

*The Flood of Years.*

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*William Lollen Bryant.*

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*THE FLOOD OF YEARS.*





THE  
FLOOD OF YEARS  
BY  
WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

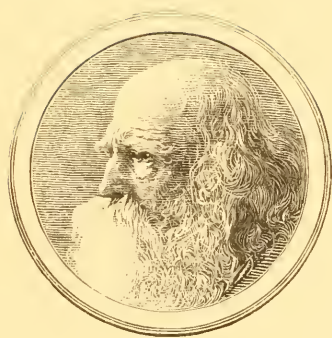
NEW YORK  
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS  
1878



1877

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*THE ILLUSTRATIONS*

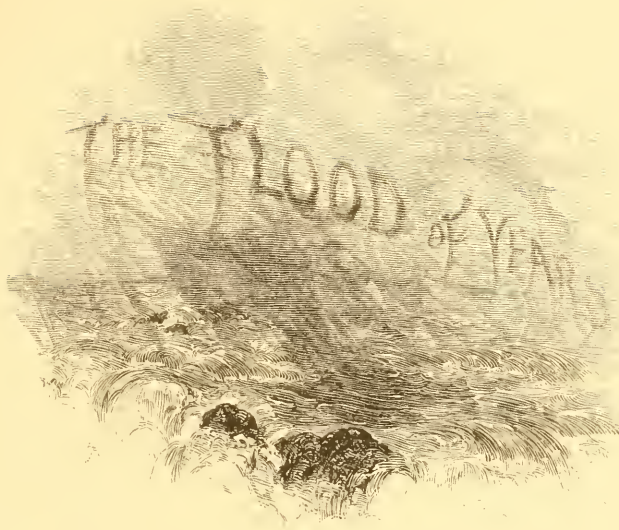
DESIGNED AND ENGRAVED

BY

W. J. LINTON.





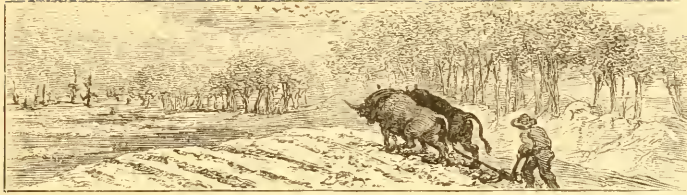


A MIGHTY HAND, from an exhaustless urn,  
Pours forth the never-ending Flood of Years  
Among the nations. How the rushing waves  
Bear all before them! On their foremost edge,  
And there alone, is Life; the Present there  
Tosses and foams and fills the air with roar  
Of mingled noises.

There are

There are they who toil,  
And they who strive, and they who feast, and they  
Who hurry to and fro. The sturdy hind—  
Woodman and delver with the spade—are there,  
And busy artisan beside his bench,  
And pallid student with his written roll.  
A moment on the mounting billow seen—  
The flood sweeps over them and they are gone.  
There groups of revelers, whose brows are twined  
With roses, ride the topmost swell awhile,

And as



*The sturdy hind—woodman and sctober with the spade—are there.*



And as they raise their flowing cups to touch  
The clinking brim to brim, are whirled beneath  
The waves and disappear. I hear the jar  
Of beaten drums, and thunders that break forth  
From cannon, where the advancing billow sends  
Up to the sight long files of armèd men,  
That hurry to the charge through flame and smoke.  
The torrent bears them under, whelmed and hid,  
Slayer and slain, in heaps of bloody foam.  
Down go the steed and rider ; the plumed chief  
Sinks with his followers ; the head that wears  
The imperial diadem goes down beside  
The felon's with cropped ear and branded cheek.



A funeral train—the torrent sweeps away  
Bearers and bier and mourners. By the bed  
Of one who dies men gather sorrowing,  
And women weep aloud; the flood rolls on;  
The wail is stifled, and the sobbing group  
Borne under. Hark to that shrill sudden shout—  
The cry of an applauding multitude  
Swayed by some loud-tongued orator, who wields  
The living mass as if he were its soul.  
The waters choke the shout and all is still.  
Lo, next, a kneeling crowd and one who spreads  
The hands in prayer; the engulfing wave o’ertakes  
And swallows them and him.

