

**BITTERS-SWEET.
A POEM**

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Bitters-Sweet. A Poem by J. G. Holland

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J. G. HOLLAND

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A POEM.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "THE HAY PATH," "TITCOMB'S LETTERS," ETC.

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PICTURE.



WINTER'S wild birthnight! In the fretful East
The uneasy wind moans with its sense of cold,
And sends its sighs through gloomy mountain gorge,
Along the valley, up the whitening hill,
To tease the sighing spirits of the pines,
And waste in dismal woods their chilly life.
The sky is dark, and on the huddled leaves—
The restless, rustling leaves—sifts down its sleet,
Till the sharp crystals pin them to the earth,
And they grow still beneath the rising storm.
The roofless bullock hugs the sheltering stack,
With cringing head and closely gathered feet,
And waits with dumb endurance for the morn.
Deep in a gusty cavern of the barn

The witless calf stands blatant at his chain ;
While the brute mother, pent within her stall,
With the wild stress of instinct goes distraught,
And frets her horns, and bellows through the night.
The stream runs black ; and the far waterfall
That sang so sweetly through the summer eves,
And swelled and swayed to Zephyr's softest breath,
Leaps with a sullen roar the dark abyss,
And howls its hoarse responses to the wind.
The mill is still. The distant factory,
That swarmed yestreen with many-fingered life,
And bridged the river with a hundred bars
Of molten light, is dark, and lifts its bulk
With dim, uncertain angles, to the sky.

* * * * *

Yet lower bows the storm. The leafless trees
Lash their lithe limbs, and, with majestic voice,
Call to each other through the deepening gloom ;
And slender trunks that lean on burly boughs
Shriek with the sharp abrasion ; and the oak,

Mellowed in fibre by unnumbered frosts,
 Yields to the shoulder of the Titan Blast,
 Forsakes its poise, and, with a booming crash,
 Sweeps a fierce passage to the smothered rocks,
 And lies a shattered ruin.

* * * * *

Other scene:—

Across the swale, half up the pine-capped hill,
 Stands the old farm-house with its clump of barns—
 The old red farm-house—dim and dun to-night,
 Save where the ruddy firelights from the hearth
 Flap their bright wings against the window panes,—
 A billowy swarm that beat their slender bars,
 Or seek the night to leave their track of flame
 Upon the sleet, or sit, with shifting feet
 And restless plumes, among the poplar boughs—
 The spectral poplars, standing at the gate.

And now a man, erect, and tall, and strong,
 Whose thin white hair, and cheeks of furrowed bronze,

And ancient dress, betray the patriarch,
Stands at the window, listening to the storm;
And as the fire leaps with a wilder flame—
Moved by the wind—it wraps and glorifies
His stalwart frame, until it flares and glows
Like the old prophets, in transfigured guise,
That shape the sunset for cathedral aisles.
And now it passes, and a sweeter shape
Stands in its place. O blest maternity!
Hushed on her bosom, in a light embrace,
Her baby sleeps, wrapped in its long white robe;
And as the flame, with soft, auroral sweeps,
Illuminates the pair, how like they seem,
O Virgin Mother! to thyself and thine!
Now Samuel comes with curls of burning gold
To hearken to the voice of God without:
"Speak, mighty One! Thy little servant hears!"
And Miriam, maiden, from her household cares
Comes to the window in her loosened robe,—
Comes with the blazing timbrels in her hand,—