

1832

TO A CLOUD

William Cullen Bryant

Bryant, William Cullen (1794-1878) - American poet and editor of the New York Evening Post who practiced law before devoting his life to writing. A master of blank verse, Bryant's earliest works are considered his best. To a Cloud (1832) - Opening lines: Beautiful cloud! with folds so soft and fair, / Swimming in the pure quiet air!...

TO A CLOUD

Beautiful cloud! with folds so soft and fair,
 Swimming in the pure quiet air!
 Thy fleeces bathed in sunlight, while below
 Thy shadow o'er the vale moves slow;
 Where, midst their labor, pause the reaper train,
 As cool it comes along the grain.
 Beautiful cloud! I would I were with thee
 In thy calm way o'er land and sea;
 To rest on thy unrolling skirts, and look
 On Earth as on an open book;
 On streams that tie her realms with silver bands,
 And the long ways that seam her lands;
 And hear her humming cities, and the sound,
 Of the great ocean breaking round.
 Ay- I would sail, upon thy air-borne car,
 To blooming regions distant far,
 To where the sun of Andalusia shines
 On his own olive-groves and vines,
 Or the soft lights of Italy's clear sky
 In smiles upon her ruins lie.
 But I would woo the winds to let us rest
 O'er Greece, long fettered and oppressed,
 Whose sons at length have heard the call that comes
 From the old battle-fields and tombs,
 And risen, and drawn the sword, and on the foe
 Have dealt the swift and desperate blow,
 And the Othman power is cloven, and the stroke
 Has touched its chains, and they are broke.
 Ay, we would linger, till the sunset there
 Should come, to purple all the air,
 And thou reflect upon the sacred ground
 The ruddy radiance streaming round.
 Bright meteor! for the summer noontide made!
 Thy peerless beauty yet shall fade.
 The sun, that fills with light each glistening fold,
 Shall set, and leave thee dark and cold:
 The blast shall rend thy skirts, or thou mayst frown
 In the dark heaven when storms come down;
 And weep in rain, till man's inquiring eye
 Miss thee, forever, from the sky.

THE END