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OLD QUAKER DAYS IN RHODE ISLAND.

By Elizabeth Buffum Chace.

L YING north and west of the new city of Woonsocket, Rhode Island about a mile distant therefrom is a quiet rural village, which eighty and ninety years ago was a spot where centered a strong intellectual, religious and moral life that affected the whole town of Smithfield. This village is now called Union Village, but at the time of which I write, the years between 1810 and 1825, it bore the Indian name Woonsocket, from the hill at the foot of which it lay, while the place now claiming that title was simply The Falls, the Blackstone River making there a precipitous descent.

The village now bears the marks of age, in the old-fashioned structure of its buildings, its ample dooryards and its venerable trees. It retains a general air of stateliness and simple elegance, which assures us that it has been the abode of a rural aristocracy inheriting the tastes and customs of Colonial neatness and prosperity.

During these years this village included in its social relations the inhabitants of nearly three miles of land between Slatersville on the north and The Falls on the southwest, a community which probably numbered not over a thousand souls, all bearing Colonial names. Some of them were descendants of Quakers exiled from Massachusetts in the days of Puritanic persecutions; and most of them were connected by membership or sympathy with the Society of Friends. A house of worship belonging to this society was the only public building in the village, except a steepled schoolhouse called the Academy. The road from Providence to Worcester ran through the place; and two rival taverns furnished rest and refreshment to travelers passing in

stage-coaches or in private carriages. Public gatherings for political purposes or those of entertainment were held in the halls of these taverns, in one of which was a public library. The postoffice was kept in a private house. The Smithfield Union Bank was in a small red building in the centre of the village.

The business was mainly farming, the farms running back from the street to the hills on one side and the river on the other. The houses were usually painted either white or yellow, but here and there a red house varied the monotony; and in most cases there were green blinds to the windows. Where the blinds were lacking, curtains made of woven rushes were used. The woodwork and the walls inside were painted, and there was a good deal of wainscoting in the houses of the wealthier families. Others were constructed much after the same pattern, but were smaller and more cheaply finished. They were all rectangular in form and low-studded. There were no Queen Anne imitations. The front door of a rich farmer's house was entered through a portico, which had seats on each side, and was floored by broad, flat stones, such as also made a walk extending through the dooryard. This yard was surrounded by a picket fence. The house had a hall running from front to back, with an outside door at either end. The roof was what is called a barn roof, and was surmounted by two chimneys. The only means of heating the rooms was by wood fires in open fireplaces. The kitchen was a lower structure, also of two stories, built onto the house as an addition, square, and crowned with another chimney, which carried the smoke from a huge fireplace, in which,



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with its brick ovens, were cooked the most elaborate dinners and breakfasts imaginable.

I do not remember any inside shutters. I think every front door had a knocker; evolution had not brought the bell. There were no bay windows nor piazzas. The furniture was all heavy. In the best houses much of it was solid mahogany, heavy chairs with and without arms, flagged seats and no upholstery, but with loose, home-made cushions. Some chairs had rockers, but none had castors, and all had straight backs. The sofa had not been developed then in Smithfield. The centre-table had not arrived, but the little stand was common, and occasionally there stood at one side of the room a small round table, the top of which turned up on a hinge. In one corner of the sitting-room was to be found a tall, eight-day clock, and beside it, in the best house, hung a thermometer and barometer in one frame.

The fireplace was embellished with large brass andirons, and it was with pride that the skilful house-mothers selected for their sitting-rooms the smooth back-logs and the proper-sized straight fore-sticks; and so tended their fires and used their hearth brushes that the evening fire-side was always attractive and inviting. Brass candlesticks held the only lighting instrument of those earlier years. The bedsteads were high from the floor, and in the best rooms had tall posts, from which curtains were suspended. Feather beds were in common use, and patch-work quilts and home-made blankets. Beautiful hand-woven linen was made into sheets and pillow-cases.

Carpets were unknown in my early childhood. I think it was about the year 1812 that the wealthiest man in the region married for his third wife a high-bred Nantucket lady, who in a short time had a handsome carpet laid on her parlor floor; and it was the only one I remember to have seen up to 1824. Ordinarily parlor and sit-

ting-room floors were painted in the mode called "marbled."

