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Volume II., The Works of Whittier: Poems of Nature, Poems Subjective
and Reminiscent, Religious Poems
#14 in our series by John Greenleaf Whittier

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Volume II., The Works of Whittier

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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK, MOUNTAIN PICTURES, ETC. *****

POEMS OF NATURE

POEMS SUBJECTIVE AND REMINISCENT

RELIGIOUS POEMS

BY
JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

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MOUNTAIN PICTURES.

I. FRANCONIA FROM THE PEMIGEWASSET

Once more, O Mountains of the North, unveil
Your brows, and lay your cloudy mantles by
And once more, ere the eyes that seek ye fail,
Uplift against the blue walls of the sky
Your mighty shapes, and let the sunshine weave
Its golden net-work in your belting woods,
Smile down in rainbows from your falling floods,
And on your kingly brows at morn and eve
Set crowns of fire! So shall my soul receive
Haply the secret of your calm and strength,

Your unforgotten beauty interfuse
My common life, your glorious shapes and hues
And sun-dropped splendors at my bidding come,
Loom vast through dreams, and stretch in billowy length
From the sea-level of my lowland home!

They rise before me! Last night's thunder-gust
Roared not in vain: for where its lightnings thrust
Their tongues of fire, the great peaks seem so near,
Burned clean of mist, so starkly bold and clear,
I almost pause the wind in the pines to hear,
The loose rock's fall, the steps of browsing deer.
The clouds that shattered on yon slide-worn walls
And splintered on the rocks their spears of rain
Have set in play a thousand waterfalls,
Making the dusk and silence of the woods
Glad with the laughter of the chasing floods,
And luminous with blown spray and silver gleams,
While, in the vales below, the dry-lipped streams
Sing to the freshened meadow-lands again.
So, let me hope, the battle-storm that beats
The land with hail and fire may pass away
With its spent thunders at the break of day,
Like last night's clouds, and leave, as it retreats,
A greener earth and fairer sky behind,
Blown crystal-clear by Freedom's Northern wind!

II. MONADNOCK FROM WACHUSET.

I would I were a painter, for the sake
Of a sweet picture, and of her who led,
A fitting guide, with reverential tread,
Into that mountain mystery. First a lake
Tinted with sunset; next the wavy lines
Of far receding hills; and yet more far,
Monadnock lifting from his night of pines
His rosy forehead to the evening star.
Beside us, purple-zoned, Wachuset laid
His head against the West, whose warm light made
His aureole; and o'er him, sharp and clear,
Like a shaft of lightning in mid-launching stayed,
A single level cloud-line, shone upon
By the fierce glances of the sunken sun,
Menaced the darkness with its golden spear!

So twilight deepened round us. Still and black
The great woods climbed the mountain at our back;
And on their skirts, where yet the lingering day
On the shorn greenness of the clearing lay,
The brown old farm-house like a bird's-nest hung.
With home-life sounds the desert air was stirred
The bleat of sheep along the hill we heard,
The bucket plashing in the cool, sweet well,
The pasture-bars that clattered as they fell;

Dogs barked, fowls fluttered, cattle lowed; the gate
Of the barn-yard creaked beneath the merry weight
Of sun-brown children, listening, while they swung,
The welcome sound of supper-call to hear;
And down the shadowy lane, in tinklings clear,
The pastoral curfew of the cow-bell rung.
Thus soothed and pleased, our backward path we took,
Praising the farmer's home. He only spake,
Looking into the sunset o'er the lake,
Like one to whom the far-off is most near:
"Yes, most folks think it has a pleasant look;
I love it for my good old mother's sake,
Who lived and died here in the peace of God!"
The lesson of his words we pondered o'er,
As silently we turned the eastern flank
Of the mountain, where its shadow deepest sank,
Doubling the night along our rugged road:
We felt that man was more than his abode,--
The inward life than Nature's raiment more;
And the warm sky, the sundown-tinted hill,
The forest and the lake, seemed dwarfed and dim
Before the saintly soul, whose human will
Meekly in the Eternal footsteps trod,
Making her homely toil and household ways
An earthly echo of the song of praise
Swelling from angel lips and harps of seraphim.
1862.

THE VANISHERS.

Sweetest of all childlike dreams
In the simple Indian lore
Still to me the legend seems
Of the shapes who flit before.

Flitting, passing, seen and gone,
Never reached nor found at rest,
Baffling search, but beckoning on
To the Sunset of the Blest.

