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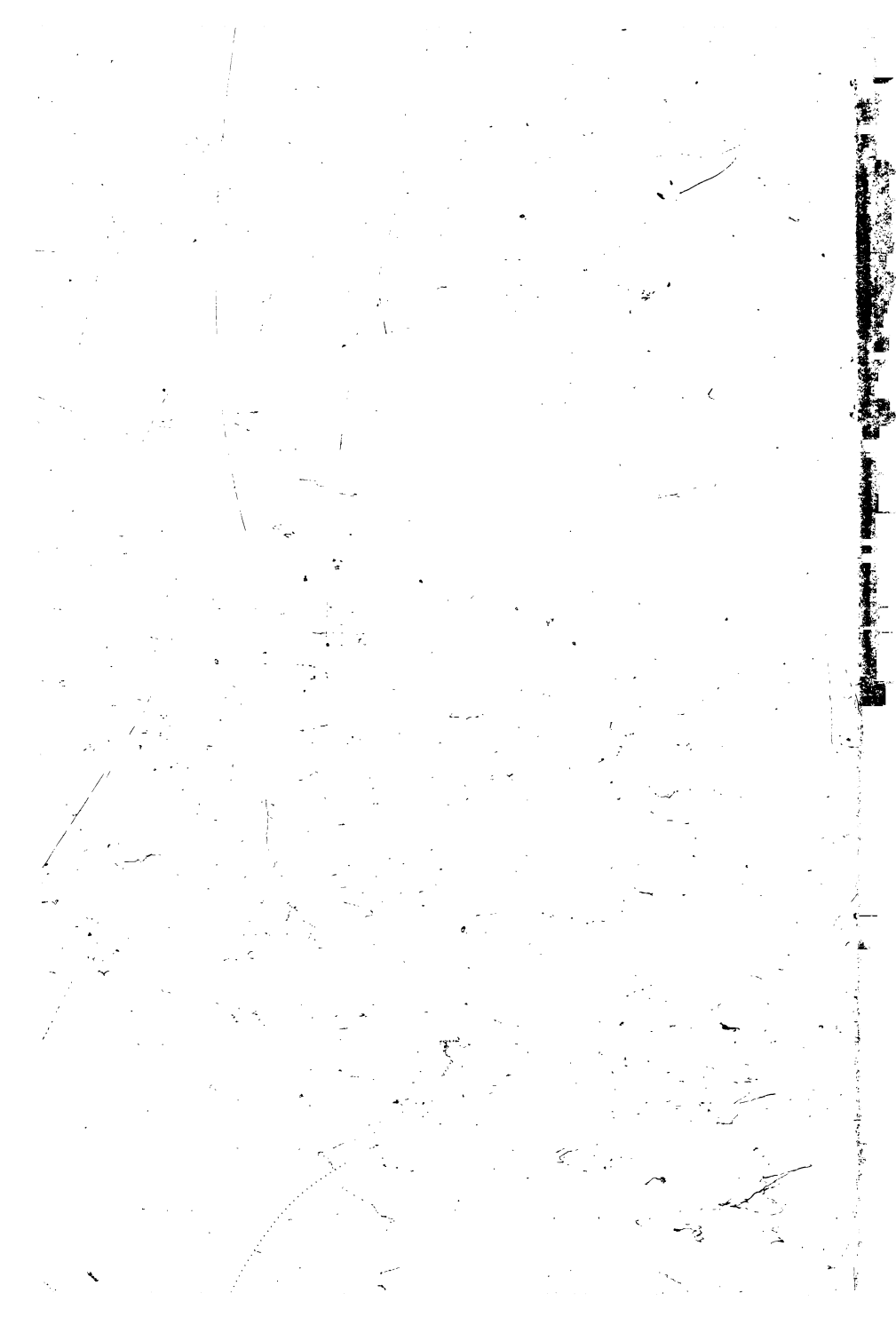
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THE LONE HOUSE.