There were only two generations behind the families occupying these farms and dwellings to the Colonial time. Among the colonists had been a man and woman who must have left a strong impression on the life and character of their community. Joseph and Margaret Buffum came from Massachusetts to Rhode Island about the year 1755. They were Quakers. He owned all the land where now is the village of Slatersville, and pursued there the occupation of farming, adding from time to time other industries. He had a grist mill, a saw mill, a forge and a store. They had fourteen children, eight sons and six daughters, who all lived to marry and establish households of their own. A writer on the genealogy of this family says: "The manner of life at his farm was primitive and patriarchal. His farm servants and the employes in his mills, forge and store formed a part of his household; and in addition, his wife had eight or ten apprentices, bound boys and girls, who were expected to work in and about the house. The clothes for this large family were, as a rule, spun, woven and made up on the place; and the household stores, except a few groceries, were all produced on the farm. In such an establishment the management of the household played a very important part; and to his wife's administrative ability Joseph Buffum attributed much of his success in life."

Tradition says that this woman whipped every one of her sons after he was twenty-one years old. It is certain that when one boy became the father of an illegitimate child in circumstances where marriage with the mother would have done no one any good, Margaret Buffum took the little one herself, gave it the Buffum surname and its father's Christian name, and brought it up in her own home. A granddaughter of hers, who remembered her well, told me that her grandmother was the nurse, the doctor, the

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lawyer and the counsellor of all the people dwelling for miles around. No man among them, she said, would have bought or sold a farm or entered into any new business without consulting "Aunt Margaret," as she was called.

Only one son of this family, my grandfather, William Buffum, settled in the neighborhood, and thus became a member of the community which I knew. He built and occupied a house in which he and his wife, Lydia Arnold, raised a large family of children. This house has been preserved so well that it now bears the same respectable and aristocratic appearance, with its long, low frame, its low ceilings, its wainscoting, its great open garret, as when I, as a child, spent half my growing years with the dear grandparents whose home it was and from whose hospitable doors had gone forth the sons and daughters who constituted a distinguished portion of the inhabitants between Slattersville and The Falls.

My grandfather was a member of the Rhode Island Society for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery. When his children were young his house was a refuge for fugitive slaves from New York, slavery having been abolished in Rhode Island in 1784.

During my childhood the girl who did the housework in this house was a daughter of my grandfather's sister, who lived in New Hampshire. Two more of her family lived as "hired girls" with two of my uncles. They were not called servants, and were members of the families, eating at table with them. They did an immense amount of work, and did it well. At my grandfather's the girl's day began at four o'clock in the morning, and she often had to heat the brick oven to bake for breakfast. Cheese-making, the churning of butter and candle-making were a part of the duties of the hired girl; while the spinning-wheel stood in the kitchen to be put in motion in any spare moments. As she was an unusually good

girl, she was paid a dollar and a half a week.

White flour was used at my grandfather's only to make pie-crust, cake and such delicacies. It was bought only in quantities of seven pounds at a time. Rye flour and Indian meal were used to make the bread which was ordinarily eaten. When the oldest boy was six or seven years of age they used to put a sack of corn across the back of a horse, seat the child firmly in the middle, and send him to the miller, where the horse would stop of his own accord, and the little fellow would cry out: "Somebody come an' take us off!" The miller would take off the child and corn, grind the corn, place the meal in the sack, put it back on to the horse, seat the boy again in the middle, and send him home.

The loaves of rye and Indian bread were baked on oak leaves. The women spread these leaves on a large wooden shovel, took the dough with their hands from the big wooden trough in which with their hands they had mixed it, molded it into mounds on the leaves, put the shovel into the oven, and dexterously slipped it out again, after depositing dough and leaves upon the oven floor. Indian meal puddings and pies were also baked in the brick oven. It took all night to bake an Indian meal pudding properly. In the autumn the children gathered the oak leaves for baking purposes and strung them on sticks. They called it "going leafing."

When the first grist of meal from the new harvest was brought home in the fall, a great quantity of hasty pudding was made, the hired men dressed in their Sunday clothes, and my grandfather's family came out and ate supper with the men in the kitchen.

