In an Old Book Store.

Rows of volumes, old and dusty,
Big and little, worn and musty,
Standing in serried ranks,
Far too old for tricks and pranks,
All waiting for the bookworm cranks.
Some bear marks of faded gentility,
Some the impressment of nobility,
And others an air of chronic debility.
Falstaffian regiments these,
Covers gone and prefaces, leaves
Yellowed by many years,
Stained perhaps with once hot tears,
Soiled by fingers that now await,
The opening of the books of fate.
Here Horace and Livy and Dante
Stand on intimate terms with Hugo and Sand,
While Virgil's "Elogues" and Georgic's charming
Nestle by Greeley's "What I know of Farming;"
And rococo's grand old bard
Is shelved with the lectures of Artemus Ward.
Stately folios once worth much pelf,
Sinking by gravity's law to the lowest shelf.
What well-stuffed heads our ancestors carried,
If over these learned tomes they tarried!
What bushels of chaff they waded through
To gather the grains of wheat so few!
Perhaps they gather more, at last,
Than we who have so often passed
The golden grain of truth, and looked
For opinions ready made, and cooked
To suit a taste for confectionery,
Affected fine and literary.

Well, here they stand, battered and torn,
Faded and cracked old and worn,
From many a distant clime and shore,
From centuries numbering three or four,
Full of quaint and curious lore,
Of theories and hypothesis.
Dead long ago, too dead to sneeze;
Of science once most proudly stated
Now as romance or humour rated;
Laws of which no man afraid is,
Theology as sulphurous as Hades,
And of medicine that of no aid is,
Yet burning words there are to give
Their writer dead a name to live
And power over living men,
To straiten or enlarge their ken.

They wait, intent, and do not stir
To lure the passing customer.
He seems to hear their silent cry,
And stays to look with greedy eye,
While they their secret magic ply.
O'er him they weave their magic spell,
Till he is fettered sure and well
By the old, the new, the near, the far,
The false, the true, things that are not and are;
And from the spell he cannot break,
Nor off the strong delusion shake;
So he leaves a part of his well-worn pelf,
And a vacant space on the dealer's shelf.
Away to his room like a miser he
Carries his latest discovery,
And in his study there live again
The old time books and the old time men.

—Chicago Sunday Evening Herald.