Classic Poetry Series

William Cullen Bryant

- poems -

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A Forest Hymn

The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,
And spread the roof above them,---ere he framed
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,
Amidst the cool and silence, he knelt down,
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks
And supplication. For his simple heart
Might not resist the sacred influences,
Which, from the stilly twilight of the place,
And from the gray old trunks that high in heaven
Mingled their mossy boughs, and from the sound
Of the invisible breath that swayed at once
All their green tops, stole over him, and bowed
His spirit with the thought of boundless power
And inaccessible majesty. Ah, why
Should we, in the world's riper years, neglect
God's ancient sanctuaries, and adore
Only among the crowd, and under roofs,
That our frail hands have raised? Let me, at least,
Here, in the shadow of this aged wood,
Offer one hymn---thrice happy, if it find
Acceptance in His ear.
Father, thy hand
Hath reared these venerable columns, thou
Didst weave this verdant roof. Thou didst look down
Upon the naked earth, and, forthwith, rose
All these fair ranks of trees. They, in thy sun,
Budded, and shook their green leaves in the breeze,
And shot towards heaven. The century-living crow,
Whose birth was in their tops, grew old and died
Among their branches, till, at last, they stood,
As now they stand, massy, and tall, and dark,
Fit shrine for humble worshipper to hold
Communion with his Maker. These dim vaults,
These winding aisles, of human pomp and pride
Report not. No fantastic carvings show
The boast of our vain race to change the form
Of thy fair works. But thou art here---thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds
That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the inmost darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt; the barky trunks, the ground,
The fresh moist ground, are all instinct with thee.
Here is continual worship;---Nature, here,
In the tranquility that thou dost love,
Enjoys thy presence. Noiselessly, around,
From perch to perch, the solitary bird
Passes; and yon clear spring, that, midst its herbs,
Wells softly forth and wandering steeps the roots
Of half the mighty forest, tells no tale

Of all the good it does. Thou hast not left
Thyself without a witness, in these shades,
Of thy perfections. Grandeur, strength, and grace
Are here to speak of thee. This mighty oak---
By whose immovable stem I stand and seem
Almost annihilated---not a prince,
In all that proud old world beyond the deep,
E'er wore his crown as lofty as he
Wears the green coronal of leaves with which
Thy hand has graced him. Nestled at his root
Is beauty, such as blooms not in the glare
Of the broad sun. That delicate forest flower
With scented breath, and look so like a smile,
Seems, as it issues from the shapeless mould,
An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this wide universe.

My heart is awed within me when I think
Of the great miracle that still goes on,
In silence, round me---the perpetual work
Of thy creation, finished, yet renewed
Forever. Written on thy works I read
The lesson of thy own eternity.
Lo! all grow old and die---but see again,
How on the faltering footsteps of decay
Youth presses----ever gay and beautiful youth
In all its beautiful forms. These lofty trees
Wave not less proudly that their ancestors
Moulder beneath them. Oh, there is not lost
One of earth's charms: upon her bosom yet,
After the flight of untold centuries,
The freshness of her far beginning lies
And yet shall lie. Life mocks the idle hate
Of his arch enemy Death---yea, seats himself
Upon the tyrant's throne---the sepulchre,
And of the triumphs of his ghastly foe
Makes his own nourishment. For he came forth
From thine own bosom, and shall have no end.

There have been holy men who hid themselves
Deep in the woody wilderness, and gave
Their lives to thought and prayer, till they outlived
The generation born with them, nor seemed
Less aged than the hoary trees and rocks
Around them;---and there have been holy men
Who deemed it were not well to pass life thus.
But let me often to these solitudes
Retire, and in thy presence reassure
My feeble virtue. Here its enemies,
The passions, at thy plainer footsteps shrink
And tremble and are still. Oh, God! when thou

Dost scare the world with falling thunderbolts, or fill,
With all the waters of the firmament,
The swift dark whirlwind that uproots the woods
And drowns the village; when, at thy call,
Uprises the great deep and throws himself
Upon the continent, and overwhelms
Its cities---who forgets not, at the sight
Of these tremendous tokens of thy power,
His pride, and lays his strifes and follies by?
Oh, from these sterner aspects of thy face
Spare me and mine, nor let us need the wrath
Of the mad unchained elements to teach
Who rules them. Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of the works
Learn to conform the order of our lives.

William Cullen Bryant

A Song of Pitcairn's Island

Come, take our boy, and we will go
Before our cabin door;
The winds shall bring us, as they blow,
The murmurs of the shore;
And we will kiss his young blue eyes,
And I will sing him, as he lies,
Songs that were made of yore:
I'll sing, in his delighted ear,
The island lays thou lov'st to hear.

And thou, while stammering I repeat,
Thy country's tongue shalt teach;
'Tis not so soft, but far more sweet,
Than my own native speech:
For thou no other tongue didst know,
When, scarcely twenty moons ago,
Upon Tahete's beach,
Thou cam'st to woo me to be thine,
With many a speaking look and sign.

I knew thy meaning--thou didst praise
My eyes, my locks of jet;
Ah! well for me they won thy gaze,--
But thine were fairer yet!

I'm glad to see my infant wear
Thy soft blue eyes and sunny hair,
And when my sight is met
By his white brow and blooming cheek,
I feel a joy I cannot speak.

