A MESS OF CLAMS

The fields are high with all the Winter’s snows,  
But somewhere there is cawing and glad crows,  
And ice upon bare birches feels the sun  
And twinkles and is starting in to run.  

And old, old, man, with no tooth in his head,  
Is walking fast, and Spring is in his tread  
As he wades the snowdrifts of his farm,  
His clam-hoe and clam-basket on his arm  
Down below him, all his bay is white,  
But out towards sea the dark place overnight  
Has widened, and blue waves are twinkling clear  
Above the first and best clams of the year.

The March sun burns upon the man’s bent bones,  
His wife is lying where the slanting stones  
Are hidden by the Winter. All his sons  
Are begotten and have begot new ones.  
He is alone, but he can go and bring  
His mess of clams home in his eightieth Spring  
As he could in his twentieth one, and he  
Can pick his dinner up out of the sea  
Just as well as any man alive  
And think of things like young men fit to wive,  
His head is high, and handsome as a ram’s,  
And life is good and tastes of sweet young clams.

ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN