

21 July 2010

Dear Chris.

It seemed I would be unsuccessful in locating the James reading you requested. Then today I was going through some of Lorna's things and found the enclosed. As you can see Papa did not compose it, but he read it to us so many times it seemed as if he did! Let me know if this is the one you requested.

We are having a great time with our children here. Susan and her family were here for 10 days; and now Daphne and Brian, and son Stephen and two of his friends - such helpful and thoughtful young men - are here and having a great time w/ golf and exploring. Tomorrow they will visit the Battery Point Lighthouse, etc.

Let us know if there are any other items you would like.

We think of you often in your cottage by the river. It brings back so many memories, not the least of which were my visits with you dear mother -

Howard joins me in fond regards.

Mary -

The envelope is from a collection of Sonnets which I am using up.

THE CHRISTMAS BACKLOG.  
(An Old Pioneer Incident Versified. Told in 1860)

'Twas more'n fifty years ago, they say,  
When old Tom Brown was livin' down this way;  
Tom was old Judge Brown's father - Judge was then  
Long ways from bein' one of our big men;  
But was as big a boy, for seventeen,  
As any that the backwoods ever seen;  
Tall as a sapling, muscled like a horse,  
He swung a broad-axe with an engine's force.  
Old Tom, his father, was a grim old blade;  
Mighty little waste o' words he made.  
He said but once whate'er he had to say -  
And those who knew him let him have his way.

Tom - the Judge, you know - was not a fool,  
And never crossed the old man's household rule;  
And so, when on a howling winter night,  
The folks were sitting in the fireside light  
(And doin' little else, because, you see,  
Old Tom was rather chilly company),  
And when the fire began to burn down low,  
And the old man commanded young Tom, "Go  
And bring the backlog," you may bet he went,  
And to the log his stalwart shoulders bent.  
No matter what its weight, his load he bore  
Without a grumble, to the cabin door.  
But always stopped, before he laid it down,  
To say "I've brought the backlog," to old Brown,  
Who never slacked his discipline, but said:  
"Then put it on the fire and go to bed."

And so things went until that Christmas Eve  
When Tom was seventeen; I do believe  
That Santa Claus was still a foreigner then,  
Leastwise in these parts, for the old gray men  
Like Judge Brown never talk about the toys  
And things old Kringle brought when they were boys.  
Well, anyhow, the fire was burning bright,  
And all were sitting round it, on that night,  
As quietly as usual; but Tom's mind  
Was filled with thoughts of an unpleasant kind,  
There lay the backlog now outside the door,  
Such as young Tom had never braved before -  
Trunk of a giant of the forest trees,  
It might have been a load for Hercules.  
Tom had helped haul it from the woods that day,  
And ever since had wondered what to say  
When the inexorable summons came  
To give the mammoth timber to the flame.  
Still more perplexed he grew; the fire burned low:  
Too soon he heard the dreaded mandate: "Go  
And bring the backlog" - you may bet he went -  
But 'twas to flee the whole predicament.  
He knew that protest would be worse than vain,  
Absurd as for a rock to melt in rain;

He ne'er would dare to meet his father's face  
Till he could put that backlog in its place.  
So off he started through the snowy night;  
Began his fortune with that sudden flight;  
Tramped forty miles that night across the woods;  
Reached town, became a store clerk, peddled goods;  
Then studied law, got higher every year,  
Until he got to be "Jedge Brown," up here.  
Well, ten years passed, and as the country grew,  
Judge Brown kept growing with it upward, too,  
Till he was known among the biggest men,  
In name and body, that one heard of then.  
But in that time his memory often strayed  
Back to the old home he had betrayed -  
Or felt he had - and sometimes he would dare  
To ask of neighbors for the old folks there;  
Wondered how they considered his high fame,  
Or if they ever spoke his truant name,  
And thought he'd like again to go and say:  
"I've brought the backlog, father," the old way,  
And hear the words the old man always said:  
"Then put it on the fire, and go to bed."

At length, with many a queer, misgiving wrack,  
The Judge resolved that he would venture back,  
And filled a sleigh of more than common size  
~~With things to take the old people by surprise,~~  
For 'twas the day precedin' Christmas Day -  
Just ten years since young Tom had run away.  
'Twas evening when he reached th' old cabin home;  
He saw the firelight flickerin' in the room,  
And felt a rush of memories round his heart,  
Which bounded in his breast when, with a start,  
He saw the old backlog lying by the door,  
Just where it lay ten Christmas Eves before.  
The Judge stole softly to the window-pane -  
Forgot his fame and was a boy again  
When, in her same old country-spun attire,  
He saw his old mother sitting by the fire,  
And just across the leaping, sinking blaze,  
His father, grim as in his younger days.  
Both now grown gray, they mused there all alone,  
As calm as if they ne'er had had a son.  
The Judge stepped back; his strength had doubly grown  
Since he had left that couple there alone.  
He raised the log; the monstrous load he bore  
Without a murmur to the cabin door,  
And threw it open wide, then paused to say:  
"I've brought the backlog, father," the old way.  
His mother smiled: the old man never turned  
His eyes from where the sinking fagots burned.  
"You've been a long time gettin' it," he said  
"Now put it on the fire and go to bed."

JOHN B. JEWETT