

Snow-Bound

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

Meanwhile we did our nightly chores,—
 Brought in the wood from out of doors,
 Littered the stalls, and from the mows
 Raked down the herd's-grass for the cows;
 Heard the horse whinnying for his corn;
 And, sharply clashing horn on horn,
 Impatient down the stanchion rows
 The cattle shake their walnut bows;
 While, peering from his early perch
 Upon the scaffold's pole of birch,
 The cock his crested helmet bent
 And down his querulous challenge sent.

Unwarmed by any sunset light
 The gray day darkened into night,
 A night made hoary with the swarm
 And whirl-dance of the blinding storm,
 As zigzag wavering to and fro
 Crossed and recrossed the wingéd snow:

And ere the early bed-time came
 The white drift piled the window-frame,
 And through the glass the clothes-line posts
 Looked in like tall and sheeted ghosts.

So all night long the storm roared on:
 The morning broke without a sun;
 In tiny spherule traced with lines
 Of Nature's geometric signs,
 In starry flake, and pellicle,
 All day the hoary meteor fell;
 And, when the second morning shone,
 We looked upon a world unknown,
 On nothing we could call our own.
 Around the glistening wonder bent
 The blue walls of the firmament,
 No cloud above, no earth below,—
 A universe of sky and snow!
 The old familiar sights of ours
 Took marvellous shapes; strange domes and towers
 Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,
 Or garden wall, or belt of wood;
 A smooth white mound the brush-pile showed,
 A fenceless drift what once was road;
 The bridle-post an old man sat
 With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat;
 The well-curb had a Chinese roof;
 And even the long sweep, high aloof,
 In its slant splendor, seemed to tell
 Of Pisa's leaning miracle.

A prompt, decisive man, no breath
 Our father wasted: "Boys, a path!"
 Well pleased, (for when did farmer boy
 Count such a summons less than joy?)
 Our buskins on our feet we drew;
 With mittened hands, and caps drawn low,
 To guard our necks and ears from snow,
 We cut the solid whiteness through.
 And, where the drift was deepest, made

A tunnel walled and overlaid
 With dazzling crystal: we had read
 Of rare Aladdin's wondrous cave,
 And to our own his name we gave,
 With many a wish the luck were ours
 To test his lamp's supernal powers.
 We reached the barn with merry din,
 And roused the prisoned brutes within.
 The old horse thrust his long head out,
 And grave with wonder gazed about;
 The cock his lusty greeting said,
 And forth his speckled harem led;
 The oxen lashed their tails, and hooked,
 And mild reproach of hunger looked;
 The hornéd patriarch of the sheep,
 Like Egypt's Amun roused from sleep,
 Shook his sage head with gesture mute,
 And emphasized with stamp of foot.

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

And, in our lonely life, had grown
 To have an almost human tone.

As night drew on, and, from the crest
 Of wooded knolls that ridged the west,
 The sun, a snow-blown traveller, sank
 From sight beneath the smothering bank,
 We piled, with care, our nightly stack
 Of wood against the chimney-back,—
 The oaken log, green, huge, and thick,
 And on its top the stout back-stick;
 The knotty forestick laid apart,
 And filled between with curious art
 The ragged brush; then, hovering near,
 We watched the first red blaze appear,
 Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam
 On whitewashed wall and sagging beam,
 Until the old, rude-furnished room
 Burst, flower-like, into rosy bloom;
 While radiant with a mimic flame
 Outside the sparkling drift became,
 And through the bare-boughed lilac-tree
 Our own warm hearth seemed blazing free.
 The crane and pendent trammels showed,
 The Turks' heads on the andirons glowed;
 While childish fancy, prompt to tell
 The meaning of the miracle,
 Whispered the old rhyme: "*Under the tree,
 When fire outdoors burns merrily,
 There the witches are making tea.*"

The moon above the eastern wood
 Shone at its full; the hill-range stood
 Transfigured in the silver flood,
 Its blown snows flashing cold and keen,
 Dead white, save where some sharp ravine
 Took shadow, or the sombre green
 Of hemlocks turned to pitchy black
 Against the whiteness at their back.
 For such a world and such a night

Most fitting that unwarming light,
Which only seemed where'er it fell
To make the coldness visible.

