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From Volume I., The Works of Whittier: Narrative and Legendary Poems
#8 in our series by John Greenleaf Whittier

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NARRATIVE AND LEGENDARY

POEMS

BY
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

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MABEL MARTIN.

A HARVEST IDYL.

Susanna Martin, an aged woman of Amesbury, Mass., was tried and executed for the alleged crime of witchcraft. Her home was in what is now known as Pleasant Valley on the Merrimac, a little above the old Ferry way, where, tradition says, an attempt was made to assassinate Sir Edmund Andros on his way to Falmouth (afterward Portland) and Pemaquid, which was frustrated by a warning timely given. Goody Martin was the only woman hanged on the north side of the Merrimac during the dreadful delusion. The aged wife of Judge Bradbury who lived on the other side of the Powow River was imprisoned and would have been put to death but for the collapse of the hideous persecution.

The substance of the poem which follows was published under the name of The Witch's Daughter, in The National Era in 1857. In 1875 my publishers

desired to issue it with illustrations, and I then enlarged it and otherwise altered it to its present form. The principal addition was in the verses which constitute Part I.

PROEM.

I CALL the old time back: I bring my lay
in tender memory of the summer day
When, where our native river lapsed away,

We dreamed it over, while the thrushes made
Songs of their own, and the great pine-trees laid
On warm noonlights the masses of their shade.

And she was with us, living o'er again
Her life in ours, despite of years and pain,--
The Autumn's brightness after latter rain.

Beautiful in her holy peace as one
Who stands, at evening, when the work is done,
Glorified in the setting of the sun!

Her memory makes our common landscape seem
Fairer than any of which painters dream;
Lights the brown hills and sings in every stream;

For she whose speech was always truth's pure gold
Heard, not unpleased, its simple legends told,
And loved with us the beautiful and old.

I. THE RIVER VALLEY.

Across the level tableland,
A grassy, rarely trodden way,
With thinnest skirt of birchen spray

And stunted growth of cedar, leads
To where you see the dull plain fall
Sheer off, steep-slanted, ploughed by all

The seasons' rainfalls. On its brink
The over-leaning harebells swing,
With roots half bare the pine-trees cling;

And, through the shadow looking west,
You see the wavering river flow
Along a vale, that far below

Holds to the sun, the sheltering hills
And glimmering water-line between,
Broad fields of corn and meadows green,

And fruit-bent orchards grouped around

The low brown roofs and painted eaves,
And chimney-tops half hid in leaves.

No warmer valley hides behind
Yon wind-scourged sand-dunes, cold and bleak;
No fairer river comes to seek

The wave-sung welcome of the sea,
Or mark the northmost border line
Of sun-loved growths of nut and vine.

Here, ground-fast in their native fields,
Untempted by the city's gain,
The quiet farmer folk remain

Who bear the pleasant name of Friends,
And keep their fathers' gentle ways
And simple speech of Bible days;

In whose neat homesteads woman holds
With modest ease her equal place,
And wears upon her tranquil face

The look of one who, merging not
Her self-hood in another's will,
Is love's and duty's handmaid still.

Pass with me down the path that winds
Through birches to the open land,
Where, close upon the river strand

You mark a cellar, vine o'errun,
Above whose wall of loosened stones
The sumach lifts its reddening cones,

And the black nightshade's berries shine,
And broad, unsightly burdocks fold
The household ruin, century-old.

Here, in the dim colonial time
Of sterner lives and gloomier faith,
A woman lived, tradition saith,

Who wrought her neighbors foul annoy,
And witched and plagued the country-side,
Till at the hangman's hand she died.

Sit with me while the westering day
Falls slantwise down the quiet vale,
And, haply ere yon loitering sail,

That rounds the upper headland, falls
Below Deer Island's pines, or sees

Behind it Hawkswood's belt of trees

Rise black against the sinking sun,
My idyl of its days of old,
The valley's legend, shall be told.

II. THE HUSKING.

It was the pleasant harvest-time,
When cellar-bins are closely stowed,
And garrets bend beneath their load,

And the old swallow-haunted barns,--
Brown-gabled, long, and full of seams
Through which the rooted sunlight streams,

And winds blow freshly in, to shake
The red plumes of the roosted cocks,
And the loose hay-mow's scented locks,

Are filled with summer's ripened stores,
Its odorous grass and barley sheaves,
From their low scaffolds to their eaves.

On Esek Harden's oaken floor,
With many an autumn threshing worn,
Lay the heaped ears of unhusked corn.

And thither came young men and maids,
Beneath a moon that, large and low,
Lit that sweet eve of long ago.

They took their places; some by chance,
And others by a merry voice
Or sweet smile guided to their choice.

How pleasantly the rising moon,
Between the shadow of the mows,
Looked on them through the great elm-boughs!

On sturdy boyhood, sun-embrowned,
On girlhood with its solid curves
Of healthful strength and painless nerves!

And jests went round, and laughs that made
The house-dog answer with his howl,
And kept astir the barn-yard fowl;

And quaint old songs their fathers sung
In Derby dales and Yorkshire moors,
Ere Norman William trod their shores;

And tales, whose merry license shook

The fat sides of the Saxon thane,
Forgetful of the hovering Dane,--

Rude plays to Celt and Cimbri known,
The charms and riddles that beguiled
On Oxus' banks the young world's child,--

That primal picture-speech wherein
Have youth and maid the story told,
So new in each, so dateless old,

Recalling pastoral Ruth in her
Who waited, blushing and demure,
The red-ear's kiss of forfeiture.

But still the sweetest voice was mute
That river-valley ever heard
From lips of maid or throat of bird;

For Mabel Martin sat apart,
And let the hay-mow's shadow fall
Upon the loveliest face of all.

She sat apart, as one forbid,
Who knew that none would condescend
To own the Witch-wife's child a friend.

The seasons scarce had gone their round,
Since curious thousands thronged to see
Her mother at the gallows-tree;

And mocked the prison-palsied limbs
That faltered on the fatal stairs,
And wan lip trembling with its prayers!

Few questioned of the sorrowing child,
Or, when they saw the mother die;
Dreamed of the daughter's agony.

They went up to their homes that day,
As men and Christians justified
God willed it, and the wretch had died!

Dear God and Father of us all,
Forgive our faith in cruel lies,--
Forgive the blindness that denies!

Forgive thy creature when he takes,
For the all-perfect love Thou art,
Some grim creation of his heart.

Cast down our idols, overturn
Our bloody altars; let us see

Thyself in Thy humanity!

Young Mabel from her mother's grave
Crept to her desolate hearth-stone,
And wrestled with her fate alone;

With love, and anger, and despair,
The phantoms of disordered sense,
The awful doubts of Providence!

Oh, dreary broke the winter days,
And dreary fell the winter nights
When, one by one, the neighboring lights

Went out, and human sounds grew still,
And all the phantom-peopled dark
Closed round her hearth-fire's dying spark.

And summer days were sad and long,
And sad the uncompanioned eves,
And sadder sunset-tinted leaves,

And Indian Summer's airs of balm;
She scarcely felt the soft caress,
The beauty died of loneliness!

The school-boys jeered her as they passed,
And, when she sought the house of prayer,
Her mother's curse pursued her there.

And still o'er many a neighboring door
She saw the horseshoe's curved charm,
To guard against her mother's harm!

That mother, poor and sick and lame,
Who daily, by the old arm-chair,
Folded her withered hands in prayer;--

Who turned, in Salem's dreary jail,
Her worn old Bible o'er and o'er,
When her dim eyes could read no more!

Sore tried and pained, the poor girl kept
Her faith, and trusted that her way,
So dark, would somewhere meet the day.

And still her weary wheel went round
Day after day, with no relief
Small leisure have the poor for grief.

IV. THE CHAMPION.

So in the shadow Mabel sits;

Untouched by mirth she sees and hears,
Her smile is sadder than her tears.

