Snow Bound, and other poems

by John Greenleaf Whittier

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POEMS OF NATURE

POEMS SUBJECTIVE AND REMINISCENT RELIGIOUS POEMS BY JOHN

GREENLEAF WHITTIER

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SNOW-BOUND.

A WINTER IDYL. TO THE MEMORY OF THE HOUSEHOLD IT DESCRIBES, THIS POEM IS DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR.

The inmates of the family at the Whittier homestead who are referred to in the poem were my father, mother, my brother and two sisters, and my uncle and aunt both unmarried. In addition, there was the district school-master who boarded with us. The "not unfeared, half-welcome guest" was Harriet Livermore, daughter of Judge Livermore, of New Hampshire, a young woman of fine natural ability, enthusiastic, eccentric, with slight control over her violent temper, which sometimes made her religious profession doubtful. She was equally ready to exhort in school-house prayer-meetings and dance in a Washington ball-room, while her father was a member of Congress. She early embraced the doctrine of the Second Advent, and felt it her duty to proclaim the Lord's speedy coming. With this message she crossed the Atlantic and spent the greater part of a long life in travelling over Europe and Asia. She lived some time with Lady Hester Stanhope, a woman as fantastic and mentally strained as herself, on the slope of Mt. Lebanon, but finally quarrelled with her in regard to two white horses with red marks on their backs which suggested the idea of saddles, on which her titled hostess expected to ride into Jerusalem with the Lord. A friend of mine found her, when quite an old woman, wandering in Syria

with a tribe of Arabs, who with the Oriental notion that madness is inspiration, accepted her as their prophetess and leader. At the time referred to in Snow-Bound she was boarding at the Rocks Village about two miles from us.

In my boyhood, in our lonely farm-house, we had scanty sources of information; few books and only a small weekly newspaper. Our only annual was the Almanac. Under such circumstances story-telling was a necessary resource in the long winter evenings. My father when a young man had traversed the wilderness to Canada, and could tell us of his adventures with Indians and wild beasts, and of his sojourn in the French villages. My uncle was ready with his record of hunting and fishing and, it must be confessed, with stories which he at least half believed, of witchcraft and apparitions. My mother, who was born in the Indian-haunted region of Somersworth, New Hampshire, between Dover and Portsmouth, told us of the inroads of the savages, and the narrow escape of her ancestors. She described strange people who lived on the Piscataqua and Cocheco, among whom was Bantam the sorcerer. I have in my possession the wizard's "conjuring book," which he solemnly opened when consulted. It is a copy of Cornelius Agrippa's Magic printed in 1651, dedicated to Dr. Robert Child, who, like Michael Scott, had learned "the art of glammorie In Padua beyond the sea," and who is famous in the annals of Massachusetts, where he was at one time a resident, as the first man who dared petition the General Court for liberty of conscience. The full title of the book is Three Books of Occult Philosophy, by Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Knight, Doctor of both Laws, Counsellor to Caesar's Sacred Majesty and Judge of the Prerogative Court.

"As the Spirits of Darkness be stronger in the dark, so Good Spirits, which be Angels of Light, are augmented not only by the Divine light of the Sun, but also by our common Wood Fire: and as the Celestial Fire drives away dark spirits, so also this our Fire of Wood doth the same."—Cor. AGRIPPA, Occult Philosophy, Book I. ch. v.

"Announced by all the trumpets of the sky, Arrives the snow, and, driving o'er the fields, Seems nowhere to alight: the whited air Hides hills and woods, the rivet and the heaven, And veils the farm-house at the garden's end. The sled and traveller stopped, the courier's feet Delayed, all friends shut out, the housemates sit Around the radiant fireplace, enclosed In a tumultuous privacy of storm." Emerson. The Snow Storm.

The sun that brief December day Rose cheerless over hills of gray, And, darkly circled, gave at noon A sadder light than waning moon. Slow tracing down the thickening sky Its mute and ominous prophecy, A portent seeming less than threat, It sank from sight before it set. A chill no coat, however stout, Of homespun stuff could quite, shut out, A hard, dull bitterness of cold, That checked, mid-vein, the circling race Of life-blood in the sharpened face, The coming of the snow-storm told. The wind blew east; we heard the roar Of Ocean on his wintry shore, And felt the strong pulse throbbing there Beat with low rhythm our inland air.

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores,— Brought in the wood from out of doors, Littered the stalls, and from the mows Raked down the herd's-grass for the cows Heard the horse whinnying for his corn; And, sharply clashing horn on horn, Impatient down the stanchion rows The cattle shake their walnut bows; While, peering from his early perch Upon the scaffold's pole of birch, The cock his crested helmet bent And down his querulous challenge sent.

Unwarmed by any sunset light The gray day darkened into night, A night made hoary with the swarm, And whirl-dance of the blinding storm, As zigzag, wavering to and fro, Crossed and recrossed the winged snow And ere the early bedtime came The white drift piled the window-frame, And through the glass the clothes-line posts Looked in like tall and sheeted ghosts.

So all night long the storm roared on The morning broke without a sun; In tiny spherule traced with lines Of Nature's geometric signs, In starry flake, and pellicle,

All day the hoary meteor fell; And, when the second morning shone, We looked upon a world unknown, On nothing we could call our own. Around the glistening wonder bent The blue walls of the firmament, No cloud above, no earth below,— A universe of sky and snow The old familiar sights of ours Took marvellous shapes; strange domes and towers Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood, Or garden-wall, or belt of wood; A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed, A fenceless drift what once was road; The bridle-post an old man sat With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat; The well-curb had a Chinese roof; And even the long sweep, high aloof, In its slant splendor, seemed to tell Of Pisa's leaning miracle.

A prompt, decisive man, no breath Our father wasted: "Boys, a path!" Well pleased, (for when did farmer boy Count such a summons less than joy?) Our buskins on our feet we drew; With mittened hands, and caps drawn low, To guard our necks and ears from snow, We cut the solid whiteness through. And, where the drift was deepest, made A tunnel walled and overlaid With dazzling crystal: we had read Of rare Aladdin's wondrous cave, And to our own his name we gave, With many a wish the luck were ours To test his lamp's supernal powers. We reached the barn with merry din, And roused the prisoned brutes within. The old horse thrust his long head out, And grave with wonder gazed about; The cock his lusty greeting said, And forth his speckled harem led; The oxen lashed their tails, and hooked, And mild reproach of hunger looked; The horned patriarch of the sheep, Like Egypt's Amun roused from sleep, Shook his sage head with gesture mute, And emphasized with stamp of foot.