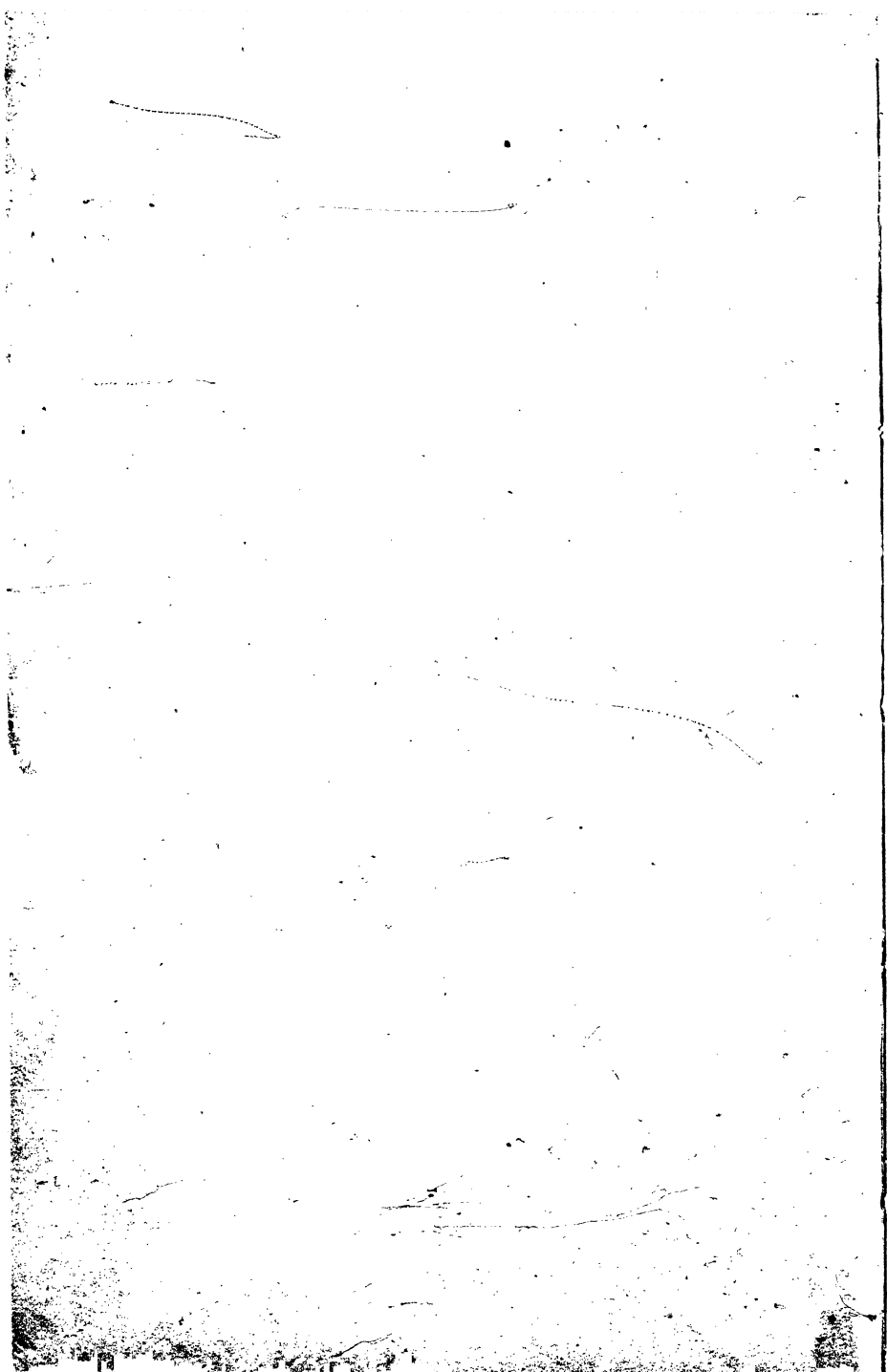
A POEM.