But cruel eyes have found her out,
And cruel lips repeat her name,
And taunt her with her mother's shame.

She answered not with railing words,
But drew her apron o'er her face,
And, sobbing, glided from the place.

And only pausing at the door,
Her sad eyes met the troubled gaze
Of one who, in her better days,

Had been her warm and steady friend,
Ere yet her mother's doom had made
Even Esek Harden half afraid.

He felt that mute appeal of tears,
And, starting, with an angry frown,
Hushed all the wicked murmurs down.

"Good neighbors mine," he sternly said,
"This passes harmless mirth or jest;
I brook no insult to my guest.

"She is indeed her mother's child;
But God's sweet pity ministers
Unto no whiter soul than hers.

"Let Goody Martin rest in peace;
I never knew her harm a fly,
And witch or not, God knows--not I.

"I know who swore her life away;
And as God lives, I'd not condemn
An Indian dog on word of them."

The broadest lands in all the town,
The skill to guide, the power to awe,
Were Harden's; and his word was law.

None dared withstand him to his face,
But one sly maiden spake aside
"The little witch is evil-eyed!

"Her mother only killed a cow,
Or witched a churn or dairy-pan;
But she, forsooth, must charm a man!"

V. IN THE SHADOW.

Poor Mabel, homeward turning, passed
The nameless terrors of the wood,
And saw, as if a ghost pursued,

Her shadow gliding in the moon;
The soft breath of the west-wind gave
A chill as from her mother's grave.

How dreary seemed the silent house!
Wide in the moonbeams' ghastly glare
Its windows had a dead man's stare!

And, like a gaunt and spectral hand,
The tremulous shadow of a birch
Reached out and touched the door's low porch,

As if to lift its latch; hard by,
A sudden warning call she heard,
The night-cry of a boding bird.

She leaned against the door; her face,
So fair, so young, so full of pain,
White in the moonlight's silver rain.

The river, on its pebbled rim,
Made music such as childhood knew;
The door-yard tree was whispered through

By voices such as childhood's ear
Had heard in moonlights long ago;
And through the willow-boughs below.

She saw the rippled waters shine;
Beyond, in waves of shade and light,
The hills rolled off into the night.

She saw and heard, but over all
A sense of some transforming spell,
The shadow of her sick heart fell.

And still across the wooded space
The harvest lights of Harden shone,
And song and jest and laugh went on.

And he, so gentle, true, and strong,
Of men the bravest and the best,
Had he, too, scorned her with the rest?

She strove to drown her sense of wrong,
And, in her old and simple way,
To teach her bitter heart to pray.

Poor child! the prayer, begun in faith,

Grew to a low, despairing cry
Of utter misery: "Let me die!

"Oh! take me from the scornful eyes,
And hide me where the cruel speech
And mocking finger may not reach!

"I dare not breathe my mother's name
A daughter's right I dare not crave
To weep above her unblest grave!

"Let me not live until my heart,
With few to pity, and with none
To love me, hardens into stone.

"O God! have mercy on Thy child,
Whose faith in Thee grows weak and small,
And take me ere I lose it all!"

A shadow on the moonlight fell,
And murmuring wind and wave became
A voice whose burden was her name.

VI. THE BETROTHAL.

Had then God heard her? Had He sent
His angel down? In flesh and blood,
Before her Esek Harden stood!

He laid his hand upon her arm
"Dear Mabel, this no more shall be;
Who scoffs at you must scoff at me.

"You know rough Esek Harden well;
And if he seems no suitor gay,
And if his hair is touched with gray,

"The maiden grown shall never find
His heart less warm than when she smiled,
Upon his knees, a little child!"

Her tears of grief were tears of joy,
As, folded in his strong embrace,
She looked in Esek Harden's face.

"O truest friend of all!" she said,
"God bless you for your kindly thought,
And make me worthy of my lot!"

He led her forth, and, blent in one,
Beside their happy pathway ran
The shadows of the maid and man.

He led her through his dewy fields,
To where the swinging lanterns glowed,
And through the doors the huskers showed.

"Good friends and neighbors!" Esek said,
"I'm weary of this lonely life;
In Mabel see my chosen wife!

"She greets you kindly, one and all;
The past is past, and all offence
Falls harmless from her innocence.

"Henceforth she stands no more alone;
You know what Esek Harden is;--
He brooks no wrong to him or his.

"Now let the merriest tales be told,
And let the sweetest songs be sung
That ever made the old heart young!

"For now the lost has found a home;
And a lone hearth shall brighter burn,
As all the household joys return!"

Oh, pleasantly the harvest-moon,
Between the shadow of the mows,
Looked on them through the great elm--boughs!

On Mabel's curls of golden hair,
On Esek's shaggy strength it fell;
And the wind whispered, "It is well!"

THE PROPHECY OF SAMUEL SEWALL.

The prose version of this prophecy is to be found in Sewall's *The New Heaven upon the New Earth*, 1697, quoted in Joshua Coffin's *History of Newbury*. Judge Sewall's father, Henry Sewall, was one of the pioneers of Newbury.

UP and down the village streets
Strange are the forms my fancy meets,
For the thoughts and things of to-day are hid,
And through the veil of a closed lid
The ancient worthies I see again
I hear the tap of the elder's cane,
And his awful periwig I see,
And the silver buckles of shoe and knee.
Stately and slow, with thoughtful air,
His black cap hiding his whitened hair,
Walks the Judge of the great Assize,

Samuel Sewall the good and wise.
His face with lines of firmness wrought,
He wears the look of a man unbought,
Who swears to his hurt and changes not;
Yet, touched and softened nevertheless
With the grace of Christian gentleness,
The face that a child would climb to kiss!
True and tender and brave and just,
That man might honor and woman trust.

Touching and sad, a tale is told,
Like a penitent hymn of the Psalmist old,
Of the fast which the good man lifelong kept to
With a haunting sorrow that never slept,
As the circling year brought round the time
Of an error that left the sting of crime,
When he sat on the bench of the witchcraft courts,
With the laws of Moses and Hale's Reports,
And spake, in the name of both, the word
That gave the witch's neck to the cord,
And piled the oaken planks that pressed
The feeble life from the warlock's breast!
All the day long, from dawn to dawn,
His door was bolted, his curtain drawn;
No foot on his silent threshold trod,
No eye looked on him save that of God,
As he baffled the ghosts of the dead with charms
Of penitent tears, and prayers, and psalms,
And, with precious proofs from the sacred word
Of the boundless pity and love of the Lord,
His faith confirmed and his trust renewed
That the sin of his ignorance, sorely rued,
Might be washed away in the mingled flood
Of his human sorrow and Christ's dear blood!

Green forever the memory be
Of the Judge of the old Theocracy,
Whom even his errors glorified,
Like a far-seen, sunlit mountain-side
By the cloudy shadows which o'er it glide
Honor and praise to the Puritan
Who the halting step of his age outran,
And, seeing the infinite worth of man
In the priceless gift the Father gave,
In the infinite love that stooped to save,
Dared not brand his brother a slave
"Who doth such wrong," he was wont to say,
In his own quaint, picture-loving way,
"Flings up to Heaven a hand-grenade
Which God shall cast down upon his head!"

Widely as heaven and hell, contrast
That brave old jurist of the past

And the cunning trickster and knave of courts
Who the holy features of Truth distorts,
Ruling as right the will of the strong,
Poverty, crime, and weakness wrong;
Wide-eared to power, to the wronged and weak
Deaf as Egypt's gods of leek;
Scoffing aside at party's nod
Order of nature and law of God;
For whose dabbled ermine respect were waste,
Reverence folly, and awe misplaced;
Justice of whom 't were vain to seek
As from Koordish robber or Syrian Sheik!
Oh, leave the wretch to his bribes and sins;
Let him rot in the web of lies he spins!
To the saintly soul of the early day,
To the Christian judge, let us turn and say
"Praise and thanks for an honest man!--
Glory to God for the Puritan!"

