

Life in Poetry.
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Life in Poetry.

I. Character.

- a. Conventional.
- b. Natural.

II. Nature.

- a. Flowers.
- b. Birds.
- c. Insects.

III. The Poet behind his work.

In every one there is a spirit which sees beneath the surface. In every one there is a touch of the artist and poet. To but a few, however, is given the power to put the ideal picture on canvas, or to make the picture clear to other eyes in poetic utterance, beautiful with thought and imagination. The poet must be an artist. He must interpret life in its artistic forms. Bare realism possesses no poetry. It is not real living when life is manifest in mere forms. The more we live by conventional rule, the more life becomes simply existence.

So it is in poetry. If the poet makes life and nature expressionless or conventional, it is not life, it is not nature, it is only an imitation. The real artist-poet

compels the reader to share his admiration for his characters and his love for nature. - He introduces and describes both character and nature so they can be recognized if met. - He fills the reader with a longing to know more about Nature, - to become better acquainted with her personally.

In reading the poetry of our language, we find that even the greatest poets whom the world accepts as interpreters of life, send out, now and then, work that is not poetry, if measured by the true standard. That is not poetry which is characterless or lifeless. That is not poetry which is so realistic that it lacks all imagination, all sense of the beauty, richness, and grandeur of life.

In Tennyson's "Mariana of the Moated Grange" the heroine lives in a dreary old castle, and pines her life away because her lover comes not. - So the healthy student, who has had lessons in floriculture and

sanitation, agriculture and carpentry,
 How pitiful seems the case when a
 poet creates a human being and
 dooms her to live in an old
 building, full of mice and mildew,
 surrounded by a ditch of stagnant
 water full of microbes and malaria;
 the place in such a tumble-down
 condition that the peach-tree dangles
 in the wind and the hinges of the
 doors so rusty that they squeak every
 time the door is opened or closed.

Here is the story as told by Tennyson:

"With blackest moss the flower-plots
 Were thickly crusted o'er and all;
 The rusty nails fell from the knots
 That held the peach to the garden-wall.
 The broken sheds look'd sad and strange;
 Unlifted was the chinking latch
 Peck'd and worn the ancient thatch
 Upon the lonely moated grange
 She only said, "My life is dreary,
 He cometh not," she said,
 She said, "I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead."

How much more sensible and poetical

to have nailed up the peach-tree,
cultivated her garden-plot and busied
herself in doing good.

"All day within the dreary house
The doors upon their hinges creaked
The blue fly sang in the pane"
until we gain would tell the weary
maiden that a little oil on a feather
and a sheet of tangle-foot would relieve
her of creaking hinges and buzzing-flies;
but

"She only said "My life is dreary;
He cometh not," she said;
She said, "I am weary, weary,
O God, that I were dead."

This is a marked contrast to Longfellow's
Evangeline, who has also lost her
lover, but instead of making her own
life and the lives of all around her
miserable, she starts out in the world
to do good, and in doing her duty
finds her lost lover.

Stedman says that the extreme finish,
adroitness and grace, which are so
pronounced in Tennyson's poems,

do not inevitably betoken the glow of imaginative conception, the ecstasy of high resolve. -

Wordsworth, whom we have known and loved since childhood, so energetically protested against the romantic school to which Byron belonged, that he sometimes wrote descriptions of characters which were so realistic that the poetry was lost. In his poem "The Wagoner":

"The horses have worked with right good will,
And so have gained the top of the hill;
He was patient, they were strong,
And now they smoothly glide along
Recovering breath and pleased to win
The praises of mild Benjamin."

In the same canto "mild Benjamin" hears a "female voice", exclaim in rather poor English -

"Who'er you be
Stop," it exclaimed, "and pity me."
And, less in pity than in wonder
Amid the darkness and the thunder
The wagoner, with prompt command
Summons his horses to a stand.

"The Idiot Boy" is a story of three thousand words, in which Wordsworth tells of sending an "Idiot Boy" after a doctor for "sick Susan". There is one verse which was changed some twenty years after it was written. Originally it read:

Beneath the moon which shines so bright
Till she is tired, let Betty Fry
With girt and stirrup, fiddle-faddle;
But wherefore set upon a saddle
Him whom she loves, her Idiot Boy?
In 1820, Wordsworth changed it to the way it is found in the books today, but change it ever so much, the subject is too realistic to be poetry.

