

## English.

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## ENGLISH LITERATURE.

THE EVENING CLOUD, BY JOHN WILSON.\*

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A cloud lay cradled near the setting sun ;  
A gleam of crimson tinged its braided snow ;  
Long had I watched the glory moving on,  
O'er the still radiance of the lake below.  
Tranquil its spirit seemed, and floated slow,—  
Even in its very motion there was rest ;  
While every breath of eve that chanced to blow  
Wafted the traveller to the beauteous West :—  
Emblem, methought of the departed soul,  
To whose white robe the gleam of bliss is given ;  
And, by the breath of Mercy made to roll  
Right onward to the golden gates of Heaven ;  
Where to the eye of faith, it peaceful lies,  
And tells to man his glorious destinies.

## I.—INTRODUCTION.

This poem may be found somewhat difficult by youthful minds, because of the rather far-fetched character of the comparison that constitutes its thought. To realize this comparison in the mind, it is necessary first to realize the elements that go to make it up; namely, the evening cloud and the soul winging its way to heaven. To make sure that the elements of the comparison are clearly realized by the class, it will be found most profitable to require from them, before the printed poem is introduced, a word-picture of a summer sunset, taking care that they have been asked to notice the sunset for a day or two before the lessons come up. Their picture can be made by the teacher's suggestion to include the glorious coloring of the west, the stillness of nature except for the breath of the evening breeze, the white cloud tinged with crimson floating slowly over the sky and mirrored in the glassy lake below. This done, the class will be asked, "If you had to say what this cloud reminded you of, what it was like, what it resembled, what answer could you give?" They will probably give answers more or less unsatisfactory; but let them have time to feel the difficulty. Then the teacher will find occasion to say that a Scotch poet once saw just such an evening cloud as they saw, and it reminded him of something different from anything they thought of. Let us see, he will add, just *what the poet saw* and *what he thought of*. The poem will then be read, and the class will be called upon to satisfy themselves from the poem as to the following:

## II.—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

WHAT THE POET SAW. [He saw the cloud "cradled," that is, *slowly moving*, and low down, in the west. The cloud was white as snow, but yet beautifully fashioned, patterned perhaps like the finest needle-work ("braided"). A flush of crimson from the red of the west just tinted ("tinged") its whiteness.] Where was he standing? Had he long stood there? What was he doing? What did he see standing there? [He saw "the glory," that is, the cloud with its glorious coloring, slowly floating over the sky, and on the placid surface of the lake before him he saw the picture of the cloud mirrored.] Have any of the class noticed objects mirrored in the water in that way? What were they? [Elsewhere our poet has a very pretty picture of a reflection in the water:—

"The placid lake that rested far below,  
Softly embosoming another sky."]

What is the condition for seeing such? [The absence of such a breeze as would ruffle the water.] What sort of breeze did the poet feel? [It was only a "breath," so that the lake was "still."] What color was the water? ["Radiant," from the reflected light of the west, which

it lay "below."] Does the cloud seem to the poet lifeless? [It appears to have life, a "spirit."] What kind of a spirit? That of the thunder or rain? [The spirit of peace, signified by the word "tranquil."] Describe its motion. [It was moving slowly ("cradled"), floating gradually towards the west. There was rest even in its motion.] How could that be? [It moved so quietly and peacefully that it appeared to rest even when moving. In a similar way, fine machinery is able to exercise prodigious force with grace and ease, while apparently using no effort, almost resting as it does it.] Describe the action of the breeze. [It was not a steady breeze, it was only a "breath" as it were of "evening." It did not blow regularly, but only now and again ("it chanced to blow"). Consequently it did not drive the cloud roughly before it, but only gently "wafted" it, journeying ("the traveller") towards the west, aglow with the setting sun ("beauteous West").]

WHAT THE POET THOUGHT OF. What did the cloud suggest to the poet? What words are understood before "emblem"? Define it as regards a nation's flag, the rose, the maple leaf, etc. What difference is there between these "emblems" and the emblem of the cloud for the soul? [Wilson regards the cloud as being *like* the soul in many respects; whereas the flag, rose, maple leaf are purely suggestive terms, not in the least like the objects suggested.] Explain "methought." [It is a compound word—*me + thought*, an impersonal verb, and really means "(it) to me seemed." It is not to be confused with the more common verb to think.] Explain "departed." What color does "gleam" imply? Whence does the gleam come? How does the cloud suggest this gleam? What is the "breath of mercy" that brings the soul nearer heaven? [Read Titus iii. 5, etc.] What is there in the evening scene emblematic of this mercy? Explain "roll." [Here simply "move forward," just as when we say, "The river rolls its waters to the sea."] What are the "gates of heaven?" [Read Revel. xxi. 12, 13, 21 and Matt. xvi. 19.] What is there in the evening scene emblematic of "the golden gates?" Explain "eye of faith." [The understanding and believing man. Read especially such verses as Eph. i. 18 and Heb. xi. 3.] What corresponds in the evening scene to the "eye of faith?" Explain "destinies." What "glorious destinies" does this view of the departed soul reveal to the believer?