From the clefts of mountain rocks,
Through the dark of lowland firs,
Flash the eyes and flow the locks
Of the mystic Vanishers!

And the fisher in his skiff,
And the hunter on the moss,
Hear their call from cape and cliff,
See their hands the birch-leaves toss.

Wistful, longing, through the green

Twilight of the clustered pines,
In their faces rarely seen
Beauty more than mortal shines.

Fringed with gold their mantles flow
On the slopes of westering knolls;
In the wind they whisper low
Of the Sunset Land of Souls.

Doubt who may, O friend of mine!
Thou and I have seen them too;
On before with beck and sign
Still they glide, and we pursue.

More than clouds of purple trail
In the gold of setting day;
More than gleams of wing or sail
Beckon from the sea-mist gray.

Glimpses of immortal youth,
Gleams and glories seen and flown,
Far-heard voices sweet with truth,
Airs from viewless Eden blown;

Beauty that eludes our grasp,
Sweetness that transcends our taste,
Loving hands we may not clasp,
Shining feet that mock our haste;

Gentle eyes we closed below,
Tender voices heard once more,
Smile and call us, as they go
On and onward, still before.

Guided thus, O friend of mine
Let us walk our little way,
Knowing by each beckoning sign
That we are not quite astray.

Chase we still, with baffled feet,
Smiling eye and waving hand,
Sought and seeker soon shall meet,
Lost and found, in Sunset Land
1864.

THE PAGEANT.

A sound as if from bells of silver,
Or elfin cymbals smitten clear,
Through the frost-pictured panes I hear.

A brightness which outshines the morning,
A splendor brooking no delay,
Beckons and tempts my feet away.

I leave the trodden village highway
For virgin snow-paths glimmering through
A jewelled elm-tree avenue;

Where, keen against the walls of sapphire,
The gleaming tree-bolls, ice-embossed,
Hold up their chandeliers of frost.

I tread in Orient halls enchanted,
I dream the Saga's dream of caves
Gem-lit beneath the North Sea waves!

I walk the land of Eldorado,
I touch its mimic garden bowers,
Its silver leaves and diamond flowers!

The flora of the mystic mine-world
Around me lifts on crystal stems
The petals of its clustered gems!

What miracle of weird transforming
In this wild work of frost and light,
This glimpse of glory infinite!

This foregleam of the Holy City
Like that to him of Patmos given,
The white bride coming down from heaven!

How flash the ranked and mail-clad alders,
Through what sharp-glancing spears of reeds
The brook its muffled water leads!

Yon maple, like the bush of Horeb,
Burns unconsumed: a white, cold fire
Rays out from every grassy spire.

Each slender rush and spike of mullein,
Low laurel shrub and drooping fern,
Transfigured, blaze where'er I turn.

How yonder Ethiopian hemlock
Crowned with his glistening circlet stands!
What jewels light his swarthy hands!

Here, where the forest opens southward,
Between its hospitable pines,
As through a door, the warm sun shines.

The jewels loosen on the branches,

And lightly, as the soft winds blow,
Fall, tinkling, on the ice below.

And through the clashing of their cymbals
I hear the old familiar fall
Of water down the rocky wall,

Where, from its wintry prison breaking,
In dark and silence hidden long,
The brook repeats its summer song.

One instant flashing in the sunshine,
Keen as a sabre from its sheath,
Then lost again the ice beneath.

I hear the rabbit lightly leaping,
The foolish screaming of the jay,
The chopper's axe-stroke far away;

The clamor of some neighboring barn-yard,
The lazy cock's belated crow,
Or cattle-tramp in crispy snow.

And, as in some enchanted forest
The lost knight hears his comrades sing,
And, near at hand, their bridles ring,--

So welcome I these sounds and voices,
These airs from far-off summer blown,
This life that leaves me not alone.

For the white glory overawes me;
The crystal terror of the seer
Of Chebar's vision blinds me here.

Rebuke me not, O sapphire heaven!
Thou stainless earth, lay not on me,
Thy keen reproach of purity,

If, in this August presence-chamber,
I sigh for summer's leaf-green gloom
And warm airs thick with odorous bloom!

Let the strange frost-work sink and crumble,
And let the loosened tree-boughs swing,
Till all their bells of silver ring.

Shine warmly down, thou sun of noontime,
On this chill pageant, melt and move
The winter's frozen heart with love.

And, soft and low, thou wind south-blowing,
Breathe through a veil of tenderest haze

Thy prophecy of summer days.

