

# Pipes O'Pan at Zekesbury eBook

## Pipes O'Pan at Zekesbury by James Whitcomb Riley

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# Page 1

## PIPES O' PAN AT ZEKESBURY

The pipes of Pan! Not idler now are they  
Than when their cunning fashioner first blew  
The pith of music from them: Yet for you  
And me their notes are blown in many a way  
Lost in our murmurings for that old day  
That fared so well, without us.—Waken to  
The pipings here at hand:—The clear halloo  
Of truant-voices, and the roundelay  
The waters warble in the solitude  
Of blooming thickets, where the robin's breast  
Sends up such ecstasy o'er dale and dell,  
Each tree top answers, till in all the wood  
There lingers not one squirrel in his nest  
Whetting his hunger on an empty shell.

### AT ZEKESBURY.

The little town, as I recall it, was of just enough dignity and dearth of the same to be an ordinary county seat in Indiana—"The Grand Old Hoosier State," as it was used to being howlingly referred to by the forensic stump orator from the old stand in the courthouse yard—a political campaign being the wildest delight that Zekesbury might ever hope to call its own.

Through years the fitful happenings of the town and its vicinity went on the same—the same! Annually about one circus ventured in, and vanished, and was gone, even as a passing trumpet-blast; the usual rainy-season swelled the "Crick," the driftage choking at "the covered bridge," and backing water till the old road looked amphibious; and crowds of curious townfolk straggled down to look upon the watery wonder, and lean awe-struck above it, and spit in it, and turn mutely home again.

The usual formula of incidents peculiar to an uneventful town and its vicinity: The countryman from "Jessup's Crossing," with the cornstalk coffin-measure, loped into town, his steaming little gray-and-red-flecked "roadster" gurgitating, as it were, with that mysterious utterance that ever has commanded and ever must evoke the wonder and bewilderment of every boy. The small-pox rumor became prevalent betimes, and the subtle aroma of the assafoetida-bag permeated the graded schools "from turret to foundation-stone;" the still recurring exposé of the poor-house management; the farm-hand, with the scythe across his shoulder, struck dead by lightning; the long-drawn quarrel between the rival editors culminating in one of them assaulting the other with a "sidestick," and the other kicking the one down stairs and thenceward *ad libitum*; the tramp, suppositiously stealing a ride, found dead on the railroad; the grand jury



returning a sensational indictment against a bar-tender *non est*; the Temperance outbreak; the “Revival;” the Church Festival; and the “Free Lectures on Phrenology, and Marvels of Mesmerism,” at the town hall. It was during the time of the last-mentioned sensation, and directly through this scientific investigation, that I came upon two of the town’s most remarkable characters. And however meager my outline of them may prove, my material for the sketch is most accurate in every detail, and no deviation from the cold facts of the case shall influence any line of my report.

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For some years prior to this odd experience I had been connected with a daily paper at the state capitol; and latterly a prolonged session of the legislature, where I specially reported, having told threateningly upon my health, I took both the advantage of a brief vacation, and the invitation of a young bachelor Senator, to get out of the city for awhile, and bask my respiratory organs in the revivifying rural air of Zekesbury—the home of my new friend.

“It’ll pay you to get out here,” he said, cordially, meeting me at the little station, “and I’m glad you’ve come, for you’ll find no end of odd characters to amuse you.” And under the very pleasant sponsorship of my senatorial friend, I was placed at once on genial terms with half the citizens of the little town—from the shirt-sleeved nabob of the county office to the droll wag of the favorite loafing-place—the rules and by-laws of which resort, by the way, being rudely charcoaled on the wall above the cutter’s bench, and somewhat artistically culminating in an original dialectic legend which ran thus:

F’rinstance, now whar *some* folks gits To relyin’ on their wits. Ten to one they git too smart, And spile it all right at the start!— Feller wants to jest go slow And do his *thinkin’* first, you know:— *Ef I can’t think up somepin’ good, I set still and chaw my cood!*

And it was at this inviting rendezvous, two or three evenings following my arrival, that the general crowd, acting upon the random proposition of one of the boys, rose as a man and wended its hilarious way to the town hall.

“Phrenology,” said the little, old, bald-headed lecturer and mesmerist, thumbing the egg-shaped head of a young man I remembered to have met that afternoon in some law office; “Phrenology,” repeated the professor—“or rather the *term* phrenology—is derived from two Greek words signifying *mind* and *discourse*; hence we find embodied in phrenology-proper, the science of intellectual measurement, together with the capacity of intelligent communication of the varying mental forces and their flexibilities, *etc.*, &c. The study, then, of phrenology is, to wholly simplify it—is, I say, the general contemplation of the workings of the mind as made manifest through the certain corresponding depressions and protuberances of the human skull, when, of course, in a healthy state of action and development, as we here find the conditions exemplified in the subject before us.”

Here the “subject” vaguely smiled.

“You recognize that mug, don’t you?” whispered my friend. “It’s that coruscating young ass, you know, Hedrick—in Cummings’ office—trying to study law and literature at the same time, and tampering with ‘The Monster that Annually,’ don’t you know?—where we found the two young students scuffling round the office, and smelling of peppermint?— Hedrick, you know, and Sweeney. Sweeney, the slim chap, with the pallid face, and frog-eyes, and clammy hands! You remember I told you ‘there was a pair of ‘em?’ Well,

they're up to something here to-night. Hedrick, there on the stage in front; and Sweeney—don't you see?—with the gang on the rear seats."



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“Phrenology—again,” continued the lecturer, “is, we may say, a species of mental geography, as it were; which—by a study of the skull—leads also to a study of the brain within, even as geology naturally follows the initial contemplation of the earth’s surface. The brain, thurfur, or intellectual retort, as we may say, natively exerts a molding influence on the skull contour; thurfur is the expert in phrenology most readily enabled to accurately locate the multitudinous intellectual forces, and most exactly estimate, as well, the sequent character of each subject submitted to his scrutiny. As, in the example before us—a young man, doubtless well known in your midst, though, I may say, an entire stranger to myself—I venture to disclose some characteristic trends and tendencies, as indicated by this phrenological depression and development of the skull—proper, as later we will show, through the mesmeric condition, the accuracy of our mental diagnosis.”

Throughout the latter part of this speech my friend nudged me spasmodically, whispering something which was jostled out of intelligent utterance by some inward spasm of laughter.

“In this head,” said the Professor, straddling his malleable fingers across the young man’s bumpy brow—“In this head we find Ideality large—abnormally large, in fact; thurby indicating—taken in conjunction with a like development of the perceptive qualities—language following, as well, in the prominent eye—thurby indicating, I say, our subject as especially endowed with a love for the beautiful—the sublime—the elevating—the refined and delicate—the lofty and superb—in nature, and in all the sublimated attributes of the human heart and beatific soul. In fact, we find this young man possessed of such natural gifts as would befit him for the exalted career of the sculptor, the actor, the artist, or the poet—any ideal calling; in fact, any calling but a practical, matter-of-fact vocation; though in poetry he would seem to best succeed.”

“Well,” said my friend, seriously, “he’s *feeling* for the boy!” Then laughingly: “Hedrick *has* written some rhymes for the county papers, and Sweeney once introduced him, at an Old Settlers’ Meeting, as ‘The Best Poet in Center Township,’ and never cracked a smile! Always after each other that way, but the best friends in the world. *Sweeney’s* strong suit is elocution. He has a native ability that way by no means ordinary, but even that gift he abuses and distorts simply to produce grotesque, and oftentimes ridiculous effects. For instance, nothing more delights him than to ‘lothfully’ consent to answer a request, at The Mite Society, some evening, for ‘an appropriate selection,’ and then, with an elaborate introduction of the same, and an exalted tribute to the refined genius of the author, proceed with a most gruesome rendition of ‘Alonzo The Brave and The Fair Imogene,’ in a way to coagulate the blood and curl the hair

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of his fair listeners with abject terror. Pale as a corpse, you know, and with that cadaverous face, lit with those malignant-looking eyes, his slender figure, and his long, thin legs and arms and hands, and his whole diabolical talent and adroitness brought into play—why, I want to say to you, it's enough to scare 'em to death! Never a smile from him, though, till he and Hedrick are safe out into the night again—then, of course, they hug each other and howl over it like Modocs! But pardon; I'm interrupting the lecture. Listen.”

“A lack of continuity, however,” continued the Professor, “and an undue love of approbation, would, measurably, at least, tend to retard the young man's progress toward the consummation of any loftier ambition, I fear; yet as we have intimated, if the subject were appropriately educated to the need's demand, he could doubtless produce a high order of both prose and poetry—especially the latter—though he could very illy bear being laughed at for his pains.”

“He's dead wrong there,” said my friend; “Hedrick enjoys being laughed at; he 's used to it—gets fat on it!”

“He is fond of his friends,” continued the Professor “and the heartier they are the better; might even be convivially inclined—if so tempted—but prudent—in a degree,” loiteringly concluded the speaker, as though unable to find the exact bump with which to bolster up the last named attribute.

The subject blushed vividly—my friend's right eyelid dropped, and there was a noticeable, though elusive sensation throughout the audience.

“*But!*” said the Professor, explosively, “selecting a directly opposite subject, in conjunction with the study of the one before us [turning to the group at the rear of the stage and beckoning], we may find a newer interest in the practical comparison of these subjects side by side.” And the Professor pushed a very pale young man into position.

“Sweeney!” whispered my friend, delightedly; “now look out!”

“In *this* subject,” said the Professor, “we find the practical business head. Square—though small—a trifle light at the base, in fact; but well balanced at the important points at least; thoughtful eyes—wide-awake—crafty—quick—restless—a policy eye, though not denoting language—unless, perhaps, mere business forms and direct statements.”

“Fooled again!” whispered my friend; “and I'm afraid the old man will fail to nest out the fact also that Sweeney is the cold-bloodedest guyer on the face of the earth, and with more diabolical resources than a prosecuting attorney; the Professor ought to know this, too, by this time—for these same two chaps have been visiting the old man in his room

at the hotel;—that’s what I was trying to tell you awhile ago. The old sharp thinks he’s ‘playing’ the boys, is my idea; but it’s the other way, or I lose my guess.”

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“Now, under the mesmeric influence—if the two subjects will consent to its administration,” said the Professor, after some further tedious preamble, “we may at once determine the fact of my assertions, as will be proved by their action while in this peculiar state.” Here some apparent remonstrance was met with from both subjects, though amicably overcome by the Professor first manipulating the stolid brow and pallid front of the imperturbable Sweeney—after which the same mysterious ordeal was lothfully submitted to by Hedrick—though a noticeably longer time was consumed in securing his final loss of self-control. At last, however, this curious phenomenon was presented, and there before us stood the two swaying figures, the heads dropped back, the lifted hands, with thumb and finger-tips pressed lightly together, the eyelids languid and half closed, and the features, in appearance, wan and humid.

“Now, sir!” said the Professor, leading the limp Sweeney forward, and addressing him in a quick, sharp tone of voice.—“Now, sir, you are a great contractor—own large factories, and with untold business interests. Just look out there! [pointing out across the expectant audience] look there, and see the countless minions toiling servilely at your dread mandates. And yet—ha! ha! See! see!—They recognize the avaricious greed that would thus grind them in the very dust; they see, alas! they see themselves half-clothed—half-fed, that you may glut your coffers. Half-starved, they listen to the wail of wife and babe, and, with eyes upraised in prayer, they see *you* rolling by in gilded coach, and swathed in silk attire. But—ha! again! Look—look! they are rising in revolt against you! Speak to them before too late! Appeal to them—quell them with the promise of the just advance of wages they demand!”

The limp figure of Sweeney took on something of a stately and majestic air. With a graceful and commanding gesture of the hand, he advanced a step or two; then, after a pause of some seconds duration, in which the lifted face grew paler, as it seemed, and the eyes a denser black, he said:

“But yesterday  
I looked away  
O’er happy lands, where sunshine lay  
In golden blots,  
Inlaid with spots  
Of shade and wild forget-me-nots.”

The voice was low, but clear, and ever musical. The Professor started at the strange utterance, looked extremely confused, and, as the boisterous crowd cried “Hear, hear!” he motioned the subject to continue, with some gasping comment interjected, which, if audible, would have run thus: “My God! It’s an inspirational poem!”

“My head was fair  
With flaxen hair—”



resumed the subject.

“Yoop-ee!” yelled an irreverent auditor.

“Silence! silence!” commanded the excited Professor in a hoarse whisper; then, turning enthusiastically to the subject—“Go on, young man! Go on!—’*Thy head-was fair-with flaxen hair—*”



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“My head was fair  
With flaxen hair,  
And fragrant breezes, faint and rare,  
And warm with drouth  
From out the south,  
Blew all my curls across my mouth.”

The speaker’s voice, exquisitely modulated, yet resonant as the twang of a harp, now seemed of itself to draw and hold each listener; while a certain extravagance of gesticulation—a fantastic movement of both form and feature—seemed very near akin to fascination. And so flowed on the curious utterance:

“And, cool and sweet,  
My naked feet  
Found dewy pathways through the wheat;  
And out again  
Where, down the lane,  
The dust was dimpled with the rain.”

In the pause following there was a breathlessness almost painful. The poem went on:

“But yesterday  
I heard the lay  
Of summer birds, when I, as they  
With breast and wing,  
All quivering  
With life and love, could only sing.

“My head was leant,  
Where, with it, blent  
A maiden’s, o’er her instrument;  
While all the night,  
From vale to height,  
Was filled with echoes of delight.

“And all our dreams  
Were lit with gleams  
Of that lost land of reedy streams,  
Along whose brim  
Forever swim  
Pan’s lilies, laughing up at him.”

And still the inspired singer held rapt sway.



“It is wonderful!” I whispered, under breath.

“Of course it is!” answered my friend. “But listen; there is more:”

“But yesterday!...  
O blooms of May,  
And summer roses—Where-away?  
O stars above;  
And lips of love,  
And all the honeyed sweets thereof!

“O lad and lass.  
And orchard-pass,  
And briared lane, and daisied grass!  
O gleam and gloom,  
And woodland bloom,  
And breezy breaths of all perfume!—

“No more for me  
Or mine shall be  
Thy raptures—save in memory,—  
No more—no more—  
Till through the Door  
Of Glory gleam the days of yore.”

This was the evident conclusion of the remarkable utterance, and the Professor was impetuously fluttering his hands about the subject’s upward-staring eyes, stroking his temples, and snapping his fingers in his face.

“Well,” said Sweeney, as he stood suddenly awakened, and grinning in an idiotic way, “how did the old thing work?” And it was in the consequent hilarity and loud and long applause, perhaps, that the Professor was relieved from the explanation of this rather astounding phenomenon of the idealistic workings of a purely practical brain—or, as my impious friend scoffed the incongruity later, in a particularly withering allusion, as the “blank-blanked fallacy, don’t you know, of staying the hunger of a howling mob by feeding ’em on Spring poetry!”



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The tumult of the audience did not cease even with the retirement of Sweeney, and cries of “Hedrick! Hedrick!” only subsided with the Professor’s high-keyed announcement that the subject was even then endeavoring to make himself heard, but could not until utter quiet was restored, adding the further appeal that the young man had already been a long time under the mesmeric spell, and ought not be so detained for an unnecessary period. “See,” he concluded, with an assuring wave of the hand toward the subject, “see; he is about to address you. Now, quiet!—utter quiet, if you please!”

“Great heavens!” exclaimed my friend, stifflingly; “Just look at the boy! Get onto that position for a poet! Even Sweeney has fled from the sight of him!”

And truly, too, it was a grotesque pose the young man had assumed; not wholly ridiculous either, since the dwarfed position he had settled into seemed more a genuine physical condition than an affected one. The head, back-tilted, and sunk between the shoulders, looked abnormally large, while the features of the face appeared peculiarly child-like—especially the eyes—wakeful and wide apart, and very bright, yet very mild and very artless; and the drawn and cramped outline of the legs and feet, and of the arms and hands, even to the shrunken, slender-looking fingers, all combined to most strikingly convey to the pained senses the fragile frame and pixey figure of some pitiably afflicted child, unconscious altogether of the pathos of its own deformity.

“Now, mark the kuss, Horatio!” gasped my friend.

At first the speaker’s voice came very low, and somewhat piping, too, and broken—an eerie sort of voice it was, of brittle and erratic *timbre* and undulant inflection. Yet it was beautiful. It had the ring of childhood in it, though the ring was not pure golden, and at times fell echoless. The *spirit* of its utterance was always clear and pure and crisp and cheery as the twitter of a bird, and yet forever ran an undercadence through it like a low-pleading prayer. Half garrulously, and like a shallow brook might brawl across a shelvy bottom, the rhythmic little changeling thus began:

“I’m thist a little crippled boy, an’ never goin’ to grow  
An’ git a great big man at all!—’cause Aunty told me so.  
When I was thist a baby one’t I falled out of the bed  
An’ got ‘The Curv’ture of the Spine’—’at’s what the Doctor said.  
I never had no Mother nen—far my Pa run away  
An’ dassn’t come back here no more—’cause he was drunk one day  
An’ stobbed a man in thish-ere town, an’ couldn’t pay his fine!  
An’ nen my Ma she died—an’ I got ‘Curv’ture of the Spine!’”

A few titterings from the younger people in the audience marked the opening stanza, while a certain restlessness, and a changing to more attentive positions seemed the

general tendency. The old Professor, in the meantime, had sunk into one of the empty chairs. The speaker went on with more gaiety:



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"I'm nine years old! An' you can't guess how much I weigh, I bet!—  
Last birthday I weighed thirty-three!—An' I weigh thirty yet!  
I'm awful little far my size—I'm purt' nigh littler 'an  
Some babies is!—an' neighbors all calls me 'The Little Man!  
An' Doc one time he laughed an' said: 'I 'spect, first thing you  
know,  
You'll have a little spike-tail coat an' travel with a show!  
An' nen I laughed—till I looked round an' Aunty was a-cryin'—  
Sometimes she acts like that, 'cause I got 'Curv'ture of the  
Spine!'"

Just in front of me a great broad-shouldered countryman, with a rainy smell in his cumbrous overcoat, cleared his throat vehemently, looked startled at the sound, and again settled forward, his weedy chin resting on the knuckles of his hands as they tightly clutched the seat before him. And it was like being taken into a childish confidence as the quaint speech continued:

"I set—while Aunty's washin'—on my little long-leg stool,  
An' watch the little boys an' girls 'a-skipin' by to school;  
An' I peck on the winder, an' holler out an' say:  
'Who wants to fight The Little Man 'at dares you all to-day?'  
An' nen the boys climbs on the fence, an' little girls peeks  
through,  
An' they all says: 'Cause you're so big, you think we're 'feared o'  
you!  
An' nen they yell, an' shake their fist at me, like I shake mine—  
They're thist in fun, you know, 'cause I got 'Curv'ture of the  
Spine!'"

"Well," whispered my friend, with rather odd irrelevance, I thought, "of course you see through the scheme of the fellows by this time, don't you?"

"I see nothing," said I, most earnestly, "but a poor little wisp of a child that makes me love him so I dare not think of his dying soon, as he surely must! There; listen!" And the plaintive gaiety of the homely poem ran on:

"At evening, when the ironin's done, an' Aunty's fixed the fire,  
An' filled an' lit the lamp, an' trimmed the wick an' turned it  
higher,  
An' fetched the wood all in far night, an' locked the kitchen door,  
An' stuffed the ole crack where the wind blows in up through the  
floor—  
She sets the kittle on the coals, an' biles an' makes the tea,  
An' fries the liver an' the mush, an' cooks a egg far me;



An' sometimes—when I cough so hard—her elderberry wine  
Don't go so bad far little boys with 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'"

"Look!" whispered my friend, touching me with his elbow. "Look at the Professor!"

"Look at everybody!" said I. And the artless little voice went on again half quaveringly:

"But Aunty's all so childish-like on my account, you see,  
I'm 'most afeared she'll be took down—an' 'at's what bothers  
*me!*—

'Cause ef my good ole Aunty ever would git sick an' die,  
I don't know what she'd do



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in Heaven—till / come, by an' by:—

Far she's so ust to all my ways, an' ever'thing, you know,  
An' no one there like me, to nurse, an' worry over so!—  
'Cause all the little childerns there's so straight an' strong an'  
fine,  
They's nary angel 'bout the place with 'Curv'ture of the Spine!'"

The old Professor's face was in his handkerchief; so was my friend's in his; and so was mine in mine, as even now my pen drops and I reach for it again.

I half regret joining the mad party that had gathered an hour later in the old law-office where these two graceless characters held almost nightly revel, the instigators and conniving hosts of a reputed banquet whose *menu's* range confined itself to herrings, or "blind robins," dried beef, and cheese, with crackers, gingerbread, and sometimes pie; the whole washed down with anything but

"——Wines that heaven knows when  
Had sucked the fire of some forgotten sun,  
And kept it through a hundred years of gloom  
Still glowing in a heart of ruby."

But the affair was memorable. The old Professor was himself lured into it, and loudest in his praise of Hedrick's realistic art; and I yet recall him at the orgie's height, excitedly repulsing the continued slurs and insinuations of the clammy-handed Sweeney, who, still contending against the old man's fulsome praise of his more fortunate rival, at last openly declared that Hedrick was *not* a poet, *not* a genius, and in no way worthy to be classed in the same breath with *himself*—"the gifted but unfortunate *Sweeney*, sir—the unacknowledged author, sir—'y gad, sir!—of the two poems that held you spell-bound to-night!"

## DOWN AROUND THE RIVER POEMS

### DOWN AROUND THE RIVER.

Noon-time and June-time, down around the river!  
Have to furse with 'Lizey Ann—but lawzy! I fergive her!  
Drives me off the place, and says 'at all 'at she's a-wishin',  
Land o' gracious! time'll come I'll git enough o' fishin'!  
Little Dave, a-choppin' wood, never 'pears to notice;  
Don't know where she's hid his hat, er keerin' where his coat is,—



Specalatin', more 'n like, he haint a-goin' to mind me,  
And guessin' where, say twelve o'clock, a feller'd likely find me.

Noon-time and June-time, down around the river! Clean out o' sight o' home, and skulkin' under kivver Of the sycamores, jack-oaks, and swamp-ash and ellum— Idies all so jumbled up, you kin hardly tell 'em!— *Tired*, you know, but *lovin'* it, and smilin' jest to think 'at Any sweeter tiredness you'd fairly want to *drink* it. Tired o' fishin'—tired o' fun —line out slack and slacker— All you want in all the world's a little more tobacker!

Hungry, but *a-hidin'* it, er jes' a-not a-keerin':-  
Kingfisher gittin' up and skootin'



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out o' hearin';

Snipes on the t'other side, where the County Ditch is,  
Wadin' up and down the aidge like they'd rolled their britches!  
Old turkle on the root kindo-sorto drappin'  
Intoo th' worter like he don't know how it happen!  
Worter, shade and all so mixed, don't know which you'd orter  
Say, th' *worter* in the shadder—*shadder* in the *worter*!

Somebody hollerin'—'way around the bend in  
Upper Fork—where yer eye kin jes' ketch the endin'  
Of the shiney wedge o' wake some muss-rat's a-makin'  
With that pesky nose o' his! Then a sniff o' bacon,  
Corn-bread and 'dock-greens—and little Dave a-shinnin'  
'Crost the rocks and mussel-shells, a-limpin' and a-grinnin',  
With yer dinner far ye, and a blessin' from the giver.  
Noon-time and June-time down around the river!

### KNEELING WITH HERRICK.

Dear Lord, to Thee my knee is bent.—  
Give me content—  
Full-pleasured with what comes to me,  
What e'er it be:  
An humble roof—a frugal board,  
And simple hoard;  
The wintry fagot piled beside  
The chimney wide,  
While the enwreathing flames up-sprout  
And twine about  
The brazen dogs that guard my hearth  
And household worth:  
Tinge with the ember's ruddy glow  
The rafters low;  
And let the sparks snap with delight,  
As ringers might  
That mark deft measures of some tune  
The children croon:  
Then, with good friends, the rarest few  
Thou holdest true,  
Ranged round about the blaze, to share  
My comfort there,—  
Give me to claim the service meet



That makes each seat  
A place of honor, and each guest  
Loved as the rest.

### ROMANCIN'.

I' b'en a-kinde musin', as the feller says, and I'm  
About o' the conclusion that they ain't no better time,  
When you come to cipher on it, than the times we used to know  
When we swore our first "dog-gone-it" sorto solem'-like and low!

You git my idy, do you?—*Little* tads, you understand—  
Jes' a wishin' thue and thue you that you on'y was a *man*.—  
Yit here I am, this minute, even forty, to a day,  
And fergittin' all that's in it, wishin' jes' the other way!

I hain't no hand to lectur' on the times, er dimonstrate  
Whur the trouble is, er hector and domineer with Fate,—  
But when I git so flurried, and so pestered-like and blue,  
And so rail owdacious worried, let me tell you what I do!—

I jes' gee-haw the hosses, and unhook the swingle-tree,  
Whur the hazel-bushes tosses down their shadders over me,  
And I draw my plug o' navy, and I climb the fence, and set  
Jes' a-thinkin' here, 'y gravy! till my eyes is wringin'-wet!

Tho' I still kin see the trouble o' the *present*, I kin see—  
Kinde like my sight was double—all the things that *used to be*;  
And the flutter o' the robin, and the teeter o' the wren  
Sets the willer branches bobbin "howdy-do" thum Now to Then!



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The deadnin' and the thicket's jes' a bilin' full of June,  
Thum the rattle o' the cricket, to the yallar-hammer's tune;  
And the catbird in the bottom, and the sap-suck on the snag,  
Seems ef they cain't—od-rot'em!—jes' do nothin' else but brag!

They's music in the twitter of the bluebird and the jay,  
And that sassy little critter jes' a-peckin' all the day;  
They's music in the "flicker," and they's music in the thrush,  
And they's music in the snicker o' the chipmunk in the brush!

They's music *all around* me!—And I go back, in a dream—  
Sweeter yit than ever found me fast asleep—and in the stream  
That used to split the medder whur the dandylions growed,  
I stand knee-deep, and redder than the sunset down the road.

Then's when I' b'en a-fishin'!—and they's other fellers, too,  
With their hickry poles a-swishin' out behind 'em; and a few  
Little "shiners" on our stringers, with their tails tiptoein' bloom,  
As we dance 'em in our fingers all the happy journey home.

I kin see us, true to Natur', thum the time we started out  
With a biscuit and a 'tater in our little "roundabout!"  
I kin see our lines a-tanglin', and our elbows in a jam,  
And our naked legs a-danglin' thum the apern of the dam.

I kin see the honeysuckle climbin' up around the mill;  
And kin hear the worter chuckle, and the wheel a-growlin' still;  
And thum the bank below it I kin steal the old canoe,  
And jes' git in and row it like the miller used to do.