Partly founded on fact.

BY CASSIE FAIRBANKS.

HALIFAX :
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1869.





THE LONE HOUSE.

A POEM.

PARTLY FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY CASSIE FAIRBANKS.

'Twas a lonely hut, on a lonely road,
So far removed from neighbor abode,
You needs must journey for many a mile,
On either side, would you seek the smile
Of friendly welcome or social cheer—
Did the clouds forbode that a storm drew near—
Little incited the wayfarer's zest
To take at that dwelling the noontide rest;
And fain was the trav'ler, whate'er his need,
To urge to a quickened pace his steed:
For few were the footsteps that linger'd near
A place so lovely, and yet so drear.
Brownly outstretching—the untill'd ground
Was upheav'd by many a moss-grown mound,
And the charr'd and bleaching stumps on the plain
Were as tombstones marking the fallen slain;
While the darkling river that muttered by,
Seemed telling some sorrow angrily—

Perchance of the loss of the leafy screen
 Sequest'ring its eddies with trembling green ;
 Or, it might be, 'twas telling its troubled fear
 Of the group of fire-scathed hemlocks near,
 Whose skeleton arms on high were flung,
 As convulsion strained and torture strung :
 They had perished in helpless agony,
 In their verdurous cloud of vitality ;
 And the death-bound frenzy of those gaunt trees
 Still made an appeal to earth's sympathies,
 While the lichens, white as a veteran's beard,
 Made the withered spectres still more weird.
 Brave was the heart that first had come
 To carve in the forest that dear word "home ;"
 Strong was his soul as he firmly stood,
 Gazing, axe in hand, on the frowning wood,
 Ere he woke its echoes with blow on blow,
 Laying the clust'ring pine trees low.
 And the unbark'd logs which that squatter hew'd
 Still form the walls of that cabin rude.
 Little of building craft he brought
 To rear the shelter which there he sought :
 No ample proportions gave outward proof
 That comfort might nestle beneath his roof ;
 And as year on year had flown apace,
 But two small chambers increased its space.
 Days had come and weeks had flown
 Over the house that was called "the lone,"
 Bringing no change with the summer's glow—
 No alteration with winter's snow ;
 And the few improvements which round it grew,
 Gave sign that the occupant's wants were few.
 And yet 'twas a sight that pleased one well,
 As you rose o'er the hill and looked down the dell,

On a nook which memory will oft intrude
 In the hush of its perfect solitude,
 Where the spiral curl of the silvery smoke
 Alone of intelligent being spoke,
 And seemed it a pleasant thing to be
 In the heart of Nature's liberty,
 Untrammel'd by aught that fashion lays
 On the ebbing hours of fleeting days,
 Free to inhale the pure fresh air,
 Unheeding time in the sunshine there ;
 Through moss-grown thickets to roam at will,
 To the stern grey steep of the rock-scarr'd hill :
 To come, perchance, on the very lair
 Of the fox, or the mink, or the grizzly bear ;
 Or, if sylvan attractions might further woo,
 On the trail of the moose or the cariboo ;
 On—on to the lake by whose liliated brink—
 The antler'd herds have paused to drink—
 Or, from keen pursuit, have sought to lave
 Their heated sides in the cooling wave,
 Giving broad mark, in each dusky frame,
 To the tube that utters the hunter's aim,
 Who reads, in the glance of the bloodshot eye.
 How the brutes that perish regret to die.
 'Tis a strange, sad feeling to think one's own
 The only footsteps a place has known—
 That the tassel-tufted larches nigh
 Ne'er mirror'd their grace in a human eye—
 That never the beach-tree's foliage spread
 Its glossy grandeur o'er human head,
 Or the wreath-like branch which the elm arrays
 Bent shrinkingly down 'neath a human gaze,
 Till you flung yourself, like a monarch free,
 Beneath the maple's red canopy,