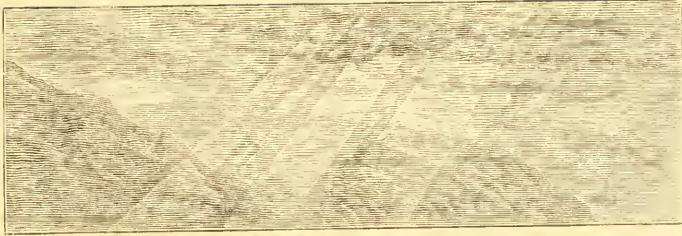
A sculptor



A sculptor wields  
The chisel, and the stricken marble grows  
To beauty ; at his easel, eager-eyed,  
A painter stands, and sunshine at his touch  
Gathers upon the canvas, and life glows ;  
A poet, as he paces to and fro,  
Murmurs his sounding lines. Awhile they ride  
The advancing billow, till its tossing crest  
Strikes them and flings them under while their tasks  
Are yet unfinished. See a mother smile  
On her young babe that smiles to her again—  
The torrent wrests it from her arms ; she shrieks,  
And weeps, and midst her tears is carried down.

A beam





*A sculptor wields the chisel. . . painter. . . poet.*



A beam like that of moonlight turns the spray  
To glistening pearls ; two lovers, hand in hand,  
Rise on the billowy swell and fondly look  
Into each other's eyes. The rushing flood  
Flings them apart ; the youth goes down ; the maid,  
With hands outstretched in vain and streaming eyes,  
Waits for the next high wave to follow him.  
An aged man succeeds ; his bending form  
Sinks slowly ; mingling with the sullen stream  
Gleam the white locks and then are seen no more.  
Lo, wider grows the stream ; a sea-like flood  
Saps earth's walled cities ; massive palaces  
Crumble before it ; fortresses and towers

Dissolve

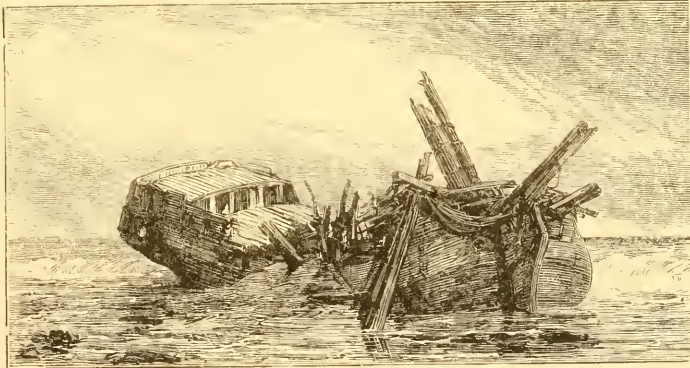
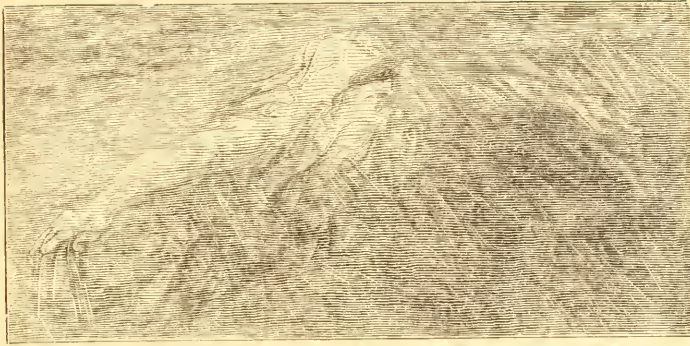


*The rushing flood flings them apart. . . .*



Dissolve in the swift waters; populous realms  
Swept by the torrent, see their ancient tribes  
Engulfed and lost, their very languages  
Stifled and never to be uttered more.