William Buffum had water brought into his house through log pipes, and was the first person in that vicinity who had running water in his kitchen. A building in his back yard had a basement, where cotton yarn was dyed

before being woven into gingham, and the upper story was a tenement for a workman's family. Here a room was reserved to hold a loom, and an extra woman was often employed as a weaver. My grandmother herself, when quite an old woman, used to spin flax on a low linen wheel. One of my father's sisters, when a young girl, raised silkworms, wound the silk from the cocoons, doubled and twisted it, had it dyed, wove it herself, and made it into a gown, in which she was married. I have a piece of the silk still, but it was woven long before my day.

In my childhood, we wore in summer imported calico and muslin frocks, and in winter dresses of a home-made material composed of cotton warp and woolen weft or filling. Usually the warp was blue and the filling red. The prettiest had a white warp. Our frocks—my sisters' and mine—when I was from eight to twelve years old, were made low in the neck and tied in the back, as were our petticoats. No buttons were used, but sometimes pins. I think we had no boughten tape at that time. For strings we braided "thrums," which were the ends of the warp left by the weavers; and this braiding was the children's work.

A little episode of my childhood comes in here, which I will relate. My mother had such a houseful of little girls that my Grandmother Buffum used to keep me with her about half the time; and when there what I needed of clothing she provided. I think it was in the year 1815 that a worsted material called bombazet was first imported into this country; and a cousin of mine had a bombazet frock for her best. I was then nine years old, and I longed for a bombazet frock. I don't think I begged for it, but I suppose I let my desire be known. My grandmother was economical, and she compromised by getting me a heavy Scotch gingham with a large check of blue and white. I seem to see it now. I did not like it,

though it was supposed to be nicer than the customary home-made linsay-woolsey.

The first time I wore this frock to meeting it had been arranged that I should go home with my cousin who had the bombazet, and spend the afternoon. So with my Quaker bonnet and my outside "coat," which reached below my frock, I went, in a dissatisfied state of mind, to meeting. I was a religious child, and a reader of the Bible; I had been well instructed in the duty of worship and of serious reflection in meeting. But my poor little heart was sore, and I tried to turn my worship to account. I had read "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find," "If ye have faith ye shall remove mountains," "The fervent, effectual prayer of the righteous man availeth much." In the faith so implanted, I spent the hour of the silent meeting in fervent prayer that my gingham dress might be changed to bombazet. I am not sure that I felt entire confidence, but I had strong hope and a good degree of faith. My coat entirely covered the frock, so I could not see the process of change. I went home with my cousin. I took off my coat in excitement and agitation; and there was my gingham dress just the same. I said nothing—children kept their heart-aches more to themselves then than they do now; and it was many years before I ever told the story or ever suffered a deeper disappointment.

Speaking of my bonnet reminds me that I began to be taken to meeting as well as to school when I was two years old; and my bonnet was of course a little silk Quaker bonnet. When I was three years old I could read very well. At our first school we were taught reading and sewing. At meeting we were taught to sit still, which is no mean accomplishment.

After passing through the school for little ones, we children—the children in my set in the old village—began receiving our instruction in the Academy. The public school system had

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not been established in Rhode Island, but our parents were a reading and thinking people. Several of these parents were the grandchildren of Joseph and Margaret Buffum, and they had been well instructed for their day and generation. They spoke the English language correctly; and I can think of no other reason for the class distinction, which did certainly exist in this community, except that it was determined by the different manner in which the language was spoken. There were families scattered right along this country road, owning farms, behaving as irreproachably as their neighbors, and dealing as honestly, who had no social relations with these same neighbors. They probably used two negatives where there was need of only one, and put plural personal pronouns with singular verbs.

They may also have belonged to the other political party, our people being all Federalists, the women as well as the men. There were at that time public questions not settled by the Revolutionary war and the organization of the new government; and when the weekly news came in *The Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal*, my grandmother was as much interested in everything political as were her husband and the neighboring men. At nine years of age I used to read to my grandparents the whole Congressional proceedings and other political matter.

So our fathers and mothers had a lively interest in the education of their children, and a good school was maintained fifty-two weeks in the year, with no vacations. Our text-books were of a very primitive kind. In geography we had no atlases to use, and I believe the imperfect manner in which I learned localities is the reason why I have never been able to think of places in the right direction.

