

VARIOUS

OUR HOLIDAYS

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Various Our Holidays / Their Meaning and Spirit; retold from St. Nicholas

PREFACE

To most young people, holidays mean simply freedom from lessons and a good time. All this they should mean—and something more.

It is well to remember, for example, that we owe the pleasure of Thanksgiving to those grateful Pilgrims who gave a feast of thanks for the long-delayed rain that saved their withering crops—a feast of wild turkeys and pumpkin pies, which has been celebrated now for nearly three centuries.

It is most fitting that the same honor paid to Washington's Birthday is now given to that of Lincoln, who is as closely associated with the Civil War as our first President is with the Revolution.

Although the birthdays of the three American poets, Whittier, Lowell, and Longfellow, are not holidays, stories relating to these days are included in this collection as signaling days to be remembered.

In this book are contained stories bearing on our holidays and annual celebrations, from Hallowe'en to the Fourth of July.

Our Holidays

*If all the year were playing holidays,
To sport would be as tedious as to work.*

Shakspeare. King Henry IV, Part I.

ST. SATURDAY

BY HENRY JOHNSTONE

Oh, Friday night's the queen of nights, because it ushers in
The Feast of good St. Saturday, when studying is a sin,
When studying is a sin, boys, and we may go to play
Not only in the afternoon, but all the livelong day.

St. Saturday—so legends say—lived in the ages when
The use of leisure still was known and current among men;
Full seldom and full slow he toiled, and even as he wrought
He'd sit him down and rest awhile, immersed in pious thought.

He loved to fold his good old arms, to cross his good old knees,
And in a famous elbow-chair for hours he'd take his ease;
He had a word for old and young, and when the village boys
Came out to play, he'd smile on them and never mind the noise.

So when his time came, honest man, the neighbors all declared
That one of keener intellect could better have been spared;
By young and old his loss was mourned in cottage and in hall,
For if he'd done them little good, he'd done no harm at all.

In time they made a saint of him, and issued a decree—
Since he had loved his ease so well, and been so glad to see
The children frolic round him and to smile upon their play—
That school boys for his sake should have a weekly holiday.

They gave his name unto the day, that as the years roll by
His memory might still be green; and that's the reason why
We speak his name with gratitude, and oftener by far
Than that of any other saint in all the calendar.

Then, lads and lassies, great and small, give ear to what I say—
Refrain from work on Saturdays as strictly as you may;
So shall the saint your patron be and prosper all you do—

And when examinations come he'll see you safely through.

Hallowe'en

October 31

The Eve of All Saints' Day

This night is known in some places as Nutcrack Night, or Snapapple Night. Supernatural influences are pretended to prevail and hence all kinds of superstitions were formerly connected with it. It is now usually celebrated by children's parties, when certain special games are played.

ALL-HALLOW-EVE MYTHS

BY DAVID BROWN

As the world grows old and wise, it ceases to believe in many of its superstitions. But, although they are no longer believed in, the customs connected with them do not always die out; they often linger on through centuries, and, from having once been serious religious rites, or something real in the life of the people, they become at last mere children's plays or empty usages, often most zealously enjoyed by those who do not understand their meaning.

All-hallow Eve is now, in our country towns, a time of careless frolic, and of great bonfires, which, I hear, are still kindled on the hill-tops in some places. We also find these fires in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and from their history we learn the meaning of our celebration. Some of you may know that the early inhabitants of Great Britain, Ireland, and parts of France were known as Celts, and that their religion was directed by strange priests called Druids. Three times in the year, on the first of May, for the sowing; at the solstice, June 21st, for the ripening and turn of the year; and on the eve of November 1st, for the harvesting, those mysterious priests of the Celts, the Druids, built fires on the hill-tops in France, Britain, and Ireland, in honor of the sun. At this last festival the Druids of all the region gathered in their white robes around the stone altar or cairn on the hill-top. Here stood an emblem of the sun, and on the cairn was a sacred fire, which had been kept burning through the year. The Druids formed about the fire, and, at a signal, quenched it, while deep silence rested on the mountains and valleys. Then the new fire gleamed on the cairn, the people in the valley raised a joyous shout, and from hill-top to hill-top other fires answered the sacred flame. On this night, all hearth-fires in the region had been put out, and they were kindled with brands from the sacred fire, which was believed to guard the households through the year.

