

## THE FATHER OF AMERICAN SONG.



PART from any critical considerations of poetic genius and literary merit, the fact of a man having been the first of a nation's versifiers attaches a certain importance to his name and value to his works. For this reason—if for no other—William Cullen Bryant stands foremost in the ranks of American literary men.

He was born on November 3rd, 1794, at Cummingtown, Mass., a fair little town nestling in the bosom of the Hampshire hills. Here it was, no doubt, in these picturesque surroundings, that Bryant was inspired with thoughts that characterize all his writings, and emphatically stamp him "the Poet of Nature."

His father, a fairly well-to-do doctor, and a descendant of old Puritan stock, was very proud of his profession, and, in order that his son also might become a disciple of Æsculapius, he had him christened William Cullen, in honor of a celebrated medical authority, who had departed this life four years before.

But Fortune, the ever-watchful mistress of human affairs, saw that if the child followed in the footsteps of its father, the Muses, her most devoted friends, would indeed lose an ardent follower, and she disposed things accordingly. The youth at an early age exhibited very great precocity. Possessed of all the advantages that his father's library could afford him, he became an ardent reader of Pope, Thomson and Cowper. Judging from some of his earlier poems, we may easily perceive that Pope held foremost place in William Bryant's youthful affection.

Worthy Dr. Bryant bore his disappointment with equanimity, and seeing with real Puritanical wisdom that it would be folly to thwart the child in his choice of a calling, he instructed him

in the art of verse-making. At the age of nine, the youthful poet began his literary career. From this until the age of twelve, he wrote several poems which were then collected in the form of a volume and read by himself with great success before his father and invited guests.

Politics, during the early years of Bryant's life, occupied largely public attention, and when in 1807 Jefferson, the President of the United States, laid an embargo on American shipping, his act was roundly denounced, and by none more than by Master Bryant himself, who, prompted no doubt by his father, ridiculed it in his poem "The Embargo; or Sketches of the Times."

This poem was published in book form, and its first edition received an immense sale; but its readers were indeed doubtful as to whether the book's author was a youth who had but just entered his teens, as was stated in the preface. This doubt, however, was soon dispelled by Bryant's friends, who announced that they were ready to swear as to the age of the author.

In the year 1810, the yet youthful poet entered the Sophomore class at William's College, where he spent several years in diligent study. His sole ambition during this time was to pass from William's to Yale, and there gain all possible honors. But in this he was sorely disappointed, for his father, though very desirous of having the boy reach the highest pinnacle of fame in learning, had by this time found that his means would no longer permit him to give his son all the advantages that only a University course can bestow.

However, he secured for him a place in a country lawyer's office, where for several years the boy prepared for the bar. It was in his eighteenth year, while engaged in this study, that William Cullen Bryant wrote his imperishable poem "Thanatopsis; or a Vision of Death," and by it eminently proved himself to be