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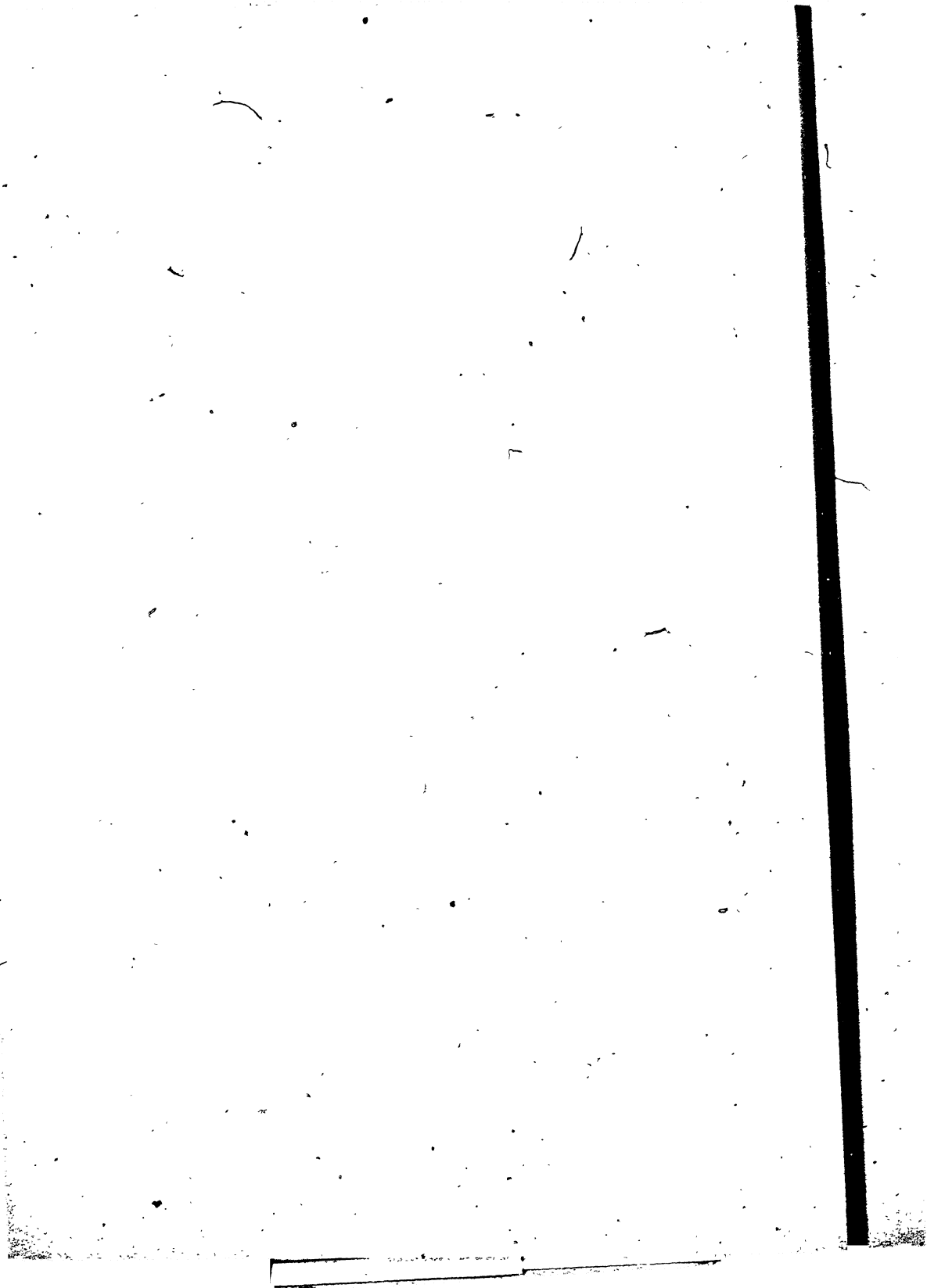
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VILLAGE SCENES;

A CANADIAN POEM,

— BY —

DENNIS COUGHLIN.



