BRYANT AND THE BERKSHIRE HILLS.

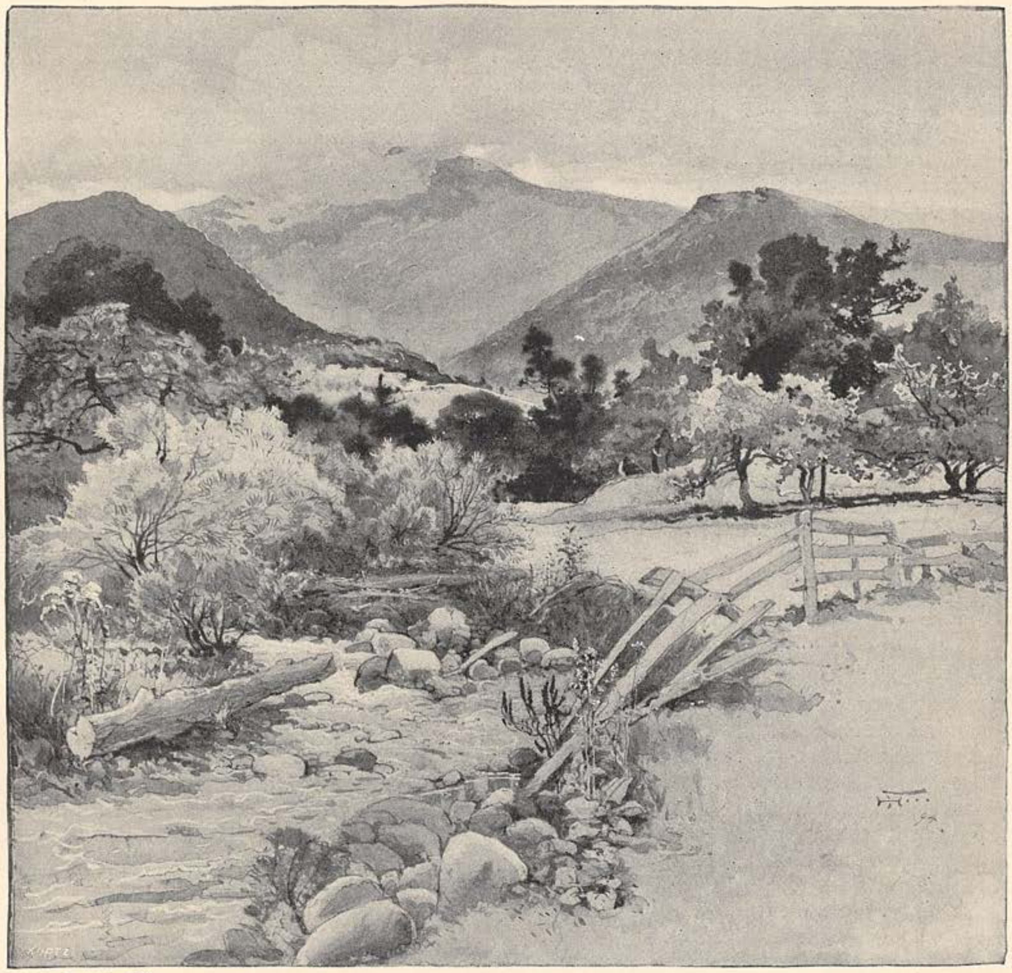
WITH PICTURES BY HARRY FENN.

MAN and nature have both done their part to give to the Berkshire region of Massachusetts a charm and character peculiarly its own.

A spur of the Green Mountains, running down through Massachusetts and losing itself in Connecticut and New York, gives to the country dignity at least, if not grandeur. In the north, Saddleback, the loftiest mountain in the State, overlooks the college village of Williamstown and the manufacturing towns of Adams and North Adams, while Mount Everett, otherwise called the Dome, dominates the south. The Housatonic River, rising near Pittsfield, winds in many and beautiful curves through the valleys; and meadow, mountain, and river lend their several charms to a diversified and satisfying landscape. In no other part of America do the wildness of nature and the finish of cultivation more beautifully blend: nowhere do they lie in closer contact. A severe but invigorating climate gives energy to mind and body; the somber grandeur of the winter alternates with a wealth of summer life, when the laurel clothes the hillsides with its tender glow and the bobolink floods with song the meadows, which the blossoms fill with beauty; abundant water-power tempts enterprise into varied industries, and a not infertile soil affords a livelihood to a sturdy farming race, always the basis of a strong and stable community. It is a region for which nature has done much, blending both her sterner and her kindlier forces to produce a country the charm of which has long appealed to many of the most observant and cultivated minds both in the Old World and the New. It has been called the Piedmont of America.

