

And listened long to the sweet sounds that thrilled
 The frosty air, till now the encroaching cold
 Recalled her to herself. 'Too long, too long
 I linger here,' she said, and then she sprang
 Into the path, and with a hurried step
 Followed it upward. Ever by her side
 Her little guide kept pace. As on they went,
 Eva bemoaned her fault: 'What must they think —²²⁹
 The dear ones in the cottage, while so long,
 Hour after hour, I stay without? I know
 That they will seek me far and near, and weep
 To find me not. How could I, wickedly,
 Neglect the charge they gave me?' As she spoke,
 The hot tears started to her eyes; she knelt
 In the mid-path. 'Father! forgive this sin;
 Forgive myself I cannot' — thus she prayed,
 And rose and hastened onward. When, at last,
 They reached the outer air, the clear north
 breathed
 A bitter cold, from which she shrank with dread,²⁴⁰
 But the snow-maiden bounded as she felt
 The cutting blast, and uttered shouts of joy,
 And skipped, with boundless glee, from drift to drift,
 And danced round Eva, as she labored up
 The mounds of snow. 'Ah me! I feel my eyes
 Grow heavy,' Eva said; 'they swim with sleep;
 I cannot walk for utter weariness,
 And I must rest a moment on this bank,
 But let it not be long.' As thus she spoke,
 In half-formed words, she sank on the smooth snow,²⁵⁰
 With closing lids. Her guide composed the robe
 About her limbs, and said: 'A pleasant spot
 Is this to slumber in; on such a couch
 Oft have I slept away the winter night,
 And had the sweetest dreams.' So Eva slept,
 But slept in death; for when the power of frost

Locks up the motions of the living frame,
 The victim passes to the realm of Death
 Through the dim porch of Sleep. The little
 guide,
 Watching beside her, saw the hues of life
 Fade from the fair smooth brow and rounded cheek,²⁶¹
 As fades the crimson from a morning
 cloud,
 Till they were white as marble, and the
 breath
 Had ceased to come and go, yet knew she
 not
 At first that this was death. But when she
 marked
 How deep the paleness was, how motionless
 That once lithe form, a fear came over her.
 She strove to wake the sleeper, plucked her
 robe,
 And shouted in her ear, but all in vain;
 The life had passed away from those young
 limbs.²⁷⁰
 Then the snow-maiden raised a wailing
 cry,
 Such as the dweller in some lonely wild,
 Sleepless through all the long December
 night,
 Hears when the mournful East begins to
 blow.
 But suddenly was heard the sound of
 steps,
 Grating on the crisp snow; the cottagers
 Were seeking Eva; from afar they saw
 The twain, and hurried toward them. As
 they came
 With gentle chidings ready on their lips,
 And marked that deathlike sleep, and heard
 the tale²⁸⁰
 Of the snow-maiden, mortal anguish fell
 Upon their hearts, and bitter words of grief
 And blame were uttered: 'Cruel, cruel
 one,
 To tempt our daughter thus, and cruel we,
 Who suffered her to wander forth alone
 In this fierce cold!' They lifted the dear
 child,
 And bore her home and chafed her tender
 limbs,
 And strove, by all the simple arts they
 knew,
 To make the chilled blood move, and win
 the breath
 Back to her bosom; fruitlessly they strove;
 The little maid was dead. In blank de-
 spair²⁹¹

They stood, and gazed at her who never
 more
 Should look on them. 'Why die we not
 with her?'
 They said; 'Without her, life is bitterness.'
 Now came the funeral-day; the simple
 folk
 Of all that pastoral region gathered round
 To share the sorrow of the cottagers.
 They carved a way into the mound of snow
 To the glen's side, and dug a little grave
 In the smooth slope, and, following the bier,
 In long procession from the silent door,³⁰¹
 Chanted a sad and solemn melody:
 'Lay her away to rest within the ground.
 Yea, lay her down whose pure and innocent
 life
 Was spotless as these snows; for she was
 reared
 In love, and passed in love life's pleasant
 spring,
 And all that now our tenderest love can
 do
 Is to give burial to her lifeless limbs.'
 They paused. A thousand slender voices
 round,³⁰⁹
 Like echoes softly flung from rock and hill,
 Took up the strain, and all the hollow air
 Seemed mourning for the dead; for, on
 that day,
 The Little People of the Snow had come,
 From mountain-peak, and cloud, and icy
 hall,
 To Eva's burial. As the murmur died,
 The funeral-train renewed the solemn chant:
 'Thou, Lord, hast taken her to be with
 Eve,
 Whose gentle name was given her. Even
 so,
 For so thy wisdom saw that it was best
 For her and us. We bring our bleeding
 hearts,³²⁰
 And ask the touch of healing from thy
 hand,
 As, with submissive tears, we render back
 The lovely and beloved to Him who gave.'
 They ceased. Again the plaintive mur-
 mur rose.
 From shadowy skirts of low-hung cloud it
 came,
 And wide white fields, and fir-trees capped
 with snow,
 Shivering to the sad sounds. They sank
 away
 To silence in the dim-seen distant woods.

The little grave was closed; the funeral-
 train
 Departed; winter wore away; the Spring
 Steeped, with her quickening rains, the
 violet-tufts,³³¹
 By fond hands planted where the maiden
 slept.
 But, after Eva's burial, never more
 The Little People of the Snow were seen
 By human eye, nor ever human ear
 Heard from their lips articulate speech
 again;
 For a decree went forth to cut them off,
 Forever, from communion with mankind.
 The winter-clouds, along the mountainside,
 Rolled downward toward the vale, but no
 fair form³⁴⁰
 Leaned from their folds, and, in the icy
 glens,
 And aged woods, under snow-loaded pines,
 Where once they made their haunt, was
 emptiness.
 But ever, when the wintry days drew
 near,
 Around that little grave, in the long night,
 Frost-wreaths were laid and tufts of silvery
 rime
 In shape like blades and blossoms of the
 field
 As one would scatter flowers upon a bier.
 1863. 1834.

THE POET

THOU who wouldst wear the name
 Of poet 'mid thy brethren of mankind,
 And clothe in words of flame
 Thoughts that shall live within the gen-
 eral mind!
 Deem not the framing of a deathless lay
 The pastime of a drowsy summer day.
 But gather all thy powers,
 And wreak them on the verse that thou
 dost weave,
 And in thy lonely hours,
 At silent morning or at wakeful eve,¹⁰
 While the warm current tingles through
 thy veins
 Set forth the burning words in fluent
 strains.
 No smooth array of phrase,
 Artfully sought and ordered though it be,

Which the cold rhymer lays
Upon his page with languid industry,
Can wake the listless pulse to livelier
speed,
Or fill with sudden tears the eyes that
read.

The secret wouldst thou know
To touch the heart or fire the blood at
will? 20

Let thine own eyes o'erflow;
Let thy lips quiver with the passionate
thrill;
Seize the great thought, ere yet its power
be past,
And bind, in words, the fleet emotion fast.

Then, should thy verse appear
Halting and harsh, and all unaptly
wrought,
Touch the crude line with fear,
Save in the moment of impassioned
thought;
Then summon back the original glow, and
mend
The strain with rapture that with fire was
penned. 30

Yet let no empty gust
Of passion find an utterance in thy lay,
A blast that whirls the dust
Along the howling street and dies away;
But feelings of calm power and mighty
sweep,
Like currents journeying through the wind-
less deep.

Seek'st thou, in living lays,
To limn the beauty of the earth and
sky?
Before thine inner gaze
Let all that beauty in clear vision lie; 40
Look on it with exceeding love, and write
The words inspired by wonder and de-
light.

Of tempests wouldst thou sing,
Or tell of battles — make thyself a part
Of the great tumult; cling
To the tossed wreck with terror in thy
heart;
Scale, with the assaulting host, the ram-
part's height,
And strike and struggle in the thickest
fight.

So shalt thou frame a lay
That haply may endure from age to age,
And they who read shall say: 51
'What witchery hangs upon this poet's
page!
What art is his the written spells to find
That sway from mood to mood the willing
mind!'

1863.

1864.

MY AUTUMN WALK

ON woodlands ruddy with autumn
The amber sunshine lies;
I look on the beauty round me,
And tears come into my eyes.

For the wind that sweeps the meadows
Blows out of the far Southwest,
Where our gallant men are fighting,
And the gallant dead are at rest.

The golden-rod is leaning,
And the purple aster waves 10
In a breeze from the land of battles,
A breath from the land of graves.

Full fast the leaves are dropping
Before that wandering breath;
As fast, on the field of battle,
Our brethren fall in death.

