

# SNOW-BOUND

John Greenleaf Whittier

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

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores,—  
Brought in the wood from out of doors,  
Littered the stalls, and from the mows  
Raked down the herd's-grass for the cows;  
Heard the horse whinnying for his corn;  
And, sharply clashing horn on horn,  
Impatient down the stanchion rows

The cattle shake their walnut bows;  
While, peering from his early perch  
Upon the scaffold's pole of birch,  
The cock his crested helmet bent  
And down his querulous challenge sent.

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

So all night long the storm roared on:  
The morning broke without a sun;  
In tiny spherule traced with lines  
Of Nature's geometric signs,  
In starry flake, and pellicle,  
All day the hoary meteor fell;  
And, when the second morning shone,  
We looked upon a world unknown,  
On nothing we could call our own.  
Around the glistening wonder bent  
The blue walls of the firmament,  
No cloud above, no earth below,—  
A universe of sky and snow!  
The old familiar sights of ours  
Took marvellous shapes; strange domes and towers  
Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,  
Or garden-wall, or belt of wood;  
A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,  
A fenceless drift what once was road;

The bridle-post an old man sat  
With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat;  
The well-curb had a Chinese roof;  
And even the long sweep, high aloof,  
In its slant splendor, seemed to tell  
Of Pisa's leaning miracle.

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

All day the gusty north-wind bore

The loosening drift its breath before;  
Low circling round its southern zone,  
The sun through dazzling snow-mist shone.  
No church-bell lent its Christian tone  
To the savage air, no social smoke  
Curled over woods of snow-hung oak.  
A solitude made more intense  
By dreary-voicéd elements,  
The shrieking of the mindless wind,  
The moaning tree-boughs swaying blind,  
And on the glass the unmeaning beat  
Of ghostly finger-tips of sleet.  
Beyond the circle of our hearth  
No welcome sound of toil or mirth  
Unbound the spell, and testified  
Of human life and thought outside.  
We minded that the sharpest ear  
The buried brooklet could not hear,  
The music of whose liquid lip  
Had been to us companionship,  
And, in our lonely life, had grown  
To have an almost human tone.

As night drew on, and, from the crest  
Of wooded knolls that ridged the west,  
The sun, a snow-blown traveller, sank  
From sight beneath the smothering bank,  
We piled, with care, our nightly stack  
Of wood against the chimney-back,—  
The oaken log, green, huge, and thick,  
And on its top the stout back-stick;  
The knotty forestick laid apart,  
And filled between with curious art  
The ragged brush; then, hovering near,  
We watched the first red blaze appear,  
Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam

On whitewashed wall and sagging beam,  
Until the old, rude-furnished room  
Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom;  
While radiant with a mimic flame  
Outside the sparkling drift became,  
And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree  
Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free.  
The crane and pendent trammels showed,  
The Turks' heads on the andirons glowed;  
While childish fancy, prompt to tell  
The meaning of the miracle,  
Whispered the old rhyme: "*Under the tree,  
When fire outdoors burns merrily,  
There the witches are making tea.*"

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

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

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

What matter how the night behaved?  
What matter how the north-wind raved?  
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow  
Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow.  
O Time and Change!—with hair as gray  
As was my sire's that winter day,  
How strange it seems, with so much gone  
Of life and love, to still live on!  
Ah, brother! only I and thou  
Are left of all that circle now,—  
The dear home faces whereupon  
That fitful firelight paled and shone.  
Henceforward, listen as we will,  
The voices of that hearth are still;  
Look where we may, the wide earth o'er,  
Those lighted faces smile no more.  
We tread the paths their feet have worn,  
    We sit beneath their orchard trees,  
    We hear, like them, the hum of bees  
And rustle of the bladed corn;  
We turn the pages that they read,  
    Their written words we linger o'er,  
But in the sun they cast no shade,

No voice is heard, no sign is made,  
    No step is on the conscious floor!  
Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust,  
(Since He who knows our need is just,)       
That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.  
Alas for him who never sees  
The stars shine through his cypress-trees!  
Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,  
Nor looks to see the breaking day  
Across the mournful marbles play!  
Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,  
    The truth to flesh and sense unknown,  
That Life is ever lord of Death,  
    And Love can never lose its own!

