

P. S. Leaving Literature.

THE CLOUD.

The cloud is a chorus of voices rather than a solo. One writer has said, "Each fairy figure in this lovely throng sings its mission to earth or its frolics in the air, and they are all a tangled circle of floating fair-limbed creatures, laughing and gay, or grave and serious, quite capriciously, as becomes their slight textures. A hundred songs are here, a thousand pictures, all fleeting, none pausing longer than

'An eagle alit one moment may sit.'

The critics have said, "The poem has no moral." Let us see, "The cloud tells of the vicissitudes of life, of its complexity, its joy, its peace, its activities, its despair, its passions, and its abysses; it is no longer a poem, it is a soul, a living, breathing, laughing, sobbing, storming human soul, with thousands of moods and terrible mysteries; it is a fitful fever; it does not know whence it comes, though pretending to tell, nor whither it goes, though pretending to die; but it knows surely that it is immortal, and that, because when men say it is dead, the conditions are most favorable for a new birth, it can never die."

The plan of the poem is as follows:

- Stanza 1—The summer cloud.
- Stanza 2—The winter cloud.
- Stanza 3—The morning and the evening clouds.
- Stanza 4—The night clouds.
- Stanza 5—The storm clouds.
- Stanza 6—The immortality of the cloud.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

STANZA I. THE SUMMER CLOUD.

In lines 1 and 2 the cloud sings of itself as a water-carrier.

In lines 3 and 4 it becomes an attendant on the sleeping leaves.

In lines 5-8 it changes to a bird or spirit.

In lines 9 and 10 it works as a thresher.

And in lines 12 and 13 changed into a merry, jocund spirit, it passes away, laughing at its own fickle changefulness.

What a wanton, sportive, playful, merry cherub the cloud is!

When laid.—Hanging listlessly as the leaves do during the hot day.

Noon-day dreams.—An allusion to the belief that plants grow during the night and sleep during the day.

From my wings are shaken.—A beautiful metaphor. Can you not see the dew as particles shaken from the wings of this beneficent cloud-spirit? Do not try to reconcile this poetic statement with the true scientific explanation of the formation of dew.

Mother's breast.—The bosom of the earth.

Dances about the sun.—Refers to the earth's regular motion (dance) around the sun, once every

year. Notice the contrast between the rest of the bud sleeping on the breast of Mother Earth and her ceaseless motion.

Flail of the lashing hail.—A summer hail-storm beats out the grain in the fields.

Whiten the green plains.—Covered with accumulated hail-stones.

I dissolve it.—Let the hail fall in the form of rain.

And laugh as I pass in thunder.—The laugh is not the thunder-peal, but rather refers to the glad, green appearance everything puts on after the storm, or to the golden gleams which border the dissolving clouds as the storm passes away. The cloud laughs because of its fickle changefulness. The laugh is the joyous, bubbling merriment of a kindly cherub, not the heartlessness of a revengeful demon glorying in the damage he has done.

STANZA II.—THE WINTER CLOUD.

I sift the snow.—How fittingly this describes the manner in which snow falls!

Pines groan aghast.—Under the weight of the snow.

While I sleep.—We might expect the cloud to be awake and active in the storm, but "sleep" has been suggested by the word "night." This at once suggests a "pillow" to sleep on, and "arms" to sleep in, and the figure is complete. You will notice that "this assigning of personality to inanimate objects," this making of things which are dead act as though they were alive, gives great spirit and vividness to the poem. It is called personal metaphor.

Pillow white.—This is the snow on the mountains, the dark, heavy storm-clouds seeming to rest on the mountain tops for support, and thus use the snow-clad mountain for a "pillow."

Sublime.—Majestic, stately.

Lightning, my pilot.—The cloud is now a ship, the lightning shows the way.

In a cavern under is fettered the thunder.—The truthfulness of this description of the lightning as sitting above the thunder will be apparent to anyone who has watched the lightning playing on the face of a lowering storm-cloud. "Fettered" suggests "struggles" and "howls." We would say "by fits," not "at fits." You need not wonder at the thunder in winter when you remember that it is an Italian scene, not a Canadian scene, which Shelley is picturing to us.

Lured by the love of the Genii.—Genii were, according to ancient belief, the guardian divinities of the seas, lakes, mountains, etc. Here the "Genus" is the cloud's shadow which he sees in the water. The meaning, then, is, "The cloud floats over patches of water and of land; in the water the cloud sees his image, but not so on the land; as, however, the image reappears whenever he again comes to water, he concludes the spirits follow him underground; hence,

"Over the rills and the crags and the hills,
Over the lakes and the plains,
Wherever he dream, under mountain or stream,
The spirit he loves remains."