

A Life's Story, In Poetry. Other Poems

Woodcock, Dennison

Borne down by weight of ninety years
My limbs have weaker grown;
'Mid joy and grief. 'mid smiles and tears
How quick the years have flown.
I look 'way back, a distant view,
To years of long ago.
I asked my brother if he knew
What caused the winds to blow.

My brother answered me with ease,
As if prepared to know;
It is those slim and lofty trees
That make the wind to blow.
I looked and saw the lofty pines
Waving to and fro;
They were full proof within my mind
They were what made it blow.

When I felt the chilling breeze,
The snowflakes whizzing round;
I felt a grudge against those trees.
And wished they were cut down.
But a wee bit of a child
Knew naught of nature's laws;
My mind was often running wild
And took effect for cause.

Saw water gushing from a mill,
Heard a fluttering sound;
As we went riding up the hill,
The saw went up and down.
It remained a mystery still,
The thing I could not know;
How water running through a mill
Could make the saw to go.

A bush had lopped into a stream,
Was bobbing up and down;
I thought that I had solved the theme
The truth there I had found.
I went and fixed a limber stick,
A saw attached also;
It run on water from the creek,
The saw it would not go.

I went there to recruit my skill,
Saw pitman, crank and wheel;
Then I went home and built a mill,
With saw of tempered steel.
When I built that little mill
I something more than played;
It helped to point mechanic skill.

It helped to learn a trade.

To Boston went to learn a trade,
It was the iron founder's,
Many patterns there I made,
And learned to use the pounders.
Pattern-making was a trade,
Was often in demand;
When I wished a casting made,
The shape it came to hand.

When I was fifteen years of age
I started for the west;
Sometimes I rode upon the stage,
Sometimes got off to rest.
When I came to Clinton's Ditch
I went on board a boat;
My mind was raised to highest pitch.
So many things to note.

A query how two boats could pass,
With lines from boat to shore;
The horses stopped, the line it sunk,
The boat went passing o'er.
It was a mystery to me,
How boats went through the locks:
But then I soon began to see,
When in between the rocks.

The boat was run into the lock,
The gates were closed below;
The boat it bumped against the rock,
Water began to flow.
Soon that spacious flume was full.
The gates above were swung;
The hoses then began to pull,
The boat it moved along.

We ate and drank within the boat,
Was seeming much like home;
We passing many towns of note,
Looking for more to come.
No railroads running then that way.
No, none in all the land;
Riding sixty miles a day
Was then thought something grand.

Rochester, near Sandy Ridge,
Where roaring falls there be,
Canal it crosses on a bridge,
Across the Genessee.
In a race the water ran,
The falls so high and steep;
Where Sammy Patch, that foolish man
There made his fatal leap.

I left the boat and took to land,
A trip of eighty miles;
Where my friends had made a stand
Far in the Western wilds.

Now the West has taken flight
Three thousand miles or more;
Thru valleys bright, o'er mount'ns high
Unto the western shore.

For a shop I built a shed
And covered it with bark;
I worked until the day had fled,
From morning until dark.
I built for me a turning lathe,
Made bedsteads, tables, chairs;
I built a bureau for my ma
And sometimes did repairs.

I found plenty of work to do
To keep me from all harm,
And when my father wanted me
I helped him on the farm.
A seventeen laid out a frame,
A building for a school;
Where a youth might learn to read
If he was not a fool.

When I was eighteen years of age,
Somewhat inclined to roam;
Then I unto old Swanzey went,
My old and native home.
The same good man was teaching there
I visited the district school
Saw those I used to know;
That taught me year ago.

To Athol factory I went,
Was looking for employ;
'Twas by good luck there I was sent,
For I was just the boy.
We had a first-rate boarding place,
It was a lucky chance;
The factory girls were boarding there
We often had a dance.

Five long months we labored there,
Till finished was the task;
When I went to draw my pay
They paid more than I asked.
I worked on houses, barns and mill,
And helped to build a church;
'Twa long I work'd and labored there,
Refrained from spending much.

I of old Swanzey took a view,
Her rivers, brooks and fountains;
Bid old Monadnock last adieu
From top of the Green Mountains.
My father needed all I earned
In payment on his land;
Huge piles of timber there he burned
to get it off his hand.

Still kept working for my father,

A revenue to bring,
Making buckets in the winter
And sugar in the spring.
So we made a pile of sugar,
Enough to sweeten many throats;
Helping Nathan log a fallow,
To sow a field of oats.

I worked at different kinds of work,
I worked at making chairs,
And I also made two cutters,
And sometimes did repairs.
When twenty-two in Hallsport bought
A lot, 'twas rough and new;
To me an interesting spot,
So pleasing to my view.

A limpid stream was running there,
'Till make machinery whirl;
Here I'll build a dwelling fair
For that prospective girl.
I from there to Whitesville went,
Worked for Joseph Cory;
A house for Matthew Wilson built,
Here I'll tell a story.

He had a daughter young and fair,
Just budding into bloom;
She was a lively helper there,
The sunshine of her home.
I felt my heartstrings give a start,
They snapped like burning twine;
And so she stole away my heart
And gave me hers for mine.

So Colonel Matthew Wilson, 'Squire,
Gave me a loving bride;
New life's vicissitudes to share,
A helpmeet by my side.
Worked forty days to buy two stoves
To warm our little fold;
To boil potatoes, bake our loaves,
And drive away the cold.

I undertook to build a house,
Was often gee's and haw'd;
The season it was very dry,
My logs they were not sawed.
No circular mills in that day
Were run by water's flow,
The upright saw went "yerk te yerk"
As Paddie's toad did go.