W'y, I git my fancy focussed on the past so mortal plain  
I kin even smell the locus'-blossoms bloomin' in the lane;  
And I hear the cow-bells clinkin' sweeter tunes 'n "money musk"  
Far the lightnin'-bugs a-blinkin'and a-dancin'in the dusk.

And so I keep on musin', as the feller says, till I'm  
Firm-fixed in the conclusion that they hain't no better time,  
When you come to cipher on it, than the *old* times,—and, I swear,  
I kin wake and say "dog-gone-it!" jes' as soft as any prayer!



## HAS SHE FORGOTTEN.

### I.

Has she forgotten? On this very May  
We were to meet here, with the birds and bees,  
As on that Sabbath, underneath the trees  
We strayed among the tombs, and stripped away  
The vines from these old granites, cold and gray—  
And yet, indeed, not grim enough were they  
To stay our kisses, smiles and ecstasies,  
Or closer voice-lost vows and rhapsodies.  
Has she forgotten—that the May has won  
Its promise?—that the bird-songs from the tree  
Are sprayed above the grasses as the sun  
Might jar the dazzling dew down showeringly?  
Has she forgotten life—love—everyone—  
Has she forgotten me—forgotten me?



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### II.

Low, low down in the violets I press  
My lips and whisper to her. Does she hear,  
And yet hold silence, though I call her dear,  
Just as of old, save for the tearfulness  
Of the clenched eyes, and the soul's vast distress?  
Has she forgotten thus the old caress  
That made our breath a quickened atmosphere  
That failed nigh unto swooning with the sheer  
Delight? Mine arms clutch now this earthen heap  
Sodden with tears that flow on ceaselessly  
As autumn rains the long, long, long nights weep  
In memory of days that used to be,—  
Has she forgotten these? And, in her sleep,  
Has she forgotten me—forgotten me?

### III.

To-night, against my pillow, with shut eyes,  
I mean to weld our faces—through the dense  
Incalculable darkness make pretense  
That she has risen from her reveries  
To mate her dreams with mine in marriages  
Of mellow palms, smooth faces, and tense ease  
Of every longing nerve of indolence,—  
Lift from the grave her quiet lips, and stun  
My senses with her kisses—drawl the glee  
Of her glad mouth, full blithe and tenderly,  
Across mine own, forgetful if is done  
The old love's awful dawn-time when said we,  
"To-day is ours!" .... Ah, Heaven! can it be  
She has forgotten me—forgotten me!

### A' OLD PLAYED-OUT SONG.

It's the curiousest thing in creation,  
Whenever I hear that old song,  
"Do They Miss Me at Home?" I'm so bothered,  
My life seems as short as it's long!—  
Far ever'thing 'pears like adzackly  
It 'peared, in the years past and gone,—



When I started out sparkin', at twenty,  
And had my first neckercher on!

Though I'm wrinkelder, older and grayer  
Right now than my parents was then,  
You strike up that song, "Do They Miss Me?"  
And I'm jest a youngster again!—  
I'm a-standin' back there in the furries  
A-wishin' far evening to come,  
And a-whisperin' over and over  
Them words, "Do They Miss Me at Home?"

You see, Marthy Ellen she sung it  
The first time I heerd it; and so,  
As she was my very first sweetheart,  
It reminds of her, don't you know,—  
How her face ust to look, in the twilight,  
As I tuck her to spellin'; and she  
Kep' a-hummin' that song 'tel I ast her,  
Pine-blank, ef she ever missed me!

I can shet my eyes now, as you sing it,  
And hear her low answerin' words,  
And then the glad chirp of the crickets  
As clear as the twitter of birds;  
And the dust in the road is like velvet,  
And the ragweed, and fennel, and grass  
Is as sweet as the scent of the lilies  
Of Eden of old, as we pass.



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“Do They Miss Me at Home?” Sing it lower—  
And softer—and sweet as the breeze  
That powdered our path with the snowy  
White bloom of the old locus'-trees!  
Let the whippoorwills he'p you to sing it,  
And the echoes 'way over the hill,  
'Tel the moon boolges out, in a chorus  
Of stars, and our voices is still.

But, oh! “They's a chord in the music  
That's missed when *her* voice is away!”  
Though I listen from midnight 'tel morning,  
And dawn, 'tel the dusk of the day;  
And I grope through the dark, lookin' up'ards  
And on through the heavenly dome,  
With my longin' soul singin' and sobbin'  
The words, “Do They Miss Me at Home?”

### THE LOST PATH.

Alone they walked—their fingers knit together,  
And swaying listlessly as might a swing  
Wherein Dan Cupid dangled in the weather  
Of some sun-flooded afternoon of Spring.

Within the clover-fields the tickled cricket  
Laughed lightly as they loitered down the lane,  
And from the covert of the hazel-thicket  
The squirrel peeped and laughed at them again.

The bumble-bee that tipped the lily-vases  
Along the road-side in the shadows dim,  
Went following the blossoms of their faces  
As though their sweets must needs be shared with him.

Between the pasture bars the wondering cattle  
Stared wistfully, and from their mellow bells  
Shook out a welcoming whose dreamy rattle  
Fell swooningly away in faint farewells.

And though at last the gloom of night fell o'er them,  
And folded all the landscape from their eyes,



They only know the dusky path before them  
Was leading safely on to Paradise.

### THE LITTLE TINY KICKSHAW.

“—*And any little tiny kickshaws.*”—Shakespeare.

O the little tiny kickshaw that Mither sent tae me,  
'Tis sweeter than the sugar-plum that reopens on the tree,  
Wi' denty flavorin's o' spice an' musky rosemarie,  
The little tiny kickshaw that Mither sent tae me.

'Tis luscious wi' the stalen tang o' fruits frae ower the sea,  
An' e'en its fragrance gars we laugh wi' langin' lip an' ee,  
Till a' its frazen sheen o' white maun melten hinnie be—  
Sae weel I luv the kickshaw that Mither sent tae me.

O I luv the tiny kickshaw, an' I smack my lips wi' glee,  
Aye mickle do I luv the taste o' sic a luxourie,  
But maist I luv the luvein' han's that could the giftie gie  
O' the little tiny kickshaw that Mither sent tae me.

### HIS MOTHER.

DEAD! my wayward boy—*my own*—  
Not *the Law's!* but *mine*—the good  
God's free gift to me alone,  
Sanctified by motherhood.



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“Bad,” you say: Well, who is not?  
“Brutal”—“with a heart of stone”—  
And “red-handed.”—Ah! the hot  
Blood upon your own!

I come not, with downward eyes,  
To plead for him shamedly,—  
God did not apologize  
When He gave the boy to me.

Simply, I make ready now  
For *His* verdict.—*You* prepare—  
You have killed us both—and how  
Will you face us There!

### KISSING THE ROD.

O heart of mine, we shouldn't  
Worry so!  
What we've missed of calm we couldn't  
Have, you know!  
What we've met of stormy pain,  
And of sorrow's driving rain,  
We can better meet again,  
If it blow!

We have erred in that dark hour  
We have known,  
When our tears fell with the shower,  
All alone!—  
Were not shine and shadow blent  
As the gracious Master meant?—  
Let us temper our content  
With His own.

For, we know, not every morrow  
Can be sad;  
So, forgetting all the sorrow  
We have had,  
Let us fold away our fears,  
And put by our foolish tears,  
And through all the coming years  
Just be glad.



## HOW IT HAPPENED.

I got to thinkin' of her—both her parents dead and gone—  
And all her sisters married off, and none but her and John  
A-livin' all alone there in that lonesome sort o' way,  
And him a blame old bachelor, confirmder ev'ry day!  
I'd knowed 'em all from childern, and their daddy from the time  
He settled in the neighborhood, and had n't ary a dime  
Er dollar, when he married, far to start housekeepin' on!—  
So I got to thinkin' of her—both her parents dead and gone!

I got to thinkin' of her; and a-wundern what she done  
That all her sisters kep' a gittin' married, one by one,  
And her without no chances—and the best girl of the pack—  
An old maid, with her hands, you might say, tied behind her back!  
And Mother, too, afore she died, she ust to jes' take on,  
When none of 'em was left, you know, but Evaline and John,  
And jes' declare to goodness 'at the young men must be bline  
To not see what a wife they 'd git if they got Evaline!

I got to thinkin' of her; in my great affliction she  
Was sich a comfert to us, and so kind and neighborly,—  
She 'd come, and leave her housework, far to be'p out little Jane,  
And talk of *her own* mother 'at she 'd never see again—  
Maybe sometimes cry together—though, far the most part she  
Would have the child so riconciled and happy-like 'at we  
Felt lonesomer 'n ever when she 'd put her bonnet on  
And say she 'd raily haf to be a-gittin' back to John!



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I got to thinkin' of her, as I say,—and more and more  
I'd think of her dependence, and the burdens 'at she bore,—  
Her parents both a-bein' dead, and all her sisters gone  
And married off, and her a-livin' there alone with John—  
You might say jes' a-toilin' and a-slavin' out her life  
Far a man 'at hadn't pride enough to git hisse'f a wife—  
'Less some one married *Evaline*, and packed her off some day!—  
So I got to thinkin' of her—and it happened thataway.

### BABYHOOD.

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger:  
Let's toddle home again, for we have gone astray;  
Take this eager hand of mine and lead me by the finger  
Back to the Lotus lands of the far-away.

Turn back the leaves of life; don't read the story,—  
Let's find the *pictures*, and fancy all the rest:—  
We can fill the written pages with a brighter glory  
Than Old Time, the story-teller, at his very best!

Turn to the brook, where the honeysuckle, tipping  
O'er its vase of perfume spills it on the breeze,  
And the bee and humming-bird in ecstasy are sipping  
From the fairy flacons of the blooming locust trees.

Turn to the lane, where we used to "teeter-totter,"  
Printing little foot-palms in the mellow mold,  
Laughing at the lazy cattle wading in the water  
Where the ripples dimple round the buttercups of gold:

Where the dusky turtle lies basking on the gravel  
Of the sunny sandbar in the middle-tide,  
And the ghostly dragonfly pauses in his travel  
To rest like a blossom where the water-lily died.

Heigh-ho! Babyhood! Tell me where you linger:  
Let's toddle home again, for we have gone astray;  
Take this eager hand of mine and lead me by the finger  
Back to the Lotus lands of the far-away.



## THE DAYS GONE BY.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!  
The apples in the orchard, and the pathway through the rye;  
The chirrup of the robin, and the whistle of the quail  
As he piped across the meadows sweet as any nightingale;  
When the bloom was on the clover, and the blue was in the sky,  
And my happy heart brimmed over in the days gone by.

In the days gone by, when my naked feet were tripped  
By the honey-suckle's tangles where the water-lilies dipped,  
And the ripples of the river lipped the moss along the brink  
Where the placid-eyed and lazy-footed cattle came to drink,  
And the tilting snipe stood fearless of the truant's wayward cry  
And the splashing of the swimmer, in the days gone by.

O the days gone by! O the days gone by!  
The music of the laughing lip, the luster of the eye;  
The childish faith in fairies, and Aladdin's magic ring—  
The simple, soul-reposing, glad belief in everything,—  
When life was like a story, holding neither sob nor sigh,  
In the golden olden glory of the days gone by.



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### MRS. MILLER

John B. McKinney, Attorney and Counselor at Law, as his sign read, was, for many reasons, a fortunate man. For many other reasons he was not. He was chiefly fortunate in being, as certain opponents often strove to witheringly designate him, “the son of his father,” since that sound old gentleman was the wealthiest farmer in that section, with but one son and heir to, in time, supplant him in the role of “county god,” and haply perpetuate the prouder title of “the biggest tax-payer on the assessment list.” And this fact, too, fortunate as it would seem, was doubtless the indirect occasion of a liberal percentage of all John’s misfortunes. From his earliest school-days in the little town, up to his tardy graduation from a distant college, the influence of his father’s wealth invited his procrastination, humored its results, encouraged the laxity of his ambition, “and even now,” as John used, in bitter irony, to put it, “it is aiding and abetting me in the ostensible practice of my chosen profession, a listless, aimless undetermined man of forty, and a confirmed bachelor at that!” At the utterance of this self-deprecating statement, John generally jerked his legs down from the top of his desk; and, rising and kicking his chair back to the wall, he would stump around his littered office till the manilla carpet steamed with dust. Then he would wildly break away, seeking refuge either in the open street, or in his room at the old-time tavern, The Eagle House, “where,” he would say, “I have lodged and boarded, I do solemnly asseverate, for a long, unbroken, middle-aged eternity of ten years, and can yet assert, in the words of the more fortunately-dying Webster, that ‘I still live!’”

Extravagantly satirical as he was at times, John had always an indefinable drollery about him that made him agreeable company to his friends, at least; and such an admiring friend he had constantly at hand in the person of Bert Haines. Both were Bohemians in natural tendency, and, though John was far in Bert’s advance in point of age, he found the young man “just the kind of a fellow to have around;” while Bert, in turn, held his senior in profound esteem—looked up to him, in fact, and in even his eccentricities strove to pattern after him. And so it was, when summer days were dull and tedious, these two could muse and doze the hours away together; and when the nights were long, and dark, and deep, and beautiful, they could drift out in the noon-light of the stars, and with “the soft complaining flute” and “warbling lute,” “lay the pipes,” as John would say, for their enduring popularity with the girls! And it was immediately subsequent to one of these romantic excursions, when the belated pair, at two o’clock in the morning, had skulked up a side stairway of the old hotel, and gained John’s room, with nothing more serious happening than Bert falling over a trunk and smashing his guitar,—just after such a night of romance and adventure it was that, in the seclusion of John’s room, Bert had something of especial import to communicate.



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“Mack,” he said, as that worthy anathematized a spiteful match, and then sucked his finger.

“Blast the all-fired old torch!” said John, wrestling with the lamp-flue, and turning on a welcome flame at last. “Well, you said ‘Mack!’ Why don’t you go on? And don’t bawl at the top of your lungs, either. You’ve already succeeded in waking every boarder in the house with that guitar, and you want to make amends now by letting them go to sleep again!”

“But my dear fellow,” said Bert, with forced calmness, “you’re the fellow that’s making all the noise—and—”

“Why, you howling dervish!” interrupted John, with a feigned air of pleased surprise and admiration. “But let’s drop controversy. Throw the fragments of your guitar in the wood-box there, and proceed with the opening proposition.”

“What I was going to say was this,” said Bert, with a half-desperate enunciation; “I’m getting tired of this way of living—clean, dead-tired, and fagged out, and sick of the whole artificial business!”

“Oh, yes!” exclaimed John, with a towering disdain, “you needn’t go any further! I know just what malady is throttling you. It’s reform—reform! You’re going to ‘turn over a new leaf,’ and all that, and sign the pledge, and quit cigars, and go to work, and pay your debts, and gravitate back into Sunday-School, where you can make love to the preacher’s daughter under the guise of religion, and desecrate the sanctity of the innermost pale of the church by confessions at Class of your ‘thorough conversion!’ Oh, you’re going to—”

“No, but I’m going to do nothing of the sort,” interrupted Bert, resentfully. “What I mean—if you’ll let me finish—is, I’m getting too old to be eternally undignifying myself with this ‘singing of midnight strains under Bonnybell’s window panes,’ and too old to be keeping myself in constant humiliation and expense by the borrowing and stringing up of old guitars, together with the breakage of the same, and the general wear-and-tear on a constitution that is slowly being sapped to its foundations by exposure in the night-air and the dew.” “And while you receive no further compensation in return,” said John, “than, perhaps, the coy turning up of a lamp at an upper casement where the jasmine climbs; or an exasperating patter of invisible palms; or a huge dank wedge of fruit-cake shoved at you by the old man, through a crack in the door.”

“Yes, and I’m going to have my just reward, is what I mean,” said Bert, “and exchange the lover’s life for the benedict’s. Going to hunt out a good, sensible girl and marry her.” And as the young man concluded this desperate avowal he jerked the bow of his cravat into a hard knot, kicked his hat under the bed, and threw himself on the sofa like an old suit.



John stared at him with absolute compassion. “Poor devil,” he said, half musingly, “I know just how he feels—

’Ring in the wind his wedding chimes,  
Smile, villagers, at every door;  
Old church-yards stuffed with buried crimes,  
Be clad in sunshine o’er and o’er.—”



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“Oh, here!” exclaimed the wretched Bert, jumping to his feet; “let up on that dismal recitative. It would make a dog howl to hear that!”

“Then you ‘let up’ on that suicidal talk of marrying,” replied John, “and all that harangue of incoherency about your growing old. Why, my dear fellow, you’re at least a dozen years my junior, and look at me!” and John glanced at himself in the glass with a feeble pride, noting the gray sparseness of his side-hair, and its plaintive dearth on top. “Of course I’ve got to admit,” he continued, “that my hair is gradually evaporating; but for all that, I’m ‘still in the ring,’ don’t you know; as young in society, for the matter of that, as yourself! And this is just the reason why I don’t want you to blight every prospect in your life by marrying at your age—especially a woman—I mean the kind of woman you’d be sure to fancy at your age.”

“Didn’t I say ‘a good, sensible girl’ was the kind I had selected?” Bert remonstrated.

“Oh!” exclaimed John, “you’ve selected her, then?—and without one word to me!” he ended, rebukingly.

“Well, hang it all!” said Bert, impatiently; “I knew how *you* were, and just how you’d talk me out of it; and I made up my mind that for once, at least, I’d follow the dictations of a heart that—however capricious in youthful frivolties—should beat, in manhood, loyal to itself and loyal to its own affinity.”

“Go it! Fire away! Farewell, vain world!” exclaimed the excited John.—“Trade your soul off for a pair of ear-bobs and a button-hook—a hank of jute hair and a box of lily-white! I’ve buried not less than ten old chums this way, and here’s another nominated for the tomb.”

“But you’ve got no *reason* about you,” began Bert,—“I want to”—

“And so do I ‘want to,’” broke in John, finally,—“I want to get some sleep.—So ‘register’ and come to bed.—And lie up on edge, too, when you *do* come—’cause this old catafalque-of-a-bed is just about as narrow as your views of single blessedness! Peace! Not another word! Pile in! Pile in! I’m three-parts sick, anyhow, and I want rest!” And very truly he spoke.

It was a bright morning when the slothful John was aroused by a long, vociferous pounding on the door. He started up in bed to find himself alone—the victim of his wrathful irony having evidently risen and fled away while his pitiless tormentor slept—“Doubtless to at once accomplish that nefarious intent as set forth by his unblushing confession of last night,” mused the miserable John. And he ground his fingers in the corners of his swollen eyes, and leered grimly in the glass at the feverish orbs, blood-shotten, blurred and aching.



The pounding on the door continued. John looked at his watch; it was only 8 o'clock.

"Hi, there!" he called viciously. "What do you mean, anyhow?" he went on, elevating his voice again; "shaking a man out of bed when he's just dropping into his first sleep?"



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"I mean that you're going to get up; that's what!" replied a firm female voice. "It's 8 o'clock, and I want to put your room in order; and I'm not going to wait all day about it, either! Get up and go down to your breakfast, and let me have the room!" And the clamor at the door was industriously renewed.

"Say!" called John, querulously, hurrying on his clothes, "Say! you!"

"There's no 'say' about it!" responded the determined voice: "I've heard about you and your ways around this house, and I'm not going to put up with it! You'll not lie in bed till high noon when I've got to keep your room in proper order!"

"Oh ho!" bawled John, intelligently: "reckon you're the new invasion here? Doubtless you're the girl that's been hanging up the new window-blinds that won't roll, and disguising the pillows with clean slips, and 'hennin' round among my books and papers on the table here, and ageing me generally till I don't know my own handwriting by the time I find it! Oh, yes! you're going to revolutionize things here; you're going to introduce promptness, and system, and order. See you've even filled the wash-pitcher and tucked two starched towels through the handle. Haven't got any tin towels, have you? I rather like this new soap, too! So solid and durable, you know; warranted not to raise a lather. Might as well wash one's hands with a door-knob!" And as John's voice grumbled away into the sullen silence again, the determined voice without responded: "Oh, you can growl away to your heart's content, Mr. McKinney, but I want you to distinctly understand that I'm not going to humor you in any of your old bachelor, sluggardly, slovenly ways, and whims and notions. And I want you to understand, too, that I'm not hired help in this house, nor a chambermaid, nor anything of the kind. I'm the landlady here; and I'll give you just ten minutes more to get down to your breakfast, or you'll not get any—that's all!" And as the reversed cuff John was in the act of buttoning slid from his wrist and rolled under the dresser, he heard a stiff rustling of starched muslin flouncing past the door, and the quick italicized patter of determined gaiters down the hall.

"Look here," said John to the bright-faced boy in the hotel office, a half hour later. "It seems the house here's been changing hands again."

"Yes, sir," said the boy, closing the cigar case, and handing him a lighted match. "Well, the new landlord, whoever he is," continued John, patronizingly, "is a good one. Leastwise, he knows what's good to eat, and how to serve it."

The boy laughed timidly,—*"It aint a landlord,' though—it's a landlady; it's my mother."*

"Ah," said John, dallying with the change the boy had pushed toward him. "Your mother, eh?" And where's your father?"

"He's dead," said the boy.



“And what’s this for?” abruptly asked John, examining his change.

“That’s your change,” said the boy: “You got three for a quarter, and gave me a half.”

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"Well, *you* just keep it," said John, sliding back the change. "It's for good luck, you know, my boy. Same as drinking your long life and prosperity. And, Oh yes, by the way, you may tell your mother I'll have a friend to dinner with me to-day."

"Yes, sir, and thank you, sir," said the beaming boy.

"Handsome boy!" mused John, as he walked down street. "Takes that from his father, though, I'll wager my existence!"

Upon his office desk John found a hastily written note. It was addressed in the well-known hand of his old chum. He eyed the missive apprehensively, and there was a positive pathos in his voice as he said aloud, "It's our divorce. I feel it!" The note, headed, "At the Office, 4 in Morning," ran like this:

"Dear Mack—I left you slumbering so soundly that, by noon, when you waken, I hope, in your refreshed state, you will look more tolerantly on my intentions as partially confided to you this night. I will not see you here again to say good-bye. I wanted to, but was afraid to 'rouse the sleeping lion.' I will not close my eyes to-night—fact is, I haven't time. Our serenade at Josie's was a pre-arranged signal by which she is to be ready and at the station for the 5 morning train. You may remember the lighting of three consecutive matches at her window before the igniting of her lamp. That meant, 'Thrice dearest one, I'll meet thee at the depot at 4:30 sharp.' So, my dear Mack, this is to inform you that, even as you read, Josie and I have eloped. It is all the old man's fault, yet I forgive him. Hope he'll return the favor. Josie predicts he will, inside of a week—or two weeks, anyhow. Good-bye, Mack, old boy; and let a fellow down as easy as you can.

Affectionately,

BERT."

"Heavens!" exclaimed John, stifling the note in his hand and stalking tragically around the room. "Can it be possible that I have nursed a frozen viper? An ingrate? A wolf in sheep's clothing? An orang-outang in gent's furnishings?"

"Was you callin' me, sir?" asked a voice at the door. It was the janitor.

"No!" thundered John; "Quit my sight! get out of my way! No, no, Thompson, I don't mean that," he called after him. "Here's a half dollar for you, and I want you to lock up the office, and tell anybody that wants to see me that I've been set upon, and sacked and assassinated in cold blood; and I've fled to my father's in the country, and am lying there in the convulsions of dissolution, babbling of green fields and running brooks, and thirsting for the life of every woman that comes in gunshot!" And then, more like a



confirmed invalid than a man in the strength and pride of his prime, he crept down into the street again, and thence back to his hotel.

Dejectedly and painfully climbing to his room, he encountered, on the landing above, a little woman in a jaunty dusting-cap and a trim habit of crisp muslin. He tried to evade her, but in vain. She looked him squarely in the face—occasioning him the dubious impression of either needing shaving very badly, or having egg-stains on his chin.



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"You're the gentleman in No. 11, I believe?" she said.

He nodded confusedly.

"Mr. McKinney is your name, I think?" she queried, with a pretty elevation of the eyebrows.

"Yes, ma'am," said John, rather abjectly. "You see, ma'am—But I beg pardon," he went on stammeringly, and with a very awkward bow—"I beg pardon, but I am addressing—ah—the—ah—the—"

"You are addressing the new landlady," she interpolated, pleasantly. "Mrs. Miller is my name. I think we should be friends, Mr. McKinney, since I hear that you are one of the oldest patrons of the house."

"Thank you—thank you!" said John, completely embarrassed. "Yes, indeed!—ha, ha. Oh, yes—yes—really, we must be quite old friends, I assure you, Mrs.—Mrs.—"

"Mrs. Miller," smilingly prompted the little woman.

"Yes, ah, yes,—Mrs. Miller. Lovely morning, Mrs. Miller," said John, edging past her and backing toward his room.

But as Mrs. Miller was laughing outright, for some mysterious reason, and gave no affirmation in response to his proposition as to the quality of the weather, John, utterly abashed and nonplussed, darted into his room and closed the door. "Deucedly extraordinary woman!" he thought; "wonder what's her idea!"

He remained locked in his room till the dinner-hour; and, when he promptly emerged for that occasion, there was a very noticeable improvement in his personal appearance, in point of dress, at least, though there still lingered about his smoothly-shaven features a certain haggard, care-worn, anxious look that would not out.

Next his own place at the table he found a chair tilted forward, as though in reservation for some honored guest. What did it mean? Oh, he remembered now. Told the boy to tell his mother he would have a friend to dine with him. Bert—and, blast the fellow! he was, doubtless, dining then with a far preferable companion—his wife—in a palace-car on the P., C. & St. L., a hundred miles away. The thought was maddening. Of course, now, the landlady would have material for a new assault. And how could he avert it? A despairing film blurred his sight for the moment—then the eyes flashed daringly. "I will meet it like a man!" he said, mentally—"like a State's Attorney,—I will invite it! Let her do her worst!"

He called a servant, directing some message in an undertone.



“Yes, sir,” said the agreeable servant, “I’ll go right away, sir,” and left the room.

Five minutes elapsed, and then a voice at his shoulder startled him:

“Did you send for me, Mr. McKinney? What is it I can do?”

“You are very kind, Mrs.—Mrs.—”

“Mrs. Miller,” said the lady, with a smile that he remembered.

“Now, please spare me even the mildest of rebukes. I deserve your censure, but I can’t stand it—I can’t positively!” and there was a pleading look in John’s lifted eyes that changed the little woman’s smile to an expression of real solicitude. “I have sent for you,” continued John, “to ask of you three great favors. Please be seated while I enumerate them. First—I want you to forgive and forget that ill-natured, uncalled-for grumbling of mine this morning when you wakened me.”



