

The Fire of 1838 (1838)

The following poem is from the scrapbook of H. J. Coggeshell and was loaned to the Waterville Historical Society by Bill Cowen.

The following lines are suggested by the burning of the factory of Bacon, Tower & Co., on the night of the twenty-second of December, 1838. A copy was accidentally found on the twentieth anniversary of its occurrence. It may be read by some with interest.

'Tis midnight; and the wintry moon
Beams brightly through the frosty air,
Upon the pure and crested snow
That seemed like bride in jewels rare,
Save, that such glorious, spotless gems
Shine not in earthly diadems.

How silent all! each village home
Hath quenched the clear and ruddy blaze
That rose upon its cheerful hearth,
And all is dark, save where the rays
Of some pale lamp, love's watch maintains
Beside the restless couch of pain.

How sweetly sleeps the prattling child
Upon the living mother's breast,
The light of heart - the care-worn soul,
By earth's sad pilgrimage oppressed,
Now in the arms of slumber find
A respite for the frame and mind.
Hark! on the dreamer's ear there falls
The fearful cry of wild affright;
Each slumberer starting, holds his breath,
Half doubting if he heard aright.
Again; it comes more near and near,
And a red gleam illumines the air.

How changed the scene! the snow-clad fields
Are glittering on the dazzled sight,
And trees, in icy foliage clad,
Reflect a rainbow shower of light;
The distant hills have caught it too,
And rise like giants on the view.

The village street, but now so lone,

Is echoing to the hurried tread
Of old and young; who onward press
To where the flames like billows spread,
Till the high walls that stood so proud
Are wrapt as in a fiery shroud.

Listen! the bell of that tall spire
Is sounding as with magic stroke,
For what bold hand dare peal it forth,
Amid yon sea of flame and smoke?
Alas! for him who tolled that bell,
He rung his own, his funeral knell!
He comes not forth - the forky flames
Rise like wreathed serpents in the air;
One crash, and he, yet warm with life,
Is palled upon a fiery bier.
Oh, God of mercy! thou alone
Canst aid the hapless fated one.

Gray morning dawns - destruction's wing
Is brooding o'er the fire-scathed mass;
And the sad crowd, with weary steps,
Back to their homes in silence pass.
Oh! God, the ways seem dark to view,
But still we feel that thou art true.

These blackened walls again shall rise,
And cheerful voices there resound,
But oft they'll pause to speak of him
Who 'neath, his sepulchre has found,
And oft the stranger passing by,
Shall to his memory heave a sigh.

A.W.F.

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