We sped the time with stories old,  
Wrought puzzles out, and riddles told,  
Or stammered from our school-book lore  
“The Chief of Gambia’s golden shore.”  
How often since, when all the land  
Was clay in Slavery’s shaping hand,  
As if a far-blown trumpet stirred  
The languorous sin-sick air, I heard:  
“Does not the voice of reason cry,  
    Claim the first right which Nature gave,  
From the red scourge of bondage to fly,  
    Nor deign to live a burdened slave!”  
Our father rode again his ride  
On Memphremagog’s wooded side;  
Sat down again to moose and sump  
In trapper’s hut and Indian camp;  
Lived o’er the old idyllic ease  
Beneath St. François’ hemlock-trees;  
Again for him the moonlight shone  
On Norman cap and bodiced zone;  
Again he heard the violin play

Which led the village dance away.  
And mingled in its merry whirl  
The grandam and the laughing girl.  
Or, nearer home, our steps he led  
Where Salisbury's level marshes spread  
    Mile-wide as flies the laden bee;  
Where merry mowers, hale and strong,  
Swept, scythe on scythe, their swaths along  
    The low green prairies of the sea.  
We shared the fishing off Boar's Head,  
    And round the rocky Isles of Shoals  
    The hake-broil on the drift-wood coals;  
The chowder on the sand-beach made,  
Dipped by the hungry, steaming hot,  
With spoons of clam-shell from the pot.  
We heard the tales of witchcraft old,  
And dream and sign and marvel told  
To sleepy listeners as they lay  
Stretched idly on the salted hay,  
Adrift along the winding shores,  
When favoring breezes deigned to blow  
The square sail of the gundelow  
And idle lay the useless oars.

Our mother, while she turned her wheel  
Or run the new-knit stocking-heel,  
Told how the Indian hordes came down  
At midnight on Concheco town,  
And how her own great-uncle bore  
His cruel scalp-mark to fourscore.  
Recalling, in her fitting phrase,  
    So rich and picturesque and free  
    (The common unrhymed poetry  
Of simple life and country ways,)  
The story of her early days,—  
She made us welcome to her home;

Old hearths grew wide to give us room;  
We stole with her a frightened look  
At the gray wizard's conjuring-book,  
The fame whereof went far and wide  
Through all the simple country side;  
We heard the hawks at twilight play,  
The boat-horn on Piscataqua,  
The loon's weird laughter far away;  
We fished her little trout-brook, knew  
What flowers in wood and meadow grew,  
What sunny hillsides autumn-brown  
She climbed to shake the ripe nuts down,  
Saw where in sheltered cove and bay,  
The ducks' black squadron anchored lay,  
And heard the wild-geese calling loud  
Beneath the gray November cloud.

Then, haply, with a look more grave,  
And soberer tone, some tale she gave  
From painful Sewel's ancient tome,  
Beloved in every Quaker home,  
Of faith fire-winged by martyrdom,  
Or Chalkley's Journal, old and quaint,—  
Gentlest of skippers, rare sea-saint!—  
Who, when the dreary calms prevailed,  
And water-butt and bread-cask failed,  
And cruel, hungry eyes pursued  
His portly presence mad for food,  
With dark hints muttered under breath  
Of casting lots for life or death,  
Offered, if Heaven withheld supplies,  
To be himself the sacrifice.  
Then, suddenly, as if to save  
The good man from his living grave,  
A ripple on the water grew,  
A school of porpoise flashed in view.

“Take, eat,” he said, “and be content;  
These fishes in my stead are sent  
By Him who gave the tangled ram  
To spare the child of Abraham.”