And this region, so favored by nature, owes much of its character and interest to its history as well. Settled later than the sea-coast, the western part of the State was in its beginnings made up of more varied elements than the eastern. From the valley of the Connecticut colonists pushed through the mountain-gaps into that of the Housatonic; the hills attracted settlers from the flat and sandy lands of Cape Cod; while the Dutch from New York have left in name and character their impress upon the Berkshire people of to-day. Spiritual and intellectual forces were largely prominent in the laying of its foundations, and such forces have contributed and continued their influences ever since. Missionary zeal, represented by such names as Eliot and Sargeant, founded Stockbridge. Jonathan Edwards here spent the years which represented the prime and fullness of his powers. Ephraim Williams, the fighter in the French and Indian war, dying on the battlefield, left his fortune to plant and endow the college which bears his name. Mark Hopkins, Berkshire born and bred, another Arnold of Rugby, set his stamp upon a whole generation; throughout its history, soldiers, saints, and scholars have both represented and impressed its life. The reasonings of Jonathan Edwards, which for good and evil have had so great an influence upon theological thought, found their most powerful expression in his treatise on the will, which was written while he lived in Stockbridge. Lenox heard the last public utterances of Channing; his successor, Orville Dewey, born a hundred years ago (1794), at Sheffield, long made that place his home; and there, too, were born the two Barnards, one the president of Columbia College, the other the soldier scholar of our Civil War. Oliver Wendell Holmes lived for years at Pittsfield. Catharine Maria Sedgwick drew around her at Stockbridge and Lenox a distinguished circle of the best literary society of our own country, and many cultivated wanderers from the Old World. Fanny Kemble here made for years her home. Longfellow, Lowell, Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Beecher, G. P. R. James, George William Curtis, Matthew Arnold, and others lingered among and loved the beauty of these hills, where plain living and high thinking have found noble expression in the past, and where here and there they still survive, spite of the inflowing tide of wealth and luxury that floods the Berkshire of to-day.

It is a little land, but one which has contributed more than its share to the forces which have shaped and are shaping the life of our country and our time. Before the Philadelphia Congress of 1776, or the famous Mecklenburg Convention of 1775, a congress of deputies from the several towns in Berkshire met at Stockbridge, John Ashley being president, Theodore Sedgwick secretary, and some sixty delegates being in attendance. A covenant was agreed upon, to be signed by the people of the country, engaging "not to import, purchase, or consume, or suffer any person for, by, or under them, to import, purchase, or consume



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

GREYLOCK FROM THE NORTH, NEAR WILLIAMSTOWN.

in any manner whatever, any goods, wares, or manufactures which should arrive in America from Great Britain, from and after the first day of October next, or such other time as should be agreed upon by American Congress; nor any goods which should be ordered from thence from and after that day until our charter and Constitutional rights should be restored." Before the battles of Concord and Bunker Hill a regiment of minute-men had been formed, and the Berkshire men were on the march for Cambridge and Bunker Hill the day after the news of the battle of Lexington was received. In the trying times and critical periods which followed the Revolution, the hardest blow which was struck at Shays's rebellion was at Sheffield. It was Mumbet, the ex-slave and faithful servant in the Sedgwick family, whose case drew forth the judicial decision that the soil of Massachusetts could not hold a slave. Under the haystack at Williamstown began the movement which has girdled the world with a chain of American missions, while in Stockbridge was born and now lies buried the man over whose grave are carved the simple and significant words, "Cyrus West Field, to whose courage, energy, and perseverance the world owes the Atlantic cable." In a little study, hardly larger than a closet, looking out upon Bear Mountain was done much of the work of the codifying of procedure and of laws which the civilized world associates with the name of David Dudley Field. Yale University boasts that three of the nine judges who sit upon the Supreme bench of the United States are her graduates; one third of those nine judges went to school in the single village of Stockbridge. The esthetic movement which finds expression in numberless village improvement societies all over the land began in Berkshire; the Laurel Hill Society of Stockbridge is the oldest of them all. The wood pulp on which the modern printed page so much depends was first made in the town of Lee.

And so we might go on, were it not that we might seem to be wandering from our subject, which is literary Berkshire. But it is not easy to speak of literary Berkshire merely. The forces which have made it what it is are so complex, its natural charms are so blended in their influence with the conditions of its moral, intellectual, and social life, that its literature is an expression and outcome of that life, and difficult to consider as a thing apart.

The great name which we associate with Berkshire is that of Bryant. At Williams College his only college days were passed. Though he cannot be called with exactness a Berkshire man, he was born in sight of the Berkshire Hills across the Hampshire border, at Cummington. There was spent most of his life up to his twentieth year. He entered Williams as a sophomore in 1810, but remained only seven months. The beauty of his person, his reputation for genius, and the dignity and grace of his manner made him a marked figure among his fellows; and had he chosen, he might have won their affection as a comrade and made his mark as a scholar. But he was not content, and in May, 1811, he retired. Something in the atmosphere of the place and of his surroundings he found uncongenial, and he betook himself once more to the retirement of his father's house at Cummington, with a Parthian shot behind him as he left, in the shape of a satiric poem upon the town and college, which his friends, out of regard for the fame both of his college and himself, did not for half a century permit to see the light or know the touch of printer's ink. He lived in West College, the oldest of the colleges, and room number eleven on the third floor is reputed to be the one which he occupied. Years later the college gave him degrees, and enrolled him among her graduates. His desire was to enter Yale, and it is pathetic to know that it was the narrowness of his father's means—himself a scholar and a cultivated gentleman—which prevented him from carrying out his earnest desire.

