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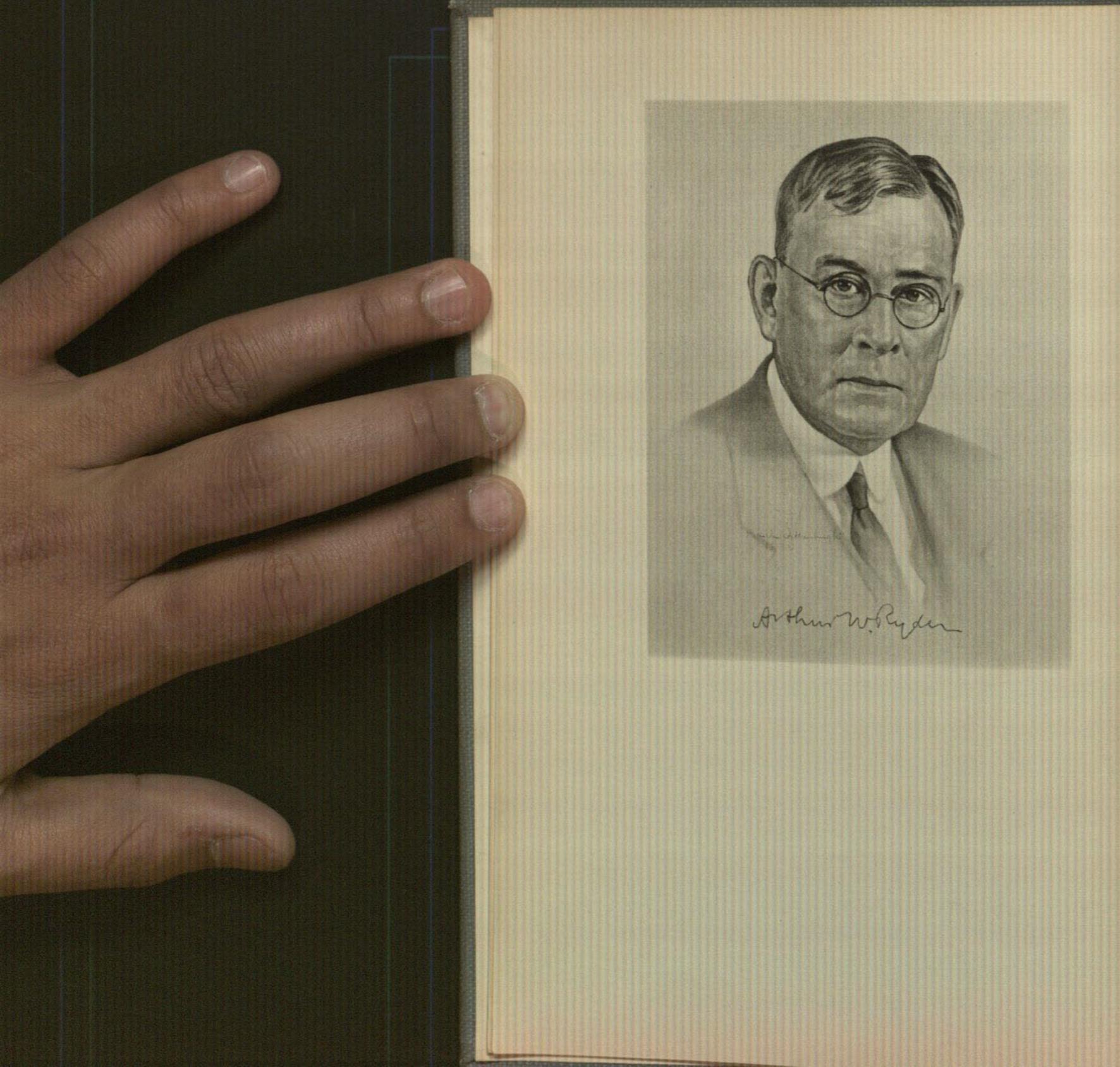
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ORIGINAL POEMS  