Beautiful over my pathway
The forest spoils are shed;
They are spotting the grassy hillocks
With purple and gold and red. 20

Beautiful is the death-sleep
Of those who bravely fight
In their country's holy quarrel,
And perish for the Right.

But who shall comfort the living,
The light of whose homes is gone:
The bride that, early widowed,
Lives broken-hearted on;

The matron whose sons are lying
In graves on a distant shore; 30
The maiden, whose promised husband
Comes back from the war no more?

I look on the peaceful dwellings
Whose windows glimmer in sight,

With croft and garden and orchard,
That bask in the mellow light;

And I know that, when our couriers
With news of victory come,
They will bring a bitter message
Of hopeless grief to some. 40

Again I turn to the woodlands,
And shudder as I see
The mock-grape's blood-red banner
Hung out on the cedar-tree;

And I think of days of slaughter,
And the night-sky red with flames,
On the Chattahoochee's meadows,
And the wasted banks of the James.

Oh, for the fresh spring-season,
When the groves are in their prime; 50
And far away in the future
Is the frosty autumn-time!

Oh, for that better season,
When the pride of the foe shall yield,
And the hosts of God and Freedom
March back from the well-won field;

And the matron shall clasp her first-
born
With tears of joy and pride;
And the scarred and war-worn lover
Shall claim his promised bride! 60

The leaves are swept from the branches;
But the living buds are there,
With folded flower and foliage,
To sprout in a kinder air.

October, 1864.

January, 1865.

THE DEATH OF LINCOLN¹

OH, slow to smite 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.

¹ Bryant wrote this poem for the day when Lin-
coln's body was carried in funeral procession through
the streets of New York city.

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

Pure was thy life; its bloody close
Hath placed thee with the sons of light,
Among the noble host of those
Who perished in the cause of Right.
April, 1865. January, 1866.

A LIFETIME

I sit in the early twilight,
And, through the gathering shade,
I look on the fields around me
Where yet a child I played.

And I peer into the shadows,
Till they seem to pass away,
And the fields and their tiny brooklet
Lie clear in the light of day.

A delicate child and slender,
With locks of light-brown hair, 10
From knoll to knoll is leaping
In the breezy summer air.

He stoops to gather blossoms
Where the running waters shine;
And I look on him with wonder,
His eyes are so like mine.

I look till the fields and brooklet
Swim like a vision by,
And a room in a lowly dwelling
Lies clear before my eye. 20

There stand, in the clean-swept fireplace,
Fresh boughs from the wood in bloom,
And the birch-tree's fragrant branches
Perfume the humble room.

And there the child is standing
By a stately lady's knee,
And reading of ancient peoples
And realms beyond the sea:

Of the cruel King of Egypt
Who made God's people slaves, 30
And perished, with all his army,
Drowned in the Red Sea waves;

Of Deborah who mustered
Her brethren long oppressed,

And routed the heathen army,
And gave her people rest;

And the sadder, gentler story
How Christ, the crucified,
With a prayer for those who slew Him,
Forgave them as He died. 40

I look again, and there rises
A forest wide and wild,
And in it the boy is wandering,
No longer a little child.

He murmurs his own rude verses
As he roams the woods alone;
And again I gaze with wonder,
His eyes are so like my own.

I see him next in his chamber,
Where he sits him down to write 50
The rhymes he framed in his ramble,
And he cons them with delight.

A kindly figure enters,
A man of middle age,
And points to a line just written,
And 't is blotted from the page.

And next, in a hall of justice,
Scarce grown to manly years,
'Mid the hoary-headed wranglers
The slender youth appears. 60

With a beating heart he rises,
And with a burning cheek,
And the judges kindly listen
To hear the young man speak.

Another change, and I see him
Approach his dwelling-place,
Where a fair-haired woman meets him,
With a smile on her young face —

A smile that spreads a sunshine
On lip and cheek and brow; 70
So sweet a smile there is not
In all the wide earth now.

She leads by the hand their first-born,
A fair-haired little one,
And their eyes as they meet him sparkle
Like brooks in the morning sun.

Another change, and I see him
Where the city's ceaseless coil

Sends up a mighty murmur
From a thousand modes of toil. 80

And there, 'mid the clash of presses,
He plies the rapid pen
In the battles of opinion,
That divide the sons of men.

I look, and the clashing presses
And the town are seen no more,
But there is the poet wandering
A strange and foreign shore.

He has crossed the mighty ocean
To realms that lie afar, 90
In the region of ancient story,
Beneath the morning star.

