

# My Old Home

and other  
Poems



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# MY OLD HOME

AND OTHER

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POEMS



BY

JAMES MCNEILL

## MY OLD HOME.

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I have just returned from Clermont,  
In the State where I was born,  
Where I made my first acquaintance  
With the growing grass and corn.

Where I learned to ride the horses,  
And to drive the cows afield,  
Where I spread hay in the meadows,  
Ere I learned the scythe to wield.

Where I used to carry water  
To the tired, thirsty men,  
And to chase the quail and rabbit  
From her nest and from his den.

My, what fun we there encountered,  
And what battles there we had,  
With the bumble-bee and hornet,  
When aroused and fighting mad.

It was back beyond the fifties,  
More than sixty years ago,  
When I made my hand in harvest  
And with men could hoe my row.

More than sixty years have vanished,  
Since I drove my first ox-team,  
Hauling wood and hay to market  
Down the little Boat Run stream,

Past the Kire Bainum saw mill,  
With its small but busy crew,  
Past the wooded hills around it,  
Where the luscious pawpaws grew;

Down that little, winding brooklet,  
O'er its pebbles and its sand,  
To the banks of the Ohio,  
Where the steam-boats used to land.

That is where the good old Swiftsure,  
In that somewhat early day,  
Stopped to gather up some freightage,  
And to take on father's hay.

O! My travels on this highway,  
Down and up this shaded stream,  
Then an item in my boyhood,  
Now, it seems, a faded dream!

Then, the Corbins and the Dixons  
And the Whites upon this road,  
Used to give me friendly greeting,  
As I passed by with my load.

There were Friedman's store and Parker's,  
Parker's School of rising fame.  
Even then an institution,  
Great and worthy of the name

Which it bore throughout the county,  
And for many miles around,  
For its thorough mental training,  
And its morals clean and sound.

Here the noble Teacher Parker,  
From young manhood to life's end,  
Was its worthy head and master,  
And the student's guide and friend.

Here unselfishly he labored  
In the cause to him most dear;  
Here he battled for the righteous,  
And he battled without fear.

For he knew no race distinction,  
Favored neither black nor white,  
Gave to all an equal service,  
As he felt to be their right.

Here he gave his life-long efforts  
To the service of mankind,  
In the moulding and the shaping  
Of the young, aspiring mind.

All his students honored, loved him,  
All the people were his friends,  
And the gratitude of hundreds,  
As the waves of prayer, ascends

To the higher courts of wisdom,  
To the Father's house and throne,  
Where all human deeds are tested,  
And their merits duly known.

Where I'm sure our noble brother,  
Teacher, counselor and guide,  
Has received a joyful welcome,  
And shall ever more reside.

Rest thy soul, O! Teacher Parker,  
For the good which thou hast done,  
In the honor, fame and glory,  
And the home which thou hast won!

We shall miss thy kind instructions,  
Miss thy genial smile and cheer,  
But the people of old Clermont  
Shall thy memory revere.



Yes, I saw the dear old homestead,  
Where I spent my boyhood days,  
And I found it greatly altered,  
Changed in many, many ways.

As I looked upon its corn-fields,  
I could feel my heart grow sad,  
For I missed the old appearance,  
Which I surely know it had.

Yes, its fields seemed unfamiliar,  
And its buildings out of place,  
And those old, familiar landmarks  
I could nowhere even trace.

For there used to be great meadows,  
With a lengthy lane between,  
Passing by the house and orchard,  
To the distant woodland green.

But the fields were all divided,  
And were growing oats and corn;  
And I could not see the briers  
Nor the alder bush nor thorn.

And the giant oaks and hick'ries,  
Of whose nuts we were so fond,  
Trees that stood in great sedateness,  
In the pasture, near the pond,

And the elms that grew beyond them  
And the beach trees farther on,  
Yes, alas, of all this forest,  
Every bush and tree was gone.

They had even drained the marshes,  
Drained and dried our swimming holes;  
And had cut down all the thickets,  
Where we went for fishing poles.

They had moved the barn and corn-cribs  
From between the house and road;  
Leveled off the rougher places,  
Where we once the jimson mowed.

Cleared and cleaned and smooth the places  
Where our straw stacks used to stand,  
Over which they'd built a driveway  
And a walk of stone and sand.

They had planted trees and roses  
By the driveway and the path,  
On those grounds where geese and turkeys  
Used to hold their aftermath.

And the old house, too, was altered,  
    In conditions not a few;  
For they'd added on a story,  
    And had made it look quite new.

You may know that I was puzzled  
    One familiar line to trace;  
And my mind was sorely troubled,  
    For I did not know the place.