All day the gusty north-wind bore The loosening drift its breath before; Low circling round its southern zone, The sun through dazzling snow-mist shone. No church-bell lent its Christian tone To the savage air, no social smoke Curled over woods of snow-hung oak. A solitude made more intense By dreary-voiced elements, The shrieking of the mindless wind, The moaning tree-boughs swaying blind, And on the glass the unmeaning beat Of ghostly finger-tips of sleet. Beyond the circle of our

hearth No welcome sound of toil or mirth Unbound the spell, and testified Of human life and thought outside. We minded that the sharpest ear The buried brooklet could not hear, The music of whose liquid lip Had been to us companionship, And, in our lonely life, had grown To have an almost human tone.

As night drew on, and, from the crest Of wooded knolls that ridged the west, The sun, a snow-blown traveller, sank From sight beneath the smothering bank, We piled, with care, our nightly stack Of wood against the chimney-back,— The oaken log, green, huge, and thick, And on its top the stout back-stick; The knotty forestick laid apart, And filled between with curious art The ragged brush; then, hovering near, We watched the first red blaze appear, Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam On whitewashed wall and sagging beam, Until the old, rude-furnished room Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom; While radiant with a mimic flame Outside the sparkling drift became, And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free. The crane and pendent trammels showed, The Turks' heads on the andirons glowed; While childish fancy, prompt to tell The meaning of the miracle, Whispered the old rhyme: "Under the tree, When fire outdoors burns merrily, There the witches are making tea."

The moon above the eastern wood Shone at its full; the hill-range stood Transfigured in the silver flood, Its blown snows flashing cold and keen, Dead white, save where some sharp ravine Took shadow, or the sombre green Of hemlocks turned to pitchy black Against the whiteness at their back. For such a world and such a night Most fitting that unwarming light, Which only seemed where'er it fell To make the coldness visible.

Shut in from all the world without, We sat the clean-winged hearth about, Content to let the north-wind roar In baffled rage at pane and door, While the red logs before us beat The frost-line back with tropic heat; And ever, when a louder blast Shook beam and rafter as it passed, The merrier up its roaring draught The great throat of the

chimney laughed; The house-dog on his paws outspread Laid to the fire his drowsy head, The cat's dark silhouette on the wall A couchant tiger's seemed to fall; And, for the winter fireside meet, Between the andirons' straddling feet, The mug of cider simmered slow, The apples sputtered in a row, And, close at hand, the basket stood With nuts from brown October's wood.

What matter how the night behaved? What matter how the north-wind raved? Blow high, blow low, not all its snow Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow. O Time and Change!—with hair as gray As was my sire's that winter day, How strange it seems, with so much gone Of life and love, to still live on! Ah, brother! only I and thou Are left of all that circle now,— The dear home faces whereupon That fitful firelight paled and shone. Henceforward, listen as we will, The voices of that hearth are still; Look where we may, the wide earth o'er Those lighted faces smile no more. We tread the paths their feet have worn, We sit beneath their orchard trees, We hear, like them, the hum of bees And rustle of the bladed corn; We turn the pages that they read, Their written words we linger o'er, But in the sun they cast no shade, No voice is heard, no sign is made, No step is on the conscious floor! Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust, (Since He who knows our need is just,) That somehow, somewhere, meet we must. Alas for him who never sees The stars shine through his cypress-trees Who, hopeless, lays his dead away, Nor looks to see the breaking day Across the mournful marbles play! Who hath not learned, in hours of faith, The truth to flesh and sense unknown, That Life is ever lord of Death, And Love can never lose its own!

We sped the time with stories old, Wrought puzzles out, and riddles told, Or stammered from our school-book lore The Chief of Gambia's "golden shore." How often since, when all the land Was clay in Slavery's shaping hand, As if a far-blown trumpet stirred The languorous sin-sick air, I heard "Does not the voice of reason cry, Claim the first right which Nature gave, From the red scourge of bondage fly, Nor deign to live a burdened slave!" Our father rode again his ride On

Memphremagog's wooded side; Sat down again to moose and samp In trapper's hut and Indian camp; Lived o'er the old idyllic ease Beneath St. Francois' hemlock-trees; Again for him the moonlight shone On Norman cap and bodiced zone; Again he heard the violin play Which led the village dance away, And mingled in its merry whirl The grandam and the laughing girl. Or, nearer home, our steps he led Where Salisbury's level marshes spread Mile-wide as flies the laden bee; Where merry mowers, hale and strong, Swept, scythe on scythe, their swaths along The low green prairies of the sea. We shared the fishing off Boar's Head, And round the rocky Isles of Shoals The hake-broil on the drift-wood coals; The chowder on the sand-beach made, Dipped by the hungry, steaming hot, With spoons of clam-shell from the pot. We heard the tales of witchcraft old, And dream and sign and marvel told To sleepy listeners as they lay Stretched idly on the salted hay, Adrift along the winding shores, When favoring breezes deigned to blow The square sail of the gundelow And idle lay the useless oars.

Our mother, while she turned her wheel Or run the new-knit stocking-heel, Told how the Indian hordes came down At midnight on Cocheco town, And how her own great-uncle bore His cruel scalp-mark to fourscore. Recalling, in her fitting phrase, So rich and picturesque and free, (The common unrhymed poetry Of simple life and country ways,) The story of her early days,— She made us welcome to her home; Old hearths grew wide to give us room; We stole with her a frightened look At the gray wizard's conjuring-book, The fame whereof went far and wide Through all the simple country side; We heard the hawks at twilight play, The boat-horn on Piscataqua, The loon's weird laughter far away; We fished her little trout-brook, knew What flowers in wood and meadow grew, What sunny hillsides autumn-brown She climbed to shake the ripe nuts down, Saw where in sheltered cove and bay The ducks' black squadron anchored lay, And heard the wild-geese calling loud Beneath the gray November cloud.