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“Why, certainly,” said the landlady, again smiling, though quite seriously.

“I thank you,” said John, with dignity. “And, second,” he continued—“I want your assurance that my extreme confusion and awkwardness on the occasion of our meeting later were rightly interpreted.”

“Certainly—certainly,” said the landlady, with the kindest sympathy.

“I am grateful—utterly,” said John, with newer dignity. “And then,” he went on,—after informing you that it is impossible for the best friend I have in the world to be with me at this hour, as intended, I want you to do me the very great honor of dining with me. Will you?”

“Why, certainly,” said the charming little landlady—“and a thousand thanks beside! But tell me something of your friend,” she continued, as they were being served. “What is he like—and what is his name—and where is he?”

“Well,” said John, warily,—“he’s like all young fellows of his age. He’s quite young, you know—not over thirty, I should say—a mere boy, in fact, but clever—talented—versatile.”

“—Unmarried, of course,” said the chatty little woman.

“Oh, yes!” said John, in a matter-of-course tone—but he caught himself abruptly—then stared intently at his napkin—glanced evasively at the side-face of his questioner, and said,—“Oh yes! Yes, indeed! He’s unmarried.—Old bachelor like myself, you know. Ha! Ha!”

“So he’s not like the young man here that distinguished himself last night?” said the little woman, archly.

The fork in John’s hand, half-lifted to his lips, faltered and fell back toward his plate.

“Why, what’s that?” said John, in a strange voice; “I hadn’t heard anything about it—I mean I haven’t heard anything about any young man. What was it?”

“Haven’t heard anything about the elopement?” exclaimed the little woman, in astonishment.—“Why, it’s been the talk of the town all morning. Elopement in high life—son of a grain-dealer, name of Hines, or Himes, or something, and a preacher’s daughter—Josie somebody—didn’t catch her last name. Wonder if you don’t know the parties—Why, Mr. McKinney, are you ill?”

“Oh, no—not at all!” said John: “Don’t mention it. Ha—ha! Just eating too rapidly, that’s all. Go on with—you were saying that Bert and Josie had really eloped.”



“What ‘Bert’?” asked the little woman quickly.

“Why, did I say Bert?” said John, with a guilty look. “I meant Haines, of course, you know—Haines and Josie.—And did they really elope?”

“That’s the report,” answered the little woman, as though deliberating some important evidence; “and they say, too, that the plot of the runaway was quite ingenious. It seems the young lovers were assisted in their flight by some old fellow—friend of the young man’s—Why, Mr. McKinney, you *are* ill, surely?”

John’s face was ashen.

“No—no!” he gasped, painfully: “Go on—go on! Tell me more about the—the—the old fellow—the old reprobate! And is he still at large?”



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“Yes,” said the little woman, anxiously regarding the strange demeanor of her companion. “They say, though, that the law can do nothing with him, and that this fact only intensifies the agony of the broken-hearted parents—for it seems they have, till now, regarded him both as a gentleman and family friend in whom”—

“I really am ill,” moaned John, waveringly rising to his feet; “but I beg you not to be alarmed. Tell your little boy to come to my room, where I will retire at once, if you’ll excuse me, and send for my physician. It is simply a nervous attack. I am often troubled so; and only perfect quiet and seclusion restores me. You have done me a great honor, Mrs.”—(“Mrs.—Miller,” sighed the sympathetic little woman)—“Mrs. Miller, —and I thank you more than I have words to express.” He bowed limply, turned through a side door opening on a stair, and tottered to his room.

During the three weeks’ illness through which he passed, John had every attention—much more, indeed, than he had consciousness to appreciate. For the most part his mind wandered, and he talked of curious things, and laughed hysterically, and serenaded mermaids that dwelt in grassy seas of dew, and were bald-headed like himself. He played upon a fourteen-jointed flute of solid gold, with diamond holes, and keys carved out of thawless ice. His old father came at first to take him home; but he could not be moved, the doctor said.

Two weeks of John’s illness had worn away, when a very serious looking young man, in a traveling duster, and a high hat, came up the stairs to see him. A handsome young lady was clinging to his arm. It was Bert and Josie. She had guessed the very date of their forgiveness. John wakened even clearer in mind than usual that afternoon. He recognized his old chum at a glance, and Josie—now Bert’s wife. Yes, he comprehended that. He was holding a hand of each when another figure entered. His thin, white fingers loosened their clasp, and he held a hand toward the new comer. “Here,” he said, “is my best friend in the world—Bert, you and Josie will love her, I know; for this is Mrs.—Mrs.”—“Mrs. Miller,” said the radiant little woman.—“Yes,—Mrs. Miller,” said John, very proudly.

## RHYMES OF RAINY DAYS

### THE TREE-TOAD.

“Scurious-like,” said the tree-toad,  
“I’ve twittered far rain all day;  
And I got up soon,  
And I hollered till noon—  
But the sun, hit blazed away,  
Till I jest clumb down in a crawfish-hole,  
Weary at heart, and sick at soul!



“Dozed away far an hour,  
And I tackled the thing agin;  
And I sung, and sung,  
Till I knowed my lung  
Was jest about give in;  
And then, thinks I, ef hit don’t rain now.  
There’re nothin’ in singin’, anyhow!



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“Once in awhile some  
Would come a drivin’ past;  
And he’d hear my cry,  
And stop and sigh—  
Till I jest laid back, at last,  
And I hollered rain till I thought my th’oat  
Would bust right open at ever’ note!

“But *I fetched* her! O *I fetched* her!—  
’Cause a little while ago,  
As I kindo’ set,  
With one eye shet,  
And a-singin’ soft and low,  
A voice drapped down on my fevered brain,  
Sayin’,—’ Ef you’ll jest hush I’ll rain!”

### A WORN-OUT PENCIL.

Welladay!  
Here I lay  
You at rest—all worn away,  
O my pencil, to the tip  
Of our old companionship!

Memory  
Sighs to see  
What you are, and used to be,  
Looking backward to the time  
When you wrote your earliest rhyme!—

When I sat  
Filing at  
Your first point, and dreaming that  
Your initial song should be  
Worthy of posterity.

With regret  
I forget  
If the song be living yet,  
Yet remember, vaguely now,  
It was honest, anyhow.



You have brought  
Me a thought—  
Truer yet was never taught,—  
    That the silent song is best,  
    And the unsung worthiest.

So if I,  
When I die,  
May as uncomplainingly  
    Drop aside as now you do,  
    Write of me, as I of you:—

Here lies one  
Who begun  
Life a-singing, heard of none;  
    And he died, satisfied,  
    With his dead songs by his side.

#### **THE STEPMOTHER.**

First she come to our house,  
    Tommy run and hid;  
And Emily and Bob and me  
    We cried jus' like we did  
When Mother died,—and we all said  
'At we all wisht 'at we was dead!

And Nurse she couldn't stop us,  
    And Pa he tried and tried,—  
We sobbed and shook and wouldn't look,  
    But only cried and cried;  
And nen someone—we couldn't jus'  
Tell who—was cryin' same as us!

Our Stepmother! Yes, it was her,  
    Her arms around us all—  
'Cause Tom slid down the bannister  
    And peeked in from the hall.—  
And we all love her, too, because  
She's purt nigh good as Mother was!



## THE RAIN.

### I.

The rain! the rain! the rain!  
It gushed from the skies and streamed  
Like awful tears; and the sick man thought  
How pitiful it seemed!  
And he turned his face away,  
And stared at the wall again,  
His hopes nigh dead and his heart worn out.  
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

### II.



## Page 25

The rain! the rain! the rain!  
And the broad stream brimmed the shores;  
And ever the river crept over the reeds  
And the roots of the sycamores:  
A corpse swirled by in a drift  
Where the boat had snapt its chain—  
And a hoarse-voiced mother shrieked and raved.  
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

### III.

The rain! the rain! the rain!—  
Pouring, with never a pause,  
Over the fields and the green byways—  
How beautiful it was!  
And the new-made man and wife  
Stood at the window-pane  
Like two glad children kept from school.—  
O the rain! the rain! the rain!

### THE LEGEND GLORIFIED.

“I deem that God is not disquieted”—  
This in a mighty poet’s rhymes I read;  
And blazoned so forever doth abide  
Within my soul the legend glorified.

Though awful tempests thunder overhead,  
I deem that God is not disquieted,—  
The faith that trembles somewhat yet is sure  
Through storm and darkness of a way secure.

Bleak winters, when the naked spirit hears  
The break of hearts, through stinging sleet of tears,  
I deem that God is not disquieted;  
Against all stresses am I clothed and fed.

Nay, even with fixed eyes and broken breath,  
My feet dip down into the tides of death,  
Nor any friend be left, nor prayer be said,  
I deem that God is not disquieted.



## WANT TO BE WHUR MOTHER IS.

“Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!”  
 Jeemses Rivers! won’t some one ever shet that howl o’ his?  
 That-air yellin’ drives me wild!  
 Cain’t none of ye stop the child?  
 Want jer Daddy? “Naw.” Gee whizz!  
 “Want to be whur mother is!”

“Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!”  
 Coax him, Sairy! Mary, sing somepin far him! Lift him, Liz—  
 Bang the clock-bell with the key—  
 Er the *meat-ax!* Gee-mun-nee!  
 Listen to them lungs o’ his!  
 “Want to be whur mother is!”

“Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!”  
 Preacher guess’ll pound all night on that old pulpit o’ his;  
 ’Pears to me some wimmin jest  
 Shows religious interest  
 Mostly ’fore their fambly’s riz!  
 “Want to be whur mother is!”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Want to be whur mother is! Want to be whur mother is!”  
 Nights like these and whipperwills allus brings that voice of his!  
 Sairy; Mary; ’Lizabeth;  
 Don’t set there and ketch yer death  
 In the dew—er rheumatiz—  
 Want to be whur mother is?”

## OLD MAN’S NURSERY RHYME.

I.



## Page 26

In the jolly winters  
Of the long-ago,  
It was not so cold as now—  
O! No! No!  
Then, as I remember,  
Snowballs, to eat,  
Were as good as apples now,  
And every bit as sweet!

### II.

In the jolly winters  
Of the dead-and-gone,  
Bub was warm as summer,  
With his red mitts on,—  
Just in his little waist-  
And-pants all together,  
Who ever heard him growl  
About cold weather?

### III.

In the jolly winters of the long-ago—  
Was it *half* so cold as now?  
O! No! No!  
Who caught his death o' cold,  
Making prints of men  
Flat-backed in snow that now's  
Twice as cold again?

### IV.

In the jolly winters  
Of the dead-and-gone,  
Startin' out rabbit-hunting  
Early as the dawn,—  
Who ever froze his fingers,  
Ears, heels, or toes,—  
Or'd a cared if he had?  
Nobody knows!



## V.

Nights by the kitchen-stove,  
Shelling white and red  
Corn in the skillet, and  
Sleepin' four abed!  
Ah! the jolly winters  
Of the long-ago!  
We were not so old as now—  
O! No! No!

## THREE DEAD FRIENDS.

Always suddenly they are gone—  
The friends we trusted and held secure—  
Suddenly we are gazing on,  
Not a *smiling* face, but the marble-pure  
Dead mask of a face that nevermore  
To a smile of ours will make reply—  
The lips close-locked as the eyelids are—  
Gone—swift as the flash of the molten ore  
A meteor pours through a midnight sky,  
Leaving it blind of a single star.

Tell us, O Death, Remorseless Might!  
What is this old, unescapable ire  
You wreak on us?—from the birth of light  
Till the world be charred to a core of fire!  
We do no evil thing to you—  
We seek to evade you—that is all—  
That is your will—you will not be known  
Of men. What, then, would you have us do?—  
Cringe, and wait till your vengeance fall,  
And your graves be fed, and the trumpet blown?

You desire no friends; but *we*—O we  
Need them so, as we falter here,  
Fumbling through each new vacancy,  
As each is stricken that we hold dear.  
One you struck but a year ago;  
And one not a month ago; and one—  
(God's vast pity!)—and one lies now  
Where the widow wails, in her nameless woe,  
And the soldiers pace, with the sword and gun,  
Where the comrade sleeps, with the laureled brow.



## Page 27

And what did the first?—that wayward soul,  
Clothed of sorrow, yet nude of sin,  
And with all hearts bowed in the strange control  
Of the heavenly voice of his violin.  
Why, it was music the way he *stood*,  
So grand was the poise of the head and so  
Full was the figure of majesty!—  
One heard with the eyes, as a deaf man would,  
And with all sense brimmed to the overflow  
With tears of anguish and ecstasy.

And what did the girl, with the great warm light  
Of genius sunning her eyes of blue,  
With her heart so pure, and her soul so white—  
What, O Death, did she do to you?  
Through field and wood as a child she strayed,  
As Nature, the dear sweet mother led;  
While from her canvas, mirrored back,  
Glimmered the stream through the everglade  
Where the grapevine trailed from the trees to wed  
Its likeness of emerald, blue and black.

And what did he, who, the last of these,  
Faced you, with never a fear, O Death?  
Did you hate *him* that he loved the breeze,  
And the morning dews, and the rose's breath?  
Did you hate him that he answered not  
Your hate again—but turned, instead,  
His only hate on his country's wrongs?  
Well—you possess him, dead!—but what  
Of the good he wrought? With laureled head  
He bides with us in his deeds and songs.

Laureled, first, that he bravely fought,  
And forged a way to our flag's release;  
Laureled, next—for the harp he taught  
To wake glad songs in the days of peace—  
Songs of the woodland haunts he held  
As close in his love as they held their bloom  
In their inmost bosoms of leaf and vine—  
Songs that echoed, and pulsed and welled  
Through the town's pent streets, and the sick child's room,  
Pure as a shower in soft sunshine.



Claim them, Death; yet their fame endures,  
What friend next will you rend from us  
In that cold, pitiless way of yours,  
And leave us a grief more dolorous?  
Speak to us!—tell us, O Dreadful Power!—  
Are we to have not a lone friend left?—  
Since, frozen, sodden, or green the sod,—  
In every second of every hour,  
*Some one*, Death, you have left thus bereft,  
Half inaudibly shrieks to God.

## IN BOHEMIA.

Ha! My dear! I'm back again—  
Vendor of Bohemia's wares!  
Lordy! How it pants a man  
Climbing up those awful stairs!  
Well, I've made the dealer say  
Your sketch *might* sell, anyway!  
And I've made a publisher  
Hear my poem, Kate, my dear.



## Page 28

In Bohemia, Kate, my dear—  
Lodgers in a musty flat  
On the top floor—living here  
Neighborless, and used to that,—  
Like a nest beneath the eaves,  
So our little home receives  
Only guests of chirping cheer—  
We'll be happy, Kate, my dear!

Under your north-light there, you  
At your easel, with a stain  
On your nose of Prussian blue,  
Paint your bits of shine and rain;  
With my feet thrown up at will  
O'er my littered window-sill,  
I write rhymes that ring as clear  
As your laughter, Kate, my dear.

Puff my pipe, and stroke my hair—  
Bite my pencil-tip and gaze  
At you, mutely mooning there  
O'er your "Aprils" and your "Mays!"  
Equal inspiration in  
Dimples of your cheek and chin,  
And the golden atmosphere  
Of your paintings, Kate, my dear!

*Trying!* Yes, at times it is,  
To clink happy rhymes, and fling  
On the canvas scenes of bliss,  
When we are half famishing!—  
When your "jersey" rips in spots,  
And your hat's "forget-me-nots"  
Have grown tousled, old and sere—  
It is trying, Kate, my dear!

But—as sure—*some* picture sells,  
And—sometimes—the poetry—  
Bless us! How the parrot yells  
His acclaims at you and me!  
How we revel then in scenes  
Of high banqueting!—sardines—  
Salads—olives—and a sheer  
Pint of sherry, Kate, my dear!



Even now I cross your palm,  
With this great round world of gold!—  
“Talking wild?” Perhaps I am—  
Then, this little five-year-old!—  
Call it anything you will,  
So it lifts your face until  
I may kiss away that tear  
Ere it drowns me, Kate, my dear.

### **IN THE DARK.**

O in the depths of midnight  
What fancies haunt the brain!  
When even the sigh of the sleeper  
Sounds like a sob of pain.

A sense of awe and of wonder  
I may never well define,—  
For the thoughts that come in the shadows  
Never come in the shine.

The old clock down in the parlor  
Like a sleepless mourner grieves,  
And the seconds drip in the silence  
As the rain drips from the eaves.

And I think of the hands that signal  
The hours there in the gloom,  
And wonder what angel watchers  
Wait in the darkened room.

And I think of the smiling faces  
That used to watch and wait,  
Till the click of the clock was answered  
By the click of the opening gate.—

They are not there now in the evening—  
Morning or noon—not there;  
Yet I know that they keep their vigil,  
And wait for me Somewhere.

### **WET WEATHER TALK.**



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It ain't no use to grumble and complain;  
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice:  
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,  
W'y, rain's my choice.

Men giner'ly, to all intents—  
Although they're ap' to grumble some—  
Puts most their trust in Providence,  
And takes things as they come;—  
That is, the commonality  
Of men that's lived as long as me,  
Has watched the world enough to learn  
They're not the boss of the concern.

With *some*, of course, it's different—  
I've seed *young* men that knowed it all,  
And didn't like the way things went  
On this terrestrial ball!  
But, all the same, the rain some way  
Rained jest as hard on picnic-day;  
Er when they raily wanted it,  
It maybe wouldn't rain a bit!

In this existence, dry and wet  
Will overtake the best of men—  
Some little skift o' clouds'll shet  
The sun off now and then;  
But maybe, while you're wondern' who  
You've fool-like lent your umbrell' to,  
And *want* it—out'll pop the sun,  
And you'll be glad you ain't got none!

It aggervates the farmers, too—  
They's too much wet, er too much sun,  
Er work, er waiting round to do  
Before the plowin''s done;  
And maybe, like as not, the wheat,  
Jest as it's lookin' hard to beat,  
Will ketch the storm—and jest about  
The time the corn 's a-jintin' out!

These here cy-clones a-foolin' round—  
And back'ard crops—and wind and rain,  
And yit the corn that's wallered down



May elbow up again!  
They ain't no sense, as I kin see,  
In mortals, sich as you and me,  
A-faultin' Nature's wise intents,  
And lockin' horns with Providence!

It ain't no use to grumble and complain;  
It's jest as cheap and easy to rejoice:  
When God sorts out the weather and sends rain,  
W'y, rain's my choice.

### WHERE SHALL WE LAND.

*"Where shall we land you, sweet?"—Swinburne.*

All listlessly we float  
Out seaward in the boat  
That beareth Love.  
Our sails of purest snow  
Bend to the blue below  
And to the blue above.  
Where shall we land?

We drift upon a tide  
Shoreless on every side,  
Save where the eye  
Of Fancy sweeps far lands  
Shelved slopingly with sands  
Of gold and porphyry.  
Where shall we land?

The fairy isles we see,  
Loom up so mistily—  
So vaguely fair,  
We do not care to break  
Fresh bubbles in our wake  
To bend our course for there.  
Where shall we land?

The warm winds of the deep  
Have lulled our sails to sleep,  
And so we glide  
Careless of wave or wind,  
Or change of any kind,  
Or turn of any tide.  
Where shall we land?



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We droop our dreamy eyes  
Where our reflection lies  
    Steeped in the sea,  
And, in an endless fit  
Of languor, smile on it  
    And its sweet mimicry.  
    Where shall we land?

“Where shall we land?” God’s grace!  
I know not any place  
    So fair as this—  
Swung here between the blue  
Of sea and sky, with you  
    To ask me, with a kiss,  
    “Where shall we land?”

## AN OLD SETTLER’S STORY

William Williams his name was—or so he said;—Bill Williams they called him, and them ’at knowed him best called him Bill Bills.

The first I seed o’ Bills was about two weeks after he got here. The Settlement wasn’t nothin’ but a baby in them days, far I mind ’at old Ezry Sturgiss had jist got his saw and griss-mill a-goin’, and Bills had come along and claimed to know all about millin’, and got a job with him; and millers in them times was wanted worse’n congerss-men, and I reckon got better wages; far afore Ezry built, ther wasn’t a dust o’ meal er flour to be had short o’ the White Water, better’n sixty mild from here, the way we had to fetch it. And they used to come to Ezry’s far ther grindin’ as far as that; and one feller I knowed to come from what used to be the old South Fork, over eighty mild from here, and in the wettest, rainyest weather; and mud! *Law!*

Well, this-here Bills was a-workin’ far Ezry at the time—part the time a-grindin’, and part the time a-lookin’ after the sawin’, and gittin’ out timber and the like. Bills was a queer-lookin’ feller, shore! About as tall a build man as Tom Carter—but of course you don’t know nothin’ o’ Tom Carter. A great big hulk of a feller, Tom was; and as far back as Fifty-eight used to make his brags that he could cut and put up his seven cord a day.

Well, what give Bills this queer look, as I was a-goin’ on to say, was a great big ugly scar a-runnin’ from the corner o’ one eye clean down his face and neck, and I don’t know how far down his breast—awful lookin’; and he never shaved, and ther wasn’t a hair a-growin’ in that scar, and it looked like a—some kind o’ pizen snake er somepin’ a crawlin’ in the grass and weeds. I never seed sich a’ out-an’-out onry-lookin’ chap, and I’ll never fergit the first time I set eyes on him.



Steve and me—Steve was my youngest brother; Steve's be'n in Californy now far, le' me see,—well, anyways, I reckon, over thirty year.—Steve was a-drivin' the team at the time—I allus let Steve drive; 'peared like Steve was made a-purpose far hosses. The beatin'est hand with hosses 'at ever you *did* see-an'-I-know! W'y, a hoss, after he got kind o' used to Steve a-handlin' of him, would do anything far *him*! And I've knowed that boy to swap far hosses 'at cou'dn't hardly make a shadder; and, afore you knowed it, Steve would have 'em a-cavortin' around a-lookin' as peert and fat and slick!



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Well, we'd come over to Ezry's far some grindin' that day; and Steve wanted to price some lumber far a house, intendin' to marry that Fall—and would a-married, I reckon, ef the girl hadn't a-died jist as she'd got her weddin' clothes done, and that set hard on Steve far awhile. Yit he rallied, you know, as a youngster will; but he never married, someway—never married. Reckon he never found no other woman he could love well enough, 'less it was—well, no odds.—The Good Bein's jedge o' what's best far each and all.

We lived *then* about eight mild from Ezry's, and it tuck about a day to make the trip; so you kin kind o' git an idee o' how the roads was in them days.

Well, on the way over I noticed Steve was mighty quiet-like, but I didn't think nothin' of it, tel at last he says, says he, "Tom, I want you to kind o' keep an eye out far Ezry's new hand," meanin' Bills. And then I kind o' suspicioned somepin' o' nother was up betwixt 'em; and shore enough ther was, as I found out afore the day was over.

I knowed 'at Bills was a mean sort of a man, from what I'd heerd. His name was all over the neighborhood afore he'd be'n here two weeks.

In the first place, he come in a suspicious sort o' way. Him and his wife, and a little baby only a few months old, come through in a kivered wagon with a fambly a-goin' som'ers in The Illinoy; and they stopped at the mill, far some meal er somepin', and Bills got to talkin' with Ezry 'bout millin', and one thing o' nother, and said he was expeered some 'bout a mill hisse'f, and told Ezry ef he'd give him work he'd stop; said his wife and baby wasn't strong enough to stand trav'lin', and ef Ezry'd give him work he was ready to lick into it then and there; said his woman could pay her board by sewin' and the like, tel they got ahead a little; and then, ef he liked the neighborhood, he said he'd as leave settle there as anywheres; he was huntin' a home, he said, and the outlook kind o' struck him, and his woman raily needed rest, and wasn't strong enough to go much funder. And old Ezry kind o' tuck pity on the feller; and havin' houseroom to spare, and raily in need of a good hand at the mill, he said all right; and so the feller stopped and the wagon druv ahead and left 'em; and they didn't have no things ner nothin'—not even a cyarpet-satchel, ner a stitch o' clothes, on'y what they had on their backs. And I think it was the third er fourth day after Bills stopped 'at he whirped Tomps Burk, the bully o' here them days, tel you would n't a-knowed him!

Well, I'd heerd o' this, and the fact is I'd made up my mind 'at Bills was a bad stick, and the place was n't none the better far his bein' here. But, as I was a-goin' on to say,—as Steve and me driv up to the mill, I ketched sight o' Bills the first thing, a-lookin' out o' where some boards was knocked off, jist over the worter-wheel; and he knowed Steve—I could see that by his face; and



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he hollered somepin', too, but what it was I couldn't jist make out, far the noise o' the wheel; but he looked to me as ef he'd hollered somepin' mean a-purpose so's Steve *wouldn't* hear it, and *he'd* have the consolation o' knowin' 'at he'd called Steve some onry name 'thout givin' him a chance to take it up. Steve was allus quiet like, but ef you raised his dander one't—and you could do that 'thout much trouble, callin' him names er somepin', particular' anything 'bout his mother. Steve loved his mother—allus loved his mother, and would fight far her at the drap o' the hat. And he was her *favo-rite*—allus a-talkin' o' "her boy, Steven," as she used to call him, and so proud of him, and so keerful of him allus, when he 'd be sick er anything; nuss him like a baby, she would.

So when Bills hollered, Steve didn't pay no attention; and I said nothin', o' course, and didn't let on like I noticed him. So we druv round to the south side and hitched; and Steve 'lowed he'd better feed; so I left him with the hosses and went into the mill.