OTTAWA :

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TO
THE RIGHT HONORABLE
SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD, G.C.B.,
Prime Minister of Canada,

—AND—

The Father of Confederation,

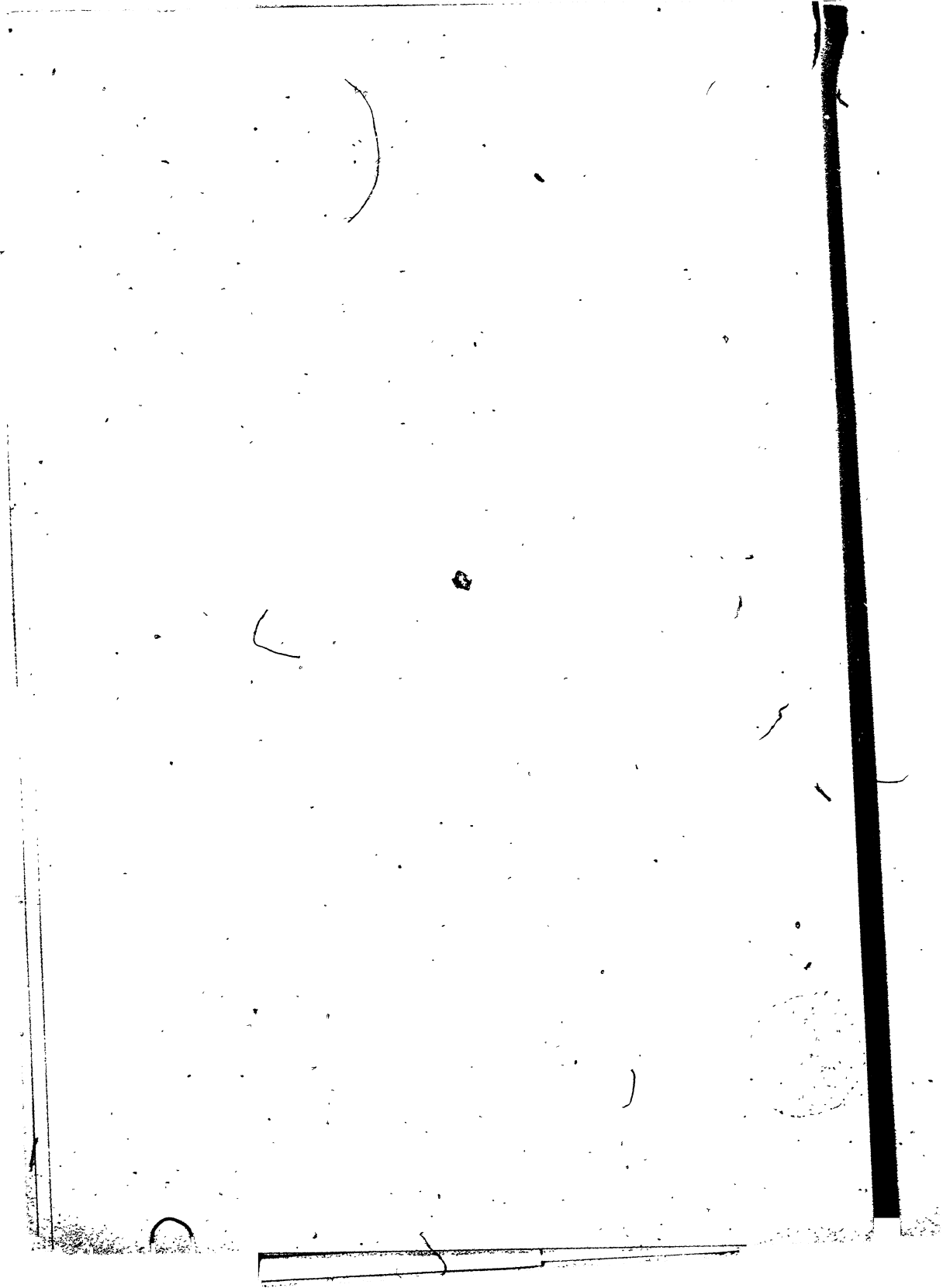
THIS POEM

IS, BY KIND PERMISSION,

DEDICATED

With deep gratitude and respect

BY THE AUTHOR.



TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD, G.C.B., P.C.

Right Honourable Sir:

Whatever I may gain by a dedication of my feeble attempt to you, I cannot be insensible to the fact, that it must be a great concession on your part to permit me to do myself this honour.

However defective my poem may be in other respects, I have the presumption to hope that the life which I attempt to describe will strike a responsive chord in your bosom. It is true that to a City bred person, this phase of Canadian Country life may appear to be the outcome of the imagination; but to one, like yourself, whose busy public life has led him into many out of the way places, much that I have written herein must appeal, if not as a vivid description, at least as a bold counterfeit of the reality.

The earlier, or opening parts of my poem, are devoted mainly to scenes amid which my boyhood years were spent, and are of an entirely descriptive nature. Wherever in these parts I may have touched on politics, it was as a faithful chronicler of events such as actually took place, and not as a partisan, I wrote.

In the next portion of my poem, I make an attempt to introduce the great railway system, which, under your administration has been successfully extended from ocean to ocean. In this connection I do not think I over-step the bounds of fact, when I describe villages as growing up to towns, poverty to ease and ease to affluence. All these changes I have observed along the line of this world famous road, and have long looked upon them as a fitting theme for a Canadian Poem. Hence my poem

is properly divided into three parts. First, Village Scenes before the railway; second, the introduction of the railway, and thirdly, the changes consequent upon its construction.

Of the two first parts, I have already spoken, of the third there is little to be said. In it I but describe scenes which must be familiar to every Canadian, while I enter a protest against that too great ambition for wealth, which seems to have taken possession of the people. Yet, understand me, it is not against that true ambition which, guided by reason, begets for man all the goods of this life, but against that over-ambition which fills the mind of man with nothing but toil and gain, and leaves no time for recreation, and which must in the end ruin his health and rob him of peace and contentment, that I protest. That there are facts to bear me out in this, is too painfully evident. Day after day we read of our best and ablest men being carried off by some disease or other "brought on by over work."

But I must not detain you any longer, lest I may tire you with the preface, while soliciting your perusal of the poem. Therefore, such as it is, I submit it to your kind consideration, hoping that you will find it sufficiently meritorious to warrant the granting of your permission for a dedication of the same to yourself.

Believe me, to remain,

Right Honourable Sir,

Yours faithfully

DENNIS COUGHLIN.

OTTAWA, 15th October, 1889.

VILLAGE SCENES.

Fair, smiling hill, sweet village of my birth,
To me the dearest spot of all the earth,
Where childhood's careless hours unheeded fled,
Where pleasures came, and sorrows all were dead,
Where free from care and ignorant of all strife,
The hours flew—the sweetest of my life.
Alas! such hours can ne'er be mine again,
Afar I've drifted o'er life's rugged main,
Yet, yet, though far I've wandered from thee, still,
While tossed about at th' ocean's cruel will,
To thee my thoughts turn back, I see again,
The rolling river and the smiling plain,
The old log-schoolhouse, and the grassy lawn,
That oft in childish sports I've gamboled on;
I see the children trooping round the door,
And oh, sweet thought! I am a child once more!

At school again, my book and slate arranged;
But ah! the vision's fled, and all is changed!
New looks in every face, the teacher gone,
Who held the teacher's seat when I was young.
In vain I search around each bench and chair,
Friends of my youth are now no longer there;
They're absent all, some gone, some wander far,
'Mid savage tribes on bleak and distant bar,
Some 'mong the dead, some grown to man's estate,
Some old, with wrinkled brow and shining pate;
All, all, are absent from the happy scene,
Where years ago we sported on the green.

O Time ! to tell I will not here delay
 Of all the horrors of thy dreadful sway ;
 But hurrying on, each well remembered nook,
 I'll seek the old fish-pond, and murm'ring brook.
 How oft, when from my long day-task set free,
 I've spent my evenings here in joy with thee ;
 How oft essay'd with crooken'd pin for hook,
 To catch thy finny 'habitants, O brook !
 How oft have my bare patt'ring feet been wash'd
 With waters from thy pebble bottom dash'd ;
 But oh, thy sad, thy ever mournful tone
 Beats low and calm, responsive to my own,
 It adds, O Brook, it adds new woe to mine,
 Recalls the past and makes the tear drops shine
 Within my eye, then bursting flood my cheek ;
 Bid sorrow silence for I cannot speak !