To this part of his life belong "Thanatopsis" and the "Ode to a Waterfowl." Bryant was only seventeen or eighteen years old when he wrote the former. It was composed, not, as tradition at one time had it, in Flora's Glen, a ravine not far from Williamstown, but in the woods at Cummington shortly after his return. It is interesting to trace the course of his thought which found utterance in "Thanatopsis." His biographer says, quoting from his autobiography:

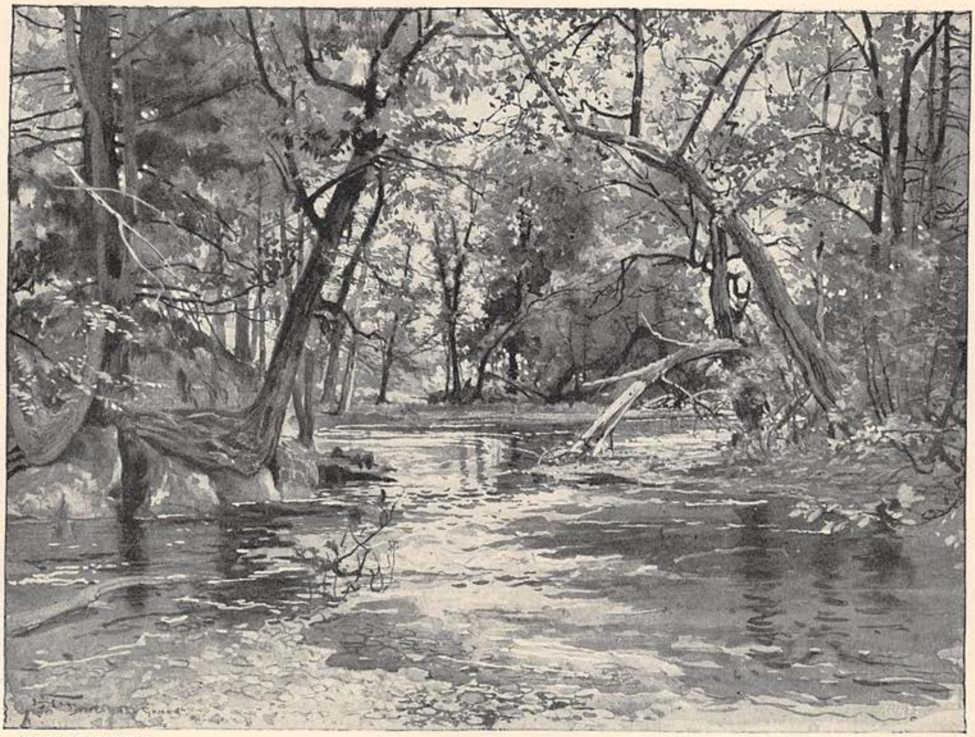
> He had been engaged, as he says, in comparing Blair's poem of "The Grave" with another of the same cast by Bishop Porteus; and his mind was also considerably occupied with a recent volume of Kirke White's verses—those "Melodies of Death," to use a phrase from the ode to the Rosary. It was in the autumn; the blue of the summer sky had faded into gray, and the brown earth was heaped with sere and withered emblems of the departed glory of the year. As he trod upon the hollow-sounding ground, in the loneliness of the woods, and among the prostrate trunks of trees, that for generations had been mouldering into dust, he thought how the vast solitudes about him were filled with the same sad tokens of decay. He asked himself, as the thought expanded in his mind, What, indeed, is the whole earth but a great sepulcher of once living things; and its skies and stars, but the witnesses and decorations of a tomb? All that ever trod its surface, even they who preceded the kings and patriarchs of the ancient world, the teeming populations of buried cities that tradition itself has forgotten, are mingled with its soil. All who tread it now in the flush of beauty, hope, and joy, will soon lie down with them, and all who are yet to tread it in ages still unknown, . . . will join the innumerable hosts that have gone the dusky way.
>
> While his mind was yet tossing with the thought, he hurried home, and endeavored to paint it to the eye, and render it in music to the ear. . . . This poem, for which he coined a name from the Greek, was, says the poet Stoddard, "the greatest poem ever written by so young a man.". . . And as it came out of the heart of our primeval woods, so it first gave articulate voice to the genius of the New World, which is yet, as the geologists tell us, older than the Old.

To these early years belongs also the "Ode to a Waterfowl." That, too, was written amid these Northern hills. When the time had come for Bryant to begin his work as a lawyer, his first venture was at Plainfield, a hamlet only seven miles from his father's home. On December 15, 1815, says his biographer,

> He went over to the place to make the necessary inquiries. He says in a letter that he walked up the hills very forlorn and desolate indeed, not knowing what was to become of him in the big world, which grew bigger as he ascended, and yet darker with the coming on of night. The sun had already set, leaving behind it one of those brilliant seas of chrysolite and opal which often flood the New England skies; and while he was looking upon the rosy splendor with rapt admiration, a solitary bird made wing along the illuminated horizon. He watched the lone wanderer until it was lost in the distance, asking himself whither it had come and to what far home it was flying. When he went to the house where he was to stop for the night, his mind was still full of what he had seen and felt, and he wrote those lines as imperishable as our language, "The Waterfowl."

But at Plainfield he stayed only eight months, and then Berkshire once more claimed him. He was invited to a partnership with a young lawyer named George H. Ives of Great Barrington, and at once accepted the invitation, making the journey, probably, on foot. He writes to Miss Catharine M. Sedgwick in after years:

> The woods were in all the glory of autumn, and I well remember, as I passed through Stockbridge, how much I was struck by the beauty of the smooth, green meadows on the banks of that lovely river, which winds near the Sedgwick family mansion, the Housatonic, and whose gently flowing waters seemed tinged with the gold and crimson of the trees that overhung them. I admired no less the contrast between this soft scene and the steep, craggy hills that overlooked it, clothed with their many-colored forests. I had never before seen the southern part of Berkshire, and congratulated myself on being a resident of so picturesque a region.