I see, far southward, this quiet day,
The hills of Newbury rolling away,
With the many tints of the season gay,
Dreamily blending in autumn mist
Crimson, and gold, and amethyst.
Long and low, with dwarf trees crowned,
Plum Island lies, like a whale aground,
A stone's toss over the narrow sound.
Inland, as far as the eye can go,
The hills curve round like a bended bow;
A silver arrow from out them sprung,
I see the shine of the Quasycung;
And, round and round, over valley and hill,
Old roads winding, as old roads will,
Here to a ferry, and there to a mill;
And glimpses of chimneys and gabled eaves,
Through green elm arches and maple leaves,--
Old homesteads sacred to all that can
Gladden or sadden the heart of man,
Over whose thresholds of oak and stone
Life and Death have come and gone
There pictured tiles in the fireplace show,
Great beams sag from the ceiling low,
The dresser glitters with polished wares,
The long clock ticks on the foot-worn stairs,
And the low, broad chimney shows the crack
By the earthquake made a century back.
Up from their midst springs the village spire
With the crest of its cock in the sun afire;
Beyond are orchards and planting lands,
And great salt marshes and glimmering sands,
And, where north and south the coast-lines run,
The blink of the sea in breeze and sun!

I see it all like a chart unrolled,
But my thoughts are full of the past and old,
I hear the tales of my boyhood told;
And the shadows and shapes of early days
Flit dimly by in the veiling haze,
With measured movement and rhythmic chime
Weaving like shuttles my web of rhyme.
I think of the old man wise and good
Who once on yon misty hillsides stood,
(A poet who never measured rhyme,
A seer unknown to his dull-eared time,)
And, propped on his staff of age, looked down,
With his boyhood's love, on his native town,
Where, written, as if on its hills and plains,
His burden of prophecy yet remains,
For the voices of wood, and wave, and wind
To read in the ear of the musing mind:--

"As long as Plum Island, to guard the coast
As God appointed, shall keep its post;
As long as a salmon shall haunt the deep
Of Merrimac River, or sturgeon leap;
As long as pickerel swift and slim,
Or red-backed perch, in Crane Pond swim;
As long as the annual sea-fowl know
Their time to come and their time to go;
As long as cattle shall roam at will
The green, grass meadows by Turkey Hill;
As long as sheep shall look from the side
Of Oldtown Hill on marishes wide,
And Parker River, and salt-sea tide;
As long as a wandering pigeon shall search
The fields below from his white-oak perch,
When the barley-harvest is ripe and shorn,
And the dry husks fall from the standing corn;
As long as Nature shall not grow old,
Nor drop her work from her doting hold,
And her care for the Indian corn forget,
And the yellow rows in pairs to set;--
So long shall Christians here be born,
Grow up and ripen as God's sweet corn!--
By the beak of bird, by the breath of frost,
Shall never a holy ear be lost,
But, husked by Death in the Planter's sight,
Be sown again in the fields of light!"

The Island still is purple with plums,
Up the river the salmon comes,
The sturgeon leaps, and the wild-fowl feeds
On hillside berries and marish seeds,--
All the beautiful signs remain,
From spring-time sowing to autumn rain
The good man's vision returns again!

And let us hope, as well we can,
That the Silent Angel who garners man
May find some grain as of old lie found
In the human cornfield ripe and sound,
And the Lord of the Harvest deign to own
The precious seed by the fathers sown!
1859.

THE RED RIPER VOYAGEUR.

OUT and in the river is winding
The links of its long, red chain,
Through belts of dusky pine-land
And gusty leagues of plain.

Only, at times, a smoke-wreath
With the drifting cloud-rack joins,--
The smoke of the hunting-lodges
Of the wild Assiniboins.

Drearly blows the north-wind
From the land of ice and snow;
The eyes that look are weary,
And heavy the hands that row.

And with one foot on the water,
And one upon the shore,
The Angel of Shadow gives warning
That day shall be no more.

Is it the clang of wild-geese?
Is it the Indian's yell,
That lends to the voice of the north-wind
The tones of a far-off bell?

The voyageur smiles as he listens
To the sound that grows apace;
Well he knows the vesper ringing
Of the bells of St. Boniface.

The bells of the Roman Mission,
That call from their turrets twain,
To the boatman on the river,
To the hunter on the plain!

Even so in our mortal journey
The bitter north-winds blow,
And thus upon life's Red River
Our hearts, as oarsmen, row.

And when the Angel of Shadow
Rests his feet on wave and shore,
And our eyes grow dim with watching
And our hearts faint at the oar,

Happy is he who heareth
The signal of his release
In the bells of the Holy City,
The chimes of eternal peace!
1859

THE PREACHER.

George Whitefield, the celebrated preacher, died at Newburyport in 1770,
and was buried under the church which has since borne his name.

ITS windows flashing to the sky,
Beneath a thousand roofs of brown,
Far down the vale, my friend and I
Beheld the old and quiet town;
The ghostly sails that out at sea
Flapped their white wings of mystery;
The beaches glimmering in the sun,
And the low wooded capes that run
Into the sea-mist north and south;
The sand-bluffs at the river's mouth;
The swinging chain-bridge, and, afar,
The foam-line of the harbor-bar.

Over the woods and meadow-lands
A crimson-tinted shadow lay,
Of clouds through which the setting day
Flung a slant glory far away.
It glittered on the wet sea-sands,
It flamed upon the city's panes,
Smote the white sails of ships that wore
Outward or in, and glided o'er
The steeples with their veering vanes!

Awhile my friend with rapid search
O'erran the landscape. "Yonder spire
Over gray roofs, a shaft of fire;
What is it, pray?"--"The Whitefield Church!
Walled about by its basement stones,
There rest the marvellous prophet's bones."
Then as our homeward way we walked,
Of the great preacher's life we talked;
And through the mystery of our theme
The outward glory seemed to stream,
And Nature's self interpreted

The doubtful record of the dead;
And every level beam that smote
The sails upon the dark afloat
A symbol of the light became,
Which touched the shadows of our blame,
With tongues of Pentecostal flame.

Over the roofs of the pioneers
Gathers the moss of a hundred years;
On man and his works has passed the change
Which needs must be in a century's range.
The land lies open and warm in the sun,
Anvils clamor and mill-wheels run,--
Flocks on the hillsides, herds on the plain,
The wilderness gladdened with fruit and grain!
But the living faith of the settlers old
A dead profession their children hold;
To the lust of office and greed of trade
A stepping-stone is the altar made.

The church, to place and power the door,
Rebukes the sin of the world no more,
Nor sees its Lord in the homeless poor.
Everywhere is the grasping hand,
And eager adding of land to land;
And earth, which seemed to the fathers meant
But as a pilgrim's wayside tent,--
A nightly shelter to fold away
When the Lord should call at the break of day,--
Solid and steadfast seems to be,
And Time has forgotten Eternity!

But fresh and green from the rotting roots
Of primal forests the young growth shoots;
From the death of the old the new proceeds,
And the life of truth from the rot of creeds
On the ladder of God, which upward leads,
The steps of progress are human needs.
For His judgments still are a mighty deep,
And the eyes of His providence never sleep
When the night is darkest He gives the morn;
When the famine is sorest, the wine and corn!

In the church of the wilderness Edwards wrought,
Shaping his creed at the forge of thought;
And with Thor's own hammer welded and bent
The iron links of his argument,
Which strove to grasp in its mighty span
The purpose of God and the fate of man
Yet faithful still, in his daily round
To the weak, and the poor, and sin-sick found,
The schoolman's lore and the casuist's art
Drew warmth and life from his fervent heart.