Then, haply, with a look more grave, And soberer tone, some tale she gave From

painful Sewell's ancient tome, Beloved in every Quaker home, Of faith fire-winged by martyrdom, Or Chalkley's Journal, old and quaint,— Gentlest of skippers, rare sea-saint!— Who, when the dreary calms prevailed, And water-butt and bread-cask failed, And cruel, hungry eyes pursued His portly presence mad for food, With dark hints muttered under breath Of casting lots for life or death, Offered, if Heaven withheld supplies, To be himself the sacrifice. Then, suddenly, as if to save The good man from his living grave, A ripple on the water grew, A school of porpoise flashed in view. "Take, eat," he said, "and be content; These fishes in my stead are sent By Him who gave the tangled ram To spare the child of Abraham."

Our uncle, innocent of books, Was rich in lore of fields and brooks, The ancient teachers never dumb Of Nature's unhoused lyceum. In moons and tides and weather wise, He read the clouds as prophecies, And foul or fair could well divine, By many an occult hint and sign, Holding the cunning-warded keys To all the woodcraft mysteries; Himself to Nature's heart so near That all her voices in his ear Of beast or bird had meanings clear, Like Apollonius of old, Who knew the tales the sparrows told, Or Hermes who interpreted What the sage cranes of Nilus said;

Content to live where life began; A simple, guileless, childlike man, Strong only on his native grounds, The little world of sights and sounds Whose girdle was the parish bounds, Whereof his fondly partial pride The common features magnified, As Surrey hills to mountains grew In White of Selborne's loving view,— He told how teal and loon he shot, And how the eagle's eggs he got, The feats on pond and river done, The prodigies of rod and gun; Till, warming with the tales he told, Forgotten was the outside cold, The bitter wind unheeded blew, From ripening corn the pigeons flew, The partridge drummed I' the wood, the mink Went fishing down the river-brink. In fields with bean or clover gay, The woodchuck, like a hermit gray, Peered from the doorway of his cell; The muskrat plied the mason's trade, And tier by tier his mud-walls laid; And from the shagbark overhead The grizzled squirrel dropped his shell.

Next, the dear aunt, whose smile of cheer And voice in dreams I see and hear,— The sweetest woman ever Fate Perverse denied a household mate, Who, lonely, homeless, not the less Found peace in love's unselfishness, And welcome wheresoe'er she went, A calm and gracious element,— Whose presence seemed the sweet income And womanly atmosphere of home,— Called up her girlhood memories, The huskings and the apple-bees, The sleigh-rides and the summer sails, Weaving through all the poor details And homespun warp of circumstance A golden woof-thread of romance. For well she kept her genial mood And simple faith of maidenhood; Before her still a cloud-land lay, The mirage loomed across her way; The morning dew, that dries so soon With others, glistened at her noon; Through years of toil and soil and care, From glossy tress to thin gray hair, All unprofaned she held apart The virgin fancies of the heart. Be shame to him of woman born Who hath for such but thought of scorn.

There, too, our elder sister plied Her evening task the stand beside; A full, rich nature, free to trust, Truthful and almost sternly just, Impulsive, earnest, prompt to act, And make her generous thought a fact, Keeping with many a light disguise The secret of self-sacrifice. O heart sore-tried! thou hast the best That Heaven itself could give thee,—rest,

Rest from all bitter thoughts and things! How many a poor one's blessing went With thee beneath the low green tent Whose curtain never outward swings!

As one who held herself a part Of all she saw, and let her heart Against the household bosom lean, Upon the motley-braided mat Our youngest and our dearest sat, Lifting her large, sweet, asking eyes, Now bathed in the unfading green And holy peace of Paradise. Oh, looking from some heavenly hill, Or from the shade of saintly palms, Or silver reach of river calms, Do those large eyes behold me still? With me one little year ago:— The chill weight of the winter snow For months upon her grave has lain; And now, when summer south-winds blow And brier and

harebell bloom again, I tread the pleasant paths we trod, I see the violet-sprinkled sod Whereon she leaned, too frail and weak The hillside flowers she loved to seek, Yet following me where'er I went With dark eyes full of love's content. The birds are glad; the brier-rose fills The air with sweetness; all the hills Stretch green to June's unclouded sky; But still I wait with ear and eye For something gone which should be nigh, A loss in all familiar things, In flower that blooms, and bird that sings. And yet, dear heart' remembering thee, Am I not richer than of old? Safe in thy immortality, What change can reach the wealth I hold? What chance can mar the pearl and gold Thy love hath left in trust with me? And while in life's late afternoon, Where cool and long the shadows grow, I walk to meet the night that soon Shall shape and shadow overflow, I cannot feel that thou art far, Since near at need the angels are; And when the sunset gates unbar, Shall I not see thee waiting stand, And, white against the evening star, The welcome of thy beckoning hand?

Brisk wielder of the birch and rule, The master of the district school Held at the fire his favored place, Its warm glow lit a laughing face Fresh-hued and fair, where scarce appeared The uncertain prophecy of beard. He teased the mitten-blinded cat, Played cross-pins on my uncle's hat, Sang songs, and told us what befalls In classic Dartmouth's college halls. Born the wild Northern hills among, From whence his yeoman father wrung By patient toil subsistence scant, Not competence and yet not want,

He early gained the power to pay His cheerful, self-reliant way; Could doff at ease his scholar's gown To peddle wares from town to town; Or through the long vacation's reach In lonely lowland districts teach, Where all the droll experience found At stranger hearths in boarding round, The moonlit skater's keen delight, The sleigh-drive through the frosty night, The rustic party, with its rough Accompaniment of blind-man's-buff, And whirling plate, and forfeits paid, His winter task a pastime made. Happy the snow-locked homes wherein He tuned his merry violin, Or played the athlete in the barn, Or held the good dame's

winding-yarn, Or mirth-provoking versions told Of classic legends rare and old, Wherein the scenes of Greece and Rome Had all the commonplace of home, And little seemed at best the odds 'Twixt Yankee pedlers and old gods; Where Pindus-born Arachthus took The guise of any grist-mill brook, And dread Olympus at his will Became a huckleberry hill.