I built a shanty snug and warm,
It was inside the frame;
It shielded us from cold and storm
And from the snow and rain.
When the spring and summer came
And my logs were sawed;
'Twas then that I enclosed the frame,

Had rooms more long and broad.

The upper rooms a dwelling were,
The lower room a shop;
There I made machinery purr,
Could make it go or stop.
A Western fever seized my brain,
It was in forty-four;
So we wandered south and west
Three thousand miles or more.

We did not find that favored spot.
That o'er productive soil;
Where peace and plenty was our lot,
And pleasures banished toil.
So we came home and went to work.
It strengthens limb and wind;
The idleness of lazy shirk
Will prove a constant grind.

Built a machine for turning bowls,
It turned them smooth and round;
It seemed to prove a turning point,
It turned me out of town.
For bowl timber grew very scarce,
Hard work finding any;
So we left our Hallsport home
For wilds of Pennsylvania.

And so we built us there a shop,
Brother Nathan and I,
And there we climb'd the mout'n top,
Whose summits pierced the sky.
We cut down trees and sawed of blocks,
And made them nearly round.
And then we cleared away a path
And saw them rolling down.

Typhoid fever siezed my wife,
My brother lost a child;
So trouble seemed to hedge us round
Here in the forest wild.
Our dear mother came to see us,
Here she took sick and died;
It seem'd that fate was bound to treens
At length we stemmed the tide.

He thought he saw a greater charm
On Alleghany's hill,
With cows and horses on a farm,
The fruitful soil to till.
And so I bought my brother out
And ran the work alone,
Was in my prime then, strong and stout,
I much hard work have done.

And so my neighbors bro't the blocks,
The turning I would do;
With skill and labor earned the rocks
And helped my neighbors too.

I built for me a larger shop
With greater water power;
It served to make machinery hop
Almost every hour.

We bought a new carding machine,
David Wilson and I;
It showed I was not very keen,
The business had gone by.
They sold their wool to ship away,
Came back already made;
If you hire a maid today
A greater price is paid.

Other machinery in the shop
Employed my time in full;
So I could make my business whop
Without the aid of wool.
My shop was helping me to build,
In paying for my land;
Was helping be to buy my bread,
A helper still in hand.

My wife and I we built a house,
We made it snug and warm;
To shield us from the chilling blast
And from the pelting storm.
We realized a long desire;
But ah! A blighting joke,
My shop was wrapped in flaming fire
And all went up in smoke.

The burning shop it knocked me out.
Gave me a sideways toss;
Was on the down-hill side of life.
Could not retrieve my loss.
I then worked out at hard days work
On houses, barns and mill,
All to supply our needed wants,
Our stomachs to keep still.

They built the railroad here at last,
After much surveying,
So they cheaply rushed it past
After much delaying.
It caused the lumberman to hump
And low the hemlocks laid,
And left us nothing but the stump
Of sombre hemlock shade.

They laid bare the lofty hills,
And the valleys also;
They rushed the logs into the mill,
From there away they go;
I built for me another shop
With lathes and a buzz-saw;
'Twas there I worked ant mending sleds
The hemlock logs to draw.

In the spring when sledding flees,

Still worked to earn the rocks;
I neckyokes turned and whiffletrees,
And also lever stocks.
Lumbermen gone, the farmer comes,
He works with care and toil;
He burns the brush, blows out the stumps,
Draws money from the soil.

He crowds the forest up the hill,
It yields to his desire;
He makes his pastures broader still,
All with the help of fire.
At the little hamlet Wrights,
The farmers come to get their mail.
And to buy at prices right
The many things for sale.

Where once I heard the wild bird sing,
In forest dark and drear,
Now I hear the church bells ring
In tones so loud and clear.
While the lumber wagon ploughing
Through mud holes deep and wide,
Now merry parties for an outing,
In automobiles glide.

Now I'll turn back on memory's page
And note things of my time;
The uplifting of the age,
And evolution's climb.
The Erie Canal was building
When I was three years old;
Unnumbered boats it has floated
And brought in piles of toll.

A barge canal they are building,
State of New York is growing rich;
Compared with the new the old one
Was but a little ditch.
Then th' next thing comes th' railroad.
Of almost boundless worth;
Its iron bands are now reaching
Almost around the earth.

They have tunnel'd the lofty mount'ns
Clear through from side to side;
And bridged the gushing fountains,
That trains may smoothly glide.
The north unto the south are bound,
And gridironed all the land,
From the Missouri's turbid mouth
To Lake Superior's sand.

The telephone and telegraph,
They give a rising start;
Are helping people talk and laugh
A hundred miles apart.
With lightning speed th' news is hurl'd
On many wires is sped;
Yesterday's news from all the world

In morning papers read.

Then came the mower and the reaper,
The farmer's great delight,
Have driven the scythe and the sickle
Almost away from sight.
With the help of machinery,
Much of his work is done;
With help of steam and good horse power
Machinery is run.

Agricultural colleges
In almost every state;
They are lifting up the farmers
From a low drudging fate.
They've tapped the earth for oil and gas
Houses to light and warm;
That cheerfulness may reign within,
While outside howls the storm.

Then came the Wheeler and the Singer
Others that worked complete;
Helps the woman's tired fingers
While sewing with her feet.
The type-setter, wonderful thing,
New one, under the sun;
Whole lines it will together fling,
From melted metal run.

I am here with loving friends,
Kind neighbors all around;
I wait to see what will turn up
Until I am turned down.