Whittier's barefoot boy,
"with cheek of tan, red lip, redder still
kissed by strawberries on the hill,
with the sunshine on his face,
thru his torn brim's jaunty grace"
ought not, as far as poetry is concerned,
to be mentioned the same day with
Wordsworth's "Idiot Boy".

Another really artistic sketch of
Whittier's is his Maud Muller, who
"on a summer day

Raked the meadow sweet with hay.
Beneath her torn hat glowed the wealth
Of simple beauty and rustic health.
She hands the judge her small tin cup
"Filled where the cool spring bubbled up."
She blushed as she gave it looking down
On her feet so bare and her tattered gown.

A beautiful, innocent character
is portrayed in Browning's "My Last
Duchess." Here also is pictured a perfect
brute in her husband who is showing
the painting to an ambassador. He
tells how she angered him by smiling
on all alike and not alone on him.
Finally he gave commands, and all
smiles stopped together.

Among our more amusing
characters Cooper sketches for us
John Delpin, who, with his wife,
plans to spend a holiday in the
country. John's wife with the
children fill the chaise and John
rides a borrowed horse. - After he
is mounted Betty comes with
two bottles of wine which John

fastens to his belt one on each side.
His horse is nervous, and as soon
as they are well started breaks into
a gallop much to Gilpin's discomfort.

"Away went Gilpin neck or nought
Away went hat and wig
The wind did blow; the clock did fly,
Like streamers long and gay,
Till loop and button gailing both,
At last it flew away.

Then might all the people well discern
The bottles he had slung
A bottle swinging at each side
As hath been said or sung

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Now let us sing, long live the King!
And Gilpin, long live he;
And when he next doth ride abroad,
May I be there to see! -"

Milton in "Lycidas" gives us a wonderful
description of his friend, in a series of
classical illustrations.

In his "Samson Agonistes" he feels his
own blindness.

Browning's "Saul" is a vivid character sketch of Saul, and also of David.

Shakespeare is our best character artist. Every one of his characters appears to be living; we know them as old friends.

Coleridge in his "Ancient Mariner" takes us on a sea voyage, giving a wonderful touch of nature, with his purely imaginative character, the Mariner.

Whittier's "Among the Hills" is a rural love-song, the lover being an actual man, Paul Hoag, who here is set like a gem in old gold. He was born and always lived at Sandwich, New Hampshire. His house and barn knew no lock or bar, yet the most wretched tramp never abused the free hospitality of that Quaker home.

"The Village Blacksmith" of Longfellow and the "Village Poacher" of Goldsmith are two village lords portrayed in such a manner as to win equal admiration.

The Blacksmith's hair is black, and crisp and long.
His face is like the tan;

His brow is wet with honest sweat,
He earns what ere he can
And looks the whole world in the face
For he owes not any man.
And children coming home from school
Look in at the open door;
They love to see the flaming forge,
And hear the bellows roar,
And catch the burning sparks that fly
Like chaff from a thrashing floor. -

He goes on Sunday to the church
And sits among his boys; -
He hears the parson pray and preach,
He hears his daughter's voice
Singing in the village choir,
And it makes his heart rejoice.

Toiling, rejoicing, - sorrowing,
Onward through life he goes; -
Each morning sees some Task begun,
Each evening sees its close;
Something attempted, something done,
He earned a night's repose. "

The preacher was "a man to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year."
* * *

"To relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side;
* * *

"At church with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorn the venerable place; -
The service past, around the pious man,
With ready zeal, each honest rustic ran;
E'en children followed, with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown to share the good man's smile,
* * *

As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Bryant's soul-stirring "The African Chief" is a story, making as strong a protestation against slavery as any poem in our language. It is a picture of a noble African King, who is taken captive but promises gold and ivory for his freedom. A prince among his tribe before, - he could not be a slave.

He tells his captors to cut off his heavy braids of hair and there they'll find the gold. The man tightens his chains and steals the gold. The eyes of the king begin to roll, and his mind to wander, he trembles and cries like a child:—

"He struggled fiercely with his chain:—
Whispered and wept and smiled:
Yet were not long those fatal bands,
And once, at shut of day,
They drew him forth upon the sands
The foul hyena's prey. —"

The poets who have been lovers of nature are more numerous than those who have created characters. Shakespeare always combines the two, often placing his characters in a garden, or forest. John Burroughs, a true lover of nature, says that this love springs from our religious needs and instincts. Nature speaks through the heart and the love for her makes her

dissolve in our minds. Wordsworth and Bryant had such a love of nature that all their thoughts were colored by it. Bryant in his poem, "The Entrance To A Wood," takes his reader with him as he enters:

Stranger, if thou hast learned a truth which needs
No school of long experience, that the world
Is full of guilt and misery and has 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 cool 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.