I pause and turn my eyes and, looking back,  
Where that tumultuous flood has passed, I see  
The silent Ocean of the Past, a waste  
Of waters weltering over graves, its shores  
Strewn with the wreck of fleets, where mast and hull  
Drop away piecemeal; battlemented walls  
Frown idly, green with moss, and temples stand  
Unroofed, forsaken by the worshippers.  
There lie memorial stones, whence time has gnawed  
The graven legends, thrones of kings o'erturned,  
The broken altars of forgotten gods,

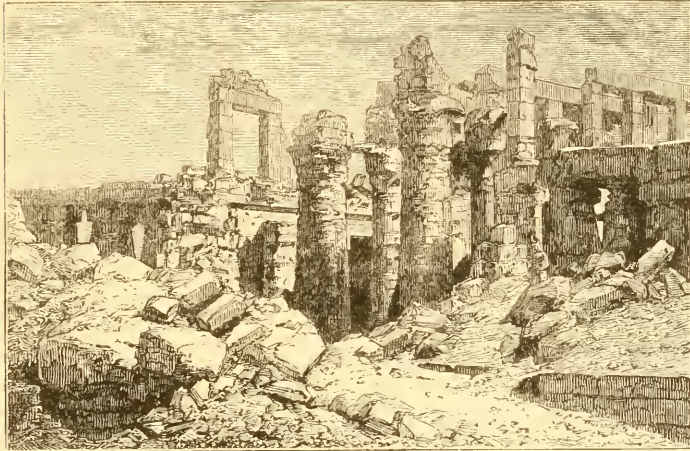
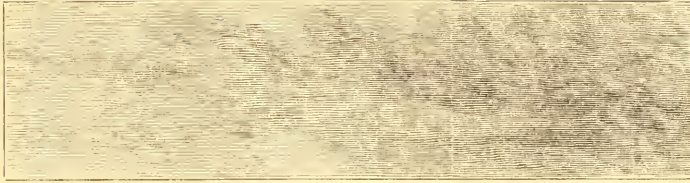


*Where mast and hull drop away piecemeal.*



Foundations of old cities, and long streets  
Where never fall of human foot is heard  
Upon the desolate pavement. I behold  
Dim glimmerings of lost jewels far within  
The sleeping waters, diamond, sardonyx,  
Ruby and topaz, pearl and chrysolite,  
Once glittering at the banquet on fair brows  
That long ago were dust; and all around,  
Strewn on the waters of that silent sea,  
Are withering bridal wreaths, and glossy locks  
Shorn from fair brows by loving hands, and scrolls  
O'erwritten,—haply with fond words of love  
And vows of friendship—and fair pages flung  
Fresh from the printer's engine. There they lie  
A moment and then sink away from sight.

I look,



*Temples forsaken by the worshippers.*

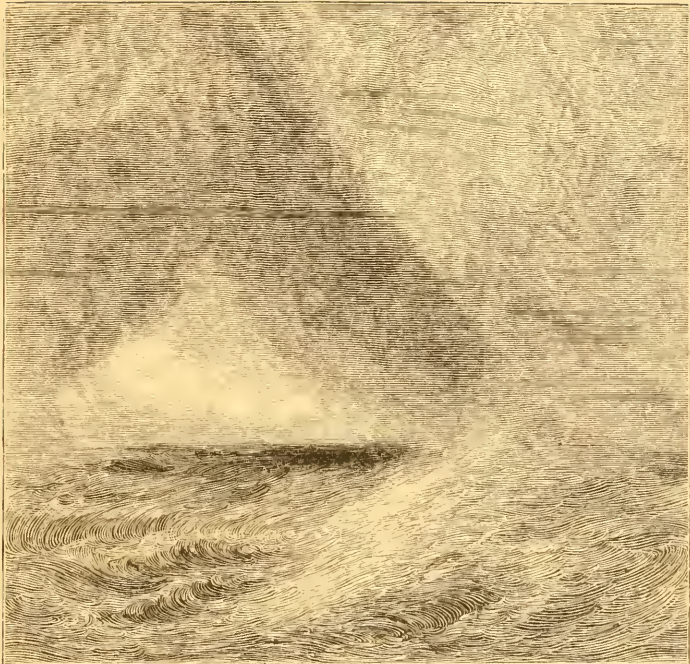


I look, and the quick tears are in my eyes,  
For I behold, in every one of these,  
A blighted hope, a separate history  
Of human sorrow, telling of dear ties  
Suddenly broken, dreams of happiness  
Dissolved in air, and happy days, too brief,  
That sorrowfully ended, and I think  
How painfully must the poor heart have beat  
In bosoms without number, as the blow  
Was struck that slew their hope or broke their peace.