Come with thy green relief of promise,
And to this dead, cold splendor bring
The living jewels of the spring!
1869.

THE PRESSED GENTIAN.

The time of gifts has come again,
And, on my northern window-pane,
Outlined against the day's brief light,
A Christmas token hangs in sight.

The wayside travellers, as they pass,
Mark the gray disk of clouded glass;
And the dull blankness seems, perchance,
Folly to their wise ignorance.

They cannot from their outlook see
The perfect grace it hath for me;
For there the flower, whose fringes through
The frosty breath of autumn blew,
Turns from without its face of bloom
To the warm tropic of my room,
As fair as when beside its brook
The hue of bending skies it took.

So from the trodden ways of earth,
Seem some sweet souls who veil their worth,
And offer to the careless glance
The clouding gray of circumstance.
They blossom best where hearth-fires burn,
To loving eyes alone they turn
The flowers of inward grace, that hide
Their beauty from the world outside.

But deeper meanings come to me,
My half-immortal flower, from thee!
Man judges from a partial view,
None ever yet his brother knew;
The Eternal Eye that sees the whole
May better read the darkened soul,
And find, to outward sense denied,
The flower upon its inmost side
1872.

A MYSTERY.

The river hemmed with leaning trees
Wound through its meadows green;
A low, blue line of mountains showed
The open pines between.

One sharp, tall peak above them all
Clear into sunlight sprang
I saw the river of my dreams,
The mountains that I sang!

No clue of memory led me on,
But well the ways I knew;
A feeling of familiar things
With every footstep grew.

Not otherwise above its crag
Could lean the blasted pine;
Not otherwise the maple hold
Aloft its red ensign.

So up the long and shorn foot-hills
The mountain road should creep;
So, green and low, the meadow fold
Its red-haired kine asleep.

The river wound as it should wind;
Their place the mountains took;
The white torn fringes of their clouds
Wore no unwonted look.

Yet ne'er before that river's rim
Was pressed by feet of mine,
Never before mine eyes had crossed
That broken mountain line.

A presence, strange at once and known,
Walked with me as my guide;
The skirts of some forgotten life
Trailed noiseless at my side.

Was it a dim-remembered dream?
Or glimpse through ions old?
The secret which the mountains kept
The river never told.

But from the vision ere it passed
A tender hope I drew,
And, pleasant as a dawn of spring,
The thought within me grew,

That love would temper every change,
And soften all surprise,
And, misty with the dreams of earth,

The hills of Heaven arise.
1873.

A SEA DREAM.

We saw the slow tides go and come,
The curving surf-lines lightly drawn,
The gray rocks touched with tender bloom
Beneath the fresh-blown rose of dawn.

We saw in richer sunsets lost
The sombre pomp of showery noons;
And signalled spectral sails that crossed
The weird, low light of rising moons.

On stormy eves from cliff and head
We saw the white spray tossed and spurned;
While over all, in gold and red,
Its face of fire the lighthouse turned.

The rail-car brought its daily crowds,
Half curious, half indifferent,
Like passing sails or floating clouds,
We saw them as they came and went.

But, one calm morning, as we lay
And watched the mirage-lifted wall
Of coast, across the dreamy bay,
And heard afar the curlew call,

And nearer voices, wild or tame,
Of airy flock and childish throng,
Up from the water's edge there came
Faint snatches of familiar song.

Careless we heard the singer's choice
Of old and common airs; at last
The tender pathos of his voice
In one low chanson held us fast.

A song that mingled joy and pain,
And memories old and sadly sweet;
While, timing to its minor strain,
The waves in lapsing cadence beat.

.

The waves are glad in breeze and sun;
The rocks are fringed with foam;
I walk once more a haunted shore,
A stranger, yet at home,

A land of dreams I roam.

Is this the wind, the soft sea wind
That stirred thy locks of brown?
Are these the rocks whose mosses knew
The trail of thy light gown,
Where boy and girl sat down?

I see the gray fort's broken wall,
The boats that rock below;
And, out at sea, the passing sails
We saw so long ago
Rose-red in morning's glow.

The freshness of the early time
On every breeze is blown;
As glad the sea, as blue the sky,--
The change is ours alone;
The saddest is my own.

A stranger now, a world-worn man,
Is he who bears my name;
But thou, methinks, whose mortal life
Immortal youth became,
Art evermore the same.