Come talk of Europe's maids with me,
Whose necks and cheeks, they tell,
Outshine the beauty of the sea,
White foam and crimson shell.
I'll shape like theirs my simple dress,
And bind like them each jetty tress.
A sight to please thee well:
And for my dusky brow will braid
A bonnet like an English maid.

Come, for the soft low sunlight calls,
We lose the pleasant hours;
'Tis lovelier than these cottage walls,--
That seat among the flowers.
And I will learn of thee a prayer,
To Him, who gave a home so fair,
A lot so blessed as ours--
The God who made, for thee and me,
This sweet lone isle amid the sea.

William Cullen Bryant

After a Tempest

The day had been a day of wind and storm;--
The wind was laid, the storm was overpast,--
And stooping from the zenith, bright and warm
Shone the great sun on the wide earth at last.
I stood upon the upland slope and cast
My eye upon a broad and beauteous scene,
Where the vast plain lay girt by mountains vast,
And hills o'er hills lifted their heads of green,
With pleasant vales scooped out and villages between.

The rain-drops glistened on the trees around,
Whose shadows on the tall grass were not stirred,
Save when a shower of diamonds, to the ground,
Was shaken by the flight of startled bird;
For birds were warbling round, and bees were heard
About the flowers; the cheerful rivulet sung
And gossiped, as he hastened ocean-ward;
To the gray oak the squirrel, chiding clung,
And chirping from the ground the grasshopper upsprung.

And from beneath the leaves that kept them dry
Flew many a glittering insect here and there,
And darted up and down the butterfly,
That seemed a living blossom of the air.
The flocks came scattering from the thicket, where
The violent rain had pent them; in the way
Strolled groups of damsels frolicksome and fair;
The farmer swung the scythe or turned the hay,
And 'twixt the heavy swaths his children were at play.

It was a scene of peace--and, like a spell,
Did that serene and golden sunlight fall
Upon the motionless wood that clothed the fell,
And precipice upspringing like a wall,
And glassy river and white waterfall,
And happy living things that trod the bright
And beauteous scene; while far beyond them all,
On many a lovely valley, out of sight,
Was poured from the blue heavens the same soft golden light.

I looked, and thought the quiet of the scene
An emblem of the peace that yet shall be,
When, o'er earth's continents and isles between,
The noise of war shall cease from sea to sea,
And married nations dwell in harmony;
When millions, crouching in the dust to one,
No more shall beg their lives on bended knee,
Nor the black stake be dressed, nor in the sun
The o'erlabored captive toil, and wish his life were done.

Too long, at clash of arms amid her bowers
And pools of blood, the earth has stood aghast,

The fair earth, that should only blush with flowers
And ruddy fruits; but not for aye can last
The storm, and sweet the sunshine when 'tis past.
Lo, the clouds roll away--they break--they fly,
And, like the glorious light of summer, cast
O'er the wide landscape from the embracing sky,
On all the peaceful world the smile of heaven shall lie.

William Cullen Bryant

Constellations, The

O constellations of the early night,
That sparkled brighter as the twilight died,
And made the darkness glorious! I have seen
Your rays grow dim upon the horizon's edge,
And sink behind the mountains. I have seen
The great Orion, with his jewelled belt,
That large-limbed warrior of the skies, go down
Into the gloom. Beside him sank a crowd
Of shining ones. I look in vain to find
The group of sister-stars, which mothers love
To show their wondering babes, the gentle Seven.
Along the desert space mine eyes in vain
Seek the resplendent cressets which the Twins
Uplifted in their ever-youthful hands.
The streaming tresses of the Egyptian Queen
Spangle the heavens no more. The Virgin trails
No more her glittering garments through the blue.
Gone! all are gone! and the forsaken Night,
With all her winds, in all her dreary wastes,
Sighs that they shine upon her face no more.
No only here and there a little star
Looks forth alone. Ah me! I know them not,
Those dim successors of the numberless host
That filled the heavenly fields, and flung to earth
Their guivering fires. And now the middle watch
Betwixt the eve and morn is past, and still
The darkness gains upon the sky, and still
It closes round my way. Shall, then, the Night,
Grow starless in her later hours? Have these
No train of flaming watchers, that shall mark
Their coming and farewell? O Sons of Light!
Have ye then left me ere the dawn of day
To grope along my journey sad and faint?
Thus I complained, and from the darkness round
A voice replied--was it indeed a voice,
Or seeming accents of a waking dream
Heard by the inner ear? But thus it said:
O Traveller of the Night! thine eyes are dim
With watching; and the mists, that chill the vale
Down which thy feet are passing, hide from view
The ever-burning stars. It is thy sight
That is so dark, and not the heaens. Thine eyes,
Were they but clear, would see a fiery host
Above thee; Hercules, with flashing mace,
The Lyre with silver cords, the Swan uppoised
On gleaming wings, the Dolphin gliding on
With glistening scales, and that poetic steed,
With beamy mane, whose hoof struck out from earth
The fount of Hippocrene, and many more,
Fair clustered splendors, with whose rays the Night
Shall close her march in glory, ere she yield,
To the young Day, the great earth steeped in dew.

So spake the monitor, and I perceived
How vain were my repinings, and my thought
Went backward to the vanished years and all
The good and great who came and passed with them,
And knew that ever would the years to come
Bring with them, in their course, the good and great,
Lights of the world, though, to my clouded sight,
Their rays might seem but dim, or reach me not.