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

GREEN RIVER, NEAR GREAT BARRINGTON, WHERE THE POEM OF THAT NAME WAS WRITTEN.

His health had probably something to do with his removal to Great Barrington. It is hard to realize, as one recalls the astonishing vigor and vitality of his old age, that as a young man he should have apparently been a consumptive. He says of himself that he had been wasted to a shadow by a complaint of the lungs, probably a pulmonary weakness that had already assailed his father and a young and favorite sister, whose death occurred a year or two after her marriage, and was probably the occasion of the poem beginning,

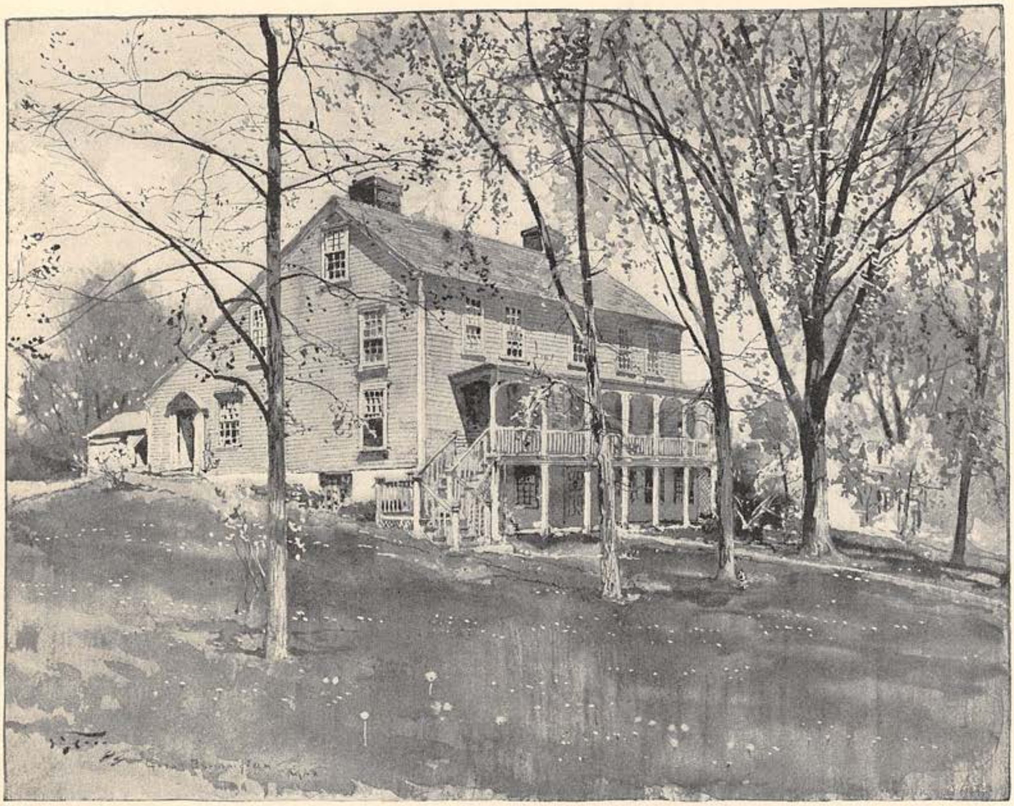
> Ay, thou art for the grave; thy glances shine
> Too brightly to shine long.

His health improved, however, and he worked faithfully and diligently at his profession. But his heart was not in it, nor did the improvement in his income keep pace with that of his health. He had not yet found his life-work, and he was destined to be dissatisfied until he had. He writes to an old friend:

> You ask whether I am pleased with my profession. Alas! Sir, the Muse was my first love, and the remains of that passion which is not *rooted out* nor chilled into extinction, will always, I fear, cause me to look coldly upon the severe beauties of Themis. Yet I tame myself to its labors as well as I can, and have endeavored to discharge with punctuality and attention such of the duties of my profession as I am capable of performing.

And so he did, and not only performed the duties of his profession, but was faithful to his responsibilities as a citizen. Once more we quote his biography:

> On the 9th of March, 1819, he was elected one of its [Great Barrington's] tithing men, whose duties consisted in keeping order in the churches, and enforcing the observance of the Sabbath. I may add that soon afterward he was chosen town clerk by a vote of 82 out of 102. His principal function in this capacity was to keep account of the town's doings, such as the appointment of selectmen, sur-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

HOUSE IN WHICH BRYANT WAS MARRIED, GREAT BARRINGTON.

veyors of the highway, fence viewers, field drivers, and hog reeves. One may still see his records at Great Barrington, where they form an object of considerable curiosity to summer visitors. Written in a neat and flexible hand, it is remarked that almost the only blot is where he registers his own marriage, and the only interlineation where in giving the birth of his first child he had left out the name of the mother. . . . His salary as clerk was five dollars per annum, at which rate he held the place for the period of five years—all the time that he remained in the village. A more important dignity, conferred upon him by the Governor of the Commonwealth, was that of Justice of the Peace, empowered to hear and try small causes as an inferior local court. In this character, it appears, he performed the marriage ceremony twice, for contracting parties who objected to the service of the usual clergyman because they differed from him in religious opinion. An old gentleman still living makes it a boast that he was "jined to his first old woman by Squire Bryant."

One little incident may not be without interest. It was Mr. Bryant's duty as town clerk to publish the banns of marriage in the church, which was generally done by reading them aloud; but in his own case he pinned the required notice on the door of the vestibule, and kept carefully out of sight.