Thou art not here, thou art not there,
Thy place I cannot see;
I only know that where thou art
The blessed angels be,
And heaven is glad for thee.

Forgive me if the evil years
Have left on me their sign;
Wash out, O soul so beautiful,
The many stains of mine
In tears of love divine!

I could not look on thee and live,
If thou wert by my side;
The vision of a shining one,
The white and heavenly bride,
Is well to me denied.

But turn to me thy dear girl-face
Without the angel's crown,
The wedded roses of thy lips,
Thy loose hair rippling down
In waves of golden brown.

Look forth once more through space and time,
And let thy sweet shade fall
In tenderest grace of soul and form

On memory's frescoed wall,
A shadow, and yet all!

Draw near, more near, forever dear!
Where'er I rest or roam,
Or in the city's crowded streets,
Or by the blown sea foam,
The thought of thee is home!

.

At breakfast hour the singer read
The city news, with comment wise,
Like one who felt the pulse of trade
Beneath his finger fall and rise.

His look, his air, his curt speech, told
The man of action, not of books,
To whom the corners made in gold
And stocks were more than seaside nooks.

Of life beneath the life confessed
His song had hinted unawares;
Of flowers in traffic's ledgers pressed,
Of human hearts in bulls and bears.

But eyes in vain were turned to watch
That face so hard and shrewd and strong;
And ears in vain grew sharp to catch
The meaning of that morning song.

In vain some sweet-voiced querist sought
To sound him, leaving as she came;
Her baited album only caught
A common, unromantic name.

No word betrayed the mystery fine,
That trembled on the singer's tongue;
He came and went, and left no sign
Behind him save the song he sung.
1874.

HAZEL BLOSSOMS.

The summer warmth has left the sky,
The summer songs have died away;
And, withered, in the footpaths lie
The fallen leaves, but yesterday
With ruby and with topaz gay.

The grass is browning on the hills;

No pale, belated flowers recall
The astral fringes of the rills,
And drearily the dead vines fall,
Frost-blackened, from the roadside wall.

Yet through the gray and sombre wood,
Against the dusk of fir and pine,
Last of their floral sisterhood,
The hazel's yellow blossoms shine,
The tawny gold of Afric's mine!

Small beauty hath my unsung flower,
For spring to own or summer hail;
But, in the season's saddest hour,
To skies that weep and winds that wail
Its glad surprisals never fail.

O days grown cold! O life grown old
No rose of June may bloom again;
But, like the hazel's twisted gold,
Through early frost and latter rain
Shall hints of summer-time remain.

And as within the hazel's bough
A gift of mystic virtue dwells,
That points to golden ores below,
And in dry desert places tells
Where flow unseen the cool, sweet wells,

So, in the wise Diviner's hand,
Be mine the hazel's grateful part
To feel, beneath a thirsty land,
The living waters thrill and start,
The beating of the rivulet's heart!

Sufficeth me the gift to light
With latest bloom the dark, cold days;
To call some hidden spring to sight
That, in these dry and dusty ways,
Shall sing its pleasant song of praise.

O Love! the hazel-wand may fail,
But thou canst lend the surer spell,
That, passing over Baca's vale,
Repeats the old-time miracle,
And makes the desert-land a well.
1874.

SUNSET ON THE BEARCAMP.

A gold fringe on the purpling hem

Of hills the river runs,
As down its long, green valley falls
The last of summer's suns.

Along its tawny gravel-bed
Broad-flowing, swift, and still,
As if its meadow levels felt
The hurry of the hill,
Noiseless between its banks of green
From curve to curve it slips;
The drowsy maple-shadows rest
Like fingers on its lips.

A waif from Carroll's wildest hills,
Unstoried and unknown;
The ursine legend of its name
Prowls on its banks alone.
Yet flowers as fair its slopes adorn
As ever Yarrow knew,
Or, under rainy Irish skies,
By Spenser's Mulla grew;
And through the gaps of leaning trees
Its mountain cradle shows
The gold against the amethyst,
The green against the rose.

Touched by a light that hath no name,
A glory never sung,
Aloft on sky and mountain wall
Are God's great pictures hung.
How changed the summits vast and old!
No longer granite-browed,
They melt in rosy mist; the rock
Is softer than the cloud;
The valley holds its breath; no leaf
Of all its elms is twirled
The silence of eternity
Seems falling on the world.