They was jist a-stoppin' far dinner. Most of 'em brought ther dinners—lived so far away, you know. The two Smith boys lived on what used to be the old Warrick farm, five er six mild, anyhow, from wher' the mill stood. Great stout fellers, they was; and little Jake, the father of 'em, wasn't no man at all—not much bigger'n you, I rickon. Le' me see, now:—Ther was Tomps Burk, Wade Elwood, and Joe and Ben Carter, and Wesley Morris, John Coke—wiry little cuss, he was, afore he got his leg sawed off—and Ezry, and—Well, I don't jist mind all the boys—'s a long time ago, and I never was much of a hand far names.—Now, some folks'll hear a name and never fergit it, but I can't boast of a good ricollection, 'specially o' names; and far the last thirty year my mem'ry's be'n a-failin' me, ever sence a spell o' fever 'at I brought on onc't—fever and rheumatiz together. You see, I went a-sainin' with a passel o' the boys, fool-like, and let my clothes freeze on me a-comin' home. Wy, my breeches was like stove-pipes when I pulled 'em off. 'Ll, ef I didn't pay far that spree! Rheumatiz got a holt o' me and helt me there flat o' my back far eight weeks, and couldn't move hand er foot 'thout a-hollerin' like a' Injun. And I'd a-be'n there yit, I reckon, ef it had n't a-be'n far a' old hoss-doctor, name o' Jones; and he gits a lot o' sod and steepes it in hot whisky and pops it on me, and I'll-be-switched-to-death ef it didn't cuore me up, far all I laughed and told him I'd better take the whisky inardly and let him keep the grass far his doctor bill. But that's nuther here ner there:—As I was a-saying 'bout the mill: As I went in, the boys had stopped work and was a-gittin' down ther dinners, and Bills amongst 'em, and old Ezry a-chattin' away—great hand, he was, far his joke, and allus a-cuttin' up and a-gittin' off his odd-come-shorts on the boys. And that day he was in particular good



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humor. He'd brought some liquor down for the boys, and he'd be'n drinkin' a little hisse'f, enough to feel it. He didn't drink much—that is to say, he didn't git drunk adzactly; but he tuck his dram, you understand. You see, they made ther own whisky in them days, and it was n't nothin' like the bilin' stuff you git now. Old Ezry had a little still, and allus made his own whisky, enough for fambly use, and jist as puore as worter, and as harmless. But now-a-days the liquor you git's rank pizen. They say they put tobacker in it, and strychnine, and the Lord knows what; ner I never knowed why, 'less it was to give it a richer-lookin' flavor, like. Well, Ezry he 'd brought up a jug, and the boys had be'n a-takin' it purty free; I seed that as quick as I went in. And old Ezry called out to me to come and take some, the first thing. Told him I did n't b'lieve I keered about it; but nothin' would do but I must take a drink with the boys; and I was tired anyhow and I thought a little would n't hurt; so I takes a swig; and as I set the jug down Bills spoke up and says, "You're a stranger to me, and I'm a stranger to you, but I reckon we can drink to our better acquaintance," er somepin' to that amount, and poured out another snifter in a gourd he'd be'n a-drinkin' coffee in, and handed it to me. Well, I could n't well refuse, of course, so I says, "Here 's to us," and drunk her down—mighty nigh a half pint, I reckon. Now, I raily did n't want it, but, as I tell you, I was obleeged to take it, and I downed her at a swaller and never batted an eye, far, to tell the fact about it, I liked the taste o' liquor; and I do yit, only I know when I' got enough. Jist then I didn't want to drink on account o' Steve. Steve couldn't abide liquor in no shape ner form—far medicine ner nothin', and I 've allus thought it was his mother's doin's.

Now, a few months afore this I 'd be'n to Vincennes, and I was jist a-tellin' Ezry what they was a-astin' for ther liquor there—far I 'd fetched a couple o' gallon home with me 'at I 'd paid six bits for, and pore liquor at that: And I was a-tellin' about it, and old Ezry was a-sayin' what an oudacious figger that was, and how he could make money a-sellin' it for half that price, and was a-goin' on a-braggin' about his liquor—and it was a good article—far new whisky,—and jist then Steve comes in, jist as Bills was a-sayin' 'at a man 'at wouldn't drink that whisky wasn't no man at all. So, of course, when they ast Steve to take some and he told 'em no, 'at he was much obleeged, Bills was kind o' tuck down, you understand, and had to say somepin'; and says he, "I reckon you ain't no better 'n the rest of us, and we 've be'n a-drinkin' of it." But Steve did n't let on like he noticed Bills at all, and rech and shuck hands with the other boys and ast how they was all a-comin' on.



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I seed Bills was riled, and more 'n likely wanted trouble; and shore enough, he went on to say, kind o' snarlin' like, 'at "he'd knowed o' men in his day 'at had be'n licked far refusin' to drink when their betters ast 'em;" and said funder 'at "a lickin' wasn't none too good far anybody 'at would refuse liquor like that o' Ezry's, and in his own house too"—er *buildin'*, ruther. Ezry shuck his head at him, but I seed 'at Bills was bound far a quarrel, and I winks at Steve, as much as to say, "Don't you let him bully you; you'll find your brother here to see you have fair play!" I was a-feelin' my oats some about then, and Steve seed I was, and looked so sorry like, and like his mother, 'at I jist thought, "I kin fight far you, and die far you, 'cause you're wuth it!"—And I didn't someway feel like it would amount to much ef I did die er git killed er somepin' on his account. I seed Steve was mighty white around the mouth and his eyes was a glitterin' like a snake's; but Bills didn't seem to take warnin', but went on to say 'at he'd knowed boys 'at loved the'r mothers so well they couldn't drink nothin' stronger 'n milk.—And then you'd ort o' seed Steve's coat fly off, jist like it wanted to git out of his way, and give the boy room accordin' to his stren'th. I seed Bills grab a piece o' scantlin' jist in time to ketch his arm as he struck at Steve,—far Steve was a-comin' far him dangers. But they'd ketched Steve from behind jist then; and Bills turned far me. I seed him draw back, and I seed Steve a-scufflin' to ketch his arm; but he didn't reach it quite in time to do me no good. It must a-come awful suddent. The first I ricollect was a roarin' and a buzzin' in my ears, and when I kind o' come a little better to, and crawled up and peeked over the saw-log I was a-layin' the other side of, I seed a couple clinched and a rollin' over and over, and a-makin' the chips and saw-dust fly, now I tell you! Bills and Steve it was—head and tail, tooth and toenail, and a-bleedin' like good fellers. I seed a gash o' some kind in Bills's head, and Steve was purty well tuckered, and a-pantin' like a lizard; and I made a rush in, and one o' the Carter boys grabbed me and told me to jist keep cool; 'at Steve didn't need no he'p, and they might need me to keep Bills's friends off ef they made a rush. By this time Steve had whirlt Bills, and was a-jist a-gittin' in a fair way to finish him up in good style, when Wesley Morris run in—I seed him do it—run in, and afore we could ketch him he struck Steve a deadener in the butt o' the ear and knocked him as limber as a rag. And then Bills whirlt Steve and got him by the throat, and Ben Carter and me and old Ezry closed in—Carter tackled Morris, and Ezry and me grabs Bills—and as old Ezry grabbed him to pull him off, Bills kind o' give him a side swipe o' some kind and knocked him—I don't know how far! And jist then Carter and Morris come a-scufflin' back'ards right amongst us, and Carter throwed



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him right acrost Bills and Steve. Well, it ain't fair, and I don't like to tell it, but I seed it was the last chance and I tuck advantage of it:—As Wesley and Ben fell it pulled Bills down in a kind o' twist, don't you understand, so's he couldn't he'p hisse'f, yit still a-clinchin' Steve by the throat, and him black in the face: Well, as they fell I grabbed up a little hick'ry limb, not bigger 'n my two thumbs, and I struck Bills a little tap kind o' over the back of his head like, and blame me ef he didn't keel over like a stuck pig—and not any too soon, nuther, far he had Steve's chunk as nigh put out as you ever seed a man's, to come to agin. But he was up th'reckly and ready to a-went at it ef Bills could a-come to the scratch; but Mister Bills he wasn't in no fix to try it over! After a-waitin' awhile far him to come to, and him not a-comin' to, we concluded 'at we'd better he'p him, maybe. And we worked with him, and washed him, and drenched him with whisky, but it 'peared like it wasn't no use: He jist laid there with his eyes about half shet, and a-breathin' like a hoss when he's bad sceart; and I'll be dad-limbed ef I don't believe he'd a-died on our hands ef it hadn't a-happened old Doc Zions come a-ridin' past on his way home from the Murdock neighborhood, where they was a-havin' sich a time with the milk-sick. And he examined Bills, and had him laid on a plank and carried down to the house—'bout a mild, I reckon, from the mill. Looked kind o' curous to see Steve a-heppin' pack the feller, after his nearly chokin' him to death. Oh, it was a bloody fight, I tell you! W'y, ther wasn't a man in the mill 'at didn't have a black eye er somepin'; and old Ezry, where Bills hit him, had his nose broke, and was as bloody as a butcher. And you'd ort a-seed the women-folks when our p'session come a-bringin' Bills in. I never seed anybody take on like Bills's woman. It was distressin'; it was, indeed.—Went into hysterics, she did; and we thought far awhile she'd gone plum crazy, far she cried so pitiful over him, and called him “Charley! Charley!” 'stid of his right name, and went on, clean out of her head, tel she finally jist fainted clean away.

Far three weeks Bills laid betwixt life and death, and that woman set by him night and day, and tended him as patient as a' angel—and she was a' angel, too; and he'd a-never lived to bother nobody agin ef it hadn't a-be'n far Annie, as he called her. Zions said ther was a 'brazure of the—some kind o' p'tubernece, and ef he'd a-be'n struck jist a quarter of a' inch below—jist a quarter of a' inch—he'd a-be'n a dead man. And I've sence wished—not 'at I want the life of a human bein' to account far, on'y, well, no odds—I've sence wished 'at I had a-hit him jist a quarter of a' inch below!



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Well, of course, them days ther wasn't no law o' no account, and nothin' was ever done about it. So Steve and me got our grindin', and talked the matter over with Ezry and the boys. Ezry said he was a-goin' to do all he could far Bills, 'cause he was a good hand, and when he wasn't drinkin' ther wasn't no peaceabler man in the settlement. I kind o' suspicioned what was up, but I said nothin' then. And Ezry said funder, as we was about drivin' off, that Bills was a despart feller, and it was best to kind o' humor him a little. "And you must kind o' be on your guard," he says, "and I'll watch him and ef anything happens 'at I git wind of I'll let you know," he says; and so we put out far home.

Mother tuck on awful about it. You see, she thought she'd be'h the whole blame of it, 'cause the Sunday afore that her and Steve had went to meetin', and they got there late, and the house was crowded, and Steve had ast Bills to give up his seat to Mother, and he wouldn't do it, and said somepin' 'at disturbed the prayin', and the preacher prayed 'at the feller 'at was a-makin' the disturbance might be forgive; and that riled Bills so he got up and left, and hung around till it broke up, so's he could git a chance at Steve to pick a fight. And he did try it, and dared Steve and double-dared him far a fight, but Mother begged so hard 'at she kep' him out of it. Steve said 'at he'd a-told me all about it on the way to Ezry's, on'y he'd promised Mother, you know, not to say nothin' to me.

\* \* \* \* \*

Ezry was over at our house about six weeks after the fight, appearantly as happy as you please. We ast him how him and Bills was a-makin' it, and he said firstrate; said 'at Bills was jist a-doin' splendid; said he'd got moved in his new house 'at he'd fixed up far him, and ever'thing was a-goin' on as smooth as could be; and Bills and the boys was on better terms 'n ever; and says he, "As far as you and Steve 's concerned, Bills don't 'pear to bear you no ill feelin's, and says as far as he 's concerned the thing 's settled." "Well," says I, "Ezry, I hope so; but I can't he'p but think ther 's somepin' at the bottom of all this;" and says I, "I do n't think it's in Bills to ever amount to anything good;" and says I, "It's my opinion ther 's a dog in the well, and now you mark it!"

Well, he said he *wasn't* jist easy, but maybe he 'd come out all right; said he couldn't turn the feller off—he hadn't the heart to do that, with that-air pore, dilicate woman o' his, and the baby. And then he went on to tell what a smart sort o' woman Bills's wife was,—one of the nicest little women he 'd ever laid eyes on, said she was; said she was the kindest thing, and the sweetest-tempered, and all—and the handiest woman 'bout the house, and 'bout sewin', and cookin', and the like, and all kinds o' housework; and so good to the childern, and all; and how they all got along so well; and how proud she was of her baby,



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and allus a-goin' on about it and a-cryin' over it and a-carryin' on, and wouldn't leave it out of her sight a minute. And Ezry said 'at she could write so purty, and made sich purty pictures far the childern; and how they all liked her better'n ther own mother. And, sence she'd moved, he said it seemed so lonesome like 'thout *her* about the house—like they'd lost one o' ther own fambly; said they didn't git to see her much now, on'y sometimes, when her man would be at work, she'd run over far awhile, and kiss all the childern and women-folks about the place,—the greatest hand far the childern, she was; tell 'em all sorts o' little stories, you know, and sing far 'em; said 'at she could sing so sweet-like, 'at time and time agin she'd break clean down in some song o'nuther, and her voice would trimble so mournful-like 'at you'd find yourse'f a-cryin' afore you knowed it. And she used to coax Ezry's woman to let her take the childern home with her; and they used to allus want to go, 'tel Bills come onc't while they was there, and they said he got to jawin' her far a-makin' some to-do over the baby, and swore at her and tuck it away from her and whipped it far cryin', and she cried and told him to whip her and not little Annie, and he said that was jist what he was a-doin'. And the childern was allus afear'd to go there any more after that—'fear'd he'd come home and whip little Annie agin. Ezry said he jist done that to skeer 'em away—'cause he didn't want a passel o' childern a-whoopin' and a-howlin' and a-trackin' 'round the house all the time.

But, shore enough, Bills, after the fight, 'peared like he 'd settled down, and went 'bout his business so stiddy-like, and worked so well, the neighbors begin to think he was all right after all, and raily *some* got to *likin'* him. But far me, well, I was a leetle slow to argy 'at the feller wasn't "a-possumin'." But the next time I went over to the mill—and Steve went with me—old Ezry come and met us, and said 'at Bills didn't have no hard feelin's ef *we* didn't, and 'at he wanted us to fergive him; said 'at Bills wanted him to tell us 'at he was sorry the way he'd acted, and wanted us to fergive him. Well, I looked at Ezry, and we both looked at him, jist perfectly tuck back—the idee o' Bills a-wantin' anybody to fergive him! And says I, "Ezry, what in the name o' common sense do you mean?" And says he, "I mean jist what I say; Bills jined meetin' last night and had 'em all a-prayin' far him; and we all had *a glorious time*," says old Ezry; "and his woman was there and jined, too, and prayed and shouted and tuck on to beat all; and Bills got up and spoke and give in his experience, and said he'd be'n a bad man, but, glory to God, them times was past and gone; said 'at he wanted all of 'em to pray far him, and he wanted to prove faithful, and wanted all his inemies to fergive him; and prayed 'at you and Steve and your folks would fergive him, and ever'body



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'at he ever wronged anyway." And old Ezry was a-goin' on, and his eyes a-sparklin', and a-rubbin' his hands, he was so excited and tickled over it, 'at Steve and me we jist stood there a-gawkin' like, tel Bills hisse'f come up and rech out one hand to Steve and one to me; and Steve shuck with him kind o' oneasy like, and I—well, sir, I never felt cur'oser in my born days than I did that minute. The cold chills crep' over me, and I shuck as ef I had the agur, and I folded my hands behind me and I looked that feller square in the eye, and I tried to speak three or four times afore I could make it, and when I did, my voice wasn't natchurl—sounded like a feller a-whisperin' through a tin horn er somepin'.—and I says, says I, "You're a liar," slow and delibert. That was all. His eyes blazed a minute, and drapped; and he turned, 'thout a word, and walked off. And Ezry says, "He's in airnest; I know he's in airnest, er he'd a-never a-tuck that!" And so he went on, tel finally Steve jined in, and betwixt 'em they p'suaded me 'at I was in the wrong and the best thing to do was to make it all up, which I finally did. And Bills said 'at he'd a-never a-felt jist right 'thout *my* friendship, far he'd wronged me, he said, and he'd wronged Steve and Mother, too, and he wanted a chance, he said, o' makin' things straight agin.

Well, a-goin' home, I don't think Steve and me talked o' nothin' else but Bills—how airnest the feller acted 'bout it, and how, ef he *wasn't* in airnest he'd a-never a-swallowed that 'lie,' you see. That's what walked my log, far he could a-jist as easy a-knocked me higher 'n Kilgore's kite as he could to walk away 'thout a-doin' of it.

Mother was awful tickled when she heerd about it, far she'd had an idee 'at we'd have trouble afore we got back, and a-gitten home safe, and a-bringin' the news 'bout Bills a-jinin' church and all, tickled her so 'at she mighty nigh shouted far joy. You see, Mother was a' old church-member all her life; and I don't think she ever missed a sermont er a prayer-meetin' 'at she could possibly git to—rain er shine, wet er dry. When ther was a meetin' of any kind a-goin' on, go she would, and nothin' short o' sickness in the fambly, er knowin' nothin' of it would stop *her!* And clean up to her dyin' day she was a God-fearin' and consistent Christian ef ther ever was one. I mind now when she was tuck with her last spell and laid bedfast far eighteen months, she used to tell the preacher, when he 'd come to see her and pray and go on, 'at she could die happy ef she could on'y be with 'em all agin in their love-feasts and revivals. She was purty low then, and had be'n a-failin' fast far a day er two; and that day they'd be'n a-holdin' service at the house. It was her request, you know, and the neighbors had congergated and was a-prayin' and a-singin' her favorite hymns—one in p'tickler, "God moves in a mysterious way his wunders to p'form," and 'bout his "Walkin' on the sea and a-ridin'



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of the storm.”—Well, anyway, they’d be’n a-singin’ that hymn far her—she used to sing that ’n so much, I ricollect as far back as I kin remember; and I mind how it used to make me feel so lonesome-like and solemn, don’t you know,—when I’d be a-knockin’ round the place along of evenin’s, and she’d be a-milkin’, and I’d hear her, at my feedin’, way off by myse’f, and it allus somehow made me feel like a feller’d ort o’ try and live as nigh right as the law allows, and that’s about my doctern yit. Well, as I was a-goin’ on to say, they’d jist finished that old hymn, and Granny Lowry was jist a-goin to lead in prayer, when I noticed mother kind o’ tried to turn herse’f in bed, and smiled so weak and faint-like, and looked at me, with her lips a-kind o’ movin’; and I thought maybe she wanted another dos’t of her syrup ’at Ezry’s woman had fixed up far her, and I kind o’ stooped down over her and ast her if she wanted anything. “Yes,” she says, and nodded, and her voice sounded so low and solemn and so far away-like ’at I knowed she’d never take no more medicine on this airth. And I tried to ast her what it was she wanted, but I couldn’t say nothin’; my throat hurt me, and I felt the warm tears a-boolgin’ up, and her kind old face a-glimmerin’ a-way so pale-like afore my eyes, and still a-smilin’ up so lovin’ and forgivin’ and so good ’at it made me think so far back in the past I seemed to be a little boy agin; and seemed like her thin gray hair was brown, and a-shinin’ in the sun as it used to do when she helt me on her shoulder in the open door, when Father was a-livin’ and we used to go to meet him at the bars; seemed like her face was young agin, and a-smilin’ like it allus used to be, and her eyes as full o’ hope and happiness as afore they ever looked on grief er ever shed a tear. And I thought of all the trouble they had saw on my account, and of all the lovin’ words her lips had said, and of all the thousand things her pore old hands had done far me ’at I never even thanked her far; and how I loved her better ’n all the world besides, and would be so lonesome ef she went away—Lord! I can’t tell you what I didn’t think and feel and see. And I knelt down by her, and she whispered then far Steven, and he come, and we kissed her—and she died—a smilin’ like a child—jist like a child.

Well—well! ‘Pears like I’m allus a-runnin’ into somepin’ else. I wisht I could tell a story ’thout driftin’ off in matters ’at hain’t no livin’ thing to do with what I started out with. I try to keep from thinkin’ of afflictions and the like, ’cause sich is bound to come to the best of us; but a feller’s ricollection will bring ’em up, and I reckon it’d ort ’o be er it wouldn’t be; and I’ve thought, sometimes, it was done may be to kind o’ admonish a feller, as the Good Book says, of how good a world ’d be ’thout no sorrow in it.



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Where was I? Oh, yes, I ricollect;—about Bills a-jinin' church. Well, sir, ther' wasn't a better-actin' feller and more religious-like in all the neighborhood. Spoke in meetin's, he did, and tuck a' active part in all religious doin's, and, in fact, was jist as square a man, appearantly, as the preacher hisse'f. And about six er eight weeks after he'd jined, they got up another revival, and things run high. Ther' was a big excitement, and ever'body was a'tendin' from far and near. Bills and Ezry got the mill-hands to go, and didn't talk o' nothin' but religion. People thought awhile 'at old Ezry 'd turn preacher, he got so interested 'bout church matters. He was easy excited 'bout anything; and when he went into a thing it was in dead earnest, shore!—"jist flew off the handle," as I heerd a comical feller git off onct. And him and Bills was up and at it ever' night—prayin' and shoutin' at the top o' the'r voice. Them raily did seem like good times—when ever'body jined together, and prayed and shouted ho-sanner, and danced around together, and hugged each other like they was so full o' glory they jist couldn't he'p theirse'v's—that's the reason I jined; it looked so kind o' whole-souled-like and good, you understand. But la! I didn't hold out on'y far a little while, and no wunder!

Well, about them times Bills was tuck down with the agur; first got to chillin' ever'-other-day, then ever' day, and harder and harder, tel sometimes he 'd be obleeged to stay away from meetin' on account of it. And one't I was at meetin' when he told about it, and how when he couldn't be with 'em he allus prayed at home, and he said 'at he believed his prayers was answered, far onc't he'd prayed far a new outpourin' of the Holy Sperit, and that very night ther' was three new jiners. And another time he said 'at he 'd prayed 'at Wesley Morris would jine, and lo and behold you! he *did* jine, and the very night 'at he prayed he would.

Well, the night I'm a-speakin' of he'd had a chill the day afore and couldn't go that night, and was in bed when Ezry druv past far him; said he'd like to go, but had a high fever and couldn't. And then Ezry's woman ast him ef he was too sick to spare Annie; and he said no, they could take her and the baby: and told her to fix his medicine so's he could reach it 'thout gittin' out o' bed, and he'd git along 'thout her. And so she tuck the baby and went along with Ezry and his folks.

I was at meetin' that night and ricollect 'em comin' in. Annie got a seat jist behind me—Steve give her his'n and stood up; and I ricollect a-astin' her how Bills was a-gittin' along with the agur; and little Annie, the baby, kep' a-pullin' my hair and a-crowin' tel finally she went to sleep; and Steve ast her mother to let *him* hold her—cutest little thing you ever laid eyes on, and the very pictur' *of* her mother.



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Old Daddy Barker preached that night, and a mighty good sermont. His text, ef I ricollect right, was “workin’ out your own salvation;” and when I listen to preachers nowadays in ther big churches and ther fine pulpits, I allus think o’ Daddy Barker, and kind o’ some way wisht the old times could come agin, with the old log meetin’-house with its puncheon floor and the chinkin’ in the walls, and old Daddy Barker in the pulpit. He’d make you feel ’at the Lord could make hissef at home there, and find jist as abundant comfort in the old log house as he could in any of your fine-furnished churches ’at you can’t set down in ’thout payin’ far the privilege, like it was a theater.

Ezry had his two little girls jine that night, and I ricollect the preacher made sich a purty prayer about the Savior a-cotin’ from the Bible ’bout “Suffer little childern to come unto me” and all; and talked so purty about the jedgment day, and mothers a-meetin’ the’r little ones there and all; and went on tel ther wasn’t a dry eye in the house—and jist as he was a-windin’ up, Abe Riggers stuck his head in at the door and hollered “fire” loud as he could yell. We all rushed out, a-thinkin’ it was the meetin’-house; but he hollered it was the mill; and shore enough, away off to the southards we could see the light acrost the woods, and see the blaze a-lickin’ up above the trees. I seed old Ezry as he come a-scuflin’ through the crowd; and we put out together far it. Well, it was two mild to the mill, but by the time we’d half way got there, we could tell it wasn’t the mill a-burnin’, ’at the fire was funder to the left, and that was Ezry’s house; and by the time we got there it wasn’t much use. We pitched into the household goods, and got out the beddin’, and the furnitur’ and cheers and the like o’ that; saved the clock and a bedstid, and got the bureau purt’ nigh out when they hollered to us ’at the roof was a cavin’ in, and we had to leave it; well, we’d tuck the drawers out, all but the big one, and that was locked; and it and all in it went with the buildin’, and that was a big loss: All the money ’at Ezry was a-layin’ by was in that-air drawer, and a lot o’ keepsakes and trinkets ’at Ezry’s woman said she wouldn’t a-parted with far the world and all.

I never seed a troubleder fambly than they was. It jist ’peared like old Ezry give clean down, and the women and childern a-cryin’ and a-takin’ on. It looked jist awful—shore’s you’re born!—Losin’ ever’tthing they’d worked so hard far—and there it was, purt’ nigh midnight, and a fambly, jist a little while ago all so happy, and now with no home to go to ner nothin’!

It was arranged far Ezry’s to move in with Bills—that was about the on’y chance—on’y one room and a loft; but Bills said they could manage *some way*, far a while anyhow.

Bills said he seed the fire when it first started, and could a-put it out ef he’d on’y be’n strong enough to git there; said he started twic’t to go, but was too weak and had to go back to bed agin; said it was a-blazin’ in the kitchen roof when he first seed it. So the gineral conclusion ’at we all come to was—it must a-ketched from the flue.



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It was too late in the Fall then to think o' buildin' even the onryest kind o' shanty, and so Ezry moved in with Bills. And Bills used to say ef it had n't a-be'n far Ezry *he'd* a-never a-had no house, ner nuthin' to put in it, nuther. You see, all the household goods 'at Bills had in the world he'd got of Ezry, and he 'lowed he'd be a triflin' whelp ef he didn't do all in his power to make Ezry perfectly at home 's long as he wanted to stay there. And together they managed to make room far 'em all, by a-buildin' a kind o' shed-like to the main house, intendin' to build when Spring come. And ever'thing went along first-rate, I guess; never heerd no complaints—that is, p'ticular.

Ezry was kind o' down far a long time, though; didn't like to talk about his trouble much, and didn't 'tend meetin' much, like he used to; said it made him think 'bout his house burnin', and he didn't feel safe to lose sight o' the mill. And the meetin's kind o' broke up altogether that winter. Almost broke up religious doin's, it did. 'S long as I've lived here I never seed jist sich a slack in religion as ther' was that winter; and 'fore then, I kin mind the time when ther' wasn't a night the whole endurin' winter when they didn't have preachin' er prayer-meetin' o' some kind a-goin' on. W'y, I ricollect one night in p'ticular—the *coldest* night, *whooh!* And somebody had stold the meetin'-house door, and they was obleeged to preach 'thout it. And the wind blowed in so they had to hold the'r hats afore the candles, and then one't-in-a-while they'd git sluffed out. And the snow drifted in so it was jist like settin' out doors; and they had to stand up when they prayed—yessir! stood up to pray. I noticed that night they was a' oncommon lot o' jiners, and I believe to this day 'at most of 'em jined jist to git up wher' the stove was. Lots o' folks had the'r feet froze right in meetin'; and Steve come home with his ears froze like they was whittled out o' bone; and he said 'at Mary Madaline Wells's feet was froze, and she had two pair o' socks on over her shoes. Oh, it was cold, now I tell you!