But the Druids disappeared from their sacred places, the cairns on the hill-tops became the monuments of a dead religion, and Christianity spread to the barbarous inhabitants of France and the British Islands. Yet the people still clung to their old customs, and felt much of the old awe for them. Still they built their fires on the first of May,—at the solstice in June,—and on the eve of November 1st. The church found that it could not all at once separate the people from their old ways, so it gradually turned these ways to its own use, and the harvest festival of the Druids became in the Catholic Calendar the Eve of All Saints, for that is the meaning of the name "All-hallow Eve." In the seventh century, the Pantheon, the ancient Roman temple of all the gods, was consecrated anew to the worship of the Virgin and of all holy martyrs.

By its separation from the solemn character of the Druid festival, All-hallow Eve lost much of its ancient dignity, and became the carnival-night of the year for wild, grotesque rites. As century after century passed by, it came to be spoken of as the time when the magic powers, with which the peasantry, all the world over, filled the wastes and ruins, were supposed to swarm abroad to help or injure men. It was the time when those first dwellers in every land, the fairies, were said to come out from their grotts and lurking-places; and in the darkness of the forests and the shadows of old ruins, witches and goblins gathered. In course of time, the hallowing fire came to be considered a protection against these malicious powers. It was a custom in the seventeenth century for the master of a family to carry a lighted torch of straw around his fields, to protect them from evil influence through the year, and as he went he chanted an invocation to the fire. The chief thing which we seek to impress upon your minds in connection with All-hallow Eve is that its curious customs show how no generation of men is altogether separated from earlier generations. Far as we think we are from our uncivilized ancestors, much of what they did and thought has come into our doing and thinking,—with many changes perhaps, under different religious forms, and sometimes in jest where they

were in earnest. Still, these customs and observances (of which All-hallow Eve is only one) may be called the piers, upon which rests a bridge that spans the wide past between us and the generations that have gone before.

Election Day

The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November

This day is now a holiday so that every man may have an opportunity to cast his vote. Unlike most other holidays, it does not commemorate an event, but it is a day which has a tremendous meaning if rightly looked upon and rightly used. Its true spirit and significance are well set forth in the following pages. By act of Congress the date for the choosing of Presidential electors is set for the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November in the years when Presidents are elected, and the different States have now nearly all chosen the same day for the election of State officers.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF CITIZENS

BY S.E. FORMAN

Read the bill of rights in the constitution of your State and you will find there, set down in plain black and white, the rights which you are to enjoy as an American citizen. This constitution tells you that you have the right to your life, to your liberty, and to the property that you may honestly acquire; that your body, your health and your reputation shall be protected from injury; that you may move freely from place to place unmolested; that you shall not be imprisoned or otherwise punished without a fair trial by an impartial jury; that you may worship God according to the promptings of your own conscience; that you may freely write and speak on any subject providing you do not abuse the privilege; that you may peaceably assemble and petition government for the redress of grievances. These are civil rights. They, together with many others equally dear, are guaranteed by the State and national constitutions, and they belong to all American citizens.

These civil rights, like the air and the sunshine, come to us in these days as a matter of course, but they did not come to our ancestors as a matter of course. To our ancestors rights came as the result of hard-fought battles. The reading of the bill of rights would cause your heart to throb with gratitude did you but know the suffering and sacrifice each right has cost.

Now just as our rights have not been gained without a struggle, so they will not be maintained without a struggle. We may not have to fight with cannon and sword as did our forefathers in the Revolution, but we may be sure that if our liberty is to be preserved there will be fighting of some kind to do. Such precious things as human rights cannot be had for nothing.