The pause before the breaking seals
Of mystery is this;
Yon miracle-play of night and day
Makes dumb its witnesses.
What unseen altar crowns the hills
That reach up stair on stair?
What eyes look through, what white wings fan
These purple veils of air?
What Presence from the heavenly heights
To those of earth stoops down?
Not vainly Hellas dreamed of gods
On Ida's snowy crown!

Slow fades the vision of the sky,

The golden water pales,
And over all the valley-land
A gray-winged vapor sails.
I go the common way of all;
The sunset fires will burn,
The flowers will blow, the river flow,
When I no more return.
No whisper from the mountain pine
Nor lapsing stream shall tell
The stranger, treading where I tread,
Of him who loved them well.

But beauty seen is never lost,
God's colors all are fast;
The glory of this sunset heaven
Into my soul has passed,
A sense of gladness unconfined
To mortal date or clime;
As the soul liveth, it shall live
Beyond the years of time.
Beside the mystic asphodels
Shall bloom the home-born flowers,
And new horizons flush and glow
With sunset hues of ours.

Farewell! these smiling hills must wear
Too soon their wintry frown,
And snow-cold winds from off them shake
The maple's red leaves down.
But I shall see a summer sun
Still setting broad and low;
The mountain slopes shall blush and bloom,
The golden water flow.
A lover's claim is mine on all
I see to have and hold,--
The rose-light of perpetual hills,
And sunsets never cold!

1876

THE SEEKING OF THE WATERFALL.

They left their home of summer ease
Beneath the lowland's sheltering trees,
To seek, by ways unknown to all,
The promise of the waterfall.

Some vague, faint rumor to the vale
Had crept--perchance a hunter's tale--
Of its wild mirth of waters lost
On the dark woods through which it tossed.

Somewhere it laughed and sang; somewhere
Whirled in mad dance its misty hair;
But who had raised its veil, or seen
The rainbow skirts of that Undine?

They sought it where the mountain brook
Its swift way to the valley took;
Along the rugged slope they clomb,
Their guide a thread of sound and foam.

Height after height they slowly won;
The fiery javelins of the sun
Smote the bare ledge; the tangled shade
With rock and vine their steps delayed.

But, through leaf-openings, now and then
They saw the cheerful homes of men,
And the great mountains with their wall
Of misty purple girdling all.

The leaves through which the glad winds blew
Shared the wild dance the waters knew;
And where the shadows deepest fell
The wood-thrush rang his silver bell.

Fringing the stream, at every turn
Swung low the waving fronds of fern;
From stony cleft and mossy sod
Pale asters sprang, and golden-rod.

And still the water sang the sweet,
Glad song that stirred its gliding feet,
And found in rock and root the keys
Of its beguiling melodies.

Beyond, above, its signals flew
Of tossing foam the birch-trees through;
Now seen, now lost, but baffling still
The weary seekers' slackening will.

Each called to each: "Lo here! Lo there!
Its white scarf flutters in the air!"
They climbed anew; the vision fled,
To beckon higher overhead.

So toiled they up the mountain-slope
With faint and ever fainter hope;
With faint and fainter voice the brook
Still bade them listen, pause, and look.

Meanwhile below the day was done;
Above the tall peaks saw the sun
Sink, beam-shorn, to its misty set

Behind the hills of violet.

"Here ends our quest!" the seekers cried,
"The brook and rumor both have lied!
The phantom of a waterfall
Has led us at its beck and call."

But one, with years grown wiser, said
"So, always baffled, not misled,
We follow where before us runs
The vision of the shining ones.

"Not where they seem their signals fly,
Their voices while we listen die;
We cannot keep, however fleet,
The quick time of their winged feet.

"From youth to age unresting stray
These kindly mockers in our way;
Yet lead they not, the baffling elves,
To something better than themselves?

"Here, though unreached the goal we sought,
Its own reward our toil has brought:
The winding water's sounding rush,
The long note of the hermit thrush,

"The turquoise lakes, the glimpse of pond
And river track, and, vast, beyond
Broad meadows belted round with pines,
The grand uplift of mountain lines!

"What matter though we seek with pain
The garden of the gods in vain,
If lured thereby we climb to greet
Some wayside blossom Eden-sweet?

"To seek is better than to gain,
The fond hope dies as we attain;
Life's fairest things are those which seem,
The best is that of which we dream.

"Then let us trust our waterfall
Still flashes down its rocky wall,
With rainbow crescent curved across
Its sunlit spray from moss to moss.

