

William Cullen Bryant

~~And sound of swaying branches, and the voice
Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
By the road-side and the borders of the brook,
Nod gaily to each other; glossy leaves
Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
Were on them yet, and silver waters break
Into small waves and sparkle as he comes.~~

*An Indian at the Burying-Place
of His Fathers* (1824)

It is the spot I came to seek,—
My fathers' ancient burial-place,
Ere from these vales, ashamed and weak,
Withdrew our wasted race.
It is the spot,—I know it well—
Of which our old traditions tell.

For here the upland bank sends out
A ridge toward the river side;
I know the shaggy hills about,
The meadows smooth and wide;
The plains, that, toward the southern sky,
Fenced east and west by mountains lie.

A white man, gazing on the scene,
Would say a lovely spot was here,
And praise the lawns so fresh and green
Between the hills so sheer.
I like it not—I would the plain
Lay in its tall old groves again.

The sheep are on the slopes around,
The cattle in the meadows feed,
And laborers turn the crumbling ground,
Or drop the yellow seed,
And prancing steeds, in trappings gay,
Whirl the bright chariot o'er the way.

Methinks it were a nobler sight
 To see these vales in woods arrayed,
 Their summits in the golden light,
 Their trunks in grateful shade,
 And herds of deer, that bounding go
 O'er rills and prostrate trees below.

And then to mark the lord of all,
 The forest hero, trained to wars,
 Quivered and plumed, and lithe and tall,
 And seamed with glorious scars,
 Walk forth, amid his reign, to dare
 The wolf, and grapple with the bear.

This bank, in which the dead were laid,
 Was sacred when its soil was ours;
 Hither the silent Indian maid
 Brought wreaths of beads and flowers,
 And the gray chief and gifted seer
 Worshipped the god of thunders here.

But now the wheat is green and high
 On clods that hid the warrior's breast,
 And scattered in the furrows lie
 The weapons of his rest,
 And there, in the loose sand, is thrown
 Of his large arm the mouldering bone.

Ah, little thought the strong and brave,
 Who bore their lifeless chieftain forth;
 Or the young wife, that weeping gave
 Her first-born to the earth,
 That the pale race, who waste us now,
 Among their bones should guide the plough.

They waste us—aye—like April snow
 In the warm noon, we shrink away;
 And fast they follow, as we go

Towards the setting day,—
 Till they shall fill the land, and we
 Are driven into the western sea.

But I behold a fearful sign,
 To which the white men's eyes are blind;
 Their race may vanish hence, like mine,
 And leave no trace behind,
 Save ruins o'er the region spread,
 And the white stones above the dead.

Before these fields were shorn and tilled,
 Full to the brim our rivers flowed;
 The melody of waters filled
 The fresh and boundless wood;
 And torrents dashed and rivulets played,
 And fountains spouted in the shade.

Those grateful sounds are heard no more,
 The springs are silent in the sun,
 The rivers, by the blackened shore,
 With lessening current run;
 The realm our tribes are crushed to get
 May be a barren desert yet.

After a Tempest

The day had been a day of wind and storm;—
 The wind was laid, the storm was overpast,—
 And stooping from the zenith, bright and warm
 Shone the great sun on the wide earth at last.
 I stood upon the upland slope and cast
 My eye upon a broad and beautiful scene,
 Where the vast plain lay girt by mountains vast,
 And hills o'er hills lifted their heads of green,
 With pleasant vales scooped out and villages between.