They run the mill part o' that winter—part they couldn't. And they didn't work to say stiddy tel along in Aprile, and then ther' was snow on the ground yit—in the shadders—and the ground froze, so you couldn't hardly dig a grave. But at last they got to kind o' jiggin' along agin. Plenty to do ther' was; and old Ezry was mighty tickled, too; 'peared to recruit right up like. Ezry was allus best tickled when things was a-stirrin', and then he was a-gittin' ready far buildin', you know, wanted a house of his own, he said—and of course it wasn't adzackly like home, all cluttered up as they was there at Bills's. They got along mighty well, though, together; and the women-folks and childern got along the best in the world. Ezry's woman used to say she never laid eyes on jist sich another woman as Annie was. Said it was jist as good as a winter's schoolin'



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far the childern; said her two little girls had learnt to read, and didn't know the'r a-b abs afore Annie learnt 'em; well, the oldest one, Mary Patience, she did know her letters, I guess—fourteen year old, she was; but Mandy, the youngest, had never seed inside a book afore that winter; and the way she learnt was jist su'prisin'. She was puny-like and frail-lookin' allus, but ever'body 'lowed she was a heap smarter 'n Mary Patience, and she was; and in my opinion she raily had more sense 'n all the rest o' the childern put together, 'bout books and cipherin' and arethmetic, and the like; and John Wesley, the oldest of 'em, he got to teachin' at last, when he growed up,—but, la! he couldn't write his own name so 's you could read it. I allus thought ther was a good 'eal of old Ezry in John Wesley. Liked to romance 'round with the youngsters 'most too well.—Spiled him far teachin', I allus thought; far instance, ef a scholard said somepin' funny in school, John-Wes he'd jist have to have his laugh out with the rest, and it was jist fun far the boys, you know, to go to school to him. Allus in far spellin'-matches and the like, and learnin' songs and sich. I ricollect he give a' exhibition onc't, one winter, and I'll never fergit it, I reckon.

The school-house would on'y hold 'bout forty, comfortable, and that night ther' was up'ards of a hunderd er more—jist crammed and jammed! And the benches was piled back so's to make room far the flatfom they'd built to make the'r speeches and dialogues on; and fellers a-settin' up on them back seats, the'r heads was clean aginst the j'ist. It was a low ceilin', anyhow, and o' course them 'at tuck a part in the doin's was way up, too. Janey Thompson had to give up her part in a dialogue, 'cause she looked so tall she was afeard the congergation would laugh at her; and they couldn't git her to come out and sing in the openin' song 'thout lettin' her set down first and git ready 'fore they pulled the curtain. You see, they had sheets sewed together, and fixed on a string some way, to slide back'ards and for'ards, don't you know. But they was a big bother to 'em—couldn't git 'em to work like. Ever' time they'd git 'em slid 'bout half way acrost, somepin' would ketch, and they'd have to stop and fool with 'em awhile 'fore they could git 'em the balance o' the way acrost. Well, finally, t'ords the last, they jist kep' 'em drawed back all the time. It was a pore affair, and spiled purt nigh ever' piece; but the scholards all wanted it fixed thataway, the teacher said, in a few appropert remarks he made when the thing was over. Well, I was a settin' in the back part o' the house on them high benches, and my head was jist even with them on the flatfom, and the lights was pore, wher' the string was stretched far the curtain to slide on it looked like the p'formers was strung on it. And when Lige Boyer's boy was a-speakin'—kind o' mumbled it, you know, and you couldn't half hear—it looked far the world like he was a-chawin' on that-air string; and some devilish feller 'lowed ef he'd chaw it clean in two it'd be a good thing far the balance. After that they all sung a sleigh-ridin' song, and it was right purty, the way they got it off. Had a passel o' sleigh-bells they'd ring ever' onc't-in-a-while, and it sounded purty—shore!



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Then Hunicut's girl, Marindy, read a letter 'bout winter, and what fun the youngsters allus had in winter-time, a-sleighin' and the like, and spellin'-matches, and huskin'-bees, and all. Purty good, it was, and made a feller think o' old times. Well, that was about the best thing ther' was done that night; but ever'body said the teacher wrote it far her; and I wouldn't be su'prised much, far they was married not long afterwards. I expect he wrote it far her.—Wouldn't put it past Wes!

They had a dialogue, too, 'at was purty good. Little Bob Arnold was all fixed up—had on his pap's old bell-crowned hat, the one he was married in. Well, I jist thought die I would when I seed that old hat and called to mind the night his pap was married, and we all got him a little how-come-you-so on some left-handed cider 'at had be'n a-layin' in a whisky-bar'l tel it was strong enough to bear up a' egg. I kin ricollect now jist how he looked in that hat, when it was all new, you know, and a-settin on the back of his head, and his hair in his eyes; and sich hair!—as red as git-out—and his little black eyes a-shinin' like beads. Well sir, you'd a-died to a-seed him a-dancin'. We danced all night that night, and would a-be'n a-dancin' yit, I reckon, ef the fiddler hadn't a-give out. Wash Lowry was a-fiddlin' far us; and along to'rds three or four in the mornin' Wash was purty well fagged out. You see, Wash could never play far a dance er nothin' 'thout a-drinkin' more er less, and when he got to a certain pitch you couldn't git nothin' out o' him but “Barbary Allan;” so at last he struck up on that, and jist kep' it up and kep' it up, and nobody couldn't git nothin' else out of him!

Now, anybody 'at ever danced knows 'at “Barbary Allan” hain't no tune to dance by, no way you can fix it; and, o' course, the boys seed at onc't the'r fun was gone ef they could n't git him on another tune.—And they 'd coax and beg and plead with him, and maybe git him started on “The Wind Blows over the Barley,” and 'bout the time they'd git to knockin' it down agin purty lively, he'd go to sawin' away on “Barbary Allan”—and I'll-be-switched-to-death ef that feller didn't set there and play hisse'f sound asleep on “Barbary Allan,” and we had to wake him up afore he'd quit! Now, that's jes' a plum' facts. And ther' wasn't a better fiddler nowheres than Wash Lowry, when he was at hisse'f. I've heerd a good many fiddlers in my day, and I never heerd one yit 'at could play my style o' fiddlin' ekal to Wash Lowry. You see, Wash didn't play none o' this-here newfangled music—nothin' but the old tunes, you understand, “The Forkéd Deer,” and “Old Fat Gal,” and “Gray Eagle,” and the like. Now, them's music! Used to like to hear Wash play “Gray Eagle.” He could come as nigh a-makin' that old tune talk as ever you heerd! Used to think a heap o' his fiddle—and he had a good one, shore. I've heard him say, time and time agin, 'at a five-dollar gold-piece wouldn't buy it, and



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I knowed him my-se'f to refuse a calf far it onc't—yessir, a yearland calf—and the feller offered him a double-bar'l'd pistol to boot, and blame ef he'd take it; said he'd ruther part with anything else he owned than his fiddle.—But here I am, clean out o' the furry agin. Oh, yes; I was a-tellin' about little Bob, with that old hat; and he had on a swaller-tail coat and a lot o' fixin's, a-actin' like he was 'squire; and he had him a great long beard made out o' corn-silks, and you wouldn't a-knowed him ef it wasn't far his voice. Well, he was a-p'tendin' he was a 'squire a-tryin' some kind o' law-suit, you see; and John Wesley he was the defendunt, and Joney Wiles, I believe it was, played like he was the plaintive. And they'd had a fallin' out 'bout some land, and was a-lawin' far p'session, you understand. Well, Bob he made out it was a mighty bad case when John-Wes comes to consult him about it, and tells *him* ef a little p'int o' law was left out he thought he could git the land far him. And then John-Wes bribes him, you understand, to leave out the p'int o' law, and the 'squire says he'll do all he kin, and so John-Wes goes out a feelin' purty good. Then *Wiles* comes in to consult the 'squire don't you see. And the 'squire tells *him* the same tale he told *John Wesley*. So *Wiles* bribes him to leave out the p'int o' law in *his* favor, don't you know. So when the case is tried he decides in favor o' John-Wes, a-tellin' Wiles some cock-and-bull story 'bout havin' to manage it thataway so 's to git the case mixed so's he could git it far him shore; and posts him to sue far change of venue er somepin',—anyway, Wiles gits a new trial, and then the 'squire decides in *his* favor, and tells John-Wes another trial will fix it in *his* favor, and so on.—And so it goes on tel, anyway, he gits holt o' the land hisse'f and all ther money besides, and leaves them to hold the bag! Wellsir, it was purty well got up; and they said it was John-Wes's doin's, and I 'low it was—he was a good hand at anything o' that sort, and knowed how to make fun.—But I've be'n a tellin' you purty much ever'thing but what I started out with, and I'll try and hurry through, 'cause I know you're tired.

'Long 'bout the beginin' o' summer, things had got back to purty much the old way. The boys round was a-gittin' devilish, and o' nights 'specially ther' was a sight o' meanness a-goin' on. The mill-hands, most o' em, was mixed up in it—Coke and Morris, and them 'at had jined meetin' 'long in the winter, had all backslid, and was a-drinkin' and carousin' 'round worse 'n ever.

People perdicted 'at Bills would backslide, but he helt on faithful, to all appearance; said he liked to see a feller when he made up his mind to do right, he liked to see him do it, and not go back on his word; and even went so far as to tell Ezry ef they didn't put a stop to it he'd quit the neighborhood and go some'rs else. And Bills was Ezry's head man then, and he couldn't a-got along 'thout him; and I b'lieve ef Bills had a-said the word old Ezry would a-turned off ever' hand he had. He got so he jist left ever'thing to Bills. Ben Carter was turned off far somepin', and nobody ever knowed what. Bills and him had never got along jist right sence the fight.



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Ben was with this set I was a-tellin' you 'bout, and they'd got him to drinkin' and in trouble, o' course. I'd knowed Ben well enough to know he wouldn't do nothin' onry ef he wasn't agged on, and ef he ever was mixed up in anything o' the kind Wes Morris and John Coke was at the bottom of it, and I take notice they wasn't turned off when Ben was.

One night the crowd was out, and Ben amongst 'em, o' course.—Sence he'd be'n turned off he'd be'n a-drinkin',—and I never blamed him much; he was so good-hearted like and easy led off, and I allus b'lieved it wasn't his own doin's.

Well, this night they cut up awful, and ef ther was one fight ther was a dozend; and when all the devilment was done they *could* do, they started on a stealin' expedition, and stold a lot o' chickens and tuck 'em to the mill to roast'em; and, to make a long story short, that night the mill burnt clean to the ground. And the whole pack of 'em cologued together against Carter to saddle it onto him; claimed 'at they left Ben there at the mill 'bout twelve o'clock—which was a fact, far he was dead drunk and couldn't git away. Steve stumbled over him while the mill was a-burnin' and drug him out afore he knowed what was a-goin' on, and it was all plain enough to Steve 'at Ben didn't have no hand in the firm' of it. But I'll tell you he sobered up mighty suddent when he seed what was a-goin' on, and heerd the neighbors a-hollerin', and a-threatenin', and a-goin' on!—far it seemed to be the ginerl idee 'at the buildin' was fired a-purpose. And says Ben to Steve, says he, "I expect I'll have to say good-bye to you, far they've got me in a ticklish place! I kin see through it all now, when it's too late!" And jist then Wesley Morris hollers out, "Where's Ben Carter?" and started to'rds where me and Ben and Steve was a-standin'; and Ben says, wild like, "Don't you two fellers ever think it was my doin's," and whispers "Good-bye," and started off, and when we turned, Wesley Morris was a-layin' flat of his back, and we heerd Carter yell to the crowd 'at "that man"—meanin' Morris—"needed lookin' after worse than *he* did," and another minute he plunged into the river and swum acrost; and we all stood and watched him in the flickerin' light tel he clum out on t'other bank; and 'at was last anybody ever seed o' Ben Carter!

It must a-be'n about three o'clock in the mornin' by this time, and the mill then was jist a-smoulderin' to ashes—far it was as dry as tinder and burnt like a flash—and jist as a party was a-talkin' o' organizin' and follerin' Carter, we heerd a yell 'at I'll never fergit ef I'd live tel another flood. Old Ezry, it was, as white as a corpse, and with the blood a-streamin' out of a gash in his forehead, and his clothes half on, come a-rushin' into the crowd and a-hollerin' fire and murder ever' jump. "My house is a-burnin', and my folks is all a-bein' murdered while you 're a-standin' here! And Bills done it! Bills done it!" he hollered, as he



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headed the crowd and started back far home. “Bills done it! I caught him at it; and he would a-murdered me in cold blood ef it had n’t a-be’n far his woman. He knocked me down, and had me tied to a bed-post in the kitchen afore I come to. And his woman cut me loose and told me to run far he’p; and says I, ‘Where’s Bills?’ and she says, ‘He’s after me by this time.’ And jist then we heerd Bills holler, and we looked, and he was a-standin’ out in the clearin’ in front o’ the house, with little Annie in his arms; and he hollered wouldn’t she like to kiss the baby good-bye.”

“And she hollered My God! far me to save little Annie, and fainted clean dead away. And I heerd the roof a-crackin’, and grabbed her up and packed her out jist in time. And when I looked up, Bills hollered out agin, and says, ‘Ezry,’ he says, ‘You kin begin to kind a’ git an idee o’ what a good feller I am! And ef you hadn’t a-caught me you ’d a-never a-knowed it, and ‘Brother Williams’ wouldn’t a-be’n called away to another app’intment like he is.’ And says he, ‘Now, ef you foller me I’ll finish you shore!—You’re safe now, far I hain’t got time to waste on you further.’ And jist then his woman kind o’ come to her senses agin and hollered far little Annie, and the child heerd her and helt out its little arms to go to her, and hollered ‘Mother! Mother!’ And Bills says, ‘Dam your mother! ef it hadn’t a-be’n far *her* I’d a-be’n all right. And dam you too!’ he says to me, —‘This’ll pay you far that lick you struck me; and far you a-startin’ reports when I first come ’at more ’n likely I’d done somepin’ mean over east and come out west to reform! And I wonder ef I *didn’t* do somepin’ mean afore I come here?’ he went on; ‘kill somebody er somepin’? And I wonder ef I ain’t reformed enough to go back? Good-bye, Annie!’ he hollered; ‘and you needn’t fret about your baby, I ’ll be the same indulgent father to it I ’ve allus be’n!’ And the baby was a-cryin’ and a-reachin’ out its little arms to’rds its mother, when Bills he turned and struck off’ in the dark to’rds the river.”

This was about the tale ’at Ezry told us, as nigh as I can ricollect, and by the time he finished, I never want to see jist sich another crowd o’ men as was a-swarmin’ there. Ain’t it awful when sich a crowd gits together? I tell you it makes my flesh creep to think about it!

As Bills had gone in the direction of the river, we wasn’t long in makin’ our minds up ’at he’d have to cross it, and ef he done *that* he’d have to use the boat ’at was down below the mill, er wade it at the ford, a mild er more down. So we divided in three sections, like—one to go and look after the folks at the house, and another to the boat, and another to the ford. And Steve and me and Ezry was in the crowd ’at struck far the boat, and we made time a-gittin’ there! It was awful dark, and the sky was a-cloudin’ up like a storm; but we wasn’t long a-gittin’ to the p’int where the boat was allus tied; but



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ther' wasn't no boat there! Steve kind o' tuck the lead, and we all talked in whispers. And Steve said to kind o' lay low and maybe we could hear somepin', and some feller said he thought he heerd somepin' strange like, but the wind was kind o' raisin' and kep' up sich a moanin' through the trees along the bank 't we couldn't make out nothin'.

"Listen!" says Steve, suddent like, "I hear somepin!" We was all still again—and we all heerd a moanin' 'at was sadder 'n the wind—sounded mournfuller to me 'cause I knowed it in a minute, and I whispered, "Little Annie." And 'way out acrost the river we could hear the little thing a-sobbin', and we all was still 's death; and we heerd a voice we knowd was Bills's say, "Dam ye! Keep still, or I'll drownd ye!" And the wind kind o' moaned agin and we could hear the trees a-screechin' together in the dark, and the leaves a-rustlin'; and when it kind o' lulled agin, we heerd Bills make a kind o' splash with the oars; and jist then Steve whispered far to lay low and be ready—he was a-goin' to riconnitre; and he tuck his coat and shoes off, and slid over the bank and down into the worter as slick as a' eel. Then ever'thing was still agin, 'cept the moanin' o' the child, which kep' a-gittin' louder and louder; and then a voice whispered to us, "He's a-comin' back; the crowd below has sent scouts up, and they're on t' other side. Now watch clos't, and he's our meat." We could hear Bills, by the moanin' o' the baby, a-comin' nearer and nearer, tel suddently he made a sort o' miss-lick with the oar, I reckon, and must a splashed the baby, far she set up a loud cryin'; and jist then old Ezry, who was a-leanin' over the bank, kind o' lost his grip some way o' nuther, and fell kersplash in the worter like a' old chunk. "Hello!" says Bills, through the dark, "you're there, too, air ye?" as old Ezry splashed up the bank agin. And "Cuss you!" he says then, to the baby—"ef it hadn't be'n far your infernal squawkin' I'd a-be'n all right; but you've brought the whole neighborhood out, and, dam you, I'll jist let you swim out to 'em!" And we heerd a splash, then a kind o' gurglin', and then Steve's voice a-hollerin', "Close in on him, boys; I've got the baby!" And about a dozend of us bobbed off the bank like so many bull-frogs, and I'll tell you the worter b'iled! We could jist make out the shape o' the boat, and Bills a-standin' with a' oar drawn back to smash the first head 'at come in range. It was a mean place to git at him. We knowed he was despert, and far a minute we kind o' helt back. Fifteen foot o' worter 's a mighty onhandy place to git hit over the head in! And Bills says, "You hain't afeard, I reckon—twenty men agin one!" "You'd better give your se'f up!" hollered Ezry from the shore. "No, Brother Sturgiss," says Bills, "I can't say 'at I'm at all anxious 'bout bein' borned agin, jist yit awhile," he says; "I see you kind o' 'pear to go in far babtism; guess you'd better go home and git some dry clothes



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on; and, speakin' o' home, you'd ort 'o be there by all means—your house might catch afire and burn up while you're gone!" And jist then the boat give a suddent shove under him—some feller'd div under and tilted it—and far a minute it throwed him off his guard and the boys closed in. Still he had the advantage, bein' in the boat, and as fast as a feller would climb in he'd git a whack o' the oar, tel finally they got to pilin' in a little too fast far him to manage, and he hollered then 'at we'd have to come to the bottom ef we got him, and with that he div out o' the end o' the boat, and we lost sight of him; and I'll be blame ef he didn't give us the slip after all.

Wellsir, we watched far him, and some o' the boys swum on down stream, expectin' he'd raise, but couldn't find hide ner hair of him; so we left the boat a-driftin' off down stream and swum ashore, a-thinkin' he'd jist drownded hisse'f a-purpose. But ther' was more su'prise waitin' far us yit,—for lo-and-behold-you, when we got ashore ther' wasn't no trace o' Steve er the baby to be found. Ezry said he seed Steve when he fetched little Annie ashore, and she was all right on'y she was purt nigh past cryin'; and he said Steve had lapped his coat around her and give her to him to take charge of, and he got so excited over the fight he laid her down betwixt a couple o' logs and kind o' forget about her tel the thing was over, and he went to look far her, and she was gone. Couldn't a-be'n 'at she'd a-wundered off her-own-se'f; and it couldn't a-be'n 'at Steve'd take her, 'thout a-lettin us know it. It was a mighty aggervatin' conclusion to come to, but we had to do it, and that was, Bills must a got ashore unbeknownst to us and packed her off. Sich a thing wasn't hardly probable, yit it was a thing 'at might be; and after a-talkin' it over we had to admit 'at it must a-be'n the way of it. But where was Steve? W'y, we argied, he'd discivvered she was gone, and had put out on track of her 'thout losin' time to stop and explain the thing. The next question was, what did Bills want with her agin? He'd tried to drownd her onc't. We could ast questions enough, but c'rect answers was mighty skearce, and we jist concluded 'at the best thing to do was to put out far the ford, far that was the nighest place Bills could cross 'thout a boat, and ef it was him tuck the child he was still on our side o' the river, o' course. So we struck out far the ford, a-leav-in' a couple o' men to search up the river. A drizzlin' sort o' rain had set in by this time, and with that and the darkness and the moanin' of the wind, it made 'bout as lonesome a prospect as a feller ever wants to go through agin.



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It was jist a-gittin' a little gray-like in the mornin' by the time we reached the ford, but you couldn't hardly see two rods afore you far the mist and the fog 'at had settled along the river. We looked far tracks, but couldn't make out nuthin'. Thereckly old Ezry punched me and p'inted out acrost the river. "What's that?" he whispers. Jist 'bout half way acrost was somepin' white-like in the worter—couldn't make out what—perfectly still it was. And I whispered back and told him I guess it wasn't nothin' but a sycamore snag. "Listen!" says he; "Sycamore snags don't make no noise like that!" And, shore enough, it was the same moanin' noise we'd heerd the baby makin' when we first got on the track. Sobbin' she was, as though nigh about dead. "Well, ef that's Bills," says I—"and I reckon ther' hain't no doubt but it is—what in the name o' all that's good and bad's the feller a-standin' there far?" And a-creep-in' clos'ter, we could make him out plainer and plainer. It was him; and there he stood breast-high in the worter, a-holdin' the baby on his shoulder like, and a lookin' up stream, and a-waitin'.

"What do you make out of it?" says Ezry. "What's he waitin' far?"

And a strainin' my eyes in the direction he was a-lookin' I seed somepin' a-movin' down the river, and a minute later I'd made out the old boat a-driftin' down stream; and then of course ever'thing was plain enough: He was waitin' far the boat, and ef he got *that* he'd have the same advantage on us he had afore.

"Boys," says I, "he mustn't git that boat agin! Foller me, and don't let him git to the shore alive." And in we plunged. He seed us, but he never budged, on'y to grab the baby by its little legs, and swing it out at arms-len'th. "Stop, there," he hollered. "Stop jist where you air! Move another inch and I'll drownd this dam young-un afore your eyes!" he says.—And he 'd a done it. "Boys," says I, "he's got us. Don't move! This thing'll have to rest with a higher power 'n our 'n! Ef any of you kin pray," says I, "now's a good time to do it!"

Jist then the boat swung up, and Bills grabbed it and rech 'round and set the baby in it, never a-takin' his eye off o' us, though, far a minute. "Now," says he, with a sort o' snarlin' laugh, "I've on'y got a little while to stay with you, and I want to say a few words afore I go. I want to tell you fellers, in the first place, 'at you've be'n *fooled* in me: I *hain't* a good feller, now, honest! And ef you're a little the worse far findin' it out so late in the day, you hain't none the worse far losin' me so soon—far I'm a-goin' away now, and any interference with my arrangements 'll on'y give you more trouble; so it's better all around to let me go peaceable and jist while I'm in the notion. I expect it'll be a disapp'intment to some o' you that my name hain't 'Williams,' but it hain't. And maybe you won't think nigh as much o' me when I tell you funder



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'at I was obleeged to 'dopt the name o' 'Williams' onc't to keep from bein' strung up to a lamp-post, but sich is the facts. I was so extremely unfortunit onc't as to kill a p'ticular friend o' mine, and he forgive me with his dyin' breath, and told me to run while I could, and be a better man. But he'd spotted me with a' ugly mark 'at made it kind o' onhandy to git away, but I did at last; and jist as I was a-gittin' reformed-like, you fellers had to kick in the traces, and I've made up my mind to hunt out a more moraler community, where they don't make sich a fuss about trifles. And havin' nothin' more to say, on'y to send Annie word 'at I'll still be a father to her youngun here, I'll bid you all good-bye." And with that he turned and clum in the boat—or ruther fell in,—far somepin' black-like had riz up in it, with a' awful lick—my—God!—and, a minute later, boat and baggage was a-gratin' on the shore, and a crowd come thrashin' 'crosst from tother side to jine us, and 'peared like wasn't a *second* longer tel a feller was a-swingin' by his neck to the limb of a scrub-oak, his feet clean off the ground, and his legs a-jerkin' up and down like a limber-jack's.

And Steve it was a-layin' in the boat, and he'd rid a mild or more 'thout knowin' of it. Bills had struck and stunt him as he clum in while the rumpus was a-goin' on, and he'd on'y come to in time to hear Bills's farewell address to us there at the ford.

Steve tuck charge o' little Annie agin, and ef she'd a-be'n his own child he wouldn't a-went on more over her than he did; and said nobody but her mother would git her out o' his hands agin. And he was as good as his word; and ef you could a-seed him a half hour after that, when he *did* give her to her mother—all lapped up in his coat and as drippin'-wet as a little drownded angel—it would a-made you wish't you was him to see that little woman a caperin' round him, and a-thankin' him, and a-cryin' and a-laughin', and almost a-huggin' him, she was so tickled,—Well, I thought in my soul she'd die! And Steve blushed like a girl to see her a-taking' on, and a-thankin' him, and a-cryin', and a-kissin' little Annie, and a-goin' on. And when she inquired 'bout Bills, which she did all suddent like, with a burst o' tears, we jist didn't have the heart to tell her—on'y we said he'd crossed the river and got away. And he had!

And now comes a part o' this thing 'at 'll more 'n like tax you to believe it: Williams and her wasn't man and wife—and you needn't look su'prised, nuther, and I'll tell you far why—They was own brother and sister; and that brings me to *her* part of the story, which you'll have to admit beats anything 'at you ever read about in books.

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Her and Williams—that *wasn't* his name, like he acknowledged, hisse'f, you ricollect—ner she didn't want to tell his right name; and we forgive her far that. Her and 'Williams' was own brother and sister, and the'r parents lived in Ohio some'ers. The'r mother had be'n dead five year' and better—grieved to death over her onnachurl brother's recklessness, which Annie hinted had broke her father up in some way, in tryin' to shield him from the law. And the secret of her bein' with him was this: She had married a man o' the name of Curtis or Custer, I don't mind which, adzackly—but no matter; she'd married a well-to-do young feller 'at her brother helt a' old grudge agin, she never knowed what; and sence her marriage her brother had went on from bad to worse tel finally her father jist give him up and told him to go it his own way—he'd killed his mother and ruined him, and he'd jist give up all hopes. But Annie—you know how a sister is—she still clung to him and done ever'thing far him, tel finally, one night about three years after she was married she got word some way that he was in trouble agin, and sent her husband to he'p him; and a half hour after he'd gone, her brother come in, all excited and bloody, and told her to git the baby and come with him, 'at her husband had got in a quarrel with a friend o' his and was bad hurt. And she went with him, of course, and he tuck her in a buggy, and lit out with her as tight as he could go all night; and then told her 'at *he* was the feller 'at had quarreled with her husband, and the officers was after him and he was obleeged to leave the country, and far fear he hadn't made shore work o' him, he was a-takin' her along to make shore of his gittin' his revenge; and he swore he'd kill her and the baby too ef she dared to whimper. And so it was, through a hunderd hardships he'd made his way at last to our section o' the country, givin' out 'at they was man and wife, and keepin' her from denyin' of it by threats, and promises of the time a-comin' when he'd send her home to her man agin in case he hadn't killed him. And so it run on tel you'd a-cried to hear her tell it, and still see her sister's love far the feller a-breakin' out by a-declarin' how kind he was to her *at times*, and how he wasn't raily bad at heart, on'y far his ungov'nable temper. But I couldn't he'p but notice, when she was a tellin' of her hist'ry, what a quiet sort o' look o' satisfaction settled on the face o' Steve and the rest of 'em, don't you understand.