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FROM THE  
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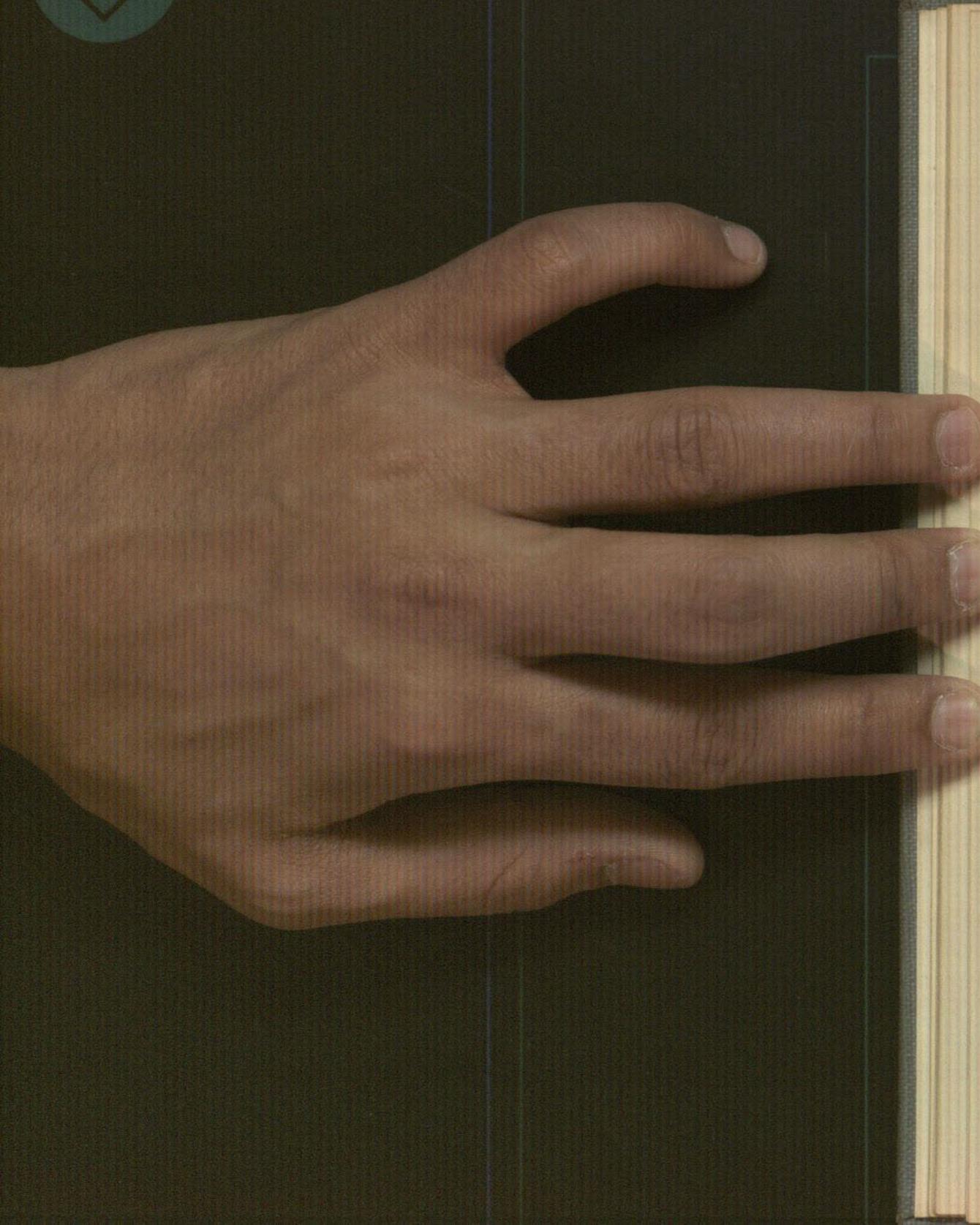
BY ARTHUR WILLIAM RYDER



