



LUCY LARCOM

(1824-1893)



LUCY LARCOM received only slight notice in the anthologies compiled by Griswold and Stedman, but her poems, issued in a "Household Edition" in 1884, had broad appeal. Her talent was in many ways similar to that of Alice and Phoebe Cary. She maintained sympathy with the working class and was a skillful writer of monologues.

Lucy grew up in Beverly, Massachusetts, her father a retired shipmaster. In *A New England Girlhood* (1889), Larcom recalls her early childhood there in a rural society about to disappear. Her rather idyllic existence, allowing her freedom to wander and explore, was suddenly disrupted when her father died. Her mother moved her many children to Lowell, where she ran a boardinghouse, and Lucy and her sisters worked in the Lowell Mills.

Considered enlightened in their day, the Lowell Mills employed girls from New England farm families. (See Alice Cary's poem "The West Country.") To supplement the long hours of work, Lowell offered unusual educational activities. Lucy, who worked in various capacities from the time she was eleven, read poetry, learned German, and contributed poems to the twin publications that eventually merged as the well-known *Lowell Offering* in 1842. While at Lowell, Larcom enjoyed her friendships with girls from many backgrounds and was excited by the hustle and bustle of the mill.

In 1846 she moved with her sister's family to Illinois where she attended the Monticello Female Seminary. She then returned to Massachusetts, teaching at Wheaton College from 1854 to 1862. During this

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period she also published poetry in a variety of literary journals, and in 1868 her first book of poems came out. After 1862 she was the editor of a children's magazine called *Our Young Folks*, which published work by many eminent American writers of both sexes, and in the 1870s she collaborated with Whittier on several projects.

An ardent reader of Wordsworth, Larcom wrote many poems about nature. In 1879 she published *Landscape in American Poetry*, a volume of critical essays. Even *An Idyl of Work* (1875) dedicated "To Working Women by One of Their Sisterhood," seems almost preindustrial compared to Rebecca Harding Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*. Larcom believed that "any needed industry, thoughtfully pursued, brings the laborer into harmony with the unceasing activities of the universe." She did not despise her mill work which at that time was less arduous than some industrial jobs.

Still, Lucy Larcom did not have an easy life. She was both poor and torn by emotional conflicts. There are really three Lucy Larcoms: the rebellious feminist of the popular "A Loyal Woman's No," the yearning intellectual of "The Rose Enthroned," and the moral naturalist of "November." Though she never fully united her warring spirits, Larcom's religion and strong beliefs in hard work and moral effort gave her life both purpose and meaning.

Selected Works: Poems. 1868; *Wild Roses of Cape Ann, and Other Poems.* 1881; *At the Beautiful Gate, and Other Songs of Faith.* 1892.

Selected Criticism: Addison, Daniel Dulany, ed. *Lucy Larcom: Life, Letters, and Diary.* Boston: Houghton, 1894; Eisler, B. *The Lowell Offering.* New York: Lippincott, 1977; Cott, Nancy. Foreword to *A New England Girlhood.* Boston: Northeastern, 1986; Marchalonis, Shirley. "Profile of Lucy Larcom." *Legacy* 5:1 (1988); Marchalonis, Shirley. *The Worlds of Lucy Larcom.* Athens: U of Georgia P, 1989.

GETTING ALONG

We trudge on together, my good man and I,
 Our steps growing slow as the years hasten by;

Our children are healthy, our neighbors are kind,
And with the world round us we've no fault to find.

'T is true that he sometimes will choose the worst way
For sore feet to walk in, a weary hot day;
But then my wise husband can scarcely go wrong,
And, somehow or other, we're getting along.

There are soft summer shadows beneath our home trees:
How handsome he looks, sitting there at his ease!
We watch the flocks coming while sunset grows dim,
His thoughts on the cattle, and mine upon him.

The blackbirds and thrushes come chattering near;
I love the thieves' music, but listen with fear:
He shoots the gay rogues I would pay for their song;—
We're different, sure; still, we're getting along.

He seems not to know what I eat, drink, or wear;
He's trim and he's hearty, so why should I care?
No harsh word from him my poor heart ever shocks:
I would n't mind scolding,—so seldom he talks.

Ah, well! 't is too much that we women expect:
He only has promised to love and protect.
See, I lean on my husband, so silent and strong;
I'm sure there's no trouble;—we're getting along.

Life is n't so bright as it was long ago,
When he visited me amid tempest and snow,
And would bring me a ribbon or jewel to wear,
And sometimes a rosebud to twist in my hair:

But when we are girls, we can all laugh and sing;
Of course, growing old, life's a different thing!

My good man and I have forgot our May song,
But still we are quietly getting along.

It is true I was rich; I had treasures and land;
But all that he asked was my heart and my hand:
Though people do say it, 't is what they can't prove,—
"He married for money; she,—poor thing! for love."

My fortune is his, and he saves me its care;
To make his home cheerful's enough for my share.
He seems always happy our broad fields among;
And so I'm contented:—we're getting along.

With stocks to look after, investments to find,
It's not very strange that I'm seldom in mind:
He can't stop to see how my time's dragging on,—
And oh! *would* he miss me, if I should be gone?

Should he be called first, I must follow him fast,
For all that's worth living for then will be past.
But I'll not think of losing him: fretting is wrong,
While we are so pleasantly getting along.

~~UNWEDDED~~

~~Behold her there in the evening sun,
That kindles the Indian Summer trees
To a separate burning bush, one by one,
Wherein the Glory Divine she sees!~~

~~Mate and nestlings she never had:
Kith and kindred have passed away;~~