



*THE OLD SCHOOL-HOUSE AT THE CREEK.*

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**T**O-DAY it is just twenty years,  
    Since I began to roam :  
Now, safely back, I stand once more,  
Before the quaint old school-house door,  
    Close by my father's home.

I've been in many houses since,  
    Of marble built, and brick ;  
Though grander far, their aim they miss,  
To lure my heart's old love from this  
    Old school-house at the creek.

Let those who dream of happier scenes,  
    Go forth those scenes to find ;  
They'll learn what thousands have confessed,  
That with our home our heart's true rest  
    Is ever left behind.

I've travelled long and travelled far,  
Till weary, worn, and sick ;  
How joyless all that I have found,  
Compared with scenes that lie around  
This school-house at the creek.

How home-like is this spot to me !  
I stand, and think, and gaze !  
The buried past unlocks its graves,  
While memory o'er my spirit waves  
The wand of other days.

The little creek still idles by,  
With bright and playful flow ;  
And little fish still sport and glide,  
Where yon low elder shades the tide,  
As they did long ago.

The white-oak stands before the door,  
And shades the roof at noon ;  
The grape-vine, too, is fresh and green ;  
The robin's nest ! — Ah, hark ! — I ween  
That is the same old tune !

The swallows skip across the mead —  
The foremost one is best !  
And, look ye at the gable there,  
A house of stubble, mud, and hair —  
That is the swallow's nest !

The young are very still just now —  
    They all are sleeping sound ;  
Wait till the old with worms appear,  
Then you the hungry cry shall hear  
    From mouths that lie around !

These scenes are as they were of yore,  
    Though void of former glee ;  
But I have changed ! — From yonder brook  
The boy's reflected rosy look,  
    No more smiles out on me !

I stand, like Ossian in his vale,  
    And watch the shadowy train !  
Now joy, now sadness me beguile,  
And tears will course o'er every smile,  
    And bring their pleasing pain !

'Twas here I first attended school,  
    When I was very small :  
There was the Master on his stool,  
There was his whip and there his rule —  
    I seem to see it all.

The long desks ranged along the walls,  
    With books and inkstands crowned ;  
Here on this side the large girls sat,  
And there the tricky boys on that —  
    See ! how they peep around !

The Master eyes them closely now,  
They'd better have a care ;  
The one that writes a billet-doux —  
The one that plays his antics, too —  
And that chap laughing there !

For all the scholars, large and small,  
Are under equal rule ;  
Which is quite right — whoever breaks  
The Master's rules, a whipping takes,  
Or leaves at once the school.

Around the cosy stove, in rows,  
The little tribe appears ;  
What hummings make those busy bees —  
They better like their A, B, C's,  
Than boxing at their ears !

Those benches are by far too high —  
Their feet don't reach the floor !  
Full many a weary back gets sick,  
In that old school-house at the creek,  
And feels most woful sore !

Poor innocents ! behold them sit,  
In miseries and woes !  
It is no wonder, I declare,  
If they should learn but little there,  
On benches such as those !

With all these drawbacks, that was still  
    A well conducted school ;  
For Master such, in vain you look,  
Who cyphers through the Ainsworth book,  
    And never skips a rule !

That he was cross, I must confess ;  
    He whipped us through and through ;  
But still most wholesome rules observed ;  
Who felt the rod, the rod deserved —  
    According to his view !

This duty he with zest performed,  
    Though charmless to us all !  
'Tis strange, our nature never could  
Delight in what is for our good —  
    'Tis owing to the Fall !

When a new Master took the school,  
    Around the question ran :  
“Oh, is he Irish ? Is he cross ?”  
How much our gain, how much our loss,  
    Depended on that man !

Then when the autumn school began,  
    We eyed the Master shy !  
His rules, his whip, told very quick,  
That he to former rules would stick,  
    And ancient methods ply.

Still was there little of complaint ;  
    We had our pleasures too ;  
This world does not just always dish  
Our fare as sweet as we could wish,  
    Yet sweeter than is due !

At noon-day, when the school left out,  
    We had of sport our fill ;  
Some play the race, some houses wall,  
Some love a stirring game of ball,  
    Some choose the soldier drill.

The large girls sweep ; the larger boys —  
    What mischief they are at !  
They tease, they laugh, they hang about,  
Until the Master turns them out —  
    The rules were strict in that !

The little girls, of "ring" most fond,  
    Their giggling circle drew ;  
When larger girls joined in the ring —  
Now is it not a curious thing ? —  
    The large boys did it too !

The large ones always tagged the large —  
    The small ones always missed !  
Then for the prize began the race ;  
The one that's caught, has now to face  
    The music, and be kissed !

Old Christmas brought a glorious time —  
    Its mem'ry still is sweet!  
We barred the Master firmly out,  
With bolts, and nails, and timbers stout —  
    The blockade was complete!

Then came the struggle fierce and long!  
    The fun was very fine!  
And whilst he thumped and pried about,  
We thrust the terms of treaty out,  
    Demanding him to sign!

The treaty signed — the conflict o'er,  
    Once Master now were we!  
Then chestnuts, apples, and such store,  
Were spread our joyous eyes before —  
    We shared the feast with glee!

Oh, where are now the school-mates, who  
    Here studied long ago?  
Some scattered o'er the world's wide waste!  
By fortune hither, thither chased!  
    Some, in the church-yard low!

My muse has struck a tender vein!  
    And asks a soothing flow;  
O Time! what changes thou hast made,  
Since I around this school-house played,  
    Just twenty years ago!

Good bye! Old school-house! Echo sad,  
„Good bye! Good bye!” replies;  
I leave you yet a friendly tear!  
Fond mem'ry bids me drop it here,  
'Mid scenes that gave it rise!

Ye, who shall live when I am dead —  
Write down my wishes quick —  
Protect it, love it, let it stand,  
A way-mark in this changing land —  
That school-house at the creek.