William Cullen Bryant

Consumption

Ay, thou art for the grave; thy glances shine
Too brightly to shine long; another Spring
Shall deck her for men's eyes---but not for thine---
Sealed in a sleep which knows no wakening.
The fields for thee have no medicinal leaf,
And the vexed ore no mineral of power;
And they who love thee wait in anxious grief
Till the slow plague shall bring the final hour.
Glide softly to thy rest then; Death should come
Gently, to one of gentle mould like thee,
As light winds wandering through groves of bloom
Detach the delicate blossom from the tree.
Close thy sweet eyes, calmly, and without pain;
And we will trust in God to see thee yet again.

William Cullen Bryant

Hymn of the City

Not in the solitude
Alone may man commune with heaven, or see
Only in savage wood
And sunny vale, the present Deity;
Or only hear his voice
Where the winds whisper and the waves rejoice.

Even here do I behold
Thy steps, Almighty!--here, amidst the crowd,
Through the great city rolled,
With everlasting murmur deep and loud--
Choking the ways that wind
'Mongst the proud piles, the work of humankind.

Thy golden sunshine comes
From the round heaven, and on their dwellings lies,
And lights their inner homes;
For them thou fill'st with air the unbounded skies,
And givest them the stores
Of ocean, and the harvests of its shores.

Thy spirit is around,
Quickening the restless mass that sweeps along;
And this eternal sound--
Voices and footfalls of the numberless throng--
Like the resounding sea,
Or like the rainy tempest, speaks of thee.

And when the hours of rest
Come, like a calm upon the mid-sea brine,
Hushing its billowy breast--
The quiet of that moment too is thine;
It breathes of him who keeps
The vast and helpless city while it sleeps.

William Cullen Bryant

Hymn To Death

Oh! could I hope the wise and pure in heart
Might hear my song without a frown, nor deem
My voice unworthy of the theme it tries,--
I would take up the hymn to Death, and say
To the grim power, The world hath slandered thee
And mocked thee. On thy dim and shadowy brow
They place an iron crown, and call thee king
Of terrors, and the spoiler of the world,
Deadly assassin, that strik'st down the fair,
The loved, the good--that breath'st upon the lights
Of virtue set along the vale of life,
And they go out in darkness. I am come,
Not with reproaches, not with cries and prayers,
Such as have stormed thy stern insensible ear
From the beginning. I am come to speak
Thy praises. True it is, that I have wept
Thy conquests, and may weep them yet again:
And thou from some I love wilt take a life
Dear to me as my own. Yet while the spell
Is on my spirit, and I talk with thee
In sight of all thy trophies, face to face,
Meet is it that my voice should utter forth

Thy nobler triumphs: I will teach the world
To thank thee.--Who are thine accusers?--Who?
The living!--they who never felt thy power,
And know thee not. The curses of the wretch
Whose crimes are ripe, his sufferings when thy hand
Is on him, and the hour he dreads is come,
Are writ among thy praises. But the good--
Does he whom thy kind hand dismissed to peace,
Upbraid the gentle violence that took off
His fetters, and unbarred his prison cell?
Raise then the Hymn to Death. Deliverer!
God hath anointed thee to free the oppressed
And crush the oppressor. When the armed chief,
The conqueror of nations, walks the world,
And it is changed beneath his feet, and all
Its kingdoms melt into one mighty realm--
Thou, while his head is loftiest, and his heart
Blasphemes, imagining his own right hand
Almighty, sett'st upon him thy stern grasp,
And the strong links of that tremendous chain
That bound mankind are crumbled; thou dost break
Sceptre and crown, and beat his throne to dust.
Then the earth shouts with gladness, and her tribes
Gather within their ancient bounds again.
Else had the mighty of the olden time,
Nimrod, Sesostris, or the youth who feigned
His birth from Lybian Ammon, smote even now
The nations with a rod of iron, and driven
Their chariot o'er our necks. Thou dost avenge,

In thy good time, the wrongs of those who know

No other friend. Nor dost thou interpose
Only to lay the sufferer asleep,
Where he who made him wretched troubles not
His rest--thou dost strike down his tyrant too.
Oh, there is joy when hands that held the scourge
Drop lifeless, and the pitiless heart is cold.
Thou too dost purge from earth its horrible
And old idolatries; from the proud fanes
Each to his grave their priests go out, till none
Is left to teach their worship; then the fires
Of sacrifice are chilled, and the green moss
O'ercreeps their altars; the fallen images
Cumber the weedy courts, and for loud hymns,
Chanted by kneeling crowds, the chiding winds
Shriek in the solitary aisles. When he
Who gives his life to guilt, and laughs at all
The laws that God or man has made, and round
Hedges his seat with power, and shines in wealth,--
Lifts up his atheist front to scoff at Heaven,
And celebrates his shame in open day,
Thou, in the pride of all his crimes, cutt'st off
The horrible example. Touched by thine,
The extortioner's hard hand foregoes the gold
Wrong from the o'er-worn poor. The perjurer,
Whose tongue was lithe, e'en now, and voluble
Against his neighbour's life, and he who laughed
And leaped for joy to see a spotless fame
Blasted before his own foul calumnies,
Are smit with deadly silence. He, who sold
His conscience to preserve a worthless life,