One of the hardest battles will be to fulfil the duties which accompany our rights, for every right is accompanied by a duty. If I can hold a man to his contract I ought (*I owe it*) to pay my debts; if I may worship as I please, I ought to refrain from persecuting another on account of his religion; if my property is held sacred, I ought to regard the property of another man as sacred; if the government deals fairly with me and does not oppress me, I ought to deal fairly with it and refuse to cheat it; if I am allowed freedom of speech, I ought not to abuse the privilege; if I have a right to a trial by jury, I ought to respond when I am summoned to serve as a juror; if I have a right to my good name and reputation, I ought not to slander my neighbor; if government shields me from injury, I ought to be ready to take up arms in its defense.

Foremost among the rights of American citizenship is that of going to the polls and casting a ballot. This right of voting is not a civil right; it is a political right which grew out of man's long struggle for his civil rights. While battling with kings and nobles for liberty the people learned to distrust a privileged ruling class. They saw that if their civil rights were to be respected, government must pass into their own hands or into the hands of their chosen agents. Hence they demanded political rights, the right of holding office and of voting at elections.

The suffrage, or the right of voting, is sometimes regarded as a natural right, one that belongs to a person simply because he is a person.

People will say that a man has as much right to vote as he has to acquire property or to defend himself from attack. But this is not a correct view. The right to vote is a *franchise* or privilege which the law gives to such citizens as are thought worthy of possessing it. It is easy to see that everybody cannot be permitted to vote. There must be certain qualifications, certain marks of fitness, required of a citizen before he can be entrusted with the right of suffrage. These qualifications differ in the different States. In most States every male citizen over twenty-one years of age may vote. In four States, women as well as men exercise the right of suffrage.

But the right of voting, like every other right, has its corresponding duty. No day brings more responsibilities than Election Day. The American voter should regard himself as an officer of government. He is one of the members of the electorate, that vast governing body which consists of all the voters and which possesses supreme political power, controlling all the governments, federal and State and local. This electorate has in its keeping the welfare and the happiness of the American people. When, therefore, the voter takes his place in this governing body, that is, when he enters the polling-booth and presumes to participate in the business of government, he assumes serious responsibilities. In the polling-booth he is a public officer charged with certain duties, and if he fails to discharge these duties properly he may work great injury. What are the duties of a voter in a self-governing country? If an intelligent man will ask himself the question and refer it to his conscience as well as deliberate upon it in his mind, he will conclude that he ought to do the following things:

1. To vote whenever it is his privilege.
2. To try to understand the questions upon which he votes.
3. To learn something about the character and fitness of the men for whom he votes.
4. To vote only for honest men for office.
5. To support only honest measures.
6. To give no bribe, direct or indirect, and to receive no bribe, direct or indirect.
7. To place country above party.
8. To recognize the result of the election as the will of the people and therefore as the law.
9. To continue to vote for a righteous although defeated cause as long as there is a reasonable hope of victory.

"The proudest now is but my peer,
The highest not more high;
To-day of all the weary year,
A king of men am I.

"To-day alike are great and small,
The nameless and the known;
My palace is the people's hall,
The ballot-box my throne!"

WHITTIER.

Thanksgiving Day

Appointed by the President—usually the last Thursday in November

Now observed as a holiday in all the States, but not a legal holiday in all. The President's proclamation recommends that it be set apart as a day of prayer and rejoicing. The day is of New England origin, the first one being set by Governor Bradford of the Massachusetts colony on December, 1621. Washington issued a thanksgiving proclamation for Thursday, December 18, 1777, and again at Valley Forge for May 7, 1778. The Thanksgiving of the present incorporates many of the genial features of Christmas. The feast with the Thanksgiving turkey and pumpkin-pie crowns the day. Even the poorhouse has its turkey. The story of "An Old-Time Thanksgiving," in "Indian Stories" of this series, well brings out the original spirit of the day.