And now he stands in wonder
On an icy Alpine height;
Now pitches his tent in the desert
Where the jackal yells at night;

Now, far on the North Sea islands,
Sees day on the midnight sky,
Now gathers the fair strange fruitage
Where the isles of the Southland lie.

I see him again at his dwelling, 101
Where, over the little lake,
The rose-trees droop in their beauty
To meet the image they make.

Though years have whitened his temples,
His eyes have the first look still,
Save a shade of settled sadness,
A forecast of coming ill.

For in that pleasant dwelling,
On the rack of ceaseless pain, 110
Lies she who smiled so sweetly,
And prays for ease in vain.

And I know that his heart is breaking,
When, over those dear eyes,
The darkness slowly gathers,
And the loved and loving dies.

A grave is scooped on the hillside
Where often, at eve or morn,
He lays the blooms of the garden —
He, and his youngest born. 120

And well I know that a brightness
From his life has passed away,

And a smile from the green earth's beauty,
And a glory from the day.

But I behold, above him,
In the far blue deeps of air,
Dim battlements shining faintly,
And a throng of faces there;

See over crystal barrier
The airy figures bend, 130
Like those who are watching and waiting
The coming of a friend.

And one there is among them,
With a star upon her brow,
In her life a lovely woman,
A sinless seraph now.

I know the sweet calm features;
The peerless smile I know,
And I stretch my arms with transport
From where I stand below. 140

And the quick tears drown my eyelids,
But the airy figures fade,
And the shining battlements darken
And blend with the evening shade.

I am gazing into the twilight
Where the dim-seen meadows lie,
And the wind of night is swaying
The trees with a heavy sigh.
1876. 1876.

THE FLOOD OF YEARS

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 they who toil,
And they who strive, and they who feast,
and they

Who hurry to and fro. The sturdy swain —
Woodman and delver with the spade — is
there, 10

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 revellers whose brows are
twined

With roses, ride the topmost swell awhile,
And as they raise their flowing cups and
touch

The clinking brim to brim, are whirled be-
neath

The waves and disappear. I hear the jar
Of beaten drums, and thunders that break
forth 20

From cannon, where the advancing billow
sends

Up to the sight long files of armed 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 31

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-voiced 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 40

The hands in prayer — the engulfing wave
o'ertakes

And swallows them and him. 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 his 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 ⁵⁰
 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 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, ⁶⁰
 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 in the swift waters; populous
 realms
 Swept by the torrent see their ancient
 tribes
 Engulfed and lost; their very languages ⁷⁰
 Stilled, and never to be uttered more.
 I pause and turn my eyes, and looking
 back
 Where that tumultuous flood has been, 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 worshipper.
 There lie memorial stones, whence time
 has gnawed ⁸⁰
 The graven legends, thrones of kings o'er-
 turned,
 The broken altars of forgotten gods,
 Foundations of old cities and long streets
 Where never fall of human foot is heard,
 On all 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 ⁹⁰
 Strewn on the surface of that silent sea
 Are withering bridal wreaths, and glossy
 locks
 Shorn from dear 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, and the quick tears are in my
 eyes,
 For I behold in every one of these
 A blighted hope, a separate history ¹⁰⁰
 Of human sorrows, 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 and broke
 their peace.
 Sadly I turn and look before, where yet
 The Flood must pass, and I behold a mist
 Where swarm dissolving forms, the brood
 of Hope, ¹¹⁰
 Divinely fair, that rest on banks of flowers,
 Or wander among rainbows, fading soon
 And reappearing, haply giving place
 To forms of grisly aspect such as Fear
 Shapes 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 to
 come
 Touches the Life that is. The Flood of
 Years ¹²⁰
 Rolls toward it near and nearer. It must
 pass
 That dismal barrier. What is there be-
 yond?
 Hear what the wise and good have said.
 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 over-
 whelmed
 And lost to sight, all that in them was good,
 Noble, and truly great, and worthy of
 love — ¹²⁹
 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 with the breath
 Of flowers that never wither. So they pass
 From stage to stage along the shining
 course
 Of that bright river, broadening like a sea
 As its smooth eddies curl along their way.

They bring old friends together; hands are
 clasped ¹⁴⁰
 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
 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 ¹⁵⁰
 That waits on growth and action shall pro-
 ceed
 With everlasting Concord hand in hand.
 1876. 1876.