A careless boy that night be seemed; But at his desk he had the look And air of one who wisely schemed, And hostage from the future took In trained thought and lore of book. Large-brained, clear-eyed, of such as he Shall Freedom's young apostles be, Who, following in War's bloody trail, Shall every lingering wrong assail; All chains from limb and spirit strike, Uplift the black and white alike; Scatter before their swift advance The darkness and the ignorance, The pride, the lust, the squalid sloth, Which nurtured Treason's monstrous growth, Made murder pastime, and the hell Of prison-torture possible; The cruel lie of caste refute, Old forms remould, and substitute For Slavery's lash the freeman's will, For blind routine, wise-handed skill; A school-house plant on every hill, Stretching in radiate nerve-lines thence The quick wires of intelligence; Till North and South together brought Shall own the same electric thought, In peace a common flag salute, And, side by side in labor's free And unresentful rivalry, Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

Another guest that winter night Flashed back from lustrous eyes the light. Unmarked by time, and yet not young, The honeyed music of her tongue And words of meekness scarcely told A nature passionate and bold, Strong, self-concentred, spurning guide, Its milder features dwarfed beside Her unbent will's majestic pride. She sat among us, at the best, A not unfeared, half-welcome guest, Rebuking with her cultured phrase Our homeliness of words and ways. A certain pard-like, treacherous grace Swayed the lithe limbs and dropped the lash, Lent the white teeth their dazzling flash; And under low brows, black with night, Rayed out at times a dangerous light; The sharp heat-lightnings of her face Presaging ill to him whom Fate Condemned to share her love or hate. A woman tropical, intense In thought and

act, in soul and sense, She blended in a like degree The vixen and the devotee, Revealing with each freak or feint The temper of Petruchio's Kate, The raptures of Siena's saint. Her tapering hand and rounded wrist Had facile power to form a fist; The warm, dark languish of her eyes Was never safe from wrath's surprise. Brows saintly calm and lips devout Knew every change of scowl and pout; And the sweet voice had notes more high And shrill for social battle-cry.

Since then what old cathedral town Has missed her pilgrim staff and gown, What convent-gate has held its lock Against the challenge of her knock! Through Smyrna's plague-hushed thoroughfares, Up sea-set Malta's rocky stairs, Gray olive slopes of hills that hem Thy tombs and shrines, Jerusalem, Or startling on her desert throne The crazy Queen of Lebanon s With claims fantastic as her own, Her tireless feet have held their way; And still, unrestful, bowed, and gray, She watches under Eastern skies, With hope each day renewed and fresh, The Lord's quick coming in the flesh, Whereof she dreams and prophesies!

Where'er her troubled path may be, The Lord's sweet pity with her go! The outward wayward life we see, The hidden springs we may not know. Nor is it given us to discern What threads the fatal sisters spun, Through what ancestral years has run The sorrow with the woman born, What forged her cruel chain of moods, What set her feet in solitudes, And held the love within her mute, What mingled madness in the blood, A life-long discord and annoy, Water of tears with oil of joy, And hid within the folded bud Perversities of flower and fruit. It is not ours to separate The tangled skein of will and fate, To show what metes and bounds should stand Upon the soul's debatable land, And between choice and Providence Divide the circle of events; But lie who knows our frame is just, Merciful and compassionate, And full of sweet assurances And hope for all the language is, That He remembereth we are dust!

At last the great logs, crumbling low, Sent out a dull and duller glow, The bull's-eye

watch that hung in view, Ticking its weary circuit through, Pointed with mutely warning sign Its black hand to the hour of nine. That sign the pleasant circle broke My uncle ceased his pipe to smoke, Knocked from its bowl the refuse gray, And laid it tenderly away, Then roused himself to safely cover The dull red brands with ashes over. And while, with care, our mother laid The work aside, her steps she stayed One moment, seeking to express Her grateful sense of happiness For food and shelter, warmth and health, And love's contentment more than wealth, With simple wishes (not the weak, Vain prayers which no fulfilment seek, But such as warm the generous heart, O'er-prompt to do with Heaven its part) That none might lack, that bitter night, For bread and clothing, warmth and light.

Within our beds awhile we heard The wind that round the gables roared, With now and then a ruder shock, Which made our very bedsteads rock. We heard the loosened clapboards tost, The board-nails snapping in the frost; And on us, through the unplastered wall, Felt the light sifted snow-flakes fall. But sleep stole on, as sleep will do When hearts are light and life is new; Faint and more faint the murmurs grew, Till in the summer-land of dreams They softened to the sound of streams, Low stir of leaves, and dip of oars, And lapsing waves on quiet shores.

Next morn we wakened with the shout Of merry voices high and clear; And saw the teamsters drawing near To break the drifted highways out. Down the long hillside treading slow We saw the half-buried oxen' go, Shaking the snow from heads uptost, Their straining nostrils white with frost. Before our door the straggling train Drew up, an added team to gain. The elders threshed their hands a-cold, Passed, with the cider-mug, their jokes From lip to lip; the younger folks Down the loose snow-banks, wrestling, rolled, Then toiled again the cavalcade O'er windy hill, through clogged ravine, And woodland paths that wound between Low drooping pine-boughs winter-weighed. From every barn a team afoot, At every house a new recruit, Where, drawn by Nature's subtlest law Haply the watchful young men saw Sweet doorway pictures of the curls And curious eyes of merry girls, Lifting their

hands in mock defence Against the snow-ball's compliments, And reading in each missive tost The charm with Eden never lost.

We heard once more the sleigh-bells' sound; And, following where the teamsters led, The wise old Doctor went his round, Just pausing at our door to say, In the brief autocratic way Of one who, prompt at Duty's call, Was free to urge her claim on all, That some poor neighbor sick abed At night our mother's aid would need. For, one in generous thought and deed, What mattered in the sufferer's sight The Quaker matron's inward light, The Doctor's mail of Calvin's creed? All hearts confess the saints elect Who, twain in faith, in love agree, And melt not in an acid sect The Christian pearl of charity!

