

“WHEN THE OLD MAN SMOKES”

BY

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In the forenoon’s restful quiet,
When the boys are off at school,
When the window lights are shaded
And the chimney–corner cool,
Then the old man seeks his armchair,
Lights his pipe and settles back;
Falls a–dreaming as he draws it
Till the smoke–wreaths gather black.

And the tear–drops come a–trickling
Down his cheeks, a silver flow—
Smoke or memories you wonder,
But you never ask him,—no;
For there ’s something almost sacred
To the other family folks
In those moods of silent dreaming
When the old man smokes.

Ah, perhaps he sits there dreaming
Of the love of other days
And of how he used to lead her
Through the merry dance's maze;
How he called her "little princess,"
And, to please her, used to twine
Tender wreaths to crown her tresses,
From the "matrimony vine."

Then before his mental vision
Comes, perhaps, a sadder day,
When they left his little princess
Sleeping with her fellow clay.
How his young heart throbbed, and pained him!
Why, the memory of it chokes!
Is it of these things he 's thinking
When the old man smokes?

But some brighter thoughts possess him,
For the tears are dried the while.
And the old, worn face is wrinkled
In a reminiscent smile,
From the middle of the forehead

To the feebly trembling lip,
At some ancient prank remembered
Or some long unheard-of quip.

Then the lips relax their tension
And the pipe begins to slide,
Till in little clouds of ashes,
It falls softly at his side;
And his head bends low and lower
Till his chin lies on his breast,
And he sits in peaceful slumber
Like a little child at rest.

Dear old man, there 's something sad'ning,
In these dreamy moods of yours,
Since the present proves so fleeting,
All the past for you endures.
Weeping at forgotten sorrows,
Smiling at forgotten jokes;
Life epitomized in minutes,
When the old man smokes.