It is not easy, after all these years, to learn very much as to the details of his Great Barrington life. His biographer says that he "was commonly gentle, courteous, and polite; but he allowed of no familiarities, and impertinence or vulgarism he rebuked on the spot, no matter who the offender. He was punctual in going to church, owning half a pew in the Congregational Church, but he was terribly prone to pick the sermon all to pieces." He was courteous, and in a way social, but had few intimates, and lived much by himself and among his books. He loved out-of-door life. He was fond of going into the woods, by himself or with some congenial friend. The best botanist in Berkshire, he knew every tree and shrub and flower; with an exquisite sense of all that was grand and beautiful in nature, he was able in a rare degree to read her secrets and understand her mysteries and to divine those harmonies of hers too fine for human ear. He loved to people in his imagination the surrounding solitudes with their earlier occupants, and to dwell upon the legends and histories of their Indian possessors.

Monument Mountain has preserved one of these legends; the "Indian at the Burial-place of his Fathers" is full of the spirit of that past.

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.

He used often to make his way across the hills from the village to a spot upon the banks of Green River in what is now the estate of the late J. Milton Mackie, where his favorite seat was upon the twisted roots of a large tree which overhung the stream, and there it was that he wrote the poem "Green River." The illustration by Mr. Harry Fenn on page 371 gives an admirable idea of the place as it now is.

Yet pure its waters — its shallows are bright
With colored pebbles and sparkles of light,
And clear the depths where its eddies play,
And dimples deepen and whirl away,
And the plane-tree's speckled arms o'ershoot
The swifter current that mines its root.

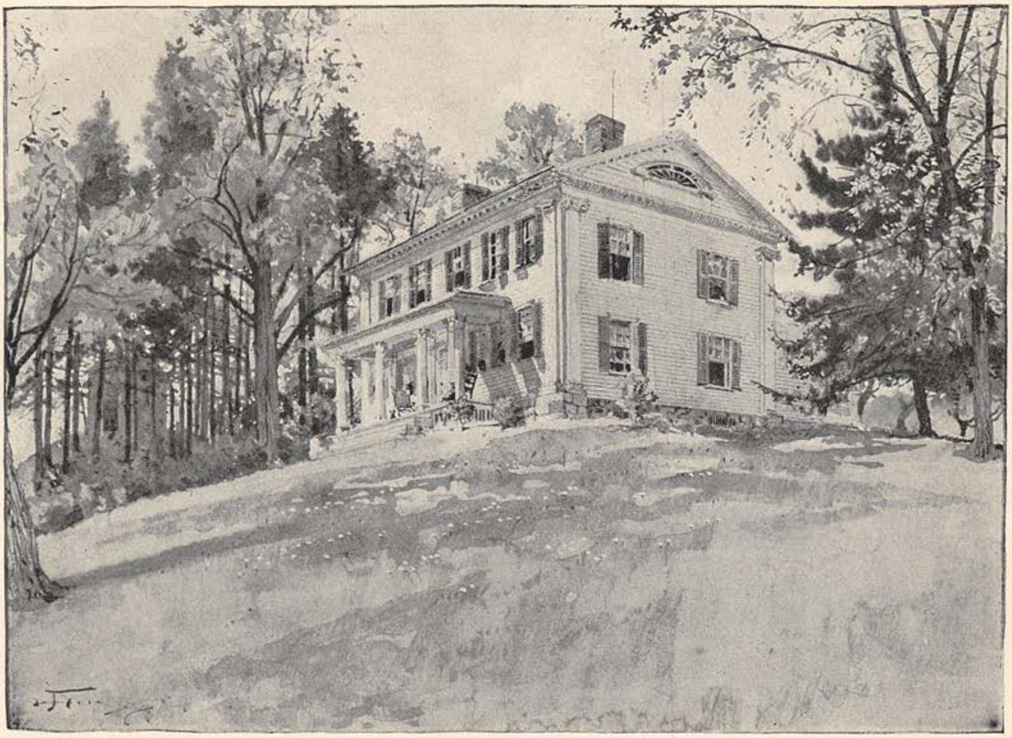
. . . . . .

Though forced to drudge for the dregs of men
And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen,
And mingle among the jostling crowd,
Where the sons of strife are subtle and loud —
I often come to this quiet place,
To breathe the airs that ruffle thy face,
And gaze upon thee in silent dream,
For in thy lonely and lovely stream
An image of that calm life appears
That won my heart in my greener years.

The Green River seems always to have lingered in his memory. As late as June 19, 1869, he wrote to his friend Mr. John H. Gourlie:

> You spoke of going to Green River the day after writing your letter. If you had given me more notice I would have sent my compliments, for we were once well acquainted, though I dare say Green River has forgotten me by this time.