I must bid thee farewell and wander on,
 Where'er by fancy led or mem'ry drawn,
 It matters not, 'tis all the same to me ;
 The hill, the mountain, and the upland lea,
 All are the scenes of childhood's happy hours,
 When life roll'd on through gardens deck'd with flowers,
 When love and youth went trooping by my side,
 Or dash'd with me into thy mimic tide ;
 But I must on, the pastures now are nigh :
 To thee, sweet Brook, to thee, a sad good-bye.

Hail ye, fair fields ! where lambkins freely roam,
 Where fresh green grasses grow and cow-slips bloom,
 Where children chase the fleet-wing'd butterfly,
 Where daisies bloom to day, to-morrow die
 Where rural sports and games were practised oft,
 The swain contended and the maiden laughed,

While all essay'd to please by art or awe
 By might, the dazzled crowd that wond'ring saw
 Their feats of strength, or supple acts that drew
 Applause, that all thought but their well-won due ;
 While maids smil'd on the winner of the chase,
 Or shyly kiss'd the first one in the race.
 'Twas here, all pompous social laws unknown,
 Made each one feel that freedom was his own ;
 A lord, a man ; a man a lord might be,
 In this fair cradle of the simply free.
 But here's the road I must be wand'ring on ;
 Farewell, farewell to thee, sweet grassy lawn.

Ah ! here's the village, here's the inn and store,
 And there, as oft of old, sits by the door,
 The village scribe with politics and news,
 Some old, some new, he cares not what its hues,
 And parties he oft gets so badly mix'd
 'Tis hard to tell to which his views are fix'd !
 But see ! beside the barrel on which he sits,
 The master stands, the votary of the Grits.
 Time's chang'd ; it was not thus in days gone by,
 When the village scribe all comers did defy ;
 Ah ! then the master held his peace, his rule
 Held sway o'er nothing but the old log school ;
 But now he's burst the bonds that bound him down,
 His noble spirit beams through many a frown,
 As waxing hot with rhetoric's stern laws,
 He nobly, bravely fights the lib'ral cause.
 But vain his strength, the burly scribe defies
 His arguments, his every fact denies,
 He slaps his knee, he thunders on the barrel,
 And fiercely, bravely fights his party's quarrel.
 The trembling swains, amazed at the debate,

Stand list'ning round to learn their country's fate,
 Then toddle home and wonder by the way,
 How men can learn to talk, so learn'd as they.
 Let us approach and lend a willing ear,
 And standing 'mid the swains we'll list'ning hear.

"Protection," says the scribe, "the country's stay,
 "If the country you'd ruin sweep that away!"
 "You're wrong, you're wrong," the master then maintains,
 "Free trade's the life, the liberty of swains,
 "The royal road to progress and to wealth,
 "When swains may live in luxury and health."
 And then the scribe, all trembling with affright,
 Right quickly draws to join the thicken'd fight.
 "Believe him not," he cries "this is a plan,
 "By which he mocks the liberties of man!
 "What! would you see your factories mould'ring fall,
 "And see the ivy climb the factory wall,
 "See honest toil go mourning through the land,
 "See treason raise aloft its dark'ning hand?
 "If this you'd see, rush onward to your fate,
 "Elect the Grits, you'll not have long to wait."
 "Nonsense and rot, sir, this fictitious stuff,
 "No doubt, for Tories may be well enough;
 "But with the swains, our country's stay and pride,
 "Such stuff as this scarce needs to be denied.
 "They know, that governed by the Liberal,
 "Their sheds will empty, and their pockets fill."
 A swain then threw his snapping hand on high,
 "I say," he cries, "will't raise the price of rye?"
 "Why yes," the master makes his answer quick,
 "'Twill raise at once the price on every sack."
 "Be gob!" says the swain, his very words I quote,
 "'Tis Lib'ral sure the next time will I vote!"