Many love nature as genuinely as did Wordsworth and Bryant but have not the power to make others share with them this love. A love for nature is a gift which tends to make him who possesses it a happy man, for he daily sees beautiful pictures in the clouds, the sun-set sky, the flowers, the birds, the trees, and God in everything.

"Such blessings nature pours,
Her stock'd mankind enjoy but half her stores
She rears her flowers and spreads her velvet green"

Coleridge was stirred to eloquence and to worship, by Nature, and as an artist, to imaginative mysticism. The painter may be able to depict to the common mind what nature has to give, but to those who live on the same plane as the poet, he is the better interpreter. Artists have painted with brush the hills, the mountains, the plain and the sea, but poets have made just as vivid pictures by a stroke of the pen. Look at the pictures of the ocean as described by Harriet Beecher Stowe in "Life's Mystery" or J. S. Frowbridge's "At Sea". The glimpse of "coral reefs" and "cold sea-maids" drawn by Dr. Holmes in his "Chambered Nautilus" makes one sail with the poet into "gulfs enchanted" on the same "venturous barge". - Longfellow brings "the mists from out the sea, on any early morning when we read

his poem, "Daybreak," and there are poets, like Landor, Lovell and Edwin Arnold to whom the tree is animate. Helen Hunt declares "The pines grow gray A little in the biting wind!"

Byron makes the thorn tree a ~~king~~ ^{king} of life when he says in "Child of Harod" "They have torn me and I bleed, Should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed."

Bayard Taylor's "Arab" loves the palm tree "Next to thee, O fair gazelle, O Beddowee girl, beloved so well" Next to his fleet horse he loves this tree "with its leaves of beauty and its fruit of gold." Heine in "Lyrical Interlude" makes a lovely fir tree sleep "while thine and snow" "Cast round it a garment of white."

The poets who have written about flowers are numberless. Ballou evidently believes in the divinity of each flower for it was he who gave us these beautiful lines:

"Sweet letters of the angel tongue,

I've loved ye long and well
 And never have failed in your fragrance sweet
 To find some secret spell,
 A charm that bound me with, witching power,
 For mine is the old belief
 That, midst your sweets, and midst your bloom,
 There's a soul in every leaf!"

George Elliot in her "Spanish Gypsy"
 says "If never rains roses; when we want
 To have more roses, we must plant more trees."
 But the poets have showered poems about
 roses all about us and every year
 there falls new thoughts of dewy
 roses fresh and gay until we are almost
 ready to cry out with Hood's

"Poor Peggys who hawks nosegays from
 street to street
 Till—think of that who finds life so sweet!
 She hates the sight of roses"

Yet who ever saw the "daisy" until
 Chaucer described it. The daisy
 was Chaucer's favored companion;
 his devotion to it was unremitting;
 he met its opening fringes at the
 dawn; he lingered by it "as it

closed its buds at eve, which for
the parting sunbeams seem to grieve."

Burns, Keats, Milton Owen Meredith,
Wordsworth, Spencer, Shelly, and
Tennyson have written about the
daisy, - the daffodil, the lily, the
pansy, and

"The violets that prattle and titter,
And gaze on the stars high above,"
and "A host of evening primroses
Air which the wind may hover till it does,
Air which it well might take a pleasant sleep
But that tis ever startled by the leap
Of buds into ripe flowers."

"Twas midnight thro' the lattice, wreathed
With wood vine many a perfume breathed
From plants that wake when others sleep.
From timid jasmine buds that keep
Their odors to themselves all day,
But when the sunlight dies away
Let the delicious fragrance out
To every breeze that roams about. -

Emerson sees beauty in the flower of
the marsh; to it he says:

"Rhodora! if the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the marsh and sky
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for being."

No wonder Emerson finds solace
in "A woodland walk" when he goes in
quest of river grapes and enjoys the
song of "a mocking thrush" and
"a wild rose, a rock-loving columbine
Salve my worst wounds!"

Wordsworth tells a pathetic story in
which a thrush plays a prominent part, where
a girl away from home stops in the
street to hear the caged bird sing.
Christina Rossetti hears the thrushes
sing "Till in the latest sunlight flashes
In the west."

