

The New York Ledger
XIV:19:8 July 17, 1858

TO A PORTRAIT OF MY MOTHER.

Taken in her Childhood.

BY SALLIE M. BRYAN.

I've gazed in dreamy silence on the stars
That rest in solemn splendor strange and proud,
Wearing the old unchanging smile above
The giant groves of ages, that rushed down
To the all-voiceless gulf with broken hearts
Clasped in their awful bosoms! The *cold* stars
That seem to say, without an audible voice,
"Behold us! We are God's bright mysteries!
Weep that our glory and our loveliness
Is to ye mortals unapproachable!"
Then I have turned to watch the sweet moon float
Through the unfathomable deeps of Night,
Like some young angel's pleasure-bark sent forth
From the far shores of Paradise! And then
I've longed, oh with what vain intensity,
What burning, agonizing brain to know
The things beneath Eternity's still veil.

And yet it were as sweet to look on *thee*,
Fair shadow of evanished loveliness,
As the *near* glory of moon or star—
Ay, or the Heaven beyond!

Alas! alas,

They tell me, *picture*, that thou art a thing
Of fairy beauty; that thy lip and brow
Are chiseled as might be a baby-angel's!
Those curls of gold-touched brown sweep carelessly
Around thy dimpled bosom's snow; and that
Thy tiny hand grasps summer's sweetest flowers,
Not one so sweet as thou! Oh, in my heart
The worship for all beauty is so deep
That I could love thee for thy loveliness;
Ay, love thee earnestly for that *alone*.
But when I think how those young charms matured
And softened into calmer brightness, watched
Above my cradle-dreams; how that fond breast
Has pillowed oft my childish head; and how—
Hush, breaking heart—how once that lovely lip
Called me those sweet names only mothers know;

And how, at last, that fairest face grew pale,
And icy cold, and strangely, sadly calm,
And met our kisses—*and returned them not!*
And how amid the moonlight mists of May,
Pale flowers lay fading o'er a grave, whose shade
Darkened our home!—Home? 'tis a sweet, *sweet* word—
But it sounds strangely on *my* lip! and how
Each mournful even in the twilight-hush
My baby brother lisped "Mamma!" in vain;
And when they told him she was gone to Heaven,
And would come back no more, sank wearily
To orphan slumbers, sweetly asking *why*
She did not take him! And how oft we said,
"We always, *always* will be lonesome now."
Oh, when *these* thoughts rise from the mists of years,
How deeply, fondly, fearfully I yearn
To look, bright shade, on thee!

But thou art far,
So far away, and my unrestful course
Perchance will never, *never* wind to thee;
And she, thy semblance—sighs and tears are vain—
It were as well to kneel before the Night,
And question of the Pleiad that is fled
From her eternal splendors, as to ask
The voiceless Heaven for *her!* The angels know
She is *my Mother*—*yet* they answer not.