A THANKSGIVING DINNER THAT FLEW AWAY

BY H. BUTTERWORTH

"Honk!"

I spun around like a top, looking nervously in every direction. I was familiar with that sound; I had heard it before, during two summer vacations, at the old farm-house on the Cape.

It had been a terror to me. I always put a door, a fence, or a stone wall between me and that sound as speedily as possible.

I had just come down from the city to the Cape for my third summer vacation. I had left the cars with my arms full of bundles, and hurried toward Aunt Targood's.

The cottage stood in from the road. There was a long meadow in front of it. In the meadow were two great oaks and some clusters of lilacs. An old, mossy stone wall protected the grounds from the road, and a long walk ran from the old wooden gate to the door.

It was a sunny day, and my heart was light. The orioles were flaming in the old orchards; the bobolinks were tossing themselves about in the long meadows of timothy, daisies, and patches of clover. There was a scent of new-mown hay in the air.

In the distance lay the bay, calm and resplendent, with white sails and specks of boats. Beyond it rose Martha's Vineyard, green and cool and bowery, and at its wharf lay a steamer.

I was, as I said, light-hearted. I was thinking of rides over the sandy roads at the close of the long, bright days; of excursions on the bay; of clam-bakes and picnics.

I was hungry; and before me rose visions of Aunt Targood's fish dinners, roast chickens, berry pies. I was thirsty; but ahead was the old well-sweep, and, behind the cool lattice of the dairy window, were pans of milk in abundance.

I tripped on toward the door with light feet, lugging my bundles and beaded with perspiration, but unmindful of all discomforts in the thought of the bright days and good things in store for me.

"Honk! honk!"

My heart gave a bound!

Where did that sound come from?

Out of a cool cluster of innocent-looking lilac bushes, I saw a dark object cautiously moving. It seemed to have no head. I knew, however, that it had a head. I had seen it; it had seized me once on the previous summer, and I had been in terror of it during all the rest of the season.

I looked down into the irregular grass, and saw the head and a very long neck running along on the ground, propelled by the dark body, like a snake running away from a ball. It was coming toward me, and faster and faster as it approached.

I dropped all my bundles.

In a few flying leaps I returned to the road again, and armed myself with a stick from a pile of cord-wood.

"Honk! honk! honk!"

It was a call of triumph. The head was high in the air now. My enemy moved grandly forward, as became the monarch of the great meadow farm-yard.

I stood with beating heart, after my retreat.

It was Aunt Targood's gander.

How he enjoyed his triumph, and how small and cowardly he made me feel!

"Honk! honk! honk!"

The geese came out of the lilac bushes, bowing their heads to him in admiration. Then came the goslings—a long procession of awkward, half-feathered things: they appeared equally delighted.

The gander seemed to be telling his admiring audience all about it: how a strange girl with many bundles had attempted to cross the yard; how he had driven her back, and had captured her bundles, and now was monarch of the field. He clapped his wings when he had finished his heroic story, and sent forth such a "honk!" as might have startled a major-general.

Then he, with an air of great dignity and coolness, began to examine my baggage.

Among my effects were several pounds of chocolate caramels, done up in brown paper. Aunt Targood liked caramels, and I had brought her a large supply.

He tore off the wrappers quickly. Bit one. It was good. He began to distribute the bon-bons among the geese, and they, with much liberality and good-will, among the goslings.

This was too much. I ventured through the gate swinging my cord-wood stick.

"Shoo!"

He dropped his head on the ground, and drove it down the walk in a lively waddle toward me.

"Shoo!"

It was Aunt Targood's voice at the door.

He stopped immediately.

His head was in the air again.

"Shoo!"

Out came Aunt Targood with her broom.

She always corrected the gander with her broom. If I were to be whipped I should choose a broom—not the stick.

As soon as he beheld the broom he retired, although with much offended pride and dignity, to the lilac bushes; and the geese and goslings followed him.