So days went on: a week had passed Since the great world was heard from last. The Almanac we studied o'er, Read and reread our little store, Of books and pamphlets, scarce a score; One harmless novel, mostly hid From younger eyes, a book forbid, And poetry, (or good or bad, A single book was all we had,) Where Ellwood's meek, drab-skirted Muse, A stranger to the heathen Nine, Sang, with a somewhat nasal whine, The wars of David and the Jews. At last the floundering carrier bore The village paper to our door. Lo! broadening outward as we read, To warmer zones the horizon spread; In panoramic length unrolled We saw the marvels that it told. Before us passed the painted Creeks, And daft McGregor on his raids In Costa Rica's everglades. And up Taygetos winding slow Rode Ypsilanti's Mainote Greeks, A Turk's head at each saddle-bow Welcome to us its week-old news, Its corner for the rustic Muse, Its monthly gauge of snow and rain, Its record, mingling in a breath The wedding bell and dirge of death; Jest, anecdote, and love-lorn tale, The latest culprit sent to jail; Its hue and cry of stolen and lost, Its vendue sales and goods at cost, And traffic calling loud for gain. We felt the stir of hall and street, The pulse of life that round us beat; The chill embargo of the snow Was melted in the genial glow; Wide swung again our ice-locked door, And all the world was ours once more!

Clasp, Angel of the backward look And folded wings of ashen gray And voice of echoes far away, The brazen covers of thy book; The weird palimpsest old and vast, Wherein thou hid'st the spectral past; Where, closely mingling, pale and glow The characters of joy and woe; The monographs of outlived years, Or smile-illumed or dim with tears, Green hills of life that slope to death, And haunts of home, whose vistaed trees Shade off to mournful cypresses With the white amaranths underneath. Even while I look, I can but heed The restless sands' incessant fall, Importunate hours that hours succeed, Each clamorous with its own sharp need, And duty keeping pace with all. Shut down and clasp the heavy lids; I hear again the voice that bids The dreamer leave his dream midway For larger hopes and graver fears Life greatens in these later years, The century's aloe flowers to-day!

Yet, haply, in some lull of life, Some Truce of God which breaks its strife, The worldling's eyes shall gather dew, Dreaming in throngful city ways Of winter joys his boyhood knew; And dear and early friends—the few Who yet remain—shall pause to view These Flemish pictures of old days; Sit with me by the homestead hearth, And stretch the hands of memory forth To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze! And thanks untraced to lips unknown Shall greet me like the odors blown From unseen meadows newly mown, Or lilies floating in some pond, Wood-fringed, the wayside gaze beyond; The traveller owns the grateful sense Of sweetness near, he knows not whence, And, pausing, takes with forehead bare The benediction of the air. 1866.

MY TRIUMPH.

The autumn-time has come; On woods that dream of bloom, And over purpling vines, The low sun fainter shines.

The aster-flower is failing, The hazel's gold is paling; Yet overhead more near The eternal stars appear!

And present gratitude Insures the future's good, And for the things I see I trust the

things to be;

That in the paths untrod, And the long days of God, My feet shall still be led, My heart be comforted.

O living friends who love me! O dear ones gone above me! Careless of other fame, I leave to you my name.

Hide it from idle praises, Save it from evil phrases Why, when dear lips that spake it Are dumb, should strangers wake it?

Let the thick curtain fall; I better know than all How little I have gained, How vast the unattained.

Not by the page word-painted Let life be banned or sainted Deeper than written scroll The colors of the soul.

Sweeter than any sung My songs that found no tongue; Nobler than any fact My wish that failed of act.

Others shall sing the song, Others shall right the wrong,— Finish what I begin, And all I fail of win.

What matter, I or they? Mine or another's day, So the right word be said And life the sweeter made?

Hail to the coming singers Hail to the brave light-bringers! Forward I reach and share All that they sing and dare.

The airs of heaven blow o'er me; A glory shines before me Of what mankind shall be,— Pure, generous, brave, and free.

A dream of man and woman Diviner but still human, Solving the riddle old, Shaping the Age of Gold.

The love of God and neighbor; An equal-handed labor; The richer life, where beauty Walks hand in hand with duty.

Ring, bells in unreared steeples, The joy of unborn peoples! Sound, trumpets far off

blown, Your triumph is my own!

Parcel and part of all, I keep the festival, Fore-reach the good to be, And share the victory.

I feel the earth move sunward, I join the great march onward, And take, by faith, while living, My freehold of thanksgiving. 1870.

IN SCHOOL-DAYS.

Still sits the school-house by the road, A ragged beggar sleeping; Around it still the sumachs grow, And blackberry-vines are creeping.

Within, the master's desk is seen, Deep scarred by raps official; The warping floor, the battered seats, The jack-knife's carved initial;

The charcoal frescos on its wall; Its door's worn sill, betraying The feet that, creeping slow to school, Went storming out to playing!

Long years ago a winter sun Shone over it at setting; Lit up its western window-panes, And low eaves' icy fretting.

It touched the tangled golden curls, And brown eyes full of grieving, Of one who still her steps delayed When all the school were leaving.

For near her stood the little boy Her childish favor singled: His cap pulled low upon a face Where pride and shame were mingled.

Pushing with restless feet the snow To right and left, he lingered;— As restlessly her tiny hands The blue-checked apron fingered.

He saw her lift her eyes; he felt The soft hand's light caressing, And heard the tremble of her voice, As if a fault confessing.

"I 'm sorry that I spelt the word I hate to go above you, Because,"—the brown eyes lower fell,— "Because you see, I love you!"

Still memory to a gray-haired man That sweet child-face is showing. Dear girl! the

grasses on her grave Have forty years been growing!

He lives to learn, in life's hard school, How few who pass above him Lament their triumph and his loss, Like her,—because they love him.

MY BIRTHDAY.

Beneath the moonlight and the snow Lies dead my latest year; The winter winds are wailing low Its dirges in my ear.

I grieve not with the moaning wind As if a loss befell; Before me, even as behind, God is, and all is well!

His light shines on me from above, His low voice speaks within,— The patience of immortal love Outwearying mortal sin.

Not mindless of the growing years Of care and loss and pain, My eyes are wet with thankful tears For blessings which remain.

If dim the gold of life has grown, I will not count it dross, Nor turn from treasures still my own To sigh for lack and loss.

