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A POEM,

BY

COL. PUTNAM W. TAFT,

DELIVERED IN MENDON, MASS.,

ON THE TWO HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE INCORPORATION
OF THE TOWN,

MAY 15th, 1867.

WORCESTER:
PRIVATELY PRINTED.
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P O E M .

Sweet May has come with blossoming buds,
And the rippling silvery notes
Are heard, high up in the leafy boughs,
From the song birds' tufted throats;
The robin's come back, from wandering far
In the sunny southland fair,
And the blue-bird pipes in merry glee,
As he breathes his mountain air.

So we've turned, with joy, our roving feet,
From the varied walks of earth,
To join in this gathering, household band,
At the place that gave us birth.
We answered with joy, your call "Come Home."
For our feet were tired and sore;
The road has been hard since last we left
The path that leads to your door.

There are joy gleams, bright, in every eye
As we pledge, with solemn truth,
The purest love, that our hearts can know,
To the dear home of our youth;
No blush of shame need mantle the brow
Of the man of high renown
As he turns aside, from worldly strife,
To his quiet, native town.

I look abroad, o'er the green crowned hills
And the valleys spreading wide,
And the stern old woods, that many years
Have the storm-king's power defied;
The fruitful orchards, clustering stand,
And the cherry blossoms white,
Are sprinkling the earth with snowy leaves,
As they fall so pure and light.

And, scattered about, embowered with trees,
All over the goodly land,
Crowned with contentment's sweetest joys,
The homes of the farmers stand.
And my grateful heart responds with joy
To the sentiment just read,
We'll wreath, with laurels of well-earned fame,
The names of the honored dead.

We stand erect in our manhood's prime,
And our hearts with pleasure glow,
As our thoughts turn back to days long past,
When "two hundred" years ago,
Where our goodly town now prosperous stands
Was a forest far and wide,
And the Indian warrior roamed at will,
And the white man's power defied.

But there came from 'cross the foaming deep,
A firm and stalwart band,
Who sought a home 'mid the dreary wilds
Of a distant stranger land;
They fled from tyranny's iron rule,
To the drear New England's shore,
Where the white waves dashed against the rocks
With a constant, sullen roar.

While the snow-king wove a mantle white,
And covered the frozen ground,
The bleak winds whistled through branches bare
With a wailing mournful sound:
And the hungry wolf roamed through the woods
With a fierce and fearful cry,
The war-whoop shrill of the Indian brave
Rung through the winter sky.

But *their* hearts changed not from their stern resolve,
Though their cheeks turned white with fear,
When the reaper Death, with cruel hand,
Gathered their loved ones dear;
In the dim old woods and meadows sweet,
Where *our* childish feet have trod,
The pilgrims found what long they had sought,
The freedom to worship God.

While the changing years passed one by one,
In their never-ceasing flight,
They brought success to the pilgrim band,
For God was with the right;
The sunlight ripened their corn and grain;
In the golden Autumn time,
They gathered, from off their wide-spread fields
A beautiful harvest fine.

The people learned, on the Sabbath day,
The golden rule of love,
At the little church with the spire upraised
Towards the arching blue above:
They built the school-house down by the hill,
Though the winds blew cold and drear,
The children came, with willing feet,
from the homesteads far and near.

And the village grew and prospered too,
Was a place of great renown,
And they sought a name worthy the fame
Of their busy thriving town;
When the fathers gazed, with conscious pride,
On each brave and stalwart son,
They gave it a name which suited well,
The one it still bears—Mendon(e).

With pleasure to-day we've turned aside
From the vexing cares and strife,
From the troubles which shadow every path
'Long the weary march of life;
Our youth days come *back* with magic power,
As we see each well-known face,
And hearts grow *light* as we gaze upon
Each well remembered place.

There are the woods, which in summer time,
Bent low o'er the rippling pond,
Where we sailed at eve for the lilies sweet,
To the further side beyond;
There is the hill where we coasted oft,
When the snow so pure and white,
Covered the the top and sloping sides
With a fleecy mantle light.

In those good old days, strong common sense
Was taught in the country schools,
And the young folks then knew not the power
Of dame fashion's iron rule.
The boys rose up with the morning sun,
And whistled a merry lay,
They ate their breakfast with right good will,
And off to the fields away.

They plowed and sowed, reaped and mowed,
Though rough and rocky the soil,
But the harvest fine in Autumn time
Well paid for their hardy toil.
When Winter came with chilling blast,
And the farm work all was done,
With a willing heart and busy brain
They studied till set of sun.
Then, Daboll's arithmetic they conned,
Learned Murray's grammar too,
The American preceptor read,
And Morse's geography through.