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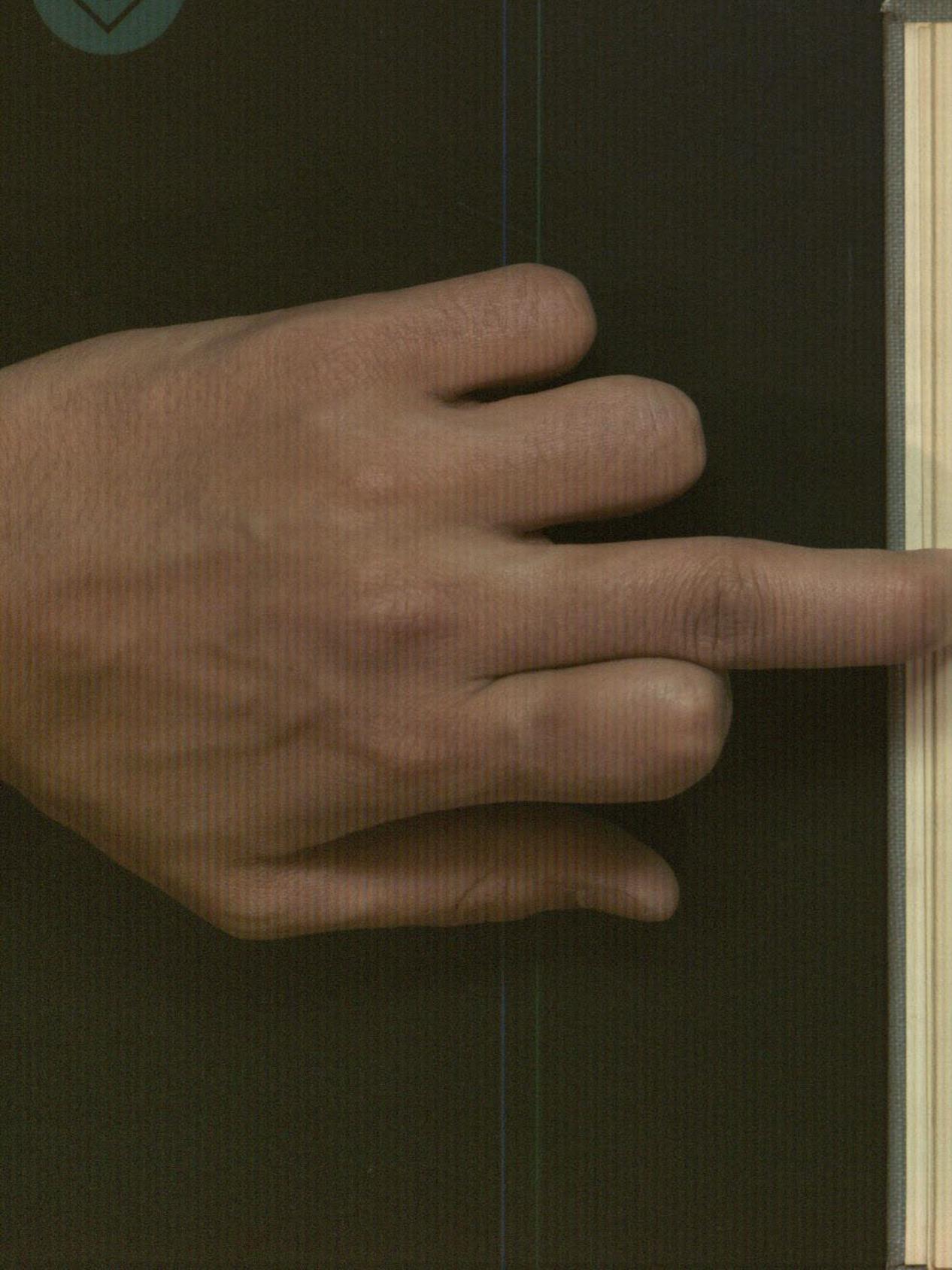
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## Arthur William Ryder