They had changed the whole surroundings,  
    House and barn and field and wood,  
So I could not then be certain  
    That I on the old place stood.

Can this be, I asked, my birthplace?  
    For as such it does not seem;  
Can it be my mind is wand'ring  
    And I living in a dream?

Yes, my mind was sorely troubled,  
    As I've just above confessed,  
For I really did feel worried,  
    Disappointed and distressed;

Vexed and troubled o'er the blunder,  
    The mistake which I had made,  
In so foolishly forgetting  
    How all cherished pictures fade.

Yes, so foolishly forgetting  
    That the world is moving on,  
And the dear old things we loved most  
    Will be faded soon and gone;

All that links us in the present  
    With the once familiar past,  
By the mighty tide of progress  
    Will be swept away at last.



When I came to this old homestead  
    With that picture in my mind,  
Which for three-score years I'd carried  
    In my heart and soul enshrined,

I confess my disappointment  
And my sadness and chagrin,  
When I found it all so altered,  
So unlike what it had been.

I'm aware this may be foolish,  
But I could not bear to know,  
That the idol I had carried,  
Since so long, so long ago,

Must be taken from its corner,  
Must be rudely cast aside;  
For its truthfulness is vanished  
And its faithfulness belied.

Now, henceforth its only purpose  
Must be merely to call in,  
Not the loved and living present,  
But the "gone," the "what has been."

But, my story's growing tedious,  
I must hasten to get on,  
Or I'll fail to entertain you,  
And your patience will be gone.

On this farmstead once resided  
Boys and girls, a merry crew;  
Six strong sons and six fair daughters  
Here to boyhood, girlhood grew.

Two were born before they came here,  
Two, I think, and may be more,  
And it matters but a trifle,  
If the number counts to four.

All were active, robust children,  
Healthy from the very start,  
And for each, in mind and body,  
Nature had performed her part.

All the boys were strong and manly,  
And the girls were passing fair,  
All were courteous, free, outspoken,  
And of friends each had his share.

None was selfish, rude or cruel;  
Family quarrels were unknown,  
But of spirit, will and temper,  
Doubtless, each one had his own.

Early led to choose the upright,  
And the manly and the true,  
Early taught to shun all falsehood  
And the base and low eschew.

Nothing ever crossed this threshold,  
No dishonor or ill-fame,  
To becloud its reputation,  
Or to mar its honored name.

For our parents were our comrades,  
Our associates and friends,  
And were always wise providers  
Who could look to means and ends.

Through their prudence and their foresight,  
In the house and on the farm,  
Nothing ever greatly suffered,  
No one ever came to harm.

They were patient with our pastimes,  
Seldom checked our romps and plays,  
Always parties to our schemings,  
And our plans for holidays.

So, we had no room to grumble,  
Little cause for discontent,  
While we gathered in the blessings,  
Which for our good were meant.

Our father, I remember,  
Was a free, outspoken man,  
A descendant not unworthy  
Of that ancient McNeill clan,

Who, in Scottish Highland warfare,  
With the bravest of their race,  
Always met their foes in open,  
And defied them face to face.

He was genial, open-hearted,  
Fond of merriment and joke,  
With the members of his household,  
And the jovial neighbor folk.

Yet a man of quiet firmness  
In his dealings with mankind,  
And for keen, far-seeing shrewdness,  
Scarce a greater you could find.

He was born to trade and traffic,  
And his mind could never rest,  
Till he found something to purchase,  
And the money to invest.

Oft he'd buy and sell for others,  
Use their credit and their gold,  
Making always handsome profits,  
Sometimes fortunes, I am told.

He would buy and sell for others,  
And they'd trust him with their all,  
For they knew he scorned deception,  
And no bribe could make him fall.

With his neighbors in their troubles,  
When requested to advise,  
He would quickly end their quarrel  
By a prudent compromise.

And our mother, dear, kind mother,  
She was always our best friend;  
To our wants and cares devoted  
Through her whole life to its end.

She was proud of all her children,  
And she gave them all her love,  
Till the angels wished her presence  
In the brighter spheres above.

She was loved by all her neighbors;  
To the sick and the distressed,  
She was comfort, consolation,  
And she gave them of her best.

When they told me at the college,  
Where I'd lately gone to stay,  
How that death had claimed our mother  
And had taken her away,

I could hardly read the message,  
Or its meaning realize,  
For the cloud that hovered round me,  
And the mist before my eyes.



O! How swiftly time is moving  
And how rapid are his strides  
As he measures off the ages,  
Which the future from us hides!