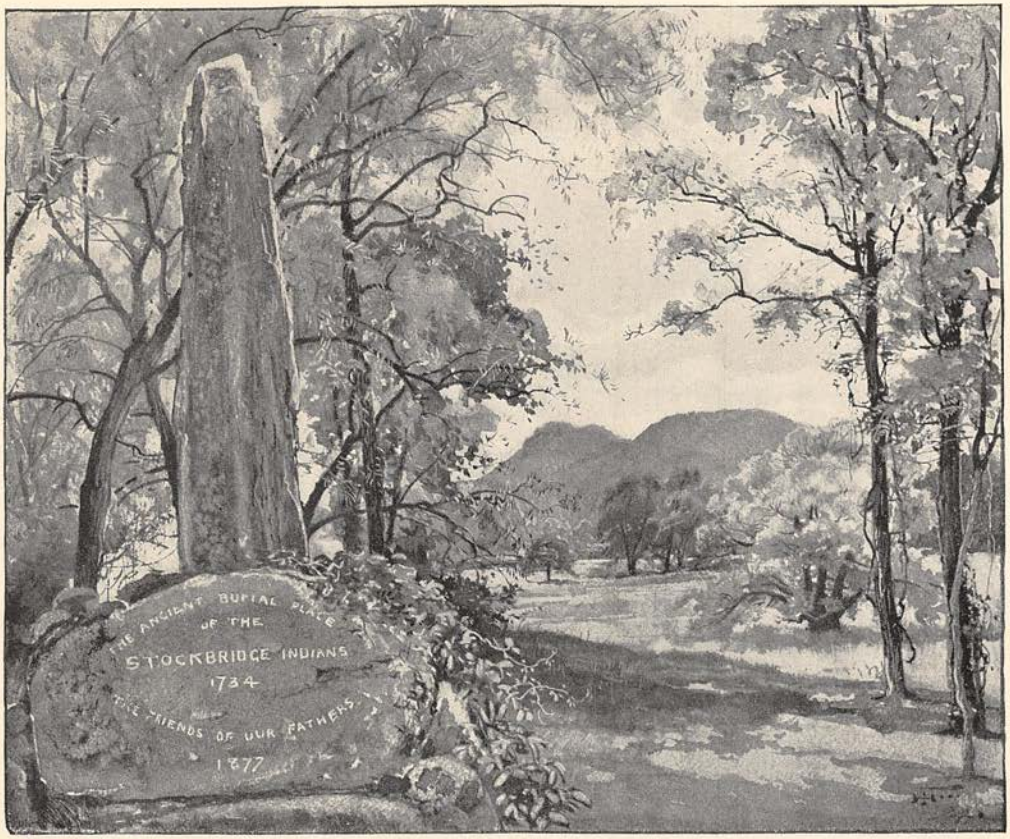
There is a touch of reality in the first lines of the stanza last quoted which throws light upon his frame of mind. His aversion to the practical side of his profession was steadily growing. The love of letters was ever stronger with him than the love of the law, and he felt deeply the contrast between the theory of the majesty of the law and its actual workings in the courts. The outcome of a particular case in which he was engaged did special violence to his sense of right and justice; and at last, after five years' residence at Great Barrington, he flung down his law-books, and set his face toward New York, specially encouraged thereto by one for whom he felt the greatest admiration and reverence, Mr. Henry D. Sedgwick, though he had been tempted to make his home in Bos-



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

HOUSE IN WHICH BRYANT LIVED, GREAT BARRINGTON.

ton, where Allston, Pierpont, Sprague, Dana, and others drew him toward a circle whose poetic and literary charm had strong attractions for him. But New York presented on the whole the stronger inducements, and to New York from this time forth his life belongs.



DRAWN BY HARRY FENN.

THE ANCIENT BURIAL-PLACE OF THE STOCKBRIDGE INDIANS, AT STOCKBRIDGE; MONUMENT MOUNTAIN IN THE DISTANCE.

The years at Great Barrington were fruitful years, though their fruitfulness was more apparent in after life than at the time. They brought him but little money, but they added to his influence, and witnessed his increasing recognition in the world of letters. His pen was busy, and some of his best-known poems belong to this time. It was then that he published his first volume of poems. Among them were "Thanatopsis," "The Waterfowl," "Green River," "The Yellow Violet," "The Song," and "The Ages," which last poem was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society of Harvard University. They made an era in, or rather they belonged to an era of, American literature which marked the beginning of a new life of the highest promise to America. Mr. Godwin says:

> The year . . . which saw the publication of Mr. Bryant's little volume belonged to a significant and notable time in our literary annals. It was then that Cooper published his "Spy"; Washington Irving his "Sketch Book" and "Bracebridge Hall"; Halleck his "Fanny"; Sands and Eastburn their "Yamoyden"; Dana his "Idle Man"; Hillhouse his "Percy's Masque"; Percival his "Prometheus"; Miss Sedgwick her "New England Tale"; Channing his earliest essays in the "Christian Disciple"; Daniel Webster his "Plymouth Oration"; and Edward Livingston his "Penal Codes."

It is amusing to know how small were the pecuniary rewards of Bryant's literary labors, whatever may have been the fame they brought him. Two dollars a poem was the price that he named, and he seemed to be abundantly satisfied with the terms. A gentleman met him in New York many years after, and said to him, "I have just bought the earliest edition of your poems, and gave twenty dollars for it." "More, by a long shot," replied the poet, "than I received for writing the whole work."

