

The Passing of the Backhouse.

When memory keeps us company and moves to smiles or tears,
A weather-beaten object looms through the mist of years,
Behind the house and barn it stood, a half mile or more,
And hurrying feet a path had made, straight to its swinging door.
Its architecture was a type of simple classic art,
But in the tragedy of life it played a leading part;
And oft the passing traveler drove slow and heaved a sigh
To see the modest hired girl slip out with glances shy.

We had our posy garden that women loved so well;
I loved it too, but better still, I loved the stronger smell
That filled the evening breezes so full of homely cheer
And told the night-o'er-taken tramp that human life was near.
On lazy August afternoons it made a little bower
Delightful, where my grandsire sat and whiled away an hour.
For there the summer morning its very cares entwined,
And berry bushes reddened in the steaming coil behind.

All day fat spiders spun their webs to catch the buzzing flies
That flitted to and from the house where he was baking pies,
And once a swarm of hornets bold had built a place there
And stung my unsuspecting aunt--I must not tell you where.
Then father took a flaming pole--that was a happy day--
He nearly burned the building up, but the hornets left to stay.
When summer bloom began to fade and winter to carouse
We banked the little building with a heap of hemlock boughs.

But when the crust was on the snow and sullen skies were gray,
In sooth the building was no place where one would wish to stay.
We did our duties promptly--there one purpose swayed the mind:
We tarried not nor lingered long on what we left behind.
The torture of that icy seat would make a Spartan sob
For we had to scrape the gooseflesh with a lacerating cob
That from a frost-encrusted nail was suspended by a string.
My father was a frugal man and wasted not a thing.

When Grandpa had to go out back and make his morning call
We'd bundle up the dear old man with muffler and a shawl.
I knew the hole on which he sat--'twas padded all around,
And once I dared to sit there--'twas all too wide I found.
My loins were all too little, and I jack-knifed there to stay;
They had to come and get me out or I would have passed away.
Then father said ambition was a thing that boys should shun
And I must use the children's hole till childhood's days were done.

But still I marvel at the craft that cut those holes so true--
The baby hold and the slender hole that fitted Sister Sue.
That dear old country landmark--I've tramped around a bit,
And in the lap of luxury my lot has been to sit;
But ere I die I'll eat the fruit of trees I robbed of yore,
Then seek the shanty where my name is carved upon the door.
I ween the old familiar smell will soothe my jaded soul.
I'm now a man, but none the less, I'll try the children's hole.