountain-steeps. See *Psalms*, xcvi, 11, and xcvi, 7, 8.

31-36.—“For my part, I am apt to join in opinion with those who believe that all the regions of nature swarm with spirits, and that we have multitudes of spectators on all our actions, when we think ourselves most alone. * * * I am wonderfully pleased to think that I am always engaged with such an innumerable society in searching out the wonders of the creation, and joining in the same concert of praise and adoration.”—*Addison, in the Spectator, No. 12.*

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
 Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep;
 All these with ceaseless praise His works behold
 Both day and night.”—*Paradise Lost, Bk. iv., 677.*

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