Had he not seen in the solitudes
Of his deep and dark Northampton woods
A vision of love about him fall?
Not the blinding splendor which fell on Saul,
But the tenderer glory that rests on them
Who walk in the New Jerusalem,
Where never the sun nor moon are known,
But the Lord and His love are the light alone
And watching the sweet, still countenance
Of the wife of his bosom rapt in trance,
Had he not treasured each broken word
Of the mystical wonder seen and heard;
And loved the beautiful dreamer more
That thus to the desert of earth she bore
Clusters of Eshcol from Canaan's shore?

As the barley-winnower, holding with pain
Aloft in waiting his chaff and grain,
Joyfully welcomes the far-off breeze
Sounding the pine-tree's slender keys,
So he who had waited long to hear
The sound of the Spirit drawing near,
Like that which the son of Iddo heard
When the feet of angels the myrtles stirred,
Felt the answer of prayer, at last,
As over his church the afflatus passed,
Breaking its sleep as breezes break
To sun-bright ripples a stagnant lake.

At first a tremor of silent fear,
The creep of the flesh at danger near,
A vague foreboding and discontent,
Over the hearts of the people went.
All nature warned in sounds and signs
The wind in the tops of the forest pines
In the name of the Highest called to prayer,
As the muezzin calls from the minaret stair.
Through ceiled chambers of secret sin
Sudden and strong the light shone in;
A guilty sense of his neighbor's needs
Startled the man of title-deeds;
The trembling hand of the worldling shook
The dust of years from the Holy Book;
And the psalms of David, forgotten long,
Took the place of the scoffer's song.

The impulse spread like the outward course
Of waters moved by a central force;
The tide of spiritual life rolled down
From inland mountains to seaboard town.

Prepared and ready the altar stands

Waiting the prophet's outstretched hands
And prayer availing, to downward call
The fiery answer in view of all.
Hearts are like wax in the furnace; who
Shall mould, and shape, and cast them anew?
Lo! by the Merrimac Whitefield stands
In the temple that never was made by hands,--
Curtains of azure, and crystal wall,
And dome of the sunshine over all--
A homeless pilgrim, with dubious name
Blown about on the winds of fame;
Now as an angel of blessing classed,
And now as a mad enthusiast.
Called in his youth to sound and gauge
The moral lapse of his race and age,
And, sharp as truth, the contrast draw
Of human frailty and perfect law;
Possessed by the one dread thought that lent
Its goad to his fiery temperament,
Up and down the world he went,
A John the Baptist crying, Repent!

No perfect whole can our nature make;
Here or there the circle will break;
The orb of life as it takes the light
On one side leaves the other in night.
Never was saint so good and great
As to give no chance at St. Peter's gate
For the plea of the Devil's advocate.
So, incomplete by his being's law,
The marvellous preacher had his flaw;
With step unequal, and lame with faults,
His shade on the path of History halts.

Wisely and well said the Eastern bard
Fear is easy, but love is hard,--
Easy to glow with the Santon's rage,
And walk on the Meccan pilgrimage;
But he is greatest and best who can
Worship Allah by loving man.
Thus he,--to whom, in the painful stress
Of zeal on fire from its own excess,
Heaven seemed so vast and earth so small
That man was nothing, since God was all,--
Forgot, as the best at times have done,
That the love of the Lord and of man are one.
Little to him whose feet unshod
The thorny path of the desert trod,
Careless of pain, so it led to God,
Seemed the hunger-pang and the poor man's wrong,
The weak ones trodden beneath the strong.
Should the worm be chooser?--the clay withstand
The shaping will of the potter's hand?

In the Indian fable Arjoon hears
The scorn of a god rebuke his fears
"Spare thy pity!" Krishna saith;
"Not in thy sword is the power of death!
All is illusion,--loss but seems;
Pleasure and pain are only dreams;
Who deems he slayeth doth not kill;
Who counts as slain is living still.
Strike, nor fear thy blow is crime;
Nothing dies but the cheats of time;
Slain or slayer, small the odds
To each, immortal as Indra's gods!"

So by Savannah's banks of shade,
The stones of his mission the preacher laid
On the heart of the negro crushed and rent,
And made of his blood the wall's cement;
Bade the slave-ship speed from coast to coast,
Fanned by the wings of the Holy Ghost;
And begged, for the love of Christ, the gold
Coined from the hearts in its groaning hold.
What could it matter, more or less
Of stripes, and hunger, and weariness?
Living or dying, bond or free,
What was time to eternity?

Alas for the preacher's cherished schemes!
Mission and church are now but dreams;
Nor prayer nor fasting availed the plan
To honor God through the wrong of man.
Of all his labors no trace remains
Save the bondman lifting his hands in chains.
The woof he wove in the righteous warp
Of freedom-loving Oglethorpe,
Clothes with curses the goodly land,
Changes its greenness and bloom to sand;
And a century's lapse reveals once more
The slave-ship stealing to Georgia's shore.
Father of Light! how blind is he
Who sprinkles the altar he rears to Thee
With the blood and tears of humanity!

He erred: shall we count His gifts as naught?
Was the work of God in him unwrought?
The servant may through his deafness err,
And blind may be God's messenger;
But the Errand is sure they go upon,--
The word is spoken, the deed is done.
Was the Hebrew temple less fair and good
That Solomon bowed to gods of wood?
For his tempted heart and wandering feet,
Were the songs of David less pure and sweet?

So in light and shadow the preacher went,
God's erring and human instrument;
And the hearts of the people where he passed
Swayed as the reeds sway in the blast,
Under the spell of a voice which took
In its compass the flow of Siloa's brook,
And the mystical chime of the bells of gold
On the ephod's hem of the priest of old,--
Now the roll of thunder, and now the awe
Of the trumpet heard in the Mount of Law.

A solemn fear on the listening crowd
Fell like the shadow of a cloud.
The sailor reeling from out the ships
Whose masts stood thick in the river-slips
Felt the jest and the curse die on his lips.
Listened the fisherman rude and hard,
The calker rough from the builder's yard;
The man of the market left his load,
The teamster leaned on his bending goad,
The maiden, and youth beside her, felt
Their hearts in a closer union melt,
And saw the flowers of their love in bloom
Down the endless vistas of life to come.
Old age sat feebly brushing away
From his ears the scanty locks of gray;
And careless boyhood, living the free
Unconscious life of bird and tree,
Suddenly wakened to a sense
Of sin and its guilty consequence.
It was as if an angel's voice
Called the listeners up for their final choice;
As if a strong hand rent apart
The veils of sense from soul and heart,
Showing in light ineffable
The joys of heaven and woes of hell
All about in the misty air
The hills seemed kneeling in silent prayer;
The rustle of leaves, the moaning sedge,
The water's lap on its gravelled edge,
The wailing pines, and, far and faint,
The wood-dove's note of sad complaint,--
To the solemn voice of the preacher lent
An undertone as of low lament;
And the note of the sea from its sand coast,
On the easterly wind, now heard, now lost,
Seemed the murmurous sound of the judgment host.

Yet wise men doubted, and good men wept,
As that storm of passion above them swept,
And, comet-like, adding flame to flame,
The priests of the new Evangel came,--
Davenport, flashing upon the crowd,

Charged like summer's electric cloud,
Now holding the listener still as death
With terrible warnings under breath,
Now shouting for joy, as if he viewed
The vision of Heaven's beatitude!
And Celtic Tennant, his long coat bound
Like a monk's with leathern girdle round,
Wild with the toss of unshorn hair,
And wringing of hands, and, eyes aglare,
Groaning under the world's despair!
Grave pastors, grieving their flocks to lose,
Prophesied to the empty pews
That gourds would wither, and mushrooms die,
And noisiest fountains run soonest dry,
Like the spring that gushed in Newbury Street,
Under the tramp of the earthquake's feet,
A silver shaft in the air and light,
For a single day, then lost in night,
Leaving only, its place to tell,
Sandy fissure and sulphurous smell.
With zeal wing-clipped and white-heat cool,
Moved by the spirit in grooves of rule,
No longer harried, and cropped, and fleeced,
Flogged by sheriff and cursed by priest,
But by wiser counsels left at ease
To settle quietly on his lees,
And, self-concentred, to count as done
The work which his fathers well begun,
In silent protest of letting alone,
The Quaker kept the way of his own,--
A non-conductor among the wires,
With coat of asbestos proof to fires.
And quite unable to mend his pace
To catch the falling manna of grace,
He hugged the closer his little store
Of faith, and silently prayed for more.
And vague of creed and barren of rite,
But holding, as in his Master's sight,
Act and thought to the inner light,
The round of his simple duties walked,
And strove to live what the others talked.