"But stay, my friend," the cobbler then exclaims,
 "We manufacturers must have our claims !
 "Say what, should everything be done for you,
 "Would we poor cobblers then have left to do ?"
 "Make boots, but if by Yankees cheaper made,
 "Why then, my friend, you'd close for want of trade."

And thus all open questions were debated,
 And parties praised and often soundly rat'd,
 But little odds it made, that candidate
 Was sure to win, who'd oft'nest pay the treat.
 How often have I witnessed scenes like these,
 That, though they fail'd to teach, ne'er fail'd to please ;
 How often have I heard these mighty men,
 Expound the laws, and then expound again,
 Till twisted by the Tory and the Grit,
 To both they'd suit and either nicely fit,
 Till wanting shape and form to make them laws,
 They'd furnish arguments to either cause
 Upholding both; the wond'ring swains they'd awe,
 And make them doubt if there be any law ! -

I will depart and, moving on, cross o'er
 To where the sign-board tops the tavern door.
 This is the place where travellers are supplied,
 Where all are welcome made and none denied.
 Ah ! here's the bar, where many a swain's gone down,
 This narrow room's the hell-hole of the town ;
 This is the place my youth was taught to shun,
 As that by which the road to hell is won.
 I will not linger in its damning gloom,
 But enter now into the inner room.

How different this, how peaceful all's in here,
 Where youthful mirth inspir'd hoary hair,

Where wrinkled sages taught the youthful train,
 The love of wisdom and the cost of gain ;
 But youthful heads forgot the teaching old,
 Despised the lessons and pursued the gold.
 That brought them wealth, but lost their quiet ease,
 For those who had still more was wanting these ;
 The rage of gain, the cancer of content,
 Brings wealth and might, with ease and pleasure spent.

'Tis here the jokes are cracked and stories told
 Of wond'rous sights and deeds both brave and bold,
 And often each succeeding yarn supplies,
 The warp to weave another web of lies ;
 But harmless lies, mere stories to beguile
 The weary night and make the list'ners smile.
 Ah ! what great fishing here has often been,
 A one pound fish here quickly rose to ten,
 And how it grew with each succeeding tale !
 From fish to shark ; from shark to monstrous whale,
 The climax reach'd, the night being wasted far,
 They'd wander home, and each to rest repair,
 As they did then, so now will I betake,
 Myself to bed for dear old nature's sake.

'Tis morning, in the Eastern sky the grey
 Streaks, here and there, betoken coming day ;
 The grass is heavy with the mid-night dew,
 And th' little song-birds now their songs renew ;
 All else is hush'd except the thund'ring falls,
 That loud defiance to the woodland call,
 And echo answers back in mocking tone,
 And tells the falls creation's not their own.
 Oh ! what a scene old nature here unfolds,
 Of all the joy and comfort nature holds,

Of all the beauty, peace and ease that e'er
 Can bless poor man while lab'ring in this sphere.
 This quiet scene no bigot zeal e'er riles,
 Nor turns to dark'ning frowns those happy smiles ;
 But each with each can labor in good will,
 And lab'ring love, and loving labor still.

I will ascend yon hill, and there renew
 My memory with this long remember'd view.

The height is gain'd ; from here I can behold
 The dew encumber'd grass, the upturn'd mould,
 The tree-top'd mountain in the distance far,
 The shifting sands along the river's bar,
 Th' winding river that many an island makes,
 As it flows on into the spreading lakes,
 The glistening of the sun upon the brink,
 Of the little spring where the cattle drink,
 The horses, sheep and cows that roam at will,
 Or plunge into the dam behind the mill,
 The jingle of cow-bells, the waving grain,
 All, all bring back my youth to me again !

But now my eye takes in a broader view,
 A thousand beauties, striking, grand and new :
 The valley's slope, the mountain's sudden rise,
 Combine to charm with wonder and surprise,
 The river's windings add another charm,
 The vine o'er shadowed cot, the cultur'd farm,
 The works of man with natures bolder scheme,
 Combine to aid the poet's vent'rous theme,
 And though he flounder in his peaceful art,
 The glorious scene will linger in his heart,
 And in that scene, though critics scoff his rhyme,
 He lives an age beyond the age of time !