Even while he hugs himself on his escape,
Trembles, as, doubly terrible, at length,
Thy steps o'ertake him, and there is no time
For parley--nor will bribes unclench thy grasp.
Oft, too, dost thou reform thy victim, long
Ere his last hour. And when the reveller,
Mad in the chase of pleasure, stretches on,
And strains each nerve, and clears the path of life
Like wind, thou point'st him to the dreadful goal,
And shak'st thy hour-glass in his reeling eye,
And check'st him in mid course. Thy skeleton hand
Shows to the faint of spirit the right path,
And he is warned, and fears to step aside.
Thou sett'st between the ruffian and his crime
Thy ghastly countenance, and his slack hand
Drops the drawn knife. But, oh, most fearfully
Dost thou show forth Heaven's justice, when thy shafts
Drink up the ebbing spirit--then the hard
Of heart and violent of hand restores

The treasure to the friendless wretch he wronged.
Then from the writhing bosom thou dost pluck
The guilty secret; lips, for ages sealed,
Are faithless to the dreadful trust at length,
And give it up; the felon's latest breath
Absolves the innocent man who bears his crime;
The slanderer, horror smitten, and in tears,
Recalls the deadly obloquy he forged
To work his brother's ruin. Thou dost make
Thy penitent victim utter to the air
The dark conspiracy that strikes at life,

And aims to whelm the laws; ere yet the hour
Is come, and the dread sign of murder given.
Thus, from the first of time, hast thou been found
On virtue's side; the wicked, but for thee,
Had been too strong for the good; the great of earth
Had crushed the weak for ever. Schooled in guile
For ages, while each passing year had brought
Its baneful lesson, they had filled the world
With their abominations; while its tribes,
Trodden to earth, imbruted, and despoiled,
Had knelt to them in worship; sacrifice
Had smoked on many an altar, temple roofs
Had echoed with the blasphemous prayer and hymn:
But thou, the great reformer of the world,
Tak'st off the sons of violence and fraud
In their green pupilage, their lore half learned--
Ere guilt has quite o'errun the simple heart
God gave them at their birth, and blotted out
His image. Thou dost mark them, flushed with hope,
As on the threshold of their vast designs
Doubtful and loose they stand, and strik'st them down.

Alas, I little thought that the stern power
Whose fearful praise I sung, would try me thus
Before the strain was ended. It must cease--
For he is in his grave who taught my youth
The art of verse, and in the bud of life
Offered me to the muses. Oh, cut off
Untimely! when thy reason in its strength,
Ripened by years of toil and studious search

And watch of Nature's silent lessons, taught
Thy hand to practise best the lenient art
To which thou gavest thy laborious days.
And, last, thy life. And, therefore, when the earth
Received thee, tears were in unyielding eyes
And on hard cheeks, and they who deemed thy skill
Delayed their death-hour, shuddered and turned pale
When thou wert gone. This faltering verse, which thou
Shalt not, as wont, o'erlook, is all I have

To offer at thy grave--this--and the hope
To copy thy example, and to leave
A name of which the wretched shall not think
As of an enemy's, whom they forgive
As all forgive the dead. Rest, therefore, thou
Whose early guidance trained my infant steps--
Rest, in the bosom of God, till the brief sleep
Of death is over, and a happier life
Shall dawn to waken thine insensible dust.
Now thou art not--and yet the men whose guilt
Has wearied Heaven for vengeance--he who bears
False witness--he who takes the orphan's bread,
And robs the widow--he who spreads abroad
Polluted hands in mockery of prayer,
Are left to cumber earth. Shuddering I look
On what is written, yet I blot not out
The desultory numbers--let them stand.
The record of an idle revery.

William Cullen Bryant

Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood

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
And view the haunts of nature. The calm shade
Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze
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,
And made thee loathe thy life. The primal curse
Fell, it is true, upon the unsinning earth,
But not in vengance. God hath yoked to guilt
Her pale tormentor, Misery. Hence these shades
Are still the abode of gladness; the thick roof
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
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.
Scarce less the cleft-born wildflower 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 causeway rude,
Or bridge the sunken brook, and their dark roots,
With all their roots upon them, twisting high,
Breathe fixed tranquility. The rivulet
Sends forth glad sounds, and tripping o'er its bed
Of pebbly sands, or leaping down the rocks
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,
Like one that loves thee nor will let thee pass
Ungreeted, and shall give its light embrace.

William Cullen Bryant

June

I gazed upon the glorious sky
And the green mountains round,
And thought that when I came to lie
At rest within the ground,
"Twere pleasant, that in flowery June,
When brooks send up a cheerful tune,
And groves a joyous sound,
The sexton's hand, my grave to make,
The rich, green mountain-turf should break.

A cell within the frozen mould,
A coffin borne through sleet,
And icy clods above it rolled,
While fierce the tempests beat--
Away!--I will not think of these--
Blue be the sky and soft the breeze,
Earth green beneath the feet,
And be the damp mould gently pressed
Into my narrow place of rest.

There through the long, long summer hours,
The golden light should lie,
And thick young herbs and groups of flowers
Stand in their beauty by.
The oriole should build and tell
His love-tale close beside my cell;
The idle butterfly
Should rest him there, and there be heard
The housewife bee and humming-bird.

And what if cheerful shouts at noon
Come, from the village sent,
Or songs of maids, beneath the moon
With fairy laughter blent?
And what if, in the evening light,
Betrothed lovers walk in sight
Of my low monument?
I would the lovely scene around
Might know no sadder sight nor sound.