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ARTHUR WILLIAM RYDER was born March 8, 1877, at Oberlin, Ohio. He was the son of William Henry Ryder, a Congregational clergyman, then Professor of the Greek Language and Literature at Oberlin College, later (1888-1908) Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Andover Theological Seminary (Massachusetts), still later (1908-18) Andover Professor of New Testament Interpretation at Harvard University. He thus grew up in an atmosphere of classical scholarship. He graduated from Phillips Academy (Andover) in 1894 and from Harvard College in 1897. In his college course his main interests were Greek and Latin literature, but in his last year he began the study of Sanskrit under Professor C. R. Lanman. During these early years, aside from his formal studies, he read extensively in Greek and Latin authors. In 1897-98 he taught Latin at Phillips Academy. In 1898-1901 he studied in Germany, one semester at the University of Berlin and three semesters at the University of Leipzig. Among his teachers were Professors Brugmann, Geldner, Pischel, and Windisch. He continued to work in Greek and Latin and began Old Persian, his minor subject for the doctorate. His chief study, however, was in Sanskrit; he received his doctor's degree from the University of Leipzig in 1901, his dissertation being on *Die Rbhū's im Rgveda*.

Returning to America in 1901, Ryder taught at Harvard University: during 1901-2 as Assistant in Sanskrit, from 1902 to December, 1905, as Instructor in Sanskrit. In his years at Harvard he assisted Professor Lanman in his work as editor of the Harvard Oriental Series. In January, 1906, he came to the University of California (Berkeley, California), as Instructor in Sanskrit; in 1908 he became an assistant professor, in 1919 an associate professor, and in 1925 a professor. At the time of the war he wished



to enter the United States service and he took lessons in French conversation preparatory to life in France. But, owing to high blood pressure, he could not obtain a government position of any sort. On March 21, 1938, he was seized by a heart attack while teaching, and died while being taken to the hospital.

Ryder was not in the conventional implications of the terms either a scholar, a man of letters, or even (except by title) a professor; he was a reader, a man of literature, and a teacher. He was a man of genius, but his genius was not of the academic type.

Ryder went to Germany, partly at least, to study comparative philology. But during a semester's work with Brugmann he discovered—or thought he discovered—that Brugmann, the acknowledged master of linguistic science, "could speak only one language and could understand none." Hence he acquired a profound contempt for comparative philology; he quoted with approval a remark by Pischel, a teacher for whom he had deep respect, that the subject was "the greatest fake of the nineteenth century." (Yet chance comments in his classes would show that he remembered more of the subject than he might have cared to admit.) Henceforth for Ryder grammar was merely a tool to be used, not something to be studied for its own sake. "In the formal structure of a complicated grammar," Professor Cherniss writes of him, "he took the same delight as does the mathematician in an elegant demonstration, and he could expound the whole of Sanskrit grammar with such intimate knowledge and loving understanding that it seemed to be a cosmic fugue constructed by a demiurgic organist; but he did not believe that such knowledge even supported by an exhaustive knowledge of 'vocabulary' and 'etymology' constituted knowledge of a language, for a language, he knew, is not analyzable into words and grammatical forms but consists of phrases, idioms, nuances of thought.\* It was the language as it came alive from the author

\* "Suppose I plan a long walk, and find a pebble in my shoe. Its removal is a necessary condition of success in my plan, yet of itself does not further that plan; hinders it indeed, if I imagine this action to be of itself meritorious, and become attached thereto. The same reasoning applies to the acquisition of the grammar of a language by one whose object is the enjoyment of poetry written in that language."—Introduction to the *Bhagavad-gita*, p. x.