Shut in from all the world without,
We sat the clean-winged hearth about,
Content to let the north-wind roar
In baffled rage at pane and door,
While the red logs before us beat
The frost-line back with tropic heat;
And ever, when a louder blast
Shook beam and rafter as it passed,
The merrier up its roaring draught
The great throat of the chimney laughed.
The house-dog on his paws outspread
Laid to the fire his drowsy head,
The cat's dark silhouette on the wall
A couchant tiger's seemed to fall;
And, for the winter fireside meet,
Between the andirons' straddling feet,
The mug of cider simmered slow,
The apples sputtered in a row,
And, close at hand, the basket stood
With nuts from brown October's wood.

What matter how the night behaved?
What matter how the north-wind raved?
Blow high, blow low, not all its snow
Could quench our hearth-fire's ruddy glow.
O Time and Change! — with hair as gray
As was my sire's that winter day,
How strange it seems, with so much gone
Of life and love, to still live on!
Ah, brother! only I and thou
Are left of all that circle now, —
The dear home faces whereupon
That fitful firelight paled and shone.
Henceforward, listen as we will,
The voices of that hearth are still;
Look where we may, the wide earth o'er,

Those lighted faces smile no more.
We tread the paths their feet have worn,
We sit beneath their orchard-trees,
We hear, like them, the hum of bees
And rustle of the bladed corn;
We turn the pages that they read,
Their written words we linger o'er,
But in the sun they cast no shade,
No voice is heard, no sign is made,
No step is on the conscious floor!
Yet Love will dream, and Faith will trust,
(Since He who knows our need is just,
That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.
Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine through his cypress-trees!
Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,
Nor looks to see the breaking day
Across the mournful marbles play!
Who hath not learned, in hours of faith,
The truth to flesh and sense unknown,
That Life is ever lord of Death,
And Love can never lose its own!

We sped the time with stories old,
Wrought puzzles out, and riddles told,
Or stammered from our school-book lore
"The Chief of Gambia's golden shore."
How often since, when all the land
Was clay in Slavery's shaping hand,
As if a trumpet called, I've heard
Dame Mercy Warren's rousing word:
*"Does not the voice of reason cry,
Claim the first right which Nature gave,
From the red scourge of bondage fly,
Nor deign to live a burdened slave!"*
Our father rode again his ride
On Memphremagog's wooded side;
Sat down again to moose and samp
In trapper's hut and Indian camp;
Lived o'er the old idyllic ease

Beneath St. François' hemlock-trees;
 Again for him the moonlight shone
 On Norman cap and bodiced zone;
 Again he heard the violin play
 Which led the village dance away,
 And mingled in its merry whirl
 The grandam and the laughing girl.
 Or, nearer home, our steps he led
 Where Salisbury's level marshes spread
 Mile-wide as flies the laden bee;
 Where merry mowers, hale and strong,
 Swept, scythe on scythe, their swaths along
 The low green prairies of the sea.
 We shared the fishing off Boar's Head,
 And round the rocky Isles of Shoals
 The hake-broil on the drift-wood coals;
 The chowder on the sand-beach made,
 Dipped by the hungry, steaming hot,
 With spoons of clam-shell from the pot.
 We heard the tales of witchcraft old,
 And dream and sign and marvel told
 To sleepy listeners as they lay
 Stretched idly on the salted hay,
 Adrift along the winding shores,
 When favoring breezes designed to blow
 The square sail of the gundalow
 And idle lay the useless oars.
 Our mother, while she turned her wheel
 Or run the new-knit stocking-heel,
 Told how the Indian hordes came down
 At midnight on Cochecho town,
 And how her own great-uncle bore
 His cruel scalp-mark to fourscore.
 Recalling, in her fitting phrase,
 So rich and picturesque and free,
 (The common unrhymed poetry
 Of simple life and country ways,)
 The story of her early days,—
 She made us welcome to her home;
 Old hearths grew wide to give us room;