We did an immense amount of memorizing. In grammar we were obliged to recite every word of Mur-

ray's large volume over and over for a long time before we were set to make any practical application of it in the analysis or parsing of a sentence. We must repeat *Of, to, for, by, with, in, into, within, without, over, under, through, above, below, before, behind, beneath, on or upon, among, after, about, against* for months before we were permitted to tell what should be done with the smallest preposition of them all.

When, at twelve years of age, I had recited Murray's grammar through perhaps a dozen times without a word of explanation or application, the master, as I was passing by him to my seat, handed me an open book and, pointing to a passage, said I might study that for a parsing lesson. Alas, it was no open book to me. The sentences which he indicated read: "Dis-simulation in youth is the forerunner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance is a token of growing depravity and future shame." I knew every rule in the grammar, but I did not know how to apply one of them to the first word. I carried the book out at recess, and a more advanced pupil gave me a clue. I put my memory into harness, and soon learned to use the rules of which till then I had had no comprehension.

The master carried in his hand all the time a ruler with a leather strap nailed over the end. If he caught an eye wandering from the book or saw signs of restlessness or heard a whisper, he gave the offender a smart blow, especially if it was his own little motherless boy, to whom he was particularly cruel.

We learned our religion in the old Quaker meeting-house, where the seats were hard benches and the great beams and rafters had no paint. I think there was no plastering except overhead. The dear old meeting-house was to me an object of great reverence. Our ministers were two women. I remember one spring day when one of them invited a company of the young girls to go with her to

clean the meeting-house. We had a jolly time, scrubbing the benches and the floor, and she, our preacher, white-washed the ceiling, and made the affair as pleasant as a picnic.

We were taught to consider ourselves especially privileged in having been born in the Society of Friends. After we had attended meeting on "First-day" morning the afternoon was usually spent in paying or receiving visits. It was not necessary to announce our coming. Whoever stayed at home expected company. No one objected to sewing or knitting on First-day. Unnecessary housework was avoided. It was against our principles to regard one day as holier than another; but this day was regarded as one in which we should put on our best apparel, and of which we should make a day of recreation after a morning meeting.

In these customs of life there grew up in this rural village and its outskirts a group of thoughtful, intelligent, well-behaved boys and girls. Their morality was after a high standard. They were like their parents, readers and thinkers. At our social gatherings—for we had such by ourselves—we used to discuss affairs of state. We had our rival candidates for office, although we were mostly of one party. The generation of young people who had preceded us used in their evening parties to play the old-fashioned games, in which kissing between the sexes had a prominent part. We never played them; we were too dignified for that. The Quaker element among us excluded music; so, instead of singing, we recited poetry. As it was not uncommon for us to commit to memory long poems, we never lacked material for this purpose. Instead of dancing we played blind-man's buff, puss in the corner and fox and geese. We took long walks, jumped the rope and rode on horseback. Most of us wore the Quaker costume, addressed all persons by their Christian names,* and called the days of the week and the

months by their numbers instead of by what we consider their heathenish names.

At our evening parties, to which we sometimes walked two miles, we had for refreshments fruit or nuts, or both, and often cake and light wine, total abstinence not having at that time been thought of. When I was fourteen years old I found that when I drank wine it made me dizzy, and I renounced it, without ever thinking or hearing that there was any moral harm in it. Cider was the family dinner drink, and I renounced that for the same reason.

The boys and girls walked together going to these parties and returning from them; and the gatherings ended at nine o'clock. We had our little partialities and preferences and our youthful love affairs; but curiously enough not one of them in that group of boys and girls terminated in matrimony. Perhaps there were too many cousins among us.

We had great freedom in our set of young people, but our parents were strict about our association with strangers. A young doctor came to live in our village. He went socially chiefly among the set of girls older than we were. One day I was standing on a terrace between our doorway and that of our next neighbor chatting with the neighbor's daughter, and the doctor came along and stood just below me. He reached up, took hold of my hands and pulled until I was compelled to jump down. My father happened to be at a window and saw the performance. When I went in he rebuked me severely for allowing such a liberty, although I was not really to blame for it. Two young men who were brothers came to our village and opened an evening writing-school. My sister and I attended it. As far as appeared, the men were well-behaved young persons. One evening one of them called at our house and

* The formal way of addressing a comparative stranger or an old person among many Quakers is to use both Christian and surname, but not even this ceremony in address was used among us at the beginning of the century.

