

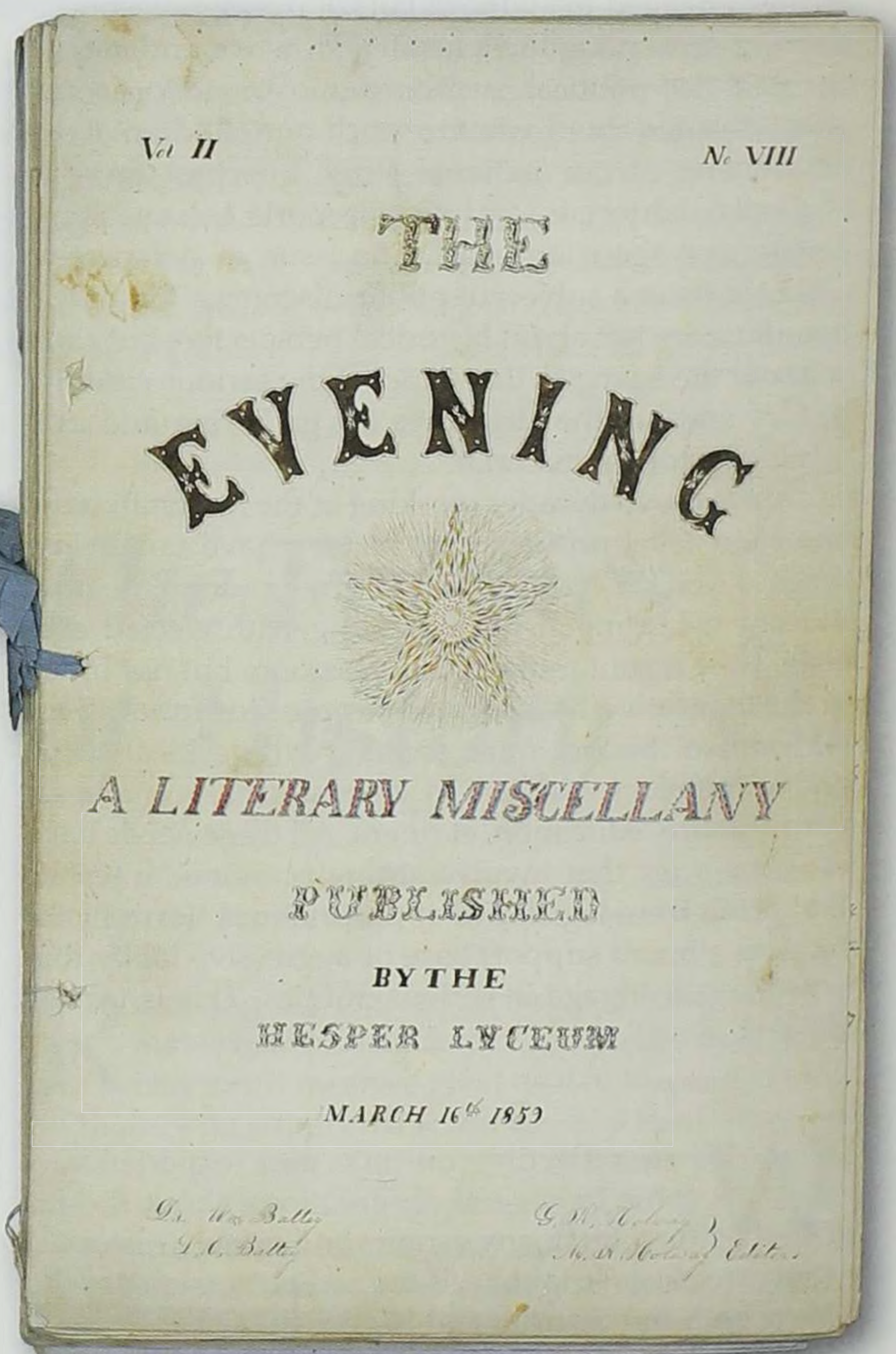
March Mud

1859 Reflections on Surviving Till Spring

*From our Home Correspondent.
Hesper March 14th /59*

It is a miserably dull, cloudy, rainy, muddy time. The sun has scarcely made his appearance for days. The water lies in little ponds and rivulets, scattered over the surface of the ground. Just now Aquarius has put up his watering pot, and old Winter is shaking his few remaining snow clouds over us, just to remind us that we are not quite beyond his reach yet, covering the trees with a white evanescent foliage, half concealing the brown autumn grass, and making one continuous bed of slush for the luckless pedestrian. But the sun is on the track of winter (like a star after a comet) and his end is sure —