And who shall marvel if evil went
Step by step with the good intent,
And with love and meekness, side by side,
Lust of the flesh and spiritual pride?--
That passionate longings and fancies vain
Set the heart on fire and crazed the brain?
That over the holy oracles
Folly sported with cap and bells?
That goodly women and learned men
Marvelling told with tongue and pen
How unweaned children chirped like birds

Texts of Scripture and solemn words,
Like the infant seers of the rocky glens
In the Puy de Dome of wild Cevennes
Or baby Lamas who pray and preach
From Tartir cradles in Buddha's speech?

In the war which Truth or Freedom wages
With impious fraud and the wrong of ages,
Hate and malice and self-love mar
The notes of triumph with painful jar,
And the helping angels turn aside
Their sorrowing faces the shame to bide.
Never on custom's oiled grooves
The world to a higher level moves,
But grates and grinds with friction hard
On granite boulder and flinty shard.
The heart must bleed before it feels,
The pool be troubled before it heals;
Ever by losses the right must gain,
Every good have its birth of pain;
The active Virtues blush to find
The Vices wearing their badge behind,
And Graces and Charities feel the fire
Wherein the sins of the age expire;
The fiend still rends as of old he rent
The tortured body from which he went.

But Time tests all. In the over-drift
And flow of the Nile, with its annual gift,
Who cares for the Hadji's relics sunk?
Who thinks of the drowned-out Coptic monk?
The tide that loosens the temple's stones,
And scatters the sacred ibis-bones,
Drives away from the valley-land
That Arab robber, the wandering sand,
Moistens the fields that know no rain,
Fringes the desert with belts of grain,
And bread to the sower brings again.
So the flood of emotion deep and strong
Troubled the land as it swept along,
But left a result of holier lives,
Tenderer-mothers and worthier wives.
The husband and father whose children fled
And sad wife wept when his drunken tread
Frightened peace from his roof-tree's shade,
And a rock of offence his hearthstone made,
In a strength that was not his own began
To rise from the brute's to the plane of man.
Old friends embraced, long held apart
By evil counsel and pride of heart;
And penitence saw through misty tears,
In the bow of hope on its cloud of fears,
The promise of Heaven's eternal years,--

The peace of God for the world's annoy,--
Beauty for ashes, and oil of joy
Under the church of Federal Street,
Under the tread of its Sabbath feet,
Walled about by its basement stones,
Lie the marvellous preacher's bones.
No saintly honors to them are shown,
No sign nor miracle have they known;
But he who passes the ancient church
Stops in the shade of its belfry-porch,
And ponders the wonderful life of him
Who lies at rest in that charnel dim.
Long shall the traveller strain his eye
From the railroad car, as it plunges by,
And the vanishing town behind him search
For the slender spire of the Whitefield Church;
And feel for one moment the ghosts of trade,
And fashion, and folly, and pleasure laid,
By the thought of that life of pure intent,
That voice of warning yet eloquent,
Of one on the errands of angels sent.
And if where he labored the flood of sin
Like a tide from the harbor-bar sets in,
And over a life of tune and sense
The church-spires lift their vain defence,
As if to scatter the bolts of God
With the points of Calvin's thunder-rod,--
Still, as the gem of its civic crown,
Precious beyond the world's renown,
His memory hallows the ancient town!
1859.

THE TRUCE OF PISCATAQUA.

In the winter of 1675-76, the Eastern Indians, who had been making war upon the New Hampshire settlements, were so reduced in numbers by fighting and famine that they agreed to a peace with Major Waldron at Dover, but the peace was broken in the fall of 1676. The famous chief, Squando, was the principal negotiator on the part of the savages. He had taken up the hatchet to revenge the brutal treatment of his child by drunken white sailors, which caused its death.

It not unfrequently happened during the Border wars that young white children were adopted by their Indian captors, and so kindly treated that they were unwilling to leave the free, wild life of the woods; and in some instances they utterly refused to go back with their parents to their old homes and civilization.

RAZE these long blocks of brick and stone,
These huge mill-monsters overgrown;

Blot out the humbler piles as well,
Where, moved like living shuttles, dwell
The weaving genii of the bell;
Tear from the wild Cochecho's track
The dams that hold its torrents back;
And let the loud-rejoicing fall
Plunge, roaring, down its rocky wall;
And let the Indian's paddle play
On the unbridged Piscataqua!
Wide over hill and valley spread
Once more the forest, dusk and dread,
With here and there a clearing cut
From the walled shadows round it shut;
Each with its farm-house builded rude,
By English yeoman squared and hewed,
And the grim, flankered block-house bound
With bristling palisades around.
So, haply shall before thine eyes
The dusty veil of centuries rise,
The old, strange scenery overlay
The tamer pictures of to-day,
While, like the actors in a play,
Pass in their ancient guise along
The figures of my border song
What time beside Cochecho's flood
The white man and the red man stood,
With words of peace and brotherhood;
When passed the sacred calumet
From lip to lip with fire-draught wet,
And, puffed in scorn, the peace-pipe's smoke
Through the gray beard of Waldron broke,
And Squando's voice, in suppliant plea
For mercy, struck the haughty key
Of one who held, in any fate,
His native pride inviolate!

"Let your ears be opened wide!
He who speaks has never lied.
Waldron of Piscataqua,
Hear what Squando has to say!

"Squando shuts his eyes and sees,
Far off, Saco's hemlock-trees.
In his wigwam, still as stone,
Sits a woman all alone,

"Wampum beads and birchen strands
Dropping from her careless hands,
Listening ever for the fleet
Patter of a dead child's feet!

"When the moon a year ago
Told the flowers the time to blow,

In that lonely wigwam smiled
Menewee, our little child.

"Ere that moon grew thin and old,
He was lying still and cold;
Sent before us, weak and small,
When the Master did not call!

"On his little grave I lay;
Three times went and came the day,
Thrice above me blazed the noon,
Thrice upon me wept the moon.

"In the third night-watch I heard,
Far and low, a spirit-bird;
Very mournful, very wild,
Sang the totem of my child.

"Menewee, poor Menewee,
Walks a path he cannot see
Let the white man's wigwam light
With its blaze his steps aright.

"All-uncalled, he dares not show
Empty hands to Manito
Better gifts he cannot bear
Than the scalps his slayers wear.'

"All the while the totem sang,
Lightning blazed and thunder rang;
And a black cloud, reaching high,
Pulled the white moon from the sky.

"I, the medicine-man, whose ear
All that spirits bear can hear,--
I, whose eyes are wide to see
All the things that are to be,--

"Well I knew the dreadful signs
In the whispers of the pines,
In the river roaring loud,
In the mutter of the cloud.

"At the breaking of the day,
From the grave I passed away;
Flowers bloomed round me, birds sang glad,
But my heart was hot and mad.

"There is rust on Squando's knife,
From the warm, red springs of life;
On the funeral hemlock-trees
Many a scalp the totem sees.

"Blood for blood! But evermore
Squando's heart is sad and sore;
And his poor squaw waits at home
For the feet that never come!

"Waldron of Cocheco, hear!
Squando speaks, who laughs at fear;
Take the captives he has ta'en;
Let the land have peace again!"

As the words died on his tongue,
Wide apart his warriors swung;
Parted, at the sign he gave,
Right and left, like Egypt's wave.

And, like Israel passing free
Through the prophet-charmed sea,
Captive mother, wife, and child
Through the dusky terror filed.