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spent an hour or so in the family room. After he went away our father requested us to give no encouragement to such visits.

About the year 1825 a new schoolmaster came to teach in our Academy. He was George D. Prentice, then just graduated from Brown University, a young man who was afterwards distinguished as a lawyer and statesman, and who was for many years the brilliant editor of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, in which he battled royally for the Federal Union, when it was beginning to be disturbed by the spirit of rebellion which culminated in the Civil War. Up to the time of his coming to us we had read such books as were in our own libraries and the village library. There was only one novel in my father's house, Hannah More's "Coelebs in Search of a Wife." In the village library were Miss Burney's novels and a few others, which we were not forbidden to read. We read the "Spectator," the "Rambler" and others of Dr. Johnson's writings, and the British poets, Milton, Young, Pope, Cowper, Montgomery and Moore; and we read, especially, religious and Quaker books, such as Barclay's "Apology," "Piety Promoted," the "Life of George Fox," "Pilgrim's Progress" and works on female education. Our new schoolmaster soon discovered our literary inclination, and besides introducing some modern improvements into our school he helped us in the cultivation of our taste for reading. He taught school every other Saturday, and on the alternate Saturdays he would start in the morning and walk to Providence, fourteen miles, go to the college library, get a number of books, tie them up in a bandanna handkerchief, bring them home, and distribute them among us, to be read and changed about for the next fortnight, then to be returned and another batch brought out for our delectation. Thus we read the Waverley Novels as they were issued from the press, while the author was "the Great Unknown." We had also Scott's

and Byron's poems and Cooper's novels.

As Mr. Prentice was our teacher our parents trusted to his judgment more than might have been expected. However, one day my father took up Byron's "Manfred," and, seeing something in it objectionable, inquired where it came from; and on learning that Mr. Prentice brought it to my sisters and me, he walked out of the house with it in his hand, and with consternation we saw him enter the house where the master boarded. He returned soon without the book, but as we heard no report of the interview, our fears of a general interdict were allayed, and we went on enriching our minds with the new literature.

As it was with the books so it was with the young man himself; being our teacher, he was admitted into our social circle without restraint or question. Since he was not our cousin, and was a little older than the boys, who were cousins to most of us, he became quite a favorite. Alas, when he had been with us a year he declared himself in love with our loveliest girl in language so violent and determined that he was refused by her parents with contumely and disdain, and he left in a state of burning indignation, leaving behind him in the girl an aching heart but a very submissive spirit. He came back once and had a glimpse of her in the Friends' meeting, and wrote some lines about her containing a reference to this sight of her:

"I saw thee in the House of Prayer."

Our religious society forbade the marriage of members with persons not in our fold. The poor girl was sent away to boarding-school and forbidden to answer the letters he would write to her, but which we had reason to think were generally intercepted, so that she seldom received them. It was a sad ending to what had been to us a year of much pleasure, as well as lasting benefit.

As I compare the manners and people of that time with those of to-day,

in the same station in life, I think that my grandparents, my uncles and aunts and neighbors were most of them persons of strong mental and moral individuality, and yet narrow-minded in some directions. In this age of Associated Charities it seems strange that they had no more sympathy with poverty and destitution, no idea of lifting up those lowlier than themselves. Sometimes there was real neglect of cases which now we should feel bound to consider.

There was a deaf and dumb woman whose home was at the town poor-house, several miles from our village. She used to come to the village occasionally and, in her way, proclaim her woes in the street. She wore always a very short skirt and a short gown, which we should call now a sack, and she was bare-footed. She had short hair, and she wore no bonnet. She stood on the street, and by throwing her arms about she told the crowd, which listened to her inarticulate cries, how either the overseer or the keeper had beaten and abused her. We children pitied her, but nobody appeared to do anything for her. Her name was Patience. We always called her "Deef Pashe." She seemed to be utterly an outcast.