In the strength "to do," and the power "to dare,"
 Claiming lordship over the waste land there.
 Oft 'mid such wilderness reveries,
 With the lightning's wing, through past centuries.
 The electric throb of the first man's heart
 Has caused mine with as wild a thrill to start.
 He read, when the world was fresh and young,
 And the spheres their choral praises sung,
 The infant page of earth's history,
 In himself the noblest mystery!
 Natures, divine and human, met
 In the crown on material beauty set
 The living seal on a finished plan
 Was the soul, God's image, of thinking man;
 And since the rich gift to him of all
 That earth's broad bosom her own can call,
 Holding God's charter, full and free,
 "Over all I have given dominion to thee,"
 Inanimate nature his will has swayed,
 And mute creation his rule obeyed.
 Earth's fallen sons read the same sweet story,
 Though dim is the page, in its faded glory,
 When they come to some quiet, secluded spot,
 Whose verdure has hitherto known them not,
 To feel in the tranquil air profound,
 Through the rustling surges that ripple round,
 As if every leaflet that fluttered there
 Imprisoned a spirit engrossed in prayer;
 And he who ventures, with earnest senses,
 'Mid the purest of earthly influences,
 If his heart listen, can clearly hear
 Tones that are mute to the careless ear—
 Even that voice which the stillness broke,
 When God in the evetide of Eden spoke!

Bent was the sinewy settler's frame,
 When the warning to flit from his dwelling came,
 And his spirit forsook its house of clay,
 When deep in the valley the snow-drifts lay.
 Nature was drest as a fair young bride,
 That beautiful morning on which he died.
 Veiled and robed in its white array,
 Breathing gladness, and hope, and holiday,
 That familiar haunt, now that life was o'er,
 Had never seemed half so bright before :
 For winter's regalia, from every tree,
 Was flashing the blaze of its jewelry.
 Golden network and starry crown,
 With pendant brilliants, gleam'd lustrous down ;
 Crystal encased each bowing stem ;
 Each twig wore its own peculiar gem ;
 While rush and reed, by the frozen river,
 Rose, pearly shafts from a sparkling quiver ;
 And the sun, from a throne of resplendent blue,
 Lent each and all a prismatic hue,
 Till the dazzled eyesight could hardly bear
 A glory that seemed celestial there.
 Death and decay had no power to awe
 That dreamland splendor, a silver thaw.
 But the beauty the radiant vision shed
 Seemed little in unison with the dead,
 Lying unmoved on his wildwood bier,
 Unheeding the stranger unusual there,
 Whose friendly aid would pillow his rest
 In the scenes that his manhood had lov'd the best.
 Where the purple daisy and golden rod
 In autumn would bloom on the hillock's sod,
 And the oaks of summer their shadows wave
 In greenest gloom o'er his forest grave.—

Another came in his place to dwell,
To tenant that hut in the lonely dell :
Strange that a woman was not afraid
To dwell far from all neighbor aid —
From human intercourse far aloof,
Alone and defenceless beneath her roof !
No break in the day's monotony —
Alone from the morn till the eve to be,
Except at those intervals, few and rare,
When travellers rested their horses there ;
Depending on self to securely guard
That lonely homestead — to watch and ward
The meagre comforts she called her own,
From thrifty toil by her rough hearthstone.
In the furrows that mark'd her handsome face,
A resolute will had left its trace ;
And her eyes had a flash in their deep'ning grey,
Well remembered for many a day,
Though their beauty was foreign to that we bless
In the gentle gaze of womanliness.
Force and daring were in their spell,
And use had strengthened their meaning well.
The hues of health had bronzed her cheek,
And of constant exposure seemed to speak ;
For none of her sisterhood's quiet ways
Had filled the round of her restless days.
While they sat sewing beside the door,
She was away on the barren moor,
Trapping the mink or the fox, to win
The price that's set on the glossy skin ;
Or her rifle was sending its sharp report,
To earn a meal by the morning's sport ;
And woe to the timid bird whose wing
Across her pathway would startled spring :