And now ther' was on'y one thing she wanted to ast, she said; and that was, could she still make her home with us tel she could git word to her friends?—and there she broke down agin, not knowin', of course, whether *they* was dead er alive; far time and time agin she said somepin' told her she'd never see her husband agin on this airth; and then the women-folks would cry with her and console her, and the boys would speak hopeful—all but Steve; some way o' nuther Steve was never like hisse'f from that time on.



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And so things went far a month and better. Ever'thing had quieted down, and Ezry and a lot o' hands, and me and Steve amongst 'em, was a-workin' on the frame-work of another mill. It was purty weather, and we was all in good sperits, and it 'peared like the whole neighborhood was interested—and they \_-was\_, too—women-folks and ever'body. And that day Ezry's woman and amongst 'em was a-gittin' up a big dinner to fetch down to us from the house; and along about noon a spruce-lookin' young feller, with a pale face and a black beard, like, come a-ridin' by and hitched his hoss, and comin' into the crowd, said "Howdy," pleasant like, and we all stopped work as he went on to say 'at he was on the track of a feller o' the name o' 'Williams,' and wanted to know ef we could give him any infermation 'bout sich a man. Told him maybe,—'at a feller bearin' that name desappeared kind o' myster'ous from our neighborhood 'bout five weeks afore that. "My God!" says he, a-turnin' paler'n ever, "am I too late? Where did he go, and was his sister and her baby with him?" Jist then I ketched sight o' the women-folks a-comin' with the baskets, and Annie with 'em, with a jug o' worter in her hand; so I spoke up quick to the stranger, and says I, "I guess 'his sister and baby' wasn't along," says I, "but his *wife* and *baby*'s some'eres here in the neighborhood yit." And then a-watchin' him clos't, I says, suddent, a-pin'tin' over his shoulder, "There his woman is now—that one with the jug, there." Well, Annie had jist stooped to lift up one o' the little girls, when the feller turned, and the'r eyes met, "Annie! My wife!" he says; and Annie she kind o' give a little yelp like and come a-flutterin' down in his arms; and the jug o' worter rolled clean acrost the road, and turned a somerset and knocked the cob out of its mouth and jist laid back and hollered "Good—good—good—good—good!" like as ef it knowed what was up and was jist as glad and tickled as the rest of us.

## SWEET-KNOT AND GALAMUS

### AN OLD SWEETHEART.

As one who cons at evening o'er an album all alone,  
And muses on the faces of the friends that he has known,  
So I turn the leaves of fancy till, in shadowy design,  
I find the smiling features of an old sweetheart of mine.

The lamplight seems to glimmer with a flicker of surprise,  
As I turn it low to rest me of the dazzle in my eyes,  
And light my pipe in silence, save a sigh that seems to yoke  
Its fate with my tobacco and to vanish with the smoke.

'Tis a fragrant retrospection—for the loving thoughts that start  
Into being are like perfumes from the blossom of the heart;  
And to dream the old dreams over is a luxury divine—  
When my truant fancy wanders with that old sweetheart of mine.



Though I hear, beneath my study, like a fluttering of wings,  
The voices of my children, and the mother as she sings,  
I feel no twinge of conscience to deny me any theme  
When care has cast her anchor in the harbor of a dream



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In fact, to speak in earnest, I believe it adds a charm  
To spice the good a trifle with a little dust of harm—  
For I find an extra flavor in Memory's mellow wine  
That makes me drink the deeper to that old sweetheart of mine.

A face of lily-beauty, with a form of airy grace,  
Floats out of my tobacco as the genii from the vase;  
And I thrill beneath the glances of a pair of azure eyes  
As glowing as the summer and as tender as the skies.

I can see the pink sunbonnet and the little checkered dress  
She wore when first I kissed her and she answered the caress  
With the written declaration that, "as surely as the vine  
Grew 'round the stump," she loved me—that old sweetheart of mine.

And again I feel the pressure of her slender little hand,  
As we used to talk together of the future we had planned—  
When I should be a poet, and with nothing else to do  
But write the tender verses that she set the music to:

When we should live together in a cozy little cot  
Hid in a nest of roses, with a fairy garden-spot,  
Where the vines were ever fruited, and the weather ever fine,  
And the birds were ever singing for that old sweetheart of mine:

When I should be her lover forever and a day,  
And she my faithful sweetheart till the golden hair was gray;  
And we should be so happy that when either's lips were dumb  
They would not smile in Heaven till the other's kiss had come.

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But, ah! my dream is broken by a step upon the stair,  
And the door is softly opened, and—my wife is standing there;  
Yet with eagerness and rapture all my visions I resign  
To greet the living presence of that old sweetheart of mine.

### MARTHY ELLEN.

They's nothin' in the name to strike  
A feller more'n common like!  
'Taint liable to git no praise  
Ner nothin' like it nowadays;  
An' yit that name o' her'n is jest



As purty as the purtiest—  
And more 'n that, I'm here to say  
I'll live a-thinkin' thataway  
    And die far Marthy Ellen!

It may be I was prejudust  
In favor of it from the fust—  
'Cause I kin ricollect jest how  
We met, and hear her mother now  
A-callin' of her down the road—  
And, aggervatin' little toad!—  
I see her now, jes' sort o' half-  
Way disapp'inted, turn and laugh  
    And mock her—"Marthy Ellen!"

Our people never had no fuss,  
And yit they never tuck to us;  
We neighbored back and foreds some;  
Until they see she liked to come  
To our house—and me and her  
Were jest together ever'whur  
And all the time—and when they'd see  
That I liked her and she liked me,  
They'd holler "Marthy Ellen!"



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When we growed up, and they shet down  
On me and her a-runnin' roun'  
Together, and her father said  
He'd never leave her nary red,  
So he'p him, ef she married me,  
And so on—and her mother she  
Jest agged the gyrl, and said she 'lowed  
She'd ruther see her in her shroud,  
I writ to Marthy Ellen—

That is, I kindo' tuck my pen  
In hand, and stated whur and when  
The undersigned would be that night,  
With two good hosses saddled right  
Far lively travelin' in case  
Her folks 'ud like to jine the race.  
She sent the same note back, and writ  
"The rose is red!" right under it—  
"Your 'n allus, Marthy Ellen."

That's all, I reckon—Nothin' more  
To tell but what you've heerd afore—  
The same old story, sweeter though  
Far all the trouble, don't you know.  
Old-fashioned name! and yit it's jest  
As purty as the purtiest;  
And more 'n that, I'm here to say  
I'll live a-thinking thataway,  
And die far Marthy Ellen!

### MOON-DROWNED.

'Twas the height of the fete when we quitted the riot,  
And quietly stole to the terrace alone,  
Where, pale as the lovers that ever swear by it,  
The moon it *gazed down as a god from his throne.*  
*We stood there enchanted.—And O the delight of*  
*The sight of the stars and the moon and the sea,*  
*And the infinite skies of that opulent night of*  
*Purple and gold and ivory!*

The lisp of the lip of the ripple just under—  
The half-awake nightingale's dream in the yews—  
Came up from the water, and down from the wonder



Of shadowy foliage, drowsed with the dews,—  
Unsteady the firefly's taper—unsteady  
The poise of the stars, and their light in the tide,  
As it struggled and writhed in caress of the eddy,  
As love in the billowy breast of a bride.

The far-away lilt of the waltz rippled to us,  
And through us the exquisite thrill of the air:  
Like the scent of bruised bloom was her breath, and its dew was  
Not honier-sweet than her warm kisses were.  
We stood there enchanted.—And O the delight of  
The sight of the stars and the moon and the sea,  
And the infinite skies of that opulent night of  
Purple and gold and ivory!

## LONG AFORE HE KNOWED WHO SANTY-CLAUS WUZ.

Jes' a little bit o' feller—I remember still,—  
Ust to almost *cry* far Christmas, like a youngster will.  
Fourth o' July's nothin' to it!—New-Year's ain't a smell:  
Easter-Sunday—Circus-day—jes' all dead in the shell!  
Lordy, though! at night, you know, to set around and hear  
The old folks work the story off about the sledge and deer,  
And "Santy" skootin' round the roof, all wrapped in fur and fuzz—  
Long afore  
I knowed who  
"Santy-Claus" wuz!



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Ust to wait, and set up late, a week er two ahead:  
Couldn't hardly keep awake, ner wouldn't go to bed:  
Kittle stewin' on the fire, and Mother settin' here  
Darnin' socks, and rockin' in the skreeky rockin'-cheer;  
Pap gap', and wunder where it wuz the money went,  
And quar'l with his frosted heels, and spill his liniment:  
And me a-dreamin' sleigh-bells when the clock 'ud whir and buzz,  
Long afore  
I knowed who  
"Santy-Claus" wuz!

Size the fire-place up, and figger how "Old Santy" could  
Manage to come down the chimbly, like they said he would:  
Wisht that I could hide and see him—wundered what he 'd say  
Ef he ketched a feller layin' far him thataway!  
But I *bet* on him, and *liked* him, same as ef he had  
Turned to pat me on the back and say, "Look here, my lad,  
Here's my pack,—jes' he'p yourse'f, like all good boys does!"  
Long afore  
I knowed who  
"Santy-Claus" wuz!

Wisht that yarn was *true* about him, as it 'peared to be—  
Truth made out o' lies like that-un's good enough far me!—  
Wisht I still wuz so confidin' I could jes' go wild  
Over hangin' up my stockin's, like the little child  
Climbin' in my lap to-night, and beggin' me to tell  
'Bout them reindeers, and "Old Santy" that she loves so well  
I'm half sorry far this little-girl-sweetheart of his—  
Long afore  
She knows who  
"Santy-Claus" is!

### DEAR HANDS.

The touches of her hands are like the fall  
Of velvet snowflakes; like the touch of down  
The peach just brushes 'gainst the garden wall;  
The flossy fondlings of the thistle-wisp  
Caught in the crinkle of a leaf of brown  
The blighting frost hath turned from green to crisp.

Soft as the falling of the dusk at night,  
The touches of her hands, and the delight—



The touches of her hands!  
The touches of her hands are like the dew  
That falls so softly down no one e'er knew  
The touch thereof save lovers like to one  
Astray in lights where ranged Endymion.

O rarely soft, the touches of her hands,  
As drowsy zephyrs in enchanted lands;  
Or pulse of dying fay; or fairy sighs,  
Or—in between the midnight and the dawn,  
When long unrest and tears and fears are gone—  
Sleep, smoothing down the lids of weary eyes.

## **THIS MAN JONES.**

This man Jones was what you'd call  
A feller 'at had no sand at all;  
Kind o' consumed, and undersize,  
And sailor-complected, with big sad eyes,  
And a kind-of-a sort-of-a hang-dog style,  
And a sneakin' sort-of-a half-way smile  
'At kind o' give him away to us  
As a preacher, maybe, er somepin' wuss.

Didn't take with the gang—well, no—  
But still we managed to use him, though,—  
Coddin' the gilly along the rout',  
And drivin' the stakes 'at he pulled out—  
Far I was one of the bosses then,  
And of course stood in with the canvasmen;  
And the way we put up jobs, you know,  
On this man Jones jes' beat the show!



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Ust to rattle him scandalous,  
And keep the feller a-dodgin' us,  
And a-shyin' round half skeered to death,  
And afeerd to whimper above his breath;  
Give him a cussin', and then a kick,  
And then a kind-of-a back-hand lick—  
Jes' far the fun of seem' him climb  
Around with a head on most the time.

But what was the curious thing to me,  
Was along o' the party—let me see,—  
Who was our “Lion Queen” last year?—  
Mamzelle Zanty, or De La Pierre?—  
Well, no matter—a stunnin' mash,  
With a red-ripe lip, and a long eye-lash,  
And a figger sich as the angels owns—  
And one too many far this man Jones.

He'd allus wake in the afternoon,  
As the band waltzed in on the lion-tune,  
And there, from the time 'at she'd go in  
Till she'd back out of the cage agin,  
He'd stand, shaky and limber-kneed—  
'Specially when she come to “feed  
The beasts raw meat with her naked hand”—  
And all that business, you understand.

And it was resky in that den—  
Far I think she juggled three cubs then,  
And a big “green” lion 'at used to smash  
Collar-bones far old Frank Nash;  
And I reckon now she hain't fergot  
The afternoon old “Nero” sot  
His paws on *her!*—but as far me,  
It's a sort-of-a mixed-up mystery:—

Kind o' remember an awful roar, And see her back far the bolted door— See the cage  
rock—heerd her call “God have mercy!” and that was all— Far they ain't no livin' man  
can tell *What* it's like when a thousand yell In female tones, and a thousand more Howl  
in bass till their throats is sore!

But the keeper said 'at dragged her out,  
They heerd some feller laugh and shout—  
“Save her! Quick! I've got the cuss!”



And yit she waked and smiled on *us!*  
And we daren't flinch, far the doctor said,  
Seein' as this man Jones was dead,  
Better to jes' not let her know  
Nothin' o' that far a week er so.

**TO MY GOOD MASTER.**

In fancy, always, at thy desk, thrown wide,  
Thy most betreasured books ranged neighborly—  
The rarest rhymes of every land and sea  
And curious tongue—thine old face glorified,—  
Thou haltest thy glib quill, and, laughing-eyed,  
Givest hale welcome even unto me,  
Profaning thus thine attic's sanctity,  
To briefly visit, yet to still abide  
Enthralled there of thy sorcery of wit,  
And thy songs' most exceeding dear conceits.  
O lips, cleft to the ripe core of all sweets,  
With poems, like nectar, issuing therefrom,  
Thy gentle utterances do overcome  
My listening heart and all the love of it!

**WHEN THE GREEN GITS BACK IN THE TREES.**



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In spring, when the green gits back in the trees,  
And the sun comes out and stays,  
And yer boots pulls on with a good tight squeeze,  
And you think of yer barefoot days;  
When you ort to work and you want to not,  
And you and yer wife agrees  
It's time to spade up the garden lot,  
When the green gits back in the trees—  
Well! work is the least o' *my* idees  
When the green, you know, gits back in the trees!

When the green gits back in the trees, and bees  
Is a-buzzin' aroun' agin,  
In that kind of a lazy go-as-you-please  
Old gait they bum roun' in;  
When the groun's all bald where the hay-rick stood,  
And the crick 's riz, and the breeze  
Coaxes the bloom in the old dogwood,  
And the green gits back in the trees,—  
I like, as I say, in sich scenes as these,  
The time when the green gits back in the trees!

When the whole tail-feathers o' wintertime  
Is all pulled out and gone!  
And the sap it thaws and begins to climb,  
And the sweat it starts out on  
A feller's forred, a-gittin' down  
At the old spring on his knees—  
I kind o' like jes' a-loaferin' roun'  
When the green gits back in the trees—  
Jes' a-potterin' roun' as I—durn—please—  
When the green, you know, gits back in the trees!

### AT BROAD RIPPLE.

Ah, Luxury! Beyond the heat And dust of town, with dangling feet, Astride the rock below the dam, In the cool shadows where the calm Rests on the stream again, and all Is silent save the waterfall,— bait my hook and cast my line, And feel the best of life is mine.No high ambition may I claim— angle not for lordly game Of trout, or bass, or wary bream— black perch reaches the extreme Of my desires; and “goggle-eyes” Are not a thing that I despise; A sunfish, or a “chub,” or “cat”— A “silver-side”—yea, even that!

In eloquent tranquility  
The waters lisp and talk to me.



Sometimes, far out, the surface breaks,  
As some proud bass an instant shakes  
His glittering armor in the sun,  
And romping ripples, one by one,  
Come dallying across the space  
Where undulates my smiling face.

The river's story flowing by,  
Forever sweet to ear and eye,  
Forever tenderly begun—  
Forever new and never done.  
Thus lulled and sheltered in a shade  
Where never feverish cares invade,  
I bait my hook and cast my line,  
And feel the best of life is mine.

## **WHEN OLD JACK DIED.**

**I.**



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When old Jack died, we staid from school (they said,  
At home, we needn't go that day), and none  
Of us ate any breakfast—only one,  
And that was Papa—and his eyes were red  
When he came round where we were, by the shed  
Where Jack was lying, half way in the sun  
And half way in the shade. When we begun  
To cry out loud, Pa turned and dropped his head  
And went away; and Mamma, she went back  
Into the kitchen. Then, for a long while,  
All to ourselves, like, we stood there and cried.  
We thought so many good things of Old Jack,  
And funny things—although we didn't smile—We  
couldn't only cry when Old Jack died.

### II.

When Old Jack died, it seemed a human friend  
Had suddenly gone from us; that some face  
That we had loved to fondle and embrace  
From babyhood, no more would condescend  
To smile on us forever. We might bend  
With tearful eyes above him, interlace  
Our chubby fingers o'er him, romp and race,  
Plead with him, call and coax—aye, we might send  
The old halloo up for him, whistle, hist,  
(If sobs had let us) or, as wildly vain,  
Snapped thumbs, called "speak," and he had not replied;  
We might have gone down on our knees and kissed  
The tousled ears, and yet they must remain  
Deaf, motionless, we knew—when Old Jack died.

### III.

When Old Jack died, it seemed to us, some way,  
That all the other dogs in town were pained  
With our bereavement, and some that were chained,  
Even, unslipped their collars on that day  
To visit Jack in state, as though to pay  
A last, sad tribute there, while neighbors craned  
Their heads above the high board fence, and deigned  
To sigh "Poor dog!" remembering how they



Had cuffed him, when alive, perchance, because,  
For love of them he leaped to lick their hands—  
Now, that he could not, were they satisfied?  
We children thought that, as we crossed his paws,  
And o'er his grave, 'way down the bottom-lands,  
Wrote "Our First Love Lies Here," when Old Jack died.

### DOC SIFERS.

Of all the doctors I could cite you to in this-'ere town  
Doc Sifers is my favorite, jes' take him up and down!  
Count in the Bethel Neighborhood, and Rollins, and Big Bear,  
And Sifers' standin's jes' as good as ary doctor's there!

There's old Doc Wick, and Glenn, and Hall, and Wurgler, and McVeigh,  
But I'll buck Sifers 'ginst 'em all and down 'em any day!  
Most old Wick ever knowed, I s'pose, was *whisky!* Wurgler—well,  
He et morphine—ef actions shows, and facts' reliable!

But Sifers—though he ain't no sot, he's got his faults; and yit  
When you *git* Sifers one't, you've got a *doctor*, don't fergit!  
He ain't much at his office, er his house, er anywhere  
You'd natchurly think certain far to ketch the feller there.—



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But don't blame Doc: he's got all sorts o' cur'ous notions—as  
The feller says; his odd-come-shorts, like smart men mostly has.  
He'll more'n like be potter'n 'round the Blacksmith Shop; er in  
Some back lot, spadin' up the ground, er gradin' it agin.

Er at the workbench, planin' things; er buildin' little traps  
To ketch birds; galvenizin' rings; er graftin' plums, perhaps.  
Make anything! good as the best!—a gunstock—er a flute;  
He whittled out a set o' chesstmen one't o' laurel root,

Durin' the Army—got his trade o' surgeon there—I own  
To-day a finger-ring Doc made out of a Sesesh bone!  
An' glued a fiddle one't far me—jes' all so busted you  
'D a throwed the thing away, but he fixed her as good as new!

And take Doc, now, in *ager*, say, er *biles*, er *rheumatiz*,  
And all afflictions thataway, and he's the best they is!  
Er janders—milksick—I don't keer—k-yore anything he tries—  
A abscess; getherin' in yer year; er granilated eyes!

There was the Widder Daubenspeck they all give up far dead;  
A blame cowbuncle on her neck, and clean out of her head!  
First had this doctor, what's-his-name, from "Puddlesburg," and then  
This little red-head, "Burnin' Shame" they call him—Dr. Glenn.

And they "consulted" on the case, and claimed she'd haf to die,—  
I jes' was joggin' by the place, and heerd her dorter cry,  
And stops and calls her to the fence; and I-says-I, "Let me  
Send Sifers—bet you fifteen cents he'll k-yore her!" "Well," says  
she,

"Light out!" she says: And, lipp-tee-cut! I loped in town, and rid  
'Bout two hours more to find him, but I kissed him when I did!  
He was down at the Gunsmith Shop a-stuffin' birds! Says he,  
"My sulky's broke." Says I, "You hop right on and ride with me!"

I got him there.—"Well, Aunty, ten days k-yores you," Sifers said,  
"But what's yer idy livin' when yer jes' as good as dead?"  
And there's Dave Banks—jes' back from war without a scratch—one  
day  
Got ketched up in a sickle-bar, a reaper runaway.—

His shoulders, arms, and hands and legs jes' sawed in strips! And  
Jake



Dunn starts far Sifers—feller begs to shoot him far God-sake.  
Doc, 'course, was gone, but he had penned the notice, "At Big Bear—  
Be back to-morry; Gone to 'tend the Bee Convention there."

But Jake, he tracked him—rid and rode the whole endurin' night!  
And 'bout the time the roosters crowed they both hove into sight.  
Doc had to amputate, but 'greed to save Dave's arms, and swore  
He could a-saved his legs ef he'd ben there the day before.

Like when his wife's own mother died 'fore Sifers could be found,  
And all the neighbors far and wide a' all jes' chasin' round;  
Tel finally—I had to laugh—it's jes' like Doc, you know,—  
Was learnin' far to telegraph, down at the old deepo.



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But all they're faultin' Sifers far, there's none of 'em kin say  
He's biggoty, er keerless, er not posted anyway;  
He ain't built on the common plan of doctors now-a-days,  
He's jes' a great, big, brainy man—that's where the trouble lays!

### AT NOON—AND MIDNIGHT.

Far in the night, and yet no rest for him! The pillow next his own  
The wife's sweet face in slumber pressed—yet he awake—alone!  
alone!  
In vain he courted sleep;—one thought would ever in his heart  
arise,—  
The harsh words that at noon had brought the teardrops to her eyes.

Slowly on lifted arm he raised and listened. All was still as death;  
He touched her forehead as he gazed, and listened yet, with bated  
breath:  
Still silently, as though he prayed, his lips moved lightly as she  
slept—  
For God was with him, and he laid his face with hers and wept.

### A WILD IRISHMAN.

Not very many years ago the writer was for some months stationed at South Bend, a thriving little city of northern Indiana, its main population on the one side of the St. Joseph river, but quite a respectable fraction thereof taking its industrial way to the opposite shore, and there gaining an audience and a hearing in the rather imposing growth and hurly-burly of its big manufactories, and the consequent rapid appearance of multitudinous neat cottages, tenement houses and business blocks. A stranger, entering South Bend proper on any ordinary day, will be at some loss to account for its prosperous appearance—its flagged and bowldered streets—its handsome mercantile blocks, banks, and business houses generally. Reasoning from cause to effect, and seeing but a meager sprinkling of people on the streets throughout the day, and these seeming, for the most part, merely idlers, and in no wise accessory to the evident thrift and opulence of their surroundings, the observant stranger will be puzzled at the situation. But when evening comes, and the outlying foundries, sewing-machine, wagon, plow, and other “works,” together with the paper-mills and all the nameless industries—when the operations of all these are suspended for the day, and the workmen and workwomen loosed from labor—then, as this vast army suddenly invades and overflows bridge, roadway, street and lane, the startled stranger will fully comprehend the why and wherefore of the city's high prosperity. And, once acquainted with the people there, the fortunate sojourner will find no ordinary culture and intelligence, and, as certainly, he will meet with a social spirit and a wholesouled

heartiness that will make the place a lasting memory. The town, too, is the home of many world-known notables, and a host of local celebrities, the chief of which latter class I found, during my stay there, in the person of Tommy Stafford, or “The Wild Irishman” as everybody called him.

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“Talk of odd fellows and eccentric characters,” said Major Blowney, my employer, one afternoon, “you must see our ‘Wild Irishman’ here before you say you’ve yet found the queerest, brightest, cleverest chap in all your travels. What d’ye say, Stockford?” And the Major paused in his work of charging cartridges for his new breech-loading shotgun and turned to await his partner’s response.

Stockford, thus addressed, paused above the shield-sign he was lettering, slowly smiling as he dipped and trailed his pencil through the ivory black upon a bit of broken glass and said, in his deliberate, half-absent-minded way,—“Is it Tommy you’re telling him about?” and then, with a gradual broadening of the smile, he went on, “Well, I should say so. Tommy! What’s come of the fellow, anyway? I haven’t seen him since his last bout with the mayor, on his trial for shakin’ up that fast-horse man.”

“The fast-horse man got just exactly what he needed, too,” said the genial Major, laughing, and mopping his perspiring brow. “The fellow was barkin’ up the wrong stump when he tackled Tommy! Got beat in the trade, at his own game, you know, and wound up by an insult that no Irishman would take; and Tommy just naturally wore out the hall carpet of the old hotel with him!”

“And then collared and led him to the mayor’s office himself, they say!”

“Oh, he did!” said the Major, with a dash of pride in the confirmation; “that’s Tommy all over!”

“Funny trial, wasn’t it?” continued the ruminating Stockford.

“Wasn’t it though?” laughed the Major.

“The porter’s testimony: You see, he was for Tommy, of course, and on examination testified that the horse-man struck Tommy first. And there Tommy broke in with: ‘He’s a-meanin’ well, yer Honor, but he’s lyin’ to ye—he’s lyin’ to ye. No livin’ man iver struck me first—nor last, nayther, for the matter o’ that!’ And I thought—the—court—would—die!” concluded the Major, in a like imminent state of merriment.

“Yes, and he said if he struck him first,” supplemented Stockford, “he’d like to know why the horseman was ‘wearin’ all the black eyes, and the blood, and the booms on the head of um!’ And it’s that talk of his that got him off with so light a fine!”

“As it always does,” said the Major, coming to himself abruptly and looking at his watch. “Stock’, you say you’re not going along with our duck-shooting party this time? The old Kankakee is just lousy with ’em this season!”

“Can’t go possibly,” said Stockford, “not on account of the work at all, but the folks at home ain’t just as well as I’d like to see them, and I’ll stay here till they’re better. Next time I’ll try and be ready for you. Going to take Tommy, of course?”



