

# BURNING DRIFT-WOOD

John Greenleaf Whittier

a poem

published in *The Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier*, page 298–301  
by Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1892-1894

THE  
PROUD READER

[theproudreader.com](http://theproudreader.com)

©2021 Keygen Ltd LLC

BEFORE my drift-wood fire I sit,  
And see, with every waif I burn,  
Old dreams and fancies coloring it,  
And folly's unlaid ghosts return.

O ships of mine, whose swift keels cleft  
The enchanted sea on which they sailed,  
Are these poor fragments only left  
Of vain desires and hopes that failed ?

Did I not watch from them the light  
Of sunset on my towers in Spain,  
And see, far off, uploom in sight  
The Fortunate Isles I might not gain ?

Did sudden lift of fog reveal  
Arcadia's vales of song and spring,  
And did I pass, with grazing keel,  
The rocks whereon the sirens sing ?

Have I not drifted hard upon  
The unmapped regions lost to man,  
The cloud-pitched tents of Prester John,  
The palace domes of Kubla Khan ?

Did land winds blow from jasmine flowers,  
Where Youth the ageless Fountain fills ?  
Did Love make sign from rose blown bowers,  
And gold from Eldorado's hills?

Alas! the gallant ships, that sailed  
On blind Adventure's errand sent,  
Howe'er they laid their courses, failed  
To reach the haven of Content.

And of my ventures, those alone  
Which Love had freighted, safely sped,  
Seeking a good beyond my own,  
By clear-eyed Duty piloted.

O mariners, hoping still to meet  
The luck Arabian voyagers met,  
And find in Bagdad's moonlit street,  
Haroun al Raschid walking yet,

Take with you, on your Sea of Dreams,  
The fair, fond fancies dear to youth.  
I turn from all that only seems,  
And seek the sober grounds of truth.

What matter that it is not May,  
That birds have flown, and trees are bare,  
That darker grows the shortening day,  
And colder blows the wintry air !

The wrecks of passion and desire,  
The castles I no more rebuild,  
May fitly feed my drift-wood fire,  
And warm the hands that age has chilled.

Whatever perished with my ships,  
I only know the best remains ;  
A song of praise is on my lips  
For losses which are now my gains.

Heap high my hearth! No worth is lost ;  
No wisdom with the folly dies.  
Burn on, poor shreds, your holocaust  
Shall be my evening sacrifice !

Far more than all I dared to dream,  
Unsought before my door I see ;  
On wings of fire and steeds of steam  
The world's great wonders come to me,

And holier signs, unmarked before,  
Of Love to seek and Power to save,—  
The righting of the wronged and poor,  
The man evolving from the slave ;

And life, no longer chance or fate,  
Safe in the gracious Fatherhood.  
I fold o'er-wearied hands and wait,  
In full assurance of the good.

And well the waiting time must be,  
Though brief or long its granted days,  
If Faith and Hope and Charity  
Sit by my evening hearth-fire's blaze.

And with them, friends whom Heaven has spared,  
Whose love my heart has comforted,  
And, sharing all my joys, has shared  
My tender memories of the dead,—

Dear souls who left us lonely here,  
Bound on their last, long voyage, to whom  
We, day by day, are drawing near,  
Where every bark has sailing room.

I know the solemn monotone  
Of waters calling unto me ;  
I know from whence the airs have blown  
That whisper of the Eternal Sea.

As low my fires of drift-wood burn,  
I hear that sea's deep sounds increase,  
And, fair in sunset light, discern  
Its mirage-lifted Isles of Peace.



This document is released under the  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license.

The written work contained in this document is in the public domain.  
You are free to copy its text and reuse it without permission.

You are free to share this document in its entirety—be it in print or digitally—  
but you are not authorized to modify it, sell it, or use it in any way commercially.

For more written works and free audiobooks, visit our website,  
and follow us at the social media sites below.

## Official Website

---

[theproudreader.com](http://theproudreader.com)

## Listen to The Proud Reader

---

YouTube: [youtube.com/channel/UCHnUg4W9wkn2ISDoCxucd\\_A](https://youtube.com/channel/UCHnUg4W9wkn2ISDoCxucd_A)

Bitchute: [bitchute.com/theproudreader](https://bitchute.com/theproudreader)

Rumble: [rumble.com/c/TheProudReader](https://rumble.com/c/TheProudReader)

Odysee: [odysee.com/@TheProudReader:c](https://odysee.com/@TheProudReader:c)

## Follow The Proud Reader

---

Minds: [minds.com/theProudReader](https://minds.com/theProudReader)

Gab: [gab.com/theProudReader](https://gab.com/theProudReader)

Parler: [parler.com/profile/TheProudReader](https://parler.com/profile/TheProudReader)

## Subscribe & Donate

---

Patreon: [patreon.com/theproudreader](https://patreon.com/theproudreader)

SubscribeStar: [subscribestar.com/theproudreader](https://subscribestar.com/theproudreader)

PayPal: [paypal.com/biz/fund?id=5GFSVWEHUPK66](https://paypal.com/biz/fund?id=5GFSVWEHUPK66)