

pupils, will be so great to the eager teacher, anxious to do her best for each, that no arguments for its continuance will be needed.—*N. Y. School Journal.*

* English. *

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THE PRAIRIES.

BY BRYANT.

I. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT was born at Cannington, Massachusetts, November 3, 1794. His father, Dr. Bryant, belonged to the good old Puritan stock, and his mother was a descendant of John Alden, whose name has been immortalized in Longfellow's "Miles Standish." With his father and mother lived his maternal grandparents, who are said to have been characterized by some of the sterner attributes of the Puritans. The effect of the atmosphere of the poet's home seems to have been very ungenial, though the harshness of his grandparents was modified by the love and sympathy of his father, a man of warm heart and cultured tastes. It was his father, the poet says, who taught him the art of versification. As early as eleven years of age Bryant wrote some clever verses in imitation of the Latin poet, Horace, and at eighteen he published *Thanatopsis*, a work of original genius, which won him well-deserved fame. For a few years the poet practised law, but he found the work very ungenial, and in 1825 gave it up and removed to New York, where he occupied himself wholly in literary pursuits. He continued to write poetry, edited a newspaper, and wrote stories and magazine articles. The first collection of his verses had been published in 1821; in 1832 appeared a second volume of his poems, containing among others, "The Death of the Flowers" and "The Prairies." He continued to write poetry till his death in 1878, and the productions of his later years show no falling off in his poetic powers. "No distinguished man in America was better known by sight than Bryant."

"O good grey head that all men view"

rose unbidden to one's lips as he passed his fellow pedestrians in the streets of the great city, active, alert, with a springing step and buoyant gait. He was seen in all weathers, walking down to his office in the morning, and back to his house in the afternoon—an observant antiquity, with a majestic white beard, a pair of sharp eyes, and a face that, when observed closely, recalled the line of the poet:

"A million wrinkles carved his skin."

II. QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES.

Questions intended to suggest the mode in which this lesson should be studied.

1. State in a sentence the topic of the poem.
2. Give the topic of each subdivision, and show how it is connected with the main theme.
3. What are the conditions of place, time and feeling under which the scene is supposed to be viewed?
4. Bryant's poems may be divided into four main classes: (1) These dealing with subjects founded on the myths or history of Greece and Rome; (2) descriptions of nature; (3) poems treating of the progress of the human race; and (4) those founded upon the history or traditions of the Indians of this continent. To which class does "The Prairies" in the main belong? Show that it has elements connecting it with each of the four classes.
5. Give in your own words a short description of the scene the first and last sections call to your mind, endeavoring to realize the feelings of the poet and the appearance of the various objects towards which he successively turns his eyes.
6. What part of the description of the former inhabitants of the prairie lands seems to be a statement of facts, what is conjectural with a foundation in fact, and what is purely fanciful? Discuss the probabilities of the poet's fancies or conjectures.
7. Give other illustrations than those the poet brings forward of the fact that constant changes are going on in the "forms of being" on the earth.

The teacher should use every means in his power to arouse the imaginations of his pupils as they study this poem. Pictures may be shown them, descriptions given, and comparisons made with things they know that serve to illustrate the poet's thoughts.

III. EXPLANATORY NOTES.

P. 151, l. 3. *For which* name.—The word prairie is French, signifying a meadow. Savanna, frequently used in the Southern States and in England, is a Spanish word.

1. 4. *For the first*.—For the first time.
1. 5. *Dilated sight*.—Eyes wide open in awestruck admiration of the beauty of the scene.
1. 6. *Encircling vastness*.—The first impression produced on one's mind by the sight of the prairies is that of their limitless extent.

1. 7. *Airy*.—Easy, gentle.
1. 8. *Gentlest swell*.—When there is no wind the waters of the ocean undulate in long, low waves with little or no ripple on their surface. This constitutes what sailors call the "ground swell."

1. 11. *Unchained*.—In free motion. Cf. ll. 9 and 10.

1. 11-15. *The clouds* ridges.—This effect may be seen on a small scale in any meadow or field of grain over which is cast the shadow of a passing cloud.

1. 13. *Fluctuates*.—Moves like a wave, the literal meaning of the word. (Lat. *fluctus*, a wave.)

1. 14. *Golden* flowers.—On the prairies in many places grow an abundance of small, brilliant flowers of the sun-flower family.

1. 18. *Moves not*.—Does not change his position.

1. 19. *Palms*.—Branchless tropical trees bearing at their summits clusters of large leaves. The word is intended to suggest the luxuriant beauty of tropical vegetation.

1. 20. *Crisped*.—Caused a ripple to pass over their surface

1. 21. *Fountain of Sonora*.—In Sonora, a frontier state in the north-west of Mexico, rise the rivers Colorado, Yaqui and Mayo.

1. 24. *Part*.—Share in its production.

1. 25. *Firmament*.—The sky, in which the stars were supposed to be firmly fixed.

1. 26-28. *Sown, planted, hedged*.—Terms applied to human labor. Observe the magnitude of the work attributed to "The Hand that built the firmament."

1. 27. *Island groves*.—Clusters of trees that appear like islands in the sea of herbage.

1. 28. *Fitting floor* sky.—The poet changes the comparison. The vault of heaven is the roof of the temple, the prairies with their bright flowers the floor.

1. 30-31. *Flowers* constellations.—See l. 16. Cf. Longfellow's "Evangeline."