“Of course! Got to have ‘The Wild Irishman’ with us! I’m going around to find him now.” Then turning to me the Major continued, “Suppose you get on your coat and hat and come along? It’s the best chance you’ll ever have to meet Tommy. It’s late anyhow, and Stockford’ll get along without you. Come on.”



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“Certainly,” said Stockford; “go ahead. And you can take him ducking, too, if he wants to go.”

“But he doesn’t want to go—and won’t go,” replied the Major with a commiserative glance at me. “Says he doesn’t know a duck from a poll-parrot—nor how to load a shotgun—and couldn’t hit a house if he were inside of it and the door shut. Admits that he nearly killed his uncle once, on the other side of a tree, with a squirrel runnin’ down it. Don’t want him along!”

Reaching the street with the genial Major, he gave me this advice: “Now, when you meet Tommy, you mustn’t take all he says for dead earnest, and you mustn’t believe, because he talks loud, and in italics every other word, that he wants to do all the talking and won’t be interfered with. That’s the way he’s apt to strike folks at first—but it’s their mistake, not his. Talk back to him—controvert him whenever he’s aggressive in the utterance of his opinions, and if you’re only honest in the announcement of your own ideas and beliefs, he’ll like you all the better for standing by them. He’s quick-tempered, and perhaps a trifle sensitive, so share your greater patience with him, and he’ll pay you back by fighting for you at the drop of the hat. In short, he’s as nearly typical of his gallant country’s brave, impetuous, fun-loving individuality as such a likeness can exist.”

“But is he quarrelsome?” I asked.

“Not at all. There’s the trouble. If he’d only quarrel there’d be no harm done. Quarreling’s cheap, and Tommy’s extravagant. A big blacksmith here, the other day, kicked some boy out of his shop, and Tommy, on his cart, happened to be passing at the time; and he just jumped off without a word, and went in and worked on that fellow for about three minutes, with such disastrous results that they couldn’t tell his shop from a slaughter-house; paid an assault and battery fine, and gave the boy a dollar beside, and the whole thing was a positive luxury to him. But I guess we’d better drop the subject, for here’s his cart, and here’s Tommy. Hi! there, you Far-down ’Irish Mick!” called the Major, in affected antipathy, “been out raiding the honest farmers’ hen-roosts again, have you?”

We had halted at a corner grocery and produce store, as I took it, and the smooth-faced, shave-headed man in woolen shirt, short vest, and suspenderless trousers so boisterously addressed by the Major, was just lifting from the back of his cart a coop of cackling chickens.

“Arrah! ye blasted Kerryonian!” replied the handsome fellow, depositing the coop on the curb and straightening his tall, slender figure; “I were jist thinking of yez and the ducks, and here ye come quackin’ into the prisence of r’yalty, wid yer canvas-back suit upon ye and the shwim-skins bechuxt yer toes! How air yez, anyhow—and air we startin’ for the Kankakee by the nixt post?”



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"We're to start just as soon as we get the boys together," said the Major, shaking hands. "The crowd's to be at Andrews' by 4, and it's fully that now; so come on at once. We'll go 'round by Munson's and have Hi send a boy to look after your horse. Come; and I want to introduce my friend here to you, and we'll all want to smoke and jabber a little in appropriate seclusion. Come on." And the impatient Major had linked arms with his hesitating ally and myself, and was turning the corner of the street.

"It's an hour's work I have yet wid the squawkers," mildly protested Tommy, still hanging back and stepping a trifle high; "but, as one Irishman would say til another, 'Ye're wrong, but I'm wid ye!'"

And five minutes later the three of us had joined a very jolly party in a snug back room, with

"The chamber walls depicted all around  
With portraitures of huntsman, hawk, and hound,  
And the hurt deer,"

and where, as well, drifted over the olfactory intelligence a certain subtle, warm-breathed aroma, that genially combatted the chill and darkness of the day without, and, resurrecting long-dead Christmases, brimmed the grateful memory with all comfortable cheer.

A dozen hearty voices greeted the appearance of Tommy and the Major, the latter adroitly pushing the jovial Irishman to the front, with a mock-heroic introduction to the general company, at the conclusion of which Tommy, with his hat tucked under the left elbow, stood bowing with a grace of pose and presence Lord Chesterfield might have applauded.

"Gintlemen," said Tommy, settling back upon his heels and admiringly contemplating the group; "Gintlemen, I congratu-late yez wid a pride that shoves the thumbs o' me into the arrum-holes of me weshkit! At the inshtigation of the bowld O'Blowney—axin' the gintleman's pardon—I am here wid no silver tongue of illoquence to para-lyze yez, but I am prisent, as has been ripresented, to jine wid yez in a stupendeous waste of gun-powder, and duck-shot, and 'high-wines,' and ham sand-witches, upon the silvonian banks of the ragin' Kankakee, where the 'di-dipper' tips ye good-bye wid his tail, and the wild loon skoots like a sky-rocket for his exiled home in the alien dunes of the wild morass—or, as Tommy Moore so illegantly describes the blashted birrud,—

'Away to the dizhmal shwamp he shpeeds—  
His path is rugged and sore,  
Through tangled juniper, beds of reeds,  
And many a fen where the serpent feeds,



*And birrud niver flew before—  
And niver will fly any more*

if iver he arrives back safe into civilization again—and I've been in the poultry business long enough to know the private opinion and personal integrity of ivery fowl that flies the air or roosts on poles. But, changin' the subject of my few small remarks here, and thankin yez wid an overflowin' heart but a dhry tongue, I have the honor to propose, gintlemen, long life and health to ivery mother's o' yez, and success to the 'Duck-hunters of Kankakee.'"



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“The duck-hunters of the Kankakee!” chorussed the elated party in such musical uproar that for a full minute the voice of the enthusiastic Major—who was trying to say something—could not be heard. Then he said:

“I want to propose that theme—’The Duck-hunters of the Kankakee’, for one of Tommy’s improvisations. I move we have a song now from Tommy on the ‘Duck-hunters of the Kankakee.’”

“Hurra! Hurra! A song from Tommy,” cried the crowd. “Make us up a song, and put us all into it! A song from Tommy! A song! A song!”

There was a queer light in the eye of the Irishman. I observed him narrowly—expectantly. Often I had read of this phenomenal art of improvised ballad-singing, but had always remained a little skeptical in regard to the possibility of such a feat. Even in the notable instances of this gift as displayed by the very clever Theodore Hook, I had always half suspected some prior preparation—some adroit forecasting of the sequence that seemed the instant inspiration of his witty verses.

Here was evidently to be a test example, and I was all alert to mark its minutest detail.

The clamor had subsided, and Tommy had drawn a chair near to and directly fronting the Major’s. His right hand was extended, closely grasping the right hand of his friend which he scarce perceptibly, though measuredly, lifted and let fall throughout the length of all the curious performance. The voice was not unmusical, nor was the quaint old ballad-air adopted by the singer unlovely in the least; simply a monotony was evident that accorded with the levity and chance-finish of the improvisation—and that the song was improvised on the instant I am certain—though in no wise remarkable, for other reasons, in rhythmic worth or finish. And while his smiling auditors all drew nearer, and leant, with parted lips to catch every syllable, the words of the strange melody trailed unhesitatingly into the lines literally as here subjoined:

“One gloomy day in the airy Fall,  
Whin the sunshine had no chance at all—  
No chance at all for to gleam and shine  
And lighten up this heart of mine:

“’Twas in South Bend, that famous town,  
Whilst I were a-strollin’ round and round,  
I met some friends and they says to me:  
‘It’s a hunt we’ll take on the Kankakee!’”

“Hurra for the Kankakee! Give it to us, Tommy!” cried an enthused voice between verses. “Now give it to the Major!” And the song went on:—



“There’s Major Blowney leads the van,  
As crack a shot as an Irishman,—  
For its the duck is a tin decoy  
That his owld shotgun can’t destroy!”

And a half a dozen jubilant palms patted the Major’s shoulders, and his ruddy, good-natured face beamed with delight. “Now give it to the rest of ‘em, Tommy!” chuckled the Major. And the song continued:—

“And along wid ‘Hank’ is Mick Maharr,  
And Barney Pince, at ‘The Shamrock’ bar—  
There’s Barney Pinch, wid his heart so true;  
And the Andrews Brothers they’ll go too.”



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“Hold on, Tommy!” chipped in one of the Andrews; “you must give ‘the Andrews Brothers’ a better advertisement than that! Turn us on a full verse, can’t you?”

“Make ‘em pay for it if you do!” said the Major, in an undertone. And Tommy promptly amended:—

“O, the Andrews Brothers, they’ll be there,  
Wid good se-gyars and wine to shpare,—  
They’ll treat us here on fine champagne,  
And whin we’re there they ’ll treat us again.”

The applause here was vociferous, and only discontinued when a box of Havanas stood open on the table. During the momentary lull thus occasioned, I caught the Major’s twinkling eyes glancing evasively toward me, as he leant whispering some further instructions to Tommy, who again took up his desultory ballad, while I turned and fled for the street, catching, however, as I went, and high above the laughter of the crowd, the satire of this quatrain to its latest line—

“But R-R-Riley he ’ll not go, I guess,  
Lest he’d get lost in the wil-der-ness,  
And so in the city he will shtop  
For to curl his hair in the barber shop.”

It was after six when I reached the hotel, but I had my hair trimmed before I went in to supper. The style of trimming adopted then I still rigidly adhere to, and call it “the Tommy Stafford stubble-crop.”

Ten days passed before I again saw the Major. Immediately upon his return—it was late afternoon when I heard of it—I determined to take my evening walk out the long street toward his pleasant home and call upon him there. This I did, and found him in a wholesome state of fatigue, slippers and easy chair, enjoying his pipe on the piazza. Of course, he was overflowing with happy reminiscences of the hunt—the wood-and-water-craft—boats—ambushes—decoys, and tramp, and camp, and so on, without end;—but I wanted to hear him talk of “The Wild Irishman”—Tommy; and I think, too, now, that the sagacious Major secretly read my desires all the time. To be utterly frank with the reader I will admit that I not only think the Major divined my interest in Tommy, but I know he did; for at last, as though reading my very thoughts, he abruptly said, after a long pause, in which he knocked the ashes from his pipe and refilled and lighted it:—  
“Well, all I know of ‘The Wild Irishman’ I can tell you in a very few words—that is, if you care at all to listen?” And the crafty old Major seemed to hesitate.

“Go on—go on!” I said, eagerly.



“About forty years ago,” resumed the Major, placidly, “in the little, old, unheard-of town Karnteel, County Tyrone, Province Ulster, Ireland, Tommy Stafford—in spite of the contrary opinion of his wretchedly poor parents—was fortunate enough to be born. And here, again, as I advised you the other day, you must be prepared for constant surprises in the study of Tommy’s character.”

“Go on,” I said; “I’m prepared for anything.”

The Major smiled profoundly and continued:—



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“Fifteen years ago, when he came to America—and the Lord only knows how he got the passage-money—he brought his widowed mother with him here, and has supported, and is still supporting her. Besides,” went on the still secretly smiling Major, “the fellow has actually found time, through all his adversities, to pick up quite a smattering of education, here and there—”

“Poor fellow!” I broke in, sympathizingly, “what a pity it is that he couldn’t have had such advantages earlier in life,” and as I recalled the broad brogue of the fellow, together with his careless dress, recognizing beneath it all the native talent and brilliancy of a mind of most uncommon worth, I could not restrain a deep sigh of compassion and regret.

The Major was leaning forward in the gathering dusk, and evidently studying my own face, the expression of which, at that moment, was very grave and solemn, I am sure. He suddenly threw himself backward in his chair, in an uncontrollable burst of laughter. “Oh, I just can’t keep it up any longer,” he exclaimed.

“Keep what up?” I queried, in a perfect maze of bewilderment and surprise. “Keep what up?” I repeated.

“Why, all this twaddle, farce, travesty and by-play regarding Tommy! You know I warned you, over and over, and you mustn’t blame me for the deception. I never thought you’d take it so in earnest!” and here the jovial Major again went into convulsions of laughter.

“But I don’t understand a word of it all,” I cried, half frenzied with the gnarl and tangle of the whole affair. “What ‘twaddle, farce and by-play,’ is it anyhow?” And in my vexation, I found myself on my feet and striding nervously up and down the paved walk that joined the street with the piazza, pausing at last and confronting the Major almost petulantly. “Please explain,” I said, controlling my vexation with an effort.

The Major arose. “Your striding up and down there reminds me that a little stroll on the street might do us both good,” he said. “Will you wait until I get a coat and hat?”

He rejoined me a moment later, and we passed through the open gate; and saying, “Let’s go down this way,” he took my arm and turned into a street, where, cooling as the dusk was, the thick maples lining the walk, seemed to throw a special shade of tranquility upon us.

“What I meant was”—began the Major, in low, serious voice,—“What I meant was— simply this: Our friend Tommy, though the truest Irishman in the world, is a man quite the opposite everyway of the character he has appeared to you. All that rich brogue of his is assumed. Though he’s poor, as I told you, when he came here, his native quickness, and his marvelous resources, tact, judgment, business qualities—all have helped him to the equivalent of a liberal education. His love of the humorous and the ridiculous is unbounded; but he has serious moments, as well, and at such times is as



dignified and refined in speech and manner as any man you'd find in a thousand. He is a good speaker, can stir a political convention to fomentation when he gets fired up; and can write an article for the press that goes spang to the spot. He gets into a great many personal encounters of a rather undignified character; but they are almost invariably bred of his innate interest in the 'under dog,' and the fire and tow of his impetuous nature."



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My companion had paused here, and was looking through some printed slips in his pocket-book. "I wanted you to see some of the fellow's articles in print, but I have nothing of importance here—only some of his 'doggerel,' as he calls it, and you've had a sample of that. But here's a bit of the upper spirit of the man—and still another that you should hear him recite. You can keep them both if you care to. The boys all fell in love with that last one, particularly, hearing his rendition of it. So we had a lot printed, and I have two or three left. Put these two in your pocket and read at your leisure."

But I read them there and then, as eagerly, too, as I append them here and now. The first is called—

### SAYS HE.

"Whatever the weather may be," says he—

"Whatever the weather may be,  
It's plaze, if ye will, an' I'll say me say,—  
Supposin' to-day was the winterest day,  
Wud the weather be changing because ye cried,  
Or the snow be grass were ye crucified?  
The best is to make your own summer," says he,  
"Whatever the weather may be," says he—  
"Whatever the weather may be!

"Whatever the weather may be," says he—

"Whatever the weather may be,  
It's the songs ye sing, an' the smiles ye wear,  
That's a-makin' the sunshine everywhere,  
An' the world of gloom is a world of glee,  
Wid the bird in the bush, an' the bud in the tree,  
An' the fruit on the stim of the bough," says he,  
"Whatever the weather may be," says he—  
"Whatever the weather may be!

"Whatever the weather may be," says he—

"Whatever the weather may be,  
Ye can bring the Spring, wid its green an' gold,  
An' the grass in the grove where the snow lies cold,  
An' ye'll warm yer back, wid a smiling face,  
As ye sit at yer heart like an owld fire-place,  
An' toast the toes o' yer soul," says he,  
"Whatever the weather may be," says he—  
"Whatever the weather may be!"



“Now” said the Major, peering eagerly above my shoulder, “go on with the next. To my liking, it is even better than the first. A type of character you’ll recognize.—The same ‘broth of a boy,’ only *Americanized*, don’t you know.”

And I read the scrap entitled—

## CHAIRLEY BURKE.

It’s Chairley Burke’s in town, b’ys! He’s down til “Jamesy’s Place,”  
Wid a bran’ new shave upon ‘um, an’ the fhwhuskers aff his face;  
He’s quit the Section Gang last night, and yez can chalk it down,  
There’s goin’ to be the divil’s toime, sence Chairley Burke’s in  
town.

It’s treatin’ iv’ry b’y he is, an’ poundin’ on the bar  
Till iv’ry man he ‘s drinkin’ wid must shmoke a foine cigar;  
An’ Missus Murphy’s little Kate, that’s comin’ there for beer,  
Can’t pay wan cint the bucketful, the whilst that Chairley’s here!



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He's joompin' oor the tops o' sthools, the both forninst an' back!  
He'll lave yez pick the blessed flure, an' walk the straightest  
crack!  
He's liftin' barrels wid his teeth, and singin' "Garry Owen,"  
Till all the house be strikin' hands, sence Chairley Burke's in  
town.

The Road-Yaird hands comes dthroppin' in, an' niver goin' back;  
An' there 's two freights upon the switch—the wan on aither track—  
An' Mr. Gearry, from The Shops, he's mad enough to swear,  
An' durst n't spake a word but grin, the whilst that Chairley's  
there!

Oh! Chairley! Chairley! Chairley Burke! ye divil, wid yer ways  
O' dhrivin' all the throubles aff, these dark an' gloomy days!  
Ohone! that it's meself, wid all the griefs I have to drown,  
Must lave me pick to resht a bit, sence Chairley Burke's in town!

"Before we turn back, now," said the smiling Major, as I stood lingering over the indefinable humor of the last refrain, "before we turn back I want to show you something eminently characteristic. Come this way a half dozen steps."

As he spoke I looked up, to first observe that we had paused before a handsome square brick residence, centering a beautiful smooth lawn, its emerald only littered with the light gold of the earliest autumn leaves. On either side of the trim walk that led up from the gate to the carved stone ballusters of the broad piazza, with its empty easy chairs, were graceful vases, frothing over with late blossoms, and wreathed with laurel-looking vines; and, luxuriantly lacing the border of the pave that turned the further corner of the house, blue, white and crimson, pink and violet, went fading in perspective as my gaze followed the gesture of the Major's.

"Here, come a little further. Now do you see that man there?"

Yes, I could make out a figure in the deepening dusk—the figure of a man on the back stoop—a tired looking man, in his shirt-sleeves, who sat upon a low chair—no, not a chair—an empty box. He was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, and the hands dropped limp. He was smoking, too, I could barely see his pipe, and but for the odor of very strong tobacco, would not have known he had a pipe. Why does the master of the house permit his servants to so desecrate this beautiful home? I thought.

"Well, shall we go now?" said the Major.

I turned silently and we retraced our steps. I think neither of us spoke for the distance of a square.



“Guess you didn’t know the man there on the back porch?” said the Major.

“No; why?” I asked dubiously.

“I hardly thought you would, and besides the poor fellow’s tired, and it was best not to disturb him,” said the Major.

“Why; who was it—some one I know?”

“It was Tommy.”

“Oh,” said I, inquiringly, “he’s employed there in some capacity?”



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“Yes, as master of the house.”

“You don’t mean it?”

“I certainly do. He owns it, and made every cent of the money that paid for it!” said the Major proudly. “That’s why I wanted you particularly to note that ‘eminent characteristic’ I spoke of. Tommy could just as well be sitting, with a fine cigar, on the front piazza in an easy chair, as, with his dhudeen, on the back porch, on an empty box, where every night you’ll find him. Its the unconscious dropping back into the old ways of his father, and his father’s father, and his father’s father’s father. In brief, he sits there the poor lorn symbol of the long oppression of his race.”

## RAGWEED AND FENNEL

### WHEN MY DREAMS COME TRUE.

#### I.

When my dreams come true—when my dreams come true—  
Shall I lean from out my casement, in the starlight and the dew,  
To listen—smile and listen to the tinkle of the strings  
Of the sweet guitar my lover’s fingers fondle, as he sings?  
And as the nude moon slowly, slowly shoulders into view,  
Shall I vanish from his vision—when my dreams come true?

When my dreams come true—shall the simple gown I wear  
Be changed to softest satin, and my maiden-braided hair  
Be raveled into flossy mists of rarest, fairest gold,  
To be minted into kisses, more than any heart can hold?—  
Or “the summer of my tresses” shall my lover liken to  
“The fervor of his passion”—when my dreams come true?

#### II.

When my dreams come true—I shall bide among the sheaves  
Of happy harvest meadows; and the grasses and the leaves  
Shall lift and lean between me and the splendor of the sun,  
Till the noon swoons into twilight, and the gleaners’ work is done—  
Save that yet an arm shall bind me, even as the reapers do  
The meanest sheaf of harvest—when my dreams come true.



When my dreams come true! when my dreams come true!  
True love in all simplicity is fresh and pure as dew;—  
The blossom in the blackest mold is kindlier to the eye  
Than any lily born of pride that looms against the sky:  
And so it is I know my heart will gladly welcome you,  
My lowliest of lovers, when my dreams come true.

**A DOS'T O' BLUES.**

I' got no patience with blues at all!  
And I ust to kindo talk  
Against 'em, and claim, 'tel along last Fall,  
They was none in the fambly stock;  
But a nephew of mine, from Eelinoy,  
That visited us last year,  
He kindo convinct me differunt  
While he was a-stayin' here.

Frum ever'-which way that blues is from,  
They'd tackle him ever' ways;  
They'd come to him in the night, and come  
On Sundays, and rainy days;  
They'd tackle him in corn-plantin' time,  
And in harvest, and airly Fall,  
But a dose 't of blues in the wintertime,  
He 'lowed, was the worst of all!



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Said all diseases that ever he had—  
The mumps, er the rheumatiz—  
Er ever'-other-day-aigger's bad  
Purt' nigh as anything is!—  
Er a cyarbuncle, say, on the back of his neck,  
Er a felon on his thumb,—  
But you keep the blues away from him,  
And all o' the rest could come!

And he'd moan, "They's nary a leaf below!  
Ner a spear o' grass in sight!  
And the whole wood-pile's clean under snow!  
And the days is dark as night!  
You can't go out—ner you can't stay in—  
Lay down—stand up—ner set!"  
And a tetch o' regular tyfoid-blues  
Would double him jest clean shet!

I writ his parents a postal-kyard,  
He could stay 'tel Spring-time come;  
And Aprile first, as I rickollect,  
Was the day we shipped him home!  
Most o' his relatives, sence then,  
Has either give up, er quit,  
Er jest died off; but I understand  
He's the same old color yit!

### THE BAT.

#### I.

Thou dread, uncanny thing,  
With fuzzy breast and leathern wing,  
In mad, zigzagging flight,  
Notching the dusk, and buffeting  
The black cheeks of the night,  
With grim delight!

#### II.

What witch's hand unhasps  
Thy keen claw-cornered wings



From under the barn roof, and flings  
Thee forth, with chattering gasps,  
    To scud the air,  
And nip the lady-bug, and tear  
Her children's hearts out unaware?

### III.

The glow-worm's glimmer, and the bright,  
Sad pulsings of the fire-fly's light,  
    Are banquet lights to thee.  
O less than bird, and worse than beast,  
Thou Devil's self, or brat, at least,  
    Grate not thy teeth at me!

### THE WAY IT WUZ.

Las' July—an', I presume  
    'Bout as hot  
As the ole Gran'-Jury room  
    Where they sot!—  
Fight 'twixt Mike an' Dock McGriff—  
'Pears to me jes' like as if  
    I'd a dremp' the whole blame thing—  
    Allus ha'nts me roun' the gizzard  
When they're nightmares on the wing,  
    An' a feller's blood's jes' friz!  
    Seed the row from a to izzard—  
'Cause I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em  
    As me an' you is!

Tell you the way it wuz—  
    An' I do n't want to see,  
Like *some* fellers does,  
    When they 're goern to be  
Any kind o' fuss—  
On'y makes a rumpus wuss  
    Far to interfere  
    When their dander's riz—  
But I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em  
As me an' you is!

I wuz kind o' strayin'  
    Past the blame saloon—  
Heerd some fiddler playin'  
    That "ole hee-cup tune!"

Sort o' stopped, you know,  
Far a minit er so,  
And wuz jes' about



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Settin' down, when—*Jeemses-whizz!*  
Whole durn winder-sash fell out!  
An' there laid Doc McGriff, and Mike  
A-straddlin' him, all bloody-like,  
An' both a-gittin' down to biz!—  
An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em  
As me an' you is!

I wuz the on'y man aroun'—  
(Durn old-fogy town!  
'Peared more like, to me,  
*Sund'y 'an Saturd'y!*)  
Dog come 'crost the road  
An' tuck a smell  
An' put right back;  
Mishler driv by 'ith a load  
O' cantalo'pes he couldn't sell—  
Too mad, 'y jack!  
To even ast  
What wuz up, as he went past!  
Weather most outrageous hot!—  
Fairly hear it sizz  
Roun' Dock an' Mike—till Dock he shot,  
An' Mike he slacked that grip o' his  
An' fell, all spraddled out. Dock riz  
'Bout half up, a-spittin' red,  
An' shuck his head—  
An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em  
As me an' you is!

An' Dock he says,  
A-whisperin'-like,—  
"It hain't no use  
A-tryin'!—Mike  
He's jes' ripped my daylights loose!—  
Git that blame-don fiddler to  
Let up, an' come out here—You  
Got some burryin' to do,—  
Mike makes *one*, an' I expects  
In ten seconds I'll make *two!*"  
And he drapped back, where he riz,  
'Crost Mike's body, black and blue,  
Like a great big letter X!—



An' I wuz a-standin' as clost to 'em  
As me an' you is!

## THE DRUM.

O the drum!  
There is some  
Intonation in thy grum  
Monotony of utterance that strikes the spirit dumb,  
As we hear  
Through the clear  
And unclouded atmosphere,  
Thy palpitating syllables roll in upon the car!

There's a part  
Of the art  
Of thy music-throbbing heart  
That thrills a something in us that awakens with a start,  
And in rhyme  
With the chime  
And exactitude of time,  
Goes marching on to glory to thy melody sublime.

And the guest  
Of the breast  
That thy rolling robs of rest  
Is a patriotic spirit as a Continental dressed;  
And he looms  
From the glooms  
Of a century of tombs,  
And the blood he spilled at Lexington in living beauty blooms.

And his eyes  
Wear the guise  
Of a purpose pure and wise,  
As the love of them is lifted to a something in the skies  
That is bright  
Red and white,  
With a blur of starry light,  
As it laughs in silken ripples to the breezes day and night.

There are deep  
Hushes creep  
O'er the pulses as they leap,  
As thy tumult, fainter growing, on the silence falls asleep,  
While the prayer

Rising there  
Wills the sea and earth and air  
As a heritage to Freedom's sons and daughters everywhere.



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Then, with sound  
As profound  
As the thunderings resound,  
Come thy wild reverberations in a throe that shakes the ground,  
And a cry  
Flung on high,  
Like the flag it flutters by,  
Wings rapturously upward till it nestles in the sky.

O the drum!  
There is some  
Intonation in thy grum  
Monotony of utterance that strikes the spirit dumb,  
As we hear  
Through the clear  
And unclouded atmosphere,  
Thy palpitating syllables roll in upon the ear!

