A Forest Hoian
A forest hymn
by
William Cullen Bryant
with Illustrations
by
John A. Nungs

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Enter this wild wood
And view the haunts of Nature.
The groves were God's first temples. Ere man learned
To hew the shaft, and lay the architrave,
And spread the roof above them,—ere he framed
The lofty vault, to gather and roll back
The sound of anthems; in the darkling wood,
Amidst the cool and silence, he knelt down,
And offered to the Mightiest solemn thanks
And supplication. For his simple heart
Might not resist the sacred influences,
Which, from the stilly twilight of the place,
And from the gray old trunks that high in heaven
Mingled their mossy boughs, and from the sound
Of the invisible breath that swayed at once
All their green tops,
Stole over him, and bowed
His spirit with the thought of boundless power
And inaccessible majesty. Ah, why
Should we, in the world's riper years, neglect
God's ancient sanctuaries, and adore
Only among the crowd, and under roofs
That our frail hands have raised?
Let me, at least,

Here, in the shadow of this aged wood,

Offer one hymn—thrice happy, if it find

Acceptance in His ear.
Father, thy hand

Hath reared these venerable columns, thou

Didst weave this verdant roof.
Upon the naked earth, and, forthwith, rose
All these fair ranks of trees. They, in thy sun,
Budded, and shook their green leaves in the breeze.
And shot towards heaven.
The century-living crow,
Whose birth was in their tops,
grew old and died
Among their branches, till, at last,
they stood,
As now they stand, massy, and
tall, and dark,
Fit shrine for humble worshipper
to hold
Communion with his Maker.
These dim vaults,

These winding aisles,
of human pomp or pride

Report not. No fantastic carvings show

The boast of our vain race to change the form

Of thy fair works.
But thou art here—thou fill'st
The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds
That run along the summit of these trees
In music; thou art in the cooler breath
That from the inmost darkness of the place
Comes, scarcely felt;
barky trunks, the ground,

The fresh moist

ground,

Are all

instinct

With thee.
Here is continual worship;—nature, here,

In the tranquillity that thou dost love,

Enjoys thy presence.
Poiselessly, around,

From perch to perch, the solitary bird

Passes; and yon clear spring, that, midst its herbs,

Wells softly forth and wandering steeps the roots
half the mighty forest, tells no tale

Of all the good it does.
Thou hast not left
Thyself without a witness, in these shades,
Of thy perfections.
Grandeur, strength, and grace

Are here to speak of thee. This mighty oak—

By whose immovable stem I stand and seem

Almost annihilated—not a prince,

In all that proud old world beyond the deep,

E'er wore his crown as loftily as he

Wears the green coronal of leaves with which

Thy hand has graced him.
Is beauty, such as blooms not in the glare
Of the broad sun. That delicate forest flower
With scented breath, and look so like a smile,
Seems, as it issues from the shapeless mould,
An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this wide universe.
Is beauty, such as blooms not in the glare
Of the broad sun. That delicate forest flower
With scented breath, and look so like a smile,
Seems, as it issues from the shapeless mould,
An emanation of the indwelling Life,
A visible token of the upholding Love,
That are the soul of this wide universe.
heart is awed within me when I think
Of the great miracle that
still goes on,
In silence, round me—the perpetual
work
Of thy creation, finished, yet re-
newed
Forever. Written on thy works
I read
The lesson of thy own eternity.
Lo! all grow old and die—but see again,

How on the faltering footsteps of decay

Youth presses—ever gay and beautiful youth

In all its beautiful forms.
These lofty trees

Wave not less proudly that their ancestors

Moulder beneath them.
there is not lost

One of earth's charms: upon her bosom yet,

After the flight of untold centuries,

The freshness of her far beginning lies

And yet shall lie.
Life mocks the idle hate

Of his arch-enemy Death—yea, seats himself

Upon the tyrant's throne—the sepulchre,

And of the triumphs of his ghastly foe

Makes his own nourishment. For he came forth

From thine own bosom, and shall have no end.
There have been holy men who hid themselves

Deep in the woody wilderness, and gave

Their lives to thought and prayer, till they outlived
The generation born with them, nor seemed

Less aged than the hoary trees and rocks
Around them;—and there have been holy men
Who deemed it were not well to pass life thus.
But let me often to these solitudes
Retire, and in thy presence reassure
My feeble virtue. Here its enemies,
The passions, at thy plainer footsteps shrink
And tremble and are still. Oh, God! when thou
Dost scare the world with tempests, set on fire
The heavens with falling thunderbolts, or fill,
With all the waters of the firmament,
The swift dark whirlwind that uproots the woods

And drowns the villages; when, at thy call,

Uprises the great deep, and throws himself

Upon the continent, and overwhelsms

Its cities—
Who forgets not,

at the sight

Of these tremendous tokens of thy power,

His pride, and lays his strifes and follies by?

Oh, from these sterner aspects

Of thy face

Spare me and mine,
Or let us need the wrath
Of the mad unchained elements to teach
Who rules them. Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works
Learn to conform the order of our lives.