"And we, forgetful of our pain,
In thought shall seek it oft again;
Shall see this aster-blossomed sod,
This sunshine of the golden-rod,

"And haply gain, through parting boughs,

Grand glimpses of great mountain brows
Cloud-turbaned, and the sharp steel sheen
Of lakes deep set in valleys green.

"So failure wins; the consequence
Of loss becomes its recompense;
And evermore the end shall tell
The unreached ideal guided well.

"Our sweet illusions only die
Fulfilling love's sure prophecy;
And every wish for better things
An undreamed beauty nearer brings.

"For fate is servitor of love;
Desire and hope and longing prove
The secret of immortal youth,
And Nature cheats us into truth.

"O kind allurers, wisely sent,
Beguiling with benign intent,
Still move us, through divine unrest,
To seek the loveliest and the best!

"Go with us when our souls go free,
And, in the clear, white light to be,
Add unto Heaven's beatitude
The old delight of seeking good!"
1878.

THE TRAILING ARBUTUS

I wandered lonely where the pine-trees made
Against the bitter East their barricade,
And, guided by its sweet
Perfume, I found, within a narrow dell,
The trailing spring flower tinted like a shell
Amid dry leaves and mosses at my feet.

From under dead boughs, for whose loss the pines
Moaned ceaseless overhead, the blossoming vines
Lifted their glad surprise,
While yet the bluebird smoothed in leafless trees
His feathers ruffled by the chill sea-breeze,
And snow-drifts lingered under April skies.

As, pausing, o'er the lonely flower I bent,
I thought of lives thus lowly, clogged and pent,
Which yet find room,
Through care and cumber, coldness and decay,
To lend a sweetness to the ungenial day

And make the sad earth happier for their bloom.
1879.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

This name in some parts of Europe is given to the season we call Indian Summer, in honor of the good St. Martin. The title of the poem was suggested by the fact that the day it refers to was the exact date of that set apart to the Saint, the 11th of November.

Though flowers have perished at the touch
Of Frost, the early comer,
I hail the season loved so much,
The good St. Martin's summer.

O gracious morn, with rose-red dawn,
And thin moon curving o'er it!
The old year's darling, latest born,
More loved than all before it!

How flamed the sunrise through the pines!
How stretched the birchen shadows,
Braiding in long, wind-wavered lines
The westward sloping meadows!

The sweet day, opening as a flower
Unfolds its petals tender,
Renews for us at noontide's hour
The summer's tempered splendor.

The birds are hushed; alone the wind,
That through the woodland searches,
The red-oak's lingering leaves can find,
And yellow plumes of larches.

But still the balsam-breathing pine
Invites no thought of sorrow,
No hint of loss from air like wine
The earth's content can borrow.

The summer and the winter here
Midway a truce are holding,
A soft, consenting atmosphere
Their tents of peace enfolding.

The silent woods, the lonely hills,
Rise solemn in their gladness;
The quiet that the valley fills
Is scarcely joy or sadness.

How strange! The autumn yesterday

In winter's grasp seemed dying;
On whirling winds from skies of gray
The early snow was flying.

And now, while over Nature's mood
There steals a soft relenting,
I will not mar the present good,
Forecasting or lamenting.

My autumn time and Nature's hold
A dreamy tryst together,
And, both grown old, about us fold
The golden-tissued weather.

I lean my heart against the day
To feel its bland caressing;
I will not let it pass away
Before it leaves its blessing.

God's angels come not as of old
The Syrian shepherds knew them;
In reddening dawns, in sunset gold,
And warm noon lights I view them.

Nor need there is, in times like this
When heaven to earth draws nearer,
Of wing or song as witnesses
To make their presence clearer.

O stream of life, whose swifter flow
Is of the end forewarning,
Methinks thy sundown afterglow
Seems less of night than morning!

Old cares grow light; aside I lay
The doubts and fears that troubled;
The quiet of the happy day
Within my soul is doubled.

That clouds must veil this fair sunshine
Not less a joy I find it;
Nor less yon warm horizon line
That winter lurks behind it.

The mystery of the untried days
I close my eyes from reading;
His will be done whose darkest ways
To light and life are leading!

Less drear the winter night shall be,
If memory cheer and hearten
Its heavy hours with thoughts of thee,
Sweet summer of St. Martin!

1880.

STORM ON LAKE ASQUAM.