I know that I no more should see
The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me,
Nor its wild music flow;
But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their softened hearts should bear
The thought of what has been,

And speak of one who cannot share
The gladness of the scene;
Whose part, in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
Is that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.

William Cullen Bryant

Living Lost, The

Matron! the children of whose love,
Each to his grave, in youth have passed,
And now the mould is heaped above
The dearest and the last!
Bride! who dost wear the widow's veil
Before the wedding flowers are pale!
Ye deem the human heart endures
No deeper, bitterer grief than yours.

Yet there are pangs of keener wo,
Of which the sufferers never speak,
Nor to the world's cold pity show
The tears that scald the cheek,
Wrung from their eyelids by the shame
And guilt of those they shrink to name,
Whom once they loved, with cheerful will,
And love, though fallen and branded, still.

Weep, ye who sorrow for the dead,
Thus breaking hearts their pain relieve;
And graceful are the tears ye shed,
And honoured ye who grieve.

The praise of those who sleep in earth,
The pleasant memory of their worth,
The hope to meet when life is past,
Shall heal the tortured mind at last.

But ye, who for the living lost
That agony in secret bear,
Who shall with soothing words accost
The strength of your despair?
Grief for your sake is scorn for them
Whom ye lament and all condemn;
And o'er the world of spirits lies
A gloom from which ye turn your eyes.

William Cullen Bryant

Love and Folly

Love's worshippers alone can know
The thousand mysteries that are his;
His blazing torch, his twanging bow,
His blooming age are mysteries.
A charming science--but the day
Were all too short to con it o'er;
So take of me this little lay,
A sample of its boundless lore.

As once, beneath the fragrant shade
Of myrtles breathing heaven's own air,
The children, Love and Folly, played--
A quarrel rose betwixt the pair.
Love said the gods should do him right--
But Folly vowed to do it then,
And struck him, o'er the orbs of sight,
So hard, he never saw again.

His lovely mother's grief was deep,
She called for vengeance on the deed;
A beauty does not vainly weep,
Nor coldly does a mother plead.

A shade came o'er the eternal bliss
That fills the dwellers of the skies;
Even stony-hearted Nemesis,
And Rhadamanthus, wiped their eyes.

"Behold," she said, "this lovely boy,"
While streamed afresh her graceful tears,
"Immortal, yet shut out from joy
And sunshine, all his future years.
The child can never take, you see,
A single step without a staff--
The harshest punishment would be
Too lenient for the crime by half."

All said that Love had suffered wrong,
And well that wrong should be repaid;
Then weighed the public interest long,
And long the party's interest weighed.
And thus decreed the court above--
"Since Love is blind from Folly's blow,
Let Folly be the guide of Love,
Where'er the boy may choose to go."

William Cullen Bryant

Mutation

They talk of short-lived pleasure--be it so--
Pain dies as quickly; stern, hard-featured pain
Expires, and lets her weary prisoner go.
The fiercest agonies have shortest reign;
And after dreams of horror, comes again
The welcome morning with its rays of peace.
Oblivion, softly wiping out the stain,
Makes the strong secret pangs of pain to cease:

Remorse is virtue's root; its fair increase
Are fruits of innocence and blessedness;
Thus joy, o'erborne and bound, doth still release
His young limbs from the chains that round him press.
Weep not that the world changes--did it keep
A stable, changeless state, 'twere cause indeed to weep.

William Cullen Bryant

November

Yet one smile more, departing, distant sun!
One mellow smile through the soft vapoury air,
Ere, o'er the frozen earth, the loud winds ran,
Or snows are sifted o'er the meadows bare.
One smile on the brown hills and naked trees,
And the dark rocks whose summer wreaths are cast,
And the blue Gentian flower, that, in the breeze,
Nods lonely, of her beauteous race the last.
Yet a few sunny days, in which the bee
Shall murmur by the hedge that skim the way,
The cricket chirp upon the russet lea,
And man delight to linger in thy ray.
Yet one rich smile, and we will try to bear
The piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air.

William Cullen Bryant

October

Ay, thou art welcome, heaven's delicious breath!
When woods begin to wear the crimson leaf,
And suns grow meek, and the meek suns grow brief
And the year smiles as it draws near its death.
Wind of the sunny south! oh, still delay
In the gay woods and in the golden air,
Like to a good old age released from care,
Journeying, in long serenity, away.
In such a bright, late quiet, would that I
Might wear out life like thee, 'mid bowers and brooks
And dearer yet, the sunshine of kind looks,
And music of kind voices ever nigh;
And when my last sand twinkled in the glass,
Pass silently from men, as thou dost pass.

William Cullen Bryant

Spring in Town

The country ever has a lagging Spring,
Waiting for May to call its violets forth,
And June its roses--showers and sunshine bring,
Slowly, the deepening verdure o'er the earth;
To put their foliage out, the woods are slack,
And one by one the singing-birds come back.

Within the city's bounds the time of flowers
Comes earlier. Let a mild and sunny day,
Such as full often, for a few bright hours,
Breathes through the sky of March the airs of May,
Shine on our roofs and chase the wintry gloom--
And lo! our borders glow with sudden bloom.

For the wide sidewalks of Broadway are then
Gorgeous as are a rivulet's banks in June,
That overhung with blossoms, through its glen,
Slides soft away beneath the sunny noon,
And they who search the untrodden wood for flowers
Meet in its depths no lovelier ones than ours.