### TOM JOHNSON'S QUIT.

A passel o' the boys last night—  
An' me amongst 'em—kindo got  
To talkin' Temper'nce left an' right,  
An' workin' up "blue-ribbon," *hot*;  
An' while we was a-countin' jes'  
How many bed gone into hit  
An' signed the pledge, some feller says,—  
"Tom Johnson's quit!"

We laughed, of course—'cause Tom, you know,  
*He's* spiled more whisky, boy an' man,  
And seed more trouble, high an' low,  
Than any chap but Tom could stand:  
And so, says I "*He's* too nigh dead.  
Far Temper'nce to benefit!"  
The feller sighed agin, and said—  
"Tom Johnson's quit!"

We all *liked* Tom, an' that was why  
We sorto simmered down agin,  
And ast the feller ser'ously  
Ef he wa'n't tryin' to draw us in:  
He shuck his head—tuck off his hat—  
Helt up his hand an' opened hit,



An' says, says he, "I'll swear to that—  
Tom Johnson's quit!"

Well, we was stumpt, an' tickled too,—  
Because we knowed ef Tom *had* signed  
Ther wa'n't no man 'at wore the "blue"  
'At was more honest' inclined:  
An' then and there we kindo riz,—  
The hull dern gang of us 'at bit—  
An' th'owed our hats and let 'er whizz,—  
"Tom Johnson's quit!"

I've heerd 'em holler when the balls  
Was buzzin' 'round us wus 'n bees,  
An' when the ole flag on the walls  
Was flappin' o'er the enemy's,  
I've heerd a-many a wild "hooray"  
'At made my heart git up an' git—  
But Lord!—to hear 'em shout that way!—  
"Tom Johnson's quit!"

But when we saw the chap 'at fetched  
The news wa'n't jinin' in the cheer,  
But stood there solemn-like, an' reched  
An' kindo wiped away a tear,  
We someway sorto' stilled agin,  
And listened—I kin hear him yit,  
His voice a-wobblin' with his chin,—  
"Tom Johnson's quit—

"I hain't a-givin' you no game—  
I wisht I was!... An hour ago,  
This operator—what's his name—  
The one 'at works at night, you know?—  
Went out to flag that Ten Express,  
And sees a man in front of hit  
Th'ow up his hands an' stagger—yes,—  
Tom Johnson's quit."



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### LULLABY.

The maple strews the embers of its leaves  
O'er the laggard swallows nestled 'neath the eaves;  
And the moody cricket falters in his cry—Baby-bye!—  
And the lid of night is falling o'er the sky—Baby-bye!—  
The lid of night is falling o'er the sky!

The rose is lying pallid, and the cup  
Of the frosted calla-lily folded up;  
And the breezes through the garden sob and sigh—Baby-bye!—  
O'er the sleeping blooms of summer where they lie—Baby-bye!—  
O'er the sleeping blooms of summer where they lie!

Yet, Baby—O my Baby, for your sake  
This heart of mine is ever wide awake,  
And my love may never droop a drowsy eye—Baby-bye!—  
Till your own are wet above me when I die—Baby-bye!—  
Till your own are wet above me when I die.

### IN THE SOUTH.

There is a princess in the South  
About whose beauty rumors hum  
Like honey-bees about the mouth  
Of roses dewdrops falter from;  
And O her hair is like the fine  
Clear amber of a jostled wine  
In tropic revels; and her eyes  
Are blue as rifts of Paradise.

Such beauty as may none before  
Kneel daringly, to kiss the tips  
Of fingers such as knights of yore  
Had died to lift against their lips:  
Such eyes as might the eyes of gold  
Of all the stars of night behold  
With glittering envy, and so glare  
In dazzling splendor of despair.

So, were I but a minstrel, deft  
At weaving, with the trembling strings  
Of my glad harp, the warp and weft



Of rondels such as rapture sings,—  
I'd loop my lyre across my breast,  
Nor stay me till my knee found rest  
In midnight banks of bud and flower  
Beneath my lady's lattice-bower.

And there, drenched with the teary dews,  
I'd woo her with such wondrous art  
As well might stanch the songs that ooze  
Out of the mockbird's breaking heart;  
So light, so tender, and so sweet  
Should be the words I would repeat,  
Her casement, on my gradual sight,  
Would blossom as a lily might.

## THE OLD HOME BY THE MILL.

This is "The old Home by the Mill"—far we still call it so,  
Although the old mill, roof and sill, is all gone long ago.  
The old home, though, and old folks, and the old spring, and a few  
Old cat-tails, weeds and hartychokes, is left to welcome you!

Here, Marg'et, fetch the man a tin to drink out of' Our spring  
Keeps kindo-sorto cavin' in, but don't "taste" anything!  
She's kindo agein', Marg'et is—"the old process," like me,  
All ham-stringed up with rheumatiz, and on in seventy-three.

Jes' me and Marg'et lives alone here—like in long ago;  
The childern all put off and gone, and married, don't you know?  
One's millin' way out West somewhere; two other miller-boys  
In Minnyopolis they air; and one's in Illinoise.



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The oldest gyrl—the first that went—married and died right here;  
The next lives in Winn's Settlement—for purt' nigh thirty year!  
And youngest one—was allus far the old home here—but no!—  
Her man turns in and he packs her 'way off to Idyho!

I don't miss them like *Marg'et* does—'cause I got *her*, you see;  
And when she pines for them—that's 'cause *she's* only jes' got  
*me!*

I laugh, and joke her 'bout it all.—But talkin' sense, I'll say,  
When she was tuk so bad last Fall, I laughed the t'other way!

I haint so favorble impressed 'bout dyin'; but ef I  
Found I was only second-best when *us two* come to die,  
I'd 'dopt the "new process" in full, ef *Marg'et* died, you see,—  
I'd jes' crawl in my grave and pull the green grass over me!

### A LEAVE-TAKING.

She will not smile;  
She will not stir;  
I marvel while  
I look on her.  
The lips are chilly  
And will not speak;  
The ghost of a lily  
In either cheek.

Her hair—ah me!  
Her hair—her hair!  
How helplessly  
My hands go there!  
But my caresses  
Meet not hers,  
O golden tresses  
That thread my tears!

I kiss the eyes  
On either lid,  
Where her love lies  
Forever hid.  
I cease my weeping  
And smile and say:  
I will be sleeping  
Thus, some day!



## WAIT FOR THE MORNING.

Wait for the morning:—It will come, indeed,  
As surely as the night hath given need.  
The yearning eyes, at last, will strain their sight  
No more unanswered by the morning light;  
No longer will they vainly strive, through tears,  
To pierce the darkness of thy doubts and fears,  
But, bathed in balmy dews and rays of dawn,  
Will smile with rapture o'er the darkness drawn.

Wait for the morning, O thou smitten child,  
Scorned, scourged and persecuted and reviled—  
Athirst and famishing, none pitying thee,  
Crowned with the twisted thorns of agony—  
No faintest gleam of sunlight through the dense  
Infinity of gloom to lead thee thence—  
Wait for the morning:—It will come, indeed,  
As surely as the night hath given need.

## WHEN JUNE IS HERE.

When June is here—what art have we to sing  
The whiteness of the lilies midst the green  
Of noon-tranced lawns? Or flash of roses seen  
Like redbirds' wings? Or earliest ripening  
Prince-Harvest apples, where the cloyed bees cling  
Round winey juices oozing down between  
The peckings of the robin, while we lean  
In under-grasses, lost in marveling.  
Or the cool term of morning, and the stir  
Of odorous breaths from wood and meadow walks,  
The bobwhite's liquid yodel, and the whir  
Of sudden flight; and, where the milkmaid talks  
Across the bars, on tilted barley-stalks  
The dewdrops' glint in webs of gossamer.



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### THE GILDED ROLL.

Nosing around in an old box—packed away, and lost to memory for years—an hour ago I found a musty package of gilt paper, or rather, a roll it was, with the green-tarnished gold of the old sheet for the outer wrapper. I picked it up mechanically to toss it into some obscure corner, when, carelessly lifting it by one end, a child's tin whistle dropped therefrom and fell tinkling on the attic floor. It lies before me on my writing table now—and so, too, does the roll entire, though now a roll no longer,—for my eager fingers have unrolled the gilded covering, and all its precious contents are spread out beneath my hungry eyes.

Here is a scroll of ink-written music. I don't read music, but I know the dash and swing of the pen that rained it on the page. Here is a letter, with the self-same impulse and abandon in every syllable; and its melody—however sweet the other—is far more sweet to me. And here are other letters like it—three—five—and seven, at least. Bob wrote them from the front, and Billy kept them for me when I went to join him. Dear boy! Dear boy!

Here are some cards of bristol-board. Ah! when Bob came to these there were no blotches then. What faces—what expressions! The droll, ridiculous, good-for-nothing genius, with his “sad mouth,” as he called it, “upside down,” laughing always—at everything, at big rallies, and mass-meetings and conventions, county fairs, and floral halls, booths, watermelon-wagons, dancing-tents, the swing, Daguerrean-car, the “lung-barometer,” and the air-gun man. Oh! what a gifted, good-for-nothing boy Bob was in those old days! And here 's a picture of a girlish face—a very faded photograph—even fresh from “the gallery,” five and twenty years ago it was a faded thing. But the living face—how bright and clear that was!—for “Doc,” Bob's awful name for her, was a pretty girl, and brilliant, clever, lovable every way. No wonder Bob fancied her! And you could see some hint of her jaunty loveliness in every fairy face he drew, and you could find her happy ways and dainty tastes unconsciously assumed in all he did—the books he read—the poems he admired, and those he wrote; and, ringing clear and pure and jubilant, the vibrant beauty of her voice could clearly be defined and traced through all his music. Now, there's the happy pair of them—Bob and Doc. Make of them just whatever your good fancy may dictate, but keep in mind the stern, relentless ways of destiny.

You are not at the beginning of a novel, only at the threshold of one of a hundred experiences that lie buried in the past, and this particular one most happily resurrected by these odds and ends found in the gilded roll.

You see, dating away back, the contents of this package, mainly, were hastily gathered together after a week's visit out at the old Mills farm; the gilt paper, and the whistle, and

the pictures, they were Billy's; the music pages, Bob's, or Doc's; the letters and some other manuscripts were mine.

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The Mills girls were great friends of Doc's, and often came to visit her in town; and so Doc often visited the Mills's. This is the way that Bob first got out there, and won them all, and "shaped the thing" for me, as he would put it; and lastly, we had lugged in Billy, —such a handy boy, you know, to hold the horses on picnic excursions, and to watch the carriage and the luncheon, and all that.—"Yes, and," Bob would say, "such a serviceable boy in getting all the fishing tackle in proper order, and digging bait, and promenading in our wake up and down the creek all day, with the minnow-bucket hanging on his arm, don't you know!"

But jolly as the days were, I think jollier were the long evenings at the farm. After the supper in the grove, where, when the weather permitted, always stood the table, ankle-deep in the cool green plush of the sward; and after the lounge upon the grass, and the cigars, and the new fish stories, and the general invoice of the old ones, it was delectable to get back to the girls again, and in the old "best room" hear once more the lilt of the old songs and the stacattoed laughter of the piano mingling with the alto and falsetto voices of the Mills girls, and the gallant soprano of the dear girl Doc.

This is the scene I want you to look in upon, as, in fancy, I do now—and here are the materials for it all, husked from the gilded roll:

Bob, the master, leans at the piano now, and Doc is at the keys, her glad face often thrown up sidewise toward his own. His face is boyish—for there is yet but the ghost of a mustache upon his lip. His eyes are dark and clear, of over-size when looking at you, but now their lids are drooped above his violin, whose melody has, for the time, almost smoothed away the upward kinkings of the corners of his mouth. And wonderfully quiet now is every one, and the chords of the piano, too, are low and faltering; and so, at last, the tune itself swoons into the universal hush, and—Bob is rasping, in its stead, the ridiculous, but marvelously perfect imitation of the "priming" of a pump, while Billy's hands forget the "chiggers" on the bare backs of his feet, as, with clapping palms, he dances round the room in ungovernable spasms of delight. And then we all laugh; and Billy, taking advantage of the general tumult, pulls Bob's head down and whispers, "Git 'em to stay up 'way late to-night!" And Bob, perhaps remembering that we go back home to-morrow, winks at the little fellow and whispers, "You let me manage 'em! Stay up till broad daylight if we take a notion—eh?" And Billy dances off again in newer glee, while the inspired musician is plunking a banjo imitation on his enchanted instrument, which is unceremoniously drowned out by a circus-tune from Doc that is absolutely inspiring to everyone but the barefooted brother, who drops back listlessly to his old position on the floor and sullenly renews operations on his "chigger" claims.



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“Thought you was goin’ to have pop-corn to-night all so fast!” he says, doggedly, in the midst of a momentary lull that has fallen on a game of whist. And then the oldest Mills girl, who thinks cards stupid anyhow, says: “That’s so, Billy; and we’re going to have it, too; and right away, for this game’s just ending, and I shan’t submit to being bored with another. I say ‘pop-corn’ with Billy! And after that,” she continues, rising and addressing the party in general, “we must have another literary and artistic tournament, and that’s been in contemplation and preparation long enough; so you gentlemen can be pulling your wits together for the exercises, while us girls see to the refreshments.”

“Have you done anything toward it!” queries Bob, when the girls are gone, with the alert Billy in their wake.

“Just an outline,” I reply. “How with you?”

“Clean forgot it—that is, the preparation; but I’ve got a little old second-hand idea, if you’ll all help me out with it, that’ll amuse us some, and tickle Billy I’m certain.”

So that’s agreed upon; and while Bob produces his portfolio, drawing paper, pencils and so on, I turn to my note-book in a dazed way and begin counting my fingers in a depth of profound abstraction, from which I am barely aroused by the reappearance of the girls and Billy.

“Goody, goody, goody! Bob’s goin’ to make pictures!” cries Billy, in additional transport to that the cake pop-corn has produced.

“Now, you girls,” says Bob, gently detaching the affectionate Billy from one leg and moving a chair to the table, with a backward glance of intelligence toward the boy,—“you girls are to help us all you can, and we can all work; but, as I’ll have all the illustrations to do, I want you to do as many of the verses as you can—that’ll be easy, you know,—because the work entire is just to consist of a series of fool-epigrams, such as, for instance.—Listen, Billy:

Here lies a young man  
Who in childhood began  
To swear, and to smoke, and to drink,—  
In his twentieth year  
He quit swearing and beer,  
And yet is still smoking, I think.”

And the rest of his instructions are delivered in lower tones, that the boy may not hear; and then, all matters seemingly arranged, he turns to the boy with—“And now, Billy, no lookin’ over shoulders, you know, or swinging on my chair-back while I’m at work. When the pictures are all finished, then you can take a squint at ’em, and not before. Is that all hunky, now?”



“Oh! who’s a-goin’ to look over your shoulder—only *Doc*.” And as the radiant Doc hastily quits that very post, and dives for the offending brother, he scrambles under the piano and laughs derisively.

And then a silence falls upon the group—a gracious quiet, only intruded upon by the very juicy and exuberant munching of an apple from a remote fastness of the room, and the occasional thumping of a bare heel against the floor.



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At last I close my note-book with a half slam.

“That means,” says Bob, laying down his pencil, and addressing the girls,—“That means he’s concluded his poem, and that he’s not pleased with it in any manner, and that he intends declining to read it, for that self-acknowledged reason, and that he expects us to believe every affected word of his entire speech—”

“Oh, don’t!” I exclaim.

“Then give us the wretched production, in all its hideous deformity!”

And the girls all laugh so sympathetically, and Bob joins them so gently, and yet with a tone, I know, that can be changed so quickly to my further discomfiture, that I arise at once and read, without apology or excuse, this primitive and very callow poem recovered here to-day from the gilded roll:

### **A BACKWARD LOOK.**

As I sat smoking, alone, yesterday,  
And lazily leaning back in my chair,  
Enjoying myself in a general way—  
Allowing my thoughts a holiday  
From weariness, toil and care,—  
My fancies—doubtless, for ventilation—  
Left ajar the gates of my mind,—  
And Memory, seeing the situation,  
Slipped out in street of “Auld Lang Syne.”

Wandering ever with tireless feet  
Through scenes of silence, and jubilee  
Of long-hushed voices; and faces sweet  
Were thronging the shadowy side of the street  
As far as the eye could see;  
Dreaming again, in anticipation,  
The same old dreams of our boyhood’s days  
That never come true, from the vague sensation  
Of walking asleep in the world’s strange ways.

Away to the house where I was born!  
And there was the selfsame clock that ticked  
From the close of dusk to the burst of morn,  
When life-warm hands plucked the golden corn  
And helped when the apples were picked.



And the “chany-dog” on the mantel-shelf,  
With the gilded collar and yellow eyes,  
Looked just as at first, when I hugged myself  
Sound asleep with the dear surprise.

And down to the swing in the locust tree,  
Where the grass was worn from the trampled ground,  
And where “Eck” Skinner, “Old” Carr, and three  
Or four such other boys used to be  
Doin’ “sky-scrapers,” or “whirlin’ round:”  
And again Bob climbed for the bluebird’s nest,  
And again “had shows” in the buggy-shed  
Of Guymon’s barn, where still, unguessed,  
The old ghosts romp through the best days dead!

And again I gazed from the old school-room  
With a wistful look of a long June day,  
When on my cheek was the hectic bloom  
Caught of Mischief, as I presume—  
He had such a “partial” way,  
It seemed, toward me.—And again I thought  
Of a probable likelihood to be  
Kept in after school—for a girl was caught  
Catching a note from me.



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And down through the woods to the swimming-hole—  
Where the big, white, hollow, old sycamore grows,—  
And we never cared when the water was cold,  
And always “ducked” the boy that told  
On the fellow that tied the clothes.—  
When life went so like a dreamy rhyme,  
That it seems to me now that then  
The world was having a jollier time  
Than it ever will have again.

The crude production is received, I am glad to note, with some expressions of favor from the company, though Bob, of course, must heartlessly dissipate my weak delight by saying, “Well, it’s certainly bad enough; though,” he goes on with an air of deepest critical sagacity and fairness, “considered, as it should be, justly, as the production of a jour-poet, why, it might be worse—that is, a little worse.”

“Probably,” I remember saying,—“Probably I might redeem myself by reading you this little amateurish bit of verse, enclosed to me in a letter by mistake, not very long ago.” I here fish an envelope from my pocket the address of which all recognize as in Bob’s almost printed writing. He smiles vacantly at it—then vividly colors.

“What date?” he stoically asks.

“The date,” I suggestively answer, “of your last letter to our dear Doc, at Boarding-School, two days exactly in advance of her coming home—this veritable visit now.”

Both Bob and Doc rush at me—but too late. The letter and contents have wholly vanished. The youngest Miss Mills quiets us—urgently distracting us, in fact, by calling our attention to the immediate completion of our joint production; “For now,” she says, “with our new reinforcement, we can, with becoming diligence, soon have it ready for both printer and engraver, and then we’ll wake up the boy (who has been fortunately slumbering for the last quarter of an hour), and present to him, as designed and intended, this matchless creation of our united intellects.” At the conclusion of this speech we all go good-humoredly to work, and at the close of half an hour the tedious, but most ridiculous, task is announced completed.

As I arrange and place in proper form here on the table the separate cards—twenty-seven in number—I sigh to think that I am unable to transcribe for you the best part of the nonsensical work—the illustrations. All I can give is the written copy of—



## BILLY'S ALPHABETICAL ANIMAL SHOW.

A was an elegant Ape  
Who tied up his ears with red tape,  
And wore a long veil  
Half revealing his tail  
Which was trimmed with jet bugles and crape.

B was a boastful old Bear  
Who used to say,—“Hoomh! I declare  
I can eat—if you'll get me  
The children, and let me—  
Ten babies, teeth, toenails and hair!”

C was a Codfish who sighed  
When snatched from the home of his pride,  
But could he, embrined,  
Guess this fragrance behind,  
How glad he would be that he died!



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D was a dandified Dog  
Who said,—“Though it’s raining like fog  
I wear no umbrellah,  
Me boy, for a fellah  
Might just as well travel incog!”

E was an elderly Eel  
Who would say,—“Well, I really feel—  
As my grandchildren wriggle  
And shout ‘I should giggle’—  
A trifle run down at the heel!”

F was a Fowl who conceded  
*Some* hens might hatch more eggs than *she* did,—  
But she’d children as plenty  
As eighteen or twenty,  
And that was quite all that she needed.

G was a gluttonous Goat  
Who, dining one day, *table-d’hote*,  
Ordered soup-bone, *au fait*,  
And fish, *papier-mache*,  
And a *filet* of Spring overcoat.

H was a high-cultured Hound  
Who could clear forty feet at a bound,  
And a coon once averred  
That his howl could be heard  
For five miles and three-quarters around.

I was an Ibex ambitious  
To dive over chasms auspicious;  
He would leap down a peak  
And not light for a week,  
And swear that the jump was delicious.

J was a Jackass who said  
He had such a bad cold in his head,  
If it wasn’t for leaving  
The rest of us grieving,  
He’d really rather be dead.

K was a profligate Kite  
Who would haunt the saloons every night;



And often he ust  
To reel back to his roost  
Too full to set up on it right.

L was a wary old Lynx  
Who would say,—“Do you know wot I thinks?—  
I thinks ef you happen  
To ketch me a-nappin’  
I’m ready to set up the drinks!”

M was a merry old Mole,  
Who would snooze all the day in his hole,  
Then—all night, a-rootin’  
Around and galootin’—  
He’d sing “Johnny, Fill up the Bowl!”

N was a caustical Nautilus  
Who sneered, “I suppose, when they’ve *caught* all us,  
Like oysters they’ll serve us,  
And can us, preserve us,  
And barrel, and pickle, and bottle us!”

O was an autocrat Owl—  
Such a wise—such a wonderful fowl!  
Why, for all the night through  
He would hoot and hoo-hoo,  
And hoot and hoo-hooter and howl!

P was a Pelican pet,  
Who gobbled up all he could get;  
He could eat on until  
He was full to the bill,  
And there he had lodgings to let!

Q was a querulous Quail,  
Who said: “It will little avail  
The efforts of those  
Of my foes who propose  
To attempt to put salt on my tail!”

R was a ring-tailed Raccoon,  
With eyes of the tinge of the moon,  
And his nose a blue-black,  
And the fur on his back  
A sad sort of sallow maroon.

S is a Sculpin—you’ll wish  
Very much to have one on your dish,



Since all his bones grow  
On the outside, and so  
He's a very desirable fish.



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T was a Turtle, of wealth,  
Who went round with particular stealth,—  
“Why,” said he, “I’m afraid  
Of being waylaid  
When I even walk out for my health!”

U was a Unicorn curious,  
With one horn, of a growth so *luxurious*,  
He could level and stab it—  
If you didn’t grab it—  
Clean through you, he was so blamed furious!

V was a vagabond Vulture  
Who said: “I don’t want to insult yer,  
But when you intrude  
Where in lone solitude  
I’m a-preyin’, you’re no man o’ culture!”

W was a wild *Woodchuck*,  
And you can just bet that he *could* “chuck”  
He’d eat raw potatoes,  
Green corn, and tomatoes,  
And tree roots, and call it all “*good chuck!*”

X was a kind of X-cuse  
Of a some-sort-o’-thing that got loose  
Before we could name it,  
And cage it, and tame it,  
And bring it in general use.

Y is the Yellowbird,—bright  
As a petrified lump of star-light,  
Or a handful of lightning-  
Bugs, squeezed in the tight’ning  
Pink fist of a boy, at night.

Z is the Zebra, of course!—  
A kind of a clown-of-a-horse,—  
Each other despising,  
Yet neither devising  
A way to obtain a divorce!

& here is the famous—what-is-it?  
Walk up, Master Billy, and quiz it:



You've seen the *rest* of 'em—  
Ain't this the *best* of 'em,  
Right at the end of your visit?

At last Billy is sent off to bed. It is the prudent mandate of the old folks: But so lothfully the poor child goes, Bob's heart goes, too.—Yes, Bob himself, to keep the little fellow company awhile, and, up there under the old rafters, in the pleasant gloom, lull him to famous dreams with fairy tales. And it is during this brief absence that the youngest Mills girl gives us a surprise. She will read a poem, she says, written by a very dear friend of hers who, fortunately for us, is not present to prevent her. We guard door and window as she reads. Doc says she will not listen; but she does listen, and cries, too—out of pure vexation, she asserts. The rest of us, however, cry just because of the apparent honesty of the poem of—

## BEAUTIFUL HANDS.

O your hands—they are strangely fair!  
Fair—for the jewels that sparkle there,—  
Fair—for the witchery of the spell  
That ivory keys alone can tell;  
But when their delicate touches rest  
Here in my own do I love them best,  
As I clasp with eager acquisitive spans  
My glorious treasure of beautiful hands!

Marvelous—wonderful—beautiful hands!  
They can coax roses to bloom in the strands  
Of your brown tresses; and ribbons will twine,  
Under mysterious touches of thine,  
Into such knots as entangle the soul,  
And fetter the heart under such a control  
As only the strength of my love understands—  
My passionate love for your beautiful hands.



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As I remember the first fair touch  
Of those beautiful hands that I love so much,  
I seem to thrill as I then was thrilled,  
Kissing the glove that I found unfilled—  
When I met your gaze, and the queenly bow,  
As you said to me, laughingly, "Keep it now!"  
And dazed and alone in a dream I stand  
Kissing this ghost of your beautiful hand.

When first I loved, in the long ago,  
And held your hand as I told you so—  
Pressed and caressed it and gave it a kiss,  
And said "I could die for a hand like this!"  
Little I dreamed love's fulness yet  
Had to ripen when eyes were wet,  
And prayers were vain in their wild demands  
For one warm touch of your beautiful hands.

Beautiful Hands! O Beautiful Hands!  
Could you reach out of the alien lands  
Where you are lingering, and give me, to-night,  
Only a touch—were it ever so light—  
My heart were soothed, and my weary brain  
Would lull itself into rest again;  
For there is no solace the world commands  
Like the caress of your beautiful hands.

\* \* \* \* \*

Violently winking at the mist that blurs my sight, I regretfully awaken to the here and now. And is it possible, I sorrowfully muse, that all this glory can have fled away?—that more than twenty long, long years are spread between me and that happy night? And is it possible that all the dear old faces—O, quit it! quit it! Gather the old scraps up and wad 'em back into oblivion, where they belong!

Yes, but be calm—be calm! Think of cheerful things. You are not all alone. *Billy's* living yet.

I know—and six feet high—and sag-shouldered—and owns a tin and stove-store, and can't hear thunder! *Billy!*

And the youngest Mills girl—she's alive, too.

S'pose I don't know that? I married her!



And Doc.—

*Bob* married her. Been in California for more than fifteen years—on some blasted cattle-ranch, or something,—and he's worth a half a million! And am I less prosperous with this gilded roll?