One alone, a little maid,
Middleway her steps delayed,
Glancing, with quick, troubled sight,
Round about from red to white.

Then his hand the Indian laid
On the little maiden's head,
Lightly from her forehead fair
Smoothing back her yellow hair.

"Gift or favor ask I none;
What I have is all my own
Never yet the birds have sung,
Squando hath a beggar's tongue.'

"Yet for her who waits at home,
For the dead who cannot come,
Let the little Gold-hair be
In the place of Menewee!

"Mishanock, my little star!
Come to Saco's pines afar;
Where the sad one waits at home,
Wequashim, my moonlight, come!"

"What!" quoth Waldron, "leave a child
Christian-born to heathens wild?
As God lives, from Satan's hand
I will pluck her as a brand!"

"Hear me, white man!" Squando cried;
"Let the little one decide.
Wequashim, my moonlight, say,

Wilt thou go with me, or stay?"

Slowly, sadly, half afraid,
Half regretfully, the maid
Owned the ties of blood and race,--
Turned from Squando's pleading face.

Not a word the Indian spoke,
But his wampum chain he broke,
And the beaded wonder hung
On that neck so fair and young.

Silence-shod, as phantoms seem
In the marches of a dream,
Single-filed, the grim array
Through the pine-trees wound away.

Doubting, trembling, sore amazed,
Through her tears the young child gazed.
"God preserve her!" Waldron said;
"Satan hath bewitched the maid!"

Years went and came. At close of day
Singing came a child from play,
Tossing from her loose-locked head
Gold in sunshine, brown in shade.

Pride was in the mother's look,
But her head she gravely shook,
And with lips that fondly smiled
Feigned to chide her truant child.

Unabashed, the maid began
"Up and down the brook I ran,
Where, beneath the bank so steep,
Lie the spotted trout asleep.

"'Chip!' went squirrel on the wall,
After me I heard him call,
And the cat-bird on the tree
Tried his best to mimic me.

"Where the hemlocks grew so dark
That I stopped to look and hark,
On a log, with feather-hat,
By the path, an Indian sat.

"Then I cried, and ran away;
But he called, and bade me stay;
And his voice was good and mild
As my mother's to her child.

"And he took my wampum chain,

Looked and looked it o'er again;
Gave me berries, and, beside,
On my neck a plaything tied."

Straight the mother stooped to see
What the Indian's gift might be.
On the braid of wampum hung,
Lo! a cross of silver swung.

Well she knew its graven sign,
Squando's bird and totem pine;
And, a mirage of the brain,
Flowed her childhood back again.

Flashed the roof the sunshine through,
Into space the walls outgrew;
On the Indian's wigwam-mat,
Blossom-crowned, again she sat.

Cool she felt the west-wind blow,
In her ear the pines sang low,
And, like links from out a chain,
Dropped the years of care and pain.
From the outward toil and din,
From the griefs that gnaw within,
To the freedom of the woods
Called the birds, and winds, and floods.

Well, O painful minister!
Watch thy flock, but blame not her,
If her ear grew sharp to hear
All their voices whispering near.

Blame her not, as to her soul
All the desert's glamour stole,
That a tear for childhood's loss
Dropped upon the Indian's cross.

When, that night, the Book was read,
And she bowed her widowed head,
And a prayer for each loved name
Rose like incense from a flame,

With a hope the creeds forbid
In her pitying bosom hid,
To the listening ear of Heaven
Lo! the Indian's name was given.
1860.

MY PLAYMATE.

THE pines were dark on Ramoth hill,
Their song was soft and low;
The blossoms in the sweet May wind
Were falling like the snow.

The blossoms drifted at our feet,
The orchard birds sang clear;
The sweetest and the saddest day
It seemed of all the year.

For, more to me than birds or flowers,
My playmate left her home,
And took with her the laughing spring,
The music and the bloom.

She kissed the lips of kith and kin,
She laid her hand in mine
What more could ask the bashful boy
Who fed her father's kine?

She left us in the bloom of May
The constant years told o'er
Their seasons with as sweet May morns,
But she came back no more.

I walk, with noiseless feet, the round
Of uneventful years;
Still o'er and o'er I sow the spring
And reap the autumn ears.

She lives where all the golden year
Her summer roses blow;
The dusky children of the sun
Before her come and go.

There haply with her jewelled hands
She smooths her silken gown,--
No more the homespun lap wherein
I shook the walnuts down.

The wild grapes wait us by the brook,
The brown nuts on the hill,
And still the May-day flowers make sweet
The woods of Follymill.

The lilies blossom in the pond,
The bird builds in the tree,
The dark pines sing on Ramoth hill
The slow song of the sea.

I wonder if she thinks of them,
And how the old time seems,--

If ever the pines of Ramoth wood
Are sounding in her dreams.

I see her face, I hear her voice;
Does she remember mine?
And what to her is now the boy
Who fed her father's kine?

What cares she that the orioles build
For other eyes than ours,--
That other hands with nuts are filled,
And other laps with flowers?

O playmate in the golden time!
Our mossy seat is green,
Its fringing violets blossom yet,
The old trees o'er it lean.

The winds so sweet with birch and fern
A sweeter memory blow;
And there in spring the veeries sing
The song of long ago.

And still the pines of Ramoth wood
Are moaning like the sea,--

The moaning of the sea of change
Between myself and thee!
1860.

COBBLER KEEZAR'S VISION.

This ballad was written on the occasion of a Horticultural Festival.
Cobbler Keezar was a noted character among the first settlers in the
valley of the Merrimac.

THE beaver cut his timber
With patient teeth that day,
The minks were fish-wards, and the crows
Surveyors of highway,--

When Keezar sat on the hillside
Upon his cobbler's form,
With a pan of coals on either hand
To keep his waxed-ends warm.

And there, in the golden weather,
He stitched and hammered and sung;
In the brook he moistened his leather,
In the pewter mug his tongue.

Well knew the tough old Teuton
Who brewed the stoutest ale,
And he paid the goodwife's reckoning
In the coin of song and tale.

The songs they still are singing
Who dress the hills of vine,
The tales that haunt the Brocken
And whisper down the Rhine.

Woodsy and wild and lonesome,
The swift stream wound away,
Through birches and scarlet maples
Flashing in foam and spray,--

Down on the sharp-horned ledges
Plunging in steep cascade,
Tossing its white-maned waters
Against the hemlock's shade.

Woodsy and wild and lonesome,
East and west and north and south;
Only the village of fishers
Down at the river's mouth;

Only here and there a clearing,
With its farm-house rude and new,
And tree-stumps, swart as Indians,
Where the scanty harvest grew.

No shout of home-bound reapers,
No vintage-song he heard,
And on the green no dancing feet
The merry violin stirred.

"Why should folk be glum," said Keezar,
"When Nature herself is glad,
And the painted woods are laughing
At the faces so sour and sad?"

Small heed had the careless cobbler
What sorrow of heart was theirs
Who travailed in pain with the births of God,
And planted a state with prayers,--

Hunting of witches and warlocks,
Smiting the heathen horde,--
One hand on the mason's trowel,
And one on the soldier's sword.

But give him his ale and cider,
Give him his pipe and song,

Little he cared for Church or State,
Or the balance of right and wrong.

"T is work, work, work," he muttered,--
"And for rest a snuffle of psalms!"
He smote on his leathern apron
With his brown and waxen palms.

"Oh for the purple harvests
Of the days when I was young
For the merry grape-stained maidens,
And the pleasant songs they sung!

"Oh for the breath of vineyards,
Of apples and nuts and wine
For an oar to row and a breeze to blow
Down the grand old river Rhine!"

A tear in his blue eye glistened,
And dropped on his beard so gray.
"Old, old am I," said Keezar,
"And the Rhine flows far away!"

But a cunning man was the cobbler;
He could call the birds from the trees,
Charm the black snake out of the ledges,
And bring back the swarming bees.