Partridge, or woodcock, or rare curlew,
 Fell fluttering down 'neath an aim so true.
 Yet was she not savage, though stern of mood,
 Gaining so strangely her livelihood ;
 Nor was she mad, though there seemed to be
 A shadowy trace of insanity
 In her wild pursuits and her self-reliance,
 While her tongue's rough scorn and fierce defiance
 Inspired an awe the intruder felt
 To avoid the place where Beck Langley dwelt.
 Why she had chosen apart to live,
 None of her kindred could reason give ;
 Why thus estranged from all natural ties —
 What had unsexed her sympathies —
 None could answer : her struggling heart
 Would of hidden sorrow to none impart ;
 Her sullen contest alone she waged,
 If passion or pride in her bosom raged ;
 And the only soothing her strong grief sought
 Was uninterrupted indulgence of thought —
 To be unobserved when her wayward soul
 Burst from the fetters of self control,
 And memory's burning and passionate tears
 Flowed fast o'er the grave of embittered years.
 This might not last : the hour came
 When from smouldering embers burst forth the flame,
 And a pressing need in her heart awoke,
 When gentler feelings within her spoke :
 A craving that some young human thing
 Should to her in fond dependence cling —
 A heart by self-interest yet untaught,
 Artlessly lisping each tender thought,
 Breaking, with voice that mirth imbued,
 The silence of that stern solitude ;

And that love-thirst of the desolate
 Rose day by day importunate,
 Till back on her childhood's track she fled,
 To the shadowy caves of the old homestead ;
 And when next she traversed that moorland wild,
 Her arms enclasped a sister's child,
 Orphaned ere life's progression new
 Looked conscious forth from the eyes of blue—
 Orphaned ere memory's mystic thread
 Had, link by link, been fashioned,
 Until the enduring meshes twined
 The first idea of the infant mind.
 "Father" and "mother" hence could be
 Vague words and dark in her history,
 And the meaning instinct still would crave,
 Her self-charged guardian gently gave ;
 And so it came, in the twilight dim,
 Might be heard at eve some low sweet hymn.
 And the time-worn volume of sacred lore
 Unbosom'd again its neglected store,
 While solemn inspiration taught
 Each hermit scholar deepen'd thought ;
 Other instruction the wildwood lent,
 And, following the train of enquiring bent,
 The student drew, with quickened sense,
 Crude facts from forest experience,
 Till the page of Nature, often trod,
 Received a voice from the Book of God.

* * * * *

Day's vagrant sunbeams gently stole
 From floweret lips, grey twilight's dole
 Of perfumed dew ; then swept the lake,
 And tipped the fern, and tinged the brake,
 And, with long, prying glance, betrayed

The secret of each sylvan shade,
 While broader sunshine made the corn
 More golden still, that autumn morn.
 But ah! for earth's disrupted ties—
 For jarred and broken sympathies!
 No day-spring beauty soothed the breast—
 No morning benediction blest
 The demon soul, that onward strode,
 To that lone home, the untravelled road.
 And shrunk no bough, nor shivered flower,
 With prescience of an evil power?
 The shadow of a darkening gloom
 Passed all unscathed their freshened bloom;
 The sweet serenity around
 Awoke with sharp contention's sound;
 Its mistress gave the asked-for food,
 But entrance to the hut withstood;
 And for a while, her dauntless mien
 Obtained her will; then fierce and keen,
 Dread imprecations rent the air,
 That pitying angels weep to hear;
 And then the miscreant feigned to stray
 To where the widening high road lay,
 'Neath arches thick with clustering leaves,
 While she stood still beneath the eaves.
 Of her low roof, and fixed her gaze
 On the perspective's violet haze.
 She marked of light the changeful guise,
 Then fixed her wistful, dreamy eyes
 Where glacier cloudlets snowier grew,
 Gliding from depth to depth of blue.
 But little deemed she e'er the sun
 Had to his zenith splendor won,
 Her throbbing and bewildered brain

Might never feel earth's griefs again,
 But find—by poet's thought express'd—
 "Around her restlessness, God's rest."

