

**THE POEMS OF
HENRY TIMROD**

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The Poems of Henry Timrod by Henry Timrod & Paul H. Hayne

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HENRY TIMROD & PAUL H. HAYNE

**THE POEMS OF
HENRY TIMROD**

TO THE
POET'S WIFE AND SISTER,*

AND TO HIS EARNEST FRIENDS, THE

HON. GEORGE S. BRYAN,

OF CHARLESTON, S. C.,

AND

DOCTOR J. DICKSON BRUNS,

OF NEW ORLEANS,

THIS VOLUME IS

Dedicated.

* This sister died soon after the "Dedication" was penned. The life-long affection between the Post and herself was of the most tender, touching, and beautiful description. They sympathized in heart, soul, and intellect. Their names must always be associated in the memory of gentle and appreciative spirits.

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MEMOIR
OF
HENRY TIMROD.

THE name and writings of HENRY TIMROD have been long known and appreciated at the South. Nor are they wholly unknown at the North. I have before me a letter from the Quaker poet, WHITTIER, in which he warmly commends the poems of TIMROD he had seen, while expressing a regret for his early death.

Frequently, in his critical essays, RICHARD HENRY STODDARD has referred to TIMROD, as in his opinion the ablest poet the South had yet produced—a verdict fully sustained by some other (Northern) writers of high position, to whose notice the poems had been brought.

These facts may prove, in some sort, an introduction to the present volume, so far as the Northern public is concerned. They may win for it a candid examination, all that is necessary, doubtless, for its success.

Meanwhile, I purpose to give a sketch of TIMROD'S life, which, though comparatively brief, and to an exceptional degree uneventful, is still of interest, as throwing much light upon the character of his verses, and the development of his genius.

HENRY TIMROD was born in Charleston, S. C., on the 8th of December, 1829. He was the son of WILLIAM H. TIMROD, whose father (HENRY TIMROD), a native of Germany, had married Miss GRAHAM, a gifted and highly educated lady of the north of Ireland, though of Scotch descent, and in good, if not affluent, circumstances. Mr. TIMROD had been for a considerable time a resident in this country, and was, it seems, a widower, when Miss GRAHAM came to Carolina. Sometime in 1792, their only son, WILLIAM, was born on a plantation not far from Charleston.

Upon the death of his father, which occurred unfortunately while the lad was quite young, his mother married again; a step by which the family means, already reduced by the exigencies of a revolutionary time, were still further squandered.

Nevertheless, an effort was made by the mother to educate her son for the Bar. It was frustrated in a manner at once ludicrous and provoking. At the age of eleven, WILLIAM, then at school, became possessed of an *idea*—a brilliant, fascinating conception—which he must seize the first opportunity of practically testing. To the boy's fancy the most enviable of mortals appeared to be, not a king or a conquering soldier, but a *bookbinder!*

Reasoning from his narrow premises, he concluded that this lucky craftsman must, by the necessities of his position, have access to innumerable volumes, and to stores of untold learning. In order to realize this personally, and to live thenceforth in a beatified atmosphere of Russia leather, he ran away from school, and having found his Phoenix—a complacent bookbinder—placed himself deliberately under his tuition. Of course the intelligent lad must soon have perceived how his dreams of the trade and its æsthetic facilities had deceived him; but whether actuated by self-

will, or some better motive not revealed to others, he resisted both his mother's entreaties and the remonstrances of friends, refusing utterly to return to his orthodox studies.

Thus, by his own erratic will, the father of the poet became a mechanic—a skilled mechanic, we have been told—and rather proud than otherwise, like the true man he was, of his useful and honest craft.*

In the course of time, WILLIAM TIMROD, self-educated, but full of information, especially in English *belles lettres*, attracted the attention of his fellow-citizens by his brilliant talents. The wise and the gifted were happy to associate with him; and by the simple mastery of genius, he gained no trifling influence among the highest intellectual and social circles of a city noted at that period for aristocratic exclusiveness. Lawyers, politicians, editors, *littérateurs*, and gentlemen of scholarly ease and culture, would gather about his place of work, chiefly for the delight of listening to his unpremeditated and eloquent conversation. He seems indeed to have been—*longo intervallo*—a provincial Coleridge, holding his little audiences spell-bound by the mingled audacity and originality of his remarks.

Nor were his gifts exclusively conversational. On the contrary, that he possessed the special endowments of a poet, and of a poet of no mean order, some of the songs and sonnets he has left us clearly demonstrate.

* When the young aspirant after knowledge became bound to his master, he found that he had neither much time given him in the day to read, nor light at night!—"I have heard him declare," says one of his daughters, "that he used, when the moon was clear, or at its full, to climb on the leads of the house, and there, by the lunar rays, to read into the small hours of the night: Shakespeare was, at that time, his favorite companion."

Of these, an Ode "To TIME,"* an apostrophe to "THE MOCKING BIRD," and a *Sonnet* called "*Autumnal Day in Carolina*," are the most finished and striking. I will quote them here.

TO TIME—THE OLD TRAVELLER.

I.

"They slander thee, Old Traveller,
Who say that thy delight
Is to scatter ruin, far and wide,
In thy wantonness of might:
For not a leaf that falleth
Before thy restless wings,
But in thy flight, thou changest it
To a thousand brighter things.

II.

"Thou passest o'er the battle-field
Where the dead lie stiff and stark,
Where naught is heard save the vulture's scream,
And the gaunt wolf's famished bark;
But thou hast caused the grain to spring
From the blood-enriched clay,
And the waving corn-tops seem to dance
To the rustic's merry lay.

* These four stanzas, "To TIME," formed a portion, originally, of a much longer poem. Oddly enough, they occur in a very unambitious production, viz., a newspaper "*Carrier's Address*."

Apropos of the verses, Judge Bryan, in a private letter to me, observes,

"As one proof of the excellence of the ode, "*To Time*," let me say here what it would have delighted me to have said to the author, that on my reciting this poem to Washington Irving, he exclaimed with fervor, that 'Tom Moore had written no finer lyric.'"