For here are eyes that shame the violet,
Or the dark drop that on the pansy lies,
And foreheads, white, as when in clusters set,
The anemonies by forest fountains rise;

And the spring-beauty boasts no tenderer streak
Than the soft red on many a youthful cheek.

And thick about those lovely temples lie
Locks that the lucky Vignardonne has curled,
Thrice happy man! whose trade it is to buy,
And bake, and braid those love-knots of the world;
Who curls of every glossy colour keepest,
And sellest, it is said, the blackest cheapest.

And well thou may'st--for Italy's brown maids
Send the dark locks with which their brows are dressed,
And Gascon lasses, from their jetty braids,
Crop half, to buy a riband for the rest;
But the fresh Norman girls their tresses spare,
And the Dutch damsel keeps her flaxen hair.

Then, henceforth, let no maid nor matron grieve,
To see her locks of an unlovely hue,
Frouzy or thin, for liberal art shall give
Such piles of curls as nature never knew.
Eve, with her veil of tresses, at the sight
Had blushed, outdone, and owned herself a fright.

Soft voices and light laughter wake the street,
Like notes of woodbirds, and where'er the eye

Threads the long way, plumes wave, and twinkling feet
Fall light, as hastes that crowd of beauty by.
The ostrich, hurrying o'er the desert space,
Scarce bore those tossing plumes with fleeter pace.

No swimming Juno gait, of languor born,
Is theirs, but a light step of freest grace,
Light as Camilla's o'er the unbent corn,
A step that speaks the spirit of the place,
Since Quiet, meek old dame, was driven away
To Sing Sing and the shores of Tappan bay.

Ye that dash by in chariots! who will care
For steeds or footmen now? ye cannot show
Fair face, and dazzling dress, and graceful air,
And last edition of the shape! Ah no,
These sights are for the earth and open sky,
And your loud wheels unheeded rattle by.

William Cullen Bryant

Summer Wind

It is a sultry day; the sun has drank
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
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
Its tender foliage, and declines its blooms.
But far in the fierce sunshine tower the hills,
With all their growth of woods, silent and stern,
As if the scortching heat and dazzling light
Were but an element they loved. Bright clouds,
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 eye away. For me, I lie
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 its coming. Why so slow,
Gentle and voluble spirit of the air?
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, chesnut and oak
Are tossing their green boughs about. He comes!
Lo, where the grassy meadow runs in wives!
The deep distressful silence of the scene
Breaks up with mingling of unnumbered sounds
And universal motion. He is come,
Shaking a shower of blossoms from the shrubs,
And bearing on the fragrance; and he brings
Music of birds, and rustling of young boughs,
And soun of swaying branches, and the voice
Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
By the road-side and the borders of the brook,
Nod gaily to each other; glossy leaves
Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
Were on them yet, and silver waters break
Into small waves and sparkle as he comes.

William Cullen Bryant

Thanatopsis

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--
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,
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
To mix forever 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 mold.

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,
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-ribbed and ancient as the sun, -- the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods -- rivers that move
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,
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
Of morning, pierce the Barcan wilderness,

Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
Where rolls the Oregon, and 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 withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
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
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--
Shall one by one be gathered to thy side,
By those, who in their turn, shall follow them.

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan, which moves
To that mysterious realm, where each shall take
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
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

William Cullen Bryant

The Constellations

O constellations of the early night,
That sparkled brighter as the twilight died,
And made the darkness glorious! I have seen
Your rays grow dim upon the horizon's edge,
And sink behind the mountains. I have seen
The great Orion, with his jewelled belt,
That large-limbed warrior of the skies, go down
Into the gloom. Beside him sank a crowd
Of shining ones. I look in vain to find
The group of sister-stars, which mothers love
To show their wondering babes, the gentle Seven.
Along the desert space mine eyes in vain
Seek the resplendent cressets which the Twins
Uplifted in their ever-youthful hands.
The streaming tresses of the Egyptian Queen
Spangle the heavens no more. The Virgin trails
No more her glittering garments through the blue.
Gone! all are gone! and the forsaken Night,
With all her winds, in all her dreary wastes,
Sighs that they shine upon her face no more.
No only here and there a little star
Looks forth alone. Ah me! I know them not,
Those dim successors of the numberless host
That filled the heavenly fields, and flung to earth
Their guivering fires. And now the middle watch
Betwixt the eve and morn is past, and still
The darkness gains upon the sky, and still
It closes round my way. Shall, then, the Night,
Grow starless in her later hours? Have these
No train of flaming watchers, that shall mark
Their coming and farewell? O Sons of Light!
Have ye then left me ere the dawn of day
To grope along my journey sad and faint?
Thus I complained, and from the darkness round
A voice replied--was it indeed a voice,
Or seeming accents of a waking dream
Heard by the inner ear? But thus it said:
O Traveller of the Night! thine eyes are dim
With watching; and the mists, that chill the vale
Down which thy feet are passing, hide from view
The ever-burning stars. It is thy sight
That is so dark, and not the heaens. Thine eyes,
Were they but clear, would see a fiery host
Above thee; Hercules, with flashing mace,
The Lyre with silver cords, the Swan uppoised
On gleaming wings, the Dolphin gliding on
With glistening scales, and that poetic steed,
With beamy mane, whose hoof struck out from earth
The fount of Hippocrene, and many more,
Fair clustered splendors, with whose rays the Night
Shall close her march in glory, ere she yield,
To the young Day, the great earth steeped in dew.