Yes, the years are multiplying,  
And the space has grown so long  
That divides us from the crooning  
Of the dear old mother-song.

Days and months are marching onward,  
Into three-score years have grown  
Since the brood which I have mentioned  
From the parent nest has flown.

From the house and farm they've wandered,  
Some to distant lands have flown;  
All have bound themselves in wedlock,  
And have offspring of their own.

Of the twelve, whom I have mentioned,  
Six in earthly homes reside,  
Six have left the land of mortals  
And have crossed the Great Divide.

Of the twelve and their descendants,  
Scattered now through many lands,  
I have little more to mention,  
Which this story yet demands.

They have multiplied in numbers  
Till the name is widely known,  
They've accumulated wisdom  
And the seeds of knowledge sown.

Farmers, lawyers, wives of preachers,  
They're in all professions found,  
Where they stand abreast the foremost,  
In opinions that are sound.

In their wide-spread avocations  
None has e'er disgraced the name,  
And so far as in my knowledge,  
None has reached renown and fame.

They now represent large interests,  
And are doing what they can  
In the forward march of movements  
To advance the race of man.

Now, before I close this story,  
And retire from the stage,  
I must write about our neighbors,  
And thus add another page,

Or, perhaps, a half a dozen,  
If my muse can move along,  
For he's not as swift as Hermes,  
Nor as Hercules as strong.



Well we know that all things earthly,  
Just as people, have their day;  
Fret and worry till you're weary,  
Nothing ever comes to stay.

When I lived within that precinct,  
Knew its lands from end to end  
Every farm house was familiar,  
Every household held a friend.

I could ride or drive for hours,  
Far around the fine old place,  
And would scarcely meet a stranger,  
See an unfamiliar face.

Altered now! You may imagine,  
Nearly everything is strange;  
Of the homes and farms and people,  
All have undergone a change.

Where the Fishers and the Barkleys  
And the Slaters used to dwell,  
And the Bainums and the Marshes  
And the Simmonses as well,—

There the stranger guides his movements  
As his interest demands,  
For by right of lawful purchase,  
He is owner of these lands.

And a score or more of others,  
Who were neighbors just as near,  
Whom I now recall with pleasure,  
And whose memories hold dear,—

All, with very few exceptions,  
Are beyond the border-line,  
Which divides this life of error  
From the life of Truth Divine.

They have gone to that fair region,  
Where all mortals hope to go,  
And enjoy eternal respite  
From their labors here below.

Of the few I found remaining  
Where their parents once were known,  
And with whom I used to visit,  
Ere I'd out of boyhood grown,

All were gray and looked so weary,  
As if waiting each his turn  
To be ferried o'er that river,  
Whence 'tis said there's no return,

To that land of light and promise,  
Where I trust we'll meet again,  
To renew our earth acquaintance  
On a higher, broader plane.

Where I'm very well persuaded,  
(For I've studied long to know),  
That the life we'll live thenceforward  
Is the earth-life here below;

Just this earthly life continued,  
And identical in kind,  
With the ruder forms of grossness  
In the mortal left behind.

Yes, I'm thoroughly persuaded,  
That man's life beyond this sphere  
Is evolved from all his actions,  
And the thoughts he harbors here.

His position and condition,  
His surroundings, just as well  
As the comrades he impresses  
And invites with him to dwell,

Are results of human efforts,  
Of indulgence, or of crime,  
Which have shaped his future being  
In the moulds of earth and time.

I'm convinced that Mother Nature,  
And the Father we adore  
Are but one in aim and purpose,  
And the same on either shore;

And the law that binds the mortal  
On this first and earthly plane  
Is the law that holds forever,  
Where immortal spirits reign.

Hence the parting with our loved ones,  
With our neighbors and our friends,  
When the spirit of the mortal  
To its final home ascends,

Is a parting not eternal,  
As, in truth, it doth appear,  
But a separation ending  
In another higher sphere.



Now my story is completed  
And I've sung my little song;  
We shall meet again in future  
And the time will not be long.

When we've rounded out the circle  
Of a few more fleeting years,  
Of the term to us allotted  
In this world of grief and tears,

One by one we'll cross the border,  
To the promised summer-land,  
Where I trust we'll solve life's problem,  
And its purpose understand.

## OUT OF MY LIFE.

---

1

“Good-byes” were said and “All aboard,”  
The waiting train moved on,  
And then I knew that something true  
Out of my life had gone;  
Out of my life and out of my sight  
And out of my humble home,  
Out in the world to smile and weep  
Out in the world to roam.

