

Dryant's Style
by
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The birthplace of William Cullen Bryant seems to have been selected by Nature as a fit residence for the early unfolding of high poetic genius. The little town of Cummington, situated on the forest elevations above the beautiful valley of the Connecticut in the old country of Hampshire, has the distinction of giving birth to the greatest poet of America.

Mr. Bryant's vocation for poetry was marked at a very early age. His first efforts were several clever enigmas, fashioned after Latin writers, and a translation from Homer. These were written in his tenth year, and three years later appeared, "The Embargo", a satirical poem on the embargo of American shipping. It was well received, but there were many who refused to believe he was a mere youth of thirteen years.

His early productions were regarded as the work of a precocious genius which would surely spend itself in these premature efforts;

but the appearance of, "Xanatosia", written in his eighteenth year proved conclusively that he was not a mere youthful prodigy. This imperishable poem is one of the most precious gems of didactic verse in the whole history of English poetry.

The criticism has been made that its consolations in view of death are not drawn directly from the doctrines of religion, and that it makes no allusions to the immortality of the soul. But Bryant was not writing a theological treatise. His imaginations were absorbed with the soothing influences of Nature. He opens the poem with a dreary picture of the common destiny of man. Earth claims the body; man must mingle with the elements and roots of the mighty oak pierce his mouldering body. But he goes on to say, no lone retire alone to his eternal resting place, that the dead are everywhere, and that the sun and planets have shone on the abodes of death through all ages. Thus Nature soothes

those who shudder at thought of the narrow house.

This is Bryant's great Nature poem, but his love of Nature gives the prevailing spirit to all his poetry. His poems convey the actual impression which is awakened by our lakes, mountains and forests. He approaches the forests, whose shadowy haunts only the footsteps of the Indian have penetrated, deeply conscious of its grandeur. Every moss-covered trunk breathes to him of the mysteries of Time, and each wild flower, springing from brown and withered leaves, whispers some thought of gentleness. A violet in his hands becomes a gem; a mountain leads his eyes to the blue sky above it.

Bryant is a graphic poet in the best sense of the word. In his descriptive poems, there is the same finished work and beauty of style as in his reflective poems. Although the whole is grand, the minutest part is not neglected. He has pictured con-

rectly every season of our American year. For example, our American Spring, is not at all the ideal or poetic our nor does he pretend that it is, yet he can find a poetical side, as is shown by his poem, "March". He pictures Summer by taking our glorious month of June as characteristic. Mid-summer, he pictures with its fervid and overpowering heat, but Autumn is Bryant's favorite season, and some of his most beautiful passages are those which paint its hues of crimson and purple.

The wonderful descriptive power displayed in the stanzas, "To a Waterfowl", gives the very impression of its flight, floating as they do, with a calm cadence on the ear. We see that solitary wanderer of the "cold thin atmosphere"; we watch its serene course until the "abyss of heaven has swallowed up its form." It is one of those rare poems which, once read, dwell in the imagination with a lasting charm.

The kind of interest with which Bryant regards Nature is common to the majority of minds in which a love of beauty is blended with a reverence for Him who made all beautiful things. To some extent, this accounts for his popularity. Many readers of poetical taste are repelled by the very vehemence and intensity of Byron. The tranquil delight with which the American poet dwells upon the beauties of creation is perfectly genial. All is clear, earnest and thoughtful. He is the friend of a universal religion and his views of Nature are not strained, unintelligible or morbid. They are more or less familiar to all people and distinguish the poetry of Bryant, forming one of its most dominant charms.

Bryant must be regarded as a national poet. His works are not only American in subject and scenery, but also in their spirit. They breathe a love of liberty, a hatred of wrong and sympathy with mankind. The

is in his verses an atmosphere, moral and material, which belongs peculiarly to this country. The melancholy which runs through his poems is the melancholy of the landscape, uninhabited as yet. His poetry is not the poetry of rapid, active, passionate life, but rather the poetry of loneliness tempered by morality and religion.

The poetry of Bryant is not great in amount but it represents a great deal of work. No verse ever leaves his hands until it has received the last touch demanded by the most correct judgement and exacting taste. Thus the style of his poetry is always admirable. Nowhere can we find in what he has written a careless or slovenly expression, an ill chosen word or an awkward phrase.

He refreshes, inspires, consoles and imparts what Nature gives to her close student. There is not a line that appeals to an unworthy feeling, not a suggestion that is un-

pure. His lines are musical and full of gentle revery.

Dryant has translated many short poems from the Spanish, but his largest literary undertaking was a translation of the Iliad and Odyssey of Homer. He brought to the task great requisite power, and the methodious flow of his verse, the vigor and compactness of his language shows him to be a perfect master of his art.

Simplicity, nobility and plainness that rivals prose without being prosaic are characteristics of Dryant's style.

He is wholly without mannerisms and his art aims at being effectual.

His poetry is beautiful without being overladen with ornament.

As a prose writer, Mr. Dryant is distinguished for excellence of thought and expression. He writes equally well a political essay, a fictitious tale or recollections of foreign travel. He is graceful and vigorous, surpassed by few writers of his time.

Dryant has often been called

the American Wordsworth, though in purity of diction, dignity and elegance of style he is very much superior. He appeals more directly to the common element. Another striking characteristic is his high, lofty, moral tone which is eloquent of a great intellect warmed and controlled by high and pure impulses.

Bryant is an exception to the general rule in that he set up a standard and reached it. He has brought forward no hero or heroine; tells no story; lays no plot. He does not address the feelings or sympathy of common readers; communicates not with others but with himself. Never his poetry will not be read by the unthinking but it will charm men of sound judgment and cultivated tastes.

It is true that Bryant's poetry is reflection, rather than passion, but a deep sentiment underlies the expression. His poetry will win a more lasting admiration than if it

were merely a creative fancy. The influence of his poetry is of a pure and ennobling nature. Its most sensitive tones, do not lull the soul, but inspire it with cheerful hopes for the future.

The great principle of Bryant's faith is that,
 "Eternal Love doth keep
 In his complacent arms the earth, the
 air, the deep."

To set forth in strains the most attractive and lofty, this glorious sentiment is the constant aim of his poetry. Gifted must be the man who is loyal to such a high vocation. From the din of outward activity, the vain turmoil of mechanical life, it is delightful to turn to a true poet - one who scatters flowers along our pathway, and lifts our gaze to the stars. This high service has Bryant fulfilled. It will identify his memory with the loveliest scenes of his native land, and endear him to her children forever.