

BELL-BIRDS by Henry Kendall

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling,
And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling:
It lives in the mountain where moss and the sedges
Touch with their beauty the banks and the ledges.
Through breaks of the cedar and sycamore bowers
Struggles the light that is love to the flowers;
And, softer than slumber, and sweeter than singing,
The notes of the bell-birds are running and ringing.

The silver-voiced bell birds, the darlings of daytime!
They sing in September their songs of the May-time;
When shadows wax strong, and the thunder bolts hurtle,
They hide with their fear in the leaves of the myrtle;
When rain and the sunbeams shine mingled together,
They start up like fairies that follow fair weather;
And straightway the hues of their feathers unfolden
Are the green and the purple, the blue and the golden.

October, the maiden of bright yellow tresses,
Loiters for love in these cool wildernesses;
Loiters, knee-deep, in the grasses, to listen,
Where dripping rocks gleam and the leafy pools glisten:
Then is the time when the water-moons splendid
Break with their gold, and are scattered or blended
Over the creeks, till the woodlands have warning
Of songs of the bell-bird and wings of the Morning.

Welcome as waters unvisited by the summers
Are the voices of bell-birds to the thirsty far-comers.
When fiery December sets foot in the forest,
And the need of the wayfarer presses the sorest,
Pent in the ridges for ever and ever
The bell-birds direct him to spring and to river,
With ring and with ripple, like runnels who torrents
Are toned by the pebbles and the leaves in the currents.

Often I sit, looking back to a childhood,
Mixt with the sights and the sounds of the wildwood,
Longing for power and the sweetness to fashion,
Lyrics with beats like the heart-beats of Passion; -
Songs interwoven of lights and of laughters
Borrowed from bell-birds in far forest-rafters;
So I might keep in the city and alleys
The beauty and strength of the deep mountain valleys:
Charming to slumber the pain of my losses
With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.

Reading for understanding

TASK: Read "[Bell-birds](#)" by nineteenth century Australian Kenry Kendall, and answer the questions with quotations. The 25 marks are noted in brackets.

1. What is the poet saying? (3)

2. What images can you pick out? Are they connected? How? (4)

3. Find two examples of hyerbole. (2)

4. Quote two examples of personification. (2)

5. Quote three examples of alliteration. (3)

6. The poet speaks in his own voice in the last fifth stanza. How does he finish or apply the observations made earlier? (3)

7. What is the tone/atmosphere of the poem? Explain and quote. (3)

8. Supply its rhyme scheme / pattern. (1)

9. Some months are mentioned: September, May, December. Why? (2)

10. Give your opinion of the poem. While it is merry with rhyming with a regular beat, how does the beauty of the bush liven up his own sadness? Does this work for you? (4)

ANSWERS

1. Kendall looks with nostalgia to a sweeter time in childhood when the bell-birds gave him comfort. They lead the lost traveller to safety, they endure hardships and yet continue to sing. It is a celebration of the beauty of the Australian fauna and flora as was common in the time before federation (1901).
 2. Waterfalls in gorges, hidden boweries in the bush, rain and sunbeams mingling, dripping rocks gleam, leafy pools glisten, mosses and sedges in hidden ledges, fiery December bushfires and heat in the bush. Yes they all recollect the beauties of the bush as distinct from the streets and alleys of the cities.
 3. Light is love to the flowers, birds hide with their fear, waters unvisited by the summer.
 4. October is like a golden haired maiden sitting in the cool quiet rock pools, Fiery December sets foot in the forests,
 5. Woodlands have warning, channels of coolness, softer than slumber, running and ringing, feathers unfold, sunbeams shine, sing in September, bell-birds.
 6. His childhood was mixed with the sounds of the bell-birds in the bush. He finishes his observations with the nostalgic note that he still gets comfort from those memories. They charm and numb his present losses.
 7. The poem creates charm about the tinkling of the unseen bell-birds in the bush. They live where the bush is most wilderness, "wildwood" and they act like its enlightening spirits and its enduring guardians. The voices of the bbs "direct him to spring and to river" whereby travellers may find passage to safety.
 8. The poem's metric pattern is four rhyming couplets: aa, bb, cc, dd
 9. The bell-birds are there all the time, not migratory birds, inhabiting as native birds. They bring September joy (spring tunes to wintry May), and they live through thunder and lightning and fiery December too.
 10. The rhythm and rhyme are enjoyable and very fluent making the poem a pleasure to read. There are some quite memorable lines. It is a quaint celebration of the Australian bush and reminds us it has its own beauty. So far somehow the bell-birds do endure in Australians southern parts despite man's exploitation. Not having those childhood memories myself unfortunately I can only try to relate to his joy in the b-bs.
- Author: © G Smith 2006

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