The years no charm from Nature take; As sweet her voices call, As beautiful her mornings break, As fair her evenings fall.

Love watches o'er my quiet ways, Kind voices speak my name, And lips that find it hard to praise Are slow, at least, to blame.

How softly ebb the tides of will! How fields, once lost or won, Now lie behind me green and still Beneath a level sun.

How hushed the hiss of party hate, The clamor of the throng! How old, harsh voices of debate Flow into rhythmic song!

Methinks the spirit's temper grows Too soft in this still air; Somewhat the restful heart foregoes Of needed watch and prayer.

The bark by tempest vainly tossed May founder in the calm, And he who braved the

polar frost Faint by the isles of balm.

Better than self-indulgent years The outflung heart of youth, Than pleasant songs in idle ears The tumult of the truth.

Rest for the weary hands is good, And love for hearts that pine, But let the manly habitude Of upright souls be mine.

Let winds that blow from heaven refresh, Dear Lord, the languid air; And let the weakness of the flesh Thy strength of spirit share.

And, if the eye must fail of light, The ear forget to hear, Make clearer still the spirit's sight, More fine the inward ear!

Be near me in mine hours of need To soothe, or cheer, or warn, And down these slopes of sunset lead As up the hills of morn! 1871.

RED RIDING-HOOD.

On the wide lawn the snow lay deep, Ridged o'er with many a drifted heap; The wind that through the pine-trees sung The naked elm-boughs tossed and swung; While, through the window, frosty-starred, Against the sunset purple barred, We saw the sombre crow flap by, The hawk's gray fleck along the sky, The crested blue-jay flitting swift, The squirrel poising on the drift, Erect, alert, his broad gray tail Set to the north wind like a sail.

It came to pass, our little lass, With flattened face against the glass, And eyes in which the tender dew Of pity shone, stood gazing through The narrow space her rosy lips Had melted from the frost's eclipse "Oh, see," she cried, "the poor blue-jays! What is it that the black crow says? The squirrel lifts his little legs Because he has no hands, and begs; He's asking for my nuts, I know May I not feed them on the snow?"

Half lost within her boots, her head Warm-sheltered in her hood of red, Her plaid skirt close about her drawn, She floundered down the wintry lawn; Now struggling

through the misty veil Blown round her by the shrieking gale; Now sinking in a drift so low Her scarlet hood could scarcely show Its dash of color on the snow.

She dropped for bird and beast forlorn Her little store of nuts and corn, And thus her timid guests bespoke "Come, squirrel, from your hollow oak,— Come, black old crow,—come, poor blue-jay, Before your supper's blown away Don't be afraid, we all are good; And I'm mamma's Red Riding-Hood!"

O Thou whose care is over all, Who heedest even the sparrow's fall, Keep in the little maiden's breast The pity which is now its guest! Let not her cultured years make less The childhood charm of tenderness, But let her feel as well as know, Nor harder with her polish grow! Unmoved by sentimental grief That wails along some printed leaf, But, prompt with kindly word and deed To own the claims of all who need, Let the grown woman's self make good The promise of Red Riding-Hood 1877.

RESPONSE.

On the occasion of my seventieth birthday in 1877, I was the recipient of many tokens of esteem. The publishers of the Atlantic Monthly gave a dinner in my name, and the editor of The Literary World gathered in his paper many affectionate messages from my associates in literature and the cause of human progress. The lines which follow were written in acknowledgment.

Beside that milestone where the level sun, Nigh unto setting, sheds his last, low rays On word and work irrevocably done, Life's blending threads of good and ill outspun, I hear, O friends! your words of cheer and praise, Half doubtful if myself or otherwise. Like him who, in the old Arabian joke, A beggar slept and crowned Caliph woke. Thanks not the less. With not unglad surprise I see my life-work through your partial eyes; Assured, in giving to my home-taught songs A higher value than of right belongs, You do but read between the written lines The finer grace of unfulfilled designs.

AT EVENTIDE.

Poor and inadequate the shadow-play Of gain and loss, of waking and of dream, Against life's solemn background needs must seem At this late hour. Yet, not unthankfully, I call to mind the fountains by the way, The breath of flowers, the bird-song on the spray, Dear friends, sweet human loves, the joy of giving And of receiving, the great boon of living In grand historic years when Liberty Had need of word and work, quick sympathies For all who fail and suffer, song's relief, Nature's uncloying loveliness; and chief, The kind restraining hand of Providence, The inward witness, the assuring sense Of an Eternal Good which overlies The sorrow of the world, Love which outlives All sin and wrong, Compassion which forgives To the uttermost, and Justice whose clear eyes Through lapse and failure look to the intent, And judge our frailty by the life we meant. 1878.

VOYAGE OF THE JETTIE.

The picturesquely situated Wayside Inn at West Ossipee, N. H., is now in ashes; and to its former guests these somewhat careless rhymes may be a not unwelcome reminder of pleasant summers and autumns on the banks of the Bearcamp and Chocorua. To the author himself they have a special interest from the fact that they were written, or improvised, under the eye and for the amusement of a beloved invalid friend whose last earthly sunsets faded from the mountain ranges of Ossipee and Sandwich.

A shallow stream, from fountains Deep in the Sandwich mountains, Ran lake ward Bearcamp River; And, between its flood-torn shores, Sped by sail or urged by oars No keel had vexed it ever.

Alone the dead trees yielding To the dull axe Time is wielding, The shy mink and the otter, And golden leaves and red, By countless autumns shed, Had floated down its water.

From the gray rocks of Cape Ann, Came a skilled seafaring man, With his dory, to the right place; Over hill and plain he brought her, Where the boatless Beareamp water Comes winding down from White-Face.

Quoth the skipper: "Ere she floats forth; I'm sure my pretty boat's worth, At least, a name as pretty." On her painted side he wrote it, And the flag that o'er her floated Bore aloft the name of Jettie.

On a radiant morn of summer, Elder guest and latest comer Saw her wed the Bearcamp water; Heard the name the skipper gave her, And the answer to the favor From the Bay State's graceful daughter.