Select the words in the poem that would scarcely be used in prose. Select the words that would have a slightly different form in prose. [Note that in poetry one is able ("poetic license") in a certain sense to violate the laws of grammar (cf. 'slow' for 'slowly').] Select the line or lines that you like best.

## III.—THE FORM OF THE POEM.

The class will read aloud the poem, making the accents by beating with the hand as in music, till they notice (1) That the syllables run in groups, each group in general having one unaccented syllable (x), followed by one accented syllable (˘),—each group or "foot" being called therefore an *Iambus* and the metre *Iambic metre*. (2) That each line has *five* of these groups, or is *Pentameter* (Gk. *penta*, five). (3) That there are fourteen lines. [These are three characteristics of the *Sonnet*.] They will note in addition (4) that the rhymes of the lines are a b a b c b c d e d e f f, which was almost the form Shakespeare used in his sonnets, and which make this form (or almost this form) to be called a *Shaksperian sonnet*. Compare the rhymes with those in the sonnet of the common and usual form on page 302 of the IV. Reader.

## IV.—BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

John Wilson (1785—1854), better known by the name of "Christopher North," with which he designates himself in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, was the son of a rich Scotch manufacturer. He graduated from Oxford, excelling in essays, poetry, and in all sorts of athletic sports. His love of the poet Wordsworth took him to West-

moreland, where he lived for eight years in the brilliant society of not only Wordsworth, but also Southey, Coleridge, and DeQuincey. But his fortune was dissipated by his uncle, and forced to adopt a profession, Wilson became an Edinburgh lawyer. Law was not so congenial as letters; so that when in 1817 *Blackwood's Magazine* was founded, he became a constant contributor, and for many years was its chief intellectual force. In 1820 he was appointed professor of moral philosophy in Edinburgh university. His works are chiefly *Lights and Shadows of Scottish Life* (1822), *The Trials of Margaret Lyndsay*, (1823), *The Foresters* (1825), and *Noctes Ambrosianae*, ('Ambrosial Nights'), which are imaginary dialogues of himself, his uncle, and the poet Hogg (see note to *The Skylark*) during nights spent at Ambrose's Tavern. His poetry is scarcely read to-day; but the memory of the author as a true-hearted, noble, manly character is still cherished.

## OUTSIDE READING FOR OUR PUPILS.

MISS M. A. WATT.

WHAT is the teacher's responsibility in the matter of supplementary reading for the boys and girls? There is really so much to be done in school now, that the mere mention of anything new can scarcely be tolerated. But this cannot be termed new matter; has it not always been the duty of the teacher to guide the children in their reading, even though many teachers have failed to recognize the responsibility. Certainly it has not been recognized, as too many grown persons can testify, and certainly we ourselves, who are teachers, have assumed far too little of it in our own schools. Some may flippantly say, "Let the parents attend to that, we are not paid to do that sort of thing!" and others may think it is none of their affair if the children learn their lessons and are promoted safely at the end of the term. But many parents are not capable of guiding their children in the selection of suitable reading, and a large number are not able to buy books for them, and the teacher who feels the responsibility of souls upon him cannot with a clear conscience shirk this care. But the care becomes such a pleasure when the growing mentality of the child responds, that the teacher who starts the work will become fascinated with it, and he will realize that it is a relief from the dull routine into which school work tends to fall to hear some boy tell of a book he has read or to find his original essay bringing out the result of his association with some cultured writer. The specific knowledge of general subjects must become enlarged and the expression of all knowledge be facilitated by reading outside of the school-room. A pupil might be encouraged to make a selection, under the teacher's approval, of some extract which he could read on a Friday afternoon, and this would be an incentive to others to read with a degree of criticism. There are many homes where no books are ever bought for the children's reading and many a bright family grow up limited in their mental outlook, because there was no one to suggest or guide them into the open fields of literature. It is a matter of regret that there should not be a certain sum set apart annually in every school section, especially in the country, for the purchase of cheaply bound books of good literature, which could be lent to the pupils, say as rewards for good conduct, each week, and thus send into hundreds of homes literature of an elevating, broadening character. The short-sighted ratepayer who objects to school taxes ("he has no children to send to school,") might raise his voice against it, but the same answer that is given to his usual objection would have equal force. "The better the character of the young people of the neighborhood, the more valuable your property must be and the safer." Many an empty hour would have a suitable employment and the fascination of an interesting book might keep the boys at home at night when otherwise they might be in unprofitable company, learning what is too easily acquired—"indifference to everything good or sacred." Many teachers have tried to fill this crying want, but the not very munificent salary of the public school teacher is very sensitive to drains upon it, and each book bought means a deprivation in some way to the teacher himself. The above suggestion is offered in the hope that some true teacher

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