"Hester, you dear child, come here. I was expecting you, and had been looking out for you, but missed sight of you. I had forgotten all about the gander."

We gathered up the bundles and the caramels. I was light-hearted again.

How cool was the sitting-room, with the woodbine falling about the open windows! Aunt brought me a pitcher of milk and some strawberries; some bread and honey; and a fan.

While I was resting and taking my lunch, I could hear the gander discussing the affairs of the farm-yard with the geese. I did not greatly enjoy the discussion. His tone of voice was very proud, and he did not seem to be speaking well of me. I was suspicious that he did not think me a very brave girl. A young person likes to be spoken well of, even by the gander.

Aunt Targood's gander had been the terror of many well-meaning people, and of some evildoers, for many years. I have seen tramps and pack-peddlers enter the gate, and start on toward the door, when there would sound that ringing warning like a war-blast. "Honk, honk!" and in a few minutes these unwelcome people would be gone. Farm-house boarders from the city would sometimes enter the yard, thinking to draw water by the old well-sweep: in a few minutes it was customary to hear shrieks, and to see women and children flying over the walls, followed by air-rending "honks!" and jubilant cackles from the victorious gander and his admiring family.

"Aunt, what makes you keep that gander, year after year?" said I, one evening, as we were sitting on the lawn before the door. "Is it because he is a kind of a watch-dog, and keeps troublesome people away?"

"No, child, no; I do not wish to keep most people away, not well-behaved people, nor to distress nor annoy any one. The fact is, there is a story about that gander that I do not like to speak of to every one—something that makes me feel tender toward him; so that if he needs a whipping, I would rather do it. He knows something that no one else knows. I could not have him killed or sent away. You have heard me speak of Nathaniel, my oldest boy?"

"Yes."

"That is his picture in my room, you know. He was a good boy to me. He loved his mother. I loved Nathaniel—you cannot think how much I loved Nathaniel. It was on my account that he went away.

"The farm did not produce enough for us all: Nathaniel, John, and I. We worked hard and had a hard time. One year—that was ten years ago—we were sued for our taxes.

"Nathaniel,' said I, 'I will go to taking boarders.'

"Then he looked up to me and said (oh, how noble and handsome he appeared to me!):

"Mother, I will go to sea.'

"Where?' asked I, in surprise.

"In a coaster.'

"I turned white. How I felt!

"You and John can manage the place,' he continued. 'One of the vessels sails next week—Uncle Aaron's; he offers to take me.'

"It seemed best, and he made preparations to go.

"The spring before, Skipper Ben—you have met Skipper Ben—had given me some goose eggs; he had brought them from Canada, and said that they were wild-goose eggs.

"I set them under hens. In four weeks I had three goslings. I took them into the house at first, but afterward made a pen for them out in the yard. I brought them up myself, and one of those goslings is that gander.

"Skipper Ben came over to see me, the day before Nathaniel was to sail. Aaron came with him.

"I said to Aaron:

"What can I give to Nathaniel to carry to sea with him to make him think of home? Cake, preserves, apples? I haven't got much; I have done all I can for him, poor boy.'

"Brother looked at me curiously, and said:

"Give him one of those wild geese, and we will fatten it on shipboard and will have it for our Thanksgiving dinner.'

"What brother Aaron said pleased me. The young gander was a noble bird, the handsomest of the lot; and I resolved to keep the geese to kill for my own use and to give *him* to Nathaniel.

"The next morning—it was late in September—I took leave of Nathaniel. I tried to be calm and cheerful and hopeful. I watched him as he went down the walk with the gander struggling under his arms. A stranger would have laughed, but I did not feel like laughing; it was true that the boys who went coasting were usually gone but a few months and came home hardy and happy. But when poverty compels a mother and son to part, after they have been true to each other, and shared their feelings in common, it seems hard, it seems hard—though I do not like to murmur or complain at anything allotted to me.

