

THE OLD BIRCHEN SWITCH THAT HUNG ON THE WALL.

How dear to my heart are the school-days of childhood,
 When no care nor contrition my wild spirits knew,—
 The orchards I robbed, our larks in the wildwood,
 The school-house and grove where the birch-switches grew ;
 The row of mud-pies with toe-marks imprinted,
 How they rush to my sight at fond memory's call ;
 The old cider-mill with draughts never stinted,
 And the switch that hung high on the old school-house wall.
 How the youngsters assembled in terror oft trembled,
 As that hide-cutting switch came down from the wall.

That knotty old switch in my mind is abiding,
 For oft, when returned with some wild truant band,
 I received, with that switch, a most merciless hiding,
 The toughest and sorest boy-nature could stand.
 Unlike the old bucket no moss was adhering,
 No white-pebbled bottom was touched when it fell,
 No pure sense of coolness e'er marked its appearing,
 But I marked each descent with a jump and a yell.
 Oh, I viewed it with loathing, for no underclothing
 Broke the force of those blows as so swiftly they fell.

I remember with trembling one grim little madam
 Who taught me the rudiments, pot-hooks, and all,
 And who thought to expel all the sin left by Adam,
 By thrashing it out with that switch on the wall ;
 I've been horsed o'er the knees of that maiden so human,
 With my back to the foe and my face to the floor,
 And I thought how fools prate of the soft touch of woman,
 For each touch drew a blister, each stroke woke a roar,
 In that day of tough switches and very thin breeches,
 When correction was pressed both behind and before.

I survived all the blows, and married the daughter
 Of that muscular schoolmarm whose blows fell like rain ;
Now her roguish grandchildren defy her with laughter ;
 Their tricks she approves,—mine she punished with pain.
 And though I remember of no interceding
 When she put in the licks with a switch or a rule,
 If a grandchild I spank there's a grandmother pleading,—
 'Tis the granny who whaled me of old in the school,
 With the toughest of switches, her sharpest of switches,
 That started a rogue like the kick of a mule.

How we boast of advance in the secrets of learning,
 How to cram the young heads we take infinite pains,
 And forget inward pangs yield to blisters and burning,
 That the switch hath oft quickened both conscience and brains.
 To four minor senses we're often appealing ;
 Each one to our aid, in correction, we call,
 But that old bottom sense, the keen sense of feeling,
 No longer the rogue doth persuade or appal !
 Yet to quiet confusion, or force a conclusion,
 There's a mission to-day for that switch from the wall.