

1835

TO THE APENNINES

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 the Apennines (1835) - Bryant finds a symbol for his conception of liberty and the spirit of freedom. Opening lines: Your peaks are beautiful, ye Apennines! / In the soft light of these serenest skies;...

TO THE APENNINES

Your peaks are beautiful, ye Apennines!
 In the soft light of these serenest skies;
 From the broad highland region, black with pines,
 Fair as the hills of Paradise they rise,
 Bathed in the tint Peruvian slaves behold
 In rosy flushes on the virgin gold.

There, rooted to the aerial shelves that wear
 The glory of a brighter world, might spring
 Sweet flowers of heaven to scent the unbreathed air,
 And heaven's fleet messengers might rest the wing
 To view the fair earth in its summer sleep,
 Silent, and cradled by the glimmering deep.

Below you lie men's sepulchres, the old
 Etrurian tombs, the graves of yesterday;
 The herd's white bones lie mixed with human mould,
 Yet up the radiant steeps that I survey
 Death never climbed, nor life's soft breath, with pain,

Was yielded to the elements again.

Ages of war have filled these plains with fear;
 How oft the hind has started at the clash
 Of spears, and yell of meeting armies here,
 Or seen the lightning of the battle flash
 From clouds, that rising with the thunder's sound,
 Hung like an earth-born tempest o'er the ground!

Ah me! what armed nations-
 Asian horde, And Libyan host, the Scythian and the Gaul
 Have swept your base and through your passes poured,
 Like ocean-tides uprising at the call
 Of tyrant winds- against your rocky side
 The bloody billows dashed, and howled, and died!

How crashed the towers before beleaguering foes,
 Sacked cities smoked and realms were rent in twain;
 And commonwealths against their rivals rose,
 Trode out their lives and earned the curse of Cain!

While, in the noiseless air and light that flowed
Round your fair brows, eternal Peace abode.

Here pealed the impious hymn, and altar-flames
Rose to false gods, a dream-begotten throng,
Jove, Bacchus, Pan, and earlier, fouler names;
While, as the unheeding ages passed along,
Ye, from your station in the middle skies,
Proclaimed the essential Goodness, strong and wise.

In you the heart that sighs for freedom seeks
Her image; there the winds no barrier know,
Clouds come and rest and leave your fairy peaks;
While even the immaterial Mind, below,
And Thought, her winged offspring, chained by power,
Pine silently for the redeeming hour.

THE END