One day a vagrant came along and begged somebody for food, and one of our tavern keepers, hunting up an old Rhode Island law, went with a horse-whip and drove him out of the village. I remember, however, that my father came in and spoke of the affair with great indignation as an unjustifiable outrage. Still, the general feeling was that poor people must look out for themselves; that their poverty was their own fault.

In families the husband and father was the person not only to be held in the highest respect, but to be regarded with awe and a kind of fear by all the women. My mother, who came from Newport, and in whose family there had been more freedom, noticed when she first came into my father's family that even the married daugh-

ters when visiting their parents, if they were chatting with their mother and each other, always subsided into silence when their father came into the room,—he, my grandfather, being regarded as a sort of godlike personage before whom no everyday, feminine talk was to be indulged. Yet there was a story handed down which proved that his own daughters did sometimes beard this lion in his den.

On one occasion my grandfather and grandmother went from home on a visit, leaving their daughters, Hannah and Lucy, two lively maidens in their teens, as housekeepers. The girls decided to have a party. They had the windpipes of some chickens which they had dried for such a purpose, and they molded some candles, putting the windpipes filled with gunpowder along the sides of the wicks. They invited their friends and had a nice supper, the table being well lighted with candles. While the supper was going on there was an explosion. Everybody was startled, but nobody was hurt, and the fun was very much enjoyed. When the father and mother came home nothing was said, and everything was cleared away. Somehow the story got told outside, and the overseers of the Friends' monthly meeting heard of it, and came to the house to visit the parents of these wild young maidens. The parents were very dignified and highly responsible members of the Meeting, and it was a great mortification to them to be reproved for any disorderly conduct in their house. So when the overseers were gone, the father summoned the girls to the sitting-room and demanded what this all meant. When the affair was confessed and explained, he, walking up and down the room, reproved them very severely for such disgraceful conduct. Lucy, who, I think, was the bolder of the two, said: "Well, father, I'm *very* sorry." "Sorry for *what*?" cried the indignant father, as he stopped before her. "Sorry that thee has found it out," she replied.

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During one of the later years of my life in the old village a few of the girls of our circle organized a society which we called "The Female Mutual Improvement Society." We agreed to meet one evening every week and read some useful book and contribute original compositions of our own. I do not remember that we had any written constitution or any officers except a clerk. I do not think any record was preserved; but while the society lasted we were faithful to our pledges, and we enjoyed the meetings very much. We had no boys in it. We did not know that we were starting a movement which would spread over the country in a great Federation of Women's Clubs,—but we were.

This was many years before the agitation for the immediate emancipation of the slaves began, or the prejudice against color was weakened; but my older sister wrote a paper which she dated in the twentieth century in which she pictured the negroes as in possession of the government and at the head of society; and she stated in it that great consternation existed at the capital because the daughter of the President of the United States had married a white man! I think some of our members did not like the paper very well; but the author lived to do valiant service long afterwards in the Anti-Slavery movement and the protection of fugitive slaves.

I was then about fifteen years old, and I wrote an earnest appeal to young girls to seek the improvement of their minds in order to prepare for usefulness in life. I made a visit in Providence soon afterwards, at my

uncle's, and carried my "composition" with me. I read it to some boy cousins, and one of them took it and refused to return it to me. Without my knowledge, he carried it to the office of the *Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal*, and it was published, the editor, William E. Richmond, thanking the writer (the composition was signed *Anna*), and requesting further contributions. It was many years before I complied with this request.

We kept up our Mutual Improvement undertaking until we began to be scattered. When I was seventeen years old I went to the Friends' Boarding School in Providence, others of our circle doing the same. While I was there my family, to my very great grief, moved to Fall River, Mass. Since then I have only returned to the dear old home as a visitor, but to this day the place is to me the

"Spot of earth supremely blest,
A dearer, sweeter spot than all the rest."

And now, in the ninetieth year of my age, as I have written these annals of my early life, when some item a little indistinct in my mind has made me wish to inquire of some one for fuller information, I have recollected that not one of that group of boys and girls whom I have described is left upon the earth, save myself alone.

"When I remember all
The friends so linked together
I've seen around me fall
Like leaves in wintry weather,
I feel like one who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled, whose garlands
 dead,
And all but he departed."

