

THE POETRY OF NATURE

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The poetry of nature by Henry Van Dyke

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HENRY VAN DYKE

**THE POETRY
OF NATURE**

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SELECTED BY

HENRY VAN DYKE

FOR

"COUNTRY LIFE IN AMERICA"

ILLUSTRATED

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PREFACE

THE sixty Nature poems which I have chosen are full of various music. They utter the changing thoughts and feelings which are awakened in the heart of man by the procession of the seasons, the alternations of day and night, the balancing of the clouds and the journeying of the winds, the vision of the sea and the stars, the silent blossoming and fading of the flowers, the fleeting masonry of the snow, the flight and the return of our little brothers of the air. In all this wondrous pageant that passes before us we dimly perceive a meaning that corresponds to something within us. There are moments when this meaning seems to come nearer, to flash itself out more clearly, almost to lift the veil of beautiful form under which it moves. These clearer glimpses are the inspiration of the true poems of Nature. It is as if the great Mother herself were waking to consciousness in her human children, and speaking through their lips a part at least of that eternal thought and feeling which is transiently embodied in her visible forms.

Do not the best of these poems always bring to us, as we read them, at once a sense of familiarity and a sense of surprise? They tell us something that belongs

PREFACE

to us; their message comes from a world of which we ourselves are part; and it seems as if we must have always known it. But the telling of it so clearly is a sudden gleam of light falling into a place dim with shadows, and the newness of the vision fills us with an exquisite pleasure.

Some of the verses are but little lyrics, brief and delicate wafts of song, like Herrick's "Daffodils"; others are deeper and stronger, moving with a long-drawn, solemn music of thought, like Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," or sweeping us away with tempest-tones, like Shelley's "West Wind." But two things I have sought and found in all of them, simple or profound. They are true to the facts of Nature, faithful in observation of her works and ways; not daring to report falsely or foolishly of birds and flowers, of trees and rivers, but seeing with a lover's eyes, and painting with a lover's hand, loyal to the form as well as to the spirit. They are also clear and lucid in their utterance of the idea or emotion which is their life; not shapeless and incoherent, darkening the face of Nature by words without knowledge; but illuminating it with the light that comes from a spirit that can both think and feel.

There are many other Nature poems besides these

PREFACE

which are here gathered—some, indeed, of the most beautiful have been written by living poets. But these that follow are sixty of the best songs and sonnets, odes and reflective verses, written by poets who have finished their work and passed into new regions. Yet, as Keats said, they have also souls on earth, and they

*teach us every day
Wisdom, though fled far away,*

helping to make the world more beautiful and significant to those who are willing to live with Nature and learn of her.

HENRY VAN DYKE



CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE TITMOUSE. <i>By</i> RALPH WALDO EMERSON	1
THE OAK. <i>By</i> LORD TENNYSON	5
THE WHAUPS. <i>By</i> ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	5
FROST AT MIDNIGHT. <i>By</i> SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE	9
NIGHT. <i>By</i> JOSEPH BLANCO WHITE	12
UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE. <i>As You Like It,</i> ii. v.	13
FAIRY LAND. <i>Midsummer Night's Dream,</i> ii. i.	13
WHEN DAISIES PIED. <i>Love's Labour's Lost,</i> v. ii.	14
WHEN ICICLES HANG BY THE WALL. <i>Love's</i> <i>Labour's Lost,</i> v. ii.	15
THE FAIRY LIFE. <i>The Tempest,</i> v. i., i. ii.	16
EARLY SPRING. <i>By</i> LORD TENNYSON	17
TO A MOUNTAIN DAISY. <i>By</i> ROBERT BURNS	19
WALDEINSAMKEIT. <i>By</i> RALPH WALDO EMERSON	23
MY HEART LEAPS UP WHEN I BEHOLD. <i>By</i> WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	30
THE SANDPIPER. <i>By</i> CELIA THAXTER	30
DAFFODILS. <i>By</i> WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	33
HOME-THOUGHTS FROM ABROAD. <i>By</i> ROBERT BROWNING	35
TO DAFFODILS. <i>By</i> ROBERT HERRICK	36
THE THROSTLE. <i>By</i> LORD TENNYSON	37
TO THE CUCKOO. <i>By</i> JOHN LOGAN	41

CONTENTS

	PAGE
TO A SKYLARK. <i>By</i> PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY	42
CORINNA'S GOING A-MAYING. <i>By</i> ROBERT HERRICK	47
LINES WRITTEN IN EARLY SPRING. <i>By</i> WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	49
ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE. <i>By</i> JOHN KEATS	51
TO A WATERFOWL. <i>By</i> WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT	54
THE RHODORA. <i>By</i> RALPH WALDO EMERSON	55
THE GARDEN. <i>By</i> ANDREW MARVELL	56
TO THE DANDELION. <i>By</i> JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL	59
SONG OF THE BROOK. <i>By</i> LORD TENNYSON	61
TO A SKYLARK. <i>By</i> WILLIAM WORDSWORTH	64
THE MOCKING BIRD. <i>By</i> WALT WHITMAN	65
SONGS FROM "PIPPA PASSES." <i>By</i> ROBERT BROWNING	71
SUMMER DAWN. <i>By</i> WILLIAM MORRIS	71
TO THE HUMBLE-BEE. <i>By</i> RALPH WALDO EMERSON	72
THE BAREFOOT BOY. <i>By</i> JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER	78
THE EVENING WIND. <i>By</i> WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT	83
THE MIDGES DANCE ABOON THE BURN. <i>By</i> ROBERT TANNAHILL	86
BRIGHT STAR! WOULD I WERE STEADFAST AS THOU ART. <i>By</i> JOHN KEATS	87
DAYBREAK. <i>By</i> HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW	88
THE MARSHES OF GLYNN. <i>By</i> SIDNEY LANIER	89
THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS. <i>By</i> OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES	95