A cloud, like that the old-time Hebrew saw
On Carmel prophesying rain, began
To lift itself o'er wooded Cardigan,
Growing and blackening. Suddenly, a flaw

Of chill wind menaced; then a strong blast beat
Down the long valley's murmuring pines, and woke
The noon-dream of the sleeping lake, and broke
Its smooth steel mirror at the mountains' feet.

Thunderous and vast, a fire-veined darkness swept
Over the rough pine-bearded Asquam range;
A wraith of tempest, wonderful and strange,
From peak to peak the cloudy giant stepped.

One moment, as if challenging the storm,
Chocorua's tall, defiant sentinel
Looked from his watch-tower; then the shadow fell,
And the wild rain-drift blotted out his form.

And over all the still unhidden sun,
Weaving its light through slant-blown veils of rain,
Smiled on the trouble, as hope smiles on pain;
And, when the tumult and the strife were done,

With one foot on the lake and one on land,
Framing within his crescent's tinted streak
A far-off picture of the Melvin peak,
Spent broken clouds the rainbow's angel spanned.
1882.

A SUMMER PILGRIMAGE.

To kneel before some saintly shrine,
To breathe the health of airs divine,
Or bathe where sacred rivers flow,
The cowed and turbaned pilgrims go.
I too, a palmer, take, as they
With staff and scallop-shell, my way
To feel, from burdening cares and ills,
The strong uplifting of the hills.

The years are many since, at first,
For dreamed-of wonders all athirst,
I saw on Winnepesaukee fall

The shadow of the mountain wall.
Ah! where are they who sailed with me
The beautiful island-studded sea?
And am I he whose keen surprise
Flashed out from such unclouded eyes?

Still, when the sun of summer burns,
My longing for the hills returns;
And northward, leaving at my back
The warm vale of the Merrimac,
I go to meet the winds of morn,
Blown down the hill-gaps, mountain-born,
Breathe scent of pines, and satisfy
The hunger of a lowland eye.

Again I see the day decline
Along a ridged horizon line;
Touching the hill-tops, as a nun
Her beaded rosary, sinks the sun.
One lake lies golden, which shall soon
Be silver in the rising moon;
And one, the crimson of the skies
And mountain purple multiplies.

With the untroubled quiet blends
The distance-softened voice of friends;
The girl's light laugh no discord brings
To the low song the pine-tree sings;
And, not unwelcome, comes the hail
Of boyhood from his nearing sail.
The human presence breaks no spell,
And sunset still is miracle!

Calm as the hour, methinks I feel
A sense of worship o'er me steal;
Not that of satyr-charming Pan,
No cult of Nature shaming man,
Not Beauty's self, but that which lives
And shines through all the veils it weaves,--
Soul of the mountain, lake, and wood,
Their witness to the Eternal Good!

And if, by fond illusion, here
The earth to heaven seems drawing near,
And yon outlying range invites
To other and serener heights,
Scarce hid behind its topmost swell,
The shining Mounts Delectable
A dream may hint of truth no less
Than the sharp light of wakefulness.

As through her vale of incense smoke.
Of old the spell-rapt priestess spoke,

More than her heathen oracle,
May not this trance of sunset tell
That Nature's forms of loveliness
Their heavenly archetypes confess,
Fashioned like Israel's ark alone
From patterns in the Mount made known?

A holier beauty overbroods
These fair and faint similitudes;
Yet not unblest is he who sees
Shadows of God's realities,
And knows beyond this masquerade
Of shape and color, light and shade,
And dawn and set, and wax and wane,
Eternal verities remain.

O gems of sapphire, granite set!
O hills that charmed horizons fret
I know how fair your morns can break,
In rosy light on isle and lake;
How over wooded slopes can run
The noonday play of cloud and sun,
And evening droop her oriflamme
Of gold and red in still Asquam.

The summer moons may round again,
And careless feet these hills profane;
These sunsets waste on vacant eyes
The lavish splendor of the skies;
Fashion and folly, misplaced here,
Sigh for their natural atmosphere,
And travelled pride the outlook scorn
Of lesser heights than Matterhorn.

But let me dream that hill and sky
Of unseen beauty prophesy;
And in these tinted lakes behold
The trailing of the raiment fold
Of that which, still eluding gaze,
Allures to upward-tending ways,
Whose footprints make, wherever found,
Our common earth a holy ground.
1883.

SWEET FERN.

The subtle power in perfume found
Nor priest nor sibyl vainly learned;
On Grecian shrine or Aztec mound
No censer idly burned.