All the virtues of herbs and metals,
All the lore of the woods, he knew,
And the arts of the Old World mingle
With the marvels of the New.

Well he knew the tricks of magic,
And the lapstone on his knee
Had the gift of the Mormon's goggles
Or the stone of Doctor Dee.[11]

For the mighty master Agrippa
Wrought it with spell and rhyme
From a fragment of mystic moonstone
In the tower of Nettesheim.

To a cobbler Minnesinger
The marvellous stone gave he,--
And he gave it, in turn, to Keezar,
Who brought it over the sea.

He held up that mystic lapstone,
He held it up like a lens,
And he counted the long years coming
Ey twenties and by tens.

"One hundred years," quoth Keezar,
"And fifty have I told
Now open the new before me,
And shut me out the old!"

Like a cloud of mist, the blackness
Rolled from the magic stone,
And a marvellous picture mingled
The unknown and the known.

Still ran the stream to the river,
And river and ocean joined;
And there were the bluffs and the blue sea-line,
And cold north hills behind.

But--the mighty forest was broken
By many a steepled town,
By many a white-walled farm-house,
And many a garner brown.

Turning a score of mill-wheels,
The stream no more ran free;
White sails on the winding river,
White sails on the far-off sea.

Below in the noisy village
The flags were floating gay,
And shone on a thousand faces
The light of a holiday.

Swiftly the rival ploughmen
Turned the brown earth from their shares;
Here were the farmer's treasures,
There were the craftsman's wares.

Golden the goodwife's butter,
Ruby her currant-wine;
Grand were the strutting turkeys,
Fat were the beeves and swine.

Yellow and red were the apples,
And the ripe pears russet-brown,
And the peaches had stolen blushes
From the girls who shook them down.

And with blooms of hill and wildwood,
That shame the toil of art,
Mingled the gorgeous blossoms
Of the garden's tropic heart.

"What is it I see?" said Keezar
"Am I here, or ant I there?
Is it a fete at Bingen?"

Do I look on Frankfort fair?

"But where are the clowns and puppets,
And imps with horns and tail?
And where are the Rhenish flagons?
And where is the foaming ale?

"Strange things, I know, will happen,--
Strange things the Lord permits;
But that droughty folk should be jolly
Puzzles my poor old wits.

"Here are smiling manly faces,
And the maiden's step is gay;
Nor sad by thinking, nor mad by drinking,
Nor mopes, nor fools, are they.

"Here's pleasure without regretting,
And good without abuse,
The holiday and the bridal
Of beauty and of use.

"Here's a priest and there is a Quaker,
Do the cat and dog agree?
Have they burned the stocks for ovenwood?
Have they cut down the gallows-tree?

"Would the old folk know their children?
Would they own the graceless town,
With never a ranter to worry
And never a witch to drown?"

Loud laughed the cobbler Keezar,
Laughed like a school-boy gay;
Tossing his arms above him,
The lapstone rolled away.

It rolled down the rugged hillside,
It spun like a wheel bewitched,
It plunged through the leaning willows,
And into the river pitched.

There, in the deep, dark water,
The magic stone lies still,
Under the leaning willows
In the shadow of the hill.

But oft the idle fisher
Sits on the shadowy bank,
And his dreams make marvellous pictures
Where the wizard's lapstone sank.

And still, in the summer twilights,
When the river seems to run
Out from the inner glory,
Warm with the melted sun,

The weary mill-girl lingers
Beside the charmed stream,
And the sky and the golden water
Shape and color her dream.

Air wave the sunset gardens,
The rosy signals fly;
Her homestead beckons from the cloud,
And love goes sailing by.
1861.

AMY WENTWORTH

TO WILLIAM BRADFORD.

As they who watch by sick-beds find relief
Unwittingly from the great stress of grief
And anxious care, in fantasies outwrought
From the hearth's embers flickering low, or caught
From whispering wind, or tread of passing feet,
Or vagrant memory calling up some sweet
Snatch of old song or romance, whence or why
They scarcely know or ask,--so, thou and I,
Nursed in the faith that Truth alone is strong
In the endurance which outwearies Wrong,
With meek persistence baffling brutal force,
And trusting God against the universe,--
We, doomed to watch a strife we may not share
With other weapons than the patriot's prayer,
Yet owning, with full hearts and moistened eyes,
The awful beauty of self-sacrifice,
And wrung by keenest sympathy for all
Who give their loved ones for the living wall
'Twixt law and treason,--in this evil day
May haply find, through automatic play
Of pen and pencil, solace to our pain,
And hearten others with the strength we gain.
I know it has been said our times require
No play of art, nor dalliance with the lyre,
No weak essay with Fancy's chloroform
To calm the hot, mad pulses of the storm,
But the stern war-blast rather, such as sets
The battle's teeth of serried bayonets,
And pictures grim as Vernet's. Yet with these
Some softer tints may blend, and milder keys

Relieve the storm-stunned ear. Let us keep sweet,
If so we may, our hearts, even while we eat
The bitter harvest of our own device
And half a century's moral cowardice.
As Nurnberg sang while Wittenberg defied,
And Kranach painted by his Luther's side,
And through the war-march of the Puritan
The silver stream of Marvell's music ran,
So let the household melodies be sung,
The pleasant pictures on the wall be hung--
So let us hold against the hosts of night
And slavery all our vantage-ground of light.
Let Treason boast its savagery, and shake
From its flag-folds its symbol rattlesnake,
Nurse its fine arts, lay human skins in tan,
And carve its pipe-bowls from the bones of man,
And make the tale of Fijian banquets dull
By drinking whiskey from a loyal skull,--
But let us guard, till this sad war shall cease,
(God grant it soon!) the graceful arts of peace
No foes are conquered who the victors teach
Their vandal manners and barbaric speech.

And while, with hearts of thankfulness, we bear
Of the great common burden our full share,
Let none upbraid us that the waves entice
Thy sea-dipped pencil, or some quaint device,
Rhythmic, and sweet, beguiles my pen away
From the sharp strifes and sorrows of to-day.
Thus, while the east-wind keen from Labrador
Sings it the leafless elms, and from the shore
Of the great sea comes the monotonous roar
Of the long-breaking surf, and all the sky
Is gray with cloud, home-bound and dull, I try
To time a simple legend to the sounds
Of winds in the woods, and waves on pebbled bounds,--
A song for oars to chime with, such as might
Be sung by tired sea-painters, who at night
Look from their hemlock camps, by quiet cove
Or beach, moon-lighted, on the waves they love.
(So hast thou looked, when level sunset lay
On the calm bosom of some Eastern bay,
And all the spray-moist rocks and waves that rolled
Up the white sand-slopes flashed with ruddy gold.)
Something it has--a flavor of the sea,
And the sea's freedom--which reminds of thee.
Its faded picture, dimly smiling down
From the blurred fresco of the ancient town,
I have not touched with warmer tints in vain,
If, in this dark, sad year, it steals one thought
from pain.

.....

Her fingers shame the ivory keys
They dance so light along;
The bloom upon her parted lips
Is sweeter than the song.

O perfumed suitor, spare thy smiles!
Her thoughts are not of thee;
She better loves the salted wind,
The voices of the sea.

Her heart is like an outbound ship
That at its anchor swings;
The murmur of the stranded shell
Is in the song she sings.

She sings, and, smiling, hears her praise,
But dreams the while of one
Who watches from his sea-blown deck
The icebergs in the sun.

She questions all the winds that blow,
And every fog-wreath dim,
And bids the sea-birds flying north
Bear messages to him.

She speeds them with the thanks of men
He perilled life to save,
And grateful prayers like holy oil
To smooth for him the wave.

Brown Viking of the fishing-smack!
Fair toast of all the town!--
The skipper's jerkin ill beseems
The lady's silken gown!

But ne'er shall Amy Wentworth wear
For him the blush of shame
Who dares to set his manly gifts
Against her ancient name.