that he desired to know. 'Not what this word *should* mean according to the philologists but what the author intended it to mean in this particular place' this was his principle. It is measured by this standard that one must understand his serious statement that he knew only one language well, his native English. That he was a master of English his writings amply prove; that he came miraculously near to realizing the same standard in Sanskrit, however, is obvious to anyone who is capable of comparing his translations with their originals. His determination to approximate this standard in any language that he studied was the reason for his early decision to curtail the number of languages to which he would devote his energies. He soon abandoned all but Sanskrit, Latin, French, and German. Only the abandonment of Greek, he said, remained a matter of sorrow to him. What he called his 'abandonment of Greek,' however, would have been considered by most philologists the continuation of a lively interest and understanding; he would in the course of conversation recite whole choruses of Sophocles and long passages from Homer and discuss with penetrating intelligence both Greek literature and Greek philosophy. Yet he felt that it would be quixotic for him to attempt to master both Greek and Sanskrit; he had made his choice and he abode by it. His regret was due to his belief that in Greek was written one of the world's three truly great literatures, the other two being in Sanskrit and in English."

For all technical scholarship of the usual academic type Ryder soon came to cherish the same aversion (that is, as far as laboring on it himself was concerned) as for comparative philology. Of his doctoral dissertation, on a subject in Vedic mythology, he spoke with no great pride. His later contributions were two very brief articles in the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* for 1902: one (two pages) on a *hapax legomenon* in the Veda, the other (five pages) on a modern Hindu commentary on the *Shakuntala* of Kalidasa; and a longer article (37 pages) in the same journal for 1906, containing notes on *The Little Clay Cart*.

The failure of well-read and reputedly brilliant university men to fulfill the promise of their youth in productive scholarship is

usually due to mere intellectual laziness or to a lack of any synthetic ability; they merely soak up information and perhaps use it in their class teaching, but do not organize it. They illustrate Milton's lines:

Who reads

Incessantly, and to his reading brings not  
A spirit and judgment equal or superior, . . .  
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,  
Deep-versed in books and shallow in himself.

This was by no means true of Ryder. He was emphatically not lazy; though deep-versed in books he was not shallow in himself, and he probably did not lack constructive capacity. But he thought that he could do better and more useful work in other ways than in technical scholarship. In an unpublished "lay sermon" he writes: "We know how in the universities the fetish of scholarship is held before the eyes of young men, and is used to pervert and crush all disinterested love for intellectual things." In the introduction to his translation of *The Ten Princes* he says (p. x): "Let us pay homage to the unknown artist of chapters i-v, who was zealous for art, not for self-exploitation; who stands a silent rebuke-needed, if unheeded—of any age greedy for scholarship and other stultifying self-advertisement?" And again (*ibid.*): "Dismal studies in influences and sources may be securely left in the hands of those who have no love for literature, since the result is always the same. A great author uses what fits his purpose, and in using it, so transforms it as to make it his own." In his translations Ryder never used footnotes; the text, he thought, should speak for itself, without commentary. Yet Ryder could respect sound and honest work of a sort that he himself would never undertake. A proof of this is his brief article "Laboremus" (reprinted in the present volume), a noble tribute to Professor Lanman, a man who in temperament and in ideals of accomplishment was utterly different from Ryder himself.

Professor Cherniss cites Ryder's own explanation of his refraining from scholarly publication:

"He had been reading Sanskrit drama and had noticed a peculiarity of technique which he one day mentioned in conver-

sation with an older Sanskritist. This scholar urged him to write a paper on the subject; and he, deferring to his older colleague, went home with the intention of following this advice. Upon sitting down to write, however, it occurred to him that for anyone who did not read the texts themselves the essay could have neither meaning nor legitimate interest, while anyone who did read the dramas must either observe the point himself or else be so obtuse that he could not profit by having it pointed out to him. From that time forth Ryder never published any 'scholarly research.'"