But ah ! what roaring monster comes apace,
 To break the quiet of this resting place ?
 What snorting fiend fills the gentle wind
 With hideous roars, and belches smoke to blind ?
 Through fields of waving grain, mark how it speeds,
 Then o'er the hill, and dale, and grassy meads
 And ever on it takes its winding way,
 No power can stop nor imprecation stay !
 And thus the brain of man creates a strength
 Himself may master or himself resent ;
 His puny hands by mites may raise a tower—
 The strength of which withstands his human power,
 Or falling by the will of Heaven may crush
 Its builder, and his voice forever hush ;
 But here weak man exerts his manly strain,
 And, as he guides, so runs the railway train.

The railway train, the outpost of commerce,
 The young may bless, retiring age may curse ;
 The one by gain, the other comfort led,
 Praise and condemn as suits their pers'nal need,
 To one like me who scorns all worldly gain,
 'Tis the usurper of sweet pleasure's reign ;
 And yet when by unfeeling commerce bless'd,
 Most praised by those who are the most dirtress'd,
 It aids the politician's ceaseless cant,
 Fills th' land with wonder, th' treasury with want ;
 But to the politician's broader view,
 Who sees the gain but not the losses too,
 Who sees the envy of the neighb'ring state,
 Sees Yankees frown while Canada grows great,
 To these it looks quite different far from this,
 The Lib'ral's dread, the Tories lasting bliss,
 Condemned on this, praised on that other lip,

It is the glory of their statesmanship !
 Surprised, Columbus well might look upon,
 This master scheme that makes two oceans one ;
 Amazed, behold the way he fail'd to find,
 At last completed by a master mind ;
 And see the oceans o'er the land he found
 In one immense steel bond together bound !

But now to thee, fair village, will I sing
 The sorrows wrought beneath thy parent wing.
 How like a mother hen I used to know,
 Who saw with pride her young chicks larger grow,
 And saw the feathers fast replace the down,
 And mark'd the chick from chick to gay poult grown,
 But ah ! young, foolish chickens sorrows bring,
 For soon they flee the mother's covering wing,
 Left to themselves oft from the road they stray,
 Too young to guide, yet scorning to obey ;
 Long may the mother cluck, she clucks in vain,
 The young brood scorn the old's persuasive strain,
 Seek for themselves, the richest grains they take,
 And reck' not that fat chicks are fit to bake ;
 And so grown fat and useless as a slov'n,
 The foolish chick is sent unto the ov'n.

And so, sweet village, with thy offspring fair,
 Who cheer'd to see the head-light's sudden glare,
 And hailed with joy the steaming train of cars
 Which now their money makes and comfort mars.
 Increasing wealth, increasing care begets,
 And while the poor man plays, the rich man frets,
 For having naught, naught can the former lose,
 All day he toils, at e'en he gathers news,
 Then peacefully he seeks his restful bed,

Free from all care and ignorant of that dread
 Which fills the rich man's dreams and makes him frown.
 Perhaps the morn will see his stock gone down,
 Mayhap the bank where he has placed his store,
 Will break and hurl him back among the poor.
 Ah ! then were wretchedness that knows no cure,
 Poverty's victim is the rich made poor.

To adverse fortune's cut, the poor are dead,
 For having naught no losses need they dread ;
 The town may burn, no tenement of theirs
 Will fall in ruin or excite their fears.
 How different are the rich ; before their eyes
 Some ghostly phantom of foul ruin flies
 With taunting mien, excites their greatest fears,
 Wears on the heart, the constitution wears ;
 A day comes round when fortune's smile's, a frown,
 The rich man finds his wealth has dwindled down,
 And then, alas ! luxurious living tells,
 The soft white hands with labor's blister swells,
 His weary looks his fallen pride betrays,
 His heart's sore pangs cut short his ling'ring days,
 The rich man's scorn sore cuts his sullen pride,
 The poor's distrust builds up a chasm wide,
 And thus cut off from all beneath the sky,
 He lingers on, then lays him down to die,
 And this great truth the world each day proclaims,
 As rich men fall within the poor's domains :
 The richer part of life is not the best,
 But that wherein man finds most peace and rest.