The stream is brightest at its spring,
And blood is not like wine;
Nor honored less than he who heirs
Is he who founds a line.

Full lightly shall the prize be won,
If love be Fortune's spur;
And never maiden stoops to him
Who lifts himself to her.

Her home is brave in Jaffrey Street,

With stately stairways worn
By feet of old Colonial knights
And ladies gentle-born.

Still green about its ample porch
The English ivy twines,
Trained back to show in English oak
The herald's carven signs.

And on her, from the wainscot old,
Ancestral faces frown,--
And this has worn the soldier's sword,
And that the judge's gown.

But, strong of will and proud as they,
She walks the gallery floor
As if she trod her sailor's deck
By stormy Labrador.

The sweetbrier blooms on Kittery-side,
And green are Elliot's bowers;
Her garden is the pebbled beach,
The mosses are her flowers.

She looks across the harbor-bar
To see the white gulls fly;
His greeting from the Northern sea
Is in their clanging cry.

She hums a song, and dreams that he,
As in its romance old,
Shall homeward ride with silken sails
And masts of beaten gold!

Oh, rank is good, and gold is fair,
And high and low mate ill;
But love has never known a law
Beyond its own sweet will!
1862.

THE COUNTESS.

TO E. W.

I inscribed this poem to Dr. Elias Weld of Haverhill, Massachusetts, to whose kindness I was much indebted in my boyhood. He was the one cultivated man in the neighborhood. His small but well-chosen library was placed at my disposal. He is the "wise old doctor" of Snow-Bound. Count Francois de Vipart with his cousin Joseph Rochemont de Poyen came to the United States in the early part of the present century. They took up their residence at Rocks Village on the Merrimac, where they both

married. The wife of Count Vipart was Mary Ingalls, who as my father remembered her was a very lovely young girl. Her wedding dress, as described by a lady still living, was "pink satin with an overdress of white lace, and white satin slippers." She died in less than a year after her marriage. Her husband returned to his native country. He lies buried in the family tomb of the Viparts at Bordeaux.

I KNOW not, Time and Space so intervene,
Whether, still waiting with a trust serene,
Thou bearest up thy fourscore years and ten,
Or, called at last, art now Heaven's citizen;
But, here or there, a pleasant thought of thee,
Like an old friend, all day has been with me.
The shy, still boy, for whom thy kindly hand
Smoothed his hard pathway to the wonder-land
Of thought and fancy, in gray manhood yet
Keeps green the memory of his early debt.
To-day, when truth and falsehood speak their words
Through hot-lipped cannon and the teeth of swords,
Listening with quickened heart and ear intent
To each sharp clause of that stern argument,
I still can hear at times a softer note
Of the old pastoral music round me float,
While through the hot gleam of our civil strife
Looms the green mirage of a simpler life.
As, at his alien post, the sentinel
Drops the old bucket in the homestead well,
And hears old voices in the winds that toss
Above his head the live-oak's beard of moss,
So, in our trial-time, and under skies
Shadowed by swords like Islam's paradise,
I wait and watch, and let my fancy stray
To milder scenes and youth's Arcadian day;
And howsoe'er the pencil dipped in dreams
Shades the brown woods or tints the sunset streams,
The country doctor in the foreground seems,
Whose ancient sulky down the village lanes
Dragged, like a war-car, captive ills and pains.
I could not paint the scenery of my song,
Mindless of one who looked thereon so long;
Who, night and day, on duty's lonely round,
Made friends o' the woods and rocks, and knew the sound
Of each small brook, and what the hillside trees
Said to the winds that touched their leafy keys;
Who saw so keenly and so well could paint
The village-folk, with all their humors quaint,
The parson ambling on his wall-eyed roan.
Grave and erect, with white hair backward blown;
The tough old boatman, half amphibious grown;
The muttering witch-wife of the gossip's tale,
And the loud straggler levying his blackmail,--
Old customs, habits, superstitions, fears,
All that lies buried under fifty years.

To thee, as is most fit, I bring my lay,
And, grateful, own the debt I cannot pay.

.....

Over the wooded northern ridge,
Between its houses brown,
To the dark tunnel of the bridge
The street comes straggling down.

You catch a glimpse, through birch and pine,
Of gable, roof, and porch,
The tavern with its swinging sign,
The sharp horn of the church.

The river's steel-blue crescent curves
To meet, in ebb and flow,
The single broken wharf that serves
For sloop and gundelow.

With salt sea-scents along its shores
The heavy hay-boats crawl,
The long antennae of their oars
In lazy rise and fall.

Along the gray abutment's wall
The idle shad-net dries;
The toll-man in his cobbler's stall
Sits smoking with closed eyes.

You hear the pier's low undertone
Of waves that chafe and gnaw;
You start,--a skipper's horn is blown
To raise the creaking draw.

At times a blacksmith's anvil sounds
With slow and sluggard beat,
Or stage-coach on its dusty rounds
Fakes up the staring street.

A place for idle eyes and ears,
A cobwebbed nook of dreams;
Left by the stream whose waves are years
The stranded village seems.

And there, like other moss and rust,
The native dweller clings,
And keeps, in uninquiring trust,
The old, dull round of things.

The fisher drops his patient lines,
The farmer sows his grain,
Content to hear the murmuring pines

Instead of railroad-train.

Go where, along the tangled steep
That slopes against the west,
The hamlet's buried idlers sleep
In still profounder rest.

Throw back the locust's flowery plume,
The birch's pale-green scarf,
And break the web of brier and bloom
From name and epitaph.

A simple muster-roll of death,
Of pomp and romance shorn,
The dry, old names that common breath
Has cheapened and outworn.

Yet pause by one low mound, and part
The wild vines o'er it laced,
And read the words by rustic art
Upon its headstone traced.

Haply yon white-haired villager
Of fourscore years can say
What means the noble name of her
Who sleeps with common clay.

An exile from the Gascon land
Found refuge here and rest,
And loved, of all the village band,
Its fairest and its best.

He knelt with her on Sabbath morns,
He worshipped through her eyes,
And on the pride that doubts and scorns
Stole in her faith's surprise.

Her simple daily life he saw
By homeliest duties tried,
In all things by an untaught law
Of fitness justified.

For her his rank aside he laid;
He took the hue and tone
Of lowly life and toil, and made
Her simple ways his own.

Yet still, in gay and careless ease,
To harvest-field or dance
He brought the gentle courtesies,
The nameless grace of France.

And she who taught him love not less

From him she loved in turn
Caught in her sweet unconsciousness
What love is quick to learn.

Each grew to each in pleased accord,
Nor knew the gazing town
If she looked upward to her lord
Or he to her looked down.

How sweet, when summer's day was o'er,
His violin's mirth and wail,
The walk on pleasant Newbury's shore,
The river's moonlit sail!

Ah! life is brief, though love be long;
The altar and the bier,
The burial hymn and bridal song,
Were both in one short year!

Her rest is quiet on the hill,
Beneath the locust's bloom
Far off her lover sleeps as still
Within his scutcheoned tomb.

The Gascon lord, the village maid,
In death still clasp their hands;
The love that levels rank and grade
Unites their severed lands.

What matter whose the hillside grave,
Or whose the blazoned stone?
Forever to her western wave
Shall whisper blue Garonne!

O Love!--so hallowing every soil
That gives thy sweet flower room,
Wherever, nursed by ease or toil,
The human heart takes bloom!--

Plant of lost Eden, from the sod
Of sinful earth unriven,
White blossom of the trees of God
Dropped down to us from heaven!

This tangled waste of mound and stone
Is holy for thy sale;
A sweetness which is all thy own
Breathes out from fern and brake.

And while ancestral pride shall twine
The Gascon's tomb with flowers,
Fall sweetly here, O song of mine,
With summer's bloom and showers!

And let the lines that severed seem
Unite again in thee,
As western wave and Gallic stream
Are mingled in one sea!
1863.

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