Allusion has already been made to his marriage. None could have been happier; no union more nearly an ideal one. Miss Fanny Fairchild was a young lady whose parents had lived on the Seekonk, a stream tributary to the Green River, not far from Great Barrington. Early left an orphan, she made her home alternately with her married sisters in that place, and there it was that Bryant met her. Charming in person, sweet in disposition, lovely in character, she drew him to her through his sympathy with her orphanage, his admiration of her beauty, and his appreciation of her worth. For forty-five years she was the stay and blessing of his life. What that marriage was to him they knew best who knew him best. Reserved on the subject to the world at large, he allowed only those who were nearest him to know the wonderful depth and tenderness of his affection. Their sympathy was perfect, their dependence mutual. He said after her death, "I never wrote a poem that I did not repeat it to her and take her judgment upon it. I found its success with the public to be precisely in proportion to the impression it made upon her." A dear friend of them both has said, "The union between Mr. and Mrs. Bryant was a poem of the tenderest rhythm. Any of us who remember Mr. Bryant's voice when he said 'Frances' will join in his hope that she kept the same beloved name in heaven. I remember alluding to those exquisite lines, 'The Future Life,' to Mrs. Bryant, and her replying, 'Oh, my dear, I am always sorry for any one who sees me after reading those lines; they must be so disappointed.' Beatrice and Laura have not received such tributes from their poets, for Mrs. Bryant's husband was her poet and lover at seventy as at seventeen."

The lovers were married June 11, 1821, and Bryant, in the humorous vein which was one of his best gifts, announced the fact to his mother as follows:

DEAR MOTHER:

I hasten to send you the melancholy intelligence of what has lately happened to me.

Early on the evening of the eleventh day of the present month I was at a neighboring house in this village. Several people of both sexes were assembled in one of the apartments, and three or four others, with myself, were in another. At last came in a little elderly gentleman, pale, thin, with a solemn countenance, pleuritic voice, hooked nose, and hollow eyes. It was not long before we were summoned to attend in the apartment where he and the rest of the company were gathered. We went in and took our seats; the little elderly gentleman with the hooked nose prayed, and we all stood up. When he had finished, most of us sat down. The gentleman with the hooked nose then muttered certain cabalistical expressions which I was too much frightened to remember, but I recollect that at the conclusion I was given to understand that I was married to a young lady of the name of Frances Fairchild, whom I perceived standing by my side, and I hope in the course of a few months to have the pleasure of introducing to you as your daughter-in-law, which is a matter of some interest to the poor girl, who has neither father nor mother in the world.

I have not "played the fool and married an Ethiop for the jewel in her ear." I looked only for goodness of heart, an ingenuous and affectionate disposition, a good understanding, etc., and the character of my wife is too frank and single-hearted to suffer me to fear that I may be disappointed. I do myself wrong; I did not look for these nor any other qualities, but they trapped me before I was aware, and now I am married in spite of myself.

Thus the current of destiny carries us all along. None but a madman would swim against the stream, and none but a fool would exert himself to swim with it. The best way is to float quietly with the tide. So much for philosophy—now for business. . . . Your affectionate son,

WILLIAM.

His biographer adds: "When this singular epistle, in which his pride seems to be awkwardly seeking excuses for a humiliating surrender, reached his good mother, she is said to have exclaimed: 'He make a fool of himself! He never has done so yet, and could n't if he tried.'"

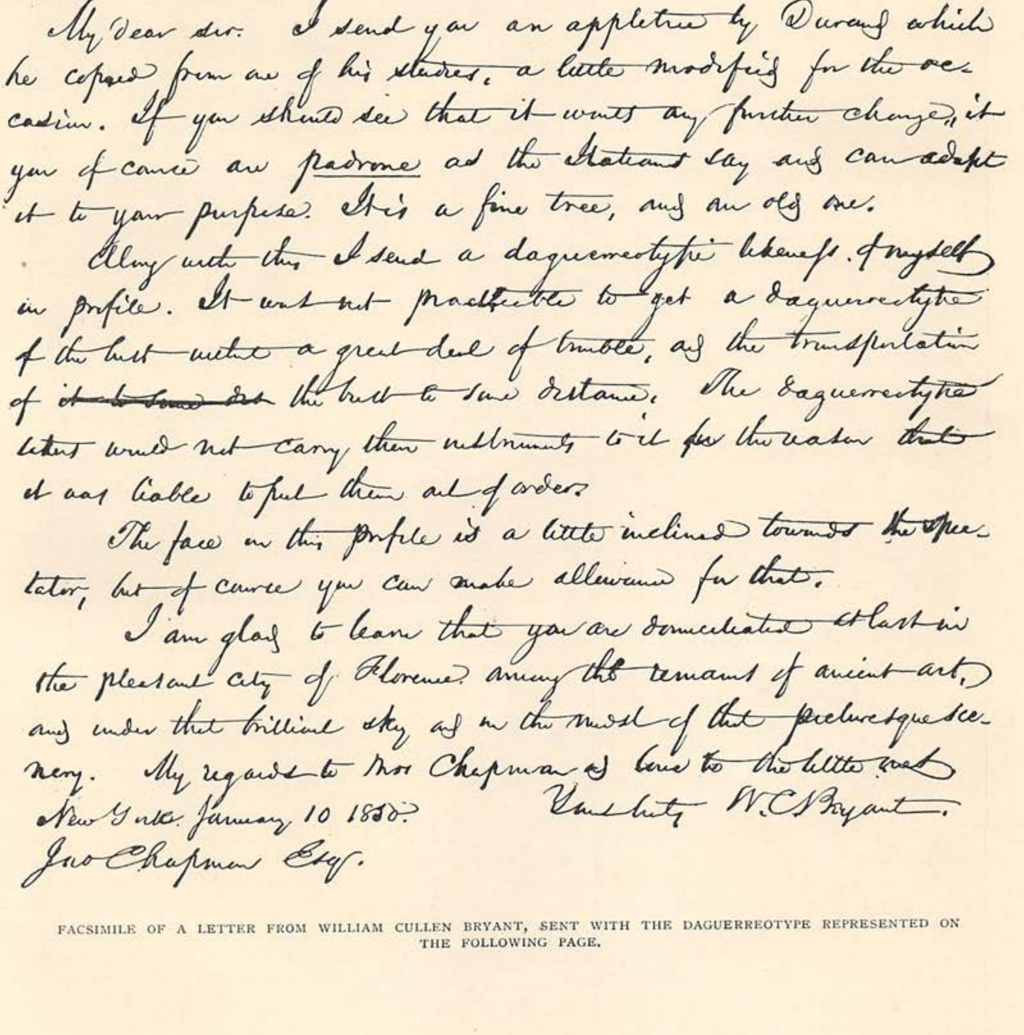
The house still stands in which the young couple began their married life. Instead of taking the whole, they hired two rooms, a chamber and a parlor, and shared the kitchen with the other occupants of the house. Their housekeeping was on a modest scale. Here are some items connected with it, taken from an old account-book still preserved under the same roof:

1821. Dr. William C. Bryant in account—

Mr. Bryant with his family moved into my house to occupy certain rooms and other priviledges at the rate of thirty dollars for the year by agreement, Mr. Charles Taylor being the appraiser..........	$30.00
May 5, To one bushel of potatoes......	.11
Bushels of potatoes	.66
Nov. 23, To 2 bushels ears of corn.....	.50
Dec. 3, 1821, To pasturing your cow, 28½ weeks at 17 cents per week.....	4.75
19 Jan'y, 1822, To 67 lbs. beef........	2.01
[*sic*]	$37.92

The memory of that early married life never grew dim. Mr. Godwin says that fifty-five years after his marriage, and ten years after his wife's death, the poet visited once more the house where the marriage had taken place. He walked about for some time, saying nothing; but as he was about to turn away he exclaimed, "There is not a spire of grass her foot has not touched," and his eyes filled with tears. Beneath that calm and undemonstrative exterior lay hid the deepest and tenderest feeling.

Arthur Lawrence.



My dear sir: I send you an appletree by Durand which he copied from one of his studies, a little modified for the occasion. If you should see that it wants any further changes, it you of course are *padrone* as the Italians say and can adapt it to your purpose. It is a fine tree, and an old one.

Along with this I send a daguerreotype likeness of myself in profile. It was not practicable to get a daguerreotype of the bust without a great deal of trouble, as the transportation of ~~it to some dis~~ the bust to some distance. The daguerreotype artists would not carry their instruments to it for the reason that it was liable to put them out of order.

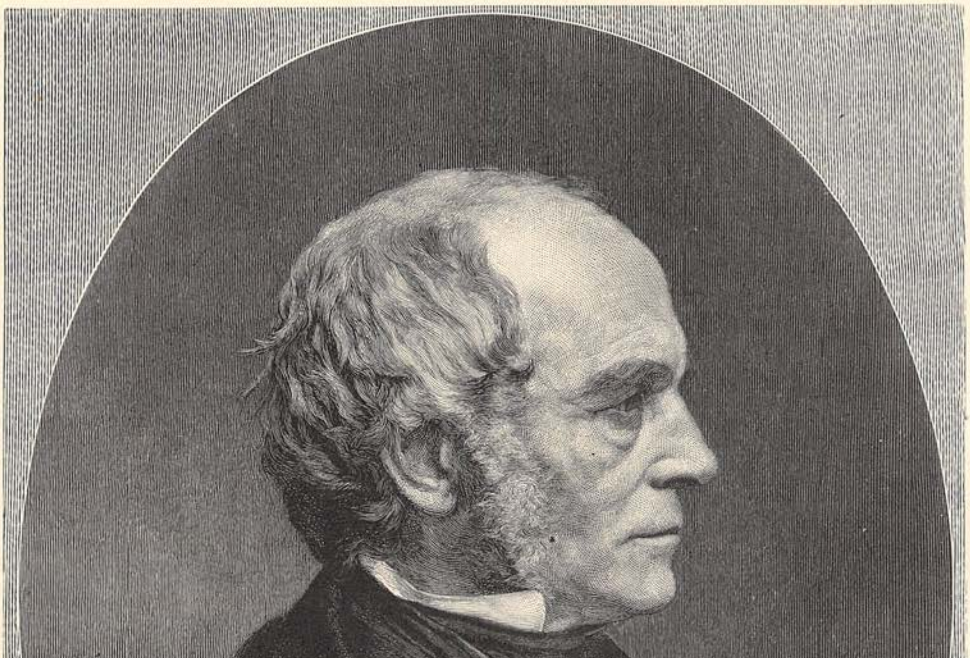
The face in this profile is a little inclined towards the spectator, but of course you can make allowance for that.

I am glad to learn that you are domiciliated at last in the pleasant city of Florence among the remains of ancient art, and under that brilliant sky and in the midst of that picturesque scenery. My regards to Mrs Chapman and love to the little ones.

New York. January 10 1850.　Yours truly W. C. Bryant.

Jno Chapman Esq.

FACSIMILE OF A LETTER FROM WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, SENT WITH THE DAGUERREOTYPE REPRESENTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE.



ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE. FROM THE ORIGINAL DAGUERREOTYPE.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT, ABOUT 1850.