Nobody can step out of doors in comfort, save the man with India rubber encasings. Woman, if she goes beyond the threshold, lifts her foot catlike, and makes a spring for the nearest tiny island, which does not always prove a safe dependence; as one may see by the high mud mark, encircling her shoe. Though she be no "woman's rights woman" she is pretty nigh convinced that she has either a right to a pair of water tight



The untitled essay reprinted here is one of several in this ribbon-bound booklet, preserved in the State Historical Society of Iowa Special Collections (Iowa City).

boots, and a convenient dress, or a right to keep her slippered feet upon soft carpets or dry boards — where she may know little difference between the sunshine and the rainfall —

But we are not going to discuss that subject, this weather Messrs Editors. We, like every body around us, are darker, and duller and stupider than usual. The weather affects us, as though we were so many barometers, but tomorrow, or the next day, when the clear air, and sunshine comes again, you can mark the difference.

Now the men folk are lounging about the house in the intervals of chore doing, drying their feet, and yawning over the paper that is no longer a news paper, or striving to sleep away some of the tedious hours. Those who, like a bad chimney, are given to smoking apply themselves with double diligence to their favorite diversion — Now and then one gazes out of the window to see if any signs of clearing away are perceptible, perhaps envying the in-door mechanic whom no rainy day prevents from following his accustomed employment.

Only the little ones, in the blessed unconsciousness of childhood, are as busy, nay, their mother thinks busier than usual, for the superabundance of animal spirit, whose outpourings are in sunnier times spread over a wide extent of outer air, now reverberates with double force through the limited area of the dwelling. They have no fear of the rain, or the snow or the mud, so, escaping from parental watchfulness, they rush delightedly out, and when their absence is discovered by the great calm which succeeds, they are called back with wet feet and muddy garments —

Women look at their floors, and view the periodical reinforcements of mud, with a sort of desperate resignation — and when a neighbor, pausing at the door, hesitates to enter with his muddy boots. They tell him “walk in, never mind, we are just as dirty as we can be now.”

More fortunate than man, woman is never stopped in her industrial career by opposing elements. Storms and darkness are no hindrance to her. There never comes an hour when she cannot work unless physical ability is wanting — or the lights are all gone. Happy woman! we have

nothing to say to her, she can get along if she is patient and cheerful, even in this disagreeable weather.

But the laboring man — he who has acquired no taste for reading, and don't know what to do with himself when he is neither working, eating or sleeping, or smoking. What shall be done with him? Verily for him who is too old to learn, we have no remedy — But there are very few who would come under that head, if they chose to make the necessary effort.

Let all remember that no organ of body or mind can be developed without exercise. No man becomes athletic and vigorous who is sitting down in idleness. Just so when the mental powers are lying dormant, they grow weaker and weaker, till even a trifling exertion of the intellect seems a great effort.

The class of persons to which we refer are, we are sorry to say, numerous, and are not found alone on this side of the Mississippi. Some are so little accustomed to reading, that only the simplest subjects, such as anecdotes or songs, interest them. Others read silly novels, and similar trash — which are about as efficient in nourishing the mind as poisonous weeds would be in sustaining the body. It is a subject of regret that any American boy of Northern extraction should grow up with so little cultivation.

Fathers, heads of families, see to it that your own boys and others whom you employ, have some means of improvement besides the two or three months of schooling they may get in the winter. Furnish them with books and papers — a library in the neighborhood might be made of much service if supplied with suitable books. But this subject expands before me and I must close for the present. ❖