But young *America* rules to-day;
'Tis sad indeed but true,
Their wisdom exceeds, when ten years old,
Whatever their fathers knew.

They roam all night and sleep all day,
And labor, to them, is disgrace;
Their hair is curled by barber's hand
And powdered their simple face;
With dainty gloves and their feet well pinched
To a small and high heeled boot,
Their little forms are padded and stuffed,
To fill out a fashionable suit;
They carry a cane with graceful air,
Or handle a lady's fan,
No wonder people ask as they pass
If that *thing* is called a man.

The girls were taught in their youthful days,
To make the butter and cheese;
To spin the yarn and to knit and sew
And cook a dinner with ease.
They spun and wove the flannels so soft,
And the linen pure and white,
The bedquilts warm, all quilted so firm,
Indeed were a goodly sight.

But *now* a little Latin and French
Goes into each feeble brain,
With all the "isms" and "ologies,"
And they soon fly out again.

But the ladies fair can promenade,
Or join in the mazy dance,
They can gossip and simper and smile
With the ease and grace of France.

Like lilies, they neither toil nor spin,
Their hands are folded in ease,
While Solomon in his glory bright
Was never arrayed like these.

They have many a dress and robe so gay,
But weep in bitter despair,
Like "Flora McFlimsey," renowned in song,
Because they have nothing to wear.

O! sad are the changes time has made,
For everything now is fast,
And we pray, with anxious, waiting hearts,
For the good old time that's past.

I wandered along the well-known road
With an aching heart this morn,

And passed, all shaded with ancient trees,
The homestead* where I was born.
The robin sang clear its notes of joy
As it sang in bygone Mays,
But I gazed in vain for the loved ones dear
Who gladdened my boyhood's days.

The voice is hushed that tenderly soothed
Each childish trouble and pain,
And the *cradle* song with its magic power
Will never be heard again.
In sorrow's hour I have sadly felt
The loss of that mother love,
But I know the spirit, robed in white,
Roams the better land above.

I sought for the landmarks known in youth,
For each old familiar spot,
Where I often strayed in childish hours,
But alas! I found them not.
The blacksmith shop of old "Uncle Sim,"
Where I often stopped to play,
And watch the sparks from the heated iron,
Has long since passed away.

* The Jonathan Russell place.

How well I remember the patient John,
His good-natured face aglow,
As he stood with strong and steady arm,
Ready to strike or blow.

A little farther, just around the corner,
Nestled a cosy hatter's shop,
Where Mr. Stone, with a skillful craft,
Made coverings for the head.
I've watched him bowing the rabbit fur,
And making the lofty crown;
With a generous brim he formed each hat
For the staid men of the town.

Genuine hats—not shoddy or sham—
Were made in the days of yore.
For *best* they were worn full fifteen years,
For common some ten years more.

Up under the elms was the bake-house old,
Where Mr. Brackett baked our bread,
And the crackers light, and buns so sweet,
With which the hungry were fed.

O! what a feast we might have enjoyed
If he had been here to-day.

We are proud to-day of our noble sires,
And high on the roll of fame
Is writ, in letters of blazing light,
Many an honored name.
That of "Aldrich" stands first on the list;
George and Nathan, soldiers bold,
At Crown Point and old Ticonderoga
Fought in the days of old.
Peleg the surveyor, and Jabez the postmaster.
Anson, Scammel, and Quissett Luke,
And that other Luke at the turnpike gate,
Who is here to-day with a smiling face,
All free from the world's contending strife,
To welcome the children home.
Methinks the angel of health came down
And granted a new lease of life.

There was Eben, and William, and Major Rufus
Who anxiously watched the fray
At the bloody battle of Bunker Hill
Where the sons of freedom lost the day,
Tho' Putnam, Prescott, Warren, Stark and Reed
"Mid death shots, falling thick and fast,"

With Spartan valor, thrice beat back the foe
Covering the ground with British dead.
He saw the flames of the city rage,
And heard the pealing bell
Toll, e'er it fell, with a crashing sound,
The oppressor's funeral knell.

Of Tafts there were at least a score or more,
Intelligent and good-looking of course;
Zacheus, Enos, 'Villa, Elijah and George,
Jotham, Alvin, and Amariah,
Thomas, Nathaniel, Eben and Japheth,
Good citizens, farmers all;
And if I'm not mistaken *this* gathering shows
The race is yet not *quite* extinct.