But thou, fair village, thou hast left that portion,
 And launch'd on proud wealth's care encumbered ocean,
 As on this height I stand and look around,

Thy wealth I see, thy loss I feel, the sound
 Of market bells come ringing to my ear,
 And sharp, loud whistles beat the flutt'ring air,
 The driver's shout, the merchant's hurrying feet,
 The noisy mart, the thickly crowded street,
 The houses that usurp the sloping green,
 Build up a town and change the village scene.

My eye must now take in thy widen'd bounds,
 Luxurious homes with artificial grounds,
 Where self-made lords in pompous fashion dwell,
 Esteeming earthly want, and earthly hell,
 Their scon cast on the ranks from which they rose,
 And where much better blood than theirs still flows,
 Thy factories with their chimneys towering high,
 Vomiting smoke to blur thy bright blue sky,
 Thy hundred steeples and thy bright round dome,
 Cause me to doubt if this can be my home.

Oh ! thou, fair village, thou hast chang'd since when,
 With childish laugh, I wandered through the glen,
 Or stood to view the young men's manly sports,
 Where now aristocrats have grassy courts,
 And pale fac'd men with tennis bats contend,
 Where once with sledge friend measured strength with friend,
 And thus doth wealth those healthful games destroy,
 Usurp the plain and weaker ones supply,
 The weaker games begetting weaker men,
 Who leave the plough to take the office pen ;
 And thus, alas ! towns grow and cities swarm,
 With hopeful youths who leave the healthful farm,
 And think they leave the region of the slave,
 Whereas they only find an early grave.
 Oh youth ! be warn'd in time, take heed and stay

At home among your flocks and scented hay ;
 Or if you roam, ambitious of the town,
 Take heed, where others fell, you may go down.
 Remember he who tills the fertile sod,
 Depends on none save on himself and God ;
 His city brothers' lives his labor gives,
 He is their master, they, his bowing slaves.

Oh ye, who in the nation's halls assemble,
 Forgive me if I pause, and sighing tremble
 To view this scene so chang'd in every mood,
 My old home's loss, the country's general good,
 The growing wealth, that yields increase of pow'r,
 May build the state, and yet its strength must low'r,
 For what in strength is he, the rich man's child,
 Who grows in ease effeminate and mild ?
 Should war break out and strangers scourge the land,
 Oh where is he who could in battle stand,
 And for her cause fatigues and trials bear,
 Nor send a substitute to take his share ?
 Not on the tennis grounds with graceful bow,
 But in the fields he stands behind the plough.

Oh village ! for the days when thy young men,
 Could put the stone or leap the sheep's high pen,
 Or swing the scythe or fork the heavy grain,
 That tri'd their strength with each successive strain.
 But now they cut the corn and mow the hay
 With that great ease that marks progression's day,
 " Ye bending swains that dress the flowery vale,"
 Your day is done, machines proud prevail,
 And all is chang'd, all things themselves o'ergrown
 Build up a town, and village, thou art gone.

No more, no more thy peaceful streets I'll tread,
 For peace without thy noisy walls hath fled,
 And as proud commerce, tyrant of all joy,
 Came sweeping in, sweet pleasure wandered by.
 Thy empty green, thy noisy crowded mart
 Show pleasure dead, while avarice takes the heart,
 And all are struggling to heap wealth on wealth,
 While fast they fail and lose the bloom of health.
 As slowness may damn, so may ambition curse,
 A state with ills than poverty much worse,
 For in this mad'ning whirl, this race for gain,
 Men rarely pause, but oft increase the strain.
 Unceasing toil that aims at wealth's high station,
 Must weaken man with each new generation.

But thou, fair village, once thou didst enjoy
 Those sports that gave to toil a sweet alloy,
 And oft relax'd thy strength to join the mirth,
 That giving health, to healthful ones gave birth ;
 But since thou hast join'd in this mad'ning race,
 Deep wrinkles mar with care each troubled face,
 And joy, departing, leaves but toil behind,
 And man grows weak with care encumbered mind.