So spake the monitor, and I perceived
How vain were my repinings, and my thought
Went backward to the vanished years and all
The good and great who came and passed with them,
And knew that ever would the years to come
Bring with them, in their course, the good and great,
Lights of the world, though, to my clouded sight,
Their rays might seem but dim, or reach me not.

William Cullen Bryant

The Death of Lincoln

Oh, slow to smit and swift to spare,
Gentle and merciful and just!
Who, in the fear of God, didst bear
The sword of power, a nation's trust!

In sorrow by thy bier we stand,
Amid the awe that hushes all,
And speak the anguish of a land
That shook with horror at thy fall.

Thy task is done; the bond of free;
We bear thee to an honored grave,
Whose proudest monument shall be
The broken fetters of the slave.

Pure was thy life; its bloddy close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.

William Cullen Bryant

The Death of the Flowers

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,
And from the wood-top calls the crow through all the gloomy day.

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.
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 hills the golden-rod, and the aster in the wood,
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;
When the sound of dropping nuts is heard, though all the trees are still,
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,
The fair meek blossom that grew up and faded by my side.
In the cold moist earth we laid her, when the forests 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.

William Cullen Bryant

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,
And the gossip of swallows through all the sky;
The ground-squirrel gaily 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,
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,
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.

William Cullen Bryant

The Living Lost

Matron! the children of whose love,
Each to his grave, in youth have passed,
And now the mould is heaped above
The dearest and the last!
Bride! who dost wear the widow's veil
Before the wedding flowers are pale!
Ye deem the human heart endures
No deeper, bitterer grief than yours.

Yet there are pangs of keener wo,
Of which the sufferers never speak,
Nor to the world's cold pity show
The tears that scald the cheek,
Wrung from their eyelids by the shame
And guilt of those they shrink to name,
Whom once they loved, with cheerful will,
And love, though fallen and branded, still.

Weep, ye who sorrow for the dead,
Thus breaking hearts their pain relieve;
And graceful are the tears ye shed,
And honoured ye who grieve.

The praise of those who sleep in earth,
The pleasant memory of their worth,
The hope to meet when life is past,
Shall heal the tortured mind at last.

But ye, who for the living lost
That agony in secret bear,
Who shall with soothing words accost
The strength of your despair?
Grief for your sake is scorn for them
Whom ye lament and all condemn;
And o'er the world of spirits lies
A gloom from which ye turn your eyes.

William Cullen Bryant

The Skies

Ay! gloriously thou standest there,
Beautiful, boundless firmament!
That swelling wide o'er earth and air,
And round the horizon bent,
With thy bright vault, and sapphire wall,
Dost overhang and circle all.

Far, far below thee, tall old trees
Arise, and piles built up of old,
And hills, whose ancient summits freeze,
In the fierce light and cold.
The eagle soars his utmost height,
Yet far thou stretchest o'er his flight.

Thou hast thy frowns--with thee on high,
The storm has made his airy seat,
Beyond that soft blue curtain lie
His stores of hail and sleet.
Thence the consuming lightnings break.
There the strong hurricanes awake.

Yet art thou prodigal of smiles--
Smiles, sweeter than thy frowns are stem:
Earth sends, from all her thousand isles,
A shout at thy return.
The glory that comes down from thee,
Bathes, in deep joy, the land and sea.

The sun, the gorgeous sun, is thine,
The pomp that brings and shuts the day,
The clouds that round him change and shine,
The airs that fan his way.
Thence look the thoughtful stars, and there
The meek moon walks the silent air.

The sunny Italy may boast
The beauteous tints that flush her skies.
And lovely, round the Grecian coast,
May thy blue pillars rise.
I only know how fair they stand,
Around my own beloved land.

And they are fair--a charm is theirs,
That earth, the proud green earth, has not--
With all the forms, and hues, and airs,
That haunt her sweetest spot.
We gaze upon thy calm pure sphere,
And read of Heaven's eternal year.

Oh, when, amid the throng of men,
The heart grows sick of hollow mirth,
How willingly we turn us then

Away from this cold earth,
And look into thy azure breast,
For seats of innocence and rest.

William Cullen Bryant

The Strange Lady

The summer morn is bright and fresh, the birds are darting by,
As if they loved to breast the breeze that sweeps the cool dear sky;
Young Albert, in the forest's edge, has heard a rustling sound
An arrow slightly strikes his hand and falls upon the ground.

A lovely woman from the wood comes suddenly in sight;
Her merry eye is full and black, her cheek is brown and bright;
She wears a tunic of the blue, her belt with beads is strung,
And yet she speaks in gentle tones, and in the English tongue.

"It was an idle bolt I sent, against the villain crow;
Fair sir, I fear it harmed thy hand; beshrew my erring bow!"
"Ah! would that bolt had not been spent, then, lady, might I wear
A lasting token on my hand of one so passing fair!"

"Thou art a flatterer like the rest, but wouldst thou take with me
A day of hunting in the wilds, beneath the greenwood tree,
I know where most the pheasants feed, and where the red-deer herd,
And thou shouldst chase the nobler game, and I bring down the bird."

Now Albert in her quiver lays the arrow in its place,
And wonders as he gazes on the beauty of her face:
`Those hunting-grounds are far away, and, lady, 'twere not meet
That night, amid the wilderness, should overtake thy feet."