Sadly I turn, and look before, where yet  
The Flood must pass, and I behold a mist

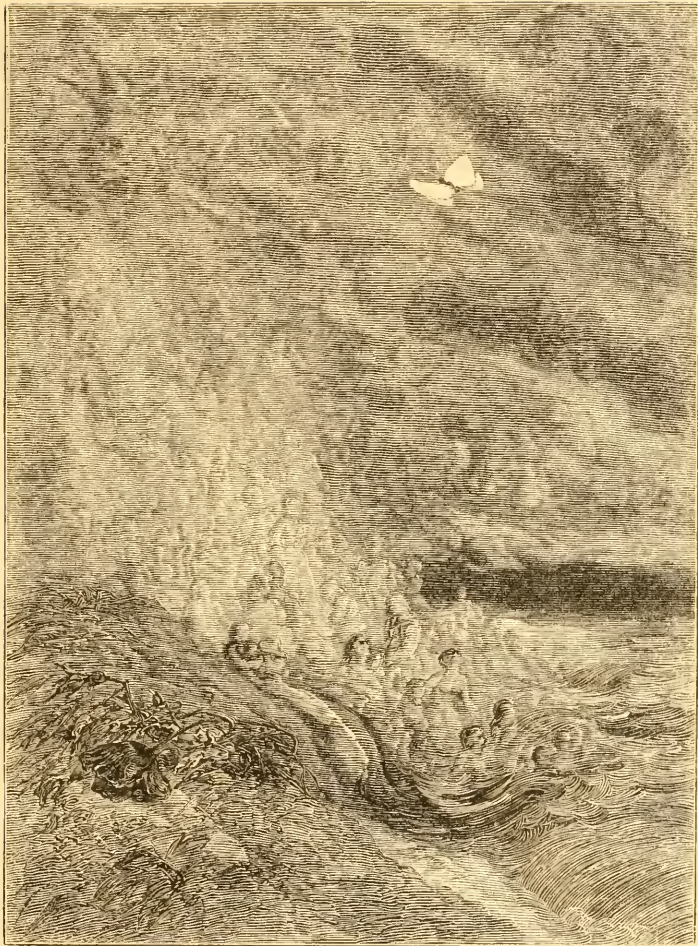
Where





Where swarm dissolving forms, the brood of Hope,  
Divinely fair, that rest on banks of flowers  
Or wander among rainbows, fading soon  
And reappearing, haply giving place  
To shapes of grisly aspect, such as Fear  
Molds from the idle air; where serpents lift  
The head to strike, and skeletons stretch forth  
The bony arm in menace. Further on  
A belt of darkness seems to bar the way,  
Long, low and distant, where the Life that Is  
Touches the Life to Come. The Flood of Years  
Rolls toward it, near and nearer. It must pass  
That dismal barrier. What is there beyond?  
Hear what the wise and good have said.

