

Beautiful Snow

A Message to Youth from 1870

In the early part of the American war, one dark Saturday morning, in the dead of winter, there died at the Commercial Hospital, Cincinnati, a young woman, over whose head only two-and-twenty summers had passed. She had once been possessed of an enviable share of beauty; had been as she herself said, "flattered and sought for the charms of her face." But alas! upon her fair brow had long been written that pitiable word—unfortunate!

Once the pride of respectable parentage, her first wrong step was the small beginning of the "same old story over again," which has been the life-history of thousands. Highly educated and accomplished in manner, she might have shone in the best society. But the evil hour that proved her ruin was but the door from childhood; and having spent a young life in disgrace and shame, the poor friendless one died the melancholy death of a broken-hearted outcast.

Among her personal effects was found, in manuscript, the "Beautiful Snow," which was immediately carried to Enos B. Reed, a gentleman of culture and literary tastes, who was at that time editor of the National Union. In the columns of that paper, on the morning following the girl's death, the poem appeared for the first time. When the paper containing the poem came out on Sunday morning, the body of the victim had not yet received burial. The attention of Thomas Buchanan Read, one of the first American poets, was soon directed to the newly published lines, who was so taken with their stirring pathos, that he immediately followed the corpse to its final resting place.

Such are the plain facts concerning her whose "Beautiful Snow" will be long regarded as one of the brightest gems in American literature:

*Oh, the snow, the beautiful snow,
Filling the sky and earth below,
Over the housetops, over the street,
Over the heads of people you meet;
Dancing—Flirting—Skimming along
Beautiful snow! It can do no wrong;
Flying to kiss a fair lady's cheek,*

*Clinging to lips in frolicsome freak;
Beautiful snow from Heaven above,
Pure as an angel, gentle as love!*

*Oh! the snow, the beautiful snow,
How the flakes gather and laugh as they go
Whirling about in maddening fun;*

*Chasing—Laughing—Hurrying by,
It lights on the face and it sparkles the eye;
And the dogs with a bark and a bound
Snap at the crystals as they eddy around;
The town is alive, and its heart is aglow,
To welcome the coming of beautiful snow!
How wild the crowd goes swaying along,
Hailing each other with humor and song;*

*How the gay sleighs like meteors flash by,
Bright for a moment, then lost to the eye;
Ringing—Swinging—Dashing they go,
Over the crest of the beautiful snow;
Snow so pure when it falls from the sky,
As to make one regret to see it lie
To be trampled and tracked by thousands of feet
Till it blends with the filth in the horrible street.*

*Once I was pure as the snow, but I fell,
Fell like the snow flakes from Heaven to Hell;
Fell to be trampled as filth in the street,
Fell to be scoffed, to be spit on and beat;
Pleading—Cursing—Dreading to die,
Selling my soul to whoever would buy;
Dealing in shame for a morsel of bread,
Hating the living and fearing the dead,
Merciful God! have I fallen so low!
And yet I was once like the beautiful snow.*

*Once I was fair as the beautiful snow,
With an eye like a crystal, a heart like its glow;
Once I was loved for my innocent grace—
Flattered and sought for the charms of my face!
Fathers—Mothers—Sisters—all,
God and myself I have lost by my fall;
The veriest wretch that goes shivering by,
Will make a wide sweep lest I wander too nigh,
For all that is on or above me I know,
There is nothing so pure as the beautiful snow.*

*How strange it should be that this beautiful snow
Should fall on a sinner with nowhere to go!*

*How strange it should be when the night comes again
If the snow and the ice struck my desperate brain!*

*Fainting—Freezing—Dying—alone,
Too wicked for prayer, too weak for a moan
To be heard in the streets of the crazy town,
Gone mad in the joy of snow coming down;
To be and to die in my terrible woe,
With a bed and a shroud of the beautiful snow.*

*Helpless and foul as the trampled snow,
Sinner, despair not! Christ stoopeth low
To rescue the soul that is lost in sin,
And raise it to life and enjoyment again,
Groaning—Bleeding—Dying—for thee,
The Crucified hung on the cursed tree!
His accents of mercy fall soft on thine ear,
“Is there mercy for me? Will He heed my weak prayer?”
Oh God! in the stream that for sinners did flow
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.*



“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord:
though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as

snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

– Isaiah 1:18

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

– 1 John 1:9