"Heed not the night, a summer lodge amid the wild is mine,
'Tis shadowed by the tulip-tree, 'tis mantled by the vine;
The wild plum sheds its yellow fruit from fragrant thickets nigh,
And flowery prairies from the door stretch till they meet the sky.

"There in the boughs that hide the roof the mock-bird sits and sings,
And there the hang-bird's brood within its little hammock swings;
A pebbly brook, where rustling winds among the hopples sweep,
Shall lull thee till the morning sun looks in upon thy sleep."

Away, into the forest depths by pleasant paths they go,
He with his rifle on his arm, the lady with her bow,
Where cornels arch their cool dark boughs o'er beds of wintergreen,
And never at his father's door again was Albert seen.

That night upon the woods came down a furious hurricane,
With howl of winds and roar of streams and beating of the rain;
The mighty thunder broke and drowned the noises in its crash;
The old trees seemed to fight like fiends beneath the lightning-flash.

Next day, within a mossy glen, mid mouldering trunks were found
The fragments of a human form, upon the bloody ground;
White bones from which the flesh was torn, and locks of glossy hair;
They laid them in the place of graves, yet wist not whose they were.
And whether famished evening wolves had mangled Albert so,
Or that strange dame so gay and fair were some mysterious foe,
Or whether to that forest lodge, beyond the mountains blue,

He went to dwell with her, the friends who mourned him never knew.

William Cullen Bryant

The West Wind

Beneath the forest's skirts I rest,
Whose branching pines rise dark and high,
And hear the breezes of the West
Among the threaded foliage sigh.

Sweet Zephyr! why that sound of wo?
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--
Yon stretching valleys, green and gay,
And yon free hilltops, 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
Have made thee faint beneath their heat.

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.

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.

William Cullen Bryant

The Yellow Violet

When beechen buds begin to swell,
And woods the blue-bird's warble know,
The yellow violet's modest bell
Peeps from last-year's leaves below.

Ere russet fields their green resume,
Sweet flower, I love, in forest bare,
To meet thee, when thy faint perfume
Alone is in the virgin air.

Of all her train, the hands of Spring
First plant thee in the watery mould,
And I have seen thee blossoming
Beside the snow-bank's edges cold.

Thy parent sun, who bade thee view
Pale skies, and chilling moisture sip
Has bathed thee in his own bright hue,
And streaked with jet thy glowing lip.

Yet slight thy form, and low thy seat,
And earthward bent thy gentle eye,
Unapt the passing view to meet,
When loftier flowers are flaunting nigh.

Oft, in the sunless April day,
Thy early smile has stayed my walk;
But midst the gorgeous blooms of May
I passed thee on thy humple stalk.

So they, who climb to wealth, forget
The friends in darker fortunes tried;
I copied them--but I regret
That I should ape the ways of pride.

And when again the genial hour
Awakes the painted tribes of light,
I'll not o'er look the modest flower
That made the woods of April bright.

William Cullen Bryant

To A Cloud

Beautiful cloud! with folds so soft and fair,
Swimming in the pure quiet air!
Thy fleeces bathed in sunlight, while below
Thy shadow o'er the vale moves slow;
Where, midst their labour, pause the reaper train
As cool it comes along the grain.
Beautiful cloud! I would I were with thee
In thy calm way o'er land and sea:
To rest on thy unrolling skirts, and look
On Earth as on an open book;
On streams that tie her realms with silver bands,
And the long ways that seam her lands;
And hear her humming cities, and the sound
Of the great ocean breaking round.
Ay--I would sail upon thy air-borne car
To blooming regions distant far,
To where the sun of Andalusia shines
On his own olive-groves and vines,
Or the soft lights of Italy's bright sky
In smiles upon her ruins lie.
But I would woo the winds to let us rest
O'er Greece long fettered and oppressed,

Whose sons at length have heard the call that comes
From the old battle-fields and tombs,
And risen, and drawn the sword, and on the foe
Have dealt the swift and desperate blow,
And the Othman power is cloven, and the stroke
Has touched its chains, and they are broke.
Ay, we would linger till the sunset there
Should come, to purple all the air,
And thou reflect upon the sacred ground
The ruddy radiance streaming round.

Bright meteor! for the summer noontide made!
Thy peerless beauty yet shall fade.
The sun, that fills with light each glistening fold,
Shall set, and leave thee dark and cold:
The blast shall rend thy skirts, or thou may'st frown
In the dark heaven when storms come down,
And weep in rain, till man's inquiring eye
Miss thee, forever from the sky.

William Cullen Bryant

To a Waterfowl

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
Might mark thy distant flight to do thee wrong
As, darkly seen against the crimson sky,
Thy figure floats along.

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

There is a Power whose care
Teaches thy way along that pathless coast--
The desert and illimitable air--
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.

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.

Thou'rt gone, the abyss of heaven
Hath swallowed up thy form; yet, on my heart
Deeply has 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,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

William Cullen Bryant

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
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,
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
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
The hour of death draw near to me,
Hope, blossoming within my heart,
May look to heaven as I depart.

William Cullen Bryant

West Wind, The

Beneath the forest's skirts I rest,
Whose branching pines rise dark and high,
And hear the breezes of the West
Among the threaded foliage sigh.

Sweet Zephyr! why that sound of wo?
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--
Yon stretching valleys, green and gay,
And yon free hilltops, 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
Have made thee faint beneath their heat.

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.

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.

William Cullen Bryant