Our uncle, innocent of books,  
Was rich in lore of fields and brooks,  
The ancient teachers never dumb  
Of Nature’s unhousted lyceum.  
In moons and tides and weather wise,  
He read the clouds as prophecies,  
And foul or fair could well divine,  
By many an occult hint and sign,  
Holding the cunning-warded keys  
To all the woodcraft mysteries;  
Himself to Nature’s heart so near  
That all her voices in his ear  
Of beast or bird had meanings clear,  
Like Apollonius of old,  
Who knew the tales the sparrows told,  
Or Hermes, who interpreted  
What the sage cranes of Nilus said;  
A simple, guileless, childlike man,  
Content to live where life began;  
Strong only on his native grounds,  
The little world of sights and sounds  
Whose girdle was the parish bounds,  
Whereof his fondly partial pride  
The common features magnified,  
As Surrey hills to mountains grew  
In White of Selborne’s loving view,—  
He told how teal and loon he shot,  
And how the eagle’s eggs he got,  
The feats on pond and river done,  
The prodigies of rod and gun;  
Till, warming with the tales he told,

Forgotten was the outside cold,  
The bitter wind unheeded blew,  
From ripening corn the pigeons flew,  
The partridge drummed i' the wood, the mink  
Went fishing down the river-brink.  
In fields with bean or clover gay,  
The woodchuck, like a hermit gray,  
Peered from the doorway of his cell;  
The muskrat plied the mason's trade,  
And tier by tier his mud-walls laid;  
And from the shagbark overhead  
The grizzled squirrel dropped his shell.

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

From glossy tress to thin gray hair,  
All unprofaned she held apart  
The virgin fancies of the heart.  
Be shame to him of woman born  
Who hath for such but thought of scorn.

There, too, our elder sister plied  
Her evening task the stand beside;  
A full, rich nature, free to trust,  
Truthful and almost sternly just,  
Impulsive, earnest, prompt to act,  
And make her generous thought a fact,  
Keeping with many a light disguise  
The secret of self-sacrifice.  
O heart sore-tried! thou hast the best  
That Heaven itself could give thee,—rest,  
Rest from all bitter thoughts and things!  
    How many a poor one's blessing went  
    With thee beneath the low green tent  
Whose curtain never outward swings!

As one who held herself a part  
Of all she saw, and let her heart  
    Against the household bosom lean,  
Upon the motley-braided mat  
Our youngest and our dearest sat,  
Lifting her large, sweet, asking eyes,  
    Now bathed in the unfading green  
And holy peace of Paradise.  
Oh, looking from some heavenly hill,  
    Or from the shade of saintly palms,  
    Or silver reach of river calms,  
Do those large eyes behold me still?  
With me one little year ago:—

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

Brisk wielder of the birch and rule,  
The master of the district school

Held at the fire his favored place,  
Its warm glow lit a laughing face  
Fresh-hued and fair, where scarce appeared  
The uncertain prophecy of beard.  
He teased the mitten-blinded cat,  
Played cross-pins on my uncle's hat,  
Sang songs, and told us what befalls  
In classic Dartmouth's college halls.  
Born the wild Northern hills among,  
From whence his yeoman father wrung  
By patient toil subsistence scant,  
Not competence and yet not want,  
He early gained the power to pay  
His cheerful, self-reliant way;  
Could doff at ease his scholar's gown  
To peddle wares from town to town;  
Or through the long vacation's reach  
In lonely lowland districts teach,  
Where all the droll experience found  
At stranger hearths in boarding round,  
The moonlit skater's keen delight,  
The sleigh-drive through the frosty night,  
The rustic party, with its rough  
Accompaniment of blind-man's-buff,  
And whirling-plate, and forfeits paid,  
His winter task a pastime made.  
Happy the snow-locked homes wherein  
He tuned his merry violin,  
Or played the athlete in the barn,  
Or held the good dame's winding-yarn,  
Or mirth-provoking versions told  
Of classic legends rare and old,  
Wherein the scenes of Greece and Rome  
Had all the commonplace of home,  
And little seemed at best the odds  
'Twixt Yankee pedlers and old gods;

Where Pindus-born Arachthus took  
The guise of any grist-mill brook,  
And dread Olympus at his will  
Became a huckleberry hill.