That power the old-time worships knew,
The Corybantes' frenzied dance,
The Pythian priestess swooning through
The wonderland of trance.

And Nature holds, in wood and field,
Her thousand sunlit censers still;
To spells of flower and shrub we yield
Against or with our will.

I climbed a hill path strange and new
With slow feet, pausing at each turn;
A sudden waft of west wind blew
The breath of the sweet fern.

That fragrance from my vision swept
The alien landscape; in its stead,
Up fairer hills of youth I stepped,
As light of heart as tread.

I saw my boyhood's lakelet shine
Once more through rifts of woodland shade;
I knew my river's winding line
By morning mist betrayed.

With me June's freshness, lapsing brook,
Murmurs of leaf and bee, the call
Of birds, and one in voice and look
In keeping with them all.

A fern beside the way we went
She plucked, and, smiling, held it up,
While from her hand the wild, sweet scent
I drank as from a cup.

O potent witchery of smell!
The dust-dry leaves to life return,
And she who plucked them owns the spell
And lifts her ghostly fern.

Or sense or spirit? Who shall say
What touch the chord of memory thrills?
It passed, and left the August day
Ablaze on lonely hills.

THE WOOD GIANT

From Alton Bay to Sandwich Dome,
From Mad to Saco river,
For patriarchs of the primal wood
We sought with vain endeavor.

And then we said: "The giants old
Are lost beyond retrieval;
This pygmy growth the axe has spared
Is not the wood primeval.

"Look where we will o'er vale and hill,
How idle are our searches
For broad-girthed maples, wide-limbed oaks,
Centennial pines and birches.

"Their tortured limbs the axe and saw
Have changed to beams and trestles;
They rest in walls, they float on seas,
They rot in sunken vessels.

"This shorn and wasted mountain land
Of underbrush and boulder,--
Who thinks to see its full-grown tree
Must live a century older."

At last to us a woodland path,
To open sunset leading,
Revealed the Anakim of pines
Our wildest wish exceeding.

Alone, the level sun before;
Below, the lake's green islands;
Beyond, in misty distance dim,
The rugged Northern Highlands.

Dark Titan on his Sunset Hill
Of time and change defiant
How dwarfed the common woodland seemed,
Before the old-time giant!

What marvel that, in simpler days
Of the world's early childhood,
Men crowned with garlands, gifts, and praise
Such monarchs of the wild-wood?

That Tyrian maids with flower and song
Danced through the hill grove's spaces,
And hoary-bearded Druids found
In woods their holy places?

With somewhat of that Pagan awe
With Christian reverence blending,
We saw our pine-tree's mighty arms
Above our heads extending.

We heard his needles' mystic rune,
Now rising, and now dying,

As erst Dodona's priestess heard
The oak leaves prophesying.

Was it the half-unconscious moan
Of one apart and mateless,
The weariness of unshared power,
The loneliness of greatness?

O dawns and sunsets, lend to him
Your beauty and your wonder!
Blithe sparrow, sing thy summer song
His solemn shadow under!

Play lightly on his slender keys,
O wind of summer, waking
For hills like these the sound of seas
On far-off beaches breaking,

And let the eagle and the crow
Find shelter in his branches,
When winds shake down his winter snow
In silver avalanches.

The brave are braver for their cheer,
The strongest need assurance,
The sigh of longing makes not less
The lesson of endurance.
1885.

A DAY.

Talk not of sad November, when a day
Of warm, glad sunshine fills the sky of noon,
And a wind, borrowed from some morn of June,
Stirs the brown grasses and the leafless spray.

On the unfrosted pool the pillared pines
Lay their long shafts of shadow: the small rill,
Singing a pleasant song of summer still,
A line of silver, down the hill-slope shines.

Hushed the bird-voices and the hum of bees,
In the thin grass the crickets pipe no more;
But still the squirrel hoards his winter store,
And drops his nut-shells from the shag-bark trees.

Softly the dark green hemlocks whisper: high
Above, the spires of yellowing larches show,
Where the woodpecker and home-loving crow
And jay and nut-hatch winter's threat defy.

O gracious beauty, ever new and old!

O sights and sounds of nature, doubly dear
When the low sunshine warns the closing year
Of snow-blown fields and waves of Arctic cold!

Close to my heart I fold each lovely thing
The sweet day yields; and, not disconsolate,
With the calm patience of the woods I wait
For leaf and blossom when God gives us Spring!
29th, Eleventh Month, 1886.

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