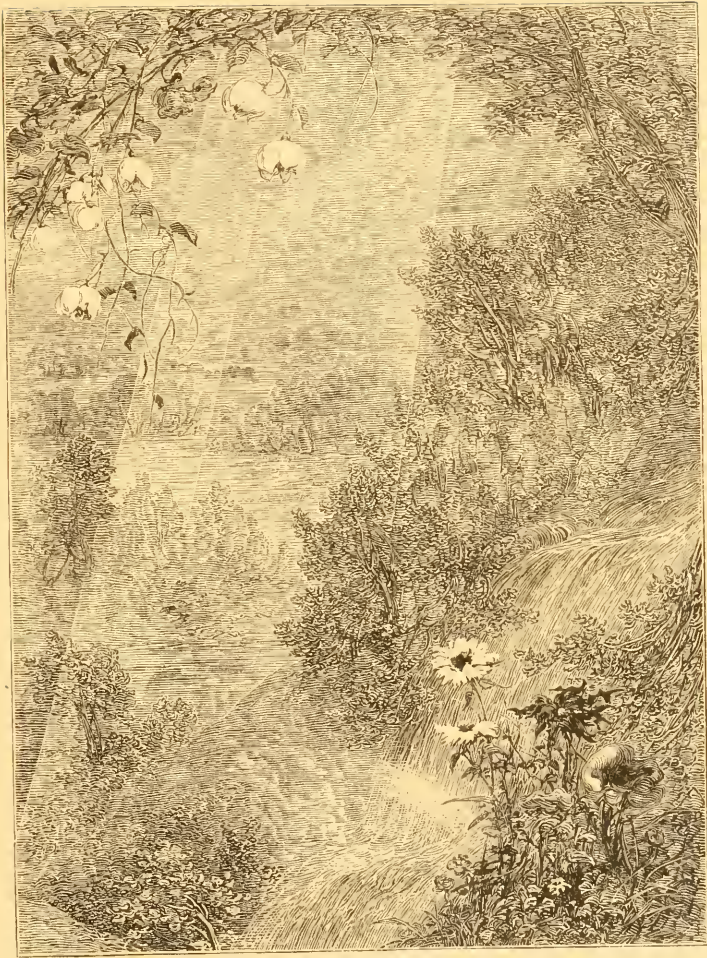
Beyond



Beyond

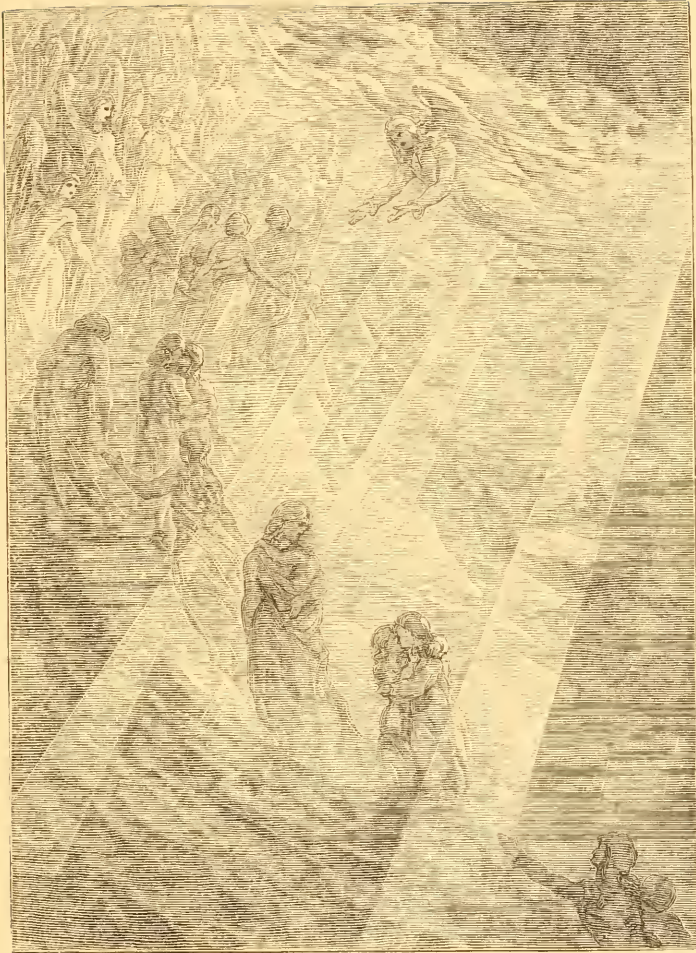
That belt of darkness still the years roll on  
More gently, but with not less mighty sweep.  
They gather up again and softly bear  
All the sweet lives that late were overwhelmed  
And lost to sight—all that in them was good,  
Noble, and truly great and worthy of love—  
The lives of infants and ingenuous youths,  
Sages and saintly women who have made  
Their households happy—all are raised and borne  
By that great current in its onward sweep,  
Wandering and rippling with caressing waves  
Around green islands, fragrant with the breath  
Of flowers that never wither.

So they pass,



So they pass,  
From stage to stage, along the shining course  
Of that fair river broadening like a sea.  
As its smooth eddies curl along their way,  
They bring old friends together ; hands are clasped  
In joy unspeakable ; the mother's arms  
Again are folded round the child she loved  
And lost. Old sorrows are forgotten now,  
Or but remembered to make sweet the hour  
That overpays them ; wounded hearts that bled  
Or broke are healed forever.

In the room



In the room  
Of this grief-shadowed Present there shall be  
A Present in whose reign no grief shall gnaw  
The heart, and never shall a tender tie  
Be broken—in whose reign the eternal Change  
That waits on growth and action shall proceed  
With everlasting Concord hand in hand.



















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