CANTO II.

When first on England's glories throned,
 A royal maiden's voice, firm toned,
 Spake queenly oath, her people heard
 The full expression of each word.
 Justice she vowed to execute,
 As though sweet Mercy's tongue were mute ;
 The sword of Justice, held unsheathed,
 She vowed to list what Mercy breathed ;
 And so, when from the reeking sod,
 A "brother's blood" cries up to God,
 She must arise in God-like might,
 And drag the accursed deed to light ;
 Crime's labyrinthine course pursue,
 Guided by one slight scarlet clue,
 And gain, if possible, access
 To that unsearchable recess,
 The human heart, which chance may be
 A fortress in its agony,
 Where Truth, a coward, grovelling, lies,
 And Fear's stern ward escape defies.
 Our Sovereign wields no tyrant's rod :
 "Victoria, by the Grace of God,"
 Rules o'er a realm whose broad expanse
 May never mourn day's dying glance,
 Where lustrous sunshine streaming down
 Gilds still some jewel of her crown.

Untiring as those waves of light,
 Justice unsleeping seeks her right,
 But wheresoe'er her task is sped,
 Gleams Mercy's heaven-enhaloed head.
 Where sacred missions thus combine,
 The royal law becomes divine.
 And so it came in solemn state,
 And robed in power delegate.
 The judges of our land gave ear
 To "far-off shriek of woman's fear"—
 To "striding step"—to "stunning blow"—
 To "stifled gasp of mortal woe;"—
 Then heard on August's scented gale,
 "The piteous sob of infant wail."—
 It was strange trial—in the court;
 Each foot of standing room was sought,
 And for a while each human breast
 Abeyant held self interest,
 While in each separate whirlpool thought,
 Varied emotions surging wrought.
 At that tribunal all arraign
 One branded with the curse of Cain;
 And he—he was an abject thing—
 Earth's earthiest off-scouring;
 Less than a brute, for brutes but do
 What craving instinct urges to;
 But man, with passions past control,
 Still feels abhorrent to the soul,
 The crimson flood, of whose foul stain
 He ne'er may cleanse his hand again;
 And all they urged in his defence
 Was disproportionate rational sense.
 The grave Chief Justice held the place
 His years and righteous judgments grace;

And near him, calmed by manners mild,
 (The only witness) stood a child !
 He bade her stand beside him there ;
 He held her hand—he stroked her hair ;
 And 'twas a touching sight to see,
 And one to live in memory,
 How on her head his hand still lingered,
 The flaxen elf locks gently fingered,
 And won her childish lips to speak
 Of scenes that blanched the old man's cheek.
 In rustic beauty, roughly dress'd,
 The little maid stood self-possess'd :
 The forest-bred of life's degrees
 Knew nothing, so she gazed at ease,
 And answered prompt, in accents clear,
 Nor felt surprise, nor seemed to fear.
 They asked no oath : all felt that she
 Spoke truth in truth's simplicity ;
 And when they questioned, " Would she know
 The form of him that dealt the blow ?"
 She sent her vivid glance among
 The various faces of the throng,
 And then replied, " He is not here !"
 But at that moment one most near
 The accused rose up and left a space,
 Revealing thus the criminal's face ;
 Then eagerly she forward bent,
 And, with dismayed astonishment,
 She cried, " Ah ! there, I see him now —
 His hand supports his hidden brow ;"
 Then in a tone no doubt confessing,
 But fullest certainty expressing,
 " Yes !"—and she tried a sob to smother —
 " Yes, that's the man that murdered mother !