2

I stood and watched the moving train,  
As on and on it sped,  
And felt indeed that some great need,  
Out of my life had fled;  
Out of my life and out of my sight  
And out of the home she blessed,  
Out in the world to love and hate,  
To be loved and caressed.

26

3

But scarce a year had come between  
Her parting tears and me,  
When, sad to tell, a dread death knell  
Came over the land and sea;  
Over the land and over the wave  
And out from the distant shore  
And over my heart like a blight it came,  
With sorrow evermore.

4

Her grave is on the mountain's crest  
Amid a southern grove,  
Where many a note from feathered throat  
Is heard in songs of love;  
And out of the wood and over the hills  
And up from the flowery dells,  
The perfumed zephyrs gather there  
To sigh their sad farewells.

5

Though years have passed with all their trains,  
Of triumphs and of woe,  
And many a smart in the aging heart  
Has smouldered faint and low;  
Still into my thoughts and into my dreams  
And into my spirit's sight,  
With softer smiles and lovelier form  
She comes an angel bright.

27

## 6

Now 'mid life's shadows longer grown  
 Within its Autumn sear,  
 Where e'er I stray by night or day  
 I know her presence near;  
 For into my life and into my sight  
 And out of her home above,  
 She comes a spirit, doubly pure,  
 A messenger of love.

## 7

And, when across Death's fabled stream,  
 Beyond the Borderland,  
 I, not alone in the great unknown,  
 Shall chilled and cheerless stand;  
 For over the way I know full well  
 I'll meet her face to face  
 And feel those twining arms again  
 In fervent love's embrace.

## 8

So shall we all our loved ones meet  
 And be with them at last;  
 Nor into the gloom of an endless doom,  
 Shall child of earth be cast;  
 For out of the depths there comes a voice,  
 Out of His boundless love—  
 "There is a chance for a better life  
 In the clearer light above."

## 9

Away with the fear of death prolonged  
 In lakes that burn for aye,  
 Of curses hurled through a burning world,  
 And horrors of Judgment Day;  
 For out in the realms of Truth Divine,  
 Out in the Father's Plan,  
 There is no change in His being's law,  
 And man is still a man.

## 10

We make and mar our lives at will;  
 May blunder as we build;  
 And beauties of soul may not unfold  
 Till cycles of time are filled.  
 But out in the ages yet to come,  
 Out in the sweep of time,  
 We'll learn the truths we ought to know,  
 The way, and how to climb.

## 11

We'll learn that life is something more  
 Than 'mid earth's scenes to dwell,  
 To fill a place in an honored race,  
 Succeed, however well.  
 And out in the school by wisdom taught,  
 Out where the law is known,  
 We'll find that push as well as prayer  
 Leads toward the Eternal Throne.

We'll learn that faiths are but results  
 Of human thought and will,  
 That creeds of earth are of mortal birth  
 And gods of human skill;  
 And out where the earthly binds no more,  
 Out where the soul is free,  
 We'll know that Progress is God's Plan  
 For all humanity.

## HEWING OUT THE TIMBERS.

---

As regarding man's condition,  
 And the nature of the place  
 Where he hopes to spend the future,  
 When he's run this mortal race,

There has been so much discussion,  
 And so much has been denied,  
 That it's really very trying  
 On what course he should decide.

We are taught that mind is motion  
 And depends upon the brain  
 For these wonderful achievements  
 In its short, uncertain reign.

And at death, this motion ended,  
 As a wave upon the sea,  
 When impelled by naught external,  
 It can only cease to be.

So, he can have no hereafter  
In a conscious, living state,  
Nor a place where he may wander  
To avoid the hand of Fate,

Who consigns him in an instant  
To the silence of the dead,  
From whose store-house all the millions  
Of the future must be fed.

But we know these would-be teachers  
Are as wrong as wrong can be,  
For the spirit man's immortal,  
And from death forever free.

Death can only deal with matter,  
With the mortal of mankind;  
In the flight across the Border  
He is always left behind.

Yes, there is a great Hereafter,  
And a sphere of conscious life,  
Where there's greater room for progress,  
And there's less of human strife.

But, the nature of that country,  
Where this greater life begins,  
And the state of risen mortals,  
On account of earthly sins,

Both have questions been for ages  
'Mong the foolish and the wise,  
And the wrangles they've occasioned  
Seem beyond all compromise.

And it used to be considered  
That this life was for the few,  
Who, through faith in certain dogmas,  
Had been furnished with a clew

To the mysteries of Godhood  
And decrees thereof proclaimed,  
E'er our Eden's garden flourished,  
Or its occupants were named.

Who shall say that proper conduct  
On the part of sinful man  
Is devoid of grace or favor  
In the true salvation plan?