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

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

Our uncle, innocent of books,
 Was rich in lore of fields and brooks,
 The ancient teachers never dumb
 Of Nature's unhoused lyceum.
 In moons and tides and weather wise,
 He read the clouds as prophecies,
 And foul or fair could well divine,
 By many an occult hint and sign,
 Holding the cunning-warded keys
 To all the woodcraft mysteries;
 Himself to Nature's heart so near
 That all her voices in his ear
 Of beast or bird had meanings clear,
 Like Apollonius of old,
 Who knew the tales the sparrows told,
 Or Hermes, who interpreted
 What the sage cranes of Nilus said;
 A simple, guileless, childlike man,
 Content to live where life began;
 Strong only on his native grounds,
 The little world of sights and sounds
 Whose girdle was the parish bounds,
 Whereof his fondly partial pride
 The common features magnified,
 As Surrey hills to mountains grew
 In White of Selborne's loving view,—
 He told how teal and loon he shot,
 And how the eagle's eggs he got,
 The feats on pond and river done,
 The prodigies of rod and gun;
 Till, warming with the tales he told,
 Forgotten was the outside cold,
 The bitter wind unheeded blew,
 From ripening corn the pigeons flew,
 The partridge drummed i' the wood, the mink
 Went fishing down the river-brink.
 In fields with bean or clover gay,
 The woodchuck, like a hermit gray,
 Peered from the doorway of his cell;
 The muskrat plied the mason's trade,

And tier by tier his mud-walls laid;
 And from the shagbark overhead
 The grizzled squirrel dropped his shell.

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

There, too, our elder sister plied
 Her evening task the stand beside;
 A full, rich nature, free to trust,
 Truthful and almost sternly just,
 Impulsive, earnest, prompt to act,
 And make her generous thought a fact,

Keeping with many a light disguise
 The secret of self-sacrifice.
 O heart sore-tried! thou hast the best
 That Heaven itself could give thee, — rest,
 Rest from all bitter thoughts and things!
 How many a poor one's blessing went
 With thee beneath the low green tent
 Whose curtain never outward swings!

As one who held herself a part
 Of all she saw, and let her heart
 Against the household bosom lean,
 Upon the motley-braided mat
 Our youngest and our dearest sat,
 Lifting her large, sweet, asking eyes,
 Now bathed within the fadeless green
 And holy peace of Paradise.
 O, looking from some heavenly hill,
 Or from the shade of saintly palms,
 Or silver reach of river calms,
 Do those large eyes behold me still?
 With me one little year ago: —
 The chill weight of the winter snow
 For months upon her grave has lain;
 And now, when summer south-winds blow
 And brier and harebell bloom again,
 I tread the pleasant paths we trod,
 I see the violet-sprinkled sod
 Whereon she leaned, too frail and weak
 The hillside flowers she loved to seek,
 Yet following me where'er I went
 With dark eyes full of love's content.
 The birds are glad; the brier-rose fills
 The air with sweetness; all the hills
 Stretch green to June's unclouded sky;
 But still I wait with ear and eye
 For something gone which should be nigh,
 A loss in all familiar things,
 In flower that blooms, and bird that sings.
 And yet, dear heart! remembering thee,

Am I not richer than of old?
 Safe in thy immortality,
 What change can reach the wealth I hold?
 What chance can mar the pearl and gold?
 Thy love hath left in trust with me?
 And while in life's late afternoon,
 Where cool and long the shadows grow,
 I walk to meet the night that soon
 Shall shape and shadow overflow,
 I cannot feel that thou art far,
 Since near at need the angels are;
 And when the sunset gates unbar,
 Shall I not see thee waiting stand,
 And, white against the evening star,
 The welcome of thy beckoning hand?