The black-bird is loved by Tennyson,
Longfellow hears the blue-bird and the
robin pipe and sing to Hiawatha.

Bryant's love for the bobolink has
made this bird a favorite all over the land.
Lowell makes Hosea Biglow talk about
the bobolink as

"June's Bridesman, poet 'o the year

Gladness on wings, the Bobolink is here;
 Half hid in tip-top apple-bloom he sings,
 Or climbs against the breeze with quivering wings,
 Or, givin' way to it in a mock despair,
 Runs down a brook o' laughter thro' the air."

Florence Percy finds a new meaning in the
 song of the Bobolink as he sings to a sparrow and
 his mate: "Balancing on a black-berry brier,
 The bobolink sang with his heart on fire,
 Chick? If you wish to kiss her, do! -
 Do it, do it, you coward you!
 Kiss her! kiss kiss her! who will see?
 Only we three, we three, we three!"
 And when the pair sought a safer retreat -
 "Again beside them the tempter went,
 Keeping the thread of his argument:
 'Kiss her! kiss her! chick-a-chee-chee.
 I'll not mention it; don't mind me!
 I'll be sentinel - I can see
 All around from this tall birch-tree!
 But ah! they noted nor deemed it strange
 In his volubling chorus a trifling change.
 'Do it, do it! with might and main
 Warbled the tell-tale, do it again!'"

Burns, Milton, Hogg, Drayton,
Dirak Mulock, Montgomery, Pope
and many lesser poets besides
Wordsworth, Shelley and Shakespeare
have written about the skylark. -

Shakespeare's attitude toward nature
is like that of a gay, careless reveler
who leaves his companions for a
moment to pluck a flower, gather
a shell here and there or listen to
the song of the birds. -

It was the nightingale and not the lark
Nighly she sings on yon pomegranate tree: ^{etc.}

Believe me, love, it was the nightingale,
he has Romeo say to Juliet.

In Hamlet he calls the sky-lark, "the bird
of dawning. He talks about the cuckoo
and the eagle. He makes the dove
"a very blessed spirit of peace". But it
seems as though he delighted to
describe the hawk, the swan, the owl
and the raven. Shakespeare seems
to be happy with all life in nature.
Not only the great pictures of sudden
landscape, of forest, sky, ocean, of
sunlight, moonlight or storm are

perfect as a whole, but his descriptions in detail are true to nature. He notices the grass, the weeds, the insects. He hears the "buzzing night-flies", he pities the beetle that is trod upon, and says "It feels a pang as great as when a giant dies". Other poets have noticed insect life and many found comfort and delight in the butterfly, the firefly, the cricket, that Keats says "takes the lead in summer luxury", the bee that Emerson calls an "animated torrid zone!" The Katy-did whom Walt Whitman says "Works her chromatic reed on the walnut-tree over the well." He notices the dragon-fly over "the rivulet dancing" and the "Glow-worms on the ground are moving As if the torch dancer circling." Bryant has an ode to a "mosquito", Swift writes about a flea, and Milton mentions "The gay motes that people the sun-beams".

The poet instinctively feels that he must express what is true and beautiful and the poet is always seen behind his work. The truth

to life depends on the poet as a poet.
The city-bred poet cannot describe nature without striking false notes which can be detected, says one writer, as quickly in poetry as in music.

The poet can never be a realist, as we said at the beginning of our thesis; that is, he must not refuse to paint things as they are, but he must paint always at their best. This puts them in holiday attire and gives the best thought and sentiment possible to express. He must interpret life as he finds it, but he must find it as an idealist. Unless the poet does this, unless he has a large, broad spirit, has deep insight, and is able to enter into the mysteries of life and nature as well as into great passions and experiences, he is not a true poet.

"Poetry, has of late," says Steadman, "been turned a force, very much as if it were the heat, light or motion known to physics."
Dr. Gussakus says that poetry is

the art by which things are seen and expressed in the atmosphere of imagination. Emerson says "it is the perpetual endeavor to express the spirit of things."

This power of expression cannot be learned, it is not gained by experience, but is a natural gift.

The poet should think his beautiful thoughts and then, before he puts them on record, obey the command of one of the greatest of England's poets who says —

"If thou indeed derive thy light from heaven
Then to the measure of that heaven-born light
Shine, Poet! Shine in thy place and be content."