"I saw him go over the hill. On the top he stopped and held up the gander. He disappeared; yes, my own Nathaniel disappeared. I think of him now as one who disappeared.

"November came—it was a terrible month on the coast that year. Storm followed storm; the sea-faring people talked constantly of wrecks and losses. I could not sleep on the nights of those high winds. I used to lie awake thinking over all the happy hours I had lived with Nathaniel.

"Thanksgiving week came.

"It was full of an Indian-summer brightness after the long storms. The nights were frosty, bright, and calm.

"I could sleep on those calm nights.

"One morning, I thought I heard a strange sound in the woodland pasture. It was like a wild goose. I listened; it was repeated. I was lying in bed. I started up—I thought I had been dreaming.

"On the night before Thanksgiving I went to bed early, being very tired. The moon was full; the air was calm and still. I was thinking of Nathaniel, and I wondered if he would indeed have the

gander for his Thanksgiving dinner: if it would be cooked as well as I would have cooked it, and if he would think of me that day.

"I was just going to sleep, when suddenly I heard a sound that made me start up and hold my breath.

"*Honk!*"

"I thought it was a dream followed by a nervous shock.

"*Honk! honk!*"

"There it was again, in the yard. I was surely awake and in my senses.

"I heard the geese cackle.

"*Honk! honk! honk!*"

"I got out of bed and lifted the curtain. It was almost as light as day. Instead of two geese there were three. Had one of the neighbors' geese stolen away?

"I should have thought so, and should not have felt disturbed, but for the reason that none of the neighbors' geese had that peculiar call—that hornlike tone that I had noticed in mine.

"I went out of the door.

"The third goose looked like the very gander I had given Nathaniel. Could it be?

"I did not sleep. I rose early and went to the crib for some corn.

"It was a gander—a 'wild' gander—that had come in the night. He seemed to know me.

"I trembled all over as though I had seen a ghost. I was so faint that I sat down on the meal-chest.

"As I was in that place, a bill pecked against the door. The door opened. The strange gander came hobbling over the crib-stone and went to the corn-bin. He stopped there, looked at me, and gave a sort of glad "honk," as though he knew me and was glad to see me.

"I was certain that he was the gander I had raised, and that Nathaniel had lifted into the air when he gave me his last recognition from the top of the hill.

"It overcame me. It was Thanksgiving. The church bell would soon be ringing as on Sunday. And here was Nathaniel's Thanksgiving dinner; and brother Aaron's—had it flown away? Where was the vessel?

"Years have passed—ten. You know I waited and waited for my boy to come back. December grew dark with its rainy seas; the snows fell; May lighted up the hills, but the vessel never came back. Nathaniel—my Nathaniel—never returned.

"That gander knows something he could tell me if he could talk. Birds have memories. He remembered the corn-crib—he remembered something else. I wish he *could* talk, poor bird! I wish he could talk. I will never sell him, nor kill him, nor have him abused. *He knows!*"

Whittier's Birthday

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

Born December 17, 1807 Died September 7, 1892

Whittier is known not only as a poet, but as a reformer and author. He was a member of the Society of Friends. He attended a New England academy; worked on a farm; taught school in order to afford further education, and at the age of twenty-two edited a paper at Boston. He was a leading opponent of slavery and was several times attacked by mobs on account of his opinions.

THE BOYHOOD OF JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

BY WILLIAM H. RIDEING

The life of Whittier may be read in his poems, and, by putting a note here and a date there, a full autobiography might be compiled from them. His boyhood and youth are depicted in them with such detail that little need be added to make the story complete, and that little, reverently done as it may be, must seem poor in comparison with the poetic beauty of his own revelations.