Brisk wielder of the birch and rule,
 The master of the district school
 Held at the fire his favored place,
 Its warm glow lit a laughing face
 Fresh-hued and fair, where scarce appeared
 The uncertain prophecy of beard.
 He teased the mitten-blinded cat,
 Played cross-pins on my uncle's hat,
 Sang songs, and told us what befalls
 In classic Dartmouth's college halls.
 Born the wild Northern hills among,
 From whence his yeoman father wrung
 By patient toil subsistence scant,
 Not competence and yet not want,
 He early gained the power to pay
 His cheerful, self-reliant way;
 Could doff at ease his scholar's gown
 To peddle wares from town to town;
 Or through the long vacation's reach
 In lonely lowland districts teach,
 Where all the droll experience found
 At stranger hearths in boarding round,
 The moonlit skater's keen delight,
 The sleigh-drive through the frosty night,

The rustic party, with its rough
 Accompaniment of blind-man's-buff,
 And whirling plate, and forfeits paid,
 His winter task a pastime made.
 Happy the snow-locked homes wherein
 He tuned his merry violin,
 Or played the athlete in the barn,
 Or held the good dame's winding yarn,
 Or mirth-provoking versions told
 Of classic legends rare and old,
 Wherein the scenes of Greece and Rome
 Had all the commonplace of home,
 And little seemed at best the odds
 'Twixt Yankee pedlers and old gods;
 Where Pindus-born Araxes took
 The guise of any grist-mill brook,
 And dread Olympus at his will
 Became a huckleberry hill.

A careless boy that night he seemed;
 But at his desk he had the look
 And air of one who wisely schemed,
 And hostage from the future took
 In trained thought and lore of book.
 Large-brained, clear-eyed,—of such as he
 Shall Freedom's young apostles be,
 Who, following in War's bloody trail,
 Shall every lingering wrong assail;
 All chains from limb and spirit strike,
 Uplift the black and white alike;
 Scatter before their swift advance
 The darkness and the ignorance,
 The pride, the lust, the squalid sloth,
 Which nurtured Treason's monstrous growth,
 Made murder pastime, and the hell
 Of prison-torture possible;
 The cruel lie of caste refute,
 Old forms remould, and substitute
 For Slavery's lash the freeman's will,
 For blind routine, wise-handed skill;

A school-house plant on every hill,
 Stretching in radiate nerve-lines thence
 The quick wires of intelligence;
 Till North and South together brought
 Shall own the same electric thought,
 In peace a common flag salute,
 And, side by side in labor's free
 And unresentful rivalry,
 Harvest the fields wherein they fought.

Another guest that winter night
 Flashed back from lustrous eyes the light.
 Unmarked by time, and yet not young,
 The honeyed music of her tongue
 And words of meekness scarcely told
 A nature passionate and bold,
 Strong, self-concentred, spurning guide,
 Its milder features dwarfed beside
 Her unbent will's majestic pride.
 She sat among us, at the best,
 A not unfeared, half-welcome guest,
 Rebuking with her cultured phrase
 Our homeliness of words and ways.
 A certain pard-like, treacherous grace
 Swayed the lithe limbs and drooped the lash,
 Lent the white teeth their dazzling flash;
 And under low brows, black with night,
 Rayed out at times a dangerous light;
 The sharp heat-lightnings of her face
 Presaging ill to him whom Fate
 Condemned to share her love or hate.
 A woman tropical, intense
 In thought and act, in soul and sense,
 She blended in a like degree
 The vixen and the devotee,
 Revealing with each freak or feint
 The temper of Petruchio's Kate,
 The raptures of Siena's saint.
 Her tapering hand and rounded wrist
 Had facile power to form a fist;

The warm, dark languish of her eyes
 Was never safe from wrath's surprise.
 Brows saintly calm and lips devout
 Knew every change of scowl and pout;
 And the sweet voice had notes more high
 And shrill for social battle-cry.