A famous tribe were the well known Thayers,—
Allen the merchant, Alexander the doctor,
Over the river were Moses, Aaron, Nahum and Ben,
And Aleck and Captain Amos,
And down by the tavern, near the Five Corners,
Were many more of the name.
Henry, Artemas, Ichabod, Joseph and Nicholas;
At "Waterbug Hill" lived Uncle Robert,
At "Chestnut" Captain Caleb and Esquire Elijah,
All eminently useful men.

The Kelleys who owned the factories and mills
At the "Upper" and "Lower Canadas,"
Asa, Seth, Willis, Daniel, John and David—
Good Quakers of the Hicksite sect;
They sawed our logs and ground our grain,
Dyed our wool and carded our rolls,
And dressed the cloth which busy hands at home
Had spun and wove.

The limpid stream, which turned their wheels,
Still runs its meandering course
Towards the great ocean, but the miller
And his vocation are gone.

There was the old forge, down by the spring,
Which made iron for the farmers' use,
Whose ponderous hammer could be heard
To ring, oft in the silly night;
But the forge, and its owner, Mr. Paine,
Have gone the way of all the earth,
While the spring, whose cooling waters quenched
The thirst of the heated forgerman,
Surrounded by mossy stones and grassy banks,
Fresh and green as the memories
Which cluster around it, only remains
To mark the spot and tell the story.

There was Doctor T., a kind and genial man,
With the mark of wisdom in each eye,
A word of cheer for the children dear,
And a smile for each passer-by.
One pleasant morning, to a neighboring mill,
The Doctor carried a grist to grind,
And gaily chatted with the miller hale,
While rumbled the noisy stone.

The miller said with a laughing air,
"What good are your drugs and pills?
You *kill* the people and still pretend
To *cure* all earthly ills."
Then spake the Doctor, with solemn air;
"Just read the papers, please,
And you 'll see, we 've found a wondrous cure
For consumption's dire disease;
The medicine it is sad to say,
Though we 've sought the earth around,
Is the meal-dust on an *honest* miller's hat,
But has never yet been found."

In the green and shady Quissett vale
Lived the blacksmith, Mr. P.,
Who toiled from morn till the set of sun
For his little family.

In those old days each man was taxed,
The minister to pay;
Whether he heard the preaching fine,
Or whether he staid away.

The blacksmith refused to pay the tax,
And they started him for jail;
He turned away with an anxious heart,
From his peaceful quiet vale.
Before he reached his journey's end,
He met good Parson D.,
The blacksmith said in sorrowing voice—
“’Tis very hard for me,
To be sent to jail because I have
No money the tax to pay,
When I never came inside your church,
And never heard you pray.”

“But Ah!” the parson blandly said,
“My doors were open wide,
’Tis your own fault, nobody’s to blame
That you never came inside;
But for fear your family might want,
This time the tax I’ll pay.”
The blacksmith thanked the generous man,
And homeward took his way.

While musing, he roamed along the road,
In the weary march he paused;
He had found a way the parson to pay,
For the trouble he had caused.
So the blacksmith made and sent a bill
Right up to Parson D., *
For shoeing his horse at sundry times,
And a good round sum charged he.

In indignation the parson came
A galloping down the hill,
And asked the blacksmith what right had he
To send him such a bill;
“For I have not been inside your door,
In your shop I never trod,
I don’t understand the meaning of this,
For my horse you never shod.”

“My tools were ready,” the blacksmith said,
“And my doors were open wide,
’Tis no one’s fault but your own, dear sir,
That you never came inside.”
The parson left with a knowing air,
Nor went that way for days,
But the blacksmith sung, “’Tis a very poor rule
That does not work both ways.”

Our hearts are grieved as we close our lay,
And the sad tears dim our sight,
As we sing the changes time has wrought
In his onward rapid flight;
And *our* lives are drawing to a close,
And soon we shall bid farewell
To the homes made dear by memories sweet,
Where the loved and loving dwell.
Let us strive with earnest, faithful hearts,
Stern duty's call to obey,
And walk with a firm and steady tread
In the straight and narrow way.

Let us imitate with purpose firm
Our fathers' virtues of old,
And defy oppression's cruel power
With a courage firm and bold.
Let us nobly stand for freedom and right
Till the setting of life's sun,
Till our ears shall hear the Master's voice:
"Servants of God, well done."

My muse is sad as I gently breathe
That sweet old word good-bye,
But we hope to meet in union sweet
In the better world on high.

At the river side, for the boatman pale,
We stand and tremblingly wait,
Loved ones will welcome who've gone before,
When we reach the pearly gate.
No sorrow or parting can sadden,
In those mansions of the blest,
Where the wicked cease from troubling
And the weary are at rest.

THE END.

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