He came on that autumnal morn—
 A haggard, tattered wretch forlorn ;
 And mother did not wish that he
 A loiterer round our place should be ;
 And so she brought, with ready zeal,
 The remnants of our morning meal ;
 And glad was she, and well content,
 When, after resting brief, he went ;
 But ere she knew, he back returned,
 While furious passion in him burned ;
 And seizing, from the cord wood nigh,
 A gnarled log, he raised it high,
 And felled her helpless to the floor,
 From which she never rose up more.”
 She said, “I had to hiding run,
 When mother bade me fetch her gun,
 Which ere I reached the ruffian fled,
 And mother on the floor lay dead.
 I called until she must have heard,
 But never answered she a word ;
 And her pale, blood-stained features wore
 A look I never saw before.”
 They asked her, how she knew ’twas death ?
 And every listener held his breath,
 As o’er those blue, intrepid eyes,
 There came a sickened, strange surprise,
 While to that lithe and childish frame
 A woman’s weight of anguish came,
 And the quick rush of burning tears
 Told of experience past her years—
 Of teaching mute, but eloquent,
 Of what we call “life’s strange event.”
 She said she went in hurried quest
 Of a young boy, a playmate guest ;

And speedily they took their way
 To where the nearest farm-house lay.
 Fear to their infant feet lent speed,
 Which flagg'd not in their hour of need.
 On—on, without one thought of rest,
 For hours those tender travellers press'd,
 Nor knew that fifteen miles between,
 Of swampy waste and barren green,
 Lay, ere their cry for aid might be
 Answered by ready sympathy.
 Forlorn—fatigued—by sorrow spent,
 Those children bravely underwent
 The weary pilgrimage that gave
 Voice to this legend of the grave—
 To those whose active interest sped
 To seek and sepulchre the dead,
 By that dark solitary mound
 That made one spot of forest ground.
 Sacred—within the dim recess
 Of the breeze-whispering wilderness!
 The shattered tabernacle lay
 'Mid sweetest silence—silent clay!
 Her's was a lonelier mansion still
 Than the rude cabin 'neath the hill,
 The lowly house—where God's own keep
 A solemn rest—nor wake to weep.

* * * * *

They doomed the wretch to ward confined
 As irresponsible of mind,
 Enshrouded in a dungeon's gloom
 They gave him but a living tomb.
 Where never to beclouded sense
 Darts sunbeam-like intelligence,
 From year to year to undergo

One long dark night of mental woe
 'Till aid invisible be sent
 And prison bolt and bar be rent
 And to its fleshly temple cell
 Life's fevered frenzy gasp farewell !
 Then He— whose living kindness saves —
 (Himself a wanderer once 'mid graves)
 May gather that demoniac loathed
 In his own mind and once more clothed
 And on the troubled maniac's brain
 God's long lost image stamp again !

* * * * *

The fire has died upon the hearth
 Whence the light laugh of childish mirth
 Has passed away—the rotting floor
 Creaks 'neath the passer's tread no more ;
 Each after each the rafters fall—
 And totters the decaying wall,
 While rankest vegetation takes
 Possession of what man forsakes,
 Nature, regretful, claims her own
 By tangled vines and briars o'ergrown,
 And buries 'neath the herbage green
 The tragic memories of the scene.

NOTE.

THE murder of Rebecca Langley to which the foregoing lines refer, was committed on the 24th of August, 1854, at a remote part of the road leading from Halifax to Guysboro. A true Bill was returned by the Grand Jury of the County of Halifax, on the 29th November, against Alex. McDonald, a native of Antigonish, in the County of Sydney, who was tried on the 12th and 13th of December before Mr. Justice Dodd, and the following verdict recorded, "that the prisoner is not guilty upon the indictment, having been *insane* at the time of the offence being committed. The murderer was subsequently confined in the Provincial Penitentiary near Halifax.