I will descend from this high grassy throne,
 And wander through thy streets so chang'd, so grown,
 And oh ! so like a maid whom once I knew,
 At first, though poor, yet pleasing to the view,
 Grew rich by times and poised at every feast,
 And with increasing wealth her sloth increased,
 And as she richer grew so grew her form,
 Till losing shape and robb'd of every charm,
 Unfit to move, no longer fit to please,
 She lost in pleasure what she gain'd in size.

Again the morning breaks with peaceful smile,
 And resting are the weary hands of toil.
 No clang of hammer, nor the clash of steel
 Blends with the church-bells loud and happy peal ;
 But all is hush'd as though they strain'd to hear,
 The church-bells calling to the house of prayer,
 The hundred weary toilers of the town,
 Who on this day have laid theirs tools all down.
 This is the Sabbath day, the day of prayer,
 And I will like the rest to church repair.

This is the church, the same that long has stood,
 Through wind and rain to do the village good.
 Unchanged it stands a grey, old landmark here,
 To touch the soul and start the ready tear,
 A monument to mark the days gone by,
 With spire pointing upward toward the sky,
 As though to draw man's thoughts from earth away,
 And show him whence comes pleasure's lasting ray.
 Within 'tis chang'd, and grandeur takes the place,
 Of country dress, and simple Godly grace,
 And jewels flash, and bright gay ribbons flare,
 And give the look of some great fancy fair,
 Where all's a farce, and critics constant stare,
 And so much mockery takes the form of prayer ;
 Is this thy gain, is this wealth's holy state,
 That counts in dimes, or shows in silks its faith ?
 Is this a house of prayer, or just a mart,
 Where rich ones poise, and poor ones' envies start ?
 It must be so, my heart is sore to see,
 'Mid all this style so little piety.
 If this be progress, then may progress cease,
 When earthly wealth endangers heav'nly peace.

O God ! Which of the two doth please the most ;
 The simple country folk, or this proud hoste
 Of wealth, who on soft cushions bend the knee,
 Think less of prayer and more of luxury ?
 I cannot judge ; the Publican I see,
 And by his side the boastful Pharisee,
 The former humble, meek, repentant, mild,
 The latter boasts a soul by sin unsoiled,
 The one admits the faults of man his own,
 The other boasts but leaves his sins unknown,
 The self-exalted man in time must fall,
 While the self-humbled man will rise o'er all.

But now, sweet church, I'll quit thy holy aisle
 And wander out among the dead awhile,
 This is the church-yard, cold and grey and lone,
 Its grassy mounds, its walls of battered stone,
 Its creaking gate that grates the sorrowing mind,
 Shuts in the dead and leaves the world behind.
 Oh, lonesome sight ! Oh, harbour of the bier !
 I'll enter, and I'll seek my friends in here,
 Among the dead ! they whom I left so well,
 So young, so strong, so vainly hoping all,
 Oh ! why, Oh ! why have I out-lived their days,
 Why wander'd back on this poor sight to gaze ?
 Weak man ! fierce time ! you both have had your will,
 He's gone but thou, Oh Time ! art ling'ring still.

Let me alone to meditate awhile,
 On this sad end of man's unceasing toil ;
 Let me condemn that all too constant sway
 Of toil that gives not time for prayer and play ;
 Then let me trace along each marble stone
 And find if e'er these names to me were known,

Alas ! each marble slab some name doth bear,
 Recalling friends that once my heart held dear,
 And dearer still in death they come to mind,
 As in this narrow cell they lie confined ;
 Oh ye ! fond spirits, where ambition burned,
 You are, indeed, " Dust unto dust return'd,"
 O Glory, Fame and Wealth ! what can you save ?
 " The paths of glory lead but to the grave,"
 Yet further still doth virtue's pathway tend
 Unto a God, a Father and a Friend,
 Beyond the grave there's joy that ne'er will cease,
 Where worthy souls forever rest in peace.

And now, sweet muse, who didst invoke my song,
 Let critics scoff, I ne'er will do thee wrong,
 What'er be good, that part alone be thine,
 What'er be ill, that part be counted mine,
 For thou art good, as master hands have shewn,
 The faults are mine, the virtues all thine own ;
 But this I know, and this to man be given,
 That wealth is might, but goodness leads to heav'n.



