

THE PICTURE OF ST. JOHN

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649254521

The picture of St. John by Bayard Taylor

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BAYARD TAYLOR

**THE PICTURE
OF ST. JOHN**

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PICTURE OF ST. JOHN.

BY

BAYARD TAYLOR.



BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
1866.

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UNIVERSITY PRESS: WELCH, BIGELOW, & CO.,
CAMBRIDGE.

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1866



INTRODUCTORY NOTE.



IN regard to the subject of this poem I have nothing to say. It grew naturally out of certain developments in my own mind; and the story, unsuggested by any legend or detached incident whatever, shaped itself to suit the theme. The work of time, written only as its own necessity prompted, and finished with the care and conscience which such a venture demands, I surrender it to the judgment of the reader.

The form of the stanza which I have adopted, however, requires a word of explanation. I have endeavored to strike a middle course between the almost inevitable monotony of an unvarying stanza, in a poem of this length, and the loose char-

acter which the heroic measure assumes when arbitrarily rhymed, without the check of regularly recurring divisions. It seemed to me that this object might be best accomplished by adhering rigidly to the measure and limit of the stanza, yet allowing myself freedom of rhyme within that limit. The *ottava rima* is undoubtedly better adapted for the purposes of a romantic epic than either the Spensorian stanza or the heroic couplet; but it needs the element of humor (as in Byron's "Don Juan") to relieve its uniform sweetness. On the other hand, the proper compactness and strength of rhythm can with difficulty be preserved in a poem where all form of stanza is discarded. My aim has been, as far as possible, to combine the advantages and lessen the objections of both.

I know of but one instance in which the experiment has been even partially tried, — the "Oberon" of Wieland, wherein the rhymes are wilfully varied, and sometimes the measure, the

stanza almost invariably closing with an Alexandrine. In the present case, I have been unable to detect any prohibitory rule in the genius of our language; and the only doubt which suggested itself to my mind was that the ear, becoming swiftly accustomed to the arrangement of rhyme in one stanza, might expect to find it reproduced in the next. I believe, however, that such disappointment, if it should now and then occur, will be very transitory, — that even an unusually delicate ear will soon adjust itself to the changing order, and find that the varied harmony at which I have aimed (imperfectly as I may have succeeded) compensates for the lack of regularity. At times, I confess, the temptation to close with an Alexandrine was very great; but it was necessary to balance the one apparent license by a rigid adherence to the customary form in all other respects. Hence, also, I have endeavored, as frequently as possible, to use but three rhymes in a stanza, in order to

strengthen my experiment with an increased effect of melody. I have found, since the completion of the poem, that it contains more than seventy variations in the order of rhyme, not all of which, of course, can be pronounced equally agreeable: nor does this freedom involve less labor than a single form of stanza, because the variations must be so arranged as to relieve and support each other. My object has been, not to escape the laws which Poetry imposes, but to select a form which gives greater appearance of unrestrained movement, and more readily reflects the varying moods of the poem.

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