"Silently, one by one, in the infinite meadows of heaven,
Blossomed the lovely stars, the forget-me-nots of the angels."

P. 152, l. 2. *Nearer vault*.—On the prairies, as upon the ocean, the sky seems to be nearer than in places where the view of the horizon is shut off by hills, etc.

Tenderer blue.—In the clear air of the great central plains, the color of the sky is purer and brighter than in the comparatively foggy climate of the Eastern States, where Bryant resided.

1. 4. *Waste*.—Cf. *desert*, l. 1.

1. 5. *Rank*.—Growing luxuriantly.

1. 7. *A sacrilegious sound*.—Disturbing the solemn stillness of the scene.

1. 9. *Of other days*.—Of past ages.

1. 11. *Mighty mounds*.—Read "The Mound-Builders."

1. 15. *Disciplined*.—Cultured, civilized.

1. 17. *Pentelicus*.—A mountain in Greece, whence was obtained a very beautiful marble much used by the Greek sculptors.

1. 19. *The Parthenon*.—A magnificent temple on the Acropolis at Athens, was built of marble from the Pentelicus, but not upon that mountain, as the poet's words seem to imply.

1. 21-22. *Harly* yoke.—The poet thinks the bison (commonly known as the buffalo) may have been domesticated by the Mound-Builders.

1. 22. *Maned*.—The fore-parts of the bison are covered with long, coarse hair.

1. 31. *Prairie wolf*.—The coyote, a cowardly animal of the wolf tribe, still frequently seen on the prairies.

1. 33. *Gopher*.—The prairie dog, as it is com-

monly called, an animal of the same species as the ground-hog or wood-chuck, which it somewhat resembles, though it is much smaller in size. Gophers are very common in the less fertile parts of the prairies, where they congregate in such numbers that a large extent of prairie is often covered with the mounds of earth they throw up in making their burrows.

P. 153, l. 7. *Vultures*.—A repulsive bird allied to the hawk and eagle. It is the scavenger of the plains, feeding upon the bodies of dead animals.

1. 8. *Sepulchres*.—Usually places of burial; here places where the bodies of the dead were lying.

1. 23. *Quickening*.—Life-giving.

1. 29. *Gave back*.—Reflected.

1. 31. *Issues*.—The rivers that flow from them.

Oregon.—Another name for the Columbia river.

1. 33. *His little Venice*.—The city of Venice, built upon a crowded cluster of islets, at the head of the Adriatic. The houses are usually situated at the water's edge, and communication is maintained by means of boats which ply along the narrow channels among the islands. The dome-shaped houses of the beaver are generally built in irregular clusters in ponds, formed by means of dams which the animal constructs with marvellous skill.

1. 34. *Twice twenty leagues*, etc.—Herds of wild American bison no longer exist. A few of the animals may be seen in zoological gardens, and some, generally, I believe, crossed with domestic cattle, are bred for the sake of their hides.

P. 154, l. 4. *Quick*.—Literally means alert.

1. 6. *Gentle quadrupeds*—e.g., the gopher, the deer.

1. 7. *Birds*.—e.g., the little prairie owl, which is said to share the gopher's hole.

1. 8. *Sliding reptiles*.—Travellers on the prairies say that rattlesnakes are often found in the burrows of the gopher.

1. 9. *Startlingly*.—Seems to refer to the effect of the sight of the reptile itself rather than to that of its beauty.

1. 12. *With whom* deep.—The hive-bee was imported to America from Europe.

1. 13. *Savannas*.—See note on l. 3.

1. 14. *The golden age*.—Most people have traditions of a better time when the earth was the common property of man, and produced spontaneously all things necessary to his subsistence and enjoyment. This imaginary period was called by the Romans the golden age.

1. 16. *Domestic*.—Reminding him of home.

1. 17. *That advancing* deserts.—This vision has been realized already. There are now few portions of the prairie states that are not settled.

1. 24. *Breaks my dream*.—Dispels his visions, and brings him back to the realities of the scene before him.

A. W. B.

SHYLOCK vs. ANTONIO.*

(A BRIEF FOR PLAINTIFF ON APPEAL.)

BY CHARLES HENRY PHELPS.

(Continued.)

EVEN while the words are upon his lips, Antonio appears upon the scene, and, with a ready show of virtue, ignores the gain which he hopes to reap by the transaction, and poses as one who neither lends nor borrows, but who, to "supply the ripe wants of a friend," is willing to break a custom. But so clumsily does he conceal his contempt for the Hebrew that he also stirs the wrath of the latter, who exclaims:

"Signior Antonio, many a time and oft,
In the Rialto you have rated me
About my monies and my usances:
Still have I borne it with a patient shrug,
For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe;
You call me,—misbeliever, cut-throat, dog,
And spat upon my Jewish gaberdine,
And all for use of that which is mine own.
Well, then, it now appears you need my help;
Go to then; you come to me, and you say,
Shylock, we would have monies: You say so
You, that did void your rheum upon my beard,
And foot me, as you spurn a stranger cur
Over your threshold: monies is your suit.
What should I say to you? Should I not say,
Hath a dog money? is it possible
A cur can lend three thousand ducats? Or
Shall I bend low, and in a bondsman's key,

*The "Trial Scene" of the "Merchant of Venice" forms this year a part of so many examinations that we think our readers will not be sorry to see this reproduction of Mr. Phelps's clever article. It appeared originally in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April, 1886.