This reasoning most men will find fallacious, merely whimsical, not worth attention. A man who has not read *Beowulf* may have a legitimate interest in an account of its position in English literature and of the alliterative technique of its verse. And scholarship is a coöperative business. Even the most brilliant student may fail to observe all the peculiarities of a text that he is studying and may profit by the aid of others. The discovery of the composite authorship of the Pentateuch, for example, was the work of a whole series of scholars. But for Ryder the reasoning was characteristically satisfactory.

On the other hand, reading was for Ryder a controlling passion. Almost deaf to music, he was sensitive to all shades of expression in prose and poetry. Through his careful reading of English authors he became himself a master of English style.

But even in his native English Ryder's reading had curious gaps. He loved Shakespeare but apparently cared nothing for the other Elizabethan dramatists; neither did he care for English ballad literature. He was no more an omnivorous reader than an omnivorous student of languages. He followed his own inclinations, reading over and over again his favorite books; Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* he read six times. Nevertheless his taste was more catholic than, say, that of Matthew Arnold. He admired the high seriousness of Milton; he was equally devoted to W. S. Gilbert and Edward Lear. (Once, probably whimsically, he told a student that Walt Mason was the best American poet; his serious opinion gave that rank to Emerson.) Wit and humor were part of his nature as much as moral earnestness.

According to Ryder, literature should be read intelligently and thoughtfully, for its own sake, for instruction or amusement, or for both. Information about the lives of authors was in his eyes superfluous. "Dandin" [the author of *The Ten Princes*], he wrote, "has been as successful as Homer—more successful than Shakespeare—in baffling the impertinences of the 'Who's Who' brand of scholarship. And while a few more details might prove piquant, it is better to know too little than too much. In the case of truly great writers, both understanding and enjoyment are commonly enhanced when we have their works and have lost their lives." Hence most teaching of English literature in school and college was abhorrent to him: the language was that of the reader and the reader must make himself one with the author. Apparently he expected the average boy or girl to be of the same temperament as himself. He enjoyed biography for its own sake, in fact Boswell's *Johnson* was one of his best-loved books; but he objected to gossip on domestic details as a substitute for the sympathetic understanding of literature.

During his residence in Germany Ryder acquired a fine command of German; he could write the language well, with more than mere grammatical correctness. But for German literature, aside from Heine, Lenau, the romantic poets, and Schopenhauer, he cared little. He concurred in a colleague's verdict that Goethe was "a local celebrity"; the fact that Goethe should be regarded as the greatest German poet he deemed a definite proof of the poverty of the literature. Yet in his volume of translations from Kalidasa (p. xvii) he refers to Goethe as being in 1789, when Sir William Jones translated the *Shakuntala*, "the greatest living poet of Europe."

For French poetry, aside from Villon, Racine, and Molière, Ryder cared little, but French prose he thought the most consistently great of any in the world. Montaigne, Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, and Anatole France were ever in his hands or on his lips. Molière, however, he believed to be the greatest glory of France.

Among the Latins Ryder's favorites were Virgil, Lucretius, Horace, and Caesar, whom he regarded as the greatest writer of

prose in the language. These, with Catullus and Tacitus, he read and reread, and none of the other Latin writers did he believe really significant.

Though Ryder could read Italian, he apparently was little acquainted with Italian literature. Of Spanish literature he was ignorant. Of the Russian writers he read Tolstoi, whom, judging from his poem on him, he respected even more as a personality than as a novelist. Yet in his later years, when he himself had grown intensely conservative, he came to dislike the Russian genius because of his socialistic and anarchistic teachings.