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

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

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

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

Within our beds awhile we heard
 The wind that round the gables roared,

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

Next morn we wakened with the shout
 Of merry voices high and clear;
 And saw the teamsters drawing near
 To break the drifted highways out.
 Down the long hillside treading slow
 We saw the half-buried oxen go,
 Shaking the snow from heads uptost,
 Their straining nostrils white with frost.
 Before our door the straggling train
 Drew up, an added team to gain.
 The elders threshed their hands a-cold,
 Passed, with the cider-mug, their jokes
 From lip to lip; the younger folks
 Down the loose snow-banks, wrestling, rolled,
 Then toiled again the cavalcade
 O'er windy hill, through clogged ravine,
 And woodland paths that wound between
 Low drooping pine-boughs winter-weighed.
 From every barn a team afoot,
 At every house a new recruit,
 Where, drawn by Nature's subtlest law,
 Haply the watchful young men saw
 Sweet doorway pictures of the curls
 And curious eyes of merry girls,
 Lifting their hands in mock defence
 Against the snow-ball's compliments,

And reading in each missive tost
 The charm with Eden never lost.

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

So days went on: a week had passed
 Since the great world was heard from last.
 The Almanac we studied o'er,
 Read and reread our little store,
 Of books and pamphlets, scarce a score;
 One harmless novel, mostly hid
 From younger eyes, a book forbid,
 And poetry, (or good or bad,
 A single book was all we had,)
 Where Ellwood's meek, drab-skirted Muse,
 A stranger to the heathen Nine,
 Sang, with a somewhat nasal whine,
 The wars of David and the Jews.
 At last the floundering carrier bore
 The village paper to our door.
 Lo! broadening outward as we read,
 To warmer zones the horizon spread;
 In panoramic length unrolled
 We saw the marvels that it told.

Before us passed the painted Creeks,
 And daft McGregor on his raids
 In Costa Rica's everglades.
 And up Taygetos winding slow
 Rode Ypsilanti's Mainote Greeks,
 A Turk's head at each saddle-bow!
 Welcome to us its week-old news,
 Its corner for the rustic Muse,
 Its monthly gauge of snow and rain,
 Its record, mingling in a breath
 The wedding bell and dirge of death;
 Jest, anecdote, and love-lorn tale,
 The latest culprit sent to jail;
 Its hue and cry of stolen and lost,
 Its vendue sales and goods at cost,
 And traffic calling loud for gain.
 We felt the stir of hall and street,
 The pulse of life that round us beat;
 The chill embargo of the snow
 Was melted in the genial glow;
 Wide swung again our ice-locked door,
 And all the world was ours once more!

Clasp, Angel of the backward look
 And folded wings of ashen gray
 And voice of echoes far away,
 The brazen covers of thy book;
 The weird palimpsest old and vast,
 Wherein thou hid'st the spectral past;
 Where, closely mingling, pale and glow
 The characters of joy and woe;
 The monographs of outlived years,
 Or smile-illumed or dim with tears,
 Green hills of life that slope to death,
 And haunts of home, whose vistaed trees
 Shade off to mournful cypresses
 With the white amaranths underneath.
 Even while I look, I can but heed
 The restless sands' incessant fall,

Importunate hours that hours succeed,
 Each clamorous with its own sharp need,
 And duty keeping pace with all.
 Shut down and clasp the heavy lids;
 I hear again the voice that bids
 The dreamer leave his dream midway
 For larger hopes and graver fears:
 Life greatens in these later years,
 The century's aloe flowers to-day!

Yet, haply, in some lull of life,
 Some Truce of God which breaks its strife,
 The worldling's eyes shall gather dew,
 Dreaming in throngful city ways
 Of winter joys his boyhood knew;
 And dear and early friends—the few
 Who yet remain—shall pause to view
 These Flemish pictures of old days;
 Sit with me by the homestead hearth,
 And stretch the hands of memory forth
 To warm them at the wood-fire's blaze!
 And thanks untraced to lips unknown
 Shall greet me like the odors blown
 From unseen meadows newly mown,
 Or lilies floating in some pond,
 Wood-fringed, the wayside gaze beyond;
 The traveller owns the grateful sense
 Of sweetness near, he knows not whence,
 And, pausing, takes with forehead bare
 The benediction of the air.

from *Among the Hills*

Prelude

Along the roadside, like the flowers of gold
 That tawny Incas for their gardens wrought,
 Heavy with sunshine droops the golden-rod,