That one's morals and his virtues,  
And his thoughts and deeds of love  
Of themselves have no persuasion  
In the higher courts above?

But, we've Christ for our example,  
For our counselor and guide,  
And we'll run no risk of error  
If we travel by His side;

If we harken to His counsels  
And accept Him as our guide,  
If we follow out His teachings,  
In His words of truth confide;

If we choose Him as our leader  
And then treat Him as our friend,  
We will hardly find Him wanting,  
Or be losers in the end.

By His sermon on the mountain,  
And His words by Jordan's stream,  
By His scorn of creed and dogma,  
And His hate of priestly scheme,

It is plain that He commended,  
When He told his brother man,  
He was going over thither  
To complete the Father's plan.

Just the simple law of goodness  
As the strait and narrow way  
Through the maze of human darkness  
To the light of endless day;

That the Father's will, as pleaded,  
Shall be done upon the earth,  
As within the courts of Heaven,  
Is the one great pearl of worth;

Do to others as you'd have them,  
(Should conditions be reversed)  
Do to you in human kindness,  
And the deed will not be cursed.

For our Father curses no one,  
And His anger you will find,  
Is the changeless law of Nature  
Dealing merit to mankind.

God supreme can know no anger,  
Neither punishment nor strife,  
For He's all there is of goodness,  
And the source of love and life.

Man himself is a creator,  
Makes his Heaven or his Hell,  
Builds on earth for all the future,  
And the present life as well.

All his life long he is building,  
Through his days and months and years,  
He is hewing out the timbers  
For a home within the spheres.

He is hewing out the timbers  
By his thoughts and by his deeds;  
By the help he gives to others,  
As he knows their wants and needs.

He is hewing out the timbers  
By his selfishness and pride,  
By his sheer neglect of duty,  
In his brother's wants denied.

'Tis the golden rule of Nature  
That man's future home depends,  
For its beauty and its comfort,  
On the effort which he spends

To assist the cause of progress,  
And to help the world along,  
In its efforts for the godly  
And the banishment of wrong.

In your little acts of kindness,  
To a neighbor or a friend,  
In your treatment of your fellows,  
And your care to not offend,

In your boldness and your courage,  
And your readiness to aid,  
Where a risk must be encountered  
And a sacrifice be made,

In your knowledge, skill and wisdom  
And the firmness you display,  
In your fights with superstition,  
For the true and better way,

You are hewing out the timbers  
For a building over there,  
Which through all the future ages,  
Shall be tall and strong and fair.

If you give your time and efforts  
To the poor and lame and blind,  
If your motives are unselfish  
And your heart is ever kind,

If the fatherless you visit,  
To the widow give your aid,  
And your alms are all in secret,  
As the many prayers you've made,

If you shun all ways of folly,  
And condemn the source of crime,  
And the world is aught the better  
For the way you've spent your time,

You are getting out the timbers,  
The materials and the plans  
For a mansion over yonder,  
Yea, a house not made by hands.

## THE HOMING PIGEON.

---

Bird of the Peerless wing, out in the gloaming,  
Cleaving the ether and breasting the gale,  
Speed, thou, away on thy glorious homing,  
Courage as thine must forever prevail.

Over the mountains with consummate daring,  
Swift as an arrow that speeds to its goal,  
Drives thee a passion that knows no despairing,  
Love of thy native land, home of thy soul.

Deep in thy bosom has nature implanted  
Love of thy home as thy lode-star of light,  
Leading thee on in thy spirit undaunted,  
Guiding thy wing in its tireless flight.

Tell me, O voyager, bird of endurance,  
Whence comes the light that illumines thy way?  
Whence the protection, the kindly assurance,  
Against the mischance that might lead thee astray?

Reason and instinct, through labor's fruition,  
Glory and honor on mortals bestow;  
God, by the gift of divine intuition,  
Gives thee the secret, the power to know.

Other birds please by their gayness of plumage,  
Others still more by their sweetness of song;  
All the world over is man's greatest homage  
Vouchsafed to thee for thy home love so strong.

Teach me, O Father, this secret of knowing,  
Led by thy grace to its fountain above,  
Open my soul to the great inward flowing  
Spirit of wisdom, of goodness and love.

Long have I wandered in darkness and doubting,  
Seeking the light that has always been thine,  
Goaded my soul to its uttermost, shouting —  
Give me, O give me, this knowledge divine!

Give to my spirit the wings of the morning,  
Bid me the ether, unfettered to roam,  
Earth and its gilded wealth infinitely scorning,  
Straightway I fly to my Heavenly home.