What more can we do to show his early home than to quote from his own beautiful poem, "Snow-bound"? There the house is pictured for us, inside and out, with all its furnishings; and those who gather around its hearth, inmates and visitors, are set before us so clearly that long after the book has been put away they remain as distinct in the memory as portraits that are visible day after day on the walls of our own homes. He reproduces in his verse the landscapes he saw, the legends of witches and Indians he listened to, the schoolfellows he played with, the voices of the woods and fields, and the round of toil and pleasure in a country boy's life; and in other poems his later life, with its impassioned devotion to freedom and lofty faith, is reflected as lucidly as his youth is in "Snow-bound" and "The Barefoot Boy."

He himself was "The Barefoot Boy," and what Robert Burns said of himself Whittier might repeat: "The poetic genius of my country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha, at the plow, and threw her inspiring mantle over me." He was a farmer's son, born at a time when farm-life in New England was more frugal than it is now, and with no other heritage than the good name and example of parents and kinsmen, in whom simple virtues—thrift, industry, and piety—abounded.

His birthplace still stands near Haverhill, Mass.,—a house in one of the hollows of the surrounding hills, little altered from what it was in 1807, the year he was born, when it was already at least a century and a half old.

He had no such opportunities for culture as Holmes and Lowell had in their youth. His parents were intelligent and upright people of limited means, who lived in all the simplicity of the Quaker faith, and there was nothing in his early surroundings to encourage and develop a literary taste. Books were scarce, and the twenty volumes on his father's shelves were, with one exception, about Quaker doctrines and Quaker heroes. The exception was a novel, and that was hidden away from the children, for fiction was forbidden fruit. No library or scholarly companionship was within reach; and if his gift had been less than genius, it could never have triumphed over the many disadvantages with which it had to contend. Instead of a poet he would have been a farmer like his forefathers. But literature was a spontaneous impulse with him, as natural as the song of a bird; and he was not wholly dependent on training and opportunity, as he would have been had he possessed mere talent.

Frugal from necessity, the life of the Whittiers was not sordid nor cheerless to him, moreover; and he looks back to it as tenderly as if it had been full of luxuries. It was sweetened by strong affections, simple tastes, and an unflinching sense of duty; and in all the members of the household the love of nature was so genuine that meadow, wood, and river yielded them all the pleasure they needed, and they scarcely missed the refinements of art.

Surely there could not be a pleasanter or more homelike picture than that which the poet has given us of the family on the night of the great storm when the old house was snowbound:

"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 andiron's 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."

For a picture of the poet himself we must turn to the verses in "The Barefoot Boy," in which he says:

"O for boyhood's time of June,
Crowding years in one brief moon,
When all things I heard or saw,
Me, their master, waited for.
I was rich in flowers and trees,
Humming-birds and honey-bees;
For my sport the squirrel played,
Plied the snouted mole his spade;
For my taste the blackberry cone
Purpled over hedge and stone;
Laughed the brook for my delight
Through the day and through the night,
Whispering at the garden-wall,
Talked with me from fall to fall;
Mine the sand-rimmed pickerel pond,
Mine the walnut slopes beyond,
Mine on bending orchard trees,
Apples of Hesperides!
Still as my horizon grew,
Larger grew my riches, too;
All the world I saw or knew
Seemed a complex Chinese toy,
Fashioned for a barefoot boy!"¹

I doubt if any boy ever rose to intellectual eminence who had fewer opportunities for education than Whittier. He had no such pasturage to browse on as is open to every reader who, by simply

¹ The selections from Mr. Whittier's poems contained in this article are included by kind permission of Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

reaching them out, can lay his hands on the treasures of English literature. He had to borrow books wherever they could be found among the neighbors who were willing to lend, and he thought nothing of walking several miles for one volume. The only instruction he received was at the district school, which was open a few weeks in midwinter, and at the Haverhill Academy, which he attended two terms of six months each, paying tuition by work in spare hours, and by keeping a small school himself. A feeble spirit would have languished under such disadvantages. But Whittier scarcely refers to them, and instead of begging for pity, he takes them as part of the common lot, and seems to remember only what was beautiful and good in his early life.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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