The Sanskrit language Ryder valued solely as the vehicle of a great literature, a literature in his eyes of more worth than that of Greece. In it his tastes were as individual as they were in English literature. Despite his early study of the Vedas he cared less for them than for classical Sanskrit literature. Though his erudition in Hindu mythology was vast, he was not interested in its anthropological or historical aspects, only in its function in literature, in what the great poets had made of it. His attitude towards *Realien*, details of domestic and public life, was the same: a knowledge of them seemed to him interesting and valuable only as it aids one to understand the literary texts. The Rig-Veda, however, he never ceased to read, not merely because he felt that it is the stuff of which all Indian literature is made, but as a collection of great poems. Sanskrit drama and the "fable literature" he read exhaustively and repeatedly; but all this he took seriously even as he did Indian philosophy, not as a collection of primitive *curiosa* but as the work of real artists to whom he was not ashamed to go to school. When he read the *Mahabharata* or the *Ramayana* he read it from first to last; and that he read them thus not once but several times will furnish some notion of the way in which he read Sanskrit. He said to a student that if he were confined for life to a single book he should certainly choose the *Mahabharata*. He read for his own instruction and amusement, not merely as an aid to teaching or publication. He roundly condemned an eminent Sanskritist because he "never read any Sanskrit for fun." He would have scorned the attitude of a famous Spanish scholar who said: "I do not read ballads,

I study them." He was equally devoted to the high seriousness of the *Bhagavad-gita* and to the elegantly picaresque narrative of Dandin's *Ten Princes*.

Through and through a man of literature, Ryder was not to any great degree a man of letters. (Here he is in sharp contrast to Paul Elmer More, a man of similar training to his own and like him in many peculiarities of temperament.) The few original poems contained in this volume—all of them fine in their own way, and all of them self-revelatory—and the short introductions to his volumes of translation constitute his only claim to that title. Criticism in general he despised, though he could not resist indulging in bits of it in his introductions and though his conversation was full of it. In the introduction to his volume of translations from Kalidasa, after quoting a paragraph from Lévi's *Théâtre Indien*, he writes:

"It is hardly possible to say anything true about Kalidasa's achievement which is not already contained in this appreciation. Yet one loves to expand the praise, even though realizing that the critic is by his very nature a fool. Here there shall at any rate be none of that cold-blooded criticism which imagines itself set above a world-author to appraise and judge, but a generous tribute of affectionate admiration."

Ryder was passionately devoted to the Indian systems of philosophy, not as a subject for scholarly investigation, but as a guide of life. Western philosophy was for him "frivolous" because it does not discuss salvation. Of Aristotle he said: "He seems to me a man of great learning and industry, often acute, but rarely right as to what is really important. It is an open question whether his labors have done good or harm." On the other hand, he regarded the Sankhya system as "a nearer approximation to the truth concerning the soul's relation to the physical universe than [is] any Occidental philosophy." Yet, aside from the brief introduction to his translation of the *Bhagavad-gita* from which this quotation is taken, he wrote nothing on the Hindu philosophies. Perhaps he felt that his energies were better spent on translation; and, when he had ceased to translate, he had probably lost any impulse for constructive work.

History Ryder regarded as a pleasant and instructive subject for study and reflection but not a matter of equal importance with great literature, for he agreed fervently with Aristotle that poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. For him history was an art, not a science. He knew best the history of Greece, Rome, the French Revolution, and (by "fortuity of birth," as he explained) the United States. He was specially interested in the period of the Civil War. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* remained for him the greatest work on Roman history. The notes added to it by later scholars he termed impertinences that merely demonstrated the greatness of Gibbon and the inability of his commentators to understand him. This is the point of view of a bright twelve-year-old lad poring over his Christmas Plutarch. Nothing could better illustrate Ryder's almost exclusive interest in literature and his dislike of scholarly disquisitions about it. It would seem that any truth-loving man with enough interest in history to read Gibbon from cover to cover would wish to know how far the statements and views of an eighteenth-century Englishman have been corrected by sources of information discovered since his time.

Ryder loathed the formal features of academic life; he detested the machinery of courses and grades, examinations and degrees. One of the bitterest gibes in his "Tolstoi" is:

They of the Inquisition prayed  
To him of Galilee!  
The Renaissance of learning made  
A University!