Then, a singer, richly gifted, Her charmed voice uplifted; And the wood-thrush and song-sparrow Listened, dumb with envious pain, To the clear and sweet refrain Whose notes they could not borrow.

Then the skipper plied his oar, And from off the shelving shore, Glided out the strange explorer; Floating on, she knew not whither,— The tawny sands beneath her, The great hills watching o'er her.

On, where the stream flows quiet As the meadows' margins by it, Or widens out to borrow a New life from that wild water, The mountain giant's daughter, The pine-besung Chocorua.

Or, mid the tangling cumber And pack of mountain lumber That spring floods downward force, Over sunken snag, and bar Where the grating shallows are, The good boat held her course.

Under the pine-dark highlands, Around the vine-hung islands, She ploughed her crooked furrow And her rippling and her lurches Scared the river eels and perches, And the musk-rat in his burrow.

Every sober clam below her, Every sage and grave pearl-grower, Shut his rusty valves the tighter; Crow called to crow complaining, And old tortoises sat craning Their leathern necks to sight her.

So, to where the still lake glasses The misty mountain masses Rising dim and distant northward, And, with faint-drawn shadow pictures, Low shores, and dead pine spectres, Blends the skyward and the earthward,

On she glided, overladen, With merry man and maiden Sending back their song and laughter,— While, perchance, a phantom crew, In a ghostly birch canoe, Paddled dumb and swiftly after!

And the bear on Ossipee Climbed the topmost crag to see The strange thing drifting under; And, through the haze of August, Passaconaway and Paugus Looked down in sleepy wonder.

All the pines that o'er her hung In mimic sea-tones sung The song familiar to her; And the maples leaned to screen her, And the meadow-grass seemed greener, And the breeze more soft to woo her.

The lone stream mystery-haunted, To her the freedom granted To scan its every feature, Till new and old were blended, And round them both extended The loving arms of Nature.

Of these hills the little vessel Henceforth is part and parcel; And on Bearcamp shall her log Be kept, as if by George's Or Grand Menan, the surges Tossed her skipper through the fog.

And I, who, half in sadness, Recall the morning gladness Of life, at evening time, By chance, onlooking idly, Apart from all so widely, Have set her voyage to rhyme.

Dies now the gay persistence Of song and laugh, in distance; Alone with me remaining The stream, the quiet meadow, The hills in shine and shadow, The sombre pines complaining.

And, musing here, I dream Of voyagers on a stream From whence is no returning, Under sealed orders going, Looking forward little knowing, Looking back with idle yearning.

And I pray that every venture The port of peace may enter, That, safe from snag and fall And siren-haunted islet, And rock, the Unseen Pilot May guide us one and all. 1880.

MY TRUST.

A picture memory brings to me I look across the years and see Myself beside my mother's knee.

I feel her gentle hand restrain My selfish moods, and know again A child's blind sense of wrong and pain.

But wiser now, a man gray grown, My childhood's needs are better known, My mother's chastening love I own.

Gray grown, but in our Father's sight A child still groping for the light To read His works and ways aright.

I wait, in His good time to see That as my mother dealt with me So with His children dealeth He.

I bow myself beneath His hand That pain itself was wisely planned I feel, and partly understand.

The joy that comes in sorrow's guise, The sweet pains of self-sacrifice, I would not have them otherwise.

And what were life and death if sin Knew not the dread rebuke within, The pang of merciful discipline?

Not with thy proud despair of old, Crowned stoic of Rome's noblest mould! Pleasure and pain alike I hold.

I suffer with no vain pretence Of triumph over flesh and sense, Yet trust the grievous providence,

How dark soe'er it seems, may tend, By ways I cannot comprehend, To some

unguessed benignant end;

That every loss and lapse may gain The clear-aired heights by steps of pain, And never cross is borne in vain. 1880.

A NAME

Addressed to my grand-nephew, Greenleaf Whittier Pickard. Jonathan Greenleaf, in A Genealogy of the Greenleaf Family, says briefly: "From all that can be gathered, it is believed that the ancestors of the Greenleaf family were Huguenots, who left France on account of their religious principles some time in the course of the sixteenth century, and settled in England. The name was probably translated from the French Feuillevert."

The name the Gallic exile bore, St. Malo! from thy ancient mart, Became upon our Western shore Greenleaf for Feuillevert.

A name to hear in soft accord Of leaves by light winds overrun, Or read, upon the greening sward Of May, in shade and sun.

The name my infant ear first heard Breathed softly with a mother's kiss; His mother's own, no tenderer word My father spake than this.

No child have I to bear it on; Be thou its keeper; let it take From gifts well used and duty done New beauty for thy sake.

The fair ideals that outran My halting footsteps seek and find— The flawless symmetry of man, The poise of heart and mind.

Stand firmly where I felt the sway Of every wing that fancy flew, See clearly where I groped my way, Nor real from seeming knew.

And wisely choose, and bravely hold Thy faith unswerved by cross or crown, Like the stout Huguenot of old Whose name to thee comes down.

As Marot's songs made glad the heart Of that lone exile, haply mine May in life's heavy hours impart Some strength and hope to thine.

Yet when did Age transfer to Youth The hard-gained lessons of its day? Each lip must learn the taste of truth, Each foot must feel its way.

We cannot hold the hands of choice That touch or shun life's fateful keys; The whisper of the inward voice Is more than homilies.

Dear boy! for whom the flowers are born, Stars shine, and happy song-birds sing, What can my evening give to morn, My winter to thy spring!

A life not void of pure intent, With small desert of praise or blame, The love I felt, the good I meant, I leave thee with my name. 1880.

GREETING.

Originally prefixed to the volume, The King's Missive and other Poems.

I spread a scanty board too late; The old-time guests for whom I wait Come few and slow, methinks, to-day. Ah! who could hear my messages Across the dim unsounded seas On which so many have sailed away!

Come, then, old friends, who linger yet, And let us meet, as we have met, Once more beneath this low sunshine; And grateful for the good we 've known, The riddles solved, the ills outgrown, Shake bands upon the border line.

The favor, asked too oft before, From your indulgent ears, once more I crave, and, if belated lays To slower, feebler measures move, The silent, sympathy of love To me is dearer now than praise.