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

Another guest that winter night  
Flashed back from lustrous eyes the light.  
Unmarked by time, and yet not young,  
The honeyed music of her tongue  
And words of meekness scarcely told  
A nature passionate and bold,  
Strong, self-centred, spurning guide,  
Its milder features dwarfed beside  
Her unbent will's majestic pride.  
She sat among us, at the best,  
A not unfeared, half-welcome guest,  
Rebuking with her cultured phrase  
Our homeliness of words and ways.  
A certain pard-like, treacherous grace  
    Swayed the lithe limbs and drooped the lash,  
    Lent the white teeth their dazzling flash;  
    And under low brows, black with night,  
    Rayed out at times a dangerous light;  
The sharp heat-lightnings of her face  
Presaging ill to him whom Fate  
Condemned to share her love or hate.  
A woman tropical, intense  
In thought and act, in soul and sense,  
She blended in a like degree  
The vixen and the devotee,  
Revealing with each freak or feint  
    The temper of Petruchio's Kate,  
    The raptures of Siena's saint.  
Her tapering hand and rounded wrist  
Had facile power to form a fist;  
The warm, dark languish of her eyes  
Was never safe from wrath's surprise.  
Brows saintly calm and lips devout  
Knew every change of scowl and pout;  
And the sweet voice had notes more high  
And shrill for social battle-cry.

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

Where'er her troubled path may be,  
    The Lord's sweet pity with her go!  
The outward wayward life we see,  
    The hidden springs we may not know.  
Nor is it given us to discern  
    What threads the fatal sisters spun,  
    Through what ancestral years has run  
The sorrow with the woman born,  
What forged her cruel chain of moods,  
What set her feet in solitudes,  
    And held the love within her mute,  
What mingled madness in the blood,  
    A life-long discord and annoy,  
    Water of tears with oil of joy,  
And hid within the folded bud  
    Perversities of flower and fruit.

It is not ours to separate  
The tangled skein of will and fate,  
To show what metes and bounds should stand  
Upon the soul's debatable land,  
And between choice and Providence  
Divide the circle of events;  
But He who knows our frame is just,  
    Merciful and compassionate,  
And full of sweet assurances  
And hope for all the language is,  
That He remembereth we are dust!

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

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

Next morn we wakened with the shout  
Of merry voices high and clear;  
And saw the teamsters drawing near  
To break the drifted highways out.  
Down the long hillside treading slow  
We saw the half-buried oxen go,  
Shaking the snow from heads uptost,  
Their straining nostrils white with frost.  
Before our door the straggling train  
Drew up, an added team to gain.  
The elders threshed their hands a-cold,  
    Passed, with the cider-mug, their jokes  
    From lip to lip; the younger folks  
Down the loose snow-banks, wrestling, rolled,  
Then toiled again the cavalcade  
    O'er windy hill, through clogged ravine,  
    And woodland paths that wound between  
Low drooping pine-boughs winter-weighed.

From every barn a team afoot,  
At every house a new recruit,  
Where, drawn by Nature's subtlest law,  
Haply the watchful young men saw  
Sweet doorway pictures of the curls  
And curious eyes of merry girls,  
Lifting their hands in mock defence  
Against the snow-ball's compliments,  
And reading in each missive tost  
The charm with Eden never lost.

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

So days went on: a week had passed  
Since the great world was heard from last.  
The Almanac we studied o'er,  
Read and reread our little store  
Of books and pamphlets, scarce a score;  
One harmless novel, mostly hid  
From younger eyes, a book forbid,

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

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

Yet, haply, in some lull of life,  
Some Truce of God which breaks its strife,  
The worldling's eyes shall gather dew,  
    Dreaming in throngful city ways  
Of winter joys his boyhood knew;  
And dear and early friends—the few  
Who yet remain—shall pause to view  
    These Flemish pictures of old days;

Sit with me by the homestead hearth,  
And stretch the hands of memory forth  
    To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze!  
And thanks untraced to lips unknown  
Shall greet me like the odors blown  
From unseen meadows newly mown,  
Or lilies floating in some pond,  
Wood-fringed, the wayside gaze beyond;  
The traveller owns the grateful sense  
Of sweetness near, he knows not whence,  
And, pausing, takes with forehead bare  
The benediction of the air.



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