His own examinations in his language courses were perfunctory; he appraised his students by his personal knowledge of them. Only one student ever received under his supervision a higher degree in Sanskrit, and that was only a master's degree. The student wanted the degree and had the requisite preparation for it. The Dean of the Graduate Division sent to Ryder the formal papers that must be filled out and Ryder tossed them in his wastebasket. The unfortunate student appealed for help to the Dean, who instructed him to capture Ryder and bring him to his office.

The student, finding Ryder in a mellow mood, did so. So after weeks of delay the proper documents were made out and filed. Ryder now loosened up; he conducted a formal examination and the student received his coveted degree. It is fair to state, however, that at least once Ryder encouraged a brilliant student to proceed to the doctorate in Sanskrit. But the student's main interest was in Greek, so that he offered Sanskrit only as a minor for the degree.

Nevertheless Ryder took part in the administration of the University, doing loyal service on the committees to which he was assigned—service of more value than that of the majority of his colleagues. The Dean of the Graduate Division testifies that there has been no better chairman than Ryder of the important Committee on Fellowships and Graduate Scholarships.

Ryder was a teacher of the most genuine worth; he hoped to be remembered primarily as a teacher. In his first-year class the students had to learn Sanskrit grammar, though Ryder did not drill it into them. They had to work. If they did not work, Ryder did not order them to leave the class; they just left, awed by the personality of the man. Ryder led his students; he did not drive them. Professor Clark remarks that he had "a gift for encouraging students to think that they could do things for themselves." After the first year the classes usually met, if no women were enrolled in them, in Ryder's room. Ryder would assign a lesson that he thought adequate, cover it in half an hour, and then chat for the rest of the time—or beyond the time—on topics suggested by the text or on topics not suggested by it: on literature, the general conduct of life, or the ways of the world. For students who seemed to have a genuine interest in Sanskrit literature and to be worth while in themselves Ryder would do anything. He enjoyed reading Sanskrit privately with students or ex-students more than he did the conduct of formal classes. He would listen respectfully to the opinions of the lowliest student, and he never tried to force his way of thinking upon anyone; for, although he might condemn with vehemence the actions or opinions of another, he staunchly upheld the right of every man to make his own mistakes in his own fashion.

Ryder believed that the only true foundation for a general education was a knowledge of Greek, Latin, and mathematics. He found the world fallen on evil days and coped with the situation as best he could, permitting students to start Sanskrit with him even if they had little previous experience in language study. Once a young woman who was intensely interested in Hindu philosophy, but who had never studied either Latin or Greek, enrolled in his elementary class. According to her own account she worked about eight hours on a lesson, and at that was "the dunce of the class." In her second year she was reading the *Bhagavad-gita* with intelligence and understanding. In her third year she started in on the *Upanishads*; sometimes Ryder would read with her only two verses and then discuss with her the Hindu philosophies.

Besides his courses in Sanskrit Ryder offered lecture courses on "The Veda and the Philosophical Systems" and "Classical Sanskrit Literature." These soon became crowded with miscellaneous and untrained students. He skillfully remedied affairs by limiting the registration to "students who for four years have studied ancient languages: Sanskrit, Latin, Greek."

Ryder was a man of wonderful personal charm and he displayed fascinating wit in conversation. Yet from the first he shunned general society; he was not seen at teas, though at least twice he gave them himself. He repeatedly expressed, for instance in his poem on Tolstoi, his scorn for "respectability." Yet his own offenses against it were no more than breaches of convention. He was no Bohemian; no breath of scandal was ever attached to his name. He belonged to no clubs except the Faculty Club of the University, where he would spend long hours playing chess or billiards, games at which he was an expert. He was intimate at different times with various colleagues; then he would suddenly drop the friendship, apparently not from any ill will but because the society of the person concerned no longer gave him pleasure; he might speak with warm appreciation of the individual from whom he had parted company. Nevertheless by his desertion he sometimes caused real pain to men who valued his friendship. To his students and to his brothers and sisters he was