And ye, O younger friends, for whom My hearth and heart keep open room, Come smiling through the shadows long, Be with me while the sun goes down, And with your cheerful voices drown The minor of my even-song.

For, equal through the day and night, The wise Eternal oversight And love and power and righteous will Remain: the law of destiny The best for each and all must be, And life its promise shall fulfil. 1881.

AN AUTOGRAPH.

I write my name as one, On sands by waves o'errun Or winter's frosted pane, Traces a record vain.

Oblivion's blankness claims Wiser and better names, And well my own may pass As from the strand or glass.

Wash on, O waves of time! Melt, noons, the frosty rime! Welcome the shadow vast, The silence that shall last.

When I and all who know And love me vanish so, What harm to them or me Will the lost memory be?

If any words of mine, Through right of life divine, Remain, what matters it Whose hand the message writ?

Why should the "crowner's quest" Sit on my worst or best? Why should the showman claim The poor ghost of my name?

Yet, as when dies a sound Its spectre lingers round, Haply my spent life will Leave some faint echo still.

A whisper giving breath Of praise or blame to death, Soothing or saddening such As loved the living much.

Therefore with yearnings vain And fond I still would fain A kindly judgment seek, A tender thought bespeak.

And, while my words are read, Let this at least be said "Whate'er his life's defeatures, He loved his fellow-creatures.

"If, of the Law's stone table, To hold he scarce was able The first great precept fast, He kept for man the last.

"Through mortal lapse and dulness What lacks the Eternal Fulness, If still our weakness can Love Him in loving man?

"Age brought him no despairing Of the world's future faring; In human nature still

He found more good than ill.

"To all who dumbly suffered, His tongue and pen he offered; His life was not his own, Nor lived for self alone.

"Hater of din and riot He lived in days unquiet; And, lover of all beauty, Trod the hard ways of duty.

"He meant no wrong to any He sought the good of many, Yet knew both sin and folly,— May God forgive him wholly!" 1882.

ABRAM MORRISON.

'Midst the men and things which will Haunt an old man's memory still, Drollest, quaintest of them all, With a boy's laugh I recall Good old Abram Morrison.

When the Grist and Rolling Mill Ground and rumbled by Po Hill, And the old red school-house stood Midway in the Powow's flood, Here dwelt Abram Morrison.

From the Beach to far beyond Bear-Hill, Lion's Mouth and Pond, Marvellous to our tough old stock, Chips o' the Anglo-Saxon block, Seemed the Celtic Morrison.

Mudknock, Balmawhistle, all Only knew the Yankee drawl, Never brogue was heard till when, Foremost of his countrymen, Hither came Friend Morrison;

Yankee born, of alien blood, Kin of his had well withstood Pope and King with pike and ball Under Derry's leaguered wall, As became the Morrisons.

Wandering down from Nutfield woods With his household and his goods, Never was it clearly told How within our quiet fold Came to be a Morrison.

Once a soldier, blame him not That the Quaker he forgot, When, to think of battles won, And the red-coats on the run, Laughed aloud Friend Morrison.

From gray Lewis over sea Bore his sires their family tree, On the rugged boughs of it Grafting Irish mirth and wit, And the brogue of Morrison.

Half a genius, quick to plan, Blundering like an Irishman, But with canny

shrewdness lent By his far-off Scotch descent, Such was Abram Morrison.

Back and forth to daily meals, Rode his cherished pig on wheels, And to all who came to see "Aisier for the pig an' me, Sure it is," said Morrison.

Simple-hearted, boy o'er-grown, With a humor quite his own, Of our sober-stepping ways, Speech and look and cautious phrase, Slow to learn was Morrison.

Much we loved his stories told Of a country strange and old, Where the fairies danced till dawn, And the goblin Leprecaun Looked, we thought, like Morrison.

Or wild tales of feud and fight, Witch and troll and second sight Whispered still where Stornoway Looks across its stormy bay, Once the home of Morrisons.

First was he to sing the praise Of the Powow's winding ways; And our straggling village took City grandeur to the look Of its poet Morrison.

All his words have perished. Shame On the saddle-bags of Fame, That they bring not to our time One poor couplet of the rhyme Made by Abram Morrison!

When, on calm and fair First Days, Rattled down our one-horse chaise, Through the blossomed apple-boughs To the old, brown meeting-house, There was Abram Morrison.

Underneath his hat's broad brim Peered the queer old face of him; And with Irish jauntiness Swung the coat-tails of the dress Worn by Abram Morrison.

Still, in memory, on his feet, Leaning o'er the elders' seat, Mingling with a solemn drone, Celtic accents all his own, Rises Abram Morrison.

"Don't," he's pleading, "don't ye go, Dear young friends, to sight and show, Don't run after elephants, Learned pigs and presidents And the likes!" said Morrison.

On his well-worn theme intent, Simple, child-like, innocent, Heaven forgive the half-checked smile Of our careless boyhood, while Listening to Friend Morrison!

We have learned in later days Truth may speak in simplest phrase; That the man is not the less For quaint ways and home-spun dress, Thanks to Abram Morrison!

Not to pander nor to please Come the needed homilies, With no lofty argument Is the fitting message sent, Through such lips as Morrison's.

Dead and gone! But while its track Powow keeps to Merrimac, While Po Hill is still on guard, Looking land and ocean ward, They shall tell of Morrison!

After half a century's lapse, We are wiser now, perhaps, But we miss our streets amid Something which the past has hid, Lost with Abram Morrison.

Gone forever with the queer Characters of that old year Now the many are as one; Broken is the mould that run Men like Abram Morrison. 1884.

A LEGACY

Friend of my many years When the great silence falls, at last, on me, Let me not leave, to pain and sadden thee, A memory of tears,

But pleasant thoughts alone Of one who was thy friendship's honored guest And drank the wine of consolation pressed From sorrows of thy own.

I leave with thee a sense Of hands upheld and trials rendered less— The unselfish joy which is to helpfulness Its own great recompense;

The knowledge that from thine, As from the garments of the Master, stole Calmness and strength, the virtue which makes whole And heals without a sign;

Yea more, the assurance strong That love, which fails of perfect utterance here, Lives on to fill the heavenly atmosphere With its immortal song. 1887.

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